



Kelley: 2026 'our comeback year'

By **DON MONCRIEF**

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"If there's one thing I know about AFGE members, it's that we don't give up!" So said AFGE National President Everett Kelley, as he reflected on the one-year anniversary of President Donald Trump's second Presidency. He continued: "Our great union is filled with unionists who are fighters, dreamers and activists. When the chips are down, we get creative on how to best defend our rights on the job and go after what we deserve from our workplaces."

Kelley continued that in many ways his presidency ushered in one of the toughest years for federal workers and their unions. The brazen attacks against workers and your union, AFGE, he said, were unprecedented. "Yet, one year later," he went on, "we are still here, with unshakeable resolve and relentless determination to keep up the fight for federal and D.C. government workers."

"It's no doubt that this administration came out swinging.

The roadmap:

- Focus on retaining membership and growing from the ground up
- Secure pro-AFGE majorities in the House and Senate
- Restore collective bargaining rights throughout the federal sector
- Reinforce operations at the local, council, district and national levels
- Involve AFGE leaders throughout the federation in its comeback plans

They aimed to demoralize, antagonize and terrorize workers under their purview as a way to bully us into abandoning our dedication to public

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New year primer - key events, priorities

By **AFGE Leadership**

If 2025 was any indication, federal and D.C. government workers are in for another roller-coaster this year.

President Trump took office Jan. 20, 2025, with a mission to downsize the federal government and gut workers' union rights and labor protections. Over the subsequent year, our union successfully reversed or delayed many of these efforts through legal challenges, legislative victories, and grassroots activism.

"2025 was a tough year for many of us. It was a tough year for our union, for our country, but I'm proud to say that AFGE did not cower. We didn't give up, we stood up, and we fought back," AFGE National President Everett Kelley said during an AFGE leaders' town hall Jan. 22 to kick off the new year.

Make no mistake – while we managed to stave off the worst of the attacks last year, we are gearing up for more battles in 2026. That's why we're breaking it all down here – highlighting our top priorities, key events, and other activities coming up this year that you need to know about.

Top Legislative Goals

Hundreds of AFGE members will gather in the nation's capital on the first weekend in February for our annual Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization Conference. This is a time for members to network with each other, meet with congressional members and staff to lobby in support of our key legislative priorities, and come away with new tools and tips to help

drive action on our most important issues.

One of our annual legislative goals is to increase take-home pay for the rank-and-file employees who serve this country with honor and distinction. We are currently working with key lawmakers in both the House and Senate to introduce legislation that would provide federal employees with a 4.1% pay raise in 2027 to help close the pay gap between the public and private sectors and raise workers' living standards. We also will advocate for parity between the pay raises provided to employees in the civil and military services.

In addition to the pay raise legislation, AFGE has identified numerous bills that are among our top legislative priorities for the year. They include:

- Shutdown Fairness Act (S 3168, HR 7137), which would ensure federal workers are paid during government shutdowns.
- Protect America's Workforce Act (S 2837), which would overturn executive orders taking away collective bargaining rights and reinstate all contracts in effect on March 26, 2025.
- Saving the Civil Service Act (HR 492, S 134), which would limit the conversion of federal jobs from the competitive service to the excepted service.
- Equal COLA Act (HR 491, S 624), which would eliminate the inflation penalty for federal employee retiree beneficiaries.
- COST of Relocations Act (HR 2470, S 1171), which would require agencies to

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AFGE gearing up focus groups for second-straight year

By **DON MONCRIEF**

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AFGE put out the call in 2025 for Bargaining Union Members to participate in its Partnership for Public Service Viewpoint Survey. More than 12,000 took the organization up on it, hence it is building upon that success by doing it again in 2026.

The survey, according to a release, invites members to share experiences via "confidential" focus groups. "These discussions will gather anecdotes that will further highlight the federal employee experience and will be paired with the survey results when they are released later this year," reads the release.

The release continues that focus groups will be held outside of working hours to pro-



vide a safe space for open discussion. The Partnership will also only collect "personal" email addresses and your agency information, "which will be deleted at the end of the project. All quotes will be anonymized and potentially identifying details that are shared will be redacted before publication."

The focus groups will be held via Zoom, with the Partnership providing instruc-

tions for "renaming yourself" on the platform to conceal your identity. "To ensure the facilitators accurately capture participant insights, sessions will be recorded and transcribed," reads the release. "All notes and recordings will be password protected and deleted once the project concludes," it continues. "The Partnership may also use an LLM-based AI tool for analysis that operates within a secure service boundary and does not share insights outside of their organization."

Depending on the number of potential enrollees, not all of those interested may be selected to join the focus group.

To sign up visit: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8656167/14a421e18aa1afge?>

You can also visit <https://ourpublicservice.org> for more information on the Partnership for Public Service or ask questions directly by emailing PSVS@ourpublicservice.org.



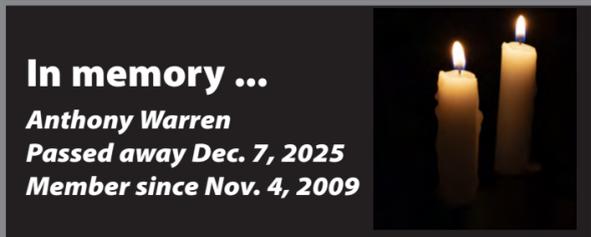
The origin of Presidents' Day lies in the 1880s, when the birthday of George Washington—commander of the Continental Army during the American Revolution and the first president of the United States—was first celebrated as a federal holiday.

In 1968 Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Bill, which moved a number of federal holidays to Mondays. The change was designed to schedule certain holidays so that workers had a number of long weekends throughout the year, but it has been opposed by those who believe that those holidays should be celebrated on the dates they actually commemorate.

During debate on the bill, it was proposed that Washington's Birthday be renamed Presidents' Day to honor the birthdays of both Washington (February 22) and Abraham Lincoln (February 12); although Lincoln's birthday was celebrated in many states, it was never an official federal holiday. Following much discussion, Congress rejected the name change.

After the bill went into effect in 1971, however, Presidents' Day became the commonly accepted name, due in part to retailers' use of that name to promote sales and the holiday's proximity to Lincoln's birthday. Presidents' Day is usually marked by public ceremonies in Washington, D.C., and throughout the country.

As for the long weekend, Presidents Day affords many Americans a day off from work, thanks to President Lyndon B. Johnson, who mandated that it, along with Memorial Day and Veterans Day, occur on Mondays to avoid mid-week shutdowns. Through the signing of the Uniform Holidays Act, Johnson created longer weekends to enable Americans "to travel farther and see more of this beautiful land of ours," according to The American Presidency Project.



Membership meeting

Local 987 will have a membership meeting Feb. 19 at 5 p.m. It will be held at Union Hall, located at 1764 Watson Blvd. Membership will be verified. You can make updates to your contact information by calling Union Hall at 478-922-5758 or by emailing Linda Baxter at linda@afgelocal987.org or Jeanette McElhaney at jmac@afgelocal987.org.

Ossoff: Raid a 'continuation of this sore loser's crusade'

From reports

The FBI, according to a number of media sources executed a search warrant at the Fulton County elections office outside Atlanta Jan. 28.

FBI spokesperson, Jenna Sellitto, was reported as saying the agency was executing "a court authorized law enforcement action" at the county's main elections office in Union City. She did not specify the objective of the search and described it as part of an ongoing investigation.

Georgia's secretary of state's office and Fulton County's elections offices did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff on the other hand did. "After losing Georgia in 2020, Donald Trump demanded state officials 'find' votes

to change the outcome, tried to use DOJ to overturn it, and spread conspiracy theories that led to the Jan. 6 sacking of the U.S. Capitol, he said.

"From Minnesota to Georgia, on display to the whole world is a President spiraling out of control, wielding federal law enforcement as an unaccountable instrument of personal power and revenge."

The action came just a week after Trump vowed that "people will soon be prosecuted for what they did" regarding the 2020 presidential election.

Fulton County Commissioner Mo Ivory, a Democrat, said in a brief interview with POLITICO that she learned upon arriving at the facility that the FBI was seeking ballots from the 2020 presidential election.

"The FBI agents are here to get the 2020 ballots," Fulton County Court Clerk

Ché Alexander told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "They're all here — trucks, everything."

Trump has long held, without evidence, that the 2020 election was "rigged" in favor of former President Joe Biden, falsely alleging there was widespread voter fraud across the country. The metro Atlanta county, which was central to Trump infamously and unsuccessfully pressuring Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to alter the outcome of the presidential vote, has long been at the heart of conspiracy theories related to the 2020 election.

"I suspect today's raid is a continuation of this sore loser's crusade, despite repeated audits and independent reviews confirming that Donald Trump was indeed defeated," Ossoff, who is up for reelection in November, said.



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Living to be 100? Research suggests it's achievable

(StatePoint) Living to 100 may sound extraordinary, but research suggests it's more achievable—and enjoyable—than many people think. Studies show the majority of centenarians rate their health as good, and large numbers of people in this age group are mobile, active and optimistic.

According to the American Medical Association, adopting these seven habits can improve longevity and quality of life:

1. **Eat healthy.** Think of food as medicine. Choose nutritious, whole foods. Eat more fruits that are dark in color — blue, purple and red — to get the most nutrients, as well as fiber-rich vegetables, especially non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and leafy greens. Incorporate whole grains, nuts, seeds, lean meats and fish. Drink more water, or as an alternative, flavored or sparkling water with no added sugar.

Reduce your intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and unhealthy ultra-processed foods, especially those with added

sodium and sugar. Drinking sugary beverages, even 100% fruit juices, is associated with a higher mortality risk, according to a study published in JAMA Network Open. Eat fewer processed meats, which tend to be high in fat and heavy on added salt and preservatives. Limit your intake of refined grains, such as breads, crackers, baked goods and white rice. Drink less alcohol.

2. **Exercise.** Adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity weekly. A recent study published in JAMA found that putting down the television remote and walking can improve healthy aging — highlighting the importance of small everyday habits.

3. **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep improves memory, reduces stress, improves mood, and primes the body's natural defenses against disease. But sleep quality decreases with age. Improve your sleep quality by setting a regular bedtime and

wake-up time, insulating your bedroom against noise, avoiding exercise within an hour of bedtime, maintaining a cool and dark bedroom, and limiting fluids within two hours of bedtime.

Also avoid alcohol before bedtime and make your bedroom a tech-free zone as screen-time can impact your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

4. **Live with purpose.** A sense of purpose can lead to increased energy, motivation, emotional stability and resilience. Take time for self-reflection and try meditation or yoga. Prioritize your values and beliefs and put them into action toward a goal that's meaningful to you and benefits others.

5. **Stay positive.** To bust stress, take a break from decisions, connect with others, pet your dog or cat, write a to-do list (stick to three items), take time to recharge, laugh, sing, curb clutter, set boundaries, perform mindfulness exercises, practice gratitude, and seek help from a

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Take extra measures to help prevent check fraud

(StatePoint) The use of checks may be declining, but check crimes are actually on the rise due to new, creative criminal schemes. Once a check is stolen, it can be altered or signed on your behalf to withdraw money from your account, and there are online marketplaces where criminals will sell stolen checks for other criminals to use for fraud.

Luckily, there are steps you can take to protect yourself:

- **Pay Digitally.** Reduce the number of checks you send and utilize card or digital payment methods instead. Consider using check fraud prevention services like Positive Pay, if available at your financial institution.

- **Go to the Post Office.** If you must mail a check, use the secure mailbox inside a USPS facility or hand the envelope over to a postal worker who can mail it for you.

- **Follow Up.** If you mail a check, confirm with the payee that they received it.

- **Monitor Accounts.** Set up account alerts and review statements regularly. Most banks will provide an option for an image of each check to be viewable on statements. Cross-reference this image to ensure that the check processed is identical to the one you wrote.

- **Report Quickly.** Approximately 50% of stolen check images are posted online for sale within eight days of theft. Criminals act fast, and you need to act fast, too, to stop them in their tracks. As soon as you identify an account or payment



iStock via Getty Images

anomaly, notify your bank to put a stop payment on the check and a freeze on your account. File a police report and submit a separate report with the Federal Trade Commission. Keep a record of all conversations, reports and correspondence in case later problems arise.

Methods of fraud continue to evolve, and a simple check can be used in a variety of ways to commit theft. For instance, criminals can create fraudulent checks using your account information and sign your name. Or they could copy down your account information and use it for fraudulent purposes digitally or otherwise.

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BBB offers tips on romance scams during Valentine's Day

Although the concern exists all year round, with Valentine's Day just around the corner, romance scams are extremely prevalent at this time of year. This is a great time to stay aware and also check on family and friends who could unknowingly be falling prey to a catfishing scam or other romance-related schemes.

Many people have turned to online dating and social media sites over the past few years to find love and/or meet new people. These platforms have not only made it easier than ever to meet new people and find dates, but unfortunately, they have also made it easier for someone to take on a fake persona and create a compelling backstory, potentially leading to them successfully pulling off a romance scam.

Most romance scams start with fake profiles on online dating sites created by stealing photos and text from real accounts. Scammers often claim to be in the military or working overseas to explain why they can't meet in person. Over a short period of time, the scammer builds a fake relationship with their victim, exchanging photos and romantic messages, even talking on the phone or through a webcam.

Just when the relationship seems to be getting serious, the new sweetheart has a health issue or family emergency or wants to plan a visit. No matter the story, the request is the same: they need money. But after the victim sends money, there's another request, and then another. Or the scammer stops communicating altogether. That's the classic scenario of a catfish scam, and it can result in huge losses.

In addition to these schemes, the FBI has reported a trend that involves international crypto investment fraud as part of romance scams. The scam starts similarly to the online relationship scheme, but instead of asking for funds to help with an emergency, the scammer asks their victim to invest in cryptocurrency.

Overall, the best way to combat romance schemes is to recognize what they look like, and the red flags associated with them. In addition to catfishing schemes, BBBs have seen reports of



Kelvin Collins

fake dating websites and even traditional schemes using a romance theme to lure victims, such as fake check scams and money mule scams. In money mule scams, victims are tricked into moving illegal funds or items.

You can read more on each of these by visiting BBB's romance scam resource page at bbb.org/romance. In the meantime, your BBB offers tips to help you and your loved ones identify and avoid catfishing scams:

Too hot to be true. Scammers offer up good-looking photos and tales of financial success. If they seem "too perfect," your alarm bells should ring.

In a hurry to get off the site. "Catfishers" will try very quickly to get you to move off of a dating site or social media site and instead communicate through email, messenger, or phone.

Moving fast. A catfisher will begin speaking of a future together and tell you they love you quickly. They often say they've never felt this way before.

Talk about trust. Catfishers will start manipulating you with talk about trust and its importance. This will often be the first step to asking you for money.

Don't want to meet. Be wary of someone who always has an excuse to postpone a meeting because they say they are traveling, live overseas, or are in the military.

Suspect language. If the person you are communicating with claims to be from your hometown but has poor spelling or grammar, uses

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Medal of Honor spotlight

Civil War Army Bugler John Cook

By KATIE LANGE
DoD News

Civil War Union Army bugler John Cook is one of the youngest Medal of Honor recipients in American history.

When he was just a teen, he marched into battle with his counterparts several times, including during the bloody Battle of Antietam, where he took over as a cannoneer to help fend off a Confederate advance.

Cook was born on Aug. 16, 1847, in Cincinnati, to Thomas and Lydia Cook. Months after the Civil War broke out, the young man, who was already working as a laborer, wanted to do his part to help, so — at age 14 and standing at a mere 4 feet 9 inches, according to historians — he enlisted in the Union Army.

Cook served with Battery B of the 4th U.S. Artillery as a bugler, but the role was like a messenger, of sorts. The bugle's high-pitched sound could reach further than human voices, so it was used to pass on officers' orders, via a system of calls



Photo courtesy defense.gov

Army Bugler John Cook

and signals, to units across a battlefield.

On Sept. 17, 1862, Cook's unit was among a detachment under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker during the Battle of Antietam, Maryland.

As daylight broke that morning, the battery was marching south on Hagerstown Pike when it came under heavy fire from Confederate infantrymen.

During the early part of the melee, the unit's leader, Capt. Joseph B. Campbell, was injured by musket fire as he dismounted a horse. Cook,

who was nearby, helped him to safety behind some haystacks before being ordered by Campbell to let Lt. James Stewart know he would have to take command of the battery.

Cook returned to the battery to pass that message on. After he completed the mission, however, he noticed that the attack had killed most of his unit's cannoneers.

Without thinking twice, the young man began loading cannons by himself until Gen. John Gibbon, who happened to be riding by, saw him doing the work alone. Gibbon — still dressed in a general's uniform — hopped off his horse and began to help. While the Confederates came dangerously close to completely taking over, Gibbon and Cook were able to successfully man the cannons and push the enemy back.

The Battle of Antietam was considered the bloodiest of the Civil War. According to a 1961 Cincinnati Enquirer newspaper article, 40 of Battery B's 100 men were either killed or injured during the fight.

Cook's heroics weren't only during the Battle of Antietam. In 1863, during the Battle of Gettysburg, he worked fervently to carry messages across a half mile of open terrain as enemy fire flew around him. He also helped destroy a damaged caisson to keep it from falling into enemy hands.

Cook received an honorable discharge from the Army in June 1864; however, he wasn't quite finished serving his country. In September 1864,

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The way Americans buy, own smartphones is changing

(StatePoint) What Americans want in their smartphone is changing rapidly, new research reveals. The latest mobile survey from Allstate Protection Plans illustrates a mobile market no longer defined by annual upgrades, but instead by durability, value and sustainability.

Upgrade Slowdown

There was a time when smartphone manufacturers could count on blockbuster sales with each flagship release, but the era of annual upgrades is fading.

With performance, storage and battery life now hitting plateaus, consumers are no longer chasing the latest device, and are now

seeing smartphones as long-term personal assets:

- ✓ 27% upgrade every two years (likely at the end of carrier contracts)
- ✓ 23% now stretch devices to 3-4 years
- ✓ 21% delay upgrading until their phone breaks
- ✓ Only 22% upgrade within 12 months
- ✓ Only 3% replace a device within six months

Pragmatic Purchasing

As budgets tighten, consumers are redefining what "premium" means. Practicality now matters more than hype, with people choosing phones for core per-

formance, not experimental features. Signaling a clear shift, the factors that matter most today are: battery life, price, storage, camera quality, screen size and brand reputation.

Despite the hype, only 17% of Americans say AI features are a big influence on their buying decisions. However, that number is expected to grow as AI becomes more integrated into daily life.

The Used/Refurbished Tech Economy

Despite 52% of respondents saying the environmental impact of smartphones is

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COMEBACK

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service and commitment to our union. They thought they had us figured out, but they were wrong.

"We've stood firm in our defense of the federal workforce and were ready when the administration started their attacks."

Ready, he said, because AFGE had a plan from the very

beginning. A year ago, as he was taking the oath of office, AFGE, he said, joined a coalition in suing the Administration over the creation of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency.

Ever since, he went on, AFGE has stayed in the courts, launching challenge after challenge "to this administration's illegal attacks on the dedicated public servants that show up every day for the American people."

AFGE filed 17 lawsuits, he said, and in many cases won court injunctions intended to prevent the administration from moving forward with its plans, at least temporarily, he added, "as our lawsuits work their way through the legal system."

"Through coalition building, worker organizing, legal strategy, and legislative and community outreach, we have shown that AFGE and our members aren't going anywhere."

The sum of those efforts,

Kelley continued, secured important wins like: Bipartisan approval of the Protect America's Workforce Act in the House of Representatives; Pressuring the Department of Veterans Affairs to abandon plans to lay off more than 80,000 workers and protecting collective bargaining rights for workers at agencies like the U.S. Agency for Global Media and TSA. (See the related article on wins.)

Twenty twenty-six then,

"is our comeback year. We're going to continue this fight and win back what this administration has stolen from workers. Our solidarity and commitment to a strong, fighting union is what is needed now, more than ever."

The roadmap he laid out included: Focusing on retaining membership and growing from the ground up; securing pro-AFGE majorities in the House and Senate; restoring collective bargaining rights throughout

the federal sector; reinforcing operations at the local, council, district and national levels and involving AFGE leaders throughout the federation in its comeback plans.

"We've got our work cut out for us but I know we can succeed when we work together. Now is the time to stay active in your union, make sure you're signed up for AFGE E-Dues, and talk with your coworkers to ensure they are union members too."

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conduct a benefit-cost analysis and submit it to Congress before attempting to relocate federal agencies or employees.

● Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act (HR 3226), which would extend enhanced retirement benefits to

federal law enforcement officers who otherwise do not receive them.

● Rights for the TSA Workforce Act (HR 2086, S 997), which would give TSA officers the same basic rights as other federal workers including the right to join a union.

● VA Care and Benefits Accountability Act (HR 6015, S 3174), which would restore and protect the collective bargaining rights

of Department of Veterans Affairs employees.

● Federal Correctional Officer Paycheck Protection Act (HR 7033, S 3626), which would establish a 35% increase in base pay for all correctional staff at the Bureau of Prisons.

Legal battles

On the legal front, while we have scored some significant victories for our members, several of our lawsuits

challenging the administration's workforce policies remain active.

Among the ongoing cases include challenges to the administration's merit hiring plan, the effort to reclassify tens of thousands of federal employees into at-will positions, and the improper sharing of federal workers' personnel records with the so-called Department of Government Efficiency.

Midterm elections

Every seat in the U.S. House and one-third of the U.S. Senate will be up for election on Nov. 3. AFGE districts have already begun endorsing candidates ahead of the primaries, and we will be announcing more endorsements as we get closer to the midterms.

Details on our endorsed candidates and other information pertinent to the election will be posted on our website in the coming months.

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professional when stress becomes overwhelming.

6. Stay connected. Research shows that having social connections is a significant predictor of longevity and better physical, cognitive and mental health, while social isolation and loneliness are significant predictors of premature death and poor health.

Unfortunately, there is a nationwide loneliness epidemic that medical experts consider a major public health concern. Combat loneliness with social clubs and community groups, or by taking up a hobby, learning something new or volunteering. If you're struggling with loneliness, reach out to a professional, your doctor, family member or friend. You can also call the 988 crisis helpline for support

7. Get screened. Schedule preventive care, tests and health screenings to help your doctor spot certain conditions before they become more serious. Your doctor can recommend needed tests based on your age, gender and health conditions — including colonoscopies, mammograms, gynecological and prostate exams, and vision screenings.

Today, there are many at-home screening options available. Some are more effective than others, and all work best — and minimize stress around results — when taken in consultation with a doctor.

For more resources on staying healthy, visit <http://www.ama-assn.org>.

"Everyone strives to live longer, but the goal should be to live as healthy as possible for as long as we live," says AMA CEO John Whyte, MD, MPH. "Simple steps today — eating well, staying active, sleeping enough, and seeing your doctor — can add quality years, or even decades, to your life."

MEASURES

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Mail theft-related check fraud — where a check is stolen while enroute — accounts for hundreds of millions of dollars in attempted theft annually.

Here are some of the most common fraud methods used:

● Account Theft. Checks are used to steal account information details to either steal money directly or fraudulently open additional accounts.

● Forgery. Criminals have long forged the legitimate signature or altered the payee or amount on a check. However, artificial intelligence (AI) is making it easier than ever to do so with accuracy.

● Check Washing. Criminals "wash" a check, using chemicals like acetone or bleach to erase the payee and amount, then rewrite the check to themselves for their amount of choice.

● Counterfeits. Criminals create entirely fake checks that look real using stolen account information.

● Check Return Schemes. Criminals will send what they claim is a paycheck or other payment by way of a check where they "overpay." They ask you to deposit it, then return the "extra" money back before it's discovered that the check is fake.

For more fraud prevention information, visit PNC's Security and Privacy Center. Safe handling of checks may not only protect against theft but also defend against more widespread account compromise.

Older phone? No problem.

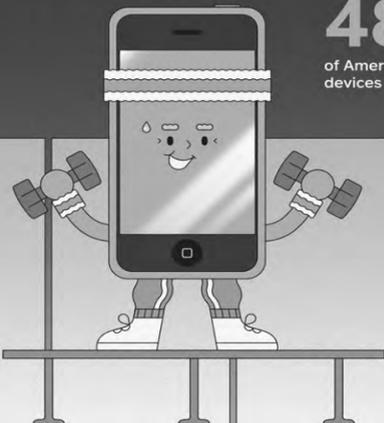
We're making our phones last longer:

48%

of Americans keep their devices for 3 or more years

22%

upgrade annually



SMARTPHONES

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"extremely or very important," refurbished device adoption has stagnated, revealing a growing trust gap. In fact, only 18% have purchased refurbished phones. When asked why they are less likely to choose a refurbished device, 52% worry about quality, 51% worry about defects, and 40% worry about data privacy.

The Recycling Gap

Consumers care deeply about the environmental impact of their tech, but only 20% recycle old phones. The average household contains 1.8 unused smartphones — a sign of "sustainability inertia," in part because 26% are not confident they know how to recycle a phone. This disconnect reveals an opportunity for clearer recycling guidance and trade-in programs that make "doing the right thing" easier.

A New Environmental Battleground

While consumers don't always act on their green conscience, they're increasingly rewarding brands that take visible responsibility for their devices' footprint:

✓ 34% say they are more likely to buy from manufacturers committing to emissions reductions

✓ 34% say recycled ocean plastics increase purchase likelihood

✓ 30% say recycled glass makes them more likely to buy a smartphone, and 30% say recycled packaging has the same effect

✓ 27% say knowing their device will be responsibly recycled makes trade-ins more appealing

Leasing and Flex Subscriptions Gain Momentum

As subscription models reshape everything from entertainment to transportation, smartphone ownership is also becoming optional. Like leasing a car, 29% of Americans say they would be likely to lease a smartphone when they next upgrade or replace their device. This "Device-as-a-Service" mindset is driven by lower upfront cost, more frequent upgrades, greater flexibility and the ability to include protection, insurance, or repair services as part of their lease.

"With tighter budgets and diminishing emphasis on chasing the latest tech innovations, consumers are taking a more thoughtful approach to smartphone ownership," said Karl Wiley, global president and CEO of Allstate Protection Plans. "This is why we're seeing growing interest in leasing and Device-as-a-Service models, which integrate repair, recycling, and end-of-life management directly into the ownership experience."

SCAMS

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overly flowery language, or uses phrases that don't make sense, that's a red flag.

Hard luck stories. Before moving on to asking you for money, the scammer may hint at financial troubles, such as their heat being cut off, their car being stolen, or a sick relative. They may also share a sad story from their past (death of parents or spouse, etc.).

Protect yourself from this scam:

● Never send money or personal information that can be used for identity theft to someone you've never met in person. Never give someone your credit card information to book a ticket to visit you. Cut off contact if someone starts asking you for information like credit card, bank, or government ID numbers.

● Ask specific questions about the details given in a profile. A scammer may stumble over remembering details or

making a story fit.

● Do your research. Many scammers steal photos from the web to use in their profiles. You can do a reverse image lookup using a website like tineye.com or images.google.com to see if the photos on a profile are stolen from somewhere else. You can also search online for a profile name, email, or phone number to see what adds up and what doesn't.

To report a scam, visit bbb.org/scamtracker. For more information, you can reach your BBB at 800-763-4222.

HONOR

From page 2

Cook briefly joined the Union Navy. According to Arlington Historical Magazine, he served on the Union gunboat Peosta until June 1865, shortly after the war ended.

After his second stint at service, Cook moved back to Cincinnati, where he worked in his father's shoe shop. In 1870, he married Isabella MacBryde. They had three children, John, Rebecca and Margarette.

According to the Cincinnati Enquirer, Cook

eventually got bored working in the shoe shop, so he joined the Cincinnati police before taking a job as a county recorder.

In 1887, Cook moved his family to Washington, D.C., where he worked for many years as a guard for the U.S. Government Printing Office.

On June 30, 1894 — nearly 32 years after his valiant actions during the Battle of Antietam — Cook received the Medal of Honor for his bravery during that fight.

Cook died on Aug. 3, 1915, at age 67. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery beside his wife, who died a year after he did.

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Just for

King Crossword

- ACROSS**
- 1 Nile biter
 - 4 Chat
 - 8 Job for Holmes
 - 12 One of the five W's
 - 13 "East of Eden" son
 - 14 Makes a choice
 - 15 Snaky fish
 - 16 Fruit salad ring
 - 18 — Lama
 - 20 Humorist
 - 21 — Raton
 - 24 Settle a debt
 - 28 Holiday wreath adornment
 - 32 Ms. McEntire
 - 33 "I love," to Livy
 - 34 Passion
 - 36 "The One I Love" band
 - 37 Attempt
 - 39 Pesto ingredients
 - 41 Bar mixer
 - 43 Salinger girl
 - 44 Sticky stuff
 - 46 Tuscany setting
 - 50 Forest-inspired color
 - 55 Uncle, to Pedro
 - 56 Romanov ruler

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16				17				
18			19				20					
			21		22	23		24		25	26	27
28	29	30					31		32			
33				34				35		36		
37			38		39					40		
41				42		43						
			44		45		46		47	48	49	
50	51	52					53	54		55		
56							57			58		
59							60					61

- 57 Hardly hirsute
 - 58 Help
 - 59 Rental units (Abbr.)
 - 60 Totals
 - 61 24 horas
- DOWN**
- 1 Dumbstruck
 - 2 — butter
 - 3 Survey
 - 4 Bubble tea ingredient
 - 5 Shapiro of NPR
 - 6 Horror star Chaney
 - 7 Recognized
 - 8 Whirlybird
 - 9 Smartphone download
 - 10 Cardinal cap letters
 - 11 Jargon suffix
 - 17 Tire filler
 - 19 Jurist Fortas
 - 22 Business abbr.
 - 23 MacDowell of "Green Card"
 - 25 Andean land
 - 26 Help a hood
 - 27 Thanksgiving veggies
 - 28 Bygone days
 - 29 Texter's "As I see it"
 - 30 Lunch hour
 - 31 Billions of years
 - 35 Prompts
 - 38 Detroit team
 - 40 Mosquito barrier
 - 42 Gearwheel tooth
 - 45 Spheres
 - 47 Slightly
 - 48 Ovid's 53
 - 49 Luke's teacher
 - 50 School org.
 - 51 MSN, for one
 - 52 Rebel Turner
 - 53 Vichy water
 - 54 Stately tree

Top gardening apps

Apps for planning:

- Planter
- iScape
- Gardenize
- Gardroid

Apps for plant care:

- Planta
- From Seed to Spoon
- Garden Manager
- Moon and Garden

— Brenda Wöwler
Source: gardentherapy.ca

THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

— Psalm 124: 6-8

Detail of "Rippling Water" by Frank Benson (1920)

Five Spot™ Space mission

O	R	B	I	T

Go around
People
Steel fastener
Starbucks' Large
They give the Ivy League its name
Famous armless statue

S	U	N	E	V
S	E	N	I	V
I	T	N	E	V
T	E	V	I	R
E	B	I	R	T
T	I	B	R	O

Solution

SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

Sweet
MEALCAR

Cipher
DECO

Exclusive
INDIES

Clumsy
TIPEN

TODAY'S WORD

SCRAMBLERS

INCOME

Today's Word

1. Caramel; 2. Code; 3. Inside; 4. Inept

Solution

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

TOP GOLFERS OF OLD FOCUSED ON HAND ACTION AS THE KEY SWING ELEMENT.

THE EMPHASIS THESE DAYS HAS SHIFTED MUCH MORE TO BODY ACTION.

THE KEY TO ME IS A BALANCED USE OF BOTH. I BEST ACHIEVE THAT WHEN I FOCUS ON CORRECT BODY ACTION, WHICH PROMOTES PROPER HAND ACTION REFLEXIVELY.

SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆◆◆

◆ Easy ◆◆ Medium ◆◆◆ Difficult

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Americanisms

"Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching."

— Satchel Paige

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps

I FOLLOWED MOST OF THE RECIPE. IT'S PROBABLY FINE DESPITE THE WAY IT LOOKS...AND SMELLS...RIGHT?

A	P	T	S	S	U	M	S	D	I	A	
T	S	A	R	B	A	L	D	A	I	D	
P	I	N	E	G	R	E	N	T	I	O	
G	O	O	I	T	A	L	L				
T	O	N	I	C	E	S	M	E			
S	H	O	T	P	I	N	E	N	U	T	S
A	M	O	R	A	R	D	O	R	R	E	M
P	I	N	E	C	O	N	E	R	E	B	A
B	O	C	A	R	E	P	A	Y			
D	A	L	A	I	W	I	T				
E	E	L	P	I	N	E	A	P	P	L	E
W	H	O	A	R	O	N	O	P	T	S	
A	S	P	T	A	L	K	C	A	S	E	

Solution time: 24 mins.

Answers

King Crossword

Weekly SUDOKU

	8	1				7	3	6
		4	6				1	2
6					2		9	
		5	9				8	4
	3		4		5			1
	6			3	1	9	5	7
	4	6	9			1	7	
9	2	8			7		4	
		7						

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆◆◆

◆ Moderate ◆◆ Challenging
◆◆◆ HOO BOY!

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5	1	7	3	6	4	8	2	9
9	2	8	1	5	7	6	4	3
3	4	6	9	2	8	1	7	5
4	6	2	8	3	1	9	5	7
8	3	9	4	7	5	2	6	1
1	7	5	2	9	6	3	8	4
6	5	3	7	1	2	4	9	8
7	9	4	6	8	3	5	1	2
2	8	1	5	4	9	7	3	6

Answer

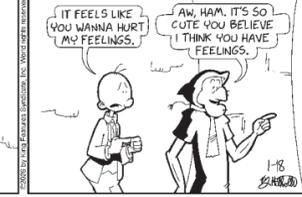
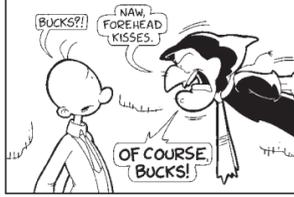
Weekly Sudoku

fun

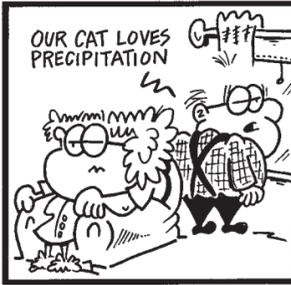
Amber Waves



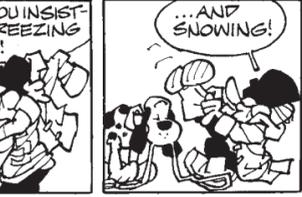
Out on a Limb



The Spats



TIGER



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GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		x	=	70			
+		+		-				
	-		x	=	6			
÷		+		+				
	+		+	=	15			
=		=		=				
6		16			10			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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FEAR & KNIGHT

By: rj johnson

DOUBT? ... OR DARE!

ANC
♥ DACERG
ERMEC
♥ ERDI
♥ RIDONA
GDU
ONAR
NEMIC
♥ REA
♥ EMREDA
DANLE
♥ OSGE

Unscramble these twelve letter strings to form each into an ordinary word (ex. HAGNEC becomes CHANGE). Prepare to use only ONE word from any marked (♥) letter string as each unscrambles into more than one word (ex. ♥RATHE becomes HATER or EARTH or HEART). Fit each string's word either across or down to knot all twelve strings together.

					S	
			E		SE	
N		D	R	O		
A		A	V	G	D	U
E		C	E	M	I	N
		E		M	E	C
		E		R	E	M
		E		R	I	D
		A		R	O	A
		L				

answer

FEAR & KNIGHT

People should be very prudent when selecting beverage containers. Choose your bottles wisely.

ANSWER

CryptoQuip

		10			16			9
		=			=			=
15	=	6	+	5	+	1		
		+		+		÷		
6	=	6	x	3	-	4		
		-		+		+		
		7	x	8	+	2		

answers

Go Figure!

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Back of chair is different. 2. Box is different. 3. Collar is missing. 4. Burner is missing. 5. Refrigerator handle is lower. 6. Stove hood is wider.

CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: F equals P

FHEFRH JTEQRV GH LHYS
FYQVHAU DTHA JHRHIUOAC
GHLHYXCH IEAUXOAHYJ. ITEEJH
SEQY GEURHJ DOJHRS!

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Sweet Potato Breakfast Bowl

Prep time: 5 minutes
Cook time: 10 minutes
Servings: 2

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 small red bell pepper, finely chopped
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 2 cups cooked sweet potatoes
- 1 can (15 ounces) Bush's Black Beans, drained
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 fried eggs
- 1 avocado, sliced
- cotija cheese, crumbled
- lime wedges, for serving

In large skillet over medium heat, heat olive oil. Add onions and bell pepper; cook, stirring occasionally, until peppers are softened, 5-7 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Add sweet potatoes, black beans and chili powder; stir to combine. Cook until potatoes and beans are warmed through, 4-5 minutes.

Divide bean mixture between two bowls. Top each bowl with fried egg, avocado slices and crumbled cotija cheese. Serve with lime wedges.



Simple, Satisfying Meals for the NEW YEAR

FAMILY FEATURES

While you're easing your family back into routines in the new year, simple, wholesome meals can help you stretch your grocery dollars further and find your rhythm in the kitchen again.

Satisfying and approachable recipes that come together quickly using a dependable base ingredient like beans are resonating with home cooks, helping take the pressure out of cooking. Grown, cooked and canned in America, Bush's Recipe Beans add plant-based protein and fiber to any dish, making it easy to achieve new year's goals while bringing flavorful meals with high-quality ingredients to the table.

For a warm, colorful way to start your morning without spending extra time in the kitchen, consider this Sweet Potato Breakfast Bowl, which satisfies both eyes and stomachs through a combination of black beans, eggs and sautéed vegetables. Or put a Mediterranean twist on lunch and dinner with this Greek Dense Bean Salad, a bright, fresh dish that includes chick peas and cannellini beans.

Visit bushbeans.com for more meal ideas that help you cook more, spend less and gather with loved ones.

Greek Dense Bean Salad

Prep time: 15 minutes
Servings: 6-8

Dressing:

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Tzatziki Sauce:

- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1/4 cucumber, grated, excess water drained
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons fresh dill, chopped
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Salad:

- 1 can (16 ounces) Bush's Chick Peas, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 1/2 ounces) Bush's Cannellini Beans, drained and rinsed

- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup red onion, diced
- 1 cucumber, seeded and diced
- 1/2 cup Kalamata olives, pitted and halved
- 1/2 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Greek dressing (directions below)
- 1 cup tzatziki sauce (directions below)
- chicken skewers (optional), for serving

To make dressing: In food processor or blender, blend olive oil; red wine vinegar; lemon juice; Dijon mustard; garlic; oregano; and salt and pepper, to taste, until well combined. Set aside.

To make tzatziki sauce: In bowl, stir yogurt; cucumber; lemon juice; olive oil; garlic; dill; and salt and pepper, to taste, until well combined. Set aside.

To make salad: In large bowl, combine chick peas, cannellini beans, cherry tomatoes, red onion, cucumber, olives, feta cheese and parsley; toss with dressing.

Top with tzatziki sauce and serve with chicken skewers, if desired.

Chef's tip: Store leftover tzatziki sauce separate from salad.

The least glamorous meal prep that saves me every week

By Patti Diamond
King Features Syndicates

Easy batch cooking is one of those habits that sounds slightly extreme until you try it. The short version is this: Cook extra, freeze it and thank yourself later.

Preparing ready-to-use meal components ahead of time takes the pressure off weeknight cooking and gives you the best of both worlds -- nutritious, frugal, home-cooked meals and far less time spent staring hopefully into the refrigerator at 5:30 p.m.

The only real downside is that batch cooking asks for a little time upfront, usually on the weekend. But I've learned that an hour or two of focused prep can buy me days of easier dinners.

Which brings me to one of my least glamorous but most useful kitchen habits: cooking ground beef in bulk.

Why cook just 1 pound of ground beef when I can cook 5 or even 10 pounds and be set for weeks? Especially when ground beef is rarely the finished dish anyway. It's a building block, destined for soups, casseroles, tacos, burritos, pasta sauces and skillet meals that will all be seasoned later.

This is usually the point in the conversation where eyebrows go up. Because, yes, I cook ground beef in the slow cooker, on purpose, and it turns out to be one of the



most useful kitchen shortcuts I know.

Slow-cooked ground beef comes out fully cooked and surprisingly moist. It isn't browned or particularly pretty, and that's exactly the point. This meat is meant to be finished later, not served as-is.

How to Cook Ground Beef in a Slow Cooker

Place 5-6 pounds of ground beef in a 6-quart slow cooker, breaking it into large chunks. Season lightly with 1 teaspoon garlic powder, 1 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Add 1 cup of water, cover, and cook on low for 6-8 hours, until fully cooked. Drain well, cool completely, then portion into labeled freezer bags (about 2 cups each) and freeze flat. Use directly from the freezer in soups, casseroles, taco

filling, pasta sauce, shepherd's pie, stuffed peppers or skillet meals.

Meal prep doesn't have to mean finished meals lined up in identical containers. Sometimes it's enough to prepare the parts that take the longest. Future you will take it from there.

CURRIED BEEF PITA POCKETS

Yield: 4 servings
Total Time: 10 minutes
1/2 tablespoon olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 1/2 to 2 cups cooked ground beef (about 1 pound raw)
1 garlic clove, minced or grated
1 tablespoon curry powder, or more to taste
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 (14.5 ounce) can diced tomatoes

1 medium zucchini, diced
1/4 cup water
1 cup cucumber, peeled, seeded and chopped
1/2 cup sour cream or plain Greek yogurt
1 teaspoon dill
Salt and pepper
4 pita pockets, cut into halves

Preheat a large skillet on medium-high heat. Heat the olive oil and brown the onion. Add the ground beef and garlic, curry powder, salt, pepper, diced tomato and zucchini, and stir to combine. Add 1/4 cup water, cover and simmer 3 minutes.

While that's simmering, mix the cucumber with sour cream and dill, adding salt and pepper to taste, set aside. Spoon meat mixture into pita breads. Top with dollops of cucumber sauce. Serve with a salad.



Getting a taste of the 2026 Olympics in Italy

Photo and story by Donna Erickson
King Features Syndicate

The 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, will be in full swing on televisions and screens all across America starting on Feb. 6. I love how the cameras put viewers like us in the middle of the action, as if we're standing on the sidelines as a skier comes racing by.

Amidst the thrills, there's one thing that we miss out on, which are the mouthwatering smells and tastes of the local food that gets enjoyed by spectators throughout the event. So, this year, I decided to make the Olympics a "total" cultural experience and create a taste of Italy by preparing a panini (Italian for "sandwich"). But hold the pickles, lettuce and mayo! Italians are known to love their panini with a drizzle of olive oil, balsamic vinegar or pesto on the bread.

They add good meat and cheese, then toast it on an electric grill. The heat intensifies the flavors and creates diagonal grill marks on the outside of the bread.

To create the same taste and effect, we make our panini on the stove with a basic grill pan and press them with a brick covered in tinfoil. If you don't have a brick, set another heavy skillet on top of the sandwich with soup cans to weight it down as it heats throughout. To get you started, here's my simple, basic traditional recipe for 4-5 paninis:

- 1 loaf of good Italian bread, such as ciabatta or focaccia
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- 20 fresh basil leaves
- 4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto (optional)
- 4 ripe tomatoes, sliced
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced 1/4 inch thick

Slice bread for 4-5 paninis, then split each one in half horizontally. Drizzle bottom cut halves with olive oil and stack with basil, prosciutto, tomatoes and cheese. Top with bread. Set panini on a heated, nonstick grill pan. Set bricks covered with tinfoil on top to compress the panini. Grill until cheese softens. Flip over and toast on second sides.



Got a recipe you want to share with our members?
Email it to theunionadvocate@gmail.com and
let's get to cooking and eating!