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STARS AND STRIPES

stripes.com

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NICOLE MILLER/U.S. Army

Paratroopers assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division walk to a C-17 Globemaster III before an airborne operation at Fort Bragg, N.C., in March 2025. Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne's quick-reaction brigade known as the Immediate Response Force are deploying to the Middle East.

82nd Airborne ordered to Mideast

About 2,000 paratroopers headed to potentially join operations against Iran

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The 82nd Airborne Division was ordered Tuesday to begin deploying to the Middle East, where about 2,000 paratroopers are headed to potentially join operations against Iran.

The soldiers are being drawn from the 82nd Airborne's quick-reaction brigade of 3,000 soldiers known as the Immediate Response Force, which is designed to mobilize anywhere in the world in 18 hours, several news outlets reported late Tuesday citing defense officials.

The contingent headed to the Middle East is comprised of two battalions of roughly 800 soldiers each along with the division's commander, Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, and supporting staff, The New York Times reported.

It was unclear where the soldiers will be located in the Middle East, but they were expected to be positioned within striking distance of Iran, officials told the Times.

The deployment order comes as reports say the U.S. has compiled a 15-point peace proposal, which Pakistan delivered, highlighting the urgency within President Donald Trump's administration to resolve a conflict it started alongside Israel almost a month ago. Trump has said he hopes to reach an agreement by Friday.

Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, two of Trump's special envoys, as well as Secretary of State Marco Rubio, have been involved in the negotiations with Iran, according to the president. Pakistan has offered itself as a mediator.

It's unclear who the U.S. would negotiate with, given a lack of clarity about Iran's power structure following the killing of Supreme

SEE ORDERED ON PAGE 6

Chaplains to display religious insignia

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon is doing away with rank insignias for military chaplains, requiring them to instead display religious insignia as part of broader changes to the chaplain corps, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced this week.

Chaplains will still retain their ranks, Hegseth said in a video announcement Tuesday, but the change is meant to highlight the importance of the chaplain's role as a religious leader.

Eliminating rank insignia will also help junior officers or enlisted personnel feel more comfortable approaching officers, or potentially senior officers, about sensitive subjects, like addiction, relationship or struggles with faith, he said.

"A chaplain is first and foremost a chaplain, and an officer second," Hegseth said. "This change is a visual representation of that fact."

The Pentagon late last year announced plans to overhaul the military's chaplain corps, which

SEE CHAPLAINS ON PAGE 7



JAMISON SUTTON/U.S. Navy

Navy Chaplain (Lt.) Jesus Dominguez, right, applies ash to a sailor's forehead during an Ash Wednesday service aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

FCC bans WiFi router imports on security concerns

Bloomberg News

The Federal Communications Commission ordered a ban on the import of new models of foreign-produced consumer wireless routers after an interagency panel determined they threaten national security.

While the FCC said companies could apply for exemptions, the move could dramatically shake up the market for routers, which are primarily made overseas. Consumers and businesses connect wired internet lines to routers to create Wi-Fi networks for computers, phones, TVs, cameras and other internet-enabled products.

The action puts further pressure on TP-Link Systems Inc., one of the world's largest makers of routers.

The company, which was founded in China 30 years ago but which has since set up its headquarters in Irvine, Calif., is already facing investigations by the Trump administration over concerns that its connections to China could threaten national security.

"While the rule doesn't name China, the direction of travel is pretty clear, and it raises the stakes for how the U.S. approaches connected devices going forward," said Craig Singleton, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Other router makers include Netgear Inc., Alphabet Inc.'s Google Nest, Amazon.com Inc.'s Eero, Cisco Systems Inc., Linksys and Asustek Computer Inc. They all build their products overseas.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (March 26)	0.84
British pound (March 26)	$1.31
Japanese yen (March 26)	155.00
South Korean won (March 26)	1,456.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3752
Britain (Pound)	1.3371
Canada (Dollar)	1.3787
China (Yuan)	6.4562
Denmark (Krone)	6.4562
Egypt (Pound)	52.5398
Euro	0.8640
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8185
Hungary (Forint)	336.29
Israel (Shekel)	3.1222
Japan (Yen)	159.14
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3059
Norway (Krone)	9.7193
Philippines (Peso)	60.00
Poland (Zloty)	3.69
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7471
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2806
South Korea (Won)	1,501.69
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7915
Thailand (Baht)	32.66
Turkey (NewLira)	44.3418

(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

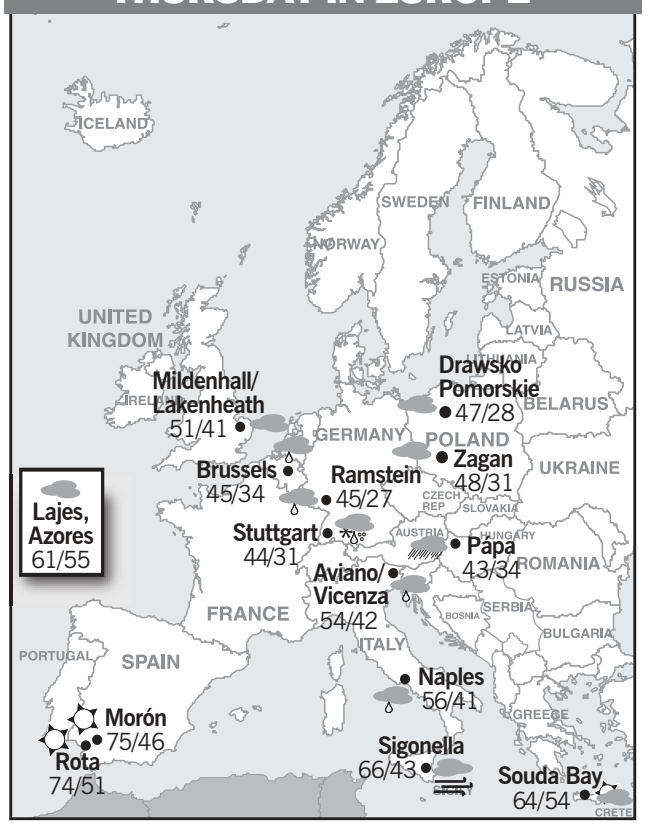
Prime rate	6.75
Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75
Federal funds market rate	3.62
3-month bill	3.71
30-year bond	4.93

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is compiled from weather.com reports.

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MILITARY

Study links Agent Orange to bone cancers

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A new study links Agent Orange to more aggressive bone marrow cancers in Vietnam veterans, which researchers say strengthens the case for granting presumptive service-connected benefits to veterans diagnosed with the disease decades after military service.

Known as myelodysplastic syndromes, or MDS, this group of bone marrow cancers disrupts blood cell production, resulting in a low blood cell count, according to researchers at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Fla.

The findings shed light on why some Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange have developed more severe bone marrow cancers, said Mikkael A. Sekeres, a physician and chief of hematology at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The study identified genetic mutations tied to earlier diagnosis and faster progression of the disease, he said.

"What we're seeing is that Agent Orange added a mutation — and that mutation sets patients on the road to cancer 50 years later," Sekeres said.

The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes several cancers as presumptively linked to Agent Orange, enabling qualifying veterans to receive disability compensation without proving a direct connection, according to the VA.



U.S. Army

A military helicopter in July 1969 sprays Agent Orange over the Mekong Delta, near Can Tho, Vietnam.

Qualifying cancers include but are not limited to certain lymphomas, bladder cancer, multiple myeloma and prostate cancer, according to the VA.

But MDS is not designated as a presumptive condition, which means that veterans must provide the necessary medical evidence to show a direct service connection between herbicide exposure and their disease, according to the VA Disability Group.

"I'm one of maybe several hundred to be compensated for MDS. But there are thousands of us with it who served in Vietnam," said Bob Macfarlane, an 81-year-old Vietnam veteran who was on active duty in the Air Force from 1962 to 1968.

"My VA doctors gave me 29 months to live, but only God knows my expiration date," said Macfarlane, who was diagnosed with MDS in 2005 and obtained a service-connected disability rating five years later.

Macfarlane, a former master sergeant, said spraying Agent Orange was common to clear the dense jungles in Vietnam, and no one questioned it.

Macfarlane said he was able to obtain VA disability benefits for exposure, after challenging repeated denials before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in Washington, D.C.

"There is hope if you don't give up," Macfarlane said.

Approximately 2.6 million Vietnam-era service members were potentially exposed to Agent Orange, which contains a highly toxic form of dioxin, a chemical that disrupts cellular processes, according to the study.

MDS develops slowly and typically occurs later in life. Most people receive a diagnosis in their 70s. "That long arc between exposure and diagnosis makes environmental risk factors particularly difficult to study," Sekeres said.

"We have aging veterans developing MDS who are being told by the [VA] that they can't get their health care covered to the extent they need because there hasn't been an official association made," Sekeres said. "This new analysis changes that dynamic. While it does not prove cause and effect, it provides the strongest data to date linking Agent Orange exposure with distinct genetic changes and more aggressive disease."

Veterans can file for disability benefits for MDS, but they must submit additional medical evidence to support their claim, according to the VA Disability Group.

"This doesn't mean you can't collect VA disability benefits from MDS, though the VA has so far refused to add MDS to the Agent Orange presumptive disease list," according to the VA Disability Group, which assists veterans in filing claims for disability benefits and health care coverage for service-connected medical conditions.

Because MDS commonly occurs in older patients, it is often attributed to age rather than toxic exposure, according to the Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation, which advocates for patients with the disease.

Among patients diagnosed with MDS, those exposed to Agent Orange were more than twice as likely to show "high-risk chromosome abnormalities," Sekeres said.

"For veterans living with MDS, knowing their cancer may have a unique genetic profile offers more than scientific insight. It can influence follow-up care and treatment decisions," he said.

Coast Guard relieves commander of cutter

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

The Coast Guard temporarily relieved the commanding officer of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Denman, homeported in Ketchikan, Alaska, the service announced Monday.

Lt. Edwin Kuster was relieved by Rear Adm. Bob Little, commander of the Coast Guard Arctic District. Little said an unspecified investigation led to a "loss of confidence" in Kuster's ability to lead.

The Coast Guard said Kuster's relief was "not due to misconduct."

Lt. Bryce Matakas has temporarily assumed the position of commanding officer of USCGC Douglas Denman. The Coast Guard did not say what duties Kuster would be assigned following his removal.

"A temporary relief for cause is initiated by the operational commander with information and circumstances that raise concerns about a service member's ability to effectively serve in their current position," said Coast Guard Lt. Pamela Manns, a spokeswoman for Arctic District Public Affairs. "The final decision authority for a permanent relief for cause resides with the commander of the Coast Guard Personnel Service Center."



U.S. Coast Guard

Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Denman near Sitka, Alaska, in May 2023.

Kuster took command of the fast response cutter in May 2024, according to a change of command ceremony report in the Ketchikan Daily News. The report said Kuster was the second commander of the cutter, which was delivered to the Coast Guard in 2022.

Report says KC-46A Pegasus tanker not full operation rated

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force's KC-46A Pegasus tanker has not reached full operational standards despite being deployed in restricted service, a key Pentagon report said Tuesday.

The Pentagon's Director, Operational Test and Evaluation annual report said two components of the refueling system have yet to pass tests meant to remove limitations on its use.

The issues are with the Remote Vision System and the Boom Telescope Actuator.

In-flight refueling system operators use the Remote Vision System to connect with a plane needing fuel. Unlike other refueling aircraft, the KC-46A uses a tail-mounted camera that feeds an image to the refueler, with software that creates a depth perception image that gives a daylight, night and infrared image. The boom operator sees this image on a 3D display and uses the Boom Telescope Actuator to extend and retract the refueling boom to the receiving plane.

"The KC-46A has not been able to meet several suitability metrics in past years, and this trend has continued through FY25," the report said. "The operational availability and mission capable rates are still well below their threshold requirements."

The Air Force said the tanker has already been deployed by Air Mobility Command in some situations but passing full operational testing certifications would allow for a less restrictive use of the KC-46A.

The first 183 KC-46A to be built are to begin replacing the aging fleet of more than 400 legacy KC-135 and KC-10 Extender refueling aircraft.

The KC-46A is a military tanker based on an extended-range variant of the Boeing 767 commercial airliner, with military upgrades for carrying fuel, defensive countermeasures, communications, rescue, medical transport and cargo roles.

The Air Force expects the KC-46A Pegasus to support combat and rescue missions, including delivering cargo to service members in the field and evacuating wounded personnel.

With corrections to the flaws noted in the report, the Pentagon expressed optimism that the KC-46A would rapidly reach full operational standards.

"Most flight testing has already been completed, but final testing depends on finishing the remaining fixes," the report said. "The aircraft can be deployed today, but with limits."

The KC-46A is capable of refueling 26 of 27 aircraft variants, according to the report — but with restrictions on "certain environmental conditions and aircraft configurations."

The report did not identify the 27th aircraft type that can't currently be used with the KC-46A, but the report said the Air Force will "resume testing" on the variant's use of the KC-46A in the near future.

MILITARY

USS Mason leaves homeport ahead of deployment



Daniel De Jesus

Families of sailors assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mason wave goodbye as the ship departs Naval Station Mayport, Fla., on Tuesday.

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A Navy destroyer assigned to the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group has left its homeport in Florida to begin operations in support of an upcoming deployment, the Navy announced this week.

USS Mason, which serves as the air and missile defense commander for the Bush group, departed Mayport, Fla., on Tuesday, the Navy said in a statement the same day.

The departure comes after months of training, maintenance and certification events as part of the strike group, according to the statement.

It's not clear when Mason will join the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush for the group's scheduled deployment. The Navy has not officially announced where the Bush will go.

But with USS Gerald R. Ford at a Navy base in Greece for an assessment, repairs and replenishment following a March 12 fire aboard the ship during operations in the Red Sea, there now is only one Navy aircraft carrier in the Middle East.

USS Abraham Lincoln continues operations in the Arabian Sea in support of Operation Epic Fury, the ongoing joint American and Israeli military campaign against Iran.

On Tuesday, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said the cause of the fire aboard the Ford, which started in the ship's main laundry area, remained under investigation.

"Specific details and subsequent damage assessment are being evaluated as part of ongoing investigations and will be released at a later date," NAVEUR-AF/6th Fleet said in a statement in response to Stars and Stripes' questions about the impact of the fire on the ship and its personnel.

Mason has a crew of about 300 and is one of at least two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers assigned to the Bush carrier strike group; the other is USS Ross, homeported in Norfolk, Va.

Mason is among the first destroyers to take on the responsibility of air and surface command, a role traditionally filled by cruisers. With the Navy's aging cruiser fleet nearing retirement, destroyers are bridging the gap.

Bush, which completed a predeployment certification exercise March 5, was last deployed to the Mediterranean in August 2022. The carrier returned to Norfolk in April 2023 after more than eight months on deployment.

Latvian Black Hawk crews gain aerial gunnery capability

BY SHATYRA COX
Stars and Stripes

Latvian Black Hawk crews, assisted by U.S. Army aviators, were put to the test this month when they carried out their first aerial gunnery, adding a new combat capability along NATO's eastern flank.

The effort reflects a broader push by the U.S. to help frontline allies in the Baltics build up their capabilities in a region where concerns about potential Russian aggression run high.

The Latvians are preparing to add the M240H machine gun to their arsenal. Before that happens, they need to learn the finer points of using the weapon for air combat.

"This task is a completely new line of effort in our mission-essential task list, and we will be able to complete those tasks on our own," said Latvian air force Commander Col. Viesturs Masulis.



PHOTOS BY DEAN JOHNSON/U.S. Army

A U.S. soldier conducts aerial gunnery training with members of the Latvian air force at Adazi Military Training Area, Latvia, on March 18.

Building up aviation firepower has been an area of focus for Latvia as it moves to close capability gaps and build a force able to move with speed in a crisis.



During the training, U.S. crews helped establish Latvia's aerial gunnery program.

The U.S. Army's 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, operating out of Latvia's Camp Adazi, led the training initiative.

Before firing from the aircraft, crews train on weapons handling and safety procedures, including clearing weapons and maintaining proper firing direction.

Once airborne, door gunners engage ground targets while working closely with pilots to safely execute the mission.

"They fly, fight and maintain their aircraft to the same standards as we do, so we are going to take them out and train them on aerial gunnery to those standards," said Maj. Aaron Koser with the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade's Task Force Vipers.

For U.S. crews, the training also provides an opportunity to refine their own skills.

"This allows us to get an external look on how we train," Koser explained. "You not only pick up new tactics, techniques and procedures, but it allows you to get feedback."

Italian military to remove WWII-era bomb near Aviano's main gate

BY KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — Italian military experts will attempt to dispose of an unexploded bomb that's kept a small area of the base closed off for about a month, according to a local media report.

Aviano Air Base's main gate, located just outside the cordoned area, will be closed during the Sunday morning operation, according to Il Gazzettino, a local newspaper. Traffic will be restricted and redirected by local police officers.

The exact type of device in question has not been made public. Il Gazzettino described it as a 100-pound bomb dropped by American forces. It speculates that it was dropped in January 1944 by either a B-17 or B-24 during flights over the area.

No sources were cited, which is not unusual for an Italian media report.

The 31st Fighter Wing public affairs office has declined to answer queries about the bomb, directing questions to the Italian air force. A query to the local spokesman for ITAF went unanswered.

The bomb was reportedly discovered during construction work on an unused hangar that has been undergoing renovations for years. When the bomb was found Feb. 26, authorities closed the main gate temporarily as a precaution. However, the area, which includes outdoor recreation facilities and auto skills shops, has remained off-limits since then.

Work is scheduled to start at 7 a.m. Sunday, according to the article. The local population has been advised to stay away from the area.

The operation will be carried out by the Italian army's 3rd Engineer Regiment.

The unit is based at a barracks in Udine named after Giovanni Battista Berghinz, an Italian army officer who refused to cooperate with the Nazis in World War II and was eventually tortured and killed by them.

MILITARY

Army increases max enlistment age to 42

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Those in their late 30s and early 40s can now join the U.S. Army.

The Army increased its maximum enlistment age to 42 this month, bringing its accession policy closer in line with most of the United States' other military services, according to updated service regulation documents published this month.

Individuals up to 42 with or without prior military service can enlist in the Regular Army, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, according to the updated Army Regulation 601-210 published March 20. AR 601-210 is the regulation that governs policies and procedures for the Army's enlistment process.

The Army in recent years had capped the enlistment age at 35, although it did accept some older recruits with waivers, officials said. The policy did not change the Army's minimum ages for enlisting, which remain 17 with parental permission or 18.

The updated enlistment age brings the Army in line with the Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard, which all accept recruits up to 42. The Navy accepts recruits up to 41, and the Marine Corps only accepts enlisted recruits up to 28 years old.

It is not the first time the Army has accepted older recruits. The service temporarily increased its maximum enlistment age to 42 in 2006 as it struggled to fill its ranks amid major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The service dropped its enlistment age back to 35 in 2016.

The Air Force and Space Force were the most recent services to raise their max enlistment age in 2023 when they moved it from 39 to 42 amid a yearslong recruiting slump that saw Air Force recruiters fall short of their enlistment goals for multiple years.

But the Army policy change comes amid a solid recruiting environment in which its recruiters have reached or surpassed their goals in the last year and report being on track to meet their 2026 recruiting aims.

The policy change is meant to better align the service with Defense Department standards, an Army spokesperson said Tuesday.

The updated Army regulation also allows recruits who have a single marijuana possession or drug paraphernalia possession conviction to enlist without a waiver. Such convictions previously would have technically barred potential recruits from enlisting, but those with such convictions were often granted waivers to join the service.

All of the U.S. military services also allow exceptions to their enlistment policies via waivers. The Air Force, for example, recently allowed 51-year-old David Goggins to enlist. Goggins is a storied former Navy SEAL who entered the Air Force as master sergeant and was assigned to the Special Warfare Training Wing, according to an Air Force spokesperson.

In 2023, Rand Corp. analysts suggested the Army raise its maximum enlistment age to help it increase recruiting at a time when the service had just missed its recruiting goals by about 25% in 2022.

In a 2022 study, Rand analysts found that older recruits might perform better. It found recruits between 25 and 35 were about 15% less likely to wash out of initial entry training than younger recruits. That age group was also about 6% more likely to reenlist after their initial contract, Rand found.

The company also found that recruiters believed older recruits were "of higher quality, more focused, and more motivated, as well as being ready to ship to basic training more quickly."



SCOTT STURKOL/U.S. Army

An Army officer gives the oath of enlistment to new recruits in June at Fort McCoy, Wis. The Army has increased its maximum enlistment age to 42.

3 military families file lawsuit over homes leased at base

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Three military families have filed a federal lawsuit against the private landlord at a Texas Air Force base, accusing the company of leasing them homes plagued with mold growth, sewage problems, lead paint and other ongoing conditions that caused their health to suffer.

The three families lived in homes rented between 2017 and 2025 through Hunt Military Communities at Randolph Air Force Base, part of Joint Base San Antonio.

The lawsuit, filed March 13 in the Western District of Texas San Antonio Division, stated the families — retired Master Sgt. Michael and Angela Kellar; retired Staff Sgt. Leroy and Shelvella Holmes; and Senior Master Sgt. Matthew and Heidi Eller — sued because of "false promises, atrocious living conditions, personal injuries and property damage caused by their profound neglect, malfeasance and greed."

The Kellars and their son leased a home at Randolph in June 2018 after Michael Kellar retired and without being allowed in before signing a lease. During their three years living there, they experienced "pervasive and serious problems related to mold growth, sewage issues, water damage, asbestos, lead paint and structural deficiencies."



Kellar family

The Kellar family claims to have experienced problems at a home they leased at Randolph Air Force Base in June 2018.

Despite multiple requests, Hunt did not clean the air ducts, which were filthy, according to the lawsuit. The company also failed to fix an electrical issue which left the Kellars with an energy bill that skyrocketed.

The Holmeses, a multigenerational family of four, moved into Randolph housing in November 2017 and experienced pervasive problems, including structural issues, deteriorating window seals, and unstable stairs and railings.

"Sewage and toilet problems required the family to manually flush toilets using bottles of water, and slow drainage throughout the home's sinks and tub forced the family to purchase drain cleaning products out of pocket," according to the lawsuit.

A crawlspace under the home was not covered, which allowed for raccoons and opossums to get underneath the house. Roaches and spiders frequented the inside.

The Ellers and their four children spent five years in a home on Randolph, beginning in August 2020, and saw the problems progressively develop. By August 2023 there was visible mold growth around an AC vent. Issues continued, and they were displaced in July 2025 and moved out in September, abandoning personal property in the house because of contamination, according to the lawsuit.

Each family described an array of health symptoms that began or worsened while they were in the housing. Those symptoms often improved when they were out of the house for extended periods of time.

Carolyn Baker, a spokeswoman for Hunt Military Communities, said she could not comment on specific details of the litigation.

"Randolph Family Housing, LLC is committed to providing high-quality housing to military members and their families in support of their critical missions. We have rigorous processes in place and provide ongoing training to ensure our staff responds quickly and effectively to any issues that arise," she said in a statement.

The three families join eight others awaiting trial after filing lawsuits in 2019 against Hunt for similar conditions. At that time, several military housing companies were sued for poor housing conditions at various installations. Some have been settled outside of court, and others continue to wind through the legal system more than six years later.

Only one family related to Randolph housing, Shane and Becky Vinales, has seen their lawsuit through to a jury trial. They were awarded more than $91,000 in 2023, although the trial did not include some allegations because the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that company only has to maintain state standards that were set at the time the property was deeded to the United States. Randolph first became an Army airfield in 1930, according to the base. It transferred to the Air Force in 1948.

"Off base, this conduct violates Texas law. On base, it's nearly untouchable," said Jim Moriarty, an attorney for the families. "Families are living in conditions that would trigger immediate enforcement anywhere else, and inadequate mechanisms exist to hold these companies accountable."

Congress could pass a law to solve this, he said. It has not.

However, Congress did begin in 2019 to tackle the concerns of military families. It passed a series of military family housing reforms intended to improve oversight, accountability and existing conditions. Despite this, Moriarty said his legal teams have continued to receive calls describing the same problems.

"The work gets done, the reports get written, and the problems keep coming back," he said.

Jury trials are scheduled this summer for three families who first filed suit in 2019, according to online court documents.

MIDEAST

Gulf states weigh options to counter Iran

By Sam Dagher, Fiona MacDonald, Mirette Magdy and Samy Adghirni
Bloomberg News

Iran's biggest Gulf Arab neighbors are considering joining the U.S.-Israeli war against Tehran and could be pushed to if Tehran attacks their critical infrastructure, according to several people with knowledge of the situation.

The Gulf's most powerful states, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in particular, are losing patience with Iranian strikes that have already hit ports, energy facilities and airports, said these people, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely. But they would only join the war if the Islamic Republic makes good on its threats to attack vital Gulf power and water infrastructure — a high threshold, the people added.



AP

Smoke rises from Kuwait international airport after a drone strike on fuel storage on Wednesday.

Most Gulf states are headed in that direction with some exceptions such as Oman, which wants to maintain its role as mediator, said the people.

Still, they are wary of joining the war given Iran could escalate its attacks on them. They could also end up in a situation where President Donald Trump cuts a deal with Tehran and they're left to deal with a wounded, angry regime, added a European diplomat in the region.

Many governments also fear that could happen even if they don't join the war, said the people.

The war has upended Iran's relations with its Sunni Arab neighbors. Saudi Arabia and the UAE spent most of the past five years attempting to stabilize ties with the Islamic Republic, in large part to prevent the kind of conflict now raging. Gulf states have long seen Iran's Shiite theocratic regime as trying to extend its ideology and influence to the rest of the region.

In the past two days Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE all intercepted drones and missiles fired by Iran. Abu Dhabi condemned what it called an "unprovoked terrorist attack" by Iran on Bahrain on Tuesday that killed a Moroccan contractor. Several Emirati and Bahraini soldiers were injured in the missile attack.

Senate blocks another attempt to stop Iran war

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate defeated legislation Tuesday that would have blocked President Donald Trump from continuing to wage war against Iran without congressional authorization, the third unsuccessful attempt to limit his military power since the conflict began.

The 53-47 vote was the latest attempt by Democrats to give Congress a say in the nearly one-month war and part of an effort by several Democratic senators to continue forcing votes on war powers resolutions until top Trump officials publicly testify about the U.S.-Israeli bombing campaign.

Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a libertarian who routinely supports measures to assert Congress's role in authorizing the use of military force abroad, was the only Republican to support the resolution, and Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania was the only Democrat to oppose it.

The vote breakdown was similar to two prior measures to halt offensive U.S. military operations in Iran that have not been approved by lawmakers. The first resolution was introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and the second was introduced by Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., as one of five separate measures meant to tie up the Senate floor with repeated votes on the issue.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., forced the third vote on Tuesday and emphasized that it will not be the last.

"If our Republican colleagues will not do their duty, if they are going to engage in an effort to hide the consequences of the war, if they are going to refuse to ask questions of our incompetent national security leaders at the White House who have waged this war without planning for the foreseeable consequences, then we will force a debate and a vote on this floor," he said.

Democrats have repeatedly called for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other administration officials to appear at oversight hearings on Capitol Hill, not just in classified briefings, so that they can explain their justifications for the war and outline its endgame to the public.

The administration has offered various objectives for its attacks on Iran, from regime change to degrading Tehran's missile and naval capabilities.

"They need to explain their case, respecting the American people enough to tell them why they're being forced to take on the cost of this conflict," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a veteran of the Iraq War. "They need to prove that they've thought this through."

Most Republicans have continued to defend Trump's decision to go to war, though they have offered cautious support for an anticipated supplemental funding request from the Pentagon that could top $200 billion. Some have also expressed concern about a potential ground invasion, which Trump is reportedly considering.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reiterated his backing for the conflict and accused Democrats of trying to help Iranians by introducing war powers resolutions over and over.

"Every American should stand behind our fighting men and women, they need to continue on, they need to complete the job," he said. "The President of the United States is going to do this. So to my friends on the other side of the aisle: stop this."

In a related vote earlier Tuesday, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution honoring six service members who were killed in a refueling plane crash in Iraq this month while supporting the Iran mission.

"We will never forget the ultimate sacrifice these American heroes made and continue to pray for their loved ones," Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., a Marine veteran, said in a statement.

Ordered: Deployment comes as Iran fires more missiles at Israel

FROM PAGE 1

Leader Ali Khamenei on the first day of the conflict. Several other leading government and military officials have also been killed.

The president boasted Tuesday that the U.S. is in "a good bargaining position" after weeks of strikes that he says have taken out Iranian missiles, launchers and ships.

A series of Iranian officials have denied negotiations are taking place, and on Wednesday, Iran dismissed the U.S. plan to pause the war, The Associated Press reported. Iranian state television's English-language broadcaster quoted an anonymous official as saying Iran rejected America's ceasefire proposal and has its own demands for an end to the fighting.

In an overnight statement, the country's military told the U.S. not to "call your defeat an agreement."

"The level of your internal conflicts has reached the point where you are negotiating with yourselves," the armed forces said in a statement carried by Iran's state-run IRIB News.

There's also little clarity over whether Iran will immediately allow commercial ships safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial shipping corridor for oil, natural gas, metals and other commodities — as well as how Israel would respond to any deal. There's been little sign of Iran backing down in the face of a relentless bombardment. Iranian media said more missiles were fired at Israel.

Despite the reported talks, Trump has ordered thousands of troops to the Middle East as he weighs options for ending Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

The paratroopers will join several thousand Marines also headed to the region, giving Trump options if he decides to launch a ground attack. One possible operation for 82nd soldiers and Marine infantrymen is seizing the strategic Kharg Island, a small strip of land in the Persian Gulf that handles 90% of Iranian oil exports.

Experts say the size of the force being sent to the region isn't large enough to carry out large-scale operations over an expansive amount of territory.

"That (force) is not sufficient for a major invasion nor to hold a single city. [It] says limited/targeted ops only," Alex Plitsas, an expert with the Atlantic Council think tank, said on X.

The Immediate Response Force is a go-to unit for the Pentagon during major crises. In 2022, elements of the brigade mobilized as a precaution to Europe as Russian forces began gathering on Ukraine's border just ahead of the Kremlin's full-scale invasion. The brigade also assisted in the evacuation of U.S. Embassy personnel in Kabul during the hurried withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

The soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, one of the Army's most storied units, specialize in forcing their way into contested territory, often tasked with opening the battlefield for follow-on forces.

Bloomberg News contributed to this report.

MILITARY



PHOTOS FROM U.S. ARMY CADET COMMAND/Facebook

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael R. Weimer and Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, left, shake hands Sunday with Old Dominion University ROTC cadets at a ceremony where they were honored for stopping a shooting.

Army ROTC cadets awarded medals after stopping shooter

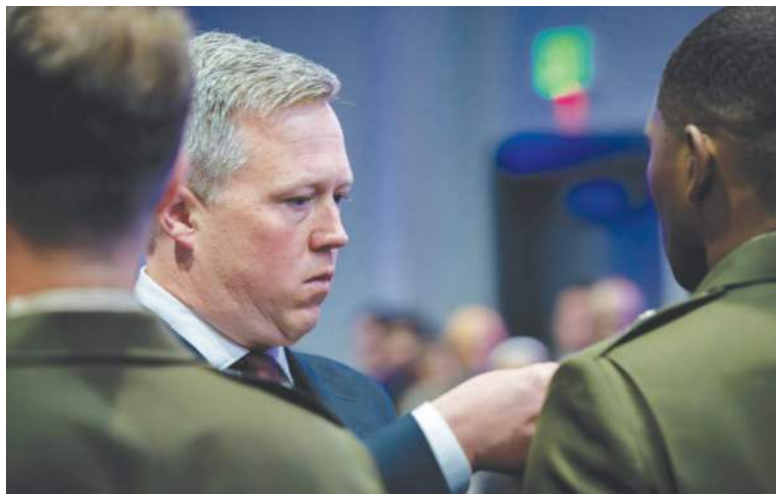
Stars and Stripes

Army ROTC cadets attending Old Dominion University in Virginia received eight meritorious service medals and two Purple Hearts on Sunday in recognition of their efforts to stop a shooter at the university two weeks earlier.

The private ceremony saw the unnamed cadets awarded by Army Secretary Dan Driscoll and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer, U.S. Army Cadet Command said in a Facebook post.

On March 12, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh fired in a classroom at the university, killing one person and injuring two others. Jalloh, a previously convicted terrorist and former member of the Army National Guard, was stopped by students.

"The shooter is now deceased thanks to a group of brave students who stepped in and subdued him — actions that undoubtedly saved lives along with the quick response of law enforcement," FBI Director Kash Patel said the day of the shooting in a post on X.



Driscoll awarded meritorious service medals and Purple Hearts to ROTC cadets attending Old Dominion University.

The man who was killed, retired Army Lt. Col. Brandon Shah, 41, was a decorated military veteran who led the university's ROTC program and was credited with boosting its size.

"The greatest gift to the nation from [Shah] who lost his life, is the training he gave these cadets," one person wrote in a comment on the command's Facebook post.

Japanese town to pay locals $500 for F-35B noise

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

A town in southern Japan will pay its residents about $500 over four years to help offset noise from the Japan Air Self-Defense Force's new F-35B fighters at a nearby air base.

Shintomi — a town in Miyazaki prefecture on the island of Kyushu — plans to pay each resident about $126 annually beginning in fiscal 2026, which starts April 1, a spokesman for the town's Base Affairs Division said Wednesday.

The town has about 15,570 residents, according to its website.

"Citizens can use the money for what they want, but we were thinking that it would be good if they can use it for soundproofing goods like curtains or headphones," the spokesman said.

Japan plans to deploy 42 F-35B Lightning IIs to Nyutabaru Air Base, about two miles from the center of Shintomi, as part of efforts to strengthen defenses along the Nansei Islands, a chain that stretches from Kyushu toward Taiwan.

The first three short-takeoff, vertical-landing aircraft arrived at the base on Aug. 7, a spokesman for the Kyushu Defense Bureau said Monday.

Two more arrived on Oct. 28 and three additional aircraft arrived on Feb. 12. Four more are expected in fiscal 2026.

The payments will come from the town budget and are intended to help residents cope with noise from vertical-landing training through fiscal 2029, the town spokesman said.

Those landings can produce noise of up to 110 decibels, roughly equivalent to a chainsaw or a car horn at close range.

Some Japanese government officials must speak to the press on condition of anonymity.

Japan had planned to train F-35 pilots on Mageshima, a small island in Kagoshima prefecture southwest of Nyutabaru, but completion of the base there has been delayed until 2030, according to the Ministry of Defense.

Japan announced in 2018 that it would acquire the F-35B and later added 63 F-35A aircraft in a package worth about $23 billion. It has also modified two helicopter carriers, the JS Izumo and JS Kaga, to operate the aircraft.

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, north of Nyutabaru, hosts two permanently based F-35B squadrons. Two additional squadrons were temporarily deployed there last year.



Japan Air Self-Defense Force

A Japanese F-35B Lightning II stealth fighter arrives at Nyutabaru Air Base in the island of Kyushu, on Aug. 7.

Chaplains: DOD to use 31 religious affiliation codes instead of previous 221



ANTONIO TURRETTO RAMOS/U.S. Navy

Chaplain (Lt. Cmdr.) Leszek N. Sikorski, left, and Bishop Richard B. Higgins, vicar for Veterans Affairs Archdiocese for the Military Services, spread holy water at Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.

FROM PAGE 1

Hegseth said had become too focused on political correctness and secular humanism.

He eliminated the Army's spiritual fitness guide and vowed to streamline the military's faith and belief coding system.

Since 2017, the Defense Department has recognized 221 groups as religious denominations or belief systems, ranging from mainstream to obscure Christian sects, Wiccans and atheists.

That system was impractical and unusual, Hegseth said this week. Moving forward, the Pentagon will use 31 religious affiliation codes.

"This brings the codes in line with its original purpose: giving chaplains clear, usable information, so they can minister to service members in a way that aligns with that service member's faith background and religious practice," he said.

More than 80% of service members identify as being religious, Hegseth said, without citing a source.

Hegseth called the latest reforms the first steps toward returning chaplains to their esteemed positions as moral anchors of the armed forces.

"In combat, in crisis, in loss, a warfighter needs more than a coping mechanism," Hegseth said. "They need truth, 'big T truth.' They need conviction. They need a shepherd."

NATION

Fire truck in LaGuardia crash had no tracker



THEODORE PARISIENNE, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS/TNS

A destroyed Port Authority emergency vehicle is pictured after it collided with an Air Canada Express plane at LaGuardia Airport in New York City, on Sunday.

BY THOMAS TRACY AND EVAN SIMKO-BEDNARSKI
New York Daily News

NEW YORK — The Port Authority fire truck that got into a fatal crash with an Air Canada jet landing at LaGuardia Airport didn't have transponders installed that could have helped air traffic controllers better track its movements, NTSB investigators said Tuesday.

While radio transmissions made it clear the Port Authority Police aircraft rescue fire truck and several other emergency vehicles were close to the runway, transponders would have allowed controllers in the tower to see them on their instruments, National Transportation Safety Board Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy said.

"The controllers should have all the tools they need to do their job," she said at a press briefing at LaGuardia Airport on Tuesday afternoon. "Whether it's aircraft or vehicles moving in the taxiways, they should have it all."

The NTSB will be investigating all facets of the crash, including the possibility that a tower operator gave the emergency vehicle permission to cross the runway without realizing the Air Canada plane was landing there.

"We rarely, if ever, investigate a major accident where it was one failure," Homendy said. "Our aviation system is incredibly safe because there are multiple, multiple layers of defense built in to prevent an accident."

"When something goes wrong, that means many, many things went wrong," she added.

NTSB investigators have yet to interview the Port Authority Police sergeant and officer who were in the fire truck involved in the crash. The sergeant was expected to be released from the hospital Tuesday, and the officer was released the day before.

"It happened very quickly," Homendy said of the crash. "We need to match up all the times. We need to look at visibility and look at the movement of the trucks and the visibility of the trucks."

She said a transponder aboard the fire truck would have ensured it was visible to LaGuardia's airport surface detection system, known as "ASDE-X," which is meant to automatically notify controllers to potential dangers on the tarmac.

"ASDE-X did not alert," Homendy said.

A replay of data from the ASDE-X system — which relied on ground radar in the absence of a transponder — showed no vehicles crossing the runway at the time of the fatal crash.

"This is an active NTSB investigation, and as with any ongoing investigation, we're not able to comment on specifics," a Port Authority spokesman said in a statement. "Our focus is on ensuring investigators have full access and support as they carry out a thorough and independent review."

Homendy told reporters Tuesday there was no indication any of the fire rescue trucks at LaGuardia Airport were equipped with transponders.

A Port Authority source said its emergency vehicles have never had transponders nor are they required to. "But I'm sure they will be now," the source added.

Air traffic control audio reviewed by the Daily News indicate controllers were nonetheless aware of the truck's position — on Taxiway D preparing to cross Runway 4 — in the seconds leading up to the fatal crash.

The crash unfolded around 11:45 p.m. Sunday when the Air Canada jet arriving from Montreal slammed into the Port Authority fire truck racing across the runway to respond to a strange odor on a different plane.

The impact sheared off the front of the jet, killing the two pilots and injuring dozens of passengers.

Homendy said Tuesday that there were at least two controllers in the tower at the time of the crash, each handling multiple roles — a situation she characterized as "in the standard operating procedure" for LaGuardia and other airports nationwide during the midnight shift.

Judge calls US government ban on Anthropic AI tech 'troubling'

BY RACHEL METZ
Bloomberg News

A judge appeared skeptical of the Trump administration's rationale for banning the federal government from using artificial intelligence technology from Anthropic, a move that the Claude chatbot maker claims could cost it billions in lost revenue.

During a hearing Tuesday in San Francisco, U.S. District Judge Rita F. Lin said it was "troubling" that the Defense Department had designated Anthropic a supply-chain risk, a label normally used to describe U.S. adversaries. Lin said the decision by the government doesn't appear to be "tailored to the stated national security concern."

Instead, the ban that followed the Pentagon's dispute with the company over AI safety concerns "looks like an attempt to cripple Anthropic," she said. The judge added that she's concerned about whether the government is punishing Anthropic for speaking out publicly about the conflict.

Anthropic sued last month to block the Pentagon's declaration, escalating a high-stakes dispute over safeguards on AI technology used by the military. The startup's CEO, Dario Amodei, demanded assurances that its AI wouldn't be used for mass surveillance of Americans or autonomous weapons deployment, while the government cited national security in arguing it couldn't accept any restrictions.



Amodei

Anthropic had asked the judge to issue a preliminary injunction to block the government's ban from staying in effect while the legal fight plays out. Lin didn't rule on that request, but said she'd make a decision in the coming days.

Anthropic wants the judge to remove the supply-chain risk designation and require U.S. agencies to withdraw directives related to it.

The company claims it is being shut out for disagreeing with the administration and argues the legal principles at stake affect every federal contractor whose views the government dislikes.

The Trump administration has vowed a legal fight to oust Anthropic from all U.S. government agencies.

During the hearing, a lawyer for the federal government said trust was a key component in any relationship the military has with companies providing it with services and that Anthropic destroyed that trust during contract negotiations by trying to dictate Pentagon policies on use of AI technology.

The lawyer argued that the government is concerned about the risk of "future sabotage" from Anthropic, including changes to the AI software the government purchases from the company.

Dem alleges Trump shared classified map during 2022 plane trip

BY ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump showed off a classified map on a 2022 flight to his New Jersey golf club and held onto a record from his first term that was so sensitive only six people would have had access to it, according to a letter released Wednesday by a top House Democrat.

The letter from Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, adds to the public understanding of the investigation into Trump's retention of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla.

It quotes from a newly disclosed Department of Justice memo from January 2023 in which prosecutors cited evidence they said they had accumulated as they moved toward a felony indictment of Trump that would be filed months later.

The memo recounts a June 2022 flight to Trump's golf club in Bedminster, N.J., on which the Republican apparently took classified documents, and it says that prosecutors "identified a classified map that we believe Trump may have shown to individuals on board," according to Raskin's letter. Prosecutors said in their memo that their investigation indicated that Susie Wiles, Trump's future chief of staff at the White House, was on the plane and witnessed the episode, Raskin said.

Responding to Raskin's letter, the White House said he was not credible. "It's pathetic that Democrats with zero credibility like Jamie Raskin are still clinging to deranged [special counsel] Jack Smith and his lies in 2026," White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said.

NATION

Jury finds Meta culpable of harming teens

By Olivier Uyttebrouck
Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

Jurors on Tuesday found digital media giant Meta culpable of failing to protect New Mexico teenagers on the company's platforms in a verdict that came less than a day after attorneys ended closing arguments in the six-week trial.

The jury ordered Meta to pay $375 million in civil penalties for violations of New Mexico's consumer protection laws.

The jury found Meta liable for both claims brought by New Mexico under the state's Unfair Practices Act.

State Attorney General Raúl Torrez filed the suit against Meta Platforms and CEO Mark Zuckerberg in 2023, alleging the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp failed to protect children from sexual abuse, online solicitation and human trafficking.

"The jury's verdict is a historic victory for every child and family who has paid the price for Meta's choice to put profits over kids' safety," Torrez said of the verdict. "Meta executives knew their products harmed children, disregarded warnings from their own employees and lied to the public about what they knew. Today the jury joined families, educators and child safety experts in saying enough is enough."

Attorneys for New Mexico asked jurors on Monday to impose a penalty of more than $2 billion against Meta.



Nathan Burton/AP

Linda Singer, an attorney representing the state, and Donald Migliori, attorney with the law firm MotleyRice celebrate after the jury reached a verdict against Meta for violated state laws and ordering the social media company to pay $375 million in damages to the state, Tuesday, in Santa Fe, N.M.

The next phase of New Mexico's legal action against Meta will be a bench trial before 1st Judicial District Judge Bryan Biedscheid seeking additional financial penalties and court-mandated changes to Meta's platforms that offer stronger protections for children, Torrez said in a statement. That portion of the trial has not been scheduled.

"New Mexico is proud to be the first state to hold Meta accountable in court for misleading parents, enabling child exploitation and harming kids," Torrez said.

Advocates hugged one another in celebration outside the courthouse in downtown Santa Fe after the verdict was announced.

One of the jurors, Lindsay Payton, said the trial showed Meta could do more to protect teenagers in New Mexico from online solicitation and sexual abuse.

"They're not out to do evil in that way — I don't think they're doing it on purpose — but they are aware of what's going on and they know the extent of it and they really need to fix it," Payton said.

Another juror, Molly Archuleta, said the jury grappled with whether Meta willfully and intentionally allowed harm to happen.

"To get 12 people to agree on what is grossly unfair was a struggle," said Archuleta, who works as a registered nurse. While Archuleta said she believes Meta proved they do care about children, she also said she believes justice was "heavily served" in the case.

Jurors found 37,500 violations of state law, or 25% of New Mexico teenagers, based on U.S. Census Bureau figures, Archuleta said.

New Mexico's legal action differs from thousands of other lawsuits filed against social media companies across the country by focusing on what the lawsuit argues is Meta's failure to protect young people from sexual exploitation. In preparing the suit, investigators created fictitious Facebook and Instagram accounts, including those for boys and girls in their early teens, complete with photos.

One such account was promoted as being created by "Issa Bee," a fictitious 13-year-old girl, which quickly garnered 5,000 friends and 6,700 followers, most of them males ages 18 to 40, who often sent her salacious messages and sexually explicit photos, the suit said.

Meta's attorney, Kevin Huff, said in closing arguments that investigators were "not trying to replicate a true teen experience like a real teen in New Mexico" when they created the Issa Bee account. "This is precisely why Meta doesn't allow fake accounts on its apps, because bad people can do bad things that might put people at risk," he told jurors.

Huff also argued Monday that New Mexico didn't meet its burden of showing that Meta violated state law by failing to disclose known risks of its platforms for young users.

Surgeon general nomination stalls, senators question her experience

By Ali Swenson
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Wellness influencer Dr. Casey Means' nomination to be U.S. surgeon general is stalled a month after senators of both major political parties grilled her on vaccines and other health topics during a tense confirmation hearing, deepening doubts about her ability to secure the votes she needs for the role.

The nomination has languished despite ongoing efforts from the White House and Make America Healthy Again activists, revealing how intractable rifts over health policy can be even when Congress has shown deference to President Donald Trump. It's become the latest snag in Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s agenda after two legal setbacks last week.

Means, a 38-year-old Stanford-educated physician who became disillusioned with traditional medicine and did not finish her surgical residency program, has faced scrutiny for her lack of experience and potential conflicts. Another sticking point has been her close alignment with Kennedy, whose efforts to dramatically pull back vaccine recommendations have been slammed by lawmakers and medical groups.



Means

To advance to a full Senate vote, Means likely needs every Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to support her nomination. But after last month's hearing, two of them — Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine — told reporters they still had questions for her.

Murkowski told reporters Tuesday that "I'm just in the same spot" when it comes to those hesitations. Collins and Republican committee chairman Sen. Bill Cassidy, a physician from Louisiana who interrogated Means about vaccines during the hearing, didn't respond to multiple inquiries about the delay.

Means promotes ideas popular with the MAHA movement, including that Americans are overmedicalized and that diet and lifestyle changes should be at the center of efforts to end widespread chronic disease.

Others have loudly opposed Means' nomination. Dr. Jerome Adams, Trump's first-term surgeon general, has repeatedly called her unqualified for her lack of an active medical license. He said in an interview that Republicans in Congress and in the Trump administration have told him they disapprove of the pick but see it as Kennedy's choice.

While surgeons general aren't mandated by law to have an active medical license, they are required to be part of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, a group of health professionals that says members should have up-to-date licenses.

Judge orders return of Calif. DACA recipient deported to Mexico

By Andrea Castillo
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Monday ordered the government to return to the U.S. a California DACA recipient who was deported to Mexico.

U.S. District Judge Dena Coggins in Sacramento gave the government seven days to return Maria de Jesus Estrada Juarez, 42, and restore her protections under the Obama-era program Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

A lawyer for Estrada Juarez argued that she was unlawfully deported within a day of appearing at a scheduled immigration appointment in Sacramento.

Lawyers for the government, meanwhile, argued that the court lacked jurisdiction over Estrada Juarez's case because her petition was filed after she was deported and because her removal was a discretionary decision the government is entitled to.

Coggins said she found the government's argument "unavailing," writing in her ruling that Estrada Juarez "was removed in flagrant violation of the regulatory protections afforded to her under DACA."

The Department of Homeland Security said it had reinstated an expedited removal order for Estrada Juarez from 1998, when she was 15. But her lawyer, Stacy Tolchin, said the record showed that the order lacked supervisory approval and was never finalized, so there was no valid removal order to reinstate.

Estrada Juarez, who worked as a regional manager for Motel 6, has had protection from deportation under DACA since 2013. She applied for legal permanent residency, or a green card, through her daughter, Damaris Bello, 22, who is a U.S. citizen.

NATION

Thune mulls reconciliation for voter bill

BY SAVANNAH BEHRMANN
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — For Senate leaders, pursuing another budget reconciliation bill this year was once considered a no-go. But in a matter of days, it's become a distinct possibility.

Using the often arduous budgetary maneuver would represent a shift for both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, necessitated by Republican needs to reopen the Department of Homeland Security while passing some of their legislative priorities, key among them a voter ID bill.

But using reconciliation remains an uphill battle, as rank and file resist the idea of a process that would require broad consensus within the GOP.

The idea became even more attractive for Senate GOP leaders Monday, when President Donald Trump tied funding DHS — which has been shut down for four weeks — to passage of the GOP's election security legislation.

Doing both would represent a herculean task for Senate Majority Leader John Thune, who faces both a slim majority and Senate rules requiring 60 votes to pass legislation. Plan B: passing some of the voter ID bill, nicknamed the SAVE America Act by Republicans, with a reconciliation bill, which would only require a simple majority to pass.



Thune

"I think with budget reconciliation, as I've said before, you have to have a reason to do it … And we (very) well may," the South Dakota Republican said Tuesday. He said that inside the Senate Republican Conference, "there's a lot of support for a budget reconciliation bill."

"We have two legislative vehicles available to us, so we could tee one of those up and that's an option, and we'll see if that's what it takes to get some of these things across the finish line, and if we can do it with simple majorities, we'll take a hard look at that," Thune said.

Previously, Thune and leadership had been reluctant to go through another reconciliation process this year, pointing to last year's reconciliation measure, nicknamed the One Big Beautiful Bill, which aimed to address expiring tax cuts and other GOP priorities.

But Tuesday, Trump also seemed open to the idea.

Such a stance would mark a shift in Trump's position: He has said for months that no more major legislation is needed after Republicans passed their "big, beautiful bill" last summer.

While reconciliation would bypass the risk of a Democratic filibuster, it would require near-unanimous support among Republicans because of their razor-thin majorities.

And it's unclear which portions of the election bill could be included in a reconciliation bill and would survive a scrub of the chamber's parliamentarian; provisions that don't touch upon spending or revenue and are just about policy are usually expunged under the Byrd Rule, which requires reconciliation bills to focus on fiscal issues.

Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., told reporters he would not be willing to override the parliamentarian's rulings when asked Tuesday.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, who was sworn in Tuesday to the role, said that Budget Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., is "committed to making sure we get reconciliation through."

But some of Mullin's former colleagues remain skeptical of the idea and worry the legislation would become watered down to abide by the reconciliation process' guardrails.

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, posted, "It's hard to imagine how the SAVE America Act could be passed through reconciliation. And by 'hard' I mean 'essentially impossible.' "

Lee, a member of the Budget Committee, has led the push for the chamber to debate SAVE and even pursue a so-called talking filibuster to pass the bill via a simple majority. Leadership has held firm against that and instead has allowed an extended debate to happen on the Senate floor into this week. Still, the legislation is not expected to pass because it would not receive the required 60 votes.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

A United Airlines ticketing agent helps a couple tag their baggage in the main terminal of Denver International Airport on Monday.

Denver keeps TSA lines short as other airports see rising waits

BY BRUCE FINLEY
The Denver Post

DENVER — Tens of millions of dollars that Denver International Airport officials invested in reconfiguring security screening checkpoints have helped keep the airport relatively quick for travelers amid the double trouble of a spring break surge and the partial federal government shutdown.

Security wait times at DIA over the past two weeks averaged 12 minutes, according to airport records. Travelers never waited longer than 35 minutes and often got through in less than 10 minutes, airport officials said this week.

That compares with chaos at other airports around the country, where lengthy Transportation Security Administration wait lines delayed travelers for hours. TSA officers have been forced to work without pay for weeks as the partial government shutdown, which started Jan. 31, drags on, leading to short staffing.

In Denver, a $2.1 billion overhaul of the main terminal included a security checkpoints makeover. DIA installed 34 security screening lanes using Artificial Intelligence-powered systems that allow passengers to keep laptops in their bags and facial recognition technology to speed processing. TSA teams can screen 180 to 240 passengers an hour per lane.

DIA's west-side checkpoint opened in February 2024. The east-side checkpoint opened in August 2025. Before the terminal reconstruction is completed next year, airport officials plan to install another 12 screening lanes.

After investing $60 million in the equipment for the two new checkpoints, DIA donated it to TSA along with manufacturer warranty, maintenance, and support services, officials said this week in an emailed statement.

During the shutdown, DIA last week struggled to deal with an unexpected Xcel Energy power outage that caused havoc. But officials reported that "TSA workers are showing up to work at DIA."

DIA rallied public support, launching a donations campaign that brought in more than 950 grocery and gas gift cards to help security officers working without pay handle daily living expenses. "We are grateful to the TSA employees who are continuing to come to work to maintain normal operations."

Energy executive tapped to replace Mullin as senator from Oklahoma

BY NICK ESKOW
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt named Republican energy executive Alan S. Armstrong to the Senate, filling the vacant seat left by the resignation of former GOP Sen. Markwayne Mullin to serve as President Donald Trump's next Homeland Security secretary.

Stitt, also a Republican, announced his selection at a Tuesday morning press conference, calling Armstrong a "strong business leader" and a champion of the state's energy industry.

The announcement came the morning after the Senate voted 54-45 to confirm Mullin for the role. Mullin resigned from his Senate seat immediately after the vote.

Armstrong is expected to take the Senate oath of office Tuesday afternoon. He will serve the remainder of Mullin's unexpired term, which ends in January 2027.



Armstrong

Under state law, Armstrong cannot run for a full term.

Trump has already endorsed Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., in advance of the June primary in the race for a full Senate term.

Armstrong, a Tulsa businessman, comes to Congress after four decades at Williams, one of the largest natural gas pipeline companies in the U.S.

He spent 14 years as CEO before being named chairman of the board in 2025. Armstrong joined the company in 1986 as an engineer.

Armstrong resigned from his board seat ahead of his Senate appointment. He also previously served on the board of the American Petroleum Institute and was a member of the President's National Infrastructure Advisory Council under President Joe Biden.

NATION

Md. Key Bridge construction to begin soon



KEVIN RICHARDSON, THE BALTIMORE SUN/TNS

Workers continue repairs on the Francis Scott Key Bridge, including demolition of the old structure and planning and construction of a new, taller, stronger cable-stayed bridge.

BY BRIAN CARLTON AND NATALIE JONES
The Baltimore Sun

BALTIMORE — Nearly two years after the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, Md., officials say reconstruction is accelerating and on the verge of entering full-scale construction.

Speaking at the Port of Baltimore on Tuesday, Gov. Wes Moore said the Key Bridge rebuild is the "fastest-moving large project in the country," adding that he and U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy are aligned on its aggressive pace.

The bridge collapsed March 26, 2024, after the cargo vessel Dali lost power and struck a main pier, killing six construction workers and severing a critical harbor crossing that once carried roughly 30,000 to 33,000 vehicles daily. That traffic has since been rerouted onto already congested regional roadways.

Moore said the pace of the rebuild reflects an unusually fast federal and state process. "I am very clear: I want to be the governor that cuts the ribbon on this," he said. "That is my plan, and that is how fast we are moving when you consider that just for permitting, it could take five to seven years, and we got it done in months. To get to a 70% design build, it could [have taken] five years, and we got it done in 14 months."

Additional revenue has also been lost due to the collapse. Key Bridge tolls that would have otherwise supported maintenance on Maryland's highway system statewide can no longer be collected. Without this revenue — approximately $56 million in 2023 — the Maryland Transportation Authority, which operated the bridge, has less ability to repair roads.

Work on the project is going through Phase One, which is expected to run through this spring.

During this period, engineers are finishing detailed design work on the bridge's foundations, towers and spans, while pre-construction activities are on track to continue through the end of this year to prepare the site for major construction.

Through the end of this year, crews are expected to continue demolition of all remaining land-based structures tied to the former bridge and finish up their test pile program in the Patapsco River to confirm subsurface conditions for the new foundations. These efforts will set the stage for full-scale construction.

Residents who were near the bridge site this fall heard the bell-like sounds as workers stabilized the piles and drove them into the riverbed with a hydraulic hammer, transportation officials said.

The main construction is expected to start in the next few months, as the project enters into Phase Two.

From this summer through 2028, approach spans leading into the bridge are expected to take shape, while construction of the bridge's main pylons is scheduled to run from the end of this year through 2028. These towers will form the structural backbone for the new cable-stayed design.

The most visible transformation is expected between 2028 and 2029, when crews install the cable-stayed spans that will connect the roadway deck to the pylons. Final construction, systems installation and testing are expected to follow, with the new bridge projected to open to traffic in 2030.

Congress committed in December 2024 to cover 100% of the replacement cost, as the Maryland Transportation Authority moved forward with an updated rebuild plan now shaped by higher construction costs and revised engineering requirements.

Floridians regain HIV drug access after DeSantis reverses cuts his agency made

BY ANTHONY MAN
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Thousands of Floridians living with HIV/AIDS are regaining access to life-saving medication after Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation Tuesday reversing most of the deep cuts his administration ordered earlier this year.

House Bill 697, now law, appropriates $30.9 million in stopgap funding to get the AIDS Drug Assistance Program through June 30 at roughly its previous levels. Without the fix, 12,000 to 16,000 people would have lost coverage.

The AIDS Drug Assistance Program pays for the expensive medications for about 28,000 Floridians. In January, the Department of Health began notifying recipients of significant cuts: reducing the maximum income for an individual covered by ADAP from $63,840 a year (400% of the federal poverty level) to about $21,000 a year (130% of poverty).

The reductions, which went into effect March 1, included eliminating medications from the list of approved drugs and no longer paying premiums for some recipients' Affordable Care Act insurance coverage.

The governor hadn't announced the action as of Tuesday afternoon.

But his office has notified some lawmakers who worked on the issue, including state Sen. Rosalind Osgood, D-Fort Lauderdale, that he signed it. And the Florida Senate website showed DeSantis signed it into law.

"It wasn't everything we wanted, but it was an immediate response to meet the needs of people in Florida who desperately need this lifesaving medication," Osgood said. "I am very grateful to the governor and to the Senate and to the House for taking care of this population of Floridians."

Esteban Wood, director of advocacy and legislative affairs at AIDS Healthcare Foundation, said those who were cut off "can breathe a little easier" after weeks of uncertainty.

"For ten weeks, 12,000 Floridians living with HIV did not know if they could fill their next prescription. Today, they can," Wood said in a written statement.

The Florida Department of Health, which is run by the DeSantis-appointed state surgeon general, Dr. Joseph Ladapo, said earlier this year it was acting because of a $120 million budget shortfall caused by federal funding cuts.

Other states are experiencing shortfalls in their programs, prompting cuts, the health research organization KFF reported, citing several reasons: federal funding not keeping pace with inflation, an increase in people turning the program, rising drug costs, and expiration of extra subsidies for Affordable Care Act insurance.

A Department of Health spokesperson said before the legislation was signed that the agency "implemented necessary program changes to responsibly manage resources while maintaining access to critical medications for Floridians living with HIV."

The Florida Senate and Florida House unanimously approved the stopgap measure. It restores the previous income limits.

CDC vaccine adviser quits to avoid 'drama'

BY ARIEL COHEN
CQ-Roll Call

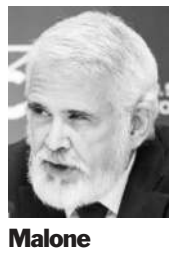
WASHINGTON — Robert Malone, an ideological ally of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is stepping away from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccine advisory committee following a court ruling that effectively nullified the panel.

Malone was one of several picks by Kennedy in a controversial reworking of the entire Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices last year. Malone said Tuesday that he won't be a part of any attempt to reform the panel after a feud with HHS personnel on whether the court ruling would be appealed.

A federal judge last week blocked the vaccine panel's controversial changes to the childhood vaccine schedule and called into question the panel's validity, essentially kneecapping it from any future actions.

Malone posted on social media that the decision wouldn't be appealed, which was contradicted by HHS spokesperson Andrew Nixon.

"After Andrew trashing me with the press, I am done with the CDC and ACIP," Malone said Tuesday morning. "That was the last straw."



Malone

"Suffice to say I do not like drama, and have better things to do," Malone added.

A physician and biochemist, Malone had questioned the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and, according to FactCheck.org, elevated unfounded claims about the disease.

While on the panel, he supported a more limited COVID-19 vaccine recommendation, arguing that Americans should be guided by consultations with health care providers rather than "propaganda, marketing and other activities that are not based in an actual, real world assessment of their risks and benefits."

NATION

NC GOP Senate leader concedes tight primary

By Kyle Ingram and Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan
The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer

RALEIGH, N.C. — After a bruising primary election followed by a string of recounts and protests, North Carolina Senate leader Phil Berger conceded the race to Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page on Tuesday, ushering in the end of Berger's more than 15 years as the most powerful Republican in North Carolina and 25 years in the Senate.

Tuesday's announcement confirms the stunning defeat of a man who has dominated North Carolina politics for over a decade, having helped usher in a Republican majority to the legislature in 2010 that has not been toppled since.

Berger has been known for leading conservative efforts to lower income taxes and expand school choice.


Berger

In a statement released after a partial hand recount confimed his 23-vote loss, Berger congratulated Page on winning the race.

"Republicans in the General Assembly have fundamentally redefined our state's outlook and reputation. It has been an honor to play a role in that transformation," Berger said in a statement. "Looking ahead, I remain committed to working with my colleagues in the short session to ensure North Carolina continues to be the best state in the nation in which to live, work, raise a family, and retire."

In a statement, Page said he appreciated Berger's service to the state.

Berger told The News & Observer a week before the primary that he plans to finish out the rest of his term in the Senate, which ends in December. As the Senate president pro tempore, he holds the top leadership position chosen by the Senate's controlling party. He was elected to a two-year term as pro tem, giving him final say on what bills come to the floor for a vote.

Senate Republicans currently hold a supermajority, meaning they have enough votes to override a veto from Democratic Gov. Josh Stein. But Republicans are one vote short of that threshold in the House of Representatives.

Berger was in the minority party for the first decade of his Senate career. His tenure leading the Senate took place as Republicans also led the House with former speakers Thom Tillis and Tim Moore, who both went on to serve in Congress.

Despite receiving an endorsement from President Donald Trump and benefiting from millions in campaign spending, Berger trailed Page by just two votes on election night.

After provisional votes were counted, Page's lead grew to 23.

Berger easily won a majority of votes in the Guilford County part of Senate District 26, but Page doubled Berger's votes in their home county of Rockingham.

Berger and Page's careers have both lasted decades, with Page in office as sheriff just a few years longer than Berger has been in the Senate in the Republican-leaning district.

Signs of cracks in Berger support showed a few years ago when Page led an effort to oppose Berger's plan to bring a casino to the district.

After Page declared his run in 2025, Berger racked up many endorsements, including one from Trump. Trump's endorsement of Berger came with praise for Page, too, and the president offered Page a job in Washington to leave the race.


AL DRAGO/TNS

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Tuesday in a case in which the Trump administration is seeking to restart a policy that prevents immigrants from presenting asylum claims at the border with Mexico.

Supreme Court sounds ready to allow policy limiting asylum claims

By Michael Macagnone
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — A majority of the Supreme Court appeared ready during oral arguments Tuesday to clear the way for a policy seeking to prevent immigrants from presenting asylum claims at the U.S. border with Mexico.

The Trump administration asked the justices to overturn a ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit that blocked the policy known as "metering," which has border officials prevent immigrants from crossing into the U.S. to present their asylum claims.

The policy was initially adopted by the Obama administration before being formalized in the first Trump term and then dropped by the Biden administration while the legal challenge moved through the courts.

At the arguments, an attorney for the government said the Trump administration wants the option to restart the policy and asked the justices to resolve the issue now.

The dispute centers on language in the law that allows asylum-seekers to present their claims when the claimant "arrives in" the U.S.

The group representing the asylum-seekers, Al Otro Lado, argued that "arrives in" language should include an immigrant arriving at the port of entry. Attorney Kelsi Corkran frequently referred to it as the "threshold" of the United States.

Throughout the arguments, members of the court's six-justice conservative majority questioned what problems ruling in favor of the asylum-seekers would cause.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett repeatedly pushed Corkran on how far from a port of entry an asylum-seeker could be and still make a claim.

"Could you say that someone arrives in the United States if they're at a portion of the border that does not have a port of entry? Like, what is it, if it's not crossing the physical border? What is the magic thing, or the dispositive thing, that we're looking for where we say, 'Ah, now that person, we can say, arrives in the United States?' " Barrett said.

Corkran responded that an asylum-seeker should be able to have their claims processed when they arrive at the port of entry and that the metering policy flouted Congress.

Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch pointed out that ruling in favor of the asylum-seekers on the meaning of "arrives in" would not likely end litigation over the issue.

Kavanaugh also pointed out the Trump administration could take steps to prevent asylum-seekers from reaching whatever line the court draws to present their claims.

"The whole thing seems kind of artificial to me because the government is going, if they want to do this policy, they're going to stop you on the other side of the line," Kavanaugh said.

The administration asked the justices to take up the case after a ruling from the 9th Circuit found the law required officials to start processing asylum claims if an applicant presented themselves to officials at the border, rather than on U.S. soil itself.

Democrats flip state House district that includes Mar-a-Lago

By John Harney
Bloomberg News

A Democrat is poised to represent President Donald Trump and his Mar-a-Lago residence in the Florida state House of Representatives after Republicans lost a special election in a surprise upset.

The Democratic candidate, Emily Gregory, was projected to defeat her Republican opponent, Jon Maples, in a special election Tuesday, according to Decision Desk HQ.

Republicans hold a wide majority in the Florida statehouse, so the upset will have little effect on state politics.

But it represents a symbolic win for Democrats and warning sign for Republicans ahead of the November congressional midterms where the GOP faces an uphill battle to retain their majorities in the U.S. House and Senate.

Trump easily won Florida's 87th legislative district in 2024. It includes Palm Beach, which Trump declared as his primary residence during his first term, switching from Manhattan's Trump Tower to his Mar-a-Lago resort.

The loss is also personal for Trump, who backed Maples, on Monday posting on social media that he gave the Republican candidate "MY COMPLETE AND TOTAL ENDORSEMENT!"

Gregory, according to her campaign website, runs a fitness center for recent mothers and pregnant women.

Like many successful Democratic candidates in Trump's second term, she emphasized the cost of living throughout her campaign and pledged "to fight for a healthier, more affordable Florida where families can thrive."

Gregory's win adds to a series of Democratic victories or over-performances in off-cycle and special elections in recent months.

As polls show that voters have soured on Trump's handling of the economy, Democrats sense opportunity in national, as well as state and local, races.

The unpopularity of the Iran war, begun by the U.S. and Israel on Feb. 28, has only intensified Democratic optimism and Republican anxieties.

WORLD

Russia, Ukraine use drones to escalate aerial barrages

By Dasha Litvinova
Associated Press

Russian air defenses downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

The drones were stopped over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Also Wednesday, a drone attack set Russia's Ust-Luga port on the Baltic Sea on fire as Ukraine carried out the most intense air strike on its foe in over a year.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine in the space of 24 hours, extending its usual nighttime barrage into daylight hours in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war. At least six people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities said.

Ukrainian forces also carried out a missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure, its Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, he said.

Meanwhile, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Wednesday that his nation will gradually cut off gas supplies to Ukraine until Russian oil deliveries resume through the Druzhba pipeline. The transit of natural gas through Hungary plays a key role in fulfilling the energy needs of Ukraine.



Russian Defense Ministry Press Service/AP

In this image made from video Monday, a Russian Pion self-propelled 203 mm cannon fires toward a Ukrainian position.

Russian oil supplies to Hungary and Slovakia have been halted for nearly two months after what Ukrainian officials say were Russian drone attacks that damaged the pipeline, which crosses Ukrainian territory, and that continuous strikes risk the lives of technicians trying to repair it.

Danish leader's party wins vote; talks await

Bloomberg News

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's party won a closely contested election by pledging stability in global turmoil, setting the stage for difficult coalition talks to secure a third term in power.

The premier's Social Democrats emerged as the biggest with 21.9% of the Tuesday parliamentary vote overshadowed by President Donald Trump's threats over Greenland, after all ballots were preliminarily counted. Still, it's the party's worst result in more than a century.

With both traditional camps short of a clear majority, Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen of the centrist Moderates landed the role of kingmaker. His election-night plea to continue with a cross-bloc coalition was dismissed by Liberal leader Troels Lund Poulsen, who ruled out cooperating with Frederiksen, narrowing options for the talks that are due to start Wednesday.

The election is one in a string of European ballots shaped by Trump's return to the White House. While Danish parties are unified in standing up to the U.S., key votes starting with an April ballot in Hungary will help determine how Europe positions itself toward the U.S.

The Danish election — typically domestically focused — was dominated by foreign and security policy in light of Trump's designs for Greenland. The crisis drove home just how directly impacted Danes are by the shift in the global order.

The 48-year-old Frederiksen had been polling poorly before the U.S. president renewed his claims over the Arctic territory in January, but saw a boost in backing following her handling of the dispute. That prompted her to call the vote early, with Danes galvanized by Trump's pressure to rally around their leader — mirroring the outcomes of Canadian and Australian votes last year.

Frederiksen's leftist ally the Green Left followed her party with 11.6% backing, with right-leaning rival Liberals at 10.1% — which was also that party's worst on record. Turnout was 84%.

Overall, the left-leaning bloc had 84 seats, its opponent 77, leaving Moderates with 14.

UK police arrest 2 men over attack on Jewish charity's ambulances

By Jill Lawless
Associated Press

LONDON — British police arrested two men on Wednesday in connection with an arson attack on four ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity, an assault that authorities are investigating as an antisemitic hate crime.

The Metropolitan Police said the two men, ages 45 and 47, were arrested in London on suspicion of arson with intent to endanger life and that both men have been taken to a police station in the city for questioning.

Officers are searching two properties in north London, a few miles from the scene of the attack in Golders Green.

Commander Helen Flanagan, head of Counter Terrorism Policing London, said the arrests marked "an important breakthrough in the investigation." But she noted that surveillance camera footage of the incident suggests three people were involved.

Police have not declared the incident to be a terror attack, but are investigating a claim of responsibility by a group with potential links to Iran.

The blaze early on Monday morning in Golders Green, a London neighborhood with a large Jewish population, consumed four ambulances belonging to the volunteer organization Hatzola Northwest. Oxygen cylinders in the vehicles exploded, breaking windows in an adjacent apartment block.

The Metropolitan Police force has stepped up security for Jewish schools, synagogues and community centers ahead of Passover next month, including what the force says are "highly visible firearms patrols."

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Some NYU professors on strike; classes continue

NY NEW YORK — A New York University faculty union went on strike Monday for raises and job security, while classes were scheduled to continue.

The strike impacts about half of NYU's full-time faculty members, who are represented by Contract Faculty United-UAW. The professors, known as "contract faculty," are not on a track to earn tenure.

In raw numbers, that's nearly 1,000 NYU professors. It does not include full-time tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, or graduate student workers who are represented by other unions.

"We are fighting for stronger job security, support for our careers and families, reasonable workloads, full participation in governance and academic decision-making, academic freedom protections, and fair compensation that reflects our contributions and years of service to NYU," CFU-UAW said in a Feb. 28 statement announcing their intent to strike.

In February, members voted 90% in favor of authorizing a strike, with 75% of the unit participating, according to the union.

The strike started at 11 a.m. Monday after a temporary extension. Faculty members picketed outside NYU's Paulson Center in Greenwich Village and expect to be on the picket line every day this week, according to a union schedule.

NYU spokesman Wiley Norvell said the school administration had presented a "generous and comprehensive package," including the highest minimum salaries of any unionized contract faculty in the country.



ALLISON ROBBERT/AP

Visitors take photos of magnolias beginning to bloom in the Enid A. Haupt Garden on Friday, in Washington.

Steal magnolias

Suit: Airline crew caused disabled man's fall, death

NV LAS VEGAS — Relatives of a disabled Allegiant passenger filed a lawsuit Friday against the airline, alleging that the company was responsible for his death after crew members pushed him in an unsecured wheelchair, and he fell face-first.

Tony Adkins is suing Allegiant Travel Co. and Allegiant Air in connection with a March 28, 2024, incident involving his son, Hunter Adkins.

Officials for Allegiant, headquartered in Las Vegas, could not be reached immediately for comment.

Hunter Adkins, 24, had lived with muscular dystrophy and used a wheelchair, the complaint said. As he, his father, and his 9-year-old brother prepared to board their flight at Huntington Tri-State Airport in West Virginia, where the family lives, the captain ordered ground and flight crews to hurry the process to keep the next flight on schedule, according to the lawsuit.

Adkins' attorneys alleged that, as a result, extra wheelchair assistants who were supposed to help transfer Adkins from his motorized wheelchair to an "aisle wheelchair" were reassigned to load luggage.

Attorneys said Adkins was transferred from his personal wheelchair to one that lacked safety straps. According to the complaint, when the assistant pushing Adkins up the ramp reached the plane door and attempted to enter the cabin, the wheelchair tipped over.

Quadruple amputee charged with murder

MD LA PLATA — A professional cornhole player celebrated for excelling against the odds has been arrested for murder.

According to the Charles County Sheriff's Office in Maryland, Dayton James Webber, 27, is accused of shooting and killing a front-seat passenger in his vehicle during an argument Sunday night.

Cornhole, sometimes called "bags," is a popular lawn game where players toss bean bags from 27 feet away at a raised board with a hole, aiming to reach 21 points.

Webber has gained some fame for winning cornhole tournaments as a quadruple amputee. In 2023, he was featured by NBC's "Today" and ESPN where he talked about losing his limbs to a bacterial infection at 10 months old and his unlikely journey to stardom. ESPN also reported on Webber in 2010 when he was wrestling as a 12-year-old.

Detectives say officers with the La Plata Police Department were flagged down near La Plata Road and Radio Station Road in La Plata by two witnesses who said they saw the shooting happen. Bradrick Michael Wells, 27, of Waldorf, has been identified as the victim.

Webber left the scene but was arrested in Charlottesville, Va., about two hours later.

Federal judges appoint another new US attorney

NJ NEWARK — New Jersey has another new U.S. attorney.

District court judges on Monday said veteran Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Frazer would lead the office, the latest twist in a leadership saga that has been unfolding in the state's legal system over the past year.

Frazer's promotion to serve as New Jersey's top federal prosecutor took effect immediately and was made official in a one-page order signed by U.S. District Judge Renée Marie Bumb.

The decision came just weeks after another judge had separately ruled that President Donald Trump's administration had acted "unlawfully" in appointing three officials to lead the office together. That ruling was one of several since the summer that had pitted the judiciary against top officials in the Justice Department over questions of who could serve as New Jersey's U.S. attorney.

By contrast, Monday's appointment of Frazer appeared to have Justice Department support. Alina Habba — a top aide to Attorney General Pam Bondi and the former interim top prosecutor in New Jersey — said on social media that judges worked with Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche on the issue, and that Frazer "will be a great champion of this state and the mission of the (Justice Department)."

Man charged in connection with gift card fraud scheme

MI DETROIT — A California man has been charged in connection with a major gift card fraud scheme, the Michigan Attorney General's Office said.

Sinjuan Song was arraigned Friday through the 51st District Court in Waterford on one count of conducting a criminal enterprise, a 20-year felony, and two counts of possession of a fraudulent financial transaction device, each a four-year felony.

Authorities allege the 31-year-old is connected to an organized retail crime group that distributed altered gift cards in March 2025 at Meijer locations in White Lake, Waterford, Auburn Hills, Southgate, Allen Park and Taylor.

According to Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel's office, such scams typically involve empty, unsold gift cards stolen from retail stores. The cards are then altered to reveal their unique redemption numbers, recorded by scammers and concealed again with an adhesive before being returned.

Scammers use computer programs to monitor when any card is activated, and when a shopper places a balance, it is transferred into another digital account, Nessel's office said.

'Kinda terrifying': Fireball streaks across sky

CA SAN LUIS OBISPO — A rare fireball put on a dazzling display across the California sky on Sunday night.

According to NASA Space Alerts, an official NASA account on X dedicated to alerting the public to "cosmic activity in near-Earth space," the meteor was first spotted around Chowchilla on Sunday night going at a speed of 35,000 mph. The agency said the fireball traveled "58 miles through the upper atmosphere before disintegrating 29 miles above Calflax."

"This fireball does not appear to be related to other recent bright meteors," NASA said.

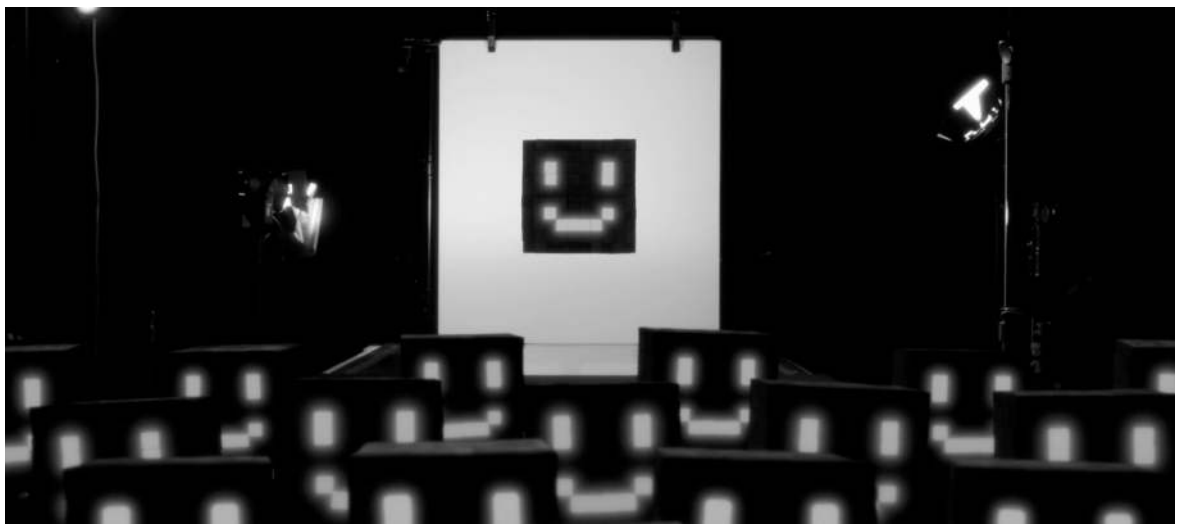
The display spawned more than 230 reports of sightings from California, Arizona and Nevada, according to the American Meteor Society, which allows members to submit sightings of meteor events on its website.

One user by the name of Gregory E., who spotted the fireball from Lake Nacimiento in San Luis Obispo County around 8:20 p.m., said it was "like nothing I've ever seen before."

Other users noted the fireball appeared in an array of colors, including blue, green, red and orange as it streaked across the sky.

From wire reports

FACES



FOCUS FEATURES/AP photos

"The AI Doc: Or How I Became an Apocaloptimist" is meant to be a nonpartisan call to action.

'Impossible' AI film

Oscar-winning filmmakers challenged by making sense of moving target

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

The idea to make the "definitive" documentary about artificial intelligence was, admittedly, ambitious. But the timeline was downright absurd.

The filmmaking teams behind "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "Navalny" started talking about a collaboration on the Oscars circuit, thinking perhaps they could finish something in a year. In reality, it would take "The AI Doc: Or How I Became an Apocaloptimist" almost three years to reach audiences. The film, co-directed by Daniel Roher and Charlie Tyrell, and co-produced by Daniel Kwan, attempts to zoom out from the daily headlines to give audiences a more evergreen glimpse of what is at stake for humanity as artificial intelligence rapidly evolves.

"The film is a journey of understanding that casts me as sort of a proxy for everyone, as a pea-brain regular person who's trying to understand what the (expletive) is going on in the world," Roher said earlier this year in an interview alongside Tyrell.

Their questions were straightforward: What is it? Why is it good? Why is it bad? And what do we need to know?

"And that simple task," Roher said, "was impossible. It was like making a film about outer space or China or the Bible. Like, fit that into 90 minutes."

"Impossible" was a sentiment shared by many who worked on the film, which opens in theaters Friday. Producer Diane Becker said it was the most challenging movie she's ever made, a Sisyphean task where, "literally the minute we started making it, it was out of date."

But they were emboldened by the urgency of the subject and the idea that what they were making might be not just a primer about an elusive subject, but a necessary, nonpartisan call to action. "The AI Doc" is about something bigger than AI Val Kilmer movies. For Center for Humane Technology co-founder Tristan Harris, it's about fighting against an "antihuman future."

"The only thing that would give humanity a shot for not ending in a dystopian or antihuman future would be for us to have collective clarity that we are heading towards that future," Harris said. "My hope is that this film is kind of like 'An Inconvenient Truth' or 'The Social Dilemma' for AI."

Harris is just one of many voices in the film alongside the likes of OpenAI's Sam Altman, Anthropic's Daniela and Dario Amodei and Google DeepMind's Demis Hassabis. In the end, more than 40 people encompassing a wide range of views and levels of expertise were interviewed on camera, resulting in some 3,300 pages of transcripts.



More than 40 people in the artificial intelligence industry were interviewed on camera for "The AI Doc: Or How I Became an Apocaloptimist."

Behind the scenes, there was also a big operation of people synthesizing the information they were receiving and figuring out a way to translate it cinematically. Tyrell said they decided on an anti-digital visual approach, using handmade things — ranging from Roher's notebook, where he is always drawing, to stop-motion animation.

If you're looking for a film that will convince or reassure you that artificial intelligence is all good or all bad, this is not it. You'll hear bleak stories about generative AI blackmailing its programmers and doomsday scenarios of war and mass unemployment. You'll also hear rose-colored predictions of a utopian future of medical advancements, creativity and freedom, and many things in between — like how there is more regulation over making a sandwich in New York then there is over the AI development arms race.

The subtitle "or how I became" implies there will be a kind of tidy conclusion by the end of the film. Then you get to that pesky "apocaloptimist" term.

For Roher, it's the key to the film.

"I am not an optimist, and I do not believe this will be the apocalypse. I believe it is both at the same time, and that's critical," Roher said. "What I take solace in is the idea that we still have agency over steering this thing towards the good and away from the bad. If we can walk this narrow path between the two and be very thoughtful and discerning, I think it will be OK."

"The film is meant to be a catalyst for a broader conversation, and for a movement that's the size of humanity," Harris said. "This one actually is a risk that we all face in the next single-digit number of years. It's unlike climate change; it's unlike specific political topics. This literally affects everyone, your well-being, your ability to put food on the table, your job, your livelihood, and I think everyone can get behind that."

Colbert and son co-writing a 'Lord of the Rings' movie

Associated Press

Stephen Colbert, famous devotee to J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth, is co-writing a "Lord of the Rings" movie with his son.

Warner Bros. announced early Wednesday that Colbert will script "The Lord of the Rings: Shadow of the Past" along with series veteran Philippa Boyens and Peter McGee, Colbert's son. Producer Peter Jackson revealed Colbert's involvement in a social media video.

"It took me a few years to scrape my courage into a pile to give you a call, but about two years ago I did," Colbert told Jackson. "You liked it enough to talk to me about it, and ever since then, the two of us have been working with the brilliant Philippa Boyens on how to develop this story."

"Shadow of the Past" will come after Andy Serkis' upcoming "The Hunt of Gollum," which is set to arrive in theaters next year.

Colbert said that a few years ago, while talking with his son, he thought of a potential framing device for the film, which follows a new adventure for Sam, Merry and Pippin 14 years after the passing of Frodo.

"You know what the books mean to me, and what your films mean to me," Colbert said. "But the thing I found myself reading over and over again were the six chapters early on in ('The Fellowship of the Ring') that y'all never developed into the first movie back in the day."



Colbert

"I thought: 'Oh, wait, maybe that could be its own story that could fit into the larger story. Could we make something that was completely faithful to the books while also being completely faithful to the movies that you guys had already made?'" Colbert added.

Colbert's "The Late Show" on CBS is to air its last episode on May 21 after the network announced it was canceling the late-night show last July.

Composer of 'Lion King' chant sues comedian over translation

Associated Press

A Grammy award-winning South African composer who wrote and performed the iconic opening chant in "Circle of Life" for Disney's "The Lion King" movies is suing a comedian for allegedly damaging his reputation by intentionally misrepresenting the song's meaning.

Lebohang Morake's lawsuit accuses Zimbabwean comedian Learnmore Mwanyenyeka, known as Learnmore Jonasi, of intentionally mistranslating the chant, which launches the 1994 Disney movie and is central to staged versions as well as Disney's 2019 remake.

The dispute, which has gone viral as the two men challenge each other on social media, stems from statements Jonasi made in his stand-up routines and in a recent podcast interview, where he translated the song's lyrics from Zulu and Xhosa, two of South Africa's 12 national languages.

The lawsuit was filed this month in federal court in Los Angeles.

Disney's official translation of the opening phrase "Nants'ingonyama bagithi Baba" is "All hail the king; we all bow in the presence of the king."

In the episode of One54 cited in the lawsuit, the podcast's Nigerian hosts initially sing the chant with incoherent and incorrect words. Jonasi corrects them, and says "That's not how you sing it; don't mess up our language like that."

Jonasi then sings the correct lyrics in Zulu. When asked, he says they translate to: "Look, there's a lion. Oh my god."

OpenAI pulls plug on viral AI video app Sora

OpenAI is shutting down its social media app Sora, which went viral last fall as a place to share short-form videos generated by artificial intelligence but also raised alarms in Hollywood and elsewhere.

OpenAI said in a brief social media message Tuesday that it was "saying goodbye to the Sora app" and that it would share more soon about how to preserve what users already created on the app.

"What you made with Sora mattered, and we know this news is disappointing," it said.

The company behind ChatGPT released Sora in September as an attempt to capture the attention, and potentially advertising dollars, that follow short-form videos on TikTok, YouTube or Meta-owned Instagram and Facebook.

But a growing chorus of advocacy groups, academics and experts expressed concern about the dangers of letting people create AI videos on just about anything they can type into a prompt, leading to the proliferation of nonconsensual images and realistic deepfakes.

Associated Press

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OPINION

Trump and Iran tap the brakes at last

By David Ignatius
The Washington Post

When bargaining about war and peace, the strategist Thomas Schelling wrote, you're more likely to win concessions "if you get a reputation for being reckless, demanding, or unreliable."

By that measure, President Donald Trump and Iran's hard-line leaders both deserve what we might call the Schelling Prize for negotiations. They scrambled up the ladder of escalation without clearly defined objectives or a strategy for climbing down. Their recklessness was believable. But they seem to have come back from the brink.

This game of chicken paused Monday morning, just hours before the expiration of Trump's ultimatum to "obliterate" Iran's power plants unless it agreed to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Trump made a surprise announcement that he'd had "very good and productive conversations regarding a complete and total resolution of our hostilities in the Middle East." He said he would delay the power plant strikes for five days.

Trump has made similar claims about negotiating breakthroughs before, only to reverse course and attack. He did that in late February, on the eve of this war, and back in June 2025 before the 12-day conflict. But an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed that messages had been received through "friendly countries" seeking negotiations to end the war.

The trick to the game of chicken is to make the other guy believe you are truly ready to crash the car. As strategist Herman Kahn observed in his 1965 book "On Escalation," a winning strategy might be to remove the steering wheel and throw it out the window as a sign you're totally out of control. Except that the "winner" might end up dead. Trump is convincing as a risk-taker, but not a suicidal one. He has an instinct for self-preservation amid the chaos he inflicts.

The Iran war, to me, has been a lesson in the limits of brinkmanship. As Schelling put it in "The Strategy of Conflict," his classic work, "Brinkmanship involves getting onto the slope where one may fall in spite of his own best efforts to save himself, dragging his adversary with him." Trump approached the brink — but not so close that he might slide off.

That's the problem with Trump's way of war: You can't bluff your way to a decisive victory. After Iran closed the strait, it became increasingly clear that Tehran had a potentially ruinous squeeze on the global economy. Trump has a high risk tolerance, until he reaches an unacceptable pain threshold.

Critics call this TACO, for "Trump always chickens out." But the real lesson is one that the president never seemed to learn in business: Don't bet more than you're willing to lose.

Even before Monday's announcement of peace negotiations, there were signs that a diplomatic track was reemerging. One was the almost frantic signaling by Trump that he wanted to end the conflict — as he moved from demanding "unconditional surrender" to announcing that the war was over to threatening destruction of Iranian power plants.

Another telling sign was that Trump quietly encouraged mediation efforts by two nations that Israel regards as adversaries: Qatar and Turkey. Qatari officials explored settlement terms last week until Israel's strike on Iran's South Pars gas field triggered a reciprocal Iranian attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan gas facility. Then Turkey's foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, announced Sunday that he was talking with Tehran, Washington and Brussels about a possible deal.

A third signal came from Iran itself. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted an intriguing message Sunday: "Strait of Hormuz is not closed. Ships hesitate because insurers fear the war of choice you initiated — not Iran. ... Freedom of Navigation cannot exist without Freedom of Trade. Respect both — or expect neither."

When a crisis becomes as dangerous as this one — and there is no clear path to victory at an acceptable cost — then de-escalation makes sense. But nobody should pretend that the kind of deal Trump and Iranian leaders are exploring will resolve the fundamental issues in this conflict. The Iranian nuclear program may be shattered, but not the malign regime that spawned it.

What worries me as this war is cresting are those caught in the crossfire. The United Arab Emirates, for example, cautioned Washington against going to war, but the UAE took more missile and drone hits than Israel. It wanted Trump to "finish the job" but seems likely to get something considerably less.

And the Iranian people, who marched in the streets to protest a regime they detest, died by the tens of thousands in January as the regime cracked down. Everyday Iranians are the real victims: They shouldn't be left on the precipice much longer.

David Ignatius writes a foreign affairs column for The Washington Post. His latest novel is "Phantom Orbit."

Data centers also gobbling up this vital resource

By Brandon N. Owens and Morgan Bazilian
Special to The Washington Post

The race to build artificial intelligence infrastructure is no longer abstract. It is visible in land deals, the growing demand on the power grid and the expansion of data centers across the United States. Technology companies are committing billions of dollars to facilities designed to power the next generation of computing. Public debate primarily focuses on electricity affordability and grid capacity.

That focus is justified. Electricity is the dominant input to AI but not the only one. A second constraint is emerging, less visible and largely absent from the policy conversation. It is beginning to shape where these facilities can be built and how quickly.

Water — and increasingly, water security.

In the past two years, proposed "hyperscale" data centers — those industrial-scale facilities run by companies such as Amazon, Google or Microsoft — in the Southwest have encountered an unexpected obstacle: water permitting. A multibillion-dollar campus proposed outside Tucson, Ariz., drew opposition over projected water consumption and ultimately required a redesign of its cooling system. Nearby municipalities responded by introducing rules requiring conservation plans and public review for large industrial users. Similar scrutiny is appearing in other markets, including Northern Virginia, home to the world's largest concentration of data centers.

These conflicts point to a reality overlooked in discussions of AI. Data centers may power a digital economy, but they operate within physical limits. Every watt of electricity consumed by computing equipment is ultimately released as heat, and that heat must be removed to keep servers within safe operating limits. In many of today's most efficient facilities, this is achieved through evaporative cooling — systems in which water absorbs heat, then evaporates into the air, carrying that heat away.

For years, water remained a secondary consideration because it accounted for a small share of operating costs. But scale changes the equation. As facilities expand from tens of megawatts of use to campuses approaching hundreds of megawatts, water consumption grows from a marginal input into a factor that attracts regulatory attention and public scrutiny. And the water used on-site is only part of the system. Electricity generation consumes water as well. Many power plants use it for cooling and evaporate a portion of it during operation. When a center draws electricity from the grid, it also draws on that upstream water.

Different electricity generation technologies consume very different amounts of water. Wind and solar power require almost no operational water, while thermoelectric plants, including nuclear and many fossil fuel facilities, rely on water for cooling and can consume several liters for every kilowatt-hour they produce. As a result, two identical data centers using the same cooling systems can have dramatically different water footprints depending on the regional electricity mix that powers them. In some parts of the country, the majority of water associated with computing is not used at the data center itself but is embedded in electricity generation.

For developers building hyperscale infrastructure, this variation is beginning to matter. These projects represent large, fixed capital investments. Hyperscale campuses often cost billions of dollars to build and can generate hundreds of millions in annual revenue.

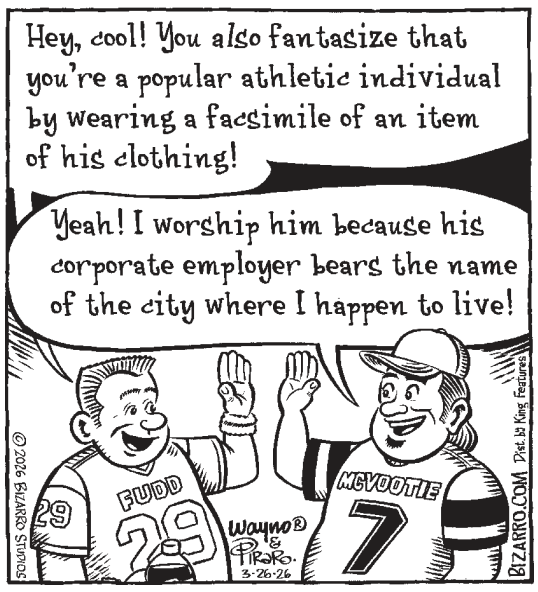
Under those conditions, the greatest financial risk is not the price of water but the possibility that a project will be delayed. Water governance in the U.S. is highly decentralized. Federal regulations primarily govern surface-water withdrawals and wastewater discharge, while decisions about municipal water supply, groundwater management and conservation policies are largely made at the state or local level. In some regions, large industrial water users must undergo environmental review, submit conservation plans or demonstrate sustainable water supply before projects can proceed.

For developers planning computing campuses, these requirements introduce uncertainty into project timelines. Regions with lower water intensity in electricity generation, or with established reclaimed water infrastructure, may gain an advantage in attracting hyperscale facilities.

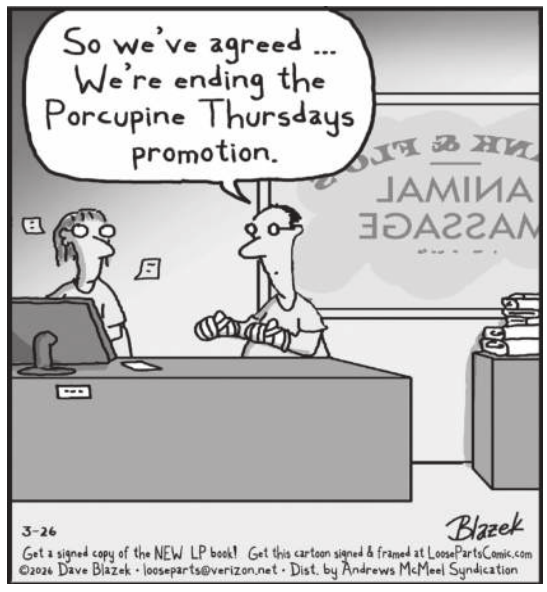
As the physical footprint of computing expands, the geography of the AI economy may increasingly be shaped not only by where power is available, but by where water security can be assured.

Brandon N. Owens is an energy infrastructure strategist and founder of AIxEnergy. Morgan Bazilian is director of the Payne Institute for Public Policy at the Colorado School of Mines.

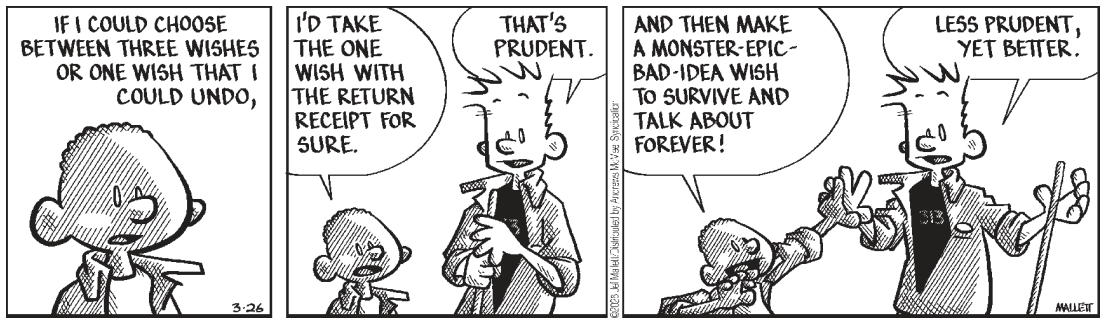
Bizarro



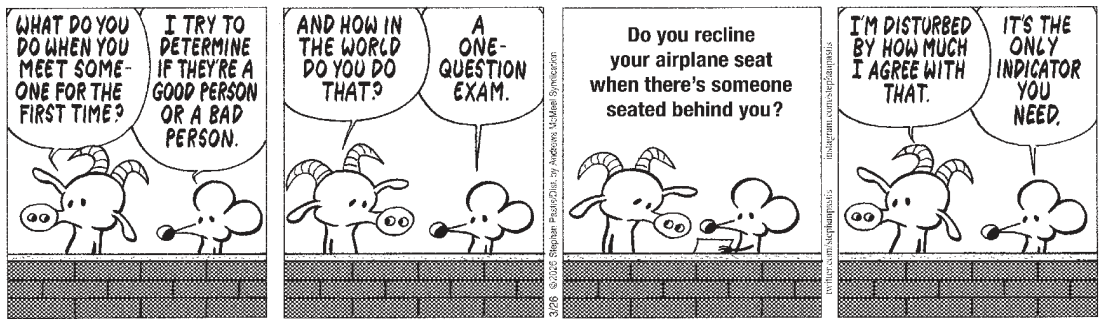
Loose Parts



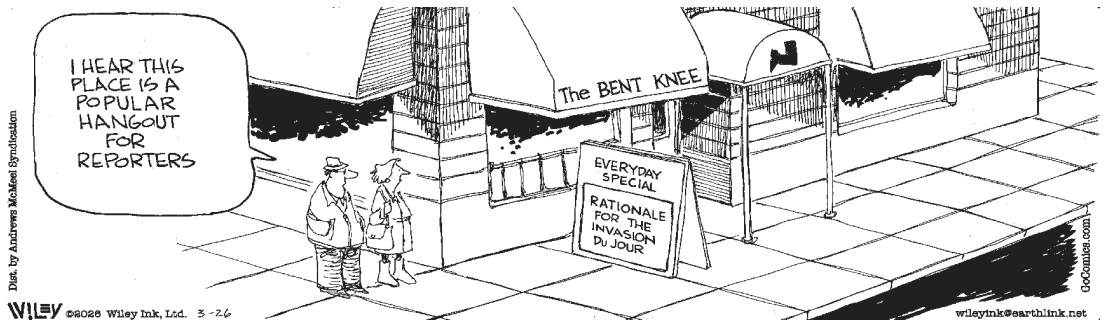
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



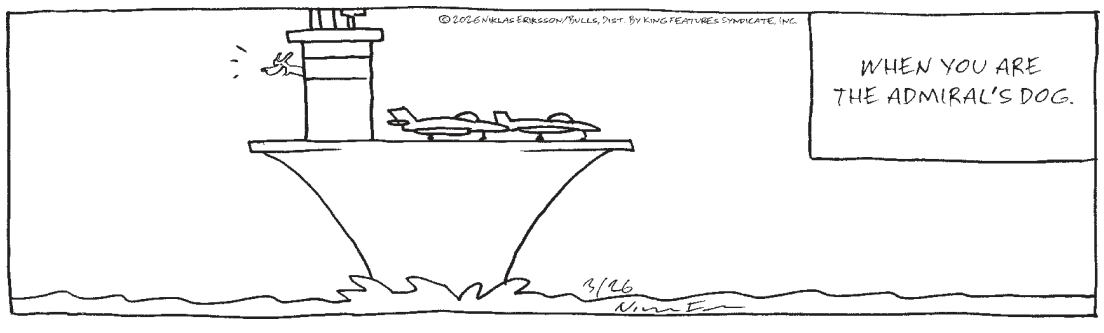
Non Sequitur



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				■	60				■	61		

ACROSS

1 Actress Tyler
4 Deep cut
8 Punch
12 Luau instrument
13 Geometric calculation
14 "Che" star Benicio del —
15 Explorer Amerigo
17 Othello's betrayer
18 Label
19 Was hot, on Instagram
21 Carpentry tool
24 Hang low
25 Tennis feat
26 Pouch
28 Picture puzzle
32 Singer k.d.
34 Expert
36 Nevada city
37 Illuminated
39 Guffaw
41 Aachen article
42 "Mangia!"
44 Dancer's wear
46 Ballroom dance
50 Miss Piggy's pronoun
51 Sun beams
52 Hollow coastal formations
56 Frozen desserts
57 Sister of Rachel
58 "Xanadu" band
59 Chucklehead
60 Jai —
61 Blue hue

DOWN

1 Candy heart word
2 '50s POTUS
3 Ceremonial robe
4 Dashboard array
5 Joan of —
6 Faction
7 What quibblers split
8 Brandy cocktail
9 Burden
10 Desire
11 Suitable
16 Shriver of tennis
20 Corn serving
21 Corridor
22 "Superfood" berry
23 LL Cool J's music
27 Sob
29 Places abuzz with activity
30 One
31 Some babies
33 "I suppose ..."
35 "Shoo!"
38 Bit of butter
40 Korean cabbage dish
43 Inventor Nikola
45 Small Indian state
46 Chicago paper, for short
47 Texas city
48 Courtroom call
49 Rind
53 Motorist's org.
54 Wapiti
55 Tofu source

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-26

CRYPTOQUIP

PGHS PHK SGA ROIIJ RDKG KGVU VPIAY HTPHJK AIBVOYHCDIC RVTXK SV LV? "UDBX H BVL, HIJ BVL!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A CONVENT DWELLER'S COMMENT IS QUITE IRRELEVANT, I WOULD CONSIDER THAT A NUN SEQUITUR.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals W

SCOREBOARD/NBA

DEALS

Tuesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Agreed to terms with RHP Elvis Peguero on a two-year contract.

CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Traded 3B Carter Kieboom to Philadelphia for cash considerations.

DETROIT TIGERS — Optioned RF Wenceel Pérez, 3B Jace Jung and CF Trei Cruz to Toledo (IL).

LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Agreed to terms with LHP Joey Lucchesi on a one-year contract. Selected the contracts of INFs Jeimer Candelario and Adam Frazier from Salt Lake. Placed INF Vaughn Grissom on the 10-day IL, retroactive to March 22. Placed RHPs Ben Joyce, Alek Manoah, Grayson Rodriguez and Kirby Yates on the 15-day IL, retroactive to March 22. Placed INF Anthony Rendon and RHP Robert Stephenson on the 60-day IL Designated LHP Jayvien Sandridge for assignment.

NEW YORK YANKEES — Traded INF Zack Short to Washington in exchange for cash considerations.

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Placed LF Gavin Lux on the 10-day IL, retroactive to Mar. 23. Placed RHP Ryan Pepiot and SS Taylor Wells on the 15-day IL, retroactive to Mar. 22. Recalled SS Carson Williams, RHP Joe Boyle and LF Richie Palacios from Durham (IL). Optioned RHP Hunter Bigge to Durham (IL).

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with 1B Rowdy Tellez on a contract. Claimed RHP Osvaldo Bido off waivers from the New York Yankees. Placed LHP Joey Wentz on the 60-day IL.

CHICAGO CUBS — Optioned OF Kevin Alcántara and RHP Javier Assad to Iowa (IL). Placed 1B Tyler Austin on the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of LF Dylan Carlson from Iowa (IL).

CINCINNATI REDS — Reassigned INF Garrett Hampson and C/INF P.J. Higgins to minor league camp.

COLORADO ROCKIES — Agreed to terms with LHP Parker Mushinski on a minor league contract.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Agreed to terms with RHP Jake Cousins on a contract.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Acquired RHP Jake Woodford from Tampa Bay in exchange for RHP K.C. Hunt and cash considerations. Transferred OF Akil Baddoo to the 60-day IL.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Recalled RHP Griff McGarry from Washington.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Optioned CF Drew Gilbert, RHP Tristan Beck and RF Will Brennan to Sacramento (PCL).

FOOTBALL
National Football League

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed LB Nick Hampton, RB A.J. Dillon and TE Feleipe Franks to contracts.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed DT Sam Kamara and WR Tylan Wallace to contracts.

DETROIT LIONS — Signed QB Teddy Bridgewater to a contract.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Signed LS Zach Triner to a contract.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Acquired QB Andy Dalton from Carolina in exchange for a conditional 2027 seventh-round draft pick. Signed DB J.T. Gray to a contract.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed C Brock Hoffman and RB Travis Homer to contracts.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed G Robert Jones and RB Patrick Taylor to contracts.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed DBs D'Anthony Bell and Shemar Jean-Charles to contracts.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Announced the retirement of LB Lavonte David. Signed LB Christian Rozeboom to a contract.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Signed OT Foster Sarell to a contract.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

CAROLINA HURRICANES — Recalled F Charles-Alexis Legault from Chicago (AHL).

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Reinstated F Logan O'Connor from long-term injured reserve.

DETROIT RED WINGS — Sent F Michael Brandsegg-Nygård to Grand Rapids (AHL).

EDMONTON OILERS — Recalled LW/C James Hamblin from Bakersfield (AHL) under emergency conditions.

FLORIDA PANTHERS — Recalled F Noah Gregor from Charlotte (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Sent G Chase Wutzke to Iowa (AHL).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Recalled D Isaiah George from Bridgeport (AHL).

NEW YORK RANGERS — Recalled F Adam Sýkora from Hartford (AHL). Sent D Connor Mackey to Hartford.

OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled D Jorian Donovan and D Carter Yakemchuk from Belleville (AHL).

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Recalled F Ville Koivunen from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

ORLANDO CITY — Signed F Antoine Griezmann to a DP contract starting in July 2026 and extending through the 2027-28 season, with an option for 2028-29.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	4	0	1	13	13	2
NYC FC	3	1	1	10	13	6
Inter Miami CF	3	1	1	10	9	8
Charlotte FC	2	1	2	8	10	6
Chicago	2	2	1	7	7	5
D.C. United	2	2	1	7	4	4
Toronto FC	2	2	1	7	6	8
New York	2	2	1	7	5	11
Cincinnati	2	3	0	6	7	11
Atlanta	1	3	1	4	5	8
New England	1	3	0	3	8	9
CF Montréal	1	4	0	3	7	14
Orlando City	1	4	0	3	5	17
Columbus	0	3	2	2	5	8
Philadelphia	0	5	0	0	3	9

Western Conference

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

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

NWSL

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

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

Wednesday's games

Denver Summit FC at Gotham FC
Utah Royals FC at Washington
Orlando at Chicago
Kansas City at Seattle
Portland at San Diego

Friday's game

Houston at Angel City

Saturday's games

Utah Royals FC at Boston Legacy FC
Washington at Denver Summit FC
Kansas City at Portland
Louisville at Seattle
Bay FC at North Carolina
Chicago at San Diego

TENNIS

Miami Open

Tuesday
At Miami Gardens
Purse: $9,415,725
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Martin Landaluce, Spain, def. Sebastian Korda (32), United States, 2-6, 7-6 (6), 6-4
Jiri Lehecka (21), Czechia, def. Taylor Fritz (6), United States, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-2
Arthur Fils (28), France, def. Valentin Vacherot (24), Monaco, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-4
Tommy Paul (22), United States, def. Tomas Martin Etcheverry (29), Argentina, 6-1, 6-3
Jannik Sinner (2), Italy, def. Alex Michelsen, United States, 7-5, 7-6 (4)
Frances Tiafoe (19), United States, def. Terence Atmane, France, 6-4, 1-6, 6-4
Francisco Cerundolo (18), Argentina, def. Ugo Humbert (31), France, 6-4, 6-3
Alexander Zverev (3), Germany, def. Quentin Halys, France, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (1).

Women's Singles
Quarterfinals

Karolina Muchova (13), Czechia, def. Victoria Mboko (10), Canada, 7-5, 7-6 (5)
Coco Gauff (4), United States, def. Belinda Bencic (12), Switzerland, 6-3, 1-6, 6-3



PAMELA SMITH/AP

The Knicks' Jalen Brunson drives against the New Orleans Pelicans' Dejounte Murray during the second half Tuesday in New York. Brunson scored 32 points, leading the Knicks to their seventh straight win.

ROUNDUP

Brunson lifts Knicks to 7th straight win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson scored 32 points, including 15 in the fourth quarter, and the New York Knicks beat the New Orleans Pelicans 121-116 on Tuesday night for their seventh straight victory.

Karl-Anthony Towns and OG Anunoby each added 21 points for New York (48-25), which pulled within percentage points of Boston (47-24) for second place in the Eastern Conference. Towns also grabbed 14 rebounds.

But it was Brunson who made the difference for the Knicks in a game that was close throughout the second half. He scored 10 straight points for New York midway through the fourth quarter, including back-to-back baskets after New Orleans had cut it to 109-107 with 4½ minutes remaining.

Zion Williamson scored 22 points and Jeremiah Fears had 21 for the Pelicans.

The Knicks have feasted on a soft part of their schedule, beating Indiana twice, Utah, Brooklyn and Washington during the winning streak, which came entirely against teams with losing records. They will get tested on a four-game road trip that begins Thursday at Charlotte and features stops at NBA champion Oklahoma City and Houston.

Nuggets 125, Suns 123: Nikola Jokic had 23 points, 17 rebounds and tied a season high with 17 assists to lead visiting Denver over Phoenix.

Jokic made the go-ahead basket, knocking down a 12-foot jumper with 11.5 seconds left. The Suns' Devin Booker got a good look at a potential winning 3-pointer, but it bounced off the rim.

Phoenix trailed 117-109 with 3:19 left, but methodically worked its way back. Booker made a tough jumper in the lane to tie the game at 123 with 30.2 seconds remaining. He had 22 points and eight assists.

Jokic had his NBA-leading 29th triple-double of the season by early in the third quarter. The three-time MVP shot 9-for-16 and delivered several pinpoint passes, including one that went the full length of the court for a layup by Christian Braun.

Cavaliers 136, Magic 131: Donovan Mitchell scored 42 points, James Harden added 26 and host Cleveland beat Orlando to extend its winning streak to four games.

It is Mitchell's sixth game with at least 40 points this season, tied for fourth-most in the league.

Paolo Banchero had 36 points for the Magic (38-34), which has dropped six straight and dropped into a three-way tie with Charlotte and Miami for eighth place in the Eastern Conference.

Hornets 134, Kings 90: Coby White made six of host Charlotte's franchise-tying 26 3-pointers and finished with 27 points as it routed Sacramento for its fourth straight win.

LaMelo Ball had 20 points on six 3s and Moussa Diabate added 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Hornets (38-34), who pulled within two games of Atlanta for sixth place in the Eastern Conference.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Detroit	52	19	.732	—
Boston	47	24	.662	5
New York	48	25	.658	5
Cleveland	45	27	.625	7½
Toronto	40	31	.563	12
Atlanta	40	32	.556	12½
Philadelphia	39	33	.542	13½
Orlando	38	34	.528	14½
Charlotte	38	34	.528	14½
Miami	38	34	.528	14½
Milwaukee	29	42	.408	23
Chicago	29	42	.408	23
Brooklyn	17	55	.236	35½
Washington	16	55	.225	36
Indiana	16	56	.222	36½

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	57	15	.792	—
San Antonio	54	18	.750	3
L.A. Lakers	46	26	.639	11
Denver	44	28	.611	13
Minnesota	44	28	.611	13
Houston	43	28	.606	13½
Phoenix	40	32	.556	17
L.A. Clippers	36	36	.500	21
Portland	36	37	.493	21½
Golden State	34	38	.472	23
New Orleans	25	48	.342	32½
Memphis	24	47	.338	32½
Dallas	23	49	.319	34
Utah	21	51	.292	36
Sacramento	19	54	.260	38½

x-clinched playoff spot

Tuesday's games

New York 121, New Orleans 116
Denver 125, Phoenix 123
Cleveland 136, Orlando 131
Charlotte 134, Sacramento 90

Wednesday's games

Atlanta at Detroit
Chicago at Philadelphia
L.A. Lakers at Indiana
Miami at Cleveland
Oklahoma City at Boston
San Antonio at Memphis
Washington at Utah
Houston at Minnesota
Brooklyn at Golden State
Dallas at Denver
Milwaukee at Portland
Toronto at L.A. Clippers

Thursday's games

New Orleans at Detroit
New York at Charlotte
Sacramento at Orlando

Friday's games

L.A. Clippers at Indiana
Atlanta at Boston
Miami at Cleveland
Chicago at Oklahoma City
Houston at Memphis
New Orleans at Toronto
Utah at Denver
Dallas at Portland
Washington at Golden State
Brooklyn at L.A. Lakers

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Buffalo	71	44	20	7	95	251	207
Tampa Bay	70	44	21	5	93	257	195
Montreal	70	39	21	10	88	249	230
Boston	71	39	24	8	86	236	221
Ottawa	71	38	24	9	85	239	216
Detroit	71	38	25	8	84	207	211
Florida	70	35	32	3	73	211	233
Toronto	72	30	29	13	73	225	252

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	71	45	20	6	96	252	211
Columbus	71	38	22	11	87	231	217
Pittsburgh	71	35	20	16	86	243	225
N.Y. Islanders	72	40	27	5	85	209	206
Philadelphia	70	34	24	12	80	204	214
Washington	72	35	28	9	79	220	211
New Jersey	70	36	32	2	74	193	213
N.Y. Rangers	71	28	34	9	65	199	226

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-Colorado	70	47	13	10	104	263	177
x-Dallas	71	43	17	11	97	244	196
Minnesota	72	40	20	12	92	236	208
Utah	72	37	29	6	80	225	203
Nashville	71	34	28	9	77	215	235
Winnipeg	71	30	29	12	72	203	220
St. Louis	70	29	30	11	69	184	225
Chicago	71	27	31	13	67	187	228

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Anaheim	71	40	27	4	84	240	245
Edmonton	72	35	28	9	79	250	246
Vegas	72	32	26	14	78	225	225
Los Angeles	71	28	25	18	74	189	216
Seattle	70	31	29	10	72	200	218
San Jose	69	32	31	6	70	211	249
Calgary	71	30	34	7	67	180	219
Vancouver	70	21	41	8	50	182	262

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

Monday's games

Ottawa 2, N.Y. Rangers 1

Tuesday's games

Chicago 4, N.Y. Islanders 3
Columbus 3, Philadelphia 2
Ottawa 3, Detroit 2
Montreal 5, Carolina 2
Florida 5, Seattle 4, SO
Toronto 4, Boston 2
Colorado 6, Pittsburgh 2
Tampa Bay 6, Minnesota 3
Winnipeg 4, Vegas 1
New Jersey 6, Dallas 4
Nashville 6, San Jose 3
St. Louis 3, Washington 0
Calgary 3, Los Angeles 2, SO
Edmonton 5, Utah 2
Anaheim 5, Vancouver 3

Wednesday's games

Boston at Buffalo
N.Y. Rangers at Toronto

Thursday's games

Chicago at Philadelphia
Columbus at Montreal
Dallas at N.Y. Islanders
Minnesota at Florida
Pittsburgh at Ottawa
Seattle at Tampa Bay
Colorado at Winnipeg
New Jersey at Nashville
San Jose at St. Louis
Anaheim at Calgary
Washington at Utah
Edmonton at Vegas
Los Angeles at Vancouver

Friday's games

Chicago at N.Y. Rangers
Detroit at Buffalo

Scoring leaders

Through Tuesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nikita Kucherov, TB	66	40	80	120
Connor McDavid, EDM	72	40	78	118
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	69	46	69	115
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	65	35	62	97
Macklin Celebrini, SJ	69	35	61	96
Martin Necas, COL	67	34	54	88
David Pastrnak, BOS	66	28	59	87
Nick Suzuki, MTL	70	24	62	86
Mark Scheifele, WPG	71	32	54	86
Jason Robertson, DAL	71	39	46	85

ROUNDUP

Sharangovich lifts Flames past Kings

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Yegor Sharangovich scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lead the Calgary Flames to a 3-2 victory over the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday night.

Olli Maatta and Zayne Parekh, each with their first goals of the season, scored in regulation time for the Flames, who have won four games in a row for the first time this season. Dustin Wolf stopped 23 shots.

Quinton Byfield scored both goals and Darcy Kuemper made 21 saves for Los Angeles, which has points in seven of their last nine but just three victories. They have dropped four straight.

With the loss the Kings fall three points behind the Nashville Predators for the final wild-card berth in the Western Conference.

Calgary tied the game 1-1 at 14:50 of the second period when Ryan Strome and Victor Olofsson combined to set up Maatta as the three veterans the Flames added at the trade deadline combined to get Calgary on the scoreboard.

Olofsson was part of the Nazem Kadri deal with Colorado. Maatta came over from Utah in the MacKenzie Weegar trade. Strome was picked up from Anaheim for a seventh-round pick to replace Kadri at center.

Maatta has one goal and five assists in 10 games with Calgary after recording just a single assist in 22 games with the Mammoth.

Byfield's second of the night 17 seconds into the third period restored the Kings' lead, but Parekh tied it with a power-play goal at 13:02.

After Morgan Frost and Artemi Panarin exchanged goals in the first three rounds of the shootout, Sharangovich's winner came when he mishandled the puck but it slipped through Kuemper's pads.



JEFF MCINTOSH, The Canadian Press/AP

The Flames' Yegor Sharangovich, right, scores the winning goal in the shootout past Los Angeles Kings goalie Darcy Kuemper in Calgary on Tuesday.

Senators 3, Red Wings 2: Carter Yakemchuk scored a second-period goal and also had an assist in his NHL debut as the streaking visiting Ottawa edged Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday night.

Yakemchuk, the No. 7 overall pick of the 2024 draft, had been playing for the American Hockey League's Belleville Senators. He was called up earlier in the day with defensemen Thomas Chabot, Dennis Gilbert, Nick Jensen, Jake Sanderson and Lassi Thomson sidelined by injuries.

Maple Leafs 4, Bruins 2: Matthew Knies scored a pair of goals and Toronto snapped a three-game losing streak with a road victory over Boston.

Max Domi and William Nylander also scored for the Maple Leafs and John Tavares had three assists as Toronto outshot Boston 35-20 and avoided a three-game season sweep in the Original Six rivalry. Anthony Stolarz finished with 18 saves.

Canadiens 5, Hurricanes 2: Cole Caufield scored his 44th goal of the season and Jakub Dobes made 41 saves as host Montreal held off Carolina.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Ivan Demidov had a goal and an assist each, and Oliver Kapanen also scored as Montreal erased a two-goal deficit for its second consecutive win.

Panthers 5, Kraken 4 (SO): Florida gave up a three-goal, third-period lead but recovered for a shootout home win over Seattle on Vinnie Hinostroza's goal.

The Panthers led 4-1 on Noah Gregor's goal with 7:39 to play, but Seattle's Matty Beniers, Jordan Eberle and Bobby McMann scored in a span of 2:21 to force overtime. Eberle and McMann scored just 14 seconds apart.

Seattle, which has lost eight of 10, has not won since beating the Panthers 6-2 at home on March 15.

Blackhawks 4, Islanders 3: Anton Frondell had an assist in his NHL debut, Nick Lardis and Frank Nazar each had a goal and an assist and visiting Chicago defeated New York.

Ilya Mikheyev and Tyler Bertuzzi also had goals for the Blackhawks, who scored four straight goals and snapped a two-game skid.

Blue Jackets 3, Flyers 2: Zach Werenski continued his torrid scoring pace with a goal and an assist as visiting Columbus defeated Philadelphia.

The Blue Jackets outshot the Flyers 6-0 in the opening three minutes of the period.

Avalanche 6, Penguins 2: Martin Necas scored twice, Nathan MacKinnon poured in his NHL-leading 46th goal and visiting Colorado breezed past the Pittsburgh.

Necas, Sam Malinski and Parker Kelly scored within a 1:55 span late in the first period to break it open as the Avalanche atoned for one-sided loss to the Penguins last week in Denver by returning the favor in Pittsburgh. Cale Makar picked up the assist on Necas' first goal, boosting his career point total to 499. Ross Colton scored an empty-netter late.

Lightning 6, Wild 3: Erik Cernak scored a tiebreaking goal with 2:53 left in the third period Minnesota goaltender Filip Gustavsson misplayed a carom off the end boards and host Tampa Bay beat the Wild.

Tampa Bay rallied from a two-goal deficit, scoring three goals in the second period and five unanswered overall over the second and the third to win for the fourth time in five games and fifth time in seven.

Blues 3, Capitals 0: Jimmy Snuggerud and Otto Stenberg scored, Joel Hofer made 21 saves and host St. Louis beat Washington.

Jordan Kyrou scored his team-leading 17th goal into an empty net with 41 seconds remaining to seal the win for Hofer, who earned his sixth shutout of the season and the eighth of his career.

Predators 6, Sharks 3: Filip Forsberg scored a goal and assisted on two others to lead Nashville to a home victory over San Jose in a matchup of teams headed in opposite directions in the standings.

Matthew Wood, Roman Josi, Luke Evangelista, Brady Skjei and Steven Stamkos also scored and Juuse Saros made 27 saves for Nashville, winners of a season-high five consecutive games. Jonathan Marchessault had three assists.

Devils 6, Stars 4: Jack Hughes scored twice in the Devil's four-goal first period, and visiting New Jersey handed Dallas consecutive losses in regulation for the first time in two months.

Jesper Bratt and Connor Brown also had goals as the Devils put four of their first five shots past Jake Oettinger to end the Dallas goalie's career-best point streak at 14 games. Oettinger was pulled after the first period.

Jets 4, Golden Knights 1: Mark Scheifele had a goal and two assists — and a rare fighting major in the second period — to lead the Winnipeg to a home victory over Vegas.

Kyle Connor, Alex Iafallo and Cole Perfetti also scored for Winnipeg, which snapped a five-game home skid against Vegas.

Oilers 5, Mammoth 2: Connor McDavid scored twice to give him 401 career goals and 1,200 points, sparking Edmonton Oilers to a road victory over Utah.

McDavid became the fifth player in Oilers history to reach 400 goals when he took a feed from Mattias Ekholm and Evan Bouchard and beat Karel Vejmelka with 7:53 left in the second period.

Ducks 5, Canucks 3: Mikael Granlund scored twice, Alex Killorn had a goal and an assist, and visiting Anaheim beat Vancouver.

Anaheim grabbed a 2-1 lead in the second period, only to see Vancouver rally and tie the game twice before McTavish scored the winner at the 5:45 mark of the third.

MLB

Tigers set sights on AL Central title, longer playoff run



MIKE STEWART/AP

Detroit pitcher Tarik Skubal throws during workouts at spring training Feb. 20 in Lakeland, Fla. The two-time reigning Cy Young winner Skubal hopes to lead the Tigers deeper into the postseason.

BY DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

The Detroit Tigers and two-time Cy Young Award winner Tarik Skubal have their sights set on winning the AL Central for the first time since 2014.

The Chicago White Sox would love to simply get out of the division's basement.

As for the AL Central's other three teams — the Kansas City Royals, Cleveland Guardians and Minnesota Twins — a wide range of outcomes seem possible. The Guardians have won two straight division titles and are going for a third despite one of the lowest payrolls in baseball.

Here's a look at one of baseball's most unpredictable divisions heading into opening day:

1. Detroit Tigers. The Tigers lost the AL Central to Cleveland after a brutal September collapse, but got their revenge in the playoffs, beating the Guardians two games to one in the AL Wild Card Series. They would go on to play the Mariners tough in the AL Division Series before losing the best-of-five series in five games. Detroit is aiming to go deeper in the postseason this year, led by Skubal, who returns as the team's ace. A balanced lineup features Riley Greene, Gleyber Torres, Kerry Carpenter and Spencer Torkelson while top prospect Kevin McGonigle made the roster and could open as the starting shortstop. The Tigers beefed up their pitching staff during the offseason, adding Framber Valdez from the Astros, while 43-year-old Justin Verlander returns to the franchise where he spent his first 13 big league seasons.

2. Kansas City Royals. The Royals were unable to follow their divisional playoff berth in 2024 with a return to the playoffs last year, but they still finished 82-80 after an abysmal start. They have one of the league's most exciting players in All-Star shortstop Bobby Witt Jr., an emerging star in All-Star third baseman Maikel Garcia, a popular veteran catcher in Salvador Perez and plenty of starting pitchers capable of shutting teams down. The big problem for Kansas City for years has been outfield production. The Royals will hope that power-hitting Jac Caglianone will improve against big league pitching in his sophomore season. If starter Cole Ragans can return to All-Star form after injuries last season, Kris Bubic can follow through on his breakout year and the offense can tick up with some help from Caglianone and promising young catcher Carter Jensen, Kansas City has a shot to win its first AL Central title since 2015.

3. Cleveland Guardians. The Guardians' biggest offseason move was signing superstar third baseman José Ramírez to a $175 million, seven-year contract extension. But they still have plenty of questions on who else is going to pick up the slack on offense as they chase a third straight division title. Ramírez had a .283 batting average and stole a career-high 44 bases last season as the rest of the lineup struggled. All-star outfielder Steven Kwan batted .272 last season and will move from left to center field. Chase DeLauter, who made his big league debut during last year's AL Wild Card Series against Detroit, and George Valera are expected to get the corner outfield spots. The rotation has plenty of depth with Gavin Williams and Tanner Bibee anchoring it. Hunter Gaddis and Cade Smith will lead the bullpen, with Smith expected to be the closer.

4. Minnesota Twins. The Twins slumped last season to their worst record (70-92) since 2016 and missed the playoffs for the fourth time in the last five years. They're a franchise in transition since last summer's trade-deadline selloff when they dealt 10 players off the major league roster, including their top four relief pitchers. Manager Rocco Baldelli was fired and replaced by Derek Shelton. President Derek Falvey departed in a mutual decision with new controlling owner Tom Pohlad, who took over for his younger brother to try to get the franchise back on track on and off the field. General manager Jeremy Zoll has taken over baseball operations.

5. Chicago White Sox. After three straight years of 100-plus losses, including a franchise-record 121 in 2024, it looks as if the White Sox might be moving in the right direction. Shortstop Colson Montgomery made his major league debut in July and hit 21 homers in 71 games. Young catchers Kyle Teel and Edgar Quero also broke into the majors last year and showed some promising signs. Chicago's bullpen has a new look after it had a 4.26 ERA and blew 24 save opportunities last year. Seranthony Domínguez signed a $20 million, two-year contract in free agency, and Jordan Hicks was acquired in a trade with the Red Sox. The White Sox also added to their lineup by signing Japanese slugger Munetaka Murakami.

Raleigh, Mariners look to defend 1st AL West title since '01

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

Cal Raleigh and the Seattle Mariners switched things up in the American League West last season, getting as close as they ever have to making a World Series.

After winning their first division title since 2001, the Mariners are looking to do it again this year with slugging switch-hitting catcher Raleigh, 25-year-old three-time All-Star center fielder Julio Rodríguez, an All-Star closer and the only rotation in the majors with three 10-win starters back from last season.

The Houston Astros' incredible run of eight consecutive playoff appearances ended last year. They won seven AL West crowns in that streak, went to the AL Championship Series seven years in a row, won four pennants and twice were World Series champions.

The Athletics, who have made more long-term commitments to young regulars, begin their second season in a temporary home in West Sacramento, Calif., with one more expected before their scheduled move to Las Vegas in 2028.



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Seattle Mariners catcher Cal Raleigh bats during the fifth inning of a spring training game against the San Diego Padres on Feb. 20 in Peoria, Ariz. Raleigh was the AL MVP runner-up last season.

In what could be baseball's tightest division, new managers will be in the dugouts for the 2023 World Series champion Texas Rangers and Los Angeles Angels, who haven't had a winning season since 2015.

Here's how they project:

1. Seattle Mariners. Seattle led 3-1 with one out in the seventh inning of Game 7 in the ALCS at Toronto before George Springer's three-run homer. Raleigh was the AL MVP runner-up last season after hitting 60 homers, the most ever for a catcher and a switch-hitter. Rodríguez, the AL Rookie of the year in 2022, had his second 30-30 season (32 homers, 30 stolen bases). The Mariners also have a stable of capable right-handers, including closer Andrés Muñoz (38 saves) and All-Star starter Bryan Woo (15-7).

2. Houston Astros. Ace left-hander Framber Valdez, the Astros' opening day starter the past four seasons, left in free agency, but their rotation got a boost with the signing of 27-year-old Japanese star Tatsuya Imai. Hunter Brown, also 27, is poised to move into the top spot after going 12-9 with a 2.43 ERA. Houston hopes for a full season from slugger Yordan Alvarez after injuries limited him to 48 games, ending a streak of four consecutive 30-homer seasons.

3. Texas Rangers. New manager Skip Schumaker takes over a Rangers team that has missed the playoffs in both seasons since their only World Series championship. They are coming off the first .500 record (81-81) in the franchise's 65 seasons, when for the first time their pitching staff led the majors in ERA (3.47). Texas also set a single-season MLB record with a .99112 fielding percentage.

4. Athletics. Some momentum for the A's to end last season has led to optimism, especially with reigning AL Rookie of the Year Nick Kurtz leading the way. Kurtz batted .290 with 36 home runs and 86 RBIs in 117 games. In July, he became the first major league rookie to hit four homers in a game. The Athletics finished 76-86 and were 13-10 in September.

5. Los Angeles Angels. The Angels hope to take steps toward ending their MLB-worst stretches of 11 straight non-playoff seasons and 10 consecutive losing seasons under inexperienced new manager Kurt Suzuki, but they're trying to do it with a roster that's cheaper and riskier than last season. GM Perry Minasian, whose job could finally be on the line, took fliers on the likes of Grayson Rodriguez, Alek Manoah and Drew Pomeranz to bolster the pitching staff, while light-hitting outfielder Josh Lowe was his biggest position player addition.

MLB

Phillies look to resist new Mets, banged-up Braves

By Mike Fitzpatrick
Associated Press



LAURENCE KESTERSON/AP

The Phillies and Mets took opposite approaches in the offseason, with Philadelphia bringing back mostly the same core of players while New York was aggressive in trades and free agency to turn over its roster.

NEW YORK — Still powered by Kyle Schwarber and Bryce Harper, the Philadelphia Phillies are bringing back mostly the same team that won its second consecutive NL East title last season and made a fourth straight playoff appearance.

Time to take yet another run at that elusive World Series championship.

Meanwhile, the New York Mets are counting on a major makeover to produce October results. And the banged-up Atlanta Braves believe they can rebound quickly, too — if only they could keep all their key players on the field.

In a division that features two new managers and a host of established stars such as Juan Soto, Trea Turner and Ronald Acuña Jr., the young Miami Marlins and rebuilding Washington Nationals remain two of baseball's biggest mysteries.

Here's how they project:

1. Philadelphia Phillies. Harper and the Phillies remain in win-now mode while chasing the franchise's first World Series crown since 2008. They won the NL East by 13 games last season only to get eliminated in a Division Series for the second year in a row. Philadelphia essentially brought back the same core, as Schwarber and three-time All-Star catcher J.T. Realmuto returned in free agency with new contracts. Ranger Suárez left for a $130 million, five-year deal with the Red Sox, but NL Cy Young Award runner-up Cristopher Sánchez, Jesús Luzardo and Aaron Nola return from a strong rotation that hopes to include a healthy Zack Wheeler again soon. Touted prospects Andrew Painter and Justin Crawford will be getting their first chances in the starting rotation and center field, respectively.

2. New York Mets. The free-spending Mets faded badly in the second half and missed the playoffs last year. Convinced significant changes were necessary, President of Baseball Operations David Stearns ended up overhauling the roster. Several fan favorites are gone, including Pete Alonso, outfielder Brandon Nimmo, All-Star closer Edwin Díaz and versatile veteran Jeff McNeil. In their place are first baseman Jorge Polanco, second baseman Marcus Semien, third baseman Bo Bichette, center fielder Luis Robert Jr. and closer Devin Williams. But the biggest move Stearns made might have been trading two top prospects to the Brewers for Freddy Peralta, which gave New York a much-needed No. 1 starter. The rotation could be a real strength (unlike last year), with impressive rookie Nolan McLean, right-hander Kodai Senga, converted reliever Clay Holmes and left-hander David Peterson.

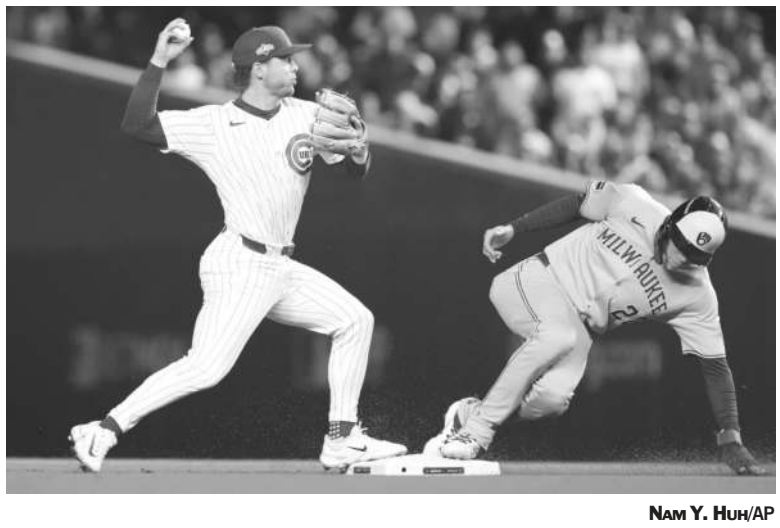
3. Atlanta Braves. After missing the playoffs last year for the first time since 2017, the Braves were looking for a return to form and good health in 2026. Instead, first-year manager Walt Weiss is adjusting to a jarring series of setbacks. Designated hitter and outfielder Jurickson Profar's suspension for the season following his second positive test for a performance-enhancing drug was the most devastating blow. Atlanta also lost left-hander Joey Wentz to a season-ending knee injury in spring training. Starting pitchers Spencer Schwellenbach and Hurston Waldrep went on the 60-day injured list following elbow surgery. Mauricio Dubón will begin the season at shortstop while Ha-Seong Kim recovers from a finger injury. The Braves will also open without catcher Sean Murphy, who had season-ending hip surgery in September.

4. Miami Marlins. The surprising Marlins finished third in the division last year at 79-83 under rookie manager Clayton McCullough, a 17-win improvement over 2024. And led by President of Baseball Operations Peter Bendix, they're trying different things — such as calling pitches from the dugout. Miami might be short on household names, but there are talented arms and promising young players on the roster like All-Star outfielder Kyle Stowers, center fielder Jakob Marsee, shortstop Otto López, second baseman Xavier Edwards and slugging catcher Agustín Ramírez. The rotation could be capable, headlined by 2022 NL Cy Young Award winner Sandy Alcantara and 6-foot-8 Eury Pérez along with newcomer Chris Paddack.

5. Washington Nationals. It's been a slow reconstruction for the Nationals, who went 66-96 in 2025 for their sixth straight losing season since winning the 2019 World Series. The youth movement now includes 36-year-old president of baseball operations Paul Toboni, 33-year-old rookie manager Blake Butera and 32-year-old GM Ani Kilambi. Washington still hopes young slugger James Wood, shortstop CJ Abrams and outfielder Dylan Crews can ultimately revitalize the franchise. The Nationals are counting on 2020 first-round draft pick and opening day starter Cade Cavalli to lead the rotation.

Cubs target NL Central title with Brewers, Reds lurking

By Jay Cohen
Associated Press



NAM Y. HUH/AP

The Cubs and Brewers are projected to be the top two teams in the NL Central this season after they both made the playoffs last year, with Milwaukee eliminating Chicago in the NLDS.

CHICAGO — Alex Bregman, welcome to the NL Central. Welcome back, Eugenio Suárez.

Bregman is hoping to lead the Chicago Cubs to their first Central title since 2020 after signing a $175 million, five-year contract with the North Siders in free agency. But the competition is tough in a division that put three teams in the playoffs last year.

Cincinnati added a familiar face when it signed Suárez to a $15 million, one-year deal. The 34-year-old Suárez, who played for the Reds for seven seasons before he was traded to Seattle in March 2022, is expected to provide some protection for Elly De La Cruz in a lineup that struggled at times last season.

The Milwaukee Brewers are the reigning Central champions, and the Pittsburgh Pirates are much improved after acquiring Brandon Lowe in a trade and signing Ryan O'Hearn to a two-year contract.

Here's how they project:

1. Chicago Cubs. The Bregman move was a high-profile splash, but Chicago also acquired Edward Cabrera in a January trade with Miami. The right-hander had a 3.53 ERA in a career-high 26 starts last year, striking out 150 in 137⅔ innings. He joins a deep rotation that also includes Matthew Boyd, Cade Horton, Jameson Taillon and Shota Imanaga — with Justin Steele on his way back from elbow surgery. The pitching staff should be helped by a stellar defensive lineup, led by Gold Glove winners Pete Crow-Armstrong, Ian Happ and Nico Hoerner.

2. Milwaukee Brewers. The pitching staff took a hit when Freddy Peralta was traded to the New York Mets in January, but it's a familiar situation for Milwaukee. After all, the Brewers traded Corbin Burnes to Baltimore in 2024, and they won the division for the third consecutive year in 2025. With Peralta gone, the rotation is fronted by Brandon Woodruff, Quinn Priester and Jacob Misiorowski. Priester was terrific in his first year with the Brewers, going 13-3 with a 3.32 ERA. But Woodruff has a long history of injuries and Priester was hampered by a lingering wrist issue during spring training.

3. Cincinnati Reds. Cincinnati hit just 167 homers in Terry Francona's first year as Reds manager, despite playing in hitter-friendly Great American Ball Park. Enter Suárez, who matched his career high with 49 homers in 2025. His return could provide a big lift for Cincy, but the Reds also need some of their young position players to step up. Matt McLain was one of the team's best hitters as a rookie in 2023, but he was not the same player last year in his return from shoulder surgery. Noelvi Marte is another key performer for Cincinnati after making a successful transition to the outfield last year.

4. Pittsburgh Pirates. There is hope in Pittsburgh again. At least some hope, anyway. Lowe, a two-time All-Star, hit 31 homers last year and O'Hearn batted .281 with a career-high 17 homers and 63 RBIs. Marcell Ozuna joins the lineup as the team's regular designated hitter after agreeing to a $12 million, one-year contract. Konnor Griffin, a shortstop who turns 20 on April 24, is one of the majors' top prospects. Fresh off his first NL Cy Young Award, Paul Skenes leads a rotation that also includes Mitch Keller and Bubba Chandler. The 23-year-old Chandler broke into the majors in August, going 4-1 with a 4.02 ERA in seven appearances.

5. St. Louis Cardinals. St. Louis is rebuilding under Chaim Bloom, who took over as the organization's president of baseball operations after the Cardinals went 78-84 last year. Right-hander Sonny Gray and infielders Willson Contreras, Nolan Arenado and Brendan Donovan were shipped off to new homes in the offseason.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Together: Teams left in Tournament emphasize importance of continuity

FROM PAGE 24

Five teams still alive have at least four starters who have played multiple seasons for their current coaches, according to a roster survey from The Associated Press, and nine of the 16 have at least three. Duke and Michigan State have starting lineups that consist entirely of guys who have played nowhere else in college, and 11 of the 16 teams have at least three such starters.

Those numbers exist despite the fact that Iowa (Ben McCollum) and Texas (Sean Miller) have new coaches, and both were forced to mine the transfer portal after the typical and unavoidable outflow of players from the previous regime.

At Purdue, Smith — now the NCAA career assists leader — and Loyer have been starters the last four years. Kaufman-Renn, also a senior, has been in the starting lineup the last three. Together, they are tied for the winningest class in school history.

"Who wouldn't want to stay?" Smith asked. "Obviously if our situation was different, whatever. For us just being around a great group of people as a whole, the community at Purdue, the coaching staff, just staff in general — it just makes it super special."

In the Hawkeyes' case, four starters — Bennett Stirtz, Tavion Banks, Cam Manyawu and Kael Combs — followed McCollum from Drake, creating the same sort of continuity. The other starter, Jacob Koch, played for Fran McCaffery at Iowa last season.

"We've got really loyal kids, and I knew that going in," said McCollum, who two years ago was coaching Division II ball. "Whether or not they're perfect — they're not. We've got our issues, I've got my issues, but what they're perfect at is loyalty, and they're tough, and they've established a foundation and a solid core."

The Hawkeyes' in-state rival, Iowa State, is back in the Sweet 16 behind Tamin Lipsey, a fourth-year senior who grew up near the campus in Ames. Milan Momcilovic and injured forward Joshua Jefferson have been with T.J. Otzelberger for multiple years.

Over time, they have embraced what it means to be a part of the Cyclones program.

"We have a lot of pride that this program continues to do really well," Otzelberger said, "and the consistency of it means a whole lot to us. We're going to continue to have those work habits that reflect that day-in and day-out."

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo doesn't just have five starters he recruited out of high school, but four who have stuck with him at least three seasons. That includes Carson Cooper and Jaxon Kohler, a pair of college basketball unicorns: fourth-year seniors.

"When you end up coaching and you have guys for three and four years, they do become like your own kids," Izzo said. "In fact, I spent more time with some of my players than I did my own kids as they were growing up. I'm not really proud of that, just the fact of life."

It's a somewhat pleasant way of life for those who remember what college sports was before administrators began chasing money above all else, and players followed suit. Teams were embraced by fans when March Madness rolled around because they had watched their players grow up; they had a vested interested after years of shared joy and suffering.

In some ways, this year's Sweet 16 is a throwback to an increasingly bygone era.

"I kind of go back to just how we are right now, even in like, our meals in the hotel rooms, and just hanging out with the guys. I think that's something that we're all going to take for granted at some point," Cooper said. "When we graduate, wherever the next step takes us, we're going to think back and wish that we were back there, being able to hang out with the guys."



CHRIS CARLSON/AP

North Carolina fired men's basketball head coach Hubert Davis on Tuesday after the Tar Heels lost to VCU in overtime during the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Davis had a 125-54 record in five seasons.

North Carolina parts ways with Davis after 5 seasons

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

Hubert Davis appeared to be the right coach to be North Carolina's bridge from Dean Smith to Roy Williams and into the future. Instead, that run lasted just five years.

The Tar Heels have parted ways with Davis, announcing Tuesday night that they had made "a leadership change" to end Davis' tenure as successor to retired Hall of Fame coach Williams. Davis' time featured multiple high points, but also wild swings of results, an inconsistency that runs contrary to North Carolina's status as a tradition-rich blueblood with a hallmark of sustained top-tier success.

In its announcement, the school said athletic director Bubba Cunningham and executive associate AD Steve Newmark — who will take over as Cunningham's successor in July — made the recommendation ultimately accepted by chancellor Lee Roberts.

"We appreciate all that Hubert has done for Carolina as a player, assistant coach, head coach and community leader — he has helped make special memories we will never forget," Cunningham said in a statement. "This was not an easy decision because of Hubert's tremendous character and all he has given to the program, but we must move forward in a way that allows our team to compete more consistently at an elite level."

In his own statement posted on social media, Davis said he had been "let go" by the school and that he hopes to continue coaching.

"My desire was to continue to coach here," Davis said. "This opportunity has truly been such a blessing. I thank Jesus literally every day for giving me the opportunity, relationships and experiences with the kids and my staff.

"I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish together. My goal is to coach again in the very near future."

The program with six NCAA titles and a national-record 21 Final Fours now has just three March Madness wins in the four seasons since an unexpected run to the 2022 national title game in Davis' debut season. UNC reached the Sweet 16 as a No. 1 seed in 2024 before being upset by Alabama, but otherwise hasn't reached the round of 32 in that span, and even missed the NCAAs entirely in 2023.

The final blow was Thursday's overtime loss to VCU in the NCAA Tournament in which the Rams rallied from 19 down for the biggest comeback in first-round history, changing the tenor of conversations about Davis' future. And by Saturday, Cunningham said the school was evaluating "all facets" of the program.

Davis, who played for the Tar Heels from 1988-92, finished with a 125-54 record at North Carolina for a 69.8% win percentage.

Scoreboard

Men's tournament

EAST REGIONAL
At Washington
Regional Semifinals
Friday, March 27

Duke vs. St. John's, **AFN-Sports, 12 a.m. Saturday CET, 7 a.m. Saturday JKT**
UConn vs. Michigan St., **AFN-Sports 2:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 9:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**

Regional Championship
Sunday, March 29

Duke-St. John's winner vs. UConn-Michigan St. winner

SOUTH REGIONAL
At Houston
Regional Semifinals
Thursday, March 26

Nebraska vs. Iowa, **AFN-Sports, 12:30 a.m. Friday CET, 7:30 a.m. Friday JKT**
Houston vs. Illinois, **AFN-Sports2, 3 a.m. Friday CET, 10 a.m. Friday JKT**

Regional Championship
Saturday, March 28

Nebraska-Iowa winner vs. Houston-Illinois winner

MIDWEST REGIONAL
At Chicago
Regional Semifinals
Friday, March 27

Michigan vs. Alabama, **AFN-Sports2, 12:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 7:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**
Iowa St. vs. Tennessee, **AFN-Sports2, 3 a.m. Saturday CET, 10 a.m. Saturday JKT**

Regional Championship
Sunday, March 29

Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa St.-Tennessee winner

WEST REGIONAL
At San Jose, Calif.
Regional Semifinals
Thursday, March 26

Arizona vs. Arkansas, **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Friday CET, 9:30 a.m. Friday JKT**
Purdue vs. Texas, **AFN-Sports, 12 a.m. Friday CET, 7 a.m. Friday JKT**

Regional Championship
Saturday, March 28

Arizona-Arkansas winner vs. Purdue-Texas winner

Women's tournament

Fort Worth 3
At Fort Worth, Texas
Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 28

Texas vs. Kentucky
Michigan vs. Louisville

Regional Championship
Monday, March 30

Texas-Kentucky winner vs. Michigan-Louisville winner

Sacramento 2
At Sacramento, Calif.
Regional Semifinals
Friday, March 27

UCLA vs. Minnesota
LSU vs. Duke

Regional Championship
Sunday, March 29

UCLA-Minnesota winner vs. LSU-Duke winner

Sacramento 4
At Sacramento, Calif.
Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 28

South Carolina vs. Oklahoma
Virginia vs. TCU

Regional Championship
Monday, March 30

South Carolina-Oklahoma winner vs. TCU-Virginia winner

Fort Worth 1
At Fort Worth, Texas
Regional Semifinals
Friday, March 27

UConn vs. North Carolina
Vanderbilt vs. Notre Dame

Regional Championship
Sunday, March 29

UConn-North Carolina winner vs. Vanderbilt-Notre Dame winner

NCAA MEN'S TOURNAMENT

Houston, Illinois move past strong openers

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

Houston coach Kelvin Sampson wanted his Cougars simply to stick to what they do best in defending with their typical toughness to open March Madness. Illinois coach Brad Underwood hoped his team would "just let it rip."

They got what they wanted in the opening weekend of the NCAA Tournament while posting the two most lopsided scoring margins of any teams to advance to the Sweet 16. Now they will try those very different approaches against one another in a Thursday clash in Houston.

The second-seeded Cougars — who played in last year's national title game — rolled to 31-point wins against both Idaho and Texas A&M. That came while allowing just 0.839 points per possession (104 points on 124 possessions).

"Everybody's got a style," coach Kelvin Sampson said after the 88-57 win against the Aggies. "We have a style. Texas A&M has a style, but it doesn't come down to what you are doing vs. them. It's how you do what you do."

Houston allowed the Vandals and Texas A&M to score on just 37.1% of their possessions, with those teams shooting a combined 31.5% while making 12 of 54 3-pointers (22.2%).

The third-seeded Fighting Illini had the second-largest scoring margin (plus-56) of the first weekend while averaging 1.382 points per possession (181 points on 131 possessions). They scored on 60.3% of their possessions against Penn and VCU.

"We're 34 or 35 games in, whatever we're in, and there's not a lot we don't know," Underwood said. "I'm really glad to see us — I used the term before the tournament — 'just let it rip.' We've got to play that way, and we've got to play loose and we've got to play free."



KYLE PHILLIPS/AP

Houston guard Kingston Flemings (4) and forward Emanuel Sharp try to get to a rebound before Texas A&M guard Marcus Hill (0) during the first half in the second round of the NCAA Tournament on March 21 in Oklahoma City.

Things figure to be tighter against the stingy Cougars, and whichever team is the most successful doing what it does best will likely advance. Houston is a 3.5-point favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

Shooting the 3

Purdue is shooting the 3-pointer better than anyone heading to the regional round so far, while Alabama continues firing from long range at a frenetic pace under Nate Oats.

The Boilermakers made 22 of 38 3-pointers in wins against Queens and Miami, good for 57.9% to lead all tournament teams. They were the only tournament team to make more than half their attempts while playing multiple games.

In all, six Sweet 16 teams shot at least 40% from 3-point range in the tournament's opening weekend, including Michigan (46.8%, 22 of 47) and Michigan State (45.7%, 21 of 46).

The Crimson Tide, meanwhile, lead all tournament teams with 31 made 3s through two rounds, at least five more than any other team. And their 78 attempted 3s were tied with 12-seed High Point — which upset Wisconsin before falling in a shootout to Arkansas — for the most in the tournament, at least eight more than any other team.

Winning profiles, tiers

Going back to the 2001 tournament, 55 of 96 teams to reach the Final Four (57.3%) were ranked inside the top 25 in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency for KenPom entering March Madness, with 21 of those ranking in the top 10 at both ends.

Slightly more than half of the remaining teams (21) ranked inside the top 10 at one end of the court to offset a ranking outside the top 25 in the other.

That leaves 20 outliers that reached the sport's final weekend without holding top-10 status in at least one category.

Looking at the three tiers of the 16 teams that will play this week:

■ Six favorites entered the tournament with top-25 rankings at both ends of the floor: 1-seeds Duke, Arizona and Michigan, and 2-seeds Houston, Iowa State and Michigan State. Of that group, the Blue Devils and Wildcats were top-5 in both categories.

■ Five teams ranked in the top 10 at one end of the court: 2-seed Purdue, 3-seed Illinois and 4-seeds Alabama, Arkansas and Nebraska. The Cornhuskers were the only one of that quintet to rank in the top 10 defensively.

■ The five outliers: 2-seed UConn, 5-seed St. John's, 6-seed Tennessee, 9-seed Iowa and 11-seed Texas. The Huskies are the surprise addition in this group after flirting with earning a No. 1 seed coming down the stretch, but they entered March Madness ranked 30th in offense (122.0 points per 100 possessions) and 11th in defense (94.1).

Acuff -Thomas teamup stokes Arkansas tournament run

BY ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

Arkansas freshmen Darius Acuff Jr. and Meleek Thomas were plotting their on-court relationship in chats while they were still recruits.

"We talked about it in high school when we first committed and like I said, it don't just take a game, it takes practice, workouts, just it takes a lot of communication, I would say, and we have that," Acuff said.

The duo's chemistry is a big reason the Razorbacks (28-8) have advanced to the Sweet 16. Fourth-seeded Arkansas faces No. 1 seed Arizona (34-2) on Thursday in the NCAA Tournament's West Region.

Acuff, an AP first-team All-American, scored 36 points in the Razorbacks' 94-88 second-round victory over High Point on Saturday night. Thomas scored 19.

"It takes a lot of communication, a lot of togetherness, like Darius said," Thomas said. "We spoke about that before the season and when you're genuinely happy for your teammate, you're genuinely happy for your brother, then you really get excited and you get enjoyment out of seeing him dominate and do well. So like when he's on, it's like, 'Yeah, keep doing you.'"

The duo stands out in a season of fantastic freshmen, including Duke's Cameron Boozer and BYU's AJ Dybantsa. Together, Acuff (23.3) and Thomas (15.6) combine for an average of nearly 40 points per game.

"And you know what's great? They're playing off of one another," Arkansas coach John Calipari said. "All they have done is helped each other. People are like, 'How are you going to get these two to play together?' They're both good young people with good hearts and they care about each other."

Acuff, the Southeastern Conference player of the year, holds Razorbacks single-season records with 817 points and 229 assists, eclipsing the previous marks during March Madness. His 36 points against High Point were the most ever for an Arkansas player during the tournament.

Acuff's combined 60 points in the first two tournament games are the most scored by a freshman in the opening rounds, passing the record of 57 reached by Cam Thomas at LSU, Zion Williamson at Duke and Kevin Durant at Texas.



AMANDA LOMAN/AP

Arkansas guard Meleek Thomas shoots past High Point forward Owen Aquino during the second half in the second round of the NCAA Tournament on March 21 in Portland, Ore.

The 6-foot-3 Acuff is considered among the top picks in the NBA draft, should he choose to go pro. Known for his strength and a focused determination on the court, he had 30 points and 11 assists in the SEC title game victory over Vanderbilt.

"Always wanted to be the big moment. Always just thinking win," he said. "Like whatever I got to do to win that's what I'm going to do."

Thomas gives balance to Arkansas' backcourt, often knocking down the key shot. Against High Point, he hit a long 3-pointer with 6:11 left in the game as the Razorbacks started to shift the momentum.

"I'm trying to get Meleek Thomas to catch and shoot it. Quit bouncing it and side stepping, just shoot. So the last one he just caught and shot. He's one of the best scorers in the country," Calipari said after the game.

Against Arizona, Arkansas will face another high-scoring freshman duo in Brayden Burries and Koa Peat. The Wildcats beat No. 9 seed Utah State 78-66 on Sunday to advance.

The Razorbacks are making their 37th NCAA Tournament appearance. They won the national title in 1994 and were runners-up in 1995. They have been to the Final Four five times, but not since '95.

The program is in its second straight Sweet 16 and fifth in the last six years. It has made it to that round 16 times. Last year's Sweet 16 team fell 85-83 in overtime to Texas Tech.

This season, Arkansas has its supremely confident freshman twosome.

"I don't care how they're playing. They both have otherworldly confidence in themselves," Calipari said. "That's why I say they could run for president. They're so confident in themselves, they could do fine."

SPORTS

Shootout winner

Flames top Kings on late shot from Sharangovich ›› NHL, Page 19

NCAA MEN'S TOURNAMENT

Sticking together

Sweet 16 filled with veteran teams defying era of NIL, transfers

By Dave Skretta
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Purdue was struggling to put away Miami in the second half of their second-round NCAA Tournament game Sunday when Braden Smith, Fletcher Loyer and Trey Kaufman-Renn combined to score the Boilermakers' next 22 points, helping them to turn a three-point lead into a 79-69 victory and a spot in the Sweet 16.

It was exactly what coach Matt Painter has come to expect from his guys over the last four years.

The antithesis of college basketball in the age of free transfers and name, image and likeness money, Purdue is two wins away from a second Final Four appearance in the last three years by keeping things decidedly old-school: It recruits players that fit its program, develop them over time and then it leans on them when it matters the most.

"It comes down to culture," Smith said. "Having what we have here in the last four years is really special. I think we've had maybe four transfers in my four years that we have had, and I think that's pretty special, and not a lot of teams ever have that."

It's unique in college basketball, to be sure, but not necessarily unique in the Sweet 16.

In fact, the tournament this year has underscored the value of continuity within a program, and that restocking with a new wave of transfers each offseason is not necessarily the best way to build a championship roster.

SEE TOGETHER ON PAGE 22



Purdue's Fletcher Loyer, left, and Trey Kaufman-Renn, along with Braden Smith, have stayed together since 2022, a direct contrast to an era where players are constantly changing schools.

CRAIG PESSMAN/AP

Brunson scores 32, Knicks win 7th straight ›› NBA, Page 18

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