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Lions win division, top seed as Vikings hit road at No. 5
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STARS AND STRIPES®

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JASMIN L. AQUINO/U.S. Navy

The guided missile destroyer USS Oscar Austin conducts a berth shift at Naval Station Rota, Spain, on Dec. 4 before it headed into the Mediterranean Sea. The U.S. Navy's presence in the Mediterranean is at its lowest with last week seeing USS Austin as the only ship on patrol.

US Navy reduces its patrol presence due to eased tensions and only so many ships

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes
NAPLES, Italy — U.S. Navy presence in the Mediterranean Sea is at its lowest in years, an indication the service is feeling the pinch of sustaining the fleet following long overseas deployments, analysts say.
There isn't a carrier strike group

or amphibious ready group in the region, a notable change since the near-constant presence of at least one of those groups in the Mediterranean since December 2022. The Navy hasn't said if it plans to send more ships to Europe anytime soon.
Last week, a single destroyer, USS Oscar Austin, was on patrol in

the eastern Mediterranean, USNI News reported on Dec. 30.
The only other Navy ships in the area on Friday appeared to be the fast-attack submarine USS Indiana, the oiler USS Laramie and the expeditionary sea base USS Woody Williams.
In 2022, naval presence in the Mediterranean and Black seas

reached highs not seen since the Cold War as Russia prepared to invade Ukraine and the service surged forces to the region.
While some of those ships subsequently returned stateside, the Navy's force in the region largely remained constant, increasing in the aftermath of Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023 amid con-

cerns of a wider conflict.
The reasons behind the Navy's current ship allocation in the Mediterranean are varied and complex, analysts said.
For example, it's common for many ships to return to port during the holidays. And with a cease-fire
SEE ALONE ON PAGE 4

Recent incidents highlight increased role of troops, vets in attacks

BY JASON DEAREN, MICHELLE R. SMITH AND AARON KESSLER
Associated Press
The military ties of the man who carried out an attack in New Orleans on New Year's and another who died in an explosion in Las Vegas the same day highlight the



Jabbar

increased role of people with military experience in ideologically driven attacks, especially those that seek mass casualties.
In New Or-



Livelsberger

leans, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a veteran of the U.S. Army, was killed by police after a deadly rampage in a pickup truck that left 14 others

dead and injured dozens more. It's being investigated as an act of terrorism inspired by Islamic State.
In Las Vegas, officials say Matthew Livelsberger, an active duty member of the U.S. Army Special Forces, shot himself in the head in a Tesla Cybertruck packed with firework mortars and camp fuel

canisters, shortly before it exploded outside the entrance of the Trump International Hotel, injuring seven people. On Friday, investigators said Livelsberger wrote that the explosion was meant to serve as a "wake up call"
SEE ATTACKS ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Millions to get higher Social Security payments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Sunday signed into law a measure that boosts Social Security payments for current and former public employees, affecting nearly 3 million people who receive pensions from their time as teachers, firefighters, police officers and in other public service jobs.

Advocates say the Social Security Fairness Act rights a decades-old disparity, though it will also put strain on Social Security Trust Funds, which face a looming insol-

vency crisis.

The bill rescinds two provisions — the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset — that limit Social Security benefits for recipients if they get retirement payments from other sources, including public retirement programs from a state or local government.

“The bill I’m signing today is about a simple proposition: Americans who have worked hard all their life to earn an honest living should be able to retire with economic securi-

ty and dignity — that’s the entire purpose of the Social Security system,” Biden said during a signing ceremony in the White House East Room.

“This is a big deal,” he said.

Biden was joined by labor leaders, retirement advocates, and Democratic and Republican lawmakers including the legislation’s primary sponsors, Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins and exiting Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, who received a standing ovation from ceremony attendees.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates													
Euro costs (Jan. 7)	\$0.94	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9040										
British pound (Jan. 7)	\$1.22	Thailand (Baht)	34.53										
Japanese yen (Jan. 7)	154.00	Turkey (NewLira)	35.3114										
South Korean won (Jan. 7)	1433.00												
Commercial rates													
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	<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>4.30</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.81</td></tr></table>		Prime rate	7.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50	Federal funds market rate	4.33	3-month bill	4.30	30-year bond	4.81
Prime rate	7.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50												
Federal funds market rate	4.33												
3-month bill	4.30												
30-year bond	4.81												
Britain (Pound)	1.2516												
Canada (Dollar)	1.4329												
China (Yuan)	7.3134												
Denmark (Krone)	7.1741												
Egypt (Pound)	50.6740												
Euro	0.9619												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7747												
Hungary (Forint)	399.68												
Israel (Shekel)	3.6344												
Japan (Yen)	157.22												
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3084												
Norway (Krone)	11.2618												
Philippines (Peso)	58.04												
Poland (Zloty)	4.08												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7543												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3623												
South Korea (Won)	1459.85												

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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PACIFIC



STEPHANY JOHNSON/U.S. Air Force

Airmen with the 35th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron unload an AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missile during training at Misawa Air Base, Japan.

Japan to acquire \$3.64B in air-to-air missiles from US

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. government has proposed selling 1,200 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles to Japan to help counter threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

The State Department approved the sale of up to 1,200 AIM-120 (D-3/C-8) advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles, or AMRAAMs; up to 20 AIM-120D-3 guidance sections; and up to four AIM-120C-8 guidance sections, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency announced in a news release Thursday.

The proposed sale is worth an estimated \$3.64 billion.

The AMRAAM is an improved version of the AIM-7 Sparrow missile and is capable of striking targets beyond visual range. All U.S. fighters, and those sold to its allies, may carry the AMRAAM, according to the Air Force. Pilots may fire several missiles simultaneously at several targets, then take evasive action while the mis-

siles guide themselves to detonation.

The sale would include warheads, propulsion equipment, AIM-120 captive air training missiles, spare and repair parts, technical documentation and support, the release said.

The missiles will “improve Japan’s capability to meet current and future threats by defending its homeland and U.S. personnel stationed there,” according to the release.

The approval comes as Japan continues to beef up its defense spending. The government in 2022 set a target of spending 2% of Japan’s gross domestic product for defense, aiming to strengthen its deterrence capabilities in a security environment made uncertain by an assertive China.

The missiles would give Japan “a chance” in aerial combat against China, North Korea or Russia, but the sale is “just one step of many that Japan needs to take to prepare to fight a war,” re-

tired Marine Col. Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo, told Stars and Stripes via email Monday.

“This alone is not going to deter Japan’s enemies very much,” he wrote. “It will give them something to think about and it will make [Japan’s Air Self-Defense Force] more deadly, but by itself it isn’t a ‘game-changer.’”

The department notified Congress of the proposed sale on Thursday, the release said. Lawmakers will have 15 days to review the sale, according to the Arms Export Control Act.

State Department spokesman Andrew Strike in an email Monday declined to comment on the sale beyond the release.

Last month, Japan’s government approved the country’s largest-ever defense budget for this year at 8.7 trillion yen, or about \$54.8 billion — a 9.7% increase from 2024’s budget of 7.95 trillion yen, or about \$50.1 billion.

Army seeks public help in search for at-risk teen missing near Camp Zama

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The U.S. Army is requesting help finding a teenager who went missing near Camp Zama early Monday.

Tupu Lamar Hawkins, 17, “has been determined to be at significant risk by law enforcement,” according to a missing person alert issued by the Army Criminal Investigation Division that evening.

Hawkins was last seen leaving



Hawkins

the Sagami-hara Family Housing Area at 3:16 a.m., the Army said. He may have been walking toward the nearest 7/11 convenience store.

Hawkins is approximately 5-foot-9 with black hair and brown eyes, according to

the alert.

He was wearing a blue sweatshirt, blue jeans and brown dress shoes.

“Any person having credible information regarding this missing person should contact the Army CID Far East Field Office/Japan at (517) 637-8561,” the alert said. “Anonymous tips can also be submitted through Army CID at www.cid.army.mil/tips.”

Japan inspects site of PFAS leak at Yokota

Firefighting foam likely overflowed into stormwater drains from training facility

BY SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Japanese officials visited a training facility at this airlift hub in western Tokyo where firefighting foam likely overflowed into stormwater drains last summer.

The Aug. 30 leak of thousands of gallons of water was probably tainted with PFAS, so-called “forever chemicals.”

On Oct. 3, U.S. authorities notified the Japanese government of the spill “since it was highly likely” that the water flowed outside the facility, according to a statement last month from Japan’s ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and the Environment.

Local authorities requested an on-base inspection, according to the Dec. 20 statement, which announced the site visit that day.

A short burst of heavy rain caused approximately 12,640 gallons of water to overflow from Yokota’s fire training area onto an asphalt surface and eventually into stormwater drains, Capt. Emma Quirk, spokeswoman for Yokota’s 374th Airlift Wing, said in October.

The water probably contained residual amounts of aqueous film forming foam, she said.

The foam is a firefighting material that contains PFAS, a class of chemicals with suspected toxic properties. U.S. Forces Japan announced in November that the U.S. military had destroyed its last supplies of toxic firefighting foam at installations in the country.

PFAS, and its components, PFOS and PFOA, are found in many household products, from stainproof and waterproof fabric to nonstick cookware, according to the American Cancer Society. They are linked to an increased risk of certain tumors of the liver, testicles, breasts and pancreas.

Representatives of the Japanese government, Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the surrounding cities and towns of Fussa, Tachikawa, Akishima, Musashimurayama, Hamura and Mizuho participated in the site visit, according to the ministries’ statement.

They inspected the fire training area, according to the statement, which included a summary of what Yokota officials told the visitors.

The area includes a rusting aircraft mockup, a tower and a few wrecked cars parked in an area about the size of a football field west of the runway.

The leak was visually confirmed by civil engineering units, according to the summary.

“The water leaked from the training pit in the firefighting training area, flowed through the asphalt surrounding the training pit into the surrounding gutters and then into the underground drainage pipes,” it states. “It is also possible that the water in the reservoir was blown by wind to the surface of the asphalt. However, it is highly unlikely that it flowed outside the base without passing through the stormwater drains.”

Water in the reservoir contained 1,620 nanograms of PFOS per liter when it was tested in November 2023, well above Japan’s target value of 50 nanograms per liter, according to the summary.

“Since then, no fire drills have been conducted that would have added PFOS and such to the reservoir,” it states.

Water from the Aug. 30 leak flowed into drains and, ultimately, to the southwest part of the base, according to the summary.

As a short-term measure to prevent recurrence, approximately 40,000 gallons of water were removed from the base by the end of October and incinerated at an approved facility, according to the summary.

“Considering the current water level in the reservoir, the risk of leakage is low since there will be little rainfall for the time being because it is winter,” it states.

Remaining water will be managed appropriately, and additional information will be provided through the Japanese government when a decision is made about how it will be managed, the summary states.

Spokespeople for Yokota and USFJ did not answer phone calls or respond to emailed requests for comment Monday.

EUROPE

Austin to lead final meeting on Ukraine aid

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin this week will hold his final meeting of a group of about 50 countries that banded together to support Ukraine against Russia’s 2022 invasion.

Austin is slated to lead Ukraine Defense Contact Group discussions Thursday at Ramstein Air Base, where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is expected to make an appeal for more air defense systems.

During the gathering of defense ministers and military leaders, Austin will reaffirm the United States’ “enduring commitment to Ukraine,” the Pentagon said.

“Secretary Austin will focus on delivering practical and coordinated support that reinforces Ukraine’s ability to defend itself today and deter aggression in the future,” Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said Friday.

Yet the durability of U.S. military support for Ukraine is in question, as is the fate of the body known informally as the Ramstein

group.

In two weeks, President-elect Donald Trump will take office and could bring with him a policy overhaul in how the United States approaches the war in Ukraine.

While it is not clear yet whether Trump will halt U.S. military aid to Kyiv, he has expressed opposition before and said he intends to bring Russia and Ukraine to the negotiating table in an attempt to end the war, which began Feb. 24, 2022.

Trump hasn’t laid out how he intends to pursue peace, but his

team is said to be considering a plan that would see European troops in charge of a demilitarized zone in Ukraine.

The proposal, reported by The Wall Street Journal in November, would have the U.S. continue to provide arms to Ukraine in exchange for sizable territorial concessions and a deferment of Ukrainian NATO ambitions.

So far, Zelenskyy hasn’t indicated any interest in ceding territory to Russia, which occupies a swath of Ukraine that is roughly the size of Pennsylvania.

But the Ukrainian leader is in a difficult spot given a worsening manpower shortage for his armed forces and his country’s dependence on American military support.

Zelenskyy said he will press Ukraine’s backers at the Ramstein meeting, emphasizing the need for more missile and anti-aircraft systems.

“We will talk to them about this,” he said Saturday in an address to his country. “We will convince them. Life needs protection here and now in Ukraine.”

Alone: Navy feels stress of extended deployments

FROM PAGE 1

agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, there’s less likelihood of a sudden crisis.

Meanwhile, the service is fighting Iranian-backed Houthi militants threatening ships in the Red Sea, among other competing priorities that are drawing resources.

But ultimately, the reduction in forces on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean boils down to having a fleet that is inadequately sized to meet demand, analysts said.

Presence in the Mediterranean is “partly threat-driven and situation-driven, and it’s all conditioned by (the fact that) there aren’t enough ships in the Navy,” said Bradley Martin, a retired Navy surface warfare officer and director of the Rand Corp. National Security Supply Chain Institute.

With limited U.S. ashore bases in the region, the presence of a carrier in the eastern Mediterranean offers more flexibility. It also signals to Russia and other competitors that the U.S. is militarily committed to the region, naval experts said.

“The European theater and the mischief and war-making at work in that theater demands a strong U.S. response in concert with (allies),” said Bryan McGrath, managing director of the Maryland-

based national security and defense consulting firm the Ferry Bridge Group.

“One of the ways you deter another power is to show that other power that you are willing to risk things that are important to you,” McGrath added. “That is the essence of deterrence, and we don’t routinely do that.”

That doesn’t mean the U.S. lacks the resources to respond to a crisis in the region, Martin and other analysts pointed out.

In addition to Oscar Austin, four other destroyers are based at Rota, Spain, and could be in the area within days. Air Force planes from Aviano Air Base in northern Italy and other locations in Europe and the Middle East could be used if needed.

And navies from NATO countries, such as Italy, France, Greece and Spain, regularly patrol the Mediterranean.

“It’s a little awkward that we don’t have something in the eastern Med for anyone that likes having the reassurance of a surface ship,” said Michael Bohnert, a Rand Corp. analyst. “But from a military and a practical perspective, it’s perfectly fine.”

Still, multiple extended deployments have taken a toll on Navy ships and played havoc with maintenance and repair schedules, said



JASMIN L. AQUINO/U.S. Navy

Sailors aboard the destroyer USS Oscar Austin attach a cargo hook to an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter during a replenishment drill on Dec. 16 in the Mediterranean Sea.

Bryan Clark, director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

For example, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower spent roughly nine months deployed, fending off Houthi attacks at a combat tempo unseen in decades.

The Navy also extended the deployments of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, among other ships and groups.

Those extended deployments hurt an already tight maintenance and repair schedule, creating a domino effect of delays exacerbated by the need for additional work from the wear and tear of having a ship at sea for a longer period,

Clark said.

“The Navy worked a lot of ships hard over the last year-and-a-half with what’s going on in Israel and the Middle East,” Clark said. “Those operations put a huge stress on the force.”

In 2024, the service’s deployable battle force was estimated to be 293, down three from the year before, Stars and Stripes reported in March 2023. That number includes 11 aircraft carriers in various cycles of operation, deployment and maintenance.

Three carriers — USS George Washington, USS Carl Vinson and USS Harry S. Truman — are now deployed.

In the final analysis, shortage of

ships and manpower explains why the service has fewer ships in the Mediterranean, said McGrath, who served 21 years in the Navy, including as commander of the destroyer USS Bulkeley.

He advocates for a constant carrier and amphibious presence in Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. Those three major areas of the world are where the U.S. has enduring interests.

Yet “we have a Navy barely sized to accomplish our desires in two regions,” he said.

“If we were to be, in any one of those three areas or some combination thereof, actually at war, we are in desperate trouble,” McGrath added.

Russia claims it has captured another key town in eastern Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops in eastern Ukraine have captured the stronghold of Kurakhove after a monthslong battle, Russia’s Defense Ministry claimed Monday, adding the wrecked town to the Kremlin’s list of conquests during the almost three-year war.

The claim, which drew no response from Ukrainian author-

ities, came a day after the Russian Defense Ministry said Ukrainian forces had pressed new attacks in Russia’s Kursk border region.

The inauguration in two weeks’ time of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has brought a new element of uncertainty into the conflict and triggered an apparent effort by both sides to establish battlefield gains before any possible peace talks are held.

Trump hasn’t detailed his plans for accomplishing his goal of ending the fighting, but his presence in the White House is likely to significantly affect how the war plays out.

Kurakhove is a key stronghold for the Ukrainian army on the eastern front line in the partially occupied Donetsk region.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said Sunday that Ukraine launched a

fresh offensive in the Kursk region of Russia. It claimed its forces pushed back Ukrainian troops, but some reports from Russian military bloggers indicated that Moscow’s forces faced significant pressure.

A ministry statement said Ukrainian forces attacked about 9 a.m. local time near the village of Berdin with two tanks, a mine-clearing vehicle and 12 armored

combat vehicles with paratroopers. Two Ukrainian attacks were repelled, it said.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Andriy Yermak said there was “good news” from Kursk and that Russia was “getting what it deserves.” And Andriy Kovalenko, head of Ukraine’s official Centre Against Disinformation, said on Telegram that Russian troops were attacked in several places.

MILITARY

Marines on pathway to save desert tortoises

Sheltered habitat created to offset base expansion at Twentynine Palms

BY ALEX WIGGLESWORTH
Los Angeles Times

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. — The two tiny tortoises emerged from their burrows as soon as they detected Brian Henen’s footsteps, eager for the handfuls of bok choy and snap peas that would soon be tossed their way.

It will be a few years before the tortoises, roughly the size of playing cards, have shells tough enough to avoid becoming prey for the ravens soaring above. So for now, they live with roughly 1,000 others of their species in a sheltered habitat ringed by barbed wire and draped in netting.

The elaborate setup on the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center is designed to protect the tortoises not only from ravens, coyotes and other predators, but from rumbling tanks, live explosives and anything else that might put them in harm’s way at the 1,189-square-mile Mojave Desert base.

“The desert tortoise is considered a keystone species, which means that they have a disproportionate effect on the entire ecosystem,” says Henen, a civilian who heads the conservation branch of the base’s Environmental Affairs Division.

The tortoises pockmark the desert floor with burrows that other animals use for shelter, and disperse the seeds of native plants in their waste. “They’re influencing what else can exist on the landscape,” Henen said.

With its barbed-wire enclosure, some call this place Tortoise Gitmo, after the U.S. Navy’s Guantanamo Bay base and prison camp in Cuba. Others call it the Tortoise Bordello, although the young tortoises are released before they are mature enough to breed.

Officially it’s called the Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site, and since it was established in 2005 it has helped scientists learn how to protect a species that’s threatened by human encroachment, disease and climate change.

In the first iteration of the program, biologists gathered eggs from wild females and raised the hatchlings until they were hardy enough to stand a chance against predators and drought, in a process known as head-starting.

The facility got an influx of new tenants in 2017, when the military relocated tortoises to make way for a controversial expansion of



PHOTOS BY ROBERT GAUTHIER, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Brian Henen of the Environmental Affairs Division at Twentynine Palms, Calif., holds a desert tortoise. Some desert conservationists say the captive rearing program is essentially a smokescreen that distracts from the pressing need to conserve critical habitat.



The Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site raises vulnerable tortoises at Twentynine Palms. Since it was established in 2005, the site has helped scientists learn how to protect a species that’s threatened by human encroachment, disease and climate change.

the base’s training grounds. Biologists decided to head-start about 550 young tortoises that were taken from expansion areas.

Then, starting a couple of years ago, Henen’s team began gathering, incubating and hatching eggs from the relocated adult tortoises to study whether they were breeding with their new neighbors. Rather than release the hatchlings into the wild, where they were unlikely to survive, they decided to head-start them as well.

Some desert conservationists are critical of the efforts, saying the captive rearing program is essentially a smokescreen that distracts from the pressing need to conserve critical habitat.

“What I’d like to see is this kind of effort being done on public lands as a tool to repatriate areas as opposed to minimizing the impacts of the Marine Corps expansion,” said Ed LaRue, a board member of the nonprofit Desert

Tortoise Council.

“Hundreds of square miles of good tortoise habitat is now being used for military maneuvers,” LaRue said, citing base expansions at Twentynine Palms and at Fort Irwin National Training Center near Barstow. “It enables the military to go ahead and degrade the desert and claim it’s successful because the tortoises have been moved out of the way.”

Bases should instead stop expanding into tortoise habitat, he said.

Henen says the program has enabled biologists to both augment tortoise populations and track the success of those efforts by committing to decades of monitoring.

He also points out that the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center has partnered with a coalition of agencies and nongovernmental organizations to conserve land off base. And inside the

boundaries of the massive installation, officials have identified the most valuable tortoise habitat and set aside 43,800 acres of restricted areas that protect the species, as well as other natural and cultural resources, he says.

Marines at Twentynine Palms receive specialized training on how to handle tortoises. A glimpse of a single reptile interloper will bring a training exercise to a halt. Troops must radio in to range control and request permission to move the animal. If permission is granted but the tortoise urinates, which can cause them to become dangerously dehydrated, the soldiers must call it in again and wait for a base ecologist to respond.

Desert tortoises were once so plentiful that people driving through the Mojave would take them home to keep as backyard pets. But in some patches of California desert, their numbers have dropped by up to 96% since the 1970s, according to study plots monitored by Kristin Berry, supervisory research wildlife biologist at the U.S. Geological Survey’s Western Ecological Research Center.

Recognizing the dire straits, the California Fish and Game Commission in April voted to uplist desert tortoises from threatened to endangered.

The Marines are hardly the only threat to tortoises. Roads and highways have carved up previously wide-open stretches of desert into parcels that are in some cases too small to allow for the breeding and genetic diversity needed to sustain their population health. A warming climate has dried up the precipitation needed

to sustain them in some places.

Livestock not native to the desert have grazed and trampled the plants tortoises like to eat, spreading unpalatable nonnative grasses in their wake. Power lines have added miles of resting perches for ravens, allowing them to more easily spot young tortoises.

Ravens used to be rare in the desert — they could only subsist for a couple of months in the springtime of good rainfall years, said Ken Nagy, professor emeritus at UCLA, who with Henen founded the program at Twentynine Palms. But now, thanks to everything from leaky faucets at gas stations to the irrigation of alfalfa fields, the birds have year-round sources of drinking water that’s caused their population to explode to 30 to 50 times greater than what it once was, he said.

“You can go beneath raven nests on power poles and see piles of dead baby tortoises that were opened, killed, carried to the nests by adults and fed to the babies,” he said. “That is what started this whole thing.”

In desert tortoise head-starting programs, biologists use radio transmitters to monitor wild females and portable X-ray machines to determine when they’re pregnant. They bring those females inside enclosures to lay their eggs, then release them. The hatchlings are reared in captivity until they reach a certain length — Twentynine Palms uses a threshold of 110 millimeters, or about 4 inches long, which can take between seven and nine years — and then rereleased, typically with radio transmitters to monitor their health and movements.

The concept was pioneered in the 1990s at Fort Irwin, followed by a similar program at Edwards Air Force Base near Mojave.

The captive rearing site is tucked in an isolated corner of the base, down a sandy road flanked by mesquite dunes and wrinkled mountains; past collections of buildings used for training that resemble crudely built neighborhoods. Fences to keep Marines on the road have spiky pins atop each post to prevent ravens from having yet another place to perch.

The program, and others like it, have won converts over the years.

Biologist Tim Shields, who founded a company that develops tortoise conservation technology, was once opposed to head-starting because he thought it was unnatural and the tortoises would be inferior at survival.

“But some very intelligent people have spent a lot of time figuring out a formula for essentially mass production of tortoises — and I’m all for it,” he said. “Because the underlying ecosystem is so bunged up that I don’t see an alternative.”

NATION

New Orleans attacker used Meta glasses to check site

By JACK BROOK, STEPHEN SMITH AND SARA CLINE
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS—The man responsible for the truck attack in New Orleans on New Year’s Day that killed 14 people visited the city twice before and recorded video of the French Quarter with Meta smart glasses, an FBI official said Sunday.

Shamsud-Din Jabbar also traveled to Cairo and Canada before the attack although it was not yet clear whether those trips were connected to the attack, Deputy Assistant Director Christopher Raia said at a news conference. Federal officials believe Jabbar, a U.S. citizen and former U.S. Army soldier, was inspired by the Islamic State militant group to carry out the attack.

Police fatally shot Jabbar, 42, during an exchange of gunfire at the scene of the deadly crash of the rented pickup truck on Bourbon Street, famous worldwide for its festive vibes in New Orleans’ historic French Quarter.

Federal investigators so far be-

lieve Jabbar acted alone, but are continuing to explore his contacts. “All investigative details and evidence that we have now still support that Jabbar acted alone here in New Orleans,” said Raia. “We have not seen any indications of an accomplice in the United States, but we are still looking into potential associates in the U.S. and outside of our borders.”

Lyonel Myrthil, FBI special agent in charge of the New Orleans Field Office, said Jabbar traveled to Cairo in the summer of 2023 and then to the Canadian province of Ontario a few days later.

“Our agents are getting answers to where he went, who he met with and how those trips may or may not tie into his actions here,” Myrthil said.

Suspect recorded video with smart glasses while plotting attack, the FBI says

Jabbar had also traveled to New Orleans twice in the months preceding the attack, first in October and again in November.

On Oct. 31, Myrthil said Jabbar used glasses from Meta, the par-

ent company of Facebook, to record video as he rode through the French Quarter on a bicycle as “he plotted this hideous attack.” He said Jabbar was also in New Orleans on Nov. 10.

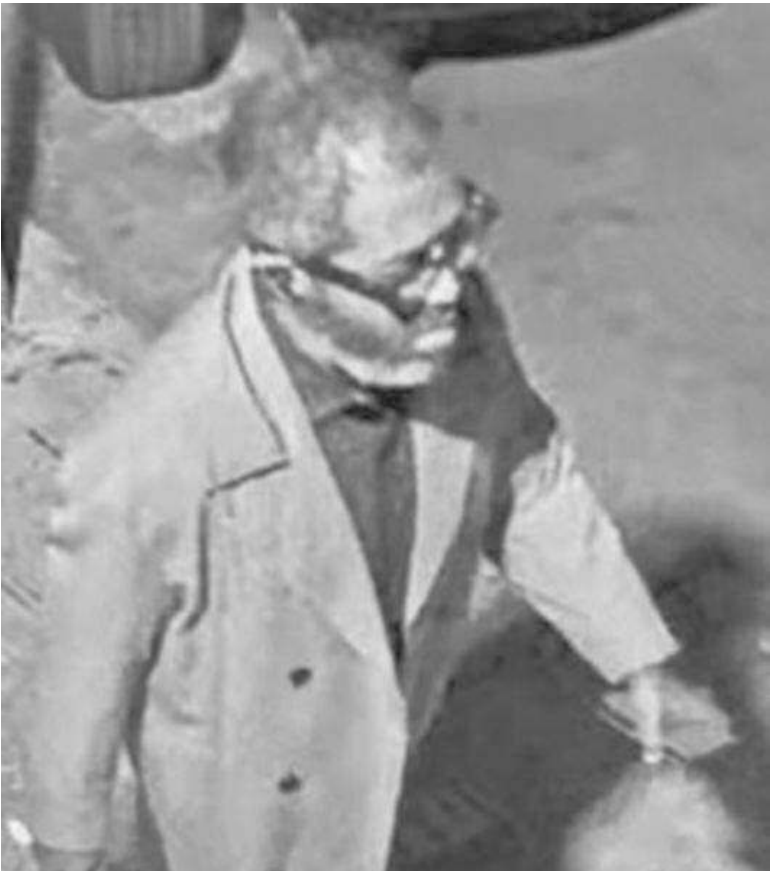
He also wore the glasses capable of livestreaming during the attack, but Myrthil said Jabbar did not activate them.

When asked about the glasses, a Meta spokesperson declined comment.

The FBI released Jabbar’s recorded video from the planning trip to New Orleans as well as video showing him placing two containers with explosive devices in the French Quarter at around 2 a.m. shortly before the attack. One of the containers, a cooler, was moved a block away by someone uninvolved with the attack, officials said.

Joshua Jackson, New Orleans special agent in charge, said Jabbar purchased a semiautomatic rifle on Nov. 19 from an individual in a legal transaction in Arlington, Texas.

“This was a chance encounter,” Jackson said. “There’s no way this



NYJ0331/AP

The Federal Bureau of Investigation released photos of surveillance footage that shows Shamsud-Din Jabbar an hour before he drove a truck down Bourbon Street, New Orleans, early Wednesday.

individual knew that Jabbar was radicalized or had any sort of awareness that this attack was imminent.”

The two explosive devices that Jabbar placed were recovered by federal officials undetonated.

ATF Special Agent in Charge Joshua Jackson credited New Orleans police for responding quickly before the devices could be set off. He said both were equipped with receivers and a transmitter was recovered in Jabbar’s truck.

Tesla data helped police in Las Vegas blast; experts concerned

By BERNARD CONDON
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Your car is spying on you.

That is one takeaway from the fast, detailed data that Tesla collected on the driver of one of its Cybertrucks that exploded in Las Vegas earlier this week. Privacy data experts say the deep dive by Elon Musk’s company was impressive, but also shines a spotlight on a difficult question as vehicles become less like cars and more like computers on wheels.

Is your car company violating your privacy rights?

“You might want law enforcement to have the data to crack down on criminals, but can anyone have access to it?” said Jodi Daniels, CEO of privacy consulting firm Red Clover Advisors. “Where is the line?”

Many of the latest cars not only know where you’ve been and where you are going, but also often have access to your contacts, your call logs, your texts and other sensitive information thanks to cell phone syncing.

The data collected by Musk’s electric car company after the Cybertruck packed with fireworks burst into flames in front of the Trump International Hotel Wednesday proved valuable to police in helping track the driver’s



LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

The remains of the Tesla Cybertruck that exploded Wednesday in front of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

movements.

Within hours of the New Year’s Day explosion that burned the driver beyond recognition and injured seven, Tesla was able to track Matthew Livelsberger’s movements in detail from Denver to Las Vegas, and also confirm that the problem was explosives in the truck, not the truck itself. Tesla used data collected from charging stations and from onboard software — and to great acclaim.

“I have to thank Elon Musk, specifically,” said Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahon to reporters. “He

gave us quite a bit of additional information.”

Some privacy experts were less enthusiastic.

“It reveals the kind of sweeping surveillance going on,” said David Choffnes, executive director of the Cybersecurity and Privacy Institute at Northeastern University in Boston. “When something bad happens, it’s helpful, but it’s a double edged sword. Companies that collect this data can abuse it.”

General Motors, for instance, was sued in August by the Texas attorney general for allegedly selling data from 1.8 million drivers to

insurance companies without their consent.

Cars equipped with cameras to enable self-driving features have added a new security risk. Tesla itself came under fire after Reuters reported how employees from 2019 through 2022 shared drivers’ sensitive videos and recordings with each other, including videos of road rage incidents and, in one case, nudity.

Tesla did not respond to emailed questions about its privacy policy. On its website, Tesla says it follows strict rules for keeping names and information private.

“No one but you would have knowledge of your activities, location, or a history of where you’ve been,” according to a statement. “Your information is kept private and secure.”

Auto analyst Sam Abuelsamid at Telemetry Insight, said he doesn’t think Tesla is “especially worse” than other auto companies in handling customer data, but he is still concerned.

“This is one of the biggest ethical issues we have around modern vehicles. They’re connected,” he said. “Consumers need to have control over their data.”

Tensions were high when the Cybertruck parked at the front doors of Trump’s hotel began smoking, then burst into flames. Just hours earlier a driver in another vehicle using the same peer-to-peer car rental service, Turo, had killed 15 people after slamming into a crowd in New Orleans in what law enforcement is calling a terrorist attack.

Shortly before 1 p.m., the Las Vegas police announced they were investigating a second incident.

“The fire is out,” the police announced on X, one of Musk’s other companies. “Please avoid the area.”

Tesla shortly thereafter swung into action.

“The whole Tesla senior team is investigating this matter right now,” Musk wrote on X. “Will post more information as soon as we learn anything.”

Over the next few hours, Tesla was able to piece together Livelsberger’s journey over five days and four states by tracking, among other things, his recharging stops in various locations, including Monument, Colo., Albuquerque, N.M., and Flagstaff, Ariz.

There are no federal laws regulating car data similar to those that restrict information collection and sharing by banks and health care providers. And state laws are a grab-bag of various rules, mostly focused on data privacy in general.

MILITARY

Attacks: Vets, troops radicalized at faster rate, study found

FROM PAGE 1

and that the country was “terminally ill and headed toward collapse.”

Service members and veterans who radicalize make up a tiny fraction of a percentage point of the millions and millions who have honorably served their country. But an Associated Press investigation published last year found that radicalization among both veterans and active duty service members was on the rise and that hundreds of people with military backgrounds had been arrested for extremist crimes since 2017. The AP found that extremist plots they were involved in during that period had killed or injured nearly 100 people.

The AP also found multiple issues with the Pentagon’s efforts to address extremism in the ranks, including that there is still no force-wide system to track it, and that a cornerstone report on the issue contained old data, misleading analyses and ignored evidence of the problem.

Since 2017, both veterans and active duty service members radicalized at a faster rate than people without military backgrounds, according to data from terrorism researchers at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or START, at the University of Maryland.

Less than 1% of the adult population is currently serving in the U.S. military, but active duty military members make up a disproportionate 3.2% of the extremist cases START researchers found between 2017 and 2022.

While the number of people with military backgrounds involved in violent extremist plots remains small, the participation of active military and veterans gave extremist plots more potential for mass injury or death, according to data collected and analyzed by the AP and START.

More than 480 people with a military background were accused of ideologically driven extremist crimes from 2017 through

2023, including the more than 230 arrested in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection — 18% of those arrested for the attack as of late last year, according to START.

The data tracked individuals with military backgrounds, most of whom were veterans, involved in plans to kill, injure or inflict damage for political, social, economic or religious goals.

The AP’s analysis found that plots involving people with military backgrounds were more likely to involve mass casualties, weapons training or firearms than plots that didn’t include someone with a military background. This held true whether or not the plots were carried out.

The jihadist ideology of ISIS apparently connected to the New Orleans attack would make it an outlier in the motivations of previous attacks involving people with military backgrounds. Only around 9% of such extremists with military backgrounds subscribed to jihadist ideologies, START re-

searchers found. More than 80% identified with far-right, anti-government or white supremacist ideologies, with the rest split among far-left or other motivations.

Still, there have been a number of significant attacks motivated by ISIS and jihadist ideology in which the attackers had U.S. military backgrounds.

In 2017, a U.S. Army National Guard veteran who’d served in Iraq killed five people in a mass shooting at the Fort Lauderdale airport in Florida after radicalizing via jihadist message boards and vowing support for ISIS.

In 2009, an Army psychiatrist and officer opened fire at Fort Hood (now Fort Cavazos), Texas, and killed 13 people, wounding dozens more. The shooter had been in contact with a known al-Qaida operative prior to the shooting.

In the shadow of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol — led in part by veterans — law enforcement officials said the threat from domestic

violent extremists was one of the most persistent and pressing terror threats to the United States.

The Pentagon has said it is “committed to understanding the root causes of extremism and ensuring such behavior is promptly and appropriately addressed and reported to the proper authorities.”

Kristofer Goldsmith, an Army veteran and CEO of Task Force Butler Institute, which trains veterans to research and counter extremism, said the problem of violent extremism in the military cuts across ideological lines.

Still, he said, while the Biden administration tried to put in place efforts to address it, Republicans in Congress opposed them for political reasons.

“They threw, you know, every roadblock that they could in saying that all veterans are being called extremists by the Biden administration,” Goldsmith said. “And now we’re in a situation where we’re four years behind where we could have been.”

Military assignments, deployments by Livelsberger, Jabbar

Stars and Stripes

The Army on Sunday released a list of assignments and deployment for Shamsud-Din Jabbar, who drove a truck into a crowd in New Orleans on New Year’s Day, and Matthew Livelsberger, who was driving a truck that exploded in Las Vegas the same day.

Jabbar was an Army veteran. Livelsberger was a noncommissioned officer in the Army’s Special Forces.

Livelsberger

Assignments

- July 2022 to present — 10th Special Forces Group, Germany
- October 2013 to July 2022 —

- 10th Special Forces Group, Fort Carson, Colo.
- December 2012 to October 2013 — Student Support Battalion, F Detachment, Fort Bragg, N.C.
- October 2010 to December 2012 — 19th Special Forces Group, Columbus, Ohio.
- February 2008 to October 2010 — 10th Special Forces Group, Germany
- May 2006 to February 2008 — Student Support Battalion, 1 Special Warfare Training Group, Fort Bragg.

Deployments

- Republic of Georgia — February 2021 to March 2021
- Afghanistan — February

- 2019 to September 2019
- Afghanistan — September 2017 to April 2018
- Tajikistan — June 2016 to December 2016
- Ukraine — January 2016 to March 2016
- Republic of Congo — March 2014 to September 2014
- Afghanistan — June 2010 to September 2010
- Afghanistan — May 2009 to December 2009
- Afghanistan — April 2008 to November 2008

Jabbar

Assignments: reserve

- January 2018 to March 2019

- Information Technology Staff Noncommissioned Officer In Charge, 373rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Beaumont, Texas
- January 2016 to January 2018 — Information Technology Staff Noncommissioned Officer, 368th Engineer Detachment (FEST-M), Decatur, Ga.
- January 2015 to January 2016 — Information Technology Team Chief, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 324th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, Fort Gordon, Ga.

Assignments: active duty

- June 2012 to January 2015 — Information Technology Team

- Chief, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg.
- June 2011 to June 2012 — Brigade Automations NCO, 1st 82nd Infantry Provisional, Fort Bragg.
- September 2010 to June 2011 — Human Resources Sergeant, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron (A), 40th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Richardson, Alaska
- January 2008 to September 2010 — Human Resources Specialist, Fort Richardson
- Deployment
- Afghanistan — February 2009 to January 2010

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NATION

Congress certifies Trump election victory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress certified President-elect Donald Trump as the winner of the 2024 election in proceedings that unfolded Monday without violence or mayhem, in stark contrast to the Jan. 6, 2021, violence as his mob of supporters stormed the Capitol.

Lawmakers convened under heavy security and a snowstorm to meet the date required by law to certify the election, but the legacy of Jan. 6 leaves an extraordinary fact: The candidate who tried to overturn the previous election won this time and is legitimately returning to power.

Layers of tall black fencing flank the U.S. Capitol complex in a stark reminder of what happened four years ago, when a defeated Trump sent his mob to “fight like hell” in what became the most gruesome attack on the seat of American democracy in 200 years.

Vice President Kamala Harris, presiding over proceedings as the role of the office, read the tally.

The chamber broke into applause, first Republicans for Trump, then Democrats for Harris.

The whole process happened swiftly and without unrest. One by one, the state results were read aloud by the tellers as senators and representatives sat in seats in the House chamber. Vice President-elect JD Vance joined his former colleagues. Within half an hour the process was done.

No violence, protests or even procedural objections in Congress this time. Republicans who challenged the 2020 election results when Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden have no qualms this year after he defeated Harris.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Vice President Kamala Harris presides Monday over the counting of electoral votes at a joint session of Congress, affirming President-elect Donald Trump's victory.

And Democrats frustrated by Trump's 312-226 Electoral College victory nevertheless accept the choice of the American voters. Even the winter snow blanketing the grounds didn't interfere.

Trump said in a Monday post online that Congress was certifying a “GREAT” election victory and called it “A BIG MOMENT IN HISTORY.”

The day's return to a U.S. tradition that launches the peaceful transfer of presidential power comes with an asterisk as Trump prepares to take office in two weeks with a revived sense of authority. He denies that he lost four years ago, muses about staying beyond the Constitution's two-term White House limit and promises to pardon some of the more than 1,250 people who have pleaded guilty or were convicted of crimes for the Capitol siege.

What's unclear is if Jan. 6, 2021,

was the anomaly, the year Americans violently attacked their own government, or if this year's expected calm becomes the outlier. The U.S. is struggling to cope with its political and cultural differences at a time when democracy worldwide is threatened. Trump calls Jan. 6, 2021, a “day of love.”

“We should not be lulled into complacency,” said Ian Bassin, executive director of the cross-ideological nonprofit Protect Democracy.

He and others have warned that returning to power an emboldened leader who has demonstrated his unwillingness to give up the office “is an unprecedentedly dangerous move for a free country to voluntarily take.”

Biden, speaking Sunday at events at the White House, said, “We've got to get back to the basic, normal transfer of power,” the president said. What Trump did

last time, Biden said, “was a genuine threat to democracy. I'm hopeful we're beyond that now.”

Still, American democracy has proven to be resilient, and Congress, the branch of government closest to the people, was coming together to affirm the choice of Americans.

With pomp and tradition, the day unfolded as it has countless times before, with the arrival of ceremonial mahogany boxes filled with the electoral certificates from the states — boxes that staff were frantically grabbing and protecting as Trump's mob stormed the building last time.

Senators walked across the Capitol — which four years ago had filled with roaming rioters, some defecating and menacingly calling out for leaders, others engaging in hand-to-hand combat with police — to the House to begin certifying the vote.

Harris presided over the counting, as is the requirement for the vice president, and certify her own defeat — much the way Democrat Al Gore did in 2001 and Republican Richard Nixon in 1961.

She stood at the dais where then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi was abruptly rushed to safety last time as the mob closed in and lawmakers fumbled to put on gas masks and flee, and shots rang out as police killed Ashli Babbitt, a Trump supporter trying to climb through a broken glass door toward the chamber.

The House chaplain, Margaret Kibben, who delivered a prayer during the mayhem four years ago, gave a simple request as the chamber opened to “shine your light in the darkness.”

There are new procedural rules in place in the aftermath of what happened four years ago, when Republicans parroting Trump's lie that the election was fraudulent challenged the results their own states had certified.

Under changes to the Electoral Count Act, it now requires one-fifth of lawmakers, instead of just one in each chamber, to raise any objections to election results.

With security as tight as it is for the Super Bowl or the Olympics, law enforcement is on high alert for intruders. No tourists were allowed.

Republicans, who met with Trump behind closed doors at the White House before Jan. 6, 2021, to craft a complex plan to challenge his election defeat, have accepted his win this time.

Democrats, who have raised symbolic objections in the past, did not object. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries has said the Democratic Party is not “infested” with election denialism.

Trump seeks to delay sentencing in hush money case during appeal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump on Monday moved to indefinitely postpone this week's sentencing in his hush money case as he appeals a ruling that upheld the historic verdict and put him on course to be the first president to take office convicted of felony crimes.

Trump's lawyers said they will ask a New York appeals court to reverse Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan's ruling last week, which set the case for sentencing on Friday — a little more than a week before his inauguration.

Merchan rejected Trump's bid to throw out the May 30 verdict because of his impending return to the White House. Trump's lawyers said they will also appeal a prior decision in which the judge refused to dismiss the case on presidential immunity grounds.

In his decision last week, the judge signaled he is not likely to sentence Trump, a Republican, to any punishment for his historic con-



STEVEN HIRSCH, NEW YORK POST/AP

Lawyers for Donald Trump are seeking a reversal of last week's ruling that set the sentencing for Friday in his conviction in a criminal hush money case.

viction on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

Trump has said that it “would be the end of the Presidency as we know it” if the ruling is allowed to stand.

Trump's lawyers argued Monday that their appeal to the Appellate Division of the state's trial court should trigger what's known as an automatic stay, or pause, in the proceedings. If that doesn't happen, they said, Merchan should step in and halt Friday's sentencing.

They asked Merchan to inform them by Monday afternoon of his decision “to allow sufficient time for President Trump to seek an emergency appellate review.”

Any delay in sentencing Trump could run out the clock on closing the case before his second term begins Jan. 20. As president, he will again be immune from criminal proceedings, making it unlikely he can be sentenced while in office. If sentencing doesn't happen before Trump is sworn in, waiting until he leaves office in 2029 “may become the only viable option,” Merchan said last week.

While Trump asserted that presidential immunity and his looming second term necessitated nixing the verdict, Merchan wrote in his Jan. 3 ruling that only “bringing finality

to this matter” by sentencing Trump would serve the interests of justice.

The judge wrote that sentencing Trump to what's known as an unconditional discharge — closing the case without jail time, a fine or probation — “appears to be the most viable solution.”

Acknowledging the demands of the transition process, Merchan had given Trump the option to attend in person or appear virtually by video.

Whenever he is sentenced, Trump will have an opportunity to speak, as will his lawyers and prosecutors. Once he is sentenced, he can appeal the verdict, as he has vowed to do.

The charges involved an alleged scheme to hide a hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in the last weeks of Trump's 2016 campaign to keep her from publicizing claims she'd had sex with him years earlier. He says that her story is false and that he did nothing wrong.

NATION

Dem governors hoping to work with new leader

Most spent election hammering Trump

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE
Associated Press
ALBANY, N.Y. — They warned about him. Now they'll have to work with him.

A handful of prominent Democratic governors are quickly adjusting their approach to President-elect Donald Trump before he takes office, hoping to avoid antagonizing him to ensure they'll have a working relationship with his new administration.

They're in a precarious position: adopting caution while also weighing their party's desires to stake out early, and often combative, positions against Trump's agenda.

"It's a combination of fighting like hell if your values are attacked or if your innocent communities or innocent people are attacked. And then on the other hand, you're trying like heck also to find common ground on things that we could agree on," New Jersey Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Democratic New York Gov. Kathy Hochul is walking a similar tightrope, vowing to push back

against Trump on potential policies against reproductive rights, while also appearing hopeful that she and the Republican can work together.

Hochul, who slammed Trump during a speech at the Democratic National Convention and was a prominent campaign surrogate for Democrats this year, has said she and Trump spoke at length after his election victory and were able to find common ground.

"There are areas where we can work together, like infrastructure where we rely on federal money, and he seems to share my priorities, but also I'm going to stand up for protecting rights, reproductive rights and other rights," she said at a news conference.

Asked this week whether as governor she would consider pardoning Trump in his New York hush money criminal conviction, Hochul notably didn't shut down the question. "There is a pardon-



Polis



JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/AP

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul speaks at a press conference in the Queens borough on Nov. 26.

ing process in the state of New York. It is lengthy. It requires a couple of elements. One is remorse," she said, letting out a quick laugh.



Whitmer

to a porn actor who said the two had sex.

Other Democrats have taken decidedly more combative stances.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a fierce Trump critic, summoned lawmakers back to work this month to allocate more money to

the state attorney general's office so it can launch anticipated legal battles against the Trump administration. Newsom's goal, as he put it, is to "Trump-proof" California's progressive state laws.

Shortly after Trump defeated Vice President Kamala Harris, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Colorado Gov. Jared Polis formed a group called Governors Safeguarding Democracy to "fortify democratic institutions in the states and ensure the rule of law serves all people," according to the group's website.

Still, Polis has put on a balancing act in his relationship with Trump. He's expressed excitement for Trump's pick of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, saying he was hopeful Kennedy would take on "big pharma

and corporate ag."

As co-chair of Harris' presidential campaign, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer frequently warned about the dangers of a second Trump presidency, describing him as "deranged" and declaring that his reelection would signify that "we failed as a country."

But after Trump's victory, the second-term governor has largely stayed out of the spotlight and said little about how she will address some of his policy proposals, such as mass deportations.

"I know that some of my colleagues have staked out some pretty aggressive strategies," Whitmer told reporters days after the election. "As I'm thinking about what a Trump administration will mean for our work, I'm trying to focus on where we can find some shared priorities."

GOP to try to make Trump's push for voting changes happen

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY
Associated Press
ATLANTA — Republicans plan to move quickly in their effort to overhaul the nation's voting procedures, seeing an opportunity with control of the White House and both chambers of Congress to push through long-sought changes that include voter ID and proof-of-citizenship requirements.

They say the measures are needed to restore public confidence in elections, an erosion of trust that Democrats note has been fueled by false claims from President-elect Donald Trump and his allies of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. In the new year, Republicans will be under pressure to address Trump's desires to change how elections are run in the U.S., something he continues to promote despite his win in November.

The main legislation that Republicans expect to push will be versions of the American Confidence



SETH WENIG/AP

Poll workers help guide voters at a busy polling site in the Brooklyn borough of New York, on Nov. 5.

in Elections Act and the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, said GOP Rep. Bryan Steil of Wisconsin, chair of the Committee on House Administration, which handles election-related legislation. The proposals are known as the ACE and SAVE acts, respec-

tively.

"As we look to the new year with unified Republican government, we have a real opportunity to move these pieces of legislation not only out of committee, but across the House floor and into law," Steil said in an interview.

"We need to improve Americans' confidence in elections."

Republicans are likely to face opposition from Democrats and have little wiggle room with their narrow majorities in both the House and Senate.

Steil said he expects there will be "some reforms and tweaks" to the original proposals and hopes Democrats will work with Republicans to refine and ultimately support them.

New York Rep. Joe Morelle, the ranking Democrat on the committee, said there was an opportunity for bipartisan agreement on some issues but said the two previous GOP bills go too far.

"Our view and the Republicans' view is very different on this point," Morelle said. "They have spent most of the time in the last two years and beyond really restricting the rights of people to get to ballots — and that's at the state level and the federal level. And the SAVE Act and the ACE Act both

do that — make it harder for people to vote."

Morelle said he wants to see both parties support dedicated federal funding for election offices. He sees other bipartisan opportunities around limiting foreign money in U.S. elections and possibly imposing a voter ID requirement if certain safeguards are in place to protect voters.

Democrats say some state laws are too restrictive in limiting the types of IDs that are acceptable for voting, making it harder for college students or those who lack a permanent address.

Republicans say the current process relies on an what they call an honor system with loopholes that have allowed noncitizens to register and vote in past elections. While voting by noncitizens has occurred, research and reviews of state cases have shown it to be rare and typically a mistake rather than an intentional effort to sway an election.

NATION

Nippon, US Steel sue after \$15B deal scuttled

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel filed a federal lawsuit challenging a Biden administration decision to block Nippon’s proposed \$15 billion acquisition of the Pittsburgh company and said that the head of the Steelworkers union and a rival steelmaker worked together to scuttle the buyout.

Outgoing President Joe Biden said Friday that U.S. companies producing a large amount of steel need to “keep leading the fight on behalf of America’s national interests,” though Japan, where

Nippon is based, is a strong ally.

In separate lawsuits filed Monday in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, the steelmakers allege that it was a political decision made by the Biden administration that had no rational legal basis.

“Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel have engaged in good faith with all parties to underscore how the Transaction will enhance, not threaten, United States national security,” the companies said in a prepared statement Monday.

Nippon Steel had promised to invest \$2.7 billion in U.S. Steel’s aging blast furnace operations in Gary, Ind., and Pennsylvania’s Mon Valley.

It also vowed not to reduce production capacity in the U.S. over the next decade without first getting U.S. government approval.

Biden on Friday decided to stop the Nippon takeover — after federal regulators deadlocked on whether to approve it — because “a strong domestically owned and operated steel industry represents an essential national security priority. ... Without domestic

steel production and domestic steel workers, our nation is less strong and less secure,” he said in a statement.

While administration officials have said the decision was unrelated to Japan’s relationship with the U.S. — this is the first time a U.S. president has blocked a merger between a U.S. and Japanese firm.

The president’s decision to block the deal comes after the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, known as CFIUS, failed to reach consensus on the possible national se-

curity risks of the deal last month, and sent a long-awaited report on the merger to Biden.

He had 15 days to reach a final decision.

In a separate lawsuit filed in the District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, the companies accused steel-making rival Cleveland-Cliffs Inc. and its CEO, Lourenco Goncalves, in coordination with David McCall, the head of the U.S. Steelworkers union, of “engaging in a coordinated series of anticompetitive and racketeering activities” to block the deal.

Winter blast shuts down schools, offices in several states

By Patrick Whittle and Brian Witte
Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A huge swath of the U.S. was blasted with ice, snow and wind on Monday as the polar vortex that dipped south over the weekend kept much of the country east of the Rockies in its frigid grip, making many roads treacherous, forcing school closures, and causing widespread power outages and flight cancellations.



National Park Service workers shovel a pathway during a winter storm at the White House, on Monday.

Kansas and Missouri, where blizzard conditions brought wind gusts of up to 45 mph. The warnings extended to New Jersey into early Tuesday.

The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes escapes and plunges southward into the U.S., Europe and Asia. Studies show a fast-warming Arctic is partly to blame for the increasing frequency of the polar vortex extending its icy grip.

Starting Monday, the eastern

two-thirds of the U.S. would be dealing with bone-chilling cold and wind chills, forecasters said. Temperatures could be 12 to 25 degrees below normal.

The Northeast, which has had a relatively mild start to winter, is likely to experience several days of cold, said Jon Palmer, a weather service meteorologist based in Gray, Maine.

The cold air was expected to grip the Eastern Seaboard as far south as Georgia, with temperatures dropping into the low single

digits in some coastal areas, Palmer said. Major southern cities including New Orleans and Dallas were bracing for uncharacteristically cold weather.

And Washington, D.C., received heavy snow. Taking advantage of the rare snowstorm in the nation’s capital, revelers engaged in a snowball fight in front of the Washington Monument as flags flew at half-staff in memory of former President Jimmy Carter.

President Joe Biden was closely monitoring the severe weather

and making sure the federal government would assist affected states, a White House spokesperson said.

School closings were widespread Monday. Districts in Indiana, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri and Kansas began announcing cancellations and delays on Sunday afternoon. Kentucky’s Jefferson County Public Schools canceled classes, extracurricular activities and athletics for its nearly 100,000 students.

Classes were also canceled in Maryland, where Gov. Wes Moore declared a state of emergency Sunday and announced that state government offices would also be closed Monday.

At least 600 motorists were stranded in Missouri over the weekend, authorities said. Hundreds of car accidents were reported in Virginia, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky, where a state trooper was treated for non-life-threatening injuries after his patrol car was hit.

Virginia State Police responded to at least 230 crashes from 4 p.m. Sunday through 4 a.m. Monday. More than 20 people were injured in those crashes. One was fatal, but it wasn’t clear if it was storm-related, authorities said. More than 200 additional crashes took place later in the morning. In Charleston, West Virginia, where several inches of snow had fallen by Sunday night, authorities urged motorists to stay home.

Biden bans new offshore oil, gas drilling in most federal waters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is moving to ban new offshore oil and gas drilling in most coastal waters, a last-minute effort to block possible action by the incoming Trump administration to expand offshore drilling.

Biden, whose term expires in two weeks, said he is using authority under the federal Outer Conti-

mental Shelf Lands Act to protect offshore areas along the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and portions of Alaska’s Northern Bering Sea from future oil and natural gas leasing.

“My decision reflects what coastal communities, businesses and beachgoers have known for a long time: that drilling off these coasts could cause irreversible

damage to places we hold dear and is unnecessary to meet our nation’s energy needs,” Biden said in a statement.

Biden’s orders would not affect large swaths of the Gulf of Mexico, where most U.S. offshore drilling occurs, but it would protect coastlines along California, Florida and other states from future drilling.

Biden’s actions, which protect

more than 625 million acres of federal waters, could be difficult for President-elect Donald Trump to unwind, since they would likely require an act of Congress to repeal. Trump signed a memorandum in 2020 directing the interior secretary to prohibit drilling in the waters off both Florida coasts, and off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina until 2032.

The action came after Trump initially moved to vastly expand offshore drilling, before retreating amid widespread opposition in Florida and other coastal states.

Trump has vowed to establish what he calls American “energy dominance” around the world as he seeks to boost U.S. oil and gas drilling and move away from Biden’s focus on climate change.

NATION

Students with disabilities are embracing AI

Technology can help pupils with visual, speech, language, hearing impairments

BY HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH
Associated Press

For Makenzie Gilkison, spelling is such a struggle that a word like rhinoceros might come out as “ri-neanswsaurs” or sarcastic as “srkastik.”

The 14-year-old from suburban Indianapolis can sound out words, but her dyslexia makes the process so draining that she often struggles with comprehension. “I just assumed I was stupid,” she recalled of her early grade school years.

But assistive technology powered by artificial intelligence has helped her keep up with classmates. Last year, Makenzie was named to the National Junior Honor Society. She credits a customized AI-powered chatbot, a word prediction program and other tools that can read for her.

“I would have just probably given up if I didn’t have them,” she said.

Artificial intelligence holds the promise of helping countless other students with a range of visual, speech, language and hearing impairments to execute tasks that come easily to others. Schools everywhere have been wrestling with how and where to incorporate AI, but many are fast-tracking applications for students with disabilities.

Getting the latest technology into the hands of students with disabilities is a priority for the U.S. Education Department, which has told schools they must consider whether students need tools like text-to-speech and alternative communication devices. New rules from the Department of Justice also will require schools and other government entities to make apps and online content accessible to those with disabilities.

There is concern about how to ensure students using it — including those with disabilities — are still learning.

Students can use artificial intelligence to summarize jumbled thoughts into an outline, summarize complicated passages, or even translate Shakespeare into common English. And computer-generated voices that can read passages for visually impaired and dyslexic students are becoming less robotic and more natural.

“I’m seeing that a lot of students are kind of exploring on their own, almost feeling like they’ve found a cheat code in a video game,” said Alexis Reid, an educational therapist in the Boston area who works



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Makenzie Gilkison sits in the lobby at Greenfield Central High School last month in Greenfield, Ind.

“I’m seeing that a lot of students are kind of exploring on their own, almost feeling like they’ve found a cheat code in a video game.”

Alexis Reid
educational therapist

with students with learning disabilities. But in her view, it is far from cheating: “We’re meeting students where they are.”

Ben Snyder, a 14-year-old freshman from Larchmont, N.Y., who was recently diagnosed with a learning disability, has been increasingly using AI to help with homework.

“Sometimes in math, my teachers will explain a problem to me, but it just makes absolutely no sense,” he said. “So if I plug that problem into AI, it’ll give me multiple different ways of explaining how to do that.”

He likes a program called Ques-

tion AI. Earlier in the day, he asked the program to help him write an outline for a book report — a task he completed in 15 minutes that otherwise would have taken him an hour and a half because of his struggles with writing and organization. But he does think using AI to write the whole report crosses a line.

“That’s just cheating,” Ben said. Schools have been trying to balance the technology’s benefits against the risk that it will do too much. If a special education plan sets reading growth as a goal, the student needs to improve that skill. AI can’t do it for them, said

Mary Lawson, general counsel at the Council of the Great City Schools.

But the technology can help level the playing field for students with disabilities, said Paul Sanft, director of a Minnesota-based center where families can try out different assistive technology tools and borrow devices.

“There are definitely going to be people who use some of these tools in nefarious ways. That’s always going to happen,” Sanft said. “But I don’t think that’s the biggest concern with people with disabilities, who are just trying to do something that they couldn’t do before.”

Another risk is that AI will track students into less rigorous courses of study. And, because it is so good at identifying patterns, AI might be able to figure out a student has a disability. Having that disclosed by AI and not the student or their family could create ethical dilemmas, said Luis Pérez, the disability and digital inclusion lead at the Center for Accessible Technolo-

gy.

Schools are using the technology to help students who struggle academically, even if they do not qualify for special education services. In Iowa, a new law requires students deemed not proficient — about a quarter of them — to get an individualized reading plan. As part of that effort, the state’s education department spent \$3 million on an AI-driven personalized tutoring program. When students struggle, a digital avatar intervenes.

More AI tools are coming soon.

The U.S. National Science Foundation is funding AI research and development. One firm is developing tools to help children with speech and language difficulties. Called the National AI Institute for Exceptional Education, it is headquartered at the University of Buffalo, which did pioneering work on handwriting recognition that helped the U.S. Postal Service save hundreds of millions of dollars by automating processing.

“We are able to solve the postal application with very high accuracy. When it comes to children’s handwriting, we fail very badly,” said Venu Govindaraju, the director of the institute. He sees it as an area that needs more work, along with speech-to-text technology, which isn’t as good at understanding children’s voices, particularly if there is a speech impediment.

Sorting through the sheer number of programs developed by education technology companies can be a time-consuming challenge for schools. Richard Culatta, CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education, said the nonprofit launched an effort this fall to make it easier for districts to vet what they are buying and ensure it is accessible.

Makenzie wishes some of the tools were easier to use. Sometimes a feature will inexplicably be turned off, and she will be without it for a week while the tech team investigates. The challenges can be so cumbersome that some students resist the technology entirely.

But Makenzie’s mother, Nadine Gilkison, who works as a technology integration supervisor at Franklin Township Community School Corporation in Indiana, said she sees more promise than downside.

In September, her district rolled out chatbots to help special education students in high school. She said teachers, who sometimes struggled to provide students the help they needed, became emotional when they heard about the program. Until now, students were reliant on someone to help them, unable to move ahead on their own.

“Now we don’t need to wait anymore,” she said.

WORLD

Macron: Trump has ‘solid ally’ in France

Also states need for Ukraine to have territorial realism in New Year’s address

By THOMAS ADAMSON
Associated Press
PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron extended an olive branch to President-elect Donald Trump on Monday, declaring that France is “a solid ally” as he outlined his vision for global diplomacy in 2025 during his New Year’s address to French ambassadors.

“Donald Trump knows that he has a solid ally in France, an ally he does not underestimate, one who believes in Europe and carries a lucid ambition for the transatlantic relationship,” Macron said at the Élysée Palace, emphasizing France’s commitment to fostering cooperation while urging European nations to fortify their unity and resilience.

“If we decide to be weak and defeatist, there is little chance we will be respected by the United States under President Trump,” he warned.

Macron’s speech, delivered against a backdrop of geopolitical turmoil, laid out France’s foreign policy priorities, spanning the Ukraine war, European defense, and the Middle East.

Even as Macron extended an olive branch to Trump, he delivered pointed criticism of tech mogul Elon Musk, a known Trump ally, for promoting what he described as a “new reactionary international” movement through his social media

platform, X. Without naming Musk directly, Macron referenced his alleged support for Germany’s far-right AfD party and his increasing interference in European elections.

He warned of the risks posed by unchecked power in the hands of tech billionaires and the destabilizing impact they could have on democratic institutions.

Addressing the war in Ukraine, Macron stressed the need for “realistic discussions on territorial questions,” adding, “such negotiations can only be conducted by Ukrainians themselves.”

He called on the United States to “help change the nature of the situation and convince Russia to come to the negotiating table,” while underscoring Europe’s pivotal role.

Macron countered Trump’s campaign pledge for an express settlement, warning, “There is no quick and easy solution in Ukraine.” He also highlighted the stakes for the United States, stating, “The new American president himself knows the United States has no chance of winning anything if Ukraine loses.”

Macron addressed a range of pressing international issues, identifying Iran as the “principal strategic and security challenge” in the Middle East. On Syria, Macron reiterated France’s long-term commitment to supporting a democratic transition.



HEINZ-PETER BADER / AP
Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen, left, welcomes head of the Freedom Party Herbert Kickl in his office, in Vienna, Austria.

Austrian far right set to form new government

Associated Press
VIENNA — The leader of Austria’s Freedom Party received a mandate Monday to form a new government, which would be the first headed by the far right since World War II if he succeeds.

The anti-immigration and euroskeptic Freedom Party, which opposes sanctions against Russia and is led by Herbert Kickl, won Austria’s parliamentary election in September. It took 28.8% of the vote and beating outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer’s conservative Austrian People’s Party into second place.

But in October, President Alexander Van der Bellen gave Nehammer the first chance to form a new government after Nehammer’s party said it wouldn’t go into government with the Freedom Party under Kickl and others refused to work with the Freedom Party at all. Those efforts to form a governing alliance without the far right collapsed in the first few days of the new year and Nehammer said Sat-

urday that he would resign. The People’s Party then signaled that it might be open to working under Kickl. Van der Bellen said after meeting Kickl for about an hour at the presidential palace Monday that he had tasked the Freedom Party leader with holding talks with the People’s Party to form a new government. “I did not take this step lightly,” the president told reporters. “I will continue to take care that the principles and rules of our constitution are correctly respected and adhered to.”

The far right and the conservatives have governed together before, but on previous occasions with the Freedom Party as the junior partner.

In its election program titled “Fortress Austria,” the Freedom Party has called for the “remigration of uninvited foreigners,” for achieving a more “homogeneous” nation by tightly controlling borders and suspending the right to asylum via an emergency law.

Canada’s Trudeau resigns as party leader

Associated Press
TORONTO — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his resignation Monday in the face of rising discontent over his leadership and after the abrupt departure of his finance minister signaled growing turmoil within his government.

A misty-eyed Trudeau said it had become clear to him that he cannot “be the leader during the next elections due to internal battles.” He planned to stay on as prime minister until a new leader of the Liberal Party is chosen.

“I don’t easily back down faced with a fight, especially a very important one for our party and the country. But I do this job because the interests of Canadians and the well being of democracy is something that I hold dear,” he said at the announcement outside his official residence.

He said Parliament, which had been due to resume Jan. 27, would be suspended until March 24. The timing will allow for a Liberal Party leadership race.

All three main opposition parties have said they plan to topple the Liberal Party in a no-confidence vote when Parliament resumes, so a spring election after the Liberals pick a new leader was almost assured.

Trudeau, a former teacher, nightclub bouncer and snowboard instructor, came to power in 2015. Trudeau has three children with his now estranged wife.

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WORLD

S. Korean agency, police debate tougher measures to detain Yoon

By KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea’s anti-corruption agency and police debated on Monday more forceful measures to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after their previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week.

The discussions highlighted the obstacles facing the criminal investigation into Yoon’s Dec. 3 martial law decree, which led to his impeachment on Dec. 14. The one-week detention warrant was set to expire at midnight, but the agency requested a new court warrant to extend the timeframe

for taking Yoon into custody.

The Seoul Western District Court last week issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after he defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning over his brief power grab. Executing those warrants is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official residence.

Yoon has described his power grab as a necessary act of governance against a liberal opposition bogging down his agenda with its legislative majority and has vowed to “fight to the end” against efforts to oust him. While martial law lasted only several hours, it set

off turmoil that has shaken the country’s politics, diplomacy and financial markets for weeks and exposed the fragility of South Korea’s democracy while society is deeply polarized.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which leads a joint investigation with police and military investigators, revealed Monday it had asked police to take over efforts to detain Yoon, following its prominent role in Friday’s failure.

However, the anti-corruption agency backtracked hours later after the police stated it could be legally problematic for them to be entirely responsible for Yoon’s de-



Protesters demanding the arrest of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol attend a rally near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday.

AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

tention, given that the warrants had been obtained by the agency.

Police say they plan to make a more aggressive effort to detain Yoon at the official residence, where members of the presidential security staff were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to the building.

Shooting attack on bus carrying Israelis in occupied West Bank kills 3

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Israelis in the occupied West Bank on Monday, killing at least three people and wounding seven others. Violence has surged in the territory since Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the on-

going war there.

The attack occurred in the Palestinian village of Al-Funduq, on one of the main east-west roads crossing the territory. Israel’s Magen David Adom rescue service said two women in their 60s and a man in his 40s were killed, and the military said it was looking for the

attackers.

Palestinians have carried out scores of shooting, stabbing and car-ramming attacks against Israelis in recent years. Israel has launched near-nightly military raids across the territory that frequently trigger gunbattles with militants. There has also been a

sharp rise in attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says at least 838 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza. Most appear to have been militants killed in battles with Israeli troops, but the

dead also include protesters and civilian bystanders.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to “reach the despicable murderers” behind Monday’s attack and “settle accounts with them and with everyone who assisted them. No one will be spared.”



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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Spider monkey found in Rolls-Royce during stop

CA OAKLAND — A baby spider monkey discovered by the California Highway Patrol is in critical condition — suffering from malnourishment, skin and coat issues and an upper respiratory infection. But the Oakland Zoo is hopeful that the plucky young primate will make a full recovery.

The baby monkey is being housed in a humid environment to help treat her upper respiratory infection and has been given fluids and a proper diet, according to zoo officials.

It is illegal to own primates as pets in the state of California and the poor condition of the young spider monkey is a prime example of why, zoo officials said.

CHP officers discovered the monkey during a bizarre traffic stop in Madera County.

Officers pulled over a Rolls-Royce Ghost speeding north on Highway 99 and were stunned to find a small monkey wearing a onesie inside — as well as copious amounts of marijuana and five cellphones.

The driver was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, possession of an exotic animal and possession of cannabis for sale.

Jill Biden gifted \$20K diamond in 2023

DC WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and his family were given tens of thousands of dollars in gifts from foreign leaders in 2023, according to an annual accounting published by the State Department, with first lady Jill Biden receiving the single most expensive present: a \$20,000 diamond from India's leader.

The 7.5-carat diamond from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was easily the most costly gift presented to any member of the first family in 2023, although she also received a brooch valued at \$14,063 from the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States and a bracelet, brooch and photograph album worth \$4,510 from the president and first lady of Egypt.

The \$20,000 diamond was retained for official use in the White House East Wing, according to a State Department document, while the other gifts to the president and first lady were sent to the archives.

NYC deli dispute ends in fatal stabbing

NY NEW YORK — A woman accused of stabbing a postal worker to death in a New York City deli was charged with murder. Witnesses said the killing followed a quarrel over whose turn it was to order.

Jaia Cruz, 24, was being held without bail after her arraignment in the killing of letter carrier Ray



TED SHAFFREY/AP

Getting a leg up

Visitors ride a tour bus emblazoned with an advertisement depicting legs underwater in New York.

Hodge. A message seeking comment was left for Cruz's lawyer.

Hodge, 36, was stabbed in the chest, neck and arms at a Harlem deli, according to a court complaint. Police found him wounded on the floor in his postal uniform.

Another customer, Janet Rich, told the Daily News that Hodge and Cruz argued at the sandwich counter over who was next. Rich said she and another person tried unsuccessfully to intervene.

AG: TikTok's live video feature 'groomed' minors

UT SALT LAKE CITY — TikTok has long known that its popular video livestreams encourage sexual content, including streams exploiting and "grooming" minors, according to a lawsuit from the state of Utah that was unredacted.

TikTok also discovered through an internal investigation that the feature, called TikTok Live, facilitated money laundering and allowed users to sell drugs and fund terrorism, the lawsuit alleged.

Bipartisan attorneys general from more than a dozen states sued TikTok last fall, accusing the app of financially and sexually exploiting minors. Utah also sued TikTok on similar grounds in June. Several of those lawsuits — including those from Utah, Vermont, New Hampshire, Kentucky and the District of Columbia — fo-

cused on TikTok Live. The suits cited investigative reporting from Forbes that found adult men regularly use the livestreams to coax teen girls to perform racy, sometimes sexual acts in exchange for digital "gifts" that can be redeemed for money.

Man tries to drive off in autonomous Waymo car

CA LOS ANGELES — After a man hopped behind the wheel of an autonomous Waymo vehicle and tried to drive off, the company offered assurances that the car's technology includes protections against bad actors.

A man in downtown LA allegedly attempted to get into a Waymo and drive away. Police responded and eventually got the man out of the car.

It was not immediately clear if the man was the person who had called the vehicle.

The incident raised questions about how the autonomous vehicle ride-share company protects its human-free cars, just months after Waymo began providing rides for all Angelenos.

The service now operates more than 100 vehicles in Los Angeles. Waymo has many more vehicles roaming the streets of San Francisco, Daly City and Phoenix, among several other locations.

In more than 5 million rides tak-

en in Waymos, only a "handful" of people have attempted to commandeering the vehicles, according to the company.

Hundreds of animals died by shopping center fire

TX DALLAS — A fire that broke out at a shopping center in Dallas killed more than 500 animals, most of which were small birds, authorities said.

The 579 animals in the pet shop at Plaza Latina in Northwest Dallas died from smoke inhalation, Dallas Fire-Rescue spokesperson Jason Evans said in a statement.

The flames from the fire never reached the animals. Chickens, hamsters, two dogs and two cats also died, Evans said.

The two-alarm fire took about two hours and as many as 45 firefighters to extinguish around 11 a.m., Evans said.

"While DFR personnel did search and attempt rescue, all animals in the shop unfortunately perished due to smoke inhalation," Evans said.

The cause of the fire was not immediately determined and is under investigation, Evans said.

Cartoonist quits after paper rejects sketch

DC WASHINGTON — A cartoonist has decided to quit her job at the Washington

Post after an editor rejected her sketch of the newspaper's owner and other media executives bowing before President-elect Donald Trump.

Ann Telnaes posted a message on the online platform Substack saying that she drew a cartoon showing a group of media executives bowing before Trump while offering him bags of money, including Post owner and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

Telnaes wrote that the cartoon was intended to criticize "billionaire tech and media chief executives who have been doing their best to curry favor with incoming President-elect Trump."

Several executives, Bezos among them, have been spotted at Trump's Florida club Mar-a-Lago. She accused them of having lucrative government contracts and working to eliminate regulations.

The Post's communications director, Liza Pluto, provided The Associated Press with a statement from David Shipley, the newspaper's editorial page editor. Shipley said in the statement that he disagrees with Telnaes' "interpretation of events."

He said he decided to nix the cartoon because the paper had just published a column on the same topic as the cartoon and was set to publish another.

From wire reports

FACES

Golden Globes reward outliers

‘Emilia Perez,’ ‘The Brutalist’ triumph at 1st major awards event of season

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Two wildly audacious films — Brady Corbet’s 215-minute post-war epic “The Brutalist” and Jacques Audiard’s Spanish language, genre-shifting trans musical “Emilia Perez” — won top honors at the 82nd Golden Globes on Sunday.

The Globes, which are still finding their footing after years of scandal and makeover, scattered awards around to a number of films. But the awards group put its strongest support behind a pair of movies that sought to defy easy categorization.

“The Brutalist” was crowned best film, drama, putting one of 2024’s most ambitious films on course to be a major contender at the Academy Awards. The film, shot in VistaVision and released with an intermission, also won best director for Corbet and best actor for Adrien Brody.

“I was told that this film was undistributable,” said Corbet. “No one was asking for a 3½-hour film about a mid-century designer in 70mm. But it works.”

“Emilia Pérez” won best film, comedy or musical, elevating the Oscar chances of Netflix’s top contender. It also won best supporting actress for Zoe Saldaña, best song (“El Mal”) and best non-English language film. Audiard, the French director, made way for Karla Sofia Gascón, the film’s transgender star who plays a Mexican drug lord who undergoes gender affirming surgery, to speak on behalf of the film.

“The light always wins over darkness,” said Gascón. “You can maybe put us in jail. You can beat us up. But you never can take away our soul or existence or identity.”

Moore wins 1st Globe

Though the Globes audience was particularly starry, including nominees Zendaya, Timothée Chalamet, Angelina Jolie and Daniel Craig, most of the winners hailed from smaller, less seen films.

That included some surprises. One was Demi Moore’s win for best actress in a comedy or musical. Her comeback performance in “The Substance,” about a Hollywood star who resorts to an experimental process to regain her youth, landed the 62-year-old Moore her first Globe — a victory

that came over the heavily favored Mikey Madison of “Anora.”

“I’m just in shock right now. I’ve been doing this a long time, like over 45 years, and this is the first thing I’ve ever won as an actor,” said Moore, who was last nominated by the Globes for a film role in 1991 for “Ghost.”

“Thirty years ago, I had a producer tell me that I was a popcorn actress.”

The result for best actress in a drama film was an even bigger surprise. The Brazilian actress Fernanda Torres won for her performance in “I’m Still Here,” a based-on-a-true-story drama about a family living through the disappearance of political dissident Rubens Paiva in 1970s Rio de Janeiro. Torres dedicated the award to her mother, the great actor Fernanda Montenegro, who appears in “I’m Still Here,” too.

“She was here 25 years ago,” said Torres. “And this is like a proof that art can endure through life even through difficult moments.”

Best supporting actor in a musical or comedy went to Sebastian Stan for “A Different Man,” in which Stan plays a man with a deformed face who’s healed. Stan, who was also nominated for playing Donald Trump in “The Apprentice,” noted that both films were hard to get made.

“These are tough subject matters but these films are real and they’re necessary,” said Stan. “We can’t be afraid and look away.”

Glaser a successful host

Comedian Nikki Glaser kicked off the Globes with a promise: “I’m not here to roast you.”

But Glaser, a stand-up whose breakthrough came in a withering roast of Tom Brady, made her way around the ballroom of the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif., on Sunday picking out plenty of targets in an opening monologue she had worked out extensively in comedy clubs beforehand.

While Glaser might not have reached Tina Fey and Amy Poehler levels of laughs, the monologue was a winner, and a dramatic im-



PHOTOS BY CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

“Emilia Perez” actresses Adriana Paz (left), Selena Gomez, Zoe Saldaña and Karla Sofia Gascón pose in the press room during the Golden Globes on Sunday at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif.



Brady Corbet, named best director for “The Brutalist,” left, stands with the film’s star, Adrien Brody, who won for best actor.



Glaser

provement over last year’s host, Jo Koy. Last year’s Globes, following a diversity and ethics scandal that led to the dissolution of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, were widely panned. But they delivered where it counted: Ratings rebounded to about 10 million viewers, according to Nielsen. CBS, who waded in after NBC dumped the Globes, signed up for five more years.

Television prizes

Most of the TV winners were oft-awarded series, including the Emmy champ “Shogun.” It won four awards, including best drama series and acting wins for Hiroyuki Sanada, Anna Sawai and Tadanobu Asano.

Other repeat winners were: “Hacks” (best comedy series, actress for Jean Smart), “The Bear” (Jeremy Allen White for best actor) and “Baby Reindeer” (best limited series).

Ali Wong won for best stand-up performance, Jodie Foster for “True Detective” and Colin Farrell for his physical transformation in “The Penguin.”

“I guess it’s prosthetics from here on out,” Farrell said.

Golden Globes winners

- MOVIES**
- Best motion picture, drama:** “The Brutalist”
 - Best motion picture, musical or comedy:** “Emilia Pérez”
 - Best actress in a motion picture, drama:** Fernanda Torres, “I’m Still Here”
 - Best actor in a motion picture, drama:** Adrien Brody, “The Brutalist”
 - Best actress in a motion picture, musical or comedy:** Demi Moore, “The Substance”
 - Best actor in a motion picture, musical or comedy:** Sebastian Stan, “A Different Man”
 - Best supporting actress:** Zoe Saldaña, “Emilia Pérez”
 - Best supporting actor:** Kieran Culkin, “A Real Pain”
 - Cinematic and Box Office Achievement:** “Wicked”
 - Best motion picture, non-English:** “Emilia Pérez”
 - Best motion picture, animated:** “Flow”
 - Best director:** Brady Corbet, “The Brutalist”
 - Best screenplay:** Peter Straughan, “Conclave”
 - Best original score:** Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross, “Challengers”
 - Best original song:** “El Mal” from “Emilia Pérez,” music/lyrics by Clément Ducol, Camille, Jacques Audiard
- TELEVISION**
- Best television series, drama:** “Shogun”
 - Best television series, comedy or musical:** “Hacks”
 - Best actress, drama:** Anna Sawai, “Shogun”
 - Best actor, drama:** Hiroyuki Sanada, “Shogun”
 - Best actress, musical or comedy:** Jean Smart, “Hacks”
 - Best actor, musical or comedy:** Jeremy Allen White, “The Bear”
 - Best limited series, anthology series or movie made for television:** “Baby Reindeer”
 - Best actor in a limited series, anthology series or movie made for television:** Colin Farrell, “The Penguin”
 - Best actress in a limited series, anthology series or movie made for television:** Jodie Foster, “True Detective: Night Country”
 - Best supporting actress:** Jessica Gunning, “Baby Reindeer”
 - Best supporting actor:** Tadanobu Asano, “Shogun”
 - Best performance in stand-up comedy on TV:** Ali Wong, “Ali Wong: Single Lady”

The Associated Press

‘Mufasa’ wins 1st box office race of 2025

Associated Press

The Walt Disney Co.’s “Mufasa” claimed the No. 1 spot on the North American box office charts over the first weekend of 2025.

The photorealistic “Lion King” prequel earned \$23.8 million in its third weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. Paramount’s “Sonic the Hedgehog 3,” which has dominated the past two weekends, wasn’t far behind.

“Sonic 3” stayed close with a three-day estimate of \$21.2 million, bringing its total domestic earnings to \$187.5 million. “Mufasa’s” running total is slightly less, with \$169.2 million.

In third place, Focus Features’ “Nosferatu” remake fell only 39% in its second weekend. Horror films typically fall sharply after the first weekend and anything less than a 50% decline is notable. “Nosferatu” claimed \$13.2 million in ticket sales, bringing its running total to \$69.4 million since its Christmas debut.

No new wide releases opened this weekend, leaving the box office top 10 once again to holdovers. “Moana 2” claimed the No. 4 spot for Disney in its sixth weekend. The animated sequel earned another \$12.4 million, bumping its global total to \$960.5 million.

The Bob Dylan biopic “A Complete Unknown” dipped only slightly in its second weekend, bringing in \$8.1 million. It has made \$41.7 million in total.

“Wicked” rounded out the top five. Universal’s movie musical earned another \$10.2 million.

Other news

- Incoming first lady Melania Trump** will be the subject of a new documentary directed by Brett Ratner and distributed by Amazon Prime Video. The streaming arm of the tech giant got exclusive licensing rights for a streaming and theatrical release later this year, the company said Sunday. Filming is already underway on the documentary. The company said in a statement that the film will give viewers an “unprecedented behind-the-scenes look” at Melania Trump and also promised a “truly unique story.”
- Writer-director Jeff Baena**, whose darkly comedic independent films included “The Little Hours” and who was married to his frequent creative collaborator Aubrey Plaza, has died. He was 47. Baena was found dead Jan. 3 at a Los Angeles home, according to the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner’s Office. His death was ruled a suicide. Baena co-wrote David O. Russell’s 2004 film “I Heart Huckabees” and wrote and directed five of his own films, four of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.



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OPINION

Ukraine needs a new sales rep for Trump and the GOP

By JIM GERAGHTY
 Special to The Washington Post
 A new administration is coming to town, and the president-elect has sent some decidedly mixed signals about continued support for Ukraine. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump repeatedly boasted he could quickly negotiate a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, and at one point complained that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy “should never have let that war start. That war’s a loser.” Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and — short of unilateral surrender — there was never any way for Zelenskyy to deter the attack.

But if a recent report in the Financial Times is correct, Trump is willing to maintain U.S. military supplies to Kyiv after his inauguration, “according to three other people briefed on the discussions with Western officials,” but Trump will demand NATO members more than double the current “2 percent spending target — which only 23 of the alliance’s 32 members currently meet — to 5 percent, two people briefed on the conversations said. One person said they understood that Trump would settle for 3.5 percent.”

If the Ukrainian government wants to keep the arms supplies coming, it needs to tailor its arguments to be persuasive to Trump, his administration and congressional Republicans. And that might well require thanking the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, Oksana Markarova, for her service and sending a replacement.

For example, in theory, it was a good idea to have Zelenskyy visit a Scranton, Pa., ammunition factory in September to thank the workers who are producing one of the most

critically needed munitions for his country’s fight. (At other stops on the trip, Zelensky met separately with both Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris.) But this was just weeks before the Nov. 5 election, and Zelenskyy visited the plant with two prominent Pennsylvania Democrats, Gov. Josh Shapiro and Sen. Bob Casey, who was then in a tight (and ultimately unsuccessful) bid for reelection against Republican Dave McCormick.

The all-Democratic photo opportunity with Zelenskyy left some Republicans fuming. House Speaker Mike Johnson wrote to Zelenskyy, demanding the Ukrainian government immediately fire Markarova. “The facility was in a politically contested battleground state, was led by a top political surrogate for Kamala Harris and failed to include a single Republican because — on purpose — no Republicans were invited,” Johnson, R-La., wrote. “The tour was clearly a partisan campaign event designed to help Democrats and is clearly election interference.”

It didn’t help that a few days earlier, in an interview with the New Yorker, Zelenskyy had said, “My feeling is that Trump doesn’t really know how to stop the war even if he might think he knows how” and called JD Vance “too radical.”

Markarova has done yeoman work making Ukraine’s argument to the Biden administration and congressional Democrats. But there are fair questions about whether the Ukrainian diplomatic presence in the United States has tried hard enough to court Republicans.

Markarova has appeared on Fox News only a few times, most recently July 2023, although she was a guest on a Fox podcast in February 2024. But in November, she did present a Ukrainian award to conservative Newsmax TV anchor Greta Van Susteren, in

recognition of her support.

Mark Strand tells me that before his retirement last year as president of the Congressional Institute, he invited Markarova and others at the Ukrainian Embassy to address several of the Republican-aligned organization’s events, but the invitations were declined. Luckily for Ukraine’s cause, representatives from the British, Polish and Romanian embassies did attend and talked about the importance of standing up to Russian aggression.

In late March 2022, one month after Russia invaded Ukraine, a YouGov-Economist survey found 68% of Trump supporters favored sending weapons to Ukraine. By late November 2024, the same pollster found just 13% of these supporters wanted to increase military aid to Ukraine, and only 23% wanted to maintain the same amount of military aid to Ukraine. Almost half, 49%, wanted aid decreased.

There are arguments for aiding Ukraine that appeal to the right side of the political spectrum, including the need to counter Russia’s brutal suppression of evangelical Christian churches in occupied territories and its hunger for Ukraine’s vast natural resources. Also: Pressing Ukraine to cede territory to Moscow in a peace deal would make the United States look weak, emboldening other hostile nations.

Starting on Jan. 20, Republicans will be running the White House, Senate and House of Representatives. Ukraine needs an advocate who understands them, speaking with a fresh voice to their perspective and priorities.

Jim Geraghty is National Review’s senior political correspondent, where he writes the daily “Morning Jolt” newsletter, among other writing duties.

‘Dark money’ is not the boogeyman it’s made out to be

By HEATHER LAUER
 Tribune News Service
 Among the big losers of the 2024 election were politicians and activist groups who claim so-called “dark money” is the secret force driving American politics. Groups that do not disclose their donors once again made up a small share of overall campaign spending and notched few notable victories.

The results underscore an uncomfortable but increasingly clear reality: calls to force disclosure of “dark money” are not about securing a negligible increase in transparency in elections. They are about subjecting donors to harassment and retaliation for their beliefs.

The organization Open Secrets estimates that roughly \$16 billion will have been spent on federal campaigns in the 2024 election cycle when all is said and done. Yet “dark money” nonprofit organizations account for only about \$62 million in independent expenditures, according to spending reports they are legally required to file with the Federal Election Commission. Nondisclosing groups also reportedly contributed \$1 billion to other independent entities like super PACs. Super PACs, however, must publicly report contributions from nonprofits in their FEC filings.

However you slice it, “dark money” paled in comparison to the many billions of dollars raised and spent by candidates and groups that disclose their donors. “Dark money” also did not have any secret power to sway voters. In the presidential race, Vice President Kamala Harris enjoyed significantly more sup-

port from “dark money” groups than did former President Donald Trump. Harris also raised more money from donors overall and received more support from super PACs.

None of it mattered. Spending a lot of money can ensure lots of voters hear your message, but it can’t make them agree with you or vote for you. Just ask Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush.

In recent years, politicians on the left and the right have denounced “dark money” as a cancer that must be rooted out of our politics. Some have proposed legislation that would force groups that speak about policy or elections to expose the names and home addresses of their significant donors. Harris was a co-sponsor of such legislation in the U.S. Senate.

These laws would not blunt the barrage of attack ads and fundraising appeals that hit voters’ mailboxes and televisions every election cycle, the vast majority of which come from groups that disclose their donors. But disclosure could silence trusted nonprofit organizations who value their supporters’ privacy beyond their ability to speak about elections. These are exactly the kinds of voices we should be encouraging, not excluding, in campaigns.

Hyperbolic rhetoric around “dark money” can mislead voters into thinking that these groups are a new phenomenon. Yet “dark money” is simply a smear for groups that dare to speak about politics without serving up a list of their supporters’ personal information for opponents to exploit. News flash: these groups have always existed in American society.

Many of the Founding Fathers were them-

selves members of secret societies or wrote under pen names to protect their privacy. Abolitionists and later civil rights activists also relied on private donors and networks as they fought to vindicate the rights of African Americans. In fact, the landmark Supreme Court ruling that protects the ability of nonprofits to keep their donor lists private came out of the civil rights movement.

“It is hardly a novel perception that compelled disclosure of affiliation with groups engaged in advocacy may constitute as effective a restraint on freedom of association as (other) forms of governmental action,” wrote a unanimous Court in 1958’s NAACP v. Alabama.

Name any social or political movement in American history, left or right, and you will find nonprofit groups at the forefront. Some are even household names like the NAACP, ACLU, NRA, or League of Women Voters. These groups have not always campaigned for specific candidates in elections, but they have always had a voice in our civic debates and an influential role in our politics.

It is time to stop maligning nonprofits as “dark money.” Privacy and free speech go hand-in-hand in a world where extreme activists and corrupt governments seek to dox their critics for retaliation. Every American deserves the right to participate in our democracy without the risk of losing their job or facing harassment at their home.

Heather Lauer is the CEO of People United for Privacy Foundation, a nonprofit that defends the First Amendment rights of all Americans, regardless of their beliefs, to come together in support of their shared values.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

- 1 Makes a choice
- 5 Pear-shaped fruit
- 8 "The Black Prince" author
- 12 High point
- 13 Hostel
- 14 Central point
- 15 "Citadel" actress
- 17 Only
- 18 Brooch
- 19 Rappers' improvisations
- 21 Signaled "Hi!"
- 24 — Bator
- 25 Battery fluid
- 26 Female royal
- 30 Roulette bet
- 31 Carried on, as war
- 32 Pickles on "Rugrats"
- 33 Inmate
- 35 Chorus syllables
- 36 "I dropped the fruitcake!"
- 37 How distant stars shine
- 38 Politico Nancy
- 41 Parcel of land
- 42 Latin 101 word
- 43 Archbishops, e.g.
- 48 Get overemotional

- 49 Slithery fish
- 50 Prime-time hour
- 51 Villa d'—
- 52 Tofu source
- 53 Bigfoot's cousin

DOWN

- 1 Antonym (Abbr.)
- 2 Capita lead-in
- 3 — chi
- 4 Used a Zoom alternative
- 5 Twain hero
- 6 Squid squirt
- 7 More knotted, as a tree
- 8 Harmonious
- 9 Leeway
- 10 Between jobs
- 11 Beholds
- 16 Help
- 20 Royal flush, e.g.

- 21 Get bent out of shape
- 22 Computer brand
- 23 Caesar's "I saw"
- 24 Implores
- 26 Primitive flutes
- 27 Wax-coated cheese
- 28 Ledge
- 29 Do in
- 31 Courts
- 34 Mollify
- 35 Lengthy list
- 37 — Pérignon
- 38 Leaf
- 39 Flightless birds
- 40 Endure
- 41 Easter bloom
- 44 Classic car
- 45 Dead heat
- 46 Sinusitis doc
- 47 Six, in Sicily

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1-7

CRYPTOQUIP

ZIPX GPUPYDF YPGPDYBI FDQG
DYP BSFOKUDOKXL GKEKFDY
QDBOPYKD, OIPYP EKLIO QP D
BSFOSYP ZDY.

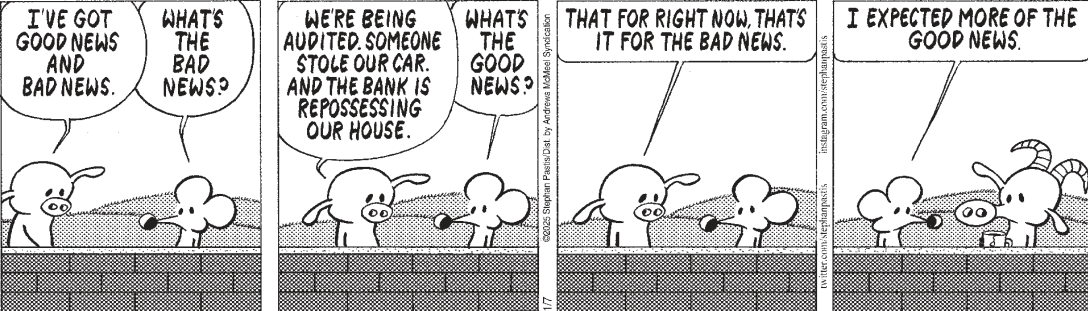
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: POPULAR MOVIE ABOUT A TROUPE OF BAD, OVERDRAMATIC PANTOMIME ACTORS: "THE SILENCE OF THE HAMS."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals G

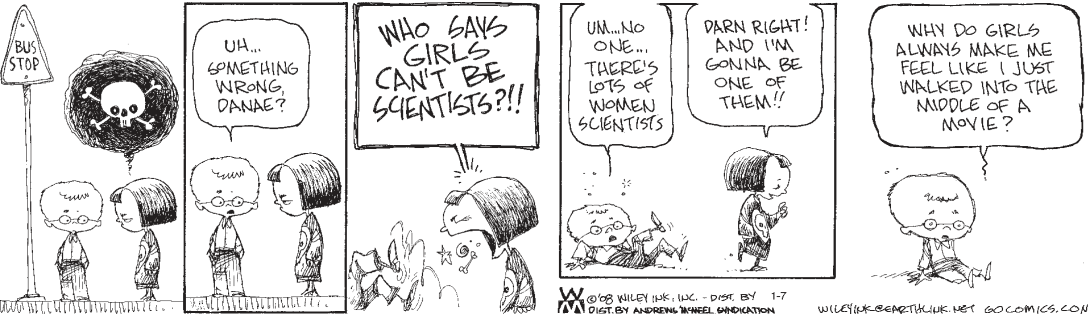
Frazz



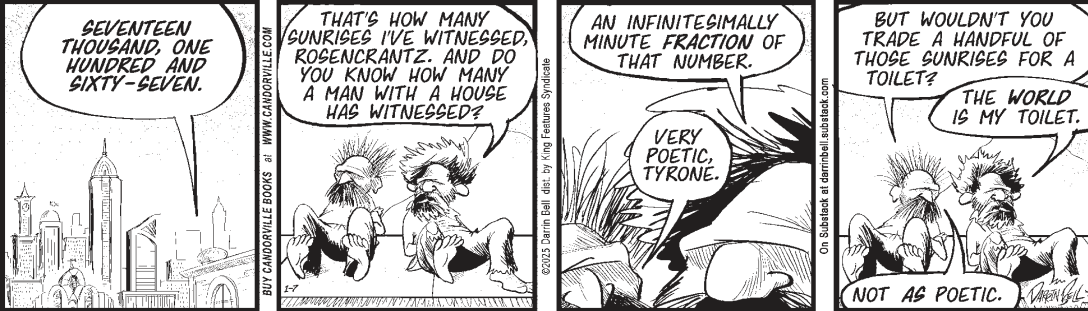
Pearls Before Swine



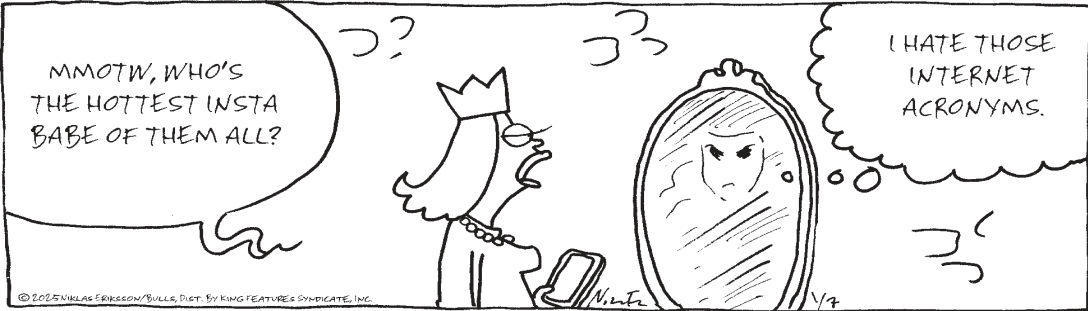
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

DEALS

Sunday’s transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with INF/OF Cavan Biggio on a minor league contract.

National League

WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Agreed to terms with 1B/DH Josh Bell on a one-year contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Fired offensive coordinator Ken Dorsey and offensive line coach Andy Dickerson.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Fired head coach Jerod Mayo.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

CAROLINA HURRICANES — Recalled LW Juha Jaaska from Chicago (AHL). Placed D Shayne Gostibehere on injured reserve.

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Recalled F Tye Felhaber from Colorado (AHL).

DALLAS STARS — Loaned RW Arttu Hyry to Texas (AHL).

LOS ANGELES KINGS — Waived RW Arthur Kaliyev.

MINNESOTA WILD — Reassigned C Brendan Gaunce and D Carson Lambos to Iowa (AHL).

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Placed C Philip Tomasino on injured reserve. Reinstated D Kris Letang from injured reserve.

SEATTLE KRAKEN — Placed F Gianni Gourde and G Joey Daccord on injured reserve. Recalled D Cale Fleury from Coachella Valley (AHL).

UTAH — Claimed D Nick DeSimone off waivers. Reassigned D Kevin Connauton to Tuscon (AHL).

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Loaned C Tanner Laczynski to Henderson (AHL).

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

LAFC — Transferred D Omar Campos to Cruz Azul of Mexico’s Liga MX.

MINNESOTA UNITED — Recalled M Alejandro Bran from his loan at Burton Albion FC.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

FCS playoffs

Championship
Monday, Jan. 6

Montana St. vs. North Dakota St.

NCAA Division III playoffs

Championship
Sunday, Jan. 5

North Central (Ill.) 41, Mount Union 25

College Football Playoff

First Round
Dec. 20

No. 7 Notre Dame 27, No. 10 Indiana 17

Dec. 21

No. 6 Penn St. 38, No. 11 SMU 10
No. 5 Texas 38, No. 12 Clemson 24
No. 8 Ohio St. 42, No. 9 Tennessee 17

Quarterfinals
Dec. 31

Fiesta Bowl

Penn St. 31, Boise St. 14

Jan. 1

Rose Bowl

Ohio St. 41, Oregon 21

Peach Bowl

Texas 39, Arizona St. 31, 2OT

Jan. 2

Sugar Bowl

Notre Dame 23, Georgia 10

Semifinals
Jan. 9

Orange Bowl

Penn St. vs. Notre Dame

Jan. 10

Cotton Bowl

Texas vs. Ohio St.

National Championship
Jan. 20

Atlanta

Semifinal winners

Bowl glance

Dec. 30

Musiac City Bowl

Missouri 27, Iowa 24

Dec. 31

ReliaQuest Bowl

Michigan 19, Alabama 13

Sun Bowl

Louisville 35, Washington 34

Citrus Bowl

Illinois 21, South Carolina 17

Texas Bowl

LSU 44, Baylor 31

Jan. 2

Gator Bowl

Mississippi 52, Duke 20

Jan. 3

First Responder Bowl

Texas St 30, North Texas 28

Duke’s Mayo Bowl

Minnesota 24, Virginia Tech 10

Jan. 4

Bahamas Bowl

Buffalo 26, Liberty 7

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Sunday’s men’s scores

EAST

American 75, Holy Cross 64
Boston U. 71, Army 63
Brown 98, Johnson & Wales (RI) 57
Bucknell 66, Colgate 60
CCSU 62, Mercyhurst 50
Cornell 123, Nittany Lions 71
Fairleigh Dickinson 71, Wagner 59
Harvard 71, Bowdoin 65
Indiana 77, Penn St. 71
Iona 74, Siena 73
LIU 53, Chicago St. 39
Loyola (Md.) 80, Lehigh 74
Manhattan 80, Rider 79
Marist 69, Quinnipiac 62
Mount St. Mary’s 68, Niagara 62
Navy 71, Lafayette 70
Sacred Heart 99, Canisius 82
Stonehill 64, St. Francis (Pa.) 60
UConn 87, Providence 84

SOUTH

FAU 78, East Carolina 76
Kansas 99, UCF 48
Memphis 68, North Texas 64

MIDWEST

Illinois St. 85, S. Illinois 54
Murray St. 66, Drake 59
Purdue 79, Northwestern 61

FAR WEST

Hawaii 68, Cal Poly 55
Illinois 81, Washington 77
Oregon 83, Maryland 79

Sunday’s women’s scores

EAST

Army 69, Boston U. 59
Bucknell 51, Colgate 34
Drexel 70, Northeastern 55
Fordham 64, Duquesne 62
Hofstra 63, Delaware 57
Holy Cross 69, American 61
Lehigh 74, Loyola (Md.) 66
Loyola Chicago 67, George Washington 63

SOUTH

Alabama 68, Missouri 49
Clemson 65, Stanford 61, OT
Coll. of Charleston 78, Campbell 63
Dayton 69, VCU 49
Duke 69, Pittsburgh 31
Elon 70, William & Mary 66, OT
Florida 73, Georgia 57
Florida St. 85, Syracuse 73
George Mason 83, St. Bonaventure 63
Kentucky 96, Vanderbilt 78
LSU 73, Auburn 63
Louisville 81, Wake Forest 76, OT
NC A&T 75, Hampton 48
NC State 91, Boston College 52
Notre Dame 76, North Carolina 66
Oklahoma 87, Tennessee 86
South Carolina 95, Mississippi St. 68
Towson 70, UNC-Wilmington 69
Virginia Tech 68, Miami 64

MIDWEST

Bradley 65, Indiana St. 52
Cleveland St. 72, Detroit 62
Davidson 94, Saint Louis 53
Fort Wayne 77, Oakland 37
Kent St. 82, Buffalo 73
Maryland 74, Iowa 66
Minnesota 68, Illinois 61
Nebraska 72, Penn St. 61
Ohio St. 92, Northwestern 62
Utah 75, Iowa St. 67

SOUTHWEST

California 81, SMU 66
Texas 90, Arkansas 56
Texas A&M 60, Mississippi 58

GOLF

The Sentry

Sunday
At The Plantation Course
at Kapalua Resort
Kapalua, Hawaii
Purse: \$20 million
Yardage: 7,596; Par: 73
Final Round

H. Matsuyama, \$3,600,000	65-65-62-65—257	-35
C. Morikawa, \$2,160,000	66-65-62-67—260	-32
Sungjae Im, \$1,360,000	69-67-62-65—263	-29
Jhonattan Vegas, \$975,000	68-68-66-65—267	-25
Ludvig Aberg, \$744,167	69-70-65-64—268	-24
Corey Connors, \$744,167	66-66-69-67—268	-24
Thomas Detry, \$744,167	67-65-65-71—268	-24
Sam Burns, \$550,000	72-66-66-65—269	-23
Harry Hall, \$550,000	68-65-66-70—269	-23
Tom Hoge, \$550,000	64-68-68-69—269	-23
M. McNealy, \$550,000	68-64-69-68—269	-23
Cameron Young, \$550,000	66-67-68-68—269	-23
Cameron Davis, \$410,000	73-64-64-69—270	-22
Taylor Pendrith, \$410,000	71-65-67-67—270	-22
Keegan Bradley, \$292,000	69-64-70-68—271	-21
Patrick Cantlay, \$292,000	74-64-65-68—271	-21
Wyndham Clark, \$292,000	69-64-69-69—271	-21
Austin Eckroat, \$292,000	68-68-68-67—271	-21
Tony Finau, \$292,000	67-69-66-69—271	-21
R. Macintyre, \$292,000	70-66-69-66—271	-21
Aaron Rai, \$292,000	68-71-66-66—271	-21
Adam Scott, \$292,000	68-69-64-70—271	-21
Sepp Straka, \$292,000	69-65-67-70—271	-21

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

UConn erases 14-point deficit to top Providence

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — Hassan Diarra had 19 points and eight assists, Aidan Mahaney and Tarris Reed Jr. helped spark a second-half comeback and No. 11 UConn overcame a 14-point deficit to beat Providence 87-84 on Sunday and extend its home winning streak to 28 games.

Solo Ball added 16 points for the Huskies (12-3, 4-0 Big East). Mahaney scored 15, Alex Karaban had 13 and Reed had all of his 10 in the second half.

Jayden Pierre scored 24 points and Wesley Cardet finished with 18 for the Friars (7-8, 1-3).

Providence scored the final nine points in the first half, with UConn missing nine of its last 10 shots. The Friars pushed the lead to 14 points early in the second half, but Reed later had six points in a 16-2 run that gave the Huskies a 64-60 lead.

UConn played without second-leading scorer Liam McNeeley. McNeeley suffered a high ankle sprain in Wednesday’s win at DePaul and Huskies men’s basketball coach Dan Hurley told reporters Saturday that the freshman will be out “weeks, not days.”

Bryce Hopkins, Providence’s top scorer who has been limited to just three games this season with a knee injury, also missed the game.

No. 7 Kansas 99, UCF 48: Hunter Dickinson scored 21 of his 27 points in the first half and the No. 7 Jayhawks posted the second-largest margin of victory in program history, beating host UCF in a Big 12 matchup.

Dickinson, a 7-foot-2 senior center, shot 12 for 17 from the field and had nine rebounds while limiting the Knights’ Moustapha Thiam, a 7-2 freshman who was slowed by foul trouble, to four points.

Flory Bidunga had 12 points and five rebounds, Rylan Griffen scored 14 points and Dajuan Harris Jr. and AJ Storr each had 11 for the Jayhawks (10-3, 1-1).

Kansas went on a 23-8 run after Thiam’s second foul in the first half and held UCF without a field goal for more than seven minutes. The Knights missed 11 straight shots during that run and made only three of their final 19 shots in the first half. UCF shot 20.6% in the game and was 7 for 30 from 3-point distance.

Keyshawn Hall had 12 points on 4-for-17 shooting as the Knights (10-3, 1-1) suffered their worst home loss.

No. 9 Oregon 83, Maryland 79: Jackson Shelstad scored 23 points to lead the No. 9 Ducks over the visiting Terps.



Jessica Hill/AP

UConn guard Aidan Mahaney makes a basket as Providence guard Wesley Cardet Jr. defends during the second half Sunday. Mahaney scored 18 points and helped spark a second-half rally.

Shelstad was 8-for-10 from the field and made all five of his 3-point attempts while grabbing five rebounds. Nate Bittle added 16 points and six rebounds for Oregon (13-2, 2-2 Big Ten).

Rodney Rice led Maryland (11-4, 1-3) with 19 points and Derik Queen scored 17.

The Terps took their biggest lead at 30-17 in the first half when Selton Miguel converted a three-point play with 10:09 left, but the Ducks followed with a 13-2 run. Shelstad scored eight points during the spurt.

No. 20 Purdue 79, Northwestern 61: Braden Smith had 22 points and seven assists to lead the No. 20 Boilermakers to a rout of the visiting Wildcats.

Smith, who scored 17 of his points in the first half, hit 8 of 16 shots for Purdue (11-4, 3-1 Big Ten). Trey Kaufman-Renn and C.J. Cox each scored 12 points for the Boilermakers.

Angelo Ciaravino led Northwestern (10-5, 1-3) with 19 points on 8-for-14 shooting. Brooks Barnhizer, who graduated from nearby Lafayette Jefferson High School, and Jalen Leach each had 11 points. Barnhizer, who was averaging 20.1 points entering the game, struggled from the field, making 4 of 15 shots.

Purdue led by as many as 29 points at 63-34 with 11:21 left in the second half. It scored the first seven points and never trailed.

No. 21 Memphis 68, North Tex-

as 64: PJ Haggerty scored 27 points to lead the No. 21 Tigers over the visiting Mean Green.

Haggerty was 11-for-14 from the field, including hitting his first seven shots in the game. Dain Dainja finished with 14 points, missing only one of his six shots as Memphis (12-3, 2-0 American Athletic Conference) won for the fifth time in its last six games.

Brenen Lorient led North Texas (10-4, 1-1) with 18 points, while Moulaye Sissoko added 17 points and eight rebounds.

The game was close throughout with no team leading by more than seven points. There were four ties and six lead changes. The Tigers press finally made a difference in key situations. That led to 16 turnovers for the Mean Green.

No. 22 Illinois 81, Washington 77: Kasparas Jakucionis made a tiebreaking layup with 32 seconds left, and the No. 22 Illini survived a furious comeback bid by the host Huskies to squeak out a victory.

Illinois (11-3, 3-1 Big Ten), playing at UW for the first time since the 1952 Final Four, had a 17-point lead but Washington tied it at 75 on Luis Kortright’s layup with 47 seconds left. Jakucionis then scored and the Illini put it away at the free throw line.

Jakucionis had 18 points and six assists.

DJ Davis led the Huskies (10-5, 1-3) with 31 points, finishing 7-for-14 from beyond the arc.

NHL

Broken leg hasn't slowed Ovechkin in goal chase

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Coaching Alex Ovechkin for three seasons has normalized his hot pursuit of Wayne Gretzky's NHL career goals record for Peter Laviolette.

"Not a crazy thing at all," Laviolette said before his New York Rangers faced Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals on Saturday. "I don't see him slowing down."

Nope, not slowing down.

Ovechkin scored the fifth goal in a 7-4 win to move 23 back of breaking Gretzky's record of 894. He has four in five games since returning from missing the previous 16 with a broken leg.

"It's incredible," teammate Connor McMichael said. "Ever since I was a kid, I grew up watch-

ing him do all these amazing things, and now to have a front-row seat to him doing something really special has been awesome. He's been helping our team win night in and night out, so I can't say enough good things about him."

Ovechkin is one away from reaching 20 goals in all 20 of his seasons in the league. The broken left fibula paused the Gretzky chase, but the 39-year-old has returned with a vengeance.

"To be honest with you, I feel every game better — touches, skating wise," Ovechkin said. "I'll take it."

Center Dylan Strome, who has assisted on 14 of Ovechkin's 19 goals, said, "It just feels like he gets on these runs." Because of these runs, Ovechkin remains on pace to

pass Gretzky this spring.

"Just seeing his every day kind of lifestyle and seeing him on the ice and every time he scores, it's a great kind of feeling and I think it pumps up everyone on our bench," Capitals winger Andrew Mangiapane said.

Laviolette, who coached Washington from 2021-23, praised Ovechkin's shot as being the best in the world but pointed more to his work ethic than anything else to explain how the scoring has continued.

"He's a guy that just doesn't stop," Laviolette said. "He wants to get better. He's going to play hurt. He's going to play injured. He's going to get out there (and) he's going to try and make a difference for his team."



JOHN McDONNELL/AP

Alex Ovechkin, center, celebrates his goal with teammates during the Capitals' win over the New York Rangers on Saturday in Washington.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference									
Atlantic Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Toronto	41	26	13	2	54	129	113		
Florida	40	24	14	2	50	135	124		
Boston	42	20	17	5	45	111	131		
Tampa Bay	37	20	15	2	42	137	105		
Ottawa	38	19	17	2	40	112	111		
Montreal	39	18	18	3	39	117	132		
Detroit	39	17	18	4	38	107	126		
Buffalo	40	14	21	5	33	122	137		
Metropolitan Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Washington	39	26	10	3	55	145	104		
New Jersey	42	24	15	3	51	134	107		
Carolina	40	24	14	2	50	135	114		
Pittsburgh	41	17	17	7	41	125	152		
Columbus	40	17	17	6	40	137	145		
Philadelphia	40	17	18	5	39	123	144		
N.Y. Rangers	39	18	20	1	37	113	123		
N.Y. Islanders	40	15	18	7	37	108	128		
Western Conference									
Central Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Winnipeg	41	27	12	2	56	147	104		
Minnesota	40	25	11	4	54	121	107		
Dallas	38	24	13	1	49	123	95		
Colorado	40	24	15	1	49	137	130		
St. Louis	41	19	18	4	42	114	123		
Utah	39	17	15	7	41	113	118		
Nashville	40	13	20	7	33	98	123		
Chicago	40	13	25	2	28	102	137		
Pacific Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Vegas	39	27	9	3	57	139	105		
Los Angeles	38	23	10	5	51	118	96		
Edmonton	39	24	12	3	51	128	109		
Vancouver	38	18	12	8	44	116	121		
Calgary	39	18	14	7	43	105	120		
Anaheim	39	17	18	4	38	101	118		
Seattle	40	17	20	3	37	116	127		
San Jose	42	13	23	6	32	110	149		

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

Sunday's games

N.Y. Rangers 6, Chicago 2
Carolina 4, Pittsburgh 3, OT
N.Y. Islanders 5, Boston 4, OT
Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2, OT
Anaheim 4, Tampa Bay 1

Monday's games

Washington at Buffalo
Vancouver at Montreal
Florida at Colorado
New Jersey at Seattle

Tuesday's games

Carolina at Tampa Bay
Columbus at Pittsburgh 3
Dallas at N.Y. Rangers
Edmonton at Boston
Ottawa at Detroit
Toronto at Philadelphia
Nashville at Winnipeg
St. Louis at Minnesota
Calgary at Anaheim
Vegas at San Jose

ROUNDUP

Aho's OT goal lifts Hurricanes over Penguins

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho's goal at 1:30 in overtime led the Carolina Hurricanes to a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday night.

Aho added two assists. Seth Jarvis had two goals and Jalen Chatfield also scored for the Hurricanes, who improved to 3-0 against the Penguins this season. Dustin Tokarski had 16 saves for Carolina.

Kevin Hayes, Michael Bunting and Erik Karlsson scored for Pittsburgh. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 26 shots for the Penguins.

Pittsburgh built a 2-0 lead in the first six minutes of the game. Hayes and Bunting beat Tokarski for the early advantage.

Aho set up Jarvis' first goal and then fed Chatfield to tie the game at 2-2 with 7:15 left in the second period. Jarvis made it 3-2 with an assist from Andrei Svechnikov with 3:42 left in the second.

The Hurricanes' penalty kill, second-best in the NHL, held up late in regulation when Chatfield was sent to the box for a delay of game with 3 minutes left in the third period.

Rangers 6, Blackhawks 2: Filip Chytil scored twice, Jonny Brodzinski, Will Borgan, Reilly Smith and Vincent Trochek added goals, and visiting New York beat Chicago.

The Rangers won for the second time in three games and are 2-5 over their last seven games. The Blackhawks lost for the sixth time in seven starts.

Brodzinski and Borgan scored in the final five minutes of the first period to give New York a 2-1 lead. Both shots beat Chicago goaltender Arvid Soderblom (28 saves) from the high slot, Brodzinski's was aided by Mika Zibanejad's screen.

Chytil made it 3-1 on a wrist shot 3:28 into the second, then added the Rangers' last goal on a double-deflection with 11:24 to play.

The Blackhawks took an early lead on Tyler Bertuzzi's 14th goal of the season, set up by Connor Bedard's pass following a steal from Zibanejad, at 5:37. Chicago's Wyatt Kaiser scored his first NHL goal late in the second period.

Islanders 5, Bruins 4 (OT): Bo Hovart scored his second goal of the game on a breakaway 3:10 into overtime and visiting



KARL B DEBLAKER/AP

The Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho celebrates after scoring past Penguins goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic in overtime as Sidney Crosby looks on. It was Aho's 600th career point.

New York snapped a three-game skid with a win over Boston.

Anders Lee scored twice, and Ryan Pulock had a goal and an assist for the Islanders. Ilya Sorokin made 26 saves for New York, which won for just the third time in nine games.

Hovart fired a wrist shot that slipped between Jonas Korpisalo's pads for the winner.

David Pastrnak scored twice, and Cole Koepke and Justin Brazeau added goals as the Bruins lost their fourth straight game.

Lee's second goal gave the Islanders a two-goal edge early in the third period, before Pastrnak scored twice in an 8:09 span.

Maple Leafs 3, Flyers 2: Morgan Rielly scored 2:25 into overtime and host Toronto extended its winning streak to four games with a victory over Philadelphia.

Rielly converted a feed from Auston Matthews for his fifth goal of the season and first in two months.

Matthew Knies and Oliver Ekman-Larsson

also scored for the Maple Leafs, who lead the Atlantic Division and are second in the Eastern Conference, a point behind Washington. Dennis Hildeby finished with 30 saves.

Tyson Foerster and Scott Laughton scored for the Flyers, who closed out a six-game, 10-day trip. Ivan Fedotov made 22 saves.

Ducks 4, Lightning 1: Frank Vatrano had two goals and assist after signing a three-year contract extension, and host Anaheim defeated Tampa Bay.

Troy Terry also had a goal and an assist for the Ducks, who have won four of their last six. Jackson Lacombe put it out of reach with a goal at 16:26 of the third. John Gibson stopped 36 shots.

Jake Guentzel had a power-play goal in the second period for the Lightning. Nikita Kucherov picked up his 38th assist and 55th point, both fifth in the league.

Jonas Johansson made 22 saves. Tampa Bay has dropped at least three straight for the second time this season.

ROUNDUP

Thunder win team-best 15th straight

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points and 11 rebounds, and the Oklahoma City Thunder pulled away from the Boston Celtics 105-92 on Sunday for their franchise-record 15th straight win.

The Thunder, who improved to 30-5, have not lost a game that counted in the standings since Dec. 1. Their loss to the Milwaukee Bucks in the NBA Cup final does not count on the team's record.

Jayson Tatum had 26 points and 10 rebounds for the defending NBA champion Celtics. Jaylen Brown scored 21 points, but went scoreless on 0-for-7 shooting in the second half.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored nine points in the first 3½ minutes of the game to help Oklahoma City take an early lead, but Boston rallied and led 65-55 at halftime.

The Thunder trimmed the deficit to 80-76 at the end of the third quarter and regained the lead, 81-80, on a pair of free throws by Jalen Williams early in the fourth.

Oklahoma City remained in control, and back-to-back 3s by Lu Dort put the Thunder up 100-88 with just under two minutes to play. Dort scored 11 points and made all three of his shots from beyond the arc in the fourth quarter.

Pelicans 110, Wizards 98: CJ McCollum scored 25 points and Dejounte Murray had a triple-double to help visiting New Orleans to a second straight victory over Washington.

Murray had 14 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds for his 20th career triple-double. Trey Murphy III added 22 points for the Pelicans.

New Orleans (7-29) swept a home-and-home set with the Wizards (6-27) and moved past them in the standings in this matchup of the NBA's bottom two teams.

Cavaliers 115, Hornets 105:



NATE BILLINGS/AP

Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander shoots over Boston Celtics guard Derrick White during the second half Sunday in Oklahoma City. Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points in the Thunder's 105-92 win.

Darius Garland scored 25 points, Jarrett Allen had 19 points and 11 rebounds, and NBA-leading Cleveland beat visiting Charlotte to extend its winning streak to 10.

Donovan Mitchell had 17 of his 19 points in the second half and Evan Mobley added 17 for the Cavaliers, who won for the 18th time in 19 home games and are 31-4 overall. All 10 victories in Cleveland's streak have been by double digits, a franchise record.

LaMelo Ball and Brandon Miller paced the Hornets with 24 points apiece, while Nick Smith Jr. had 18 off the bench. Charlotte dropped its 10th in a row and is 1-18 since Nov. 23.

Jazz 105, Magic 92: Brice Sensabaugh scored 27 points, Collin Sexton added 20 and Walker Kessler grabbed 17 rebounds for visit-

ing Utah in a win over Orlando.

Sensabaugh shot 11-for-19 from the field including 5-for-6 on 3-pointers in 28 minutes off the bench.

Johnny Juzang, Kyle Filipowski and Svi Mykhailiuk scored 12 points each for the Jazz, who have won two in a row.

Rockets 119, Lakers 115: Jalen Green scored 33 points and Fred VanVleet grabbed a key steal late to allow host Houston to hold on for a win over Los Angeles.

Amen Thompson added 23 points and a career-high 16 rebounds in his return after a two-game suspension to help the Rockets eke out the victory after leading by as many as 22.

A basket by LeBron James got the Lakers within 117-115 with eight seconds to go. Alperen Sen-

gun missed 1 of 2 free throws after that to give Los Angeles a chance to tie it.

Kings 129, Warriors 99: Malik Monk had 26 points and 12 assists, Domantas Sabonis contributed 22 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists, and visiting Sacramento dominated Golden State for its fourth straight win despite playing without leading scorer De'Aaron Fox.

The Kings never trailed, led 75-51 at halftime and didn't look back — with many frustrated home fans heading early for the Chase Center exits.

Stephen Curry scored 26 to go with seven rebounds after resting the first night of a back-to-back Saturday against the Grizzlies, and Andrew Wiggins added 18 points.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	26	10	.722	—
New York	24	12	.667	2
Philadelphia	14	19	.424	10½
Brooklyn	13	22	.371	12½
Toronto	8	27	.229	17½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	21	16	.568	—
Miami	17	16	.515	2
Atlanta	18	18	.500	2½
Charlotte	7	27	.206	12½
Washington	6	27	.182	13
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	31	4	.886	—
Milwaukee	17	16	.515	13
Indiana	18	18	.500	13½
Detroit	17	18	.486	14
Chicago	16	19	.457	15
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	23	12	.657	—
Memphis	23	13	.639	½
Dallas	20	15	.571	3
San Antonio	18	17	.514	5
New Orleans	7	29	.194	16½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	30	5	.857	—
Denver	20	14	.588	9½
Minnesota	17	17	.500	12½
Portland	12	22	.353	17½
Utah	9	25	.265	20½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	20	15	.571	—
L.A. Clippers	20	15	.571	—
Golden State	18	17	.514	2
Sacramento	17	19	.472	3½
Phoenix	15	18	.455	4
Sunday's games				
Oklahoma City 105, Boston 92				
Cleveland 115, Charlotte 105				
New Orleans 110, Washington 98				
Utah 105, Orlando 92				
Houston 119, L.A. Lakers 115				
Sacramento 129, Golden State 99				
Monday's games				
Phoenix at Philadelphia				
Portland at Detroit				
Indiana at Brooklyn				
Milwaukee at Toronto				
Orlando at New York				
Dallas at Memphis				
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota				
San Antonio at Chicago				
Miami at Sacramento				
Tuesday's games				
Houston at Washington				
Phoenix at Charlotte				
L.A. Lakers at Dallas				
Minnesota at New Orleans				
Atlanta at Utah				
Boston at Denver				
Miami at Golden State				

Heat begin new chapter without suspended Butler

By TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

MIAMI — For the 119th time since Jimmy Butler joined Miami, the Heat played a game without him.

This was different from the others.

And it went very — very — badly for Miami.

Butler is gone, banished by the Heat for seven games over what they called conduct detrimental to the team — and he's probably not going to play for Miami again. His suspension started Saturday night when the Heat played the Utah Jazz, and the team said it will agree to his wishes and try to facilitate a trade.

Game 1 of the Butler suspension was a disaster: The Jazz, who entered with a 7-25 record, took a 43-point lead and wound up



Butler

winning 136-100. They outrebounded Miami 57-32, and it didn't seem that close.

"It's disappointing when you see the organization and a player going head-to-head like that," Heat captain Bam Adebayo said

Saturday after the team's shootaround practice. "But the rest of us got to figure out how to win games."

They did not have it figured out Saturday. Not even close.

They hadn't lost a game by more than 19 all season. They lost this game by 36, the sixth-biggest home loss in franchise history.

"I don't think we make any excuses for

this," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "We just took it on the chin and we have to get to work."

Butler has not commented publicly on the suspension. The National Basketball Players Association spoke out on Butler's behalf hours after the Heat announced the suspension Friday, saying it believes the team's actions are "excessive and inappropriate." The suspension could cost Butler about \$2.4 million of his \$48.8 million salary this season.

"It's none of our business," Adebayo said. "It's for Jimmy and for the management to handle."

How it gets handled from here, and on what timeframe, is anyone's guess.

There was a new starting lineup with Butler gone: Miami opened the game with Ter-

ry Rozier, Tyler Herro, Haywood Highsmith, Nikola Jovic and Adebayo. Butler's locker is still the way he left it, shower shoes leaning against the drawer under the seat, a few items hanging on hooks and a few things taped to the wall. It will be cleaned out at some point, but he's still part of the team.

For now, anyway.

"We're just going to focus on tonight," Spoelstra said before the game. "I want to quiet all the distractions. Enough has been said. We have clarity. We're just going to focus on this group in the locker room. That's what I want them to focus on and quiet the noise as much as possible. I'm not a click-bait type of coach, so you're not going to get anything else really from me. We have a task to do."

NFL

Pederson out as Jags' coach, GM Baalke stays

BY MARK LONG
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Doug Pederson is out as Jacksonville's head coach after the franchise's "best team assembled" won just four games.

Jaguars owner Shad Khan fired Pederson on Monday, a day after a 26-23 loss at Indianapolis in overtime. It was the team's 18th loss in its last 23 games. But Khan kept general manager Trent Baalke, a questionable decision that will surely affect who will become Jacksonville's next coach.

Khan made the move with one year remaining on Pederson's contract. The decision came more than five months after Khan stood in front of coaches and players and declared this the "best team assembled by the Jacksonville Jaguars ever."

"Winning now" was Khan's edict as training camp opened and after he committed nearly half a billion dollars to to signing quarterback Trevor Lawrence, pass rusher Josh Hines-Allen and cornerback Tyson Campbell to long-term deals in the offseason. It was the most expensive stretch of roster building in franchise history.

And Khan has gotten little, if any, return on his investment.

"Doug is an accomplished football man who will undoubtedly enjoy another chapter in his impressive NFL career, and I will be rooting for Doug and his wife Jeannie when that occasion arrives," Khan said in a statement. "As much as Doug and I both wish his experience here in Jacksonville would have ended better, I have an obligation first and foremost to serve the best interests of our team and especially our fans, who faithfully support our team and are overdue to be rewarded.

In that spirit, the time to summon new leadership is now.

"I strongly believe it is possible next season to restore the winning environment we had here not long ago. I will collaborate with General Manager Trent Baalke and others, within and close to our organization, to hire a leader who shares my ambition and is ready to seize the extraordinary opportunity we will offer in Jacksonville."

The Jaguars (4-13) ended up with their 10th losing season in Khan's 13 years as owner. Now, Khan will hire his sixth head coach; current NFL offensive coordinators Ben Johnson (Detroit) and Liam Coen (Tampa Bay) should top the list. But would they even agree to work with Baalke, whose draft picks have been mostly suspect and his latest free-agent class is among the worst in franchise history?

Pederson became the fifth NFL head coach fired this season, joining Robert Saleh (New York Jets), Dennis Allen (New Orleans), Matt Eberflus (Chicago) and Jerod Mayo (New England).

Pederson finished 9-8 in his first two campaigns in Jacksonville and made the playoffs in his first year. He became the first coach in franchise history to start with back-to-back winning seasons and was a welcome relief following Urban Meyer's 13-game tenure that was filled with dysfunction.

But Pederson's injury-riddled team went 1-5 down the stretch in 2023 and missed the postseason after spending nearly two months atop the AFC South. He thought getting Lawrence healthy and revamping his defensive staff would change the team's fortunes. Neither made a difference.



PHILAN M. EBENHACK/AP

Doug Pederson, right, was fired as Jacksonville Jaguars coach after three seasons, while general manager Trent Baalke will remain in his position. The Jaguars have gone 25-43 in Baalke's four seasons as GM.



STEVEN SENNE/AP

Jerod Mayo was fired as head coach of the New England Patriots after going 4-13 in his only season.

Patriots fire head coach Mayo after one season

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The New England Patriots fired coach Jerod Mayo on Sunday after one season, beginning another reboot for the franchise just a year after it parted with longtime coach Bill Belichick.

Owner Robert Kraft announced the firing in a statement shortly after New England closed its 4-13 season with a 23-16 win over the Buffalo Bills.

"After the game, I informed Jerod Mayo that he will not be returning as the head coach of the New England Patriots in 2025. For me, personally, it was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made," Kraft said. "Unfortunately, the trajectory of our team's performances throughout the season did not ascend as I had hoped."

Kraft was set to discuss the move in a news conference Monday.

A former Patriots linebacker who worked as an assistant under Belichick, Mayo started the season with a strong endorsement from Kraft. But alongside a coaching staff that featured offensive coordinator Alex Van Pelt and first-time defensive coordinator DeMarcus Covington, he struggled to get the most out of a young roster that included rookie quarterback Drake Maye.

New England opened the season with a win at Cincinnati before losing its next six games. The Pats won two of their next three but then closed the season by losing six of seven, missing the playoffs for the third consecutive season. Belichick was 4-13 in his final season in 2023 to cap a 24-year run with the Patriots that included six Super Bowl titles.

Mayo played eight seasons with New England and won a Super Bowl during the 2014 season. He took a post-retirement job in corporate America in 2015, then returned to football in 2019 to work with Belichick. He served primarily as the Patriots' linebackers coach while developing a strong reputation among players.

It made him a rising star in the coaching ranks and he turned down several interviews for head coaching jobs following the 2022 season, instead signing an extension to remain in New England.

A week after letting Belichick go, the Patriots hired Mayo as the franchise's first Black head coach. At age 37, he started the season as the NFL's second-youngest coach behind Seattle's Mike Macdonald.

From the beginning of his tenure, Mayo tried to establish a culture that differed from Belichick's often robotic devotion to football — a move that drew praise from players.

Yet it didn't translate into victo-

ries for a team that was ranked near the bottom of the NFL offensively and defensively, and went 3-6 in one-score games.

Kraft could turn to another former New England linebacker in Mike Vrabel, the former Tennessee Titans coach who recently interviewed with the New York Jets for their coaching vacancy. Vrabel was a pivotal part of the Patriots' first three Super Bowl titles during his eight seasons, and he led the Titans to three playoff appearances in six years before he was fired after the 2023 season.

After Sunday's win and before Mayo's firing was announced, players praised the job he did this season.

"He's stayed consistent," cornerback Jonathan Jones said. "The effort from the guys today showed just how no matter what the situation is, how he can get guys to go out there and fight."

Veteran quarterback Jacoby Brissett said coming together under a new coaching staff was a challenge for everyone.

"First year for head coach, offensive coordinator, defensive coordinator, (general manager). People don't understand all that," Brissett said. "But good things take time. It's not like Rome was built in a day. ... The word that people don't want to use is patience. You've got to have patience with this thing."

NFL

Broncos clinch 1st postseason spot in nearly a decade

Denver routs KC backups in win

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press

DENVER — Bo Nix celebrated the end of the Broncos' eight-year playoff drought with a bunch of new friends.

The rookie quarterback circled Empower Field while handing out high-fives to fans after he passed for 321 yards and four touchdowns in a 38-0 rout of the Kansas City Chiefs' bevy of backups on Sunday.

"I learned I've got to run a little more during the week because that's a long lap," Nix said. "I was a little tired at the end. But the fans deserve it, it's been a long time coming."

Denver (10-7) buried nearly a decade's worth of futility and frustrations by returning to the post-season party for the first time since winning Super Bowl 50 following the 2015 season.

The Broncos will visit Buffalo (13-4) for a wild-card game Sunday after handing the two-time defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs

their first shutout since Dec. 16, 2012, at Oakland.

Nix went 26-for-29 while setting franchise records for completion percentage (89.7) and most completions to start a game (18).

"It's fun to clinch a playoff spot in the last game of the year against a divisional team," said Nix, who also set an NFL record with 19 touchdown throws at home in his rookie season. "But now playoff time starts, and our goal wasn't just to make the playoffs, even though it hadn't been done in a while."

Having already secured the AFC's No. 1 seed and sole first-round bye in their quest for an unprecedented three-peat, Kansas City coach Andy Reid sat Patrick Mahomes, Travis Kelce and a host of other starters.

"My hat goes off to Denver. Great opportunity for them to get into the playoffs and did a nice job today," Reid said. "Sean (Payton) has done a good job with that group. A positive for us we got to



GENEVA HEFFERNAN/AP

Broncos quarterback Bo Nix greets fans after beating the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday in Denver.

play a lot of young guys. That experience is invaluable, especially against a good football team."

Carson Wentz got the start at quarterback and fizzled in his first extended action since Week 18 with the Rams last season. He was 10-for-17 for 98 yards and was sacked four times by the league's best pass rush (62 sacks).

"We didn't play great as a team. I didn't play my best, either," Wentz said. "Move on from this one pretty quick. It was fun to get out there, give myself and a lot of guys a chance to just go out there and

compete. But obviously they were the better team today."

The Broncos beat the Chiefs (15-2) for just the second time in the last 19 games between the teams.

Nix's four TD passes gave him 29 for the season, second-most by a rookie in NFL history, behind only Justin Herbert's 31 in 2020. He hit Marvin Mims twice, Courtland Sutton (five times for 98 yards) and De Vaughn Vele for scores.

Vele's TD was intended for Adam Trautman but ricocheted off cornerbacks Nazeeh Johnson

(twice) and Keith Taylor before Vele cradled the catch just before tumbling out of the back of the end zone, extending Denver's lead to 21-0.

"Vele ran the wrong route," Nix said, "but he didn't give up on the play.... Actually, it was perfect. I'm glad he did exactly what he did and he got a touchdown out of it."

Kansas City won't play again until Jan. 18 or 19, meaning Mahomes, who last played on Christmas Day, and other stars who sat this one out will have at least 24 days between games.

ROUNDUP

Evans, Bucs top Saints to secure NFC South title

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Just 36 seconds away from clinching the NFC South title, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had another goal to achieve.

Take a knee on their 32-yard line and run out the clock?

No chance. Mike Evans still needed 5 yards to make history.

Evans caught a 9-yard pass on the final play of the game to surpass 1,000 yards for the 11th straight season, tying Jerry Rice for the most ever in the NFL and setting off a wild celebration following Tampa Bay's 27-19 victory over the New Orleans Saints on Sunday.

Quarterback Baker Mayfield used his legs and arm to help the Buccaneers secure their fourth straight division championship, rallying the team from a 16-6 deficit for his first career win after trailing by 10 or more points. Mayfield had been 0-43 in those situations.

Tampa Bay (10-7) will host the Washington Commanders (12-5) next Sunday night in a wild-card playoff game. It's a rematch of the Bucs' 37-20 victory over Washington in Week 1 in rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels' first game.



CHRIS O'MEARA/AP

Tampa Bay Buccaneers wide receiver Mike Evans warms up before a game against the New Orleans Saints on Sunday in Tampa, Fla.

Bears 24, Packers 22: Caleb Williams drove visiting Chicago to Cairo Santos' 51-yard field goal as time expired and the Bears snapped a 10-game skid with a victory over playoff-bound Green Bay, who lost quarterback Jordan Love and wide receiver Christian Watson to injuries.

Packers coach Matt LaFleur said

Love was held out as a precaution. The QB had some practice tosses on the sideline late in the game.

Eagles 20, Giants 13: Tanner McKee threw for 269 yards and two touchdowns in a game full of backups to help host Philadelphia tune up for the postseason with a victory over New York.

The NFC East champion Eagles

(14-3) are the No. 2 seed in the conference and will host Green Bay next weekend in a wild-card game.

Texans 23, Titans 14: C.J. Stroud completed all six of his passes for 50 yards and a touchdown Sunday on visiting Houston's opening drive before going to the bench as the Texans snapped a two-game skid going into the AFC playoffs with a victory over Tennessee.

Houston (10-7) will host the Los Angeles Chargers in an AFC wild-card game. The Texans won for the first time since clinching their second straight AFC South title Dec. 15 with a win over Miami.

Commanders 23, Cowboys 19: Marcus Mariota threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to Terry McLaurin with 3 seconds left, lifting visiting Washington to a victory over Dallas and clinching the sixth seed in the NFC playoffs.

Patriots 23, Bills 16: Joe Milton III passed for a touchdown and ran for another in his NFL debut, and host New England cost itself the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL draft with a win over AFC East champion Buffalo.

Panthers 44, Falcons 38 (OT):

Bryce Young passed for three touchdowns, ran for two scores and led a 70-yard drive capped by Miles Sanders' 1-yard TD run on the opening possession of overtime to give visiting Carolina a win over Atlanta.

Colts 26, Jaguars 23 (OT): Jonathan Taylor ran for 177 yards, including 33 yards on six consecutive carries in overtime to set up Matt Gay's go-ahead 38-yard field goal, and host Indianapolis beat Jacksonville.

Chargers 34, Raiders 20: Justin Herbert passed for 346 yards and two touchdowns, and visiting Los Angeles secured the fifth seed in the AFC playoffs with a victory over Las Vegas.

Jets 32, Dolphins 20: Aaron Rodgers threw a season-high four touchdown passes — Nos. 500, 501, 502 and 503 of his storied career — in what could've been his final NFL game to lead host New York to a victory over Miami.

Cardinals 47, 49ers 24: Kyler Murray threw for 242 yards and four touchdowns, two to Greg Dortch, and host Arizona beat injury-depleted San Francisco.

Scoreboard

American Conference							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-Buffalo	13	4	0	.765	525	368	
e-Miami	8	9	0	.471	345	364	
e-N.Y. Jets	5	12	0	.294	338	404	
e-New England	4	13	0	.235	289	417	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-Houston	10	7	0	.588	372	372	
e-Indianapolis	8	9	0	.471	377	427	
e-Jacksonville	4	13	0	.235	320	435	
e-Tennessee	3	14	0	.176	311	460	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-Baltimore	12	5	0	.706	518	361	
x-Pittsburgh	10	7	0	.588	380	347	
e-Cincinnati	9	8	0	.529	472	434	
e-Cleveland	3	14	0	.176	258	435	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
*-Kansas City	15	2	0	.882	385	326	
x-L.A. Chargers	11	6	0	.647	402	301	
x-Denver	10	7	0	.588	425	311	
e-Las Vegas	4	13	0	.235	309	434	
National Conference							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-Philadelphia	14	3	0	.824	463	303	
x-Washington	12	5	0	.706	485	391	
e-Dallas	7	10	0	.412	350	468	
e-N.Y. Giants	3	14	0	.176	273	415	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-Tampa Bay	10	7	0	.588	502	385	
e-Atlanta	8	9	0	.471	389	423	
e-Carolina	5	12	0	.294	341	534	
e-New Orleans	5	12	0	.294	338	398	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
x-Detroit	15	2	0	.882	564	342	
x-Minnesota	14	3	0	.824	432	332	
x-Green Bay	11	6	0	.647	460	338	
e-Chicago	5	12	0	.294	310	370	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-L.A. Rams	10	7	0	.588	367	386	
e-Seattle	10	7	0	.588	375	368	
e-Arizona	8	9	0	.471	400	379	
e-San Francisco	6	11	0	.353	389	436	
e-Eliminated from playoffs							
x-clinched playoff spot							
y-clinched division							
*-clinched home-field advantage							
Saturday's games							
Baltimore 35, Cleveland 10							
Cincinnati 19, Pittsburgh 17							
Sunday's games							
Carolina 44, Atlanta 38, OT							
Chicago 24, Green Bay 22							
Houston 23, Tennessee 14							
Indianapolis 26, Jacksonville 23, OT							
New England 23, Buffalo 16							
Philadelphia 20, N.Y. Giants 13							
Tampa Bay 27, New Orleans 19							
Washington 23, Dallas 19							
Arizona 47, San Francisco 24							
Denver 38, Kansas City 0							
L.A. Chargers 34, Las Vegas 20							
N.Y. Jets 32, Miami 20							
Seattle 30, L.A. Rams 25							
Detroit 31, Minnesota 9							
Playoffs							
Wild-card Playoffs							
Saturday, Jan. 11							
L.A. Chargers at Houston							
Pittsburgh at Baltimore							
Sunday, Jan. 12							
Denver at Buffalo							
Green Bay at Philadelphia							
Washington at Tampa Bay							
Monday, Jan. 13							
Minnesota at L.A. Rams							
Divisional Playoffs							
Saturday, Jan. 18-Sunday, Jan. 19							
AFC lowest remaining seed at Kansas City							
NFC lowest remaining seed at Detroit							
AFC two remaining seeds at higher seed							
NFC two remaining seeds at higher seed							
Conference Championships							
Sunday, Jan. 26							
AFC lowest remaining seed at AFC high-est remaining seed							
NFC lowest remaining seed at NFC high-est remaining seed							

Gibbs scores 4 TDs, gives Lions bye

BY LARRY LAGE
Associated Press

DETROIT — Jahmyr Gibbs was the game-breaking player the Detroit Lions needed to get their high-powered offense in gear — and give them a first-round bye and home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs.

Gibbs scored three of his franchise-record tying four touchdowns in the second half, and the Lions beat the Minnesota Vikings 31-9 on Sunday night to win their second straight NFC North title.

“Everybody’s got to come through here, baby!” Detroit defensive end Za’Darius Smith said to the roaring crowd after the game.

The Lions (15-2) and Vikings (14-3) could meet again in two weeks.

Banged-up Detroit will have a much-needed week off, while Minnesota plays at the NFC West champion Los Angeles Rams next Monday night.

In the NFL’s final game before the playoffs, two teams played in the regular season with a combined 28 victories for the first time. A No. 1 seed was determined in a regular-season finale for the third time in three-plus decades.

The Lions are seeking their first Super Bowl appearance and hoping to end an NFL championship drought that dates to 1957. They are a No. 1 seed for the first time in franchise history.

“It’s not the cherry on top,” quarterback Jared Goff said. “Not yet.”

Game No. 272 of the regular season was expected to be a shootout with Pro Bowl quarterbacks leading high-scoring offenses, but Goff and Sam Darnold were not at their best.

Gibbs picked up the slack for his team.

“He’s as explosive as any player in the league,” Vikings coach Kevin O’Connell said.

Gibbs had 23 carries for 139 yards with a career-high three rushing touchdowns and caught five passes for 31 yards and another score.



RICK OSENTOSKI/AP

Lions running back Jahmyr Gibbs celebrates after he scores a touchdown against the Minnesota Vikings in the second half on Sunday in Detroit. Gibbs had four TDs in the game.

“He was special, and we needed him to be,” Goff said.

Goff threw two interceptions after getting picked off only once in the previous seven games and Minnesota made field goals after the turnovers in the second and third quarters.

After Vikings rookie Will Reichard connected on his third kick to cut the deficit to 10-9 early in the third, Goff directed a 13-play, 70-yard drive that took 7:25 and was capped by a slick pass to Gibbs for a 10-yard touchdown on fourth-and-2.

Goff was 8-for-8 on that possession and finished 27-for-33 for 231 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions.

Darnold completed fewer than half his pas-

ses in the first half, missing opportunities to pick up first downs and score touchdowns. Minnesota was 0 of 3 in the red zone through two quarters to let Detroit lead 10-6 at halftime and failed to score a touchdown when they were inside the 20 for a fourth time in the second half.

The Vikings went for it on fourth down from the Lions 3 in the second quarter and Darnold, under pressure, overthrew an open Justin Jefferson in the end zone.

Darnold threw another incomplete pass on fourth down from the Detroit 2 early in the third.

“Kicking field goals isn’t going to get it done against that team,” Darnold said. “I have to hit those throws.”

Loss drops Rams into matchup with Vikings

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Matthew Stafford and nearly all of his fellow offensive starters watched the Los Angeles Rams’ regular-season finale in street clothes. Coach Sean McVay knew his NFC West champions would fall from the third to the fourth playoff seed if they lost to Seattle, but he didn’t care.

Jimmy Garoppolo and the backups nearly beat the Seattle Seahawks anyway, and that looks like an encouraging sign for the Rams next week and beyond.

“We’ve got some dawgs on this team, man,” Garoppolo said. “I know we’re going to show up next week ready to roll.”

Geno Smith passed for 223 yards and threw his career-best fourth touchdown pass to Noah Fant with 3:19 to play, and the Seahawks finished their 12th winning season in 13 years with a 30-25 victory over playoff-bound Los Angeles on Sunday.

Garoppolo passed for 334 yards and two TDs in his debut for the Rams (10-7), who had already clinched the division title through strength of schedule before they



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Rams QB Matthew Stafford, left, and WRs Puka Nacua, center, and Cooper Kupp watch from the bench during Sunday’s loss to Seattle.

hosted Seattle (10-7).

In keeping with McVay’s career-long policy of prioritizing rest and health over meaningless results, Los Angeles sat Stafford along with receivers Puka Nacua and Cooper Kupp, running back Kyren Williams and four starting offensive linemen.

But the Rams’ first loss since Nov. 24 dropped them to the fourth seed in the NFC playoff bracket behind Tampa Bay (10-7), which beat New Orleans.

That means Los Angeles’ visitor in the wild-card round Monday

night will be the 14-3 Minnesota Vikings, who lost 31-9 at Detroit on Sunday night.

Asked if he cared about the team’s first playoff opponent before the Vikings-Lions game, McVay responded: “I really don’t.”

“You know what’s at stake and you have tremendous respect, but I’m excited about seeing who that is, and then we’re going to dive into it,” he continued. “We’re going to go for it with no fear.”

Tyler Higbee and Tyler Johnson caught TD passes for the

Rams, who had won five straight and nine of 11 since their bye week. Although most of their defensive starters played, Los Angeles limited its snaps — and McVay even allowed offensive coordinator Mike LaFleur to call the Rams’ plays.

“It’s going to be a great challenge, but I do know this: I’ve been fortunate enough to get into this thing (before), and you can’t worry about ducking people,” said McVay, the youngest coach to win the Super Bowl. “If you ... really expect to make some noise when you get in it, you’re going to have to play people eventually. Felt like it was the smart move for our football team, and really, we had an opportunity to come away with the win.”

The Seahawks didn’t trail until the fourth quarter. After Johnson caught a 4-yard TD pass from Garoppolo, Los Angeles got the ball back and drove for Joshua Karty’s 38-yard field goal to go up 25-24 with 7:29 to play.

Fant put Seattle back ahead by holding on to Smith’s 16-yard TD pass despite landing nearly head-first in the end zone after getting undercut.

SPORTS



15 straight wins
Thunder set franchise-record streak with victory over Celtics » **NBA, Page 20**



Lions running back Jahmyr Gibbs (26) celebrates with teammates after he ran for a touchdown against the Minnesota Vikings during the second half Sunday in Detroit.

Playoff picture finalized

Lions secure NFC's No. 1 seed, Broncos and Bucs get last two spots

By Rob Maaddi
Associated Press

The road to the Super Bowl in the NFC will go through Motown. The Detroit Lions secured a No. 1 seed with a 31-9 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night. Jahmyr Gibbs scored four touchdowns to help the Lions (15-2) clinch the NFC North, earn a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs.

The Vikings (14-3) missed an op-

portunity to overtake Detroit for the top spot and ended up with the fifth seed. They'll play on the road against the No. 4 seed Los Angeles Rams (10-7) next Monday night. The Denver Broncos and Tampa Bay Buccaneers captured the NFL's final two playoff spots earlier in the day in Week 18. Rookie quarterback Bo Nix led the Broncos to a 38-0 victory over Kansas City's backups, sending Denver to the postseason for the first time since Peyton Manning helped the team win the Super Bowl following the 2015 season.

The Buccaneers clinched the NFC South with a 27-19 comeback victory over New Orleans and earned the No. 3 seed when the Los Angeles Rams lost to Seattle 30-25. Tampa Bay (10-7) will host Washington (12-5) in the wild-card round next Sunday night. The Broncos (10-7) got the seventh seed and will visit Buffalo (13-4) in the first game Sunday. Denver's victory eliminated Cincinnati and Miami, which lost to the Jets. Green Bay, which lost 24-22 to

Chicago, will be the seventh seed and visits No. 2 seed Philadelphia on Sunday in the middle game of a playoff tripleheader. The Eagles (14-3) beat the Packers (11-6) in the season opener, 34-29, in Brazil. The Commanders beat Dallas 23-19 behind backup quarterback Marcus Mariota's two touchdown passes. Washington opened the season with a loss in Tampa Bay, but rookie QB Jayden Daniels has come a long way since Week 1. The AFC's playoff picture became more clear Saturday when the Baltimore Ravens beat Cleve-

land to clinch the North and the No. 3 seed. The Chiefs (15-2) already locked up a first-round bye, the Bills are the No. 2 seed and the Houston Texans are No. 4. The Los Angeles Chargers beat Las Vegas to get the No. 5 seed. The Chargers (10-7) will play at Houston (10-7) in the first wild-card game Saturday afternoon. The Ravens (12-5) host the Pittsburgh Steelers (10-7), who lost the final four games of the regular season to drop to the No. 6 seed, on Saturday night. The division rivals split the season series.

Hurricanes beat Penguins on Aho's OT goal » NHL, Page 19

