

CIVITAS EXAMINER

By students, for students.

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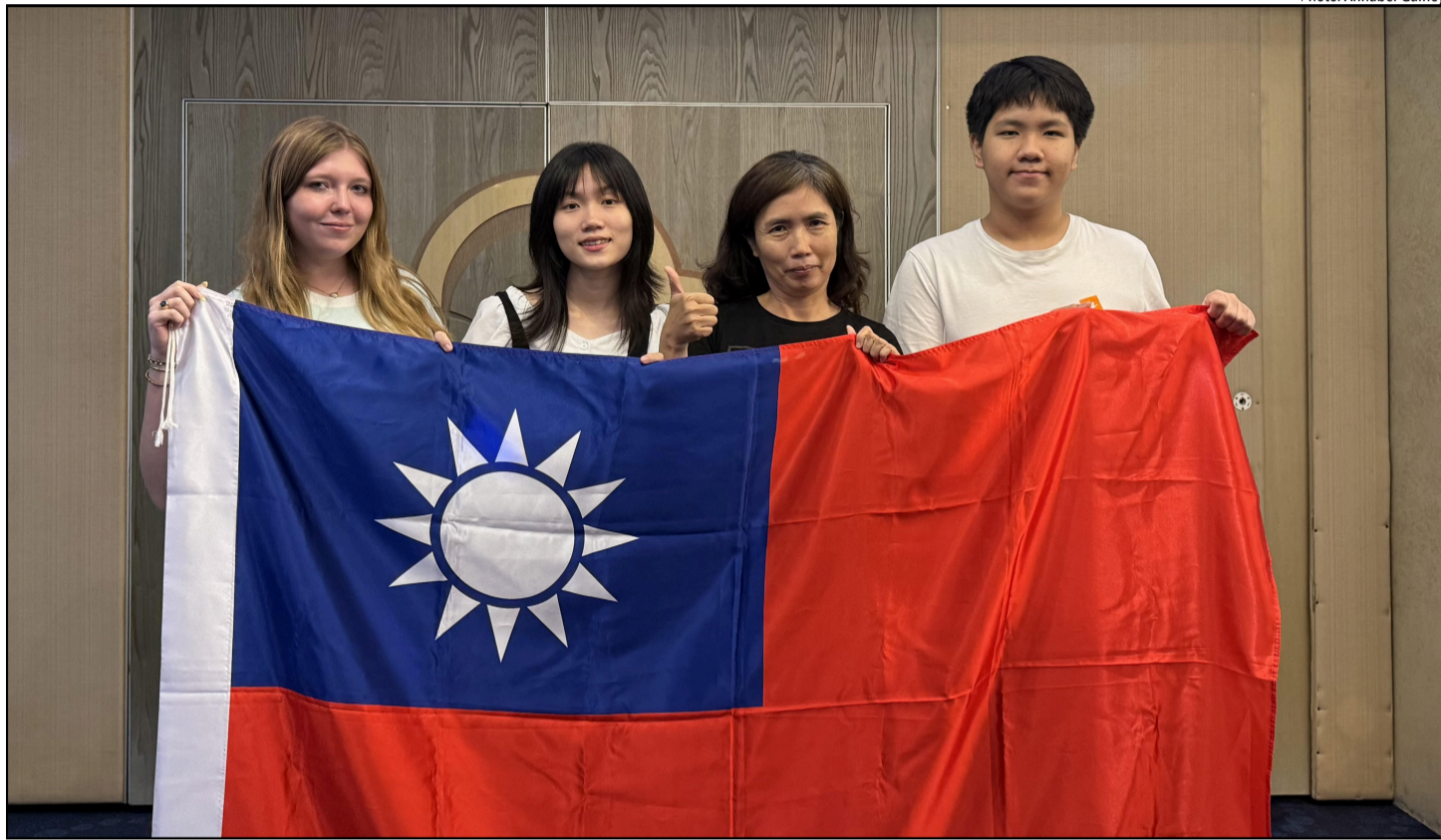
TAIWANESE PERSPECTIVES FROM A CONTESTED ISLAND

Life amid tensions

BY ANNABEL GAINEY
ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, 2026

**It's important to note that, due to a language barrier, my interview was conducted partially in Chinese and partially in English. Some questions and responses were translated and may have lost some original meaning.*

I stepped off the plane in Taipei, Taiwan, on June 25, 2025, greeted by humid air and a whirlwind of transportation to my destination: Kaohsiung. This moment kick-started my two-month study abroad trip through the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) and the International Education and Research Network (iEARN-USA), programs in which I stay with a host family, attend Chinese language classes at Wenzao University, and explore a vibrant new city. My weeks are filled with sightseeing, struggling with Hanzi, trying new foods, making friends, marvelling at the convenience of 7-Elevens, and many, many



Annabel Gainey (left) poses with her host family while holding the Taiwanese flag in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, during her two-month study abroad experience in summer 2025.

photos. My time in Taiwan was incredible, filled with amazing memories from a peaceful yet bustling country. It's easy, amid the everyday rhythms of life, to forget that this small island occupies one of the most contentious political positions in East Asia and remains China's most

sought-after acquisition. The roots of this tension trace back over a century. In the early 1900s, Taiwan was under Japanese rule following the First Sino-Japanese War. After Japan's defeat in World War II, control of Taiwan was transferred to the Republic of

China (ROC). However, the Chinese Civil War soon followed, ending in 1949 with the Communist Party establishing the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland. The defeated ROC government retreated to Taiwan, where it continued to operate

separately. For decades afterwards, both governments claimed to represent "China," but political, military, and ideological divisions solidified the separation. While Taiwan gradually transitioned into a democratic system in the late

20th century, the PRC never relinquished its claim over the island.

China's continued interest in Taiwan today stems from a combination of political, historical, and strategic factors. The Chinese government views Taiwan as an inseparable part of its territory and frames reunification as essential to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beyond symbolism, Taiwan's location carries significant strategic value along key shipping lanes and plays a role in regional security dynamics. Taiwan is also a global leader in advanced semiconductor manufacturing, further elevating its importance. For Beijing, reunification is presented not only as a historical inevitability but as a matter tied to long-term national strength and legitimacy.

With tensions slowly but surely rising between the two nations, I took it upon myself to ask my host family what they think about reunification with China*.

SEE TAIWAN, PAGE 4

Mr. Smith goes to Civitas

BY COCO LORD
METRO HIGH SCHOOL, 2028

Former state Sen. Jeff Smith, who was once an incarcerated individual, spoke to Civitas students through Zoom on Jan. 24, 2026, about his experiences and work with prison reform in Missouri.



Jeff Smith

Smith began his career in the public lens when he co-founded Confluence Academies in north St. Louis, a reaction to the disparities surrounding education in the city. Later, motivated by escalating political tensions in the United States, Smith ran for a congressional seat in 2004 in an extremely crowded Democratic primary. While he eventually lost to Russ Carnahan by one percentage point, Smith states that a 30-second moment of his campaign "changed the trajectory of the whole rest of [his] life."

During the campaign, Smith was given the option to release a negative campaign against Carnahan, playing on his low attendance in the Missouri Legislature to a

third party. Instead of telling his staff to release the information or not release it, Smith told his staff, "I don't want to know what you do."

This action led to Carnahan filing a complaint to the Federal Election Commission. When Smith was sent an affidavit regarding the case, he lied and stated that he did not know who had released the information.

Four years and eleven months later, whilst serving in the Missouri Senate, Smith was indicted for obstruction of justice after a friend of his wore a wire and collected information proving he had lied on the affidavit. Smith was sent to a federal prison in rural Kentucky, set to serve one year and one day.

During his time in prison, Smith says that he learned many valuable lessons, from the fact that somebody always has it worse to how to properly unload trucks at his loading-dock job. By far the most valuable lesson that

SEE SMITH, PAGE 3

Candles

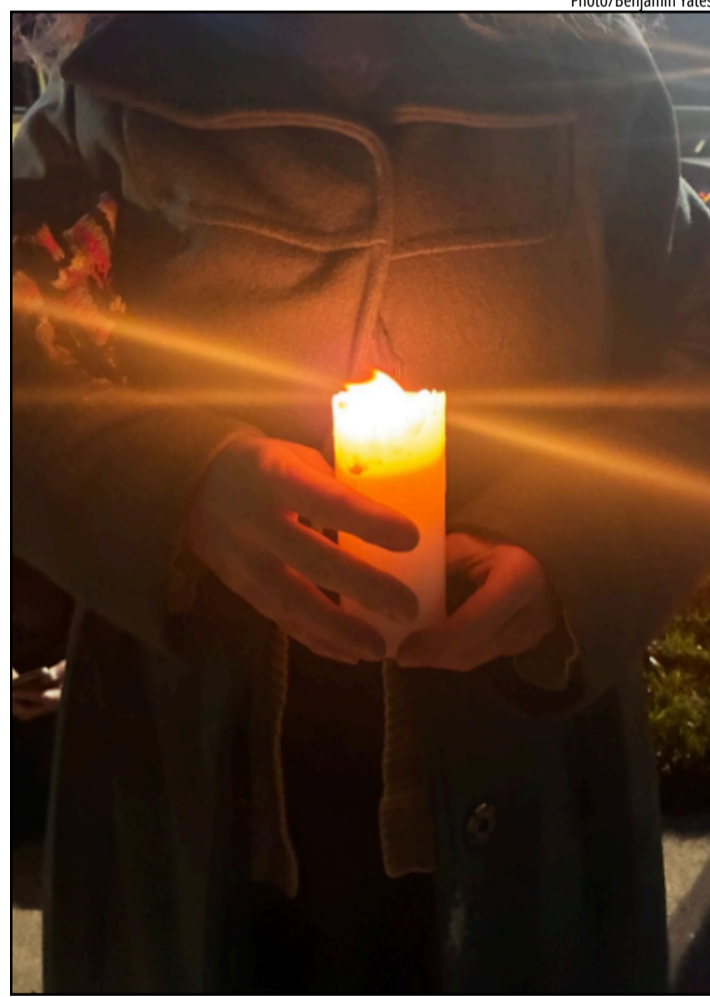
BY BENJAMIN YATES
HOME SCHOOL HARMONY, 2028

"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared." - The Buddha

My family goes to protests. It's what we have done as long as I can remember. When something happens, my brother immediately asks when the protest is and starts to make a sign. And so, days after Renée Good was murdered by an agent from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, we made plans to attend the candlelight vigil at Brentwood Square.

So far, the protests we have attended have been daytime protests with chants, loud music, and a strong sense of community. Attending a quiet, nighttime vigil was a vastly different but just as empowering experience.

At first, it felt strange. There was a bit of a disconnect from the other people there, separated as we were by darkness and cold. But eventually, something became clear – the simple act



A participant holds a candle at a candlelight vigil for Renée Good in Brentwood, Mo. in January 2026.

of holding a candle alongside other people is a way to build community.

You see, candles go out. You can grab a lighter from your pocket, but chances are it will be easier to ask for a light from the person next to you. And so you stand close to each other, cradling the flame

from the January wind. Maybe you talk as you do so, or maybe you just share in the subtle warmth. You find yourself building community still, but in a much quieter way.

It wasn't all quiet, though. People honked to show their

SEE VIGIL, PAGE 4

HOW RETREAT AMID TENSION BACKFIRED

From DEI to decline

BY LEANNA J.D. HAYNES
HOME SCHOOL NETWORK, 2027

From late 2024 to early 2025, large American corporations, including Google, Meta, PepsiCo, Amazon, McDonald's, Boeing, and Target, announced the rollback or significant alteration of their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. These decisions came amid conservative criticism, legal threats, and a shifting political landscape, especially following executive orders from the Trump administration declaring many DEI initiatives "illegal" or in violation of civil rights law.

Instead of targeted programs aimed at increasing representation and equity for historically marginalized groups, many companies replaced specific DEI terminology with broader terms such as

SEE DEI, PAGE 4



Photo/Lawrence Haynes



Photo/Lawrence Haynes



Top: Lawrence Haynes sits at a delegate's seat in the United Nations Office in Geneva in fall 2024. Bottom: Lawrence Haynes and his sister, Leanna, pose near the Broken Chair sculpture outside the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland in fall 2024.

MY VISIT TO THE UN OFFICE AT GENEVA

A walk into global diplomacy

BY LAWRENCE E.C. HAYNES
HOME SCHOOL NETWORK, 2029

In the fall of 2024, my understanding of the United Nations shifted from something I studied in Model United Nations conferences to something I experienced firsthand. My family and I were in France for a one-year French immersion, and we got the opportunity to step inside one of the world's most important centers of international diplomacy: the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

Before we moved to France, the grandpa of one of the kids in my taekwondo class told my dad that his sister lives in Geneva and that we must meet her. My parents arranged this meeting during our first week in France. Jo Elizabeth Butler was an international lawyer and longtime U.N. official. Over the course of her more than 30 years at the U.N., Jo played a significant role in global governance, beginning in the early 1990s as a legal advisor for the Climate Change Secretariat. She helped negotiate early frameworks for the first climate change treaty, served on a U.N. task force addressing drought relief in Ethiopia, and worked extensively with the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). She later retired as Deputy Director for Africa at UNCTAD after holding multiple leadership roles, including work in Addis Ababa.



Lawrence Haynes poses with family members in front of the United Nations Office in Geneva during a visit in fall 2024.

When Jo learned that my sister, Leanna, and I are deeply interested in the U.N., she generously offered to give us a private tour of the UNOG. At the time, my grandmother was visiting from Canada, and my grandaunt was visiting from London, which made Jo's offer even more special for me.

Right outside our kitchen window was the border of France and Geneva, Switzerland. Every morning and evening, we would watch rush hour traffic going through this border. Many days we would take this walk, and it was a constant reminder of how seamlessly borders can blend in Europe. On Oct. 31, my family and I walked across this border from France into Switzerland, no passports or ID necessary. We navigated Geneva's efficient electric public transportation system and soon arrived near the U.N. grounds.

The first landmark we encountered was the Broken Chair, a massive sculpture with one leg shattered.

Reading its description was powerful: "the sculpture stands as a symbol of opposition to landmines and cluster munitions, and as a reminder of the lasting human cost of war." Nearby, the water from the Fountains of Place des Nations rose into the air, contrasting the calm beauty of the setting with the serious purpose of the institutions surrounding it. Right up the street, we walked by the building of the International Committee of the Red Cross (CICR), a quiet but striking reminder of Geneva's role as a hub for humanitarian work.

After ID checks and security, we began our tour inside the U.N. complex. Walking through the buildings and departments where diplomats, legal experts, and humanitarian officials work every day made the U.N. feel real in a way no textbook ever could. Jo took us inside one of the session chambers and demonstrated how she would chair sessions. Leanna and I got to take pictures pretending to chair a session, holding the gavel, and

standing at the podium. My mom, dad, grandma, and grandaunt were busy moving through the room to find the seats for their favorite countries, including Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, where my maternal and paternal families are from, respectively.

Probably the most inspiring moment was being escorted up into one of the upper rooms while an actual session with delegates from many countries was happening. Being able to observe and listen to the meeting in session will be something that I will remember forever. One thing that stood out to me was that there were translators in eleven languages, and we could turn our headphones to listen to the session in the language we preferred. This was impactful for us because we were two months into the immersive year to become fluent in our fourth language, French. This was a moment that increased our appreciation for being worldschoolers and for our parents creating the opportunities and experiences for us to become polyglots. From this meeting in session, we gained insight into how international dialogue actually unfolds through careful language, negotiation, and compromise.

At the end of our thorough tour of the buildings, Jo took us to the UNOG superstore. This was fun. There, we were able to shop for food, clothes, jewelry, perfumes, books, home supplies, and just

SEE GENEVA, PAGE 3

THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF AMERICA'S FOOD PYRAMID

How it all turned upside down

BY LUCY MIKOW
LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL, 2029

The traditional American food pyramid has been a familiar fixture for 34 years and has played a major role in the health, fitness, and dietary scene.

It made its debut during World War II in 1943 with the Basic 7 food guide created by W.O. Atwater with the United States Department of Agriculture. This was a general guide of all the food groups, whereas the modern food pyramid shows the serving sizes and other information. This version was introduced by the USDA to ensure a strong home front during rationing. The Basic 7 placed emphasis on eating a well-balanced diet, featuring many different foods all in the same amounts. It was created with the dietary knowledge they had at the time, which was expanded in the years following. As the nation progressed, it was evident that we needed a new system.

When the next food guide was created in 1992, it had six major food groups going from bottom to top, showing what a healthy person needed to eat. 6-11 servings of carbs, 3-5 servings of vegetables, two to four servings of fruits, two to three servings of dairy products, two to three servings of meat, beans, and nuts, and finally a sparing use of fats, oils, and sweets. This framework was



The new 2025 to 2030 U.S. dietary guidelines feature an inverted food pyramid, emphasizing vegetables, proteins, and healthy fats over grains.

invented in Sweden, used to help people deal with food shortages. This format would inspire one of the next forms. This pyramid was taught in schools and used nationally as a framework for meals. However, some controversy sparked almost immediately upon release.

The food pyramid was harshly ridiculed after its release for promoting excessive grains and carbs as well as overemphasizing dairy products. In other countries' food pyramids, it was noticed that carbs and dairy were not as large of portions as in the U.S., and almost none of them had carbs as their largest portion. However, this pyramid was

still a mainstay until it was updated once again in 2005. Critics of the 1992 pyramid were ready for a new design that would show a more scientifically accurate recommendation for Americans. These critics were likely disappointed when they saw the new pyramid, which also showed a larger portion of carbs and grains, as well as larger amounts of dairy products. The pyramid also encourages eating larger portions of foods with higher saturated fat content. When you consume foods with lots of saturated fats, such as milk, cheese, fatty meats, and other animal fats, they can block up parts of your veins

and arteries with this fat and make it more difficult for your body to pump blood. This pyramid promotes eating more saturated fats than unsaturated fats.

This format was a benchmark until the entire program got a whole new format. What was formerly MyPyramid became MyPlate. This version of dietary structure featured no serving sizes, but instead showed how much of your plate should be which food groups. This version still prioritized grains, but it took a step in the right direction with an emphasis on vegetables, proteins, and fruits. Americans were still

SEE PYRAMID, PAGE 5

Protests spread in Iran

BY FIONA REID
METRO HIGH SCHOOL, 2029

In late December 2025, widespread protests started across Iran. This has been caused by many underlying issues in Iran, including an annual inflation rate of nearly 40%. Food has gotten overly expensive, and recently, the central bank stopped using cheaper American money, which caused prices to skyrocket.

Many Iranian citizens are also losing faith in their government, with some even answering the call of the son of the last Shah, Reza Pahlavi, to protest, with them chanting out his name and calling for his return. The widespread corruption of the Iranian government and human rights violations have been enough for them to want a new ruler.

Their current leader is a cleric and their second supreme leader since 1989; his name is Ali Khamenei. His leadership has been riddled with human rights abuses and corruption. But there is also the president, who is a step below the supreme leader, Masoud Pezeshkian. He ran on the platform of promising economic change, but now, just under two years in office, he has yet to deliver and has been involved in corruption scandals, including bribery.

On Jan. 8, 2026, the internet in Iran went down, and since then, communications have been

SEE IRAN, PAGE 3

How the right is taking over Latin America

BY KIRILL KONDRATYUK
PARKWAY WEST HIGH SCHOOL, 2027

It seems that the right wing is taking over Latin America. From Argentina to Chile, from Bolivia to Honduras, right-wing candidates are defeating their left-wing counterparts. But to understand this right-wing tide, we first need to look at how it started.

At the start of the 21st century, left-wing movements rose across Latin America. What became known as the pink tide saw various left-wing populists come to power in Latin America, from Hugo Chavez in Venezuela to Evo Morales in Bolivia. Many were elected due to difficulties facing emerging markets worldwide, leading many to look away from liberal economics and embrace left-wing populists. However, the pink tide was not without controversy, as countries like Nicaragua and Venezuela turned authoritarian, though not all, and some, like Brazil, remained democratic. But by the 2010s, a reaction to this blue tide rose up the conservative wave. It was successful, with right-wing leaders coming to power, such as Mauricio Macri in Argentina and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. But many of these right-wing candidates, such as Bolsonaro, soon became embroiled in scandals and

SEE RIGHT, PAGE 5

A GUIDE TO ICE RUSES

Taking off the mask

BY BENJAMIN YATES
HOME SCHOOL HARMONY, 2028

Have you ever looked at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement website? It's full of propaganda, blatant lies, and even fake press releases from the "ICE newsroom." There is an entire section devoted to clinically cold recountings of atrocities with pitifully minimizing commentary. ICE's public front is not an accurate source. However, behind the scenes, ICE takes off its figurative – and also very literal – mask and seems to be very aware of what it is doing.

One leaked document, found on immigrantdefensewatch.org, detailed how to act in a confrontation, mostly consisting of information on how to mislead people and convince them that you are not, in fact, trying to arrest and deport them. The document is 37 pages long, which is not that bad on its own, but then you realize that what you are seeing is only the tip of the iceberg. The page numbers demonstrate that the 37 pages is actually only the uncensored portion of a 2,353-page document on how to deceive.

Recently, ICE has been increasing its presence in predominantly Democratic cities across the nation, attempting to detain and deport anyone they think is an undocumented immigrant. Often, they will directly detain people in a public setting, wearing ICE uniforms – tactical gear and face masks are the public face while not the official uniform – and making it obvious what they are there to do. But they don't have to.

ICE agents often target people based on skin color, the speaking of a foreign language, or physical location. Because this does not constitute probable cause, the agent often does not have a judicial search warrant and requires consent from the occupant to enter the car or house. What they do have is an administrative search warrant, which is not viable for entering without consent.

This would seem to tilt things in favor of the occupant. You see the agents coming, you refuse consent, and legally they have to leave. But ICE knows this too, and they have adopted a loophole.

In cases where ICE would need to get close to someone without arousing suspicion, like if a known criminal might retaliate or flee, agents can employ tactics known as ruses – a word chosen because it is less harsh than "lie." Basically, ICE can come to someone's door under false pretenses by pretending to be someone they are not, like local police or an evangelist organization.

The resulting loophole is that ICE can use these ruses to gain consent without full knowledge of the officers' identity. If you invite them into your house so that they can tell you about Jesus, you have given consent and they

SEE ICE, PAGE 5

Technology is a double-edged sword for gifted education

BY LUCY MIKOW
LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL, 2029

The advancement of technology has made so many things possible for our current generation. Not to mention the generations before us. Technology has really been growing exponentially over the past 400 to 600 years. 1440, the printing press. 1608, the telescope. 1765, the steam engine. 1804, the modern railways. The list goes on. Less than 200 years ago, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Think about your iPhone 15. How much more can it do? Yes, these innovations and inventions have made our lives easier and provided us with tools to do things like cure polio or fly in a plane. But, as it turns out, these innovations prove to be just as much a curse as they are a blessing. The recent advancements in easily accessible technology marketed for kids have taken the United States by storm, with the rise of children with high digital consumption referred to as "iPad kids."

Gifted children make up about 7% of American students. The standard childhood for children in the U.S. is becoming more and more digitized, which leaves us wondering how this will impact the gifted population of youth. The National Institutes of Health

published that the excessive use of screens during childhood negatively affects the development of speech, social skills, and overall brain activity. According to Oak Crest Academy, a co-educational private school in California for gifted and talented children in grades K-12, large amounts of screen time can potentially lead to "decreased academic performance...problems with interpersonal relationships...[and] can even lead to an

Smith

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Smith learned, though, was how the American prison system is in desperate need of reform.

"Our prison system is very different than the prison system in most European countries. The recidivism rate in Scandinavia... is about 13%. The recidivism rate in America is about 70%. And the main reason why, I think, is in those countries, when you come to prison, they don't strip you of your clothes and give you a uniform," Smith said to Civitas students. "They don't call you by your number. They call you by your name, and they don't waste your time in there."

The United States prison system exploits racial tension and bias, and Smith wanted to do something about it.

"When I came out, I vowed that I was going to do whatever I could to make sure that guys like the ones I was locked up with didn't have to waste any more of their life than they already had," Smith said in his 2012 TED Talk.

Smith stayed true to this promise. Since leaving prison, Smith has taken major steps to do what he can toward

Iran

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

limited. As of Jan. 16, at least 1,190 have died, but the real count is likely much higher, with some saying as many as 12,000 have been killed in Tehran alone. These have been due to many factors, including the aggressive force used by the



An iPad is shown in use, symbolizing the expanding role of digital technology in learning.

increase in negative behaviors like over-aggressiveness." Gifted children are already far more likely to have more emotional intensity than their peers, which can be worsened by screen time. For a mind that is already processing information rapidly, the overstimulation that can come with most digital programs has major negative effects. Not to mention the impacts of social media.

At Lafayette High School,

published that the excessive use of screens during childhood negatively affects the development of speech, social skills, and overall brain activity.

According to Oak Crest Academy, a co-educational private school in California for gifted and talented children in grades K-12, large amounts of screen time can potentially lead to "decreased academic performance...problems with interpersonal relationships...[and] can even lead to an

Geneva

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

just about anything you can think of... for a discounted price. What a great perk for the UNOG employees.

Lastly, we explored the beautiful outdoors. There were sculptures scattered across the grounds, gifted by different nations, each reflecting themes of peace, cooperation, and shared responsibility. One of the most striking sights was the long row of flagpoles displaying the flags of UN member states. Seeing them all together, equal in height and space, symbolized the core UN principle of international cooperation among nations, large and small.

This visit transformed the U.N. from an abstract institution into a living, working community of people dedicated to solving global problems. For me, as a Model UN student, it reinforced why diplomacy, international law, and multilateral cooperation matter. Standing in Geneva, where so many global decisions have been debated and shaped, made me more motivated than ever to engage seriously with international affairs in Model

my high school and much of the Rockwood School District, information like schedules and lunch shifts is found exclusively on Instagram. Schools in general have made having social media non-negotiable. This is encouraging students to participate in an app that is designed specifically to be addictive, especially for minors.

However, there are also some incredibly beneficial upsides to the digital world for gifted children. There are benefits like self-expression and exploration, keeping track of time and organizing, as well as digital communities where people all across the world can relate to one another. Two out of three gifted students have experienced bullying, and this kind of online connection can help these children feel less alone in the world, which should never be understated.

Innovation is rarely a net bad, and it isn't in this case either. There are so many wonderful things that come out of these kinds of technology. Gifted kids are a unique and important population who will be our next generation of innovators, but there are two sides to this coin. They can maximize their potential by using technology as a tool. However, they mustn't let the tool use them. ←



Lawrence Haynes stands in front of the flags of United Nations member states during a visit to the United Nations Office in Geneva in fall 2024.

UN and beyond.

This tour was deeply personal. I am happy to say that Jo has become family to us and we spent many meaningful days of our year with her. Her work at the U.N. is written in history, and my family and I are incredibly grateful to know her. We are proud of her passion, dedication, and commitment to the global mission, and we are very inspired by her. Through her and many of her friends who have worked or are still working at the U.N., my sister and I have begun to see the world, our future careers, and our responsibilities as global citizens in a new light. This experience was one of profound learning, inspiration, and growth. ←

Pahlavi to lead their country. He is a divisive figure, especially due to one of his backers being Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, who has recently bombed parts of Iran. And those who do support him may not truly want him back, but just want a more secular country, where religion does not dictate the laws of their

ABOUT US

THE EXAMINER

The Civitas Examiner is a newspaper, composed of both news and opinion, written mostly by Civitas participating high school students. The Examiner is available both in printed copy and online on the Civitas home page.

The opinions expressed herein do not reflect those of Civitas other than respect for the value of open dialogue.

CIVITAS

Civitas organizes Model United Nations programs and activities that promote active citizenship and world awareness for high school and middle school students attending public, private and parochial schools. You can contact Civitas at info@civitas-stl.com. Civitas is not associated with any school, school district, religious or political organization.

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EMILY NGUYEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

country. Truly, what the Iranians may want is just a government that doesn't let their country fall apart as they grow richer. Whether Reza Pahlavi can deliver this is unknown; he was only 16 when his father's reign was toppled, so no one knows whether he will truly be the leader Iran needs in this troubled time in its history. ←

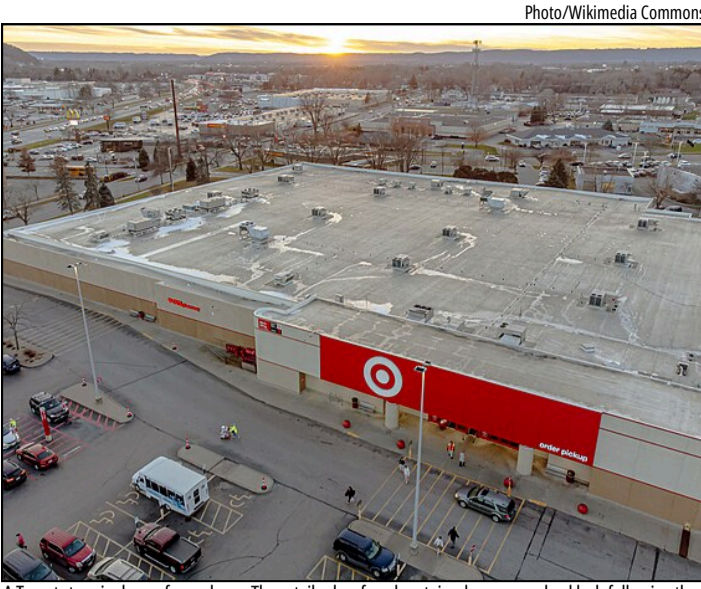
DEI

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“talent,” “opportunity,” “fairness,” and “belonging,” claiming to be focused on “consistent practices for all employees.” These replacements, executives claimed, would promote the so-called “fairness” without specific targeted diversity metrics. However, the social and financial consequences of these actions have been stark since customers have decided to implement their own rollback on spending at these companies.

Across industries, DEI programs that were once core to corporate strategies were de-emphasized, renamed, or removed completely.

- Tech giants Google and Meta, beverage company PepsiCo, and online shopping corporation Amazon removed their comprehensive diversity employment reports.
- Meta formally ended its “diverse slate approach” to hiring, which was once a cornerstone of its recruitment strategy. Meta then eliminated its internal DEI team.
- At Amazon, the company’s public-facing “Our Positions” webpage was edited to combine the separate sections of “Equity for Black people” and “LGBTQ+ rights” into a single paragraph, and removed any explicit mention of the term “transgender.” Let’s not even get into the use of “proven outcomes” as a talent strategy.
- Boeing completely dissolved its standalone DEI program, a symbolic end to one of the most visible equity offices in U.S. aerospace.
- McDonald’s scrapped its “aspirational representation goals,” which had previously aimed for 35% underrepresented groups in senior leadership by the end of 2025. Its diversity team was renamed the “Global Inclusion Team” to shift focus from specific



A Target store is shown from above. The retailer has faced sustained consumer backlash following the rollback of several diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

- demographic targets toward a broader “inclusion” value. McDonald’s also retired its “Mutual Commitment to DEI” pledge for suppliers, replacing it with general discussions about inclusion as it relates to business performance. While McDonald’s still reports their “inclusion efforts,” the very principles that these reports are rooted in have been ripped apart.
- PepsiCo ended workforce representation goals and eliminated the chief DEI officer role, moving toward a broader engagement and development framework.
- And Target, long regarded as one of the most outspoken corporate supporters of DEI, ended its Racial Equity Action and Change (REACH) initiative and rebranded its Supplier Diversity team to Supplier Engagement, removing external diversity goals and participation in benchmark surveys such as the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index. Target’s public justification? That these changes were simply a response to “an evolving external landscape” and legal pressures, not a departure from its values.

Since the corporations have announced the termination of the programs that promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people, their customer bases

have reduced dramatically. For many consumers, Target’s rollback wasn’t a neutral shift; it was a betrayal. Consumers organized protests at Target’s Minneapolis headquarters. Pride organizations severed partnerships, and grassroots boycotts spread online and off.

Civil rights leaders launched a sustained boycott campaign known as #TargetFast that has lasted for hundreds of days. The boycott was spearheaded by figures like Pastor Jamal Bryant, who argued that Target’s decisions disregarded the people who had supported the company for years.

“They’ve awakened a sleeping giant... we’re not going to spend our dollars with companies that don’t treat us with dignity,” Bryant told PBS NewsHour.

“We rarely engage in this type of action, but we’re doing so here because [...] Target rolled back promises to help the people who have been loyal customers,” The American Federation of Teachers’ President Randi Weingarten said.

The financial fallout has been dramatic and measurable:

- Target’s stock plummeted as much as 33% from its pre-rollback levels, wiping out over \$20 billion in shareholder value by mid-2025, with earnings per share falling sharply amid sustained consumer resistance.
- Comparable sales missed expectations, and foottraffic declined for successive quarters, even

- as rivals like Costco saw growth.
- Operating income has dropped by 20% between 2024 and now, only having increased by less than 1.5% since 2025.
- Shareholders filed lawsuits alleging that Target failed to disclose the risks of its DEI rollback, claiming the decision was a material omitted risk factor that harmed investors. This isn’t an anecdote or a rumor. Investors are backing these claims with legal action tied directly to financial performance.

Grassroots reaction has extended far beyond digital hashtags. A 2025 report noted that consumer groups like People’s Union USA explicitly urged shoppers to avoid retailers like Target and Amazon in protest of their DEI cancellations. People aren’t just posting online; they are shifting how they spend. Competitors who maintained or defended their DEI commitments, like Costco, have seen foot traffic and spending increases in the same period. Currently, over a quarter of a million Black Americans have made a pledge to boycott Target until they choose to re-implement its DEI policies or create a new DEI-like program. I am one of them.

Target’s experience shows that rolling back DEI initiatives is not a neutral managerial decision; it is a market risk. Customers and communities interpret these moves as moral choices, not internal reorganizations. Additionally, while corporate leaders speak reassuringly about “belonging” and “equal opportunity,” activist groups, consumers, and even legal watchdogs argue that retreating from explicit equity goals leaves workers and customers without clarity, accountability, or trust.

In the end, Target’s rollout of terms like “belonging” and “engagement” may have looked like PR polish, but the market has judged the substance. The verdict, so far, has not favored companies that abandoned substantive DEI commitments. ←

Civitas hosts Saturday disability panel



Kelli Dunaway



Olivia Apollo



Rasheen Aldridge



Photo/Bobbi Kennedy

Panelists speak with Civitas students during a discussion on living with disabilities at a recent event.

BY CIVITAS STAFF

Many Civitas students and other guests heard some frank and heartfelt accounts last Saturday from a panel of guests who shared their personal stories about living with disabilities.

Kelli Dunaway, an attorney and former St. Louis County Councilwoman, started the morning describing a horrific car accident she experienced in high school that resulted in a spinal injury that doctors feared would leave her paralyzed.

“My rage kept that from happening,” said Kelli, refusing to accept that outcome. As a result of her determination and hard work, fueled by anger at times, Kelli walks today with the assistance of a cane.

Rasheen explained how the way he grew in the womb resulted in a leg that never fully developed. Today, he walks with a prosthetic from his hip down.

Olivia was born with cerebral palsy, a physical challenge in many ways, but “[she’s] never known anything different, so [she’s] adapted.”

After sharing their experiences, the three panelists talked of other topics related to having a disability, segueing from one another’s experiences with grace and commonalities. All three have had feelings of

despair, frustration, and even suicide at different stages of their experiences.

“The world tries to make people with disabilities second-class,” said Rasheen while Olivia and Kelli nodded vigorously.

Being treated as an “other” is a common experience. Kelli described her anger when people claim they don’t see her disability because “it is a part of who [she is].”

As a state representative, Rasheen passed legislation making April Limb Loss Awareness Month in Missouri. It was an uphill battle, though, because disabilities are “not a priority for others.”

Olivia works with the Starkloff Disability Institute, counseling others and helping to promote the goal for all with disabilities to thrive at work and at home. Starkloff offers many resources to empower those with disabilities and to build inclusion and belonging for all.

It was a morning of eye-opening and honest sharing by the incredible panelists and the students who posed poignant questions to our guests. We all came away with more insight and empathy for anyone who faces different struggles from our own, a message needed in today’s trying times. ←

Vigil

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

support, as in any other protest, and the sidewalk we were on sat frighteningly adjacent to a speedy turn lane, but it was easy to tune these things out after a while. There were reminders, too, that not everyone there supported our cause, like the occasional car that sped up when driving past, or the young adults who zoomed through the parking lot behind us on a motorcycle, shouting “We love ICE!”

I talked to people attending the vigil and asked them what they were thinking about as they stood there bearing witness. One told me, “I used to live an hour north of Minneapolis, and just seeing all this happen in my home – it feels like my home is bearing the brunt of all this.”

From another, I received a sobering yet realistic assessment of the current state. “I grew up in the aftermath of World War II, and this – it reminds me of the brown shirts, people just getting grabbed off the street and disappearing.”

There were messages of

hope, too: “Before this, I felt like there was nothing I could do. I felt hopeless. But being here now, I feel like there are people out there who can do something, and we can actually do this.”

And finally, love and prayer. “I’ve been praying this entire time. I’m praying for this woman, this mother of three, who lost her life to ICE, and to her family – because they’re all just humans, in the world.”

And she is right. Candles have been used for centuries in rituals and practices of all kinds, representing prayers and the souls of lost loved ones. This practice may have started in ancient Greece, where offerings of burnt offerings, incense, or candles would be given to the Olympic gods, which would reach them by virtue of being lighter than air and wafting skyward. The Hindu festival of Diwali represents the final triumph of the forces of light and good over evil, and involves the use of many candles, which symbolize the lighted path Lord Rama followed to return home.

So join the vigil. Honor the ones we have lost. We are all here, and there is plenty of light to go around. ←

Taiwan

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My host mom shrugged. “I am not Chinese, I am Taiwanese. I don’t think Taiwan should become part of China because we would lose our freedoms.”

I nod, digesting her response before posing another inquiry. “The white paper (a term used to describe a government report or authoritative guide) that China posted in 2022 states they hope to achieve a peaceful reunification, taking a “One Country, Two Systems” approach. Do you think this would be a satisfactory outcome?”

She took a moment to think before replying. “No, I don’t think so. We [Taiwan] saw what occurred in Hong Kong in 2019. I don’t believe the People’s Republic of China will keep its word. They didn’t in Hong Kong (referring to the 2019-20 Hong Kong protests), so why should they with us?”

Despite this stance, she noted that she isn’t worried about a full-scale invasion happening anytime soon. “China’s made a timeline, but nothing has really happened

yet.” “China and Taiwan have been suspended in a tentative peace for years now. Life goes on—there’s no time to worry about an invasion.” Her words rang true in what I have observed in the time I lived there.

The cities are teeming with life: malls are bustling, restaurants are crowded, and night markets are filled with the smell of delicious food stalls and heavy foot traffic. The only sign that an invasion may be imminent is the air raid sirens that ring out every few weeks. Even then, the streets are only quiet for half an hour. The population recedes underground, only to continue with their day like it’s just routine.

Some weeks later, I posed a similar question to my host sister, who, like me, is also 17 years old. Her response was reminiscent of her mother’s, but her passion was clearer in her words: “I dislike that China seems to be practising an invasion near our coasts. They are confident they will be successful, and for good reason. If Taiwan does not receive foreign help, we will fall to China. I hope this won’t happen, because I love

my country. But I think it will happen, and it will happen soon.”

At the start of 2026, tensions once again drew international attention as China conducted military drills within 24 nautical miles of Taiwan’s coastline, a move widely interpreted as both a show of force and a warning. While Taiwan responded by monitoring the exercises and reaffirming its defensive readiness, daily life on the island largely continued uninterrupted. These drills reflect a broader pattern of pressure that has become increasingly normalized, even as official dialogue remains limited.

Looking ahead, China–Taiwan relations appear poised to remain defined by uncertainty: a balance between deterrence and restraint, where heightened military activity coexists with economic ties and the everyday lives of millions caught in between. ←

I FIRST LEARNED OF TAIWAN IN MY HIGH SCHOOL MANDARIN CLASS. HOWEVER, BY APPLYING TO THE NSLI-Y MANDARIN PROGRAM, I WAS SET TO TRAVEL TO TAIWAN MUCH SOONER THAN I THOUGHT. AT FIRST, I HAD WISHED TO BE PLACED IN TAIPEI, AS THE CITY BOASTED A VIBRANT SOCIAL SCENE AND PLENTY OF SIGHTSEEING, SO I WAS, ADMITTEDLY, SURPRISED TO BE PLACED IN KAOHSIUNG. BUT THE CITY GREW ON ME.

TELL YOUR STORY.

CONTACT US

ARTHUR@CIVITAS-STL.COM

@CIVITASEXAMINER

SCAN TO JOIN US.

ICE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

will now be legally allowed to search your house.

As you can tell, all this hinges on your consent for the agents to enter your house. They will try to trick you, but with the right knowledge, you can recognize suspicious behavior and figure out who is and is not an ICE agent.

A 2006 ICE memorandum states that “the use of ruses utilizing the names of agencies and companies involved in the administration of health and safety programs can impede the functions of those organizations by creating a perception that these organizations are acting as an enforcement tool of ICE.”

Basically, the observation they are making is that if you see an ICE agent pretending to be with OSHA, you will be much more cautious the next time a real OSHA employee shows up. ICE came to the conclusion that agents would no longer be allowed to impersonate employees of a government organization or private business, as it could sow mistrust of that particular organization and get ICE in all sorts of legal trouble. As far as recent reports of ICE activity suggest, they seem to have upheld this promise, but fake government agencies are not outside their dominion. Therefore, if you see someone representing a government organization you do not recognize or a company with a fake or generic name, they could actually be ICE.

Another common ruse is to pretend to be representing an evangelist organization. They can't pretend to be the actual Jehovah's Witnesses or a specific religious sect, but “Christianity” is definitely generic enough for them. What you should know is that most groups stopped going door-to-door during the COVID pandemic, and never really started again afterward, so if they do this, they could be ICE. Also, these groups have no reason to want to enter your house, so if they ask, that is a definite red flag.

ICE can also pretend to be the police. They cannot pretend to be part of a specific district, but they can say they are local. What you need to remember here is that ICE agents do not have a warrant. Ask if they have a warrant and ask to see it. Real local police are legally required to show it to you, so if they refuse, they are either ICE or police not doing their job. When they show the warrant, you can tell what kind of warrant it is by the signature. A judicial search warrant will be signed by a judge, while an administrative search warrant will be signed by an immigration officer.

One thing they cannot under any circumstances do is fabricate a false safety concern. If someone says there is a gas leak or some other dangerous circumstance, they are not ICE! Please do not put your safety at risk.

However, if ICE wants to put your safety at risk, there is no limit to what they are willing to do. A new and disturbing ICE tactic has emerged in recent days, notably on Jan. 21, when a five-year-old boy and his father were detained as they

were standing in their driveway on their way home from school. ICE agents then held the boy at gunpoint, forcing him to knock on the door of his house to see if there were any other detainable people inside the house. If you hear the voice of someone you know at the door, remember to look through the peephole or a nearby window to make sure the person is actually who you think they are and is not accompanied by an ICE agent. This tactic could be used to avoid a warrant altogether by making you step out of your home, forcibly or not.

And yet, a new tactic has become known as of Jan. 22. A leaked memo reveals that ICE has now allowed itself to enter people's homes without consent. While frightening, this memo is not associated with any legal documents, so if ICE actually does do this, it is likely they will be met with both lawsuits and grassroots activism.

Clearly, this is a rapidly developing situation, so the only safe assumption is continual change. If you encounter a ruse not described here, make sure to report it online and see if anyone else knows about it. Above all, trust your gut, your family, and your community.

For up-to-date information, visit immigrantdefenseproject.org. ←

Pyramid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

unsatisfied with the portions of grains to fruits or proteins, but the MyPlate was a step in the right direction for American health, and has been the standard until the stark switch this January.

The evolution of the pyramid reached a new turning point on Jan. 7th, 2026, when U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. made a statement about the future of the food pyramid and revealed its revised form. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt began the event. Leavitt opened the briefing by recounting the accomplishments of the Make America Healthy Again program, such as the removal of artificial and petroleum-based food dyes from products made by over a dozen food manufacturers.

“[We] are here to unveil the 2025 to 2030 dietary guidelines for America. These new guidelines are informed by the best and most reliable research on health and nutrition, particularly as it relates to the role of our diets and the prevalence of chronic disease in the country...If we want to help cut our health care costs, we must become a healthier country.” She said.

The intended goals of this new pyramid are to give Americans a more science-based, healthier diet that can

help make our country healthier as a whole. 90% of healthcare spending goes towards treating chronic disease, much of which is linked to diet and lifestyle. 70% of Americans are obese or overweight.

“This new pyramid will allow Americans to have a guideline for their diets that is beneficial for them,” Leavitt said.

“For decades, Americans have grown sicker while healthcare costs have soared. The reason is clear. The hard truth is that our government has been lying to us...telling us that these food-like substances were beneficial to the public...Today, the lies stop.” Kennedy said. “Dietary guidelines shape dozens of federal feeding programs... Lean standards affect 45 million school lunches every day. Meals for 1.3 million active duty service members and food served to 9 million veterans in VA hospitals.”

Secretary Kennedy brings up a very significant point, explaining the diets impacted by government institutions like the former MyPlate and MyPyramid. American health is directly impacted by the standards of health created by government institutions, especially for children in public school systems. The U.S. obesity rate is five times higher than that of countries like France, and our life expectancy rate is five years lower than theirs. This new food pyramid is a step closer to bringing obesity levels



President Donald Trump and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. attend the announcement of the Make America Healthy Again Commission on May 22, 2025.

down and bringing our life expectancies up, which is a positive thing for the U.S.

“It's shocking that our own government helped to drive these cataclysmic changes in our diet. The damage is real. It is preventable. And President Trump has ordered it to end.” Kennedy said.

Although there have been motions of changing food pyramids in the past, none have been this dramatic, and all of the prior forms show many similarities that this feature does not share.

This is the form of the food

pyramid that was unveiled on Jan. 7. As you can see, there is some stark contrast between this version and the earlier versions. The amount of grains is much lower, there is a prioritization of protein and vegetables, and more presence of healthy fats and seed oils.

The feedback to this pyramid has been very mixed, with some people saying it is a wonderful thing for the American people, whilst others believe that this pyramid isn't science-based. ←

Right

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

lost popularity due to their policies, such as Macri's controversial neoliberal reforms, which did little to improve the Argentinian economy. So by the 2020s, the second pink tide began, with Lula being reelected president in Brazil, and Claudia Sheinbaum winning the 2024 elections in a landslide. However, in the late 2020s, conservative candidates rebounded, and the second conservative wave had begun. Let us look into just some of the major right-wing wins in Latin America in the 2020s.

First, we go to Argentina. After a weak and unpopular rule of the Peronist Alberto Fernandez, Javier Milei, an erratic anarcho-capitalist libertarian, was elected president in 2023. Once he came to power, he committed a major overhaul of the country's fiscal policy, mostly through austerity, deregulation, and reduced government spending. When the 2025 midterms came, Milei's party, La Libertad Avanza, saw a major increase in seats in both chambers of the legislature. It seems that Milei, while being eccentric, is not going anywhere.

Moving on, we go to Bolivia. The 2025 elections saw a major defeat for the left-wing Movement for Socialism (MAS), which ruled Bolivia for two decades, and a victory for the centre-right conservative, Rodrigo Paz. Paz came to power on the platform of “capitalism for all,” arguing for free markets and privatization while not excluding social programs. His win came at a time when MAS faced unpopularity, mostly due to economic decline and instability within the party. Paz also went on to restore relations with Israel, which Bolivia had severed

since the beginning of the 2023 Israeli assault on Gaza, and has let the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) back into the country.

Out of all the conservative wins, however, the 2025 Honduran election was the most chaotic. At the last minute, Donald Trump endorsed Nasry Asfura, a right-wing businessman from the National Party, and began to threaten Honduras aid cuts if Asfura did not win, as well as calling the centre-right Salvador Nasrallah, a major opponent of Asfura, a “communist.” The election took a long time to verify. The initial tie between Asfura and Nasrallah, along with Honduran government claims of an “electoral coup,” led to calls to refuse to accept the election results and to block vote counting. However, on Dec. 24, 2025, the national electoral council declared Asfura the winner, and the left-wing government of Xiomara Castro finally accepted the results.

Our final case study for today will be Chile. In the 2025 elections, the ultraconservative Jose Antonio Kast won, this being his third attempt at the presidency. This came as a shock to many, as Kast is probably the most right-wing candidate who would be president of Chile since the Pinochet dictatorship. Additionally, many noted Kast's controversial past. His father, Michael Kast, was a member of the Nazi Party who moved to Chile in 1950. Michael is also suspected of having worked with the Pinochet regime, specifically in the disappearance of Pedro Vargas, who was organizing workers in Kast's business. However, Jose Kast denies this allegation.

Now, some might ask: Why is the right on the rise again? The main reasons are security and economy. First,

"I HOPE THE PEOPLE OF HONDURAS VOTE FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY, AND ELECT TITO ASFURA, PRESIDENT!"

- DONALD TRUMP VIA TRUTH SOCIAL POST

security. The rise of organized crime in Latin America led to security becoming a major concern for citizens, and many consider policies of left-wing governments to be ineffective against this. The symbol of this hard-on crime approach is Nayib Bukele, the El Salvadoran president who transformed his country into a prison state and became an inspiration to many right-wing politicians. The second, and just as important reason is the economy. Latin America has for a decade struggled economically, and in some cases, left-wing governments have made the economy worse, such as the Kirchners in Argentina. Thus, many turned to the right, especially after Milei's drastic but successful stabilization program. For example, in Bolivia, the economic decline under the leftist Luis Arce led to the right rising in popularity, allowing Rodrigo Paz to win.

However, one question remains: Is this right-wing shift for the better, or for the worse? Unfortunately, I cannot answer it. Only time will tell. The only thing for certain is this: analysts generally agree that this conservative wave has a high likelihood of continuing in 2026. So look out for upcoming elections in Latin America, as we might see more conservative candidates win them. ←

Photo/Wikimedia Commons



Javier Milei

Photo/Wikimedia Commons



Rodrigo Paz Pereira

Photo/Wikimedia Commons



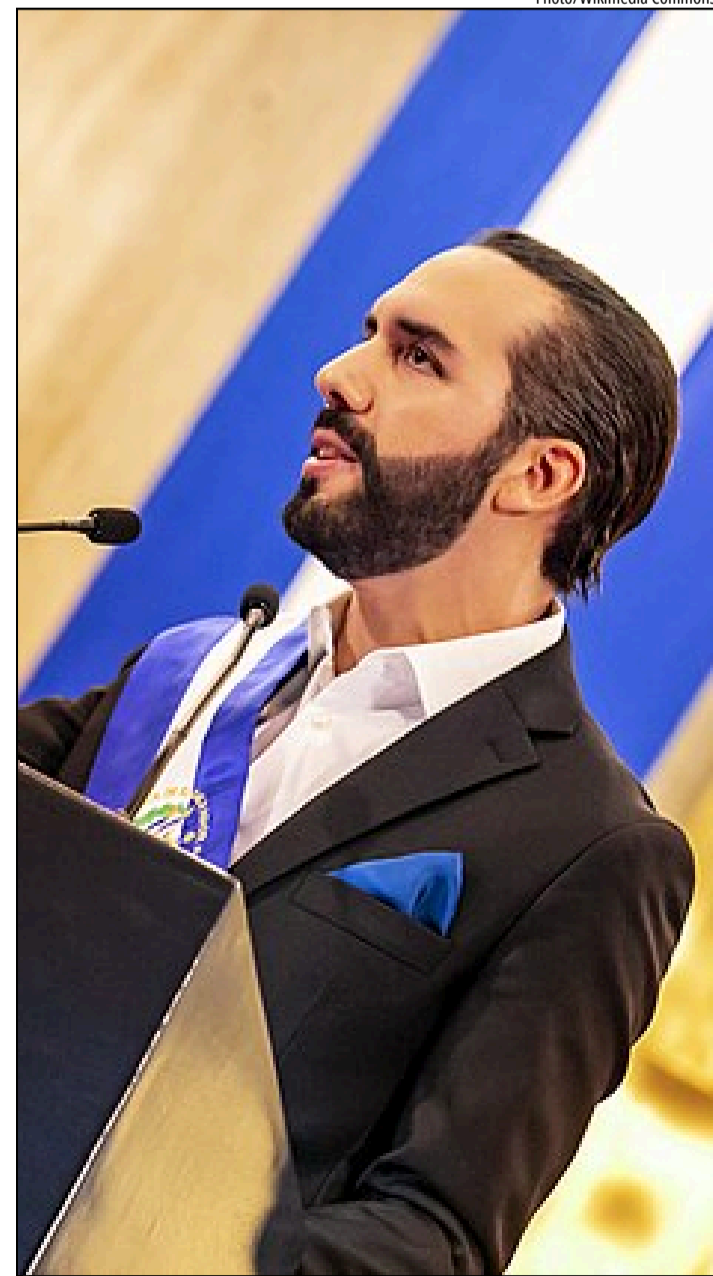
Nasry Asfura

Photo/Wikimedia Commons



José Antonio Kast

Photo/Wikimedia Commons



Nayib Bukele

UPCOMING CIVITAS EVENTS

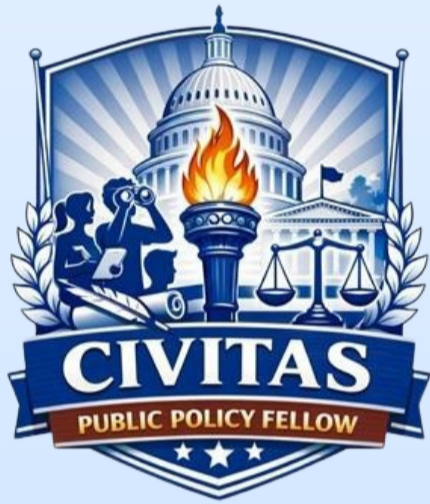


THE CIVITAS PUBLIC POLICY INTERNSHIP

New to Civitas this year is the Civitas Public Policy Internship, an intensive two-week program in which Civitas students learn about both public and private power in the United States, with particular focus on the St. Louis metropolitan area. We will examine how wealth is distributed in our community, how political power is earned and gifted, how individuals of 'goodwill' and non-profit organizations almost always seem to be 'swimming upstream,' and what roles each of us can establish for ourselves to advance any one or more of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Students will need six points, each earned by participating in a Civitas event, to apply for the Civitas Public Policy Internship.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Right now, 16 Civitas students have six points. Another 12 are within two points of reaching that. To find out your point total, click [here](#) or on the logo on the right. Even if you have zero points now, it's not too late. We have six events this month, and if you attend every one of them, you will have six points and will be able to apply. We list the six events below.



CIVITAS.FILLOUT.COM/WELCOME

SATURDAY, FEB. 7, 2026, 9 A.M. TO 1 P.M.
High School Model United Nations

TUESDAY, FEB. 10, 2026, 7 P.M. TO 8 P.M.
Zoom Conversation on Guns in America

SATURDAY, FEB. 21, 2026, 10 A.M. TO 12 P.M.
Conference on How UN Reforms Work

SUNDAY, FEB. 22, 2026, 5:30 P.M. TO 6:30 P.M.
Session A Common Ground Zoom Meeting

SUNDAY, FEB. 22, 2026, 7 P.M. TO 8 P.M.
Session B Common Ground Zoom Meeting

THURSDAY, FEB. 26, 2026, 7 P.M. TO 8 P.M.
First Amendment Zoom with Cathy Kuhlmeier

SATURDAY, FEB. 28, 2026, 6:30 P.M. TO 10 P.M.
League of Women Voters Trivia

