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PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. Antonio Gallegos with the Alaska-based 11th Airborne Division fights during the Arctic Forge exercise in Sodankylä, Finland, on Thursday.

Forging skills in Arctic drill

Army troops take on extreme cold, Finland's forces to prepare and deter

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes
SODANKYLÄ, Finland — Army 2nd Lt. Emily Rief, concealed by a whitened camouflage tent and the cover of a nondescript patch of pine forest blanketed by powdery snow, tracked enemy movements with cutting-edge technology.
She also had an analog board that would have looked familiar in the mid-20th century, because technology sometimes fails when the thermometer reading plum-



A Finnish soldier, left, talks to 1st Lt. Tanner Kublick, from left, Spc. Jaxon Doyel and Spc. Kenneth Peak during the military exercise.

nets below -20 F.
In a part of northern Finland that even hardy Finns find austere, U.S. soldiers are learning quickly about the obstacles they may face if conflict erupts in a region where military and economic competition is rapidly increasing. Sometimes, the simplest solutions are the best.
“U.S. forces, we got some really awesome equipment that enables us to maybe go further in some ways than the Finns,” Rief said.

SEE FORGING ON PAGE 4

Dems: 70K civilians targeted for DOD firings

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers are warning the Defense Department is preparing to fire tens of thousands of civilian workers — many of them veterans — in a “tsunami of layoffs” that could pose a risk to national security.
More than 70,000 civilian personnel are being targeted for a mass firing similar to the terminations of probationary employees recently carried out at multiple federal agencies, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said Thursday during a news conference.
Affected jobs could span logistics, equipment maintenance, aircraft repair and information security, he said.
“This will inevitably impact defense readiness,” Blumenthal said. “There’s a domino effect that will extend across the military. People get demoralized and disillusioned. Costs go well beyond dollars and cents.”
The Pentagon already announced last week that it plans to terminate 5,400 workers in a first phase of cuts. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had said he expected the reductions would impact 5% to 8% of the civilian workforce. He also said a hiring freeze will be implemented after the layoffs while a review of staffing needs at the Defense Depart-

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Pentagon order aims to ID, remove transgender troops
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BUSINESS/WEATHER

Thousands report outage affecting Microsoft services

Associated Press

Thousands of Microsoft 365 customers reported having issues with services like Outlook on Saturday.

In a series of posts on the social platform X, the company said it was investigating the issue, which affected various Microsoft 365 services.

“We’ve identified a potential cause of impact and have reverted the suspected code to alleviate impact,” Microsoft said in the posts, which were published by a

company page dedicated to addressing incidents tied to its office software programs.

The company said in the afternoon that its tracking indicated that “a majority of impacted services are recovering following our change.”

Earlier some users took to social media to say they were unable to access their Outlook email accounts.

Data from Downtdetector, which tracks outages, showed thousands of reports from users.

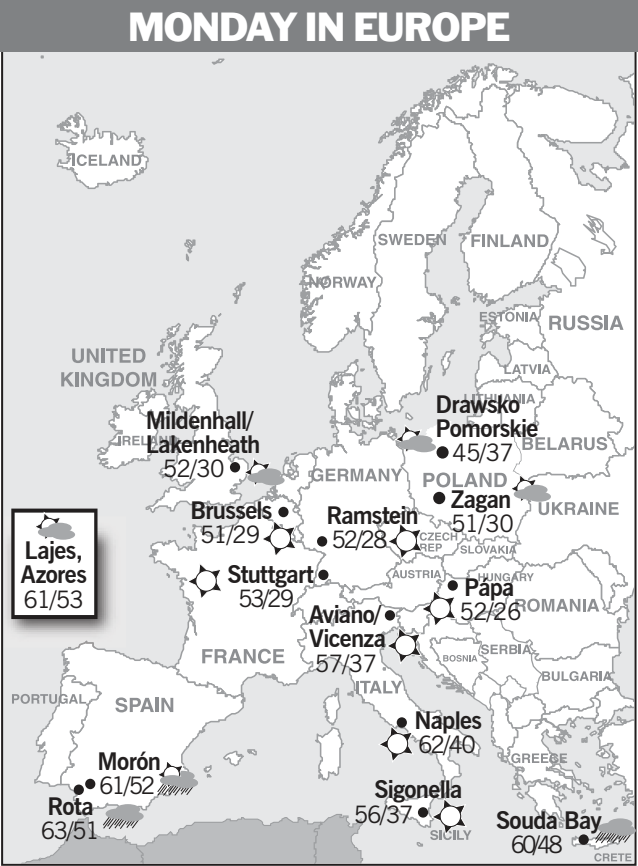
Outage reports for Microsoft 365, and Outlook, Microsoft’s email platform, in particular, peaked around 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time before dropping off as some users began making posts saying that their access had been restored.

Last week the communications platform Slack, which is also used in many office environments, experienced a similar service outage that left thousands of its users unable to use the messaging service.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates													
Euro costs (March 3)	0.94	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9034										
British pound (March 3)	\$1.23	Thailand (Baht)	34.30										
Japanese yen (March 3)	145.00	Turkey (NewLira)	36.5270										
South Korean won (March 3)	1421.00												
Commercial rates		<p>(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.)</p> <div>INTEREST RATES</div> <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>7.50</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>4.50</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>4.33</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>4.20</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.625</td></tr></table>		Prime rate	7.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50	Federal funds market rate	4.33	3-month bill	4.20	30-year bond	4.625
Prime rate	7.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50												
Federal funds market rate	4.33												
3-month bill	4.20												
30-year bond	4.625												
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768												
Britain (Pound)	1.2571												
Canada (Dollar)	1.4459												
China (Yuan)	7.2838												
Denmark (Krone)	7.1934												
Egypt (Pound)	50.6496												
Euro	0.9646												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7767												
Hungary (Forint)	389.11												
Israel (Shekel)	3.5982												
Japan (Yen)	150.56												
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3087												
Norway (Krone)	11.2724												
Philippines (Peso)	58.02												
Poland (Zloty)	4.04												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7506												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3518												
South Korea (Won)	1463.06												

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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PACIFIC

US carrier, warships arrive in S. Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. aircraft carrier and two warships arrived at South Korea's largest port Sunday in a show of force aimed at deterring North Korean provocations, the South Korean navy said.

The USS Carl Vinson pulled into Busan, about 200 miles southeast of Seoul, as part of ongoing efforts by the United States and South Korea to strengthen cooperation and train for threats posed by North Korea, according to a South Korean navy news release.

The aircraft carrier was accompanied by the USS Princeton, a guided-missile cruiser, and the USS Sterett, a guided-missile destroyer, the release said. All three warships are homeported in San Diego.

"Our military will strongly punish any North Korean provocation, and the South Korea-U.S. alliance will support peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the region through close cooperation," South Korean navy Rear Adm. Lee Nam-gyu said in the release.

While in Busan, sailors from the three warships are scheduled to participate in cultural exchanges, including a visit to the U.N. Memorial Cemetery, where approximately 2,330 Korean War veterans are buried, according to the release.

Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Moroney, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet based at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, said the carrier was making a "scheduled port visit"



ISAIAH GOESSL/U.S. Navy

U.S. Army Gen. Xavier Brunson, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, arrives aboard the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier on Saturday.



DAVID CHOI/Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson docks in Busan, South Korea, on Nov. 22, 2023.

and declined to comment on its itinerary, citing operational security concerns.

"With almost seven decades of

partnership, the U.S. and [South Korean] navies are working more closely and are more integrated than ever before," she said in an email Sunday. "This port visit highlights our continued cooperation with [South Korea] and our strong support for the region."

On Saturday, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea toured the Carl Vinson at sea alongside South Korean navy officials, according to a separate news release from the carrier strike group.

"The Carl Vinson's presence here not only underscores the importance of both the maritime and air domains but also reaffirms our commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific by integrat-

ing these unique capabilities into our comprehensive all-domain approach," Army Gen. Xavier Brunson, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, said in the release.

The Carl Vinson is the first U.S. carrier to visit Busan since the USS Theodore Roosevelt docked there on June 24. Days later, the Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group took part in Freedom Edge, the first major trilateral maritime and aerial exercise involving the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The Carl Vinson last visited Busan on Nov. 21, 2023, before conducting a one-day air-defense and maritime maneuver drill with South Korean and Japanese warships, according to South Korea's Ministry of National Defense.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries are scheduled to hold Freedom Shield later this month, a two-week air, land and sea exercise expected to involve thousands of troops from both countries.

North Korea routinely denounces the presence of U.S. strategic assets in the South. After the nuclear-powered submarine USS Alexandria docked at Busan on Feb. 10, the state-run Korean Central News Agency called the deployment an "undeniable threat" and warned of an unspecified "counteraction against our rivals."

On Wednesday, North Korea launched several cruise missiles that flew 990 miles off its western coast in a test to confirm the weapons' reliability, KCNA reported Friday.

Stinger missile exercise marks historic first for Cobra Gold

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

LOPBURI, Thailand — Four missiles streaked over a freshly harvested cornfield Friday as U.S. and Thai soldiers launched one of the first live-fire drills of this year's Cobra Gold, the region's largest joint military exercise.

The annual training, held in Thailand since 1982, began Tuesday with an opening ceremony at Camp Suranaree, about 140 miles northeast of Bangkok. Since then, approximately 8,000 troops from 30 countries have dispersed across the country for a series of drills scheduled through March 7.

On Friday, fire teams from the U.S. and Thai armies targeted a dummy drone flying overhead. U.S. soldiers fired two portable FIM-92D Stinger missiles, while Thai troops launched two Starstreak missiles from a stationary launcher.

The ground-to-air missile drill marked the first use of a Stinger missile in Cobra Gold's 44-year history.

The Stinger — a fire-and-forget weapon that's proven itself to be pivotal weapon in Ukraine and other conflicts — locks onto a target's infrared signature, while the Starstreak requires the operator to track the target manually with a laser.

Despite solid target locks and careful aiming, none of Friday's missiles struck their target. That was due to the target itself rather than any errors by the troops, said Lt. Col. Brandon Wohlschlegel.

"The Stinger and Starstreak are really meant to be used for fast movers at lower altitudes," such as helicopters, he told Stars and Stripes after the drill.

The dummy drone, a Griffon Aerospace MQM-170 Outlaw, was the largest available training tar-



An MQM-170 Outlaw target drone takes off in an empty field in Lopburi, Thailand.

get, Wohlschlegel said, adding that modifications are being developed to increase its heat signature for future exercises.

For Sgts. Kyle McWhorter and Jared Eckert, both with the 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Carson, Colo., the drill was still a valuable experience.



PHOTOS BY ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers launch an FIM-92D Stinger missile toward a dummy drone target during a Cobra Gold drill in Lopburi, Thailand, on Friday.

"It's not often you see infantrymen going out representing their country, especially on this weapon system," McWhorter said. "Despite the anticlimactic ending, it was good training for our readiness."

Cobra Gold features a range of drills, including command-and-control exercises, large-scale field training, amphibious landings, and humanitarian projects such as

disaster-relief and construction, said Capt. Jennifer Messina, spokeswoman for the 7th Infantry Division's Combined Joint Information Bureau.

This year's exercise also reflects the "evolving nature of modern warfare," with a new emphasis on cyber defense, space operations and counter-drone exercises, she told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

MILITARY

SEALs drill with Lithuanians, Germans in Baltic

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Navy SEALs and combat crewmen launched small raiding crafts from a high-speed patrol boat off the Lithuanian coastline in a show of force aimed at “reestablishing deterrence” in the Baltic region, the Navy said.

The SEALs, along with German and Lithuanian special operators, carried out a range of maritime maneuvers and combat tactics at sea over a two-week span.

“Exercises like this are crucial to ensuring we can operate seamlessly together to fight and win wars,” Capt. V. Scott King, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 2, said in a statement Thursday.

The exercises were conducted

around Klaipeda, a seaside Lithuanian city about 50 miles from the Russian military exclave of Kaliningrad.

The Baltic Sea region has emerged as a potential flashpoint with Russia. In recent months, a series of suspected sabotage incidents targeted critical undersea infrastructure, including communications cables.

In January, NATO responded with a new surveillance mission in the region focused on tracking down potential saboteurs. Some 40 U.S. Marines have deployed to Finland to assist in that campaign. Meanwhile, U.S. special operators have forged closer partnerships with their counterparts in the Baltics.

Advanced marksmanship and



WILLIAM CARLISLE/U.S. Navy

East Coast-based Navy SEALs conduct maritime training with German and Lithuanian special operations forces near Klaipeda, Lithuania, on Jan. 22. The Navy released details on the training last week.

close-quarters combat techniques were among the tactics rehearsed. The special operators also fine-tuned their ability to launch small raiding craft from the well decks of the Combatant Craft Medium, a versatile patrol vessel that plays a key role in SEAL missions.

The event culminated with a scenario that showcased the troops' preparedness to carry out combat operations in the maritime realm, the SEALs said. The Navy did not elaborate on the details of the scenario.

“This training showcases U.S. forces' lethality as well as re-establishes the U.S. military as a formidable deterrent to those who may try to test America's military capabilities,” the statement said.

Forging: Commander says more foreign troops want to train in Finland

FROM PAGE 1

“But they have history in the Arctic to make them better.”

Soldiers with the Alaska-based 11th Airborne Division have been training here in Lapland — about 100 miles from the Russian border — for a little over a week in a first-of-its-kind exercise for the unit that American and Finnish military officials are calling a success.

It's the latest in a surge of activity by U.S. personnel in the Arctic in recent years, following Russia's military expansion and China's aspirations to grow its influence in higher latitudes.

Last week's Arctic Forge exercise reflects the Army's role in ensuring that the U.S. and its allies maintain a favorable balance of power in the region, which is undergoing rapid change due to melting sea ice, even though other branches of the military are often more associated with Arctic operations aimed at protecting the U.S. homeland.

“The land component is where the people are. That's the area we need to influence,” Lt. Col. Dan Ludwig, a squadron commander with the 11th Airborne Division's 1st Brigade, told a small group of journalists Thursday during a mock land battle involving U.S., Finnish and Canadian soldiers. “And it is gaining prominence.”

Ludwig cut questions short after enemy troops, played by Finland's Jaeger Brigade, attacked his mobile command post, forcing him to rush back to the fight.

The three-day battle was the highlight of Finland's portion of Arctic Forge, which ended Friday. The exercise was designed as if enemy forces had invaded Finland, a new NATO member, which in turn called on the U.S. for urgent support.

Upon receiving the call, a company of New York-based soldiers with the 10th Mountain Division



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

A soldier with the Alaska-based 11th Airborne Division looks for enemy activity Thursday, during a mock battle in Sodankylä, Finland, that was part of the Arctic Forge military exercise.

and a platoon of Canadian infantry flew to Fort Wainwright, Alaska, to form a task force with an 11th Airborne Division company.

After training together for several days — including sleeping outside in bone-chilling weather, ski practice and shooting in the snow — the task force flew to Finland, some in a C-17 cargo plane with their equipment over the North Pole.

Soon after, they hit the ground — or rather, sank their boots into it. Finns here say the snow is unusually wet for this time of year.

The soldiers had just a few extra days of training before going into battle.

“This exercise has shown that if we needed to deploy tomorrow to this type of environment, we're more than capable of winning here,” said Canadian Brig. Gen. Robert McBride, who serves as deputy commanding general of

operations for the 11th Airborne Division.

While Arctic defense was a priority during the Cold War, attention waned as counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East took precedence. Now, as the U.S. prepares for near-peer conflict, it is again looking north.

The Arctic is warming significantly faster than the global average, according to scientific studies, resulting in ice melt that is expected to open access to natural resources and new shipping lanes.

Russia and China are poised to take advantage of those opportunities, analysts say.

A 2023 study by the Rand Corp. warned that the U.S. faces significant capacity gaps in the Arctic, including limited icebreakers, inadequate communications and insufficient troops trained for extreme cold-weather operations.

One reason the 11th Airborne

Division was established in 2022 was to develop more Arctic-ready troops. Soldiers assigned to the unit typically spend three years training in Alaska, gaining area-specific expertise that could be shared within the force.

Exercises like Arctic Forge build skills and act as a deterrent, said Dan Hamilton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

“And if deterrence fails and conflict is to happen, better for it to happen ‘there’ rather than ‘here,’” Hamilton said.

The Arctic was a focal point for potential missile and air attacks during the Cold War, as it is the shortest route between Russia and North America.

The Air Force and, more recently, the Space Force monitor Arctic airspace for threats, while the Navy and Coast Guard patrol the waters.

“No one expects that we're going to be fighting (enemy ground forces) in Alaska anytime soon,” McBride said when asked how the Army's Arctic efforts protect the United States.

“But there is a real possibility we could come over here to northern Europe to fight,” he added, emphasizing the importance of collective defense training with allies.

Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the third anniversary of which coincided with Arctic Forge, prompted historically neutral Finland and Sweden to join NATO.

While this strengthens Arctic cooperation among allies, it also means there is far more Arctic territory to defend. Finland shares an over 800-mile border with Russia.

“At the moment in Finland, we feel that we are somehow like a front-line country,” Col. Ari Mure, deputy commander of Finland's Jaeger Brigade, said Thursday at

the Sodankylä training area, which is about 600 miles north of Helsinki.

“It's no secret that we're thinking if we someday have an enemy, it will be Russia,” Mure added. “And it's very close to here.”

Mure said he was impressed by how the U.S. troops performed during the exercise, in which the invading team, played by the Finns, used tanks and various simulated weapons systems.

The North American forces called in simulated long-range fire support from a U.S. unit stationed in Norway, some 200 miles away.

That unit, the 41st Field Artillery Brigade, is becoming a regular presence in the High North, having trained in Finland in May and November 2023.

Soldiers with the Virginia National Guard, which paired with Finland last year under the U.S. State Partnership Program, were also in southern Finland conducting engineer training as part of Arctic Forge.

Mure said the demand for foreign troops to train in Finland's Arctic region has surged in recent years.

“We can't take all who want to come here now,” he said.

But of all the recent exercises, Mure said Arctic Forge was particularly important, as it tested for the first time the ability of U.S. Arctic forces to rapidly deploy to Finland in case of an attack.

“I feel this has been the best show of capability of U.S. troops that I've seen here in these conditions,” Mure said.

Finnish soldier Santeri Koivula agreed. His rank, also called jaeger, is the Finnish equivalent of a U.S. Army private.

“I thought it would be easier to beat them because this is our environment,” Koivula said Thursday. “But it's actually been quite balanced.”

MILITARY

Report details Navy shipbuilding shortfalls

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy’s approach to managing the shipbuilding industry is ineffective as ships face lengthy construction delays, according to a new federal watchdog report.

“These problems are in part because the ship industrial base faces workforce and infrastructure challenges that put the Navy’s goals out of reach. Yet, the Navy continues to expect different performance outcomes in the coming years than it has achieved in the past,” according to a report published Thursday by the Government Accountability Office.

The Navy, which relies on contracted private shipbuilding companies, planned to have a battle force of 313 ships by 2025. But in its fiscal 2025 shipbuilding plan, the Navy said the service will have 287 ships by 2025 — 26 fewer ships than expected.

From 2019-23, the Navy

planned for the delivery of 11 new Virginia-class submarines and 15 new Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. Only four of those submarines and seven of the destroyers were delivered. Additionally, the report found 37 out of 45 — or 85% — of ships now under construction are facing delays ranging from five months to more than three years.

For years, shipbuilders have said they need a stable industrial base to hire and retain a workforce and invest in shipyard infrastructure. The Navy has tried to reassure the shipbuilding industry through long-range planning, seeking the funds for future ships years in advance.

“However, our analysis of the Navy’s shipbuilding plans for fiscal years 2019 through 2025 found that the Navy made significant changes to these plans from year to year, resulting in an unreliable signal of shipbuilding demand,” the report read.

The Navy planned in 2019 to procure 11 ships in fiscal 2025. But under its fiscal 2025 plan, the Navy reduced its procurement plans to six ships. In its 2024 plan, the Navy envisioned purchasing as many as 35 next-generation attack submarines but has since proposed buying just 14 of those vessels.

Enduring changes, the report read, require a strategic, rather than reactive, approach that aligns with the National Defense Industrial Strategy. The Defense Department’s industrial strategy was first released last year to guide the department’s policy development and investment in the industrial base in three- to five-year increments.

“As such, developing a strategy to motivate the ship industrial base to perform better — including goals and the resources it needs to achieve them — will help the Navy break a cycle of poor performance that has stifled the

growth and modernization of the fleet for decades,” the report reads.

The GAO made six recommendations to the Navy and the Defense Department that include improving visibility across investments and establishing metrics for investments, and creating a ship industrial base strategy. Additionally, Navy leaders and the Office of the Secretary of Defense should better coordinate shipbuilding investments to ensure there are no duplicate investments, the report reads.

The watchdog report was released as John Phelan, the nominee to be the next Navy secretary, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee about how he would use his background in the private sector to “step outside the status quo,” if he is confirmed, to tackling issues such as shipbuilding and recruitment. A businessman with no military experience, Phelan is “not a traditional” candi-

date, multiple lawmakers have said.

“You are a non-traditional appointee for this position, and that can be OK if the tradition is not working,” said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., who introduced the GAO report during the hearing. “I think the punchline in this report is the tradition isn’t working.”

Kaine, who is the top Democrat on the Senate’s subcommittee on sea power, said it was his assumption that if Congress provides the funds, the Navy and the private sector will deliver the ships. The Defense Department spent more than \$5.8 billion from 2014-23 to support the shipbuilding industrial base, with plans to spend an additional \$12.6 billion through fiscal 2028.

“Putting more money into the bucket without changing how we are doing things — I now have completely lost confidence that that is going to solve the problem,” Kaine said.

DODEA students on Okinawa stage latest walkout for diversity

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — More than 60 high school students staged a walkout here Friday to protest Pentagon policies affecting diversity initiatives, the third such demonstration at a Defense Department school since Feb. 11.

The Kadena High School students — children of airmen and DOD employees — walked out at 10 a.m. for a 15-minute protest in front of the school, principal James Bleeker wrote in a letter emailed to parents that afternoon.

Stars and Stripes counted at least 80 students in photos taken from about 250 feet away.

Sophomore Elliot Field organized the walkout with support from the DODEA Student Advocacy Core Team, which also backed a Feb. 21 protest at Nile C. Kinnick High School on Yokosuka Naval Base, she said by email Wednesday. She took inspiration from that protest, where about 150 students walked out.

“It’s kind of frightening because I’ve never done anything like this before,” she told Stars and Stripes outside the school before the walkout. “I’ve always sort of been like, if something needs to get done, why not just do it? Something needed to happen.”

Field said she coordinated the protest with Bleeker. Miranda Ferguson, a spokeswoman for Department of Defense Education Activ-

ity-Pacific, confirmed in an email Friday that the demonstration was organized with school administrators.

Bleeker referred questions emailed by Stars and Stripes on Friday to Ferguson.

“DODEA respects the rights of our students to engage in peaceful expressions of their opinions through speech and other ways as long as it is done respectfully, does not interfere with the rights of others, and does not disrupt learning in the school,” he wrote in his letter to parents. “Our school is committed to providing a safe environment where everyone is treated with respect and encouraged to help others.”

Ferguson barred Stars and Stripes from entering school grounds to cover the protest. DODEA requires parental consent for student photographs, she wrote in an email Friday. The school did not know in advance which students would participate, she said in a follow-up message.

The school was unable to determine whether it had “appropriate image release authority” for students taking part in the walkout, Ferguson wrote.

The Kadena protest, like those at Kinnick on Feb. 21 and Patch Middle School in Stuttgart, Germany, on Feb. 11, pushed back on a Jan. 27 executive order by President Donald Trump ending diversity, equity and inclusion programs created



ELISA KAI/EK Studio Photography

Students pose with signs during a protest of anti-diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at Kadena High School on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, on Friday.

under previous administrations.

Among the direct effects of Trump’s order on DODEA schools are the review and possible removal of books and classroom discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion; potential restrictions on some school clubs and extracurricular activities; and the end of official observances like Black History Month.

Kinnick principal Kira Hurst told students and parents in a Feb. 5 email that the school was directed to “pause planned activities and events for cultural observances” in compliance with DOD guidance.

Kadena High has not notified students or parents of specific pro-

gram changes, book removals, or the end of any activities, Ferguson said by phone Thursday.

However, Field and other students said activities such as a door-decorating contest for Black History Month were canceled.

During the walkout, junior Mary Hardy called DODEA’s policies “a step back from progress made towards representing and celebrating marginalized communities,” according to a copy of her speech she emailed to Stars and Stripes. Students erupted in cheers after her remarks.

Caleese Council, a junior, said she walked out to show support and provide “power in numbers.”

She said a Black History Month program she organized had to be moved to the Schilling Community Center after she was not allowed to hold it at the school or any enlisted clubs on base.

“We couldn’t do it anywhere,” she said outside the school after the walkout. “I don’t know why it got taken away; I feel like it’s kind of stupid.”

Hardy, who helped organize the protest, said she hoped it would inspire other DODEA students to stage their own walkouts.

“We believe that political policies shouldn’t dictate what we can and cannot learn in the classroom,” she said.

MILITARY

Trans troops now being ID'd for removal

**By TARA COPP
AND LOLITA C. BALDOR**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The military services have 30 days to figure out how they will seek out and identify transgender service members to remove them from the force — a daunting task that may end up relying on troops self-reporting or tattling on their colleagues.

A memo sent to Defense Department leaders on Thursday — after the Pentagon filed it late Wednesday as part of a response to a lawsuit — orders the services to set up procedures to identify troops diagnosed with or being treated for gender dysphoria by March 26. They will then have 30 days to begin removing those troops from service.

The order expands on the executive order signed by President Donald Trump during his early

days in office setting out steps toward banning transgender individuals from serving in the military. The directive has been challenged in court.

A senior defense official said Thursday they believe there are about 4,200 troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria currently serving in the active duty, National Guard and Reserves.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel issues, said that between 2015 and 2024, the total cost for psychotherapy, gender-affirming hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgery and other treatment for service members is about \$52 million.

There are about 2.1 million troops serving.

However, the issue has taken up a large part of the Pentagon's attention and time as Trump and

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth work to root them out, arguing that their medical condition doesn't meet military standards.

"The medical, surgical, and mental health constraints on individuals who have a current diagnosis or history of, or exhibit symptoms consistent with, gender dysphoria are incompatible with the high mental and physical standards necessary for military service," Darin Selnick, who is serving as defense undersecretary for personnel, said in the new memo.

It claims that the lethality and integrity of the military "is inconsistent" with what transgender personnel go through as they transition to the gender they identify with, and it issues an edict that gender is "immutable, unchanging during a person's life."

Lawyers for six transgender service members who are suing

over Trump's executive order have argued in court filings that his directive openly expresses "hostility" toward transgender people and marks them as "unequal and dispensable, demeaning them in the eyes of their fellow service members and the public."

Sarah Warbelow, vice president for legal affairs for the Human Rights Campaign, said the new policy puts service members in a difficult position and pushes transgender troops to self-identify.

"All of a sudden, you are going to be required to out yourself. Other people are going to be required to out you," Warbelow said. "If you've got a best friend in the military who happens to know that you are transgender, under this new guidance they're required — if you are a woman who is transgender — they're required to start referring to you as 'he' and 'sir,' as

of today."

Troops are put in the position of having to choose "between the safety of their friends and violating direct orders," Warbelow said, adding that transgender service members may feel pressure to self-identify, knowing that they may be penalized by not coming forward.

On Thursday, U.S. officials said early rough numbers suggest about 600 transgender troops can be quickly identified in the Navy, between 300 and 500 in the Army and fewer than 50 in the Marine Corps. Officials said individuals could, for example, be identified by documented medical treatments, and acknowledged those numbers are likely to increase.

Other numbers were not available, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel issues.

3K troops, Strykers ordered to the border

By DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered about 3,000 active-duty troops to the southern U.S. border, including soldiers from a motorized brigade equipped with 20-ton armored Stryker combat vehicles, defense officials familiar with the effort said.

The defense secretary approved the orders Friday, said two officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal Defense Department planning. The soldiers are primarily from the 4th Infantry Division's 2nd Stryker Brigade at Fort Carson, Colo., and will be joined by soldiers specializing in engineering, intelligence and public affairs, the officials said.

The Pentagon announced the deployment in a statement Saturday afternoon after the news was first reported by The Washington Post. Hegseth has ordered the deployment of a Stryker brigade combat team and a helicopter unit to "reinforce and expand current border security operations to seal the border and protect the territorial integrity of the United States," the statement said.

The troops will arrive in coming weeks, underscoring the Defense Department's "unwavering dedication to working alongside the Department of Homeland Security



U.S. Army National Guard soldiers conduct a security and surveillance flight inside a UH-72A Lakota in Sahuarita, Ariz., on Feb. 14.

to secure our southern border and maintain the sovereignty, territory integrity, and security of the United States under President [Donald] Trump's leadership," the statement added.

About 2,400 soldiers will deploy with the Stryker brigade and an additional 550 will go with the aviation unit, said another defense official, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. A handful of others will join them.

After news of the deployment, Hegseth said in a post on X that the administration is "dead serious about 100% OPERATIONAL CONTROL of the southern border."

The mission had been in planning since January and comes de-

spite a sharp drop in border crossings since the Trump administration took office.

Hegseth said during a trip to the border in February that all options are on the table to support Trump's efforts to stop illegal migration.

The orders are part of a broader, politically fraught military mission that the Trump administration initiated to stop undocumented migrants and drug smugglers from crossing into the United States. Several thousand U.S. troops are already involved, primarily assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the detection and apprehension of migrants seeking to enter the United States illegally.

Attorneys suing to keep 10 migrants out of Gitmo amid claims of abuse

By JOHN HANNA
Associated Press

Civil rights attorneys sued the Trump administration Saturday to prevent it from transferring 10 migrants detained in the U.S. to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and filed statements from men held there who said they were mistreated there in conditions that one of them called "a living hell."

The federal lawsuit came less than a month after the same attorneys sued for access to migrants who were already detained at the naval base in Cuba after living in the U.S. illegally. Both cases are backed by the American Civil Liberties Union and filed in Washington.

The attorneys also filed statements translated from Spanish into English from two men still held at Guantanamo Bay, four men held there in February and sent back to Venezuela, and a Venezuelan migrant sent back to Texas. The men said they were kept in small, windowless cells, with lights on around the clock, hindering sleep, and had inadequate food and medical care. One man reported attempting suicide there, and two said they knew of others' attempts. The men said migrants were verbally and physically abused by staffers.

"It was easy to lose the will to live," said Raul David Garcia, a former Guantanamo detainee sent back to Venezuela. "I had been kidnapped in Mexico before, and at least my captors

there told me their names."

Another former detainee sent back to Venezuela, Jonathan Alejandro Alviares Armas, reported that fellow detainees were sometimes denied water or "tied up in a chair outside our cells for up to several hours" as punishment, including for protesting conditions.

"Guantanamo is a living hell," he said.

In another, separate federal lawsuit filed in New Mexico, a federal judge on Feb. 9 blocked the transfer of three immigrants from Venezuela being held in that state to Guantanamo Bay.

The White House and the Defense and Homeland Security departments did not immediately respond to emails Saturday seeking comment about the latest lawsuit.

The two agencies are among the defendants.

Trump has promised mass deportations of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally and has said Guantanamo Bay, also known as "Gitmo," has space for up to 30,000 of them.

He also has said he plans to send "the worst" or high-risk "criminal aliens" to the base in Cuba.

The administration has not released specific information on who is being transferred, so it is not clear what crimes they are accused of committing in the U.S. and whether they have been convicted in court, or merely been charged or arrested.

MILITARY

Former defense chiefs call for probe of firings

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Five former secretaries of defense are calling on Congress to hold immediate hearings on President Donald Trump’s recent firings of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and several other senior military leaders, according to a letter obtained by The Associated Press.

The five men — who represented Republican and Democratic administrations over the past three decades — said the dismissals were alarming, raised “troubling questions about the administration’s desire to politicize the military” and removed legal constraints on the president’s power.

Late last week, Trump fired Air Force Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown Jr. as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth followed by firing Adm. Lisa Franchetti, chief of naval operations; Gen. Jim Slife, vice chief of the Air Force; and the judge advocates general for the military services.

Hegseth has defended the firing of Brown, saying other presidents made changes in military personnel and that Trump deserves to pick his own team. Hegseth said



Brown

he fired the JAGs because he didn’t think they were “well-suited” to provide recommendations when lawful orders are given.

The letter — signed by William Perry, Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel, Jim Mattis and Lloyd Austin — said there were no real justifications for the firings because several of the officers had been nominated by Trump previously. And they had exemplary careers, including operational and combat experience.

“We, like many Americans — including many troops — are therefore left to conclude that these leaders are being fired for purely partisan reasons,” said the letter, “we’re not asking members

of Congress to do us a favor; we’re asking them to do their jobs.”

In the meantime, they said, senators should refuse to confirm any new Pentagon nominations, including retired Lt. Gen. Dan Caine, who Trump has said should be the next joint chiefs chairman.

Trump’s choice of Caine is unusual. Caine, who is widely respected in the military, would have to come back onto active duty, but he does not meet the legal requirements for the top post. According to law, a chairman must have served as a combatant commander or service chief. The president can waive requirements.

Hagel is a Republican and Mattis, an independent, was Trump’s

first defense chief. The other three are Democrats. Four of the five served in the military, including two — Mattis and Austin — who were four-star generals.

“The House and Senate should demand that the administration justify each firing and fully explain why it violated Congress’ legislative intent that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff complete a four-year term in office,” the letter said.

Brown had served a bit less than 17 months.

In recent decades, a number of three-star and four-star officers have been fired, but Pentagon leaders have routinely made clear why they were ousted.

Firings: Senators criticize workforce cuts

FROM PAGE 1

ment is conducted.

The review will help identify “low-impact and low-priority” programs that could be eliminated, according to the department. Robert Salesses, acting deputy defense secretary, stated the initiative would reallocate \$50 billion in fiscal 2026 to reflect the priorities of President Donald Trump’s administration.

Blumenthal, who was joined by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said a memo on Trump’s budget “relook” for fiscal 2026 contains a list of proposed budget reductions amounting to an 8% to 10% cut of the existing Defense Department budget estimate of \$876 billion.

Fiscal 2026 starts Oct. 1, 2025, and runs through Sept. 30, 2026. The senators did not provide the memo.

Blumenthal and Kaine are members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Blumenthal also sits on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday to consider John Phelan as Navy secretary, Blumenthal criticized cuts to the civilian workforce proposed in the memo that include reductions of more than 70,000 personnel and \$70 billion in spending.

“The administration appears to be undertaking a first wave — part of a purge — an 8% slash to both the budget and defense workforce,” he said.

“I view it as a breathtaking act of disrespect. The administration branded these positions as non-mission critical,” Blumenthal added.

Phelan said the proposed budget cuts are for planning purposes only and the reductions will come from non-warfighting elements.

At the same time, the House last week approved a budget framework that would allocate an additional \$100 billion for defense

spending in the next decade as part of Trump’s domestic agenda.

The Senate also advanced its own budget blueprint last week that calls for allocating an extra \$150 billion in spending for the military.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the administration is reviewing the entire proposed 2026 defense budget.

“This process will enable [Hegseth] to offset needless and distracting programs — such as those focused on climate change and DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] — and direct focus on important warfighting priorities shared by the Congress,” he said. “I have spoken with President Trump repeatedly, and he intends to deliver a desperately needed military rebuild and Pentagon reform agenda.”

Blumenthal and Kaine also said they sent a letter to Trump signed by 21 Democratic senators to voice concern about the impact of the pending cuts on morale in the military and veterans.

Veterans make up about 30% of the federal workforce but comprise nearly half of the Defense Department’s civilian workforce, which totaled more than 789,000 employees in June 2024, according to the department’s Defense Manpower Data Center.

Trump’s administration already has carried out firings at several federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, as part of a larger workforce reduction to bring down costs by reducing the size of government.

As part of that effort, federal employees are receiving another email this week requiring them to explain their recent accomplishments, The Associated Press reported. The first email, which was distributed to federal employees a

week ago, asked “what did you do last week?” and prompted them to list five tasks that they had completed.

Musk said anyone who didn’t respond would be fired.

Many agencies responded by telling their workforces not to respond to the email or issued conflicting guidance.

The second email was expected to be delivered in a different way, according to a person with knowledge of the situation, potentially making it easier to discipline federal employees for noncompliance with the request, according to the AP report.

Kaine described the terminations as a war on veterans.

“I think Donald Trump in six weeks has achieved the record of having fired more veterans of any president of the U.S., and he’s not done. He wants to do much, much more,” he said.

Kaine said some of the probationary employees have worked for the federal government for years but are new to their roles after receiving promotions for good performance.

He said his office learned about the experience of a Marine Corps veteran who transferred to the Agriculture Department after joining the Defense Department as a civilian worker in 2024.

He was recently laid off in the mass firing of probationary workers, Kaine said.

At a separate news conference Thursday, Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee, also condemned the firings as causing “needless pain” and creating chaos for the nation’s veterans.

Blumenthal and Kaine called on Trump to restore the jobs of any veterans who have been impacted and to provide them with back pay and benefits.



MORIAH RATNER/For The Washington Post

Federal workers rally Feb. 11 at Upper Senate Park in Washington.

White House seeks data on federal staffers’ union work

By LAUREN KAORI GURLEY
The Washington Post

The Trump administration is requesting data from all federal agencies about government resources devoted to union matters, potentially setting the stage for a showdown between the White House and federal unions.

In a memo issued Thursday to the heads of all executive departments and agencies, the Office of Personnel Management requested data on the amount of government time and funds spent on union matters, such as negotiations and grievance proceedings.

It also requested detailed information about federal employees with union responsibilities enshrined in collective bargaining contracts, including their pay, telework authorization, and work time spent on union matters.

Agencies will be required to monitor the use of “taxpayer-funded union time ... to see that it is used efficiently,” acting OPM director Charles Ezell wrote in the memo.

Legislation passed by Congress

in 1978 grants federal government employees designated paid time during work hours — known as “official time” — to engage in certain union matters related to labor-management activities, such as bargaining contracts, filing grievance proceedings and holding workplace safety training.

A federal worker, for example, may be allowed to use paid work time to represent an employee who is getting disciplined or fired. Official time is not allocated for union-specific business, such as union drives or elections.

Labor leaders and other experts said they fear Thursday’s memo signals that the Trump administration is preparing to eliminate or reduce the time federal government employees can spend on union matters. That stance is popular with some conservatives, who argue that taxpayers should not foot the bill for union matters, while union leaders say official time lets employees carry out their legal duties to represent their co-workers and resolve workplace issues.

NATION

Congress tries to avoid a partial shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As House members finished voting for the week and left Washington, the lead Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, voiced frustration that Republicans had yet to respond to her latest offer on a full-year spending bill, even though it had been made five days earlier.

Meanwhile, her Republican counterpart outright dismissed Democratic efforts to include assurances in the legislation that funding approved by Congress would be spent by President Donald Trump's administration as lawmakers intended.

"A Republican Senate and a Republican House are not going to limit what a president can do, particularly when he has to sign the bill," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

The exchanges demonstrate the divides that remain as the nation approaches a March 14 deadline to avoid a partial federal government shutdown.

Such deadlines have become commonplace in recent years with lawmakers almost always working out their differences in the end or at least agreeing to a short-term funding extension.

But with Republicans now in charge of the White House and Trump sidestepping Congress on previous funding decisions, a more contentious dynamic has emerged during negotiations, raising questions about whether lawmakers will avoid a shutdown this time.

The stage for the current negotiations was set nearly two years ago when then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and then-President Joe Biden worked out a two-year budget deal that would essentially hold non-defense spend-



CAROLYN KASTER / AP

Several divides remain between Republicans and Democrats in Congress as a March 14 deadline to avoid a partial federal government shutdown approaches.

ing flat for 2024, while boosting it slightly for defense. The agreement provided for 1% increases for both in 2025.

Democrats want to adhere to that agreement, which would bring defense spending to about \$895.2 billion and non-defense to about \$780.4 billion. Republicans are looking to spend less on non-defense programs. Cole has argued Republicans are not bound to an agreement negotiated by two men no longer in office.

It's unclear how much the two sides disagree on an overall spending amount. But Sen. Patty Murray, the lead Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said they weren't far apart.

"We are close on topline spending, but we need to know Republicans are willing to work with us to protect Congress' power of the

purse — and I welcome any and all ideas they may have on how we can work together to do just that," Murray said.

Trump pushed early to pause grants and loans potentially totaling trillions of dollars while his administration conducted an across-the-board review of federal programs. A subsequent memorandum purported to rescind the pause.

Still, a federal judge issued an order last week as a backstop. The preliminary injunction continued to block the pause. The judge said the freeze had "placed critical programs for children, the elderly, and everyone in between in serious jeopardy."

Meanwhile, Trump has empowered Elon Musk to help engineer the firing of thousands of federal employees and potentially shutter

entire agencies created by Congress.

The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the power to appropriate money and requires the executive to pay it out.

A 50-year-old law makes that explicit by prohibiting the president from halting payments on grants or other programs approved by Congress.

Democrats have sought to place in the spending bill some guarantees the administration would follow what Congress intended. But Republicans are making clear that's a non-starter.

"Democrats are placing completely unreasonable conditions on the negotiations. They want us to limit the scope of executive authority," House Speaker Mike Johnson said.

The current fiscal year began in

October, so lawmakers are already five months late. Trump complained Thursday on Truth Social, blaming Biden, saying he "left us a total MESS."

But it was congressional Republicans who opted in December to hold over budget negotiations for a few months, largely because Trump would be in the White House. Johnson on Fox News in December urged a short-term extension so "we get to March where we can put our fingerprints on the spending. That's when the big changes start."

The first fallback option is the continuing resolution Trump endorsed, a stopgap measure that would generally fund federal agencies at current levels.

The White House has submitted to lawmakers a list of what are referred to as "anomalies" that it wants to see added to a continuing resolution. For example, it wants an additional \$1.6 billion to increase pay for junior enlisted service members by an average of 10% effective April 1. Congress has also supported a pay increase in previous legislation.

The White House is also seeking \$485 million for more immigrant detention beds and for removal operations at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The request also seeks to give Trump more flexibility on how money within certain departments is spent. For example, the White House wants language allowing \$30 billion in Department of Defense transfers.

Democrats will want to negotiate some of the changes the White House is seeking, adding to the uncertainty of reaching a final agreement.

If talks break down completely, funding for agencies will end at midnight March 14.

Trump speech to Congress likely to diverge from first term

By CALVIN WOODWARD

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation will hear a new president sing a far different tune in his prime-time address before Congress on Tuesday night. Some Americans will lustily sing along. Others will plug their ears.

The old tune is out — the one where a president declares "we strongly support NATO," "I believe strongly in free trade" and Washington must do more to promote clean air, clean water, women's health and civil rights.

That was Donald Trump in 2017.

That was back when gestures of bipartisanship and appeals to national unity were still in the mix on the night the president comes before Congress to hold forth on the

state of the union. Trump, then new at the job, was just getting his footing in the halls of power and not ready to stomp on everything.

It would be three more years before Americans would see Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, then the House speaker and his State of the Union host in the chamber, performatively rip up a copy of Trump's speech in disgust over its contents.

On Tuesday, Americans who tune into Trump's address will see whether he speaks to the whole country, as he mostly did in his first such speech in the chamber as president, or only to the roughly half who voted for him.

They will see also whether he hews to ceremony and common courtesies, as he did in 2017, or goes full bore on showmanship

and incitement.

He comes into it days after assailing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to his face and before the cameras in the Oval Office for not expressing sufficient gratitude for U.S. support in Ukraine's war with Russia. It was a display of public humiliation by an American president to an allied foreign leader with no parallel in anyone's memory.

A new president's first speech to Congress is not designated a State of the Union address, coming so close to the Jan. 20 inauguration. But it serves the same purpose, offering an annual accounting of what has been done, what is ahead and what condition the country is in, as the president sees it.

It is customary in modern times for the president to say the state of

the union is strong, no matter what a mess it may be in. Trump won the election saying the state of the union was in shambles and he was going to make it right.

The Trump who addressed Congress on Feb. 28, 2017, is recognizable now, despite the measured tone and content of that speech. After all, he had already shocked the political class by assailing "American carnage" from the inaugural stage.

He told Congress that night he wanted NATO members to spend more on their armed forces, wanted trade to be "fair" as well as free and wanted foreign countries in crises to be made stable enough so that people who fled to the U.S. could go back home. But he did not open his first term with the wrenching turns in foreign policy,

civil service firings, stirrings of mass deportation or cries of "drill, baby, drill" of today.

In a line that could have come from any president of either party, Trump noted in his 2017 speech that, "with the help of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, we have formed a council with our neighbors in Canada to help ensure that women entrepreneurs have access to the networks, markets and capital they need to start a business and live out their financial dreams."

Now he belittles Trudeau as "governor" of a land he wants to make the 51st state and is about to slam with tariffs, along with Mexico. Canadians, not known for displays of patriotism, are seething about their neighbor and rushing to buy and fly their flag.

NATION

Trade war a threat to US auto industry

By PAUL WISEMAN
AND ALEXA ST. JOHN
Associated Press

DETROIT — President Donald Trump’s trade wars threaten to claim a casualty on the home front: the American auto industry.

If the president goes ahead with 25% taxes on imports from Canada and Mexico on Tuesday, he will disrupt more than \$300 billion in annual U.S. automotive trade with its two neighbors, wreck supply chains that have been operating for decades and likely push up the already-forbidding price of new cars.

The tariffs pose an “existential” threat to North American auto production, said David Gantz, a fellow at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy. They will push up “the cost of everything that’s imported from Mexico or Canada that goes into a car assembled in the U.S.”

Kelley Blue Book says Trump’s tariffs could raise the U.S. price of the average new car — already approaching \$49,000 — by \$3,000 or more. The price of some full-size pickup trucks could shoot up by \$10,000.

The economic pain would intensify if Canada and Mexico counterpunched with tariffs on American exports.

Andrew Foran of TD Economics estimates that 25% tariffs would push down auto sales by 13.6% a year in Canada and 10.6% in the United States.

Since 1965 — when the U.S. and Canada eliminated tariffs on each other’s autos and auto parts — North America has turned into an integrated auto manufacturing powerhouse. Mexico was brought into the fold by a 1994 regional

trade pact and another one negotiated by Trump himself in 2020.

“The fact that you can tap relatively cheap steel and aluminum from Canada, that you can use the relatively low-cost labor in Mexico to assemble cars, and that you can leverage the high tech expertise and technology of the United States together, makes North America an incredibly competitive place to build automobiles,” said Brett House, a professor at Columbia University’s business school.

Just over half the 8 million cars and light trucks the United States imported last year came from Mexico and Canada. Canada and Mexico are also the top two foreign markets for U.S.-built cars and light trucks, accounting for 53% of America’s auto exports.

By taxing Canadian and Mexican imports, most of which has been entering the U.S. duty free, Trump would be lobbing an explosive into that elaborate manufacturing network.

A White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the tariff plan, said the taxes would apply each time goods cross the border from Mexico or Canada. That means the costs would pile up as auto components traveled from factories in the United States to Mexico or Canada and back again.

What’s more, the 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico would come atop higher taxes Trump intends to impose on foreign steel and aluminum starting March 12. Trump is removing exemptions on the metals tariffs he imposed in his first term — 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum — and raising the levy on aluminum to 25%.



ERIN MINICHELLO/AP

Protesters line Main Street in Waitsfield, Vt., to protest Vice President JD Vance's visit on Saturday.

Crowds protest near ski resort where Vance planned vacation

Associated Press
WAITSFIELD, Vt. — Crowds protesting Vice President JD Vance the day after an Oval Office blowout over Ukraine lined roadways Saturday near a Vermont ski resort where he had planned to spend a weekend vacationing with his family.

Many of the hundreds of demonstrators held signs in support of Ukraine, while other anti-war protesters waved Palestinian flags or signs in support of immigrant rights. Protesters showed up at several locations in the area, including both sides of Route 100 in Waitsfield.

Though demonstrations were planned days in advance, they were energized Saturday morning by a heated Oval Office exchange a day earlier between Vance,

President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Vance berated Zelenskyy for challenging Trump’s assertions that Russian President Vladimir Putin could be trusted.

“Ski Russia because JD Vance has no friends in Vermont, but he’s got lots of friends in Russia, so he should go there for vacation,” Tekla Van Hoven of Waterbury told WCAX-TV.

Vance and his family arrived in Vermont ahead of the weekend, with plans to ski at Sugarbush Resort in Warren.

A few protested at the resort on Saturday.

“There were a handful of protesters at the resort throughout the day, but all were peaceful and none were disruptive,” resort spokesman John Bleh said in an

email Sunday. He declined further comment, referring reporters to the White House.

Messages left Sunday for White House officials weren’t immediately returned.

Republican Gov. Phil Scott issued a statement on Thursday welcoming Vance and his family to the state, and asked Vermont residents to do the same even if they have political differences with the vice president.

“I hope Vermonters remember the vice president is here on a family trip with his young children and, while we may not always agree, we should be respectful,” the statement said.

A smaller number of protesters in support Vance and President Donald Trump also showed up with a “welcome rally.”

Tate brothers return to US, DeSantis says they are not welcome in Fla.

By KATE PAYNE
AP/Report For America

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Andrew and Tristan Tate, who are charged with human trafficking in Romania, have returned to the U.S. after authorities lifted travel restrictions on the siblings, who have millions of online followers.

After the pair arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on Thursday, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis made it clear the influencer brothers are not welcome in his state and that his administration is conducting a preliminary inquiry into the pair — sparking pushback from supporters of the Tates.

Andrew Tate, 38, is a former professional kickboxer and self-described misogynist who has amassed more than 10 million fol-

lowers on X. He and his brother Tristan Tate, 36, are vocal supporters of President Donald Trump.

Andrew Tate is a hugely successful social media figure, attracting millions of followers, many of them young men and schoolchildren who were drawn in by the luxurious lifestyle the influencer projects online.

He previously was banned from TikTok, YouTube and Facebook for hate speech and his misogynistic comments, including that women should bear responsibility for getting sexually assaulted.

The Tates, who are dual U.S.-British citizens, were arrested in late 2022 and formally indicted last year on charges they participated in a criminal ring that lured women to Romania where they

were sexually exploited. Andrew Tate was also charged with rape. They deny the allegations.

The Tates’ departure came after Romanian Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu said last month that a Trump administration official expressed interest in the brothers’ case at the recent Munich Security Conference.

The Tates arrived in the U.S. Thursday, landing in Fort Lauderdale around midday.

Speaking to reporters at the airport, Andrew Tate repeated his insistence that the siblings had done nothing wrong.

The brothers are expected to return to Romania, where they still face criminal charges. An attorney for the siblings there did not immediately respond to a request

for comment on Friday on when they are due back in the country.

The brothers’ return to the U.S. has sparked disagreement among conservative commentators and officials.

Speaking to reporters, Florida’s Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis made clear he doesn’t want the brothers to remain in his state.

Florida’s attorney general is examining whether the state may have any jurisdiction over the brothers’ alleged crimes, and if so, how to “hold them accountable.” In court documents, the Tates have said they are not and have never been Florida residents.

Once the legal saga in Romania ends, the United Kingdom has an extradition request — that was approved last year by a Romanian



VADIM GHIRDA/AP

Andrew Tate leaves after a hearing in Bucharest, Romania, Wednesday, June 21, 2023.

court — for separate charges the Tates face there related to allegations of sexual aggression.

NATION



RODRIQUE NGOW/AP

Protesters rally outside of a Tesla store in Boston, on Saturday, against the company's CEO, Elon Musk, who is leading an effort to cut government jobs on behalf of President Donald Trump.

Anti-DOGE protests at Tesla target Musk's bottom line

BY RODRIQUE NGOWI
AND JONATHAN J. COOPER
Associated Press

BOSTON — Demonstrators gathered outside Tesla stores across the U.S. on Saturday to protest the automaker's billionaire CEO, Elon Musk, and his push to slash government spending on behalf of President Donald Trump.

The demonstrations are part of a growing backlash in North America and Europe to Musk's disruptive role in Washington.

Critics of Trump and Musk hope to discourage and stigmatize purchases of Tesla, the electric car company that is the world's most valuable automaker. Liberal groups for weeks have organized anti-Tesla protests in hopes of galvanizing opposition to Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and energizing Democrats still demoralized by Trump's November victory.

"We can get back at Elon," said

Nathan Phillips, a 58-year-old ecologist from Newton, Mass., who was protesting in Boston on Saturday. "We can impose direct economic damage on Tesla by showing up at showrooms everywhere and boycotting Tesla and telling everyone else to get out, sell your stocks, sell your Teslas."

Musk is taking direction from Trump to slash federal spending and sharply reduce the workforce, arguing that Trump's victory gave the president and him a mandate to restructure the U.S. government. DOGE officials have swiftly gained access to sensitive databases, directed thousands of federal job cuts, canceled contracts and shut down sections of the government.

Musk's critics say his actions defy Congress' power to control the U.S. budget and present a host of ways for him to enrich himself.

"Protests will not deter President Trump and Elon Musk from delivering on the promise to establish

DOGE and make our federal government more efficient and more accountable to the hardworking American taxpayers across the country," said White House spokesperson Harrison Fields.

Tesla did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

More than 50 demonstrations were listed Saturday on the website Tesla Takedown, with more planned later in March in the United States along with England, Spain and Portugal. News reports showed demonstrations in recent days in U.S. cities including Tucson, Ariz.; St. Louis; New York City; Dayton, Ohio; Charlotte, N.C.; and Palo Alto, Calif.

Tesla's share price has fallen by nearly a third since Trump took office, though it's still higher than it was a year ago. Musk's current net worth is an estimated \$359 billion, according to Forbes, which calculated his 2024 net worth as \$195 billion.

Judge: Watchdog agency head must keep job

BY ALANNA DURKIN RICHER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of a federal watchdog agency must remain in his job, a judge in Washington ruled on Saturday, saying Republican President Donald Trump's bid to remove the special counsel was unlawful.

U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sided with Hampton Dellinger, who leads the Office of Special Counsel, in a legal battle over the president's authority to oust the head of the independent agency that's likely headed back to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Dellinger sued Trump last month after he was fired, even though the law says special counsels can be removed by the president "only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office." Jackson, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, quickly reinstated Dellinger in the job while he pursued his case.

Jackson rejected the Trump administration's claims that the special counsel's removal protections are unconstitutional because they prevent the president from rightfully installing his preferred agen-

cy head.

The judge said allowing the president to remove the special counsel at will would have a chilling effect on his crucial duties, which include guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblowing.

The Justice Department quickly filed court papers indicating it will challenge the ruling to Washington's federal appeals court. The case has already gone up once to the Supreme Court, which previously temporarily allowed Dellinger to remain in his job.

Sirens at agencies as Musk polices his own conflicts

BY FAIZ SIDDIQUI
AND HANNAH NATANSON
The Washington Post

When the Office of Personnel Management asked federal workers to explain what they did last week, the email landed with extra weight for workers at NASA's Human Landing System program.

The program has a lunar lander contract with Blue Origin, the rocket company owned by Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos. Replying to the email could reveal details of that contract work to Blue Origin's primary competitor: Billionaire Elon Musk, now a powerful adviser to President Donald Trump and also the founder of the rocket company SpaceX.

Initially, workers at NASA were told they didn't need to respond to the email, according to a person familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution. But then a program manager for HLS sent a note, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post, saying that she would reply and would "recommend we all do."

The note urged workers to exclude proprietary or contractually sensitive information. But NASA workers were nonetheless rattled by the idea of disclosing what they were doing to OPM, an agency run by Musk's allies — in the latest collision between Musk's public role and his sprawling business empire.

Since formally joining the Trump administration as a "special government employee," Musk has said he would recuse himself from tasks that might pose a conflict of interest; the White House has said Musk would police those conflicts himself. But that hasn't eased concerns in agencies that do business with Musk's companies or his competitors. Federal law generally prohibits public officials from working on issues in which they, their families or their outside employers have financial interest, and ethics offices — not the officials — are supposed to decide what poses a conflict.

At the Federal Aviation Administration, worry over potential conflicts of interest spiked after revelations that the agency is close to shifting work on a \$2.4 billion contract for its communications systems from Verizon to Musk's Starlink.

"For them to come in and be awarded the contract at the last minute is startling across the board," said an employee briefed on the agency's deliberations, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution. "It's such a clear conflict of interest."

Meanwhile, a handful of SpaceX employees have arrived at the FAA and gotten temporary waivers from conflict-of-interest rules so they can review its technology on behalf of the U.S. DOGE Service, a budget-cutting agency Trump created under Musk's command (though the White House now says Musk is merely a presidential adviser and that DOGE is run by administrator Amy Gleason).

"FAA's office of commercial space [flight] regulates SpaceX, and now we have their employees inside our agency while they still serve SpaceX," said another worker, also speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Musk and SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment, nor did Neuralink, Musk's brain chip startup.

But in the FAA, some people are uncomfortable about allies — or employees — of Musk reviewing an agency that also grants licenses to SpaceX and its competitors, according to a different FAA staffer who also spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

"It's a fox in the henhouse situation," another FAA staffer said.

Such worries are even more prevalent at NASA, the agency most closely tied to Musk's business empire. NASA has invested more than \$15 billion into SpaceX, according to a Post analysis that cited an agency spokeswoman.

Within days of a DOGE team arriving at the agency, the engineering directorate at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida held a large question-and-answer session, according to an employee, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. One of nearly 600 attendees spoke up to ask a question that had been on many staffers' minds, the employee said.

"With Elon seemingly having his hand in everything and SpaceX being a major NASA contractor," the employee recalled this person asking, "what should we do regarding any conflicts of interest?"

Leaders in the meeting told staff to pass any concerns up their normal management chain, the employee said. But the response yielded more questions than answers, according to interviews with a half dozen NASA employees, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation over criticizing Musk publicly. They said Musk's rapid entry into their agency is stirring alarm that he could try to use NASA data or weaken its regulatory and safety functions to boost his company's fortunes.

NATION

Florida Man Games make return for Round 2

By DANIEL KOZIN
Associated Press

ELKTON, Fla. — The Florida Man Games are back for Round 2, as teams from around the state gather to prove they have what it takes to join the ranks of the world’s worst superhero.

Following the success of last year’s inaugural Florida Man Games in downtown St. Augustine, organizers have moved Saturday’s event a few miles away to the St. Johns County Fairgrounds, where they expected to have room for more spectators and tailgating.

The games were hosted by Florida comedians Josh Wicks Robinson and Kevin Flynn.

Poking fun at the state’s reputation for bizarre stories, last year’s teams competed in Florida-themed events like the Evading Arrest Obstacle Course and Beer Belly Sumo Wrestling. New events added this year include Hurricane Party Prep: Grocery Aisle Brawl and Human Beer Pong.

Ten teams from around the state, from Fort Myers to Pensacola, were competing. Last year’s winner, team Hanky Spanky from St. Augustine, were returning to defend their snakeskin championship belt. Also competing this year was an all-female team called the Ball Busters.

Croix Bruns, a 29-year-old tech-



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

April Cullinan, left, of Gainesville, Fla., and Zach Reynolds, of Tampa, Fla., compete in the Florida Sumo Cage Match and Beer Chug event during the Florida Man Games on Saturday in Elkton, Fla.

nician for Dave & Buster’s, participated in the weaponized pool noodle competition. He has lived in Florida his whole life, with the tattoos “to show for it,” and he said he believes that a “true Florida Man”

doesn’t prepare for the games.

“They’re just born ready to be great,” Bruns said. “They’re born ready for the trophy and ready for the title, and each year someone new has to be born for it.”

The Florida Man Games are something you won’t find anywhere else, he said.

“We’ve got the Olympics and they’ve been around forever, but they don’t have gator tossing,”

Bruns said. “They don’t have a contest where you’ve got to hold your beer and fight someone else at the same time.”

Besides watching the events, guests have a chance to get up to Florida Man shenanigans themselves. They can interact with alligators from Gatorland and ride a mechanical alligator. The games also feature a show by “Midget Wrestling Warriors” and lawnmower racing hosted by NASCAR driver Jeffrey Earnhardt.

To announcer Che Durena, the games embody Florida in a competitive sense.

“It’s exactly on-brand the way I thought it would be,” he said. “It’s the right level of grimy and extravagance and debaucherous. It’s exactly what I want. It’s a lot of people day drinking, a lot of people getting sunburnt, a lot of people just partying and acting foolish in the best way.”

The “Florida Man” phenomenon seeped into the nation’s consciousness thanks in part to a Twitter account that started in 2013 with the handle @FloridaMan. The account touted “real-life stories of the world’s worst superhero,” sharing news headlines such as “Florida Man Bites Dog to ‘Establish Dominance’ ” and “Florida Man Tried to Pay for McDonald’s With Weed.”

Private lunar lander aces moon touchdown with NASA delivery

By MARCIA DUNN
Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth’s celestial neighbor ahead of astronaut missions.

Firefly Aerospace’s Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon’s northeastern edge of the near side.

Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company’s Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles away.

“You all stuck the landing. We’re on the moon,” Firefly’s Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported.

An upright and stable landing makes Firefly — a startup founded a decade ago — the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Eleven countries have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the U.S., China, India and Japan.

A half hour after landing, Blue Ghost started to send back pictures from the surface, the first one a selfie somewhat obscured by the sun’s glare. The second shot included the home planet, a blue dot glimmering in the blackness of space.

Two other companies’ landers are hot on Blue Ghost’s heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week.

Blue Ghost — named after a rare U.S. species of fireflies — had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 tall and 11 feet wide, providing extra stability, according to the company.

Launched in mid-January from Florida, the lander carried 10 experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid \$101 million for the delivery, plus \$44 million for the science and tech on board. It’s the third mission under NASA’s commercial lunar delivery program, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade.

Firefly’s Ray Allensworth said the lander skipped over hazards including boulders to land safely.

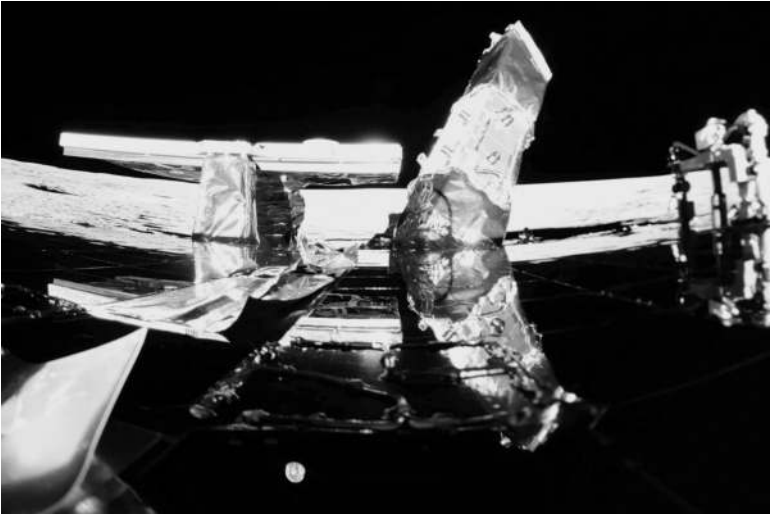
Allensworth said the team continued to analyze the data to figure out the lander’s exact position, but all indications suggest it landed within the 328-foot target zone in Mare Crisium.

The demos should get two weeks of run time, before lunar daytime ends and the lander shuts down.

It carried a vacuum to suck up moon dirt for analysis and a drill to measure temperature as deep as 10 feet below the surface. Also on board: a device for eliminating abrasive lunar dust — a scourge for NASA’s long-ago Apollo moonwalkers, who got it caked all over their spacesuits and equipment.

On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. The lander continued to stun once in orbit around the moon, with detailed shots of the moon’s gray pockmarked surface. At the same time, an on-board receiver tracked and acquired signals from the U.S. GPS and European Galileo constellations, an encouraging step forward in navigation for future explorers.

The landing set the stage for a fresh crush of visitors angling for a piece of lunar business.



Firefly Aerospace/AP

Private lunar lander Blue Ghost is seen after touching down on the moon with a special delivery for NASA on Sunday.

Another lander — a tall and skinny 15-footer built and operated by Houston-based Intuitive Machines — is due to land on the moon Thursday. It’s aiming for the bottom of the moon, just 100 miles from the south pole. That’s closer to the pole than the company got last year with its first lander, which broke a leg and tipped over.

Despite the tumble, Intuitive Machines’ lander put the U.S. back on the moon for the first time since NASA astronauts closed out the Apollo program in 1972.

A third lander from the Japanese company ispace is still three months from landing. It shared a rocket ride with Blue Ghost from

Cape Canaveral on Jan. 15, taking a longer, windier route. Like Intuitive Machines, ispace is also attempting to land on the moon for the second time. Its first lander crashed in 2023.

The moon is littered with wreckage not only from ispace, but dozens of other failed attempts over the decades.

NASA wants to keep up a pace of two private lunar landers a year, realizing some missions will fail, said the space agency’s top science officer Nicky Fox.

“It really does open up a whole new way for us to get more science to space and to the moon,” Fox said.

European leaders discuss an end to war in Ukraine

WORLD

Israel cuts off Gaza aid to pressure Hamas

BY TIA GOLDENBERG AND SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of “additional consequences” if Hamas doesn’t accept a new proposal to extend a fragile ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the existing ceasefire agreement and said its decision to cut off aid was “cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack” on

the truce, which took hold in January after more than a year of negotiations. Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday.

The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and a lasting ceasefire.

An Israeli official said the deci-

sion to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration.

Hundreds of aid trucks have entered Gaza daily since the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, and it was unclear what the immediate impact of the aid cutoff would be.

Israel said the new proposal, which it said came from U.S. Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, called for extending the ceasefire through Ramadan — the Muslim holy month that began over the weekend — and the Jewish Pas-

sover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office.

Hamas warned that any attempt to delay or cancel the ceasefire agreement would have “humanitarian consequences” for the hostages and reiterated that the only way to free them was through

implementing the existing deal, which did not specify a timeline for freeing the remaining captives.

Hamas has said it is willing to free the hostages all at once in Phase 2, but only in return for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

An Egyptian official said Hamas and Egypt would not accept a new proposal aimed at returning the remaining hostages without ending the war.

Kurdish militants declare ceasefire in 40-year insurgency in Turkey

BY ANDREW WILKS
Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Kurdish militants who have waged a 40-year insurgency in Turkey declared a ceasefire on Saturday in what could mark a significant boost to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government, two days after their imprisoned leader called for the group to disarm.

The announcement by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, comes alongside major changes in the region, including the reconfiguration of power in neighboring Syria, the weakening of the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

While the government is yet to respond in detail to the PKK’s declaration, Erdogan warned that Turkey would “always keep our iron fist ready in case the hand we

extend is left in the air or bitten.”

Speaking at a Ramadan fast-breaking dinner in Istanbul, Erdogan added: “We will continue our ongoing (military) operations, if necessary, until we eliminate the last terrorist without leaving a single stone on top of another, without leaving a single head on his shoulder.”

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has led to tens of thousands of deaths since it began in 1984. The ceasefire is the first sign of a breakthrough since peace talks broke down in summer of 2015.

The PKK declaration was published by the Firat News Agency, a media outlet close to the group, on Saturday. It referred to the insurgents’ leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999.

The peace initiative between the Turkish state and the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and Western allies, was started in October by Erdogan’s coalition partner, Devlet Bahceli, a far-right politician who suggested that Ocalan could be granted parole if his group renounces violence and disbands.

“There is an opportunity to take a historic step toward tearing down the wall of terror that has stood between (Turkish and Kurdish peoples’) 1,000-year-old brotherhood,” Erdogan said on Friday.

Some believe the main aim of the reconciliation effort is for Erdogan’s government to garner Kurdish support for a new constitution that would allow him to remain in power beyond 2028, when his term ends.

Pope gets visit from Vatican secretary of state

BY NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

ROME — A stable Pope Francis had a visit Sunday from the Vatican secretary of state as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia, the Vatican said, but again skipped his weekly noon blessing to avoid even a brief public appearance from the hospital.

Instead, the Vatican distributed a message from the pope in which he thanked his doctors for their care and well-wishers for their prayers and prayed again for peace in Ukraine and elsewhere.

“From here, war appears even more absurd,” Francis said in the message, which he drafted in recent days from the Gemelli hospital, the Vatican said. Francis said he was living his hospitalization as an experience of profound solidarity with people who are sick and suffering everywhere.

It marked the third weekend in a row that Francis has canceled the Sunday appointment delivering the Angelus prayer in person.

But many signs indicated he was recovering and improving. He had no fever or signs of elevated white blood cells, which would signal his body was still fighting an infection.

Doctors on Saturday reported that Francis was in stable condition, with no mention of him being critical. Their upbeat assessment came a day after a respiratory crisis that resulted in him being put on noninvasive mechanical ventilation.

But the 88-year-old pope had a “good response” in his gas exchange levels even during the “long periods” he was off the ventilator mask Saturday and only using high-flow supplemental oxygen, the Vatican said.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill would make it harder to sue for excessive force

AL MONTGOMERY — Divisive legislation that would expand legal immunity for police officers who use excessive force or kill someone in the line of duty advanced in the Alabama legislature last week.

The action sparked outcry among civil rights attorneys and activists who say that it would make civil and criminal prosecution functionally impossible.

Existing Alabama law already offers enhanced legal protections for law enforcement, but proponents of the “back the blue” bill say that it will increase the recruitment and retention of officers and make police safer.

Police and civilians alike are currently entitled to a “stand your ground” hearing in criminal cases where a judge can determine whether the defendant acted in self-defense. The new bill would allow an additional immunity hearing for officers accused of criminal wrongdoing, where a judge will decide if a case can proceed based on whether the officer acted recklessly outside the scope of law enforcement duties.

As the bill is currently written, even if the judge initially denies the officer immunity in a criminal case, defense attorneys for the officers can repeat their argument for immunity in front of a jury.

Man gets probation for threatening ex-speaker

MT BILLINGS — A Montana man was sentenced to four years of probation for threatening to assault former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy after becoming upset with the government for not shooting down a Chinese spy balloon that floated over the defendant’s home city.

Richard Rogers, 45, of Billings, was convicted by a federal jury on charges of threatening a member of Congress and making harassing phone calls to the FBI and congressional staff. He routinely made vulgar and obscene comments and berated officials during the calls.

Prosecutors last week urged Judge Susan Watters to sentence Rogers to two years in prison. But Watters noted that Rogers did not act on his threats.

Katy Perry, Gayle King part of trip into space

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — Katy Perry and Gayle King are headed to space with Jeff Bezos’ fiancée Lauren Sanchez and three other women.

Bezos’ rocket company Blue Origin announced the all-female celebrity crew on Thursday.

Sanchez, a helicopter pilot and former TV journalist, picked the crew who will join her on a 10-minute spaceflight from West Texas, the company said. They will blast off sometime this spring aboard a



Ty O’Neil/AP

Jumbo traffic jam

A section of a 747 jetliner is towed through Las Vegas last week on its way to a new home at Area 15, where it will be part of an immersive art display. The section had been transformed into a party venue at the 2017 Burning Man Festival.

New Shepard rocket. No launch date was given.

Blue Origin has flown tourists on short hops to space since 2021. Some passengers have gotten free rides, while others have paid a hefty sum to experience weightlessness. It was not immediately known who’s footing the bill for this upcoming flight.

Sanchez invited singer Perry and TV journalist King, as well as a former NASA rocket scientist who now heads an engineering firm Aisha Bowe, research scientist Amanda Nguyen and movie producer Kerianne Flynn.

Woman arrested in Tesla dealership vandalism

CO DENVER — Federal prosecutors have charged a woman in connection with vandalism of a Colorado Tesla dealership, which included Molotov cocktails being thrown at vehicles and the words “Nazi cars” spray painted on the building, along with a message that appeared directed at company co-founder Elon Musk.

Lucy Grace Nelson appeared in federal court in Denver on Thursday after being arrested on a single federal charge of malicious destruction of property. Her ankles and wrists were shackled. She wore a purple tie-dye shirt and red-and-black checked pants, as she sat in the jury box with other defendants waiting for their cases to be called.

Cassie Wiemken of the U.S. At-

torney’s Office said the federal government had a compelling interest to prosecute the case because of the danger posed by the “incendiary devices” allegedly used.

Presidential meme coins draw criticism from Dem

CA SAN FRANCISCO — The first legislation sponsored by freshman Rep. Sam Liccardo takes aim at President Donald Trump’s meme coin.

The president’s launch of a meme coin just before taking office last month needed some kind of response, Liccardo said. Those who bought the meme coin right after launch made out, but the price quickly dropped leaving others with big losses. Even Trump-supporting crypto enthusiasts found the launch distasteful.

“That behavior is so self-evidently unethical that it raises the question why isn’t there a clear enough prohibition,” he said, adding that Trump’s meme coin raises concerns about transparency, insider trading and improper foreign influence.

DMV voter registrations restart after snafu

OR SALEM — Oregon authorities say the state’s DMV has resumed automatic voter registrations, after being paused since last fall because of the discovery of errors that registered nearly 1,600 people who

didn’t show proof of U.S. citizenship.

Gov. Tina Kotek had paused the automatic DMV registrations in October. The improper voter registrations occurred in part because Oregon allows some residents who aren’t citizens to obtain driver’s licenses, and the state’s so-called “Motor Voter” law automatically registers most people to vote when they seek a new license or ID.

The Secretary of State’s office said it reviewed the cases and found that of the nearly 1,600 people who were mistakenly registered, only 17 voted in an election.

The Secretary of State’s elections division investigated the 17 cases, according to the office’s website. Eight cases are closed, six cases are still under active investigation by the office and three were referred to the Oregon Department of Justice for further investigation.

The DMV said it has put new controls in place. It hired a “voter registration integrity analyst” and changed the computer interface for DMV staff and now requires a manager to review all files for accuracy at the end of the day.

Outrage follows release of cannibal killer

CT HARTFORD — The conditional release granted to a man who axed a man to death before eating his brain and one of his eyeballs has outraged a number of Connecticut

lawmakers, including one who has proposed a bill that would partially reform the standards used by the state board that made the decision.

The release, granted to Tyree Smith following a hearing before the state Psychiatric Security Review Board, made headlines around the world as details of the horrific killing spread.

It also drew sharp criticism from multiple Connecticut Republicans who have expressed safety concerns for those living and working in the group home where Smith resides and the surrounding community.

The granting of Smith’s release also brought into forefront House Bill 6392, which was proposed in January by Republican state Rep. Devin Carney. Carney said he brought the bill forward after learning last year that Smith in 2023 had been granted temporary leave privileges, including overnights, from Whiting Forensic Hospital.

The bill would require the review board to consider public safety as its “primary concern” while treating the wellbeing of an acquittee as “secondary.” It would also require hearings to be held for individuals requesting temporary leave and increase the waiting period between applications for such leave privileges and conditional release from six months to a year.

FACES

Back to musical roots

Jessica Simpson releases her first single in almost 17 years

By Cerys Davies
Los Angeles Times

Jessica Simpson, the pop singer turned fashion mogul, reality TV star and bestselling author, is returning to her musical roots.

Simpson released “Use My Heart Against Me,” a single off her upcoming EP, “Nashville Canyon, Part 1,” last month. It marks Simpson’s first single in almost 17 years — her last project was the 2008 album “Do You Know.”

In an interview for the Cut with her sister, Ashlee Simpson Ross, the 44-year-old musician said she’s exploring a new chapter in her life through music. “Through the deepest heartbreak of my life, it was the most intense yet enlightening therapy I’ve ever been through,” Simpson said.

In January, Simpson and former NFL player Eric Johnson announced their separation after a decadelong marriage. Together, they have three children: Maxwell “Maxi” Drew, 12; Ace Knute, 11; and Birdie Mae, 5.

Simpson said she first came up with the idea for the rockabilly EP when she was in Nashville, celebrating her daughter Maxwell’s birthday. Instead of requesting the Happy Birthday song, the 11-year-old asked her mother to sing Hank Williams’ “I Saw the Light.” Simpson said it led to “all these flashbacks of making [her] first record at 14.”

“I saw the light: I had to be in Nashville,” she told Simpson Ross.

“I started looking at real estate that day.” After returning to Nashville and chasing her passion, Simpson said she was able to branch out musically without the pressures of a controlling record label. From her beginnings in gospel music, the singer got her big break when she signed to Columbia Records in 1997. She went on to release major pop hits “I Wanna Love You Forever” and “With You.”

“The music releases from my younger years were all over the place in terms of actual direction. It was always about following pop-music trends no matter the cost,” Simpson said in the same interview. “Even if I didn’t love what I was singing, it was what the label needed of me. I was always going to abide by the rules because I was taught to be a rule-abider.”

She says the vulnerability heard in her new music comes from how her audience received her 2020 memoir, “Open Book.” In the bestselling book, she recounts struggles with addiction, body image and toxic relationships. It sold more than half a million copies in 14 weeks and was adapted by Amazon FreeVe into a scripted TV series.

To Simpson, “Nashville Canyon, Part 1” isn’t about making a hit record.

“It was just about having a vibe. There’s really not a lot of that in LA right now. It’s formulaic. I wanted to break that mold for myself personally,” Simpson said in the Cut cover story. “I don’t care if anything’s a hit. I’m not with



Jessica Simpson has released “Use My Heart Against Me,” from her upcoming rockabilly EP, “Nashville Canyon, Part 1.”

a record label. I don’t expect it to even be on the radio.”

The EP will be released March 21.

Lithgow says he has role in ‘Potter’ reboot

Los Angeles Times

It seems John Lithgow spilled the (Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor) beans about his involvement in HBO’s upcoming “Harry Potter” series.

The Oscar-nominated actor revealed last week that he has agreed to enter the magical halls of Hogwarts and join the TV reboot in a pivotal role. Lithgow, 79, confirmed to Screen Rant in an interview published Feb. 25 that he is set to play Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore.

“I’m very excited,” he told the website. “Some wonderful people are turning their attention back to ‘Harry Potter.’ That’s why it’s been such a hard decision.”

He added: “I’ll be about 87 years old at the wrap party, but I’ve said yes.”

Lithgow revealed the casting on his own terms more than a week after Deadline reported the veteran actor was in final negotiations to star as the powerful wizard and professor, previously portrayed by late actors Richard Harris and Michael Gambon. The latter, who died in September 2023, took over the role after Harris died in 2002.

Lithgow seems to be the first actor to publicly share his involvement in the upcoming series. HBO, which has kept much about the “Harry Potter” reboot under wraps, did not confirm the casting.

Warner Bros. Discovery, the parent company of HBO and Warner Bros. Pictures, which produced and distributed the “Harry Potter” film franchise, announced the series in April 2023 as a “faithful adaptation” of British author J.K. Rowling’s novels. Rowling will be an executive producer.

HBO is expecting the series to debut in 2026 or 2027, Deadline reported.



Lithgow

Johansen, singer of seminal protopunk band, dies at 75

Associated Press

David Johansen, the wiry, gravelly-voiced singer and last surviving member of the glam and protopunk band the New York Dolls who later performed as his campy, pompadoured alter ego, Buster Poindexter, has died.

He was 75.

Johansen died Friday at his home in New York City, Jeff Kilgour, a family spokesperson told The Associated Press. It was revealed in early 2025 that he had stage 4 cancer and a brain tumor.

In the 1970s, the New York Dolls were fore-runners of punk and the band’s style — teased hair, women’s clothes and lots of makeup — inspired the glam movement that took up residence in heavy metal a decade later in bands like Faster Pussycat and Mötley Crüe.

The band never found commercial success and was torn by internal strife and drug addic-



Johansen

tions, breaking up after two albums by the middle of the decade. In 2004, former Smiths frontman and Dolls admirer Morrissey convinced Johansen and other surviving members to regroup for the Meltdown Festival in England, leading to three more studio albums.

In the ‘80s, Johansen assumed the persona of Buster Poindexter, a pompadour-styled lounge lizard who had a hit with the kitschy party single “Hot, Hot, Hot” in 1987. He also appeared in such movies as “Candy Mountain,” “Let It Ride,” “Married to the Mob” and had a memorable turn as the Ghost of Christmas Past in Bill Murray-led hit “Scrooged.”

In 2023, Johansen was the subject of Martin Scorsese and David Tedeschi’s documentary

“Personality Crisis: One Night Only,” which mixed footage of his two-night stand at the Café Carlyle in January 2020 with flashbacks through his wildly varied career and intimate interviews.

Other news

■ Charli xcx’s “Brat” reign continued at the BRIT Awards, the U.K.’s leading music awards show, on Saturday in London. She won 5 awards, including Artist, Song and Album of the Year for “Brat.” The awards come hot on the heels of Charli’s wins at the Grammy Awards last month, where she took the coveted Best Album.

■ Grammy-nominated R&B singer Angie Stone, a member of the all-female hip-hop trio The Sequence and known for the hit song “Wish I Didn’t Miss You,” was killed early Saturday in a car crash. She was 63.

Hollywood diversity in decline despite audience demand, study finds

By Tracy Brown
Los Angeles Times

A new study examining the top films of 2024 has found that Hollywood is backsliding on its diversity efforts.

The 2025 edition of the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, released Feb. 27, has determined that the proportion of people of color working in key entertainment roles dropped compared with their white counterparts in every area from 2023 to 2024. This is despite findings that also show that films with casts that reflect the diversity of the real world performed better at the box office.

“Last year, we celebrated some historic

highs for people of color in the industry,” Ana-Christina Ramón, the report’s co-founder and director of UCLA’s Entertainment and Media Research Initiative, said in a statement. “But 2024 saw a widespread reversal, as film studios retreated from racial and ethnic diversity in front of and behind the camera.”

The latest UCLA study examined 104 of the top English-language theatrical releases from 2024 to analyze the demographics of actors, writers, directors and even ticket buyers. The study tracked global and domestic box office figures as well as film genres.

Researchers found that among the top

films, those with more racially diverse casts tended to perform better at the global box office than those with less diverse casts. Films in which 41-50% of cast members were people of color — such as “Wicked,” “Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire” and “A Quiet Place: Day One” — were found to have the highest median global box office earnings. These movies also tended to be released in more international markets.

“Diversity is a key part of the big financial picture,” Jade Abston, one of the study’s co-authors and a doctoral candidate in cinema and media studies at UCLA, said in a statement. “Diversity travels. When a film lacks diverse faces and perspectives,

it’s just not as appealing here and abroad.”

Actors of color accounted for 25.2% of lead roles in the top theatrical films of 2024, which is down from 29.2% in 2023. People of color account for 44.3% of the U.S. population.

Directors of color accounted for 20.2% of 2024 movies, compared with 22.9% of films the year before.

The study did find positive trends. After two years of decline, women accounted for 47.6% of lead performers in 2024 — closer to parity with men compared with 2023 (32.1% of leads). Female directors accounted for 15.4% of films in 2024, which is similar to the previous year’s findings of 14.7%.

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 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
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Jacqueline Smith

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OPINION

‘The Women’ is historical, but fiction on Stripes

BY JACQUELINE SMITH
 Stars and Stripes Ombudsman

Kristin Hannah’s book “The Women” is an unforgettable tale of a U.S. Army nurse serving in the brutal Vietnam War. It’s also about friendship, love, betrayal and the disturbing treatment of the vets — especially the women — when they returned home.

The book is historical fiction, meaning that fictional characters act within actual historic events, placed in Vietnam from 1967 to ’69 and later years in the U.S. Hannah spoke with veterans for details to make the scenes realistic; they insisted she use the actual names of places and battles.

Published in 2024, “The Women” has been on the New York Times Hardcover Best Seller list for 53 weeks. As of Feb. 23, it was in fifth place, out of 10. With hundreds of thousands of readers — likely reaching at least a million by now — I feel the need to speak out.

As much as I liked the novel overall, one aspect was jarring and felt wrong — her depiction of Stars and Stripes’ coverage of the war.

Consider this on page 138 (of my paperback edition): “There were more than 450,000 American men in Vietnam now and God knew how many deaths and casualties. You certainly couldn’t find that answer in the Stars and Stripes,” Hannah wrote. I counted about half-a-dozen unflattering mentions of the newspaper. The supposition was that since Stripes was a military publication, it published only the Defense Department version of events.

This is not the Stars and Stripes I know today. But, being a journalist, I set out to learn the truth of coverage 58 years ago. It is widely acknowledged now that the government misled the public about the war. Robert McNamara, who was secretary of defense from 1961-68, confessed in his 1995 memoir that he was “wrong, terribly wrong” about the war in which 58,000 American troops gave their lives.

But back in 1967 — when Hannah’s main character Frankie McGrath goes to Vietnam as an Army nurse — did Stripes deliberately withhold casualty numbers and battle losses as the book implies? No.

In fact, for example, the Feb. 13, 1968, edition of Pacific Stars and Stripes devotes nearly half a page to “Casualties in Vietnam” with names listed by military branch and categories such as “Killed in Action” and “Died of Wounds.” This was a few weeks into the Tet Offensive. The rest of the page contains war stories from The Associated Press and United Press International wire services.

I thank Catharine Giordano, assistant managing editor for Stripes archives, for finding that page for me and providing other valuable material.

Consider this article by Robert Hoderne for The New York Times in 1970: “Stripes was the one place that G.I.s could sometimes read about the shooting, bleeding, bombing, gassing, dying and killing.” Staff was military and civilian; reporters would come back from the front to Saigon and send their stories direct to Stripes’ office in Tokyo, uncensored by the military. “No other military journalists in Vietnam can claim that privilege.”

Sometimes the unfiltered coverage was raw. Read what Sgt. Gene Young wrote in Pacific Stars and Stripes on May 14, 1967. The dateline is Lai Khe, Vietnam; Young described the 1st Infantry Division searching for a supply center and finding the Viet Cong.

“We decided to go around and come into the area from behind. Just inside the jungle we found more bunkers and a cooking fire still



JIM CLARE/Stars and Stripes

A Huey evacuation helicopter lands on a tiny clearing on “Hamburger Hill” as a wounded American soldier is rushed aboard during the Vietnam War. Men of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division were trying to take the bomb-scarred, blood-soaked mountaintop from North Vietnamese forces.



JOHN OLSON/Stars and Stripes

Marines retrieve the body of a fellow Marine during the Vietnam War who died after a U.S. Air Force cargo plane making a low level drop over the Marine fortress of Khe Sanh at less than 50 feet altitude missed the landing zone for the cargo. One block hit a bunker and tent area.



JOHN OLSON/Stars and Stripes

Life Magazine photographer Co Rentmeester’s left hand is examined by a nurse at a U.S. Army hospital after being hit by a bullet while covering the fighting in Saigon on May 6, 1968. The Dutch photographer was hit with the same bullet that wounded Art Greenspon, a freelance photographer for The Associated Press.

New York Times.

Fast forward to today. Could such manipulation happen again? An emphatic no.

Although it can be hard to understand how a news organization that is partially funded by the Defense Department — and is part of that department — could be editorially independent, Stripes is.

The top position of publisher is required to be filled by a civilian. Stripes’ mission is to fully inform U.S. troops stationed around the world without bias. It must be a trusted source of information. And in the early 1990s, Congress mandated the position of ombudsman to protect the First Amendment rights of Stars and Stripes and ensure it is free from government interference. That is what I do.

Read “The Women” to learn about U.S. Army nurses in Vietnam. But keep in mind the difference between fiction and truth.

Email the Stripes ombudsman at smith.jacqueline@stripes.com. Looking for Stars and Stripes’ historic coverage? Subscribe to Stars and Stripes’ historic newspaper archive! We have digitized our 1948-99 European and Pacific editions, as well as several of our WWII editions and made them available online through <https://starsandstripes.newspaperarchive.com/>

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11
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- ACROSS
- 58 Eye drops
- 59 Bit of advice
- 21 Monet works
- 22 Edge
- 23 "A Death in the Family" author
- 27 Auction signal
- 29 "Understood"
- 30 Round Table titles
- 32 Pearl Harbor site
- 34 With-it person
- 37 Powerful engine
- 39 Is a bad winner
- 42 Evaluate
- 44 Cleric's garment
- 45 End-of-week letters
- 46 Indy event
- 50 Mrs. in Mexico
- 51 Select, with "for"
- 52 Swiss canton
- 53 Surpass
- DOWN
- 1 — Mahal
- 2 Lennon's partner
- 3 Refusals
- 4 Scald briefly in water, as veggies
- 5 Akin
- 6 "You've got mail" co.
- 7 Furtive one
- 8 Cranky due to skipping lunch, say
- 9 Mini-strike
- 10 Big fusses
- 11 On deck
- 16 Hasten
- 20 Works the soil

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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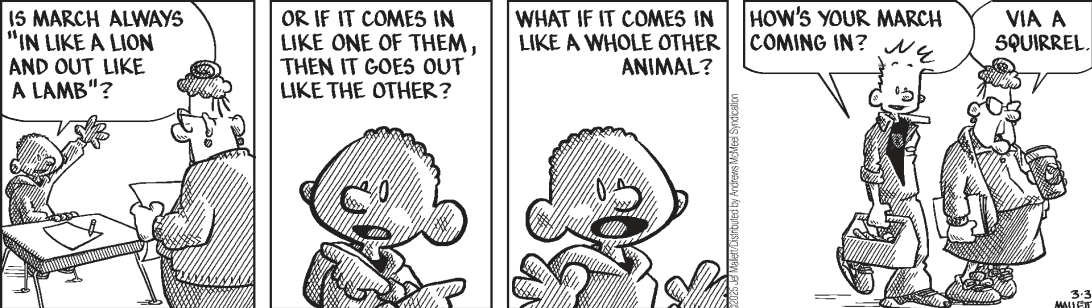
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CRYPTOQUIP

CQDDR GL COX RGXW YBJY
LDDI QOXBY JY BGHD BJVXOVX
GFY OV WHJII DVZIGWFQDW:
YBD ZQJYD RJVD.

Saturday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE THIS TOWN IS NOT ELEVATED ENOUGH TO HAVE SNOW-PACKED SLOPES, IS IT BELOW SKI LEVEL?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals G

Frazz



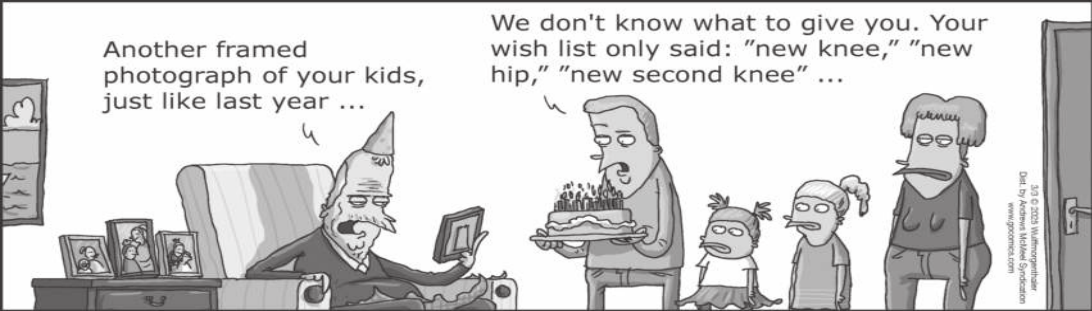
Pearls Before Swine



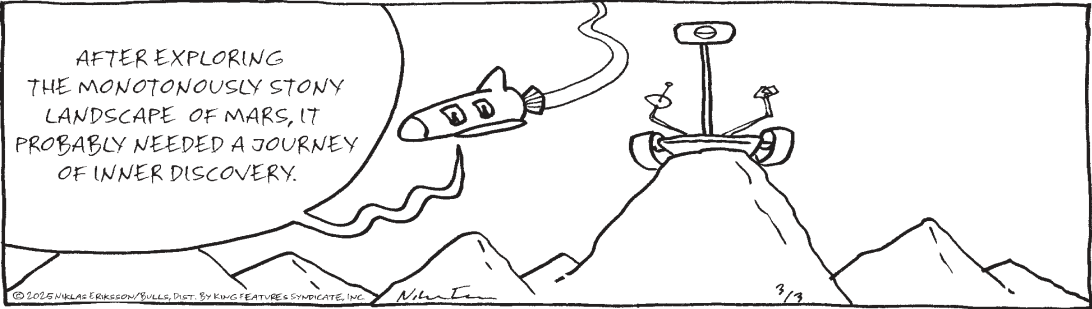
Non Sequitur



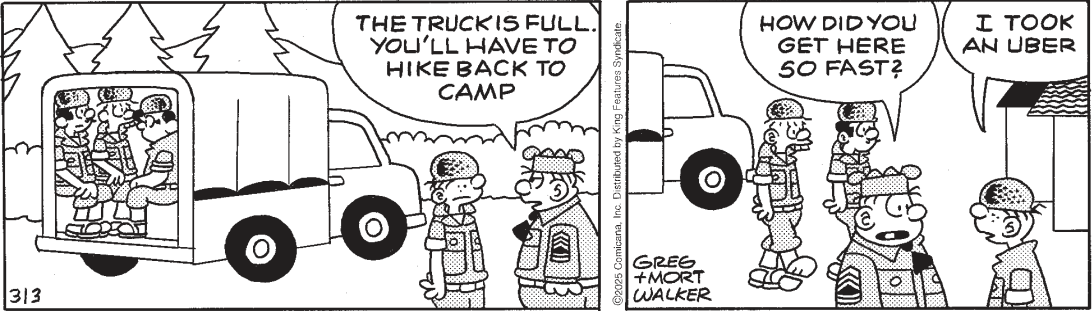
Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



COLLEGE BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

Fifth-ranked Vols' long 3 at buzzer beats No. 6 Tide

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Jahmai Mashack raced up the court and hit a 3-pointer from well beyond the arc at the buzzer to give No. 5 Tennessee a 79-76 victory over No. 6 Alabama on Saturday.

The Volunteers (24-5, 11-5 Southeastern Conference) got the final shot by forcing a five-second inbounds violation under the Crimson Tide's basket with 3.8 seconds left.

Chaz Lanier and Jordan Gainey each scored 18 points for Tennessee. Zakai Zeigler had 15 and Mashack finished with 11.

Mark Sears led Alabama (23-6, 12-4) with 24 points. Labaron Philan had 13, and Aden Holloway added 11.

Sears had 12 points in the first half to help the Crimson Tide take a 42-38 lead.

No. 1 Auburn 94, No. 17 Kentucky 78: Miles Kelly scored a season-high 30 points to lead the visiting Tigers to a win over the Wildcats.

Auburn (27-2, 15-1 SEC) has six straight victories and won the SEC regular-season title outright when Tennessee beat Alabama. The Tigers posted video on X of their players celebrating on the team bus after watching the Volunteers' 3-pointer at the buzzer to win it.

Auburn won in Lexington for the first time since a 53-52 triumph over then-No. 1 Kentucky in 1988.

Chad Baker-Mazara followed Kelly with 22 points and Tahaad Pettiford scored 21.

No. 2 Duke 100, Florida State 65: Isaiah Evans scored 19 points and the host Blue Devils overcame freshman star Cooper Flagg's injury scare to rout the Seminoles.

Flagg sat out more than 11 minutes to end the first half, twice leaving the gym to be evaluated after he was struck in the face on a hard foul. He was on the court for the first 12 minutes of the second half, when he racked up 12 of his 16 points.

Kon Knueppel and Khaman Maluach both had 14 points to help Duke (26-3, 17-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) maintain a one-game lead over Clemson in the league standings.

Jamir Watkins had 21 points and Jerry Deng added 12 points for Florida State (16-13, 7-11). The Seminoles have lost three straight and four of five.

No. 3 Florida 89, No. 12 Texas

A&M 70: Will Richard made six 3-pointers and scored 25 points, Thomas Haugh added 17 points and the host Gators handed the Aggies a fourth consecutive loss.

Alijah Martin had 14 points for Florida, which bounced back from a midweek loss at unranked Georgia and moved a step closer to securing a double bye in the Southeastern Conference Tournament in two weeks.

Texas A&M (20-9, 9-7 SEC) could fall out of the AP Top 25 college basketball poll. The Gators (25-4, 12-4), meanwhile, improved to 14-1 at home this season.

Zhuric Phelps led the Aggies with 16 points. Pharrel Payne added 14.

No. 4 Houston 73, Cincinnati 64: L.J. Cryer scored 20 points and the host Cougars clinched the outright Big 12 regular-season title for a second straight season with a win over the Bearcats.

Terrance Arceneaux added 10 points for Houston (25-4, 17-1 Big 12), which has won eight straight. The Cougars became the first team to win the regular-season championship in its first two years in a major conference since Idaho, which won the PCC in the 1921-22 and 1922-23 seasons. Houston joined the Big 12 in 2023.

The Cougars, who have won 12 straight over Cincinnati, shot 54% and owned a 17-9 advantage in points off turnovers.

Day Day Thomas scored 19 points and Jizzle James added 18 for the Bearcats (17-12, 7-11).

No. 7 St. John's 71, Seton Hall 61: RJ Luis Jr. scored 21 points and the host Red Storm beat the Pirates to clinch their first outright regular-season Big East title since 1985.

St. John's (26-4, 17-2) improved to 18-0 at home as it played in front of its third straight sellout crowd at Madison Square Garden and with coach Rick Pitino sporting a white suit for the second straight season.

Zuby Ejiofor added 17 points and 10 rebounds as the Red Storm shot 43.4% and struggled until the final minutes.

Dylan Addae-Wusu scored 18 for Seton Hall (7-22, 2-16), which is concluding its worst season since 1982-83. Isaiah Coleman added 15 for the Pirates.

No. 9 Iowa State 84, No. 22 Arizona 67: Milan Momcilovic scored 17 points as the host Cyclones survived a late scare from the Wildcats for a win.



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Tennessee guard Jahmai Mashack (15) celebrates with teammates after hitting the winning 3-point basket as time expired against Alabama on Saturday in Knoxville, Tenn.

Tamin Lipsey added 15 for Iowa State (22-7, 12-6 Big 12) while Curtis Jones and Nate Heise each contributed 12 points off the bench. Brandon Chatfield scored 10 points for a new season-high with the Cyclones.

Jaden Bradley scored 18 points while KJ Lewis added 13 off the bench to lead Arizona (19-10, 13-5), who has lost four of its last six games.

Iowa State turned the tables on the Wildcats after suffering an overtime loss in Tucson on Jan. 27.

No. 10 Texas Tech 78, Kansas 73: JT Toppin had 21 points to lead the visiting Red Raiders to a win over the Jayhawks.

It was the second win at Allen Fieldhouse (2-22) in the school's history.

Christian Anderson had 15 points and Darrion Williams scored 14 for Texas Tech (22-7, 13-5 Big 12).

KJ Adams Jr. had 21 points for Kansas (19-10, 10-8), which had multiple runs of at least six points.

No. 13 Clemson 71, Virginia 58: Ian Schieffelin scored 13 of his 21 points in the second half to help the visiting Tigers come from behind and beat the Cavaliers.

Schieffelin, coming off a 24-point outing against Notre Dame, also grabbed 13 rebounds for his ninth double-double of the season as Clemson (24-5, 16-2 ACC) stayed a game behind first-place Duke in the conference standings.

Isaac McKneely had 16 points for Virginia (14-15, 7-11). The Cavaliers had hit 10 or more 3-pointers in seven of their last 10 games before Saturday, but went 8-for-19 from beyond the arc.

Vanderbilt 97, No. 14 Missouri 93 (OT): Chris Manon had 23 points and a game-high 11 rebounds as the host Commodores beat the Tigers in overtime for their third win in a row.

AJ Hoggard scored 21 points, Jason Edwards finished with 17

and Tyler Nickel added 12 for Vanderbilt (20-9, 8-8 Southeastern Conference).

Caleb Grill scored 28 points to lead Missouri (21-8, 10-6). Mark Mitchell scored 20, and Anthony Robinson II and Tamar Bates had 16 apiece for the Tigers.

No. 16 Maryland 68, Penn State 64: Derik Queen had 23 points, Ja'kobi Gillespie scored 19 to lead the visiting Terrapins over the Nittany Lions.

Selton Miguel added 17 points for Maryland (22-7, 12-6 Big Ten), which overcame a 36-30 halftime deficit to snap a seven-game losing streak in Happy Valley.

Ace Baldwin Jr. had 18 points and D'Marco Dunn scored 14 for Penn State (15-15, 5-14), which needed to win out and get help in the standings to make the 15-team Big Ten Tournament.

No. 19 Louisville 79, Pittsburgh 68: Chucky Hepburn scored a career-high 37 points to lead the host Cardinals to a victory over the Panthers.

Terrence Edwards Jr. added 23 points and seven rebounds for Louisville (23-6, 16-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), which shot 51.1% from the field (23-for-45) and went 11-for-21 (52.4%) from 3-point range.

Jaland Lowe led Pittsburgh (16-13, 7-11) with 16 points and Zack Austin added 15.

No. 21 Marquette 76, Georgetown 61: Kam Jones scored 13 points and had a career-high 13 assists for his fifth double-double as the visiting Golden Eagles easily topped the Hoyas.

David Joplin had 17 points and Ben Gold added 15 as Marquette (22-7, 13-5 Big East) led by as many as 28 in the second half for its second straight lopsided win after overpowering Providence 82-52 on Tuesday.

Micah Peavy had 15 points and Curtis Williams 14 for Georgetown (16-13, 7-11). Jordan Burks

had 11 points and 10 rebounds.

No. 23 Saint Mary's 74, Oregon State 64: Augustas Marciolionis scored 25 points and the host Gaels won their seventh straight, beating the Beavers.

Marciolionis, the son of Hall of Famer Sarunas Marciolionis, made four 3-pointers and shot 7-for-12 overall to lead regular-season champion Saint Mary's (27-4, 17-1 West Coast Conference) in its final tune-up before the conference tournament this week. It's the best conference record in Gaels history.

Parsa Fallah scored 14 points for Oregon State. The Beavers (20-11, 10-8) beat Saint Mary's this season at home but couldn't duplicate the feat on the road. Michael Rataj and Liu Lelevicius each scored 12 points.

No. 24 Mississippi State 81, LSU 69: Josh Hubbard scored 20 of his 30 points in the second half to help the host Bulldogs beat the Tigers.

Riley Kugel had 12 points for Mississippi State on 5-for-6 shooting. The Bulldogs (20-9, 8-8 SEC) trailed by as many as eight points in the first half and were down 37-35 at halftime.

Cam Carter scored 23 points for LSU (14-15, 3-13), and Damion Collins finished with 10. Derek Fountain had nine points on 4-for-4 shooting and grabbed five rebounds.

No. 25 BYU 77, West Virginia 56: Fousseyni Traore scored 20 points and had 10 rebounds for his second double-double of the season off the bench, Egor Demin had 15 points and six rebounds and the host Cougars dominated the Mountaineers.

Richie Saunders added 13 points for BYU (21-8, 12-6 Big 12), which has won six straight.

Javon Small scored 15 points for West Virginia (17-12, 8-10). Sen-cire Harris and Amani Hansberry each added seven points.

NHL

ROUNDUP

Jackets top Wings in Stadium Series

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Justin Danforth scored with 2:17 remaining to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets over Detroit 5-3 on Saturday night in the Stadium Series, leapfrogging the Red Wings to take sole possession of the first Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

Denton Mateychuk notched the team’s first-ever outdoor goal, Dmitri Voronkov and Mathieu Olivier scored 32 seconds apart in the second period, and Adam Fantilli added an empty-netter.

Elvis Merzlikins made 43 stops to help Columbus beat Detroit for the second time in three days and win its fourth straight in front of 94,751 at Ohio Stadium.

Alex DeBrincat scored twice to extend his point streak to nine games. Patrick Kane added a goal, and Cam Talbot made 16 stops for the Red Wings, who snapped a five-game road win streak and cling to the second wild-card spot.

The NHL made it a priority to honor Johnny Gaudreau, the NHL star known as “Johnny Hockey,” and his younger brother, Matthew, who were struck and killed while riding bicycles near their New Jersey home Aug. 29, during the Blue Jackets’ first outdoor hockey experience.

Columbus entered the arena in what team captain Boone Jenner called “Signature Johnny fit,” wearing matching sweatshirts from Avalon Surf Shop, emulating Gaudreau’s ritual of representing businesses from his New Jersey home. Detroit donned No. 13 Gaudreau jerseys from across his career, including Team USA and the Boston College Eagles.

Bruins 3, Penguins 2: David Pastrnak had a goal and an assist, extending his point streak to 17 games, and visiting Boston beat Pittsburgh.

Mason Lohrei added a power-play goal for Boston and Charlie Coyle scored an empty-net short-handed goal to give the Bruins a 3-1 lead in the final minute.

Anthony Beauvillier scored a short-handed goal for Pittsburgh and Rickard Rakell scored a power-play goal.

Panthers 3, Flames 0: Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 23 shots for his 47th career shutout, Jonah Gadjovich and Evan Rodrigues had second-period goals, and host Florida beat Calgary.

Mackie Samoskevich scored with 3:52 left to seal the victory, the Panthers’ eighth in 10 games.

Dan Vladar did all he could for the Flames, stopping 39 shots. Calgary has been shut out in back-to-back games for the first time since Nov. 16-17, 2019.

Islanders 7, Predators 4: New York goaltender Ilya Sorokin was



JAY LAPRETE/AP

Fireworks go off before the Stadium Series game between the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets at Ohio Stadium on Saturday in Columbus, Ohio.

credited with his first career goal when Nashville forward Steven Stamkos sent a pass into his own net in the final seconds of host New York’s victory.

Brock Nelson had two goals and an assist for the Islanders in their second straight win. Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Kyle Palmieri, Bo Horvat and Casey Cizikas also scored, and Adam Boqvist and Simon Holmstrom each had two assists.

Cole Smith had two goals for the Predators in their third loss in four games. Marc Del Gaizo and Colton Sissons also scored, and Juuse Saros stopped 30 shots.

Oilers 3, Hurricanes 1: Adam Henrique and Corey Perry scored to help visiting Edmonton beat Carolina.

Connor McDavid added an empty-netter and Calvin Pickard stopped 35 shots for the Oilers, who snapped a five-game losing streak.

Sebastian Aho scored and Frederik Andersen made 28 saves for the slumping Hurricanes, who have lost six of their past eight.

Canadiens 4, Sabres 2: Montreal extended its winning streak to a season-high four games with a win at Buffalo.

Cole Caufield, Josh Anderson and Alex Newhook each scored, and Jake Evans added an empty-net goal for the Canadiens. Jakub Dobes made 23 saves.

Alex Tuch and Jiri Kulich scored and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 25 saves for the Sabres, who have dropped two in a row and three of the past five.

Senators 5, Sharks 3: Tim Stutzle scored and added an assist

to keep his 11-game point streak alive, Brady Tkachuk and Shane Pinto returned to the lineup and scored, and host Ottawa ended a five-game losing streak with a victory over San Jose.

Tkachuk tied the game scoring on a two-man advantage and just over a minute later, a weird bounce provided Stutzle with his 19th of the year. David Perron and Michael Amadio also scored for the Senators. Linus Ullmark stopped 34 shots for his first win since Dec. 19.

Tyler Toffoli, Timothy Liljegren and Will Smith scored for the Sharks. Vitek Vanecek made 27 saves.

Flyers 2, Jets 1 (SO): Rookie Matvei Michkov scored on a backhand against Connor Hellebuyck in the shootout and visiting Philadelphia beat Winnipeg.

Jamie Drysdale scored in regulation and Ivan Fedotov stopped 30 shots to help the Flyers extend their point streak to five games (4-0-1).

Mark Scheifele scored for the Jets and Hellebuyck made 31 saves. Winnipeg lost its second straight after an 11-game win streak and dropped to 11-1-1 in its past 13.

Lightning 3, Capitals 1: Mitchell Chaffee and Gage Goncalves scored, Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 20 of the 21 shots he faced behind a remarkable tight-checking team effort as visiting Tampa Bay won its eighth consecutive game by beating Eastern Conference-leading Washington.

The Capitals lost their third game in a row for the first time all

season despite Alex Ovechkin scoring his 884th career goal with 3:59 left to move 10 back of tying Wayne Gretzky’s NHL record.

Blues 4, Kings 1: Colton Parayko and Pavel Buchnevich each scored, and Jordan Binnington made 25 saves to help host St. Louis beat Los Angeles.

Dylan Holloway and Zack Bolduc also scored for the Blues, who have won four in a row for the first time this season.

Devils 3, Utah 1: Timo Meier scored the tiebreaking goal 14 seconds into the third period, and visiting New Jersey beat Utah.

Nico Hischier and Curtis Lazar also scored as the Devils won for the fourth time in their past five road games. Nico Daws made 24 saves.

Kraken 6, Canucks 3: Eeli Tolvanen had two goals, including the go-ahead score with 6:52 to go in the second period, and Vince Dunn had two assists to give him 200 for his career in host Seattle’s victory over Vancouver.

Oliver Bjorkstrand tied the game with a goal for the Kraken early in the second, but Dakota Joshua put the Canucks back in front with a score at 8:05, before Matty Beniers and Tolvanen each found the net for Seattle.

Blackhawks 6, Ducks 3: Ryan Donato had two goals and an assist and visiting Chicago ended a five-game losing streak with a victory over Anaheim.

Teuvo Teravainen had a goal and two assists and Lukas Reichel, Wyatt Kaiser and Patrick Marron also scored. Arvid Soderblom made 28 saves.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Florida	61	37	21	3	77	204	171	
Toronto	59	37	20	2	76	188	167	
Tampa Bay	59	35	20	4	74	211	156	
Detroit	60	30	24	6	66	176	191	
Ottawa	59	30	25	4	64	166	168	
Boston	61	28	25	8	64	167	194	
Montreal	60	29	26	5	63	180	201	
Buffalo	58	24	29	5	53	186	198	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Washington	60	38	14	8	84	215	157	
Carolina	60	34	22	4	72	193	169	
New Jersey	61	33	22	6	72	186	152	
Columbus	60	30	22	8	68	205	196	
N.Y. Rangers	59	29	26	4	62	179	183	
Philadelphia	61	27	26	8	62	180	202	
N.Y. Islanders	59	27	25	7	61	165	176	
Pittsburgh	62	24	29	9	57	178	227	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Winnipeg	61	42	15	4	88	214	143	
Dallas	59	38	19	2	78	200	152	
Minnesota	60	34	22	4	72	172	176	
Colorado	61	35	24	2	72	198	182	
St. Louis	61	29	26	6	64	176	181	
Utah	61	27	25	9	63	172	181	
Nashville	59	21	31	7	49	153	197	
Chicago	60	18	35	7	43	164	213	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	59	35	18	6	76	197	166	
Edmonton	60	35	21	4	74	195	174	
Los Angeles	58	31	19	8	70	166	154	
Vancouver	60	27	22	11	65	165	184	
Calgary	59	28	23	8	64	154	174	
Anaheim	59	26	26	7	59	154	183	
Seattle	61	26	31	4	56	180	198	
San Jose	61	15	37	9	39	157	230	
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								
Toronto 3, N.Y. Rangers 2 Dallas 6, Los Angeles 2 Colorado 5, Minnesota 2								
Saturday's games								
Tampa Bay 3, Washington 1 N.Y. Islanders 7, Nashville 4 Florida 3, Calgary 0 Boston 3, Pittsburgh 2 Columbus 5, Detroit 3 Edmonton 3, Carolina 1 Philadelphia 2, Winnipeg 1, SO Ottawa 5, San Jose 3 Montreal 4, Buffalo 2 St. Louis 4, Los Angeles 1 New Jersey 3, Utah 1 Seattle 6, Vancouver 3 Chicago 6, Anaheim 3								
Sunday's games								
Toronto at Pittsburgh Boston at Minnesota Calgary at Carolina St. Louis at Dallas Nashville at N.Y. Rangers New Jersey at Vegas								
Monday's games								
Ottawa at Washington Buffalo at Montreal N.Y. Islanders at N.Y. Rangers Tampa Bay at Florida San Jose at Toronto Los Angeles at Chicago								
Tuesday's games								
Calgary at Philadelphia Carolina at Detroit Columbus at Tampa Bay Nashville at Boston San Jose at Buffalo Winnipeg at N.Y. Islanders New Jersey at Dallas Anaheim at Edmonton Pittsburgh at Colorado Minnesota at Seattle								
Scoring leaders								
Through Saturday								
	GP	G	A	Pts				
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	61	23	68	91				
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	60	44	46	90				
Nikita Kucherov, TB	56	27	60	87				
Connor McDavid, EDM	54	22	53	75				
David Pastrnak, BOS	61	32	43	75				
Mitch Marner, TOR	58	18	56	74				
Kyle Connor, WPG	61	31	43	74				
Jack Eichel, LV	58	19	51	70				
Mikko Rantanen, COL	59	27	43	70				
Jack Hughes, NJ	61	27	43	70				

NBA/NHL

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	42	18	.700	—
New York	39	20	.661	2½
Philadelphia	21	38	.356	20½
Brooklyn	21	39	.350	21
Toronto	18	42	.300	24
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	28	30	.483	—
Orlando	29	32	.475	½
Atlanta	27	33	.450	2
Charlotte	14	45	.237	14½
Washington	11	48	.186	17½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	49	10	.831	—
Milwaukee	34	25	.576	15
Indiana	33	25	.569	15½
Detroit	34	27	.557	16
Chicago	24	36	.400	25½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	38	22	.633	—
Houston	37	23	.617	1
Dallas	32	29	.525	6½
San Antonio	25	33	.431	12
New Orleans	16	44	.267	22
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	48	11	.814	—
Denver	39	21	.650	9½
Minnesota	32	29	.525	17
Portland	27	33	.450	21½
Utah	15	44	.254	33
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	37	21	.638	—
L.A. Clippers	32	27	.542	5½
Golden State	32	28	.533	6
Sacramento	31	28	.525	6½
Phoenix	28	32	.467	10
Saturday's games				
Washington 113, Charlotte 100				
Detroit 115, Brooklyn 94				
Sacramento 113, Houston 103				
San Antonio 130, Memphis 128				
Milwaukee 132, Dallas 117				
Philadelphia 126, Golden State 119				
Sunday's games				
Denver at Boston				
Portland at Cleveland				
Chicago at Indiana				
New York at Miami				
Toronto at Orlando				
Oklahoma City at San Antonio				
New Orleans at Utah				
L.A. Clippers at L.A. Lakers				
Minnesota at Phoenix				
Monday's games				
Golden State at Charlotte				
Portland at Philadelphia				
Washington at Miami				
Atlanta at Memphis				
Houston at Oklahoma City				
Sacramento at Dallas				
Detroit at Utah				

NBA ROUNDUP

Bucks top short-handed Mavericks

Associated Press

DALLAS — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, Damian Lillard scored 28 and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Dallas Mavericks 132-117 on Saturday night.

Gary Trent Jr. added 20 points as Milwaukee won for the sixth time in seven games, surging into fourth place in the Eastern Conference.

Kyrie Irving scored 31 points for the short-handed Mavericks, who are trying to stay afloat in the West playoff race until Anthony Davis returns from a groin injury, possibly by mid-March. The star forward got hurt in his Dallas debut after the seismic trade that sent Luka Doncic to the Los Angeles Lakers.

Irving made all 11 of his free throws, but was just 2-for-9 from 3-point range as the Mavs shot 28% (11 of 40) from beyond the arc.

Wizards 113, Hornets 110: Khris Middleton and Bilal Coulibaly each scored 17 points and visiting Washington defeated Charlotte in a matchup of the teams with the NBA's two worst records.

Richaun Holmes added 15 points and nine rebounds for the Wizards, who had eight players finish in double figures in scoring.

Mark Williams had 24 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who've lost six straight. LaMelo Ball added 20 points and Miles Bridges had 18 for Charlotte.

Pistons 115, Nets 94: Cade Cunningham broke out of a slump by scoring nine of his 15 points in the fourth quarter and host Detroit pulled away to beat Brooklyn.

Tobias Harris, Malik Beasley and Jalen Duren all added 18 points for the Pistons.

Tyrese Martin came off the bench to score 23 points for the



TONY GUTIERREZ/AP

Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo shoots after getting past Mavericks guard Dante Exum during the first half in Dallas on Saturday. Antetokounmpo scored 29 points in the Bucks' 132-117 win.

Nets, who have lost four straight.

Kings 113, Rockets 103: DeMar DeRozan had 21 points and visiting Sacramento overcome an early injury to Domantas Sabonis for its third straight victory.

Zach LaVine added 20 points for the Kings. Sacramento had a 13-3 run to push its advantage to 97-85 with 10 minutes remaining. LaVine and Keon Ellis had 3-pointers in that stretch and DeRozan scored the last five points.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 30 points and 10 rebounds. Jalen Green added 24 points in the loss that ended a two-game winning streak.

Spurs 130, Grizzlies 128: De'Aaron Fox broke a tie with a 20-footer with 2.6 seconds left for the last of his 20 points and visiting San Antonio beat Memphis.

Stephon Castle had 24 points and seven assists to help the Spurs end a four-game losing streak. Devin Vassell matched Fox with 20 points, and Jeremy Sochan added 18.

Jackson scored 42 points. Jaylen Wells had 18 for Memphis and Zach Edey had 17 points, nine rebounds and three blocks.

76ers 126, Warriors 119:

Quentin Grimes scored a career-high 44 points and host Philadelphia snapped a nine-game losing streak, beating Golden State in a game where Stephen Curry had his first dunk in six years.

Curry's one-handed jam on a break cut the 76ers' lead to 109-104 midway through the fourth quarter.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 20 points for Philadelphia. Guerschon Yabusele added 18, and Paul George had 17 points and seven rebounds. The Sixers improved to 21-39, winning for the first time since Feb. 4 against Dallas.

Avalanche, Wild, Panthers make moves in busy trade day

Associated Press

Defensemen Seth Jones and Ryan Lindgren and forward Gustav Nyquist were on the move Saturday as three Central Division teams got a jump on the NHL's looming trade deadline.

The Colorado Avalanche got the ball rolling with another splash by acquiring Lindgren and forward Jimmy Vesey in a trade with the New York Rangers. The Minnesota Wild answered hours later by acquiring pending free agent forward Gustav Nyquist.

And the last-place Chicago Blackhawks shipped out another veteran, sending Jones to the defending champion Florida Panthers.

The NHL trade deadline is Friday.

The Rangers acquired a second- and a fourth-round pick, young forward Juuso Parssinen, veteran defenseman Calvin de



Lindgren

Haan and the rights to unsigned prospect Hank Kempf. New York is retaining half of Lindgren's salary, according to a person with knowledge of the deal.

The Rangers will receive the better of their own or the Hurricanes' pick in the second round and the better of Carolina's or Vancouver's in the fourth round of the draft later this year, the person said.

Nashville acquired a 2026 second-round pick from Minnesota, while retaining half of Nyquist's salary. The 35-year-old forward is joining the Wild at the trade deadline for the second time in three years.

"They're getting a real good player, real good," Predators coach Andrew Brunette said. "He's a smart player, versatile, can



Nyquist

play any role on your team. They're getting one of the best teammates you'll ever find and one of the best people. So they're lucky to get him, and hopefully he plays up to what he can bring."

Florida got Jones and a 2026 fourth-round pick from Chicago for goaltender Spencer Knight and a conditional first-round pick in next year's draft. The Blackhawks are also retaining 26% of Jones' salary.

"It is definitely hard, but he is going to a good team and I think that's what he wants," Chicago's Lukas Reichel said after the Blackhawks' 6-3 victory over the Anaheim Ducks. "I hope he does well there."

Jones, 30, was the No. 4 overall pick by Nashville in the 2013 draft. He is under con-



Jones

tact through 2030.

"Seth is a pro, great guy in the locker room so we wish him the best," Chicago interim coach Anders Sorenson said.

The Panthers are already deep at forward with Aleksander Barkov, Matthew Tkachuk, Sam Reinhart, Anton Lundell, Carter Verhaeghe and Gustav Forsling all locked up for at least three more seasons after this.

Lindgren, 27, has struggled this season, but he gives Colorado left-handed-shooting depth on the blue line in an attempt to make another long playoff run this spring. Vesey, 31, did not get as much playing time as he would have liked in New York, skating under 10 minutes a game, and could get a bigger opportunity with the Avalanche.

NFL

Texas' Golden is fastest receiver

Kentucky CB Hairston's 4.28 is best in 40; Iowa St.'s Noel has top jumps among WRs

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Receiver Matthew Golden of Texas recorded the fastest 40-yard dash time in Saturday's workouts at the NFL's annual scouting combine, finishing in 4.29 seconds.

It was the second-fastest time this week in Indianapolis, just one tick off from Maxwell Hairston. The cornerback from Kentucky ran a 4.28-second 40 on Friday night.

The third of four workout sessions featured quarterbacks, running backs and receivers and Golden's showing allowed the Longhorns to retain the title of fastest receiver in the draft. Xavier Worthy of Texas ran a combine record 4.21-second 40 last year at Lucas Oil Stadium.

Ten receivers and three running backs posted times under 4.4.

Dont'e Thornton Jr. of Tennessee ran a 4.3 and Chimere Dike of Florida had a 4.34 were the closest to Golden. Other notable times included Jaylin Lane of Virginia Tech at 4.34, Tai Felton of Maryland at 4.37 with Golden's college teammate, Isaiah Bond, and Jaylin Noel of Iowa State each clocked at 4.39.

Golden did not do the vertical jump or broad jump.



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Kentucky defensive back Maxwell Hairston runs a drill at the combine on Friday.

Bhayshul Tuten of Virginia Tech was the fastest running back at 4.32 and was followed by Jaydon Blue of Texas at 4.38 and Brashard Smith of SMU at 4.39.

Three receivers had vertical jumps of at least 40 inches — Sam Brown Jr. of Miami and Noel each leapt 41½ inches while Lane was measured at 40. Felton was fourth at 39½.

Noel's broad jump of 11 feet, 2 inches was the best in the receivers group. He was followed by Isaiah Neyor of Nebraska (11-1)



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Texas wide receiver Matthew Golden runs the 40-yard dash at the NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis on Saturday. His 4.29 seconds was the fastest of the 10 receivers who posted times under 4.4.

and Lane (11 feet). Felton was fifth at 10-10.

Two of the top-rated receivers, Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter of Colorado and Tetairoa McMillan of Arizona, did not work out. Heisman runner-up Ashton Jeanty of Boise State, the top-ranked running back, and the top two quarterbacks, Shedeur Sanders of Colorado and Cam Ward of Miami, also did not work out Saturday.

All five plan to do their drills in front of scouts at their respective college pro days.

Tuten also led the running backs with a vertical jump of 40½ inches. DJ Giddens of Kansas

State and Cam Skattebo of Arizona State tied for second at 39½. Quinshon Judkins of Ohio State had the best broad jump (11 feet) in the group and was followed by three backs who went 10-10 — Giddens, Tuten and Omarion Hampton of North Carolina.

Only three quarterbacks ran the 40 and only four participated in the broad jump and vertical jump.

Upton Stout of Western Kentucky and Nohl Williams of California led the cornerbacks with 21 and 19 reps on the bench press, respectively. Caleb Ransaw of Tulane was third with 16. Nick Emaniwor of South Carolina (20), Jaylen Reed of Penn State (19) and

Kitan Crawford of Nevada (18) were the top safeties in the weight room.

Two tight ends from Alabama, CJ Dippre and Robbie Ouzts, had the most reps of the five tight ends who lifted Saturday. Dippre had 32, Ouzts had 26.

Ethan Downs of Oklahoma led the defensive ends with 32 reps on Friday night while Jordan Phillips of Maryland led the defensive tackles with 29 and Teddye Buchanan of California and Nick Martin of Oklahoma State each had 26 reps to lead linebackers.

Offensive linemen will be on the field Sunday for the final full day of workouts in Indianapolis.

Stafford gets restructured contract to stay with Rams

By GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Quarterback Matthew Stafford is staying with the Los Angeles Rams under a restructured contract, ending weeks of speculation about the Super Bowl winner's future.

The Rams announced their new agreement with Stafford on Friday without initially revealing any details.

Stafford, 37, had two years left on the four-year, \$160 million contract extension he signed in 2022, shortly after leading Los Angeles to a championship in his first season with the team. But his \$27 million salary for the upcoming season was significantly less than the compensation for most quarterbacks of Stafford's stature, and the deal had only \$4 million in guaranteed money remaining in 2025 and none in 2026.

Stafford reached a deal to get more guaranteed money last year on the day before training camp opened, and he engaged the Rams



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford will remain in Los Angeles after he and the team agreed to a restructured contract.

on a second renegotiation in recent weeks. The Rams apparently were reluctant to meet Stafford's initial demands, even allowing the quarterback to get an assessment of his value to other teams in view of a possible trade.

The Rams were concerned about a financial commitment that would impede their ability to build depth, but the sides ultimately came to an agreement that will keep Stafford at the controls of coach Sean McVay's offense in

2025. The Rams' social media accounts went even farther, saying Stafford "is here to stay."

Stafford passed for 3,762 yards and 20 touchdowns last season for the Rams, who went 10-7 and won the NFC West before reaching the divisional round of the playoffs, where they lost a close road game to eventual champion Philadelphia.

The Las Vegas Raiders and the New York Giants were among the teams widely reported to be interested in trading for Stafford, even discussing the framework of a potential new contract with Stafford's agent. Raiders minority owner Tom Brady and Stafford made headlines when they ran into each other recently at a Montana ski resort, but Brady's agent said the meeting was brief and accidental.

Stafford has led the Rams to three playoff appearances in four seasons with the team following 12 mostly unsuccessful years with the Detroit Lions, who traded Staf-

ford to Los Angeles in a deal for Jared Goff in early 2021. Stafford has passed for 14,700 yards — sixth-most in Rams history — with 95 touchdowns and 44 interceptions over those four years running McVay's offense.

Stafford needs just 191 more yards passing to become the 10th quarterback in NFL history with 60,000 yards.

The Rams' offense will get continuity at its most important position during what could be a busy offseason. Receiver Cooper Kupp announced three weeks ago that the Rams are trying to trade him, almost certainly ending the Super Bowl 56 MVP's eight-year tenure with Los Angeles.

Even if Kupp departs, McVay and the Rams still appear to provide Stafford's best chance by far to contend for another Super Bowl ring among the choices available to him. Stafford and his wife also won't have to move their four daughters from a comfortable family life in Los Angeles.

NFL COMBINE

Premier QBs build cases, anticipation

Shedeur Sanders, Ward take center stage, though neither will step on the field until pro days

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Shedeur Sanders and Cam Ward stood one podium apart Friday, each making his case to be the first quarterback selected in this year's NFL draft at the same moment.

They couldn't have taken more different approaches.

Sanders arrived in a sparkly necklace and spoke with the same brash confidence that defined the career of his longtime coach and Hall of Fame father, Deion Sanders. Ward delivered a blue-collar message, describing his six-year journey from overlooked Texas prep player to Heisman Trophy finalist and now, perhaps, to being the first pick in April.

And yet, these two college stars managed to cast aside the playful, public verbal barbs to show a mutual respect on one of the most crucial stages in football.

"We'll both end up being one of the best quarterbacks in the league," Ward said. "We play around, we joke around with it (who will be first), but it really doesn't mean nothing. At the end of the day, you've got to show you can improve each and every Sunday. You can't just do it one year. You've got to do it each and every time you step on the field."

Scouts will have to wait until the



PHOTOS BY GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Colorado's Shedeur Sanders, left, and Miami's Cam Ward speak at the NFL combine on Friday. The quarterbacks present different styles on and off the field, but both are in the running to go first in the draft.

players' college pro days to get an actual glimpse of this year's top two quarterbacks because Ward and Sanders did not work out Saturday with the quarterbacks, running backs and receivers in Indianapolis.

They added their names to a long list of top prospects opting to wait to show their stuff on familiar turf while throwing to college teammates. The list includes Caleb Williams, Bryce Young and Joe Burrow, all quarterbacks who were chosen No. 1 overall.

There's no telling yet if Ward or Sanders will be next, but each has plenty of tape for scouts to pore through since both started 50 or

more games while playing at multiple colleges.

Sanders and his father used their flashy style to help revive Jackson State in Mississippi before repeating the feat at Colorado. Ward threw an NCAA record 158 TD passes as he ascended from FCS star at Incarnate Word in Texas to become Washington State's starter before nearly leading Miami to the CFP playoffs.

This week, though, Sanders and Ward seem virtually inseparable as they stroll through the Indianapolis Convention Center hallways, part of the same quarterback group as they ponder their futures and how to sell themselves to

coaches and general managers.

"If you ain't trying to change the franchise then don't get me," Sanders said. "You should know history repeats itself over and over and over, and I've done it over and over and over, so there should be no question why an NFL franchise should pick me."

While there's little debate over their productivity or penchant for winning, there are plenty of questions to answer.

At 6-foot-2, 215 pounds, Sanders possesses good size, a solid arm, mobility in the pocket and the kind of strong personality needed from a locker room leader. Still, he must show the throws he made into tight windows in college will not become interceptions in the NFL and he needs to eliminate his propensity for taking sacks. Others wonder if his father's influence might become a problem.

Sanders shrugged off any such doubts.

"You think I'm worried about what critics say or what people got to say? You know who my dad is? They hated on him, too," Shedeur Sanders said. "So it's almost normal. Without people hating, it's not normal for us. We like the adversity. We like everything that comes with the name. That's why we are who we are."

Ward is slightly bigger at 6-2,

223 pounds, has a stronger arm, a quicker release and throws with more velocity. But he can struggle with accuracy and his ability to read coverages.

And while he's more reserved as a public speaker than Sanders, those who have played with Ward insist he has a different personality in the locker room.

"Everybody sees what he does on the field, his confidence and everything, but the biggest thing I would say is the type of leader he is," former Miami tight end Elijah Arroyo said Thursday. "He's not afraid to hold people accountable. He wants to win, and he holds the team to a certain standard and he doesn't care how he's going to get his point across."

But with no clear-cut favorite entering or leaving combine week, the debate over who's better will only continue to rage as they hold campus workouts and fly around the country for team interviews.

They just believe one thing: Both will be successful, wherever they land.

"I just think the work me and him are willing to put in, the relationship we have to constantly compete each and every day to better our craft and ourselves," Ward said, "I just think it's going to end up paying off for us in the long run."

Big-gain: Eagles, with Barkley, bucked conventional wisdom

FROM PAGE 24

There's little doubt a workhorse back or even a strong backfield tandem can propel a team into an immediate playoff or Super Bowl contender.

But the conventional wisdom lately has been avoiding hefty investments at the position.

Since 2020, only five backs were first-round draft picks and only four went in the top 30.

The same philosophy held true in free agency. Last year, the New York Giants, Tennessee Titans and Las Vegas Raiders each let their top rushers walk away and, perhaps not surprisingly, each team earned top-six picks in April's draft.

Barkley, meanwhile, topped the 2,000-yard mark and won a Super Bowl with the Philadelphia Eagles while Henry and Jacobs led their new teams, Baltimore and Green Bay, back to the playoffs.

Will those results benefit a position group that seemingly has a fit for every team?

Jeanty certainly hopes so after rushing for 2,601 yards and falling 27 yards short of Barry Sanders' Football Bowl Subdivision single-season record as well as falling



DOUG BENC/AP

Saquon Barkley signed with the Philadelphia Eagles in free agency, rushed for more than 2,000 yards and won a Super Bowl.

just short to receiver-cornerback Travis Hunter in the closest Heisman Trophy race since 2009.

"There's a need for a lot of teams at running back, whenever they feel necessary to draft one,"

Jeanty said.

This year's position group is deep, versatile and seems to have something for everyone.

Jeanty, for instance, finished last season with nearly 2,000



Skattebo



Henderson

yards after contact with Boise State.

Cam Skattebo led Arizona State to a CFP playoff berth by rushing for more than 1,700 yards and catching 45 passes for 600.

"It's pretty simple, I'm physical," Skattebo said. "People don't think I'm as fast as I am, which I am fast, but I like to punish defenders because they don't like to do that for four quarters."

Dylan Sampson does more than score touchdowns, but he did break Tennessee's single-season school record, a mark that had stood nearly a century.

And TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins both possess rare power-speed combinations as Ohio State found out in its national championship-winning season. Together they gave the Buckeyes arguably the FBS' best backfield tandem.

"The best part of my game is my breakaway speed," said Henderson, who plans to run the 40-yard dash in Saturday's workouts featuring quarterbacks and receivers in addition to backs. "The area of the game I'm looking to highlight is my pass protection. I feel like that shows what type of player you are."

Jeanty still feels like he has something to prove, too — that he's a better receiver than he had a chance to demonstrate at Boise State.

Each is likely to find an NFL home, though it's unclear where they may land and whether anyone can climb high enough on draft boards to join Jeanty as a first-round selection.

But after this past season, Jeanty thinks NFL teams could be rewarded, maybe handsomely, if they're willing to take a chance.

"You can see the value of running backs is definitely going back up, so definitely coming in at the perfect time," Jeanty said. "It's not just him (Barkley), all the guys are doing exception things in the NFL. And right here, in my draft class, there are a lot of great backs as well."

SPORTS



Tennessee edges Alabama

No. 5 Vols top No. 6 Tide on long 3 at buzzer » College basketball, Page 19

NFL COMBINE

Big-gain potential

Jeanty, deep position group hope to cash in as value of RBs rises

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

Heisman Trophy runner-up Ashton Jeanty noticed running back values declining just as his college career started to take off.

Then he watched the resurgence of free agent acquisitions Saquon Barkley, Derrick Henry and Josh Jacobs and realized things were back on the upswing — just as Jeanty was becoming a marquee name in college football.

The timing couldn't be better for Jeanty and a stacked crop of running backs at the annual NFL scouting combine. Suddenly, Jeanty is considered a possible top-15 pick in one of the strongest position groups.

"I think there was a period of time where there was just kind of a low (in value) at the position," Jeanty said. "But those guys, they've been doing special deals and showing if you have a special player at running back, it can really enhance your offense."

SEE BIG-GAIN ON PAGE 23



"You can see the value of running backs is definitely going back up, so definitely coming in at the perfect time."

Ashton Jeanty
Former Boise State RB, Heisman Trophy runner-up



Boise State running back Ashton Jeanty rushed for 2,601 yards last season, just 27 short of Barry Sanders' Football Bowl Subdivision season record.

DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

More combine and NFL news on Pages 22-23

3 Central teams get jump on trade deadline » NHL, Page 21

