**Companies Weigh Requiring Vaccines**

As American companies prepare to bring large numbers of workers back to the office in the coming months, executives are facing one of their most delicate pandemic-related decisions: Should they require employees to be vaccinated? 

Take the case of United Airlines. In January, the chief executive, Scott Kirby, indicated at a company town hall that he wanted to require all of his roughly 96,000 employees to get coronavirus vaccines once they became widely available.

“I think it’s the right thing to do,” Kirby said, before urging other corporations to follow suit. It has been four months. No major airlines have made a similar pledge — and United Airlines is waffling.

“It’s still something we are considering, but no final decisions have been made,” a spokeswoman, Leslie Scott, said.

For the country’s largest companies, mandatory vaccinations would protect service workers and lower the anxiety for returning office employees. That includes those who have been vaccinated but may be reluctant to return without knowing whether their colleagues have as well.

But making vaccinations mandatory could risk a backlash, and perhaps even litigation, from those who view it as an invasion of privacy and a Big Brother-like move.

In polls, executives show a willingness to require vaccinations. In a survey of 1,339 employers conducted by Arizona State University’s College of Health Solutions and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, 44 percent of U.S. respondents planned to mandate vaccinations for their companies.

Despite what surveys have found, few executives have taken the step of mandating vaccines. It seems that most are hoping that encouragement, whether forceful or subtle, will be enough.

Douglas Braley, an employment lawyer at the global law firm Ropes & Gray, warns clients of the implications of following through on a mandate, he said.

“What if 10 percent of your workforce refuses? Are you prepared to lay off that 10 percent?” he said he asked clients. “Or what if it’s someone high-level or in a key role, would you be prepared to impose consequences? And then they sometimes get more nervous.”

Some companies are sidestepping the problem and trying incentives instead. Amtrak is paying employees two hours’ worth of regular wages per shot upon proof of vaccination. Darden, which owns Olive Garden and other restaurants, told employees it would offer two hours of pay for each dose they receive.

In the United States, there’s nothing new about vaccines being required for participation in public life. The Supreme Court ruled about a century ago that states could require vaccinations for school attendance.

But the pandemic brings up a host of complications that companies typically prefer to avoid, involving the private lives, religious preferences and medical histories of employees.

**Unattended Ballots and the Bamboo Conspiracy**

Untrained citizens are trying to find traces of bamboo on last year’s ballots, seemingly trying to prove a conspiracy theory that the election was tainted by fake votes from Asia. Thousands of ballots are left unattended and unsecured. People with open partisan bias, including a man who was photographed at the Capitol steps during the Jan. 6 riot, are doing the recounting.

All of these issues with the Republican-backed re-examination of the November election results from Arizona’s most populous county were laid out this week by Katie Hobbs, Arizona’s Democratic secretary of state, in a scathing six-page letter.

Hobbs called the process “a significant departure from standard best practices.”

“Though conspiracy theorists are undoubtedly cheering on these types of inspections — and perhaps providing financial support because of their use — they do little other than further marginalize the professionalism and intent of this ‘audit,’” she wrote to Ken Bennett, a former Republican secretary of state and the liaison between Republicans in the State Senate and the company conducting it.

The effort has no official standing and will not change the state’s vote, whatever it finds. But it has become so troubled that the Department of Justice expressed concerns this week that it might violate federal laws.

“We have a concern that Maricopa County election records, which are required by federal law to be retained and preserved, are no longer under the ultimate control of elections officials, are not being adequately safeguarded by contractors, and are at risk of damage or loss,” wrote Pamela Karlan, the principal deputy assistant attorney general with the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

The scene playing out in Arizona is perhaps the most off-the-rails episode in the Republican Party’s escalating effort to support former President Donald J. Trump’s lie that he won the election. Four months after Congress certified the results of the presidential election, local officials around the country are continuing to provide oxygen for Trump’s obsession.

In Arizona, the review is proving to be every bit as problematic as skeptics had imagined.

Last month, the Arizona Republic editorial board called for the state’s G.O.P. Senate majority to stop “abusing its authority.”

Bennett, the liaison between Republicans in the State Senate and the company conducting the vote review, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
Junta Restores Reign of Terror For Myanmar

Every night at 8, the stern-faced newscaster on Myanmar military TV announces the day’s hunt. The mug shots of those charged with political crimes appear on screen. Among them are doctors, students, beauty queens, actors, reporters, even a pair of makeup bloggers.

Some of the faces look puffy and bruised, the likely result of interrogations. They are a warning not to oppose the military junta that seized power in a Feb. 1 coup and imprisoned the country’s civilian leaders.

As the midnight insects trill, the hunt intensifies. Military censors sever the internet across most of Myanmar, matching the darkness outside with an information blackout. Soldiers sweep through the cities, arresting, abducting and assaulting with slingshots and rifles.

The nightly banging on doors, as arbitrary as it is dreaded, galvanizes a frenzy of self-preservation. Residents delete their Facebook accounts, destroy incriminating mobile phone cards and erase traces of support for Myanmar’s elected government. As sleep proves elusive, it’s as if much of the nation were suffering a collective insomnia.

Little more than a decade ago, the most innocuous of infractions — owning a photograph of pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or an unregistered cell phone — could mean a prison sentence. Some of the military’s Orwellian diktats rivaled those of North Korea.

But the Tatmadaw, as the Myanmar military is known, has built an entire infrastructure dedicated to one purpose: perpetuating its power for power’s sake.

The Tatmadaw may have modernized its military arsenal, acquiring Chinese-made weapons and Russian fighter jets. But its propaganda is stuck in a time warp from back when few challenged its narrative.

For all the fear percolating in Myanmar, the resistance has only hardened. On Wednesday, the National Unity Government said it was forming a “people’s defense force” to counter the Tatmadaw.

HANNAH BEECH

Desperate Afghans Take Grim Jobs in Istanbul

ISTANBUL — In a derelict house in one of the oldest quarters of Istanbul, a group of Afghan migrants were welcoming new arrivals — two teenagers who had survived the perilous two-month journey on the migrant trail from Afghanistan.

“Wherever there is money and food,” said Idris, 18, in April. “Wherever we can earn money to send back to our families who are hungry, we will stay.” He and several other Afghans gave only one name, since they were in the country without documentation.

A former athlete from Kabul, he said they had just arrived overnight in Istanbul after a 60-hour trek over the mountains from Iran into Turkey. A high school student who came with him was hunched over a cellphone, calling his mother in Afghanistan.

The number of Afghans arriving in Turkey has soared over the last seven years as the United States and NATO forces have wound down their military presence. With the Taliban gaining strength and the last American forces preparing to leave this summer, more turmoil could force an even greater exodus, according to refugee officials and the migrants themselves.

More than 200,000 Afghans were caught entering Turkey illegally in 2019, many of whom were deported back to Afghanistan. But despite a reduction of overall numbers in the last year because of the pandemic, Afghans still represent by far the largest migrant group making the dangerous crossing by sea or land to Greece.

Among those making the dangerous journey is former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is among those calling for the Biden administration to set up a large visa program to manage an expected outpouring of Afghans.

25 Killed as Drug Raid in Brazil Ends in Shootout

RIO DE JANEIRO — A police operation targeting drug dealers in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday morning left at least 25 people dead, including a police officer, in an operation that officials and human rights activists called the deadliest in the city’s history.

The gun battle in Jacarezinho, a poor and working-class district controlled by the Comando Vermelho, or Red Command, also wounded at least two subway passengers who were struck as their train was caught in the crossfire.

Residents and human rights activists accused the police of using excessive force and questioned why the operation was launched at all, given a Supreme Court ban on law enforcement raids in the city during the pandemic.

Nadine Borges, vice president of the human rights commission at Brazil’s bar association, said a team of lawyers gathering facts had heard chilling preliminary accounts.

“There were executions of people who had already surrendered,” she said. “It was absolute barbarism.”

Police commanders said the shootout began at 6 a.m. when officers who had arrived to serve arrest warrants were fired upon. One officer, André Leonardo de Mello Frias, was fatally shot in the head, they said.

Police operations in Rio de Janeiro are among the most lethal in the world: In 2019, at least 1,610 people were killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro state, a record high. Officers are seldom subject to investigation or prosecution.

Elected officials who have been critical of the police denounced Thursday’s raid.

FLÁVIA MILHORANCE and ERNESTO LONDONO

In Brief

U.S. Says Talks Are Near a Deal

The United States and Iran could each come back into compliance with a 2015 nuclear deal within weeks, a senior State Department official said Thursday, on the eve of what could be a final round of negotiations before an agreement is brokered.

Significant hurdles remain. But the comments were an optimistic signal by the Biden administration that an American return to the accord between Iran and world powers could be within reach. Briefing journalists on the condition of anonymity, the senior official described the likelihood of an agreement before Iran’s presidential elections in mid-June as both possible and doable. He did not rule out that it could come in the round of talks that begin on Friday in Vienna. Still, the official cautioned that the United States and Iran continued to diverge on the extent to which each side needed to comply with the original terms of the 2015 deal.

Somalia Moves to Defuse Tensions

Days after Somalia’s president relented on plans to extend his term in office following street battles and international condemnation, his government announced Thursday that it would restore diplomatic relations with Kenya, ending a monthslong standoff that had injected an additional note of instability into an already-volatile region. The Somali deputy minister of information said that Qatar had played a role in mediating between the two nations, and that the two sides would hold further talks in the near future on issues including trade and the movement of people.

The announcement came just days after tensions also ratcheted down on the domestic front.
SACRAMENTO — He was new to politics but a working actor who has shared the screen with Kevin Costner. He posed. He swaggered. He did not obviously beg for the rotisserie chicken. He publicly refrained from his two favorite offstage habits, flatulence and belching, although at one point he did wash himself with his tongue as the cameras rolled.

Under a broiling Sacramento sun, Tag — a half-ton bear hired as a stunt by one of the Republicans hoping to replace Gov. Gavin Newsom of California in a likely fall recall election — hit all his marks in front of a campaign bus on Tuesday before heading home to Kern County in time for a dip and a nap.

By Thursday, editorial boards were fretting, a state senator was fuming, animal rights groups were calling for investigations and the Republican candidate, John Cox, was fending off questions about whether his rented mascot had been exploited.

Texas Republicans Push to Limit Ballot Access

Hours after Florida installed a rash of new voting restrictions, the Republican-led Legislature in Texas pressed ahead on Thursday with its own far-reaching bill that would make it one of the most difficult states in the nation in which to cast a ballot.

The Texas bill would, among other restrictions, greatly empower partisan poll watchers, prohibit election officials from mailing out absentee ballot applications and impose strict punishments for those who provide assistance outside the lines of what is permissible. The State House of Representatives was scheduled to debate the measure late into the evening with the possibility that it would pass and send it to the Senate. Gov. Greg Abbott is widely expected to sign the bill into law.

Florida and Texas are critical Republican-led battleground states with booming populations and 70 Electoral College votes between them. The new measures the legislatures are putting in place represent the apex of the current Republican effort to roll back access to voting across the country.

Earlier on Thursday, Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, with great fanfare, signed his state’s new voting bill, which passed last week. Held at a Palm Beach hotel with cheering supporters in the background, the ceremony showcased DeSantis’s brash style.

Democrats argued on Thursday that the Republican crackdowns on voting in Florida and Texas had made it more urgent for the Senate to pass the For the People Act, which would radically reshape the way elections are run and mitigate the new state laws.

“We are witnessing a concerted effort across this country to spread voter suppression,” Jena Griswold, the Colorado secretary of state, said Thursday on a call with progressive groups.

State’s Bill to Allow Firing Squads Poised to Become Law

Frustrated by the lack of drugs available to carry out lethal injections in their state, South Carolina lawmakers are on the cusp of a controversial solution: forcing death row inmates to face the electric chair or firing squad when lethal injection is not possible.

A bill proposing that change, approved by the State House this week, is being labled by Republicans, including Gov. Henry McMaster, who have been vexed by pharmaceutical companies’ refusal to sell states the drugs needed to carry out lethal injections.

The lack of drugs, they say, is a key reason South Carolina has not executed anyone in 10 years.

Opponents are appalled by the bill, which would make South Carolina the fourth state — along with Mississippi, Oklahoma and Utah — in which death by firing squad is an option for the condemned.

“Why would South Carolina move toward the firing squad when they also do that in North Korea?” State Rep. Justin Bamberg, a Democrat, said in an interview on Thursday.

Three inmates in the United States have been executed by firing squad since the 1970s, according to Robert Dunham, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center.

F.E.C. Drops Case

The Federal Election Commission said on Thursday that it had formally dropped a case looking into whether former President Donald J. Trump violated election law with a payment of $130,000 shortly before the 2016 election to a pornographic-film actress by his personal lawyer at the time, Michael D. Cohen. The payment was never reported on Trump’s campaign filings. Cohen would go on to say that Trump had directed him to arrange payments to two women during the 2016 race. Cohen went to prison for breaking campaign finance laws, tax evasion and lying to Congress.

In December, the F.E.C. issued an internal report from its Office of General Counsel, which said it had found “reason to believe” violations were made “knowingly and willfully” by the Trump campaign. But the commission declined to proceed.

False Claims Resurface

As House Republicans have made the case for ousting Representative Liz Cheney, their No. 3, from their leadership ranks, they have insisted that it is not her repudiation of former President Donald J. Trump’s election lies that they find untenable, but her determination to be vocal about it.

But on Thursday, Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, the Republican whom leaders have anointed as Cheney’s replacement in waiting, loudly resurrected his false narrative, citing “unprecedented, unconstitutional overreach” by election officials in 2020 and endorsing an audit in Arizona that was trounced by Newsom in the 2018 election. He changed his Twitter handle to @BeastJohnCox, and labeled Newsom a “pretty boy” whose looks had carried him into office.

Tag’s job, apparently, was to drive home the “beast” theme and represent California, where the state animal is the brown California grizzly. SHAWN HUBLER (NYT)

F.E.C. Seeks Ban

The Federal Election Commission voted unanimously on Thursday to recommend that Congress ban political campaigns from guiding donors by default into recurring contributions through prechecked boxes, a month after a New York Times investigation showed that former President Donald J. Trump’s political operation had steered huge numbers of unwitting supporters into repeated donations through that tactic.

RICHARD FAUSSET and RICK ROJAS (NYT)
WASHINGTON — President Biden’s plan to raise taxes on high earners and the wealthy is likely to entice more rich Americans to give property or other assets to charity before they die in order to avoid large tax bills, a top administration official told nonprofit leaders last week in a private conference call.

On the call, a deputy director of Biden’s National Economic Council, David Kamin, was asked how the president’s tax plans would affect charitable giving — in particular, his proposals to change the tax treatment of the capital gains income from selling assets that have gained value, like businesses or stocks.

The plan “actually increases the incentive to give to charity,” Kamin told the group. “And it basically says if you want to not pay tax on the gain, the way you need to do that is to give the property to charity.”

Kamin further explained, saying “at that point it’s obviously with a charitable organization.”

“We think it’s appropriate that no tax is paid at that point,” he continued. “But if you choose to give it to your heirs or you choose to use it for yourself, then you should be paying tax on those very large amounts of gains.”

The comments were an acknowledgment that Biden’s proposals would encourage the wealthy to find new workarounds to reduce the amount of tax they or their heirs pay, particularly on assets that appreciate over time, even as the president seeks to level the tax playing field between typical workers and the very rich.

Biden could have limited that workaround by proposing a cap on itemized deductions for high earners, as he did in the campaign, but such a plan was not included in his $4 trillion economic agenda introduced this spring.

Many economists and tax experts agree the net effect of the plans would be an increased incentive to donate.

“When I heard about this proposal, the potential opportunity for avoidance through charitable giving was the first thing that came to my mind,” said Garrett Watson, a senior policy analyst at the Tax Foundation, a think tank in Washington that tends to extol the benefits of lower taxes. “Higher tax rates mean the deductibility with respect to charitable giving is more valuable.”

Net Neutrality Opposition Was Faked, State Says

Internet service providers funded an effort that yielded millions of fake comments supporting the Federal Communications Commission’s repeal of so-called net neutrality rules in 2017, the New York attorney general said on Thursday.

Internet providers, working through a group called Broadband for America, spent $4.2 million on the project. Attorney General Letitia James said the effort generated roughly nine million comments to the agency and letters to Congress backing the rollback, almost all signed by people who had never agreed to the use of their names on such comments, according to the investigation. Some of the names had been obtained earlier, in other marketing efforts, officials said. The agency approved the repeal in late 2017.

Broadband for America’s members include some of America’s most prominent internet providers, like AT&T, Comcast and Charter, as well as several trade groups.

Supporters of the repeal regularly cited the number of comments opposing the rules. Investigators said Broadband for America had “commissioned and publicized a third-party study” of how many comments were being submitted, and then briefed F.C.C. officials on their findings as part of their push.

“Instead of actually looking for real responses from the American people, marketing companies are luring vulnerable individuals to their websites with freebies, co-opting their identities and fabricating responses that giant corporations are then using to influence the policies and laws that govern our lives,” James said in a statement.

The report said investigators had not found evidence that Broadband for America or the lobbying firm it used for the campaign was aware of the fraud. But, the attorney general said, several “significant red flags” appeared “shortly after the campaign started, and continued for months yet still remained unheeded.”

David McCabe

Federal Reserve Calls Out Financial Weak Spots

The Federal Reserve warned about financial stability risks emanating from frothy stocks and debt-laden hedge fund bets in its twice-annual report on potential vulnerabilities in the system, pointing to the rise of so-called meme stocks as one sign that risk-taking could be getting out of hand.

The central bank’s Financial Stability Report, released Thursday, followed an unusual six months for markets. Over that period, stocks climbed steadily as the U.S. economic outlook rebounded, and stories of excess began to crop up.

Internet discussion boards helped fuel interest in stocks such as GameStop, a cryptocurrency created as a joke has run up in value, and a little-known hedge fund melted down, stories that have captured headlines and caused many — including, evidently, some at the Fed — to ask whether the financial system was headed for problems.

“Vulnerabilities associated with elevated risk appetite are rising,” Lael Brainard, a Fed governor, said in a statement accompanying the Fed’s release. Stock prices are high compared with earnings, and “the appetite for risk has increased broadly.”

“The Fed’s new report painted a generally sunny picture in which banks, consumers and businesses have weathered the coronaviruses in decent financial shape.

The pandemic, which is coming under control in the United States but continues to rage across large portions of the world, poses continued risks to the system, it said.

Jeanne Smialek

The Markets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>DJIA</th>
<th>NASDAQ</th>
<th>S&amp;P 500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>318.19</td>
<td>50.42</td>
<td>33.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.93%</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34,548.53</td>
<td>13,632.84</td>
<td>4,201.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>FTSE 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>DAX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>CAC 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,076.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>518.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29,331.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TSX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bovespa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bolsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19,290.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Crude Oil Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,185.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6,474.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Exchange</th>
<th>Fgn. currency in Dollars</th>
<th>Dollars in Fgn. currency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>.7781</td>
<td>1.2852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>2.6494</td>
<td>.3774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil (Real)</td>
<td>1.985</td>
<td>6.2766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (Pound)</td>
<td>1.3889</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (Dollar)</td>
<td>822.9</td>
<td>21.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (Yuan)</td>
<td>1546</td>
<td>6.4878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark (Krone)</td>
<td>1.825</td>
<td>6.1631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom. Rep. (Peso)</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>56.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt (Pound)</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>15.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (Euro)</td>
<td>1.2068</td>
<td>8.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (Dollar)</td>
<td>1.267</td>
<td>7.7684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan (Yen)</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>109.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico (Peso)</td>
<td>0.0497</td>
<td>20.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway (Krone)</td>
<td>1.204</td>
<td>8.3023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore (Dollar)</td>
<td>7.498</td>
<td>1.3337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So. Africa (Pound)</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>14.2551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So. Korea (Won)</td>
<td>0.0009</td>
<td>1120.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (Krona)</td>
<td>1.187</td>
<td>8.4265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (Franc)</td>
<td>1.102</td>
<td>9.074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Thomson Reuters

Online: More Prices and Analysis

Information on all United States stocks, plus bonds, mutual funds, commodities and foreign stocks along with analysis of industry sectors and stock indexes: nytimes.com/markets
The Messy Battle Over a Vital Resource

Atop a long-dormant volcano in northern Nevada, workers are preparing to start blasting and digging out a giant pit that will serve as the first new large-scale lithium mine in the United States in more than a decade—a new domestic supply of an essential ingredient in electric car batteries and renewable energy.

The mine, constructed on leased federal lands, could help address the near total reliance by the United States on foreign sources of lithium.

But the project, known as Lithium America, has drawn protests from members of a Native American tribe, ranchers and environmental groups because it is expected to use billions of gallons of precious ground water, potentially contaminating some of it for 300 years, while leaving behind a giant mound of waste.

“Blowing up a mountain isn’t green, no matter how much marketing spin people put on it,” said Max Wilbert, who has been living in a tent on the proposed mine site while two lawsuits seeking to block the project wound their way through federal courts.

The fight over the Nevada mine is emblematic of a fundamental tension surfacing around the world: Electric cars and renewable energy may not be as green as they appear. Production of raw materials like lithium, cobalt and nickel that are essential to these technologies are often ruinous to land, water, wildlife and people.

Developers and lawmakers see this Nevada project, given final approval in the last days of the Trump administration, as part of the opportunity for the United States to become a leader in producing some of these raw materials as President Biden moves aggressively to fight climate change. In addition to Nevada, businesses have proposed lithium production sites in California, Oregon, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina.

But traditional mining is one of the dirtiest businesses out there. That reality is not lost on automakers and renewable-energy businesses. This friction helps explain why a contest of sorts has emerged in recent months across the United States about how best to extract and produce the large amounts of lithium in ways that are much less destructive than how mining has been done for decades.

Just in the first three months of 2021, U.S. lithium miners raised nearly $3.5 billion from Wall Street according to data assembled by Bloomberg.

Some of those investors are backing alternatives, including a plan to extract lithium from briny water beneath California’s largest lake, the Salton Sea, about 600 miles south of the Lithium Americas site.

So far, the Biden administration has not moved to help push more environmentally friendly options—like lithium brine extraction, instead of open pit mines. (NYT)

Grudge Match in Japan: One Corner, Two 7-Elevens

HIGASHI-OSAKA, Japan — Across Japan, it can seem as if there’s a 7-Eleven on every corner.

Now, on a single corner in a working-class suburb of Osaka, there are two.

The unusual pairing is the latest manifestation of a grudge there are two.

Mitoshi Matsumoto, a franchisee, ran one of the two 7-Elevens until the chain revoked his contract in 2019 after he dared to shorten his operating hours. For over a year, his store has sat empty as he and 7-Eleven have battled in court over control of the shop. Fed up and with no end in sight, the company decided on a stopgap: It built a second shop in what used to be Matsumoto’s parking lot.

The conflict’s outcome will determine not just who gets to sell rice balls and cigarettes from one tiny patch of asphalt and concrete. It could also have profound implications for 7-Eleven’s authority over tens of thousands of franchise shops across Japan, part of a convenience store network so ubiquitous that the government considers it vital to the national infrastructure during emergencies.

The company maintains that it moved against Matsumoto simply because he was a bad franchisee. But he argues that it is no coincidence that the company’s view of him dimmed sharply after he said he would defy its stance on operating hours.

“Blowing up a mountain isn’t green, no matter how much marketing spin people put on it,” said Max Wilbert, who has been living in a tent on the proposed mine site while two lawsuits seeking to block the project wound their way through federal courts. The fight over the Nevada mine is emblematic of a fundamental tension surfacing around the world: Electric cars and renewable energy may not be as green as they appear. Production of raw materials like lithium, cobalt and nickel that are essential to these technologies are often ruinous to land, water, wildlife and people.

Developers and lawmakers see this Nevada project, given final approval in the last days of the Trump administration, as part of the opportunity for the United States to become a leader in producing some of these raw materials as President Biden moves aggressively to fight climate change. In addition to Nevada, businesses have proposed lithium production sites in California, Oregon, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina.

But traditional mining is one of the dirtiest businesses out there. That reality is not lost on automakers and renewable-energy businesses. This friction helps explain why a contest of sorts has emerged in recent months across the United States about how best to extract and produce the large amounts of lithium in ways that are much less destructive than how mining has been done for decades.

Just in the first three months of 2021, U.S. lithium miners raised nearly $3.5 billion from Wall Street according to data assembled by Bloomberg.

Some of those investors are backing alternatives, including a plan to extract lithium from briny water beneath California’s largest lake, the Salton Sea, about 600 miles south of the Lithium Americas site.

So far, the Biden administration has not moved to help push more environmentally friendly options—like lithium brine extraction, instead of open pit mines. (NYT)
Somewhere, These Consumer Items Do Exist

Shoppers are playing catch-up with supplies of ketchup packets, appliances and sofas.

The definition of a luxury problem, according to Olivia Kraus, a lawyer in Mount Vernon, N.Y., is the inability to buy something expensive that one can afford. As such, she has lots. In August 2020, Kraus ordered a generator through an electrician. It came in January 2021, she said.

That month, she went to a Jacuzzi dealer, who told her that she was “in luck.” The dealer had a Jacuzzi unspoken for arriving in January and two similar models arriving in February. No other hot tub would be available until October 2021.

She picked one that could be scheduled to arrive in February. It arrived two weeks ago.

All over the United States, or at least the places where people have jobs, disposable income and time to spare, shoppers are encountering the same thing: products that are sold out or on back order. That they are “hard to find” naturally increases their desirability, sort of like “hard to get” used to be in relationships.

The reason some things are unavailable seems straightforward enough. Millions of people who before the pandemic weren’t at home much spent the last year testing the limits of their clothes dryers, dishwashers and stoves, and their living spaces groaned under the unreasonable demands.

Top brands like Viking, Bosch and Miele are all in high demand now. Dyson’s V8 Vacuum cleaner, lauded for its ability to erase pet hair, was nowhere to be found at the packed Home Depot in Chelsea on a recent Sunday (though it’s now back in stock).

The descalers for cleaning up buildup from the Breville Espresso maker sold at Williams-Sonoma have also been elusive.

Experience the Joys of Post-Covid Beauty

The actress Naomi Watts has been wearing several hats since the pandemic hit. She is a founder of Onda Beauty, an indie retail store with branches in Tribeca and Sag Harbor; Skin Deep N.Y. She has also been filming, including a couple of movies that will be out this year: The First Purge, a tale of survival.

A mother of two living in Manhattan, Watts, 52, has, like the rest of us, been living through the ups and downs of this strange time. Find out the beauty rituals and regimens that keep her centered. DISCOVERING SKIN CARE: I’ve always had sensitive skin. Working on set, with multiple applications of makeup and under hot lights, I became really reactive to everything.

My morning routine moves around a lot because I’m often trying things. I don’t really cleanse unless I’m working out. Then I use African Botanics cleanser in the shower, or sometimes I use just water. I’m very excited about Furtuna skin care products. I’m also very into the Answer by Symiome. It’s a serum, and it feels good.

TIME FOR YOURSELF: I do love that moment at the end of the day when the kids are in bed, where I can take my bath. I love getting hot water. I love Verty bath salts. Then I mix my skin is cleansed properly — sometimes a double cleanse. Maybe I’ll do a face mask. I love the Osea White Algae Mask. It’s a good price.

HAIR ISSUES: I go to Mark DeBolt for my color. Ryan, his partner in life and in business, has also done my hair for film and red carpets. They had just opened their salon before Covid struck. I went recently for the first time in a year. I couldn’t quite believe it when I stepped out of the salon.

GET MOVING: Fitness is a big part of my life. It’s great for mood, isn’t it?

Bombshell Cover, Then the Fallout

Billie Eilish wants you to know she is in charge, brash and self-assured enough to scrap the raffish image that helped garner her a world of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

She vamps this month on the cover of British Vogue, a portrait of artfully crafted provocation. The singer once identified by her shock of green hair has gone blond and full bombshell, swapping her trademark sweats for a style more domme than deb: pink Gucci corset and skirt over Age Provocateur skivvies, accessorized with latex gloves and leggings.

The choice was her own, Edward Enninful, the magazine’s editor in chief, wrote in the June issue. “What if, she wondered, she wanted to show more of her body for the first time in a fashion story?” Enninful recalled.

To that end, Eilish embraced the shopworn trimmings of female allure, offering the camera, without apparent irony, a nod to the sirens of golden-age Hollywood and some more recent vintage: Taylor Swift, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion among them.

And she is owning her look. An icon of body positivity who once cloaked her curves under neon tone track suits and hoodies, she appears to be done with all that. “My thing is that I can do whatever I want,” she told the journalist Laura Snapes, going on to dismiss the fashionsic nature of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

And at Restoration Hardware, in the meatpacking district, a person at the front desk said last week that “most” sofas were still being delivered in 10 to 12 weeks, which is the normal time frame. But “most” doesn’t include the track arm sofa that Chris Peregrin, the global director of partnerships at the photography agency Magnum, ordered in April.

It is due to arrive in early August, thanks to what the person at the front desk said were issues obtaining velvets and Belgian linens.

Break out the tiny violins, right? If you can locate some.

The problem is not likely to abate in the near future, according to John Pitzer, an analyst at Credit Suisse who specializes in semiconductors. “My best guess is that if the economy starts to reopen in the back half of the year and we start to see things really continue to pick up, the supply issues get worse, not better,” he said.

JACOB BERNSTEIN

Billie Eilish
The pop star has been known for defying gender stereotypes.

But “most” seems straightforward enough. Millions of people who before the pandemic weren’t at home much spent the last year testing the limits of their clothes dryers, dishwashers and stoves, and their living spaces groaned under the unreasonable demands.

JACOB BERNSTEIN

Experience the Joys of Post-Covid Beauty

The actress Naomi Watts has been wearing several hats since the pandemic hit. She is a founder of Onda Beauty, an indie retail store with branches in Tribeca and Sag Harbor; Skin Deep N.Y. She has also been filming, including a couple of movies that will be out this year: The First Purge, a tale of survival.

A mother of two living in Manhattan, Watts, 52, has, like the rest of us, been living through the ups and downs of this strange time. Find out the beauty rituals and regimens that keep her centered. DISCOVERING SKIN CARE: I’ve always had sensitive skin. Working on set, with multiple applications of makeup and under hot lights, I became really reactive to everything.

My morning routine moves around a lot because I’m often trying things. I don’t really cleanse unless I’m working out. Then I use African Botanics cleanser in the shower, or sometimes I use just water. I’m very excited about Furtuna skin care products. I’m also very into the Answer by Symiome. It’s a serum, and it feels good.

TIME FOR YOURSELF: I do love that moment at the end of the day when the kids are in bed, where I’m taking time for me. I’d rather have a bath than a shower. I just love the feeling of being in really hot water. I love Verty bath salts. Then I mix my skin is cleansed properly — sometimes a double cleanse. Maybe I’ll do a face mask. I love the Osea White Algae Mask. It’s a good price.

HAIR ISSUES: I go to Mark DeBolt for my color. Ryan, his partner in life and in business, has also done my hair for film and red carpets. They had just opened their salon before Covid struck. I went recently for the first time in a year. I couldn’t quite believe it when I stepped out of the salon.

GET MOVING: Fitness is a big part of my life. It’s great for mood, isn’t it?

BEE SHAPIRO

Bombshell Cover, Then the Fallout

Billie Eilish wants you to know she is in charge, brash and self-assured enough to scrap the raffish image that helped garner her a world of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

She vamps this month on the cover of British Vogue, a portrait of artfully crafted provocation. The singer once identified by her shock of green hair has gone blond and full bombshell, swapping her trademark sweats for a style more domme than deb: pink Gucci corset and skirt over Age Provocateur skivvies, accessorized with latex gloves and leggings.

The choice was her own, Edward Enninful, the magazine’s editor in chief, wrote in the June issue. “What if, she wondered, she wanted to show more of her body for the first time in a fashion story?” Enninful recalled.

To that end, Eilish embraced the shopworn trimmings of female allure, offering the camera, without apparent irony, a nod to the sirens of golden-age Hollywood and some more recent vintage: Taylor Swift, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion among them.

And she is owning her look. An icon of body positivity who once cloaked her curves under neon tone track suits and hoodies, she appears to be done with all that. “My thing is that I can do whatever I want,” she told the journalist Laura Snapes, going on to dismiss the fashionsic nature of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

And at Restoration Hardware, in the meatpacking district, a person at the front desk said last week that “most” sofas were still being delivered in 10 to 12 weeks, which is the normal time frame. But “most” doesn’t include the track arm sofa that Chris Peregrin, the global director of partnerships at the photography agency Magnum, ordered in April.

It is due to arrive in early August, thanks to what the person at the front desk said were issues obtaining velvets and Belgian linens.

Break out the tiny violins, right? If you can locate some.

The problem is not likely to abate in the near future, according to John Pitzer, an analyst at Credit Suisse who specializes in semiconductors. “My best guess is that if the economy starts to reopen in the back half of the year and we start to see things really continue to pick up, the supply issues get worse, not better,” he said.

JACOB BERNSTEIN

Bombshell Cover, Then the Fallout

Billie Eilish wants you to know she is in charge, brash and self-assured enough to scrap the raffish image that helped garner her a world of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

She vamps this month on the cover of British Vogue, a portrait of artfully crafted provocation. The singer once identified by her shock of green hair has gone blond and full bombshell, swapping her trademark sweats for a style more domme than deb: pink Gucci corset and skirt over Age Provocateur skivvies, accessorized with latex gloves and leggings.

The choice was her own, Edward Enninful, the magazine’s editor in chief, wrote in the June issue. “What if, she wondered, she wanted to show more of her body for the first time in a fashion story?” Enninful recalled.

To that end, Eilish embraced the shopworn trimmings of female allure, offering the camera, without apparent irony, a nod to the sirens of golden-age Hollywood and some more recent vintage: Taylor Swift, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion among them.

And she is owning her look. An icon of body positivity who once cloaked her curves under neon tone track suits and hoodies, she appears to be done with all that. “My thing is that I can do whatever I want,” she told the journalist Laura Snapes, going on to dismiss the fashionsic nature of fans in favor of something a little more … adult.

Suddenly you’re a hypocrite if you want to show your skin, and you’re easy and you’re a slut,” Eilish said in the interview. “Let’s turn it around and be empowered in that. Showing your body and showing your skin — or not — should not take any respect away from you.”

Some fans are cheering. “She looks just as awesome now as she did in oversized clothing,” Karin Ann Trabelsise, a 19-year-old student from Slovakia, said via text.
LONDON — It wasn’t another Falklands War, let alone a modern-day battle of Trafalgar. Yet, when naval ships from Britain and France converged in the waters off the island of Jersey on Thursday, it was a vivid reminder of the loose ends left by Britain’s bitter departure from the European Union.

The maritime standoff came after 60 French fishing boats massed to blockade a port in Jersey in an ugly spat over post-Brexit fishing rights. By day’s end, tempers had cooled as both sides pledged to work out differences over new licensing requirements for the French fishermen who ply these coastal waters. The French protesters shot off flares and waved angry banners, then sailed away.

France and Britain Play Chicken in the Channel

The sudden eruption of tensions in the English Channel, five months after Britain ratified its split with the European Union and on the eve of a British election, drew theatrical displays of muscle-flexing in London and Paris — suggesting it was a politically expedient six-hour clash, even if it augurs months or years of tensions ahead.

The dramatics began Wednesday evening when Prime Minister Boris Johnson deployed two Royal Navy vessels, the H.M.S. Tamar and the H.M.S. Severn. His office called it a “precautionary measure,” but it amounted to a vigorous show of support for Jersey, a crown dependency of Britain and the largest of the Channel Islands.

A day later, France answered with its own deployment of two naval patrol ships near the island, which lies just 14 miles off the French coast. French officials said they were sent to protect the “safety of human life at sea” in the crowded waters off Jersey’s capital, St. Helier.

Earlier in the week, a French government official warned that France could cut off the power supply to Jersey, most of which is delivered through undersea cables from France. That brought a derisive reaction from London, where officials muttered that even Germany hadn’t turned off the lights when it occupied Jersey during World War II.

For Britain, which just played host to foreign ministers from the Group of 7 nations and is debuting its post-Brexit role in the world, a clash with France over fish in the English Channel seemed like a relic of a bygone age. But it also laid bare the risks of life outside the European Union.

“This is the kind of old-fashioned dispute that the European Union was created to prevent,” said Simon Fraser, the former top civil servant in Britain’s Foreign Office.

Under the part of the Brexit agreement governing fishing, which went into effect on May 1, following a four-month grace period, Jersey granted fishing licenses to 41 French boats larger than 12 meters, or 39 feet. The problem, according to Marc Delahaye, director of the Normandy Regional Fisheries Committee, was that the additional requirements were imposed without warning or consultation.

As a crown dependency, Jersey is not part of the United Kingdom and has special status that gives it self-governing rights. However, Jersey’s reliance on French electricity makes its economy vulnerable, Delahaye said, noting it was in the interests of the British and French governments to calm the situation.

“I don’t think that London and Paris want to start firing missiles across the Channel,” he said.

MARK LANDLER and STEPHEN CASTLE

CROSSWORD

Edited by Will Shortz

ACROSS

1 Tinder and others
5 Appeal
9 Costa ___
14 Activist Copeny known as "Little Miss Flint"
15 City SW of Pyramid Lake
16 Chilled
17 Kind of device used in filmmaking
18 Jafar’s parrot in “Aladdin”
19 Big name in kitchen appliances
20 Unexpected
23 Rhythmic
24 Constellation that Regulus is part of
25 Decision-making time
26 Smartphone field test
27 Rotation calculation
29 “That fits perfectly!”
31 Cosmopolitan
35 Sarcastic punch line to an insincere remark
36 Energize, with “up”
37 City whose name means “spring hill”
38 Total wrecks
39 Reciprocal of cosecant
41 Best-selling video game that takes place in space
44 Let’s, say
45 Running apparel?
46 “Well done!”
48 Endangered
50 Liquor brand that inspired the name of a Grammy-winning rapper
54 Nonkosher deli order
55 Something of interest to a business?
56 Mathematician who lent his name to a test
57 Singer who was an original judge on “The Voice”
58 Flies
59 Ab ___ (absent, in Latin)
60 Good to go

DOWN

1 Hype (up)
2 Home of many a tech start-up
3 ___ moment (crowning achievement)
4 Stay-at-home workers
5 Meaning
6 Heartfelt
7 “Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘Fore I Dille” poet
8 Low speaker
9 Mouth part
10 Esoteric
11 Word that becomes its own synonym when RED is inserted between its first two letters
12 Train that serves three Union Stations
13 Workish
14 Relevant
15 Parts of a restaurant’s overhead?
16 Caleb represents him in “East of Eden”
17 Part of a ship’s rigging
18 Something bookmarked in a bookmark bar
19 Wishes
20 Voracious
21 Young ‘un in Yucatán
22 Anticipatory times
23 Common items at merchandise stands
24 Giveaway
25 Banned refrigerant, for short
26 Common items at merchandise stands
27 Build muscle
28 Having the same number of karats, e.g.
29 Coors Field athlete
30 Roman god of love
31 “I don’t think that London and Paris want to start firing missiles across the Channel,” he said.
32 Ericidle
33 ___ the finish
34 Sweetie

SWEETIE
Resist the ‘Wellness’ Shakedown

Jennifer Weiner

Perhaps you’ve heard someone bemoan the “quarantine 15” gained during lockdown, or of struggles to “flatten the curve” of a body that looks different after a year inside.

It was inevitable. The pandemic has made us more sedentary, and many of us have sought comfort in eating. We are languishing, as Adam Grant wrote recently, living in “the void between depression and flourishing — the absence of well-being.” And where there’s insecurity and unhappiness, there are companies looking to make money. So here come the weight-loss profiteers, the misery merchants dressed up as purveyors of “wellness.”

They’re looking to make back whatever money they missed out on during 2020 and then some. Last year was not normal. There was stress snacking and procrasti-baking. There was no shedding for the wedding in a year when most weddings were postponed or drastically downsized; no pre-high-school-reunion crash diet or worrying if Grandma would body-shame you at Thanksgiving.

And honestly, with a pandemic to worry about, getting bigger didn’t seem like an especially big deal. It’s no surprise that many weight-loss companies took a financial hit. According to Marketdata Enterprises, a research firm, the overall U.S. diet industry reached a new peak of $78 billion in 2019, but it lost 21 percent of its value in 2020.

Was that dip matched by concurrent weight gain among Americans who suddenly couldn’t make it to their weekly weigh-ins or stock up on their meal-replacement shakes? Depends on whose data you believe. In any case, the weight-loss industry isn’t going to let a lack of data dull its zeal to convince Americans that yes, we got fat, and that now we need to get up off our couches and get back into shape. My Twitter feed is suddenly full of ads for intermittent fasting apps; on Instagram, it’s wall-to-wall shapewear and fat-shredding supplements. Then there’s the Facebook friend who really wants to talk about the Keto diet, or Optavia, or the Beachbody plan, and would be happy to bring me into the fold. (Yes, the weight-loss industry has branched into multilevel marketing.)

You can consume a lot of this marketing without ever hearing the words “weight” or “diet” or “calories.” The diet industry has gotten impressively subtle, even as it’s incessantly in your face. Buzzwords like “wellness” and “strength” have replaced “diet” and “calories.”

I have one word for you: Resist.

Don’t worry about the ‘quarantine 15’ or pay for costly diet products.

As we should all know by now, diets don’t work in the long term. Studies show that 41 percent of dieters gain back more weight over the next five years than they lost, and that dieters are more likely than non-dieters to become obese. For some, the language of diet culture can be downright dangerous, contributing to life-threatening eating disorders.

There’s nothing wrong with taking action to improve your health. Want to add more fruits and vegetables to your diet, or get back to regular workouts? Go for it. Get outside, now that we can do that again. But you don’t need to enroll in a program, download an app or buy frozen meals to do any of this.

After everything we’ve endured — and as the crisis still rages around the world — each of us should cherish the body that got us through it, rather than punish it for failing to fit into last year’s skinny jeans. **JENNIFER WEINER** is the author of the forthcoming novel “That Summer.”

Hawley and Trump Aren’t ‘Silenced’

I was on my iPhone the other day when I heard the first furtive whispers about Big Tech’s silencing of Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri. Since Jan. 6, when he was photographed fist-pumping his support for some of the very fine people who would later storm the U.S. Capitol, Hawley has hardly been seen.

He was booked solid. The canceled senator’s media calendar wouldn’t be possible. The can-celation point: When we talk about ideas like free speech, censorship, tyranny, “woke mobs” and especially “cancellation” in the American digital discourse, we are rarely talking about eliminating a speaker’s opportunity to be heard.

Although he has suffered widespread opprobrium for his actions on Jan. 6, Hawley has hardly been silenced. Neither, of course, has former President Donald Trump, who was kicked off Twitter and Facebook for multiple posts that stoked the Jan. 6 riot — but who also, on Tuesday, released to great fanfare a new website that describes itself as a “beacon of freedom” in a “time of silence and lies.”

Hawley and Trump’s very noisy cancellations point to a central complication in America’s endless fights about how and whether to police speech online. Outside of truly repressive regimes, no one, in the digital age, is ever really “silenced.” What we are fighting about when we fight about cancellation is not an erasure, exactly, but instead a quieting — not who gets to speak, but whose speech gets to be amplified by recommendation algorithms, shared and echoed across the viral social-media-cable-news axis until it becomes loud enough to blanket the entire media landscape. As the misinformation scholar Renée DiResta has put it, it is the difference between “freedom of speech” and “freedom of reach.”

**The difference between ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘freedom of reach.’**

In America we have well-established traditions regarding censorship — it’s bad. But amplification presents another question entirely, one for which no one seems to have any ready answers.

Now even the supposed experts are coming up short on solutions. On Wednesday, Facebook’s Oversight Board punted on its biggest decision to date, whether to reinstate Trump’s account. The board declined to undo Facebook’s Trump ban, but it also gave Facebook six months to issue clearer rules and make a final decision about Trump’s account status.

I had picked up Hawley’s book to see if, amid the general hopelessness in these debates about online speech, he might have come up with novel ideas about how to address our plight.

Given his banishment from the media, I thought he’d be up for chatting. But when I reached out to a representative, I was told that wouldn’t be possible. The canceled senator’s media calendar was booked solid.

Farhad Manjoo
Pfizer Vaccine Work Well Against Variants, Studies Find

The Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine is extraordinarily effective at protecting against severe disease caused by two dangerous variants, according to two studies published Wednesday.

The studies, which are based on the real-world use of the vaccine in Qatar and Israel, suggest that the vaccine can prevent the worst outcomes — including severe pneumonia and death — caused by B.1.1.7, the variant first identified in the U.K., and B.1.351, the variant first identified in South Africa.

“This is really good news,” said Dr. Annelies Wilder-Smith, an infectious disease researcher at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “At this point in time we can confidently say that we can use this vaccine, even in the presence of circulating variants of concern.”

Previous research suggested that B.1.1.7 is more infectious and more deadly than other variants, but that vaccines still worked well against it. But vaccines appeared to be less effective against B.1.351, according to earlier studies.

One of the new studies, which appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine, is based on information about more than 200,000 people that was pulled from Qatar’s national Covid-19 databases between Feb. 1 and March 31.

During that time, the variants were widespread there: Sequence conducted between Feb. 23 and March 18 suggested that roughly half of the coronavirus infections in that period were caused by B.1.351 and 44.5 percent were caused by B.1.1.7.

In multiple analyses, the researchers found that the vaccine was 87 to 89.5 percent effective at preventing infection with B.1.1.7 among people who were at least two weeks past their second shot. It was 72 to 75 percent effective at preventing infection with B.1.351 among those who had reached the two-week point.

Even that slightly reduced effectiveness against infection with B.1.351 is still largely good news, one of the study’s authors, Laith Abu-Raddad, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, said. “We’re talking about a variant which is probably the nastiest of all the variants of concern,” he said.

The second new study, which was published in The Lancet, was conducted by researchers at the Israel Ministry of Health and Pfizer. It is based on more than 230,000 coronavirus infections that occurred in Israel between Jan. 24 and April 3. During that period, B.1.1.7 accounted for nearly 95 percent of all coronavirus cases in the country, which has vaccinated more than half of its population. The researchers found that the vaccine was more than 95 percent effective.

Joy, Love, Grief:
How It Looks
When Families Reunite

A daughter holding her mother’s hand. A son overcome that his 95-year-old mother survived the pandemic. A stoic family patriarch, suddenly in tears.

After a year of excruciating lockdowns, these were the scenes at nursing homes and other long-term care facilities as they began to open up this spring.

The New York Times sent photographers across the country to document the reunions between family members. For many, it was the first time they were able to be together, hold hands and hug in more than a year.

Biden’s Support for Patent Waivers Faces Battle in Europe

BRUSSELS — President Biden’s about-face on pushing pharmaceutical companies to share vaccine patents, in an attempt to help poorer countries, faces a considerable challenge in Europe.

Under growing pressure, the European Union — whose approval would be needed — said Thursday it would consider the Biden administration’s decision to reverse course and support a waiver of patents for Covid-19 vaccines as many poor and middle-income nations struggle to secure lifesaving doses.

But in a speech Thursday, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, did not endorse the plan, raising questions about whether the bloc would agree to waive patents, something she has said previously she was staunchly against. That position was underscored by a statement from Germany, the bloc’s de facto leader, later in the day, that the U.S. proposal could trigger “significant implications” for the production of vaccines.

“The limiting factor in vaccine manufacturing is production capacity and high quality standards, not patents,” a spokeswoman for Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany said in the statement.

In her speech, von der Leyen, said that the European Union was “ready to discuss any proposals that address the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner.”

But she also suggested that the focus should instead be on getting more vaccines to countries that needed them by following the bloc’s example in permitting the ample export of doses. The United States has so far balked at that approach.

joy, love, grief: how it looks
when families reunite

Joy, Love, Grief: How It Looks When Families Reunite

A daughter holding her mother’s hand. A son overcome that his 95-year-old mother survived the pandemic. A stoic family patriarch, suddenly in tears.

After a year of excruciating lockdowns, these were the scenes at nursing homes and other long-term care facilities as they began to open up this spring.

The New York Times sent photographers across the country to document the reunions between family members. For many, it was the first time they were able to be together, hold hands and hug in more than a year.

Biden’s Support for Patent Waivers Faces Battle in Europe

BRUSSELS — President Biden’s about-face on pushing pharmaceutical companies to share vaccine patents, in an attempt to help poorer countries, faces a considerable challenge in Europe.

Under growing pressure, the European Union — whose approval would be needed — said Thursday it would consider the Biden administration’s decision to reverse course and support a waiver of patents for Covid-19 vaccines as many poor and middle-income nations struggle to secure lifesaving doses.

But in a speech Thursday, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, did not endorse the plan, raising questions about whether the bloc would agree to waive patents, something she has said previously she was staunchly against. That position was underscored by a statement from Germany, the bloc’s de facto leader, later in the day, that the U.S. proposal could trigger “significant implications” for the production of vaccines.

“The limiting factor in vaccine manufacturing is production capacity and high quality standards, not patents,” a spokeswoman for Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany said in the statement.

In her speech, von der Leyen, said that the European Union was “ready to discuss any proposals that address the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner.”

But she also suggested that the focus should instead be on getting more vaccines to countries that needed them by following the bloc’s example in permitting the ample export of doses. The United States has so far balked at that approach.

Doses Offered to Olympians and Officials

The International Olympic Committee said Thursday that it had struck deals with two companies for coronavirus vaccine doses that will allow athletes and officials traveling to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo this summer the opportunity to be vaccinated before they arrive in Japan.

The committee announced the agreements with the companies, Pfizer and BioNTech, to distribute donated doses to Games participants in their home countries, where they would be administered by local officials.

The effort is the latest by Olympic officials and Japanese organizers to assuage the concerns of a skeptical Japanese public, who have consistently told pollsters that they do not want the Games to take place during the pandemic. Only about 1 percent of the Japanese population is fully vaccinated, and several areas, including Tokyo, are under restrictions that have shuttered restaurants, bars and nonessential businesses.

Despite the new program, and an earlier announcement that the I.O.C. would buy doses of a Chinese vaccine and distribute them, there is still no requirement that athletes, coaches, officials or others attending the Games be vaccinated before coming to Japan.
Why the Violence Remains in Hockey

Ten years ago this month, a popular Rangers enforcer, considered by some to be the toughest man and the most fearsome fighter in the N.H.L., died alone in his apartment from an accidental overdose of painkillers and alcohol. That man, Derek Boogaard, 28, was later determined to have a severe case of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E., the degenerative brain disease caused by repeated blows to the head.

When the puck and the gloves dropped and the fists began flying at the start of Wednesday night’s game between the Rangers and the Washington Capitals, hockey managed to get itself noticed again, for all the familiar reasons.

It was an old-school spectacle greeted with scattered bits of disgust, nostalgia and excitement. Vigilante justice is part of hockey’s history, and N.H.L. Commissioner Gary Bettman has never seemed interested in removing it from the game. Anecessary “thermostat,” he has called it.

Wednesday’s brawls, in a game that featured 141 penalty minutes, were sparked two nights earlier by a pair of ugly acts of violence that hockey reveres but that Bettman views as an unnecessary evil. It was an old-school spectacle with scattered bits of disgust, nostalgia and excitement. Vigilante justice is part of hockey’s history, and N.H.L. Commissioner Gary Bettman has never seemed interested in removing it from the game. An necessary “thermostat,” he has called it.

Wednesday’s brawls, in a game that featured 141 penalty minutes, were sparked two nights earlier by a pair of ugly acts of violence. Tom Wilson, the Capitals’ enforcer, started it all, and was later determined to have a severe case of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E., the degenerative brain disease caused by repeated blows to the head.

When the puck and the gloves dropped and the fists began flying at the start of Wednesday night’s game between the Rangers and the Washington Capitals, hockey managed to get itself noticed again, for all the familiar reasons. It was an old-school spectacle greeted with scattered bits of disgust, nostalgia and excitement. Vigilante justice is part of hockey’s history, and N.H.L. Commissioner Gary Bettman has never seemed interested in removing it from the game. Anecessary “thermostat,” he has called it.

Wednesday’s brawls, in a game that featured 141 penalty minutes, were sparked two nights earlier by a pair of ugly acts of violence that hockey reveres but that Bettman views as an unnecessary evil. It was an old-school spectacle with scattered bits of disgust, nostalgia and excitement. Vigilante justice is part of hockey’s history, and N.H.L. Commissioner Gary Bettman has never seemed interested in removing it from the game. Anecessary “thermostat,” he has called it.

Wednesday’s brawls, in a game that featured 141 penalty minutes, were sparked two nights earlier by a pair of ugly acts of violence that hockey reveres but that Bettman views as an unnecessary evil. It was an old-school spectacle with scattered bits of disgust, nostalgia and excitement. Vigilante justice is part of hockey’s history, and N.H.L. Commissioner Gary Bettman has never seemed interested in removing it from the game. Anecessary “thermostat,” he has called it.