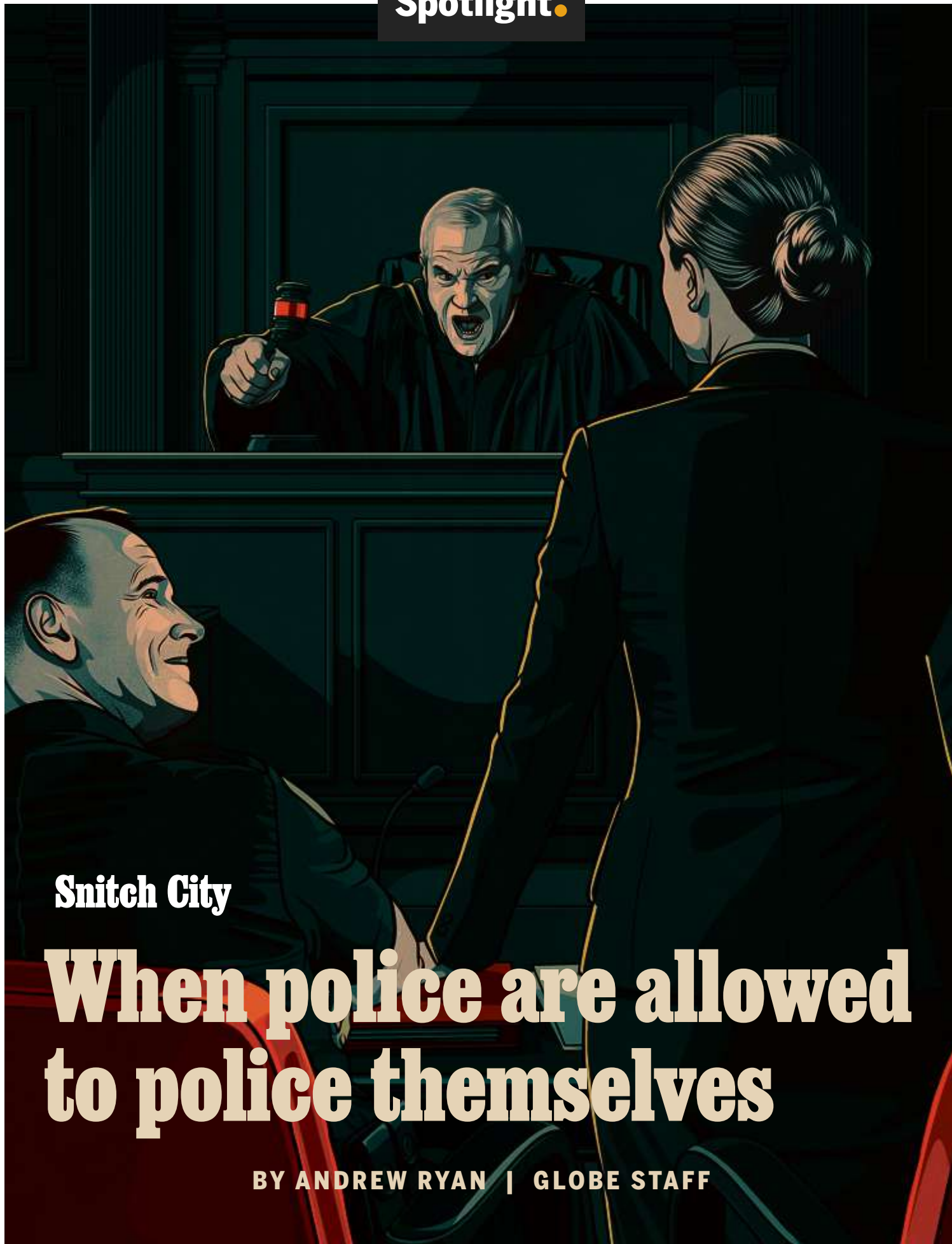


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Spotlight.



Snitch City

When police are allowed to police themselves

BY ANDREW RYAN | GLOBE STAFF

ILLUSTRATION • JULIAN D. PAULSEN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Mass. prosecutors rarely prevent informant abuse. They often enable it.

Last in a series.

Prosecutor Brooke Hartley was 18 seconds into her defense of a fentanyl bust when a judge interrupted. He wanted to know if Boston police had really refused to tell the district attorney almost anything about the confidential informant at the heart of the case.

Yes, Hartley conceded. The department had disobeyed a court order, refusing to disclose even to Suffolk County prosecutors what the informant had told the cops and whether the source had a reason to lie.

No matter. Though Hartley had never seen the informant's police file, she still assured the panel of appellate judges that nothing in it could help prove the defendant's innocence.

"How do you know that?" asked an incredulous Justice Andrew M. D'Angelo. "For all the Commonwealth knows, this police officer made the entire thing up [and] there is no confidential informant."

Ultimately, prosecutors did what they often do when a po-

lice informant comes under fire. They dropped the charges, making the problem go away. There would be no deeper scrutiny of the detective, his purported informant, or the cloak of secrecy that protected them both.

"The informant system is essentially a black box," said defense lawyer Zachary Lown, whose client that day was a new father with no criminal record who fought the case for six years. "Police withhold informant files from the prosecution meaning that even the prosecutor is kept in the dark. It is the only area of our law where guilt or innocence is at stake that lacks any checks or balances."

This is the way confidential informants work: District attorneys blindly defend police sources they know nothing about.

And instead of safeguarding against abuse, prosecutors enable misconduct in a system that grants police unchecked power, a new Globe Spotlight Team investigation has found. Other gatekeepers — most notably clerk-magistrates, who must ap-

SNITCH CITY, Page A6

For volunteer from Vt., war came too close

Fighting his own demons, he chose to go to Ukraine

By Paul Heintz
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT
WEST BRATTLEBORO, Vt. — Andrew Mario's final messages home were brief and to the point.

"Well I'm heading off in the morning bro," he wrote a close friend Nov. 22.

Mario, a 33-year-old carpenter, had traveled to Kyiv in June to volunteer for the Ukrainian military. After months of training, he was being deployed to the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine

amid the grinding Russian invasion.

Mario asked his friend Ramsey Demeter for help paying for his storage unit in Vermont. "[M]y money's mostly gone now," he explained. "[H]ave had to buy a bunch for this mission."

Two weeks later, Mario was dead — killed by a Russian drone not far from the front, near the decimated city of Pokrovsk, on Dec. 3. Mario's comrades told his parents he'd been fetching fuel with another soldier. The end came quickly, they said, and the other man's life was spared.

"I know he would want to
AMERICAN, Page A10

CONQUERING THE COLD



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Conditions weren't great (for most people, anyway) but a New Year's Day snow squall couldn't stop the L Street Brownies polar plunge. From left, Snow Legion members Bruno Tramontozzi, Chris Marobella, and Chris Bruet did their thing. **B1.**

About 40 killed in blaze at Swiss bar

No word on possible cause; most victims young adults

By Ségolène Le Stradic, Christopher F. Schuetze, and Aurelien Breeden

NEW YORK TIMES

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland — Fire ripped through a bar packed with young New Year's revelers in an upscale Swiss ski resort town early Thursday, killing about 40 people and injuring about 115, officials said, in what the Swiss president called "one of the worst tragedies our country has ever experienced."

The victims, from multiple countries, had flocked to Le Constellation bar in the resort town of Crans-Montana, officials said. The initial blaze set off a flashover, when surfaces in an enclosed space become hot enough to ignite almost simultaneously, spreading flames with lethal speed. At least one explosion quickly followed.

Guy Parmelin, president of the Swiss federal council, said that "many lives, young for the most part, have been lost," and several medical officials also noted the youth of the victims.

The head of a hospital in the city of Lausanne, where 22 severely burned people were taken, told the Swiss news site 24 Heures that most of them were between ages 16 and 26. University Hospital Zurich was treating 15 victims with severe burns, most of them "young adults around the age of 20," a hospital spokesperson said.

Beatrice Pilloud, the prosecutor general for the
FIRE, Page A4

After charges, Patriots face new opponent

Allegations of violence off the field bring distraction

By Ben Volin
GLOBE STAFF

As the Patriots have progressed through a dream 2025 season, coach Mike Vrabel has highlighted different themes in his weekly Wednesday meetings with players.

How to be consistent. How to use underdog status as motivation. How to handle success. How to bounce back from adversity.

This week, there's a new message as the 13-3 Patriots prepare to host the Dolphins in the regular-season finale and rev up for the playoffs: How to handle a major distraction.

Vrabel delivered his message amid unexpected turmoil for the Patriots, as news broke within 48 hours this week that two significant pieces of the roster, wide receiver Stefon Diggs and defensive tackle Christian Barmore, were accused of violence against women.

"Improve through practice, finish what we started, and speak for yourself," Vrabel said Wednesday. "That was my message, and we'll continue to do that."

On Monday, Dedham police filed charges
PATRIOTS, Page C2



Wild and freeze

Friday: Still windy and cold. High 26-31. Low 19-24.

Saturday: And another one. High 28-33. Low 20-25.

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Weather and Comics, G6-7.

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Brown University is planning to incorporate key safety measures, including additional security cameras, after the mass shooting. **B1.**

Russia has made a formal request that the United States stop its pursuit of an oil tanker that had been sailing for Venezuela and is now fleeing the Coast Guard. **A3.**

Here are eight money resolutions to help you improve your financial picture. **B7.**