RECUEIL de TEXTES de l'ÉPREUVE ORALE de LANGUE VIVANTE

ANGLAIS

session 2024

SUMMARY

1	A COHORT OF WORKING AMERICANS LIVING IN THEIR CARS	The New York Times
2	A GENETIC BASIS FOR VEGETERIANISM	New Scientist (2023)
3	ACCESS TO WOMEN ATHLETES SHOULD BE A PRIVILEGE NOT A PREROGATIVE	The Guardian (2023)
4	AI ANCHOR ZAE-IN GRANTS US AN INTERVIEW	The Guardian (2023)
5	AI CAN NOW PREDICT YOUR CHANCES OF SURVIVING CANCER	Newsweek (2023)
6	AI IS COMING FOR OUR JOBS! COULD UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME BE THE SOLUTION?	The Guardian (2023)
7	AI IS POWERING POLITICS – BUT IT COULD ALSO REBOOT DEMOCRACY	The Guardian (2023)
8	AI LIKELY TO SPELL END OF TRADITIONAL SCHOOL CLASSROOM, LEADING EXPERT SAYS	The Guardian (2023)
9	ALL I WANT IS A JOB WITH A DECENT NUMBER OF HOURS - WHY IS THAT SO HARD TO FIND?	Guardian.com (2023)
10	AMAZON STARTING TO TRACK AND PENALIZE WORKERS WHO WORK FROM HOME TOO MUCH	The Guardian (2023)
11	AMERICA'S UNDYING EMPIRE: WHY THE DECLINE OF US POWER HAS BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED	The Guardian (2023)
12	AND THEN ELON MUSK SAID THERE'LL BE NO MORE WAR	The Guardian (2023)
13	ANTIBIOTIC USE IN MEAT REVEALED BY UK SUPERMARKETS	BBC News (2023)
14	ASTRONAUTS MIGHT BE ABLE TO GROW PLANTS ON THE MOON, THANKS TO A FEW EARTH MICROBES	Space.com (2022)
15	AT 101, HIS SECRET TO HAPPINESS? MAKING NEW FRIENDS	The Washington Post (2023)
16	BALLOONING STUDENT DEBT	New York Times Newletter (2023)
17	BERLIN TO TIGHTEN IMMIGRATION RULES	Financial Times (2023)
18	BIKE RIDING ANS MENTAL HEALTH	NPR (2023)
19	BINARY THINKING —RIGHT FOR COMPUTERS, WRONG FOR US	Financial Times (2023)
20	BIRD FLU: SCIENTISTS SEE GENE EDITING HOPE FOR IMMUNE CHICKENS	BBC (2023)
21	BIRDS OF NEW YORK	The Economist (2023)
22	BORDEAUX WINE SNOBS HAVE A POINT, ACCORDING TO THIS COMPUTER MODEL	New York Times (2023)
23	BRITAIN'S SURPRISING, UPSTART UNIVERSITIES	The Economist (2023)
24	CAN LITTLE ACTIONS BRING BIG JOY? RESEARCHERS FIND 'MICRO-ACTS' CAN BOOST WELL-BEING	NPR (2023)
25	CHINA REPORTEDLY EXTENDS IPHONE BAN [] AS TENSIONS WITH US RISE	The Guardian (2023)
26	COLLEGES WRESTLE WITH A.IGENERATED ADMISSIONS ESSAYS	The New York Times (2023)
27	CONCERN OVER TOXIC CHEMICALS IN TAP WATER	BBC News (2022)
28	DISCARDED TOYS PRODUCE MORE ELECTRONIC WASTE THAN VAPES	New Scientist (2023)
29	DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY	The Miami Herald (2023)
30	'ELITE COUPLE BREEDING TO SAVE MANKIND' INSIST THEY'RE NOT TRYING TO PERFECT THE HUMAN RACE - DESPITE USING EMBRYO SELECTION []	The Daily Mail (2023)

31	ELON MUSK WANTS TO SAVE HUMANITY. THE ONLY PROBLEM: PEOPLE	The New York Times (2023)
32	ERASING HISTORY OR KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES? THE GREAT ROALD DAHL DEBATE	The Sydney Morning Herald (2023)
33	EUROPE'S UNIQUE TRIALS IN FOOD "SOCIAL SECURITY"	BBC Future (2023)
34	EXEMPTIONS FOR ROUTINE CHILDHOOD VACCINATION AT HIGHEST LEVEL EVER: CDC REPORT	ABC News (2023)
35	EXPERT SAYS SHE WAS FIRED BY HARVARD UNDER META PRESSURE	The Guardian (2023)
36	FARMERS TURN TO TECH AS BEES STRUGGLE TO POLLINATE	BBC News (2023)
37	FEWER PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MOVIES, THEATER AND MUSEUMS, NEA STUDY SHOWS	The Washington Post (2023)
38	FINANCIAL ANXIETY: THE ALARMING SIDE EFFECT OF INFLATION	BBC News.com (2023)
39	FLORIDA SCHOOLS PLAN TO USE ONLY EXCERPTS FROM SHAKESPEARE TO AVOID 'RAUNCHINESS'	The Guardian (2023)
40	FRENCH PHILOSOPHER URGES PEOPLE TO REBEL - BY MAKING FRIENDS	The Guardian (2023)
41	GEN Z TURN AWAY FROM 'ADDICTIVE' SOCIAL MEDIA	BBC News (2023)
42	GEN Z WANT TO WORK 'LAZY GIRL JOBS'. WHO CAN BLAME THEM?	The Guardian (2023)
43	GET ON THE BUS: BANNED BOOKS TOUR HITS THE ROAD, FROM NEW YORK OF TEXAS	The Guardian (2023)
44	GUNS ARE SEIZED IN U.S. SCHOOLS EACH DAY. THE NUMBERS ARE SOARING	The Washington Post (2023)
45	HALF A MILLION CHILDREN DIE OF MALARIA EVERY YEAR	Nature (2023)
46	HEALING NATURE WILL HELP US ALL	The Guardian (2023)
47	HOW BRITAIN LIVES WITH COVID-19 TODAY	The Economist (2023)
48	HOW EVERY WORKPLACE BECOME 'TOXIC'	BBC (2023)
49	HOW GREEN ARE ELECTRIC VEHICLES?	New York Times (2023)
50	HOW LONDON BUS DRIVERS CHANGED THE WORLD	The Economist (2023)
51	HOW PARENTS' INCOME INFLUENCES ATTENDANCE AT TOP COLLEGES	The New York Times (2023)
52	HOW SAFE IS NUCLEAR ENERGY?	BBC News (2023)
53	HOW THE PROTEST AT THE MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS SHOOK THE WORLD	BBC.com (2023)
54	HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT HATE SPEECH	Unicef (2023)
55	HOW WILL BRITAIN TURN OFF ITS GAS GRID?	The Economist (2023)
56	HUNDREDS OF WORKERS JOIN AMAZON PICKET LINE FOR BLACK FRIDAY STRIKE	The Guardian (2023)
57	I DON'T HAVE TO POST ABOUT MY OUTRAGE. NEITHER DO YOU.	New York Times (2023)
58	I THOUGHT VAPING WAS MY PLEASURE BUT A BOOK SHOWED ME IT WAS A TYRANNY	The Guardian (2023)
59	INDIA'S MOON LANDING IS A STELLAR ACHIEVEMENT	Nature (2023)
60	INVESTING IN THE ARTIST MAKES ME FEEL MORE INVOLVED IN THE SONG"	BBC Future (2023)

61	IS THIS THE SUMMER OF BAD TOURISTS?	BBC Travel (2023)
62	KENDRICK LAMAR'S ANTI-SMART PHONE SELLE OUT IN A DAY	Euronews.com (2023)
63	KENYAN STARGAZER BRINGING ASTRONOMY TO THE PEOPLE	The Guardian (2023)
64	LANDMARK PIG KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS IN MONKEYS RAISE HOPES FOR HUMAN SURGERIES	The Telegraph (2023)
65	LIKE A DREAM': SUCCESSFUL RETURN OF NASA CAPSULE WITH ASTEROID SAMPLE HAILED	The Guardian (2023)
66	LIKE IT OR NOT: KIDS HEAR THE NEWS. HERE'S HOW TEACHERS HELP THEM UNDERSTAND IT	NPR (2023)
67	LONDON MAYOR REJECTS PLAN FOR STRATFORD SPHERE MUSIC ARENA	The Guardian (2023)
68	MAJOR UK RETAILERS URGED TO QUIT 'AUTHORITARIAN' POLICE FACIAL RECOGNITION STRATEGY	The Guardian (2023)
69	MAUI TOURISM, AN ECONOMIC MAINSTAY, SPARKS ANGER AMID FIRE RUIN	Reuters (2023)
70	META ALLOWS ADS SAYING 2020 ELECTION WAS RIGGED ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM	The Guardian (2023)
71	MICROSOFT'S NEW AI ASSISTANT CAN GO TO MEETINGS FOR YOU	BBC News (2023)
72	MONACO YACHT BUYERS SHRUG OFF CLIMATE CONCERNS	The Guardian (2023)
73	MOVIE MARATHONS	The Economist (2023)
74	MUSEUM VOWS BETTER STEWARDSHIP OF HUMAN BONES	NPR (2023)
75	NEPAL IS BANNING TIKTOK OVER HATE CONTENT	nytimes.com (2023)
76	NEW HOME HEATING RULES THREATEN UK CLIMATE GOALS	BBC News (2023)
77	NEW YORK CITY DISCOVERS A REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY:	Th - F (0000)
	THE BIN	The Economist (2023)
78	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB	The Economist (2023)
78 79		. ,
	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS	The Economist (2023)
79	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023)
79 80	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023)
79 80 81	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023)
79 80 81 82	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023) Guardian.com (2023)
79 80 81 82 83	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS PEPSI'S NEW HEALTHY DIET: MORE POTATO CHIPS AND SODA	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023)
79 80 81 82 83	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023) Guardian.com (2023) The Wall Street Journal
79 80 81 82 83 84 85	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS PEPSI'S NEW HEALTHY DIET: MORE POTATO CHIPS AND SODA PROPOSED SMOKING BAN WOULD IMPROVE UK PUBLIC HEALTH-BUT TOBACCO INDUSTRY OPPOSITION COULD BE A MAJOR	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023) Guardian.com (2023) The Wall Street Journal (2023)
79 80 81 82 83 84 85	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS PEPSI'S NEW HEALTHY DIET: MORE POTATO CHIPS AND SODA PROPOSED SMOKING BAN WOULD IMPROVE UK PUBLIC HEALTH- BUT TOBACCO INDUSTRY OPPOSITION COULD BE A MAJOR ROADBLOCK	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023) Guardian.com (2023) The Wall Street Journal (2023) The Conversation (2023)
79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86	NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ONE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS PEPSI'S NEW HEALTHY DIET: MORE POTATO CHIPS AND SODA PROPOSED SMOKING BAN WOULD IMPROVE UK PUBLIC HEALTH - BUT TOBACCO INDUSTRY OPPOSITION COULD BE A MAJOR ROADBLOCK PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM OPIOID OVERDOSE IN THE U.S.	The Economist (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Conversation (2023) The Guardian (2023) The Parliament (2023) The Guardian (2023) Guardian.com (2023) The Wall Street Journal (2023) The Conversation (2023) Newsweek (2023)

90	REPUBLICANS' PUSH FOR DEATH PENALTY EMBRACES TO POLITICS OF THE PAST	The Washington Post (2023)
91	RISHI SUNAK'S PLANNED A-LEVELS REVAMP COULD INCLUDE BACCALAUREATE	The Guardian (2023)
92	SCHOOL POLICE OFFICERS DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD. WHY DO POLITICIANS STILL PUSH FOR THEM?	USA Today (2023)
93	SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT NOISE POLLUTION?	The Guardian (2023)
94	SHOULD YOU DELETE YOUR KID'S TIKTOK THIS WEEK?	The Atlantic (2023)
95	SKIMPFLATION': AN EVEN SNEAKIER FORM OF 'SHRINKFLATION'	BBC.com (2023)
96	SOME DEVELOPERS OPPOSE VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES	The Economist (2023)
97	SOME ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS SHOULD BE LABELLED "ADDICTIVE," SCIENTISTS SUGGEST	The Independent (2023)
98	SWEDEN'S SCHOOLS MINISTER DECLARES FREE SCHOOL 'SYSTEM FAILURE'	Guardian.com (2023)
99	TEENS ARE EXHAUSTED BY PHONE NOTIFICATIONS	CNN (2023)
100	THE BATTLE AGAINST FAST FASHION'S HYPOCRITICAL SCHOLARSHIPS	cnn.com (2023)
101	THE CHINESE WOMEN WHO DEFY BEAUTY DUTY	New York Times (2023)
102	THE ENHANCED GAMES: LETTING ATHLETES USE DRUGS COULD LEAD TO WORSE PROBLEMS THAN CHEATING	The Conversation (2023)
103	THE EU'S 'SET MENU' MEMBERSHIP MODEL IS FAILING. IT'S TIME FOR AN 'A LA CARTE' APPROACH	The Guardian (2023)
104	THE FIVE-DAY OFFICE WEEK IS DEAD	New York Times (2023)
105	THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON FARMING'S GREEN TRANSITION: THE POLITICS AREN'T LOOKING GOOD	The Guardian (2023)
106	THE JOBS AI WON'T TAKE YET	BBC News (2023)
107	THE NEW FRONTIER IN THE US WAR ON TIKTOK: UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES	The Guardian (2023)
108	THE PEOPLE GOING 'MONK MODE' TO LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA USE	BBC.com (2023)
109	THE PROBLEM IN EDUCATION	The Times (2023)
110	THE RISE OF LONDON'S SUPER-LUXE HOTELS	The Guardian (2023)
111	THE SETTLERS BROUGHT THE LOTTERY TO AMERICA. IT'S HAD A LONG, UNEVEN HISTORY	NPR (2023)
112	THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM	The New York Times (2023)
113	THE SUPREME COURT BANS AFFIRMATIVE-ACTION POLICIES IN US UNIVERSITIES	The Guardian (2023)
114	THE TRIALS OF MANAGING AUSTRALIA'S FERAL PIGS	The Guardian Australia (2023)
115	THE WNBA'S DEARICA HAMBY SPEAKS OUT: 'YOU'RE TRADING ME BECAUSE I'M PREGNANT?'	The Washington Post (2023)
116	THE WORLD CAN SOLVE THIS MIGRATION CRISIS	The Guardian (2023)
117	THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECT PLACED ARE BEING TURNED INTO BACKDROPS FOR OUR TOURIST SELFIES	The Guardian (2023)
118	THERE HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTS TO CENSOR MORE THAN 1,900 LIBRARY BOOK TITLES SO FAR IN 2023	NPR (2023)
119	THERE'S NO AGE LIMITE FOR POLITICIANS - AS PEOPLE LIVE LONGER, SHOULD THAT CHANGE?	The Conversation (2023)

120	TIKTOK MIGHT BE PART OF A PLOT TO MAKE US DUMBER	The Washington Post (2023)
121	UK EDUCATION SECRETARY PLANS TO BAN MOBILE PHONES FROM ENGLISH SCHOOLS	The Guardian (2023)
122	UN EXPERTS URGE UK TO HALT IMPLEMENTATION OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BILL	UN Press (2023)
123	UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME TO BE TRIALLED IN ENGLAND	The Guardian (2023)
124	VERBAL EXTREMISM IS NOW THE BIGGER THREAT TO LANGUAGE	The Economist (2023)
125	VIDEO DOORBELLS: POLICE CHAMPION THEM BUT DO THEY CUT CRIME?	BBC news (2023)
126	WALES TO CLAMP DOWN ON JUNK FOOD MEAL DEALS TO TACKLE OBESITY	The Guardian (2023)
127	WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE 'BEACH TOWEL REVOLT' TAKING BACK GREEK BEACHES	BBC.com (2023)
128	WHY CHILDREN OF MARRIED PARENTS DO BETTER, BUT AMERICA IS MOVING THE OTHER WAY	NPR (2023)
129	WHY COBALT MINING IN CONGO NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION	Council on Foreign relations (2023)
130	WHY EUROPE IS A MAGNET FOR MORE AMERICANS	The Economist (2023)
131	WHY SURGE PRICING IS SPREADING	BBC.com (2023)
132	WHY UNEMPLOYED WORKERS ARE SO BURNT OUT	BBC news (2023)
133	WHY WE USE GRAPHIC NOVELS TO TEACH MATH ANS PHYSICS	theconversation.com (2023)

A COHORT OF WORKING AMERICANS LIVING IN THEIR CARS

One of the fastest growing segments of America's homeless population is people who live in their cars, R.V.s or other vehicles. It's a sign of the squeeze on the middle-class.

California has more safe parking lots than any other state, with more than two dozen from Santa Rosa to San Diego [...] thanks to New Beginnings, [...] the nonprofit that runs the parking initiative in Santa Barbara County. The inspiration for it came from a county supervisor who stepped out of her office one day, looked around at the parking lot and realized that the solution to Santa Barbara's growing homelessness problem was there.

But even with the growth of these programs, only a fraction of the tens of thousands of people living in their cars across the country can be accommodated. And some cities are cracking down on people sleeping in their cars. [...]

That growth is a testament to the growing tension between municipalities who are trying to limit the eyesore of R.V.s, vans and passenger cars parking on public rights-of-way and the people stuck inside them, who have nowhere else to go.

The need has become so pronounced in California that Long Beach City College set aside a parking structure for its homeless students, after discovering that nearly 70 students were sleeping in their cars each night. [...]

In many ways, it's a sign of the worsening squeeze on the nation's middle class. Compared with those living in tents and shelters, the so-called mobile homeless are more likely to have jobs or to be actively looking for work, a U.C.L.A. study found. Many lost their homes after being unable to afford rent or their mortgage, and had to move into their most valuable possession.

But living in a car comes with risks — of burglary, harassment and more. That has led to the creation of safe parking lots, designated places for people living in their vehicles to stay overnight. Dozens of such lots, often outside churches, have opened across the nation in the past five years, a testament to the severity of the homelessness crisis.

"Cities aim to build affordable housing, but the timeline for doing so is measured in years," Rukmini Callimachi, a housing reporter said. [...] He just published an article about these lots and the people who need them, most of whom have some kind of income but are stuck in expensive housing markets. He shadowed a social worker in Washington State who makes more than \$72,000 a year, but lives in her car.

Now they are fielding requests from other community colleges asking how to provide parking for their own homeless students.

Adapted from *The New York Times*October 2023
(445 words)

A GENETIC BASIS FOR VEGETERIANISM?

[...] People's likelihood of being vegetarian seems to be influenced by several genetic variants, and two of the three most important genes found so far appear to be involved in fat metabolism.

This hints that some people find it easier to give up meat because they naturally produce certain fat molecules, says Nabeel Yaseen at Northwestern University in Chicago. "Maybe there is some fat that is essential for some people to have in their diet, but not for others", he says.

Genetic factors are known to influence aspects of diet, such as whether people like coffee or alcohol. To see if genes also affect vegetarianism, Yaseen and his team turned data on about 5,300 people who said they were strict vegetarians and 330,000 people who were meat eaters in the UK Biobank study, for which people filled in lifestyle surveys and had their DNA sequenced.

Three gene variants were more common in vegetarians. Two called NPC1 and RMC1 are involved in the transport and metabolism of cholesterol and other fatty molecules called glycolipids. The third gene, called RIOK3, has various functions including affecting the immune system.

It is not known how these genes may relate to vegetarianism. But one of the chief differences between animal-based foods and plant-based one is the chemical make-up of their fats or oils, collectively known as lipids. Yaseen and his colleagues speculate that some people may function better on a vegetarian diet because they are more able to synthesise certain lipid molecules that are present in meat.

"Some people who try vegetarianism but give up may be doing so because their body becomes deficient in the postulated essential lipids", says Yaseen. "They decide that this diet is not for them or gradually creep back into an omnivore diet. Some people might think they just do not have the willpower".

"Another possibility", says Yaseen, "is that the apparently vegetarianism-promoting gene variants affect people's taste". [...]

Albert Koulman at the University of Cambridge says most research into how nutrients influence satiety and food choices has focused on proteins rather than fats. "We don't know enough about [this idea] to either accept or dismiss it", he says.

Richard McIlwain at the United Kingdom Vegetarian Society says the number of vegetarians had almost doubled in the UK between 2012 and 2019. "That would seem to suggest something other than underlying genetic factors are at play", he says. "People go vegetarian because, more and more, they are concerned about climate, about animal welfare or about their health", he says, which are more important determinants than physiological factors.

Adapted from **New Scientist**October 2023
(446 words)

ACCESS TO WOMEN ATHLETES SHOULD BE A PRIVILEGE NOT A PREROGATIVE

The growing post-match trend of demanding jerseys is becoming a burden for players who want to please all but simply cannot.

It is a trend that has been slowly building for a while, having made its way over from men's sport, where there is often little chance of even getting within 10 metres of a player, let alone taking home their jersey.

However the proposition is often quite different in women's sport. In the fortune-filled world of professional men's sport, the camera zooms in to show a player's jersey, embroidered with the date of the match and the opposition. If the shirt gets [...] damaged during the game, another will be waiting for them to pull on. At each game, a fresh kit awaits and handing over a particular jersey is far from being a big deal.

In women's sport however, players often have just a couple of jerseys to last them the season. They often can simply not afford to hand them out to every small child with a glittery sign. [...]

The other issue for female athletes is their accessibility. While a sign made to ask Lionel Messi for his shirt may be caught on camera and prompt the star to seek out the child in the crowd, female athletes typically have long signing and selfie sessions after each match, meaning they are constantly confronted with these requests in a very real, face-to-face way that male athletes do not as often have to deal with. Whereas once these were opportunities to connect with fans and inspire the next generation, they have turned into constant demands on athletes' time and property that will make it difficult for such sessions to be sustainable.

As fans of women's sport, we have all become accustomed to this incredible access to the players. But we should consider this access a privilege, not an entitlement. The reality is [...] a significant number of these athletes are still earning minimum wage. That extra hour they stay after a game each time is a sacrifice. It is time that could be spent preparing meals to get ahead of a busy week of training, completing a university assignment, or even working to make ends meet. They stay because they love the game and love the fans. [...]

With much-improved merchandise offerings for women's teams in the current era, fans now have the option to purchase replica jerseys and some sports even offer customisation so everyone can get their favourite player's name and number on the back. It is still a fantastic keepsake, but rather than being a burden on the players, it is actually a way to support them and their clubs.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2023 (457 mots)

[...] AI ANCHOR ZAE-IN GRANTS US AN INTERVIEW

Like most newsreaders, Zae-In wears a microphone pinned to her collar and clutches a stack of notes – but unlike most, her face is entirely fake. A "virtual human" designed by South Korean artificial intelligence company Pulse9, Zae-In spent five months this year reading live news bulletins on national broadcaster SBS. That, you might think, is it then. To adapt the words of another animated newscaster: "I, for one, welcome our new AI overlords." The future is now. The world belongs to the artificially intelligent and the News at Ten will never be the same again.

Are things really that simple? Since spring, country after country have debuted their first Al news anchor: India has Sana and Lisa, Greece has Hermes, Kuwait has Fedha and Taiwan has Ni Zhen. "She is bright, gorgeous, ageless, tireless and speaks multiple languages, and is totally under my control," said Kalli Purie, the vice chairperson of the India Today Group, when Sana first appeared in March. For broadcasters, it's easy to see the appeal of Al: virtual presenters can read rolling news for twenty-four hours unpaid and unfed, and it's unlikely they'll ever skip the queue at a lying-instate.

Yet though non-human newsreaders are on the rise, it remains to be seen whether they are firmly anchored in place. These days, you can't move for an Al marketing gimmick: in September, Coca-Cola released a new "Al-generated" drink flavoured, they claimed, like the future, but the company didn't go into much detail about Al's exact contribution (and consumers can't agree what it actually tastes like). How exactly do Al newscasters work – do they work? – and is the future really now?

Sana, Lisa, Hermes and Fedha's creators did not respond to interview requests, but on a drizzly Friday in October, I video call Zae-In. I'm not sure what to expect when the camera connects, but I'm met by a real human actor with Zae-In's flawless face pasted on top. At present, human actors are required to bring Zae-In to life — only her face is artificial, generated by deepfake technology and designed by analysing K-pop singers' faces. [...]

In real time, a human actor's face is being transformed into Zae-In's using Pulse9's technology, a "virtual character automation service" called Deep Real AI. When the human moves their lips or blinks their eyes, so does Zae-In. But Zae-In's hand movements, body language and even voice are very much human, though the person behind them remains unnamed on our call. [...] Nervous or not, Zae-In presented the news well. [...] Yet just because AI anchors haven't fully been realised yet doesn't mean they won't be. [...] I wonder whether the public are ready to trust AI anchors.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(453 words)

AI CAN NOW PREDICT YOUR CHANCES OF SURVIVING CANCER

A new tool for predicting survival rates of newly diagnosed cancer patients could be on the horizon, thanks to artificial intelligence. Preliminary research on the "survival calculator" demonstrates a high prediction accuracy and may offer more personalized prognoses for newly diagnosed patients.

Today, estimates for patient survival rates are primarily based on the stage of the person's cancer and its location.

"A multitude of other factors may influence a patient's survival beyond just their staging criteria," said lead study author Lauren Janczewski, a clinical scholar with the American College of Surgeons' Cancer Programs and a general surgical resident at Northwestern University's McGaw Medical Center, in a statement.

"We sought to develop this Cancer Survival Calculator to provide a more personalized estimate of what patients can expect regarding their cancer prognosis," she said. When a man receives a CT scan to determine if he has cancer, artificial intelligence may be able to provide a more accurate prognosis for cancer patients following their initial diagnosis.

Janczewski and her team collected data from thousands of patients diagnosed in twenty fifteen and twenty seventeen with breast, thyroid and pancreatic cancers from the National Cancer Database. A joint effort of the American College of Surgeons and the American Cancer Society, the database contains records for seventy-two percent of newly diagnosed cancer cases in the U.S.

Janczewski said they chose those three cancer sites for their prototype because they cover diverse patient populations with highly varied survival rates between individuals.

After this initial phase, three-quarters of the collected data was used to train machine learning algorithms to recognize patterns between patients' five-year survival and their characteristics at diagnosis. The other twenty-five percent of the data was used to test their prediction model's accuracy in estimating patient survival.

Their analysis, presented at the American College of Surgeons Clinical Congress twenty twenty-three, included data from two hundred and sixty thousand breast cancer patients, seventy-seven thousand thyroid cancer patients and eighty-five thousand pancreatic cancer patients. For each cancer site, the team found multiple characteristics that significantly influenced survival at five years post-diagnosis. These included age at diagnosis, tumor size, the time from diagnosis to treatment and whether the patient had surgery.

Using these specific biomarkers and treatment variables, the team was able to create what they describe as a "highly accurate" prediction model that is more comprehensive and accurate than previous survival calculators already in use.

Janczewski said that the team's next step was to finalize its user interface before completing a pilot test of the calculator in selected cancer care centers. The team also hopes to eventually add all other cancer sites that are included in the National Cancer Database.

Adapted from *Newsweek*October 2023
(458 words)

AI IS COMING FOR OUR JOBS! COULD UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME BE THE SOLUTION?

The idea of a guaranteed income for all has been floating around for centuries [...] While it is still considered by many to be a radical concept, proponents of a universal basic income (UBI) no longer see it only as a solution to poverty but as the answer to some of the biggest threats faced by modern workers: wage inequality, job insecurity – and the looming possibility of Al-induced job losses.

Elon Musk, at the recent Bletchley Park summit, said he believed "no job is needed" due to the development of AI, and that a job can be for "personal satisfaction". An economist [...] sees it differently. "Even if AI takes your job away, you don't necessarily just become unemployed for the rest of your life," he says. "What happens is you go down in the labour market, you start crowding the lower-income professions." He believes, at least in the short term, that the growth of AI will push white-collar workers into the gig economy, and into other forms of poorly paid, insecure work. Such a shift in the workforce would, he fears, drive down wages and conditions, while increasing inequality. A UBI policy in response to AI and automation would address the failure of employers to distribute the spoils of economic growth – propelled, at least in part, by automation – fairly among workers, says the economist.

Some go further still, pointing to UBI as a dividend due to workers for their role in the development and dissemination of knowledge used to train AI models such as ChatGPT. [...] While UBI experiments do not generally show that the policy encourages workers to entirely leave the labour market, higher payments have led to some people reducing their working hours. [...]

In Kenya, the world's largest UBI scheme has been providing almost 5,000 people with a payment of about 75 cents a day since 2017 [...] "People leave low wage jobs, they are going and starting businesses, and the businesses are doing great because there's money around. This unexpected wave of entrepreneurship has also had a positive impact on those taking jobs that pay wages, as a shrinking of the available workforce has led to an increase in salaries [...] In a developing country, if we see a 20% increase in businesses, that's people who are going to pay taxes".

For countries where automation is a greater concern, a macroeconomist has considered a very different approach: a robot tax [...] She described the possibility of taxing companies that replace workers with robots in order to fund a UBI as "philosophically appealing", if currently unrealistic.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(445 words)

AI IS POWERING POLITICS - BUT IT COULD ALSO REBOOT DEMOCRACY

The YouTube clip I return to most often is David Bowie being interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on Newsnight in 1999. Bowie is talking about what the internet might do: "I don't think we've even seen the tip of the iceberg. I think that the potential of what the internet is going to do to society, both good and bad, is unimaginable. I think we're on the cusp of something exhilarating and terrifying." [...]

Fast forward 25-odd years and we know the opposite has happened: truth and trust have been eroded, democracy has failed to reform for the digital age and the relationship between those in power and those who elect them is strained to breaking point. It's at this moment that we are seeing the proliferation of generative AI, and understandably the response has been a mixture of hysteria and hope. [...]

If we make AI work for democracy, then in 10 years' time our information ecosystems could be vastly improved to support democratic decision-making. We could train AI to value verified information, and serve it in ways that make the most complex information more accessible to more people.

Politicians could be more trusted to do the right thing by people, because they've learned new ways to involve people in decision-making. Al citizens' assemblies could help people and politicians to navigate through the trade-offs required to tackle the big problems. [...]

In a decade's time we could repair the relationship between state and citizen. It could facilitate dialogue between MPs and constituents, enabling elements of direct democracy to supplement our representative system. Al could also allow for the better use of citizens' data to target public services, interventions and support people on a more human level. Al could be used to guide people to access help from the state.

But this will only happen if we make it happen. Because right now the incentives to develop generative AI are all commercial, with investors steering the development of the technology in ways that threaten to further leave democracy behind – not least because the talent, expertise and infrastructure follows the money, rather than where it could be used for common good. [...]

Without focusing explicitly on the potential for AI to improve democracy – or at least do no harm – it will most probably corrupt. Distrusted information will proliferate, further eroding trust. But without explicitly updating our democracy to encompass more participatory activities that could be facilitated through these technologies, we will increasingly be left in a system that is centuries out of date, trying to govern in a world that moves at completely different speeds and in completely different ways. We have to learn this time.

Adapted from *The Guardian*July 2023
(453 words)

AI LIKELY TO SPELL END OF TRADITIONAL SCHOOL CLASSROOM, LEADING EXPERT SAYS

Prof Stuart Russell, a British computer scientist based at the University of California, Berkeley, said that personalised ChatGPT-style tutors have the potential to hugely enrich education and widen global access by delivering personalised tuition to every household with a smartphone. The technology could feasibly deliver "most material through to the end of high school", he said.

"Education is the biggest benefit that we can look for in the next few years," Russell said before a talk on Friday at the UN's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva. "It ought to be possible within a few years, maybe by the end of this decade, to be delivering a pretty high quality of education to every child in the world. That's potentially transformative."

Russell cited evidence from studies using human tutors that one-to-one teaching can be two to three more times effective than traditional classroom lessons, allowing children to get tailored support and be led by curiosity. "Oxford and Cambridge don't really use a traditional classroom ... they use tutors presumably because it's more effective," he said. "It's literally unfeasible to do that for every child in the world. There aren't enough adults to go around."

OpenAl is already exploring educational applications, announcing a partnership in March with an education nonprofit, the Khan Academy, to pilot a virtual tutor powered by ChatGPT. This prospect may prompt "reasonable fears" among teachers and teaching unions of "fewer teachers being employed – possibly even none," Russell said. Human involvement would still be essential, he predicted, but could be drastically different from the traditional role of a teacher, potentially incorporating "playground monitor" responsibilities, facilitating more complex collective activities and delivering civic and moral education.

"We haven't done the experiments so we don't know whether an AI system is going to be enough for a child. There's motivation, there's learning to collaborate, it's not just 'Can I do the sums?" Russell said. "It will be essential to ensure that the social aspects of childhood are preserved and improved."

The technology will also need to be carefully risk-assessed. [...] Controlling AI systems poses both regulatory and technical challenges, because even the experts don't know how to quantify the risks of losing control of a system. OpenAI announced on Thursday that it would devote 20% of its compute power to seeking a solution for "steering or controlling a potentially super-intelligent AI, and preventing it from going roque".

"The large language models in particular, we have really no idea how they work," Russell said. "We don't know whether they are capable of reasoning or planning. They may have internal goals that they are pursuing – we don't know what they are."

Adapted from *The Guardian*July 2023
(451 words)

ALL I WANT IS A JOB WITH A DECENT NUMBER OF HOURS – WHY IS THAT SO HARD TO FIND?

I am back on the job hunt. My recent role working with young people who are at risk of becoming involved with county-lines activities has come to an end.

I'm used to it. I've always worked short contracts. What I'm not used to is how hard it is to get a proper contract now with a decent number of hours. No one knows what the future holds so employers have become tentative. Any contracts that are given out are small – 18 hours a week, for instance.

I have enjoyed this latest job. What it's really made me realise is that county-lines and exploitation can be traced back to poverty and destitution. Young people are being exploited because their mums work on low-income wages and they don't have any money. These mums can't afford to buy them £100 Nikes or whatever it is they've seen on Instagram. [...]

Rishi Sunak is on a different planet. He's not seeing the poverty, the destitution, the high cost of living that normal people are experiencing. The cost of living is still affecting me and everybody else but there is also clearly greedflation. There are things I simply refuse to buy now. I saw [...] gravy granules [...] for £4. Are you mad? They used to be £2.50. [...] The Nescafé cappuccino sachets I used to like for £2.50 are now £3 [...]. I refuse. I just buy the rubbish stuff instead. I feel like I'm being mugged off. The only power you have is to say no.

We are being squeezed. To me there is something really evil about doing this to customers; money is being made off our backs. I might be working but I feel like I'm not reaping the whole benefits of my salary.

I don't even know who I am going to vote for. [The Leader of the Opposition] has said he is not going to change the policy on the two-child benefit cap. What is the point of voting for a progressive party if they are not going to make change? That policy is what has driven so many children into poverty. [...]

On a positive note, I've got a role in a play called Bread and Roses, part of the Untold Stories series in Enfield. It covers suffragettes and going to war, but also deals with homelessness, eviction and the cost of living. I rehearse every Sunday. I feel like I'm getting to do what I want. Even though I'm not acting full-time, I'm still engaged in it, still performing.

Adapted from *guardian.com*July 2023
(447 words)

AMAZON STARTING TO TRACK AND PENALIZE WORKERS WHO WORK FROM HOME TOO MUCH

Amazon workers in the US are being tracked and penalized for not spending sufficient time in the company's offices, an email sent to employees this week revealed, as tech companies push back against work-from-home practices that flourished during the pandemic.

Some staff members were alerted on Wednesday they were "not currently meeting our expectation of joining your colleagues in the office at least three days a week", according to emails shared with the Financial Times. The emails were also discussed on the anonymous corporate message board platform Blind.

The email was intended to be sent to workers who come into the office fewer than three days a week for five or more of the past eight weeks, according to a follow-up message sent to employees that Amazon shared with the Guardian. Some employees reported receiving the email by mistake and were encouraged to clarify their attendance with human resources.

Amazon is the latest employer taking measures to encourage workers to return to the office. In March, Apple began threatening punitive action against employees who did not return to the office part-time and shortly after taking over as CEO of Twitter, Elon Musk began to require employees to return full-time.

The pandemic sent a large portion of the workforce home, including many tech workers. As of May 2022, 48% of tech workers said they were working fully remotely, up from 22% before the onset of the pandemic, according to a study from Morning Consult. It found that the majority of tech workers – 85% - were now working either hybrid or fully remote.

The trend has marked a major shift from the heyday of Silicon Valley, during which tech giants like Google, Meta and Apple spent billions to build massive campuses equipped with perks like catered food, laundry facilities and exercise centers to keep employees on the premises as much as possible.

Workers are not interested in returning to that lifestyle, studies have shown, with the Morning Consult report finding that three in five tech workers said they were not interested in returning to the office full-time.

Companies that have enacted such policies have faced backlash, with Amazon workers staging a walkout in June to protest the return-to-work policies. The latest email from Amazon reportedly angered some employees: "Is this supposed to scare people?" one employee wrote on an internal chat shared with Insider. Workers' rights groups say pushing employees back to the office against their will stands only to strengthen the growing labour movement in the tech space. "Across its business lines, Amazon imposes a rigid and punitive system of management in an attempt to control and silence workers" said one director.

Adapted from *The Guardian*August 2023
(458 words)

AMERICA'S UNDYING EMPIRE: WHY THE DECLINE OF US POWER HAS BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED

For more than a decade, people have been saying that the era of US dominance is coming to an end. But in reality there are still no other global players to rival it.

In recent years, the idea that the United States is an empire in decline has gained considerable support, some of it from quarters that until very recently would have denied it was ever an empire at all. The New York Times, for instance, has run columns that describe a "remarkably benign" American empire that is "in retreat", or even at risk of decline and fall.

Yet the shadow American power still casts over the rest of the world is unmistakable. The US has military superiority over all other countries, control of the world's oceans via critical sea lanes, garrisons on every continent, a network of alliances that covers much of the industrial world, the ability to render individuals to secret prisons in countries from Cuba to Thailand, preponderant influence over the global financial system, about 30% of the world's wealth and a continental economy not dependent on international trade.

To call this an empire is, if anything, to understate its range. [...]

If proponents of the end of the US global order do not assert a decrease in the potency of the instruments of American power, that is because there has been no such decrease. The share of global transactions conducted in dollars has been increasing, not declining. No other state can affect political outcomes in other countries the way the US still does. The reach of the contemporary US is so great that it tends to blend into the background of daily events. [...]

For more than a decade, commentators on international affairs have obsessed over the supposed transition from a unipolar order, in which the US is the sole global superpower, to a multipolar or polycentric world in which the distribution of power is less lopsided. But this is easy to overstate. International affairs scholars have long predicted a return to a balance of power among the great states, as a correction to the enormous imbalance represented by the US since the late cold war, if not since the end of the second world war. One question is why it seems to have taken so long. Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, two scholars at Dartmouth College, persuasively argued that the extent of American power had to be reckoned with in a different way: the US had attained power preponderance – a degree of global power so great that its very extent served to disincentivise other states from challenging it.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2023 (449 mots)

AND THEN ELON MUSK SAID THERE'LL BE NO MORE WAR [...]

When Elon Musk posted a personally crafted [...] "peace plan" for the war in Ukraine last October, a Ukrainian diplomat offered a carefully considered review. It ran to a full three words: "Go to hell". This week's allegations that Musk shut down his Starlink system (on which the comms-shattered Ukraine relies to defend itself against Russia) right in the middle of a counteroffensive last year – apparently deliberately to neuter it – forces a new question. When he does finally make it there in his big space rocket, will even Mars be far enough for Elon Musk to go to hell to? [...]

The magnate ordered his engineers to switch off the Starlink satellite communications network during a surprise attack on the Russian fleet in Crimea last year. Or to "disrupt" the attack, as CNN puts it, still clinging embarrassingly to the preferred Silicon Valley argot that surely ought to have been discredited once its boy kings started becoming more powerful than many of the world's actual countries. [...] Yet until very recently, Musk was still being breathlessly judged a net good to humanity, what with his electric cars and his hyperloops and the fact he once smoked a joint on a podcast. So! Very! Cool! Elon was endlessly covered by the media as a kind of fascinating, eccentric inventor, as opposed to someone with a vast amount of power who should be held to account accordingly. Just as it was with Mark Zuckerberg before him, by the time people realised a lot of what was happening, it was rather too late.

Anyway, back to this strategic Starlink blackout, which was apparently prefaced by Elon wailing to his biographer: "How am I in this war?" [...] Instead of accepting the complexities of the consequences of his own actions, Musk seems to have simply buzzed in on the answer to that age-old question: how can a just tech god permit suffering? The Ukrainian drones were thus stopped in their tracks, while the Russian fleet remained unharmed and able to launch future attacks itself. [...]

It's not that Musk doesn't have a consistent worldview so much as he doesn't even have consistency. Barely a week goes by without him making threats and failing to follow through. [...] He probably wasn't even really going to buy X (formerly Twitter), and only ended up going through with it because the courts forced him to. He just says any old stuff for attention or a laugh, or because he can. The key question is whether someone who just says any old stuff for attention or a laugh or because he can should have quite this much supra-democratic power. [...]

Elon's here. Until – as Ukrainians seem to have discovered – he suddenly isn't.

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(459 words)

ANTIBIOTIC USE IN MEAT REVEALED BY UK SUPERMARKETS

Three UK supermarket chains have published figures on the amount of antibiotics used by their farm suppliers, in an effort to cut use of the medicines. Marks and Spencer, Waitrose and Asda have all revealed the quantities of antibiotics in meat and dairy produce. Campaigners have called on all supermarkets to follow their lead.

Overuse of antibiotics can cause drug resistance leading to the prevalence of superbugs such as MRSA. England's Chief Medical Officer warned in October that if antibiotics lost their effectiveness it would "spell the end to modern medicine".

The campaign group, the Alliance To Save Our Antibiotics, [...] welcomed the move by the supermarkets, saying it was a good start. Their scientific advisor said: "The publication of this data should help drive average use across the farming industry down, as it illustrates the extent to which many other producers are still overusing antibiotics, despite recent cuts. We are also calling for all supermarkets to publish antibiotic-use data by farming system, so that consumers can compare free-range and organic farming with indoor farming and intensive systems."

Figures from all three supermarket chains show they are ahead of industry-wide targets on chicken farms. The Alliance Marks and Spencer figures showed their pig and chicken farmers were using less than one quarter of the UK averages. Antibiotic use in Waitrose's pig and chicken suppliers was about one third or less than industry averages and use in turkeys was about one sixth of the average. [...]

Information on the different sectors is not comprehensive and varies in detail so it is not always possible to make direct comparisons. The supermarkets follow industry standards set by an alliance which represents organisations involved in the food chain.

The UK Veterinary Antibiotics Resistance and Sales Surveillance Report 2016, released in October, showed sales of antibiotics for use in food-producing animals dropped by 27%, achieving a government-set target two years early.

Other supermarkets do not at present publish data on antibiotic use. Lidl said: "We are committed to meeting sector targets and fully support the disclosure of antibiotic usage, however we believe that it is important to support suppliers through the development of a centralised, industry-wide approach." Morrisons said it was "open-minded" about publishing data. Tesco said it had a comprehensive plan to reduce antibiotic use, "including measuring and publishing progress against our commitments".

The British Retail Consortium, which represents the big supermarkets, said all its members advocated the responsible use of antibiotics and were working to reduce usage without any detrimental effect on animal welfare. Its director of food policy said: "All our members are collaborating with their suppliers to determine what data is available and the best way to communicate progress."

Adapted from **BBC** October 2023 (449 words)

ASTRONAUTS MIGHT BE ABLE TO GROW PLANTS ON THE MOON, THANKS TO A FEW EARTH MICROBES

Microbes could help unlock vital nutrients in lunar soil to one day help farms sustain astronaut crews on the moon, a new study reports.

Previous research found that lunar soil possesses a number of elements vital for plant growth. This has raised hopes that greenhouse farms on the moon could make use of local resources to help lunar bases sustain life, instead of astronauts having to lug huge amounts of soil or bulky hydroponic systems from Earth.

"The advantage of growing plants on the moon is not limited to providing food for the astronauts who live in the lunar base," study lead author Yitong Xia, of China Agricultural University in Beijing, says. "It could also help to refresh the air by providing oxygen, purify water and even provide emotional comfort."

However, prior experiments have shown that lunar soil is bad at hosting crops. It lacks carbon and nitrogen compounds that are necessary for plant growth, and vital elements such as phosphorus are mostly locked within insoluble compounds that plants find difficult to absorb. "If we grow plants directly in lunar regolith, their growth would be limited, and they would die early," Xia said.

In the new study, Xia and colleagues explored ways to make lunar soil more fertile. They noted that microbes on Earth helped make our planet more habitable over billions of years by altering rock into porous, biologically active soil. Flying microbes to the moon to liberate insoluble elements would prove much easier than flying tons of those fertilizer elements there from Earth, Xia explained.

The researchers experimented with Chinese volcanic powder whose composition was similar to samples collected by the Apollo 14 mission in 1971. They investigated which five species of bacteria could convert insoluble phosphorus in this simulated lunar soil into a soluble form that plants could use. They mixed samples of simulated lunar soil with the microbes and found that three species of bacteria more than doubled the amount of soluble phosphorus. The microbes helped make the soil more acidic, liberating the phosphorus from the compounds it was trapped within.

The researchers next grew tobacco in simulated lunar soil treated with these three species of bacteria for 18 days. They found that levels of chlorophyll in plants with these live bacteria were about double those of plants grown in simulated lunar soil with dead bacteria. They also tended to have longer stems and roots, were heavier and had wider leaves, compared to plants grown in simulated lunar soil with dead bacteria.

In the future, the scientists would like to mix these bacteria with algae or compost to see how that might further improve plant growth, Xia said.

Adapted from **Space.com**November 2023
(459 words)

AT 101, HIS SECRET TO HAPPINESS? MAKING NEW FRIENDS

Paul Snyder walks around Kensington, Md., wearing a hat that reads: "MADE IN 1921." It's a good conversation starter.

At almost 102 years old, Snyder believes the secret to successful aging is making new friends. He befriends people wherever he goes: the grocery store, the doctors' office, church, the nail salon. Most people in his neighborhood call him "Grandpa Paul."

"At [...] [my age], most of your close friends have gone by," said Snyder [...]. "But you can keep making new ones." [...] Some of his fondest bonds have been formed in recent years. [...]

Kira Lueders is an [...] example of a relatively new friendship in Snyder's life. Lueders is president of the Residents Association, and from a local e-mail group, she learned that it was Snyder's 100th birthday in 2021. Although she had never met him, she decided to hand-deliver a card to him [...].

When Lueders delivered her card, the two got to talking. "I realized that he was a bird lover like I, so I started sharing my bird magazines with him, and sending him e-mails about things that would interest him," Lueders said. "He is interested in everything." [...]

Snyder [...] has lived alone since his wife, Kay, died in 2005. They were married for more than 60 years, and have two sons together. [...]

He tries to fill his days with friends and family, and although his sons don't live nearby, they have a standing three-way FaceTime call on Tuesdays and Fridays. "That's another thing that keeps me going. My boys," Snyder said.

His sons taught him how to use an iPad – which helps him stay in touch with faraway friends and family members [...]. He also tunes in virtually to services at [his church] [...], where he has been a member for 72 years. He has many friends there. [...]

Maintaining "strong ties" – or the relationships we have with family and close friends – is important to Snyder, but he also understands the value of what sociologists call "weak ties" – casual acquaintances, such as neighbors, store workers and bank tellers. Daily interactions like these, experts say, have significant effects on health and well-being.

Every few months, Snyder stops in at A&L Nails for a pedicure. "They all recognize me. Whenever I get there, I say 'Grandpa Paul is here," Snyder said. "I love it." The feeling seems to be mutual. "He is very happy and very nice," said Ana Nguyen, the owner of the salon. [...]

Snyder is realistic about the challenges [...] of getting older, saying he tries to take life one day at a time. Mostly, though, he's just happy to be here. "Everybody has been so nice," he said.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*October 2023

BALLOONING STUDENT DEBT

Ballooning student debt was a concern for many borrowers even before the coronavirus emergency.

In [...] 2018, I remember brainstorming with a friend about ways to get her out of the debt hole she was in. She had taken student loans to attend graduate school nearly a decade earlier, and although she paid consistently since graduating, the balance she owed had swelled far higher than the amount she originally borrowed.

She briefly considered giving up her apartment and living on a boat. But in the end, she accepted a job teaching overseas a month before the pandemic hit. She'd make just about the same amount of money she did in New York, but the cost of living would be lower, and she'd get a living stipend, which would allow her to put the rest of her salary toward her debt.

The pandemic brought much-needed, albeit temporary, relief for borrowers like her. For a moment, it even seemed that relief might become a permanent reality. That is, until the Supreme Court struck down President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan. His administration is now working toward a new plan, but in the meantime the student loan payments people were spared from over the past three years are now coming due.

The trouble is that economic hardship brought on by the pandemic, including a spike in unemployment has left some in even more precarious financial situations than before. Yarimar Bonilla, a contributing writer for Times Opinion, also has a friend who took on a student loan debt. In a guest essay, she notes that before the pandemic, he was earning close to six figures and had even built up some savings.

Because his work was deemed essential, he was called back. [...] Yet because his salary was based on commissions, his pay took a hit. In many ways, he is now worse off than when the pandemic started. He cannot even begin to fathom what he's going to do now that the moratorium on student loan payments is over and he has to pay them — with interest — again. [...]

Yarimar thought of him when she learnt her own loans had been forgiven under the expansion of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. "I had done everything right: borrowed responsibly, paid diligently […] during historically low interest rates", she writes. And yet she realized that by the time her loans were forgiven as part of the program, she had paid more than she originally borrowed. […]

"Why should low-income students, reliant on financial aid for college, be burdened with a lifetime of debt? And what about those who sacrificed during the pandemic, seeing their paychecks evaporate and their debt balloon?"

Adapted from a **New York Times** newsletter October 2023 (448 words)

BERLIN TO TIGHTEN IMMIGRATION RULES

The German government plan to speed up the removal of failed asylum seekers, in a sign of how surging support for the far right is prompting Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition to get tough on immigration.

"It's clear we have to restrict irregular migration and to send back more quickly the people who have no right to stay," said Steffen Hebestreit, Scholz's spokesman.

Under new rules proposed yesterday, deportations will no longer have to be announced in advance, officials searching for deportees in shared accommodation will be allowed to enter other people's rooms, and the amount of time a person can be kept in pre-deportation custody will rise from ten to twenty-eight days.

The legislation, which must still be passed by the Bundestag, would also make it easier to deport members of human-trafficking groups and organised crime gangs, and give police more powers to search through a person's documents in order to ascertain their true identity and nationality.

The new law comes two weeks after regional elections saw a big increase in support for the far right Alternative for Germany. Pollsters say a key factor in AfD's growing popularity is public disquiet over the recent surge in asylum seekers entering the country.

Scholz indicated last week that his government was prepared to clamp down on immigration, telling Der Spiegel news magazine that Germany must start deporting failed asylum seekers « on a significant scale. » Scholz said Germany needed skilled workers from abroad and remained committed to offering asylum to those facing political persecution. But « whoever doesn't belong to one of those two groups can't stay here, » he said. « That's why we are restricting irregular migration to Germany. Too many people are coming here. »

Scholz's government has recently introduced checks on the borders of neighbours such as Poland, and has also approved efforts by its individual regions to switch from cash payments for asylum seekers to benefits in kind. But the law attempts to tackle a particularly thorny issue – the huge number of people who have been told they have to leave Germany, but still remain in the country. Interior ministry officials say there are around 50,000 such people.

Critics of the government say it is much harder to deal with such holdouts than Scholz is letting on. They say repatriations often fail because the country of origin refuses to readmit the deportees. The government is trying to address that problem by negotiating deals with other countries under which they would take back their citizens and, in exchange, Berlin would provide people from those countries with legal pathways to come to Germany for work.

Adapted from *Financial Times*October 2023
(452 Words)

BIKE RIDING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Middle school is a good time to encourage kids to embrace the benefits of bike riding, according to Outride, a nonprofit which promotes cycling at school. Teaching middle schoolers bike riding skills as part of physical education classes may help improve their mental health. That's according to a new study that looked at the effects of a 6-8 week cycling class taught in schools across the U.S.

The mental health benefits of exercise are well-documented. And anyone who's lived through middle school knows those years can be particularly challenging. The new study comes at a time when research shows that youths across the U.S. are struggling with mental health.

The study involved more than 1,200 students, aged 11 to 14, enrolled in middle schools across the U.S. that offered a program called Ride for Focus from the nonprofit Outride, which conducts research and provides cycling programs and equipment for youths – primarily middle schoolers.

Students participated in a cycling class for at least three days a week, for a minimum of 6 weeks. They learned cycling safety and maneuvering skills outdoors while raising their heart rate and just having fun. The students completed standardized screening questionnaires before and after the program designed to measure their well-being.

Middle school is a good time to encourage kids to embrace the benefits of bike riding, because they're starting to experience all sorts of social pressures, anxiety, stress from school, stress from home. So it's a really important time to provide additional outlets to explore not only physical activity, but also the freedom and relief that can come with going out for a bike ride during the day.

Exercise in general is "the most evidence-based, cheapest form of prevention and intervention that human beings can do for their mental health," says a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Stanford University School of Medicine.

While many forms of moderate-intensity exercise offer brain benefits, aspects of cycling give it a leg up on other physical activities, he says. "It engages all of these other parts of brain function, such as sensory perception," Reiss says. "You are looking at your hearing, you're balancing, you're navigating and turning. Oftentimes, you're doing it with someone else, so there's the positive effect of company or group activity."

Of course, while exercise has powerful mental health benefits, it's not a panacea. For example, research has shown that adolescent girls are at higher risk of mental health problems like depression and anxiety than boys... The study found that adolescents who didn't limit screen time to a maximum of two hours a day, or who got less than the recommended 8.5 hours of sleep, saw less improvement in their well-being.

Adapted from *NPR*October 2023
(451 words)

BINARY THINKING — RIGHT FOR COMPUTERS, WRONG FOR US

George Boole made a profound contribution to today's technological society, but one can also argue that he helped to entrench a damaging way of thinking that permeates our society. One of his prevailing contributions came in his 1854 book, entitled "An Investigation of the Laws of Thought", which introduced what we now know as the "Boolean algebra" which is crucial to computers. In this book, Boole applied the systematic language of algebra to the field of logic — a unification of two disparate fields which created a much more powerful one which is based on the simple idea that statements are either true or false. [...]

What was so unexpected then, is that "true", "false" and a few simple logical operations such as "and", "or" and "not" can be combined to make an equation that can add, multiply, compare, remember and do much more.

Indeed, 80 years later, Alan Turing — the British mathematician who developed the first electronic computer — proved that you only needed these simple operations to compute absolutely anything. From the great simplicity of binary logic, we have built the most complex of machines that is developing today into Artificial Intelligence.

However, this same attractive simplification is commonly behind poor decisions in other fields. We should not really blame Boole. Human nature has always tried to reduce the world to binary choices and states such as, for example, good and evil... But Boole gave strength to such thinking at a time when seemingly exact laws of physics promised to make the universe simple and predictable. [...]

But now, what seems limitless in computing raises issues in real life since the problem with binary thinking is that it leads to binary decision-making... [...] And binary decision-making may certainly make it easier to quickly direct people to a common goal, but it may fail to give the high-quality solutions we may need in the long term. For example, solving a waiting-time problem in the accident and emergency department may prove detrimental to the quality of response and care. [...]

So we need to improve our decision-making... Rather than use modern computing that reduces complexity to the point that all problems can be solved in a few seconds by a binary program, we need to be aware that the real world is not like that. We need to accept that practical problems do not necessarily have a single correct answer. Just as Boole combined mathematics and logic, we need to combine the power of computers with our natural intuition for a nuanced world.

Ultimately, is Boole the hero or villain of this story? He is neither... He's something in between.

Adapted from *the Financial Times*October 2023
(449 words)

BIRD FLU: SCIENTISTS SEE GENE EDITING HOPE FOR IMMUNE CHICKENS

Researchers have developed gene-edited chickens that are partially resistant to bird flu. Although the birds are not completely immune, the scientists say their work shows it might be possible to block the virus in three years. The latest results suggest that making further changes to the birds' DNA could produce fully immune chickens. Critics say gene editing tackles the symptoms of high-density farming rather than the root cause of animal diseases.

One professor from the University of Edinburgh said the team had made significant progress. "We have got to the point where the results are very encouraging and we want to take this approach further."

The recent spike in bird flu has been particularly harmful to protected seabird species like gannets. The researchers identified three genes they believed were important for the bird flu (formally known as avian influenza) virus to reproduce in the chickens. They made two small changes to one of the genes using a technique known as gene editing.

The resulting chickens had no side effects after two years. They also had increased resistance to bird flu, but were not fully immune: half the chickens infected with a high dose of the virus developed an infection.

Although any increase in resistance to bird flu should be welcome, only a solution that provides complete immunity can be used in practice. Any intervention that develops partial resistance would also encourage the virus to change in order to fight back and so, if the intervention were widely used, it would slightly increase the risk of another human global pandemic if a mutation made the virus deadly to humans.

Another professor from the same institute told BBC News that experiments in test tubes showed if changes are made to all three genes, then a fully resistant bird might be possible. "When we did these edits in the cells there was no growth of the virus at all. The changes stopped all replication of the flu. I am extremely confident that editing the three genes will give full immunity."

Gene editing involves making precise changes to DNA to change the function of a gene. In this instance the three genes were altered to stop them helping bird flu reproduce, but in a way that did not harm the bird.

The researchers are trying to identify the further genetic changes required, before producing gene-edited chickens for the next phase of their research.

Bird flu is a major global threat, with a devastating impact in both farmed and wild bird populations. In the UK alone, the current outbreak of H5N1 bird flu has decimated seabird populations and cost the poultry industry more than £100 million in losses.

Adapted from **BBC** October 2023 (448 words)

BIRDS OF NEW YORK

Early-rising New Yorkers may spot an unusual patrol group in Manhattan this autumn. They sport sensible shoes, latex gloves and an armful of brown paper bags. As in spring, they comb the streets for migrating birds that have struck windows. They are Project Safe Flight volunteers, out to save the injured and count the dead.

It is a tough gig. Fruzsina Agocs saw her first yellow-billed cuckoo, a shy species that is hard to spot, dead on the pavement. « That was not the way I wanted to see it », she says. But she is cautiously optimistic that she will have fewer such encounters in the future. In the past couple of years New York has moved to the forefront of a push to make cities more welcoming to their avian neighbours.

New York – like Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington – sits underneath the « Atlantic Flyway », an ancient migration route travelled by millions of birds, from teeny warblers to long-legged shorebirds, every spring and autumn. Up to a quarter of a million of them die colliding with windows in New York every year, according to New York City Audubon, the bird charity that organises Project Flight Safe. Birds confuse reflections of sky or vegetation for the real thing and fly straight for them.

In 2021, [...] new legislation came into force in New York requiring all new buildings and renovations to be made bird-friendly. Specifically, they must use glass that birds recognise as surfaces, which is usually achieved by incorporating tiny dots. It is the most stringent [...] legislation in America, spurred by the compelling case of the Jocab K. Javits Convention Centre in west Manhattan. It used to be a top bird-killer, but after swapping its panes for bird-friendly glass in 2013 strikes dropped by 90%. [...]

Other places are now following New York's lead. Maryland's version of the law went into effect this month, and Washington, DC's will begin next year. And while the law does not apply to New York's existing buildings, some are taking voluntary steps. [...]

At night artificial light draws birds into the city, where they are more likely to crash; some studies suggest it disorients them because it interferes with their ability to navigate using the Earth's magnetic field. Last year the city passed a law that requires all city-owned and managed buildings to switch their lights off at night during migration. An expanded bill, which would extend the requirement to privately owned commercial buildings all year, is in committee in the council. Though exemptions would be allowed for icons such as the Empire State and the Chrysler Building, the change would still transform the world's most famous skyline. [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2023
(455 words)

BORDEAUX WINE SNOBS HAVE A POINT, ACCORDING TO THIS COMPUTER MODEL

In the Bordeaux region of southwest France, scores of vineyard estates transform finicky grapes into bold blends of red wine. Some bottles sell for thousands of dollars each. Prestigious chateaus boast about the soil, microclimate and traditional methods that make their own wine superior, an inscrutable mix known as terroir.

"It's one of those terms that the wine industry likes to keep a bit mysterious, part of the magic of wine," said Alex Pouget, a computational neuroscientist at the University of Geneva.

Dr. Pouget is trying to apply chemical precision to this je ne sais quoi. He and his colleagues described a computer model that could pinpoint which Bordeaux estate produced a wine based only on its chemical makeup. The model also predicted the year in which the wine was made, known as its vintage, with about 50 percent accuracy.

Dr. Pouget grew up in Paris in a family that drank only Bordeaux ("You pretend Burgundy does not exist," he said). As a young neuroscientist in the late 1980s, he studied the brain with machine learning, a type of artificial intelligence that identifies patterns in large data sets.

The researchers trained an algorithm to seek common patterns in the chemical fingerprints of the wines. They were shocked by the results: The model grouped the wines into distinct clusters that matched with their geographical locations in the Bordeaux region.

The approach, Dr. Jeffery said, is "not only about what makes a great wine chemically." Another application of these models, experts said, is rooting out fraud, which is fairly common among expensive wines. Producers have adjusted their bottles, labels and corks to make them harder to copy.

"If there is a doubt about the origin of a wine, analyzing a wine sourced from the estate as a benchmark would probably allow to know whether the wine is fake or not," said Cornelis van Leeuwen, the head of the viticulture and oenology department at Bordeaux Sciences Agro.

The approach would probably work for any wine region, so long as the model has been trained on a large array of wines from different producers and vintages. An open question, though, is whether the model would retain its accuracy after a few years, he said. Even inside a bottle, wine changes over time.

Dr. Pouget, who has a large wine collection, hopes to repeat the study using some of his favorite kinds from the Châteauneuf-du-Pape region in southeastern France.

But among the best wines, he said, age is probably more important than provenance.

"I only drink old wine," he said. "I think drinking things when they're younger than 15 years is a bit criminal."

Adapted from *The New York Times*November 2023
(451 words)

BRITAIN'S SURPRISING, UPSTART UNIVERSITIES

Sir James Dyson, a designer of whizzy home appliances who became a billionaire, has long complained that Britain pumps out too few engineers. So a few years ago he set out to mint graduates of his own. A mini-university he created at his company's glassy research facility in Wiltshire now has about 160 youngsters enrolled, all in engineering. They spend two days a week in lessons and the rest working on real products, for which they earn a salary. They pay no fees and incur no loans. Instead of residential halls, newcomers live in timber "pods" stacked near Dyson's labs; [...] Two undergraduates say they turned down Cambridge for the chance to attend.

The Dyson Institute [...], one of a clutch of universities that have opened in recent years, saw its first students graduate in 2021. In the past it was almost impossible for such outfits to hand out degrees unless they first partnered with an existing institution. Now upstarts may apply to operate independently from day one—a consequence of rule changes the government introduced in 2017. Having lifted caps that limited how many people could attend university, policymakers hoped that new providers would keep incumbents on their toes and encourage innovation in higher education. The result, so far, is a handful of energetic new institutions. But the campaign for their expansion needs another shove.

So far seven new bodies have received "degree awarding powers", though they are not yet supposed to use the term "university", which remains a tightly protected title. Most teach only one or two degrees, usually in technical subjects whose graduates are in the most demand from employers. Perhaps the most novel degrees are offered by the London Interdisciplinary School (LIS) in Whitechapel [...] Each term its students examine a different thorny issue: inequality, say, or sustainability. Rather than pick one subject, they study things as diverse as philosophy and data science; eventually they earn a degree in "interdisciplinary" studies. Nurturing broad thinkers is crucial to solving big problems.

If these new outfits are zingy, for the moment they are all still very small. There are also fewer of them than reformers a few years ago had hoped. [...] There's no guidebook, [...] new entrants have to battle big incumbents [...]

The bigger challenge is that, despite promises, regulation continues to hamper the new providers. Though upstarts are no longer forced into partnerships with their competitors, they must convince the Office for Students, Britain's newish universities regulator, that they are made of the right stuff. That process has sometimes taken years. [...] Innovators say the box-ticking has been hardest for outfits unwilling to promise they will do things the same way as everyone else.

Adapted from *The Economist*September 2023
(450 words)

CAN LITTLE ACTIONS BRING BIG JOY? RESEARCHERS FIND 'MICRO-ACTS' CAN BOOST WELL-BEING

It's 8 a.m., and your in-box is filling up. You spot an email about a colleague's promotion. Do you scroll past or take a moment to give props? Or, you're in line at the coffee shop, where it's easy to tune everyone out. But, today, you decide to pick up the tab for the person behind you.

How might a little act like this influence your mood later today, tonight or throughout this week?

An analysis [...] finds that people who commit daily "micro-acts" of joy experience about a 25% increase in emotional well-being over the course of a week. [...]

All of the recommended micro-acts have been linked to emotional well-being in prior published studies. Examples include making a gratitude list or journal, or engaging in acts of kindness such as visiting a sick neighbor or doing a nice gesture for a friend – or a stranger. Some micro-acts involve celebrating another person's joy, or engaging in self reflection, meditation, or taking the time to identify the silver lining in a bad situation, known as positive reframing.

Each day, people answer questions about what they did and how they felt afterwards. At the end of the week, they take another survey to gauge how their emotions and sense of well-being have changed.

When people intentionally plan out a daily micro-act, it may help them feel as if they have a bit of control over their emotions, explains [...] a professor of psychiatry, at the University of California, San Francisco. "So there's this feeling of agency," [she] says, and that could be one explanation for the improvements in well-being seen in the survey.

For instance, participants were asked how much they agreed with the statement: "I have felt able to impact, influence, or play an active role in how happy I generally feel." The participants' level of agreement with this statement increased by about 27%, over the course of the week.

Since all participants chose to be part of the project, it's likely they were hoping for a benefit. But it's not clear if everyone — even people who don't believe small acts can be beneficial – would see the same results. [...] The researchers plan to run some controlled studies and publish results in the future.

At a time when global conflicts, political divide, and societal problems may seem insurmountable, some may question whether small acts of joy can help make a difference? The answer, the researchers say, stems from the ideas of the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who both spoke about how it's possible to feel joy even in the midst of suffering, and to use that feeling to help do good. [...]

Adapted from *NPR*November 2023
(455 words)

CHINA REPORTEDLY EXTENDS IPHONE BAN [...] AS TENSIONS WITH US RISE

China's government has reportedly expanded its ban of iPhones to local government workers and state-owned companies, a day after it emerged central government employees were forbidden from bringing the devices to work. [...]

The ban on the use of Apple products is believed to be a sign of Beijing pushing back on its reliance on US tech. China had more than one hundred fifty thousand state-owned companies, according to state media, employing more than fifty-six million people in twenty twenty-one. [...]

On Thursday the Wall Street Journal and Reuters reported that China had widened existing curbs on the use of iPhones by state employees, telling staff at some central government agencies to stop using their Apple mobiles at work. Officials at central government agencies were given the instructions by their superiors in workplace chat groups or meetings.

In response to the news, Apple shares fell more than six percent over Wednesday and Thursday, though they rose one percent on the opening of trading on Friday. China is one of Apple's biggest markets and generates nearly a fifth of its revenue. Greater China – including China, Hong Kong and Taiwan – is Apple's third largest market and accounted for nineteen percent of its three hundred and ninety four billion dollars in sales last year.

The Morgan Stanley analyst Erik Woodring [...] predicted the worst-case scenario was a four percent revenue hit for the company. "China is critical to Apple's success, but Apple is also critical to the Chinese economy," he said. "While the potential for a broad decoupling between Apple and China in this multipolar world clearly exists, we don't believe recent headlines are necessarily foreshadowing this 'worst case' scenario."

Apple production remains centered in China, with about ninety percent of its products made in the country. Among others, the Taiwan-founded Apple supplier Foxconn has its megafactories in China, employing more than one million people. But after political instability and pandemic disruptions, Apple has accelerated plans to move some production elsewhere, including Vietnam and India. IPhone 14 production was moved to India. [...]

Some analysts suggested Beijing's bans on Apple were part of tit-for-tat measures, after Huawei bans by the US and others – including Costa Rica last week – from national 5G networks. The US continues to restrict China's access to vital equipment needed to keep its chip industry competitive.

The US government has banned approvals of new telecommunications equipment from Chinese telecoms firms Huawei and ZTE [...] and has also banned the Chinese-owned video app TikTok from government-issued phones. [...]

Beijing has told operators of important infrastructure in China to stop buying products from the US chipmaker Micron Technology, while ramping up efforts to be more self-sufficient in making semiconductors – known as the "brains of electronic devices". [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(460 mots)

COLLEGES WRESTLE WITH A.I.-GENERATED ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

Tech giants and their tools are reshaping education. Indeed, A.I. chatbots could facilitate plagiarism on college applications or democratize student access to writing help. Or maybe both. Susan Barber, a high school English teacher, said using A.I. chatbots could make students' college essays too generic.

Rick Clark, the executive director of undergraduate admission at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and his staff spent weeks this summer pretending to be high school students using A.I. chatbots to fill out college applications.

The admissions officers each took on a different high school persona: swim team captain, Eagle Scout, musical theater performer. Then they fed personal details about the fictional students into ChatGPT, prompting the A.I. chatbot to produce the kind of extracurricular activity lists and personal essays commonly required on college applications.

Mr. Clark said he wanted to get a handle on how A.I. chatbots might reshape the admissions process this fall — the start of the first full academic year when the tools will be widely available to high school seniors — and come up with guidance for students applying to Georgia Tech. [...]

The easy availability of A.I. chatbots like ChatGPT, which can manufacture humanlike text in response to short prompts, is poised to upend the traditional undergraduate application process at selective colleges — ushering in an era of automated plagiarism or of democratized student access to essay-writing help.

The digital disruption comes at a turning point for institutions of higher education across the United States. After the Supreme Court ruled in June that race-based university admissions programs were illegal, some selective universities and colleges had hoped to rely more on essay questions — about applicants' upbringing, identities and communities — to help foster diversity on campus.

The personal essay has long been a staple of the application process at elite colleges, not to mention a bane. [...] Admissions officers have often employed applicants' essays as a lens into their unique character, pluck, potential and ability to handle adversity. As a result, some former students say they felt tremendous pressure to develop, or at least concoct, a singular personal writing voice.

But new A.I. tools threaten to recast the college application essay as a kind of generic cake mix, which high school students may simply lard or spice up to reflect their own tastes, interests and experiences — casting doubt on the legitimacy of applicants' writing samples as authentic, individualized admissions yardsticks. [...]

The dean of admissions at Dartmouth College said [...] that the idea that this central component of the admissions could be manufactured by someone other than the applicant is disheartening. [...]

Georgia Tech. school [...] has posted guidelines for applicants on using A.I. tools for college essays.

Adapted from *The New York Times*, September 2023 (444 words)

CONCERN OVER TOXIC CHEMICALS IN TAP WATER

British scientists are concerned that the allowable levels of toxic Polyfluoroalkyl Substances – PFAS – in drinking water are too high. Indeed, a BBC study found PFAS levels exceeded European safety levels in almost half of the samples taken in England and Wales. However, none exceeded the British current safety-level, which is not as strict.

Working with researchers from the University of Greenwich and Manchester Metropolitan University, BBC investigative journalists took 45 tap water samples from sites in England and Wales. Laboratory analysis found that none exceeded the British limit of 100 nanograms per litre, but 25 samples did contain PFAS, 4 had levels that exceeded 10 nanograms per litre, and almost half of the samples exceeded the European Food Standards Agency tolerable limit of 2.2 nanograms per litre. [...]

PFAS can be found in many familiar products such as non-stick pans, food-packaging, carpets, furniture and fire-fighting foam...

A Professor of toxicology at the University of Michigan, said these results raised a potential concern since health effects are found at lower and lower concentrations and since also PFA Substances have probable links to high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, testicular cancer, kidney cancer, and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

According to a researcher of Harvard University, there is particular concern about the effect on children. A woman may indeed build this up in her body and when she gets pregnant, she shares that with her foetus. And when the baby is born, she eliminates part of the chemicals into her milk. So, the baby may end up having up to 10 times as much PFAS in the blood, which is a concerning huge dose. [...]

Therefore, the US is also considering reducing its 70 nanograms per litre safety level. "We are beginning to think that there's no such thing as a safe level and we want it to be as low as possible, because water is not the only source of exposure," said former head of the National Institute of Environmental Sciences.

However, there is little public data to face the problem but many testimonies such as Sarah's, a lifelong Jersey resident who said: "I have an autoimmune disease, my father has kidney disease, and my mother has thyroid disease... When I started talking to our neighbours, I found that many of the men had kidney stones and the women had thyroid disease. This can't be a coincidence." [...]

What the BBC study also revealed is that 18 different types of PFA Substances were found in the tap water samples. The Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs is right now working closely with regulators to better assess the presence of PFAS in the environment.

Adapted from **BBC News** March 2022 (453 words)

DISCARDED TOYS PRODUCE MORE ELECTRONIC WASTE THAN VAPES

Toys are a much bigger contributor to electronic waste than vapes, according to an analysis by the United Nations.

To mark International E-Waste Day on 14 October, the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Forum collaborated with the UN Institute for Training and Research to quantify how much electronic waste the world disposes of without realising it has the potential to be recycled.

In all, 9 billion kilograms of "invisible" e-waste is thrown away every year, worth nearly \$10 billion, according to the analysis. Around one-third of this waste comes from children's toys containing hidden electronics, some 3.2 billion kilograms. Toys contribute 77 times more to the world's invisible e-waste than vapes, which account for 42 million kilograms each year. The UN estimates that 844 million vapes are thrown away every year.

"Electronic waste is our fastest growing waste stream", says Oliver Franklin-Wallis, the author of *Wasteland*, a book on waste disposal. "It's also by far our most valuable waste stream, when it comes to household waste".

However, very few people seem to realise that many common items they dispose of contain e-waste. "Highlighting that was the purpose of the research", says Magdalena Charytanowicz at the WEEE Forum. "We're trying to make people understand that the items they may not suspect are electronics actually do contain a lot of precious metals, like copper and rare earth [elements]", she says.

Globally, just 17 per cent of e-waste is collected and recycled, although the figure is far higher in some areas. Across the European Union, around 55 per cent of this waste is officially collected and reported.

"People recognize that vapes are e-waste because of the very obvious battery that powers them", says Louise Grantham at REPIC, a UK-based WEEE compliance scheme. "Getting that association with toys I suspect is probably more difficult because it might be a big toy powered by a small battery". [...]

That is supported by research from Switzerland, says Charytanowicz, which found that if the primary function of a device wasn't electronic, people using it didn't consider it to be electronic.

Franklin-Wallis says that overlooking the contribution toys make towards e-waste is a risk. "Anyone with small children knows just how much of this stuff is in every household now", he says, calling it "a tremendously rich source" for waste processors and the wider economy. [...]

"The collection of electronic waste is relatively poor", he says. "I think there's still a job yet to be done in informing the public on the value of the materials, how to dispose of them and recycle them safely". [...]

Adapted from **New Scientist** October 2023 (453 words)

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

The key to happiness is one of life's most pondered questions. While answers may vary and there isn't a general consensus on what that "key" is, the place in which you live can certainly have an impact on your quality of life.

Back in March 2023, the World Happiness Report released a comprehensive ranking of the happiest countries in the world. According to CNN the report is a culmination of survey data from people in more than 150 countries. The happiness of each country is determined by the average life evaluations over the course of three years. [...]

Aside from the overall ranking, the report found that benevolence is around 25 percent higher than it was prior to the pandemic. "Benevolence to others, especially the helping of strangers, which went up dramatically in 2021, stayed high in 2022," John Helliwell, co-author of the World Happiness Report, told CNN.

Another major takeaway from the report is that despite the strain the pandemic put on the world, resilience was still quite high from 2020 to 2022. The report noted that the "remarkable resilient" life evaluations during this time period were on par with those in the three years prior to the pandemic.

"Even during these difficult years, positive emotions have remained twice as prevalent as negative ones, and feelings of positive social support twice as strong as those of loneliness," Helliwell said in a news release.

The World Happiness Report based its ratings of each nation [...] using the following metrics: healthy life expectancy, GDP per capita, social support, low corruption, community generosity and freedom to make important life decisions.

Finland clinched the top spot for the world's happiest country and has been able to do so for six years in a row. Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Norway [...] also ranked in the top 10.

Having made back-to-back appearances in the number one spot, Finland appears to be a reputable source when trying to determine what the key to happiness is. But what about this country allows it to consistently rise above the rest?

"Is it, are they doing things that we wish we'd seen before and we can start doing? Or is it something unique about their climate and history that make them different? And fortunately, at least from my perspective, the answer is the former," said Helliwell.

The findings of the report indicate that rating the overall well-being of a society and its members has a positive impact on life evaluations, resulting in happier nations. The report states that "the objective of every institution should be to contribute what it can to human well-being." This includes considering future generations and ensuring that basic human rights are preserved.

Adapted from **The Miami Herald**July 2023
(460 words)

ELITE COUPLE BREEDING TO SAVE MANKIND

The Collinses, a married couple with three young children from Pennsylvania, are self-proclaimed 'pro-natalists' — a growing movement that promotes having as many children as possible to combat falling birth rates.

Malcolm Collins, 36, and his wife, Simone, 35, have three children: five-month-old daughter Titan Invictus, and sons Octavian, three, and Torsten, two. The couple hope to have seven kids in all. When conceiving Titan Invictus - a name the couple decided upon because they feared a feminine name would be taken less seriously - the couple went through genetic testing and embryo selection to ensure the child wouldn't be obese or suffer from anxiety when they grew up.

It is one of the many reasons the pro-natalist movement is controversial, with many viewing it as a form of eugenics. Indeed, the Collinses have been called 'hipster eugenicists,' a label they denounce.

'We don't think humanity can be perfected, we just want to give our kids the best possible roll of the dice,' Simone told The Telegraph. [...]

Malcolm and Simone cofounded the nonprofit initiative Pronatalist.org and made themselves the poster children of the movement, which is largely situated in Silicon Valley.

Twitter CEO and Tesla boss Elon Musk is also a champion of pronatalism. Musk has had 10 children with three different women and believes 'civilization is going to crumble' unless everyone starts having more kids.

Musk has tweeted several times in recent years about the threat of a declining population. 'If the alarming collapse in birth rate continues, civilization will indeed die with a whimper in adult diapers,' he tweeted in January.

The wealthy husband-and-wife entrepreneurs argue that the elite of Silicon Valley are interested in pronatalism because they are the ones paying attention to the data surrounding birth rates — and they don't mind being 'cancelled.'

'I don't think it's appealing to just Silicon Valley people,' Malcolm told the Daily Telegraph. 'It's more like, anyone who is familiar with modern science and familiar with the statistics is aware that this is an issue, and they are focused on it. [...]

Pronatalists also believe that having more children is beneficial for society and the economy, as it leads to a larger workforce and greater economic growth.

The movement encompasses various initiatives, including government policies that provide financial incentives for families to have more children, cultural campaigns that promote the idea that parenthood is the most important role for women, and religious or ideological beliefs that emphasize the importance of procreation.

The movement, however, is often criticized for ignoring the potential negative consequences of overpopulation, such as environmental degradation and resource depletion.

Adapted from *The Daily Mail*April 2023
(443 words)

ELON MUSK WANTS TO SAVE HUMANITY. THE ONLY PROBLEM: PEOPLE

[] Walter Isaacson's biography of the world's richest person depicts [] a mercurial "manchild" [] with grandiose ambitions and an ego to match. [] Musk talks about having Asperger's, which makes him "bad at picking up social cues." As people close to him attest, he lacks empathy — something that Isaacson describes as a "gene" that's "hard-wired."
Yet even as Musk struggles to relate to the actual humans around him, his plans for humanity are grand. "A fully reusable rocket is the difference between being a single-planet civilization and being a multiplanet one": Musk would "maniacally" repeat this message to his staff at SpaceX [] where every decision is motivated by his determination to get earthlings to Mars. He pushes employees at his companies — he now runs six, including X, the platform formerly known as Twitter — to slash costs and meet brutal deadlines because he needs to pour resources into the moonshot of colonizing space "before civilization crumbles." Disaster could come from climate change, from declining birthrates, from artificial intelligence. Isaacson describes Musk stalking the factory floor of Tesla, his electric car company, issuing orders. "If I don't make decisions," Musk explained, "we die."
Musk likes to speak of his business interests in superhero terms. [] At one point, Isaacson asks why Musk is so offended by anything he deems politically correct. [] He also sees firsthand Musk's habit of deriding as a saboteur or an idiot anyone who resists him. The musician Grimes, the mother of three of Musk's children (the existence of the third, Techno Mechanicus, nicknamed Tau, has been kept private until now), calls his roiling anger "demon mode" — a mind-set that "causes a lot of chaos." She also insists that it allows him to get stuff done.
[] Elon Musk has ten children with three women, one of whom — Shivon Zilis, who bore his twins in 2021 — is an executive at one of his companies. [] "He really wants smart people to have kids," she said of Musk, who offered to be her sperm donor so that "the kids would be genetically his." At the time, Grimes and Musk were expecting their second child, a girl. Musk didn't tell Grimes that he had just had twins with one of his employees.
[] Musk is mostly preoccupied with his businesses, where he expects his staff to abide by "the algorithm," his workplace creed, which commands them to "question every requirement" from a department, including "the legal department" and "the safety department"; and to "delete any part or process" they can. "Comradery is dangerous," is one of the corollaries. So is this: "The only rules are the ones dictated by the laws of physics." []
Adapted from <i>The New York Times</i> September 2023 (446 words)

ERASING HISTORY OR KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES? THE GREAT ROALD DAHL DEBATE

Is it a matter of keeping classics relevant or political correctness gone mad? That's the crux of the polarised reactions to news Roald Dahl's publisher Puffin, together with Netflix, is changing language in some of his most iconic works. Works being re-examined with a contemporary lens have led to hundreds of changes to the English author's books, including the Oompa Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* being made gender-neutral instead of male, the words "fat" and "ugly" being culled, and more inclusive terminology being used throughout

What to some seems like benign intervention to keep classic books relevant is damned by others as censorship and revisionism. Acclaimed author Salman Rushdie is incensed by the changes, describing the updated language as blatant censorship. [...] Denise Chapman, a lecturer in literacy at Monash University, agrees with Rushdie. "We can't erase it: we have to be able to know our history. This artwork is history," she says. [...]

The publisher has removed colourful language from some of Roald Dahl's classic books. As an African-American woman, Chapman says it's a challenging topic, citing *Huckleberry Finn* as another example of a problematic text. "We are always going to have books that upset people, that contain ideas that people don't like or don't agree with, that we all agree are absolutely wrong, but if we hide these books it doesn't make it go away. In fact, it prevents us from preparing children to engage with this idea that we agree is wrong and that they will eventually face," she says.

[...] On the other hand, best-selling author Andy Griffiths argues that the changes do not affect the fundamental stories Dahl was telling. [...] He sees the tweaks to the language as logical and indeed justified.

Dani Solomon, manager of Readings Kids Shop in Carlton, is with Griffiths, saying the changes are minimal and help keep the books relevant. [...] To her mind, updating language to meet current social expectations is different to altering the plot. According to Solomon, making changes to classics such as [...] *Huckleberry Finn* would be a different issue. "It's easier to make little changes to things like fantasy or things that are not meant to be taken seriously. [...] Little changes don't change that, whereas *Huckleberry Finn* is a snapshot of its time and it's important to preserve those sorts of things. Maybe if it comes to it have a little disclaimer so parents can have those conversations with their kids".

"Nothing is black and white, there's not one rule for every single book. It's more nuanced than some people on Twitter think it should be."

Adapted from *The Sydney Morning Herald*February 2023
(449 words)

EUROPE'S UNIQUE TRIALS IN FOOD "SOCIAL SECURITY"

[...] On a crisp winter morning in Schaerbeek, a vibrant neighbourhood in north-east Brussels, Marie-Christine Hache walks the aisles of BEES Coop supermarket filling her cart with organic fruit, vegetables, nuts, rice, pulses and pasta. For Hache, the burden of grocery shopping amidst recordhigh prices has been eased through her participation in one of two novel initiatives trialling "social security for food".

The affordability of food is a growing concern for increasing numbers of households worldwide as people struggle to cope with the greatest cost of living crisis in a generation. With some forced to cut back on food to meet other essential expenses, food insecurity is on the rise around the world.

The idea of social security for food might sound far-fetched. But through recently launched projects in Montpellier in France and Brussels in Belgium, burgeoning collectives of NGOs, farmers, researchers and citizens are experimenting with the idea that quality, nutritious and organic food should be accessible to everyone – regardless of income.

"Eating healthy and having access to quality food is expensive and only a minority of the population can afford to do so," says Margherita Via, project manager at BEES Coop.

Inspired by universal healthcare systems such as those in France and Belgium, civil society groups have proposed establishing a new branch of social security, under which each citizen would receive a monthly allowance enabling them to buy food meeting certain environmental and ethical criteria. [...]

As the costs of the modern, globalised industrial food system – biodiversity loss, labour exploitation, food waste, disease – have come into sharper focus in recent years, calls to transform it have intensified. Effectively addressing these issues requires a systemic approach, which is where social security for food comes in, explains Jonathan Peuch, advocacy officer on the right to food and nutrition at Fian Belgium.

Under the proposed scheme for France and Belgium, each person would automatically receive a fixed sum every month through, for example, a designated card. [...]

Like healthcare, the system would be financed through contributions from each citizen proportional to their income. […] Yet all would receive €150 monthly – in effect, helping redistribute wealth from those with the most means to those with the least.

Further funding could be raised through a state contribution, for example from taxes on profits of multinational food companies or through increasing excise duties on nutritionally unhealthy products, such as alcohol or tobacco.

"Politically, some people say [the idea] is utopic," says Peuch. "I don't think it's utopic, it's just a choice for society to say we're going to increase our contribution, and we want to put that money here."

Adapted from **BBC FUTURE**March 2023
(443 words)

EXEMPTIONS FOR ROUTINE CHILDHOOD VACCINATION AT HIGHEST LEVEL EVER

Vaccination rates among U.S. kindergartners for routine childhood shots have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, according to new federal data.

Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at how many children met school requirements for the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine; the diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine; the poliovirus (polio) vaccine; and the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine. For the last school years, about 93 % of children in kindergarten had met the vaccination requirements. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it was 95 %. [...] "We're not surprised that there was a drop in vaccination over the pandemic," said Dr. Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital. "We've known these challenges are because of care access and misinformation and, unfortunately, some of these challenges have persisted post-pandemic."

Data also showed that exceptions from school vaccination requirements increased to 3% during the 2022-23 school year. [...] The report found vaccination coverage decreased in 30 states for the DTaP, MMR and polio vaccines and in 25 states for the chickenpox vaccine, all over the same period. [...] In total, 10 states reported an exemption for at least one vaccine for more than 5% of kindergartners. The percentage goes up to 12 % in some states.

The authors said it's not clear whether the increase in exemptions is because there has been an increase in parents opposing routine childhood vaccines, or because they have barriers that make it difficult to vaccinate their children. Brownstein said that it's likely a mix of both. When it comes to vaccine hesitancy, he said he believes the pandemic exacerbated misinformation, due to the politicization of the COVID-19 vaccine, which may have caused a decrease in confidence in vaccination overall. He said one way to ease parents' concerns is to "establish relationships with trusted partners. A lot of that resides within the schools but also especially with medical professionals. There are pediatricians to help educate families on the values of these vaccines."

The CDC noted that clusters of unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children can lead to outbreaks of preventable diseases. In one case, between November 2022 and February 2023, a measles outbreak swept across several schools and day cares in Ohio, infecting 85 children, 80 of whom were unvaccinated. "Sometimes there's a lack of recognition of why we need a vaccine in the first place," Brownstein says. "The reason we don't see these diseases is because of vaccinations. There's a false narrative that these vaccines are not needed because we don't see these pathogens. We need these vaccines to not see these pathogens." [...]

Adapted from *abcnews* November 2023 (457 words)

EXPERT SAYS SHE WAS FIRED BY HARVARD UNDER META PRESSURE

One of the world's leading experts on misinformation says she was fired by Harvard University for criticising Meta at a time that the school was being pledged \$500 million from Mark Zuckerberg's charity.

Joan Donovan says her funding was cut off, she could not hire assistants and she was made the target of a smear campaign by Harvard employees. In a legal filing [...], she said her right to free speech had been abrogated.

The controversial claims stem in part from Donovan's publication of the Facebook papers, a bombshell leak of 22,000 pages of Facebook's internal documents by the whistleblower Frances Haugen, who used to work at the company.

Donovan, believing them to be of huge public interest, began publishing them to Harvard's website for anyone to access.

In an October 2021 meeting of the council which advises the Harvard department where Donovan worked, the former Facebook communications head allegedly argued that Facebook "should not be the arbiter of truth". A little over a week later, the council emailed Donovan asking her to justify her approach to studying misinformation in a climate "when there is no independent arbiter of truth (in this country or others) and constitutional protections of speech (in some countries)?".

Donovan reproduced the email in her complaint, adding that Zuckerberg also frequently uses the term "arbiter of truth".

Last year she was told her main project would be wound down. This year the school eliminated her position.

In an email [...], Harvard said Donovan's departure was not related to Meta.

It said it struggled to find a professor to oversee her project, which is a university policy. It also said she was not fired. Donovan "was offered the chance to continue as a part-time lecturer, and she chose not to do so".

Donovan had made a name for herself in part by testifying before Congress and speaking publicly about how the spread of misinformation financially benefited tech companies.

The filing was put together with the assistance of Whistleblower Aid, a Washington-based organization that also helped Haugen, who alleged that Meta knew its platforms helped to spread harmful misinformation.

Donovan claims that Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, both Harvard alumni, have given it hundreds of millions of dollars including promising \$500 million to the school's Institute for the Study of Natural and Artificial Intelligence.

"There are a handful of tried and true means to coerce someone or some entity to do something they would not otherwise do, and influence through financial compensation is at or near the top of the list," the filing says. "Objectively, \$500 million is certainly significant financial influence."

Adapted from *The Guardian*December 2023
(457 words)

FARMERS TURN TO TECH AS BEES STRUGGLE TO POLLINATE

Based on a moshav, or collective farm, in central Israel, Mr Sade is the founder of tech firm BloomX. He says that the company has found a way to mechanically pollinate crops in a similar way to bees. "We are not replacing bees... but rather, offering more efficient pollinating methods to farmers, and reducing the dependence on commercial honeybees," he says.

Three out of every four crops grown around the world to produce fruits or seeds for human consumption are reliant, at least in part, on pollinators. And it is bees, be they farmed honeybees, or the more than 20,000 different wild bee species, such as bumble bees, that do the heavy lifting. In the US, bees of all sorts are said to account for 75% of the pollination of the fruits, nuts and vegetables grown in the country. It is a similar percentage in Europe, with other insects, such as wasps and butterflies, making up the remaining quarter. Unfortunately for farmers, bee populations are under pressure, due to factors such as climate change, habitat loss and the use of pesticides. The European honeybee is also being badly affected by a parasitic mite called *varroa destructor*.

BloomX's technology is currently aimed at two crops – blueberries and avocados – and allows them to be pollinated even if local bee numbers are very low. The firm's main product is called "Robee", which at first glance looks like a large push-along lawnmower. It has two mechanical arms that stick out either side. These vibrate, and when brushed over blueberry plants, they cause them to release their pollen. The level of vibration is said to have been designed to imitate that of bumble bees – the most effective pollinators of blueberries – which use their wings to agitate the flowers. BloomX's other product is "Crossbee", a handheld tool for collecting and spreading sticky pollen grains between avocado trees. To date the equipment is being used in South America, South Africa, Spain, the US and Israel, and BloomX says it can increase fruit yields by 30%.

Both products are controlled by an Al-based software system linked to a mobile phone app, and each is fitted with a GPS tool so that farm workers know which areas of a field have been treated. Sensors can also be put in place so that the pollination takes place on the optimum days. [...]

Some commentators point to the high mortality rate of honeybees in almond fields, with bee-keepers blaming exposure to pesticides, and the stress of their hives being transported thousands of miles. [...] Introducing some artificial pollination to the almond fields may help lessen all these problems.

Adapted from *BBC News* September 2023 (454 words)

FEWER PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MOVIES, THEATER AND MUSEUMS, NEA STUDY SHOWS

Research released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) found that significantly fewer American adults are attending cultural activities such as classical music concerts, theater productions and movies than they did before the coronavirus pandemic.

Just 48 percent of adults reported attending at least one arts event from July 2021 to July 2022, according to the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, which is administered by the Census Bureau [...]. That number represents a six-point drop from the most recent survey in 2017, amplifying alarm bells that the arts community is struggling to regain its pre-shutdown audience.

In addition to drawing on the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the NEA's research also cited the General Social Survey, which was administered by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. That survey found that 82 percent of respondents watched or listened to arts activities through digital platforms between 2021 and 2022, suggesting a robust online engagement that persisted even as in-person events returned. [...]

The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts [...] found nearly universal declines in fine arts attendance. The adults who reported seeing a musical theater production fell 7 percent [...]; the number for nonmusical plays dropped from about 9 percent to 5 percent. Attendance for ballet, opera and classical music performances saw similarly dramatic decreases.

Although visual arts also experienced drop-offs, the rate of change wasn't as proportionally drastic. The number of respondents who reported visiting an art museum or gallery shrank from about 24 percent to 18 percent, while those attending craft fairs or visual arts festivals declined similarly. But those who said they toured parks, buildings or neighborhoods for "historic or design value" fell only two percentage points. [...]

The survey also found that about 43 percent of respondents reported going to the movies — about a 16 percentage point decrease from 2017 — though the numbers predated the blockbuster release of "Avatar: The Way of Water" this past winter and this summer's Barbenheimer phenomenon. That decline grew steeper among people with higher levels of education, including an approximately 24 percentage point plunge for moviegoers with a graduate or professional degree. The number of people who said they read a book dwindled four points, to about 49 percent. [...]

Unsurprisingly, young adults reported higher rates of engaging with digital arts activities: 95 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds, compared with 68 percent of people 75 and older.

The pessimistic in-person numbers validate existing anxieties among arts leaders. *The Washington Post* reported this past summer that about one third of the theater audience has not returned since the shutdown [...].

Adapted from *The Washington Post*October, 2023
(460 words)

FINANCIAL ANXIETY: THE ALARMING SIDE EFFECT OF INFLATION

Worrying about finances is nothing new. But as inflation has taken hold, and the cost of living has spiked without wages keeping pace, more and more people are starting to panic about their money. Financial anxiety has set in for billions of people – including some who haven't felt the acute pressure before.

The term may not be familiar, but you might know the feeling: "the stress, worry or unease people experience due to their financial situation, including concerns about money, debt, expenses and financial stability", says Jenna Vyas-Lee, a clinical psychologist [...]. Financial anxiety can affect anyone from those on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale living paycheque to paycheque, to those considered more traditionally 'well-off'.

"Unemployment has been remarkably low since the pandemic, so most of the economic pressure comes from incomes not keeping pace with inflation, rather than people losing their jobs", says Kerry Papps, a professor of economics [...]. So, while many people are still employed, they find that their salaries are stretched.

The ripple effects are manifesting around the world, but the UK is bearing the brunt of this problem, with prices set to rise faster in Britain than any other advanced economy in 2023, at 7.2% [...]. In the US, in comparison, inflation is falling faster, but Papps says financial anxiety is rampant in America as well, particularly among people at the lower end of the earning scale, due to a lower minimum wage relative to the UK. [...]

Vyas-Lee says "financial anxiety can [...] link closely with self-image and self-esteem – and the lack thereof." She says [...] "People would rather keep any issue related to self-worth very private for fear of judgement." [...]

It can also torpedo overall mental health. A recent UK study of 2,000 British people [...] showed 30% reported deteriorating mental health since the start of the economic crisis. [...]

As a result of financial anxiety, Vyas-Lee explains it can be difficult for people to focus on their daily tasks. [...]. "At home, the emotional strain can contribute to tension within relationships as individuals may become irritable or withdrawn". She adds financial anxiety can also "take huge tolls on personal relationships, with money worries and troubles as one of the leading reasons for divorce". [...]

With uncertainty around the current economic climate, the widespread issue of financial anxiety isn't going away. [...] People experiencing the stress may need to push past the urge to keep the feeling to themselves – even if talking about money can feel shameful, even taboo.

"Often, people are reluctant to engage with support services and instead shut down [...]" says Vyas-Lee. And she adds, "financial anxiety rarely resolves by itself, so professional support can be genuinely transformational for those who do step forward".

Adapted from **BBC News.com** October 2023 (459 words)

FLORIDA SCHOOLS PLAN TO USE ONLY EXCERPTS FROM SHAKESPEARE TO AVOID 'RAUNCHINESS'

Teachers in a Florida county are preparing to use only excerpts of works by William Shakespeare, rather than whole plays, as part of an attempt to conform to hardline rightwing legislation on teaching about sex.

"There's some raunchiness in Shakespeare," Joseph Cool, a reading teacher at Gaither high school in Hillsborough county, told the Tampa Bay Times. "Because that's what sold tickets during his time."

But, the newspaper said: "In staying with excerpts, the schools can teach about Shakespeare while avoiding anything racy or sexual."

The legislation at issue is the Parental Rights in Education Act, commonly known as the "don't say gay" law for its clampdown on teaching about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

The act was signed into law in March 2022 by Ron DeSantis, the hard-right Republican governor who is now running for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, and expanded in April this year.

The law has fueled widely reported culture-war clashes, including parental pushes for book bans in public school libraries and a legal battle between DeSantis and Disney, a major state employer which opposes the law.

According to the Tampa Bay Times, the Hillsborough county school district has also switched to using excerpts as a way to help students meet state Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking, teachers aiming to give pupils a broad range of knowledge based on one whole novel and excerpts from five to seven novels or plays.

But the Parental Rights in Education Act also says material that is sexual in nature should not be used in classes not concerning sexual health or reproduction.

Prudishness towards Shakespeare's discussion of sex or use of sexual slang is not new. As the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) notes, "Early editions of Shakespeare's plays sometimes ignored or censored slang and sexual language.

But the First Folio [published in 1623] reveals a text full of innuendo and rudeness.

Suggesting that some sexual references may yet creep unwittingly into Florida classrooms, the RSC gives extensive examples of "slang or sexual language which were clearly understood by Shakespeare's original audiences but may be less obvious to audiences today".

In Florida, rightwing groups such as Moms for Liberty also offer reading lists, selections more likely to include fellow travelers of the far-right John Birch Society than the works of Shakespeare. (...)

A Hillsborough county high-school reading teacher, told the Tampa Bay Times: "I think the rest of the nation – no, the world, is laughing at us. Taking Shakespeare in its entirety out because the relationship between Romeo and Juliet is somehow exploiting minors is just absurd."

Adapted from *The Guardian*August 2023
(455 words)

FRENCH PHILOSOPHER URGES PEOPLE TO REBEL - BY MAKING FRIENDS

Building your life around close friendships rather than family or romance is a joyous and necessary act of rebellion, and governments should put in place "friendship ministries" to radically rethink the way society is organised, a key French philosopher has argued.

Geoffroy de Lagasnerie this week publishes a manifesto for friendship. Une Aspiration au Dehors", detailing his close friendship with two other writers, Didier Eribon and Édouard Louis. The three friends eat together in the evening, speak many times daily, wish each other goodnight and good morning every day and synch their schedules to make sure they prioritise friendship moments, namely meeting up for long chats. He described the friendship as the centre of their lives, "one long discussion that never ends".

Presented as a kind of radical blueprint for investing in good friendships, De Lagasnerie questions society's "authoritarian" insistence on prioritising family structures and romantic relationships.

He describes in the book how the three men always spend their birthdays and special occasions together, including Christmas Eve. "When we send other people our Christmas photos or post them on social media, we get a vast number of messages from people who say they envy the chance to spend the festive season with friends. [...] This raises the question: why does friendship as a way of life seem so inaccessible, even to those who aspire to it?"

He said pure friendship – not just interactions with neighbours or work colleagues – must be constantly nourished and invested in, but there was no model or institutional support for that from governments. He said people did not tend to stay in friendships with people they did not like, but many people did stay in a miserable romantic relationship long after feelings had died. Centring your life around friendship rather than family or a romantic relationship, appealed to many, whether gay or straight, he said.

De Lagasnerie, who is gay and has decided not to have children, told France Inter radio: "The book stemmed from a form of sadness and melancholy at how life is organised socially, the idea that life should happen in cycles: youth, studies, form a relationship, move in together, sleep in the same bed, have children... Those are institutional roles but a lot of people feel at odds with that type of life and have other aspirations. My idea was to instead write an account of a life organised around friendship, to make friendship a space of counterculture against the institutional norms dominating our society." [...]

The arts magazine Les Inrocks said the book made any solitary reader long to reach out and contact old friends.

Adapted from *The Guardian*March 2023
(446 words)

GEN Z TURN AWAY FROM 'ADDICTIVE' SOCIAL MEDIA

Young people say their mental health has improved since shunning social media.

[...] One student said "constant negativity" on the platforms was affecting him, and he feels better since taking a break.

It comes as research showed a quarter of respondents felt anxious due to constant notifications.

Gen Z - people born between 1996 and 2010 - are the most likely to say that social media impacts their wellbeing, the research showed.

Iwan, a student at Cardiff University said social media was an important way to stay in touch with his friends. He said: "I decided to go on a detox because I could see the negativity [social media] was putting in my head. The one that took up most of my time was TikTok. I'd describe it as quite addictive. All I could see were negative stories about all kinds of things." [...]

Three in five people in the Gen Z age bracket are regularly undertaking a social media detox to reconnect with the world around them, the research showed.

In another study [...], one in four of Gen Z associated spending a lot of time on social media with worse mental health.

[...] Dixon, lecturer of childhood and youth studies at Bangor University, researches into the impact of technology on young people.

"Research suggests that there's a complicated relationship between engaging with social media and mental health amongst young people," she said.

"The unhealthy use of social media... can be connected to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression."

Ms Dixon's study discovered that parental usage of technology can also impact young people's relationship with social media.

Despite this, Dixon also recognizes the benefits of these platforms.

"Despite increasing evidence of the harmful effect of social media on young people's mental health, there is evidence that suggests positive impacts, such as social connection".

Discussing the increasing practice of social media detox, she said: "While some research does show a relationship between less usage of social media and better wellbeing, the implication of taking a break from technology is unclear."

[...] While he has since returned to social media, Iwan uses his accounts less often.

He said: "I've seen a big change. Not seeing negative content and not using my phone negatively, even, just makes you much happier in day to day life."

[...] Dixon said: "Maybe the aim is to encourage the healthy use of technology, emphasising the importance of recognizing positive and negative impacts of using social media and moving away from an over-simplified narrative".

Instead of spending hours scrolling, Iwan now has more time to dedicate to his interests.

Adapted from **BBC News** November 2023 (449 words)

GEN Z WANT TO WORK 'LAZY GIRL JOBS'. WHO CAN BLAME THEM?

In the mid-2010s, I worked in a cafe in a south London art gallery. Every day I'd make a few coffees, gossip with customers and then take home my generous tips. Though I've had jobs more suited to my genuine interests since, that cafe job was one of my favourites, mainly because of the pure leisure of it. I got paid more or less the same as I did later, as an editor at a major media publication. But I was relaxed and never checked my emails.

Young women have taken to calling these jobs – that are undemanding but well enough paid, with little personal passion involved – "lazy girl jobs". Mostly the term refers to menial office jobs as opposed to the service industry: people on computers, sending emails and taking home a comfortable salary. I've seen no evidence of "lazy boy jobs". Perhaps the concept of men being paid more to do less isn't quite as novel or interesting.

While the phrase "lazy girl job" might be relatively new, an anti-work, anti-ambition sentiment has been brewing among gen Z for some time. These are the post-pandemic twentysomethings who spent their teens witnessing the rise and fall of the girlboss, and, disillusioned with hustle culture and the resultant burnout, would rather just take home a solid monthly wage and enjoy life within the parameters possible under capitalism. At a time when creative industries are becoming next to impossible to enter for swathes of the working class, why not just focus on an easy life, while finding life satisfaction outside of career stress?

49% of gen Z say work is central to their identity, in comparison with 62% of millennials. Plenty of lazygirljob posts echo this sentiment. "All I want is to make the most amount of money working the least amount of hours so I can spend most of my time with my family instead of spending 40 years working for a boss who pays what he thinks is 'fair'."

It's a shift reflected in wider pop culture, too. Consider the films and TV shows that millennials were spoonfed growing up: Sex and the City, Ugly Betty, The Devil Wears Prada. These were stories about high-flying, stressed yet sexy women who dared to "have it all". A decade or two later the mood has shifted. Young people are more interested in shows like Euphoria, The Last of Us and Sex Education, in which interpersonal dynamics are prioritised over anything related to careers. (...) Indeed, the days of asking people, "what do you do?" might finally be moving a little closer to something more like, "what do you do outside of work?"

Adapted from *The Guardian*July 2023
(456 words)

GET ON THE BUS: BANNED BOOKS TOUR HITS THE ROAD, FROM NEW YORK TO TEXAS

Bus driver Carlos Benjamin leans on the vehicle that will be something of a home to him and his crew for the month of October. It's huge and covered in graphics, and printed on the side in yellow and black are the words "Banned Books Tour 2023". The bus isn't stacked with the usual road-trip items, such as coffee cups, clothes or daily supplies. It's filled with thousands of books. As part of an initiative spearheaded by the New Republic, the books will be driven throughout the US to spread awareness about literary censorship and the freedom to read. Beginning in New York earlier this week, the bookmobile will visit several states and end in Texas. [...]

Book banning in public schools has been on the rise in the US, jumping by 33% during the 2022-2023 school year, according to a new PEN America study. Florida has overtaken Texas as the state with the highest number of titles pulled off the shelves and accounts for just under half of the nationwide bans. Consistently, this censorship targets materials dealing with themes like physical abuse, sexual assault, race and LGBTQ+ identities.

"The toll of the book-banning movement is getting worse," said Suzanne Nossel, the chief executive officer of PEN America, in a press release. "More kids are losing access to books." The New Republic partnered with organizations [...] for the bookmobile tour and hopes to use it as a way to fight back against censorship. Organizers plan to hand out 20,000 books as they pass through the likes of Florida, Virginia, Missouri and Kentucky – a route chosen to align with the recent PEN data. "Literature shouldn't be a privilege," Erin Cox, [...] who is working with the tour, said. "It should be something everyone can have access to."

By hitting areas designated by PEN as having the highest number of book bans, the banned books tour is putting accessibility at the forefront of its agenda. Staffers have created festival events in each city to give free books to children, including banned titles – but only if requested. Information will also be shared with parents, teachers and librarians, guiding them on how best to fight against censorship in their community. [...]

This fight to prohibit specific titles stems from many places, including coordinated pressure groups, both at local and national levels, and politicians who can influence their state legislatures. The bans are happening alongside a broader legislative push to restrict the teaching of topics like race and gender in schools. PEN America refers to this as the nationwide "ed scare", a campaign that has created so much anxiety it represses free expression in education. [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(456 words:)

GUNS ARE SEIZED IN U.S. SCHOOLS EACH DAY. THE NUMBERS ARE SOARING

Jaden Wood didn't know about the gun brought to school on the fourth day of his junior year until he got home and the news spread on social media. An assistant principal at Rome High in northwest Georgia had gotten a tip and confronted a ninth-grader, police would later say. But the 15-year-old refused to give up his backpack, prompting a resource officer to wrestle him to the floor. Inside the bag, a staff member found a black 9mm handgun loaded with seven rounds, including one in the chamber.

Jaden, then 16, felt more annoyed than frightened. He was, at last, an upperclassman, with his own parking spot and aspirations for the year ahead: AP classes, starting on the soccer team and, maybe, finding a girlfriend. The gun was an aberration.

"It's not going to happen again," he remembered thinking on that Wednesday evening in early August 2022.

And then it did — on the fifth day of school.

A 16-year-old was spotted on a security camera with a Glock sticking out of his jacket pocket, police said. It, too, was loaded. Rome High, Jaden understood, would not soon get past this, and neither would he.

"School a war zone ..." the teen wrote on Instagram.

In the United States, where gun violence has soared since the pandemic began, Jaden's experience is one shared by students of every age in every state throughout the school year — a bleak reflection of a society awash in firearms.

Last school year, news reports identified more than 1,150 guns brought to K-12 campuses but seized before anyone fired them, according to an investigation by The Washington Post. That's more than six guns each day, on average. Nationwide, 1 in 47 school-age children — 1.1 million students — attended a school where at least one gun was found and reported on by the media in the 2022-2023 school year.

But the true number is almost certainly far higher. A Washington Post survey of 51 of the country's largest school systems showed that 58 percent of seizures in those districts last academic year were never publicly reported by news organizations. Those same districts said the number of guns recovered on campus rose sharply in recent years, mirroring the growing prevalence of firearms in many other public places.

The guns were discovered practically everywhere — bookbags, lockers, trash cans, bathrooms, cars, pockets, purses, bulging behind waistbands and hidden above bathroom ceiling tiles. Some were brought by accident, others to show off. In many cases, police alleged, they were brought to end lives.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*October 2023
(458 words)

HALF A MILLION CHILDREN DIE OF MALARIA EVERY YEAR

Malaria is likely to kill more than 600,000 people this year and nearly four out of five will be children under five years old, mostly in Africa. The disease is one of the largest causes of child mortality. With a 2nd vaccine available, this killer disease could soon be eliminated — but will the world pull together to make it happen?

Scientific advisers to the World Health Organization (WHO) have indeed recommended a second malaria vaccine called R21. It has been developed by researchers at the University of Oxford, in the UK, and by the Serum Institute of India. It uses technology from US company Novavax and was funded by European Union institutions as well as by a British biomedical research centre in London.

[...] After additional WHO approvals, the vaccine could be ready for use by the middle of next year. But without step changes in planning, funding and local vaccine manufacturing, progress towards reducing the disease's toll will be too slow. [...]

Conceiving the vaccine is already quite long, principally because of the complex life cycle of the five species of *Plasmodium* that cause malaria in humans. Two of those pose the biggest risk. When an infected mosquito bites someone, the parasite is transmitted to their bloodstream, enters the liver, where it multiplies and then invades red blood cells, leading to characteristic symptoms such as fever and chills. The R21 vaccine could stop the parasite entering liver cells. [...]

So far, it has been administered to 2 million children across Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. The WHO estimates that 40 to 60 million malaria vaccine doses will soon be needed annually and demand is expected to grow to 100 million doses each year by 2030.

This is undoubtedly positive, but questions remain over funding. Malaria programmes are already short by around 1.5 billion dollars annually to meet their existing targets. This deficit is set to double soon. It's one thing to have the capacity to design and make vaccines, but another to find the money. [...] The poorest countries must wait for donations to pay for doses and depend on other nations to manufacture vaccines and most times these nations prioritize their own populations before releasing supplies to others.

[...] Even though the new vaccine brings hope, its manufacturing, as well as the programmes to increase the availability of clean water, good sanitation, insecticide treated bed-nets and other preventive measures will require money. Only with all these in place can the world say it is doing everything it can to capitalize on scientific advances and reduce malaria's death toll — especially among children.

Adapted from *Nature* October 2023 (446 words)

HEALING NATURE WILL HELP US ALL

For 10,000 years, human civilisation has grown and thrived because of Earth's remarkable regenerative capacity that sustains climate stability and rich biological diversity. Now human activity has severely undermined this resilience.

Our patterns of economic growth, production and consumption are pushing the planet's life-support systems beyond their natural boundaries. But members of the European parliament's agriculture and fisheries committees have rejected European Commission proposals for a nature restoration law. The vote flies in the face of science. [...]

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, soaring inflation has pushed up food prices. [...] Sixty-four per cent of people in 12 European countries [...] say the cost of food is their biggest worry.

Changing farming practices to align food production with efforts to manage the climate crisis and restore nature is the only solution to ensure affordable food for all. Yet some Members of the European Parliament claim [...] that a move to more nature-friendly agriculture would negatively impact farmers and even jeopardise EU climate commitments by making it more difficult to build wind and solar farms. Research shows, however, that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are "already jeopardising food production" in Europe and that the situation will only get worse.

Hand in hand with another proposal to cut the use of pesticides, the nature restoration law would require changes to current farming methods to reduce harm to wildlife, increase water harvesting, prevent soil erosion, enhance pollination and encourage a more diverse production of crops. [...]

The argument that today's system of industrial agriculture, fed by fossil fuels and pesticides, will increase food security, secure climate action and offer long-term protection for rural communities is found wanting. At least 10% of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, with the food sector as a whole responsible for as much as a third of EU emissions. Moreover, degraded soils from overproduction and poor management are reducing agricultural yields. [...]

"We can do excellent work in decreasing emissions", the EU environment commissioner said recently. "But if ecosystems degrade, if soil degrades, if forests and marine ecosystems degrade, they are not able to absorb carbon or mitigate heat". [...]

If nothing is done, farmers might one day be left to cope with unproductive land and the vagaries of climate change-induced extreme weather, affecting their lives and livelihoods.

Farmers in Europe are already suffering from droughts and floods. Spain is turning into an unproductive desert. [...]

The facts are that climate action, nature restoration and food production go hand in hand. Politicians arguing against restoring nature are not fighting to protect consumers from high prices. They are not fighting to protect farmers. They are not fighting to defend climate action. [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian*June 2023
(445 words)

HOW BRITAIN LIVES WITH COVID-19 TODAY

Covid-19 is still making headlines. On October 3rd Britain's official covid inquiry began a fresh set of public hearings, looking at the government's decision-making around interventions such as lockdowns. Entries released from the diary of Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific adviser during the pandemic, criticised the "flip-flopping", "bipolar decision-making" and "chaos" of Boris Johnson's government. What, though, of the disease itself?

As Britain heads towards the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of covid-19, it is easy to forget what life was like at the height of the pandemic. At the peak of the crisis, when hospitals were running out of body bags, more than 1,000 people in England were dying with the virus a day. Cases are rising again, and many people remain affected by long covid. But the decreasing virulence of variants and the delivery of 150m covid vaccines have reduced the number of people the virus can kill or hospitalise. Now, when covid hits, it does so in small waves, not tsunamis. [...]

Britons, in turn, have grown used to living with covid. The protocols that used to govern behaviour are largely things of the past. Walk down a typical high street or get on the Tube and masks are rarely seen. [...]

For some, vaccines remain imperative. Seven in ten over-75s have taken up the offer of a covid booster since the spring. In the London borough of Brent, one of the areas hardest hit by the disease, a mobile "vaccine bus" still criss-crosses the borough, offering jabs to all who proffer an arm. [...]

Monitoring the spread of covid depends mainly on government-run surveillance programmes—especially a new winter covid-infection survey, which will send out up to 32,000 lateral-flow tests each week to a representative sample of the population. One of the main aims, says Steven Riley of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), is to detect any changes in the way the virus is spreading, and the risk to hospitals of surging demand. Last winter, flu hospitalised many more people than covid, including over 10,000 children. But the UKHSA is more worried about how covid could mutate than flu, says Professor Riley. [...]

For most Britons, attention has shifted away from the disease to other problems, including those worsened by covid. At the back of the mosque in Brent, a health centre built in 2021 offers screening for certain cancers that are being diagnosed later, in part because of pandemic-era backlogs. At its front, tables teem with crates of bananas and courgettes for those struggling with the cost of living. The virus was once the only thing people thought about. For many, it is now background noise.

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2023
(443 words)

HOW EVERY WORKPLACE BECAME 'TOXIC'

[...] At nearly every company, there's an employee who thinks their workplace is 'toxic'. The term has become a catch-all to describe all sorts of work issues: major problems, such as unethical, abusive, discriminatory and even illegal behaviours; but also everyday issues, like cultures of long hours and burnout, or simple grievances with standard workplace policies.

Recent high-profile reports of workplace toxicity have underscored the murky, imprecise definition of the word.

In August, [a] pop star was named in a lawsuit accusing her of creating a hostile work environment through "sexual, religious and racial harassment, disability discrimination, assault and false imprisonment". In September, Rolling Stone described the American late-night talk show The Tonight Show as a "toxic workplace", following complaints from staffers of a high-pressure atmosphere, erratic behaviour of host Jimmy Fallon and bullying from senior leadership.

When 'toxicity' has swelled to mean so much, it subsequently has come to mean so little, too. Experts say the overuse and misattribution of the word can minimise or even mask real workplace issues. And that can create a whole new set of problems.

The term 'toxic' has a violent history. In ancient times, [...] archers dipped their arrowheads into a mixture of blood, dung and snake venom. The Greeks called this 'toxikon pharmakon', loosely translated as 'poisoned arrows'. Borrowed from Latin and French, 'toxic' was first recorded in English in the 17th Century to describe poison.

In the industrial era, 'toxic' was ascribed to workplaces with real toxins: hazardous materials and carcinogenic chemicals: the phrase 'toxic environment' was initially literal. According to the American Historical Association, the metaphor first emerged in nursing: a 1989 guide to leadership defined 'toxic workplaces' as those featuring conflict among roles, obscure goals and values, aggressive communication and scenarios in which staff are used like material resources.

During the following decades, 'toxic' slowly became ubiquitous: it was Oxford Dictionaries' word of the year in 2018, following the #MeToo movement and the spotlight on 'toxic masculinity' and harmful work environments.

In subsequent years, however, 'toxic' has been used to also describe everyday workplace annoyances, says behavioural expert Erikson. [...] "The word has gone into hyperinflation, often used to dramatically label situations that aren't actually 'poisonous', but rather negative experiences with a lousy manager. 'Toxic' is so overused that I don't react when I see it now."

As opposed to an increasing prevalence of toxic workplaces, Erikson blames social media for popularising the term and taking it into overdrive.

While the technology creates more opportunities to expose genuinely harmful work environments, it can also encourage workers to share workplace grievances under a catch-all, self-perpetuating term, he says. "Exaggerations are often attention seeking. And everything spreads faster now: search '#toxicworkplace', and you're drowning in noise."

Adapted from **BBC** October 2023 (456 words)

HOW GREEN ARE ELECTRIC VEHICLES?

Around the world, governments and automakers are promoting electric vehicles as a key technology to curb oil use and fight climate change. (...) But as electric cars and trucks go mainstream, they have faced a persistent question: Are they really as green as advertised?

Broadly speaking, most electric cars sold today tend to produce significantly fewer planet-warming emissions than most cars fueled with gasoline. But a lot depends on how much coal is being burned to charge up those plug-in vehicles. And electric grids still need to get much, much cleaner before electric vehicles are truly emissions free.

(...) The good news for electric vehicles is that most countries are now pushing to clean up their electric grids. In the United States, utilities have retired hundreds of coal plants over the last decade and shifted to a mix of lower-emissions natural gas, wind and solar power. As a result, researchers have found, electric vehicles have generally gotten cleaner, too. And they are likely to get cleaner still.

"The reason electric vehicles look like an appealing climate solution is that if we can make our grids zero-carbon, then vehicle emissions drop way, way down," said (...) an associate professor of energy studies at the M.I.T.

Like many other batteries, the lithium-ion cells that power most electric vehicles rely on raw materials — like cobalt, lithium and rare earth elements — that have been linked to grave environmental and human rights concerns. Cobalt has been especially problematic.

- (...) Focusing first on cobalt, automakers and other manufacturers have committed to eliminating "artisanal" cobalt from their supply chains and have also said they will develop batteries that decrease, or do away with, cobalt altogether. But that technology is still in development, and the prevalence of these mines means these commitments "aren't realistic," said Mickaël Daudin of Pact, a nonprofit organization that works with mining communities in Africa.
- (...) As earlier generations of electric vehicles start to reach the end of their lives, preventing a pileup of spent batteries looms as a challenge. Most of today's electric vehicles use lithium-ion batteries, which can store more energy in the same space than older, more commonly used lead-acid battery technology.

Experts point out that spent batteries contain valuable metals and other materials that can be recovered and reused. Depending on the process used, battery recycling can also use large amounts of water, or emit air pollutants (...) A different, promising approach to tackling used electric vehicle batteries is finding them a second life in storage and other applications. (...) If done properly, though, used car batteries could continue to be used for a decade or more as backup storage for solar power, researchers at the M.I.T found in a study last year.

Adapted from *The New York Times*June 2023
(452 words)

HOW LONDON BUS DRIVERS CHANGED THE WORLD

A new study has found that smiling at London bus drivers—an act rarely attempted in the capital except under experimental conditions—increases their happiness. [...] The authors of the research, which was conducted by the University of Sussex and others, hope it will lead to "more interaction and kindness on buses". [...]

It might seem improbable that a report on London's buses could change behaviour. But it has happened before. For London's buses have an underappreciated role in the history of medical science. In the 1940s, a single study of London's transport workers transformed epidemiology, medicine and the way we live now. Every time you go on a run, check your stepcount, or take the stairs instead of the lift, you are treading a path forged by the feet of the workers on London's buses.

In the late 1940s, medics were worried. Britain, like many rich countries, was suffering from an "epidemic" of heart disease and no one knew why. Various hypotheses, such as stress, were suggested; but one thing that was not was exercise. The idea that health and exercise were linked "wasn't the accepted fact that we know today", says a professor of epidemiology at Cambridge University. Some even felt that "too much physical activity was a bad thing for your health". Navvies, miners and farm labourers did physical exercise by the spade-load. They also suffered disproportionately from various diseases, died young and featured in novels by D.H. Lawrence. It was a miserable existence.

At this time a young doctor called Jerry Morris started to suspect that the excess deaths from heart disease might be linked to occupation. He began studying the medical records of 31,000 London transport workers. His findings were breathtaking: conductors, who spent their time running up and down stairs, had an approximately 30% lower incidence of disease than drivers, who sat down all day. Exercise was keeping people alive. Morris looked at postal workers, and found a similar pattern: postmen (who walked all day) had far lower rates of disease than telephonists (who typically sat).

Morris's research was eventually published in 1953, just three years after a study by Richard Doll proving the link between smoking and lung cancer. As any Londoner could tell you, you wait centuries for a paradigm-changing epidemiological study to turn up; then two come along at once. Morris's work had consequences both big and small. Morris (who had given up smoking when he read Doll's study) now also took up exercise, handing his jacket to his daughter on Hampstead Heath and just running. "People thought I was bananas." Slowly, the rest of the world took off its jacket and followed.

Adapted from *The Economist*September 2023
(455 words)

HOW PARENTS' INCOME INFLUENCES ATTENDANCE AT TOP COLLEGES

At many selective private colleges, being very rich is a door to entry. Students with parents earning in the top 1 percent attend at much higher rates than other similarly qualified students, new data shows. But at most public colleges, [...] there is no such difference, and in-state students from across the income spectrum attend at roughly similar rates.

The data comes from [...] a new research project on college admissions. It combines college attendance records with federal income tax data to show the share of all students who attend a given college, by parental income. And it shows the chances that similarly qualified students — those with the same standardized test scores — have at attending a college based on their parents' income. The data is available for both public and private colleges. [...]

This new data comes from Opportunity Insights, a group of economists led by Raj Chetty of Harvard whose large study combined tax and attendance data for college students with applicants' standardized test scores.

The data shows that students from higher-income families are far more likely to attend top colleges. At many selective colleges, both public and private, over half of students come from families earning in the top 20 percent, and fewer than one in 20 students have parents earning in the bottom 20 percent. [...]

At the most elite private colleges, like those in the Ivy League, students from rich families have an even greater advantage, getting in at much higher rates than other similarly qualified students. [...]

The advantage for the very rich at these highly selective colleges is driven by legacy admissions, the recruitment of athletes, and a preference for students from private high schools, found the new paper published by Harvard Professors.

In much of the next tier of elite private colleges, rich students have a similar advantage. But at some, there's even less socioeconomic diversity — poor students, even with the same test scores, have a lower chance of attending than the typical applicant with that score. [...] This is partly because these colleges tend to have fewer resources to recruit high-achieving students from low-income families, and smaller financial aid funds to pay their way. Ivy League colleges often promise a full ride to any admitted student whose parents earn below a certain amount. [...]

At many public colleges, in-state students from the richest families are no more likely to attend — and often less likely to do so. At the University of California, Los Angeles, for instance, students from the bottom 20 percent attended at 1.5 times the average rate of students with the same test score, while the very richest students were 0.8 times as likely to attend.

Adapted from *The New York Times*September 2023
(450 words)

HOW SAFE IS NUCLEAR ENERGY?

The British government wants nuclear power to provide 25% of the UK's electricity needs by 2050. So as to get extra support in the Budget, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced he wants to reclassify it as "environmentally sustainable". The announcement follows a similar move by the EU in 2022.

The International Atomic Energy Agency says nuclear power plants are among "the safest and most secure facilities in the world". They are subject to stringent international safety standards. However, there have been a number of high-profile accidents which released large amounts of radioactive material into the environment. The worst nuclear accident in history was caused by an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine in 1986. More recently an enormous earthquake caused a tsunami which flooded the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan in 2011, causing a partial meltdown of the reactor cores. Even under normal conditions, generating nuclear power produces hazardous radioactive waste which needs to be safely managed and stored for hundreds of years.

To generate nuclear power in non-military reactors, uranium atoms are bombarded by much smaller neutron particles. This causes the atoms to break down in a process called nuclear fission, which releases huge amounts of energy as heat. The heat is used to boil water, producing steam which drives turbines and generates electricity.

Like fossil fuels, nuclear fuels are non-renewable energy resources, but unlike fossil fuels, nuclear power stations do not produce greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide or methane when operated. Building new nuclear plants does, however, create emissions - through manufacturing the steel and all the other materials needed. But, altogether, the emissions footprint [...] is still very low compared to coal and fuel.

There are currently six plants that can supply about 20% of UK electricity demand, with 15.5% generated this way in 2022. Most are at the end of their life, but the government wants to deliver up to eight new reactors overall. The Hinkley Point C plant is already under construction in Somerset, and the government has approved one more nuclear power plant on the Suffolk coast. Together these will be able to power 12 million homes in the UK. [...]

However, critics of nuclear power say the new plants will take so long to come on stream they will be too late to help the UK meet its emissions targets or reduce energy prices for consumers. For example, Hinkley Point C is two years behind schedule – and is also expected to cost twice as much as originally planned – and the new approved station in Suffolk will take nine years to construct.

Adapted from **BBC News** March 2023 (450 words)

HOW THE PROTEST AT THE MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS SHOOK THE WORLD

On 16 October 1968, two black US athletes – Tommie Smith and John Carlos – stood on the podium at the Mexico City Olympics, heads bowed. They wore black socks with no shoes; Smith wore a black scarf around his neck. As the US national anthem played, they each raised a black-gloved hand in silent protest.

Although no words were spoken, the moment was full of meaning. Smith, who had won gold in the 200m, setting a new world record, raised his right fist to represent Black Power. Bronze medallist Carlos (...) raised his left fist to represent black unity. (...)

The Black Power salute, as it came to be known, was a defiant statement against the systemic oppression of black people in the US and marked a defining moment in the history of civil rights activism. But their use of it (...) came at great personal cost to the athletes involved. Within hours, they were condemned by the International Olympic Committee. Two days later, they were suspended from the US team and sent home. (...)

It was a year of intense political and social turmoil: the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement were in full swing, and the Civil Rights Movement had made the struggle for racial equality one of the defining issues of the era. In April, Dr Martin Luther King Jr had been murdered by a white gunman in Memphis, and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated two months later. (...) Many black athletes felt a deep sense of anger and frustration at the injustices they were facing every day. (...)

Sport was one of the few areas where the ability of the individual could triumph over the barriers faced by black Americans, Smith explains. (...) "The black athlete... has grown to know that the body could be a springboard to success. (...) Because in athletics, especially track and field, nobody can say you are no good. The only person who can say that is that clock," he says.

Despite the hardships he endured, Smith continued to speak out for social justice and equality. He completed a master's degree in sociology and moved into teaching and athletics coaching, becoming a prominent advocate for racial equality in sport and society.

In 2008, Smith and Carlos were honoured with the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, which is presented annually to individuals whose contributions "transcend sports". US President Barack Obama said of the pair: "Their powerful silent protest was controversial, but it woke folks up and created greater opportunity for those that followed."

When asked by BBC if he regretted the salute, Smith said: "The only regret was that it had to be done".

Adapted from **bbc.com** October 2023 (450 words)

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT HATE SPEECH

Hate speech has a long history, but the growth of online communications means that it can now spread far and fast. Whether in person or online, almost all children will some day be confronted with hate speech. It's important to help them recognize it and know what to do when they encounter it. [...]

Hate speech can be described as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or discriminates against a person or group's identity, such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation. It can also include other "identity factors", like language, economic or social origin, or health status. Hate speech isn't just words. It can be expressed in many ways, including images, cartoons, games, videos, objects, gestures and symbols. It aims to provoke an emotional response like fear, distress, isolation or intimidation in its target, to spread hatred in society, even inciting abuse and violence.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to hate speech, both online and in person. When children hear or read hate speech aimed at them directly or at a part of their identity—such as their race, colour or gender— it can make them feel like there is something different or wrong about them. This can impact their self-esteem and can lead to a deterioration of their mental health, such as experiencing feelings of anxiety and depression, even thoughts about suicide. [...]

Since freedom of expression is a human right, it's possible to disagree with or criticize an individual or group without threatening their well-being and safety. But hate speech limits freedom of expression since those targeted by hateful language do not feel safe expressing themselves freely. [...]

Conversations about issues like hate, racism, sexism and xenophobia can be uncomfortable, but it is important to try to create a safe space for children to be able to speak to adults who need to be good listeners and sensitive to the children's level of anxiety. Adults could also explain that everyone has a right to be safe in society and treated with dignity and respect before helping the children to identify hate speech. [...]

And since hate speech is often based on ignorance or false information, adults could encourage children to have an open attitude and honest curiosity about other people so as to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Finally, it may be interesting to warn children about social media [...] and explain that some information online may not be accurate and can be used to harm individuals, divide society, undermine trust and incite violence and that what may seem harmless to one person can be deeply hurtful to others. [...]

Adapted from **UNICEF** November 2023 (451 words)

HOW WILL BRITAIN TURN OFF ITS GAS GRID?

[...] The discovery of North Sea reservoirs — a "timely bonus from Mother Nature" — ushered in a new era. Within a decade, nearly all British homes had switched to natural gas.

It was a vast undertaking. The Gas Council, a state-owned enterprise, built a 3,200km high-pressure transmission network. Street by street, engineers installed compliant cookers and boilers in 13.5m homes. Denis Rooke, the captain of industry in charge, bombastically called it "perhaps the greatest peacetime operation in this nation's history". British Gas, which saw itself as a beacon of modernity, ran a huge campaign selling the idea of central heating, previously a rare extravagance.

Eight in ten of Britain's homes are still heated by natural gas, carried by 284,000km of pipes that steadily lower its pressure. But soon Britain must work out how to turn the network off.

To reach the government's target of net zero greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050, householders will have to give up gas boilers and do away with gas cookers. Gas companies have lobbied for using hydrogen via the existing network, but that would be more expensive than switching to electric heat pumps. The government thinks heat pumps will work for most homes, though their deployment remains slow.

This switchover will be much harder than Rooke's operation. In the 1960s a state-owned monolith built a network and told people which day their street would be switched to gas. In the coming decades, governments will nudge people to move away from gas with a mix of market incentives and regulation.

The obvious challenge is to generate and distribute much more electricity. But there is another question that has received scant attention: what to do with the gas grid? Currently around £1bn is invested in maintaining the gas grid each year. A point will be reached when running a vast network for fewer and fewer consumers no longer makes economic sense. Area by area, the gas grid will need to be safely phased down. Some pipes run under roads or other infrastructure; leaving them would be risky because they might eventually collapse. They could be filled with concrete or repurposed, for instance for electricity cables.

Few politicians have so far grappled with this issue; no money has been set aside for decommissioning. Ignoring the problem is likely to increase costs in the long run. [...]. It may cost around £65bn, £2,300 for each current customer. That will prompt questions about who pays. One risk is that gas companies are left trying to recover the costs of decommissioning the grid from a shrinking group of bill payers.

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2023
(456 words)

HUNDREDS OF WORKERS JOIN AMAZON PICKET LINE FOR BLACK FRIDAY STRIKE

Hundreds of strikers outside Amazon's Coventry warehouse were joined on Black Friday by trade unionists from Europe and the US as part of a "Make Amazon Pay" campaign calling for better working conditions at the internet retailer. [...] Activists from Germany, Italy and California, on strike at their respective Amazon workplaces, expressed solidarity with the Coventry strikers, who have taken 28 days of industrial action since January.

Gathered near the vast warehouse in the chilly early morning air, scores of the activists from the Make Amazon Pay campaign joined in chants of: "What do we want? £15! When do we want it? Now!" Jessie Moreno, who delivers Amazon parcels from Palmdale, in the California desert, said: "This isn't just a US fight, this is a global fight, so we are happy to come here to support our brothers and sisters from England."

"We have to spread the word and bring awareness," he added. "The issues are the same, no matter what country you're in – it's all the same." Moreno described the challenges he faces at work of operating in high temperatures, to stringent targets. "It's the living conditions, it's respect, and of course it's money. We're living in poverty conditions while the CEO, Jeff Bezos, gets richer and richer off our hard work, and we're just struggling to put food on the table."

Organizers of the strike in Coventry, where workers first took strike action in January, say they have now signed up 1,000 members. [...] Alke Bössiger, the deputy general secretary of the Coventry global union, said: "It's really important that people here know that they're not lonely in this fight." She said 150 actions against Amazon were taking place in more than 30 countries on Friday. "Some of the actions are strikes and some of them are protests — on environmental issues, for example," Bössiger added. "It's such a big company and it has such a big global footprint." She raised other issues including taxation, and claims of anti-competitive practices — something Amazon has denied.

In Coventry, the workers' union has focused on winning higher pay. [...] Following the strikes, the basic rate of pay has increased several times, and will rise to £12.30 an hour. Amazon denies the increases have any link with the industrial action, insisting it reviews pay regularly and always has. [...] An Amazon spokesperson said: "We offer great pay and benefits, opportunities for career growth, all while working in a safe working environment. At Amazon, these benefits and opportunities come with the job, as does the ability to communicate directly with the leadership of the company. We don't need to recognize a union to treat our staff well."

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(456 words)

I DON'T HAVE TO POST ABOUT MY OUTRAGE. NEITHER DO YOU

I am neither Jewish nor Palestinian, and none of my six regular jobs have anything to do with foreign policy, but most of the people on social media had made a statement, including various corporate brands, celebrities and influencers. "Praying for Israel," Justin Bieber posted on Instagram, over an image of what was actually Gaza.

There's a facile version of taking a stand on social media that generates righteous back patting but reduces complex issues to a simple yes or no. Taking simplistic stands can also lead to twisting words. Concern for Palestinians is portrayed as support for Hamas or hatred toward Israel or Jews in general. Anger about Hamas's deadly attacks on Israeli citizens is portrayed as denigrating the dignity of all Palestinian lives.

When institutions offered statements that expressed sorrow for the loss of both Israeli and Palestinian lives, some customers demanded a revision that explicitly condemned their preferred villain. If these institutional voices stayed silent, it was considered newsworthy. "Six days after Hamas's horrific terror attacks on Israel," a reporter at Women's Wear Daily wrote last Thursday, "many major players in the fashion industry have remained largely silent in support of the victims on both sides of the conflict." Did we really need or want to hear from L'Oréal?

Sitting with uncertainty is hard, especially when social media has primed us to expect perfect realtime information during traumatic events and to want instantaneous answers and resolution.

Social media posts are not what bother me most, though. Instead, it's the idea that not posting is wrong somehow — that everyone needs to speak, all the time. It discourages shutting up and listening and letting the voices that matter the most be heard.

I'm not a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, but a passage in the book "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" seems applicable here. "Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen," writes A. A.'s co-founder. "We must avoid quick-tempered criticism and furious arguments," which he calls "emotional traps filled with pride and vengefulness." I'll admit I have posted on social media from a place of pride and vengeance, and as a writer, I'm perhaps less conditioned to practice restraint of pen. But thoughtful criticism is my goal, and while I've regretted posting half-formed thoughts quickly, I've never regretted waiting until I was less angry or not posting at all.

In an environment where people are led to believe they should post or blurt out simplistic opinions, they will, for fear that others will think they're not informed enough. But a reactionary social media post tells you nothing about what they really think or know, cheapens the discourse and impedes progress.

Adapted from *The New York Times*October 2023
(452 words)

I THOUGHT VAPING WAS MY PLEASURE BUT A BOOK SHOWED ME IT WAS A TYRANNY

I have been a nicotine addict ever since I smoked my first cigarette at the age of 14, perched on some steps during my school lunch break. It tasted disgusting but I persevered and soon I was hooked. [...]

It was great fun for a while. I happily trooped outside nightclubs and pubs where the smokers were held. Smoking was a group activity back then. My best friend and I chain-smoked rollies until the ashtray overflowed.

After university, things began to change. One by one, friends kicked the habit. But I was a determined smoker. I started the day with a cigarette and I ended it with one. Smoking was like breathing to me. It was inconceivable that one day I might stop.

When I moved to New York and discovered how smokers are shunned in that city, I swapped cigs for their modern counterpart, the vape. I soon noticed the benefits of an e-cig loaded with nicotine. It didn't stink. I could smoke it anywhere. I puffed away in the office, at home, in restaurants, shops, even under a blanket on an aeroplane. [...]

Despite the cost and the health issues, I was dependent. Heaven was lying in bed, alone, vaping and scrolling on my phone. I started to feel ashamed that the e-cigarette was, as a friend put it, surgically attached to my hand. [...]

But even thinking I could quit seemed audacious. I had tried before. I went to an NHS nurse when I was 16. I saw a hypnotherapist in my mid-20s. These attempts either failed or simply saw me exchange one nicotine product for another.

But I started to see glimmers of hope. A friend told me how she had given up cigarettes for 18 months by reading Allen Carr's book Easy Way to Quit Smoking.

I dared to believe that I could, perhaps, quit nicotine. I bought the vaping version of the book and read it in a couple of days. The book was boring and repetitive but it worked some kind of sorcery because I obediently puffed my last vape – you are encouraged to vape as you read – threw it in the bin, and somehow I have been nicotine-free for an astounding 402 days. This is the first time in 20 years that I have not been ingesting some form of nicotine on a daily basis. [...]

I assume that by stopping I've added years to my life, but it's not the health benefits I consider, or the money I've saved. I'm just relieved to be free from the tyranny of the vape. [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(442 words)

INDIA'S MOON LANDING IS A STELLAR ACHIEVEMENT

It's hard to land on the Moon and keep your spacecraft intact. Just a few days ago, Russia's "Luna 25" mission crashed, dashing hopes for the country's first trip to the Moon since 1976. In April, a private Japanese effort also crashed when landing on the lunar surface. That is one of the reasons why the successful landing of the Chandrayaan-3 mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is so special.

Touchdown occurred just after 6 p.m. Indian time on 23 August, making India only the fourth nation - after the United States, the Soviet Union and China - to achieve a controlled lunar landing. Besides, India is the first to reach high latitudes. Indeed, the space craft managed to land at around 600 kilometres from the Moon's south pole. That is significant because the polar regions are thought to contain ice that could be a resource for future lunar exploration. It could, for instance, be a source of the components of rocket fuel.

Earlier today, the mission's landing module Vikram, named after a famous Indian physicist - the founder of India's space programmes, deployed a small rover that will study lunar rocks and dirt. The solar-powered mission is meant to last for two weeks, until lunar night hits this part of the surface. [...]

Dozens of missions to the Moon are planned from all over the world in the coming years. The next attempt will come in the a few days, when Japan aims to send a spacecraft to test pinpoint landing techniques. It's tempting to frame this flood of interest in the Moon as a new space race, with nations competing to be the first to discover potential resources. [...]

However, lunar exploration can be seen as a new proving ground for science and engineering. Previous ISRO missions have already brought about fresh lunar science. India's first Moon mission, the Chandrayaan-1 orbiter - launched in 2008 - helped to confirm the existence of water on the Moon with data gathered by a NASA instrument on board. Even though the second Indian mission - the Chandrayaan-2 - crashed when landing on the moon in September 2019, its orbiter module could still be launched and it continues to map and study the lunar surface. If Chandrayaan-3 continues to function well, it will collect data on the chemistry and mineralogy of the surface. [...]

Indian Prime Minister, who joined millions of people in watching the final descent, rightly said: "This success belongs to all of humanity." But it is also undoubtedly a stellar achievement for India's scientists and engineers across many generations.

Adapted from **Nature** August 2023 (450 words)

"INVESTING IN THE ARTIST MAKES ME FEEL MORE INVOLVED IN THE SONG"

You might not have heard of an electronic music artist called Alan Walker, but he has a significant fanbase. On YouTube the video of one of his songs, Faded, has been played 3.5 billion times, and he has 43 million subscribers on the platform. [...]

For the music industry the fans are normally just the consumers - they pay to listen to the songs and albums, attend the concerts, and buy the merchandise. But last year Walker decided that he would start to allow his fanbase to share in his financial success.

He has done this by giving around 8,000 fans the opportunity to invest in four of his singles, sharing with them his streaming revenues. To facilitate this, Walker has used a new Swedish website and app called Corite, which handles all the financial details, including the collection and exchanges of funds. [...]

Stockholm-based Corite is the brainchild of music industry veteran Mattias Tengblad. The idea behind Corite is that up and coming artists can skip signing with record labels. Under Corite's model, artists secure financial backing from their, hopefully, growing fanbase.

In return, fans can hope to earn more money than the sum they have invested. Although it is important to stress that they can lose money.

The way it works is that an artist announces a "campaign" via Corite, typically the forthcoming release of a single. They then detail how much money they are seeking to raise, and how much profit they will give to each investor if the song is streamed a certain number of times over the first year of its release. [...]

And if the song greatly exceeds its streaming target, the investors will get even more earnings. However, it is a gamble, as if the song flops, and doesn't hit its goal, then the investors won't recoup as much money as they put in. [...]

But can artists really succeed without the support of a record label?

Jeremy Lascelles has been a music industry executive for more than 50 years. He says that record companies still have a very important role to play. "They still have access to quite considerable capital and funding, they have marketing muscle, and they have access to media, to radio, TV and the like."

One Alan Walker fan who has invested in one of his singles is student Effie Sampson. She invested \$35, and has so far got back \$20. However, Ms Sampson says it isn't about the money. "I did it to support an artist that I love," she says. "And you feel more involved in the song when you listen to it."

Adapted from **BBC News** February 2023 (455 words)

IS THIS THE SUMMER OF BAD TOURISTS?

Last week, it was two drunk Americans sneaking into a closed section of the Eiffel Tower and sleeping off their bender high above Paris. The previous week, a French woman was arrested for carving a heart and her initials into Italy's iconic Leaning Tower of Pisa. A Canadian teen defaced a 1,200-year-old Japanese temple last month. [...]

It feels like the whole world has forgotten how to act in other people's homes. But while this may seem like the summer of bad tourists, it could just represent a rather uncomfortable truth: as long as people have travelled, we've misbehaved.

From Pompeii to the Egyptian pyramids, some of the world's most famous man-made wonders are scarred with millennia-old graffiti etched into their walls by ancient sightseers [...]. And according to Lauren Siegel, a tourism and events lecturer at the University of Greenwich in London, as recently as the 18th and 19th Centuries, it was common for British nobles taking the Grand Tour of Europe to belittle and disregard the people and places they were visiting. [...]

According to Siegel, unlike in years past, many travellers today are competing for social media likes and views. "People are reverting to more extreme actions for their Instagram or TikTok feeds," she noted. Ironically, social media accounts like the massively popular Passenger Shaming are also being used to call out insensitive and disrespectful behaviour. David Beirman, an adjunct fellow at the University of Technology Sydney, noted that nearly 1.5 billion people travelled internationally in 2019. With travel now surging to its highest levels since before the pandemic, he said it's inevitable some tourists will think "it's cool to pose nude in front of a temple in Bali, get drunk at an Islamic holy site or dance in front of a Nazi concentration camp". [...]

In particular, Siegel isn't surprised by the number of people caught engraving their names on ancient monuments. "They think this is a chance to immortalise themselves."

Yet, this summer's shameful headlines may offer an opportunity for change. [...]

Several destinations have taken a proactive approach to this idea. Tourism hotspots like Bali and Iceland now formally ask tourists to promise to respect their culture and environment after visiting it. Palau requires visitors to sign an eco-pledge on arrival. Bucket-list locations are also increasingly regulating tourists. Visitors to Australia can no longer climb Uluru, because the country recognises it as an Aboriginal sacred site. Meanwhile, Amsterdam recently launched a "stay-away" ad campaign targeting drunk Brits.

Siegel applauds these stricter guidelines, and what she sees as a growing recognition of the problem by fellow travellers.

Adapted from *BBC Travel*August 2023
(445 words)

KENDRICK LAMAR'S ANTI-SMART PHONE SELLS OUT IN A DAY

Pulitzer Prize winning American rapper and songwriter Kendrick Lamar has entered the tech space with a collaboration on the pgLang Light Phone 2, a new limited edition mobile phone. [...] It is marketed as "just a phone", and a less distracting alternative to other modern designs – part of the trend that sees more mainstream support for "dumb phones", which are less smart and more practical devices.

The minimalistic phone has no web browser. You can call, text and set an alarm. You can also use add-on tools that include a music player, notes, a calculator, directions, and a "language" tool. Users are invited to ask the simple phone a question and shake it to find out an answer.

The sleek new device, released last week, sold out in a matter of minutes. Hardly surprising considering the 36-year-old rapper's influence, and the fact that the phones were restricted to just 250 models.

Light phones offer minimalistic experiences without apps or colour, with the intention to see people more present in real life and less dependent on their devices. It is in line with the ethos of the Light brand, which describes itself as "an alternative to the tech monopolies that are fighting more and more aggressively for our time and attention".

"Dumb Phones" have been particularly popular with Gen-Zers and millennials, who are dumping their smartphones for less complex and much, much cheaper options. Indeed, the growing trend of people returning to simpler, more classic phones is a retro revolution and a refreshing alternative to the dangers of doomscrolling.

Globally, people average 6 hours 58 minutes of screen time per day, an increase of nearly 50 minutes per day since 2013. And as if that wasn't alarming enough, a study conducted last year concluded that excessive smartphone use is strongly correlated with increased anxiety and stress levels, especially among students.

Rediscovering the pleasures of the offline world also harks back to a sentiment of nostalgia for aging millennials, a trip down memory lane that Gen-Zers, the generation that grew up in front of the screens, appears to be fascinated by. For them, the offline past becomes reminiscent of a time when life seemed simpler and more carefree.

Last year, Lars Silberbauer, chief marketing officer of Nokia Phones, reported that tens of thousands of its flip and slide phones were sold every month. "We see that the market for flip phones is up 5 per cent". [...] He added: "I think the trend is really [about] people taking control of their own lives, of their own digital lives."

Adapted from *Euronews.com* November 2023 (440 words)

KENYAN STARGAZER BRINGING ASTRONOMY TO THE PEOPLE

It's 1.30am in Kenya's parched and sparsely populated north, and 50 people are lying on their backs on the shore of a dried-up river, staring up at the night sky. Thousands of stars create a vast, glittering canvas with the ghostly glow of the Milky Way clearly visible.

These stargazers have travelled 250 miles (400km) overland from Nairobi to Samburu county to witness the Perseid meteor shower – a celestial event that happens every July and August. They are not disappointed: every few minutes, arrows of light shoot across the sky like silent fireworks. [...]

The Star Safari is organised by a Kenyan astronomer, Susan Murabana, who has brought the SkyWatcher Flextube – a 50kg, 170cm-long telescope – to allow the group to view Jupiter, Saturn, Mars and Venus, and deep-sky objects such as the Orion and Trifid nebulae, star clusters and galaxies such as Pinwheel and Andromeda. [...]

"There's something about the sky that makes you want to experience it with other people," says Murabana, who launched Star Safaris in 2021. But this is not the only way she is sharing her passion and knowledge.

The proceeds from the £136 two-night trips, as well as monthly overnight excursions to the outskirts of Nairobi, fund the Travelling Telescope, a social enterprise set up by Murabana in 2014 that aims to educate remote communities and inspire a love of science and astronomy among young people, particularly girls. [...]

"The challenge is that most children, especially in Kenya, have not had a chance to look through a telescope or visit a planetarium, and we are trying to change that. We hope these experiences can widen their views about the world and the opportunities beyond Kenya," says Murabana who also runs kids' space camps in Nairobi.

She estimates that she has shown the wonders of the night sky to 400,000 people since the launch of the Travelling Telescope. They primarily target schools in remote areas because of the quality of the night sky and because of her mission to give children an opportunity that she wishes had been available to her.

"When I started this work, I didn't see people who looked like me. I was a lone ranger and I wanted to change that," says Murabana.

"There is a common misconception in Kenya that astronomy – and science in general – is hard, boring, for the west, and only for boys," she adds. "I'd like to teach young girls that science is none of these things and that they, too, can become astronomers like me."

Adapted from *The Guardian* September 2023 (441 words)

LANDMARK PIG KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS IN MONKEYS RAISE HOPES FOR HUMAN SURGERIES

Humans are one step closer to getting gene-edited pig kidneys after monkeys given the organs survived for more than two years with no health issues. [...]

Researchers at Harvard University, in partnership with biotech company eGenesis, bred Yucatan miniature pigs with 69 genetic modifications to prevent organs being rejected when transplanted into monkeys. Three of the changes, made with the "genetic scissors" tool Crispr, are the removal of pig-like markers on kidneys and seven are the insertion of seven human-like genes.

Yucatan miniature pigs were chosen because their organs are the most similar to human organs in size and all the animals had type O blood to further reduce rejection risk. [...]

The average length of survival was 176 days, far better than the four-week alternative for organs that have only the pig genes deleted and none of the human genes added. One monkey survived for more than two years with the xenotransplantation. [...]

The work builds on experiments where some dying or braindead people have been given gene-edited pig organs. Earlier this year it was reported that two braindead people had received gene-edited pig organs and were alive for up to a month afterwards with good functionality and no rejection. [...]

"This is a major step forward for the field of transplantation," said Dr Kawai, professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School. "We anticipate that transplant outcomes in humans will be even more favourable, as these gene-edited organs are a better match for humans."

A professor who works on stem cell sciences at King's College London, said the work "showcased science at its best". "This groundbreaking achievement was made possible solely through the implementation of state-of-the-art genome editing technology. However, it is important to note that while this represents a remarkable step forward, there is still a long way to go before this strategy could be used in clinical trials."

Doctor Curtis, study author from eGenesis, told reporters: "This landmark study marks a significant step forward in transplantation and medicine more broadly. It provides hope and paves the way to better outcomes for countless individuals in need of life-saving organ transplants. Xenotransplantation offers the most sustainable, scalable and feasible approach for delivering new sources of organs to patients. [...] The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) wanted to see monkeys survive at least 12 months before considering giving approval for human studies. So we will continue to work with the agency to enable the study in the near term. Our intention here is to work with the agency over the next few months to set the path to the first human trial. We think that this data is critical in establishing that foundation to launch that trial."

Adapted from *The Telegraph*October 2023
(453 words)

'LIKE A DREAM': SUCCESSFUL RETURN OF NASA CAPSULE WITH ASTEROID SAMPLE HAILED

Sitting isolated in the arid landscape of the Utah desert, its orange and white parachute cast aside, the Osiris-Rex capsule was a picture of stillness. Yet all around, scientists were swinging into action, rushing to recover its precious cargo: 4.6bn-year-old chunks of space rock. Racing towards the scene were four helicopters bearing scientists, engineers and military safety personnel. Their mission: to recover the capsule as quickly as possible to prevent samples of asteroid Bennu from becoming contaminated by planet Earth.

The successful return of the largest asteroid sample ever to be recovered marks the culmination of a seven-year journey in which a robotic spacecraft the size of a transit van was sent to scout out the asteroid Bennu, scoop up samples of its pebbles and dust, and then return them to Earth.

"What an incredible day this has been," Nasa planetary science division director Lori Glaze said at a news briefing later on Sunday. "These types of samples – they are truly the gifts that keep on giving. They are a treasure ... for scientific analysis for years and years to come, to our kids and our grandkids and people who haven't even been born yet."

Meanwhile, about 20 minutes after the capsule's release, the Osiris-Rex spacecraft itself set off on a new mission, blasting off to explore another asteroid, Apophis.

Prof Neil Bowles of the University of Oxford, who is among the scientists who will be studying the space rocks, said he was relieved to see the sample return capsule on the ground. "[I'm] really excited for the next steps, getting the sample capsule safe in the clean room at Johnson Space Center and then seeing what is inside. So much new science to come!" he said.

With the rocks that comprise asteroid Bennu thought to be about 4.6bn years old, the samples contain some of the oldest materials formed in our solar system. What's more, they are known to be rich in carbon-based substances and water-containing minerals.

As such, scientists hope the samples will help them understand the ingredients that went into making planets including our own, and how those materials came together to create environments suitable for life.

Crucial to this goal was making sure that the space rocks did not become contaminated by the terrestrial environment.

Osiris-Rex principal investigator Dante Lauretta, who was part of the recovery team, added: "It was pulse-pounding. I couldn't be more proud... Not only did we bring this mission in on schedule, under budget and delivered more science than we had ever thought was possible with the encounter with Bennu, but we think we've got a lot of sample in that canister."

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(453 words)

LIKE IT OR NOT: KIDS HEAR THE NEWS. HERE'S HOW TEACHERS HELP THEM UNDERSTAND IT

Each morning, Stephanie Nichols gathers her second graders around a table to eat breakfast and start their day.

As the kids unpack their knapsacks and settle into the classroom, Nichols likes to listen more than she speaks. Breakfast table conversation can be about anything – from video games to the New England Patriots.

But in recent weeks the table was buzzing about one thing: the mass shooting in Lewiston that left 18 people dead and 13 wounded. The event resulted in a multi-day that closed schools and left the community on lockdown.

Nichols teaches at Narragansett Elementary School in Gorham, Maine, about 40 minutes from Lewiston. "Even that far away, you know, we all have connections," she says. "It's Maine. It really is like the biggest small town." Nichols knew her students needed to talk about it: "I think people sometimes really underestimate kids of this age level," she says. "My kids had all these things they heard on the news."

With tragedies dominating the news cycle for the past few weeks, teachers are looking for ways to help their students make sense of the world around them. Even the youngest children are absorbing headlines and current events. Teachers say they need to give them tools to help them process – and filter — information. One key element of that approach is media literacy.

Even if children aren't seeking out the news, Nichols says, they're still exposed to it. And they have lots of questions. One student in her class asked a big one: Why? Why did the shooter do this?

She says the best course of action is to be honest with her students, telling them: "We know a lot, but we don't always have the answers for everything. And that might be something that we never have an answer for." Nichols says this isn't the first time she and her students have had tough conversations about the news.

Sometimes, even their distractions – like YouTube videos or gamers on Twitch – can expose them to the headlines. And she wants them to understand that not everything they see on the Internet can be trusted.

"It's important that we know who's putting out things like an advertisement." she says. "Because, you know, we don't necessarily know if that's a fact or opinion."

For older students – middle and high schoolers – the media literacy discussion is more nuanced. A high school history and government teacher in Richmond, Virginia, tries to bring the topic into all his classes. He uses MediaWise, an online course, to give his students a crash course. He starts with the program's quiz for students, asking things like, "Do you know what a deepfake is?"

Adapted from *NPR* November 2023 (457 words)

LONDON MAYOR REJECTS PLAN FOR STRATFORD SPHERE MUSIC ARENA

It might be good enough for Las Vegas, but the Sphere – a dazzling globe-shaped 90 meter-high music venue that doubles as a giant digital billboard – is unlikely to be coming to London after Sadyq Khan, the Mayor of London, rejected the project. [...] The Sphere, a 20,000-capacity structure which had been planned for a site in Stratford, East London, would have been vividly illuminated at night.

Since it opened in September with an immersive concert by Irish rock band U2, the Sphere in Las Vegas has become a building of global fascination as its exterior has been programmed to make it look variously like a motor racing helmet for last weekend's Las Vegas F1 Grand Prix race, a giant eyeball, an emoji and a basketball, when the NBA came to town.

[...] Khan's refusal on Monday represented a change of attitude since the project was first announced in 2018, when the mayor said: "It's great to welcome another world-class venue to the capital, to confirm London's position as a music powerhouse and to boost still further our city's thriving night-time economy." The planned Sphere [...] was also backed by the then culture secretary, Matt Hancock, who had said it would cement the UK's reputation "for leading the world in music and the creative industries."

But in a detailed report, City Hall said the intensity of the external illumination would "cause significant light intrusion resulting in significant harm to the outlook of neighboring properties, detriment to human health, and significant harm to the general amenity enjoyed by residents of their own homes." It would also be "a bulky, unduly dominant and incongruous form bombarding the residents of Stratford with endless advertising, and an environmentally unsustainable music stage given the amount of energy required to power its lighting rigs. It would harm the setting of nearby listed buildings and conservation areas." A spokesperson for the mayor added that London was open to investment from around the world and that they wanted to see more world-class, ambitious, innovative entertainment venues in the city.

Nate Higgins, a local councilor who campaigned against the Sphere, said he was "absolutely delighted" with the refusal in London, which he said meant "residents will not have to put up with blackout blinds, and Stratford station will not be overwhelmed."

The Sphere's promoters responded saying they were "disappointed in London's decision" as they did not feel there was huge public opposition. They added: "There are many forward-thinking cities that are eager to bring this technology to their communities. We will concentrate on those." It is planning further Spheres in Hanan in South Korea and in several other cities which have not yet been publicly named.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(455 words)

MAJOR UK RETAILERS URGED TO QUIT 'AUTHORITARIAN' POLICE FACIAL RECOGNITION STRATEGY

Some of Britain's biggest retailers, including Tesco, and Sainsbury's, have been urged to pull out of a new policing strategy amid warnings it risks wrongly criminalizing people of colour, women and LGBTQ+ people.

A coalition of 14 human rights groups has written to the main retailers (...) saying that their participation in a new government-backed scheme that relies heavily on facial recognition technology to combat shoplifting will "amplify existing inequalities in the criminal justice system". The letter, from Liberty, Amnesty International and Big Brother Watch, among others, questions the unchecked rollout of a technology that has provoked fierce criticism over its impact on privacy and human rights at a time when the European Union is seeking to ban the technology in public spaces through proposed legislation.

"Facial recognition technology notoriously misidentifies people of colour, women and LGBTQ+ people, meaning that already marginalised groups are more likely to be subject to an invasive stop by police, or at increased risk of physical surveillance, monitoring and harassment by workers in your stores," the letter states. Its authors also express dismay that the move will "reverse steps" that big retailers introduced during the Black Lives Matter movement, including high-profile commitments to be champions of diversity, equality and inclusion.

(...) Critics say using biometric surveillance could impinge on a person's "freedom of expression" and deter people from protesting. Madeleine Stone, senior advocacy officer at Big Brother Watch, said: "Live facial recognition is a dystopian mass surveillance tool that turns streets into police lineups. Deploying this biometric surveillance to track protesters is an authoritarian step that aligns the UK with the likes of Russia and China."

The police's new strategy to crack down on shoplifting called Project Pegasus (...) involves retailers stumping up almost £800,000 over two years to fund a partnership with police. Under the (...) initiative, shoplifting will be targeted like organised crime with a specialist police team to gather intelligence on gangs responsible for widespread retail crime.

However, the coalition of campaign groups (...) urged the government to halt Pegasus and focus instead on tackling the root causes of shoplifting, namely poverty and the cost of living crisis. (...) Despite the increasing adoption of the technology, campaigners point out there is no legal basis for police to use it (...) On Monday, the police minister, Chris Philp, chaired a meeting with senior police leaders and big UK retailers to outline his backing of facial recognition technology to tackle retail crime. According to official figures, an average of more than 1,000 shoplifting offences a day were recorded by police in England and Wales in the year to June - a 25% increase compared with the previous 12 months.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(457 words)

MAUI TOURISM, AN ECONOMIC MAINSTAY, SPARKS ANGER AMID FIRE RUIN

The incongruous sight of tourists enjoying Maui's tropical beaches while search-and-rescue teams trawl building ruins and waters for victims of the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century has outraged some residents. They have vented on social media, posting videos of tourists enjoying holiday activities like snorkeling while the death toll in the historic resort town of Lahaina passes 100 and is rising every day. "Our community needs time to heal, grieve, and restore," Hawaiian actor Jason Momoa said on Instagram, urging tourists to cancel their trips. Authorities and businesses have welcomed the trickle of travelers, saying it will lessen the blow to the island's economy, which relies heavily on tourism. The industry is Maui's "economic engine," generating 80% of its wealth, according to the island's economic development board. As Maui embarks on a long, painful recovery from the fires, officials are wrestling with how to balance residents' immediate needs for housing and resources against the island's long-term financial health.

Hawaii Governor Josh Green recalled at a weekend press conference how the COVID-19 pandemic similarly forced the state to weigh the risks of allowing tourists in during a public health crisis against the harm Hawaii's economy would suffer from barring them. "All of our people will need to survive, and we can't afford to have no jobs or no future for our children," Green said. "When you restrict any travel to a region, you really devastate its own local residents in many ways more than anyone else." The state tourism department reported in February that visitors spent \$5.69 billion on Maui in 2022. The Hawaii Tourism Authority now is asking visitors to avoid all non-essential travel to West Maui, the part of the island affected by the fires, so resources can be used to help locals recover. "It is likely that a big chunk of the people who are affected, losing family members, losing family homes, it's likely a lot of them were employed by the visitor industry," a tourism authority spokesperson said.

Hotels in West Maui have temporarily stopped accepting bookings. Many are housing their employees and preparing to house evacuees and first-responders working on disaster recovery, according to the tourism authority. The agency urged visitors to areas of Maui that did not burn to contact their accommodation and ensure they could still be hosted. "Maui is not closed," said the island's governor. "Many of our residents make their living off of tourism." Reached by phone on Tuesday, the Four Seasons Resort at Wailea Beach in South Maui said all hotel operations were running normally, but that it was encouraging tourists with August reservations to postpone their trips until the rest of the island had recovered more fully.

Adapted from *Reuters*August 2023
(450 words)

META ALLOWS ADS SAYING 2020 ELECTION WAS RIGGED ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

Meta is now allowing Facebook and Instagram to run political advertising saying the 2020 election was rigged. The policy was reportedly introduced quietly in 2022 after the US midterm primary elections, according to the Wall Street Journal, citing people familiar with the decision. The previous policy prevented Republican candidates from running ads arguing during that campaign that the 2020 election, which Donald Trump lost to Joe Biden, was stolen.

Meta will now allow political advertisers to say past elections were "rigged" or "stolen", although it still prevents them from questioning whether ongoing or future elections are legitimate.

Other social media platforms have been making changes to their policies ahead of the 2024 presidential election, for which online messaging is expected to be fiercely contested.

In August, X (formerly known as Twitter) said it would reverse its ban on political ads, originally instituted in 2019. Earlier, in June, YouTube said it would stop removing content falsely claiming the 2020 election, or other past US presidential elections, were fraudulent, reversing the stance it took after the 2020 election. It said the move aimed to safeguard the ability to "openly debate political ideas, even those that are controversial or based on disproven assumptions".

Meta, too, reportedly weighed free-speech considerations in making its decision. The Journal reported that the company took the position that it should not decide whether elections were legitimate. [...]

The Tech Oversight Project decried the change in a statement: "We now know that Mark Zuckerberg and Meta will lie to Congress, endanger the American people, and continually threaten the future of our democracy," said Kyle Morse, deputy executive director. "This announcement is a horrible preview of what we can expect in 2024."

"Today you can create hundreds of pieces of content in the snap of a finger and you can flood the zone," Gina Pak, chief executive of Tech for Campaigns, a digital marketing political organization that works with Democrats, told the Journal.

Over the past year Meta has laid off about 21,000 employees, many of whom worked on election policy.

Facebook was accused of having a malign influence on the 2016 US presidential election by failing to tackle the spread of misinformation in the run-up to the vote, in which Trump beat Hillary Clinton. Fake news, such as articles slandering Clinton as a murderer or saying the pope endorsed Trump, spread on the network as non-journalists – including teenagers living in Macedonia – published false pro-Trump sites in order to reap advertising dollars when the stories went viral.

Trump later appropriated the term "fake news" to slander legitimate reporting of his own falsehoods.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(454 words)

MICROSOFT'S NEW AI ASSISTANT CAN GO TO MEETINGS FOR YOU

Microsoft 365 Copilot, a ChatGPT-style AI assistant, can summarise meetings for anyone who chooses not to attend. It can also draft emails, create word documents, spreadsheet graphs, and Power-point presentations in moments. [...]

Even though both Europe's AI act and China's AI regulations state that people must know if they are interacting with artificial intelligence rather than humans, the head of Microsoft 365 Copilot Project, said it was up to the individual using Copilot to clarify that since, she added, the data is managed securely and Copilot will respect data policies. However, the EU states that it is up to the firms which develop AI tools to ensure they are used responsibly. [...]

My first impression of Copilot is that it will be a useful tool, but also a formidably competitive colleague for those who do office work. I could see it confidently summarise a long chain of emails regarding a fictional product launch in a few seconds. It then suggested a brief response. We could use an available menu to make it longer and more casual, and the Chatbot finally generated a warm reply, expressing admiration for the ideas proposed and declaring excitement at being involved in the project - although none of us had actually read any of it. We could then choose to send the email and there was no hint within this email that it contained anything from Copilot.

I then saw the tool generate a Power-point presentation in around 43 seconds, based on the contents of a Word document. It can use images embedded within the document, or it can search its own royalty-free collection. It created a simple but effective presentation and it also wrote a suggested narrative to read out alongside it. [...]

Finally, we looked at a Microsoft Teams meeting. Copilot identified themes and offered summaries of the various threads which had run through the discussion. It could also summarise what one particular person had said if required, and in the event of a disagreement, it was able to offer, in a chart format, the pros and cons which had been debated... and all of this took a few seconds. [...]

Critics say this kind of technique is likely to lead to a huge disruption in admin-based jobs. Will anyone actually bother attending meetings, once they realise that Copilot can save them the time and effort?

Another important problem was raised by a professor at Oxford University's Institute for Ethics in AI, who said she was concerned about people becoming overly dependent on such tools. Indeed, what happens if the technique fails, or if it is hacked?

Adapted from **BBC News** October 2023 (449 words)

MONACO YACHT BUYERS SHRUG OFF CLIMATE CONCERNS

The largest of the yachts in Monaco's harbour were worth more than the annual GDP of some small island states. But few of the customers touring their decks seemed to care that buying the former would help drown the latter. "I don't think about this yet," said Elena Papernaya, an artist who had set her eyes on a mid-sized yacht, when asked if she worried about the damage it would do to the climate. [...]

The Monaco yacht show is one of the greatest concentrations of wealth in the world. The event, which calls itself "the ultimate gathering of maritime luxury", takes place in a tax haven where two in three residents are millionaires. When the Guardian visited in late September, the port was filled with more than 100 superyachts, some of which boasted submersibles and swimming pools. Visitors could book airport transfers in private jets and helicopters.

The true cost of such luxury is paid for, in part, by the rest of society. The top 10% of earners in the EU emit 24.5 times as much planet-heating CO_2 through their transport as the bottom 10% do, according to new data from the International Energy Agency. At the extreme end of the spectrum, the carbon footprints of the ultra-rich are inflated by giant yachts, private jets and sports cars with engines that burn barrels of oil.

"There is no other way," said Christian Largura, an Instagram star and founder of a luxury retail site who was about to buy a superyacht that runs on diesel. "For sure, if it's possible, you take the green one ... [but] if you want a big one, there is nothing fully electric."

Billionaires' consumption emissions run to thousands of tonnes a year, with transport, including private jets and yachts, by far the biggest contributor, according to Oxfam's new report on carbon inequality. And transport, especially car use, is a major factor in the disproportionately high emissions of the richest 10% too, with these emissions 20-40 times higher than among the poorest 10% in major nations and blocs including the EU, according to the IEA.

A superyacht, or even a medium-sized motor yacht, is the most polluting single object a person can own. There are no reliable estimates of how much carbon the world's 6,000 superyachts pump into the atmosphere but one study of billionaires' footprints found yachts were the single biggest contributor, ahead of private jets.

"Even a mansion on a private island has less impact because it is at least stuck in one place," said Richard Wilk, of the Open Anthropology Institute, who co-wrote the study.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(453 words)

MOVIE MARATHONS

[...]

Want to know what is coming soon to a cinema near you? Probably not an hour-and-a-half-long movie, as in the old days. This year audiences have endured the longest instalments yet in the "Indiana Jones", "John Wick" and "Mission Impossible" franchises. "Oppenheimer", Christopher Nolan's three-hour blockbuster, required 11 miles [...] of film stock for IMAX showings.

On October 20th comes "Killers of the Flower Moon", a grisly western from the director Martin Scorsese. At nearly three and a half hours, its length is nearly double that of the average film last year. Even movie fans struggle to concentrate for that long. During the premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May, some viewers dozed off. Afterwards there was a mad dash (and long queue) for the toilets. [...]

The Economist analysed over 100,000 feature films released internationally since the 1930s, the start of Hollywood's golden age, using data from IMDb, a movie database. The average length of productions has crept up by around 24%, from one hour and 21 minutes in the 1930s to one hour and 47 minutes in 2022. [...]. Blockbusters are the worst offenders. For the ten most-popular titles (measured by how many reviewers rated the films on IMDb) average lengths stretched to around two and a half hours in 2022, nearly 50% higher than in the 1930s.

Film-makers began churning out protracted pictures in the early 1960s. Cinema was booming and auteurs wanted to distinguish their art from television. Epics graced the silver screen, including "Lawrence of Arabia" [...], which surpassed the three-and-a-half-hour mark, and "Cleopatra" [...], which originally exceeded four hours but was later cut down. Back then, audiences enjoyed an intermission while the projectionist prepared the reels for the next act.

[...] Franchises are one driver of this trend. Studios want to squeeze the most out of their costly intellectual property, but they are competing with streaming platforms for eyeballs. They hope that a spectacular, drawn-out "events" movie will tempt audiences away from the small screen and into cinemas. This approach has often paid off: "Avengers: Endgame", Marvel's three-hour superhero spree, was the highest-grossing film in 2019. Last year long franchise movies made up most of the highest-grossing films in America.

Anything that lures people off their couches to see a film in theatres is good news for cinemas. But protracted runtimes also pose a "fundamental problem", complains Clare Binns, managing director of Picturehouse, a British cinema group and film distributor. Long movies can mean forgoing two showings per night, which hurts ticket sales and profits. [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2023
(450 words)

MUSEUM VOWS BETTER STEWARDSHIP OF HUMAN BONES

New York's American Museum of Natural History says it plans to improve its handling of thousands of human remains [...] kept in its collections. A recent investigation found that the New York institution has not been proactive in sharing information about its collection, which includes the bones of Native Americans and enslaved Black people.

The museum says it will remove all bones and objects made from bone over the next weeks and then put them into storage while the museum holds conversations with affected communities. The museum is also changing its collections policy, which it has posted on its website. Sean Decatur, who is the museum's first African American president said: [...] "We can't become an inclusive and just institution until we are very clear about coming to terms with our past."

For decades, museums used human remains for scientific research. Erin Thompson, professor at John Jay College in New York, said that this research is rooted in racism. "They were looking for physical proof of the superiority of white people and they didn't find it, but they just kept looking," she said.

Museums have been historically unethical in how and why they collected human remains. Researchers dug up sacred burial sites, for example, and accepted skeletons from private collections without requesting permission from family members. Penn Museum now apologizes for 'unethical possession of human remains'. [...]

Thompson spent months investigating the American Museum of Natural History after receiving an anonymous tip from a staff member. What surprised her the most was the museum's lack of publicly-available information. [...] "Where did these remains come from? How did they get them?", she asks. [...]

Decatur, president of the museum, acknowledged the troubled history of the bones and items made from human bone, some of which were displayed for the public and others which were kept in storage for research purposes. "Human remains collections were made possible by extreme imbalances of power," he wrote. He referred to some research as "deeply flawed scientific agendas rooted in white supremacy."

Decatur said that the museum is making "concrete changes" using "a new ethical framework." The museum will remove all public displays of human remains and "make sure that we have the staffing and support in place to have a full accounting for our holdings". [...]

Other museums, including the Smithsonian Institution [...] have also vowed to be more transparent.

"This is long term work for us," Decatur told NPR. "The history here is long and deep and painful and is going to take some very careful, intentional work over time to appropriately repair and heal. And that's the work that's ahead of us." [...]

Adapted from *NPR*October 2023
(441 words)

NEPAL IS BANNING TIKTOK OVER HATE CONTENT

The small Himalayan nation's cabinet of ministers said the Chinese-owned app had neglected its repeated requests to restrict content that affected "social harmony."

The government in Nepal said on Monday that it was banning the popular social media app TikTok, saying the platform's refusal to curb hate content was affecting "social harmony."

TikTok has more than a billion users globally, so the ban by a Himalayan country with a population of about 30 million is unlikely to significantly affect the app, but it is another ominous sign for the Chinese-owned company of broader efforts by governments around the world to restrict its use.

TikTok was among dozens of Chinese apps India banned in 2020, following a military standoff between the two countries in the Himalayas that remains unresolved. The app has also been subjected to increased scrutiny and restrictions in the United States, Europe and Canada over concerns that sensitive data for users is being shared with the Chinese government.

Nepal finds itself pulled between its two giant neighbors, but the concern has been less about Chinese misuse and more about domestic harmony. Officials cited the prevalence of content that they said was stoking religious hate, violence and sexual abuse and has led to clashes offline, forcing curfews and the deployment of the police. [...]

"Our social harmony, family structure and family relations are being disturbed by social media, by TikTok," said Rekha Sharma, Nepal's Minister for Communications and Information Technology, after approval of the ban by the cabinet of ministers. "The decision to ban TikTok will be effective immediately," Ms. Sharma said, but telecommunications companies must still put the ban into effect, and it was not clear when users would no longer have access. TikTok representatives did not respond to requests for comment.

Nepali officials said they resorted to the ban after TikTok declined to address concerns about troubling content, even after the government reached out on repeated occasions. It last raised the issue with TikTok representatives nine days ago, to no avail, said Narendra K.C., an adviser to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. He said Narayan Kaji Shrestha, the country's Home Minister, told the cabinet on Monday that removing individual videos would be technologically difficult for the Nepali authorities, leading him to propose a ban on the app itself.

TikTok's popularity has particularly jumped in Nepal since the pandemic, reaching about 2.2 million active users. The app is used by some users to vent anger at the government and politicians, and some journalists and activists expressed worries that the government was trying to curb free speech under the guise of protecting social harmony. [...]

Adapted from *nytimes.com* November 2023 (446 words)

NEW HOME HEATING RULES THREATEN UK CLIMATE GOALS

The UK will find it harder to meet its climate targets after the Prime Minister's policy changes last month, the government's advisers have warned. PM Rishi Sunak said his review of green pledges was about the "long-term interests of our country". But the Climate Change Committee (CCC) says the PM's "loosening" of key climate policies has countered recent progress in other areas. [...]

This assessment of the UK's progress towards its climate goals follows a series of policy changes announced by the Prime Minister at the end of September. These included pushing back the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035 and changing the rules on the phase out of gas and oil-fired boilers. The CCC said the biggest impact would come from a promise by Mr Sunak that one in five homes would never be required to switch from a fossil fuel boiler. It means that many more UK homes could still be producing carbon dioxide emissions from their heating systems by 2050 – the deadline for the legally-binding commitment for the UK to reach net zero.

Mr Sunak said he is "absolutely unequivocal" about sticking to the 2050 net zero target, but the committee warned the new exemptions will make that "considerably harder to achieve". It said the changes would also create uncertainty for consumers. The government did increase the grant on offer to homes for installing heat pumps from £5,000 to £7,500. It says this will encourage people to make the switch away from fossil fuel boilers, meaning more people could benefit. [...]

Mr Sunak said his changes to climate policy were about taking a "more pragmatic, proportionate and realistic approach". [...] But today's assessment from the CCC found some of the Prime Minister's changes "likely to increase both energy bills and motoring costs for households". It says that electric vehicles will be significantly cheaper to own and operate over their lifetimes so delaying their rollout will ultimately increase costs for consumers. Meanwhile, Mr Sunak's decision not to force landlords to improve the energy efficiency of accommodation would increase costs for people in rented homes. [...]

The committee praised progress in some areas. [...] However, it criticised the government for not being open enough with information about the impact of the policy announcements. "Recent policy announcements were not accompanied by estimates of their effect on future emissions, nor evidence to back the Government's assurance that the UK's targets will still be met," said Professor Piers Forster, chair of the CCC. "We remain concerned about the likelihood of achieving the UK's future targets," he added.

Adapted from **BBC News** October 2023 (454 words)

NEW YORK CITY DISCOVERS A REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY: THE BIN

Ah New York, how it sparkles—from afar. Street level is a different experience. Smelly rubbish mounds create trash-fjords on city pavements, with buildings on one side and piles of black bin-bags on the other. New Yorkers know to lift their feet to avoid the garbage juice that leaks from the bags. Rats feed on the bags, startling even the hardiest citizens. For decades New York endured this, nay accepted it, but no more. A massive "containerisation programme" is under way. The piles of black bin-bags are being replaced by a technology new to the city: secure bins.

On October 11th Eric Adams, New York City's mayor, and Jessica Tisch, his sanitation commissioner, announced that from autumn of 2024 buildings with nine or fewer residential units will be required to place all trash in secure containers. That will cover 765,000 buildings, or 95% of the city's residential properties. [...]

Containerisation is the norm for cities like Barcelona, Milan and Paris. Cities in South Korea and the Netherlands use submerged ones, something out of reach for New York, where the realm below the pavement is a crowded maze of sewage pipes, gas pipes, power cables, fibre optics and the subway. "We are playing a massive game of catch-up with the rest of the world," says Ms Tisch. [...]

Containerisation seems revolutionary. But it is also a return to old ways. [...]. The use of metal containers faded after a 1968 strike saw piles of rubbish uncollected for nine days. The stench and mess became so bad the city distributed plastic bags for the overflow. They soon became a formal part of rubbish collection. The bags also helped the growth of the rat population. Mr Adams, a former police captain who promised to fight both crime and rats, declared rats "Public Enemy No 1".

This is more than just rhetoric. The Sanitation Department draws inspiration from the Police Department. Three decades ago city crime began to fall when policing changed from responsive to preventive tactics and enforcement, relying on crime statistics to spot problem areas. Ms Tisch, who worked in the Police Department for 12 years, launched TrashDash in May. Every week sanitation leaders meet to create strategies to deal with upticks they see in rubbish data from 311 calls (a sort of municipal customer service). [...] "We absolutely and emphatically reject the status quo," says Ms Tisch. She has overhauled operations so that trash in high-density areas is collected earlier. The rats appear to be in retreat (though they could be regrouping). This summer brought a 20% decrease citywide in rat complaints to 311. [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2023
(454 words)

NEW YORK CITY IS RESTRICTING AIRBNB

"It's my house," says a host on Airbnb, a rental platform. "I've worked really hard to buy it. So the thought that someone else can tell me what I can do with my house is a little crazy." But a law which went into effect on September 5th caused this host's Brooklyn listing, and thousands more, to disappear from Airbnb and other short-term rental platforms.

It took a long time for New York City to get its hands around Airbnb. Years after many cities (including Boston, Paris, San Francisco and Sydney) began implementing laws limiting rental days and slapping fines on violators, the Big Apple is following suit. A new municipal law requires hosts of short-term rentals of less than 30 days to register with New York City.

The city also requires that hosts be present during the stay and guests must have full access to the entire home. A short-term-rental host calls the new law a "roommate set-up", where neither the guest nor the host has privacy. "There's no way I'm letting somebody into my home," she says. "I walk around in my underwear."

Hosts say the rules are stringent (Paris's regulations stretch to 120-day rentals) and the registration process onerous. According to Skift, a travel news site, only 3,800 (roughly 16% of previously active listings) have applied as of September 4th and only 290 have been approved. Some are worried they will lose their homes without the added income from short-term renters.

Airbnb, which filed an unsuccessful legal challenge, calls the law a "de facto ban". It says New York City's new rules are an outlier and a contrast with the approach in places like San Diego and Seattle. Airbnb has weathered restrictions before. New regulations removed 10,000 listings from Amsterdam in 2021. [...] Around 80% of its top 200 markets by revenues globally have some sort of regulation in place, the firm says.

The law's proponents say it will stamp out illegal rentals, which contribute to the city's shortage of affordable housing. Some argue that short-term lets are "potentially displacing the people that used to live there. Sometimes people were evicted." Others argue that they make neighbourhoods worse. Vijay Dandapani, of the Hotel Association of New York City (which has an interest in squishing Airbnb), said "I live in a condo. I can tell you I don't want people coming in at 1am."

Yet Airbnb may not be the neighbourhood killer some claim. Culling Airbnb has not stopped rent increases in the cities that have done it so far. [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*September 2023
(442 words)

NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE ARE BIASED AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS 'ALARMING' UN REPORT

Bias against women is as entrenched as it was a decade ago and gender equality progress has gone into reverse, according to a UN report.

Nine out of 10 people of all genders have a bias against women, found the Gender Social Norms Index, a figure unchanged from data collected more than a decade ago.

Published by the UN development programme on Monday, it found that half of people in 80 countries believe men make better political leaders, 40% believe men are better business executives and a quarter believe it is justified for men to beat their wives. [...]

"My expectation was that we would see some progress, because nine out of every 10, I mean, how can it get any worse?" said Pedro Conceição, head of UNDP's human development report office. "And it was also a period in which we saw, for example, the #MeToo movement and a lot of visibility to the very shocking ways in which these bias norms affect women".

"Unfortunately, doing this exercise has been an experience of shock after shock. The first time that we released it, I was shocked with the magnitude [of biases], and this time around I was shocked with the lack of progress."

The biases result in barriers for women in politics, business and work, as well as the stripping away of their rights and human rights violations, said the researchers. Despite women being more educated and skilled than ever before, there was a 39% salary gap with men, they added.

"This is truly alarming [...]," said Anam Parvez, head of research at Oxfam GB. "In 2021, one in five women were married before they turn 18, 1.7 billion women and girls live on less than \$5.50 a day, and women continue to take on three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men around the world. [...]

Heidi Stöckl, a professor specialising in gender-based violence at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, said "a conscious effort and a strong commitment from all levels of society" were needed to overcome entrenched bias. But there are signs of progress, she said, with a surge in education rates in places such as Bangladesh and higher representation of women in politics and in the economy.

"We have experienced a serious backlash and rollback of women's rights, most notably in Afghanistan but also in the western world with the election of Donald Trump or in South Korea, where an anti-feminist president was elected recently," said Stöckl. "What makes me hopeful is that, in the majority, the younger part of the population clearly resents this backlash and is striving for an equal society."

Adapted from *The Guardian*June 2023
(457 words)

NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS: A GOLDMINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER PAY GAP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women stirred up a "quiet revolution" in the labour market, according to Claudia Goldin, a Professor of Economics at Harvard University. She is the 2023 winner of the Nobel prize in economics for her analysis of gender differences in the labour market, particularly the persistent problem of the gender pay gap. (...)

Goldin studies, documents and illuminates the changes in female economic empowerment over time in labour markets, as well as the causes and challenges ahead for all of us who want to make the world a more equal place in which to live and work.

Despite some progress, gender inequality remains a global concern. It varies across countries of course, but women's participation in the labour market falls short of men's everywhere in the world.

And when women work, their wages fall short of men's. If you want to understand what's driving the dynamics of these gender gaps, Goldin's work is a goldmine.

The role of education, family and organisation of work are some of the themes explored in her research that explain the historical evolution of gender gaps in labour participation and wages.

Goldin coined the term "quiet revolution" to describe the dynamics of the gender gap in the labour market and the increase in labour force participation of married women in the US in the seventies. She showed that there are two key ingredients to this quiet revolution: investment in education, and postponement of age at first marriage. (...)

As the average age at which women married increased over this time, going to college became a critical investment for them. They could plan for an independent future and form their identities before marriage and family. (...)

Family also strongly influences female labour force participation, with childbirth typically setting mothers and fathers on different paths – children contribute to gender gaps. (...)

But the penalty hasn't vanished. Goldin and her coauthors' research also shows the motherhood penalty declines over a woman's lifetime, but the earnings gap between two heterosexual parents persists due to a fatherhood premium. (...)

Examining how workplaces are organised and how that influences the gender gap is another key insight of Goldin's work. According to her research, the gender pay gap would be considerably smaller if firms did not disproportionately reward individuals who work long and particular hours.

Industries such as technology have seen changes in how work is organised that have enhanced employee flexibility, but this is not yet as common in the financial and legal worlds, for example.

There is more work to do to promote gender equality and Goldin's will help with this. (...)

Adapted from *The Conversation*October 2023
(442 words)

ONLINE VITRIOL COULD UNDO DECADES OF POLITICAL PROGRESS, WARNS DUTCH DEPUTY PM

Six years after Sigrid Kaag was catapulted into the highest ranks of Dutch politics, police keep a constant watch over her home. Cameras sweep across the back of the property while every piece of mail sent to her is screened before she can open it.

"Most people would still have the tendency to say, 'Oh well, this is part and parcel of politics,'" said Kaag, the first deputy prime minister of the Netherlands. "I don't accept that."

Instead, she described it as a glimpse of how the steady flow of vitriol, amplified by social media and, in her case, the extreme right wing, is reshaping politics. Speaking to the Guardian, Kaag warned the shift threatened to roll back decades of progress when it comes to the political participation of women, minorities and people of colour.

"I think it's quite sick, frankly," said Kaag, a former UN diplomat. "The tone and the intimidation and the easy threats that are issued via social media against a broad range of people serving in the public domain. It's become so rampant that I really feel it's up to politicians to draw a line in the sand."

Earlier this year Kaag, 61, announced she had decided to step down rather than lead her party in the Netherlands' upcoming general elections. At the time she pointed to the toll that the years of "hate, intimidation and threats" had taken on her husband and children. "I just couldn't do this to them again," she said.

Her departure adds to the growing list of high-profile female politicians who have turned their backs on politics.

After resigning in February, Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's former first minister, signalled the deteriorating climate for female politicians, describing the current environment as "much harsher and more hostile" than any other time in her decades-long career.

"Social media provides a vehicle for the most awful abuse of women, misogyny, sexism and threats of violence for women who put their heads above the parapet," she told a BBC documentary.

It is a view echoed by Kaag. "It's not about me – forget me – it's about the impact it has on society," said Kaag. "It also impacts the quality of our democracy and it will hinder people of stature, people of calibre, women, people of colour to even be willing to join political life. So what does that mean for our democracy in the future?" [...]

Often women who speak out about the abuse find themselves fending off veiled criticism that they are trying to paint themselves as a victim, said Kaag. "Very often you get asked: what makes you think that people hate you so much?"

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(456 words)

PARADISE LOST: HOW OVERTOURISM IS CHANGING EUROPE'S HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS

Europe's beauty spots are buckling under mass tourism – so some popular destinations are fighting back. Venice has blocked cruise ships and Amsterdam has launched 'stay away' ads aimed at badly behaved Brits. But the trade-off between quality of life and much-needed revenue is a tricky one.

The pleasure boat is packed with tourists. As it glides across the calm waters, most take out their phones and cameras and aim them at the mountains towering over the lake and the colourful houses dotting its shores. With clouds wisping around the peaks and just a hint of sunlight bouncing off the water, the landscape looks magical.

The onlookers are on their way to Hallstatt in the region of central Austria. Over the last 15 years or so, the small town of 740 residents has become a top tourist destination, with 1.2 million visitors in 2019, according to official records. And numbers are expected to be back up to prepandemic levels this year.

Tourists are drawn by various claims to fame: the town was listed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1997[...] and there are rumours that it inspired the design of Arendelle, the mythical kingdom in Disney's Frozen.

Hallstatt's famous landscape has been reproduced many times on social media. Today, there are more than 836,000 posts on Instagram with the #Hallstatt tag, and on TikTok, videos about Hallstatt have nearly 7 million views. The town is so popular that, in 2012, a company in China spent hundreds of millions of euros replicating parts of Hallstad for a residential development in Guangdong.

In some ways, the tourism explosion has been a boon, bringing funding for social projects and supporting the growth of local businesses. At the same time, locals are frustrated by the amount of litter visitors leave behind; the increased traffic from cars and tourist buses; the drones tourists fly that invade residents' privacy; and the skyrocketing prices of goods and property. [...]

All over Europe, cities and towns like Hallstatt have begun to rebel against the painful effects of overtourism, including degradation of nature, overburdened infrastructure, litter, property destruction, and frustrated residents.

So far, overtourism has not entered the policymaking stage at the EU level. [...] Covid-19 stalled tourism, and only recently have EU Member States begun to bounce back. [...]

Just in time for this return to almost-normal, the European Tourism Agenda 2030, published last December, underscored the importance of sustainability in travel and called on Member States to share best practices and examples of comprehensive tourism strategies by 2025.

Adapted from *The Parliament*June 2023
(453 words)

'PEOPLE FEEL SCARED ABOUT WALKING': THE COST OF CAR CULTURE IN BIRMINGHAM

It was once proudly known as motor city, the UK's home of the kind of postwar construction labelled "carchitecture" for embracing the booming automobile market that fuelled the city's economy.

But now Birmingham is waging a battle against an ingrained car culture that is causing a nuisance on the streets and has left pedestrians fearing for their safety. [...]

Over the summer six cyclists and pedestrians were killed in Birmingham by drivers in separate incidents, including a police officer walking to work and a 12-year-old boy riding his bike near home. In many cases the car drivers fled the scene.

Earlier this month, two traffic wardens were physically attacked as they worked, while West Midlands police now have a dedicated team to clamp down on street racing on the city's roads at night.

Adam Tranter, the cycling and walking commissioner for [...] the mayor of the West Midlands, said: "People are racing in the streets of Birmingham in their hundreds and causing collisions. They're becoming so organised that they are arranging their own off-the-books recovery trucks because they know there are going to be crashes."

"You've also got people driving with nitrous oxide balloons in their mouths, and posting videos on social media. I think it stems from this mindset, that we see around the country, typically in young men, that this is a cool thing to do."

But Tranter said blame for dangerous driving could not just be placed on street racing. "Cars are getting bigger, more comfortable, more protected. The more we lose sight of the fact that cars are very effective weapons when used incorrectly, we lull ourselves into a false sense of security".

"We forget that driving is probably the most dangerous thing we will ever do and as a normal citizen, it is the most likely way that you will kill another citizen."

Last month, hundreds of people in 15 locations across England and Wales took to their streets to protest against dangerous driving, in a coalition movement that began life in Birmingham called Safe Streets Now. [...]

The problems the city is experiencing are not unique, but the city faces an uphill task to get people off the road in a place historically designed around the car.

"Looking back, the architects of the postwar vision for Birmingham had a really idealistic vision of boundless autonomous travel for all people through cars, thinking it would lead to a better connected, enriched, happier city. So they built the city for the car and, lo and behold, people started driving everywhere."

"But what that shows is if we build the infrastructure for people to cycle, to skate, to walk, people will do that."

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(459 words)

PEOPLE NEVER VISITED BY LOVED ONES MORE LIKELY TO DIE EARLIER, STUDY FINDS

Everyone should visit friends and family at least once a month to prevent loneliness and reduce the risk of dying earlier, according to new research.

Academics at the University of Glasgow have calculated that not seeing loved ones at least once a month and living alone significantly increases people's risk of dying.

Using data from the UK Biobank study, a long-term study tracking the health and genetics of adults across the UK, the authors looked at five different kinds of social connection [... and] found that each form of social isolation, such as living alone, often feeling lonely, or infrequent visits from friends or family, was linked to a higher risk of dying.

People who were never visited by friends or family were [...] more likely to die from cardiovascular disease and had [an ...] increased risk of death compared with those who were visited daily. Those who lived alone were [...] more likely to die from cardiovascular disease, while not being able to confide in someone or take part in activities also increased mortality risk.

Those experiencing more than one form of social isolation were at an even higher risk. People who lived alone and never saw friends or family had a [...] higher risk of dying from any cause and an even higher risk of dying from heart disease or stroke, compared with those living with someone who saw friends or family daily, the study calculated.

But even visiting just once a month could reduce this risk, the researchers concluded. [...] "The risk seems to be among people who are very isolated, and never ever see friends and family or see them less frequently than once a month," said the study's co-author Jason Gill [...].

The study did not examine why social isolation and loneliness increased mortality risk, but its lead author, [...] a clinical research fellow [...] at the University of Glasgow, said: "It could be that people who are more socially isolated may have some more unhealthy behaviours like smoking or high alcohol intake, for example." He also suggested that not having someone to help take them to the doctor or encouraging them to seek help when needed, as well as direct biological effects on the immune system, could be factors.

Responding to the findings, [... the] president-elect of the British Psychological Society [...] said: "By highlighting the damaging effects of both low levels of objective and subjective social connections, this study shows just how important it is that we understand the different dimensions and causes of loneliness and social isolation, so that it is recognised as a major public health issue and that effective interventions are developed at a society level." [...]

Adapted from *guardian.com*November 2023
(448 words)

PEPSI'S NEW HEALTHY DIET: MORE POTATO CHIPS AND SODA

After spending years trying to shift its business toward [...] yogurt, vegetable crisps and fruitand-nut bars, PepsiCo, the world's largest snackfood company, is back to pushing Pepsi, Doritos and Lay's.

The company's chief executive, Ramon Laguarta, says many people are going to continue eating potato chips no matter what [...]. So, it is working to make its snacks and drinks a little less bad for you. PepsiCo has been gradually lowering the amount of sodium, saturated fat and sugar in its products, and says it wants to bring them even lower—without consumers noticing.

The new approach is a tough sell to nutrition experts, who link the consumption of ultra-processed foods, salty snacks and sugary drinks to a range of health problems [...].

Mr. Laguarta points to the evolution of the company's [...] cola as evidence that his approach is making a difference. In the U.S., a can of full-sugar Pepsi still has 150 calories, or 9.4 teaspoons, of sugar. But in more than a dozen markets including China, France, South Africa and Mexico, it now has 100 calories, or 6 teaspoons [...].

Nutrition experts say PepsiCo's efforts to reduce sugar, sodium and saturated fat could improve public health in the short term, but add that there is a limit to how much salt you can take out of a potato chip before it no longer tastes good. They said long-term public-health gains won't materialize unless people shift away from ultra-processed foods [...].

The number of adults with diabetes tripled over two decades to 537 million, or 10.5% of the global population, in 2021, according to the International Diabetes Federation. Global obesity is on the rise as well, particularly among young people: About 9% of children aged 5 to 19 had obesity in 2020, up from less than 1% in 1975. That rate is expected to more than double to 19% by 2035, according to the World Obesity Federation.

Food companies that sell ultra-processed foods like chips and cookies "are creating products which in reality are killing us slowly," said [...] a nutrition professor at the University of North Carolina [...].

PepsiCo pointed out that the WHO has said the food industry can play a significant role in promoting healthy diets by reducing the fat, sugar and salt content of processed foods, among other measures.

In the 2000s, cities and countries around the world began focusing on policies to combat obesity and adopted new taxes on sugary drinks. At the same time, consumers were becoming more health-conscious and started shifting away from soda toward healthier options [...]. Many healthy product launches worked but others fizzled. The company found that while many consumers said they wanted to eat healthier, often what they really wanted was potato chips.

Adapted from *The Wall Street Journal*April 2023
(456 words)

PROPOSED SMOKING BAN WOULD IMPROVE UK PUBLIC HEALTH – BUT TOBACCO INDUSTRY OPPOSITION COULD BE A MAJOR ROADBLOCK

In his speech on Tuesday, King Charles outlined what measures the government plans to introduce to cut smoking rates and create a smoke-free generation in England.

Among the measures the government hopes to introduce as part of its new tobacco and vapes bill are plans to restrict sales of e-cigarettes so they're less accessible to children and young people, as well as exploring the possibility of a new duty on vapes.

But perhaps the most notable of these measures are plans to introduce a so-called "generational" smoking ban. Current legal smokers would be unaffected but, if the legislation came into force as planned, it would mean that from 2027 anyone aged 14 or under will never be able to legally buy a cigarette.

Prime minister Rishi Sunak claims that not only would eradicating smoking save 17 billion pounds per year, it would also reduce pressure on the NHS. Over roughly the last decade, 25 to 31% of all hospital admissions were from conditions directly caused by smoking – such as respiratory and circulatory diseases, and cancers. Smoking is also the leading cause of preventable death and illness in the UK. (...)

Whether such a ban actually comes to fruition is uncertain – and the tobacco industry will probably do as much as it can to ensure this policy never comes to pass.

(...) If this plan goes through, it would make England the second country in the world to introduce such a ban. (...) New Zealand was the first country to successfully implement a generational smoking ban in January 2023. (...)

It's still too early to know exactly what benefits this policy will have on public health. But computer modelling suggests that a well-enforced effort would halve smoking rates within 10 to 15 years after the ban is implemented. (...)

But for years the tobacco industry has opposed virtually every tobacco control policy that has been proposed – including smoke-free public places and standardised tobacco packaging. It should come as no surprise then that the industry could be a major roadblock in the government's plans to implement a smoking ban.

Research at the University of Bath has highlighted the techniques the tobacco industry uses to undermine such policies. One main strategy is spreading a false narrative about the effect tobacco control policies will have on society and the economy. This narrative is spread using a number of techniques – including producing skewed evidence, (...) and bringing forward litigation. (...)

The policy also stands to be most successful when not viewed in isolation. Other stop smoking measures will continue to have a role to play, given that many current smokers will not be affected by the legislation.

Adapted from *The Conversation*November 2023
(459 words)

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM OPIOID OVERDOSE IN THE U.S.

Inadvertent exposure to opioids is a real risk for children everywhere. Last year, a 10-monthold nearly died after ingesting fentanyl while playing at a park. In 2021 alone, there were 133 deaths from fentanyl among children under 5 years old. Moreover, in 20 years, over a third of all the 14,000 fatal pediatric opioid poisonings in the U.S. were caused by fentanyl overdose.

Let's put that last number in perspective: Over the past 25 years, America has had nearly twice as many children die from inadvertent exposure to fentanyl than all those who perished in the 9/11 attacks. But we are nowhere near resolving this issue; in fact, it only seems to be getting worse.

These are children who are simply playing or sleeping in the wrong place and somehow encounter these highly potent substances—often only trace amounts of it. And little is needed to prove lethal to a small child.

There are no simple answers. As long as there is an opioid epidemic in this country, there will be ample opportunities for children to inadvertently come into contact with these drugs. As a result of the recent decision by the FDA to approve Naloxone (commonly known as Narcan) as an overthe-counter nasal spray that rapidly counters the effects of opioid overdose for people of all ages, there is now an easily-accessible product that all commercial establishments, businesses, and public venues should have on hand. Just as they already have a variety of other emergency safety tools such as first aid kits and fire extinguishers, Naloxone nasal sprays should be available. Nowhere is this needed more urgently than in daycare facilities, schools and other places frequented by young children.

The recent global opioid settlement deal with the pharmaceutical industry that will pay out over \$50 billion to local governments to spend toward tackling the epidemic over the next 18 years should enable elected officials to not only mandate that businesses have Naloxone on site, but also offset some or all of the costs of doing so with their settlement dollars. The president and CEO of the National Safety Council, has been blunt in her assessment of what should come next: "Now that it is available over the counter, Naloxone should be in every workplace," she said.

State and local leaders will have access to a lot of opioid dollars over the coming years. It would be wise if they remembered the myriad other cases of innocent kids needlessly swept up in this epidemic when thinking about where to spend it.

Adapted from *Newsweek*October 2023
(441 words)

REAL MEN SHARE THE HOUSEWORK

And lo! As we all return to school it turns out that women in Britain are still doing more housework than men. The new British social attitudes survey has just been published, and it reveals that although a majority of Britons agree that adult couples sharing a home should do equal amounts of housework, two-thirds of them admitted that women ended up doing much more. Italian and Spanish women have it worse. But my adopted Nordic homeland is – apparently – winning, and there's much that Brits can learn from the way things are done here.

Since moving to Denmark in 2013, I've noticed a rhythm to Danish life that's more conducive to the equal division of labour. Both sexes work and get paid a decent wage. And from the age of 10 months, all children go to tax-subsidised, state-run daycare. Most daycare institutions and offices are open from 8am until 4pm, and this has defined the way Danes work. So even the CEO of a company is allowed to say in a meeting at 4pm, "I have to leave to pick up the kids and make dinner." And they go home to eat as a family.

Meals are something you have together in Denmark, and we could never, ever eat in front of the TV. Finns, Icelanders, Norwegians and Swedes also prioritise family mealtimes. In my old life in London, my husband and I would regularly be shovelling a takeaway with one hand while clutching the remote or a phone with the other. Dinnertime conversations would run along the lines: "Want food?" "No thanks, I ate earlier. At the fridge..." But in Denmark, "life around the table" is prized.

Most Danish men have a signature bake up their sleeves and the Danish equivalent of Jamie Oliver is Timm Vladimir, a tattooed Viking in a leather apron. Inspired by the notion that "real men cook", my husband now makes a mean cinnamon bun, and his apple-chip salmon was recently reviewed as "to die for". Most Danes also take huge pride in their homes, so don't mind doing a whiz around with a vacuum cleaner. The weekend living supplements have not been lying: Danes love a chic minimalist home, so no one puts up with clutter or cobwebs.

Researching Nordic childhoods for my new book, I've discovered that Vikings learn their way around a kitchen from an early age. My five-year-old twins learned to bake bread at kindergarten. Their big brother attends a weekly "food lab" at school where he has learned to rustle up messy yet edible scrambled eggs and porridge.

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(452 words)

REFUSING TO FLY HAS LOST ME MY JOB AS A CLIMATE RESEARCHER. IT'S A PRICE WORTH PAYING

Two weeks ago, my employer presented me with a stark ultimatum: return to my offices in Kiel, Germany, within five days, or lose my job. I am a climate researcher and since March 2023, I have been completing vital fieldwork into the social impact of climate change almost 24,000 kilometers away, on the island of Bougainville off the coast of Papua New Guinea. [...]

The urgency of their request to return meant I would have to jump on a plane if I was to meet the deadline; but for me, this was not an option. I have been practising conscientious objection to flying for more than 10 years. My employer has supported me on a "slow trip" in the past. I do not boycott flying altogether, but I will only catch a plane when no other alternative exists. [...]

Many people have asked why it is so important for me to travel as low-carbon as possible. I have three reasons. First, I want to be consistent with my moral commitment to avoid flying. Aviation is the biggest contributor to climate change of all forms of transport. [...] A trip by plane from Papua New Guinea to Germany produces, in 32 hours, 5.3 tonnes of CO2 per passenger. Slow travel produces approximately 12 times less. [...]

Second, I promised all the 1,800 participants in my research in Bougainville that I would return low-carbon. I want to keep my promise. [...]

Finally, and most importantly, I hope my case might put a little crack into the wall of "selfishness, greed, and apathy", which, in the words of a climate lawyer, is the main hindrance to stopping runaway climate change. [...]

I am not the type of person who likes telling others what to do. But I would like to invite people to shift the boundaries of what is considered normal within their own sphere of action. According to Oxfam, the richest 10% in the world produce over half of emissions. Ninety companies are responsible for 63% of the world's historic CO2 emissions. Worldwide, flying remains the prerogative of the elite.

At the time of writing, I am waiting to embark on a cargo ship on the first leg of my low-carbon journey to Europe. When I arrive in Europe in about 45 days, I will be jobless. If, on my way, I manage to persuade people that our planet is seriously endangered and that radical, extraordinary action is needed, losing my job will have been a price worth paying.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(442 words)

REPUBLICANS' PUSH FOR DEATH PENALTY EMBRACES THE POLITICS OF THE PAST

As the 2024 presidential primary season kicks off, Republican candidates (announced and anticipated) are touting their support for the death penalty amid heightened concern over crime.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) recently signed two bills expanding capital punishment. One eliminates the requirement that juries unanimously recommend death sentences, while the other makes child rape a capital offense, defying a 2008 Supreme Court decision that such a law is unconstitutional. Last month, former vice president Mike Pence told gun enthusiasts at the National Rifle Association's annual summit that he wanted to expedite the death penalty for "mass shooters." And former president Donald Trump — who oversaw an unprecedented spate of executions in the final days of his presidency — has vowed to swiftly execute drug dealers if reelected. In private, Trump has reportedly proposed that the federal government bring back group executions and the guillotine, and televise executions, potentially even the grisly footage of inmates' death throes.

These Republicans are not the first to use the death penalty as a political tool. Their tactics hark to the 1980s and 1990s, when America had a "political climate" where elected officials "who covet[ed] higher office" had to "constantly profess their fealty to the death penalty," to quote a 1995 dissent by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens. Capitalizing on fears of crime, politicians from both parties endorsed the death penalty with vigor — and to great electoral success. The political memory of this era helps explain why Republicans are embracing capital punishment amid febrile anxiety over crime.

In 1972, the Supreme Court held that death sentences as they were then carried out violated the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual" punishment. That halted death sentences in the United States for four years — until the court reversed course, upholding new death penalty laws in 1976.

The latter decision, which had the practical effect of letting states reinstate the death penalty, came during a combustible moment of rising crime rates, sensationalized coverage of crime and social unrest that left many voters on edge. To them, the "ultimate punishment" came to represent the ultimate opposition to lawlessness and disorder. Ambitious politicians who embraced the death penalty won their favor. Those who didn't, risked defeat.

No one mastered this political balancing act better than Bill Clinton. In 1980, Clinton lost his bid for reelection as governor of Arkansas after Republicans painted him as a Democrat who was "soft" on crime. They attacked Clinton for reducing sentences, including the life sentences of nearly 40 people convicted of first-degree murder.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*May 2023
(451 words)

RISHI SUNAK'S PLANNED A-LEVELS REVAMP COULD INCLUDE BACCALAUREATE

The A-level system in England could be overhauled with a new style of British baccalaureate in which children would study more subjects after the age of 16, according to reports. The proposals include English and maths becoming compulsory up until the age of 18, the Times said. Students would also be required to study a wider range of subjects in post-16 education.

A conservative source told the paper that Rishi Sunak was determined to press ahead with the plan, having initially suggested the idea during his unsuccessful leadership campaign against Liz Truss last year. The Tory source added: "He came back from the summer with a series of things he wanted to move on. A-level reform is a critical part of it."

In 2021, the EDSK education think tank concluded that A-levels were too narrow and should be replaced with a three-year "baccalaureate" that covers all academic, applied and technical courses. The report said students should be required to study English and maths up to the age of 18, in line with other developed nations.

The EDSK report warned that the dominance of A-levels in the English education system had relegated applied and technical courses to second-class status. About half of 18-year-olds in England take A-levels, meaning they typically sit exams in three subjects. Rather than narrowing choices, the baccalaureate would in theory allow students to retain more breadth in their studies and only gradually specialise over the three-year programme.

A senior government source told the Times that options were being looked into and no final decision had been taken. Robert Halfon, the former chairman of the education select committee, has previously backed the idea of a British baccalaureate. He said: "The advantage of the British baccalaureate is it will mean that students have a much wider curriculum so they get the skills that they need and employers want."

A-levels were first awarded in 1951 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and until the early 1960's, the qualification was awarded only at the grades of pass and distinction.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "Since 2010 we have made huge progress in driving up school standards and giving young people the best start in life, with record funding for schools and more full-time teachers than ever before. We have already taken steps to reform the post-16 qualifications landscape, including reforming technical education and delivering millions of new high-quality apprenticeships. Alongside this, we have set plans to ensure that every young person studies some form of maths up to the age of 18 to give them the skills they need to succeed in the jobs of the future."

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(448 words)

SCHOOL POLICE OFFICERS DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD. WHY DO POLITICIANS STILL PUSH FOR THEM?

The first school resource officer (SRO) came into existence in the 1950s under the guise that having a police officer in the school would "improve" the relationship between youth and law enforcement – a claim that helped SRO programs multiply. It's estimated that 20 % of schools have an officer. Yet, there has not been any evidence that an officer presence improves youth relationships with law enforcement. [...]

However, we know that having armed officers in schools has not prevented school shootings. We know that youth crime has been on the decline since the 1990s, but that youth arrests are up in schools with SROs to the tune of 3.5 times the rate of schools without officers. Despite this, lawmakers push for more school officers in the name of safety, despite researchers saying it cannot be proven.

Instead, your child is more likely to be arrested for a crime that would normally not be a crime if they were an adult. Indeed, your child is more likely to develop a criminal record. [...]

Why is this happening? Well, there's an entire financial gain system in the juvenile justice system. In 2009 two judges were convicted for sentencing children to harsh sentences and were caught accepting money from private interest groups who were benefiting from the harsher sentencing of the youth. What does this have to do with school officers? Well, to have children come before a corrupt judge, they need to be arrested first. And some policymakers push for more SROs in schools every day.

None of this is surprising because we have justified the privatization of prisons for years despite knowing their negative consequences. We have had a continuous and unrelenting push from some states [...] to allow an expansion to private probation, despite knowing all of the terrible and corrupt things attached to this criminal justice model. The difference here is instead of adults allegedly committing crimes, we have 6-year-olds acting out in school.

The last link in this exploitation chain is which schools do and do not have officers. Only 20% of schools have SROs, and not any schools: private schools don't have SROs the way public schools do. Black and brown students are targeted the most for arrests because the officers are in their schools.

The SRO system is exploitative and corrupt, similar to private prison and private probation, but it chooses children to be exploited. It should have never existed and does not clearly benefit anyone except those lining their pockets at the expense of our children's futures. [...]

School resource officers need to go, and they need to go now.

Adapted from *USA Today*October 2023
(454 words)

SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT NOISE POLLUTION?

The world is getting louder. [...] The European Environment Agency (EEA) estimates that at least one in five Europeans are now exposed to noise levels considered harmful to their health, with that number projected to increase.

So what's the actual issue with society's volume going up? The perils of pneumatic drills and emergency service sirens is obvious: both operate close to the 120-decibel level that can damage hearing over very short exposures. What's more insidious is the background noise that many of us have to learn to live with: roads, railways and even loud stereos, all of which can cause problems over time. "The EEA recently estimated that in the UK, 9.5 million people are exposed to harmful levels of road noise, 1.2 million to harmful railway noise and 1 million people to harmful aircraft noise," says Charlotte Clark, professor of environmental epidemiology at the University of London. "In the UK, these levels are estimated to cause more than 6,000 new cases of heart disease, 1,000 premature deaths and 750,000 cases of sleep disturbance each year. [...]

Part of the problem is simply how stressful it is to live with a constant din, even if it's relatively low-level. "Living with noise day to day is annoying, and annoyance is a stress response," says Prof Clark. "If experienced over time, the stress hormones released affect mood and can cause a range of biological changes to the body that influence cardiovascular health. Over the long term, chronic noise exposure is also associated with increased risk for hypertension, strokes, and dementia. [...]

Even when we're asleep, noise can affect us. Obviously, it affects our ability to fall asleep but it can also fragment sleep, nudging us away from restorative REM rest and towards more time spent in superficial sleep stages.

So what's the solution? Unfortunately, there's no single easy answer, and it's often very difficult for individuals to reduce their noise exposure. Turning off devices at night is the most basic way to reduce unnecessary sleep interruptions; earplugs can also help (...). Noise-cancelling headphones can be helpful in public. [...]

On a larger level, though, noisiness is a choice we make as a society: it's about flight paths, and traffic levels, and how much we lubricate our heavy machinery. In some areas (...) "noise buffers" composed of trees and shrubs can reduce noise. In others, solutions could include more rigidly enforced speed limits, reassessing what noise levels workers should be exposed to, or introducing directional sirens.

Noise pollution (...) is more of a problem than most of us are ready to accept. Maybe it's time to start shouting about it.

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(448 words)

SHOULD YOU DELETE YOUR KID'S TIKTOK THIS WEEK?

This week, a teenager might open up their TikTok feed and immediately be served a video about a hairbrush that promises to gently detangle the roughest of tangles. Or the app could show them a scene from the Israeli Supernova music festival, where on Saturday a young woman was put on the back of a motorcycle as her boyfriend was held by captors. Footage from Hamas's surprise attack on Israel, and the retaliatory strikes it has prompted, is appearing in social-media feeds across the world. Videos about the conflict have drawn billions of views on TikTok alone, [...] and queries related to it have appeared in the app's trending searches. Hamas reportedly posted the murder of one grandmother to her own Facebook page. [...]

Some schools in Israel and the United States have asked that parents preemptively delete social-media apps from their children's devices in order to protect them from the possibility of seeing clips in which hostages beg for their lives. "We are warning parents to disable social media apps such as Instagram, X, and Tiktok from their children's phones," reads one such statement. "Graphic and often misleading information is flowing freely, augmenting the fears of our students."

Parents have good reason to be concerned. Psychologists don't fully know how watching graphic content online can affect kids. But "there's enough circumstantial evidence suggesting that it's not healthy from a mental-health standpoint," Meredith Gansner, a psychiatrist told me, citing research on the viral videos of George Floyd's death in police custody. Of course, kids have long been at risk of encountering disturbing or graphic content on social media. But the current era of single feeds serving short videos selected by algorithms, sometimes with little apparent logic, potentially changes the calculus. Firing up TikTok feels like pulling the lever of a content slot machine; every time a user opens up the app, they don't necessarily know whether they'll find comedy or horror. Lots of kids are pulling the lever many times a day, sometimes spending hours in the app. Nor is this just a TikTok problem: Instagram and YouTube, among other platforms, both have their own TikTok-like feeds. Much of the material on these platforms is benign, but on weeks like this one, when even adults may have trouble stomaching visuals they encounter, the idea that children are all over social media is particularly unsettling.

If hostage videos appear, the social-media platforms are hypothetically in a position to prevent them from going viral, [...] platforms offer safety tools for parents. Still, social-media platforms' track record when it comes to content moderation is abysmal. Some videos that are upsetting to children may find their way onto the apps, especially those posted by reputable news outlets.

Adapted from *The Atlantic*October 2023
(457 words)

'SKIMPFLATION': AN EVEN SNEAKIER FORM OF 'SHRINKFLATION'

[...] Products on shelves are getting quantifiably smaller, yet you're paying the same price. This practice is known as 'shrinkflation' – shrinking meaning reducing. But in addition to reducing the quantity of products, businesses are also cutting back on the quality and availability of their services, while still keeping prices steady. This is called 'skimpflation' – skimping meaning lacking generosity. And although the changes are sometimes significant, you may not even notice them. [...]

In 2021, consumers called out Disney for reducing its offerings for the same ticket prices. After the Covid-19 crisis, the company failed to restart its tram services to and from parking lots, which forced visitors to walk a mile to enter and exit the parks. After receiving tremendous complaints from angry visitors, Disney slowly began to reintroduce the service.

Generally speaking, skimpflation is an issue that can also manifest in fewer workers to assist customers. In grocery stores, for example, it's now common for customers to bag their own items at checkout instead of having a clerk do it for them. Even the number of self-checkout stations, where customers replace cashiers, has increased around the world, with fewer workers available to help customers pay – a change some consumers construe as a degradation of service.

Under-staffing at food establishments has led to slower service for diners. Elsewhere in the hospitality industry, hotels, for example, are keeping room prices stable, but only offering housekeeping services upon request. [...]

Skimpflation can also manifest in downgrading the quality of products, which is quite difficult to assess... This is why most consumers don't even notice it. [...] Grocery aisles in supermarkets, for example, are rife with this type of skimpflation. Along with shrinking size and quantity of products, food manufacturers are applying skimpflation to the quality of goods to reduce costs. This often includes swapping out expensive, premium ingredients for cheaper, lower-quality ones while keeping the same price tags, or even raising them. To save money, for instance, some ice-cream manufacturers have replaced some of the expensive milk-fat in their products with other ingredients, including water, cheaper components of milk, but also sweeteners.

For now, in a skimpflation economy, consumers have to be particularly resourceful to get the most value out of goods and services. However, not all hope is lost for better quality and service. Competition – especially in industries where higher standards are more observable – means a market for quality will exist. Simply, some companies will choose to provide higher quality than their competitors to stand out.

Yet consumers still may need to make a concession since higher quality options might come with higher prices. Therefore, as far as the effects of inflation go, the hits keep coming.

Adapted from **BBC.com** October 2023 (452 words)

SOME DEVELOPERS OPPOSE VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

A Tamil mother, recently immigrated to Canada, stirs *biryani*. Her young son looks on, sniffing the delectable aromas. This is a scene in *Venba*, a recently released video game attracting attention. Through a series of cooking puzzles—in which players learn to prepare ingredients in the correct order or work out the various items missing from recipes—it offers an emotionally intense family saga, serving up topics like immigration and identity, alongside Tamil food.

Unlike the noisy, big-budget productions that dominate gaming, *Venba* is peaceful and gentle. It cost less than \$1m to make but quickly managed to break into the top-sellers on *Steam*, a PC gaming hub, sitting alongside rivals that cost as much as \$100m. *Venba* is important, because it is part of a growing trend of non-violent games attracting both game developers and players. [...]

Games that do not feature violence would have been impossible before. According to a gaming expert, only 300 peaceful games were created in the last 50 years. More than half of them came out in the past ten years.

Two factors are contributing to the rise of kinder, gentler games. One is a backlash by game designers. Many independent developers, who can choose their own projects, do not want to spend their careers designing games about killing. Job Stauffer who contributed to violent productions such as the "Grand Theft Auto" series, has started refusing to work on brutal or murderous ones. "We see media reports of mass shootings and wars day after day," he explains. "I decided that I didn't want to be a part of the problem, creating entertainment that involves firing rockets into buses," he adds. [...]

In these new games, players speak instead of killing each other. It is popular with parents who want to play games with their kids, but who don't want to expose them to gore and violence. [...]

When people think about gamers, they often picture them as male and on the cusp of puberty. Some are. But in reality, the average age of gamers is around 33, and about half are female. Wren Brier, a developer, says the tastes and preferences of women gamers have started to influence developers; many are looking for play where caring and friendship are on display, instead of shooting and domination. [...]

However, the most lavish productions and biggest commercial successes in gaming still usually include slaughter. "As soon as we attach a certain dollar amount to a project, it's like violence becomes as understood a feature as having graphics," says Laralyn McWilliams, a game developer. She hopes this will change in the future, as more developers and gamers choose a side. But of the 20 top-selling premium games so far this year, 15 feature combat.

Adapted from *The Economist*August 2023
(459 words)

SOME ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS SHOULD BE LABELLED "ADDICTIVE," SCIENTISTS SUGGEST

Some 14% of adults and 12% of children could be addicted to ultra-processed foods, experts have warned.

Labelling some foods as "addictive" could help people change their diets, scientists have said, as estimates suggest that one in seven adults and one in eight children could be hooked on ultraprocessed foods (UPFs).

Researchers said the way some people consume foods that are high in fat and carbohydrates could "meet the criteria for diagnosis of substance use disorder". Behaviours which could meet these criteria include: intense cravings, symptoms of withdrawal, less control over intake, and continued use despite such consequences as obesity, binge eating disorder, poorer physical and mental health, and lower quality of life.

A team of international researchers said that if some foods high in carbohydrates and fats are viewed as "addictive" it could potentially improve health through changes to social, clinical and political policies. "By acknowledging that certain types of processed foods have the properties of addictive substances, we may be able to help improve global health," said the article's corresponding author and psychology professor at the University of Michigan in the US. It would also drive more research in these areas, the authors added.

[...] The researchers said: "Refined carbohydrates or fats evoke similar levels of extracellular dopamine in the brain striatum to those seen with addictive substances such as nicotine and alcohol. Based on these behavioural and biological parallels, foods that deliver high levels of refined carbohydrates or added fats are a strong candidate for an addictive substance."

The speed at which these foods deliver carbohydrates and fats to the gut could also play a role in their "addictive potential", the authors added. Food additives may also contribute to the "addictiveness of UPFs".

But the academics stress that not all foods have addictive potential. They conclude: "While further careful research is needed to determine the exact mechanism by which these foods trigger addictive responses, [...] ultra-processed foods high in refined carbohydrates and added fats are highly rewarding, appealing, and consumed compulsively may be addictive. Behaviours around ultra-processed food may meet the criteria for diagnosis of substance use disorder in some people. [...] Understanding of these foods as addictive could lead to novel approaches in the realm of social justice, clinical care, and policy approaches."

A recent review by UK government scientists concluded that evidence linking UPFs to a range of health issues "needs to be treated with caution".

Some studies and books have linked ultra-processed foods such as ice cream, crisps, mass-produced bread and breakfast cereals to a number of poor health outcomes, including an increased risk of some cancers, weight gain and heart disease. [...] The academics said the observed associations are "concerning" but called for more studies to thoroughly investigate the link.

Adapted from *The Independent*October 2023
(456 words)

SWEDEN'S SCHOOLS MINISTER DECLARES FREE SCHOOL 'SYSTEM FAILURE'

Sweden has declared a "system failure" in the country's free schools, pledging the biggest shake-up in 30 years and calling into question a model in which profit-making companies run state education. Sweden's *friskolor* – privately run schools funded by public money – have attracted international acclaim, including from Britain, with the former education secretary Michael Gove using them as a model for hundreds of new British free schools opened under David Cameron's government.

But in recent years, a drop in Swedish educational standards, rising inequality and growing discontent among teachers and parents has helped fuel political momentum for change. A report by Sweden's biggest teachers' union [...] warned of the negative consequences of having become one of the world's most marketised school systems, including the viewing of pupils and students as customers and a lack of resources resulting in increased dissatisfaction.

The union demanded the phasing out of for-profit and marketised schools and in the meantime that they reinvested any profits in their businesses. "Joint-stock companies are not a long-term sustainable form of operation to run school activities," it said.

Now Lotta Edholm, a Liberal who was appointed schools minister last year during the formation of Sweden's Moderate party-run minority coalition, has launched an investigation into the issue which, she said, would oversee her plans for reform.

"It will not be possible [in the reformed system] to take out profits at the expense of a good education," she told the *Guardian* at the ministry of education and research in Stockholm.

There are thousands of *friskolor* – directly translated as "independent schools" but known as "free schools" – across Sweden, with a higher proportion in cities. About 15% of all primary schoolchildren (six- to 16-year-olds) and 30% of all upper secondary school pupils (16- 19-year-olds) go to a free school. [...]

She [...] pledged to tighten rules on religious influence on teaching in religious schools and to strengthen rules on school ownership, citing a government report that warned free schools could be exploited by Swedish and foreign owners wanting to influence society.

Edholm also accused some free schools of grade inflation, with teachers awarding children grades that were too high – creating imbalance across the whole system. It is understood to be a particular problem in free schools with a low proportion of qualified teachers and schools run as joint-stock companies.

"Free schools tend to give higher grades than municipal schools. That risks that in the end it could be that the municipal schools give higher grades, and that in turn is very bad," she said. It's unfair and it leads additionally to students thinking they are much more knowledgable than they are."

Adapted from from *guardian.com* November 2023 (447 words)

TEENS ARE EXHAUSTED BY PHONE NOTIFICATIONS

Teens get as many as 237 or more notifications each day on their smartphones, according to a new report published by Common Sense Media — a non profit organization that helps kids, parents and schools in facing media problems.

"Because the industry has failed to offer young people better options for managing their smartphones, teens are working hard to set boundaries," said Dr. Jenny Radesky, a co author of the report and director of developmental and behavioural paediatrics at the University of Michigan.

The report's findings are based on the Android smartphone use of about 200 11- to 17-year-old participants who let their data be collected via software, and on feedback about the data from Common Sense Media's Youth Advisory Council who help interpret data to understand the relationships young people have with their phones.

About one-fourth of notifications came during school hours, [...] when teens should not be disrupted — especially because most participants used their phone at least once for 43 minutes on average. Some teens even used their phones for more than six hours during that time. [...]

"Whereas a lot of adults might turn off notifications or shut their phones off while in an important meeting, teenagers tend to keep them on," said psychologist John Duffy. "An impulse pulls them toward looking at every single notification. As a result, their attention is scattered." [...]

Besides, Duffy added, "excessive phone use and the pressure to respond which some teens experience, can be anxiety-provoking even if they aren't aware of it. It is all the more stressful as teens' notifications do not only concern friends, social media, sports or celebrity gossip, but also security, school shootings and other tragic events. It is also important to remember that the brain operates at its best when the cognitive load, i.e. the amount of information the brain is working to process, is low."

The findings make it abundantly clear that teens are struggling to manage their phone use, which is taking a serious toll on their ability to focus and on their overall mental health. Adults could do more to help teens and children develop healthier habits for phone use, experts said. Young people need more support from family members and educators, as well as clear guardrails from the technologists who are intentionally designing these devices to be addictive, at the expense of teens' well-being.

"I encourage the teenagers that I work with to turn off notifications or use do not disturb features so that notifications are collected without having to hear alerts immediately," Duffy said. "But most teenagers get anxious that they might be missing out on something that is relevant to them." [...]

Adapted from **CNN** September 2023 (451 words)

THE BATTLE AGAINST FAST FASHION'S HYPOCRITICAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Lexy Silverstein, a 20-year-old Los Angeles fashion student, can list the fast-fashion brand Shein's many controversies in one breath. Shein's global revenue amounted to \$23 billion last year, while earning criticism from US lawmakers over its alleged forced labor practices. It has surpassed Amazon as the most-downloaded shopping app, even as designers have filed a lawsuit, accusing the brand of engaging in shocking abuses of copyright to create its cheap clothes. Environmental activists also frequently blast the label for producing 6,000 pieces of clothing a day, contributing to the fashion industry's enormous waste problem.

That's why Silverstein was shocked to learn that her college, the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM), collaborated with Shein on a scholarship program. "A part of me didn't want to believe it," Silverstein said. "How can a school that markets itself as one of the top 10 sustainable fashion schools in the world partner with one of the biggest fast-fashion companies in our industry? It was very hypocritical and shocking."

Through the Shein scholarship, 12 FIDM students were awarded \$40,000 each and the chance to design pieces for the brand's collection. "I'm very grateful that FIDM is giving students this opportunity, but Shein is the worst possible pick for a partnership like this," Silverstein said. Outraged, she started a petition to end the scholarship, which has been signed by more than 5,000 people. According to the trade publication Vogue Business, that's more than double FIDM's enrollment, which is 2,000 undergraduate students.

For Silverstein, Shein's attempt to work with universities constitutes greenwashing as it misleads consumers into believing the brand is taking steps to help the environment. [...] Silverstein calls universities a "playing ground" for Shein to attempt to rehab its image, and tries to prevent a similar situation happening at another school by currently contacting student groups across the country, including sororities, and encouraging members to boycott Shein.

[...] The use of university partnerships by companies to distract from unethical business practices is not unique to the fashion world. Last year, a study found six fossil fuel companies funneled more than \$700m in research funding to 27 universities in the US from 2010 to 2020. Elite universities like Harvard, MIT and Stanford benefit from these relationships. "When companies like Shein give money to schools, it benefits them more than it benefits the universities," said a member of the student group MIT Divest. "If Shein gives a half a million dollars for a scholarship, it gives them legitimacy and helps promote trust among their consumer base. They are getting a significant return on that investment. It's a very calculated business decision."

Adapted from *cnn.com* September 2023 (449 words)

THE CHINESE WOMEN WHO DEFY BEAUTY DUTY

Legend Zhu was the conventional ideal of Chinese beauty. Tall with shoulder-length hair, she led her university's modeling team, whose members were often called upon to strut down runways at campus fashion shows wearing body-hugging dresses and dramatic eye makeup.

A recent college graduate, Ms. Zhu has attracted attention for her appearance once again, but in a far different way. This summer, she took to a Chinese social media platform known for its lifestyle influencers, to post a selfie with buzz-cut hair and a cosmetic-free face. "From a model to a natural woman," Ms. Zhu wrote in the post [...]. "It feels so comfortable!"

Ms. Zhu's image received more than 1,000 likes and many compliments. She was also applauded for her defiance of the pressure on women to conform to traditional beauty standards. "This is so brave," one comment said. Bravery is necessary because the online approbation for Ms. Zhu's new look is only part of the story. There were negative comments, too [...].

Anything connected to feminism can be a delicate subject in China. The nation's Communist Party has long promoted gender equality as one of its core tenets, but it is wary of grass-roots organizing. Women making feminist statements online often face abuse and sometimes have their social media accounts deleted for "gender discrimination." Those who have complained about sexual mistreatment by powerful men have lost in court or been pressured into silence.

Awareness of such problems is growing among young women in China, especially college-educated ones [...]. Sex discrimination in university admissions and in the job market has prompted some young women to resist gender roles, including those connected to appearance [...].

Ms. Zhu, 23, is among a number of young women inspired by a growing trend of rejecting what is known in Chinese internet parlance as "beauty duty": the costly and sometimes painful devotion to mainstream notions of attractiveness. The idea is to spend time and resources not on beauty standards, but on personal development, including education and career growth.

"To stay beautiful, you need to constantly invest time, money and energy," Ms. Zhu said. "Most men are free of this. It is unfair."

Women subscribing to this idea are also refusing to starve themselves, shunning the dangerous diet culture that has underpinned popular internet challenges [...]. Ms. Zhu said that when she was in college in Beijing and considering a career in the fashion industry, a modeling agency advised her to lose at least 22 pounds, down to 110. At 5 feet 10 inches tall, she found this unreasonable: "I could not imagine the harm to my body."

She decided to enter a postgraduate program in urban planning instead.

Adapted from *The New York Times*October 2023
(450 words)

THE ENHANCED GAMES: LETTING ATHLETES USE DRUGS COULD LEAD TO WORSE PROBLEMS THAN CHEATING

[...] When the first Enhanced Games takes place in December 2024, athletes in its five categories of competition – track and field, swimming, weightlifting, gymnastics, and combat sports – will be allowed to ingest whatever substance they wish to improve their performance.

There will be no tests, no bans, no limits. For some, including the games' founder, the Enhanced Games is the next step in sport's evolution, but for others, it is a moral stain on the sporting landscape.

Advocates of "enhanced sport" contend that permitting athletes to use whatever drugs they choose will allow sport to test the limits of human potentials, to respect athletes' bodily autonomy, and to escape the unending cycle of cheating scandals generated by a failing anti-doping system. However, it is far from clear that enhanced sport will open new horizons of sports performance, support athlete autonomy, or promote fair competition.

Anti-doping rules limit the substances that athletes can use to reach peak performance. [...] So the prohibition of these substances appears to place a ceiling on the pursuit of sporting achievement. Athletic excellence is not, however, reducible to outcomes. [...]

In evaluating any sports performance, the outcome cannot be detached from the means of its achievement. More work needs to be done by philosophers and sport scientists to determine when, if ever, drug-assisted performance truly extends the limits of human performance, as envisaged by the organisers of the Enhanced Games.

Furthermore, sports are designed to test a specific cluster of skills and capacities, including physical, psychological, tactical and technical abilities. Performance-enhancing drugs elevate the importance of certain physical attributes, such as strength and stamina.

Lifting the ban on drugs would alter the nature of sports by increasing the significance of this sub-set of physical attributes at the expense of other physical attributes such as coordination and agility, as well as non-physical attributes such as strategic skill, mental resilience, and technical proficiency. [...]

Lifting the doping ban would grant further competitive advantage to athletes who represent economic superpowers such as the US and China. These governments could invest huge sums into drug research and development for the benefit of their athletes. They could provide expert medical supervision, not available to athletes from less wealthy states, to ensure that drugs are used in ways that minimise harm and maximise their effect. In a sporting world in which inequality of opportunity is already rampant, the removal of the doping ban would only deepen an existing moral failing. [...]

Doping is a problem that needs to be managed, not side-stepped. Competitions that allow it will increase the risk to athletes' health, render competition even more unfair and threaten to undermine the fundamental purpose of sport.

Adapted from *The Conversation*July 2023
(460 words)

THE E.U'S SET MENU MEMBERSHIP MODEL IS FAILING.IT'S TIME FOR AN "À LA CARTE " APPROACH

For the first time in two decades EU governments could soon be ready to embark on reforms that would make the EU unrecognisable. 27 leaders agree to "lay the reforms" needed before Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and six other candidate countries of the western Balkans can join. The accession of countries' may be a long way off, but preparing for it makes radical internal reform inescapable.

The crises of the past decade – from the eurozone crisis to Brexit, Covid and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – have tested Europe's ability to respond collectively to international challenges. The EU proved its resilience with decisions on measures like new EU-wide taxes to fund Covid recovery, joint procurement for vaccines and weapons and an emergency system to welcome Ukraine's war refugees. Yet its joint responses also revealed the limitations of a system created for another age.

Despite the inadequacies and the growing signs of strain, governments have – resisted any genuine reform of the EU's internal structures. Too often, they have muddled through invoking emergency measures, with little democratic scrutiny. The EU is also vulnerable to constantly being taken hostage by member states' national agendas, from migration to grain imports, undermining its ability to act and its overall authority.

Not only does the EU lack the powers it needs in key areas, and appear insufficiently accountable to its citizens for newly acquired responsibilities, it is also under attack from within. Over the past decade the EU has proved incapable of taming rebellious member states, like Poland and Hungary.

The next enlargement offers an opportunity to make the union independent in a menacing new world order and capable of leading on the climate emergency.

EU leaders appear ready to rethink the union's future and its governance framework. Two parallel initiatives are put forward While being complementary, they respond to different logics. In the EU parliament's vision, all members must be pressed to integrate more closely or leave the union. The Group of 12 flips that logic. It contemplates four distinct tiers of membership.

To preserve its credibility, the EU must move away from the paradigm of "set menu" membership towards a new understanding in which each country accepts to integrate, but on the basis of a more "à la carte" menu of possible arrangements.

This suggests that prospective members choose the degree of integration most suitable to their needs but that current members could reconsider their commitment to the EU. While incoming countries remain free to choose which circle to join, respect for the rules is not negotiable. Hence, it would be possible to exclude a non-compliant member from a given circle.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(454 words)

THE FIVE-DAY OFFICE WEEK IS DEAD

Working from home is here to stay. I can prove it with data [...].

Work-from-home levels aren't as high as they were during the pandemic's first peak [...], when 62 percent of paid work happened at home. People did begin filtering back to the office as the pandemic waned. But they did so only to a point: [...] as of July, we're at 31 percent.

Why have the return-to-office maximalists lost? There seemed to be so much excitement and pent-up demand from people who wanted to leave their kitchen tables for ergonomically better office desks. There was. They just didn't want to go in all the time.

Hybrid work arrangements have killed the return-to-office hype. Employees equate a mix of working in the office and working from home to an 8 percent raise. They don't have to deal with the daily hassle and costs of a commute. In fact, the process of getting to work is more despised by employees than the need to actually work.

And at the end of the day, [...] remote work saves companies money. It cuts overhead, boosts productivity and is profitable. And what is profitable in a capitalist economy sticks. Thankfully, remote work also has major benefits for society, including improving the climate by cutting billions of miles of commuting and supporting families by liberating parents' time. [...]

What about the future? [...] In 10 years, remote work is likely to increase, driven by two powerful economic forces.

First, U.S. data going back to the 1960s reveals [...] [the number of days worked from home] doubled roughly every 15 years until 2019, driven by improving technology. First came personal computers in the 80s, then laptops in the 90s. The internet opened up more possibilities in the 2000s, followed by file sharing and video calls in the 2010s. [...]

Second, we have business cohort effects. In the data, we see that more than 75 percent of start-ups allow employees flexible working locations. Start-up companies have been born in an era when having an office is optional and meeting customers and clients online are standard. [...] Today's new companies have nearly twice as many days worked from home as those founded 20 years ago. As these young companies grow, they will turn into tomorrow's medium and large companies, bringing their remote-friendly practices with them. As importantly, their founding chief executives will become tomorrow's business leaders, [...] actively embracing hybrid work rather than begging employees to return to the office.

Change isn't easy. [...] But rarely as an economist do I see a change so profoundly positive for the majority of America's businesses and workers. [...] Companies, employees and society all benefit. [...] We should support this golden moment and lay the five-day-office-week movement to rest.

Adapted from **New York Times**October, 2023
(460 words)

THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON FARMING'S GREEN TRANSITION: THE POLITICS AREN'T LOOKING GOOD

One of our era's great and inconvenient truths is that global food production and the climate emergency are intimately linked. Drought, flood and other extreme weather events threaten farming ecosystems across the world. At the same time, greenhouse gas emissions from animal agriculture play a major role in global heating. We know that the default western diet, with its heavy emphasis on meat and dairy, is harming the planet. Eating habits in wealthy countries will have to change, and livestock numbers be reduced, if climate targets are to be met and vulnerable food systems saved.

At Cop28 in Dubai, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization will foreground the need to transform patterns of consumption and production if the goal of limiting temperature rises to 1.5C is to be met. The emphasis on the impact of food systems is welcome and overdue. For various reasons it has been badly neglected at previous summits.

Agriculture is a sector where economic interests overlap with cultural traditions, national identities and sentimental attachments to the land.

In the United States, Joe Biden has introduced new requirements to reduce methane emissions in fossil fuel industries, but they did not extend to the vast American beef industry. Last spring, the Dutch Farmer-Citizen Movement – set up in protest at government plans to reduce livestock numbers by a third – sent shock waves across Europe when it won regional elections. In Ireland, where farming makes up almost 40% of all emissions, proposals for similarly dramatic culls have been discussed behind closed doors in government, but not approved as policy. Compared with sectors such as transport and construction, the green transition in agriculture is notably underpowered.

The drift must not continue. New Zealand will price emissions from livestock farming from 2025 – the only country in the world to have committed to do so. This moves in the right direction, but only if combined with a generous combination of subsidies, compensation and financial incentives for farmers to diversify. Similarly, persuading western populations to eat less meat will require imaginative, innovative political leadership. Any proposed "meat tax" will provide automatic fodder for the populist right. But if revenue from new pricing mechanisms is directed towards the popular cause of animal welfare and some form of climate payment to the less well-off, the politics might begin to look different.

Changing the way we eat is an enormous cultural challenge, with huge economic implications. It cannot be done by stealth or diktat, or on the cheap. Nor can the task be swerved if sustainable farming is to flourish in the future. Governments must follow where Cop28 leads.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2023
(445 words)

THE JOBS AI WON'T TAKE YET

Since the start of the industrial revolution, there have been threats that new machines would usurp human jobs. For the most part, up to now, the humans have prevailed. But today, with Al ubiquity on the horizon, the threat is becoming real.

A March 2023 report from Goldman Sachs estimated that AI could do a quarter of all the work currently done by humans. Across the European Union and US, 300 million jobs could be lost to automation. And there could be worse, says Martin Ford, author of Rule of the Robots. According to him, the real question in fact, is "How Will Artificial Intelligence Transform Everything?" [...]

However, there are still things AI isn't capable of, such as tasks that involve distinctly human qualities, like emotional intelligence and outside-the-box thinking. [...] Therefore, three categories seem to be relatively insulated in the foreseeable future.

The first would be unconventional jobs that are genuinely creative in domains needing people to come up with new ideas so as to build something new in such fields as science, medicine and law... [...]

The second insulated category includes jobs that require interpersonal relationships such as nurses, business consultants and investigative journalists. These are jobs, Ford says, where you need a very deep understanding of human nature. That is why he thinks it will be a long time before AI has the ability to interact in the kinds of ways that really build relationships.

"The third safe zone, says Ford, are jobs that really require lots of mobility and dexterity and problem solving ability in unpredictable environments. Many jobs, such as electricians, plumbers, welders, which are the kinds of jobs where you're dealing with a new situation all the time, are probably the hardest of anything to automate. In order to automate jobs like this, you would need a science fiction robot."

While humans will likely remain in jobs that fall within those categories, that doesn't mean those professions are totally insulated from the ascent of Al. [...] Indeed, Al will soon detect cancers better than humans could, so doctors will surely use that new technology [...] but most people will still want a doctor —a real person— to be the one to tell them about it. [...]

"It is interesting to note, concludes Ford, that an advanced education or a high-paying position is not a defence against AI takeover. The white-collar employee's future is more threatened than the Uber driver, because we still don't have self-driving cars. In many cases, more educated workers are going to be threatened more than the least educated. Think of the person that works cleaning hotel rooms... it's really hard to automate that job."

Adapted from **BBC News** May 2023 (450 words)

THE NEW FRONTIER IN THE US WAR ON TIKTOK: UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

The China-based app TikTok has already been banned on all federal government devices and on government devices in many states over data privacy concerns. Now restrictions are spreading to universities, with the University of Oklahoma, Texas A&M and others all blocking the platform from school wifi networks in recent weeks.

Such bans are possible because school policies allow for the blocking of traffic to certain websites on campus wifi networks, measures that are typically reserved for harmful content and pornography. But those policies can also extend to specific apps, which has been done in the past with platforms like anonymous social media account Yik Yak. [...]

The university bans come amid a cascade of actions against TikTok in recent months by law-makers who say its China-based parent company could collect sensitive user data and censor content that goes against the demands of the Chinese Communist party. In late December, Congress passed a measure banning the platform on all federal government devices and similar bans have taken hold in more than 30 states in the past year. [...]

Many internet freedom advocates have highlighted the irony of states and schools purportedly combatting Chinese censorship by censoring these apps themselves.

While bans on state and school devices are easier to implement, the university measures will be much more logistically difficult, experts say, since students can still easily get around them by using cellular data instead.

"This specific ban will likely count as barely an inconvenience for the students subject to it, and it would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, both technically and ethically, to enforce students using TikTok on their own personal devices," said Mike Parkin, senior technical engineer at cybersecurity firm Vulcan Cyber.

This could also lead to data networks being clogged on campuses, making student devices run more slowly and ineffectively. TikTok spokesperson Jamal Brown criticized the ban, and warned there could be unintended consequences for students' ability to share information and connect on campus. "We're disappointed that so many states are jumping on the political bandwagon to enact policies that will do nothing to advance cybersecurity in their states and are based on unfounded falsehoods about TikTok," he said.

Many of these bans were enacted by schools that take government funds in states such as Texas where lawmakers are already waging political war on TikTok. This chapter marks just the latest example of global culture wars playing out on college campuses. Whether the counterculture movement of the 1960s, the Satanic panic of the 1980s, or allegations of liberal indoctrination on college campuses that began in the 1990s and continue today, young people are often used as pawns in larger political battles. [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian*January 2023
454 mots

THE PEOPLE GOING 'MONK MODE' TO LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA USE

When she really needs to focus on her work, Susie Alegre uses an app on her phone that blocks her access to social media sites for however long she requires. [...]

"I think it's incredibly hard by willpower alone to have a smartphone and not waste a significant amount of time on it," she says. The app Ms Alegre uses is called Freedom. You can choose to block specific social media sites and websites, or turn off internet access entirely. [...] Or alternatively, you can tick the "locked mode" button, which then means that your block cannot be overridden until the time you scheduled is up.

Ms Alegre adds that she uses the Freedom app [...] "when I need to be contactable on the phone, but I really don't want to be distracted". Similar blocking apps now include ColdTurkey, FocusMe and Forest.

With the proliferation of social media platforms and devices vying for our attention, a growing number of people are looking for ways to help them resist the urge to continually check notifications and scroll through social media feeds. This has seen a surge in popularity this year of an approach to productivity called "monk mode". [...]

The term has gone viral on TikTok, where videos marked with the hashtag #monkmode now have more than 77 million views [...]. Ms Alegre credits the Freedom app with helping her focus on writing her book, a work of non-fiction appropriately entitled *Freedom to Think*, which was published last year. [...]

Switching off from social media and the internet in general is not easy though, says Grace Marshall, an author and productivity coach. [...] "Our brain wants to close that loop by looking at the notification because we get a dopamine hit when we close that loop."[...]

"It's not just about the focus and productivity aspect, it's also about the mental health impact," says Ms Marshall.

The founder of the Freedom app, Fred Stutzman, says he got the idea when he was at university and found himself spending too much time on Facebook and not enough time on his dissertation. The app now has more than 2.5 million users around the world. [...] The social media sites that are most blocked are [...] Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. [...]

Vladimir Druts, co-founder of FocusMe, [...] sees monk mode as a movement against an increased desire for instant gratification. "A lot of the stuff in the zeitgeist today is 'hey get rich quick, make your millions in an instant'. [...]

In future, with the rise of artificial intelligence, the distractions from tech are only set to increase, adds Mr Druts. "Al is just increasing the amount of content that's out there. [...]

Monk mode is definitely going to be gaining steam."

Adapted from **BBC.COM** October 2023 (456 words)

THE PROBLEM IN EDUCATION

The most recent data from the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings shows that the UK has three fewer universities in the top 200; Cambridge has fallen two places from third to fifth; and Chinese universities are now rising strongly up the rankings, with two entering top 15 for the first time.

Should we be worried? It seems so. A spokesman for *Times Higher Education*, has warned that "the UK's standing among academics worldwide, while still very high, is in steady decline". Furthermore, he said, the UK is "losing ground to international competitors" in key areas, such as "research productivity and the attraction of international talent".

Much of this "steady decline" can be attributed to the funding cuts in higher education. It is self evident that wealthy institutions can attract the cream of academic talent, and finance world-class research, in a way that poorer ones cannot. Yet the cap on UK tuition fees means that university budgets are, in effect, shrinking every year. As the consultancy DataHE pointed out, if the £9,000 annual fee introduced in 2012 had kept pace with inflation it would have exceeded £12,000 by last autumn. Instead, it is now £9,250.

Universities have sought to make up the shortfall by attracting growing numbers of international students, paying higher fees: they now deliver about 20 per cent of universities' income, roughly double a decade ago. The strategy has its pitfalls as it restricts places available to domestic students.

This has long been politically explosive terrain. The government is reluctant to increase direct funding. Instead, it has cut the salary threshold for student loan repayments to £25,000 a year, and extended the repayment window from 30 to 40 years. In financially difficult times, it is unlikely that the electorate would welcome any sharp rise in tuition fees.

The US model — of higher tuition fees, softened by bursaries — has advantages and drawbacks. Its finest universities are indeed handsomely resourced, but studies suggest that the average college debt is now so high that even higher graduate wages often do not compensate for it: one reason, perhaps, why US undergraduate numbers have fallen significantly since 2010. The future for UK universities must be more thoughtfully tailored to our needs, and perhaps designed to encourage students towards areas in which we face the most serious skills shortages. Two things are now clear, however. The first is that Britain cannot afford to ignore its university funding problem. The second is that — on present rankings at least — we still have some of the finest minds in the world to help us to solve it.

Adapted from *The Times*September 2023
(445 words)

[...] THE RISE OF LONDON'S SUPER-LUXE HOTELS

Cost of living crisis, what cost of living crisis? A new breed of uber-luxury hotels in London is breaking records with rooms costing more than one thousand pounds a night as wealthy visitors flock to the capital for "experiences" only (a lot of) money can buy.

In the Peninsula on Hyde Park Corner, a short walk from Buckingham Palace, rooms start at a kingly one thousand three hundred pounds. Despite the startling price tag, the hotel is said to be running at full capacity, with the manager, Joseph Lee, reporting it has been "very busy" since last month's opening. "It's been very successful," he says, with the hotel anticipating a strong Christmas. "We've been very happy with the level of bookings so far." [...]

With many Britons struggling with rising living costs it could be another planet. However, Roberts, head of luxury goods at the market researcher Euromonitor, says super-luxe hotels are popping up in the world's big tourist destinations as the one percent increasingly spend on "experiences". Its figures estimate the global luxury hotel market is now worth fifty-five billion pounds but is headed nearer eighty billion pounds within four years.

"Although most of us are struggling to pay our rent and mortgages, there is a huge amount of wealth out there," Roberts says. "A few years ago you could easily find rooms for five hundred or six hundred pounds whereas now it's kind of normal to be one thousand pounds plus." The hotels "aren't just places to stay", adds Roberts. They are resorts under one roof with multiple restaurants, state-of-the-art gyms and wellness spaces. "The needle keeps getting moved." [...]

After the hiatus caused by Covid, international tourism has roared back and there seems to be no shortage of high rollers. Almost 16 million visitors are expected in London this year -2.5 million or 18% more than last year. They will collectively spend about £13.4bn, which is about 25% more than last year, according to London & Partners, the mayor of London's tourism and growth agency.

Since 2019 luxury hoteliers have defied gravity with "unprecedented" room rate increases, to achieve some of the highest prices on record, says Cristina Balekjian, CoStar's director of UK hospitality analytics, adding that rising demand means 2023 is "looking to be another record year for hotels in this sector". [...]

"The ultra-rich are price insensitive," he says. "What matters most to them is not the price but the exclusivity; your Hermès scarf doesn't keep you any warmer but you feel whiz bang when you wear it. You set your prices super high because that makes the statement. It's not only about competing down to the last penny and making sure you're always full."

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(454 words)

THE SETTLERS BROUGHT THE LOTTERY TO AMERICA. IT'S HAD A LONG, UNEVEN HISTORY

One very lucky person in Florida just won \$1.5 billion in the Mega Millions jackpot drawing, with an estimated before-taxes payout of \$800 million.

The Mega Millions started in 1996 as the Big Game. It is now played in most states, the District of Colombia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. [...]

In short, state lotteries are thriving, with Americans spending an estimated \$100 billion each year on tickets. But that wasn't always the case.

In 1612, the Virginia Company of London was authorized by King James I to run a lottery to help finance ships to the Jamestown colony in Virginia.

Despite Puritans viewing gambling as "a dishonor to God", lotteries flourished in the American colonies in the mid-to-late 1700s and their proceeds went to build roads, bridges, churches and colleges, says Victor Matheson, a professor of economics. [...]

The founding fathers were big into lotteries too.

In 1748, Benjamin Franklin organized a lottery in Philadelphia to help fund the establishment of "a militia for defense against marauding attacks by the French,". [...] Around 1800, Denmark Vesey, an enslaved person in S.C., won a local lottery and used the money to buy his freedom. Vesey was eventually executed for his role in planning a failed slave revolt later on.

The same religious and moral sensibilities that eventually led to prohibition also started to turn the tide against gambling of all forms beginning in the 1800s. [...] The Louisiana Lottery Company, a private enterprise started in 1868 by a group of entrepreneurs, sold tickets well beyond the state borders. At the end of the century, however, Congress banned the interstate promotion and sale of lottery tickets. [...]

The lotto comeback started in 1964 with New Hampshire, one of only three states at the time without a sales or income tax.

That made it "really heavily reliant on property taxes, and willing to take a chance," he says. New Hampshire tried to create "legitimacy" for lotteries despite fears at the time that "the games are gonna be corrupt and infiltrated by organized crime."

By the 1980s, an avalanche of states followed suit and started getting into the lottery game. [...] Multi-state lotteries, such as Powerball and Mega Millions, came into being as smaller states banded together to increase the size of jackpots, and attract more players.

The odds today may be in favor of lotteries, but for anyone buying a ticket, they've gotten steadily worse as the size of jackpots and the number of players has increased. For Mega Millions, the chances of winning are about 1 in 300 million.

Adapted from *NPR*August 2023
(454 words)

THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Many Americans [....] worry that grass-roots political movements are powerless to overcome entrenched interests, whether those interests are self-serving politicians, large employers or dominant social media platforms. [....]

For most Americans, progress has slowed to a crawl in recent decades. Income and wealth inequality have both soared. The top 1 percent have pulled away from everyone else, while working-class Americans often struggle to afford the best health care and homes in good school districts.

The clearest sign of our problems is [....] that in 1980, the U.S. had a typical life expectancy for an affluent country. Today, we have the lowest such life expectancy, worse than those of Britain, France, Germany, Canada or Japan, as well as some less rich countries, like Chile. The main reason is the stagnation of life expectancy for working-class people.

For nearly 50 years, our economy has failed to deliver on the basic promise of the American dream — that living standards meaningfully improve over time for most citizens.

These [....] themes shape many parts of American life, including our polarized politics and angry national dialogue. [....] In short, the American political system helped create today's problems, and only the American political system can solve them. [....]

In the 1920s and '30s, the country had a highly unequal economy and a Supreme Court that [....] rejected most policies to reduce inequality. But activists used the tools of democracy to create mass prosperity. They built a labor movement that remade federal policy to put workers and corporations on a more equal footing. The rise of the labor movement [....] led to incomes rising even more rapidly for the poor and middle class than for the rich, and to the White-Black wage gap shrinking. [....] The role of labor unions was unparalleled in combating inequality. [....]

There are plenty of other examples of grass-roots movements remaking American life [....] such as the civil-rights and women's movements of the 1960s and the marriage-equality movement of the 2000s.

Other examples come from the political right. In the '50s and '60s, a group of conservatives, including Milton Friedman, began trying to sell the country on the virtues of a low-tax, light-regulation economy. [....] President Ronald Reagan embraced their ideas and moved the U.S. closer to the laissez-faire ideal than almost any other country. The conservatives who sold this vision promised it would lead to a new prosperity for all. They were wrong [....]. Since 1980, the U.S. has become a grim outlier on many indicators of human well-being. [....]

The U.S. doesn't have a broadly prosperous economy because the country has no mass movement organized around the goal of lifting living standards for the middle class and the poor. [....]

Adapted from *The New York Times*October 2023
(446 words)

THE SUPREME COURT BANS AFFIRMATIVE-ACTION POLICIES IN US UNIVERSITIES

The US supreme court banned the use of affirmative action policies in college admissions which had been in place for decades arguing and ruling that race-conscious admissions violate the equal-protection clause under the US constitution. Envisioned as a tool to help remedy historical discrimination and create more diverse student bodies, affirmative action policies have permitted hundreds of colleges and universities to factor in students' racial backgrounds during the admissions process. That consideration is supplementary, and taken in tandem with other factors such as applicants' test scores, grades and extracurricular activities. Even with race-conscious admissions, however, many selective public and private colleges and universities struggle to enroll diverse student populations that accurately reflect society. At the University of North Carolina, for example, in a state where 21% of people are Black, just 8% of the school's undergraduates are Black.

Opponents of affirmative action, such as the advocacy group Students for Fair Admissions, argue that considering race as a factor in the admissions process amounts to racial discrimination – particularly against Asian Americans. This group has brought cases against Harvard University, the nation's oldest private university, to challenge their affirmative action policies, which the group contends favors Black and Latino students. Ultimately, it hopes that race considerations will be replaced by race-neutral or "color-blind" policies. [...]

After generations of near total exclusion of Black students and other students of color, colleges and universities began admitting more diverse groups in the 1960s and 70s, and soon thereafter incorporated race-consciousness into their admissions policies. Data shows that the rise of affirmative action policies in higher education has bolstered diversity on college campuses. In 1965, Black students accounted for roughly 5% of all undergraduates. And between 1965 and 2001, the percentage of Black undergraduates doubled. The number of Latino undergraduates also rose during that time.

Still, the practice of factoring race into the admissions process faced repeated attacks. Nine states have now eliminated such race-conscious policies. The end of affirmative action at those state levels shows just how impactful the consideration of race in admissions has been: a UC Berkeley study found that after the ban in California, the number of applicants of color in the UC system sharply shifted away from UC's most selective campuses. Specifically, the number of Black freshmen admitted to UC Berkeley dropped to 3.6% between 2006 and 2010 – almost half of its population before the ban. [...] Though students of color remain underrepresented at selective colleges and universities today, institutions argue that their presence helps shape students' oncampus experiences. The removal of race consideration from college admissions could set a precedent for a less diverse school system, which stands in stark contrast to an increasingly diverse world.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
(454 words)

THE TRIALS OF MANAGING AUSTRALIA'S FERAL PIGS

Controlling millions of feral pigs is a serious problem. But for some recreational hunters, it's a family affair. [...]

Natasha and her husband, Daniel, supplement their income through Boaring Australia, a YouTube channel that documents their pig hunting across the country. Despite the grisly public perception, Natasha says it's "not a blood sport". [...]

There is no shortage of their chosen game. Feral pigs cover 45% of the Australian landmass, and the Invasive Species Council estimates their numbers fall between two and four million, depending on the season. They cause \$100m worth of damage to the agricultural sector each year. [...]

Feral pigs have a devastating impact on the landscape, threatening the habitat of 149 threatened species by digging up soil and vegetation, fouling waterways and preying on smaller animals such as reptiles, frogs and eggs, including turtle eggs. They are also, the council says, "vectors for diseases". [...]

The National Feral Pig Action Plan, endorsed in October 2021, suggests using a range of methods to control pig numbers, including shooting, baiting, trapping and fencing. [...]

"Our aim is to get populations of feral pigs down as low as possible, and to keep them there over the long term, because we know that if we don't – if we start and then stop – they will recover very quickly," [a coordinator at the National Feral Pig Action Plan] says. [...]

Pig hunting is sometimes portrayed as one of the last bastions of the rural redneck, but the Game Hunters Association of Australia (GHAA), which has been in operation for 25 years and has more than 500 members, promotes a different image.

"We don't go out there and blast everything that moves. We practice ethical hunting," says the GHAA president. "We work with the property owner to target pest species. For example, he may have pigs on a crop and we will go in and clear them".

"We like to hunt [at distances of] between 50 to 150 metres because that involves hunting and stalking, and whenever you pull that trigger you have to know where that bullet is going to go". [...]

Members of GHAA must hold a current gun licence and undergo mandatory training that covers hunter ethics, safety, policy, insurance and first aid. "The property owner is assured [the shooters] are people we have vetted, trained and are competent and capable," [the president] says. [...]

Yet for all the training and technology, [he] acknowledges the role of recreational hunters in controlling feral pigs is "a contentious issue", but adds, "if you ask the farmers, they couldn't do without us". [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian Australia*December 2023
(445 words)

THE WNBA'S DEARICA HAMBY SPEAKS OUT: 'YOU'RE TRADING ME BECAUSE I'M PREGNANT?'

She asked her coach twice, she says, just to be sure. "You're trading me because I'm pregnant?"

It was January. Dearica Hamby had just come off a championship-winning and all-star season with the Las Vegas Aces [...]. She had a good relationship with her team and with her coach, former WNBA star Becky Hammon. But then, Hamby told Hammon she was pregnant. That's when everything changed, Hamby said in an interview last week and in a federal discrimination complaint she recently filed.

The coach grilled her about whether she had planned the pregnancy, Hamby said, and even remarked about Hamby's use of birth control. According to Hamby, Hammon told her she wasn't "holding up her end of the bargain" after signing a two-year contract extension: "We didn't expect you to get pregnant in the next two years," Hamby says Hammon told her.

So when the coach called Hamby to tell her she was being traded away from Las Vegas, where she had twice won the league's player of the year award, Hamby says she asked Hammon explicitly if it was happening because of her pregnancy. Hammon's response, Hamby says, made the situation clear: "What do you want me to do?"

Earlier this month, Hamby took the extraordinary step of filing a gender and pregnancy discrimination complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against Hammon, the Aces and the WNBA, taking aim at a league that has promoted itself as an engine of gender diversity, particularly when it comes to maternity benefits for its athletes. [...]

The EEOC has become a vehicle in recent years for athletes to attempt to force change from their employers and teams. The U.S. women's national soccer team first turned to the EEOC in 2016 to allege its employer, the U.S. Soccer Federation, was paying female players less because of their gender [...].

A spokesperson for the Aces did not respond to requests for comment. Hammon has denied any allegations of wrongdoing, saying Hamby had been traded because of "math and business," not her pregnancy. [...]

Federal anti-discrimination and disability laws forbid employers not just from firing employees because of pregnancy or potential pregnancy but also from changing other terms and conditions of employment, such as job assignments. Hamby and her attorneys argue that by trading her, the Aces violated the law. [...]

Hamby wants an apology first and foremost, she said [...]. But she is also calling for significant change to the WNBA's handling of players' pregnancy and maternity. [...]

The Aces, Hamby alleges in her complaint, asserted that by signing a two-year contract extension, she had effectively given up the right to become pregnant. "Players shouldn't be afraid to start families," she said.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*October 2023
(455 words)

THE WORLD CAN SOLVE THIS MIGRATION CRISIS

Are the world's richer nations normalising the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean? That's the fear of the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) established in 1951. Eleven million people were uprooted and the IOM's job was to help European governments identify countries where people could be resettled.

In the 1950s, the IOM arranged transport for nearly a million migrants to their new countries, with the success of the resettlement programme based on international cooperation, and the idea that the burden had to be shared. More than 70 years later we see a different attitude towards the world's various migration crises, when the climate crisis, wars and poverty, are helping fuel displacement in unprecedented numbers.

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that 71.1 million people worldwide in 2022 fled their native communities in search of safety and shelter. Nearly three-quarters of the world's displaced people live in Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine and Sudan, affected by wars, climate disasters, floods, drought and landslides. They cannot rebuild their lives at home and will try to start anew abroad, but where is the international cooperation to help them?

The drive for foreign migrant workers, who were vital for postwar reconstruction, was a feature of much of northern Europe after 1945, hence the creation of the IOM. West Germany had a migrant worker programme, which explains the presence of the Turkish community in today's unified Germany.

What's interesting is that labour shortages are back. The post-pandemic world has seen unemployment in richer nations fall to the lowest level in decades, with vacancies being high and employers needing workers. Governments now try to encourage immigration. Canada hopes for 1.5 million new residents in the next few years and many countries, including some traditionally opposed to immigration, like Japan and South Korea, are more receptive to foreign-born talent, as they battle against ageing populations.

Yet there are few visa programmes, resettlement schemes or safe routes to the wealthiest countries. Since 2014, more than 28,000 people have died while trying to reach Europe, and the number of people reported dead or missing so far this year is higher than in the past four years. There are now delays in state-led search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, and some governments, like Hungary, say they're happy to accept Christian and white migrants, while rejecting non-Christian, black or brown people.

The UN says now is the time for a coordinated, global strategy on international migration. The aim is to find a more humane approach to what the UN is calling the worst migration crisis since WWII. After 1945, global leaders rose to the challenge. Now, we all wait for them to do it again.

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2023
(454 words)

THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECT PLACES ARE BEING TURNED INTO BACKDROPS FOR OUR TOURIST SELFIES

Last week Italy was, again, struggling with the conundrum of mass tourism. One of the country's most charming seaside towns, Portofino has just introduced legislation to dissuade tourists lingering for selfies: there will be fines of up to €300 if they block traffic or pedestrians in two "red zones" of the beautiful bay.

It's the latest in a series of draconian measures adopted by Italian councils to deal with herds of holidaymakers: there are fines of up to €2,500 for walking the paths above the Cinque Terre (five villages in Liguria) in flip-flops or sandals; you are no longer allowed to eat snacks outside in the center of Venice; you can be fined €250 just for sitting down on Rome's Spanish Steps; and one beach, in Eraclea, has even banned the building of sandcastles because they're considered unnecessary obstructions. […]

Italy, so dependent on tourism, is also beginning to despair of it. [...] Mass tourism is turning destinations into the opposite of what they once were. The attraction of the Cinque Terre is their stunning simplicity: they have no great monuments as such, just a sense of serenity (the steep mountains host pastel houses perched above an azure sea) that can't survive millions of wham-bam visitors a year. [...]

But if the tourism boom is often bad for locals, it's equally depressing for visitors. The fiction of tourism in the social media age is that we, as rugged adventurers, are there by ourselves. But we're only alone for that Instagram money shot. The rest is full of crowds and discomfort, with long queues just to get on the footpaths or to drink a coffee. Visitors to famous sites often come away feeling not uplifted, but fleeced by car-park charges, entry prices, food stalls and so on.

We're bemused by the inauthenticity of the experience. Travel used to be about adventure and hardship, sometimes solitude, but invariably surprise and spontaneity. Now the road is so well-trodden and designated that you feel forced through a well-oiled funnel as someone picks your pockets.

But the sense of unease goes deeper. In the past we travelled to broaden and educate the mind. Travelers suffered discomfort to absorb the wideness of the world, to feel small or vulnerable perhaps, and to allow the learning of other cultures to infiltrate their beings. Now, it seems, all that is reversed: there's minimal danger or risk to travel, and our big egos are imposed on a small world. Sites are nothing more than the backdrop for our selfies because we go places not to learn from them, but just to post and boast to others that we've been there.

Adapted from *The Guardian*April 2023
(449 words)

THERE HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTS TO CENSOR MORE THAN 1,900 LIBRARY BOOK TITLES SO FAR IN 2023

There were nearly 700 attempts to ban library books in the first eight months of 2023, according to data released Tuesday by the American Library Association (ALA). From January 1st to August 31st, the attempts sought to challenge or censor 2,000 titles, an increase compared to the same months the year before, the organization said. Last year saw the most challenges since the ALA began tracking book censorship more than two decades ago.

But the real numbers may even be higher. The ALA collects data on book bans through library professionals and news reports, and therefore, its numbers may not encompass all attempts to ban or censor certain books.

Most of the titles under scrutiny this year were written by or about people of color or members of the LGBTQ+ community, the group said.

"These attacks on our freedom to read should trouble every person who values liberty and our constitutional rights," said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom. "To allow a group of people or any individual, no matter how powerful or loud, to become the decision-maker about what books we can read or whether libraries exist, is to place all of our rights and liberties in jeopardy."

In one instance, a local group called Clean Up Samuels hosted barbecues to pass out "Request for Reconsideration" forms at the Samuels Public Library, Virginia. More than 500 forms were filled out regarding about 150 titles. The county board of supervisors there has since voted to deny 75% of the library's funding and the library director resigned in August, the ALA said.

In July, a Community School District in Iowa listed 374 books that it took issue with, but was unsure if many of the books were available in the schools' libraries. The list was trimmed down to 65 books, and titles, including some famous ones like *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *All Boys aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, were removed from the libraries.

"What this data set does not reveal are the people who want books that speak to their lived experience and librarians who want to make books accessible to people who find them relevant. Both of them are under attack," ALA President Emily Drabinski said.

Book bans, and attempts to ban books, have become more common in recent years, so much so that President Biden created a role within the Department of Education specifically focused on the practice. Illinois also became the first state to ban book bans in June.

Adapted from *NPR*September 2023
(441 words)

THERE'S NO AGE LIMIT FOR POLITICIANS – AS PEOPLE LIVE LONGER, SHOULD THAT CHANGE?

[...] President Joe Biden, approaching his 82nd birthday in November 2024, is the oldest serving U.S. president. He shares the distinction of old age with a growing number of politicians, including 82-year-old U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell. On August 30, 2023 81-year-old Sen. Mitch McConnell froze after a reporter asked him about his re-election plans. He remained silent for more than 20 seconds, his gaze distant, including after a political aide asked him if he heard the question. [...] This followed a similar incident with McConnell in July 2023.

Some people – from fellow Democrats to the New York Times editorial board – have questioned whether McConnell and other colleagues, including 90-year-old Dianne Feinstein, can fulfill the duties of their jobs. With Feinstein, there have been incidents in which she stumbled over words. She began reading prepared remarks during a Senate appropriations hearing vote on July 27, 2023, until her democratic colleague, Sen, Patty Murray, whispered to her, "Just say aye."

Such incidents prompt the question: Can politicians be too old to serve in office? Should society make retiring at a certain age mandatory for elected officials who run the country – like presidents and senators? [...] Today, the life span for the average American is 79 years. But it tends to be much higher for people like politicians, who are relatively wealthy and receive good health care. In the U.S., a person needs to be 35 years old or older in order to be president. A person must be at least 25 years old in order to serve in the House of Representatives, while the minimum age rises slightly to 30 years old for serving in the Senate. The U.S. banned age discrimination in workplaces in 1967. Should politicians who lead the country be an exception to this law?

A 2022 YouGov poll reported that 58% of Americans want a maximum age for politicians. Those who support age limits usually say that politicians holding office should be no more than 70 years old. That would make 71 % of current US senators ineligible to hold office. [...] Considering age limits for high-ranking politicians poses certain ethical questions that do not have a clear answer. Staying in office despite health problems can threaten public safety. An American president holds immense power – including the ability to launch nuclear weapons. Members of Congress are responsible for making laws, declaring war and controlling taxes and spending. Defenders of mandatory retirement say older people have had their turn.

Adapted from *The Conversation*August 2023
(450 words)

TIKTOK MIGHT BE PART OF A PLOT TO MAKE US DUMBER

Palantir chief executive Alex Karp is best known for his artificial intelligence platform, but his biggest idea might be his insistence upon rescuing the West from influences that damage the nation's intelligence.

When most people express concern about China's export as a national security threat, they tend to think about the platform's ability to retrieve massive amounts of data. They see TikTok as the ultimate spyware — a cartoonish medium that snatches our secrets while we're distracted by the vanities.

Karp has a different take. He says China is strategically using TikTok to make us, meaning the West, "dumber and slower." He isn't alone in his thinking. National Security Agency Director has warned that Chinese control of TikTok's algorithm could allow China to deploy influence operations among Western populations.

As Karp sees things, we will bury ourselves from within by becoming a nation of ignorant people. Those are my words, not his. I just happen to agree with him. Granted, this is a harsh assessment of something that millions of people view as harmless self-indulgence and entertainment.

I confess that my TikTok exposure has been limited. I only recently signed on to see what all the fuss was about. My one previous brush was in a parking lot where I saw a young girl dancing in front of an iPhone perched against her car window and blasting music that plainly stimulated her.

She was making a video for TikTok, she said. Unable to resist the moment, I asked if I could film her. I'm a reporter, I told her, which is true, and she seemed a worthy.

We don't ban free speech in this country, and we don't cancel culture. But Karp's sense of things reminds me of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" and Neil Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death."

In Huxley's novel, people are addicted to entertainment and medicate themselves with the fictional drug "soma." Their resulting stoned complacency allows the state to confiscate their rights. Postman, a professor and media critic, wrote about television and explained how the medium alters our thought processes. Postman died in 2003, one year before Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook, which triggered the Big Bang of social media. One can easily imagine what he would have thought about TikTok's effect on our brains.

Even so, that's no argument for banning TikTok, as several countries would like to do. The White House has demanded that ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, sell the app or face a possible U.S. ban. Given that China is doing to us what we aren't allowed to do to China, we should put an end to TikTok. Full stop. Inconveniently, ByteDance's owners are 20 percent its founders and Chinese investors, 60 percent global investors and 20 percent employees.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*April 2023
(448 words)

UK EDUCATION SECRETARY PLANS TO BAN MOBILE PHONES FROM ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Mobile phones could be banned from schools in England if the latest attempt to push the measure through by Gillian Keegan, the Conservative education secretary, is successful. The guidance, which would align all schools in the country, would affect the whole school day, Keegan is reportedly due to tell the Tory party conference in Manchester on Monday.

Ministers already encourage headteachers to limit phone usage, with many schools having put restrictions in place. But the BBC reported Keegan wanted expanded guidance to be offered by Whitehall, and government sources told the broadcaster they were confident it would have an effect. [...]

In July, a UN report recommended banning smartphones from schools to tackle classroom disruption, improve learning and help protect children from cyberbullying.

Unesco, the UN's education, science and culture agency, said there was evidence that excessive mobile phone use was linked to reduced educational performance and that high levels of screen time had a negative effect on children's emotional stability.

Unesco's director general said: "The digital revolution holds immeasurable potential but, just as warnings have been voiced for how it should be regulated in society, similar attention must be paid to the way it is used in education. Its use must be for enhanced learning experiences and for the wellbeing of students and teachers, not to their detriment. Keep the needs of the learner first and support teachers. Online connections are no substitute for human interaction."

The Unesco report said countries should have clear objectives and principles in place to ensure digital technology in education was beneficial and avoided harm. [...]

The general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, accused the government of failing to address the real problems facing schools of funding and staff shortages. [...] He said most schools already prohibited the use of mobile phones during the school day and most of the problems associated with mobiles – addictive use, bullying and inappropriate material – generally happened outside school.

A teachers' union said its own survey of 6,500 UK teachers last month showed there was a behaviour crisis in schools. Teachers' biggest concerns were verbal and physical abuse in the classroom, while a far smaller number reported that mobile phones were causing behaviour issues.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said the government's own consultation earlier this year concluded that most schools already had policies in place to deal with the problems of mobile phone use and urged the education secretary to focus instead on the challenge of teacher recruitment, real-terms funding cuts, the lack of mental health support and rising levels of child poverty.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2023
445 words

UN EXPERTS URGE UK TO HALT IMPLEMENTATION OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BILL

UN experts today urged the United Kingdom to take urgent action to halt the implementation of the Illegal Migration Bill, and bring domestic law in line with international human rights standards to protect and uphold migrants' rights. "Any deportation policy is in direct breach of the UK's commitments and obligations under international human rights and refugee law if it fails to provide for due process safeguards, individualised risk assessments, asylum procedures and adequate protection measures," the UN experts said.

A number of amendments from the House of Lords, including restrictions on the detention of children and inadmissibility of asylum claims, and safeguards for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, were overturned by the House of Commons earlier this week, ending the series of readings and votes between the Lords and Commons – and paving the way for the Bill to receive Royal Assent and become law. [...] "The Illegal Migration Bill gives the Home Secretary unprecedented powers to make arrangements for the detention and deportation of migrants who enter the country irregularly and meet the conditions laid down in the new law, regardless of their protection needs and individual circumstances," the experts said.

The Bill would establish new detention powers in relation to irregular migration with limited judicial oversight; restrict certain legal challenges and human rights arguments to prevent deportation; fail to make provision for unaccompanied children, pregnant women and victims of slavery or human trafficking; ban people subject to deportation from re-entering the UK or applying for UK citizenship in the future; extend the list of safe third countries; and set an annual cap on the number of people who can enter the UK through "safe and legal" routes. [...]

The UN experts stressed that the current approach, which focuses on punitive measures, fails to address the root causes of migration and leaves many people in a state of perpetual limbo, with no means of ensuring their safety and guaranteeing their rights. "Vulnerable people could be exposed to further harm and risks, including exploitation, trafficking including for purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation, arbitrary detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment".

"The new policy is likely to fuel hostility, xenophobia and discrimination against migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees," the experts said. They warned that the implementation of the new law could seriously erode and undermine the right to seek asylum and the prohibition of refoulement, the right to liberty, the prohibition of collective expulsions, and the rights and best interests of the child. They urged the Government to repeal this legislation swiftly, take immediate steps to halt any implementation plans and engage in genuine dialogue.

Adapted from *UN Press*July 2023
(448 words)

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME TO BE TRIALLED IN ENGLAND

A universal basic income of £1,600 a month is to be trialled in England for the first time in a pilot programme. Thirty people will be paid a lump sum without conditions each month for two years and will be observed to understand the effects on their lives.

The director of research at the thinktank Autonomy, which is backing the plan, said: "This is a substantial amount. Universal basic income usually covers people's basic needs but we want to see what effect this unconditional lump sum has on people's mental and physical health, whether they choose to work or not. Our society is going to require some form of basic income in the coming years, given the tumult of climate change, tech disruption and industrial transition that lies ahead."

Advocates argue that universal basic income (UBI) can provide a level of economic security to everyone. It is seen as a potential solution to insecurity in the labour market, while others say it is expensive and support should be targeted.

Last year, Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, said UBI was an idea "whose time has come" as he spoke on the cost of living crisis." A universal basic income will put a solid foundation beneath everybody so that they can have a life with security and stop worrying about everything." Similar pilots are already under way in other countries. In Wales, the devolved government is running a scheme paying £1,600 a month for two years to young people leaving care. It says it will report on the outcome after the trial finishes.

In 2020, more than 170 MPs and peers urged the government to introduce a universal basic income to "give everyone the financial support they need to provide for themselves and their families" during the coronavirus pandemic. Cleo Goodman, a co-founder of the initiative Basic Income Conversation, said: "No one should ever be facing poverty, having to choose between heating and eating, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Basic income has the potential to simplify the welfare system and tackle poverty in Britain."

A control group will be recruited and not paid the basic income to monitor their experiences during the same period. Participants will be randomly selected from a pool of volunteers, with 20% of places allocated to people with disabilities. All the evidence shows that it would directly alleviate poverty and boost millions of people's wellbeing: the potential benefits are just too large to ignore. "With the decades ahead set to be full of economic shocks due to climate change and new forms of automation, basic income is going to be a crucial part of securing livelihoods in the future."

Adapted from *The Guardian*June 2023
(457 words)

VERBAL EXTREMISM IS NOW THE BIGGEST THREAT TO LANGUAGE

George Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language", published in 1946, took aim at the bureaucrats, academics and hacks who obfuscated their misdeeds in vague, jargon-packed writing. Abstractions, euphemisms and clichés all served as "the defence of the indefensible". [...]

If Orwell were writing today, he would find plenty of euphemisms to complain about. On October 7th an open letter from a clutch of student groups at Harvard University vaguely described the "unfolding violence" in Israel without ascribing blame to Hamas. Abstract brutality "unfolding" shocks rather less than a clearer description of Hamas slaughtering 1,200 Israelis, nearly all civilians, including many children.

As a onetime contributor to the BBC, it is easy to imagine Orwell defying the broadcaster's refusal to use the word "terrorism". Orwell had no trouble doling out his medicine to both sides; he would have also had harsh words for those describing the "collateral damage" buried in Gazan rubble, another abstraction designed to prevent readers picturing dead children. Around 13,000 Palestinians have died since October 7th.

[...] Today, [...] billions of people can publish their thoughts instantaneously. The desire to grab attention seems to incentivise stylistic sin. The social-mediafication of writing has steered the tone from the offence of euphemism to its twin offence of exaggeration.

Taking what they no doubt believe to be an Orwellian starting point – the danger of being too soft in their language – keyboard warriors cannot resist the temptation to reach for the most inflammatory words available. What used to be called chauvinism, then sexism, is now "misogyny", a word once reserved for actual hatred of women. Those who do not ascribe to left-wing views on race are accused not of bias, prejudice or even racism, but of "white supremacy", a phrase that just a decade ago was reserved for neo-Nazis. [...]

The worst crime imaginable – "genocide" – is also being bandied about more often. The word is used correctly when describing the Arab militias in Sudan who are rounding up black African tribes, such as the Masalit, murdering men and boys, raping women and saying "the baby will be an Arab". But those using the term "genocide" to characterise Israeli attacks on civilians in Gaza are not hewing strictly to what the word's definition is, which is the intentional destruction of people for the mere fact of their ethnicity.

So here is a suggestion for writers. You cannot outshout the crowds. So distinguish yourselves by choosing accurate, vivid words between the evasions of euphemism and the temptations of exaggeration. Crimes against language, in the long run, make it harder to describe crimes against humanity.

Adapted from *The Economist*, November 2023 (448 words)

VIDEO DOORBELLS: POLICE CHAMPION THEM BUT DO THEY CUT CRIME?

Ms Randle had been napping in her living room in Phoenix, Arizona, when she heard a slight noise from outside that she chose to ignore. Later, when she reviewed the automatic recording from the video doorbell on her phone she discovered that a burglar had tried to open her front door. He then walked off, most likely after seeing the camera. [...]

There is no doubting the ever-growing popularity of the doorbells. Some 12 million were sold around the world in 2021, up 63% from 2020, according to one estimate. The doorbells connect to a property's wi-fi, and then to an app on the user's phone. So you can be away from home, and get instant notification and video footage of someone at your front door. You can also talk to the person. The video recording is then typically stored on a cloud computer for a month, if the user pays a subscription. [...]

"Like all CCTV, we use video doorbell footage as evidence to help solve crime," says a spokesman for London's Metropolitan Police. [...] At Greater Manchester Police, officers now often ask people to submit doorbell camera footage to help investigations.

The world's best-selling video doorbell is Amazon's Ring. [...] Google's Nest is another popular video doorbell. [...] In the US, both Ring and Nest have provided footage to thousands of police forces across the country for a number of years. However, this has not been without controversy, as there have been some occasions where Ring and Nest have given footage to US police forces without first getting permission from the homeowner. Ring counters that it only does this "in cases involving imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to any person".

Another criticism of video doorbells is whether they infringe on the privacy of neighbours, whose comings and goings could be recorded by the motion-detecting cameras. [...]

While footage from video doorbells is being increasingly used by police forces, do the products work as a crime deterrent in the first place? The evidence appears to be mixed. Back in 2017, the Los Angeles Police Department said that, in a trial, the crime rate in an area with homes fitted with Ring video doorbells saw a 50% reduction in crime compared with another neighbourhood that did not have the cameras. Yet since then other police forces have said that the doorbells make little difference.

Meanwhile, a UK organisation says that video doorbells may actually make a home more vulnerable to being burgled. Its argument is that the doorbells indicate to a burglar that the homeowner is affluent, and therefore is likely to have things worth stealing. [...]

Adapted from **BBC NEWS** August 2023 (452 words)

WALES TO CLAMP DOWN ON JUNK FOOD MEAL DEALS TO TACKLE OBESITY

Clampdowns on unhealthy meal deals and supermarket temporary price reductions for foods high in fat, sugar or salt are to be introduced in Wales to help tackle the obesity crisis. With almost two-thirds of adults in Wales overweight or obese, the Labour-led government announced it would go further than England in framing laws designed to tackle the promotion of ultra-processed foods.

The government said it intended to match the UK government's plans to curb volume promotions such as buy one get one free in England. It also revealed proposals to tackle meal deals and temporary price reductions, arguing it needed to do more because of the scale of the crisis.

The Welsh deputy minister for mental health and wellbeing, Lynne Neagle, said: "Rising levels of obesity are creating the serious burden of preventable ill health in Wales. The situation is urgent and we have to act now".

"We're not banning meal deals but we want to shift the focus of meal deals towards healthier, more nutritionally balanced food. Lots of them come with large bags of crisps and the snacks are often high in fat and sugar. We want to make sure we can still have meal deals available at an affordable price but which are not so high in calories, fat and sugar."

Research from Public Health Wales found that three-quarters of lunchtime meal deals exceed the recommended level of calories and salt for lunch. The least healthy lunchtime options contain two-thirds of daily calorie intake, more than 120% of daily fat intake, 150% of sugar and 110% of salt. The majority of dinnertime meal combinations exceed average energy requirements.

The researchers concluded that if someone bought an average meal deal for lunch five days a week, they would gain more than 3 kgs in a year. If they bought a high-calorie meal deal for lunch five days a week, they could gain 20 kgs in a year.

Neagle said the government would not ban temporary price reductions either but added: "Our aim is to rebalance our food environments so that the healthy choice becomes the easy choice."

Last week, the UK government put off by two years its planned ban on buy one get one free junk food deals, citing the cost of living crisis. The Welsh government is planning to bring in its restrictions by 2025 and said it would press ahead even if the UK government did not.

She denied this was an example of the nanny state. "Tackling obesity is not just about personal responsibility. It's about the food environment in which we live, which is full of processed, unhealthy food." The Welsh government said over 60% of people in Wales aged 16 and over were overweight or obese.

Adapted from *The Guardian*June 2023
(465 words)

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE 'BEACH TOWEL REVOLT' TAKING BACK GREEK BEACHES

It was around sunset on a Sunday in Paros, a popular holiday island in Greece's Cycladic region. A crowd of around 50 were gathered on a beach close to the island's main port. [...] As the audience watched, a man read parts of the Greek constitution aloud, which states that beaches and other natural areas belong to the country's citizens.

The protest was part of a campaign that media has dubbed the "beach towel revolt", whereby locals are seeking free access to beaches that have been taken over by beach bars and other businesses offering exorbitantly priced sun loungers and umbrellas. [...] It's one symptom of how the island is increasingly catering to tourists at the expense of locals.

Beach-side businesses must apply for licences from the Greek finance minister to use designated parts of the beach. [...] Protestors allege that checks are rarely – if ever – carried out. As a result, free spots for towels are now few and far between.

Residents created a Facebook page and began organising demonstrations, calling for a crackdown on these private operators. They also used drone images to document illegal sun loungers, comparing their locations to their government-designated areas. [...]

The movement has quickly gained momentum. [...] Demonstrations have taken place on the neighbouring island Naxos and the southern island of Crete. More recently, the islands of Rhodes and Aegina, as well as Attica – the state where Athens is located – have joined in. [...]

However, campaigners say the beaches are just one part of a bigger struggle. Greece is one of the most popular holiday destinations in Europe and speakers at the protest told the gathered crowd that overtourism – and the social and environmental problems that come with it – must be addressed.

Tourism is Greece's largest industry. In 2021 the country welcomed 15 million visitors – one-and-a-half-times its total population. However, many argue that the tourism boom has not been properly managed. [...]

It appears that the protests are having an effect. Thanks to media attention, authorities carried out inspections on one of Paros's worst-affected beaches. [...]

"Right now, prices are out of control," said Stephanou, a campaigner. "Most people can't afford to go to a bar or a restaurant. The traffic is incredible." If you don't own a house, it's hard to find one to rent that isn't an Airbnb, which has led to shortages of key workers such as doctors, nurses and teachers. [...]

Stephanou would like to see a move away from marketing the Cycladic islands as a luxury destination. "There is amazing history here, archaeological sites, walking paths, good wine and agricultural produce," he said. "This can attract a more responsible visitor than one who just wants to sit on a sun lounger with a cocktail."

Adapted from *bbc.com* September 2023 (460 words)

WHY CHILDREN OF MARRIED PARENTS DO BETTER, BUT AMERICA IS MOVING THE OTHER WAY

The economist Melissa Kearney has been both vilified and praised for *The Two-Parent Privilege*. In her book, Kearney points out the fact that children raised by two parents have a much higher chance of success than those raised by one. She even argues that whether parents are married or not impacts their children's success.

Her argument goes against the trend in the United States. [...] Almost half of all babies born in the U.S. in 2019 were born to unmarried mothers, a dramatic increase since 1960, when only 5% of births were born to unmarried mothers. The U.S. has the world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households. 23% of U.S. children under age 18, live with one parent and no other adults. Kearney finds that this arrangement hurts children, widens inequality and ultimately damages society. [...]

Progressives are accusing [...] Kearney of stigmatizing single mothers. Conservatives are celebrating her findings as validating their support of marriage. Kearney's research as an economist at the University of Maryland focuses on issues such as poverty, inequality, family and children.

Undeniably more women are deciding to have children and remain single. [...] Some children who are raised by single mothers go on to achieve great things. But the data shows that the odds of graduating from high school, getting a college degree and having high earnings in adulthood are substantially lower for children who grow up in single-mother homes. [...] Kearney notes that families headed by a single mother are five times more likely to live in poverty than families headed by a married couple. It's simple math, she says: [...] raising children takes a lot of resources: money, time, emotional energy and more.

Most single mothers are less likely to have a college education or a high income. Single motherhood is a lot less prevalent in higher-educated women. [...] Data also shows that many single mothers don't have help from any other adult, like a grandparent or other family member. That means it's mom who both supports the family financially and serves as the primary caregiver. [...]

Kearney focuses her research on single mothers because of their outsize number. It's not like there aren't single dads. But they're only a quarter of single moms. Kearney is especially worried about boys falling behind and no role models around them. "We've got millions of boys growing up without dads in their home," she says. Data shows that boys from disadvantaged homes are more likely to get in trouble at school and with the criminal justice system.

Altogether, this has a compounding effect of undermining social mobility and perpetuating inequality across generations, she argues. [...]

Adapted from *NPR*October 2023
(453 words)

WHY COBALT MINING IN CONGO NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION

Cobalt is an essential mineral used for batteries in electric cars, computers, and cell phones. Demand for cobalt is increasing as more electric cars are sold, particularly in Europe, where governments are giving generous environmental bonuses. As a result, according to recent projections, the demand for cobalt for use in batteries will grow fourfold in 2030.

More than 70 percent of the world's cobalt is produced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and 15 to 30 percent of the Congolese cobalt is produced by "artisanal and small-scale mining" referred to as "ASM". For years, human rights groups have documented severe human rights issues in these ASM sites. These human rights risks are particularly high in this African country weakened by violent ethnic conflict, Ebola, and high levels of corruption. Child labor, fatal accidents, and violence are recurrent there.

Artisanal and small-scale mines cannot simply be shut down, however. They mean survival for millions of Congolese who live in extreme poverty. Cutting ASM out of the cobalt supply chain is neither feasible, due to the complex nature of the cobalt supply chain, nor desirable from a development perspective. Instead, companies committed to setting up responsible cobalt sourcing practices need to take responsibility for addressing the human rights violations.

Some companies have started experimenting with so-called "ASM formalization projects", which govern mining methods and working conditions [...] so as to establish a common standard for mine safety and child labor regulation as well as to ensure cobalt is mined responsibly. [...]

Many large companies that produce electronics or electric vehicles are, at least officially, NOT using cobalt from ASM sites. But it is quite difficult to clearly separate them out from official industrial production.

To improve consumer confidence that cobalt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not mined by children or in unsafe conditions, the mining industry needs to put in place universal human rights standards [...]. The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has already adopted a "Mining Code" to support human rights challenges, such as the regulation of child labor.

Several leading companies are beginning to support mining common standards. The government could impose them to all cooperatives and concession holders, manufacturing and enduser companies so as to develop systems that promote responsible cobalt production and trade practices.

The increasing world demand for battery minerals presents a unique opportunity to develop a model for responsible cobalt. The benefits from the cobalt model could apply to the estimated 40 million artisanal miners that work on extracting different minerals for a living around the world. And these solutions should be put in place now before the electric vehicle boom really takes off.

Adapted from *Council on Foreign relations*November 2023
(450 words)

WHY EUROPE IS A MAGNET FOR MORE AMERICANS

[...] One type of American expat is still the well-off innocent who comes to Europe for amusement or edification. Another sort, however, comes not to enjoy the old world but to escape the new one. [...]

More Americans are moving to Europe lately, and many are fleers rather than seekers. The statistics are messy, but in some countries the trend is clear; [...] Britain thinks the number of resident Americans rose from 137,000 in 2013 to 166,000 in 2021.

Meanwhile, more and more Americans say they want out of their own country. But few of those who vowed to leave if Donald Trump were elected in 2016 actually did so [...]. The follow-through rate remains tiny: a few tens of thousands of émigrés out of a population of 330m. But many recent expats say they left partly out of despair at where the United States is heading. [...] For most expats, politics was not so much the reason they left as a reason not to go back: "Not just the election, but the continued divisiveness".

"The thing we hear all the time is that the work-life balance is so much better here," says an American expat who heads the John Adams Institute, an American-Dutch cultural venue. American workers toil for 1,810 hours a year, Europeans just 1,570. [...] The rise of international English makes things easier for Americans, who are notoriously bad at languages.

Some émigrés are also drawn to Europe's robust social safety-nets. [...] In Portugal, they pay for coverage a fraction of what an equivalent American plan would cost. [...]

"We felt the tension lift" within weeks of leaving America, agrees a Black American psychiatrist who moved to Lisbon in 2022. For her, the central issues were racism and violence. She had been trying for years to persuade her husband, a lawyer, to move abroad. The strife after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 brought him around. He recalls saying: "I think we need to get a gun.' When I said that out loud, I was like, if I have to live in a country where I need a gun to protect my family, then this is not the country for me."

Other factors are more prosaic. The huge increase in remote working during the pandemic made living abroad more feasible. And the European countries that lure the most Americans have set up tempting deals for foreigners. [...] Several countries are introducing "digital nomad" visas for tech freelancers. [...]

Americans once felt that their country was the ultimate immigrant nation; leaving seemed odd. Now they are aware that Europe has its advantages. [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*September 2023
(460 words)

WHY SURGE PRICING IS SPREADING

Whether it's a Friday-evening flight, [...] or a taxi ride in a downpour, we have all been burned by higher-than-normal prices due to excess demand.

Raising costs when businesses are busiest is the norm across the travel industry, for instance – but now, consumers are beginning to see these 'surge prices' in more sectors. [...]

The trend is spreading. An October survey [...] showed 47% of British people had noticed examples of surge pricing, with 32% seeing an increase in the price of food and drink in pubs and bars during peak times.

The concept of dynamic pricing is simple – and easy for businesses to implement. [...] "In periods of high demand, the scarce goods are more valuable, and companies can increase their prices," says Arnd Vomberg, a professor of digital marketing [...] at the University of Mannheim Business School, Germany.

Perhaps the most well-known example of this is within ride-share companies, including Uber and Lyft, which have used surge pricing for years to charge riders when demand for cars spikes relative to the number of drivers available. However, while these companies have become synonymous with the concept of surge pricing, it is not new – airlines have been implementing this business model since the 1980s [...].

Outside travel, online stores are increasingly using this dynamic pricing, too, says Vomberg. "On Amazon.com alone, millions of price changes occur within a day, corresponding to a price change over approximately every ten minutes for each product." [...] He cites a 2016 study, which showed the price of a Nikon camera on Amazon changed within hours with a difference of [...] 240%.

[...] Vomberg says time-based dynamic pricing will likely become a competitive standard at least in online markets. He attributes this largely to the development of algorithms that naturally build the approach into business models. "Al-enabled tools can rely on internal inventory levels and [...] also track and learn competitor and customer responses to price changes," he says.

Now, surge pricing is happening within brick-and-mortar establishments including bars and supermarkets as well. "Physical businesses are adopting electronic shelf labels that enable real time price adjustments depending on the time of day, stock levels and whether items are approaching their sell-by date," says [...] a chairman of Oxford Business College. [...]

The current economic climate is also driving the need for these pricing technologies. While creating competitive prices is always key to healthy profit margins, he says dynamic pricing enables businesses to optimise their pricing depending on the financial situations of their customer base. [...]

"Dynamic and surge pricing will likely expand to more industries and more companies in the long term, but just because a product may be popular does not mean that customers are willing to turn a blind eye to being charged more," Vomberg says. [...]

Adapted from **BBC.COM** November 2023 (459 words)

WHY UNEMPLOYED WORKERS ARE SO BURNT OUT

Employees are burnt out. Data and anecdotes alike throughout the past several years show that the volatile job market, [...] budget cuts and hiring freezes are taking a toll on workers, especially younger employees. But this isn't the whole story: people who are out of work and actively searching for jobs are burnt out, too.

Many of these jobseekers face a frustrating, time-consuming cycle of submitting applications, to no avail. They spend time networking, CV and cover-letter writing, interviewing, following up and getting their hopes up – only for companies to send a curt rejection, or not reply at all. Then, they must start the process again. [...]

Dublin-based Basant Shenouda, 26, spent three emotional years on a job search that left her very burnt out. She started job searching during her last year in university as an international student in Germany. Following a full year of rejections from major tech companies in 2018, Shenouda took a step back and took another internship post-graduation for experience. She secured a job offer right before the start of the pandemic in 2020 – but her offer was postponed eight months, with the risk of possibly being revoked amid layoffs.

Her job search has a happy ending – in 2021, she finally started what she calls a "dream job". But it took a significant amount of effort and strife to get there. [...]

The years-long ordeal also dampened her career confidence. [...] Her low point, she says, was when a company put her through six rounds of interviews throughout four months, only to tell her via a form message that she did not get the job. [...]. "My mental health completely plummeted. [...]I lost weight from the pressure."

Vicki Salemi, a New York-based careers expert [...] says many workers may have to augment the way they're thinking about their career paths as a result of increasingly tough labour-market conditions. She says [...] jobseekers may also need to consider "a part-time, hourly job to keep your skills sharp, earn some money, make some contacts, get you out of the house and stay engaged".

She suggests [...] creating a daily routine and setting a designated time each day for setting up job alerts, spending time applying for jobs and sending out emails. The process is still time consuming, but for workers who are suffering, it can help to "incorporate the job search and networking conversations into your day, but don't make it your entire day". [...]

The reality is that it may still take time for jobseekers to secure a role. However difficult, Vicky Salemi recommends workers do their best to protect and prioritise their health, and be as patient as possible – especially as recruiters are especially inundated with applications right now.

Adapted from **BBC News** July 2023 (456 words)

WHY WE USE GRAPHIC NOVELS TO TEACH MATH AND PHYSICS

Post-pandemic, some educators are trying to reengage students with technology – like videos, computer gaming or artificial intelligence, just to name a few. But teachers using these tools often struggle to retain students' attention, often competing with the latest social media phenomenon.

Graphic novels – offering visual information with text – provide a means to engage students without losing the rigor of textbooks. Two educators in math and physics have found graphic novels to be effective. [....] In addition to covering a wide range of topics and audiences, graphic novels can explain tough topics without alienating students averse to STEM – science, technology, engineering and math. They help dive into topics beyond what is possible in a time-constrained class. [...]

Graphic novels offer the best of two worlds – a hybrid between modern and traditional media. This integration of text with images and diagrams is especially useful in STEM disciplines that require quantitative reading and data analysis skills, like math and physics. For example, our collaborator Jason Ho, uses "Max the Demon Vs Entropy of Doom" to teach his physics students about entropy. This topic can be particularly difficult for students because it's one of the first times when they can't physically touch something in physics. Instead, students have to rely on math and diagrams to fill in their knowledge. Rather than stressing over equations, Ho's students focus on understanding the subject more conceptually. This approach helps build their intuition before diving into the algebra. They get a feeling for the fundamentals before they have to worry about equations. [...]

Students learning math and physics today are surrounded by math anxiety and trauma, which often lead to their own negative associations with math. [...] Graphic novels can help make math more accessible not only for students themselves, but also for parents or students learning to be teachers.

In a geometry course, secondary education students don't memorize formulas and fill out problem sheets. Instead, they read "Who Killed Professor X?", a murder mystery in which all of the suspects are famous mathematicians. The suspects' alibis are justified through problems from geometry, algebra and pre-calculus. While trying to understand the hidden geometry of suspect relationships, students often forget that they are doing math – focusing instead on poring over secret hints and notes needed to solve the mystery.

Although this is just one experience for these students, it can help change things for students experiencing mathematical anxiety. It boosts their confidence and shows them how math can be fun.

In addition to being viewed favorably by students, graphic novels can enhance student learning by improving written communication skills, reading comprehension and critical literacy skills. And even outside the classroom, graphic novels support long-term memory. [...]

Adapted from *theconversation.com*August 2023
(452 words)