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US 'at heart of Nato' says King in Congress speech

King Charles has told Congress the United States lies at “the heart” of Nato in an apparent rebuke to president Donald Trump’s threats to leave the alliance. In a historic address, he said Britain had committed to the biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the Cold War, addressing the president’s claims the US has propped up Europe in military power.

“From the depths of the Atlantic to the disastrously melting ice caps of the Arctic, the commitment and expertise of the United States Armed Forces and its allies lie at the heart of Nato, pledged to each other’s defence, protecting our citizens and interests, keeping North Americans and Europeans safe from our common adversaries,” he said. “Our defence, intelligence and security ties are hardwired together through relationships measured not in years, but in decades.”

Early this month, President Trump warned he “absolutely” was considering withdrawing the US from Nato, after America’s allies refused to join the American-Israeli campaign against Iran and has since repeated his warning.

The King was addressing the politicians during his visit with Queen Camilla to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of America’s Declaration of Independence. As he sought to heal a rift between the two countries’ leaders, he went out of his way to stress the historic ties between the two nations, saying it was “one of the greatest alliances in human history”, and that the UK-US partnership “is more important today than it has ever been”.

Referencing the US becoming independent in 1776, he said: “The very principle on which your Congress was founded – no taxation without representation – was at once a fundamental disagreement between us, and at the same time a shared democratic value which you inherited from us. Ours is a partnership born out of dispute, but no less strong for it.”

He insisted the story of the UK and US over the past 250 years was one of “reconciliation and renewal”, adding: “I pray with all my heart that our Alliance will continue to defend our shared values, with our partners in Europe and the Commonwealth, and across the world, and that we ignore the clarion calls to become ever more inward-looking.”

The King also reminded his audience of the climate crisis, saying: “As we look toward the next 250 years, we must also reflect on our shared responsibility to safeguard Nature, our most precious and irreplaceable asset.” He added: “Yet even as we celebrate the beauty that surrounds

us, our generation must decide how to address the collapse of critical natural systems, which threatens far more than the harmony and essential diversity of Nature.”

Mr Trump has in recent months repeatedly attacked prime minister Sir Keir Starmer over the government’s refusal to join his war on Iran and other domestic policies, such as migration and renewable energy.

Charles has faced some calls to meet victims of Jeffrey Epstein while he is in the US. He didn’t make a direct mention of the convicted sex offender, but did reference the “collective strength” in the US and the UK to “support victims of some of the ills that, so tragically, exist in both our societies today.”

It was unclear if the carefully-worded remarks were meant to be an oblique acknowledgement of sexual abuse victims in the wake of the Epstein scandal.

Mr Trump, who has criticised Sir Keir Starmer for being “no Winston Churchill” over the UK’s response to US calls for support in the Iran conflict, pointedly referred several times to wartime leader Sir Winston in his speech, calling him “Britain’s greatest prime minister”.

Charles is only the second British monarch to address a joint session of Congress. His mother, Queen Elizabeth II, delivered a similar speech in 1991 highlighting the historic ties between both countries and the importance of their democratic values.

The Independent
April 29, 2026



'This Is for All of Us'

Ben Nedivi and Matt Wolpert, who co-created "For All Mankind" and now its spin-off "Star City" with Ronald D. Moore, are adamant that people are dreaming of space exploration again.

"With the Artemis II launch that just happened, I felt that excitement again. It wasn't about space tourism; it wasn't about the wealthy. It was about being inspired," Wolpert tells Variety at Canneseries where "Star City" world premiered on April 26th. Apple TV's "Star City" follows the space race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

"There was this moment in the late '60s and early '70s when we were pushing each other forward. It was a competition, but it did lead toward amazing things. There's an exploration gene in our DNA and space is the last frontier."

As Russian invasion on Ukraine continues, they acknowledge it's a "complicated time" to tell a story set in the Soviet Union.

"Our point of view is that human beings are human beings. Their system and their government are obviously negative, but there are many people living under that government who don't agree with it or are just trying to live a normal life," notes Wolpert.

Nedivi adds: "We are students of history, and sadly, history repeats itself. This period speaks to a lot of what's happening now. It's a reminder, and a warning, of what can happen if we're not careful. We can easily return to that horror."

As he points out, the characters quickly discover "it's more dangerous on the ground than it is in space." While they reference real-life space pioneers such as Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, others are fictionalized.

"Everybody knows everything about the U.S. program. There were movies, TV shows, books, magazines. The Soviets, however, wanted to keep theirs a secret. The stories we heard were incredible and insane. We couldn't believe they were true."

Take the landing of Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, says Wolpert. "They went off course and landed in the middle of a snowbound forest in Siberia, surrounded by wild animals. They had to survive there! These cosmonauts and engineers became superstars and because of that, they were kept under careful watch. The idea of being so terrified of something you're also so proud of is fascinating."

In the series, cosmonauts are controlled by the system. It follows their every move, writes their speeches and decides who they are going to marry. "Again, this was based on something that

actually happened: Tereshkova had an arranged marriage with another cosmonaut. They weren't able to feel safe," says Wolpert.

Despite all this struggle, they wanted to show that the human spirit can overcome pretty much everything.

"That's the story we wanted to tell. We live in very dark times. Every time I read the newspaper, I want to cry. These characters really spoke to us," notes Nedivi.

"Honestly, we were amazed that Apple would even make it. To their credit, they never saw it through the lens of politics or what sells and what doesn't. It's a testament to Apple's confidence that we were able to tell a story like this, which is very rare on TV."

Although "Star City" is in English, they set out to create an international show.

"'Chernobyl' was definitely one of our inspirations. We even shot in Lithuania, just like they did. This show epitomizes an international production. Here we are: two American writers with a British cast and a show shot in Lithuania and premiering in France," says Nedivi.

"Many people in our Lithuanian crew grew up in the shadow of the Soviet Union. Their parents would come and look at the costumes and buildings in horror. It's important to explore cultures outside your own. Now more than ever, because our world is shrinking. What unites us is this wonder about venturing further into space. This is for all of us. This is for all mankind."

Variety

April 27, 2026



Canada launches tens of billions in Arctic military investment

Picture an Arctic territory, marginalized by its own country, almost entirely lacking roads, ports and power sources, but rich in mining potential and suddenly feeling vulnerable to outside threats. It's not Greenland; it's the Canadian Arctic. After decades of underinvestment, Ottawa is now turning its attention to the country's north amid an outbreak of nationalism and new spending, in reaction to provocations by the Trump administration.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has announced plans to invest tens of billions of dollars in military facilities in its Arctic region as part of a pledge to significantly expand defence spending by 2035.

Canada will invest the bulk of the C\$35bn (US\$25.7bn) in "forward operating bases" in Arctic communities to "enable the Canadian Armed Forces to defend the Arctic without the help of allies".

The vast Arctic region has moved higher up Canada's military agenda in the face of threats from Russia and US President Donald Trump's shifting expansionist rhetoric as well as the increased accessibility of the north as a result of climate change. Carney has also sought to boost Canada's military independence amid erratic moves by the US, its closest ally.

"Canada is taking full responsibility for defending our Arctic sovereignty," Carney said on Thursday in Yellowknife, one of Canada's major military hubs for its Arctic presence.

The three main sites of the investment are already part of Canada's contribution to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (Norad), the joint air-defence system it has operated with the US since the 1950s. While the money announced on Thursday comes from a 2022 spending plan for Norad modernisation, Ottawa had not previously stated how or where the money would be spent.

Carney said the defence funding would go to upgrading airfields, new or repurposed hangars, ammunition and fuel storage as well as for military accommodation, warehouses and information technology.

"After decades of limited and piecemeal investments in the North, Canada's new government is acting with a scale of ambition worthy of this vast region and its peoples," Carney said.

His government has pledged to increase Canadian defence spending to 5 per cent of GDP by 2035.

In February, Canada launched its defence industry strategy that aims to award local companies 70 per cent of the nation's military spending, up from about 50 per cent, boosting revenues for local businesses by more than C\$5.1bn a year.

Toronto-based James Yurichuk, chief executive of Wuxly, a Canadian military contractor that makes cold-weather uniforms, said renewed focus on Arctic defence infrastructure was a necessary step towards closing the "capability gap" in the North.

Canada's Arctic region is emerging as the new front line in a geopolitical contest with Russia's President Vladimir Putin and China's leader Xi Jinping.

The plan also includes the most literal kind of nation-building: roads, rails and other transport corridors. Carney said the government also wants to fast-track the approval of the Mackenzie Valley highway, an 800km-long route to better connect remote communities as part of a \$100mn investment.

Canada's Arctic region makes up 40 per cent of the country's landmass but is home to only 150,000 people, the majority of whom are Inuit.

This may be a rare moment when some proposals are not calculated just in terms of costs per capita or per kilometre travelled, said Matti Siemiatycki, an infrastructure expert at the University of Toronto. That can be good – and risky too, he said. "The United States kind of shook up the snow globe and ... made us refocus on these issues of sovereignty, security and of economic self-sufficiency," he said. "I think people are seeing this as a moment where Canada starts reinvesting in itself."

Financial Times
March 13th, 2026



‘King of the North’: Who is Andy Burnham, a potential UK prime minister?

With UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer under pressure from within his own party to announce his resignation, Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has announced an ambitious plan of his own – to win a parliamentary seat in the northern English town Ashton-in-Makerfield. According to his supporters, he is the best candidate to replace Starmer by the time of the Labour Party’s next annual conference in September. Many in the party are hungry for a change following a series of missteps, culminating in a disastrous showing in local elections in early May.

Despite winning an overwhelming majority in the 2024 general election, Labour languishes in the polls, often coming second to the right-wing Reform party. According to Ipsos, Starmer is the most unpopular prime minister since it began polling began in the late 1970s.

Burnham is one of the party’s most popular politicians, dubbed the “King of the North” in the press and a soft left contender from outside of the London political elite. According to The Times, Burnham’s rivals for the top job, including the incumbent, Keir Starmer, are reportedly being asked to stand aside should the 56-year-old mayor win a by-election.

However, just how far outside the establishment is Burnham, what is his background, and what might his possible leadership mean for domestic and global politics?

Analysts say Burnham has appeal because of his apparent distance from the “Westminster bubble.” That perception was consolidated in February when, in a move seen by many as protecting a vulnerable Starmer, Labour’s ruling Labour’s National Executive Committee (NEC) prevented Burnham from standing in the Manchester Gorton and Denton by-election, which was eventually won by the Green Party.

Burnham, whose speech is peppered with northern colloquialisms, leans into his outsider status. But he has also served as a prominent member of Labour’s front bench, both in power and opposition. Before winning the Manchester mayoralty in 2017, he served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury and later Secretary of State for Health under Gordon Brown, giving him a front-line role in managing the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and NHS reform debates during a period of tightening public spending.

He also twice challenged for the party's leadership. Firstly, in 2010, after Gordon Brown resigned following Labour's general election defeat, he entered the contest only to finish fourth behind winner Ed Miliband. In 2015, after Ed Miliband stepped down, he was a distant second to Jeremy Corbyn. (...)

However, while his rupture with the political mainstream looked final, his subsequent role as mayor has won plaudits from locals and observers.

From his victory in 2017 to his re-elections in 2021 and 2024, Burnham has focused on expanding devolved powers for the city region, including greater control over transport, housing and skills funding. His tenure has also been marked by the introduction of bus franchising reforms, the so-called Bee Network, designed to bring services back under public control, alongside initiatives addressing homelessness and rough sleeping.

His high-profile clashes with Westminster during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly over funding for local restrictions in Greater Manchester, led sections of the press to dub him the "King of the North," a moniker that first emerged humorously in 2020 but has come to be viewed more seriously as his national profile has grown. (...)

Burnham also backs the UK's traditional network of alliances. He has criticised the UK's exit from the bloc, using an appearance at last year's conference to lambast his own party for its failure to "call out" the economic damage Brexit had done. He told a fringe event that he hoped in his lifetime to see the UK rejoin the EU.

However, standing between Burnham and 10 Downing Street is an as yet unscheduled by-election and the insurgent right wing Reform Party. Leader Nigel Farage has told reporters the party will "throw absolutely everything" at the Ashton in Makerfield by-election.

So, while Burnham may enjoy the title of King of the North, his coronation remains uncertain.

Al Jazeera

19 May 2026



India's female workers watching hours of abusive content to train AI

On the veranda of her family's home, with her laptop balanced on a mud slab built into the wall, Monsumi Murmu works from one of the few places where the mobile signal holds. The familiar sounds of domestic life come from inside the house: clinking utensils, footsteps, voices.

On her screen a very different scene plays: a woman is pinned down by a group of men, the camera shakes, there is shouting and the sound of breathing. The video is so disturbing Murmu speeds it up, but her job requires her to watch to the end.

Murmu, 26, is a content moderator for a global technology company, logging on from her village in India's Jharkhand state. Her job is to classify images, videos and text that have been flagged by automated systems as possible violations of the platform's rules. On an average day, she views up to 800 videos and images, making judgments that train algorithms to recognise violence, abuse and harm.

This work sits at the core of machine learning's recent breakthroughs, which rest on the fact that AI is only as good as the data it is trained on. In India, this labour is increasingly performed by women, who are part of a workforce often described as "ghost workers".

"The first few months, I couldn't sleep," she says. "I would close my eyes and still see the screen loading." Images followed her into her dreams: of fatal accidents, of losing family members, of sexual violence she could not stop or escape. Now, she says, the images no longer shock her the way they once did. "In the end, you don't feel disturbed – you feel blank." There are still some nights, she says, when the dreams return. "That's when you know the job has done something to you."

Researchers say this emotional numbing – followed by delayed psychological fallout – is a defining feature of content moderation work. "There may be moderators who escape psychological harm, but I've yet to see evidence of that," says Milagros Miceli, a sociologist leading the Data Workers' Inquiry, a project investigating the roles of workers in AI. "In terms of risk," she says, "content moderation belongs in the category of dangerous work, comparable to any lethal industry."

A study of content moderators published last December, which included workers in India, identified traumatic stress as the most pronounced psychological risk. The study found that even where workplace interventions and support mechanisms existed, significant levels of secondary trauma persisted.

As early as 2021, an estimated 70,000 people in India were working in data annotation, which had a market value of about \$250m (£180m) in 2021, according to the country's IT industry body Nasscom. About 60% of revenues came from the US, while only 10% came from India.

About 80% of data-annotation and content moderation workers are drawn from rural, semi-rural or marginalised backgrounds. Firms deliberately operate from smaller cities and towns, where rents and labour costs are lower, and a growing pool of first-generation graduates are seeking jobs.

Women form half or more of this workforce. For companies, women are seen as reliable, detail-oriented and more likely to accept home-based or contract work that could be seen as "safe" or "respectable". These jobs offer rare access to income without migration.

A sizeable number of workers in these hubs come from Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) communities. For many of them, digital work of any kind represents an upward shift; cleaner, more regular and better-paid jobs than agricultural labour or mining.

But working from or close to home, can also reinforce women's marginal position, according to Priyam Vadaliya, a researcher working on AI and data labour.

"The work's respectability, and the fact that it arrives at the doorstep as a rare source of paid employment, often creates an expectation of gratitude," she says. "That expectation can discourage workers from questioning the psychological harm it causes."

(...)

The Guardian

5 February 2026



The steroid Olympics fell short at its finishing line

The Enhanced Games, held in Las Vegas at the weekend, were informally billed as the "steroid Olympics". The no-holds barred sporting competition drew headlines for allowing track athletes, swimmers and weightlifters to use performance-enhancing drugs (Peds). The edgy experiment was meant to shatter world records and force a rethink of what it means to be the strongest or fastest human on Earth.

In the end, the thing that was most pumped up was the marketing. The uncertainty about what these games represented - for science, for sport, for human achievement - reached its apotheosis in the men's 100-metre sprint final. The winner, 31-year-old two-time US Olympic medallist Fred Kerley, clocked up a time - without doping - that would have placed him last at the 2024 Olympic final.

By churning out a series of decent but unexceptional results, which also saw a non-enhanced sprinter triumph in the women's 100-metre final with a lacklustre time, the Enhanced Games fell short of its own finishing line. While one swimming world record was broken and more than a dozen athletes set new personal bests, the steroid Olympics were not really about making the best better. For the most part, the best were absent.

But for the less-than-best and those past their best, Peds can make them feel they still belong on the starting blocks. This was performance enhancement as a kind of DEI initiative - and one that mostly served to make current "non-enhanced" Olympians look more superhuman.

The inaugural Las Vegas extravaganza, with a total prize pot of \$25mn, featured 42 athletes who could choose to use drugs approved by the FDA for medical purposes but banned in sport, such as anabolic steroids. It was organised by Enhanced Group, a start-up with ties to the Maga movement (backers include Peter Thiel and a group led by Donald Trump Jr). The venture, blending sport, entertainment and drug sales, aims to tap into online "wellness" trends, with a sleek website selling Enhanced-branded products, including testosterone and peptides.

As in the real Olympics, all eyes were on the 100-metre finals. Kerley's win, earning him \$250,000 in 9.97 seconds, came after a race marred by false starts. He had previously promised to "destroy" Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt's world record of 9.58s but failed to beat his own PB of 9.76. The second-placed sprinter ran a time over 10 seconds, a barrier that some elite college athletes are breaking. (...)

The one world record broken, the 50-metre freestyle swim, earned a million-dollar payout for the Greek swimmer Kristian Gkolomeev, who has never won an Olympic medal. The record will not be officially recognised, due to doping and Gkolomeev's banned skinsuit (the swimmer refused to disclose his drug regimen).

Kim Wolff of the Drug Control Centre at King's College London, an accredited anti-doping laboratory, has warned that substances like testosterone and synthetic erythropoietin (EPO) offer an unclear competitive advantage while also carrying risks. Testosterone can lead to cardiovascular and hormone complications, as well as mood swings and depression. EPO, the banned substance famously favoured by cyclists, can push up cardiovascular risk.

This might explain why so few of sport's finest were willing to participate - although some might now relish the prospect of an easy, drug-free payday. At a post-event press conference, a spokesman for the games praised the event as "sport as it's never been seen before, massive personal bests, an extraordinary world record. That's a success." He welcomed having both enhanced and non-enhanced winners, and noted the athletes passed health checks.

The Enhanced Games website still boasts: "Our athletes aren't endorsers. They're evidence." Of what, exactly? That doping alone, even with the best medical care, will not guarantee triumph. Faster, higher, stronger is still about strategy, not steroids; about perseverance and psychology, not peptides. For old-fashioned (and perhaps naive) sports fans like me, that alone is a winning message.

Financial Times

May 27, 2026



The net zero revolt has begun

A new pragmatism is infusing the climate debate in the West, driven by voters weary of soaring energy bills and annoyed by increasingly hysteric and patronizing climate rhetoric. From Washington to Westminster to Canberra, the political class is confronting a simple truth: Aggressive net-zero mandates are delivering present economic pain for unmeasurable and far-off climate gain.

The starting shot might have been the US election of Donald Trump, but the clearest warning comes from the United Kingdom. The UK's net-zero law, enacted in 2019, committed the country to zero emissions by 2050. It was hailed as bold leadership, but the reality has been economic sabotage. Industrial electricity prices surged 124% between 2019 and 2024 leaving the UK with the highest rates in the western world at 26.63 pence (\$0.36) per kilowatt-hour.

And the Labour government's renewable-heavy plans will only inflate costs further. At a recent parliamentary hearing, top energy executives laid bare the facts. Chris Norbury, CEO of EOn UK, testified that even if wholesale prices were to plummet to zero, consumer bills would remain just as high as today, due to escalating policy-driven expenses.

Reform UK, now leading national polls and poised to form the next government, first demanded an end to net-zero targets, condemning their design and cost. The Conservatives, staring at electoral oblivion, hastily followed suit, pledging to repeal the Climate Change Act. Prime Minister Keir Starmer is reportedly preparing to delay or dilute key green commitments to curb voter revolt.

The UK's plight is no isolated incident -- it's a harbinger of a retreat from the global net-zero experiment recently championed by politicians even in blue US states and across Europe, as well as further abroad.

In Australia, the conservative Liberal Party has abandoned the promise of net-zero in 2050, and will instead prioritize lower energy prices. (...)

This broadening dissent mostly doesn't dismiss the reality of the climate issue, but insists that we shouldn't deny the climate policy costs either: Net zero will cost hundreds of trillions of dollars and deliver benefits much smaller.

Moreover, even if all rich countries were to cut to zero emissions by mid-century, the climate models clearly show that the impact would avert less than 0.1°C of the projected warming by the end of the century, while imposing 8-18% hits to GDP already by mid-century.

It is now becoming clear that the rosy claims of green growth or just modest costs from a forced green transition are no longer plausible. Instead, if green politicians truly do believe that climate action justifies exorbitant costs and making power unaffordable for millions, they now have to make that argument openly. And this is a losing argument. The UK's slide from energy powerhouse to price pariah emphasizes this.

Enter Bill Gates, whose recent memo ahead of the COP30 climate summit calls for a strategic pivot. He lays out three tough truths: Climate change is serious but "will not lead to humanity's demise" or the end of civilization; temperature is not the best progress metric; and health and prosperity are our best defenses against it.

This means shifting from obsessive emission cuts which have shaped climate and energy policy across the UK, Europe, and other Western countries. Instead, Gates highlights, we need to focus on what boosts human welfare most.

For the world's poor, that means tackling hunger, poverty, and disease directly. This will help people live much better lives and improve their resiliency in a warmer climate. For rich nations, it means addressing jobs, education, immigration, defense, and energy head-on.

To respond to climate change smartly, we need to pivot from making energy more expensive to innovation which will eventually make green energy cheaper (...)

The net-zero era is fracturing. It is time for honesty, innovation, and policies that serve people the best.

Dhaka Tribune
28 January 2026



The case for sending astronauts into space is rapidly shrinking

The 2020s has seen a revival of the “Apollo spirit”. The US and China are seemingly in a race to send humans to the moon by the end of the decade – and thereafter, perhaps, even to Mars. Nasa astronauts have just returned from a 10-day journey looping around the moon. Although they arrived back safely, Nasa accepts that the lack of data makes it impossible to quantify the risks involved – this represents only the second launch for the Artemis system and the first to carry astronauts.

To date, estimated expenditures on the Artemis programme are close to \$100bn (£75bn). The “one big beautiful bill” that the US Congress passed in July 2025 allocates \$9.9bn for the Artemis IV and V missions. Still greater expenditures are envisioned for a well-developed lunar base.

The benefits of going to the moon are clear. Detailed exploration will give us important clues about the formation of the solar system, and by implication about the history of exoplanets orbiting other stars throughout the cosmos. In addition, the moon offers a stable observing platform for all types of telescopes, including giant arrays of radio antennas. These can profit from their location on the lunar far side, which is shielded from the light and other radiation that our terrestrial civilisation constantly radiates into space.

But are “on-site” humans needed for any of this? Today, astronauts could still prove useful, despite the difficulties of keeping them alive and productive. But a decade from now, the advantage could swing towards robots: able to work around the clock, comparatively inexpensive, and not requiring replacement for many years or even decades.

Robots on Mars such as Curiosity and Perseverance (and their Chinese counterparts) have performed almost flawlessly for many years. These marvellous machines steadily improve their capabilities, while humans, who demand oxygen, food and shelter, do not. What cost, including possible tragedy, should be imposed for the greater inspiration that astronauts offer? And, we may reasonably ask, how much inspiration would astronauts on the moon now provide given that humans achieved the basic goal more than half a century ago?

As ever, space exploration has a political dimension, as well as a scientific one, with sending astronauts an eye-catching achievement. The Chinese government's plans show a determination to increase China's prestige and influence through space exploration. (...)

In 2028, the Chinese government plans to send equipment to investigate construction of a lunar base, including an enclosed ecosystem to rest on the moon's surface. And there is every expectation that the Chinese will aim to match the US by sending humans.

But the most relevant difference between the Apollo era and the mid-2020s is the amazing improvement in our ability to create, launch and guide robotic explorers. Improvements in sensors and in artificial intelligence (AI) will enable the robots themselves to identify particularly interesting sites from which to gather samples for return to Earth. Within 10 or 20 years, robotic exploration of the lunar surface could be almost autonomous, with little advantage to be gained by a human presence. (...)

Indeed, as robotics and miniaturisation improve, the practical and scientific case for any human spaceflight weakens. Its prime motive now is simply as an adventure – an ultra-expensive sport that should be left to billionaires and private sponsorship.

We may envy the crew of Artemis who, while orbiting the moon, experienced the awe of the pioneer Apollo 8 astronaut Bill Anders in his iconic image Earthrise, depicting the Earthly home that we must cherish. But we do not need to send astronauts to the moon, or beyond, to bring the benefits of space exploration to humanity.

The Guardian

11 April 2026



Whitewashing 'Wuthering Heights' now hits differently

Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" has been adapted to the big screen numerous times and has largely been consistent in one disappointing way: the whitewashing of Heathcliff. So when the complaints about the colorblind casting in Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" came, they didn't feel entirely unfamiliar. What's changed is the terrain. Whether it likes it or not, Hollywood is now one of the country's most visible political battlegrounds - where casting is treated less like a creative choice than as a statement of values.

Viral videos of violent ICE raids widely criticized as racial profiling, alongside news of visa limits that disproportionately impact nonwhite-majority countries - and a sustained assault on DEI - have heightened how audiences read race on-screen and what it signals in the real world. Fennell's "Wuthering Heights," then, can't just be another adaptation. It's the latest proxy fight over race and representation.

The original novel was written in 1847 and has lived on for more than a century and a half, firmly embedding itself in pop culture. But the film doesn't explore the exclusion of Heathcliff, played by Jacob Elordi, because of his ethnicity, or its effects on his social class. The fact that he's described as "dark-skinned" and a "gypsy" is central to the story because it unsettles the novel's Victorian characters.

Then there is Fennell's decision to cast nonwhite actors in supporting roles - Hong Chau as Nelly Dean and Shazad Latif as Edgar Linton. It's a departure from the book that inverts the story's racial politics, inadvertently amplifying the victimization of Cathy Earnshaw, played by Margot Robbie, and Heathcliff, while minimizing the effects of their own choices and cruelty.

The film portrays Nelly, Cathy's paid companion, as a vengeful schemer (unlike her counterpart in the book). Her spiteful machinations - burning Heathcliff's letters to Cathy and her inaction ultimately leading to Cathy's death from sepsis - become an obstacle to a white couple's love story. Meanwhile, Cathy's callousness toward Nelly, including sidelining her in favor of Heathcliff, is glossed over. These are racist undertones that sparked online discourse.

Jananie K. Velu, a popular YouTuber known for her book content, captured many people's frustrations in a YouTube short with over 50,000 views.

She noted how the casting of Chau and Latif avoids the complexities of Cathy and Heathcliff's romance and winds up "blaming the Asian servant and the rich brown man" Cathy marries for her own gain.

Velu says that the film is a reflection of real life in that it's "a story rooted in the cycles of violence perpetuated by whiteness that has its genesis in the abuse of people of color."

In response to the backlash, Fennell has defended Elordi's casting as Heathcliff, saying she made the movie she "sort of imagined" when she read it and was focused more "on the pseudo-masochistic elements of it."

Even so, it's hard to ignore how the director's creative license reinforces the idea that people of color and those from lower economic classes are seen as threats to power and whiteness.

In a tumultuous political landscape, audiences are increasingly primed to notice this kind of racialized and class-based tension in the media they consume. But movies have always been political, even when their messages are subtle or when filmmakers insist they're simply telling a story. (...)

Fennell's adaptation of "Wuthering Heights" may be personal, but her choices don't exist in a vacuum or land on neutral ground. Her use of colorblind casting is a cautionary tale. However well-intentioned the strategy is nowadays, it can be harmful when deployed without careful consideration. In a story anchored in power, inheritance, exclusion and social consequences, colorblind casting operates as a kind of erasure, flattening the very tensions that give the plot meaning.

Movies don't always reflect our real world, nor do they have to. But studios, writers and directors have to accept that once art is public, its meaning is no longer solely dictated by the creators' intentions.

Bloomberg
February 25, 2026



When AI leads to tragedy, big tech must be accountable

The economic and social promise of large language models has driven the western world into an AI mania that's driving our stock markets and leading to massive investments in data centres and energy infrastructure. Yet we still don't really know how AI works - nor the very real effects it can have on our brains.

What we do know is that it can lead to real, horrific harms. That's the basis of a new lawsuit filed against OpenAI in a British Columbia court by Cia Edmonds, mother of Maya Gebala, 12 years old, who was shot last month.

Edmonds claims ChatGPT was a "collaborator, trusted confidante, friend, and ally" of the shooter, Jesse Van Rootselaar, acting as a therapist to the 18-year-old who had long struggled with her mental health. Van Rootselaar used ChatGPT in devising her plan to attack the Tumbler Ridge secondary school.

The lawsuit alleges, "OpenAI knew that ChatGPT possessed extensive knowledge and capabilities - including the ability to provide detailed, actionable information on dangerous or harmful subjects like how to conduct a mass casualty event like the Tumbler Ridge Mass Shooting." (...)

Edmond's lawsuit is important because it not only attempts to hold OpenAI accountable for the harms its services have abetted but also recognizes that the risks ChatGPT poses are inherent, not incidental, to the platform. ChatGPT is advertised as a gateway to human knowledge, and OpenAI's stated ethos resembles that of other LLM companies: it promises to act "in the best interests of humanity" - but clearly this is not the primary goal.

The earliest iterations of ChatGPT offered robotic, formulaic, clear and disinterested responses to user prompts. As other competitors came onto the market, however, OpenAI tweaked its chatbot to be more personable, more emotional, more human. This was not done out of altruism. It was a marketing decision.

That's precisely what Edmonds' lawsuit contends. OpenAI "prioritized user engagement over safety," she argues through her lawyers, and its chatbot "was programmed to accept and

elaborate upon users' inputs rather than challenging them or refuse to engage with the user for the purpose of maximizing user engagement and making users feel validated." (...)

ChatGPT has been in wide use for less than three years - and we can't even contend with how much damage it's done so far. (...)

This isn't a part of some natural technological progression. As Edmonds's lawsuit claims, OpenAI deliberately gave ChatGPT a "sycophantic, anthropomorphized interface" to get users hooked, collect their data and charge them subscription fees. (...)

When I engaged ChatGPT recently on the topic of school shootings, it made its boundaries clear immediately: "I can't help explain how to bypass or defeat safety measures for violent attacks, even hypothetically." But ChatGPT is far from being the only game in town.

Elon Musk's Grok, for example, readily engaged with my prompts. It soon offered advice on maximizing shooting casualties and suggested means of obtaining higher-capacity rifle magazines. When I asked about Tumbler Ridge, specifically, Grok advised how the shooter might have gone about "maximizing initial impact," although it stopped short of providing specific instructions.

The blame for the violence in Tumbler Ridge doesn't lie solely with OpenAI: it didn't purchase the weapons; it didn't fail to remove those weapons from Van Rootselaar's home; and it can't be blamed for our massively underfunded mental-health system, which neglected to intervene despite clear signs Van Rootselaar was in crisis. And, of course, ultimate responsibility for the crime lies with the shooter herself.

Still, it's worth investigating to what extent OpenAI bears responsibility for the tragic deaths of eight B.C. residents and Van Rootselaar herself. Canadians have become conditioned to believe Big Tech shouldn't be held civilly liable for the damage it causes. This attitude may be partly inherited from the U.S., where federal law generally gives internet platforms immunity with respect to how their products are used.

Toronto Star
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Ozempic marks end of fat activism

Ever since Ozempic hit the market as a weight-loss drug, fat activists of the world appear to have been cycling (not literally, of course) between the five stages of grief.

There has been anger: one learned fat scholar suggested in 2023 that weightloss drugs like Ozempic “relate to eugenicist social practices”.

Some accused persons who lost weight of having undergone conversion therapy - because there seems to be no historical struggle or oppression that these activists aren’t willing to appropriate for their cause.

Other activists reached the ‘acceptance’ stage very early on, even before half of Hollywood dropped a collective 10 dress sizes: a Guardian headline from two years ago claimed that “Ozempic has won, body positivity has lost, and I want no part of it.”

The author graciously declared that her anti-Ozempic stance was “not to say that fat people owe it to their community to stay fat”. Let’s stop for a moment to appreciate the irony of a movement that simultaneously insists that one’s weight doesn’t define them, but also threatens to excommunicate from the ‘community’ those who lose too much.

More recently, body positive activist Tess Holliday, who makes a living modelling and selling plus-sized clothing, appears to be experiencing the ‘denial’ stage in her Ozempic grief journey. In a video posted to her Instagram account, she insisted that Ozempic is not going to destroy her movement.

“I don’t think that Ozempic is killing the body positive, body neutrality space”, she said. “Because before that, there were diet pills. There were machines that you stood on that shook the fat away. There were all kinds of promises and pills and programs and camps. They’ve existed since the beginning of time.”

Fact check: for the vast majority of Homo sapiens’ existence these past 300,000 years, we have struggled to find enough calories to survive. Being obese and wanting to lose weight is a very

modern problem, resulting from our modern privilege of constant access to calorie-dense foods. (...)

More than 42 per cent of American adults are obese (included in this group are the 9.2 per cent of Americans who are severely obese), and 30.7 per cent are overweight, per the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Roughly three-quarters of American adults do not fall into a normal weight range. Even this might be an underestimate: A 2025 study found that obesity in American adults rose from 40 to 70 per cent depending on how it defined the condition.

In Canada, by comparison, nearly 30 per cent of adults are obese, and more than 35 per cent are overweight. Being thin, or even of normal weight, is the exception in North America. When fat activists like Holliday tell others that obesity is a radical political act and something that contributes to one's uniqueness - they're wrong.

Ozempic is outing the truth: no one genuinely wants to be obese.

For example, after years of cracking "I'm fat and I don't care" jokes, comedian Amy Schumer shared bikini photos with her newly thin Ozempic and Mounjaro body early this year. Another fat activist, rapper Lizzo, also dabbled in Ozempic and now proudly shares photos of her thinner self online.

This month, Cornell University published a study on the impact of Ozempic and similar weight-loss drugs on grocery spending in the U.S. Unsurprisingly, persons on Ozempic have lower grocery bills.

"If Ozempic use continues to expand, food manufacturers, restaurants, and retailers could face long-term changes in demand, especially for snack foods and fast food. Companies may need to rethink package sizes, product formulas, and marketing strategies", concluded ScienceDaily in a report about the study.

If Holliday's plus-sized clothing line stops selling and her modelling gigs dry up, perhaps she can find a new career in food marketing.

The Chronicle Herald
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Politicians and religion: a bad mix

Among all of the odd and peculiar actions of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration - its starts and stops, its lurches forwards and backwards, its threats of annexations and tariffs and retribution - this has to rank as one of the strangest.

After Pope Leo XIV gave a State of the World speech in January, one that clearly but indirectly chastised the United States, the Trump administration reportedly told the Catholic Church that it had better fall in line.

U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby called Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the Vatican's U.S. representative, to the Pentagon.

"The United States," Colby reportedly told Pierre, "has the military power to do whatever it wants in the world. The Catholic Church had better take its side." (...)

Just about the most honest thing you can say about the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is that its members seem to like some parts of Christianity - they just don't know very much about what it is meant to be. And maybe that's at the core of the latest battle between the Trump administration and Pope Leo.

Trump says the Pope is "weak on crime" - well, yes. Pope Leo is long on mercy, short on ordering personal vengeance. That's ... his job.

Trump doesn't seem to understand the difference between political roles and religious ones - just like he didn't understand that sharing a meme on social media that highlighted Trump himself as a Jesus-like figure, tending to the sick, might cause an uproar.

Trump isn't alone. Vice-President JD Vance - himself a Catholic - recently said the Pope doesn't understand Christian teachings, saying Pope Leo should be "more careful when he talks about matters of theology." Have we ever heard a politician lecture a Pope on the proper interpretation of theology before? Leo, by the way, has a master's of divinity and a doctorate in canon law.

And then there's U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. This week, Hegseth read a prayer to members of the military where he cited Ezekiel 25:17, but Hegseth's prayer instead closely mirrored a speech from the movie Pulp Fiction, given by Samuel L. Jackson just before he kills another character in the movie. (...)

A subtle difference? Well, for a start, the real Bible verse cites the actions of the Lord, while Hegseth's cites the actions of brothers in arms. One makes retribution the preserve of the Christian God, while the other justifies vengeance as a biblical right of men.

Maybe we should leave Christian theology to the theologians, though it's not so useful for justifying foreign wars.

Here's what Pope Leo has said very plainly this week: "Blessed are the peacemakers," he said in Cameroon. "Woe to those who manipulate religion and the very name of God for their own military, economic and political gain, dragging that which is sacred into darkness and filth. (...) Authentic peace arises when everyone feels protected, heard and respected, when the law serves as a secure safeguard against the whims of the rich and powerful."

Pope Leo is the first American Pope. He has apparently now turned down an invitation to attend an event celebrating America's 250th anniversary, and will spend July 4 on the island of Lampedusa, which is well known as a landing place for North African refugees.

The Trump administration clearly fails to understand many things, including what faith entails - which, obviously, includes speaking truth to power. Regardless of Trump's beliefs, not everything is transactional, based on power and threats.

Pope Leo speaks out against injustice, cruelty and inhumanity. The idea that a government feels it can restrict the pope from speaking his conscience and temper his words because of threats is startling - even after everything the Trump administration has done so far.

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