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STARS AND STRIPES

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50¢/Free to Deployed Areas

Pentagon ends policy mandating COVID shot

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon on Tuesday announced the formal end of mandated vaccination of all members of the armed forces against COVID-19, a policy rollback required in the defense authorization bill passed last month.

The reversal, however, does nothing to change the status of the thousands of troops separated from service for refusing orders to take the vaccine.

"The Department will continue to promote and encourage COVID-19 vaccination for all Service members," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a Tuesday memo, referring to the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

"The Department has made COVID-19 vaccination as easy and convenient as possible, resulting in vaccines administered to over two million Service members and 96 percent of the Force — Active and Reserve — being fully vaccinated," Austin said.

Austin mandated the vaccinations for active-duty service members on Aug. 24, 2021, and for National Guard and Ready Reserve three months later on Nov. 30.

Treatment for and vaccination against COVID-19 became highly politicized under President Donald Trump's administration in the months after the virus spread throughout the United States beginning in spring of 2020.

The Trump administration declined to mandate vaccination for U.S. troops, with many Republican lawmakers and some service

SEE POLICY ON PAGE 4



NOAH BERGER/AP

Brenda Ortega, 15, salvages items from her flooded Merced, Calif., home on Tuesday. Following days of rain, Bear Creek overflowed its banks, leaving dozens of homes and vehicles surrounded by floodwaters.

Weathering the storms

As California scrambles to clean up, north sees more rain while south dries out

BY BRIAN MELLEY
AND CHRISTOPHER WEBER
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Storm-ravaged California scrambled to clean up and repair widespread damage on Wednesday as the lashing rain eased in many areas, although thunderstorms led a new atmospheric river into the northern half of the state.

The plume of moisture lurking off the coast stretched all the way over the Pacific to Hawaii, making it "a true Pineapple Express," the National Weather Service said.

Its rains were expected to impact only Northern California, giving the south a break until more wet weather arrives by the weekend.

At least 17 people have died in

the storms battering the state. The figure is likely to rise, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Tuesday during a visit to the scenic town of Capitola on the Santa Cruz coast that was hard hit by high surf and flooding creek waters last week.

A pickup truck driver and a motorcyclist were killed early Tuesday in the San Joaquin Valley when a tree that had been struck

by lightning fell on them, authorities said.

More than half of California's 58 counties were declared disaster areas, the governor said.

The previous storm that began Monday was one in a series that began late last month and repairing the damage may cost more

SEE STORMS ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Korean firm plans \$2.5B in Georgia solar plants

Associated Press

ATLANTA—A South Korean solar panel maker will invest more than \$2.5 billion to build factories in Georgia, hiring 2,500 new employees and making components usually manufactured outside the United States, the company announced Wednesday.

Qcells, a unit of Hanwha Solutions, will build a new factory in Cartersville that will employ 2,000 people, with construction starting within weeks and production starting before the end of 2024.

The company also announced a third phase of its Dalton plant, already the largest maker of solar panels in the Western Hemisphere. Qcells will add nearly 500 jobs in Dalton, raising employment above 1,500 once all expansions are done.

“We are seeking to further expand our low-carbon solar investments as we lead the industry toward fully American-made clean energy solutions,” Qcells CEO Justin Lee said in a statement.

President Joe Biden described the announcement as “a win for

workers, consumers and our climate,” saying in a statement that it would provide good jobs, reduce American reliance on other countries for solar components, lower the cost of solar panels and help lower carbon emissions.

The Cartersville plant will fulfill one of the aims of the climate change bill Biden signed in August.

It included provisions from Georgia Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, allowing companies making the components used in solar panels to claim tax credits.

EXCHANGE RATES

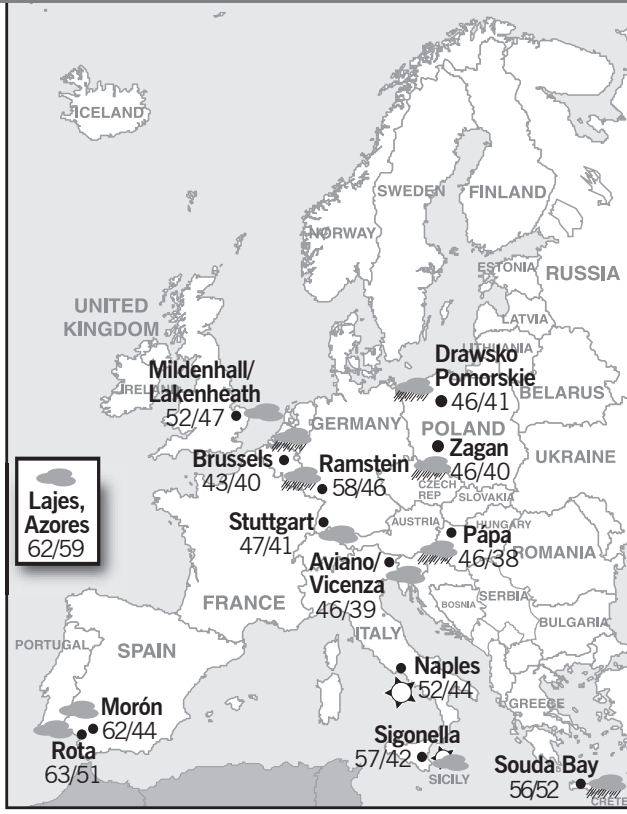
Military rates		South Korea (Won)	
Euro costs (Jan. 12)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)	1,246.88
Dollar buys (Jan. 12)	0.9068	Thailand (Baht)	33.44
British pound (Jan. 12)	\$1.18	Turkey (New Lira)	18,780.4
Japanese yen (Jan. 12)	129.00		
South Korean won (Jan. 12)	1,217.00		
Commercial rates		(Military exchange 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.)	
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3770	INTEREST RATES	
Britain (Pound)	1.2149	Prime rate	7.50
Canada (Dollar)	1.3427	Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00
China (Yuan)	6.7706	Federal funds market rate	4.33
Denmark (Krone)	6.9063	3-month bill	4.69
Egypt (Pound)	29.7022	30-year bond	3.74
Euro	.9286		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8115		
Hungary (Forint)	370.92		
Israel (Shekel)	3.4363		
Japan (Yen)	132.52		
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3059		
Norway (Krone)	9.9680		
Philippines (Peso)	54.99		
Poland (Zloty)	4.34		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7556		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3309		

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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EUROPE

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

MIDDLE EAST

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

PACIFIC

PacificAdvertising@stripes.com

+81 (42) 552.2511
DSN: 315.227.7310

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MILITARY

S. Korea official blasts 'fake peace' with North

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A secure peace with North Korea will require mutual assurances and actions that go beyond just words, South Korea's defense minister said Wednesday.

A "peace relying on the other party's good will can't last," Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup said at a news conference in Seoul after meeting earlier in the day with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

"Such a peace relying on the oth-

er party is a peace that can't last and is a fake peace," Lee said.

Lee spoke at the Seoul Government Complex shortly after the Ministry of National Defense submitted its annual policy report to the presidential office. The plans lay the groundwork for the South Korean military's mission for the year and signals the presidential administration's foreign policy goals.

Lee said Yoon ordered more cooperation with the United States military and strengthened military readiness to deter threats from

North Korea.

"The president emphasized that we need to be prepared to exercise the right of self-defense at any time in the event of an adversary's threat against the freedom and peace of [South Korea]," Lee said.

The South Korean military plans around 20 large-scale drills with the U.S. by June, according to the policy report. Some may be longer in duration and will include more troops than in previous years. The plans also include a tabletop exercise in which the two militaries respond to the use of a nuclear weap-

on by North Korea.

U.S. Forces Korea, responsible for roughly 28,500 troops, conducted several large-scale drills with South Korean forces last year. In the fall, they held Vigilant Storm, a five-day air power exercise that included roughly 240 aircraft.

Yoon restarted much of the joint military drills like Vigilant Storm that were suspended during former South Korean President Moon Jae-in's administration. In an interview with The Associated Press published Wednesday, Yoon said North Korean provocations will streng-

then the South's resolve.

"The discussions are under way over the so-called joint planning and joint execution, and I think it's right for South Korea and the United States to cooperate because both of us are exposed to the North Korean nuclear threat," he told AP.

North Korea fired missiles at a record pace last year, launching more than 70 missiles in 36 days of testing. The communist regime last fired a short-range missile on Jan. 1.

choi.david@stripes.com
Twitter: @choiboy

China renews threats against Taiwan amid island's military drills

Associated Press

BEIJING — China renewed its threats Wednesday to attack Taiwan and warned that foreign politicians who interact with the self-governing island are "playing with fire."

A spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the country was recommitted in the new year to "safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "smashing plots for Taiwan independence" on the self-governing democracy that separated from mainland China in 1949.

"The malicious support for Taiwan independence among anti-China elements in a few foreign countries are a deliberate provocation," Ma Xiaoguang said at a

biweekly news conference.

China views Taiwan as a Chinese territory that must be brought under Beijing's control, by force if necessary. A string of visits in recent months by foreign politicians to Taiwan, including by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and numerous politicians from the European Union, spurred displays of military might from both sides.

This week, Taiwan's military is staging drills intended to reassure the public of its ability to counter China's threats ahead of this month's Lunar New Year holiday.

"The most important thing is to maintain the safety of our airspace and national security," air



DANIEL CENG/AP

Soldiers holding a Taiwanese flag are seen during a preparedness enhancement drill simulating the defense against Beijing's military intrusions in Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, on Wednesday.

force Lt. Col. Wu Bong-yeng told reporters at Hsinchu Air Base just south of the capital, Taipei.

The drills coincide with a visit from German and Lithuanian

lawmakers — the latter Baltic state being a particular target of Chinese ire for upgrading its ties with Taiwan.

"We call on the relevant coun-

tries to ... cease sending the wrong signals to Taiwan independence separatist forces and cease playing with fire on the question of Taiwan," Ma said.

Pilot's lawyer says US extradition attempt is 'political'

Associated Press

SYDNEY — The U.S. has accused a former military pilot of illegally training Chinese military pilots, and is trying to extradite him from Australia.

But the pilot's lawyer says his client has been unfairly singled out because of the current geopolitical struggle between the U.S.

and China.

Pilot Daniel Duggan, 54, has been held in an Australian jail since his October arrest. Duggan's lawyer Dennis Miralis said outside a Sydney courtroom Tuesday that Duggan denies the allegations and will continue to fight the extradition process at every step.

Australia's Attorney-General

Mark Dreyfus last month approved the U.S. extradition request. But before the extradition can proceed, a judge must first determine whether Duggan is eligible for extradition under Australian law.

Miralis said the U.S. Department of Defense had acknowledged there were other people

helping foreign militaries but that the U.S. and Australia had singled out Duggan for extradition.

"We are concerned that this does highlight the political nature of what's occurring here," Miralis told reporters.

A 2016 indictment from the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., was recently unsealed. In it,

prosecutors say Duggan was an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps and a naval aviator. They say Duggan conspired with others to provide training to Chinese military pilots in 2010 and 2012, and possibly at other times, without applying for an appropriate license.

Miralis said Duggan "contests and denies" the allegations.

Air Force Academy football player dies following 'medical emergency'

Stars and Stripes

An Air Force Academy cadet who played on the offensive line for the Falcons' football team died on his way to class Monday after suffering a "medical emergency," according to the academy.

A cause of death has not been announced for Hunter Brown, 21, of Lake Charles, La.

"Academy first responders were immediately called and attempted



Brown

life saving measures which were ultimately unsuccessful," the academy said in a statement Tuesday.

The academy's superintendent, Lt. Gen. Richard Clark, called Brown a standout offensive lineman who was well respected in Ca-

det Squadron 16.

"The entire U.S. Air Force Academy mourns his loss, and our hearts and condolences are with his family, his squadron, and all who were touched by this incredible young man," Clark said in the statement.

Brown, who majored in management and minored in French, was a member of teams that notched back-to-back 10-win seasons, the academy said. Head coach Troy

Calhoun call him "a pure joy" to have on the Falcons.

"He was tough, a great worker, and no one unselfishly pulled harder for others than Hunter," Troy said in the statement.

Brown, who signed with Air Force out of Lake Charles' Barbe High School in 2019, called being in the military "a dream come true."

"It's something I've wanted to do my whole life," he told KPLC TV af-

ter signing. "I'm ready to just put it all on the field at the highest level."

The Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the El Paso County Sheriff's Office are investigating the death, standard protocol for any military member or on-base death, the academy's statement said.

news@stripes.com
Twitter: @StarsandStripes

MILITARY

NATO, EU to create infrastructure task force

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NATO and the European Union agreed Wednesday to launch a task force focused on protecting critical infrastructure from sabotage, a move prompted by the intentional destruction of an undersea gas pipeline last year.

The incident heightened concerns about vulnerabilities to crucial infrastructure relied on by both civil society and militaries, including U.S. forces.

The joint task force will focus on making "critical infrastructure,



Stoltenberg

said Wednesday in Brussels.

Stoltenberg's comments came ahead of a meeting between the NATO chief and EU officials on defense and security matters.

In September, the Nord Stream

technology and supply chains more resilient to potential threats" and mitigating potential vulnerabilities, NATO Secretary-General Jens

Stoltenberg said Wednesday in Brussels. Stoltenberg's comments came ahead of a meeting between the NATO chief and EU officials on defense and security matters.

In September, the Nord Stream gas pipeline, which runs from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, began leaking after a series of clandestine explosions. An international investigation determined that the damage was intentional.

So far, a culprit has not been identified, though some in the West have blamed Russia, which pointed the finger at the United Kingdom but provided no evidence that the NATO country had sabotaged a fellow alliance member's energy supply.

Protecting underwater communication cables is a key objective

of the task force. The group also will look at emerging and disruptive technologies, space and the security impact of climate change, Stoltenberg said. Stoltenberg said Russian President Vladimir Putin's weaponizing of energy underscores the need to ensure that allies become more resilient.

"This will be an important step in making our societies stronger and safer," Stoltenberg said.

Meanwhile, he welcomed recent announcements by the United States, France and Germany, which pledged to send armored

infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine.

"At this key juncture of the war, we must do even more, even faster," Stoltenberg said.

Later this month, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will meet with members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which will gather at Ramstein Air Base to consider what additional support is needed for Ukraine's military.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: @john_vandiver



SASHA AMBROSE/U.S. Navy

Petty Officer 2nd Class Chanel Friday, a hospital corpsman assigned to the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, vaccinates a sailor against COVID-19 on Dec. 12, while on the Adriatic Sea.

Policy: Service members' previous discharge holds despite end of mandate

FROM PAGE 1

members also against a mandate.

Upon taking office in early 2021, President Joe Biden took more aggressive steps in combating the spread of the coronavirus, including the mandate for armed forces later that year. Republican opposition to the mandate remained, though, and negotiations between the GOP and Democrats last fall led to language in the final version of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act requiring an end to required vaccinations within 30 days of its passage.

More than 8,000 service members were separated from the armed forces for refusing to be vaccinated, according to a Washington Post report last month.

In Tuesday's memo, Austin said no service member currently serving "shall be separated solely on the basis of their refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccination if they sought an accommodation on religious, administrative, or medical grounds."

"The Military Departments will update the records of such individuals to remove any adverse actions solely associated with denials of such requests, including letters of reprimand," Austin said.

Ongoing reviews of requests for exemption by service members for reasons of religious, administrative or medical accommodation will cease, he said.

Service members who were ousted from the armed services for refusing vaccination, however,

will find little accommodation in the policy's rescission.

"For Service members administratively discharged on the sole basis that the Service member failed to obey a lawful order to receive a vaccine for COVID-19, the Department is precluded by law from awarding any characterization less than a general (under honorable conditions) discharge," Austin said.

Service members can petition their Military Department's Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military or Naval Records to request changes regarding the characterization of their discharge, Austin said.

olson.wyatt@stripes.com

Army questions special operators at Fort Bragg in drug investigation

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

ATLANTA — More than a dozen Fort Bragg special operations soldiers were recently detained by Army officials investigating drug allegations at the North Carolina installation, military officials said Wednesday.

Criminal Investigation Division officials have questioned 15 soldiers assigned to U.S. Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, said Lt. Col. Mike Burns, spokesman for the command.

The soldiers were released to their chains of command following the interviews, and two were cleared of wrongdoing, he said.

"The use of illegal drugs or any other illegal activity goes directly against [Army special operations forces] values and does not reflect the behavior we demand from every soldier in our formation" Burns said in a statement.

"USASOC maintains a strict policy against the use of any illegal drugs. Illegal drug use is not acceptable nor is it tolerated."

It was not immediately clear Wednesday what sparked the investigation. A spokesman for CID did not return a request for further comment.

No soldiers had been charged with a crime related to the probe as of Wednesday, Army officials said.

Burns said the probe was continuing and it "would be inappropriate" to comment further on the allegations or the soldiers questioned in the matter.

"All soldiers have the right to due process, including the presumption of innocence under the Uniform Code of Military Justice," he said.

USASOC would continue to

cooperate with CID, Burns said.

The allegations are the latest in a string of recent incidents within the Pentagon's special operations community that have included other allegations of drug use.

Special operators in recent years have also faced other accusations including sexual misconduct and the use of alcohol on deployment and extrajudicial killings.

Four special operators — two Navy SEALs and two Marine Raiders — pleaded guilty in the death of an Army Green Beret killed on a deployment to Mali in 2017.

A review of ethics within the special operations community ordered in 2019 found there was not a systemic problem within the Pentagon's elite forces, but that high operations tempos and a lack of high-level oversight had contributed to problems with some special operators.

U.S. Special Operations Command, which is based at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., and oversees all U.S. special operators, said in a statement that it was aware of the allegations against soldiers at Fort Bragg.

"Illegal activity by any member of the special operations forces community undermines everything we stand for as an organization," according to the USASOC statement issued Monday.

"As a professional and disciplined force, we are committed to addressing harmful behaviors that affect our people — our most important asset — and upholding the high standards of conduct displayed by the vast majority of SOF members every day."

dickstein.corey@stripes.com
Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

MILITARY

Spy agency aids rescue during hurricanes

BY MICHAEL BIRNBAUM
The Washington Post

Corry Robb's colleagues at the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency use powerful satellites to monitor protests in Iran, missile launches in North Korea and Russian strikes on Ukraine. This fall, Robb and a team from the agency were deployed under far different circumstances: to Florida, in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian.

With climate change driving more frequent and powerful natural disasters, the intelligence agency, part of the Department of Defense, is contending with new needs closer to home. Charged with mapping and analyzing the physical world, it's turning skills sharpened in the world's danger spots toward helping people inside

U.S. borders. And within days of Ian's landfall on the Florida coast, Robb and his team of analysts were processing tens of thousands of drone and satellite images per day to help direct rescuers in the Fort Myers area to their most important targets.

The weeklong effort was one of the latest examples of public agencies and companies repurposing advanced technology toward improving the speed and efficacy of rescues, as more people stand in the pathway of climate-driven disasters. Now, U.S. intelligence officials are experimenting with ways to get involved, taking a small step toward an area they have often avoided: domestic deployments.

"Geospatial data is really layered data," said Robb, who helps run a team at the geospatial

intelligence agency that deploys to locations. "We're that foundational layer that you build everything on top of."

The deployment came after President Joe Biden declared Hurricane Ian a major disaster on Sept. 29, giving the Federal Emergency Management Agency the power to request help from across the federal government in response to one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to hit the United States.

The intelligence officials could accumulate drone and satellite photos of the hurricane-hit areas, plug them into their systems, and come up with a list of areas that were the likeliest to be in need of search-and-rescue teams. They could figure out which boat docks were still likely to be functional,

making it easier to get around by water. They could plot quicker and safer routes for rescuers as they zipped around a torn-up and waterlogged landscape no longer navigable with Google Maps. More than 100 people died in the hurricane. Far more needed help from emergency workers.

At the peak, the analysts' system was processing about 60,000 images per day, Robb said, helping to produce rich information about the geography of the damage that made rescue efforts more effective. The agency has deployed to natural disasters for years, but it hadn't previously used drones, which meant it didn't have as rich or as many low-altitude images to work with.

The agency doesn't use classified images for emergency situa-

tions such as Hurricane Ian, since most of the people who would need access to them don't have security clearances, Robb said. But the analysts are still able to do powerful work with commercial, unclassified satellite images and pictures taken from small quadcopter drones, he said.

The data "tells us where some vulnerable communities could be," he said.

The effort was responsible for at least one human rescue, Robb said. After receiving a tip that a person might be stranded in a stand of mangrove trees, which can be difficult to search because of their thick root structures, an analyst pored over drone imagery and found a possible target for a rescue team. The analyst was right.

Navy plans new flagship museum

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — "Straight in!" mover Terry Goodwin called out as the century-old model of the USS South Carolina was eased across the museum floor at the Washington Navy Yard.

"Nice and easy," he said, as he and five other men guided the old battleship, which is nine feet long, stern first. The casters under its antique glass and mahogany case squeaked. And the movers laid down thin planks to smooth the way.

As the model moved through the museum one day last month, it passed big guns shrouded in plastic tarps, artworks under protective covers, and other ship models being readied for relocation.

It was part of the Navy's preparation for a \$450 million flagship museum to replace the almost 60-year-old facility in its cavernous Naval Gun Factory and an adjacent building at the historic yard in Southeast Washington.

The service announced two years ago that it wanted to build the new museum on a roughly six-acre plot on M street next-door to the Navy Yard.

Now, the site has been secured via a land swap with a developer, pending environmental review, the Navy says. The Navy would exchange 15 acres of "underutilized" land in the southeastern part of the yard for the new museum site.

Officials this month announced that five prominent architecture firms had been chosen to develop concepts for the new museum.

The Navy hopes to break

ground in the fall of 2025.

The current museum opened in 1963. Because it is within the Navy Yard, it has been closed periodically for security reasons in recent years and could be difficult to visit.

In November, the Navy closed the main part of the old museum on weekdays, admitting visitors only on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. A secondary building has been closed permanently.

The new museum will be outside the yard and will offer full public access, said retired Rear Adm. Samuel J. Cox, the director of the Naval History and Heritage Command. But before the new facility is built, the old museum must be rearranged and repurposed into a staging area.

"The first thing that we have to do is clear out some of the older exhibits here in the main building so that we can create some open storage space," said James C. Rentfrow, the acting director of the Navy Museums Division.

The model of the South Carolina had been on exhibit for 23 years, said Jennifer Marland, the assistant curator of Navy models. It was moved off exhibit to the edge of the museum space on Dec. 13.

There it will stay with other large ship models until they are either placed in the new museum or relocated elsewhere, Rentfrow said.

The actual South Carolina, which served in World War I, brought thousands of American soldiers home from Europe when the war ended. It was sold for scrap in 1924, according to the Navy.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL E. RUANE/The Washington Post

The Navy's century-old model of the battleship USS South Carolina at the Washington Navy Yard.



A sculpture in silver of Navy sailor Charles W. Riggin, of the USS Baltimore, who was killed in 1891 in Chile.

"Do we have this battleship today?" Marland said. "No."
"But we have this model," she said.



Guns under wraps at the Washington Navy Yard's current Navy museum on Dec. 13.

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EUROPE

Ukraine: Mining town holds out against Russia

By **ANDREW MELDRUM**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The fate of a devastated salt-mining town in eastern Ukraine hung in the balance Wednesday as Ukraine said its forces were holding out against a furious Russian onslaught in one of the fiercest and bloodiest recent ground battles of the nearly 11-month war.

Russian forces using jets, mortars and rockets bombarded Soledar in what a Ukrainian military officer said was an unrelenting assault.

The officer, near Soledad, told The Associated Press the pattern is that first the Russians send one or two waves of soldiers, many from the private Russian military contractor Wagner Group, who take heavy casualties as they probe the Ukrainian defenses.

When Ukrainian troops have taken casualties and are exhausted, the Russians send a fresh wave of highly-trained soldiers, paratroopers or special forces, said the Ukrainian officer, who insisted on anonymity for security reasons.

Soledar's fall, while unlikely to provide a turning point in the war, would be a prize for a Kremlin starved of good news from the battlefield in recent months. It would also offer Russian troops a springboard to conquer other areas of Donetsk province that remain under Ukrainian control, such as the nearby strategic city of Bakhmut.

Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province, which together make up the Donbas region bordering Russia, were Moscow's main stated territorial targets in invading Ukraine, but the fighting has stood mostly at a stalemate.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense

Minister Hanna Malyar and the spokesman for Ukraine's Eastern Group of Forces, Serhiy Cherevaty, denied Russian claims that Soledar had fallen, but Malyar acknowledged heavy fighting.

Late Tuesday, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group's owner, claimed on his Russian social media platform that his soldiers had seized control of Soledar, though he also said fighting continued in a "cauldron" in the city's center.

The AP was unable to verify that claim.

Russian forces had achieved "positive dynamics in advancing" in Soledar, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday, stopping short of declaring its capture.

"Let's not rush, and wait for official statements," he said.

Soledar, known for salt mining and processing, has little intrinsic value but it lies at a strategic point six miles north of the city of Bakhmut, which Russian forces want to surround.

Taking Bakhmut would disrupt Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces to press toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk province.

Soledar's fall would make "holding Bakhmut much more precarious for Ukraine," Michael Kofman, the director of Russia Studies at the CAN nonprofit research organization in Arlington, Va., noted Wednesday.

The war of attrition, with heavy casualties, may make a Russian victory as deadly as a defeat.

"I don't think the outcome at Bakhmut is that significant com-



EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

Ukrainian servicemen fire by a Finnish 120 mm mortar towards Russian positions at the frontline near Bakhmut, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Wednesday.



ANDREW KRAVCHENKO/AP

People pass by buildings hit by Russian shelling in Kyiv.

pared to what it costs Russia to achieve it," Kofman said in a tweet.

The Wagner Group, which now reportedly includes a large contingent of convicts recruited in Russian prisons, has spearheaded the attack on Soledar and Bakhmut.

Western intelligence has estimated that the Wagner Group constitutes up to a quarter of all Russian combatants in Ukraine.

A success in Soledar and Bakhmut would help Prigozhin, who

has openly criticized Russia's military leadership, increase his clout at the Kremlin.

In an apparent recognition of flaws in the top chain of command, Russia's Defense Ministry announced what appeared to be a demotion for the head of Russian forces in Ukraine after only three months in the job. The chief of the military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, was named to that role, replacing Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who was named his deputy,

along with two other generals. Surovikin was credited with strengthening coordination and reinforcing control but his demotion signaled that Putin wasn't fully satisfied with his performance.

The Defense Ministry said the leadership changes were prompted by expanded military tasks and the need for "closer interaction between branches of the military as well as increasing the quality of supplies and the efficiency of directing groups of forces."

Russian troops have struggled to gain control over Donetsk, Luhansk and two other Ukrainian provinces the Kremlin illegally annexed in September. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. After Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city of Kherson in November, the battle heated up around Bakhmut.

Putin identified the Donbas region as a focus from the war's outset, and Moscow-backed separatists have fought there since 2014. Russia captured almost all of Luhansk during the summer. Donetsk escaped the same fate, and the Russian military subsequently poured manpower and resources around Bakhmut.

Poland to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine if others do too

Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine — Poland has decided to send a company of Leopard tanks to help neighboring Ukraine in the war with invading Russia, President Andrzej Duda said Wednesday.

But Duda, on a visit to Lviv, said that the move would be possible only as an element in a larger international coalition of tank aid to Kyiv.

Poland's leaders have been indicating that they were in talks with other countries over a po-

tential international coalition that would send the German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine. They haven't named the countries.

Within this potential international coalition, "we have taken the decision to contribute a first package of tanks, a company of Leopard tanks, which, I hope, together with other companies of Leopard and other tanks that will be offered by other countries will ... be able to strengthen Ukraine's defense," Duda told a

news conference in Lviv.

A company consists of 14 tanks. Duda and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausda met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Lviv within the so-called Lublin Triangle of mutual cooperation.

Zelenskyy said that Ukraine needs tanks to win the war and is "awaiting a joint decision" on the subject because "one country cannot provide us with a sufficient number of them."

The three leaders also dis-

cussed further strategic partnership between their countries.

"Lithuania and Poland have confirmed their determination to continue providing military, political, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian support to Ukraine," Nausda said.

"The war in Ukraine is our war — the war of the free world against a dictator. We will stand with Ukraine until victory," he said.

In Britain, another staunch ally of Ukraine, the spokesman for

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that "battle tanks could provide a game-changing capability to the Ukrainians."

Spokesman Max Blain said that Sunak has instructed Defense Secretary Ben Wallace to work with allies on what vehicles were best to send. He said no final decision has been made. The U.K. has been considering whether to send Challenger 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, which has been battling Russia's full-scale invasion since Feb. 24.

NATION

Air travel disrupted by computer outage

BY MICHELLE CHAPMAN
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The world's largest aircraft fleet was grounded for hours by a cascading outage in a government system that delayed or canceled thousands of flights across the U.S. on Wednesday.

The White House initially said that there was no evidence of a cyberattack behind the outage that ruined travel plans for millions of passengers. President Joe Biden said Wednesday morning that he's directed the Department of Transportation to investigate.

Whatever the cause, the outage revealed how dependent the world's largest economy is on air travel, and how dependent air travel is on an antiquated computer system called the Notice to Air Missions, or NOTAM.

Before commencing a flight, pilots are required to consult NOTAMs, which list potential adverse impacts on flights, from runway construction to the potential for icing. The system used to be telephone-based, with pilots calling dedicated flight service stations for the information, but has moved online.

The NOTAM system broke down late Tuesday, leading to more than 1,000 flight cancellations and 7,000 were delayed flights by midday Wednesday, according to



STEVEN SENNE/AP

Passenger jets are seen on the tarmac at Logan International Airport in Boston on Wednesday. Thousands of flight delays and cancellations rippled across the U.S. early Wednesday after computer outage.

the flight tracking website FlightAware.

The chaos is expected to grow as backups compound. More than 21,000 flights were scheduled to take off in the U.S. today, mostly domestic trips, and about 1,840 international flights expected to fly to the U.S., according to aviation data firm Cirium.

Airports in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Atlanta were seeing between 30% and 40% of flights delayed.

"We are going to see the ripple effects from that, this morning's delays through

the system during the day," said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in an interview on CNN. "Now we have to understand how this could have happened in the first place. Why the usual redundancies that would stop it from being that disruptive did not stop it from being disruptive this time."

Longtime aviation insiders could not recall an outage of such magnitude caused by a technology breakdown. Some compared it to the nationwide shutdown of airspace after the terror attacks of September 2001.

"Periodically there have been local issues here or there, but this is pretty significant historically," said Tim Campbell, a former senior vice president of air operations at American Airlines and now a consultant in Minneapolis.

Campbell said there has long been concern about the Federal Aviation Administration's technology, and not just the NOTAM system.

"So much of their systems are old mainframe systems that are generally reliable but they are out of date," he said.

John Cox, a former airline pilot and aviation safety expert, said there has been talk in the aviation industry for years about trying to modernize the NOTAM system, but he did not know the age of the servers that the FAA uses.

He couldn't say whether a cyberattack

was possible.

"I've been flying 53 years. I've never heard the system go down like this," Cox said. "So something unusual happened."

According to FAA advisories, the NOTAM system failed at 8:28 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday preventing new or amended notices from being distributed to pilots. The FAA resorted to a telephone hotline to keep departures flying overnight, but as daytime traffic picked up it overwhelmed the telephone backup system.

The FAA ordered all departing flights grounded early Wednesday morning, affecting all passenger and shipping flights.

Some medical flights could get clearance and the outage did not impact any military operations or mobility.

Flights for the U.S. military's Air Mobility Command were not affected.

Biden said Wednesday morning that he was briefed by Buttigieg.

Buttigieg said on CNN that the order to ground all departing flights was done out of an abundance of caution, but said mass disruptions to U.S. air travel are not acceptable.

"We need to design a system that does not have this kind of vulnerability," Buttigieg said.

European flights into the U.S. appeared to be largely unaffected.

Storms: Mud, water cut off road, strand Matilija Canyon residents

FROM PAGE 1

than \$1 billion, said Adam Smith, a disaster expert with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Crews worked to reopen major highways that were closed by rockslides, swamped by flooding or smothered with mud while more than 10,000 people who were ordered out of seaside towns on the central coast were allowed to return home.

They included Montecito, a wealthy Santa Barbara County community that is home to Prince Harry and other celebrities where 23 people died and more than 100 homes were destroyed in a mudslide five years ago.

Yet thousands of people living near rain-swollen creeks and rivers remained under evacuation orders. In the San Joaquin Valley, raging waters from Bear Creek flooded parts of the city of Merced and neighboring Planada, a small agricultural community along a highway leading to Yosemite National Park.

All 4,000 residents of Planada were ordered to leave Tuesday morning. Neighborhoods were under water with cars submerged up to their roofs. Residents ordered to evacuate carried whatever they could salvage on their backs as they left in the rain.

Other evacuations were ordered because of levee breaches in parts of Monterey County.

Despite the rain, most of the state remained in extreme or severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The storms may help locally "but will not resolve the long-term drought challenges," said Rick Spinrad, administrator of the Na-

tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Damage from the storm included washed-out roads and seaside businesses flooded by 20-foot surf that pounded Santa Cruz County.

Many areas saw unprecedented amounts of rain coupled with furious winds and even hail and lightning that knocked down trees and damaged electrical lines.

More than 75,000 homes and businesses around the state were without power as of late Tuesday night, according to the website Poweroutage.us.

Mudslides damaged some homes in pricey Los Angeles hillside areas, while further up the coast a sinkhole damaged 15 homes in the rural Santa Barbara County community of Orcutt.

Kevin Costner, best-actor winner in a television drama series for "Yellowstone," was unable to attend Tuesday's Golden Globe awards in Los Angeles because of the weather. Presenter Regina Hall said he was sheltering in place in Santa Barbara due to flooding.

In San Francisco, a tree fell on a commuter bus on Tuesday without causing injuries and lightning struck the city's iconic Transamerica Pyramid building without damage. High winds also ripped away part of the roof on a large apartment building.

Some people found themselves stranded in small communities inundated with water and mud.

"We're all stuck out here," Brian Briggs said, describing a scary night during which the deluge unleashed mudslides in remote Matilija Canyon that buried one house and cut off the only road to nearby Ojai. The canyon creek began to flood yards and the surrounding hills, which were stripped of vege-



Nic Courty/AP

Matt O'Brien shovels mud from a friend's driveway after the San Lorenzo River overflowed in the Felton Grove neighborhood of Felton, Calif., on Tuesday.

tation in the 2017 Thomas Fire, began to tumble down in the dark.

Mudflows dragged sheds, gazebos and outhouses into the creek, Briggs said. After helping neighbors get to higher ground, he returned home to find his fence destroyed by waist-deep mud.

A helicopter dropped 10 sheriff's deputies Tuesday to help the residents of dozens of canyon homes.

The wet and blustery weather left California's large homeless population in a precarious situation. At least two homeless

people in Sacramento County died and more than a dozen people were rescued from a homeless encampment on the Ventura River.

Theo Harris, who has lived on San Francisco's streets since 2016, fortified his shelter with tarps and zip ties Tuesday and took in his girlfriend after her tent flooded.

"The wind has been treacherous, but you just got to bundle up and make sure you stay dry," Harris said. "Rain is part of life. It's going to be sunny. It's going to rain. I just got to strap my boots up and not give up."

NATION

Biden 'surprised' records found at old office

BY ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said he was surprised when informed that government records were found by his attorneys at his former office space in Washington. He was asked about the issue after the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee requested that the U.S. intelligence community conduct a “damage assessment” of potentially classified documents.

Speaking to reporters in Mexico City on Tuesday, Biden said his attorneys “did what they should have done” when they immediately called the National Archives about the discovery at the offices of the Penn Biden Center. He kept an office there after he left the vice

presidency in 2017 until shortly before he launched his Democratic presidential campaign in 2019.

The White House confirmed that the Department of Justice was reviewing “a small number of documents with classified markings” found at the office.

“I was briefed about this discovery and surprised to learn that there are any government records that were taken there to that office,” Biden said in his first comments since news of the document discovery emerged Monday. He added that “I don’t know what’s in the documents” and that his lawyers had suggested he not ask.

Earlier Tuesday, Rep. Mike Turner sent the request to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, saying that Biden’s reten-

tion of the documents put him in “potential violation of laws protecting national security, including the Espionage Act and Presidential Records Act.”

Irrespective of a federal review, the revelation that Biden potentially mishandled classified or presidential records could prove to be a political headache for the president, who called former President Donald Trump’s decision to keep hundreds of such records at his private club in Florida “irresponsible.”

“Those entrusted with access to classified information have a duty and an obligation to protect it,” said Turner in a letter to Haines. “This issue demands a full and thorough review.”

On Tuesday, Rep. James Com-

er, the new GOP chairman of the House Oversight Committee, sent the White House Counsel’s office a letter requesting copies of the documents found at the Biden office, communications about the discovery, and a list of those who may have had access to the office where they were found.

Haines agreed in September to conduct a “risk assessment” rather than a “damage assessment” of the Trump case.

There are significant differences between the Trump and Biden situations, including the gravity of an ongoing grand jury investigation into the Mar-a-Lago matter. The intelligence risk assessment into the Trump documents is to examine the seized records for classification as well as “the po-

tential risk to national security that would result from the disclosure of the relevant documents.”

Sen. Mark Warner, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, called for a briefing on the documents.

“Our system of classification exists in order to protect our most important national security secrets, and we expect to be briefed on what happened both at Mar-a-Lago and at the Biden office as part of our constitutional oversight obligations,” he said. “From what we know so far, the latter is about finding documents with markings, and turning them over, which is certainly different from a months-long effort to retain material actively being sought by the government.”

Newly empowered House Republicans launch investigations into FBI, China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans moved Tuesday to swiftly establish the marquee investigations of their new majority, voting to create panels focused on China and what they assert is rampant abuse of power in the federal government.

Newly empowered, GOP lawmakers are vowing to bring accountability to the Biden administration, pledging to investigate federal law enforcement agencies, including those that are conducting probes into former President Donald Trump.

Republicans also established a committee, with broad bipartisan support, to investigate “strategic competition” between the U.S. and China, in line with the party’s push for a more hardline approach to the Asian nation.

The creation of the committees is the first of many investigative steps Republicans plan to take as they settle into their slim majority and attempt to serve as a check against President Joe Biden and his agenda on Capitol Hill.

It amounts to a massive reshuffling away from the oversight priorities of Democrats, who used their majority to form a select committee to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. That committee is no more, and Republicans have no plans to revive it, vowing instead to take a closer look at the actions of law enforcement. Republicans officially labeled one of the committees as reviewing “the Weaponization of the Federal Government,” a name that from the outset suggests the panel’s investigations may be one-sided. The probe will be conducted under the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee, which is headed by Rep. Jim Jordan, R-



JABIN BOTSFORD/The Washington Post

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, exits the House floor at the U.S. Capitol on Monday in Washington.

Ohio, a hardliner who is a close ally of Trump.

The committee is being given a broad mandate, told to investigate “the expansive role” of the executive branch to “collect information on or otherwise investigate citizens of the United States, including ongoing criminal investigations.” Notably, the panel will have access to classified information, a privilege usually reserved for the intelligence committees in the House and Senate.

First up is investigating what they call a coordinated effort by the Justice Department “to go after parents” and deem them domestic terrorists following an increase of threats targeting school board members, teachers and other employees in the nation’s public schools.

“The real focus has always been what 14 FBI agents have come and told Judiciary Republican staff about what’s going on with the FBI and the very first one was on the school board,” Jordan told reporters Monday. “We’ll start with those individuals and

we’ll move from there once we get up and running with who’s on our committee.”

The GOP focus on issues like parents’ rights in schools stems from the unruliness that engulfed local education meetings across the country since the pandemic began, with board members regularly confronted and threatened by angry protesters. There is no evidence the FBI ever declared protesting parents “domestic terrorists,” despite Republican rhetoric.

Jordan, who is expected to lead the investigation, said the committee is modeled after the bipartisan “Church Committee,” a 1970s congressional investigation that sought to investigate allegations that the U.S. government spied on its own citizens for decades. That investigation led to significant reforms with the passage of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), which requires intelligence agencies to seek permission from a secret court before surveilling Americans.

Rogers takes reins of House Armed Services Committee

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Mike Rogers, of Alabama, was named chairman of the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday, days after being involved in a near scuffle on the House floor.

Rogers replaces Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., in the panel’s top spot after Republicans took control of the House last week. He drew attention Friday for angrily approaching fellow committee member Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., during a tense vote for House speaker before Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C., pulled him back.

Rogers apologized for the incident Sunday and said Tuesday that he planned to “leave no stone unturned in holding the Biden administration accountable” on military matters. The Armed Services committee oversees the Pentagon and plays a leading role in shaping priorities and spending targets for the military.

“The committee will hold the Biden administration accountable for misguided policies that distract from the core mission of the Department of Defense. Initiatives that service a social agenda but don’t advance our national security will be scrutinized,” Rogers said in a statement. “Those in charge of these initiatives will come before the committee to explain how they will protect our national security.”

The rescinded coronavirus vaccine mandate for troops is among those initiatives. Rogers vowed last month to determine who was “adversely affected” by the requirement and “make them whole.” He also led a Republican effort in December to pursue Defense Department records on gender identity.

Rogers on Tuesday also promised to focus on equipping the military with the resources and weapons necessary to meet challenges from China, Russia, North Korea and Iran.

“In order to deter these threats and remain the most feared force in the world — we must ensure that our military focuses on lethality and capability,” he said.

He was at the forefront of a Republican push last year to increase the defense budget requested by the White House, harshly criticizing President Joe Biden’s proposed military spending plan for leaving America “weakened and vulnerable.”

Rogers admonished hard-line Republican members who forced the House into 15 rounds of voting for House speaker last week and dismissed reports that defense spending could be cut to meet their demands. He told Politico that he was “not worried” about a purported deal between House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and the Republican Party’s conservative faction affecting the military.

Rogers was elected to the House in 2002 and served as the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee from 2020 to 2022. He was instrumental to the creation of the Space Force as chairman of the panel’s Strategic Forces subcommittee in 2019. Rogers is the first congressman from Alabama to be selected chairman of the full Armed Services committee.

shkolnikova.svetlana@stripes.com
Twitter: @svetashko

NATION

NY GOP: Santos disgraced House, should step down

By MICHELLE L. PRICE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Republican leaders in New York on Wednesday called for the immediate resignation of their new GOP congressman George Santos, who is facing multiple investigations by prosecutors over his personal and campaign finances and lies about his resume and family heritage.

“His lies were not mere fibs. He disgraced the House of Representatives,” Joseph Cairo Jr., chair of the Nassau County Republican Committee, said at a news conference. “He’s not welcome here at Republican headquarters.”

Santos, swarmed by reporters at the Capitol on Wednesday, flatly rejected the call to resign, saying, “I will not.”

The call was an extraordinary rebuke of the freshman congressman whose election months ago flipped a Democratic House seat and was initially one of the GOP’s highlights of the November election. The denunciation by local Republicans also amps up the pressure on Republicans in Congress to rebuke or sideline Santos.

Cairo and other Republicans said Santos deceived voters and the Nassau County GOP and they were particularly incensed by his lies about having Jewish ancestry. Rep. Anthony D’Esposito, another

Republican newly elected to represent Long Island, spoke at the news conference via video from Washington and joined Cairo’s call for his colleague’s resignation.

“George Santos does not have the ability to serve here in the House of Representatives and should resign,” D’Esposito said.

The local party has no mechanism to remove Santos from office. He was sworn in to the U.S. House last week.

The move comes a day after two Democrats from New York asked the House Ethics Committee to investigate Santos. Reps. Ritchie Torres and Dan Goldman, in a letter to the committee, said Santos also failed to file “timely, accurate and complete” financial disclosure reports and the reports he did file are “sparse and perplexing.”

Earlier this week, the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center lodged a complaint with the Federal Election Commission and urged regulators to investigate Santos. The “mountain of lies” Santos propagated during the campaign about his life story and qualifications, the center said,

should prompt the commission to “thoroughly investigate what appear to be equally brazen lies about how his campaign raised and spent money.”

Initially, the victory by Santos, an openly gay Republican, was seen as one of his party’s bright spots in an otherwise underwhelming midterm election. But as reports began to emerge that Santos had lied about having Jewish ancestry, a career at top Wall Street firms and a college degree, he turned into a distraction and an embarrassment to the party as it took control of the House.

During his campaign, he referred to himself as “a proud American Jew.” But he later backtracked on that claim, saying his mother’s family had “a Jewish background,” and he told the New York Post in an interview, “I said I was ‘Jew-ish.’”

Bruce Blakeman, a Jewish Republican and the elected Nassau County Executive, said he and other members of the sizable Jewish population in the area take their religion and heritage seriously. He said it was “ridiculous” for Santos to call himself a Jew, but said it was “beyond the pale” and “outrageous” for Santos to have said in an interview that his grandparents survived the Holocaust.



Santos



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

A Mega Millions customer purchases her tickets for the estimated jackpot of \$1.1 billion at the Fuel On convenience store in Pittsburgh on Monday.

With no winners, Mega Millions jackpot climbs to \$1.35B, 2nd highest ever

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Mega Millions prize has grown again to an estimated \$1.35 billion after there was no winner of the lottery’s latest giant jackpot.

The numbers drawn late Tuesday night were: 7, 13, 14, 15, 18 and gold Mega Ball 9.

The new jackpot drawing on Friday night will be another milestone in the game, Mega Millions said in a statement early Wednesday.

“Now at \$1.35 billion, the Mega Millions jackpot is moving up and making history as the second highest Mega Millions jackpot ever,” Pat McDonald, Ohio lottery director and lead director of the Mega Millions Consortium, said in the statement.

The only Mega Millions jackpot larger than Friday’s prize is the \$1.53 billion won in South Carolina

in 2018, Mega Millions said.

The largest jackpot in the U.S. to date was a \$2.04 billion Powerball won by a single ticket in California in November.

The estimated \$1.35 billion jackpot in the next drawing would only be distributed to a winner who chooses an annuity paid over 29 years.

Nearly all grand prize winners opt to take a cash payout, which for Friday night’s drawing is an estimated \$707.9 million.

There have been 25 drawings over three months since the last time a player matched all six numbers and claimed the jackpot.

Despite the game’s long odds of 1 in 302.6 million, players continue to purchase tickets as the size of the grand prize grows.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as in Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Texas executes ex-police officer who hired two people to kill wife

Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE, Texas — A former suburban Houston police officer was executed Tuesday for hiring two people to kill his estranged wife nearly 30 years ago amid a contentious divorce and custody battle.

Robert Fratta, 65, received a lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville for the November 1994 fatal shooting of his wife, Farah. He was pronounced dead at 7:49 p.m., 24 minutes after the lethal dose of the powerful sedative pentobarbital began flowing into his arms.

For about three minutes before the execution began, Fratta’s spiritual adviser, Barry Brown, prayed over Fratta, who was strapped to the death chamber gurney with intravenous needles in each arm.

Brown, his prayer book on the pillow next to Fratta’s head and his right hand resting on Fratta’s right hand, asked for prayers for “hearts that have been broken ...

for people who grieved and those who will grieve in days ahead.” He asked God to “be merciful to Bobby.”

Asked by the warden if he had a final statement, Fratta replied: “No.”



Fratta

Brown resumed praying as the lethal drugs began and Fratta, his eyes closed, took a deep breath and then snored loudly six times. Then all movement stopped.

Prosecutors say Fratta organized the murder-for-hire plot in which a middleman, Joseph Prystash, hired the shooter, Howard Guidry. Farah Fratta, 33, was shot twice in the head in her home’s garage in the Houston suburb of Atascocita. Robert Fratta, who was a public safety officer for Missouri City, had long claimed he was innocent.

The punishment was delayed for little more than an hour until the last of a flurry of final-day appeals cleared the U.S. Supreme Court and Texas’ highest courts, the Texas Supreme Court and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

Fratta’s lawyers argued unsuccessfully that prosecutors withheld evidence that a trial witness had been hypnotized by investigators, leading her to change her initial recollection that she saw two men at the murder scene as well as a getaway driver.

Prosecutors have argued the hypnosis produced no new information and no new identification. They had also said that Fratta had repeatedly expressed his desire to see his wife dead and asked several acquaintances if they knew anyone who would kill her, telling one friend, “I’ll just kill her, and I’ll do my time and when I get out, I’ll have my kids,” according to court records. Prystash and Guidry were also sent to death row for the slaying.

Boston Marathon bomber’s lawyer seeks new sentence

Associated Press

BOSTON — Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s attorney urged a federal appeals court Tuesday to throw out the 29-year-old’s death sentence because of juror misconduct claims just months after it was revived by the nation’s highest court.

Tsarnaev is making a renewed push to avoid execution after the Supreme Court last year reinstated the death sentence imposed on him for his role in the bombing that killed three people and injured hundreds near the finish line of the marathon in 2013.

His lawyers are now challenging issues that weren’t considered by the Supreme Court, including whether the trial judge wrongly denied his challenge of two jurors who defense attorneys say lied during ju-



Tsarnaev

ry selection questioning.

One juror said she had not commented about the case online but had retweeted a post calling Tsarnaev a “piece of garbage.” As a result, Tsarnaev’s lawyers raised concerns during jury selection, but the judge chose not to look into them further, they say.

“This case was tried in Boston on a promise... that despite the extraordinary impact of the marathon bombing on this community,” a through questioning of potential jurors would remove anyone unqualified, Tsarnaev attorney Daniel Habib told the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges. “That promise was not kept.”

NATION

Conflict looms as US nears \$31T debt ceiling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The federal government is on track to max out on its \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority as soon as this month, starting the clock on an expected standoff between President Joe Biden and the new House Republican majority that will test both parties' ability to navigate a divided Washington, with the fragile global economy at stake.

Once the government bumps up against the cap — it could happen any time in the next few weeks or longer — the Treasury Department will be unable to issue new debt without congressional action. The department plans to deploy what are known as “extraordinary measures” to keep the government operating.

But once those measures run out, probably mid-summer, the government could be at risk of defaulting unless lawmakers and the president agree to lift the limit on the U.S. government's ability to borrow.

The expected showdown over the debt limit would be a stark display of the new reality for Biden and Democrats, who enjoyed

“Attempts to exploit the debt ceiling as leverage will not work. There will be no hostage taking.”

Karine Jean-Pierre
White House Press Secretary

one-party control of Washington for the past two years.

It would presage the challenges to come in achieving even the modest ambitions that Democrats are bringing to the task of legislating in a divided Capitol.

The White House has insisted that it won't allow the nation's credit to be held captive to the demands of newly empowered GOP lawmakers. But the concessions made by new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in his arduous path to securing the job raise questions about whether he has the ability to cut any kind of deal to resolve a standoff.

McCarthy, who only secured his post after

15 rounds of voting and major compromises with hard-line members of his caucus, has said that his fellow Republicans will only agree to increase the debt ceiling in return for spending cuts of unspecified magnitude. And a new rule that allows any one lawmaker to trigger a vote for McCarthy's removal could make even the most urgent of votes a dicey matter.

McCarthy said he's spoken with Biden about the coming debt ceiling and told the president “it doesn't have to come to that” — meaning a federal government shutdown over spending levels.

“This is our moment to change the behavior,” McCarthy said Tuesday on Fox's “Hannity.”

But the new speaker stopped short of saying Republicans now in charge of the House would go so far as to refuse to pass the annual spending bills needed to fund the government, as happened more than a decade ago during an earlier debt ceiling showdown in Congress.

“We're going to look at every single dollar spent,” McCarthy said.

The stakes are treacherous. Past forecasts suggest a default could instantly bury the country in a deep recession, right at a moment of slowing global growth as the U.S. and much of the world face high inflation because of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The White House has ruled out executive action to stave off a default.

“Congress is going to need to raise the debt limit without — without — conditions and it's just that simple,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said recently. “Attempts to exploit the debt ceiling as leverage will not work. There will be no hostage taking.”

On Capitol Hill, Republican Rep. Chip Roy of Texas, one of the McCarthy holdouts and an outspoken critic of government spending, wouldn't rule out trying to oust McCarthy if he fails to live up to his pledge to seek spending cuts along with any debt limit increase.

“We will use the tools of the House to enforce the terms of the agreement,” Roy told CNN on Sunday.

US egg prices double as pressure mounts on consumers, businesses

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Chickens may not be able to fly very far, but the price of eggs is soaring.

A lingering bird flu outbreak, combined with soaring feed, fuel and labor costs, has led to U.S. egg prices more than doubling over the past year, and hatched a lot of sticker shock on grocery aisles.

The national average price for a dozen eggs hit \$3.59 in November, up from \$1.72 a year earlier, according to the latest government data. That's putting stress on consumer budgets and the bottom lines of restaurants, bakeries and other food producers that rely heavily on eggs.

Grocery prices that were up 12% in November are driving inflation higher, even though the overall pace of price increases slowed a bit through the fall as gas prices eased.

But egg prices are up significantly more than other foods — even more than chicken or turkey — because egg farmers were hit harder by the bird flu.

More than 43 million of the 58 million birds slaughtered over the past year to control the virus have been egg-laying chickens, including some farms with more than a million birds apiece in major egg-producing states like Iowa.

Everyone who approaches the egg case at Hy-Vee grocery store in Omaha, “has a sour face,” said shopper Nancy Stom.

But even with the cost increases, eggs remain relatively cheap compared with the price of other proteins like chicken or beef, with a pound of chicken breasts going



NAM Y. HUH/AP

A shopper checks eggs at a grocery store in Glenview, Ill., on Tuesday.

for \$4.42 on average in November and a pound of ground beef selling for \$4.85, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“It's still an inexpensive meal,” Stom said.

But the 70-year-old said that at these prices, she'll watch her eggs more closely in the fridge and try not to let them go bad before they get used.

If prices remain this high, Kelly Fischer said she will start thinking more seriously about building a backyard chicken coop in Chicago because everyone in her family eats eggs.

“We [with neighbors] are contemplating building a chicken coop behind our houses, so eventually I hope not to buy them and have my own eggs and I think the cost comes into that somewhat,” the 46-year-old public school teacher said while shopping at

HarvesTime Foods on the city's North Side. “For me, it's more of the environmental impact and trying to purchase locally.”

In some places, it can even be hard to find eggs on the shelves. But egg supplies overall are holding up because the total flock is only down about 5% from its normal size of about 320 million hens. Farmers have been working to replace their flocks as soon as they can after an outbreak.

Purdue University agricultural economist Jayson Lusk said he believes the bird flu outbreak is the biggest driver in the price increases. Unlike past years, the virus lingered throughout the summer and made a resurgence last fall infecting egg and poultry farms.

“Bird flu is not the only factor, but in my view it's the main driver of what we're experiencing at the moment,” Lusk said.



YUKI IWAMURA/AP

A sign reading “Gun Free Zone” is posted around Times Square, in New York.

Supreme Court lets New York enforce gun law during lawsuit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is allowing New York to continue to enforce a sweeping new gun law banning guns from “sensitive places” such as schools and playgrounds for now while a court challenge plays out.

The justices on Wednesday turned away a plea by the law's challengers. The gun owners wanted the high court to lift a federal appeals court order that temporarily put on hold a lower court decision blocking portions of the law. The appeals court hasn't finished its review of the case, and justices are often reluctant to weigh in under those circumstances. The justices could still consider the case and the law more generally in the future.

New York lawmakers rewrote the state's handgun laws over the summer after a June Supreme

Court ruling invalidated New York's old system for granting permits to carry handguns outside the home. The ruling said that Americans have a right to carry firearms in public for self-defense, invalidating the New York law, which required people to show a specific need to get a license to carry a gun outside the home. The ruling was a major expansion of gun rights nationwide and resulted in challenges to other, similar state laws.

The new law New York passed in the wake of the ruling broadly expanded who can get a license to carry a handgun, but it increased training requirements for applicants and required them to provide more information including a list of their social media accounts.

Applicants for a license must also demonstrate “good moral character.”

SCIENCE

2022 hit with costly climate extremes in US

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**
Associated Press

DENVER — Costly weather disasters kept raining down on America last year, pounding the nation with 18 climate extremes that caused at least \$1 billion in damage each, totaling more than \$165 billion, federal climate scientists calculated Tuesday.

Even though 2022 wasn't near record hot for the United States, it was the third-wildest year nationally both in number of extremes that cost \$1 billion and overall damage from those weather catastrophes, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a report issued at the American Meteorological Society's conference.

The amount, cost and death toll of billion-dollar weather disasters make up a key measurement, adjusted for inflation, that NOAA uses to see how bad human-caused climate change is getting. They led to at least 474 deaths.

"People are seeing the impacts of a changing climate system where they live, work and play on a regular basis," NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad said at a Tuesday press conference. "With a changing climate buckle up. More extreme events are expected."

Hurricane Ian, the costliest drought in a decade and a pre-Christmas winter storm pushed last year's damages to the highest since 2017. The only more expensive years were 2017 — when Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria struck — and the disastrous 2005 when numerous hurricanes, headlined by Katrina, pummeled the Southeast, federal meteorologists said. The only busier years for billion-dollar disasters were 2020 and 2021.

Ian was the third-costliest U.S. hurricane on record with \$112.9 billion in damage, followed by \$22.2 billion in damage from a western and midwestern drought that halted barge traffic on the Mississippi River, officials said. The \$165 billion total for 2022 doesn't even include a total yet for the winter storm three weeks ago, which could push it close to \$170 billion, officials said.

More than 40% of the continental United States was under official drought conditions for 119 straight weeks, a record in the 22 years of the federal drought monitor, easily passing the old mark of 68 straight weeks, Spinrad said. The country peaked at 63% of the nation in drought in 2022. Spinrad said he expects the atmospheric



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Kathy Hickey, 70, carefully picks her way through debris from destroyed trailers in the mobile home park where she and her husband Bruce had a winter home on San Carlos Island in Fort Myers Beach, Fla., on Oct. 5, 2022, one week after the passage of Hurricane Ian.

"With a changing climate buckle up. More extreme events are expected."

Rick Spinrad
NOAA Administrator

river pouring rain on California to provide some relief, but not a lot.

"Climate change is supercharging many of these extremes that can lead to billion-dollar disasters," said NOAA applied climatologist and economist Adam Smith, who calculates the disasters, updating them to factor out inflation. He said more people are also building in harm's way, along pricey coasts and rivers, and lack of strong construction standards

is also an issue. With a good chunk of development beachside, real estate inflation could be a small localized factor, he said.

"The United States has some of the consistently most diverse and intense weather and climate extremes that you'll see in many parts of the world. And we have a large population that's vulnerable to these extremes," Smith told The Associated Press. "So it's really an imbalance right now."

Climate change is a hard-to-ignore factor in extremes, from deadly heat to droughts and flooding, Smith and other officials said.

"The risk of extreme events is growing and they are affecting every corner of the world," NOAA chief scientist Sarah Kapnick said.

The problem is especially bad when it comes to dangerous heat, said NOAA climate scientist Stephanie Herring, who edits an annual study in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society that calculates how much of the extreme weather in past years was worsened by climate change.

"Research is showing that these extreme heat events are also likely to become the new normal," Herring said at the weather conference.

Forest lizards genetically morph to survive life in the city

By **DANICA COTO**
Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Lizards that once dwelled in forests but now slink around urban areas have genetically morphed to survive life in the city, researchers have found.

The Puerto Rican crested anole, a brown lizard with a bright orange throat fan, has sprouted special scales to better cling to smooth surfaces like walls and windows and grown larger limbs to sprint across open areas, scientists say.

"We are watching evolution as it's unfolding," said Kristin Winchell, a biology professor at NYU and main author of the study published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

As urbanization intensifies around the world, it's important to understand how organisms adapt and humans can design cities in ways that support all species, Winchell said.

The study analyzed 96 *Anolis cristatellus* lizards, comparing the genetic makeup of forest-dwellers to those living in Puerto Rico's capital, San Juan, as well as the northern city of Arecibo and western city of



KRISTIN WINCHELL, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY/AP

An *Anolis cristatellus* lizard stands on a gate in Rincon, Puerto Rico, in 2018.

Mayaguez. Scientists found that 33 genes within the lizard genome were repeatedly associated with urbanization.

"You can hardly get closer to a smoking gun!" said Wouter Halfwerk, an evolutionary ecologist and professor at Vrije University Amsterdam who was not involved in the study.

He said he was impressed that the scientists were able to detect such a clear genomic signature of adaptation: "The ultimate goal within the field of urban adaptive evolution is to find evidence for heritable traits and their genomic architecture."

Winchell said the lizards' physical differences appeared to be mirrored at the genomic level.

"If urban populations are evolving with parallel physical and genomic changes, we may even be able to predict how populations will respond to urbanization just by looking at genetic markers," she said.

The changes in these lizards, whose lifespans are roughly 7 years, can occur very quickly, within 30 to 80 generations, enabling them to escape from predators and survive in urban areas, Winchell added. The larger limbs, for example, enable them to run more quickly across a hot parking lot, and the special scales to hold onto surfaces far more smooth than trees.

"They can't dig their claws into it. ... (Or) squirrel around to the backside," she noted.

The scientists chased after dozens of lizards for their study, catching them with their hands or using fishing poles with a tiny lasso to snag them.

"It takes some practice," Winchell said. On occasion, they had to ask permission to catch lizards off people's homes.

Among Winchell's favorite findings was a rare albino lizard. She also found a nearly 8-inch one, rather large for the species, that she nicknamed "Godzilla."

The study focused on adult male lizards, so it's unclear if females are changing in the same way or at the same rate as males, and at which point in a lizard's life the changes are occurring.

Halfwerk, whose own research showed how one frog species changed its mating call in urban areas, said scientists should look next for possible constraints on the evolutionary response and how morphology relates to mating behavior.

"Ultimately, to cash in on adaptive traits for survival, they need to lead to higher reproduction," he said.

WORLD

Japan, S. Korea protest China visa stoppage

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan and South Korea defended public health restrictions on travelers from China on Wednesday, a day after China stopped issuing new visas in both countries in apparent retaliation.

Chinese embassies stopped issuing new visas for South Koreans and Japanese on Tuesday. It wasn't clear whether China

would expand the visa suspensions to other countries that have imposed stricter virus testing on passengers from China following its COVID-19 surge.

South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin said Wednesday he finds "significantly regrettable" that China stopped issuing short-term visas to South Koreans and called for China to align its pandemic

steps with "scientific and objective facts."

According to South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency, about 17% of the 2,550 short-term travelers from China from Jan. 2 to Tuesday have tested positive.

South Korea has stopped issuing most short-term visas at its consulates in China through the

end of January while also requiring all passengers from China, Hong Kong and Macau to submit proofs of negative tests taken within 48 hours of their arrival in addition to COVID-19 tests at the airport.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno criticized China for "one-sidedly" restricting visa issuances to the Japanese

nationals "because of a reason that is not related to COVID-19 measures."

Tokyo protested and demanded China scrap the measures and that Japan will "respond appropriately while closely watching China's infection situation and how information disclosures are handled by the Chinese side," Matsuno said.

Afghan women athletes barred from play, fear Taliban threats

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Noura's determination to play sports was so great that she defied her family's opposition for years. Beatings from her mother and jeers from her neighbors never stopped her from the sports she loved.

But the 20-year-old Afghan woman could not defy her country's Taliban rulers. They have not just banned all sports for women and girls, they have actively intimidated and harassed those who once played, often scaring them from even practicing in private, Noura and other women say.

Noura has been left shattered. "I'm not the same person anymore," she said. "Since the Taliban came, I feel like I'm dead."

A number of girls and women who once played a variety of sports told The Associated Press they have been intimidated by the Taliban with visits and phone calls

warning them not to engage in their sports. The women and girls spoke on condition of anonymity for fear they will face further threats.

They posed for an AP photographer for portraits with the equipment of the sports they loved. They hid their identities with burqas, the all-encompassing robes and hood that completely cover the face, leaving only a mesh to see through. They didn't normally wear the burqa, but they said they sometimes do now when they go outside and want to remain anonymous and avoid harassment.

The ban on sports is part of the Taliban's escalating campaign of restrictions that have shut down life for girls and women.

Since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban have barred girls from attending middle and high school. Last month, they ordered all women

thrown out of universities as well.

The Taliban require women to cover their hair and faces in public and prohibit them from going to parks or gyms. They have severely limited women's ability to work outside the home and most recently forbade non-governmental organizations from employing women, a step that could cripple the vital flow of aid.

Even before the Taliban, women's sports were opposed by many in Afghanistan's deeply conservative society, seen as a violation of women's modesty and of their role in society. Still, the previous, internationally-backed government had programs encouraging women's sports and school clubs, leagues and national teams for women in many sports.

Mushwanay, spokesman of the Taliban's Sports Organization and National Olympic Committee, said authorities were looking for a way to restart sports for women by building separate sports venues. But he gave no time frame and said funds were needed to do so.

Noura faced resistance her whole life as she tried to play sports.

Raised in a poor Kabul district by parents who migrated from the provinces, Noura started out playing soccer alongside local boys in the street. When she was 9, a coach spotted her and, at his encouragement, she joined a girls' youth team.

She kept it a secret from everyone but her father, but her cover was blown by her own talent. At 13,



PHOTOS BY EBRAHIM NOROOZI/AP

Afghan women who practice Muay Tha, or Thai boxing, pose for a photo in Kabul, Afghanistan, in October.

she was named the best girl soccer player in her age group, and her photo and name were broadcast on television.

Furious, her mother beat her, shouting that she was not allowed to play soccer. She kept playing in secret but was exposed again when her team won a national championship, and her photo was in the news. Again, her mother beat her.

Still, she sneaked off to the award ceremony. She broke down in tears on stage as the audience cheered. "Only I knew I was crying because of loneliness and the hard life I had," she said.

When she found out, her mother set fire to her soccer uniform and shoes.

Noura gave up soccer, but then turned to boxing. Her mother eventually relented, realizing she couldn't stop her from sports, she said.

The day the Taliban entered Kabul, she said, her coach called her

mother and said Noura should go to the airport to be taken out of the country. Noura said her mother didn't deliver the message because she didn't want her to leave. When she learned of the message—too late to escape—Noura said she cut her wrists and had to be taken to the hospital.

"The world had become dark for me," she said.

Three months later, someone who identified himself as a member of the Taliban called the family and threatened her. "They were saying, why did you play sports? Sports are forbidden," she recalled.

Terrified, she left Kabul, disguising herself in her burqa to travel to her family's hometown. Eventually, she returned but remains in fear.

"Even if my life was difficult, I used to have confidence in myself and knew that, with effort, I could do what I wanted," she said. "Now I don't have much hope anymore."



An Afghan women's soccer team poses for a photo in Kabul in September.

WHO, officials say Uganda's Ebola outbreak is over

Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda — Uganda's latest outbreak of the Ebola virus is over, the government and the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

Health Minister Ruth Aceng told journalists that no new cases had been registered in the past 42 days.

This outbreak was the first in a decade of the less common Sudan strain that, unlike the Zaire strain that has caused outbreaks in neighboring Congo in recent years, has no

proven vaccine or therapeutics.

Uganda had recorded 142 cases including 56 deaths since the outbreak was announced in September. Ebola, which can sometimes manifest as a hemorrhagic fever, spreads through contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials.

"With no vaccines and therapeutics, this was one of the most challenging Ebola outbreaks in the past five years," WHO Africa director Matshidiso Moeti said. "Two months ago, it looked as if Ebola would cast a dark sha-

dow over the country well into 2023 as the outbreak reached major cities such as Kampala and Jinja, but this win starts off the year on a note of great hope for Africa."

Plans to test three potential vaccines for the Sudan strain — from the Sabin Vaccine Institute, the University of Oxford and Merck — will go ahead in Uganda. The WHO country representative, Yonas Tegren Woldemariam, said global health experts will meet Thursday to decide on when and how the trials should begin.



HAJARAH NALWADDA/AP

Doctors pray together before they visit a patient who was in contact with an Ebola victim in Entebbe, Uganda, in October.

WORLD

Police start clearing village in Germany fated for coal mine

By FRANK JORDANS
Associated Press

LUETZERATH, Germany — Police in riot gear on Wednesday moved into a condemned village in western Germany, launching an effort to evict activists holed up at the site in an attempt to prevent its demolition to make way for the expansion of a coal mine.

Some stones and fireworks were thrown as officers entered the tiny hamlet of Luetzerath, which has become a flashpoint of debate over the country's climate efforts, on Wednesday morning.

Police announced that the operation had started and that the area would be fenced off. They said that people "currently have the possibility to leave the site without further police measures." They said they had found "further stored projectiles."

Several dozen activists remained camped out in the village, some in tree houses, as police slowly removed further barricades near the entrance in muddy conditions. Some activists read books or played accordion while perched some 10 feet up on tripods.

Police removed dozens of activists from a roadblock. Some went voluntarily, while others were carried away. At least one screamed in apparent pain as officers used force to remove her.

Police then started entering several large farm warehouses, one used as a soup kitchen by squatters, and removed the activists holed up inside.

A few sat or stood on the roofs of Luetzerath's remaining buildings in the chilly wind.

"I'm really afraid today," Petra



MICHAEL PROBST/AP

A climate activist hangs on a rope at the village Luetzerath near Erkelenz, Germany, on Wednesday.

Mueller, a 53-year-old local who said she had been at the site for a few days, said from a top-floor window of one of the few houses. But she said she held out hope of preserving what's left of Luetzerath "until nothing is left standing; hope dies last."

Russia to send new capsule to bring space crew back

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian space corporation Roscosmos said Wednesday that it will launch a new spacecraft to take some of the International Space Station's crew back to Earth after their capsule was damaged and leaked coolant.

Russian cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio arrived at the station in September on board a Soyuz MS-22 and planned to use the capsule to return to Earth. But it leaked coolant last month, resulting in higher cabin temperatures.

After analyzing the situation and discussing it with NASA, Roscosmos decided to launch a new Soyuz MS-23 capsule in crewless automatic mode on Feb. 20 that the trio will use to come back, Roscosmos chief Yuri Borisov told reporters.

The mission of Prokopyev, Petelin and Rubio will be extended, Borisov said without specifying for how long. He emphasized that Roscosmos had discussed the move with NASA, which agreed

with the plan.

The Soyuz MS-23 was initially scheduled to be launched in March to carry two Russian cosmonauts and a U.S. astronaut into orbit.

Borisov said Russian space officials had explored the option of launching the new Soyuz with one crewmember but decided against it because it would require longer preparations. He added that the Soyuz MS-23 will also ferry some supplies to the International Space Station.

In case of an emergency on the International Space Station that would require the evacuation of the entire crew before the new capsule arrives, space officials will consider whether the Soyuz MS-22 could be used safely, Borisov said.

The leak from the Soyuz MS-22 was spotted in December when the Russians were about to venture outside the station on a planned spacewalk and ground specialists saw a stream of fluid and particles emanating from the Soyuz on a live video feed from space.

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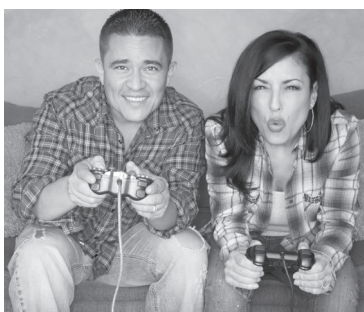
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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

TSA: 'Emotional support' snake barred from flight

FL TAMPA — The Transportation and Security Administration shared a cheeky public service announcement on Instagram Friday night after agents found a 4-foot boa constrictor hidden inside a woman's luggage. They made the alarming discovery on Dec. 15 at Tampa International Airport in Florida, the agency's spokeswoman, Lisa Farbstein, told CNN.

The traveler told security that the snake, named Bartholomew, was actually her "emotional support animal" and requested that he be allowed to fly with her. In the end, the airline ultimately barred Bartholomew from boarding, Farbstein said in a tweet.

The snake was not injured in the incident and was returned home, officials said.

Louisville animal shelter loses no-kill status

KY LOUISVILLE — Louisville's animal shelter has lost its no-kill status due to overcrowding, prompting the first euthanizations in more than five years.

Staffers recently euthanized two dogs "because we are out of room, time and space" at the shelter, Louisville Metro Animal Services spokeswoman Teeya Barnes said. They were the first at the shelter since 2017, The Courier Journal reported.

The facility was at or over maximum capacity for most of 2022, Barnes said. More than 7,000 animals entered the shelter in 2021, and officials took in nearly 6,300 cats and dogs in the first 10 months of 2022, according to a city report.

Iowa city cancels classes due to cyberattack

IA DES MOINES — Iowa's largest school district canceled classes for Tuesday after determining there was a cyberattack on its technology network.

Des Moines Public Schools announced Monday that classes would be canceled for its 33,000 students after being "alerted to a cybersecurity incident on its technology network."

The district said in a news release that it took its internet and network services offline while it assessed the situation. It didn't describe the nature of the attack or say whether sensitive information might have been stolen, and it didn't immediately respond to a request for further information.

Semiautomatic weapons ban now law in state

IL SPRINGFIELD — Illinois banned the sale or possession of semiautomatic weapons Tuesday when Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed legislation driven largely by the killing of seven people at a



BEN GARVER/AP

Shelter from the cold

Horticulturist Amie Combs works Monday in the Greenhouse at Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Mass. Work on the property is a yearlong process to keep the gardens in top shape, and some of the summer favorites are kept safe in the greenhouse during the winter. Naumkeag is the former country estate of noted New York City lawyer Joseph Hodges Choate and Caroline Dutcher Sterling Choate.

4th of July parade last year in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park.

Pritzker acted without hesitation after the House voted 68-41 to make Illinois the ninth state, as well as Washington, D.C., to prohibit the sale or possession of semiautomatic weapons. The vote concurred with a plan the Senate OK'd Monday night, hours after Pritzker was sworn into his second term.

The legislation would ban the manufacture or possession of dozens of brands and types of rapid-fire rifles and pistols, .50-caliber guns and attachments that enhance a weapon's firepower. Those who currently own such guns would not be required to surrender them but would have to register them with the Illinois State Police.

Critics warn the governor's signature will trigger court challenges, which will ultimately overturn the law as a violation of the 2nd Amendment.

Legal marijuana sales begin in Connecticut

CT MONTVILLE — Connecticut's first round of retail cannabis sales for adults 21 and older kicked off Tuesday at seven existing medical marijuana establishments across the state, less than two years after Gov. Ned Lamont signed legislation making Connecticut the latest state to legalize recreational sales.

By the end of the day, state regulators reported more than \$250,000 in sales generated during the first seven hours.

As many as 40 dispensaries, along with dozens of other cannabis-related businesses, are expected to eventually open in Connecticut by the end of 2023.

Lynn Goldstein, 60, of Norwich, was the first recreational marijuana customer to make a purchase at The Botanist in Montville. Goldstein, who said she uses medical marijuana for her chronic pain, was given a bag of goodies, including a \$250 vaporizer.

Twenty-one states have legalized recreational marijuana for adults over the past decade, even though it remains illegal under federal law.

Nygren sworn in as Navajo Nation president

AZ FORT DEFIANCE — Buu Nygren was sworn in Tuesday as the next president of the vast Navajo Nation, a job that will test his ability to make good on promises to deliver water, electricity and broadband to tens of thousands who don't have it.

Nygren beat out incumbent President Jonathan Nez in the tribe's general election by about 3,500 votes.

The office heavily intersects with the federal government, as do other tribes that receive federal funding for services like housing,

health care, education and public safety. The Navajo Nation also owns property in D.C.

Nygren, 36, will be the youngest to hold the tribal presidency and has never held political office, though he was a vice presidential candidate in 2018. His vice president, Richelle Montoya, will be the first woman in the position.

Oregon's governor sworn in, declares emergency

OR SALEM — Oregon's newly sworn-in Democratic Gov. Tina Kotek said Monday at her inauguration that her first order of business will be tackling homelessness, as she unveiled several measures intended to address one of the state's most pressing issues.

In her inaugural address at the state Capitol in Salem, Kotek said she will declare a homeless state of emergency and sign an executive order to increase housing construction on her first full day in office. She also proposed a \$130 million emergency investment to help unsheltered people move off the streets.

Oregon has struggled for years to address a housing shortage and interwoven homelessness, addiction and mental health crises. Its homeless population has increased by more than 22% since 2020, according to figures from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

It also has the highest drug addiction rate of any state and ranks last in access to mental health treatment, according to federal data from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Gates considers W.Va. to expand nuclear energy

WV GLASGOW — Bill Gates is looking to West Virginia as he plans for the next phase of his effort to reboot U.S. nuclear energy technology: powering the east coast.

Microsoft co-founder Gates, who visited a closed down coal-fired plant in Glasgow on Monday, said he needs to see how his Natrium nuclear reactor demonstration in Wyoming performs before making any announcements about new sites.

Still, during a visit to the American Electric Power plant, which closed in 2015, Gates called the West Virginia's Legislature's decision last year to repeal the state's ban on nuclear power facilities "quite impressive" and said he's looking for sites to expand his efforts to the east coast.

West Virginia's new law has opened the door to discussions with American Electric Power during the last six months, said Gates, who founded TerraPower, the company behind the \$4 billion project in Wyoming.

FACES



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Julia Garner was a supporting actress winner for the television series “Ozark.”



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Angela Bassett won a Globe for her supporting role in “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever.”



NBC/AP

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” star Michelle Yeoh took best actress, comedy or musical.



NBC/AP

Show host Jerrod Carmichael waded into the issues that kept the Globes off TV last year.



NBC/AP

Colin Farrell won best actor in a comedy or musical film for “The Banshees of Inisherin.”

‘The Fabelmans,’ ‘Banshees’ triumph at rehabbed Globes

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

The Golden Globes returned to the air Tuesday with a red carpet flush with celebrities, comedian Jerrod Carmichael as a hesitant emcee and top awards for Steven Spielberg’s “The Fabelmans” and Martin McDonagh’s “The Banshees of Inisherin,” as the beleaguered award show sought to rekindle its pre-pandemic and pre-scandal glamour.

Spielberg’s autobiographical coming-of-age film won best drama film and the dark friendship tale “The Banshees of Inisherin” took best film, comedy or musical. “Abbott Elementary,” “White Lotus” and “House of the Dragon” led the TV awards.

For the fifth time, one of Spielberg’s films won a best picture Globe. Nominated 14 times by the Globes for best director, Spielberg won the honor for the third time. He began by thanking his three sisters, his late father and his late mother, Leah Adler (played by Michelle Williams in the film). “She is up there kvelling about this right now,” Spielberg said.

Carmichael kicked off the 80th Golden Globes from the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif., with little of the fanfare that usually opens such ceremonies. He plunged straight into the issues that drove the Globes off television and led much of the entertainment industry to boycott the Hollywood Foreign Press Association after the group was revealed to have no Black members.

“I am your host, Jerrod Carmichael,” said the “Rothaniel” comedian. “And I’ll tell you why I’m here. I’m here ‘cause I’m Black.”

“I won’t say they were a racist organization,” he continued. “But they didn’t have a single Black member until George Floyd died. So do with that information what you will.”

“The Banshees of Inisherin” left with three awards, including



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Steven Spielberg won Golden Globe Awards for best director and for best motion picture, drama for “The Fabelmans” on Tuesday night in Beverly Hills, Calif. The Globes are attempting to reform their image after a 2021 report revealed that the Hollywood Foreign Press Association had no Black members.

best screenplay for McDonagh and best actor in a comedy for Colin Farrell.

Ke Huy Quan, the former child star of “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,” won best supporting actor in “Everything Everywhere All at Once.” A clearly emotional Quan, who had left acting years before directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert cast him in their multiverse tale, thanked them for his second act.

“More than 30 years later, two guys thought of me,” Quan said. “They remembered that kid. And they gave me the opportunity to try again.”

Michelle Yeoh, the star of “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” also won, for best actress in a comedy or musical. The Malaysian-born Yeoh was the second female actor of Asian descent to win in the category, after her “Crazy Rich Asian” costar Awkwafina, who won for “The Farewell” in 2020.

“Forty years,” the 60-year-old Yeoh said. “Not letting go of this.” Possibly Yeoh’s stiffest competition at the Academy Awards, Cate Blanchett of “Tár,” won best actress on the drama side.

Angela Bassett, a likely Oscar frontrunner, won best supporting actress for “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever.”

Best actor was an upset. Austin Butler won for his performance in Baz Luhrmann’s “Elvis.” The favorite had arguably been Brendan Fraser for “The Whale.” Ahead of the Globes, Fraser said he would not attend because “my mother didn’t raise a hypocrite.” In 2018, Fraser said he was groped in 2003 by longtime HFPA member Philip Berk. Berk, who is no longer an HFPA member, denied it.

The public school sitcom “Abbott Elementary” took home three TV awards, including best comedy series. Quinta Brunson, the show’s creator and star, won best actress in a comedy series, and

Tyler James Williams won for his supporting role.

The Globes were plunged into chaos shortly before a largely remote pandemic 2021 show when a Los Angeles Times report revealed that the HFPA, then numbering 87, had no Black members.

Stars and studios boycotted last year’s Globes, which NBC opted not to televise, saying the HFPA needed time to reform.

The HFPA now has 96 members, six of them Black, along with 103 nonmember voters.

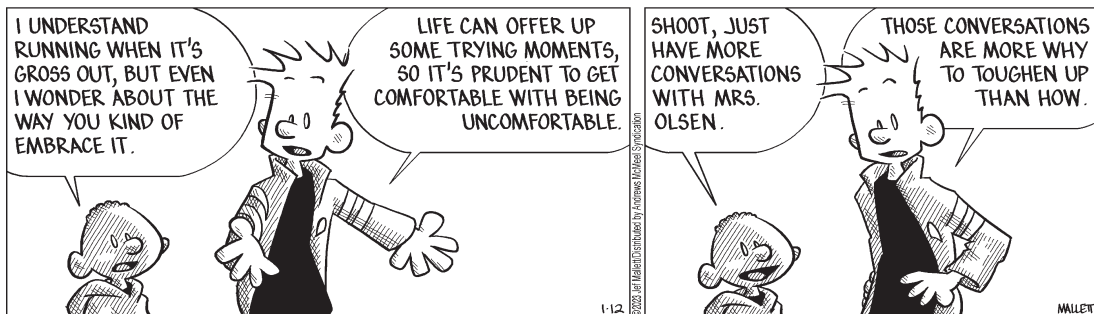
The Globes remain a valuable marketing tool for awards contenders, propping up ads for films in the long stretch between the holidays and the Oscars, which air March 12, a year after “The Slap.”

Accepting the Cecil B. DeMille Award, Eddie Murphy said he knew the blueprint for longevity in show business: “Pay your taxes, mind your business, and keep Will Smith’s wife’s name out of your (expletive) mouth!”

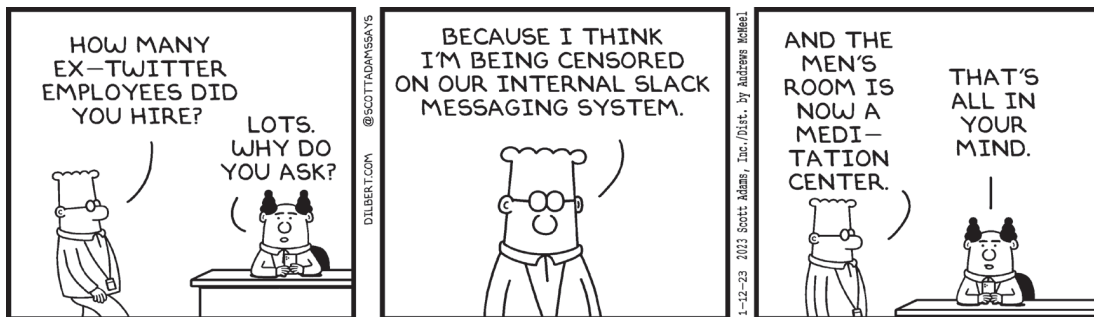
Golden Globe winners

- Motion picture – drama
“The Fabelmans”
- Director – motion picture
Steven Spielberg, “The Fabelmans”
- Actor in a motion picture – drama
Austin Butler, “Elvis”
- Actress in a motion picture – drama
Cate Blanchett, “Tár”
- Motion picture – musical or comedy
“The Banshees of Inisherin”
- Actress in a motion picture – musical or comedy
Michelle Yeoh, “Everything Everywhere All at Once”
- Actor in a motion picture – musical or comedy
Colin Farrell, “The Banshees of Inisherin”
- Supporting actress in a motion picture
Angela Bassett, “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever”
- Supporting actor in a motion picture
Ke Huy Quan, “Everything Everywhere All at Once”
- Screenplay – motion picture
Martin McDonagh, “The Banshees of Inisherin”
- Motion picture – animated
“Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio”
- Motion picture – foreign language
“Argentina, 1985” (Argentina, U.S.)
- Original song – motion picture
“Naatu Naatu,” by M.M. Keeravani, Chandrabose (“RRR”)
- Original score – motion picture
Justin Hurwitz, “Babylon”
- Television series – drama
“House of the Dragon”
- Actor in a television series – drama
Kevin Costner, “Yellowstone”
- Actress in a television series – drama
Zendaya, “Euphoria”
- TV series – musical or comedy
“Abbott Elementary”
- Actress in a television series – musical or comedy
Quinta Brunson, “Abbott Elementary”
- Actor in a television series – musical or comedy
Jeremy Allen White, “The Bear”
- Supporting actress – musical-comedy or drama TV series
Julia Garner, “Ozark”
- Supporting actor – musical-comedy or drama television series
Tyler James Williams, “Abbott Elementary”
- Limited series, anthology series or motion picture made for television
“The White Lotus”
- Actor in a limited series, anthology series or motion picture made for TV
Evan Peters, “Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story”
- Actress in a limited series, anthology series or motion picture made for TV
Amanda Seyfried, “The Dropout”
- Supporting actress in a limited series, anthology series or motion picture made for television
Jennifer Coolidge, “The White Lotus”
- Supporting actor in a limited series, anthology series or motion picture made for television
Paul Walter Hauser, “Black Bird”

Frazz



Dilbert



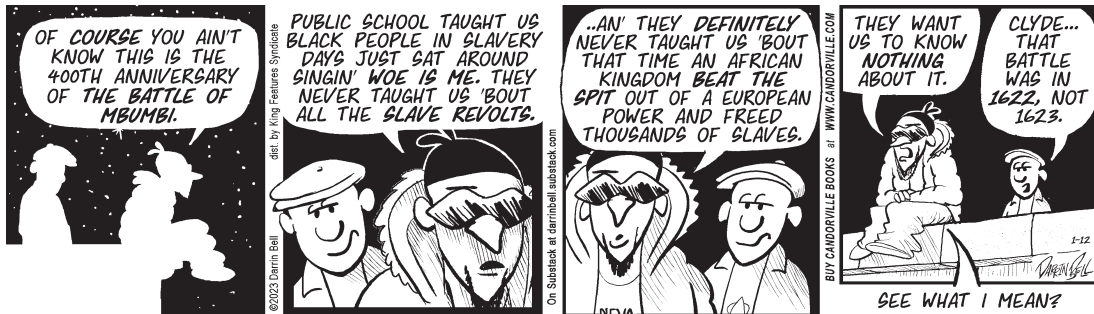
Pearls Before Swine



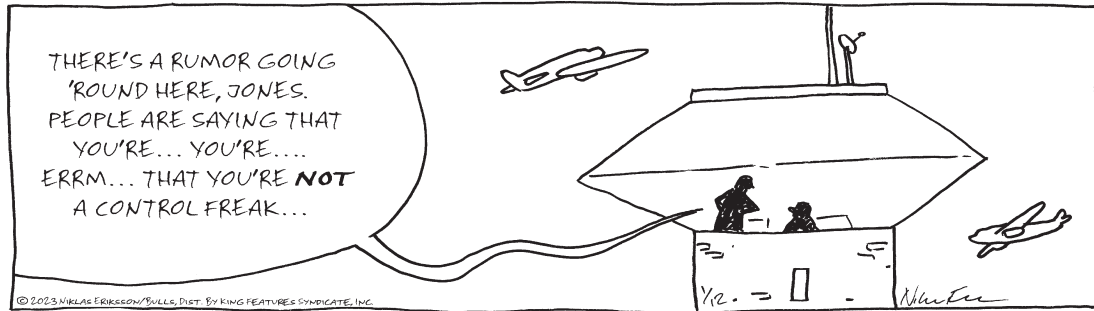
Non Sequitur



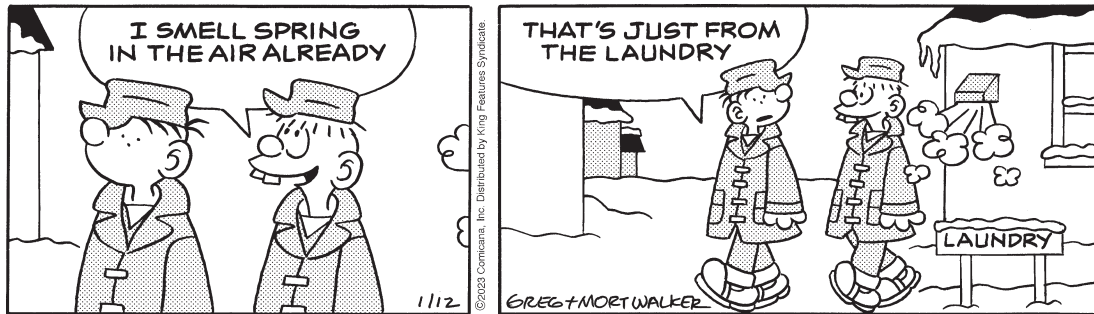
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

- 1 Desist
- 5 Dallas hoopster, briefly
- 8 Wrestler John Sagan
- 12 Astronomer
- 13 Roof ornament
- 14 Skater's leap
- 15 Killer whale
- 16 Actor Billy — Williams
- 17 GPS suggestions
- 18 Sesame paste
- 20 Eccentric
- 22 "Little piggie"
- 23 Homer Simpson's barkeep
- 24 Church service
- 27 Used a Dyson, say
- 32 Roman 1051
- 33 I love (Lat.)
- 34 "Evil Woman" band

DOWN

- 1 Native of Inverness
- 2 Olympian Lipinski
- 3 Symphonic gp.
- 4 Braids
- 5 Of the Middle Ages
- 6 Chest-beating beast
- 7 Panorama
- 8 Len of "Blue Bloods"
- 9 Highs and lows
- 10 Must have
- 11 Too
- 19 "Forget it!"

- 21 Outback bird
- 24 "Tasty!"
- 25 Pub order
- 26 Cognac cocktails
- 28 "— dreaming?"
- 29 Ate
- 30 Antlered animal
- 31 Coifs
- 36 Change gradually
- 37 Bk. after Exodus
- 38 Not digital
- 41 Hesitant sound
- 42 Words said with a sigh
- 43 Ogler's look
- 44 "Zounds!"
- 46 Cold War initials
- 47 Emit coherent light
- 48 Pack cargo
- 51 Popular card game

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1-12

CRYPTOQUIP

OA ESDIQ AG OXA-XIT WIPLAE
 LG OCAED GAWOC IVDWLBIG
 VANGOILGE, BANFP SDASFD
 NED WABQT-OIFQLDE?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT YOU CALL MALE SIBLINGS WHO CONSTANTLY CAUTION PEOPLE ABOUT THINGS? WARNER BROTHERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals P

STARS AND STRIPES

OPINION

Biden's immigration shift acknowledges the obvious

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
 Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Europe commander
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
 Lt. Col. Michael Kerschbaum, Pacific commander
 Michael Ryan, Pacific chief of staff

EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editor
 leonard.terry@stripes.com
 Robert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor
 reid.robert@stripes.com
 Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
 moores.sean@stripes.com
 Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
 pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast
 Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
 slavin.erik@stripes.com
 +49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350
Pacific
 Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
 kidd.aaron@stripes.com
 +81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380
Washington
 Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
 cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
 (+1)(202)886-0033
 Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
 bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast
 Kevin R. Miller, Circulation Manager
 miller.kevin@stripes.com
 xsscirculation@stripes.com
 +49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583-9136
Europe
 Karen Lewis, Community Engagement Manager
 lewis.karen@stripes.com
 memberservices@stripes.com
 +49(0)631.3615.9090; DSN (314)583.9090

Pacific
 Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
 +81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

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

Reader letters
 letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts
 stripes.com/contactus

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BY DAVID IGNATIUS
 The Washington Post

WASHINGTON

When President Joe Biden was rolling out his new, tougher "border enforcement" policy last week, a reporter asked whether he believed, as many in his party do, that "migration is a human right."

Well, yes, Biden answered, "it is a human right ... if your family is being persecuted." But he went on to express something that Democrats rarely discuss — "the other side of this," he said — which is that Americans want a secure, enforceable border, rather than the pell-mell chaos of the current, broken system.

"The people in this country have ... basic fundamental rights to assure the people who are coming have been checked out," he explained. "There has to be an orderly process and rationale to it."

Biden's statement of the obvious drew angry criticism from Democratic activists. An immigration advocate called his new border policy "callous." A human rights leader described it as "a humanitarian disgrace." The critics seemed to imply that the very idea of border control is morally wrong. This progressive view is compassionate but misconceived. Border security can be abused, but it's an essential requirement for a free, sovereign nation.

The right denounced the new enforcement policy, too. That's because, even as Biden expanded restrictions on illegal entry, he broadened a policy of two-year "parole," with work permits included, for 30,000 immigrants a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela who apply through an official

portal and have financial sponsorship. For many MAGA activists, the right level of immigration is none.

Biden hasn't wanted to go near the border, literally, given how toxic the issue of immigration has become for the Democrats. But he stepped into the minefield with his trip to El Paso, Texas, on Sunday and his summit meetings in Mexico City on Monday and Tuesday. And frankly, it's about time he took on the issue forthrightly. Other Democrats and Republicans should follow.

What Biden proposes is a trade-off. Border enforcement will be tougher. The penalties for illegal migration will increase, and those caught attempting to enter the United States without legal permission will face expedited removal and a five-year ban on reentry. But at the same time, the parole process will be expanded for the four countries, and Mexico will accept up to 30,000 migrants a month from those countries who tried to enter illegally.

Asylum will remain a moral and legal obligation under the new plan. But asylum seekers who don't use a legal pathway through a third country will face a "rebuttable presumption" that their claims are invalid. The central idea is that while migration is essential, it must be more orderly and manageable.

The policy goes a little way in both directions, which no one is very happy with. My sense is that this is Biden's home ground, in the middle, taking potshots from both sides. His patchwork centrism is easy to knock, but it's why he was elected in 2020, and why his party did surprisingly well in the midterms. In a dysfunctional political system, Biden manages to get things done. He might seem

to stumble, but it's usually uphill.

"I don't want to pretend there's anything easy about it," Biden said last week of the border-enforcement problem. White House officials know that what they have announced is a temporary fix, at best. Right now, there are only bad policies on immigration. There is no upside to this issue, but Biden must still navigate the political swamp.

What seems to have led the White House to frame a pragmatic compromise on immigration was that protests about last year's surge of migrants were coming increasingly from Democratic politicians, in California, Illinois and New York — not just from MAGA Republicans in Texas and Florida. The White House concluded it wasn't a left-right issue, but one of governing or not governing.

The administration's new approach to immigration began last spring, with a rush of Ukrainian refugees, a thousand a day, trying to cross the Mexico border. To stem this chaotic flow, the administration created an online application process, and the number of illegal entries each day fell to single digits. A similar application process was developed in October for Venezuelan refugees, whose numbers had surged to 1,500 a day. That has since fallen into the low hundreds.

In politics, you usually get credit for telling the faithful what they want to hear. But that has it backward. Good government often means upsetting powerful constituencies and choosing a path that might be unpopular but is still correct. I don't want to oversell Biden's immigration plan. It's not going to fix our shattered system. But it recognizes that people aren't morally defective if they demand a more secure and effective border policy.

The concession Kevin McCarthy shouldn't have made

BY JONATHAN BERNSTEIN
 Bloomberg Opinion

Rep. Kevin McCarthy made many concessions in his bid to become speaker of the House. But his offer to allow the hard-line House Freedom Caucus to select three of the nine Republicans on the powerful House Committee on Rules stands out for its ability to diminish the influence of the Republican Party within the House. It will grant a handful of extremists outsize power in Congress, reducing the Republican Party's ability to govern.

The deal, which wasn't part of proposed rule amendments adopted Monday evening, is far more significant than the much-ballyhooed change allowing a single House member to essentially call a vote of no-confidence against the speaker. Threatening the speaker's job is messy, and as aggressive as the dissidents might be, the mechanism isn't something likely to see everyday use.

By contrast, handing seats on the Rules Committee to a small, radical faction institutionalizes their influence in a way that will come into play on every single bill the House considers, because every bill must go through that committee in order to be considered by the full House.

Strict party rule in a closely divided chamber is controversial but perhaps justified; having a small minority of that party dictate to everyone is something else. That would be true of any small faction gaining excessive power, let alone one mostly known for seeking to overturn the 2020 election.

To understand why, it helps to know how the current system works. Bills in the House begin in committees, such as Agriculture or Foreign Affairs. Those that are approved by a committee vote are sent on to the full House for consideration. But before that happens, bills need what the House calls a "rule" — the procedure under which they will be considered, including which amendments will be allowed, and other procedural quirks. That's what the Rules Committee provides. A bill that passes Armed Services or Ways and Means can't be considered by the full House until it also passes through Rules. And the committee's influence is vast; it isn't unusual for legislation to be entirely rewritten by Rules.

But under McCarthy's changes, the consensus views of the Republican Party will no longer necessarily hold sway. Instead of nine Republicans and four Democrats, all chosen for their loyalty to their party, the rules committee will now have six mainstream Republicans, four Democrats, and three Republicans selected by the House Freedom Caucus. To get a seven-vote majority on the 13-member committee, the six Republicans will have to cut a deal with either the Democrats or the Republican dissidents.

So as a matter of standard procedure, every Republican bill will be hostage to a tiny bloc within the party. It won't take an extraordinary revolt. It will be built in.

Having even a single Rules Committee member loyal to a faction, and not to the leadership and the entire party, would be a major change that would make it harder for

Republicans to function as the majority. Going further and giving the faction three seats? That's asking for trouble.

The GOP should understand by now that McCarthy's opponents won't hesitate to harm their fellow Republicans if they think it's to their advantage. It's easy to imagine most Republicans regretting letting McCarthy agree to this kind of deal.

There is a fair criticism that Rep. Nancy Pelosi and other recent speakers have been too powerful within the House and that restoring some of the balance to subject-matter committees would be good for the chamber. McCarthy's opponents claimed that what they are doing is decentralizing the House and restoring influence to individual members.

But what's actually happening is that the new House will be as centralized as before; the only difference will be that instead of the speaker and party leadership running things, it will be the speaker and one small, hostile group. The speaker, at least, is responsible to the entire majority party. The three radical members on the rules committee will only be responsible to themselves and their allies.

As much as the bulk of Republicans wanted to stand behind McCarthy, they should have let him know that these concessions would exact too high a price on the party as a whole.

Jonathan Bernstein is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering politics and policy. A former professor of political science at the University of Texas at San Antonio and DePauw University, he wrote A Plain Blog About Politics.

SCOREBOARD/SKIING

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Tuesday's men's scores

EAST

Dayton 82, Fordham 58
Seton Hall 66, Georgetown 51
St. Francis (NY) 78, Hartford 73
St. John's 77, Butler 61

SOUTH

Auburn 82, Mississippi 73
Florida 67, LSU 56
South Carolina 71, Kentucky 68
Tennessee 77, Vanderbilt 68
Virginia 65, North Carolina 58

MIDWEST

Akron 74, Bowling Green 70
Belmont 74, Valparaiso 59
DePaul 75, Villanova 65
Drake 76, Ill.-Chicago 71, OT
Illinois 76, Nebraska 50
Iowa St. 84, Texas Tech 50
Kansas 79, Oklahoma 75
Kansas St. 65, Oklahoma St. 57
Kent St. 75, Toledo 63
Miami (Ohio) 91, Buffalo 80
Michigan St. 69, Wisconsin 65
N. Illinois 73, Cent. Michigan 54
N. Iowa 75, Murray St. 67
Notre Dame 73, Georgia Tech 72, OT
Ohio 76, Ball St. 71
VCU 78, Loyola Chicago 64
W. Michigan 85, E. Michigan 79

SOUTHWEST

Temple 76, Tulsa 72
FAR WEST
Air Force 85, Colorado St. 74, OT
San Diego St. 74, Nevada 65
San Jose St. 74, Fresno St. 64
Utah St. 83, Wyoming 63

Men's AP Top 25 schedule

Thursday's games

No. 7 UCLA vs. Utah
No. 8 Gonzaga at BYU
No. 9 Arizona at Oregon St.

Friday's games

No. 3 Purdue vs. Nebraska

Tuesday's women's scores

EAST

Penn 76, Hartford 30
Saint Joseph's 58, Loyola Chicago 36
West Virginia 77, TCU 45

MIDWEST

Michigan 80, Purdue 59
SOUTHWEST
Houston 80, UCF 42
SMU 55, Cincinnati 44
Texas 72, Kansas 59

Women's AP Top 25 schedule

Thursday's games

No. 1 South Carolina at Kentucky
No. 5 LSU at Missouri
No. 6 Indiana vs. No. 9 Maryland
No. 7 Notre Dame vs. Wake Forest
No. 11 NC State at Florida St.
No. 13 Virginia Tech vs. Louisville
No. 16 Duke vs. Clemson
No. 22 North Carolina at Virginia

Friday's games

No. 2 Stanford at No. 8 UCLA
No. 10 Utah vs. Arizona St.
No. 14 Arizona at Colorado
No. 21 Oregon vs. Washington

Tuesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Sent RHP Chris Vallmont outright to Norfolk (IL).

MINNESOTA TWINS — Acquired RHP A.J. Alexy from Washington in exchange for minor league RHP Cristian Jimenez. Designate RHP Oliver Ortega for assignment.

SEATTLE MARINERS — Named Trent Black major league coach/director of pitching strategy and Stephen Vogt bullpen and quality control coach.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Designated RHP Junior Fernandez for assignment. Agreed to terms with INF Brandon Belt on a one-year contract. Designated RHP Julian Merryweather for assignment.

National League

NEW YORK METS — Promoted Sue Lucchi to senior vice president/stadium operations.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Traded RHP Zach Thompson to Toronto in exchange for OF Chavez Young.

WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Agreed to terms with OF Corey Dickerson on a one-year contract. Designated RHP Andres Machado for assignment.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed DB Nate Hairston to a reserve/futures contract.

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Agreed to terms with LB Roquan Smith on a five-year contract extension. Signed TE Nick Boyle to the practice squad. Released DT Christian Ringo from the practice squad.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed CB Herb Mille to a reserve/futures contract.

CHICAGO BEARS — Signed WR Daurice Fountain and DL Donovan Jeter to reserve/futures contracts.

GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed TEs Austin Allen and Nick Guggemo, WR Jeff Cotton, OT Jean Delance, QB Danny Etting, DBs Tyrell Ford and Benjie Franklin, RB Tyler Goodson, LB La'Darius Hamilton and DT Chris Slayton, CB Kiondre Thomas, K Parker White and S James Wiggins to reserve/futures contracts.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed WRs Alex Bachman, Johnny Johnson III and Drew Estrada, RB Gerrid Doaks, DE Adedayo Odeleye, DB D'Angelo Ross and TE Mason Schreck to reserve/futures contracts.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Claimed C Dakoda Shepley off waivers from Dallas. Signed Lucas Havrisik to a reserve/futures contract.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed WRs John

TENNIS

ASB Classic

Wednesday
At ASB Tennis Arena
Auckland, New Zealand
Purse: \$642,735

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Jenson Brooksby, United States, def. Diego Schwartzman (3), Argentina, 6-1, 0-0, ret.

Marcos Giron, United States, def. Jeffrey John Wolf, United States, 6-4, 6-4.

Richard Gasquet, France, def. Joao Sousa, Portugal, 7-6 (2), 6-2.

Cameron Norrie (2), Britain, def. Jiri Lehecka, Czech Republic, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-3.

Quentin Halys, France, def. Ben Shelton, United States, 6-3, 6-2.

David Goffin, Belgium, def. Christopher Eubanks, United States, 6-2, 6-4.

Constant Lestienne, France, def. Gregoire Barrere, France, 1-6, 7-6 (4), 7-5.

Laslo Djere, Serbia, def. Casper Ruud (1), Norway, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3).

ATP Adelaide International 2

Wednesday
At Memorial Drive Tennis Centre
Adelaide, Australia
Purse: \$642,735

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (7), Spain, def. John Millman, Australia, 6-3, 6-3.

Jack Draper, Britain, def. Tommy Paul (8), United States, 6-4, 6-4.

Karen Khachanov (3), Russia, def. Marc-Andrea Huesler, Switzerland, 6-4, 6-4.

Kwon Soon Woo, South Korea, def. Pablo Carreno Busta (2), Spain, 3-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Roberto Bautista Agut (4), Spain, def. Robin Haase, Netherlands, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

Mikael Ymer, Sweden, def. Mackenzie McDonald, United States, 3-6, 7-6 (2), 6-3.

Miomir Kecmanovic (6), Serbia, def. Jason Kubler, Australia, 5-7, 7-6 (1), 6-4.

Thanasi Kokkinakis, Australia, def. An-

drey Rublev (1), Russia, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

WTA Adelaide International 2

Wednesday
At Memorial Drive Tennis Centre
Adelaide, Australia
Purse: \$780,637

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Petra Kvitova, Czech Republic, def. Zheng Qinwen, China, 7-6 (6), ret.

Danielle Collins (10), United States, def. Jil Teichmann, Switzerland, 6-3, 7-6 (2).

Belinda Bencic (8), Switzerland, def. Anna Kalinskaya, Russia, 6-3, 6-3.

Beatriz Haddad Maia, Brazil, def. Amanda Anisimova, United States, 6-4, 7-5.

Daria Kasatkina (5), Russia, def. Barbora Krejickova, Czech Republic, 6-2, 7-5.

Veronika Kudermetova (6), Russia, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova, Russia, walkover.

Paula Badosa (9), Spain, def. Kaia Kane-pi, Estonia, 6-1, 7-5.

Hobart International

Wednesday
At Hobart International Tennis Centre
Hobart, Australia
Purse: \$259,303

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Italy, def. Jasmine Paolini, Italy, 6-2, 6-1.

Bernarda Pera (6), United States, def. Laura Siegemund, Germany, 6-4, 6-7 (3), 6-4.

Anhelina Kalinina (5), Ukraine, def. Tatjana Maria, Germany, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.

Lauren Davis, United States, def. Ysaline Bonaventure, Belgium, 7-6 (1), 6-3.

Sofia Kenin, United States, def. Maryna Zanevska, Belgium, 6-2, 6-3.

Anna Blinkova, Russia, def. Marie Bouzkova (1), Czech Republic, 7-5, 6-4.

Wang Xinyu, China, def. Alison van Uytvanck, Belgium, 7-5, 4-6, 6-3.

Yulia Putintseva (8), Kazakhstan, def. Nuria Parrizas Diaz, Spain, 6-2, 6-3.

AP SPORTLIGHT

Jan. 12

1951 — Ezzard Charles knocks out Lee Oma in the 10th round at Madison Square Garden in New York to retain the heavyweight title.

1958 — Dolph Schayes of the Syracuse Nationals sets an NBA record for career points in a 135-109 victory over the Detroit Pistons. Schayes scores 23 points to bring his career mark to 11,770, breaking the record of 11,764 held by George Mikan.

1958 — The NCAA rules committee makes the first change in football scoring rules since 1912 by adding the two-point conversion.

1960 — Syracuse's Dolph Schayes becomes the first player in NBA history to score 15,000 career points.

1969 — New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath "guarantees" a victory before the

game against the 17-point favorite Baltimore Colts, then leads the AFL to its first Super Bowl victory, a 16-7 triumph over a Baltimore team that had lost only once in 16 games all season.

1975 — The Pittsburgh Steelers totally shut down Minnesota's offense, handing the Vikings their third Super Bowl defeat, 16-6. Franco Harris, the game's MVP, sets a Super Bowl rushing record with 158 yards.

1986 — Chicago's Denis Savard ties an NHL record for the fastest goal to start a period by scoring four seconds into the third period of the Blackhawks' 4-2 victory over the Hartford Whalers.

2007 — Tadd Fujikawa, just shy of his 16th birthday, steals the show at the Sony Open. Fujikawa shoots a 4-under 66, making him the youngest player in 50 years to make the cut on the PGA Tour.

from Bakersfield (AHL) loan.

MINNESOTA WILD — Reassigned G Hunter Jones to Iowa (ECHL) from Iowa (AHL).
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Recalled F Nolan Foote from Utica (AHL).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Reassigned LW Collin Adams to Worcester (ECHL) from Bridgeport (AHL). Reinstated RW Simon Holmstrom to the active roster from injured reserve.

ST. LOUIS BLUES — Recalled D Dmitriy Samorukov from Springfield (AHL).

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Reassigned G Keith Petruzzelli to Newfoundland (ECHL) from Toronto (AHL). Recalled LW Bobby McMann from Toronto (AHL).

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Placed C Jake Leschyshyn on waivers with the purpose of sending him to Henderson (AHL).

SOCCER

Major League Soccer

FC DALLAS — Signed D Amet Korca from Croatian first-division side HNK Gorica to a one-year contract with club options for 2024 and 2025. Announced a mutually agreed termination of the contract for F Franco Jara.

HOUSTON DYNAMO FC — Acquired \$500,000 in general allocation money (GAM) from Austin FC in a trade for D Adam Lundkvist.

LAFC — Announced the signing of John Thorington (president/general manager) and Larry Freedman (co-president/CBO) to multi-year contract extensions.

NASHVILLE SC — Announced mutual agreement with M Handwalla Bwana to part ways.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Acquired M Latif Blessing from Los Angeles FC in exchange for \$400,000 in 2023 general allocation money (GAM). Acquired D Dave Romney from Nashville SC in exchange for \$250,000 in 2023 GAM and \$275,000 in 2024 GAM. Signed M Jack Panayotou to a home-grown player contract through 2026 with an additional one-year club option for 2027.

NYFC — Claimed F Gabriel Segal off waivers through the 2023 season.

ORLANDO CITY SC — Acquired a 2023 international roster spot from Portland Timbers FC in exchange for \$200,000 in 2023 general allocation money (GAM).

REAL SALT LAKE — Acquired F Carlos Andres Gomez from Columbian power Millonarios FC on a five-year contract with options for the 2028 season, pending receipt of an international transfer certificate (ITC) and a P-1 Visa. Signed D Erik Holt to a multi-year contract extension through 2025 with an option for 2026. Signed G Tomas Gomez to a one-year contract extension.



GIOVANNI AULETTA/AP

Mikaela Shiffrin, left, congratulates Slovakia's Petra Vlhova during the podium ceremony for Tuesday's women's World Cup slalom in Flachau, Austria. Vlhova won and Shiffrin finished second.

Record on hold as Shiffrin places 2nd

BY ERIC WILLEMSSEN

Associated Press

FLACHAU, Austria — Mikaela Shiffrin will have to wait a bit longer to celebrate a record-breaking win No. 83 on the women's World Cup circuit.

Her biggest rival and an illness spoiled Shiffrin's hopes of a big party at a floodlit night slalom Tuesday as the American stand-out skier finished second behind Olympic champion Petra Vlhova after feeling ill during the race and throwing up afterward.

"I don't feel very well, but that is not surprising at the end of a long stretch of races. And no matter what, Petra skied amazing tonight and she deserves the victory," Shiffrin told Austrian TV before feeling even worse and going into a tent adjacent to the finish area to vomit.

She then did not speak to other reporters.

"Ideally, there is not a story about how I'm feeling. I earned the second place and she earned the victory tonight, and that was quite an amazing show," Shiffrin said in the brief TV interview. "It was a little bit difficult this evening to perform top-top, but even then, I felt some turns that I loved to feel."

Shiffrin matched Lindsey Vonn's women's record of 82 race victories by winning a giant slalom in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, on Sunday, but wasn't able to produce another win in her best discipline, slalom, to move past her former teammate.

Her head coach, Mike Day, said Shiffrin was "not feeling tip-top" even before the race.

"It was good skiing, for sure not her best, but it was good skiing," Day said.

About 13,200 fans attended the race in the hometown of Hermann Maier, one of Austria's most successful racers. Marlies Raich, a

former Austrian slalom standout when competing under her maiden name Schild and Shiffrin's biggest idol growing up, was in attendance.

Vlhova had the fastest time in the first run and then extended her lead over Shiffrin for her first win this season. The Slovakian skier finished 0.43 seconds ahead of Shiffrin, while Lena Duerr of Germany finished 0.85 back in third.

"To be honest, I loved watching (Vlhova) ski this run. I think it was the perfect combination of aggressive and also smart," Shiffrin said.

The American still leads the discipline standings after winning four of the seven slaloms so far this season, and holds a big lead of 399 points over Vlhova in the overall standings.

Shiffrin's next chance to break the record will come in a super-G in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, in 10 days. She plans to sit out speed races at another Austrian venue, St. Anton, this weekend.

Vonn broke the previous record, Annemarie Moser-Pröll's mark of 62 wins, in Cortina eight years ago. Vonn retired four years ago when injuries cut her career short.

Shiffrin seemed to sense she might not have done enough after her second run, only briefly saluting the crowd as she then stuck her poles into the snow and looked back up the mountain to watch Vlhova's winning run.

Shiffrin's teammates were holding aloft balloons shaped as an "8" and "3" to form the No. 83 but there was to be no celebration this time as Vlhova, Shiffrin's biggest rival, enjoyed the moment instead with a large crowd of Slovakian fans that follow her around.

Vlhova had compiled seven podium finishes this season without a win entering the night.

NHL

Scoreboard

ROUNDUP

Mercer lifts Devils with 2-goal game

Associated Press
 RALEIGH, N.C. — Dawson Mercer's first two-goal game in the NHL came at an ideal time for the New Jersey Devils.

His offense helped the Devils overcome allowing two short-handed goals and gave them a 5-3 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night.

"I'm an offensive player, but I like playing defense and playing that two-way game," said Mercer, a first-round draft pick in 2020. "To help contribute out there and get this big win is a huge thing for me, and I want to make sure I can keep it going."

Mercer gave New Jersey its first lead of the game at 8:53 of the third period on his 10th goal of the season. Mercer, playing in his 123rd NHL game, also had an assist.

The Devils began a five-game trip by winning for the third time in four games. They also closed the gap on the first-place Hurricanes in a game marking the midway mark of the season for the top two teams in the Metropolitan Division.

"We played one of our best third periods of the year," New Jersey coach Lindy Ruff said.

Jonas Siegenthaler, Jesper Boqvist and Nico Hischier also scored for New Jersey, with Hischier's empty-netter coming with 55 seconds left. Michael McLeod had two assists.

Goalie Vitek Vanecek made 25 saves for his fourth win in a row.

"We never quit," Siegenthaler said. "It's not always easy to make a comeback."

Jesper Kotkaniemi, Max Pacioretty and Sebastian Aho scored for the Hurricanes, who lost their fourth straight game (0-3-1) and surrendered a two-goal lead in the last minute of the second period. Pyotr Kochetkov made 17 saves.

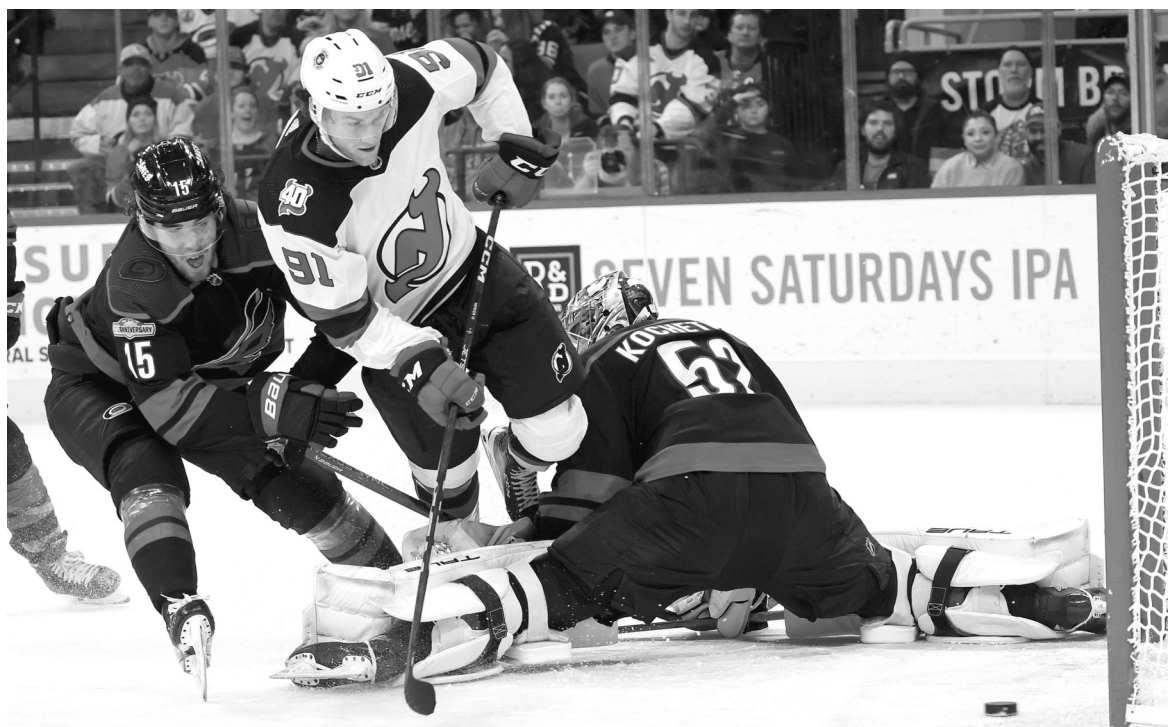
"They got the one (in the third) and then they didn't give us much," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We should have got more out of those first two periods."

The Devils didn't flinch when falling behind, even with the short-handed goals allowed.

"When we had our opportunities, we took advantage of it. ... You can't let that get to your head," Mercer said. "All we can do is make sure we change that and keep pushing."

Rangers 4, Wild 3 (SO): Artemi Panarin scored the deciding goal in a shootout and host New York beat Minnesota.

K'Andre Miller and Adam Fox each had a goal and an assist, and Filip Chytil also scored for New York. Igor Shesterkin finished with 28 saves as the Rangers



KARL B. DEBLAKER/AP

The New Jersey Devils' Dawson Mercer scores after driving between the Carolina Hurricanes' Dylan Coghlan (15) and goalie Pyotr Kochetkov during the third period Tuesday in Raleigh, N.C.

moved to 4-0-2 since a 4-0 loss to Washington on Dec. 27.

Kirill Kaprizov, Mats Zuccarello and Jon Merrill scored and Sam Steel had two assists for Minnesota, which is 9-3-2 in its last 14 games. Marc-Andre Fleury had a season-high 41 saves.

Kaapo Kakko scored for the Rangers and Zuccarello for the Wild in the first round of the tiebreaker. Panarin then lifted the puck over a sprawled Fleury on the Rangers' third attempt and Shesterkin denied Frederick Gaudreau to preserve the win.

Lightning 6, Blue Jackets 3: Nikita Kucherov had two goals and two assists, and host Tampa Bay won its eighth consecutive home game by defeating Columbus.

The Lightning also got goals from Nick Paul, Vladislav Namestnikov, Brayden Point and Ross Colton. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 20 saves.

Steven Stamkos had two assists but remains two goals away from becoming the 47th NHL player to reach 500.

Elvis Merzlikins stopped 40 shots for Columbus. Gavin Bayreuther, Tim Berni and Kirill Marchenko scored for the Blue Jackets, who have lost 10 in a row on the road and are 2-14-1 away from home.

Penguins 5, Canucks 4: Evgeni Malkin scored twice and added two assists as host Pittsburgh roared back from an early deficit against Vancouver.

Malkin's 28th career four-point game — fourth-most among active players — helped spark the Penguins after they spotted the Canucks a three-goal lead. Malkin

started the comeback with Pittsburgh's first power-play goal in nearly two weeks and gave the Penguins the lead after executing a pretty give-and-go with Jason Zucker.

Zucker, Sidney Crosby and Rickard Rakell also scored for Pittsburgh, which has won two straight following a six-game losing streak. Dustin Tokarski came in after Casey DeSmith was pulled 7:05 into the first period. Tokarski made 18 saves to pick up his first victory since April while playing for Buffalo.

Stars 2, Islanders 1 (SO): Jason Robertson scored in regulation and converted the only goal in the shootout to give visiting Dallas a victory over New York.

Robertson wired a wrist shot over Ilya Sorokin's glove in the shootout. Dallas' Jake Oettinger made 26 saves and stopped Mathew Barzal, Anthony Beauvillier and Brock Nelson in the tiebreaker.

Anders Lee scored for the Islanders and Sorokin finished with 23 saves in the opener of a five-game homestand.

Panthers 5, Avalanche 4: Matthew Tkachuk scored his second goal of the game with 3:30 remaining and visiting Florida beat Colorado after blowing a three-goal lead in the third period.

Tkachuk kept swiping at the puck down low on a power play until defenseman Cale Makar finally pushed it toward the side. But the puck went in off the skate of Avalanche forward Evan Rodrigues.

Kraken 4, Sabres 3: Matty Beniers, Justin Schultz and Jordan Eberle each had a goal and an as-

sist as visiting Seattle rallied past Buffalo for its sixth consecutive win.

Yanni Gourde also scored, Andre Burakovsky had two assists and Philipp Grubauer made 32 saves in the fifth of a seven-game trip, Seattle's longest of the season.

Red Wings 7, Jets 5: Moritz Seider had four assists, tying the Red Wings' record for a defenseman, and host Detroit topped Winnipeg to snap a three-game skid.

Jake Walman, Jonatan Berggren and Oskar Sundqvist scored in the first period — all assisted by Seider — to give Detroit a 3-0 lead. Dominik Kubalik, Dylan Larkin, Robby Fabbri and Lucas Raymond also scored for the Red Wings. Ville Husso finished with 32 saves.

Blues 4, Flames 3 (OT): Robert Thomas' goal 28 seconds into overtime capped host St. Louis' comeback against Calgary.

Thomas' winner came on a one-timer off an odd-man rush with Jordan Kyrou, who had a goal and two assists. Pavel Buchnevich had a goal and an assist, and Nikita Alexandrov also scored for the Blues, who won their fourth in the last five games. Jordan Binnington made 28 saves.

Sharks 4, Coyotes 2: Matt Nieto scored the tiebreaking goal nine seconds into the third period and visiting San Jose handed Arizona its sixth straight defeat.

Jaycob Megna scored with six minutes remaining for the Sharks. Megna's goal, his first of the season, came on an assist from Erik Karlsson, who leads the NHL with 42 assists and has points in 15 of the last 16 games.

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	40	32	4	4	68	156	88
Toronto	41	25	9	7	57	141	108
Tampa Bay	39	25	13	1	51	139	115
Buffalo	39	20	17	2	42	152	135
Florida	42	19	19	4	42	138	145
Detroit	39	17	15	7	41	121	134
Ottawa	40	18	19	3	39	120	127
Montreal	41	16	22	3	35	109	156

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	41	25	9	7	57	130	113
New Jersey	41	26	12	3	55	141	109
N.Y. Rangers	42	23	12	7	53	138	116
Washington	43	23	14	6	52	140	118
Pittsburgh	40	21	13	6	48	133	121
N.Y. Islanders	42	22	17	3	47	130	116
Philadelphia	41	16	18	7	39	114	133
Columbus	40	12	26	2	26	103	158

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	42	25	11	6	56	146	111
Winnipeg	41	26	14	1	53	138	110
Minnesota	40	22	14	4	48	129	116
St. Louis	42	21	18	3	45	136	151
Nashville	39	19	14	6	44	111	115
Colorado	39	20	16	3	43	116	115
Arizona	40	13	22	5	31	110	149
Chicago	39	10	25	4	24	86	144

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	42	27	13	2	56	140	120
Los Angeles	44	24	14	6	54	148	149
Seattle	40	24	12	4	52	147	125
Calgary	42	19	14	9	47	132	128
Edmonton	42	21	18	3	45	147	144
Vancouver	40	17	20	3	37	139	161
San Jose	42	13	21	8	34	130	157
Anaheim	41	12	25	4	28	96	169

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.

Tuesday's games

- Tampa Bay 6, Columbus 3
- Pittsburgh 5, Vancouver 4
- Seattle 4, Buffalo 3
- New Jersey 5, Carolina 3
- Detroit 7, Winnipeg 5
- N.Y. Rangers 4, Minnesota 3, SO
- Dallas 2, N.Y. Islanders 1, SO
- St. Louis 4, Calgary 3, OT
- San Jose 4, Arizona 2
- Florida 5, Colorado 4

Wednesday's games

- Washington at Philadelphia
- Nashville at Toronto
- Edmonton at Anaheim
- San Jose at Los Angeles

Thursday's games

- Carolina at Columbus
- Dallas at N.Y. Rangers
- Nashville at Montreal
- Seattle at Boston
- Toronto at Detroit
- Vancouver at Tampa Bay
- Winnipeg at Buffalo
- Minnesota at N.Y. Islanders
- Calgary at St. Louis
- Colorado at Chicago
- Ottawa at Arizona
- Florida at Vegas

Friday's games

- Winnipeg at Pittsburgh
- New Jersey at Anaheim
- Edmonton at San Jose

Saturday's games

- Calgary at Dallas
- Columbus at Detroit
- Montreal at N.Y. Islanders
- Ottawa at Colorado
- Philadelphia at Washington
- Pittsburgh at Carolina
- Toronto at Boston
- Vancouver at Florida
- Arizona at Minnesota
- Buffalo at Nashville
- Seattle at Chicago
- Tampa Bay at St. Louis
- Edmonton at Vegas
- New Jersey at Los Angeles

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	42	34	43	77
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	40	22	40	62
Nikita Kucherov, TB	39	16	43	59
Jason Robertson, DAL	42	29	29	58
David Pastrnak, BOS	40	32	26	58
Tage Thompson, BUF	39	31	26	57
Erik Karlsson, SJ	42	13	42	55
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	39	22	29	51

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Clemson, Pitt starting fast in wide-open ACC

BY WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

Brad Brownell isn't quite ready to go there. A decade-plus of trying to lead Clemson out of the ACC's muddled middle class has taught the Tigers' longtime coach it is best not to get ahead of yourself. Especially in January.

Brownell said he is not paying too much attention to the standings, even with his team — picked to finish 11th during the preseason — looking down at everyone else.

"It's way too early for all that," Brownell said moments after the Tigers put together a dramatic late rally to beat Pitt in a 75-74 victory that left Clemson (13-3, 5-0) as the lone ACC team still unbeaten in conference play.

The Tigers have shown a grittiness and maturity that could serve them well over the next two months in a topsy-turvy conference where the bluebloods appear to have been joined by new blood.

Preseason No. 1 North Carolina is still trying to find its footing after a nightmarish start. No. 24 Duke is searching for an identity in year one of the post-Mike Krzyzewski era. No. 13 Virginia found itself overwhelmed in the second half last week against Pitt.

All of this is good news for a conference that saw just four teams reach the NCAA Tournament last season.

The Panthers have already beaten the Tar Heels and Cavaliers. Another chance for the program to distance itself from its forgettable recent past comes Wednesday night when Pitt (11-5, 4-1) visits Duke (12-4, 3-2).

"I think the league is a lot deeper this year," first-year Blue Devils coach Jon Scheyer said. "It's a lot deeper and really, it's never been where you can go somewhere and you can just check it off where you're going to win. But this year in particular, you see teams beating up each other."

Clemson and Pitt have taken very different paths to relevance.

The Tigers are almost completely homegrown, a throwback approach in an era dominated by the prevalence of the transfer portal. Guard Brevin Galloway, a graduate transfer from Boston College, is the only starter who hasn't spent his entire collegiate career at Clemson.

"I've always said we have a very good culture," Brownell said, adding, "we're probably a little more talented, we're older, and we're probably reaping the benefits of that."

Contrast that with the approach Pitt coach Jeff Capel has taken in his fifth season. Six of the Panthers' top seven scorers are transfers, four of whom — guard Nelly Cummings (Colgate), forward Blake Hinson (Mississippi, Iowa State), Greg Elliot (Marquette) and Federico Federico (Northern Oklahoma) are in their first year with the program.

Pitt is essentially conducting a chemistry experiment.

"They do things the right way," Virginia coach Tony Bennett said after watching the Panthers pick apart the Cavaliers in front of a small but vocal crowd at a somewhat rejuvenated Petersen Events Center. "Obviously I don't know many of the players. (Capel) is off to a good start. For his sake, I hope he keeps it up."



MATT GENTRY, THE ROANOKE TIMES/AP

Junior guard Chase Hunter is one of four starters who has played his entire college career at Clemson and one of two to start every game.



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Kansas forward K.J. Adams Jr. shoots over Oklahoma forward Tanner Groves during the first half Tuesday in Lawrence, Kan. Adams scored 22 points as No. 2 Kansas won 79-75.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Kansas extends home win streak vs. Sooners to 22

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — KJ Adams scored a career-high 22 points and No. 2 Kansas closed the game on an 18-4 run to beat Oklahoma 79-75 on Tuesday night.

It wasn't easy, but in what Kansas coach Bill Self calls "a monster league," a win is a win.

"Give OU credit," Self said. "They did everything you're supposed to do to win a game on the road. They controlled tempo. They played smart. For the most part, they took care of the ball. They did a lot of good things. What else could they have done?"

"We're so happy that we won, but that's about as poor as we've played in a long time."

Kansas (14-1, 3-0 Big 12) got 17 points from Jalen Wilson, 11 from Dajuan Harris and 10 from Zach Clemence. The Jayhawks have won 22 straight games against Oklahoma in Allen Fieldhouse, including 16 straight under Self.

"We've been battle tested so much this year, especially with close games, we always find a way to stay composed," Wilson said. "We just continued to play our ball. There's no 10-point play, so there's no point in rushing the shots."

"There wasn't a time when I thought the game was over, because I know we're always going to find a way to win."

Grant Sherfield scored a season-high 25 points for Oklahoma (10-5, 1-2 Big 12). Sam Godwin added 12 points, Milos Uzan had 11 and Tan-

ner Groves had 10.

Kansas led by as many as seven points early in the second half, but Oklahoma used a 6-0 run to take a 50-48 lead with 14:12 left. The Sooners were still ahead 56-53 with 11:20 left in the game when Groves picked up his fourth foul.

Oklahoma hung tough, and led 61-56 with about nine minutes left as Adams was called for his fourth foul. The Sooners' largest lead of the game — 65-58 — came with 7:06 left.

But Kansas went on a run that's almost expected when it's playing at home.

"When something good happens (for Kansas) down the stretch it's hard to communicate because it's so loud," Oklahoma coach Porter Moser said. "There's a belief in here from the fan base. That snowball starts going downhill."

No. 5 Tennessee 77, Vanderbilt 68: Santiago Vescovi and Julian Phillips each scored 15 points as the host Vols recovered from a halftime deficit to pull out a win over the Commodores.

Vescovi scored 12 of his points in the second half to lead the recovery for Tennessee (14-2, 4-0 Southeastern Conference), who won their 25th straight game at Thompson-Boling Arena. Uros Plavsic contributed 11 points.

No. 11 Kansas State 65, Oklahoma State 57: Markquis Nowell scored 20 points and found Keyontae Johnson for an alley-oop dunk with 38 seconds left as the

host Wildcats held off the Cowboys.

Johnson added 12 points and Desi Sills had 11 for Kansas State (15-1, 4-0 Big 12), which won its ninth straight and matched its victory total from last season. Predicted to finish last in the Big 12, Kansas State went from unranked last week to just outside the top 10 in the AP poll.

No. 13 Virginia 65, North Carolina 58: Ben Vander Plas had 17 points and eight rebounds and the host Cavaliers used a 17-2 second-half run to beat the Tar Heels, who lost leading scorer and rebounder Armando Bacot to a left ankle injury.

No. 14 Iowa State 84, Texas Tech 50: Gabe Kalscheur scored a season-high 25 points to help host Iowa State roll past Texas Tech.

Michigan State 69, No. 18 Wisconsin 65: A.J. Hoggard made a tiebreaking layup with 41 seconds left and the visiting Spartans rallied past Wisconsin for their seventh consecutive victory in a game that had 14 lead changes.

No. 21 Auburn 82, Ole Miss 73: Wendell Green Jr. scored 23 points, including 18 in the second half, and the visiting Tigers dominated after halftime to beat the Rebels.

No. 23 San Diego State 74, Nevada 65: Matt Bradley scored 17 points and Lamont Butler added 15 and host San Diego State took sole possession of first place in the Mountain West Conference.

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	29	12	.707	—
Brooklyn	27	13	.675	1½
Philadelphia	25	15	.625	3½
New York	22	19	.537	7
Toronto	18	23	.439	11
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	22	20	.524	—
Atlanta	19	21	.475	2
Washington	17	24	.415	4½
Orlando	16	26	.381	6
Charlotte	11	31	.262	11
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	26	14	.650	—
Cleveland	26	16	.619	1
Indiana	23	18	.561	3½
Chicago	19	22	.463	7½
Detroit	11	33	.250	17
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	27	13	.675	—
New Orleans	25	16	.610	2½
Dallas	23	19	.548	5
San Antonio	13	28	.317	14½
Houston	10	30	.250	17
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	27	13	.675	—
Minnesota	20	21	.488	7½
Utah	21	23	.477	8
Portland	19	21	.475	8
Oklahoma City	18	23	.439	9½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	21	18	.538	—
L.A. Clippers	22	21	.512	1
Phoenix	21	21	.500	1½
Golden State	20	21	.488	2
L.A. Lakers	19	22	.463	3

Tuesday's games				
Philadelphia 147, Detroit 116	Toronto 132, Charlotte 120	Miami 112, Oklahoma City 111	Utah 116, Cleveland 114	Orlando 109, Portland 106
Phoenix 125, Golden State 113	L.A. Clippers 113, Dallas 101	Wednesday's games		
Chicago at Washington	Minnesota at Detroit	Indiana at New York	Milwaukee at Atlanta	New Orleans at Boston
San Antonio at Memphis	Houston at Sacramento	Phoenix at Denver	Thursday's games	
Oklahoma City at Philadelphia	Boston at Brooklyn	Charlotte at Toronto	Milwaukee at Miami	Cleveland at Portland
Dallas at L.A. Lakers	Friday's games			
Atlanta at Indiana	New Orleans at Detroit	New York at Washington	Golden State at San Antonio	Oklahoma City at Chicago
Phoenix at Minnesota	Orlando at Utah	Denver at L.A. Clippers	Houston at Sacramento	Saturday's games
Milwaukee at Miami	Boston at Charlotte	Memphis at Indiana	Atlanta at Toronto	Cleveland at Minnesota
Philadelphia at Utah	Dallas at Portland	Leaders		

Through Saturday Scoring					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Doncic, DAL	38	433	326	1301	34.2
Embiid, PHI	29	327	289	974	33.6
Antetokmpo, MIL	34	379	295	1078	31.7
Tatum, BOS	39	394	288	1202	30.8
Gil-Alex., OKC	37	380	343	1140	30.8
Rebounding					
	G	OFF	DEFTOT	AVG	
Sabonis, SAC	38	113	357	470	12.4
Gobert, MIN	35	124	293	417	11.9
Antetokmpo, MIL	34	78	322	400	11.8
Adams, MEM	36	178	228	406	11.3

ROUNDUP

Bridges, Suns spoil Curry's return

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Mikal Bridges had 26 points, nine rebounds and five assists and the undermanned Suns dominated in Stephen Curry's return from injury as Phoenix beat the Golden State Warriors for a third time this season, 125-113 on Tuesday night to snap a season-worst six-game skid.

Former Warriors guard Damon Lee received his championship ring in a pregame ceremony from brother-in-law Curry, then scored 22 points and grabbed seven rebounds against his former team. He converted six free throws over the final 1:13 and went 14-for-14 from the line overall.

"I just thought it was a special night all the way around," Suns coach Monty Williams said, noting of the ring ceremony, Lee's performance and the win. "That's a trifecta if I ever heard of one."

Duane Washington Jr. scored 21 points, Dario Saric contributed 19 points, nine rebounds and seven assists and Torrey Craig had 12 points and 14 rebounds for a deep Phoenix team missing four of five starters and six of eight rotation regulars.

Curry came back from an 11-game absence with a partially dislocated left shoulder to score 24 points on 8-for-22 shooting. Klay Thompson had 29 points with six three-pointers — four threes and 14 points in the first quarter alone. Jordan Poole's three with 1:28 remaining cut it to 117-111, and he scored 27 points.

While Warriors coach Steve Kerr noted, "to go 6-5 without Steph is an accomplishment," the reigning NBA Finals MVP couldn't do it all against a Phoenix team missing injured stars Devin Booker, Chris Paul, Deandre Ayton and Cameron Johnson. The Warriors have lost three in a row after a season-best five-game winning streak, wrapping up an eight-game homestand that matched the longest in franchise history.

Kerr said Golden State let its "guard down" with the Suns missing so many players.

"We didn't start competing until it was too late," he said.

Heat 112, Thunder 111: Jimmy Butler's three-point play with 12.9 seconds left capped an NBA-record performance by host Miami in a victory over Oklahoma City.

Butler's free throw made the Heat 40-for-40 from the foul line, breaking the 39-for-39 mark by Utah against Portland on Dec. 7, 1982.

Butler was 23-for-23 from the line, tying the second-most makes without a miss in NBA history. James Harden made 24 without a



GODOFREDO A. VASQUEZ/AP

Suns guard Mikal Bridges shoots over Warriors center Kevon Looney during the second half in San Francisco on Tuesday. Bridges led short-handed Phoenix past Golden State.

miss for Houston on Dec. 3, 2019, and Dirk Nowitzki made 24 without a miss for Dallas in a playoff game against the Thunder on May 17, 2011. Dominique Wilkins also went 23-for-23 in a game in 1992.

Butler had 35 points for Miami, which had used only eight players and was down to seven when Dewayne Dedmon was ejected in the second quarter. The Heat were without four regular starters — Tyler Herro, Bam Adebayo, Kyle Lowry and Caleb Martin — along



WILFREDO LEE/AP

Heat forward Jimmy Butler, right, scores against Thunder guard Jalen Williams in the last seconds on Tuesday. Miami hit 40 of 40 free throws in the win.

with reserves Duncan Robinson, Omer Yurtseven and Nikola Jovic, all because of injuries.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 26 points for the Thunder. Josh Giddey had a triple-double — 18 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists.

Jazz 116, Cavaliers 114: Donovan Mitchell had 46 points in his return to Utah, but the Jazz rallied late behind Jordan Clarkson to beat Cleveland.

Clarkson scored 32 points, including five three-pointers, and had nine straight down the stretch to fuel a decisive 13-0 run.

Mitchell, who spent his first five seasons with Utah, also had six assists and three steals. Darius Garland added 21 points and six assists for Cleveland.

Lauri Markkanen had 25 points and 16 rebounds for the Jazz. Malik Beasley, Mike Conley and Nickeil Alexander-Walker added 13 apiece as Utah won for just the second time in nine games.

76ers 147, Pistons 116: Joel Embiid rocked braids and had 36 points and 11 rebounds, James Harden added a second straight triple-double and host Philadelphia routed Detroit.

Harden finished with 16 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds

Embiid returned from a three-game absence with a sore left foot with a new look. But it was the same dominant performance out of last season's NBA scoring champion.

The Sixers raced to a 24-point

lead in the first half.

Clippers 113, Mavericks 101: Kawhi Leonard scored a season-high 33 points, Norman Powell added 27 and host Los Angeles snapped a six-game losing streak, overcoming Luka Doncic's 43-point night for Dallas.

Leonard tied a season high in rebounds with nine.

Doncic, who sat out Sunday against Oklahoma City due to left ankle soreness, missed four of his first five shots and had 12 points on 3-for-9 shooting in the first half before getting hot.

Magic 109, Trail Blazers 106: Franz Wagner scored 29 points, Wendell Carter Jr. added 20 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Orlando beat Portland.

Paulo Banchemo added 19 points for the Magic. They were coming off a 115-101 loss at Sacramento the night before.

Damian Lillard had 30 points for Portland. The Trail Blazers have lost four straight.

Raptors 132, Hornets 120: Pascal Siakam scored 28 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 24 and host Toronto beat Charlotte for its second straight victory

O.G. Anunoby had 22 points, matching his career high with six three-pointers. The Raptors made a season-high 20 three-pointers in 44 attempts.

Terry Rozier scored 33 points and LaMelo Ball had 24 points and 14 assists for Charlotte, which lost for the fifth time in six games.

MLB/COLLEGE FOOTBALL/NFL

Twins sign off on physical, finalize Correa's contract

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — This time, Carlos Correa's deal is done.

Correa passed his physical exam Wednesday and signed a \$200 million, six-year contract to return to the Minnesota Twins, who reentered the most convoluted free-agent negotiations in baseball history after deals with the San Francisco Giants and New York Mets fell through.

Correa agreed Tuesday to a contract that could be worth \$270 million over 10 seasons if the All-Star shortstop stays healthy, a uniquely structured deal the Twins assembled to jump back in contention after it appeared they'd been outspent — twice — by bigger-market franchises.

The agreements with the Giants and Mets dissolved over concerns by those clubs about the long-term viability of his lower right leg. Correa broke a bone near his ankle sliding into third base as a minor leaguer in 2014, and he had a metal plate inserted for extra support in the surgical repair.

Correa agreed Dec. 13 to a \$350 million, 13-year contract with the Giants, who scheduled a news conference a week later to announce the deal. That was called off hours before it was set to begin.

Correa agreed that night to a \$315 million, 12-year deal with the Mets, and high-spending owner Steve Cohen even publicly confirmed the pending agreement. But the Mets also raised concerns about the ankle after a Dec. 22 physical, and they held off finalizing the contract while attempting to negotiate protections over the next two weeks. Correa's agent, Scott Boras, maintained last month that Correa's tibia surgery should not have been an issue.

The Twins had more advanced insight on Correa's health, having signed him prior to last season in a deal that Correa opted out of to hit the market again after making \$35.1 million in 2022. Correa only missed time to an injured finger after being hit by a pitch and a bout with COVID-19. He played in 136 games, batting .291 with 22 homers and 64 RBIs and leading all major league shortstops with an .834 OPS.

The Mets issued a 13-word statement after the Twins announced the surprise signing of Correa for a second straight offseason: "We were unable to reach an agreement. We wish Carlos all the best."

The deal with the Twins gives



ABBIE PARR/AP

Carlos Correa passed his physical and finalized a \$200 million, six-year contract to return to the Twins.

Correa an \$8 million signing bonus, salaries of \$32 million in each of the first two seasons, \$36 million in 2025, \$31.5 million in 2026, \$30.5 million in 2027 and \$30 million in 2028.

Then it gets more complicated, part of the design to protect the Twins once Correa turns 34. The team has options for \$25 million in 2029, \$20 million in 2030, \$15 million in 2031 and \$10 million in 2032, and those salaries would become guaranteed if Correa has 575 plate appearances in 2028, 550 in 2029, 525 in 2030 and 502 in 2031. The contract could be worth \$225 million over seven seasons, \$245 million over eight years and \$260 million over nine seasons.

Correa's options also could be triggered by a top-five finish in MVP voting, a Silver Slugger award or World Series or League Championship Series MVP. He gets a no-trade provision.

Correa won the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year award with Houston, a Gold Glove and Platinum Glove award winner in 2021 and twice made the All-Star team with the Astros, who drafted him first overall in 2012.

The Twins raved about Correa's leadership during their first season together, and the native of Puerto Rico praised them right back—re-marking often about how much he enjoyed the community, the ballpark and the organization. He insisted all along the Twins were in the mix to keep him, even with the bigger spenders pursuing him in a particularly lucrative off-season for shortstops.

Correa's \$33.3 million average annual salary is the 11th-highest among current players, just behind Mets shortstop Francisco Lindor's \$34.1 million.



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

Georgia coach Kirby Smart, right, and quarterback Stetson Bennett celebrate Monday. Bennett was the offensive player of the game in four CFP games but is considered a late-round NFL Draft prospect.

QB Bennett an underdog again in NFL's draft class

BY CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

Stetson Bennett has a new world of doubters to disprove.

After winning a second consecutive national championship at Georgia, the 25-year-old quarterback is now facing questions about his NFL Draft qualifications.

Bennett (5-11, 190) is seen as undersized and lacking elite arm strength—the same questions he faced when he walked on at Georgia in 2017. After leaving for junior college and returning to win back-to-back titles, including Monday night's 65-7 rout of TCU, Bennett is being excluded from the list of top quarterback prospects in the April NFL Draft.

After watching Bennett pass for four touchdowns and rush for two scores against TCU, Georgia coach Kirby Smart said draft experts are making the same mistake college recruiters made six years ago.

"When you have a quarterback that can do the protections and check things and know what the defense is doing, yet still beat you with his feet, you've got a high-level quarterback," Smart said. "And people have slept on Stetson Bennett for too long. He needs an opportunity to play for a long time at the next level."

College football has a long list of standout QBs who never caught fire in the NFL. Just among two-time national championship winners, that list includes Matt Leinert (USC), A.J. McCarron (Alabama) and Tim Tebow (Florida). McCarron was a fifth-round pick; Leinert and Tebow, both Heisman Trophy winners, went in the first round.

Bennett never allowed himself to forget his background as a walk-on. He remained driven through the end of his college career. He

was not satisfied with his performance in Georgia's 42-41 College Football Playoff semifinal win over Ohio State so he capped his career with perhaps his best game, according to Smart.

Bennett completed 18 of 25 passes for 304 yards. Both TD runs and two of his four scoring passes came in the first half as the Bulldogs (15-0) built a 38-7 lead. He added two third-quarter scoring passes before Smart took him out to an ovation from Georgia fans.

Bennett was named offensive player of the game in each of his four CFP games, all of them wins.

Even so, Alabama's Bryce Young, Ohio State's C.J. Stroud, Kentucky's Will Levis, Tennessee's Hendon Hooker and Florida's Anthony Richardson are expected to be selected in the first two rounds. Bennett may have to wait until the third day of the draft.

Dane Bugler, NFL Draft analyst for The Athletic, said Bennett's draft outlook has improved this season but he is still viewed as a possible late-round pick who will "be drafted to be a backup, not a starter."

"About midway through this season was when I started to hear from scouts that Bennett had a realistic chance of being drafted," Bugler said Tuesday. "And those chances only increased with the way he finished the season."

ESPN draft analyst Matt Miller said Bennett was projected as a possible undrafted free agent before the season but has improved his draft outlook.

"His lack of size and arm strength are still issues and there will be those who believe the supporting cast around him elevate his game, but Bennett's poise and toughness paired with his accuracy and timing give him a chance to stick in the NFL," Miller said.

NFL BRIEFS

Tagovailoa ruled out for game vs. Bills

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has not been cleared to return to football activities and has been ruled out for Sunday's playoff game against the Buffalo Bills as he remains in the NFL's concussion protocol, coach Mike McDaniel said Wednesday.

The Dolphins are preparing for rookie Skylar Thompson to be their starter when they face the Bills for the third time this season. Backup Teddy Bridgewater is working his way back to full strength after dislocating his pinky finger.

McDaniel said he doesn't know if Tagovailoa will be able to travel with the team this weekend, and although he hasn't had any setbacks in the healing process, there are "compounding variables" at play that will keep him off the field indefinitely.

Tagovailoa was diagnosed with his second concussion of the season after a Week 16 loss to Green Bay and missed the Dolphin's final two games of the regular season.

Hamlin released from Buffalo hospital

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Bills safety Damar Hamlin was released from a Buffalo hospital on Wednesday, more than a week after he went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated during a game at Cincinnati, after his doctors said they completed a series of tests.

A news release from the Bills quoted Dr. Jamie Nadler as saying: "We have completed a series of tests and evaluation and in consultation with the team physicians, we are confident that Damar can be safely discharged." Nadler said Hamlin will continue his rehabilitation with the Bills.

Hamlin is going home after spending two days undergoing tests at Buffalo General Medical Center. He was transferred to Buffalo after spending last week at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center, where the 24-year-old from the Pittsburgh area experienced what doctors called "a remarkable recovery."

Hamlin collapsed on the field after being struck in the chest by Bengals receiver Tee Higgins while making what appeared to be a routine tackle during the first quarter of Buffalo's since-canceled game at Cincinnati on Jan. 2.

NFL PLAYOFFS

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Changes pay dividends for five franchises

Record number of coaches headed into playoffs after first year on job

By **JOSH DUBOW**
Associated Press

Coaching changes paid off in a big way for several teams this season.

From impressive turnarounds for Jacksonville and the New York Giants to big boosts for Minnesota and Miami, a record-setting five of the 10 teams that hired new coaches for the 2022 season made the playoffs.

Doug Pederson led the Jaguars on a worst-to-first flip in the AFC South, Brian Daboll helped the Giants go from last place to a wild-card berth, Kevin O'Connell took Minnesota from a losing record to 13 wins and an NFC North title, Mike McDaniels got Miami to its first playoff berth since 2016 and Todd Bowles helped Tampa Bay repeat as division champs for the first time in franchise history.

That broke the previous record of four coaches getting to the postseason in their first season with a team set in 1997 when Jim Fassel (Giants), Pete Carroll (Patriots), Bobby Ross (Lions) and Steve Mariucci (49ers) did it.

The most impressive turnaround came in Jacksonville where Pederson helped the Jaguars become the first team since the 2008 Dolphins to win their division the season after posting the league's worst record.

Daboll's work helping the Giants go from 4-13 to 9-7-1 despite a flawed roster hurt by a staggering \$54.8 million in dead money on the salary cap got to the postseason for the first time since 2016.

Bowles struggled a bit more as



McDaniels



Bowles



Daboll



O'Connell

Tampa Bay won just eight games to become the fourth division winner in NFL history with a losing record. Two of the previous three — the 2010 Seahawks (7-9) and 2014 Panthers (7-8-10) — won a playoff game, while Washington (7-9) lost to the Bucs in the 2020 playoffs.

Rematch weekend

All six games on wild-card weekend are rematches from the regular season, including three matchups of division foes with Baltimore playing Cincinnati, Miami visiting Buffalo and San Francisco hosting Seattle.

Two of those three matchups ended in splits in the regular season with the Ravens and Bengals, and Dolphins and Bills splitting their two games.

The 49ers swept the Seahawks but know how little that matters after losing to the Rams in the NFC title game last season following two regular-season wins.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Jaguars head coach Doug Pederson talks to safety Andre Cisco during the first half of Saturday's game against the Tennessee Titans in Jacksonville, Fla. Pederson and the Jaguars won the AFC South.

In the Super Bowl era, teams that swept an opponent in the regular season are 14-10 in a playoff rematch, including 13-6 when the game is at home like it is for the 49ers on Saturday.

In the other rematches, the Chargers are seeking to avenge a Week 3 loss to Jacksonville, the Giants are looking to do the same after losing to the Vikings in Week 16, and the Cowboys are trying to do it after losing in Week 1 to Tampa Bay.

This is the fifth time since the merger that every game in the opening round of the playoffs is a rematch from the regular season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. It happened on four-game

wild-card weekends in 2009, 2004, 1994 and 1992.

Streaking

The Niners are headed into the postseason on a quite a roll, having won the last 10 games of the regular season with Jimmy Garoppolo starting the first five games and Brock Purdy the last five.

The last team to have two QBs with consecutive five-game winning streaks were the perfect Dolphins in 1972 with Bob Griese and Earl Morrall.

San Francisco is the 13th team in the Super Bowl era to end the regular season on a winning streak of at least 10 games.

The results of the previous 12

haven't been overly impressive with only three winning the Super Bowl with the 1972 Dolphins, 1976 Raiders and 2003 Patriots extending the streaks through the postseason.

Two others got to the Super Bowl before losing with the 1967 Raiders and 2007 Patriots falling in the final game.

Five of the teams lost their first playoff game: the 2019 Ravens, 2012 Broncos, 2009 Chargers, 2006 Chargers and 1993 Oilers.

Kansas City won a wild-card game in 2015 before losing in the division round and Pittsburgh won the division-round game in 2004 before losing in the AFC title game.

Chemistry: New receivers insist they haven't let egos get in the way

82 catches for 823 yards and five scores. Engram has 73 catches for 766 yards, with four TDs.

Together, they finished just shy of becoming the first NFL team to have three newcomers with 800 yards receiving each.

"I think it comes down to guys really just being unselfish," Lawrence said. "When there's really no egos, that makes things a lot easier for me to do my job to the best of my ability and not worry about who's getting the ball necessarily, just trying to get it to the right place."

No egos? Really? All four insist there has been no angst about who's getting the ball, who's finding the end zone or who's getting the credit.

"Everybody has a right to have

Scoreboard

NFL playoffs

Wild card
Saturday, Jan. 14
Seattle at San Francisco. **AFN-Sports, 10:30 p.m. Saturday CET; 6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**
L.A. Chargers at Jacksonville. **AFN-Sports, 2:15 a.m. Sunday CET; 10:15 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Sunday, Jan. 15
Miami at Buffalo. **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Sunday CET; 3 a.m. Monday JKT**
N.Y. Giants at Minnesota. **AFN-Sports 10:30 p.m. Sunday CET; 6:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
Baltimore at Cincinnati. **AFN-Sports 2:15 a.m. Monday CET; 10:15 a.m. Monday JKT**
Monday, Jan. 16
Dallas at Tampa Bay. **AFN-Sports 2:15 a.m. Tuesday CET; 10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT**

some type of ego, but we don't," Engram said. "Everybody's had their day; everybody's had their success. And we see how much

fun we're having winning. I've never been a part of a winning team like this. I'm going to keep doing whatever it takes to keep this going, and that's what they're going to do, too.

"We've got a special group and we're on a special path. We found a process that works along that path, and we're all committed to it."

It surely helps that all three newcomers got paid, at least to some extent. Kirk signed a four-year, \$72 million contract that included \$37 million guaranteed. Jones got \$24 million over three years, with \$14 million guaranteed.

Engram gambled on himself by signing a one-year, \$9 million deal but likely will be the most sought-

after tight end when free agency opens in March.

Engram hopes to remain in Jacksonville, and teammates already are openly campaigning for him to land a long-term deal.

Lawrence, Jones and Kirk believe they're just getting started, too. The Jaguars expect to add suspended receiver Calvin Ridley to the mix next month, but they don't want to disrupt the chemistry in what's emerged as the team's deepest and most talented groups.

Getting to this point was somewhat methodical. Lawrence created camaraderie by organizing a weeklong trip to the Bahamas and a weekend trip to Las Vegas last summer.

"That was a big step for us," En-

gram said. "We had fun together, but we also had to be responsible and get our work in and then go have fun and watch out for each other."

It may have helped that all three also had something to prove: Kirk that he could be the go-to guy; Jones that he could be a legitimate No. 2; and Engram that he could be more consistent and surehanded.

"It's a group of guys that have talent and may not have previously had the ability to show it," Jones said. "It was playing Robin to Batman. When you bring those guys into a building together and you give everyone a fresh slate, they just start playing for each other. And that's the most beautiful thing about it."

SPORTS



Shiffrin comes up short

Skier finishes second in slalom, just misses 83rd career victory » Page 18

NFL

Offensive chemistry

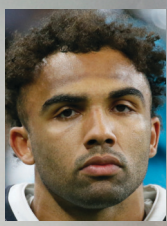
Trio of new pass catchers fuels Jaguars' attack

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

Zay Jones has been in the NFL long enough to realize — and appreciate — the uniqueness of Jacksonville's receiving group.

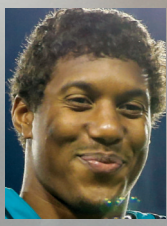
The Jaguars signed three pass catchers in free agency to help second-year quarterback Trevor Lawrence, and each of them delivered a career season.

Jones, fellow receiver Christian Kirk and tight end Evan Engram quickly bonded with Lawrence and became one of the most dynamic trios in the league.



Kirk

They played significant roles in helping the Jaguars (9-8) win the AFC South for the second time in franchise history and will be counted on in a wild-card matchup against the Los Angeles Chargers (10-7) on Saturday night.



Jones

"It happened faster than I had even anticipated," Jones said. "We just started speaking the same language.

Where did that come from? I think maybe the freedom and availability we have in this building to say anything and be ourselves."

Jones, Kirk and Engram have combined to catch 239 passes for 2,687 yards and 17 touchdowns, roughly 68% of Lawrence's completions and two-thirds of his TD passes.

Kirk leads the way with 84 receptions for 1,108 yards and eight touchdowns. Jones is close behind with

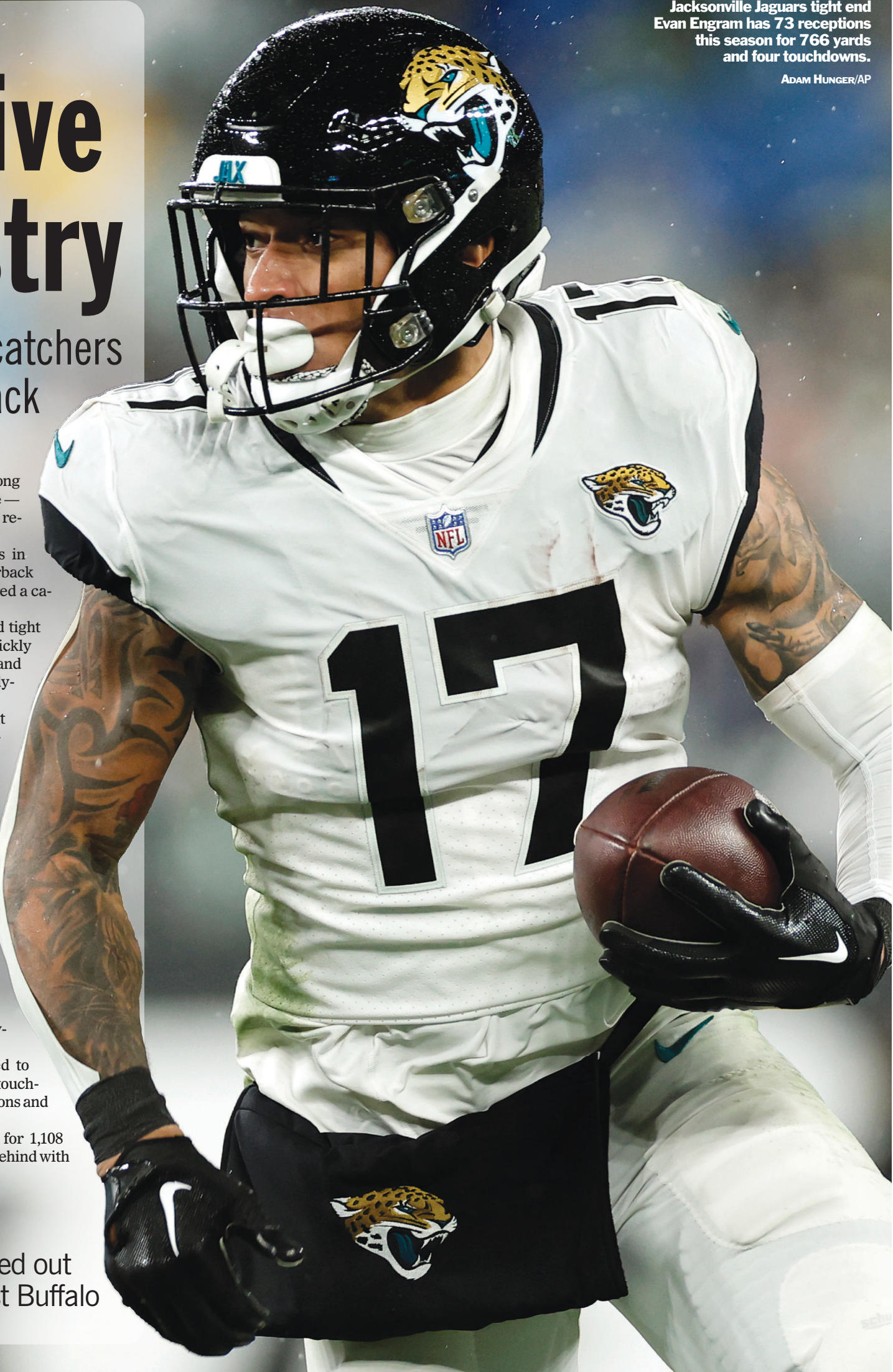
SEE CHEMISTRY ON PAGE 23

INSIDE

Miami QB Tagovailoa ruled out of wild-card game against Buffalo
Page 22

Jacksonville Jaguars tight end Evan Engram has 73 receptions this season for 766 yards and four touchdowns.

ADAM HUNGER/AP



Bridges, Suns ruin Curry's return to Warriors

» NBA, Page 21

