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# Naval name game



MAXWELL ORLOSKY/U.S. Navy

**The replenishment oiler USNS Harvey Milk conducts a replenishment at sea with the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford in 2024. In 2025, the ship's name was changed from that of a gay-rights leader to that of a Medal of Honor recipient.**

## A busy 2025 saw ships named, renamed, canceled and conceived

BY GARY WARNER
*Stars and Stripes*

President Donald Trump scrambled Navy ship-naming traditions last month with his announcement of a new "Trump-class" battleship, to be called the USS Defiant, featuring nuclear-tipped missiles and laser defenses.

Battleships are usually named after states — the last commissioned was the USS Missouri in 1944. Ship classes are named after the first ship of the type built — the Missouri was an Iowa-class ship, named for the first of four battleships ordered in 1939.

Trump's announcement put an exclamation point on the end of a busy year for Navy ship naming.



ALEX BRANDON/AP

**President Donald Trump announced a new "Trump-class" battleship at his Mar-a-Lago club last month in Palm Beach, Fla.**

The period between a presidential election and inauguration is often filled with last-minute ship naming.

In January 2021, Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite traveled to Massachusetts to film a video in front of the Navy's oldest ship, the USS Constitution, nicknamed "Old Ironsides," commissioned in October 1797.

"We must always look to our wake to chart our future course," he said before announcing names for a new frigate, an expeditionary ship, an attack submarine and an amphibious transport dock.

Four years later, it was the turn of outgoing President Joe Biden's administration to go on

SEE SHIPS ON PAGE 5

## Militarization of Greenland seen as way to avert crisis

BY JOHN VANDIVER
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — A clash over the status of Greenland is shaping into a NATO stress test as President Donald Trump's push for more control sparks European concerns that coercion from Washington could lead to the alliance's unraveling.

Some analysts say one way to avoid such a scenario is to find a diplomatic off-ramp that leaves the political autonomy of the Danish island intact but entails more U.S. forces on the ground and greater American access to its natural resources.

The question is whether the United States and Denmark can reach a deal that satisfies Trump's stated desire for more security on the territory while avoiding a rupture in NATO that could come from a unilateral American push into the territory.

The White House doubled down this week on its assertion that Greenland should be transferred to American control.

"You know what Denmark did recently to boost up security in

SEE GREENLAND ON PAGE 6



ANDREW ESTRADA/U.S. Army

**A U.S. Army Special Forces soldier operates a snowmobile during exercise Arctic Edge in Mestersvig, Greenland, in 2024.**

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## Trump Mobile's golden phone remains unseen

*Associated Press*

A golden phone that President Donald Trump's family business promised to release last year remains mysteriously under wraps as the technology industry serves up a glut of new gadgets at CES in Las Vegas this week.

When the Trump Organization launched a mobile phone service last June, it was supposed to be a stage setter for a new smartphone bathed in gold with a $500 price tag — a bargain compared to Apple's latest iPhone models that sell for anywhere from $800 to $1,200. The newly formed Trump Mobile targeted its T1 phone for an August or September release.

What's more, Trump Mobile initially hailed T1 as a device that would be "proudly designed and built in the United States for customers who expect the best."

But both the T1's shipping date and U.S. manufacturing ambitions gradually began to shift, even as Trump Mobile continues to accept $100 deposits for the device.

Not long after announcing the device, Trump Mobile pivoted from describing it as a phone that would be made in the U.S. to framing it as a device that would be "proudly American." Trump Mobile's website now touts the T1 as having an "American-proud" design, with no further explanation.

Analysts believed that the shift stemmed from a recognition that the U.S. lacked the supply chain and other logistics required to make a smartphone for less than $1,000.

## EXCHANGE RATES

| Military rates | |
|---|---|
| Euro costs (Jan. 7) | 0.83 |
| British pound (Jan. 7) | $1.32 |
| Japanese yen (Jan. 7) | 153.00 |
| South Korean won (Jan. 7) | 1,411.00 |
| **Commercial rates** | |
| Bahrain (Dinar) | 0.3743 |
| Britain (Pound) | 1.3527 |
| Canada (Dollar) | 1.3764 |
| China (Yuan) | 6.9880 |
| Denmark (Krone) | 6.3805 |
| Egypt (Pound) | 47.2701 |
| Euro | 0.8539 |
| Hong Kong (Dollar) | 7.7884 |
| Hungary (Forint) | 328.81 |
| Israel (Shekel) | 3.1651 |
| Japan (Yen) | 156.39 |
| Kuwait (Dinar) | 0.3067 |
| Norway (Krone) | 10.0216 |
| Philippines (Peso) | 59.25 |
| Poland (Zloty) | 3.74 |
| Saudi Arabia (Riyal) | 3.7460 |
| Singapore (Dollar) | 1.2793 |
| South Korea (Won) | 1,447.65 |
| Switzerland (Franc) | 0.7929 |
| Thailand (Baht) | 31.20 |
| Turkey (NewLira) | 43.0420 |

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

## INTEREST RATES

| | |
|---|---|
| Prime rate | 6.75 |
| Interest Rates Discount rate | 3.75 |
| Federal funds market rate | 3.62 |
| 3-month bill | 3.62 |
| 30-year bond | 4.84 |

## WEATHER OUTLOOK

### WEDNESDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST




### WEDNESDAY IN EUROPE




### THURSDAY IN THE PACIFIC




The weather is compiled from weather.com reports.

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MILITARY

# Horses to stay at Fort Hood, Fort Riley

By Rose L. Thayer
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army will preserve two of the five ceremonial horse units that were to be cut for cost savings after determining the horses bring community engagement opportunities and capabilities that are difficult to replicate.

The units at Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Riley, Kan., will remain active, but the horses, mules and donkeys owned by the Army at Fort Irwin, Calif.; Fort Huachuca, Ariz.; and Fort Sill, Okla., will be put up for adoption and transferred out of the Army by July.

"After careful consideration, the Army has determined that retaining these [Military Working Equid] programs is in the best interests of the force," said Col. James Fuhriman, assistant deputy for Army health affairs.

The plan announced in July called for cutting all five horse units to save the Army about $2 million annually. Keeping the two units and transforming them into official programs will cost the Army roughly $1.2 million a year, Army spokesman Tony McCormick said.

The Old Guard caisson units at the Military District of Washington and Joint Base San Antonio, Texas, were not affected by the horse reduction plans. Those units participate in funeral services for Medal of Honor recipients, prisoners of war, those killed in action and veterans ranked sergeant major or higher at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, in Texas, and at Arlington National Cemetery, in Virginia.



Miriam Espinoza/U.S. Army

**The 1st Cavalry Division's Horse Cavalry Detachment marches in the Tournament of Roses Parade in 2022 in Pasadena, Calif. Fort Hood's troopers and horses also participated in this year's parade.**

The ceremonial horse units typically bring alive the history of the cavalry during weekly public demonstrations and unit ceremonies as well as during parades, rodeos and events throughout local communities.

The 1st Infantry Division Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard at Fort Riley — with 30 soldiers, 18 horses and four mules — is reminiscent of Civil War-era soldiers.

Fort Hood's 1st Cavalry Division Horse Cavalry Detachment represents the Army of the late 1880s, using Colt revolvers and sabers of the era with about 40 troopers working alongside 29 horses and four mules.

Each has participated in presidential inaugurations as well as many events within their local communities. Fort Hood's troopers and horses participated in the Tournament of Roses Parade in California last week, as it has more than 20 times before.

The Army will formally establish the two units as programs linking the Army and the American people through public demonstrations, educational outreach and participation in local events, the service said Tuesday.

The Army said Tuesday it recently established a new military occupational specialty, Army Equestrian (08H) as an example of its investment in the units. The new specialty replaces the "military horseman" identifier and creates a specialized career path dedicated to the professional care of military working equines. The specialty is currently open to infantry soldiers in grades E5-E9.

Soldiers could begin transferring to the specialty as early as next year, McCormick said.

"Supplying trained personnel and animals allows us to maintain the program's high standards," Fuhriman said. "It empowers the Fort Hood and Riley [military working equid] programs, much like The Old Guard, to continue their legacy of excellence in preserving the Army's equine heritage."

# Nimitz reactors could power land-based AI data center

By Gary Warner
*Stars and Stripes*

A pair of nuclear reactors that have propelled a U.S. Navy supercarrier to hot spots around the world for half a century could end up repurposed to power a data center in Tennessee.

HGP Intelligent Energy, based in Dallas, has proposed to the Department of Energy that the two Westinghouse A4W naval fission pressurized water reactors on the USS Nimitz be sent to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory after they are removed from the carrier during its upcoming decommissioning, deactivation and defueling. Oak Ridge is a key U.S. government center for nuclear energy research.

The reactors could generate up to 520 megawatts of power, which HGP said in a letter to the Department of Energy could be used to boost energy for power-hungry data centers at the heart of the booming artificial intelligence industry.

HGP Intelligent Energy filed a letter with the White House's Genesis Mission Office, which President Donald Trump created by executive order in November to "leverage artificial intelligence" on a scale and pace equal to the "Manhattan Project," which produced the first atomic bomb in World War II.



Leon Roberts/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**The new Interpretive Center at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee includes exhibits on the area's role in developing atomic bombs and scientific research since then.**

The proposal was first reported by Bloomberg News.

HGP said that reusing and adapting the Nimitz nuclear reactors would cost between $1 million and $4 million per megawatt of generating power.

A 2024 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said a new large reactor built from the ground up would cost between $8 and $10 million per megawatt.

As part of the plan, HGP said it would cost up to $2.1 billion in private funds to create the system to use the naval reactors. The company stated it plans to apply for a loan guarantee from the Energy Department.

If the Nimitz project succeeds, reactors from future decommissioned aircraft carriers, submarines and other sources could be used for data centers.

The Nimitz arrived at its homeport of Bremerton, Wash., in December at the end of the final deployment of its career. The Navy's oldest carrier was commissioned in May 1975. The first of the 10 Nimitz-class carriers already has orders to sail soon to Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia to begin its retirement.

Huntington Ingalls Industries has received a $33.5 million contract to continue planning for the carrier's decommissioning, deactivation and defueling.

This process has not been previously done on a ship the size of the Nimitz.

HII's Newport News Shipbuilding facility in Virginia would be responsible for eventually removing the two reactors.

Marine Insight, a maritime industry publication, said last week that the process is expected to take five phases, with each step requiring up to 10 years, at an eventual price tag of $1 billion.

The Navy currently has a protocol for smaller reactors from Los Angeles-class submarines retired since the late 1990s.

The reactors are wrapped in radioactive-shielded containers, sent on a barge from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, then out to the Pacific Ocean and finally up the Columbia River to a port that transports the containers to a radioactive materials burial trench at the Hanford Nuclear Site in eastern Washington.

The Navy is still working on plans to dispose of or reuse the power plants on Nimitz-class carriers. Each ship has two reactors that generate 140,000 shaft horsepower, with each reactor driving two propeller shafts. The reactors also generate about 100 megawatts of electricity for use on the ship.

USS Nimitz is the first of the supercarrier class named for it to be slated for decommissioning. Earlier plans to also decommission the second-oldest carrier, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, were delayed from 2026 until the early 2030s.

The Navy has said the process for decommissioning and disposing of the Nimitz will serve as the template for future retirements as the Nimitz carriers and their reactors reach their planned half-century service lives. The carriers are to be replaced by the new USS Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers.

Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., is undergoing a major shore systems electrical upgrade to eventually homeport USS John F. Kennedy, the second Ford-class carrier, which is scheduled to be commissioned in 2027.

MILITARY

# Iraq War veteran seeks Purple Heart medal

By Linda F. Hersey
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — An Iraq War veteran has petitioned the Army, claiming it failed to award him the Purple Heart for combat-related injuries suffered more than 20 years ago.

The medal, which honors extraordinary service and sacrifice on the battlefield, also unlocks medical and financial benefits for recipients and their survivors. There is no statutory time limit for awarding the Purple Heart.

Stephen J. Froom, of Colorado, a former military police soldier, argues in a petition to the Army Review Boards Agency that the military failed to consider his injuries and act to award him the Purple Heart in multiple instances.

Purple Heart medals recognize service members seriously wounded or killed in enemy action. Froom's petition was submitted as a request to correct his military records. The award is usually a command responsibility, but the petition process is a path for correcting an omission.

Veterans awarded Purple Hearts also may qualify for special monthly compensation added to their VA disability payments, depending on the severity of injuries. The enhanced payments are to help veterans with serious medical needs.

Froom has a 100% disability rating from the Department of Veterans Affairs. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, two traumatic brain injuries that caused him to lose consciousness, a shrapnel wound and other injuries, according to a Petition for Correction filed with the Army Review Boards Agency.

But more than 20 years after deployment, Froom is still fighting to receive the recognition he "rightly deserves," said Allison Weber, his attorney. "This is about his effort to preserve his own legacy and to shed light on the contributions of other members of his unit."

He also is seeking a Distinguished Service Cross or Silver Star for his service. The medals are the Army's second- and third-highest decorations for valor, respectively.

"This is about claiming my legacy. Money has never been a motivator for me," Froom said about his efforts for the formal recognition. "I have these events that shaped my life but no proof of them."



Stephen Froom

**Army Spc. Stephen Froom, right, stands with Spc. Joshua Gutierrez in Iraq. Froom, who served as a military police soldier, has petitioned the Army for the Purple Heart medal for his injuries in an ambush, grenade attack, firefight and a car bombing while stationed in Iraq in 2003 and 2004.**

Froom participated in missions to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government and to restore order to the country, according to the petition. He served with the 204th Military Police Company.

Froom's injuries were related to an ambush, grenade attack, firefight and car bombing while he was stationed in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, according to the petition.

There is no formal count on the number of petitions retroactively filed seeking Purple Hearts, according to the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor.

"This request is made on the basis of error and injustice, in that [Specialist] Froom was injured as the result of combat," Weber wrote in a letter that accompanied his petition.

The Purple Heart is awarded automatically to service members wounded in combat or by specific hostile acts, according to the Army.

"Despite contemporaneous documentation and eyewitness accounts, the associated awards were never formally reviewed," Weber wrote. "He has previously exhausted all administrative remedies available to him."

The Purple Heart also helps recipients with their medical care, disability claims and tuition assistance.

Recipients receive priority status for processing disability claims, according to the VA.

A Purple Heart medal may help qualify a veteran for special monthly compensation based on the seriousness of injuries, in addition to disability payments. The amount depends on the injury and impact on daily living.

"A Purple Heart — and its documentation — serves as strong evidence that your injury occurred in combat, which is crucial for proving service connection for severe conditions that qualify for special monthly compensation or combat-related special compensation," according to the VA.

Purple Heart recipients do not have co-payments on outpatient services and hospitalizations at the VA. They receive priority status in scheduling VA medical appointments.

Recipients are granted full post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits, regardless of time on active duty. They receive preferences for federal government job opportunities, too.

Family members also may be eligible for health coverage, tuition assistance and other benefits.

Weber wrote that the "high op-tempo and various distractions" during Froom's deployment led to oversight in recognizing him.

"Froom was a highly respected soldier and combat leader, who regularly exposed himself to danger to further the mission and protect his fellow unit members," Weber wrote.

If his petition fails, Froom has the option to challenge the decision. He can sue in federal district court if an appeal is denied.

The Defense Department has not awarded Purple Hearts for PTSD, because the condition is classified as a psychological illness, not a physical injury.

Froom experienced "extreme PTSD as a result of his deployment," according to the petition. He has had depression, painful memories and mental instability.

"I do have PTSD, but I do not feel it alone meets the standard for a Purple Heart," Froom said.

But there's growing pressure by veterans' groups for the Defense Department to revisit Purple Heart eligibility, according to DisabledVeterans.org, an advocacy group founded by Benjamin Krause, an Air Force veteran and attorney.

Veterans with combat-related PTSD may be denied certain honors because their injuries are not seen, Krause said.

They often struggle "to explain the depth of their trauma to a system that often only acknowledges physical harm," Krause said.

# New evidence sought in Guam endangered species lawsuit

By Alex Wilson
*Stars and Stripes*

A federal judge on Guam recently ordered the U.S. Navy to dive deeper into its record of endangered species protections at a new Marine Corps base on the U.S. island territory.

U.S. District Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood on Dec. 12 rejected the Navy's bid to limit disclosure to records prior to 2017 and said environmental groups suing under the Endangered Species Act are entitled to see more recent evidence.

The case began in 2023, when advocacy groups the Center for Biological Diversity and Prutehi Litekyan: Save Ritidian — now known as Prutehi Guahan — sued the Navy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over insufficient efforts to protect endangered animals.

The lawsuit claims construction at Camp Blaz created massive environmental impacts and that the two federal agencies have failed "to protect and conserve more than a dozen endangered and threatened species at imminent risk of extinction on Guam," according to an amended complaint filed Dec. 12.

The construction of Blaz, the Marines' first new installation since 1952, is a core component of the Defense Department's planned relocation of Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The base covers more than 4,000 acres and is expected to host approximately 5,000 Marines.

The groups also said that promised mitigation efforts, such as controlling invasive species and restoring habitats, have yet to be enacted.

The Navy and Fish and Wildlife Service denied those allegations.

In the most recent ruling, the federal agencies sought to limit discovery to "administrative records," particularly environmental reviews and other data prior to the lawsuit.

However, since the advocacy groups are attempting to "determine the extent of any continuing violations" of the Endangered Species Act, the court determined that the case requires additional discovery and ordered the two parties to coordinate a plan to share evidence within 30 days.

"For too long, our island has been treated as a sacrifice zone," Leevin Camacho, attorney for Prutehi Guahan, said in a Dec. 18 news release. "This ruling affirms that the military does not get a free pass just because it operates behind fences. Our people, our wildlife and our cultural practices deserve protection and respect."

Camacho did not respond after business hours Tuesday to an email seeking further comment.

The construction of Camp Blaz — and an $8 billion missile defense system spread across 16 sites on the island — have been the subject of scrutiny by locals and environmental advocacy groups due to the destruction of limestone forests, a unique ecosystem home to various endangered species.

Joint Region Marianas acknowledged Stars and Stripes email request for comment Tuesday afternoon but had not responded as of that evening.

# MILITARY

## Ships: Name switch ups continue

FROM PAGE 1

a ship-naming spree.

Biden's Navy secretary, Carlos Del Toro, rolled out 19 new ship names — including new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers to be named for former President William J. Clinton (a Democrat) and President George W. Bush (a Republican).

"When I personally delivered the news to Bill and George, they were deeply humbled," Biden said at the time. "Each knows firsthand the weight of the responsibilities that come with being commander-in-chief."

In 2025, the naming — and renaming — of ships didn't hit much of a speed bump with a change in the occupant of the White House.

In June, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the name of the USNS Harvey Milk stripped from the official Naval Vessel Register. Milk was a gay-rights leader and San Francisco supervisor assassinated in 1978. The Navy said Hegseth had ordered Navy Secretary John Phelan to make the change, "taking the politics out of ship naming."

The ship was renamed for Navy Chief Petty Officer Oscar V. Peterson, a Medal of Honor recipient from the World War II Battle of the Coral Sea in 1942.

The ship is the second of new class of replenishment oilers. According to the Congressional Research Service, Congress directed that they be named for prominent civil rights advocates. The class carries the name of the late Black civil rights advocate and longtime U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.

Phelan, Hegseth and Trump have not ordered any further name changes to the Lewis-class ships.

Before the new battleship announcement, Trump scrambled



SHANNON RENFROE/U.S. Navy

**A graphic rendering depicts the now-canceled Constellation-class frigate USS Lafayette. USS Lafayette is the fourth of the new Constellation-class frigates, scheduled to commission in 2029.**

Navy ship naming plans with an announcement canceling the Constellation frigate program after the two ships were already under construction — the USS Constellation and the USS Congress.

The Navy canceled the remaining ships, including those to be named for the French Marquis de Lafayette, who aided American patriot forces in the Revolutionary War; Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton; Spain's Louisiana Governor Conde Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, a backer of the American Revolution; former Navy pilot Everett Alvarez Jr., who was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War; and Capt. Bright Joy Hancock, one of the first female Navy officers, who served during World War I and II.

Also canceled was the new USS Chesapeake, named after the early American frigate captured by Britain in 1813, renamed HMS Chesapeake and later deconstructed for use as a watermill in Wickham, Hampshire, England. In recent years, the building has housed an antiques store.

In canceling the Constellation program, Trump announced a new generation of frigates called FF(X) based on the U.S. Coast Guard's large National Security Cutter design. The names of the future ships are to be determined.

A sidelight to the "Trump-class" battleship-naming controversy is that it could affect naming a future aircraft carrier after the president.

Twelve of the past 17 aircraft carriers have been named for presidents, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. From Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush, nearly every president has had an aircraft carrier named for them.

The exceptions are Lyndon B. Johnson, whose name is on a Zumwalt-class destroyer to be commissioned in 2027, and President Jimmy Carter, a former Navy submarine officer, who has a Seawolf-class attack submarine named for him.

Only President Richard M. Nixon, who resigned office in 1974 because of the Watergate scandal, doesn't have a ship at sea or in the construction pipeline bearing his name.

Four of six Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers are named for presidents. If the naming tradition is followed in chronological order, future carriers could be named for Presidents Barack Obama, Trump and Biden.

# Trial program redesignates master sergeants

BY LYDIA GORDON
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps broke a long-standing senior enlisted career divide this week by redesignating its first-ever master sergeants to the rank of first sergeant under a trial program.

Master Sgt. Joseph Stoker, an individual material readiness list coordinator with Marine Forces Reserve, was among the first Marines selected to laterally transition between the two E-8 ranks, the service said in a statement Dec. 31.



**Stoker**

While master sergeants serve primarily as senior experts in their job fields, first sergeants fulfill a command leadership role, acting as the senior enlisted adviser to commanders at the company, battery or squadron levels.

Historically, gunnery sergeants selected for advancement to E-8 were assigned by a selection board to either career track.

Prior to the trial program, Marines were locked into one track or the other once they pinned the selected rank, and they had no option to laterally transition.

The trial program is a significant milestone in the Marine Corps option and gives master sergeants greater control over their careers, Sgt. Maj. Carlos Ruiz, the service's senior enlisted leader, said in the statement.

"It advances our talent management efforts by ensuring our E-8s are placed in positions that best support both their success and that of the Marine Corps," Ruiz said.

Another beneficiary of the program is Master Sgt. Cord Burgan, an instructor section adviser at the Staff Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in Quantico, Va.

Ruiz said Monday that Burgan had been selected as a program qualifier and pinned on the rank of first sergeant.

Announced in mid-2025, the program began reviewing eligible applicants in October and selected its first group of Marines to transition in January, with Stoker among those approved to pin on the first sergeant rank.

"I've always believed that the strength of the Marine Corps is its people, and I want to be in a position where I can guide and mentor more Marines on a larger scale," Stoker said in the statement.

Service officials have not said how many Marines will ultimately be approved under the program, but it is expected to inform future decisions on whether lateral transitions between the two E-8 career tracks could become permanent.

Lateral transitions between ranks in the same pay grade are not new across the Defense Department.

The Army, for example, has long allowed such movement between certain ranks.

Possibilities for soldiers include switches from specialist to corporal, master sergeant to first sergeant and sergeant major to command sergeant major.

## US soldier wounded in stabbing outside Italian club is recuperating

BY KENT HARRIS
*Stars and Stripes*

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — An American soldier based at Aviano is recovering after being stabbed outside a nightclub last week in the nearby city of Conegliano.

The unidentified soldier, described by multiple Italian media outlets as a 28-year-old man, was treated for his injuries at a local hospital and is recovering at home, 173rd Airborne Brigade spokeswoman Capt. Jennifer French said.

U.S. military officials are cooperating with Italian investigators, French said, adding that the soldier was off duty at the time.

She declined to provide more details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Italian media reports said the stabbing happened in the early morning hours of Dec. 28 outside a private club.

The soldier and a 37-year-old Albanian woman who was with him reportedly were confronted by a group of people who knew the woman.

A scuffle broke out and both the American soldier and the woman were injured, reports said.

The soldier was initially thought to be critically injured and was rushed to the hospital for treatment after neighbors were alerted by the woman's calls for help, according to reports.

Police identified a suspect by reviewing video camera footage of a license plate, according to a report by Virgilio.it on Dec. 29. As of that time, the suspect was still at large.

Conegliano is a city of about 35,000 people roughly 18 miles southwest of Aviano and home to some Americans that are stationed there.

## Soldier sentenced for child rape, sexual assault

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
*Stars and Stripes*

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A soldier assigned to the 7th Army Training Command received a 30-year prison sentence for sex offenses he committed against a girl in his family while living in Grafenwoehr.

Spc. Marcus Hampton, 27, was convicted Dec. 18, of one count each of rape of a child under age 12 and sexual assault of a child.

Hampton was originally charged with two counts of rape of a child under 12, two counts of sexual assault of a child, failure to obey a written order and preventing legal seizure of property.

The trial was held at the Rose Barracks courthouse in Vilseck. Lt. Col. Jordan Stapley, the judge in the case, acquitted Hampton of the remaining charges.

Hampton, a signal soldier assigned to the Grafenwoehr-based 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, began abusing the girl in fall of 2023, the statement said.

She told other family members about the abuse, and they reported it to local authorities.

The Army's Criminal Investigation Division was notified and launched an investigation, the statement said.

EUROPE

# Europe pushes back on Trump Greenland talk

*Associated Press*

Several European leaders pushed back Tuesday on U.S. President Donald Trump's comments seeking an American takeover of Greenland.

The leaders issued a statement reaffirming the strategic, mineral-rich Arctic island "belongs to its people."

The leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom joined Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen in defending Greenland's sovereignty in the wake of Trump's comments about Greenland, which is a self-governing territory of the kingdom of Denmark and thus part of the NATO alliance.

"Greenland belongs to its people," the statement said. "It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland."

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney also expressed his support and announced a visit to Greenland early next month by Canada's Governor General Mary Simon, who is of Inuk descent, and Foreign Minister Anita Anand.



Frederiksen

"The future of Greenland and Denmark are decided solely by the people of Denmark," Carney said, standing next to Frederiksen at the Canadian Embassy in Paris.

Stephen Miller, the White House deputy chief of staff, said Monday that Greenland should be part of the United States in spite of a warning by Frederiksen that a U.S. takeover of Greenland would amount to the end of NATO.

"The president has been clear for months now that the United States should be the nation that has Greenland as part of our overall security apparatus," Miller said during an interview with CNN Monday afternoon.

His comments came after the Danish leader, together with Greenland's prime minister and other European leaders, firmly rejected Trump's renewed call for the island to come under U.S. control in the aftermath of the weekend U.S. operation in Venezuela.

Trump has argued the U.S. needs to control Greenland to ensure the security of the NATO territory in the face of rising threats from China and Russia in the Arctic. "It's so strategic right now," he told reporters Sunday.

"Greenland is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place," Trump said. "We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it."

Miller wondered during his interview Monday whether Denmark can assert control over Greenland. "What is the basis of their territorial claim," Miller said. "What is their basis of having Greenland as a colony of Denmark?"

He said it was not necessary to consider whether the U.S. administration was contemplating an armed intervention.

"There is no need to even think or talk about this in the context that you are asking, of a military operation. Nobody is going to fight the U.S. militarily over the future of Greenland," he said.

Greenland had been a colony of the Danish kingdom for hundreds of years, becoming an integral part in 1953. The U.S. government recognized Denmark's right to the whole of Greenland at the beginning of the 20th century.

Legislation in 2009 that extended self-government to Greenland also recognized a right to independence under international law, an option favored by a majority of Greenlanders.

Greenland sits off the northeastern coast of Canada, with more than two-thirds of its territory lying within the Arctic Circle. That location has made it crucial to the defense of North America since World War II.

The Department of Defense operates the remote Pituffik Space Base in northwestern Greenland.

Constructed after a 1951 defense agreement between Denmark and the U.S., the base supports missile warning, missile defense and space surveillance operations for the U.S. and NATO.

Greenland also guards the North Atlantic, where NATO monitors Russian naval movements.

# **Greenland:** Analysts argue for greater US presence in country

FROM PAGE 1

Greenland? They added one more dogsled," Trump said.

But if the United States strongarms its way into seizing control of fellow NATO ally Denmark's territory, it could put the bloc's future viability at risk. NATO's core principle — that an attack on one member is an attack on all — would effectively be turned on its head.

The situation calls for a new "Northern Corridor Doctrine" that would update U.S.-Danish security cooperation agreements while expanding allied efforts to develop key minerals and other resources on the territory, Vienna-based geopolitical strategist Velina Tchakarova said.

That would bolster the American and European position against Russia and China, as well as manage what she called "an unavoidable reality."

"The United States will expand its military, security and geoeconomic presence in Greenland," Tchakarova said. "The only strategic question is whether this expansion produces confrontation and polarization or cohesion and stability among strategic allies."

A new arrangement would expand U.S. access in Greenland in exchange for a wide range of security activity, she said.

"Such an agreement would acknowledge an uncomfortable but necessary truth: in Cold War 2.0, Greenland is once again indispensable to North American and transatlantic security," Tchakarova said. "Avoiding this reality does not preserve sovereignty. It weakens it."

There is a historical basis for ramping up the U.S. military presence in Greenland. During the Cold War, the United States had thousands of troops there in addition to numerous military sites equipped with nuclear-armed long-range bombers.



ANTHONY RANDISI/U.S. Coast Guard

**The destroyer USS Delbert D. Black and a U.S. Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopter transit the Nuup Kagerlua fjord near Nuuk, Greenland, in 2024. President Donald Trump said recently the U.S. needs Greenland from the standpoint of national security.**

Today, the presence is much smaller, with about 200 troops involved in an early-warning ballistic missile mission.

One reason Greenland has emerged as a potential flashpoint is the failure of Europeans to recognize its strategic importance, Atlantic Council analyst Justina Budginaite-Froehly said.

"Europe's problem is not that Washington sees Greenland as a strategic asset. It is that Europe has largely failed to do so itself," Budginaite-Froehly said. "For decades, Greenland was treated as a political sensitivity rather than a strategic priority. That complacency is now dangerous."

In an era of great-power competition, "territory that is weakly defended, lightly governed or externally dependent invites pressure, regardless of legal status," she said.

That reasoning echoed comments by Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff.

"We live in a world ... that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power," Miller told CNN host Jake Tapper on Monday. "These are the iron laws of the world since the beginning of time."

When asked about using force against a NATO ally, Miller responded that "nobody's going to fight the United States militarily over the future of Greenland."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said Monday that such a move would spell the end of the transatlantic security bloc, founded 76 years ago as a counter to the Soviet Union and a linchpin of Western security strategy ever since.

"If the United States chooses to attack another NATO country militarily, then everything stops," Frederiksen told Danish broadcaster TV2. "That is, including our NATO and thus the security that has been provided since the end of the Second World War."

But Trump made it clear Sunday that the status quo in Greenland was coming to an end, saying that U.S. national security concerns were at stake and that Denmark was not up to the job of keeping Russia and China from dominating the region.

And so far, he appears to have been unimpressed by allied efforts to do more in the Arctic.

Budginaite-Froehly said Denmark and other European countries should ramp up their military commitments in Greenland and the Arctic to signal to the Trump administration that security concerns in the region are being taken seriously. In practice, that means a European military presence that can deny Russia and China the ability to encroach deeper into the Arctic region.

"A Europe that treats Greenland as central to its own security, rather than as a liability to be explained away, can shift the Trump administration's fixation on acquiring Greenland toward cooperating on Greenland's security," Budginaite-Froehly said.

NATION

# Venezuelan officers killed in operation to capture Maduro



MATIAS DELACROIX / AP

**Government supporters gather for a women's march to demand the return of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela, Tuesday, three days after U.S. forces captured him and his wife.**

**BY REGINA GARCIA CANO, AAMER MADHANI AND MEGAN JANETSKY**
*Associated Press*

CARACAS, Venezuela — At least 24 Venezuelan security officers were killed in the dead-of-night U.S. military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and spirit him to the United States to face federal drug charges, officials said Tuesday.

Venezuela's Attorney General Tarek William Saab said "dozens" of officials and civilians were killed and that prosecutors would investigate the deaths in what he described as a "war crime." He didn't specify if the estimate was specifically referring to Venezuelans.

The death toll for Venezuelan security officials comes after Cuba's government on Sunday announced that 32 Cuban military and police officers working in Venezuela had died in the operation, prompting two days of mourning on the Caribbean island.

A video tribute to the slain Venezuelan security officials posted to the military's Instagram features faces of many of those killed over black-and-white videos of soldiers, American aircraft flying over Caracas and armored vehicles destroyed by the blasts.

"Their spilled blood does not cry out for vengeance but for justice and strength," the military wrote in an Instagram post. "It reaffirms our unwavering oath not to rest until we rescue our legitimate President, completely dismantle the terrorist groups operating from abroad and ensure that events such as these never again sully our sovereign soil."

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump on Tuesday pushed back against Democratic criticism of this weekend's military operation, noting that his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden had also called for the arrest of the Venezuelan leader on drug trafficking charges.

Trump in remarks before a House Republican retreat in Washington grumbled that Democrats were not giving him credit for a successful military operation that led to the ouster of Maduro, even though there was bipartisan agreement that Maduro was not the rightful president of Venezuela.

In 2020, Maduro was indicted in the United States, accused in a decades-long narco-terrorism and international cocaine trafficking conspiracy. White House officials have noted that Biden's administration in his final days in office last year raised the award for information leading to Maduro's arrest after he assumed a third term in office despite evidence suggesting that he lost Venezuela's most recent election. The Trump administration doubled the award to $50 million in August.

"You know, at some point, they should say, 'You know, you did a great job. Thank you. Congratulations.' Wouldn't it be good?" Trump said. "I would say that if they did a good job, their philosophies are so different. But if they did a good job, I'd be happy for the country. They've been after this guy for years and years and years."

Trump's latest comments came after Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other top officials briefed leaders in Congress late Monday on the Venezuela operation amid mounting concerns that the Republican administration is embarking on a new era of U.S. expansionism without consultation with lawmakers or a clear vision for running the South American country.

After the briefing, House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters he does not expect the United States to deploy troops to Venezuela, saying the U.S. actions there are "not a regime change" operation. Democratic leaders said the session lacked clarity about the Trump administration's plans for Venezuela.

Americans are split about the capture of Maduro — with many still forming opinions — according to a poll conducted by The Washington Post and SSRS using text messages over the weekend. About 4 in 10 approved of the U.S. military being sent to capture Maduro, while roughly the same share were opposed. About 2 in 10 were unsure.

Nearly half of Americans, 45%, were opposed to the U.S. taking control of Venezuela and choosing a new government for the country. About 9 in 10 Americans said the Venezuelan people should be the ones to decide the future leadership of their country.

Maduro pleaded not guilty to federal drug trafficking charges in a U.S. courtroom on Monday. U.S. forces captured Maduro and his wife early Saturday in a raid on a compound where they were surrounded by Cuban guards. Maduro's No. 2, Delcy Rodriguez, has been sworn in as Venezuela's acting president.

In the days since Maduro's ouster, Trump and top administration officials have raised anxiety around the globe that the operation could mark the beginning of a more expansionist U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere.

Trump has said that his administration will now "run" Venezuela policy and would press the country's leaders to open its vast oil reserves to American energy companies.

Colombia's Foreign Affairs Minister Rosa Villavicencio said Tuesday she'll meet with the U.S. Embassy's charge d'affaires in Bogota to present him with a formal complaint over the recent threats issued by the United States.

On Sunday, Trump said he wasn't ruling out an attack on Colombia and described its president, who's been an outspoken critic of the U.S. pressure campaign on Venezuela, as a "sick man who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States."

At a news conference, Villavicencio said she's hoping to strengthen relations with the United States and improve cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking, echoing comments made Monday by several members of Colombia's government.

"It is necessary for the Trump administration to know in more detail about all that we are doing in the fight against drug trafficking," she said.

# White House thanks media for keeping quiet before Venezuela strike

**BY DAVID BAUDER**
*Associated Press*

In the wake of last weekend's U.S. military action in Venezuela, the news media got something it has seldom heard from the Trump administration: a "thank you."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio credited news organizations that had learned in advance about Saturday's strike that led to the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro with not putting the mission in jeopardy by publicly reporting on it before it happened.

Rubio's acknowledgment was particularly noteworthy because Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has cited a mistrust of journalists' ability to responsibly handle sensitive information as one of the chief reasons for imposing restrictive new press rules on Pentagon reporters. Most mainstream news organizations have left posts in the Pentagon rather than agree to Hegseth's policy.

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, Rubio said the Republican administration withheld information about the mission from Congress ahead of time because "it will leak. It's as simple as that." But the primary reason was operational security, he said.

"Frankly, a number of media outlets had gotten leaks that this was coming and held it for that very reason," Rubio said. "And we thank them for doing that or lives could have been lost. American lives."

News website Semafor, citing "people familiar with communications between the administration and news organizations," reported that The New York Times and The Washington Post had both learned of the raid in advance but held off reporting on it to avoid endangering U.S. military personnel. Representatives for both outlets declined to comment to The Associated Press.

Withholding information on a planned mission for that reason is routine for news organizations, said Dana Priest, a longtime national security reporter at the Post who now teaches at the University of Maryland. Even after the fact, the Post has asked government authorities about whether revealing certain details could endanger people, she said.

When The Atlantic magazine editor Jeffrey Goldberg was inadvertently included in a text chain last spring where Hegseth revealed information about a military attack in Yemen, the journalist did not report on the events until well after U.S. personnel was out of danger and the information had been thoroughly checked out.

Most Americans learned of the Venezuela attack in the predawn hours of Saturday when President Donald Trump announced it on his Truth Social platform upon completion.

NATION

# Cuba on edge after strike topples Venezuelan leader

By Dánica Coto and Andrea Rodríguez
*Associated Press*

HAVANA — Cuban officials on Monday lowered flags before dawn to mourn 32 security officers they say were killed in the U.S. weekend strike in Venezuela, the island nation's closest ally, as residents here wonder what the capture of President Nicolás Maduro means for their future.

The two governments are so close that Cuban soldiers and security agents were often the Venezuelan president's bodyguards, and Venezuela's petroleum has kept the economically ailing island limping along for years. Cuban authorities over the weekend said the 32 had been killed in the surprise attack "after fierce resistance in direct combat against the attackers, or as a result of the bombing of the facilities."

The Trump administration has warned outright that toppling Maduro will help advance another decades-long goal: Dealing a blow to the Cuban government. Severing Cuba from Venezuela could have disastrous consequences for its leaders, who on Saturday called for the international community to stand up to "state terrorism."

On Saturday, Trump said the ailing Cuban economy will be further battered by Maduro's ouster.

"It's going down," Trump said of Cuba. "It's going down for the count."

Many observers say Cuba, an island of about 10 million people, exerted a remarkable degree of influence over Venezuela, an oil-rich nation with three times as many people. At the same time, Cubans have long been tormented by constant blackouts and shortages of basic foods. And after the attack, they woke to the once-unimaginable possibility of an even grimmer future.

"I can't talk. I have no words," 75-year-old Berta Luz Sierra Molina said as she sobbed and placed a hand over her face.

Even though 63-year-old Regina Méndez is too old to join the Cuban military, she said that "we have to stand strong."

"Give me a rifle, and I'll go fight," Méndez said.

Maduro's government was shipping an average of 35,000 barrels of oil daily over the last three months, about a quarter of total demand, said Jorge Piñón, a Cuban energy expert at the University of Texas at Austin Energy Institute.

"The question to which we don't have an answer, which is critical: Is the U.S. going to allow Venezuela to continue supplying Cuba with oil?" he said.

Piñón noted that Mexico once supplied Cuba with 22,000 barrels of oil a day before it dropped to 7,000 barrels after U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Mexico City in early September.

"I don't see Mexico jumping in right now," Piñón said. "The U.S. government would go bonkers."

Ricardo Torres, a Cuban economist at American University in Washington, said that "blackouts have been significant, and that is with Venezuela still sending some oil."

"Imagine a future now in the short term losing that," he said. "It's a catastrophe."

Piñón noted that Cuba doesn't have the money to buy oil on the international market.

"The only ally that they have left out there with oil is Russia," he said, noting that it sends Cuba about 2 million barrels a year.

"Russia has the capability to fill the gap. Do they have the political commitment, or the political desire to do so? I don't know," he said.



RAMON ESPINOSA/AP

**Workers fly the Cuban flag at half-staff outside the U.S. Embassy in Havana on Monday in memory of Cubans who died two days before in Caracas, Venezuela, during the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by U.S. forces.**

# Trump team touts 'American dominance' in hemisphere

By Aamer Madhani
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump hasn't minced words about the larger message he's trying to send the world with the U.S. military raid to capture Nicolás Maduro and spirit the deposed Venezuelan leader and his wife to the United States to face federal drug trafficking charges.

"American dominance in the Western Hemisphere," Trump declared following Maduro's capture, "will never be questioned again."

In the days since the audacious raid, Trump and his team have doubled down on the notion that the new focus on American preeminence in the hemisphere is here to stay. He also held up Maduro's capture to make the case to neighbors to get in line or potentially face consequences.

Trump's rhetoric harkens back to the muscular talk of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when American presidents deployed the military for territorial and resource conquests, including to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

"There's been periods, Vietnam and Iraq, which have evoked questions about a return to American imperialism, but the U.S. leaders' messages in those periods were cloaked in talk of democracy. The way Trump is talking about it is something we haven't seen in a very long time," said Edward Frantz, a historian at the University of Indianapolis.




HEATHER KHALIFA/AP

**People protest outside Manhattan Federal Court in Newy York before the arraignment of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Monday.**

In the aftermath of the operation, Trump's tough talk has been been directed at titular allies in Greenland — where he renewed calls for the U.S. to take over the Danish territory for national security reasons — and Mexico. Trump says America's southern neighbor needs to "get their act together" fighting drug cartels.

Trump has also warned that longtime adversary Cuba is "going down" now that Maduro, who has provided deeply discounted oil to the economically isolated government in Havana, has been deposed. And the president has heightened anxiety with Venezuela's neighbor, telling reporters that a military operation in Colombia — the epicenter of global cocaine production — "sounds good to me."

The Republican president has also said his administration will "run" Venezuela policy and threatened the country's new leader, interim President Delcy Rodríguez, with an outcome worse than Maduro's if she does not "do what's right." He's made plain that he expects Caracas to open its vast oil reserves to U.S. energy companies, further igniting speculation about American overreach.

"We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure — the oil infrastructure — and start making money for the country," Trump said over the weekend.

The Venezuela incursion has split Latin America, with Trump-aligned leaders mostly from the right applauding the ouster, and non-aligned leaders condemning it on sovereignty grounds. It's sharpened concerns that Trump might actually be serious about his desire to annex Greenland as well.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned Monday that Trump would mark the undoing of the transatlantic military alliance, NATO, if he attempts to follow through on his assertion that the U.S. "absolutely" needs to take over Greenland for national security reasons. The alliance, which includes the U.S. and Denmark, has been a linchpin of post-World War II security.

"If the United States chooses to attack another NATO country militarily, then everything stops," Frederiksen told Danish broadcaster TV2.

In the early part of the 20th century, American leaders repeatedly turned to the Monroe Doctrine, a foundational U.S. foreign policy document authored by the nation's fifth president, which had been aimed at opposing European meddling in the Western Hemisphere.

Now, Trump too is leaning on the doctrine to justify U.S. intervention in Venezuela and threaten action around the hemisphere in the name of protecting the safety and welfare of Americans.

"Trump's rhetoric conjures up images of Teddy Roosevelt and gunboat diplomacy. The rhetoric is a return to a pre-Great War era," Frantz said, referring to the 26th president's intercessions in unstable Caribbean and Central American economies as well as his backing of Panama's secession from Colombia in the name of the U.S. national interest.

Just weeks before the ouster of Maduro, Trump rolled out a long-awaited National Security Strategy that had some disparate elements that seemed to be at odds with each other.

On one hand, Trump, who has long eschewed America's role in foreign wars, asserted that the administration would have a "predisposition to non-interventionism." But the strategy document also made clear that the administration would push "to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere."

With the ouster of Maduro, the administration has clearly doubled down on the latter.

"This is the Western Hemisphere," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday. "This is where we live — and we're not going to allow the Western Hemisphere to be a base of operation for adversaries, competitors and rivals of the United States."

NATION

# US cuts number of vaccines it advises for kids



SARAH L. VOISIN/The Washington Post

**Azlaan Ayaz, 13, gets a shot at a vaccine clinic in Maryland in August.**

BY ALI SWENSON AND LAURAN NEERGAARD
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. took the unprecedented step Monday of cutting the number of vaccines it recommends for every child — a move that leading medical groups said would undermine protections against a half-dozen diseases.

The change is effective immediately, meaning that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will now recommend that all children get vaccinated against 11 diseases. What's no longer broadly recommended is protection against flu, rotavirus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, some forms of meningitis or RSV. Instead, protections against those diseases are only recommended for certain groups deemed high risk, or when doctors recommend them in what's called "shared decision-making."

Trump administration officials said the overhaul, a move long sought by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., won't result in families who want the vaccines losing access to them, and said insurance will continue to pay. But medical experts said the decision creates confusion for parents and could increase preventable diseases.

States, not the federal government, have the authority to require vaccinations for schoolchildren. While CDC requirements often influence those state regulations, some states have begun creating their own alliances to counter the Trump administration's guidance on vaccines.

The change comes as U.S. vaccination rates have been slipping and the share of children with exemptions has reached an all-time high, according to federal data. At the same time, rates of diseases that can be protected against with vaccines, such as measles and whooping cough, are rising across the country.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the overhaul was in response to a request from President Donald Trump in December.

Trump asked the agency to review how peer nations approach vaccine recommendations and consider revising U.S. guidance accordingly.

HHS said its comparison to 20 peer nations found that the U.S. was an "outlier" in both the number of vaccinations and the number of doses it recommended to all children.

Trump, reacting to the news on his Truth Social platform, said the new schedule is "far more reasonable" and "finally aligns the United States with other Developed Nations around the World."

Among those left on the recommended-for-everyone list are vaccines against measles, whooping cough, polio, tetanus, chickenpox and human papillomavirus, or HPV. The guidance reduces the number of recommended vaccine doses against HPV from two or three shots depending on age to one for most children.

Dr. Sean O'Leary of the American Academy of Pediatrics said countries carefully consider vaccine recommendations based on levels of disease in their populations and their health systems.

"You can't just copy and paste public health and that's what they seem to be doing here," said O'Leary. "Literally children's health and children's lives are at stake."

Most high-income countries recommend vaccinations against a dozen to 15 serious pathogens, according to a recent review by the Vaccine Integrity Project, a group that works to safeguard vaccine use.

France today recommends all children get vaccinated against 14 diseases, compared to the 11 that the U.S. now will recommend for every child under the new schedule.

# Flu season surged over holiday, rivals last winter's harsh epidemic

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — U.S. flu infections surged over the holidays, and health officials are calling it a severe season that is likely to get worse.

New government data posted Monday — for flu activity through the week of Christmas — showed that by some measures this season is already surpassing the flu epidemic of last winter, one of the harshest in recent history.

The data was released the same day that the Trump administration said it will no longer recommend flu shots and some other types of vaccines for all children.

Forty-five states were reporting high or very high flu activity during the week of Christmas, up from 30 states the week before.

The higher numbers appear to be driven by the type of flu that's been spreading, public health experts say.

One type of flu virus, called A H3N2, historically has caused the most hospitalizations and deaths in older people. So far this season, that's the type most frequently reported. Even more concerning, more than 90% of the H3N2 infections analyzed were a new version — known as the subclade K variant — that differs from the strain in this year's flu shots.

Flu seasons often don't peak until January or February, so it's too early to know how big a problem that mismatch will be.

"The fact that we've seen steady increases over the last several weeks without much of a decline or even a flattening would suggest to me that we've got the peak ahead of us," said Dr. Robert Hopkins, medical director of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

Last flu season was bad, with the overall flu hospitalization rate the highest since the H1N1 flu pandemic 15 years ago. Child flu deaths reached 288, the worst recorded for regular U.S. flu season.

Nine pediatric flu deaths have been reported so far this season. For children, the percentage of emergency department visits due to flu has already surpassed the highest mark seen during the 2024-25 season.

Hopkins said H3N2 typically hits older adults hardest, and rising rates among children and young adults suggest a severe flu season across all age groups.

Another ominous sign: The percentage of doctor's office and medical clinic visits that were due to flu-like illness also was higher late last month than at any point during the previous flu season.

Deaths and hospitalizations have not reached last year's levels, but those are lagging indicators, Hopkins noted.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates at least 11 million illnesses, 120,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths from flu have already occurred this season.

Public health experts recommend everyone 6 months and older get an annual influenza vaccine.

But federal health officials on Monday announced they will no longer recommend flu vaccinations for U.S. children, saying it's a decision parents and patients should make with their doctors.

# Venezuela emerging as issue in Ky.'s GOP primary

*Associated Press*

President Donald Trump's military intervention in Venezuela has emerged as a flash point in the closely watched Republican primary campaign between Kentucky U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, a long-running Trump antagonist, and retired Navy SEAL officer Ed Gallrein, who has the president's backing.

Massie, showing his non-interventionist leanings, fired off a series of social media posts criticizing the dramatic action that captured Nicolás Maduro and removed him from the South American country.

"Wake up MAGA," Massie wrote. "VENEZUELA is not about drugs; it's about OIL and REGIME CHANGE. This is not what we voted for."

The congressman claimed that Trump wrongly circumvented Congress when ordering the attack.

"In the Constitution, the Founders vested war making power in Congress, not the Executive branch," he wrote.

Gallrein responded that Massie had "shown his true colors" by criticizing the military operation, and said the congressman's stance "is not what the people of this district expect from a Republican."



**Massie**

Gallrein is a farmer and businessman who had a long military career. Gallrein says he was part of the military operation decades ago that toppled another Latin American strongman: Panama's Manuel Noriega. He is Trump's choice to challenge Massie, a maverick who has had an up-and-down relationship with Trump.

The primary election in May will test Trump's hold over Republican politics.

The sudden emergence of Venezuela as an issue will test the president's ability to hold together his coalition during a challenging election year for Republicans that could be defined by domestic concerns like health care and affordability.

NATION

# Violent crime fell again in New Orleans

By Jack Brook
*AP/Report For America*

NEW ORLEANS — Violent crime in New Orleans declined for a third consecutive year in 2025, police officials announced Monday as National Guard troops begin patrolling the city on President Donald Trump's orders.

The crime figures were released less than a week after armed troops arrived in New Orleans, becoming the latest city where Trump has deployed National Guard members on crime-fighting missions.

A separate immigration crackdown that began in December has also deployed hundreds of federal agents in and around the city.

Local officials pushed back for months against the possibility of a Guard mission in New Orleans, pointing out that crime was already decreasing and that troops aren't trained to arrest and jail people, much less investigate crimes and prosecute anyone.

But Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick said she supported the troops' presence as a deterrent.

"The National Guard's presence will certainly have impact," Kirkpatrick said. "We're just grateful that crime is down, and I don't care who gets the credit."

Trump approved sending 350 National Guard members to Louisiana months after Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry requested a deployment to fight crime. Other cities where Trump has launched National Guard missions include Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tenn.



Matthew Hinton/AP

**The Louisiana National Guard, military police, and Louisiana law enforcement agencies patrol the French Quarter for New Year's celebrations in New Orleans, Dec. 30.**

During a Saturday news conference, Trump credited the Guard deployment with New Orleans' drop in crime.

"We have crime down to almost nothing already," Trump said. He added: "I cannot imagine why governors would not want us to help."

Landry, a Republican, has said troops were needed in New Orleans due to "elevated violent crime rates" even though local officials said crime has been dropping for years in the city.

Since 2022, murders, shootings, armed robberies and car jackings in New Orleans have decreased significantly, according to violent crime data released Monday by the police.

Although New Orleans was considered the country's per-capita "murder capital" in 2022, with 266 murders, there were only 121 in 2025 — including 14 people who were killed in a vehicle-ramming attack on Jan. 1 last year.

By "murders," the New Orleans Police Department is referring to criminal homicides, a department spokesperson said Monday. These include suspected homicides and manslaughter that are under investigation and haven't yet been adjudicated, and excludes suspected suicides, accidental deaths and justifiable homicides.

So far, the National Guard troops have been confined to the historic French Quarter, where troops were also deployed last year after the New Year's Day attack.

Kirkpatrick said Monday that she would welcome Guard members in other crime hot spots beyond the French Quarter, adding that the deployment bolstered an understaffed 910-member city police force

"If they prevent a crime by their presence, I'm all for the safety of the city, as long as it's constitutional and ethical," she added.

New Orleans' Democratic mayor-elect, Helena Moreno, initially opposed the National Guard deployment but has since said she welcomes the federal government's support for the city's safety during major events in the Mardi Gras carnival season, which runs into February.

# Deaths of officers drop 25%

*Associated Press*

Deaths of on-duty law enforcement officers in the U.S. decreased by nearly 25% in 2025, according to an annual report.

The report from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, shows a drop in all categories of fatalities, from 148 total deaths in 2024 to 111 last year.

Officer firearm fatalities dropped to 44, a 15% decrease from 52 in 2024 and the lowest number in at least a decade, according to the Fund's previous annual officer fatality reports.

"I always like to see that firearms deaths are down. They are the tip of the spear for egregious acts," said Bill Alexander, the chief executive officer of the Fund, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that works to memorialize fallen officers, educate the public about the profession and improve officer safety.

Traffic-related deaths also decreased nearly 23% between 2024 and 2025, including both fatal traffic accidents and officers killed after being struck by a vehicle — usually during traffic stops.



Matt Rourke/AP

**Officers wait for slain West York Borough Police Officer Andrew Duarte's funeral procession from Living Word Community Church, in Red Lion, Pa., in February.**

Alexander said the reduction in traffic-related officer deaths likely can be attributed to an increase in the national conversation around officer safety on the road. More states around the country have passed "move-over" laws requiring drivers to move out of the lane closest to traffic stops or accidents while passing them.

The reason behind the decrease in firearm fatalities is harder to define. While many departments have offered increased safety training and have better equipment for firearm injuries, Alexander said luck and other unquantifiable factors also play a role.

Among the high-profile shooting deaths in 2025 was Andrew Duarte, a West York Borough Police Department officer who was shot and killed in February while responding to a man who had taken several people hostage in a York, Pa., hospital. And law enforcement officers from around the country attended funeral services Monday for Delaware State Trooper Matthew "Ty" Snook, who was shot and killed while he was working an overtime shift at a DMV office on Dec. 23, after pushing a DMV employee out of the way of the gunman.

# Prosecutor: Officer at Uvalde did nothing until it was too late

*Associated Press*

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas — A school police officer in Uvalde, Texas, stood by during the deadly elementary school shooting and made no attempt to distract or stop the gunman before he opened fire inside classrooms, a prosecutor told a jury Tuesday.

Adrian Gonzales, a former Uvalde schools officer who was among the first to respond to the attack, arrived while the teenage assailant was still outside the building and did nothing, even when a teacher pointed out the direction of the shooter, special prosecutor Bill Turner said during opening statements of a criminal trial.

The officer only went inside Robb Elementary minutes later "after the damage had been done," Turner said.

Gonzales has pleaded not guilty in the case, which is a rare example of charges being brought against an officer who is accused of not doing more to save lives.

His attorney has said the officer tried to save children that day in 2022.

Once inside the school, authorities waited more than an hour to confront the shooter. Gonzales faces 29 counts of child abandonment or endangerment and could be sentenced to a maximum of two years in prison if he's convicted.

"He could have stopped him, but he didn't want to be the target," said Velma Lisa Duran, sister of teacher Irma Garcia, who was among the 19 students and two teachers who were killed.

Duran, who arrived at the courthouse Tuesday morning to watch the beginning of the trial, said authorities stood by more than three years ago while her sister "died protecting children."

Defense attorneys insisted Tuesday that Gonzales did what he could when he arrived at a confusing and chaotic scene.

They described an officer who tried to assess where the gunman was while thinking he was being fired on without protection against a high-powered rifle.

NATION

# Trump urges GOP to be 'flexible' on abortion

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Tuesday he wants Republicans to reach a deal on health care insurance assistance by being willing to bend on a 50-year-old amendment that bars federal money from being spent on abortion services.

"You have to be a little flexible" on the Hyde Amendment, Trump told House Republicans as they gathered in Washington for a caucus retreat to open the midterm election year. "You gotta be a little flexible. You gotta work something. You gotta use ingenuity."

With his suggestion, Trump, who supported abortion rights before he entered politics in 2015, is asking conservatives to abandon or at least ease up on decades of Republican orthodoxy on abortion and spending policy. At the same time, he is demonstrating his longstanding malleability on abortion and acknowledging that Democrats have the political upper hand on health care after Republicans, who control the White House, the Senate and the House, allowed the expiration of premium subsidies for people buying Affordable Care Act insurance policies.

As negotiations on Capitol Hill continue, some Democrats are pushing to end the Hyde restrictions as part of any new agreements on health care subsidies.



EVAN VUCCI/AP

**President Donald Trump arrives at an annual policy retreat on Tuesday, in Washington. Trump told House Republicans to reach a deal on health care insurance assistance by being willing to bend on the 50-year-old Hyde Amendment that bars federal money from being spent on abortion services.**

Trump's road map on the Hyde Amendment came more than an hour into a stem-winding speech intended as a part strategy session and part cheerleading as Republicans attempt to maintain their threadbare House majority in the November midterms.

The president touted the House GOP proposal to replace ACA subsidies — which taxpayers typically steer directly to insurance companies after selecting their policies — into direct payments that taxpayers could use for a range of health care expenses, including insurance. The expanded ACA subsidies expired on Dec. 31, 2025, hitting millions of policy holders with steep premium increases.

During his speech, Trump also defended his actions during the Capitol riot five years ago, joked about being liberal-minded to win the votes of transgender people and mocked a predecessor's use of a wheelchair while delivering a meandering speech to House Republicans as the party enters a critical election year facing a razor-thin majority in the House.

The remarks were intended to ensure both the GOP's executive and legislative wings are aligned on their agenda heading into the November midterms that will determine party control of Congress. But Trump spent more time airing his grievances in the lengthy appearance than he did about the U.S. military operation in Venezuela that captured leader Nicolas Maduro or specific steps he's taking to bring down prices with polls showing inflation as the public's top concern.

The president also did not discuss new policy initiatives or legislation on his agenda for the year.

"We won every swing state. We won the popular vote by millions. We won everything," Trump said, recounting his performance in the 2024 presidential election while seeming to acknowledge that history will side with the Democratic Party in November.

The House GOP is facing a sudden narrowing of their already-thin majority with the death of California Rep. Doug LaMalfa, announced Tuesday, and the resignation of former Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, which took effect at midnight.

"You can't be tough when you have a majority of three, and now, sadly, a little bit less than that," Trump said after paying tribute to LaMalfa, noting the challenges House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., faces in keeping their ranks unified.

# 2nd Ga. lawmaker accused of lying to collect pandemic unemployment

*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — A second former Georgia state House member has been accused of lying to collect federal unemployment benefits during the pandemic.

Federal prosecutors filed charges Monday against Karen Bennett of Stone Mountain, accusing her of one count of making false statements to collect $13,940.

Bennett waived indictment, pleaded not guilty and was released on $10,000 bail after a Monday court appearance.

Lawyers for Bennett did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Tuesday. In federal court, waiving indictment is often a prelude to a defendant pleading guilty.

Bennett, a Democrat, resigned from the House on Thursday. She was first elected in 2012, representing a district covering parts of DeKalb and Gwinnett counties.

She's the second Democratic House member to be charged with lying to obtain federal unemployment assistance during the pandemic. Rep. Sharon Henderson, a Covington Democrat, was indicted in December on charges of theft of government funds and making false statements, accused of illegally collecting $17,811 in unemployment benefits. Henderson is free on bail and remains in office. Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has not yet appointed a review commission to determine whether Henderson should be suspended from office after the indictment.

U.S. Attorney Theodore Hertzberg said in December that other Georgia state House members were being investigated in addition to Henderson. It's unclear if more charges will follow in addition to Bennett.

Prosecutors said Bennett, a physical therapist, lied in 2020 when she stated she was being prevented by quarantine from working for Metro Therapy Providers, a company Bennett owned. Prosecutors said that in reality, Bennett's role with the company was administrative and she worked from a home office, instead of providing therapy to clients. They also allege that Metro Therapy continued operating and generating income after a brief disruption.

In addition, prosecutors say Bennett failed to disclose that she was also receiving $905 in weekly pay from a church. Bennett has been a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The federal government paid special unemployment benefits during the pandemic, using state unemployment systems, to people who lost their jobs because of COVID-19. As with regular unemployment benefits, applicants had to certify every week that they remained unemployed to claim benefits.

Democrats are likely to start the session Monday with 79 members in the 180-member House. In addition to Bennett, Democratic state Rep. Lynn Heffner of Augusta resigned Monday, saying that her house was heavily damaged in 2024's Hurricane Helene and that rebuilding has reached an "impasse," casting doubt on whether Heffner could maintain residency in House District 130, which includes parts of Augusta.

Kemp must now call special elections to replace Bennett and Heffner. It's unclear if their successors will be seated before the regular session ends.

# Rep. LaMalfa, reliable Trump vote, dies at 65

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Republican Doug LaMalfa, a seven-term U.S. representative from California and a reliable vote on President Donald Trump's agenda, has died, reducing the GOP's narrow control of the House. He was 65.

His death, confirmed by Majority Whip Tom Emmer and National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Richard Hudson, trims the Republicans' margin of control of the House to 218 seats to Democrats' 213.

Trump expressed "tremendous sorrow" over LaMalfa's death on Tuesday as he addressed a meeting of House Republicans, lamenting the loss of a lawmaker he championed as an ally for his agenda.

Trump said the late congressman "wasn't a 3 o'clock in the morning person" like other lawmakers he would call in the wee hours to lobby for their votes.

"He voted with me 100% of the time," Trump said. "With Doug, I never had to call."

Meanwhile, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York called for a moment of silence in honor of LaMalfa at the start of a panel at the Capitol commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack.

Details surrounding LaMalfa's death were unclear.

LaMalfa represented Northern California's 1st District, along the Oregon border, including Redding and reaching just north of Sacramento. He had planned to run for reelection despite his district being dramatically redrawn under a ballot measure passed by California voters in November. The measure, backed by Democrats, was designed to make it harder for LaMalfa and four other Republicans to win reelection.



**LaMalfa**

Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, must call a special election to replace LaMalfa, his office said. The election could happen as late as June, when California will hold its primary for the 2026 midterm.

Hudson called LaMalfa "a principled conservative and a tireless advocate for the people of Northern California."

WORLD



EUGENE HOSHIKO/AP

## Fighting fires, gravity

**Members of a traditional firefighting preservation group perform ladder stunts during the annual New Year's Fire Brigade Review on Tuesday, in Tokyo.**

# Plan: US to help Ukraine if Russian attacks again

BY ANDREA PALASCIANO AND DONATO PAOLO MANCINI
*Bloomberg News*

President Donald Trump's administration will agree to support Ukraine in the event of a future Russian attack, according to a draft statement being negotiated by Kyiv's top allies.

The plan, which is subject to change and would need Washington's approval, offers binding security guarantees urgently sought by Ukrainian authorities as part of a peace deal, including a U.S. offer to back a European-led military force, according to an agreement text seen by Bloomberg News.

European and Canadian leaders met with Trump envoys in Paris on Tuesday to push forward a plan that involves monitoring a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, backing for Kyiv's military and assembling a multinational force to safeguard a truce, the draft said.

"These elements will be European-led, with U.S. participation, including U.S. capabilities such as intelligence and logistics, and with a U.S. commitment to support the force if it is attacked," it said.

The talks in the French capital aim to build on momentum as European capitals latch on to U.S. commitments for security guarantees, potentially advancing Trump's ambition to bring Russia's four-year war to an end. But the Kremlin has given little indication of whether it would accept the transatlantic diplomatic foray.

Discussions will integrate Washington's recent proposals on capabilities with plans advanced by Ukraine's main allies, a group known as the coalition of the willing, according to people familiar with the matter.

French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed leaders at the Elysee Palace, a meeting that follows a series of discussions between national security advisers over the last month. The U.S. is represented by special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived earlier and will be joined by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer among European leaders, as well as NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said details of the deal may not be finalized in Paris, noting that details may be "improved or adjusted" further.

The role and scope of a Western troop presence in Ukraine as part of a postwar deal remains unclear. European nations have discussed deploying a multinational "reassurance force," with Ukraine's army leading its defense at the front line.

European officials have been upbeat about their latest discussions with American counterparts. One person described the U.S. offer of intelligence and troops as a game-changer. Another said it much more closely resembled the so-called American backstop sought by European nations over the last year.

Territory remains the toughest sticking point, with Russia demanding that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the eastern Donbas region — including areas that Moscow has struggled to take since the war began in February 2022. Zelenskyy has repeatedly rejected the demand.

# Israel strikes Lebanon ahead of key disarmament talk

*Associated Press*

SIDON, Lebanon — Israel's air force struck areas in southern and eastern Lebanon on Monday and early Tuesday, including in the country's third-largest city.

A strike around 1 a.m. Tuesday leveled a three-story commercial building in the southern coastal city of Sidon, a few days before Lebanon's army commander is scheduled to brief the government on its mission of disarming militant group Hezbollah in areas along the border with Israel.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in a statement Tuesday condemned the attacks as counter to both international efforts to deescalate hostilities and Lebanon's efforts to extend the government's authority into areas long dominated by Hezbollah and to disarm militants.

An Associated Press photographer at the scene in Sidon said the area was in a commercial district containing workshops and mechanic shops and the building was uninhabited.

At least one person was transported by ambulance and rescue teams were searching the site for others, but no deaths have been reported.

Israel's military said Tuesday they targeted weapons storage sites and infrastructure belonging to the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas. They acknowledged the sites were located in civilian areas but blamed the groups for operating there.

The strikes were the latest in near-daily Israeli military action since a ceasefire signed more than a year ago that included a Lebanese pledge to disarm militant groups, which Israel says has not been fulfilled.

They took place nearly two hours after Israel's military Arabic language spokesman Avichay Adraee posted warnings on X that the military would strike targets in two villages in the eastern Bekaa Valley and two others in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said a home struck in the village of Manara in the Bekaa Valley belonged to Sharhabil al-Sayed, a Hamas military commander who was killed in an Israeli drone strike in May 2024.

The areas were evacuated after Israel's warning. There were no reports of casualties in those strikes.

Earlier Monday, Lebanon's Health Ministry said a drone strike on a car in the southern village of Braikeh earlier Monday wounded two people. The Israeli military said the strike targeted two Hezbollah members.

The Lebanese army last year began the disarmament process of Palestinian groups while the government has said that by the end of 2025 all the areas close to the border with Israel — known as the south Litani area — will be clear of Hezbollah's armed presence.

The Lebanese government is scheduled to discuss Hezbollah's disarmament during a meeting Thursday that will be attended by army commander Gen. Rudolph Haikal.

# New deadly clashes between Syrian forces, Kurdish fighters in Aleppo

*Associated Press*

DAMASCUS, Syria — Renewed clashes broke out Tuesday between Syrian government forces and Kurdish fighters in a contested area of the northern city of Aleppo, as efforts to merge the fighters with the national army have shown little progress.

Syria's state-run SANA news agency said a soldier was killed and three others were wounded in an attack by the Kurdish-led and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. State TV later reported that three civilians, including two women, were killed and others were wounded, including two children, in shelling of a residential area that it blamed on the SDF.

SANA said nine employees of the Aleppo Directorate of Agriculture were wounded by SDF shelling that hit its office.

The SDF in a statement denied being behind that shelling and asserted instead that a shell launched by "factions affiliated with the Damascus government" landed in the al-Midan neighborhood. The SDF claimed the target had been the adjacent Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood.

"This indiscriminate shelling constitutes a direct attack on residential areas and exposes the lives of civilians to grave danger," it said.

The SDF also said a drone strike launched by government forces had killed one resident of Sheikh Maqsoud and wounded two children, and that shelling in the nearby Bani Zaid neighborhood killed a woman and wounded dozens. There was no mention of those incidents in state media.

There have been intermittent clashes in the predominantly Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud and Achrafieh neighborhoods of Aleppo in recent months.

The leadership in Damascus under interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa signed a deal in March with the SDF, which controls much of the northeast. The SDF was to merge with the Syrian army by the end of 2025, but there have been disagreements on how it would happen.

Officials from the central government and SDF met again Sunday in Damascus, but government officials said no "tangible progress" had been made.

WORLD

# Snow, ice wreak havoc across Europe, causing chaos

By Mike Corder
*Associated Press*

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Snow, ice and freezing temperatures hit parts of Europe on Tuesday, causing treacherous traffic conditions that left at least five people dead in France and forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights from one of the continent's busiest airports.

Authorities in the Landes region of southwestern France reported three dead in accidents, and at least two more people were reportedly killed in the Île-de-France region around Paris, where authorities ordered trucks off the road as snowfall caused huge traffic jams on Monday.

Paris awoke Tuesday to a blanket of snow on its famous rooftops and sites, and children whose schools couldn't hold classes delighted in an unexpected day off. Air travelers were less happy, as heavy snowfall forced the closure of six airports in the north and west of France.

Bloomberg News reported temperatures in Mouthe in eastern France and Oberstdorf in the Bavarian Alps dipped to -22C, according to government forecasters.

As snow fell across the Netherlands, Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport reported that some 400 flights were grounded as crews worked to clear runways and de-ice planes waiting to depart. Hundreds of flights were canceled Monday in Amsterdam and more snow was forecast for the rest of the week.



Aurelien Morissard/AP

**A dog stands by the Sacre-Coeur basilica during a snowfall in Paris, Monday.**

Just getting to and from the airport outside the Dutch capital was a struggle with frozen points and an early morning software glitch throwing the Netherlands' rail system into turmoil. Limited rail services resumed later in the morning but routes around Amsterdam remained largely closed because of the icy conditions, national railway company NS said.

A combination of snow and ice snarled traffic on some highways.

In Rome, weeks of rain that have swollen the Tiber River over its banks again muted Pope Leo XIV's Christmas-time celebrations. St. Peter's Square was only partially full Tuesday as Leo delivered his Epiphany blessing.

Rome has been soaked by steady rains since before Christmas, and Mayor Roberto Gualtieri issued an ordinance limiting public access to parks and other areas at risk for falling trees and flooding.

Farther north, snow dusted Bologna and gave skiers in the Dolomites reason to cheer, though freezing temperatures are forecast for much of the north and central part of the peninsula over the coming days.

A cold snap sent the temperature in northern parts of Britain down to minus 9.5 degrees overnight, as snow disrupted rail, road and air travel and closed hundreds of schools.

Horse races and soccer matches have been called off because of snow and frost, a power failure caused by ice closed Glasgow's subway and Liverpool's John Lennon Airport was closed Monday.

Up to 6 inches of snow was forecast Tuesday for northern Scotland, where some people have already been snowed in.

Both heavy snow and heavy rain swept through Balkan countries, swelling rivers and creating problems in traffic and disruptions in power and water supplies. A woman died in Bosnia's capital Sarajevo on Monday after a snow-covered tree branch fell on her head. In neighboring Serbia, some western municipalities introduced emergency measures due to bad weather.

# Security forces clash with protesters in Iran's main market

By Jon Gambrel
*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Protesters angry over Iran's ailing economy conducted a sit-in Tuesday at Tehran's Grand Bazaar, witnesses said, with security forces ultimately firing tear gas and dispersing demonstrators as the rest of the market shut down.

The protest at the Grand Bazaar, the beating heart for centuries of both Iran's economic and political life, represents the latest signal that the demonstrations likely are to continue as the country's rial currency fell to a record low Tuesday. Already, violence surrounding the protests has killed at least 35 people with authorities detaining more than 1,200 others, activists abroad say.

Meanwhile, the situation is likely to worsen as Iran's Central Bank drastically reduced the subsidized exchange rates for dollars it offers to importers and producers in the country. That likely will see merchants pass on price hikes in the coming days for goods directly onto consumers, whose life savings already have dwindled over years of international sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic.

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# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Tim Walz drops bid for third term as governor

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Democrats' 2024 candidate for vice president, is ending his bid for a third term as governor amid President Donald Trump's relentless focus on a fraud investigation into child care programs in the state.

Less than four months after announcing his reelection campaign, Walz said Monday that he could no longer devote the energy necessary to win another term, even as he expressed confidence that he could win.

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota is considering running for governor, according to a person close to her. The person, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Klobuchar has not made a final decision.

Around a dozen Republicans are already in the race.

## 15-year-old charged in first homicide of 2026

ALBIRMINGHAM — A 15-year-old has been charged in Birmingham's first homicide of the new year.

The teen was charged with capital murder during a robbery and certain persons forbidden to possess a firearm.

Two other suspects remain held pending formal charges, Sgt. LaQuitta Wade said Sunday.

The victim has been identified as Morgan Brown. He was a 33-year-old father of a young daughter.

Brown's family said he doted on his daughter and described him as a loving person.

Wade said the preliminary investigation indicates Brown was robbed and fatally shot by the suspects, who immediately fled the scene.

## Open carry ban deemed unconstitutional

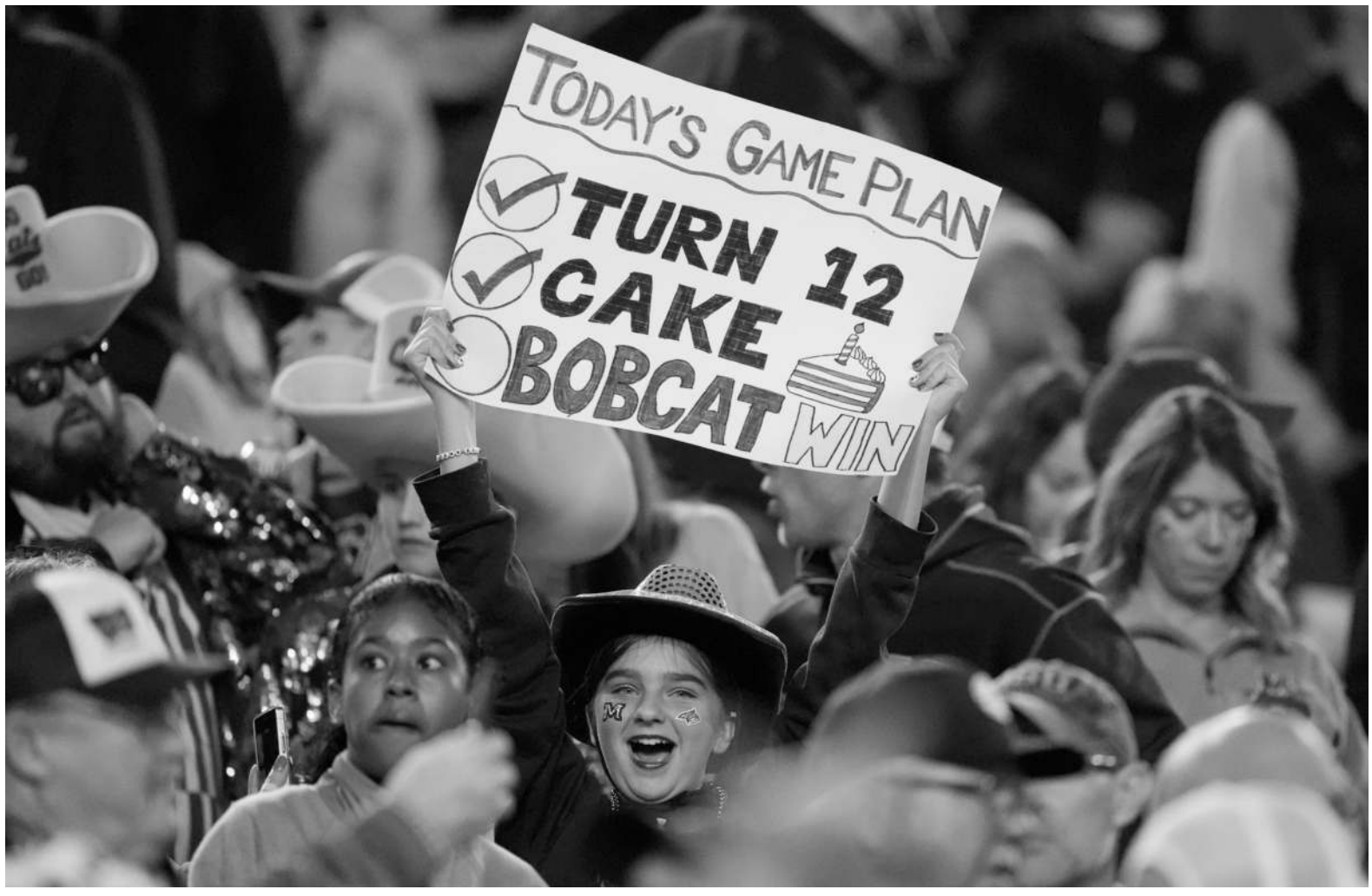
CASACRAMENTO — A federal appeals panel has ruled that a California law prohibiting open carry of firearms in heavily populated counties is unconstitutional.

The ruling was issued Friday by two judges on a three-judge panel for the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The judges found that the state's policy of limiting open carry to counties with a population of less than 200,000 is inconsistent with the Second Amendment.

"California's legal regime is a complete ban on open carry in urban areas — the areas of the state where 95% of the people live," they said in the decision.

The dissenting judge said California could limit open carry in more populated areas because it allows for concealed carry throughout the state.




GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

# Birthday wish comes true

**A Montana State fan waves a sign before the FCS Championship NCAA college football game Monday against Illinois State in Nashville, Tenn. The Bobcats beat the Redbirds 35-34 in overtime for the program's first national title since 1984.**

## Judge dismisses Louisville police reform proposal

KYLOUISVILLE — A federal judge in Kentucky has dismissed Louisville's proposed settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice over police reforms after the department withdrew its support of the plan.

The Justice Department announced in May it was canceling proposed consent decrees with Louisville and Minneapolis that sought to curb police bias and abuses after the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

Justice Department officials under President Joe Biden's administration conducted a multiyear investigation in Louisville prompted by the fatal shooting of Taylor and police responses to public protests in 2020.

New DOJ leadership accused the Biden Justice Department of using flawed legal theories to judge police departments and pursuing costly and burdensome consent decrees.

## Man who broke windows at VP's home detained

OHCINCINNATI — A man who broke windows at Vice President JD Vance's Ohio home and caused other property damage was detained early Monday, the U.S. Secret Service said.

William D. DeFoor, 26, is facing federal charges for allegedly damaging government property, engaging in physical violence against property in a restricted area and assaulting, resisting or impeding federal officers, according to the United States Attorney's office in Ohio's southern district.

DeFoor was detained after midnight by Secret Service agents assigned to Vance's home, east of downtown Cincinnati, agency spokesperson Anthony Guglielmi said in a statement. The vice president and his family were not at the home, his office said.

The Secret Service saw a man running along the front fence of Vance's residence and breach the property line, according to an affidavit filed Monday. The man had a hammer and vandalized an unmarked Secret Service vehicle on his way up the home's driveway before moving toward the front of the home and breaking its glass windows, the affidavit says.

DeFoor is accused of causing around $28,000 in damage, the affidavit says.

## Resident sows sunflowers where home once stood

CAALTADENA — Missi Dowd-Figueroa brought life back to the fire-ravaged plot where her home once stood — one sunflower at a time.

The registered nurse and mother of three lost her 1898 farm-style house in the Eaton Fire, one of two deadly wildfires that tore through the Los Angeles area last January, obliterating entire neighborhoods and displacing tens of thousands.

Dowd-Figueroa is among those who decided to stay. Her process of healing started with tiny seeds that gave her hope and eventually turned her barren property into a flourishing garden.

For several months, while Dowd-Figueroa and her husband took steps toward eventually building a new home, the garden flourished, blanketing a large swath of the lot with a colorful display of approximately 500 flowers — bright orange and red ones, as well as yellow ones with giant heads.

## Embattled superintendent abruptly resigns

MAWHITMAN — Whitman-Hanson Regional School District's superintendent resigned last week, leaving the position midway through the school year, the district's school committee announced Friday.

Superintendent Jeffrey Szymaniak's resignation went into effect on Jan. 1, the Whitman-Hanson School Committee wrote in a press release. Duval Elementary School Principal John Marcus took over as acting superintendent the same day.

Szymaniak's resignation follows months of criticism over a district budget deficit of approximately $1.4 million and the decision to lay off educators to help rectify the problem.

After the Whitman-Hanson school committee signed off on 25 position terminations this fall, students at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School protested the decision by walking out of their classes.

Anger toward the former superintendent intensified after he was absent from the most recent school committee meeting in November.

## EPA to propose drinking water perchlorate limit

DCWASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Monday said it would propose a drinking water limit for perchlorate, a harmful chemical in rockets and other explosives, but also said doing so wouldn't significantly benefit public health and that it was acting only because a court ordered it.

The agency said it will seek input on how strict the limit should be for perchlorate, which is particularly dangerous for infants, and require utilities to test. The agency's move is the latest in a more than decade-long battle over whether to regulate perchlorate.

Perchlorate is used to make rockets, fireworks and other explosives, although it can also occur naturally. At some defense, aerospace and manufacturing sites, it seeped into nearby groundwater where it could spread, a problem that has been concentrated in the Southwest and along sections of the East Coast.

From Associated Press and Tribune News Services reports

FACES

# Maintaining momentum

## Regional Mexican band Grupo Frontera's meteoric rise continues with Grammy nods

By Berenice Bautista
*Associated Press*

Regional Mexican band Grupo Frontera is heading to the 2026 Grammys with two nominations, following a double nod at the Latin Grammys, where the band competed for best regional Mexican song and a collaboration with Fuerza Regida.

While they didn't win a Latin Grammy, band members said they were honored to have shared the category with Los Tigres del Norte, a group they consider true legends. Now, Grupo Frontera looks ahead to the Grammys on Feb. 1, where it will compete for best Música Mexicana album (including Tejano) for its EP with Fuerza Regida, "Mala mía," and its solo EP "Y lo que viene."

These are the group's first Grammy nominations — a remarkable feat considering they only debuted in 2022.

"It's something you would never think, that someone who plays our style of music would be nominated," said the group's vocalist and bajo quinto performer, Adelaido "Payo" Solis III, about the Grammys.

The idea for an EP with Fuerza Regida came from guitarist Beto Acosta, who drew inspiration from the success of their hit "Bebé dame" and other important collaborations such as "Oasis" by Bad Bunny and J Balvin.

"Our vibes are similar," Payo said. "I feel that the chemistry is very cool."

The EP was recorded in Los Angeles, where the band took the opportunity to record additional material, including "Tu favorita," a collaboration with Fuerza Regida and Chilean artist Cris MJ, featured on their latest album, "Lo que me falta por llorar."

"The cool thing is that they are from Los Angeles and we are from Texas," Payo said of the band led by Jesús Ortiz Paz. "We kind of have a certain style that we grew up listening to ... I feel that that was a super perfect fusion."

Since the debut of "Lo que me falta por llorar," Grupo Frontera has maintained its momentum with a string of surprises and releases. Most recently, they joined Bad Bunny at one of his eight concerts in Mexico City to perform their hit "Un x100to." They also released "Beses así" with Calle 24, and the music video for "Se me sale," one of the songs on their album.

Next up for the band is a long-awaited international tour that will take them to Latin America and Europe, including stops in Bogota, Mexico City, Paris, London, Madrid, Milan, Quito, Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile.

The tour marks a return to the spotlight after a period of focusing on producing new music.

"We decided to take a break because, last year, we were releasing songs recorded right on stage," Payo said. "'Quédate, bebé' was actually recorded during a soundcheck that night ... To be honest, we didn't realize just how much we would miss being up there."

For "Lo que me falta por llorar," the band reunited with Edgar Barrera, the Mexican producer and composer currently nominated for his third consecutive Grammy for songwriter of the year. However, at Barrera's own suggestion, the band looked for other collaborators including Tito Double P, Los Dareyes de la Sierra, Ozuna and Myke Towers, who contributed their own styles.

The new album also marks Grupo Frontera's new approach of allowing themselves to embrace songs of pain.

"Normally, our lyrics are sad, but the music is happy," said Payo. "With this album ("Lo que me falta por llorar"), we try to make the sad songs actually sound sad."



Berenice Bautista/AP

**Alberto Acosta (left), Carlos Guerrero, Julian Pena, Adelaido "Payo" Solis III and Juan Javier Cantu of Grupo Frontera are up for Grammys for their EP with Fuerza Regida, "Mala mía," and solo EP "Y lo que viene."**

# New this week: Kid Laroi, 'The Pitt' and 'Tron: Ares'

*Associated Press*

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

### Movies

■ Audiences can reenter the Grid when "Tron: Ares" hits Disney+ on Wednesday. The franchise's third film stars Jared Leto, Greta Lee and Jodie Turner-Smith and features a return of Jeff Bridges. The 1982 original starred Bridges as a hacker who's transported into a dangerous digital world and kicked off the cult franchise with then-state-of-the-art computer graphics and special effects.

Associated Press critic Mark Kennedy praised Leto and Lee's performances and said despite being a movie that "bites off too much," it was worth a watch. A bonus for music fans? The film's Nine Inch Nails soundtrack with some throwbacks to the original film's score.

— AP film team

### Music

■ Grammy-nominated artist the Kid Laroi — a direct inheritor of Justin Bieber's glossy R&B-informed pop — will release his second album, "Before I Forget," on Friday. Judging by the previously released singles, listeners can expect slow-burn breakup reflections ("A Perfect World") and high-hat-heavy tracks with lovelorn lyrics ("A Cold Play"). It's frictionless listening to start the new year.

— AP Music Writer
Maria Sherman

### Television

■ In what counts as a quick turnaround these days in the world of prestige TV, "The Pitt" returns for its second season, and a second day in the life of a frenetic Pittsburgh emergency room run by Noah Wyle's beleaguered and beloved Dr. Robby. The first episode of Season 2 premieres Thursday on HBO Max at 9 p.m. EST. Expectations will be a lot higher this time. In the 10 months since Season 1 ended, "The Pitt" won the best drama Emmy along with four other awards, including best actor for Wyle and supporting actress for Katherine LaNasa, who will be returning despite her character vowing to quit after taking a punch. Ten months have also passed in the world of the show, which will again follow a single ER shift, this time on a July Fourth weekend.

■ After a much, much longer absence, "The Night Manager" will return for a second season. It's been nearly a decade since Tom Hiddleston's hotel worker-turned-spy stalked a dirty arms dealer on the show based on a novel by John le Carré. It was meant to be a limited series for the BBC and AMC, but its creators are now bringing it back with a new and original story. This time, its airing on Prime Video in the U.S., beginning with a three-episode drop on Sunday.

— AP Entertainment Writer
Andrew Dalton



Prime Video

**Tom Hiddleston, left, returns as Jonathan Pine in "The Night Manager." The first three episodes of the show's second season will be available Sunday on Prime Video. Also pictured: Camila Morrone.**

## South Korean movie star Ahn Sung-ki dies at 74

Ahn Sung-ki, one of South Korean cinema's biggest stars whose prolific 60-year career and positive, gentle public image earned him the nickname "The Nation's Actor," died Monday. He was 74.

Ahn, who had blood cancer for years, died at Seoul's Soonchunhyang University Hospital, his agency, the Artist Company, and hospital officials said.

Born to a filmmaker in the southeastern city of Daegu in 1952, Ahn made his debut as a child actor in the movie "The Twilight Train" in 1957. He subsequently appeared in about 70 movies before he left the industry.

Ahn returned to the film industry in 1977. In 1980, he rose to fame for his lead role in Lee Jang-ho's "Good, Windy Days." Ahn won the best new actor award in the prestigious Grand Bell Awards, the Korean version of the Academy Awards.

He later starred in a series of highly successful and critically acclaimed movies, sweeping best actor awards and becoming arguably the country's most popular actor in much of the 1980s-90s.

From The Associated Press

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## EDITORIAL

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

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

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

## BUREAU STAFF

### Europe/Mideast
+49(0)631.3615.9324; DSN (314)583.9324

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

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

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

## CIRCULATION

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

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

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

## CONTACT US

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

### Reader letters
letters@stripes.com

### Additional contacts
stripes.com/contactus

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Jacqueline Smith

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# OPINION

## A tragic transformation of the Kennedy Center

**BY CHRISTINE LEDBETTER**
*Chicago Tribune*

President Donald Trump wasn't joking when he welcomed guests to the live "Trump-Kennedy Center Honors" on Dec. 7, a comment that was cut in the televised version Dec. 23. Shortly after the original event, the president's handpicked board voted to rename the center. Guess who got top billing?

Signage was erected on the facade the day after the vote to read: The Donald J. Trump and The John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts.

To understand how the Kennedy Center came to be bullied into submission, let's recap Trump's relationship with it.

During his first term, several honorees suggested they would boycott the 2017 White House reception after Trump defended white supremacist marches in Charlottesville, Va. In response, the Trumps skipped the honors all four years to avoid "political distraction."

During his second term, he roared back with revenge. He fired the center's top leadership; dismantled its bipartisan board and anointed a new one of loyalists; named a former envoy as president; and installed himself as chairman.

Over 100 staff members have been fired or resigned, departments dismantled and programming curtailed. As a result, ticket sales plummeted, and top touring acts withdrew.

Trump personally oversaw the honors, including replacing the iconic medallions, trimmed with a rainbow ribbon for 47 years, with a solid blue one. He chose the honorees instead of a selection process involving artists, board members and center officials. He also hosted the 48th annual Kennedy Center Honors ceremony — the first president to do so.

He claimed he didn't have much time to prepare. Certainly he has been busy deflecting the fallout over Jeffrey Epstein's crimes and building a $300 million ballroom where the East Wing once stood. He found congressional money for a $257 million renovation for the Kennedy Center, while ending arts funding across the nation.

Stars strolling the red carpet weren't A-listers of years past. Instead, the grand entrance was strewn with Fox News personalities, members of his administration and others who should have had name tags to be recognized.

The "unbelievable talent" for the 2025 honors were George Strait, Kiss, Sylvester Stallone, Gloria Gaynor and Michael Crawford.

Departing from tradition, there was no nominee from the fine arts — no dancers, composers, classical musicians or opera stars.

Nashville luminaries came, but Hollywood stayed home.

**Once a behemoth of culture and a refuge from politics, the center now endorses a narrow vision of art and espouses a MAGA agenda.**

Country stars Miranda Lambert, Vince Gill and Brooks & Dunn saluted Strait. Presenters for the other nominees were Kurt Russell for Stallone, Kelsey Grammer for Crawford, Elle King for Gaynor and Garth Brooks for Kiss.

The show was bloated, as usual, but without tour de force performances such as when Aretha Franklin sang "A Natural Woman" for Carole King or Heart performed Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven." There were no presenters for the mourned Rob Reiner, who had honored both Norman Lear and Billy Crystal, and whose death the president spitefully said resulted from the director's anti-Trump activism.

Trump, however, was everywhere: opening the show with his customary ineloquence and introducing the segments by prerecorded remarks. He reappeared on stage before Cheap Trick's forgettable finale of "Rock and Roll All Nite." The event was co-opted as a starring vehicle for the president with acolytes as costars. And while Trump had predicted his hosting would be the highest-rated honors ever done, it was the lowest, according to Nielsen's preliminary data.

Once a behemoth of culture and a refuge from politics, the center now endorses a narrow vision of art and espouses a MAGA agenda.

The Kennedy Center has never been a performing arts venue only. Founded in 1971, it serves as a living memorial to a slain president who supported the arts. Programming reflected the country's diversity and was dedicated to bringing culture to all Americans.

Until now. Since the takeover, it has sponsored a NewsNation Town Hall, U.S.-Saudi Investment Forum, a prayer vigil for right-wing activist Charlie Kirk and the World Cup draw. It will also host the premiere of "Melania," a documentary about the first lady.

Trump stamping his name on buildings is not new. But the proliferation of his branding on government entities shows a brazen vigor at self-promotion. Commemorative Trump coins are planned for the 250th anniversary of Declaration of Independence. The Institute of Peace was renamed the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace, ironic given lethal — and probably illegal — strikes in the Caribbean, as well as attacks in Syria and threats to take over Greenland. Up next: Trump-class battleships.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty is suing Trump, and U.S. Rep. April McClain Delaney is introducing legislation to prohibit the name change. Trump, however, is impervious to legal restraints.

The Kennedy family and arts groups such as Hands off the Arts, American Guild of Musical Artists and Actors' Equity Association condemn the renaming.

"Adding your name to a memorial already named in honor of a great man doesn't make you a great man," said Maria Shriver, a Kennedy niece.

Meanwhile, Trump has "joked" about giving himself an honors award. Given recent history, it's probably not a joke — just another stake in the heart of the once-great national arts center.

*Christine Ledbetter is a former senior arts editor at The Washington Post who lives in Illinois, where she writes about culture and politics.*

## The national spotlight ends Walz's political career

*The Washington Post Editorial Board*

Tim Walz has never lost an election in Minnesota. That record will remain intact following his Monday announcement that he is dropping out of the race for reelection to a third term as governor.

Turns out being the Democratic nominee for vice president in 2024 was the worst thing that ever happened to Walz's political career.

He won six U.S. House races, starting with a 2006 upset over a GOP incumbent, but remained relatively obscure and kept a low profile in the House. He won two terms as governor by comfortable margins. And he and Vice President Kamala Harris carried his home state in 2024 by four points.

Harris said in her book that the 61-year-old was not her first choice for running mate. That was Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, but Harris didn't believe Americans could vote for a Black woman and a gay man at the same time. Walz's straightness, and plainness, seemed to make him the safer choice.

Safer for Harris, that is. Under the intense glare of the national spotlight, Walz's underexamined record didn't hold up. A tough congressional race is nothing compared with being on a major-party presidential ticket.

Scrutiny of Walz's past statements wasn't flattering. He had said he was in Hong Kong during the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. He was in Nebraska. He had described certain guns as "weapons of war that I carried in war." He never saw combat during his time in the National Guard. His go-to defense was Midwestern folksiness and that he just "speaks like everybody else."

But his actual governing record was more troubling than his verbal flubs. As rampant welfare fraud in Minnesota has resulted in a cascade of federal indictments, Walz has insisted that he was focused all along on cleaning up fraud. If that's true, he's really bad at cleaning up fraud, because the problem exploded under his governorship.

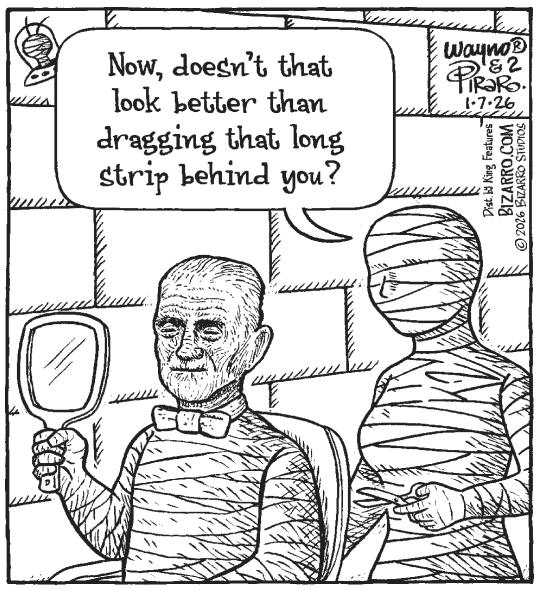
Conservatives have been critical of Walz's performance for seven years, especially his draconian restrictions during the COVID pandemic. He took advantage of unified Democratic control in St. Paul to sign into law a laundry list of far-reaching progressive priorities and hiking taxes to pay for them.

Ultimately, Walz might have prevailed by using President Donald Trump as a foil in what is poised to a be a good midterm year for Democrats nationally, but it would have been tough sledding. As swing voters increasingly felt Walz fatigue, an electable Republican alternative — not Mike Lindell, the MyPillow guy — could have toppled him.

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar, expected to announce she will run for governor now that Walz is out, would be the prohibitive favorite. She is a serious and savvy legislator who would do the country a service by cleaning up the fraud mess and focusing on pro-growth policy in her home state.

Harris and Walz might both wish that Harris had selected Buttigieg instead, though that ticket also probably would have lost.

## Bizarro



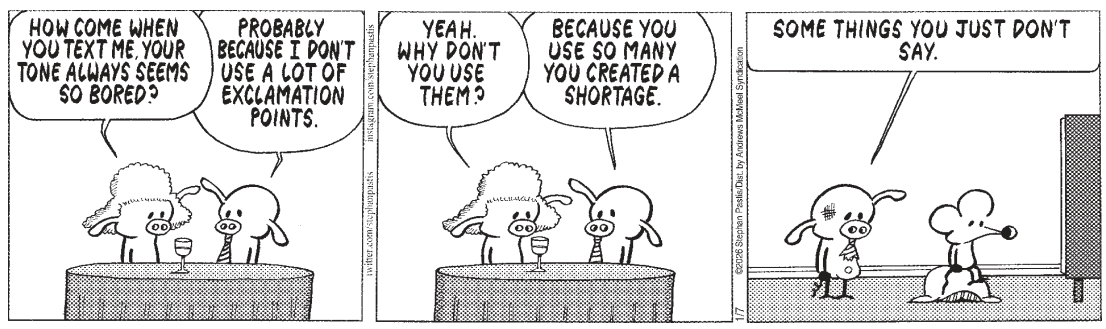

## Loose Parts




## Frazz




## Pearls Before Swine




## Non Sequitur



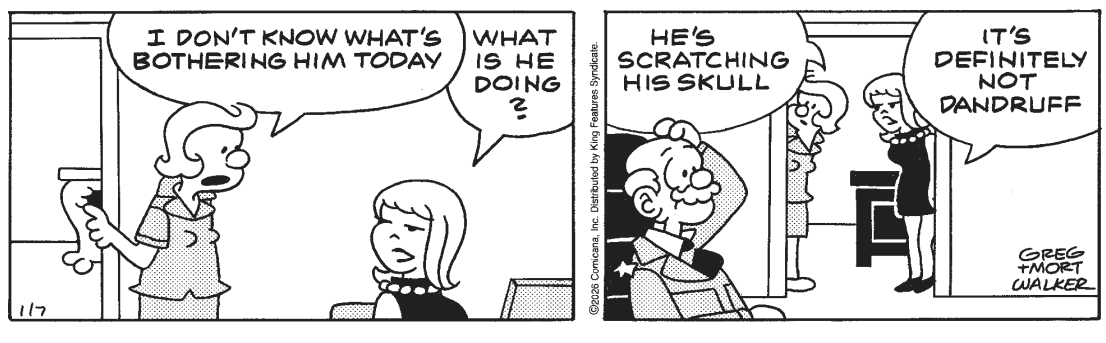

## Wumo




## Carpe Diem




## Beetle Bailey




## Eugene Sheffer Crossword

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | ■ | 5 | 6 | 7 | ■ | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 12 | | | | ■ | 13 | | | ■ | 14 | | | |
| 15 | | | | 16 | | | | ■ | 17 | | | |
| 18 | | | | | ■ | ■ | 19 | 20 | | | | |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | 21 | | 22 | 23 | ■ | 24 | | | ■ | ■ |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | | ■ | 28 | | 29 | | ■ | 30 | 31 | 32 |
| 33 | | | ■ | 34 | | | | | ■ | 35 | | |
| 36 | | | ■ | 37 | | | | ■ | 38 | | | |
| ■ | ■ | 39 | 40 | | ■ | 41 | | 42 | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 43 | 44 | | | | 45 | ■ | ■ | 46 | | 47 | 48 | 49 |
| 50 | | | | ■ | 51 | 52 | 53 | | | | | |
| 54 | | | | ■ | 55 | | | ■ | 56 | | | |
| 57 | | | | ■ | 58 | | | ■ | 59 | | | |

### ACROSS

1 Name of 12 popes
5 Pool unit
8 Trudge
12 "Insecure" actress Rae
13 Right angle
14 — bean
15 Previous incarnation
17 Miles away
18 Aleppo's land
19 Blood line
21 Linguist Chomsky
24 That girl
25 Cartoon frames
28 Bud holder
30 Copper head?
33 Egg (Pref.)
34 Salami variety
35 Nourished
36 Klutz
37 Saharan
38 Sch. supporters
39 Night school subj.
41 Beer buy
43 Defy
46 Singer Mariah
50 Valhalla VIP
51 Extravagant existence
54 Stupor
55 Lupino of film
56 Jazz singer James
57 Diving duck
58 Refusals
59 Sprint

### DOWN

1 Gladys Knight's backup
2 "By Jove!"
3 Cold War initials
4 Lustrous fabrics
5 Maui souvenir
6 TV alien
7 Entreaty
8 Roofing material
9 Emergency vessel
10 Epps of "This Is Us"
11 Indiana city
16 Asian language
20 Ostrich kin
22 Say it's so
23 Frenzied
25 Bill's partner
26 Longoria of TV
27 Full-scale
29 Pop
31 Actress Arthur
32 Mag. staff
34 Women
38 Rang
40 Tendon
42 Learning ctr.
43 Scepters
44 Wax-coated cheese
45 Reedy
47 Broadway star Moreno
48 New newts
49 "Amen!"
52 Altar vow
53 Petrol

### Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

**1-7**

### CRYPTOQUIP

BHLDVLKXA VDQYXRJX RLHYD LMXL HPPDYR HVAG HVD QYXVO HP BKXVHR XVO WHLHYQKJDR:

"HWXMX GXWXMX."

**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:** IF A HARDY FLOWER KEEPS GROWING BACK EACH TIME YOU PICK IT, SHOULD YOU CALL IT A BLOOMERANG?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals O

# SCOREBOARD/NFL

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

### AP Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking.

| | Record | Pts | Prv |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Arizona (32) | 14-0 | 1494 | 1 |
| 2. Michigan (29) | 13-0 | 1493 | 2 |
| 3. Iowa St. | 14-0 | 1390 | 3 |
| 4. UConn | 14-1 | 1343 | 4 |
| 5. Purdue | 13-1 | 1254 | 5 |
| 6. Duke | 13-1 | 1206 | 6 |
| 7. Houston | 13-1 | 1113 | 8 |
| 8. Gonzaga | 16-1 | 1101 | 7 |
| 9. BYU | 13-1 | 1039 | 10 |
| 10. Nebraska | 14-0 | 998 | 13 |
| 11. Vanderbilt | 14-0 | 936 | 11 |
| 12. Michigan St. | 12-2 | 834 | 9 |
| 13. Alabama | 11-3 | 782 | 14 |
| 14. Texas Tech | 11-3 | 676 | 15 |
| 15. Arkansas | 11-3 | 659 | 18 |
| 16. Illinois | 11-3 | 602 | 20 |
| 17. North Carolina | 13-2 | 557 | 12 |
| 18. Georgia | 13-1 | 378 | 23 |
| 19. Iowa | 12-2 | 340 | 25 |
| 20. Louisville | 11-3 | 336 | 16 |
| 21. Tennessee | 10-4 | 277 | 19 |
| 22. Kansas | 10-4 | 208 | 17 |
| 23. Virginia | 12-2 | 183 | 21 |
| 24. SMU | 12-2 | 142 | - |
| 25. UCF | 12-1 | 132 | - |

**Others receiving votes:** Villanova 127, Seton Hall 31, Southern Cal 28, Utah St. 27, Miami (Ohio) 22, Clemson 21, Saint Louis 14, LSU 14, Texas 12, Florida 11, Saint Mary's 10, Kentucky 9, California 8, Miami 5, Indiana 4, Auburn 3, TCU 2, UCLA 2, Virginia Tech 2.

### USA Today Men's Top 25

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

| | | Pts | Prv | 1st |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Michigan (13-0) | 768 | 1 | 24 |
| 2 | Arizona (14-0) | 749 | 2 | 7 |
| 3 | Iowa State (14-0) | 703 | 3 | 0 |
| 4 | Connecticut (14-1) | 666 | 4 | 0 |
| 5 | Purdue (13-1) | 624 | 6 | 0 |
| 6 | Duke (13-1) | 616 | 5 | 0 |
| 7 | Houston (13-1) | 584 | 8 | 0 |
| 8 | Gonzaga (16-1) | 565 | 7 | 0 |
| 9 | BYU (13-1) | 527 | 10 | 0 |
| 10 | Vanderbilt (14-0) | 488 | 11 | 0 |
| 11 | Nebraska (14-0) | 473 | 13 | 0 |
| 12 | Alabama (11-3) | 403 | 15 | 0 |
| 13 | Michigan St. (12-2) | 400 | 9 | 0 |
| 14 | Texas Tech (11-3) | 345 | 16 | 0 |
| 15 | Arkansas (11-3) | 334 | 18 | 0 |
| 16 | Illinois (11-3) | 294 | 19 | 0 |
| 17 | N. Carolina (13-2) | 250 | 12 | 0 |
| 18 | Louisville (11-3) | 232 | 13 | 0 |
| 19 | Iowa (12-2) | 211 | 23 | 0 |
| 20 | Georgia (13-1) | 164 | 24 | 0 |
| 21 | Kansas (10-4) | 131 | 17 | 0 |
| 22 | Tennessee (10-4) | 123 | 20 | 0 |
| 23 | Virginia (12-2) | 120 | 21 | 0 |
| 24 | Villanova (12-2) | 70 | NR | 0 |
| 25 | SMU (12-2) | 42 | NR | 0 |

**Dropped out:** No. 22 Florida (9-5); No. 25 St. John's (9-5).

**Others receiving votes:** Central Florida (12-1) 41; Utah State (12-1) 34; Clemson (12-3) 29; Florida (9-5) 21; Saint Mary's (15-2) 17; Seton Hall (13-2) 13; Saint Louis (13-1) 11; Indiana (11-3) 10; St. John's (9-5) 4; Kentucky (9-5) 3; Miami (Ohio) (15-0) 3; Missouri (11-3) 3; California (13-2) 2; Southern California (12-2) 1; Oklahoma State (12-2) 1.

### Monday's men's scores

**EAST**

Columbia 104, Cornell 99
Dartmouth 76, Harvard 68
Princeton 78, Pennsylvania 76
Rutgers 88, Oregon 85, OT
Yale 70, Brown 53

**SOUTH**

Alabama A&M 71, Mississippi Valley State 51
Charleston 88, William & Mary 79
Grambling State 84, Texas Southern 67
McNeese 66, Stephen F. Austin 64
New Orleans 83, East Texas A&M 73
Nicholls State 74, Northwestern State 72
Prairie View A&M 89, Southern University 85
Southeastern Louisiana 60, Lamar 52

**MIDWEST**

Green Bay 79, Milwaukee 76
Michigan State 80, USC 51
Nebraska 72, Ohio State 69

**SOUTHWEST**

Arkansas-Pine Bluff 90, Alabama State 79
Texas A&M-CC 81, Houston Christian 65

**FAR WEST**

Texas Rio Grande Valley 80, Incarnate Word 67

### Men's Top 25 schedule

**Tuesday's games**

No. 2 Michigan (13-0) at Penn State (9-5)
No. 6 Duke (13-1) at No. 20 Louisville (11-3)
No. 7 Houston (13-1) vs. No. 14 Texas Tech (11-3)
No. 18 Georgia (13-1) at Florida (9-5)
No. 19 Iowa (12-2) at Minnesota (9-5)
No. 21 Tennessee (10-4) vs. Texas (9-5)
No. 22 Kansas (10-4) vs. TCU (11-3)
No. 25 UCF (12-1) at Oklahoma State (12-2)

**Wednesday's games**

No. 1 Arizona (14-0) vs. Kansas State (9-5)
No. 3 Iowa State (14-0) at Baylor (10-3)
No. 4 UConn (14-1) at Providence (8-6)
No. 5 Purdue (13-1) vs. Washington (9-5)
No. 9 BYU (13-1) vs. Arizona State (9-5)
No. 11 Vanderbilt (14-0) vs. No. 13 Alabama (11-3)
No. 15 Arkansas (11-3) at Ole Miss (8-6)
No. 23 Virginia (12-2) vs. California (13-2)
No. 24 SMU (12-2) at Clemson (12-3)

**Thursday's games**

No. 8 Gonzaga (16-1) vs. Santa Clara (13-4)
No. 12 Michigan State (12-2) vs. Northwestern (8-6)
No. 16 Illinois (11-3) vs. Rutgers (7-7)

### AP Women's Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' women's college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking.

| | Record | Pts | Prv |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. UConn (28) | 15-0 | 796 | 1 |
| 2. Texas (4) | 17-0 | 772 | 2 |
| 3. South Carolina | 15-1 | 725 | 3 |
| 4. UCLA | 14-1 | 715 | 4 |
| 5. Oklahoma | 14-1 | 654 | 8 |
| 6. Kentucky | 15-1 | 625 | 11 |
| 7. Vanderbilt | 15-0 | 621 | 12 |
| 8. Maryland | 15-1 | 537 | 7 |
| 9. Michigan | 11-2 | 517 | 6 |
| 10. Louisville | 14-3 | 485 | 13 |
| 11. Iowa St. | 14-1 | 462 | 10 |
| 12. LSU | 14-2 | 456 | 5 |
| 13. TCU | 14-1 | 454 | 8 |
| 14. Iowa | 12-2 | 403 | 14 |
| 15. Michigan St. | 14-1 | 280 | 24 |
| 16. Baylor | 13-3 | 278 | 22 |
| 17. Texas Tech | 16-0 | 263 | 21 |
| 18. Mississippi | 14-3 | 243 | 15 |
| 19. Ohio St. | 13-2 | 237 | 19 |
| 20. Tennessee | 10-3 | 162 | 23 |
| 21. Southern Cal | 10-4 | 150 | 17 |
| 22. North Carolina | 13-4 | 129 | 16 |
| 23. Washington | 12-2 | 117 | - |
| 24. Princeton | 13-1 | 91 | 25 |
| 25. Nebraska | 13-2 | 65 | 20 |

**Others receiving votes:** Illinois 58, Notre Dame 27, Stanford 25, NC State 22, Alabama 13, West Virginia 9, Georgia 5, Duke 3, Oklahoma St. 1.

### Monday's women's scores

**EAST**

Brown 88, Yale 72

**MIDWEST**

Iowa 67, Northwestern 58
Michigan 70, Minnesota 60
Purdue Fort Wayne 71, IUPUI 46
Youngstown State 81, Oakland 58

### Women's Top 25 schedule

**Tuesday's game**

No. 21 USC (10-4) vs. Oregon (13-3)

**Wednesday's games**

No. 1 UConn (15-0) vs. St. John's (13-3)
No. 11 Iowa State (14-1) at Cincinnati (5-10)
No. 13 TCU (14-1) vs. Oklahoma State (13-3)
No. 17 Texas Tech (16-0) at West Virginia (13-2)
No. 19 Ohio State (13-2) at Illinois (13-2)

**Thursday's games**

No. 2 Texas (17-0) vs. Auburn (11-5)
No. 3 South Carolina (15-1) at Arkansas (11-6)
No. 5 Oklahoma (14-1) vs. No. 18 Ole Miss (14-3)
No. 6 Kentucky (15-1) at Alabama (15-1)
No. 7 Vanderbilt (15-0) vs. Missouri (12-5)
No. 8 Maryland (15-1) at Rutgers (8-7)
No. 9 Michigan (11-2) at Penn State (7-8)
No. 10 Louisville (14-3) at Miami (FL) (10-5)
No. 12 LSU (14-2) at Georgia (15-1)
No. 15 Michigan State (14-1) at No. 23 Washington (12-2)
No. 16 Baylor (13-3) vs. Colorado (11-4)
No. 20 Tennessee (10-3) at Mississippi State (14-2)
No. 25 Nebraska (13-2) vs. Indiana (11-5)

**Saturday's games**

No. 17 Texas Tech (16-0) at Cincinnati (5-10)
No. 24 Princeton (13-1) at Yale (4-9)

## DEALS

### Monday's transactions

**BASEBALL**
**Major League Baseball**
**American League**

**BALTIMORE ORIOLES** — Claimed OF Jhonkensy Noel off waivers from Cleveland. Designated RHP George Soriano for assignment.

**National League**

**MILWAUKEE BREWERS** — Named Spencer Allen first base coach, Guillermo Martinez and Daniel Vogelbach hitting coaches and Juan Sandoval assistant pitching coach.

**SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS** — Agreed to terms with RHP Tyler Mahle on a one-year major league contract.

**WASHINGTON NATIONALS** — Claimed OF Joey Wiemer off waivers from San Francisco.

**BASKETBALL**
**National Basketball Association**

**INDIANA PACERS** — Waived C Tony Bradley.

**FOOTBALL**
**National Football League**

**ARIZONA CARDINALS** — Fired head coach Jonathan Gannon.

**ATLANTA FALCONS** — Signed WR Chris Blair, P Trenton Gill, DBs Tysheem Johnson and A.J. Woods, DT Ben Stille, OT Andrew Stueber and RB Carlos Washington to reserve/futures contracts.

**CINCINNATI BENGALS** — Signed LBs Liam Anderson and Antwaun Powell-Ryland, C Jacob Bayer, RB Gary Brightwell, QB Sean Clifford, Ts Andrew Coker and Javon Foster, DT Howard Cross III, WRs Xavier Johnson and Jordan Moore, CBs Jalen Kimber and Bralyn Lux and S Russ Yeast to reserve/futures contracts. Signed DE Isaiah Foskey, LBs Joe Giles-Harris and Shaka Heyward, TE Cam Grandy, S PJ Jules and WR Mitch Tinsley to one-year contract extensions.

**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Fired head coach Kevin Stefanski. Signed TEs Sal Cannella and Caden Prieskorn, G Jack Conley, WR Luke Floriea, RB Ahmani Marshall and T Tyre Phillips to reserve/futures contracts.

**DETROIT LIONS** — Signed OLs Devin Cochran and Mason Miller, WRs Malik Cunningham and Jackson Meeks, DE Ahmed Hassanein, TE Zach Horton, RB Jabari Small, DL Chris Smith and S Loren Strickland to reserve/futures contracts. Re-signed OL Michael Niese, RB Jacob Saylors and CB Nick Whiteside.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Signed LB Austin Ajiake to a one-year contract extension. Signed RB Ulysses Bentley IV, QB Seth Henigan, T Bayron Matos, C Jimmy Morrissey, CB Wyett Ekeler, DT Tim Smith, TE Sean McKeon, Gs LaDarius Henderson, Bill Murray and Josh Sills, DEs Viliami Fehoko Jr. and Durell Nchami, Ss Ben Nikkel and Trey Washington and WRs Coleman Owen and Eli Pancol to futures contracts.

**LAS VEGAS RAIDERS** — Fired head coach Pete Carroll. Signed RB Chris Collier, Gs McClendon Curtis and Layden Robinson, LB Jamin Davis, WRs Phillip Dorsett II, Brenden Rice and Justin Shorter, DT Treven Ma'ae, Ts Joshua Miles and Dalton Wagner, TE Albert Okwuegbunam and OL Laki Tasi to reserve/futures contracts.

**LOS ANGELES CHARGERS** — Signed G Ben Cleveland to the practice squad. Waived S Marcus Maye.

**MINNESOTA VIKINGS** — Signed WRs Dontae Fleming, Joaquin Davis and Jeshaun Jones, S Kahlef Hailassie, LB Josh Ross, G Vershon Lee, T Caleb Etienne and TE Bryson Nesbit to reserve/futures contracts.

**NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** — Signed DBs Dalys Beanum, Beanie Bishop Jr. and Jayden Price, WR Elijah Cooks, S Elliott Davison, DT Coziah Izzard and Ts Easton Kilty and Barry Wesley to reserve/futures contracts.

**PITTSBURGH STEELERS** — Waived CB Tre Flowers.

**TENNESSEE TITANS** — Signed CB Keydrain Calligan, LBs Nate Lynn and Cam Riley, DE David Ebuka Agoha, G Clay Webb, NT Isaiah Raikes, WRs Hal Presley III and Xavier Restrepo, DT Timmy Horne, RB Blake Watson and TE Joel Wilson to reserve/futures contracts.

**WASHINGTON COMMANDERS** — Signed G Sala Aumavae-Laulu, DT Ricky Barber, WRs Ja'Corey Brooks and Jacoby Jones, CBs Tre Hawkins, Darius Rush and Car'lin Vigers, DEs D.J. Johnson and TJ Maguranyanga, S Rob McDaniel and T Tim McKay to reserve/futures contracts.

**HOCKEY**
**National Hockey League**

**CALGARY FLAMES** — Recalled F William Strömgren.

**DALLAS STARS** — Reinstated G Casey DeSmith from the non-roster list. Reinstated F Nathan Bastian from his conditioning assignment. Sent G Remi Poirier to Texas (AHL).

**MINNESOTA WILD** — Recalled D David Jiricek from Iowa (AHL).

**NASHVILLE PREDATORS** — Signed G Justus Annunen to a two-year contract.

**SAN JOSE SHARKS** — Recalled F Patrick Giles from San Jose (AHL). Placed D John Klingberg on injured reserve.

**TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING** — Sent F Maxim Groshev to Syracuse (AHL).

**TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS** — Recalled D Marshall Rifai from Toronto (AHL). Placed F William Nylander on injured reserve.

**SOCCER**
**Major League Soccer**

**FC DALLAS** — Signed Fs Jaidyn Contreras, Ds Kaka Scabin and Slade Starnes and M Caleb Swann to two-year contracts.

**MINNESOTA UNITED** — Acquired an international roster spot from Toronto FC in exchange for $300,000 in general allocation money.

**NEW YORK RED BULLS** — Mutually terminated the contract of D Alexander Hack.

**SPORTING KANSAS CITY** — Named Raphael Wicky head coach and signed him to a two-and-a-half-year contract.

## PRO FOOTBALL

### NFL playoffs

**WILD-CARD**
**Saturday, Jan. 10**

LA Rams at Carolina, **AFN-Sports, 10:30 p.m. Saturday CET, 6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Green Bay at Chicago, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Sunday CET, 10 a.m. Sunday JKT**

**Sunday, Jan. 11**

Buffalo at Jacksonville, **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Sunday CET, 3 a.m. Sunday JKT**
San Francisco at Philadelphia, **AFN-Sports, 10:30 p.m. Sunday CET, 6:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
LA Chargers at New England, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Monday CET, 10 a.m. Monday JKT**

**Monday, Jan. 12**

Houston at Pittsburgh, **AFN-Sports, 2:15 a.m. Tuesday CET, 10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT**

**DIVISIONAL ROUND**
**Saturday, Jan. 17 and Sunday, Jan. 18**

AFC lowest remaining seed at Denver
NFC lowest remaining seed at Seattle
Two remaining seeds at higher seed
Two remaining seeds at higher seed

**CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS**
**Sunday, Jan. 25**
**AFC**

At AFC highest remaining seed

**NFC**

At NFC highest remaining seed

## TENNIS

### WTA Brisbane International

**Tuesday**
**At Brisbane, Australia**
**Purse: $1,691,602**
**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**
**Seedings in parentheses**
**Women's Singles**
**Round of 32**

Madison Keys (5), United States, def. McCartney Kessler, United States, 6-4, 6-3
Aryna Sabalenka (1), Belarus, def. Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-0, 6-1
Diana Shnaider (12), Russia, def. Anastasia Potapova, Russia, 6-1, 6-3
Ekaterina Alexandrova (7), Russia, def. Sofia Kenin, United States, 7-6 (2), 6-3
Sorana Cirstea, Romania, def. Jelena Ostapenko (14), Latvia, 6-2, 7-6 (5)
Karolina Muchova (11), Czechia, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (5)
Elena Rybakina (3), Kazakhstan, def. Zhang Shuai, China, 6-3, 7-5
Paula Badosa (15), Spain, def. Marie Bouzkova, Czechia, 6-7 (4), 6-4, 6-2

**Women's Doubles**
**Round of 16**

Alexandra Panova and Irina Khromacheva (4), Russia, def. Clara Tauson, Denmark, and Linda Noskova, Czechia, 7-6 (6), 6-1
Lyudmyla Kichenok and Nadiia Kichenok, Ukraine, def. Miyu (1994) Kato, Japan, and Fanny Stollar, Hungary, 2-6, 6-2, 10-7

**Quarterfinals**

Aleksandra Krunic, Serbia, and Anna Danilina (2), Kazakhstan, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova and Mirra Andreeva, Russia, 6-1, 6-3

### ATP Hong Kong Open

**Tuesday**
**At Hong Kong, China**
**Purse: $700,045**
**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**
**Seedings in parentheses**
**Men's Singles**
**Round of 32**

Alexandre Muller (7), France, def. Miomir Kecmanovic, Serbia, 7-5, 6-4
Lorenzo Sonego (5), Italy, def. Rei Sakamoto, Japan, 6-2, 7-6 (4)
Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Argentina, def. Valentin Royer, France, 6-4, 7-5
Coleman Wong, Hong Kong, China, def. Mariano Navone, Argentina, 6-3, 7-5
Gabriel Diallo (6), Canada, def. Jesper De Jong, Netherlands, 6-4, 7-6 (7)
Michael Mmoh, United States, def. Alejandro Tabilo, Chile, 7-5, 6-4
Marcos Giron, United States, def. Laslo Djere, Serbia, 6-2, 6-0
Botic Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, def. Jan-Lennard Struff, Germany, 6-3, 1-6, 6-1
Juncheng Shang, China, def. Francisco Comesana, Argentina, 6-4, 6-4



MATT PATTERSON/AP

**Dallas Cowboys defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus is out after just one season.**

# Dallas fires DC Eberflus

## Cowboys' defense posted historic lows

BY SCHUYLER DIXON
*Associated Press*

FRISCO, Texas — The Dallas Cowboys have fired first-year defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus after they allowed the most points and intercepted the fewest passes in franchise history, two people with knowledge of the decision said Tuesday.

It's the second consecutive season in which Eberflus has been fired. He was let go midseason in 2024, his third year as head coach of the Chicago Bears. The people spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the decision hasn't been announced.

Eberflus made it to the end of the season in his return to Dallas, where he had been an assistant from 2011-17 before going to the Indianapolis Colts as defensive coordinator. But the 55-year-old's fate appeared sealed before Sunday's finale, a 34-17 loss at the New York Giants that set a club record as the ninth game of allowing at least 30 points.

The departure of Eberflus means the Cowboys will have their fourth defensive coordinator in four seasons, following Dan Quinn in 2023, Mike Zimmer last year and Eberflus.

Dallas (7-9-1) finished last in the NFL in scoring defense and passing defense and 30th overall, wasting one of quarterback Dak Prescott's best seasons for the league's No. 2 offense.

The Cowboys gave up 500 points for the first time in club history, allowing 511 for an average of 30.1. The only higher average was the 30.8 points per game given up by the franchise's winless expansion team in 1960.

The defense's 12 takeaways were the second fewest in club history. Dallas finished tied for 29th in the NFL with a minus-9 turnover margin.

The Cowboys have consecutive losing seasons for the first time since the last of three in a row in 2002.

# NFL

## Weekly statistics

### AFC individual leaders

**Quarterbacks**

| | Att | Com | Yds | TD | Int |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maye, NE | 492 | 354 | 4394 | 31 | 8 |
| Lawrence, Jac | 560 | 341 | 4007 | 29 | 12 |
| Nix, Den | 612 | 388 | 3931 | 25 | 11 |
| Herbert, LAC | 512 | 340 | 3727 | 26 | 13 |
| Allen, Buf | 460 | 319 | 3668 | 25 | 10 |
| Mahomes, KC | 502 | 315 | 3587 | 22 | 11 |
| Rodgers, Pit | 498 | 327 | 3322 | 24 | 7 |
| C.Ward, Ten | 540 | 323 | 3169 | 15 | 7 |

**Rushers**

| | Att | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cook, Buf | 309 | 1621 | 5.2 | 64t | 12 |
| Henry, Bal | 307 | 1595 | 5.2 | 59 | 16 |
| Taylor, Ind | 323 | 1585 | 4.9 | 83t | 18 |
| Achane, Mia | 238 | 1350 | 5.7 | 59t | 8 |
| Etienne, Jac | 260 | 1107 | 4.3 | 71 | 7 |
| Pollard, Ten | 242 | 1082 | 4.5 | 65t | 5 |
| Hall, NYJ | 243 | 1065 | 4.4 | 59t | 4 |
| C.Brown, Cin | 232 | 1019 | 4.4 | 37 | 6 |
| Jeanty, Las | 266 | 975 | 3.7 | 64t | 5 |
| Warren, Pit | 211 | 958 | 4.5 | 45t | 6 |

**Receivers**

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chase, Cin | 125 | 1412 | 11.3 | 64t | 8 |
| Flowers, Bal | 86 | 1211 | 14.1 | 64t | 5 |
| Collins, Hou | 71 | 1117 | 15.7 | 57t | 6 |
| Sutton, Den | 74 | 1017 | 13.7 | 52t | 7 |
| Diggs, NE | 85 | 1013 | 11.9 | 34 | 4 |
| Pierce, Ind | 47 | 1003 | 21.3 | 66t | 6 |
| Waddle, Mia | 64 | 910 | 14.2 | 46t | 6 |
| Kelce, KC | 76 | 851 | 11.2 | 44 | 5 |
| Metcalf, Pit | 59 | 850 | 14.4 | 80t | 6 |
| Washington, Jac | 58 | 847 | 14.6 | 63 | 5 |

**Punters**

| | No | Yds | Lg | Avg |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rehkow, Cin | 65 | 3285 | 70 | 50.5 |
| Stout, Bal | 53 | 2657 | 74 | 50.1 |

**Scoring Touchdowns**

| | TD | Rush | Rec | Ret | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Taylor, Ind | 20 | 18 | 2 | 0 | 120 |
| Henry, Bal | 16 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 96 |

**Kicking**

| | PAT | FG | LG | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fairbairn, Hou | 28/28 | 44/48 | 57 | 160 |
| Dicker, LAC | 34/35 | 38/41 | 59 | 148 |
| C.Little, Jac | 50/51 | 30/34 | 68 | 140 |

**Kickoff Returners**

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R.Davis, Buf | 31 | 943 | 30.4 | 97t | 1 |
| I.Williams, NYJ | 28 | 837 | 29.9 | 83 | 0 |

### NFC individual leaders

**Quarterbacks**

| | Att | Com | Yds | TD | Int |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stafford, LAR | 597 | 388 | 4707 | 46 | 8 |
| Goff, Det | 578 | 393 | 4564 | 34 | 8 |
| Prescott, Dal | 600 | 404 | 4552 | 30 | 10 |
| Darnold, Sea | 477 | 323 | 4048 | 25 | 14 |
| Ca.Williams, Chi | 568 | 330 | 3942 | 27 | 7 |
| Mayfield, TB | 543 | 343 | 3693 | 26 | 11 |
| Love, GB | 439 | 291 | 3381 | 23 | 6 |
| Brissett, Ari | 485 | 315 | 3366 | 23 | 8 |

**Rushers**

| | Att | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B.Robinson, Atl | 287 | 1478 | 5.2 | 93t | 7 |
| K.Williams, LAR | 259 | 1252 | 4.8 | 34 | 10 |
| Gibbs, Det | 243 | 1223 | 5.0 | 78t | 13 |
| McCaffrey, SF | 311 | 1202 | 3.9 | 41 | 10 |
| J.Williams, Dal | 252 | 1201 | 4.8 | 66 | 11 |
| Barkley, Phi | 280 | 1140 | 4.1 | 65t | 7 |
| Swift, Chi | 223 | 1087 | 4.9 | 25 | 9 |
| Dowdle, Car | 236 | 1076 | 4.6 | 53 | 6 |
| Walker, Sea | 221 | 1027 | 4.6 | 55t | 5 |
| Jacobs, GB | 234 | 929 | 4.0 | 40t | 13 |

**Receivers**

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Smith-Njigb., Sea | 119 | 1793 | 15.1 | 63t | 10 |
| Nacua, LAR | 129 | 1715 | 13.3 | 58 | 10 |
| Pickens, Dal | 93 | 1429 | 15.4 | 45 | 9 |
| St. Brown, Det | 117 | 1401 | 12.0 | 52 | 11 |
| McBride, Ari | 126 | 1239 | 9.8 | 31 | 11 |
| Olave, NO | 100 | 1163 | 11.6 | 62t | 9 |
| J.Williams, Det | 65 | 1117 | 17.2 | 64 | 7 |
| Lamb, Dal | 75 | 1077 | 14.4 | 74t | 3 |
| Jefferson, Min | 84 | 1048 | 12.5 | 50 | 2 |
| McMillan, Car | 70 | 1014 | 14.5 | 43t | 7 |

**Punters**

| | No | Yds | Lg | Avg |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whelan, GB | 49 | 2533 | 72 | 51.7 |
| Mann, Phi | 72 | 3591 | 70 | 49.9 |

**Scoring Touchdowns**

| | TD | Rush | Rec | Ret | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gibbs, Det | 18 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 108 |
| McCaffrey, SF | 17 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 102 |

**Kicking**

| | PAT | FG | LG | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Myers, Sea | 48/48 | 41/48 | 57 | 171 |
| Aubrey, Dal | 47/48 | 36/42 | 64 | 155 |
| Bates, Det | 54/56 | 27/34 | 59 | 135 |

**Kickoff Returners**

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| McCaffrey, Was | 26 | 769 | 29.6 | 58 | 0 |
| Moore, SF | 33 | 907 | 27.5 | 98 | 0 |

### AFC team statistics

**Average per game**

**Offense**

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---|---|---|---|
| New England | 379.4 | 128.9 | 250.5 |
| Buffalo | 376.3 | 159.6 | 216.6 |
| Indianapolis | 345.9 | 118.1 | 227.8 |
| Denver | 342.6 | 118.7 | 223.9 |
| Jacksonville | 337.4 | 115.1 | 222.3 |
| L.A. Chargers | 333.8 | 121.6 | 212.2 |
| Baltimore | 332.2 | 156.6 | 175.6 |
| Cincinnati | 329.2 | 93.6 | 235.6 |
| Houston | 327.0 | 108.9 | 218.1 |
| Kansas City | 320.6 | 106.6 | 214.1 |
| Pittsburgh | 305.6 | 103.3 | 202.4 |
| Miami | 300.7 | 120.2 | 180.5 |
| N.Y. Jets | 263.6 | 123.3 | 140.3 |
| Cleveland | 262.1 | 97.0 | 165.1 |
| Tennessee | 259.6 | 93.5 | 166.1 |
| Las Vegas | 245.2 | 77.5 | 167.7 |

**Defense**

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---|---|---|---|
| Houston | 277.2 | 93.7 | 183.5 |
| Denver | 278.2 | 91.1 | 187.2 |
| Cleveland | 283.6 | 116.4 | 167.2 |
| L.A. Chargers | 285.2 | 105.4 | 179.9 |
| Buffalo | 293.1 | 136.2 | 156.9 |
| New England | 295.2 | 101.7 | 193.5 |
| Kansas City | 301.5 | 105.7 | 195.8 |
| Jacksonville | 303.6 | 85.6 | 218.1 |
| Las Vegas | 317.8 | 116.8 | 201.0 |
| Tennessee | 345.1 | 114.6 | 230.5 |
| Miami | 348.8 | 132.4 | 216.4 |
| Indianapolis | 349.8 | 101.9 | 247.9 |
| Baltimore | 354.5 | 106.6 | 247.9 |
| N.Y. Jets | 355.6 | 139.5 | 216.1 |
| Pittsburgh | 356.9 | 113.1 | 243.9 |
| Cincinnati | 380.9 | 147.1 | 233.8 |

### NFC team statistics

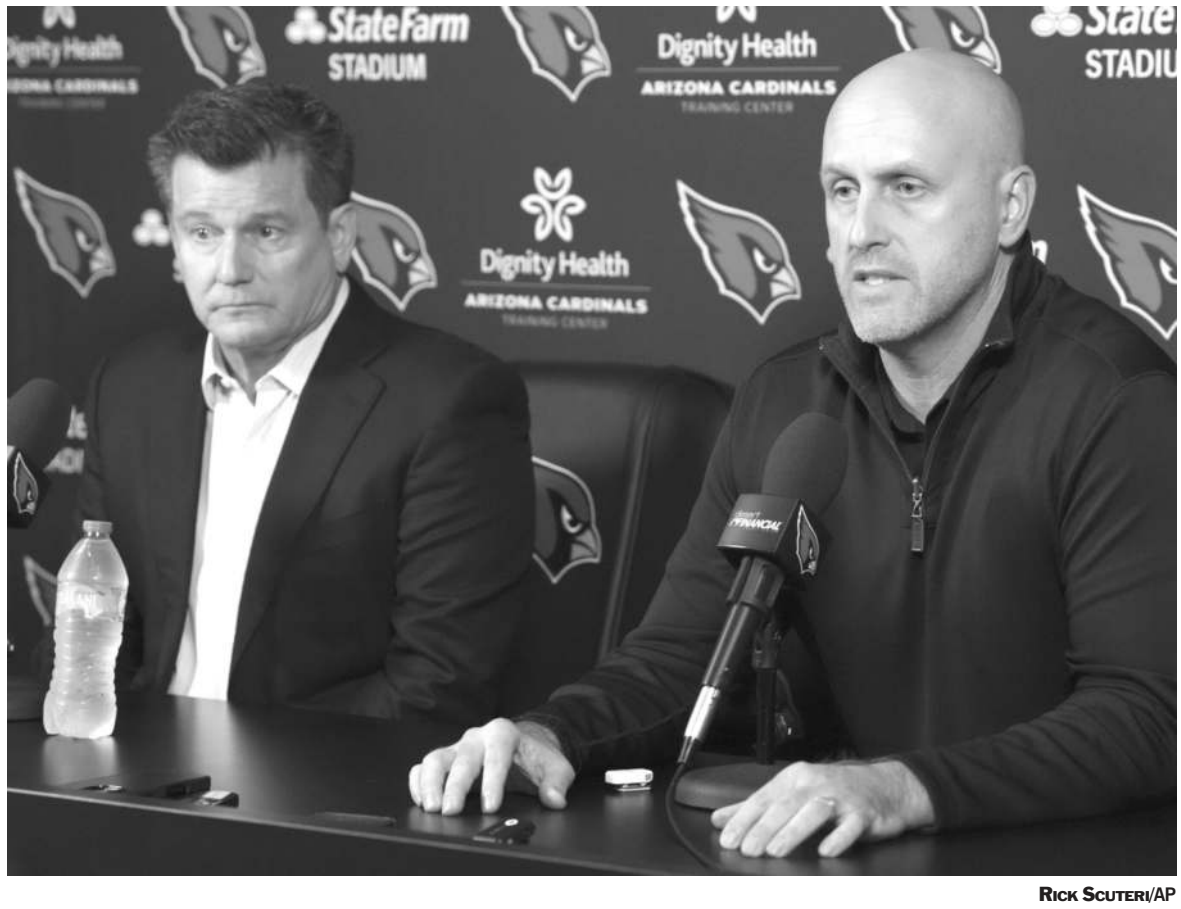
**Average per game**

**Offense**

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---|---|---|---|
| L.A. Rams | 394.6 | 126.6 | 268.1 |
| Dallas | 391.9 | 125.6 | 266.3 |
| Detroit | 373.2 | 120.1 | 253.1 |
| Chicago | 369.5 | 144.5 | 225.1 |
| San Francisco | 351.4 | 106.9 | 244.5 |
| Seattle | 351.4 | 123.3 | 228.1 |
| N.Y. Giants | 333.5 | 129.1 | 204.4 |
| Atlanta | 333.0 | 125.8 | 207.2 |
| Green Bay | 332.6 | 119.8 | 212.8 |
| Arizona | 325.8 | 93.1 | 232.6 |
| Tampa Bay | 320.4 | 114.5 | 205.9 |
| Washington | 318.8 | 134.7 | 184.1 |
| New Orleans | 313.6 | 94.3 | 219.3 |
| Philadelphia | 311.2 | 116.9 | 194.3 |
| Carolina | 295.6 | 116.3 | 179.3 |
| Minnesota | 275.0 | 108.3 | 166.7 |

**Defense**

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---|---|---|---|
| Minnesota | 282.6 | 124.1 | 158.5 |
| Seattle | 285.9 | 91.9 | 193.9 |
| New Orleans | 299.8 | 120.6 | 179.2 |
| Green Bay | 311.8 | 117.7 | 194.1 |
| Philadelphia | 314.2 | 124.4 | 189.8 |
| Atlanta | 326.6 | 126.2 | 200.4 |
| Carolina | 327.2 | 123.3 | 203.9 |
| L.A. Rams | 327.5 | 110.8 | 216.7 |
| Detroit | 331.9 | 114.5 | 217.4 |
| Tampa Bay | 337.2 | 99.1 | 238.2 |
| San Francisco | 340.2 | 107.8 | 232.4 |
| Arizona | 357.7 | 126.9 | 230.8 |
| N.Y. Giants | 359.5 | 145.3 | 214.2 |
| Chicago | 361.8 | 134.5 | 227.2 |
| Dallas | 377.0 | 125.5 | 251.5 |
| Washington | 384.3 | 141.8 | 242.5 |




RICK SCUTERI/AP

**Arizona Cardinals owner Michael Bidwell and general manager Monti Ossenfort acknowledge the media after firing head coach Jonathan Gannon on Monday in Tempe, Ariz.**

# Teams searching for coaches will talk to playoff assistants

BY JOSH DUBOW
*Associated Press*

As the 14 playoff-bound teams set their sites on a Super Bowl title, the rest of the teams in the NFL are already on to the 2026 season.

With six teams already looking for new coaches, this month will require several top assistants on playoff teams to balance in both worlds.

The New York Giants, Tennessee, Las Vegas, Atlanta, Cleveland and Arizona have already fired their head coach, setting off searches for replacements that will include playoff-bound assistants.

The NFL has strict rules on when — and how long — those coaches can talk to other teams while their seasons are still alive. Here's a look at some of the protocols in place for the coaching searches.

## When can interviews start?

Teams can start interviewing candidates not employed by another organization as soon as they have an opening. But for coaches employed by other teams, the process is more formal.

Teams were able to start making interview requests for coaches under contract to another team beginning Monday.

For teams that didn't make the playoffs, their coaches could be interviewed virtually three days after their final game — Tuesday for coaches on Tampa Bay, or Wednesday for any other non-playoff team.

The process is different for assistants on playoff teams. For the two teams with a bye, those virtual interviews could be held this week with Seattle's assistants available starting Tuesday and Denver's on Wednesday. Those interviews can be conducted through wild-card weekend and are limited to three hours in length.

For assistants coaching on wild-card weekend, they can have a virtual interview of up to three hours beginning Jan. 13, except for coaches on Houston and Pittsburgh, who must wait until Jan. 14 because they play Monday night.

## What comes next?

In-person interviews with assistants who are under contract with other teams can begin Jan. 19, unless those teams are still alive for the conference title games.

Those coaches must wait until Jan. 26, when either they were eliminated from the playoffs or have a bye week before the Super Bowl. Coaches on the Super Bowl teams are allowed to be interviewed through Feb. 1 but are forbidden from talking to other teams after that until Feb. 9, the day after the Super Bowl.

Coaches on the Super Bowl teams are not allowed to interview in person with other teams during the bye week if they hadn't done an initial virtual interview earlier in January.

No coach can either sign a contract or agree to sign a contract until their season is completed.

## What's the Rooney Rule?

Teams must abide by the Rooney Rule, which was first implemented in 2003 to boost minority hiring. Before hiring a new head coach, teams are required to conduct in-person interviews with at least two diverse — minority or female — candidates who don't currently work for the team.

The rules are the same for all coordinator positions and clubs must interview one diverse candidate for any quarterback coach job.

## What about GMs?

The rules are a little different for interviewing candidates for general manager. Teams could start seeking permission Monday to interview candidates from other organizations who weren't the primary decision maker.

Teams must conduct in-person interviews of at least two minority or women candidates from outside the organization to satisfy the Rooney Rule.

A GM candidate from a team in the playoffs can accept the job before their season is over if their current team provides written permission.

NBA

# Durant nails 3 to beat former team

By Kristie Rieken
*Associated Press*

HOUSTON — Houston's Kevin Durant said hitting the game-winning shot Monday night against the Phoenix Suns meant more because it came against his former team that he felt kicked him out.

Durant scored 26 points and his 3-pointer with 1.1 seconds to go lifted the Rockets to the 100-97 victory.

Asked if it meant more because it came against the the Suns, the 15-time All-Star didn't hold back.

"Most definitely," he said. "A place that I didn't want to leave. My first time — I don't want to sound too dramatic, but I will — to be kicked out of a place."

The game was tied when Durant drained the 27-footer to give the Rockets the victory.

Durant joined the Rockets from Phoenix this summer in a blockbuster trade that sent Dillon Brooks and Jalen Green to the Suns.

"It feels good to play against a team that booted you out of the building and scapegoated you for all the problems they had," he said.

"And it hurt because I put all my effort and love and care towards the Suns and the Phoenix area and Arizona in general. But that's just the business, that's the name of the game. So, when you play against a (former) team, yeah you got a chip on your shoulder."



David J. Phillip/AP

**The Rockets' Kevin Durant, left, shoots the game-winning 3-pointer against the Phoenix Suns on Monday in Houston.**

The 37-year-old Durant spent 2½ seasons with the Suns after a trade from the Nets in Feb. 2023. He was an All-Star in both of his full seasons there, but the team failed to meet expectations, losing in the first round of the postseason in the 2023-24 season and failing to reach the playoffs last season.

"It's nothing but love for the players, but I want to beat that team," he said.

"I want to show them that I still got some juice in the tank. Even though I'm old, I still can play. I feel like every player has that mentality playing against their former team. I don't think it's malicious in any way towards them. But just as a competitor, you want to go out there and beat them."

But Durant said he hopes these feelings won't linger too long.

"By the time I get home tonight, I probably won't even remember it," he said.

"Well, I will remember it, but I'll try my best to forget about it and move on to the next one."

## Scoreboard

### Eastern Conference

**Atlantic Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boston | 23 | 12 | .657 | — |
| New York | 23 | 13 | .639 | ½ |
| Toronto | 22 | 15 | .595 | 2 |
| Philadelphia | 19 | 15 | .559 | 3½ |
| Brooklyn | 11 | 22 | .333 | 11 |

**Southeast Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Orlando | 20 | 16 | .556 | — |
| Miami | 20 | 16 | .556 | — |
| Atlanta | 17 | 21 | .447 | 4 |
| Charlotte | 13 | 23 | .361 | 7 |
| Washington | 9 | 25 | .265 | 10 |

**Central Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Detroit | 27 | 9 | .750 | — |
| Cleveland | 20 | 17 | .541 | 7½ |
| Chicago | 17 | 19 | .472 | 10 |
| Milwaukee | 16 | 20 | .444 | 11 |
| Indiana | 6 | 30 | .167 | 21 |

### Western Conference

**Southwest Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| San Antonio | 25 | 10 | .714 | — |
| Houston | 22 | 11 | .667 | 2 |
| Memphis | 15 | 20 | .429 | 10 |
| Dallas | 13 | 23 | .361 | 12½ |
| New Orleans | 8 | 29 | .216 | 18 |

**Northwest Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Oklahoma City | 30 | 7 | .811 | — |
| Denver | 24 | 12 | .667 | 5½ |
| Minnesota | 23 | 13 | .639 | 6½ |
| Portland | 17 | 20 | .459 | 13 |
| Utah | 12 | 23 | .343 | 17 |

**Pacific Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| L.A. Lakers | 22 | 11 | .667 | — |
| Phoenix | 21 | 15 | .583 | 2½ |
| Golden State | 19 | 18 | .514 | 5 |
| L.A. Clippers | 13 | 22 | .371 | 10 |
| Sacramento | 8 | 28 | .222 | 15½ |

**Sunday's games**

Detroit 114, Cleveland 110
Orlando 135, Indiana 127
Brooklyn 127, Denver 115
Miami 125, New Orleans 106
Minnesota 141, Washington 115
Phoenix 108, Oklahoma City 105
Milwaukee 115, Sacramento 98
L.A. Lakers 120, Memphis 114

**Monday's games**

Detroit 121, New York 90
Boston 115, Chicago 101
Toronto 118, Atlanta 100
Charlotte 124, Oklahoma City 97
Houston 100, Phoenix 97
Denver 125, Philadelphia 124, OT
Portland 137, Utah 117
L.A. Clippers 103, Golden State 102

**Tuesday's games**

Cleveland at Indiana
Orlando at Washington
L.A. Lakers at New Orleans
Miami at Minnesota
San Antonio at Memphis
Dallas at Sacramento

**Wednesday's games**

Chicago at Detroit
Denver at Boston
Toronto at Charlotte
Washington at Philadelphia
L.A. Clippers at New York
New Orleans at Atlanta
Orlando at Brooklyn
Phoenix at Memphis
Utah at Oklahoma City
L.A. Lakers at San Antonio
Houston at Portland
Milwaukee at Golden State

**Thursday's games**

Indiana at Charlotte
Cleveland at Minnesota
Miami at Chicago
Dallas at Utah

### Scoring leaders

**Through Sunday**

| | G | FG | FT | PTS | AVG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Doncic, LAL | 26 | 267 | 254 | 875 | 33.7 |
| Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC | 36 | 389 | 285 | 1136 | 31.6 |
| Maxey, PHI | 32 | 345 | 182 | 992 | 31.0 |
| Mitchell, CLE | 34 | 355 | 170 | 1013 | 29.8 |
| Jokic, DEN | 32 | 339 | 203 | 948 | 29.6 |
| Brown, BOS | 33 | 360 | 188 | 977 | 29.6 |
| Edwards, MIN | 29 | 291 | 176 | 854 | 29.4 |
| Brunson, NY | 33 | 342 | 179 | 962 | 29.2 |
| Curry, GS | 27 | 250 | 146 | 775 | 28.7 |
| Leonard, LAC | 25 | 245 | 148 | 702 | 28.1 |

ROUNDUP

# Kerr tossed, Curry fouls out in loss to Clippers

*Associated Press*

NGLEWOOD, Calif. — Kawhi Leonard had 24 points and 12 rebounds, rookie Kobe Sanders added 20 points, and the Los Angeles Clippers edged the Golden State Warriors 103-102 on Monday night in a wild game that included Warriors coach Steve Kerr getting ejected and Steph Curry fouling out for the first time since 2021.

Kerr was ejected with 7:57 remaining in the game after becoming irate when the Clippers' John Collins wasn't called for goaltending. A shouting Kerr pursued the referees along the sideline and had to be restrained by his assistants before getting tossed.

Curry scored 27 points but was just 4-for-15 from 3-point range and 9-for-23 overall before fouling out with 42 seconds remaining in the game. It was the first time he fouled out since Dec. 17, 2021.

James Harden was a late scratch for the Clippers because of right shoulder soreness. But they got double-figure scoring from all five starters, including Sanders, whose points were a career high. Collins added 18 points and Kris Dunn had 16. Ivica Zubac had 11 rebounds.

Jimmy Butler added 24 points for the Warriors but missed a 16-footer before time expired.

**Pistons 121, Knicks 90:** Cade Cunningham had 29 points and 13 assists as host Detroit beat New York.

It was the first meeting between the teams since May 1, when the Knicks eliminated the Pistons 116-113 in Game 6 of their first-round playoff series.

Cunningham had 14 points and seven assists as the Pistons built a 64-54 halftime lead.

**Celtics 115, Bulls 101:** Anfernee Simons scored 27 points, Payton Pritchard had 21 and Boston held Chicago to 33 points in the opening half of a home victory.

Neemias Queta added 13 points and 13 rebounds for Boston, which won its fourth straight game and for the eighth time in nine games.

**Raptors 118, Hawks 100:** Rookie Collin Murray-Boyles scored 17 points as host Toronto beat Atlanta.

Murray-Boyles added seven rebounds and seven assists for Toronto (22-15) in place of injured starter Jakob Poeltl (back strain).

**Hornets 124, Thunder 97:** Brandon Miller scored 28 points, and visiting Charlotte stunned NBA-leading Oklahoma City..

Kon Knueppel added 23 points for the Hornets, who had lost three of four before handing Oklahoma City its worst loss of the season. It was the only time this season the Thunder failed to score 100 points.



Jae C. Hong/AP

**Los Angeles Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard makes his way down the court during the first half against the Golden State Warriors on Monday in Inglewood, Calif. The Clippers beat the Warriors 103-102.**

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 21 points for his 108th straight game with at least 20, the second-longest streak in NBA history.

**Nuggets 125, 76ers 124 (OT):** Bruce Brown scored 19 points and got the winning bucket in overtime on a goaltending call on Joel Embiid, and Jalen Pickett had 29 points to lead short-handed Denver to a road win over Philadelphia.

Embiid was whistled for the decisive goaltend when he tried to block Brown's running layup with 5.3 seconds left.

**Trail Blazers 137, Jazz 117:** Deni Avdija had 33 points, nine assists and eight rebounds in three quarters, falling just short of his second consecutive triple-double, and host Portland routed Utah.

Shaedon Sharpe scored 29 for the Trail Blazers, who have won three straight games and five of six.

Lauri Markkanen scored 22 points for the Jazz, who have dropped four in a row and eight of 10.

# NHL/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## NHL scoreboard

### Eastern Conference

**Atlantic Division**

| | GP | W | L | OT | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Detroit | 44 | 25 | 15 | 4 | 54 | 136 | 141 |
| Tampa Bay | 41 | 25 | 13 | 3 | 53 | 142 | 110 |
| Montreal | 42 | 23 | 13 | 6 | 52 | 141 | 141 |
| Florida | 41 | 22 | 16 | 3 | 47 | 129 | 130 |
| Buffalo | 40 | 21 | 15 | 4 | 46 | 125 | 126 |
| Boston | 42 | 22 | 18 | 2 | 46 | 133 | 136 |
| Toronto | 41 | 19 | 15 | 7 | 45 | 137 | 138 |
| Ottawa | 41 | 20 | 16 | 5 | 45 | 136 | 134 |

**Metropolitan Division**

| | GP | W | L | OT | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carolina | 42 | 25 | 14 | 3 | 53 | 141 | 128 |
| N.Y. Islanders | 42 | 23 | 15 | 4 | 50 | 120 | 120 |
| Washington | 43 | 22 | 15 | 6 | 50 | 142 | 125 |
| Philadelphia | 40 | 21 | 12 | 7 | 49 | 124 | 116 |
| Pittsburgh | 41 | 20 | 12 | 9 | 49 | 135 | 131 |
| New Jersey | 42 | 22 | 18 | 2 | 46 | 114 | 124 |
| N.Y. Rangers | 44 | 20 | 18 | 6 | 46 | 116 | 120 |
| Columbus | 41 | 18 | 16 | 7 | 43 | 127 | 137 |

### Western Conference

**Central Division**

| | GP | W | L | OT | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colorado | 41 | 31 | 3 | 7 | 69 | 165 | 93 |
| Dallas | 42 | 25 | 9 | 8 | 58 | 146 | 117 |
| Minnesota | 44 | 25 | 11 | 8 | 58 | 140 | 119 |
| Utah | 43 | 20 | 20 | 3 | 43 | 130 | 124 |
| Nashville | 41 | 19 | 18 | 4 | 42 | 118 | 136 |
| St. Louis | 43 | 17 | 18 | 8 | 42 | 107 | 146 |
| Chicago | 42 | 17 | 18 | 7 | 41 | 118 | 134 |
| Winnipeg | 40 | 15 | 21 | 4 | 34 | 115 | 126 |

**Pacific Division**

| | GP | W | L | OT | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vegas | 40 | 17 | 11 | 12 | 46 | 124 | 126 |
| Edmonton | 42 | 20 | 16 | 6 | 46 | 139 | 143 |
| Seattle | 40 | 19 | 14 | 7 | 45 | 108 | 116 |
| Los Angeles | 41 | 18 | 14 | 9 | 45 | 111 | 113 |
| Anaheim | 42 | 21 | 18 | 3 | 45 | 143 | 153 |
| San Jose | 41 | 20 | 18 | 3 | 43 | 127 | 146 |
| Calgary | 42 | 18 | 20 | 4 | 40 | 112 | 126 |
| Vancouver | 41 | 16 | 20 | 5 | 37 | 117 | 143 |

**Note:** Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

**Sunday's games**

Montreal 4, Dallas 3, OT
Pittsburgh 5, Columbus 4, OT
Florida 2, Colorado 1
Chicago 3, Vegas 2, OT
Carolina 3, New Jersey 1

**Monday's games**

Utah 3, N.Y. Rangers 2, OT
Washington 7, Anaheim 4
Detroit 5, Ottawa 3
Seattle 5, Calgary 1
Los Angeles 4, Minnesota 2

**Tuesday's games**

Anaheim at Philadelphia
Colorado at Tampa Bay
Dallas at Carolina
Vancouver at Buffalo
Florida at Toronto
New Jersey at N.Y. Islanders
Vegas at Winnipeg
Nashville at Edmonton
Boston at Seattle
Columbus at San Jose

**Wednesday's games**

Dallas at Washington
Calgary at Montreal
Ottawa at Utah
St. Louis at Chicago
San Jose at Los Angeles

**Thursday's games**

Anaheim at Carolina
Buffalo at N.Y. Rangers
Calgary at Boston
Florida at Montreal
New Jersey at Pittsburgh
Toronto at Philadelphia
Vancouver at Detroit
Edmonton at Winnipeg
N.Y. Islanders at Nashville
Ottawa at Colorado
Columbus at Vegas
Minnesota at Seattle

### Scoring leaders

**Through Monday**

| | GP | G | A | PTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nathan MacKinnon, COL | 41 | 35 | 39 | 74 |
| Connor McDavid, EDM | 42 | 25 | 47 | 72 |
| Macklin Celebrini, SJ | 41 | 22 | 41 | 63 |
| Nikita Kucherov, TB | 37 | 20 | 39 | 59 |
| Mikko Rantanen, DAL | 41 | 16 | 41 | 57 |
| Leon Draisaitl, EDM | 42 | 20 | 37 | 57 |
| Martin Necas, COL | 41 | 19 | 34 | 53 |
| Jason Robertson, DAL | 42 | 24 | 25 | 49 |
| Kirill Kaprizov, MIN | 44 | 24 | 25 | 49 |
| Kyle Connor, WPG | 40 | 19 | 29 | 48 |

NHL ROUNDUP

# Sourdif nets 1st hat trick in Caps win

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Justin Sourdif scored his first NHL hat trick and added two assists and the Washington Capitals beat the Anaheim Ducks 7-4 on Monday night.

Alex Ovechkin scored twice, Ryan Leonard had a goal and an assist, John Carlson also scored and Connor McMichael had four assists for the Capitals, who ended a two-game slide. Charlie Lindgren made 41 saves in the win.

Chris Kreider, Alex Killorn, Jacob Trouba and Beckett Sennecke scored for the Ducks, who have lost six straight.

Kreider opened the scoring just 6:33 into the first period, ending a 15-game goal drought.

Sourdif evened the score, firing home a drop pass from Connor McMichael in the slot. Three minutes later, the rookie struck again, beating Petr Mrazek glove side to give Washington a 2-1 lead going into the second.

Sourdif picked up where he left off, finding Ryan Leonard, who banked in a shot off Mrazek to make it 3-1. Just 1:36 later, Leonard returned the favor, setting up Sourdif for a tap-in for his third goal of the game. Ovechkin then rifled home a wrister from the left circle to end a four-game goal drought.

**Mammoth 3, Rangers 2 (OT):** Sean Durzi scored 1:06 into overtime and visiting Utah beat New York for their second win in three games.



NICK WASS/AP

**Capitals right wing Justin Sourdif celebrates his third goal of the game during the second period against the Anaheim Ducks on Monday.**

Dylan Guenther and Michael Carcone scored for Utah, and Karel Vejmelka had 22 saves.

Vincent Trocheck and Alexis Lafrenière scored goals, and Artemi Panarin and Mika Zibanejad each had two assists for the Rangers, who lost for the fourth time in five games (1-2-2). Igor Shesterkin stopped all nine shots he faced before he left with an apparent injury with 7 minutes remaining in the first period. Jonathan Quick replaced him and finished with 14 saves.

**Red Wings 5, Senators 3:** James van Riemsdyk had a goal and two assists to lead Detroit to a road win over Ottawa Senators to snap a two-game losing skid.

Coming off back-to-back losses to the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Red Wings were determined to take defeat their divisional rivals in the first of four meetings between the two clubs.

Brady Tkachuk, Claude Giroux and Dylan Cozens scored for the Senators.

**Kraken 5, Flames 1:** Shane Wright scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period and Philipp Grubauer made 41 saves to lead visiting Seattle past Calgary.

The victory moved the Kraken into third place in the Pacific Division, one point behind Vegas and Edmonton. Seattle is even in games with the Golden Knights and has two games in hand on the Oilers.

Adam Klapka scored for Calgary (18-20-4), and Dustin Wolf stopped 23 shots.

**Kings 4, Wild 2:** Andrei Kuzmenko had a goal and an assist, and host Los Angeles held on to beat Minnesota.

Warren Foegele, Kevin Fiala and Adrian Kempe also scored, and Darcy Kuemper stopped 33 shots for the Kings, who beat the Wild for the second time in three nights and got just their fourth win in 12 games (4-6-2).

Jared Spurgeon had a goal and an assist, and Ryan Hartman also scored for Minnesota, which snapped a six-game point streak (3-0-3). and Filip Gustavsson had 29 saves.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

# No. 10 Nebraska holds off Ohio State's late rally

*Associated Press*

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Braden Frager scored 15 points off the bench and No. 10 Nebraska held off a late rally by Ohio State to win 72-69 on Monday night.

Rienk Mast added 12 points while Jamarques Lawrence and Pryce Sandfort each had 11 as the Cornhuskers (15-0, 4-0 Big Ten) extended the best start in school history.

John Mobley Jr. led Ohio State (10-4, 2-2) with 22 points. Bruce Thornton scored 16 and Devin Royal added 14.

Playing as a top-10 team for the first time since 1966, Nebraska led by 14 in the first half. The Cornhuskers were up 38-31 at halftime, but Ohio State went in front for the first time on a pair of free throws by Thornton with 10:24 to go.

That was the first of eight lead changes.

The last came on a basket by Mast with 4:39 left. He was fouled on a drive and sank the free throw to make it 60-58. That started a 9-0 run by Nebraska, but Ohio State got back within one on Royal's layup with 14 seconds to play.

The Huskers were 14 for 17 from the free-throw line and had a 38-29 advantage on the boards. They also outscored Ohio State 22-0 in bench points.

Amare Bynum had nine points and nine rebounds for Ohio State, which was trying for its first win over a top-10 opponent since beating No. 4 Kentucky on Dec. 21, 2024.

**No. 12 Michigan State 80, Southern Cal 51:** Coen Carr scored 18 points and Jaxon Kohler added 16 on perfect shooting to lead host Michigan State to a blowout against Southern California.

Jeremy Fears Jr. had 15 points and seven assists for the Spartans (13-2, 3-1 Big Ten), who took control with a 27-6 run early in the game and led by at least 20 for much of the second half.

Kohler made all six of his field goal attempts, including a trio of 3-pointers, and sank his only free throw. He also grabbed eight rebounds, two short of a sixth straight double-double.

Ezra Ausar scored 16 points and Jerry Easter added 12 for the Trojans (12-3, 1-3), who lost consecutive games for the first time this season.

Michigan State was ahead 33-17 at halftime with Kohler leading the way offensively, scoring eight points while seven teammates contributed at least two.



SUE OGROCKI / AP

**Nebraska forward Braden Frager drives to the basket in the first half against Ohio State on Monday. The Cornhuskers won 72-69.**

Carr and Fears picked up their scoring in the second half to build a bigger cushion, combining to score 25 points after halftime.

Michigan State held Chad Baker-Mazara to four points after he entered the game averaging a team-high 20.4 for USC.

The Spartans bounced back from a 58-56 loss to No. 10 Nebraska to win for the fifth time in six games.

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

**Montana State place-kicker Myles Sansted kicks the winning point in the FCS Championship game against Illinois State in overtime Monday in Nashville, Tenn. The Bobcats won their first national title since 1984.**

# Montana State wins in OT for 1st FCS title since '84

BY TERESA M. WALKER
*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Montana State finally found a way to answer when it mattered most for the program's first national championship since 1984.

A year ago, the Bobcats missed winning their first title in 40 years when a slow start doomed them in a shootout loss to North Dakota State. Two years ago, their season ended in Bozeman in the quarterfinals on a blocked extra point in overtime against the Bison.

They started this season losing the first two — at Oregon and a double-overtime loss at home to South Dakota State.

So when Myles Sansted's extra point went through the uprights in overtime for a 35-34 victory over Illinois State on Monday night in the Football Championship Subdivision title game, Montana State chucked helmets in the air while sprinting around with a heavy contingent of Bobcats fans celebrating with them.

"To be able to clear that hurdle and know that yes this '25 group accomplished what hadn't been done in a long time," said coach Brent Vigen, who's already thinking ahead with a young, Montana-laden team featuring only nine seniors. "You know, we're building for more."

The Bobcats (14-2) capped a season that featured not one, but two wins over in-state rival Montana over a four-week span. Beating the Grizzlies in the semifinals put Montana State back into the title game for the second straight season, third in five years under Vigen and the fourth berth overall.

The Bobcats topped that accomplishment with their 14th straight win in a thrilling finish in the first overtime in the 48 years of this title game. They led 21-7 at halftime and 28-14 in the third. They needed Jhase McMillan's block of Michael Cosentino's 38-yard field goal attempt with 57 seconds left in regulation to keep it tied at 28.

In overtime, Justin Lamson tied it with a 14-yard touchdown pass to Taco Dowler on fourth-and-10. Hunter Parsons blocked the extra point attempt after Tommy Rittenhouse threw a 10-yard TD pass to Dylan Lord to give Illinois State its only lead at 34-28 to open overtime.

Stansted's kick started the celebration of the end of a long title drought. Along with the 1984 I-AA championship, Montana State also won the 1976 NCAA Division II title and 1956 NAIA championship.

"What a hard-fought game, and these things aren't supposed to come easily, I guess," Vigen said.

Lamson, who didn't join the Bobcats until June, said the OT touchdown was a great play call.

"Taco was wide open," Lamson said. "I got hit so I was just trying to give him a chance and the rest is history, and Myles did his thing and that was the game."

Illinois State (12-5) already made history as the first FCS team to win four straight road games to advance through the playoffs to this championship game. That included a win over this postseason's No. 1 seed and North Dakota State — winners of 10 of the last 14 FCS championships including last year.

This was the Redbirds' first time in this game since 2014, and they leave empty-handed.

"Just couldn't find one more play," Illinois State coach Brock Spack said. "We needed to make one more play to win. When you look at a game that's a one-point loss like that, there's probably 10, 15, maybe 20 plays in the game if you make just one of them, you win. Wasn't able to do that, and we came up short."

Lamson finished with 280 yards passing and two TDs. He also ran for two more scores. Dowler had eight catches for 111 yards.

Rittenhouse finished with 311 yards passing and four TDs. Victor Dawson ran for 126 yards, and Lord had 13 catches for 161 yards receiving and two TDs.

## The takeaway

Illinois State made big defensive plays to give the Redbirds a chance. They forced Montana State three-and-out on consecutive drives in the fourth for a chance at the win and had three sacks.

Montana State won its 14th straight game despite too many self-inflicted mistakes. The Bobcats were flagged 14 times for 93 yards.

"We offensively showed flashes, but it was one step forward, maybe sometimes two steps back," Vigen said.

## Blocked kicks

Spack said he thought ball-handling issues might be why both the field goal and extra point attempts were blocked. Cosentino has the ability to get the ball up in the air, which is why Spack decided to go for the lead with the field goal attempt.

"It's very disappointing," Spack said.

# Becht follows Campbell to Penn State following Grunkemeyer's transfer

*Associated Press*

Rocco Becht has announced he will follow coach Matt Campbell from Iowa State to Penn State, giving the Nittany Lions a veteran quarterback to replace Ethan Grunkemeyer.

Becht stated his decision in a social media post late Sunday. Grunkemeyer posted at about the same time that he would enter the transfer portal, and multiple media outlets reported Monday that he will reunite with James Franklin at Virginia Tech.

Becht started 39 straight games for Campbell with the Cyclones, the longest active streak among Big 12 quarterbacks and fourth-longest in the nation among quarterbacks. He will continue to work with his Iowa State offensive coordinator, Taylor Mouser, for his final season of eligibility.

Becht, who led the Cyclones to the Big 12 championship game in 2024, completed 60% of his passes this season for 215 yards per game with 16 touchdowns and nine interceptions. He has been one of the steadiest quarterbacks in the country the past three years, and he had a Bowl Subdivision-best streak of 22 games with at least one touchdown pass.

Grunkemeyer is first in line to take over as Virginia Tech quarterback for Kyron Drones, who has exhausted his eligibility. Grunkemeyer, who was thrust into action after Drew Allar broke his ankle at midseason, led Penn State to four straight wins to end the season. He finished with a program-record 69.1% completion rate and threw for more than 200 yards in three games. He has three seasons of eligibility.

North Texas quarterback Drew Mestemaker and running back Caleb Hawkins are also on the move and following their coach, with both committing to Oklahoma State with coach Eric Morris. The two freshmen helped lead the Mean Green to a school-record 12 wins, and they missed out on a College Football Playoff berth only after losing to Tulane in the American Conference championship game.

Mestemaker, the national passing leader after never starting a varsity game at quarterback in high school, changed the picture on his X profile to himself in an Oklahoma State uniform. Hawkins, who ran for 1,434 yards and a national-best 25 touchdowns, posted a photo with him in a Cowboys uniform and wrote "100% committed."

Morris was introduced as Oklahoma State's coach last month after three seasons at North Texas.

The Cowboys, who had one of the worst passing offenses in the country, get a quarterback who threw for 4,379 yards — second all-time among FBS freshmen — and a UNT-record 34 TD passes. Mestemaker's 15 straight games with at least 200 yards passing is the longest streak in the nation.

Nebraska thought it had found its replacement for Dylan Raiola in Notre Dame's Kenny Minchey according to various reports. ESPN reported Monday night, however, that he changed his commitment to go to Kentucky instead.

Minchey was backup to C.J. Carr and played 87 snaps over six games for the Irish. Minchey, a four-star recruit coming out of high school in Hendersonville, Tenn., has two seasons of eligibility.

Wisconsin announced it has added former Iowa State running back Abu Sama III, who had rushed for 1,933 yards over the last three seasons. Sama ran for 732 yards and five touchdowns on 140 carries this season.

Sama will be part of a backfield that also includes former Old Dominion quarterback Colton Joseph, who announced Sunday that he was transferring to the Badgers.

Quarterback Bryce Underwood announced Monday that he is staying at Michigan for his sophomore season to play for first-year coach Kyle Whittingham.



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

**Iowa State quarterback Rocco Becht announced he will be transfering to Penn State as quarterback Ethan Grunkmeyer moves to Virginia Tech.**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

# Coach Cristobal ignores 'The U' hype

BY TIM REYNOLDS
*Associated Press*

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Mario Cristobal doesn't want to hear any of the incessant "The U Is Back" stuff.

Yes, Miami is in the College Football Playoff semifinals after being given almost no chance of making the 12-team field after a pair of losses around the midseason point and hearing plenty of pundits saying the Hurricanes don't belong. Yes, they've tied a school record with 12 wins. Yes, they're two wins from what would be their first national championship since the 2001 season — and one victory away a title-game appearance that would just happen to come on their home field.

Save it, at least around Cristobal. None of those words matter to him right now. Saturday was just another day in Coral Gables, which is consistent with what he's been preaching since he returned to his alma mater four seasons ago. Miami (12-2, No. 10 CFP) takes on Mississippi (13-1, No. 6 CFP) in the Fiesta Bowl on Thursday night in Glendale, Ariz.

"There aren't really distractions. You create your own distractions," Cristobal said Saturday. "And I think the mentality — the DNA of our guys as it gets stronger and better, as our older guys realize that it's their time, it's their legacy and that they have to take control of the locker room and how we think and how we go about things — I think all that has improved in a dramatic fashion.



JULIO CORTEZ / AP

**Miami head coach Mario Cristobal, center, celebrates after winning the Cotton Bowl College Football Playoff quarterfinal game against Ohio State on Dec. 31 in Arlington, Texa.**

"We hammer it every single day and so far, we feel like we're getting a pretty good result. But you get on it, and you stay on it. I think if you come off it for a second, you're going to leave a window open and you're going to let a rat in there."

Ah, the rat.

He means rat poison, a term his old boss — former Alabama coach Nick Saban — used at times in the final years of his coaching career. Rat poison, in Saban-speak, is what is detrimental to teams that start believing their hype and losing focus on the controllables like working as hard as possible every day.

And every coach left in the race for this CFP title knows exactly what Cristobal means — since they all worked for Saban. Cristobal worked under Saban with the Crimson Tide from 2013 through 2016. Ole Miss coach Pete Golding was with Saban for five seasons, from 2018 through 2022. Oregon coach Dan Lanning was a graduate assistant on Saban's staff in 2015. And Indiana coach Curt Cignetti did his time under Saban from 2007 through 2011.

All four of those coaches left Alabama with at least one national title from their time with the Tide. They have a chance to win their own now.

"I think most people who went through and were fortunate enough to be around coach Saban understand, number one, (the) lifeblood of the program is recruiting," Golding said Saturday. "And then you've got to have sound schemes on both sides. You want to keep stability within those schemes for the development of players. And there's a toughness component, a competitive character component to hold these guys accountable and hold them to a high standard. And I think that's pretty consistent with whoever is playing right now."

Now the Rebels are dealing with the fallout from losing coach Lane Kiffin to LSU and the will-they-or-won't-they questions about assistant coaches who — at some point — will be following him to Baton Rouge. Some came back for Mississippi's win over Georgia in the CFP quarterfinal; whether they'll all be at the Fiesta Bowl is still a bit of a mystery.

Again, Cristobal sees it all as a distraction, and he insists that distractions — even the Rebels staff situation — must be ignored.

"It has zero impact on our preparation, and I think it'd be safe to say that it doesn't impact their preparation as well," Cristobal said. "They're a great football team with great coaches that are in place, and they're preparing just as hard for this as they have for any game."

# **Running:** Indiana RBs Hemby, Black overlooked despite offense's success

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game — 10th nationally and No. 1 among the teams still fighting for a national championship. They've topped the 300-yard mark six times and had two more with more than 200 including the 215 they logged in last week's 38-3 rout over No. 9 Alabama.

It's also a big reason undefeated Indiana has the nation's top third-down conversion percentage at 56.5%. Perhaps more important — the Hoosiers have only one fumble all season.

"It just comes from wanting to be better," Black said, referring to the backfield's internal motivation. "Being around a great group of guys, a great group of teammates, you just have the want to to be better in your life and also on the football field. And now that we're in this position, we have no choice but to be better."

Still, Hemby and Black are hardly household names.

Hemby played four seasons at Maryland, averaging 4.9 yards per carry while rushing for 2,347 yards. This year, he's at 5.2 yards and topped the 1,000-yard mark for the first time with an 8-yard game against Alabama. He earned a third team all-Big Ten selection from the media, but not the coaches.

Black was solid, not spectacular, in four seasons at James Madison but blossomed after following coach Curt Cignetti to Bloomington. This season, he has 157 carries, 898 yards and eight TDs — all career bests with top-seeded Indiana (14-0). Yet he was left off the all-conference list.

The two backs already understand the challenge Oregon (13-1) poses. In their first meeting, the Hoosiers ran 27 times for a paltry 111 yards or 3.0 yards per carry, their third-lowest single game average all season. And on tape, they think the Ducks look even better now.

So does linebacker Bryce Boettcher, who acknowledged having some mental mistakes in Round 1 but played a key role in Oregon's 23-0 shutout over No. 4 Texas Tech in the Orange Bowl.

On the other hand, the Ducks recognize how difficult it will be to replicate that effort, especially with Indiana's secret weapon — Mendoza's ability to buy time and scramble for first downs — and against an offensive line that has proven to be one of the nation's best.

"They're smart, fast and physical," Boettcher said, describing the Hoosiers' linemen. "In the run game, they play physical and they do their job. They don't have a lot of unblocked hats. I know in the screen game, they get out and they're elite at kind of retracing and blocking for the receiver in the screen game, which was present in our last game."

Oregon's offense looks remarkably similar to Indiana's.

While the Ducks rank second in scoring among the final four teams, 38.0 points per game, and as Mendoza and Dante Moore continue their presumed competition to be the No. 1 NFL draft pick in April, Oregon enters Friday with the second-best ground game in the remaining field at 206.1 yards with Noah Whittington and Jordon Davison leading the way.



MARK YLEN/AP

**Oregon running back Jordon Davison rushes in front of JMU defensive back Jacob Thomas (7) and linebacker Drew Spinogatti during the first half in the first round of the CFP on Dec. 20 in Eugene, Ore.**

The Hoosiers had the upper hand in the 30-20 victory in October, holding the Ducks to 81 yards rushing, their lowest regular-season total, on 30 carries. Indiana knows the rematch could prove more difficult.

But for two offenses that have thrived through the air with star quarterbacks and a deep stable of prominent receivers, the path to Miami and the Jan. 19 national championship will likely be determined on the ground.

"It's one of those things where we had to keep working toward it to get where we want to be and, obviously, we're still not where we want to be," Hemby said when asked about the improvement in Indiana's ground game this season. "I don't know if we've changed people's minds, we're not really in the business of trying to do that. Hopefully we did. But at the end of the day if we're winning games, we'll take it however we can."

# SPORTS

## Getting revenge

Durant's 3-pointer vs. former team gives Rockets win over Suns ›› NBA, Page 20



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

# Running around

## Strong ground games propel Indiana, Oregon to Peach Bowl matchup

By Michael Marot
*Associated Press*

INDIANAPOLIS — Fernando Mendoza spent all season stealing headlines and collecting awards.

Indiana running backs Roman Hemby and Kaelon Black were content doing the dirty work in the shadows of their Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback, propelling the top-ranked Hoosiers into college football's version of the Final Four.

Now, less than a week after dominating Alabama on the ground, the Indiana dynamic duo hopes to replicate that performance against No. 5 Oregon in Friday night's Peach Bowl.

"You see the guys we have up front, they work really hard and they make my job and Kaelon's job really easy," Hemby said Monday. "We just try to outphysical our opponents. We really want to make it a four-quarter fight to where we kind of impose our will and, at some point in the game, we feel like we could potentially break the defense or make that play that helps us win."

The surprise, to some, has been just how much the Football Bowl Subdivision's third-highest scoring offense, 41.6 points per game, has actually relied on the running game.

While Mendoza and the passing attack certainly have driven this season's narrative, Indiana's ground game sometimes went unnoticed.

The Hoosiers rush for 220.7 yards per

SEE RUNNING ON PAGE 23

Indiana running back Kaelon Black had career-best totals of 157 carries, 898 yards and eight TDs this season.

Darron Cummings/AP

## Montana St. wins FCS title in overtime ›› College football, Page 22

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