SPORTS

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‘There’s still so much danger’

Domestic violence homicides drop but attacks with guns rise

By Caroline Kubzansky
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A few weeks before Crystal Salter was shot and killed, she threw her 7-year-old daughter a K-pop themed birthday party — the kind of huge celebration she had always wanted to mark special occasions with.

She was big on Halloween and other holidays, her sister Regina Salter said. She took her daughter everywhere with her and had been thrilled to start fostering another little girl in April.

Both girls were in bed with Salter on Sept. 6 when her boyfriend allegedly shot and killed her. He was found in his car a few blocks away on the Near West Side, dead of a gunshot wound to his mouth, which was ruled a suicide. Crystal Salter’s family said police have closed the case and have not considered any other suspects in her death.

Salter is one of at least 28 people killed at the hands of a family member or intimate partner so far in 2026.

That number represents a significant decrease from the same period last year when a spike in homicides turned up the volume on an alarm that had been ringing since the beginning of the pandemic. But at the same time, domestic attacks involving guns have increased this year, leaving law enforcement, advocates and other criminal justice stakeholders taking stock of a complicated year.

Regina Salter said her sister’s killing came out of the blue.

“If there were some type of domestic violence going on and she told us, we would have encouraged her to leave the situation,” she said. “But sometimes it’s hard to leave or scary to leave.”

Sometimes, as in Salter’s case, there’s no obvious sign to the family that someone is in danger. Other times there are indicators

See **VIOLENCE** on Page A4

ELECTION 2026



Illinois’ next U.S. senator, Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, greets Sen. Tammy Duckworth alongside Gov. JB Pritzker on Wednesday as they celebrate election victories and unveil an agenda for the years ahead at the Columbus Park Refectory in Chicago. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Blue blood, new blood

Illinois’ congressional Democrats, with 6 new faces, vow to balance oversight of Trump with delivering results in wake of Tuesday’s transformative election

By Olivia Olander and Dan Petrella
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Judging only by the maps of congressional election results, it would appear last week’s Democratic wave bypassed Illinois as it swept across the country, turning new and unfamiliar places blue from South Carolina to northern Nevada.

After Tuesday’s transformative midterm elections, the partisan makeup of Illinois’ delegation is unchanged: Both U.S. senators and 14 of 17 House members will be Democrats.

■ A new CPS board takes shape, with big decisions ahead. **Page A2**
■ How Trump effect grew Dems’ suburban footprint. **Page A6**
■ Marchers take to streets with hope after “blue wave.” **Page A9**
■ Trump’s grip on the Republican Party now in question. **Page B5**

When the new Congress convenes in January, however, six of those seats — one in the Senate and five in the House — will have new occupants. The turnover marks a generational, if not ideological, shift in the state’s Democratic representation in Washington as the party assumes its largest congressional majorities since before the tea party “shellacking” of 2010.

With two years remaining in President Donald Trump’s term, there’s a broad consensus among Illinois’ congressional Democrats, from the political center to the left flank, that their newly empowered and emboldened party must balance two responsibilities: It has to serve as a check on the administration while also addressing the economic anxieties and corruption concerns that fueled a stunning midterm rebuke of Republicans.

“Americans sent a very, very clear message: They are sick of Donald Trump’s bull---- ... promising one thing in the morning but going back on his word by the afternoon,” Sen. Tammy Duckworth said Wednesday, a day after Democrats gained at least 41 House seats and at least seven in the Senate. “And they are done with him putting self-interest over our national interest.”

Duckworth wasn’t on the ballot, but the two-term Hoffman Estates Democrat will become the state’s senior senator next year with the

See **ELECTION** on Page A8

Runway taxi times at O’Hare among worst in nation



A United Airlines jet taxis on a runway at O’Hare International Airport in 2025. O’Hare averaged 20 minutes for jets to taxi to their gates. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

“It’s kind of like driving up into your garage, or driving up into your driveway at home, and then they don’t let you out of the car.”

DENNIS TAJER, an O’Hare-based American Airlines pilot and spokesperson for its pilots union

By Talia Soglin
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicago can look tantalizing from the window of an airplane on its descent into O’Hare International Airport.

But much to the chagrin of air travelers who might glimpse the city’s skyline rising over Lake Michigan on their way in, touching down at O’Hare isn’t exactly the same as arriving. That’s because taxi times at the airport are longer, on average, than those at almost every other major airport in the country.

“It’s kind of like driving up into your garage, or driving up into your driveway at home, and then they don’t let you out of the car,” said Dennis Tajer, an O’Hare-based American Airlines pilot and spokesperson for its pilots union.

From January through the end of August this year — the most recent month for which Federal Aviation Administration data is available — planes landing at O’Hare averaged 20 minutes to taxi to their gates once their wheels hit the ground. No other major U.S. airport reported

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INSIDE



EILEEN T. MESLAR/TRIBUNE

With Welch out, who will be next speaker?

With women expected to make up more than half of the likely 85-member Democratic caucus in Springfield, there is the potential they could elect the state’s first woman House speaker. **Chicagoland, Page A3**

Style embodies futurism, optimism

A hundred years ago, Art Deco emerged, an exuberant style that spans architecture, interior design, artwork and even type fonts. And it is the subject of a new book by a Chicago architectural historian. **Arts & Entertainment**

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179th year No. 312
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Florence heaven on earth for foodie travelers



Rick Steves



The heart of the food scene in Italy's Florence is the trendy, Industrial Age, steel-and-glass Mercato Centrale. **JESSICA SHAW**

Sampling Italian cuisine is sightseeing for your palate. The recipe for a successful tour: Start with fresh ingredients, add some talented cooks, mix in a city's personality marbled with a rich heritage, and sprinkle a happy dining crowd on top. Experiencing Italy's cuisine is a joy, and in the heart of Tuscany, Florence offers a particularly satisfying spread.

Tuscan cuisine is hearty and simple farmer's food: grilled meats, high-quality seasonal vegetables, fresh herbs, prized olive oil, and rustic bread. Tuscan ribollita combines these ingredients into a savory bean-and-bread soup. If a dish's name ends with"alla toscana" or"alla fiorentina," it's cooked in the Tuscan or Florentine style — usually a preparation highlighting local products.

Restaurant competition in Florence is fierce, so it's easy to find delicious Tuscan specialties at fair prices — even in the tourist zone. But for the most authentic ambience and better-quality meals, I like to hike across the Arno River to the quiet Oltrarno neighborhood. This is where I find the best bistecca alla Fiorentina— a thick T-bone steak, generally grilled very rare and lightly seasoned. The best (and most expensive) is from the white Chianina breed of cattle you'll see grazing throughout Tuscany.

But dining out is only one option for foodies. The heart of the food scene in Florence is the trendy, Industrial Age, steel-and-glass Mercato Centrale (Central Market). Along with all the must-see museums, this market is one of the great sights in Florence. The ground floor is a thriving edible wonderland of vendors selling meat, fish, produce, and other staples to a mostly local clientele.

And the upstairs is a bustling food court open late into the evening.

I come here to gather a picnic of fresh mozzarella cheese, olives, fruit and crunchy bread. But these days, picnickers like me need to be discreet — Florence recently imposed a ban on eating on public sidewalks and doorsteps in its historic center (and violators risk a hefty fine).

At the market's tripe stand, it's easy to see that locals eat just about every bit of the cow ... and some bits unique to the bull, as well. Tourists may find it hard to stomach, but Florentines' favorite quick lunch is a panino (sandwich) of trippa or lampredotto — the lining from the second and fourth stomach of a cow, respectively — slow-boiled to tender perfection.

Offal sandwiches originated as an affordable source of protein for working-class Florentines. While on a lunch break from chipping trapped statues out of blocks of marble, Michelangelo would swing by a Florentine market and dig into a bun stuffed with stewed organs. This long-standing tradition nearly faded away a few years back, but the recent worldwide trend for "nose-to-tail" eating has kicked off a renaissance of food carts selling this local delicacy.

While offal's worth trying (be brave), many carts also offer easier-to-stomach bollito (stewed beef) and the always delicious porchetta (roast pork with herbs).

No matter what you order, watch closely as the food-cart owner pulls the lid off of a gently simmering pot, forks out some tender meat, and — if you're lucky — dips the bun in the broth before topping it with spicy and tangy sauces. If you have the guts ... give trippa a try. It's offal.

Cooking classes are an ideal way to learn a thing or two about this region's prodigious culinary tradition. Classes in Florence range from multiday or multiweek courses for more serious chefs, to two- or three-hour crash courses for tourists. These are some of my favorite activities in Tuscany, combining a unique Italian experience (learning to make, say, pasta from scratch) with a satisfying meal, all in just a few hours.

In my experience, the best casual cooking classes are taught in a real kitchen environment (rather than a stuffy classroom or "show" kitchen) and have a spirit of fun and collaboration. After a couple of hours cooking, everyone sits down to a hard-earned (if not always flawlessly executed) meal. They'll usually send you on your way with the recipes you prepared that day.

I finish nearly every Italian meal with a gelato-fueled stroll. For many, Italy's best and most flavorful ice cream is in Florence. I stay away from places with heaping mounds of brightly (artificially) colored gelato and instead look for covered metal tins with muted-hued gelato that's more likely to be homemade. Pistachio is a good test flavor. If a stand sells bright green pistachio gelato, I move on — green is the color of the shell. You want a beige-brown pistachio ... the color of the nut. Seasonal flavors — like fico (late summer fig) or castagna (autumn chestnut) — are also a good sign.

Florence offers a wide array of foodie activities and Tuscan delicacies beyond the usual Italian pizza and pasta fare. Consider these edible experiences part of your sightseeing duty. Buon appetito!

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Musician eyes trip to New Zealand

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY



Andy Koh is celebrating the release of his aptly titled album "Taking the Long Way." **RACHEL KOH**

For Andy Koh, his October debut album "Taking the Long Way" has been four decades in the making.

Though he'd been writing songs and singing since his college days at Harvard University, his music took a back seat to his family and career as a pediatric oncologist.

Koh, who recently celebrated his 60th birthday and 30th wedding anniversary, said, "2026 has been a year of milestones. Early in my (medical) career, it was extremely difficult to find time for music. Now that I'm an established physician and scientist, and my sons are young adults, music has become increasingly important again. Music is the only thing that helps me reset. Focusing on music can stop me from replaying the loss of a patient or worrying about why an experiment didn't work in the lab. It clears my mind and helps me come back the next day with more focus and energy."

This interview with Koh has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: When did you find time to work on "Taking the Long Way"?
A: At night, on weekends and during vacations. I was also lucky to surround myself with extraordinary musicians and engineers who helped me turn my songs into the records I had been hearing in my head for decades. I've become more focused as I've gotten older. Family, medicine and music. That's all I do. I have no social life.

Q: Do your patients or their parents know about your music?
A: For the most part, no. I have always tried to keep those worlds separate. But lately my worlds are colliding. Medical colleagues and even patients' families are starting to discover this other part of my life, largely through social media. The most common reaction has been some version of being dumbfounded in a very kind and positive way. It has been very touching and a little surreal.

Q: What venue is on your bucket list?
A: Royal Albert Hall. I've attended a few concerts there, including Elvis Costello doing a solo acoustic set. It has that perfect blend of intimacy and grandeur. It feels big without feeling cold or alienating.

Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?
A: Mexico City in December. My sons are major foodies, so we have a running list of cities and countries we want to visit largely for the cuisine. We're interested in everything from street food to Michelin-starred restaurants. Mexico City has been high on the list for a long time.

Q: What childhood trip has stood out?
A: My first trip to South Korea (was) my first time outside the U.S. I was six years old and traveled with my family to Seoul and Busan to visit my parents' relatives. It was an overwhelming visual, cultural, emotional and sensory experience. Most of it was amazing, particularly the food and being surrounded by Korean language and culture. Other parts were difficult to process, including the poverty and encountering bathrooms that were definitely not what I was accustomed to.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?
A: New Zealand. I've never been to that part of the world. And full disclosure, our whole family is full of "The Lord of the Rings" nerds. So yes, we would love to see some of the places where the movies were filmed. The landscape is insanely beautiful.

Q: What is your best and worst vacation memory?
A: Best was a family trip to Japan and South Korea to celebrate my sons' college and high school graduations. My sons designed most of the itinerary and I forced myself to put aside my micromanaging tendencies and let them be in charge. It turned out to be wonderful. Worst was a trip to the Azores that never happened. We were supposed to go with my wife's family, but our flight was canceled because of wildfire-related travel disruptions. The next available flight was several days later. So we canceled the trip and flew back to Dallas for an staycation.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Driver charged extra $650 after rental car returned 3 hours late

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I rented a car through Europcar for a trip to France last summer. I had a voucher through my travel agency specifically stating that "unlimited mileage is included with this vehicle." I paid $670 for a 27-day rental.

Everything seemed fine until I returned the car at Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport. I was about 3 hours late because of some local traffic.

When I received my final bill from Europcar, I was shocked to see an additional charge of $650 for "additional kilometers."

I contacted my travel agent to point out that my contract promised unlimited miles.

After a month of silence and weekly follow-ups, I finally got a response. My agent told me that because the rental was extended by one day due to my late return, the mileage conditions changed in accordance with the terms and conditions. It claimed that neither the agency nor I decide the amount charged — the rental supplier determines it based on its own pricing policy.

I'd be happy to pay for one extra day of rental, but $650 for a 3-hour delay feels like highway robbery.

Europcar has since told me it conducted a "thorough investigation" and considers the matter resolved.

Can you help me get a refund for these overcharges?

— George Meyer, in Fair Oaks, California

A: If you reserve a car with unlimited mileage, this feature shouldn't vanish into thin air just because you hit a traffic jam on the way to the airport. I do think you might've avoided this by leaving a little earlier for the airport.

In France, returning a car more than 29 minutes late often triggers a charge for an entire extra day. Usually, this just means paying a daily rate, but your case hit a regulatory trip wire. (I'll get to the explanation in a minute.)

You did the right thing by starting a paper trail with your travel advisor and rental agency.

Your travel agent should've stepped up to help you, but it didn't. The agency also failed to respond to my advocacy team's request for help.

Next stop: Europcar. When the front-line agents gave you the brush-off, you could have sent a polite appeal to the executives at Europcar. I publish their names and email addresses on my advocacy site at Elliott.org.

So, what went wrong here? Vincent Vevaud, a spokesman for Europcar Mobility Group, explained the problem.

Your 27-day rental had unlimited mileage, but your 3-hour delay pushed the rental to 28 days.

"In line with EU regulation, rentals exceeding 27 days fall into a different category than short-term rental, with different rules applying," Vevaud says. "Notably, the 28-day rate does not include unlimited mileage, but rather 3,750 kilometers with additional kilometers charged."

The fine print feels like a trap. Because no one clearly warned you that a few extra hours would change the entire structure of your mileage plan, Europcar has agreed to refund the $650.

Next time you're driving in France, remember that the 28th day is the most expensive one you'll ever buy!

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.