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# STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

Volume 84 Edition 96 ©SS 2025

CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025

Free to Deployed Areas



JOHN SORENSEN/U.S. Navy

Midshipman candidates perform warm-ups during a physical training session at Recruit Training Command, Naval Station Great Lakes in Great Lakes, Ill., in 2021. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has asked the base for access to help with its operations.

# ICE eyes Great Lakes use

## Noem seeks access of Chicago-area Navy base for 'strike team'

BY DAN LAMOTHE  
*The Washington Post*

The Trump administration wants to use a Navy base north of Chicago as a launchpad for federal law enforcement activity against undocumented immigration, defense officials said Tuesday, as the White House contemplates also deploying thousands of U.S. troops to the nation's third-largest city amid rising tension with the Illinois governor.

Officials at Naval Station Great Lakes on Wednesday acknowledged having received a

request from the Department of Homeland Security that seeks "limited support" for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, whose aggressive tactics under the current administration have drawn outrage from opponents of President Donald Trump. The base, a hub for recruit training, would provide "facilities, infrastructure, and other logistical needs" if the request is granted, defense officials said in a statement.

No decisions to approve access have been made, officials said. That responsibility lies

with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who since taking office in January has eagerly pledged the Pentagon's full cooperation as DHS and its agents search for, detain and remove undocumented immigrants. He has approved the use of other military bases to build detention facilities for people in DHS custody.

The White House is determined to ramp up ICE operations, with deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller pressing for 3,000 arrests per day.

SEE USE ON PAGE 7

## Mystery clouds firm at center of Texas camp

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER  
AND JOSHUA GOODMAN  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — When President Donald Trump's administration last month awarded a contract worth up to \$1.2 billion to build and operate what it says will become the nation's largest immigration detention complex, it didn't turn to a large government contractor or even a firm that specializes in private prisons.

Instead, it handed the project on a military base to Acquisition Logistics LLC, a small business that has no listed experience running a correction facility and had never won a federal contract worth more than \$16 million. The company also lacks a functioning website and lists as its address a modest home in suburban Virginia owned by a 77-year-old retired Navy flight officer.

The mystery over the award only deepened last week as the new facility began to accept its first detainees. The Pentagon has refused to release the contract or explain why it selected Acquisition Logis-

SEE MYSTERY ON PAGE 8



PLANET LABS/AP

Construction of a new immigrant detention center at Fort Bliss, a U.S. Army base outside El Paso, Texas, on Aug. 7.

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## Ford recalls over 355K pickups over display failure

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ford is recalling more than 355,000 of its pickup trucks across the U.S. because of an instrument panel display failure that's resulted in critical information, like warning lights and vehicle speed, not showing up on the dashboard.

According to documents published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the recall covers certain Ford F-150s from the 2025 model year — as well as other Ford "Super Duty"

trucks, including 2025-2026 F-550 SD, F-450 SD, F-350 SD and F-250 SDs. A recall report dated Aug. 22 notes that the instrument panel cluster (IPC) can fail at startup, resulting in drivers seeing a blank screen.

As a result, the NHTSA notes, drivers may not be able to read critical "safety-related telltales and gauges," increasing the risk of crash. The recall report notes that Ford isn't aware of any accidents or injuries related to this issue — but had received 95 warranty

claims as of June 26.

To address the display failure, Ford is offering a free IPC software update to impacted owners. This fix will be available at authorized dealers or through an "over-the-air" update, the NHTSA notes.

In a statement sent to The Associated Press, Ford said that the over-the-air software update is "more convenient for customers compared to an in-person dealer visit." The Michigan-based auto maker added that owner notification letters will soon be sent out.

## EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Aug. 29)	0.83	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744
British pound (Aug. 29)	\$1.32	Britain (Pound)	1.3504
Japanese yen (Aug. 29)	144.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3767
South Korean won (Aug. 29)	1,354.00	China (Yuan)	7.1530
		Denmark (Krone)	6.3960
		Egypt (Pound)	48.4700
		Euro	0.8568
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7945
		Hungary (Forint)	340.14
		Israel (Shekel)	3.3289
		Japan (Yen)	147.08
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3050
		Norway (Krone)	10.0760
		Philippines (Peso)	56.99
		Poland (Zloty)	3.65
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7476
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.2832
		South Korea (Won)	1,385.23
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8015		
Thailand (Baht)	32.30		
Turkey (NewLira)	41.0408		

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES	
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.33
Federal funds market rate	4.38
3-month bill	4.18
30-year bond	4.92

## WEATHER OUTLOOK

### FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



### FRIDAY IN EUROPE



### SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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## MILITARY

# Out of sight, pinpoint strike

## Israel-made, Apache-fired missiles destroy targets in Baltic Sea test

By MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

USTKA, Poland — With the Baltic Sea as their backdrop, American and Polish troops fired a new long-range missile from Apache helicopters in a first-of-its-kind European demonstration aimed squarely at deterring Russia.

Soldiers from U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade on Wednesday launched two Spike Non-Line of Sight missiles from AH-64E Apache helicopters at the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka.

The Israeli-made missiles traveled 16 miles out to sea to destroy a pair of floating targets in pinpoint strikes that were broadcast for brass from both nations.

Apache pilots can fire the weapon without seeing their target — even from behind mountains — and without exposing themselves to the enemy, said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Weisskopf, the brigade standardization officer.

Produced by the Haifa-based Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, the Spike missile can destroy armor, air defense artillery, naval flotillas and even troop formations up to 30 miles away, or about four times the distance of

the current Hellfire missile, said Weisskopf, who is also an Apache pilot.

The demonstration in Ustka came as Russia gears up for its major Zapad military exercise with Belarus.

"This shows the Russians, 'Hey, we watch what you're doing, and we're here to deter any future aggression,'" V Corps commander Lt. Gen. Charles Costanza said prior to the exercise.

The missile launches were part of the third Polish Apache Initiative, a series of semiannual summits and exercises where U.S. Army aviators share their knowledge of tactics and maintenance, as well as train with Polish air force members.

Col. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, chief of combat aviation for the helicopter branch of the Polish military, called the event very important for the development of the Polish air force. He credited V Corps with helping the Poles build a "new strength."

Last year Poland purchased 96 Apaches, which will begin arriving in 2028. Warsaw has also been procuring upgrades to its existing tanks, jets and artillery systems. It is unclear if or when the Polish air force will obtain its own Spike NLOS missiles.



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

An Army AH-64E Apache helicopter from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade fires a Spike Non-Line of Sight missile during a Wednesday demonstration at the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka, Poland. It was the first time the Israeli-made missile had been fired in Europe.



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

The missile can be guided to its target from afar using a controller.

The missiles can lock on before or after being fired and can be guided into a target using a camera, screen and what looks like a gaming controller.

Guests at Wednesday's launches watched on a giant screen for several minutes as the munition traveled to the targets, which



GRANT HOCKLEY/U.S. Army

Soldiers load a Spike Non-Line of Sight missile onto an AH-64E Apache helicopter during a test run Tuesday.

were white boxes marked with X's.

The pilots simulated their GPS systems being jammed by an adversary, which forced them to rely on the missile's internal navigation and then manual control.

Applause erupted as the feeds showed the missiles heading for

the center of the X's, followed by static. Weisskopf called the missile a "game-changer."

"It gives U.S. Army aviation and Apaches the capability to defeat and have overmatch on (air defense artillery) systems that we did not previously have that overmatch on with," he said.

## US intercepts another Russian surveillance flight near Alaska

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

American aircraft intercepted a Russian surveillance flight Tuesday off the coast of Alaska for the fifth time in the past week, defense officials said Wednesday.

An Ilyushin IL-20 surveillance aircraft flew into the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone, according to the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the joint U.S.-Canadian air defense operation based at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado.

National borders extend 12 miles from land under international law. The ADIZ is an additional buffer zone of up to 150 miles into international airspace created by the U.S. and Canada in which visual identification of all aircraft is required.

NORAD responded by scrambling two F-16 Fighting Falcon fighters, one E-3 Sentry surveil-

**"This Russian activity in the Alaskan ADIZ occurs regularly and is not seen as a threat."**

### NORAD

lance plane, and one KC-135 Stratotanker refueling tanker to make visual contact with the Russian IL-20, a type given the NATO nickname "COOT."

"The IL-20 flew inside the ADIZ for approximately two hours and 20 minutes — the closest point of approach to the U.S. mainland was 26 nautical miles north of Shemya Island," said Canadian Armed Forces Capt. Rebecca Garand, a NORAD spokeswoman in Colorado.

Shemya Island is one of the far western Aleutian Islands, about 1,500 miles from Anchorage.

Though 2,300 miles from the nearest major Russian city, Vladivostok, the island is only a few hundred miles from northern islands that are part of Russia.

NORAD said the Russian military aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter the sovereign airspace of the United States or Canada.

"This Russian activity in the Alaskan ADIZ occurs regularly and is not seen as a threat," NORAD said Wednesday in a statement.

NORAD has logged incursions into the zone on Aug. 20, 21, 24 and

26.

The Alaskan zone stretches from the west end of the Aleutian Islands chain, across the Alaska and Canadian mainland, where it joins with the Canadian zone, which extends to St. Lawrence Island in the east.

The flurry of Russian flights into Alaska zone began five days after a meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska to discuss ending the war in Ukraine.

Russia and China have increased their military activity in the Arctic region in recent years as climate change has opened up far northern waterways to military and commercial shipping. Russia and China operated a joint flotilla through the 51-mile-wide Bering Strait that separates eastern Russia and Alaska.

Other recent Russian flights near Alaska were tracked on July 22, July 24, April 14, Feb. 18 and 19.

American and Canadian aircraft were also sent to monitor Russian aircraft over the Arctic on Jan. 30, though NORAD did not specify whether they entered the Alaska zone.

NORAD recorded 12 flights into the zone by Russian planes during 2024.

"Since Russia resumed long-range aviation activities in 2007, the number of incursions fluctuates annually, but we have seen as many as 15 in one year to as low as zero," Garand said.

The U.S. and Canada use satellites, radar, and patrolling aircraft to monitor incursions, she said.

The IL-20 is a Soviet-era electronic intelligence and reconnaissance turboprop aircraft, developed from the IL-18 turboprop airliner that first flew in March 1968.

## MILITARY

# Second B-21 expected to fly by year's end

BY ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

The second of the Air Force's newest long-range stealth bombers is expected to take flight by the end of the year, a top general said this week.

Another B-21 Raider likely will be in the air soon, Lt. Gen. Andrew Gebara said Wednesday during an online discussion hosted by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a think tank based in Washington, D.C.

The service flew its first B-21 in November 2023. The aircraft is in its final test flights.

But Gebara cautioned that the Air Force wasn't going to give the aircraft's developer, Northrop Grumman, "an artificial date that they have to make."

"That's really been the secret sauce to the B-21 right now, is no undue pressures," said Gebara,



JUAN FEMATH/U.S. Air Force

**A B-21 Raider conducts flight testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., in September.**

deputy chief of staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration. "Let them do what they're doing, and they'll get us the world's best aircraft here very soon."

Realizing that goal is eased by \$4.5 billion in additional funding for the program under the recently passed reconciliation bill, helping the Air Force and Northrop Grumman build the aircraft to

scale, he said.

The domestic policy bill gave the Pentagon \$150 billion on top of its annual budget and was signed into law by President Donald Trump on July 4.

Last month, Northrop Grumman said it was in talks with the Air Force "regarding the potential for an accelerated production ramp on the program," according to a transcript of a July 22 earn-

ings call with investors.

The Air Force is expected to buy about 100 of the bombers, which can fly intercontinentally and drop conventional and thermonuclear weapons, at a cost of nearly \$700 million each. The service's 2026 budget calls for \$10.3 billion to fund the B-21.

The sixth-generation aircraft is the result of a program aimed at producing a more technologically advanced strategic bomber to eventually replace the aging B-52 Stratofortress and the B-1.

The B-21 is the Pentagon's second stealth bomber in history after the B-2 Spirit, which entered service in the late 1990s.

On a separate topic during the Mitchell Institute event, Gebara declined to comment on recent reports that the U.S. had moved nuclear weapons to the U.K. But later, he said the B61-12 nuclear

gravity bomb is "fully deployed throughout Europe."

"NATO is a nuclear alliance," Gebara said. "The United States is a huge part of that nuclear deterrence. We provide that extended deterrence in the form of these weapons at certain locations around Europe."

In July, open-source intelligence analysts said an Air Force C-17A Globemaster III aircraft appeared to have delivered nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath.

That report followed one in January 2024 by the BBC identifying a Defense Department contract announcement for the U.S. air base related to an "upcoming nuclear mission."

Nuclear bombs were removed from Lakenheath in 2008. Since then, no nuclear weapons have been deployed to the U.K. in more than 15 years, the BBC reported.

## All NATO members projected to reach 2% spending target

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — NATO released data on Thursday showing that all its 32 members are projected to finally meet a long-standing goal of spending 2% of their overall economic output on defense this year, while only three meet a new goal set at 3.5% of GDP agreed in June.

A push for higher defense spending is one result of Russia's war in Ukraine, which has created profound security concerns across Europe.

It is also a reaction to pressure from President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly accused European allies of not investing enough in their own security. Trump has warned Europeans that Washington might not defend those who fail to meet commitments.

All 32 alliance members are expected to reach the 2% goal this year for the first time, marking a significant change since 2023, when just 10 allies met that benchmark, the NATO report said.

Alliance members agreed at summit in June to hike defense spending from 2% to 3.5% and to require a further commitment of 1.5% of GDP for spending on other measures, such as upgrading roads, bridges, ports and airfields so armies can better deploy and establishing measures to counter cyber and hybrid attacks and preparing societies for future conflict.

Germany was the sole country excluded from the NATO report's 2025 GDP count, but it already

reached the 2% target in 2024. Germany finalized its 2025 budget late after the collapse of its previous government and an election in February.

The country's Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil said in June that German defense spending will hit 2.4% of GDP in 2025 and 3.5% by 2029.

Speaking on Thursday in Wurzburg, Germany, where he was attending a political conference, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte praised Germany's accelerating militarization.

"By 2029 Germany will spend over 150 billion euros (\$175 billion) on its defense. That is more than doubling what you spent in 2021, that's almost four times of what you spent in 2018," Rutte said. "And that means that you really take the lead in Europe, and we need that in Europe. You are the second biggest economy in NATO, the biggest economy in Europe."

Countries with the highest expenditures are Eastern European nations with bitter memories of past rule by Moscow. Poland's spending this year is projected to reach 4.5% of GDP, while Lithuania's will be 4% and Latvia on 3.7%.

Many European countries, including Spain and Belgium, face major economic challenges and Trump's global tariff war could make it even harder for America's allies to reach those new defense spending targets.



ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES/AP

**Allied ships sail near the Philippine Navy BRP Jose Rizal during Exercise ALON 2025 on Wednesday.**

## Australia, Canada, Philippines stage air defense drills off shoal

*Associated Press*

MANILA, Philippines — Australia, Canada and the Philippines deployed three warships and aircraft Wednesday for drills against simulated aerial threats off a disputed South China Sea shoal where Chinese forces have used risky maneuvers to try to drive away Manila's aircraft and ships.

The Philippine military said the naval drills east of the Scarborough Shoal were concluded safely, and it did not mention any encounter with Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships which have been closely guarding the uninhabited fishing atoll off the northwestern Philippines for years.

Chinese officials did not immediately issue any comment on the naval drills but they have repeatedly warned that they would defend the shoal and outlying waters, which they claim as Beijing's territory, at all cost.

China and the Philippines claim Scarborough and other is-

lands, islets and reefs in the South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also lay overlapping claims in the busy waterway, a key global trade route.

The United States has no claims but has questioned China's claim to virtually the entire sea passage, including to Scarborough. Two U.S. warships sailed off the shoal this month to promote freedom of navigation and were shadowed by a Chinese navy ship.

Sailing from a western Philippine province, the Royal Australian Navy's guided-missile destroyer HMAS Brisbane, Canadian navy frigate HMCS Ville de Quebec and a Philippine navy guided-missile frigate BRP Jose Rizal conducted exercises east of the shoal, including the "air defense exercise that honed the participants' capability to counter simulated aerial threats through coordinated defensive maneuvers," the Philippine military said in a brief statement.

Video footage and photographs

issued by the Philippine military show at least three fighter jets soaring in the sky during the drills while two combat helicopters separately flew near the Philippine navy frigate.

"This engagement reaffirms the Armed Forces of the Philippines' commitment to advancing defense cooperation with like-minded nations," it said.

The drills were among the final activities of the largest military exercises Australia has staged with the Philippines that involved more than 3,600 military personnel for 15 days of live-fire and battle maneuvers that would end on Friday.

One of Asia's most sensitive flashpoints, the Scarborough Shoal has been closely guarded by China's forces, which suffered a setback on Aug. 11 when a Chinese navy ship accidentally collided with a Chinese coast guard ship while trying to block a Philippine coast guard vessel near the shoal.

## PACIFIC



GURO FIRE STATION

These M26 grenades were found within a rice cooker inside a dumpster at Wooshin High School in Seoul, South Korea, on Saturday.

## South Korean army disposes of leftover wartime grenades

By DAVID CHOI  
AND YOJIN LEE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Three hand grenades discovered at a high school in South Korea's capital and on a hill inside the city prompted two separate emergency responses by the South Korean army within a week, according to spokesmen from local fire stations.

A janitor at Wooshin High School, in the Guro District of western Seoul, found a pair of Korean War-era M26 grenades Saturday within a rice cooker inside a dumpster, a spokesman for the Guro Fire Station said Thursday.

Army explosive ordnance disposal technicians retrieved the grenades about 90 minutes later, the spokesman said.

Police determined that a faculty member found the grenades on the campus July 29 and kept them in the rice cooker believing they were not a threat, the spokesman said.

An M26 grenade weighs a pound, about a third of it in explosives, and detonates within 4 to 5 seconds after being triggered, according to a U.S. Army technical manual dated June 1966.

The South Korean army did not

immediately respond to a request for comment. South Korean government officials speak to the media on the customary condition of anonymity.

Following the incident, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education held an emergency meeting Monday to review safety protocols at its schools, according to a news release from the office.

"We take this case seriously, and we will prioritize students' right to learn and their safety," office superintendent Jeong Geun-sik said in the release. "We will do our utmost to preemptively eliminate danger in schools and provide a safe educational environment."

In a separate incident Wednesday 15 miles east of the school, a passerby found an unspecified grenade near Daemo Mountain, a 960-foot hill in the Gangnam District with scenic views of the capital city, according to a Gangnam Fire Station spokesman.

The person placed the grenade on a pile of stones before calling the police, said the spokesman Thursday. Military explosive technicians retrieved the grenade and no injuries were reported, he said.

# Marines extend Reaper deployment at Okinawa

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps plans to keep a group of MQ-9A Reaper drones on Okinawa indefinitely beyond their original yearlong deployment, according to Japan's Ministry of Defense.

Fewer than six of the unmanned aerial vehicles arrived at Kadena Air Base on Aug. 13, 2024. They belong to Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3, Marine Aircraft Group 24, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The Reapers were scheduled to stay one year while conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities around the Nansei region, a spokeswoman with the prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division said at the time.

The extended stay continues an increased presence of U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles that began with Air Force Reapers in 2023 and was boosted by Navy Tritons in April. Two Tritons also operated from Kadena between May and October 2024.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of the ministry, announced the continuing Reaper presence on its website Wednesday, citing the "increased severity of the security environment surrounding Japan."

"Japan and the U.S. confirmed the need to further deepen their cooperation in [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] activities during the '2+2' meeting held in July last year," the release said. The 2+2 meeting was a Tokyo summit by former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, former Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Japan's defense and foreign affairs ministers at the time.

First Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman 2nd Lt. B.K. Rhodes confirmed the drones are still at Kadena but declined to confirm an extended deployment or disclose the exact number of aircraft.

"This rotational deployment



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

A Marine Corps MQ-9A Reaper assigned to Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 parks in a hangar on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, on March 21.

supports training in the region," he said. "Operating from Japan provides VMU-3 with realistic domain awareness training that will increase proficiency to help provide critical support to Marines, the Joint Force, and our Japanese Allies in support of the defense of Japan."

The Nansei island chain — also known as the Ryukyu Islands — stretches from Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, to Taiwan.

China in recent years has been conducting more drone flights around Taiwan and near Japanese airspace. In June, its military carried out Pacific drills involving both of its aircraft carriers — the Shandong and Liaoning — for the first time.

Defense bureau officials explained the extended deployment to the prefecture during a meeting in Okinawa's capital city, Naha, on Wednesday, a Military Base Affairs Division spokesman said by phone that day. Fewer than 20 personnel will remain deployed with the aircraft, he said.

"We told the bureau that the deadline was about one year, so we asked them to adhere to it," the spokesman said. "We asked them to clarify how long the aircraft will be deployed."

The Air Force and the Navy have also deployed drones to Kadena in recent years.

Air Force Reapers with the 319th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron have flown intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions over Japan's southern island chain from Kadena since 2023.

An unspecified number of Navy MQ-4C Tritons deployed to Kadena in April from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Moroney said. The aircraft, assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., came with about 50 supporting personnel.

Tritons are primarily intelligence-gathering, reconnaissance and surveillance vehicles.

They can fly for more than 24 hours at altitudes above 50,000 feet with a range of 7,400 miles, according to their maker, Northrop Grumman.

The Marines and Air Force employ the Reaper for the same mission; the Air Force highlights its ability to carry up to eight air-to-ground Hellfire missiles, according to official websites for each service.

The Tritons' mission on Okinawa is "a long-planned temporary deployment in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations and is not in response to any provocation or action," Moroney said.

## USS New Orleans steams back to Sasebo after onboard fire

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WHITE BEACH NAVAL FACILITY, Okinawa — The USS New Orleans left Okinawa on Thursday for its homeport in Japan more than a week after U.S. and Japanese sailors and Japan's coast guard extinguished a fire that burned for 12 hours aboard the ship.

The amphibious transport dock ship left White Beach at about 10 a.m. It was bound for Sasebo Naval Base on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, "for further assessment and repairs," U.S. 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Matthew Comer said Thursday.

The New Orleans was not far from the Okinawa shore when a

fire broke out in its forward area at 4 p.m. Aug. 20. Sailors extinguished it early the next morning with help from the crew of its sister ship, the USS San Diego, moored at White Beach, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the coast guard.

The New Orleans docked at White Beach at 3:40 p.m. Aug. 22 under its own power, Task Force

76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike said by email Monday. Damage assessors inspected the ship in port, according to an Aug. 22 fleet news release.

Several sailors were treated for minor injuries and have returned to duty, according to the release. Mike and Comer declined to provide an exact number of injured sailors.

The fleet reported Aug. 21 that two sailors were treated on board for minor injuries.

"The cause of the fire remains under investigation," Comer said.

Amphibious transport dock ships carry Marines, equipment and aircraft, such as helicopters and MV-22B Ospreys, to support expeditionary warfare missions.

## MILITARY

# 2nd Cavalry wins Best Squad for 4th straight year

By LYDIA GORDON  
*Stars and Stripes*

GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany — A storied cavalry regiment based in Vilseck will once again represent U.S. Army Europe and Africa at the Army's Best Squad Competition, as it kept its streak alive as the only winner of a theater-wide contest.

The 2nd Cavalry regiment scored its fourth win in a row in the eight-day competition, which ended Thursday. It brought together 10 of the toughest five-soldier squads from across Europe and Africa-based units for a grueling test of endurance, skill and teamwork at the Army's largest overseas training area in Germany.

The winning squad was made up of Staff Sgt. Seth Peaton, Sgt. James Tranchina, Spc. Devin Schallert, Spc. Reynoso Ruiz and Pfc. Samuel Vittitow.

The regiment's sniper section leader, Peaton stepped into the role held last year by Staff Sgt. Jordan Behr, inheriting both his billet within the unit and the mantle of best squad leader.

And Vittitow earned individual recognition as the competition's best soldier, a remarkable achievement given that he's been in the service for only six months.

"I'm hoping to see how other units fare against ours," he said. "I'm not going to underestimate them. I know these guys are going to be the best of the best, but so are we."

Since its inception four years ago, the USAREUR competition has been adapted with each iteration to best reflect situations would face on the battlefield.

"As we see different effects and different tactics used by the Russian forces against Ukraine and different things that are impacting the United States' efforts in Europe, of course we take those into consideration and try to work those different variables into our training scenarios," V Corps' operations Sgt. Maj. David Huntington said Monday.

While squads receive general guidance on which skills to train for, the exact challenges remain unknown until the competition be-



PHOTOS BY LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

**Army Staff Sgt. William Ansong, right, helps Sgt. Matthew Whitley, both with 2nd Theater Signal Brigade, put on a gas mask during a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials event at the U.S. Army Europe and Africa Best Squad Competition at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on Monday.**



**Army Sgt. Joshua Botti of the 2nd Theater Signal Brigade prepares his gear for an event.**



**A team from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment placed first in the U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Best Squad Competition on Thursday.**



**Soldiers carry a casualty dummy into a CH-47 Chinook during a medical event.**

gins, Huntington said.

This year's version featured three phases, with teams tested in events to include the Army Fitness Test, live-fire ranges, day and night land navigation, endurance rucks, troop-leading procedures, situational training exercises, and written exams.

For the five 2nd Cavalry Regiment members vying for the title of best squad in Europe this time around, the bar had already been

set high.

Last year's USAREUR team took third place in the Army's overall competition. Their successors will get their chance on the big stage in October, when Fort Bragg, N.C., will host the test to determine the service's best squad.

The legacy of winning is giving

them confidence for the challenge ahead.

"I think competition breeds good soldiers," Peaton said. "We aren't actively in a war zone at this moment ... so I think that competitions like these will improve our warfighting capabilities and our lethality."

## WWII exhibit reveals letters from architect of Pearl Harbor attack

By KEISHI KOJA  
AND BRIAN McELHINEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

Two letters written by the head of Japan's imperial navy during World War II are being exhibited for the first time at a museum in northeastern Japan.

The letters from Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto to his brother-in-law Toshi Mitsuhashi are on public display as part of a World War II exhibit at the Fukushima Museum in Fukushima prefecture about 180 miles northeast of Tokyo.

The Our War Experience exhibit commemorates the 80th anniversary of the war's end in the Pacific and showcases military mail and photographs sent by soldiers to their families in the prefecture,



Fukushima Museum (private collection)

**Two letters written by Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, who led the Pearl Harbor attack, are on display at Fukushima Museum through Sept. 15.**

along with uniforms and other artifacts. It runs through Sept. 15.

Yamamoto, born in Niigata on April 4, 1884, served as command-in-chief of Japan's combined

fleet from 1939 until his death in 1943.

He led the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, which killed more than 2,400 U.S. service members and civilians, damaged multiple ships and destroyed 188 U.S. military planes. The attack led the U.S. to declare war on Japan the next day and enter World War II.

Yamamoto was killed when a U.S. Army Air Forces Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter shot down the Mitsubishi G4M bomber he was traveling in over Papua New Guinea on April 18, 1943.

The museum received the letters from a descendant of Yamamoto's wife, Reiko Mitsuhashi, in July just before the exhibit opened, museum curator Ayumi

Watanabe said Thursday. Toshi was her younger brother.

Yamamoto "was a key figure during the Pacific war and was on the front lines," Watanabe said. "These letters offer a glimpse into his private life and personal interactions with his family. This is a valuable resource that reveals how he viewed the attack on Pearl Harbor."

The first letter, dated Jan. 13, 1942, was sent from the warship Nagato. Yamamoto did not wish to start a war with the U.S. but was nevertheless put in charge of Japan's combined fleet, according to explanatory material emailed to Stars and Stripes on Wednesday along with the letters.

"As a military man close to re-

tirement, I am engaged in an important mission," the letter reads. "The attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii succeeded due to American carelessness and negligence, and the first phase of the subsequent operation [in the Nanpou region including the Philippines, Malaysia and Guam] is also progressing smoothly. However, the real battle is yet to come."

The second letter, dated April 1942, was sent from the warship Yamato in response to an unknown previous letter from Toshi. In his response, Yamamoto expressed gratitude for Toshi's visit to his ancestors' grave in Wakamatsu city and wrote about his own desire to visit the grave after the war.

## MILITARY

# NTSB says B-52 bomber nearly hit 2 planes

## Incident after flyover at North Dakota State Fair last month also included small Piper

By **JOSH FUNK**  
Associated Press

Shortly after an airliner made an aggressive maneuver to avoid colliding with a B-52 last month over North Dakota, the bomber nearly collided with a small private plane as it flew past the Minot airport, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

Investigators released their preliminary report Wednesday on the July 19 incident that happened after the bomber completed a flyover at the North Dakota State Fair in Minot. The close call with Delta Flight 3788 is well known because of a video a passenger shot of the pilot's announcement after making an abrupt turn to avoid the bomber. But the fact that the B-52 subsequently came within one-third of a mile of a small Piper airplane hadn't been previously reported.

The SkyWest pilot told his passengers that day that he was surprised to see the bomber looming to the right, and the U.S. Air Force also said that air traffic controllers never warned the B-52 crew about the nearby airliner. Officials said at the time that the flyover had been cleared with the FAA and the private controllers who oversee the Minot airport ahead of time.

These close calls were just the latest incidents to raise questions about aviation safety in the wake of January's midair collision over Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people.

The NTSB report doesn't identi-



NORTH DAKOTA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE/AP

**A B-52 bomber performs a flyover at the North Dakota State Fair in Minot. Shortly after an airliner made a maneuver to avoid colliding with a B-52 last month over North Dakota, the bomber nearly collided with a small private plane, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.**

fy the cause of the incidents, but the transcript of the conversation between the three planes, the air traffic controller on duty in Minot and a regional FAA controller at a radar center in Rapid City, S.D., show several confusing commands were issued by the tower that day. Investigators won't release their final report on the cause until sometime next year.

With the B-52 and Delta planes converging on the airport from dif-

ferent directions, the controller told the Delta plane that was carrying 80 people to fly in a circle to the right until the pilot told the controller he didn't want to do that because the bomber was off to his right, so he broke off his approach.

"Sorry about the aggressive maneuver. It caught me by surprise," the pilot can be heard saying on the video a passenger posted on social media. "This is not normal at all. I don't know why they didn't give us

a heads up."

At one point, the controller intended to give the Delta plane directions but mistakenly called out the bomber's call sign and had to cancel that order.

Less than a minute after the B-52 crossed the path of the airliner, it nearly struck the small plane that was also circling while the bomber flew past the airport on its way back to Minot Air Force Base where 26 of the bombers are based.

Aviation safety consultant Jeff Guzzetti, who used to investigate plane crashes for both the NTSB and FAA, said the controller didn't give the commands for the Delta and Piper planes to circle soon enough for them to stay a safe distance away from the bomber.

The transcript shows the local controller calling the regional FAA controller to get permission every time before he issued a command to the planes. Guzzetti said it is not clear whether taking that extra step to consult with the other controller delayed the commands or whether the Minot controller simply didn't anticipate how close the planes would come.

"It all just kind of came together at the same time very quickly, and this controller was not on top of it," Guzzetti said.

The Minot airport typically handles between 18 and 24 flights a day. But at this moment, three planes were all arriving at the same time.

After the close calls, all the planes landed safely.

These North Dakota close calls put the spotlight on small airports like Minot that are run without their own radar systems, but it is not clear whether that contract tower program that includes 265 airport towers nationwide had anything to do with the incident. There was one controller staffing the tower in Minot at the time of incident, and a controller at a regional radar center in Rapid City was helping direct planes in the area.

# Use: Experts question legal limits of what Trump can approve

### FROM PAGE 1

The polarizing strategy has strained DHS, prompted public outcry and set off numerous legal battles.

Asked about its plans for the Navy base in Illinois, DHS tied the discussion to Trump's call for safer cities, though the vast majority of those targeted for removal have no history of violent crime. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in an interview with NewsNation this week that DHS will have an "ICE strike team" in Chicago soon.

"Across the country, DHS law enforcement are arresting and removing the worst of worst including gang members, murderers, pedophiles, and rapists that have terrorized American communities," the agency said in a statement.

Spokespeople for Hegseth referred questions to DHS.

The request for use of Naval Station Great Lakes was reported

earlier by the Chicago Sun-Times, which cited an email the base's commanding officer, Navy Capt. Stephen Yargosz, sent to staff. Yargosz said in the message that DHS authorities would be at the Navy base from Sept. 2 to 30, with a "potential to also support National Guard units."

The Washington Post reported Saturday that military officials have for many weeks been devising plans to send U.S. troops to Chicago, likely coordinated with expanded ICE operations there. A range of options exist, with one likely plan calling for a few thousand members of the National Guard to deploy, officials familiar with the matter said.

The deployment of active-duty troops has also been considered, officials said.

The backlash from state and local officials has been fierce. Democratic Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker has said that while Chicago has some challenges, there are no cir-

cumstances that warrant the deployment of military force there.

Pritzker told reporters Wednesday that no one from the White House or elsewhere in the federal government had contacted him about the matter.

"They don't seem to want to communicate at all. And that's odd because it sounds like what they're trying to do is march right over local police," Pritzker said of the Trump administration. "You know, we used to hear that the president of the United States supported local police. We support local police. But now it appears that he wants to ignore them all together and just do whatever he has a whim about on that day."

Pritzker and Trump have traded jabs in recent days, with Trump saying he wants the governor to approve a military deployment. But the president suggested, too, that he may send the military even if Pritzker does not endorse the move. Trump, speaking Tuesday,

claimed he has "the right to do anything that I want to do."

"I'm the president of the United States," he said. "If I think our country is in danger — and it is in danger in these cities — I can do it."

Pritzker quickly responded on social media: "No, Donald. You can't do whatever you want."

Experts on constitutional law questioned the legal limits of what Trump can approve, while acknowledging that he may pursue another domestic military deployment anyway and let the courts sort it out later.

Elizabeth Goitein, senior director of the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program, said that for Trump to deploy the Illinois National Guard in Chicago without Pritzker's consent, he could rely on the same legal authority laid out in Title 10 of U.S. code to send troops to Los Angeles earlier this year.

In that case, the administration

cited a section of law that says that U.S. troops are allowed to deploy within the United States with a limited role when "there is a rebellion or a danger of a rebellion against the authority of the Government" or when the president is unable to "execute the laws of the United States." Administration officials cited a handful of protesters throwing concrete at ICE agents as the legal basis for the deployment.

Whether the administration met the legal bar for the deployment in California remains contested, with a trial held earlier this month in U.S. District Court and no ruling issued yet by Judge Charles Breyer.

But even if that deployment is deemed to have been lawful, the situation in Chicago is separate and there is no indication of a rebellion there, Goitein said. Violent street crime also cannot be used as a legal basis to send in U.S. troops, she said.

## MILITARY

# Vet accused of false injury, death claims

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — An Army veteran from Maine accused of faking his own death after falsely claiming he was wheelchair bound to collect \$245,000 in veterans benefits was arrested by the U.S. Marshals Service.

Gregory P. Heimann Jr., 51, was detained at an Amtrak train station in Missouri on charges related to falsely representing service-connected knee and back injuries to the Department of Veterans Affairs to qualify for monthly disability checks and other benefits, according to marshals.

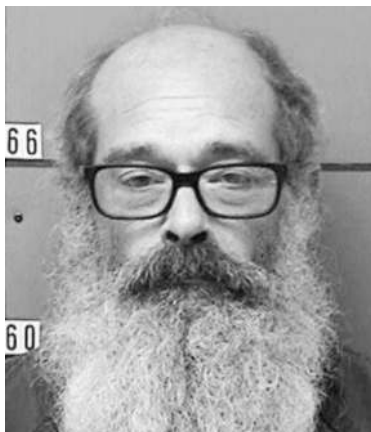
A federal judge in Missouri last week ordered Heimann to be transported back to his home state where he will face criminal charges for “materially making false, fictitious and fraudulent statements” to the VA to receive

monthly disability checks and other benefits, according to court documents.

Heimann had dropped out of sight and managed to evade authorities for more than a year, after federal marshals obtained a warrant for his arrest in April 2024, according to documents filed in U.S. District Court in Maine.

Agents from the VA Office of Inspector General said they had obtained multiple photos and video of Heimann walking and moving without the use of a wheelchair or assistance, according to an affidavit filed in support of his arrest.

But on April 19, 2024, Heimann disappeared after taking a canoe with his belongings to a river near the Canadian border, according to court documents. Heimann could not be found, and authorities at first believed he had drowned.



Army veteran Gregory Heimann

“More than 15 game wardens, dozens of civilians, aircraft, watercraft, and all-terrain vehicles from the Maine Game Warden Service responded to the call and began a search that lasted several days, all in an attempt to find Heimann or recover his body,” the

Marshals Service said.

But further investigation revealed Heimann was not deceased, and his disappearance was ruled suspicious, marshals said. Authorities said Heimann had faked his own drowning to avoid arrest shortly after authorities questioned him, according to court documents.

Heimann had claimed to the VA since 2005 that he suffered serious injuries that stemmed from a 1995 accident while based in Hawaii. He had served in the Army from 1993 to 1997. He then served in the Army National Guard from 1997 to 2005.

Heimann claimed to the VA that he first injured his back and legs in 1995 and reinjured them while on active duty that caused permanent damage.

He said the injuries worsened, caused chronic pain and severely

limited his ability to walk after leaving military service. He was collecting \$5,000 in monthly disability checks and other forms of VA assistance, according to the affidavit.

But Heimann abruptly disappeared less than a month after agents confronted him with photos showing instances of him walking and engaging in physical activities with no help or visible impairment. Investigators first discovered a Facebook account under Heimann's name that included photos of him standing without assistance and posting messages about plans to go elk hunting with friends.

They later found surveillance video of Heimann shopping at a hardware store, pushing a full grocery cart at a Walmart and dragging a chicken coop across his yard, according to the affidavit.

## Mystery: Bidding was opened up to small businesses only

FROM PAGE 1

tics over a dozen other bidders to build the massive tent camp at Fort Bliss in west Texas. At least one competitor has filed a complaint.

The secretive — and brisk — contracting process is emblematic, experts said, of the government's broader rush to fulfill the Republican president's pledge to arrest and deport an estimated 10 million migrants living in the U.S. without permanent legal status. As part of that push, the government is turning increasingly to the military to handle tasks that had traditionally been left to civilian agencies.

A member of Congress who recently toured the camp said she was concerned that such a small and inexperienced firm had been entrusted to build and run a facility expected to house up to 5,000 migrants.

“It's far too easy for standards to slip,” said Rep. Veronica Escobar, a Democrat whose district includes Fort Bliss. “Private facilities far too frequently operate with a profit margin in mind as opposed to a governmental facility.”

Attorney Joshua Schnell, who specializes in federal contracting law, said he was troubled that the Trump administration has provided so little information about the facility.

“The lack of transparency about this contract leads to legitimate questions about why the Army would award such a large contract to a company without a website or any other publicly available information demonstrating its ability to perform such a complicated project,” he said.



ALAN SUDERMAN/AP

**This home in Richmond, Va., is listed as the headquarters of Acquisition Logistics LLC, a small business that won a contract to build an immigrant detention facility in Texas.**

Ken A. Wagner, the president and CEO of Acquisition Logistics, did not respond to phone messages or emails. No one answered the door at his three-bedroom house listed as his company's headquarters. Virginia records list Wagner as an owner of the business, though it's unclear whether he might have partners.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth approved using Fort Bliss for the new detention center, and the administration has hopes to build more at other bases. A spokesperson for the Army declined to discuss its deal with Acquisition Logistics or reveal details about the camp's construction, citing the litigation over the company's qualifications.

Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman, Tricia McLaughlin, issued a statement that said “under President Trump's leadership, we are working at turbo speed on cost-effective and innovative ways to deliver on the American people's mandate for mass deportations of criminal illegal aliens.”

She said the Fort Bliss facility “will offer everything a traditional ICE detention facility offers, in-

cluding access to legal representation and a law library, access to visitation, recreational space, medical treatment space and nutritionally balanced meals.” DHS oversees the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Named Camp East Montana for the closest road, the facility is being built in the sand and scrub Chihuahuan Desert, where summertime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit and heat-related deaths are common. The 60-acre site is near the U.S.-Mexico border and the El Paso International Airport, a key hub for deportation flights.

The camp has drawn comparisons to “Alligator Alcatraz,” a \$245 million tent complex erected to hold ICE detainees in the Florida Everglades. That facility has been the subject of complaints about unsanitary conditions and lawsuits. A federal judge recently ordered that facility to be shut down.

The vast majority of the roughly 57,000 migrants detained by ICE are housed at private prisons operated by companies like Florida's Geo Group and Tennessee-based CoreCivic. As those facilities fill

up, ICE is also exploring temporary options at military bases in California, New York and Utah.

At Fort Bliss, construction began within days of the Army issuing the contract on July 18. Site work began months earlier, before Congress had passed Trump's big tax and spending cuts bill, which includes a record \$45 billion for immigration enforcement. The Defense Department announcement specified only that the Army was financing the initial \$232 million for the first 1,000 beds at the complex.

Three white tents, each about 810 feet long, have been erected, according to satellite imagery. A half dozen smaller buildings surround them.

A June 9 solicitation notice for the Fort Bliss project specified the contractor will be responsible for building and operating the detention center, including providing security and medical care. The document also requires strict secrecy, ordering the contractor inform ICE to respond to any calls from members of Congress or the news media.

The bidding was open only to small firms such as Acquisition Logistics, which receives preferential status because it's classified as a veteran and Hispanic-owned small disadvantaged business.

Though Trump's administration has fought to ban diversity, equity and inclusion programs, federal contracting rules include set-asides for small businesses owned by women or minorities. For a firm to compete for such contracts, at least 51% of it must be owned by people belonging to a federally designated disadvan-

tagged racial or ethnic group.

One of the losing bidders, Gemini Tech Services, filed a protest challenging the award and the Army's rushed construction timeline with the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Congress' independent oversight arm that resolves such disputes.

Gemini alleges Acquisition Logistics lacks the experience, staffing and resources to perform the work, according to a person familiar with the complaint who wasn't authorized to discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity. Acquisition Logistics' past jobs include repairing small boats for the Air Force, providing information technology support to the Defense Department and building temporary offices to aid with immigration enforcement, federal records show.

A ruling by the GAO on whether to sustain, dismiss or require corrective action is not expected before November. A legal appeal is also pending with a U.S. federal court in Washington.

Schnell, the contracting lawyer, said Acquisitions Logistics may be working with a larger company. Geo Group Inc. and CoreCivic Corp., the nation's biggest for-profit prison operators, have expressed interest in contracting with the Pentagon to house migrants.

In an earnings call this month, Geo Group CEO George Zoley said his company had teamed up with an established Pentagon contractor. Zoley didn't name the company.

A spokesperson for CoreCivic said it wasn't partnering with Acquisition Logistics or Gemini.

## NATION



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Work progresses on a new migrant detention facility dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz,” at Dade-Collier Training and Transition facility in the Florida Everglades, on July 4, in Ochopee. A judge has ordered the facility closed by late October.

## Judge: ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ closure can proceed amid request for stay

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — The immigration detention center in the Florida Everglades dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz” must keep moving toward shutting down operations by late October, a judge has ruled, even as the state and federal governments fight that decision.

U.S. District Judge Kathleen Williams late Wednesday denied those requests to pause her order to wind down operations at the facility, which has been plagued by reports of unsanitary conditions and detainees being cut off from the legal system.

The facility was already being emptied of detainees, according to an email exchange shared with The Associated Press on Wednesday. In a message sent to South Florida Rabbi Mario Rojzman on Aug. 22 related to providing chaplaincy services at the facility, Florida Division of Emergency Management Executive Director Kevin Guthrie said “we are probably going to be down to 0 individuals within a few days,” implying there would soon be no need for the services.

The detention center was quickly built two months ago at a lightly

used, single-runway training airport in the Everglades. State officials signed more than \$245 million in contracts for building and operating the facility, which officially opened July 1.

President Donald Trump toured the facility last month and suggested it could be a model for future lock-ups nationwide as his administration races to expand the infrastructure needed to increase deportations.

Attorneys for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said in their request for a stay that Williams’ order last week, if carried out, would disrupt the federal government’s ability to enforce immigration laws. But the judge in Wednesday night’s order noted that the detainee population already was dwindling at the facility, and that the federal government’s “immigration enforcement goals will not be thwarted by a pause in operations.”

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’ administration is preparing to open a second immigration detention facility dubbed “Deportation Depot” at a state prison in north Florida.

Williams said in last week’s order

that she expected the population of “Alligator Alcatraz” to decline within 60 days through the transferring of the detainees to other facilities, and once that happened, fencing, lighting and generators should be removed. She wrote the state and federal defendants can’t bring anyone other than those who are already being detained at the facility onto the property.

Environmental groups and the Miccosukee Tribe had argued in their lawsuit that further construction and operations should be stopped until federal and state officials complied with federal environmental laws.

A second lawsuit also was filed by civil rights groups last month against the state and federal governments over practices at the Everglades facility, claiming detainees were denied access to the legal system.

Civil rights groups last Friday filed a third lawsuit over practices at the facility in federal court in Fort Myers, asking for a restraining order and a temporary injunction that would bar Florida agencies and their contractors from holding detainees at “Alligator Alcatraz.”

# CDC director fired as other agency leaders resign

By MIKE STOBBE  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The director of the nation’s top public health agency has been fired after less than one month in the job, and several top agency leaders have resigned.

Susan Monarez isn’t “aligned with” President Donald Trump’s agenda and refused to resign, so the White House terminated her, spokesman Kush Desai said Wednesday night.

Her lawyers said she was targeted for standing up for science.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had announced her departure in a brief social media post late Wednesday afternoon. Her lawyers responded with a statement saying Monarez had neither resigned nor been told she was fired.

“When CDC Director Susan Monarez refused to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts, she chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda. For that, she has been targeted,” attorneys Mark Zaid and Abbe David Lowell wrote in a statement.

“This is not about one official. It is about the systematic dismantling of public health institutions, the silencing of experts, and the dangerous politicization of science. The attack on Dr. Monarez is a warning to every American: our evidence-based systems are being undermined from within,” they said.

Her departure coincided with the resignations this week of at least four top CDC officials. The list includes Dr. Debra Houry, the agency’s deputy director; Dr. Daniel Jernigan, head of the agency’s National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases; Dr.

Demetre Daskalakis, head of its National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases; and Dr. Jennifer Layden, director of the Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance, and Technology.

In an email seen by The Associated Press, Houry lamented the crippling effects on the agency from planned budget cuts, reorganization and firings.

“I am committed to protecting the public’s health, but the ongoing changes prevent me from continuing in my job as a leader of the agency,” she wrote.

She also noted the rise of misinformation about vaccines during the current Trump administration, and alluded to new limits on CDC communications.

“For the good of the nation and the world, the science at CDC should never be censored or subject to political pauses or interpretations,” she wrote.

Daskalakis worked closely with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. remade the committee by firing everyone and replacing them with a group that included several vaccine skeptics.

In his resignation letter, Daskalakis lamented that the changes put “people of dubious intent and more dubious scientific rigor in charge of recommending vaccine policy.” He described Monarez, 50, as “hamstrung and sidelined by an authoritarian leader.” He added: “Their desire to please a political base will result in death and disability of vulnerable children and adults.”

He also wrote: “I am unable to serve in an environment that treats CDC as a tool to generate policies and materials that do not reflect scientific reality.”

## FDA OKs updated COVID shots with limits for some kids, adults

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. regulators approved updated COVID-19 shots Wednesday but limited their use for many Americans — and removed one of the two vaccines available for young children.

The new shots from Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax are approved for all seniors. But the Food and Drug Administration narrowed their use for younger adults and children to those with at least one high-risk health condition, such as asthma or obesity. That presents

new barriers to access for millions of Americans who would have to prove their risk — and millions more who may want to get vaccinated and suddenly no longer qualify.

Additionally, Pfizer’s vaccine will no longer be available for any child under 5, because the FDA said it was revoking the shot’s emergency authorization for that age group.

Parents will still be able to seek out shots from Moderna, the other maker of mRNA vaccines, which

has full FDA approval for children as young as 6 months. But the company’s Spikevax vaccine is only approved for children with at least one serious health problem.

The revamped vaccines target a newer version of the continuously evolving virus and are set to begin shipping soon. But it could be days or weeks before many Americans know if they’ll be able to get one.

The new restrictions — previewed by FDA officials in May — are a break from the previous U.S.

policy, which recommended an annual COVID-19 shot for all Americans 6 months and up.

The approach reflects heightened skepticism about the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and the need for yearly booster shots from Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, both outspoken critics of wide-scale vaccinations.

“The American people demanded science, safety, and common sense. This framework delivers all three,” Kennedy wrote on

social media.

Novavax’s shot is only open to people 12 or older, not younger children, and carries the same risk-based restrictions that are now in place for Moderna and Pfizer. It’s the nation’s only traditional, protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

The new limits “can’t help but create barriers to vaccinations” and cause confusion for patients, doctors and pharmacists, said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccines expert.

## NATION

# Shooting suspect an ex-member of church, school

Associated Press

RICHFIELD, Minn. — The shooter who killed two Catholic school students and wounded more than a dozen children sitting in the pews of a Minneapolis church once attended the school and had been a member of the church, the city's police chief said.

Authorities were pouring over videos, writings and movements of the shooter but remained uncertain what motivated Robin Westman to open fire through stained-glass windows as children celebrated Mass on the first week of classes at the Annunciation Catholic School.

"Everything we've seen so far is a classic pathway to an active shooter," Minneapolis police chief Brian O'Hara said on NBC's "TODAY" show Thursday, adding police have seen nothing "specific to trigger the amount of hate that occurred yesterday."

Investigators have recovered hundreds of pieces of evidence from the church and three residences, and are seeking warrants to search devices, the chief said. They have found more writings from the suspect, but no additional firearms.

Westman, 23, who was armed

with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, died by suicide, he said.

Two children, ages 8 and 10, died in the shooting while 14 other kids and three parishioners in their 80s were wounded and most were expected to survive, O'Hara said. One child was in critical condition Thursday while 11 other victims remained in hospitals.

Westman, whose mother worked for the parish before retiring in 2021, left behind videos and several pages of writing describing a litany of grievances. In one he said: "I know this is wrong, but I can't seem to stop myself."

On a YouTube channel, videos that police say may have been posted by the shooter show weapons and ammunition, and list the names of mass shooters. What appears to be a suicide note to family contains a confession of long-held plans to carry out a shooting and talk of being deeply depressed.

Hours after the shooting, hundreds of people including Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and clergy members, attended a vigil.

Speaking to a crowd crammed shoulder-to-shoulder — with hundreds more outside — Archbishop Bernard Hebda described the students trying to shield their class-



ABBIE PARR/AP

**Mementos were placed as a memorial at Annunciation Catholic Church after Wednesday's school shooting in Minneapolis.**

mates as the gunfire erupted.

"In the midst of that, there was courage, there was bravery, but most especially there was love," he said.

Rev. Dennis Zehren, who was inside the church with the nearly 200 children, said the responsorial psalm — which spoke of light in the darkness — had almost ended when he heard someone yell, "Down down, everybody down," and gunshots rang out.

O'Hara said someone inside the church barricaded some of the side doors with a wooden plank and that authorities found a smoke bomb at the scene.

Fifth-grader Weston Halsne said he ducked for the pews, covering his head, shielded by a friend who was on top of him. His friend was hit, he said.

"I was super scared for him, but I think now he's OK," he said.

The police chief said the wounded children range from 6 to 15.

FBI Director Kash Patel said on X the shooting is being treated as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime targeting Catholics.

On a YouTube channel titled Robin W, police said at least two videos were posted before the channel was taken down Wednesday. In one, the person filming the video points to two windows in what appears to be a drawing of the church, then stabs it with a long knife.

The videos also show weapons and ammunition, scrawled with "kill Donald Trump" and "Where is your God?" along with the names of past mass shooters.

Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender. In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

# Economy up 3.3% in second quarter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy rebounded this spring from a first-quarter downturn caused by fallout from President Donald Trump's trade wars.

In an upgrade from its first estimate, the Commerce Department said Thursday that U.S. gross domestic product — the nation's output of goods and services — expanded at a 3.3% annual pace from April through June after shrinking 0.5% in the first three months of 2025. The department had initially estimated second-quarter growth at 3%.

The first-quarter GDP drop, the first retreat of the U.S. economy in three years, was mainly caused by a surge in imports — which are subtracted from GDP — as businesses scrambled to bring in foreign goods ahead of Trump's tariffs. That trend reversed as expected in the second quarter: Imports fell at a 29.8% pace, boosting April-June growth by more than 5 percentage points.

The Commerce Department reported that consumer spending and private investment were a bit stronger in the second quarter than it had first estimated.

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of GDP, grew at a 1.6% annual pace, lackluster but better than 0.5% in the first quarter and the 1.4% the government initially estimated for the second.

Even with an upward revision, private investment dropped at a 13.8% annual pace from April through June. That would be the biggest drop since the second quarter of 2020 at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. A reduction in private inventories cut almost 3.3 percentage points off second-quarter GDP growth.

Spending and investment by the federal government fell at a 4.7% annual clip on top of a 4.6% drop in the first quarter.

A category within the GDP data that measures the economy's underlying strength came in stronger than first reported, growing 1.9% from April-June, same as in the first quarter. This category includes consumer spending and private investment but excludes volatile items like exports, inventories and government spending.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has overturned decades of U.S. policy that had favored freer trade. He's slapped double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on Earth and targeted specific products for tariffs, too, including steel, aluminum and autos.

# Police: Amish woman threw son, 4, into lake

Associated Press

An Amish woman who told authorities she was testing her faith when she threw her 4-year-old son into an Ohio lake was charged Wednesday with two counts of aggravated murder in the boy's death.

Authorities said Ruth R. Miller, 40, of Millersburg, Ohio, told investigators she believed she was acting at the direction of God when she allegedly killed her son Vincen at Atwood Lake early Saturday.

The lead investigator with the Tuscarawas County Sheriff's Office, Capt. Adam Fisher, said Wednesday that Ruth Miller repeatedly said in interviews with police that she threw the boy off the dock and into the water to give him to God.

"It did not appear that the gravity of the situation had sunk in," Fisher said.

The woman's husband, Marcus J. Miller, 45, had apparently drowned while attempting to swim to an offshore sandbank hours earlier in another test of faith, Sheriff Orvis Campbell said Monday.



TUSCARAWAS COUNTY, OHIO, SHERIFF'S OFFICE/AP

**A dive team floats over the spot on Atwood Lake in Ohio where they recovered the body of Marcus Miller on Sunday, a day after Miller's wife allegedly killed their 4-year-old son by throwing him into the lake.**

Their other children, a 15-year-old girl and twin 18-year-old boys, survived water-based trials of their belief, Campbell said.

The family had gone to Atwood Lake in a recreational vehicle as a getaway, arriving Friday, Ruth Miller's birthday.

Online court records indicate Ruth Miller was also charged with domestic violence and child endangerment regarding the older children. Authorities said Ruth Miller

was receiving treatment at a secure mental health facility.

Family members and the Millers' church said in a statement that the deaths "do not reflect our teachings or beliefs but are instead a result of a mental illness."

Campbell said Ruth Miller told investigators she believed she could walk on water but when she tried doing so off the end of the dock, she fell into the water.

Authorities were called Saturday

morning for a report of a golf cart having gone into the lake. Campbell said Ruth Miller had driven it at a high speed into a stone wall on the shore with the three older children on board. The cart ended up submerged but visible, and her children stood on it before getting out of the water.

When a rescuer tried to get Ruth Miller out of the water, she told them to "just pray for her," Campbell said.

Park rangers heard "concerning type statements" from Ruth Miller, the sheriff said: "There was a pretty immediate statement made that she had given her son to the Lord." Authorities soon realized her husband and 4-year-old son were missing.

"She began to express more that she had thrown the child in the water to give that child to God," Campbell said.

Around 6 p.m. Saturday, a diver found Vincen on the lake bed not far from the dock. Sunday morning, divers found Marcus Miller's body 53 yards from the dock.

## NATION

# Bill would let military retirees, some vets still contribute to TSP

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Service members retiring from the military will for the first time be allowed to keep contributing to their military-sponsored retirement accounts — known as Thrift Savings Plans — under legislation introduced by Rep. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., a former Navy pilot.

The Financial Opportunities for Retirees and Warriors Advancing Retirement Development — or FORWARD Act — also would let veterans who are 100% disabled send a portion of their monthly benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs to Thrift Savings Plans that they opened during military service, according to the bill.

Under the law now, veterans can keep their Thrift Savings Plans, also known as TSP accounts, after they leave the military. But they cannot continue putting aside a portion of their income into the retirement account.

TSP accounts are funds that offer “a variety of investment options, from a short-term U.S. Treasury security to index funds made of domestic and international stocks,” according to a federal government website on the savings plan.

The bill enables qualifying veter-

ans to continue making contributions to their Thrift Savings Plans using their monthly retirement pension or from their disability payments. Service members are eligible for retirement and military pensions after 20 years of military service.

“For our 20-year retirees and veterans with a 100% disability rating, it’s only fair that they can keep contributing to the Thrift Savings Plan they’ve spent years building,” said Kiggans, a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “They shouldn’t be forced to start over in a new system when they’ve already invested in one that works for them.”

Congress originally established Thrift Savings Plans in 1986 to help federal employees save for retirement. Thrift Savings Plans are known as “defined contribution plans,” meaning individuals invest a portion of their earnings during their working years with their investment accumulating over time.

In 2001, lawmakers passed legislation that also allowed service members to participate in Thrift Savings Plans as a retirement tool.

“But right now federal law cuts off TSP [Thrift Savings Plan] contributions as soon as someone leaves the military, which creates a



**A bill led by Rep. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., a former Navy pilot, would enable military retirees and veterans with 100% disability to continue making contributions to their Thrift Savings Plans.**

frustrating gap for veterans who want to continue growing their retirement savings using the plan they know and trust,” said Kiggans, 54, a former Navy pilot who joined the military in 1993 and served for 10 years.

“I understand the challenges our service members face during the transition to civilian life,” said Kiggans, who also is married to a retired Navy fighter pilot. They have a son who is training to be a pilot.

Government contributions to a Thrift Savings Plan are similar to a 401(k) with automatic and matching contributions. But the bill would not authorize a matching contribution from the military.

A hearing has not been scheduled for the bill, which would require a rule change by the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board in coordination with the Defense Department and VA, according to Kiggans’ office.

# Fed official sues over Trump administration attempt to fire her

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook has sued the Trump administration in an effort to overturn the president’s attempt to fire her, launching an unprecedented legal battle that could significantly reshape the Fed’s long-standing political independence.

The lawsuit seeks an emergency injunction to block her firing and “confirm her status” as a member of the Fed’s governing board.

“The President’s effort to terminate a Senate-confirmed Federal Reserve Board member is a broadside attack on the century-old independence of the Federal Reserve System,” Cook’s lawyer, Abbe David Lowell, wrote in a court filing.

The case could become a turning point for the 112-year-old Federal Reserve, which was designed by Congress to be insulated from day-to-day political influence. Economists prefer independent central banks because they can more easily take unpopular measures, such as lifting interest rates to combat inflation, than elected officials can.

The case was assigned to Judge Jia Cobb, an appointee of former President Joe Biden. A hearing was scheduled for Friday.

Many economists worry that if the Fed falls under the control of the White House, it will keep its key interest rate lower than justified by economic fundamentals to satisfy President Donald Trump’s demands for cheaper borrowing. That could allow inflation to rise more quickly and could also push up longer-term interest rates, such as those on mortgages and car loans. Investors may demand a higher yield to own bonds to offset greater inflation in the future, pushing up borrowing costs throughout the economy.

“If Cook wins, she stays in place and we achieve some semblance of stability,” said Peter Conti-Brown, a professor of financial regulation at the University of Pennsylvania in a Substack post. “If she loses ... that’s the end of Fed independence as it has been constructed and reconstructed over 112 years.”

No president has sought to fire a Fed governor before until Trump posted a letter on media late Monday saying that Cook was fired.

# Banks urged to monitor for suspect Chinese transactions

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department wants U.S. financial institutions to monitor for suspected Chinese money laundering networks handling funds that are used to fuel the flood of fentanyl across American communities.

An advisory Thursday to banks, brokers and others highlights how such operations are working with Mexican drug cartels.

The Trump administration is calling on banks to flag certain customers who may fit a profile of people who could launder money for cartels. That could include Chinese nationals such as students, retirees and housewives with unexplained wealth, and those who refuse to provide information about the source of their money.

The Treasury contends that many of these people unknowingly work with cartels to bypass Chinese currency controls that restrict the renminbi exchange rate through a system limiting the annual foreign currency conversion for individuals, which is about \$50,000.

It is not uncommon for Chinese individuals to evade such restrictions by turning to underground

banks where their money is converted into foreign currencies, often U.S. dollars.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington had no immediate comment Thursday.

Also Thursday, the department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, known as FinCen, released a report about how Chinese money laundering networks are expanding their ties beyond drug cartels. Financial institutions are increasingly filing suspicious activity reports on human trafficking and adult senior day care centers in New York that have become a vehicle for money laundering, according to the report.

FinCen analyzed more than 137,000 Bank Secrecy Act reports from January 2020 to December 2024 that accounted for approximately \$312 billion in total suspicious activity.

Last year, law enforcement officials uncovered a complex partnership between Mexico’s Sinaloa Cartel and Chinese underground banking groups in the United States that laundered \$50 million from the sale of fentanyl, cocaine and other drugs, federal prosecutors said.

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# WORLD

## Russian strikes hit Ukrainian capital

BY HANNA ARHIROVA AND SAMYA KULLAB  
*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia launched a major air attack early Thursday on Kyiv that included a rare strike on the city center, killing at least 18 people, wounding dozens and damaging European Union diplomatic offices, authorities said.

The bombardment of drones and missiles was the first major Russian attack on Kyiv in weeks as U.S.-led peace efforts to end the three-year war struggled to gain traction. Britain said the attack sabotaged peace efforts, while top EU diplomat Kaja Kallas summoned Russia's EU envoy to Brussels over the strikes that damaged EU offices.

Two of Ukraine's top envoys were set to meet Friday with the Trump administration regarding mediation. The Kremlin said Russia remained interested in continuing peace talks despite Thursday's air attack, which was one of the biggest since the war began.

Among the dead were four children between 2 and 17, said Tymur Tkachenko, the head of Kyiv's city administration. The numbers are expected to rise.

The attack was one of the few



DANYLO ANTONIUK/AP

**A young woman sits in the street after her home was damaged Thursday in Russia's drone and missile attack in central Kyiv, Ukraine.**

times Russian drones and missiles have penetrated the heart of Kyiv since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 598 strike drones and decoys and 31 missiles of different types across the country early Thursday, most of them striking targets in Kyiv.

At least 33 locations across all 10 of the city's districts were directly hit or damaged by debris, Tkachenko said. Thousands of windows shattered as nearly 100 buildings were damaged, including a shopping mall in the city center.

European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said two strikes landed 20 seconds apart about 164 feet from the EU Mission to Ukraine building in Kyiv. She said no staff were injured in the strike.

"No diplomatic mission should

ever be a target. In response, we are summoning the Russian envoy in Brussels," Kallas said Thursday in a post on X.

The British Council, which promotes cultural relations and educational opportunities, also said its Kyiv office had been "severely damaged" in the attack and was closed to visitors until further notice.

The organization posted a photo showing the building with its windows and entrance smashed open and surrounded by glass and debris. A guard was injured and is "shaken but stable," council chief executive Scott McDonald posted on X.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said it carried out a strike against military air bases and companies "within Ukraine's military-industrial complex" using long-range weapons, including Kinzhal missiles.

## Rwanda says 7 deportees arrived from US in August

*Associated Press*

KIGALI, Rwanda — Seven migrants were transferred from the United States to Rwanda in August under a deportation agreement with the U.S., authorities in the East African country said Thursday.

Rwanda said earlier in August it would accept up to 250 deportees from the U.S.

Yolande Makolo, a spokeswoman for the Rwandan government, said in a statement that the "first group of seven vetted migrants arrived in Rwanda in mid-August."

Rwanda is one of four African countries that have reached deportation agreements with Washington. The others are Uganda, Eswatini and South Sudan.

No information was provided about the identities of the deportees sent to Rwanda this month.

They have been "accommodated by an international organization" with visits by the International Organization for Migration, as well as representatives of Rwandan social services, Makolo said.

"Three of the individuals have expressed a desire to return to their home countries, while four wish to stay and build lives in Rwanda," Makolo said.

In addition to accommodation, those approved for settlement in Rwanda will receive workforce training and health care, she said.

The Trump administration has come under scrutiny for the African countries it has entered into secretive deals with to take deportees. It sent eight men from South Sudan, Cuba, Laos, Mexico, Myanmar and Vietnam to South Sudan in early July after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling cleared the way for their deportations.

The U.S. also deported five men who are citizens of Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen and Laos to the southern African kingdom of Eswatini, where the government said they will be held in solitary confinement in prison for an undetermined period of time.

Uganda has also agreed to a deal with the U.S. to take deported migrants as long as they don't have criminal records and are not unaccompanied minors..

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## HEALTH &amp; FITNESS

# Nitrous abuse leaking into mainstream

Despite dangers, demand is rising for recreationally used laughing gas near concerts

By JOHN WENZEL  
The Denver Post

Every party needs balloons. These just happen to be filled with laughing gas. “We don’t do it that often. It’s funny for about 30 seconds,” said a concertgoer outside Red Rocks Amphitheatre, who was preparing to inhale nitrous oxide from a balloon before The String Cheese Incident played there in mid-July. She requested anonymity for fear of job reprisal. “There’s not really that much thought to it. It’s a stupid drug. The dumbest out of them all.”

Perched in the bed of a silver pickup with friends in Lower South Lot 1, the 20-something woman pinched the end of the pastel blue balloon as she brought it to her lips, then inhaled until the balloon went limp. A minute or so of euphoric wooziness followed, and her voice briefly dropped in pitch due to the density of the gas.

Elsewhere in the parking lot, vendors — nitrous tanks poking out of their trunks — were selling balloons in different sizes, at \$10 to \$30 a pop. (Vendors approached by The Denver Post at Red Rocks weren’t interested in commenting.)

Nitrous oxide powers whip cream canisters and sedates patients in dentists’ offices, but huffing it for fun can lead to addiction, injury and death. Still, the practice is becoming more common, not just in parks and concerts but in widely imitated viral videos.

A wave of colorfully branded new nitrous products has alarmed medical professionals who see it as a public health problem that’s hard to track, treat and warn against — even as most users consider it to be harmless fun.

Balloons and canisters, known as whippets, have been a common sight for decades in concert-venue parking lots, particularly in Colorado’s thriving jam-band scene at Phish, Dead and Company, Wide-spread Panic and others’ shows. It’s cheekily known as “hippie crack” because of its association with those bands, and people can buy nitrous from vendors at the unofficial marketplace of drugs, jewelry and merchandise that often accompanies these shows.

The gas is perfectly legal to buy (for those over 18) when used for medical or culinary purposes, though not for recreational use. Nevertheless, it is widely available in head shops and online.

But when used incorrectly — and not, for example, under the supervision of a dentist — inhaling nitrous “can lead to asphyxiation and, if deprived of too much oxygen, life-threatening seizures or even death,” said Shireen Banerji, director of Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Safety.

In addition to the potential for brain damage, recreational users can get frostbite of the mouth and soft palate, according to a New England Journal of Medicine study that documented a severe injury involving the mouth and throat. It’s a con-



ANDY CROSS, THE DENVER POST/TNS

A man inhales nitrous oxide from a large balloon in a parking lot at Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre before The String Cheese Incident concert in Morrison, Colo., on July 19.

dition sometimes referred to as “lung freeze.”

Despite the risks, nitrous abuse appears to be growing — and trendy. Between 2019 and 2023, the U.S. saw an alarming 110% increase in deaths due to hypoxia (or oxygen deprivation to the brain) stemming from nitrous oxide abuse, according to researchers. Nitrous-related emergency room visits grew by 32% over five years, said the Drug Abuse Warning Network. The data did not include the number of visits or people affected.

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health published in 2024 showed that 13 million people have tried nitrous for recreational purposes in their lifetimes, as compared with 224.3 million people ages 12 and older who have tried alcohol.

Notably, 2.9 million Americans 12 and older used inhalants in the past year, according to the survey. That covers nitrous oxide, but also poppers, household solvents and aerosols. The survey found that roughly 564,000 people aged 12 to 17 also used inhalants within the last year.

Social media seems to be glorifying it, and posts about nitrous have racked up tens of millions of views, while the companies that sell it — such as Galaxy Gas, ExoticWhip and Monster Gas — are offering newly candy-colored branding, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which renewed warnings of nitrous abuse and addiction this year.

The result is a resurgence that has tarnished nitrous’ longtime reputation among users as a cheap, easy high — and one that has leaked out of concert parking lots and into the mainstream.

In comparison to the rise of nitrous, the use of electronic cigarettes and vaping devices among middle and high school students declined between 2023 and 2024 by 5.9% — or about 1.63 million students, according to the FDA — from a high of 7.7% (or 2.13 million). Researchers credited public awareness campaigns for that, and have expressed support for new ones that target teenage nitrous abuse.

## ‘Way worse than weed’

Back at concert venues, the spike in abuse is having a corrosive effect on the jam-band scene, said Khalil Simon, leader of the Denver street-music group Brothers of Brass, which often plays in parking lots before concerts.

“When you have 20 tanks going off all around you, it’s one of the few things that can cut through a nine-piece brass band with horns and drums,” said Simon, the band’s tuba player, who largely quit playing Phish shows due to the “out of control” takeover of nitrous vendors.

“You’re also trying to play for tips and everyone’s spending all the cash in their pockets on these balloons,” he said.

Simon posted on Facebook last year that Brothers of Brass were done with Phish, despite eight years of well-received shows outside its concerts. The group began following Phish around the country in 2016 and busking in the ad-hoc markets that popped up before shows.

In some cases, his band would collect thousands of dollars in tips in a couple of hours. Over the past two years, however, nitrous vendors have muscled out nearly every other aspect of that scene, he said.

“This is one of those cases where drug dealers win,” Simon said. “They’re being persistent for years and years and multiplying, and cops don’t do anything.”

“I know Colorado’s drug-friendly, but I didn’t know it would blow up like this. Kids are losing their brain cells now that it’s been rebranded,” he said. “It’s way worse than weed or anything like that. It straight up makes you dumb.”

“There is also the issue of long-term effects,” Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Safety’s Banerji said. “Chronic use can result in anemias and effects to the brain, blood, spinal cord and nervous system. It’s not harmless. But people still don’t think of it in terms of chronic toxicity.”

Most users dismissed side effects and medical concerns when asked about nitrous outside Red Rocks. Some were planning on bringing drugs such as psilocybin mushrooms and cannabis inside with them for the show, but leaving the “dumb fun” of whippets in the parking lot.

“We do it for the ‘whomp whomp,’” said a woman holding a translucent balloon that had been filled by a golden-colored tank in her trunk. She and her friends, who described the experience as blissfully disconnected, declined to give their names due to professional concerns. Among them was a government employee, a scientist and a business owner, they said.

“Our perspective is that there’s no safe way to use it recreationally,” Banerji said. “At the very least, you should have your friends around you, so they can help if something happens.”

## Easy to get

The latest FDA warnings on nitrous were prompted by “an increase in reports of adverse events after inhalation ...” according to a June update from the agency. That means increased risks of vitamin B12-deficiency and “related neurological and hematological effects associated with heavy use,” said the National Institutes of Health. Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control, the University of Mississippi, Michigan’s Wayne State University and others have also expressed concern this year about the rise they’ve documented in nitrous addiction and attributed deaths.

On Reddit, however, users casually discuss buying 35 to 50 lb. tanks of food-grade nitrous before concerts from Phish and Billy Strings, whether from wholesalers, or local head shops like Purple Haze and online retailers such as Amazon, eBay and Walmart.

Nitrous-product sales have gone up in recent months at Myxed Up Creations, said Kyle Manibusan, assistant manager at a Denver-area head shop location. He doesn’t question why people buy nitrous products there, but he does like to give “some knowledge and responsibility” before they purchase it, he said.

“This product can be used for many different things, including food services,” he said. “But you’re an adult and you know what you’re using it for.”

Even as sales have risen, Manibusan said he’s been concerned by the sight of spent chargers strewn across nearby playgrounds and parks. His shop only sells to customers 21 and up, and he said he believes kids shouldn’t go anywhere near it.

## MOVIES

# Freestyle faceoff

Rapper A\$AP Rocky, venerable actor Denzel Washington go toe to toe on each other's turf in 'Highest to Lowest'

By JAKE COYLE  
Associated Press

**A**\$AP Rocky had no idea Denzel Washington was going to throw Nas at him.

Midway through Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest," a New York riff on Akira Kurosawa's "High and Low," wealthy music executive David King (Washington) has cornered aspiring rapper Yung Felon (Rocky) after he tries to kidnap King's son. They meet in a music studio. A rap battle ensues.

While the scene was scripted, much of what Washington freestyled — mixing in lines from Nas, Tupac, DMX and others — startled his professional rapper co-star.

"I'm like: How does this man know who Moneybagg Yo is?" Rocky says, sitting alongside Washington.

"And I'm 70," Washington says with a grin.

"Highest 2 Lowest," which was released in stateside theaters this month and streams on Apple TV+ on Sept. 5, is a heist thriller that hits hardest when Washington and Rocky are going at it. Washington, one of the mightiest of living actors, is, of course, an imposing presence. Even though Rocky might usually have the upper hand in the studio, he's just beginning to prove himself as an actor.

"Denzel is such a powerful force. Not a derogatory term, but he's a beast," Lee said. "Rocky is from Harlem, uptown. So I knew that he's not going to punk out. He's going to stand there, feet planted to the ground, as a heavyweight fight, blow to blow to blow. If you got somebody who don't got it, Denzel is going to slaughter them. SLAUGHTER."

But in "Highest 2 Lowest," Rocky proves that he can go toe-to-toe with a titan like Washington. In the annals of movie faceoffs between the veteran and the up-and-comer, the scene is a riveting showdown. Not that Rocky is claiming victory.

"I had to go with the flow with him," Rocky says.

"You've got to realize this guy's a pro. He's a wordsmith for real. It's not a joke. So when he went, I caught his drift. But I lost a rap battle to this man. And I'm a professional f—— rapper."

With that Washington roars and slams the table. "But I'm using other people's material," he adds. "And I've been practicing."

"It doesn't matter," Rocky replies. "I lost, man. It's unfortunate that that's my profession in real life."

## Washington's rapping skills

But as he showed in a recent interview, Washington's envy for his co-star's day job is more than for show. Washington's hip-hop affection runs deep. Asked how he approached the big scene with Rocky, Washington takes out his phone and begins playing Nas' "N.Y. State of Mind" and raps along: "I keep some E&J, sittin' bent up in the stairway."

"All right, would you ever in a million years expect *the* Denzel Washington to be able to recite classic quotes and lines from hip-hop?" Rocky exclaims.

But Washington was just getting started. He grandly spat a verse of DMX ("Lucky that you breathing, but you dead from the waist down"), a few bars of Outkast ("Yes, we done come along way like them slim-ass cigarettes") and cackled joyfully at a line from Samara Cyn and Smino's "Brand New Teeth": "Spent my rent money on these brand-new teeth."



DREW GURIAN, INVISION/AP

**A\$AP Rocky, left, and Denzel Washington promote their film "Highest 2 Lowest" on Aug. 10 in New York. The Spike-Lee directed film is a New York riff on Akira Kurosawa's "High and Low."**

"For me on the outside looking in, it was like this guy was method acting," Rocky says. "He was just being himself. He should have been a rapper."

Washington shakes his head. "No, I play one on TV."

Yet Washington has as much facility with Wizkid as he does Shakespeare or August Wilson. Pushed to explain his mentality going into the scene, Washington still demurs.

"I can't, man. I don't have one," he says. "I just flow. I can't tell you what I'm going to do, because I don't know. I never know how it's going to go. I don't plan. But I have been practicing for a long time, and nobody knew! I never had the platform."

## 'I'm still on top'

In "Highest 2 Lowest," Lee — in his fifth film with Washington — surveys a changing entertainment indus-

try. Washington's once supreme music executive is losing his grip on what sells — and what sells matters less than how many followers someone has. The movie weaves in some of Lee's other obsessions — the New York Yankees; New York, itself — but it casts the moral questions of Kurosawa's classic against a media landscape where authenticity can be hard to find.

Asked if he identified with his character's quandary, Washington pauses to consider the question.

"If I had an ego, I'd say no, because I'm still on top," Washington says. "And I'm getting better."

Rocky, though, sees some of himself in Yung Felon. It's a moniker Rocky, himself, suggested replace the scripted name, MC Microphone Checka. Rocky, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, shot "Highest 2 Lowest" in the run-up

**SEE BATTLE ON PAGE 15**

## MOVIES

# Battle: Music industry backdrop in film rings true

## FROM PAGE 14

to his recent trial over a 2021 incident in which Rocky was accused of firing a gun at Terrell Ephon, a former friend and collaborator known as A\$AP Relli. Rocky was found not guilty in February on two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

The verdict gave Rocky a new lease on life just as his film career might be taking off. He also co-stars in the upcoming "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," a hit at Sundance. Meanwhile, he's preparing his long-awaited fourth album, "Don't Be Dumb."

## 'The new rappers'

For Rocky, the music industry backdrop of "Highest 2 Lowest" rings true. Music sales, he notes, are way down. Artificial intelligence is taking over.

"They've got to figure out how to regulate it," Rocky says. "People in music are already doing it. Not to put nobody on the spot, there are people with No. 1 records and it's not even them. It's not even their voice on the track."

"This is a smart kid here," Washington says.

But Washington is resistant. "People trying to sound like me don't sound like me, to me," he says, doubting AI's potential. He peppers Rocky with questions. Rocky, 36, already sounds like an old-timer.

"The kids, they don't want to be rappers anymore," Rocky says. "They don't want to be ballers. They want to be streamers. It's basically another word for 'YouTuber.' They all want to be YouTubers, I promise you."

Washington: "How will they make money doing that?"

Rocky: "They make all the money now."

Washington: "From what? What do they do? Without the



Denzel Washington plays wealthy music executive David King in "Highest 2 Lowest."

talent, without the thing to go see..."

Rocky: "What's the substance? That's what I'm saying is the big question. The performers are obsolete. Nobody's watching. Nobody cares. They'd rather watch an 18-year-old with millions of viewers open up a bag of chips and tell you how good it is. These guys are the new rappers."

But for now, at least in "Highest 2 Lowest," Rocky and Washington are still the performers. They're the rappers, even the two-time Oscar winner. Rocky, who grew up watching Washington in "Malcolm X," can hardly believe it.

"He gives you that confidence he walks around with," Rocky says. "A lot of times, people tell me that I embody this self-confidence — I see it all in him. Just him embracing me, them embracing me, it was so chill. I waited my whole life for this."

"Me too!" bellows Washington, with a laugh. "And that's the truth! I've been a closet rapper for 40 years. Finally I get the chance."



A\$AP Rocky plays aspiring rapper Yung Felon in "Highest 2 Lowest." His character tries to kidnap King's son.



A24/AP

Music executive David King (Denzel Washington) is faced with a moral dilemma in "Highest 2 Lowest": save a kidnapped kid or his flagging empire.

# Quintessential Spike Lee

'Highest 2 Lowest' not director's best, but has his DNA in every frame

By LINDSEY BAHR  
Associated Press

Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest" takes some time to find its groove. But once it does, when the film leaves the high-rises and puts its feet on the New York pavement, it really sings.

A reimaging of Akira Kurosawa's 1963 crime thriller "High and Low," Lee brings the story to a modern-day New York where a music mogul, played by Denzel Washington, is faced with a moral dilemma: save a kidnapped kid or his flagging empire. Both will cost nearly everything he has.

We toss around the term "auteur" pretty casually these days. It's become almost a shorthand for any filmmaker with an ounce of style. But "Highest 2 Lowest" is a film that has Lee's DNA in every frame — a symphonic blend of his influences and passions: cinema, New York City, sports, Black stories, great needle drops and, of course, Washington. It's easy enough to just go along for the ride, trusting that it will end up somewhere worthwhile, even when the green screen is a little off, the score a little distracting or the dialogue a little unnatural.

But it will require some audience patience nonetheless. In its first half, "Highest 2 Lowest" plays a bit like a melodrama crossed with a sitcom, where the beats are stilted and the dialogue feels like dialogue. There's an awkward artificiality to the whole thing, which is likely more metaphor than accident, but it's also not the most engaging stretch.

Washington's character David King is a music executive and founder of a record label whose biggest days are behind him. You wouldn't necessarily know it to look at his palatial apartment with its panoramic views of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline, but the money isn't exactly coming in like it used to. The realities of the music business, social media and the attention economy have muddled the plot. The guy who once had the "best ears in the business" can't seem to get a handle on what works anymore. He has the chance to cash out and sell the business, but against the wishes of everyone around him, decides he wants to take back ownership of the thing he created.

When his wife Pam (Ifenesh Hadera, either miscast or terribly underwritten) says she's going to pledge half a million dollars to an arts organization, he asks her to hold off. "But we've always

supported young Black artists," she replies, though you suspect part of the worry is about keeping up appearances. Things come into focus quickly, however, when David learns that his son Trey (Aubrey Joseph) has been kidnapped. The ransom is \$17.5 million.

There is a twist, which perhaps shouldn't be spoiled, but it soon becomes less obvious to the Kings whether they should pay up. It's an interesting conundrum, and a potent one for these greedy times, but also difficult to empathize with on a certain level. This is a guy with a lot of assets to his name and the ability to get his hands on \$17.5 million. For the audience, the choice will seem obvious. It's never quite clear what his life will look like if that money disappears, but the bottom doesn't seem like a possibility.

But this is all just a lead-up to the more exciting and compelling cat-and-mouse portion of the film, where the kidnapper, an aspiring, down-on-his-luck rapper named Yung Felon (played by a magnetic A\$AP Rocky) is finally introduced. His showdown with King is fun, tense and even includes a rap battle. A\$AP Rocky more than holds his own with Washington.

In a world in which King listened to as many new artists as he did when he was starting out, their stories might have been different. Yung Felon might have been discovered, instead of just being one of the aggrieved talents languishing in obscurity and plotting violent revenge.

There is a lot going on in Alan Fox's script for "Highest 2 Lowest," which attempts to present a realistic picture of New York and all its contradictions, from the billionaire boardrooms to the Puerto Rican festivals in the Bronx to the lively Yankees fans on the subway. Jeffrey Wright, who also gets some great scenes with Washington, plays King's friend and driver, Paul. He too is looking for his son Kyle (real-life son Elijah Wright) but gets far less respect and attention from the cops. The inequalities and prejudices run deep, and at a certain point David and Paul set off on their own to solve the case, vigilantes in a Rolls-Royce. "Highest 2 Lowest" may not reach the heights of some of Lee's best films, but it's the kind of film that makes you hope Lee and Washington have more to make together.

"Highest 2 Lowest" is rated R for language throughout and brief drug use. Running time: 133 minutes. Starts streaming Sept. 5 on Apple TV+.

## MUSIC

Q&amp;A

# Perspectives on passion

Mariah the Scientist's latest, 'Hearts Sold Separately,' mixes love potions, pensive emotions

BY GARY GERARD HAMILTON  
*Associated Press*

If you were surprised when Mariah the Scientist's "Burning Blue" hit No. 1 on Billboard's rhythmic airplay chart, you weren't alone.

"It's shocking. It's almost like impostor syndrome, feeling, 'I have a No. 1 song on the radio? This is crazy,'" said the 27-year-old with a bright smile. "It makes me feel like somebody — multiple people — like my music, I guess. It's flattering."

Reaching No. 25 on the Billboard 200 and named by Rihanna as her go-to karaoke song, "Burning Blue" has created high anticipation for Mariah's new album, "Hearts Sold Separately." Available now, it's the fourth album from the R&B singer-songwriter who's crafted huge records like "From a Woman" and "Spread Thin," which has more than 190 million Spotify plays.

Following 2023's "To Be Eaten Alive," the 10-track project, with Kali Uchis as the sole feature and new age '80s R&B synth sonics, pensively explores love and relationships, themes synonymous with the former St. John's University scholarship student. Her stage name was first a nickname earned when studying biology before dropping out her junior year to pursue music.

While she's attracted dedicated fans with her alternative R&B sounds and unapologetic vulnerability, she's also the girlfriend of rapper Young Thug. The Grammy winner was indicted in a sprawling Georgia gang and racketeering case in 2022. He pleaded guilty in October 2024 to gang, drug and gun charges. He also entered a no contest plea to other charges. He was sentenced to time served and 15 years of probation.

SEE PERSPECTIVES ON PAGE 17

**Mariah the Scientist is receiving lots of attention for her music and for her relationship with rapper Young Thug.**

GARY GERARD HAMILTON/AP



# MUSIC REVIEWS

## CMAT

Euro-Country (AWAL)

Seven years ago, Irish singer CMAT (born Ciara Mary-Alice Thompson) received life-changing advice from a fellow rising pop star. Charli xcx urged her to dump her boyfriend and take making

music seriously. It turns out that Charli knows best. "Euro-Country," CMAT's third studio album, is her strongest yet, an emotive collection of energetic, cheeky pop songs.

On her previous albums, like 2023's BRIT Award nominated "Crazymad, for Me," CMAT mined relationships for big-hearted and humor-filled songs pulling from country-pop rhythms and retro '70s grooves. On "Euro-Country," she's sharpened her tools, becoming both more personal and political in the process.

CMAT opens the title track by singing in Irish. The song, atop swelling synths, traces periods of economic decline and depression in Ireland. "I never understood what this way of living could do to me / All the mooching 'round shops, and the lack of identity," she opines about the change in culture.

The song reflects the rest of the album: "Euro-Country" is a mix of catchy pop with depth. These are danceable songs written from the frustrated, introspective viewpoint of someone stuck watching daytime dramas in their hometown (the moody "Coronation Street"), or as a sharp meditation on the loss of a close friend ("Lord, Let That Tesla Crash," which inspired the album). There's also grief for girlhood ("Iceberg") or for body shaming (the upbeat "Take a Sexy Picture of Me," which inspired a TikTok dance craze), or, of course, for her country (the title track).

In an album with many enjoyable moments, a highlight is the uptempo alt-rock swagger of "Jamie Oliver's Petrol Station." Lyrically, the song tackles everyday life in Ireland by using Oliver, one of the U.K.'s most ubiquitous celebrity chefs, as a symbol for disillusionment with capitalism. Ambitious, but it works: "It's the fear of not getting the dole and the joy of then chopping it up with the card that you draw it on," she sings. "Coming through town and then seeing the type of the people you missed who'd have died back in Dublin."

The song also highlights CMAT's talent for funny pop culture lyrical references. "OK, don't be a (expletive) / The man's got kids," she sings, referencing Oliver. "And they wouldn't like this."

In the hypercompetitive musical climate of 2025, it is hard to stand apart from the crowd. But on "Euro-Country," CMAT has furthered her individual vision and style. Now it's up to the rest of the world to get on board.

— Connie Panzariello  
Associated Press



## Jon Batiste

Big Money (Interscope)

On "Big Money," Super Bowl-sized singer Jon Batiste opts for a surprisingly intimate sound.

The just over 32-minute, nine-song set, released Aug. 22, is not nearly as loud as the New Orleans jazzman's eye-popping wardrobe. The stripped-down, mostly acoustic arrangements create a chill vibe. Simplicity somehow only intensifies the songs' swing and sway.

Batiste pairs lyrics about devotion, values, angels and ecology with music that mixes folk and funk, gospel and the blues. The range is such that Batiste even plays a little fiddle and mandolin, but he shines brightest on two songs featuring his solo piano.

The first is a wonderful duet with Randy Newman, another piano man with New Orleans roots, who in recent years has been slowed by health issues and kept a low profile. They cover Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue," and Newman's legendarily froggy tenor provides a comical contrast to Batiste's vocal sheen. "I could die, I could die, I could die," Newman sings. "It sounds like I'm dying."

Also stellar is "Maybe," a ballad filled with thick chords and questions about the big picture. "Or maybe we should all just take a collective pause," Batiste sings, before launching into a keyboard exploration worthy of Jelly Roll Morton.

The bouncy "Lean on My Love" draws from Prince, Sly Stone and the Spinners as Batiste sings in unison with Andra Day. The equally buoyant title cut rhymes "money" and "dummy" in a strummy sing-along that includes backing vocals by the Womack Sisters, granddaughters of soul singer Sam Cooke.

"Pinnacle" chooses a similar tempo to kick up Delta dust around a delightful word salad. "Hop scotch / Double Dutchie jumping rope / Twistin' it and ya wobble it / And let it go," he sings on one verse.

Batiste's gospel influences are most evident on the closing reggae tune "Angels" and the ballad "Do It All Again," a love song that could be interpreted as secular or spiritual.

"When I'm happy, it's your shine," Batiste sings. As always, he makes joy sound genuine.

— Steven Wine  
Associated Press



## Conan Gray

Wishbone (Republic)

Rejection serves as inspiration for angst and contemplation on Conan Gray's wistful fourth album, "Wishbone." It is a return to form for Gray with 12 diaristic tracks that oscillate between bold heart-break anthems and moments of tender reflection.

Discovered on YouTube in the early 2010s, Gray's narrative pop earned him a place among the tastemakers of Gen Z music. He collaborated closely with producer Dan Nigro (known for his work with Olivia Rodrigo and Chappell Roan) on his first two albums. The 26-year-old's most recent, 2024's "Found Heaven," was a departure from Nigro and the affective melancholy of his previous singer-songwriter releases. Swedish super-producer Max Martin produced many of that project's well-received '80s-inspired tracks, which saw an adaptable Gray convey big emotions through sound, rather than story.

Nigro returns as the executive producer of "Wishbone." Their reunion finds Gray comfortable but candid, as recurring characters, settings and symbols help him recount relationships atop a sonic landscape informed by his past releases.

Introduced with a trumpet's call, "Romeo" details a destabilizing heartbreak. "I took the blade into my ribs," Gray sings, taking inspiration from Shakespeare's tragedy. His voice is pitched down to an almost robotic effect on the bridge: "Where art thou? I'm all alone now," he sings. Unlike the teens pushed to violent ends in the Bard's play, Gray and his 21st century Romeo meet their demise through more relatable means: egos, emotional manipulation and miscommunication. "Guess I was just your experiment!" Gray screams at the song's midpoint, his voice cracking.

Romeo returns in "My World," which opens with a preppy drum beat. Elsewhere, "Connell" approaches the self-inflicted pain of a breakup: "You remind me of how good it feels to hurt," Gray coos over strings and electric guitar, an unguarded voice replacing the angsty, spoken word cadence of "Romeo."

Many of Gray's lyrical stories are relatable, but some of the stickiest tracks focus on his inner thoughts. The acoustic guitar and piano that start "Nauseous" is drowned out by Gray's layered vocals as it takes on his fear of love and the childhood trauma that informs it. "Caramel," with an earworm chorus set to electric guitar, describes the memories he can't shake after a breakup.

"Everything comes back around, I still feel like the class clown," he lolls. While Gray struggles with his place, the way he deftly tackles those feelings in song proves he's among the star pupils of his class.

— Elise Ryan  
Associated Press



# Perspectives: Mariah doesn't feel pressure to replicate success

FROM PAGE 16

Mariah did not know Young Thug during the time of the accused crimes.

"There's just so many different facets to love. I feel like it's so romanticized, which is cute — I wish it was that great every single day, but that's not the case. Most days it is great, but it is really the collective journey," said Mariah. "Everybody has their own individual growing and evolution and journey, and then it's a totally separate thing where you're doing it together. Most people will grow apart, so, it's like an active effort to grow with somebody."

Mariah spoke with The Associated Press about creating another No. 1 hit, love and facing persistent relationship criticism. Answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.

**Associated Press: How does it feel to be one of the bright stars of R&B?**

**Mariah:** I feel like it's paying off ... I do

feel justified in some areas now.

Just people appreciating the art I make, not on just an acknowledgment level, but actually digesting it and appreciating it. ... It's really not necessarily about the accolades, but I feel like accolades are indicative of the exposure and being perceived in a flattering way.

**Would you describe your career as a slow burn?**

I think that a lot of people, as children, want to do certain things like, oh, they do want to be an actress or they do want to be a singer. And I feel like I didn't necessarily have that ambition.

I felt a little reluctant at first ... maybe almost a little shameful. Like, I just tried something — I just created something and



**Mariah the Scientist says that she is used to public scrutiny of her relationship with Young Thug, but that she doesn't want it to affect her decisions.**

then people took to it.

**After scoring a No. 1 song, is there pressure to replicate that success?**

The fact that "Burning Blue" has done what it has done ... makes me feel like I can surpass what I have done. But I don't wanna put some large list of expectations on what I'm doing because I didn't expect to have anything that I have. So, really, I'm just appreciative.

**How did you come up with the album title?**

Without a heart, the functionality of a person or of relationships, friendships, marriages, even jobs ... the passion aspect, I feel like if it's not there, you're not operating to your fullest potential.

I feel like some people really do feel like you can buy love. So, I just wanted to be

open to interpretation. I want people to take multiple different perspectives and argue over them on the internet because that's what they have been doing with the majority of stuff I put out. And it's really interesting because it brings new perspectives to my own dashboard.

**You have a relationship with Young Thug that's heavily criticized. How have you dealt with it?**

Even the fact that I do talk about him, they get mad about it ... at this point, I'm used to people scrutinizing my relationship. It's almost like I expect them to do that.

I also don't want it to have such a heavy impact on my opinion on him or us to the point where it makes me not want to do it. I just want to be able to actively decide on my own if it's something that I want to do or not. Or, if it is something that's serving me or not serving me. And I think it's definitely been a process.

## VIDEO GAMES



Electronic Arts photos

The graphics in Madden NFL 26 are as impressive as ever on more powerful consoles, but the game still runs decently on the Nintendo Switch 2. Player movement has been updated to reflect the explosive athleticism only the NFL can deliver. Physics-based interactions now include catch tackles, stiff-arms and trucks for improved collision control.

# Madden makes solid return to Nintendo

NFL 26 for the Switch 2 essentially same package as on other consoles, but portable mode tends to be glitchy

BY GIESON CACHO  
The Mercury News

It's been more than a decade since Electronic Arts released a football game on a Nintendo console, and the absence has been noticeable for a company with one of the biggest fandoms. The last Madden entry was on the Wii U and featured now-retired Calvin Johnson on the cover. EA entirely skipped the Switch generation.

That changes with Madden NFL 26 making its way to the Nintendo Switch 2. Because it's more powerful, the console can run the demanding code that EA Orlando has crafted over the years to make its football games more realistic.

The animation systems are more complex and they rely on in-game physics to make every tackle and collision feel more visceral. Internet integration is tighter so that rosters are constantly updated and online play is deeper. The graphics look so realistic that casual fans can't tell the difference between the game and a broadcast at first glance. Nintendo has missed out on a lot of improvements since 2012.

## Content on par with other consoles'

With Madden NFL 26 on the Switch 2, fans can enjoy the complete experience. It's essentially the same package as the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X versions. Gamers will start off with Madden Ultimate Team and they can navigate to the other staples such as Franchise, Superstar and online modes. They're all polished and



In Franchise mode played on simulation, gamers take on the role of the football coach and can customize their staff, scouting department and weekly game plans. Coach DNA delivers on the real-life tendencies and styles of each NFL head coach.

robust after years of tinkering.

The modes feature enough depth to sate the most rabid football fan. The Franchise mode played on simulation lets gamers take on the role of the football coach, and they can customize their staff, scouting department and weekly game plans. The developers emphasized Madden NFL 26's new wear and tear system that shows how constant pounding diminishes athletes' abilities over the season.

That forces gamers to better manage their teams over the season. While that adds more layers to gameplay, it also means that an in-game weekly matchup can take an entire night to complete. However, the developers added flexibility to streamline that depth, so that gamers can have fun at their own pace.

## Customizable depth

Gamers can simplify the Simulation Mode so that they handle just the team on game days or they can dabble with scouting at the end of the season. Those looking for more action-oriented gameplay can play arcade-style. There's even a competitive mode for players into esports.

That same customization applies to the Superstar mode, in which gamers take a rookie through his draft combine and career and have to manage relationships and superstardom. They can automate some of the other sections of the NFL lifestyle and just focus on game day performances.

## How it plays on Switch 2

For newcomers, there's an in-depth tutorial called Training Camp that first introduces the basics in a transparent manner and later injects more complex ideas. Veterans will also find it worthwhile because it introduces some gameplay tweaks and improvements such as the ability to reach for a first down or improved controls for a back shoulder throw.

The Switch 2 version boasts these improvements, but the game's performance on the system is good, not great. Visually, Madden NFL 26 on the Nintendo console is a step below the PlayStation 5 version. The developers managed to keep the realistic detail on helmets and other surfaces, but the frame rate suffers, especially when playing in portable mode. The game runs better when docked or at least connected to a power source such as an external battery.

In addition, the load times are longer, which becomes aggravating when switching modes or retrying a failed exercise. The game also has a lot of glitches and bugs. In the build I played, sometimes the offense would come out to play as the defense or I would automatically run up to spike the ball after a play was over.

The biggest benefit of the Switch 2 version compared to its counterparts is that the system is portable, so gamers can bring Madden NFL 26 wherever they go. It's a serviceable version of the famed football series. It will make Nintendo fans who haven't played an entry in ages happy, but for veterans, the year-over-year improvements feel minor and not worth it if they picked up past entries.

**Platforms:** Nintendo Switch 2, PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X and Series S, PC

**Online:** [ea.com/games/madden-nfl/madden-nfl-26](https://ea.com/games/madden-nfl/madden-nfl-26)

# CROSSWORD AND COMICS

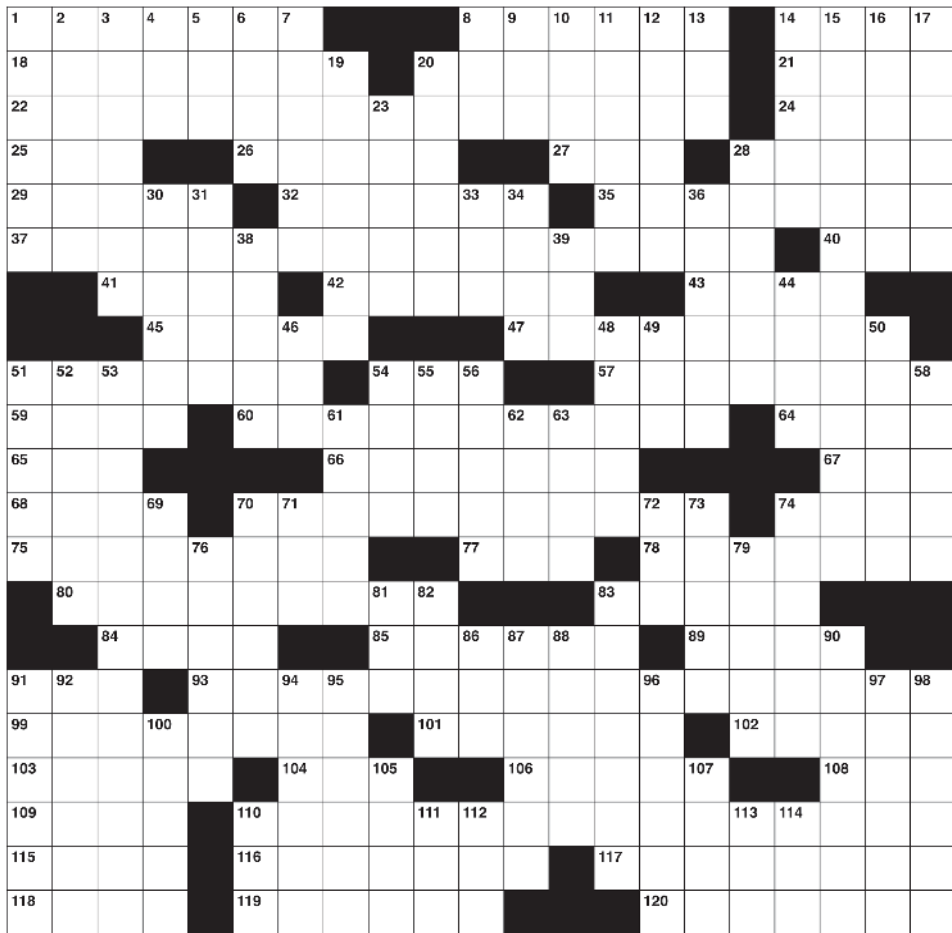
## NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

### IXNAY THAT!

BY AMSAY EZERSKY / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Sam Ezersky, of Buffalo, is a digital puzzles editor for The Times. He has been creating crosswords for the paper since he was 17. His favorite ones to solve are "tough-as-nails themeless Saturdays." When he's constructing, Sam works hard to include answers with "interesting letters and fun cluing potential" over tired fill loaded with E's, R's, S's and T's. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sign off on
  - 8 Feel the pain
  - 14 One of music's Three B's
  - 18 They're paving the way
  - 20 Island with ferries to Ibiza
  - 21 Tangent line?
  - 22 One of the better morning beverages?
  - 24 Zoom background option
  - 25 Hrs. for Augusta in August
  - 26 "\_\_\_ Q" (1968 hit)
  - 27 Styling substance
  - 28 "C'mon, the car door's open!"
  - 29 Avoid \_\_\_ (GPS option)
  - 32 Slice of the economy
  - 35 First non-English-language film to win Best Picture
  - 37 Just one inning left after this?
  - 40 Annual gala locale, with "the"
  - 41 Meat sauce in Italian cooking
  - 42 Go-getter sorts
  - 43 Trifling
  - 45 View from the Quai d'Orsay
  - 47 Character with a Jamaican accent in Disney's "The Little Mermaid"
  - 51 How a mountain road may rise or fall
  - 54 Threads, e.g.
  - 57 Query of worry
  - 59 Units on a multimeter
  - 60 Seasoning preference when eating Maryland blue crab?
  - 64 Berry plant related to a hawthorn
  - 65 The lion in summer?
  - 66 "So here's my question . . ."
  - 67 Humorous ending with hater
  - 68 Sephora competitor
  - 70 Two-pound tomahawk steak, for instance?
  - 74 Underwater respirator
  - 75 Home on the internet, perhaps
  - 77 Prescriptions, for short
  - 78 Arouses
  - 80 Slimy scheme for profit
  - 83 Listing that might include an explanation of benefits
  - 84 Anchors provide this
  - 85 Casual shoe
  - 89 New Jersey?
  - 91 A.C.C. school
  - 93 "Do I \*really\* wanna start an online bidding war? Hmm . . .?"
  - 99 Czech brew
  - 101 Move (over)
  - 102 Michael of R.E.M.
  - 103 The government, at times
  - 104 What Pomeranians do
  - 106 The (middle) sound of "silence"
  - 108 "\_\_\_ but a scratch"
  - 109 Creature in Magic: The Gathering
  - 110 Give an extra perk to a cigarette smoker?
  - 115 Finish filming
  - 116 \_\_\_ Attucks, Revolutionary War casualty who posthumously became an abolitionist symbol
  - 117 Cherish
  - 118 No side
  - 119 Become gooey over, as cheese atop a hot burger
  - 120 They're usually found to the left of Q's
  - 13 Hindi for "reign"
  - 14 Sweethearts
  - 15 One of the best coffee beverages ever?
  - 16 Top execs, collectively
  - 17 Charlotte N.B.A. player
  - 19 Montreal newspaper continuously published since 1778, with "The"
  - 20 Get-together
  - 23 French city from which a soup gets its name
  - 28 Merriment, in one spelling
  - 30 Doesn't own, say
  - 31 Largest college fraternity in the U.S., familiarly
  - 33 No U.S. area code starts with this
  - 34 Nutrition figs.
  - 36 Minnesota county whose seat is St. Paul
  - 38 Artfulness
  - 39 Suffix with journal
  - 44 Some natural borders en México
  - 46 Greek goddess of the night
  - 48 Emperor who founded the Mughal Empire
  - 49 Palindromic constellation
  - 50 Noggin
  - 51 Latin for "only"
  - 52 What fugitives are on
  - 53 What might confirm the worst for an athlete's injury?
  - 54 Many a Bahraini
  - 55 Old El \_\_\_ (Tex-Mex brand)
  - 56 Game with an annual World Series since 1970
  - 58 Collapses, with "over"
  - 61 Smartphone clock function
  - 62 A bobcat is one, technically
  - 63 . . .
  - 69 Actress Bancroft
  - 70 Many-time N.B.A. All-Star Tatum
  - 71 Boot out of Australia?
  - 72 Creature with flat, transparent larvae called "leptocephali"
  - 73 \_\_\_ change
  - 74 Vodka-and-lime cocktail
  - 76 Metal material used for dishware before porcelain became popular
  - 79 Ta-tas
  - 81 In the style of
  - 82 School bathroom sign
  - 83 Spin a yarn, perhaps?
  - 86 Progressive initials in the U.S. Congress
  - 87 Puts icing on
  - 88 Methuselah's father
  - 90 Paramount+ docuseries with real-life crime stories
  - 91 Like Manhattan in the 80s and 90s?
  - 92 Cialis alternative
  - 94 Long-eared pal of Pooh
  - 95 Country whose name Americans spell with a "z"
  - 96 Symbic
  - 97 Abode that's abuzz
  - 98 "Ah, that's right!"
  - 100 Trickles
  - 105 Wicketless attention-getter
  - 107 Traveling in waves, say
  - 110 Vintage film channel
  - 111 Milestone for a start-up, for short
  - 112 Sister figure
  - 113 Pre-\_\_\_ (exercise program in advance of surgery)
  - 114 Vowelless rebuke
- DOWN**
- 1 Actor Will of "BoJack Horseman"
  - 2 British cry of approval
  - 3 Scary snake
  - 4 Joseph who co-invented rocky road ice cream
  - 5 Obstruction to teamwork, maybe
  - 6 Greek crosses
  - 7 Sudden surge
  - 8 Round Table title
  - 9 "\_\_\_ cerveza, por favor"
  - 10 Phileas in "Around the World in Eighty Days"
  - 11 The power of social media from a marketing standpoint, informally
  - 12 Bit of green legislation



- 56 Game with an annual World Series since 1970
- 58 Collapses, with "over"
- 61 Smartphone clock function
- 62 A bobcat is one, technically
- 63 . . .
- 69 Actress Bancroft
- 70 Many-time N.B.A. All-Star Tatum
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- 112 Sister figure
- 113 Pre-\_\_\_ (exercise program in advance of surgery)
- 114 Vowelless rebuke

## GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

## RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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## TECHNOLOGY

## Is AI the answer to taking better photos?

Google Pixel 10 phones use the tech to enhance zoomed-in images, teach composition and edit by text or voice

BY CHRIS VELAZCO  
The Washington Post

I'm no great photographer, but I still get lots of questions about how to frame a photo just right. Google's new Pixel 10 phones can help with that too.

For years, Google's Pixels have been also-rans in the U.S. smartphone market, where Apple and Samsung continue to dominate. But those who do buy them have been loud in their praise of their cameras, which this year got a potent boost from artificial intelligence. Though maybe not how you'd expect.

Earlier Pixel models were more than happy to tweak your images for you. Now, Google is trying to use AI to make you better at capturing and editing those images yourself.

The new photography features built into the Pixel 10 (\$799+), 10 Pro (\$999+) and 10 Pro XL (\$1,199+), which launched Thursday, are part of Google's big push to put more smarts in smartphones by tapping its AI technology. Your photos might well look better after using them. We'll put them to a proper test soon enough — for now, here's how Google's more collaborative take on AI-supported photography works.

### Maximum zoom

Google's new phones look as sleek as ever but pack the AI equivalent of an enormous telephoto lens. With a lot of help from AI you can zoom in on a scene by 30x on the company's entry-level Pixel 10, and up to 100x on its slab-like Pro models.

As with any phone, when you zoom in beyond a certain point, these Pixel phones mostly see a blurry mess. But Google then cleans it up using an on-device AI model to "recover" texture and detail based on that model's training and what's still visible in the original image.

In the end, though, these phones are just painting in details calculated to be a good fit. Put another way, you're getting AI's interpretation of the world — not necessarily what's really there.

For photos of buildings and landmarks, this might not be so bad: AI has gotten pretty good at replicating regular lines and geometry and if you're not trying to preserve perfect architectural detail, you may well be happy with the result.

But consider this humble can of seltzer we photographed from the far end of a spacious demo room.

The top photo is what the camera's sensor "sees." Not much of anything. The bottom photo is what Google's AI guessed should be there. The results show the limits of the fake-it-to-photograph-it approach. The branding is mostly right, but the company's algorithms appear to have little idea of what to do with the finer surrounding details.

Features like this aren't completely new. Samsung's Ultra-branded smartphones have had a 100x "Space Zoom" feature for years and have previously drawn criticism for producing images that were at least a little out of step with reality.

I've also long wondered about the potential for these enhanced-zoom smartphone cameras to become helpful tools for creeps. Snapping photos of people covertly is a lot easier to do when you're using a phone instead of a camera with a massive lens.

Google has attempted to fix this: The camera on Pixel 10 phones largely refuses to enhance people appearing in those hyperzoomed photos.

In photos where, say, a landmark or city street is the clear focal point, Google's AI model will sharpen and enhance everything but the humans milling around. And if you zoom in 100x onto a person's face, the phones simply refuse to help.

When I urged a Google employee to take a close-up of



PHOTOS BY CHRIS VELAZCO/The Washington Post

**What the Pixel 10 Pro's camera sees, top, compared to an artificially enhanced version, bottom. The results show the limits of the fake-it-to-photograph-it approach. The branding on this can of seltzer is mostly right, but Google's algorithms appear to have little idea of what to do with the finer surrounding details.**



my mug from across the room, the phone instead spat out a detailed image of, uh, just my hand. I can get behind the idea of fewer AI-distorted faces on the internet, though I'm sure lots of people wouldn't want other extremities sneakily photographed at a distance either.

This feature deserves some rigorous testing. I just wish the Pixel phone had explained why it happened as I was using the feature.

### A better 'Best Take'

My colleague Geoffrey A. Fowler once called Google's Best Take "a nifty superpower for the family photographer" for the way it stitches together faces from different photos into a single cheery composite with nary a closed eyelid or squinched nose.

He's got a point: The results can be pretty and pleasant compared with the originals, where subjects could be blinking or burping or looking away, even though these composite images depict a moment that technically may have never occurred.

Google is tweaking that approach with its latest Pixels, making them more faithful to reality. The new phones will still cobble together a smiley amalgam if needed. But if they can see you appear to be taking a group shot, they'll analyze up to 150 images after you snap the photo — a process that can take a few seconds — in search of that magical moment when everyone looks just right.

If that moment never occurs? That's when the phone will cobble together a composite. (Pro tip: If these not-quite-true-to-life images give you the creeps, you can turn this feature off entirely.)

### AI photo coaching

Google's new phones also debut an AI photography feature that kicks in long before you press the shutter button. With the tap of the screen, you can launch a "Camera Coach" tool that scans what the camera can see to give advice on how to frame an image.

Once that momentary scan is complete, the Pixel will offer suggestions like "full-length portrait" or "urban oasis detail," previewing what the final image could look like.

Tap your favorite suggestion, and the real hand-holding starts: On-screen prompts will steer you to select specific photo modes, walk around your subject and move the phone to cut unwanted objects from the frame.

I haven't been thrilled by the coaching I've seen so far, but I could see the feature genuinely helping some amateurs.

But my advice for folks seriously interested in taking better photos is that they should spend a little time getting to know their camera of choice — even if it is a phone — and poring over images they find personally arresting to understand why.

That said, I'm almost certainly going to make my parents use Camera Coach all the time.

### Edit with words, not sliders

Editing photos is as much an art form as taking good ones in the first place, but getting started can feel daunting. Open up those menus and you'll soon be staring at sliders and toggles with names you've never heard of.

If you'd rather not swim through all those settings, the new Pixel phones come with a new version of the Google Photos app that will let you just type or speak the edits you want to make. You don't need to know any technical lingo, either.

The tool can field multipart requests like "remove the glare and brighten the photo" as well as dead-simple ones like "make the photo look better."

In early demos, I've used the feature to make very specific changes, like cropping images vertically for social media and swapping out existing backdrops for AI-generated views of starry space. Thankfully, it's a little harder now to pass off images edited with AI as fully genuine. Google's new phones are the first with so-called "content credentials" built in, so edited images will contain hidden data explaining exactly how they've been tweaked.

Some of these AI photography features may leave you feeling kind of icky, especially since Google is still happy to take some liberties with objective reality. But Google, a company that once unilaterally decided our photos should look like Caravaggio paintings, could have gone a lot further.

It's been a pleasant surprise that the company appears to realize that maybe the best way to use AI in photography is to keep it from making too many decisions for us.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Judge accused of helping man evade ICE loses bid

**WI** MADISON—A Wisconsin judge accused of helping a man evade arrest by U.S. immigration agents lost an attempt Tuesday to throw out the Trump administration's case against her.

The prosecution of Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Hannah Dugan has highlighted the push by President Donald Trump's administration to confront state and local authorities who resist his sweeping immigration crackdown.

Dugan was arrested at the county courthouse in April and indicted on federal charges in May. She quickly filed a motion to dismiss the charges, arguing that she was acting in her official capacity as a judge and is therefore immune from prosecution.

However, U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman on Tuesday rejected that argument and upheld the July recommendation of a magistrate judge who also ruled that the case could proceed.

Prosecutors say Dugan escorted Eduardo Flores-Ruiz, 31, and his lawyer out of her courtroom through a back door on April 18 after learning that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were in the courthouse seeking to arrest him. Agents arrested Flores-Ruiz outside the courthouse after a brief foot chase.

## Suit claims 2026 election map is racially biased

**TX** AUSTIN — Voting-rights advocates sued Tuesday to overturn a redistricting map drawn by Texas Republicans meant to favor the party in the 2026 midterm elections, saying it weakens the electoral influence of Black voters.

The NAACP and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law filed the lawsuit in Texas.

They accuse Texas legislative leaders of engaging in gerrymandering to prevent Black voters from electing candidates of their choice.

Black residents for decades have overwhelmingly favored Democratic candidates.

Texas lawmakers approved the map Saturday, adding five new districts favoring Republicans. The move came after President Donald Trump requested it.

Republican Sen. Phil King, the Texas measure's sponsor, previously denied accusations alleging that the redrawn districts violate the Voting Rights Act by diluting voters' influence based on race.

## 24 decomposing bodies removed from mortuary

**CO** DENVER — Authorities said Tuesday they removed two dozen decomposing bodies and multiple containers of bones and likely human tissue after discovering remains last week behind a hidden door of a Colorado



RAHMAT GUL/AP

## Perfectly positioned pose

Visitors take a picture at the base of the Washington Monument, on Monday, in Washington. The U.S. Capitol is seen in the background.

funeral home owned by the local county coroner.

The homes of Pueblo County Coroner Brian Cotter and his brother, Davis Mortuary co-owner Chris Cotter, were also searched as part of the criminal investigation into the funeral home in Pueblo, about 110 miles south of Denver, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation said.

Neither brother has been arrested or charged as an investigation that is expected to be lengthy continues. The Cotters have not been questioned because they retained lawyers, CBI said.

Pueblo County Commissioners on Tuesday renewed their calls for Brian Cotter, who is an elected official, to resign. Coroners from two nearby counties are running his office, CBI said.

## Democrat's win breaks Senate supermajority

**IA** DES MOINES — A Democrat has won a special election for an Iowa state Senate seat in a district that had been held by Republicans and had voted heavily for President Donald Trump in 2024, adding to the Democratic Party's hope that it can flip more seats during the 2026 midterm elections.

Democrat Catelin Drey handily defeated Republican Christopher Prosch in Tuesday's election, according to unofficial results from the Woodbury County Auditor's Office, for the district that covers

Sioux City in the Republican stronghold of northwestern Iowa. The special election had been called after Republican Sen. Rocky de Witt died in June of pancreatic cancer.

Fewer than a quarter of registered voters turned out for the special election.

Drey's win breaks Republicans' supermajority in the 50-member Iowa Senate, giving Democrats 17 seats to the GOP's 33. The addition of Drey's seat means Republicans would need the support of at least one Democrat to confirm appointments to state agencies and commissions by Gov. Kim Reynolds.

## Woman charged for using slur has collected \$800K

**MN** MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota prosecutors filed misdemeanor disorderly conduct charges Tuesday against a woman accused of using a racial slur against a Black child at a playground — an incident the woman has since used to raise more than \$800,000 after she appealed for help with relocating.

"Defendant wrongfully and unlawfully engaged in offensive, obscene, abusive, boisterous, or noisy conduct, or in offensive, obscene, or abusive language that would reasonably tend to arouse alarm, anger or resentment in others," the criminal complaint alleges.

A social media video of the April incident, in which the woman ad-

mitted to using the slur, has garnered millions of views. It showed a man confronting her for using the slur toward the child. She then appeared to double down on the racist term and held up a middle finger to the man who challenged her.

As of Tuesday, she had raised over \$800,000 on the Christian fundraising platform GiveSendGo — including many donations that came in after the charges were announced — with a stated goal of \$1 million. In her last update, in June, the woman claimed she was the victim of "silly misinformation."

The woman's arraignment was set for Oct. 29.

## Kayaker who faked his own death gets 89 days

**WI** MADISON — A Wisconsin man who faked his own drowning while kayaking and left his wife and three children to meet a woman in the country of Georgia was convicted Tuesday of obstructing an officer and sentenced to 89 days in jail, which was the amount of time he successfully misled law enforcement about his whereabouts.

The sentence given to Ryan Borgwardt was nearly twice as long as what was recommended under a plea deal reached with prosecutors.

Borgwardt, 45, initially pleaded not guilty to the misdemeanor that stemmed from his elaborate escape from the country last August. But under the plea deal unveiled

Tuesday, Borgwardt changed his plea to no contest and agreed to pay \$30,000 in restitution to law enforcement to cover what was spent trying to locate him. A no contest plea isn't an admission of guilt but is treated as such for the purposes of sentencing.

Borgwardt was reported missing on Aug. 12, 2024, after telling his wife the night before that he was kayaking on Green Lake, about 100 miles northwest of Milwaukee. His disappearance was first investigated as a possible drowning.

## Cyberattack shuts down state offices, websites

**NV** LAS VEGAS — State offices closed for two days this week after a cyberattack that rendered some state websites and phone lines unavailable, the governor's office said Tuesday.

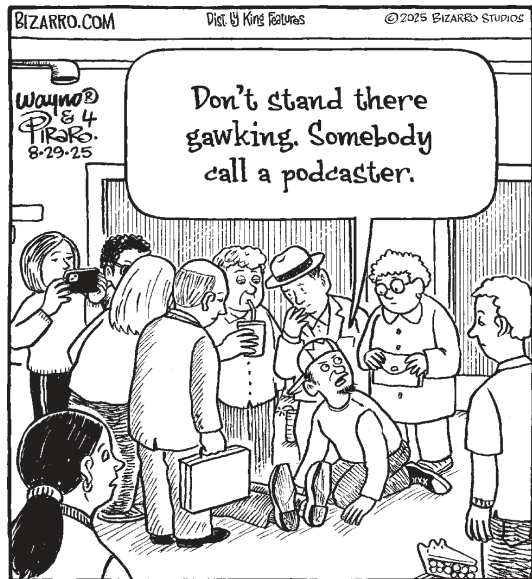
Agencies would announce when their counters would reopen for in-person services, according to the technology office of Gov. Joe Lombardo, whose website was among those disabled.

The state identified the attack Sunday and said authorities are investigating.

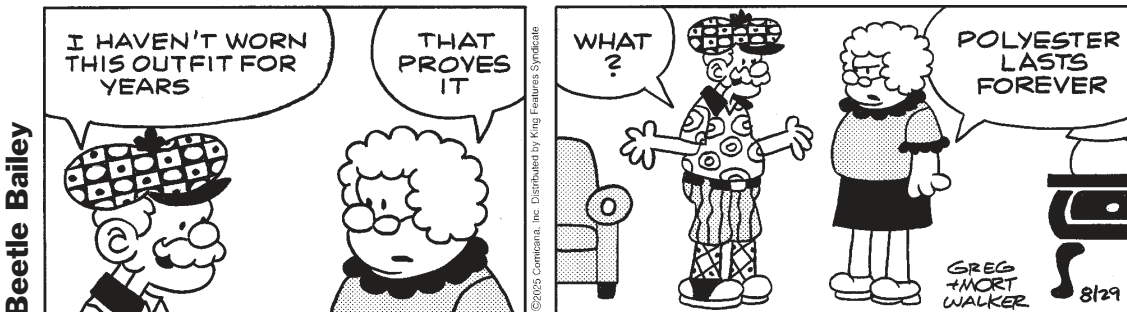
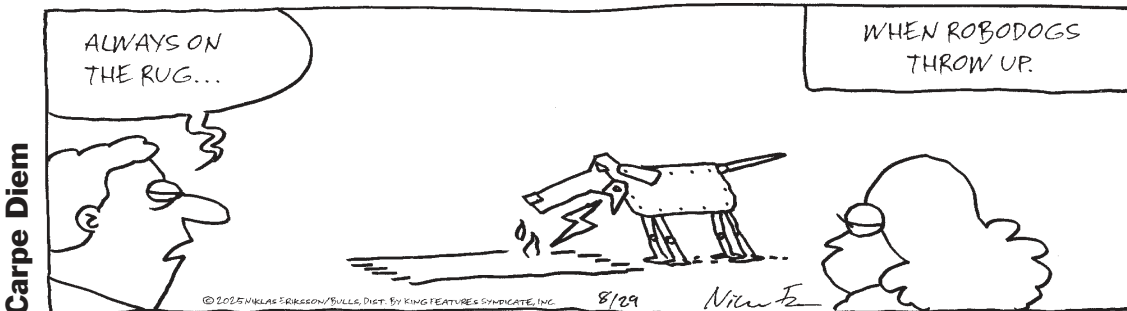
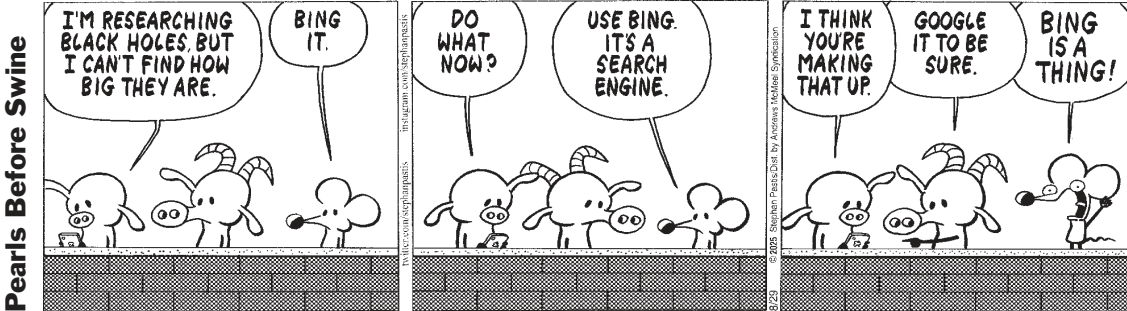
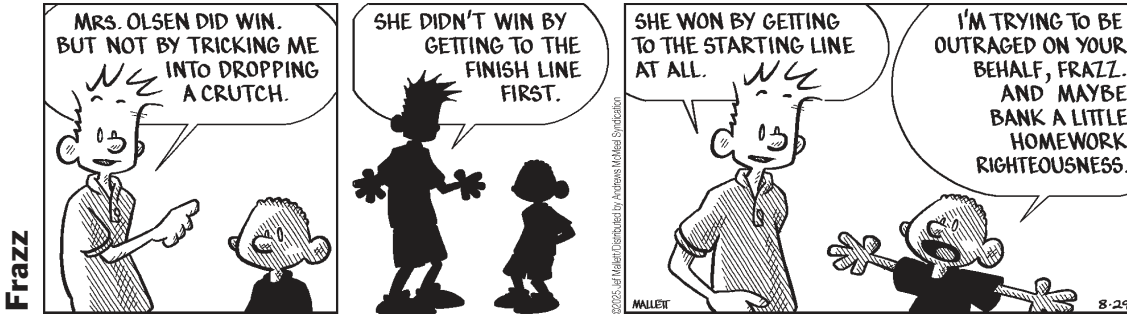
State employees were put on administrative leave Monday. Many returned to work Tuesday, and workers will continue to come back to the office as their computer systems are brought online.

From wire reports

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

- 1 Race segment
- 4 Grand tale
- 8 Sidewalk eatery
- 12 Swiss peak
- 13 Not pizzicato
- 14 Filches
- 15 Tropical fruit
- 17 Yale students
- 18 Stop
- 19 Water-testing digit
- 21 Scot's refusal
- 22 Morticia or Gomez
- 26 Stopwatch button
- 29 Cover
- 30 Avril follower
- 31 Chopping tools
- 32 Many millennia
- 33 Shade
- 34 Actress Farrow
- 35 520, in old Rome
- 36 Musical sounds
- 37 Meryl of "The Post"
- 39 Trim the grass
- 40 Night school subj.
- 41 Sports venues
- 45 Tavern order
- 48 JFK Terminal transport
- 50 Hotel chain
- 51 Concerning
- 52 Hand-held organizer
- 53 Brownish purple

- 54 Unfavorable votes
- 55 Nile viper

DOWN

- 1 "Dragnet" org.
- 2 Model Macpherson
- 3 Transcript stats
- 4 Bothers
- 5 Chatter
- 6 Here (Fr.)
- 7 Hold
- 8 Belief
- 9 "You've got mail" ISP
- 10 J. Edgar's org.
- 11 "Heir" extension?
- 16 Dressed to the —
- 20 Quirky
- 23 Whitaker's Oscar-winning role
- 24 Long hair
- 25 Poses
- 26 Runs (into)
- 27 Way out
- 28 Blacken
- 29 Bagel topper
- 32 Clarify
- 33 "Silver Ladders" composer
- Joan
- 35 — Moines
- 36 Rich cakes
- 38 Haunting
- 39 Tie the knot
- 42 Valley in Cali-ornia
- 43 Helps
- 44 Ginger cookie
- 45 Conk on the head
- 46 Big bird of Australia
- 47 SASE, e.g.
- 49 Pig-poke link

Answer to Previous Puzzle

C	A	V	S		B	A	B	A		M	A	D
U	L	E	E		O	V	I	D		E	M	I
J	E	R	R		Y	R	I	C	E		R	O
O	X	Y	G	E	N			A	E	R	I	E
					E	T		S	U	L	K	Y
A	P	B	S		O	T	B		G	M	A	T
S	E	E			N	A	E			E	L	I
H	A	R	P		M	I	R		C	N	B	C
					R	A	R	E	R		B	O
J	O	Y	C	E					G	U	M	B
U	M	P			F	E	R	R	Y	B	O	A
L	E	I			E	P	E	E		E	L	S
E	N	E			R	A	N	G			D	O

8-29

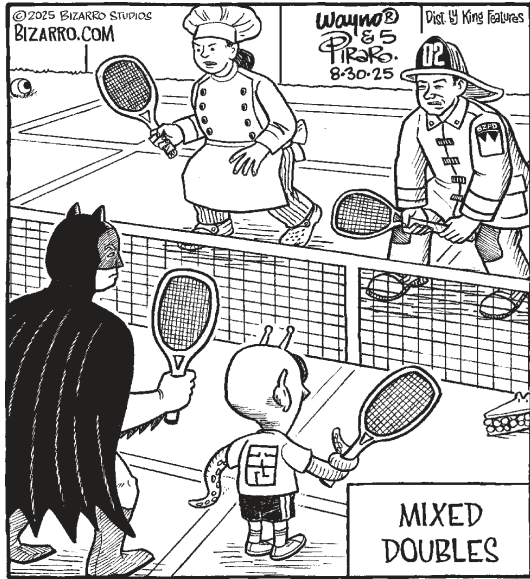
CRYPTOQUIP

CKS AR SRM FMOORFH WQDAF  
 ZHTHD ODHONDH ERD IKQZBF  
 QZ NATNZJH? WHJNMFH IKHS  
 ODHEHD IR CQZB QI.

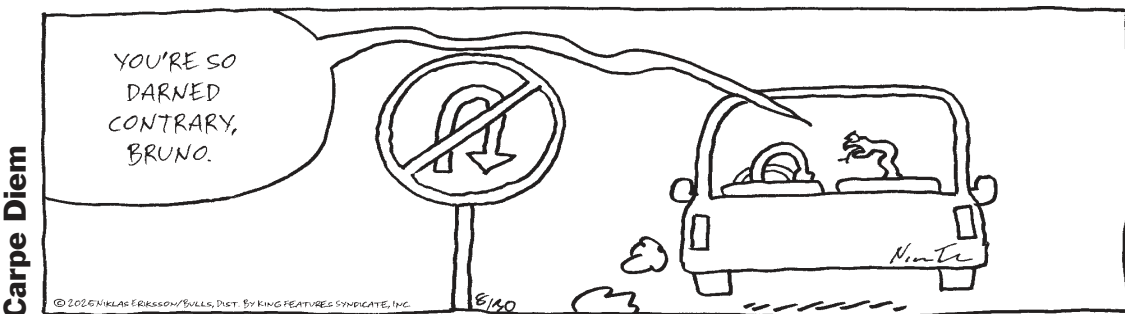
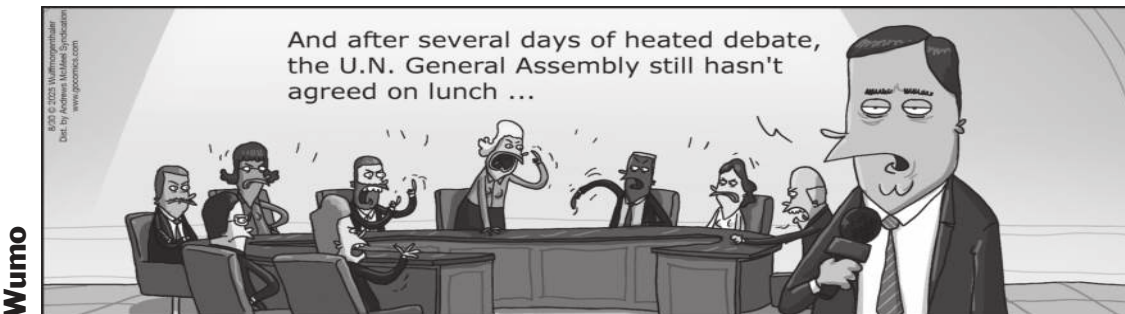
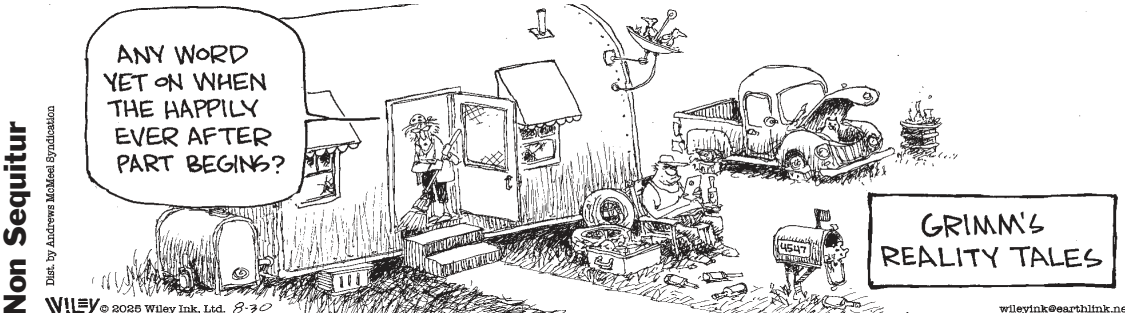
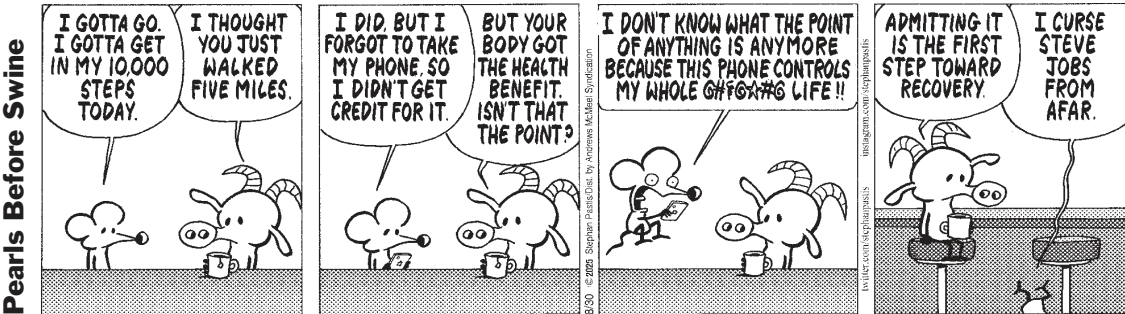
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BOTH OF THOSE UNTRAINED SCOTTIE DOGS ARE FRIGHTENING, BUT THAT ONE IS THE SCARIER TERRIER.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals P

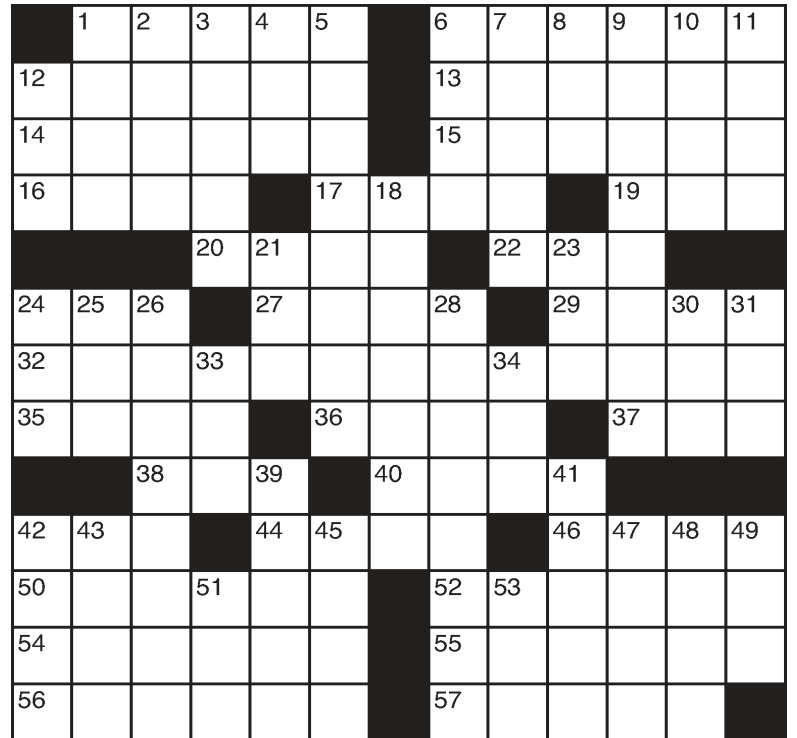
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Russian ballet company
- 6 Degraded
- 12 Italian sandwich
- 13 Bagel choice
- 14 Without markup
- 15 "I'm all ears ..."
- 16 Deli array
- 17 Slightly
- 19 Author Fleming
- 20 Wrestling style
- 22 Abel, to Eve
- 24 Chances, for short
- 27 Itsy-bitsy
- 29 Opposite of "fer"
- 32 Investor and philanthropist born on 8/30/1930
- 35 Actress Falco
- 36 Aviator's milestone
- 37 Fan's shout
- 38 — -di-dah
- 40 Adjoining
- 42 Docs' bloc
- 44 Sunrise direction
- 46 "Casablanca" role
- 50 Foreign correspondent?
- 52 Truly
- 54 Harley riders

- 55 Crown
- 56 Awake suddenly
- 57 Actress Burstyn

- 18 Chocolate treats
- 21 Salt Lake athlete
- 23 Klutz
- 24 Have bills
- 25 Small tablet
- 26 Colombo's land
- 28 Christmas season
- 30 "Give — rest!"
- 31 Ultimate
- 33 Actor Stephen
- 34 Sly one
- 39 Core
- 41 Kind of wave
- 42 SFPD alerts syst.
- 43 Chow —
- 45 To boot
- 47 News story intro
- 48 Beheld
- 49 USN bigwig
- 51 Zing
- 53 Zilch

Answer to Previous Puzzle



8-30

CRYPTOQUIP

EY X QETJT KY YKOEXLT EV  
HTNQKZXZEOW NEVVEGL YZKN  
EHV HZTT, NELDH HDXH PT X  
OTXY KY XPVTGJT?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE BIRDS NEVER PREPARE FOR THINGS IN ADVANCE? BECAUSE THEY PREFER TO WING IT.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals F

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) published daily (except Saturday, Sunday, 25 December and 1 January) for 50 cents (Monday through Thursday) and one dollar on Friday by Stars and Stripes Pacific, OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, OPC 706 BOX 7, AP 96301-9001.

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## GOP won't let hypocrisy get in the way of tyranny

BY JONAH GOLDBERG

Tribune Content Agency

Even before America became a country, Americans already had a habit of freaking out about even minor violations of abstract principles.

"In other countries, the people... judge of an ill principle in government only by an actual grievance," observed Edmund Burke, the great British statesman and philosopher, in 1775. But in America, "they anticipate the evil, and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance; and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze."

America's obsession with slippery slopes used to frustrate me. I support gun rights, but bans on machine guns or bump stocks do not overly trouble me. I'm a passionate defender of parental rights, but child abuse is intolerable. I think political speech is inviolate, but obscenity laws are fine by me.

The response to such nuance was often, "If the government can do this, what's to stop it from doing (insert something much, much, worse)."

My answer was usually "us" — i.e. Americans. Voters, politicians, intellectuals et al. can make distinctions based on context, reason and culture that still respect a principle. The trick, however, requires respecting the principle, even when inconvenient.

In the last month, President Donald Trump has sent troops — now armed — into the District of Columbia ostensibly to combat an ill-defined crime "emergency." Because of D.C.'s special constitutional status, he has the authority to do so. But he's already talking about taking the show on the road to Chicago,

Baltimore and New York, all cities that just happen to be run by Democrats.

The D.C. gambit — following an earlier scheme in Los Angeles — is partly intended to force Democrats to talk about crime (which they are very bad at). But it also seems intended to normalize using the Army on American soil, at the whim of the president, an idea that is directly contrary to the law and the constitutional order.

The Trump administration has acquired a 10% stake of Intel and wants more such "deals." It raided the home of a prominent critic, John Bolton, without much explanation. Annoyed by commentary from former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, the president threatened to reopen a criminal investigation in which Christie was already cleared of wrongdoing. Trump fired the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for releasing data he did not like, and fired the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency allegedly for a preliminary finding that contradicted his claims of military success (this on the heels of earlier Pentagon purges).

Trump successfully ordered a pliant Texas Republican governor and legislature — elected officials who do not answer to the federal government — to redraw state maps to produce more Republican friendly districts. He has declared he will lead an effort to dictate how elections are conducted — a function he has no legal or constitutional authority over — on the grounds that the states are merely "agents" of the federal government.

Since taking office, Trump has lawlessly defied Congress' explicit instruction to force the sale or termination of the Chinese spyware social media app TikTok. Last week, the White House opened a TikTok account.

Democrats have raised alarms about this hardly exhaustive list. They are obviously correct about the GOP's staggering hypocrisy. If a Democratic president did any of these things, Republican outrage would be biblical.

But the issue is bigger than that.

For my entire adult life, when conservatives raised concerns about the government intruding on constitutional rules and norms, Democrats (and the media) almost invariably responded with contemptuous eye-rolling and mockery. This is one of the reasons the new right no longer cares much about those rules and norms. They've convinced themselves that the left only cares about such things when they constrain Republicans.

Contempt breeds more contempt. Norms for thee, unrestrained power for me is a sure-fire way to destroy all norms.

I'm not saying that what Trump is doing isn't worse than what Democrats did — or wanted to do but failed. But in our politics, the ratchet effect always leads to ever greater violations, in part because each side wildly exaggerates the other's transgressions.

Point out that Trump is weaponizing the justice system or profiting off government, the reply is "they did it first." There's some truth there. But when Democrats did such things, Republicans shrieked that it was wrong. Now one team's wrongness is justification for even more wrongness.

Partisanship is not new. But partisans used to respect the rules as a way to ensure they were followed when their team was out of power. That's what has been lost: the idea that the rules should apply to your team, too.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

## Today's many college students are studying too little

BY GEORGE F. WILL

The Washington Post

Autumn, season of mists and mellow fruitfulness (Keats), is also when too many young Americans head to college, where too many of them will study too little under the undemanding supervision of faculty who teach too little. Colleges illustrate the seepage of rigor from American life.

Since 1990, college enrollment has increased by 6 million students (29%). Reasons for this include government tuition subsidies and "college for everyone" rhetoric. And "degree inflation": irrational requirements for job applicants.

Preston Cooper, then of the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, reported in 2023 that applicants for a \$35,600-per-year job driving an Oscar Mayer Wienermobile (a 27-foot-long motorized hot dog) had to have a bachelor's degree. In 2000, only 16% of prime-age workers earning \$35,000 (in today's dollars) had such degrees; by 2022, 24% did. In 1990, 9% of secretaries and administrative professionals had bachelor's degrees; today, 33% do, and a higher proportion of job listings require applicants to have one. This "paper ceiling" is especially egregious in state and local governments, where 63% of those earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000 have bachelor's degrees or higher. Only 28% of such earners in the private sector do.

A recent report from the Burning Glass Institute and the Strada Education Foundation says 52% of recent college graduates are underemployed: in jobs not using their college

learning. Meanwhile there are 750,000 industrial jobs unfilled.

Frederick M. Hess and Greg Fournier of the American Enterprise Institute document that "students spend far less time studying" than formerly. In 1961, the average full-time student at a four-year college studied 24 hours a week; today it's 14 hours. A 2016 analysis based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that "the average full-time college student spent only 2.76 hours a day on all education-related activities" (classes, out-of-class studying), a total of 19.3 hours per week.

The 2011 book "Academically Adrift" reported that first-year students spend 6.3 hours a week doing assigned reading, part of a total of 14.3 hours preparing for classes, a decline of about 50% from a few decades earlier. Today, Hess and Fournier say, faculty tend to think the figure is just 4.9 hours preparing for classes. This, although only 40% of students hold jobs, down from 79% in the mid-1990s.

Many students consider writing a 750-word essay "long." Although 64% of students say they devote "a lot" of effort to schoolwork, only 6% report spending more than 20 hours per week studying and doing homework. In 2024, 74% of first-year students reported no reading assignment longer than 11 pages and no writing assignment longer than five pages. And 51% of seniors said they had written nothing longer than 11 pages in their final year.

But as effort declines, grades rise. Hess and Fournier say, "At institutions like Harvard and Yale, the mean GPA is 3.7 or higher, and 80 percent of grades are at least an A-minus."

Economist Arnold Kling says that despite

the limited "natural demand" for college education ("students who are excited by academic subjects"), graduate schools continue to churn out more Ph.D.s (almost 60,000 in 2022) than the growth of undergraduate enrollment justifies. So, artificial student demand must be stimulated. Kling says "colleges adapt by offering dumbed-down courses and grade inflation."

And by teachers teaching less. Hess and Richard B. Keck, also of AEI, say light teaching loads have become badges of professional status — and require schools to rely on teaching by graduate students or part-time adjunct instructors. Tenured or tenure-track professors teach less and less. Most are on nine-month contracts requiring them to teach 13 weeks in each semester, or 26 weeks of the approximately 40 covered by the contracts — often about 15 hours a week each semester. Instead of teaching, teachers chase grants or participate in "publication inflation," filling the more than 24,000 "scholarly journals." This dilutes the quality of what is published — 215,000 articles from 2015 to 2019 — most of them ignored.

The College Board, administrators of the SAT, says college applicants taking the test will no longer need to demonstrate comprehension of 500- to 750-word reading passages. Instead, the passages will be of 25 to 150 words, suited to the attention spans of young minds formed by browsing social media. The board says the ability to comprehend passages of "extended length" (the length of this column, not "Middlemarch") is not "an essential prerequisite for college." What worse can be said about higher education today?

# SCOREBOARD

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

#### BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League

**ATHLETICS** — Placed RHP Joey Estes on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Recalled LHP Brady Basso from Las Vegas (PCL).

**BALTIMORE ORIOLAS** — Selected the contract of 3B Emmanuel Rivera from Norfolk (IL). Designated SS Vimaël Machin for assignment. Transferred RHP Brandon Young from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL. Optioned RHP Yaramil Hiraldo to Norfolk. Selected the contract of RHP Roansy Contreras from Norfolk.

**CHICAGO WHITE SOX** — Placed OF Luis Robert Jr. on the 10-day IL. Recalled OF Will Robertson from Charlotte (IL).

**DETROIT TIGERS** — Sent OF Parker Meadows to Toledo (IL) on a rehab assignment. **HOUSTON ASTROS** — Placed C Victor Caratini on the 7-day concussion IL. Recalled C César Salazar from Sugar Land (PCL).

**KANSAS CITY ROYALS** — Agreed to terms with RHP Geoff Hartlieb on a minor league contract.

**LOS ANGELES ANGELS** — Sent OF Chris Taylor to Salt Lake (IL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Jack Kochanowicz from Salt Lake (PCL). Optioned RHP Sam Bachman to Salt Lake.

**MINNESOTA TWINS** — Reinstated RHP Simeon Woods Richardson from his rehab assignment and reinstated him from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Pierson Ohl to St. Paul (IL).

**SEATTLE MARINERS** — Recalled RHP Emerson Hancock from Tacoma (PCL). Optioned LHP Sauryn Lao to Tacoma.

**TAMPA BAY RAYS** — Sent OF Jonny DeLuca to Durham (IL) on a rehab assignment.

**TEXAS RANGERS** — Placed RHP Nathan Eovaldi on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 24. Recalled RHP Caleb Boushley from Round Rock (PCL). Agreed to terms with INF/OF Dylan Moore on a minor league contract.

#### National League

**ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS** — Selected the contract of RHP Taylor Rashi from Reno (PCL). Optioned RHP Juan Morillo from Reno. Designated INF Tristin English for assignment.

**CINCINNATI REDS** — Placed RHP Graham Ashcraft on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Reinstated LHP Nick Lodolo from the 15-day IL.

**MIAMI MARLINS** — Selected the contract of RHP Seth Martinez from Jacksonville (IL). Recalled RHP Freddy Tarnok from Jacksonville. Placed RHP Janson Junk on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 24. Optioned LHP Josh Simpson to Jacksonville.

**MILWAUKEE BREWERS** — Transferred RHP Logan Henderson from the 15-day IL, to the 60-day IL. Placed RHP Trevor Megill on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Agreed to terms with RHP Erick Fedde on a major league contract.

**NEW YORK METS** — Sent CF Jose Siri and LF Jesse Winker to St. Lucie (FSL) on a rehab assignment. Sent OF Francisco Alvarez to Syracuse (IL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Kevin Herget from Syracuse.

**SAN DIEGO PADRES** — Agreed to terms with C Christopher Sargent on a minor league contract.

**ST. LOUIS CARDINALS** — Placed LHP John King on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 26. Recalled RHP Andre Granillo from Memphis (IL).

#### BASKETBALL Women's National Basketball Association

**GOLDEN STATE VALKYRIES** — Signed G Bree Hall to a seven-day contract.

#### FOOTBALL National Football League

**ARIZONA CARDINALS** — Signed WRs Andre Baccellia, Simi Fehoko and Tejahna Palmer, LB Elliott Brown, OL Jeremiah Byers, Jake Curham, Sincere Haynesworth and Nick Leverett, TE Josiah Deguara and DL Anthony Goodlow and Elijah Simmons to the practice squad.

**ATLANTA FALCONS** — Acquired OF Michael Jerrell from Seattle in exchange for a 2027 seventh-round draft pick. Placed RT Kaleb McGary on injured reserve. Signed K Lenny Krieg, WRs Chris Blair, Dylan Drummond and Nick Nash, CBs Cobee Bryant and C.J. Henderson, OL Joshua Gray and Brandon Parker, S Ronnie Harrison, EDGE

Khalid Kareem, TE Joshua Simon, QB Easton Stick, DL Kentavious Street and RB Carlos Washington Jr. to the practice squad.

**BALTIMORE RAVENS** — Signed S Kyle Hamilton to a four-year contract extension. Signed QB Tyler Huntley, WRs Anthony Miller and Keith Kirkwood, CBs Marquise Robinson and Thomas Graham Jr., RB D'Ernest Johnson, S Keondre Jackson, FB Lucas Scott, LBs Chandler Martin, Kaimon Rucker and Malik Hamm, DL Brent Urban and C.J. Okoye, C Nick Samac, G Jared Penning, T Gerard Lichtenhan and TE Zaire Mitchell-Paden to the practice squad.

**BUFFALO BILLS** — Signed QB Shane Buechele, RB Frank Gore Jr., WRs Stephen Gonnell and Kristian Wilkerson, TE Keleki Latu, OL Travis Clayton, Dan Feeney and Kendrick Green, DL Zion Logue and Jordan Phillips, LBs Jimmy Ciardo and Keonta Jenkins, CBs Daequan Hardy and Dane Jackson and SS Jordan Poyer and Sam Franklin to the practice squad.

**CAROLINA PANTHERS** — Claimed CB Damarri Mathis off waivers from Denver and WR Dalevon Campbell from the Los Angeles Chargers. Waived DT Jaden Crumedy. Signed LBs Krys Barnes and Mapalo Mwansa, CBs Shemar Bartholomew and Mike Reid, OL Boogie Basham, DE Jared Harrison-Hunte, OL Jarrett Kingston and Brandon Walton, OT Mike Tarquin, DT Sam Roberts, TE Bryce Pierre, WR Ja'seem Reed and S Trevian Thomas to the practice squad.

**CHICAGO BEARS** — Signed WRs Maurice Alexander, Miles Boykin and JP Richardson, RB Brittain Brown, TE Stephen Carlson, DL Xavier Carlton, Jonathan Ford, Tanoah Kpassagnon and Jamree Kromah, LB Power Echols, LS Luke Elkin, DBs Tre Flowers and Mekhi Garner and OL Jordan McFadden and Ricky Stromberg to the practice squad. Claimed LB D'Marco Jackson from New Orleans and LB Jaylon Jones from Arizona. Released DS Scott Daly and WR Devin Duvernay.

**CINCINNATI BENGALS** — Signed HBs Gary Brightwell and Kendall Milton, OTs Devin Cochran and Andrew Coker, CBs Jalen Davis and Bralyn Lux, LBs Joe Giles-Harris and Maema Njongmeta, G James Kirkland, C Seth McLaughlin, WRs Jordan Moore and Isaiah Williams and DE Isaiah Thomas and QB Brett Rypien to the practice squad.

**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Claimed DB Jarrick Bernard-Converse from the New York Jets and RB Raheim Sanders from the Los Angeles Chargers. Waived TE Brenden Bates and CB Dom Jones. Signed TE Sal Cannella, WR Kaden Davis, Ss Christopher Edmonds, CB LaMareon James, DTs Ralph Holley and Sam Kamara, RBs Ahmani Marshall and Trayveon Williams and DE Julian Okwara to the practice squad.

**DALLAS COWBOYS** — Claimed DB Trikweze Bridges off waivers from the Los Angeles Chargers and DB Reddy Steward from Minnesota. Waived CBs Andrew Booth and Zion Childress. Signed WRs Jalen Brooks, Traeshon Holden and Jalen Cropper, DT Earnest Brown IV, OL Saahdiq Charles, OT Geron Christian, Ss Alijah Clark, RB Malik Davis, TEs Rivaldo Fairweather and Princeton Fant, QB Will Grier, CBs Robert Rochell and Kemon Hall and LBs Justin Barron and Buddy Johnson to the practice squad. Placed CB Caelen Carson and RB Phil Mahaf on injured reserve. Signed OT Hakeem Adeniji and CB C.J. Goodwin to the active roster.

**DENVER BRONCOS** — Signed ILBs Jordan Turner, Garret Wallow and Levell Bailey, WRs Michael Bandy and A.T. Perry, QB Sam Ehlinger, TE Caleb Lohner, C Joe Michalski, NT Jordan Miller, CBs Reese Taylor, Jaden Robinson and Quinton Newsome, FB Adam Prentice, DB Keidron Smith, G Calvin Throckmorton and S Delarrin Turner-Yell to the practice squad.

**DETROIT LIONS** — Claimed DT Tyler Lacy off waivers from Jacksonville and Tyrus Wheat from Dallas. Signed DL Myles Adams and Keith Cooper, WRs Ronnie Bell, Tom Kennedy and Jackson Meeks, OLs Trystan Colon, Mason Miller, Michael Niese and Dan Skipper, LB Anthony Pittman, RB Jacob Saylors, S Loren Strickland, TE Zach Horton and EDGE Isaac Ukwu to the practice squad.

**GREEN BAY PACKERS** — Signed LB Nick Niemann to a contract. Released CB Micah Robinson. Signed RB Israel Abanikanda, DL Deslin Alexander, James Ester and Arron Mosby, DBs Johnathan Baldwin and Jaylin Simpson, T Brant Banks, WRs Mecole Hardman, Isaiah Neyor and Will Sheppard, LBs Jamon Johnson and Kristian Welch and K Mark McNamee to the practice squad.

**HOUSTON TEXANS** — Signed TE Harrison

Bryant, DE Solomon Byrd, C Eli Cox, LBs K.C. Ossai and Jackson Woodard, DB Myles Bryant, DTs Junior Tafuna and Hagai Ndubuisi, OLs Jaylon Thomas and Trent Brown, FB Jakob Johnson, TE Luke Lachey and WR Jared Wayne to the practice squad.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Claimed LB Chad Muma off waivers from Jacksonville. Signed LBs Austin Ajiake, DE Durrell Nchami, CB Chris Lammons, WRs Tyler Kahmann and Coleman Owen, RBs Ulysses Bentley IV and Khalil Herbert, T Marcellus Johnson, OL G Josh Sills, C Mose Vavao, DT Josh Tupou and TEs Maximilian Mang and Sean McKeon, S Trey Washington to the practice squad.

**JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS** — Acquired WR Tim Patrick from Detroit in exchange for a 2026 sixth-round draft pick. Signed WRs Chandler Brayboy and Dorian Singer, OL Jerome Carvin, Ricky Lee and Sal Wormley, LB Branson Combs, QB Seth Henigan, TE Patrick Herbert and Quintin Morris, RB Ja'Quinden Jackson, CB Keni-H Lovely, DBs Jabbar Muhammad and Cam'Ron Silmon-Craig and DL Keivie Rose to the practice squad.

**KANSAS CITY CHIEFS** — Signed LB Cole Christiansen, Ss Mike Edwards, CBs Kevin Knowles and Melvin Smith, WRs Jimmy Holiday and Hal Presley, DTs Coziah Izzard and Marlon Tuipulotu, RB Carson Steele, TE Robert Tonyan and Tre Watson, QB Chris Oladokun and T Chukwuebuka Godrick, G C.J. Hanson to the practice squad.

**LAS VEGAS RAIDERS** — Signed WRs Alex Bachman, Shedrick Jackson and Justin Shorter, RB Chris Collier, QBs Cam Miller, TE Albert Okwuegbunam Jr. and Carter Runyon, OL Laki Tasi, Antonio Mafi and T Dalton Wagner, DT Treven Ma'ae, DE Jahfari Harvey, LBs Matt Jones, CB Greedy Vance and Ss Terrell Edmunds, Trey Taylor and JT Woods to the practice squad. Waived OT Thayer Munford.

**LOS ANGELES CHARGERS** — Signed G Karsen Barnhart, DL TeRah Edwards, CBs Harrison Hand and Myles Purchase, WRs JaQuae Jackson and Jalen Reagor, S Tony Jefferson, LB Emamy Johnson, C Josh Kaltenberger, LS Rick Lovato, RBs Nyheim Miller-Hines and Kimani Vidal, OLB Garmon Randolph, T David Sharpe, G Branson Taylor, QB DJ Uiagalelei and TE Thomas Yassmin to the practice squad.

**LOS ANGELES RAMS** — Signed OL A.J. Arcuri, Wyatt Bowles and Dylan McMahon, WRs Tru Edwards and Brennan Presley, CBs A.J. Green and Cam Lampkin, DTs Jack Heflin and Bill Norton, LBs Jamil Muhammad and Elias Neal, RBs Ronnie Rivers and Cody Schrader, Ss Tanner Ingle and Nate Valcarcel to the practice squad.

**MIAMI DOLPHINS** — Signed CB Rasul Douglas and T Kendall Lamm to contracts. Placed CB Cam Smith on the NFL list. Waived CBs Isaiah Johnson, BJ Adams and Ethan Robinson, WRs Andrew Armstrong, Erik Ezukanma, AJ Henning and Theo Wease Jr., OL Mason Brooks, Braeden Daniels, Jalen McKenzie, Josh Priebe and Addison West, T Ryan Hayes, DTs Alex Huntley and Ben Stille, LBs Dequan Jackson, Mohamed Kamara, Derrick McLendon, Grayson Murphy and Channing Tindall, SS Jordan Colbert, Patrick McMorris and John Saunders Jr., TE Hayden Rucci and RB Aaron Shampkin. Waived/injured T Bayron Matos and LB Eugene Asante. Claimed DB Julius Brents off waivers from Indianapolis. Placed OL Liam Eichenberg on the PUP list and C Andrew Meyer and K Jason Sanders on injured reserve.

**MINNESOTA VIKINGS** — Traded a 2026 fifth-round draft pick and a 2027 fourth-round pick to Carolina in exchange for WR Adam Thielen, a conditional 2026 seventh-round pick and a 2027 fifth-round pick. Signed WRs Tim Jones, Jeshua Jones, Lucky Jackson and Dontae Fleming, CBs Zemaiah Vaughn and Fabian Moreau, TEs Nick Vannett and Bryson Nesbit, RB Zaxavian Valladay, OLB Gabriel Murphy, Gs Vershon Lee and Henry Byrd, DLs Jonathan Harris and Taki Taimani and OL Max Pircher to the practice squad.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS** — Claimed QB Tommy DeVito off waivers from the New York Giants and DB Charles Woods from the Los Angeles Rams. Released WRs Javon Baker and Kendrick Bourne. Signed CBs Miles Battle and Brandon Crossley, Gs Mehki Butler and Jack Conley, TE S C.J. Dippre and Gee Scott Jr., RB Terrell Jennings, WRs John Jiles and Jeremiah Webb, DE Truman Jones, C Alec Lindstrom, DB Kobe Minor, DTs David Olajiga and Jahveare Ritzie and LBs Cam Riley and Bradyn Swinew to the practice squad.

**NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** — Claimed WR Trey Palmer off waivers from Tampa Bay

and G Xavier Truss from Denver. Released WR Cedrick Wilson and TE Jack Stoll. Signed WRs Kevin Austin Jr. and Cedrick Wilson Jr., CBs Dalys Benum and Jayden Price, Ss Terrell Burgess and Elliott Davison, QBs Hunter Dekkers and Jake Haener, DEs Fadiil Diggs and Jonah Williams, T Easton Kilty, LBs Nephi Sewell, K Charlie Smyth and TEs Jack Stoll and Treyton Welch to the practice squad.

**NEW YORK GIANTS** — Claimed DB Beau Brade from Baltimore and CB Rico Payton from New Orleans. Signed DL Elijah Chatman, Elijah Garcia and Jordan Riley, OLBs Trace Ford and Tomon Fox, WRs Lil'Jordan Humphrey and Ihmir Smith-Marsette, C Bryan Hudson, G Jake Kubas, RB Dante Miller, CB Dee Williams, S Raheem Layne and K Jude McAtamney to the practice squad.

**NEW YORK JETS** — Claimed TE Jelani Woods off waivers from Indianapolis, LB Cam Jones and T Esa Pole from Kansas City. Waived WR Tyler Johnson, LB Zaire Barnes and G Marquis Hayes. Signed Ss Dean Clark and Jordan Clark, QB Brady Cook, WRs Tyler Johnson, Jamaal Pritchett, Quentin Skinner and Brandon Smith, Gs Kohl Levas and Leander Wiegand, K Harrison Mevius, DT Payton Page, LBs Jackson Sirmion and Boog Smith and DL Eric Watts to the practice squad.

**PHILADELPHIA EAGLES** — Waived G Trevor Keegan. Claimed OL Willie Lampkin off waivers from the Los Angeles Rams. Signed LBs Chance Campbell, OLBs Patrick Johnson and Antwaun Powell-Ryland, WRs Elijah Cooks and Terrace Marshall, G Kenyon Green, T Hollin Pierce, QBs Kyle McCord, CBs Brandon Johnson, Parry Nickerson and Eli Ricks, TEs E.J. Jenkins and Cameron Latu and S Andre Sam to the practice squad.

**SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS** — Claimed DT Jordan Jefferson off waivers from Jacksonville. Signed CBs Eli Apple, WRs Junior Bergen, Robbie Chosen and Malik Turner, DL William Bradley-King, Trevis Gipson and Sebastian Valdez, DB Derrick Canteen, LBs Jalen Graham and Curtis Robinson, OL Drake Nugent and Nick Zakej and TE Brayden Willis to the practice squad. Re-signed P Thomas Morstead to a contract. Placed WR Jacob Cowing on injured reserve.

**SEATTLE SEAHAWKS** — Claimed DB Deion Kendrick off waivers from the Los Angeles Rams. Released CB Shaquill Griffin. Signed DTs Quinton Bohanna, Anthony Campbell and J.R. Singleton, DE Jalen Gaines, CB Shemar Jean-Charles, Ts Amari Knight, G Sataoa Laumea, C Federico Maranges, RBs Damien Martinez, Anthony Tyus III and Jacardia Wright, LBs Patrick O'Connell and Jamie Sheriff, NT Brandon Pili, Ss Jerrick Reed II and WRs Tyrone Broden and Ricky White III to the practice squad.

**TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS** — Signed LB Nick Jackson, OLBs Michael Jordan, Luke Haggard, Ben Scott, Lorenz Metz and Tyler McLellan, WRs Garrett Greene and Dennis Houston, CB Bryce Hall, DLs C.J. Brewer, Nash Huttmacher, Jayson Jones and Adam Gotsis, TE Tanner Taula and QB Connor Bazalak to the practice squad.

**TENNESSEE TITANS** — Signed DT Shy Tuttle to a contract. Released C Corey Levin. Waived DT Timmy Horne, LB Curtis Jacobs, CB Gabe Judy-Lally and OL John Ojukwu. Claimed CBs Jalyn Armour-Davis and Samuel Womack III, LB Dorian Mausi and DL C.J. Ravenell off waivers. Signed WRs Mason Kinsey, Xavier Restrepo and James Proche II, QB Trevor Siemian, OL Andrew Ruppich, DTs Isaiah Raikes and Cam Horsley, DEs Ali Gaye and Carlos Watkins, RBs Jordan Mims and Jermar Jefferson, DBs Kendall Brooks and Amani Oruwariye and TE Thomas Odukoya to the practice squad.

**WASHINGTON COMMANDERS** — Signed DTs Ricky Barber and Sheldon Day, WRs Ja'Corey Brooks, Jacoby Jones and Chris Moore, TE Lawrence Cager, C Michael Deiter, G Timothy McKay, DEs Jalyn Holmes and T.J. Maguranyanga, CBs Antonio Hamilton Sr. and Carlin Vigers, QB Sam Hartman and S Rob McDaniel to the practice squad.

#### SOCCER Major League Soccer

**LOS ANGELES FC** — Announced the retirement of D Maxime Chanot.

**SAN ANTONIO FC** — Signed F Kyle Linhares to a contract.

#### National Women's Soccer League

**WASHINGTON SPIRIT** — Traded F Makenna Morris to Racing Louisville FC in exchange for \$115k in allocation funds.

## PRO SOCCER

### MLS

#### Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	16	7	5	53	52	33
Minn. United	14	6	8	50	47	31
Vancouver	14	6	7	49	47	31
Seattle	12	7	8	44	48	38
LAFC	11	6	8	41	44	31
Portland	10	9	8	38	35	37
Colorado	10	12	6	36	36	44
San Jose	9	11	8	35	52	48
Austin FC	9	9	8	35	26	32
Real Salt Lake	9	14	4	31	28	36
FC Dallas	7	11	9	30	39	47
Houston	7	12	8	29	34	44
Sporting KC	6	15	6	24	39	55
St Louis City	5	16	6	21	31	47
LA Galaxy	4	16	7	19	32	55

#### Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	16	6	6	54	48	26
Cincinnati	16	8	4	52	42	35
Nashville	15	8	5	50	49	32
Charlotte FC	15	11	2	47	46	39
Orlando City	13	7	8	47	54	40
Inter Miami CF	13	5	7	46	54	40
Columbus	12	6	9	45	43	39
NYC FC	13	8	5	44	37	30
New York	11	11	6	39	42	38
Chicago	11	10	6	39	50	48
New England	8	12	7	31	35	38
Toronto FC	5	13	9	24	27	34
CF Montréal	5	15	8	23	28	50
Atlanta	4	12	11	23	31	49
D.C. United	4	15	9	21	24	53

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

#### Saturday's games

Philadelphia at Cincinnati  
Chicago at Miami  
Charlotte FC at New England  
Columbus at New York  
D.C. United at New York City FC  
Vancouver at Orlando City FC  
CF Montréal at Toronto FC  
San Jose at Austin FC  
Colorado at Sporting Kansas City  
Portland at Minnesota  
Atlanta at Nashville  
Houston at St Louis City  
FC Dallas at LA Galaxy  
Real Salt Lake at Seattle

#### Sunday's game

San Diego FC at Los Angeles FC

### NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	14	2	1	43	34	10
Washington	9	4	4	31	28	24
San Diego	8	4	5	29	28	19
Orlando	8	5	4	28	22	13
Portland	7	5	5	26	25	19
Seattle	7	5	5	26	25	21
Louisville	7	6	4	25	23	27
Gotham FC	5	6	6	21	20	16
North Carolina	5	6	6	21	23	26
Angel City	5	7	5	20	22	27
Houston	5	8	4	19	20	27
Bay FC	4	8	5	17	20	25
Chicago	1	9	7	10	18	35
Utah Royals FC	1	11	5	8	12	31

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

#### Friday's games

Houston at Louisville  
Gotham FC at Orlando  
San Diego at Seattle  
Utah Royals FC at Portland

#### Saturday's game

North Carolina at Kansas City  
**Sunday's game**  
Chicago at Washington

## PRO BASKETBALL

### WNBA

#### Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	24	14	.632	—
New York	23	15	.605	1
Indiana	20	18	.526	4
Washington	16	22	.421	8
Connecticut	10	28	.263	14
Chicago	9	28	.243	14½

#### Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Minnesota	30	7	.811	—
x-Las Vegas	26	14	.650	5½
Phoenix	23	14	.622	7
Golden State	19	18	.514	11
Seattle	20	19	.513	11
Los Angeles	17	19	.472	12½
Dallas	9	30	.231	22

x-clinched playoff spot

#### Tuesday's games

Indiana 95, Seattle 75  
Phoenix 92, Los Angeles 84

#### Wednesday's games

Las Vegas 81, Atlanta 75  
Connecticut 101, Dallas 95

#### Thursday's games

Washington at New York  
Seattle at Minnesota  
Chicago at Phoenix

#### Friday's games

Dallas at Atlanta  
Indiana at Los Angeles

#### Saturday's games

Minnesota at Connecticut  
Washington at Golden State  
Chicago at Seattle  
New York at Phoenix

#### S

## US OPEN/AUTO RACING

## Djokovic advances again despite more lingering struggles

By HOWARD FENDRICH  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the second contest in a row at this U.S. Open, Novak Djokovic appeared a bit sluggish, a bit off, for a stretch. This time, he even dropped the opening set. And then, as always at Flushing Meadows, the 24-time Grand Slam champion progressed to the third round.

Djokovic improved to 36-0 across the first and second rounds in New York, a place he's won four championships, by coming back to beat 145th-ranked American qualifier Zachary Svajda 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 at Arthur Ashe Stadium on Wednesday.

"I really tried to soak it in and enjoy the moment, especially when I won the first set," said Svajda, a 22-year-old from San Diego. "It kind of shocked me. I was like, 'Wow!'"

Asked on court afterward how he felt in his first competition since losing to eventual champion Jannik Sinner in the Wimbledon semifinals on July 11 while hindered by a groin injury, Djokovic replied: "Not that great, to be honest."

Svajda noticed.

"He was missing a little bit," said Svajda, who got cramps in his legs and arms as the match wore on. "He was getting a little frustrated."

At his news conference later, the 38-year-old Djokovic spoke a little more about his mood.

"It's not a motivation thing. It's just like me a bit frustrated with my game, and then I kind of go through stuff internally that — you don't want to know the details what I'm going through and telling myself," he explained after getting to the third round at a major for the 75th time, breaking a tie with Roger Federer for the most such appearances by a man.

"I'm just trying to be locked in. Just trying to solve the riddle once

I'm on the court," Djokovic continued. "It's not like I'm not finding joy on the court competing. I enjoy competing, but I don't enjoy not playing well. That's why I put extra pressure on myself and my team to be better the next day, the next match."

That will come against Cam Norrie, a British left-hander who reached the semifinals at Wimbledon in 2022 and is 0-6 against Djokovic.

Norrie got past Francisco Comesana of Argentina 7-6 (5), 6-3, 6-7 (0), 7-6 (4) in four hours, and now it's his turn to face the task that Svajda did Wednesday against Djokovic.

"He does everything so well, which is incredible," Svajda said. "I was talking to my team and coaches before, trying to figure it out. It's Novak Djokovic, so there's not a big weakness."

Elsewhere, Taylor Townsend and Jelena Ostapenko got into a face-to-face argument on the Court 11 sideline right after Townsend won their second-round match 7-5, 6-1. Townsend, an American who is ranked No. 1 in doubles, said Ostapenko, a Latvian who won the 2017 French Open, told her she has "no class" and "no education."

No. 5 seed Jack Draper, a semifinalist in 2024, withdrew because of a lingering injury to his left arm. Other winners included defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, both of last year's runners-up — Jessica Pegula and Taylor Fritz — along with Carlos Alcaraz, Ben Shelton, Frances Tiafoe, 2021 champion Emma Raducanu and Emma Navarro. No. 12 Casper Ruud, whose 0-3 record in Grand Slam finals includes a loss to Alcaraz at Flushing Meadows in 2022, was eliminated 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 by Raphael Collignon of Belgium. The 107th-ranked Collignon had never won a match at a major or played a five-setter until this tournament.



KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP

Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, pretends to play the violin after defeating Zachary Svajda, of the United States, during the second round of the U.S. Open on Wednesday in New York.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Ryan Blaney, center, celebrates in Victory Lane after winning a NASCAR Cup Series race at Daytona International Speedway on Saturday in Daytona Beach, Fla.

# NASCAR's playoffs set with no clear favorite

By JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Nobody cheered Ryan Blaney louder to win NASCAR's regular-season finale than Alex Bowman, who vowed to buy Blaney 7 million beers for the Daytona victory that saved Bowman's spot in the playoffs.

Bowman had wrecked out at Daytona very early Saturday night and had to watch on television as Blaney won a four-wide race across the finish line to stop a gaggle of long-shot drivers from snagging Bowman's spot in the 16-driver field.

His relief was a contrast to the frustration shown by Tyler Reddick, last year's regular-season champion, who limped into the playoffs this year. Like Bowman, he also wrecked early, but his points total was better, so once Bowman was out of the race, Reddick was locked in.

But his 23XI team heads into the playoffs in a slump, a year after making it all the way to NASCAR's championship-deciding season finale, and Reddick hasn't had the consistency it will take to race again for the Cup title. Who has?

Well, no single team has emerged as the favorite as NASCAR heads to Darlington Raceway for Sunday's playoff opener. Kyle Larson is the top seed, just ahead of regular-season champion William Byron.

Lurking right behind the Hen-

drick Motorsports teammates is Denny Hamlin, one of only two drivers with a Cup Series-high four wins this season. There are two first-time playoff participants in the field, including rookie Shane van Gisbergen, who dominated street and road courses to match Hamlin with four wins.

## Front of the pack

Larson is the top seed but hasn't won a race since early May, before he ran the Indianapolis 500, when his Kansas victory gave him three wins in seven races.

It's been up and down since, but Larson starts the playoffs coming off back-to-back sixth-place finishes.

Byron has two wins, including the Daytona 500, and hasn't ranked lower than second the entire season. He is trying to make it to the championship race for a fourth consecutive year.

Hamlin does have four wins but is coming off a bad night in Daytona: His car was damaged in an early crash and he finished 25th, dropping from third to sixth in the season standings — which cost him five playoff points, the equivalent of a victory.

Hamlin has never won a Cup title and hasn't even made it to the championship four since 2021. He'll try to get there this year at the same time as 23XI Racing, the team he co-owns with Michael Jordan, fights NASCAR in federal court over antitrust claims. The two sides were due in court Thurs-

day, four days before the playoff opener.

Blaney's victory at Daytona boosted him to fourth in the playoff seedings and gave him the momentum to potentially be considered the favorite. Team Penske gets hot this time of year and has won three consecutive championships with Blaney's title in 2023 sandwiched between a pair of Joey Logano triumphs.

Logano is seeded a distant 12th, but as NASCAR's only active three-time champion, he can't be counted out.

## In the middle

Christopher Bell is the fifth seed and his three wins are tied with Larson, but he won three straight after the season-opening Daytona 500 and hasn't been to victory lane since March 9 at Phoenix.

Van Gisbergen is seeded sixth for his playoff debut based on four victories, all on street or road courses. If he can make it out of the first round, the New Zealander could be a spoiler — the hybrid road course/oval Roval at Charlotte Motor Speedway is in the second round and a win there would vault van Gisbergen into the final eight.

Chase Elliott is the seventh seed, but the 2020 champion needs to start winning. His victory at home track Atlanta is his lone win this season and only one of two victories since 2022 — the last time he made it to the championship four.

# MLB

## Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	78	56	.582	—
Boston	74	60	.552	4
New York	73	60	.549	4½
Tampa Bay	64	69	.481	13½
Baltimore	60	73	.451	17½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	78	57	.578	—
Kansas City	69	65	.515	8½
Cleveland	66	66	.500	10½
Minnesota	60	73	.451	17
Chicago	48	85	.361	29
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	73	60	.549	—
Seattle	72	62	.537	1½
Texas	68	67	.504	6
Athletics	63	72	.467	11
Los Angeles	62	71	.466	11
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	76	57	.571	—
New York	72	61	.541	4
Miami	62	71	.466	14
Atlanta	61	72	.459	15
Washington	53	80	.398	23
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	83	51	.619	—
Chicago	76	57	.571	6½
Cincinnati	68	66	.507	15
St. Louis	65	69	.485	18
Pittsburgh	59	75	.440	24
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	77	57	.575	—
San Diego	75	59	.560	2
San Francisco	65	68	.489	11½
Arizona	65	69	.485	12
Colorado	38	95	.286	38½

**Wednesday's games**

Cleveland 4, Tampa Bay 3, 10 innings  
 N.Y. Yankees 11, Washington 2  
 Seattle 4, San Diego 3  
 Boston 3, Baltimore 2  
 Toronto 9, Minnesota 8  
 Kansas City 12, Chicago White Sox 1  
 Houston 4, Colorado 0  
 Texas 20, L.A. Angels 3  
 Athletics 7, Detroit 0  
 Atlanta 12, Miami 1  
 N.Y. Mets 6, Philadelphia 0  
 Pittsburgh 2, St. Louis 1  
 Arizona 3, Milwaukee 2  
 L.A. Dodgers 5, Cincinnati 1  
 San Francisco 12, Chicago Cubs 3

**Thursday's games**

Boston at Baltimore  
 Colorado at Houston  
 Arizona at Milwaukee  
 Pittsburgh at St. Louis  
 Chicago Cubs at San Francisco  
 Atlanta at Philadelphia  
 Miami at N.Y. Mets  
 N.Y. Yankees at Chicago White Sox

**Friday's games**

St. Louis (Liberatore 6-11) at Cincinnati (Littell 9-8)  
 Atlanta (Elder 5-9) at Philadelphia (Suárez 10-6)  
 Tampa Bay (Houser 7-4) at Washington (Parker 7-14)  
 Milwaukee (Peralta 15-5) at Toronto (Bieber 1-0)  
 Pittsburgh (Burrows 1-4) at Boston (May 7-10)  
 Seattle (Kirby 8-6) at Cleveland (Allen 7-10)  
 Miami (Pérez 6-3) at N.Y. Mets (Tong 0-0)  
 N.Y. Yankees (Rodón 14-7) at Chicago White Sox (Gómez 3-1)  
 Detroit (Paddock 5-11) at Kansas City (Lugo 8-6)  
 L.A. Angels (Anderson 2-8) at Houston (McCullers 2-4)  
 San Diego (Cortes 2-2) at Minnesota (Matthews 3-4)  
 Chicago Cubs (Horton 8-4) at Colorado (Márquez 3-11)  
 Texas (Leiter 8-7) at Athletics (Springs 10-8)  
 Arizona (Gallen 9-13) at L.A. Dodgers (Snell 3-2)  
 Baltimore (Kremer 9-9) at San Francisco (TBD)

**Saturday's games**

Milwaukee at Toronto  
 Tampa Bay at Washington  
 Pittsburgh at Boston  
 Miami at N.Y. Mets  
 Atlanta at Philadelphia  
 St. Louis at Cincinnati  
 L.A. Angels at Houston  
 N.Y. Yankees at Chicago White Sox  
 San Diego at Minnesota  
 Baltimore at San Francisco  
 Detroit at Kansas City  
 Seattle at Cleveland  
 Chicago Cubs at Colorado  
 Arizona at L.A. Dodgers  
 Texas at Athletics



PAMELA SMITH/AP

Mets catcher Hayden Senger congratulates pitcher Nolan McLean on the way to the dugout during the eighth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies on Wednesday in New York.

# McLean boost Mets, wins first major league starts

By JERRY BEACH  
*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Three games into his major league career, Nolan McLean has already accomplished something Tom Seaver, Dwight Gooden, Jacob deGrom or anyone else wearing a New York Mets uniform could not.

McLean became the first Mets pitcher to win his first three MLB starts, tossing eight marvelous innings Wednesday night in a 6-0 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies that completed a three-game sweep.

“He’s a stud, man,” New York infielder Mark Vientos said with a grin. “It’s so fun to be a part of what he does on day-to-day basis.”

Facing the Phillies, who entered Wednesday with the second-best batting average in the majors, the 24-year-old right-hander allowed four hits and walked none with six strikeouts. He threw 95 pitches — just 55 through the first six innings.

“Top to bottom, they’re stacked with hitters,” McLean said. “So I definitely knew I had to bring some good stuff tonight.”

Showing off an arsenal that includes a sharp-breaking curveball in the high 70s, a sweeper and a fastball clocked in the mid-90s,

McLean retired 15 straight batters following Alec Bohm’s second-inning single and faced the minimum into the seventh.

“All I can say is wow,” Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said. “It’s just everything about the kid — not only what we’re seeing on the mound, just the way he carries himself. He’s got electric stuff, but he’s got pitchability. He knows what he’s doing on the mound. He knows how to manipulate the baseball. He knows what hitters are trying to do. He’s not afraid to use all his pitches.”

Philadelphia mounted its lone threat in the eighth, when Bohm and Max Kepler opened the inning with singles.

McLean preserved the shutout by retiring Nick Castellanos and Bryson Stott on medium-depth flyouts and inducing Harrison Bader to hit a squibber back toward the mound.

“I felt like he had good stuff,” Phillies slugger Kyle Schwarber said. “He moves the ball around really good and he was filling up the zone. I felt like he made some pitches when he needed to make some pitches.”

McLean pounded his right fist into his glove as the Citi Field crowd of 41,893 roared.

“He doesn’t shy away from big moments,” Vientos said. “Three starts — it’s been big moments and good teams and he’s done his thing.”

New York has gone 8-3 since McLean was called up from the minors to pull within four games of the NL East-leading Phillies. McLean, who went seven innings in a 12-7 win at Atlanta last Friday, and All-Star lefty David Peterson are the only Mets starters to last at least seven innings since June 2.

“We’ve been missing that type of performance pretty much the whole year,” Mendoza said.

McLean lowered his ERA to 0.89 — also the lowest in team history for a rookie in his first three starts. Seaver, a 300-game winner and Hall of Famer, held the mark previously with a 1.19 ERA over his first three starts in 1967.

McLean’s 21 strikeouts are tied with teammate Kodai Senga for the third-most in franchise annals through three career starts, behind only Matt Harvey (2012).

“I’ve always been a believer in my stuff. I’m a confident guy,” McLean said. “Obviously, the hitters here are the best in the world and I know that. But I also know I have good stuff. And if I go out there and execute, I can get a lot of guys out as well.”

## Leaders

### AMERICAN LEAGUE

**BATTING** — Judge, New York, .323; Ja.Wilson, Athletics, .311; Bichette, Toronto, .307; Peña, Houston, .307; Springer, Toronto, .303; Kirk, Toronto, .299; Witt, Kansas City, .298; M.Garcia, Kansas City, .297; V.Guerrero, Toronto, .292.

**RUNS** — Judge, New York, 104; Raleigh, Seattle, 87; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 86; Witt, Kansas City, 86; Rooker, Athletics, 85; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 83; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 81; Springer, Toronto, 81; Arozarena, Seattle, 79; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 79.

**RBI** — Raleigh, Seattle, 107; Greene, Detroit, 99; Judge, New York, 95; Ward, Los Angeles, 94; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 94; Pasquantino, Kansas City, 94; Bichette, Toronto, 86; Story, Boston, 83; Adell, Los Angeles, 82; Bellinger, New York, 79.

**HITS** — Bichette, Toronto, 169; Witt, Kansas City, 155; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 146; Judge, New York, 144; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 144; Y.Diaz, Tampa Bay, 142; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 140; Rooker, Athletics, 140; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 137; Kwan, Cleveland, 136.

**DOUBLES** — Witt, Kansas City, 41; Bichette, Toronto, 40; Ja.Duran, Boston, 34; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 32; Perez, Kansas City, 32; Rooker, Athletics, 32.

**TRIPLES** — Ja.Duran, Boston, 12; McKinstry, Detroit, 10; Bellinger, New York, 5; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 5; Henderson, Baltimore, 5; Buxton, Minnesota, 4; Carpenter, Detroit, 4; Isbel, Kansas City, 4; W.Pérez, Detroit, 4; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 4; Volpe, New York, 4; Witt, Kansas City, 4.

**HOME RUNS** — Raleigh, Seattle, 50; Judge, New York, 41; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 39; Greene, Detroit, 32; Adell, Los Angeles, 30; Ward, Los Angeles, 30; Langeliers, Athletics, 29; Torkelson, Detroit, 28; Pasquantino, Kansas City, 28; Kurtz, Athletics, 27; Buxton, Minnesota, 27.

**STOLEN BASES** — Caballero, New York, 41; Simpson, Tampa Bay, 38; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 36; Witt, Kansas City, 34; Robert, Chicago, 33; Arozarena, Seattle, 24; Neto, Los Angeles, 24; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 24.

**PITCHING** — Crochet, Boston, 14-5; Fried, New York, 14-5; Rodón, New York, 14-7; Mize, Detroit, 12-4; Woo, Seattle, 12-7; Valdez, Houston, 12-7; Ryan, Minnesota, 12-7; Eovaldi, Texas, 11-3; Skubal, Detroit, 11-4.

**ERA** — Skubal, Detroit, 2.28; H.Brown, Houston, 2.37; Crochet, Boston, 2.38; deGrom, Texas, 2.79; Woo, Seattle, 2.95; Bello, Boston, 2.99; Fried, New York, 3.06.

**STRIKEOUTS** — Skubal, Detroit, 212; Crochet, Boston, 207; H.Brown, Houston, 177; Rodón, New York, 172; Ryan, Minnesota, 166; Woo, Seattle, 166; Flaherty, Detroit, 165; Valdez, Houston, 158.

### NATIONAL LEAGUE

**BATTING** — F.Freeman, Los Angeles, .302; Frellick, Milwaukee, .297; T.Turner, Philadelphia, .297; W.Smith, Los Angeles, .295; Perdomo, Arizona, .293; Hoerner, Chicago, .290; K.Marte, Arizona, .290; Burleson, St. Louis, .288; Edwards, Miami, .288; Machado, San Diego, .288; Stowers, Miami, .288.

**RUNS** — Ohtani, Los Angeles, 123; J.Soto, New York, 96; Tatis, San Diego, 92; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 90; Lindor, New York, 90; Schwarber, Philadelphia, 90; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 90; Carroll, Arizona, 88.

**RBI** — Schwarber, Philadelphia, 110; Alonso, New York, 106; Yellich, Milwaukee, 90; E.Suárez, Arizona, 143; Perdomo, Arizona, 87; Suzuki, Chicago, 87; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 85; Wood, Washington, 83; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 82; L.Gurriel, Arizona, 80.

**HITS** — T.Turner, Philadelphia, 163; Machado, San Diego, 149; Arraez, San Diego, 147; Perdomo, Arizona, 143; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 142; Lindor, New York, 142; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 141; Hoerner, Chicago, 140; Edwards, Miami, 137; Turang, Milwaukee, 137.

**DOUBLES** — Olson, Atlanta, 35; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 34; F.Freeman, Los Angeles, 34; B.Reynolds, Pittsburgh, 34; Alonso, New York, 33; Machado, San Diego, 32; Wood, Washington, 31; Wills-Contreras, St. Louis, 30; J.Lee, San Francisco, 30.

**TRIPLES** — Carroll, Arizona, 16; J.Lee, San Francisco, 10; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 8; Harris, Atlanta, 6; Moniak, Colorado, 6; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 6; Abrams, Washington, 5; J.Beck, Colorado, 5; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 5; Edwards, Miami, 5; Hays, Cincinnati, 5.

**HOME RUNS** — Schwarber, Philadelphia, 45; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 45; E.Suárez, Arizona (Seattle), 36; J.Soto, New York, 32; Alonso, New York, 29; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 28; Carroll, Arizona, 27; Suzuki, Chicago, 27.

**STOLEN BASES** — On.Cruz, Pittsburgh, 34; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 32; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 32; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 31; V.Scott, St. Louis, 31; Tatis, San Diego, 27; Abrams, Washington, 26; Tucker, Chicago, 25; Lindor, New York, 24.

**PITCHING** — F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 15-5; Pivetta, San Diego, 13-4; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 12-6; Boyd, Chicago, 12-7; Gray, St. Louis, 12-7; Pfaadt, Arizona, 12-8; Webb, San Francisco, 12-9; Priestler, Milwaukee, 11-2; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 11-5; C.Holmes, New York, 11-6.

**ERA** — Skenes, Pittsburgh, 2.07; Abbott, Cincinnati, 2.62; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 2.66; F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 2.68; Wheeler, Philadelphia, 2.71; Boyd, Chicago, 2.82; Pivetta, San Diego, 2.82; Yamamoto, Los Angeles, 2.90; Ray, San Francisco, 2.93; Webb, San Francisco, 3.13.

**STRIKEOUTS** — Wheeler, Philadelphia, 195; Cease, San Diego, 183; Skenes, Pittsburgh, 181; Webb, San Francisco, 180; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 175; Gore, Washington, 173; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 173; Gray, St. Louis, 168.

## NFL

# Chiefs WR Rice suspended for 1st 6 games of season

By DAVE SKRETTA  
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice has been suspended six games for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy, keeping him out of a series of high-profile games starting with next week's season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers in Brazil.

Rice pleaded guilty about six weeks ago to two third-degree felony charges of collision involving serious bodily injury and racing on a highway causing bodily injury. As part of his plea agreement from the March 2024 crash on a Dallas highway, prosecutors said, Rice also received a sentence of five years of deferred probation and 30 days in jail as a condition of his probation.

The NFL handed down its suspension, which Rice will not appeal, after its own internal investigation. It voids a Sept. 30 hearing before former federal Judge Sue L. Robinson that was scheduled for the NFL's headquarters in New York.

Along with missing the Chargers game, Rice will miss a Super Bowl rematch with the Philadelphia Eagles on Sept. 14 at Arrowhead Stadium; a Sunday night trip to New York to face the Giants; a high-profile matchup with Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens on Sept. 28; a game against the Jacksonville Jaguars the following Monday night; and a Sunday night showdown with the Detroit Lions.

Rice will be eligible to return to the field when Kansas City faces the AFC West rival Las Vegas Raiders on Oct. 19.

The Chiefs did not make Rice nor coach Andy Reid available Wednesday. Rice was also not at their final practice before Sunday, when Kansas City will go into its game-week schedule to prepare for the Friday night matchup with Los Angeles.

"We're just going to go out there, trust what the coaches put on our plates, whatever game plan we have regardless of who is in there," tight end Noah Gray said Wednesday. "I'm extremely confident in all the guys."

Rice's status has been in limbo ever since he was driving a Lamborghini Urus SUV at 119 mph on the North Central Expressway, made "multiple aggressive maneuvers around traffic" and struck other vehicles, prosecutors said. After the crash, Rice did not check on the welfare of those in the other vehicles but instead fled on foot.

Rice said in a statement issued by his attorney that he's had "a lot of sleepless nights thinking about the damages my actions caused, and I will continue working within my means to make sure that everyone impacted will be made whole."

The Dallas County District Attorney's Office said the 25-year-old Rice will have some flexibility in when he must serve his jail time. He was also required to pay the victims for their out-of-pocket

medical expenses, which totaled about \$115,000.

"I've completely changed. You have to learn from things like that," Rice said during a brief media availability in training camp. "All I can focus on is what I can control right now and that's me doing what I do."

After a breakout rookie season, Rice was on his way to a memorable follow-up last fall, catching 24 passes for 288 yards and two touchdowns in his first three games. But in Week 4, after Patrick Mahomes had thrown an interception, the QB accidentally dived into Rice's leg as they were trying to make a tackle, tearing the lateral collateral ligament in his knee.

Rice wound up missing the rest of the season, including a loss to Philadelphia in the Super Bowl.

He spent the offseason rehabbing his knee and was ready to participate in the Chiefs' offseason program. But under terms of the suspension, Rice will now be barred from the practice facility until the middle of next month.

Kansas City undoubtedly believed a suspension was coming. It kept eight wide receivers Tuesday, when NFL roster cuts were due. That group includes rookie Jalen Royals, who has been dealing with an injury and might not be available for the opener, and Marquise Brown, who missed most of last season with a shoulder injury.

Now the Chiefs will be relying on Brown and second-year pro Xavier Worthy alongside tight end



REED HOFFMANN/AP

Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice stretches during warmups before a game against the Chicago Bears on Aug. 22 in Kansas City, Mo.

Travis Kelce in their passing game. The other wide receivers on the initial roster are veteran JuJu Smith-Schuster, return specialist

Nikko Remigio, preseason stand-out Tyquan Thornton and Jason Brownlee, who spent part of last season with the Jets.

## Colts GM: QB Richardson still playing part in team's future

By MICHAEL MAROT  
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Indianapolis Colts general manager Chris Ballard still believes Anthony Richardson will be part of the franchise's long-term future.

In fact, he still considers Richardson a potential franchise quarterback.

Eight days after coach Shane Steichen announced that Daniel Jones had won the starting job for Indianapolis' Sept. 7 season opener against the Miami Dolphins, Ballard insisted he thinks Richardson remains capable of realizing the potential the Colts saw when they selected him No. 4 overall in the 2023 draft.

"We knew it was going to take time. We knew it was going to be a little bit of a roller coaster, absolutely," Ballard said Wednesday. "Sometimes you've got to take a swing. So we took a swing and I'm not ready to say that we missed. I



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Indianapolis Colts quarterback and 2023 fourth overall draft pick Anthony Richardson was passed over for the starting position.

don't think we have yet. I think Anthony still has a bright future."

But Richardson, for the first time in his pro career, is not entering the season as a starting QB.

The former Florida star's first two seasons in Indy have been defined by injuries and inaccuracy.

Richardson's 8-7 record reflects his penchant for getting hurt. He's missed 19 games — 17 because of injuries, two because of a brief benching last season after taking himself out of a game because he needed a breather. And some of the games he started, he couldn't finish because of injuries.

It's been equally challenging for Richardson on the field. He's thrown more interceptions (13) than touchdown passes (11), and last season his completion percentage of 47.7% was the worst of any regular starter in the league.

Those numbers prompted the Colts to give Jones, the No. 6 overall pick in the 2019 draft, a one-year contract and a chance to challenge Richardson.

"One thing I think that gets overshadowed is Daniel won the job, OK?" Ballard said. "Does that

mean we're down on Anthony? Daniel has had a good run here. He reminds me a lot of Alex Smith, who we had in Kansas City and who I thought was just the ultimate professional. I feel that's kind of the same thing with Daniel."

Jones has also had his share of struggles.

Since cashing in on the only playoff trip of his six-year career with a \$160 million contract from the New York Giants, he's thrown 13 interceptions and 10 TD passes in 16 starts. Last November, he requested and was granted his release by New York, then signed with the Minnesota Vikings, where he did not take a snap.

But he outplayed Richardson in training camp and throughout the preseason.

Ballard said he has spoken with Richardson's agent multiple times in recent weeks, adding that he has not fielded any trade offers and has no intention of dealing the strong-

armed 23-year-old.

"I know it's easy to say, 'He's done,'" Ballard said. "I don't agree. I think overcoming challenges and obstacles along the way are good for anybody. I do. I'm proud of Anthony and where he's at, how far he's come. He's come miles. It's tough on any young quarterback in the league, but for him to keep taking the growth steps he has and to work so hard and not get the goal he set for himself and now continuing to do that, I think there's some real value in that."

The question is whether that will be enough for Indianapolis to exercise its fifth-year option on Richardson in 2026 before he begins his fourth year in the league.

"I think it's sure in him, I do," Ballard said when asked if he considered Richardson a franchise quarterback. "I think it's in him. Whether that happens or not, we'll see, but I do think that's in him."

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

# Opening week spotlight clearly on QBs

By MAURA CAREY  
Associated Press

Week 1 of the college football season boasts a loaded schedule with top-10 matchups and revenge games, and the spotlight falls squarely on the quarterbacks. Not everyone can run the table, so expect a shakeup in the next AP Top 25 on Tuesday.

Several top programs are breaking in new QBs, from the Arch Manning takeover at Texas to Julian Sayin filling the shoes of national championship-winner Will Howard at Ohio State. Just like Manning-Sayin, Heisman Trophy hopefuls Garrett Nussmeier and Cade Klubnik will also go head-to-head, while Notre Dame and Miami debut new starters with a vast difference in experience.

The theme is common across six can't-miss Week 1 games: How the QBs perform could set the tone for the playoff hunt as early as this weekend:

## No. 1 Texas at No. 3 Ohio State

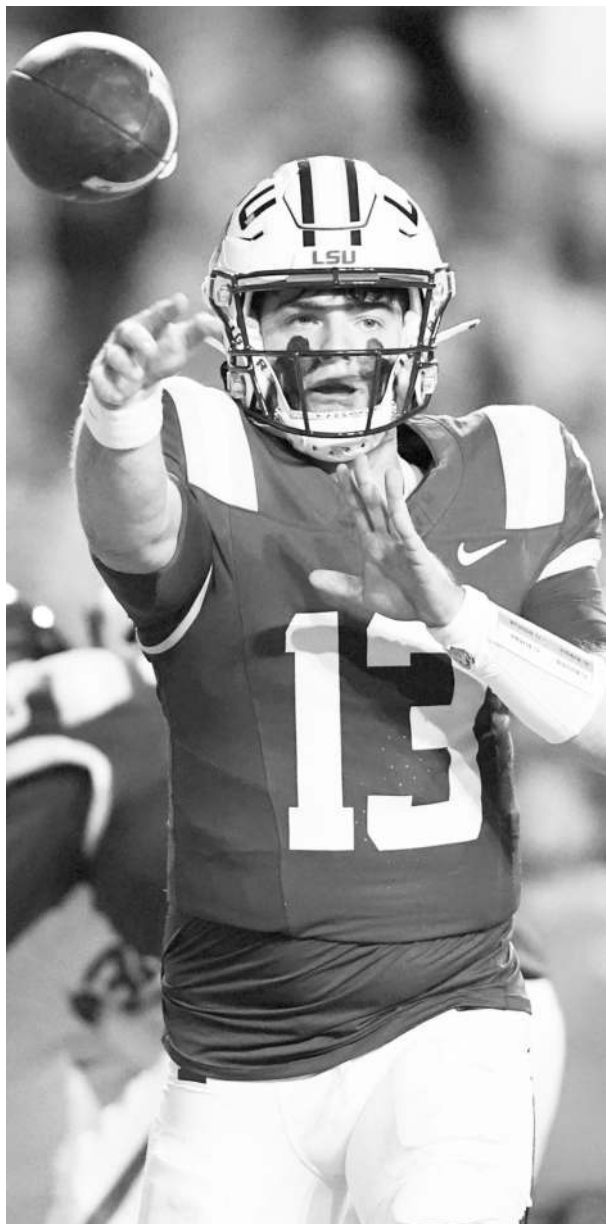
One of the most talked-about Week 1 matchups in years, Texas travels to Columbus to take on the reigning national champs. The two teams met in a College Football Playoff semifinal, where Ohio State won 28-14. Less than a year later, the two rosters look quite different, starting at signal-caller.

Manning makes his long-awaited debut as official QB1 for the Longhorns while the Buckeyes turn to Sayin, who transferred from Alabama and sat behind Howard last year. Sayin's job is simple but could be daunting for an inexperienced QB: feed Jeremiah Smith, the sophomore receiver considered a Heisman candidate.

## No. 9 LSU at No. 4 Clemson

Tiger vs. Tiger, Death Valley vs. Death Valley. QBs Nussmeier and Klubnik should each have high-powered offenses in this one.

LSU is 3-1 in the series and the last meeting came in January 2019 when it ended Clemson's 29-game winning streak with a 42-25 victory for the national championship.



GERALD HERBERT, LEFT, AND JACOB KUPFERMAN/AP

Quarterbacks Garrett Nussmeier, of LSU, left and Cade Klubnik, of Clemson, would like to get the season started on a personal path to the Heisman Trophy and their teams' path toward a CFP national title.

Five years later, the teams meet again, with two Heisman favorites eager to get a title run started with a big win.

## No. 6 Notre Dame at No. 10 Miami

Georgia transfer quarterback Carson Beck will make his debut for the Hurricanes, and the Fighting Irish have picked CJ Carr to start following Riley Leonard's departure for the pros.

Carr played all of four snaps in 2024 and is tasked with taking on a top-10 opponent on the road. Carr

will lean on Jeremiyah Love, one of the top backs in the game and the Irish have seven starters back on defense.

## No. 8 Alabama at Florida State

The Crimson Tide have something to prove after falling short of the CFP during coach Kalen DeBoer's inaugural season. Will Florida State be able to slow down a highly motivated Alabama team?

The Seminoles received eight votes in the preseason poll but are coming off a 2-10 season.

The Seminoles hope senior transfer quarterback Tommy Castellanos can jumpstart the rebuild. Returner Ty Simpson will fill Jalen Milroe's shoes for a Crimson Tide team with higher expectations and little margin for error.

## Virginia Tech at No. 13 South Carolina

It's a somewhat sentimental season opener for South Carolina coach Shane Beamer facing Virginia Tech, where his father, Frank, was the winningest coach in Ho-

### Top 25 schedule

#### Thursday's game

No. 25 Boise St. at S. Florida

#### Friday's game

No. 12 Illinois vs. W. Illinois

#### Saturday's games

- No. 1 Texas at No. 3 Ohio St.
- No. 2 Penn St. vs. Nevada
- No. 4 Clemson vs. No. 9 LSU
- No. 5 Georgia vs. Marshall
- No. 7 Oregon vs. Montana St.
- No. 8 Alabama at Florida St.
- No. 11 Arizona St. vs. N. Arizona
- No. 14 Michigan vs. New Mexico
- No. 15 Florida vs. LIU Brooklyn
- No. 16 SMU vs. East Texas A&M
- No. 17 Kansas St. vs. North Dakota)
- No. 18 Oklahoma vs. Illinois St.
- No. 19 Texas A&M (0-0) vs. UTSA
- No. 20 Indiana vs. Old Dominion
- No. 21 Mississippi vs. Georgia St.
- No. 22 Iowa St. vs. South Dakota
- No. 23 Texas Tech vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff
- No. 24 Tennessee vs. Syracuse at Atlanta

#### Sunday's games

- No. 6 Notre Dame at No. 10 Miami
- No. 13 South Carolina vs. Virginia Tech at Atlanta

kies' history. The teams meet at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Expectations are high for the Gamecocks and quarterback LaNorris Sellers after winning six straight to end the season. The Gamecocks welcome back nine starters — five on the offensive side of the ball, and four defensively, including Dylan Stewart, expected to have a breakout year.

It's an opportunity for South Carolina to get a win under its belt before a challenging SEC schedule commences. Virginia Tech has a chance to make a statement after a 6-7 finish last year, including 0-5 in one-possession games last year with two overtime road losses.

## Syracuse at No. 24 Tennessee

A whole bunch of orange in this one. No. 24 Tennessee's quarterback room was a hot topic of conversation this offseason with Nico Iamaleava unexpectedly departing for UCLA. The Volunteers landed Joey Aguilar in return, ironically coming from UCLA.

The dual-threat veteran will lead an offense against a Syracuse defense that struggled against the run and pass last fall.

Syracuse is tasked with replacing key offensive playmakers in quarterback Kyle McCord and running back LeQuint Allen Jr. Notre Dame transfer Steve Angeli has big shoes to fill at QB.

## Top 25 on AFN



**Syracuse**  
at No. 24 Tennessee  
AFN-Sports2  
6 p.m. Saturday CET  
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

**Marshall**  
at No. 5 Georgia  
AFN-Sports2  
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET  
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

**No. 8 Alabama**  
at Florida State  
AFN-Sports  
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET  
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

**No. 9 LSU**  
at No. 4 Clemson  
AFN-Sports  
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET  
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

**No. 6 Notre Dame**  
at No. 10 Miami  
AFN-Sports  
1:30 a.m. Monday CET  
8:30 a.m. Monday JKT

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Rematch: Texas will need to find new ways to keep Smith silenced

## FROM PAGE 32

horns cornerback Malik Muhammad said Monday. "He's the guy everyone is looking at in college football. I'm sure he's overly motivated, especially coming out of that game last year."



No. 1 Texas  
at No. 3 Ohio State  
AFN-Sports  
6 p.m. Saturday CET  
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

## Reloading secondary

Smith had 76 receptions for 1,315 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, with all three marks Ohio State freshman records. Yet Texas smothered him with cornerback Jahdae Barron, last season's Thorpe Award winner, and safety Andrew Mukuba. Both of them are now in the NFL.

But while the Longhorns have some holes to fill in the secondary, it's hardly a rebuild. It's more like a reload.

Texas senior safety Michael Taaffe, like Smith a preseason All-American, and Muhammad will anchor a unit that has plenty of experience. Some analysts have rated the position group among the best in the country.

The Longhorns also add the return of Duane Akina as safeties coach and passing game defensive coordinator. Akina spent 13 seasons at Texas from 2001-2013 when he coached two Thorpe Award winners (Michael Huff in 2005 and Aaron Ross in 2006) and two more finalists. He spent the past two seasons at Arizona.

## Physical mismatch

In a straight physical matchup, Smith towers over most defensive backs at 6-foot-3, 223 pounds. Muhammad is 6-0, 181. Taaffe is 6-0, 189.

Smith also had the speed to lead the nation last year with six catches longer than 50 yards.

"What he does on the football field, it doesn't seem like a real

human's doing that ... It's going to be really fun going against him because he's a freak of nature," Taaffe said. "The best thing about him is going up and getting the football. You can put three DBs on him, but if you get it up in the air, he's going to go get it."

Texas made sure Smith was always covered by multiple defenders on almost every play last season. But that also opened the field for the rest of the Buckeyes. Carnell Tate had seven catches for 89 yards against the Longhorns in the playoff.

The same scenario could play out Saturday as Akina and Texas defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski draw up a game plan to neutralize Smith again.

"Ideally you've got multiple people with eyes on him and guarding him, but you still have to play great team defense," Longhorns coach Steve Sarkisian said. "And you've gotta cover the two other wideouts they have or two other really good players, too."

But Smith is Ohio State's ultimate playmaker.

"I do think, at the end of the day, (Smith) is where your attention needs to be," Sarkisian said. "You better know where No. 4 is at all times."



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian is looking to get revenge on Ohio State after the Buckeyes beat the Longhorns in the Cotton Bowl.



GARETH PATTERSON/AP

Texas quarterback Arch Manning, right, spent the past two seasons as a backup for Quinn Ewers, but is now set to take over as the starter for the top-ranked Longhorns.

# Arch Manning finally takes reins as Texas' starting QB

BY JIM VERTUNO

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Arch Manning has waited for this moment.

So have Texas fans. College football fans have too, to see what the hype is all about.

No more waiting. Manning leads No. 1 Texas against No. 3 Ohio State on Saturday in a season-opening matchup that will lift the lid off a pair of national title contenders, and two of the early favorites for the Heisman Trophy in Manning and Buckeyes wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

Manning was one of the most coveted recruits when he signed with the Longhorns out of Isadore Newman High School in New Orleans. He certainly had the biggest name, but it was the big body, strong arm and fast feet that every program wanted.

And after two years behind Quinn Ewers, with some spot duty and two career starts when Ewers was injured, Manning finally takes over Texas as the undisputed leader of a team chasing a national title.

"I'm excited," Manning said. "This is what I've been waiting for. I spent two years not playing, so might as well go have fun, right?"

## All the Mannings

The Manning name has been big in football since the 1960s when Arch's grandfather Archie was dazzling Ole Miss fans in college and the New Orleans Saints in the NFL. Uncles Peyton and Eli combined to win four Super Bowls.

That left Arch with a legacy that would have been tough for any player to shoulder. And it would have been easy to fall into its trapings. Unlike the Manning quarterbacks before him, Arch lives in a world of constant social media attention.

Good or bad, it could be overwhelming. Like his freshman year, when he lost his student ID and it was quickly posted online.

But Manning seems to cruise through the attention on campus and far beyond with an aw-shucks attitude and soft smile under a head of curly brown hair. He also knows anything he says can instantly make a headline.

"Arch is a great kid. I just feel like he's normal. And that's what I love about him. He's not some guy who feels like he's untouchable, he's better than everybody else. He doesn't do life like that," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said this week.

## Making money

The humility in public and the locker room hasn't stopped Manning from cashing in. He arrived in college just in time for the new era of college athletes being paid for endorsements, and analysts have said there's no more valuable player on the market.

Manning has endorsements with giant brand names, including Red Bull, Uber, Vuori and Panini to name a few. He announced a new one Wednesday with Warby Parker, the eyewear company. Manning has worn glasses since

age 3 and the company said its first commercial in the partnership will debut during the game Saturday.

Manning also lives in an era of constant transfers. It would have been easy for him to chase a chance to start last season, but stayed put.

Texas was where he wanted to be. Even if that meant waiting it out.

"I want to be the quarterback at the University of Texas. Sometimes it's worth the wait," he said. "I'm ready to play."

## Time to prove it

A new starter, Manning is not exactly a mystery on the field. He started two games last season when Ewers was hurt and was used in spot duty in several other key moments.

He even earned Texas' first SEC victory against Mississippi State, and finished the season with 939 yards passing with nine touchdowns.

New Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, who came to the Buckeyes this past offseason after two decades in the NFL, is dialed in on Manning.

"I'm worried about what his uncles are telling him right now. That's probably the biggest thing for me," Patricia said. "He's big, strong and really athletic. ... We know it's a huge challenge for us. He's got, you know, his uncles and his dad and his grandfather. They pretty much groomed him as a quarterback his entire life."

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## Some late-season matchups critical for CFP

By MAURA CAREY  
Associated Press

The 2025 college football season kicks off with fireworks, featuring eye-catching Week 1 showdowns like No. 1 Texas vs. No. 3 Ohio State, No. 9 LSU vs. No. 4 Clemson and No. 10 Miami vs. No. 6 Notre Dame. Despite the excitement of preseason powerhouses and Heisman Trophy contenders going head-to-head, early stumbles in September rarely end post-season dreams, certainly not in the new 12-team playoff era of college football. The real pressure hits as the season progresses and playoff standings are on the line.

Here are six high-stakes matchups that you won't want to miss (using preseason AP Top 25 rankings):

**LSU at Alabama (Nov. 8):** After falling short of the inaugural 12-team College Football Playoff, pressure is building for LSU's Brian Kelly and Alabama's Kalen DeBoer. Both historically successful programs are not far removed from recent title victories, with LSU in 2020 and Alabama the following year.

Both are coming off matching 9-4 seasons, each with a 5-3 conference record in the rugged SEC. Alabama should be favored in every game ahead of this one except for a late September visit to No. 5 Georgia. If LSU can knock off Clemson, the Tigers should be favored in all their games too ahead of this tilt.

Last fall, a two-interception game from Garrett Nussmeier hurt the Tigers, who struggled to stop Jalen Milroe and Co. Now Nussmeier is considered a Heisman contender and he will get a chance for a marquee conference road win over the Tide and DeBoer, who wants to distance himself from last year's 9-4 debut season.

Texas and Georgia, the two highest-ranked SEC teams in the AP Top 25 preseason poll, square off in Athens less than a month before the league title game, which is where they last met (a 22-19 Bulldogs win in December).

Texas has a new quarterback in charge in Arch Manning; he briefly entered both games against Georgia in 2024, completing 3 of 6 passes for 19 yards after a slow start by Quinn Ewers and a 20-point deficit in Week 8.

Both teams have a lot of football to navigate before this one but it could be a dandy — and a precursor to another meeting or even two before the season ends?

**Penn State at Ohio State (Nov. 1):** Penn State earned the No. 2 seed in the Top 25, surpassing the reigning national champions, Ohio State, who came in at No. 3. The Big Ten rivals meet on Nov. 1 in Columbus in a matchup likely to carry



BARRY REEGER/AP

**Penn State quarterback Drew Allar runs up field against Ohio State last season in State College, Pa. The teams meet again on Nov. 1 in Columbus and both could enter the game undefeated. A good showing here might impress the CFP committee before its first rankings.**

league title game and playoff implications.

Drew Allar, a two-headed rushing attack and a stout defense should have the Nittany Lions favored in every game before this one, with all due respect to No. 7 Oregon (Sept. 27).

Same for the Buckeyes, who are a 2.5-point favorite over the higher-ranked Longhorns in the opener. Ohio State is 24-8 against Penn State and has won eight in a row. Coach James Franklin's sole victory against the Buckeyes was in 2016 during his second year at the helm.

This year, the playoff format shifts to straight seeding, meaning the top four teams will be rewarded with a bye. A good showing here might impress the CFP committee before its first rankings of the season, too.

**SMU at Clemson (Oct. 18):** Expectations are high for Clemson, which is loaded. After LSU, the Tigers could be on cruise control when SMU comes calling for a game that matches two CFP teams from a year ago (both lost in the first round).

Clemson quarterback Cade Klubnik, a Heisman favorite, had a standout outing against the Mustangs in 2024, throwing for 262 yards and four touchdowns. Receiver Bryant Wesco Jr. had a career-high eight receptions, 143 yards and two TDs. The two are ex-



ERIC GAY/AP

**Texas QB Arch Manning passes during practice in Austin, Texas, July 30. Texas is currently ranked No. 1 for the season.**

pected to pick up where they left off. SMU QB Kevin Jennings is back amid some question marks elsewhere, but the schedule isn't daunting ahead of the trip to Clemson.

**Arizona State at Iowa State (Nov. 1):** The Sun Devils went 11-3 and grabbed an automatic bid to the College Football Playoff last season, thanks in part to a dominant 45-19 Big 12 championship game victory against ... Iowa State.

The Cyclones have some challenging games ahead of this one but wins there set this up nicely for a chance to impress the CFP committee.

Power Four conference champions still earn a spot in the 12-team bracket, but they won't have the luxury of a first-round bye unless they're ranked in the top four. The Sun Devils could be in the running either way, but every win counts for both teams in pursuit of

a playoff berth.

**USC at Notre Dame (Oct. 18):** After consecutive underwhelming seasons, USC coach Lincoln Riley could use a major road win, and is there a bigger statement to make than against a storied rival?

Notre Dame has beaten the Trojans seven times in the last eight meetings, including the last two in which the Fighting Irish averaged 48.5 points. USC last won a game in Notre Dame Stadium in 2011.

The Irish have national title hopes. The Trojans have hopes that Riley is finding the right formula to turn things around in what could be one of the last games in this longstanding series. The contract for a rivalry that dates to 1926 expires after their game in 2026.

**Honorable Mention:** No. 8 Alabama at No. 5 Georgia (Sept. 27), a chance for 'Bama to improve to 10-1 against the Bulldogs since 2008 or for Kirby Smart to cut into his 1-6 record as a head coach against the Crimson Tide ... No. 3 Ohio State at No. 14 Michigan (Nov. 29), a matchup of the last two national champions in a series that has seen the Wolverines win four straight ... No. 25 Boise State at No. 6 Notre Dame (Oct. 4), a rare shot for a top Group of Five team to put up a marquee midseason win on the road ... No. 3 Ohio State at No. 12 Illinois (Oct. 11), a chance for Bret Bielema's Illini to show if last year's 10-win season was a fluke.

## SPORTS



**Good first impression**  
Mets get boost from McLean just 3 starts into career » **MLB, Page 27**

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW



MICHAEL THOMAS, LEFT, AND BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Texas linebacker Anthony Hill Jr., left, and Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith are among the returning stars for the Longhorns and Buckeyes, respectively.

# Revenge in the rematch

Texas, Ohio State WR Smith both have something to prove in opener

BY JIM VERTUNO  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Ohio State's Jeremiah Smith is the most feared wide receiver in college football.

For most teams, anyway. When the No. 3 Buckeyes meet No. 1 Texas on Saturday, Smith will face the one team that shut him

down last season.

The Longhorns held Smith to just one catch for 3 yards in a College Football Playoff semifinal. Ohio State still won the game 28-14 and went on to win the national title as Smith scored a touchdown and set up the game-clinching field goal in the final minutes with a 56-yard catch.

Smith is ready for the rematch against Texas and looking for some personal redemption.

"I'm definitely hyped about this one, especially with how things went last year, people saying things about me, about that game I had last year," Smith said during Buckeyes training camp. "I'm definitely

hungry for this one, for sure."

The Longhorns wouldn't expect him to be any other way. Smith is among the early Heisman Trophy contenders along with Texas quarterback Arch Manning.

"He has all the hype right now," Long-

**SEE REMATCH ON PAGE 30**

**NFL suspends Chiefs' Rice for first six games of season** » Page 28