



# News Currents Sr.™

by Building Wings

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## In this issue

United Auto Workers go on strike for higher pay and benefits	2
Biden announces American Climate Corps to create green jobs	4
Artists Kevin Beasley and Robert Lugo among winners of 2023 Heinz Awards	6
National Zoo to return giant pandas to China	8
This Week in History	10
Who am I?	13
News Names, Places, Words	14
Faces and Places	15
Where in the World?	17
Remember When...	18
Download links for this issue	20

# United Auto Workers go on strike for higher pay and benefits

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The UAW represents around 145,000 auto workers.

## GENERAL

[1] The United Auto Workers, a large union that represents car makers, just went on strike. **Does anyone know what it means to “go on strike?”** *(To refuse to go to work in order to force a company to change its labor practices.)*

[2] The United Auto Workers, or UAW, has around 145,000 members. It’s one of the biggest and most powerful unions in America. **What is a labor union?** *(An organization of workers who collectively fight for their rights.)*

[3] Here, you see Shawn Fain. He is the president of UAW. He’s been the president of the union since March 2023 and is now leading the strike. Fain says that car companies are making record profits while wages for auto workers have remained the same for years now. Fain and UAW are calling for higher pay, as well as a shorter work week and more benefits.

[4] The strike targets Ford, which you see here, General Motors, and Stellantis. Together, these three companies make about half of all the cars sold in the U.S. every year. **Did you know that so many cars were made by just a few companies?** The owners of these companies say that their profits haven’t increased enough to give the workers what they’re asking for.

[5] Many politicians have voiced their opinions on the strike. Senator Bernie Sanders, who you see here, was one of the first to publicly come out in support of UAW. Other politicians have done the same, and on September 26, President Biden made history by becoming the first sitting president to join a picket line. Some Republicans, however, including Senator Tim Scott, have criticized the strike. **How do you think this strike will end? Why?**

**Unions were formed to protect the rights of workers.**

## GENERAL

[6] Labor unions are an important, and controversial, part of the U.S. economy and political system. Let’s take a closer look at their history and how they work. **Do you know anyone in a labor union?**

[7] A long time ago, land and business owners had all the power. They could make people work all day for little

or no money, and workers and peasants didn't have a way to fight back.

**[8]** But in the mid-1800s, during the Industrial Revolution, things changed. **What was the Industrial Revolution?** *(A period in the 19th century when much of Western Europe and the United States went from having economies based around agriculture to having economies based around large-scale manufacturing.)* In the Industrial Revolution, many people started working close together, which allowed them to talk.

**[9]** These workers would talk about how they were being mistreated. Then, they realized that if they worked together, they could fight to make things better. Labor unions started forming all over the country.

**[10]** Some union leaders have become national figures. Here you see César Chávez. He was one of the founders of United Farm Workers, or UFW, a union for farm laborers. In the 1960s and 70s, farm workers were getting paid very little and had to work long hours in dangerous conditions. UFW called for a national boycott of lettuce, grapes, and other produce. This tactic worked. **Why do you think boycotts are an effective strategy?** *(It means that companies make less money.)*

**[11]** Unions are the reason why we have the 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, weekends, and many other things we take for granted today. While union membership has declined over the last few decades, it seems that this trend may be starting to reverse. **Do you think it's a good idea for a worker to be in a union? Why or why not?** END

# Biden announces American Climate Corps to create green jobs

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The American Climate Corps is both a job training and environmental protection program.

## GENERAL

[1] President Biden recently announced the creation of a new federal program for American young adults. This program is called the American Climate Corps. **What is a corps?** (*A group of people all working together to achieve something.*) Biden hopes that around 20,000 young people will join the American Climate Corps, and they will work around the country on environmental protection projects.

[2] The American Climate Corps is meant to be a youth jobs program, as well as a job training program. Members of the American Climate Corps will be paid for their work. And hopefully, they will also learn skills that can help them in future jobs. **Do you think this program has a chance to make a big difference in people's lives?**

[3] Federal jobs programs do already exist. One of them is AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps has around five million members. They do service work—helping out in schools, working on construction projects, planting trees, and so on. **Do you know anyone in AmeriCorps?**

[4] The American Climate Corps is working with AmeriCorps, as well as other federal agencies like the Departments of Labor, Energy, and Agriculture. Many have praised Biden's plan. Others, however, say it's a waste of government money. Others, however, say the American Climate Corps will actually need to be a lot larger to effectively fight climate change. **Do you agree with any of these criticisms? If so, which one? Why?**  
NEXT

The American Climate Corps is similar to the Civilian Conservation Corps.

## GENERAL

[5] Many observers have drawn comparisons between the American Climate Corps and a similar government program from the 1930s and 40s. This program was called the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC. **What is conservation?** (*Protecting and preserving the environment.*)

[6] Over the course of its nine-year existence, around three million people joined the CCC. They helped preserve and protect national forests and parks.

[7] The CCC was created during the Great Depression. **What was the Great Depression?** (*The worst economic crisis in American history.*) Like the American Climate Corps, the CCC was a jobs program as well as a conservation program.

[8] Here, you see President Franklin D. Roosevelt at a CCC camp. Roosevelt was president during most of the Great Depression. He created a series of policies and programs called the New Deal. **Have you ever heard of the New Deal?** The New Deal was created to help America recover. The CCC was one of the biggest and most successful New Deal programs.

[9] The CCC accomplished many things. Perhaps their greatest achievement was to plant around 3.5 billion trees around the United States.

[10] CCC workers also built shelters, paths, waterwheels, and bridges. Here you see a bridge built by CCC workers that still stands today. **Do you know if there are any CCC-built structures in your area?**

[11] The CCC officially ended in 1942. But while it hasn't existed for more than 80 years now, it's still celebrated by many for its conservation accomplishments. It's also celebrated as a jobs program that taught millions of young people valuable skills that they kept with them all their lives. **Do you think the American Climate Corps will be as successful as the CCC? Why or why not? END**

# Artists Kevin Beasley and Robert Lugo among winners of 2023 Heinz Awards

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The Heinz Awards are a major prize.

## GENERAL

[1] This is a Heinz Award medal. The Heinz Awards are an annual ceremony where artists and activists are celebrated for their efforts to make the world a better place.

[2] Over the years, the Heinz Awards have honored many exceptional people. This is Paul Farmer. A 2003 Heinz Award laureate, Farmer co-founded the charity Partners in Health and dedicated his life to giving medical care to the world's poorest people. **Have you ever heard of Farmer? Where?** Other previous winners include Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak and educator Salman Khan.

[3] Six people were honored with Heinz Awards this year, and two of them were artists. One of these artists was Roberto Lugo, who you see here. **From this picture, what kind of art would you guess he's best known for?** (*Pottery.*) The other is named Kevin Beasley. Both of these artists incorporate social justice messages in their work, and both deal with the history of race and class divisions in the United States.

[4] The other winners included this woman, Leah Penniman. Penniman is a food security activist who founded a farm in New York state. This farm, Soul Fire Farm, provides low-cost fresh produce to its community and hosts training programs that teach people how to farm their own food. **Do you see why these people were given Heinz Awards?** NEXT

**Roberto Lugo and Kevin Beasley are famous American artists.**

## GENERAL

[5] Roberto Lugo is an artist who lives outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While he is perhaps best known for his ceramics, Lugo's art blends many different mediums—including hip-hop and spoken word poetry—to create something completely new. **Does this sound interesting?**

[6] Here you can see one of Lugo's works. **Who can read the words on this bowl? What message do you think this work is trying to convey?** Lugo's art often deals with social themes, and his unique and thought-provoking art has been celebrated by critics and audiences.

[7] Kevin Beasley is the other artist to win a Heinz Award this year. Beasley often makes "found object" art.

**What is “found object” art?** (*Art made out of items found on the street instead of more common artistic materials, like paint or marble.*) Here, you can see “found object” art in a museum. **What objects do you see in this work?**

**[8]** Beasley once made a work about this machine here. This is a cotton gin. During the time of American slavery, enslaved people were often forced to work the cotton gin. It is often seen as a symbol of slavery in America. Beasley created an installation, or a three-dimensional artwork that takes up a full room, about the cotton gin. This work used sound, touch, and other interactive elements to make visitors think about slavery in a new way. **Are artworks like this one important? Why or why not?**

**[9]** Lugo and Beasley have both been featured at major museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum, which you see here. They are two of the most respected and intriguing artists working in America today, and the Heinz Award is just another honor for them both. **Do you think art has the power to make a difference in the world? Explain. END**

# National Zoo to return giant pandas to China

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Giant pandas have been at the zoo for over 50 years.

## GENERAL

[1] Giant pandas are truly amazing animals. They're famous for their black-and-white coloring, and even though they live only in China, people all over the world love them. Pandas are also known for eating a lot of bamboo. Bamboo makes up almost all of their diet!

[2] There have been giant pandas at the National Zoo for over 50 years. Recently, the National Zoo made a big announcement about its pandas. **Based on the map, where is the National Zoo? (Washington DC.)** The zoo will be sending its pandas back to China in January. These three pandas have lived at the zoo for nearly 23 years! The pandas were loaned to the National Zoo by China as part of a breeding program.

[3] Giant pandas in China were "endangered" for many years. That means they were at risk of disappearing completely. The main cause of this population loss was humans cutting down the bamboo forests where pandas live. **Why do you think humans cut down these bamboo forests?**

[4] The National Zoo has been helping protect and save giant pandas through its breeding program. Thanks to programs like these, the panda population has gone up. But, sadly, there are still not many pandas left in the wild. The National Zoo hopes to keep helping giant pandas. The zoo is in talks with China to receive more pandas in the future. **Who wants to read the quote?**

[5] After the three pandas go back to China, there will only be four pandas left in the United States. Having pandas in the United States helps more people learn about and appreciate these beautiful bears. **Why is learning about pandas a good thing for people in the United States? How does it help?** NEXT

The giant panda is a fascinating (and adorable) mammal.

## GENERAL

[6] As you can see on this map, giant pandas only live in the wild in one small area of China. Despite its name, the giant panda is one of the smaller bear species. It is only called "giant" to tell it apart from the red panda, a much smaller – and unrelated – mammal. Adult pandas usually weigh between 200 and 300 pounds.

[7] Pandas maintain their weight even though 99 percent of their diet consists of bamboo. **What is bamboo?** (A wood-like plant with a hollow stem in the grass family.) Adults eat at least 25 pounds of bamboo on



average every day to get enough nourishment. Most of this bamboo is tough fiber and cannot be digested. So, pandas poop at least 40 times a day!

**[8]** Feeding takes up two-thirds of a panda's day. The remainder is spent resting, as this diet gives the bears very little energy.

**[9]** Pandas have also developed a unique wrist bone that acts like a thumb and helps them hold bamboo during feeding. **What details do you notice about the pandas in this photo?**

**[10]** A few years ago, China built a new Giant Panda National Park. The project cost about \$1.5 billion. This park is more than 10,000 square miles – approximately the size of the state of Massachusetts. The new park connects 67 different panda habitats in the three provinces. This helps different panda populations interact and breed with each other for the first time. **Why is this important?** *(It gives pandas more chances to increase their numbers and survive.)* **What do you find most interesting about pandas?** END

## This Week in History

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Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat was assassinated on October 6,

1981.

### GENERAL

[1] In 1978, Anwar Sadat – *AHN-wahr sah-DAHT* – accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. **What is this award?** (An annual prize given to the person or group that has done great work to promote peace.) Sadat, the president of Egypt, shared this prize with Israel's leader at the time, Menachem Begin – *meh-NAKH-ehm BEY-ghin*. But just a few years after winning the prize, Sadat was assassinated in Egypt. **What does assassinated mean?** (Killed for political reasons.) This assassination shocked the world. It also closed the book on Sadat's remarkable life and career.

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[2] Mohamed Anwar al-Sadat was born in Egypt in 1918. During this time, Egypt, Sudan, and South Sudan were part of the same territory. It was called the Sultanate of Egypt, and you can see it here. Although King Farouk was supposed to be the leader of this area, the entire area was actually controlled by a European nation. **Can you guess what nation this was?** (Great Britain.)

[3] Upon joining the military, Sadat joined a secret group of officers trying to win independence for Egypt. This group thought that King Farouk was not fighting for his people. So, in 1952, this group started a revolution. Army members forced King Farouk from power. **What is it called when a leader is kicked out of office?** (A *coup* – *KOO*.)

[4] The new government was led by this man here. His name was Gamal Abdel Nasser. He was a popular leader and was seen as a hero by many Arabs and Muslims around the world. Sadat served in Nasser's government for a long time, and then took over the presidency in 1970.

[5] During this time, Egypt had been fighting with Israel for many years. **Why do you think they were fighting?** In 1967, Egypt and Israel fought a war against each other. It's called the Six Day War, because Israel won it so quickly. But Egypt and Israel kept fighting even after the war ended. Many people in Egypt wanted President Sadat to continue to fight against Israel. But a growing number of Egyptians wanted peace. As his presidency continued, Sadat felt that Egypt would be better off if it could figure out a way to stop the violence between the two nations.

[6] Sadat agreed to meet with Israeli leader Menachem Begin. This outraged some people in the Arab world and delighted some others. The two famously met with each other in the United States, in meetings hosted by the president of the U.S. **Who was president in 1978?** (*Jimmy Carter, shown here between Sadat on the left and Begin on the right.*) They met at a presidential retreat called Camp David, where they decided on a series of promises called the Camp David Accords. This led to a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel – the first such treaty between Israel and any Arab nation. **Can you understand why this was a big deal?**

[7] In 1978, Sadat and Begin traveled to Oslo, Norway, to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. But some Muslims were angry that Sadat had made a deal with Israel. These people felt that he was betraying his religion. **What do you think about this view?**

[8] On October 6, 1981, Sadat attended a parade in Egypt's capital city. **What is this city?** (*Cairo.*) During this parade, as he was standing near this platform here, a squad of gunmen shot and killed President Sadat, as well as 11 other people in the crowd. Sadat was later buried in this spot. But Sadat's dream has lived on. Egypt and Israel have had some problems over the years, but have never again gone to war with each other. **Do you think Anwar Sadat was a wise leader? Why or why not?** END

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## Who am I?

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### Who am I?

#### GENERAL

I am the president of France.

I was first elected in 2017 and won a second term in 2022. I am 45 years old. My presidency has had its ups and downs. There have been large protests against my policies both in France and around the world. But my firm leadership style has helped me remain in power.

I recently announced that I would remove all French troops and the French ambassador from the African country Niger. This will bring an end to the French presence in the country. My decision has been celebrated by many people in Niger. **Who am I?** (*Emmanuel Macron.*)

# News Names, Places, Words

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## News Names, Places, Words

### GENERAL

#### News Faces

**Anwar Sadat**—President of Egypt from 1970 to 1981 (lived 1918 to 1981)

**Franklin D. Roosevelt**—32nd president of the United States (lived 1882 to 1945)

**Franz Kafka**—Novelist and short story writer best known for “The Metamorphosis” (lived 1883 to 1924)

**Kevin Beasley**—American artist who works in sculpture, performance art, and sound installation

**Leah Penniman**—Farmer, educator, and activist who co-founded Soul Fire Farm

**Shawn Fain**—President of the United Auto Workers Union.

#### News Places

\*\*China

Egypt

Israel

Pennsylvania

The Czech Republic

Washington, D.C. \*\*

#### News Words

**bamboo**—A wood-like plant with a hollow stem, in the grass family

**conservation**—Protecting and preserving the environment

**corps**—A group of people all working together to achieve something

**coup**—The forceful overthrow of a government or political leader

**endangered**—An animal that is threatened with extinction

**installation**— A three-dimensional artwork that takes up a full room

**labor union**—An organization of workers who collectively fight for their rights

**spire**— A tall, skinny, pointed structure on the top of a building

**strike**—To refuse to go to work in order to force a company to change its labor practices

## Faces and Places

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### Senator Bob Menendez

#### GENERAL

[1] On September 22, 2023, New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez and four others, including Menendez's wife, were indicted on corruption charges. Police searched Menendez's home and discovered nearly half a million dollars in cash and around \$100,000 in gold bars hidden away. Prosecutors allege that this money was given to Menendez by business owners in exchange for his political support. They also claim that Menendez provided the Egyptian government with sensitive U.S. intelligence and was well-paid for that as well. Menendez, a Democrat, has faced calls to resign even from high-ranking members of his own party. Phil Murphy, the governor of New Jersey, and the state's other senator, Cory Booker, have both called on Menendez to step down. But so far Menendez has remained defiant, claiming that he is innocent and that the charges are politically and even racially motivated. **Do you think Menendez should step down? Why or why not?** NEXT

### Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare

#### GENERAL

[2] Manasseh Sogavare, the prime minister of the Solomon Islands, sparked controversy when he refused to attend a summit held by President Biden. Biden had invited all the leaders of Pacific Island nations to the Pacific Islands Forum in Washington, D.C. to discuss their relations with the United States. Sogavare snubbed this meeting and instead sent his foreign affairs minister. He claims that he did not want to sit and listen to Biden "lecturing" him about America's greatness. Many point to this snub as an example of growing Chinese influence among Pacific Island nations. These nations were once considered to be firmly within the American sphere of influence. But recently, some—including the Solomon Islands—have formed trade and other partnerships with China. This summit is widely seen as part of an ongoing U.S. plan to counter China and re-establish U.S. dominance over this strategically important region. **Do you think Sogavare should have attended this forum? Why or why not?** NEXT

### Azerbaijan

#### GENERAL

[3] On Thursday, September 28, Armenian leaders in the Nagorno-Karabakh region formally announced the dissolution of their breakaway government. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, but its population is largely made up of ethnic Armenians. This breakaway government was established after a war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the 1990s, and for the last

thirty years, Armenians have been able to live in this region in relative peace. However, recent invasions into this territory by the Azerbaijani government have caused the Nagorno-Karabakh government to break down, and it is now under full Azerbaijani control. Of the 120,000 Armenians who called this region home, around 70,000 have already fled to Armenia. Thousands more are trying to leave, and there have been reports of atrocities committed by Azerbaijani forces. **What should the U.S. government do to help these ethnic Armenians?** NEXT

## California

### GENERAL

**[4]** The California-based Writers Guild of America, or WGA, formally ended its strike on September 27, 2023. The WGA had been on strike since May 2, when contract negotiations between the union and studio executives fell apart. After nearly five months, these two parties have finally come to an agreement. The new contract is widely seen as a major win for the WGA. The executives agreed to large pay raises for writers, and they guaranteed that they will not use AI programs like ChatGPT to create source material for scripts. This good deal is seen as an encouraging sign for SAG-AFTRA, the Hollywood actors' union, which has been on strike since mid-July. SAG-AFTRA hopes that they'll be able to get studios to agree to a similarly labor-friendly contract, though it's uncertain when these negotiations will resume. **Do you think this deal will have an impact on the SAG-AFTRA strike? Why or why not?** END



## Where in the World?

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Test your geography knowledge with this feature.

### GENERAL

- a. The giant panda's only wild habitat is located in this country.
- b. Robert Lugo is an artist who lives in this state's largest city.
- c. Anwar Sadat, the former leader of this country, won the Nobel Prize in 1978.
- d. The city of Prague is the capital of this country.
- e. The Six Day War was a battle fought between Egypt and this country.
- f. The National Zoo, located in this city, recently sent its giant pandas back to China.

## Remember When...

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“The Tonight Show” has been an American institution since  
1954.

### GENERAL

[1] “The Tonight Show” was created in 1953 in New York City. This show, originally called “Tonight!”, ran on New York station WNBC for several months before it was broadcast nationwide starting in 1954.

[2] Here you see the first host of “The Tonight Show.” **Who was he?** (*Steve Allen.*) Allen was quick-witted and funny, and was a talented jazz pianist as well as a great interviewer. His version of “Tonight!” looked a lot like the versions that followed. He started with a comedy monologue, talked to famous guests, and performed sketches with regulars like Don Knotts.

[3] Allen was such a successful host that he was able to start a successful Sunday night variety show. **Do you remember “The Steve Allen Show?”** In 1957, NBC told Allen to leave “The Tonight Show” so he could focus on beating his main Sunday night competition: “The Ed Sullivan Show.” **Was this a good idea? Why or why not?**

[4] The next host is shown here. **Do you remember his name?** (*Jack Paar.*) Paar’s warm, witty style made him a star. **Did you watch this version of the show?**

[5] Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy were both guests on Parr’s show as was Fidel Castro. But Paar was a controversial figure. Once, in 1960, Paar walked off the show because he was angry that the NBC censors cut one of his favorite jokes because they thought it was offensive. **Do you remember this incident?** Paar eventually came back and hosted until 1962. **What else do you remember about the early years of “The Tonight Show”?**

[6] But for many people, the most enduring symbol of this show was the next host, shown here. **Can you name him?** (*Johnny Carson.*) Johnny Carson brought his dry sense of humor to “The Tonight Show” starting in 1962, and continued for another 30 years. Carson’s monologues were sharp but rarely mean, and he was widely respected. **Who was his sidekick, who introduced him with “Heeeeere’s Johnny!”** (*Ed McMahon.*)

[7] Carson, who moved the show to Los Angeles in 1972, also became well known for his recurring characters, including the fortune teller Carnac the Magnificent. **Why do you think Johnny Carson was so popular? What else do you remember about his time on “The Tonight Show”?**

When Johnny Carson retired, many thought NBC would replace him with David Letterman, who hosted

another show on the network. **[8]** Instead, NBC named Jay Leno the new host of “The Tonight Show,” starting in 1992. David Letterman was given a late-night talk show at CBS. **Did you watch either of these shows? Which one did you prefer?** Leno was #1 in the ratings for most of his 17 years as host of “The Tonight Show.”

**[9]** But the network decided they needed to appeal to a younger audience, and replaced Leno with Conan O’Brien. **Did you enjoy Jay Leno’s show? Did you stop watching once Conan O’Brien took over?** This experiment lasted seven months before NBC switched back to Jay Leno again.

**[10]** In 2014, comedian Jimmy Fallon took over “The Tonight Show,” moving it back to New York City for the first time in more than four decades. He has stiff competition now with Stephen Colbert on CBS, and Jimmy Kimmel on ABC. **Do you stay up to watch any of these shows? Who is your favorite all-time host of “The Tonight Show”? What is your favorite “Tonight Show” memory?** END

CONNECTION IDEAS: There are many “Tonight Show” clips available on the Internet. One, from the very first episode with Steve Allen, can be found right here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8AYUfBt1dE>.

Here is another amazing clip: Jack Paar and Liberace meet a young boxer named Cassius Clay: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0J4cN-V\\_I8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0J4cN-V_I8).

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