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"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

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THE WEATHER
Today, humid, clouds and sun, afternoon showers, high 89. **Tonight,** partly cloudy, an evening storm, low 75. **Tomorrow,** an afternoon storm, high 88. Weather map, Page B10.

ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Where Oil Is a Subsistence Business

Collecting crude oil with a bucket near the Indonesian village of Teksas Wonocolo, which is named for the Lone Star State. Page A7.

Trump Risks Befouling Air In A.I. Push

Gas-Burning Plants to Power Data Centers

By HIROKO TABUCHI

EL PASO — In March, a developer working on a Meta data center in El Paso applied to power the site with a gas-burning plant large enough to supply electricity to 300,000 homes.

Typically, approving a big power plant might require public hearings and months of detailed vetting. But Texas environmental regulators signed off in just 20 days.

They approved another project in three days. And an even larger data center power plant, also gas-burning, won approval in just two days.

All without public notice.

"They're going to fire up those turbines," said Cynthia Crouse, who lives in an upscale development with panoramic views of the desert, about a mile from the planned Meta data center and power plant.

"I thought I'd bought my dream home, that I'd be looking out on the dark sky, hearing the coyotes call," Ms. Crouse said. "Then I woke up to the biggest nightmare I've ever had."

As data centers ignite debates across the country, neighbors and environmentalists often cite water use and noise as problems. Less mentioned has been the pollution from the scores of gas-burning plants that will power these data centers.

When the El Paso facility's power plant is complete, it could emit as much planet-warming carbon dioxide in a year as 360,000 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles over the same period.

Encouraged by the Trump administration, data center developers are building their own power plants instead of plugging into an electric grid. Nationwide, at least 82 gas-burning power plants are being built or have been proposed to power data centers, according to the Environmental Integrity Project, a nonpartisan research organization. Most were announced or granted permits within the past 18 months.

If built as planned, the gas-burning plants — scattered across states including Texas, Ohio and Wyoming — could release as much planet-warming pollution in a year as roughly half of all the

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FAUCI IS REBUKED IN CONTEMPT VOTE BY SENATE PANEL

SPLIT ON PARTY LINES

Resolution Could Lead to Charges Over Refusal to Take Questions

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG

The Senate Homeland Security Committee voted along party lines on Thursday to hold Dr. Anthony S. Fauci in contempt of Congress for his refusal to answer questions at a hearing last week, clearing the way for the committee to ask the Justice Department to prosecute him.

Dr. Fauci invoked his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent more than 100 times last week, as Republicans accused him of funding research in China that started the coronavirus pandemic, and lying about it to Congress — accusations he vigorously denies.

Thursday's vote addressed a different question: Did Dr. Fauci fail to comply with a congressional subpoena, a federal misdemeanor that carries a prison sentence up to 12 months? The panel adopted a resolution concluding that he did.

The vote once again exposed the sharp partisan divisions around Dr. Fauci. With the midterm elections coming up in November, it also thrusts Dr. Fauci's handling of the pandemic back into the political debate. As far back as 2022, Republicans including Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, the panel's chairman, have made Dr. Fauci a boogeyman, attacking him to raise money for their campaigns and whip up the party's base.

In a statement after the hearing, Dr. Fauci's lawyer, David Schertler, called the vote "a crude political stunt intended to punish Dr. Fauci for exercising his constitutional rights."

Ordinarily, when a Senate committee passes a contempt resolution, it is forwarded to the full chamber for a vote. If the Senate approves, with a 60-vote majority, the resolution goes to the U.S. attorney in the District of Columbia, who can bring it to a grand jury.

But Republicans cannot muster the 60 votes, and the Senate is now headed into its August recess. So Mr. Paul is bypassing the Senate vote. He said after the hearing that the panel would hand-deliver

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Ukraine Pleas For Defenses Go Unheeded

By CONSTANT MÉHEUT

KYIV, Ukraine — For much of the war with Russia, President Volodymyr Zelensky's appeals to Western allies for air defenses have paid off. His lobbying helped persuade Washington to give Kyiv its first U.S.-made Patriot air-defense system in 2023, followed by several more sent by Western nations over the years.

Now, as Ukraine confronts the most intense Russian missile campaign of the war, Mr. Zelensky's renewed pleas are falling flat.

After yet another deadly assault on Kyiv early Wednesday, in which the capital was left completely undefended against Russian ballistic and hypersonic missiles, Mr. Zelensky offered an accounting. In a statement, he said the number of air-defense missiles supplied by Western partners so far this year had "dropped threefold compared with 2025."

Ukraine's allies "do have the missiles," he said, but "the necessary political decisions" to send them and accelerate production had yet to be made.

Most recently, Mr. Zelensky has framed his position in human terms, arguing that every additional interceptor saves lives. But his entreaties are no longer as successful because of a changed geopolitical landscape.

Western allies are more hesitant to give up missiles they may need for their own defense as war rages on multiple fronts, including in the Middle East, where fighting has whittled global stockpiles.

Even if Ukraine's partners did heed Mr. Zelensky's call, they could not fully meet the country's needs. Russia produces ballistic missiles faster than the West can make the interceptors designed to stop them.

So far this year, Russia has fired 650 ballistic missiles at Ukraine, according to a New York Times analysis of figures from the Ukrainian Air Force. That is more than the number of PAC-3 interceptors — the advanced weapons most capable of intercepting ballistic missiles — that their U.S. manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, delivered worldwide all of last year.

"The situation today is more critical than at any point since the

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In Lab, A.I. Designs Viruses Not Found in Nature

Hopes for Advances in Medicine, and Fears About Pathogens

By CARL ZIMMER

For the first time, scientists have used artificial intelligence to create new kinds of viruses, raising hopes for medical advances while also raising the disturbing possibility that the technology could someday be used to invent dangerous pathogens.

Synthesizing viruses from scratch is hardly new. Researchers long ago learned how to manufacture viral genomes; they are used to investigate antiviral drugs and vaccines, as well as to learn how viruses work.

But the new study, published Thursday in the journal Science, goes well beyond duplicating viral genes. Scientists at the Arc Institute, a research organization in Palo Alto, Calif., taught A.I. to recognize patterns of DNA structure in nature, and then to use that data to write recipes for entirely new viruses.

The researchers followed those recipes to create DNA molecules, which they inserted into bacteria. The modified bacteria then produced viruses never seen in nature. The viruses were able to infect other bacteria, demonstrating that they were viable.

"This is an important milestone," said Patrick Cai, a synthetic biologist at the University of Manchester, who was not involved in the study.

The viruses dreamed up by A.I. do not pose a threat to humans, because they are all similar to a naturally occurring virus called Phi X-174, which can infect only bacteria.

But the new study adds to grow-

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FREDRIK LERNERYD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Cowboys and Cowgirls in Kenya

Line dancing and Kenny Rogers songs abounded at a country music festival in Nairobi. Page A9.

SYDNEY TOWLE, 1999-2026

TikTok Creator Mixed Anguish Of Cancer With a Thirst for Life

By KATHERINE ROSMAN

Sydney Towle, a social media memoirist who mixed anguish, optimism and unabashed wanderlust as she challenged TikTok viewers to reconsider how a cancer patient should look and live, died on Wednesday at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. She was 26.

Her death, from complications of metastatic bile duct cancer, was announced on her social media channels. Earlier this week, her family said that she had entered hospice care.

In 2023, Ms. Towle, a recent graduate of Dartmouth, was living in Los Angeles — working at a remote-office marketing job, surfing and posting bikini selfies and dance-trend videos online — when a bulge and a burning sensation in her belly landed her in urgent care. Soon after, she was diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma, a rare cancer of the bile ducts.

Ms. Towle turned her new life as a young woman with cancer into content. For an audience that grew to more than a million followers, she created videos showing herself hiking in Spain, sharing her loneliness and, with her mother, wrapping her head in ice packs to help prevent hair loss from chemotherapy.

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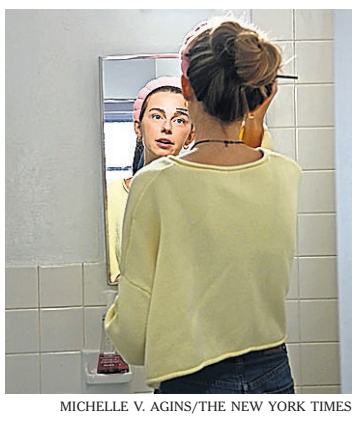

MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sydney Towle challenged how cancer patients are perceived.

On a Vanity License Plate, Whose Speech Is It?

ADAM LIPTAK

THE DOCKET

The next great First Amendment battleground is just six inches high and is attached to about a million motor vehicles in Virginia alone. It is the vanity license plate, and courts are splintered over whether and how states can censor the messages the plates convey.

The latest decision landed last Friday. It involved Curtis Whateley, who paid Virginia $10 in 2023 for a personalized license plate. He had seven characters to work with, and he sought to convey a statement "expressing my opinion on the current state of policing in this country," as he would later put it in a lawsuit.

7-Character Tag Shapes Constitutional Clash

He settled on FTP & ATF. No one disputes what those letters stand for. "TP" is the police. "ATF" is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "F" is what you think it is.

The state issued the plate, and he used it for about a year, until the authorities received an anonymous complaint that caused them to cancel it. Representing

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NATIONAL A10-18

The Parking Sticker of Shame
After a decade, New York City is once again slapping labels on cars that don't move for street sweepers. PAGE A14

Moderate Democrats to Fight
One group calls progressives' wins "deeply troubling" and plans an effort against democratic socialism. PAGE A16

INTERNATIONAL A4-9

Indictment in West Bank Death
An Israeli settler was accused of manslaughter in the death of a Palestinian activist last summer. PAGE A8

Looking In on France's Seniors
To prevent heat-related deaths, the government asked postal workers to help check on older residents. PAGE A5

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He Challenged Views on Islam
John L. Esposito, 86, started out in the 1970s as a rare U.S. expert on political Islam and became a prolific scholar and prominent public intellectual. PAGE A19

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A Boom in Local Lettuce
Amid reports of cyclosporiasis, small produce stands and farmers' markets are seeing a surge in demand. PAGE B1

Your iPhone Just Got Smarter
Siri's A.I. brain transplant has made it much more useful. Tech Fix offers five prompts to get you started. PAGE B1

SPORTS B6-9

Valkyries Riding High
From anticipating player demands to creating a loyal fan base, Golden State has taken advantage of an ideal market in the Bay Area and set a new standard for the W.N.B.A. PAGE B6

A Quarterback's Burden
The Texans have an elite defense, but they won't get to the next level unless C.J. Stroud can bounce back from an uncharacteristically sloppy playoff game last January. PAGE B7

OPINION A20-21

Daniela J. Lamas PAGE A20

WEEKEND ARTS C1-8

Say Aaah
Andrew Winslow, collections manager at the Cloisters, takes care of many mythical creatures, including the Bat Lord, a.k.a. Tzinacantecuhtli. PAGE C8

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