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The Tech
Established 1881

Volume 146, Number 14

Thursday, September 10, 2026

WEATHER, p. 2

THU: 77°F | 51°F
Sunny.

FRI: 77°F | 63°F
Sunny.

SAT: 75°F | 61°F
Rain.

In Memoriam: Thomas Rose, archaeometallurgist

Rose died on Sept. 2 due to injuries sustained in an accident on Aug. 21

By Jada Ogueh and Samuel Yuan
NEWS EDITOR

Thomas Rose, an assistant professor of materials science, died on Sept. 2 due to injuries sustained in a bicycle accident. Rose was 37.

Rose was struck by a car on his bicycle at the intersection of Memorial Drive and Massachusetts Avenue around 6 a.m. on Friday, Aug. 21, just a couple yards from Maseeh Hall. The incident is under investigation by the Massachusetts State Police.

An archaeometallurgist who joined MIT this January, Rose was still setting up his lab. According to his colleagues in the Department of Materials Science, he was looking forward to teaching his first class at MIT, 3.984 (Materials in Ancient Societies I), this fall.

"It's an archeological materials graduate class. With Thomas coming, we were all excited about him teaching because of his geochemistry background," said Senior Lecturer Michael Tarkanian '00 SM '03, who worked closely with Rose. "We've had one of the biggest enrollments in recent memory, partially because people wanted to take the class with Thomas."

Born in Berlin, Rose earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Goethe University Frankfurt. In 2023, he completed his Ph.D. in archaeology through a joint doctoral program at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Sapienza Università di Roma. His doctoral research focused on the emergence of copper pyrotechnology in Western Asia.

Before joining the Institute, Rose researched in Germany at Deutsches Bergbau Museum Bochum and Goethe University Frankfurt. His work blending archeology, geochemistry, and materials science made him a valuable asset to the materials science department.

"Thomas's expertise in archeo-metallurgy was unique. It took our department decades to find a faculty who would be a world-class metallurgist and a world-class archeologist. He was a unicorn," wrote Professor Polina Anikeeva, head of the Department of Materials Science and Engineering.

At MIT, Rose served as a faculty member in the Center for Materials Research in Archaeology and Ethnology (CMRAE). He was set to be the successor to a rich history of pioneering professors at MIT exploring the intersection of archeology and metallurgy.

"Professor Cyril Stanley Smith, the lead metallurgist on the Manhattan Project, spent his career after the 60s working on archeological metals at MIT. Then, Professors Heather Lechman and Dorothy Hostler came to the department and they retired," Tarkanian said. "Thomas was hired to fill that archeological medals role. There are other people in the department that do archeological materials work. But Thomas was the only professor that was doing solely archeological work."

Rose was also elected as the president of the Young Earth Scientists Germany chapter, which serves to support young researchers under 35 in geosciences, foster international collaboration within the discipline, and strengthen outreach.

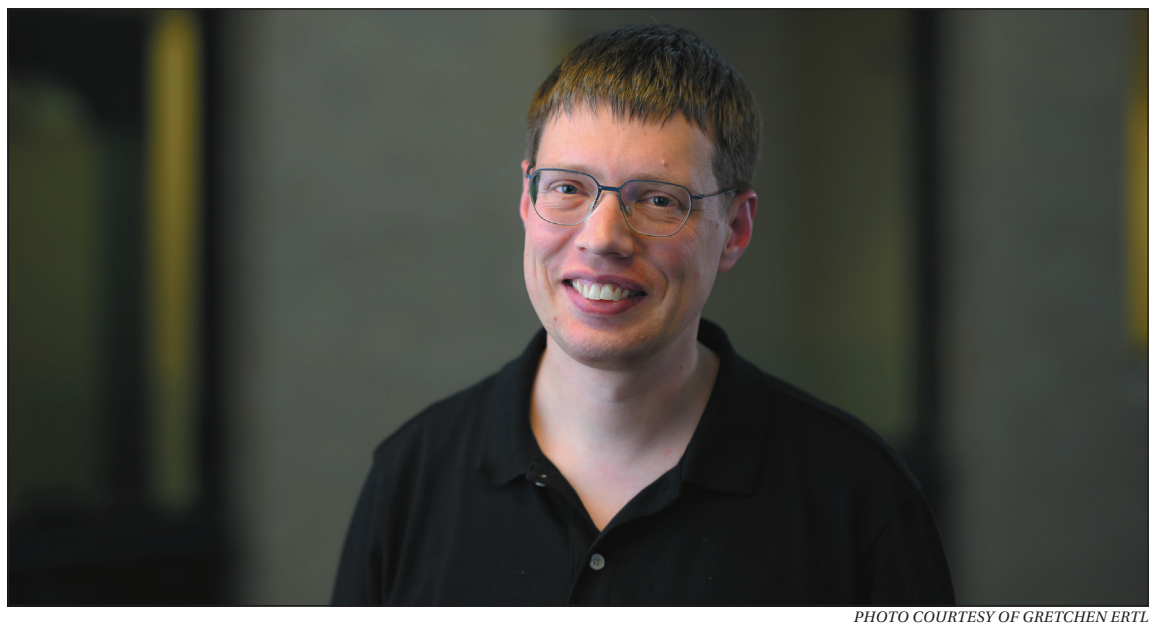


PHOTO COURTESY OF GRETCHEN ERTL

MIT Assistant Professor Thomas Rose was 37 when he died on Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2026.

This is not the first time an MIT community member has been a victim of a fatal bicycle-car collision. In 2024, Minh-Thi Nguyen, a third-year graduate student studying experimental physics, was killed while riding her bike home near Kendall Square. In 2013, MIT visiting scientist Dr. Kanako Miura died at 36 after being struck by a motor vehicle while riding her bicycle in Boston's Back Bay neighborhood.

In a statement to *The Tech,* the City of Cambridge noted that Memorial Drive is a state road, and, as such, is managed primarily by state agencies. According to the city's annual crime report, there were 197 reports of bicycle crashes in Cambridge in 2024. In recent years, Memorial Drive has received and is still undergoing several upgrades, catalyzed in part by a cyclist's 2024 death.

While his colleagues knew him as an incredibly dedicated and passionate academic, Rose enjoyed rowing on the Charles and was a member of MIT's Archery Club outside the classroom.

"I think he was all in on MIT. He was here all the time, day and night, focused on getting his lab up and running and training students," Tarkanian said.

"He was filled with a genuine sense of wonder and excitement. MIT was his dream-come-true. Thomas was just so happy to be pursuing his vision and working with his students. He was humble and kind and curious," Professor Anikeeva wrote.

Most of all, though, those who worked closely with him remember Rose for the warmth and humility he brought as a person.

"It's difficult to lose a colleague and a brilliant person that you could see succeeding academically at MIT. And it's even more difficult to lose someone with those attributes that also was a great person," Tarkanian said. "Us missing him as a person is the worst part of all this. I really liked him a lot. It's a total tragedy."

Dimethymercury scare closes Building 18 for 4 days

Blood tests and lab surfaces did not show evidence of dimethylmercury exposure

By Grace Zhang
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

From 1 p.m. on Aug. 27 through 6 a.m. on Aug. 31, Building 18 — home to the Department of Chemistry — was shut down due to a report of potential dimethylmercury contamination. Blood tests and lab surface testing did not indicate exposure to the toxic substance; the building is open but under 24-hour card access.

According to the Institute's official emergency response, a graduate student working in Building 18 "self-reported to a local emergency room and claimed to have synthesized dimethyl mercury." Their blood test on Aug. 29 "show[ed] no sign of exposure to mercury."

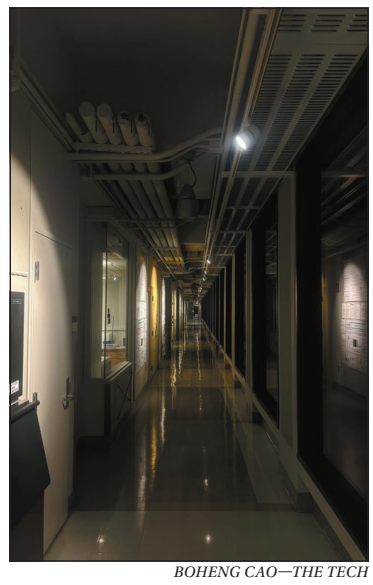
"Emerging information calls into question whether [dimethylmercury] was in fact synthesized," the notice added.

Dimethylmercury is an extremely toxic substance, and exposure to low amounts of it — for instance, through inhalation or skin absorption — is known to be fatal if left untreated. In 1997, Karen Wetterhahn, a professor of chemistry at Dartmouth College, died of mercury poisoning ten months after two drops of the substance permeated her latex gloves.

In an email to the chemistry department, professor and department head Matthew Shoulders wrote, "MIT does not allow the purchase or synthesis of dimethylmercury."

Initial response

Around 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 26, MIT Environment, Health, and Safety (EHS), the Cambridge Fire Department, and Pro EMS responded to the incident, which occurred on the second floor of Building 18 in the Wendlandt Lab. According to police radio logs, EHS shut down the second floor and the individual returned to their suite at Ashdown House following the incident, but was soon sent to Massachusetts General Hospital. Given the potential contamination, MIT Police quarantined their room that night.



BOHENG CAO—THE TECH

The fifth floor of Building 18 on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2026. The building was closed on Thursday, Aug. 27, following a report of dimethylmercury contamination the previous night.

According to an email from Shoulders, hazardous waste management firm Triumvirate Environmental wiped down surfaces and safely disposed of items that were potentially contaminated overnight. The following day, on Aug. 27, the Institute shut down all of Building 18 to eliminate any possible remaining contaminants. Around 11 a.m., those within the chemistry department received an email that recommended surveillance testing to anyone who entered the lab the previous day, and MIT Health also offered testing to any individual who "spent more than a few minutes yesterday inside common rooms of the second and fifth floor of Building 18.

Reopening of Building 18

Building 18 reopened at 6 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 31 after the completion of decontamination efforts. No blood test showed mercury levels consistent with dimeth-

Dimethymercury, Page 2

9/9 IN SHORT

The registration deadline is Friday, Sept. 11. A $50 late fee applies after this date.

First quarter Physical Education & Wellness classes begin on Monday, Sept. 14.

Come learn more about *The Tech* at our first GBM at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 14.

The last day to add half-term subjects offered in the first half of term is Friday, Sept. 18.

Interested in joining *The Tech*? Email *tt-join@mit.edu*

Send news and tips to *tt-tips@mit.edu*

IN THE MAKING

Tackling new projects in persuit of an art and design major. **CAMPUS LIFE, p.3**

THREAT TO BIOTECH: CHINA

Debate on whether China will weaken the U.S. position in biotechnology. **SCIENCE, p. 7**

ABOVE THE PAY GRADE

Kawhi Leonard breaches the NBA's salary cap. **SPORTS, p. 6**

WHERE'S THE MONEY?

Context into MIT financials. **OPINION, p. 8**

SECTIONS

WEATHER WEATHER WEATHER WEATHER WEATHER

Today
Sunny.
85°F
29°C
Wind Speed: 15–20 mph.
Gusts: 35 mph.
Direction: W.

Tonight
Partly Cloudy.
58°F
14°C
Wind Speed: 5–10 mph.
Gusts: 15 mph.
Direction: NW.

Friday
Sunny.
77°F 51°
25°C | 11°C
Wind Speed: 5–10 mph.
Gusts: 20 mph.
Direction: NW.

Saturday
Sunny.
77°F 63°
25°C | 17°C
Wind Speed: 5–10 mph.
Gusts: 15 mph.
Direction: SE.

Sunday
Rain.
75°F 61°
24°C | 16°C
Wind Speed: 5–10 mph.
Gusts: 25 mph.
Direction: S.

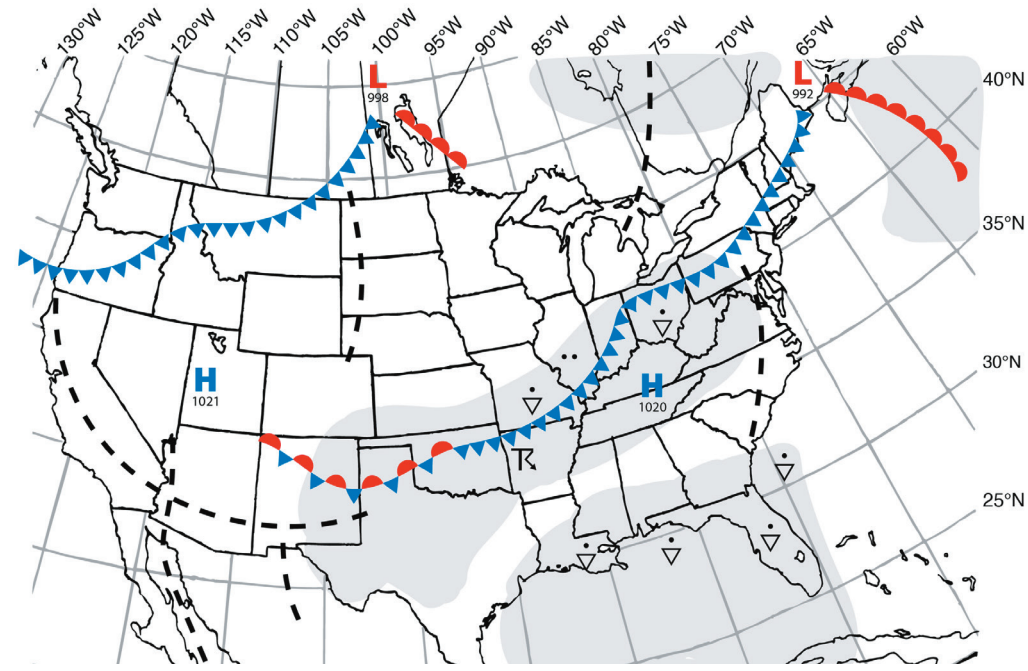
Weather to turn cooler as we head into fall

By Conrad Straden
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

The weather has been quite pleasant for the first week of classes. Today, it will get a little warmer, topping out in the mid 80s with strong westerly winds. Higher pressure will move into the region on Friday, bringing lots of sunshine but also cooler nighttime temperatures. Friday night will cool off into the low 50s, meaning it will be time to break out a sweater. Saturday will be nice as well — definitely a day worth spending outside. On Sunday, a warm front will push up from the Mid-Atlantic, bringing with it some moderate rain showers throughout the day. The weather next week looks to be fairly sunny and dry, with high temperatures expected to be in the mid 70s through the following weekend.

On another note, we are losing daylight fast. Starting Saturday, sunsets will now be before 7 p.m., with it getting 1.7 minutes earlier each day on average this month.

To the right is the synoptic chart for 2 p.m. EDT today, Thursday, Sept. 10.



Weather Systems	Weather Fronts	Precipitation Symbols			Other Symbols
H High Pressure	Trough		Snow	Rain	Fog
L Low Pressure	Warm Front	Showers	* ▽	• ▽	Thunderstorm
§ Hurricane	Cold Front	Light	*	•	Haze
	Stationary Front	Moderate	**	••	
		Heavy	***	•••	

Compiled by MIT Meteorology Staff and The Tech

Building 18 reopens

Dimethymercury, from Page 1

ylmercury exposure, and while surface wipe tests of the student's desk and fume hood in the Wendlandt Lab "tested positive for extraordinarily low levels of mercury," the results are not "at all" indicative of dimethylmercury synthesis, according to an internal email from Shoulders.

Due to "increased interest," Building 18 is currently on 24-hour card access until further notice. In an email to the chemistry department, Shoulders wrote that graduate student who was involved has been banned from MIT's campus and their card access has been disabled.

Speaking on behalf of Shoulders and the chemistry department, MIT spokesperson Kimberly Allen declined to arrange an interview with *The Tech*.

"While the building reopening is an important milestone, folks have been through a deeply challenging time together," Allen wrote. "Everyone's continued patience and kindness is deeply appreciated as the department moves forward."

MIT EHS did not respond to requests for comment regarding future lab safety precautions.

CONRAD STRADEN—THE TECH

A truck operated by hazardous waste management firm Triumvirate Environmental outside of Ashdown House on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2026.

Want to draw graphics that engage, provoke, and speak to the MIT community?
Become an editorial cartoonist for *The Tech*.
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This issue of The Tech is sponsored by:
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FROSH FILES

Progressively pursuing more and more painful and tedious crafts

(until I'm convinced I want to be a 4B major)

By Shelly Yang
CAMPUS LIFE EDITOR

I've called myself an indecisive person many times. For example, whenever I'm hanging out with my friends, I struggle with choosing what to do, but once we figure out an activity, I enjoy planning the logistics of it. When someone asks me whether we should go for Thai or Greek food — two wildly different cuisines — I freeze up, my only vocabulary becoming "I don't know" or "you choose."

But what I've realized is that I do have strong opinions and wants. I will never pass down an opportunity to go figure skating, even if the weather doesn't call for it. I don't typically like Mexican food, because it's usually too spicy for me. So in reality, I don't think I'm all too indecisive; I think the more accurate description is that I just want to try everything while bounded by limited time, hence facing endless decision paralysis.

When I first entered MIT, I was certain I wanted to pursue Course 6-9 (Computation and Cognition). In high school, I really loved my biology class, and attended a summer camp on computational neuroscience. I ended up really liking that, and read a ton of books about ailments, medicine, and of course, the brain. In fact, I was so certain about my path that I thought if I found out that the major wasn't for me, I would be completely, utterly screwed.

> **As cliche as it sounds, if you try your best, even though you might not finish with a project you expected, at least you will have learned something.**

Since then, I have switched majors three times: twice unofficially (in my head) and once officially through the Change of Major form. While I'm not completely, utterly screwed, I have decided to pursue more and more painful and tedious crafts until I'm convinced I truly want to be a 4B (Art and Design) major, which is my current fixation.

Stop 1: Nail polish and wire flowers

I first saw this craft from someone who made swift, confident strokes with their nail polish brush across twisted wire shaped like petals on Instagram Reels. Essentially, the wire petals would act like a bubble wand that would catch the nail polish. It sounded simple enough to me!

So on a random Tuesday, my friend and I worked away at leftover wire from my jewelry kit and her assorted nail polishes. We thought this project would take us 30 minutes, maybe an hour maximum if we really stretched it. It ended up taking four hours.

First of all, shaping the wire was annoying. We realized the creator of the reel made a ton of petals per flower, so we thought shaping the wire for all the petals would be the hardest part. We were wrong.

Turns out nail polish doesn't really hold its shape, nor is it particularly elastic! We had to reshape some of our petals, because they couldn't be wider than the nail polish brush (or the nail polish couldn't reach the edges of the metal frame). On top of that, the nail polish we used resisted spreading out. When it finally did, the surface tension sometimes wasn't enough to prevent breakage across the petal's surface.

After a lot of trial and error, we realized you had to slide the brush across the wire frame very slowly so that the nail polish had enough time to solidify just enough to hold its shape. Even then, a ton of breakage would still occur, but we slowly got the gist.

Still, it was extremely time-consuming and difficult. Never trust Instagram Reels.

Stop 2: Beading

As if I hadn't accumulated enough frustration from working with wire, I decided to take on beading. Beading is the art of stringing together beads to make some sort of accessory. I figured this craft could not be any more difficult than making nail polish and wire flowers, given my very short, simple two-step game plan:

1. Create the design.

This would just involve putting an image into a pixel art generator so I would have a pattern to follow.

2. Follow the pattern.

Each pixel is a color, which would correspond to one bead. As long as I follow the pattern, I should be fine.

Since I had a lot of blue beads, I wanted to make the logo of Syncopasian, the acapella group I'm a part of. After matching the beads into the pattern I generated, I got to work.

I very quickly realized I didn't know how to work with multiple rows, because you can't just bend the wire 180 degrees to form a new row; the entire structure would be really floppy or fall apart. Working with the wire ended up being really annoying, but this was in part due to the beads I was using. They were this crystal shape and were longer than they were wide. As a result, the beads would clash into each other, and I had to manipulate the wires to go around the beads in other rows.

Additionally, some rows were really long, so I had to work wire between the two rows so they wouldn't slide against each other and become weak points.

Altogether, this project took me seven hours and all my sanity.

Stop 3: Crochet of various sizes

I've been crocheting for at least five years now. It started as a pandemic hobby, and I found that I really enjoyed how meditative it was. Plus, a fun product could come out of it!

All my crochet projects could probably be a blog post of its own, but there's one project that has stuck with me for a while: Woodstock! I originally made a normal-sized Woodstock, the Peanuts character and sidekick of Snoopy.

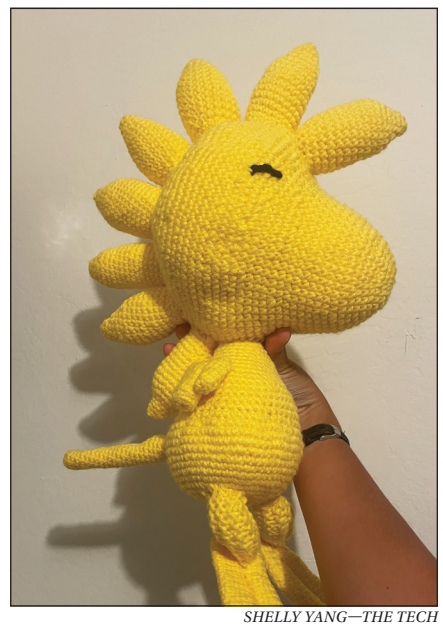
But then, I thought, what if I went *big*.

Like, really big.

Instead of going out to purchase a thicker yellow yarn, I opted for the same yarn I used for the normal-sized Woodstock, thinking I would fare just fine. I was so wrong.

I unfortunately didn't keep track of how long this large Woodstock took me, but I'm sure it was at least twenty hours. But if I used thicker yarn, it probably would've taken me the same amount of time as the normal-sized Woodstock…

For three years, I kept these two Woodstocks together, and didn't think I would crochet anything related to them for a while. That was until I looked at my embroidery threads this summer and thought, what if I went *tiny*?



SHELLY YANG—THE TECH

CHUNGUS Woodstock.

And so I did. Armed with my 1 mm. crochet hook, I spent a couple hours making a tiny Woodstock.

Let's play two truths and a lie:

1. I have never broken a single bone in my body.

2. I learned how to swim the summer before junior year of high school.

3. I used my 1 mm. crochet hook for all three projects.

The lie is #2. (I learned the summer before college.)

Small but mighty, my 1 mm. crochet hook took on all three sizes of Woodstock. While my hands didn't take a hit, my eyes probably did.

All of these difficult projects are to say that I believe you can do anything, if you put your mind to it. As cliche as it sounds, if you try your best, even though you might not finish with a project you expected, at least you will have learned something.

Next semester, I'm taking 4.354 (Introduction to Video and Related Media) and 4.031 (Design Studio: Objects and Interaction), and I'm really excited for both. Even though I still have major decision paralysis (see what I did there), for now, I am settled on those classes to work towards my 4B major. But who knows: tomorrow is another day, and the tides can change.

L.A. Clippers' future in jeopardy after NBA finds $28 million no-show deal

The NBA determined that the Los Angeles Clippers circumvented the salary cap, handing them the largest punishment in NBA history

By Tei Kim

On Sept. 3, 2025, investigative sports journalist Pablo Torre published a 1-hour-20-minute-long video on his podcast "Pablo Torre Finds Out," accusing the Los Angeles Clippers of paying Kawhi Leonard under the table. Aspiration, a sustainability-as-a-service company, accumulated an impressive list of celebrity endorsers: Robert Downey Jr., Leonardo DiCaprio, Drake, etc. But after the company filed for bankruptcy, Torre combed through thousands of documents and found an unexpected name at the top. The most lucrative deal wasn't for Downey Jr., DiCaprio, or any celebrity who publicly endorsed Aspiration. It was a $28 million deal for Leonard requiring him to do absolutely nothing. Torre suspected that through this deal, Leonard and the Clippers were circumventing the NBA's salary cap, which limits how much a team can spend on its players.

After a year-long independent investigation by the law firm Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, the NBA confirmed Torre's findings and gave the Clippers the largest punishment ever imposed on a North American professional sports franchise. Team owner Steve Ballmer must pay a $30 million fine and is banned from any league and team activities for a year, Kawhi Leonard must pay a $700,000 fine, President of Business Operations Gillian Zucker is suspended without pay for a year, and President of Basketball Operations Lawrence Frank is suspended without pay for six months. The Clippers also lost every future first-round pick from 2029 to 2033, severely hindering their ability to stay young and field talented prospects out of the draft.

How did Kawhi Leonard tempt the Clippers into this sticky situation?

To understand how the Clippers got themselves into this situation, we must travel back to the summer of 2019. Kawhi Leonard led the Toronto Raptors to their first championship in franchise history, punctuated by one of the most iconic shots in NBA history: a Game 7 buzzer-beater against the Philadelphia 76ers that bounced off the rim four times before going in. As the best player in the league at the time, Leonard became the most sought-after free agent in the 2019 offseason. His options eventually narrowed down to returning to Toronto, joining the Los Angeles Lakers, or joining the Los Angeles Clippers.

Leonard heavily recruited Paul George, who had recently finished third in MVP voting and also expressed significant interest in going to Los Angeles, to join him. On July 6, 2019, the Clippers signed Leonard and acquired George in exchange for a historic haul of Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Danilo Gallinari, five unprotected future first-round picks, and two pick swaps from the Oklahoma City Thunder. However, the signing came with major controversy, primarily because of the requests from Leonard's primary business representative and adviser Dennis Robertson, who is also Leonard's uncle (Uncle Dennis).

During free agency discussions with the Lakers and Raptors, Uncle Dennis made several requests that directly violated the salary cap. He reportedly asked for a percentage of team ownership, a private plane, a house, and guaranteed off-the-court endorsement money once Leonard signed with the team. While Uncle Dennis made the same requests to the Clippers, the organization did not report any of these requests to the NBA.

The Clippers directly facilitated endorsement deals for Leonard during COVID-19

When the NBA and the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) agreed on the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in April 2023, one of its main objectives was to limit how much teams can spend on players to create a balanced and competitive league. To do so, the CBA strictly prohibits circumvention of the salary cap, meaning that teams cannot compensate the player outside of their standard NBA contract. Teams also cannot affirmatively introduce players to third-party business parties. The one exception is that if a partner initially requests to connect with a player, the team can provide their contact information but cannot further facilitate the relationship.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Uncle Dennis reached out to Ballmer and Frank, frustrated that the Clippers were not securing enough off-the-court endorsement deals for Leonard. He requested a three-to-six month plan to connect with companies and more frequent communication with Zucker on the deals.

In June 2020, Zucker sent three separate emails to Boingo Wireless, Daktronics, and Lockton Insurance in an effort to connect Leonard's representatives to company executives. On the same day that Zucker sent the second "introduction" email, paperwork for "KL2 LBS LLC" was filed. With KL2 representing Kawhi Leonard's initials and his jersey number, the timing of the filing suggests that Leonard's camp already anticipated a payment before they even met the companies to discuss the endorsement details. It was also unusual that the companies were signing and paying Leonard during the pandemic, a period of major economic instability.

The Clippers' role in facilitating these deals for Leonard became clear with their Daktronics partnership. In the spring of 2020, Daktronics sought a contract to provide the scoreboard and signage technology at the Clippers' newly finished arena. The Clippers wanted to arrange a "spend back" deal where Daktronics would provide business back; Zucker proposed that Daktronics could fulfill this by simply paying Leonard $3 million per year for two years.

In July 2020, Daktronics agreed out of fear that declining the agreement would impact their chances of securing a contract with the Clippers. In February 2021, the Clippers' executive who outlined the terms insisted that Daktronics pay Leonard an additional $2 million the second year because the team spent more on the scoreboard than initially planned. The Clippers were not merely connecting Leonard with a sponsor, but were actively negotiating the value of his endorsement compensation.

Ballmer ensured that Leonard's deal with Aspiration would successfully go through

In August 2021, Leonard signed a maximum contract extension with the Clippers: $176.3 million over four years. A few weeks later, the Clippers negotiated a 23-year $382.5 million sponsorship agreement with Aspiration to become a founding arena partner and be on the Clippers' jersey patch, another agreement for Aspiration to provide sustainability services to the arena, and a separate agreement by Ballmer to personally invest $50 million into Aspiration. In October 2021 — after deals were finalized — Zucker met with Joe Sanberg, co-founder and board member of Aspiration. After presenting the idea of securing endorsement details between Aspiration and the Clippers' players, Zucker helped Sanberg structure a deal for Leonard.

PHOTO FROM CHENSIYUAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 4.0 INTERNATIONAL)

Kawhi Leonard prepares to shoot a free throw in Game 2 of the 2019 NBA Finals on Sunday, June 2. Leonard was playing for the Toronto Raptors at the time before signing with the Clippers in the offseason immediately after. He was recently fined $700,000 for salary cap circumvention related to his off-the-court endorsement deals facilitated by the Clippers.

The final agreement required Aspiration to pay Leonard $7 million in cash and $5 million in equity per year for four years, totaling $48 million. The deal was never publicly announced, and the contract stated that Leonard did not have to fulfill any obligations if they did not align with his "beliefs." Furthermore, Section 2.10b in Leonard's contract explicitly stated that he would only receive sponsorship payments if he remained a member of the Los Angeles Clippers. In connection with this deal, Aspiration entered an agreement with the Forum, a separate arena that Ballmer owned; the Forum would pay Aspiration on a quarterly basis corresponding to the exact amount Aspiration paid Leonard. When negotiations between the Clippers and Aspiration were stalling, Ballmer himself stepped in to execute the Forum deal.

In retrospect, the Clippers have absolutely nothing to show for the Kawhi Leonard era. Even worse, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the rookie they traded for Paul George alongside multiple first-round picks, blossomed into a two-time MVP and led the Thunder to a championship last year. The Clippers recently traded Leonard to the Toronto Raptors, giving him an opportunity to pursue a championship alongside star Scottie Barnes. Meanwhile, the Clippers are stuck in a stacked Western conference, not having their own first-round pick until 2033. The NBA has sent a strong message to all teams, ensuring that the price of circumventing rules can extend far beyond a fine or a lost draft pick; it can alter the franchise's trajectory for years to come.

Endpoints News presents 'The China biotech debate: Boston'

On Thursday, Aug. 6, about 200 venture capitalists, academics, and biotech company directors gathered to hear a series of panels titled 'The China biotech debate: Boston'

By Katherine Liu
COPY CHIEF

In America's current era of uncertain research funding, the biotechnology industry is no exception to the ambiguity. However, this domestic policy erosion is only one of two threats outlined by the American Biosecurity Initiative (ABI), an organization dedicated to protecting biotech's critical role as national security infrastructure.

The other threat, according to them, is China.

On Thursday, Aug. 6, about 200 venture capitalists, academics, and biotech company directors gathered in the Koch Institute's Luria Auditorium to hear a series of panels titled "The China biotech debate: Boston." The event was hosted by Endpoints News, an independent news organization reporting on biotech and the pharmaceutical industry; it was sponsored by ABI and the Koch. Attendees wore name tags representing institutions like J.P. Morgan, Moderna, the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology, as well as countless other biotech companies of all stages.

In his welcome remarks, Endpoints Editor-in-Chief Drew Armstrong called China's rise in biotech "the most important story of the next half-decade." As evidenced by the state of the room, where every seat was taken and additional listeners stood in the back, the professionals of Cambridge, Mass. share a similar sentiment.

Attendees comment on Chinese collaboration

"It's not even enough to say you can't ignore China anymore. They are the biggest leaders of the ecosystem," remarked John Jung, a business development manager at Korean biotech company Proteina. Chinese biotech presence is particularly influential in the eastern hemisphere, Jung said, reflecting on how his company and country must figure out a way to "find its own niche" in comparison to such a dominant competitor.

Lisa Raffensperger, a senior vice president at biotech-focused public relations company Ten Bridge Communications, has seen the way American companies have changed their strategies in response to China's growing dominance. She says there are now options to partner with China, outsource research to China, and otherwise take advantage of China's expanding biotech resources.

Of course, the ever-hanging question is the foreign country's role as competition. Raffensperger names one consequential benefit for American companies: the rivalry forces them to accelerate their own clinical processes and achieve the best result faster. "It's pushing us all to something better," she reflected.

Cissy Young, a life sciences and venture capital managing director at True Search, a talent management company, shared the positive outlook. "Competition globally is healthy for the entire ecosystem for advancing innovation [and] for the sake of better medicines for patients," Young explained.

Every interviewee was excited to hear in-depth discussions on strategy on China from leaders on the biotech forefront. There was also anticipation regarding the gathering of so many industry professionals. "These kinds of events are the exact reason why we have [a] presence in Boston… we could network and potentially meet future partners," Jung said.

In his opening remarks, Armstrong named Cambridge as one of the "four real centers of power in the biopharma world," alongside San Francisco and, humorously, the entirety of the U.S. and Europe.

The change that drove the talks is how China is quickly becoming the fifth. Jennifer Crook, the executive director of ABI, shared in her speech that one third of new American drug candidates had origins in China, and that China leads the U.S. in clinical trials by 20%. Yet Crook believes that "America is still ahead, and the moment to secure an advantage is while you still hold it."

With that, the debates began.

> **America needs to have and maintain the best frontier in order to maintain independence and not be "held hostage" in another global emergency situation like COVID-19, but completely decoupling from China was probably not the best move.**

Increasing costs, decreasing innovation

The first pair of panelists was Jacob Becraft PhD '19, cofounder and CEO of clinical stage biotech company Strand Therapeutics and Matt Gline, CEO of drug development parent company Roivant Sciences, for a debate titled "Has China changed how we build companies?"

Armstrong, acting as the moderator, opened by asking Gline about changes he has observed in biotech innovation, not only relating to China. According to Gline, one problem that the U.S. must face is the modern commoditization of the drug discovery chain: the highly profitable manufacturing step is now "cheap and easy," with novel methods being copied nationally and globally in fewer and fewer years.

Becraft diagnosed a second problem, declaring that the biotech industry has been "sick." Because of the exploding costs for a drug to reach an in-human trial, companies are hedging the capital risk by exploring only medicines already known to have a high likelihood of success.

"We are spending more and more money [while] developing less and less innovative medicines," Becraft said.

The two disagreed on the correct response to these issues. Gline called out Americans' fear of foreign medicine specifically, saying that we wouldn't have an issue if we had access to cheaper but imported hamburgers, for example. He claimed that although we should certainly have faster domestic clinical trials, we should also "just be excited" that China's efficiency allows us to have more and faster clinical data.

On the other hand, Becraft maintained suspicions about the quality of Chinese data, referencing their two recent cases of undisclosed pediatric deaths in gene-editing trials. He declared that the best solutions were reform of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and national funding sources to maintain a strong national base, referencing the limited quantity of people in his PhD class who chose to continue academia because of the exclusivity of National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants.

He worried that losing out on innovation would prove detrimental in the case of another pandemic like COVID-19. "If we don't have an industrial capacity to continue inventing medicines, then we lose an incredible amount of soft power to a country that is not a global collaborator when things get tough," Becraft said.

Gline was skeptical of these concerns. "Anywhere in the world where someone invents a drug, … the thing they dream of from the minute they are at the lab bench is … access to the U.S. patient population because that's where the money is," Glenn claimed, referring to the U.S.'s high costs of medicine.

One of Gline's final points was about the historically great innovation of the U.S., pointing out how Google, OpenAI, and Ford were all founded in America, calling them the "first among the greatest innovations" in their respective sectors. By that logic, he expressed hope that the U.S. would continue succeeding and competing. "[Innovation] is about the spirit of what it means to be an American," he concluded.

Protecting the U.S. biotech frontier

The second panel, titled "Investor math versus industrial priority," featured a highly anticipated debate between Jason Kelly '03 PhD '08 PD '08, the CEO of Ginkgo Bioworks, an autonomous lab company, and Peter Kolchinsky, a managing partner at RA Capital Management. The two had been quarreling via X and LinkedIn in the months leading up to the debate — Kelly is very against China while Kolchinsky is very for China. Joining the pair was MIT Sloan Professor of Entrepreneurship Fiona Murray, who also acts as the chair of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Innovation Fund.

The panel was extremely chaotic, with the two men frequently talking over each other while Armstrong and Murray tried to keep the peace. Kelly was the most emphatic of the speakers, calling himself a "China hawk" driven by his desire to protect the U.S.'s frontier in biotech and bioengineering. He argued for a complete protectionism standpoint, explaining his desire to fully prevent any drugs that originated in China from reaching the U.S. When questioned about the feasibility of the plan, he shared that 70% of the worldwide pharmaceutical market originates from American patients and voters, making it "basically a U.S. domestic industry." *(When fact-checking,* The Tech *found most reports estimated the value to be around 50%.)* Under Kelly's logic, therefore, the U.S. has the power to control exactly what comes to our country's borders.

Kolchinsky was much more open to the idea of partnership with China. He began by calling disease "a common enemy" to be defeated through global collaboration. As a biotech investor, Kolchinsky said he would always look for and fund the best possible drug in the world, not an American company that tried to copy it. He emphasized throughout the talk that the most powerful lobbying force in America was "a patient demanding a cure," and that it was unjust to deny someone what could potentially be the best solution just because it came from a foreign country, especially considering how easily a Chinese medicine could be repackaged as European to avoid all legal blockades. Although he admitted that China is "kind of an adversary," he quickly recalled how the U.S. had worked with the Soviet Union, even during the Cold War, to defeat smallpox together.

The most contentious moment between the two came when Kelly compared his ideals regarding medicine to a current national policy that prevents American autonomous vehicles from utilizing Russian or Chinese software. When Kolchinsky questioned the reasoning behind the order, Kelly continuously failed to answer the question, only managing to say that it was not allowed "because it was coming from China and Russia" and that "the president said in an executive order that it was a national security risk."

Kolchinsky accused him of "not knowing the root" behind the policy, and members of the audience were visibly agitated, echoing Kolchinsky with murmured interjections of "But why?" and "Rationale!" from their seats.

Armstrong calmed the tension and passed the mic to Murray for the final say. She concluded that the three of them would always agree that America needs to have and maintain the best frontier in order to maintain independence and not be "held hostage" in another global emergency situation like COVID-19, but that completely decoupling from China was probably not the best move. Still, she summarized that the political environment regarding biotech was clearly disunified, and that the most important priority was to "use all the tools at our disposal in the most coherent fashion."

The pharma perspective

The last talk was a solo feature of Dr. Andrew Baum, a senior strategic advisor to the CEO of Pfizer, to reveal more about big pharma's perspective on China.

Armstrong began by asking him about his thoughts regarding the first two panels. Baum seemed to agree with many of Kolchinsky and Gline's ideas, expressing optimism at the idea of using China's notoriously high clinical trial output as a way to garner more information faster. He affirmed that pharmaceutical companies would be very careful about choosing which hospitals and Chinese trials they would allow and trust, comparing it to a similar careful vetting process already existent in the U.S. He also wasn't bothered by the idea that the U.S. would somehow be accelerating China's biotech learning process, arguing, "they're going to get there without help."

In the end, Baum shared that he didn't believe a real competitive Chinese multinational pharma company would properly emerge until about ten years in the future. Even then, this timeline didn't worry him.

"China is already an important part of the ecosystem," Baum said. "Is it going to be more so in the future? Yes."

However, Baum continued with a statement that seemed to match the sentiment of all the attendees and panelists in the room. "Is it necessarily going to erode the U.S. position? It doesn't have to. It will be because we make that decision, and we have the power not to."

Re: MIT's financial records contradict its claims of austerity

Clarity and additional context on MIT's financials

By David Darmofal

To the Editor:

I am providing a response to an op-ed that appeared in the Aug. 18 issue of *The Tech*, "MIT's financial records contradict its claims of austerity," to provide some clarity and additional context.

First, as President Sally Kornbluth explained in a community letter in May 2026, and as senior leaders communicated in a November 2025 letter, MIT's central budget — a significant source of funding for graduate student stipends and benefits — faces major new financial burdens from an increase in the endowment tax rate from 1.4% to 8.0% that just took effect and reduced tuition revenue and reimbursement for research infrastructure related to 16% decrease in campus direct research activity charged to federal grants. [1] Lost research revenues also directly reduce available funds to pay stipends to graduate student research assistants. While a common suggestion is to draw down the endowment to replace these lost resources, state law requires MIT to maintain the endowment as a "permanent fund," preserve its purchasing power and spend it as directed by its source.

Second, while the living wage calculator is a useful tool, many of its assumptions (including the cost of health insurance, housing, transportation, and payroll taxes) must be modified for an MIT graduate student. Accounting for these modifications, the living wage for an MIT graduate student is approximately $46,500, which is about 10% below the minimum MIT PhD RA stipend of $51,200. MIT addresses living wage compensation and stipend rates in more detail on our Graduate Student Unionization site.

MIT will continue to pursue a fair contract for our graduate student workers that ensures they have the resources they need to thrive while reflecting the reality of the Institute's financial situation.

Sincerely,

David L. Darmofal

Vice Chancellor for Graduate and Undergraduate Education

Jerome B. Wiesner Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

[1] The figure of 16% is sourced directly from the Office of the Vice President for Finance at MIT.

OPINION POLICY

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Electronic submissions are encouraged and should be sent to tt-opinions@mit.edu. Hard copy submissions should be addressed to *The Tech*, P.O. Box 391529, Cambridge, Mass. 02139-7029, or sent by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-483. Electronic submissions will be prioritized over hard copy submissions. All submissions are due on Thursday two weeks before the date of publication (i.e. by the publication prior to the target publication).