



ANDREW LEYDEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Builders are working 20 hours a day, seven days a week on the ballroom, which the White House estimates to be 65 percent done.

Blistering Tempo to Build an Embattled Ballroom

By LUKE BROADWATER and ANN E. MARIMOW

WASHINGTON — With the fate of his ballroom tied up in court, President Trump is racing against the clock.

He has enlisted a team of 250 workers to push ahead with construction 20 hours a day, seven days a week to complete as much work as quickly as possible. This week, there are plans to install one million pounds of rebar and pour 3,000 cubic yards of concrete for a project that is now two-thirds complete, the administration said in a court filing.

Now, with the matter pending before the Supreme Court, the Trump administration is making a

Rush on Trump’s Project Aims to Be Too Fast for the Courts

practical appeal to the justices: The ballroom is simply too far along to be stopped now.

“His strategy clearly is to change the reality on the ground so that instead of preserving the status quo, those who rightly invoke the law against what he’s doing are put in a position of having to undo something that is already a fait accompli,” said Laurence H. Tribe, an emeritus university professor of constitutional law at Harvard.

For years, Mr. Trump has argued that the White House should have its own ballroom, saying it was a matter of prestige on the world stage. A ballroom, he said, would allow officials to hold big events for special guests without needing to erect a tent on the South Lawn.

In recent months, as preservationists and other critics have tried to halt or at least slow down the project, Mr. Trump has offered a new justification: national security. Essentially, Mr. Trump is treating the ballroom and the military bunker underneath it as one and the same.

The bunker — officially known as the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, or PEOC —

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U.S. DEBT SURGES TO \$40 TRILLION

War and Tax Cuts Power Sprint to Milestone

By ALAN RAPPEPORT

WASHINGTON — America’s gross national debt topped \$40 trillion for the first time on Wednesday, an ominous milestone for an economy that sits on a shaky fiscal foundation after decades of borrowing to pay for the rising costs of the military, social safety net programs and President Trump’s tax cuts.

This year alone, the United States is on track to borrow more than \$2 trillion to help pay for its obligations, including spending on the war in Iran and the sweeping tax cuts that Republicans enacted in 2025. Soaring interest payments to investors who have purchased America’s debt now make up about half of that red ink, pushing the United States into a deeper financial hole.

Whether the mounting debt load is a problem to be solved or a function of America’s economic strength remains a matter of debate. Deficits are also a point of political gamesmanship, with Republicans most passionate about eliminating them when they are out of power.

“The scariest thing about this is how we’re starting to see the debt spiral begin,” said Marc Goldwein, senior policy director for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, which supports deficit reduction, referring to interest on the debt.

The inability of lawmakers to confront the debt comes with long-term risks. While the United States remains the world’s largest

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CAROLINE GUTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Awaiting a patient’s arrival at a Baltimore trauma ward. Violent injuries from gunfire have plunged.

Murders Fall in a City Long Scarred by Violence

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

BALTIMORE — Murder makes work.

As soon as somebody is killed, an enormous machinery kicks into gear, driven by cops and medics, nurses and lawyers, ministers and morticians. The mechanics aren’t that different city to city, but in Baltimore the machinery has been as active and infamous as anywhere.

Optimism and Caution Across Baltimore

Now it is operating in a Baltimore that no one alive has experienced and few could have imagined. So far in 2026, Baltimore has recorded fewer homicides than ever at this point of the year, an incredible milestone in a place once

morbidly referred to as “Body-more.”

For most of the past 50 years, the city’s annual murder total exceeded 200. It ran above 300 for most of the last decade — a multi-year eruption of violence after the 2015 death of Freddie Gray from injuries in police custody. This year, the police commissioner aims for the count to stay under 100. It isn’t unattainable. From

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In a Florida Upset, Door Knockers Lift the Left

By PATRICIA MAZZEI

OAKLAND PARK, Fla. — Four days before Tuesday’s Democratic Senate primary, State Representative Angie Nixon did what she has always done in Florida: Organize activists.

The group of volunteers for her underdog Senate campaign sat inside a union office in suburban Broward County, a liberal

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stronghold in the increasingly Republican-leaning state. It was a small group, maybe a dozen people.

But don’t worry, Ms. Nixon’s political director, Rachel Gilmer, reassured them: “This tiny room is part of many, many tiny rooms” across the state, she said, with more volunteers also ready

to knock on Democratic voters’ doors.

Ms. Nixon, 42, walked in, wearing a big smile and dressed in her signature hot pink, the same color splashed on her van, campaign signs and fliers. She rallied her limited troops.

“This is a people-powered movement,” she told the volunteers, “that is built on the shoulders of working families, on the

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Trump Installs Watchdogs Eager to Follow His Lead

New Class of Inspectors General Includes Ally Reviewing Reflecting Pool Work

By LUKE BROADWATER

WASHINGTON — One federal inspector general, a former Republican congressman, has spent recent weeks lavishing praise on President Trump while attacking a rival of the president, Gov. Gavin Newsom, Democrat of California.

Another inspector general appointed by Mr. Trump has recently singled out Attorney General Letitia James of New York, one of the president’s most hated targets, as the Trump administration withheld funds for her state.

And Mr. Trump has inserted a right-wing operative — a co-author of the conservative Project 2025 document — to take over the inspector general’s office that would be in charge of any internal investigation into his botched repairs of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool.

During the first year of Mr. Trump’s second term, his approach to dealing with federal inspectors general, who are supposed to be apolitical, was to fire them and slash funding for their offices. But since the mass firings, the president has appointed some government watchdogs with overtly political backgrounds. And they have directed their investigations toward allegations of fraud at the state level, instead of targeting the agencies within the administration that they are supposed to scrutinize.

“The president wanted his own I.G.s,” said Michael J. Missal, who spent nine years as inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs. “When you have your own I.G.s, you lose the credibility and integrity of the work. If people think that you’re doing it to sup-

port the administration, then the whole concept that was created in 1978 of independent, nonpartisan inspectors general goes away.”

Taylor Rogers, a White House spokeswoman, said Mr. Trump had hired “highly qualified and accomplished individuals” who would carry out his mission of targeting fraud.

The latest example of Mr. Trump’s inserting a political actor into a nonpartisan watchdog role occurred amid public furor over the Reflecting Pool fiasco.

Alarmed over the Trump administration’s work on the Reflecting Pool and the president’s attempt to falsely blame the failures on left-wing vandals, Democratic lawmakers urged the Interior Department’s inspector general to investigate.

The Trump administration’s response was to insert a right-wing operative, Dennis Kirk, to take over the office that would carry out the investigation.

Mr. Kirk was among the authors of Project 2025, a collection of conservative policy proposals published before the 2024 election. The plan to install Mr. Kirk as the Interior Department inspector general sounded alarm bells in the world of government watchdogs and among Democrats on Capitol Hill, and not merely because he could thwart an internal investigation into the Reflecting Pool.

Through a spokesman, Mr. Kirk declined to comment. The White House voiced support for Mr. Kirk in a statement.

Mr. Missal was one of at least 20 inspectors general who were fired

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Split From Son in Ukraine War, Mother Plotted a Risky Rescue

By KIM BARKER and DZVINKA PINCHUK

KYIV, Ukraine — A mother of three sat in a Ukrainian rehabilitation center, clutching her phone, willing it to ring, trying to piece her shattered family back together.

Liliia Prutian, 55, was working as a military medic when Russian troops invaded in February 2022. They captured her, abused her, accused her of terrorism and held her for two and a half years.

After her release, she spent much of her time in this rehabilitation center, in a forest on the outskirts of Kyiv, going to government interviews, doctors’ appointments, group therapy sessions, horseback-riding and ski lessons, massages, yoga classes and reconstructive surgery on her right eardrum.

But what Ms. Prutian really wanted was to recover her youngest son, Dima Zahrebaiev, whom she had not seen in three years. He was now 20, living alone in their home in the family village, under Russian occupation since 2022. Fearing he would be forced into the Russian Army, she was

desperate to rescue him, though it would be an elaborate, dangerous venture.

Finally, just before 7 p.m. one Sunday, the phone jangled and she answered before the first ring finished. Struggling to keep her voice steady, she used bland language, unsure who was listening.

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OKSANA PARAFENIUK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Liliia Prutian with her youngest son, Dima Zahrebaiev.



OBITUARIES A20-21

Painter of Wobbly Abstractions

Mary Heilmann, above, achieved acclaim for her ebulliently colored, often lopsided paintings. She was 86. PAGE A20

A Co-Founder of ESPN

Bill Rasmussen, whose wildly innovative idea for a 24-hour sports network became a media fixture, was 93. PAGE A21

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In China, a Literary Escape

Poems, essays and books written by working-class writers have garnered recognition in recent years — as well as rising government attention. PAGE A4

Royals Plan to Leave the U.S.

Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, whose relations with the family have been tense, will move to Britain. PAGE A5

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Europe Aims to Compete

Facing a nearly \$1 trillion gap in investment funding with the U.S., the nations are seeking to back start-ups. PAGE B1

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Misuse of Cannabis Increases

A growing number of Americans reported that they were unable to quit or cut back on the drug despite it leading to problems, a study found. PAGE A17

‘With All My Heart, Natalie.’

President Trump’s devoted White House aide and gatekeeper Natalie Harp is always by his side. What, exactly, does she do? PAGE A15

Hunkering Down in Ohio City

Federal agents have begun detaining Haitians in Springfield, raising panic among a group that has lost protection against deportation. PAGE A16



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A ‘Divine’ Number for Dallas

The Cowboys won’t retire 88, which links CeeDee Lamb, above, to Drew Pearson, Michael Irvin and Dez Bryant. PAGE B6

Dissension Atop the Lakers

Jeanie Buss’s status as the team’s governor is unclear after her family trust voted to sell its stake. PAGE B9

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Consistently Emmy-Caliber

The “Shrinking” star Jessica Williams has picked up a nomination for each season of the Apple TV comedy. PAGE C1

Making the Camera a Monster

Horror films were forever changed by the frantic point-of-view shot often seen in “The Evil Dead” franchise. PAGE C5

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Sharon Weinberger

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