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No friend of the F-35

Musk, charged with cutting federal spending, calls fighter jet waste of money

By ELEANOR DEARMAN
Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram

The person soon to be in charge of cutting federal spending is blasting Lockheed Martin's F-35.

Elon Musk, the man behind Tesla and SpaceX, said Tuesday on X that the U.S. should pull the plug on the jet.

"Some US weapons systems are good, albeit overpriced, but please, in the name of all that is holy, let us stop the worst military value for money in history that is the F-35



Musk

program!" the billionaire wrote.

The comment was one of several criticisms Musk made of the fighter, which is expected to cost the federal government more than \$2 trillion over its lifespan, according to Defense News.

President-elect Donald Trump has tapped Musk and fellow billionaire Vivek Ramaswamy to head up his new De-

SEE F-35 ON PAGE 6

A U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II performs at the Great Texas Air Show over Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, on April 6. Elon Musk was highly critical of the expensive fighter jet program in recent posts on social media.

ZACHARY RUFUS/U.S. Air Force

Stealth destroyer to be home for 1st hypersonic weapon on US warship

By DAVID SHARP
Associated Press

The U.S. Navy is transforming a costly flub into a potent weapon with the first shipborne hypersonic weapon, which is being retrofitted aboard the first of its three stealthy destroyers.

The USS Zumwalt is at a Mississippi shipyard, where workers have installed missile tubes that replace twin turrets from a gun

system that was never activated because it was too expensive. Once the system is complete, the Zumwalt will provide a platform for conducting fast, precision strikes from greater distances, adding to the usefulness of the warship.

"It was a costly blunder. But the Navy could take victory from the jaws of defeat here, and get some utility out of them by making them into a hypersonic platform,"

said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

The U.S. has had several types of hypersonic weapons in development for the past two decades, but recent tests by Russia and China have added pressure to the U.S. military to hasten their production.

Hypersonic weapons travel beyond Mach 5, five times the speed of sound, with added maneuverability making them har-

der to shoot down.

Last year, The Washington Post reported that among the documents leaked by former Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira was a Defense Department briefing that confirmed China had recently tested an intermediate-range hypersonic weapon called the DF-27. While

SEE HYPERSONIC ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Southwest to end cabin service earlier on flights

Associated Press

Southwest Airlines says it is ending cabin service earlier on flights, requiring passengers to do the usual pre-landing procedures such as ensuring their seat belts are fastened and returning their seats to an upright position earlier than before.

Beginning Wednesday, a company spokesperson said, flight attendants will start preparing the cabin for landing at an altitude of 18,000 feet instead of 10,000 feet. The change in procedure is de-

signed to "reduce the risk of in-flight turbulence injuries" for crew members and passengers, the company said.

While turbulence-related fatalities are quite rare, injuries have piled up over the years.

More than one-third of all airline incidents in the United States from 2009 through 2018 were related to turbulence, and most of them resulted in one or more serious injuries but no damage to the plane, the National Transportation Safety Board reported.

In May, a 73-year old man died on board a Singapore Airlines flight when the plane hit severe turbulence over the Indian Ocean.

The airline had also previously announced other changes.

Starting next year, Southwest will toss out a half-century tradition of "open seating" — passengers picking their own seats after boarding the plane. The company said last month that surveying showed a large majority of customers preferred an assigned seat.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Dec. 2)	0.92	Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770
British pound (Dec. 2)	\$1.24	Britain (Pound)	.7849
Japanese yen (Dec. 2)	148.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3994
South Korean won (Dec. 2)	1359.00	China(Yuan)	7.2424
		Denmark (Krone)	7.0494
		Egypt (Pound)	49.5909
		Euro	.9452
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7812
		Hungary (Forint)	390.63
		Israel (Shekel)	3.6364
		Japan (Yen)	149.62
		Kuwait(Dinar)	.3074
		Norway (Krone)	11.0283
		Philippines (Peso)	58.59
		Poland (Zloty)	4.06
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7569
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3385
		South Korea (Won)	1397.62
Switzerland (Franc)	.8802		
Thailand (Baht)	34.32		
Turkey (NewLira)	34.6921		

(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	7.75
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00
Federal funds market rate	4.58
3-month bill	4.50
30-year bond	4.37

WEATHER OUTLOOK



The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

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MILITARY

GAO finds flaws in USAF deployment revamp

Air Force's quick implementation has caused issues

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force overhaul of personnel and aircraft deployments was inadequately planned and could leave some wings struggling to support their home base while its units are away, according to a federal watchdog agency.

Air Force Force Generation, the service's new model for deployments, may have been rolled out too hastily, the Government Accountability Office said in a new report released Tuesday.

The Air Force said it implemented the plan as quickly as possible to respond to a potential global conflict. The initial intent was for all major commands to follow the four-phase system over two years, but some have been reluctant to transition their subordinate units to the deployment model, the GAO found.

"There has been uncertainty and confusion across the service," analysts said in the report, which added that the Air Force did not account for how units and personnel in high demand may be affected.

During site visits to three major commands, officials meeting with the GAO team compared the new deployment guidance to "policy by PowerPoint presentations and emails," the report said.

Officials described the former Air Expeditionary Force process as "crowdsourcing," whereby personnel and equipment from



MARY BOWERS/U.S. Air Force

A B-52H Stratofortress assigned to the 20th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron takes off from RAF Fairford, England, on Nov. 22.

various wings were selected to deploy together, the report said.

But that method was unsustainable and problematic, Air Force officials told the GAO. Combining airmen from different wings often meant they had never met or worked together prior to deploying, which could degrade unit cohesion, according to the report.

So the Air Force switched to the new process, in which aircraft and personnel train together before the assignment and most of a wing deploys at once. The shift aligns the service with how the Army and Navy operate.

It's organized into four six-month stages. "Reset" is the first and includes aircraft maintenance,

personnel leave and basic training.

During phase two, called "prepare," units increase training, while during "certify," the next phase, they engage in joint exercises.

The final stage is the window when units are ready to deploy.

But that timetable has often proved unworkable in practice, the report found.

Air Mobility Command, for example, said the plan calls for 16 C-17s to be in the fourth phase at any given time, but the unit receives daily mission requests for about 40 to 50 C-17s, according to the report.

Sometimes, events such as the October 2023 Hamas attack on

Israel lead to greater demand, and the command has to pull aircraft and personnel from other phases, the GAO said.

Officials from the 2nd Bomb Wing at Barksdale Air Force, La., said their personnel cannot "reset" for six months because they must consistently participate in nuclear deterrence and bomber mission-related tasks.

A counterpart based at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, the 5th Bomb Wing, told the GAO investigators that requiring a whole unit to deploy could degrade another bomber wing's ability to support its home base.

The unit needs airmen certified to handle nuclear weapons, and a large-scale deployment

could create personnel shortages, officials said.

And a wing at Joint Base Charleston in South Carolina said that under the new Air Force deployment parameters, the base would not have enough forces to guard entrances and would therefore have to close three of seven gates. The Air Force later reduced its request for personnel.

The GAO recommended the Air Force do a service-wide assessment of minimum staffing needs, and examine potential gaps and risks associated with reduced support at its bases.

The Air Force agreed with those recommendations and estimated it would have those assessments ready by January.

Prosecutors: Bulgarians on trial in UK spied on US base in Stuttgart

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — U.S. European Command headquarters was among the targets of a spy ring accused of passing information to Russia over a three-year span, according to British prosecutors trying three Bulgarian defendants.

EUCOM's Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, where Ukrainian troops have spent time with U.S. forces, was surveilled along with various other sensitive locations around Europe, prosecutors said Thursday.

Katrin Ivanova, 33; Vanya Gaberova, 30; and Tihomir Ivanov Ivanchev, 39, are also accused of carrying out espionage in England, Austria, Spain and Montenegro, British newspaper The Independent reported.

All three are based in the United Kingdom and have denied the

spying accusations.

"They sought to gather information for the benefit of Russia ... about various targets, both people and physical locations, information of particular interest to the Russian state," prosecutor Alison Morgan said in opening statements Thursday, according to the newspaper.

Morgan told jurors at London's Old Bailey that a five-person team of Bulgarians directed by an Austrian agent for Russia had carried out six significant operations, including one to spy on Patch Barracks in late 2022, Reuters reported.

Charles Prichard, a spokesman for EUCOM, said Friday that the command is following developments in the case but directed questions about the proceedings to British authorities.

"As for the type of activities alleged in the case, for operational

security reasons we will not discuss specific force protection measures. We continue to remain vigilant and take appropriate actions—including training—to ensure the safety and security of our people," Prichard said.

Prichard also refuted some media reports on the case that stated Ukrainian troops were actively training at Patch Barracks. Ukrainians weren't training there or any other Stuttgart bases, he said.

The trial comes at a time of heightened concerns about Russian espionage and allegations of sabotage by Kremlin operatives across Europe.

Last month, U.S. authorities said American defense industry sites in Europe should step up security over elevated concerns that Russian saboteurs could target them. Meanwhile, unidentified drones have been spotted flying around military bases in England

where thousands of American military personnel are based. Over the past week, several intrusions by small drones have occurred in the vicinity of and over RAF Lakenheath, RAF Mildenhall, RAF Feltwell and RAF Fairford.

An investigation is underway to determine who is responsible for the drone intrusions. So far, U.S. military operations and families at the bases haven't been affected, officials have said. Citing operational security, EUCOM declined to say last week whether similar drone intrusions have happened at other bases in Europe where U.S. troops work.

Prichard, in an earlier statement Wednesday, said the command is prepared to "defend U.S. interests if an incident is deemed a threat."

While EUCOM didn't comment on what steps it could take to disable an intruding spy drone, the

military has made counterdrone operations a focal point in recent years given the expanding role of unmanned aircraft.

In January, German authorities complained about similar activity at bases where their soldiers were working with Ukrainian troops. A German base 60 miles west of Berlin was a particularly favorite target, with drone incursions happening on a weekly basis. The U.S. military also has been heavily involved in training Ukrainian troops at its bases in Germany, with Grafenwoehr being a main hub for conducting infantry and tank maneuvers.

Meanwhile, EUCOM headquarters in Stuttgart and U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters in Wiesbaden have served as gathering points for higher-level military planning related to support for Ukraine in its war against Russia.

PACIFIC

S. Korea to pay \$1.1B initial cost for US troops

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's National Assembly has approved a new cost-sharing agreement with the United States for stationing roughly 28,500 American troops on the Korean Peninsula, clearing the way for the deal to take effect in 2026.

The assembly voted 173-36 to pass the upcoming Special Measures Agreement, which establishes the financial framework for maintaining the U.S. military presence in South Korea for five years.

The deal follows eight rounds of negotiations this year in Washington, Seoul and Hawaii.

Under the new terms, South Korea will pay \$1.1 billion initially and increase its contribution annually in line with proportional changes to its consumer price index. The deal includes a 5% cap on annual increases to shield against sharp rises during economic downturns, according to the South's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The current accord, which went

into effect in 2021, required Seoul to pay \$1 billion and gradually increase its annual contribution based on its defense budget until the end of 2025.

South Korea's contributions pay for U.S. military operations, construction projects on American bases, and local workers employed by U.S. Forces Korea.

Recent projects include two barracks at Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. base overseas, which cost \$67 million and began housing 600 soldiers in June.

Cost-sharing negotiations have been contentious in the past. During President-elect Donald Trump's previous administration, Trump accused South Korea of not paying enough, reportedly demanding as much as \$5 billion annually.

Trump said in a 2019 interview with Bloomberg News that South Korea "would be happy" to contribute \$10 billion annually for U.S. military assistance.

Negotiations stalled in 2019 over disagreements, forcing South Korea to extend its contribution rate into 2020.

11 warplanes from Russia, China enter South Korean air defense buffer zone

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea scrambled fighter jets Friday after six Russian and five Chinese military aircraft entered the country's air defense identification zone.

The foreign aircraft approached the zone between 9:35 a.m. and 1:53 p.m., crossing into the buffer near the southern and eastern coasts, according to a statement from the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Air defense identification zones are buffers designed by some nations to monitor and identify approaching aircraft before they enter national airspace.

South Korea's military identified the foreign aircraft before they entered the zone and dispatched fighters in response. The Joint Chiefs did not disclose how many aircraft were deployed.

China and Russia have been frequently accused of violating their neighbors' airspace or air defense zones.

On July 30, South Korean and Japanese fighter jets intercepted two Russian Tu-95MS Bear-H strategic bombers flying over international waters between Seoul and Tokyo. The missile-armed aircraft were escorted by "foreign fighters," Russia's Ministry of Defense said at the time.

On Aug. 26, a Chinese Y-9 surveillance plane entered Japanese airspace, prompting Japan's then-defense minister, Minoru Kihara, to call the act "completely unacceptable" and file a formal protest through diplomatic channels.

In an incident last December, South Korea scrambled fighters after four Russian and two Chinese warplanes entered its buffer zone without prior notice. The South's Ministry of National Defense lodged complaints with the Russian and Chinese embassies in Seoul.

South Korea's ties with Moscow have deteriorated amid recent reports of more than 10,000 North Korea troops fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine.



PHOTOS BY STACI MORRIS/U.S. Marine Corps

A Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom prepares for takeoff from the expeditionary sea base USS Miguel Keith in the Philippine Sea in September.

Full Marine helo detachment trains from sea-base ship

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps recently conducted its first live-fire training with a full detachment of helicopters operating from a sea-base ship near Okinawa, showcasing the flexibility of its expeditionary advanced base operations concept.

About 100 members of Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 165 (Reinforced) — part of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit out of Camp Pendleton, Calif. — carried out the exercises on Sept. 25 and Oct. 13.

Using UH-1Y Venoms and AH-1Z Vipers, the Marines launched day and night sorties from the USS Miguel Keith near Irisuna Jima, an uninhabited island in Okinawa prefecture, the Marines announced Oct. 17.

On each training day, four helicopters carried out 18 sorties, employing live ordnance, including 2.75-inch rockets, 20 mm semi-armor-piercing high-explosive incendiary rounds and .50-caliber and 7.62 mm weapons, according to the release.

"We validated, broadly speaking, the ability to deploy H-1s on [expeditionary sea bases] for longer durations," Capt. Brian Tuthill, a 15th MEU spokesman, said by phone Nov. 5.

The full detachment comprises eight helicopters, Lt. Col. Michael Harper, the H-1 officer in charge, said during a Nov. 5 phone interview from aboard the USS Boxer, an amphibious assault ship.

During the training, the Miguel Keith served as a "spoke" in the Marines Corps' hub-spoke-node



Marine Capt. Joseph Smolenski, left, a UH-1Y Venom pilot, and Sgt. Andrew Aguirre, the crew chief, fly from Okinawa to the expeditionary sea base USS Miguel Keith in September.

operational model, supporting the Boxer — the headquarters, or "hub." Deploying helicopters from the Miguel Keith extended their range, enabling missions up to 100 miles away without refueling, Harper said.

"In our case we can expand — from an operational sense — hundreds of miles away from our home ship," he said.

The training took place in the Philippine Sea and near Palawan Island in the Philippines. The Boxer returned to its homeport at Camp Pendleton on Sunday.

The Venom utility helicopter, manufactured by Bell, can perform close air support, search-and-rescue, casualty evacuation and combat-assault missions. Its armaments include a variety of rockets and machine guns.

The Viper, also made by Bell,

offers close air support, anti-armor, anti-air, armed reconnaissance and fire-support coordination capabilities.

The training aligns with the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 plan, which emphasizes expeditionary advanced base operations. These tactics involve mobile, distributed units operating within enemy missile ranges to seize islands, disrupt enemy operations and secure maritime dominance.

"When we say 'expeditionary,' part of that means being able to react quickly and get to places quickly," Harper said.

"The other aspect is being able to distribute not just for a short amount of time, but for a sustained amount of time. And so, using these newer or different forms of ships to move Marine forces and support Marine forces is the key."

MILITARY

Female combat vets weigh in on roles

Hegseth pick puts new focus on old debate

BY EMILY WAX-THIBODEAUX
The Washington Post

The Army veteran and Fox News Channel host who could be the country's next defense secretary has strong views on a decade of women serving in combat positions in the U.S. military — strong and negative.

"I'm straight up just saying that we should not have women in combat roles," Pete Hegseth said on a podcast last month, just days before President-elect Donald Trump nominated him for the crucial Cabinet post. "It hasn't made us more effective, hasn't made us more lethal, has made fighting more complicated."

That's far different from how women who have filled such roles see their achievement. These are veterans who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan during the wars there. Some were part of specialized female teams; at times, their gender enabled them to do searches and gather intelligence that their male counterparts couldn't.

With thousands of women in combat units past and present, Hegseth's "notions" — as one Army veteran recently labeled them — could affect many futures. The Washington Post spoke to numerous female veterans whose careers benefited from the Pentagon's decision to expand the jobs they could do, including with the country's most elite forces. While acknowledging that conversations about military readiness are always important, they called Hegseth's views on what women in uniform contribute outdated, uninformed and inaccurate.

Here are three of those veterans. Their remarks have been edited for clarity and length.

Riane Donoho

Donoho is a former Marine Corps corporal who was part of a Female Engagement Team in Afghanistan and adjunct to a male infantry unit before women could officially serve in such capacity. She now hosts The Dollhouse Institute: War Women, A[n] Historic Record.

"I'll just be candid with you, it's a mixed bag in our community as far as how people feel. And I think that that's OK. I mean, I want people to have their own opinions, and all these women have their own personal experiences that draw them to those opinions.

A lot of women, myself included, do not think that the readiness of America's fighting force should be



Department of Defense

Jaclyn 'Jax' Scott, center, speaks with a mother in northern Afghanistan while deployed as an Army cultural support team leader.

diminished. The standards certainly should not be diminished so we can say that women can [serve in combat positions]. I think our priority should be having a fighting force.

Not all men can meet the standards. It is very, very difficult. A lot of men won't try for it; they don't meet the qualifications. And a lot of men who try for it don't make the cut. [But] the truth is, there are women who can meet those standards, and they should be celebrated. There are females who can complete infantry courses. I know women who would have been great at it if they had the opportunity 15 years ago.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at Fort Liberty and there was a woman who is still active duty and in the Army, who is the first to receive her ranger job. She's a petite little thing — a total powerhouse. And there is a female Marine who graduated from infantry officer course in like 2017. There are chicks out there who can do it. I applaud them.

Our team had four female Navy corpsmen. Not only did they carry their own weight, they carried the weight of medical supplies — life-saving supplies — that you would need in combat. One in particular wouldn't just carry all her weight plus all her medical kit and everything else, but she would also carry a gun.

You want to know that you have confidence in the person next to you, to the left and to the right of you, having the best capabilities that you could possibly have.



JASMINE WALKER MOTUPALLI

Jasmine Walker Motupalli poses with civilians in Afghanistan's Logar province.

Training, training and more training is really what prepares you for combat. So celebrate the women who can do the supreme.

Jasmine Walker Motupalli

A West Point graduate and former Army major, Motupalli commanded combat units during deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan — receiving a Purple Heart for injuries suffered during one of those tours. She later worked in Army intelligence at the Pentagon.

As a company commander and the sole woman among 32 commanders in a light infantry brigade, I couldn't ignore the ways I stood out. Unlike my peers, who were all infantrymen, I came from an intelligence officer background — an unconventional path in a combat-heavy environment. But I realized I had to lead with the strength of my differences.

There was an initial assumption that women couldn't pull their weight. That assumption was quickly dispelled. We could hang with any patrols and, what's more, we were value added to any operation. We moved away from the traditional female engagement

team dynamic and just fully integrated women into the formation — as gunners, squad leaders, team leaders, medics, etc. This change made us more agile, approachable and impactful overall.

I think if you asked men who served with women in combat roles and you took a survey, it would be a big net positive. There was at first a pushback, yes, but when you are together every day, and you watch each other try to pass physical tests, a connection is formed. And as the women proved themselves time and again in combat and leadership roles, resistance and skepticism gave way to respect and camaraderie. Inclusion strengthens military effectiveness.

Hegseth's statement that women shouldn't serve in combat roles stems from outdated assumptions about physical capability, cohesion and mission effectiveness. These views ignore both historical and contemporary evidence of women excelling in these roles. That's something Hegseth would have to see to recognize.

In a world where so many can discount the abuse of women, where organizations trying to close an equity gap are sued for their work, where diversity has become a dirty word, then it isn't surprising that we are now seeing rhetoric that aims to knock women down a few pegs, to undo the amazing progress we've made.

There seems to be a rise in rhetoric that "because you are doing well, it must mean that I am doing worse." But this has never been

my belief. I believe that all ships rise with the tide.

Jaclyn 'Jax' Scott

Scott did two rotations in Afghanistan as part of Army Special Forces teams. She was in more than 20 combat operations and received a Bronze Star Medal and Combat Action Badge. She still serves in the Army Reserve as a chief warrant officer but spoke to The Post as a civilian, not a member of the military.

In the military, you give your life — not just in the literal sense but through your commitment when you sign on those dotted lines. I knew that going to war meant I could die, and I accepted that. The mission was always at the forefront of my mind, above anything

else. Being a combat veteran is one of my proudest accomplishments of my life. Being a veteran is rooted deep inside me.

Hegseth's recent claim that women shouldn't be in combat roles reeks of ignorance and outdated thinking, ignoring the realities of modern warfare and the invaluable contributions of female operators. Women have been a cornerstone of success in unconventional and conventional operations. They have consistently proved they're not just capable but often critical in roles where men fall short.

Programs like the Army's Cultural Support Team highlight this. Female CST operators embedded with Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan and broke cultural barriers that male soldiers couldn't, gathering lifesaving intelligence. One member uncovered a hidden cell phone on a local woman during a raid, which led directly to the capture of a high-value target.

Such results aren't hypothetical. They're documented successes that would have been impossible without women on the front lines.

For Hegseth to dismiss the value of female soldiers also shows a refusal to adapt to the realities of asymmetrical warfare, where diversity in skill sets often determines victory. Critics like him often lean on archaic stereotypes, but here's the reality: Women bring unparalleled advantages to the fight. They exploit implicit biases to remain undetected, engage communities to extract intelligence and navigate complex environments with nuance and empathy — skills increasingly vital in modern warfare.

The military's future isn't male or female; it's about who gets the job done.



Scott



Donoho



Motupalli

MILITARY

Trump's pick to run VA serves in chaplain corps

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Col. Doug Collins attended seminary school, worked as a pastor at a small-town church and served as a chaplain in the Navy and Air Force Reserve.

But the attorney also served four terms as a Republican House lawmaker from Georgia and was one of President-elect Donald Trump's most ardent defenders in 2020 during Trump's first impeachment trial.

When Trump announced Collins' nomination Nov. 14 to be the next secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the 58-year-old made it clear how he intends to approach the job.

"We'll fight tirelessly to streamline and cut regulations in the VA, root out corruption and ensure every veteran receives the benefits they've earned," the chaplain said on social media.

Collins' selection marks the first time that a member of the military chaplain corps — one of the smallest and oldest units in the armed services — will lead the VA, which has a \$369 billion budget and a workforce of nearly 400,000.

The VA can play a critical role in the lives of the nation's 18 million veterans — delivering health care, tuition assistance, pensions, disability compensation, survivor benefits and other services.

But the agency has been dogged by complaints of fiscal mismanagement that include pushing Congress for an infusion of funds in September to cover a multibillion-dollar

shortfall for fiscal 2024 that did not exist.

Collins declined to provide an interview prior to his confirmation hearing.

"Out of the utmost respect for the Senate and its constitutional responsibility, he will reserve comment for the confirmation hearing," said a spokesperson for Trump's transition team who spoke on condition of anonymity.

But the spokesperson offered some insights about how Collins' military experiences shaped his values and are likely to influence his work at the VA.

"Doug's time in the chaplaincy has taught him that leadership is about more than rank. It's about listening, having a servant's heart, motivating people and setting a good example for others to follow," the Trump representative said. "Doug got his start in ministry serving at his local church. Taking that ministry to the military has allowed him to serve while working with people of all faiths as well as those who don't subscribe to a particular faith."

As a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve, Collins completed a deployment to Iraq in 2008 with the 94th Air Wing at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Ga. Collins already had experience in the military chaplain corps having served as a chaplain in the Navy for two years in the late 1980s.

Now a colonel, he continues to serve as a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve, with his most recent duty at Robins Air Force Base, Ga.

But Collins' career extends to serving in Congress as an elected lawmaker.

In 2012, Collins won a seat in Congress representing Georgia's 9th congressional district, considered one of the strongest held GOP districts in the nation. He served in Congress from 2013 to 2021. Prior to that, he was a House member of the Georgia Legislature from 2007 to 2012.

As a member of Congress, Collins spoke on the House floor about the unusual role of military chaplains ministering to soldiers on the front lines.

"The duty of a military chaplain is to help guide the hearts and minds of the soldiers that he serves with or she serves and that comes from a perspective of a background of their own faith but also the respect of the faiths of others that they serve with, making sure that all feel a responsibility not to only do their job, their mission, but also to themselves, that they are being all they can be in their own careers, in their own missions," Collins said.

While in Congress, he voted to support bills to expand veterans' access to health care outside the VA.

He supported the 2014 Choice Act that enabled former service members to seek non-VA medical services when an appointment was not readily available at a VA facility. He also voted for the 2018 Mission Act that gave veterans the ability to see physicians outside the VA in the private sector.

During former President Barack



BRAD FALLIN/U.S. Air Force

Doug Collins, a major at the time in the Air Force Reserve, receives the Meritorious Service Medal, First Oak Leaf Cluster from Col. Tim Tarchick, commander of the 94th Airlift Wing, in 2013, at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga. President-elect Donald Trump picked Collins to be the next secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Obama's administration, Collins introduced a resolution supported by both chambers of Congress to consider chaplains essential workers who continued to serve during a government shutdown in 2013.

Collins also is an outspoken critic of abortion, citing his own personal experience as the parent of a daughter with physical disabilities diagnosed before birth. His adult daughter, Jordan, was born with spina bifida. Collins said after he and his wife learned about their child's medical condition, his wife was encouraged by a colleague to have an abortion.

"The notion that for up to nine months my wife had the right to blot out Jordan's voice seems counterproductive to the advancement of women's rights and alien to the dignity undergirding every life," Collins said in 2016, when he introduced legislation to ban federal funds for abortion services.

"It's my privilege to channel the joy I've known as Jordan's father into supporting legislation that pro-

tections the lives of the unborn and the well-being of their mothers — because abortion hurts women, too," he said.

Collins holds a master's degree in divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned his law degree from John Marshall Law School in Georgia.

When Trump announced Collins as his pick to lead the VA, he described Collins as "a great advocate for our active-duty service members, veterans and military families to ensure they have the support they need."

"Doug has always believed military service is something we should honor and appreciate both during and after a person's time in uniform," the spokesperson for Trump's transition team said.

On social media, Collins thanked Trump for the opportunity to serve.

"Together, we'll make the VA work for those who fought for us. Time to deliver for our veterans and give them the world-class care they deserve," he said.

F-35: Lockheed seeks 'strong working relationship with President Trump'

FROM PAGE 1

partment of Government Efficiency, aka DOGE. They will pave the way for Trump's administration to "dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies," Trump said in a statement.

Musk ultimately aims to cut \$2 trillion in annual federal spending, but in an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, he and Ramaswamy wrote that they plan to start with cutting \$500 billion in federal spending that is not authorized by Congress.

Musk shared a video that appears to show a large group of drones made by China, captioning the post, "Meanwhile, some idiots are still building manned fighter jets like the F-35."

In another post on Nov. 25 Musk wrote: "The F-35 design was broken at the requirements level, be-



NICHOLAS RUPPER/U.S. Air Force

Air Force Maj. Melanie "Mach" Kluesner, the pilot for the F-35A Demonstration Team, performs aerial maneuvers in an F-35A Lightning II during the practice day before the airshow at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Fla., on Oct. 18.

cause it was required to be too many things to too many people.

This made it an expensive & complex jack of all trades, master of none. Success was never in the set of possible outcomes. And manned fighter jets are obsolete in the age of drones anyway. Will just get pilots killed."

Lockheed Martin's F-35 is made in Fort Worth, Texas, and the program supports more than 49,000 direct and indirect jobs in the Fort Worth area generates \$9.4 billion in annual economic impact.

As a federal contractor, the company's F-35 "plays a crucial role" in the Department of Defense's "ability to meet current and future U.S. national security goals," according to the Government Accountability Office.

But the program has seen production issues and rising costs as the Air Force and Navy plan to use the jets less. The F-35 has not met its readiness goals for the past six

years, according to the GAO.

Asked about Musk's post in light of his expected role in Trump's administration, the company said it is looking forward to working with the incoming president and Congress.

"As we did in his first term, we look forward to a strong working relationship with President Trump, his team, and also with the new Congress to strengthen our national defense," Lockheed Martin said in a statement. "The F-35 is the most advanced, survivable and connected fighter aircraft in the world, a vital deterrent and the cornerstone of joint all-domain operations."

Incoming U.S. Rep. Craig Goldman, a Republican from Fort Worth, said he will fight for the continuation and expansion the F-35 program. He is taking over the district represented by Kay Granger, who is retiring.

Goldman said he respects much of who Musk is and the innovations he's brought to the world, but that this is an area where they disagree. He praised the "brilliance of what the F-35 and the capabilities of what the F-35 has been able to do" for Israel in the war with Hamas. Musk might change his mind were he to have a conversation with the Israeli government, Goldman said.

"I'm going to fight like hell to make sure those cuts aren't made," Goldman said. "All that still has to go through Congress."

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, was not available for an interview on Nov. 26. Spokespersons for Rep. Marc Vesay, a Fort Worth Democrat, and Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, did not immediately return requests for comment.

The Department of Defense also did not immediately return requests for comment.

MILITARY

USAF continues to expand its version of ChatGPT

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force's generative artificial intelligence platform, NIPRGPT, launched in June and has quickly grown to include thousands of users, according to a service spokeswoman.

"From its inception, NIPRGPT launched as an experiment to enable Airmen, Guardians, civilian employees, and contractors to responsibly explore Generative AI," Laura McAndrews said by email Nov. 7. "Today it has thousands of

enrolled users, and the user base continues to evolve."

Generative AI is a form of machine learning designed to create new data, such as text or images, rather than simply analyzing existing datasets, according to a November report by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

NIPRGPT, a secure platform requiring Common Access Card, or CAC, authentication, can assist with tasks like summarizing correspondence, drafting background papers and generating software code,

McAndrews said.

The latest version allows users to interact with their uploaded data.

"NIPRGPT is an experiment to ensure we get the best tools we have into our team's hands while larger commercial tools are navigating our rigorous security parameters and approval processes," she said.

The Space Force in September prohibited Guardians from using commercial generative AI tools such as ChatGPT for work purposes, citing data security concerns, according to a Reuters report. There is

no Air Force memo prohibiting the use of ChatGPT.

"Changing how we interact with unstructured knowledge is not instant perfection," McAndrews said. "We each must learn to use the tools, query, and get the best results. NIPRGPT will allow Airmen and Guardians to explore and build skills and familiarity as more powerful tools become available."

NIPRGPT is part of the Dark Saber software platform, developed by the Air Force Research Laboratory's Information Directorate in

Rome, N.Y., the service announced in June. The AI platform operates at no additional cost to units or users, a news release said, and is designed to facilitate secure, real-world testing.

The platform focuses on evaluating practical applications of generative AI in areas such as computational efficiency, resource utilization and security compliance, McAndrews said.

"We appreciate the users of NIPRGPT helping us explore the role of Generative AI in our mission," she said.

Hypersonic: Critics say there is too little bang for the buck

FROM PAGE 1

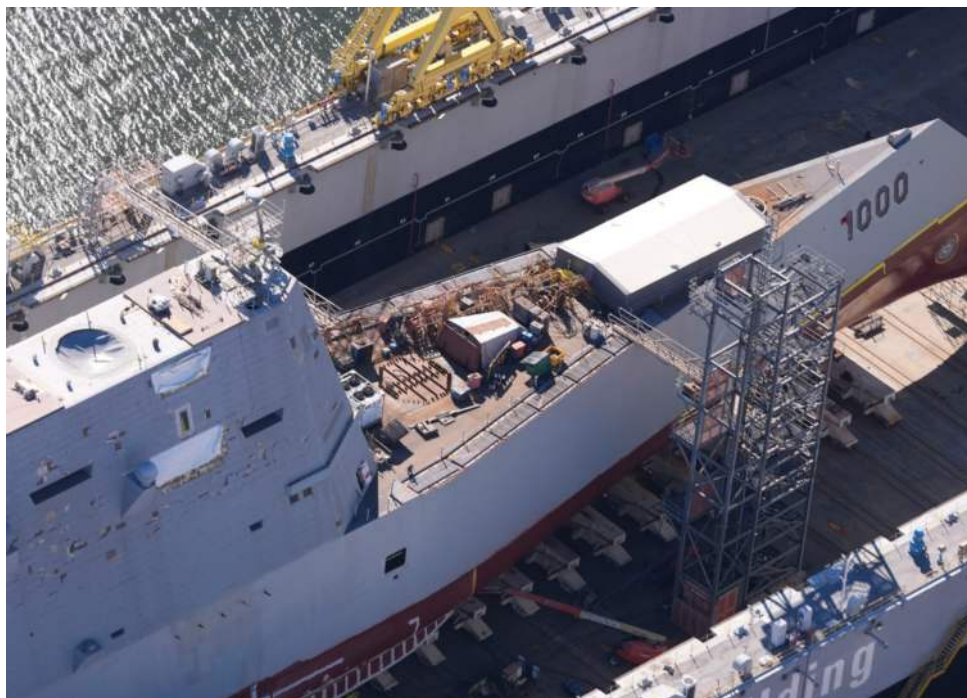
the Pentagon had previously acknowledged the weapon's development, it had not recognized its testing.

One of the U.S. programs in development and planned for the Zumwalt is the "Conventional Prompt Strike." It would launch like a ballistic missile and then release a hypersonic glide vehicle that would travel at speeds seven to eight times faster than the speed of sound before hitting the target. The weapon system is being developed jointly by the Navy and Army. Each of the Zumwalt-class destroyers would be equipped with four missile tubes, each with three of the missiles for a total of 12 hypersonic weapons per ship.

In choosing the Zumwalt, the Navy is attempting to add to the usefulness of a \$7.5 billion warship that is considered by critics to be an expensive mistake despite serving as a test platform for multiple innovations.

The Zumwalt was envisioned as providing land-attack capability with an Advanced Gun System with rocket-assisted projectiles to open the way for Marines to charge ashore. But the system featuring 155 mm guns hidden in stealthy turrets was canceled because each of the rocket-assisted projectiles cost between \$800,000 and \$1 million.

Despite the stain on its reputation, the three Zumwalt-class destroyers remain the Navy's most advanced surface warship in terms of new technologies. Those innovations include electric propulsion, an angular shape to minimize radar signature, an unconventional wave-piercing hull, automated fire and damage control and a com-



GERALD HERBERT/AP

The USS Zumwalt is seen at the Huntington Ingalls shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., last month. It is due to be undocked this week in preparation for the next round of tests.

posite deckhouse that hides radar and other sensors.

The Zumwalt arrived at the Huntington Ingalls Industries shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., in August 2023 and was removed from the water for the complex work of integrating the new weapon system. It is due to be undocked this week in preparation for the next round of tests and its return to the fleet, shipyard spokeswoman Kimberly Aguillard said.

A U.S. hypersonic weapon was successfully tested over the summer and development of the missiles is continuing. The Navy wants to begin testing the system aboard the Zumwalt in 2027 or 2028, according to the Navy.

The U.S. weapon system will come at a steep price. It would cost nearly \$18 billion to buy 300 of the weapons and maintain them over 20 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Critics say there is too little bang for the buck.

"This particular missile costs more than a dozen tanks. All it gets you is a precise non-nuclear explosion, some place far far away. Is it really worth the money? The answer is most of the time the missile costs much more than any target you can destroy with it," said Loren Thompson, a longtime military analyst in Washington, D.C.

But they provide the capability for Navy vessels to strike an enemy from a distance of thousands of miles — outside the range of most enemy weapons — and there is no effective defense against them, said retired Navy Rear Adm. Ray Spicer, CEO of the U.S. Naval Institute, an independent forum focusing on national security issues, and former commander of an aircraft carrier strike force.

Conventional missiles that cost less aren't much of a bargain if they are unable to reach their targets, Spicer said, adding the U.S. military really has no choice but to pursue them.

"The adversary has them. We never want to be outdone," he said.

The U.S. is accelerating development because hypersonics have been identified as vital to U.S. national security with "survivable and lethal capabilities," said James Weber, principal director for hypersonics in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Critical Technologies.

"Fielding new capabilities that are based on hypersonic technologies is a priority for the defense department to sustain and strengthen our integrated deterrence, and to build enduring advantages," he said.

Okinawa police seek help identifying human remains found on Marine base

By KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMPFOSTER, Okinawa — Human bones discovered this spring on Camp Schwab have prompted Okinawa police to request public assistance in identifying the remains.

The bones were found on March 21 by a contractor conducting an environmental survey at a construction site on the Marine Corps base. Among the items recovered nearby were a long-sleeved shirt, a T-shirt,

a belt, black socks, and 201 yen, a police spokesman said by phone Thursday.

The bones are believed to belong to a man older than 40 who died more than several years ago.

"We have been analyzing the shape of the bones, but we haven't been able to identify the race," the spokesman said, adding that DNA testing may be an option.

The area, part of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma replace-

ment project, is managed by the Okinawa Defense Bureau, not the U.S. military.

Police have checked missing persons records but have had no luck identifying the remains.

"We decided to release this information publicly to seek help from the community," the spokesman said.

Anyone with relevant information is urged to contact the Nago Police Station at +81-0980-52-0110.



Okinawa Prefectural Police

This T-shirt was discovered near human remains found on Camp Schwab, Okinawa, in March.

MILITARY

From French battlefields to Tokyo

Family members of WWII veteran gather to mark 100th birthday

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Members of the American military community, alongside family and friends, gathered recently to wish an early 100th birthday to a World War II veteran who served with the 326th Glider Infantry Regiment in France.

Norman Jay Green, born Dec. 19, 1924, in Brooklyn, N.Y., enlisted in the U.S. Army on March 3, 1943, according to a biography read at the event.

The longtime Tokyo resident deployed to France in February 1945 as part of the 13th Airborne Division, he told Stars and Stripes during his party at the Navy-run New Sanno Hotel on Nov. 22. His unit crossed the Atlantic aboard a troop ship and established itself at Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre, a port city in the Normandy region.

“We were the reserve division for (Gen. George) Patton’s operation crossing the Rhein,” Green recalled during the celebration.

While awaiting action, he and his comrades spent their time reading Stars and Stripes and connecting with locals.

Green, who acquired a barber’s kit, took up cutting hair for his fellow soldiers.

“A lot of funny-looking guys came out of that tent,” he said with a smile.

Green’s division arrived in Europe shortly after the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive of the war. Although he missed the famous standoff at Bastogne, he later met Gen. Anthony McAuliffe — the hero of Bastogne known for his defiant “Nuts!” reply to the Germans’ demand to surrender — during a chance encounter on a train in 1957.

Dozens of guests, including active-duty soldiers, traveled from as far as France to celebrate Green’s milestone. The New Sanno ballroom was adorned with photographs from his days in uniform, and a Scottish bagpiper played as he entered in a wheelchair, greeted by cheers.

Lt. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, commander of I Corps, and Maj. Gen. Dave Womack, commander of U.S. Army Japan, presented Green with commemorative coins and shared their appreciation for his service.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel sent a video message, played on a big screen in the



PHOTOS BY AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

World War II veteran Norman Jay Green celebrates his 100th birthday in Tokyo on Nov. 22.



World War II veteran Norman Jay Green watches a video message from U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel during his 100th birthday celebration at the New Sanno Hotel in Tokyo.

“The legacy of sacrifice of your generation lives on in all of us today and, we never say this enough, but we owe you a great deal of gratitude.”

Rahm Emanuel
U.S. Ambassador to Japan

ballroom, in which he said Green embodied the values of duty, honor and loyalty.

“The legacy of sacrifice of your generation lives on in all of us today and, we never say this enough, but we owe you a great deal of gratitude,” Emanuel said.

Norman Green’s son, Jesse, recounted his father’s wartime experiences, which included time spent in Sens, a town southeast of Paris. While there, Green befriended locals, including a resis-

tance fighter who had survived the Buchenwald concentration camp.

In 2017, Green returned to Sens, where he received a hero’s welcome.

“Norman’s military service during World War II was a testament to the courage, determination and sacrifice of the Greatest Generation,” Jesse Green told the party guests. “His experiences — from the decision to enlist after Pearl Harbor, to the grueling training, to his time in the European theater —



Norman Jay Green, 326th Glider Infantry Regiment in France.

shaped him in ways that would resonate throughout his life.”

Green narrowly missed deployment to the Pacific theater. After Germany’s defeat, his unit was preparing to fight Japan when the war ended on Aug. 15, 1945. He was honorably discharged the following year.

Green expressed admiration for the soldiers he has met in recent years.

“They seem to be good guys,” he said. “They all get training, and I think the military teaches them about discipline and friendship.”

The celebration concluded with Green cutting a large birthday cake featuring the insignia and motto of the 326th Glider Infantry Regiment: “Aspera Juvant,” Latin for “Difficult Delight.”

Green, who moved to Japan in 1980 to work for a medical publishing company, said the support of the military community in Tokyo made the occasion especially meaningful.

Court gives contractor suspended pot sentence

By **KEISHI KOJA**
Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A Japanese court handed a U.S. Navy contractor a six-month suspended sentence for possessing a small amount of marijuana after smoking with a coworker.

Tyrome Williams Jr., 28, of Urasoe, pleaded guilty Thursday in Naha District Court to violating Japan’s Cannabis Control Act. He was found with less than 2 grams of the drug in his wife’s vehicle in the Miyagi district of Chatan town on Sept. 21.

Even simple marijuana possession can bring up to five years in prison under Japan’s Cannabis Control Act.

Williams was working as a contractor performing administrative duties for U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa at the time of his arrest, hospital spokesman Trey Savitz said by email Wednesday.

When questioned by his attorney, Williams said he decided to use the drug “to relieve stress.”

“I was taking a new job, probably — I passed the test for that,” he said in court. “It was stressful. Also, living as a foreigner here — it was a kind of rough time.”

A coworker influenced Williams’ decision to obtain and use marijuana, according to the prosecutor.

“At the time, I was leaving soon,” Williams said in his testimony. “And I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Williams obtained approximately \$133 worth of cannabis through a drug trafficker, the prosecutor said.

Williams and his coworker smoked the marijuana and liquid cannabis at a park in Chatan town, the prosecutor said. They were questioned by a police patrolman after returning to the car.

The officer arrested Williams after finding marijuana, liquid cannabis and rolling papers inside the vehicle. He was transferred to an Okinawa police station, where he was detained for about 10 days.

“If I could go back again, I would do everything differently,” Williams said in his final statement.

Prosecutors sought six months in prison with hard labor, while Williams’ attorney requested a suspended sentence.

Judge Takashi Kato handed down the suspended sentence after a brief recess. Williams’ sentence is suspended for three years, meaning he must serve the six months in prison if he commits another offense in Japan during that time.

Kato said several factors influenced his decision, including the small quantity of marijuana, Williams’ remorse and his wife’s commitment to supporting him in avoiding future drug use.

EUROPE

Zelenskyy: NATO offer must be for all of Ukraine

By SUSIE BLANN
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — An offer of NATO membership to territory under Kyiv's control would end "the hot stage of the war" in Ukraine, but any proposal to join the military alliance should be extended to all parts of the country that fall under internationally recognized borders, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a broadcast interview.

Zelenskyy's remarks on Friday signaled a possible way forward to the difficult path Ukraine faces to future NATO membership. At their summit in Washington in July, the 32 members declared Ukraine on an "irreversible" path to membership.

However, one obstacle to moving forward has been the view that Ukraine's borders would need to be clearly demarcated before it could join so that there can be no mistaking where the alliance's pact of mutual defense would come into effect.

"You can't give an invitation to just one part of a country," Zelen-

skyy said in an excerpt of the interview with Sky News. "Why? Because thus you would recognize that Ukraine is only that territory of Ukraine and the other one is Russia."

Under the Ukrainian Constitution, Ukraine can't recognize territory occupied by Russia as Russian.

"So legally, by law, we have no right to recognize the occupied territory as territory of Russia," he said.

Since the start of the war in 2022, Russia has been expending huge amounts of weaponry and human life to make small-but-steady territorial gains to the nearly one-fifth of Ukraine it already controls in east and southern Ukraine.

"If we want to stop the hot stage of the war, we should take under the NATO umbrella the territory of Ukraine that we have under our control. That's what we need to do, fast. And then Ukraine can get back the other part of its territory diplomatically," he said.

An invitation for Ukraine to join

NATO is one key point of Zelenskyy's "victory plan," which he presented to Western allies and the Ukrainian people in October. The plan is seen as a way for Ukraine to strengthen its hand in any negotiations with Moscow.

Days earlier, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said that the alliance "needs to go further" to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia's invasion. Military aid to Kyiv and steps toward ending the war are expected to be high on the agenda when NATO members' foreign ministers meet in Brussels for a two-day gathering starting Tuesday.

However, any decision for Ukraine to join the military alliance would require a lengthier process and the agreement of all member states.

There is also uncertainty as to the foreign policy stance of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. While Trump vowed on the campaign trail to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine in a single day, he hasn't publicly discussed how this could happen. Trump also an-

nounced Wednesday that Keith Kellogg, an 80-year-old, highly decorated retired three-star general, would serve as his special envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

In April, Kellogg wrote that "bringing the Russia-Ukraine war to a close will require strong, America First leadership to deliver a peace deal and immediately end the hostilities between the two warring parties."

Meanwhile, during his only campaign debate with Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump twice refused to directly answer a question about whether he wanted Ukraine to win the war — raising concerns that Kyiv could be forced to accept unfavorable terms in any negotiations.

Zelenskyy's statement comes as Ukraine faces increasing pressure along the 620-mile front line. In its latest report, Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War said Saturday that Russian forces had recently advanced near Kupiansk, in Toretsk, and near Pokrovsk and Velyka Novosilka, a key logistics

route for the Ukrainian military.

At least four people were killed Saturday when a Russian missile hit Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram. Dnipropetrovsk Gov. Serhiy Lysak said that the strike also wounded at least 21 people, of which eight were in a serious condition.

Ukraine's air force announced Saturday that the country had come under attack from 10 Russian drones, of which eight were shot down over the Kyiv, Cherkassy, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk and Kherson regions. One drone returned to Russian-occupied territory, while the final drone disappeared from radar, often a sign of the use of electronic defenses.

Meanwhile, the Russian Defense Ministry said that 11 Ukrainian drones had been shot down. Both the mayor of Sochi, Andrey Proshunin, and the head of Russia's Dagestan region, Sergey Melikov, both in Russia's southwest, said that drones had been destroyed in their regions overnight. No casualties were reported.

Poland's leader visits fortifications at border with Russia

Associated Press

DABROWKA, Poland — Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk traveled Saturday to his country's border with the Russian region of Kaliningrad to inspect progress in the construction of military fortifications along the eastern frontier, calling it "an investment in peace."

Tusk's visit comes a month before Poland is to take over the rotating presidency of the 27-member European Union.

Polish officials say their priority is to urge Europeans to beef up defenses at a time of Russian aggression and with change coming soon in Washington.

Some European leaders are concerned that the incoming administration of Donald Trump might be less committed to Europe's defense.

Tusk also proposed in recent days that Poland and the Nordic and Baltic countries carry out joint navy patrols in the strateg-



CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI/AP

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk speaks to reporters in Dabrowka, during a visit to Poland's border with Russia on Saturday.

ically important Baltic Sea, following the suspected sabotage of undersea data cables.

Poland's government and army began building the system dubbed East Shield this year.

It will eventually include approximately 500 miles along the Polish borders with Russia and Belarus, at a time when Western officials accuse Russia of waging hybrid attacks against the West that include sabotage, the weaponization of migration, disinformation and other hostile measures.

"The better the Polish border is guarded, the more difficult it is to access for those with bad intentions," Tusk said at a news conference near the village of Dabrowka as he stood in front of concrete anti-tank barriers.

Poland has been at the mercy of aggressive neighbors over the past centuries and has become a leading European voice for security at a time when France and Germany are weakened by internal political problems.

Poland aims to spend 4.7% of its gross domestic product on defense next year, making it one of NATO's leaders in defense spending.

Tusk's government estimates that the strategic military project will cost at least 10 billion zlotys (\$2.5 billion).

Poland's borders with Russia, Belarus — as well as Ukraine — are the easternmost external borders of both the European Union and NATO.

Tusk said he expected the East Shield to eventually be expanded to protect the small Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

"Everything we are doing here — and we will also be doing this on the border with Belarus and Ukraine — is to deter and discourage a potential aggressor, which is why it is truly an investment in peace," Tusk said. "We will spend billions of zlotys on this, but right now the whole of Europe is observing these investments and our actions with great satisfaction and will support them if necessary."

Tusk did not elaborate on his plans for reinforcing the border with Ukraine, a close ally.

Putin signs off on record defense spending as EU officials visit Kyiv

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin approved budget plans, raising 2025 military spending to record levels as Moscow seeks to prevail in the war in Ukraine.

Around 32.5% of the budget posted on a government website Sunday has been allocated for na-

tional defense, amounting to 13.5 trillion rubles (over \$145 billion), up from a reported 28.3% this year.

Lawmakers in both houses of the Russian parliament, the State Duma and Federation Council, had already approved the plans in the past 10 days.

Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine since February 2022 is Europe's biggest conflict since World War II and has drained the resources of both sides. Kyiv has been getting billions of dollars in help from its Western allies, but Russia's forces are bigger and better equipped, and in recent months the Russian army has gradually been pushing Ukrainian

troops backward in eastern areas.

New European Council President Antonio Costa and European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas arrived in Kyiv on Sunday, marking their first day in office with a strong message of support for Ukraine. Their visit comes as doubts are deepening over what Kyiv can expect from a new U.S.

administration led by Donald Trump.

"From day one of the war, the EU has stood by the side of Ukraine," Costa posted on X, together with a photo of himself, Kallas and EU enlargement chief Marta Kos. "From day one of our mandate, we are reaffirming our unwavering support to the Ukrainian people."

MIDEAST

Syria launches counterattacks to insurgents

Assad's forces attempt to halt surprise advance

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB
Associated Press

BEIRUT — The Syrian military rushed in reinforcements and struck Idlib city Sunday in an attempt to push back insurgents from advancing farther after seizing Aleppo and surrounding strategic locations in an adjacent province in a surprise offensive.

The insurgents led by Salafi jihadi group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham took over most of Aleppo on Saturday and claimed to have entered the city of Hama. There was no independent confirmation of their claim.

The surprise offensive is a huge embarrassment for Syrian President Bashar Assad and raises questions about his troops' preparedness. It also comes at a time when Assad's allies — Iran and groups it backs and Russia — are preoccupied with their own conflicts.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi travels to the Syrian capital, Damascus, later Sunday. He told reporters that Tehran will back the Syrian government and

army. Arab leaders, including Jordan's King Abdullah II and United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in calls with Assad expressed their solidarity with Damascus.

Turkey, a main backer of Syrian opposition groups, said its diplomatic efforts had failed to stop Syrian government attacks on opposition-held areas in recent weeks. Turkish security officials said a limited offensive by the rebels was planned to stop government attacks and allow civilians to return, but the offensive expanded as Syrian government forces began to retreat from their positions.

The insurgency, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and which includes Turkey-backed fighters, launched their offensive on Wednesday with a two-pronged attack on Aleppo and the Idlib countryside, before moving toward Hama province. In Aleppo province, they captured a strategic town that lies on the highway linking Aleppo with Damascus

and the coast.

Rebel commander Col. Hassan Abdulghani said that despite the government counteroffensive, his fighters were making gains in Aleppo. He says they took control of Sheikh Najjar, also known as the Aleppo Industrial City, Aleppo's military academy and the field artillery college.

Elsewhere, he said the insurgents advanced in the Idlib countryside, putting all of the province under their control.

The United Nations special envoy for Syria said the shock push by the rebels poses a risk to regional security and called on resuming diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

"I have repeatedly warned of the risks of escalation in Syria, of the dangers of mere conflict management rather than conflict resolution," Geir Pedersen said in a statement. He said the reality is that no Syrian party or grouping of actors can resolve the conflict via military means.

According to Syrian state news agency SANA and a war monitor,



OMAR ALBAM/AP

Syrian opposition supporters stand atop a captured army tank in the town of Maarat al-Numan, southwest of Aleppo, Syria, on Saturday. Thousands of Syrian insurgents have fanned out inside Aleppo a day after storming it with little resistance from government troops.

the army overnight pushed back insurgents in the northern countryside of Hama province.

Syrian state media said government resupply included heavy equipment and rocket launchers while Syrian and Russian airstrikes targeted weapon depots and insurgent strongholds.

Britain-based opposition war

monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that government reinforcements created a "strong defensive line" in the northern Hama countryside. Syrian state television claimed government forces had killed nearly 1,000 insurgents over the past three days, without providing evidence or details.

What rebel gains in Syria's 13-year war mean and why they matter

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The 13-year civil war in Syria has roared back into prominence with a surprise rebel offensive on Aleppo, one of Syria's largest cities and an ancient business hub. The push is among the rebels' strongest in years in a war whose destabilizing effects have rippled far beyond the country's borders.

It was the first opposition attack on Aleppo since 2016, when a brutal air campaign by Russian warplanes helped Syrian President Bashar Assad retake the northwestern city. Intervention by Russia, Iran and Iranian-allied Hezbollah and other groups has allowed Assad to remain in power, within the 70% of Syria under his control.

The surge in fighting has raised the prospect of another violent front reopening in the Middle East, at a time when U.S.-backed Israel is fighting Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, both Iranian-allied groups.

Robert Ford, the last-serving U.S. ambassador to Syria, pointed to months of Israeli strikes on Syrian and Hezbollah targets in the area, and to Israel's ceasefire with Hezbollah in Lebanon last week, as factors providing Syria's rebels with the opportunity to advance.

Here's a look at some of the key aspects of the new fighting:

■ **Why does the fighting at**



OMAR ALBAM/AP

Syrian opposition fighters get on a motorcycle as opposition supporters stand on top of a captured army armored vehicle in Maarat al-Numan, Syria, on Saturday.

Aleppo matter?

Assad has been at war with opposition forces seeking his overthrow for 13 years, a conflict that's killed an estimated half-million people. Some 6.8 million Syrians have fled the country, a refugee flow that helped change the political map in Europe by fueling anti-immigrant far-right movements.

The roughly 30% of the country not under Assad is controlled by a range of opposition forces and foreign troops. The U.S. has about 900 troops in northeast Syria, far from Aleppo, to guard against a resurgence by Islamic State. Both the U.S. and Israel conduct occasional strikes in Syria against government forces and Iran-allied

militias. Turkey has forces in Syria as well, and has influence with the broad alliance of opposition forces storming Aleppo.

Coming after years with few sizeable changes in territory between Syria's warring parties, the fighting "has the potential to be really quite, quite consequential and potentially game-changing," if Syrian government forces prove unable to hold their ground, said Charles Lister, a longtime Syria analyst with the U.S.-based Middle East Institute. Risks include ISIS fighters seeing it as an opening, Lister said.

Ford said the fighting in Aleppo would become more broadly destabilizing if it drew Russia and

Turkey — each with its own interests to protect in Syria — into direct heavy fighting against each other.

■ What do we know about the group leading the offensive on Aleppo?

The U.S. and U.N. have long designated the opposition force leading the attack at Aleppo — Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, known by its initials HTS — as a terrorist organization.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani emerged as the leader of al-Qaida's Syria branch in 2011, in the first months of Syria's war. It was an unwelcome intervention to many in Syria's opposition, who hoped to keep the fight against Assad's brutal rule untainted by violent extremism.

Al-Golani and his group early on claimed responsibility for deadly bombings, pledged to attack Western forces, confiscated property from religious minorities and sent religious police to enforce modest dress by women.

Al-Golani and HTS have sought to remake themselves in recent years, focusing on promoting civilian government in their territory as well as military action, researcher Aaron Zelin noted. His group broke ties with al-Qaida in 2016. Al-Golani cracked down on some extremist groups in his territory, and increasingly portrays himself as a protector of other religions. That includes last year al-

lowing the first Christian Mass in the city of Idlib in years.

By 2018, the Trump administration acknowledged it was no longer directly targeting al-Golani, Zelin said. But HTS has allowed some wanted armed groups to continue to operate on its territory, and shot at U.S. Special Forces at least as recently as 2022, he said.

■ What's the history of Aleppo in the war?

At the crossroads of trade routes and empires for thousands of years, Aleppo is one of the centers of commerce and culture in the Middle East.

Aleppo was home to 2.3 million people before the war. Rebels seized the east side of the city in 2012, and it became the proudest symbol of the advance of armed opposition factions.

In 2016, government forces backed by Russian airstrikes laid siege to the city. Russian shells, missiles and crude barrel bombs — fuel canisters or other containers loaded with explosives and metal — methodically leveled neighborhoods. Starving and under siege, rebels surrendered Aleppo that year.

The Russian military's entry was the turning point in the war, allowing Assad to stay on in the territory he held.

This year, Israeli airstrikes in Aleppo have hit Hezbollah weapons depots and Syrian forces.

NATION



CAROLYN KASTER/AP

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, center, walks through the lobby of the Delta Hotel by Marriott on Friday in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Trudeau visits Trump but fails to get assurances about tariffs

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau returned home Saturday after his meeting with Donald Trump without assurances the president-elect will back away from threatened tariffs on all products from the major American trading partner.

Trump called the talks “productive” but signaled no retreat from a pledge that Canada says unfairly lumps it in with Mexico over the flow of drugs and migrants into the United States.

After the leaders’ hastily arranged dinner Friday night at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, Trudeau spoke of “an excellent conversation” and said in a post later Saturday on X, accompanied by a photo of the two men seated at a table and smiling, that he looked forward to “the work we can do together, again.” Trump said earlier on Truth Social that they discussed “many important topics that will require both Countries to work together to address.”

For issues in need of such cooperation, Trump cited fentanyl and

the “Drug Crisis that has decimated so many lives as a result of Illegal Immigration,” fair trade deals “that do not jeopardize American Workers” and the U.S. trade deficit with its ally to the north.

Trump asserted that the prime minister had made “a commitment to work with us to end this terrible devastation” of American families from fentanyl from China reaching the U.S. through its neighbors. The U.S., he said, “will no longer sit idly by as our Citizens become victims to the scourge of this Drug Epidemic.”

The Republican president-elect has threatened to impose a 25% tax on all products entering the U.S. from Canada and Mexico as one of his first executive orders when he takes office in January.

U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border.

On immigration, the U.S. Border Patrol made 56,530 arrests at the Mexican border in October alone and 23,721 arrests at the Canadian border between Octo-

ber 2023 and September 2024. Canadian officials have said they are ready to make new investments in border security.

Trudeau called Trump after the Republican’s social media posts about the tariffs last Monday and they agreed to meet, according to a official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to publicly discuss detail of the private talks.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, after speaking with Trump on the telephone, said Thursday that she was confident a tariff war with Washington would be averted.

At the dinner that was said to last three hours, Trump said he and Trudeau also discussed energy, trade and the Arctic. A second official cited defense, Ukraine, NATO, China, the Mideast, pipelines and the Group of Seven meeting in Canada next year as other issues that arose.

Trudeau’s office said in a statement that the leaders “shared a productive wide-ranging discussion” centering on “collaboration and strengthening our relationship.”

‘Deep state’ critic Patel selected by Trump to head FBI

By NATALIA DROZDIK AND CHRIS STROHM
Bloomberg News

Donald Trump tapped Kash Patel to be FBI director, nominating a loyalist to lead the chief U.S. law enforcement agency — which the president-elect has long derided as corrupt.

Patel rose to prominence expressing outrage over the agency’s investigation into whether Trump’s campaign conspired with Russia to interfere in the 2016 presidential election. If confirmed, Patel would replace Christopher Wray, who was chosen by Trump in his first term as president.

In an announcement on his Truth Social network, Trump called Patel “a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and ‘America First’ fighter” who played a “pivotal role in uncovering the Russia, Russia, Russia Hoax.”

As the leading U.S. law enforcement agency, the bureau has been at the center of the highest-profile investigations related to the president-elect. Trump has pledged a drastic overhaul, claiming the Federal Bureau of Investigation carried out politically motivated probes against him and his allies.

After he left the White House, FBI agents raided Trump’s Florida resort to seize classified documents, probed his efforts to overturn the 2020 election results and investigated people who stormed the U.S. Capitol in support of him.

The bureau investigates cases from cyberattacks and white-collar crime, to murder and allegations of sexual misconduct.

“This FBI will end the growing crime epidemic in America, dismantle the migrant criminal gangs and stop the evil scourge of human and drug trafficking

across the Border,” Trump said Saturday.

Patel is also a critic of government agencies for actions that he has said unfairly target Republicans. In his book “Government Gangsters” — which Trump has called a “blueprint to take back the White House” — Patel endorsed calls to fire government employees who undermine the president’s agenda.



Patel

“We must identify the people in government that are crippling our constitutional republic,” Patel told the Conservative Political Action Conference in July.

In Trump’s first administration, Patel held a number of stopgap national security positions, including chief of staff to Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller in the final months of Trump’s White House term.

Patel also served as senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council and as a senior adviser to Acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell.

Under his list of “top of reforms to defeat the deep state” outlined in his book, Patel calls for the FBI headquarters to be moved out of Washington to “curb FBI leadership from engaging in political gamesmanship.” He also suggested significantly shrinking the general counsel’s office within the FBI, which he says has taken on “prosecutorial decision-making” instead of operating only as an investigatory body.

Patel also had close ties to former Republican Rep. Devin Nunes, who was chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and helped lead opposition to the probe of Russia’s role in the 2016 election by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Trump threatens 100% tariff on BRIC nations if they act to weaken dollar

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday threatened 100% tariffs against a bloc of nine nations if they act to undermine the U.S. dollar.

His threat was directed at countries in the so-called BRIC alliance, which consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia have applied to become members and several other countries have expressed interest in joining.

While the U.S. dollar is by far the most-used currency in global business and has survived past challenges to its preeminence, members of the alliance and other developing nations have said they are fed up with America’s dominance of the global financial system.

The dollar represents roughly 58% of the world’s foreign exchange reserves, according to the IMF and major commodities like oil are still primarily bought and sold using dollars. The dollar’s dominance is threatened, however, with BRICS’ growing share of GDP and the alliance’s intent to trade in non-dollar currencies — a process known as de-dollarization.

Trump, in a Truth Social post,

said: “We require a commitment from these Countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs, and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy.”

At a summit of BRIC nations in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the U.S. of “weaponizing” the dollar and de-

scribed it as a “big mistake.”

“It’s not us who refuse to use the dollar,” Putin said at the time. “But if they don’t let us work, what can we do? We are forced to search for alternatives.”

Russia has specifically pushed for the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network, SWIFT, and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners.

NATION

Storm blankets parts of the US

Associated Press

LOWVILLE, N.Y. — Heavy snowfall and numbing temperatures kept parts of the U.S. in a deep freeze Sunday as the Thanksgiving holiday weekend draws to a close. Despite the Arctic-type weather, snowmobilers and skiers are reveling in their respective wintry terrains, and weather forecasters gave possible good news ahead of the NFL game in Buffalo.

In the remote Tug Hill region of upstate New York, where lake-effect snow off Lake Ontario can dump several feet of snow at a time, there was up to 46 inches in the Barnes Corners area.

"We just keep digging out," Kevin Tyo, a local businessman, said Sunday. "We were out all day yesterday, plowing."

Like many locals, he has a plow attached to the front of his truck for much of the winter, "and I have a tractor with a bucket, and a snowblower."

In Buffalo, officials with the NFL's Bills had sought stadium snow shovellers for the season, including ahead of Sunday night's game against the San Francisco

49ers. The team said it would pay \$20 per hour and provide food and hot drinks.

A lake-effect storm began hitting the area Saturday near the Bills' stadium in Orchard Park, N.Y. Snow was continuing to fall near the stadium just hours ahead of the game, according to the State Weather Risk Communication Center in New York.

A blast of Arctic air late last week brought bitter temperatures of 10 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit below average to the Northern Plains, the National Weather Service said, prompting cold advisories for parts of North Dakota. Frigid air was expected to move over the eastern third of the U.S. by Monday, with temperatures about 10 degrees below average.

Officials in Erie, Pa., said Sunday that the heavy lake-effect snow has produced "treacherous" conditions that are causing even snowplows to get stuck as they work around the clock to try to clear city roads.

The city estimated Sunday morning that there were "about 100 cars throughout the city that are blocking roads and need to be



CARA ANNA/AP

Flakes fall in Lowville, N.Y., where lake-effect snow blanketed the surrounding region on Sunday.

towed out of the way so plows can get through."

Commercial vehicles remained banned in both directions of I-90 in western New York along a nearly 134-mile stretch to the Pennsylvania line.

The National Weather Service said lake-effect snow was expected to continue east of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario on Sunday, with additional snowfall of 1 to 2 feet possible.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro signed a disaster emergency proclamation Saturday and said parts of Erie County in the northwest received nearly 2 feet of snow with more expected through Monday night.

Pennsylvania State Police responded to nearly 200 incidents during the 24-hour period from 6 a.m. Friday to 6 a.m. Saturday, officials said.

Parts of Michigan were bat-

tered by lake-effect snow. Bands of snow rolling off Lake Superior buried parts of the Upper Peninsula under 2 feet or more, said Lily Chapman, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Marquette, Mich.

Lake-effect snow could add more than a foot over the eastern Upper Peninsula through Monday morning, with 6 to 10 inches or higher to the west, Chapman said Saturday.

Taiwan's president arrives in Hawaii for 2-day stop in US

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Taiwan's president Lai Ching-te arrived Saturday in Hawaii to begin a two-day transit in the U.S. as part of a trip to the South Pacific, his first since assuming office.

The stopover in Hawaii and one planned for the territory of Guam have drawn fierce criticism from Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own territory and objects to official exchanges between the self-ruled democracy and the U.S., the island's biggest backer and military provider.

There were no high-ranking U.S. or Hawaii state officials to greet Lai at the Honolulu hotel where supporters cheered in Mandarin, some waving Taiwanese flags. He visited Hawaii's



MARCO GARCIA / AP

Bishop Museum CEO Dee Jay Mailer, left, greets Taiwan President Lai Ching-te at the Bishop Museum on Saturday in Honolulu.

leading museum of natural history and Native Hawaiian culture, Bishop Museum. Later, he was ex-

pected to attend a banquet with supporters.

Lai is on a weeklong trip to visit

the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau — three diplomatic allies of the self-governed island in the Pacific. Though Taiwan retains strong contacts with dozens of other nations, it has only 12 formal diplomatic allies.

Bishop Museum CEO Dee Jay Mailer presented Lai with a red lei hulu, or feather garland, made by master featherwork artist Kawika Lum-Nelmida. Lai gave Mailer a headdress, made by Paiwan Indigenous people of Taiwan, and neck and shoulder decorative pieces made by Atayal Indigenous people, also of Taiwan.

Lai's visit shows that Taiwan and the United States have a very strong relationship, said Arthur Chen, the president of the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce of

North America. He flew to Hawaii from his home near Dallas to welcome the president to the U.S.

It is unclear whether Lai will meet with any members of the incoming U.S. administration during his transit.

President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview with Bloomberg in July that Taiwan should pay for its defense. The island has purchased billions of dollars of defense weaponry from the U.S.

Trump evaded answering whether he would defend the island from Chinese military action. On Friday, the U.S. State Department said it approved the sale of \$385 million in spare parts and equipment for a fleet of F-16s, as well as support for tactical communication system to Taiwan.

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WORLD



LEO CORREA/AP

Destroyed buildings lie beyond the village of Odaisseh in southern Lebanon, as seen from northern Israel on Sunday.

Southern Lebanon struck, but tense ceasefire holds

Associated Press

TYRE, Lebanon — Israeli jets Sunday launched an airstrike over a southern Lebanese border village, while troops shelled other border towns and villages still under Israeli control, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

The attacks come days after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the strike in the village of Yaroun, nor did the Hezbollah militant group. Israel continues to call on displaced Lebanese not to return to dozens of southern villages in this current stage of the ceasefire. It also continues to impose a daily curfew for people moving across the Litani River between 5 pm and 7 am.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and the Lebanese military have been critical of Israeli strikes and overflights since the ceasefire went into effect, accusing Israel of violating the agreement. The military said it had filed complaints, but no clear military action has been taken by Hezbollah in response, meaning that the tense cessation of hostilities has not yet broken down.

The first phase of the ceasefire is a 60-day cessation of hostilities where Hezbollah militants are supposed to withdraw from southern Lebanon north of the Litani River and Israeli troops withdraw from southern Lebanon into northern Israel. Lebanese troops are to deploy in large numbers in the south, effectively being the only armed force in control of the south alongside UNIFIL peacekeepers.

UN halts aid through Gaza's main crossing after looting

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees said Sunday that it is halting aid deliveries through the main cargo crossing into the war-ravaged Gaza Strip because of the threat of armed gangs who have looted recent convoys. It blamed the breakdown of law and order in large part on Israeli policies.

The decision could worsen the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as the cold, rainy winter sets in, with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in squalid tent camps and reliant on international food aid. Experts were already warn-

ing of famine in the territory's north, which Israeli forces have almost completely isolated since early October.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA, the main aid provider in Gaza, said the route leading to the Kerem Shalom crossing is too dangerous on the Gaza side. Armed men looted nearly 100 trucks traveling on the route in mid-November, and he said gangs stole a smaller shipment on Saturday.

Kerem Shalom is the only crossing between Israel and Gaza that is designed for cargo shipments and has been the main artery for aid deliveries since the

Rafah crossing with Egypt was shut down in May. Last month, nearly two-thirds of all aid entering Gaza came through Kerem Shalom, and in previous months it accounted for an even larger amount, according to Israeli figures.

In a post on X, Lazzarini largely blamed Israel for the breakdown of humanitarian operations in Gaza, citing "political decisions to restrict the amounts of aid," lack of safety on aid routes and Israel's targeting of the Hamas-run police force, which had previously provided public security.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the decision.

Romanians vote in parliamentary election amid presidential turmoil

Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania — Romanians cast ballots Sunday in a parliamentary election sandwiched between a two-round presidential race, the first of which has plunged the European Union and NATO member into unprecedented turmoil following allegations of electoral violations and Russian interference.

Sunday's vote will elect a new government and prime minister and determine the formation of the 466-seat legislature. Romanians living abroad have been able

to vote since Saturday. By 5 p.m., about 7.5 million people — about 42% of eligible voters — had cast ballots, according to the Central Election Bureau.

The legislative vote comes a week after the first round of a presidential race that saw a controversial far-right populist who was polling in single digits win the most votes. Calin Georgescu, 62, is due to face reformist Elena Lasconi of the Save Romania Union party, orUSR, in a Dec. 8 runoff.

Georgescu's success, which many have attributed to his rapid

rise in popularity on the social media platform TikTok, has triggered nightly protests throughout Romania by those who oppose his past remarks praising Romanian fascist leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin and view him as a threat to democracy.

Many observers believe the presidential outcome indicates a sharp shift from Romania's mainstream parties to more populist anti-establishment parties, whose voices have found fertile ground amid high inflation, high cost of living and a sluggish economy.

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Cops: Assaults followed promises of free tattoos

MD GAITHERSBURG — An FBI agent charged in Maryland with sexually assaulting two women contacted his alleged victims through social media with a promise to give them free tattoos and modeling work, police said.

Neither woman knew that their alleged assailant, Eduardo Valdivia, was an FBI agent, Montgomery County Assistant Police Chief Nicholas Augustine said.

Valdivia used aliases, including Lalo Brown and “El Boogie,” as he contacted the women through an Instagram account for a tattoo parlor in Gaithersburg, according to police.

Valdivia sexually assaulted the women — both of whom are in their 20s — during photo shoots at a tattoo studio and at a hotel, police said.

Both women told police that they feared Valdivia would have caused them more harm if they tried to resist or leave.

State limits bathroom use by transgender students

OH COLUMBUS — Transgender students from kindergarten through college at Ohio public and private schools will be banned from using multiperson bathrooms that fit their gender identities under a measure that Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said Wednesday that he has signed.

DeWine signed the law out of public view over the objections of Democrats, teachers’ unions and civil rights groups, which had hoped that his objections to a ban on gender treatments for minors last year would carry through and prompt another veto. It takes effect in 90 days.

The governor issued no statement regarding the signing.

The Republican-backed measure — labeled the “Protect All Students Act” — requires public and private schools, colleges and universities to designate separate bathrooms, locker rooms and overnight accommodations “for the exclusive use” of either males and females, based on one’s gender assigned at or near birth, in school buildings and other facilities used for school-sponsored events. It contains no enforcement mechanism.

Judge OKs law requiring voters to show photo ID

MO COLUMBIA — A law requiring Missouri voters to show government-issued photo identification to cast regular ballots will stand after a lower-court judge found it constitutional.

Cole County Circuit Judge Jon Beetem’s decision upholds the law, which was made possible by a 2016 voter-approved constitutional amendment allowing lawmakers to enact photo ID require-



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

Poultry and pins

Nolan Smith, 14, tries his hand at bowling with an 11-pound turkey in a grocery bag while on ice skates during the Turkey Bowl at Edge Ice Center last week in Owensboro, Ky.

ments.

Voter photo ID supporters say the practice prevents voter fraud and improves public confidence in election results. Opponents say getting the records needed to obtain proper photo identification can be challenging, especially for older voters and people with disabilities.

The National Conference of State Legislatures reports 36 states request or require identification to vote, of which at least 21 ask for a photo ID.

37 gold coins stolen from shipwreck recovered

FL MELBOURNE — Thirty-seven gold coins, stolen by salvagers from a nearly 310-year-old shipwreck off of Florida’s coast, have been recovered by authorities, the state’s Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission announced.

The recovery “marks a major milestone in a long-standing investigation” into the theft and illegal trafficking of such historical artifacts, the agency said in a news release. The coins have an estimated combined value of more than \$1 million.

Authorities say that in 2015, there were 101 gold coins salvaged from the 1715 Fleet — a collection of Spanish treasure-laden ships that sank during a hurricane off of Florida’s central coast.

While 51 of these coins were “reported correctly and adjudicated,” 50 coins were not disclosed and were subsequently stolen, Florida authorities say.

Investigations revealed the illegal sale of the coins in 2023 and

2024. Using search warrants, authorities recovered the coins from private residences, safe deposit boxes and auctions.

Executions to resume, breaking 2-year pause

AZ PHOENIX — Executions will resume in Arizona following a two-year pause, the state’s top prosecutor says.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes said that she will soon seek an execution warrant for Aaron Brian Gunches, who is on death row after being convicted of killing his girlfriend’s ex-husband.

Mayes said her office had been preparing to resume the use of the death penalty in Arizona since earlier this year as it worked with state corrections officials to review and improve procedures.

Gov. Katie Hobbs had promised not to carry out any executions until there was confidence the state can do so without violating any laws. The review Hobbs had ordered effectively ended last month when she dismissed the retired federal magistrate she had appointed earlier to head the review.

Dentist accused of killing wife is charged again

CO DENVER — A dentist accused of killing his wife by poisoning her protein shakes has been charged with trying to get a fellow jail inmate to kill a detective investigating the murder case.

Prosecutors filed two new charges against James Craig — solicitation to commit murder as

well as solicitation to commit perjury.

The charging document does not say who Craig allegedly wanted to have killed but a spokesperson for Aurora police, Joe Moylan, confirmed that the alleged intended victim was an Aurora police detective.

A judge allowed Craig’s latest lawyer, Harvey Steinberg, to withdraw from the case Nov. 21, after he cited a professional conflict, just as Craig was about to stand trial for first-degree murder in the death of Angela Craig.

Prosecutors filed the two new charges against Craig the following day.

Angela Craig, 43, died in March 2023 of poisoning from cyanide and tetrahydrozoline, the latter a substance found in over-the-counter eye drops, according to the coroner. The couple had been married for 23 years and had six children together.

2 tax preparers charged over fake COVID claims

TN MEMPHIS — Two tax preparers submitted \$65 million in false claims for refunds under programs designed to help businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, federal prosecutors in Tennessee said.

A federal grand jury indicted Renata Walton, 44, and Nicole Jones, 36, on more than 50 counts of wire fraud, money laundering, preparing false tax returns and obstruction of justice, the U.S. attorney’s office in Memphis said in a news release.

Walton and Jones, of Olive Branch, Miss., pleaded not guilty

and were each released on \$100,000 bond. Their tax preparation business is closed “for the season,” according to a phone message at the number for R&B Tax Express in Moscow, Tenn.

Prosecutors said Walton and Jones filed for tax credits for their clients under the Employee Retention Credit and the Sick and Family Leave Credit, but their clients were not entitled to them.

The clients received six-figure tax refunds, and they paid Walton and Jones large fees that they laundered through local banks, the indictment said.

Dem lawmakers report Thanksgiving threats

CT HARTFORD — At least five Democratic members of Congress from Connecticut were targeted by bomb threats on their homes Thursday, the lawmakers or their offices said.

Sen. Chris Murphy and Reps. Jim Himes, Joe Courtney, John Larson and Jahana Hayes all reported being the subject of such threats.

Police who responded said they found no evidence of explosives on the lawmakers’ properties.

The bomb threats against Democrats happened a day after a number of President-elect Donald Trump’s most prominent Cabinet picks and appointees reported that they had received such threats, as well as “swatting attacks,” in which perpetrators initiate an emergency law enforcement response against a victim under false pretenses.

FACES

Smooth celebration

Max documentary gives late-'70s yacht rock its due

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

The stress of Thanksgiving weekend is over. Now it's time to take a breath before the end-of-year holidays begin, relax on the couch and enjoy the smooth sounds of a wrongly mocked music genre: yacht rock.

The late-'70s songs of Steely Dan, Michael McDonald and Christopher Cross take center stage in the well-crafted Max documentary "Music Box: Yacht Rock: A DOCKumentary," which started streaming Nov. 29.

Director Garret Price marries interviews with yacht rock artists, current musicians who are fans and the creators of the parody web series who coined the genre's name in 2005.

"This music is the soundtrack to our lives, whether we want it or not. It's playing in grocery stores, pharmacies, doctor's offices, elevators, our parents' cars our whole life," says Price. "I kind of took it for granted because it's just there. I think a lot of people have abandoned this music and I'm hoping those people rediscover it."

So who exactly made yacht rock? The experts in the film argue it is Toto, McDonald, Kenny Loggins, the Doobie Brothers, Cross and Steely Dan — described as "the primordial ooze from which yacht rock sprang." Think songs like "Ride Like the Wind" by Cross, "Reelin' In the Years" by Steely Dan and "Rosanna" by Toto.

What's not yacht rock — at least according to the filmmakers — is the Eagles, Hall & Oates, Jimmy Buffett or Fleetwood Mac, who don't perfectly fit the definition: elevated pop music infused with jazz and R&B.

Cross, McDonald, Loggins and Toto's David Paich and Steve Porcaro discuss the music and how they handled the label. Do-

nald Fagen of Steely Dan only had a short phone call with Price, but allowed the band's music to be used.

"I had this film basically done except for the Steely Dan music syncs and it was sitting idle for months and was like, 'I don't know how to tell this story unless I get this music.' Lo and behold, we finally hear from Donald Fagen," says Price. "We have this moment that I don't even know if I could beat if I had a sit-down interview with him."

Giving context are musician-comedian Fred Armisen, musician-author Questlove, musicians Thundercat, Brian Robert Jones and Brenda Russell, producer Prince Paul and rock critics and ses-

session players.

Questlove opens the door to a less restricted definition of yacht rock, adding artists like Al Jarreau, the Pointer Sisters and George Benson, arguing that the genre isn't limited to white artists.

"When you're dealing with a completely arbitrary genre like this that got made up completely, that's kind of the beauty of it — the debates of what is or isn't," says Price.

Yacht rock enjoyed a brief window on the charts in the late 1970s, and the documentary argues that MTV largely contributed to its demise. Yacht rockers weren't able or willing to transition into a visual space.

Once that window closed, yacht rock became derided — mocked in everything from "30 Rock" to "Family Guy." In "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," a character tortures her electronics store co-workers by playing McDonald on a constant loop.

"I feel like these artists have always been kind of punchlines in pop culture," says Price. "I went in saying, 'I want to make a fun film but not make fun of anybody.'"

The label "yacht rock" came much later thanks to a comedy series of short films by

"The underlying intent is we love this music. We poke some fun at it, but we also want people to hear it for what it is, which is really, really good, solid, well-crafted music."

Steve Huey
filmmaker, podcaster



AP photos

Donald Fagen, left, and Walter Becker of Steely Dan, shown in 1993, are foundational artists in the yacht rock genre, the definition of which varies from person to person.



Christopher Cross, shown in 2011, may have inadvertently contributed to the yacht rock label with his 1979 hit "Sailing."



Michael McDonald's contributions to the yacht rock genre come as a member of the Doobie Brothers and as a solo artist.

J.D. Ryznar and Steve Huey, who currently lead The Yacht or Nyacht Podcast. They were hoping to win a contest with their short films, and the name took off.

"This is kind of a private in-joke that sort of went global all of a sudden," says Huey. "The underlying intent is we love this music. We poke some fun at it, but we also want people to hear it for what it is ... really, really good, solid, well-crafted music."

Ryznar says the label was inspired by the cover and name of "Full Sail" — an album from Loggins and Jim Messina — Cross' hit single "Sailing" and the captain hat-wearing half of Captain & Tennille.

"We just noticed this '70s motif and it

seemed to describe the music that was so well-produced so perfectly," Ryznar says. "It's not called yacht rock because it sounds good on a boat, though it does. It's called yacht rock because it's well crafted, like the finest yacht."

Price, an editor on "Daisy Jones & The Six" who also directed the dark "Woodstock 99: Peace, Love, and Rage," says his latest work arrives at a great time in the year.

"It's the perfect post-Thanksgiving film to watch with your family after what may be a more contentious Thanksgiving this year than others," says Price. "We can all just chill out, vibe out, listen to this smooth, polished music and just smile."

Batiste, Ledisi, Trombone Shorty, Daigle to perform before Super Bowl

Associated Press

The Super Bowl pregame will have some Louisiana flavor: Multi-talented performer Jon Batiste will hit the stage to sing the national anthem, while Trombone Shorty and Lauren Daigle are slated to perform "America the Beautiful."

The performances will take place Feb. 9 at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans before the NFL's championship matchup and halftime show featuring rap megastar Kendrick Lamar, the league announced Nov. 28.

"We're honored to work with this year's pregame lineup to celebrate the rich musical legacy of New Orleans and the entire state," said Seth Dudowsky, the NFL's head of music.

Ledisi will perform "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as part of the pregame performances that will air on Fox. The pregame performers are all Louisiana natives.

The national anthem and "America the Beautiful" will be

performed by actor Stephanie Noguera in American sign language.

Otis Jones IV will sign "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and the halftime show will be signed by Matt Maxey.

Jay-Z's Roc Nation company and Jesse Collins will serve as co-executive producers of the halftime show.

Racing pioneer 'Motorcycle Mary' McGee dies 1 day before documentary is released

Mary McGee, a female racing pioneer and subject profiled in an Oscar-contending documentary "Motorcycle Mary," died Nov. 27, her family said. She was 87.

The family said McGee died of complications from a stroke at her home in Gardnerville, Nev., the day before the release of the short documentary "Motorcycle Mary" on ESPN's YouTube channel. Seven-time Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton was an executive producer on the

film, which became available globally Nov. 28.

McGee had an accomplished racing résumé, first in auto racing and later in motorcycle racing. She became the first person — man or woman — to complete the grueling Baja 500 off-road race in Mexico solo, which she did in 1975.

The film about her was directed by Haley Watson. Two-time Oscar winner Ben Proudfoot also was an executive producer.

McGee's older brother became a race car driver and encouraged his sister to take up the sport, even though it was almost unprecedented for women at that time.

McGee was the first woman to race motocross in the United States, the first to compete in an international motocross competition and the first to receive sponsorships from major brands.

McGee was inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 2018.

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OPINION

Poll shows support for Trump's picks

By JOE BATTENFELD
Boston Herald

President-elect Donald Trump has rocked the boat and roiled critics with some of his controversial transition picks and campaign promises but most Americans believe that's just what he should be doing.

Nearly six in 10 American adults approve of the way Trump is handling his transition, according to a CBS/YouGov poll, a shocker for the mainstream media and Democrats who have been treating the transition with disdain and disbelief.

While it may be a bitter pill for Democrats to swallow, the poll reaffirms the results of the election, which Trump won with an electoral mandate.

Even though Trump has been forced to withdraw his attorney general pick — former Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz — and other appointees have been under attack, that hasn't clouded the public's view of the transition, the poll found.

A strong majority of Americans say they back his Cabinet picks, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Pete Hegseth.

And 57% of Americans approve of Trump's plan to carry out mass deportations of illegal immigrants.

The poll also revealed strong partisan differences in how Trump's upcoming term is viewed. A whopping 95% of Republicans feel optimistic or excited about Trump's second term, while just 15% of Democrats feel the same way.

But just 44% of Democrats said they feel motivated to oppose Trump, according to the poll, revealing there may be some Trump fatigue among his sharpest critics.

The poll shows that while official Washington may be shocked at some of Trump's picks, the public is largely satisfied with them.

The former president has shown before



ROD LAMKEY/AP

Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for secretary of defense, speaks with reporters following a meeting with senators on Capitol Hill, on Nov. 21.

that he likes the "shock and awe" strategy of revealing unorthodox picks but ones who are loyal to his agenda.

That is the case with Hegseth, the Fox News contributor who is Trump's pick to lead the Pentagon, who is under intense scrutiny for a 2017 sexual encounter that police investigated.

No charges were filed and Hegseth claims the encounter was consensual. He paid a settlement to the woman involved to avoid a lawsuit.

There's no indication that Trump intends to withdraw the appointment to lead the Defense Department.

"It's very simple," Hegseth said when confronted by the media last week. "The matter was fully investigated and I was completely cleared. And that's where I'm going to leave it."

Trump has also picked several loyalists, including Kennedy, son of the slain Robert F. Kennedy, to lead the nation's federal health agencies, which has rocked the mainstream medical community.

The New York Times reported that "some doctors and scientists are bracing themselves for the gutting of public health agencies, a loss of scientific expertise and the injection of politics into realms once reserved for academics. The result, they fear, could be worse health outcomes, more preventable deaths and a reduced ability to respond to looming health threats, like the next pandemic."

But the polls suggest most Americans welcome the unorthodox changes to business as usual, and don't mind having Kennedy at the helm of the Health and Human Services Department.

RFK Jr. and Gabbard have to be rejected

New York Daily News Editorial Board

On Saturday afternoon, at 4:17, Donald Trump used his Truth Social to announce the last of his Cabinet secretaries, Brooke Rollins for USDA, finishing naming the 15 positions far faster than any other incoming president. His speed might be because he's been here before, so he knows what he's doing, which is definitely fine, or he's not having the normal FBI background checks on the picks, which is definitely not fine.

Whatever the reason for Trump's speed to set up his second Cabinet, the Senate cannot be hasty and must give the nominations careful scrutiny and reject those who are not qualified.

The flameout of the comically unfit Matt Gaetz for attorney general wasn't due to a Senate vote. The Senate never voted on Gaetz and no committee hearings were held. That process won't start formally until the new Senate is sworn in on Jan. 3 and the Republican-led chamber won't confirm anyone until Trump is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

Partisans and political allies are to be expected, as are Rollins and the AG substitute, Pam Bondi, but all of the nominees must be qualified for the jobs they are to assume.

If you need a mnemonic device to recall the Cabinet in order of rank and line of succession (which is also the order that each department was created) we use this: "See the dog jump in a circle; leave her home to entertain every visitor here."

Translated it is: State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Education, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security.



Kennedy

Our biggest concerns are about Defense, with Fox News personality Pete Hegseth, and HHS, with vaccine-denier Bobby Kennedy.

Hegseth has never managed anything a fraction of the size of the Pentagon in terms of its budget or personnel. His views on women on combat (he's against) are at odds with settled U.S. policy and a 2017 police report with sexual assault accusations and a confidential financial settlement with the woman at issue are troubling. He has yet to show that he can do this job.

As for RFK Jr., there is no question, he must not be the health secretary. He believes vaccines cause autism. They do not. Reasonable people may differ on getting a COVID shot (a vaccine created in record speed by the Trump administration that has saved millions of lives) but every child must be vaccinated against deadly illnesses like measles. Kennedy's quack theories, from the perch atop HHS, will reduce the measles vaccine rates and it will kill children, guaranteed.

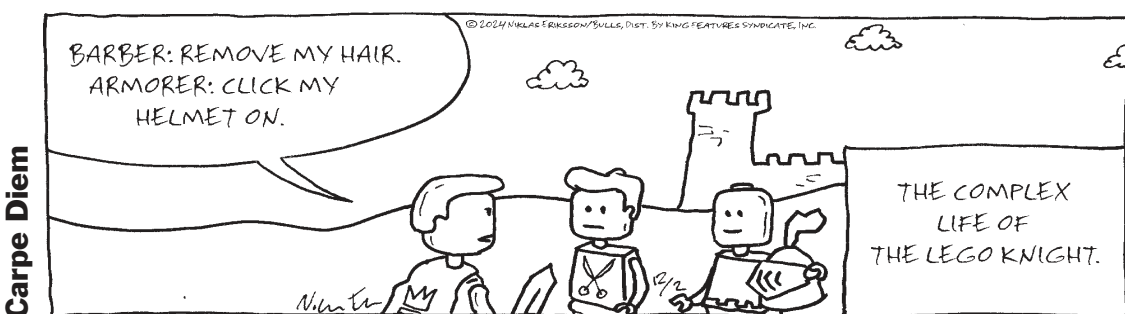
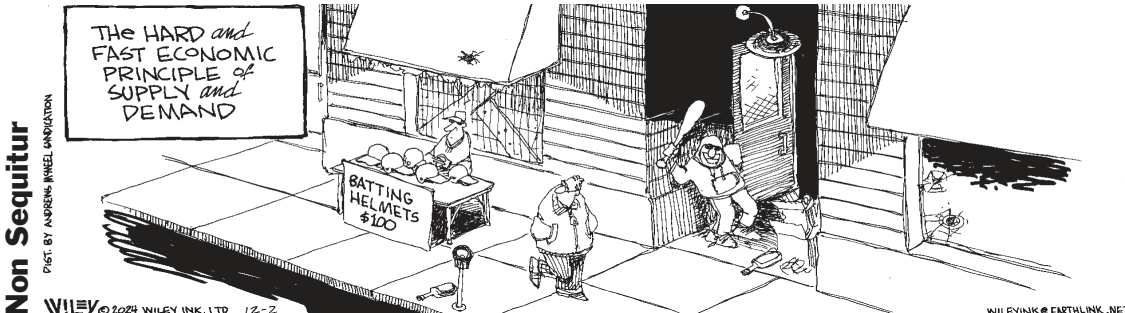
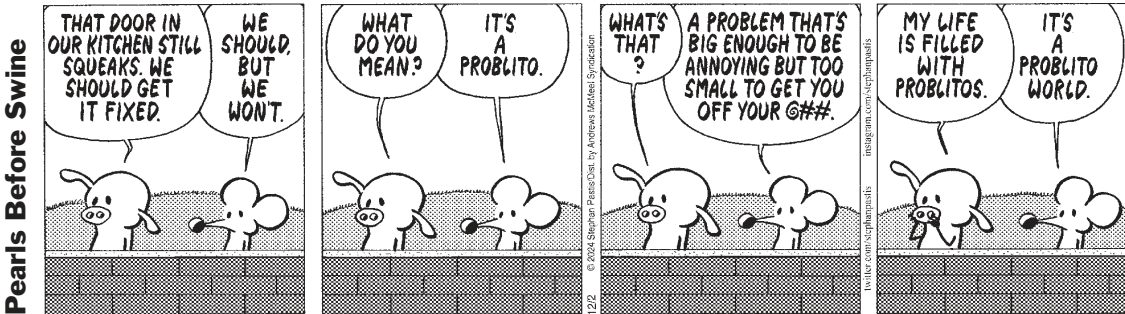
Not on the mnemonic roster is director of national intelligence, a Senate-confirmed post that Trump wants to be filled by Tulsi Gabbard, the former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, who has swung from the Bernie Sanders left to the Trump right, with a disturbing admiration for aggressive U.S. foes like Russia's Vladimir Putin and Syria's Bashar Assad. She is not to be entrusted with the nation's secrets and the Senate must reject her.

Vice President Kamala Harris said she'd name a Republican in her Cabinet if she was elected (maybe Liz Cheney?), which used to be the norm to have someone from the other party. Trump never said anything about choosing a Democrat, but he has picked RFK Jr. and Gabbard. We are all for bipartisanship, but no thanks.

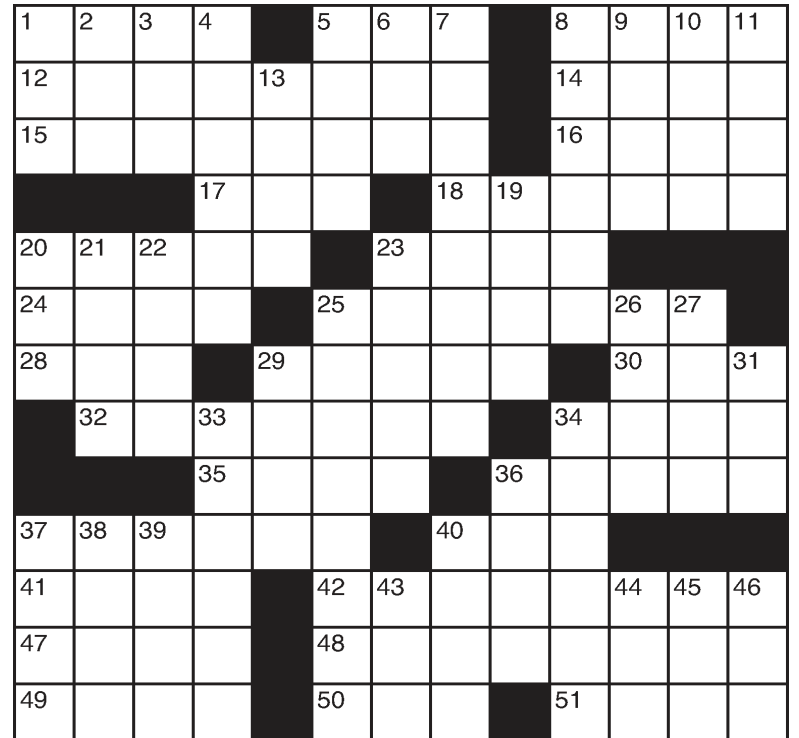
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Two-way
- 5 Squid squirt
- 8 Saab model
- 12 Walking daintily
- 14 Sketch
- 15 History book feature
- 16 Ore source
- 17 German article
- 18 Emulates Manet
- 20 Relating to Swiss peaks
- 23 Commotion
- 24 Lusty look
- 25 Final part
- 28 Cote cry
- 29 Companies
- 30 Chic no more
- 32 Early baby, informally
- 34 Killer whale
- 35 Burnsian denials
- 36 Sir Francis —
- 37 Exonerates
- 40 Mound stat
- 41 Coconut provider
- 42 Cable channel
- 47 Soap additive
- 48 Not required
- 49 Go yachting
- 50 Lean- (sheds)
- 51 Genuine

DOWN

- 1 Speck
- 2 Numerical prefix
- 3 \$ dispenser
- 4 German art songs
- 5 "How sweet —!"
- 6 Dijon denial
- 7 Do a drummer's job
- 8 Regard highly
- 9 CNN anchor Burnett
- 10 Harangue
- 11 Is in debt
- 13 Scheme
- 19 Feels unwell
- 20 Cleric's garment
- 21 Bound
- 22 Anjou, for one

- 23 Ganges
- garments
- 25 Schedule opening
- 26 Filmmaker Ephron
- 27 Pond denizen
- 29 Dread
- 31 — kwon do
- 33 Canine coat
- 34 Speaker
- 36 Zwei follower
- 37 Tax prep advisors
- 38 In — land
- 39 Sci-fi race
- 40 New newts
- 43 Wall St. debut
- 44 Chemical suffix
- 45 Goat's cry
- 46 Right angle

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-2

CRYPTOQUIP

JE WVH OVC'G RVFB P WHAAW
 OJDT VE GVSJR RP Y TJMD
 YVFBSBO JC ABRGBO YTBDB,
 J PA CPYTV GWMB.

Saturday's Cryptoquip: FANCY, LAVISH EVENT THAT STEAKS AND HAMBURGERS ATTEND IF THEY FEEL LIKE DANCING: MEAT BALLS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals Y

SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Saturday's women's scores

EAST

Buffalo 74, St. Bonaventure 46
 Colgate 62, Akron 45
 Lehigh 56, Marist 39
 Marquette 74, Md.-Eastern Shore 48
 Maryland 66, George Mason 56
 N. Iowa 90, Pittsburgh 74
 Providence 55, San Diego St. 54
 Rutgers 77, Georgia Southern 60
 Toledo 58, Navy 51
 Towson 68, Youngstown St. 57
 UMBC 62, Iona 40
 Valparaiso 76, North Dakota 57
 West Virginia 82, Boise St. 47

SOUTH

Air Force 62, Winthrop 47
 Bellarmine 72, SC-Upstate 64
 Belmont 69, Davidson 59
 Brown 69, Colorado St. 63
 E. Kentucky 84, N. Kentucky 75
 Florida Gulf Coast 61, Chattanooga 53
 Green Bay 55, Norfolk St. 54
 Illinois St. 70, High Point 49
 Jacksonville 84, Hofstra 70
 Liberty 106, Christopher Newport 58
 Manhattan 61, Austin Peay 46
 Mercer 70, Bethune-Cookman 64
 Michigan 76, Virginia Tech 65
 Minnesota 68, Louisiana-Lafayette 48
 Mississippi 89, Alabama St. 24
 Morehead St. 87, Jackson St. 57
 N. Arizona 87, Tulane 70
 North Florida 79, Samford 71
 Old Dominion 64, Oakland 56
 Penn 64, Cal Baptist 51
 Richmond 57, Oklahoma St. 53
 S. Indiana 71, Le Moyne 42
 Stephen F. Austin 81, Coppin St. 60
 Stetson 84, Utah St. 76
 TCU 87, South Florida 46
 Tennessee St. 92, UNC-Asheville 87, OT
 Wisconsin 58, VCU 45
 Wyoming 71, Virginia 66

MIDWEST

Delaware 65, Evansville 54
 Indiana St. 68, SE Missouri 65
 Iowa St. 75, Middle Tennessee 59
 Kansas 61, Auburn 60
 Loyola Chicago 67, SC State 39
 South Carolina 99, Purdue 51
 Texas St. 68, Texas Rio Grande Valley 59
 Texas Tech 72, Missouri St. 69
 UMKC 94, Texas-Dallas 60

SOUTHWEST

Bowling Green 79, Arkansas 78
 Cleveland St. 79, Lamar 52
 Nicholls 58, Tarleton St. 51
 Pacific 64, Houston 60
 Texas 94, Butler 59
 Texas A&M-CC 72, Our Lady of the Lake 37

FAR WEST

Alabama A&M 78, San Diego 67
 Denver 60, UC Irvine 50
 Drake 79, Washington St. 68
 Florida St. 95, Gonzaga 54
 Grand Canyon 110, East Texas A&M 71
 Hawaii 47, UT Martin 39
 Louisville 79, Colorado 71
 N. Colorado 93, Bluejays 46
 Nevada 72, S. Utah 54
 New Mexico St. 61, Santa Clara 49
 Omaha 53, Utah Valley St. 48
 Portland 68, Cent. Michigan 58
 Portland St. 66, UC Davis 61
 San Jose St. 68, Mass.-Lowell 67
 UC Riverside 49, Saint Mary's (Cal) 41
 UC Santa Barbara 72, Seattle 62

DEALS

Saturday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with RHP Connor Gillispie on a one-year contract.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Agreed to terms with LHP Blake Snell on a five-year contract.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association

CHARLOTTE HORNETS — Waived G Jared Rhoden.

Women's National Basketball Association

MINNESOTA LYNX — Named Eric Thibault associate head coach and Lindsay Whalen as assistant coach.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed RB James Conner to a two-year contract.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Placed TE Geoff Swaim on injured reserve. Signed TE Blake Whiteheart to the active roster from the practice squad.

GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed B Michael Barrett and G Marquis Hayes to the practice squad. Released WR Malik Knowles from the practice squad.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Elevated T Irv

UCLA 97, Fresno St. 41
 Utah 78, Notre Dame 67
 Utah Tech 63, Westcliff 40

Saturday's men's scores

EAST

Binghamton 75, LIU 70, OT
 Delaware 72, Rider 66
 Elon 69, Navy 63
 Georgetown 100, Albany (NY) 68
 Indiana St. 83, Iona 80
 La Salle 83, Temple 75
 Lafayette 59, Niagara 47
 Lehigh 74, Marist 69
 Monmouth (NJ) 63, Seton Hall 51
 Mount St. Mary's 79, Howard 75
 Penn 77, Maine 64
 Siena 71, Bucknell 58
 St. John's 77, Harvard 64
 Tarleton St. 61, Hofstra 59
 Texas A&M 81, Rutgers 77
 UConn 99, Md.-Eastern Shore 45
 Vermont 68, Northeastern 64

SOUTH

Charleston Southern 83, Miami 79
 Coastal Carolina 73, SC-Upstate 51
 ETSU 79, Austin Peay 57
 Florida Gulf Coast 80, FAU 78
 Georgia 102, Jacksonville 56
 Georgia Tech 87, Cent. Arkansas 68
 High Point 81, Pfeiffer 50
 Lipscomb 82, Alabama A&M 44
 N. Kentucky 86, Bellarmine 70
 NC Central 131, Va.-Lynchburg 51
 Nicholls 76, Louisiana-Lafayette 75
 Oregon 83, Alabama 81
 Sam Houston St. 82, Colgate 78
 Southern Miss. 66, Milwaukie 65
 Southern U. 73, Louisiana Tech 70
 UNC-Wilmington 76, Appalachian St. 61
 W. Kentucky 90, Marshall 82

MIDWEST

Abilene Christian 71, Omaha 55
 Bowling Green 61, New Mexico St. 60
 Campbell 72, Green Bay 66
 Creighton 80, Notre Dame 76
 Detroit 98, E. Michigan 89, OT
 Drake 61, Georgia Southern 47
 IU Indianapolis 106, Trinity (Ill.) 49
 Ill.-Chicago 91, Aurora 76
 Kansas 86, Furman 51
 Kent St. 67, Kennesaw St. 60
 Marquette 94, W. Carolina 62
 Oakland 85, Toledo 52
 Ohio 84, Robert Morris 68
 SE Missouri 80, UMKC 59
 Wisconsin 74, Chicago St. 53
 Wright St. 70, Air Force 57
 Youngstown St. 128, Bethany (WV) 60

SOUTHWEST

Fort Wayne 77, East Texas A&M 57
 Lamar 88, Our Lady of the Lake 54
 Rice 75, Arkansas St. 67
 San Diego St. 73, Houston 70, OT
 Texas A&M-CC 109, Prairie View 74
 UTSA 78, Houston Christian 71

FAR WEST

CS Northridge 72, Montana St. 69, OT
 Cal Poly 97, Stanford 90
 Idaho 80, UC Riverside 68
 Mercyhurst 66, Sacramento St. 60
 New Mexico 83, Southern Cal 73
 Oregon St. 90, UC Davis 57
 Pacific 64, Cal St.-Fullerton 55
 Portland St. 71, Utah Tech 68
 S. Utah 74, CS Bakersfield 64
 UC Irvine 67, Towson 60
 UC San Diego 109, La Verne 33
 Utah 88, E. Washington 80
 Weber St. 68, Pepperdine 53

Smith Jr. and WR Jared Wayne from the practice squad to the active roster.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Elevated G Mark Glowinski and WR Laquan Treadwell from the practice squad to the active roster. Signed G Atonio Mafi to the active roster. Waived LB Liam Anderson.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Elevated CB Nahshon Wright and TE Nick Muse from the practice squad to the active roster.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Elevated LB Keshawn Banks and G Michael Jordan from the practice squad to the active roster.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

ANAHEIM DUCKS — Assigned D Tyson Hinds to San Diego (AHL).

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Acquired G Scott Wedgewood from Nashville in exchange for G Justus Annunen and a sixth-round pick in the 2025 NHL draft. Reassigned LW Chase Bradley to Colorado (AHL). Recalled C Nikita Prishchepov from Colorado.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS — Reassigned G Jet Greaves to Cleveland (AHL).

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Recalled F Connor Sheary from Syracuse (AHL). Reassigned G Matt Tomkins to Syracuse.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Placed C Bobby McMann on injured reserve. Reassigned C Alex Steeves to Toronto (AHL).

UTAH HOCKEY CLUB — Recalled Maksymilian Szuber from Tucson (AHL).

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL

American Conference East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	9	2	0	.818	320	214
Miami	5	7	0	.417	232	266
N.Y. Jets	3	8	0	.273	204	242
New England	3	9	0	.250	197	282

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	7	5	0	.583	285	268
Indianapolis	5	7	0	.417	242	274
Tennessee	3	8	0	.273	202	290
Jacksonville	2	9	0	.182	208	316

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	8	3	0	.727	252	186
Baltimore	8	4	0	.636	364	294
Cincinnati	4	7	0	.364	297	296
Cleveland	3	8	0	.273	186	267

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Kansas City	11	1	0	.917	289	235
L.A. Chargers	7	4	0	.636	243	175
Denver	7	5	0	.583	264	202
e-Las Vegas	2	10	0	.167	223	333

National Conference East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	9	2	0	.818	296	199
Washington	7	5	0	.583	334	277
Dallas	5	7	0	.417	248	339
e-N.Y. Giants	2	10	0	.167	183	279

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Atlanta	6	5	0	.545	244	274
Tampa Bay	5	6	0	.455	309	273
New Orleans	4	7	0	.364	262	260
Carolina	3	8	0	.273	194	340

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	11	1	0	.917	383	203
Minnesota	9	2	0	.818	274	197
Green Bay	9	3	0	.750	318	240
Chicago	4	8	0	.333	241	240

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Arizona	6	5	0	.545	244	236
Seattle	6	5	0	.545	246	244
L.A. Rams	5	6	0	.455	233	276
San Francisco	5	6	0	.455	260	260

e-Eliminated from playoffs
 x-clinched playoff spot

Thursday's games

Detroit 23, Chicago 20
 Dallas 27, N.Y. Giants 20
 Green Bay 30, Miami 17

Friday's game

Kansas City 19, Las Vegas 17

Sunday's games

Arizona at Minnesota
 Houston at Jacksonville
 Indianapolis at New England
 L.A. Chargers at Atlanta
 Pittsburgh at Cincinnati
 Seattle at N.Y. Jets
 Tennessee at Washington
 L.A. Rams at New Orleans
 Tampa Bay at Carolina
 Philadelphia at Baltimore
 San Francisco at Buffalo

Monday's game

Cleveland at Denver

Thursday, Dec. 5

Green Bay at Detroit

Sunday, Dec. 8

Atlanta at Minnesota
 Carolina at Philadelphia
 Cleveland at Pittsburgh
 Jacksonville at Tennessee
 Las Vegas at Tampa Bay
 N.Y. Jets at Miami
 New Orleans at N.Y. Giants
 Seattle at Arizona
 Buffalo at L.A. Rams
 Chicago at San Francisco
 L.A. Chargers at Kansas City

Monday, Dec. 9

Cincinnati at Dallas
Open: Baltimore, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, New England, Washington



IAN MAULE/AP

Oregon's Nate Bittle drives against Alabama's Clifford Omoruyi in the championship game of the Players Era Festival tournament Saturday.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Late putback lifts Ducks over Tide

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Nate Bittle scored the winning shot on a putback dunk with 4.4 seconds left to lead undefeated Oregon to an 83-81 win over No. 9 Alabama Saturday night in the championship game of the Players Era Festival.

Keeshawn Barthelemy scored 22 points off the bench to lead the Ducks (8-0), and Bittle finished with 19.

Alabama's Aden Holloway made a 3-pointer to cut the lead to 81-78 with 26 seconds left. The Ducks turned it over, and Mark Sears made a free throw to pull within two. Sears missed the second free throw, but Mouhamed Dioubate grabbed the offensive rebound, was fouled and tied the game at 81 with two free throws.

On the ensuing possession, Barthelemy missed a layup, and Bittle followed with the jam.

Labaron Philon led Alabama (6-2) with 15 points, while Sears, Holloway and Jarin Stevenson each scored 11.

No. 1 Kansas 86, Furman 51: KJ Adams matched a career-high 22 points and the host Jayhawks used a 30-9 run at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second to hand the Paladins their first loss of the season.

Hunter Dickinson had 10 points and six rebounds for Kansas (7-0), which handled the trap game nestled between last week's win over No. 11 Duke and next week's trip to No. 21 Creighton.

No. 2 UConn 99, MD-Eastern Shore 45: Liam McNeeley and Jaylin Stewart each scored 16 points as the host Huskies snapped a three-game losing streak.

UConn played without leading scorer Alex Karaban, who hit his head on the floor late in a loss to Dayton in UConn's final game at the Maui Invitational.

San Diego St. 73, No. 6 Houston 70 (OT): Miles Bird scored 18 points and Jared Coleman-Jones added 16 to help the Aztecs edge the Cougars in overtime in the third-place game of the Players Era tournament in Las Vegas.

Nick Boyd added 14 points and freshman Pharoah Compton 13 for San Diego State (4-2).

Bird made two free throws with 13.4 seconds left in regulation to tie the game at 65. Emanuel Sharp missed a baseline jumper with 1 second remaining and the game went to overtime.

Sharp finished with 23 points and L.J. Cryer added 21.

No. 10 Marquette 94, W. Carolina 62: Kam Jones had 20 points, 10 assists and six rebounds as the host Golden Eagles remained unbeaten.

Marquette (8-0) continued its fastest start since 2011-12, when it won its first 10 games. That team ended up 27-8 with a Sweet 16 appearance.

No. 15 Wisconsin 74, Chicago St. 53: John Tonje had 22 points and Nolan Winter scored 12 to pace the host Badgers to a win over Chicago State.

Wisconsin (8-0) gained control with a 17-3 run early in the second half, going in front 49-30 on a dunk by Winter with 11:21 remaining. The Cougars (0-9) made just 1 of 13 shots during that stretch.

No. 20 Texas A&M 81, Rutgers 77: Wade Taylor IV scored 24 points and the Aggies defeated the Scarlet Knights in the fifth-place game of the Players Era Festival.

Rutgers led by nine with 12:51 left, but the Aggies closed the game on a 27-14 run.

No. 21 Creighton 80, Notre Dame 76: Jamiya Neal had 21 points and nine rebounds to lead the Bluejays past the Irish in the seventh-place game of the Players Era Festival.

COLLEGE SOCCER

NCAA D-I women's tournament

Third Round Sunday, Nov. 24

No. 2 Wake Forest 2, No. 3 Ohio St. 0
 No. 2 North Carolina 3, No. 6 Minnesota 0
 No. 4 Penn St. 3, No. 8 Vanderbilt 1
 No. 4 Notre Dame 2, No. 1 Mississippi St. 0
 No. 1 Duke 2, No. 5 Michigan St. 0
 No. 2 Arkansas 1, No. 3 Stanford 1, Stanford advances 4-2 on penalty kicks
 No. 1 USC 3, No. 5 Wisconsin 1
 No. 7 Virginia Tech 1, No. 3 Iowa 0

Quarterfinals Nov. 29

No. 3 Stanford 2, No. 4 Notre Dame 0
 No. 1 USC 2, No. 2 Wake Forest 2, Wake Forest advances 4-3 on penalty kicks
 No. 2 North Carolina 2, No. 4 Penn St. 1, OT

Saturday, Nov. 30

No. 1 Duke 1, No. 7 Virginia Tech 0

Semifinals Friday, Dec. 6

No. 2 Wake Forest vs. No. 3 Stanford
 No. 1 Duke vs. No. 2 North Carolina

NCAA D-I men's tournament

Third Round Saturday, Nov. 30

No. 13 Marshall 2, NC State, 1
 No. 3 Denver 1, No. 14 Indiana 0
 UMass 1, No. 11 Virginia 0
 No. 12 SMU 3, No. 5 Dayton 1

Sunday, Dec. 1

No. 1 Ohio St. vs. No. 16 Stanford
 Kansas City vs. No. 2 Pittsburgh
 No. 9 Clemson vs. No. 8 Wake Forest
 Vermont vs. San Diego

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference							
Atlantic Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	25	15	9	1	31	92	80
Toronto	23	14	7	2	30	70	60
Tampa Bay	23	12	9	2	26	86	73
Boston	25	11	11	3	25	58	77
Buffalo	24	11	11	2	24	72	73
Detroit	23	10	11	2	22	59	71
Ottawa	23	10	12	1	21	72	76
Montreal	23	8	12	3	19	65	87
Metropolitan Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	24	17	6	1	35	101	69
New Jersey	27	16	9	2	34	94	75
Carolina	24	16	7	1	33	91	70
N.Y. Rangers	23	13	9	1	27	75	65
Philadelphia	25	12	10	3	27	73	83
N.Y. Islanders	25	9	10	6	24	66	75
Pittsburgh	26	10	12	4	24	72	100
Columbus	22	10	9	3	23	78	78
Western Conference							
Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	24	18	6	0	36	93	60
Minnesota	24	16	4	4	36	77	58
Dallas	22	14	8	0	28	77	59
Colorado	25	13	12	0	26	81	93
Utah	24	10	10	4	24	69	73
St. Louis	25	11	12	2	24	63	79
Nashville	25	7	12	6	20	58	79
Chicago	23	8	13	2	18	58	68
Pacific Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	25	15	7	3	33	91	79
Los Angeles	25	14	8	3	31	76	68
Edmonton	24	13	9	2	28	72	73
Calgary	25	12	9	4	28	66	74
Vancouver	22	12	7	3	27	71	70
Seattle	25	11	13	1	23	71	76
San Jose	27	9	13	5	23	78	96
Anaheim	22	9	10	3	21	56	64

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.

Friday's games	
Philadelphia 3, N.Y. Rangers 1	
Minnesota 3, Chicago 2	
Florida 6, Carolina 3	
Vancouver 4, Buffalo 3, OT	
Tampa Bay 3, Nashville 2, OT	
Columbus 5, Calgary 2	
New Jersey 5, Detroit 4	
Washington 5, N.Y. Islanders 4, OT	
Los Angeles 2, Anaheim 1	
San Jose 8, Seattle 5	
Pittsburgh 2, Boston 1	
Vegas 4, Winnipeg 3	
Edmonton 4, Utah 3, OT	
Dallas 5, Colorado 3	
Saturday's games	
N.Y. Rangers 4, Montreal 3	
Florida 6, Carolina 0	
Los Angeles 5, Ottawa 2	
Philadelphia 3, St. Louis 2, OT	
Pittsburgh 6, Calgary 2	
Washington 6, New Jersey 5	
Toronto 5, Tampa Bay 3	
N.Y. Islanders 3, Buffalo 0	
Minnesota 3, Nashville 2, OT	
Utah 6, Vegas 0	
Edmonton 4, Colorado 1	
San Jose 4, Seattle 2	
Sunday's games	
Vancouver at Detroit	
Columbus at Chicago	
Montreal at Boston	
Winnipeg at Dallas	
Ottawa at Anaheim	
Monday's games	
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers	
Chicago at Toronto	
Dallas at Utah	

Scoring leaders				
Through Saturday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Kirill Kaprizov, MIN	23	15	23	38
Martin Necas, CAR	24	12	25	37
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	25	7	29	36
Jack Eichel, LV	25	8	28	36
Dylan Strome, WSH	24	8	26	34
Nikita Kucherov, TB	22	12	22	34
Mikko Rantanen, COL	25	15	19	34
Sam Reinhart, FLA	25	18	16	34
Cale Makar, COL	25	8	24	32
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	24	17	15	32
Mitch Marner, TOR	23	9	22	31
Jesper Bratt, NJ	27	11	20	31
Connor McDavid, EDM	21	12	19	31
Jack Hughes, NJ	27	9	21	30
Travis Konecny, PHI	25	13	17	30

ROUNDUP

Kakko lifts Rangers past Canadiens

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kaapo Kakko scored a power-play goal with 24 seconds left, and the New York Rangers stopped a five-game slide by topping the Montreal Canadiens 4-3 on Saturday.

Artemi Panarin, Vincent Trocheck and Mika Zibanejad also scored for the Rangers, who got their first win since a 4-3 victory at Vancouver on Nov. 19. Adam Fox had two assists, and Jonathan Quick made 25 saves.

With the Canadiens' Kirby Dach serving a four-minute, high-sticking penalty, Kakko got his fourth goal of the season.

Montreal trailed 3-1 after two periods, but Cole Caufield scored his 14th goal 4:16 into the third and Nick Suzuki tied it at 14:07.

Trocheck tipped the puck past Canadiens goaltender Sam Montembeault at 19:56 to put New York ahead after Panarin and Montreal's Mike Matheson scored earlier in the first.

Panarin put the Rangers ahead at 9:02, scoring on a 5-on-3 for New York's first power-play goal since Nov. 12.

Montembeault made 24 saves for the Canadiens.

Seeking an early spark, Rangers captain Jacob Trouba fought Montreal's Josh Anderson 1:58 into the contest. It appeared to give New York a collective jolt that was missing in recent games.

Panthers 6, Hurricanes 0: Spencer Knight made 20 saves, Mackie Samoskevich scored with less than a second left in the second period and host Florida got four goals in the third to beat Carolina and complete a two-day sweep.

Aleksander Barkov, Sam Bennett, Aaron Ekblad, Evan Rodrigues and Adam Boqvist also scored for the Panthers, who won 6-3 at Carolina on Friday. Florida has won three straight — that streak following a stretch of six losses in seven games for the Stanley Cup champions.

It was Knight's fourth career shutout, his first since Nov. 9, 2022 — also at home against the Hurricanes.

Spencer Martin made 23 saves on 28 shots for Carolina, which has dropped four of its last six games (2-3-1). It was Martin's fourth consecutive start for the Hurricanes.

Maple Leafs 5, Lightning 3: Auston Matthews picked up an assist in his return to the lineup and Joseph Woll stopped 38 shots as visiting Toronto beat Tampa Bay.

Chris Tanev had a goal and an assist and Mitch Marner added two assists. Nick Robertson, John Tavares and William Nylander also scored for the Maple Leafs. Matthews assisted on Nylander's



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Rangers right wing Kaapo Kakko, second from right, is congratulated by teammates after scoring a goal in the third period past Montreal Canadiens goaltender Sam Montembeault on Saturday in New York.

empty-net goal in the third period after missing nine games with an upper-body injury.

Mikey Eyssimont, Jake Guentzel and Cam Atkinson scored for the Lightning, who were without leading scorer Nikita Kucherov.

Toronto led 4-0 in the third before Tampa Bay scored three goals in just over a six-minute span, cutting its deficit to a goal with 2:22 left.

Capitals 6, Devils 5: Pierre-Luc Dubois, Rasmus Sandin and Taylor Raddysh each scored a goal and added an assist in visiting Washington's win over New Jersey in a meeting featuring the top two teams in the Metropolitan Division.

The Capitals (17-6-1) matched their franchise record for consecutive road wins with seven.

Washington got goals from Andrew Mangiapane, Connor McMichael and Jakob Chychrun. Raddysh broke a 4-4 tie with a tip-in with 6:06 to play. Dubois scored 10 seconds later for a 6-4 cushion.

Penguins 6, Flames 2: Michael Bunting and Kris Letang each scored a power-play goal and added two assists as host Pittsburgh beat Calgary.

Philip Tomasino also scored on the power play as the Penguins have goals with the man advantage in six of their last eight games. Rickard Rakell equaled a season-long three-game goal streak with his 10th of the season, while Anthony Beauvillier and Blake Lizotte also scored. Sidney Crosby extended a four-game point streak with an assist.

Alex Nedeljkovic made 30 saves for his first win since Nov. 16

against San Jose.

Flyers 3, Blues 2 (OT): Matvei Michkov scored 26 seconds into overtime as visiting Philadelphia beat St. Louis.

Owen Tippett and Tyson Foerster also scored for the Flyers, and Aleksei Kolosov had 25 saves.

Dylan Holloway and Jake Neighbours scored for the Blues. Jordan Binnington finished with 28 saves.

Kings 5, Senators 2: Anze Kopitar, Trevor Moore and Kevin Fiala each had a goal and an assist, and host Los Angeles beat Ottawa for its season-high third consecutive win.

Alex Laferriere and Adrian Kempe also scored for the Kings, and David Rittich made 20 saves.

Kopitar snapped a tie 1:37 into the third period, finding himself alone at the top of the crease before finishing for his eighth goal of the season.

Islanders 3, Sabres 0: Simon Holmstrom scored twice and Ilya Sorokin stopped 29 shots for first shutout of the season as host New York beat Buffalo.

Anders Lee also scored for the Islanders, who had lost three straight (0-2-1). Sorokin's shutout was the 19th of his career.

James Reimer finished with 17 saves for the Sabres in their third straight loss.

Wild 3, Predators 2 (OT): Jared Spurgeon scored a minute into overtime as host Minnesota beat Nashville.

Kirill Kaprizov and Declan Chisholm also scored for the Wild, who are 5-1-1 in their last seven games. Filip Gustavsson stopped 25 shots.

Fedor Svechkov and Ryan O'Reilly scored and Roman Josi had two assists for the Predators, who have lost four in a row — the last three in overtime. Juuse Saros had 25 saves.

Oilers 4, Avalanche 1: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had a goal and an assist, Stuart Skinner stopped 27 shots and visiting Edmonton beat Colorado.

Kasperii Kapanen, Vasily Podkolzin and Brett Kulak also scored as the Oilers won for the fourth time in five games.

Nikolai Kovalenko scored for the Avalanche, and Alexander Georgiev had 28 saves.

Utah 6, Golden Knights 0: Nick Schmaltz scored twice, Jaxson Stauber made 29 saves and visiting Utah beat Vegas.

It was the 28th time the Golden Knights have been shut out, but just the second time they lost 6-0, per Stathead. Vegas also lost 6-0 in Calgary on Feb 9, 2022.

Clayton Keller, Alexander Kerfoot, Logan Cooley and Michael Carcone also scored for Utah.

Sharks 4, Kraken 2: Will Smith extended his goal streak to three games, Mikael Granlund and Jake Walman each had two assists and Mackenzie Blackwood made 36 saves as visiting San Jose beat Seattle.

The victory was the second in two nights for the Sharks against the Kraken. San Jose seat Seattle 8-5 on Friday.

The Kraken fell behind 4-0 before Jaden Schwartz scored on a snap shot in the middle period. Jared McCann scored his team-leading 10th goal in the third. Joey Daccord finished with 19 saves.

NBA/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NBA ROUNDUP

Johnson, Hawks hold on, top Hornets for 3rd straight win

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Jalen Johnson had 20 points and nine assists, De'Andre Hunter added 18 points and the Atlanta Hawks handed the Charlotte Hornets their fifth straight loss 107-104 on Saturday night.

Onyeka Okongwu added 16 points and 11 rebounds for the Hawks, who have won three straight. Trae Young and No. 1 overall draft pick Zaccharie Risacher each had 14 points.

Brandon Miller finished with 32 points for the Hornets and Josh Green added 17.

Miller's 3-pointer cut Atlanta's lead to one, but Hunter answered with two free throws with 9.7 seconds left. Charlotte had a chance to tie but Miller missed an off-balance 3 and Okongwu grabbed the rebound and made two free throws to seal the game.

76ers 111, Pistons 96: Tyrese Maxey scored 28 points and visiting Philadelphia won its fourth game of the season.

Jared McCain added 19 points and Ricky Council IV scored 17 for Philadelphia, which had lost seven of its previous eight games.

Malik Beasley had 19 points for the Pistons. Jaden Ivey had 15 points and Marcus Sasser scored 12. Simone Fontecchio had 11 rebounds for Detroit — the only player on either team to reach double figures in assists or rebounds.

Bucks 124, Wizards 114: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 42 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists in his return to Milwaukee's lineup and the host Bucks won their sixth in a row by beating struggling Washington.

Antetokounmpo had missed the Bucks' 106-103 NBA Cup victory at Miami on Tuesday due to swelling in his left knee.

The two-time MVP has three triple-doubles in the last six games he has played.

Antetokounmpo had 22 points, 15 rebounds and 12 assists in a 115-114 loss at Charlotte on Nov. 16. He had 37 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds in a 129-117 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Nov. 22.

Damian Lillard added 25 points and 10 assists while Brook Lopez scored 18 points on Saturday.

Jordan Poole had 31 points Malcolm Brogdon added 29 points and 11 rebounds for the Wizards, who have lost 14 straight.

Suns 113, Warriors 105: Devin Booker scored 27 points, Kevin Durant added 21 and host Phoenix beat Golden State.

Tyus Jones added 19 points and



MATT KELLEY/AP

Hawks center Clint Capela blocks a shot attempt by Hornets forward Moussa Diabate during the first half on Saturday.

nine assists, making 7 of 9 shots, including 4 of 5 3-pointers. Grayson Allen added 17. The Suns made 18 of 35 (51.4%) shots from 3-point range.

Golden State has lost four in a row. Stephen Curry led the Warriors with 23 points but shot just 8 of 20 from the field. Andrew Wiggins added 18 points while Draymond Green had 13 points.

The Warriors trailed by 17 at halftime but cut the margin to 85-78 by the start of the fourth quarter after Curry poured in 15 points. Golden State went on a 9-0 run late in the fourth quarter to pull within 105-99 but Durant made a 3-pointer with 1:42 left to turn back the rally.

The Suns led 66-49 at halftime after making 14 of 21 (66.7%) of their 3-pointers

Mavericks 106, Jazz 94: Kyrie Irving scored 30 points and Quentin Grimes had 24 points to power short-handed Dallas over host Utah.

Dallas led the entire game despite playing without Luka Doncic (right wrist), Klay Thompson (left foot) and Dante Exum (right wrist). Naji Marshall left in the second quarter and didn't return because of illness.

P.J. Washington had 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavericks, who have won four of five games — all without Doncic.

The Jazz have lost seven of their last eight games. Lauri Markkanen scored 19 points and Walker Kessler had 18 points, 10 rebounds and five blocks for Utah.

The Mavericks led by 20 in the first quarter, thanks to Grimes' quick start with four 3s in the quarter.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	16	3	.842	—
New York	11	8	.579	5
Brooklyn	9	11	.450	7½
Toronto	5	15	.250	11½
Philadelphia	4	14	.222	11½

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	14	7	.667	—
Miami	9	8	.529	3
Atlanta	10	11	.476	4
Charlotte	6	14	.300	7½
Washington	2	16	.111	10½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	17	3	.850	—
Milwaukee	10	9	.526	6½
Indiana	9	11	.450	8
Detroit	9	13	.409	9
Chicago	8	13	.381	9½

Western Conference

Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	14	6	.700	—
Memphis	13	7	.650	1
Dallas	12	8	.600	2
San Antonio	10	9	.526	3½
New Orleans	4	16	.200	10

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	15	4	.789	—
Denver	10	7	.588	4
Minnesota	9	10	.474	6
Portland	8	12	.400	7½
Utah	4	15	.211	11

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Golden State	12	7	.632	—
Phoenix	11	8	.579	1
L.A. Lakers	11	8	.579	1
L.A. Clippers	12	9	.571	1
Sacramento	9	11	.450	3½

Friday's games

New York 99, Charlotte 98
Atlanta 117, Cleveland 101
Memphis 120, New Orleans 109
Minnesota 93, L.A. Clippers 92
Orlando 123, Brooklyn 100
Boston 138, Chicago 129
Detroit 130, Indiana 106
Miami 121, Toronto 111
Portland 115, Sacramento 106
Oklahoma City 101, L.A. Lakers 93

Saturday's games

Atlanta 107, Charlotte 104
Philadelphia 111, Detroit 96
Milwaukee 124, Washington 114
Phoenix 113, Golden State 105
Dallas 106, Utah 94

Sunday's games

Indiana at Memphis
Orlando at Brooklyn
Boston at Cleveland
Miami at Toronto
New Orleans at New York
Oklahoma City at Houston
L.A. Lakers at Utah
Dallas at Portland
San Antonio at Sacramento
Denver at L.A. Clippers

Monday's games

Miami at Boston
New Orleans at Atlanta
Brooklyn at Chicago
L.A. Lakers at Minnesota

Tuesday's games

Milwaukee at Detroit
Philadelphia at Charlotte
Washington at Cleveland
Indiana at Toronto
Orlando at New York
Utah at Oklahoma City
Memphis at Dallas
San Antonio at Phoenix
Golden State at Denver
Houston at Sacramento
Portland at L.A. Clippers



RYAN SUN/AP

Notre Dame running back Jadarian Price finishes off a TD run against Southern Cal during the second half on Saturday in Los Angeles.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL ROUNDUP

No. 5 Notre Dame punches CFP ticket

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Notre Dame's defense was backed up almost to its goal line while protecting a seven-point lead in the final minutes of the game when Southern California's Jayden Maiava fired a back-shoulder pass toward Kyron Hudson.

Christian Gray alertly picked it off, somehow keeping his feet and the ball after a pirouette — and then the sophomore cornerback ran it back for a touchdown that'll live long in Notre Dame lore.

These Fighting Irish (11-1) haven't been in many tough spots in the 12 weeks since their only defeat, but they handled pressure splendidly in the 95th edition of their biggest rivalry game.

The pressure only gets bigger in December, but Notre Dame thinks it's ready.

Gray returned his interception 99 yards for a score with 3:39 to play, Xavier Watts returned another interception 100 yards for a TD with 1:18 left, and No. 5 Notre Dame punched its ticket to the College Football Playoff with a 49-35 victory over USC on Saturday.

Riley Leonard threw two touchdown passes and rushed for another score for the Irish, who won their 10th straight game by holding off the persistent Trojans (6-6). Notre Dame has won six of seven in this famed intersectional rivalry, retaining the Jeweled Shillelagh for another year.

"The statement we made was we won our rivalry game against a dang good football team," Irish coach Marcus Freeman said. "And that was the only statement I wanted to make tonight."

Notre Dame led 35-21 early in the fourth quarter, but Ja'Kobi Lane made the second of his three touchdown catches for the Trojans with 8:43 left.

After USC stopped the Irish of-

fense, Maiava moved the Trojans to the Notre Dame 21 for a shot at a tying score — but Gray changed the game with the play of his life, returning it all the way down the USC sideline.

Maiava led another desperate drive before throwing a comparatively easy end-zone pick to Watts, who took the same route for the clinching touchdown. Notre Dame is the first team in the 21st century to have more than one 99-yard interception return for a TD in a game, let alone 2½ minutes apart.

No. 1 Oregon 49, Washington 21: Dillon Gabriel threw for two touchdowns and ran for one, and the host Ducks closed out an undefeated regular season.

Oregon, also ranked atop the College Football Playoff rankings, had already locked up a spot in next weekend's Big Ten title game.

No. 4 Penn St. 44, Maryland 7: Drew Allar threw for a touchdown and ran for another score as the host Nittany Lions advanced their first Big Ten championship game since 2016.

Nick Singleton ran for two touchdowns, Beau Pribula rushed for a TD and tossed a scoring pass to Tyseer Denmark, and star tight end Tyler Warren caught a TD pass for Penn State (11-1, 8-1 Big Ten, No. 4 CFP), which will face No. 1 Oregon for the Big Ten title with a first-round bye in the College Football Playoff at stake.

No. 13 Alabama 28, Auburn 14: Jalen Milroe passed for 256 yards and ran for 104 yards and three touchdowns to keep the host Crimson Tide's playoff hopes alive.

It was the final chance for Alabama (9-3, 5-3 SEC, No. 13 CFP) to make a statement in Kalen DeBoer's up-and-down debut season. The Tide must wait to see how the chase shakes out.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Scoreboard

ACC

Saturday's scores EAST

Army 29, UTSA 24
 Boston College 34, Pittsburgh 23
 North Texas 24, Temple 17
 Penn St. 44, Maryland 7
 Rhode Island 21, CCSU 17
 Syracuse 42, Miami 38
 UT Martin 41, New Hampshire 10
 Uconn 47, Umass 42
 Villanova 22, E. Kentucky 17

SOUTH

Alabama 28, Auburn 14
 Charlotte 29, UAB 27
 Coastal Carolina 48, Georgia St. 27
 Duke 23, Wake Forest 17
 FIU 35, Middle Tennessee 24
 Florida 31, Florida St. 11
 Georgia Southern 29, Appalachian St. 20
 LSU 37, Oklahoma 17
 Lehigh 20, Richmond 16
 Louisiana Tech 33, Kennesaw St. 0
 La.-Lafayette 37, La.-Monroe 23
 Louisville 41, Kentucky 14
 Marshall 35, James Madison 33
 NC State 35, North Carolina 10
 South Carolina 17, Clemson 34
 Southern U. 24, Grambling St. 14
 Tennessee 36, Vanderbilt 23
 Troy 52, Southern Miss. 20
 Virginia Tech 37, Virginia 17
 W. Kentucky 19, Jacksonville St. 17

MIDWEST

Illinois 38, Northwestern 28
 Illinois St. 35, SE Missouri 27
 Indiana 66, Purdue 0
 Iowa St. 29, Kansas St. 21
 Michigan 13, Ohio St. 10
 Missouri 28, Arkansas 21
 N. Illinois 24, Cent. Michigan 16
 Rutgers 41, Michigan St. 14
 TCU 20, Cincinnati 13
 W. Michigan 26, E. Michigan 18

SOUTHWEST

Abilene Christian 24, N. Arizona 0
 Baylor 45, Kansas 17
 FAU 63, Tulsa 16
 Old Dominion 40, Arkansas St. 32
 Rice 35, South Florida 28
 SMU 38, California 6
 Tarleton St. 43, Drake 29
 Texas 17, Texas A&M 7
 Texas Tech 52, West Virginia 15

FAR WEST

Air Force 31, San Diego St. 20
 Arizona St. 49, Arizona 7
 BYU 30, Houston 18
 Notre Dame 49, Southern Cal 35
 Oregon 49, Washington 21
 UCLA 20, Fresno St. 13
 UNLV 38, Nevada 14
 UTEP 42, New Mexico St. 35
 Wyoming 15, Washington St. 14

FCS playoffs

First Round Saturday, Nov. 30

UT Martin 41, New Hampshire 10
 Lehigh 20, Richmond 16
 Illinois St. 35, Southeast Mo. St. 27
 Tarleton St. 43, Drake 29
 Abilene Christian 24, Northern Ariz. 0
 Rhode Island 21, Central Conn. St. 17
 Villanova 22, Eastern Ky. 17
 Montana 41, Tennessee St. 27

Second Round Saturday, Dec. 7

Montana St. vs. UT Martin
 Idaho vs. Lehigh
 UC Davis vs. Illinois St.
 South Dakota vs. Tarleton St.
 North Dakota St. vs. Abilene Christian
 Mercer vs. Rhode Island
 UIW vs. Villanova
 South Dakota St. vs. Montana

NCAA Division II playoffs

Second Round Saturday, November 30

Slippery Rock 25, Kutztown 24, OT
 California (Pa.) 34, Ashland 33
 Valdosta St. 33, Miles 17
 Virginia Union 44, Lenoir-Rhyne 12
 Ferris St. 78, Central Okla. 17
 Harding 44, Grand Valley St. 26
 Minnesota St. 26, CSU Pueblo 23
 Bemidji St. 20, Western Colo. 19

Quarterfinals

Slippery Rock vs. California (Pa.)
 Valdosta St. vs. Virginia Union
 Ferris St. vs. Harding
 Minnesota St. vs. Bemidji St.-winner

NCAA Division III playoffs

Second Round Saturday, November 30

Saint John's (Minn.) 24, Wis.-La Crosse 13
 Susquehanna 42, Hobart 35
 Wartburg 19, Wis.-Platteville 14
 Bethel (Minn.) 48, Lake Forest 21
 Cortland 17, Endicott 9
 Springfield 54, UMass Dartmouth 27
 Hope 49, Aurora 21
 North Central (Ill.) 42, Whitworth 17
 Mary Hardin-Baylor 17, Hard.-Simm. 13
 Linfield 65, Texas Lutheran 3
 Johns Hopkins 17, Grove City 14
 DePauw 45, Maryville (Tenn.) 20
 Salisbury 33, King's (Pa.) 13
 Randolph-Macon 38, Wash. & Jeff. 22
 Carnegie Mellon 24, Centre 15
 Mount Union 42, John Carroll 7

Third Round

Saint John's (Minn.) vs. Susquehanna
 Wartburg vs. Bethel (Minn.)
 Cortland vs. Springfield
 Hope vs. North Central (Ill.)
 Mary Hardin-Baylor vs. Linfield
 Johns Hopkins vs. DePauw
 Salisbury vs. Randolph-Macon
 Carnegie Mellon vs. Mount Union

SMU reaches title game in 1st year

Associated Press

DALLAS — Brashard Smith and ninth-ranked SMU never felt they were finished, even when already locked into the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game in their league debut.

“It was really important, just being undefeated in the conference,” Smith said. “We came in on a mission.”

The Mustangs completed a sweep of their first ACC schedule with a 38-6 win over California in their regular-season finale Saturday, making them the only team in their new league that didn't lose a conference game.

“I think it shows their maturity. They wanted to finish,” third-year Mustangs coach Rhett Lashlee said. “We wanted to go 8-0, we wanted to win the regular season outright and not share it. And we were playing for a lot because the College Football Playoff still comes out with rankings for two more weeks. ... We didn't need to stumble, have a setback.”

Smith had 134 total yards (68 rushing, 66 receiving) with two touchdowns, Kevin Jennings threw for 225 yards with two scores, and the Mustangs (11-1, 8-0 ACC, No. 9 CFP) closed out the regular season with their 17th consecutive win in a league game. They won their last nine American Athletic Conference games before moving this year into the power conference.

“Just to come in our first year in



LM OTERO/AP

SMU quarterback Kevin Jennings celebrates a touchdown against California on Saturday. The Mustangs went 8-0 in ACC games.

the ACC and do it, it's really crazy for us, and it's amazing,” said Jennings, who is 9-0 as the starter this season.

Lashlee said he's in awe of his team.

“Pretty cool, you know, these guys back-to-back 11 wins, didn't lose a conference game, and going to be playing championship weekend two years in a row,” he said.

SMU will play No. 12 Clemson on Saturday for the ACC title and a spot in the expanded 12-team CFP. No. 8 Miami, Smith's team the past three seasons, would have

been in the ACC championship game with a win, but lost at Syracuse to clear the way for Clemson.

While Lashlee believes the Mustangs have done enough already to be in the playoff field, they would definitely be in with a win over the Tigers and likely have a first-round bye.

SMU took control with touchdowns on three consecutive drives early. It was 21-0 after Derrick McFall's 8-yard TD run with 13:02 left in the first half, when the Mustangs had 234 total yards. They finished with 415.

BIG 12

Sun Devils, Cyclones headed to title game

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Injuries and losses filled Arizona State's first season under coach Kenny Dillingham, capped by a disheartening setback to rival Arizona at home a year ago.

Little was expected of the Sun Devils again this year, pegged to finish last in their first season in the Big 12.

Boy, did they prove everyone wrong.

Cam Skattebo ran for 177 yards and three touchdowns, Sam Leavitt threw for three scores and No. 14 Arizona State secured a spot in the Big 12 championship game with a 49-7 blowout of Arizona on Saturday.

“Our guys played their best game of football on the most important game of the year and it was great to see,” Dillingham said.

The Sun Devils (10-2, 7-2 Big 12, No. 16 CFP) needed a victory and

a little help to get into next Saturday's conference title game.

Arizona State left no doubt about the winning part.

The Sun Devils led 35-0 at half-time behind three TD runs by Skattebo and barely let off the gas in the second half. Leavitt threw for 291 yards on 17-for-22 passing and Arizona State had 643 total yards a year after losing 59-23 to Arizona.

After a short wait, the Sun Devils locked up a trip to Arlington, Texas, next weekend with Cincinnati's 20-13 loss to TCU. Arizona State will face No. 17 Iowa State in the Big 12 championship.

“It was great to go out there and put it on them, especially after what they did to us last year,” Leavitt said. “It just makes the next one even bigger.”

No. 17 Iowa State 29, Kansas State 21: Rocco Becht threw for two touchdowns and ran for an-



SAMANTHA CHOW/AP

Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo celebrates one of his three touchdowns against Arizona on Saturday. Skattebo ran for 177 yards and the Sun Devils earned a spot in the Big 12 championship game.

other and Iowa State's defense came up with big stops in the second half to help the host Cyclones earn the first 10-win season in program history.

Becht's first TD pass, a 15-yarder to Jayden Higgins, came after Myles Purchase recovered Avery Johnson's errant pitch on the game's first play from scrimmage. Becht's 9-yard TD pass to Jaylin

Syracuse 42, No. 8 Miami 38: Kyle McCord and the host Orange knocked the Hurricanes out of title contention — and possibly ended Miami's College Football Playoff hopes — by rallying from a 21-0 deficit for a win.

McCord threw for 380 yards and three touchdowns for Syracuse (9-3, 5-3). LeQuint Allen ran for two scores and picked up two critical first downs on Syracuse's final, clock-killing drive, and Devin Grant forced a fumble that he returned 56 yards for a touchdown to help the Orange beat a ranked foe for the third time this season.

Cam Ward had 349 yards passing with two touchdowns for Miami (10-2, 6-2, No. 6 CFP), which will be off next week while Clemson faces SMU for the ACC title and will have to hope for an at-large bid into the 12-team playoff.

No. 16 South Carolina 17, No. 12 Clemson 14: LaNorris Sellers' 20-yard touchdown run with 1:08 to play gave the visiting Gamecocks their sixth straight win.

Sellers, a freshman in his first season as starter, finished with 166 yards rushing and two scores as the Gamecocks (9-3, 4-1 SEC, No. 15 CFP) continued a run that has seen them defeat four ranked opponents this month.

Clemson (9-3, 5-2 ACC, No. 12) drove to the South Carolina 18 with 16 seconds left — well within reach of a tying field goal — when Cade Klubnik was intercepted by Demetrius Knight Jr.

Noel came after Joey Petersen picked up Keagan Johnson's fumble. Noel went over 1,000 yards receiving for the season with the catch.

About three hours after the game, they had their ticket to the Big 12 title game punched when BYU's win over Houston provided the help they needed to advance to a meeting with Arizona State.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Conference title games set after chaos

Associated Press

After a chaotic end to the regular season in college football, the matchups are set for championship week. Here's a look at the showdowns coming up in the Power Four and Group of Five. All championship games are Dec. 7 except in the American Athletic, Conference USA and Mountain West, which will be played Dec. 6.

ACC Championship

No. 9 SMU (11-1, 8-0 ACC, No. 9 CFP) vs. No. 12 Clemson (9-3, 7-1, No. 12 CFP) at Charlotte, N.C.

What to know: The Mustangs completed a sweep of their first ACC schedule with a 38-6 victory over California, making them the only team in their new league that didn't lose a conference game; SMU has a 17-game conference winning streak dating to its days in the American Athletic. Clemson, which advanced to the title game after Miami lost at Syracuse, will be seeking its eighth ACC crown in the past 10 years.

Big Ten Championship

No. 1 Oregon (12-0, 9-0 Big Ten, No. 1 CFP) vs. No. 4 Penn State (11-1, 8-1, No. 4 CFP) at Indianapolis

What to know: The Nittany Lions have been one of the quietest one-loss teams all season but get a chance for a big win and a higher College Football Playoff seed with a victory in this one. They will face the last unbeaten team in college football in the Ducks, who finished the regular season without loss for the first time since 2010.

Big 12 Championship

No. 14 Arizona State (10-2, 7-2 Big 12, No. 16 CFP) vs. No. 17 Iowa State (10-2, 7-2, No. 18 CFP) at Arlington, Texas

What to know: The Sun Devils rode Cam Skattebo (177 yards and three touchdowns) in a big win over rival Arizona to land a title game berth after perhaps the wildest of all power conference races. The Cyclones will make their second appearance in the conference championship game. They lost to Oklahoma in 2020.

SEC Championship

No. 3 Texas (11-1, 7-1 SEC, No. 3 CFP) vs. No. 6 Georgia (10-2, 6-2, No. 7 CFP) at Atlanta

What to know: The Longhorns have national title hopes but first get a chance to win



STEVE CONNER/AP

Heisman hopeful Ashton Jeanty and No. 11 Boise State will face off with No. 21 UNLV in a rematch of last year's Mountain West Conference championship game.

a championship in their first year in the SEC. They will also get a chance to avenge their only loss of the season against the resi-

liant and dangerous Bulldogs, who advanced after an epic overtime win against Georgia Tech.

American Athletic Championship

No. 25 Army (10-1, 8-0 AAC) vs. No. 18 Tulane (9-3, 7-1, No. 17 CFP) at West Point, N.Y.

What to know: The Green Wave's loss to Memphis over the weekend likely cost the league any hope of a playoff bid but both teams are going to the postseason regardless.

Army still has its annual showdown with Navy before a bowl game, too.

Conference USA Championship

Jacksonville State (8-4, 7-1 CUSA) vs. Western Kentucky (8-4, 6-2) at Jacksonville, Ala.

What to know: The C-USA title game pits two teams in a rematch six days after facing each other. WKU handed the Gamecocks their first league loss, 19-17 on Saturday night, and will have to beat them again for the title.

Mid-American Championship

Ohio (9-3, 7-1 MAC) and Miami (Ohio) (8-4, 7-1) at Detroit

What to know: The two Ohio schools met earlier this season, with the RedHawks beating the visiting Bobcats 30-20. Ohio has won seven of its last eight.

Mountain West Championship

No. 11 Boise State (11-1, 7-0 MWC, No. 11 CFP) vs. No. 21 UNLV (10-2, 6-1, No. 22 CFP) at Boise, Idaho

What to know: The Broncos bring a 10-game winning streak into the championship game, have won 11 straight at home and are on the verge of making the College Football Playoff behind Heisman Trophy candidate Ashton Jeanty. They have made the Mountain West title game three straight seasons. This one is a rematch of the title game a year ago won by Boise State and a regular-season matchup in October, a 29-24 Broncos win.

Sun Belt Championship

Louisiana-Lafayette (10-2, 7-1 Sun Belt) vs. Marshall (9-3, 7-1) at Lafayette, La.

What to know: The Ragin' Cajuns earned a spot in the championship for the fifth time in the seven-year history of the game. Marshall beat James Madison 35-33 in double overtime to clinch a spot for the first time in program history.

Bitter: Buckeyes off all day in yet another loss to Wolverines

FROM PAGE 24

wered offense to 10 points, 77 rushing yards."

The Buckeyes were off all afternoon. Howard was 19 for 33 for 175 yards with one touchdown and two interceptions and Jayden Fielding missed two field-goal attempts. The run game was hardly there.

"It's hard, man," an emotional Howard said. "I really don't have much right now. I do know we're a two-loss team. We're going to get into the playoffs and make a run. But, I mean, this one hurts."

Mullings was Michigan's primary weapon. He rushed for 116 yards and the Wolverines only touchdown of the game in the first half as neither team could get much go-

ing offensively on the frigid afternoon.

"They made plays, we made plays, so as the game wore on you could definitely, slowly feel them starting to lose confidence, lose that energy and lose that faith," Mullings said.

Howard was clunky all day. In the first half he threw an interception from deep in his own territory that led to Michigan's touchdown.

He went out for a play in the second quarter to be checked for a head injury. After the game, he said he was fine.

"We're very disappointed, and never thought this would happen right here," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "We expected to win this game and go play in the Big Ten

championship game."

After the game, Michigan players attempted to plant their flag at midfield and were confronted by Ohio State players. A skirmish ensued as both teams pushed and shoved before being separated. Police deployed pepper spray in an attempt to stop the players from fighting.

The Takeaway

Michigan: Did just enough and caught Ohio State on an off day.

Ohio State: It's inexplicable how badly the Buckeyes played in their biggest game of the season. With the loss and No. 4 Penn State's win over Maryland, it will be the Nittany Lions who meet No. 1 Oregon in the Big

Ten title game.

Seniors let down

There has been talk all season about how many of the Ohio State team leaders, including receiver Emeka Egbuka, running back TreVeyon Henderson and defensive end Jack Sawyer, chose to return for another year instead of entering the NFL draft because they wanted to beat Michigan at least once. Those players were inconsolable after the game.

One of them, linebacker Cody Simon, was asked how he felt.

"I just can't speak that right now," Simon said. "I feel like we let the whole Buckeye nation down."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



SAM CRAFT/AP

Texas running back Quintrevion Wisner is tackled by Texas A&M defensive back Will Lee III after a catch and run during the first quarter Saturday in College Station, Texas. Wisner did most of his damage on the ground as the Longhorns won the teams' first meeting since 2011.

Wisner has career day, Texas advances to SEC championship

RB rushes for 186 yards as No. 3 Longhorns beat No. 20 Aggies in renewal of rivalry

BY KRISTIE RIEKEN
Associated Press

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — The third-ranked Texas Longhorns are heading to the Southeastern Conference championship game in their first season in the league after knocking off No. 20 Texas A&M on Saturday night in the renewal of a storied rivalry.

Next up is a rematch with No. 6 Georgia in Atlanta.

"The goal has always been let's get to Atlanta and if we can get to Atlanta, those other goals might start to line themselves up," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said.

Quintrevion Wisner ran for a career-high 186 yards and Quinn Ewers threw a touchdown pass to lead Texas to the 17-7 victory.

"We controlled the game and quite frankly dominated the game," Sarkisian said.

Texas (11-1, 7-1 SEC, No. 3 CFP) will face the Bulldogs next Saturday for the SEC title, with the winner getting a first-round bye in the 12-team College Football Playoff.

The highly anticipated return of this rivalry, which dates to the 1890s, had all the hype of a heavyweight title bout. It looked to be headed for a blowout after Texas raced to a 17-0 half-time lead.

But Ewers turned the ball over in the red



Sarkisian

zone on consecutive possessions to keep the Aggies in the game, the first giveaway an interception that Will Lee III returned 93 yards for a TD.

Texas A&M (8-4, 5-3, No. 20 CFP) had a shot to cut the lead to three with about 4½ minutes remaining, but Ethan Burke dropped Amari Daniels for a 3-yard loss on fourth-and-goal from the 1. The Longhorns stopped the Aggies on three fourth downs in the game.

"We just didn't play well enough on offense at all to have any chance at having success," Texas A&M coach Mike Elko said.

Backup quarterback Arch Manning ran for a score early to help Texas get its 11th straight win on an opponent's home field and its fifth consecutive victory overall since a 30-15 home loss to Georgia.

"It's a great way to end the regular season," Sarkisian said. "This is where we wanted to be. We knew when we had the slip-up earlier in the season that we would have to win out to get back to a championship game. And we've earned that right."

The crowd of 109,028 included Texas super-fan Matthew McConaughey, A&M Heisman

Trophy winner Johnny Manziel, former Saints quarterback Drew Brees and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

Ewers said it meant a lot to get the win in a series that was paused after Texas A&M went to the SEC. The teams hadn't played since 2011.

"It's been a tradition for the long time and then it went away for a little bit," he said. "Now it's back and it's fun to be on top for sure."

DJ Hicks tipped the pass that Lee intercepted and returned 93 yards for the touchdown to cut the lead to 17-7 with about six minutes left in the third quarter.

The Aggies' defense came up big again on the next possession when Cashius Howell stripped the ball from Ewers and it was recovered by Taurean York at the A&M 11 near the end of the third.

Texas A&M failed to cash in on that error and punted. The Aggies blocked a punt to get the ball back in the red zone. But the Longhorns' defense secured the win after Texas failed to score after halftime.

"We had an opportunity to do something really special this year, and we couldn't close on it," said Elko, who's in his first season after Jimbo Fisher was fired. "And so that will haunt me, that will haunt us, that will haunt the players."

No. 25 Army edges UTSA as Daily ties AAC record

BY SAL INTERDONATO
Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — Bryson Daily tied the American Athletic Conference record for touchdowns in a season and threw for a season-high 190 yards and a score to lift No. 25 Army to a 29-24 victory over UTSA on Saturday.

Army (10-1) finished the regular season 8-0 in the AAC and earned the right to host the championship game on Friday.

Daily rushed for 147 yards, his academy-record ninth straight 100-yard game, and two touchdowns.

Casey Larkin sealed Army's 10th victory of the season, picking off an Owen McCown pass at the Black Knights' 10 with 1:14 left.

"It was a great team win," Daily said. "It was great to see the defense play their hearts out like they've done all season. We knew a close game (at home) was coming at some point this season. That was today. I'm just proud of the fight that our guys showed."

Army won its 10th game for the fourth time in program history and third time in Jeff Monken's 11 years. The Black Knights had outscored their opponents 188-62 in their first five home wins.

"To be playing in the conference championship game in the first year is a little improbable," Monken said. "It's not something you anticipate. I'm glad we joined the conference. It's awesome to be in this position and have a chance to play for the conference championship. That's not something you take for granted."

Army's defense rose to the challenges all afternoon.

Kalib Fortner and Chance Keith combined to stop Brandon High on 4th-and-1 from UTSA's 16 on the first play of the fourth quarter.

Five plays later, Daily scored his 24th touchdown of the season from a yard out to give Army a 22-17 lead.

Collin Matteson picked off McCown for his first career interception with 11:17 left in the game.

Daily scored his conference-tying 25th rushing touchdown, a 42-yard run on the second play following Matteson's pick.

UTSA (6-6) fell to 0-6 away from the Alamodome. The Roadrunners opened the second half with McCown's 23-yard touchdown pass to Devin McCuin on fourth down to take 17-13 lead with 10:13 left in the third quarter.

Army senior kicker Trey Gronotte made a career-high three field goals. Gronotte's 35-yard kick tied the game at 10-10 as time expired in the first half.

SPORTS



Dunk lifts Ducks over Tide

Bittle's putback helps Oregon stay unbeaten » College basketball, Page 18

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



JAY LAPRETE/AP

Michigan kicker Dominic Zvada celebrates after making the winning field goal against Ohio State on Saturday in Columbus, Ohio. The Wolverines beat the Buckeyes 13-10.

Bitter defeat for Buckeyes

21-point underdog Michigan knocks No. 2 Ohio State out of Big Ten championship game

By MITCH STACY
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Dominic Zvada kicked a 21-yard field goal with 45 seconds left and Michigan stunned No. 2 Ohio State 13-10 on Saturday, ending the Buckeyes' hopes of returning to the Big Ten title game.

Kalel Mullings broke away for a 27-yard run, setting up the Wolverines (7-5, 5-4) at Ohio State's 17-yard line with two minutes remaining in the game. The drive stalled at the 3, and Zvada came on for the chip shot.



Moore

the biggest one of the year. It's the one that everyone looks forward to, and to be able to come in here and take the win, it's amazing."

Ohio State (10-2, 7-2, No. 2 CFP) got the ball back but couldn't move it, with Will Howard throwing incomplete on fourth down to seal the Wolverines' fourth straight victory over their bitter rival.

"You come to Michigan to play this game," Zvada said. "So, it's the biggest one of the year. It's the one that everyone looks forward to, and to be able to come in here and take the win, it's amazing."

This loss in the The Game might have been the toughest of the past four because Michigan, a 21-point underdog, was unranked and wrapping up a disappointing season. The Wolverines were playing without a couple of top players: tight end Colston Loveland and cornerback Will Johnson.

Records — and point spreads, for that matter — rarely mean much when these two teams meet.

"Our defense played outstanding," Michigan coach Sherrone Moore said. "We held a high-po-

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Consecutive wins for Michigan over Ohio State in The Game. The point spread was the widest in the rivalry since 1978, according to ESPN Stats and Info.

Associated Press

Wisner leads Longhorns to SEC title game » Page 23

SMU makes title game in 1st ACC season » Page 21

Irish hold off Trojans, punch CFP ticket » Page 20



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