

Rural Americans Are OK With 'Outside' Help To Beat Opioid Crisis And Boost Economy

By Program Error, NPR

Rural Americans can take a dim view of outsiders from Washington, D.C., (or even from the state capital) meddling in their communities.

Ronald Reagan summed up the feeling when he was president: "I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government, and I'm here to help.'"

But rural Americans have come across scarier phrases since then, like "the opioid epidemic."

"So what you have are some very serious problems — particularly around the economy and opioid and drug abuse — that really worry people," says Robert Blendon, professor of health policy and political analysis at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Small towns face big problems. In rural America, rugged individualism is still prized, but so is the pragmatism that has begun to trump traditional disdain for government.

When NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the T.H. Chan School of Public Health polled rural Americans this summer, 58 percent said they want outside help with community problems.

"I think that's a surprise for a lot of people," says Blendon, "that there is a willingness — by most, not all — to reach out for outside help."

Many rural communities are facing two big, persistent issues: drugs and economic stagnation. Take Belle, Mo., with its population of 1,500.

"Money is a big problem," says Kathy Stanfield, who is in her late 60s and raised her children here. "You don't have the tax base anymore that you used to have."

Stanfield says Belle has struggled since the shoe factory closed decades ago. It was once the town's biggest employer.

Increasingly, the town relies on grants to pay for basic maintenance, like replacing crumbling sidewalks or fixing faulty water lines. And that money is getting harder to come by.

Belle has a drug problem, too, and Roxie Murphy, a newspaper reporter who covers Belle for the *Maries County Advocate*, says drug-related crime is on a lot of people's minds.

"Even though we're rural, the idea that we're safe isn't really there anymore," says Murphy.

But she also calls Belle a proud town — one that isn't giving up.

That's consistent with NPR's rural poll results. Blendon says fully half of those surveyed say their community problems can be solved within five years.

"It is not all a world of hopelessness, as many others have described," Blendon says. "There's a great deal of optimism that 'we can deal with these issues if we can get outside help.'"

Blendon says that of those looking for outside help, three in five expect it to come from the government — state government, mainly.

The problem is, many state governments have been cutting taxes for years and are short on funds.

Johnathan Hladik, policy director for the Center for Rural Affairs, says state budget cuts are taking a heavy toll on small towns that depend on government funding far more than their residents realize. And with state funding drying up, he says, appreciation for those funds may be growing.

"This is symptomatic of a country that is re-evaluating itself, and re-evaluating these decisions, and realizing the importance of civic infrastructure and the importance of being part of a community and part of a state where we're all pulling in the same direction," Hladik says. "I think this could be a positive sign."

If rural hostility toward government is in fact easing, Hladik says, the optimism many rural residents feel about solving persistent drug and economic problems may be justified.

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Charged With Criminal Breach Of Trust

By Program Error, NPR

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak has been charged with multiple counts of criminal breach of trust involving his alleged misuse of funds totaling the equivalent of \$1.58 billion.

Najib was charged alongside Irwan Serigar Abdullah, Malaysia's former treasury secretary-general, according to Reuters. The two pleaded not guilty on Wednesday to all charges.

Each of the six counts of criminal breach of trust faced by Najib and Irwan comes with up to 20 years in prison, according to The Associated Press. The charges also include a whipping penalty; Najib would be exempt from them as he is above the age of 50.

The six charges are the latest in a crackdown on Najib, who was ousted as prime minister in May when he lost reelection, ending his party's six-decades of dominance in Malaysian politics. The 65-year-old already faced 32 charges related to money-laundering and bribery, according to Channel NewsAsia.

"Nothing in the charges show that any of the acts I undertook resulted in any benefit to me," Najib reportedly said at a news conference after the court hearing.

Wednesday's charges stem from alleged corruption in Najib's sovereign wealth fund, known as the 1Malaysia Development Berhad or 1MDB.

He created the 1MDB fund in 2009, hoping to obtain international investment. Instead, it amassed an estimated debt of \$11 billion.

Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of dollars from the fund wound up in Najib's personal bank accounts. Billions more were laundered through shell companies and used to purchase luxury assets, the U.S. Justice Department says.

"These assets allegedly included high-end real estate and hotel properties in New York and Los Angeles, a \$35 million jet aircraft, works of art by Vincent Van Gogh and Claude Monet, an interest in the music publishing rights of EMI Music and the production of the 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*," the DOJ said.

Asian Markets Fall After Sharp Losses On Wall Street

By Program Error, NPR

Stock markets in Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea experienced sharp losses Thursday on the heels of Wednesday's 608-point plunge in the Dow Jones that wiped out gains for the year.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei index plunged nearly 4 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng, affected by declines in semiconductor-makers and other tech shares, fell nearly 2.5 percent before ultimately recovering and closing down 1 percent.

Elsewhere in Asia, South Korea's stock exchange fell 2 percent. India's Sensex fell nearly a percentage point.

However, the Shanghai Composite ended up slightly for the day, despite China's markets being down 30 percent since the start of 2018.

Wednesday was rough for all the U.S. major indexes, especially the Nasdaq. The tech-heavy index closed down 4.4 percent — the largest single-day loss in seven years.

The index's tech giants felt the plunge: Facebook lost 5.4 percent; Amazon, 6 percent; Apple, 3.4 percent; and Netflix was down 9.4 percent.

“What makes the latest volatility more troubling is that it's been difficult to identify one specific cause,” Kerry Craig, global markets strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management, told Bloomberg.

Volatility in U.S. markets has weighed on Asia for some time as trade tensions between the U.S. and China heighten. It's also the middle of corporate earnings season — a time when publicly traded companies must tell the world how they're doing — and some companies are forecasting slower demand, making some shareholders wary.

Interest rates are also climbing higher.

“Meanwhile, central banks will continue to get top billing as the Fed pushes on with normalizing interest rates and the European Central Bank is set to end its bond purchase scheme by year end,” Craig said.

Some investors, including David Meier, a portfolio manager at Motley Fool Asset Management, say the sense that stock prices have simply reached their peak is driving the markets, too.

“Volatility is going to be the name of the game for some time. All this has to shake out, and then investor confidence has to be restored,” Meier told NPR on Wednesday.

“I Started With A Million Dollar Loan.” Taking Apart Trump’s Taxes

By Program Error, NPR

“I started out in Brooklyn. My father gave me a very small loan of a million dollars. My father gave a very small loan in 1975. I got a very, very small loan from my father many years ago. I started with a million-dollar loan.”

That story is not true. The loan was over \$60 million, at least, and much of it was never repaid. Earlier this month, *The New York Times* published a blockbuster investigation that showed Trump received \$413 million dollars (in today’s money) from his father, Fred. The investigation also uncovered “instances of outright fraud,” among other “dubious” tax schemes.

The president declined many requests from media outlets to comment on the piece, which took over a year to report.

A lawyer for President Trump, Charles Harder, said “The New York Times’ allegations of fraud and tax evasion are 100% false, and highly defamatory. There was no fraud or tax evasion by anyone. The facts upon which the Times bases its false allegations are extremely inaccurate.”

Read Harder’s full statement here

The story dropped in the same week as Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation,

which might be why it didn’t make a bigger splash. But critic Anne Helen Petersen, writing for *BuzzFeed News*, has another take on why this hasn’t seemed to stick to the president.

If anything, each revelation has done the opposite of what scandal should do: It didn’t revise your understanding of Trump, but reinforced what you already thought about him. If someone already loved him, they loved him more; if they already hated him, they hated him more. Which isn’t to say that these stories aren’t worth reporting or publishing, but they highlight just how strange and unprecedented their seeming lack of effect is. They don’t disassemble Trump’s image; they simply harden any existing reaction to it.

So, it’s not clear what impact the story will have. We’re talking with two reporters who broke the story. How did they get the scoop when the president has been famously reticent to release his tax returns? What are the potential consequences for Trump?

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Megyn Kelly Out At NBC's 'Today' Show

By Program Error, NPR

Updated at 1:50 p.m. ET Friday

Megyn Kelly was once talked about as the future face of NBC News — possibly as its next chief news anchor. Now, she has lost her perch as host of NBC's *Today* show at 9 a.m.

“*Megyn Kelly Today* is not returning. Next week, the 9 a.m. hour will be hosted by other TODAY co-anchors,” an NBC News spokesperson said in a statement Friday afternoon.

On Thursday, a person with direct knowledge of the matter told NPR that negotiations between NBC and Kelly were ongoing. “It’s clear she will not be returning to the network,” the person said.

Earlier this week, Kelly had unsuccessfully sought to contain the damage from several statements she made on her hour on *Today* defending the desire of white people to dress up in blackface costume for Halloween.

Colleagues and people on social media reacted in outrage to her remarks, often pointing to her own past as a host on Fox News who periodically made racially charged remarks.

“What is racist?” Kelly asked Tuesday in a conversation with other panelists on her show. “Truly, you do get in trouble if you are a white person who puts on blackface for Halloween, or a black person who put on whiteface for

Halloween. When I was a kid, it was OK as long as you were dressing up as, like, a character.”

Kelly, who is 47, grew up outside Albany, N.Y. The television news star returned to the matter more than once during the discussion, defending a white reality show star who was castigated for dressing as Diana Ross, replete with oversize Afro wig. Her remarks tapped into a painful vein of American racial history that Kelly said, in an apology, that she was only now fully realizing.

The incident recalled past controversies at Fox News. In 2013, Kelly had infamously made racial claims for both Jesus Christ and Santa Claus: “For all you kids watching at home, Santa just is white,” Kelly said during a discussion on Fox News in 2013. “Jesus was a white man, too.”

Initially, she said she had been joking. Last year, once at NBC, she told Business Insider that she regretted those remarks.

In some ways, NBC spoke most directly through its broadcasts, on which Kelly’s colleagues uniformly condemned her remarks. *NBC Nightly News*’ Lester Holt, the sole African-American evening anchor among the nation’s three big broadcast networks, devoted an extended segment to the controversy, which

included critical quotes from the head of the NAACP, among others.

NBC News Chairman Andrew Lack, her strongest advocate within the news division, had hired her away from Fox News in early 2017 amid a ton of fanfare and an annual paycheck in excess of \$16 million. Lack notably declined to defend her at a meeting this week with staffers.

On the *Today* show, of which her program was a part, two African-American colleagues offered sharp rebukes Wednesday.

Al Roker said her emailed apology to colleagues was insufficient. “She owes a bigger apology to folks of color around the country, because this is a history going back to the 1830s. Minstrel shows,” Roker said. “To demean and denigrate a race wasn’t right.”

“There was some criticism yesterday online that this was political correctness,” said Craig Melvin, a new co-host at *Today*. “That’s silly. And it’s disingenuous. And it’s just as ignorant and racist as the statement itself.”

At the opening of her show Wednesday, just 90 minutes after Melvin and Roker spoke, Kelly apologized to viewers as well. She hasn’t been seen on the air since that episode ended.

In retrospect, Kelly’s implosion seems almost foreordained. She had been hired as part of Lack’s effort to demonstrate that NBC News would not list to the left, despite the liberal outlook of MSNBC. She was coming from the nation’s most influential outlet among Republicans and cultural conservatives: Fox News.

Kelly could also claim a sense of independence: Despite Fox News’ affinity for President Trump, she had clashed with him during the campaign. And she had

embraced the #MeToo movement. Indeed, her accusation in July 2016 that Fox News Chairman Roger Ailes had sexually harassed her in addition to former Fox host Gretchen Carlson ensured Ailes’ dismissal.

Yet her history at Fox News tailed her. In the summer of 2010, Kelly made a meal of a menacing but very small hate group called the New Black Panthers, saying a campaign of voter intimidation had occurred. Several of them faced criminal charges for an incident in 2008, but the charges against the group were dropped after U.S. Justice Department officials said there was no compelling evidence the group itself was involved. One member was legally sanctioned. But no voters appeared discouraged from voting.

Kelly devoted hours to the New Black Panthers over a three-week period, attacking other media for failing to cover the story — and shouting down a colleague who disagreed. She apologized for that, too.

Yet she was serving red meat to the core Fox News viewer, and those programs were part of a record that helped propel her in short order from reporter to daytime host to prime-time host. And she was never able to turn the corner to offer the softer fare required of morning hosts.

Caught Between Trump's Tariffs And Tax Changes, Soybean Farmers Face Uncertain Future

By Program Error, NPR

As Branon Osmundson harvests soybeans in Randall, Iowa, the combine's blades cut the stems, pods are pulled apart and the hard yellow beans fill the hopper. Osmundson's cousin pulls a matching red Case I-H tractor up alongside, positioning the attached grain cart to catch the beans as they're augured out of the combine.

Osmundson is relieved to be in the field on a windy, clear day because he waited through weeks of heavy rain before his crops were dry enough to harvest. Beyond the rain, stubbornly low crop prices have been exacerbated by the trade war that decimated the once-lucrative Chinese market for soybeans. China used to be the biggest buyer of U.S.-grown soybeans. But this year, in retaliation for similar U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports, China imposed a 25 percent tariff on imports of U.S. soybeans, resulting in a dramatic drop in shipments.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture still predicts a record soybean harvest, which only further complicates the situation.

Osmundson says the price he will get is \$2 per bushel lower than last year because of the uncertainty in the export

market. That could end up costing him tens of thousands of dollars.

"It's one more thing that we have pretty much no control over, it seems like, that affects us greatly," he says. "So I guess we're just kind of rolling with the punches on this."

And the punches keep coming. The new tax law that reduced corporate taxes also changed the rules for cooperative businesses — and many farmers sell their crops to the local grain cooperative. Keri Jacobs, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University, says the law's changes make deciding whether to stick with a co-op a dicier proposition for some farmers.

"That's what's hard to nail down," Jacobs says. "And that's where farmers are in their marketing decision process at this point."

For example, a farm with lots of employees might be better off selling to a private ethanol plant, while one with no employees might benefit from co-op membership. Mike Helland, who farms near Huxley, Iowa, and serves on the board of Heartland Co-op, says even though he has been paying close attention, he still doesn't understand how the changes will affect his bottom line.

“I’ve contacted my accountant about it and he’s still going to school and learning about it, so he didn’t feel comfortable at this point advising,” Helland says.

For now, Helland is more concerned with bringing in his crop. “Most of us will be glad when this year’s just over,” he says.

The Agriculture Department promised farmers \$12 billion to help offset the tariff impact, but Osmundson says that is not a real fix.

“That’s kind of a short-term solution to a very maybe possibly long-term problem,” he says. “But we are in an election year, so I figured there would probably be something like that coming out.”

At the Key Cooperative elevator in Roland, Iowa, employee Steve Webb cranks open the hopper on a semi to let soybeans cascade into a pit. From there, they’ll be conveyed to a nearby storage bin. Iowa State University economist Chad Hart, who closely follows grain markets, says higher prices are on the horizon.

“As we look out into the spring of 2019, we do see some reasonable prices out there,” Hart says. “But that means we’re going to have to hold this crop for six, seven months to get there.”

And with all the rain, quality is a concern, he says. Some elevators may be storing soybeans that can’t sit that long. Meanwhile, Mexico, Malaysia, Indonesia and even Argentina have stepped in to buy U.S. soybeans.

“China went and bought a lot of beans from Argentina,” he says, which “left [Argentina] a bit too short. They had to come into the world market. They bought some from us. And so you’re seeing some really interesting trade flows.”

But still, about 200 million bushels that would have gone to China need to find another customer.

On dry days, farmers are razor-focused on just getting in this late crop. But with tariffs, taxes and quality to worry about, this nerve-wracking season isn’t going to end when the last beans hit the bin.

Bronx Food Revival Is Rewriting The Playbook On Gentrification

By Program Error, NPR

When Malcolm Livingston II, the pastry chef at Denmark's Noma, a four-time winner as the world's best restaurant, decided to move on to new things last year, he returned to his native Bronx, N.Y., and the Ghetto Gastro collective, a self-described "black power kitchen." And he is not alone.

Tim Washington, a chef nicknamed "The Cake Pusher" because he weighs his ingredients on digital scales used by drug dealers, bakes his sumptuous confections a block away from Yankee Stadium. Famous Nobodys, a South Bronx streetwear brand, annexed a pizzeria on its block, offering huge \$2 shots that blend blue curaçao, gin, rum, tequila, triple sec and Sprite. And at the new Bronx Night Market, a *mantia* (Albanian flaky veal dumpling) is served proudly alongside a *jibarito* (a Puerto Rican sandwich between two slices of fried plantains).

The Bronx is no longer burning. But it is lit. And its food revival is rewriting the gentrification playbook — the one issued for years by largely white interloping hipsters in Brooklyn to all corners of the world — by importing a novel tactic from Los Angeles: gentefication (from *gente*, the Spanish word for people), in which a neighborhood's artisanal renaissance goes beyond being locally inspired

or sourced toward something much more radical and resonant: locally controlled.

"The Bronx could be on the threshold of a new model of revitalization," says Ritchie Torres, a Bronx city councilman who favors Fiasco, a new Italian restaurant that serves Sicilian street food and spiced-honey pizza. "The Bronx is revitalizing itself on its own terms by changing from within."

Of course, in the cosmopolitan crossroads of New York, there are other pockets of gentefication — "hardcore Indian" Adda in Queens, refugee-staffed Emma's Torch in Brooklyn, the granny chefs of Enoteca Maria in Staten Island, and the glossy expansions of family-run Chinatown restaurants in Manhattan, including Hwa Yuan and Nom Wah Tea Parlor. But the phenomenon is more sweeping and intrinsic in the Bronx, where it is braided into daily life with the hypnotic, fluid complexity of hip-hop, which was born in its streets.

Where the narrative has long been that of Jennifer Lopez's "Jenny From the Block" — grit leads to character leads to talent leads to leaving — locals are now considering the Bronx as a home base for success, not just a launchpad. Partly, says Jacob William Faber, a sociologist at New York University who studies racial economic disparity, that's because gentefication short-circuits classic

gentrification's racial friction and internalized racism.

"The opportunity to be agents of change in their own neighborhood or community gets at the parts of gentrification we discuss much less often — changes not just in rents but in political power or cultural identity," he says. "It's harder to argue about displacement with a neighbor who is succeeding." The Cake Pusher calls gentefication "a more reasonable version of gentrification."

Gentefication poses a brash challenge to the largely white culinary cognoscenti: How long can famous minority chefs like José Andrés, David Chang, Eddie Huang, Padma Lakshmi and Marcus Samuelsson be part of the mainstream before everyday minority chefs are normalized — and spotlighted — in their own neighborhood redevelopments?

"It's a reaction, partly, to the idea that if someone's going to do this, it should be us," says Amanda Celestino, the born-and-raised self-described "Bronxophile" who is the editor of Edible Bronx magazine and co-founder of this summer's debut Bronx Night Market, which brings more than 10,000 people to its monthly event. Hers is a defiance that echoes similar sentiments in the revivals of Detroit, Houston, Newark, New Orleans and Oakland. "The Bronx is not rebranding. It's not the new Brooklyn," she says. "It's taking back what we deserve. Because we don't deserve cookie-cutter development. Nobody does."

Of the night market's 36 food vendors, 21 are Bronx-based, including Blenly Mena's Next Stop Vegan and its *asopao* (a thick Puerto Rican rice soup), chimichurri, and BBQ jackfruit offerings. Or Jason Alicea's Empanology and its

chopped cheese or red velvet varieties of empanadas. Or the hot Cheetos-flavored tamales of Israel Veliz, the 29-year-old founder of City Tamale. No taste bud is left unturned.

"I called it City Tamale because it's a taste of what it means to live here. New York is a place that welcomes new ideas and new people. Of course tradition is important to me. But so is growth. So is change. You can't stop change, especially in New York. But also you can't control change unless you join it," says Veliz, adding: "I'm the first American in my family. I'm the first English speaker in my family. I'm the first business owner in my family. I'm a new kind of Mexican, a new kind of Latino. Don't I deserve a new kind of food? A new tradition?" He pauses before offering a sharp rhetorical question: "Why can there be so many types of bagels but I can't make a jerk chicken tamale without offending people?"

Veliz and his culinary compatriots are tired of the back burner. "I'm from the Bronx," he says in Spanish, "but that doesn't stop me being a New Yorker." So they're turning up the heat — without burning out, as Brooklyn did in its descent into what critics see as pomp and parody. (Torres calls gentrified Brooklyn "cosmopolitanism without diversity.") Even among revered pizza makers from Naples and across the country at the recent New York Pizza Festival in the Bronx's Belmont neighborhood, a standout was a pie — short ribs! Tropea onions! Calabrese chili oil! — made by Ciro Perrotta at Zero Otto Nove around the corner.

"There's an old-school mentality, even with the new generation, of being proud of what you're doing. It's

trendiness with soul, not just for the regrams [Instagram reposts],” says Celestino. “The flavor of the Bronx can’t be changed. It’s an aha moment every day. Why would anyone want to change that?”

*Richard Morgan, a freelance writer in New York, is the author of *Born in Bedlam*, a memoir.*

U.S. Economy Grew At A 3.5 Percent Rate In 3rd Quarter

By Program Error, NPR

Updated at 4:39 p.m. ET

The economy expanded at a 3.5 percent annual rate in the third quarter, the Commerce Department said Friday. That's slower than the second quarter's blockbuster 4.2 percent, but it puts the economy on pace for the fastest annual growth in 13 years.

Private analysts had estimated a 3.4 percent growth rate in gross domestic product for the third quarter.

Consumer spending jumped at a 4 percent rate in the July-September quarter — the fastest in about four years and topping the 3.8 percent in the prior three months.

Former White House economist Jared Bernstein said the strong showing reflects the fact that so many people are in the job market.

“Lots of people are working and drawing paychecks,” he said. “Even if those paychecks aren't growing as fast as we might like, that's going to fuel economic growth and in this report, in fact, the strongest sector was consumer spending.”

Don't see the graphic above? Click here.

The travel industry was one sector that benefited from that increased spending.

“We set records around Labor Day and Memorial Day this year and Fourth

of July in terms of travel, and so they're spending more for trips and they're spending more with us,” said Elie Maalouf, Americas CEO of IHG, the hotel group that owns Holiday Inn and other chains.

Overall growth may have been affected, in part, by Hurricane Florence, which flooded the Southeast U.S. in September. The Commerce Department said Florence resulted in losses of \$37 billion in property and equipment. Earlier, Moody's Analytics estimated the economic cost of the storm at \$38 billion to \$50 billion. And Hurricane Michael, which plowed through the Florida Panhandle and Georgia earlier this month, could affect fourth-quarter GDP.

Last month, the Federal Reserve boosted its growth projection to 3.1 percent for 2018, but it saw growth slowing to 2.5 percent next year.

The economy has been expanding in the 2 percent range in the past few years, but growth spiked in the second quarter, boosted by consumer spending and exports.

But exports decreased at a 3.5 percent pace in the third quarter after jumping 9.3 percent in the second quarter. Analysts had cautioned that the previous increase in exports was sparked by looming tariffs by China in its ongoing trade war with the United States. So

they said that the export boom probably would not be sustained.

With unemployment at nearly 50-year lows, consumers have been confident enough to spend. The Conference Board's measure of consumer confidence rose in September and retail sales grew 4.7 percent last month from a year earlier.

But the housing market is starting to slow, amid higher interest rates.

Sales of new homes fell 5.5 percent in September — the fourth monthly drop in a row — and resales were down 3.4 percent.

The Fed has been raising interest rates as the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession. Rates on 30-year fixed-rate mortgages are approaching 5 percent, which may discourage some homebuying.

NPR's Jim Zarroli contributed to this report.

Should Self-Driving Cars Have Ethics?

By Program Error, NPR

In the not-too-distant future, fully autonomous vehicles will drive our streets. These cars will need to make split-second decisions to avoid endangering human lives — both inside and outside of the vehicles.

To determine attitudes toward these decisions a group of researchers created a variation on the classic philosophical exercise known as “the Trolley problem.” They posed a series of moral dilemmas involving a self-driving car with brakes that suddenly give out: Should the car swerve to avoid a group of pedestrians, killing the driver? Or should it kill the people on foot, but spare the driver? Does it matter if the pedestrians are men or women? Children or older people? Doctors or bank robbers?

To pose these questions to a large range of people, the researchers built a website called Moral Machine, where anyone could click through the scenarios and say what the car should do. “Help us learn how to make machines moral,” a video implores on the site.

The grim game went viral, multiple times over.

“Really beyond our wildest expectations,” says Iyad Rahwan, an associate professor of Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab, who was one of the researchers. “At some point we were getting 300 decisions per second.”

What the researchers found was a series of near-universal preferences, regard-

less of where someone was taking the quiz. On aggregate, people everywhere believed the moral thing for the car to do was to spare the young over the old, spare humans over animals, and spare the lives of many over the few. Their findings, led by MIT’s Edmond Awad, were published Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

Using geolocation, researchers found that the 130 countries with more than 100 respondents could be grouped into three clusters that showed similar moral preferences. Here, they found some variation.

For instance, the preference for sparing younger people over older ones was much stronger in the Southern cluster (which includes Latin America, as well as France, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) than it was in the Eastern cluster (which includes many Asian and Middle Eastern nations). And the preference for sparing humans over pets was weaker in the Southern cluster than in the Eastern or Western clusters (the latter includes, for instance, the U.S., Canada, Kenya, and much of Europe).

And they found that those variations seemed to correlate with other observed cultural differences. Respondents from collectivistic cultures, which “emphasize the respect that is due to older members of the community,” showed a weaker preference for sparing younger people.

Rawhan emphasized that the study's results should be used with extreme caution, and they shouldn't be considered the final word on societal preferences — especially since respondents were not a representative sample. (Though the researchers did conduct statistical correction for demographic distortions, reweighing the responses to match a country's demographics.)

What does this add up to? The paper's authors argue that if we're going to let these vehicles on our streets, their operating systems should take moral preferences into account. "Before we allow our cars to make ethical decisions, we need to have a global conversation to express our preferences to the companies that will design moral algorithms, and to the policymakers that will regulate them," they write.

But let's just say, for a moment, that a society *does* have general moral preferences on these scenarios. Should automakers or regulators actually take those into account?

Last year, Germany's Ethics Commission on Automated Driving created initial guidelines for automated vehicles. One of their key dictates? A prohibition against such decision-making by a car's operating system.

"In the event of unavoidable accident situations, any distinction between individuals based on personal features (age, gender, physical or mental constitution) is strictly prohibited," the report says. "General programming to reduce the number of personal injuries may be justifiable. Those parties involved in the generation of mobility risks must not sacrifice non-involved parties."

But to Daniel Sperling, founding director of the Institute of Transporta-

tion Studies at University of California – Davis and author of a book on autonomous and shared vehicles, these moral dilemmas are far from the most pressing questions about these cars.

"The most important problem is just making them safe," he tells NPR. "They're going to be much safer than human drivers: They don't drink, they don't smoke, they don't sleep, they aren't distracted." So then the question is: How safe do they need to be before we let them on our roads?

A Rural Colorado Coal County Was Struggling. Then A Tech Company Brought New Jobs

By Program Error, NPR

To explain why folks in rural Delta County, Colo. are feeling a lot less anxious than they were a couple years ago, consider the story of Johnny Olivas.

He's digging a line down a steep, dirt driveway, where he'll lay fiber optic cable into a home. His company, Lightworks Fiber, has begun installing badly needed broadband to this remote valley of deserts and aspen-cloaked mesas.

"I didn't know anything about fiber optic, but you catch on pretty quick," Olivas says during a break. "It's a hell of a lot easier than coal mining."

Like a lot of his family and old high school buddies, Olivas used to be a coal miner at one of the mines in the mountains of western Colorado that once employed thousands of workers with full benefits.

Olivas, who worked underground for about a decade, doesn't miss it though.

"It's so up and down," he says. "I don't want to go through that experience again where I get laid off and I'm trying to figure out what I'm gonna do next."

A tale of transformation

Olivas is one of about 800 coal miners in the North Fork Valley who found themselves unemployed over a period between 2014 to 2016. Folks now refer to

it as "the shock." Two of the county's three coal mines shut down, and the valley's tight knit little towns with folksy names — Cedaredge, Paonia, Hotchkiss — faced the prospect of shuttered businesses and consolidating schools.

When Teresa Neal and her husband heard about the mass layoffs, they saw an opportunity.

"We were like, we've got to do something; there's got to be something we can do," Neal says.

Their then fledgling company, Lightworks, began bidding — and winning — contracts offered by the local electric utility that was looking to expand broadband to thousands of homes and businesses. Coal was going away and broadband was key. After all, how does a small town compete in today's economy without good access to the internet?

According to an NPR poll released this week with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, residents of rural communities say that having access to training opportunities is one key to finding good jobs close to home. (Can't see the graphic? [Click here](#))

Rural Americans have also long complained of feeling left behind when com-

pared to most cities where internet speeds are better and access tends to be easier. So, one weekend, the Neals took their barn and literally transformed it into a makeshift training facility for former coal miners. They started teaching them about fiber, Neal says — how it worked and, more importantly, how to splice it.

They've retrained and hired more than 80 miners so far. All of this was personal.

"I didn't want my girlfriends leaving," Neal says. "My kids didn't want their friends to leave."

This was a common theme in our poll. One of the things people value most about small towns is having their close friends and family nearby. Parents want their kids to be able to stay and start their families too, instead of having to move away for better opportunities.

Don't see the graphic above? Click here.

'In spite' of the coal mines

Delta County is roughly the size of Rhode Island but with a population of just under 30,000 people. Most people know their neighbors. They don't always lock their doors and they like that their kids can ride bikes or motorcycles without worrying the way they might in a congested city.

Maybe the jobs from the new fiber-optic boom don't pay as well as the old coal jobs. But they are still good jobs with benefits and they're keeping people in Delta County, or in some cases allowing them to move there or move back.

While the NPR poll found that respondents overwhelmingly said they were concerned about local economic problems, many also said they felt better off

than their parents and had a positive outlook on the future.

For the first time in years, Delta County's population isn't declining. Lately, people are also moving to the county from urban areas — especially Denver or California — drawn by its small-town lifestyle. Now that the internet is improving, they can also work remotely.

"There's a little bit more room to take a risk in a rural community," says Stacey Voigt, executive director of Delta County Economic Development.

DCED, a nonprofit, is trying to lure more entrepreneurs like Lightworks to the valley. They're also promoting the county's burgeoning organic farm and food industries, among other businesses. Voigt's family relocated from the Denver area last fall.

"People are excited to talk about what's next," she says. "It's the 'moving on' and being successful — not because the coal mines closed, but in spite of them closing."

Hometown pride

You hear this a lot in Delta County which, make no mistake, is still solidly conservative. The county hasn't voted for a Democrat in a presidential election since 1964. Folks are proud of their natural resource heritage and agricultural roots. But you also see a big disconnect between what politicians are saying nationally about bringing coal jobs back to rural America and what's actually happening here on the ground.

People have known for some time that coal is probably not coming back to Delta County. For one thing, most all of the easy and cheap stuff has been mined.

That's according to retired miner Rob Clements, who stands with his

daughter Michelle on a drizzly morning, on the back porch at their place outside Hotchkiss.

“Right up that valley — I worked there for almost 30 years,” Rob says, pointing east up the river-cut valley toward the underground mines. The north fork of the Gunnison River is flowing muddy after some badly needed rain. The views are stunning, making it easy to see how Delta County may have more going for it than some other, less picturesque, rural areas.

“For the local people, the miners and their kids, the fiber optics has pretty much saved this valley,” Rob says.

His daughter Michelle had been living in Salt Lake City, a five-hour drive away. She’d had to move there to keep a job, working in human resources for a coal company. Some of their neighbors had to move five hours in the other direction for jobs in the Denver area.

But this past spring, Michelle felt like she’d hit the jackpot. She heard Lightworks was hiring. She applied right away and was hired on to do work in HR soon after. She and her father are both thrilled she was able to move home.

“I have a lot of pride in where I grew up,” Michelle says. “When I start a family I want my family to have that same experience, too; it’s an awesome place to grow up.”

Her company currently has 40 more open positions. And there are for-hire signs posted around town. The Clements say that hasn’t happened in years.

After ICE Raid, A Shortage Of Welders In Tigertown, Texas

By Program Error, NPR

With new enforcement priorities under the Trump administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents are taking aim at employers that knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants. The most recent — and largest — bust happened at a trailer manufacturing plant in northeast Texas.

Business had been booming at Load Trail LLC, about two hours northeast of Dallas, as customers bought the black trailers to haul hay bales, topsoil, construction refuse and oilfield equipment. Then came the ICE raid in late August.

Inside Load Trail's huge production building, welders turn raw steel into trailers, amid cacophonous clanging and showers of sparks. It's brutish labor — cut the heavy black metal, lug it into place, arc-weld it, repeat — but the production floor is nearly half-empty because of an acute shortage of welders.

Load Trail CEO Kevin Hiebert remembers the morning of Aug. 28, when a helicopter thumped overhead and 300 ICE agents swarmed into his yard. "It looked like something you would typically see in the movies," he said, "not something you ever planned on living out in real life."

ICE rounded up more than 150 employees — nearly a quarter of Hiebert's workforce — loaded them into buses and booked them for working in the country

unlawfully. A criminal investigation of the company continues.

So far this year, ICE agents have stormed 7-Eleven stores, a meatpacking plant, dairy and vegetable farms and a feedlot.

"Businesses that knowingly hire illegal aliens create an unfair advantage over their competing businesses. In addition, they take jobs away from U.S. citizens and legal residents," said Katrina Berger, special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in the Dallas ICE office.

But you won't hear those complaints in Tigertown, Texas. This flyspeck community situated between cotton fields near the Oklahoma border is home to a half-dozen major trailer manufacturers — all competitors. And they all employ undocumented workers.

"I think the manufacturing industry in Texas, any kind of steel fabrication construction, depends on illegal immigrant labor," Hiebert says.

The head of a competing trailer-maker down the road agrees, saying they all use workers who are in the country illegally. He asked not to be named in hopes of staying off ICE's radar.

It's too late for that, though: ICE is auditing the employee records of every trailer manufacturer in Tigertown to find out which workers have fake identity

documents. Some unauthorized employees are so rattled they're not showing up for work.

What the industry needs are legal guest workers, says Load Trail CEO Hiebert, "Especially now that they're cranking up on the enforcement. Everybody hopes that there'll be some kind of real immigration reform before what happened at Load Trail happens to them."

Load Trail has been in trouble before

In 2014, the company was fined \$445,000 for employing more than 170 unauthorized immigrants at its plant. Hiebert says they hire whoever walks in the door, and they pay decent wages — \$20 to \$25 an hour. Still, they've always had a hard time finding welders.

"The trailer industry is growing well," Hiebert says, "but manufacturers are unable to keep up with demand. It has to do with the inability to produce the product."

So the work is done by men like Ignacio Barrios, a sturdy, 36-year-old welder who came here illegally from Oaxaca, Mexico. He worked at Load Trail for 17 years before getting swept up in the ICE operation.

He wears an American flag T-shirt and sits in the church that's helping to support his family of five now that he's out of work. Barrios paid a \$5,000 bond to get out of detention and is waiting for his day in immigration court.

"You have to work hard," he says in Spanish. "Lots of times you get injured, burned, you break your fingers. It gets over 100 degrees in there. I've seen that Americans don't want to do the kind of work that we do."

Cal Jillson, a political scientist at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, says, "Texas has always been knowingly duplicitous when it comes to illegal immigration."

On the one hand, Texas is a staunch law-and-order state where conservatives support Trump's immigration agenda; on the other hand, Jillson says, if ICE is too successful, "employers are wondering where they're going to find people to man their businesses if American high school graduates aren't going to do it."

Lamar County, where the trailer manufacturers are headquartered, is crimson Trump country. Yet to hear the trailer bosses tell it, the administration's immigrant roundups threaten a lifeblood of the county. Locals who voted for Trump are nonetheless sympathetic to the hard-working, undocumented welders.

Every morning, a group of retirees meets at the Dairy Queen in the county seat of Paris to drink coffee and mull over the state of the nation.

"This country will not survive if we don't straighten the way [immigrants] can come over here and work. Because I guarantee you Americans are not gonna do it," says Alan Helberg, a former hospital administrator. His buddy, retired dentist Jerry Akers, chimes in, "Congress needs to get off their duff and pass some meaningful legislation to where people can come here and work legally and not have to be afraid of getting uprooted."

Comprehensive immigration reform is, so far, dead in the water in the gridlocked Congress. And back at Tigertown, some trailer manufacturers say that if they can't find enough welders, they would consider moving their entire operations to Mexico.

Can't Find An Affordable Home? Try Living In A Pod

By Program Error, NPR

The cost of housing is out of reach for many residents in cities such as Los Angeles and Seattle. One solution is called co-living, and it looks a lot like dorm life. Co-living projects are trying to fill a vacuum between low-income and luxury housing in expensive housing markets where people in the middle are left with few choices.

Nadya Hewitt lives in a building in Los Angeles run by a company called PodShare, where renters (or “members,” in company lingo) occupy “pods.” The grand tour of 33-year-old Hewitt’s home takes place sitting on her bed as she points out the various things she keeps within arm’s reach: a lamp, sunglasses, a water bottle, a jar of peanut butter.

The pods consist of a twin bed with a small flat-screen TV in a communal bunk room, some immediate storage space and access to lockers. The kitchen, bathrooms, yard and other common areas are all shared. Members also are allowed to hop around to different PodShare locations as much as they want, as long as there’s availability.

Prices vary slightly at different sites, but the PodShare where Hewitt’s staying costs \$1,400 a month. That might sound steep, but traditional apartments in the surrounding neighborhood of Venice Beach go for a lot more.

Without PodShare, Hewitt says she’d never be able to afford this area.

“Oh my gosh,” she said, “I’ve looked at studio apartments in this area, in Hollywood, downtown. I mean, we’re looking at almost \$2,000 a month.”

Co-living trend

PodShare, which opened its fifth location in L.A. this year, is part of a growing trend. It’s one of several companies operating co-living buildings in the city. In these properties, tenants typically share kitchens, bathrooms and living rooms in exchange for cheaper rent. The co-living companies generally don’t own the properties but partner with local developers to operate and manage them.

In Los Angeles, besides PodShare’s projects, there are co-living buildings under construction in downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood and Venice Beach.

New co-living projects also have popped up in other cities where the cost of housing has risen in recent years, including New York, Seattle, Portland and San Francisco.

Jon Dishotsky is the CEO of a co-living startup called Starcity, which already manages four buildings in San Francisco. The company’s first building in Los Angeles is currently under construction in Venice Beach.

On a recent afternoon, Dishotsky pushed open the door to the roof deck

on the Venice Beach project and stepped outside. Lounge furniture was arranged around the roof, and the ocean was visible a block away.

“There’s gonna be acoustic music going on here on a weekly basis,” he said, and “Sunday suppers where everybody gathers.”

As he spoke, construction crews were still putting the finishing touches on the building’s first floor.

Dishotsky said his goal is “bringing back some level of affordability to one of the most expensive ZIP codes in the country.”

Four types of working professionals for co-living projects

Specifically, he said the building targets working professionals who otherwise couldn’t afford to live near the beach.

“We kind of have four different customer types,” he said. “We have a ‘starter,’ who’s just coming to a new city and wants to grab life by its horns. We have a ‘restarter,’ somebody who’s 30 to 40 who maybe had a divorce or had a really tough roommate situation and is tired of running a home.”

Then there are the “life shapers,” who Dishotsky describes as champions of co-living as a long-term lifestyle. And finally there’s the out-of-towners who need a local place to crash for a month or two because of, say, a job assignment.

The prices at Starcity’s new L.A. building might be a good deal for Venice Beach, but they’re not cheap. Rents will start at about \$2,200 a month for dorm-like suites where renters get private bedrooms but share bathrooms and kitchens with one other unit and go all the way up to about \$3,500 a month for traditional one-bedrooms. The building also includes some traditional studios.

“We’re very hyperaware of the fact that this is not a full solution for affordability,” Dishotsky said. “We are working on that.”

The experience economy

The co-living trend, however, is about more than economics.

Jill Pable, a professor in the Department of Interior Architecture and Design at Florida State University, said co-living “fits very hand in glove with the sense that we are now moving into an experience economy rather than a possessions economy.”

“This is tied to, for example, the tiny house movement,” she said, “and a great emphasis on travel these days.”

Mike Liu, a 36-year-old PodShare member, agrees that embracing co-living is about socializing as much as lower rent.

“There’s always somebody new coming through, and that discovery feeling is always there,” he said. He added that, among the longer-term residents such as himself, there’s a sense of built-in friendship and community.

Liu, who recently earned his MBA and came to Venice Beach to search for a job in the tech sector, says he’s not sure if he sees co-living as a long-term way of life. For now, however, he’s found an affordable niche in one of the tightest housing markets in the country.

“Take the time out to let loose and absorb the place you’re in,” he said. “I think that’s a big piece of this experience.”

The State We're In: Collective Bargaining

By Program Error, NPR

From *NPR*

In *Janus v. AFSCME*, a 5-4 court majority overturned precedent, saying that public sector unions, like those that represent law enforcement, state employees, and, of course, teachers, can no longer collect what are known as agency fees from nonmembers.

Until now, in nearly half of states (22), public employees who chose not to join the union still had to pay it something, because they're still covered by unions' collective-bargaining agreements. But some workers who oppose their unions' politics, such as plaintiff Mark Janus, a state child-support specialist in Illinois, say that any payment infringes on their free speech rights.

This was the court's reasoning, according to Vox:

The logic is that unions are political actors, and by allowing unions to charge agency fees, state governments are effectively compelling employees to financially support a political organization that they may or may not agree with. That,

the plaintiffs claim, is compelled speech and thus unconstitutional.

Twenty-eight states already have "right to work" laws banning agency fees. Such laws create a free-rider problem: People don't have to join unions or pay agency fees to get the unions' benefits, so the unions lose members and political influence.

The 22 states that don't have these laws include heavily populated ones like California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio; those five states on their own account for nearly half of America's total union members.

So the labor movement has been working at the state level. We're unpacking proposals about collective bargaining and union trends for the latest edition of our series, "The State We're In."

Produced by James Morrison. Text by Gabrielle Healy.

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Asian Markets Fall After Sharp Losses On Wall Street

By Program Error, NPR

Stock markets in Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea experienced sharp losses Thursday on the heels of Wednesday's 608-point plunge in the Dow Jones that wiped out gains for the year.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei index plunged nearly 4 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng, affected by declines in semiconductor-makers and other tech shares, fell nearly 2.5 percent before ultimately recovering and closing down 1 percent.

Elsewhere in Asia, South Korea's stock exchange fell 2 percent. India's Sensex fell nearly a percentage point.

However, the Shanghai Composite ended up slightly for the day, despite China's markets being down 30 percent since the start of 2018.

Wednesday was rough for all the U.S. major indexes, especially the Nasdaq. The tech-heavy index closed down 4.4 percent — the largest single-day loss in seven years.

The index's tech giants felt the plunge: Facebook lost 5.4 percent; Amazon, 6 percent; Apple, 3.4 percent; and Netflix was down 9.4 percent.

“What makes the latest volatility more troubling is that it's been difficult to identify one specific cause,” Kerry Craig, global markets strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management, told Bloomberg.

Volatility in U.S. markets has weighed on Asia for some time as trade tensions between the U.S. and China heighten. It's also the middle of corporate earnings season — a time when publicly traded companies must tell the world how they're doing — and some companies are forecasting slower demand, making some shareholders wary.

Interest rates are also climbing higher.

“Meanwhile, central banks will continue to get top billing as the Fed pushes on with normalizing interest rates and the European Central Bank is set to end its bond purchase scheme by year end,” Craig said.

Some investors, including David Meier, a portfolio manager at Motley Fool Asset Management, say the sense that stock prices have simply reached their peak is driving the markets, too.

“Volatility is going to be the name of the game for some time. All this has to shake out, and then investor confidence has to be restored,” Meier told NPR on Wednesday.

Trump Aims To Lower Some U.S. Drug Spending By Factoring In What Other Countries Pay

By Program Error, NPR

The Trump administration says it plans to change how Medicare pays for some expensive drugs for cancer and arthritis in a move to bring the costs more in line with the prices paid in European countries.

“For decades, other countries have rigged the system so that American patients are charged much more,” President Trump said Thursday in a speech at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which administers Medicare. “American patients pay more, so other countries can pay less.”

The proposed changes are related to the Medicare Part B program that pays for medications that patients receive in hospitals or in doctor’s offices.

Today, Medicare reimburses doctors and hospitals the average sales prices of the drugs, plus 6 percent to cover the cost of giving medications to patients.

The arrangement gives physicians an incentive to prescribe the most expensive medications, because they will collect a higher fee, Trump said.

The administration is proposing new regulations that would allow it to lower the overall prices of these drugs, by including in its calculation of average sales price the prices paid in countries

around the world with similarly advanced economies. It’s calling the new formula the “International Pricing Index.”

The new formula, if approved, would be phased in over five years.

U.S. residents pay more than patients in all other high-income countries for medications, according to a 2017 study by the Commonwealth Fund.

HHS today released a study of 27 drugs that are usually paid for by Medicare Part B that showed that on average the U.S. pays 80 percent more than the average prices in other countries. HHS Secretary Alex Azar said on Twitter that some of the drugs cost four times as much in the United States.

The HHS study, for example, shows that the U.S. spent about \$1.7 billion in 2016 on Rituxan, a drug made by Biogen Inc. that treats non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. If the drug were priced using the formula the agency wants to use in the future, spending that year would have been about \$1 billion less.

Azar Tweeted that Medicare spends \$8.1 billion more a year than if U.S. prices were in line with prices elsewhere.

The agency is also proposing creating a new group of middlemen to negoti-

ate bulk purchase prices for this class of drugs, bill Medicare and then distribute the medications to doctors.

“If they can bring down the prices, that’s a positive thing,” says Ted Okon, executive director of the Community Oncology Alliance, which represents independent cancer doctors. “How are they going to do it? Is it going to work? Is it legal? Those are the questions.”

Okon says he worries about inserting middlemen between oncologists and their patients. He says his organization’s research shows that pharmacy middlemen increase medical errors and can be dangerous to patients.

In addition to trying to cut the base price of the drugs, the administration, through HHS, is proposing changing how doctors who deliver these drugs are paid. The agency will launch a pilot program to reimburse doctors with a flat rate, rather than a percentage of the drug’s price, to remove any incentive for doctors and hospitals to choose more expensive drugs over cheaper ones.

Okon says there is no evidence that doctors prescribe high-priced drugs because they make more money.

An analysis of published studies on financial incentives under Medicare found otherwise. “The mark-up on Part B drugs appears to independently influence prescribing patterns,” said a May policy paper from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center’s Drug Pricing Lab. In the case of cancer treatments, the analysis found that “oncologists shift prescribing towards drugs with larger absolute mark-ups.”

Dr. Kavita Patel, an internist at Johns Hopkins Hospital and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, says the proposals could make a difference.

“If the goal is overall out of pocket cost reduction for consumers, these proposals are promising and offer some of the boldest challenges to the medical establishment,” said Patel, who worked on health policy in the Obama administration.

“It is interesting that aspects of this mirror an Obama administration proposal which faced so much opposition and was ultimately never implemented,” she said.

Obama proposed changing the percentage-based payment system for Part B drugs but was met with fierce opposition from oncologists and rheumatologists. The agency received more than 1,350 public comments opposing the change, many from doctors who said they would have to close their practices if the plan went forward, and from patients who in turn said they feared they would lose their doctors.

The pharmaceutical industry, which also opposed the plan, spent almost \$250 million on lobbying in 2016, though that was not limited to lobbying on this issue.

Eventually even Democrats in the House and Senate, who heard opposition from constituents, came out against the plan. Obama dropped the proposal a month before he left office.

But PhRMA, the drug industry’s main trade group, came out strongly against Thursday’s proposal. “The administration is imposing foreign price controls from countries with socialized health care systems that deny their citizens access and discourage innovation,” said a statement from PhRMA CEO Stephen Ubl.

HHS says, after opening the proposal for public comments, it hopes to issue a

final rule by the spring of 2019 and start the new payment system in 2020.

Caught Between Trump's Tariffs And Tax Changes, Soybean Farmers Face Uncertain Future

By Program Error, NPR

As Branon Osmundson harvests soybeans in Randall, Iowa, the combine's blades cut the stems, pods are pulled apart and the hard yellow beans fill the hopper. Osmundson's cousin pulls a matching red Case I-H tractor up alongside, positioning the attached grain cart to catch the beans as they're augured out of the combine.

Osmundson is relieved to be in the field on a windy, clear day because he waited through weeks of heavy rain before his crops were dry enough to harvest. Beyond the rain, stubbornly low crop prices have been exacerbated by the trade war that decimated the once-lucrative Chinese market for soybeans. China used to be the biggest buyer of U.S.-grown soybeans. But this year, in retaliation for similar U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports, China imposed a 25 percent tariff on imports of U.S. soybeans, resulting in a dramatic drop in shipments.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture still predicts a record soybean harvest, which only further complicates the situation.

Osmundson says the price he will get is \$2 per bushel lower than last year because of the uncertainty in the export

market. That could end up costing him tens of thousands of dollars.

"It's one more thing that we have pretty much no control over, it seems like, that affects us greatly," he says. "So I guess we're just kind of rolling with the punches on this."

And the punches keep coming. The new tax law that reduced corporate taxes also changed the rules for cooperative businesses — and many farmers sell their crops to the local grain cooperative. Keri Jacobs, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University, says the law's changes make deciding whether to stick with a co-op a dicier proposition for some farmers.

"That's what's hard to nail down," Jacobs says. "And that's where farmers are in their marketing decision process at this point."

For example, a farm with lots of employees might be better off selling to a private ethanol plant, while one with no employees might benefit from co-op membership. Mike Helland, who farms near Huxley, Iowa, and serves on the board of Heartland Co-op, says even though he has been paying close attention, he still doesn't understand how the changes will affect his bottom line.

“I’ve contacted my accountant about it and he’s still going to school and learning about it, so he didn’t feel comfortable at this point advising,” Helland says.

For now, Helland is more concerned with bringing in his crop. “Most of us will be glad when this year’s just over,” he says.

The Agriculture Department promised farmers \$12 billion to help offset the tariff impact, but Osmundson says that is not a real fix.

“That’s kind of a short-term solution to a very maybe possibly long-term problem,” he says. “But we are in an election year, so I figured there would probably be something like that coming out.”

At the Key Cooperative elevator in Roland, Iowa, employee Steve Webb cranks open the hopper on a semi to let soybeans cascade into a pit. From there, they’ll be conveyed to a nearby storage bin. Iowa State University economist Chad Hart, who closely follows grain markets, says higher prices are on the horizon.

“As we look out into the spring of 2019, we do see some reasonable prices out there,” Hart says. “But that means we’re going to have to hold this crop for six, seven months to get there.”

And with all the rain, quality is a concern, he says. Some elevators may be storing soybeans that can’t sit that long. Meanwhile, Mexico, Malaysia, Indonesia and even Argentina have stepped in to buy U.S. soybeans.

“China went and bought a lot of beans from Argentina,” he says, which “left [Argentina] a bit too short. They had to come into the world market. They bought some from us. And so you’re seeing some really interesting trade flows.”

But still, about 200 million bushels that would have gone to China need to find another customer.

On dry days, farmers are razor-focused on just getting in this late crop. But with tariffs, taxes and quality to worry about, this nerve-wracking season isn’t going to end when the last beans hit the bin.

U.S. Economy Grew At A 3.5 Percent Rate In 3rd Quarter

By Program Error, NPR

Updated at 4:39 p.m. ET

The economy expanded at a 3.5 percent annual rate in the third quarter, the Commerce Department said Friday. That's slower than the second quarter's blockbuster 4.2 percent, but it puts the economy on pace for the fastest annual growth in 13 years.

Private analysts had estimated a 3.4 percent growth rate in gross domestic product for the third quarter.

Consumer spending jumped at a 4 percent rate in the July-September quarter — the fastest in about four years and topping the 3.8 percent in the prior three months.

Former White House economist Jared Bernstein said the strong showing reflects the fact that so many people are in the job market.

"Lots of people are working and drawing paychecks," he said. "Even if those paychecks aren't growing as fast as we might like, that's going to fuel economic growth and in this report, in fact, the strongest sector was consumer spending."

Don't see the graphic above? Click here.

The travel industry was one sector that benefited from that increased spending.

"We set records around Labor Day and Memorial Day this year and Fourth

of July in terms of travel, and so they're spending more for trips and they're spending more with us," said Elie Maalouf, Americas CEO of IHG, the hotel group that owns Holiday Inn and other chains.

Overall growth may have been affected, in part, by Hurricane Florence, which flooded the Southeast U.S. in September. The Commerce Department said Florence resulted in losses of \$37 billion in property and equipment. Earlier, Moody's Analytics estimated the economic cost of the storm at \$38 billion to \$50 billion. And Hurricane Michael, which plowed through the Florida Panhandle and Georgia earlier this month, could affect fourth-quarter GDP.

Last month, the Federal Reserve boosted its growth projection to 3.1 percent for 2018, but it saw growth slowing to 2.5 percent next year.

The economy has been expanding in the 2 percent range in the past few years, but growth spiked in the second quarter, boosted by consumer spending and exports.

But exports decreased at a 3.5 percent pace in the third quarter after jumping 9.3 percent in the second quarter. Analysts had cautioned that the previous increase in exports was sparked by looming tariffs by China in its ongoing trade war with the United States. So

they said that the export boom probably would not be sustained.

With unemployment at nearly 50-year lows, consumers have been confident enough to spend. The Conference Board's measure of consumer confidence rose in September and retail sales grew 4.7 percent last month from a year earlier.

But the housing market is starting to slow, amid higher interest rates.

Sales of new homes fell 5.5 percent in September — the fourth monthly drop in a row — and resales were down 3.4 percent.

The Fed has been raising interest rates as the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession. Rates on 30-year fixed-rate mortgages are approaching 5 percent, which may discourage some homebuying.

NPR's Jim Zarroli contributed to this report.

Lesson Not Learned: “America To Me” Documents Why Race Has Everything To Do With Education

By Program Error, NPR

Now, the school is the focus of a new documentary series on racial inequality in schools called “America To Me.” In the trailer, one person of color says “everything is made for white kids. This school is made for white kids, because this country was made for white kids.”

As *The Atlantic* suggests, the school *should* be a success. But what’s happening down the halls and between its walls is another story.

It’s in the liberal village of Oak Park, Illinois, where (as [director Steve James’s] narration reveals) community leaders in the 1950s and ’60s resisted white flight and redlining to keep the area integrated. The white residents who left were mostly older and conservative, James explains, while the white people who moved in were younger and liberal, hopeful that they could play a part in “an American experiment in true diversity.”

So if this school — with its diverse student body and 94 percent graduation rate — isn’t getting things right, the

show seems to ask, which school is?

We’ll meet the docuseries director, a recent graduate of Oak Park River and Forest High School, and two education experts to talk about how focusing on *one* school in *one* community is strengthening a national conversation about education and equity.

In the meantime, here’s a guide on racial inequality in education across the U.S., from ProPublica.

Show produced by Paige Osburn, text by Kathryn Fink.

GUESTS

Charles Donalson, Former student, Oak Park-River Forest High School in Oak Park, Illinois. He is one of about a half-dozen students featured in the documentary “America to Me.”

Steve James, Director and documentarian. His former projects include 1994’s “Hoop Dreams,” 2014’s “Life Itself,” and 2011’s “The Interrupters.” His latest is a 10-episode documentary series called “America to Me.”

David Stovall, Professor of African American Studies, University of Illinois-Chicago

Amanda Lewis, Director, The Institute for Research on Race and Pub-

lic Policy at the University of Illinois Chicago; author, “Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequity Thrives in Good Schools”; @AmandaLewisPhd

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5 Ways To Make Classrooms More Inclusive

By Program Error, NPR

Back in September, teacher Mary Gilreath's first-grade class was asked to wear blue for Peace Day. An adult worried the girls might not *own* blue shirts, and Gilreath saw an opportunity for her Boulder classroom. She shared the story with her students.

"What do you all think about that?" Gilreath asks them.

"Maybe it's because girls mostly wear dresses?" a girl wonders.

"Oh, is that true?" Gilreath replies. "What do you all think?"

The first graders erupt in a chorus of "No!"

Gilreath goes out of her way to address gender identity in her classroom. She says it's "a safety issue and a mental health issue for kids," pointing to the recent suicide of a 9-year-old Denver boy who was bullied after he came out to his classmates.

Studies have shown LGBTQ students are more likely to be bullied at school, which can lead to missed classes and a higher risk of suicide. For those kids, a teacher who knows how to be inclusive — or how to "queer" the classroom, as some refer to it — can make a big difference. But many teachers aren't sure how to do that. Over the years, gender and sexual identity have evolved, and not everyone has kept up.

"When they [teachers] realize, 'I don't know what I'm doing,' you know how vulnerable it feels? It's a big deal. They need support," says Bethy Leonardi, co-founder of A Queer Endeavor, an initiative of University of Colorado Boulder School of Education. A Queer Endeavor helps teachers navigate questions like how to intervene when they see anti-LGBTQ bullying, how to be there for students who identify as gender-fluid and how to address kids who use gender-neutral pronouns like "they."

The organization has put out a list of tips for making classrooms more LGBTQ-friendly. They include:

- Let students identify themselves on the first day of class. Ask them to fill out index cards with their preferred name and pronouns, then be sure to update the class list and share that list when there's a substitute teacher.
- Avoid using gendered language to address students ("ladies and gentlemen," "boys/girls"). Instead, use words like "scientists," "readers," "athletes," "writers," "artists," "scholars," etc.
- Avoid grouping students by gender. Instead, use birthdays, ice cream preferences, pet preferences, etc.

- If there are all-gender bathrooms, make sure students know where they are and that they are for everyone.
- Make your ally status known by hanging a rainbow flag, sharing your own pronouns and/or supporting the school's LGBTQ groups.

“I just didn't know the questions to ask”

Lisa Durant teaches health and physical education at a high school outside Denver. She says when she started hearing students use words like “asexual” and “gender-fluid,” “I had no idea what they were talking about.”

Then in June, Durant attended A Queer Endeavor's teacher training. She learned some new terminology (“C-I-S; binary, non-binary; the umbrella of transgender, pangender”) and reconsidered an interaction with a student who transitioned from male to female while at Durant's school. She remembers talking to that student about which pronouns to use and the lesson material she'd missed. But Durant now looks back at that conversation with regret.

She says she didn't ask, “How can I support you? What do I need to do to make you feel more comfortable in a group setting in this classroom?” I just didn't know the questions to ask.”

A Queer Endeavor also encourages teachers to validate who their students are. Before the training, Denver high school teacher Kari Allerton had always lived the mantra that it doesn't matter who you love or how you identify: “You're all my students and I love you all.” But the training gave her an insight.

“Saying [to a teenager] that I don't care if you're gay or straight or trans, it's almost like when people say, ‘I don't see color,’” she explains. It's dismissing them instead of “validating the beautiful people that they blossom into at our school.”

She remembers a student who, by the end of the year, had dyed his hair pink and started wearing earrings and lipstick. “I didn't say anything to him,” Allerton says — she didn't know *what* to say. At the training, a fellow teacher made a suggestion: “It's so much fun watching you become who you are.”

“We don't talk like that in my classroom”

As an LGBTQ teacher, Meghan Mosher brings a different perspective to her Louisville classroom. She says she works hard to make her high school science class a place where kids feel free to ask uncomfortable questions. Once, during a lesson about chromosomes, she heard a student put one such question to his classmate.

“He was whispering across the table and said, ‘Is that what makes you gay?’”

For Mosher, it was a chance to clarify that many factors determine sexual orientation and gender identity.

But Mosher has also struggled with how to address slurs like “That's so gay.” In the past, she talked to kids individually; but that didn't stop other students from uttering the same slurs. Then one day she heard it in the middle of a lab.

“And I stopped everybody. And it was dead silent. And I said, ‘It's not OK to use someone's identity as an insult.’ And I finally brought my own identity into it.”

The slurs stopped after that. She knows not all teachers can bring their

personal lives into the classroom, but she says it's important to tell kids what's appropriate and what's not.

Asher Cutler agrees. A recent Denver high school graduate, Cutler identifies as gender-fluid. At the training, they said they know it can be uncomfortable to intervene, but, "Don't fear that. Go for it, please. Your role as an authoritative figure means that you can save someone's life. . . . These comments are the little things that build up over time, and you have to, as a teacher say, 'No, we don't talk like that in my classroom.'"

When a teacher makes their classroom a safe place where a student isn't bullied for an hour out of the day, "That is so important," Cutler said.

Radio Replay: Too Little, Too Much

By Program Error, NPR

Have you ever noticed that when something important is missing in your life, your brain can only seem to focus on that missing thing?

Two researchers have dubbed this phenomenon scarcity, and they compare it to tunnel vision, blinding you to the big picture. When you're hungry, it can be hard to think of anything other than food. When you're desperately poor, you may constantly worry about making ends meet. When you're lonely, you might obsess about making friends. Today we'll explore why, when you're in a hole, you sometimes dig yourself even deeper.

Then, we meet Brooke Harrington, a sociologist who wanted to know what it's like to be one of the richest people on the planet. To find out, she spent years studying to become a wealth manager, a "social worker for the rich" who handles everything from stashing money in off-shore banks to recommending rehab facilities for family members.

In interviewing other wealth managers, she discovered that the rich are indeed different from the rest of us.

"It's almost literally unimaginable. National borders are nothing to them. They might as well not exist. The laws are nothing to them. They might as well not exist," she says.

More reading:

"Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function" — why poverty saps attention and bandwidth

"Some Consequences of Having Too Little" — why poor individuals often reinforce the conditions of poverty

Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir

Capital without Borders: Wealth Managers and the One Percent by Brooke Harrington

Hidden Brain is hosted by Shankar Vedantam and produced by Jennifer Schmidt, Rhaina Cohen, Parth Shah, Thomas Lu, Laura Kwerel, and Camila Vargas Restrepo. Our supervising producer is Tara Boyle. You can also follow us on Twitter @hiddenbrain.

Education Is A Top Issue In Midterms, And Professors Promise To Encourage Voting

By Program Error, NPR

You're reading NPR's weekly roundup of education news.

Education is a top issue in the midterms

From the 36 gubernatorial races to some key state congressional races, education will be a major issue on Election Day. We've reported previously on how a record number of educators who are themselves running. There were teacher walkouts in six states this year. That issue alone has gotten people mobilized.

There's something else that's bringing education to the midterms: Betsy DeVos, the polarizing education secretary.

She has been mentioned in \$3 million worth of political TV ads and dozens of Facebook ads, according to a new analysis by Politico. One analyst called her "shorthand" for "a lot of Trump administration bad stuff."

Another thing to watch: Ballot measures in several states across the country could generate almost \$2.6 billion in revenue for public education via taxes and bonds. That's according to the left-leaning Center for American Progress.

Educators promise to encourage voting

Speaking of the midterms, a number of prominent educators have signed on to an online pledge to encourage students to vote in the elections. They agreed to things like recording classes for students, distributing notes and excused absences on Nov. 6.

The list includes former Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright (now a professor at Georgetown) and John Kerry (at Yale) and former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (UChicago).

Rural teens experience homelessness

A national analysis of rural youth homelessness shows that about 1 in 30 teenagers will experience some form of homelessness at least once over the course of a year.

These homeless teens are also less likely to be employed or in school, and more likely to go unnoticed because of "couch surfing," sleeping in vehicles, or even sleeping outside. The report was conducted by Chapin Hall, a research center dedicated to policies for youth, children and families, at the University of Chicago.

Universities sue the federal government over immigration rules

Four universities have filed a lawsuit against two federal agencies, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, over rule changes that may make it harder for students, scholars and professors from overseas to stay in the U.S.

The lawsuit alleges that the Trump-era rule change may subject international students and professors to multi-year re-entry bans.

The plaintiffs are Foothill-DeAnza Community College District in California and three private liberal arts colleges: the New School in New York City, Haverford College in Pennsylvania, and Guilford College in North Carolina.

U.S.-accredited university could leave its Budapest home

The Central European University has until Dec. 1 to secure a deal with the Hungarian government to stay open. Until then, CEU has announced that all incoming students will have to study at their new campus in Vienna, Austria.

The decision comes amid a general crackdown by the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on academic freedom and other aspects of civil society.

Hungary's parliament, which supports Orbán, passed a law last year that said foreign schools couldn't enroll Hungarian students if those same students didn't have the opportunity to enroll in classes in that foreign school's respective country. In the case of CEU, the school launched a program in New York as a response to the law but Hungary's government has not recognized it.

Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros founded the CEU in the early 1990s, dedicated to liberal arts and critical thinking.

New report on college preparation

Students in predominantly poor and small schools had less access to high school courses that help prepare them for college, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office.

The research found that high-poverty schools — and smaller schools — were less likely to offer advanced classes like calculus or physics. They were also less likely to have Advanced Placement or AP classes (which allow students to earn college credit).

“These advanced level classes are important because they're what colleges are looking for in prospective students,” Jackie Nowicki, an education researcher with the GAO, told NPR. “Not only do they make students applying to college more competitive, but they help better prepare them for the rigors of college.”

Can Schools Use Federal Funds To Arm Teachers?

By Program Error, NPR

This question came up again and again Tuesday during an at-times heated hearing of the Senate's education committee: Does the law allow schools to use federal money to arm teachers?

The federal money in question comes from Title IV of the big, k-12 federal education law known as The Every Student Succeeds Act. It's a billion-dollar pot intended for what the law calls "student support and academic enrichment."

"There's a range of services that Title IV funds, from computer science programs, music, art, STEM, extended learning time," said Shavar Jeffries, one of four witnesses at Tuesday's hearing and head of Education Reform Now.

In fact, Title IV is pretty expansive in what it allows school districts to buy. In addition to a range of academic services, the law also permits spending on "violence prevention." That's the beating heart of the current debate.

Last month, the New York Times reported that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos was considering allowing districts to use Title IV money to arm teachers. Since then, DeVos has made clear, if that's what districts want, she won't stop them. The department's reasoning: The law leaves the choice up to states.

In Tuesday's Senate hearing, the committee's top Republican, Lamar

Alexander, said he's no fan of arming teachers but agreed with DeVos.

"As I read the law," Alexander said, "Title IV specifically gives states the decision about spending their money to create safe conditions, including drug and violence prevention."

Again, Alexander is referring to that section of the law that talks about using the money to promote school safety — so that students "are free from violent and disruptive acts." But Democrats point to the same section, which also prioritizes "the creation of a school environment that is free of weapons."

Democrat Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts pointed out at the hearing that many schools can barely afford nurses or guidance counselors. "Allowing schools to use scarce federal dollars to put guns in classrooms is an idea that is dangerous and dumb, and it clearly wasn't our intent."

This debate, around what lawmakers intended, is not entirely partisan. According to *Education Week*, Rep. Tom Cole, the powerful, Oklahoma Republican, agrees with Democrats. Using Title IV dollars to arm teachers is "against the law," he said recently, and if DeVos and Alexander continue down this path, they could find themselves in court.

One big caveat: This debate is still largely hypothetical. It's not clear many

states have any interest in using Title IV dollars to arm teachers, especially if the hearing's panelists are any indication.

“I would say, in Nebraska's case, we've had no serious conversations at all about trying to use federal funds for that approach and I wouldn't support that,” said Matthew Blomstedt, the education commissioner in Nebraska.

And Molly Spearman, a former teacher and South Carolina's current schools superintendent, said her state is focusing its efforts “on mental health counselors, school resource officers, and training of teachers.”

In recent weeks, lawmakers have been crafting a spending bill for the U.S. Department of Education, and Democrats have tried to add language that makes clear — these dollars cannot be used to arm teachers. But the bill currently moving through Congress includes no such ban.

Chicago Schools Lose Millions For Allegedly Not Shielding Students From Sexual Abuse

By Program Error, NPR

Chicago Public Schools will lose millions of dollars in grant money for what federal officials say is a failure to protect students from sexual abuse.

The Department of Education is withholding \$4 million, asserting that the school district wasn't complying with investigations or addressing disturbing trends, according to the Chicago Tribune. The funding is part of a \$14.9 million Magnet Schools Assistance grant which was awarded to Chicago schools in 2017 and is supposed to be dispersed over a five-year period.

The *Tribune* reported on sexual violence within the public school system this summer: One teacher allegedly gave a student sangria before sexually assaulting her in his car. He had been the subject of other complaints at the school prior to the incident. Another student, then a sophomore, said she was punched and forced into an empty building by a group of boys who made her perform oral sex, the paper reported. None of the suspects were disciplined, her complaint reportedly stated.

According to the newspaper, the Chicago schools have four sexual violence cases open — “more pending federal sexual violence investigations than

any other K-12 grade district in the country.”

Chicago Public Schools spokesman Michael Passman said in a statement emailed to NPR that the cut in funding harms three elementary schools that serve low-income and minority students.

“The Trump Administration’s move to threaten funding for schools that serve children of color is another attack on Chicago considering CPS has already taken significant steps recommended by an independent expert to transform the way it responds to and prevents abuse,” Passman said.

The Board of Education asked an independent expert — Maggie Hickey, a former federal prosecutor and Illinois Executive Inspector General — to review the district’s policies for addressing sexual misconduct. Hickey found that some “predators went undetected or unpunished.”

Passman said Hickey’s assessment resulted in changes, including partnering with the Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center and updating its sex ed curriculum to teach students about sexual violence. The school district has also shifted the responsibility of investigating allegations of adult-on-student sexual abuse to

the Office of the Inspector General, Passman said.

He told NPR that Chicago Public Schools never received a memo, reportedly sent by the Department of Education on Monday, which justified why the grant funds were withheld. Passman said CPS asked for the memo after media reported on it.

“We are working tirelessly to address this pervasive societal challenge and safeguard our students — including by cooperating with the Department of Education — and it is hard to believe that any administration committed to providing low-income and minority students with real opportunity would be able to stomach the threats the Trump Administration is making.”

The district plans to appeal the decision, he added.

According to a 2016 report by the Department of Health and Human Services, there were 57,329 sexual abuse victims that year across the United States.

New Findings On School Shootings; Hurricane Shuts Classrooms; And Midterm Ballots On Education

By Program Error, NPR

You're reading NPR's weekly roundup of education news.

New school shooting database shows 2018 spike

A new database released this week finds that 2018 was a record year for school violence.

The researchers cross-referenced more than 1,300 incident reports from 25 different sources going back nearly 50 years. This K-12 school shooting database tried to capture each and every instance a gun was brandished or a bullet was fired on school property.

So what were the results? In 2018 there were 82 documented incidents and 51 documented deaths. The next highest number of deaths occurred in 1993, with 40, and after that in 2012 with 37 deaths.

One thing to note: there are no clear trends in the database. While 2018 shows a spike, 2011, for example, was near an all-time low.

Hurricane Michael keep students out of school

As NPR has reported, schools in some parts of North Carolina have been closed for five weeks due to hurricane-related flooding damage. Parts of the state still haven't recovered from Hurri-

cane Florence, which hit a month ago. Teachers now worry that, with Hurricane Michael, students are not getting the meals, and the emotional support, that many may depend on.

Hurricane Michael also closed dozens of school districts in Florida as well as several university campuses.

Harvard lawsuit heads to trial

A federal lawsuit alleging racial discrimination in Harvard's admissions practices heads to trial on Monday.

The suit was brought by Students for Fair Admissions, which has accused Harvard of using "racial balancing," and treating Asian-American applicants unfairly by systematically rating them lower on intangible traits, like courage, kindness and leadership. The group is led by conservative legal strategist Edward Blum, who filed a similar lawsuit for a white student at the University of Texas.

The U.S. Justice Department has also backed the suit.

Education and the November election

The midterm elections are just under a month away, and a new report by the Center for American Progress finds that ballot measures in 15 states (if they are

passed) could add almost \$2 billion to public education. The center argues that “public education has suffered a punishing decade” and “most states have been slow to return to pre-recession investment levels.”

Nonprofits sign letter attacking “online preK”

A coalition of advocacy groups issued a letter on Wednesday urging states not to put public money toward so-called “online preschool” software products created by companies like K12 Inc. and Chalk.

As the letter notes, the state of Utah, “citing the need to serve families in rural areas cheaply, sponsored the first state-funded online program of this kind, called UPSTART, and thousands of families have enrolled.” UPSTART has also expanded pilot programs to at least seven other states.

The organization, Waterford, reports academic gains for students who use the software. But critics — like those at Defending the Early Years, and Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood—say young children don’t learn best in front of a computer. High-quality preschool programs, they say, include a low student-teacher ratio, hands-on play and physical activity.

Does Harvard Treat Asian-American Applicants Unfairly? The Case Goes To Trial

By Program Error, NPR

A federal lawsuit alleging Harvard University discriminates against Asian-American applicants goes to court this week in Boston.

While the case focuses on Harvard, it could have big consequences for higher education, especially if it moves on to the U.S. Supreme Court. At stake is 40 years of legal precedent allowing race to be one factor in deciding which students to admit.

The group Students for Fair Admissions, led by conservative legal strategist Edward Blum, is suing Harvard, charging the university engages in “racial balancing,” which is illegal, and discriminates against Asian-American applicants by rating them lower on intangible traits like courage, kindness and leadership.

“Harvard is systemically saying that Asian candidates are not likeable and don’t have good personalities . . . which is nothing but racist,” says Lee Cheng, a lawyer and secretary of the Asian American Legal Foundation, which supports the lawsuit.

“It perpetuates, feeds and creates stereotypes,” Cheng says.

Cheng is Chinese-American and graduated from Harvard in 1993. He believes Harvard’s admissions process up-

holds stereotypes that Asian-Americans just do well in math and standardized tests.

According to Students for Fair Admissions, none of the anonymous, Asian-American plaintiffs who claim they were denied admission will testify. Still, Cheng thinks the group has a chance of winning.

“The people who are harmed who are the basis for this group to file this lawsuit are concerned that they will be discriminated against in graduate school admissions as well as in job applications,” Cheng says. “Their existence is real. If they weren’t real, this lawsuit couldn’t move forward.”

Civil rights activists and college leaders see the lawsuit as an attack on race-conscious admissions, which, in a series of decisions since 1978, the Supreme Court has allowed if done carefully.

Harvard has denied the charges, saying Asian-Americans account for 23 percent of the students admitted to this year’s freshman class.

“Nobody wants to be judged on their numbers alone,” Harvard President Larry Bacow said at a higher education event in September. “People understand and recognize that we learn from our dif-

ferences, that creating a diverse learning environment enriches the learning experience for every student on campus.”

Ted Shaw is the director of the Center for Civil Rights at the University of North Carolina’s Law School. He says, in the past, opponents of considering race in admissions have gone after top public institutions. He believes the Harvard suit is an attempt to broaden that attack to private, selective colleges.

“This is a very important moment because the balance of the [Supreme] Court is in play,” Shaw says. “And so we can’t assume that the results that have [been] obtained in previous cases are going to continue.”

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy was the key swing vote in the 2016 decision that preserved race-conscious admissions at the University of Texas at Austin. Kennedy retired earlier this year, and Brett Kavanaugh recently replaced him.

In August, the U.S. Justice Department threw its support behind the lawsuit, saying Harvard’s admissions process “may be infected with racial bias.”

U.S. District Court Judge Allison Burroughs, who was nominated by President Barack Obama and sworn in in 2015, will preside over the non-jury trial.

Earlier this month, Burroughs granted Harvard students and alumni permission to testify and make their case for racial and ethnic diversity. Harvard’s dean of admissions, William Fitzsimmons, and former president, Drew Faust, will also take the stand.

What To Know About Affirmative Action As The Harvard Trial Begins

By Program Error, NPR

Does Harvard University discriminate against Asian-Americans in its admissions process?

That's the question on trial in a Boston federal courtroom this week. At issue is whether Harvard unfairly discriminated against an Asian-American applicant who says the Ivy League school held him to higher standards than applicants of other races. This trial will also dissect a contentious political issue in higher education: affirmative action.

But what exactly is affirmative action, and how did it become such a controversial issue?

Today in U.S. higher education, affirmative action refers to policies that give students from underrepresented racial groups an advantage in the college admissions process, said Mark Naison, an African-American studies professor who teaches about affirmative action at Fordham University. But that wasn't the original definition when it was introduced by President John Kennedy in the 1960s.

As the Harvard trial begins, here's what you need to know about affirmative action's history and how it's used today in elite college admissions.

How did affirmative action begin?

The concept was first introduced by President Kennedy in a 1961 execu-

tive order. He hoped it would increase the amount of people from historically underrepresented groups (like African-Americans at the time) employed by government contractors. But the public didn't pay much attention to his order, Naison said.

That changed later in the 1960s, when race riots shook cities across the country, including Washington, D.C., Chicago and Baltimore. Presidents at elite colleges later decided to tweak Kennedy's definition of affirmative action to include goals, quotas and racial preferences for black students in college admissions, Naison said. Affirmative action turned into a "results-driven" effort to integrate American colleges and end race rioting, he said.

"These institutions decided that they had better recruit the next generation of black leaders in America, or the country wasn't going to work," Naison said.

Has affirmative action in higher education been challenged in the courts before?

Yes. Many times.

One significant court challenge to affirmative action in higher education was in the 1970s, when a man claimed he was rejected by the medical school at the University of California, Davis because he was white. The school reserved spots in each class for minorities, and 35-year-old

Allan Bakke's credentials — his college GPA and test scores — were higher than any of the minority students admitted both years he applied.

The Supreme Court ruled that colleges could consider race as one of many factors in an admissions decision, but they couldn't set quotas for racial groups. Justice Lewis Powell played a central role in the case. He said affirmative action wasn't a way to remedy past discrimination. Instead, he said the justification for affirmative action was the educational value of having a diverse student body.

"I think that was a very, very important turning point in how we've come to think about such policies used by highly-selective institutions and frame the thinking around affirmative action," said Mitchell Chang, a University of California, Los Angeles professor who studies diversity initiatives in higher education.

Then came two cases that challenged affirmative action at the University of Michigan. The Supreme Court upheld their law school's affirmative action policies, but ruled that the school's undergraduate admissions officers couldn't use racial bonuses, like 20 points for blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans on an admissions rating scale, NPR's Nina Totenberg reported in 2003. That brings us to *Fisher v. University of Texas*, the Supreme Court's most-recent ruling on affirmative action. (Students for Fair Admissions, the group challenging Harvard's use of affirmative action in Boston this week, also backed Fisher, a white female, in this lawsuit.) The court ruled on Fisher's case in 2016, saying that schools must prove their race-conscious admissions strategy is the only

way to achieve diversity. The strategy must also be specifically designed to reach a goal.

Which schools consider race in admissions?

Mostly elite (selective) schools. The American Council on Education surveyed 338 nonprofit four-year institutions and found 60 percent of the most selective institutions, which are those admitting 40 percent or fewer applicants, consider race in admissions.

As the law stands, colleges can consider race in admissions if it is one of many factors considered when evaluating a student for admission, said Curt Levey, a lawyer who argued against the University of Michigan in its affirmative action cases.

But schools must first use race-neutral options, like grades and test scores, to meet their diversity goals, said Mike Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. (His organization is backing Harvard in the Boston trial.) If that doesn't work, they can then add race as a factor in admissions decisions, Reilly said.

"It's making sure that their student body represents a broad range of characteristics, and not simply ranking students based on their test scores and their grades from high school," Reilly said. "If that were the case, we wouldn't have an admissions profession, we'd just have a spreadsheet."

Why Public Service Loan Forgiveness Is So Unforgiving

By Program Error, NPR

Update: Many student borrowers have responded to this story by sharing stories of their struggles with PSLF. We've curated many of them here.

On the morning of Monday, Aug. 27, Seth Frotman told his two young daughters that he would likely be home early that day and could take them to the playground. They cheered.

He did not tell them why their dad, who often worked long hours as the student loan watchdog at the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, would be free for an afternoon play date.

Frotman assumed that after walking into his office and, at precisely 9:30 a.m., hitting “send” on an incendiary resignation letter to lawmakers accusing the Trump administration of betraying student borrowers, he would promptly be walked out with his things, and his career, in a cardboard box.

“Unfortunately, under your leadership,” Frotman wrote to his boss, Mick Mulvaney, “the Bureau has abandoned the very consumers it is tasked by Congress with protecting. Instead, you have used the Bureau to serve the wishes of the most powerful financial companies in America.”

Frotman arrived at this conclusion, in part, after he and his team reviewed thousands of borrower complaints the previous summer. One program kept

coming up, hurting and infuriating the very people it was meant to help: the U.S. government’s effort to reward student borrowers for public service — for being nurses, teachers and first responders.

This is the story of Seth Frotman, the mangling of the program known as Public Service Loan Forgiveness, and what it says about America’s student loan industry.

The middlemen

Congress created Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) in 2007, in the waning days of the Bush administration. The pitch to borrowers was simple:

Spend 10 years teaching, nursing, policing or otherwise working for a qualified nonprofit while also making 120 monthly payments against your student loans, and the government would forgive whatever’s left. As a thank you.

But recent data from the Department of Education show that *99 percent* of applications for loan forgiveness have been denied.

The pitch may have been simple, but the execution was anything but.

Today, the U.S. Department of Education is, essentially, a trillion-dollar bank, serving more than 40 million student borrowers. While the government writes these student loans, it simply cannot run the call centers or handle the pa-

perwork for so many borrowers. It needs help. So it pays companies — the department has contracts with nine of them — to handle customer service. These servicers, as they're known, are glorified record-keepers and debt collectors. But they're also powerful gatekeepers.

And these servicers, Frotman found, with a big assist from the Education Department, were wreaking havoc with the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Staying on track while giving back

In Greek mythology, Cassandra is the daughter of King Priam of Troy and is both blessed and cursed.

Her blessing: She can see into the future and knows, beyond a doubt, that her city's undoing awaits inside a wooden horse.

Her curse: No one believes her.

Seth Frotman is the Cassandra of the student loan industry.

Frotman served three years as the CFPB's student loan ombudsman and head of its Office for Students and Young Consumers. A fierce watchdog for student borrowers, Frotman and his team reviewed thousands of complaints about the questionable practices of student loan companies.

Since 2011, the CFPB has handled more than 60,000 student loan complaints and, through its investigations and enforcement actions, returned more than \$750 million to aggrieved borrowers.

In the spring of 2017, Frotman and his team investigated thousands of complaints about a range of issues and found a disturbing pattern with PSLF:

Borrowers would notify their loan servicers of their intent to enroll in the pro-

gram, then make it years into the repayment process before being told they didn't yet qualify — because they had the wrong loan, the wrong repayment plan or the wrong employer.

Sometimes servicers would be aware of a borrower's status as a public servant — active-duty military, for example — but not tell the borrower about the possibility of PSLF. For borrowers who needed to consolidate their loans to qualify for forgiveness, Frotman found, a process that should have taken 30 days often took much longer. Servicer employees appeared undertrained, uninformed and prone to a litany of paperwork mistakes.

"I thought, 'Oh great, I must qualify for this program,'" says Sarah Krainin, who used loans to pay for college and a master's degree and now teaches at a nonprofit, public university in California. "And I asked my servicer at the time, 'Am I gonna qualify for [PSLF]?' And they said, 'Yes, you have federal loans. You qualify.'"

Krainin says she made life choices that were informed, at least in part, by that promise. But after making six years of payments, she recently checked in with the Education Department and was told she did not qualify, *yet*.

Krainin was told she could consolidate her loans and qualify for PSLF, but doing so would reset her countdown to loan forgiveness from four years back to 10.

"I've spent six years thinking one thing, and now it's another," Krainin says.

She was devastated and pleaded for leniency with a series of call-center representatives, but got nowhere.

At last, with one call-center agent, Krainin says, “I kinda let my guard down and said, ‘This kinda sucks.’ And [the representative] said, ‘Yeah, it really sucks.’ Just hearing her say that was a relief. It wasn’t six-years-worth-of-work relief, but it was a little bit of confirmation that this is not really the way things are supposed to be.”

In June 2017, Frotman published the results of his CFPB investigation, titled “Staying On Track While Giving Back,” and he recommended that policymakers consider immediate changes, including raising standards for servicers and giving more flexibility to borrowers who have been misled by their servicers.

Frotman was not the first Cassandra to warn the Education Department and lawmakers about the program, but his voice may have been the loudest and his case the most thorough. Still, his recommendations fell largely on deaf ears.

The lucky 1 percent

Later that year, in October 2017, after a host of warnings and red flags, the floodgates opened, and the first generation of borrowers to complete 10 years of public service began applying for loan forgiveness. Thousands of them.

It has now been a year, and one thing is clear: Frotman was right.

The Department of Education and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have both released reviews of PSLF that back up Frotman’s CFPB findings.

The department’s recent report card for PSLF, the program’s first, was a revelation, describing a scale of dysfunction that surprised many in the loan industry. It found that, over the past year, nearly 29,000 applications for Public Service Loan Forgiveness were submitted

and processed. Of those, 99 percent were denied, the vast majority for “not meeting program requirements.”

Ninety-nine percent.

Just days after the Education Department released its data, the federal government’s independent watchdog weighed in with the results of its own investigation. Investigators from the GAO found that, more than a decade into the program, many borrowers and servicers still appear confused about basic requirements.

Like Frotman’s team, GAO found evidence of student borrowers thinking they were on the path to loan forgiveness, only to “find out months and potentially years later that [they] don’t qualify and that [they’re] not actually eligible for forgiveness,” says GAO’s Melissa Emrey-Arras, who led the investigation.

Some borrowers had the wrong loans or employers that didn’t qualify. Others were in the wrong repayment plan. In fact, more than half of borrowers who asked to have their loans and employment double-checked, to be sure they qualified for PSLF, “either did not meet basic eligibility requirements or had yet to make any qualifying loan payments,” according to the report.

GAO’s investigation found a communication breakdown between the Education Department and FedLoan, the contractor that officially handles PSLF. For example, if a borrower calls and asks if her job qualifies as public service, the company’s representatives told investigators they generally won’t answer that question over the phone — because they have no list of eligible employers.

“When the servicer that’s responsible for implementing the program doesn’t have a list of employers, that’s difficult

to understand,” Emrey-Arras says, making clear that the Education Department deserves as much blame, if not more, for such failures.

“I’d say it’s everybody’s fault,” says Robert Kelchen, assistant professor of higher education at Seton Hall University. “I’d put more of the blame on the Department of Education, because student loan servicers can only really do what the department tells them to do.”

Kelchen says one big reason the program’s initial rejection rate is so high is because, especially in the early days, PSLF’s basic requirements were vague.

“Servicers didn’t really have much better information than borrowers,” Kelchen says. “They were trying to help students, but they were just using their best guess and trying to go through all of the different emails that the Department of Education would send to servicers instead of actually putting together a guidebook to help them out.”

In its defense, the Education Department says it “is approving every eligible application for PSLF under the strict rules that Congress established . . . The Department concurs with the [GAO’s] recommendations and is committed to enhancing the process, outreach, and communications related to the program. We will soon implement and promote a new, automated ‘help tool’ for borrowers and will increase communications to make borrowers aware of the tool and other resources related to loan forgiveness programs.”

But this communication breakdown is only part of the PSLF problem. Yes, servicers and their call-center agents are often uninformed and unhelpful. But it’s also clear, servicers sometimes fail borrowers, *intentionally*.

“They’re doing a terrible job”

While at the CFPB, Frotman and his team found a broad pattern of servicer mistakes and mismanagement. Just days before Donald Trump’s inauguration, the bureau sued one of the nation’s largest servicers, Navient, alleging the company “provided bad information in writing and over the phone [to borrowers], processed payments incorrectly, and failed to act when borrowers complained about problems.”

At the time, Navient was managing more than 6 million student loan accounts for the federal government. Since then, five state attorneys general have also filed suit: Illinois, Washington, Pennsylvania, California and Mississippi.

Navient declined to comment for this story, but its CEO, Jack Remondi, offered this spirited rebuttal when California announced its lawsuit:

The allegations are unfounded, and the lawsuit is another attempt to blame a single servicer for the failures of the higher education system and the federal student loan program to deliver desired outcomes.

Remondi went on to remind Navient’s critics that the government’s student loan servicers do not “make, own or have a financial interest in the loans” they manage or “design the complex and confusing repayment options and enrollment requirements for borrowers.”

FedLoan is also at the center of a state-led lawsuit. Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey is suing the servicer for its handling of both the PSLF program and the Teacher Educa-

tion Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant program.

“They’re doing a terrible job,” Healey, a Democrat, told NPR earlier this year.

Healey alleges FedLoan has overcharged student borrowers and “prevented [them] from making qualifying monthly payments that count towards loan forgiveness, shifting the consequences of its loan servicing failures onto the student borrowers themselves.”

FedLoan also declined to comment for this story but has previously told NPR that the company “does not agree with the allegations made by the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office.” The company said it “remains committed to resolving outstanding borrower issues while following the U.S. Department of Education’s policies, procedures, and regulations as mandated by the Agency’s federal servicing contracts.”

In an ongoing investigation, NPR has documented FedLoan’s mismanagement of the TEACH Grant program, revealing that thousands of teachers who received college grants to teach in low-income public schools have unfairly had those grants converted to loans, with interest. The Education Department has since launched a “top-to-bottom” internal review of the program.

And there’s one more turn to this story — something Frotman tried to headline in his resignation letter:

The Trump administration has chosen sides in this fight over loan forgiveness, and it’s not with borrowers. In the absence of federal efforts to rein in servicer mistakes and bad behavior, states have tried to fill the void, passing increasingly tougher consumer protection laws and, occasionally, suing.

Ordinarily a fierce advocate for states’ rights, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is making a bold legal argument: Because these companies work for the federal government, they need not answer to state authorities. They are, in essence, protected from such lawsuits.

In response, half of state attorneys general, including reliably conservative Montana, Tennessee, Kansas and Texas, wrote to DeVos, urging her to reject this “ongoing campaign by student loan servicers and debt collectors to secure immunity for themselves from state-level oversight.”

Just this month, 12 state attorneys general signed a pointed letter to DeVos, writing that “the shocking 99 percent PSLF program denial rate is quite simply unacceptable, and borrowers need fixes for the program now.”

Cupcakes

Seth Frotman was wrong.

Not about the problems with Public Service Loan Forgiveness. They are legion, indeed. He was wrong about being able to take his daughters to the playground after turning in his resignation.

Despite grabbing headlines across the country, Frotman’s resignation letter did not get him walked out of the building with a cardboard box. He stayed through the week.

In fact, CFPB leadership met his departure largely with indifference.

Days later, Acting CFPB Director Mulvaney gave an interview to CNBC and was asked about Frotman’s fiery departure.

“I never met the gentleman,” Mulvaney said, laughing. “Don’t know who he is.”

The CFPB tells NPR in a statement: “While we disagree with the assertions

made in [Seth Frotman's] resignation letter, we wish him the best in securing his future employment.”

Friday, Aug. 31, was Frotman's last day, and he did something unusual for a man who had, earlier that week, publicly savaged his boss and the Trump administration:

He brought his wife and daughters to work.

For parts of his seven years at the CFPB, Frotman says, the work had often taken him away from home, and he wanted his girls to see where he'd been all this time, to sit in his chair, to play with his landline phone (their favorite part) and to meet some of the colleagues who had become dear friends.

They posed for pictures. His daughters dressed for the occasion, the 2-year-old wearing a purple sundress and necklace, the 5-year-old in pink with a white flower in her hair. Frotman wore faded jeans, sleeves rolled to the elbows.

“What do you do?” his 5-year-old asked.

“We help people,” he replied.

Frotman says the visit was bittersweet, because he was proud of the work he had done and wished he could have kept doing it. He says his daughter could tell there was more to his story, but cupcakes appeared and all was forgotten.

For the record, the cupcakes were not for Frotman's going-away party.

Someone else was leaving, too.

To hear our Planet Money episode on Seth Frotman and Public Service Loan Forgiveness, [click here](#).

Harvard Admissions Secrets Emerge; Defrauded Borrowers Can Now Seek Loan Forgiveness

By Program Error, NPR

You're reading NPR's weekly roundup of education news.

Harvard's admissions practices go on trial

The highly anticipated trial about Harvard University's admissions practices began Monday and continued through the week. Students for Fair Admissions, a group that opposes affirmative action, sued Harvard in 2014, alleging that the school discriminates against Asian-American applicants by rating them lower on personality measures that factor into admissions.

As William R. Fitzsimmons, Harvard's dean of admissions and financial aid, fielded questions from the stand, previously unknown details about Harvard's admissions practices emerged. Fitzsimmons acknowledged that the admissions department maintains an "interest list" of children linked to donors and alumni.

John Hughes, a lawyer for Students for Fair Admissions, presented emails between Harvard officials indicating the power that donations — or potential donations — could have on an applicant's prospects. In one email, a former tennis coach described how he "rolled out the

red carpet" for an applicant whose family donated \$1.1 million to the school.

The case is expected to continue for two more weeks and could ultimately reach the Supreme Court.

Lawmakers urge action on loan forgiveness program

More than 150 members of Congress sent a letter this week to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos urging her to investigate the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

"We are deeply troubled that millions of dedicated public servants may not obtain the loan forgiveness that they deserve if the Department does not act quickly to correct program implementation issues," they wrote.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, or PSLF, was meant to relieve teachers, emergency workers, and other public servants of their student loans after 10 years of service and 120 qualifying payments. But recent reviews show that the program's implementation has not gone smoothly.

A report by the Government Accountability Office, the independent federal watchdog, shows that 99 percent of applications for loan forgiveness have been denied so far. It describes a break-

down in communication between the Education Department and its loan servicers, which work with borrowers to manage their loans.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau raised a red flag about the program more than a year ago.

Defrauded borrowers can now seek loan forgiveness

After more than a year of delays, an Obama-era rule granting loan forgiveness to defrauded student borrowers went into effect this week. The rule, known as Borrower Defense to Repayment, applies to students who attended a for-profit college that broke consumer protection laws or lied about measures of student success, such as job placement rates.

It's one of a number of Obama-era rules targeting private, for-profit colleges that the current Department of Education, led by DeVos, has rolled back or delayed. The department initially delayed the rule's implementation in 2017, and this week, U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss denied a request by the California Association of Private Postsecondary Schools to scrap the rule entirely.

"This is not the first (and presumably not the last) chapter in a dispute about the fate of regulations that the Department of Education promulgated in November 2016," Moss wrote in his opinion this week. Court documents show that the department "remains committed to rescinding the 2016 rule."

'I Am Heartbroken': Your Letters About Public Service Loan Forgiveness

By Program Error, NPR

“Thank YOU,” writes Cara Christensen, a first-grade teacher in Washington state who read NPR’s deep dive into the troubled Public Service Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF). The reporting, she says, “made me feel not so alone.”

We received dozens of emails, tweets and Facebook comments from aggrieved borrowers responding to news that, over the past year, 99 percent of applications for the popular loan-forgiveness program have been denied.

PSLF offers the promise of loan forgiveness to nurses, teachers, first-responders and other student borrowers who work in public service for 10 years while keeping up with their loan payments. But it has been plagued by poor communication from the U.S. Department of Education and mismanaged by servicing companies the department pays to run its trillion-dollar student loan portfolio.

Many borrowers who wrote in share eerily similar stories, of making payments for years, while working in public service, only to find out they don’t yet qualify for the program because of a technicality. Perhaps, they’re enrolled in the wrong repayment plan or hold the wrong type of loan.

Colleen and Dan Burton, of New York, have struggled with both:

“My loans are of the wrong type,” Colleen writes, and “despite [Dan’s] eligible employment history, we were extremely disappointed at the time to learn that all of his previous payments (2007-2013) were not eligible because he was not in the right type of repayment plan.”

Dan’s story comes with another twist. When he realized that changing to an appropriate repayment plan would force him to restart the 10-year path to forgiveness, he simply opted to consolidate his loans, worth \$13,000, and move on. But, earlier this year, Congress created an emergency fund for public servants who, like Dan, have been excluded from PSLF because they were put in the wrong repayment plan.

There’s just one catch, Colleen writes:

“We just learned of the temporary expanded PSLF program, so we requested a re-assessment. Dan’s case is the exact scenario that they were supposedly trying to rectify. He had multiple years of payments rejected due to repayment plan type. Now

they are rejecting his forgiveness again because his loans have been consolidated. We consolidated BECAUSE he was rejected from forgiveness in 2014. If we somehow knew there would be this new opportunity, we would have made a different decision. . . . He clearly meets the standard of the ‘spirit of the law’ but the ‘letter of the law’ is making it impossible to take advantage of the program.”

We also saw this on Twitter from Nathan Fried, who teaches in the biology department at Rutgers University-Camden.

“I am one of the thousands who is trying to get answers,” writes Mary Leist of Ohio. She says her loan servicer “has miscalculated my qualifying payments over the last two years, initially telling me I had only made 8 qualifying payments, then 21, then that they had to ‘further review’ my account after I had complained a number of times, indicating that I had, in fact, made closer to 60.”

Borrowers are expected to make 120 qualifying payments — 10 years’ worth — before their loans can be forgiven.

This past week, Leist says, she spoke again with her servicer, checking the status of her payment calculation, “and was told it could take up to a year for them to get back to me. I’m not sure what I was hoping for by sharing this with you . . . maybe just the acknowledgement that we are real people, not just lines on a spreadsheet.”

This is a common theme among the notes NPR received: Borrowers who

have had their expectations of loan forgiveness dashed because of technicalities or poor communication from their servicer feel abandoned and powerless.

Ryan Coleman of Missouri writes in an email:

“When I first asked for a review of how many qualifying payments I’d made well over 6 or 7 years into my public service career, I was told the number was only 17 lol (so 1yr 5mos of payments). Incredulous, I called up, and a lady explained they’d misapplied a payment a while back and so subsequent payments hadn’t counted in their initial review. She assured me they’d recalculate soon. That was seriously probably two years ago. I’ve called a few times and just get told it takes a while.”

Justin Davis of Seattle goes on to offer some good advice — though, he admits, it hasn’t helped him:

Finally, Erik Carlton of Tennessee writes that, when he repeatedly asked his loan servicer for help reducing his steep monthly payments, no one mentioned that he qualified for Public Service Loan Forgiveness nor recommended an income-driven repayment plan. Instead, he was put in forbearance.

It wasn’t until Carlton reached out to the public university where he now teaches that he learned of PSLF and promptly enrolled. Though he says he has worked in public service for at least seven years, he has made just 18 of the 120 payments needed to qualify for loan forgiveness.

“I am heartbroken and heart-sick ... My oldest [child] is supposed to start college in three years, my next just three years after that, and our third just three years after that. ... I have never been arrested and haven’t even had a speeding ticket in 20 years. I don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t gamble. I vote. I am a teacher. I have been working and supporting myself since I was 16, and I have no idea how I am supposed to give my kids a future. Because I can’t save for theirs. I can barely pay for their present.”

Fingerprints, DNA And Social Media Posts Helped FBI Identify Bomb Suspect Cesar Sayoc

By Program Error, NPR

One day after the FBI arrested a man in connection with improvised explosive devices sent to critics and opponents of President Trump, we're learning more about the suspect Cesar Altieri Sayoc.

Sayoc, 56, was arrested on Friday morning in South Florida and now faces federal five federal crimes including; transporting explosives across state lines, illegally mailing explosives, threatening former presidents and others, threatening interstate communications and assaulting federal officials

After Sayoc was taken into custody, the FBI confirmed they found another package on Friday evening. This one was addressed to prominent Democratic donor Tom Steyer in California, bringing the total to 14 suspicious packages addressed to 12 targets.

Sayoc is expected to appear in court on Monday in Miami. He could face up to 48 years in prison if convicted.

In a news conference on Friday afternoon, FBI director Christopher Wray said a fingerprint on one of the bubble-lined manila envelopes led them to identify Sayoc, who was already in the criminal justice system because of previous arrests in Florida.

Investigators at the FBI lab in Quantico, Va., also identified a possible DNA match from two of the homemade pipe bombs.

Authorities say they are looking for more packages and investigating if Sayoc had any help making these improvised devices. The homemade bombs "are not hoax devices," Wray stressed on Friday.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions was asked about why Sayoc had allegedly only been targeting Democrats at that same news conference. Sessions and FBI Director Christopher Wray declined to talk about the potential political motivations but Sessions did say this: "He may have been a partisan . . . appears to be partisan, but that will be determined as the case goes forward."

NPR's Greg Myre reports Sayoc lived in his van, which was covered in pro-Trump stickers and anti-liberal images, and liked to hang out at the gym. An avid weightlifter, some of Sayoc's legal troubles were related to steroids, Myre reports.

Sayoc was known to work and hang out in strip clubs. Coworkers say he was DJing at a club the night before he was picked up by the FBI, Myre reports.

A registered Republican, Sayoc attended Trump rallies wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat and at one event, held up a poster that read “CNN sucks,” according to his photos on social media.

Along with the physical evidence, the FBI used clues from social media to identify him. They were tipped off by similarities of misspelled words on the packages and the same misspelled words on his Twitter account.

Sayoc was aggressive on Twitter, often threatening Democrats like former Vice President Joe Biden, in vitriolic, typo riddled tweets. One of the 14 explosive packages discovered last week was addressed to Biden.

But Sayoc didn’t just lash out at high profile politicians. Earlier this month he tweeted at Rochelle Ritchie, a political analyst and former press secretary for house Democrats, whom he likely saw on a Fox News segment.

“We will see you 4 sure. Hug your loved ones real close every time you leave you home,” his tweet read.

“I’ve received messages before from people who like to call me the N-word or the B-word or things like that, and I usually brush that off. I don’t report it to Twitter or anything,” Ritchie told NPR’s Jasmine Garsd. “But this one was a little more concerning to me because it was seeming to be a threat on my life or a threat on my safety, or possibly even a threat for my loved ones.”

Ritchie reported the tweet immediately and blocked Sayoc. She says Twitter got back to her within 24 hours and said the tweet did not violate their rules against abusive behavior.

Ritchie says she questioned the message she got back, “I felt like it was an automated response.”

Twitter is often criticized for its handling of abusive content. The company did eventually suspend Sayoc’s account, but it wasn’t until after he’d been arrested.

Twitter also walked back their response to Ritchie in a public post admitting they made a mistake and that “the Tweet clearly violated our rules and should have been removed.”

NPR’s Vanessa Romoreports Sayoc consistently posted or re-tweeted messages attacking immigrants, antifa, Parkland high school shooting survivor David Hogg, and former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

What's Known About Robert Bowers, The Suspect In The Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting

By Program Error, NPR

Robert Bowers, the suspect in the shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue on Saturday, surrendered to police, and officials say he is in fair condition at Allegheny General Hospital with multiple gunshot wounds.

Authorities say that while Bowers' motive remains unknown, "we believe he was acting alone." Eleven people were killed in the attack, and six were injured.

"We're in the early stages of this investigation," Bob Jones, FBI Pittsburgh special agent in charge, told reporters during an afternoon press conference. "Over the next several days and weeks, we will look at everything in the suspect's life: his home, his vehicle, his social media, and his movements over the last several days. At this point, we have no knowledge that Bowers was known to law enforcement before today."

Bowers, 46, is a resident of Pittsburgh with a history of making anti-Semitic remarks on social media.

Some of those remarks appeared under an account believed to belong to Bowers on Gab, an app that says it provides an alternative to anti-conservative bias on Facebook and Twitter.

On the account, Bowers posted a link to the website of HIAS, a nonprofit orga-

nization that provides humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees. The link was for a Shabbat ceremony HIAS planned for refugees in locations across the country.

The caption to Bowers' post read, "Why hello there HIAS! You like to bring in hostile invaders to dwell among us?"

Hours before Saturday morning's shooting, the account posted again, "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

Mark Hetfield, the president of HIAS, told NPR that he is in "a state of shock."

"Refugees flee hate, and for this kind of vile act to happen in our country is devastating, and then on top of that to have it happen in a sanctuary, on the holiest day of the week, is unfathomable," Hetfield said.

"There is simply too much space out there for hate, and it's hatred against refugees; hatred against Jews; hatred against Latinos; hatred against transgendered people; hatred against African-Americans; hatred against the other," Hetfield said. "It's just hate across the board, and there's too much space for it

now. Everyone has to stand up to it now. We cannot tolerate this intolerance.”

Gab issued a statement on the synagogue shooting:

Shortly after the attack, Gab was alerted to a user profile of the alleged Tree of Life Synagogue shooter. The account was verified and matched the name of the alleged shooter’s name, which was mentioned on police scanners. This person also had accounts on other social networks.

Gab took swift and proactive action to contact law enforcement immediately. We first backed up all user data from the account and then proceeded to suspend the account. We then contacted the FBI and made them aware of this account and the user data in our possession. We are ready and willing to work with law enforcement to see to it that justice is served.

Politics, Facts And Civility: A Lesson In Engaging In Discourse

By Program Error, NPR

A shooting on Saturday at a synagogue in Pittsburgh left at least 11 people dead. Earlier this week, at least 14 pipe bombs were sent to prominent Democrats and their supporters — apparently because of their political views.

But even before this week's events, people across Pennsylvania were saying they are frustrated with the tone of the country's public discourse and the lack of civility. They say they're hoping for more unity.

That message might have special resonance in Gettysburg — the site of the epic civil war battle in 1863. It went down as one of this country's bloodiest, where more than 50,000 Americans were injured or killed over the course of three days.

But now, in 2018, a group of residents in Gettysburg have been meeting up in a historic church to practice what others preach: bringing people of different political views together. It's called Politics, Facts and Civility.

Democrat Kerr Thompson, a former college professor, founded the group in 2017. Darcy Maier, also a Democrat, joined the group through her friendship with Thompson. Republican Chad Collie is also a member and says he got involved after the 2016 presidential campaign.

“During the 2016 campaign, I saw a lot of incivility, a lot of anger, a lot of resentment and saw that coming to a boiling point in many ways and it encouraged me to stop and think about what was going on in the nation,” Collie says.

In 2016 and years prior, Collie says he was very politically involved and served as the vice chairman of the local Republican Party. After the election, he says he resigned from the position “and made a vow to myself to get more involved in the community, in talking to people who were on the other side of the aisle.”

While Collie joined out of what he felt was a need he had, Maier says she didn't initially seek out this bipartisan conversation.

“I have always been a pretty staunch Democrat,” she says. “I never really thought about how important it was to bridge the divide until I got involved. I think that realizing that there is valid points to be made on both sides and that there is a balance that we can find is, has just been a real eye-opening experience for me.”

Maier says the conversations she's had have been “invaluable for me opening my horizons.”

When Thompson started the group, he says he just hoped people would come together and “come to understand each other more.”

“I am very convinced . . . that there are valid points on all sides,” Thompson says. “I am very blue, blue voter, but I think that that red voters have valid points that it will enrich all of us if we can listen to each other.”

Maier says it took Thompson’s encouragement to come to the group, but “it was the surprise at the civility of the conversation that made me stay.”

As a fairly quiet person Maier says she doesn’t often express herself well in group situations and doesn’t want to go to places where there will be arguing, but in the group’s environment, everyone encourages each other and listens to what the others say.

1.1.1 National discourse

For members of the group, the rhetoric of President Trump is a frequent topic of conversation.

“Well, I would I would just begin by saying that I was also concerned with Trump’s incivility during the campaign specifically and some of the things he’s said since then have been very uncivil,” Collie says. “Every president that we’ve ever had has had pros and cons, and if I was able to talk to President Trump today, I would I would challenge him on that and I would encourage him to be more civil, especially on Twitter.”

Seeing this as one of Trump’s weaknesses, Collie says that’s why he is participating in these conversations.

“That’s one of the reasons that I try to speak up more for civility, because I think everyone should have influence, including the president of the United States,” Collie says. “I think his tone has changed some. I think some of his policies, some of the things that have

been enacted have been very good for the country. But I think that’s something that he specifically has to work on himself. And I’m not afraid to say that.”

1.1.2 Hearing each other

Maier admits that she and Collie do have differing opinions and views on a lot of issues, but that they still keep their discussions civil.

“It’s because we both have a commitment to listening and when we sit down at the table with each other, we come with an open mind, really wanting to know what the other person thinks about an issue and not trying to win the argument,” she says.

She says they know the conversations won’t end with one of them changing the other’s mind, but that that’s not the goal.

“Our goal is really curiosity and an open heart,” Maier says.

As people begin to head to the polls for this year’s midterm elections, the group says there are some things to keep in mind that could help open up similar discussions in other parts of the country.

“My first advice to people would be ‘vote,’” Thompson says. “I think we need to come to realize that we have started thinking of politics as win-lose, or life in general as win-lose, that I have to beat you to do well. And, actually where we have had the most progress and civilization is when we have learned to work together to everyone’s benefit.”

The groups also acknowledges their location in Gettysburg might give their conversations a special resonance.

“I think that when we think about the fact that we’re meeting at the church, called the Prince of Peace, which was

built as a memorial of reconciliation between the North and the South after the Civil War, I think that that says a lot about what our community stands for and the work that we're trying to do," Maier says.

Hiba Ahmad and Ammad Omar produced and edited the audio for this story. Wynne Davis adapted it for Web.

Want To Keep Your Brain Sharp? Take Care Of Your Eyes And Ears

By Program Error, NPR

By age 40, about 1 in 10 adults will experience some hearing loss. It happens so slowly and gradually, says audiologist Dina Rollins. “You don’t realize what you’re missing.” And even as it worsens, many people are in denial.

By the time someone is convinced they have a hearing problem, age-related memory loss may have already set in. But there’s good news. Restoring hearing with hearing aids can help slow down cognitive decline.

Consider these findings: Researchers tracked about 2,000 older adults in the U.S. both before and after they started using hearing aids. The adults were participants in a big, national study called the Health and Retirement Study.

“We found the rate of cognitive decline was slowed by 75 percent following the adoption of hearing aids,” says Asri Maharani, a researcher at the University of Manchester in the division of neuroscience and experimental psychology and an author of the paper. “It is a surprising result,” Maharani says. The study was published this spring in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

To assess cognition over time, researchers performed a battery of face-to-face tests with participants. This was done every two years from 1996 to 2014. One test to assess memory required participants to recall a list of 10 words, both

immediately after the words were read aloud and then again after the participants had been distracted by other tasks.

“We weren’t expecting that hearing aid use would eliminate cognitive decline. That’s just not going to happen” because age-related decline is inevitable, explains Piers Dawes, an experimental psychologist and another author of the study. “But the reduction in the rate of change is quite substantial. It’s a very intriguing finding.”

To put the findings in context, consider that the slower rate of decline equates to remembering less than one more word on the 10-word recall test. So it’s a small but measurable effect. And it adds to the evidence that hearing loss and cognitive decline are strongly linked.

It makes sense, says Rollins. Consider what people are getting when their hearing is restored: “Stimulating your ears stimulates the nerves that stimulate your brain.”

When you get hearing aids, “we’re giving your ears back what they’re missing, and giving your brain what it needs to make sense of what you’re hearing,” Rollins explains. And this can help you stay more stimulated and socially engaged. Rollins was not involved in the study. She’s in practice in Silver Spring, Md.

Rollins says people who have hearing loss might decline faster than those with normal hearing due to the loss of social stimulation. “Social isolation is a huge part of hearing loss, and people will notice their loved ones withdrawing from conversation, or not going to family or social functions like they used to.”

Rollins fits a lot of people with hearing aids, and sometimes they come in only after their loved ones insist on it. “No one *want*s to wear a hearing aid,” Rollins says. “Typically, there’s convincing that needs to be done.” There’s still a stigma attached to wearing hearing aids. People think: “I don’t want to look old!” But Rollins says the technology has improved a lot in recent years. And often, hearing aids are a lot less noticeable and are covered up by hair.

Cost is another obstacle. With a price tag of \$4,500 and upwards for high-end aids, they’re not cheap. Less expensive options are available, but insurance plans typically don’t cover the full cost. Some plans offer no benefit for hearing aids, and, in general, Medicare does not cover the cost, either.

But when people decide to get fitted with hearing aids, this step can improve quality of life. This is the case with Rollins’ patient Lucien Johnson, 92, who was fitted with hearing aids a few weeks back.

“I was tired of screaming,” his wife, Carrie Johnson, tells us. And it was frustrating for Lucien as well.

“Sometimes she thought I was ignoring her,” Lucien says. But, really, he just didn’t hear her speaking.

The Johnsons say they’re communicating better now. Lucien went in to see Rollins for an adjustment recently.

“I need some fine-tuning,” he told her. “But so far, so good.”

Another common condition as we age is the deterioration of vision, often because of cataracts.

New evidence shows that restoring vision by having cataract surgery can also slow cognitive decline. A companion study carried out by the same researchers and published in the journal *PLOS One* this month evaluated the outcomes of about 2,000 older adults who had cataract surgery. They were all participants in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, which is carried out similarly to the U.S. Health and Retirement Survey. Participants are given periodic cognitive assessments.

“We found the rate of cognitive decline was slowed by 50 percent following cataract surgery,” explains Maharani. As with the outcome in the hearing aid study, restoring good vision can’t eliminate cognitive decline, but this study suggests it can significantly slow the process.

So many factors influence healthy aging, including lifestyle habits such as diet and physical activity. But Maharani and her co-authors say it’s important to know that steps to correct vision and hearing loss can play into the equation as well.

Antipsychotic Drugs Don't Ease ICU Delirium

By Program Error, NPR

Powerful drugs that have been used for decades to treat delirium are ineffective for that purpose, according to a study published online Monday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Antipsychotic medications, such as haloperidol (brand name, Haldol), are widely used in intensive care units, emergency rooms, hospital wards and nursing homes.

“In some surveys up to 70 percent of patients [in the ICU] get these antipsychotics,” says Dr. E. Wesley “Wes” Ely, an intensive care specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. They’re prescribed by “very good doctors at extremely good medical centers,” he says. “Millions of people worldwide are getting these drugs to treat their delirium.”

But the drugs can have serious side effects. And Ely says there is no solid research showing that they are effective at treating delirium.

Patients with delirium are often confused and incoherent and sometimes can suffer hallucinations. This condition can lead to long-term cognitive problems, including a form of dementia.

Ely and colleagues at 16 U.S. medical centers decided to put antipsychotic drugs to a rigorous test. They divided nearly 600 patients who were suffering from delirium into three groups. One group got the powerful antipsychotic

haloperidol. A second group got ziprasidone, which is a related medication from a class of drugs called “atypical antipsychotics.” A third group got a placebo.

“The three groups did exactly the same,” Ely says. There was no change in the duration of delirium, or the number of coma-free days. “They stayed in the ICU the same amount of time. They stayed on the mechanical ventilator the same amount of time. They didn’t get out of the hospital any sooner.”

“There’s not a shred of evidence in this entire investigation that this aggressive approach to treating delirium with antipsychotics, which is commonplace and usual care, did anything for the patients,” he concludes.

Ely was to present his results of the study, called MIND-USA, at the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine meeting in Paris today. Timed with that presentation, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published the paper online.

Ely says the drugs can calm patients down, and he still uses them at times for that purpose. They are also prescribed for severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and other mental health conditions. The new study only assessed the value of these drugs for treating delirium.

“This is huge!” says Dr. Juliana Barr, an anesthesiologist and intensive care specialist at Stanford University and the VA Palo Alto Medical Center who was not involved in the study. She has helped craft guidelines for appropriate drug use in the intensive care unit.

“I think the main take-home message is that providers really need to think differently about managing delirium in their patients in the ICU,” she says. “A pill or an injection is really not a magic bullet for this devastating illness.”

Barr expects the new study will change medical practice. “It’s going to generate a sea change in how we think about best practices for managing delirium in the ICU,” she says.

Both she and Ely advocate for a more holistic approach to treating delirium — getting patients off drugs and off breathing machines as soon as possible and getting them up and about as soon as they’re able.

You can reach Richard Harris at rharris@npr.org.

Can A Child Be Raised Free Of Gender Stereotypes? This Family Tried

By Program Error, NPR

Expectant parents often daydream about their children's future. What sports will they play in school? Will they become musicians, or scientists?

Royce and Jessica James had big dreams for their baby, too. But when an ultrasound revealed they were having a daughter, Jessica began to worry about how gender stereotypes would affect their child.

"I remember working at the Boys and Girls Club near our college and seeing the children, watching how they played and how they were able to play based on what they were wearing. And thinking, 'Those girls could also be up at the top of that playscape, swinging upside down, if they weren't wearing sandals and sundresses.'"

Jessica and Royce decided they weren't going to let clothing — or any other gender norms — limit their child's potential. So they said no to dresses given to them by family members and friends. They took the same approach with toys.

"We're not going to be getting her baby dolls and Barbies. We want her to have open-ended free play toys," she says.

This week on Hidden Brain, the story of a couple and the challenges they faced in trying to shield their child from gender stereotypes. And we meet their daugh-

ter, now a teenager, to hear her take on how she was raised.

More Resources:

- "No More Boys and Girls: Can Our Kids Go Gender Free?" A 2017 BBC documentary which follows a class of seven-year-olds in a gender-neutral school.
- *It Begins at 10: How Gender Expectations Shape Early Adolescence Around the World*, a 2017 article in *The Journal of Adolescent Health*.
- *Early preschool environments and gender: Effects of gender pedagogy in Sweden*, a 2017 article in *The Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* which compared children in standard schools to those in gender-neutral schools.

Hidden Brain is hosted by Shankar Vedantam and produced by Jennifer Schmidt, Rhaina Cohen, Parth Shah, Thomas Lu, and Laura Kwerel. Our supervising producer is Tara Boyle. Camila Vargas-Restrepo is our intern. You can also follow us on Twitter @hiddenbrain, and listen for Hidden Brain stories each week on your local public radio station.

Microplastics Are Turning Up Everywhere, Even In Human Excrement

By Program Error, NPR

Microplastics have been found in human stool samples from countries in many parts of the world, according to a small pilot study being presented this week at the 26th annual United European Gastroenterology conference in Vienna.

The study, conducted by researchers from the Medical University of Vienna and the Environment Agency Austria, looked at stool samples from eight individuals in eight different countries: Finland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, the U.K. and Austria. Every stool sample tested positive for up to nine different plastic types, with an average of 20 particles of plastic per 10 grams of stool.

“Personally, I did not expect that each sample would ... [test] ... positive,” says lead researcher Dr. Philipp Schwabl of the Medical University of Vienna. He and his colleagues found that all eight stool samples contained polypropylene and polyethyleneterephthalate particles, which are major components of plastic bottle caps and plastic bottles. “Is it harmful to human health? That’s a very important question and we are planning further investigations.”

In the study, which is the first of its kind, each person ate their regular diet and kept a food diary in the week leading up to their stool sampling. All par-

ticipants were exposed to plastics by consuming foods that had been wrapped in plastic as well as beverages in plastic bottles. None of the participants were vegetarians, and six of them consumed wild fish.

The concern, says Schwabl, is whether microplastics might be “entering the blood stream, lymphatic system and ... even reach the liver.” He notes that in animal and fish studies, microplastics have been shown to cause intestinal damage and liver stress.

The world produces about 400 million metric tons of plastic a year, the equivalent of 882 billion pounds, and 80 percent ends up deposited in landfills and other parts of the environment. The smallest particles, the microplastics, range from 10 nanometers — so tiny they are invisible to the human eye — up to to 5 millimeters in diameter. Microplastics — including microfibers from clothing — are floating in the air and are found in most of our bottled and tap water, our beer, our sea, rock and lake salt, and our soil.

“This study is brilliant and ingenious,” says chemist and microplastics expert Shari Mason of the State University of New York at Fredonia. Mason was not involved in the study. “They’ve definitively established what so many of

us suspected — we're ingesting these plastics."

The question now, Mason says, is: What is being retained rather than excreted? And what is its impact?

"We know from the scientific literature that anything smaller than 150 microns, and especially anything smaller than 50 microns, can migrate through the gut wall and go into the blood cells and organs," says ecologist Chelsea Rochman of the University of Toronto, who was not involved in the study.

Not only is the potential migration of the plastics throughout our body a concern, but the additives in plastics may carry health risks. Many of these additives are known endocrine disrupters. According to Dr. Herbert Tilg, president of the Austrian Society of Gastroenterology and chair of the UEG Scientific Committee, microplastics could possibly be one of the factors contributing to inflammatory bowel syndrome or even colon cancer, which is on the rise among young adults.

"Colon cancer is increasing in young people, and we think that either dietary or environmental components are a factor," he says. "Now that we know we can detect microplastics in humans, we can develop larger studies, in both healthy and diseased patients, to find out if they are a contributing factor." Tilg was not involved in this study.

So how can we minimize our exposure to microplastics? Rochman says for water, "reverse osmosis filters are beautiful, and we use them in our laboratory." HEPA filters also can clean the air of small particles, she says. One can avoid plastic bottles, but even so, plastic wrapping and containers are ubiqui-

tous for food, and plastic is everywhere around us.

"Our love affair with plastic is so huge," says Mason, "it will take time to change our current situation. People are starting to look at truly biodegradable plastics made out of hemp or corn starch, and I think that will be the ultimate solution to this multifaceted problem."

Rochman was not surprised that microplastics are being found in human stools. "We've mismanaged our waste," says Rochman, "and it's come back to haunt us at our dinner table. Now we are literally eating our own trash. We can do better than that."

Meanwhile, Schwabl says he and his colleagues are applying for funding so they can try to replicate their initial findings in a larger study.

Jill Neimark is an Atlanta-based writer whose work has been featured in Discover, Scientific American, Science, Nautilus, Aeon, Psychology Today and The New York Times.

What's Going On With That Bizarre Rectangular Iceberg?

By Program Error, NPR

An iceberg recently spotted by NASA scientists looks like it was carefully cut into a perfect rectangle, and it's getting a lot of attention because of those unexpected angles and straight lines.

It looks nothing like the craggy, uneven mass that sank the Titanic, perhaps the most famous iceberg ever.

But in fact, there is little that is particularly unusual about the iceberg photographed floating near the Larsen C ice shelf in Antarctica, as sea ice specialist Alek Petty explains. He is a research scientist with NASA's Operation IceBridge, the group that took the stunning photo, and is based at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

He says it's a kind of formation called a tabular iceberg, which forms in Antarctica, he says, "where we have these really wide floating ice shelves connected to land." The ice is "being kind of spread out in this very thin layer," Petty says, and "because it's ice and it's brittle, if that gets too weak or it comes into contact with something else, it can shatter and kind of break apart."

Petty compares the process to a fingernail that grows and grows, "then it gets very weak because really that ice is being kind of extended out into the ocean," leaving less support for the floating ice. At that point, tides or strong winds could break icebergs off.

This iceberg probably recently calved from the ice shelf, NASA says. And the portion above the surface is likely just 10 percent of the total iceberg, Petty says.

But why such straight lines? Petty compares it to a glass plate that shatters — the lines are typically very straight. "You can just get these fracture lines that can form these interesting geometric structures," he says, and points out a different, triangle-shape iceberg spotted by NASA scientists recently.

The rectangular iceberg is about a mile wide, Petty says — considerably smaller than another well-known iceberg from the Larsen C ice shelf. After years of anticipation by scientists, a formation the size of Delaware broke off from Antarctica last year. That iceberg measured about 2,300 square miles, as NPR's Geoff Brumfiel reported.

NASA's Operation IceBridge, which monitors polar ice using plane surveys, has been going on for a decade. But this is the first year that the scientists will also survey Antarctica using the new Ice, Cloud and land Elevation Satellite-2.

"IceBridge and ICESat-2 both use laser altimeters that fire pulses of light toward the ground and measure how long it takes for that light to bounce off the ice and return to the instruments' sensors," NASA said earlier this month. "Scientists can then calculate the distance be-

tween the aircraft or the satellite and the ice surface, which gives them the ice height.”

'Oldest Intact Shipwreck Known To Mankind' Found In Depths Of Black Sea

By Program Error, NPR

More than a mile beneath the surface of the Black Sea, shrouded in darkness, an ancient ship sat for millennia unseen by human eyes — until the Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project happened upon its watery grave last year.

The team announced the find Tuesday, saying its discovery has been “confirmed as the oldest intact shipwreck known to mankind.” Radiocarbon-dated to roughly 400 B.C., the trading vessel plied the waves in the days of Plato and Sophocles, when the city-states of ancient Greece had scattered colonies all around the Black Sea.

Since then, it has sat at a depth that more than doubles the height of the tallest skyscraper in the world. In water that deep, oxygen is hard to come by, and because of that, so too are the organic processes that help drive decomposition. That left the ship all but undisturbed until the research team discovered it — along with dozens of other shipwrecks — during an 800-square-mile survey of the seabed.

“A ship, surviving intact, from the Classical world, lying in over 2km of water, is something I would never have believed possible,” Jon Adams, an archaeology professor at the University of

Southampton and the group’s principal investigator, said in a statement released Tuesday. “This will change our understanding of shipbuilding and seafaring in the ancient world.”

For one example of the ship’s value, the team pointed to a very different kind of vessel — pottery. The group says ships of the design they found last year had previously only been found in artwork such as the Siren Vase, an artifact dated several decades earlier than the ship.

The vase depicts a scene from *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus is strapped to the mast as he passes the deadly sirens. Now, according to MAP, they know it also depicts a representation of real trading vessels used around the same era as their find.

“It’s like another world,” Helen Farr, a member of the expedition, told the BBC. “It’s when the ROV [remote operated vehicle] drops down through the water column and you see this ship appear in the light at the bottom so perfectly preserved it feels like you step back in time.”

But ancient Greece is not the only bygone era to reveal itself beneath the waves.

In three years of probing the Black Sea, the group says it has discovered more than 60 sunken ships — from ancient boats like the one announced Tuesday to ships of a more modern variety. That includes a 17th-century raiding fleet launched by the Cossacks, a people who had by that time settled north of the Black Sea, near the border of modern Russia and Ukraine.

The team is releasing a documentary on its findings Tuesday at the British Museum, offering a glimpse into what archaeologist Fredrik Hiebert called “an incredibly rich museum of human history.”

“This wreck shows the unprecedented potential for preservation in the Black Sea, which has been a critical crossroads of world cultures for thousands of years,” he told National Geographic. “It’s an incredible find.”

Knocking On Doors To Get Opioid Overdose Survivors Into Treatment

By Program Error, NPR

Larreca Cox is a paramedic, but instead of an ambulance with flashing lights and sirens, she drives around in an old, white sedan.

Her first call on a recent day in Huntington, W.Va, was to a quiet, middle-class neighborhood.

“He overdosed yesterday,” Cox says. “And I think we’ve been here before. I’m almost 100 percent sure we’ve been to this house before.”

Cox is the only full-time member of Huntington’s new quick-response team — a collaborative project involving law enforcement, the county’s medical first responders and several drug treatment providers.

The goal in this community ravaged by the opioid epidemic is simple: Track down people who’ve recently survived drug overdoses; visit them at home, a hospital or even in jail; and tell them how to get help.

Many rural Americans say drug addiction and abuse is the most urgent health problem facing their local community, according to a new poll by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. The issue is particularly acute in Appalachia, our poll finds; 41 percent of people there called it the “biggest problem” facing their community, compared

with 21 percent who said economic concerns were the biggest problem.

(Don’t see the graphics above? Click here.)

Cox never knows quite what to expect on these house calls. Flanked by a police officer in plain clothes and a local pastor who’s volunteering with the team, she knocks at the door and waits. When there’s no response, she tries calling a family member whose phone number is in her files. Still no luck. The team eventually moves on, promising to come back another time.

At the next stop, trash is piled high on a curb outside what looks like an old storefront; it’s now a makeshift residence. Cox warns that the place is filthy inside.

She has visited several people at this home, only one of whom entered treatment.

“A lot of people seem to hang out here,” Cox says. “I really don’t know what to say about it.”

The narrow alleyway along the building smells of urine. It leads to a back porch strewn with pieces of trash. A sleeping man is slumped in a chair.

Through an open door on the side, we see in the darkened room a stained mattress piled with bedding.

Cox calls out to a man inside: “Is David here?”

He says something I can't quite hear.

"What about Mary? Has Mary been back?"

"I ain't seen Mary in three months," the man inside says.

Cox leaves behind a card with information on how she can be contacted, then heads back to the car.

These bleak interactions are part of the quick-response team's process, says Connie Priddy, a registered nurse with Cabell County Emergency Medical Services. She says it can take time to convince people who have overdosed that they need help.

"Overdosing and having to be revived may not be the bottom for someone," Priddy says.

Priddy coordinates the quick-response teams, which got off the ground late last year with about \$1.2 million from two federal grants. Community leaders were looking for solutions, she says, after more than two dozen people overdosed on a single day in August 2016. They modeled the teams after a similar program in Ohio.

The teams visit patients, provide information about clean needle programs, hand out supplies for stopping overdoses and, if at all possible, provide information on enrolling in treatment programs. Some patients ask about residential programs, while an increasing number are opting for outpatient, medication-assisted treatment that allows them to continue working or going to school.

"We leave them our information. We'll go back a couple of days later and talk to them again," Priddy says. "We'll call them; we'll text them. So if they're not ready, they're not ready — but we keep going back."

That follow-up after an overdose is a key step in helping people finally get into treatment, says Dr. Alexander Walley, an internist and associate professor at Boston University School of Medicine and the director of an addiction medicine fellowship at Boston Medical Center. He says programs similar to Huntington's are popping up in other communities.

Walley sees relying on such teams as a promising, if challenging, approach.

"If you've just overdosed a day or two ago, and now you have a police officer knocking on your door, that first inclination among a marginalized, stigmatized population might not be so welcoming," Walley says. "And so how exactly to make that contact, I think, is really important."

Police officers on Huntington's quick-response teams wear civilian clothing and are under instructions not to make arrests unless children are at risk.

The program boasts some success stories, like Anthony Dooley, whom Cox calls its "poster child." Dooley had struggled with drugs including alcohol, cocaine and crystal meth and had spent some time in jail before winding up in a hospital earlier this year.

"It was a point in my life to where I was lost; felt hopeless," Dooley says. "I felt that, pretty much, where I was in life was the best that I was ever going to get."

Dooley, 32, recently graduated from an inpatient addiction treatment program in Huntington. He says Cox's team visited him in the hospital and walked him through his options.

"I was just so far gone," Dooley says. "I was sleeping on the hospital bed. ... She sat there with me the whole time,

made sure the paperwork was done, and got me some help.”

Officials in Huntington are optimistic that the quick-response teams are beginning to push back on some of the effects of the opioid epidemic. Overdose calls in the area are down by about a third since the teams began making visits last year.

Community leaders say they’re now beginning to talk about how to fund the program after the grants run out in 2020.

5 Major Crops In The Crosshairs Of Climate Change

By Program Error, NPR

Climate change is coming like a freight train, or a rising tide. And our food, so dependent on rain and suitable temperatures, sits right in its path.

The plants that nourish us won't disappear entirely. But they may have to move to higher and cooler latitudes, or farther up a mountainside. Some places may find it harder to grow anything at all, because there's not enough water.

Here are five foods, and food-growing places, that will see the impact.

Wheat

Wheat, source of bread and a foundation of life in much of the world, will suffer from hotter temperatures — and the country where the impact may be greatest also is among least well-equipped to cope with a shortfall. India is likely to see a large drop in wheat production due to heat stress — about 8 percent if average global temperatures rise by 1 degree Celsius, according to one recent study. Temperatures are expected to rise more than that; according to a recent report from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees Celsius will require heroic and dramatic action. It will take significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions within 15 years, plus efforts to recapture some of the carbon that's already been emitted, perhaps by planting new forests.

Globally, though, wheat may not be in short supply in a warmer world. Russia, which is already a major wheat exporter, may be able to expand the amount of land devoted to this crop.

Peaches

Despite Georgia's claim to be the Peach State, California is the country's biggest peach producer. Farmers there grow about half of the country's fresh peaches, and almost all of the fruit that's canned and processed in other ways.

Many fruit trees, including peaches, have a peculiar requirement. If they don't experience enough chill during wintertime, they get confused and don't bloom properly. No bloom, no harvest. The peach trees currently grown in California's Central Valley require about 700 "chilling hours" during the winter. But scientists are predicting that by the end of the century, only 10 percent of the valley will reliably see that much chilling. And even if plant breeders create peach varieties that need less chilling, there's another problem: Peach trees also yield less fruit when it gets too hot in summertime.

Coffee

Coffee can't take freezing temperatures, but it doesn't like extreme heat, either — at least the highly prized *Arabica* type doesn't. So it's mainly grown on relatively cool mountainsides in the

tropics. Brazil is the biggest coffee producer in the world, by far, but as the globe warms up, most of its main coffee-growing regions probably won't be suitable for growing this crop anymore, due to heat as well as more frequent rainstorms. Coffee could move to cooler parts of the country, but researchers don't think those new growing areas will make up for what's lost.

Meanwhile, rising temperatures could threaten native coffee trees that grow wild in the forests of Ethiopia and central Africa. The wild trees represent an irreplaceable storehouse of coffee's original genetic diversity. The world's commercial coffee trees are genetically very similar to each other, and those genetically diverse wild trees could be the source of genetic traits that plant breeders may need in order to create commercial trees that can thrive in tomorrow's climate. Some of the wild trees, however, are preserved in "gene banks" in Ethiopia and Latin America.

Corn

Nothing says Iowa quite like fields of corn. Climate models, though, see a different future. They're predicting that a warming climate will bring several changes, most of them bad for growing corn. Rain will come less often, and when it comes, the storms will be more intense — neither of which is helpful for a crop that demands frequent rains, but doesn't do a good job of preventing soil erosion. In addition, corn suffers when it gets too hot — especially when it's too hot at night. Add it all up, and one study estimates that corn yields in Iowa will fall substantially, anywhere from 15 percent to an astounding 50 percent. "By 2100, the Corn Belt is going to be in Canada, not in the United States," says

Jason Clay, senior vice president for food and markets at the World Wildlife Fund.

So what will replace corn on Iowa's fertile land? According to one study, by the end of the century this part of the Midwest will be more suited for growing cotton, soybeans, grass and forests.

Almonds

California, the biggest single source of America's fresh vegetables and nuts, and the primary source of almonds for the entire world, is a dramatic illustration of how subtle shifts in climate can have huge effects. California's farms rely heavily on snow that piles up in the Sierra Nevada mountains during the winter, and then slowly melts during the summer, delivering a vital flow of water to the state's irrigation canals. As the climate warms, though, winter precipitation will arrive more often as rain, and the snow that does fall will melt much more quickly, leaving farmers scrambling for water to keep crops alive in late summer. Also, there will be more variation from year to year; wet years will be wetter, and dry years will be even dryer.

Both trends increase the chances that from time to time, farmers will face catastrophic shortages of water. And that's especially bad for tree crops, of which almonds are the biggest, because losing an orchard is much more devastating than losing a single crop of, say, tomatoes. California's farmers may be forced to reduce the amount of land devoted to orchards, since there's a chance that they will not survive a major drought.

Methamphetamine Roils Rural Towns Again Across The U.S.

By Program Error, NPR

The sharp rise in opioid abuse and fatal overdoses has overshadowed another mounting drug problem: Methamphetamine use is rising across the United States.

“Usage of methamphetamine nationally is at an all-time high,” says Erik Smith, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Kansas City office.

“It is back with a vengeance.” he says. “And the reasons for that are twofold.” The drug’s now stronger, and cheaper, than it used to be.

No longer chiefly made by “cooks” in makeshift labs in the U.S., methamphetamine is now the domain of Mexican drug cartels that are mass-producing high-quality quantities of the drug and pushing it into markets where it was previously unknown.

But even in rural communities ravaged by decades of experience with the drug, meth is on the upswing thanks to its relatively low price, availability and a shortage of treatment options.

Southeast Missouri is often called “the Bootheel” because that part of the state resembles a heel-like protuberance into Arkansas.

Locally produced meth started taking hold in the Bootheel in the 1980s, in little towns such as Qulin, where it

snared generations of residents like Dustin Siebert.

“I started using methamphetamine when I was 18, 19 years old,” says Siebert, rubbing his tattooed hands. “And, months later — some four or five months — I was helping other people manufacture it. Took over my life,” Siebert says, “like it did just about everybody else in this area.”

Siebert says he’s been off meth for four years, but he says many people in the town of 450 residents have never been able to fully shake it. Amber Windhorst, the school social worker in Qulin, agrees.

“A high number of our kids are affected by drug use in the home,” she says. “Or Mom and Dad have left because they’re out using.”

Windhorst says grandparents are raising many of those kids, but meth use now spans three generations in some families.

“A lot of times we are teaching our children how to survive,” Windhorst says. “Because you have everything that goes with the drugs — lack of food, lack of safety, shelter.”

Not to mention theft, prostitution and a recent outbreak of hepatitis A.

Meth use dipped early this decade after lawmakers cut access to key ingredients — such as the over-the-counter decongestant pseudoephedrine. Siebert

says it was about the same time that opioids took hold in the region.

“Now that they’re hammering down on the opiates,” Siebert says, “guess what’s happening? Now the meth is coming back in”

Law enforcement agencies say drug cartels are pumping cheap, potent methamphetamine from “Mexican superlabs” through established distribution networks for heroin and cocaine. Sgt. Mark McClendon, of the Missouri Highway Patrol, says meth is reaching places and people it never did before.

“The meth problem has basically exploded across every race and social economic class that you can imagine,” McClendon says.

But at least in Missouri, drug policy isn’t keeping up. The state prioritizes opioid addiction over methamphetamine addiction, making intensive treatment for uninsured meth users hard to come by. And, in contrast with opioids, clinicians have no government-approved medications to help treat methamphetamine addiction.

In fact, just about the only response in southeast Missouri seems to be a crop of new, faith-based meth support groups that have sprung up.

“Campbell’s got one, Malden’s got two, Qulin’s got one,” Siebert says. “Poplar Bluff’s got one every night of the week.”

He founded his own group — the Matthew 25 Project. On a recent Thursday night, a little more than a dozen people — a mix of those addicted to meth, some recently weaned off the drug and others just offering support — met in a stark white room at the Qulin Assembly of God church.

Siebert preaches that God made lots of people with addictive personalities but intended them to be addicted to religion.

“We’re supposed to be addicted to him, and the things of the Kingdom,” Siebert tells the small group. He maintains that limiting access to drugs only creates demand for other drugs.

“Because the problem is addiction,” he says. “Until they figure out why people want to get high and use drugs, it’s always going to be something else.”

Siebert says the decades of experience that southeastern Missouri has with methamphetamine should serve as a warning to parts of the country where use of the drug is only now starting to spread.

Scientists And Parents Band Together To Research Cures For Rare Childhood Cancer

By Program Error, NPR

Whenever she asked doctors about the lump on her son's right thumb, Kim Webb heard a similar response: "No big deal. Just take care of it whenever."

They were wrong.

Last January — after the lump had doubled in size, prompting surgery to remove it — the doctor phoned Sunday evening with a diagnosis: epithelioid sarcoma, a slow-growing soft-tissue cancer.

"It was the worst day of my life," said Webb, a mother of two in Huntington Beach, California. "I just sat in my car and cried and cried in disbelief."

After a blur of tests and scans during the month after diagnosis, Webb's 16-year-old, Connor, went in for another surgery — this time for full resection of the tumor plus a bit of surrounding tissue to prevent recurrence. He regained full use of his thumb, and as of this July, CT and MRI scans show no evidence of disease. "We are very fortunate," Webb says.

But epithelioid sarcoma has an ugly secret. This cancer often comes back later — even decades later. And when it returns, it grows aggressively and there are no drugs to stop it. Webb realized she needed to keep looking for a cure. "We're never in the clear," she says.

Epithelioid sarcoma is exceedingly rare — estimates vary but at most, no more than around 100 cases per year. Of those, 10 percent occur in children and adolescents.

For this and many other rare cancers that kids get, it takes a long time to find enough patients to test new therapies. Even worse, small patient numbers mean there's less motivation to allocate resources to study the diseases and develop potential drugs. Dozens of childhood cancers fall in this category, some so rare that few pediatric oncologists hear about them.

For families like the Webbs, whose cancers have no approved treatments beyond surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, it can feel like there's next to nothing they can do for their kids. But some of these families have found a new ally in their fight: the Children's Cancer Therapy Development Institute, or cc-TDI, a nonprofit biotech lab that brings families and researchers together to push the field forward.

Filling a research gap

In 2016 the Creating Hope Act introduced incentives for industry to invest in rare childhood diseases. But pediatric cancers offer little payoff for the in-

vestment in drug development compared to breast or colon cancer, for example, where patient numbers reach “hundreds of thousands, rather than hundreds,” says Jim Geller, an oncologist at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.

Because there are so few cases, “trials cannot be conducted quickly, nor can you conduct multiple trials on the same disease as easily as in adult cancer,” he says. And so very few new treatments are in the pipeline. This means families can find themselves out of options very quickly when their kids get sick.

Since 1978, the Food and Drug Administration has approved just six drugs for children’s cancer, while it has approved dozens per year for more common cancers that affect adults.

For many families facing rare cancers, there’s nothing like sheer desperation to fuel action. Some petition pharmaceutical companies and call doctors around the country begging to try newly approved therapies.

The Children’s Cancer Therapy Development Institute, just outside of Portland, Ore., takes a more coordinated approach, one that is channeling families’ desperation to quietly transform pediatric cancer research. In less than three years after the Institute began operating out of a remodeled paint factory in Beaverton, Ore., it has pushed new drug candidates into three clinical trials.

The Institute was launched to help fill what founder Dr. Charles Keller calls the “preclinical gap” in childhood cancer research – where potential drugs languish in lab freezers because scientists aren’t incentivized to do the laborious experiments needed to translate promising lab findings into viable compounds for drug trials.

“All the papers and grants in the world don’t mean anything if we can’t get drugs into clinical trials,” says Keller, an expert on the biology of childhood sarcomas who left his faculty position at Oregon Health & Science University in 2014 to start cc-TDI. “We’ve used our relationships with families to reboot a broken cycle.”

The Institute is equipping small armies of parents to help shape the research agenda by sharing what they know from first-hand experience with these diseases. “The more you talk with people, the more you realize they have some insights,” says Keller. “They want a way to participate.”

One way families participate in the work of cc-TDI is by attending its pediatric cancer “nanocourse” – a week-long crash course offered each summer for families, students and other lay people to learn from world experts, shadow scientists in the lab, collaborate with other participants to brainstorm the road to a cure and publish those plans in peer-reviewed journals.

Participants leave the nanocourse equipped to raise funds, educate their communities, and help arrange tumor tissue donations to labs that can create cell cultures and mouse models. The Institute runs its own program, called CuRe-FAST, for families to contribute tumor samples to a registry that scientists around the world can access.

The Institute’s patient-centric approach combines the rigor of an academic lab with the flexibility of a startup. Instead of depending solely on academic grants which require scientists to apply the funding toward specific research programs, cc-TDI also receives money from foundations and other phil-

anthropic sources that do not carry such restrictions. This allows the research to move nimbly — to “go with what’s working and pivot from what’s not working,” says Keller.

And the families that the Institute works with are often key to getting that funding.

Only 4 percent of government cancer research funds go toward studying childhood cancers. “A lot of good ideas die in the mind because there are no dollars,” says Geller of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Foundations can help by giving junior scientists pilot funding for a few years of data that will help them compete for larger government grants.

“A lot of foundations are started by parents,” says Geller. “And the finances they provide is incredibly meaningful.”

Last year, more than half of cc-TDI’s \$1.9 million budget came from foundations.

Learning to be advocates

For Webb, attending a course at cc-TDI gave her new knowledge and a new network. Days after the fateful phone call about her son’s cancer, desperate for new information, Webb had joined two Facebook groups dedicated to epithelioid sarcoma.

“I had to research everything. I needed to understand what was going to help my son. But this isn’t my field,” says Webb, who hadn’t studied science since high school. “And so I’m like, where do I even go?”

One of those groups was created by Andy Woods, a Montana tile contractor whose 11-year-old daughter suffered a dire form of Wilms’ tumor, a childhood kidney cancer. Woods had become active in researching and sharing information about other rare cancers. Through

Facebook messages and a frenzy of texting, he taught Webb a lot and eventually connected her with cc-TDI, where he now works.

Webb rallied three other families to join her at this summer’s nanocourse, which focused on hepatoblastoma and epithelioid sarcoma (EpS).

The EpS families came out of the week equipped to chase a shared mission: better treatments for epithelioid sarcoma, and ultimately a cure.

“I learned more about epithelioid sarcoma and other rare cancers in one week at cc-TDI than in the last ~2.5 years since my son’s diagnosis,” Jill Cook, a mother from central Iowa, wrote in an email.

Since the nanocourse, the EpS families have set up a fundraising platform, created a research-focused Facebook group, and are holding weekly conference calls to build a website. Most importantly, they found each other.

“All of us were out there by ourselves. How do you conquer something like that — researching a rare cancer — when you’re by yourself?” Webb says. “But now, from that course, we’re able to form our army. That’s the biggest thing.”

Esther Landhuis is a freelance science journalist in the San Francisco Bay Area. Follow her on Twitter @elandhuis.

Should Self-Driving Cars Have Ethics?

By Program Error, NPR

In the not-too-distant future, fully autonomous vehicles will drive our streets. These cars will need to make split-second decisions to avoid endangering human lives — both inside and outside of the vehicles.

To determine attitudes toward these decisions a group of researchers created a variation on the classic philosophical exercise known as “the Trolley problem.” They posed a series of moral dilemmas involving a self-driving car with brakes that suddenly give out: Should the car swerve to avoid a group of pedestrians, killing the driver? Or should it kill the people on foot, but spare the driver? Does it matter if the pedestrians are men or women? Children or older people? Doctors or bank robbers?

To pose these questions to a large range of people, the researchers built a website called Moral Machine, where anyone could click through the scenarios and say what the car should do. “Help us learn how to make machines moral,” a video implores on the site.

The grim game went viral, multiple times over.

“Really beyond our wildest expectations,” says Iyad Rahwan, an associate professor of Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab, who was one of the researchers. “At some point we were getting 300 decisions per second.”

What the researchers found was a series of near-universal preferences, regard-

less of where someone was taking the quiz. On aggregate, people everywhere believed the moral thing for the car to do was to spare the young over the old, spare humans over animals, and spare the lives of many over the few. Their findings, led by MIT’s Edmond Awad, were published Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

Using geolocation, researchers found that the 130 countries with more than 100 respondents could be grouped into three clusters that showed similar moral preferences. Here, they found some variation.

For instance, the preference for sparing younger people over older ones was much stronger in the Southern cluster (which includes Latin America, as well as France, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) than it was in the Eastern cluster (which includes many Asian and Middle Eastern nations). And the preference for sparing humans over pets was weaker in the Southern cluster than in the Eastern or Western clusters (the latter includes, for instance, the U.S., Canada, Kenya, and much of Europe).

And they found that those variations seemed to correlate with other observed cultural differences. Respondents from collectivistic cultures, which “emphasize the respect that is due to older members of the community,” showed a weaker preference for sparing younger people.

Rawhan emphasized that the study's results should be used with extreme caution, and they shouldn't be considered the final word on societal preferences — especially since respondents were not a representative sample. (Though the researchers did conduct statistical correction for demographic distortions, reweighing the responses to match a country's demographics.)

What does this add up to? The paper's authors argue that if we're going to let these vehicles on our streets, their operating systems should take moral preferences into account. "Before we allow our cars to make ethical decisions, we need to have a global conversation to express our preferences to the companies that will design moral algorithms, and to the policymakers that will regulate them," they write.

But let's just say, for a moment, that a society *does* have general moral preferences on these scenarios. Should automakers or regulators actually take those into account?

Last year, Germany's Ethics Commission on Automated Driving created initial guidelines for automated vehicles. One of their key dictates? A prohibition against such decision-making by a car's operating system.

"In the event of unavoidable accident situations, any distinction between individuals based on personal features (age, gender, physical or mental constitution) is strictly prohibited," the report says. "General programming to reduce the number of personal injuries may be justifiable. Those parties involved in the generation of mobility risks must not sacrifice non-involved parties."

But to Daniel Sperling, founding director of the Institute of Transporta-

tion Studies at University of California – Davis and author of a book on autonomous and shared vehicles, these moral dilemmas are far from the most pressing questions about these cars.

"The most important problem is just making them safe," he tells NPR. "They're going to be much safer than human drivers: They don't drink, they don't smoke, they don't sleep, they aren't distracted." So then the question is: How safe do they need to be before we let them on our roads?

Radio Replay: Too Little, Too Much

By Program Error, NPR

Have you ever noticed that when something important is missing in your life, your brain can only seem to focus on that missing thing?

Two researchers have dubbed this phenomenon scarcity, and they compare it to tunnel vision, blinding you to the big picture. When you're hungry, it can be hard to think of anything other than food. When you're desperately poor, you may constantly worry about making ends meet. When you're lonely, you might obsess about making friends. Today we'll explore why, when you're in a hole, you sometimes dig yourself even deeper.

Then, we meet Brooke Harrington, a sociologist who wanted to know what it's like to be one of the richest people on the planet. To find out, she spent years studying to become a wealth manager, a "social worker for the rich" who handles everything from stashing money in off-shore banks to recommending rehab facilities for family members.

In interviewing other wealth managers, she discovered that the rich are indeed different from the rest of us.

"It's almost literally unimaginable. National borders are nothing to them. They might as well not exist. The laws are nothing to them. They might as well not exist," she says.

More reading:

"Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function" — why poverty saps attention and bandwidth

"Some Consequences of Having Too Little" — why poor individuals often reinforce the conditions of poverty

Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir

Capital without Borders: Wealth Managers and the One Percent by Brooke Harrington

Hidden Brain is hosted by Shankar Vedantam and produced by Jennifer Schmidt, Rhaina Cohen, Parth Shah, Thomas Lu, Laura Kwerel, and Camila Vargas Restrepo. Our supervising producer is Tara Boyle. You can also follow us on Twitter @hiddenbrain.

Amy Winehouse Hologram Expected To 'Tour' With A Backing Band

By Program Error, NPR

A hologram depicting Amy Winehouse, the British singer whose music, addictions and premature death dominated headlines, is expected to embark on a tour, according to Reuters.

Her father, Mitch Winehouse, told the news agency that the singer's hologram will be projected on stage along with her voice and a live band.

The tour, set for next year, is part of a trend in recent years of concerts featuring projected likenesses of deceased artists. BASE Hologram, the company producing the Winehouse concerts, has also produced hologram tours of Roy Orbison and opera singer Maria Callas.

However, unlike the Orbison and Callas holograms, which stand square in front of a microphone throughout the show, Winehouse's father wants to be sure that BASE Hologram accurately recreates his daughter's performances, which feature more dancing and movement, Reuters says.

Proceeds from the holographic tour will reportedly go toward the Amy Winehouse Foundation, which works to prevent drug and alcohol abuse in young people and provide support to those struggling with addiction.

The singer died in 2011 after attracting a legion of paparazzi and receiving international media coverage of her struggles with drugs and bulimia.

As *Amy* director Asif Kapadia told *Fresh Air* in 2015, "Amy sold newspapers. If she was on the cover of a tabloid, it sold more copies. If she was on a website, they got more hits."

The digital age was dawning, and "she was the unlucky one to be having a nervous breakdown in public at the time," Kapadia said.

Holograms were brought to the mainstream's consciousness after a Tupac Shakur hologram "performed" at Coachella alongside Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre in 2012.

The light productions of beloved, deceased artists are not without their critics. As Jason Lipshutz wrote for *Billboard* after that Coachella performance, "Watching a visual re-creation of the rapper traipse around the stage in choreographed movements felt incorrect."

"Pac's life was special, and that unique flame has been extinguished," he wrote. "Why do we need to watch an imitation of Tupac when we have an incomparable plethora of his own art at our disposal?"

And as NPR's Ann Powers has said, "A conscientiously created hologram might afford insight into performance styles of artists no longer available to observe."

The Winehouse family will have final approval of the show, which is expected

to last between 75 and 115 minutes, according to Reuters.

A Rural Colorado Coal County Was Struggling. Then A Tech Company Brought New Jobs

By Program Error, NPR

To explain why folks in rural Delta County, Colo. are feeling a lot less anxious than they were a couple years ago, consider the story of Johnny Olivas.

He's digging a line down a steep, dirt driveway, where he'll lay fiber optic cable into a home. His company, Lightworks Fiber, has begun installing badly needed broadband to this remote valley of deserts and aspen-cloaked mesas.

"I didn't know anything about fiber optic, but you catch on pretty quick," Olivas says during a break. "It's a hell of a lot easier than coal mining."

Like a lot of his family and old high school buddies, Olivas used to be a coal miner at one of the mines in the mountains of western Colorado that once employed thousands of workers with full benefits.

Olivas, who worked underground for about a decade, doesn't miss it though.

"It's so up and down," he says. "I don't want to go through that experience again where I get laid off and I'm trying to figure out what I'm gonna do next."

A tale of transformation

Olivas is one of about 800 coal miners in the North Fork Valley who found themselves unemployed over a period between 2014 to 2016. Folks now refer to

it as "the shock." Two of the county's three coal mines shut down, and the valley's tight knit little towns with folksy names — Cedaredge, Paonia, Hotchkiss — faced the prospect of shuttered businesses and consolidating schools.

When Teresa Neal and her husband heard about the mass layoffs, they saw an opportunity.

"We were like, we've got to do something; there's got to be something we can do," Neal says.

Their then fledgling company, Lightworks, began bidding — and winning — contracts offered by the local electric utility that was looking to expand broadband to thousands of homes and businesses. Coal was going away and broadband was key. After all, how does a small town compete in today's economy without good access to the internet?

According to an NPR poll released this week with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, residents of rural communities say that having access to training opportunities is one key to finding good jobs close to home. (Can't see the graphic? [Click here](#))

Rural Americans have also long complained of feeling left behind when com-

pared to most cities where internet speeds are better and access tends to be easier. So, one weekend, the Neals took their barn and literally transformed it into a makeshift training facility for former coal miners. They started teaching them about fiber, Neal says — how it worked and, more importantly, how to splice it.

They've retrained and hired more than 80 miners so far. All of this was personal.

"I didn't want my girlfriends leaving," Neal says. "My kids didn't want their friends to leave."

This was a common theme in our poll. One of the things people value most about small towns is having their close friends and family nearby. Parents want their kids to be able to stay and start their families too, instead of having to move away for better opportunities.

Don't see the graphic above? Click here.

'In spite' of the coal mines

Delta County is roughly the size of Rhode Island but with a population of just under 30,000 people. Most people know their neighbors. They don't always lock their doors and they like that their kids can ride bikes or motorcycles without worrying the way they might in a congested city.

Maybe the jobs from the new fiber-optic boom don't pay as well as the old coal jobs. But they are still good jobs with benefits and they're keeping people in Delta County, or in some cases allowing them to move there or move back.

While the NPR poll found that respondents overwhelmingly said they were concerned about local economic problems, many also said they felt better off

than their parents and had a positive outlook on the future.

For the first time in years, Delta County's population isn't declining. Lately, people are also moving to the county from urban areas — especially Denver or California — drawn by its small-town lifestyle. Now that the internet is improving, they can also work remotely.

"There's a little bit more room to take a risk in a rural community," says Stacey Voigt, executive director of Delta County Economic Development.

DCED, a nonprofit, is trying to lure more entrepreneurs like Lightworks to the valley. They're also promoting the county's burgeoning organic farm and food industries, among other businesses. Voigt's family relocated from the Denver area last fall.

"People are excited to talk about what's next," she says. "It's the 'moving on' and being successful — not because the coal mines closed, but in spite of them closing."

Hometown pride

You hear this a lot in Delta County which, make no mistake, is still solidly conservative. The county hasn't voted for a Democrat in a presidential election since 1964. Folks are proud of their natural resource heritage and agricultural roots. But you also see a big disconnect between what politicians are saying nationally about bringing coal jobs back to rural America and what's actually happening here on the ground.

People have known for some time that coal is probably not coming back to Delta County. For one thing, most all of the easy and cheap stuff has been mined.

That's according to retired miner Rob Clements, who stands with his

daughter Michelle on a drizzly morning, on the back porch at their place outside Hotchkiss.

“Right up that valley — I worked there for almost 30 years,” Rob says, pointing east up the river-cut valley toward the underground mines. The north fork of the Gunnison River is flowing muddy after some badly needed rain. The views are stunning, making it easy to see how Delta County may have more going for it than some other, less picturesque, rural areas.

“For the local people, the miners and their kids, the fiber optics has pretty much saved this valley,” Rob says.

His daughter Michelle had been living in Salt Lake City, a five-hour drive away. She’d had to move there to keep a job, working in human resources for a coal company. Some of their neighbors had to move five hours in the other direction for jobs in the Denver area.

But this past spring, Michelle felt like she’d hit the jackpot. She heard Lightworks was hiring. She applied right away and was hired on to do work in HR soon after. She and her father are both thrilled she was able to move home.

“I have a lot of pride in where I grew up,” Michelle says. “When I start a family I want my family to have that same experience, too; it’s an awesome place to grow up.”

Her company currently has 40 more open positions. And there are for-hire signs posted around town. The Clements say that hasn’t happened in years.

Spy Bosses Warn Of Foreign Interference As Feds Unseal New Russia Charges

By Program Error, NPR

Updated at 5:24 p.m. ET

The U.S. government warned about the continued threat of foreign interference on Friday as it unsealed a new criminal complaint against a Russian woman described as the paymistress for Moscow's program of information war—a scheme targeting next month's midterm elections in the U.S.

Elena Khusyaynova has worked since 2014 as a top money manager for what the Russian government calls “Project Lakhta,” according to charging documents.

She was charged with one count of conspiring to defraud the United States; prosecutors say she handled budgets and payments associated with the disinformation schemes.

Khusyaynova administered the finances for “social media operations, web content, advertising campaigns, infrastructure, salaries, travel, office rent, furniture and supplies, and the registration of legal entities” that were part of the scheme, according to court documents.

Russia's active measures scheme has a budget of tens of millions of dollars, and the funding came through a company controlled by a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, prosecutors say.

That man, oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, has already been charged

in another indictment unsealed by the Justice Department. Attorneys for his company, Concord, are fighting the case against it in federal court in Washington.

Khusyaynova was charged in a criminal complaint in the Eastern District of Virginia on Friday. She, like the other Russians who have been charged in separate federal criminal cases, is not expected to stand trial in the United States.

The government has chosen to use legal documents to lay out the case against the people who attacked the 2016 presidential election and have kept up a war of disinformation against the West.

The court documents unsealed on Friday make clear that influence operations by Khusyaynova and her associates continue to this day; the criminal complaint details how she requested and managed funds from Concord through at least July 2018.

Speaking to journalists Friday, President Trump said that his administration has “done a lot to protect the elections coming up very shortly.” Trump also slammed his predecessor in the Oval Office for not doing enough to stop Russian interference in the 2016 election and the president once again said there had been no collusion between Russia and his campaign.

Separately, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and other top intelligence agencies said on Friday that foreign interference continues to threaten the information environment inside the United States.

Election infrastructure itself — voter registration databases, ballot counting systems and so forth — appears safe for now, the agencies said, despite some ongoing cyberattacks. The biggest danger is from public messaging.

“We are concerned about ongoing campaigns by Russia, China and other foreign actors, including Iran, to undermine confidence in democratic institutions and influence public sentiment and government policies,” the agencies said. “These activities also may seek to influence voter perceptions and decision making in the 2018 and 2020 U.S. elections.”

Influence-mongering

More than two dozen Russians now have been charged in connection with the active measures, including in two major indictments from the office of special counsel Robert Mueller.

They include people who worked for the “Internet Research Agency” and conducted a campaign of social media agitation — one for which Khusyaynova allegedly was a comptroller.

Others charged were a group of intelligence officers in the military GRU spy agency, charged with the cyberattacks against the Democratic National Committee and other targets in 2016. The attackers stole emails and other material and released it publicly to embarrass their victims.

The court documents unsealed on Friday make clear that Russian influence operations are continuing; the criminal complaint details how Khusyaynova re-

quested and managed funds from Concord through at least July 2018.

Influence-mongers used social media and other online platforms to “inflame passions on a wide variety of topics, including immigration, gun control and the 2nd Amendment, the Confederate flag, race relations, LGBT issues, the women’s march and the NFL national anthem debate,” according to the court papers.

The Russians also seized on specific events including shootings in Charleston, S.C., and Las Vegas; the white nationalist rally and counterprotests in Charlottesville, Va.; police shootings of black men; “as well as the personnel and policy decision of the current U.S. administration.”

Khusyaynova and other influence-mongers discussed specific tips for targeting American populations online. When posing as liberals, they were directed not to link to Breitbart. When posing as conservatives, they were directed not to link to *The Washington Post* or BuzzFeed.

Gay and lesbian users on the Internet “are often active at night,” operatives were told. Conservatives “can view your re-post when they wake up in the morning if you post it before you leave in the evening St. Petersburg time.”

The Russians discussed specific ways to characterize individual American political figures: The late Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., was to be “an old geezer who has lost it.” House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., was to be “a complete and absolute nobody incapable of any decisiveness.” Workers were urged to post in support of his Democratic opponent.

The workers of Project Lakhta also were mindful of the ongoing investigation into whether Donald Trump’s presiden-

tial campaign might have been connected with Russia's active measures.

At one point, the Russians used a fake Facebook account to post a meme with a photo of former President Barack Obama with the legend: "If only media had been as bothered by Obama's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood as they are by Trump's fake ties to Russia."

All along, one of the most consistent threads of the Russian influence campaign has been to pit black and other nonwhite Americans against each other.

And in March, the Russians used a Twitter account to complain about the coverage of the then-ongoing serial bombings in Austin, Texas. Why weren't the bombings getting more coverage at the time, the accounts asked? Because "all of the victims have been black and Hispanic."

South Korean Women Fight Back Against Spy Cams In Public Bathrooms

By Program Error, NPR

Last winter, when Chung Soo-young saw a man rushing out of the women's restroom at a chain coffee shop in downtown Seoul, the first thing she did was to scan all stalls in search of a hidden camera. Like many other South Korean women, Chung, 26, constantly worries that she could be secretly filmed in private moments. Her fear spiked, she says, when she saw the intruder and "realized I can actually be a victim."

In South Korea, microcameras installed in public bathrooms for surreptitious filming are an everyday concern. Police data show that the number of "illegal filming" crimes sharply increased from 1,353 in 2011 to 6,470 in 2017.

The fear of digital peeping Toms has led women to stuff tiny balls of toilet paper into holes they find in public bathroom stalls or cover the holes with tape. Six months after her bathroom incident, Chung decided to act and put together her own "emergency kit" to thwart *molka*, or hidden cameras.

She started a crowdfunding project for the kit, and the response was greater than she had expected. More than 600 people bought the kit, which costs about \$12 (14,000 Korean won) and includes a tube of silicone sealant to fill up holes, an ice pick to break tiny camera lenses and stickers to patch up holes.

Thinking of her kits as a "stopgap," Chung also started building an archive of illicitly recorded videos and pictures she found online to demonstrate how serious the problem is. In September, during a search, she stumbled on a video of herself from that December day.

Once filmed, *molka* videos are quickly shared online. With the right search words in Korean, it is not difficult to find pictures and videos of women in bathrooms and changing rooms on file-sharing platforms and social networks such as Tumblr and Twitter. Thumbnails of such videos, tagged with an estimated age of the filmed women or the filming location, are posted with a messenger ID. Anyone can contact the seller, who is often the one who shot the film, and get gigabytes of voyeuristic videos for pennies.

With South Korea's fast Internet speeds and high rate of smartphone ownership, "This kind of distorted sexual culture is becoming the norm," warns professor Lee Sue-jung, a criminal psychologist at Kyonggi University, outside Seoul.

But easy access to advanced technology is just part of the picture. The other part is what Yoon-Kim Ji-young of Konkuk University's Institute of Body and Culture calls "the most backward culture of misogyny" in South Korea.

When the two coincided, “a technologized version of male violence, namely digital sexual violence, emerged,” Yoon-Kim says.

South Korean men use and get confirmation of their power by turning everyday spaces into “a scene of pornography,” she adds.

Some 70,000 women gathered in central Seoul on Aug. 4, holding picket signs saying, “My life is not your porn.” It was the fourth protest this year condemning the prevalence of *molka* crimes and the largest women-only rally in the country’s history. Protesters covered their faces for fear of becoming yet another target of sexual objectification and attack, and they demanded harsher punishment of those who make, share and watch *molka* videos.

Calls for solutions were constant and desperate even before the rallies, as South Korean women woke up to the seriousness of the problem over the past few years. The government responded by requiring regular sweeps at public bathrooms, establishing support systems for victims, and pledging to handle cases more promptly and strictly.

South Korean law punishes taking and distributing pictures of someone’s body that “may cause any sexual stimulus or shame” against the person’s will as a special case of sexual crime, with punishment of up to five years in prison or fines as high as \$8,900 (10 million Korean won). But many perpetrators — nearly 98 percent of them are male, police data show — get away with the crime. According to a study by the Korean Women Lawyers Association, only 31.5 percent of those accused of committing *molka* crimes in 2016 were prosecuted. Court records reveal that, of those tried for the

offense from 2012 to 2017, only 8.7 percent received a jail sentence.

Critics argue that the punishment is both weak and unfair. When a woman was caught in May for sharing a picture she secretly shot of a nude male model, the court sentenced a “highly unusual” 10-month jail term, Yoon-Kim says.

The investigation of this case, and the subsequent trial, sparked and helped boost the series of four rallies. Organizers and participants argue that law enforcement handled this case with more urgency and rigor because the victim was male and the perpetrator was female.

Gender bias is not merely a suspicion in a country that ranked 118th among 144 nations in the World Economic Forum’s 2017 Gender Gap Report. Even as South Korea’s human rights standards advanced in the past 20 years, the country “has lacked specialized and concrete developments, efforts and movements for women’s rights,” says Lee of Kyonggi University.

In August, the verdict in a star politician’s sexual abuse case reminded South Koreans how difficult it is for women to speak about their experience of sexual violence and demand justice. The former governor of South Chungcheong Province, Ahn Hee-jung, was acquitted of four counts of rape and multiple counts of sexual harassment brought against him by his former secretary, Kim Ji-eun.

Kim made the revelation — about the most high-profile figure yet in South Korea’s #MeToo movement — during a local cable channel’s prime-time news show in March. Ahn immediately apologized to Kim and resigned from his position but later argued that he thought the relationship was “consensual.”

The Seoul Western District Court's verdict on Aug. 14 said that even though Kim claimed to have said "no" to Ahn's advances, "It is difficult to presume that Ahn could have perceived Kim's expression of refusal."

Kim said in a statement issued immediately after the ruling, "This result could have been predicted when the judge panel spoke of 'chasteness' and 'victim-like behavior'" during the trial.

South Korean women who think twice when going into a public bathroom fear not just the spying lens, but also what's behind it — sharers and watchers online, the growing "distorted sexual culture" and the law enforcement that they cannot trust. For all the daily sweeps at public bathrooms, many women believe the problem requires more — much more — before it is solved.

Thousands Of Swedes Are Inserting Microchips Under Their Skin

By Program Error, NPR

Technology continues to get closer and closer to our bodies, from the phones in our pockets to the smartwatches on our wrists. Now, for some people, it's getting under their skin.

In Sweden, a country rich with technological advancement, thousands have had microchips inserted into their hands.

The chips are designed to speed up users' daily routines and make their lives more convenient — accessing their homes, offices and gyms is as easy as swiping their hands against digital readers.

They also can be used to store emergency contact details, social media profiles or e-tickets for events and rail journeys within Sweden.

Proponents of the tiny chips say they're safe and largely protected from hacking, but one scientist is raising privacy concerns around the kind of personal health data that might be stored on the devices.

Around the size of a grain of rice, the chips typically are inserted into the skin just above each user's thumb, using a syringe similar to that used for giving vaccinations. The procedure costs about \$180.

So many Swedes are lining up to get the microchips that the country's main chipping company says it can't keep up with the number of requests.

More than 4,000 Swedes have adopted the technology, with one company, Biohax International, dominating the market. The chipping firm was started five years ago by Jowan Osterlund, a former professional body piercer.

After spending the past two years working full time on the project, he is currently developing training materials so he can hire Swedish doctors and nurses to help take on some of his heavy workload.

“Having different cards and tokens verifying your identity to a bunch of different systems just doesn't make sense,” he says. “Using a chip means that the hyper-connected surroundings that you live in every day can be streamlined.”

Many early adopters come from Stockholm's thriving startup scene. Erik Frisk, a 30-year-old Web developer and designer, says he was really curious about the technology as soon as he heard about it and decided to get his own chip in 2014.

“It's just completely passive, it has no energy source or anything. So when you tap it against a reader, the chip sends back an ID that tells the reader which chip it is,” he explains.

“Swedes are very pragmatic and the chip is useful . . . and since a lot of people know each other in the tech community — it's very tight — [the trend has] been

spreading and people have seen the benefits,” Frisk says.

When Frisk moved into a shared house earlier this year, he organized a chipping party for his new housemates. Now they can access the 16th century building they share in Stockholm’s Old Town by tapping their hands on a digital reader by the door.

“The chip basically solves my problems,” says Szilvia Varszegi, 28, who also uses it to get into her coworking space.

And she uses it to share her LinkedIn details at networking events, avoiding the need to spell out her name. She simply touches another attendee’s smartphone and the information is transferred. “When another phone reads the chip, they see the [link] and they can open it in the phone browser,” Varszegi explains.

Sweden’s largest train company has started allowing commuters to use chips instead of tickets, and there’s talk that the chips could soon be used to make payments in shops and restaurants.

“I see no problem for [it] becoming mainstream. I think it’s something that can seriously make people’s lives better,” Varszegi says.

Osterlund believes there are two key reasons microchips have taken off in Sweden. First, the country has a long history of embracing new technologies before many others and is quickly moving toward becoming a cashless society.

In the 1990s, the Swedish government invested in providing fast Internet services for its citizens and gave tax breaks to companies that provided their workers with home computers. And well-known tech names such as Skype and Spotify have Swedish roots.

“The more you hear about technology, the more you learn about technol-

ogy, the less apprehensive you get about technology,” Osterlund says.

Only 1 in 4 people living in Sweden uses cash at least once a week. And, according to the country’s central bank, the Riksbank, the proportion of retail cash transactions has dropped from around 40 percent in 2010 to about 15 percent today.

Osterlund’s second theory is that Swedes are less concerned about data privacy than people in other countries, thanks to a high level of trust for Swedish companies, banks, large organizations and government institutions.

Swedes are used to sharing personal information, with many online purchases and administrative bodies requiring their social security numbers. Mobile phone numbers are widely available in online search databases, and people can easily look up each other’s salaries by calling the tax authority.

Osterlund says personal microchips are actually more difficult to hack than many other data sources because they are stored beneath the skin.

“Everything is hackable. But the reason to hack them will never be bigger because it’s a microchip. It’s harder for someone to get to, since you put it in you,” he says.

There are few vocal critics of Sweden’s microchip trend, and there is currently no national legislation regulating the growing industry.

However, Ben Libberton, a British scientist based in southern Sweden, is among those starting to campaign for lawmakers to keep a closer eye on developments.

“What is happening now is relatively safe. But if it’s used everywhere, if every time you want to do something and in-

stead of using a card you use your chip, it could be very, very easy to let go of [personal] information,” he says.

Libberton, a trained microbiologist now working in science communication, says one of his main concerns is how the chips could be used to share data about our physical health and bodily functions.

“Because it’s implanted in your body, when more health-related information starts being used and incorporated into the chip and being transmitted — that could create an extra layer of privacy that we really need to look at and take care of before it’s widely used,” he says.

Despite these concerns, there seems to be no letup in the trend. One coworking space and innovation hub in Stockholm is holding a large implant party this month where a tech startup, DSruptive, is promising to reveal “the next generation consumer-level implant.” The device will include 2KB of memory — double that of earlier implants — a range of new functions and an LED light designed to improve privacy by blinking if someone tries to read or access an implant.

Osterlund says the tougher data-privacy rules that came into effect across the European Union earlier this year, as part of the General Data Protection Regulation, could also help the microchip trend spread more rapidly.

“It’s the heaviest set of laws protecting individual integrity ever,” he says of the rules, which affect any organization handling personal information linked to EU residents.

But Osterlund says the fact that this kind of regulation does not exist on a global level could delay the microchip trend elsewhere.

“I have a hard time seeing the rest of the world following GDPR anytime soon.

But at least all of Europe — I mean one continent — it’s a good beginning,” he says.

Facebook, Exploited By Influence Campaigns, Tries To Clamp Down With 'War Room'

By Program Error, NPR

With midterm elections just two weeks away, Facebook says it is ramping up its operations to fight disinformation.

The social media behemoth has established a “war room” at its headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif., where specialists try to detect and disrupt bad actors attempting to delegitimize elections, spread fake information and suppress the vote.

“One of the strengths of having everybody in the same place together is just the speed with which we were able to act between detecting a problem in the first place and eventually taking action,” said Samidh Chakrabarti, head of the civic engagement team at Facebook.

“We can go from detecting things like spikes in hate speech or voter suppression activity that may be spreading on the platform . . . to action in just a couple of hours,” said Chakrabarti, whose sister, Meghna Chakrabarti, is the host of WBUR’s *On Point*. Facebook designated him as a presenter for journalists invited to visit the war room.

It’s on the fourth floor of a main building on the Facebook campus, in which approximately 20 stations are watched by engineers, data scientists and operations specialists. A large Ameri-

can flag hangs above custom-built dashboards that monitor viral news, spam and voter suppression efforts.

“These dashboards actually have alarms on them so that if there’s any spike in unusual activity, the war room is alerted to them and then our data scientists will be able to look at any sort of anomalies that are detected, figure out if there are actually problems underneath those anomalies that we see — and if there are, pass them along to our operations team,” said Chakrabarti.

Fox News, CNN and a rolling Twitter feed play on large screens along the wall — other screens show graphs indicating anomalies in Facebook’s networks that suggest there might be a problem with a surge in false election information.

Still other televisions show a direct video conference feed with Facebook’s elections teams in Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas.

The wall is also covered with various brightly colored motivational posters: “The Best Way To Complain Is To Make Things,” reads one. “Be the Nerd,” is another.

Much of one wall is covered with a large map of Brazil, which recently held the first stage of its presidential elections;

Facebook's specialists were watching for influence operations there as well.

The midterms

Even more attention is being paid to the elections that will soon be occurring in the United States: In 2016, the social media network was caught flat-footed as foreign actors spread false narratives by masquerading as Americans.

The war room is meant to be a critical part of Facebook's plan to prevent a repeat — and public officials are watching closely.

“Facebook was asleep at the switch [during the 2016 campaign]. And even in the immediate aftermath of the elections they denied that there were any foreign influencers on their platform. They were dead wrong,” Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee, told NPR.

These concerns reflect the centrality of Facebook in American civic life.

Some 43 percent of Americans get news on Facebook, by far the website Americans most commonly use for news, according to a recent survey by Pew Research.

The social media network has been clear in saying it does not want to police content, generally speaking, but Facebook officials think that cracking down on inauthentic behavior — such as fake accounts and spamming — will help curb foreign influence operations.

“We have actually made huge advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning. And we have been able to block, in a recent six-month period, 1.3 billion fake accounts from forming,” Chakrabarti said.

But Facebook faces a formidable challenge.

Kevin Mandia, the CEO of FireEye, a cybersecurity firm that counts Facebook as a client, recently told NPR that there are many foreign operations that analysts have yet to discover.

“I strongly doubt that we've caught a hundred percent of the ones Iran's doing or Russia's doing. And I would say we're more on the 3 to 5 percent on what we've found . . . meaning there's a ton of it going on right now that we're wholly unaware of,” he said.

Facebook told NPR that it has seen foreign information operations increasing as the midterms near, which is what it expected.

“Information operations, what we're talking about here, is a security challenge, which means that you have sophisticated adversaries that are continuously trying to find new ways to cause harm and manipulate your platform,” said Nathaniel Gleicher, Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy.

Here's How Russia Runs Its Disinformation Effort Against The 2018 Midterms

By Program Error, NPR

The Justice Department has revealed more than ever about the inner workings of Russia's disinformation war against the United States and the West — including how it continues to this day.

A criminal complaint unsealed Friday in the Eastern District of Virginia served both to level charges at a woman accused of serving as the money boss for the operation and to document, in ample detail, how it works.

1.1.1 Who's responsible?

The branch of active measures the Russians call "Project Lakhta" has been running since "mid-2014," and works through some dozen Russian entities, of which the best-known probably was the "Internet Research Agency." It, quasi-"news" and other organizations employed hundreds of people, with a global budget of the equivalent of tens of millions of dollars, U.S. officials say.

1.1.2 Who pays for it?

The money comes through a company called Concord, which is controlled by a billionaire ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to the Justice Department's allegations.

The company and its boss, Yevgeny Prigozhin, both have been charged by

the Justice Department as part of its investigation into the attack on the 2016 presidential election. Prigozhin denies any part of any influence work, and attorneys for Concord are fighting the charges in federal court in Washington, D.C.

According to court documents, Prigozhin— whose nickname is "Putin's chef," for his origins as a food vendor and his status today as cook to the Russian leader — holds contracts with the Russian government through which Concord is paid to feed schoolchildren and military personnel.

One way Moscow may underwrite its disinformation war, and maintain deniability about its involvement, is by outsourcing this aspect of its "active measures" to Prigozhin, his company and his employees.

Other active measures are run from within the government, as with the cyberattacks conducted by the military intelligence agency GRU.

1.1.3 How does it work?

Worker bees within Project Lakhta disguise themselves as Americans and insert themselves into conversations on social media. They create Facebook and Twitter identities, for example, that make them appear to be Americans. They use

technical means to disguise the fact that they are logging in from St. Petersburg, Russia.

Court documents unsealed in February described how influence-mongers within the Internet Research Agency set up virtual private networks and used American email accounts, along with some stolen identities of Americans, to plausibly pose as Americans, disguising the fact that they were using workstations in St. Petersburg.

Other people working in the disinformation project bought display ads, in some cases, through “third-party intermediaries,” according to court documents. So disinformation practitioners could get into an American user’s Facebook feed at least those two ways: by pretending to be real users or by having paid for ads.

Facebook and Twitter have vowed to clamp down on fake accounts and they say they’ll mandate more disclosure about who pays for political ads.

1.1.4 How many people can they reach?

The simple answer is millions of users across the various platforms. There isn’t one all-purpose influence account that can by itself get to big audiences online. Instead, there are scores of smaller ones — accounts such as the fake Twitter persona @wokeluisa, which had more than 55,000 followers as recently as last March.

Critics said Friday’s complaint makes plain how much more the social media platforms must do to get control of what’s happening.

“As the criminal complaints note, these attacks continue to this day,” said

Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Warner continued: “It is critical for Congress to step up and immediately act to employ much-needed guardrails on social media. And as I’ve said before, these companies need to work with Congress so we can update our laws to better protect against attacks on our democratic institutions.”

1.1.5 What do the influence specialists actually do?

That largely depends on what Americans are doing. The evidence from U.S. government officials suggests that Russia’s influence-mongers mostly do not try to program the American political environment with their own pet topics. Instead, they simply observe what is trending among Americans and turn up the volume.

Topics include “immigration, gun control and the 2nd Amendment, the Confederate flag, race relations, LGBT issues, the women’s march and the NFL national anthem debate,” according to court papers.

Russia’s agitation promoters evidently are nimble enough to respond to the news in real time, including mass shootings, protests and political news of the day about the Trump administration.

They are directed to create “political intensity through supporting radical groups, users dissatisfied with [the] social and economic situation and oppositional social movements,” as well as “effectively aggravate the conflict between minorities and the rest of the population.”

When real black and Latino users complained, for example, that American news organizations weren’t giving

enough coverage to the bombings in Austin, Texas, the Russian influence specialists got on board.

The project, in short, is applying an active measures playbook that has been around for decades in a 21st century context — with a twist. In the days of the Soviet Union, Moscow was interested in exporting Communism and supporting fellow travelers. Now there is very little ideology in this programming. The goal is simpler: chaos.

1.1.6 How can foreigners be effective at this?

Agitation specialists work in shifts and they schedule their days around specific targets. The Russians believe gay and lesbian users tend to stay up late, according to the charging documents released Friday. Conservatives tend to get up early, they believe.

Plus managers circulate very specific instructions about how to work in the information environments they're targeting.

In 2016, workers were told to “use any opportunity to criticize Hillary [Clinton] and the rest (except [Sen. Bernie] Sanders and [Donald] Trump — we support them.”

This year, workers were told that the late Sen. John McCain was to be portrayed “as an old geezer who has lost it.” House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., was to be cast as “a complete and absolute nobody.”

Influence specialists also got directions in real time about how to respond to specific stories. On Aug. 6, 2017, for example, they received a link to a story quoting radio host Michael Savage

promising that there would be a “civil war” if Trump were “taken down.”

“Forcefully support Michael Savage’s point of view with competence and honesty,” the workers were told. “Summarize that in case Republicans will not stop acting as traitors, they will bring upon themselves forces of civil retribution during the 2018 elections.”

Other instructions included how to characterize posts about stories on welfare programs and Justice Department special counsel Robert Mueller.

1.1.7 Are any Americans involved with these efforts?

Yes. But according to U.S. officials, not knowingly.

In the summer of 2017, for example, the Russian influence specialists sought to collaborate with real American political groups to stage anti-Trump “flash mobs” at the White House.

They pitched Americans on buying Facebook ads to target audiences around Washington, D.C. And at one point, they even pinged one American user to talk about administering the Facebook page “Stop All Invaders,” which was controlled by the influence scheme.

The Americans who became involved, just like the Americans who were enlisted in the influence campaign that targeted the 2016 election, evidently did not know the broader context of these efforts.

The identities of Americans in the court documents unsealed Friday are redacted, in keeping with the intelligence community’s policy of “minimization,” and so, instead of names, terms are used such as “U.S. Person 2” or “U.S. Political Organization 1.”

As to whether anyone in the 2016 Trump presidential campaign might have knowingly conspired with these Russian influence operations, that is the continued focus of the investigation by Mueller's office.

Uber's Online-Only Restaurants: The Future, Or The End Of Dining Out?

By Program Error, NPR

It's a chilly autumn afternoon but inside a little Brooklyn bakery, it's hot. School just let out, and the store is filled with kids eyeing baked goodies. Their banter mixes with Caribbean music playing in the background.

La Gran Via Bakery is an institution in this neighborhood. It's been around since 1978 — three generations of pastry chefs making cakes, cupcakes and traditional Latin American pastries.

Which is why, when co-owner Betsy Leyva was recently pitched the idea of creating a hamburger restaurant on the side, she balked.

"I was like, are you crazy? What do you mean? What are you talking about?" she says. Uber, the ride-sharing company, was suggesting she create a "virtual restaurant" — one that only exists online, and delivers through Uber Eats.

There are now about 800 such virtual restaurants in the U.S., often created when enough customers look through the Uber Eats app for a certain type of food in their area that they can't find.

"When we see people searching for something but not finding it, that signals to us that there's an opportunity and there's unmet demand," says Ellyse Propis, who leads Uber Eats' virtual restaurant initiative across North America.

So the company approaches an eatery and suggests creating a virtual side restaurant, with those dishes people are craving but can't get.

Uber says doing this helps restaurants grow their business and cater better to customers. But there are mixed feelings in the industry about whether these virtual restaurants are a good thing. While they can boost business, Uber takes a cut of their profits. Plus, delivery fees raise the cost for customers.

Leyva, has nothing but praise for Uber Eats. In the end it was her brother, the bakery's co-owner, who convinced her to give it a try. And that's how, the online restaurant Brooklyn Burger House was born.

It has a mouthwatering online menu, but in real life there's not much to it: just a grill, inconspicuously tucked in a corner behind the pastry counter, where meat and cheesesteaks sizzle.

Leyva says that on Brooklyn Burger's opening week, she thought she'd go crazy. The demand was so high, she was constantly running out of ingredients. It hasn't died down — she had to hire additional staff.

The restaurant might be virtual, but the profits are very real: "We've increased our sales by about 30 percent. So it's very exciting," Leyva says.

Daniela Galarza, a senior editor of Eater Magazine, says that as millennials get older, they're turning to time-saving services like Uber Eats.

"They're starting to have children. They need things that are convenient, that are easy for them. And dining out isn't always easy with young children," she says.

Enter an array of ordering platforms like Seamless and Grubhub. Galarza explains that in the restaurant business, delivery has always been a headache.

"They have to pay somebody, they have to figure out if they need to insure them," she says. "They have to figure out the delivery distance. Do they need to provide them with a vehicle, a car, a bike, whatever it may be? Whereas Uber, it's already built into that platform."

Not everyone sees Uber Eats and the virtual restaurant as a natural solution.

One Texas restaurant owner is particularly passionate about his disdain for the company's entry into the restaurant business.

"You know, I haven't had the stones to say, 'All right, cut them off.' Although many, many people would love to just tell Uber to go, you know, jump off a bridge," says Jay Jerrier, owner of the Cane Rosso wood-fired pizzerias in Texas.

Jerrier says restaurant profits can be as skinny as the thin crusts he specializes in. And Uber Eats is taking a big slice of the earnings.

"They charge us between 30 and 35 percent of whatever the bill is," Jerrier says. "And then the customer pays anywhere from two bucks to six bucks for the delivery. Plus a service fee. Plus credit card fees. So, you know, it's nuts."

Uber Eats wouldn't discuss the specifics of how much it charges restaurants. Jerrier says that for all the promises of expanding a customer base, delivery is never as profitable as someone dining in and ordering a glass of wine and dessert.

But it's not just about the money. Jerrier, like so many in this business, loves being part of the dining experience.

"You know when I was growing up, I loved Thursday, Friday, Saturday, because I knew there was a chance — just a chance — that we maybe go out to the neighborhood restaurant," he recalls wistfully.

And he wonders: Are we losing that?

Why Teen Girls And Boys Don't Have Equal Access To Mobile Phones

By Program Error, NPR

In the U.S., girls and boys are both big smartphone users.

That's not necessarily the case in the developing world, says a new report released this month by the nonprofit organization Girl Effect.

The "Real Girls, Real Lives, Connected" report surveyed more than 3,000 teenage girls and boys in 25 countries, with a focus on developing nations, including Nigeria, Bangladesh, India and Rwanda, through online questionnaires and in-person interviews.

The report found that for every 15 boys who own a phone, only 10 girls do; the difference is 18 vs. 10 for smartphone ownership.

In many parts of the world, parental restrictions and social norms, rather than cost or access, may be responsible for the disparity.

In Bangladesh, a 15-year-old girl told researchers: "People say that the girl who touches the phone is a bad girl." In Malawi, another teen girl noted: "If her parents find her with a mobile they would think she is a prostitute."

The research was funded by the Vodafone Foundation, the charitable arm of international service provider Vodafone, but the company did not interfere with the research, says Zoe Dibb, one of the lead authors.

For Dibb, the key finding was that "even though girls are less likely to have phones than boys, they have more access to mobiles phones than we thought," she says. "Even if they don't have a phone of their own, they may share one with a parent or sibling."

And even if their parents don't allow them to use phones, tenacious teen girls around the world devise workarounds.

For example, 15-year-old Riya in the northeastern state of Bihar, India — one of the girls interviewed for the report — confessed to secretly using her neighbor's phone in defiance of her parents. "I use the phone to check my Gmail, Instagram, WhatsApp and look for new dish recipes. Sometimes, we also look up new henna designs on YouTube," she told researchers. Although Riya's parents allowed her 13-year-old brother to use a phone, they worried that social media will expose her to harassment or "bad influences."

For girls who are caught illicitly using a phone, the consequences can be harsh: Girls reported scoldings and beatings. Some girls responded that parents threatened to pull them out of school.

Because girls often have limited access or face stigmas for using a phone, the report found that girls were less likely to understand how to protect them-

selves from online harassment and Internet scams.

These new findings echo previous research on girls and phone use, says Gina Porter, a professor of anthropology at Durham University in the U.K. who didn't contribute to the recent report but has been researching mobile phone use in sub-Saharan Africa for the past decade.

In her own studies, Porter found that attempts to deny girls access to phones are not only futile but can cause damage. In parts of South Africa, Porter's research found that it wasn't uncommon for men to offer phones to young women in exchange for a sexual relationship and promise access to phones in order to sexually coerce girls.

The Girl Effect report recommends that schools around the world include digital safety lessons in their curriculum, including information on how to block callers and online harassers. These lessons also "need to ensure that boys and men are accountable for their actions when using phones to interact with girls," the report says. Girl Effect also suggests that nonprofit organizations and government bodies work with teachers and parents to destigmatize phone use so that girls can openly access phones, and adults can better control and supervise their use.

Porter agrees with the approach. "Phones have made a massive difference in young people's lives," she says. It's common for young people in parts of rural South Africa, for example, to use their phones to ask for and receive school fees from wealthier relatives who live in cities.

"Earlier, a student wondering why her uncle hasn't paid [school] fees would have to travel all the way to the city to

find him, get the money and physically carry it back — and that journey can be not only expensive but also dangerous," Porter says. She's also seen girls and boys use phones to set up and manage small businesses or seek and secure job opportunities in other cities.

And there's a greater benefit to be had. Through phones, a 19-year-old Indian girl told the researchers, "We can connect globally We can know about things that are unknown to us."

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Should Self-Driving Cars Have Ethics?

By Program Error, NPR

In the not-too-distant future, fully autonomous vehicles will drive our streets. These cars will need to make split-second decisions to avoid endangering human lives — both inside and outside of the vehicles.

To determine attitudes toward these decisions a group of researchers created a variation on the classic philosophical exercise known as “the Trolley problem.” They posed a series of moral dilemmas involving a self-driving car with brakes that suddenly give out: Should the car swerve to avoid a group of pedestrians, killing the driver? Or should it kill the people on foot, but spare the driver? Does it matter if the pedestrians are men or women? Children or older people? Doctors or bank robbers?

To pose these questions to a large range of people, the researchers built a website called Moral Machine, where anyone could click through the scenarios and say what the car should do. “Help us learn how to make machines moral,” a video implores on the site.

The grim game went viral, multiple times over.

“Really beyond our wildest expectations,” says Iyad Rahwan, an associate professor of Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab, who was one of the researchers. “At some point we were getting 300 decisions per second.”

What the researchers found was a series of near-universal preferences, regard-

less of where someone was taking the quiz. On aggregate, people everywhere believed the moral thing for the car to do was to spare the young over the old, spare humans over animals, and spare the lives of many over the few. Their findings, led by MIT’s Edmond Awad, were published Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

Using geolocation, researchers found that the 130 countries with more than 100 respondents could be grouped into three clusters that showed similar moral preferences. Here, they found some variation.

For instance, the preference for sparing younger people over older ones was much stronger in the Southern cluster (which includes Latin America, as well as France, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) than it was in the Eastern cluster (which includes many Asian and Middle Eastern nations). And the preference for sparing humans over pets was weaker in the Southern cluster than in the Eastern or Western clusters (the latter includes, for instance, the U.S., Canada, Kenya, and much of Europe).

And they found that those variations seemed to correlate with other observed cultural differences. Respondents from collectivistic cultures, which “emphasize the respect that is due to older members of the community,” showed a weaker preference for sparing younger people.

Rawhan emphasized that the study's results should be used with extreme caution, and they shouldn't be considered the final word on societal preferences — especially since respondents were not a representative sample. (Though the researchers did conduct statistical correction for demographic distortions, reweighing the responses to match a country's demographics.)

What does this add up to? The paper's authors argue that if we're going to let these vehicles on our streets, their operating systems should take moral preferences into account. "Before we allow our cars to make ethical decisions, we need to have a global conversation to express our preferences to the companies that will design moral algorithms, and to the policymakers that will regulate them," they write.

But let's just say, for a moment, that a society *does* have general moral preferences on these scenarios. Should automakers or regulators actually take those into account?

Last year, Germany's Ethics Commission on Automated Driving created initial guidelines for automated vehicles. One of their key dictates? A prohibition against such decision-making by a car's operating system.

"In the event of unavoidable accident situations, any distinction between individuals based on personal features (age, gender, physical or mental constitution) is strictly prohibited," the report says. "General programming to reduce the number of personal injuries may be justifiable. Those parties involved in the generation of mobility risks must not sacrifice non-involved parties."

But to Daniel Sperling, founding director of the Institute of Transporta-

tion Studies at University of California – Davis and author of a book on autonomous and shared vehicles, these moral dilemmas are far from the most pressing questions about these cars.

"The most important problem is just making them safe," he tells NPR. "They're going to be much safer than human drivers: They don't drink, they don't smoke, they don't sleep, they aren't distracted." So then the question is: How safe do they need to be before we let them on our roads?

Pakistan Releases Taliban Co-Founder In Possible Overture To Talks

By Program Error, NPR

The Afghan Taliban confirms that Pakistan has released the co-founder of the insurgent group — a move seen as a gesture aimed at bringing the Taliban, the Afghan government and the United States to the negotiating table.

Pakistan detained Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in 2010 in the sprawling port city of Karachi. Local media report the sting was arranged by Pakistan's intelligence agency, known as the ISI, alongside the CIA.

Baradar was the deputy of Mullah Omar, the founder of the Taliban, whose death was confirmed in October 2016.

When Baradar was arrested, he was seen as the second most senior member of the Taliban, and an operational mastermind for the insurgents, according to an essay written by senior analyst Kate Clark for the Afghan Analysts Network in 2013. Clark described him as “a highly experienced military commander and keen political strategist.”

In 2013, it was widely reported that Baradar had been released; however, those reports later proved false.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, confirmed to NPR that Baradar is now free. However, he would not say exactly when Baradar was released, or if he had returned to Afghanistan.

Freeing Baradar was long viewed as a goodwill gesture with the potential to bring the Taliban to the table. The Associated Press cited two unnamed Pakistani security officials as saying that Baradar was freed after “high-level negotiations.”

There was no immediate comment from the office of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Pakistani officials declined to comment on the news.

Local Afghan and Pakistani media reported that Washington's special envoy on Afghan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, lobbied for Baradar's release.

More than eight years after his arrest, it was not immediately clear if Baradar still enjoys influence within the Taliban leadership or whether the release presages his involvement in future talks.

Over the past few months, Taliban officials have been speaking to U.S. diplomats in the Gulf State of Qatar, where the insurgents have a political office. That follows Washington's resurgent efforts to negotiate with the Taliban to an end the 17-year conflict in Afghanistan.

Khalilzad's appointment last month was seen as a sign of the serious intent of the Trump administration.

14 Children Injured In Knife Attack At Kindergarten In China

By Program Error, NPR

A knife-wielding woman stabbed 14 children at a kindergarten in the Chinese city of Chongqing on Friday, according to police statements.

The attack took place as children were returning to classes, according to The Associated Press.

CGTN reports that a 39-year-old woman with the surname Liu was taken into custody after she was restrained by the kindergarten's teachers and security guard.

Videos from the event circulating on social media are disturbing: Some young children stand still, covered in blood, as wailing adults try to guide them out of the schoolyard. Other children lie on gurneys carried by medical personnel.

Some onlookers tried to hit the suspect as she was detained by authorities.

All victims have been hospitalized and are receiving treatment, according to police. Authorities denied rumors on social media that two children died, according to the BBC.

As the BBC reports,

“Violent crime is relatively rare in China, but it has faced a string of unrelated knife attacks in school and kindergartens in recent years.

They have usually been carried out by people seeking re-

venge against officials or individuals, or who are suffering from mental health problems.

In April, nine middle school students died when a 28-year-old man attacked them as they were on their way home.

He reportedly claimed he had been bullied at the school as a child. He was executed in September.”

A crowd gathered outside the scene. Chongqing resident Xia Yang told CNN the incident shocked the city.

U.S. Charges Singaporean Trader With Laundering Money For North Korea

By Program Error, NPR

The Department of Justice is accusing a Singaporean trader of helping North Korea circumvent sanctions, saying Tan Wee Beng laundered millions of dollars through the U.S. and Singapore.

“Tan Wee Beng and his co-conspirators made deliberate efforts to launder money through the U.S. financial system on behalf of North Korea,” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement on Thursday from the agency announcing the DOJ’s charges.

The Treasury Department also announced “North Korea-related designations” on two of Tan Wee Beng’s associated businesses, Wee Tiong (S) Pte Ltd and WT Marine Pte Ltd.

A representative at Wee Tiong (S) Pte Ltd, where Tan is director and a major shareholder, told NPR Tan was not available to comment on the charges.

However, in comments to the BBC, the 41-year-old Tan denied the charges, telling the network, “Nobody has contacted me. The FBI has not called me, the Singapore police have not called me.”

“We are an international trading company, and not a front [for laundering],” he reportedly said, saying he found out about the charges through news reports.

The Treasury Department alleged that since at least 2011, Tan and at least one other person at the company com-

pleted contracts for commodities worth millions of dollars for North Korea.

“To do so, Tan Wee Beng made a concerted effort to obfuscate payment origins and structure transactions to avoid regulatory scrutiny,” the agency said — adding that in one instance, Tan and the company “orchestrated payment in bulk cash, hand-delivered to a North Korean.”

Wee Tiong (S) Pte Ltd says it trades in marine fuels, rice and sugar and is “one of the largest privately owned commodities trading house[s] in Asia.”

U.S. authorities issued a federal arrest warrant for Tan in August, after officials leveled charges against him including conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, bank fraud and money laundering.

North Korea has been called “one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world,” imposed by both the U.S. and United Nations in response to its nuclear weapons tests — though North Korea takes creative measures to evade them.

The Treasury Department said last year that North Korea uses “state-owned entities and banks, as well as bulk-cash smuggling and trade” to access finance networks outside of the country. North Korea uses “aliases, agents, and individuals in strategic jurisdictions, as well as through long-standing networks of front

or shell companies and embassy personnel,” the department said.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un earlier this month in Pyongyang — Pompeo’s fourth visit to the country — in continuing talks with Kim over denuclearization. North Korea wants sanctions lifted immediately, while the U.S. wants the “final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea” before that, as Mnuchin described it.

On Thursday, a senior North Korean official touted progress since the historic summit between President Trump and Kim in June in Singapore, in addition to multiple meetings between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in this year.

Song Il-hyok, deputy director general of the North Korean foreign ministry’s Institute for Disarmament and Peace, told a gathering of security officials in Beijing that Trump and Kim “recognised that the mutual confidence-building can promote the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.”

But according to The South China Morning Post, Song said the U.S. should “immediately lift the sanctions and the hindrance to confidence-building,” saying sanctions are “confidence-destroying measures.”

Man Tried To Steal Magna Carta, 800-Year-Old Symbol Of The Law, Police Say

By Program Error, NPR

Police in Salisbury, England, have arrested a man who, they say, tried to steal the Magna Carta — the 1215 document that established basic tenets of the rule of law. “The Magna Carta has not been damaged and nobody was injured in the incident,” Wiltshire Police said.

The police say the man set off alarms at the Salisbury Cathedral when he tried to shatter the glass shield that protects the Magna Carta. The document was not damaged, police say.

“Only four copies of Magna Carta dating from 1215 have survived the ravages of time and Salisbury Cathedral is proud to be home to the best preserved original manuscript,” the cathedral says.

From the version of events given by police, it seems the attempted theft was not the work of a master criminal. There were “a number of witnesses” in the cathedral around 5 p.m. local time Thursday when, police say, the man simply attacked the glass box.

The suspect, whom police have not publicly identified other than to say he’s 45 years old, was arrested for attempted theft, possessing “an offensive weapon” and inflicting criminal damage.

Wiltshire Police released a photo showing three holes had been punched

into the glass that protects the Magna Carta, and they asked anyone who witnessed the crime to get in touch.

The Salisbury document is one of the original charters that bore King John’s seal. The man who’s suspected of trying to steal the Magna Carta is now protected by its 39th clause — the one guaranteeing the right to a fair trial.

When Is It OK To Wear The Clothing Of Another Culture?

By Program Error, NPR

For my grandpa's 90th birthday, our family threw him a *barrio fiesta*-themed bash.

We decorated the backyard with colorful bunting so it would look like the neighborhood parties that Tatay grew up with in his home country of the Philippines. We ordered a big *lechon*, a roasted pig. And the guests were asked to wear *filipiniana*, traditional Filipino costume.

While I was jazzed to don a bright orange and yellow *patadyong*— a sarong-like skirt and wrap — my white, 30-something husband Darren, from Nashville, Tenn., felt nervous in his *barong*, an embroidered shirt woven from pineapple leaf fibers. My aunt had told all the guests to dress in traditional clothes.

"I feel like this is cultural appropriation," he said, tugging at the collar and looking around nervously. "I honestly feel uncomfortable."

I could understand Darren's trepidation. Just over this past year, a number of prominent people have gotten into hot water for donning the dress of other cultures. In February, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his family were criticized for wearing over-the-top Indian attire on his state visit to India. "We Indians don't dress like this every day . . . not even in Bollywood," wrote one person on Twitter.

In August, Madonna sported a mish-mash of accessories from the Amazigh tribe in North Africa while performing at the VMAs. Some found her jewelry "insulting," although Addi Ouadderrou, a Moroccan Amazigh, told NPR that her getup didn't bother him. "If someone comes to Morocco and wants to wear our clothes, to me, that's an honor; that's not an insult," he said.

But wearing a *barong* to Tatay's birthday party — this, I felt, was not appropriation. It filled me with pride to see my white husband in the clothing of my heritage. I know my family was excited, too. My uncle lent his shirt, which he had dry-cleaned and pressed before giving to Darren. My cousins wanted to take selfies with him.

I reassured him that he was expressing support and a sense of unity with my Filipino family. And we were wearing these outfits as an act of kindness to Tatay. He is losing his memory — but *barong* and *patadyong* and *lechon*, these are some of the things that remain in his mind.

Still, I wasn't sure who was right. Was Darren appreciating? Or appropriating? I turned to the experts for advice.

Erich Hatala Matthes, an assistant professor of philosophy at Wellesley College who studies the ethics of cultural heritage, told me that there's no clear

definition of cultural appropriation: “It’s a really messy thing.”

Listening to my story, he says it was OK that Darren wore a *barong* to my family party. “He’s been invited by you and your family. He has a good reason to do it. It’s an act of cultural solidarity,” he says.

But there are times when it’s not OK, says Matthes: If you are wearing the clothing of another culture to intentionally offend or make fun of the group or to assert power over them (for example, if Darren was wearing the *barong* to make a point that America once occupied the Philippines — yikes!). And the folks I interviewed urge caution when it comes to dressing up in the garb of another ethnic group for Halloween.

“If you’re [not] wearing it as part of a cultural exploration or education, you should be hesitant,” Matthes says.

Each culture gets to give permission to share a cultural tradition — or not, says C. Thi Nguyen, an associate professor of philosophy at Utah Valley University. He is the co-author of a paper titled *Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups*.

That’s because not all groups within a culture have the same views, he says. In May, a white high school student in Utah ignited furor for wearing a Chinese-style dress to prom because she liked its look. In a viral tweet, one person on Twitter wrote, “my culture is NOT” ... your prom dress. Another wrote, “I am a Chinese woman. I support you!”

The student, Keziah Daum, told ABC News that the backlash was unexpected. “My intention was never to cause any commotion or misunderstanding,” she said.

If you want to wear a cultural outfit to an event, say a *qipao* to a party hosted by Chinese friends, or a sari to a South Asian wedding, but you are not a member of either of these groups, what should you do?

“Listen to the cultures involved,” says Nguyen. “Ask the most relevant representatives of the culture, in this case the family, whether they want you to participate.”

And it’s not up to outsiders to decide. “It imposes *your* singular view from the outside without consulting that particular cultural group” — and it can come off as dismissive and presumptive. You’re basically deciding on behalf of a group that you’re not part of, says Nguyen.

Lastly, be aware that donning a culture’s dress comes with great responsibility, says Mayra Monroy, an adjunct professor at Baylor University and the author of a paper called *An Analysis of Cultural Appropriation in Fashion and Popular Media*. Don’t just wear something “because it looks nice,” she says.

Let’s say you’ve been gifted a piece of jewelry from Afghanistan or bought a traditional embroidered shirt from Mexico and are wondering whether to wear it. Find out what that clothing, design, print or jewelry symbolizes within the culture and what it might mean for an outsider to wear it, says Monroy.

The conversations I had with the researchers hit a big point home for me: What we choose to wear has real power.

Seeing Darren in that *barong*, standing next to my Tatay in his, showed me that he was making an effort to understand and connect with my family.

And that, to me, was a beautiful thing.

'This Is Not Liberation': Life In The Rubble Of Raqqa, Syria

By Program Error, NPR

The Syrian city of Raqqa is blanketed in despair. Residents survive in a wasteland of war-warped buildings and shattered concrete. They sleep exposed to the elements in homes with blown-out walls.

Amid the destruction, abject poverty has taken hold. Once a place of green parks and a thriving middle class, it's now common to see women and children scavenging Raqqa's debris-strewn streets for scrap metal to sell. A recent United Nations report finds that more than half of those who have returned don't have enough to eat.

"This is not liberation," says Abu Ward, who asks not to use his full name as he feels the city is too unsafe to speak openly. "Liberation" was the word that the Trump administration and its allied fighters used after they defeated ISIS in Raqqa in October 2017.

"It's destruction. Systematic destruction. This is what people believe — my relatives, my friends, my neighbors. No one can change their minds. How can you expect them to feel free when their lives are destroyed?"

One year after the United States-led coalition of countries and militia fighters drove ISIS from its onetime capital Raqqa, the city remains in ruin. And its people feel they're left to piece together

their lives with little help from the countries that destroyed their city and homes.

"ISIS sleeper cells"

Amid their resentment, insecurity is growing. In the recent two weeks that NPR visited Raqqa, an unnamed militia attacked the local police's security headquarters, prompting a gunfight, and there were reports of at least two roadside bomb attacks targeting coalition vehicles and the local security forces.

Local officials attribute these operations to "ISIS sleeper cells," and the militant group has claimed some of the attacks. Aid workers and other independent observers in the area, however, say the assaults may be the latest signs of the local majority-Arab population's growing anger at the city's new, Kurdish-led and American-backed administration.

ISIS seized Raqqa in early 2014 and controlled the city for almost four years. After taking the city from them last year, the U.S. said it was committed to "stabilizing" Raqqa as part of its offensive against ISIS. The Syria Transition Assistance Response Team, or START, has been tasked with helping reopen schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure.

"We have a clear mandate to counter ISIS. The military victory may be complete but that doesn't mean you then just leave," says a U.S. State Department official working in Syria, who asks not to

be named because they are not authorized to talk to the media. “You need to stabilize the area so they don’t return.”

But funding for this U.S.-led stabilization effort is limited and won’t likely achieve the government’s objectives.

Even officials in the U.S.-backed Raqqa Civil Council say the help is negligible compared to the need. “Of course we can’t say the funding is enough because the city is big and needs more,” says Ibrahim Hassan, who heads the Raqqa Civil Council’s reconstruction committee.

Trump freezes funds

So far, START has provided \$250 million toward Raqqa’s recovery, largely channeled through U.S. contractors to local nonprofit organizations. But in late March, the White House froze more than \$200 million from the budget. Much of that has been replaced with donations from other countries.

According to the State Department official and Raqqa Civil Council members, this money has helped clear street rubble that blocked roads in much of the city. It has funded the removal of some mines and booby traps. It also pays some salaries for teachers and other public service workers.

But in a city, where as many as 80 percent of the buildings have been destroyed, it’s a tiny portion of the work still needed to make the city habitable. While no official studies have been published on the topic, locals involved in the stabilization effort say privately that they believe Raqqa needs billions of dollars.

Annihilation tactics

While campaigning for the 2016 election, Donald Trump promised to “bomb the s***” out of ISIS. The Trump ad-

ministration then relaxed the rules of engagement to allow the military to bomb targets more quickly and fiercely.

In May 2017, Secretary of Defense James Mattis boasted on CBS’ *Face the Nation* that the coalition had changed from a tactic of “attrition” against ISIS to one of “annihilation.”

The annihilation of ISIS’ former Syrian capital is testimony to that. Whole neighborhoods were all but flattened. In others, where tower blocks still stand, it’s hard to spot a building that didn’t suffer some damage.

A combination of Kurdish and Syrian Arabground troops, armed and trained by the U.S., and American, British and French air power carried out the offensive. Some U.S. special forces also assisted the fight, manning artillery batteries — bigger weaponry than was given to the local forces.

The coalition maintains that it fought one of the most “precise” wars in modern history, causing minimal civilian casualties. But in a report in June, Amnesty International said the coalition actually killed “hundreds of civilians” in its four-month operation to capture Raqqa. It said the coalition may have committed war crimes through its “indiscriminate” use of heavy weaponry.

ISIS used civilians as “human shields,” often preventing residents from fleeing the city. But the anti-ISIS coalition knew that tactic before the Raqqa campaign, and Amnesty says coalition forces “did not take adequate account of civilians present in the city and failed to take the precautions necessary to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects.”

“An indescribable feeling”

At the headquarters of Raqqa's response team charged with finding dead bodies, desperate relatives are filing cases of missing loved ones and residents are reporting the stench of rotting corpses near their homes.

Many in the city are still reeling in shock. In one bombed out school that still hosts classes for more than 500 children, the administrator almost breaks down as he describes seeing the city for the first time after the drawn-out battle. Like other residents interviewed, he doesn't want to use his name in this story for fear of his safety.

"It was an indescribable feeling. I'd been gone from Raqqa for one year and fourth months. I was psychologically destroyed and I really missed my city; I wanted to kiss the dirt of Raqqa," he says.

"But then I came back and I saw the destruction, I started to cry. Tears were falling from my eyes."

Looking around a classroom, he says, "This school used to have books and libraries and even a garden."

The roof collapsed in an airstrike. Classroom windows shattered, leaving jagged shards stuck to the frames. Hundreds of mortar shells lie piled against the back wall of the playground.

"We think most of these mortars are spent, but we're not sure," he says. "We were told some experts would come and take them away. But that was weeks ago, and every day that passes the children play near these weapons."

The school administrator is one of more than 150,000 people the United Nations estimates have come back to Raqqa since October 2017. The U.N. says the city's population was previously more than 220,000.

He says that the signs of improvement in the city — of homes being rebuilt and stores opening — are the result of local resilience, and not outsiders' assistance.

He explains residents' deep anger at the coalition: "The person whose house is destroyed will be angry, and people who lost sons. Two of my cousins died in the airstrikes — and my uncle. Of course, I will be angry at the countries who have interests and players in this country."

"Life was better then"

Many locals even say, that despite ISIS' harsh dictates, it was easier to live in Raqqa then than now.

"ISIS is terrorism, there's no doubt about that," says one 38-year-old father, standing on the porch of his half-destroyed home. His young boy plays on a swing in what was once a well-tended garden.

"Despite this, life was better then. It's very expensive now. Bread under ISIS was cheaper. Now some families can't even afford that."

He was a firefighter before the war. His wife has a university degree in English but also hasn't been able to find work.

"If things don't get fixed here then there will be no security," he says. "If the U.S. and the local government here don't fix things, then in the end the people will rebel. The pressures will cause people to explode."

As the NPR crew drives out of Raqqa, through its decimated northern suburbs, it finds graffiti that still looks wet. In Arabic, the writing reads: "Whether you like it or not, ISIS is here."

'French Spider-Man' Arrested After Scaling London Skyscraper Without Ropes

By Program Error, NPR

A man who calls himself the “French Spider-Man” illegally scaled one of London’s tallest buildings without any ropes or safety gear on Thursday and was promptly arrested.

Alain Robert scrambled up the side of the 46-story Heron Tower as police cordoned off the building, closed roads and ushered away spectators, according to the Associated Press.

The 56-year-old has climbed many of the world’s tallest structures, including the Empire State Building, the Eiffel Tower and the Burj Khalifa in Dubai.

A few spectators captured videos of his most recent feat, which they posted on social media. One user tweeted this video of Robert beginning his ascent.

In this video, Robert seems to be nearly halfway up the building as someone is heard in the background telling people on the street to back up.

And on video that seems to be taken from inside the Heron Tower, people watched bewilderedly as Robert at one point took his foot off the building and shook it. (*Warning: This video contains profanity.*)

When he reaches the roof, Robert throws up his hands in celebration to the sound of cheers. He then ducks under a safety railing as two men wait for him on the other side. The three can be seen talking while several other men walk

up an interior staircase and out onto the roof.

The City of London Police arrested Robert, saying he caused “a public nuisance.”

“Our officers, the London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service all attended this incident taking them away from genuine emergencies,” Commander Karen Baxter said in a statement. “While the incident has caused immense disruption to everyday business in the City of London, it also posed a significant level of risk to the safety of people in and around Heron Tower at the time.”

On Friday, Robert pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 20 weeks in prison, which was suspended for two years. He was ordered to pay a fine of about \$7,000 and was barred from climbing any building in the U.K. until further notice, according to police.

“Today’s result at court should act as a deterrent for anyone thinking of participating in a similar illegal act,” Baxter said. “You will be subject to a criminal investigation, the result of which may well result in you having a permanent criminal record.”

Like the scaling of Heron Tower, most of Robert’s climbs are done without permission, and he has been arrested multiple times in various countries.

“What I am doing may seem crazy for most of the people, but not in a bad way,” he told Sky News before Thursday’s climb. “Overall, I climb to succeed, and my target is going at the top and, of course, to stay alive.”

“I didn’t even really know about this building,” he told the U.K. news service. “I only saw some pictures before I came to London two days ago.”

With Memories Of Dictatorship, Some Brazilians Fear A Hard-Right Turn

By Program Error, NPR

Half a century ago, Jean Marc von der Weid was strapped to a pole and bludgeoned with clubs by Brazilian security agents seeking information about his fellow leftist student leaders.

His torturers also attached wires to his fingers, toes, ears, tongue and penis, and blasted him with electric shocks. At one point, he recalls, they subjected him to a simulated firing squad.

“They said, ‘If you don’t talk, we will definitely shoot you,’” says von der Weid. “I remember one guy saying, ‘Do you want to smoke your last cigarette?’ I replied: ‘No thanks, I don’t smoke.’”

“That wasn’t bravery. I simply wasn’t thinking too well.”

Von der Weid endured these atrocities over five days in September 1969 during one of the most brutal phases of a military dictatorship that lasted in Brazil for just over two decades. He was 23 and the leader of a banned student organization.

Until recently, few observers imagined that Brazil, now Latin America’s largest democracy, was at significant risk of revisiting this chapter in its past. Not any more.

“This is a very, very worrying time,” says von der Weid, 72.

Brazilians are preparing for an election that will determine whether their next president will be Jair Bolsonaro, a

congressman and retired army captain who has openly, and often, expressed his admiration for the 1964-85 military regime as a period of order and tranquility.

Polls predict Bolsonaro will win. He took the first round, on Oct. 7, with a huge margin of nearly 18 million votes over his nearest rival, Fernando Haddad, the leftist Workers’ Party candidate. They face each other in a runoff on Sunday.

If that happens, Bolsonaro will assume the presidency of Brazil on Jan. 1, supported by his vice president — retired army Gen. Hamilton Mourão — along with a coterie of retired military commanders who are advisers, some of whom are expected to join his Cabinet.

What might follow, once Bolsonaro is installed in the presidential palace, is the source of impassioned debate in Brazil.

The election campaign has been ugly. Social media and texting platforms have been engulfed by acrimonious arguments and awash with lies and misleading information. There were 71 election-related attacks in the first 11 days of this month alone, according to *Pública*, a Brazilian investigative journalism agency monitoring political violence. These include the killing of Moa do Katendê, an Afro-Brazilian master of *capoeira*, a martial art combining music and dance, who was

stabbed after an argument with a Bolsonaro supporter in the city of Salvador.

“Dark forces, from within and from without, now seem to be forcing us backward and down,” wrote the celebrated musician Caetano Veloso, in a *New York Times* op-ed this week. Veloso was among the artists and intellectuals imprisoned by the military junta in the 1960s; he ended up spending more than two years in exile abroad.

“If Mr. Bolsonaro wins the election, Brazilians can expect a wave of fear and hatred,” Veloso wrote.

Bolsonaro himself dismisses predictions that he is a threat to democracy as “fake news” circulated by his enemies. He has said he wants a government “with authority but without authoritarianism” and describes himself as a “slave” to Brazil’s Constitution.

He insists that he is not interested in a military takeover. “That doesn’t go through our mind,” Bolsonaro told NPR in April. “Not even the military wants that.”

However, several recent incidents have reinforced suspicions about his intentions. In a speech last weekend, Bolsonaro described his opponents as “red bandits” and vowed to “wipe them off the map” in a “cleansing that has never been seen before in the history of Brazil.”

Alarm bells began ringing louder still when a video emerged in which Bolsonaro’s third son, Eduardo, a congressman, states that Brazil’s Supreme Court could be closed if it tries to remove his father from the presidency.

“You don’t even need to send a jeep. Send two soldiers,” said Eduardo Bolsonaro, on the video, which was recorded in July.

“What is the Supreme Court, man? Remove the power of a justice’s pen, who is he on the streets? If you arrest a justice, do you think people will protest in his favor?”

Brazil’s chief justice responded by saying an attack on the judiciary is an attack on democracy itself. Jair Bolsonaro distanced himself from his son’s remarks, characterizing them as a mistake.

Bolsonaro’s remarkable rise from political obscurity is being propelled by the deep contempt with which many Brazilians now view mainstream politicians. They are especially angry with the Workers’ Party, which ran the government for more than 13 years, from January 2003 to August 2016. That period included a deep recession, and the start of the “Car Wash” investigation that exposed a massive kickbacks-for-contracts scam involving top politicians and business executives, including former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Bolsonaro, 63, is a seven-term congressman, yet he has successfully marketed himself as an outsider, a squeaky-clean patriot who will champion the fight against corruption and violent crime and restore the nation’s pride and traditional Christian values.

Many millions of Brazilians are rallying to his battle cry. But research suggests that most of the country wants to preserve democracy. In a *Datafolha* poll this month, 69 percent defined democracy as the best form of government. Twelve percent said they would prefer a dictatorship.

Bolsonaro has sought to deflect accusations that he is a dictator in the making by channeling the same allegation toward his opponent, Haddad, portraying his Workers’ Party as an ally of

the authoritarian leftist government in Venezuela, which is in economic collapse.

Haddad, 55, is a former political science professor who has served as mayor of São Paulo and as a federal government education minister. His record, in fact, shows him to be a center-left moderate.

As Brazil's presidential election approaches, policymakers and investors worldwide are watching closely in the hope of detecting the contours of Bolsonaro's policies. Some of the country's most powerful forces, including the evangelical and agribusiness lobbies in Congress, are behind him.

Some of his agenda is already clear: His desire to loosen Brazil's environmental laws, which he says stifle economic growth, is causing deep alarm at home and abroad among those fighting for the preservation of the Amazon rain forest.

He favors allowing the Brazilian public to carry guns and advocates for police to use more lethal force against suspects — a practice already commonplace in impoverished, predominantly black neighborhoods where rogue cops and criminal gangs battle for control of the narcotics trade.

Internationally, Bolsonaro is strongly pro-Israel and is likely to move the Brazilian Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as the U.S. did with its embassy in May. He leans heavily toward the United States and much admires President Trump, who he says is pioneering “a new way of doing politics.”

“I intend to get much closer to the U.S.,” Bolsonaro told NPR in April.

He has criticized Brazil's biggest trading partner, China, arguing that the Chinese are not simply investing in the country — but buying it.

Also watching closely is von der Weid, who is now an agroecologist.

About a third of his 209 million fellow Brazilians were born after the military dictatorship and know little of its abuses. These include 434 deaths and disappearances, according to Brazil's National Truth Commission, which investigated atrocities committed during military rule.

“The military in Brazil have never admitted that they made a mistake and committed a crime,” says von der Weid. “And they have never been punished.”

If Bolsonaro becomes president, von der Weid expects him eventually to come into confrontation with Congress and the judiciary.

“Bolsonaro's instincts and . . . everything he says push toward a confrontation with the [government] institutions,” he says.

The key question is whether Brazil's military “goes along with him or not,” he says.

The torture that von der Weid suffered as a radical student leader, half a century ago, left him with some permanent hearing loss in his right ear; a crack in a bone in his spine, and — for a while — recurring nightmares.

Yet the greater legacy is an unsettling feeling that in today's Brazil, history could easily repeat itself.