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STARS AND STRIPES®

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Stars and Stripes

Village elder Haji Mohammad Zahir, left, escorts 1st Lt. Kyle McCoy, right, Capt. John Miller, and an Afghan translator along a road in Kvost-Ab, a village near Kandahar Air Base in 2002. Advocates say Afghans who have aided U.S. forces should still be given a chance for visas despite the Trump administration pause after two National Guard troops were shot by an Afghan national in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday.

Advocates defend Afghan visas

Many say those who assisted US forces should still be given chance

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

Afghans who assisted U.S. forces during the 20-year Afghan War still should be given the chance to enter the country, advocates say, condemning the State Department's decision to stop issuing visas after the arrest of an Afghan national accused of shooting two National Guard members in Washington last week.

The shooting, which killed Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, and critically wounded Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, has renewed scrutiny of a Biden-era



DAVID INTRIAGO/U.S. Marine Corps

Marines distribute new backpacks with school supplies to Afghan children at Fort Pickett, Va., in 2022.

program to evacuate Afghans who provided assistance to U.S. diplomats and military personnel in Afghanistan.

Following a social media post from President Donald Trump where he vowed to "permanently pause" migration from "Third World Countries," the State Department on Friday said that it immediately would stop issuing visas for individuals traveling on Afghan passports, which includes those applying for special immigrant visas as part of the relocation program.

SEE VISAS ON PAGE 4

Trump plays down threat on airspace in Venezuela

BY JOSH WINGROVE
Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump said Sunday that people shouldn't read much into a social media post where he said Venezuelan airspace should be considered closed.

His post from Saturday morning, addressed to airlines and "Drug Dealers," added to jitters in the region about possible U.S. strikes on Venezuelan territory.

"Don't read anything into it," he told reporters Sunday aboard Air Force One. He added, "We consider Venezuela to be not a very friendly country."

The U.S. is enacting a widening campaign in the Caribbean, one that began with fatal strikes on boats in international waters and continued when the U.S. deployed additional Navy ships, including an aircraft carrier, to the region, adding to speculation it may be about to strike Venezuela.

Trump confirmed he held a phone call recently with President Nicolas Maduro but declined to describe how it went. "I wouldn't say it went well or badly," he said.

He also downplayed concerns from Republican lawmakers about a potentially illegal fatal strike on a damaged boat in the Caribbean.

The Defense Department is facing mounting questions after a Washington Post report that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered a fatal strike on boats and demanded specifically that those strikes kill everyone on board. That led to a second strike on the damaged hull of a boat on Sept. 2 to kill two people wounded in the first strike, the Post reported.

"I'm going to find out about it, but Pete said he did not order the

SEE THREAT ON PAGE 5

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Trump commutes sentence for former private equity exec

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

HALLANDALE BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump has commuted the prison sentence of former investment manager David Gentile, who was convicted of defrauding investors — the latest in a series of clemency actions Trump has taken in white-collar criminal cases.

Gentile had reported to prison on Nov. 14, just days before Trump commuted his sentence, according to a White House official who

requested anonymity to provide details of the clemency action.

Gentile had been the CEO and co-founder of GPB Capital, which had raised \$1.6 billion in capital to acquire companies in the auto, retail, health care and housing sectors. He had been sentenced to seven years in prison after an August 2024 conviction for his role in what the Justice Department at the time described as a scheme to defraud more than 10,000 investors by misrepresenting the performance of three private equity funds. But the

White House official said GPB Capital had disclosed to investors in 2015 that their capital might go to pay dividends to other investors, which the White House said undercut claims that the company had engaged in a “Ponzi” scheme in which new investments are used to reimburse previous investors.

The government has agreed to no restitution in the criminal case, though various civil cases are currently handling the pursuit of repayments and damages to investors.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates												
Euro costs (Dec 2.)	0.84	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8022									
British pound (Dec. 2)	\$1.29	Thailand (Baht)	31.93									
Japanese yen (Dec. 2)	152.00	Turkey (NewLira)	42.4429									
South Korean won (Dec. 2)	1430.00											
Commercial rates												
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744	(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 <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>7.00</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>4.00</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>3.88</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>3.82</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.66</td></tr></table>	Prime rate	7.00	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.00	Federal funds market rate	3.88	3-month bill	3.82	30-year bond	4.66
Prime rate	7.00											
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.00											
Federal funds market rate	3.88											
3-month bill	3.82											
30-year bond	4.66											
Britain (Pound)	1.3248											
Canada (Dollar)	1.3962											
China (Yuan)	7.0751											
Denmark (Krone)	6.4206											
Egypt (Pound)	47.4724											
Euro	0.8597											
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7886											
Hungary (Forint)	327.251											
Israel (Shekel)	3.2569											
Japan (Yen)	154.993											
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3063											
Norway (Krone)	10.1020											
Philippines (Peso)	58.503											
Poland (Zloty)	3.6365											
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7486											
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2945											
South Korea (Won)	1465.28											

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MILITARY

Seoul: North may grow more hostile in 2026

S. Korea official urges renewed efforts to restart talks

By SETH ROBSON
AND YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

North Korea may grow more hostile next year unless diplomacy resumes, the South's unification minister has warned while urging renewed efforts to restart talks with Pyongyang.

Unification Minister Chung Dong-young delivered the assessment Friday during a session of the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, saying Seoul hopes to mend ties despite rising tensions.

"Based on their movements and indications, it seems more likely that they will strengthen their two states policy," he said of Pyongyang, according to a video of the meeting posted on YouTube.

The minister said South Korea must work to clear confrontation, hostility and hate while restoring

respect, acceptance, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

Chung emphasized that progress depends heavily on coordination with Washington.

"Without the resumption of U.S.-North Korea talks, it's hard to open South Korea-North Korea relations," he said.

Pyongyang has not responded to outreach since early 2023, when it declared inter-Korean ties to be those between "two states hostile to each other."

North Korea's state media on Friday denounced U.S. military activity in the region as "gravely threatening" to "strategic stability" on the peninsula. A series of U.S. and South Korean exercises, it said, encroaches on the North's "sphere of security," according to an unsigned commentary on the Korean Central News Agency

website.

U.S. Forces Korea defended the drills. Joint exercises "ensure the readiness necessary to meet the expectations of those we lead and those we are sworn to protect," according to an email Friday from command spokesman David Kim.

North Korea has carried out a steady run of missile tests this year, including an Oct. 28 launch of a sea-to-surface cruise missile while President Donald Trump was visiting South Korea for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, summit and talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Trump repeatedly expressed willingness to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during the trip, though Kim offered no public response.

Trump and Xi and slated to meet again in Beijing in April.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervises a cruise missile test in this image issued on Feb. 26. KCNA

Japan weighs Philippines missile sales as both eye China threat

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan is considering whether to sell surface-to-air missiles to the Philippines as Tokyo moves to loosen export restrictions and respond to rising security threats in the region, according to a local media report.

Informal discussions between the two U.S. allies have focused on Japan's Type 03 medium-range missile, Kyodo News reported, citing anonymous sources.

The system — also known as Chu-SAM — is deployed on Ishigaki Island at the far end of the Nansei chain, positioned to counter China's growing military activity near Taiwan and in the East China Sea.

The potential sale comes as the Philippine shifts its military focus from counterinsurgency to external defense after a series of confrontations with China over disputed waters. Last month, the Philippine marine corps unveiled its new BrahMos anti-ship missile system, capable of launching from air, land, sea and underwater and carrying conventional warheads up to 660 pounds.

Manila purchased three BrahMos batteries from India for \$320 million in 2022, and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has said the country plans to buy more. The Philippines has also expressed interest in acquiring the Type 03 missiles, which can intercept aircraft and cruise missiles, according to Kyodo.

Japanese troops fired the sys-



BRIAN McELHINEY/Stars and Stripes

Launchers for the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force's Type 03 surface-to-air missile, left, and Type 12 surface-to-ship missile are displayed at Camp Ishigaki on Ishigaki Island, on Sept. 17.

tem in July alongside U.S., Australian, South Korean and Singaporean forces during the Talisman Sabre exercise in Australia.

Air defense systems are a strong candidate for export because they are clearly defensive, said James Brown, an international affairs expert at Temple University's Japan campus.

It would, however, be easier to first provide them to a country where they would be unlikely to be used against China, he told Stars and Stripes by email Monday.

Supplying the weapons to the Philippines would intensify tensions between Japan and China, Brown added.

Tensions have already climbed in recent weeks. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said last month that a Chinese naval blockade or other moves against Taiwan could trigger a Japanese military response, prompting sharp criticism from Beijing.

China considers democratic Taiwan — a former Japanese colony — its own territory and has vowed to reunify it with the mainland, by force if necessary.

"Given the economic harm that China can do to Japan, [Takaichi's] aim will be to take heat out of the relationship, not add to it," Brown said.

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has pledged to work on abolishing long-standing rules that limit defense exports to equipment related to rescue, transport, warning, surveillance and minesweeping.

But obstacles remain, Brown said.

"The first is that the restrictions on defense equipment transfers have yet to be changed," he said. "The government can certainly do this, but, this being 'pacifist' Japan, it will cause pushback from opposition parties, as well as sections of the press and public."

US and Syrian forces find, destroy over 15 ISIS weapons stashes

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — American military forces working alongside their Syrian counterparts last week discovered and destroyed multiple Islamic State militant weapons caches in southern Syria, according to U.S. Central Command.

During multiple airstrikes and controlled detonations, U.S. military personnel from the Combined Joint Task Force — Operation Inherent Resolve worked with Syrian forces in identifying and eliminating more than 15 ISIS weapons storage facilities across the Rif Dimashq province, CENTCOM said in a statement on Sunday.

"This successful operation ensures gains made against ISIS are lasting and the group is not able to regenerate or export terrorist attacks to the U.S. homeland and around the world," Adm. Brad Cooper, CENTCOM commander, said in the statement.

During the operation, conducted Nov. 24-27, U.S. and Syrian forces destroyed more than 130 mortars and rockets, multiple assault rifles, machine guns and anti-tank mines.

They also found and destroyed materials for building improvised explosive devices and illicit drugs, CENTCOM said. The statement did not identify the types of drugs discovered.

"We will remain vigilant and

continue to aggressively pursue ISIS remnants in Syria," Cooper said.

The U.S. has maintained a contingent of military personnel in Syria for more than a decade, establishing the combined joint task force in 2014 as part of efforts to prevent a resurgence of ISIS in the region.

Last week's actions follow an early October strike in Syria by U.S. forces that killed a senior al-Qaida-affiliated attack planner.

Days earlier, Cooper announced that the U.S. was stepping in to help reduce the populations of large detention camps in northeast Syria, thought to be incubators for ISIS indoctrination.

The plan included establishing a new process to speed up the repatriation of nearly 29,000 displaced people at the al-Hol and al-Roj camps, as well as the 9,000 ISIS fighters held in nearby prisons, Cooper told delegates at the United Nations in New York in September.

Over the last year, the U.S. has been working to reduce its footprint in Syria by consolidating bases and eventually cutting the number of American troops stationed there to 1,000, according to a Defense Department Inspector General report to Congress in July.

Stars and Stripes reporters Matthew Adams in Washington, D.C., and Lara Korte in Germany contributed to this report.

MILITARY

Immigration operations ramp up in New Orleans

By Jack Brook, Rebecca Santana and Sara Cline
AP/Report For America

NEW ORLEANS — Around 250 federal border agents were expected to launch a monthslong immigration crackdown on Monday in southeast Louisiana and into Mississippi dubbed “Swamp Sweep.”

The deployment, which aims to arrest 5,000 people, is centered in liberal New Orleans and is the latest federal immigration enforcement operation to target a Democratic-run city as President Donald Trump’s administration pursues its mass deportation agenda.

Border Patrol commander Greg Bovino, who has led aggressive operations in Chicago, Los Angeles and Charlotte, N.C., is expected to helm the campaign.

Many in the greater New Orleans area, particularly in Latino communities, have been on edge since the planned operations were reported last month, even as Republican Gov. Jeff Landry said he welcomes the agents.

The Department of Justice has accused New Orleans of undermining federal immigration enforcement and included it on a list of 18 so-called sanctuary cities. The city’s jail, which has been under long-standing oversight from a federal judge, does not cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement under most circumstances, and its police department views immigration enforcement as

a civil matter outside its jurisdiction.

However, Louisiana’s Republican-dominated Legislature has passed laws to compel New Orleans agencies to align with the Trump administration’s hard-line immigration stance.

In and around New Orleans, some immigration lawyers say they have been inundated with calls from people trying to prepare for the upcoming operation. One immigration lawyer, Miguel Elias, says his firm is conducting many consultations virtually or by telephone because people are too afraid to come in person.

He likens the steps many in the immigrant community are taking to what people do to prepare for a hurricane. Families are stocking up on groceries and making arrangements for friends to take their children to school to limit how frequently they leave the house.

In the days leading up to Border Patrol’s planned operations, businesses have posted signs barring federal agents from entry and grassroots advocacy groups have offered rights-related trainings and workshops on documenting the planned crackdown.

While New Orleans is famous for its blend of cultures, only around 6.7% of its population is foreign-born, though that rises to almost 10% in neighboring metro areas. That’s still well below the national average of 14.3%, according to U.S. census data.



JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/AP

Items lay near a photograph of U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom at a makeshift memorial near the site where she and another National Guard member were shot, Monday in Washington.

Trump invites families of shot Guard members to White House

By Sophia Tareen
Associated Press

President Donald Trump on Sunday said he’s invited the family of a National Guard member fatally shot last week to the White House, saying he spoke to her parents and they were “devastated.”

Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom died after the Wednesday shooting in Washington, D.C., while her seriously injured colleague, Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, remained in critical condition.

The president said he’s discussed a White House visit for the parents of both members of the West Virginia National Guard.

“I said, ‘When you’re ready, because that’s a tough thing, come to the White House. We’re going to honor Sarah,’” Trump told report-

ers. “And likewise with Andrew, recover or not.”

In recent days, local vigils in West Virginia have honored the soldiers, including one Saturday evening at Webster County High School, where Beckstrom attended classes.

“Sarah was the kind of student that teachers hoped for, she carried herself with quiet strength, a contagious smile and a positive energy that lifted people around her,” said Gabriel Markle, the school’s principal. “She was sweet, caring and always willing to help others.”

Beckstrom, 20, and Wolfe, 24 were deployed with the West Virginia National Guard as part of Trump’s aggressive crime-fighting plan that federalized the D.C.

police force.

The hometown crowd, seated in bleachers and folding chairs, lit candles as they heard from clergy and Gov. Patrick Morrisey.

Wolfe, of Martinsburg, entered service in February 2019. He had graduated from Musselman High School in 2019, according to Berkeley County Schools.

Calling Beckstrom a “favorite daughter of Webster County,” he said he quickly learned about her reputation as someone with a big heart who loved to serve others.

Beckstrom, of Summersville, graduated in June 2023 and enlisted that month.

She served with distinction as a military police officer, according to the West Virginia National Guard.

Visas: Halt in relocations leaves hundreds of thousands in limbo

FROM PAGE 1

The announcement drew immediate ire from advocates who said the administration is using one incident to justify targeting all Afghan allies, who are vetted thoroughly and deserve protection from the Taliban.

“They are using a single violent individual as cover for a policy they have long planned, turning their own intelligence failures into an excuse to punish an entire community and the veterans who served alongside them,” said Shawn VanDiver, president of #AfghanEvac, in a statement Friday.

Rahmanullah Lakanwal, the 29-year-old Afghan man accused of the shooting, served in a CIA-backed counterterrorism unit during the war.

He was one of more than 190,000 Afghans who have entered the U.S. under Operation Allies Welcome and its successor, Operation Enduring Welcome, according to the State Department.

The programs were established in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan to support the interpreters, drivers, engineers, fixers and logistics specialists who had worked alongside U.S. partners during the war.

Lakanwal initially entered the U.S. under humanitarian parole in 2021 and underwent recurring vetting as a parolee while he pursued a special immigrant visa, according to #AfghanEvac.

He also applied for asylum under the Biden administration and his application was approved in

April, under the Trump administration.

In the months leading up to the shooting, community members in the Washington state area where Lakanwal lived said he was suffering from deteriorating mental health, struggling to hold down a job and adjust to life in the U.S., according to reporting from the Associated Press.

Although investigators are still working to determine a motive, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Sunday told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that officials believe that he was “radicalized since he’s been here in the country.”

Trump and other Republicans long have criticized the relocation programs for Afghan allies, saying they allowed tens of thousands

of “unvetted and unchecked” people to enter the country.

Since returning to office, Trump has moved to dismantle the legal pathways for the Afghans’ entry to the U.S., including defunding Operation Enduring Welcome and stopping all refugee processing.

The new policies virtually have halted the relocation pipeline, leaving hundreds of thousands of Afghans stranded around the world, advocates say.

Among those stuck in limbo are more than 3,000 family members of active-duty service members, according to #AfghanEvac.

An audit from the Justice Department’s inspector general, published in June, found that the FBI was able to effectively screen tens of thousands of Afghan eva-

cuees who came to the U.S. immediately following the collapse of the Kabul government.

Although the need for rapid evacuation increased the potential for bad actors to exploit the system, the inspector general said the Pentagon, State Department and U.S. intelligence community were able to establish a unique, multi-layered vetting system that properly identified and protected against potential threats.

“Our hearts are absolutely broken for our Afghan allies, who have already endured more trauma, loss, and sacrifice than most Americans can imagine,” VanDiver said in a statement Friday.

“They should not have to live in fear because powerful officials see political advantage in undermining their path to safety.”

MILITARY

Gangs with US guns await Marines in Haiti

By Jim Wyss
Bloomberg News

Additional U.S. Marines being sent to Haiti to defend the embassy from gang attacks face a grim reality: They're increasingly being targeted by American-made, military-grade firearms.

Haiti doesn't manufacture weapons and has been under an arms embargo since 2022, but it's awash in guns. And the Government Accountability Office says 90% of all weapons in Haiti used in a crime were U.S.-sourced.

It's not just simple handguns.

During a chaotic shootout on the outskirts of Haiti's capital in November police killed seven gang members and captured a Barret M82 .50-caliber sniper rifle, which is manufactured in Tennessee.

"That is a true military weapon," said Jonathan Lowy, president of Global Action on Gun Violence, which has been working with foreign governments to try to stem the flow of U.S. weapons. "It has a range of a mile. It can shoot down helicopters and can pierce reinforced concrete. It can cost around \$10,000. That is not a weapon that a law-abiding gun owner protecting their home or hunting deer is looking to buy."

And yet any 18-year-old with a clean record can purchase one in most U.S. states.

Homeland Security Investigations in Miami flagged a "substantial increase" in gun trafficking to Haiti and the Caribbean earlier this year, including sniper rifles, .308 rifles and at least one



MICHAEL SMITH/Bloomberg

High-caliber weapons seized by federal law enforcement are shown during a 2022 news conference to announce a crackdown on firearms smuggling to Haiti and the Caribbean.

belt-fed machine gun.

The chaos in Haiti — where gangs now control more than 85% of the capital and have forced 1.4 million to flee their homes — comes as Washington is flooding the southern Caribbean with military assets in what it claims is a push to stop drug trafficking and put pressure on Venezuela.

This weekend, heavily armed gangs attacked Haiti's central region, killing men, women and children as they set fire to homes and forced survivors to flee, The Associated Press reported.

But for many leaders in the region, U.S. weapons are the worry.

Of the 10 nations and territories

with the highest per-capita murder rates globally, eight are in the Caribbean, according to World Bank data.

The United States "is the one country in the world that is both the major manufacturer and seller of civilian small arms and combines that with some of the weakest gun laws in the world," Lowry said.

Joseph Harold Pierre, an economic and political analyst in Haiti, was stuck in Cap-Haitien this week because domestic air travel was shutdown after gangs shot a local airliner.

He said that many Haitians blame the U.S. for allowing guns to flow into the country, but he said

local authorities are also complicit. An American rifle can sell for 50 times its retail price in Haiti, making it a lucrative business that has corrupted politics, he said.

On Monday, the U.S. State Department imposed visa restrictions on Fritz Alphonse Jean, a member of Haiti's transitional presidential council, "for supporting gangs and other criminal organizations." Jean has denied those accusations, but he's just one of several private sector and political actors who have been sanctioned in recent years for allegedly working with criminal groups.

"The main problem is not the guns themselves but that there is

no political will to control them," Pierre said.

Some countries have tried to push back against the flow of weapons coming from the north. In 2021, Mexico sued U.S. gunmakers for \$10 billion, accusing them of fueling that nation's epidemic of violence. The U.S. Supreme Court threw out that suit this year, arguing that a 2005 law shields gun makers from liability.

Lowy says the U.S. needs to crack down on gun manufacturers and dealers that ignore blatant red flags. About 5% of U.S. gun dealers are responsible for supplying 90% of guns used in crimes, he said.

"If those gun dealers who choose to supply the criminal market are reformed or shut down, the crime gun pipeline can be significantly reduced," he said.

As the violence grinds on, Washington is backing a United Nations plan to send a "gang suppression force" to Haiti in hopes of laying the groundwork for general elections set to be held next year.

Just how precarious the situation is was underscored Nov. 13, when U.S. Marines guarding the American Embassy exchanged fire with suspected gang members. None of the soldiers were injured, but the embassy said it was bringing in more Marines to secure the compound, which has been attacked in the past.

"If we hold elections under the current conditions, it will only worsen the situation," Pierre said. "We have to find a way out of this security conundrum."

Threat: GOP pushes back

FROM PAGE 1

death of those two men," Trump said.

Asked whether or not a potential second strike would be legal, he replied, "No, I wouldn't have wanted that, not a second strike. The first strike was very lethal."

Analysts say that the naval strikes were already being carried out under dubious or shaky legal authority, and the strikes have been raising concerns among U.S. allies.

The administration argues the boats are legitimate targets because they are allegedly ferrying drugs that are intended for eventual distribution in the United States.

Trump said he wasn't concerned about any possible future legal challenges "because you can see the boats. You can see the drugs in the boats, and each boat is responsible for killing 25,000 Americans. So I think they do an amazing job."

The report of a follow-up strike to kill wounded people drew rare pushback against the president

from a number of Republican lawmakers.

Ohio Rep. Mike Turner told CBS on Sunday that such a strike would, if confirmed, amount to an "illegal act".

Meanwhile, Nebraska's Don Bacon told reporters at ABC that it would be a "clear violation of the law of war."

Sen. Roger Wicker, who currently serves as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has said that the panel intends to launch an investigation into the strikes in the aftermath of the report.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration warned airlines on Nov. 22 to "exercise caution" in Venezuela, prompting some to begin canceling flights.

The Trump administration recently designated Venezuela's Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization — which the U.S. says is a legal basis for certain operations, but which Venezuela argues is actually just intended to serve as a pretense to carry out the strikes.

Iceland expands NATO fuel facility amid renewed North Atlantic focus

By Phillip Walter Wellman
Stars and Stripes

Iceland is expanding a NATO fuel storage facility in the country's southwest amid heightened security concerns and a renewed emphasis by the alliance on the North Atlantic.

The facility is being developed at Helguvik, about five miles from Keflavik International Airport, where U.S. forces sometimes operate. The airport area served as a key NATO surveillance and anti-submarine hub during the Cold War.

The fuel site will include a new berth and fuel storage tanks capable of holding 25,000 cubic meters of maritime fuel, according to a statement released Thursday by the Icelandic government.

NATO is financing the construction, the statement said. The investment is expected to total up to about \$67 million, according to the Icelandic daily Morgunbladid,

which reported that the new facility will be nearly a quarter mile long.

"It is important to strengthen the defense infrastructure and capabilities here in Iceland in order to better ensure support for Allied ships conducting surveillance and operations in the North Atlantic," Foreign Minister Thorgerdur Katrin Gunnarsdottir said in the government's statement.

"These facilities are also useful for us and contribute to increased security in terms of fuel supplies and port facilities," she said.

Preparatory work and design for the Helguvik expansion are underway, the government said, with construction scheduled to begin in late 2026 and be completed in 2029.

The announcement coincided with a visit to Iceland by NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, during which senior alliance officials underscored the country's strategic importance to transat-

lantic security.

NATO has placed renewed emphasis on securing the North Atlantic, a region long viewed as critical to monitoring Russian naval and air activity and protecting transatlantic supply routes.

Iceland, a founding NATO member, has no standing military and contributes to the alliance through host-nation support and access to strategically located air and maritime facilities. The country's own defense capabilities are limited to the Icelandic coast guard, which is responsible for maritime security, airspace monitoring and search-and-rescue operations.

The island lies along the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom, or GIUK, gap, a key naval and air corridor linking the Arctic to the Atlantic and long viewed as essential to protecting transatlantic sea lanes used to move forces and supplies between North America and Europe.

MILITARY

Flag burning vet claims 'vindictive' charges

BY LINDA F. HERSEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Attorneys for an Army combat veteran facing two federal criminal charges after he burned an American flag in view of the White House are seeking to dismiss the case with video evidence collected from police-worn body cameras at the incident.

Jan "Jay" Carey, a former Army sergeant first class, was scheduled to appear in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on Monday for a status conference over his attorneys' claim that he was the target of "vindictive prosecution" after engaging in protest activities protected under the First Amendment.

Police-worn body cameras show officers discussing an executive order by President Donald Trump directing prosecution for "flag desecration" and conferring with the U.S. attorney's office prior to Carey's arrest, according to the Partnership for Civil Justice.

Trump has "declared his intention to suppress lawful speech with regard to the constitutional right to flag-burning as a matter of protected expression, stating: 'We took the freedom of speech away,'" said Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, executive director of the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund and its project, the Center for Protest Law and Litigation.

Carey is a recipient of a Bronze Star who served from 1989 to 2012, according to Army records. He deployed to Kuwait, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Partnership for Civil Justice Fund, which represents Carey, is asking the court to dismiss the two criminal charges, which are both misdemeanors and carry a maximum sentence of six months in prison.

Carey stated that he intentionally ignited a 3-by-5-foot flag on a sidewalk at Lafayette Park in view



JAY CAREY

Army combat veteran Jay Carey is arrested after he burned an American flag in Lafayette Park across from the White House. Carey, of North Carolina, said he and several other veterans traveled to the nation's capital to protest policies by President Donald Trump's administration.

of the White House as an act of political protest hours after Trump signed an executive order directing the "prosecution of American flag desecration to the fullest extent possible."

"Although we respect the First Amendment, there is a law that prohibits the burning of anything, including a flag, on federal property," said Tim Lauer, spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office, according to the Associated Press.

The White House did not re-

spond to a request for comment.

The 54-year-old veteran from North Carolina pleaded not guilty at his arraignment in September.

Video footage from police-worn body cameras showed that officers discussed the president's executive order as a basis to arrest Carey, according to court documents.

"United States Park Police command staff consulted with at least one assistant United States attorney as to how to charge Mr. Carey,

orders that were then passed down to the arresting officers," attorneys for the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund said in court documents.

The video footage showed U.S. Park Police Officer Enrique Wong arriving at Lafayette Park while Carey was handcuffed, according to court documents.

"Officer Wong told U.S. Park Police Officer Andrew Patton, 'So the President just today signed an executive order that says we're ar-

resting him. We got that going for us. The executive order is signed,'" according to court documents.

In *United States v. Jan Carey*, the veteran is charged with lighting a fire in an undesignated area and lighting a fire in a manner that causes damage to real property or park resources, according to court documents.

Carey said he and several other veterans were in Washington to peacefully protest the deployment of Army National Guard troops to the nation's capital. The troops were ordered by Trump to address crime.

"This was a direct protest about an illegal law President Trump tried to put in place," Carey said after he was detained by uniformed Secret Service agents and arrested by federal park police.

But neither of the misdemeanor charges directly addresses flag burning, according to the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund.

Carey's attorneys argued that lighting a fire as an act of civil protest is not expressly forbidden at Lafayette Park, and the charges are more commonly used to prosecute individuals who light fires in federally protected wilderness areas, such as Yellowstone Park, according to court documents.

"Historic practice ... confirms that the use of fire for expressive purposes is permitted within Lafayette Park. Candlelight vigils occur frequently in Lafayette Park, and permits are issued for vigils involving hundreds or thousands of candle-bearing participants," according to court documents.

Flag burning was formally protected as symbolic speech by a Supreme Court ruling issued in 1989, after a flag was burned outside of the 1984 Republican National Convention in Texas to protest policies of then-President Ronald Reagan.

Airman given term of 3-plus years in prison for fatal crash

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — An American airman who killed a young woman in a drunken wrong-way crash on the autobahn near Spangdahlem Air Base was handed a prison term of over three years by a German court.

The unidentified 24-year-old airman is assigned to the base and will remain in custody there during the appeals process, his attorney said Thursday, a day after the Trier District Court sentenced him to three years and four months in German prison.

He was convicted on charges of negligent homicide, negligent bodily injury and intentional en-

dangerment of road traffic.

The airman will appeal in hopes of a sentence reduction, said his attorney Christian Hoelzer.

If the prison term is upheld on appeal, the airman would likely serve his time at the Wittlich correctional facility near Spangdahlem, Hoelzer said.

The crash occurred May 3 on the autobahn A60 near Landscheid, a few miles east of Spangdahlem.

The airman was driving his Jeep Wrangler the wrong way and hit a car driven by a 23-year-old woman.

The woman was taken to a hospital, where she died.

Two 24-year-old female passen-

gers also suffered serious injuries. The airman's injuries were minor.

Prosecutors said he had a blood alcohol level of 0.14% at the time of the crash. The legal limit in Germany is 0.05% in most cases.

Germany typically waives its jurisdiction in cases involving U.S. military personnel and German citizens.

The Trier prosecutor's office said the decision to try the airman in a German court was based on the number of victims involved.

One of them testified in court Wednesday that the driver shouted "Oh, no!" shortly before the 3 a.m. collision, according to reporting by German news organization SWR.

She told the court through tears that the driver had picked up her and the other passenger from Hahn Airport after a vacation. One of the passengers underwent emergency surgery after the collision, according to SWR.

Written testimony from service members who were with the airman the night of the collision described him as being so drunk that he became "loud and obnoxious" and was asked to stop drinking several times, according to SWR.

They tried to prevent the airman from driving home to Trier that evening and offered him a place to sleep, but he left during the night without the others noticing, Hoelzer said.

On Nov. 18, the first day of the trial, the airman admitted to consuming large amounts of alcohol and said he did not realize he was driving against traffic on the autobahn.

He also apologized in court to the driver's family and the two other victims.

Trials in Germany are not usually held on consecutive days as they are in the United States.

The sentence handed down matched the prosecution's recommendation, according to SWR. Hoelzer had argued for two years' probation, SWR reported.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this story.

MILITARY

Space Force to graduate in new uniform

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A group of Space Force trainees was the first basic training class to receive the service's new dress uniform and will wear it during a graduation ceremony this month at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base.

The trainees were fitted for the uniforms last week at Lackland's clothing issue in advance of the Dec. 18 ceremony, according to the 37th Training Wing, which oversees basic military training for the Space Force at the Texas Air Force base.

The uniforms feature a dark blue jacket that buttons diagonally from the Guardian's right shoulder and a tie of the same color.

It is matched with a collared shirt and a gray skirt or pants.

The Space Force, which has roughly 9,400 members, announced in September that sizing for the service's first dress uniform would begin by the end of the year after the uniform spent about four years in development.

Since Space Force's establishment in 2019, its members have primarily worn the Air Force's



U.S. Space Force trainees receive their initial issue of the new USSF Service Dress uniform during a fitting at clothing issue at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, Nov. 19.



PHOTOS BY DANIEL CRUZ/U.S. Air Force

dress uniform.

"Our service dress uniform represents the unique identity of Guardians, blending heritage with a modern design that reflects our unity and mission," Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman said in a statement.

"From the start, Guardian feedback shaped its design and fit. I know the force will wear it with pride."

Guardians are not yet required to order the uniform, and a mandatory wear-date is still pending, according to the service.

Once the uniform is widely issued, Space Force officials will give members one year to order the uniform and prepare for its full implementation.

The first opportunity for pre-orders went to recruiters, training instructors, December graduates

of the Reserve Officer Training Corps, Honor Guard members, White House social aides and senior leaders.

Online ordering should open to all members in January with delivery expected in June, the service said.

Troops with religious beards fear Pentagon crackdown

By JANIQUA ROBINSON
Stars and Stripes

Some service members who wear beards for religious reasons worry the Pentagon may soon target their shaving waivers, a concern driven by recent policy shifts that have already tightened rules for troops with medical exemptions.

The Army, for example, announced in July it would re-evaluate all religious shaving waivers, part of a broader effort expected to extend across the services.

Then, on Sept. 30, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told the nation's top generals and admirals that medical shaving waivers would be phased out within a year. The Pentagon also directed each branch to revise religious waiver policies by limiting them to "non-deployable roles" and requiring

annual gas mask fit training.

The U.S. military accommodates beards worn as expressions of faith for adherents of several religions, including Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Heathens and Nordic Pagans.

The changes have rattled groups like the Sikh Coalition, which advocates for religious accommodations in the armed forces.

"I don't really know how the service is going to try to be harder and stricter on that note of sincerely held religious beliefs, because a lot of individuals, especially in the Sikh faith, practice on a spectrum," Marissa Rossetti, a senior staff attorney for the coalition, said last month. "Some individuals do trim a little bit of their facial hair, while some have never in their entire life."

The Defense Department declined to comment on potential changes, saying each service is responsible for its own policies.

Under Pentagon guidance, service members with medical shaving waivers have until next fall to seek treatment to resolve their condition. Many service members granted medical waivers suffer from pseudofolliculitis barbae, a skin condition exasperated by daily shaving that disproportionately affects Black men.

Since 2014, the military has permitted facial hair as an "expression of sincerely held beliefs," provided the installation's senior officer approves.

"A lot of people will say, 'We're seeing an increase in shaving waivers because the regulations got more lenient,'" a service member with a shaving waiver said

during a Nov. 7 video call on condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation. "That's not true in any sense. There has always been a method for getting a religious accommodation letter; it's not a new thing. What happened was we started teaching people how to take care of themselves medically and spiritually."

The service member, who has 19 years on active duty, said he has helped many others navigate grooming rules and obtain religious waivers.

For some troops, facial hair is central to their faith identity. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jesse Gordon, a contingency response maintenance craftsman and Heathen practitioner since 2019, said his beard is tied to his beliefs.

"I want to be steadfast in my faith," he said during a Nov. 21 vid-

eo call.

Gordon said his beard represents masculinity, fortitude, courage, strength and integrity.

"Sure, I'm a Heathen, which is a religion that most people do not understand," he said. "Just because it's not what a massive part of America considers real, doesn't mean it isn't."

Army Sgt. Clay Stephens of the 101st Airborne Division, a Nordic Pagan since 2021, said he is unsure whether the military will continue honoring his waiver.

"I spent the better part of a year and a half studying before I submitted my religious accommodation waiver," he said on a Nov. 6 video call. "You need to understand why you need it — why you deserve it — and if you can prove that to the military, you should be able to keep it."

NORAD launches Santa tracker for kids, families worldwide

Stars and Stripes

The North American Aerospace Defense Command planned to launch its Santa tracking program Monday, giving kids and families a front-row seat to Santa Claus's Christmas Eve journey.

NORAD has tracked Santa for 70 years as he soars across the globe delivering presents in addition to monitoring and defending

North American airspace every day.

The NORAD Tracks Santa website, www.noradsanta.org, features Santa's North Pole Village, which includes a holiday countdown, games, movie theater, holiday music, web store and more. The website is available in nine languages: English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese,

Portuguese, Chinese and Korean, according to a service news release.

On Dec. 24, trackers worldwide can call 1-877-HI-NORAD from 4 a.m. to midnight MST to ask live operators about Santa's location. For children without access to a phone, a new web-based calling option will allow them to contact the NORAD Tracks Santa Oper-

ations Center directly through the website.

Virtual translation services will also be able to support more than 200 languages via the call center. After midnight MST, live operators will sign off, but trackers can continue to follow Santa's flight until 3 a.m. on Dec. 25 via NORAD's Interactive Voice Response system or the website.

Users can count down the days until Santa's journey on mobile devices with the official NORAD Tracks Santa app, which is available in the Apple and Google Play stores.

NORAD Tracks Santa will also be available on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X, and other platforms such as Amazon Alexa, SiriusXM and OnStar.

Calif. city grieves loss of 4 in shooting at child's party

BY SOPHIE AUSTIN
AND CHRISTOPHER WEBER
Associated Press

STOCKTON, Calif. — Authorities in California urged witnesses of a deadly shooting at a child's birthday party to come forward as the search for a suspect stretched into another day.

Three children ages 8, 9 and 14 and a 21-year-old were killed Saturday when gunfire broke out at a banquet hall in Stockton where at least 100 people were gathered, San Joaquin County Sheriff Patrick Withrow said. Detectives believe the gunfire continued outside and there may have been multiple shooters.

Eleven people were also wounded, with at least one in critical condition, he said. No one was in custody by Sunday evening, and the sheriff urged anyone with information to contact his office with tips, cell-

phone video or witness accounts. "This is a time for our community to show that we will not put up with this type of behavior, when people will just walk in and kill children," Withrow said. "And so if you know anything about this, you have to come forward and tell us what you know. If not, you just become complacent and think this is acceptable behavior."

Sheriff's spokesperson Heather Brent said earlier that investigators believe it was a "targeted incident." She said investigators would welcome any information, "even rumors."

Roscoe Brown said the party was in honor of his brother's granddaughter, who turned 2 and was uninjured. Brown, who works for the city of Stockton's Office of Violence Prevention, was in Arizona when he learned about the shooting and

drove straight to the scene. He said a niece and nephew of his were shot, and he knows several other victims. He didn't have information about their conditions.

"Who would come and do that to some kids, you know?" Brown told The Associated Press following a vigil organized by faith leaders to honor the dead and pray for the wounded. "You can't shoot up a party. That's senseless. A kid's party, at that."

Emmanuel Lopez told the Los Angeles Times his brother, 21-year-old Susano Archuleta, was shot in the neck and died at the scene. Lopez said his 9-year-old daughter was shot in the head but survived. He didn't share details about what led up to the shooting.

Stockton is a city of 320,000 residents about 80 miles east of San Francisco. With 54 homicides in



ETHAN SWOPE/AP

Investigators examine the scene of a mass shooting Sunday, in Stockton, Calif. Three children ages 8, 9 and 14 and a 21-year-old were killed Saturday when gunfire broke out at a banquet hall.

2024, Stockton's homicide rate was significantly higher than the state average. As of October, there had been 34 this year, according to city data.

Hours after the shooting, the Stockton Police Department arrested five people, including a juvenile, on weapons and gang-related charges. There was no indication that the arrests were connected to the killings at the banquet hall, the

sheriff said. Mayor Christina Fugazi expressed anguish over the loss of victims so young. "They should be writing their Christmas lists right now. Their parents should be out shopping for them for Christmas. And to think that their lives are over. I can't even begin to imagine what these families are going through. Breaks my heart," Fugazi said on Sunday.

Northeast preps for heavy snow as Midwest flight delays linger

BY PATRICK WHITTLE
AND ADAM SCHRECK
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Black ice, snow showers and fog pestered post-holiday travelers in the Midwest on Monday while the Northeast geared up for its first major snowstorm of the season.

More than 8 inches of snow fell at Chicago O'Hare International Airport this weekend, setting a record for the highest single calendar day snowfall in November at the airport, according to the National Weather Service. The previous record was set in 1951.

About 300 flights into and out of O'Hare had been canceled by early Sunday evening, while about 1,600 had been delayed, according to the tracking site FlightAware. Dozens remained canceled or delayed



ADAM SCHRECK/AP

A departure board lists delayed and canceled flights at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago on Sunday.

there into Monday, and commuting conditions on roads were expected to remain dangerous in

some areas well into Monday night. In the Northeast, some parts of

northern New England were expecting up to 10 inches of snow. A windy, potentially icy storm was headed to the region, and could soak some parts of the six states while piling snow in others, forecasters said.

And with plowable snow expected to coat large parts of Pennsylvania, crews began to treat snow lanes along the 565-mile Pennsylvania Turnpike system on Monday, said the agency's press secretary, Marissa Orbanek. Vehicle restrictions on the turnpike system's Northeast Extension, from the Lehigh Valley to Clarks Summit, will be imposed at 5 a.m. Tuesday.

"We really prepare for snow all year long," Orbanek said.

In Chicago, Don Herrian was among the crowds of travelers at O'Hare on Sunday, hoping to make

it back home after Thanksgiving as hundreds of flights were delayed and canceled following a winter storm in the Great Lakes region.

The 76-year-old retiree from Ardmore, Okla., had visited his daughter and her family in Indianapolis. He said his first flight was three hours late, and his connecting flight to Oklahoma City from Chicago was already running another two hours behind.

"It is what it is," Herrian said. "It's congested, but that's expected due to the snow, the delays and the holidays."

Planes were being de-iced at several airports across the country on Sunday, including at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Nonprofits make GivingTuesday a fundraising focus, seek engagement

Associated Press

Since it started as a hashtag in 2012, GivingTuesday, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, has become one of the biggest fundraising days of the year for nonprofits in the U.S. This year, nonprofits face uncertainty about how donors may respond to a range of changing factors.

High prices may affect how much small-dollar donors give this year or how many charities they will support. But President Donald Trump's tax and spending legislation, which passed in July, also included a new charitable deduction of up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$2,000 for married couples for the majority of tax filers. That could incentivize more

households to give.

For larger donors, a strong stock market usually indicates they will give generously. These major donors also make up an increasingly important share of overall charitable donations and are more likely to give than less economically well off households, according to a study from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in partnership with Bank of America.

Nonprofits are also letting potential supporters know about a range of new challenges this year, with many human service organizations seeing higher demand while facing cuts to government grants, especially last month's freeze of Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits. And many charities are highlighting programs that will match or multiply donations — even up to a factor of five at some nonprofits — to showcase increased impact.

Altogether, that sets up GivingTuesday, which falls on Dec. 2, to be a high stakes fundraising day for U.S. nonprofits.

The #GivingTuesday hashtag started as a project of the 92nd Street Y in New York in 2012 and became an independent organization in 2020. It's grown into a worldwide network of local organizations that promote giving in their communities, often on different dates that

have local relevance, like holidays.

Now GivingTuesday, the nonprofit, also convenes researchers working on topics about everyday giving. It also collects data from a wide range of sources like payment processors, crowdfunding sites, employee giving software and institutions that offer donor-advised funds, a kind of charitable giving account.

The hashtag was started to promote generosity and the nonprofit continues to promote giving in the broadest sense.

For nonprofits, the point of GivingTuesday is to raise money and engage their supporters. Many will be familiar with the barrage of email

and mail appeals that coincide on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Essentially all major American nonprofits will organize fundraising campaigns and many smaller, local groups also participate.

For years, GivingTuesday has been a major focus of fundraising for nonprofits, with many seeking to organize matching donations from major donors and to leverage their networks of supporters to contribute. It is the beginning of the end-of-year fundraising rush, as nonprofits seek to reach their budget targets for the following year.

Donations on GivingTuesday in 2024 reached \$3.6 billion, an increase from the previous two years.

NATION

Ruling disqualifying Habba as prosecutor upheld

By **MIKE CATALINI**
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Alina Habba, whom the administration has maneuvered to keep in place as New Jersey top federal prosecutor, is disqualified from serving in the role, an appeals court said Monday.

A panel of judges from the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sitting in Philadelphia sided with a lower court judge's ruling after hearing oral arguments at which Habba herself was present on Oct. 20.

"It is apparent that the current administration has been frustrated by some of the legal and political barriers to getting its appointees in place. Its efforts to elevate its preferred candidate for U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey, Alina Habba, to the role of Acting U.S. Attorney demonstrate the difficulties it has faced—yet the citizens of New

Jersey and the loyal employees in the U.S. Attorney's Office deserve some clarity and stability," the court wrote in a 32-page opinion.

It concluded: "We will affirm the District Court's disqualification order."

The ruling comes amid the push by President Donald Trump's Republican administration to keep Habba as the acting U.S. attorney for New Jersey. It also comes after the judges questioned the government's moves to keep Habba in place after her interim appointment expired and without her getting Senate confirmation.

Habba said after that hearing in a statement posted to X that she was fighting on behalf of other candi-

dates to be federal prosecutors who have been denied a chance for a Senate hearing.

Messages were left Monday seeking comment from the U.S. attorney's office in New Jersey, Habba's personal staffer and the Justice Department.

Habba is hardly the only Trump administration prosecutor whose appointment has been challenged by defense lawyers.

Last week, a federal judge dismissed criminal cases against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James after concluding that the hastily installed prosecutor who filed the charges, Lindsey Halligan, was unlawfully appointed to the position of interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. The Justice Department has said it intends to appeal the rulings.

The judges on the panel were two appointed by Republican President

George W. Bush, D. Brooks Smith and D. Michael Fisher, as well as one named by Democratic President Barack Obama, Luis Felipe Restrepo.

A lower court judge said in August that Habba's appointment was done with a "novel series of legal and personnel moves" and that she was not lawfully serving as U.S. attorney for New Jersey.

That order said her actions since July could be invalidated, but he stayed the order pending appeal.

The government argued Habba is validly serving in the role under a federal statute allowing the first assistant attorney, a post she was appointed to by the Trump administration.

The Habba case comes after several people charged with federal crimes in New Jersey challenged the legality of Habba's tenure. They sought to block the charges, arguing she didn't have the authority to pros-

ecute their cases after her 120-day term as interim U.S. attorney expired.

Habba was Trump's attorney in criminal and civil proceedings before he was elected to a second term. She served as a White House adviser briefly before Trump named her as a federal prosecutor in March.

Shortly after her appointment, she said in an interview with a right-wing influencer that she hoped to help "turn New Jersey red," a rare overt political expression from a prosecutor. She then brought a trespassing charge, eventually dropped, against Democratic Newark Mayor Ras Baraka stemming from his visit to a federal immigration detention center.

Habba later charged Democratic U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver with assault stemming from the same incident. McIver denied the charges and pleaded not guilty. The case is pending.



Habba

Lawmakers in Indiana to convene session with eye on redistricting

By **ISABELLA VOLMERT**
Associated Press

Indiana House members were expected to push forward Monday with redrawing the state's congressional districts in Republicans' favor, increasing pressure on their defiant counterparts in the GOP-led Senate to meet President Donald Trump's demands.

Republicans who control the House chamber have said there's no doubt that redistricting will pass that chamber. But the fate of any proposal to emerge remains uncertain in the Senate. Republicans also control that chamber but members of the caucus have resisted pressure to redistrict for months.

Senate leadership recently backed off from previous intent not to meet at all, agreeing to convene next Monday. But it's still unclear if enough senators will back a new map.

No official map or legislation had been made public by late Friday.

Republicans hold seven of Indiana's existing nine U.S. House seats. Trump and other Republicans want to make the map 9-0 in the GOP's favor, aiming to give the party two extra seats in the 2026 elections that will determine control of the U.S. House. Democrats only need to flip a handful of seats to overcome the Republicans' current margin.

Indiana lawmakers have been under mounting pressure from the White House to redistrict like Republicans in Texas, Ohio and North Carolina have. To offset the GOP gains, Democrats in California and Virginia have moved to do the



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Indiana Republican House Speaker Todd Huston leaves the podium in the house chamber at the Statehouse, Jan. 8, 2024, in Indianapolis.

same.

But some Indiana Republicans have been far more resistant. Republicans in the state Senate rebelled against Republican Gov. Mike Braun in November and said they would not attend a special session he ordered on redistricting.

The chamber's top Republican, President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, at the time said the Senate did not have the votes. A spokesperson for Bray's office did not respond Friday when asked if that is still the case.

Meanwhile, Trump attacked Indiana senators on social media, particularly Bray. He swore to endorse primary opponents of defecting senators. A spree of threats and swatting attempts were made against lawmakers who either said they do not support redistricting or have not taken a stance. At least

one lawmaker in favor of redistricting and Braun were also threatened.

Last week, the House announced plans to convene in Indianapolis on Monday.

"All legislative business will be considered beginning next week, including redrawing the state's congressional map," House Speaker Todd Huston said in a statement last Tuesday.

The Indiana Senate, where a number of lawmakers objected to leadership's refusal to hold a vote, then said members would reconvene Dec. 8.

"The issue of redrawing Indiana's congressional maps mid-cycle has received a lot of attention and is causing strife here in our state," Bray said in a statement last Tuesday. He said the Senate will finally decide the matter this month.

Foods with tariff cuts still see price hikes

By **RACHEL LERMAN**
The Washington Post

When the Trump administration announced it was easing tariffs on a slew of agricultural products, the goal was to appease consumers who are sick of dealing with rising grocery prices.

But though the reduced tariffs could help ease the rate of inflation for foods Americans rely on, it's unlikely that shoppers will see significant price reductions in store aisles.

"Once prices increase, especially for a broad category like groceries, very rarely do they come down," said David Ortega, a food economist and professor at Michigan State University. And retailers are hesitant to adjust prices too much with things up in the air. "There's so much uncertainty with tariff announcements coming on and off."

President Donald Trump's latest tariff twist reduced the rate of tariffs on more than 100 products, including everyday household foods like coffee, beef, bananas and orange juice. The average retail prices for those products have all risen in the last year, and not totally because of new import taxes.

Average retail prices on ground coffee have surged since last September to more than \$9 per pound. That's in part because of tariffs, said Judy Ganes, president of J Ganes Consulting, which works with food and agricultural industries. Tariffs have hit the coffee industry particularly hard because of the large amount of beans the U.S. imports from Brazil, which has been under 50% tariffs for several months.

"You can't really fully replace Brazilian coffee," Ganes said.

Meanwhile, average retail beef prices have climbed this year as shoppers increasingly search for the meat on shelves. The beef Americans eat is produced mostly domestically, with more than 80% grown inside the country, said Lance Zimmerman, Senior Animal Protein Analyst at Rabobank.

Though tariffs might have a slight effect on prices, it is not the main factor driving prices up. That comes down to supply and demand. Cattle herds have been decreasing for years, and though efficiency has improved, consumer demand for beef has also spiked, Zimmerman said.

A pound of bananas now costs about 67 cents — up slightly from a year ago, but still a relatively affordable price, economists say. Prices have been inching up all year.

"Part of it very likely is the tariff," said Anna Nagurney, a professor of supply chain management at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. But it's not just tariffs. "There have been some challenges in the countries that produce."

Frozen orange juice, which now costs about \$4.74 in concentrated form, was one of many juices exempted from tariffs in Trump's latest order. Still, that doesn't mean prices will ease significantly. Consumers don't hold power when it comes to food pricing, said Andrew Muhammad, a professor in agricultural policy at University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, because everyone needs to buy groceries.

"You're noticing that consumers are still coming in," he said. "They may have modified their shopping, but food demand tends to be inelastic."

NATION

Runners tackle 32 miles, nine Taco Bells

BY KYLE SWENSON
The Washington Post

Sure, vomiting is allowed. Discouraged but allowed, according to the bylaws of this ultramarathon.

Thirty-two miles of running and several thousand calories of greasy fast food are required for the event, so yes, you can be forgiven for puking. But Pepto-Bismol, Alka-Seltzer, Pepcid, Mylanta or any other medicinal stomach aids — banned.

Otherwise, the rules of the first-ever Taco Bell DC 50k were pretty simple, organizers Phil Hargis, 54, and Mike Wardian, 51, explained to the hundreds of participants shivering in below-freezing temperatures outside a Taco Bell in Old Town Alexandria on Saturday morning.

Each participant must run to nine Taco Bells scattered across Alexandria, Arlington and the District. At each location, they must purchase and eat an item off the menu. Drinks don't count.

And there's no chance runners can squeeze through the 50 kilometers wolfing down a single taco at each stop. Per the rules, by the fourth Taco Bell stop, entrants must have eaten a Chalupa Supreme or a Crunch Wrap Supreme. By the eighth stop, they must have downed a Burrito Supreme or Nachos Bell Grande.

Receipts are required at the finish line. Runners have 11 hours to complete the course.

"Get your tacos ready!" Wardian said to the crowd minutes before the 8 a.m. start time. Then Wardian, a world-renowned runner and ultramarathoner, asked the crowd to raise their hands and repeat after him.

"I'm not going to run in the streets, I'm going to obey all the rules, I'm going to eat all my tacos and not cheat," he said.

"I'm going to have the best day ever," he said. The crowd repeated it, then erupted into cheers.

"On your mark. Get set. Eat!" Wardian and Hargis shouted.

Hundreds of jaws noshed into their first Taco Bell menu items, and the event kicked off.



PHOTOS BY MARVIN JOSEPH/The Washington Post

Hundreds gathered in Alexandria for the first-ever Taco Bell DC 50k on Saturday morning.



Racers took myriad approaches to preparing for the big event.

After swallowing their last bites, the crowd began sprinting and strolling, jogging and walking toward the next Taco Bell five miles away.

Saturday's event was modeled off Denver's Taco Bell 50k, an annual October race famous in the world of ultramarathons. Ultramarathons often combine long-distance runs with additional challenges that can be everything from quirky to bizarre. Some ask

participants to drink beer. Others ask participants to eat doughnuts.

Hargis and Wardian are longtime friends who have always enjoyed extreme tests of athletic endurance. When they heard about the Denver Taco Bell run, they decided to organize a local version on a whim.

They expected the fast food challenge, billed as an "ultimate mix of endurance and spice," to appeal to a small group of like-



Don't try to cheat the rules — receipts were required at the finish line.

minded running extremists.

"When we come up with an idea, sometimes we get like 10 people, and that's a good turnout," Wardian said. "I thought this would be like that." But within a day or so of posting about the event, hundreds of people had signed up, he said. Close to 1,000 runners were on the list by race day.

Wardian is a marquee competitor in the running world who has racked up multiple first-place finishes in premier races such as the USA Track & Field 50 km and D.C.'s National Marathon. He's also taken on long-haul runs across the United States and through the

Sahara. Hargis has also competed in runs and marathons across the country.

After the 8 a.m. start time, Alex Fenn, 34, was one of the first runners to show up at the second Taco Bell.

"More hilly than I expected," Fenn huffed between chomps of a soft taco. "Feeling good," he said as he bolted away on foot.

Two stops and an hour or so later, at the run's fourth stop, a Taco Bell in Arlington's Court House neighborhood, Fenn admitted he was beginning to feel the strain of the carbs — even as a regular ultramarathoner.

After the Arlington stop, the next destination took runners more than four miles over the Potomac River into the District. The Taco Bell at 14th Street NW in Columbia Heights was the first D.C. stop.

"Struggling," Sam Lancke admitted there. "But I'll make it."

Dozens of Target employees happened to be holding a protest right outside the Columbia Heights Taco Bell that day. The demonstration turned into a hip-hop concert. The sidewalk protest led at least one runner — Irving Ray, 38 — to overshoot the Taco Bell by a mile before another runner told him he had gone too far.

Ray doubled back, but by then had softball-sized swelling on his legs, he said. Yet two stops later, at the penultimate location — the Taco Bell at D.C.'s Union Station — Ray said he was suddenly revived by the Burrito Supreme he was eating.

"This is giving me the sodium I need," he said.

Back in Old Town, the first-place finisher came in a little after noon. Mike Smith, 43, a longtime competitive runner, had led the pack throughout the day.

He completed the race in four hours, 12 minutes and 35 seconds — the first of 429 finishers that day.

"I've got an iron stomach," he said. His practice routine?

Every day after work he downed a happy-hour beer, then went running.

Tattoo ink moves through the body, weakens vaccine response

BY JASON GALE
Bloomberg News

Tattoo ink doesn't just sit inertly in the skin. New research shows it moves rapidly into the lymphatic system, where it can persist for months, kill immune cells and even disrupt how the body responds to vaccines.

Scientists in Switzerland used a mouse model to trace what happens after tattooing. Pigments drained into nearby lymph nodes

within minutes and continued to accumulate for two months, triggering immune-cell death and sustained inflammation.

The ink also weakened the antibody response to Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE's COVID vaccine when the shot was administered in tattooed skin. In contrast, the same inflammation appeared to boost responses to an inactivated flu vaccine.

The findings, published this

week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, sharpen a public-health question as tattooing becomes mainstream. A 2023 Pew Research survey estimated that 32% of U.S. adults have at least one tattoo.

With billions spent on tattoos each year, the authors at Università della Svizzera italiana in Bellinzona say the results point to a need for tougher toxicology testing and stricter oversight of tattoo-ink in-

gredients, which face far looser regulation than medical products.

The study doesn't show whether similar immune effects occur in people — that hasn't been tested. But it flags clear risks. Pigments have long been documented in human lymph nodes, and the mouse findings mirror what's been observed in humans and primates.

A 2024 Swedish study of almost 12,000 people found tattooed individuals had a 21% higher risk of

malignant lymphoma than those without ink, with the strongest associations appearing in the first two years after getting a tattoo and again more than a decade later.

Researchers say the accumulating evidence merits deeper investigation, especially as pigments such as carbon black, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and azo dyes are known to migrate to lymph nodes and remain there for years.

EUROPE

Russia, Ukraine mull revised peace proposal

**BY DASHA LITVINOVA
AND ISOBEL KOSHIW**
Associated Press

Diplomats face an uphill battle to reconcile Russian and Ukrainian “red lines” as a renewed U.S.-led push to end the war gathers steam, with Ukrainian officials attending talks in the U.S. over the weekend and Washington officials expected in Moscow early this week.

President Donald Trump’s peace plan became public last month, sparking alarm that it was too favorable to Moscow. It was revised following talks in Geneva between the U.S. and Ukraine a week ago.

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said the revised plan could be “workable.” Russian President Vladimir Putin called it a possible “basis” for a future peace agreement. Trump said Sunday “there’s a good chance we can make a deal.”

Still, officials on both sides indicated a long road ahead as key sticking points — over whether Kyiv should cede land to Moscow and how to ensure Ukraine’s future security — appear unresolved.

Here is where things stand and what to expect this week:

■ **U.S. holds talks with Kyiv then Moscow:** Trump representatives met the Ukrainian officials over the weekend and plan to meet with the Russians in coming days.

Ukraine’s national security council head Rustem Umerov, the head of Ukraine’s armed forces

Andrii Hnatov, presidential adviser Oleksandr Bevez and others met with U.S. officials for about four hours on Sunday. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the session was productive but more work remains. Umerov praised the U.S. for its support but offered no details.

Zelenskyy’s former chief of staff and former lead negotiator for Ukraine, Andrii Yermak, resigned Friday amid a corruption scandal and is no longer part of the negotiating team. It was only a week ago that Rubio met with Yermak in Geneva, resulting in a revised peace plan.

Trump said last week that he would send his envoy Steve Witkoff to Russia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed Monday that Putin will meet Witkoff on Tuesday afternoon.

Trump suggested he could eventually meet with Putin and Zelenskyy, but not until there has been more progress.

Witkoff’s role in the peace efforts came under scrutiny last week following a report that he coached Yuri Ushakov, Putin’s foreign affairs adviser, on how Russia’s leader should pitch Trump on the Ukraine peace plan. Both Moscow and Washington downplayed the significance of the revelations.

■ **Where the two sides stand:** Eager to please Trump, Kyiv and Moscow have ostensibly welcomed the peace plan and the push to end the war. But Russia has continued attacking Ukraine and reit-

erated its maximalist demands, indicating a deal is still a ways off.

Putin implied last week that he will fight as long as it takes to achieve his goals, saying that he will stop only when Ukrainian troops withdraw from all four Ukrainian regions that Russia illegally annexed in 2022 and still doesn’t fully control. “If they don’t withdraw, we’ll achieve this by force. That’s all,” he said.

The plan, Putin said, “could form the basis for future agreements,” but it is in no way final and requires “a serious discussion.”

Zelenskyy has refrained from talking about individual points, opting instead to thank Trump profusely for his efforts and emphasizing the need for Europe — whose interests are more closely aligned with Ukraine’s — to be involved. He also has stressed the importance of robust security guarantees for Ukraine.

The first version of the plan granted some core Russian demands that Ukraine considers nonstarters, such as ceding land to Moscow that it doesn’t yet occupy and renouncing its bid to become a member of NATO.

Zelenskyy has said repeatedly that giving up territory is not an option. One of the Ukrainian negotiators, Bevez, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Ukraine’s president wanted to discuss the territory issue with Trump directly. Yermak then told The Atlantic in an interview on Thursday that Zelenskyy would not sign over the land.

Zelenskyy also maintains that NATO membership is the cheapest way to guarantee Ukraine’s security, and NATO’s 32 member countries said last year that Ukraine is on an “irreversible” path to membership. Since he took office, Trump has made it clear that NATO membership is off the table.

Moscow, in turn, has bristled at any suggestion of a Western peacekeeping force on the ground in Ukraine, and stressed that keeping Ukraine out of NATO and NATO out of Ukraine was one of the core goals of the war.

■ **Putin seems to have time on his side:** Zelenskyy, meanwhile, has been under pressure at home.

Yermak’s resignation was a major blow for Zelenskyy, although neither the president nor Yermak have been accused of wrongdoing by investigators.

“Russia really wants Ukraine to make mistakes. There won’t be mistakes on our side,” Zelenskyy said. “Our work continues, our struggle continues. We don’t have a right not to push it to the end.”

An activist with Ukraine’s non-governmental Anti-Corruption Center, Valeriia Radchenko, said letting go of Yermak was the right decision and would open a “window of opportunity for reform.”

Putin, meanwhile, seeks to project confidence, boasting of Russia’s advances on the battlefield.

The Russian leader “feels more confident than ever about the battlefield situation and is convinced that he can wait until Kyiv finally

accepts that it cannot win and must negotiate on Russia’s well-known terms,” Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia and Eurasia Center wrote on X. “If the Americans can help move things in that direction — fine. If not, he knows how to proceed anyway. That is the current Kremlin logic.”

■ **Europe’s conundrum:** NATO and the EU are holding several meetings this week focused on Ukraine.

Zelenskyy was holding talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Monday. In Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte is hosting Ukrainian Defense Minister Denys Shmyhal and EU defense and foreign ministers are gathering to discuss European military support for Ukraine and Europe’s defense readiness.

On Wednesday, NATO foreign ministers will gather again in Brussels.

The main issue for the EU right now is what to do with the frozen Russian assets in Belgium that the Trump peace plan in its initial version sought to use for post-war investment in Ukraine.

Those funds are central to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s strategy to ensure continued help for Ukraine while also maintaining pressure on Russia. But Belgium’s prime minister is holding out, worried about the legal implications of tapping the frozen assets for Ukraine, the impact that could have on the euro — and of Russian retaliation.

Arms producers increased revenue by 5.9% last year

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — The world’s biggest weapons-producing companies saw a 5.9% increase in revenue from sales of arms and military services last year as demand was fed by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza as well as countries’ rising military spending, according to a report released Monday.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, or SIPRI, said the revenues of the 100 largest arms makers grew to \$679 billion in 2024, the highest figure it has recorded.

The bulk of the increase was down to companies based in Europe and the United States, but there were increases around the world — except in Asia and Oceania, where problems in the Chinese arms industry led to a slight fall.

Thirty of the 39 U.S. companies in the top 100 — including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics — posted increases. Their combined revenue was up 3.8% at \$334 billion. But SIPRI noted that “widespread delays and budget overruns continue to plague development and production” in major U.S.-led programs, including the F-35 fighter jet.

Twenty-three of the 26 companies in Europe, excluding Russia, saw their arms revenue increase as the continent boosted spending. Their aggregate income rose by 13% to \$151 billion, fueled by demand linked to the war in Ukraine and the perceived threat from Russia.

There were notably big gains for the Czech Republic’s Czechoslovak Group, whose revenue soared by 193% thanks in part to a government-led project to source artillery shells for Ukraine; and for Ukraine’s JSC Ukrainian Defense Industry, which had a 41% gain.

European firms are investing in new production capacity to meet greater demand, but SIPRI researcher Jade Guiberteau Ricard cautioned in a statement that “sourcing materials could pose a growing challenge,” with restructuring of supply chains for critical minerals a potential complication in light of Chinese export restrictions.

The two Russian companies in SIPRI’s list, Rostec and United Shipbuilding Corporation, saw arms revenues rise 23% to a combined \$31.2 billion, despite sanctions leading to a shortage of components. SIPRI said that domestic demand was more than enough to offset falling arms exports, though a skilled



Artillery shells from German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall are displayed in Unterlues, Germany, in August.

labor shortage is a challenge.

Arms revenue also grew in the Middle East, and the three Israeli companies in the ranking had a 16% increase to \$16.2 billion. In 2024, the backlash over Israeli actions in Gaza “seems to have had little impact on interest in Israeli weapons,” SIPRI researcher Zubaida Karim said, and many countries continued to place new orders.

A 1.2% drop in revenue in Asia and Oceania to \$130 billion was led by a 10% drop in the income of the eight Chinese companies in the index. That came as multiple corruption allegations in Chinese arms procurement led to major contracts being delayed or canceled last year, SIPRI said.

WORLD

Hong Kong fire probe reveals unsafe netting as public mourns

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong officials said Monday that their investigation into a deadly blaze that killed at least 151 has revealed some of the netting that covered scaffolding used in renovations was not up to fire-safety codes, as a wave of public sympathy and support was met by government moves to stifle criticism.

Wednesday's blaze, which took until Friday to fully extinguish, started on the lower-level netting covering bamboo scaffolding around one building in the high-rise Wang Fuk Court complex. It then swept inside as foam panels placed over windows caught fire and blew out the glass. Winds carried flames from building to building that all were covered in scaffolding and netting, until seven of eight were ablaze.

Initial tests of the netting showed it was up to code, but subsequently investigators collected 20 samples from all areas, including higher floors, and found seven failed safety standards, suggesting contractors skimmed to make greater profits, said Eric Chan, Hong Kong's Chief Secretary.

"They just wanted to make money at the expense of people's lives," he told reporters.

Hong Kong police Disaster Victim Identification Unit staff had searched five of the burned buildings but only made partial progress through the remaining two, said Tsang Shuk-yin, head of the police casualty enquiry unit. Teams were assessing the safety of the other buildings, including the one that caught fire first and suffered the worst damage.

On Monday they recovered an-

other eight bodies, including three that firefighters found earlier but could not retrieve.

Dozens of people remain unaccounted for, but some are likely among the 39 bodies not yet identified, Tsang said.

Residents had complained for almost a year about the construction netting, Hong Kong's Labor Department said. It confirmed officials had carried out 16 inspections of the renovation project since July 2024 and had warned contractors multiple times in writing that they had to meet fire safety requirements. The latest inspection was just a week before the fire.

Hong Kong's anti-corruption authorities and police have arrested 14 people, including the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company, ac-



HONG KONG POLICE PUBLIC RELATIONS BRANCH/AP

Members of the Disaster Victim Identification Unit work in an apartment in the aftermath of a deadly Wednesday fire at Wang Fuk Court, a residential estate in the Tai Po district of Hong Kong's New Territories, on Sunday.

cording to Chris Tang, the secretary for security.

People increasingly have been questioning whether government officials should also be held responsible.

Death toll rises as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand begin recovery efforts

Associated Press

PADANG SIDEMPUAN, Indonesia — Indonesia's president told survivors of last week's devastating floods that help was arriving to those in need Monday as Asian governments scaled up their responses to a disaster that has left more than 1,000 dead in three countries.

Hundreds more are missing following flooding and landslides in the past week, which killed at least 604 people in Indonesia, 366 in Sri

Lanka and 176 in Thailand, authorities said.

Indonesia President Prabowo Subianto pledged to rebuild infrastructure while visiting areas impacted by floods and landslides on Sumatra island that left thousands homeless and over 800 people missing as of Monday.

Some areas of Indonesia remained unreachable Monday after the disaster damaged roads and downed communications lines, with residents in impacted

areas relying on aircraft delivering supplies. Flooding displaced 290,700 people in North Sumatra, West Sumatra and Aceh provinces, the National Disaster Management Agency said.

Prabowo, who visited North Sumatra on Monday and was expected to West Sumatra and Aceh during the day, said the government's response is reaching those in need.

"We need to confront climate change effectively," Prabowo told

reporters after visiting survivors. "Local governments must take a significant role in safeguarding the environment and preparing for the extreme weather conditions that will arise from future climate change."

Sri Lanka authorities said Monday that rescuers are still searching for 367 missing people. Nearly 218,000 people are housed in temporary shelters after being battered in the past week downpours that flooded homes, fields and

roads and triggered landslides, primarily in the tea-growing central hill country.

In Thailand, the first batch of compensation payments are set to be distributed Monday, beginning with \$7.4 million for 26,000 people, government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat said.

He said authorities on Monday worked to clean up streets and restore infrastructure including water and electricity in the southern part of the country.

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WORLD

‘Rage bait’ named Oxford University Press word of year

Associated Press
LONDON — Oxford University Press has named “rage bait” as its word of the year, capturing the internet zeitgeist of 2025.
The phrase refers to online content that is “deliberately designed to elicit anger or outrage by being frustrating, provocative or offensive,” with the aim of driving traf-

fic to a particular social media account, Oxford said in a statement.
“The person producing it will bask in the millions, quite often, of comments and shares and even likes sometimes,” lexicographer Susie Dent told the BBC. This is a result of the algorithms used by social media companies, “because although we love fluffy cats,

we’ll appreciate that we tend to engage more with negative content and content that really provokes us.”
Rage bait topped two other contenders — “aura farming” and “biohack” — after public comment on a shortlist compiled by lexicographers at Oxford University Press.

“Aura farming” means to cultivate a public image by presenting oneself in “a way intended subtly to convey an air of confidence, coolness or mystique.” “Biohack” is defined as “an attempt to improve or optimize one’s physical or mental performance, health or longevity.”
The word of the year is selected

by lexicographers at Oxford University Press who analyze new and emerging words, as well as changes in the way language is being used, to identify words of “cultural significance.”
Oxford University Press, publisher of the Oxford English Dictionary, has selected a word of the year annually since 2004.

Swiss voters reject mandatory national service for women, new inheritance tax

Associated Press
GENEVA — Swiss voters on Sunday decisively rejected a call to require women to do national service in the military, civil protection teams or other forms, as all men must do already.
Official results, with counting still ongoing in some areas after a referendum, showed that more than half of Switzerland’s cantons, or states, had rejected the “citizen service initiative” by wide margins. That meant it was defeated, because proposals need a majority of both voters and cantons to pass.
Voters also heavily rejected a separate proposal to impose a new national tax on individual dona-

tions or inheritances of more than 50 million francs (\$62 million), with the revenues to be used to fight the impact of climate change and help Switzerland meet its ambitions to have net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
Supporters of the national service plan hoped that it would boost social cohesion by adding jobs in areas like environmental prevention, food security and elderly care.
But lawmakers opposed it, mainly for cost reasons and out of concern that it could hurt the economy by taking many young people out of the workforce.
The national service proposal

came at a time when other European countries are finding ways to bolster their armed forces in the face of growing concerns about Russia’s potential threat beyond the war in Ukraine.
Young men in neutral Switzerland are already required to carry out military service or join civil protection teams. Conscientious objectors can do other types of service, and those who opt out entirely must pay an exemption fee. Each year, about 35,000 men take part in mandatory service.
The failed initiative would have required all Swiss citizens to do national service — women can currently do so on a voluntary ba-



MARTIAL TREZZINI, KEYSTONE/AP

A person walks by referendum posters of political parties and associations in Geneva on Friday.
sis — and applied the concept of military service or civil protection.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

County fair brings back pig wrestling; no men

WY TETON COUNTY — A Wyoming county fair is bringing back pig wrestling after a six-year hiatus, though it's adding a new rule: No men allowed.

The ban is meant to protect the swine after concerns about animal cruelty rippled through Teton County this fall and pleas for humane treatment of the animals surged into county commissioners' email inboxes.

The commissioners struck a compromise by voting 3-1 last month to eliminate the adult men's category of the event and require participants to complete a program about caring for animals. Mark Newcomb, Teton County commission chairman, said commissioners surmised that women and children would be less likely than men to harm the pigs. (The only woman commissioner was absent from the vote.)

Pig wrestling is a staple at some county fairs across the nation and a misdemeanor at others. The rules are simple: Four to five people hop in a muddy pit, sprinkled with bentonite to ensure maximum slickness, and try to place a free pig inside a padded barrel.

Delayed heating aid funds released to states, tribes

CT HARTFORD — Approximately \$3.6 billion in delayed funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, was released Friday to states and tribes, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.

The federal funding for LIHEAP, which helps millions of low-income households pay to heat and cool their homes, has been held up during the beginning of the cold-weather season because of the federal government shutdown, which ended Nov. 12.

"This release of LIHEAP funding is essential and long overdue," Mark Wolfe, executive director of NEADA, said in a statement. "Families can finally begin receiving the support they need to keep the heat on as winter begins."

States typically receive their allocations at the beginning of November.

Republican lawmaker says he will retire in 2026

TX AUSTIN — Republican U.S. Rep. Troy Nehls of Texas announced Saturday that he will retire from Congress after his term ends in 2026 to focus on family.

Nehls, a staunch supporter of President Donald Trump who has sported his mug shot on a T-shirt, said he called Trump to inform him of his plans.

"President Trump has always been a strong ally for our district and a true friend, and I wanted



GREG EANS, THE (OWENSBORO, KY.) MESSENGER-INQUIRER/AP

Crafting for Christmas

Jennifer Hall creates Christmas wreaths for the holiday season inside the shop at the Hilltop Tree Farm, on Friday, in Philpot, Ky.

him to hear it from me first," Nehls said on X.

Nehls added via social media that he was endorsing his twin brother to succeed him in Congress. Trevor Nehls said on Facebook that he would run for the seat and "stand shoulder-to-shoulder with President Trump."

City has highest snowfall in single day

IL CHICAGO — As Chicagoans woke up to "Winter Wonderland"-like conditions Sunday, snowfall recorded at Chicago O'Hare International Airport on Saturday was confirmed as a record 8.4 inches, the highest snowfall on a single calendar day in November since 1951, according to the National Weather Service.

The snow was likely to taper out by 11 a.m. Sunday and the temperature was expected to warm up to around 32 degrees at noon, with 25 to 30 mph winds that will decrease throughout the day. A Winter Weather Advisory was in place until noon Sunday with snow contributing to slippery roads and low visibility, according to NWS.

The last time O'Hare Airport saw so much snow on a single day

in November was 74 years ago, Nov. 6, 1951, when 8 inches fell, according to the NWS. Snowfall reached 8.6 inches at O'Hare by 6 a.m. on Sunday.

Amid the record-breaking snowfall, O'Hare airport had 1,322 flight cancellations and Midway airport had 250 cancellations, according to FlightAware data as of Sunday morning.

College to fight hazardous dust effects from mines

AZ TUCSON — The University of Arizona has received a five-year federal grant of \$14.8 million to help understand and mitigate health threats of dust from mine tailings and associated hazardous fungal spores, specifically within mining communities.

The grant was issued by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, a division of the National Institutes of Health, to UA's Superfund Research Center. Also known as the DUST Center: Hazardous Dust in Drylands — Exposure, Health Impacts, and Mitigation.

The center's work is focused on "mining towns and Native Nations across the Arizona-Sonora border

region, where residents face chronic inhalation of arsenic-rich dust from mine tailings — waste left over from mining operations," a UA news release says.

"The Southwest is hot and dry, so we generate a lot of dust that gets carried by the wind," Maier said. "These conditions also make it challenging to establish plants. We are working to determine the minimum inputs and best seasonal timing to effectively establish plants on a site. Mining companies spend a lot of money revegetating their sites and informed research like this helps them reduce these costs."

Fire heavily damages bar, one firefighter injured

NY OSWEGO — An overnight fire heavily damaged a bar and grill and injured a firefighter early Sunday morning in Oswego.

Around 3:10 a.m. a fire alarm activated at Cheap Seats Bar & Grille on Hillside Avenue, according to City of Oswego Fire Chief Paul Conzone. Firefighters arrived and found smoke showing from the building and a fire toward the back of the building.

Firefighters battled flames in the rear of the building, fighting from inside to attack what Conzone described as a "large volume of fire."

The fire was under control around 6 a.m., Conzone said. The building sustained significant interior damage in the area where the fire originated.

One firefighter suffered a minor injury, he said.

The cause of the fire has not been determined.

Mall shooting wounds 2 and prompts evacuation

CA SAN JOSE — Police in California evacuated a shopping mall Friday, one of the busiest shopping days of the year, after a shooting left two people with gunshot wounds.

The shooting was an isolated incident, the San Jose Police Department said on X.

Officers evacuated and cleared Valley Fair Mall in Santa Clara to confirm there was no threat to public safety.

The wounded were taken to a hospital, police said.

From wire reports

FACES

Wild holiday weekend at box office

‘Zootopia 2’ sets global record for animated films with \$556M opening

By Andrew Dalton
Associated Press

“Zootopia 2” had a roaring and record-setting opening at the box office. The animated animal city sequel from the Walt Disney Company brought in \$96 million in North America over the weekend, earned \$156 million over the five-day Thanksgiving frame, and scored a staggering \$556 million globally since its Wednesday opening, according to studio estimates Sunday.

That gave it the highest international opening ever for an animated movie and the fourth highest global debut of any kind, and made it the top international opener of 2025.

“Wicked: For Good” stayed aloft in its second weekend for Universal Pictures, earning another \$62.8 million domestically over the weekend for a North American total of \$270.4 million. The second half of the “Wicked” saga has brought in \$393 million internationally.

The pair of PG-rated sequels combined to make the Thanksgiving weekend a glimmering exception to an otherwise dark year at movie theaters. The five-day holiday run brought in \$290 million in total, \$188 million of it coming Friday through Sunday.

“This is a great result and a big momentum builder for the box office as we head into the final four weeks of the year,” said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore.

The first “Zootopia,” released in March 2016, outpaced expectations and had a domestic opening of \$75 million. Like the first, “Zootopia 2” features the duo of bunny cop Judy Hopps (Ginnifer Goodwin) and small-time hustler fox Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman) in a city of comically domesticated wildlife.

Dergarabedian said the sequel represented “a beloved franchise delivering what audiences were looking for around the world.”

It had the sixth biggest North American opening of 2025. But its biggest market was China, which made for nearly half of the film’s global total with a whopping \$272 million in ticket sales. No American-made animated film has ever opened bigger. It had the second best nonlocal film opening of all time in China, after “Avengers: Endgame.”

Such a result in China was once almost commonplace for Hollywood. But in recent years, as geopolitical relations have grown uneasy, box-office results have turned unpredictable at best.

“Zootopia 2” had a clear path to a big Chinese opening. The first “Zootopia,” known there as “Crazy Animal City,” grew into a surprise hit, grossing \$236 million. Shanghai Disneyland has a theme land devoted to the films.

“Wicked: For Good” didn’t seem to be hurt by the beastly competition as Universal’s gamble of splitting the Broadway tale of Oz into two films continued to pay off. It brought



DISNEY/AP

Nick Wilde, left, voiced by Jason Bateman, and Judy Hopps, voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin, return in “Zootopia 2,” which has earned \$272 million in China alone.

in a worldwide weekend total of \$92.2 million. “Hamnet,” certain to be a major player in awards season after a celebrated festival run, had a strong limited opening and landed in the overall top 10. In just 119 theaters, it earned \$1.35 million. Director Chloé Zhao’s Shakespeare story starring Jessie Buckley and Paul Mescal expands next weekend.

AI country song ‘Walk My Walk’ built on Blanco Brown’s sound sparks questions

By Jonathan Landrum, Jr.
Associated Press

When an artificial intelligence-generated country song called “Walk My Walk” hit No. 1 on Billboard’s country digital song sales chart last month, it was credited to a fictional artist named Breaking Rust — a white, digitally generated avatar that didn’t exist two months ago.

But the song’s vocal phrasing, melodic shape and stylistic DNA came from someone who does exist: Grammy-nominated country artist Blanco Brown, a Black music artist who has worked with Britney Spears, Childish Gambino and Rihanna.

And he had no idea. “I didn’t even know about the song until people hit me up about it,” said Brown, whose 2019 country rap hit “The Git Up” helped usher in a new, hybrid era of country crossover. He didn’t learn about the chart-topping AI track until his phone was flooded with messages from friends.

“My phone just kept blowing up,” he said. “Somebody said: ‘Man, somebody done typed your name in the AI and made a white version of you. They just used the Blanco, not the Brown.’”

The moment is the latest example of how generative AI is upending the music industry, giving anyone the ability to instantly create seemingly new songs by typing prompts into a chat window, often using models trained on real artists’ voices and styles without their knowledge.

Blanco Brown, shown in 2024, was unaware that a “white version” based on his 2019 country rap hit “The Git Up” was created by an avatar until the song was already a hit.

AP

The credits for the grit-filled, chant-heavy track “Walk My Walk” list Aubierre Rivaldo Taylor as one of the song’s creators, with streaming platforms such as Apple Music and Spotify identifying him as both the songwriter and producer. In recent months, Taylor has also been credited on streaming platforms as the songwriter and producer behind Defbeatsai — one of several X-rated, AI-generated country artists that exploded across social media last year.

The Defbeatsai ecosystem, however, connects back to another figure in Brown’s past:



Abraham Abushmais, a collaborator Brown once jokingly called “Abe Einstein” for his sharp studio instincts. Abushmais co-wrote a couple of songs on Brown’s 2019 album “Honeysuckle & Lightning Bugs” and is listed as the developer of Echo, an obscure AI-powered music generator app promoted on one of Defbeatsai’s Instagram pages with a link encouraging users to “make your own hit country song.”

Brown said he wasn’t notified about Abushmais’ involvement in the AI hit, and the collaborator he once mentored has since become unreachable. The AP reached out to Abushmais for comment but did not receive a response.

The digital avatar fronting “Walk My Walk,” a white, AI-generated country singer built with a vocal approach modeled on Brown’s sound, marks the moment when the situation shifted from eerie to uncomfortable for Brown.

“It’s a white AI man with a Black voice,” Brown said. “And he’s singing like a Negro spiritual.”

For Brown, the shock quickly gave way to action. He went into the studio and recorded his cover of the song, which was released two weeks ago. He also put out a reworked derivative of the track on Monday with new lyrics and a new arrangement.

Brown’s management said his response to the song is a direct challenge to the legal, ethical and policy void surrounding AI-generated music. He wants to use his own lived experience to force the industry and lawmakers to confront who owns art and what happens when technology outpaces the rights of the human creators it imitates.

“If someone is going to sing like me, it should be me,” he said.

‘Shakespeare In Love’ playwright Stoppard dies

British playwright Tom Stoppard, a playful, probing dramatist who won an Academy Award for the screenplay for 1998’s “Shakespeare In Love,” has died. He was 88.

In a statement Saturday, United Agents said the Czech-born Stoppard — often hailed as the greatest British playwright of his generation — died “peacefully” at his home in Dorset in southwest England, surrounded by his family.

King Charles III said Stoppard was “a dear friend who wore his genius lightly.”

Theaters in London’s West End will dim their lights for two minutes on Tuesday in tribute.

Over a six-decade career, Stoppard’s brain-teasing plays for theater, radio and screen ranged from Shakespeare and science to philosophy and the historic tragedies of the 20th century. Five of them won Tony Awards for best play: “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead” in 1968; “Travesties” in 1976; “The Real Thing” in 1984; “The Coast of Utopia” in 2007; and “Leopoldstadt” in 2023.

Dizzily prolific, Stoppard also wrote many radio plays, a novel, television series including “Parade’s End” (2013) and many film screenplays. These included dystopian Terry Gilliam comedy “Brazil” (1985), Steven Spielberg-directed war drama “Empire of the Sun” (1987) and Elizabethan romcom “Shakespeare in Love” (1998) — for which he and Marc Norman shared a best adapted screenplay Oscar.

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
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EDITORIAL

Erik Slavin, Editor in Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

+49(0)631.3615.9324; DSN (314)583.9324

Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington

Joe Fleming and Sean Moores,
Washington Bureau Chiefs (acting)
fleming.joe@stripes.com
moores.sean@stripes.com

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News

bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast

David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)229.3171

CONTACT US

Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

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OPINION

The West is facing 5 fearsome new giants

By ADRIAN WOOLDRIDGE

Bloomberg Opinion

The Second World War was won on the home front as well as the battlefield. As early as 1942, the British government pledged itself, as soon as the Nazis were defeated, to slaying “Five Giants on the road to reconstruction”: Disease, Want, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. This pledge boosted morale and provided the template for the postwar welfare state. A “revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not for patching,” wrote William Beveridge, the Liberal grandee who wrote the government report that identified the giants.

Today we are involved in another war and another revolution: an undeclared war against the “axis of autocracy,” led by Russia and China, and a revolution driven by technological innovation. The Five Giants that Beveridge identified have largely been vanquished: Life expectancy across the West is about 20 years longer than it was in 1942. But new giants have emerged: giants that are more subtle than the old giants but no less fearsome. These giants explain why the West is gripped by such a sense of malaise despite relentless material progress and why its citizens’ confidence in the future is fading.

What are these new giants, and how can we defeat them?

Loneliness. More than a quarter of U.S. households consist of one person living alone: cat ladies and cavemen. Many workers, particularly in the just-in-time economy, work alone as well as live alone. A quarter of U.S. 40-year-olds have never married, up from just 6% in 1970. Social isolation is bad for individuals, increasing the chances of premature death as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, but it is also bad for the species. The German fertility rate is just 1.35 children per woman and the South Korean rate is 0.7.

Addiction. Addiction is a growing problem thanks not only to a new generation of super drugs, such as fentanyl, but also to the skill of supposedly respectable companies in encouraging addictive behavior. Food companies are some of the leading culprits here, engineering their products with an irresistible blend of sugar, salt and fat. More than two in five Americans are obese. Digital companies design clever algorithms to keep us clicking and scrolling. Hence our third giant.

Distraction. The internet has become a distraction machine: Headlines blare, emails drop, special offers ping. But it is only one of many: 24-hour news programs feature “crawlers” that provide yet more information. Cars come with all-enveloping entertainment systems. Young people who were brought up in this buzzing new world find it difficult to concentrate for any length of time or perform complicated tasks. The so-called Flynn effect, whereby average IQ had been rising relentlessly for decades, has been showing signs of reversal since the turn of the century.

Lies. Lies are on the march as never before, thanks to a combination of technological innovation and information warfare. The internet giants are the first big broadcasters to be exempt from strict standards of truth or balance in what they publish. Hostile powers, particularly Russia, are using this free-for-all to inject lies, designed to inflame antagonisms or simply muddy the waters, into the bloodstream of democracy.



JOE GIDDENS/AP

Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer reads with pupils during a recent visit to Welland Academy in Peterborough, England. Just 30% of Britons aged 8-18 say that they enjoy reading in their spare time, a 36% decrease since the reading survey began in 2005.

This is eroding the bedrock of liberal democracy, informed debate.

Complexity. Complexity smothers everything, like Japanese knotweed. Passwords get convoluted. Forms get longer. Government departments get ever more Kafkaesque. Moses’ Ten Commandments have become Ten Billion Commandments, many of them contradictory. Complexity is deeply egalitarian, acting as a tax on people with low IQs while creating jobs for lawyers; it’s also deeply anti-progress. Scientists devote their lives to making grant applications, or sitting on grant committees, while building companies devote more time to regulations than to pouring concrete.

These five giants support each other. Addiction holds hands with both Distraction and Loneliness, for example: Young people (particularly men) who are addicted to their screens retreat from society into the land of the infinite scroll. Collectively, they create a general sense of a world spinning out of control. We must slay our giants to restore a sense of agency and progress.

Governments need to fight on as many fronts as possible: Departments of agriculture need to think about their role in promoting addictive foodstuffs just as departments of education need to think about opening children’s eyes to information manipulation. Four policies could produce outsized benefits:

Re-introduce national service: Offer school-leavers a choice between military service or voluntary service. National service would help to address both the division of society into social groups that have little to do with each other and the rising epidemic of loneliness. More than a million British 18- to 24-year-olds are neither in work nor in education, disconnected from society and wasting their lives in electronic distraction. Far-seeing (and Russia-facing) countries such as Sweden and Finland have already reintroduced national service.

Prioritize reading: Reading is the antidote to distraction because it obliges people to focus on a single text for a sustained period. (The great Austrian writer Stephan Zweig defined a book as a “handful of silence that assuages torment and unrest.”) Yet reading is a dying habit. Just 30% of Britons aged 8-18 say that they enjoy read-

ing in their spare time, a 36% decrease since the reading survey began in 2005. Countries everywhere should do everything they can to reverse these trends, from pro-reading campaigns to a renewed focus on the written text in schools.

Tackle complexity: Governments should put their own houses in order by reducing their own addiction to complexity. This will involve taking on interest groups that thrive on complexity such as lawyers and bureaucratic jobsworths. They should also force private sector companies to prioritize simplicity over complexity and intelligibility over gobbledygook. Governments have occasionally embraced this cause. Cass Sunstein put the reduction of “sludge” in the form of bureaucratic complexity at the heart of his work as head of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in 2009-12. But complexity-busting needs to be a permanent government priority rather than an episodic enthusiasm.

Crack the whip at digital companies: Wherever you look — at the epidemic of lies or addiction or distraction — the digital companies are at the heart of it. The companies must be forced to deal with the social pollution that we are causing. Start by repealing Section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act, which grants them limited federal immunity for what they publish online. They also need to be encouraged to side with the bright side rather than the dark side. AI gives us a great opportunity to tackle the giant Complexity. Algorithms can be adjusted to encourage concentration as well as distraction.

The public sector across the world can often seem bloated and inert. But that is not because it is populated entirely by jobsworths. It is because it is disconnected from the new challenges that trouble the world. Give the state sector a new set of giants to tackle — giants that touch and trouble us all — and it may well surprise us with its energy and zeal.

Adrian Wooldridge is the global business columnist for Bloomberg Opinion. A former writer at the Economist, he is author of “The Aristocracy of Talent: How Meritocracy Made the Modern World.” This column reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

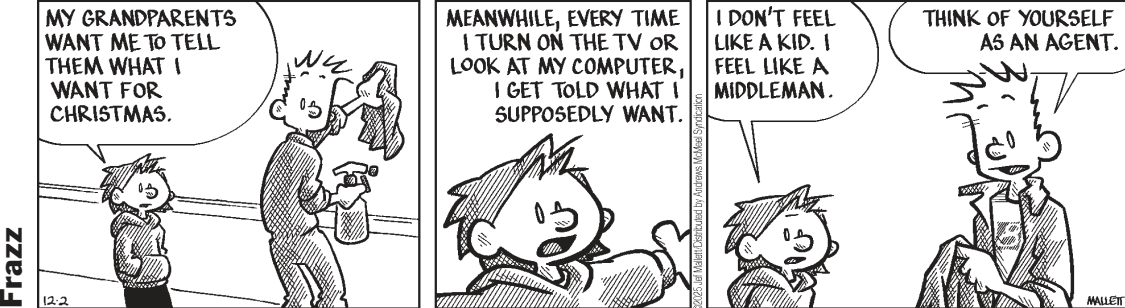
Bizarro



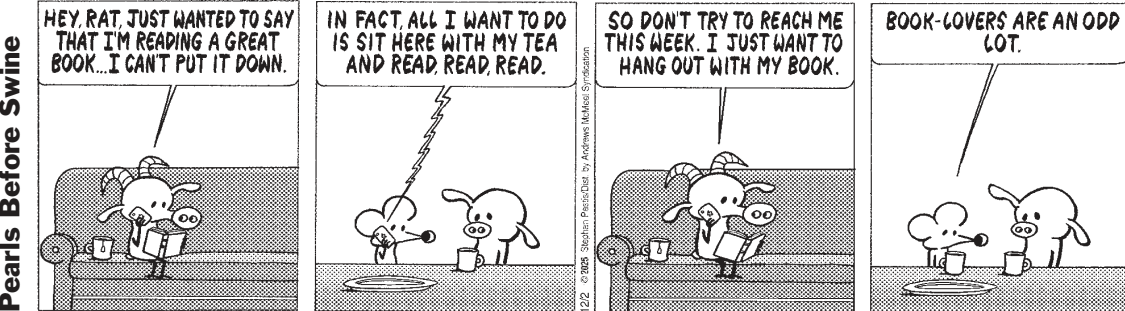
Loose Parts



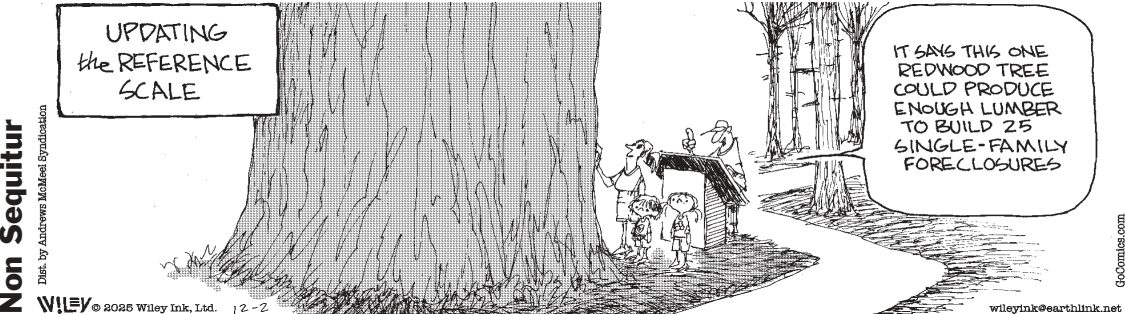
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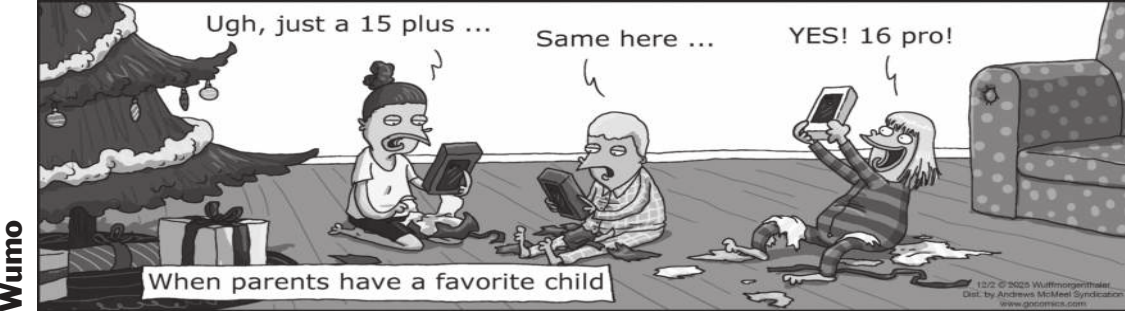
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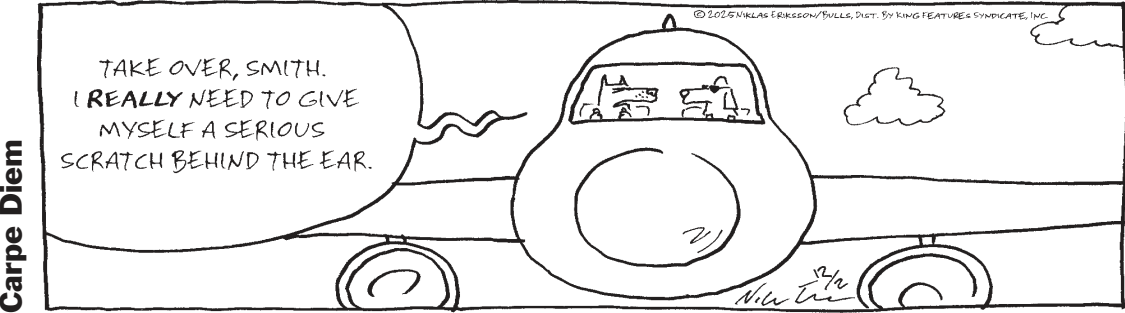
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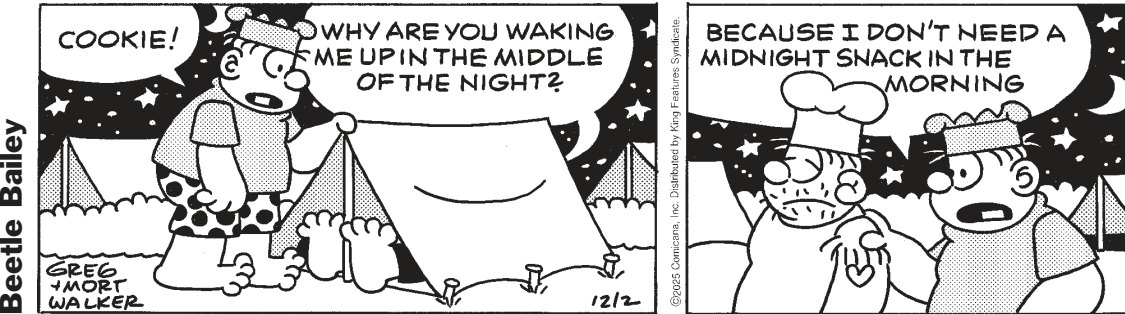
Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

- ACROSS**
1 Ms. Streisand, to fans
5 Mast
9 Cry
12 Golf bag item
13 Texas city
14 Bird (Pref.)
15 Church fundraisers
17 Cariou of Broadway
18 Comic shrieks
19 Correct, as text
21 "Hungarian Rhapsodies" composer
24 Grade-school basics
25 Singer Anita
26 Admitted as a member
30 Completely
31 Offered one's seat
32 Greek H
33 Emotions
35 McNally partner
36 Missile shelter
37 Some tomatoes
38 Spreadsheet software
40 Billions of years
42 "Today" rival, briefly
43 "Get rid of junk" events
48 Solidify
49 Crèche group
50 Caboose
- 51 NBC weekend show
52 Lighten
53 Bigfoot's cousin
- DOWN**
1 Paper Mate rival
2 Coach Parseghian
3 — choy
4 Companion of Grumpy
5 Love letter letters
6 Buddies
7 Expert serve
8 "Citizen Kane" sled
9 Company's pitching pros
10 Pizzeria fixture
11 Predicament
16 Collection
20 Cato's 1200
21 Challah unit
- 22 Not busy
23 Meeting with a prospective customer
24 Big fusses
26 "Pay — mind"
27 Yule quaff
28 Mediterranean volcano
29 June honorees
31 "What a fool I am!"
34 Fib
35 Prayer beads
37 ICU workers
38 Flan ingredients
39 Marvel superheroes
40 Work units
41 Garfield's pal
44 Bond rating
45 Grant's foe
46 "Mangia!"
47 Hindu honorific

Answer to Previous Puzzle

U	R	S	A		P	A	C		M	O	M	A
N	E	U	T	R	I	N	O		A	P	E	S
S	A	N	T	A	C	O	N		H	A	M	S
				I	N	A		C	H	A	L	E
S	L	I	C	K		P	E	E	L			
T	O	S			C	A	R	R	O	T	S	
P	O	E		T	O	R	T	S		O	N	A
		M	E	M	E	N	T	O		M	R	I
				U	R	I	S		B	O	O	T
W	H	A	T	I	F		R	A	J			
R	O	S	A		E	M	O	T	I	C	O	N
E	R	A	T		R	O	N	S	T	A	D	T
N	A	P	E		S	E	A		O	T	O	H

12-2 CRYPTOQUIP

OC AYRAVY XJL-GRZPK YJWK

RPKYN, XZP VJPYN JNY XJWU

RH CNOYHLVF PYNGD, LR

PKYF LOD JHL GJUY ZA?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: VARIETIES OF PECANS, PISTACHIOS AND CASHEWS CULTIVATED FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE IN SPACE: ASTRONUTS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals B

SCOREBOARD/AUTO RACING

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

AP Top 25

The Top 25 teams in The Associated Press college football poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, records through Nov. 29, total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote, and previous ranking:

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. Ohio St. (61)	12-0	1645	1
2. Indiana (5)	12-0	1589	2
3. Georgia	11-1	1504	4
4. Oregon	11-1	1396	5
5. Texas Tech	11-1	1366	7
6. Mississippi	11-1	1350	6
7. Texas A&M	11-1	1282	3
8. Oklahoma	10-2	1140	8
9. Notre Dame	10-2	1100	9
10. Alabama	10-2	1053	10
11. BYU	11-1	982	11
12. Miami (FL)	10-2	898	13
13. Vanderbilt	10-2	871	12
14. Texas	9-3	861	16
15. Utah	10-2	739	14
16. Virginia	10-2	637	17
17. Southern Cal	9-3	566	19
18. Michigan	9-3	441	15
19. James Madison	11-1	417	20
20. North Texas	11-1	402	21
21. Tulane	10-2	373	22
22. Arizona	0-0	257	-
23. Navy	9-2	146	-
24. Georgia Tech	9-3	90	23
25. Missouri	8-4	73	-

Others receiving votes: Tennessee 71, Houston 57, Iowa 51, UNLV 33, New Mexico 20, South Florida 11, SMU 8, Iowa St. 4, Arizona St. 3, Louisville 3, UConn 3, North Dakota St. 3, Illinois 2, Washington 1, Pittsburgh 1, San Diego St. 1.

USA Today Coaches Poll

The USA Today Coaches Poll Top 25 with team's records through Saturday in parentheses, total points based on 25 for first place through one point for 25th, ranking in last week's poll and first-place votes received

	Pts	Prv	1st
1 Ohio State (12-0)	1,575	1	63
2 Indiana (12-0)	1,510	2	0
3 Georgia (11-1)	1,438	4	0
4 Oregon (11-1)	1,353	5	0
5 Mississippi (11-1)	1,306	6	0
6 Texas Tech (11-1)	1,266	7	0
7 Texas A&M (11-1)	1,178	3	0
8 Oklahoma (10-2)	1,106	8	0
9 Notre Dame (10-2)	1,061	9	0
10 Alabama (10-2)	1,019	10	0
11 BYU (11-1)	942	11	0
12 Vanderbilt (10-2)	855	12	0
13 Miami (Fla.) (10-2)	844	13	0
14 Texas (9-3)	753	16	0
15 Utah (10-2)	750	14	0
16 Virginia (10-2)	613	17	0
17 S. California (9-3)	505	20	0
18 Michigan (9-3)	427	15	0
19 JMU (11-1)	356	21	0
20 North Texas (11-1)	345	22	0
21 Tulane (10-2)	300	23	0
22 Arizona (9-3)	223	NR	0
23 Georgia Tech (9-3)	170	19	0
24 Tennessee (8-4)	135	18	0
25 Navy (9-2)	107	NR	0

Dropped Out: No. 24 Pittsburgh (8-4); No. 25 SMU (8-4).

Others Receiving Votes: Iowa (8-4) 85; Houston (9-3) 73; Missouri (8-4) 52; SMU (8-4) 28; Washington (8-4) 18; UNLV (10-2) 17; Pittsburgh (8-4) 15; South Florida (9-3) 12; Illinois (8-4) 9; Connecticut (9-3) 6; Louisville (8-4) 6; Penn State (6-6) 5; TCU (8-4) 5; Arizona State (8-4) 2; New Mexico (9-3) 2; Old Dominion (9-3) 2; San Diego State (9-3) 1.

Schedule

Friday, Dec. 5

Jacksonville St. (8-4) vs. Kennesaw St. (9-3), Conference USA Championship at Jacksonville, Ala.
No. 19 James Madison (11-1) vs. Troy (8-4), Sun Belt Championship at Harrisonburg, Va.
No. 20 North Texas (11-1) vs. No. 21 Tulane (10-2), American Athletic Conference Championship at New Orleans
Boise St. (8-4) vs. UNLV (10-2), Mountain West Championship at Boise, Idaho

Saturday, Dec. 6

W. Michigan (8-4) vs. Miami (Ohio) (7-5), MAC Championship at Detroit
No. 1 Ohio St. (12-0) vs. No. 2 Indiana (12-0), Big Ten Championship at Indianapolis
Jackson St. (9-2) vs. Prairie View (9-3), SWAC Championship at Jackson, Miss.
No. 3 Georgia (11-1) vs. No. 10 Alabama (10-2), SEC Championship at Atlanta
No. 5 Texas Tech (11-1) vs. No. 11 BYU (11-1), Big 12 Championship at Arlington, Texas
No. 16 Virginia (10-2) vs. Duke (7-5), ACC Championship at Charlotte, N.C.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Sunday men's scores

EAST

Albany 90, SUNY-Oneonta 62
American 92, Longwood 66
Ball State 96, Le Moyne 85
Central Connecticut 122, Johnson and Wales (RI) 57

Colgate 72, Fordham 62
Cornell 101, Bucknell 72
Fairfield 72, New Hampshire 68
Hofstra 77, Pennsylvania 60
Loyola (Md) 95, Coppin State 84
Merrimack 66, La Salle 60
Monmouth 88, Lafayette 74
New Haven 92, Mitchell 69
Quinnipiac 76, Stonehill 62
Robert Morris 80, Stetson 62
Saint Joseph's 60, Princeton 58
Siena 64, Maine 60
West Virginia 70, Mercyhurst 38
Yale 77, Vermont 74

SOUTH

Belmont 96, Charleston 73
Coastal Carolina 67, Alabama A&M 60
Presbyterian 69, The Citadel 41
St. Bonaventure 70, Florida Atlantic 65
Tennessee State 70, Chattanooga 64
UNC Asheville 67, Appalachian State 55
William & Mary 88, Old Dominion 75

MIDWEST

Missouri State 92, Northeastern State 71
Western Illinois 89, St. Ambrose 73

SOUTHWEST

North Texas 72, Prairie View A&M 69
South Alabama 82, UTSA 58
Texas Tech 76, Wyoming 72

FAR WEST

Cal State Bakersfield 76, Fresno State 71
Long Beach State 76, San Diego 72
UC Irvine 72, San Jose State 63

Sunday women's scores

EAST

Canisius 75, Mercyhurst 67
Delaware 91, Towson 80
Dquesne 69, Navy 67, OT
Fordham 72, LIU 51
Holy Cross 64, New Hampshire 45
Lehigh 58, Brown 54
Liberty 68, Manhattan 56
NJIT 71, Lafayette 60
Penn State 82, Yale 64
Princeton 71, DePaul 41
Providence 62, Bryant 53
Rutgers 57, Saint Peter's 39
Syracuse 78, Howard 62
UMass Lowell 82, Maine-Fort Kent 36
Wagner 67, Cornell 54

SOUTH

Coastal Carolina 108, Gardner-Webb 57
Davidson 64, Ohio 59
East Tennessee State 60, E. Illinois 54
Florida International 64, Seattle 59
Georgia Southern 58, Wofford 52
Gonzaga 65, Marquette 61
Iowa State 106, Indiana 95
Louisville 100, Bellarmine 37
Michigan State 72, Clemson 64
Mississippi St. 66, Louisiana-Monroe 54
Missouri State 77, Coppin State 56
Morehead State 66, Marshall 56
Northern Kentucky 77, S. Indiana 71, OT
Oklahoma 109, Florida State 91
Oregon 58, Auburn 53
South Alabama 75, Florida A&M 54
South Florida 90, New Orleans 58
Temple 84, Western Carolina 64
Tennessee-Martin 78, Oakwood 53
UMBC 68, Presbyterian 48
UNC Wilmington 69, Queens 59
Virginia 92, Maryland-Eastern Shore 59
Winthrop 66, South Carolina State 45

MIDWEST

Arkansas State 74, Kent State 54
Bowling Green 56, Purdue Fort Wayne 53
Central Michigan 57, Purdue 55
Eastern Michigan 64, Detroit Mercy 55
Evansville 65, Northern Illinois 52
Illinois 100, Le Moyne 28
Iowa 86, Fairfield 72
Ohio State 130, Niagara 32
St. Thomas 77, Wisconsin-Stout 40
UConn 104, Xavier 39
Western Kentucky 60, S. Illinois 52
Youngstown State 90, Akron 63

SOUTHWEST

Baylor 76, Grambling State 35
Harvard 69, Arkansas 51
Houston 66, Tulsa 61
Texas 81, Penn 63
Texas State 93, Prairie View A&M 52

FAR WEST

Lindenwood 58, Vermont 54
Montana State 71, Colorado 70
Portland 73, Eastern Washington 58
San Diego 65, Southeast Missouri St. 55
San Francisco 92, Cal State Monterey Bay 52
Santa Clara 76, Hawai'i 57
UC San Diego 94, Portland State 64
UCLA 99, Tennessee 77

Dec. 2

1944 — Ohio State quarterback Leslie Horvath wins the Heisman Trophy.
1947 — Notre Dame quarterback Johnny Lujack wins the Heisman Trophy.
1951 — Future Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver Don Hutson has his #14 jersey retired by the Green Bay Packers; first number retired in franchise history.
1952 — Oklahoma halfback Billy Vessels is named the Heisman Trophy winner.
1958 — Army back Pete Dawkins is named the Heisman Trophy winner.
1977 — Veterinarian Mark Gerard is in-

DEALS

Sunday's transactions

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association

INDIANA PACERS — Signed G Ethan Thompson to a two-year contract.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Sent F Georgii Merkulov to Providence (AHL).

DALLAS STARS — Reinstated F Chase Wheatcroft from non-roster and sent him to Texas (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Placed F Tyler Pitlick on waivers.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Placed F Kyle Palmieri on injured reserve. Recalled F Marc Gatcomb from Bridgeport (AHL).

NEW YORK RANGERS — Recalled G Spencer Martin from Hartford (AHL). Sent G Dylan Garand to Hartford. Placed D Adam Fox on long-term injured reserve.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Placed D Adam Ginning on waivers.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Reassigned F Tristan Broz to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL). Loaned F Danton Heinen to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Recalled G Carter Hart from Henderson (AHL). Reassigned G Carl Lindbom to Henderson.

COLLEGE

NEW MEXICO — Head football coach Jason Eck has signed a new five-year contract.

LSU — Lane Kiffin named head football coach.

COLLEGE SOCCER

Men's Division I tournament

Third Round

Saturday, Nov. 29

Maryland 3, UConn 0
Georgetown 2, High Point 1
Portland 1, Grand Canyon 0

Sunday, Nov. 30

Furman 3, Hofstra 3, 2OT, Furman advances 5-4 on penalty kicks
Akron 2, Duke 0
NC State 2, UNC Greensboro 0
Bryant 2, Saint Louis 2, 2OT, Saint Louis wins 4-3 on penalty kicks.
Washington 1, Stanford 0

Quarterfinals

Friday, Dec. 5

Georgetown vs. NC State
Portland vs. Furman

Saturday, Dec. 6

Akron vs. Saint Louis
Maryland vs. Washington

Women's Division I tournament

Semifinals

Kansas City, Mo. Friday, Dec. 5

Stanford vs. Duke
Florida St. vs. TCU

COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

Women's Division I Tournament

First Round

Thursday, Dec. 4

No. 4 Colorado vs. American
No. 4 Kansas vs. High Point
No. 5 Miami (FL) vs. Tulsa
No. 4 Indiana vs. Toledo
No. 6 UTEP vs. North Carolina
No. 3 Wisconsin vs. Eastern Ill.

Friday, Dec. 5

No. 7 Western Kentucky vs. Marquette
No. 8 San Diego vs. Kansas St.
No. 6 TCU vs. Steven F. Austin St.
No. 8 Penn St. vs. South Florida
No. 2 Louisville vs. Loyola Chicago
No. 3 Texas A&M vs. Campbell
No. 7 South Dakota St. vs. Arizona
No. 1 Nebraska vs. LIU
No. 1 Texas vs. Florida A&M
No. 2 Stanford vs. Utah Valley

Second Round

TBD

PRO SOCCER

MLS playoffs

MLS Cup

Saturday, Dec. 6 Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Miami vs. Vancouver

SPORTLIGHT



DARKO BANDIC/AP

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, of the Netherlands, celebrates after winning the Qatar F1 Grand Prix, in Lusail, Qatar on Sunday.

McLaren's bad call sets Verstappen up to win F1 Qatar GP

By JEREMY PUGMIRE

Associated Press

One week after losing all their points from the Las Vegas Grand Prix, McLaren threw away a bunch more in an increasingly tense Formula 1 title race by botching a strategy call at the Qatar GP on Sunday.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen took full advantage of the unexpected gift to clinch a seventh win this season — his 70th overall — as he closed the gap on championship leader Lando Norris from 24 points at the start of the weekend to 12 points, heading into next Sunday's title decider in Abu Dhabi. McLaren still has two drivers in contention, with Oscar Piastri four points behind Verstappen in third, but must stop the slide.

Last Sunday, the two drivers lost a combined 30 points after both were disqualified following the race, won by Verstappen.

At the Qatar GP, Norris would have clinched his first F1 title with a win but finished fourth, with Piastri placing second having started from pole position and looking assured.

But after an early safety car, McLaren's decision to keep both drivers out backfired badly as Verstappen effectively benefited from a free tire change in a mandatory two-stop race.

"It's tough, we just have to have faith in the team to make the right decision," Norris told broadcaster Sky Sports. "Now it's the wrong decision, we shouldn't have done it (and) we didn't do a good job today."

Norris leads with 408 points, Verstappen has 396 and Piastri 392. All three title contenders have won seven races. Verstappen

is aiming for a fifth straight F1 crown, with Piastri chasing a first title. Norris will become the first British driver to win the championship since Lewis Hamilton clinched his seventh title in 2020 if he finishes at least third in Abu Dhabi even if Verstappen wins the race.

McLaren's gamble

Although Verstappen overtook Norris heading into Turn 1, Piastri made a clean start and took a comfortable lead early on.

Piastri also said McLaren made an error by staying out following the safety car, which came out after Nico Hulkenberg's Sauber was sent spinning off the track on Lap 7 after being clipped by Alpine driver Pierre Gasly.

"Speechless. I don't know any words," Piastri said. "It is a little bit tough to swallow at the moment."

Later, the Australian added: "Clearly we didn't get it right" and said there would be discussions.

The decision played into Verstappen's hands and the elated Dutchman climbed out of his car and jumped into the arms of his mechanics and engineers after winning.

"This was an incredible race for us, we made the right call as a team to box under that safety car," Verstappen said. "Super happy to win here, we stayed in the fight until the end. Incredible."

The decision to stay out was even more questionable in a race where drivers had to take two pit stops over the 57 laps — a measure imposed on safety grounds due to a high risk of tire degradation at the Lusail International Circuit.

NBA/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

NBA scoreboard

NBA ROUNDUP

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	13	6	.684	—
Toronto	14	7	.667	—
Boston	11	9	.550	2½
Philadelphia	10	9	.526	3
Brooklyn	3	16	.158	10
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	13	7	.650	—
Atlanta	13	8	.619	½
Orlando	12	8	.600	1
Charlotte	6	14	.300	7
Washington	2	16	.111	10
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	16	4	.800	—
Cleveland	12	9	.571	4½
Chicago	9	10	.474	6½
Milwaukee	9	12	.429	7½
Indiana	4	16	.200	12
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	13	4	.765	—
San Antonio	13	6	.684	1
Memphis	9	12	.429	6
Dallas	6	15	.286	9
New Orleans	3	18	.143	12
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	20	1	.952	—
Denver	14	5	.737	5
Minnesota	12	8	.600	7½
Portland	8	12	.400	11½
Utah	6	13	.316	13
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	15	4	.789	—
Phoenix	12	9	.571	4
Golden State	11	10	.524	5
L.A. Clippers	5	15	.250	10½
Sacramento	5	16	.238	11
Sunday's games				
Boston 117, Cleveland 115 Atlanta 142, Philadelphia 134, 2OT Houston 129, Utah 101 New York 116, Toronto 94 Minnesota 125, San Antonio 112 Oklahoma City 123, Portland 115 L.A. Lakers 133, New Orleans 121 Memphis 115, Sacramento 107				
Monday's games				
Atlanta at Detroit Cleveland at Indiana Milwaukee at Washington Charlotte at Brooklyn Chicago at Orlando L.A. Clippers at Miami Dallas at Denver Houston at Utah Phoenix at L.A. Lakers				
Tuesday's games				
Washington at Philadelphia Portland at Toronto Memphis at San Antonio Minnesota at New Orleans New York at Boston Oklahoma City at Golden State				
Wednesday's games				
Denver at Indiana Portland at Cleveland San Antonio at Orlando Charlotte at New York L.A. Clippers at Atlanta Brooklyn at Chicago Detroit at Milwaukee Sacramento at Houston Miami at Dallas				

Celtics win after near collapse vs. Cavs

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Payton Pritchard scored a season-high 42 points, Jaylen Brown got his fourth career triple-double and the Boston Celtics barely held on to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 117-115 on Sunday night after giving up most of their big lead.

Boston led by 21 points in the third quarter and was still up by 11 with less than two minutes left before Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell made consecutive 3-pointers to pull the Cavaliers within 114-112 with 20.5 seconds left.

Pritchard, who made several big buckets down the stretch, then made two free throws to put the Celtics ahead 116-112 with 5.9 seconds remaining.

Cleveland guard Darius Garland buried a 3-pointer with 1.2 seconds to go, and the Cavs fouled Brown on the ensuing inbounds pass following a timeout. Boston's All-Star guard could only split a pair of free throws, giving Cleveland a final chance.

But Evan Mobley's jumper was short at the final horn, allowing the Celtics to escape.

Hawks 142, 76ers 134: Jalen Johnson hit consecutive 3-pointers late in the second overtime and finished with 41 points and 14 rebounds to help visiting Atlanta spoil Joel Embiid's return in a victory over Philadelphia.

Johnson snapped a tie with his third 3 of the game and hit another on the next possession to send the Hawks to their fourth win in five games. Nickeil Alexander-Walker added 34 points, including two shots to tie the game at 126 and send it to the second OT.

Tyrese Maxey scored 44 points for the 76ers and hit a pair of clutch shots, one that forced OT and another that gave them the late lead in the first overtime. Maxey, an 88% free throw shooter, missed two from the line that could have stretched the lead to four, but instead cost Philadelphia in the final seconds of OT.

Embiid scored 18 points in 30 minutes in his return for the Sixers after he missed nine games because of injuries.



PHIL LONG/AP

The Boston Celtics' Payton Pritchard can't get to the ball as the Cavaliers' Donovan Mitchell, left, and Tyrese Proctor (24) almost collide during the second half in Cleveland on Sunday.

Rockets 129, Jazz 101: Kevin Durant scored 25 points in his return from a two-game absence, leading visiting Houston to a victory over Utah.

Alperen Sengün had 27 points to help the Rockets to their fifth straight road victory. Steven Adams chipped in 13 points and 12 rebounds off the bench, and Amen Thompson had nine assists.

Knicks 116, Raptors 94: Josh Hart had 20 points, 12 rebounds and seven assists, Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points and eight rebounds and host New York beat Toronto for its fourth straight victory.

Jalen Brunson had 18 points, seven assists and six rebounds, and Mikal Bridges and Miles McBride each scored 14 points. The Knicks improved to 10-1 at home and 13-6 overall. They are perfect since Hart joined the starting lineup last week.

Timberwolves 125, Spurs 112: Anthony Edwards scored 32 points to become Minnesota's all-time leader in games with 30 or more points, Julius Randle added 22 points, 12 assists and six rebounds, and the host Timberwolves pulled away from San Antonio in the fourth quarter.

Donte DiVincenzo scored 18 points and Naz Reid added 15 for Minnesota, which went 2-0 at home on the weekend after losing three straight on the road. The Spurs fell to 5-2 without Victor Wembanyama, who missed another game with a left calf strain.

Thunder 123, Trail Blazers 115: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 26 points, Chet Holmgren had 19 points and nine rebounds, and visiting Oklahoma City beat Portland for its 12th straight victory.

In his second game back from wrist surgery, Jalen Williams had

16 points and eight rebounds in 34 minutes.

Lakers 133, Pelicans 121: Luka Doncic scored 20 of his 34 points in the first quarter and host Los Angeles raced to its seventh straight victory, this one over New Orleans.

Doncic also had 12 rebounds and seven assists to help the Lakers win for the 13th time in 15 games. Austin Reaves added 33 points and eight assists, Deandre Ayton had 22 points and 12 rebounds and Rui Hachimura scored 14 points.

Grizzlies 115, Kings 107: Zach Edey had a career-high 32 points and 17 rebounds to help visiting Memphis hold off Sacramento.

Edey recorded his third double-double of the season in 29 minutes, shooting 16-for-20 from the floor. He scored six points in the final 3½ minutes to lead the Grizzlies to their fourth straight road win.

Texas Tech extends non-conference home win streak to 44

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — JT Toppin scored 27 points and had nine rebounds as No. 20 Texas Tech outlasted Wyoming for a 76-72 win Sunday that extended the Red Raiders' non-conference home winning streak to 44 games.

LeJuan Watts added 19 points and Christian Anderson 15 for Texas Tech (6-2).

Leland Walker had 28 points and was the only player scoring in double figures

for the Cowboys (6-2). He had a 3-pointer to make it 75-72 before a timeout with 8.8 seconds left.

Wyoming lost 96-49 in Lubbock early last season, but this game had eight ties and seven lead changes.

The Red Raiders led 36-26 on Toppin's layup with 2:49 left in the first half, then went more than 7½ minutes without a field goal. They missed their last three shots before halftime and started the second half 0

for 6 until Watts' jumper with 15:07 tied the game at 41.

The Cowboys' only lead after that was on a layup by Uriyah Rojas with 7:38 left that made it 56-55. Toppin, the preseason AP All-America junior forward, then scored on consecutive possessions for Texas Tech, a putback layup and a fastbreak layup, part of his 10 points in that closing stretch.

The Red Raiders haven't lost a non-con-

ference home game since an overtime loss to No. 15 Kentucky in January 2020. The only teams with longer active streaks are Auburn at 67 and Big 12 foe Baylor with 47. Third-year Tech coach Grant McCasland is 21-0 at home in non-conference home games.

The Red Raiders play LSU next Sunday at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth, Texas. Wyoming is home Saturday against Dartmouth College.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Florida hires Tulane's Sumrall as coach with deal for 6 years, \$44.7M

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida hired Tulane's Jon Sumrall as football coach Sunday, settling for its second choice after Lane Kiffin picked LSU over the Gators.

Sumrall finalized a six-year, \$44.7 million contract that comes with incentives, according to a person familiar with the search. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because financial details were not released. The deal averages \$7.45 million annually.

The 43-year-old Sumrall will remain with the 22nd-ranked Green Wave for the American Conference title game next week and through the College Football Playoff if Tulane makes the 12-team field.

Florida also agreed to terms with longtime NFL executive Dave Caldwell as its general manager. Caldwell won a Super Bowl during his five seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles and built a roster that made the AFC title game in eight years (2013-20) with the Jacksonville Jaguars. He also spent time with Atlanta, Indianapolis and Carolina.

Caldwell is expected to help manage the Gators' salary cap and evaluate talent — essentially taking some things off Sumrall's plate as college football moves closer to adopting NFL-style front offices.

Sumrall played linebacker at Kentucky (2002-04) and returned to his alma mater for a three-year

stint before becoming Troy's head coach in 2022. He won consecutive Sun Belt championships in two seasons with the Trojans and then enjoyed similar success at Tulane.

Sumrall is 19-7 in two years in New Orleans and led the Green Wave to the American championship game both seasons, so he has made four league title games in four years as a head coach. Florida is hoping he's Urban Meyer 2.0 and not Billy Napier 2.0.

"Not many coaches win big at two different non-Power programs, and even fewer do it as quickly as Jon has done it," Gators athletic director Scott Stricklin said. "He joins rare company — coaches like Urban Meyer, Brian Kelly and Willie Fritz — who've delivered immediate success at multiple stops. Jon's track record of rapid turnarounds speaks directly to his leadership and the culture he establishes."

Sumrall had been considered a possibility at Auburn, Arkansas and Ole Miss. Florida made a late push when Kiffin's interest in the Gators waned. Florida fans are likely to view him as a consolation prize, another gamble from a Group of Five conference.

Sumrall replaces Napier, who was fired in mid-October and went 22-23 over four seasons in Gainesville. Napier was nicknamed "Sun Belt Billy" because he often looked over his head in the powerhouse Southeastern Conference.



ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP

Despite leading Mississippi to an 11-1 record, a No. 6 ranking and a likely College Football Playoff berth, coach Lane Kiffin has left the Rebels to become the coach at LSU.

Kiffin leaves Ole Miss for LSU before playoffs

By BRETT MARTEL
Associated Press

Lane Kiffin left his one-loss Ole Miss team to become the coach at LSU on Sunday, taking over a program that has won national titles under three of its previous four coaches while saying he would have stayed to coach the Rebels in the postseason had he been allowed to.

The move comes two days after No. 6 Mississippi's victory over Mississippi State in the annual Egg Bowl rivalry game that all but guaranteed the Rebels a playoff berth when the bracket is announced Dec. 7.

"I was hoping to complete a historic six-season run with this year's team by leading Ole Miss through the playoffs, capitalizing on the team's incredible success and their commitment to finish strong," Kiffin wrote in a social media post. He said Rebels athletic director Keith Carter denied his request "despite the team also asking him to allow me to keep coaching them so they could better maintain their high level of performance."

"Unfortunately, that means Friday's Egg Bowl was my last game coaching the Rebels," he added.

Mississippi promoted defensive coordinator Pete Golding to succeed Kiffin. A former college player at Delta State in Mississippi, Golding is in his third season on the Rebels' staff after serving five years as a top defensive assistant at Alabama.

"Coach Kiffin and I met yester-

day, and he informed us that he is accepting the head coaching position at another school," Carter said. "For our program to begin preparing for its future — both the short and long term, he will be stepping away from the team immediately."

LSU trumpeted its new hire, with athletic director Verge Ausberry calling Kiffin the best coach in the country.

"Lane is a proven winner who has thrived in an era of college athletics that requires coaches to adapt and innovate," he said. "His passion, creativity and authenticity make him the ideal leader to guide LSU into the future and consistently position us among the sport's elite."

Ausberry — a Louisiana native, former Tigers football player and long-time LSU administrator — led a search for a new coach that focused primarily on Kiffin. LSU offered him a seven-year contract with an average annual salary of around \$13 million and pledged to ensure the football program has ample financial backing to pay players.

Kiffin's decision played out for days, contributing to an already-busy hiring cycle that saw several moves earlier Sunday, including three in the SEC alone. While players have transferred away from playoff-bound teams, a coach leaving a team that is 11-1 and all but certain to make the playoff is something new.

Kiffin and Carter had agreed last week that a decision had to be made

this weekend as negotiations dragged on. Carter could not afford to wait until after critical recruiting periods in December and transfer periods in January had passed before starting his coaching search. The CFP begins Dec. 19, the semifinals don't occur until Jan. 8-9 and the final is Jan. 19.

Kiffin is considered one of the top offensive coaches in college football. He went 55-19 in six seasons at Ole Miss, success that made him a target of several major programs seeking new coaches. Kiffin was also pursued by Florida, which fired coach Billy Napier a week before LSU cut ties with Brian Kelly.

While the Tigers offered Kiffin a raise over his current \$9 million annual salary, the decision was presumably about more than money.

LSU has a championship brand in multiple sports; state-of-the-art facilities; a rabid, regional fan following; and a legendary, historic home football venue in Tiger Stadium (nicknamed Death Valley), which towers over the banks of the Mississippi River and holds 102,000 spectators — 38,000 more than Mississippi's Vaught-Hemingway Stadium.

The lone football coach of LSU's past four who did not win a national championship was Kelly. He was fired in late October during his fourth season, a seismic development that also led then-athletic director Scott Woodward to resign under pressure from Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry.



LAURENCE KESTERSON/AP

Jon Sumrall, left, led Tulane to a 10-2 record this season and the No. 21 ranking. Though Sumrall is set to leave for Florida, he will keep coaching the Green Wave through the AAC title game and CFP if they win.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL/NHL

Spartans fire Smith, plan to hire Fitzgerald

BY LARRY LAGE
Associated Press

Michigan State plans to hire former Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald to lead its football program, according to a person familiar with the situation.

The person, who spoke to The Associated Press on Sunday on condition of anonymity because the expected hiring had not been made public, said an announcement would come this week.

The anticipated arrival of Fitzgerald comes after Michigan State fired Jonathan Smith on Sunday, two years after he was hired.

“The 2025 football season has not lived up to our shared standards for Michigan State Football,” athletic director J Batt said in a statement. “While that does not fall solely on Jonathan Smith, it’s become necessary to make a coaching change in order to chart a new direction for the program.”

The 50-year-old Fitzgerald reached a settlement with Northwestern in August, two years after he sued the university amid a team hazing scandal that led to his firing following an investigation. Details of the settlement were not made public.

Former Northwestern football players started filing lawsuits in 2023, alleging sexual abuse and racial discrimination on the team.



Fitzgerald

Similar allegations then spread across several sports.

Fitzgerald denied wrongdoing and sued for \$130 million. He alleged the school illegally terminated his employment and damaged his reputation, among other things. His case was set to go to trial this month.

Fitzgerald was an All-America linebacker for the Wildcats and starred on the 1995 team that won the Big Ten.

He was 110-101 in 17 seasons as Northwestern’s head coach. He led the Wildcats to Big Ten West championships in 2018 and 2020 and to five bowl victories. Over his final two seasons, though, Northwestern was 4-20.

Michigan State lost eight of its last nine games to finish 4-8 this season. Smith’s overall record at MSU was 9-15 and just 4-14 in the Big Ten. Smith is due more than \$30 million, according to terms of his seven-year contract.

The program has struggled since the school’s winningest coach, Mark Dantonio, retired and ended a record-breaking, 13-year run with consecutive 7-6 seasons and a .500 Big Ten record over two years.

Kentucky fires Stoops after 13 seasons, 7 bowls

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky has fired the Southeastern Conference’s longest-tenured coach, ending Mark Stoops’ tenure in his 13th season with the Wildcats after back-to-back losing records.



Stoops

Athletic director Mitch Barnhart said in a statement Monday morning that he informed Stoops they decided to go in a new direction and started a national search for his replacement.

Kentucky has become the sixth SEC program to change coaches this season, joining Auburn, Arkansas, Florida, LSU and Mississippi.

Stoops had been tied with N.C. State coach Dave Doeren for the fifth longest-tenured coach at a Bowl Subdivision program. He trailed only Kirk Ferentz with 27 seasons at Iowa, Kyle Whittingham with 21 at Utah, Troy Calhoun with 19 at Air Force and Dabo Swinney with 18 at Clemson.

Stoops signed an extension in November 2022 taking him through June 2031 and paying him

\$9 million for the 2025 season. That made him the fifth-highest paid coach in the SEC.

But Kentucky went 5-7 and missed becoming bowl eligible when shutout 41-0 by in-state rival Louisville in its season finale.

Kentucky had faced paying Stoops a \$37.6 million buyout within 60 days of his firing, though reportedly Stoops has agreed to a change in the payment schedule.

He was one of only 17 head coaches who coached at least 13 seasons at an SEC school since the league debuted in 1933. He was Kentucky’s all-time winningest coach with a record of 82-80, though 10 wins were vacated by the NCAA.

Stoops coached Kentucky to seven bowl games, a Top 10 ranking in The Associated Press Top 25 and a school-record 16-game winning streak against nonconference competition. He led the Wildcats to their first home win over Florida since 1986.

Stoops went 4-8 in 2024 with a 1-7 record in the SEC for his worst mark since his debut season at Kentucky. He lost top recruiter Vince Marrow, who had been with him since 2013, to in-state rival Louisville in June.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Tampa Bay	25	16	7	2	34	84	65	
Boston	27	15	12	0	30	83	86	
Montreal	24	13	8	3	29	82	87	
Ottawa	25	12	9	4	28	79	84	
Detroit	26	13	11	2	28	77	89	
Florida	24	12	11	1	25	75	77	
Toronto	25	11	11	3	25	85	89	
Buffalo	25	10	11	4	24	76	86	

Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	25	16	7	2	34	86	70	
New Jersey	25	16	8	1	33	80	74	
Washington	26	15	9	2	32	88	69	
Philadelphia	24	14	7	3	31	73	67	
Pittsburgh	24	12	7	5	29	74	70	
N.Y. Islanders	26	13	10	3	29	76	77	
N.Y. Rangers	27	13	12	2	28	72	71	
Columbus	25	11	9	5	27	73	82	

Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Colorado	25	18	1	6	42	103	55	
Dallas	26	17	5	4	38	93	71	
Minnesota	26	14	7	5	33	77	72	
Chicago	25	11	9	5	27	80	73	
Utah	26	12	11	3	27	77	77	
Winnipeg	24	13	11	0	26	76	70	
St. Louis	26	9	10	7	25	68	91	
Nashville	25	8	13	4	20	64	92	

Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Anaheim	25	15	9	1	31	92	83	
Los Angeles	25	12	6	7	31	68	70	
Vegas	25	11	6	8	30	76	76	
Seattle	24	11	7	6	28	59	66	
San Jose	26	12	11	3	27	74	84	
Edmonton	26	11	10	5	27	81	95	
Vancouver	26	10	13	3	23	79	95	
Calgary	27	9	14	4	22	65	82	

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.

Sunday's games

Washington 4, N.Y. Islanders 1
Chicago 5, Anaheim 3
Carolina 1, Calgary 0, OT
Dallas 6, Ottawa 1

Monday's games

Columbus at New Jersey
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia
Winnipeg at Buffalo
Anaheim at St. Louis
Utah at San Jose

Tuesday's games

Boston at Detroit
Dallas at N.Y. Rangers
Ottawa at Montreal
Tampa Bay at N.Y. Islanders
Toronto at Florida
Calgary at Nashville
Minnesota at Edmonton
Vancouver at Colorado
Chicago at Vegas
Washington at Los Angeles

Wednesday's games

Dallas at New Jersey
Buffalo at Philadelphia
Winnipeg at Montreal
Utah at Anaheim
Washington at San Jose

Thursday's games

Colorado at N.Y. Islanders
N.Y. Rangers at Ottawa
Nashville at Florida
Pittsburgh at Tampa Bay
St. Louis at Boston
Toronto at Carolina
Detroit at Columbus
Minnesota at Calgary
Seattle at Edmonton
Chicago at Los Angeles

Friday's games

Vegas at new Jersey
Buffalo at Winnipeg
San Jose at Dallas
Utah at Vancouver
Washington at Anaheim

Scoring leaders				
Through Monday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	25	20	24	44
Macklin Celebrini, SJ	26	14	23	37
Connor Bedard, CHI	25	16	21	37
Connor McDavid, EDM	26	11	25	36
Jason Robertson, DAL	26	16	19	35
Leo Carlsson, ANA	25	13	21	34
Mikko Rantanen, DAL	25	10	23	33
Martin Necas, COL	25	13	20	33



Chicago Blackhawks center Connor Bedard celebrates beating the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday, ending Chicago's losing streak.

NHL ROUNDUP

Blackhawks snap 5-game skid with win over Ducks

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Connor Bedard scored the tie-breaking goal at 9:55 of the third period, added an empty-net score and had two assists as the Chicago Blackhawks rallied from an early three-goal deficit to top the Anaheim Ducks 5-3 on Sunday and snap a five-game slide.

Tyler Bertuzzi, Ryan Greene and Colton Dach also scored as Chicago tied it 3 by 12:34 of the second. Chicago converted two of four power-play chances and killed all three Anaheim advantages.

Bedard beat Ville Husso with a nifty move from the front of the crease to put Chicago ahead 4-3 following a turnover by Alex Kilorn. Husso had entered the game 44 seconds earlier after starter Petr Mrazek exited with an undisclosed injury.

Bedard fired into an empty net with 1:55 remaining to seal it.

Spencer Knight rebounded from a shaky start to finish with 23 saves.

Cutter Gauthier had a goal and an assist as the Ducks jumped out a 3-0 lead midway through the first period.

Chris Kreider scored for the second straight game to give him 600 career points. Olen Zellweger also scored and Troy Terry set up two goals to extend his point streak to seven games.

Stars 6, Senators 1: Wyatt Johnston’s fourth career hat track included two power-play goals, giving him an NHL-best 12, and Jason Robertson had the winning goal and two assists in his 400th career NHL game as host Dallas beat Ottawa.

Johnston also had an assist to match a season high with four points.

Mavrik Bourque and Jamie Benn also scored for the Stars, who have won four consecutive games and are 10-1-1 in their last 12 games.

Robertson’s goal came 44 seconds after Jake Sanderson tied the score 1-1. Dallas outscored Ottawa 3-1 in the second period following a scoreless first.

Capitals 4, Islanders 1: Tom Wilson had two goals and an assist, and visiting Washington beat New York.

Alex Ovechkin and Aliaksei Protas each scored an empty-net goal as the Capitals extended their win streak to four games. Logan Thompson made 30 saves.

The Islanders have lost three straight and four of five overall. They dropped to 1-3-2 in matinee games this season with six remaining.

Wilson opened the scoring when he tapped in a pass from Ovechkin on the power play at 7:37 of the first period.

Horvat buried a bouncing puck near the top of the crease to make it 2-1 with 6:17 remaining in the third.

Hurricanes 1, Flames 0 (OT): Carolina rookie Brandon Bussi made 15 saves for his first NHL shutout, Nikolaj Ehlers scored at 2:52 of overtime and Carolina beat Calgary for their second straight victory.

Cooley stopped 16 shots. The Flames lost for just the second time in their last six games. They were shutout victims for the third time this season.

NFL

Broncos hang on for 9th consecutive win

By MICHAEL PHILLIPS
Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Nik Bonitto batted away Marcus Mariota’s pass in overtime to deny Washington a winning 2-point conversion, and Denver held on for its ninth straight victory, a 27-26 thriller Sunday night.

After the Broncos’ RJ Harvey ran for a touchdown on the first possession of overtime, Mariota drove the Commanders down the field, aided by a pass-interference penalty on fourth-and-6. Washington had fourth-and-goal at the 3 when Mariota connected with Terry McLaurin for a TD.

Commanders coach Dan Quinn went for 2 and Mariota had an open receiver, but Bonitto leaped and knocked the ball down.

“I knew he was buying time,” Bonitto said. “At that point I was just trying to make it hard for him to throw the ball, and I ended up knocking it down and we ended up winning the game.”

Bo Nix threw for 321 yards with a touchdown and an interception for AFC West-leading Denver (10-2), which has eight victories in one-score games.

Broncos coach Sean Payton spoke during the week about the importance of getting a first-round bye in the playoffs, and Denver remained even with New England for the best record in the AFC.

“We didn’t escape. We won,” Payton declared. “The journey of a good team’s season involves games like this. And then you believe you can do it again.”

Washington, meanwhile, now has consecutive overtime losses as part of a seven-game losing streak.

Making his sixth start this sea-



Nick Wass/AP

Denver running back RJ Harvey is lifted by teammate Quinn Meinerz after scoring during overtime against Washington on Sunday in Landover, Md. The Broncos beat the Commanders 27-26.

son in place of the injured Jayden Daniels, Mariota threw for 294 yards and two touchdowns with one pick.

“We’re going in the right direction,” Mariota said. “It’s not exactly where we want to be, but I think putting together a great week of practice, I think we just continue to stack these.

“Regardless of what it looks like for us, it’s all about the process and the journey, and the more we can find ways to improve week-to-

week, I think that sets a solid foundation for what’s to come.”

One of Mariota’s TD tosses was an incredible catch by Treyton Burks, who leaped in the corner of the end zone and made a falling, one-handed grab over cornerback Riley Moss.

For the Commanders (3-9), a woeful defense has shown signs of improvement in the two games since coach Dan Quinn took over play-calling from coordinator Joe Whitt Jr.

“I was pleased with the run game — this is a team that’s been able to get on the edge, which is something we haven’t done as well,” Quinn said. “There was progress that was made, certainly in the run game, and we’ve got plenty of room to grow in that.

“Hate the outcome, but I do love the fight and where we’re at.”

Washington leaned on tight end Zach Ertz, who finished with 10 catches for 106 yards and passed Shannon Sharpe for the fifth-most

receptions by an NFL tight end. McLaurin added seven catches for 96 yards.

Although the Broncos had just two sacks, their pass rushers frequently made Mariota uncomfortable and forced him into a bad interception at the start of the second quarter that was pulled in by Dre Greenlaw.

But Mariota delivered at the end of regulation, leading an 18-play, 71-yard drive that ended with a tying, 32-yard field goal by Jake Moody, who was playing in his first game for the Commanders.

For Nix, an uneven outing ultimately led to the desired result.

After Denver scored just six points on its first three drives, Nix settled in and delivered an acrobatic strike to Courtland Sutton for an 11-yard touchdown right before halftime, avoiding a sack just long enough to release the ball.

“I was honestly a little bit close to being down, but stayed up just long enough,” Nix said. “(Sutton) did a great job of starting on the other side of the field and ran all the way to the other side. He scrambled with me and in a game like that — we literally talk about a game of inches, but it really is. It comes down to an inch or two every once in awhile.”

The fourth quarter opened with Nix throwing an interception to Bobby Wagner that led to a Washington field goal. The Broncos punted on their final three possessions of regulation, and the Commanders finally took advantage.

Quinn said there was never a doubt the team would go for two in overtime, declaring it a “game you love to be a part of — two teams absolutely going at it, throwing punches back and forth.”

Script: Division title races tighten after surprise-filled Week 13

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A look at each division after the results:

NFC West

The Rams (9-3) came in leading the division and were holding the No. 1 seed in the conference. The loss to Carolina dropped them into a tie with the Seahawks in the division, though LA owns the tiebreaker by winning the first meeting. The teams face off in Seattle on Dec. 18. The 49ers (9-4) are also in the mix. They split with the Rams, beat the Seahawks and host them in Week 18.

The Bears (9-3) took over the top seed from Los Angeles in the NFC because they currently hold the tiebreaker.

NFC South

The Panthers (7-6) are right behind the Buccaneers (7-5), and the two teams meet twice in the final three weeks.

Carolina heads into a bye while Tampa Bay will play twice before the Panthers kick off against the Saints in New Orleans in Week 15.

The Bucs host the Saints next Sunday and the Falcons on Dec. 11.

NFC East

The Eagles (8-4) have lost two in a row while the Cowboys (6-5-1) have won three straight.

Both teams have tough road games upcoming. Dallas plays the Lions (7-5) on Thursday night. Philadelphia visits the Chargers (8-4) next Monday.

NFC North

First place is on the line when Chicago and the Packers (8-3-1) play at Lambeau Field on Sunday. They’ll meet again in Week 16. Detroit still has a shot, though it’ll need help. It plays the Bears in Week 18 in a game that could have major implications.

AFC East

New England (10-2) enters its home game Monday night against the Giants with a two-game lead over the Bills (8-4). The Patriots already won in Buffalo and the teams meet

again Dec. 14.

AFC South

Houston has come a long way since its 0-3 start. The Colts’ 7-1 start is a distant memory. C.J. Stroud returned after missing three games, the Texans’ suffocating defense stayed in control and Houston beat Indy on the road.

Jacksonville (8-4) routed the Titans to move into a tie with the Colts (8-4) while the Texans (7-5) are one game behind. Indianapolis hosts the Jaguars next Sunday in the first of two meetings. Houston hosts the Colts in Week 18.

AFC North

After the Ravens (6-6) lost to the Bengals on Thursday night to fall a half-game behind Pittsburgh, the Steelers (6-6) couldn’t do anything on offense in a 26-7 loss to the Bills. Suddenly, Cincinnati (4-8) is back in the race and has Joe Burrow.

Baltimore and Pittsburgh face off next week at M&T Bank Stadium and meet at

Acrisure Stadium in Week 18. The Bengals split with the Steelers and get a chance to sweep the Ravens when they host them Dec. 14.

AFC West

The Broncos held on for a 27-26 overtime victory against the Commanders, extending their lead over Los Angeles to two games with their ninth straight victory.

Denver (10-2) is also battling New England for the AFC’s No. 1 seed. First, they have to win the division.

After facing the Raiders next week, the Broncos’ schedule is tough down the stretch with games against Green Bay, Jacksonville, Kansas City and the Chargers.

LA also has a tough schedule. It’ll face the Eagles, Chiefs, Cowboys and Texans before closing at Denver.

KC’s run of nine straight division titles is nearing an end. The Chiefs (6-6) likely need to win out to earn a wild-card spot and will take on Houston, LA and the Broncos over the final five games.

SPORTS



Lane change

Kiffin leaves Ole Miss ahead of CFP to take LSU job » College football, Page 20



RUSTY JONES/AP

Rams running back Kyren Williams is tackled by Panthers safety Lathan Ransom during Sunday's game in Charlotte. Carolina stopped Los Angeles' six-game winning streak.



ZACH BOLINGER/AP

Houston Texans linebacker E.J. Speed celebrates Sunday during the Texans' win over the Colts in Indianapolis.

Flipping the script

Division races tighten after big weekend of surprises, upsets

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

The race for division titles in the NFL got tighter in Week 13. The Rams, Colts and Steelers became the latest first-place teams to lose Sunday. The Eagles and Ravens lost Thursday. The Patriots played Monday night. Five of the eight divisions have two teams tied for the top spot or separated by less than a game. During a week in which seven underdogs have already won, the Panthers pulled off the biggest upset when they defeated Los

Angeles 31-28. Bryce Young completed 15 of 20 passes for 206 yards and three touchdowns — two on fourth down — to lead the offense to 31 points against the stingiest defense in the league. The Rams had allowed a league-low 16.3 points per game. Matthew Stafford hadn't thrown an interception since Week 3 before having two passes picked off, one in the red zone and another that was returned for a touchdown. He was also strip-sacked with LA in position for a potential tying field goal late in the game.

The Rams, who were 10-point favorites, were the third team favored by at least a touchdown to lose, joining Philadelphia and Baltimore. "Didn't think that we weren't not ready to go," Los Angeles coach Sean McVay said. "Didn't think we took this group lightly. I don't believe that for a second. This is the NFL. This is too difficult. They did a great job making plays, and they made plays." The Texans' 20-16 victory against the Colts in Indianapolis turned the AFC South into a three-team race with the Jaguars.

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Celtics hold off Cavaliers, escape collapse » NBA, Page 19

