

FACES
'Wicked: For Good,'
'Sinners' advance in
shortlists for Oscars
Page 15



MILITARY
Senate sends
\$901B NDAA
to president
Page 7



COLLEGE FOOTBALL
QB Retzlaff humbled
by CFP spotlight at
Tulane after BYU exit
Page 24

Coast Guard policy calls swastikas, nooses 'potentially divisive' >> Page 3

STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

Volume 84 Edition 175 ©SS 2025 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025

平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く)
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価 ¥50

50¢/Free to Deployed Areas



MATTHEW GARNIER/U.S. Army

An Army chaplain provides spiritual support during an exercise at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif., on Feb. 18. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth this week ordered changes to the U.S. military's chaplain corps that he says has become too focused on 'new age' concepts.

Religious reboot

Hegseth tosses 'unacceptable and unserious' Army spiritual fitness guide

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth this week ordered sweeping changes to the U.S. military's chaplain corps, with a plan to simplify a system that he said has become too focused on "new age" concepts.

"Our chaplains are chaplains, not emotional support officers, and we're going to treat them as such," Hegseth said in a video statement to



Hegseth

Army, saying its current spiritual fitness

the force on Wednesday.

"Faith and virtue were traded for self-help and self-care," Hegseth said, adding that chaplains had been "minimized" and were "viewed by many as therapists, instead of ministers."

He took special aim at the

guide is pushing secular humanism, and he ordered the service to cease using the program immediately.

"It mentions God one time. That's it," Hegseth said. "It mentions feelings 11 times. It even mentions playfulness, whatever that is, nine times. ... In short, it's unacceptable and unserious. So we're tossing it."

SEE REBOOT ON PAGE 6

Watchdog: Army, Navy skirt recruit testing rules

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Both the Army and Navy incorrectly classified recruits who received low marks on military entry exams, a move that gave both services more underachieving enlistees than Congress allows, a watchdog agency said in a new report.

To get around a legal cap, the Navy used off-the-books academic and physical fitness development programs to help underperforming sailors improve their Armed Forces Qualification Test scores, the Defense Department inspector general said in a report released Thursday.

The qualification test score is primarily used to determine enlistment eligibility and is derived from four subtests of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, a standardized test that helps predict military success by measuring aptitude in assorted subjects.

According to federal law, the number of applicants whose Armed Forces Qualification Test scores fell between the 10th and 30th percentiles can't surpass 4% of the total enlistees in a given fiscal year. Such scores are designated as Category IV enlistments.

The Army also exceeded the 4% threshold, though the report did not contain further details.

"By incorrectly calculating the number of Category IV enlistments, the Army and the Navy circumvented the requirement to obtain Secretary of Defense approval to exceed the statutory limit of Category IV enlistments," the IG wrote on its website.

The law also requires that a service whose Category IV enlistments exceed 10% of its active-du-

SEE RECRUIT ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Ford scraps fully electric F-150 Lightning pickup truck

Associated Press

DETROIT — Ford Motor Co. is pivoting away from its once-ambitious electric vehicle plans amid financial losses and waning consumer demand for the vehicles in lieu of investment in more efficient gasoline-engines and hybrid EVs, the company said Monday.

The Detroit automaker, which has poured billions of dollars into electrification along with most of its industry peers, said it will no longer make the F-150 Lightning electric pickup truck, instead opt-

ing for an extended range version of the vehicle.

Ford will also introduce some manufacturing changes; its Tennessee Electric Vehicle Center — part of the BlueOval City campus and once the future of Ford's EVs and batteries — is being renamed the Tennessee Truck Plant and will produce new affordable gas-powered trucks instead.

Ford's Ohio Assembly Plant will now produce a new gas and hybrid van.

The company has lost \$13 billion

on EVs since 2023 and said it expects to take a \$19.5 billion hit largely in the fourth quarter due to the EV business.

Ford said it now expects half of its global volume will be hybrids, extended-range EVs — which also incorporate a gasoline-powered engine — and full EVs by 2030, up from 17% this year.

EVs accounted for about 8% of new vehicles sales in the U.S. last year, but factors such as cost and charging infrastructure remain concerns for mainstream buyers.

EXCHANGE RATES

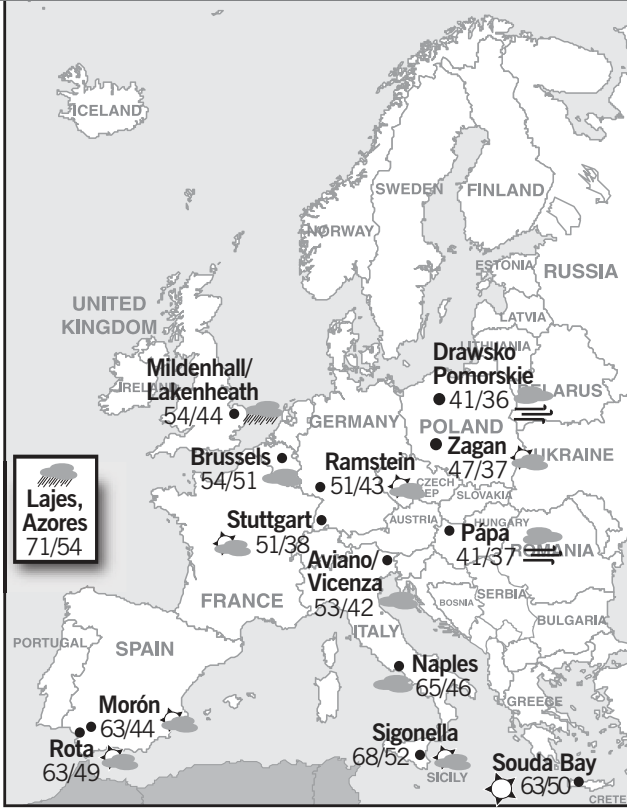
Military rates												
Euro costs (Dec. 18)	0.83	Switzerland (Franc)	0.7953									
British pound (Dec. 18)	\$1.31	Thailand (Baht)	31.452									
Japanese yen (Dec. 18)	151.00	Turkey (NewLira)	42.7191									
South Korean won (Dec. 18)	1439.00											
Commercial rates												
Bahrain (Dinar)	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>6.75</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>3.75</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>3.62</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>3.64</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.82</td></tr></table>	Prime rate	6.75	Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75	Federal funds market rate	3.62	3-month bill	3.64	30-year bond	4.82
Prime rate	6.75											
Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75											
Federal funds market rate	3.62											
3-month bill	3.64											
30-year bond	4.82											
Britain (Pound)	1.3363											
Canada (Dollar)	1.3772											
China (Yuan)	7.0417											
Denmark (Krone)	6.3628											
Egypt (Pound)	47.5378											
Euro	0.8515											
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7798											
Hungary (Forint)	330.339											
Israel (Shekel)	3.2220											
Japan (Yen)	155.462											
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3063											
Norway (Krone)	10.2063											
Philippines (Peso)	58.612											
Poland (Zloty)	3.5847											
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7466											
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2905											
South Korea (Won)	1472.95											

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



This weather is compiled from weather.com reports.

TODAY	
IN STRIPES	
American Roundup	14
Classified	13
Comics	17
Crossword	17
Faces	15
Opinion	16
Sports	18-24



However you read us,
wherever you need us.

Mobile • Online • Print

EUROPE

ADVERTISING
CustomerService@stripes.com | +49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

MIDDLE EAST

ADVERTISING
CustomerService@stripes.com | +49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

PACIFIC

ADVERTISING
PacificAdvertising@stripes.com | +81 (42) 552.2511
DSN: 315.227.7310

Round-the-world news for America's military.

Stripes.com supplies constant updates, on news of interest — including reports from our overseas military bases in Europe, Pacific, Southwest Asia and the Mideast, and coverage of the Pentagon and Capitol Hill.

Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.

MILITARY

Coast Guard downgrades swastikas, nooses

Symbols revised to ‘potentially divisive’ from ‘overt hate’

By TARA COPP
AND MICHELLE BOORSTEIN
The Washington Post

The U.S. Coast Guard has allowed a new workplace harassment policy to take effect that downgrades the definition of swastikas and nooses from overt hate symbols to “potentially divisive” despite an uproar over the new language that forced the service’s top officer to direct that both would remain prohibited.

The new policy went into effect Monday, according to written correspondence that the Coast Guard provided to Congress this week, a copy of which was reviewed by The Washington Post. The manual is posted online and makes clear that its previous version “is cancelled.”

The Post last month was first to report on the Coast Guard’s plan to revise its workplace harassment policy. The Trump administration called the article “false,” but with-



U.S. Coast Guard National Security Cutter Stratton sails past the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito, Calif., on Tuesday. The U.S. Coast Guard has enacted a new policy changes swastikas and nooses from overt hate symbols to ‘potentially divisive.’

STEPHEN LAM, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/AP

in hours of its publication Nov. 20 the service’s acting commandant, Adm. Kevin Lunday, issued a memo forcefully denouncing symbols such as swastikas and nooses, and directing that both remain prohibited. Lunday said at the time that his directive would supersede any other policy language.

It’s unclear why the new policy

was not revised to align with Lunday’s guidance before the new manual went into effect.

The Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Coast Guard, did not respond to a request for comment before the publication of this report. Later Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the agency, Tricia McLaughlin, issued a state-

ment attacking The Post and calling its reporting “pathetic” and “false.”

McLaughlin’s statement does not address why the language downgrading nooses and swastikas to “potentially divisive” symbols, rather than hate symbols, was allowed to remain in the new policy.

She said Lunday’s Nov. 20 memo “was issued to further clarify the display of divisive and hate symbols and flags prohibited as a violation of Coast Guard policy and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.”

A spokesperson for Lunday did not respond to a request for comment.

At a House subcommittee hearing Tuesday, Democrats expressed frustration with the situation and questioned why Lunday — whose nomination to take over as the permanent commandant faces a Senate confirmation vote later this week — allowed the “potentially divisive” language to remain in the new policy manual.

Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-Calif., the top Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee on the Coast Guard, said during the hearing that Lunday had told him “that he was going to fix the language, to make it clear the Coast Guard will not tolerate hate symbols. Instead he released the policy as it was originally written.”

“He had the authority to stop that policy from being printed,” Carbajal added.

Marine dress accessory mainly worn by men to become unisex

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

An eye-catching Marine Corps uniform accessory that was long reserved for male officers and senior enlisted leaders at the service’s birthday ball and formal evening dinners is no longer exclusively menswear.

The boat cloak, a niche evening dress accessory, is now authorized for eligible female Marines following a recent update to the service’s uniform regulations.

An administrative message dated Thursday announced the results of a uniform board process that began nearly two years ago.

The change was originally proposed in an early 2024 survey, which explored expanding authorization of the men’s boat cloak to female officers and senior enlisted Marines.

The special-order item, which can cost upward of \$1,000, differs from the current women’s evening dress cape, which is also reserved for formal evening events.

The difference in format was a vestige of the fashion of the mid-20th century, military historian Charles W. McFarlane told Business Insider last month.

Shorter evening capes designed to show off the wearer’s gown were popular among civilian women at the time, and the military based the design of its dress capes on that model, McFarlane said. He noted that the Army and Navy have had some version of the boat cloak in their history as well.

The flamboyance of the garment has also proved alluring on social media. For example, a Marine master gunnery sergeant with the TikTok handle POG_AC-

TUAL_1169 has at least two videos highlighting the accessory.

The boat cloak was not the only Marine uniform item proposed for change in the initial survey.

An alternative pair of dress pumps with black smooth or synthetic leather for formal events also was authorized for women, according to the message. Previously, black suede and cloth were their only options, a limitation that didn’t apply to male Marines.

The survey had also recommended standardizing the women’s neck tab color for all khaki uniforms to match how men use only a single tie, but that proposal was not addressed and no changes were made.

In addition, all Marines will see a change regarding the gray tanker jacket, a cold-weather overgarment authorized with certain ser-



TIA DUFOUR/U.S. Marine Corps

A recent change in uniform regulations makes the boat cloak, seen above worn by a Marine staff sergeant, authorized for wear by eligible female Marines, who previously were limited to the service’s dress cape for women.

vice and dress uniforms. It is now an optional seabag item that will be issued upon entry, so members of the service won’t have to pay for it out of pocket.

For recruiters, the update goes a step further, approving a cash allowance for the purchase of a

tanker jacket as part of their uniform allowance, according to the message.

Marines on funeral support details will also be given a supplemental clothing allowance for similar uniform item purchases, it said.

Kelly calls DOD investigation of him a move to chill military dissent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona said Tuesday that the Pentagon’s escalating investigation into his remarks urging troops to refuse unlawful orders is part of an effort to silence dissent within the military. “This is just about sending a

message to retired service members, active duty service members, government employees — do not speak out against this president or there will be consequences,” Kelly told reporters after a classified briefing from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and oth-

ers about deadly strikes on alleged drug boats that Kelly and other lawmakers have opposed.

Kelly said the Defense Department did not notify him of an investigation because “what they really care about is the public message.”

The Pentagon confirmed late

Monday that Hegseth’s office escalated a preliminary review of Kelly to an official command investigation over “serious allegations of misconduct.”

In a letter to the Pentagon, Kelly’s lawyers said that “there is no legitimate basis for any type of proceeding” and that “any such ef-

fort would be unconstitutional and an extraordinary abuse of power.”

The investigation was ordered after President Donald Trump accused six Democratic lawmakers of sedition “punishable by DEATH” after they appeared in the video urging troops to defy undefined illegal orders.

MILITARY

US to block ‘sanctioned oil tankers’ into Venezuela

By MICHELLE L. PRICE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump said Tuesday he is ordering a blockade of all “sanctioned oil tankers” into Venezuela, ramping up pressure on the country’s authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro in a move that seemed designed to put a tighter chokehold on the South American country’s economy.

Trump’s escalation comes after U.S. forces last week seized an oil tanker off Venezuela’s coast, an unusual move that followed a buildup of military forces in the region. In a post on social media Tuesday night announcing the blockade, Trump alleged Venezuela was using oil to fund drug trafficking and other crimes and vowed to continue the military buildup until the country gave the U.S. oil, land and assets, though it was not clear why he felt the U.S. had a claim.

“Venezuela is completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America,” Trump said in a post on his social media platform. “It will only get bigger, and the shock to them will be like nothing they have ever seen before — Until such time as they return to the United States of America all of the Oil, Land, and other Assets that they previously stole from us.”

Pentagon officials referred all questions about the post to the White House.

Venezuela’s government released a statement Tuesday accusing Trump of “violating international law, free trade, and the principle of free navigation” with “a reckless



A cargo boat is docked below cranes at the seaport in La Guaira, Venezuela, on Wednesday.

ARIANA CUBILLOS/AP

and grave threat” against the South American country.

“On his social media, he assumes that Venezuela’s oil, land, and mineral wealth are his property,” the statement said of Trump’s post. “Consequently, he demands that Venezuela immediately hand over all its riches. The President of the United States intends to impose, in an utterly irrational manner, a supposed naval blockade on Venezuela with the aim of stealing the wealth that belongs to our nation.”

Maduro’s government, according to the statement, plans to denounce the situation before the

United Nations.

The U.S. buildup has been accompanied by a series of military strikes on boats in international waters in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The campaign, which has drawn bipartisan scrutiny among U.S. lawmakers, has killed at least 95 people in 25 known strikes on vessels.

Trump has for weeks said that the U.S. will move its campaign beyond the water and start strikes on land.

The Trump administration has defended the strikes as a success, saying they have prevented drugs from reaching American shores,

and pushed back on concerns that they are stretching the bounds of lawful warfare.

The Trump administration has said the campaign is about stopping drugs headed to the U.S., but Trump’s chief of staff Susie Wiles appeared to confirm in a *Vanity Fair* interview published Tuesday that the campaign is part of a push to oust Maduro.

Wiles said Trump “wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle.”

Tuesday night’s announcement seemed to have a similar aim.

Venezuela, which has the world’s

largest proven oil reserves and produces about 1 million barrels a day, has long relied on oil revenue as a lifeline of its economy.

Since the Trump administration began imposing oil sanctions on Venezuela in 2017, Maduro’s government has relied on a shadowy fleet of unflagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

The state-owned oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.*, commonly known as PDVSA, has been locked out of global oil markets by U.S. sanctions. It sells most of its exports at a steep discount on the black market in China.

Francisco Monaldi, a Venezuelan oil expert at Rice University in Houston, said about 850,000 barrels of the 1 million daily production is exported. Of that, he said, 80% goes to China, 15% to 17% goes to the U.S. through Chevron Corp., and the remainder goes to Cuba.

In October, Trump appeared to confirm reports that Maduro has offered a stake in Venezuela’s oil and other mineral wealth in recent months to try to stave off mounting pressure from the United States.

“He’s offered everything,” Trump said at the time. “You know why? Because he doesn’t want to f— around with the United States.”

It wasn’t immediately clear how the U.S. planned to enact what Trump called a “TOTAL AND COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF ALL SANCTIONED OIL TANKERS going into, and out of, Venezuela.”

But the U.S. Navy has 11 ships, including an aircraft carrier and several amphibious assault ships, in the region.

Here are the Caribbean allies helping US against Venezuela

By SAMMY WESTFALL
AND AMANDA COLETTA
The Washington Post

As the United States threatens to attack Venezuela, some Caribbean allies are concerned that the largest U.S. military buildup in the region in decades threatens its status as a “zone of peace.” But some countries are supporting the U.S. Here’s how.

Trinidad and Tobago

No Caribbean leader has been more supportive of the Trump administration’s military campaign than Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Her country, which at its closest point lies just seven miles from the Venezuelan mainland, is hosting U.S. Marines, allowed the U.S. to install a radar system at one of its airports and has participated in joint military exercises with U.S. forces.

Dominican Republic

Dominican President Luis Abinader has authorized the U.S. military to operate within restricted areas at San Isidro Air Base and Las

Américas International Airport in its fight against Venezuelan drug traffickers. U.S. military aircraft may refuel and transport equipment and technical personnel, he said at a joint news conference with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in the Dominican capital last month.

Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands

Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, on the eastern end of Puerto Rico’s main island, was shut down in 2004. Now the station is back in business. In recent weeks, crews have cleared taxiways, and fighter jets and transport planes have landed. New aircraft have also been spotted at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Grenada

Washington approached Grenada to request a temporary installation of radar equipment and associated technical personnel at an international airport, its government said in October, and it was “carefully assessing and reviewing the requests in technical consultations.”

2 life terms for former US soldier in fatal robbery to aid war aims

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

A former U.S. soldier will go to prison for life for killing a Florida couple during a robbery intended to fund his aims to wage war in Venezuela, federal prosecutors said.

Craig Austin Lang, 35, of Arizona, was trying to get to Venezuela to fight when he stole \$3,000 and killed the couple, who had answered his online ad to buy guns, the Justice Department said in a statement Tuesday.

Previous media reports identified the victims as Serafin “Danny” Lorenzo Jr. and Deana Lorenzo. The Justice Department statement referred to them by their initials.

Lang received two consecutive life sentences from U.S. District Judge Sheri Polster Chappell following his September conviction on a host of charges.

They included conspiracy to commit robbery, discharging a

firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence which resulted in death, and conspiracy to kill persons in a foreign country.

Lang was extradited from Ukraine in 2024, more than four years after his indictment in the double homicide. Prosecutors said he had fought in Ukraine, where he joined the paramilitary group Right Sector, according to the BBC and BuzzFeed.

Lang’s accomplice in the crime, Alex Jared Zwiefelhofer, was convicted at trial in 2024 and also received two consecutive life sentences. He is also a former U.S. Army soldier.

Lang, who entered the Army in 2008, had been arrested in 2013 on suspicion of desertion from Fort Bliss in Texas after taking all his military equipment and traveling to North Carolina to confront his wife, according to local media reports.

His father told a local news sta-

tion at the time that Lang had served two tours overseas and returned with post-traumatic stress disorder.

He was discharged from the Army in 2014, according to court records, after which he began traveling to foreign countries with the hope of joining armed conflicts.

Lang came to the attention of U.S. law enforcement in 2017 when he was denied entry into South Sudan by Kenyan authorities.

He later told federal agents that he had been a soldier and a military adviser to the Ukrainian army since 2015 and had attempted to enter Sudan to fight alongside their military, according to a federal affidavit.

After the Florida killings, Lang traveled to Bogota, Colombia, with plans to cross the border into Venezuela to fight against the government of that country. He later traveled to Spain before ending up in Ukraine.

MILITARY

DODEA phone ban included in NDAA

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A bipartisan provision to limit the personal use of cellphones and other mobile electronic devices in Defense Department schools made it into the annual defense bill, which was passed Wednesday by the Senate.

The legislation orders the director of the Department of Defense Education Activity to update and standardize regulations to minimize student cellphone use “to the greatest extent practicable.”

Sen. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., and Sen. Jim Banks, R-Ind., introduced the bill in June for consideration as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

On Monday, Slotkin said cell-

phones should be banned in every K-12 classroom in the United States, calling the proposed ban for DODEA “a big step forward” toward that goal.

“Parents, educators and experts agree that access to phones makes it harder for our kids to focus and learn, and this bipartisan measure will help the next generation succeed at school without distractions,” Slotkin said in a statement.

Under the current proposal, the DODEA director has 180 days to update and standardize existing regulations on student use of portable electronic devices if the legislation is passed.

Within 60 days of enactment of the policy, the defense secretary

would be required to brief the armed services committees in the Senate and the House on the work being done to implement the policy, according to the bill.

Currently, smartphone use in DODEA varies across the school system, which serves more than 65,000 children of American service members and Defense Department personnel stationed in the United States and overseas.

Smartphone policies are currently implemented at the local school level, DODEA spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said Wednesday.

Some schools already limit the use of smartphones and other personal electronic devices on campus.

At Spangdahlem Middle School in Germany, principal Stefanie Adams posted a message on the school’s website in August titled “Why We’re a Cell Phone-Free School.”

The message said students are welcome to bring their phones to school but must keep them silenced and out of sight during instructional time.

“Phones in classrooms interrupt focus and reduce academic performance — even when students aren’t actively using them,” she wrote.

Studies show that even one buzzing phone can disrupt the attention of an entire class, Adams added.

The school handbook of Kaiser-

slautern Middle School, also in Germany, states that all personal electronic devices — including smartphones, iPads, MP3 players, earphones, earbuds and headsets — must be stored in lockers and turned off during the school day.

By contrast, Edgren Middle High School at Misawa Air Base in Japan encourages students to use technology, requiring only that personal devices be kept on silent mode during class except when they are actively being used for educational purposes with teacher permission, according to the official online school handbook.

In the U.S., at least nine states have laws in place to curtail students’ use of cellular phones during school hours.

School agreement strengthens US-Japanese student ties

By JANIQUE ROBINSON
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — An American high school on a base southwest of Hiroshima has formalized years of informal exchanges with a Japanese public school, signing a sister-school pact aimed at deepening academic, cultural and athletic ties.

Matthew C. Perry and Karyo high schools inked the agreement on Dec. 12 during a ceremony in Perry’s auditorium, where students and teachers gathered to mark the partnership.

Perry is part of Department of Defense Education Activity.

“We hope to deepen dialogue that transcends language and cultural differences and to create practical opportunities for mutual learning,” Perry’s principal, Kevin Anglim, told the audience at the signing ceremony.

Before the ceremony, the Japanese students participated in mini-lessons across multiple subjects, including art, physics, chemistry and a culinary class during which they prepared crepes.

Anglim said that the sister school agreement formalizes such exchanges, which had previously occurred between the schools only on a limited basis.

“It allows us to increase the cultural exchanges that we’ve had, because before they were more casual,” he said.

“This sister school agreement really formalizes that we will increase bonds, and we would increase curriculum, athletic and cultural exchanges.”

The two schools’ relationship began during the COVID-19 pandemic, sustained through online correspondence between students.

Perry’s National Honor Society adviser, Nancy Sullivan, and Ka-

ryo teacher Hiromi Mitsuda helped coordinate early exchanges that allowed students to practice cross-cultural communication.

“Most students at Matthew C. Perry High School will be in Japan for a time that is limited by the length of their active-duty parents’ rotations. These events and opportunities allow our students to make the most of their time here in Japan,” Sullivan said.

“Through cultural exchanges, our students become citizens of the world which in turn makes them better informed and adjusted American citizens,” the email said.

Students benefit from interacting with a variety of people beyond their immediate circle of family and friends, Sullivan added.

“They develop more refined strategies and new approaches to problem-solving which are the necessary skills for this upcoming generation of leaders,” she wrote.

Perry sophomore Matthew Samame, a National Honor Society member, said such programs motivate students to improve academically.

“Every quarter I have to have a 3.5 GPA,” he said. “If I don’t have it, then I could get kicked out of NHS, and for NHS you get a lot of opportunities.”

Anglim said he hopes the agreement leads to expanded programs in the coming years.

“I’m hoping 15, 20 years down the line that we can increase the athletic and academic partnerships,” he said.

“We want to increase that cultural bond to break down those barriers and keep up the relationship not only with DODEA but the installation and between our local community and our school,” he added.



PHOTOS BY JANIQUE ROBINSON/Stars and Stripes

Students and staff from Matthew C. Perry and Karyo high schools pose after signing a sister school agreement last week at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan.



Karyo High School students learn to make crepes with student chefs from Matthew C. Perry High School.



Kevin Anglim and Shinichi Murayama, the principals of Matthew C. Perry and Karyo high schools, sign a sister school agreement.

MILITARY

Career Special Forces officer picked for NSA

BY ELLEN NAKASHIMA
AND ALEX HORTON
The Washington Post

President Donald Trump has nominated a career Special Forces officer and current deputy commander of Indo-Pacific Command to be the next head of the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the matter.

The nomination and prospective confirmation of Lt. Gen. Joshua M. Rudd, a former Delta Force commander, would end eight months of leadership limbo at the helm of the nation's largest spy agency and its offensive military cyber organization.

The nomination was sent to Congress this week, said the two officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because it has not been officially announced by the Pentagon, White House or the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

A White House official said that no such nomination had been transmitted to the Senate.

Rudd would formally replace Gen. Timothy Haugh, who was fired by Trump in April. The presi-

dent's move drew sharp bipartisan rebukes as an unjustified political move engineered by the far-right activist Laura Loomer.



Rudd

dent's move drew sharp bipartisan rebukes as an unjustified political move engineered by the far-right activist Laura Loomer.

Rudd's role at Indo-Pacific Command gives him experience in the U.S. military's effort to counter China's aggressive push for regional dominance.

Rudd commanded the elite Delta Force, as well as squadrons and teams during numerous combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"He is the rare senior officer that can easily transition from being in the field with muddy boots, to engaging senior civilian leadership in a thoughtful, strategic context in the

halls of power," said Christopher C. Miller, who served as acting defense secretary in the final months of Trump's first administration.

Rudd carved an unusual path for a career special operations officer, beginning as a quartermaster in 1993, a position focused on supply and logistics far from the front lines. He later joined the infantry and rose to head the clandestine unit, that along with SEAL Team 6, executes the military's highest-stake missions. He then oversaw all special operations troops assigned to the Pacific, a responsibility that sprawls over half the globe and is focused on countering threats like China and training alongside regional counterparts.

But his relative lack of leadership experience in cyber operations and signals intelligence probably will draw scrutiny in the confirmation process. Some former senior U.S. cyber officials, speaking in general terms, noted that Rudd could have a steep learning curve at a time when the administration has signaled it wants a more effective and aggressive strategy to target adversaries in cyberspace.

You would never "nominate

someone to SOCOM that didn't have a heavy special operations background or [pick] someone to run Space Command that didn't know space," said one former official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to avoid retaliation. "Why would we think it's a good idea to make someone without cyber experience the head of Cyber Command?"

The next NSA and CYBERCOM chief will face challenges: workforces rocked by what many inside and outside the agencies see as politically motivated firings, including those of Haugh and his deputy, Wendy Noble, and a brain drain caused by the voluntary departures of a number of experienced personnel.

"Between the firings and the early retirements, NSA has lost decades of experience at the senior leadership level, the cybersecurity unit and the general counsel's office," said Glenn Gerstell, who served as NSA general counsel from 2015 through 2020.

"I look forward to reviewing Lt. Gen. Rudd's nomination and evaluating his qualifications to lead the NSA and U.S. Cyber Command at a

moment of unprecedented cyber and national security threats. That said, it should never have taken this long to nominate someone to this critical post," said Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chair Mark Warner, D-Va. "At a time when China, Russia, Iran, and criminal actors are constantly probing our defenses, this kind of chaos and vacancy at the top makes America less safe."

At Cyber Command, whose responsibilities include potentially disrupting adversaries' computer networks, the next chief will need to respond to heightened calls from Congress and the administration for a more effective cyber offensive capability, particularly with regard to China. The NSA also hacks into foreign networks for intelligence purposes, but does not seek to disrupt those networks in the interests of not getting discovered and maintaining access.

In recent years, China has gone beyond its rampant theft of government and commercial secrets to invade critical U.S. networks, giving it the potential to disrupt energy and other critical infrastructure systems in a conflict with the United States, officials say.



CAMILO FERNAN/U.S. Navy

Recruits attend Catholic worship service inside the Recruit Memorial Chapel at U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Ill. The command's Religious Ministries Team provides religious services to recruits during training for more than 20 different faith groups.

Reboot: DOD to create list of religious affiliation codes

FROM PAGE 1

Hegseth said the Pentagon is working on a new program, which could curtail what qualifies as a faith or belief recognized in the military.

"More reforms will be coming in the days and weeks ahead," he said. "There will be a top-down cultural shift putting spiritual well-being on the same footing as mental and physical health."

In 2017, the Defense Department updated what qualifies as a recognized religious denomination or belief system, with a list

of 221 groups that ranged from the mainstream to obscure Christian sects, Wiccans and atheists.

Hegseth blamed such changes on "political correctness" and an "ongoing war on warriors." The department will create a new list of religious affiliation codes, he said without specifying what religions or belief systems are in and which ones are out.

"We're going to streamline it ... so that our chaplains can actually use it to minister better to the flock," Hegseth said.

New Zealand honors airman for saving American troops injured in Micronesia

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A New Zealand airman who rushed into the jungle on a remote Micronesian island to save two critically injured American service members has been formally honored for his actions nearly three years after a multinational exercise.

Cpl. Abraham "Abe" Corban-Banks recently received a commendation for courage and professionalism from the head of New Zealand's air force, Air Vice-Marshal Darryn Webb, following a February 2023 vehicle accident on Tinian Island during Cope North drills.

That year's annual airpower exercise, centered on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, involved about 2,000 service members from the United States, Australia, France, Japan and New Zealand.

Corban-Banks, a security forces specialist, was among the first responders to a high-speed rollover that left two U.S. troops critically injured deep in the jungle, according to a New Zealand air force news release issued Tuesday.

"With no medical team nearby, Corporal Corban-Banks and his USAF colleague went to the scene immediately and began first aid," the release said.

He stabilized a woman suffering from a severe femur fracture, another open fracture and signs of internal bleeding, according to the air force.



MADDY BUTCHER/New Zealand Defence Force

Cpl. Abraham "Abe" Corban-Banks, right, of the New Zealand air force, receives a commendation from Air Vice-Marshal Darryn Webb for courage and professionalism for his actions following a vehicle accident during Cope North drills on Tinian Island in February 2023.

"He kept her conscious while preparing her for rapid evacuation," the release said. "Thanks to his actions, she was flown out on a nearby C-130 aircraft within minutes."

The other injured American was later airlifted by a Japanese helicopter, according to the release.

"While it was an intense situation, my instincts and training just kicked in," Corban-Banks said in the release. "There was no time to really think about the situation — I was simply doing what anyone would do. This is exactly what I

trained for."

The release did not say why Corban-Banks was being honored nearly three years after the incident. New Zealand Defence Force spokeswoman Rebecca Quilliam said by phone that she was looking into the reason for the delay Wednesday evening.

Japanese airmen who assisted in the emergency response were recognized separately.

Both crash victims survived, and an official report credited the swift actions of first responders, according to the New Zealand air force.

MILITARY

Senate sends \$901B defense bill to Trump

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday passed a \$901 billion defense policy bill authorizing a 3.8% pay raise for troops while forcing more transparency from the Pentagon and putting limits on efforts to pull the U.S. military from Europe and South Korea.

The 77-20 vote sends the annual bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, to President Donald Trump for his signature. The legislation authorizes \$8 billion above the Trump administration's request for national security spending and still needs to be funded by a defense appropriations bill.

Lawmakers used the legislation to push back against Trump's moves to disengage from Europe, notably authorizing \$400 million for each of the next two years for a Ukraine security assistance program the administration did not want to continue.

The bill also curbs the administration's ability to reduce the number of troops in Europe below 76,000 or to give up U.S. command of NATO's top officer position in Europe unless Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth certifies to Congress that such actions aligned with na-

tional security interests and were made with the consultation of NATO allies.

Similar restrictions are in place for pulling back the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula below 28,500 troops.

"To remain a force for peace and stability in these areas, we must have effective force levels, and this legislation provides for that," said Sen. Jack Reed, of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The provisions reflect bipartisan backlash to the Pentagon's recent decision to bring home about 700 troops deployed in Germany, Romania and Poland. Lawmakers have also expressed concern that Trump could draw down the U.S. military presence in South Korea, which he has said should pay more to host American troops.

The legislation also reflected frustration on Capitol Hill with the way the Pentagon communicates with lawmakers, particularly regarding the strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific that have killed nearly 100 people since September.

Hegseth said Tuesday that the Pentagon will not publicly release

the full, unedited video of a divisive follow-up strike on a vessel on Sept. 2, but a provision in the bill withholds 25% of his travel budget until he turns over the orders behind the boat bombing campaign as well as unedited videos of the strikes to the Armed Services Committees.

"This NDAA compels the secretary of defense to follow the law and submit to Congress a number of reports that he has deliberately withheld," said Reed, adding that the oversight provisions are a "ratification of our constitutional duties to raise an army, to supervise an army and to ensure that the laws of the United States are followed scrupulously."

Congress in the legislation is also asserting its authority to declare war by repealing two decades-old authorizations for the use of military force in the Gulf War in 1991 and the Iraq War in 2002. The White House has supported the repeals — a 2001 post 9/11 authorization continues to underpin nearly all U.S. counterterrorism operations around the world.

Service members will see a 3.8% pay bump under the legislation, as requested by the Trump administration. The bill also increases the family separation al-

lowance for deployed service members from \$250 to \$300 and authorizes more than \$1.5 billion in new construction of barracks, dormitories, housing and child-care centers.

The legislation also authorizes \$26 billion in shipbuilding funding, \$38 billion for aircraft and \$25 billion to ramp up production of munitions.

A core focus of the bill is speeding up and reforming the way the Pentagon purchases weapons and supplies. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the bill delivers the most sweeping upgrades to the Pentagon's business practices in 60 years.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said the legislation "takes dozens of burdensome rules and laws off the books, streamlines the buying and innovations processes and ensures more American businesses will be able to contribute to America's arsenal."

The passage of the bill marks the end of monthslong negotiations between the House and Senate. The final version of the bill stripped out most of the conservative social policy mandates the House had passed but retained

provisions banning diversity programs at the Pentagon as well as transgender athletes in women's sports at the military academies.

Also left out of the bill were provisions that would have provided Tricare coverage of in vitro fertilization for military families and reversed Hegseth's decision to undo a Congress-directed effort to change the names of Army bases that had honored Confederate leaders.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., intervened for a second year in a row to remove the IVF measure, which had been supported by both chambers. Johnson and other conservatives have expressed concern that the IVF process involves destroying embryos, which they view as people.

Bipartisan objections remained Wednesday over a provision kept from the House that would allow military aircraft to get a waiver to fly through Washington airspace without using location-transmitting technology, as was the case when an Army helicopter collided with an airliner on Jan. 29.

Lawmakers behind an effort to strengthen safety measures after the crash said they will seek to reimpose restrictions on military flights through future legislation.

Recruit: Leaders push back

FROM PAGE 1

ty accessions to establish a preparatory course, the report said.

The review looked at the Army's Future Soldier Preparatory Course and Navy's Future Sailor Preparatory Course. It took place between April 2024 and August 2025.

Statutorily mandated courses require congressional oversight and have stringent reporting requirements, the report said.

The Navy launched two congressionally unregulated courses, a Fitness Skills Development program in 2023 and Academic Skills Development program a year later to "address recruiting challenges and increase the number of potential applicants for naval service," the IG said.

The service then failed to report the original underperforming scores, according to the report. In fiscal 2025, the service had 11.3% Category IV enlistments, or 2,763 of 24,388, as of March 31, when counting the precourse qualification test scores.

Permission to go beyond the limits can be granted by the secretary of defense, who must inform the congressional armed services committees within 30 days.

The Pentagon pushed back against the findings, saying the law does not prohibit the improved scores from being used,



RAQUEL BIRK/U.S. Army

Sgt. 1st Class Johnathon Huitt briefs Future Soldier Preparatory Course trainees at Fort Jackson, S.C., in 2024.

William Fitzhugh, acting assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs, wrote in an undated rebuttal.

The Army and the Navy had been instructed to use the updated scores in memorandums in May 2024 and February 2025, the report said.

The IG recommended that the Defense Department issue clarifying guidance directing the services to use the updated scores only if the development programs have proper oversight and meet legal requirements.

They inspector general gave Fitzhugh 30 days to comment on the actions he plans to take toward meeting the recommendations.



RAHMAT GUL/AP

National Guard patrol in the Lincoln Memorial, Thursday in Washington.

Appeals court hands Trump a win over deployment of National Guard into DC

By JENNY GATHRIGHT
The Washington Post

An appeals court signaled Wednesday that it may find the National Guard deployment in D.C. to be lawful, disagreeing with a lower-court judge's opinion and issuing an order that will allow troops to stay in the city while litigation continues.

A three-judge panel — with two Trump appointees and one Oba-

ma appointee — wrote that the Trump administration is likely to succeed in its appeal of that lower-court ruling.

The panel's unanimous order on Wednesday was not a determination of the deployment's legality and functioned only to allow the troops to remain deployed pending final rulings, likely to come next year.

"Because the District of Colum-

bia is a federal district created by Congress, rather than a constitutionally sovereign entity like the fifty States, the Defendants appear on this early record likely to prevail on the merits of their argument that the President possesses a unique power within the District — the seat of the federal government — to mobilize the Guard," the panel wrote in its Wednesday order.

Popularity waning, Trump to preview '26 agenda

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump intends to preview his agenda for next year and beyond in a live speech from the White House on Wednesday night, remarks that come at a crucial juncture as he tries to rebuild his steadily eroding popularity.

The White House offered few details about what the Republican president intends to emphasize in the speech. Public polling shows most U.S. adults are frustrated with his handling of the economy as inflation picked up after his tariffs raised prices and hiring slowed.

The president's mass deportations of immigrants have also proven unpopular, even as he's viewed favorably for halting crossings along the U.S. border with Mexico. The public has generally been nonplussed by his income tax cuts and globe-trotting efforts to end conflicts, attack drug boats near Venezuela and attract investment dollars into the U.S.

In 2026, Trump and his party face a referendum on their leadership as the nation heads into the midterm elections that will decide control of the House and the Senate.

Trump has said that he thinks more Americans would back him if they simply heard him describe his track record, which administration officials say will reverse the recent decline in manufacturing jobs and dramatically increase tax refunds next year.

"It has been a great year for our Country, and THE BEST IS YET TO COME!" Trump said in a Tuesday social media post announcing the speech.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Trump would discuss his achievements this year and his plans for the remainder of his second term.

Trump has been omnipresent on social media and TV this year with his impromptu news conferences and speeches. But addresses to the nation often can be relatively sober affairs, as was Trump's June address describing



President Donald Trump applauds during a Hanukkah reception at the White House, on Tuesday.

the U.S. bombing of nuclear facilities in Iran.

The president has eschewed the messaging discipline that's common among most politicians, an authenticity that appeals to some voters and repels others.

In a speech in Pennsylvania last week, he said that his tariffs might mean that American children should have fewer dolls and pencils, while confirming a previously denied story from his first term in 2018 that he did not want immi-

grants from "shithole" countries.

On Monday, Trump on his social media site blamed Rob Reiner's vocal objections to the president for the killing of the actor-director and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner.

A report released on Tuesday showed a jobs market that looks increasingly fragile, even if the overall economy still appears to be stable.

Employers were adding on average 122,750 jobs a month during the first four months of this year. But since Trump announced his broad tariffs in April, monthly job gains have averaged a paltry 17,000 as the unemployment rate has climbed from 4% in January to 4.6%.

Trump's team has blamed Democratic lawmakers for shutting down the government for the job losses reported Tuesday during October. The president continues to blame his Democratic predecessor, Joe Biden, for any challenges the nation might face over inflation or ending Russia's war in Ukraine.

Administration restricts top ratings for staff across federal agencies

By JAKE SPRING AND HANNAH NATANSON
The Washington Post

The Trump administration is pushing to limit how many federal workers receive top ratings in annual performance reviews in agencies across the government, according to almost two dozen federal employees, a move experts say is illegal and could allow for agency staff to be more easily fired.

The effort to restrict performance ratings has reached agencies including the Commerce, Justice, Energy and Interior departments as well as the General Services and Small Business administrations, according to the employees, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Last week, a National Park Service official informed managers on a conference call that they should give 80% of their staff a rating of 3 out of 5, while only 1% to 5% should receive top marks, according to people with knowledge of the call.

Directives have gone out to some staff at the Federal Aviation Administration, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security, said Joanna Friedman, a partner at a federal employment law firm, who said she has heard about the evaluation policy from clients.

In recent months, top Trump appointees have emphasized the importance of curbing what the White

House Office of Personnel Management described in June guidelines as "ending inflation of employee performance ratings." It said "agencies should seek to ensure that a disproportionate number of employees are not rated at the highest performance levels," but did not specify quotas for ratings.

In September, OPM chief Scott Kuper wrote on the agency's website that performance ratings were inflated, likening them to grade inflation at universities, in a post titled, "Sorry, Not Everyone Gets an A." He said no more than 30% of senior government managers would get a top rating of 4 or 5.

In a statement, Kuper said that "there are no quotas or caps for federal employee performance ratings" and that OPM had not expanded the policy for senior managers to the rest of the government, although it plans "to propose such changes for public comment in coming months."

Although in the private sector it is common practice for most employees to receive an average rating of 3 out of 5, that has not traditionally been the case in the federal government, said Donald Moynihan, a professor at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy.

That's because government managers cannot as easily reward high-performing employees or fire those who perform poorly, Moynihan said. Giving out a high rating doesn't cost a manager anything and avoids

depressing morale, he said, adding that low ratings could also provide justification for additional layoffs, which take into account performance evaluations in determining who is fired.

Several department officials confirmed Monday that they were working to recalibrate how the government assesses its workers' performance.

"All employees will be evaluated fairly and impartially based upon their accomplishments and quality of work, but gone are the days where every federal bureaucratic receives an automatic five-star rating," Justice Department spokeswoman Natalie Baldassarre said in a statement.

The Trump administration has sought to drastically shrink the government, and hundreds of thousands of federal workers have left the government this year in voluntary resignation programs, early retirements and layoffs. Trump officials have also pressed federal employees to justify their jobs — with Elon Musk, the former head of the Department of Government Efficiency, demanding all workers send weekly emails listing five accomplishments.

High evaluations have been the norm in the federal government for more than a decade. A Government Accountability Office review of ratings given in 2013 found that nearly two-thirds of federal workers got fours or fives.

Trump expands travel ban, limits to 20 more countries

By REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration announced Tuesday it was expanding travel restrictions to an additional 20 countries and the Palestinian Authority, doubling the number of nations affected by sweeping limits announced earlier this year on who can travel and emigrate to the U.S.

The Trump administration included five more countries as well as people traveling on documents issued by the Palestinian Authority to the list of countries facing a full ban on travel to the U.S. and imposed new limits on 15 other countries.

The move is part of ongoing efforts by the administration to tighten U.S. entry standards for travel and immigration, in what critics say unfairly prevents travel for people from a broad range of countries. The administration suggested it would expand the restrictions after the arrest of an Afghan national suspect in the shooting of two National Guard troops over Thanksgiving weekend.

People who already have visas, are lawful permanent residents of the U.S. or have certain visa categories such as diplomats or athletes, or whose entry into the country is believed to serve the U.S. interest, are all exempt from the restrictions. The proclamation said the changes go into effect on Jan. 1.

In June, President Donald Trump announced that citizens of 12 countries would be banned from coming to the United States and

those from seven others would face restrictions. The decision resurrected a hallmark policy of his first term.

At the time the ban included Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen and heightened restrictions on visitors from Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

On Tuesday, the Republican administration announced it was expanding the list of countries whose citizens are banned from entering the U.S. to Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, South Sudan and Syria. The administration also fully restricted travel on people with Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents. South Sudan was also facing significant travel restrictions already.

An additional 15 countries are also being added to the list of countries facing partial restrictions: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Ivory Coast, Dominica, Gabon, Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Tonga, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The restrictions apply to both people seeking to travel to the U.S. as visitors or to emigrate there.

The Trump administration said in its announcement that many of the countries from which it was restricting travel had "widespread corruption, fraudulent or unreliable civil documents and criminal records" that made it difficult to vet their citizens for travel to the U.S.

NATION

Wiles pulls back curtain on White House

By **BILL BARROW**
Associated Press

White House chief of staff Susie Wiles offered an unusually candid look inside President Donald Trump’s administration in a series of interviews published Tuesday by Vanity Fair magazine, delivering details and reservations that presidential aides usually save for memoirs.

From criticizing Attorney General Pam Bondi as having “whiffed” on the Jeffrey Epstein case to saying that no rational person could believe Elon Musk did a good job dismantling the United States Agency for International Development, Wiles revealed her own thoughts about her boss and the work of his aggressive administration. The assessments are even more notable because Wiles, before now, has maintained a low profile.

Wiles dismissed Vanity Fair’s work as a “hit piece,” and a number of Cabinet officials and other aides rushed to her defense. But Wiles notably has not denied any details or quotes.

Wiles defends Trump

Wiles described Trump as an intense figure who thinks in broad strokes yet is often unconcerned about process and policy details.

She assessed Trump as having “an alcoholic’s personality,” even though the president does not drink. But the personality trait is something she recognizes from her father, the famous sports broadcaster Pat Summerall.

“High-functioning alcoholics or alcoholics in general, their personalities are exaggerated when they drink. And so I’m a little bit of an expert in big personalities,” she said.

Said Wiles: “I’m not an enabler. ... I try to be thoughtful about what I even engage in. I guess time will tell whether I’ve been effective.”

Trump’s revenge crusade

Wiles affirmed Trump’s ruthlessness and determination to achieve retribution against those he considers his political enemies, especially those who prosecuted him.

“We have a loose agreement that the score settling will end before the first 90 days are over,” Wiles said early in Trump’s second administration, telling Vanity Fair she did try to tamp down Trump’s penchant for retribution.

But in August 2025, she shifted. “I don’t think he’s on a retribution tour,” she said.

Still, she said, “there may be an element of that from time to time” and Trump “will go for it ... when there’s an opportunity.”

“Who would blame him?” she asked rhetorically. “Not me.”



ALLISON ROBERT/AP

White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles looks up at Christmas trees at the White House on Friday.

Epstein commentary

In some of her most eye-popping commentary, Wiles said Attorney General Pam Bondi “whiffed” on handling the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking case, particularly trying to manage public expectations by suggesting the Justice Department had a client list waiting to be disclosed only for the administration to later say it doesn’t exist.

Wiles also said Trump pushed false narratives that former President Bill Clinton frequented Epstein’s infamous island. “There is no evidence” those visits happened, according to Wiles, and there are no damning findings concerning Clinton at all.

“The president was wrong about that,” Wiles said.

Trump’s inner circle

Wiles often sits to the side in the Oval Office, out of camera view. But she’s paying attention.

Vice President JD Vance has been “a conspiracy theorist for a decade,” she said, and his MAGA conversion — he once compared Trump to Adolf Hitler — was “sort of political.”

Musk overstepped on his Department of Government Efficiency efforts, she said. She called

him “a complete solo actor ... an odd, odd duck” and an “avowed ketamine user.” (Musk has acknowledged using the dissociative anesthetic.) She recalled having to explain to him that “you can’t just lock people out of their offices” and said his gutting of USAID left her “initially aghast.”

“Because I think anybody that pays attention to government and has ever paid attention to USAID believed, as I did, that they do very good work,” she said, adding that “no rational person could think the USAID process was a good one. Nobody.”

She calls Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. “quirky Bobby” and White House budget chief Russell Vought “a right-wing absolute zealot.”

Tariffs are ‘more painful’

Few events undermined Trump’s standing quite like his April 2 announcement of “Liberation Day” tariffs, in which he announced import taxes ranging from 10% to 99% on most of the world. Trump’s move sparked recession fears and a delay in imposing his wider tariff strategy, leading to a rollercoaster of negotiations and new tariff threats.

Wiles called the April rollout “so much thinking out loud” and

said there were internal disputes about it among Trump’s aides.

Wiles said she believed a middle ground on tariffs would be successful. But, she concluded, “It’s been more painful than I expected.”

Immigration mistakes

When a federal judge chided the administration for deporting Maryland resident Kilmar Abrego Garcia, Trump publicly defended the approach despite the administration telling the court it was a mistake. Wiles did not mince words, telling Vanity Fair at the time, “We’ve got to look harder at our process for deportation.”

When the administration deported two mothers and their U.S. citizen children, including one who was a cancer patient, Wiles was even more plainspoken: “It could be an overzealous Border Patrol agent, I don’t know. I can’t understand how you make that mistake, but somebody did.”

Trump skeptical of Putin

After nearly four years of fighting, Trump has made the case that Russian President Vladimir Putin can be persuaded to end the war in Ukraine if Kyiv agrees to cede Ukrainian land in the eastern

Donbas region and if Western powers offer economic incentives that would bring Russia back into the economic world order.

“I actually think that President Putin wants to see it end,” Trump told reporters Monday.

But Wiles offered deep skepticism to Vanity Fair about Putin.

“The experts think that if he could get the rest of Donetsk, then he would be happy,” Wiles said in August, referring to the oblast that is a key part of Donbas.

“Donald Trump thinks he wants the whole country,” Wiles told her interviewer.

Knocking Maduro out

Wiles said in November that Trump “wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle.”

Trump has repeatedly said Maduro’s “days are numbered” as the U.S. intensifies deadly attacks on vessels in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific. The administration alleges the targets are drug-smuggling cartels.

Still, Trump and administration officials have stopped short of saying they want to topple the Maduro regime. They insist the strikes are a strategy to stem the flow of fentanyl and other illegal drugs into the U.S.

NATION

Video of possible Brown gunman released

BY KIMBERLEE KRUESI
AND LEAH WILLINGHAM
Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Authorities have asked the public for any footage they might have of the gunman who fatally shot two students and wounded nine others at Brown University, even as they released a new video timeline and a slightly clearer image of a possible suspect.

Investigators provided no indication Tuesday that they were any closer to zeroing in on his identity. In all the videos made public, the suspect's face was masked or turned away, and authorities have only been able to give a vague description of him as being stocky and about 5 feet, 8 inches tall.

Officers have been canvassing around Providence in search of clues that might help them figure out who was behind Saturday's campus shooting.

Surveillance video the FBI posted online before it was removed showed a person in dark clothing walking along multiple sidewalks for about an hour starting shortly after 2 p.m. Saturday. The streets were all within a few blocks of the Brown University engineering building where the shooting occurred.

Some clips show the person walking in front of some properties several times. In one, the per-



Photos provided by the FBI and the Providence, R.I., Police Department show a person of interest in the shooting that occurred at Brown University in Providence, R.I., Saturday.

son abruptly turns around and runs in the other direction when someone approaches.

Two clips taken minutes after the shooting show the person walking away from a parking lot and then along a street.

Police have received about 200 tips, and Col. Oscar Perez, the Providence police chief, asked the

public on Tuesday to look at their camera systems in the area to see if they have footage that might help officials identify the suspected gunman.

A lack of cameras and clear video of the gunman has continued to frustrate both authorities and the community. While Brown President Christina Paxson confirmed

Tuesday that the campus has 1,200 cameras, law enforcement says there is no clear video of the shooter from inside the engineering building.

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha defended the investigation as going "really well" as he pleaded for public patience in locating the suspected killer.

The attack and the shooter's escape have raised questions about campus security, including a lack of cameras, and led to calls for better locks on campus doors.

Paxson said the university has two security systems. One system, activated at a time of emergency, sent out text messages, phone calls and emails that reached 20,000 people. The other system features three sirens across the campus and was not activated Saturday, a decision Paxson defended because doing so would have caused people to rush into buildings, including the one where the shooting was happening.

"So that is not a system we would ever use in the case of an active shooter," she said.

Brown's website says the sirens can be used when there is an active shooter, but Paxson said it "depends on the circumstances" and the location of the shooter.

Providence remained tense on Tuesday as additional police were sent to city schools to reassure worried parents that their kids would be safe. Ten state troopers were assigned to support police sent to beef up security at schools, district Superintendent Javier Montañez said.

Providence public schools canceled after-school activities and field trips for the week as a precaution.

Damage from record flooding in Washington state 'profound'

BY GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The extent of the damage in Washington state is profound but unclear after more than a week of heavy rains and record flooding, Gov. Bob Ferguson said Tuesday, as more high water, mudslides and power outages were in the forecast.

A barrage of storms from weather systems stretching across the Pacific has dumped close to 2 feet of rain in parts of the Cascade Mountains, swelling rivers far beyond their banks and prompting more than 600 rescues across 10 counties.

As of Tuesday, there had been only one death — of a man who drove past warning signs into a flooded area — but key highways were buried or washed out, entire communities had been inundated and saturated levees had given way. It could be months before State Route 2, which connects cities in western Washington with the Stevens Pass ski area and the tourist town of Leavenworth across the mountains, can be reopened, Ferguson said.

"We're in for the long haul,"



ELLEN M. BANNER/AP

Yoon Stimak walks with his dog Mya as flood waters flow over the road, Tuesday, in Pacific, Wash.

Ferguson said at a news conference. "If you get an evacuation order, for God's sakes, follow it."

It won't be until after waters recede and landslide risk subsides that crews will be able to fully assess the damage, he said. The state and some counties are making several million dollars available to help people pay for hotels, groceries and other necessities, pending more extensive federal assistance that Ferguson and Washington's congressional delegation expect to see approved.

According to the governor's office, first responders had conducted at least 629 rescues and 572 assisted evacuations. As many as 100,000 people had been under evacuation orders, many of them in the flood plain north of Seattle.

Elevated rivers and flood risk could persist until at least late this month, according to the National Weather Service. Wind and flood watches and warnings are expected for the next couple of days as storms bring rain, heavy mountain snow and high winds.

Battle begins over Calif. new congressional map

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The fight over California's new congressional map designed to help Democrats flip a string of U.S. House seats kicked off in court Monday, where a panel of federal judges is considering whether the rejiggered districts approved by voters last month can be used in elections.

The hearing in Los Angeles sets the stage for a high-stakes legal and political fight between the Trump administration and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who's been eyeing a 2028 presidential run.

The lawsuit asks a three-judge panel to grant a temporary restraining order blocking the new map by Dec. 19 — the date candidates can take the first official steps to run in the 2026 elections when GOP control of the House will be in play.

Voters approved California's new House map in November in so-called Proposition 50. It's designed to help Democrats flip as many as five seats in the midterm elections. It was Newsom's response to a Republican-led effort

in Texas backed by President Donald Trump.

The showdown between the nation's two most populous states has spread nationally, with efforts aiming to determine which party controls Congress for the second half of Trump's term. Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio have adopted new district lines that could provide a partisan advantage.

Some plans are facing legal challenges, but the Supreme Court ruled earlier this month to allow Texas to use its new map for the 2026 election. The Justice Department has only sued California.

The Justice Department, joining a case brought by the California Republican Party, has accused California of gerrymandering its map in violation of the Constitution by using race as a factor to favor Hispanic voters.

Republicans want the court to prohibit California from using the new map. Voters approved the map for the 2026, 2028 and 2030 elections. State Democrats said they're confident the lawsuit will fail.

NATION

Smith says his team has ‘proof’ against Trump

BY ERIC TUCKER
AND LISA MASCARO
Associated Press

Former Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith told lawmakers in a closed-door interview on Wednesday that his team of investigators “developed proof beyond a reasonable doubt” that President Donald Trump had criminally conspired to overturn the results of the 2020 election, according to portions of his opening statement obtained by The Associated Press.

He also said investigators had accrued “powerful evidence” that Trump broke the law by hoarding classified documents from his first term as president at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla., and by obstructing government efforts to recover the records.

“I made my decisions in the investigation without regard to President Trump’s political asso-

ciation, activities, beliefs or candidacy in the 2024 election,” Smith said. “We took actions based on what the facts and the law required — the very lesson I learned early in my career as a prosecutor.”

He said that if asked whether he would “prosecute a former president based on the same facts today, I would do so regardless of whether the president was a Republican or Democrat.”

The private deposition before the House Judiciary Committee gives Smith his first chance to face questions, albeit behind closed doors, about a pair of investigations into Trump that resulted in since-abandoned criminal charges between the Republican president’s first and second terms in office.

Smith was subpoenaed earlier this month to provide both testimony and documents as part of a

Republican investigation into the Trump probes during the Biden administration.

The former special counsel cooperated with the congressional demand despite having volunteered more than a month earlier to answer questions publicly before the committee, an overture his lawyers say was rebuffed by Republicans.

Smith was appointed in 2022 to oversee the Justice Department investigations into Trump’s efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss to Democrat Joe Biden and his hoarding of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago. Smith’s team filed charges in both investigations.

Smith abandoned the cases after Trump was elected to the White House again last year, citing Justice Department legal opinions that say a sitting president cannot be indicted.



JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

Former Department of Justice Special Counsel Jack Smith, center, and his attorney Lanny Breuer, right, arrive for a closed-door interview with House Republicans at Capitol Hill, Wednesday in Washington.



PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP

Visitors to the Washington Monument look toward the White House and the continuing construction of the ballroom where the East Room once stood Dec. 9 in Washington.

Judge says he’s inclined to deny request to halt ballroom project

BY DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge said Tuesday he’s leaning toward denying a preservationist group’s request to temporarily halt President Donald Trump’s White House ballroom project, saying the organization failed to show that “irreparable harm” would be caused if the project moves forward.

U.S. District Judge Richard Leon said he could issue a final decision on the restraining order by Wednesday. But Leon said he plans to hold another hearing in January on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s request to pause the ballroom project until it goes through multiple independent reviews and wins approval from Congress.

In the meantime, Leon warned

the administration to not make decisions on underground work, such as the routing of plumbing and gas lines, that would dictate the scope of future ballroom construction above ground. If that were to happen, Leon said, “the court will address it, I assure you of that.”

Trump, speaking Tuesday night at a Hanukkah event, thanked the judge for the “courage in making the proper decision.” He also described the ballroom as costing \$400 million, though its previously listed price tag was \$300 million.

Carol Quillen, president and CEO of the National Trust, said it remained “fully committed to upholding the interests of the American people and advocating for compliance with the law, including review by the National Capital Planning Commission and

an opportunity for the public to provide comment and shape the project.”

Trump went ahead with the ballroom construction before seeking input from a pair of federal review panels, the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts. Trump has stocked the planning commission with allies, including the chairman, Will Scharf, who recently said he expected to receive the ballroom plans sometime this month.

Leon made a couple of references during the hearing to the administration having just two weeks to submit the plans. Adam Gustafson, the principal deputy assistant attorney general, said the administration had “initiated outreach” to the panel to do just that, but no date had been set.

16 states sue Trump over billions in withheld funding for EV charging

BY ALEXA ST. JOHN
Associated Press

DETROIT — Sixteen states and the District of Columbia are suing the Trump administration for what they say is the unlawful withholding of over \$2 billion in funding for two electric vehicle charging programs.

A federal lawsuit filed Tuesday in Seattle is the latest legal battle that Democratic-led states are pursuing over funding for EV charging infrastructure that they say was obligated to them by Congress under former President Joe Biden, but that the Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration are “impounding.”

“The Trump administration’s illegal attempt to stop funding for electric vehicle infrastructure must come to an end,” California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a release. “This is just another reckless attempt that will stall the fight against air pollution and climate change, slow innovation, thwart green job creation, and leave communities without access to clean, affordable transportation.”

President Donald Trump’s administration has been hostile to EVs and has dismantled several Biden-era policies friendly to cleaner cars and trucks in favor of policies that align with Trump’s oil and gas industry agenda.

The Trump administration in February ordered states to halt spending money for EV charging that was allocated in the biparti-

san infrastructure law passed under the previous administration.

Several states filed a lawsuit in May against the administration for withholding the funding from the \$5 billion National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program for a nationwide charging build-out. A federal judge later ordered the administration to release much of the funding for chargers in more than a dozen states.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy later issued revised guidance intended to streamline funding applications for states and make charger deployment more efficient. At least four states — Georgia, Illinois, Maryland and Wisconsin — have announced awards under the new program.

Tuesday’s separate lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, addresses withholding of funds for two other programs: \$1.8 billion for the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant program, as well as about \$350 million for the Electric Vehicle Charger Reliability and Accessibility Accelerator program.

The lawsuit is led by attorneys general from California and Colorado, joined by the attorneys general of Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia, and the governor of Pennsylvania. All are Democrats.

Reiner's son in court, facing murder charges

By Andrew Dalton and Christopher Weber
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Rob Reiner's son Nick Reiner made his first court appearance Wednesday on two counts of first-degree murder in the killing of his parents.

The 32-year-old did not enter a plea as he appeared from behind the glass wall of a custody area. He was in shackles and wearing a jail suicide prevention smock.

Reiner's arraignment was postponed until Jan. 7 at his lawyer's request. He spoke only to say "yes, your honor" to agree to the date.

Reiner was charged Tuesday with killing the 78-year-old actor and director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman announced at a news conference with LA Police Chief Jim McDonnell.

Along with the two counts of first-degree murder, prosecutors added special circumstances of multiple murders and a special allegation that the defendant used a dangerous weapon, a knife. The additions could mean a greater

sentence. Hochman said his office has not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty in the case.

"This case is heartbreaking and deeply personal, not only for the Reiner family and their loved ones but for our entire city," McDonnell said.

The announcement came two days after the couple was found dead from apparent stab wounds in their home in the upscale Brentwood neighborhood on the west side of Los Angeles.

Nick Reiner did not resist when he was arrested hours later in the Exposition Park area near the University of Southern California, about 14 miles from the crime scene, police said.

Rob Reiner was the Emmy-winning star of the sitcom "All in the Family" who went on to direct films including "When Harry Met Sally ..." and "The Princess Bride."

He was an outspoken liberal activist for decades. Michele Singer Reiner was a photographer, movie producer and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. They had been married for 36 years.

Several of those closest to them, including actors Billy Crystal, Albert Brooks, Martin Short and Larry David, released a statement mourning and celebrating the couple on Tuesday night.



Nick Reiner



ETHAN SWOPE/Bloomberg

Paramount Studios in Los Angeles on Dec. 9.

Warner Bros asks investors to reject bid from Paramount

Associated Press
NEW YORK — Warner Bros. is telling shareholders to reject a takeover bid from Paramount Skydance, saying that a rival bid from Netflix will be better for customers.

"The Board reviewed Paramount Skydance's most recent unsolicited tender offer with the same care and discipline it has applied throughout this process, including its review of multiple prior proposals," Warner Bros. said Wednesday. "The Board's evaluation followed a thorough and consistent process and is grounded in its fiduciary duties."

Paramount went hostile with its

bid last week, asking shareholders to reject the deal with Netflix favored by the board. Paramount is offering \$30 per Warner share to Netflix's \$27.75.

Paramount's bid isn't off the table altogether. While Wednesday's letter to shareholders means Paramount's is not the offer favored by the board at Warner Bros., shareholders can still decide to tender their shares in favor of Paramount's offer.

Unlike Paramount's bid, the offer from Netflix does not include buying the cable operations of Warner Bros. An acquisition by Netflix, if approved by regulators and shareholders, will close only

after Warner completes its previously announced separation of its cable operations.

Paramount has claimed it made six different bids that Warner leadership rejected before announcing its deal with Netflix on Dec. 5. Only after that did it take its offer directly to Warner's shareholders.

Beyond a greenlight from shareholders, both takeover bids face regulatory scrutiny. A change in ownership at Warner would drastically reshape the industry — impacting movie making, consumer streaming platforms and, in Paramount's case, the news landscape.

Doctor who got ketamine for Matthew Perry avoids prison

By Jaimie Ding
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A doctor who pleaded guilty in a scheme to supply ketamine to actor Matthew Perry before his overdose death was sentenced Tuesday to 8 months of home confinement.

Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett handed down the sentence that included 3 years of supervised release to 55-year-old Dr. Mark Chavez in a federal courtroom in Los Angeles.

Before the sentence was delivered, Chavez addressed the judge and said he had lost a loved one recently and understood the grief that Perry's death has caused.

"I just want to say my heart goes out to the Perry family," he said.

Chavez acquired ketamine and gave it to Dr. Salvador Plasencia, who was sentenced to 2 1/2 years

in prison earlier this month for selling ketamine to Perry in the months leading up to his death.

Chavez's attorneys emphasized the difference between the two doctors and said that Chavez "accepted responsibility early" by cooperating with investigators and voluntarily giving up his medical license ahead of his hearing.

"These are real steps that someone takes toward accountability," attorney Matthew Binner said. He called the sentence a "fair and just outcome" for the case.

Perry had been taking the surgical anesthetic ketamine legally as a treatment for depression. But when his regular doctor wouldn't provide it in the amounts he wanted, he turned to Plasencia.

Plasencia admitted to taking advantage of Perry, knowing he was a struggling addict. Plasencia texted Chavez that Perry was a

"moron" who could be exploited for money, according to court filings.

Chavez admitted to obtaining the ketamine from a wholesale distributor on false pretenses and pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine. He has not been in custody.

Perry struggled with addiction for years, dating back to his time on "Friends," when he became one of the biggest TV stars of his generation as Chandler Bing. He starred alongside Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc and David Schwimmer for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004 on NBC's megahit.

Chavez is the second person to be sentenced of the five defendants who have pleaded guilty in connection with Perry's death at age 54 in 2023.

Perry was found dead by his as-

sistant on Oct. 28. The medical examiner ruled ketamine was the primary cause of death. The actor had been using the drug through his regular doctor in a legal but off-label treatment for depression that has become increasingly common.

Seeking more ketamine than his doctor would give him, about a month before his death Perry found Plasencia, who in turn asked Chavez to obtain the drug for him.

He met with Plasencia between San Diego and Los Angeles to hand off ketamine he got using fraudulent prescriptions. In all, he admitted to supplying 22 5-milliliter vials of ketamine and nine ketamine lozenges.

Chavez will also be expected to do 300 hours of community service.

The other three defendants who



DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

Dr. Mark Chavez is seen after pleading guilty to conspiring to distribute the surgical anesthetic ketamine in Los Angeles on Oct. 2, 2024.

reached deals to plead guilty will be sentenced at their own hearings in the coming months. Garnett has said she would seek to make sure all the sentences made sense in relation to one another.

WORLD

Millions raised for Bondi ‘hero’

BY CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-MCLAY
Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Like many Australians strolling at Bondi Beach on long, warm summer evenings, Ahmed al Ahmed just wanted a cup of coffee with a friend. Around him, a bloody massacre erupted as two gunmen targeted Jews during Hanukkah festivities at a park close to the shore.

Soon al Ahmed was creeping, bent over, between two parked cars, before barreling directly toward one of the unsuspecting shooters. In footage that has been viewed millions of times around the world, the 44-year-old father can be seen tackling one of the gunmen, wrestling the man’s shotgun from his grip and turning it on the attacker.

The story of the Syrian-Australian Muslim shop owner who put an end to the rampage of one of the shooters on Sunday has been seized upon by a country desperately seeking comfort after one of its darkest hours: the slaying of 15 people as they celebrated their Jewish faith.



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese meets Ahmed al Ahmed at St George Hospital in Sydney, Tuesday.

A fundraising page established by Australians who had never met al Ahmed had attracted by Tuesday night donations by some 40,000 people, who gave \$1.5 million.

Al Ahmed, who is married with two young daughters, faces a long struggle ahead, those who have spoken to him since Sunday’s massacre say. He was shot multiple times in the left arm, apparently by the second gunman in the attack as the man fired indiscriminately from a footbridge.

He has already undergone surgery and more operations are scheduled, said Lubaba alhmidi Alkahil, a spokesperson for the Australians for Syria Association, who visited al Ahmed in a hospital late Monday. The “quiet and hum-

ble” man was conscious but frail and faced at least six months of recovery, Alkahil said.

In the days since the attack, a pile of floral tributes and notes of thanks has grown outside the small tobacco store al Ahmed owns opposite a train station in suburban Sydney.

Ahmed al Ahmed’s parents, who came to Sydney this year to reunite with their son, told Australian Broadcasting Corp. that their son had served with the police and in the central security forces in Syria. Father Mohamed Fateh al Ahmed said his son’s “conscience and soul” compelled him to act on Sunday.

“I feel pride and honor because my son is a hero of Australia,” the father said.

Putin warns of Russian expansion if peace talks fail

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Wednesday that Moscow will seek to extend its gains in Ukraine if Kyiv and its Western allies reject the Kremlin’s demands in peace talks.

President Donald Trump has unleashed an extensive diplomatic push to end nearly four years of fighting following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, but Washington’s efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv.

Speaking at an annual meeting with top military officers, Putin said Moscow would prefer to achieve its goals and “eliminate the root causes of the conflict” by diplomatic means, but he added that “if the opposing side and its foreign patrons refuse to engage in substantive dialogue, Russia will achieve the liberation of its historical lands by military means.”

Putin was referring to Ukrainian territory seized by Russia — action widely condemned in the West as a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and an unprovoked act of aggression.

Putin claimed that “the Russian army has seized and is firmly holding strategic initiative all along the front line” and warned that Moscow will move to expand a “buffer security zone” alongside the Russian border.

“Our troops are different now, they are battle-hardened and there is no other such army in the world now,” he said.

Putin praised Russia’s growing military might and particularly noted the modernization of its atomic arsenal, including the new nuclear-capable intermediate range Oreshnik ballistic missile that he said will officially enter combat duty this month.

Louvre workers vote to extend a strike as museum partially reopens

Associated Press

PARIS — Employees at the Louvre Museum voted to extend a strike that has disrupted operations at the world’s most visited museum, though the attraction partially opened Wednesday to allow visitors to enjoy the “Mona Lisa” and other highlights.

The museum said that visitors have started entering, where they had access to a limited “masterpiece route” which includes Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” and the famous Venus de Milo.

“Due to a strike, some rooms in the Louvre Museum are ... closed,” it said on social media.

“We apologize for any inconvenience.”

Union workers are protesting chronic understaffing, building deterioration and recent management decisions.

The decision came during a morning general assembly, after workers had adopted the walkout unanimously earlier this week. The museum was shuttered Tuesday for its weekly closed day.

STARS AND STRIPES
SERVICE DIRECTORY
The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market



Transportation944

VEHICLE SHIPPING SERVICES

- International Shipping
- Import & Export
- Inland trucking (U.S. & Europe)
- Door to door pick-up/delivery service
- Customs clearance
- All Risk Marine Insurance
- Auto Insurance (Germany only)

For Further Information Please Contact

GERMANY	UNITED KINGDOM	U.S.A
+49-(0)6134-2592730	+44-(0)1638-515714	+1-972-602-1670 Ext. 1701
0800-CARSHIP (Germany only)		+1-800-264-8167 (US only)
info@transglobal-logistics.de	enquiries@carshipuk.co.uk	info@tgal.us
www.transglobal-logistics.de	www.carshipuk.co.uk	www.tgal.us

For 2nd POV Shipments - Offices / Agencies near Military Installations



LOGISTICS EUROPE GMBH



Are you in the picture?



Reading Stars and Stripes gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.
No one covers the bases the way we do.

STARS AND STRIPES
However you read us, wherever you need us.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who tried to kill Trump asks for attorney

FL ORLANDO — A man convicted of trying to assassinate President Donald Trump on a Florida golf course last year has decided to use an attorney during the sentencing phase instead of representing himself as he did for most of the trial.

The sentencing hearing for Ryan Routh in Fort Pierce, Fla., was pushed back from this week to early February after he requested and was granted an attorney to represent him during the sentencing and appeal phases of the trial.

The federal courtroom erupted into chaos in September shortly after jurors found Routh guilty on all counts, including attempting to kill a presidential candidate and several firearm-related charges. Routh, 59, tried to stab himself in the neck with a pen, and officers quickly dragged him out. The pen Routh used was flexible to prevent people in custody from using it as a weapon.

Affidavit: Driver in fatal bus crash hit 91 mph

CO DENVER — The 22-year-old driver accused of crashing an SUV into a school bus carrying a Grand Junction, Colo., high school wrestling team in Lakewood and causing the death of an 18-year-old passenger had no valid license, reached speeds up to 91 mph, and initially refused to answer police agents’ questions in the wreck, according to an arrest affidavit.

Denver resident Andrew Logan Miller, who has been arrested and faces multiple reckless vehicular assault and other charges, “was very escalated” and asked “ ‘What happened?’ ” and “ ‘Who did I hit?’ ” according to a Lakewood Police arrest affidavit in the Dec. 6 crash.

Miller also told police at the scene that “ ‘I knew this would happen,’ ” and that “ ‘I had a dream about this,’ ” the affidavit said, noting Miller left the car and was on the ground, unable to move because of a leg injury. A total of 16 people were injured, including students, coaches, and three people inside the SUV.

Two days after the crash, Miller told police he didn’t remember the crash, that side airbags in the 2015 Nissan Pathfinder he was driving had been removed due to a previous incident and that the brakes “were not working as they should,” the affidavit said.

Miller’s license had been suspended since Feb. 5, 2022, the affidavit said.

Electric ferry boats one step closer to reality

CA SAN DIEGO — Plans to make San Diego a national leader in modern maritime transit took a key step forward this month when the company that



CODY JACKSON/AP

Turtles sent south for rehab

Dr. Heather Barron cares for a Kemp’s Ridley sea turtle Monday in Juno Beach, Fla. Two dozen Kemp’s ridley sea turtles are rehabilitating in Florida after cold waters off Cape Cod left them with frostbite and pneumonia.

runs the San Diego-Coronado Ferry began soliciting bids for new electric boats.

The company, Flagship Cruises & Events, plans to spend \$21 million replacing two diesel-powered boats with electric ferries that will reduce pollution on San Diego Bay and nearby neighborhoods.

Shipbuilders have until Jan. 9 to submit bids to build the new vessels. Flagship officials say they plan to select a builder in early February.

The boats will take over for two long-running vessels — the Cabrillo and the Silvergate — and operate two existing ferry routes, one from Coronado to Broadway Pier and another from Coronado to the convention center.

2 women accused of \$9K in luxury store thefts

NJ PARAMUS — Two women from New York were charged Monday after police say they stole more than \$9,000 worth of clothes from stores at the Westfield Garden State Plaza mall in Bergen County.

Police said they watched as two women made multiple trips in the early afternoon between their parked SUV and the mall off Route 17 in Paramus.

Mall security officers and local police said the women were engaged in an organized retail theft operation involving multiple stores.

“Loss prevention officers from

Lululemon and Alo Yoga reported that the suspects selected and concealed merchandise before exiting the stores without making purchases,” Paramus Police Chief Robert M. Guidetti said in a statement.

Officers stopped the women and found burglary tools used to deactivate anti-shoplifting devices. Police also seized several bags of stolen merchandise, some of which were lined with foil, the chief said.

‘Phoenix Wheel’ returns home this spring

PA PHOENIXVILLE — The 132-year-old Phoenix Wheel delighted thousands of visitors to Asbury Park, the crown jewel of the Jersey Shore, for nearly a century from 1895 to 1988.

Next spring, the vintage amusement wheel will proudly rise again, as a 78-foot-high, 68-foot-wide permanent sculpture in the center of Phoenixville, the town that originally crafted the wheel’s steel components, according to a news release issued by the Schuylkill River Heritage Center, which is leading the effort.

In 1893, the Phoenix Bridge Co., a subsidiary of Phoenix Iron and Steel Co. in Phoenixville, manufactured four extraordinary Phoenix Wheels — large, round steel marvels emblematic of the industrial era and a testament to the skilled craftsmanship of the times.

One of these four grand structures was delivered to Asbury

Park, N.J., a popular beach venue where decades of Philadelphia-area beachgoers enjoyed summers and where a young Bruce Springsteen began his musical career at the fabled Stone Pony music spot.

The Asbury Park Wheel remained in operation until 1988.

Nonprofit to pay off fallen firefighter’s mortgage

MN BURNSVILLE — A nonprofit group is paying off the mortgage for the home belonging to the family of fallen Burnsville Fire Department firefighter and paramedic Adam Finseth.

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation will pay off the mortgage on the Finseth family home through the Fallen First Responder Home Program as part of the 2025 Season of Hope.

On its website, the New York foundation, which was inspired by the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, spoke about Finseth’s bravery, saying he “acted without hesitation in his last moments.”

Finseth, along with Burnsville police officers Matt Ruge and Paul Elmstrand, both 27, were ambushed in a shooting while responding to a domestic violence call in February 2024.

Feb. 18 was supposed to be a day off for Finseth, 40. But as one of his department’s two SWAT medics, he didn’t hesitate when he was

called to respond to a standoff at a home in Burnsville.

The man in the standoff started shooting at officers without warning as they negotiated with him to surrender. When Finseth tried to provide an officer with medical aid, the gunman also shot him.

Convicted burglar said police ‘need to die’

NJ SOMERVILLE — A 39-year-old man who struck a Manville, N.J., police officer with a stolen vehicle and later said police “need to die” after crashing into a home following a pursuit was convicted.

A jury convicted Brian Niziolek, of Basking Ridge, with aggravated assault, burglary and other offenses following a two-week trial, the Somerset County Prosecutor’s office said Monday.

He was not convicted of attempted murder.

Niziolek, who has a lengthy criminal history, faces up to 86 years in state prison when he is sentenced on Jan. 26.

Following his arrest, Niziolek told investigators he “hated” police, that police “need to die” and he would “kill any cop I see from now on.”

Niziolek also said he and his friends “throw a party” anytime a police officer gets shot and watch videos of shootings.

FACES

Songwriters Hall of Fame includes Donna Summer

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

There are giants, and then there is Donna Summer. The Queen of Disco and then some, known for such timeless tunes as “Love to Love You Baby,” “I Feel Love,” “Bad Girls,” “Dim All the Lights,” “On the Radio” and “She Works Hard for the Money,” has been posthumously inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, the hall said.

Summer, who died in 2012 at age 63, was welcomed into the Songwriters Hall on Monday at a ceremony at The Butterfly Room at Cecconi’s in Los Angeles. It was led by Academy Award-winning songwriter Paul Williams. Summer’s husband, Bruce Sudano, and their daughters Brooklyn Sudano and Amanda Sudano Ramirez were in attendance.

“Donna Summer is not only one of the defining voices and performers of the 20th century; she is one of the great songwriters of all time who changed the course of music,” said Williams in a statement. “She wrote timeless and transcendent songs that continue to captivate our souls and imaginations, inspiring the world to dance and, above all, feel love.”

Summer’s smooth blend of R&B, soul, pop, funk, rock, disco and electronica launched numerous chart-topping hits in the ’70s



AP

Donna Summer, shown in 2009, was posthumously inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

and ’80s as well as three multiplatinum albums. She won five Grammys. She was unstoppable, both as a performer and a writer.

“It’s important to me because I know how important it was for Donna,” Bruce Sudano said in a press release. “The backstory is, with all the accolades that she received over her career, being respected as a songwriter was always the thing that she felt was overlooked. So, for her to be accepted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame I know that she’s very happy ... somewhere.”

The Songwriters Hall of Fame was established in 1969. A songwriter with a notable catalog of songs qualifies for induction 20 years after the first commercial release of a song.

Stern, SiriusXM sign 3-year extension

Associated Press

Howard Stern will spend another three years on SiriusXM, telling listeners Tuesday that he’s “figured out a way to have it all.”



Stern

And reps confirmed that he’s not trolling us again like he did back in August when he brought on Andy Cohen as a fake replacement host.

This time, he went the sincere route without providing many details of his latest contract extension.

“I am happy to announce that I have figured out a way to have it all. More free time and continuing to be on the radio. Yes, we are coming back for three years,” Stern said on air.

Stern, 71, said he was able to create a “more flexible schedule,” adding: “And I’m excited about it because you know what. I do still love radio.”

He made the announcement during his last show of the year. He’ll be back on the air live Jan. 5.

Stern joined what was then Sirius Satellite Radio Inc. in 2006. It helped make him one of the highest-paid personalities in broadcasting and was a game-changer

for both the company and the nascent satellite radio industry.

Other news

■ **Anthony Geary**, who rose to fame in the 1970s and ’80s as half the daytime TV supercouple Luke and Laura on “General Hospital,” died Sunday in Amsterdam of complications from a surgical procedure three days prior. He was 78. In a career spanning more than 40 years, Geary earned eight Daytime Emmy awards as Luke Spencer after joining the soap in 1978. Luke’s pairing with Genie Francis’ Laura Webber Baldwin propelled the two onto magazine covers and into the cultural mainstream. Geary also had numerous other TV and stage credits.

■ **Joe Ely**, the influential Texas-born singer-songwriter whose blend of honky-tonk, rock and roadhouse blues made him a favorite among other musicians and led to collaborations with Bruce Springsteen and the Clash, has died. He was 78. Ely died in Taos, N.M., of complications from Parkinson’s disease and pneumonia. Ely was a key figure in the progressive country music movement as a founder of country-rock band The Flatlanders with Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock, and later as a solo artist.



Universal Pictures

Michelle Yeoh as Madame Morrible, left, and Ariana Grande as Glinda in “Wicked: For Good.” The blockbuster movie is on the Academy Awards shortlists in eight categories.

Oscars shortlists bolster ‘Wicked’ sequel, ‘Sinners’

International film, documentary, song, casting among featured categories

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Ryan Coogler’s bluesy vampire thriller “Sinners,” the big-screen musical “Wicked: For Good” and the Netflix phenomenon “KPop Demon Hunters” are all a step closer to an Oscar nomination. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences released shortlists for 12 categories Tuesday, including for best song, score, international and documentary film, cinematography and this year’s new prize, casting.

“Sinners” and “Wicked: For Good” received the most shortlist mentions with eight each, including makeup and hair, sound, visual effects, score, casting and cinematography. Both have two original songs advancing as well. For “Wicked,” it’s Stephen Schwartz’s “The Girl in the Bubble” and “No Place Like Home.” For “Sinners,” it’s Ludwig Göransson, Miles Caton and Alice Smith’s “Last Time (I Seen the Sun),” and Göransson and Raphael Saadiq’s “I Lied to You.”

The “KPop Demon Hunters” hit “Golden,” by EJAE and Mark Sonnenblick, was another shortlisted song alongside notable artists such as: Nick Cave and Bryce Dessner for “Train Dreams”; John Mayer, Ed Sheeran and Blake Slatkin for the “F1” song “Drive”; Sara Bareilles, Brandi Carlile and Andrea Gibson for “Salt Then Sour Then Sweet” from “Come See Me in the Good Light”; and Miley Cyrus, Simon Franglen, Mark Ronson and Andrew Wyatt for “Dream as One” from “Avatar: Fire and Ash.”

Diane Warren also might be on her way to a 17th nomination with “Dear Me” from “Diane Warren: Relentless.”

One of the highest profile shortlist categories is the best international feature, where 15 films were named including “Sentimental Value” (Norway), “Sirat” (Spain), “No Other Choice” (South Korea), “The Secret Agent” (Brazil), “It Was Just an Accident” (France), “The Voice of Hind Rajab” (Tunisia),

“Sound of Falling” (Germany) and “The President’s Cake” (Iraq).

Notable documentaries among the 15 include “My Undesirable Friends: Part I - Last Air in Moscow,” “The Perfect Neighbor,” “The Alabama Solution,” “Come See Me in the Good Light,” “Cover-Up” and Mstyslav Chernov’s “2000 Meters to Andriivka,” a co-production between The Associated Press and PBS Frontline.

The Oscars’ new award for casting shortlisted 10 films that will vie for the five nomination slots: “Frankenstein,” “Hamnet,” “Marty Supreme,” “One Battle After Another,” “The Secret Agent,” “Sentimental Value,” “Sinners,” “Sirat,” “Weapons,” and “Wicked: For Good.” Notably, “Jay Kelly” and “Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery” did not make the list.

Composers who made the shortlist for best score include Göransson (“Sinners”), Jonny Greenwood (“One Battle After Another”), Max Richter (“Hamnet”), Alexandre Desplat (“Frankenstein”) and Kangding Ray (“Sirat”).

For the most part, shortlists are determined by members in their respective categories, though the specifics vary from branch to branch: Some have committees, some have minimum viewing requirements.

As most of the shortlists are in below-the-line categories celebrating crafts like sound and visual effects, there are also films that aren’t necessarily the most obvious of Oscar contenders like “The Alto Knights,” shortlisted in hair and makeup, as well as the widely panned “Tron: Ares” and “The Electric State,” both shortlisted for visual effects. “Tron: Ares” also made the lists for score and song with Nine Inch Nails’ “As Alive As You Need Me To Be.”

The lists will narrow to five when final nominations are announced on Jan. 22. The 98th Oscars, hosted by Conan O’Brien, will air March 15 on ABC at 7 p.m. ET.



Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
Lt. Col. Daniel “DQ” Quinlan, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Lucas Crouch, Pacific commander
John Albaugh, Pacific chief of staff

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

OMBUDSMAN

Jacqueline Smith

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper’s independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at 202.886.0003.

Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) published daily (except Saturday, Sunday, 25 December and 1 January) for 50 cents (Monday through Thursday) and one dollar on Friday by Stars and Stripes Pacific, OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, OPC 706 BOX 7, AP 96301-9001.
The Stars and Stripes newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense (DoD) for the overseas U.S. military community. As an authorized newspaper, Stars and Stripes publications may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DoD personnel are located. The content printed in this newspaper is not classified as command information and is neither endorsed by nor represents the official views of the U.S. government.
The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense, Stars and Stripes, and or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

OPINION

Close the labor-force gap to fix the housing crisis

By ANGELO FAROOQ
Los Angeles Times
America’s housing crisis is no longer a looming threat: It’s here. Across the country, home prices and rents have climbed beyond reach for millions of families. While many factors play a role, from zoning laws to inflation, one root cause is often ignored: We simply don’t have enough construction workers to build the homes America needs.
The construction industry must add roughly 723,000 workers every year through 2028 just to meet demand. Years of underinvestment in trade education have contributed to a structural shortage that’s now costing the economy an estimated \$10.8 billion annually in delayed projects and un-built homes. That’s not a future risk; it’s a current cost for every American household in the form of higher rents and home prices.
I’ve seen this crisis from both sides of the table. As a former chair of a state workforce board and now a partner in real estate development, I witness the same disconnect everywhere: young people searching for opportunity, and an industry desperate for labor. Job sites across the country can’t find electricians, plumbers, framers or HVAC technicians. Projects are delayed, scaled back or canceled. This isn’t just a workforce challenge; it’s a housing and economic growth emergency.
Yet there’s a powerful irony here. Construction is one of the most promising and well-paying career paths in the country. According to the newly released Home Builders Institute report, average wages for homebuilding jobs across the country surged more than 9% over the past year, and the average non-supervisory construction worker now earns more than \$35 an hour, well above the private-sector average. The

message from the market couldn’t be clearer: There’s tremendous demand for builders, and incredible opportunity for anyone willing to learn the trades.
There are some bright spots of progress. Women’s participation in construction has reached a 20-year high, and more Gen Z workers are entering the industry. These new faces are proof that outreach and changing perceptions work, but the progress isn’t keeping pace with the need. The median age of a construction worker is in the 40s, and retirements are accelerating. If we don’t act now, the gap between supply and demand will widen, homebuilding will slow even further, and housing costs will continue to soar.
The solution can only be a national workforce mobilization on the scale of the housing crisis itself. Federal and state governments should prioritize funding for construction training, through expanded vocational education, apprenticeships and community college partnerships. Congress should ensure workforce dollars for the building trades are included in any infrastructure or competitiveness legislation, just as it has for semiconductor jobs. The private sector should do its part too: Developers and builders ought to sponsor apprenticeship programs and create clear career pathways for young workers and members of underrepresented groups.
We also need a cultural reset. For too long, America has pushed a “college or bust” mindset that dismisses the trades as second-class options. That’s wrong, and it’s hurting our economy. Trades are the backbone of the middle class and vital to our nation’s growth. We should celebrate and elevate these jobs: Carpenters, masons and electricians are nation builders in the truest sense. A coordinated public-private campaign

could help change perceptions, attract new talent and close the workforce gap.
Some argue that technology will solve this shortage. It won’t, at least not anytime soon. Despite new tools such as AI-assisted design, construction still relies on human hands. Algorithms don’t frame houses or wire electrical systems. The short-term housing crunch requires trained workers at every site.
If we fail to act, the housing deficit, already more than 1.5 million homes, will deepen; millions of families will remain priced out of homeownership. Employers in the construction trades will struggle to attract workers and inflation will persist. All of this slows economic growth. But if we invest in people, we can reverse course: More training means more homes, more stable prices and stronger communities.
This need is about more than economics. It’s about the American promise. Every generation before us has faced moments that demanded big investments in our workforce—from the manufacturing mobilization of World War II to the tech revolution that defined recent decades. We can meet this moment too, by training and empowering the next generation of builders.
We know what needs to be done. The question is whether we have the will to do it. Every month we delay adds billions in hidden costs and pushes the dream of affordable housing further out of reach. The \$10.8 billion we lose each year to labor shortages isn’t only theoretical, in the homes not built: It is tangible in the rents that rise and the families waiting for a chance to build their future. America can’t afford to wait any longer.

Angelo Farooq is a general partner at AlphaX RE Capital and a former chairman of the National Association for State Workforce Board Chairs.

Does either party want to win the Senate race in Texas?

By JONAH GOLDBERG
Tribune Content Agency
One of the worst features of the election primary system in our polarized “Red vs. Blue” time is the tendency of primary voters to flock to the candidate they most want to “destroy” the other party, not the candidate best positioned to do so.
Let’s say a zombie is scratching at your door. You’ve got a shotgun, a handgun and your favorite frying pan. The shotgun has the greatest chance of success, the handgun — if one is careful and skilled — has a solid chance of working, and the frying pan? It probably won’t dispatch the threat but, come on, how cool would it be to take out a zombie with a frying pan? So, you go with that.
In this extended metaphor, Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett is the Democrats’ frying pan and Attorney General Ken Paxton is the Republican one.
Given trends in media coverage, you’re probably more familiar with examples of this phenomenon from the GOP. But Democrats have a similar problem. In a bunch of races, Democratic primary voters preferred the candidate who was more ideologically pure, more pugnacious, or — in the President Donald Trump era — the most committed to “resistance.” Once nominated, they were ill-suited to appeal to swing voters in a general election.

Some races were indeed close. But the populist left and populist right take the wrong lesson from the narrowness of their defeats. Like the ugly Americans who think foreigners will understand English if they just shout louder, each side convinces themselves that if they only fought harder, wasted a little more money, they could’ve won.
To be fair, sometimes they’re right. But even in those cases, they’re merely making a down payment on bigger losses to come. Because by electing bomb throwers and crackpots they hurt the brand of their party for the next election.
Which brings me back to Texas. The Senate primary is heating up. On the GOP side it’s a three-way race among solid, reliable, moderately boring conservative incumbent Sen. John Cornyn, Republican two-term Congressman Wesley Hunt and the rabble-rousing, wildly corrupt (sorry, “ethically challenged”) populist demagogue and hard-core MAGA loyalist Ken Paxton.
Although nothing is assured given what might be a Democratic wave year, Cornyn would probably beat Crockett, who most analysts and Democrats (when speaking anonymously) think cannot win against anybody except maybe Paxton. But she can soak up an enormous amount of money and attention.
Crockett is very smart, but she is in many ways a Democratic version of Republican

bomb throwers and social media phenoms Marjorie Taylor Greene or Lauren Boebert. Indeed, Crockett has already trademarked her insult for Greene (whom she said has a “bleach-blond bad-built butch body”). Crockett has also said that 80% of the “most violent crimes” are committed by “white supremacists,” Black people can’t be Republicans because Republicans are racist, Latinos have a “slave mentality” and that police shouldn’t prevent crime, they can only solve it, etc.
This stuff may work in a safe congressional district, but it’s not the stuff of a successful statewide race in Texas.
When Crockett announced she was running, Rep. Colin Allred, a more moderate candidate who was positioning himself to be a safe alternative to the Republicans, announced he was no longer pursuing a Senate bid.
And so here we are. Two parties, once again, are poised to nominate candidates so flawed they have a chance of losing to the other.
This is what happens in a polarized age when parties outsource their nominating process to the angriest voters in their coalition. They’d rather take a shot with their favorite frying pan, than shoot that boring shotgun.

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

Bizarro

CARTOONISTS' FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Wayno® & 4 PIRAR. 12-18-25

Do you find the jokes online?

© 2025 BUARD STIPROS

Why have I never heard of you?

Dist. by King Features

Can you draw The Peanuts?

BIZARRIO.COM

Loose Parts

I am the Ghost of Last Thursday, here to show you what happens if you leave eggnog on the counter for a week.

Blazek 12-18

Get a signed copy of the NEW LP book! Get this cartoon signed & framed at LoosePartsComic.com ©2025 Dave Blazek - looseparts@verizon.net - Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
18								19	20			
			21			22	23					
24	25	26			27				28		29	30
31					32					33		
34			35		36				37			
		38		39				40				
41	42						43			44	45	46
47					48	49	50					
51					52					53		
54					55					56		

- ACROSS
- 55 Tosses in
- 56 Metal boxes
- 23 Guthrie of folk
- 24 Garten of the Food Network
- 25 Actor Cage, to friends
- 26 Ultimate degree
- 27 Created
- 29 Camp bed
- 30 Bradley and Asner
- 35 Candied veggie
- 37 Behold
- 39 Salami choice
- 40 Female rabbit
- 41 Diploma recipient
- 42 Cathedral area
- 43 Pleads
- 44 Leslie Caron role
- 45 Privy to
- 46 Flan ingredients
- 49 Vintage
- 50 Walker, on a sign
- DOWN
- 1 Operates
- 2 Body lotion ingredient
- 3 Lima's land
- 4 Block-dropping computer game
- 5 Egyptian Christian
- 6 "Veep" aier
- 7 Have the flu
- 8 Facial treatments
- 9 Post-discount cost
- 10 Slender weapon
- 11 Bubblehead
- 16 Possessed
- 20 British ref. work
- 22 Luxury car brand
- 21 Freudian concept
- 22 Type of beam
- 24 Hostels
- 27 Debussy's "La —"
- 28 Vegas cubes
- 31 Little louse
- 32 Rocker Rose
- 33 Hake's relative
- 34 Needing liniment
- 36 Pair
- 37 Allows
- 38 Leaves
- 40 Accomplish
- 41 Garden statuette
- 43 "— Nights" (Mark Wahlberg film)
- 47 Like sashimi warning
- 51 "Hail!"
- 52 Fashion's Cassini
- 53 Awestruck
- 54 Aachen article

Answer to Previous Puzzle

U	G	G	S		A	G	A		T	S	A	R
S	H	O	O		Z	I	N		R	E	V	E
S	E	L	F	T	A	L	K		O	L	I	N
R	E	D	I	A	L				L	O	W	F
					A	M	E		E	V	E	L
U	N	S			P	A	L		E	L	E	C
A	S	E	A		S	O	D		S	S	T	S
W	A	L	D	O		T	W	A		S	S	E
					F	A	V	E		E	S	P
T	E	M	P	O	S				L	I	E	D
A	R	A	T			S	E	L	F	R	U	L
L	I	D	O			E	L	O		M	E	S
L	E	E	R			N	I	N		S	T	E

12-18 CRYPTOQUIP

U J B NBNP AGRRW LRRTA CE
NR XMAGRT CE CGR GEAWUCBV,
A G E M V T A E H R N E T P J U X A C
Z B V V B V B H N - M V B L Z R ?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A LARGE GROUP OF PIGS GET TOGETHER FOR A PARTY, THEY USUALLY END UP GOING HOG-WILD.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals B

Frazz

AVI TOLD ME WE'RE HALFWAY THROUGH HANUKKAH.

HANUKKAH HUMP DAY!

WHICH DOESN'T WORK WHEN YOU SPELL IT "CHANUKAH."

OR PRONOUNCE IT LIKE YOU'RE CLEARING YOUR THROAT.

OTHER CULTURES COULD DO A BETTER JOB OF ACCOMMODATING MY CLEVER ALLITERATIONS.

© 2025 Dave Blazek - looseparts@verizon.net - Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Pearls Before Swine

I LOVE MEETING NEW PEOPLE. HOW ABOUT YOU, RAT?.. HOW DO YOU VIEW NEW PEOPLE?

Potential annoying guy who might talk to me all day. Stop making eye contact. ABORT! ABORT!

DIFFERENTLY.

© 2025 Sheldon Press/Cat by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Non Sequitur

Pete and ROLF

GREAT, ROLF.. NOW WE'RE LOST

NO, WE'RE NOT

OH? WHAT DO YOU CALL NOT KNOWING WHERE WE ARE OR WHERE WE'RE GOING?!

ALTERNATIVE FUN?

OF COURSE... WHAT WAS I THINKING?

© 2025 Wiley Ink, Ltd. 12-18 Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Wumo

Yeah, we have Christmas lunch every day in December so people will come to the office instead of working from home all month ...

© 2025 Wulfmorgenthaue Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Carpe Diem

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING AND THERE IT WAS - A PARALLEL UNIVERSE!

PET STORE

DOGS

© 2025 NIKLAS ERIKSSON/BULLS, DIST. BY KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, INC.

Beetle Bailey

I'M GOING OUT FOR A SMOKE

I THOUGHT YOU QUIT SMOKING

I DID, BUT I'M NOT GIVING UP A GOOD EXCUSE FOR SOME ALONE TIME

GREG MORT WALKER 12/18

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
New York	18	7	.720	—	
Toronto	16	11	.593	3	
Boston	15	11	.577	3½	
Philadelphia	14	11	.560	4	
Brooklyn	7	18	.280	11	
Southeast Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Orlando	15	11	.577	—	
Atlanta	15	12	.556	½	
Miami	14	12	.538	1	
Charlotte	8	18	.308	7	
Washington	4	20	.167	10	
Central Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Detroit	21	5	.808	—	
Cleveland	15	12	.556	6½	
Milwaukee	11	16	.407	10½	
Chicago	10	15	.400	10½	
Indiana	6	20	.231	15	
Western Conference					
Southwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
San Antonio	18	7	.720	—	
Houston	16	7	.696	1	
Memphis	12	14	.462	6½	
Dallas	10	17	.370	9	
New Orleans	5	22	.185	14	
Northwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Oklahoma City	24	2	.923	—	
Denver	19	6	.760	4½	
Minnesota	17	9	.654	7	
Utah	10	15	.400	13½	
Portland	10	16	.385	14	
Pacific Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
L.A. Lakers	18	7	.720	—	
Phoenix	14	12	.538	4½	
Golden State	13	14	.481	6	
Sacramento	6	20	.231	12½	
L.A. Clippers	6	20	.231	12½	
Monday's games					
Detroit 112, Boston 105					
Toronto 106, Miami 96					
Utah 140, Dallas 133, OT					
Denver 128, Houston 125, OT					
Memphis 121, L.A. Clippers 103					
Tuesday's game					
New York 124, San Antonio 113 (NBA Cup Championship Game)					
Wednesday's games					
Cleveland at Chicago					
Memphis at Minnesota					
Thursday's games					
Atlanta at Charlotte					
New York at Indiana					
Miami at Brooklyn					
Houston at New Orleans					
L.A. Clippers at Oklahoma City					
Toronto at Milwaukee					
Washington at San Antonio					
Detroit at Dallas					
Golden State at Phoenix					
L.A. Lakers at Utah					
Orlando at Denver					
Sacramento at Portland					
Friday's games					
Miami at Boston					
Philadelphia at New York					
Chicago at Cleveland					
San Antonio at Atlanta					
Oklahoma City at Minnesota					
Saturday's games					
Houston at Denver					
Indiana at New Orleans					
Dallas at Philadelphia					
Boston at Toronto					
Charlotte at Detroit					
Washington at Memphis					
Phoenix at Golden St.					
Orlando at Utah					
Portland at Sacramento					
L.A. Lakers at L.A. Clippers					
Scoring leaders					
Through Thursday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Doncic, LAL	19	202	189	659	34.7
Gil.-Alex., OKC	25	271	214	811	32.4
Maxey, PHI	23	246	148	724	31.5
Mitchell, CLE	25	267	132	767	30.7
Jokic, DEN	25	268	155	746	29.8
Brown, BOS	25	269	143	733	29.3
Brunson, NY	23	235	129	663	28.8
Edwards, MIN	20	193	120	573	28.7
Markkanen, UTA	24	223	151	667	27.8
Reaves, LAL	21	178	168	583	27.8

Knicks beat Spurs to win Cup title

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — It's been more than half a century since the Knicks hung an NBA championship banner inside Madison Square Garden.

The wait since 1973 to add another one didn't end on Tuesday night, but New York can make room for the NBA Cup banner.

OG Anunoby scored 28 points, Jalen Brunson had 25, and the Knicks rallied to beat Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs 124-113.

"This is great and we're going to enjoy this," Brunson said. "But once we leave tomorrow, we're moving on."

This is a championship roster — NBA Cup MVP Brunson, Josh Hart and Mikal Bridges cut down the nets in college at Villanova — with high hopes of representing the Eastern Conference in the NBA Finals.

"This is a single-elimination tournament when you get to a certain point, so every game counts," New York coach Mike Brown said. "There was pressure on every game if you expect to be who you think you are. When you're able to have success, it breeds confidence in everybody in the organization."

New York's Karl-Anthony Towns had 16 points and 11 rebounds despite battling a calf injury. He went into the locker room with a minute left before halftime and later exited for the bench with 5:06 remaining in the third quarter and didn't return until late in the fourth.

Dylan Harper led the Spurs with 21 points, Wembanyama scored 18 and De'Aaron Fox had 16.

Wembanyama excused himself early from the postgame news conference because he said



KIRBY LEE/AP

New York Knicks guard Jalen Brunson, left, drives to the basket past San Antonio Spurs forward Julian Champagnie during the NBA Cup championship game on Tuesday in Las Vegas.

"just lost somebody" on Tuesday.

New York dominated inside, outrebounding the Spurs 59-42, with Mitchell Robinson collecting 15 boards, including 10 on the offensive end in 18 minutes. That helped give the Knicks a 56-44 edge in points in the lane.

The Spurs, however, led for much of the game before the Knicks went on a 13-1 run that began late in the third quarter to go up 100-95. New York never trailed again.

"After 25 games in, I believe that we've shown some signs that we can be a pretty good team," Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said. "We've also shown that we have a lot of areas of improvement. I think that's where we were liv-

ing today."

The Knicks got more than a trophy. Each player with a standard contract got an extra \$318,560 for winning, making the total \$530,933 for even reaching the final.

This game doesn't count in the standings, so both teams remain 18-7, putting them atop their respective divisions.

Just making the final bodes well for both teams. The previous four finalists — Los Angeles Lakers, Indiana, Oklahoma City and Milwaukee — also made the playoffs. The Pacers made the Eastern Conference finals in 2024, and the Thunder won the NBA championship last season.

Las Vegas, Seattle top list for possible expansion

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The NBA plans to make a decision regarding domestic expansion in the coming year, Commissioner Adam Silver said Tuesday, offering the most definitive timeline since the league began exploring the possibility of moving from 30 to 32 teams.

And if there are favorites, as has long been expected, Las Vegas and Seattle are at the top of the list.

"Not a secret, we're looking at this market in Las Vegas. We are looking at Seattle," Silver said before the NBA Cup final between San Antonio and New York. "We've looked at other markets as well. I'd say I want to be sensitive there about this notion that we're somehow teasing these markets, because I know we've been talking about it for a while."

Expansion has been a topic for years in the NBA, and it's no secret that Seattle — which had a team until the SuperSonics were moved to Oklahoma City in 2008 — and Las Vegas have long been clamoring for franchises.

"I think Seattle and Las Vegas are two incredible cities," Silver said. "Obviously we had a team in Seattle that had great success. We



RONDA CHURCHILL / AP

San Antonio Spurs forward Victor Wembanyama, right, shoots the ball in the second half of an NBA Cup semifinals game on Saturday in Las Vegas. Las Vegas has been the regular spot to hold the NBA Cup.

have a WNBA team here in Las Vegas in the Aces. ... I don't have any doubt that Las Vegas, despite all of the other major league teams that are here now, the other entertainment properties, that this city could support an NBA team.

"I think now we're in the process of working with our teams and gauging the level of interest and having a better understanding of what the economics would be on the ground for those particular

teams and what a pro forma would look like for them, and then sometime in 2026 we'll make a determination."

Cup future

Silver revealed on Amazon Prime Video's pregame show for the NBA Cup final that the title game of the tournament may move away from Las Vegas.

Among the sites under consideration: "Some storied college arenas," Silver said. "We're looking at other ways we can do this."

Semifinal games in the Cup will be played at No. 1 seed home sites starting next season, so the concept of a final four in Las Vegas was going to change in 2026 anyway.

NBA Europe plans

Silver hinted that there might be some news next month on the plans for the NBA's project with FIBA to start a league in Europe.

That makes sense, with the league set to play regular-season games in Berlin and London next month when Orlando and Memphis go over for a pair of matchups.

"I would say we're casting a very, very wide net right now and es-

entially saying to anyone who's interested, come see our bankers, explain to us why you're interested, how you view the opportunity, what resources you would put behind opening a team, and then we're taking all that information back," Silver said. "And then I think sometime in late January, or in January, we'll be in a position to have more serious conversations with those interested parties."

WNBA talks

Silver said he and NBA deputy commissioner Mark Tatum are available to help the WNBA and its players strike a new labor deal, if needed.

Silver said he's "optimistic" a deal will get done.

"I'm tracking things very closely," Silver said. "We're integrated at the league office. I talk to the people who are at the negotiating table on a daily basis. As I've said before, we, the NBA-WNBA collective, acknowledged that our players deserve to be paid significantly more than they have so far based on the increased success of the league. It's just a question now of finding a meeting of the minds in terms of what is a fair deal. It's going to require compromise on both sides."

NFL

Injured Adams not ruled out for Rams against Seahawks

By Greg Beacham
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES—Receiver Davante Adams has not been ruled out for the Los Angeles Rams’ showdown at Seattle on Thursday night despite his hamstring injury.

Coach Sean McVay said the NFC-leading Rams (11-3) will likely wait until game time to make a final decision on the availability of the NFL’s touchdown receptions leader. The team remains hopeful Adams can play, although he didn’t participate in their walk-throughs and practice Tuesday.

“I’m not ruling anyone out,” McVay said Tuesday. “He just got his hamstring. He felt it a little bit, and it’s something he’s been dealing with, and he’s as tough as it gets. Want to be able to see what it looks like with the time we have.”

Playoff-bound Los Angeles could use all the help it can get against the Seahawks (11-3), who sit tied with the Rams atop the NFC West and the conference standings. LA has the tiebreaker edge at the moment after its tight 21-19 win over Seattle last month.

Adams aggravated his hamstring injury while running a long route in the fourth quarter of the Rams’ 41-34 comeback win over Detroit on Sunday. The 32-year-old wideout has dealt with hamstring problems twice previously this season, and he was listed as questionable for that game.

Los Angeles doesn’t have a productive No. 3 wide receiver behind Adams and Puka Nacua. Matthew Stafford has thrown just 58 total passes this season to all of the wide receivers behind his dy-



Rams wide receiver Davante Adams makes a catch over Lions cornerback D.J. Reed on Sunday. Adams left after injuring his hamstring.



Los Angeles Rams (11-3)
at Seattle Seahawks (11-3)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Friday CET
10:15 a.m. Friday JKT

namic duo.

Adams has 60 catches for 789 yards and 14 TDs in his first season with the Rams, forming an immediate bond with MVP candidate Stafford.

Defensive lineman Braden Fiske also injured his ankle during the win over the Lions, but LA will wait to determine his status as

well for a short-week game that’s likely to play a major role in its playoff seeding.

“We’ll take it all the way up to game time and see where they’re at,” McVay said.

The Rams have won a championship, reached two Super Bowls and won four NFC West titles during seven playoff appearances under McVay, but they’ve never finished with the No. 1 seed in the NFC during the coach’s nine seasons in charge.

As if potentially playing without Adams wasn’t tough enough, McVay is working on almost no sleep for this preparation week because his wife, Veronika, gave birth to their second son, Christian Alexander McVay, on Monday.

“What a crazy week to have to play on a Thursday,” McVay said with a chuckle.

Packers’ Jacobs wants to play Saturday despite knee injury

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Green Bay running back Josh Jacobs said he aggravated his knee injury early in the Packers’ loss at Denver on Sunday, but he still believes he should play Saturday at Chicago.

Jacobs scored two touchdowns in the 34-26 loss to the Broncos after being listed as questionable for the game because of his knee, which kept him from playing in a Nov. 23 win over Minnesota. Jacobs said he hurt his knee again early in the game against Denver.

Although Green Bay only had a walk-through Tuesday, coach Matt LaFleur said Jacobs wouldn’t have participated in a full workout. Jacobs says he thinks he ought to be ready by Saturday.

“If it’s up to me, yeah, for sure I’m going to try to go,” Jacobs said.

Jacobs explained why he’s able to play through such injuries.

“For me, it’s harder to watch games than it is to play hurt,” Jacobs said. “So for me, I’d rather try to contribute in some type of fashion, even if it’s in a limited fashion, than just sit there and watch the whole



Jacobs

time. I’ve always had that kind of mindset.”

Jacobs had 12 carries for 73 yards — including a season-long 40-yard touchdown — and caught three passes for 19 yards against the Broncos. He added his first receiving TD of the season — a spectacular, contested 14-yard reception.

Both of his touchdowns came after he aggravated the injury.

“Sometimes you’ve got to talk to yourself, man,” Jacobs said. “It was hurting when I was running.”

The Packers (9-4-1) could use Jacobs on Saturday. They have numerous other players dealing with injuries heading into their showdown with NFC North-leading Chicago (10-4).

Pass rusher Micah Parsons is out for the season after tearing an ACL at Denver. Offensive tackle Zach Tom (back/knee), wide receiver Christian Watson (chest/shoulder) and safety Evan Williams (knee) were among the other players who got hurt Sunday.

Weekly statistics

AFC individual leaders

Quarterbacks

	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
Mahomes, KC	502	315	3587	22	11
Maye, NE	409	290	3567	23	7
Allen, Buf	406	284	3276	25	10
Nix, Den	504	320	3256	23	9
Lawrence, Jac	457	273	3210	23	11
Herbert, LAC	451	296	3191	23	12
D.Jones, Ind	384	261	3101	19	8
Tagovailoa, Mia	384	260	2660	20	15

Rushers

	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Taylor, Ind	272	1443	5.3	83t	16
Cook, Buf	271	1415	5.2	64t	10
Achane, Mia	205	1186	5.8	59t	7
Henry, Bal	233	1125	4.8	59	10
Etienne, Jac	213	949	4.5	71	7
Hall, NYJ	213	900	4.2	35	3
Pollard, Ten	189	847	4.5	65t	5
Judkins, Cle	222	805	3.6	46t	7
C.Brown, Cin	185	780	4.2	37	3
Henderson, NE	143	773	5.4	69t	7

Receivers

	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Chase, Cin	101	1147	11.4	64t	5
Collins, Hou	64	1001	15.6	57t	6
Flowers, Bal	71	959	13.5	56	2
Sutton, Den	63	886	14.1	52t	6
Waddle, Mia	59	838	14.2	46t	6
Metcalf, Pit	55	808	14.7	80t	6
Kelce, KC	67	797	11.9	44	5
Pierce, Ind	39	785	20.1	50	2
Diggs, NE	67	731	10.9	33	3
Pittman, Ind	72	725	10.1	27t	7

Punters

	No	Yds	Lg	Avg
Rehkwow, Cin	54	2770	70	51.3
Stout, Bal	46	2340	74	50.9

Scoring

Touchdowns

	TDRush	Rec	Ret	Pts
Taylor, Ind	18	16	2	0
Allen, Buf	12	12	0	0

Kicking

	PAT	FG	LG	Pts
Dicker, LAC	29/29	34/36	59	131
Fairbairn, Hou	22/22	33/37	57	121
Borregales, NE	40/42	24/27	53	112

Kickoff Returners

	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
R.Davis, Buf	23	745	32.4	97t	1
I.Williams, NYJ	22	653	29.7	83	0

AFC team statistics

Average per game

Offense

	Yards	Rush	Pass
Buffalo	381.2	158.5	222.7
New England	364.2	122.4	241.8
Kansas City	357.9	113.9	244.0
Indianapolis	357.5	128.5	229.0
Denver	345.5	119.5	226.0
L.A. Chargers	337.9	123.4	214.5
Jacksonville	335.7	120.7	215.0
Houston	327.7	108.4	219.4
Baltimore	324.6	146.2	178.4
Cincinnati	314.0	87.4	226.6
Miami	303.2	121.9	181.3
Pittsburgh	288.1	92.5	195.6
N.Y. Jets	275.5	128.5	147.0
Cleveland	264.3	92.4	171.9
Tennessee	250.5	88.6	161.9
Las Vegas	244.1	70.8	173.4

Defense

	Yards	Rush	Pass
Houston	269.2	92.7	176.5
Cleveland	279.1	110.1	169.0
L.A. Chargers	279.1	104.7	174.4
Denver	287.7	90.9	196.9
New England	300.1	95.1	205.1
Kansas City	303.1	99.1	204.0
Jacksonville	308.5	86.3	222.2
Buffalo	312.6	143.1	169.5
Las Vegas	330.1	118.9	211.3
Miami	334.6	132.1	202.5
N.Y. Jets	337.4	137.2	200.1
Indianapolis	342.7	95.1	247.6
Baltimore	344.4	111.1	233.3
Tennessee	356.6	123.6	233.0
Pittsburgh	363.3	120.9	242.4
Cincinnati	403.8	157.9	245.9

NFC individual leaders

Quarterbacks

	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
Prescott, Dal	522	357	3931	26	10
Stafford, LAR	470	312	3722	37	5
Goff, Det	453	314	3672	29	5
Darnold, Sea	390	263	3433	22	11
Love, GB	426	283	3304	23	6
Ca.Williams, Chi	459	266	3150	21	6
Mayfield, TB	451	276	2999	22	7
Hurts, Phi	397	259	2929	22	6

Rushers

	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
B.Robinson, Atl	234	1174	5.0	81t	6
J.Williams, Dal	230	1113	4.8	66	10
Gibbs, Det	200	1100	5.5	78t	13
K.Williams, LAR	211	1030	4.9	34	10
Dowdle, Car	208	978	4.7	53	6
Barkley, Phi	240	940	3.9	65t	6
Swift, Chi	191	935	4.9	25	7
McCaffrey, SF	259	922	3.6	20	9
Jacobs, GB	218	890	4.1	40t	13
Walker, Sea	179	779	4.4	31	4

Receivers

	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Smith-Njigb., Sea	96	1541	16.1	63t	9
Nacua, LAR	102	1367	13.4	39t	6
Pickens, Dal	81	1212	15.0	45	8
St. Brown, Det	94	1140	12.1	52	11
McBride, Ari	105	1071	10.2	31	10
Lamb, Dal	63	976	15.5	74t	3
J.Williams, Det	52	936	18.0	64	7
Olave, NO	82	896	10.9	62t	6
D.Smith, Phi	66	889	13.5	79t	3
Robinson, NYG	78	882	11.3	50	4

Punters

	No	Yds	Lg	Avg
Whelan, GB	41	2102	72	51.3
Mann, Phi	60	3001	70	50.0

Scoring

Touchdowns

	TDRush	Rec	Ret	Pts
Gibbs, Det	16	13	3	0
Adams, LAR	14	0	14	0

Kicking

	PAT	FG	LG	Pts
Myers, Sea	42/42	37/42	57	153
Aubrey, Dal	40/41	31/35	64	133
Bates, Det	49/51	21/27	59	112

Kickoff Returners

	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
McCaffrey, Was	26	769	29.6	58	0
Moore, SF	25	703	28.1	98	0

NFC team statistics

Average per game

Offense

	Yards	Rush	Pass
Dallas	396.9	120.8	276.1
L.A. Rams	383.6	126.4	257.1
Detroit	379.9	131.1	248.8
Chicago	369.1	151.9	217.2
Seattle	350.6	113.0	237.6
San Francisco	347.5	101.4	246.1
N.Y. Giants	343.2	125.1	218.1
Green Bay	341.9	117.0	224.9
Atlanta	340.4	122.7	217.7
Arizona	333.4	95.0	238.4
Washington	328.4	137.1	191.3
Tampa Bay	316.6	113.2	203.4
Philadelphia	314.9	115.6	199.3
Carolina	309.0	125.6	183.4
New Orleans	296.9	93.4	203.4
Minnesota	279.4	102.3	177.1

Defense

	Yards	Rush	Pass
Seattle	283.0	91.6	191.4
Green Bay	294.6	100.5	194.1
Minnesota	307.9	127.6	180.4
New Orleans	311.2	130.6	180.6
L.A. Rams	320.8	101.1	219.7
Philadelphia	322.6	125.9	196.7
Atlanta	323.6	127.9	195.6
Carolina	331.5	116.0	215.5
San Francisco	333.6	106.1	227.6
Detroit	337.9	106.7	231.1
Chicago	345.5	126.6	218.9
Tampa Bay	348.2	101.4	246.9
Arizona	351.1	124.5	226.6
Dallas	374.9	120.1	254.8
N.Y. Giants	382.5	153.6	228.9
Washington	382.6	136.3	246.3

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Detroit	34	19	12	3	41	107	111	
Boston	34	20	14	0	40	113	106	
Tampa Bay	33	18	12	3	39	106	88	
Montreal	33	17	12	4	38	106	117	
Florida	32	17	13	2	36	103	101	
Toronto	32	15	12	5	35	105	104	
Ottawa	32	15	13	4	34	101	104	
Buffalo	32	14	14	4	32	98	109	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	32	21	9	2	44	108	90	
N.Y. Islanders	34	19	12	3	41	102	96	
Philadelphia	32	17	9	6	40	96	89	
Washington	33	18	11	4	40	106	88	
Pittsburgh	32	14	9	9	37	103	102	
New Jersey	33	18	14	1	37	97	103	
N.Y. Rangers	35	16	15	4	36	89	95	
Columbus	33	14	13	6	34	100	115	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Colorado	33	24	2	7	55	133	77	
Dallas	34	22	7	5	49	115	90	
Minnesota	34	20	9	5	45	104	87	
Utah	35	16	16	3	35	107	105	
Winnipeg	32	15	15	2	32	98	99	
Chicago	33	13	14	6	32	93	101	
St. Louis	34	12	15	7	31	86	123	
Nashville	32	13	15	4	30	92	111	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Anaheim	34	20	12	2	42	121	112	
Vegas	31	16	6	9	41	96	90	
Edmonton	34	16	12	6	38	116	118	
Los Angeles	32	14	9	9	37	84	86	
San Jose	34	17	14	3	37	102	113	
Seattle	31	12	13	6	30	77	98	
Calgary	34	13	17	4	30	87	103	
Vancouver	33	13	17	3	29	92	112	
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.								
Monday's games								
Anaheim 4, N.Y. Rangers 1 Florida 5, Tampa Bay 2 Ottawa 3, Winnipeg 2, OT Nashville 5, St. Louis 2 Dallas 4, Los Angeles 1								
Tuesday's games								
Vancouver 3, N.Y. Rangers 0 Columbus 4, Anaheim 3, OT Detroit 3, N.Y. Islanders 2 Toronto 3, Chicago 2 Boston 4, Utah 1 Philadelphia 4, Montreal 1 Edmonton 6, Pittsburgh 4 Minnesota 5, Washington 0 San Jose 6, Calgary 3 Colorado 5, Seattle 3								
Wednesday's games								
Los Angeles at Florida Utah at Detroit Carolina at Nashville Winnipeg at St. Louis New Jersey at Vegas								
Thursday's games								
Chicago at Montreal Edmonton at Boston Los Angeles at Tampa Bay Minnesota at Columbus Pittsburgh at Ottawa Toronto at Washington Philadelphia at Buffalo N.Y. Rangers at St. Louis Seattle at Calgary Dallas at San Jose								
Friday's games								
Carolina at Florida Vancouver at N.Y. Islanders New Jersey at Utah Winnipeg at Colorado Dallas at Anaheim								
Scoring leaders								
Through Wednesday								
	GP	G	A	PTS				
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	33	28	30	58				
Connor McDavid, EDM	34	20	36	56				
Macklin Celebrini, SJ	34	18	33	51				
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	34	17	30	47				
Martin Necas, COL	33	14	31	45				
Mikko Rantanen, DAL	33	14	30	44				
Connor Bedard, CHI	31	19	25	44				
Nikita Kucherov, TB	30	13	29	42				
Jack Eichel, LV	31	12	29	41				
Kyle Connor, WPG	32	15	26	41				
Leo Carlsson, ANA	34	17	24	41				
Cale Makar, COL	33	10	30	40				
Mark Scheifele, WPG	32	16	24	40				
Jason Robertson, DAL	34	20	20	40				

ROUNDUP

Maple Leafs rally past Blackhawks

Associated Press

TORONTO — Dakota Joshua batted in a rebound with 3:01 left, just 8 seconds after Auston Matthews tied it, and the Toronto Maple Leafs rallied past the Chicago Blackhawks for a 3-2 win on Tuesday night.

Third-period goals by Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Matthews and Joshua erased Toronto's two-goal deficit and completed a wild comeback.

Joseph Woll made 23 saves and the Maple Leafs earned just their second victory this season after trailing after two periods.

Wyatt Kaiser and Jason Dickinson, short-handed, staked Chicago to a 2-0 lead in the first period.

The Blackhawks were without third-year center Connor Bedard, who was placed on injured reserve Monday for at least two weeks because of an upper-body injury.

Oilers 6, Penguins 4: Leon Draisaitl had four assists and became the fourth-fastest player in NHL history to reach 1,000 career points as visiting Edmonton beat Pittsburgh.

Draisaitl, who hit the milestone in the first period on a secondary assist, became the 103rd player in NHL history, first German-born player and fifth in franchise history to reach 1,000 points. He has 416 goals and 587 assists in 824 games for 1,003 points.

Connor McDavid scored twice, including a spectacular power-play goal and added two assists, as he and Draisaitl improved to 23-0-0 when both have at least three points in a regular-season game.

Avalanche 5, Kraken 3: Nathan MacKinnon scored twice for an NHL-leading 28 goals this season and added an assist as visiting Colorado beat Seattle for their third straight win.

MacKinnon also extended his point streak to six games as Colorado won for the fifth time in that span. The Avalanche, who have the league's best record, have earned a point in 24 of the last 25 games.

Artturi Lehkonen, Samuel Girard and Brock Nelson also scored for the Avalanche.

Blue Jackets 4, Ducks 3 (OT): Adam Fantilli scored with 1:28 left in overtime to lift Columbus to a home win over Anaheim, snapping a five-game losing streak.

Zach Werenski scored twice and added an assist in his 600th NHL game, Boone Jenner had a goal and an assist, and Kent Johnson added two assists. Jet Greaves stopped 24 shots for his first win since Nov. 20.

Mikael Granlund had a goal and an assist, Ryan Strome and Jackson LaCombe also scored goals, and Ryan Poehling recorded two assists for Anaheim. Ville Husso



NATHAN DENETTE/The Canadian Press

Maple Leafs forward William Nylander, left, fights Blackhawks forward Frank Nazar for control of the puck during the third period in Toronto on Tuesday. Chicago scored all three of its goals in the third period.

made 24 saves as the Ducks dropped three games on their five-city road trip.

Bruins 4, Mammoth 1: Morgan Geekie scored a pair of goals and Jeremy Swayman stopped 20 shots to help host Boston beat Utah for their fifth win in their last six games.

Casey Mittelstadt and Michael Eyssimont also scored goals, and David Pastrnak had a pair of assists as the Bruins returned from a three-game road trip to open a five-game homestand.

Barrett Hayton scored for the Mammoth, and Vitek Vanecek made 19 saves.

Canucks 3, Rangers 0: Evan-der Kane and Liam Ohgren scored and Thatcher Demko made 23 saves as the league-worst Vancouver defeated host New York.

Conor Garland added an empty-net goal as the Canucks, who had won only three of their previous 12 games, smothered the Rangers from start to finish. New York is 4-10-3 at home.

Kane scored his sixth goal 1:46 into the contest, when he beat Rangers netminder Jonathan Quick after defenseman Matthew Robertson's path was briefly blocked by a linesman.

Flyers 4, Canadiens 1: Carl Grundstrom and Bobby Brink scored in the final minute of the first and second period, respectively, leading Philadelphia to a road win over the Montreal Canadiens.

Trevor Zegras, playing in his 300th NHL game, ran his goal streak to a career-high four games as Philadelphia (17-9-6) snapped a season-worst three-game skid.

Alexandre Texier scored his second goal in two games for the Canadiens (17-12-4), who have dropped four of six.

Red Wings 3, Islanders 2: Alex DeBrincat scored two power-play goals in the third period as host Detroit beat New York.

DeBrincat has eight goals and 13 points in his last eight games for the Red Wings, who have won five of six. John Gibson made 16 saves to win his sixth straight start.

Ilya Sorokin stopped 18 shots for the Islanders, who had won three in a row and seven of eight.

Sharks 6, Flames 3: Macklin Celebrini scored a jaw-dropping goal and added an empty-netter and two assists to become the fastest Sharks player to reach 50 points in a season as host San Jose beat the Calgary Flames.

The empty-netter put it away, giving the 19-year-old Celebrini 51 points in San Jose's 34th game of the season. That's three games faster than any other Sharks player reached the 50-point mark, with Erik Karlsson, Joe Thornton and Owen Nolan all doing it in 37 games.

The only teenagers to reach 50 points earlier in an NHL season were Sidney Crosby and Wayne Gretzky.

Wild 5, Capitals 0: Vladimir Tarasenko had two goals and an assist, Filip Gustavsson made 25 saves, and Kirill Kaprizov became the Wild's career leader in power-play goals in Minnesota's home win over Washington.

The Wild are an NHL-best 17-3-2 since Nov. 1 and 3-0 since acquiring defenseman Quinn Hughes on Friday via one of the NHL's biggest blockbuster trades in recent memory.

Washington has lost three in a row and been outshot 183-134 in its past five games.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Back: Retzlaff has made most of new opportunity

FROM PAGE 24

ground. The other part is he's the starting quarterback."

Retzlaff went 11-2 as starter in 2024 at BYU, which narrowly missed out on playing for a Big 12 title. He was looking forward to returning to the Cougars in 2025 when he was named in a since-dismissed civil sexual assault lawsuit.

While Retzlaff contended the relationship in question was consensual, that was still a problem at BYU, where the university's honor code requires students to abstain from premarital sex. Had he remained enrolled there, he'd have been suspended.

Retzlaff was confident he'd get offers from other competitive college programs. But at Tulane, he found that and more.

"God's got a plan. And that's the hardest thing to realize in the worst of times," Retzlaff said. "I had everything great. It gets taken from me. And now I got to go make lemonade.

"And I get to meet all these people and create all these relationships" at Tulane and around New Orleans.

Retzlaff did not arrive at Tulane until July, giving him a compressed timeline to learn the Wave's offense and bond with teammates. He started by trying to sit with different players during each team meal inside Yulman Stadium.

"Guys have their groups that they usually eat lunch with or dinner with and I'm like, all right, I'm just going to jump in," Retzlaff recalled.

The dual-threat quarterback from California thrived under offensive coordinator Joe Craddock, an Alabama native who said the pace of Retzlaff's compressed integration reminded him of NASCAR races at Talladega.

Retzlaff passed for 2,862 yards and 14 TDs with six interceptions

this season. He also has been Tulane's leading rusher with 610 yards and 16 touchdowns — a record for rushing touchdowns in a season by a Green Wave QB.

Coach Jon Sumrall, who will take over as Florida coach when Tulane's playoff run ends, has been struck by Retzlaff's "moxie and his competitive nature."

"He's got a little gamesmanship about him," Sumrall added. "He's got a little edge about him, a little toughness that rubs off on other guys."

Sumrall also appreciated Retzlaff's humility and emphasis on team-building.

"Jake has handled some things that came his way that weren't ideal really well," Sumrall said. "His gratitude for his opportunity here has been very real."

Retzlaff still misses BYU, stays in touch with former teammates and watched all of the Cougars' games this season.

Practicing his faith has been easier with the Wave.

He has visited regularly with Rabbi Yochanan Rivkin at Tulane's Chabad house. They've wrapped tefillin (leather straps with small scrolls attached) while saying prayers. He attended a Rosh Hashanah dinner hosted by Chabad with about 600 students.

"I'm impressed with his Jewish pride," Rivkin said Monday, a day after at least 15 people were shot to death at a Hanukkah celebration in Australia. "It's not the easiest time to be a proud Jew right now."

When the topic of the Bondi Beach massacre in Australia came up, Retzlaff noted that he tries to keep the Star of David on his necklace outside his shirt, regardless of whether it might make him a target of antisemitism.

"It's who I am and I'm confident in that," he said. "I'm confident in the Jewish people. We've been through a lot as it is — like too much."



Tulane quarterback Jake Retzlaff shows off the Star of David on his necklace after practice at Yulman Stadium in New Orleans on Aug. 1.



Mississippi coach and former defensive coordinator Pete Golding, left, is taking over a Rebels team from Lane Kiffin, right, just as they are about to begin the College Football Playoff.

Newly promoted Mississippi coach Golding seeks stability

By CHRIS BURROWS
Associated Press

OXFORD, Miss. — As Pete Golding prepares to make his head-coaching debut for Ole Miss in a high-stakes College Football Playoff game, he's pushing the message that the Rebels are "focused on the mission, not the man."

That "man" is former coach Lane Kiffin, the brazen architect of Mississippi's dynamic, high-octane offense.

Kiffin lobbied to keep coaching the Rebels in the postseason even after accepting LSU's \$13 million-a-year offer to coach the Tigers in 2026, but Ole Miss sent him packing Nov. 30. That set in motion a coaching staff upheaval that the No. 6 seed Rebels have been forced to confront even as they prepare to host 11th-seeded Tulane in a first-round playoff game Saturday.

Several key offensive assistants — including coordinator Charlie Weiss, tight ends coach Joe Cox and receivers coaches George McDonald and Sawyer Jordan — have decided to follow Kiffin to Baton Rouge. Weiss has been permitted to remain with Mississippi through the CFP, however, offering some measure of stability for the offense.

"Super excited," Golding said when practices resumed this week. "Energy and effort have never been an issue with our group.

"All the pieces are in place to be consistent," Golding added. "The



CFP First Round
No. 11 Tulane (11-2)
at No. 6 Mississippi (11-1)
AFN-Sports
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
5:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

practice is really the easiest piece to control."

The Rebels have averaged 37 points and 498 yards of total offense per game this season under Kiffin.

Quarterback Trinidad Chambliss has accounted for 3,500 yards of total offense, with Kewan Lacy adding 20 touchdowns on 258 carries for 1,279 yards. Eight different receivers have accounted for at least 15 receptions apiece.

It remains to be seen whether Ole Miss can sustain that kind of production in the postseason without Kiffin's demonstrated knack for recognizing advantageous moments to call a given play.

"We've had a lot of success in this system. We've done well with it here," Golding said. "I love everything about it and know what issues it causes for defenses.

"Neither team is going to try to reinvent the wheel at this point," Golding said. "They're going to be who they are."

In addition to the usual work of

preparing for a game, Golding quickly hired three offensive coaches, including John David Baker, a former Rebels staffer, as offensive coordinator for next season.

The defensive staff will remain intact.

The multitasking for Golding hasn't stopped with managing staff changes. He has also had to work on roster retention, particularly on offense.

Several receivers, along with Lacy and Chambliss, are widely seen as potential transfer portal targets of other teams.

"It's about retention of your roster and stability. Players want to know who they're going to play for," Golding said. "They want to know the schemes aren't going to change."

That's why Golding wanted incoming coaches like Baker, who doesn't officially start until 2026, at Mississippi football headquarters and available to talk to current players now.

"It's really important to get those guys around our players before the portal opens" in January, Golding said. "Being available from a relationship standpoint, meet them, talk to them, so they have a really good idea about them."

Chambliss is awaiting a decision on a waiver status application that would allow an additional year of eligibility.

"It would be great to get another year, but right now that decision is in God's parking lot," Chambliss said.

COLLEGE

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Gillespie, No. 20 Vols top No. 11 Louisville

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Ja’Kobi Gillespie had 23 points and five assists to lead No. 20 Tennessee to an 83-62 victory over No. 11 Louisville on Tuesday night, snapping a three-game losing streak.

Nate Ament scored 13 and Jaylen Carey had 12 points and 10 rebounds for the Volunteers (8-3). Gillespie had 20 of his points in the second half.

Ryan Conwell scored 22 and Adrian Wooley had 19 for the Cardinals (9-2).

Tennessee outrebounded Louisville, 35-30, and limited the Cardinals to just 38% shooting from the field.

No. 1 Arizona 96, Abilene Christian 62: Freshman Brayden Burries scored 20 points, Motiejus Krivas added 15 and host Arizona rolled to a win over Abilene Christian.

Arizona (10-0) jumped out to a 6-0 lead in the first 90 seconds and never trailed, taking a 51-31 lead by halftime. Arizona has won five straight by at least 20 points for the first time since the 2010-11 season.

The 6-foot-4 Burries scored at least 20 points for the third time this season, shooting 9 of 11 from the field. He had a season-high 28 points in Saturday’s win over then-No. 12 Alabama. The 7-foot-2 Krivas made all four of his field-goal attempts and shot 7 of 8 on free throws.

No. 3 Duke 97, Lipscomb 73: Cameron Boozer scored 26 points and had 13 rebounds to help the host Blue Devils overcome a 10-point deficit and earn Jon Scheyer his 100th coaching victory with win over the Bison.

Isaiah Evans scored 16 points, reserves Maliq Brown and Darren Harris each provided 11 points and Patrick Ngongba II added 10 points and 11 rebounds for Duke (11-0), which has matched its best start since the 2017-18 season.

The Blue Devils, who had been off since winning Dec. 6 at then-No. 7 Michigan State, prevailed despite committing 22 turnovers.

No. 5 UConn 79, Butler 60: Solo Ball scored a career-high 26 points and Tarris Reed Jr. added



WADE PAYNE/AP

Tennessee guard Ja’Kobi Gillespie, right, shoots over Louisville forward Sananda Fru during the first half on Tuesday in Knoxville, Tenn. Gillespie scored 23 points as the Volunteers beat the Cardinals 17-13.

16 as the host Huskies began Big East play with a victory over the Bulldogs.

Jayden Ross had 13 points and eight rebounds off the bench and Braylon Mullins scored 12. UConn (11-1, 1-0) held Butler 30 points below its season average after the Bulldogs entered shooting 49% from the field.

Drayton Jones had nine of his 13 points in the first half for Butler (8-3, 1-1). Azavier Robinson and Evan Haywood finished with 10 apiece.

No. 9 Michigan St. 92, Toledo 69: Jaxon Kohler had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and the host Spartans never trailed while rolling over the Rockets.

Kohler’s double-double was his

sixth of the season. Jeremy Fears Jr., who came in averaging a Division I-best 9.5 assists per game, had 15 points and eight assists.

Coen Carr and Kur Teng added 14 points apiece for Michigan State (10-1). Carson Cooper added eight points and nine rebounds as the Spartans recorded season highs in scoring and rebounding.

No. 10 BYU 93, Pacific 57: AJ Dybantsa had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Richie Saunders led the host Cougars with 24 points in a win over the Tigers.

Robert Wright III added 22 points for BYU (10-1). Saunders and Wright each had five steals.

No. 12 North Carolina 77, ET-SU 58: Henri Veesaar scored a career-high 26 points to power the

host Tar Heels over the Buccaneers.

Veesaar shot a near-perfect 10-of-11 from the floor and also pulled down eight rebounds for North Carolina (10-1). Caleb Wilson added 20 points and eight rebounds for the Tar Heels.

Brian Taylor paced ETSU (8-4) with 14 points, while Blake Barkley scored 11.

No. 14 Arkansas 108, Queens (NC) 80: Trevon Brazile scored a career-high 26 points on 9-of-11 shooting from the field to lead the host Razorbacks over the Royals.

Arkansas (9-2) was never in trouble, taking a 24-point lead into halftime behind 60% shooting from the floor. Brazile had 18 points in the opening 20 minutes.

Darius Acuff Jr., who finished with 23 points and 10 assists, scored 16 in the first half.

Brazile went 5 for 7 from 3-point range and the Razorbacks were 14 of 28 compared to 6 for 25 for Queens (5-7). Arkansas also outscored the Royals 32-14 on fast-break points.

No. 17 Kansas 73, Towson 49: Flory Bidunga had 18 points and 10 rebounds to spur the host Jayhawks over the Tigers.

Tre White had 16 points and a career-high six assists for Kansas (9-3). Melvin Council, coming off a career-best 36-point performance in Saturday’s overtime win over N.C. State, added 15 points.

The Jayhawks improved to 273-9 at home against unranked opponents under coach Bill Self.

No. 19 Texas Tech 101, Northern Colorado 90: LeJuan Watts scored 36 points on 12-of-13 shooting, JT Toppin scored 23 and the Red Raiders extended their non-conference home winning streak to 45 games by beating the Bears.

Texas Tech (8-3) never trailed after leading by as many as 14 points, but needed a spurt by Watts in the second half to go ahead for good.

Northern Colorado (9-2) tied the game twice on baskets by Brock Wisne a minute apart in the second half.

No. 22 St. John’s 79, DePaul 66: Dylan Darling scored a season-high 17 points off the bench and gave the host Red Storm a lift with his 3-point shooting as St. John’s opened Big East play with a home victory over the Blue Demons.

Playing their only conference game inside Carnesecca Arena this season, the Red Storm (7-3) led virtually the entire way and avoided another slow start after missing 12 of their first 13 shots in Saturday’s 91-64 win over Iona at Madison Square Garden.

Darling shot 5 of 9 from the field and hit a trio of 3s to help the Johnnies finish with 10 in his second game since being supplanted by Ian Jackson as the team’s starting point guard. The 6-foot-1 junior entered 1 of 15 from outside the arc in his first eight games at St. John’s after transferring from Idaho State.

Jacksonville State holds off old rival Troy for bowl victory

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Caden Creel threw a touchdown pass, Deondre Johnson had six receptions for 101 yards and Jacksonville State beat Troy 17-13 on Tuesday night to win the Salute to Veterans Bowl.

Andrew Paul’s 1-yard run off a direct snap gave the Gamecocks a 17-13 lead with 5:44 remaining. With about a minute left, Tucker Kilcrease drove the Trojans past midfield

but his Hail Mary pass-attempt to DJ Epps on the final play was knocked down in the end zone.

Creel completed 14 of 20 passes for 173 yards that included a 22-yard touchdown pass to Brock Rechsteiner in the first quarter. Garrison Rippa added a 51-yard field goal in the third for Jacksonville State (9-5).

Kilcrease was 12-for-23 passing for 116 yards and threw two interceptions for Troy

(8-6), which ended a 79-game win streak when leading heading into the fourth quarter.

Late in the first quarter, the Trojans scored their only touchdown on the Gamecocks’ botched flea flicker. Luis Medina recovered a fumble in the end zone after TJ Thompson strip-sacked Creel. Scott Taylor Renfroe kicked field goals from 38 and 30 yards in the second quarter and Troy led 13-7 at halftime.

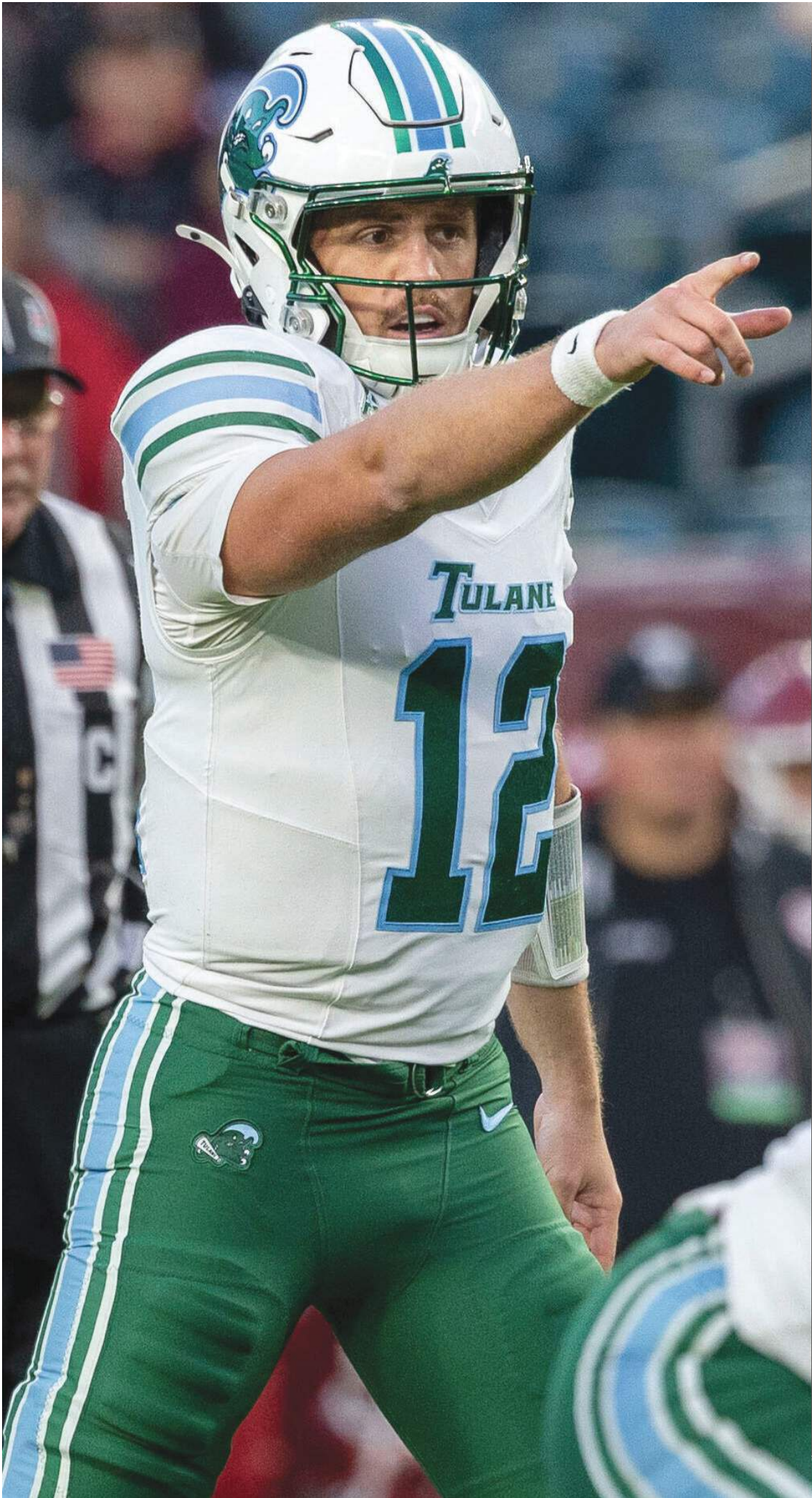
The Trojans had won the last seven games between the teams, but it was the first meeting since 2001 for the schools located just 162 miles apart. Troy is 33-29-2 in the series that dates to 1924.

Jacksonville State has played in a bowl game in each of its three seasons at the FBS level. Marshall is the only other team (1997-99) to appear in bowl games in each of its first three eligible seasons.

SPORTS



Mid-season champions
Knicks rally to beat Spurs,
win NBA Cup » **Page 19**



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Getting back up

Retzlaff humbled by CFP spotlight at Tulane after difficult BYU departure

By **BRETT MARTEL**
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Tulane quarterback Jake Retzlaff recalls being “devastated” when it became clear last spring that he would be unable to play his final season of college football at BYU.

His penchant for making plays in big moments, as well as for publicly embracing his Jewish heritage, made him something of a celebrated novelty at the Utah school run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where he became known as “BYJew.”

Suffice it to say he’s landed on his feet at Tulane — a university with a relatively large concentration of Jewish students, around 3,000 in all.

The “Bayou Jew” has help lead the Green Wave (11-2) to an American Conference championship and a first College Football Playoff berth. Tulane, seeded 11th, visits No. 6 seed Mississippi on Saturday.

Retzlaff has been “a perfect fit” with the Green Wave, said Dave Cariello, owner of the Campus Connection, which sells school merchandise and partners with players on name, image and likeness deals.

A Tulane graduate from the New York area, Cariello designed two T-shirts featuring Retzlaff, one calling him the Shabbat Shotgun and another referring to him as the aforementioned Bayou Jew.

“He’s certainly been our top-selling NIL athlete,” Cariello said. “There seems to be a larger appetite for Jake’s stuff and I believe that’s partly because of his Jewish back-

SEE BACK ON PAGE 22

Quarterback Jake Retzlaff has led Tulane to the No. 11 seed and an appearance in the CFP in his first season with the Green Wave.
LAURENCE KESTERSON/AP

Matthews, Joshua score late to boost Leafs » NHL, Page 21

