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High and Dry in Europe
Boats stranded at a Danube River marina in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Friday. A drought has lowered water levels across the continent, disrupting energy and shipping.

How Did Failed Retailer Invest \$100 Million in Trump Crypto?

Foreigner's Mysterious Windfall Goes Unchecked

By RUSS BUETTNER

During the World Cup soccer final in New Jersey last month, Zach Witkoff, co-founder of President Trump's cryptocurrency company, took in the action from a luxury suite. Joining him was a man who had made the president, and all the company's co-founders, much richer.

Two years earlier, the man, Guren "Bobby" Zhou, was a failed hardwood flooring retailer in Brit-

ain who had come under investigation there for money laundering and presided over the collapse of a small crypto start-up.

Then seemingly out of nowhere, he became one of the biggest buyers of tokens from Mr. Trump's company, World Liberty Financial, dropping a total of \$100 million through a new firm called Aqua 1. He kept quiet about it for months, other than speaking briefly as "Mr. Bobby" from Aqua 1 during a little-noticed audio stream on X.

"We're very proud to be a major player in the World Liberty, which is Trump's family's crypto venture," he said.

Under World Liberty policy, as much as \$75 million of that money was distributed to a company controlled by the president and his three sons. The money also benefited the family of Steve Witkoff, the Trump administration's special peace envoy and the father of Zach Witkoff.

In any prior era, a windfall for
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Senate Hopeful Changed Tune And Embraced Election Denial

By BETH REINHARD

In the chaotic aftermath of the 2020 election, as President Trump refused to accept defeat and pumped out false claims about voter fraud, Mike Rogers was a clear and consistent voice of reproach.

Mr. Rogers, a former Republican representative from Michigan, denounced Mr. Trump's efforts to undermine the election as "cause for both concern and alarm." He ripped the president's pressure on Georgia's top election official "as more gangster than presidential." As for Mr. Trump's role in the riot at the U.S. Capitol

on Jan. 6, 2021, Mr. Rogers declared, "You're damn right you had responsibility for this."

But as he aims to return to Washington, in a Senate race considered key to control of that chamber, Mr. Rogers has become an election skeptic. Minutes after the president's recent speech filled with outlandish accusations about voting fraud — including a debunked claim about Michigan ballots — Mr. Rogers weighed in, suggesting that further scrutiny of the election was warranted.

"I am thankful for President
Continued on Page A10

WHITE HOUSE MEMO

With Online Taunts, Vance Abandons Decorum

By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — It was hardly the first time that someone on social media called someone else fat. But it may have been the first time that a vice president of the United States did so.

Peeved at a conservative columnist who criticized his position on Iran, Vice President JD Vance jabbed last week at his physical appearance. "If you've ever met him in person," he wrote on social media, "it's quite obvious the man has never missed a burrito."

In an era when playground insults pass for political dialogue, few have leaped into the online flame wars with more gusto than Mr. Vance.

Vice President Assails His Critics Directly, Left and Right

The first millennial vice president has long dispensed with the decorum and restraint of his older predecessors to go after the "idiots" and "scumbags" who anger him, from the "limousine socialists" on the left to the "disgraceful" conservatives on the right.

He works, of course, for the master of the personal put-down, and perhaps that explains Mr. Vance's emergence as one of the administration's chief trolls. But even if he hopes to impress Pres-

ident Trump, Mr. Vance also appears to have a natural appetite for conflict, the product of a generation that grew up with gladiatorial political instincts. It is not enough that someone else may be wrong about policy or politics; they must be stupid, mendacious, vile or, yes, even overweight.

"Vice President Vance's willingness publicly to disparage others in personal terms stands apart from the behavior of modern vice presidents during the last half-century," said Joel K. Goldstein, a scholar of the vice presidency at the St. Louis University School of Law. Whatever his motivation, Mr. Goldstein added, "it departs from the norms associated with the office and undermines the goal of pro-

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When Fierce Weather Reaches The Stoops of a Friendly Street

By DAVID GELLES

No place is safe from climate change these days. Not even Sesame Street, where sunny days used to sweep the clouds away.

Last week, a fierce storm tore through the set of the 57-year-old children's show, knocking over lampposts, blowing out windows and scattering debris around Oscar the Grouch's trash can.

The fictional cloudburst was part of a special episode, "Storm on Sesame Street," created to help children make sense of the extreme weather that has become increasingly common across the world as the planet warms.

In the show, viewable on Netflix and PBS Kids, Elmo, Big Bird, Bert, Ernie, Grover and Snuffleupagus prepare for an incoming storm, then assess the damage after the clouds clear.

Left unaddressed in the episode was where all this extreme weather is coming from, and why it's increasing. There was no mention of climate change, let alone the fossil fuel emissions that are

the main driver of global warming.

Rocio Galarza, vice president of U.S. educational programs for Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind the show, said the "Sesame Street" team was well aware of the overwhelming scientific evidence showing that human activity is dangerously warming the planet.

"Definitely, that's what the science shows," she said. But the focus of the episode, she said, was on how a child would experience extreme weather.

But the episode also arrives at an uncertain and politically charged moment for PBS, which has been home to "Sesame Street" since 1969.

Last year, President Trump signed an executive order seeking to eliminate funding for PBS and NPR, which the order cited as "biased media." Two months later, Congress voted to claw back roughly \$500 million in annual
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Looking for Unity in Michigan

The Democratic Party is racing to get behind Dr. Abdul El-Sayed after a divisive Senate primary. *PAGE A10*

'Stand Your Ground' Debate

Rihanna Kelter, a trans woman, is facing trial after she drew a gun during a confrontation in Wyoming. *PAGE A9*



INTERNATIONAL A4-8

Taiwan's Swarm of Drones

Inspired by Ukraine's success, the island democracy has been building unmanned aircraft and boats to deter a potential Chinese invasion. *PAGE A4*

A Life of Survival and Burial

More than a month after the earthquakes in Venezuela, the coastal region of La Guaira, once the nation's main gateway, is unrecognizable. *PAGE A6*

Shootings Shake Thailand

The latest rampage, at a high school on Friday, has the nation wondering how to toughen its gun laws after years of vows to do so. News Analysis. *PAGE A5*

BUSINESS B1-5

After Fire, Sign of a Comeback

Rick Caruso, a billionaire real estate developer, is reviving a shopping mall in the Pacific Palisades that's still surrounded by burned-out lots. *PAGE B1*

Stuck With Unsold Businesses

Despite a deal-making boom, private equity firms are unable to exit a growing number of investments at values their investors require. *PAGE B1*

A Fumbled Renewal Plan

A Hall of Fame Village was pitched in 2014 to revive Canton, Ohio. But the N.E.L. backed out after millions were spent, and the project is stalled. *PAGE B1*

SPORTS D1-8

Running Back to Big Money

Bijan Robinson's and Jahmyr Gibbs's record contracts show that an N.F.L. position is again highly valued. *PAGE D6*

'You Can See the Joy'

Angel Reese's trade to Atlanta has proved beneficial for the player and a W.N.B.A. franchise. *PAGE D1*



ARTS C1-6

In Wagner's Sanctuary

For 150 years, devotees of the composer's works have made the pilgrimage to the Bayreuth Festival. *PAGE C1*

Her Story of Belonging

An animated special that is based on a picture book by Jacqueline Woodson extols the value of diversity. *PAGE C1*

OPINION A14-15

Matthew Yglesias

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