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STARS AND STRIPES

stripes.com

Volume 84 Edition 257 ©SS 2026 CONTINGENCY EDITION FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2026 Free to Deployed Areas



African outreach

KATELYNN MOELLER/U.S. Army

Libyan joint forces soldiers march across the parade grounds at the opening ceremony of Flintlock 2026 in Sirte, Libya, on Tuesday.

US launches large-scale Flintlock exercise, including rare drill in Libya

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. forces launched simultaneous large-scale drills this week in Africa that included a groundbreaking exercise in war-torn Libya, where special operations troops are focused on bolstering their counterterrorism skills.

U.S. Africa Command's Flintlock 2026 kicked off Monday with dual events in Ivory Coast and Libya, where troops from rival government factions are taking part in the multinational exercise.

"This exercise will forge stronger bonds between all those participating and demonstrate our shared commitments to confronting and degrading terrorism in Africa," Army Lt. Gen. John Brennan, AFRICOM's deputy commander, said in a statement at the start of the drills.

The involvement of Libya has been touted by AFRICOM as a step forward for the country, which has been in disarray ever since the 2011 overthrow and death of longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Over the past few years, the U.S. has stepped up efforts to forge closer ties with military officials in Libya, an oil-rich country where Russia also has sought a foothold.

Flintlock 2026 serves as a demonstration of AFRICOM's growing partnership with Libyan military officers from both the west and east, according to Brennan.

SEE OUTREACH ON PAGE 6



EDGAR MARTINEZ/U.S. Army

A member of the Chadian army at the opening ceremony of Flintlock 26.

US Navy turns back 13 ships in blockade

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy has forced 13 ships to turn around in the Strait of Hormuz as it enforces a naval blockade against Iran that is proceeding as planned, according to the Pentagon's latest public assessment.

At a news briefing Thursday, Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said 13 ships made the "wise decision" to turn back rather than attempt to breach the blockade.

"As of this morning, U.S. Central Command has not been required to board any particular ships," Caine said alongside Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of U.S. Central Command.

The comments provided the latest details of a U.S.-Iranian maritime standoff in one of the world's most important waterways.

On Wednesday, Central Command said a U.S. Navy destroyer turned back an Iran-flagged cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman.

USS Spruance redirected the cargo vessel Tuesday after it left the Strait of Hormuz transiting along the Iranian coastline, CENTCOM said in a post to its official X account Wednesday.

The ship headed back to Iran, according to the post, which did not identify the ship involved. No vessels connected to Iran have penetrated the U.S. blockade east of the strait since it began Monday, CENTCOM said.

Ship watchers cast doubt on that claim Thursday, saying satellite images suggested that several tankers, including those connect-

SEE STRAIT ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Snapchat parent set to lay off 1,000 employees

Los Angeles Times

Snap, the parent company of disappearing messaging app Snapchat, said Wednesday that it's laying off 1,000 workers to reduce costs.

The Santa Monica, Calif., social media company is pursuing profitability and efficiency as it faces stiff competition for ad dollars from bigger rivals such as Facebook parent company Meta and Google.

Snap said it's slashing 16% of its full-time workforce and closing more than 300 open roles. The cuts will reduce Snap's annualized cost base by more than $500 million by the second half of this year.

"Over the past several months, we have carefully reviewed the work required to best serve our community and partners, and made tough choices to prioritize the investments we believe are most likely to create long-term value," said Snap Chief Executive and co-founder Evan Spiegel in a memo to employees.

The memo, which was included in a government filing, also mentions that Snap's employees are using artificial intelligence tools to "drive meaningful progress" across several initiatives such as Snapchat Plus — a subscription service that offers users early access to new features and ways to customize the Snapchat app.

Snap is the latest tech company to cite efficiency gains from AI as it cuts jobs and pull back on hiring. Tech firms such as Meta, Block, Amazon, Oracle and others have been laying off workers this year.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (April 17)	0.83
British pound (April 17)	$1.32
Japanese yen (April 17)	156.00
South Korean won (April 17)	1,436.00
Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3747
Britain (Pound)	1.3541
Canada (Dollar)	1.3717
China (Yuan)	6.8211
Denmark (Krone)	6.3479
Egypt (Pound)	51.7920
Euro	0.8495
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8258
Hungary (Forint)	309.62
Israel (Shekel)	3.0020
Japan (Yen)	159.21
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3080
Norway (Krone)	9.3630
Philippines (Peso)	59.94
Poland (Zloty)	3.60
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7469
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2723
South Korea (Won)	1,478.69
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7832
Thailand (Baht)	31.99
Turkey (NewLira)	44.7603

(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	6.75
Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75
Federal funds market rate	3.62
3-month bill	3.70
30-year bond	4.89

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is compiled from weather.com reports.

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MILITARY

Education center now open in Poland

Soldiers' graduation precedes ceremony

BY SHATYRA COX
Stars and Stripes

POWIDZ, Poland — As U.S. forces continue to expand their presence in Poland, garrison leaders say new support services are also making progress, including access to higher education for troops stationed in the country.

The effort was on display Wednesday as U.S. Army Garrison Poland officially opened its new education center in Powidz, marking the milestone with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"This is one step toward better supporting the soldiers, civilians and family members assigned to or deployed in Poland," Col. Jeremy A. McHugh, commander of USAG Poland, said at the ceremony.

"We haven't been doing this long. It's been incremental improvements, and the education center is part of that."

The new facility expands access to academic resources for soldiers and civilians stationed at the forward site, supporting professional development during overseas assignments.



STANFORD TORAN/U.S. Army

U.S. Army Garrison Poland leaders and university partners cut the ribbon Wednesday on a new Army Education Center at Powidz, expanding academic and career development resources for soldiers and civilians serving overseas.

After years of deploying rotational units to locations across Poland, the Army established a more permanent presence in 2022 with the opening of Camp Kosciuszko in Poznan.

As its footprint has grown, the Army has taken steps to add resources, including those aimed at supporting professional development during military assignments in Poland. The effort is part of a broader push to bring services more in line with those at long-established U.S. bases elsewhere in Europe.

Prior to the ribbon-cutting, seven soldiers who earned associate and bachelor's degrees while serving overseas were recognized during a graduation ceremony.

"It is a rare and remarkable thing to balance the demands of military service with the rigors of higher education, and yet these soldiers have done just that," Magella Lanham, education services officer for the garrison, said during the graduation ceremony.

The center will serve as a key hub for education and career development as U.S. forces continue rotations in the region, officials said.

"For our soldiers, this facility represents more than a place to study," Lanham added. "It is a resource for guidance, growth and professional advancement — one that strengthens the entire Powidz community."

McHugh also praised the graduates for their commitment.

"Earning a degree at any level is never easy, but doing so while serving your country takes discipline, grit and vision," he said. "What you've achieved strengthens the entire force."

In addition, advising centers opened for University of Maryland Global Campus and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Air National Guard leaders seek new fighter jets

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Congress should appropriate funds for 72 new fighter jets in 2027 to ensure the modernization of the Air Force, according to a letter to lawmakers sent last week from 20 state National Guard adjutants general.

The letter says that the optimal procurement level would be 108 new fighters per year for the entire Air Force.

"The United States Air Force is the oldest, the smallest, and the least ready in its 78-year history," the letter states, according to Air & Space magazine, which obtained a copy.

While the letter advocates accelerated procurement for the Air Force, it notes that Air National Guard squadrons often receive older aircraft when active-duty units are upgraded to newer designs.

"Cascading legacy fighters from the active component to the reserve component is NOT recapitalization," the letter said.

A detailed Pentagon budget is expected to be released next week. The White House's Office of Management and Budget said last week that it will propose a record $1.5 trillion in military spending, spread across the defense budget and other spending legislation, that it will send to Congress.



JOSIAH MEECE/U.S. Air National Guard

Air National Guard leaders asked Congress to appropriate funds to replace F-16 Fighting Falcons in the upcoming budget.

In their letter to Congress, the adjutants general cite aging aircraft in the active-duty Air Force, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard as undermining readiness. They call for Congress to procure 48 F-35A Lightning II and 24 F-15EX Eagle II fighters in the upcoming budget and increase the total number to 72 F-35As and 36 F-15EXs in future years.

The fighter jets would replace older models of the F-15C Eagle, A-10 Thunderbolt II, and F-16 Fighting Falcon jets.

Brig. Gen. Shannon Smith, head of the Idaho Air National Guard, told Air & Space that without modernization, many Air National Guard units across the nation will be left with older aircraft that require more maintenance, undercutting combat mission readiness.

"If we don't procure at a higher rate, all of these fighter squadrons will remain with '70s-era fighters," Smith said.

The letter says 13 of the Air National Guard's 24 fighter squadrons do not have a firm schedule for when their older aircraft will be replaced.

The adjutants general signing the letter to Congress are from Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

The letter comes amid Air National Guard participation in Operation Epic Fury, the Pentagon's name for the joint U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran.

In a message to troops in early March, Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, the acting director of the Air National Guard, and Chief Master Sgt. Joshua Moore, command chief for the Air National Guard, underscored the role of guard units in the conflict.

"We have already demonstrated our formidable wartime readiness," the message said. "Our people are both leading the fight and preparing reinforcements for the battles ahead."

Marine faces extradition for military aid to China

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The United States can extradite a former Marine Corps fighter pilot accused of providing China with military training, an Australian court has ruled.

Daniel Duggan, an Australian citizen, was arrested in the state of New South Wales in 2022 at the U.S. government's request.

His detention followed reports that dozens of British pilots were recruited to teach the Chinese military how to defeat western warplanes and helicopters.

The former Harrier "jump jet" pilot is accused of conspiracy to unlawfully export defense services to China, conspiracy to launder money and violations of the arms control act, according to Thursday's decision by Justice James Stellios in the Federal Court of Australia.

The maximum penalty for the charges is 65 years imprisonment, according to the judgment.

Duggan, who denies the charges, has been held in a maximum-security prison during the legal challenge, The Australian newspaper reported Thursday.

The Australian government is aware of the court's decision, according to a statement Thursday from Australian Attorney-General Michelle Rowland's office.

"Duggan will remain in extradition custody in Australia until his surrender to the United States of America," the statement said.

Duggan served as a Harrier pilot from April 1989 to September 2002 with a deployment to Kuwait in 1999, according to the Marine Corps.

The father of six renounced his U.S. citizenship more than a decade ago and has been a permanent Australian resident since 2002, The Australian reported at the time of his arrest. The allegations against him stem from work he did with the Test Flying Academy of South Africa between 2010 and 2012, according to the newspaper.

A legal clerk for Duggan, Lynn Stocker, spoke outside the court on Thursday, the newspaper reported that day.

"Now it is a decision for the Prime Minister whether he wants to send an Australian citizen who has already been in prison for three and a half years into the hands of the Trump administration who has taken a close interest in this matter," she said, according to the report.

The U.S. Department of Justice did not respond to an emailed request for comment outside of business hours in Washington, D.C., on Thursday.

MILITARY

Army names tilt-rotor aircraft Cheyenne II

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

The Army's next-generation, multirole, vertical-lift aircraft will carry the name Cheyenne II, the service announced Wednesday.

The name was unveiled at the Army Aviation Association of America's annual conference in Nashville, a year after revealing the 101st Airborne Division would be the service's first unit to receive the MV-75.

The MV-75 is intended to replace the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, a design that first flew in October 1974, according to the Army. It is a tilt-rotor aircraft with engine nacelles mounted on the wingtips. The rotors can counter-rotate, allowing for a high level of maneuverability and hovering stability.

"The Cheyenne people represent a resilient warrior culture and embody the key attributes of the MV-75 — speed, reach, lethality and adaptability," Army Acquisition Executive Brent Ingraham said in a statement. "I am honored to be part of this historic occasion as we officially name our multi-mission tilt-rotor aircraft."



Bell

The V-280 Valor, prototype of the Army's planned MV-75 Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft that's designed to replace the UH-60 Black Hawk.

The Army evaluated the names of more than 500 tribes and Native American figures before selecting Cheyenne II, the statement says. The name was previously used in the late 1960s for the AH-56 Cheyenne, which was developed to be an advanced, high-speed attack helicopter. Though the AH-56 program did not move forward, its legacy lives on in the new tilt-rotor platform.

"The MV-75 is a transformational aircraft that will provide our Joint Force with unparalleled versatility to dominate a wide array of mission sets," Col. Jeffrey Poquette, Project Manager for the MV-75 Cheyenne II, said in a statement. "We are honored to have the Cheyenne tribes' approval to use their name, which embodies the power of this aircraft."

The MV-75 is designed to carry 14 troops and a crew of four, according to the Army. It has a cruise speed of 320 mph — much faster than the Black Hawk's operating speed of 183 mph. And it will boast a range of up to 920 miles, which dwarfs the Black Hawk's 367-mile top range.

Fort Campbell officials expect to begin receiving MV-75s around 2028.

Army officials believe the new capability will allow the 101st Airborne to deploy its forces as far as Europe with just MV-75s, instead of needing to load troops and helicopters on planes or ships to reach the Continent.

The number 75 pays homage to 1775, the birth year of the U.S. Army, an Army spokesperson said.

Free ride app aims to decrease DUIs

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

A Marine staff sergeant has developed a mobile app offering free rides to fellow service members, aiming to reduce drunken driving and the disciplinary actions that can follow.

Christian Smellie, an F-35C Lightning II maintainer with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., launched the GY6Lift app Oct. 8 after years of considering how to address the problem.

Smellie, of Kingston, Jamaica, said the idea took shape during his 2015-20 assignment at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, where he saw service members face career consequences for driving under the influence.

"Ever since I was in Japan seeing all those Marines pretty much destroying their career over a silly thing as drinking and driving — to me it's super silly," he said in a March 24 phone interview. "There's no excuse; you can always call somebody."

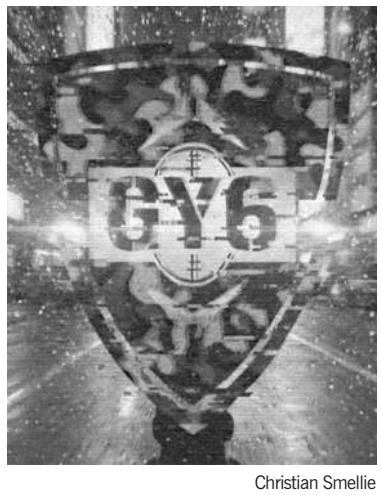
The app connects service members with volunteer drivers for free rides, operating in a format similar to commercial ride-hailing services but limited to military users. Both riders and drivers must verify their affiliation using a Defense Department identification number, while spouses can participate using their partner's credentials.

GY6Lift — available for both Apple and Android devices — is now in use in Arizona, California, Florida and North Carolina and has provided rides to dozens of passengers so far, Smellie said. About 12 drivers have signed up, including Lance Cpl. Fatima Semane, an administrator in Smellie's squadron.

"No Marine wants to get in trouble," she said by phone Wednesday. The app gives service members the confidence to reach out for help and "know for sure whoever's going to pick me up is not going to be judging me," she added.

Drunken driving remains a persistent issue among service members, particularly overseas. In Japan, where the legal blood-alcohol limit is 0.03%, Okinawa police detained 64 individuals connected to the U.S. military last year on suspicion of DUI.

Across the force, a 2018 Defense Department health survey found 34% of active-duty personnel reported binge drinking, while 9.8% were classified as heavy drinkers. The survey also found 4.9% of service members reported driving under the influence or riding with an impaired driver.



Christian Smellie

GY6Lift, a ride-hailing app developed to reduce service member DUIs, is now in use in four U.S. states.

Smellie said he pitched the app shortly after its launch to his then-commander, Lt. Col. Evan Shockley, who later invited him to present it to Marine Aircraft Group 14 leadership.

Shockley called the app a "great resource."

"What I really like about it is the fact that it is by service members, for service members, taking care of each other," he said.

Smellie said he hopes to expand the app internationally, including to Japan, though technical issues have so far limited access on Japanese mobile networks.

"As long as I can save or help save at least one person's career, the entire year of me trying to make this will be worth it," he said.

US, South Korea, Japan naval leaders meet amid threats from North Korea

BY JULIE MASSON AND YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

Senior naval leaders from the United States, South Korea and Japan met in Seoul this week to strengthen maritime cooperation and coordinate responses to North Korea's advancing missile and nuclear programs, according to the South's navy.

Adm. Stephen Koehler, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet; Adm. Kim Kyung-ryul, South Korea's chief of naval operations; and Adm. Saito Akira, chief of staff of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force, discussed enhancing deterrence and response capabilities, the South Korean navy said in a official news release Wednesday.

The talks follow a series of recent North Korean weapons tests that have raised tension in the region.

Pyongyang launched two strategic cruise missiles and three anti-ship missiles Sunday in what it described as an operational test of its destroyer, Choe Hyun.

The North's military also fired a Hwasong-11Ka surface-to-surface missile equipped with a cluster munition warhead during tests last week.

Kim hosted the two visiting admirals at his official residence after holding separate bilateral meetings with each.

During the U.S.-South Korea talks, Kim and Koehler discussed maritime security and ways to strengthen their joint defense posture, including expanding cooperation in fleet maintenance, repair and overhaul, according to South Korea's navy.

In separate discussions between South Korea and Japan, Kim and Saito focused on increasing troop-level and personnel exchanges and on plans to resume conducting joint search-and-rescue training.

Defense ministers from South Korea and Japan agreed in January to restart those drills after a nine-year hiatus.

The exercises, first launched in 1999, were suspended in 2017 amid strained relations between the two countries.

The meetings happened as broader geopolitical tensions continue to shape the security environment for U.S. allies in Asia.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung last month voiced opposition to the potential redeployment of U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, systems from the Korean Peninsula to the Middle East.

MILITARY

Navy, Marines, Coast Guard welcomed in Texas

State's first Fleet Week underway in Houston

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

HOUSTON — As soon as Marine Corps Sgt. Ashleigh Lozano heard the Navy was planning a Fleet Week for her hometown, she knew she had to find a way to be there.

"It's history in the making, and to be home to show off my uniform, serving my country, and being in my city with pride, it was something I definitely wanted to be a part of," she said Wednesday morning while standing on the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge as the amphibious assault ship made its way through Galveston Bay and into the Port of Houston.

She is one of more than 1,000 sailors, Marines and Coast Guard members participating in the first Fleet Week for a Texas city.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle said the state may be more Army- and Air Force-centric, but he is ready to show the city's 2.3 million residents what the sea services are all about.



Phil Brayton, a Navy veteran known as "the Houston Tan Man," enjoys an event at city hall as part of Fleet Week Houston.



PHOTOS BY ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Marine Corps Band performs outside Houston City Hall to kick off Fleet Week Houston on Wednesday.

"There are young adults out there, I think in middle school and certainly in high school who are thinking about service already. They've got that on their minds," Caudle said. "I want to take the mystique out of that. I want them to meet the sailors, engage with them and understand they could do that, too."

Originally scheduled for November 2025, the Navy and Houston decided to reschedule the event when the government shutdown occurred to make sure both parties could maximize participation.

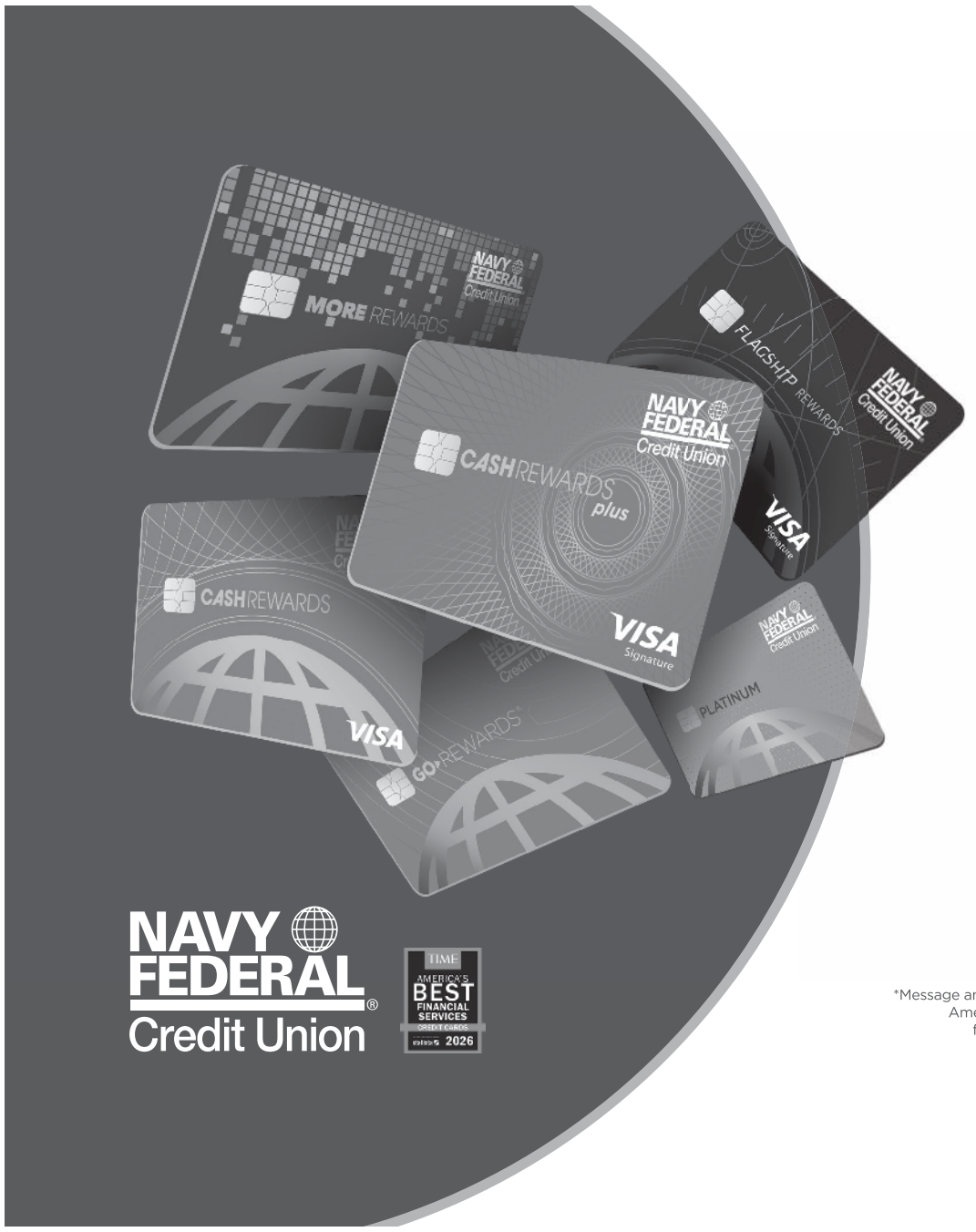
Activities kicked off Wednesday morning with a parade of ships featuring the Kearsarge and the USS St. Louis accompanied by a flyover. These ships and others will be available for public tours, and events are scheduled across the city.

For her part, Lozano, a supply manager stationed at Marine Corps Air Station New River in North Carolina, said she'll spend the next week visiting a children's museum and children's hospital, an elementary school and a Houston Astros baseball game.

"I went to all the Astros games growing up," she said. "I'm super excited to go there."

During any downtime, Lozano said, she wants to show off Houston to her fellow Marines.

"We already have an itinerary built up," she said.



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MILITARY

Two Navy minesweepers depart from Asia

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

Two U.S. Navy minesweepers based in Japan have been tracked heading toward the Middle East as the United States prepares for mine-clearing operations in the Strait of Hormuz.

The USS Chief and USS Pioneer, Avenger-class mine countermeasure ships homeported at Sasebo Naval Base, departed Singapore on April 10 and were moving northwest through the Strait of Malacca, according to ship-tracking data from MarineTraffic.org.

The vessels had arrived in Singapore two days earlier, according to ship-spotting site WarshipCam.net.

Their destination has not been officially disclosed, but their course aligns with recent statements from U.S. Central Command about preparations to clear naval mines in the strategically vital waterway.

"Today, we began the process of establishing a new passage and we will share this safe pathway with the maritime industry soon to encourage the free flow of commerce," Adm. Brad Cooper, CENTCOM's commander, said in an April 11 news release.

CENTCOM said additional assets, including underwater drones, are expected to support the effort. The littoral combat ship USS Tulsa, which also has mine countermeasure capabilities, passed through the Strait of Malacca on April 2.



Irving Garcia/U.S. Navy

The mine countermeasure ship USS Pioneer, seen here in the East China Sea in 2020, departed Singapore on a northwest course toward the Middle East on April 10.

The Chief and Pioneer, commissioned in 1994 and 1992, respectively, are among four Avenger-class ships based in Sasebo. The vessels are designed with wooden hulls coated in fiberglass to reduce their magnetic signature and are equipped with sonar, remote detonators and other systems to detect and neutralize mines, according to the Naval Surface Force Atlantic website.

Both the Pentagon and U.S. 7th Fleet — responsible for the ships while they're in the Western Pacific — declined to comment Thursday, citing operational security concerns. CENTCOM did not respond to an email requesting comment.

The Strait of Hormuz remains a critical chokepoint for global commerce and a focal point in tensions between the United States and Iran.

The day after announcing the mine-removal operation, CENTCOM began a blockade of "all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports," according to a news release Monday.

"The blockade will be enforced impartially against vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas, including all Iranian ports on the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman," the command said in a Sunday release.

Since then, 10 vessels have been turned around, with no ships breaking through, CENTCOM announced Wednesday on X. An Iranian-flagged cargo vessel attempted to evade the blockade but was redirected by the guided-missile destroyer USS Spruance.

USS Nimitz, Chilean military hold joint maritime exercises

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

USS Nimitz held joint maritime training exercises with the military of Chile this week as the carrier continued its move to a new homeport at Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia.

The Nimitz has been participating in the multinational Southern Seas 2026 exercises, hosting military leaders from Panama and El Salvador aboard the ship and conducting live-fire training with the Ecuadorian Navy. Some of the training has included the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley.

The joint exercise this week came as new Chilean President José Antonio Kast opened the Feria Internacional del Aire y del Espacio 2026 in Santiago, the largest aerospace and defense exhibition in Latin America.

"The U.S. participation will showcase a diverse set of capabilities, including C-130 Hercules and MQ-9 Reaper aircraft from the Texas Air National Guard, the U.S. Air Force Academy Wings of Blue parachute team and the F-35 Lightning II Demonstration Team, with additional support from the U.S. Navy with a P-8 Poseidon," according to a statement from U.S. Southern Command.

The exhibition included an in-flight demonstration by a Chilean Air Force KC-135 that refueled two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II fighters.

The Nimitz is scheduled to conduct additional exercises with Latin American militaries after transiting from the Pacific to the Atlantic at the tip of South America, then proceeding north to Norfolk.

Outreach: US eyes better ties with Libya

FROM PAGE 1

Since the 2011 political unrest, control of Libya has been contested by an internationally recognized government in Tripoli and the Libyan National Army, which dominates much of the eastern part of the country.

The opposing factions remain deadlocked on how to go about holding presidential and parliamentary elections to form one unified government.

Still, the situation on the ground has improved dramatically from that of a few years ago. In 2019, AFRICOM was forced to evacuate troops from the country due to the deteriorating security situation as rival militias fought.

Brennan said a joint committee was key to bringing the two sides together for the exercise being held in Sirte.

The coastal city has been the site of major battles between rival factions and at one point also was a stronghold for the Islamic State group in Libya.

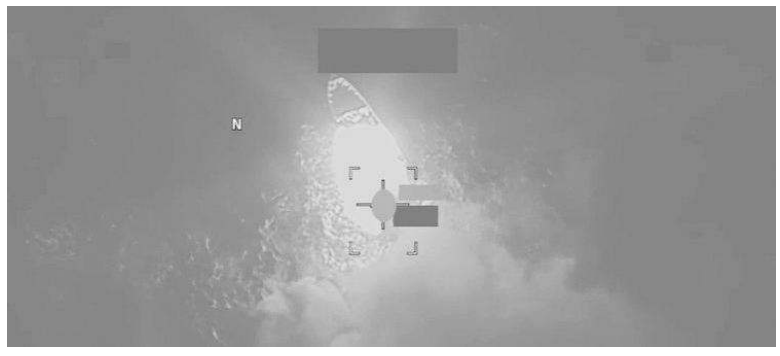
In addition to the Flintlock drills, AFRICOM this week also started Africa Lion in Tunisia, with satellite training sites in Ghana, Morocco and Senegal.

With some 7,000 personnel from more than 30 nations, it represents AFRICOM's largest drill on the continent.

Unlike Flintlock, which is focused on special operations units, Africa Lion centers more on conventional forces.

Among the main areas of focus are combined arms integration, command post simulations and practice in countering roadside bombs, according to the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa.

Both Flintlock and Africa Lion run through April.



U.S. Southern Command

U.S. forces launched a strike Wednesday on a suspected drug boat in the Eastern Pacific, killing three, U.S. Southern Command said.

Three killed in latest US strike on alleged drug boat

Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces launched a strike on Wednesday on a suspected drug boat in the Eastern Pacific, killing three, U.S. Southern Command said. It was the third strike in three days.

The latest strike brings the death toll to 178 since the operations began in early September.

"Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narcotrafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narcotrafficking operations," SOUTHCOM said in a statement.

SOUTHCOM posted a 20-second video showing the strike. No U.S. forces were harmed in the operation.

After only three strikes in March, U.S. forces have ramped up the attacks in the past five days, starting with two strikes Saturday on separate vessels that left five people dead and one survivor. The U.S. Coast Guard suspended the search for the survivor.

Operation Southern Spear, the Pentagon's name for the campaign against drug trafficking in Latin America, continues despite the U.S. military's focus on the Middle East and the conflict with Iran.

Shortly after taking office, President Donald Trump designated several drug cartels as terrorist organizations, including Venezuela's Tren de Aragua. His administration has asserted that the U.S. is in an "armed conflict" with cartels and will treat their members as "unlawful combatants." The administration, however, has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

MIDEAST

Ceasefire set in Lebanon as US, Iran mull longer truce

By Josh Wingrove, Patrick Sykes and Arsalan Shahla
Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump said Israel and Lebanon have agreed to a 10-day ceasefire, a move that offers to ease tensions more broadly in the region while the U.S. and Iran are in discussions to extend their own truce ahead of its expiration next week.

Trump announced the Israel-Lebanon truce in a social media post on Thursday, noting that it would begin at 5 p.m. New York time. He also directed Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Dan Caine to "to work with Israel and Lebanon to achieve a Lasting PEACE."

Israel has kept up its fighting against Iranian proxy Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, a military campaign that has threatened to derail the separate ceasefire with Iran. Trump's announcement on Thursday made no mention of Hezbollah.

Separately, Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir, traveled to Iran this week as his nation seeks to mediate a longer truce between Washington and Tehran. Pakistan hosted high-level talks between U.S. and Iranian officials last weekend — discussions that failed to yield a breakthrough amid the six-week war. Munir was greeted by Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The U.S. and Iran are considering a two-week ceasefire extension, according to a person familiar with the matter, who asked not to be identified discussing sensitive matters. Neither side wants to resume fighting, said another person familiar with the discussions.

Comments from both Iranian and U.S. officials on Thursday suggest the sides remain far apart on key issues, but the ceasefire with Lebanon could provide fresh momentum. Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who took part in the Pakistan talks, had earlier said a permanent ceasefire must cover the fighting in Lebanon.

Control over the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for energy supplies, remains contentious, with a U.S. naval blockade now into its fourth day. Iran, which has effectively shuttered the strait since the start of the war, is meanwhile pressing ahead with plans to charge ships for transit even after the war is over.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the U.S. military is ready to resume combat "at the push of a button," whenever Trump gives the order, and warned Iran not to make poor choices.

There is a possibility the conflict turns into a "frozen war," according to Sorana Parvulescu, a partner for Europe, Middle East and Africa at Control Risks.

"That is becoming more feasible because there is no good military option on the table right now for the U.S. and because the deal is probably going to prove itself more elusive than meets the eye," she said in an interview with Bloomberg TV on Thursday.

Thirteen vessels have turned around in three days rather than test the U.S. naval blockade on Iranian-linked ships crossing the strait, U.S. Central Command said.

Iran sees a prolonging of the U.S. blockade as "a prelude to a breach of the ceasefire," said Ali Abdollahi, the commander of Iran's joint military headquarters, according to state TV.

The U.S. is sending thousands of additional troops to the Middle East in the coming days to pressure Tehran into making a deal, the Washington Post reported, citing officials it didn't name.



IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY/AP

Pakistan's Army Chief Field Marshal Gen. Asim Munir, left, is welcomed by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi upon his arrival in Tehran on Wednesday.

Senate GOP blocks fourth attempt to curb Iran conflict

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans on Wednesday voted down for the fourth time an attempt by Democrats to force an end to the Iran war as the conflict stretched into a seventh week and a two-week ceasefire neared expiration.

The 52-47 vote to curb President Donald Trump's ability to take future military action against Iran without congressional approval was the first time lawmakers weighed in on the conflict since Congress returned from a two-week recess this week.

As in previous votes to open debate on the issue, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky was the lone Republican to side with Democrats. Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania was the only Democrat to vote against the measure.

The vote Wednesday is expected to be the start of a flurry of similar actions in the coming weeks. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats have filed about 10 more war powers resolutions, in addition to a handful of others that have yet to be called up.

"If Republicans block it, we will vote again. And again. And again. Every single week until Operation Epic Failure ends — or Congress does its job and authorizes it, which I know it won't, given how bad this war is," he said.

The resolution rejected Wednesday was led by Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a former Army helicopter pilot who lost her legs in the Iraq War.

"I ran for Congress to honor the men and women who carried me out of the bloody war zone," she said in a floor speech. "I made a promise that when the drums of war started beating again, I would be in a position to make sure that our elected officials fully consider the true cost of war, not just in terms of money but in human lives."

Trump has repeatedly declared the conflict, which began on Feb. 28, "close to over," but negotiations to end the war have stalled. More than 10,000 service members this week began enforcing a blockade of Iranian ports on the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway Iran has choked off from most commercial traffic.

A ceasefire is set to expire on April 21. On April 28, the Trump administration will reach a deadline that requires congressional authorization for continued military operations after 60 days of hostilities. Federal law mandates the withdrawal of U.S. forces unless Congress authorizes their presence, though the administration can seek a 30-day extension.

Some Republicans have indicated that two months of fighting would mark the point when a serious debate on the war would be needed. Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said this week that the panel will likely hold a hearing on the conflict in May.

But on Wednesday, most Republicans continued to stand by the president. Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, defended Trump's authority to wage war and said he was right to attack Iran alongside Israel.

"We did not start a war with Iran, we don't want a war with Iran, but we have to defend ourselves," he said.

Strait: US says enforcement of blockade is proceeding as planned

FROM PAGE 1

ed to Iran, China and India, have made it past the U.S. barricade and were in Iran.

In addition, other sanctions-compliant tankers were headed to Iraq with their location responders turned off, one ship watcher posted Thursday on X.

Meanwhile, as many as 20 ships — a combination of tankers, cargo ships and other vessels — had transited the strait in the first 24 or so hours following the U.S. blockade, The New York Times reported Wednesday, citing an unidentified U.S. official.

It remained unclear whether the commercial transits indicated that shipowners and captains were more confident in traveling the vital waterway as the U.S. works to wrest control away from Iran.

On Saturday, at least one U.S. destroyer transited the strait, a critical oil pipeline, as part of a broader effort to clear Iranian sea mines from the area.

The Navy also is rushing minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. At least one of them, the littoral combat ship USS Canberra, was in the region on Monday.

The U.S. blockade includes the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea east of the Strait of Hormuz, encompassing the entirety of the Iranian coast. It isn't limited to ports and oil terminals, CENTCOM said in a notice to mariners earlier this week.

The action follows a breakdown in U.S.-Iran talks over the weekend aimed at ending hostilities in the Persian Gulf and getting Iran to forfeit its nuclear materials.

On Wednesday, President Donald Trump turned up the pressure on Iran, sanctioning more than two dozen individuals, companies and ships associated with the county's illicit oil transportation network, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The sanctions target the Iranian and Russian petroleum sales organization controlled by Mohammad Hossein Shamkhani, who has deep connections to the Iranian regime, the Treasury Department said.

Shamkhani is the son of senior Iranian security official Ali Shamkhani, who was killed Feb. 28 in the joint U.S.-Israel attack on Iran that started the war, Al Jazeera reported.

Spruance is part of the Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group, which has been operating in the Arabian Sea. At least 10 other destroyers are in the Middle East.

On Saturday, the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, flanked by two destroyers, was spotted on satellite images operating in the Gulf of Oman just 124 miles from the southern coast of Iran, the BBC reported Monday.

That's the farthest north and west the carrier has operated in the gulf in recent weeks, a ship watcher said.

NATION

Trump's isolation deepens on world stage

By Courtney Subramanian, Jennifer A. Dlouhy and Alberto Nardelli
Bloomberg News

The war in Iran and President Donald Trump's rhetoric have driven U.S. alliances with Europe near the breaking point.

The U.S. has offered a diplomatic version of the silent treatment to many European partners, refusing to loop them in about its plans for the conflict and progress in peace negotiations, officials on the Continent say. That's included freezing much of Europe out of consultations on his recent move to impose a blockade against the few ships Iran has allowed to navigate the Strait of Hormuz, and Washington's decision to let a waiver on Russian oil expire.

The U.S. isn't the only one increasingly going at it alone. The U.K. and France — which have drawn Trump's ire over their criticism of the war — are expected to host their own conference on Friday to discuss peaceful means to restore free transit through the strait. Meanwhile, many allies have so far refused to participate in the U.S. blockade.

And while the U.S. and European leaders may not be speaking privately, they are quite publicly trading barbs. Following Pope Leo XIV's criticism of the war in Iran, Trump launched a broadside against the pontiff, calling him "terrible for foreign policy."

Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister who fostered a friendly relationship with the U.S. president, called Trump's tirade against the pope "unacceptable" and suspended Italy's two-decade-old defense pact with Israel, the U.S.'s partner in the war, citing only "the current situation."



Julia Demaree Nikhinson / AP

President Donald Trump speaks with reporters during a briefing this month.

The fissures have emerged against the backdrop of Hungarians over the weekend voting to end the 16-year tenure of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, despite a last-minute campaign visit by U.S. Vice President JD Vance. The defeat was seen as a blow to Trump, who has long hailed Orban — a close ally of Russia's Vladimir Putin and frequent irritant to the European Union — as among his closest partners on the Continent.

Taken in total, the shift has laid bare the limits of Trump's singular brand of leadership, which has disregarded the coalitions previous presidents built to counter adversaries and foster American soft power abroad.

European officials privately concede that the break is unlikely to prove permanent. Security and energy concerns mean they cannot countenance a full split with Washington, and some even agree Trump's blockade may provide the necessary pressure to encourage a deal to end the war, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Still, it will be up to Trump to unwind the crisis he helped create in the Middle East — and for the U.S. Navy to potentially get involved in reopening the strait, at risk to American service members. That has significant implications for a conflict that has set off a global energy crisis and driven economic uncertainty.

"President Trump and the people around him seem not to understand that American power floats on other countries' voluntary cooperation to drive down the costs and difficulty of anything we try and do in the world," said Kori Schake, a former George W. Bush administration official now at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute.

Instead of pursuing goals that are in the collective interest, "he's imposing the cost of what is in America's and Israel's interests on everybody else in the world — and without even consulting others," she said.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said Trump is disappointed with European allies for barring U.S. forces from using their bases for the Iran campaign.

"The President has effectively restored America's standing on the world stage and strengthened relationships abroad — but he simultaneously will never allow the United States to be treated unfairly and taken advantage of by so-called 'allies,'" Kelly said in an emailed statement.

The speedy deterioration of Trump's relationships has been remarkable, even for a president known for his volatile temperament and quick disposal of allies.

DeSantis delays special session on redistricting

Miami Herald

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Gov. Ron DeSantis on Wednesday delayed a planned special session on redistricting by one week, while simultaneously expanding the agenda to include a revived push for artificial intelligence regulations and vaccine discussions.

In a proclamation issued Wednesday evening, DeSantis said he was pushing back the special session's start date — originally a five-day planned to begin April 20 — to April 28.

He also said the session "can extend no later than" May 1 — meaning the governor is giving lawmakers one less day to debate new congressional maps and address two surprise items from his policy wish list.

The delay caps an uncertain stretch for DeSantis' push for mid-decade redistricting, which began last summer as President Donald Trump and his administration levied pressure on Texas and other red states to redraw their maps to protect the congressional GOP's majority.

DeSantis first called for a special session to address the matter in January.

But he has yet to release tentative maps for lawmakers to think over before they return to Tallahassee, and Senate President Ben Albritton said Wednesday that he's deferring to the governor to draw the map.

"The Senate is not drafting or producing a map for introduction during the special session," he said in a statement. Instead, Albritton said he expects the governor's office to submit a proposal for Senate consideration.



DeSantis

The Florida House created a special committee for congressional redistricting last August, but after holding two meetings where they spoke generally about the process at the end of last year, the committee went quiet. House Speaker Daniel Perez — who has feuded with the governor — did not put out a statement like Albritton's regarding the new special session call.

Unlike many other states, Florida's constitution bans partisan gerrymandering.

US probes suspicious oil trades made before Trump policy pivots

Bloomberg News

The top U.S. derivatives regulator is investigating a series of suspiciously well-timed trades in the oil futures market ahead of recent policy pivots by President Donald Trump related to the war in Iran, according to people familiar with the matter.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission is leading the probe into trading of oil futures contracts on platforms belonging to CME Group Inc. and Intercontinental Exchange Inc., said the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is private. Both exchanges were asked to hand over data, the people said.

The CFTC is looking into at least two instances over a period of about two weeks where trading volumes surged shortly before major announcements, the people said. Data requested from the exchanges include the so-called Tag 50 identifications of the entities behind the trades, the people said.

Recent examples where oil trading volumes spiked at key moments in the past few weeks have raised concerns about potential misuse of material nonpublic information tied to Trump's shifting stance on the war in Iran. Historic disruption to Middle Eastern oil flows sent oil soaring at the start of the conflict. Prices whipsawed in subsequent weeks on speculation over when tanker traffic might resume through the Strait of Hormuz.

The CFTC and Intercontinental Exchange declined to comment on the investigation. A White House spokesperson referred comment to the CFTC.

"We vigorously surveil our markets and work closely with the CFTC to oversee trading activity," CME said in a statement. "Importantly, any review of market behavior must include all venues, including prediction markets like Polymarket and Kalshi that list related products with little to no visibility."

Kalshi declined to comment while Polymarket didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

As scrutiny of the well-timed trades has intensified, two Democratic senators have urged the CFTC to examine potential irregularities. The White House circulated an internal memo last month cautioning staff against trading on sensitive information in financial markets and rapidly expanding event-based betting platforms.

"These suspicious oil trades look like an appalling example of insiders rigging the market," Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren said in a statement Wednesday. The probe "is a start, but CFTC and the SEC should do their job and investigate anything that looks like insider trading by Trump Administration officials."

On March 23, oil and stocks futures worth billions of dollars were traded 15 minutes before Trump said previously threatened strikes on Iranian energy infrastructure would be delayed. The president's comments in a Truth Social post sent crude prices plummeting and equities soaring.

A similar pattern was observed ahead of Trump's April 7 announcement of a two-week ceasefire with Iran. Futures activity increased in the hours before the news, which caused both oil and gas prices to plunge.

NATION

Live Nation illegally monopolized live events, jury says

Bloomberg News

Live Nation Entertainment, the largest U.S. concert promoter and ticket seller, illegally monopolized the live events industry and overcharged fans, a New York federal jury concluded Wednesday.

Following a six-week trial, the jury found in favor of a coalition of 33 states and Washington, D.C., who sued the company, handing a massive victory on all their antitrust claims after the U.S. Justice Department bowed out of the case with a settlement after the first week.

The jury of seven women and two men found that Live Nation illegally monopolized the market for ticketing services, concert ticketing and the use of amphitheaters that are a popular venue for outdoor concerts. Live Nation also illegally tied the use of company-owned venues to its concert promotion services, the jury said.

Live Nation's monopoly led concertgoers to overpay by $1.72 per ticket, the jury found. U.S. District Judge Arun Subramanian, who oversaw the trial, will consider that finding in calculating how much Live Nation must pay for its illegal conduct and how to remedy the monopoly. The states want as much as $700 million and may seek additional penalties for violations of state antitrust laws. Some also have said they want Live Nation to sell Ticketmaster, its ticketing arm.

"This is a historic and resounding victory for artists, fans, and the venues that support them," said California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a statement. "In the face of dwindling antitrust enforcement by the Trump Administration, this verdict shows just how far states can go to protect our residents from big corporations that are using their power to illegally raise prices and rip-off Americans."

Live Nation is likely to appeal the verdict and any remedy order issued by the judge to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

"We're obviously disappointed," Dan Wall, a lawyer for Live Nation, said after the verdict. "The game is not over by any means."

Shares of rival ticket brokers jumped on the news, with StubHub climbing as much as 5% and Vivid Seats rising as much as 9.1%.

"This was a massive win for the state AGs and an historic miss for the DOJ," said Roger Alford, an antitrust professor at Notre Dame Law School who until last summer was the Trump administration's No. 2 antitrust official. "The DOJ had the talent, the material, and the audience. It just lacked leadership with the courage to step on stage."

Justice Sotomayor apologizes for 'hurtful' criticism of Kavanaugh

By Jordan Fischer
Bloomberg News


Sotomayor

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor issued a rare public apology for criticism she levied toward Brett Kavanaugh during a speaking appearance.

"At a recent appearance at the University of Kansas School of Law, I referred to a disagreement with one of my colleagues in a prior case, but I made remarks that were inappropriate," Sotomayor said of the April 7 response during a question and answer session. "I regret my hurtful comments. I have apologized to my colleague."

Sotomayor, who was elevated to the Supreme Court by President Barack Obama, criticized Kavanaugh's concurrence defending an emergency decision by the court allowing warrantless immigration stops to resume in Los Angeles. Sotomayor said Kavanaugh didn't understand the impact of such stops.

"This is from a man whose parents were professionals. And probably doesn't really know any person who works by the hour," Sotomayor said.

Bloomberg Law was the first to report on Sotomayor's comments, which drew immediate condemnation from conservatives on social media.

Kavanaugh was the lone justice to write in defense of the order. In a concurrence, he said legal residents' encounters with immigration agents are "typically brief" and that those affected "promptly go free," a characterization immigration lawyers have disputed.

During a second appearance last week at the University of Alabama School of Law, Sotomayor lamented her frequent failure to win over the conservative justices to her positions. She also praised cordial relations on the court, saying she maintains a civil relationship with all eight other justices and considers many to be friends.

Trump stokes controversy by posting AI Jesus image

New York Daily News

President Donald Trump on Wednesday posted a controversial AI-generated image of himself and Jesus Christ just a day after he yanked a meme that appeared to depict him as the holy man amid widespread criticism.

Trump re-posted an image depicting Jesus blessing him, which was first posted by a right-wing Republican candidate for a Boston congressional seat.

"God might be playing his Trump card," Daniel Kelly, the candidate who uses the Twitter handle @Irish4Trump, wrote in a caption, adding that "I was never a very religious man."

Trump made no secret of his approval of the new meme and message.

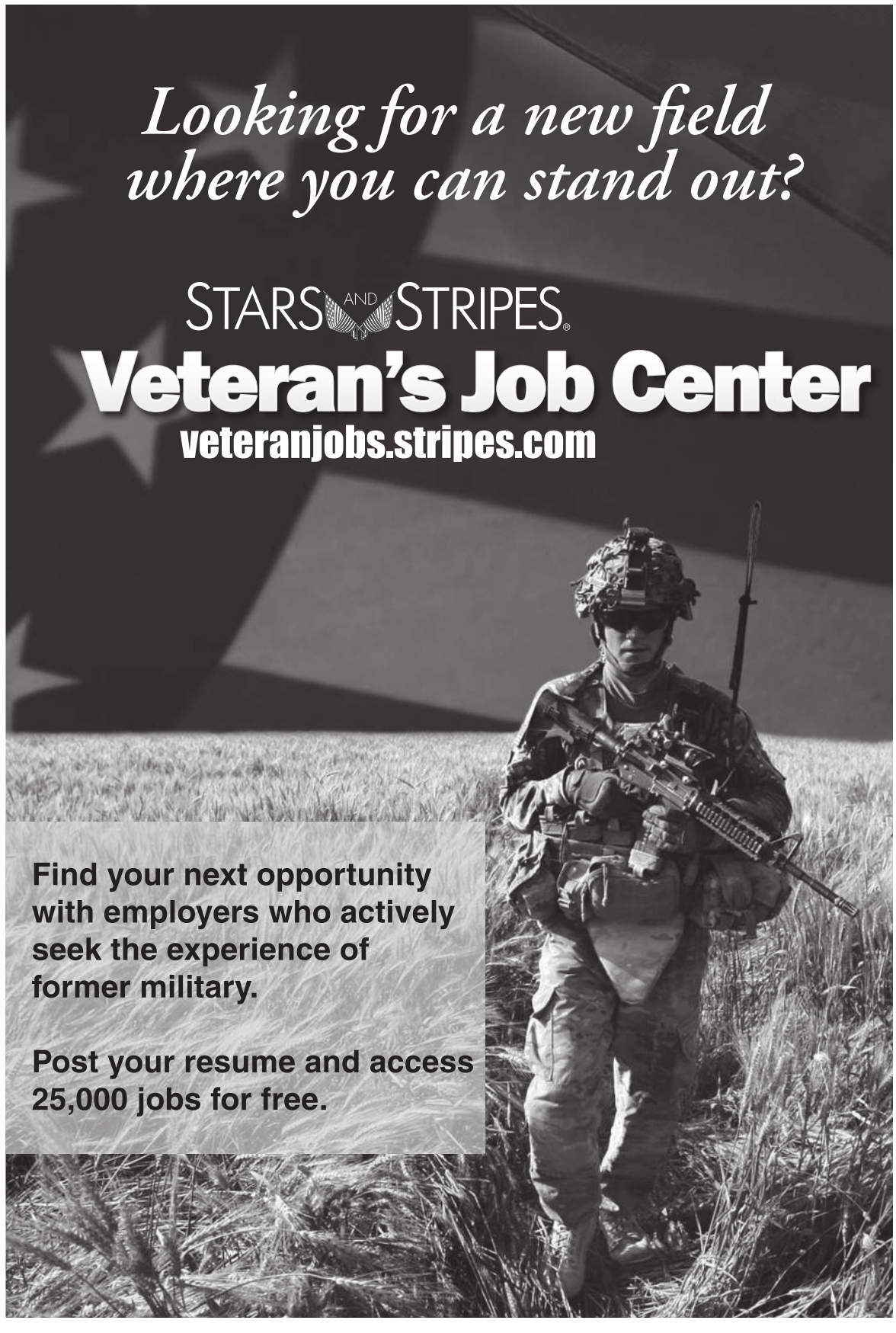
"The radical LEFT LUNATICS may not like this, but I think it's quite nice," Trump wrote on his social media site.

Meanwhile, Vice President JD Vance, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 2019, also stepped into the dispute by suggesting in a speech to a conservative political group that Pope Leo XIV should "be careful" about opining on world events.

"I think it's very, very important for the pope to be careful when he talks about matters of theology," said Vance told a gathering held by Turning Point USA in Athens, Ga., on Tuesday night.

The fresh controversy comes two days after Trump posted then deleted an image depicting himself as Jesus healing the sick, which many devout Christians, including some of his staunch supporters, slammed as blasphemous.

Trump claimed that he believed that image, which showed him in biblical robes and placing glowing hands on a suffering patient, was simply portraying him as "a doctor" or showing support for the Red Cross.



WORLD

Heavy Russian attack on Ukrainian cities kills at least 15

Bloomberg News

Russia carried out one of the largest attacks on Ukraine so far this year, killing at least 15 people and injuring dozens in an overnight onslaught of missiles and drones targeting Kyiv and other major cities.

Ukraine's Air Defense said Russia launched more than 40 ballistic and cruise missiles as well as more than 650 drones of various types, calling it one of the toughest attacks of the year to date. Dnipro, Odesa, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia were hit along with the capital.

Children were among those killed in the barrage, with mostly residential areas damaged, according to the State Emergency Service and local authorities. In Kyiv, police and medics who came to help the injured were also hurt in follow-up strikes, Ukraine's Prosecutor's General Office said on Telegram.

Russia regularly uses so-called double-tap strikes that seek to target medical crews and other rescue workers responding to initial attacks.

"Operational headquarters have been deployed on the ground in all affected cities," Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on Telegram. "Rescuers, municipal services, doctors and all responsible services are working, providing assistance to people and recording the damage."

Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said the attacks showed it's "immoral, counterproductive, and dangerous" to delay sanctions against Russia or aid for Ukraine. "Any day of further inaction on critical decisions sends wrong signals and encourages the aggressor to continue, prolong, and expand the war," Sybiha said in a post on X.

Russia's Black Sea coast came under attack overnight, with several residential buildings in Tuapse damaged and two children killed, according to Krasnodar region's authorities. Debris fell on the territory of enterprises in the port area.

Colombia moves to kill Escobar's 'cocaine hippos'

BY ANTONIO MARÍA DELGADO
Miami Herald

Colombia will euthanize dozens of invasive hippos descended from animals once owned by drug lord Pablo Escobar, in a controversial move underscoring the growing environmental and public safety risks posed by the species decades after their introduction to the South American country.

Environment Minister Irene Vélez said authorities have approved a plan to cull up to 80 animals from a population that has spread across river systems in the Magdalena basin.

Officials warn that without decisive action, the number of hippos — estimated at about 170 today — could rise to as many as 500 by the end of the decade, intensifying damage to ecosystems and nearby communities.

"If we don't do this, we will not be able to control the population," Vélez said, describing the measure as necessary to preserve Colombia's biodiversity and prevent further harm to native species.



JOAQUIN SARMIENTO/TNS

Hippo Jakira is pictured eating a cake made out of fruit during the celebration of her 4-year birthday at the Santa Fe zoo, in Medellin, Colombia, on July 15, 2018.

The so-called "cocaine hippos" trace their origins to the 1980s, when Escobar imported four animals to his sprawling Hacienda Nápoles estate. After his death in 1993, the hippos escaped captivity and began reproducing in the wild. With no natural predators in Colombia, their numbers have expanded rapidly, spreading far beyond the original ranch into rivers and wetlands.

Scientists say the animals pose a unique ecological threat. Their size and feeding habits disrupt riverbanks and vegetation, while their waste alters water chemistry, reducing oxygen levels and increasing nutrient loads. These changes can kill fish and aquatic plants and threaten species such as manatees, otters and turtles that depend on stable ecosystems.

The hippos have also increasingly come into contact with humans. Authorities report incidents in which the animals have damaged crops, caused traffic accidents and attacked boats or people, raising concerns among rural communities.

For more than a decade, Colombian governments have explored alternatives to killing them, including sterilization and relocation. But both strategies have proven costly and logistically difficult.

A 2023 study estimated that even a limited sterilization and relocation program could cost between $1 million and $2 million and still leave hippos in Colombia for decades. Exporting the animals abroad could cost even more, with some estimates reaching $3.5 million.

Faced with those constraints, the government has allocated roughly $2 million for a program combining chemical and physical euthanasia, alongside continued sterilization of some animals and monitoring to identify those posing the greatest risk.

Even some experts who favor nonlethal approaches acknowledge the difficulty of the situation.

"The ideal scenario would be that no animals die," said environmental law professor Luis Domingo Gómez Maldonado. "But the reality is that, at this point, there is no other option."

The plan, however, has drawn sharp criticism from animal-rights activists and some politicians, who argue the hippos should not be killed.

Mobile



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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Doctor gets 11 years for sexually abusing patients

LOS ANGELES — A former UCLA gynecologist pleaded guilty Tuesday to sexually abusing five of his patients during examinations, and the once-renowned cancer expert was sentenced to 11 years in state prison.

James Heaps, 70, pleaded guilty to 13 felonies, including multiple counts of sexual penetration of an unconscious person, and must register as a sex offender for life.

The plea came after a three-justice panel of the California 2nd District Court of Appeal overturned his conviction for sexual abuse of two patients with three counts of sexual battery by fraud and two counts of sexual penetration of an unconscious person. The court determined that the trial judge failed to inform his lawyers that some of the jurors raised questions about the English proficiency of one of the panel members and ordered a retrial.

Heaps has been in state prison since 2022, and agreed to plead guilty to charges involving not only the two women he was previously convicted of abusing, but also three women whose allegations the prior jury hung on during deliberations. At a second trial, Heaps faced the prospect of more charges and a potential conviction with a longer sentence.

Deputy District Attorney Danette Meyers said Tuesday's plea means Heaps will be eligible for parole in 2028 with time served. More than 500 lawsuits were filed against Heaps and UCLA, accusing the school of failing to protect patients after becoming aware of the misconduct. UCLA paid more than $700 million to settle those lawsuits.

Doctor indicted after wrong organ removed

MUSCLE SHOALS — A Florida doctor has been indicted on criminal charges in the operating room death of an Alabama man.

Dr. Thomas Shaknovsky, 44, is charged with second-degree manslaughter in the August 2024 death of 70-year-old William Bryan of Muscle Shoals.

On Aug. 21, 2024, during what was scheduled to be a laparoscopic splenectomy, Shaknovsky removed Bryan's liver instead of his spleen, resulting in catastrophic blood loss and the patient's death on the operating table, according to the Walton County Sheriff's Office.

The following month, Florida moved to suspend Shaknovsky's medical license and released a 21-page emergency order.

The order detailed how Shaknovsky allegedly caused Bryan's death and made a similar error with another patient.

The Office of the State Attorney for the First Judicial Circuit announced that a Walton County grand jury on Monday returned the criminal indictment against Shaknovsky.

Sheriff's officials said the indictment followed an extensive investigation.

Shaknovsky's 21-page suspension order in 2024 accused the physician of "repeated egregious surgical errors" and "egregious conduct of fabricating medical records."

'Baby Jessica' from 1987 well rescue arrested

MIDLAND — The woman who was known as "Baby Jessica" while the world watched her being rescued from a well in 1987 was reportedly arrested following a domestic disturbance in Texas.

The Saturday night incident occurred in Midland, which is also where Jessica McClure Morales was trapped 22-feet underground for nearly 60 hours when she was a baby.

Now 40, Morales is charged with assault causing bodily injury involving family violence. She was taken into custody by the Midland County Sheriff's Office on Saturday night, according to Texas station KXAN. The sheriff's office hasn't responded to a request for comment. No other information about her arrest was made public.

Morales was 18 months old when she fell through an 8-inch opening in her aunt's yard nearly 39 years ago. Emergency crews raced to rescue her with news crews covering their efforts. She claims to have no memory of the event.

Texas outlet KTRK said she suffered a cut to her head, and later lost a toe to infection after being pulled to safety.

Morales told People magazine in 2017 that she was married, had two children and was working as a special education teacher's aide in a Texas elementary school. She blamed a 2008 stock market collapse for wiping-out a $1.2 million trust that was established for her by well-wishers who followed her rescue.

Governor backs Turning Point program in schools

BOISE — Idaho officials are encouraging high school students to start or join chapters of a conservative group that has in the past advocated for political candidates including President Donald Trump and has called to mobilize the country's most "spirited, anti-woke warriors."

Last week, Gov. Brad Little signed a proclamation that affirmed the state's commitment to upholding the principles of the First Amendment in public schools and praised Turning Point USA for providing opportunities for young people to participate in the free exchange of ideas.

The proclamation comes after a gunman last year shot and killed Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk while he was speaking at Utah Valley University. After his death, people across the country, including in Idaho, held memorials for him, while others who spoke out against Kirk were fired from their jobs or faced other consequences.

After Kirk's death, Trump released a message calling for Americans to "commit themselves" to Kirk's values.

Supply shortage forces city to cut back on fluoride

BALTIMORE — Drinking water in Baltimore will have its fluoride levels lowered by 42% this week due to supply chain issues caused by the war between the U.S., Israel and Iran, according to a news release.

The Baltimore City Department of Public Works announced that, beginning this week, fluoride levels in the city's drinking water will be lowered from 0.7 mg to 0.4 mg per liter at the Ashburton and Montebello filtration plants. This change will affect Baltimore County and Howard County as well. WSSC Water, which serves Prince George's County and Montgomery County, also lowered its drinking water's fluoride levels last week.

The change was forced by national supply chain challenges for hydrofluorosilicic acid, which is used for water fluoridations. Officials from WSSC, which is one of the largest water and wastewater facilities in the country, as well as Baltimore Public Works, point to the U.S.-Iran war as one of the drivers for the shortage.

According to studies from Market Reports World and Trend Economy, China makes up 60% of hydrofluorosilicic acid exports. The ongoing conflict between Iran, Israel and the U.S. has resulted in the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, limiting China's ability to ship material to North America.

Worker who shot at customers gets 16 years

COLUMBIA — A Bojangles worker who served up hot lead bullets from his Taurus handgun at the drive-in window to two customers who had only wanted fried chicken has been sentenced to 16 years in South Carolina state prison.

Donte Simpson, 18, who fired his gun 17 times at two customers before and after he jumped out of a Bojangles drive-in window, was sentenced in Lexington County criminal court by Judge Debra McCaslin.

McCaslin pronounced the sentence after Simpson, of West Columbia, pleaded guilty in her court late last week, the 11th Judicial Circuit solicitor's office said in a news release. Deputy Solicitor Rhonda Patterson prosecuted the case.

Evidence against Simpson included video that captured the event and the 17 shell casings from his handgun.

From Tribune News Service



SETH WENIG/AP

Global warming

People take cover from the sun under umbrellas while in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, in the Queens borough of New York, on Tuesday.

NATION

Surveillance bill hits a snag with some in GOP

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — House GOP leadership faced a setback Wednesday in their push to reauthorize a key surveillance authority with no changes, amid signs they did not have enough support from privacy-minded conservatives to clear a procedural vote on the floor.

Key House Republicans had outlined a floor strategy to pass a measure that would extend Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act for 18 months, as they looked to act before the program's statutory authority expires next week.

Lawmakers had been expected to vote Wednesday on a rule to set guidelines for floor debate. Rule votes are typically party line.

But in a sign of trouble, the House postponed debate on the rule.

When floor votes were called midday, the rule tied to the Section 702 extension still had not been brought up for debate, the clearest sign there was not enough support for the rule within the GOP conference.

Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., an advocate for adding more privacy protections to the Section 702 program, said there are discussions going on over how to move forward.

"I think the discussions are really productive, and I think they're going to be fruitful," Biggs said. "And as soon as that happens — everybody gets on the same page — I think we'll be ready to go."

Leadership had not made any announcement about when a vote on Section 702 might happen. The episode once again exposed rifts among the House Republican Conference when it comes to Section 702, particularly over the issue of privacy protections for Americans.

The program allows the U.S. government to collect digital communications of foreigners located outside the country.

But Section 702 is controversial because it also sweeps up the communications of Americans and allows the FBI to search through data without a warrant, using information such as an email address.

The House Rules Committee, after a long recess Tuesday night, ultimately approved a rule for floor consideration of the measure that does not leave room for amendments.

Notably, conservative Reps. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., Chip Roy, R-Texas, and Morgan Griffith, R-Va., were absent from the committee vote on the rule.

House lawmakers, some heading to a House GOP conference meeting Wednesday morning, expressed uncertainty about what would happen later in the day and whether there were enough votes to adopt the rule.

"We should. We'll see," said House Intelligence Chairman Rick Crawford, R-Ark., who is pushing for a "clean" reauthorization.

When asked what might be offered to some of the Republicans who might vote against the rule, Crawford said: "That's between me and the GOP holdouts."

Rep. Michael Cloud, R-Texas, who has called for a warrant requirement, was among those who said he didn't think Republicans had the votes to adopt the rule.

"I don't think we're close to passing a rule," Cloud said Wednesday morning. "There's a lot of people not happy with where we're at."



MEL MELCON/TNS

Activist Edin Alex Enamorado protests outside Santa Barbara Superior Court during the 2023 arraignment for a woman caught on two separate videos using racist language to Latino men.

Hate crimes against Latinos reached record high in 2025

BY CARLOS DE LOERA
Los Angeles Times

Last year was a record year for hate crimes directed at Latinos in the U.S., FBI data show.

The findings — which come from preliminary FBI data that was first reviewed by Axios and later reviewed by the Los Angeles Times — showed the number of 2025 incidents the agency labeled as anti-Latino hate crimes nationwide increased 18%, from 858 incidents in 2024 to 1,014 in 2025.

In California alone, hate crime incidents against Latinos jumped 14.8% from 209 in 2024 to 240 in 2025, according to FBI data.

This marked an all-time high for the number of such incidents against Latinos since the FBI first started officially tracking hate crimes in 1991 after the passing of the Hate Crime Statistics Act by President George H.W. Bush in 1990.

The 2025 FBI data is still considered preliminary as the agency has yet to release its annual "Reported Crimes in the Nation" report for 2025.

The increase came as the overall number of hate crime incidents when accounting for all groups decreased by 11% nationally from 2024 to 2025.

Over the last decade the number of anti-Latino hate-crime incidents nationwide has gone up every year but one (2024), leading to a 238% increase in that time frame. A double-digit percentage increase in anti-Latino incidents was observed each year from 2015 to 2025, except in 2024 when the number went down 2.3% and in 2022 when it increased 2%.

The precipitous climb in the number of these incidents coincided with an increased focus on immigration enforcement by both local and national politicians. These discussions have largely centered on Latinos, and the demographic has been targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in LA and across the country.

The League of United Latin American Citizens — one of the nation's oldest Latino advocacy organizations, which focuses on civil rights, education and employment — has been following the rise in anti-Latino hate crimes and connected it to a recent rise in anti-immigrant legislation across the country.

"My feeling is that it has a lot to do with the rhetoric that we hear today about immigrants, primarily coming from the president and this administration, which has provided the space, the opportunity for people to air or take action specifically against immigrants," LULAC CEO Juan Proaño told The Times. "It doesn't matter if they're undocumented immigrants or if they're legal citizens, this period of Latino hatred should be concerning for everyone in the country."

Proaño noted that the organization gets "hundreds of emails a week" from Latinos who are concerned about rising levels of animosity. The concerns over hate-related crimes has become such a flash point that for the first time in its 97-year run, LULAC will be onboarding a researcher specifically to track xenophobia and anti-Latino hate in the U.S.

Police: Former Virginia lieutenant governor, wife found dead

The Virginian-Pilot

Former Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax shot and killed his wife, Cerina Fairfax, before killing himself inside their home in Annandale, according to Fairfax County police.

Police went to the 8100 block of Guinevere Drive after midnight Thursday and found a man and woman dead inside of a home.

A preliminary investigation found that Justin shot his wife before shooting himself, according to Fairfax Police Captain Chris Cosgriff.

Both of the couple's teenage children, a boy and a girl, were inside of the home at the time of the shootings, Police Chief Kevin Davis said during a press conference on Thursday.

The son called 911.

Police found that Justin killed Cerina in the basement of their home and then went upstairs in their home to the primary bedroom and killed himself, with the same gun.

"This has been an ongoing domestic dispute, surrounding what seems to be a complicated or messy divorce," Davis said.

In January, Justin called the police saying that Cerina had assaulted him. However, with the use of several cameras that were set up inside of the house by Cerina during the divorce proceedings, police found that the assault never occurred.

The cameras were still believed to be operational during the shooting that occurred overnight, police said.

Ghazala Hashmi, the current lieutenant governor of Virginia, said in a statement that her thoughts are with the couple's children, loved ones and numerous friends.

"Along with so many in the Commonwealth, I am filled with sorrow; I await further insights from our law enforcement officials, Hashmi said.

Justin served as the 41st lieutenant governor from 2018-22 and was the second Black person elected statewide in Virginia.

He was a Democrat who also ran for governor in 2021, finishing fourth in the primary election.

In 2019, he faced sexual assault allegations dating from 2000 and 2004, which he denied.

HEALTH & FITNESS

Learning to sidestep sciatica nerve pain

By Roberta Burkhart
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

As he trained for his first Pittsburgh Marathon last spring, Elam Gates thought he was doing everything right — building mileage, pushing his limits and chasing a new goal.

Then came the pain.

"A sudden, overnight issue" that began as twinges and tingling quickly turned into staggering nerve pain that originated in his lower back and shot down his leg, making it difficult for the 29-year-old man to walk, let alone run.

The pain disrupted not just Gates' training, but daily life. He remembers one day leisurely walking with his wife in the park: "I kept constantly having to tell her, 'Hey, I need to pause a second. I need to stretch my leg out, because it's really sore.'"

Gates had developed sciatica, a condition caused by irritation of a nerve in the lower spine.

While many runners encounter it at some point, medical experts say the condition is widely misunderstood. Running doesn't cause sciatica, but training can aggravate underlying weaknesses, imbalances or prior injuries. Recognizing symptoms early — and adjusting training accordingly — can be key to staying on the road.

Up to 40% of the population will develop sciatica at some point in their lives, according to Harvard Health, Henry Ford Health and other resources. And the likelihood of developing it increases as we age.

"It might help to talk about what sciatica is," said Jeff Fleming, associate medical director of the Pittsburgh Marathon and a primary care sports medicine doctor. "Sciatica is usually referring to irritation of a nerve, specifically one of the nerves that starts at your low back and goes down the length of your leg."

That irritation — often identified by a feeling of "pins and needles" or electricity — is most often caused by compression in the lumbar spine, he said. Sometimes there's also numbness, weakness and other symptoms.

While many runners experience sciatica at some point, both Fleming and physical therapist Scott Szelong stress that running itself is not typically the root cause.

Instead, the condition reflects a broader reality: Low back pain and related nerve issues are common in the general population.

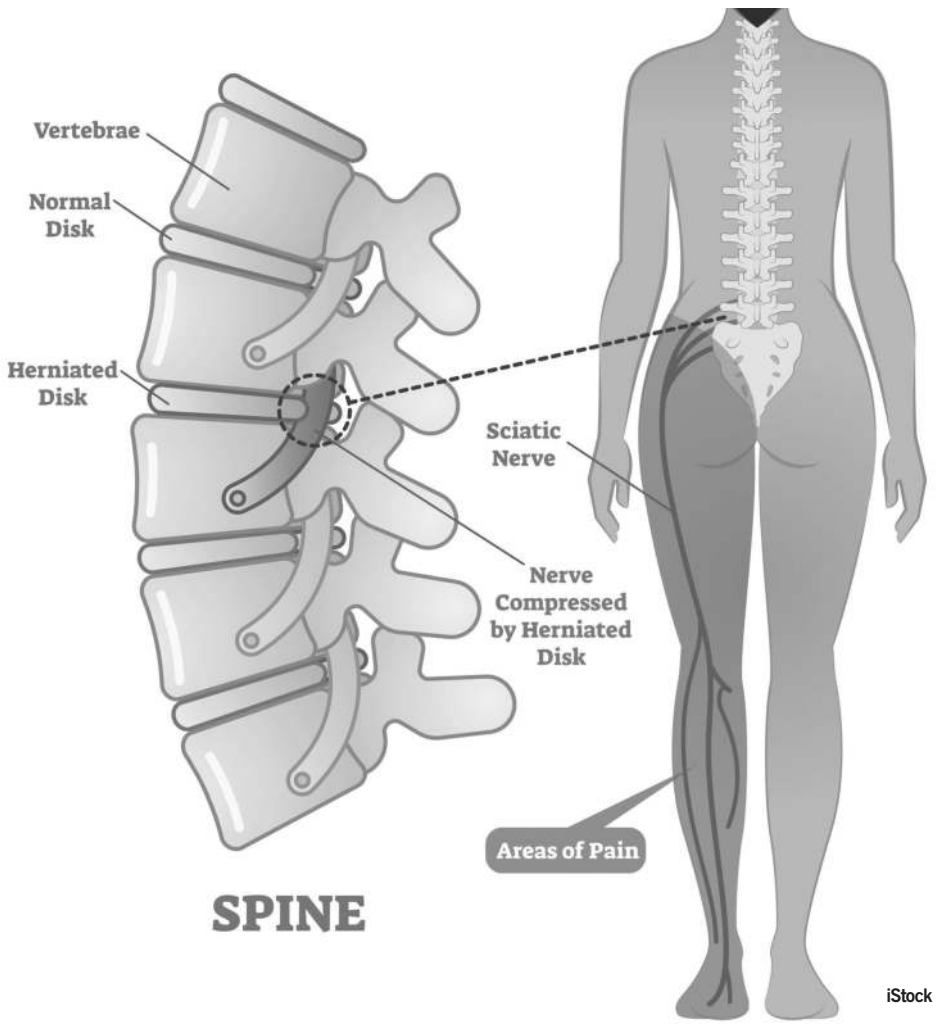
"We're bipedal individuals, right? So we bear most of our weight down through those lower segments," Szelong said. "So that's why you statistically see more dysfunction in the lower lumbar spine, and it presents with that sciatica distribution."

In fact, he noted, research and studies have shown that running can have positive effects on spinal health.

"Running has NOT been shown to adversely affect spine health," Szelong said in an email.

When pain hits

For Bill Beckett, a 52-year-old endurance runner from near St. Clairsville, Ohio, sciatica traces back to a severe back injury with a few ruptured disks, long before he ever took up running.



iStock

His back surgery in 2017 had him "tied up, laid up for almost a year." After recovering, he turned to running to stay active — and eventually became an ultramarathoner, logging about 60 miles a week and competing in races across the country.

But the nerve pain never fully disappeared. Beckett manages flare-ups by closely monitoring his body and adjusting his training.

When he feels that something is off and not quite feeling right, he stops and makes adjustments immediately. "Whether it's the surface you're running on, or maybe cut back the number of miles you're running, or maybe it's time for a shoe change."

Shoes and terrain, he added, make a noticeable difference.

"Concrete is the absolute worst," Beckett said. "The asphalt, a little better." Trail running, in his opinion, is the best surface to reduce pounding on the body.

Gates' experience was very different, and came during his first marathon training cycle.

At the time, he had only recently taken up running but had quickly ramped up mileage.

"I had never pushed my body physically this much," he said.

A physical therapist diagnosed the disabling pain he was experiencing as sciatica and pointed to multiple contributing factors.

"Number one, just a general overuse," Gates said. Second, he was underfueling his body, making recovery from the intense training harder.

One of the reasons Gates started running was an attempt at weight loss. So while his calorie reduction had succeeded in helping him shed close to 100 pounds, it also derailed his training for the race. After his bout with sciatica, he said he came to understand that, "in order to be efficient and be your best in life, you have to fuel properly."

With treatment and insight gleaned from physical therapy, Gates adjusted his approach.

The most common treatments for sciatica are conservative, nonsurgical options including physical therapy, stretching and exercises, over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) pain relievers like ibuprofen and naproxen, heat and ice therapy and continuing light activity, according to the Mayo Clinic. In some cases, doctors will prescribe a shot of a corticosteroid medication into the area around the affected nerve root or surgery to repair or correct herniated disks.

Now, Gates employs structured warmup and cooldown regimens, focuses on hip-strengthening drills in strength training routines and is more disciplined about postrun nutritional recovery.

Today, he's back on track and preparing for his second Pittsburgh Marathon on May 3 — this time with nearly double the training mileage and a focus on staying healthy. His goal this year is to shave at least five minutes off last year's finish of three hours, 20 minutes.

Why runners feel it

Running may not cause sciatica, but it can trigger symptoms — especially when underlying issues are present.

"A lot of it has to do with the repetitive motion of running," Fleming explained. A repetitive pounding of the lower back where the sciatic nerve originates "can cause that area to develop pressure on one of the nerves."

Other contributing factors include muscle imbalances, weak core muscles and prior injuries.

"Weakness in the muscles around the back and the core is probably the most common cause," he said.

Szelong emphasized the importance of "load management" — how much stress runners place on their bodies over time — as well as factors including training volume, lifestyle and biomechanics.

"A great predictor of injury is a prior episode of that injury," he said. With a prior history of back pain, "There is a greater risk of experiencing it again."

The telltale symptoms

Sciatica tends to feel different from typical muscle strain.

"Usually nerve pain is very easy for people to describe," Fleming said. "It feels like burning or pins and needles or electricity, or like you're getting zapped."

Unlike other types of pain, true sciatica often travels below the knee and into the foot, following a specific nerve pathway.

"That's one of the few things that will cross beyond the knee and go down the entire leg," he explained.

When to rest, when to worry

For runners, pushing through discomfort can be tempting. But that can lead to further problems.

"Rest from running is probably just the simplest thing that you can do," Fleming said.

For many, symptoms often resolve on their own, but worsening signs should not be ignored.

"If it gets more severe, it can cause numbness or even weakness in your leg," he said. If that happens, it's time to see a doctor and hang up the running shoes for a bit, he warned.

Certain "red flag" symptoms — including loss of bowel or bladder control or significant leg weakness — require urgent care.

Strength, not just stretching

Prevention and recovery hinge on building strength — not just flexibility.

Exercises like squats, dead lifts and planks can help stabilize the core and reduce strain on the lower back, with Szelong noting that many runners overlook this aspect.

"Distance runners tend to avoid strength and plyometric training," he said, recommending a dynamic warmup before runs and individualized programming based on a runner's needs.

Ultimately, managing sciatica comes down to listening to the body and adjusting accordingly, he said.

Runners should vary surfaces, monitor training load and incorporate cross-training to stay resilient.

"It just makes you a little bit more rounded and less injury [prone]," Fleming said.

And while sciatica can be disruptive, it doesn't have to mean the end of running.

"Running itself hasn't been shown to be an adverse movement," Szelong said. "It's just a common pathology for a lot of folks."

MUSIC

Q&A



Shervin Lainez

Triple the Tweedy

Wilco frontman discusses his sprawling yet intimate 30-song solo album, 'Twilight Override'

By Mikael Wood
Los Angeles Times

Not that long ago, Jeff Tweedy made a startling discovery: "There's more time between now and the beginning of my career than there was between the big band era and when my career began," he said, his eyes widening slightly behind a chunky pair of glasses. "How does that happen?"

In the late 1980s, Tweedy helped invent the idea of alt-country music with his band Uncle Tupelo; today he's best known as the frontman of Wilco, which since 1994 has been steadily expanding the boundaries of American roots rock.

Yet the 58-year-old has done plenty else across those four decades, including writing three books, producing albums by Mavis Staples and Richard Thompson and presenting a COVID-era variety show on Instagram with his wife, Susie Miller Tweedy (a former owner of the storied Chicago rock club Lounge Ax), and their two sons, Spencer and Sammy.

His latest project is "Twilight Override," a sprawling if homespun triple album under his own name with no fewer than 30 songs about love, travel, music, family and childhood. Tweedy cut the record at Wilco's longtime Windy City headquarters, the Loft, with a band comprising Spencer, 30, and Sammy, 26, along with Sima Cunningham, Liam Kazar and Macie Stewart.

To talk about it, I met up with Tweedy in January when he was in Los Angeles for his annual solo engagement at Largo at the Coronet, where he's been coming for years to try out new material and tell stories (and jokes) about the old hits.

Does Tweedy, the devoted Chicagoan, like LA?

"I like everywhere except for Indianapolis," he said before one of the Largo gigs. Seated backstage in a small dressing room, Tweedy grinned beneath a mop of fuzzy hair. "Indianapolis is fine. But I don't trust myself to judge any city, to be honest."

As we spoke, Spencer entered the room with a four-pack of Ardor cans, which Tweedy tucked into a cooler bag by his side. "This is really embarrassing — my decadent rock 'n' roll lifestyle with the artisanal energy drink," he said. "I don't drink coffee, but I like caffeine. And I like being able to make sure it's the same amount because I have anxiety disorder and I know how much I can handle."

What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

Los Angeles Times: I caught your show the other night and was struck by how natural you seemed by yourself onstage. When in your career would you say you attained that ease?

Tweedy: I think the ease you're referring to is just a comfort with being uneasy. And I think that happened when it became easier to acknowledge that I'm awkward. I'm not David Lee Roth, although I'd love to be.

It's never too late.

It's too late for him.

Not true, actually. Look up some recent clips on YouTube.

Yeah? Honest to God, he's like a weird hero to me. I'm not sure I could vouch for it if I dug deep into his personal beliefs or anything like that. But the confidence level and the purpose of mission — it's so clear. I love that.

So you've grown comfortable with being uncomfortable. But you must recognize that you've honed your timing. You know when to bring it up and when to bring it down.

SEE TWEEDY ON PAGE 15

MUSIC

Tweedy: Pandemic era made concept of having fans easier to embrace

FROM PAGE 14

I've done a lot of solo acoustic shows. And I've done a lot of shows that are even more nerve-racking than a solo acoustic show, and that's living room shows. Over the last 20-something years, I've done dozens and dozens of those for charity in Chicago — 30 people, 30 songs, they each get a request. And they weren't always 30 rabid fans. A lot of cases it would be 10 rabid fans — friends of the rich guy — then 20 other people that are on the guest list or they're family or they're neighbors.

I think a moment of transition for me was when I put together that the people in the audience I thought were judging me were the people most like me. In fact, an audience completely made up of people with my disposition would be silence.

Your wife's comic timing might be even better than yours. When you asked if she had any requests, her "No" from the crowd was perfect.

She's the funniest person I know. During those benefit shows, I used to put my phone on the table and she would text me during the show — like, "Why are you playing all the saddest songs in the world?"

On the topic of rabid fans: I listened to an episode of "Wilco the Podcast" — these guys are deep in the lore. Do you have a clear sense of when you became a musician with that type of following?

I've accepted that it's a fact, but I have trouble looking that fact squarely in the eye. The thing that got me closer to being comfortable with the notion of having fans was the pandemic, when we were doing "The Tweedy Show" on a nightly basis. I thought that was a moment where people were gonna grasp how connected we are — no stages, no hierarchy, we're all enduring this thing. When we canceled tour dates at the very beginning of it, people were so sad, and my wife's intuition was like, "You should let them know you're OK."

I guess what I'm getting at is: It didn't feel exalted, but I felt purpose and that it was OK to have some responsibility — like a pastor with a congregation. It turned what is a parasocial relationship into something slightly more real.

Five or six years on, has any aspect of that endured?

I think it has a lot, because I got to be seen — that's the part that was eye-opening to me. One of the reasons it's hard to accept fandom is because it's not you — it's your art, it's the persona that's been projected on you, a persona you've curated for yourself, wittingly or unwittingly. But ["The Tweedy Show"] was an acceptance of our flaws. I don't worry now about sharing too much.

You've suggested that "Twilight Override" embodies hope at a dark moment. But not everybody thinks this is a dark moment. Folks in the MAGA world have described a new age of American glory.

They sure complain a lot for thinking it's a glory time. I don't even see Trump doing that — I see him saying, "These people are the worst," and talking about how nothing is right and they've been given such an unfair deal. They're the whiniest motherf—s I've ever seen in my life. There's no doubt that there's a handful of very rich people that think this is the greatest thing that's ever happened. And I don't give a f— what they think because they don't have skin in the game. I have to respect that at some level I can't know them — I only have the information I have to go on. But it appears obscene.

When was the last time people didn't think everything was terrible?

Every generation has thought it was the end of the world, and at some point one of the generations is gonna be right.

You worked with your sons on this record. Is there anything about their musicianship that you had to warm up to?

No. But I don't think I come at other musicians like that — like I've cornered the market on the right way to do something. "These kids don't know where real rock 'n' roll comes from" — I don't have that. I've tried really hard not to surrender to nostalgia.

That's an active effort on your part.

It's not a hard-and-fast rule because that would be wrong too. I think it's OK for me to get comfort from a Creedence Clearwater Revival record. But I also think it would be wrong for me to judge that record as superior to a record from today.

I saw a picture recently of you and Cameron Winter of Geese, which got me thinking about how you're between two phases: not yet a wizened old-timer —

Depends who you ask.

But clearly no longer the new sensation.

I've been in that phase for a long time. There are moments where Wilco looks around and we're like, "How many other rock bands at this level are there?" There aren't that many. Certainly when Tom Petty died, things like that, you start to sense that we might be one of the only places people go to hear guitar music of a certain type.

What age is the dividing line that separates whatever you are from a Petty or a Springsteen or a Dylan? Is it 60? 65?

I'm a bridge between a time when there were those people and a time when there aren't. I reached out to Cameron when his "Heavy Metal" record came out. I think I saw his second-ever solo show and just said, "Hey, wanna hang out?" He went from Sleeping Village in Chicago to Carnegie Hall in a year — less than a year — and throughout that time we kept in touch. He's so talented and so unique but I also feel like it's nice that he welcomes me caring about him. Geese is doing what a band should be doing. A young band should be blowing people's minds and dividing people in a weird way. It's exciting.

What have you learned about aging from your friend Mavis Staples?

I've learned a lot from Mavis, but aging — I don't know. Mavis and I oddly have a lot in common. That sounds really self-flattering to say, but she's a baby of the family and was taken care of like the baby of the family. But also her role in the family was being the energy, so she doesn't seem old. I would never think about aging in relation to her. I don't think about it with me unless I have to have hip surgery or something. If I don't look in a mirror, I'm 18 years old — maybe younger, maybe 10, sometime before my internal biography took over.

What's an internal biography?

The you that you tell yourself you are. At some point in development, you figure out: Oh, I'm this thing, and then you're putting together the information of how people see you. But that's the stuff that stands in the way of creating. The self-image reduces the options, and so the horizon becomes narrower. I don't know why I'm being so philosophical.

You're saying we lock ourselves into an idea of who we are, but we don't have to.

Most people that I love and respect — Little Richard, Howlin' Wolf, Captain Beefheart — they have this amazing combination of confidence in who they are but also the limitless imagination to become something nobody else is. Watch any clip of any musician that takes your breath away and the part that's coming across isn't even the music in a lot of cases. Jimi Hendrix is out of tune in almost every clip you ever see of him! But it's undeniable that it's an uplifting thing to witness — and therein lies its importance to other people.

Last thing: You write in your book "World Within a Song" about learning to love ABBA's "Dancing Queen." What's your second-favorite ABBA song?

"SOS." Incredible song.

That chapter explores a young punk's knee-jerk rejection of pop music. Yet you admit that occasionally you'd hear something on the radio you didn't hate — the Bay City Rollers, for instance. Why were you open to them if not to ABBA?

The Bay City Rollers were the Ramones.

That's how people thought about them?

That's how the Ramones thought about them. The Ramones had songs based on "Saturday Night," and they dressed in the tartan plaids of Queens, which is the black leather jackets. The big difference was they didn't have the taint of disco.

Whereas ABBA reveled in it.

I love ABBA now, and part of me always did. The dismissal was the part that wasn't natural.

You describe "Dancing Queen" as "exuberantly sad." Is that an emotional state you aspire to in your music?

For sure. I wish I was better at it. I've written a lot of songs that I thought were pop songs in my life that didn't end up being popular.

What's an example?

Almost all of "Summerteeth."

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MOVIES

Showtime



Warner Bros. Pictures

Ludi Lin, Mehcad Brooks, Jessica McNamee and Karl Urban star in "Mortal Kombat II," which releases in theaters May 8. The film is a sequel to the 2021 video game adaptation.

A guide to what's coming to the big screen this spring, summer

BY SAMUEL LONG
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

From ancient monsters to galactic heroes and talking toys, Hollywood's spring-summer lineup mixes franchise heavyweights with smaller dramas and offbeat concepts.

The season brings several familiar names back to theaters, including "Mortal Kombat 2," a new "Star Wars" entry with "The Mandalorian and Grogu" and Pixar's long-running animated franchise with "Toy Story 5." Also, Steven Spielberg returns to sci-fi, a Jackson plays a Jackson and Tom Cruise's fighter pilot classic is back in theaters for its 40th anniversary.

Here's what to look out for at the movies this spring and summer (release dates subject to change):



LUCASFILM/TNS

Grogu returns in "The Mandalorian and Grogu." The film, a continuation of the Disney+ series, is out May 22.



20th Century Studios

Anne Hathaway, Meryl Streep and Stanley Tucci are back in the sequel to "The Devil Wears Prada," out May 1. Emily Blunt also reprises her role.

April 17

"Lee Cronin's The Mummy": director Lee Cronin reimagines the classic Universal monster story with a darker, modern horror approach.

"Lorne": A behind-the-scenes glimpse at "Saturday Night Live" creator Lorne Michaels, featuring interviews with cast members and exclusive and archival footage.

April 24

"Michael": Antoine Fuqua directs and Jaafar Jackson, the son of Jermaine Jackson, stars in this biopic about the King of Pop. With Colman Domingo and Nia Long.

"I Swear": Robert Aramayo plays John Davidson in this biopic about a Scottish man growing up in the '80s with severe Tourette syndrome.

May 1

"The Devil Wears Prada 2": Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci reprise their roles in this sequel to the 2006 comedy-drama about the fashion industry.

"Animal Friends": Live-action/animated comedy follows two animal companions on a cross-country adventure. With Ryan Reynolds, Jason Momoa, Aubrey Plaza, Dan Levy and Vince Vaughn.

May 8

"Mortal Kombat 2": A sequel to the 2021 video game adaptation directed by Simon McQuoid and starring Karl Urban, Lewis Tan, Jessica McNamee and Hiroyuki Sanada.

"Billie Eilish: Hit Me Hard and Soft - The Tour Live in 3D": A concert film documenting the tour supporting the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter's third album.

"The Sheep Detectives:" Hugh Jackman, Nicholas Galitzine and Emma Thompson star in this family comedy about a group of animals solving a mystery threatening their farm.

SEE SHOWTIME ON PAGE 17

MOVIES

Showtime: Expect lots of thrills with upcoming fare

FROM PAGE 16

May 13

"Top Gun 40th Anniversary": Theatrical rerelease of the 1986 Tom Cruise action classic directed by Tony Scott.

May 15

"Is God Is": Adaptation of Aleshea Harris' stage play about two sisters with a charged family history seeking revenge. Stars Kara Young and Sterling K. Brown.

"Obsession": Psychological thriller about the dangers of fixation and desire starring Inde Navarrette and Michael Johnston.

May 22

"Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu": A feature continuation of the Disney+ series directed by Jon Favreau and starring Pedro Pascal, Sigourney Weaver and Jeremy Allen White.

"Passenger": Suspense drama centered on a couple on a van journey that takes a dangerous turn. Starring Jacob Scipio, Melissa Leo and Lou Llobell.

May 29

"Pressure": Drama finds Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower (Brendan Fraser) and Capt. James Stagg (Andrew Scott) in the buildup to D-Day facing an impossible choice to launch the invasion or risk losing the war.

June 5

"Scary Movie": Reboot of the 2000 horror parody classic stars Anna Faris, Marlon Wayans and Dave Sheridan.

"Power Ballad": Paul Rudd and Nick Jonas star in this musical comedy about a conflict between a rock star and a wedding singer.

June 12

"Disclosure Day": Steven Spielberg returns to sci-fi in this thriller exploring the fallout after a major secret becomes public. Starring Emily Blunt and Josh O'Connor.

June 19

"Toy Story 5": Pixar's latest sequel finds the toys competing for attention with hand-held devices. Andrew Stanton directs.

"Girls Like Girls": A romance and musical coming-of-age drama. Directed by Hayley Kiyoko and starring Maya Da Costa, Myra Molloy and Levon Hawke.

June 26

"Supergirl": Milly Alcock stars as the Man of Steel's cousin, traveling the galaxy with her dog Krypto on a quest for revenge.

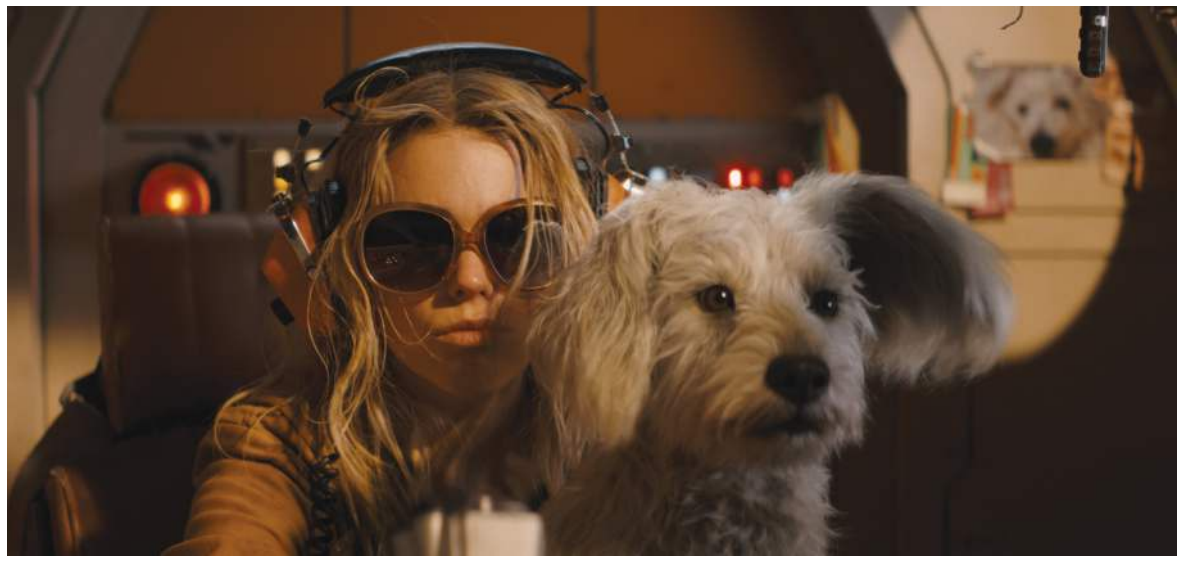
July 1

"Minions & Monsters": The little troublemakers from "Despicable Me" are back for their third go-round, aiming to make a monster movie in Old Hollywood.



Warner Bros. Pictures

Natalie Grace stars in a darker, reimagined version of "The Mummy," now in theaters.



Warner Bros. Pictures

Supergirl and her dog Krypto seek revenge in the titular film coming June 26 and starring Milly Alcock.

July 3

"Thrash": When a Category 5 hurricane destroys a coastal town, storm surge brings devastation, chaos and hungry sharks.

July 10

"Moana": Catherine Laga'aia and Dwayne Johnson star in this live-action remake of the Disney animated classic about an island girl on an adventure.

July 17

"The Odyssey": Christopher Nolan's first movie since "Oppenheimer" stars Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Charlize Theron, Zendaya and Anne Hathaway in an adaptation of Homer's Greek classic about the king of Ithaca on a perilous journey home from the Trojan War.

"Cut Off": Jonah Hill wrote, directed and stars in this film about siblings forced to fend for themselves when their parents cut them off. With Kristen Wiig and Bette Midler.

July 24

"Evil Dead Burn": More gore on the way in this sequel to 2023's "Evil Dead Rise."

July 31

"Spider-Man: Brand New Day": Tom Holland is back as Spidey and Zendaya as MJ in this fourth installment of Marvel's "Spider-Man" franchise.

Aug. 7

"One Night Only": Monica Barbaro and Callum Turner are on the prowl in this romantic comedy about premarital sex being legal one night a year.

"Paw Patrol: The Dino Movie": The animated canines land on a mysterious dinosaur island.

Aug. 14

"The End of Oak Street": Anne Hathaway and Ewan McGregor star in this '80s-set sci-fi thriller about a suburban neighborhood transported to an unknown place after a mysterious cosmic event.

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VIDEO GAMES & TECHNOLOGY



Owlchemy Labs

Dimensional Double Shift is a multiplayer game that pushes up to four people to work together to accomplish several tasks from an artificial intelligence manager named ALICE. The newest pack, out April 23, takes players to Orlando-inspired Sporelando.

Dimensional Double Shift getting new location soon

Here's a preview of the multiplayer VR game and its upcoming pack, Sporelando

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Virtual reality was once touted as the next big frontier for gaming, promising to bring players into immersive worlds. Meta, Sony and Valve have worked to establish the medium, but VR gaming hasn't taken off like console or mobile gaming has.

Nevertheless, developers are forging ahead, and one of the more successful VR studios is Owlchemy Labs. The team behind the superfun Job Simulator and Vacation Simulator has been working on a new project called Dimensional Double Shift. It's a multiplayer game that pushes up to four people to work together to accomplish several tasks from an artificial intelligence manager named ALICE.

The game is being released in packs that take players to different dimensions, where they'll use their skills in different scenarios. In Hexas, a lava-filled version of Texas, they'll staff a diner. Setting up shop in Treattle, they'll work at a Gas 'N Grill, a gas station with a restaurant. Up in New Joysey, players will find themselves at a boardwalk.

In the latest pack, launching April 23, Owlchemy Labs takes players to Sporelando, which is parody of the Florida city



Orlando. I had a chance to get an early look at the stage, which features a swampy area and residents who happen to be sentient mushrooms. I worked with four other players to fix up a golf cart.

Dimensional Double Shift, available on Meta Quest and Android XR, uses hand tracking instead of controllers, making it feel more natural to play. It works fairly well as long as players know the gestures for navigating menus and customizing their avatar.

Moving one's hands around to grab tools or share needed pieces with another player is intuitive. Players don't have to worry about what each button does. They can act instinctively to accomplish the silly goals that ALICE asks them to do. Players will have to decipher a puzzle using clues from the other players. They may have to use a hose next to them to help fix a broken piece of equipment.

The key is that these tasks require teamwork. They can't be done solo. Owlchemy divides the tasks, putting important bits of information in another player's area. They'll have to talk to each other to figure things out and get things done, but the fun is in the chaos. There's so much going on that wires may be crossed or confusion may reign. The developer captured the magic of its Job Simulator game and distilled it into a fun multiplayer experience.

Despite some of the hurdles that VR faces, Owlchemy CEO Andrew Eiche says the industry "is doing all right."

He said the younger generation has embraced the medium and will continue to play VR. "What really has happened here is that VR had a lot of investment and a lot of help in terms of financial support into a space that we wanted, and now, what we're seeing is a kind of pulling the training wheels off."

He said his studio has to build games for the people who are playing now, and with more than 1 million downloads, it has found success with Dimensional Double Shift and its dimensional packs, which sell for $4.99.

Online: dimensionaldoubleshift.com

Expect to hear callers better with this headset

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

BlueParrott's new M500-XT Bluetooth headset ($119.99) is designed for both professional and day-to-day road use, with lots of features including artificial intelligence-powered noise cancellation.

The quality of cellphone calls on the single-piece headset is as good as I've experienced on others, and the headset is comfortable, designed for extended wear. It can be worn on either ear and weighs less than one ounce. Inside is a 10mm speaker that delivers clear audio.

The battery life is rated at up to 11 hours, but it can vary depending on call length, volume and other factors. The built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery (USB-C) charges in about two hours and has 60 hours of standby time.

But where the BlueParrott M500-XT really stands above its competitors is the AI-powered noise cancellation.

It uses two intelligent microphones in a small boom arm to block up to 93% of ambient noise. Background noises can include others around you, barking dogs, passing cars or wind. Whatever the distraction, it will be eliminated or minimized during the call.

Buttons on the back control everything. A multifunction button has a variety of programmable features including power on or off, answering or rejecting calls and accessing voice assistants.

The buttons below the multifunction button control volume, and that's also where the USB-C charging port is. Lifting the boom microphone up will temporarily mute your call.

The BlueParrott Button can also be customized. You can set it to work as a one-touch mute for instant privacy and control. Or program it to gain instant access to push-to-talk apps. The BlueParrott mobile app lets you customize the controls. The M500-XT has an IP54 weather- and dust-resistant rating.

Three sets of ear gels are included, along with a USB-A-to-USB-C cable for charging. Bluetooth 5.3 offers a range of up to 300 feet. It allows pairing up to eight devices, and multipoint pairing allows two devices to be used simultaneously.

Online: blueparrott.com/on-the-road-headsets/blueparrott-m500-xt



The BlueParrott M500-XT Bluetooth headset uses artificial intelligence to minimize or block background noise.

BLUEPARROTT/TNS

CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

BADVERTISING

BY SAM DONALDSON / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

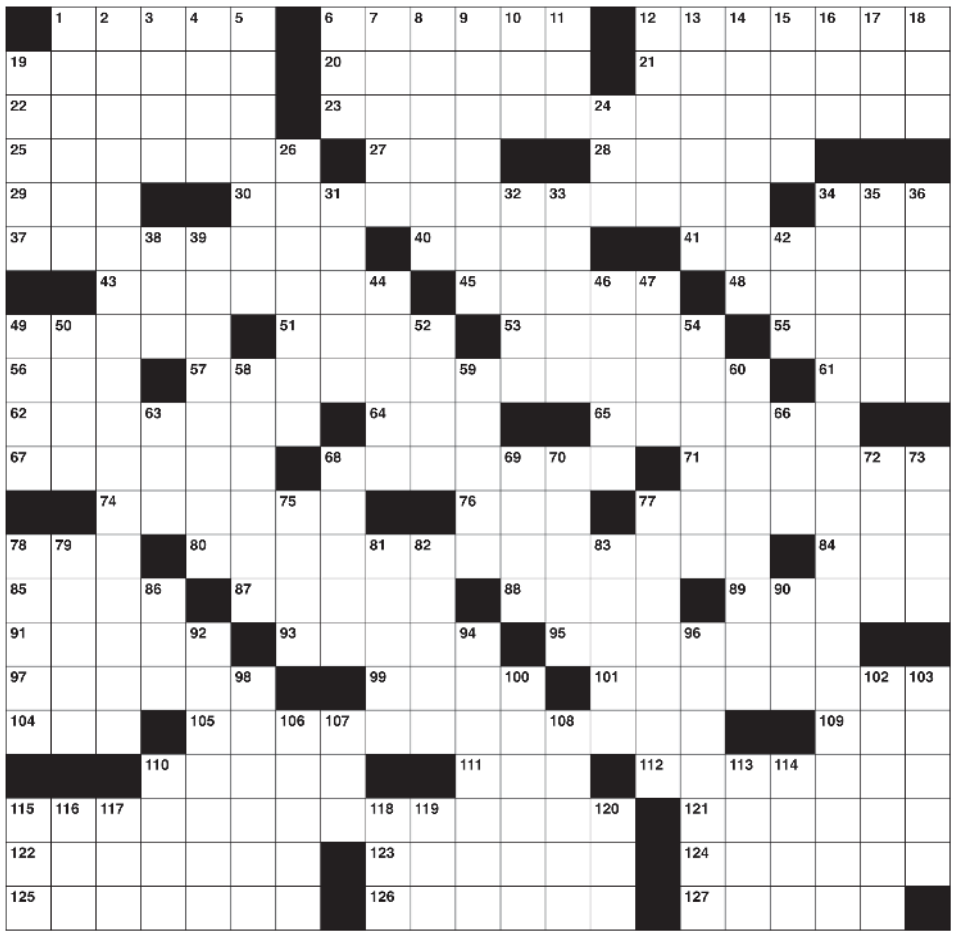
Sam Donaldson is a law professor at Georgia State University. He recently joined the board of directors of Dogs for Better Lives, a national organization that trains and places assistance dogs. This puzzle started when he saw 57-Across on a billboard and thought that would make a poor slogan for a certain airline. Then he brainstormed other possible examples of "badvertising." — W.S.

ACROSS

1 They need fans to stay cool
6 Philippine marinades
12 Second first lady, after Martha
19 Cheap cigar
20 Philippine capital
21 Contrition
22 Prime-time time
23 We're literally giving away our rental cars!
25 Resembling bone
27 Overnight option
28 Pull some strings?
29 Phony social media follower
30 It hurts how much we're overcharging for this detergent!
34 ____ Constitution
37 Winter measure
40 "Nostalgia is a seductive ____": George W. Ball
41 Spider's pouch
43 Inappropriately appropriated
45 Crush a test
48 Muse depicted with a lyre
49 Like raw footage
51 Alexander ____, 1980s secretary of state
53 Competition with clowns, maybe
55 Showbiz "grand slam," familiarly
56 Scrooge's shout
57 Our planes don't have seats!
61 Social worker?
62 Undertake, as a journey
64 College admissions fig.
65 Whence St. Francis
67 Quite spirited
68 Bulletin board addition
71 A chair might cover one
74 Place to store magazines
76 Broody genre
77 First college in the modern era to boast a 15-0 football team
78 Bump on the head, say?
80 Our tech products fall apart easily!
84 However, in texts
85 Sportsbook figures
87 Grinning Face With Sweat, for one
88 Winnow
89 Some exits in Exeter
91 Japanese healing discipline
93 Hägar the Horrible's dog
95 Like a wrung-out mop
97 Some commotion in a sheepfold
99 Rep
101 Most ridiculous
104 Monopolist's portion
105 Our cable channel is devoted to censorship!
109 Dripping, say
110 White's longtime co-host
111 Many a book fair sponsor, for short
112 [Look below for more info]
115 Go ahead and shoplift one pair of our jeans!
121 Bolts (down)
122 Home country of the Center for Civil Liberties, jointly awarded the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize
123 Monkey's place, maybe
124 Article of jewelry worn around the biceps
125 Erudite
126 Stylishly elegant
127 Shoe leather for Elvis

DOWN

1 "This. Means. War!"
2 Our soap is deadly!
3 Serpentine shape in architecture
4 Certain cosmetic surgery, familiarly
5 High class?
6 Big letters in bowling
7 "Beavis and Butt-Head" spinoff
8 Common soccer score
9 Two-year periods
10 Common soccer cheer
11 With 44-Down, home of the U.S.'s most-visited municipal zoo
12 ____ rock (music genre)
13 Nickname for Britain's King Edward VII
14 Encroach (on)
15 Horror movie staple
16 Grande's perfume line
17 Major research lab for astronauts, for short
18 Actress Jamie ____ Curtis
19 Highfalutin sorts
24 Yank
26 Creature with a signature whistle it can use to identify itself
31 Accordion fold
32 Iridescent shell material
33 Dirt pie ingredients
34 Our magazine hates everything and everyone!
35 Squelched
36 Michael ____, Steve Carell's role on "The Office"
38 Sch. endearingly called "Wazzu"
39 Animated TV series set in the 31st century
42 LSAT alternative, for some law schools
44 See 11-Down
46 Lab label
47 Afternoon socials
49 It'll take you for a ride
50 Mama's mama
52 Natl. economic yardsticks
54 Discounted
58 Zero chance
59 Something well-taken?
60 Chartreuse or brandy, e.g.
63 Mess up
66 Part of a sch. year
68 Orange cone, say
69 "No cause for alarm!"?
70 Land rover
72 Home of Qatar Airways
73 A long time, in Spain
75 Tach stats
77 Sax player Clarence
78 "The Greek" in a 1964 film
79 Optimal
81 Emergency option for a fighter pilot
82 High, wispy clouds
83 Alice of TV's "Queen of the South"
86 Manage moguls, say
90 "____ expected"
92 Like many legal phrases
94 Fried Japanese fare
96 Impersonates
98 1997 Demi Moore military drama
100 Hampers
102 Fixed rate
103 Statistics tool used to find significant differences
106 Not real
107 ____ out an existence
108 They might be loaded or stolen
110 Headliner
113 Neutral tone
114 April or May, e.g.
115 Q3 starter: Abbr.
116 Luau instrument, in brief
117 Mme., across the Pyrenees
118 "The Bachelor" network
119 Actress Gadot
120 Foxy



GUNSTON STREET



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

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE





TELEVISION

Cutting marital problems down to size

Sci-fi rom-com 'Miniature Wife' turns a big misadventure into a little love story

BY ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times



PEACOCK/TNS

Lindy (Elizabeth Banks), left, gets shrunk by her husband Les (Matthew Macfadyen), a scientist, in Peacock's "The Miniature Wife." Whether by accident, on purpose, or accidentally on purpose, you'll have to make up your own mind.

Now streaming on Peacock, "The Miniature Wife" is a messy, energetic science fiction farce about a scientist who shrinks his wife to a height of 6 inches, or more to the point, about a woman whose scientist husband shrinks her to a height of 6 inches, by accident, on purpose, or accidentally on purpose. (Watch closely to make up your own mind.) Created by Jennifer Ames and Steve Turner, it's based on a 2013 short story by Manuel Gonzales, sharing its central conceit, characters, various plot points and details to a rather different effect while adding a boatload of extra characters, plot points, details and backstory and extending the story's arc toward a resolution fit for television.

Elizabeth Banks plays Lindy Littlejohn, the miniaturized wife, who introduces the series over a montage of future bite-sized misadventures. (Lindy is bite-sized, that is, not the misadventures.)

"This is a love story," she begins, going on to describe the ways love can make you crazy. "Fair warning, it's going to get worse before it gets better."

The important notice here is not that it's going to get worse, but that it's going to get better, as you will be given much cause to doubt that it will.

Matthew Macfadyen is Les Littlejohn, the small-making husband, whose public claim to fame is a superior genetically modified tomato. (He has poster-sized photos of himself holding one both at home and in the office.) But, with more than a bit of desperation, he regards his work in miniaturization as his "last chance at greatness," greatness mattering to him a great deal.

Two decades earlier, Lindy, for her part, made a smash, and a packet, with "My Rainbow Starts with Black," a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, seemingly based on her own dysfunctional family, and its Oscar-winning film adaptation. Though she maintains the fiction of a career, she hasn't written a word since; but the money "Rainbow" earned — it's still a staff pick at the local bookstore — has bought Les a flashy red sports car, an expensive wine collection and an imposing mansion clearly more his idea than hers. They live in St. Louis because he had hoped to build "the Menlo Park of the Midwest," creating "the bioagritech that will change the world," but dream of returning to a house in Vermont.

As we begin, Les and Lindy are at dinner, toasting their couples therapist; he acknowledges his "narcissistic tendencies" and her "accountability issues," both of which we will see are still in operation and account for most of the chaos that lies ahead. Les has notions of winning the Nobel Prize for his work in size alteration — work that is somehow a secret from Lindy — though he has, so far, only been able to make things small; they blow up when turned large again. Lindy, meanwhile, is about to end an "emotional affair" with Les' right hand, Richard (O-T Fagbenle), the only named character in Gonzales' story.

"You were a great shoulder, an ear," she tells him; "But I fell in love," he replies.

He's a clingy, immature man-boy who as a Christmas present has sent a manuscript he assumed was Lindy's — it was in fact her student's work — to her agent (Sian Clifford), who has passed it on to the New Yorker; Lindy, enjoying the interest, neglects to correct the error. (The series is as whimsical about publishing as it is about science.)

Much of what happens proceeds from there. In the course of an argument, in which Lindy accuses Les of "sucking the life out of me and my promising writing career" and Les calls Lindy's novel a "book report," she is spritzed with Les' shrinking potion. She'll wake up to find herself in bed in a dollhouse, with working miniaturized appliances, where she'll be left under lock and key for her "own safety," which seems a pretty (perhaps all too) neat metaphor for marital oppression.

"I'm not a misogynist," Les will protest. "Not intentionally. If anything, I'm an accidental misogynist, and I too blame the patriarchy for that."

And misogyny isn't exactly the point; he's just a self-involved, insecure egotist. He conducts changes on a huge digital whiteboard from a podium like a conductor leading an orchestra; he regards "my John Cougar Mellencamp Velcro wallet with my high school ID still inside" as valuable enough to auction for charity.

That Les and his partner Martin (Aasif Mandvi) are running out of money brings in billionaire investor Hilton Smith (Ronny Chieng, intense in that Ronny Chieng way) and his science adviser Vivienne (Zoe Lister-Jones), whom he inserts as a watchdog into Les and Martin's business. With her sharp features, geometric haircut and form-fitting black ensembles, she's a Bond villain minus the martial arts skills — icy but with a flicker of feeling, which makes her interesting. Their arrival, and a contractual deadline for successfully reversing the formula that might cost Les his company, sets up a ticking clock, represented by literal ticking clocks mounted around the laboratory.

For all of her flaws, self-delusion and some knuckleheaded decisions, it's much easier to side with Lindy as the puny partner than Les, the giant who made her small.

Entering the show in Episode 3 is Lulu, the Littlejohns' daughter, back from college. She's played by Sofia Rosinsky, so terrific and natural in the criminally canceled Prime Video series "Paper Girls" and great again here; Lulu has age-appropriate business quite apart from the sci-fi storyline, but her scenes with her parents help ground the show. She's a valuable player.

Les and Lindy fall in and out of understanding as they drift into a state of war; she gains power, self-knowledge and self-sufficiency even as he falls apart. Escaping her dollhouse prison, she contrives to harry him in creative and increasingly violent ways, even as she's attempting to remotely manage her literary credit-stealing — on FaceTime, no one knows how big you are — and sending mixed signals to Richard, who continues to press his suit in extraordinary ways. (It's a very busy show.) For all of her flaws, self-delusion — she comes to think of herself as the author of her student's work — and some knuckleheaded decisions, it's much easier to side with Lindy as the puny partner than Les, the giant who made her small. (Gonzales' story is told from the husband's point of view, in the detached voice of a scientist.) It only matters to us that Les manages to return Lindy to her former status; his thirst for recognition is represented as pathetic and unseemly. It helps, of course, that Banks is light and engaging where Macfadyen, in the person of Les, is not.

The series is both watchable and trying, given its many tonal shifts and an able, attractive cast, some of whom are assigned to play quite annoying people. Ranging from complete cartoons to more or less fully realized humans, they don't all fit together perfectly, and so nominally emotional moments don't necessarily register as such. Some effort is expended to remind us that Les and Lindy have been in love and may be again, an outcome that we reflexively approve, even against our better instincts and even if we don't feel it. Romantic comedy, which "The Miniature Wife" sort of is, demands a reunion. It's part of the deal that things will get worse before they get better. (Though they don't always get this bad.)

Anyway, good and bad, it's easy enough to recommend the series. Delightful and disturbing, size-related fantasies are eternally appealing, going back to Gulliver in Brobdingnag and forward to "The Incredible Shrinking Man," "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids," "Ant-Man" and that scene in "Help!" where Paul McCartney is made tiny by a scientist's ray. (It doesn't matter much that the special effects here don't always look convincing — better than those scenes where the people of Tokyo run from a man in a Godzilla suit, but still not quite knitted together.) Such stories play upon our own imaginings; anyone who's run a toy car across the landscape of a floor, or pretended a planter was a jungle, or made a mountain out of a mound, or projected themselves into a model train layout — indeed, a scene here — will relate.

FACES/PUZZLES

Sheridan show 'The Madison' gets renewed

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Taylor Sheridan's neo-Western show "The Madison" is coming back for Season 3.

The Michelle Pfeiffer-led Paramount+ series premiered its first three episodes on March 14, and released its final three on March 21. The show is described as a "heartfelt study of grief and human connection following a New York City family (the Clyburns) relocating to the Madison River valley of central Montana."

Paramount announced Tuesday that the series has been renewed for a third season. No filming or release date was mentioned in the announcement.

"Season 2 is already in the works, and now it's official: 'The Madison' has been renewed for Season 3 as well!" a post on the Instagram page of "The Madison" read.

Before premiering this spring, "The Madison" filmed its first season in 2024 and second in 2025.

The reasoning for the dual season shoot was to accommodate Kurt Russell's schedule as he was filming "Monarch: Legacy of Monsters" in 2024. When "The Madison" came back for Season 2, Russell joined the production to film scenes for both seasons.

Production on the show's first two seasons took place in Montana and in North Texas, where the region stood in for New York City.



Paramount+

Michelle Pfeiffer, left, and Kurt Russell star in the Paramount+ series "The Madison."

While already filmed, no release date has been set for "The Madison" Season 2.

The second season is expected to follow the Clyburns as they continue to grieve and move forward after a family tragedy. Both Montana and New York City will likely appear in the second go-around.

In addition to Pfeiffer and Russell, "The Madison" stars Patrick J. Adams, Matthew Fox, Elle Chapman, Beau Garrett, Amiah Miller, Alaina Pollack, Ben Schnetzer, Rebecca Spence, Danielle Vasinova, Kevin Zegers and Will Arnett.

"The Madison" Season 1 is streaming on Paramount+.

Show creator Sheridan is an Oscar nominee for best screenplay for the 2016 crime drama "Hell or High Water," The other television series he has overseen include "Yellowstone," "Tulsa King" and "Mayor of Kingstown."

Taylor Swift leads nominations for 2026 American Music Awards

Tribune News Service

It's 40 and counting for Taylor Swift at the American Music Awards.

Swift's eight nods lead this year's nominations for the 52nd AMAs, taking place May 25 in Las Vegas. The show will air live on CBS and Paramount+.

Queen Latifah returns as host for this year's show. Latifah was also among the inductees announced for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, announced Monday.



Swift

Show producer Dick Clark Productions announced the nominations Tuesday. Fan voting is open at VoteAMAs.com and the @AMAs Instagram profile in all award categories. Voting closes May 8.

Swift, with 40, has won more AMAs than any other artist. Her latest nominations are for artist of the year, album of the year ("The Life of a Showgirl"), song of the year ("The Fate of Ophelia"), best music video ("The Fate of Ophelia"), song of the summer ("Elizabeth Taylor"), best female pop artist, best pop song ("The Fate of Ophelia") and best pop album ("The Life of a Showgirl").

Morgan Wallen, Sabrina Carpenter, Olivia Dean and Somber each have seven nominations. First-time nominees Dean and Somber are named in such categories as new artist of the year, song of the year and breakthrough album of the year.

Other first-time nominees include Alex Warren, BigXthaPlug, Katseye, Leon Thomas, PinkPantheress, Raye, Sienna Spiro, Role Model and Tate McRae.

The AMA nominees are based on such fan interactions as streaming, album and song sales, radio airplay and tour grosses. These measurements are tracked by Billboard and Luminate, the entertainment industry's data partner, and cover the data from the eligibility period of March 21, 2025, through March 26, 2026.

French officials 'highly determined' to stop Ye from performing in France

French officials are "highly determined" to stop Ye from performing in France. The country's interior minister hopes to prevent the "Heil Hitler" rapper from doing a June 11 show in the southern city of Marseille due to his history of antisemitism, according to French publication Le Monde.

All options for blocking the artist formerly known as Kanye West from performing are said to be under consideration. Ye was one of the world's most popular performers when he posted an October 2022 message on social media in which he threatened to go "death con 3 on Jewish People."

That appeared to be a botched reference to the military state of increased readiness known as DEFCON 3. He has since made numerous remarks demonizing Jews, for which he recently apologized. That conduct led several companies to cut ties with the musician.

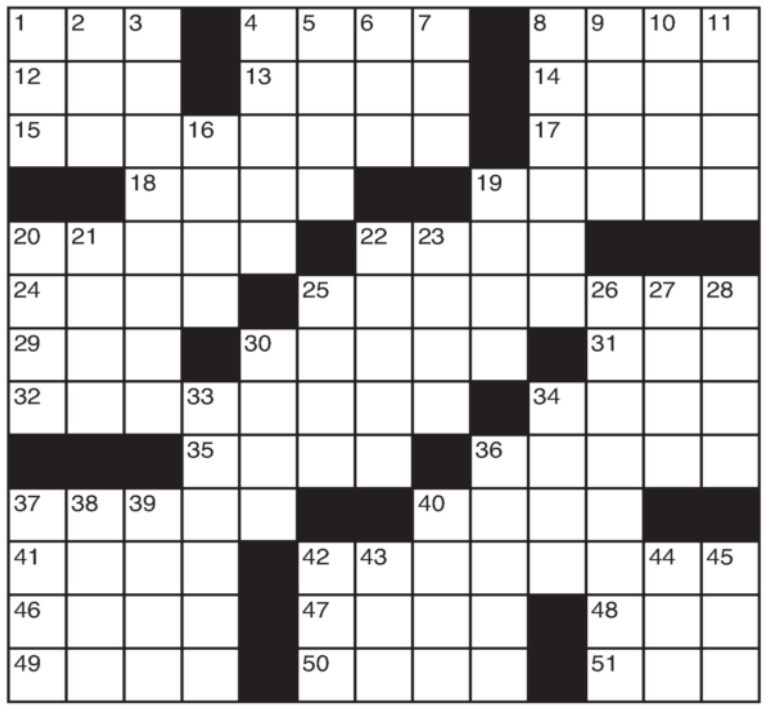
Ye blames mental health problems for his erratic behavior.

The BBC reported last week that officials in the United Kingdom denied Ye's application for the Electronic Travel Authorization visa he needed to perform at London's Wireless Festival in July. That decision was "made on the grounds that his presence would not be conducive to the public good."

The Wireless Festival was subsequently canceled.

Ye performed a pair of sold-out shows in Los Angeles at the start of April. His next concert is scheduled for May 23 in India. His Ye Live Concert Tour 2026 also includes stops in the Netherlands, Turkey, Portugal and Spain.

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 PC port
4 Authentic
8 Easy targets
12 Menlo Park monogram
13 Feedbag fill
14 Couturier Cassini
15 Shook down
17 Legal wrong
18 Tarzan's clique
19 Gets ready, briefly
20 Ryan's daughter
22 Biblical twin
24 Iowa city
25 Highs and lows
29 "You bet!"
30 Suggestions
31 Greek vowel
32 Stretched out
34 Crucial time
35 Sweater material
36 Agitates
37 Rustic home
40 Opposite of "sans"
41 Panache
42 Outer surface
46 Protracted
47 French perfume brand
48 Actress Vardalos
49 Fireplace fuel
50 Supermodel Molly
51 Days of yore

DOWN

1 Colorado native
2 Charlie Parker's instrument
3 Software trial
4 Composer Ned
5 Diner sign
6 Devoured
7 Leary's drug
8 "Amen to that!"
9 Soap additive
10 Criminal, to cops
11 LAPD ranks
16 Musical composition
19 Fraction
20 Diggs of "Rent"
21 Visa rival, briefly
22 Kick out
23 Poker variety
25 Within (Pref.)
26 Pharmacy purchase
27 And others (Lat.)
28 Declares
30 Privy to
33 "Dallas" family
34 Active sort
36 Camper owners, for short
37 Honeycomb division
38 — gobi (Indian vegetarian dish)
39 Firecracker sound
40 Teensy bit
42 Cosmo VIPs
43 Noon, on a sundial
44 Sesame product
45 "Awesome, dude!"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

4-17

CRYPTOQUIP

ETAP ZQXBTRTZQE XR MTV RAZWPXTP VT VQW GQXMWRW XLWDB, RT GAV TAV VQW QTBXWP-VQDM-VDT DVVXVALW!

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF AN APOLOGY COMPRISED ONLY OF DOTS AND DASHES GETS SENT TO SOMEONE, IS THAT REMORSE CODE?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals H

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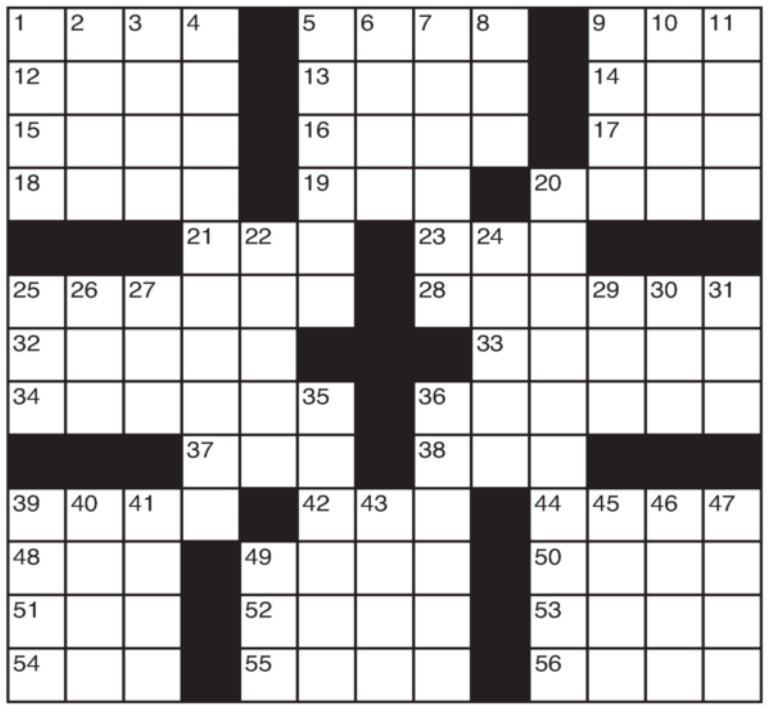
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PUZZLES

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS
1 Envelope part
5 Kate of "The Martian"
9 Binge
12 Activist Parks
13 Pundit's piece
14 Samovar
15 Wife of Geraint
16 Incite
17 Aunt, in Cancœn
18 The Grateful —
19 Boom times
20 Plane reservation
21 "Bad" cholesterol
23 — Mae ("Ghost" role)
25 Bit parts
28 Elbowed
32 Dull colors
33 Online matchmaker
34 Birch bark vessels
36 "Let me find out"
37 Request
38 "Cats" monogram
39 Pizzazz
42 LAX info
44 Goalie's goal
48 Hugs, in a letter
49 Military no-show
50 Greet
51 Artist Yoko
52 Sweet beginning?
53 Spoken
54 AOL rival
55 Location
56 Congers

DOWN
1 Wilma's hubby
2 Single
3 Nepal's continent
4 Lake resort rental
5 Ski slope bumps
6 Per person
7 Logic
8 Do sum work?
9 Burlap fiber
10 La Scala melody
11 Pesky insect
20 Two-tone footwear
22Rx amounts
24 One-on-one battles
25 Govt. health org.
26 Football's Parseghian
27 Fellow
29 Tank filler
30 Tours season
31 Billy — Williams
35 Kebab holder
36 Roma's land
39 Go fast
40 Billions of years
41 Anon
43 Heavy reading?
45 Swiss river
46 Test tube
47 Building wings
49 Solid-rock insert

Answer to Previous Puzzle

U	S	B	■	R	E	A	L	■	S	A	P	S
T	A	E	■	O	A	T	S	■	O	L	E	G
E	X	T	O	R	T	E	D	■	T	O	R	T
■	■	A	P	E	S	■	■	P	R	E	P	S
T	A	T	U	M	■	E	S	A	U	■	■	■
A	M	E	S	■	E	X	T	R	E	M	E	S
Y	E	S	■	I	N	P	U	T	■	E	T	A
E	X	T	E	N	D	E	D	■	D	D	A	Y
■	■	■	W	O	O	L	■	R	O	I	L	S
C	A	B	I	N	■	■	A	V	E	C	■	■
E	L	A	N	■	E	X	T	E	R	I	O	R
L	O	N	G	■	D	I	O	R	■	N	I	A
L	O	G	S	■	S	I	M	S	■	E	L	D

4-18 **CRYPTOQUIP**

UQD UJE HDB VOEVDTTXBF UQDXO FEBZETSY JXUQ UEUSTTL ZXAADODBU HDUQEZY JDOD VETDO EVVEYXUDY.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: YOUR PHILOSOPHY IS NOT SUPERIOR TO THE CHINESE IDEAL, SO CUT OUT THE HOLIER-THAN-TAO ATTITUDE!

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals P

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OPINION

Why now? Because that's how trauma works.

BY ANITA CHABRIA
Los Angeles Times

Why now? Why now?

Every time a woman comes forward with her story of sexual assault, this is the first question she faces. OK, maybe the second — after some variation of "Are you a lying slut?"

At least we are consistent. But on behalf of all survivors everywhere, of any gender, identity or age, let me give you some blanket answers to "Why now?"

Survivors come forward now, whenever now is, because they have reached the point in their recovery when facing the inevitable "lying slut" accusation is less terrible than watching their abuser strut around as if that person is not a dangerous, cruel predator who is almost certainly going to hurt someone else if they are not stopped.

Whether it's in Congress, on a movie set, in the halls of their school — wherever that predator is just living their life without consequence — there is a survivor who has been cowering in the shadows of her own life, in pain, wanting to scream to the world that this person is not what they seem.

But the price of that honesty has always been steep. Too steep. Even after #MeToo.

Ask Cassie Ventura. Ask Jennifer Siebel Newsom. Ask E. Jean Carroll. Dolores Huerta. Simone Biles.

Even powerful women can't escape the blowback, the fear. Even powerful women are steamrolled over and over again by the overwhelming presumption that they are lying, and that there is an ulterior motive for coming forward at this particular moment.

Imagine just being an average person holding that secret. Who are any of us to stand up alone against a rich and powerful man whose very freedom will depend on crushing our credibility?

P. Diddy. Harvey Weinstein. Donald Trump. César Chávez. Larry Nassar. Eric Swalwell. Those men know power, and know how to use it.

"He thought he was untouchable. He acted with total impunity. He never thought that the consequences of his actions would follow him," Ally Sammarco, one of the women who spoke out about Swalwell (who has previously denied allegations of misconduct), told CBS.

It's why the women of the Jeffrey Epstein files stayed silent for so long. It's why there are thousands of rape survivors out there right now who have never said a word about what they endured, and maybe never will.

"Why now?" is just a more palatable version of "lying slut," a question based on ignorance about how trauma — and society — works. A question meant not to elicit fact, but to feed the Jezebel frenzy men always use in their attempt to escape justice.

Here's the truth about sexual assault: There is no right way to respond to it, no right time. There is no one reaction that proves it happened or that creates the perfect scenario that will protect the survivor's reputation while delivering justice upon the predator. In fact, there is really no way at all to respond to a sexual assault that won't bring secondary trauma.

Wait years and face disdain — that it didn't happen, wasn't serious, is only coming out now for some agenda, like politics or money.

Report it immediately and be prepared for every move, every smile, every sip of a drink, to be examined for signs that this was, if not consensual, somehow deserved — a gray area of shared responsibility.

Imagine, at a moment of crushing vulnerability, when your body has been violated and your mind is reeling trying to find safe ground, being bludgeoned by these accusations, stated or implied, that you brought this on yourself.

"Why now?" becomes "Why would you?"

Even when the scenario is one in which there can be no defense — such as the UCLA gynecologist, James Heaps, who on Tuesday pleaded guilty to sexually abusing five of his patients during exams — the cost of reporting is terrible. That case has wound on for years, leaving each of the victims to constantly relive their worst moments, constantly fear that all of their courage would come to nothing.

Which is why survivors don't always come forward. Maybe they need time to put themselves back together, even just a little bit. Maybe the fear of all that societal scrutiny is just too much. Maybe they fear they won't be believed, and their attacker will be free to harm them again.

Maybe they just want it to all go away. Maybe they do blame themselves, and are paralyzed by an unfounded shame.

There are so many reasons why survivors stay silent — and none of them are because it didn't happen, or because they are lying.

Lonna Drewes, the Beverly Hills model who came forward Tuesday with an accusation that Swalwell drugged and raped her in 2018, summed up the experience of many, many survivors.

"I did not want to live anymore," she said of how she felt after the attack. "I cried all the time for years."

So here's the real answer to "Why now?" from a victim's statement that one of Heaps' survivors read in court.

"What you intended to break, you did not," she said.

That is the answer to "Why now?" Because the bravery and courage at the heart of the survivor was bruised but not defeated.

Because she doesn't want it to happen to anyone else.

Because she deserves to be free of his secrets: Ones she has been forced to keep out of fear of him, but also of us.

Anita Chabria is a California columnist for the Los Angeles Times, based in Sacramento.

The US and Iran should turn this pause into peace

Bloomberg Opinion Editorial Board

Even as the U.S. and Iran flirt with a return to negotiations, each appears convinced it can dish out more pain — and absorb more — than its opponent. They'd both be wiser to accept the compromises needed to bring their six-week conflict to a close.

Exactly what derailed marathon peace talks in Islamabad last weekend — and whether they were truly "inches away" from a successful conclusion, as Iran's foreign minister has claimed — remains murky. Reports suggest the main sticking points involved whether Iran would suspend nuclear enrichment for as long as 20 years and surrender its stockpile of near-weapons-grade uranium. What, if any, progress was made toward restoring freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, or limiting Iran's missile arsenal and support for terrorist groups, is uncertain.

Each side sees reason to hold firm. U.S. officials view the Iranian economy as near collapse — and think that blockading Iranian ports will tip the regime into crisis. Although costs to the global economy and American pocketbooks continue to mount, there's still time for them to abate before midterm elections in November. Meanwhile, the president faces pressure to reach a deal that's stronger than his predecessors achieved, both to justify launching the war and to pacify hawkish allies in Washington and Jerusalem.

For their part, Iranian leaders clearly think that after years of crushing sanctions and weeks of U.S. and Israeli airstrikes, they have a far greater tolerance for pain than their rivals; the blockade, even if successful, isn't likely to force a quick capitulation. Iranian negotiators also have an unfortunate tendency to overplay their hand, endlessly haggling for a bit more advantage and then being surprised when talks collapse. That the regime is now so fragmented after Israeli decapitation strikes could make it harder to agree internally on difficult concessions.

Both nations ought to appraise their own weaknesses as closely as their rivals'. The U.S. needs to find a way to salvage some strategic gain from this misadventure. A return to fighting would further deplete critical missile inventories, drive up gas prices and harm the economy, raise the risk of military casualties, and distract policymakers from arguably more important global challenges. Meanwhile, if the Iranian regime hopes to survive, it will need funds for reconstruction, an end to its economic isolation and peace with its Persian Gulf neighbors.

In that light, compromise should look rather more appealing. Not every issue has to be solved immediately. Judging by U.S. and Israeli claims about the success of their strikes, Iran's missiles and proxies should pose a less urgent threat now; the regime will ultimately have to come to some accommodation with its neighbors on both issues if it's to enjoy the stability needed to rebuild. Similarly, now that Iran has demonstrated it can block traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, it can in theory afford to ease those restrictions — and will need to do so before the U.S. lifts its blockade.

That diplomats are discussing specific time limits — Iranian negotiators reportedly offered to suspend enrichment for three to five years instead of 20 — suggests that finding a middle ground on the nuclear program should be possible, too. Although Iran says it's only willing to dilute its highly enriched uranium to less-risky levels, it shipped out earlier stockpiles as part of the 2015 nuclear deal with the U.S.; clearly, doing so isn't a fatal affront to national sovereignty. One nonnegotiable priority must be the return of international inspectors, to restore full monitoring over Iran's nuclear assets.

The U.S. embarked on this war with grandiose and unrealistic goals. Ending it will require another approach.

SCOREBOARD/GOLF

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Selected the contracts of SS Sam Antonacci and C Sam Huff from Norfolk (IL). Optioned LHP Nick Raquet to Norfolk. Designated LHP Jayvien Sandridge for assignment.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Selected the contract of UTL Sam Antonacci from Charlotte (IL). Recalled LHP Tyler Gilbert from Charlotte. Optioned LHP Brandon Eisert to Charlotte. Designated OF Dustin Harris for assignment.

DETROIT TIGERS — Agreed to terms with 3B Kevin McGonigle on an eight-year contract extension.

HOUSTON ASTROS — Placed RHP Cody Bolton on the 15-day IL, retroactive tom April 13. Recalled RHP Spencer Arrighetti from Sugar Land (PCL).

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Sent LHP Bailey Falter to Omaha (IL) on a rehab assignment.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Sent RHP Travis Adams to Fort Myers (FSL) on a rehab assignment.

NEW YORK YANKEES — Optioned RHP Yerry De los Santos to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (IL). Recalled RHP Angel Chivilli from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre.

TEXAS RANGERS — Agreed to terms with RHP Eithan Mendez on a minor league contract. Placed RHPs Luis Curvelo and Chris Martin on the 15-day IL. Selected the contracts of RHPs Cal Quantrill and Gavin Collyer from Round Rock (PCL).

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Sent RHP Trey Yesavage to Buffalo (IL) on a rehab assignment.

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with RHP Martín Pérez on a minor league contract and optioned him to Gwinnett (IL). Sent SS Luke Williams outright to Gwinnett.

COLORADO ROCKIES — Placed LHP Kyle Freeland on the 15-day IL, retroactive to April 13. Reinstated LHP Jose Quintana from the 15-day IL.

MIAMI MARLINS — Sent LF Esteury Ruiz and SS Maximo Acosta to Jacksonville (IL) on a rehab assignment.

NEW YORK METS — Placed INF/OF Jared Young on the 10-day IL, retroactive to April 13. Recalled OF MJ Melendez from Syracuse (IL). Released LHP Luis Garcia.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Placed RHP Zach Pop on the 15-day IL retroactive to April 13. Recalled LHP Kyle Backhus from Lehigh Valley (IL).

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Agreed to terms with SS Luis Almeida on a minor league contract.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Placed OF Jared Oliva on the 10-day IL. Placed OF Harrison Bader on the 10-day IL retroactive to April 12. Recalled OFs Will Brennan and Drew Gilbert from Sacramento (PCL).

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Sent RHP Matt Pushard to Memphis (IL) on a rehab assignment.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

NBA — Fined Charlotte G LaMelo Ball $35,000 and assessed a flagrant foul 2 for making unnecessary and reckless contact with Miami C Bam Adebayo. Fined Ball an additional $25,000 for using profane language during a live postgame interview.

Women's National Basketball Association

CONNECTICUT SUN — Signed C Reagan Beers to a rookie scale contract. Signed Gs Harmoni Turner and Madison Hayes to training camp contracts.

DALLAS WINGS — Signed G Azzi Fudd to a rookie scale contract.

GOLDEN STATE VALKYRIES — Signed Gs Caroline Ducharme, Ndjakalenga Mwenentanda and Bailey Maupin to rookie scale contracts.

LAS VEGAS ACES — Signed C A'ja Wilson to a three-year supermax contract.

NEW YORK LIBERTY — Signed Gs Ashley Owusu and Rebekah Gardner to training camp contracts. Signed C Ugonne Onyiah and G Derin Erdogan to rookie scale contracts.

PHOENIX SUN — Re-signed Gs Monique Akoa Makani to a two-year contract. Signed F Lee Seul Kan to a training camp contract.

PORTLAND FIRE — Signed G Kamiah Smalls to a training camp contract.

SEATTLE STORM — Signed G/F Rennia Davis and F Beatrice Mompremier to training camp contracts. Signed G/F Jaelyn Brown and G Ellie Ladine to rookie scale contracts.

TORONTO TEMPO — Signed G Dara Mabrey to a rookie scale contract.

WASHINGTON MYSTICS — Signed Gs Rori Harmon and Cassandre Prosper to rookie scale contracts. Signed F Mya Hollingshed to a training camp contract.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

ANAHEIM DUCKS — Recalled D Tristan Luneau from San Diego (AHL).

CAROLINA HURRICANES — Assigned Ds Charles-Alexis Legault, Joel Nystrom and Ronan Seeley and Fs Bradly Nadeau, Felix Unger Sörum and Skyler Brind'Amour to Chicago (AHL).

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Assigned D Jack Ahcan to Colorado (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Assigned Fs Ben Jones, Hunter Haight and Nicolas Aube-Kubel to Iowa (AHL). Signed D Ben Dexheimer to a one-year, entry-level contract.

MONTREAL CANADIENS — Assigned F Vinzenz Rohrer to Laval (AHL).

NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Assigned G Nico Daws, F Marc McLaughlin, and D Topias Vilen to Utica (AHL).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Assigned Fs Victor Eklund, Liam Foudy and Calum Ritchie and D Isaiah George to Bridgeport (AHL).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Assigned Fs Jacob Gaucher and Anthony Richard, Ds Hunter McDonald, David Jiricek and Oliver Bonk and G Alexei Kolosov to Lehigh Valley (AHL).

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Assigned Fs Avery Hayes, Joona Koppanen, Ville Koivunen, Rafael Harvey-Pinard and Rutger McGroarty to Wilkes/Barre/Scranton (AHL).

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Recalled G Brandon Halverson, Fs Jakob Pelletier and Mitchell Chaffee and D Steven Santini from Syracuse (AHL). Activated D Maxwell Crozier from long-term injured reserve. Placed D Steven Santini on waivers. Recalled F Jakob Pelletier from Syracuse.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Assigned G Clay Stevenson and Fs Ilya Protas and Ivan Miroshnichenko to Hershey (AHL).

TENNIS

Porsche Grand Prix

WTA
Wednesday
At Porsche Arena
Stuttgart, Germany
Purse: $1,206,446
Surface: Red clay indoor
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles
Round of 32

Zeynep Sonmez, Turkiye, def. Jasmine Paolini (5), Italy, 6-2, 6-2
Alycia Parks, United States, def. Noma Noha Akugue, Germany, 6-4, 6-2
Linda Noskova, Czechia, def. Zhang Shuai, China, 5-7, 6-1, 6-4
Mirra Andreeva (6), Russia, def. Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, 5-7, 6-2, 6-4

Women's Singles
Round of 16

Iga Swiatek (3), Poland, def. Laura Siegemund, Germany, 6-2, 6-3
Elina Svitolina (4), Ukraine, def. Eva Lys, Germany, 6-1, 6-0

Barcelona Open

ATP
Wednesday
At Real Club de Tenis Barcelona
Barcelona, Spain
Purse: Euro 2,950,310
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Argentina, 6-3, 7-6 (4)
Hamad Medjedovic, Serbia, def. Alex de Minaur (3), Australia, 6-3, 6-4
Rafael Jodar, Spain, def. Camilo Ugo Carabelli, Argentina, 6-3, 6-3
Cameron Norrie (7), Britain, def. Ethan Quinn, United States, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup Series
schedule-winners

Feb. 4 — Cook Out Clash at Bowman Gray (Ryan Preece)
Feb. 12 — x-America 250 Florida Duel at DAYTONA (Joey Logano)
Feb. 12 — x-America 250 Florida Duel at DAYTONA (Chase Elliott)
Feb. 15 — DAYTONA 500 (Tyler Reddick)
Feb. 22 — Autotrader 400 (Tyler Reddick)
March 1 — DuraMAX Texas Grand Prix Powered by RelaDyne (Tyler Reddick)
March 8 — Straight Talk Wireless 500 (Ryan Blaney)
March 15 — Pennzoil 400 presented by Jiffy Lube (Denny Hamlin)
March 22 — Goodyear 400 (Tyler Reddick)
March 29 — Cook Out 400 (Chase Elliott)
April 12 — Food City 500 (Ty Gibbs)
April 19 — AdventHealth 400, Kansas City, Kan.
April 26 — Jack Link's 500, Talladega, Ala.
May 3 — Würth 400 presented by LIQUI MOLY, Fort Worth, Texas
May 10 — Go Bowling at The Glen, Watkins Glen, N.Y.
May 17 — NASCAR All-Star Race, Dover, Del.
May 24 — Coca-Cola 600, Concord, N.C.
May 31 — Cracker Barrel 400, Lebanon, Tenn.
June 7 — FireKeepers Casino 400, Brooklyn, Mich.
June 14 — Great American Getaway 400 presented by VISITPA, Long Pond, Pa.
June 21 — Anduril 250, San Diego
June 28 — Save Mart 350, Sonoma, Calif.
July 5 — NASCAR Cup Series Race at Chicagoland, Joliet, Ill.
July 12 — Quaker State 400 Available at Walmart, Hampton, Ga.
July 19 — Window World 450, North Wilkesboro, N.C.
July 26 — Brickyard 400, Speedway, Ind.
x-non-points race

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	5	1	1	16	15	4
Chicago	4	2	1	13	9	5
Inter Miami CF	3	1	3	12	13	12
NYC FC	3	2	2	11	14	9
Charlotte FC	3	2	2	11	13	9
Toronto FC	3	2	2	11	10	11
New York	3	2	2	11	11	15
New England	3	3	0	9	12	9
D.C. United	2	4	1	7	4	9
Cincinnati	2	4	1	7	10	16
Columbus	1	3	3	6	9	10
Atlanta	1	5	1	4	6	12
Orlando City	1	5	1	4	6	24
Philadelphia	1	6	0	3	6	12
CF Montréal	1	6	0	3	8	19

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	6	1	0	18	19	4
San Jose	6	1	0	18	13	2
LAFC	5	1	1	16	15	2
Real Salt Lake	4	1	1	13	12	8
Seattle	4	1	1	13	6	2
Colorado	4	3	0	12	19	12
FC Dallas	3	1	3	12	15	10
San Diego FC	3	2	2	11	14	10
Minn. United	3	2	2	11	8	13
LA Galaxy	2	3	2	8	10	11
Portland	2	4	1	7	11	16
Houston	2	4	0	6	10	16
Austin FC	1	3	3	6	8	11
St Louis City	1	3	3	6	6	9
Sporting KC	1	5	1	4	7	17

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

Friday's game

Sporting Kansas City at Vancouver

Saturday's games

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

Sunday's game

San Jose at Los Angeles FC

Wednesday, April 22

LA Galaxy at Columbus
Cincinnati at New York City FC
D.C. United at New York
Charlotte FC at Orlando City
Philadelphia at Toronto FC
New England at Atlanta
Minnesota at FC Dallas
San Diego FC at Houston
Miami at Real Salt Lake
Colorado at Los Angeles FC
Austin FC at San Jose

Saturday, April 25

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

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego	4	1	0	12	8	3
Portland	3	1	1	10	8	5
Seattle	3	1	1	10	7	4
Angel City	3	1	0	9	10	4
Houston	3	1	0	9	9	5
Orlando	2	1	2	8	7	4
Utah Royals FC	2	2	1	7	6	6
Washington	1	1	3	6	5	4
Denver FC	1	1	3	6	4	3
Bay FC	2	2	0	6	6	7
Kansas City	2	3	0	6	5	9
North Carolina	1	1	2	5	5	6
Gotham FC	1	2	2	5	2	4
Chicago	1	4	0	3	2	11
Louisville	0	3	1	1	7	10
Boston FC	0	4	0	0	1	7

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

Friday, April 24

Orlando at Louisville
Kansas City at Washington

Saturday, April 25

Bay FC at Gotham FC
Boston Legacy FC at Chicago
North Carolina at Houston
San Diego at Denver Summit FC

LIV chief affirms league will go on

By Doug Ferguson
Associated Press

LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil sought to quell speculation about the league's financial future Wednesday evening with a memo to his staff that said the 2026 season will continue as planned without interruption and "at full throttle."

The memo, a copy of which was sent to The Associated Press, followed a long day of reports suggesting Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund was on the verge of cutting its financial backing of the upstart league.

The newsletter Money in Sport reported in February that LIV Golf had already spent $5.3 billion and was projected to surpass $6 billion by the end of the year.

"I want to be crystal clear: Our season continues exactly as planned, uninterrupted and at full throttle," O'Neil said. "While the media landscape is often filled with speculation, our reality is defined by the work we do on the grass. We are heading into the heart of our 2026 schedule with the full energy of an organization that is bigger, louder and more influential than ever before."

Left unclear was how long the funding would last for LIV Golf, which launched in June 2022 by paying roughly $1 billion in signing bonuses to some of the PGA Tour's biggest names, such as Bryson DeChambeau, Brooks Koepka, Phil Mickelson, Dustin Johnson and Jon Rahm.

Prize money for individuals and the 13 teams was raised to $30 million this year.

Koepka has since left LIV and was allowed to rejoin the PGA Tour this year with stipulations. Patrick Reed also left LIV and is playing a European tour schedule this year. He is virtually certain to be eligible to return to the PGA Tour in 2027 through the European tour points race.

Questions about LIV's future funding were raised as the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia revealed a new five-year investment strategy.

"The 2026-30 strategy marks a natural evolution as PIF moves from a period of rapid growth and acceleration to a new phase of sustained value creation, with a strengthened focus on maximizing impact, raising the efficiency of investments and applying the highest standards of governance, transparency and institutional excellence," the PIF said in a release.

The plan was developed before the U.S.-Israel war against Iran. Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the PIF governor behind LIV Golf, told the London-based Financial Times, "Of course the war would add more pressure to reposition some priorities."

LIV players at Chapultepec Golf Club for LIV Golf Mexico that started Thursday did not have answers as speculation ran rampant throughout the day.

One player said Al-Rumayyan met with players the first week of March in Hong Kong and said funding for LIV was set through 2032. The player spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private. The player also said O'Neil arrived in Mexico City on Wednesday and was set to meet with the players.

LIV Golf promoted the Mexico event Wednesday evening on social media with the message, "Slow news day? We are ON."

LIV has played five events this year in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Africa. It celebrated an inspirational victory at its biggest event in Australia when Anthony Kim won after the American had been away for 12 years while battling drug and alcohol addiction.

DeChambeau won the last two events in playoffs.



SCOTT TAETSCH, LIV GOLF/AP

Jon Rahm signs autographs after the first round of LIV Golf tournament at Trump National Doral on April 4 in Miami.

NHL

Playoff format sets up grand Central standoff

By Dave Campbell
Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The current concentration of power in the Western Conference makes the Central Division a good bet to be the star of the show in these Stanley Cup playoffs.

Don't wait for the ending, though. The bracket ensures that two of the conference's top three teams — Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota — will be ousted over the first two rounds.

"The rules are the rules, so you deal with them, and if you're going to win the Stanley Cup, you've got to beat all the teams anyway, so it is what it is," Stars general manager Jim Nill said.



Tony Gutierrez/AP

The Stars and Wild start fighting in the third period on April 9. The Central Division rivals will meet in the first round of the playoffs.

The postseason format the NHL brought back with the divisional realignment for the 2013-14 season to intensify the first round and double down on regional rivalries has occasionally proved controversial. With the Avalanche, Stars and Wild cemented at the top of the conference and their division for most of the season the calls for change have come louder this spring.

League-leading Colorado would face the Minnesota-Dallas winner in the second round if the Avs beat the second wild card team as they will be favored to do. The Stars, who have lost in the Western Conference final in each of the last three years, don't get much of a reward for finishing third overall in the league.

"Well, I've yet to meet somebody who likes it, so I'll leave it at that," Stars forward Matt Duchene said. "I think everybody feels the same way. Regular season should set you up well if you do well, and with our division being as strong as it is, it doesn't, right? But at the same time, there's nothing we can do about it. You've got to go through great teams no matter what round you're in."

The Stars were close to overtaking the Avalanche last month before a late fade. The bonus for Colorado of finishing first was avoiding a familiar Central Division foe in the first round.

"We're just worried about our business. We like to clinch the one seed just to be able to have home ice throughout the entire thing," center Brock Nelson said.

This will be just the third time in 13 years of the current format that the top three teams in one conference were all in the same division. In past occurrences, though, the favorites didn't fare well.

Washington, which led the NHL and won the Metropolitan Division in 2016-17, lost in the second round to second-place Pittsburgh, which went on to win the Stanley Cup. Dallas, which was second in the league in 2015-16, won the Central Division with 109 points and lost in the second round to second-place St. Louis.

Commissioner Gary Bettman is committed to the format that fuels what he has called the best first round of the playoffs in any sport, touting not only more intense series but longer matchups that mean more games. This is a throwback to a 12-year period between the 1981-82 and 1992-93 seasons when the top four teams from each division qualified with no wild cards, until switching to conference-based seeds.

There's nostalgia in effect for those playing the game now who grew up watching that era, or for those in coaching or executive roles who were players then, which softens a bit the frustration of the format.

The Wild, who matched the third-best record in franchise history with 104 points, have lost nine straight series since the last time they advanced in 2015. Beating the Stars would be quite the way to end that skid.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
z-Carolina	82	53	22	7	113	296	240
y-Buffalo	82	50	23	9	109	288	241
x-Tampa Bay	82	50	26	6	106	290	231
x-Montreal	82	48	24	10	106	283	256
x-Boston	82	45	27	10	100	272	250
x-Ottawa	82	44	27	11	99	278	246
x-Pittsburgh	82	41	25	16	98	293	268
x-Philadelphia	82	43	27	12	98	250	243
Washington	82	43	30	9	95	263	244
Detroit	82	41	31	10	92	241	258
Columbus	82	40	30	12	92	253	253
N.Y. Islanders	82	43	34	5	91	233	241
New Jersey	82	42	37	3	87	230	254
Florida	82	40	38	4	84	251	276
Toronto	82	32	36	14	78	253	299
N.Y. Rangers	82	34	39	9	77	238	250

Western Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
z-Colorado	81	54	16	11	119	300	203
x-Dallas	82	50	20	12	112	279	226
x-Minnesota	82	46	24	12	104	272	240
y-Vegas	82	39	26	17	95	265	250
x-Utah	81	43	32	6	92	265	235
x-Edmonton	81	40	30	11	91	276	268
x-Anaheim	81	42	33	6	90	268	284
x-Los Angeles	81	35	26	20	90	224	244
Nashville	81	38	33	10	86	243	264
St. Louis	81	36	33	12	84	226	255
San Jose	81	38	35	8	84	245	291
Winnipeg	81	35	34	12	82	230	254
Seattle	81	34	36	11	79	226	261
Calgary	81	33	39	9	75	209	258
Chicago	82	29	39	14	72	213	275
Vancouver	81	25	48	8	58	215	310

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.
x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference

Wednesday's games

Florida 8, Detroit 1
N.Y. Rangers 4, Tampa Bay 2
Dallas 4, Buffalo 3, SO
Ottawa 3, Toronto 1
Chicago 5, San Jose 2
Vegas 4, Seattle 1

Thursday's games

St. Louis at Utah
Anaheim at Nashville
San Jose at Winnipeg
Los Angeles at Calgary
Vancouver at Edmonton
Seattle at Colorado
End of regular season

Avs insist intense MacKinnon has lighter side

By Pat Graham
Associated Press

DENVER — There are plenty of reasons for Nathan MacKinnon to smile over one of the finest seasons for him and for the Colorado Avalanche. Actually getting the all-business center to break into a grin, well, that can prove challenging — even for teammates.

"Yeah, I can," Logan O'Connor said with a smile about making his hard-charging, fast-flying fellow forward smile. "A little bit."

MacKinnon's intensity burns red hot on the ice. He's been on-point, too, in scoring a career-best 53 goals with one game to go before the playoffs and is in line to capture the Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy for the first time as the league's highest goal producer. MacKinnon's also among the favorites to take home his second Hart Trophy in three seasons as the league's MVP.

His lighter side does show through.

Like after goals, especially Tuesday night at Calgary when his empty-netter resulted in an assist for Martin Necas and gave Necas his first 100-point season (MacKinnon rushed toward Necas for a celebratory embrace).

Or when MacKinnon talks about winning streaks ("winning is fun," he recently quipped). Or that scene earlier this month when Dallas captain Jamie Benn was trying to get under MacKinnon's skin with a few pushes. MacKinnon proceeded to touch the cheek of Benn with his glove, drawing a grin from Benn ("Just saying hi," Benn commented).

Teammates can bring out MacKinnon's playful side by making fun of something. Warning: Tread carefully.

"I don't know if I'd necessarily tell you guys (the media) to do that," said O'Connor, whose team finishes the regular season Thursday against Seattle. "You can keep it pretty light with him. Obviously, that intense personality makes him a remarkable player."

The 30-year-old MacKinnon has turned in the second 50-goal season of his career, joining Hall of Famers Joe Sakic and Michel Goulet as the only players in Quebec/Colorado history to reach the milestone multiple times. He's also recorded three or more points in a game on 20 occasions this season. That beats the franchise record of 19 held by Peter Stastny (1982-83) and Sakic (2000-01).



Jason Franson/The Canadian Press

Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon shoots against Oilers goalie Connor Ingram on Monday. MacKinnon leads the NHL in goals and is among the favorites to win the Hart Trophy.

"We're spoiled getting to see him on an everyday basis," captain Gabriel Landeskog said of MacKinnon, who also has 74 assists for 127 points (he trails points leader Connor McDavid by seven). "He's one of the top players in the league every single year. Look at the way he impacts the game on a nightly basis. We're grateful to have him."

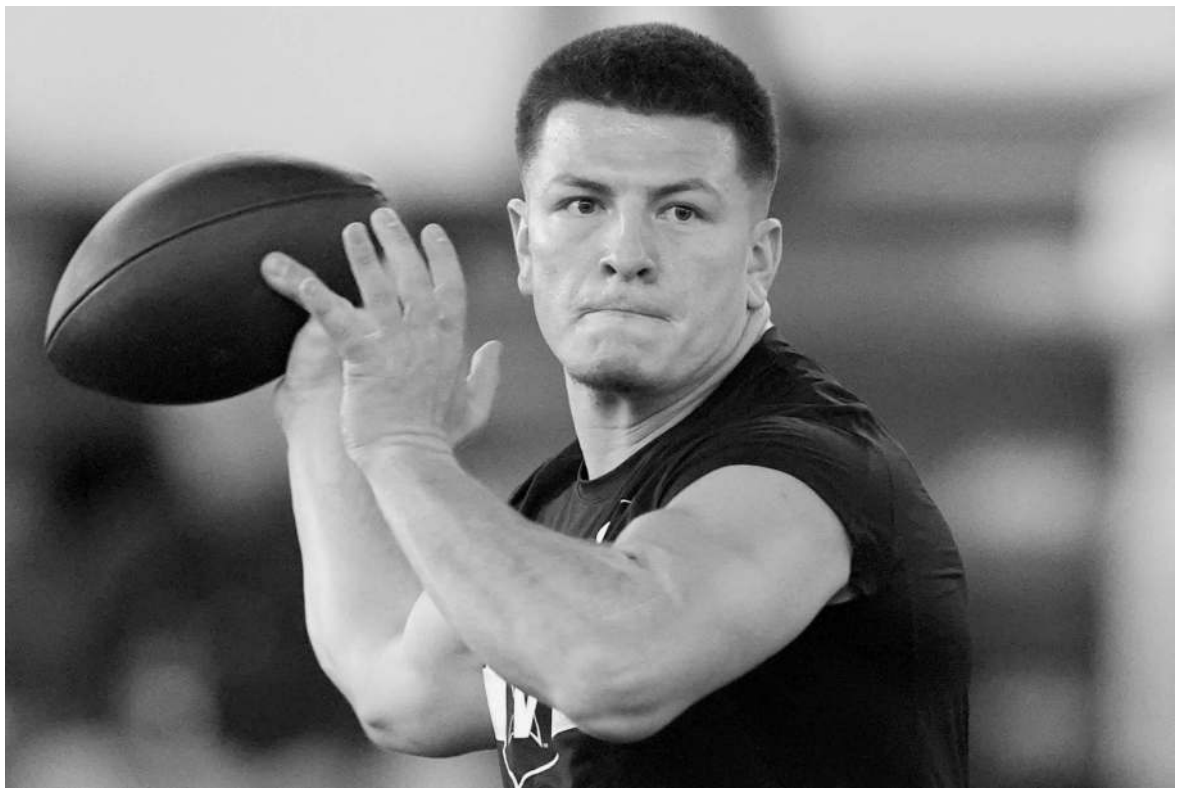
But can Landeskog make the MacKinnon laugh?

"Yeah, I can," Landeskog chuckled. "He just seems so serious. You just don't know what buttons to push. I've known him long enough to know when to push those buttons and what buttons to push. I don't think necessarily he's always going to be the bubbly guy in front of the media, but I can make him laugh plenty."

Behind MacKinnon's goal-scoring prowess, the Presidents' Trophy-winning Avalanche have notched 119 points, which matches their most points in a season. That last time they had that many was 2021-22 when they hoisted the Stanley Cup.

Defenseman Josh Manson described MacKinnon's drive as similar to the one that motivated the late Kobe Bryant toward greatness. Bryant captured five NBA titles, while MacKinnon has one Cup so far.

"He's always looking for little edges to get him better," Manson said. "Always looking to fine-tune his game. He doesn't get caught too much in a pattern of repetition. He's always trying to move himself forward, which I think is the mark of a true, excellent player."



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia looks to pass during the school's NFL pro day on March 20. Pavia is short for a QB by NFL standards but was the 2025 AP SEC offensive player of the year.

Pavia, teammates say look at tape, not tape measure

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Diego Pavia's confidence, seen by some outsiders as sheer arrogance, has taken him from a junior college in New Mexico to the Southeastern Conference and then New York as the Heisman Trophy runner-up.

His next target? The NFL, where critics point to a key detail putting both Pavia's draft position and chance at pro football in question. His official measurement of 5-foot-10 usually is just too small to play quarterback in the NFL.

Pavia has a short response to anyone thinking he's too short to play in the league.

"I would just say turn on the tape," Pavia said at the NFL combine, pointing to his two seasons at Vanderbilt. "The SEC and the Big Ten probably have the most guys getting drafted in the first (and) second round. So we're playing those guys."

Teammates who played with Pavia agree. Eli Stowers switched to tight end from quarterback while playing with Pavia at New Mexico State before both transferred to Vanderbilt. Stowers said all the talk about the quarterback's height and size boils down to something simple.

"Can the kid play football?" Stowers said at Vanderbilt's pro day. "And Diego was the best player in college football last year. He led the entire country in total yards. I mean, he won 10 games and got us to the point where we had two winning seasons back-to-back after going 2-10 the year before."

Pavia was the AP SEC offensive player of the year after leading Vanderbilt to the first 10-win season in school history in 2025. He completed 71% of his passes, finishing with 3,539 yards. He accounted for 4,401 total yards and 39 touchdowns, including an SEC-best 29 passing, and led Vandy with 862 yards rushing and 10 TDs.

He finished second in the country in total offense, averaging 338.5 yards per game.

Stowers credits Pavia for being the reason the Vanderbilt Commodores believed they could win every game they played.

"He's the best leader I've ever been around, the hardest worker I've been around," Stowers said. "He always cares about everyone around his team, around the facility. I mean, you just watch him on film. The kid is an amazing football player, and he will win you games at any level."

Jordan White snapped the ball to Pavia at Vanderbilt. He said teammates were wowed watching the quarterback on film every day.

"I know every time I snap it to him, a great play's going to be made no matter what it is," White said at the pro day.

Only three quarterbacks 5-10 or shorter have started in the NFL since the league's merger with the AFL in 1970, according to Sportradar.

They are Doug Flutie (66 starts), Bryce Young (44) and Kyler Murray (87) — all listed at 5-10.

In Sportradar's database going back to 1948, only one quarterback shorter than 5-10 ever started. That was 5-9 Eddie LeBaron, nicknamed "The Little General," who started 88 games over 11 NFL seasons between 1952 and 1963.

With Pavia, the SEC's perennial cellar dweller went 7-6 in his first season, including the Commodores' first win over an AP top-five program. Vanderbilt went 10-3 in 2025 with six SEC wins, including four wins over ranked programs, with the Dores ranked as high as No. 9 — their highest ranking in The Associated Press Top 25 since 1937.

Now 24, Pavia has a resume filled with a combined six seasons and plenty of tape for scouts to watch what he actually does on the field.

Tampa Bay talked with Pavia at the Senior Bowl. He talked with the New York Jets at the NFL combine, where he threw for everyone watching. He visited Carolina on April 7, a person familiar with the stop told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the Panthers don't comment on Top 30 visits.

Pavia's confidence stems from what he believes he brings to any team.

"What's true about me is I'm humble and I get my confidence from my process," Pavia said. "And if you saw how much I put into this, you would see where I get my confidence for anything."

Potential 1st-round pick Banks stays grounded but not by fear of flying

BY MARK LONG
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — The NFL draft process has been excruciating for Florida defensive tackle Caleb Banks.

And it has nothing to do with his broken left foot or his cumbersome mobility scooter.

The 6-foot-6, 327-pound Detroit native doesn't like to fly. Not even a little.

Takeoffs, landings, cramped seats, airline food — none of it appeals to the potential first-round draft pick who began his college career at Louisville.

"The first 10 seconds of the flight are like the worst for me," Banks said. "I put my headphones in, listen to some Rod Wave and just flow with it. But it's really, really bad. I can't explain it. It's bad."

He's nonetheless willing to deal with some physical, mental and emotional stress to make his childhood dream of playing in the NFL a reality.

Banks is widely considered a first-round talent, but he cracked the fourth metatarsal in his left foot in February while practicing for the 40-yard dash the night before the NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis.

He felt a pop but thought it was a muscle strain. He kept working and even showed up the next day for position drills. He ran the 40 in 5.04 seconds — faster than seven others at his position — but the pain intensified.

His second attempt was slightly slower and brought more pain. He tried one more drill, realized something was seriously wrong and shut it down because he "didn't want to put anything like that on film."

Tests confirmed what he already suspected — another injury to the same foot that caused him to miss games in 2023 and 2025. He had surgery in early March, his second in six months.

"It wasn't nothing too crazy," said Banks, who expects to be fully healthy by the end of June. "They just went back in and repaired it, put a bigger plate in there, so I'm all good now."

Maybe so. But his injury history could cause NFL teams to pause when considering whether to call his name early in the draft. Banks, though, is taking a positive approach to the setback.

"I don't think it undercuts my value," he said. "I don't think that it did anything detrimental to my draft stock. I don't really think too much about that, you know what I mean? I'm staying grounded."

Banks played 34 collegiate games over five seasons, the first two at Louisville. He was at his best in 2024 with the Gators. He finished with 21 tackles, including 4½ sacks and seven behind the line of scrimmage.

He suggested anyone questioning his ability should watch his performance against Ole Miss in 2024. He was equally dominant in his 2025 season debut against LSU, a game in which he re-injured his foot late and missed the next two months, and in the Senior Bowl in January. He showed up at Florida's pro day last month to cheer on former teammates and mingle with NFL scouts.

"He could easily have just stayed home, done something else, but he decided to be here and show up for the guys," Florida defensive end George Gumbs said. "I feel like that's like a wholesome guy, a great guy and he kind of shows his character. Even though he's going through something, he's still going to show up and support his guys."

It helped that Banks didn't have to get on a plane. He had top-30 visits with Arizona, Atlanta, Baltimore, Denver, Detroit, the Los Angeles Chargers, Kansas City, Tennessee and a few others. Of those, the flight to Baltimore was memorable for all the wrong reasons.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Florida defensive lineman Caleb Banks sacks LSU QB Garrett Nussmeier in 2024. Banks is considered to have first-round talent.

MLB

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	10	7	.588	—
New York	10	8	.556	½
Baltimore	9	9	.500	1½
Toronto	7	10	.412	3
Boston	7	11	.389	3½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	11	8	.579	—
Cleveland	10	9	.526	1
Detroit	9	9	.500	1½
Kansas City	7	11	.389	3½
Chicago	6	12	.333	4½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Athletics	10	8	.556	—
Texas	9	9	.500	1
Los Angeles	9	10	.474	1½
Houston	8	11	.421	2½
Seattle	8	11	.421	2½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	12	7	.632	—
Miami	9	10	.474	3
Philadelphia	8	10	.444	3½
Washington	8	10	.444	3½
New York	7	12	.368	5

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cincinnati	11	7	.611	—
Pittsburgh	11	7	.611	—
St. Louis	10	8	.556	1
Milwaukee	9	8	.529	1½
Chicago	9	9	.500	2

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	14	4	.778	—
San Diego	12	6	.667	2
Arizona	11	8	.579	3½
Colorado	6	12	.333	8
San Francisco	6	12	.333	8

Wednesday's games

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

Thursday's games

Washington at Pittsburgh
San Francisco at Cincinnati
Kansas City at Detroit
L.A. Angels at N.Y. Yankees
Toronto at Milwaukee
Tampa Bay at Chicago White Sox
Texas at Athletics
Baltimore at Cleveland
Colorado at Houston
Seattle at San Diego

Friday's games

N.Y. Mets (Senga 0-2) at Chicago Cubs (Cabrera 1-0)
Baltimore (Bassitt 0-2) at Cleveland (Bibee 0-2)
Atlanta (Pérez 0-1) at Philadelphia (Walker 1-2)
San Francisco (Webb 1-2) at Washington (Littell 0-1)
Tampa Bay (Martinez 0-0) at Pittsburgh (Chandler 0-1)
Kansas City (Wacha 2-0) at N.Y. Yankees (Schlittler 2-1)
Milwaukee (Harrison 1-1) at Miami (Junk 0-2)
Detroit (Mize 1-1) at Boston (Suarez 1-1)
Cincinnati (Williamson 1-1) at Minnesota (Ryan 2-1)
St. Louis (Leahy 1-2) at Houston (Bolton 0-1)
L.A. Dodgers (Glasnow 1-0) at Colorado (Feltner 1-1)
San Diego (Márquez 2-1) at L.A. Angels (Soriano 4-0)
Chicago White Sox (Martin 2-1) at Athletics (Civale 2-0)
Texas at Seattle (deGrom 1-0) at Seattle (Gilbert 1-2)
Toronto (Lauer 1-2) at Arizona (Soroka 3-0)

Saturday's games

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

Money, tech closing gap with college

By David Brandt
Associated Press



SARA NEVIS/AP

Athletics first baseman Nick Kurtz won AL Rookie of the Year last season, just a year after he completed his college career at Wake Forest and was selected fourth overall in the 2024 draft.

PHOENIX — There was a time in the not-so-distant past that many Major League Baseball teams looked at their college baseball counterparts with a degree of skepticism. There were the metal bats, the shorter schedule and a sense that nothing could replace the seasoning that came with years of grinding through professional baseball's minor leagues.

Not anymore.

Thanks to a variety of factors — especially money and technology — the MLB and NCAA versions of baseball have never been more similar. There's also been more movement between the two versions of the sport in recent years.

It's part of the reason Tony Vitello is now the manager of the San Francisco Giants despite never working or playing for a professional organization before he was hired — a first in MLB history. It's also a factor in why Athletics slugger Nick Kurtz was the AL Rookie of the Year in 2025 barely one year after finishing a decorated college career at Wake Forest.

"The college game has definitely taken a bigger step toward the pro game — mainly because of the almighty dollar," said Arizona State coach Willie Bloomquist, who played 14 big league seasons. "Essentially what's happened, the Power 4 Conferences are basically the minor leagues."

A's general manager David Forst — who selected Kurtz with the No. 4 overall pick in the 2024 draft — said the first baseman's quick rise through the minors made him realize how good college baseball had become. Kurtz needed just 210 plate appearances in the minors before dominating MLB pitching, batting .290 with 36 homers and 86 RBIs over 117 games in 2025.

"There's no doubt that top-level college baseball is High-A or Double-A now. It's really close," Forst said. "I never would have imagined a player like Nick Kurtz coming to the big leagues for us 11 months after he was drafted.

"That was unthinkable when I first started doing this. The timeline is squashed because these guys are coming out of college so ready, so physically advanced. Some of them — frankly — don't need the minor league at-bats they used to need."

One reason the college game has improved so much is an influx of cash. Coaching salaries have exploded over the past few decades: LSU's Jay Johnson is at the top of the scale at more than $3 million per year while Mississippi State's Brian O'Connor is second at $2.9 million.

Those are outliers, but it's not uncommon for power conference coaches to make more than $1 million.

The highest paid MLB managers make around $8 million per season, but top assistants like pitching and hitting coaches usually make six figures.

The advent of NIL money has also made playing college baseball more lucrative, even if payouts lag well behind their football and basketball counterparts. There's also the fact that top-level NCAA programs are investing in technology.

"We have one of the better pitching labs on the West Coast," Bloomquist said. "I think it would rival a lot of professional organizations. From a data standpoint, it's all trickled down to the college level."

After retiring as a player, Bloomquist worked in the Arizona Diamondbacks' front office before getting hired by the Sun Devils. His pitching coach — Jeremy Accardo — spent 18 years in professional baseball as a player and coach.

Bloomquist said MLB teams have become more comfortable trusting NCAA programs to develop professional talent instead of taking the risk of drafting an unproven 18-year-old straight out of high school. He added that it's probably one of the reasons that MLB felt comfortable cutting 40 minor league affiliates back in 2020.

In the 2025 MLB draft, 56 college players were selected in the top 90 picks.

"These guys trust (college) programs," Bloomquist said. "They say, 'We'll just watch them in college in three years at a Power 4 program, see how they development and then we'll go get them.'"

Georgia baseball coach Wes Johnson is another who has bounced between MLB and NCAA with success at both levels. He was hired as the pitching coach for the Minnesota Twins and had a strong 3½-year run between 2019 and 2022 before going back to the college game. He helped develop 2025 NL Cy Young Award winner Paul Skenes as LSU's pitching coach before landing the head job with the Bulldogs.

Johnson said there's little doubt the college and pro games have never been more similar, but added that there are still real differences for players and coaches. The biggest is the schedule.

In college, the condensed schedule makes all 56 regular-season games feel huge. A three-game losing streak is the end of the world. In professional baseball, it's just a small bump in the road.

"With the Twins, we played 33 spring games, then played 162 in the season and then made the playoffs," Johnson said. "It's every day there. ... We won 101 games in 2019 (in the regular season). That means we only lost 61 games.

"But that's the most I've ever lost in my life in one year."

San Francisco Giants third baseman Matt Chapman played in college at Cal State Fullerton before becoming a five-time Gold Glove winner the big leagues. Even though there are some differences — like many more native Spanish speakers in professional baseball — he wasn't worried about Vitello's transition.

"Winning baseball looks the same," Chapman said. "It's pitching and defense, knowing how to run the bases and then managing personalities. He has a lot of experience with that."

Tigers, McGonigle agree to 8-year, $150M extension

Associated Press

DETROIT — Detroit Tigers rookie Kevin McGonigle became the latest young player to get a big money deal, agreeing Wednesday to an eight-year, $150 million contract that starts in 2027.

A 21-year-old infielder, McGonigle had four hits in his major league debut March 26 and entered Thursday hitting .313 with one homer, eight RBIs and a .421 on-base percentage in 18 games.

McGonigle is the fourth top prospect to get a big-money deal since late March following a nine-year, $140 million contract for 19-year-old Pittsburgh shortstop Konnor Griffin, an eight-year, $95 million agreement for 20-year-old Seattle shortstop Colt Emerson and an eight-year, $50.75 million pact for 21-year-old Milwaukee shortstop Cooper Pratt.



McGonigle

McGonigle has a one-year contact for 2026 paying the $780,000 minimum while in the major leagues and $127,100 while in the minors.

His new deal calls for a $14 million signing bonus and salaries of $1 million next year, $7 million in 2028, $16 million in 2029, $21 million in 2030, $22 million in 2031 and $23 million each in 2032, 2033 and 2034.

Escalators could increase his salaries to $25 million in 2032, $26 million in 2033 and $28 million in 2034. He would get a $5 million assignment bonus each time he is traded.

His deal covers the first three seasons after he would have been eligible for free agency.

McGonigle was selected by the Tigers 37th overall in the 2023 amateur draft out of Monsignor Bonner and Archbishop Prendergast High School in Drexel Hill, Pa.

He has reached base in 14 consecutive starts and 16 of 17 games. He is one of only six players in the majors with more walks (12) than strikeouts (10) among players with at least 12 walks.

COLLEGE

Bethune-Cookman low-cost baseball runs through SEC



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

Bethune-Cookman's Andrey Martinez had a home run and two doubles in Tuesday's win over No. 7 Florida.

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Bethune-Cookman plays in the second-weakest baseball conference in Division I, its team runs on a shoestring budget and its home games draw an average of 87 fans.

And the powerful big-money programs of the Southeastern Conference should want no part of the Wildcats right now.

The small private school in Daytona Beach, Fla., is the pride of historically Black colleges and universities members after going on the road and knocking off a nationally ranked SEC team two weeks in a row.

Bethune-Cookman posted a 13-7 victory Tuesday night against Florida, No. 7 in the Baseball America ratings. That followed a 10-7 win over defending national champion LSU, which was No. 24 by D1Baseball.com when they met April 7.

While college baseball observers look at the wins as upsets, eighth-year coach Jonathan Hernandez would prefer his players not.

"Our program is playing high-caliber baseball right now," he said, "and it's not new to the program."

The Wildcats returned almost their entire lineup from a year ago, when they won the Southwestern Athletic Conference Tournament to earn an NCAA regional bid for the first time under Hernandez. They're 26-11 overall after beating the Gators and in a three-way tie for first in the SWAC at 12-3.

The 40-year-old Hernandez said his goal is not for Bethune-Cookman just to make the NCAA Tournament, but to win when it gets there. He knows the odds are stacked against him.

While the SEC programs his team just beat operate with budgets in the millions of dollars, his runs on a just a few hundred thousand. Hernandez has a skeletal staff, so he arranges team travel and meals himself, and even conducts the mandatory pregame bat testing that's typically done by an administrator.

Hernandez has 13 scholarships, more than the NCAA limit of 11.7 that was in place prior to this year but far from the current maximum of 34.

Hernandez said university leaders have told him there would soon be some money available for revenue sharing with players. In the meantime, there's opportunities for them to earn money through name, image and likeness — "just enough for some guys to buy groceries or a tank of gas," he said.

The program's bottom line, according to Hernandez: "We have to think outside the box because we can't afford the box."

Hernandez's roster-building strategy relies not on the transfer portal, but on a pipeline of players who come from junior colleges via other countries. Bethune-Cookman has a total of 11 players from Aruba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia and the Dominican Republic in addition to 24 Americans, including 22 from Florida.

"When it comes to international baseball," Hernandez said, "we're viewed as the Florida, as the Miami, as the big program, so to speak, especially in Latin America."

Andrey Martinez, who homered and doubled twice in the win over Florida, comes from Colombia and was among five non-American players in the lineup. Justin Morales, who pitched one-hit relief over the last 2⅔ innings, is from Aruba and pitched for the Netherlands in the World Baseball Classic.

More opportunities against power-conference opponents await. The Wildcats play nationally ranked Big 12 contender UCF home and away over the next month.

"As long as we play clean defense and have timely hitting and put our guys in successful positions, that's pretty much what our guys base everything on," Hernandez said. "It's obviously big playing against LSU and Florida and the midweek gantlet that we go through. The big thing is having the confidence to compete and play at a high level, which they've done."

NCAA urges further study of age-based eligibility change

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The NCAA confirmed Wednesday that it is exploring a move to an age-based eligibility model that would give athletes a window of five years to compete in Division I starting immediately after their high school graduation or 19th birthday, whichever comes first.

The Division I Cabinet discussed the possibility at meetings that concluded Wednesday, but did not take a formal position. The Cabinet supports having NCAA staff continue to discuss the idea with other stakeholders to gather feedback.

The Cabinet said the new model would include possible exceptions for circumstances such as pregnancy, military service and religious missions.

The age-based model is similar to an idea included in an executive order issued by President Donald Trump on April 3.



JESSICA TOBIAS/AP

Baylor center James Nnaji enrolled after the Detroit Pistons drafted him in the second round, but he had never signed an NBA contract.

Currently, athletes generally are allowed four seasons of competition over five years with no age restrictions.

The possibility of an age-based model comes after numerous athletes have challenged NCAA eligibility rules in lawsuits with the hope of extending their college careers and ability to earn money through revenue sharing and name, image and likeness deals.

During its meetings, the Cabinet approved changes to preenrollment eligibility rules, including one that would bar athletes who have entered and remained in a professional sports draft from competing in college.

One of the rules requires prospects to withdraw from opt-in professional league drafts, including the NBA draft, to bring precollege enrollment draft rules in line with postcollege enrollment draft rules. Men's ice hockey and baseball would not be affected because athletes don't opt in to those sports' drafts.

The change came after two basketball players, Alabama's Charles Bediako and Baylor's James Nnaji, played in college this season after entering the 2023 NBA draft.

Bediako played two seasons at Alabama and entered the draft. He wasn't selected but played three years in the G League, the NBA's minor league. He played in five games this past season before the Alabama Supreme Court upheld a ruling that made him ineligible.

Nnaji was selected by the Detroit Pistons in the second round. He played professionally overseas before he enrolled as a freshman at Baylor in December. He was granted eligibility because he had never signed an NBA contract or played in the G League. He would be ineligible in 2026-27 under the new rules.

In other changes, athletes are allowed to sign with agents prior to enrolling for purposes other than name, image and likeness and are allowed to accept prize money in their respective sports without impacting eligibility.

NBA PLAYOFFS

Group effort earned post-Young Hawks berth

By Maura Carey
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Trae Young rose from the bench, shook the hands of his teammates and bid farewell to the 15,993 fans in State Farm Arena midway through the fourth quarter of the Hawks' Jan. 7 win over the Pelicans.

After weeks of anticipation, Atlanta had finalized a deal that sent the four-time NBA All-Star to the Wizards for CJ McCollum and Corey Kispert.

Young, the centerpiece the franchise built around for the past seven seasons, had become synonymous with the Hawks. And his departure was only the first domino to fall.

But when the dust settled after all the transactions, what remained was something different: a group of seven players who had started the season together and eight eager new additions who learned to lean on one another, carrying Atlanta out of play-in purgatory and into an outright playoff berth for the first time since the 2020-21 season.

A selfless, unified group is what coach Quin Snyder knew was the only path forward for a team that had lost its identity amid a revolving door of player acquisitions and exits.

"I think we've had literally about five different iterations of a team," Snyder said, fresh off the trade deadline. "The key thing for us is going to be to continue to grow together."

Snyder was off with his estimation.

Twenty-five different starting lineups have taken the court this season for the Hawks, but heading into a first-round series against the Knicks, the April version is the most cohesive to date.



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Atlanta Hawks guard Nickeil Alexander-Walker celebrates with teammates after making a shot during the first half against the Houston Rockets in Houston on March 20.

A 13-2 winning streak in March, which brought the Hawks from the familiar cusp of the play-in tournament into the mix for the No. 5 or No. 6 seeds, proved that to be true.

Four of the Hawks' starting five embarked on the season together: center Onyeka Okongwu, first-time All-Star Jalen Johnson, reigning Most Improved Player Dyson Daniels and new addition Nickeil Alexander-Walker.

All of them are having career years.

McCollum, acquired in the Young trade, replaced former No. 1 draft pick Zaccharie Risacher in the lineup and brought the veteran presence the team needed. Jonathan Kuminga, when healthy, has established himself as the sixth man.

"The fact that our group has connected the way they have in a short period of time really speaks to those guys in the locker room," Snyder said after the Hawks' April 3 win against the Nets. "They've embraced one another as much as everything. ... We've talked about it a lot, the roles are going to evolve and you're going to have different things that are available to you at different times. As long as we stay connected and play with the pass, good things can happen."

That connection will be tested against a Knicks team that enters the series with a clear advantage in continuity, built around a core that has played together for years, and in some cases, dating back to college.

Atlanta is banking on momentum to challenge New York's long-standing chemistry.

"It takes time to build chemistry. We have a bunch of guys here who are willing to work at things and play basketball the right way," Okongwu said. "I'm proud of that."

"The new guys have been really good for us," Daniels said. "Not just on the floor but in the locker room as well, building chemistry, you know, team meetings, really speaking up. I think our team's just gelling really well at the moment. Guys know their role now. Everyone's out there playing really hard. ... We know what it takes to win."

Snyder often credits the full roster buy-in as the reason for the late-season surge.

"That's who we are," he said. "When we're playing that way and looking for each other, helping each other on the offensive end, whether it's a screen or a pass or running for somebody, that's when we're a more efficient offensive team, and you know, our guys are really making an effort to execute in those situations."

And perhaps most importantly, Snyder added, it's something he's seen few times in his coaching career.

"When you get a group that feels that way and wants to play that way, and is able to put the team in front of themselves individually, I think it's a rare thing."

League: Ball should have been ejected

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

MIAMI — Charlotte's LaMelo Ball should have been ejected for an uncalled flagrant foul when he reached out and tugged on the ankle of Miami's Bam Adebayo, causing a back injury that forced Adebayo out of a play-in tournament game, the NBA said Wednesday.

The league said Ball made "unnecessary and reckless contact" with Adebayo on Tuesday night. Ball was fined $60,000 for the foul and for using profanity in an interview, but he remains eligible to play in the Hornets' elimination game Friday against Orlando.

The flagrant foul from Tuesday's game, if called in real time, would have resulted in Miami being awarded two free throws and possession of the ball.

The Heat wound up losing 127-126 in overtime, ending their season.

The NBA said a flagrant foul, penalty two, was merited. If that had been called, Ball would have been ejected.

Adebayo was hurt early in the second quarter and did not return, leaving Miami without its best player. Ball made the decisive layup for the Hornets in overtime.

While he lauded the way Charlotte played, Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said he felt Ball should have been ejected and wondered how officials Zach Zarba, Curtis Blair and Gediminas Petraitis all missed the incident.

"I don't think that belongs in the game, tripping guys, shenanigans," Spoelstra said. "Curtis was there. It's his responsibility to see that. And if it's not his responsibility, then Zach's got to see it. Somebody's got to see that. He should have been thrown out of the game for that. I don't know him from anyone. There's no place in the game for that."

Per NBA rules, the Heat could not challenge the ruling on the play because no foul was called. Play continued, leaving no opportunity for a replay review.

"The play wasn't whistled in real time," Zarba told a pool reporter.

"Play continued with a fast break. And because play wasn't stopped immediately, and there was no whistle on the play, the window to review the play was closed."

Ball was fined $35,000 for the foul on Adebayo. He was fined $25,000 for using profanity in an on-court postgame interview.

The league did not publicly address a separate incident where Ball struck Charlotte's mascot during the postgame celebration.

Tuesday's play was reminiscent of one during a game at Miami in January 2024, when Ball grabbed at Adebayo's leg as the Heat center was running to the other end of the court. Adebayo stumbled but did not fall.

Scoreboard

Play-in Tournament

Tuesday's games

Charlotte 127, Miami 126, OT
Portland 114, Phoenix 110

Wednesday's games

Philadelphia 109, Orlando 97
Golden State 126, L.A. Clippers 121

Friday's games

Charlotte at Orlando, **AFN-Sports, 1:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 8:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**
Golden State at Phoenix, **AFN-Sports, 4 a.m. Saturday CET, 11 a.m. Saturday JKT**

First round

x-if necessary

Toronto vs. Cleveland

Saturday: at Cleveland, **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Saturday CET, 2 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Monday: at Cleveland
Thursday, April 23: at Toronto
Sunday, April 26: at Toronto
x-Wednesday, April 29: at Cleveland
x-Friday, May 1: at Toronto
x-Sunday, May 3: at Cleveland

Minnesota vs. Denver

Saturday: at Denver, **AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. Saturday CET, 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Monday: at Denver
Thursday, April 23: at Minnesota
Saturday, April 25: at Minnesota
x-Monday, April 27: at Denver
x-Thursday, April 30: at Minnesota
x-Saturday, May 2: at Denver

Atlanta vs. New York

Saturday: at New York, **AFN-Sports, 12 a.m. Sunday CET, 7 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Monday: at New York
Thursday, April 23: at Atlanta
Saturday, April 25: at Atlanta
x-Tuesday, April 28: at New York
x-Thursday, April 30: at Atlanta
x-Saturday, May 2: at New York

Houston vs. L.A. Lakers

Saturday: at L.A. Lakers, **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Sunday CET, 9:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Tuesday, April 21: at L.A. Lakers
Friday, April 24: at Houston
Sunday, April 26: at Houston
x-Wednesday, April 29: at L.A. Lakers
x-Friday, May 1: at Houston
x-Sunday, May 3: at L.A. Lakers

Boston vs. Philadelphia

Sunday: at Boston, **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Sunday CET, 2 a.m. Monday JKT**
Tuesday, April 21: at Boston
Friday, April 24: at Philadelphia
Sunday, April 26: at Philadelphia
x-Tuesday, April 28: at Boston
x-Thursday, April 30: at Philadelphia
x-Saturday, May 2: at Boston

Oklahoma City vs. TBD

Sunday: at Oklahoma City, **AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. Sunday CET, 4:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
Wednesday, April 22: at Oklahoma City
Saturday, April 25: at TBD
Monday, April 27: at TBD
x-Wednesday, April 29: at Oklahoma City
x-Friday, May 1: at TBD
x-Sunday, May 3: at Oklahoma City

Detroit vs. TBD

Sunday: at Detroit, **AFN-Sports, 12:30 a.m. Monday CET, 7:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
Wednesday, April 22: at Detroit
Saturday, April 25: at TBD
Monday, April 27: at TBD
x-Wednesday, April 29: at Detroit
x-Friday, May 1: at TBD
x-Sunday, May 3: at Detroit

Portland vs. San Antonio

Sunday: at San Antonio, **AFN-Sports, 3 a.m. Monday CET, 10 a.m. Monday JKT**
Tuesday, April 21: at San Antonio
Friday, April 24: at Portland
Sunday, April 26: at Portland
x-Tuesday, April 28: at San Antonio
x-Thursday, April 30: at Portland
x-Saturday, May 2: at San Antonio

NBA



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Oklahoma City Thunder guard Jared McCain drives past Nuggets forwards David Roddy, left, and Zeke Nnaji in the second half on April 10 in Denver. McCain has been a key contributor off the bench.

Road to title goes through OKC as Thunder seek repeat

By Cliff Brunt
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma City Thunder know how vital homecourt advantage can be in securing a championship.

They won Game 7 at home in the Western Conference finals last year against Denver and Game 7 in the NBA Finals at home against Indiana to win the title. They clinched the Western Conference finals series against Minnesota at home in Game 5.

This season, Oklahoma City held off San Antonio in the race for homecourt advantage throughout the playoffs. Thanks to a league-best 64-18 record, the road to the NBA title once again goes through the Thunder, reigning league MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and the Paycom Center, where the upper levels are known as "Loud City."

"It's extremely important," OKC guard/forward Jalen Williams said of earning homecourt. "Otherwise, I don't think everybody would be trying to get the records and stuff. It's just one of those things. Last year it saved us a couple times. ... If we don't have home court advantage, those can turn out totally different. So, home court is extremely important."

The Thunder will host Game 1 of their first-round series Sunday against Phoenix or Golden State.

Oklahoma City says one of the keys to its success has been to mentally separate this season from the last. The Thunder are not looking to repeat — they are trying merely to win this season's championship. Coach Mark Daigneault said the detachment from last year's title has a lot to do with why the team was so successful this season.

"Last year's championship was great," Daigneault said. "We earned it. No one can ever take it from us. And we'll have the rest of our lives to be the 2025 champions. But it's also over, and completely mutually exclusive to this year's playoffs."

There are plenty of reasons to believe this run will be similar to the last one. OKC was fifth in the league in scoring (119 points per game), second in scoring defense (107.9) and first with an 11.1-point average victory margin.

Gilgeous-Alexander is well-positioned to repeat as MVP after averaging 31.1 points and 6.6 assists per game this season. He shot 55.3% from the field and 38.6% from 3-point range.

Chet Holmgren missed 50 games in the regular season last year. This time, he was mostly healthy and emerged as an All-Star. He averaged 17.1 points and 8.9 rebounds while finishing second in the league with 1.9 blocks per game.

Williams, an All-Star last season, was injured much of this season. He has returned to form and has averaged 17.1 points per game this season. Center Isaiah Hartenstein and guard Lu Dort remained steady starters.

The team's greatest strength might lie in its bench. Ajay Mitchell, Isaiah Joe, Alex Caruso, Aaron Wiggins, Jaylin Williams, Cason Wallace, Kenrich Williams and Jared McCain are significant contributors. Of the Thunder players who participated in at least 30 games, 13 averaged at least 15 minutes per contest and 10 averaged at least eight points.

The Thunder added McCain in a mid-season trade with Philadelphia, and he has averaged 10.4 points in 18 minutes per game since the deal.

Daigneault showed willingness to go deep into his bench and shift lineups during last season's playoffs. He noted that he moved Wallace into the starting lineup during the NBA Finals last year, and said reserves such as Kenrich Williams, who is 13th on the team in minutes played this year, had key moments during last season's playoffs.

"We're going to just try to find the best thing," Daigneault said. "But when you have a deep team, that's sometimes the best thing. We've got a lot of guys we believe in, and we assume that they're all ready to do whatever it takes to help the team at any time. And there's so many examples of that from last year's playoffs."

Doncic, Cunningham officially eligible for awards after appeals

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press



Doncic



Cunningham

The Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic and Detroit Pistons' Cade Cunningham will be eligible for awards such as MVP and All-NBA this season despite falling short of the 65-game minimum, the league and the National Basketball Players Association said Thursday.

Doncic played in 64 games and Cunningham played in 63. But the league and the union both agreed that each should be on the ballot based on the "extraordinary circumstances provision" in the collective bargaining agreement.

Doncic — who is one of the favorites to contend for MVP honors after winning the league's scoring title — missed two games to attend the birth of his daughter in Slovenia. Cunningham missed 12 games as a result of a collapsed lung that was diagnosed March 17.

"The NBA and NBPA agreed that, taking into account the totality of the circumstances for Cunningham and Doncic, each player qualified for awards," the league and the union said in a statement.

The statuses of Doncic and Cunningham were a major topic toward the end of the season. Denver coach David Adelman said last week that he hopes the 65-game rule is changed, somehow, this summer. He said if players like Nikola Jokic can play 64 games, never wanting to come out, and not be award-eligible, then something is wrong.

"That's not the spirit of what that rule is," Adelman said.

Strength: Several players stepped up to help Celtics

FROM PAGE 32

No. 1 option and leader, taking his game to new levels on both the offensive and defensive ends. He posted career-high averages in points (28.7), rebounds (6.9) and assists (5.1).

He also got lots of support.

Derrick White struggled offensively at times but remained a stalwart on defense, leading all NBA guards in contested shots (550) while ranking second among guards in blocks per game (1.3).

Payton Pritchard adjusted his game, first as a starter and then by returning to the bench role that earned him Sixth Man of the Year honors last season. Sam Hauser remained a reliable threat from the 3-point line, and Neemias Queta grew his game in leaps in his first year as a starter.

There were some questions about how Tatum's return March 6 would affect the flow of a group that had learned to adjust and thrive without the sixth-time All-Star.

Instead, Tatum has reacclimated himself in short order, averaging 21.8 points, 10 rebounds and 5.1 assists in 16 games.

"Quite honestly I think it's impressive that he's gotten back to the level that he's at as fast as he's done it, while also keeping the main thing the main thing, which is remaining healthy and giving us the best chance to win every night," Mazzulla said. "It's a credit to him."

One of the final hurdles to Tatum feeling "back" came April 9, when Boston visited the New York Knicks in his first game at Madison Square Garden since suffering his injury. He said the past month has strengthened a love for basketball he feared during rehab he might lose.

"You go through ups and downs mentally when you go through an injury, especially the one that I had," Tatum said. "Moments of doubt or things like that. But there's definitely a sense of gratitude."

For Brown, it's also put into perspective just how unlikely his nine seasons playing alongside Tatum have been.

Famed Celtics duo Bill Russell and Bob Cousy played together for seven seasons. Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant played together for eight.

"I think it's been a historic run. We were able to deliver a championship in 2024. Unfortunately, we had opportunities in the past that got away from us, but we've been right there for a long amount of time. We've gained a lot of experience," Brown said.

Brown also has an eye on bringing more trophies to Boston.

"I'm still improving. I'm still getting better. I'm still learning. I'm still growing," he said. "I feel like I'm entering my prime and I'm excited to maximize my potential and then take advantage of every opportunity I have to win and just be a part of a team and be a part of something special."

NBA

Warriors evoke golden era in comeback win

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Stephen Curry hit seven 3-pointers while scoring 35 points, holding every fan at Intuit Dome in his thrall with another dazzling display of his unmatched shooting skill.

In the fourth quarter of an elimination game, Draymond Green bodied up to Kawhi Leonard and utterly shut down one of the greatest scorers of their generation.

Curry and Green have already done it all and won it all during their 14 years and four championships together. The Golden State Warriors' visit to the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday night was merely a play-in game for the right to travel to Phoenix after a trying regular season that ended with Golden State sitting eight games below .500 and in 10th place in the Western Conference.

And yet both the style and substance of this 126-121 comeback victory indelibly evoked the brilliance of the Warriors' golden era.

The few remaining men who have been around for the whole ride were thrilled to travel back in time.

"For one night, we're us. We're champions again," coach Steve Kerr said. "And I know that may sound crazy to everybody out there. It's a play-in game. I don't care. Just absolutely beautiful to watch."

Curry put it even more simply: "That's what you live for right there."

Golden State overcame a 13-point deficit in the fourth quarter behind Curry, who scored 27 points in a dominant second half. While he took care of the offense, Green took the defensive lead with a smothering effort against Leonard, who couldn't score in the fourth quarter until the Clippers were cooked.



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, right, and Los Angeles Clippers guard Kris Dunn chase after a loose ball during the second half of a play-in tournament game on Wednesday in Inglewood, Calif. The Warriors defeated the Clippers 126-121.

The Warriors also got stellar contributions from two newcomers. Kristaps Porzingis had 20 points, five rebounds and five assists with an exciting series of big plays — and 39-year-old Al Horford shocked the entire arena when he hit four 3-pointers in the fourth quarter of just his third game since missing a month with a strained right calf.

Curry broke a tie with his final 3-pointer, falling into the front row of Clippers fans while the ball pierced the net with 50 seconds left. The superstar was playing just his fifth game since returning from a 27-game absence with a knee injury, and he demonstrated exactly why he rejected any notion that he should shut himself down for the summer.

"This is what you work all year for, all summer, offseason," Curry said. "We're not guaranteed a (playoff) series yet, but these nights make everything worth it, because you feel the anxiety of having to perform when the lights are bright, do-or-die game. ... Considering how our season has gone, all the injuries and all that, for us to play the way we did tonight was special."

Green didn't score in the fourth quarter, but the Warriors credited their defensive stopper for stifling Leonard, whose play for Toronto in the 2019 NBA Finals is still painful in the minds of Golden State fans.

With Green hounding his every move, Leonard got only two shots in the fourth quarter. Leonard finished with 21 points while having a fraction of his usual impact on Clippers games.

Leonard called Green a "Hall of Fame defender. It was hard to even get shots up."

Green thought the Warriors could be a title contender going into this season, but it didn't happen. Jimmy Butler went down for the season in January, Moses Moody was sidelined in March, and Golden State finished the regular season on a 5-15 skid to its worst record in a full regular season since 2012.

But after knocking off Los Angeles, Golden State is one win away from making the playoffs anyway. Even for the Warriors who have already won everything, the chance to do the improbable is irresistible.

"I know we're not satisfied," Curry said. "We want to go to Phoenix and guarantee a playoff series against OKC. That's the next goal, but for us to lock in on just 48 minutes, figure out how to get a win, knowing that the game was not going to be perfect, we were all pretty committed to that. The eight guys that got on the floor all had a part in making it happen."

After boost from Embiid, Maxey carries 76ers into playoffs

BY DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tyrese Maxey and his 76ers teammates sent feelers out to Joel Embiid about the recovering All-Star center attending the play-in game.

Embiid had been absent since his emergency appendectomy last week and the Sixers thought it would lift his spirits if he was part of their playoff push. Unsure of his answer hours ahead of tipoff Wednesday night against Orlando, Embiid surprised his teammates by walking into the locker room about an hour before the game.

He provided an emotional boost to Maxey and the Sixers just by showing up.

"I gave him a big hug," Maxey said. "I was glad to see him."

Maxey took over in the fourth quarter, much the way Embiid did in so many crucial games over the years.

Maxey scored 31 points, and V.J. Edgecombe added 19 points and 11 rebounds in the Sixers' 109-97 win over the Magic that gave Philadelphia the No. 7 seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs.



MATT SLOCUM/AP

Philadelphia 76ers' Tyrese Maxey moves down the court during a play-in tournament game on Wednesday in Philadelphia.

The Sixers begin their first-round series Sunday at Boston.

Maxey, named an All-Star starter for the first time in his career, scored seven straight points late in the fourth to help the Sixers put away the Magic.

"It was just me deciding I wanted to be aggressive," Maxey said. "I had some really good looks that I missed early in the third, that I made in the first half. So I was just really confident I was going to make some shots."

Maxey — the Sixers' career 3-point leader — hit three 3s and made 11 of 25 shots as the Sixers made the playoffs a year after they went 24-58.

"He's been doing a bit of that lately as far as understanding we need kind of his greatness at the right time," coach Nick Nurse said.

The Sixers had leaned on Embiid's greatness over the years — but also came to understand that playing without the oft-injured former MVP is part of the deal in Philadelphia.

The team hasn't given a timetable for Embiid's return from his appendectomy. The two-time scoring champion sat in on a video session Wednesday and watched the game from the bench.

Maxey is going to need to excel for the Sixers to have a shot against the Celtics.

Sixers fans chanted "We want Boston!" in the waning moments, but it might be best to pay heed to series history — the 76ers have lost their last six playoff series against the Celtics.

Philadelphia last topped Boston in a series in 1982. That's a worry for the next practice.

Maxey walked off the court to a roaring crowd — including Allen Iverson — and teammates swarmed him to show their appreciation.

"I promised some guys we were going to get in the playoffs," Maxey said.

One bright spot out of last season's dismal finish was getting the No. 3 pick in the draft.

The Sixers — who drafted a string of busts during their lengthy rebuild — appear to have made a wise move by selecting Edgecombe out of Baylor.

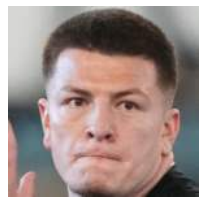
The 20-year-old opened the season with 34 points against Boston, the third-most points for an NBA player in his first game. He was just as impressive in his first play-in game with 19 points and 11 rebounds.

Edgecombe was whistled for taunting after a dunk in the third quarter and officials had to separate the teams.

"I was tweaking a little bit tonight," Edgecombe said.

"I guess it happens when you let a kid play such a high-intensity game. I was out there having fun. If I've got to play wild for us to win, I'll play wild."

SPORTS



Measuring up

Pavia remains confident in face of criticism over height ›› NFL Draft, Page 26

NBA PLAYOFFS

Returning to full strength

With Brown leading and Tatum back, Celtics whole again and title contenders





PHOTOS BY AARON GASH, LEFT, AND STEVEN SENNE/AP

Many predicted Boston would struggle with Jayson Tatum, right, out for most of the year with a ruptured Achilles tendon. But behind the leadership of Jaylen Brown, left, the Celtics remained contenders and now have Tatum back as they enter the playoffs Sunday.

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

BOSTON — The Boston Celtics heard loud and clear what everyone what was saying about them before this season.

They heard all the predictions about how they would take a step back from the NBA's top tier with Jayson Tatum rehabbing from the ruptured Achilles tendon he suffered in the playoffs last May.

They heard the narrative that this would be a throwaway year, likely ending with Boston in the draft lottery, after an offseason shakeup that included the departures of key 2024 championship contributors Jrue Holiday, Kristaps Porzingis and Al Horford.

So when the Celtics last month notched their 50th win for the fifth consecutive season, All-Star Jaylen Brown didn't hold back in ripping that narrative into confetti.

"50 wins in a gap year," Brown posted on X, along with a shamrock emoji.

Enough said.

Now, as Boston prepares for its fourth straight playoff appearance under coach Joe Mazzulla as the Eastern Conference's No. 2 seed, it is whole again following Tatum's return last month. And the rest of the NBA is acknowledging what the Celtics have believed for some time: The sky remains the limit for this team.

Though Brown, who seized the leadership reins during an MVP-caliber season, acknowledged that he was surprised "a little" at least about just how well the cards have fallen for this group.

"Obviously, my mentality was come in and compete. But the way the group merged together as quickly as it did — it didn't take us long. I thought it would take us a little longer," Brown said. "We were trending upward post-All-Star break. But we kind of figured it out maybe the first 10 or 15 games. We started clicking and gelling. That just doesn't happen."

With Tatum sidelined the first 65 games, Brown flourished as the

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Central powerhouse teams will meet early in playoffs ›› NHL, Page 25