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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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## Pentagon eyes almost \$850B in its 2025 budget

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Pentagon on Monday sent Congress a nearly \$850 billion budget request for fiscal 2025 that would invest heavily in technology aimed at countering Chinese military advancements and a pay raise for troops while also shrinking the size of U.S. armed forces.

The \$849.8 billion proposal represents the largest dollar-figure ever sought by the Pentagon, but defense officials noted they would have requested more if not for spending caps imposed by Congress in 2023. The budget caps — alongside the failure of Congress to pass a 2024 Pentagon budget more than five months into the fiscal year — forced the Defense Department to make “difficult, but responsible, decisions” in many cases, including to cut some 7,800 service members from the active-duty force, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin wrote in a statement accompanying the budget rollout.

“This request will bolster our ability to defend our country ... [and] it will better posture us to deter aggression against the United States, our allies and partners, while also preparing us to prevail in conflict, if necessary,” Austin wrote, citing the 2023 Fiscal Responsibility Act’s caps.

Senior defense officials last week blasted Congress’ failure to pass a defense appropriation bill

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### NATION

Biden budget plan has tax breaks, lower health care  
**Page 8**



VIKTOR BILIAK/AP

A Ukrainian infantryman with the 110th brigade poses for a photo in Avdiivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine. The loss of the city of Avdiivka in February marked the end of a long, exhausting defense for the Ukrainian military. One brigade had defended the same block of buildings for months without a break. Another unit had been in the city for nearly two years.

# Losing Avdiivka to Russia

## Ukraine dealt with exhaustion, dwindling reserves, missing commander

BY ALEX BABENKO, HANNA ARHIROVA,  
SUSIE BLANN AND LORI HINNANT  
*Associated Press*

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine — One Ukrainian brigade had defended the same block of industrial buildings for months without a break. Another had been in Avdiivka for nearly the entire two years of the war, bone-tired but with no replacements to relieve them.

Ammunition was low, and the Russians con-

ducted dozens of airstrikes every day, using “glide bombs” to obliterate even fortified positions.

Russian soldiers came in waves: First lightly armed grunts, to force the Ukrainian defenders to spend precious bullets, followed by well-trained soldiers. Sometimes groups of Russians popped out of tunnels in front of them and opened fire.

As morale plummeted, a battalion com-

mander — in charge of hundreds of men — vanished under murky circumstances, according to law enforcement documents seen by The Associated Press. One of the soldiers with him was found dead. The commander and another soldier with them have not been seen since.

Within a week, Ukraine had lost Avdiivka, the city in the Donetsk region that it had been

SEE LOSING ON PAGE 7



BUSINESS/WEATHER

Disney seeks expansion of Calif. theme park

Associated Press

Walking through the frosty, snow-covered hamlet of Arendelle from “Frozen,” or the bustling, critter-filled metropolis of “Zootopia” might be possible one day for visitors to Disney’s California theme parks.

That’s only if Disney wins approval from local officials to expand its Anaheim resort over the next four decades.

The proposed expansion wouldn’t increase Disney’s 490-acre footprint in Southern Califor-

nia or change what the company already has permission to build. But it could help the company develop new attractions. They could place rides and entertainment options on what is currently a sprawling, 50-acre parking lot — and move parking for Disneyland to a multistory structure — all while keeping within the boundaries of a resort surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

“We know what kind of stories we would love to tell,” said Rachel Alde, Disney’s senior vice presi-

dent of global development and finance. “We need to get the guidance on what we can build there so we can understand how.”

The city of Anaheim’s planning commission was scheduled Monday to review the proposal for Disneyland, dubbed the “happiest place on Earth.” The project — which would require Disney to invest at least \$1.9 billion in the theme park, lodging, entertainment and related uses over the next decade — still must be approved by the city council before taking effect.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		
Euro costs (March 12)	\$1.07	
British pound (March 12)	\$1.25	
Japanese yen (March 12)	144.00	
South Korean won (March 12)	1292.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3768	
Britain (Pound)	1.2824	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3504	
China (Yuan)	7.1816	
Denmark (Krone)	6.8274	
Egypt (Pound)	40.0184	
Euro	.9158	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8199	
Hungary (Forint)	362.12	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6170	
Japan (Yen)	146.98	
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3071	
Norway (Krone)	10.4755	
Philippines (Peso)	55.37	
Poland (Zloty)	3.92	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7506	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3308	
South Korea (Won)	1314.06	
Switzerland (Franc)	.8786	
Thailand (Baht)	35.44	
Turkey (New Lira)	32.0128	

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	3.25	
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.25	
Federal funds market rate	0.09	
3-month bill	0.10	
30-year bond	1.65	

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MILITARY

# Yokota Fly Girls event hopes to inspire futures

By **KELLY AGEE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — International Women’s Day at this airlift hub in western Tokyo dawned cold and wet but the weather did not deter the third annual Fly Girls celebration.

More than 100 girls and boys from Yokota and Yokosuka middle and high schools attended Friday’s event, organized by Capt. Casey Guardia, a Huey pilot with Yokota’s 49th Airlift Squadron. Also present were airmen from Misawa Air Base and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force.

“Women’s numbers have been rising (in the military) and it’s exciting to show the students that women are here, that we’re making an impact and that we work really well with our male counterparts in aviation,” Guardia told Stars and Stripes at the event.

“And for the little girls out there, you can do whatever you set your mind to ... you can still have an impact and you can still make a big difference,” she said.

The students’ day started with a morning ride on a C-130J Super Hercules airlifter.

“Today really opened my (eyes) to a new experience of joining the Air Force,” say Kaiya Tryka, 17, an 11th grader at Yokosuka’s Nile C. Kinnick High School. “This was just really a fun experience, and I really enjoyed it.”

Tryka said she plans to join the Air Force after graduation and wants to fly the F-15 Eagle.

“Being able to experience getting on the plane and seeing a different perspective, and how pilots manage and work things on the plane was really interesting to me,” she said.

Guardia invited the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and Misawa’s 14th Fighter Squadron, and orga-

nized aircraft static displays and information tables in the 459th Airlift Squadron hangar. There, attendees met the women who pilot and maintain the



**Guardia**

aircraft.

“I was just looking at the aircrew equipment, said Senior Airman Kyoka Kusuhashi, a C-130H Hercules maintainer for the Air Self-Defense Force. “I’ve never seen that, so that was very cool. I’ve also never seen the aircraft, as well, and it is a chance for me to meet all our American friends here as well.”

Kusuhashi said only about 10 out of 200 people working at Komaki Air Base are women, a big difference that she sees between the American and Japanese military.

Guardia said her mother, Char-



PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

**Yokota High School ninth-grader Mallory Cochran gazes out the window of a C-130J Super Hercules during a Fly Girls excursion over Tokyo, on Friday.**

lene Guardia, served six years in the Army as an occupational therapist and has been a great role model as her daughter paves her own path in the military.

“I’m really lucky to serve when I am, when women’s numbers are rising,” she said.

“About 25% of the students were women when I was in pilot training at the Air Force Academy.

Guardia said it’s great to an increasing number of women in the service.

“We’re grateful for all the women that came before us and kind of paved the path, and that we just don’t face the hardships they faced because they’ve really led the way,” she said.

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**Lt. Col. Kira Coffey, commander of the 36th Airlift Squadron, answers students’ questions during a Fly Girls event at Yokota Air Base, Japan.**

## Marines investigate corporals charged for antisemitic and racial slur graffiti

By **GARY WARNER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps is investigating two lance corporals assigned to the prestigious Marine Corps Barracks Washington for their roles in scrawling antisemitic and racial slurs on the walls of a dormitory at the University of Maryland.

Lance Cpl. Sergio Delgado, 21, and Lance Cpl. Hayden Pritchard, 22, face charges in Prince George’s County district court for the April 2023 incident.

Both Marines appeared in court Thursday and asked for a speedy trial. Under Maryland law, they must now be brought to trial within 180 days of the court appearance.

Pritchard is charged with race/

religion property damage and trespassing. Delgado is charged with trespassing.

All the charges are misdemeanors. The property damage charge carries a maximum penalty of three years in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500. Trespassing carries a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail and a fine of up to \$500 for a first offense.

The Marine Corps has launched its own review but will wait for the civilian court to rule before proceeding.

“The accused Marines are waiting trial, and upon conclusion, Marine Barracks Washington will determine which administrative and/or punitive measures are necessary and appropriate,” Capt. Kayla Haas, spokeswoman for the

Marine Barracks Washington, said in a statement Thursday.

Pritchard and Delgado were charged Feb. 8 after a nearly year-long investigation into the April 29, 2023, incident at La Plata Hall at the University of Maryland in College Park, Md. Investigators used security video of the hall to trace the source of the graffiti.

The university police contacted the Marines in January 2024 to assist with identifying the perpetrators of the crime.

The Marine Barracks has been the symbolic home of the Marine Corps since 1801. It is home to its elite ceremonial units and the residence of the Marine commandant.

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## Airman who nearly drowned recovering at Walter Reed

By **JENNIFER H. SVAN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — An airman who was found unresponsive in the base pool last month is recovering at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Ramstein officials said Monday.

The airman, who has not been identified, was transferred to the hospital in Bethesda, Md., on Thursday. The service member is in stable condition and has shown positive signs of recovery, base officials said in a statement. The airman will do physical therapy while at the hospital, officials said.

The 86th Airlift Wing Safety Office is investigating the Feb. 21 incident, the base statement said. Safety investigations are required

to be completed within 30 days.

The airman was “performing underwater training exercises in the lap pool area” when they lost consciousness, Lt. Col. Megan Mooney, the commander of the 86th Force Support Squadron, said in a statement last month. Lifeguards resuscitated the airman, who was initially in critical but stable condition and hospitalized at Saarland University Medical Center in Homburg.

The Ramstein Aquatic Center has a 25-meter fitness pool with lap lanes and a deep area with a diving board. It also has a separate pool area for children with a depth of up to 3 feet and a water slide.

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MILITARY

# US, Japan talks of Osprey return after ban lifted

By SETH ROBSON  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*  
YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The U.S. and Japanese governments are working on a timeline for resuming tiltrotor flights over Japan, according to officials from both countries.

On Friday, the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps lifted a flight ban imposed on V-22 Ospreys after an Air Force tiltrotor crashed off Japan on Nov. 29, killing eight Yokota-based members of Special Operations Command.

A timeline for resuming flights in Japan for U.S. and Japanese tiltrotors “continues to be closely coordinated between the Government of Japan and the Government of the United States,” U.S. Forces Japan said in a statement Friday.

On Dec. 6, the U.S. military grounded about 400 Ospreys after Japan grounded its fleet of 14 during an investigation into the Nov. 29 incident and an August crash in Australia that killed three Marines.

The Air Force cited equipment failure for the most recent crash but was not specific.

“Return to flight timelines after the issuance of flight clearance for the V-22 are based on operational requirements unique to each service and mission profile,” USFJ said in its statement. “V-22 aircraft will only operate after all maintenance, safety and procedural changes have been implemented.”

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with top service leaders March 1 and endorsed their plans for a safe and measured return to operation, according to The Associated Press.

Naval Air Systems Command lifted the flight ban Friday, but

Austin had asked for a briefing because of the significant safety concerns and the fact that three of the services and a critical ally are involved.

Japan’s Defense Ministry, in a statement Friday, echoed the USFJ announcement.

“The confirmation work between Japan and the United States has recognized that materiel failure that caused the accident has been identified and we believe that flight operations can be resumed safely by taking various safety measures for the concerned failure,” the statement said.

U.S. officials have provided their Japanese counterparts with a detailed explanation of the November accident, Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters Saturday.

The allies will coordinate closely to come up with a timeline for resuming flights in Japan, he said, according to a transcript of his news conference posted on the ministry’s website.

“We have received an unprecedented level of detailed information from the U.S. side regarding the circumstances and cause of the accident, as well as safety measures,” Kihara said. “We evaluate this as reasonable from the professional standpoint of the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces, as well as the standpoint from the operator.”

However, he declined to discuss the details until the U.S. releases an accident report.

The ministry will explain the circumstances and cause of the accident to anxious Japanese residents before flights resume, he said.

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An Air Force CV-22B Osprey arrives at Yokota Air Base, Japan, in 2018.



PHOTOS BY GUY BLACK

Elizabeth MacHardy and Gordon Strachan hold a plaque commemorating Canadians killed in the Korean War. Their brother, Pvt. William Leslie Strachan, was one of the six who died on Hill 467 in the battle for Chail-li Village.

## Battlefield plaques will remember Canadians’ Korean War sacrifices

By CHRISTOPHER GREEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — A Canadian man who walked nearly 200 miles at home and in South Korea last year to commemorate a battle his countrymen fought in the Korean War has created a more lasting remembrance.

Guy Black walked 186 miles in April, starting in British Columbia, Canada, then completing the trek in South Korea to the battlefield at Kapyong, east of Seoul. His journey coincided with the 72nd anniversary of the fight, in which a brigade of Canadian and Australian troops held off three larger Chinese regiments.

Now Black is planning to erect two plaques at the sites of Kapyong and another battle fought a month later by the 2nd Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment at Chail-li, a village near Pocheon city.

During his trek to Hill 677 at Kapyong, Black noticed memorials everywhere commemorating the battle but no honor roll with the names of those who died at Chail-li, he told Stars and Stripes.

“The idea for my next project began to grow,” he said. “I realized I had found something important I wanted to bring to life.”

The Canadian army regards Kapyong as its “greatest victory” of the war, but Chail-li was a defeat, according to a July 2021 article on the Canadian government website.

The 2nd Battalion launched its attack on May 30, 1951, to capture Chail-li Village, Hills 162 and 269 and the larger Hill 467.

They encountered stiff resistance from the Chinese; dark skies and heavy rain precluded air or artillery support. The Canadians fell back from Hill 467.

“Withdrawal, usually a difficult



A plaque honors six Canadians killed in a Korean War battle to capture Chail-li Village on May 30, 1951.

feat, was successful; Canada’s six casualties and fifty-four wounded soldiers were recovered and rescued from the scene, leaving no soldier behind,” said the account on Canada’s website.

Once Black arrived home in June, he started working on two plaques — one of Pocheon and another for Kapyong — listing the names of each Canadian soldier killed in those battles.

“The most time-consuming part is writing the text for each plaque and making sure there are no errors. It is especially complicated because the text is written in English and Korean,” he said.

For help with translations, Black contacted Sgt. Jonghyeon Jeon of the South Korean army, and David Suh, the international relations officer in Gapyeong county.

A friend, Elizabeth MacHardy, and her family also inspired the

project, Black said.

MacHardy’s brother, Pvt. William Leslie Strachan, was one of the six who died on Hill 467 in the battle for Chail-li village.

“The death of their beloved brother has haunted them ever since he was killed,” Black said. “I have tried to do as much as I can to help them heal and receive recognition for how much they lost and have suffered due to the Korean War.”

The Pocheon plaque is with the South Korean Customs Service and will be sent to Jeon to install at the Pocheon battle site. The Kapyong plaque will be sent around April, Black said.

“I believe in service above oneself, and I feel privileged I am actually able to contribute to something so important,” he said.

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MILITARY

# Pentagon finds no evidence of alien visits

## Report says claims about secret government extraterrestrial programs are based on hearsay

By SHANE HARRIS  
AND DAN LAMOTHE  
*The Washington Post*

A lengthy Defense Department review of U.S. government activities related to “unidentified anomalous phenomena,” more commonly known as UFOs, has found no evidence that extraterrestrial intelligence has visited Earth or that authorities have recovered crashed alien spacecraft and are hiding them from the public.

The review, publicly released on Friday, covered all official U.S. investigatory efforts from 1945 to the present and examined classified and unclassified government archives.

It was unequivocal in its conclusions, finding “no evidence that any [U.S. government] investigation, academic-sponsored research, or official review panel has confirmed that any sighting of a UAP represented extraterrestrial technology.” Reports of flying objects or suspected alien craft usually turned out to have quotidian explanations: They were “ordinary objects and phenomena and the result of misidentification,” sometimes by well-meaning witnesses who thought they had spotted something otherworldly.

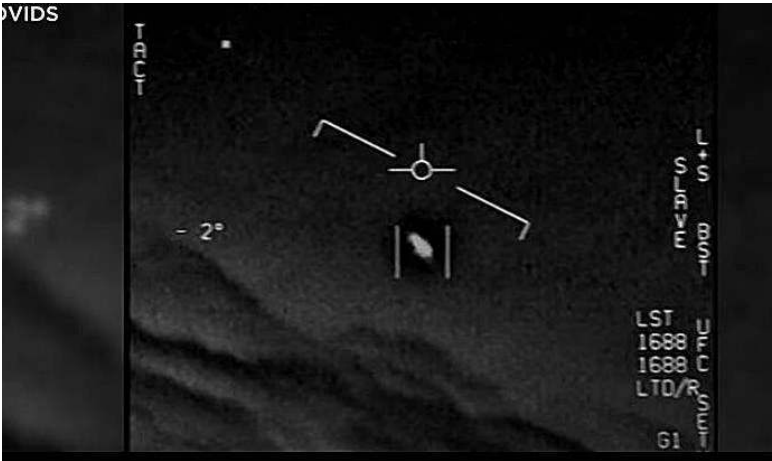
The report is likely to be scrutinized and rejected by independent investigators, former U.S. personnel and conspiracy theorists who appear convinced the government is hiding evidence of alien life and has constructed an elaborate set of classified programs devoted to reverse-engineering their technology. Last summer, a former intelligence officer who had served on a Pentagon UAP task force sparked headlines and speculation when he told Congress that the government has a secret repository of downed alien spacecraft and corpses.

The new report, compiled by the Defense Department’s All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO), directly addressed those allegations.

“AARO determined, based on all information provided to date, that claims involving specific people, known locations, technological tests, and documents allegedly involved in or related to the reverse-engineering of extraterrestrial technology, are inaccurate,” the office stated in a 60-plus page unclassified document.

### Full access

Even before the report was published, critics of the office had questioned whether investigators would be hamstrung by a lack of access to highly classified material. But the office devised a “secure



An unidentified object appears in a recording played during a panel discussion NASA officials had on unidentified anomalous phenomena in May 2023.

process,” according to the report, working with government agencies to review so-called special-access programs that interviewees had identified, either by their supposed code names or description.

The office’s investigators were “granted full access to all pertinent sensitive [U.S. government] programs,” and when companies and contractors were identified, the office interviewed senior-level executives, scientists and engineers in those organizations, the report stated. Investigators had access to a wide range of government departments and agencies, including the Defense Department and the military services, the intelligence community — including records held by the CIA — the Energy Department, the Homeland Security Department and the National Archives.

The investigators seemed to anticipate that their work would face a skeptical audience. They argued that the public’s imagination and misunderstanding about alien visitations has been fueled by an industry of TV shows, books, movies and social media that repeat the same extravagant claims about spaceships in hangars and alien bodies in basements.

“A consistent theme in popular culture involves a particularly persistent narrative that the [U.S. government] — or a secretive organization within it — recovered several off-world spacecraft and extraterrestrial biological remains ... and that it has conspired since the 1940s to keep this effort hidden from the United States Congress and the American public,” the report stated.

Government personnel are some of the most ardent believers in that idea. The investigators interviewed about 30 people, including some who had worked on official UAP research programs, “who claimed to have insight into alleged [U.S. government] invol-

vement in off-world technology exploitation,” the report said. In some cases, they had stumbled upon actual, highly classified programs that had nothing to do with aliens.

“Many have sincerely misinterpreted real events or mistaken sensitive U.S. programs for which they were not cleared as having been related to UAP or extraterrestrial exploitation,” Tim Phillips, the AARO acting director, told reporters.

Their conclusions were based on a sort of classified game of telephone, in which whispers of secret programs, often based on hearsay, circulated for years in the military and intelligence community.

“We saw a small group of people who knew each other, who all cited their observations as the purpose for their beliefs or for their observations,” Phillips said.

Some of those people had worked on UAP research under a Pentagon program in the early 2000s that aimed to study next-generation aerospace technologies. It had a powerful backer in then-Sen. Harry M. Reid, D-Nev., who had an abiding interest in unidentified flying objects and hailed from the home state of Area 51, the secretive Air Force testing grounds that hold a central place in UFO lore.

According to the report, UAP research was not part of the program’s mission, but it ventured into that territory, examining reports of paranormal activity, “creatures” and “international-dimensional phenomena.”

In 2017, the work of that outfit became public, along with videos taken from military aircraft that seemed to show UFOs flying at extraordinary speed, to the astonishment of military pilots. That exposure ushered in a new era of openness in the military and intelligence community, which began to examine UAPs — which some thought might be drones or hyper-

sonic weapons — as a potential threat to national security and commercial aviation. Military personnel have since been encouraged to report sightings; some have later been attributed to foreign aircraft, surveillance balloons, atmospheric anomalies or simply debris floating in the air.

### Confused suspicions

Confusion appeared to permeate the statements from witnesses who spoke to the AARO investigators. Some of the programs’ code names that interviewees provided turned out not to exist or could be traced back to defunct entities, the report found. One person mistakenly identified a private UAP research program as being run by the U.S. government.

Another program brought to AARO’s attention, Kona Blue, was alleged to be a Homeland Security Department effort “to cover up the retrieval and exploitation of ‘nonhuman biologics,’” the report found. In other words, alien bodies.

The origins of those suspicions, investigators found, traced back to some of those earlier Pentagon researchers, backed by Reid, who had strayed into studying UAPs.

When the Defense Intelligence Agency canceled that effort in 2012 “due to lack of merit,” its supporters proposed that Homeland Security fund a new version to investigate paranormal research, including “human consciousness anomalies,” the report found. The program, which they proposed calling Kona Blue, also would reverse-engineer “off-world spacecraft that they hoped to acquire.” The Kona Blue backers assumed that biological evidence of aliens was already in the government’s possession, the report found.

Homeland Security leaders ultimately rejected the proposal.

The AARO investigators investigated a number of specific claims, including that the CIA had been working with a company to examine alien spacecraft; that a former senior U.S. military officer had “touched the surface” of a spacecraft and had seen one “floating in a building,” presumably a military or contractor facility; and that alien technology remains in the possession of companies, not the government, as part of an effort to keep it away from congressional overseers.

Other interviewees provided accounts of their own UAP sightings, as well as claims that they had seen military personnel loading containers of spacecraft onto planes or overheard scientists discussing the presence of alien beings during the testing of special-

ized materials. Others claimed that people who knew about the classified activities had signed nondisclosure agreements with a provision that any breach of secrecy was “punishable by death.”

The AARO investigators found no evidence to substantiate these accounts and were able to dispute or debunk some of them.

The former military officer who was said to have touched a spacecraft denied this claim when investigators asked him about it, couldn’t remember the conversation in question and speculated that the issue might stem from a misunderstanding: He had, in fact, once touched an F-117 Night-hawk stealth fighter, “an aircraft so secret Nevada folklore labeled it a UFO,” according to an Air Force publication from 2018.

The person who claimed that aliens were present during a materials test had likely misunderstood the conversation, which probably referred to “a test and evaluation unit that had a nickname with ‘alien’ connotations at the specific installation mentioned,” the report said.

In another instance, an interviewee who claimed to have seen an object “exhibiting strange characteristics” was probably correct. Based on the specific information provided, the person had likely witnessed the test of a new military “platform” that was “not related in any way to the exploitation of off-world technology,” the report found.

The AARO investigators even managed to get their hands on what private investigators alleged was a sample from an alien craft. On further inspection, it turned out to be a “manufactured, terrestrial alloy and does not represent off-world technology or possess any exceptional qualities,” the report found. The sample’s contents were magnesium, zinc and bismuth, with other trace elements such as lead.

People alleged to have participated in efforts to conceal alien technology, including executives at companies said to be participating in the classified work, denied this when questioned by investigators, attesting to the truthfulness of their statements for the record.

The Washington Post has previously interviewed six individuals who claimed to have information about U.S. government and private-sector crash retrieval and reverse-engineering activities. While the AARO report does not identify the people its investigators interviewed, several of their accounts match the detailed claims of those who spoke to The Post.



PACIFIC

Army powerlifter primed for Netflix competition

Officer stationed in S. Korea will appear on ‘Physical: 100’

By David Choi  
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — An Army officer who lifts weights competitively will be featured in Netflix’s upcoming season of “Physical: 100,” a South Korean reality show in which 100 contestants compete in theatrical strength-based challenges.

Maj. Gibson Kim, of the 411th Contracting Support Brigade at Camp Humphreys, described himself as a “normal guy doing normal stuff with my day job and family,” during a March 4 interview with Stars and Stripes.

Before his workday starts, however, this father of a 5-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter rises early for a round of weightlifting at his home gym. He started as a powerlifter at Rutgers University, where he earned a degree in economics in 2007. Soon after, he worked for Chase Bank as a manager trainee. He left that job to become a fitness trainer.

“I could not see myself doing that for the rest of my life,” he said. “So, I said, ‘I’m going to figure something else out.’”

That led Kim to Officer Candidate School in 2011 and an Army commission the following year. His passion for powerlifting and



U.S. Army Maj. Gibson Kim, a contestant on the upcoming season of “Physical: 100,” poses at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, on March 4.

the Army’s focus on physical requirements drew him to the service.

“With powerlifting, it’s a numbers game,” he said. “No matter how you feel, the numbers don’t lie — the fact that it’s very clear whether you’re making progress or not; to me that’s very rewarding.”

Kim said Netflix approached him last year to be a contestant on “Physical: 100, Season 2 — Underground,” which airs March 19.

“I watched the first season, got me hooked, and then I was thinking if I got an opportunity to compete, that would be so incredible,”

he said. “It was a no-brainer for me.”

The first season debuted in January 2023. One hundred contestants compete in strength-based challenges to win roughly \$225,000. The challenges include rolling 220-pound boulders up a makeshift hill, pushing a wooden boat and tugs of war on a platform.

In a Netflix promotional video revealing the newest contestants, Gibson is seen with Ultimate Fighting Championship welterweight Kim Dong Hyun, South Korean rugby coach Andre Jin Coquillard and National Sport Climber Kang Min-su.



Kim is on the upcoming season of the reality series, in which 100 contestants compete in strength challenges.

Kim said he was surprised by the athleticism of the diverse group of contestants while filming last summer.

“I’m not a small guy by any means, but when I first walked in and saw the other contestants, it was kind of intimidating,” he said. “The first season was such a success that I knew they were going to [increase] the scale in many ways.”

Kim said he trained for about four months for the show, focusing on his weaknesses.

Powerlifters are generally “focused on one repetition at maximum strength, unlike someone who does long-distancing train-

ing,” Kim said. “So, generally speaking for powerlifters, we don’t have great stamina.”

Kim said he purchased four sandbags to carry and throw, which “completely changed my training to resemble athletic and conditioning-based” athletes. He said he lost about 20 pounds and shed 5% of his body fat following the new regimen.

Christopher Szefler, Kim’s former workout partner and a personal trainer in New York City, described him as “extremely dedicated to health and wellness.”

“When it came to education, he would try to look up everything that he could in every aspect of fitness,” Szefler said by phone on Friday.

“Powerlifting’s commitment can be relatively easy in terms of work that you need to put in to see a good result,” he said. “For someone that has to do a lot of work and then come home and have a family life, it can be a nice way to stay focused.”

Kim said the most difficult aspect of the show is how contestants “only get one chance” to succeed.

“Every single time, you’re seeing a completely new thing that you haven’t dealt with,” he said. “Being able to understand the situation, analyze it and try to come up with a plan, I think that was the tough part.”

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1,000-pound bomb from Korean War discovered

By David Choi  
AND YOO KYONG CHANG  
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — An unexploded 1,000-pound bomb leftover from the Korean War was partially dismantled and removed from a construction site last week south of Seoul, a South Korean air force spokesman said.

The AN-M65 general-purpose bomb from the 1950-53 conflict was discovered Thursday by workers at a construction site in Cheongju city, roughly 60 miles south of the capital, a South Korean air force spokesman said by phone Monday.

The spokesman declined to say precisely where the bomb was discovered. South Korean officials regularly speak to the media on a customary condition of anonymity.

Air Force explosive ordnance disposal specialists removed the bomb’s detonator about two hours after it was discovered, the

spokesman said. The bomb was removed for further investigation, he said.

“Our [explosive ordnance disposal] members are experts and have always been making their efforts for national security and the people,” the spokesman said.

M65 bombs were dropped from P-47 Thunderbolt and B-26 Invader aircraft on “reinforced targets like dams and concrete or steel railroad bridges,” according to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force’s website.

Unexploded ordnance dating to the Korean War are routinely discovered throughout South Korea.

In June, unexploded ordnance was safely recovered by the South Korean military at a construction site in Seoul, a little over a mile from the U.S. Army’s Yongsan Garrison.

U.S. aircraft dropped around 635,000 tons of bombs throughout the Korean Peninsula during the war, former University of Chicago professor Bruce Cumings wrote in



This AN-M65 general-purpose bomb was discovered Thursday at a construction site south of Seoul, South Korea.

his book, “The Korean War: A History.”

At least 5 million artillery rounds were fired by allied and communist troops in the final two months of the conflict and up to 2 million unexploded ordnance and land mines are estimated to remain on the border between North and South Korea, according to United Nations Command’s website.

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Court fines teenage Marine \$680 for assaulting older Japanese man, trespassing

By Jonathan Snyder  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO  
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — A Japanese court fined a 19-year-old Marine the equivalent of about \$680 for trespassing and assaulting an older man in November near an air base south of Hiroshima.

Japanese authorities did not identify the Marine, who under age 20 is considered a juvenile in the Japanese judicial system. Marine spokesmen declined to identify the service member on Monday, saying they were not yet apprised that his case had closed.

The Marine was referred first to family court, then back to the Yamaguchi Public Prosecutors Office last month for criminal proceedings, a spokesman for that office said by phone Friday.

A court in Iwakuni city rendered a summary judgment Thursday and ordered the Marine

to pay 100,000 yen, the spokesman said.

The victim, 67, scuffled with a U.S. service member Nov. 18 following a break-in at a store in Iwakuni, according to a Yamaguchi Broadcasting report.

He “sustained serious injuries, such as bruises to his body and a cut on his head,” the report said. The service member was taken away by other Americans.

“We respect the decision of the court, and we take this matter very seriously,” base spokesman 1st Lt. Aaron Ellis told Stars and Stripes by email on Monday.

“The actions for which the service member was convicted are contrary to our values, and we expect our service members to be upstanding members of the community,” he said.

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EUROPE

Losing: Russia had a seemingly limitless supply of men, ammo

FROM PAGE 1

defending since long before Russia's full-scale invasion. Nearly surrounded and vastly outnumbered, the Ukrainians made the decision to withdraw and avoid the same kind of deadly siege soldiers experienced in the port city of Mariupol's Azovstal steel mill, where thousands were taken captive or killed.

The Associated Press interviewed 10 Ukrainian soldiers to reconstruct how dwindling ammunition, overwhelming Russian numbers and military mismanagement led to the worst Ukrainian defeat in a year. The same problems pose risks for Ukraine's near future.

"We weren't so much physically exhausted as psychologically, being chained to that place," said Viktor Biliak, an infantryman with the 110th Brigade who had been in the area since March 2022.

His unit was on the southern outskirts of Avdiivka, in a position called Zenith. Normally the men would dig fortifications, but Biliak said there were constant Russian attacks, and no energy or equipment beyond hand shovels.

A soldier named Oleh arrived in mid-October with the 47th Brigade. Ill-trained Russian infantry, wearing new uniforms and marching in rows, made easy targets, he said. The Ukrainian equipment worked and ammunition supplies were enough to return fire.

But by the end of November, during a major Russian assault, the Ukrainians realized something had changed: The skies filled with glide bombs, unguided Soviet-era weapons retrofitted with a navigational targeting system, as well as motion-sensing explosive drones that could enter buildings and hunt down personnel.

With ammunition stocks running low, the Ukrainians fought back with whatever caliber of ammunition was left in the warehouses. For every shell they fired, the Russians fired eight or nine, the men said.



Commander of Ukraine's 3rd Assault Brigade Andriy Biletsky, left, shakes hands with newly recruited soldiers at a military base in September. The brigade arrived in Avdiivka last month with orders to head to its coke plant. By the time the fighters got there, Russian troops had nearly closed a wide pincer around it.

"The longer it went, the more we got this stew of shells for all kinds of weapons," Oleh said.

Among the Ukrainian soldiers, the idea of defeat took seed.

Hundreds of Ukrainian forces withdrew to Avdiivka's coke plant after repeated Russian onslaughts last fall. The Soviet-era factory, a warren of alleys, railways and tunnels, was a near-perfect defensive position.

But as the new year began, even the coke plant felt vulnerable.

Ukrainian brigades try to rotate men out of direct front-line positions after a matter of days or a week at most. And brigades with long-term engagements are supposed to be pulled back and reinforced to allow them to replace people lost to death or injury, rest their nerves and resupply.

That didn't happen in Avdiivka. As officials in Kyiv argued over

the delicate question of expanding the draft, many of the soldiers in the east felt abandoned by Western allies who no longer sent weapons, by their high command, and by fellow Ukrainians.

In addition to endless frontal assaults, Russian soldiers started popping up, opening fire on the Ukrainians before disappearing.

"They just kept throwing themselves at the coke plant, leaving piles of their corpses there. Mountains of bodies and heaps of smashed equipment," said Maksym, a soldier in the Presidential Brigade.

But the Russians had a seemingly limitless supply of men and ammunition. The Ukrainian men saw their options narrowing.

With the constant pressure and the lack of foreign help, there was talk of retreat, Oleh said. "Their constant assaults exhausted us."

The 3rd Assault Brigade arrived early in the second week of February, with orders to head to the coke plant. By the time the seasoned Ukrainian fighters got there, Russian troops had nearly closed a wide pincer around it.

On Feb. 8, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fired Ukraine's military chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi. It was the biggest shake-up of the military since the start of the war.

The next day just outside Avdiivka, officers fighting to save the town gathered in a command post a few miles from the coke plant. There was a heated discussion and the commander and two soldiers got into a car. What happened next is unclear, at a time when emotions were running high and Russian saboteurs were appearing behind the Ukrainian lines.

Authorities don't believe the



ALEX BABENKO/AP  
The serviceman of 47th brigade known by call sign "Azimuth," 33, speaks during an interview with a reporter in Ukraine's Donetsk region last month.

missing officer had classified information or military hardware on him when he disappeared with the two others. One of the soldiers was found dead nearby of gunshot wounds. The commander and the other man vanished.

The AP is not naming the men to avoid endangering anyone who might be prisoner.

On Feb. 15, Biliak received the order for a nighttime retreat for the 110th Brigade from his point on the southern flank of Avdiivka. He had been at the same intersection for just under two years.

"It would have been joyful if it had happened earlier. We were always ready to drop everything and flee from there because we had known for a long time that the end was coming," Biliak said. "But then we already knew it was too late, and it was out of desperation."

The 3rd Assault Brigade received the command to retreat from the coke plant the next day.

On Feb. 17, Russia claimed control of Avdiivka and its coke plant.

Ukraine's new military chief, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, released a statement Feb. 29 emphasizing the importance of experienced and decisive commanders and noting that an inspection of Donetsk had revealed "certain miscalculations in mastering the situation and assessing the enemy."

Deutsche Bahn seeks to derail new train drivers' strike

By ALEXANDER RIEDEL  
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — German railway operator Deutsche Bahn was taking court action in an attempt to prevent its train drivers from going on strike Tuesday, which would halt railway traffic in much of country for the second time in a week.

Deutsche Bahn filed for an injunction at the Frankfurt Labor Court on Monday, the company criticizing the union's abrupt timing and arguing that the strike, affecting both freight and passenger

services, is "groundless" and "disproportionate."

The train drivers' union GDL was to strike for 24 hours starting at 2 a.m. Tuesday, the union said this weekend, after concluding a 35-hour strike Friday.

In the case of a strike, Deutsche Bahn said it would maintain basic service across its long-distance, regional and S-Bahn trains. The company on its website advised passengers to book seats in advance due to expected limitations.

Tickets affected by the strike will remain valid and passengers

will have the option to travel at other times without being bound to specific trains, Deutsche Bahn said. Additionally, seat reservations can be canceled for free and full refunds are available for canceled trains.

Union leaders announced the strike less than 48 hours in advance in order to prevent Deutsche Bahn from creating an emergency timetable. Fewer trains may roll Tuesday as a result, according to German automobile club ADAC.

Tuesday's standoff between

Deutsche Bahn and GDL would mark the sixth work stoppage over wages and benefits, with each side blaming the other for the failure to reach an agreement that could avert further disruptions in Germany's rail services.

"(Deutsche Bahn) shows once again that it has no interest in improving the working, income and living conditions of its employees, but simply wants to 'win,'" GDL chief Claus Weselsky said in a Friday statement. "This is not what a collective bargaining and social partnership on equal footing looks

like."

Mediation talks last month aimed to address the union's demands for reduced working hours, salary increases and improvements in working conditions. Key to the deadlock is GDL's demand for a 35-hour workweek with full wage compensation. A mediator's suggestion to gradually reduce working hours to 36 per week by 2028 was rejected by GDL.

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NATION

# Biden’s budget offers tax breaks, lower health costs

By Josh Boak  
and Colleen Long  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Monday released a budget proposal aimed at getting voters’ attention: It would offer tax breaks for families, lower health care costs, smaller deficits and higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations.

Unlikely to pass the House and the Senate to become law, the proposal for fiscal 2025 is an election year blueprint about what the future could hold if Biden and enough of his fellow Democrats win in November. The president and his aides previewed parts of his budget going into last week’s State of the Union address, and they provided the fine print on Monday.

If the Biden budget became law, deficits could be pruned \$3

trillion over a decade. It would raise tax revenues by a total of \$4.9 trillion over that period and use roughly \$1.9 trillion to fund various programs, with the rest going to deficit reduction.

Biden aides said their budget was realistic and detailed while rival measures from Republicans were not financially viable.

“Congressional Republicans don’t tell you what they cut, who they harm,” White House budget director Shalanda Young said. “The president is transparent, details every way he shows he values the America people.”

Parents could get an increased child tax credit in 2025, as payments would return briefly to the 2021 level funded by Biden’s coronavirus pandemic relief package. Homebuyers could get a tax credit worth up to \$10,000 and \$10 billion in down payment aid



MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP

**President Joe Biden puts on a button that was thrown to him from the crowd that says "Regulate Guns NOT Women" as he speaks at a campaign rally Saturday at Pullman Yards in Atlanta.**

for first-generation buyers. Corporate taxes would jump upward, while billionaires would be charged a minimum tax of 25%.

Biden said in his State of the Union that Medicare should have the ability to negotiate prices on 500 prescription drugs, which could save \$200 billion over 10

years. Aides said his budget does not specify how many drug prices would be subject to negotiations.

The president was traveling Monday to Manchester, N.H., where he planned to call on Congress to apply his \$2,000 cap on drug costs and \$35 insulin to ev-

eryone, not just people who have Medicare. He’ll also seek to make permanent some protections in the Affordable Care Act that are set to expire next year.

The proposal would provide about \$900 billion for defense in fiscal 2025, about \$16 billion more than the baseline.

## Budget: Budget request seeks to trim Army, Navy troop levels

FROM PAGE 1

for fiscal 2024, which began Oct. 1. The department has operated since then on a series of limited, stopgap spending authorities that largely prohibit the Pentagon from starting new programs — including weapons development or new construction projects — and lock them into fiscal 2023 spending levels. The lack of a budget also made building the 2025 budget request unusually difficult, according to a senior defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the proposal ahead of its formal release.

The Pentagon has operated under the stopgap budget deals — known as continuing resolutions — for a cumulative five years during the past 15 years, the official said.

“We are standing still instead of moving forward — a pretty unhealthy situation with respect to the federal budget process as a whole,” the official said. “I know the committees that write the bills are not the drivers of this. They probably could have written this bill in December, possibly could have written it in November. But, you know, we are where we are.”

Service members also would see a 4.5% pay boost under the spending plan, and Defense Department civilian employees would see a 2% pay raise.

The plan calls for some \$17.5 billion for military construction,

including \$2 billion for family housing and \$2.3 billion for barracks, medical clinics, child development centers and on-post schools.

The budget would cut the Pentagon’s authorized active-duty force from 1,305,400 to 1,267,700 troops — as most of the services struggle with recruiting — and work toward using more unmanned systems in combat operations.

The bulk of the cuts to troops would come from the Navy, according to budget documents. The sea service would see some 5,000 sailors cut from the active-duty force, leaving it with about 332,300 sailors. The other cuts would come from the Army, which would lose about 2,700 active-duty soldiers leaving it with 442,300 troops.

The Marines would remain the same size with about 172,300 active-duty troops. The Air Force would remain the same size at about 320,000 active-duty airmen. The Space Force would grow by about 300 guardians to a 9,800-troop force.

In all, the Army would get some \$185.8 billion in fiscal 2025. The Navy would get \$209 billion, and the Marine Corps would receive about \$48.6 billion. The Air Force would get some \$188 billion, and the Space Force would receive about \$29.4 billion.

Among the areas that the Penta-

gon downsized in its 2025 request were for researching and testing emerging technologies and for buying the latest ready-to-deploy weapons compared to its request one year ago.

The Defense Department is requesting about \$167.5 billion for weapons procurement in 2025, down from its \$170 billion request last year. The procurement budget would spend some \$61.2 billion on air power, including fighter jets, drones and helicopters, and another \$41.8 billion on sea power, including six new battle ships.

Pentagon officials plan to spend \$9.8 billion on hypersonic and long-range subsonic missiles, which they consider some of the most critical munitions to check Chinese military ambitions.

The 2025 budget plan would also spend \$49.2 billion to upgrade the Pentagon’s nuclear enterprise, funding forthcoming programs including the B-21 Raider bomber, the Columbia-class submarine and the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile program. Another \$28.4 billion would be invested to bolster U.S. missile defense capabilities, budget documents show.

The department plans to spend \$143.2 billion on research, development, testing and evaluations, down from a \$145 billion request last year. It proposes spending about \$17.2 billion in emerging science and technology and about

\$1.8 billion on artificial intelligence advancement.

While the Pentagon continues to focus on supporting Ukraine — and defense officials pushed again for the House to approve a Senate-passed defense supplemental with billions in weapons aid for Ukraine — its 2025 budget proposal shows China remains its top concern over other threats such as Russia and transnational terrorism.

The 2025 request includes \$9.9 billion for deterrence operations in the Indo-Pacific, focused largely on countering Chinese influence in the region. Meanwhile, the request includes some \$3.9 billion for its longer-running European deterrence initiative, which is focused on deterring Russian aggression.

For the first time, the Pacific deterrence program includes funding to directly support Taiwan, which fears an invasion from China. The budget request includes about \$500 million to support outfitting the island nation. The Pacific funding would also provide increases to ballistic missile defense in Guam, training operations with partner forces in the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility, and fielding of uncrewed and autonomous systems that military officials consider critical if the United States ended up in a war with China.

The European initiative would

fund continued rotations of combat units into Europe to train alongside NATO partners and deter Russia from considering attacking an alliance nation.

The senior defense official said those pools of money only include some of the funds that ultimately go toward U.S. efforts to deter Russian and Chinese aggression. He called on the House to approve a roughly \$95 billion Senate-passed security supplemental with billions in weapons and aid for Ukraine and Israel, which were not included in the 2025 Pentagon budget request.

That supplemental funding alongside a 2024 budget, the official said, would drastically improve the Pentagon’s ability to help Ukraine, to deter Russia and to restock some weapons that it previously provided the Ukrainians.

“We have not been able with the funding we’ve had to date [this fiscal year] — and there’s a big funding piece waiting in the supplemental — been able to replenish everything we’ve already given to Ukraine. So, it would come back on our own [combat] readiness and our own stockpile to a certain extent if we can’t get new funding. It touches our partners, and it touches us.”

Stars and Stripes reporter Matthew Adams contributed to this report.  
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NATION



NATHAN HOWARD/AP

Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., left, speaks alongside Reps. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich.; Jonathan Jackson, D-Ill.; and Cori Bush, D-Mo., during a vigil with state legislators and faith leaders on hunger strike outside the White House to demand that President Joe Biden call for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, on Nov. 29.

# Progressive groups unite to counter pro-Israel groups before '24 election

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facing a barrage of super PAC money, more than 20 progressive groups are coming together to forcefully counter pro-Israel groups' efforts to primarily challenge liberal members who've been critics of Israel's blistering military offensive in Gaza.

The coalition, called Reject AIPAC, includes Jewish peace organizations and Arab American and Muslim groups that have been organizing in record numbers since the Israel-Hamas war began in October.

Their efforts are a direct response to pro-Israel political action committees like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, better known as AIPAC, that are pledging or planning to spend tens of millions of dollars to try to defeat Democratic members of the so-called "squad" in primaries and the general election this year. That campaign has turned the otherwise safely Democratic districts into election battlegrounds.

"These are a handful of Black and brown progressive incumbents who are under attack from a

threat of \$100 million in spending and usually Democratic leadership and establishment is up in arms anytime someone primaries an incumbent," said Usamah Andrabi, communications director for Justice Democrats, one the groups leading the coalition. "But the energy is a little lighter when it comes to some of these progressives and so we are coming together to ensure that they have the resources to defend themselves against AIPAC."

The strategy, according to Andrabi, is to link up the grassroots organizations behind a seven-figure "electoral defense campaign" that aims to not only protect members of Congress being targeted by AIPAC but also to bring light to what they see as the group's divergence from the longstanding values of the Democratic Party.

AIPAC has defended its track record, telling The Associated Press last month that "it is entirely consistent with progressive values to stand with the Jewish state" and that the group has a history of supporting members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Nonetheless, the coalition's lobbying effort will focus on promoting pro-Palestinian members and candidates as well as highlighting national polling that shows that the majority of Democratic voters are aligned with their stances, including increasing calls for a cease-fire in Gaza and conditioning U.S. aid to Israel as the number of civilian casualties rises above 30,000 Palestinians in just five months of war.

This comes as AIPAC shifted in its own strategy in the last several years, transitioning from strictly a lobbying organization to helping elect centrist, pro-Israel Democrats. In 2022, it began challenging Democratic incumbents in primaries.

Before November, the group and PACs connected to its ethos have once again begun contributing to candidates running against members of the squad. The Democrats facing challengers include Jamaal Bowman of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Summer Lee of Pennsylvania and Cori Bush of Missouri, all of whom have not only called for a cease-fire but have demanded an end to U.S. aid to Israel.

# Dems' anti-Biden effort spreads to more primaries

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI  
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. — The protest-vote movement over President Joe Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war has spread to several states and raised more questions about whether a small but significant number of Democrats angry at Biden might abandon him in November.

A week after 101,000 Michigan voters chose "uncommitted" on their ballots, so did roughly 263,000 voters in the five Super Tuesday states where similar ballot options were available. Minnesota, which had the most organized effort outside of Michigan, saw 1 in 5 Democratic voters mark the "uncommitted" option, a higher percentage than the 13% who voted uncommitted in Michigan.

Organizers are watching the state of Washington's primary on Tuesday to see how many voters select "uncommitted." And a "Leave It Blank" campaign has formed for Georgia's Tuesday primary that's intended to have the same effect, as is a "uninstructed" vote in Wisconsin's April 2 primary.

Supporters of the protest argue anger over the war could endanger Biden's chances in swing states like Michigan against former President Donald Trump in their likely rematch. Biden's allies believe disaffected Democrats will return to the president's fold when faced with a choice between him and Trump, who the president's campaign has argued is a threat to democracy and is planning a sweeping set of policy changes that would attack liberal priorities.

While the reasons for voters favoring unpledged delegates over Biden may differ, the choice has been increasingly pushed as a protest vote against Biden's handling of the conflict in Gaza, where more than 30,000 people have been killed, two-

thirds of them women and children, in Israel's offensive following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed 1,200 people.

"We wanted to show that these voters not only morally matter but politically matter as well. Because if they sit out the election, which it seems like many of them might, that would have severe consequences for Biden," said Waleed Shahid, a Democratic strategist who first organized the effort in Michigan.

Lauren Hitt, a Biden campaign spokeswoman, said following the Super Tuesday primaries that the president "believes making your voice heard and participating in our democracy is fundamental to who we are as Americans."

"He shares the goal for an end to the violence and a just, lasting peace in the Middle East. He's working tirelessly to that end," Hitt added.

As Biden's supporters are quick to point out, the "uncommitted" vote isn't a historical anomaly. In 2012, over 400,000 people cast their ballots as "uncommitted" or "no preference," expressing discontent with then-President Barack Obama's reelection. Biden has won every state's primary contest so far and is on track to clinch the nomination this month.

Still, the single-issue campaign has alarmed some of Biden's closest allies.

"Obama's results were just randomized. This is showing that there are particular groups of our coalition that are upset," said Rep. Ro Khanna, a Biden surrogate and cease-fire supporter.

Over 100,000 people voted "uncommitted" on Feb. 27, far exceeding a 10,000 vote goal that had been intentionally set low. Khanna, the California congressman, said Biden's recent references to a potential cease-fire were a "direct result" of the grassroots movement in Michigan.

# Youth activist groups endorse Biden, cite his actions over his age

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jack Lobel is a college sophomore who will be voting in his first presidential election this fall, casting a ballot for Joe Biden.

At 19, he's six-plus decades Biden's junior, which isn't lost on him. But Lobel is spokesperson for Voters of Tomorrow, one of 15 youth organizations that announced Monday that they are jointly endorsing the reelection of the oldest president

in U.S. history — defying polls consistently showing voter concerns about the 81-year-old Biden's age.

"If age were really a concern we would not see this much energy around these groups," said Lobel, an urban studies major in New York.

The joint endorsement is meant as a show of political strength for Biden, who would be 86 by the end of the second term he's seeking — after Super Tuesday all but cemented

a November rematch of the 2020 election between him and former President Donald Trump.

The groups' affinity for the president is little surprise given that young people tend to be more left-leaning than many other voting blocs. Still, it may soften the blow of many voters' concerns about Biden's age. A recent Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey found that 63% of Americans believe Biden

lacks mental capability to serve effectively as president, though 57% felt similar about Trump, who is 77.

Joining Voters of Tomorrow formally supporting Biden is NextGen PAC, Planned Parenthood Action Fund, Blue Future, Jr. Newtown Action Alliance, Path to Progress, Students Demand Action, Team ENOUGH, Voices of Gen-Z and Dream for America. They are doing so with more traditional, party-aligned youth organizations.

Trump and top Republicans have blasted Biden as being too old to handle a second term. But Aalayah Eastmond, a survivor of the 2018 Parkland school shooting in Florida and co-founder of Team ENOUGH, said Biden's age wasn't a consideration in the endorsement.

"What's most important to America's youth is having a president who listens to our concerns and knows how to deliver on solutions that improve our lives," Eastmond said.



NATION

# VFW: Predatory ‘claims sharks’ targeting vets

Groups urge laws to combat firms that charge fees for service VA offers for free

**BY LINDA F. HERSEY**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Cracking down on predatory “claims sharks” that charge veterans exorbitant fees to file for disability benefits with the Department of Veterans Affairs is a priority for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, whose leaders urged lawmakers to toughen laws against the illegal practices.

“These companies that prey on veterans must be held accountable and not rewarded for their predatory behavior toward veterans and their survivors,” Duane Sarmiento, the VFW’s commander in chief, said Wednesday at a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs committees.

Sarmiento was the first witness during a half-day of testimony from a dozen national veterans’ groups that included the VFW, Wounded Warrior Project, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Blue Star Families, among others.

The veterans service organizations highlighted their fiscal 2025 legislative agendas before lawmakers from both chambers. Collectively known as VSOs, the non-profit groups have a mission to aid and serve veterans, service members, dependents and survivors.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chairman of the Senate committee, opened the joint hearing by highlighting his priorities that focused on pending legislation to protect VA benefits and improve their delivery to former service members.

Tester pointed to the Governing

Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act, also known as the GUARD VA Benefits Act, which would impose criminal penalties including fines and prison time for individuals convicted of soliciting or receiving fees and other compensation to prepare or alter a veteran’s disability claim for VA benefits.

Federal law bans individuals and companies from assisting veterans in preparing their claims for disability benefits without accreditation from the VA Office of General Counsel. Many veterans service organizations have been trained by the VA in claims preparation and offer the service for free.

But the VFW and other veterans organizations who testified said the existing law is unenforceable because it lacks criminal penalties. Tester said the GUARD Benefits Act would restore criminal penalties that were removed 20 years ago.

He said record levels of benefits from the passage of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act in 2022 have resulted in a proliferation of businesses illegally charging veterans to file claims for disability benefits when the service is provided for free by accredited veterans organizations, including the VFW.

The accreditation demonstrates the organizations have received VA training to prepare the claims



JOE GROMELSKI/Special to Stars and Stripes

**Duane Sarmiento, national commander in chief for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, speaks during a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs committees last week on Capitol Hill.**

and meet VA standards and regulations for providing the service.

Since the PACT Act became law in August 2022, more than 720,000 claims for disability benefits have been filed by veterans who were exposed to burn pits, herbicides and other toxic substances during military service, Tester said.

The act has yielded more than \$1.8 billion in disability benefits to qualifying veterans, according to the VA.

Sarmiento said though some state legislatures recently passed laws to stop individuals and companies from illegally offering to help veterans with their claims, “it is time for a federal fix.”

Some companies also fraudulently solicit veterans with offers to boost their disability ratings for higher monthly benefits, he said.

“With the PACT Act, there has been an increase in online ads targeting veterans’ benefits with high fees. Taking money from veterans is distasteful, but taking money from their survivors is absolutely disgusting,” Sarmiento said.

He pointed to a pin that he wore on his lapel with picture of a shark’s fin and the message: “Do not feed the sharks.”

Sarmiento also urged lawmakers to pass the TAP Promotion Act, which would make claims assistance part of the required Transition Assistance Program, an edu-

cational course for service members in their final months of active duty. The program provides service members with employment resources, information on veterans’ benefits and counseling services as they begin their transition to civilian life.

The TAP Promotion Act would add claims preparation help by veterans service organizations as a basic component of the course for exiting service members.

Nancy Espinosa, national commander of the Disabled American Veterans, said Thursday in a second day of testimony that her organization conducts extensive outreach to veterans with combat injuries who need help with their disability claims. Members of the Disabled American Veterans also drive veterans to and from VA medical appointments. Both services are free.

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, said there should be the same level of attention to a veteran’s transition to civilian life as there is to military recruitment of individuals entering the military.

“At one of the first armed service hearings I attended 10 years ago, I made the statement ‘Why don’t we spend as much money on transition as we do on recruiting?’ In other words, let’s take care of those veterans when they’re coming out,” he said.

# Judge halts labor rule that eases unionizing

*Associated Press*

A federal judge in Texas has blocked a new rule by the National Labor Relations Board that would have made it easier for millions of workers to form unions at big companies.

The rule, which was due to go into effect Monday, would have set new standards for determining when two companies should be considered “joint employers” in labor negotiations.

Under the current NLRB rule, which was passed by a Republican-dominated board in 2020, a company like McDonald’s isn’t considered a joint employer of most of its workers since they are directly employed by franchisees.

The new rule would have expanded that definition to say companies may be considered joint employers if they have the ability to control — directly or indirectly — at least one condition of employment.

Conditions include wages and benefits, hours and scheduling, the assignment of duties, work rules and hiring.

The NLRB argued a change is necessary because the current rule makes it too easy for companies to avoid their legal responsibility to bargain with workers.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups — including the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the International Franchise Association and the National Retail Federation — sued the NLRB in federal court in the Eastern District of Texas in November to block the rule.

They argued the new rule would upend years of precedent and could make companies liable for workers they don’t employ at workplaces they don’t own.

In his decision Friday granting the plaintiffs’ motion for a summary judgment, U.S. District Court Judge J. Campbell Barker concluded that the NLRB’s new rule would be “contrary to law” and that it was “arbitrary and capricious” in regard to how it would change the existing rule.

Barker found that by establishing an array of new conditions to be used to determine whether a company meets the standard of a joint employer, the NLRB’s new rule exceeds “the bounds of the common law.”

The NLRB is reviewing the court’s decision and considering its next steps in the case, the agency said in a statement Saturday.

# Decades-old Mexico rape story cited in GOP rebuttal

*Associated Press*

The Republican senator who gave the party’s response to President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address used a harrowing account of a young woman’s sexual abuse to attack his border policies, but the rapes did not happen in the U.S. or during the Biden administration.

First-term Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama in the GOP response criticized current immigration policies, describing how she had met a woman at the U.S.-Mexico border who told of being raped



**Britt**

thousands of times in a sex trafficking operation run by cartels, starting at age 12.

The victim has previously spoken publicly about the abuse happening in her home country of Mexico from 2004 to 2008 — not in the United States during the Biden administration. Yet, Britt used the account to chastise Biden’s action on the border.

“We wouldn’t be OK with this happening in a third-world country. This is the United States of America, and it’s past time we start acting like it,” Britt said in the Thursday night speech televised from her home in Alabama. “President Biden’s border crisis is a disgrace.”

Britt has made immigration one of her top issues in her first years in the Senate, and Republicans have seized on a surge of immigrants entering the country during Biden’s term to attack the president.

Independent journalist Jonathan Katz revealed in a TikTok video Friday that the sex trafficking of the victim mentioned by Britt on Thursday did not happen during the Biden administration or in the United States.

Asked by Fox News Sunday if she had meant to give the impression that the trafficking and rape in question happened during the Biden administration, Britt said “No.”

She said she had recounted the victim’s story to “bring some light to” sex trafficking by cartels.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## 2 drove man’s body to bank to withdraw money

**OH** ASHTABULA — Two Ohio women have been accused of driving the body of a deceased 80-year-old man to a bank to withdraw money from his account before dropping his body off at a hospital.

Karen Casbohm, 63, and Loreen Bea Feralo, 55, were charged in Ashtabula with gross abuse of a corpse and theft from a person in a protected class, according to Ashtabula Municipal Court records.

Police said they were told that two women had dropped off a body at the Ashtabula County Medical Center emergency room without identifying the person or themselves. A few hours later, one of them contacted the hospital with information on the deceased, who was then identified as Douglas Layman of Ashtabula.

Layman’s body “was placed in the vehicle in such a manner that he would be visible to bank staff in order to make the withdrawal,” Ashtabula Police Chief Robert Stell said in a news release.

## Crime scene tape covers weather-abused landmark

**ME** SKOWHEGAN — Crime scene tape surrounds the Skowhegan Indian, a local landmark in Maine, after an assault by Mother Nature.

The towering wooden sculpture is missing part of its face and arm, as well as a spear. The damage is believed to have been caused by wild weather and a windstorm.

The 62-foot sculpture depicts a Wabanaki fisherman and was completed in 1969 by artist Bernard Langlais, a student and teacher at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Chamber of Commerce said. Before it was damaged, the fisherman was holding a spear in one hand and a fishing weir, or trap, in the other.

## Plea hearing set in case of faked kidnapping

**AL** BESSEMER — A new plea hearing has been set for an Alabama woman accused of falsely telling police she was abducted last summer after stopping her car to check on a toddler wandering near a highway.

Carlee Russell’s two-day disappearance, and her story of being abducted, captivated the nation before police called her story a hoax.

Russell was scheduled for trial March 18, but a court document filed showed a plea hearing is now set for March 21.

Russell disappeared July 13 after calling 911 to report a toddler beside a stretch of Interstate 459 in the Birmingham suburb of Hoover. She returned home two days later and told police she had been abducted and forced into a vehicle.

Her attorney issued a statement



DIANE BONDAREFF, CYCLE FOR SURVIVAL/AP

# Cancer crushing cycle

**Enthusiastic participants cheer and dance at a Cycle for Survival event in New York City, on Sunday. Cycle for Survival, the movement to beat rare cancers, has raised over \$370 million since it began in 2007. Every dollar funds groundbreaking rare cancer research and clinical trials at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, which owns and operates Cycle for Survival.**

through police acknowledging there was no kidnapping and that she never saw a toddler.

## Expelled ex-Rep. Santos says he’s running again

**DC** WASHINGTON — Former U.S. Rep. George Santos, who was expelled from Congress in December and faces federal charges of defrauding donors to his 2022 campaign, has announced he is running for the House again.

Santos, a Republican who is just the sixth member to be ousted by fellow House members, posted on X that he will challenge Republican Rep. Nick LaLota, who represents a district on New York’s Long Island that is different from the one Santos represented before he was expelled.

Santos made the announcement after attending President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address and mingling with former colleagues who voted to kick him out of Congress following a blistering report by the House Ethics Committee.

## Rare 2-faced calf flourishing despite odds

**LA** ABBEVILLE — A rare calf born with two faces — four eyes, two noses, two mouths and two ears — continued to flourish Thursday, eight days after its birth at a southwest Loui-

siana farm.

The owners of Breaux Farms LLC in Cossinade, a community about 90 miles west of Baton Rouge, said the calf, which appears normal from the ears back, was named “Deux Face” — “deux” is French for “two.” The chance of this type of birth is 1 in 400 million, Eric and Dawn Breaux said in a post on Facebook.

“We know this calf will have a short life span and will most likely only live a few days,” Dawn Breaux said. “She has beaten a lot of odds by being born alive.”

Most calves with polycephaly, the condition of having more than one head, are stillborn. Some live for several hours or days. According to Ripley’s Believe It or Not!, the oldest living two-faced calf survived for 40 days.

At 8 days old, Deux Face is making slow progress under the care of several veterinarians and the Breauxs, the Facebook posts said.

## Concealed guns may be OK in schools, meetings

**WY** CHEYENNE — A bill that would allow concealed carry of firearms in schools and government meetings is headed to Wyoming’s governor after clearing the state Legislature by a wide margin.

What happens next is somewhat uncertain because Wyoming governors traditionally don’t say if they plan to sign or veto bills. Gov.

Mark Gordon has not spoken publicly about the bill, but he is a Republican gun rights supporter.

Wyoming is among the gun-friendliest states and the bill passed the state Senate 22-8 after supporters dismissed fears about allowing guns where they’re currently banned.

Under the latest gun bill, open carry would still be prohibited in schools and government meetings, and K-12 students could not have guns at school.

But concealed firearms would become permissible with a permit at the University of Wyoming and community colleges in areas not serving alcohol. They also would be allowed without a permit in government meetings including those of the Legislature.

## Student makes 94-foot putt and wins car

**AL** AUBURN — An Auburn University student connected on a long-distance shot, draining a length-of-the-basketball court putt to win a car.

Conor Boyle made the 94-foot putt, rolling a golf ball from one baseline and through a sign next to the opposite basket during a promotion in the second half of Auburn’s game with Georgia.

After the putt found the small opening on the sign, Boyle raced around the court celebrating while fans erupted and TV cameras showed Auburn guard K.D.

Johnson looking on from the bench with a stunned expression, mouth wide open.

Boyle was the first winner of the promotion this season, winning a car from a local Toyota dealership.

## State House OKs new requirements to buy gun

**DE** DOVER — Delaware’s Democrat-led House voted mostly along party lines to approve a bill requiring anyone who wants to buy a handgun to first be fingerprinted, undergo training and obtain permission from the state.

Majority Leader Melissa Minor-Brown, chief House sponsor of the Delaware legislation, insisted that permit-to-purchase laws are effective in reducing gun deaths. “States with permit laws have 25% lower gun homicide rates,

House lawmakers passed the bill despite concerns about its price tag, rejecting several GOP amendments that Republicans said would reduce the financial burden imposed both on taxpayers and prospective gun buyers. Legislative analysts estimate that the permitting system will cost taxpayers about \$3 million in initial implementation costs, and about \$5 million annually thereafter.



# Houthi's suspected in explosion near ship in Red Sea

Other recent Houthi actions include an attack last month on a cargo ship carrying fertilizer, the *Rubymar*, which later sank after drifting for several days, and the downing of an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

# Gaza still struggling as Ramadan starts

The United States, Qatar and Egypt had hoped to broker a cease-fire ahead of the normally joyous month of dawn-to-dusk fasting that would include the release of dozens of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, and the entry of a large amount of humanitarian aid, but the talks stalled last week.

Biden acknowledged in his annual Rama-

The United States has provided crucial military support to Israel and shielded it from international calls for a cease-fire while urging it to do more to avoid harming civilians and facilitate humanitarian aid.

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WORLD

# Al-Qaida branch says leader is dead

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The leader of Yemen's branch of al-Qaida is dead, the militant group announced late Sunday, without giving details.

Khalid al-Batarfi had a \$5 million bounty on his head from the U.S. government over leading the group, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, through years that saw him imprisoned, freed in a jailbreak, and governing forces in Yemen amid that country's grinding war.

Though believed to be weakened in recent years due to infighting and suspected U.S. drone strikes killing its leaders, the group known by the acronym AQAP has long been considered the most dangerous branch of the extremist group still operating after the killing of founder Osama bin Laden.

Al-Qaida released a video showing al-Batarfi wrapped in a

white funeral shroud and al-Qaida's black-and-white flag.

Militants offered no details on the cause of his death and there was no clear sign of trauma visible on his face.

Al-Batarfi was believed to be in his early 40s.

"Allah took his soul while he patiently sought his reward and stood firm, immigrated, garrisoned, waged jihad for His sake," the militants said in the video, according to the SITE Intelligence Group.

In the announcement, the group said Saad bin Atef al-Awlaki would take over as its leader. The U.S. has a \$6 million bounty on him, saying al-Awlaki "has publicly called for attacks against the United States and its allies."



Al-Batarfi

# Princess Kate apologizes for editing photo that fueled rumors about health

Associated Press

LONDON — Kate, Princess of Wales, apologized Monday for "confusion" caused by her editing of a family photo released by the palace — an image of Kate and her children that was intended to calm concern and speculation about the British royal's health, but had the opposite effect.

Several news agencies that initially published the photo, including The Associated Press, withdrew the image over concerns about digital manipulation. Issued by the couple's Kensington Palace office on Sunday to mark Mother's Day in Britain, it was the first official photo of Kate since she had abdominal surgery nearly two months ago.

The retractions sent the online rumor mill, already rampant with speculation over Kate's operation and recuperation, into overdrive.

In a post on social media, Kate said that "like many amateur photographers, I do occasionally experiment with editing."

"I wanted to express my apologies for any confusion the family

photograph we shared yesterday caused," the post said.

In the past, the palace has issued several of Kate's family snapshots featuring her and Prince William with their children Prince George, 10; Princess Charlotte, 8; and Prince Louis, 5.

The latest photo was taken by William, Kensington Palace said. In an accompanying message posted on social media, Kate said: "Thank you for your kind wishes and continued support over the last two months. Wishing everyone a Happy Mother's Day."

# India tests domestically developed missile

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — India has successfully conducted its first test flight of a domestically developed missile that can carry multiple warheads, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Monday.

The missile is equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles, Modi said in

a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. India has been developing its medium- and long-range missile systems since the 1990s as its strategic competition with China grows.

In 2021, India successfully tested Agni-5, a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile with a range of 3,125 miles that is

believed to be capable of targeting nearly all of China. Agni missiles are long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles.

India is also able to strike anywhere in neighboring Pakistan, its archrival with which it has fought three wars since they gained independence from British colonialists in 1947.

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FACES

# ‘Oppenheimer,’ Nolan have huge night

Biopic wins 7 Oscars; Stone tops Gladstone in best actress category; Eilish youngest to win 2

**By JAKE COYLE**  
*Associated Press*

“Oppenheimer,” a solemn three-hour biopic that became an unlikely billion-dollar box-office sensation, was crowned best picture at a 96th Academy Awards that doubled as a coronation for Christopher Nolan.

After passing over arguably Hollywood’s foremost big-screen auteur for years, the Oscars made up for lost time by heaping seven awards on Nolan’s blockbuster biopic, including best actor for Cillian Murphy, best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr. and best director for Nolan.

In anointing “Oppenheimer,” the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences did something it hasn’t done for more than a decade: hand its top prize to a widely seen, big-budget studio film. In a film industry where a cape, dinosaur or Tom Cruise has often been a requirement for such box office, “Oppenheimer” brought droves of moviegoers to theaters with a complex, fission-filled drama about J. Robert Oppenheimer and the creation of the atomic bomb.

“For better or worse, we’re all living in Oppenheimer’s world,” Murphy said in his acceptance speech. “I’d like to dedicate this to the peacemakers.”

As a film heavy with unease for human capacity for mass destruction, “Oppenheimer” emerged as a fittingly foreboding film for times rife with cataclysm, man-made or not.

Sunday’s Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles unfolded against the backdrop of wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and with a potentially momentous U.S. election on the horizon. Awards for the documentary winner, “20 Days in Mariupol,” and best international film, “The Zone of Interest,” brought geopolitics into the Oscar spotlight.

The most closely watched contest went to Emma Stone, who won best actress for her performance as Bella Baxter in “Poor Things.” In what was seen as the night’s most nail-biting category, Stone won over Lily Gladstone of “Killers of the Flower Moon.” Gladstone would have become the first Native American to win an Academy Award.

Instead, Oscar voters couldn’t resist the full-bodied extremes of Stone’s “Poor Things” performance. The win for Stone, her second best actress Oscar following her 2017 win for “La La Land,” confirmed the 35-year-old as arguably the preeminent big-screen actress of her generation. The list of women to win best actress two

or more times includes Katharine Hepburn, Frances McDormand, Ingrid Bergman and Bette Davis.

“Oh, boy, this is really overwhelming,” said Stone, who fought back tears and a broken zipper on her dress during her speech.

Sunday’s broadcast had razzle dazzle, including a sprawling song-and-dance rendition of the “Barbie” hit “I’m Just Ken” by Ryan Gosling, with an assist on guitar by Slash and a sea of Kens who swarmed the stage.

But protest and politics intruded.

Late during the show, host Jimmy Kimmel read a critical social media post from former president Donald Trump.

“Thank you for watching,” said Kimmel. “Isn’t it past your jail time?”

Nolan has had many movies in the Oscar mix before, including “Inception,” “Dunkirk” and “The Dark Knight.” But his win Sunday for direction is the first Academy Award for the 53-year-old filmmaker. Addressing the crowd, Nolan noted cinema is just over a hundred years old.

“Imagine being there 100 years into painting or theater,” said Nolan, who shared the best-picture award with Emma Thomas, his wife and producer. “We don’t know where this incredible journey is going from here. But to know that you think that I’m a meaningful part of it means the world to me.”

Downey, nominated twice before (for “Chaplin” and “Tropic Thunder”), also notched his first Oscar, crowning the illustrious second act of his up-and-down career.

“I’d like to thank my terrible childhood and the academy, in that order,” said Downey, the son of filmmaker Robert Downey Sr.

“Barbie,” last year’s biggest box-office hit with more than \$1.4 billion in ticket sales, ultimately won just one award: best song (sorry, Ken) for Billie Eilish and Finneas O’Connell’s “What Was I Made For?” It’s their second Oscar, two years after winning for their James Bond theme, “No Time to Die.”

In doing so, Eilish, 22, has become the youngest person by far to have won two career Oscars.

That beats an old record set by Luise Rainer, who won her second best actress Oscar at 28 in 1938.



O’Connell and Eilish



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Christopher Nolan accepts the Academy Award for best director Sunday for “Oppenheimer” at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.



JORDAN STRAUSS, INVISION/AP

Left to right: Robert Downey Jr., best supporting actor winner for “Oppenheimer”; Da’Vine Joy Randolph, best supporting actress winner for “The Holdovers”; Emma Stone, best actress winner for “Poor Things”; Cillian Murphy, best actor winner for “Oppenheimer.”

Protests over Israel’s war in Gaza snarled traffic around the Dolby Theatre, slowing stars’ arrival on the red carpet.

A year after “Navalny” won the same award, Mstyslav Chernov’s “20 Days in Mariupol,” a harrowing chronicle of the early days of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, won best documentary. The win, a first for The Associated Press and PBS’ “Frontline,” came as the war in Ukraine passed the two-year mark with no signs of abating.

Chernov, the Ukrainian filmmaker and AP journalist whose hometown was bombed the day he learned of his Oscar nomination, spoke forcefully about Russia’s invasion.

“This is the first Oscar in Ukrainian history, and I’m honored,” he said. “Probably I will be the first director on this stage to say I wish I’d never made this film. I wish to be able to exchange this (for) Russia never attacking Ukraine.”

In the early going, Yorgos Lanthimos’ Frankenstein riff “Poor Things” ran away with three prizes for its sumptuous craft, including awards for production design, makeup and hairstyling and costume design. “Poor Things” fared second best to “Oppenheimer,” with a total of four awards.

Kimmel, hosting the ABC telecast for the fourth time, opened the awards with a monologue that emphasized Hollywood as “a union town” following 2023’s actor and writer strikes, and drew a standing ovation for bringing out teamsters and behind-the-scenes workers — who are now entering their own labor negotiations.

The night’s first award was one of its most predictable: Da’Vine Joy Randolph for best supporting actress, for her performance in Alexander Payne’s “The Holdovers.”

“For so long I’ve always wanted to be different,” said Randolph.

## Award winners

- Best picture:** “Oppenheimer”
- Best actress:** Emma Stone, “Poor Things”
- Best actor:** Cillian Murphy, “Oppenheimer”
- Best supporting actor:** Robert Downey Jr., “Oppenheimer”
- Best supporting actress:** Da’Vine Joy Randolph, “The Holdovers”
- Best director:** Christopher Nolan, “Oppenheimer”
- Live action short film:** “The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar”
- Sound:** “The Zone of Interest,” Tarn Willers and Johnnie Burn
- Original score:** “Oppenheimer,” Ludwig Göransson
- Original song:** “What Was I Made For?” from “Barbie”
- Visual effects:** “Godzilla Minus One”
- Film editing:** “Oppenheimer,” Jennifer Lame
- Documentary short film:** “The Last Repair Shop”
- Documentary feature:** “20 Days in Mariupol”
- Cinematography:** “Oppenheimer,” Hoyte Van Hoytema
- Animated short film:** “WAR IS OVER! Inspired by the Music of John & Yoko”
- Animated film:** “The Boy and the Heron”
- Original screenplay:** “Anatomy of a Fall,” Justine Triet and Arthur Harari
- Adapted screenplay:** “American Fiction,” Cord Jefferson
- Makeup and hairstyling:** “Poor Things,” Nadia Stacey, Mark Coulier and Josh Weston
- Production design:** “Poor Things,” James Price, Shona Heath and Zsuzsa Mihalek
- Costume design:** “Poor Things,” Holly Waddington
- International feature film:** “The Zone of Interest” (United Kingdom)

The Associated Press

“And now I realize I just need to be myself.”

Hayao Miyazaki’s “The Boy and the Heron” won for best animated feature, a surprise over the slightly favored “Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse.”

In the best adapted screenplay category, where “Barbie” was nominated — and where some suspected Greta Gerwig would win after being overlooked for director — the Oscar went to Cord Jefferson, who wrote and directed his feature film debut “American Fiction.”

He pleaded for executives to take risks on young filmmakers like himself.

The Oscars belonged largely to theatrical-first films. Though it came into the awards with 19 nominations, Netflix was a bit player. Its lone win came for live action short: Wes Anderson’s “The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar,” based on the story by Roald Dahl.





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OPINION

US is already turning its back on the world

By HAL BRANDS  
Bloomberg Opinion

It's one of the classic lines in America cinema. In "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," Paul Newman and Robert Redford are cornered by a posse of lawmen, and the only escape is to leap from a cliff into the river below. When Sundance says he won't jump, because he can't swim, Butch reassures him: "The fall will probably kill you."

It's a sad metaphor for U.S. foreign policy. As Donald Trump marches toward the Republican presidential nomination, it's only natural to wonder what will happen if the U.S. is once again led by an erratic, impulsive and frequently destructive president. But speculating about Trump's impact is like wondering what happens after a precipitous plunge.

The great crisis of U.S. foreign policy isn't something that will materialize only if Trump wins in November. It's happening right now, as America struggles to provide the aid an embattled Ukraine needs to survive.

On Capitol Hill, there doesn't seem any great urgency. A vital funding resolution has been postponed, first by protracted negotiations in the Senate — on a deal combing border security with Ukraine aid — that ultimately went nowhere, then by a two-week recess the Republican-led House took after receiving the bill the Senate eventually passed, and then by the latest frenzied efforts to keep the U.S. government running for a few more weeks. As Washington dithers, the battlefield effects pile up.

The eastern city of Avdiivka fell late last month because Ukrainian forces lacked the shells and bullets needed to stop unending Russian attacks. Now, Moscow is pressing onward. Russia's air force, which previously played a limited, unimpressive role in this war, is getting into the fight by pulverizing ar-

eas into which the Russian army can then advance. President Vladimir Putin's planes would, of course, be very vulnerable to Ukraine's air defenses — if Ukraine still had enough of these systems to keep the Russian air force at bay.

For Ukraine, the costs of a shortfall in U.S. aid aren't prospective or hypothetical. They are real, and they are mounting by the day, in lives and territory lost. Put bluntly, we are seeing how Ukraine loses this war — not because of some brilliant Russian blitzkrieg, but because of the incremental accumulation of setbacks that deprive the country of any hope of victory, and thereby force it to accept a peace that is effectively a strategic defeat.

Which brings us back to U.S. policy. At the Munich Security Conference last month, and in capitals around the world, the specter of a Trump revival has been weighing on U.S. allies. And for good reason, given that Trump is doing all the same things — talking about throwing allies to the wolves, fantasizing about an assault on America's democratic institutions — that alarmed so many U.S. friends the first time around.

But the Ukraine impasse should be even more alarming to those who depend on the U.S. for their safety. That's because it's hard to believe America will send its men and women to defend U.S. allies when the next crisis comes, if it won't even send money and arms to support Ukraine in a conflict that hasn't killed a single U.S. service member. The Ukraine impasse also shows that the rot in the U.S. political system goes deeper than the rantings of a rogue president.

Yes, Trump has played his shameful part in the Ukraine debate: His resistance to fixing America's southern border, because he wants to run on that issue in November, helped tank the bipartisan agreement Senate dealmakers

produced. His opposition to Ukraine aid is emboldening his MAGA allies, and frightening internationalist Republicans, in the House right now.

But the current debate demonstrates that the U.S. political system can be paralyzed on critical strategic issues even when America's president has described Ukraine as the central front in a great struggle between autocracy and democracy, and when even a solid majority of House and Senate legislators favor giving that country support. If this is the best the U.S. can do under Joe Biden, it won't take a second Trump presidency to cast America's global role into doubt.

In a recent essay for Foreign Affairs, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued that U.S. political dysfunction is abetting geopolitical instability — that a divided America lacks the constancy and commitment needed to hold back the forces of global disorder. The longer the Ukraine impasse continues, the more prescient that warning looks.

We live in an era when many longtime verities of global affairs — the advance of democracy, the absence of great-power war, the relative stability of key regions — are coming into question. So is the uber-verity that underpins all the others: That America's political system, for all its foibles and absurdities, will eventually produce policies that nudge the world in a positive direction. Whatever happens in November, the Ukraine aid stalemate is sobering because it gives America's friends, and its enemies, a preview of what the world will look when that's no longer the case. It could be a very long way down.

Hal Brands is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and the Henry Kissinger Distinguished Professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

DEI, said to promote racial harmony, does the opposite

By JONATHAN BUTCHER  
The Heritage Foundation

Programs designed to instill "diversity, equity and inclusion" (DEI) do not promote racial harmony. The trainings, which have become commonplace in schools, workplaces and government agencies nationwide, may in fact be manipulative, unlicensed attempts at psychology.

Just ask Chad Ellis.

Ellis, a former researcher at Chevron Phillips Chemical Co., holds a doctorate in chemistry. He was forced to undergo DEI training and "received confirmed mental health damage from coerced, mandatory workplace attendance at a psychological video series," according to Ellis' complaint in district court against the Oklahoma State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. The techniques used in the training mirror the psychological coercion used in military interrogations, according to expert witness testimony in the complaint.

Chevron used a DEI training series called "Here and Heard," which attacked viewers' loyalties and personal appearances, accusing the viewers of maintaining bias based on their skin color. The program uses images of abuse and genocide to create distress in viewers' minds — which are psychological, not instructional, techniques.

DEI sessions are not simply teaching tools. In fact, the DEI trainer in the "Here and Heard" video said that the approach was "purposefully designed to cause visceral reac-

tions," which sounds like emotional manipulation, not instruction.

The trainer was not a psychologist, though (she was a part-time real estate agent), which means the training program could be unlicensed practice of psychology. In an interview, Ellis said the training was "very provocative . . . highly graphical [with] emotional content." He says he told his supervisors, "You don't have my consent to do this," but, "I didn't get anywhere." Ellis says he is not opposed to some DEI activities, but someone with a psychology license should be accountable for the trainings' effects.

Ellis is not asking for sympathy for facing DEI training. Rather, he asked Oklahoma's board of examiners to investigate the Chevron program to determine whether it constitutes the practice of psychology. The board dismissed his complaint.

In the legal battle that ensued, with Ellis contending that the state board should at least make a determination, the chemist said, "Just like if I'm exposed to a chemical spill, I deserve to know what's in that. If I'm exposed to something like this, I deserve to know where it's coming from and who stands behind it."

Ellis is not the first to make claims such as this. In Pennsylvania, a former professor at Pennsylvania State Abington alleged he faced racial discrimination and experienced harm as part of a DEI program at the college. A district judge is allowing the case to proceed, despite university opposition.

Ellis said "Here and Heard" was "pushing

the levers of guilt and shame and humiliation to coerce belief change." This helps explain why researchers have found that DEI fails to change individual attitudes and behavior. DEI does not appeal to our better natures. It holds that if you do not see racism everywhere, you are trying to maintain power over others. That's hardly a message that helps build camaraderie.

Policymakers in six states, including Oklahoma, have either prohibited the use of taxpayer spending on DEI programs or called for an end to DEI in public spaces.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, reminded residents in his executive order that the state constitution prohibits "preferential treatment" or discrimination based on race, ethnicity or sex. These are the very racist ideas DEI programs advocate for.

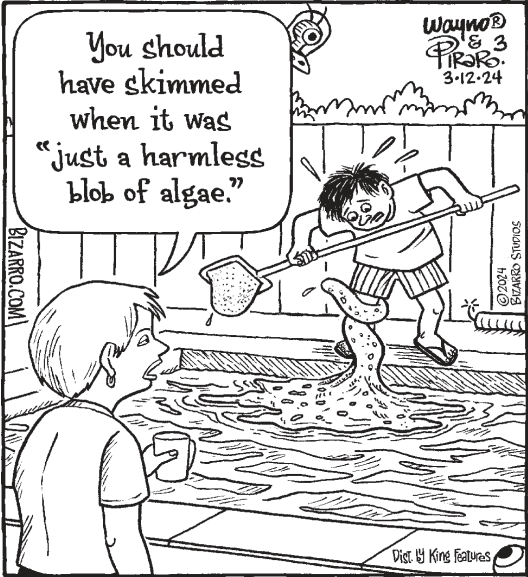
Chevron Phillips is a private joint venture between Chevron and Phillips 66, so the DEI prohibitions may not apply to them, but allowing the practice of unlicensed psychologists is still illegal. Ellis' legal filings say "Here and Heard" is "trying to mold the minds of these employees and, again, practicing psychology without any consent and without any license."

If DEI sessions are psychological treatments — from unlicensed psychologists — all the more reason to bolster state and federal civil rights laws, protect equality under the law, and reject DEI and its racist results.

Jonathan Butcher is the Will Skillman Fellow in Education at The Heritage Foundation.



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16				17			
18					19				20			
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38	39	40				41				42	43	44
45						46				47		
48						49				50		
51						52				53		

ACROSS

- 1 Author — Neale Hurston  
5 Educ. group  
8 Tide variety  
12 "Peek- —!"  
13 Web address  
14 Hoops legend Monroe  
15 Krypton, for one  
17 "Simpsons" bus driver  
18 "You bet!"  
19 Gym unit  
20 Start  
21 Part of NIMBY  
22 Assoc.  
23 Inventor Howe  
26 Book-lined room  
30 Lake bird  
31 The Cowboys, on a scoreboard  
32 Buffalo's county  
33 Established  
35 Pretend  
36 "That hurts!"  
37 "Sheesh!"  
38 Goopy treat  
41 Humorist  
42 Mauna —  
45 Twistable cookie  
46 Mensches  
48 Taj Mahal site  
49 Melody  
50 Goofs  
51 Pre-Easter period  
52 Conceit  
53 Biblical garden

DOWN

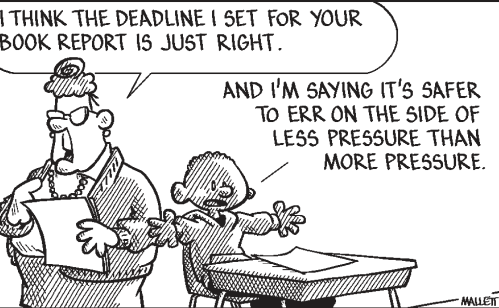
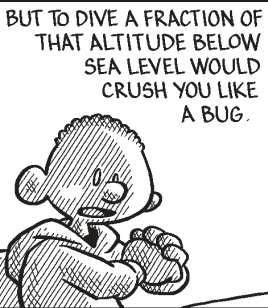
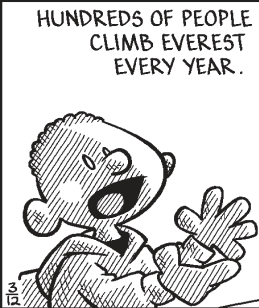
- 1 Madcap  
2 Bassoon's kin  
3 Rips off  
4 ISP giant  
5 Washington Sound  
6 Snare  
7 Roker and Michaels  
8 Bright running shoe color  
9 Diner grub  
10 Prado display  
11 Conspiracy  
16 Love god  
20 Sphere  
21 Barnyard beast  
22 Sesame product  
23 Santa's helper  
24 Bathroom, to a Brit

- 25 Debtor's letters  
26 Young fellow  
27 Onassis nickname  
28 Predetermine  
29 Longing  
31 Morning moisture  
34 Female hare  
35 Kismet  
37 Itty-bitty  
38 Baby horse  
39 Incite  
40 "Wild" actress Laura  
41 Kristen of "Bridesmaids"  
42 Kirkuk native  
43 Literary Jane  
44 Professional gp.  
46 Scot's denial  
47 "Gosh!"

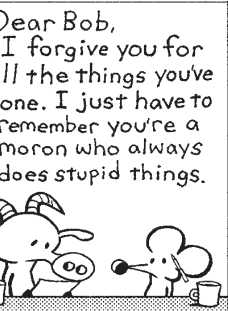
Answer to Previous Puzzle

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O	M	E	N		M	I	R		E	D	A
S	A	M	O	A		C	O	D	E		
				T	H	Y		L	E	S	T
B	A	S	S	I	S	T		S	T	O	L
R	O	I	L		L	E	G		A	N	O
A	U	R	A	S		D	I	G	N	I	T
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Frazz



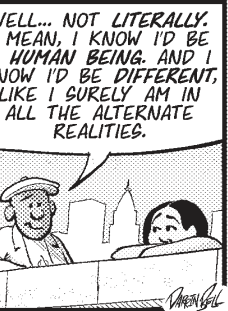
Pearls Before Swine



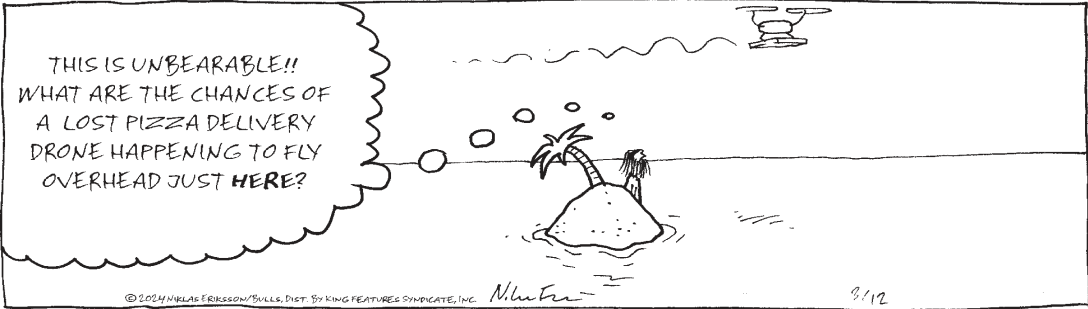
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



3-12

CRYPTOQUIP

YI VADZZ, IUHVORL QDGRL  
FHHLV DUR YM VKDERV  
URVRAQZYM TJOR WHJMF  
LHFV, DUR OKRW EJE-TDGRV?  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: QUITE SUPERIOR TYPE OF DRINK MADE FOR TAILLESS AUSTRALIAN MARSUPIALS: QUALITY KOALA TEA.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals G



SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL	
<b>Sunday's men's scores</b> <b>EAST</b> Colgate 68, Bucknell 65 Hofstra 73, Delaware 58 Lehigh 84, Boston U. 79, OT Ohio St. 73, Rutgers 51 Penn St. 85, Maryland 69 Stony Brook 91, Drexel 88, 2OT <b>SOUTH</b> Arkansas St. 67, Appalachian St. 65 Coll. of Charleston 83, Monmouth (NJ) 59 ETSU 85, Chattanooga 84, OT James Madison 73, Texas St. 68 Longwood 85, UNC-Asheville 59 New Orleans 78, SE Louisiana 66 Samford 84, Furman 77 Stetson 94, Austin Peay 91 Texas A&M Commerce 69, Northwest-ern St. 64 Towson 66, UNC-Wilmington 56 UAB 74, SMU 70 <b>MIDWEST</b> Drake 84, Indiana St. 80 Illinois 73, Iowa 61 Indiana 65, Michigan St. 64 Nebraska 85, Michigan 70 Omaha 73, North Dakota 72 Purdue 78, Wisconsin 70 St. Thomas (MN) 68, N. Dakota St. 58 <b>SOUTHWEST</b> Temple 84, UTSA 82 <b>FAR WEST</b> Hawaii 74, CS Bakersfield 57 Idaho St. 83, N. Colorado 76 Sacramento St. 74, E. Washington 69 San Francisco 72, Portland 51	<b>Wednesday, March 13</b> UC Davis vs. Cal St.-Fullerton UC Santa Barbara vs. Long Beach St. <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> UC Riverside vs. UC Santa Barbara-Long Beach St. winner Cal Poly vs. UC Davis-Cal St.-Fullerton winner <b>Coastal Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Washington, D.C.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Hampton vs. Hofstra Northeastern vs. UNC-Wilmington <b>Second Round</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Campbell vs. Elon William & Mary vs. Hampton-Hofstra winner Drexel vs. Delaware Towson vs. Northeastern-UNC-Wilmington winner <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Friday, March 15</b> Stony Brook vs. Campbell-Elon winner NC A&T vs. TBD Monmouth (NJ) vs. Drexel-Delaware winner Coll. of Charleston vs. TBD <b>Conference USA Conference</b> <b>At Huntsville, Ala.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> UTEP vs. Sam Houston St. <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Middle Tennessee vs. UTEP-Sam Houston St. winner Liberty vs. W. Kentucky <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Louisiana Tech vs. Jacksonville St. FIU vs. New Mexico St. <b>Horizon League Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Cleveland St. vs. Wright St. Green Bay vs. Fort Wayne <b>Ivy League</b> <b>At New York, N.Y.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Friday, March 15</b> Princeton vs. Penn Columbia vs. Harvard <b>Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Atlantic City, N.J.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Rider vs. Iona Quinnipiac vs. St. Peter's Mount St. Mary's vs. Marist <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Fairfield vs. Rider-Iona winner Niagara vs. Quinnipiac-St. Peter's winner <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Siena vs. Mount St. Mary's-Marist winner Manhattan vs. Canisius <b>Mid-American Conference</b> <b>At Cleveland, Ohio</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Toledo vs. W. Michigan Buffalo vs. Bowling Green Ball St. vs. Ohio Kent St. vs. N. Illinois <b>Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Norfolk, Va.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Norfolk St. vs. SC State Howard vs. Morgan St. <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Coppin St. vs. Md.-Eastern Shore NC Central vs. Delaware St. <b>Missouri Valley Conference</b> <b>At Moline, Ill.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> S. Illinois vs. Indiana St. Illinois St. vs. Evanville UIC vs. Valparaiso Murray St. vs. Bradley <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Friday, March 15</b> Drake vs. S. Illinois-Indiana St. winner N. Iowa vs. Illinois St.-Evanville winner Belmont vs. UIC-Valparaiso winner Missouri St. vs. Murray St.-Bradley winner <b>Mountain West Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas, Nev.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Fresno St. 62, Air Force 44 San Diego St. 72, San Jose St. 51 Boise St. 85, Utah St. 49 <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> UNLV vs. Fresno St. Nevada vs. Colorado St. New Mexico vs. San Diego St.
	<b>Wyoming vs. Boise St.</b> <b>Northeast Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Merrimack vs. CCSU Sacred Heart vs. St. Francis (Pa.) Fairleigh Dickinson vs. LIU Le Moyne vs. Stonehill <b>Pac-12 Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas, Nev.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Southern Cal 74, Stanford 61 <b>Patriot League Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Colgate vs. Navy Boston U. vs. Army Holy Cross vs. Bucknell Loyola (Md.) vs. Lehigh <b>Southeastern Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> South Carolina 79, LSU 72 <b>Southern Conference</b> <b>At Asheville, N.C.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Chattanooga 69, UNC-Greensboro 60 <b>Southland Conference</b> <b>At Lake Charles, La.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Texas A&M-Commerce vs. Northwest-ern St. New Orleans vs. Nicholls <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Incarnate Word vs. Texas A&M-Com-merce-Northwestern St. winner SE Louisiana vs. New Orleans-Nicholls-winner <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Lamar vs. TBD Texas A&M-Corpus Christi vs. TBD <b>Southwest Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Birmingham, Ala.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Grambling St. vs. Florida A&M Jackson St. vs. Prairie View <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Southern U. vs. Alcorn St. Ark.-Pine Bluff vs. Alabama A&M <b>Summit League Conference</b> <b>At Sioux Falls, S.D.</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> N. Dakota St. 72, Denver 60 S. Dakota St. 66, Omaha 53 <b>Sunday, March 10</b> South Dakota 70, St. Thomas 57 Oral Roberts 91, North Dakota 68 <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> N. Dakota St. vs. Oral Roberts S. Dakota St. vs. South Dakota <b>Sun Belt Conference</b> <b>At Pensacola, Fla.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Marshall 76, Old Dominion 70 James Madison 64, Louisiana-Lafayette 54 <b>Championship</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Marshall vs. James Madison <b>West Coast Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas, Nev.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Gonzaga vs. Pacific Santa Clara vs. Portland <b>Western Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas, Nev.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Texas-Arlington vs. S. Utah Abilene Christian vs. Tarleton State <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Utah Tech vs. Texas-Arlington-S. Utah winner Stephen F. Austin vs. Abilene Christian-Tarleton State winner <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Friday, March 15</b> Cal Baptist vs. TBD Grand Canyon vs. TBD
	<b>Women's NCAA automatic bids</b> UT-Martin, Ohio Valley Conference Chattanooga, Southern Conference Iowa, Big Ten Conference Notre Dame, Atlantic Coast Conference South Carolina, Southeastern Conference Richmond, Atlantic 10 Conference Southern Cal, Pac-12 Conference Presbyterian, Big South Conference
	<b>Women's conference tournaments</b> <b>America East Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Maine vs. Binghamton Albany (NY) vs. Vermont <b>American Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Fort Worth, Texas</b> <b>Second Round</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> East Carolina 65, Memphis 53 South Florida 69, Wichita St. 62 Rice 71, UAB 56 Tulane 65, Charlotte 52 <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Tulsa vs. East Carolina UTSA vs. South Florida North Texas vs. Rice Temple vs. Tulane <b>Atlantic 10 Conference</b> <b>At Glen Allen, Va.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Richmond 65, Rhode Island 51 <b>Atlantic Coast Conference</b> <b>At Greensboro, N.C.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Notre Dame 55, NC State 51 <b>Atlantic Sun Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Cent. Arkansas vs. E. Kentucky Florida Gulf Coast vs. Austin Peay <b>Big 12 Conference</b> <b>At Kansas City, Mo.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Oklahoma vs. Iowa St. Texas vs. Kansas St. <b>Big East Conference</b> <b>At Uncasville, Conn.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> UConn 58, Marquette 29 Georgetown 55, Creighton 46 <b>Championship</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> UConn vs. Georgetown <b>Big Sky Conference</b> <b>At Boise, Idaho</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> E. Washington 71, Weber St. 58 N. Arizona 81, Sacramento St. 63 <b>Monday, March 11</b> Montana St. vs. N. Colorado Montana vs. Idaho <b>Big South Conference</b> <b>At High Point, N.C.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Presbyterian 60, Radford 37 <b>Big Ten Conference</b> <b>At Minneapolis, Minn.</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Iowa 94, Nebraska 89, OT <b>Big West Conference</b> <b>At Henderson, Nev.</b> <b>First Round</b>
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SOCCER/NHL



The United States' Lindsey Horan celebrates after scoring a goal during the first half of the CONCACAF Gold Cup tournament final.

Horan goal lifts US to Gold Cup trophy

Associated Press  
 SAN DIEGO — Lindsey Horan scored on a header in first-half stoppage time and the United States went on to beat Brazil 1-0 on Sunday to win the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup.  
 The Americans lifted the trophy despite being stunned by a loss to Mexico in the group stage of the tournament. It was the first women's Gold Cup, created to bring teams in the region more meaningful competition.  
 "It was a difficult game. Brazil challenged us in a different way," Horan said. "I'm really, really proud of us finding a way to get a goal and finishing out the game and getting a trophy."  
 It was the fourth time that the United States faced Brazil in a tournament final. The Americans also won the previous three, including the 2004 and 2008 Olympics.  
 The game drew a sellout crowd of 31,528 to San Diego's Snapdragon Stadium.  
 Horan scored just moments into stoppage time with a header off a well-placed lofted pass from Emily Fox. It was Horan's third goal of the tournament; her earlier goals were from the penalty spot.  
 Lynn Williams nearly scored a second for the United States in the 79th minute but the play was off-sides. Casey Krueger headed out a dangerous Brazilian cross in the final moments.  
 Brazil outshot the United States 12-7 and at times appeared the more dominant team.  
 "It's not always pretty, and this was a game that we just grinded through," defender Crystal Dunn said. "We got the job done and that's the most important."  
 The United States was upset in the group stage of the tournament by a 2-0 loss to Mexico — just the

second loss in the 43-game series.  
 The Americans rebounded with a 3-0 win over Colombia in the quarterfinals, before advancing to the final on penalties in a rain-soaked match with Canada.  
 "That was a crazy tournament, but finished strong," forward Alex Morgan said. "That's what mattered. So many players coming up big time."  
 Brazil won all of its five matches, including a 3-0 victory over Mexico in the semifinals, scoring 15 goals.  
 The Brazilians allowed just two total goals in the team's first competitive tournament under coach Arthur Elias, who took over for Pia Sundhage after Brazil failed to get out of the group stage at last summer's Women's World Cup.  
 "The American players are very strong physically speaking and I believe that we had a great performance during the game," Elias said through a translator after the game. "We had chances to score goals today. The U.S. had some strengths that we were able to stop, but they were very well prepared as well to play our team today."  
 Likewise, the United States was playing its first tournament under interim coach Twila Kilgore, who assumed her role after the U.S. parted ways with coach Vlatko Andonovski following the team's early exit from the World Cup.  
 The United States hired Emma Hayes as the team's coach, but she is concluding the season with Chelsea in the Women's Super League.  
 "I'm just so happy for the team," Kilgore said. "This is a team and a program that will always have attention and expectations on it. We always say that pressure is a privilege and it is, but it's another thing to walk the walk."

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Florida	65	44	17	4	92	217	153	
Boston	66	38	13	15	91	222	179	
Toronto	64	37	19	8	82	231	201	
Tampa Bay	65	34	25	6	74	224	219	
Detroit	64	33	25	6	72	221	211	
Buffalo	65	30	30	5	65	189	195	
Montreal	64	24	30	10	58	180	229	
Ottawa	62	25	33	4	54	200	220	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
N.Y. Rangers	63	41	18	4	86	210	172	
Carolina	64	39	19	6	84	216	177	
Philadelphia	65	33	24	8	74	192	194	
N.Y. Islanders	63	29	20	14	72	197	206	
Washington	62	30	23	9	69	170	194	
New Jersey	64	31	29	4	66	211	224	
Pittsburgh	63	28	27	8	64	180	184	
Columbus	64	22	32	10	54	192	232	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Dallas	66	40	17	9	89	242	199	
Winnipeg	63	40	18	5	85	193	153	
Colorado	65	40	20	5	85	241	197	
Nashville	66	37	25	4	78	211	201	
Minnesota	65	31	27	7	69	204	215	
St. Louis	64	32	29	3	67	179	199	
Arizona	65	26	34	5	57	192	218	
Chicago	65	17	43	5	39	138	233	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vancouver	66	42	17	7	91	234	178	
Edmonton	63	39	21	3	81	222	180	
Los Angeles	63	32	20	11	75	194	171	
Vegas	64	34	23	7	75	207	191	
Seattle	63	28	24	11	67	174	179	
Calgary	64	31	28	5	67	200	206	
Anaheim	64	23	38	3	49	167	229	
San Jose	63	16	40	7	39	139	250	
<b>Note:</b> 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.								
<b>Sunday's games</b>								
Edmonton 4, Pittsburgh 0								
Minnesota 4, Nashville 3, OT								
Carolina 7, Calgary 2								
Chicago 7, Arizona 4								
N.Y. Islanders 6, Anaheim 1								
<b>Monday's games</b>								
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers								
St. Louis at Boston								
Washington at Winnipeg								
N.Y. Islanders at Los Angeles								
<b>Tuesday's games</b>								
Columbus at Montreal								
Detroit at Buffalo								
N.Y. Rangers at Carolina								
Pittsburgh at Ottawa								
San Jose at Philadelphia								
Arizona at Minnesota								
Florida at Dallas								
Anaheim at Chicago								
Colorado at Calgary								
Vegas at Seattle								

ROUNDUP

Wild pull goalie in OT, beat Predators

Associated Press  
 ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota pulled its goaltender in overtime and Matt Boldy scored to lift the Wild to a 4-3 victory over the Nashville Predators on Sunday.  
 Wild goalie Marc-Andre Fleury skated off 3:30 into OT, giving Minnesota a 4-on-3 advantage. Seconds later, Boldy got a pass from Mats Zuccarello and beat Predators goalie Juuse Saros for his 24th goal.  
 Had Nashville scored an empty-netter after Fleury was pulled, Minnesota (31-27-7) would have forfeited its point for the overtime loss. But the Wild are trying to rally into a playoff spot, so coach John Hynes tried a risky gamble.  
 "We need two points," Hynes said. "One point, zero points, it's not doing us any good. Two points is what we need."  
 Nashville's Ryan O'Reilly scored a power-play goal with 2:02 remaining in regulation, helping the Predators avoid what would have been their first regulation loss since Feb. 15. Nashville is 10-0-2 in its past 12 games.  
 "It was a gutsy play by them," O'Reilly said. "It's frustrating. We're good in shootouts. Who knows, we get there, we have another chance to get two."  
 Players in Minnesota's locker room were unaware that, had Nashville scored an empty-netter in overtime, the Wild would have forfeited their point.  
 That included Fleury, who said he couldn't recall the last time he was pulled for an extra attacker in an overtime game.  
 "I'll remember this one," Fleury said. "It was such a great feeling, great ending to the game here."  
**Oilers 4, Penguins 0:** Connor

McDavid had a goal and two assists, sending visiting Edmonton to the victory.  
 Darnell Nurse scored twice in the third period. Mattias Ekholm had a goal and an assist for the Oilers, who snapped a two-game losing streak by shutting down the struggling Penguins.  
 Pittsburgh has lost six of its past seven and was blanked in back-to-back home games for the first time since 2004.  
**Islanders 6, Ducks 1:** Bo Horvat and Brock Nelson each had a goal and an assist, and visiting New York moved into a playoff position with its sixth straight win.  
 The Islanders scored three times in the first period and have outscored opponents 11-0 in the first 20 minutes during their winning streak.  
 Anaheim's Alex Killorn extended his goal streak to four games during the second period.  
**Hurricanes 7, Flames 2:** Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov each had a goal and two assists, powering host Carolina to its third consecutive victory.  
 Jalen Chatfield, Seth Jarvis and Teuvo Teravainen each had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes. Brent Burns and Jordan Martinook also scored, and Jordan Staal and Jesperi Kotkaniemi each had two assists.  
**Blackhawks 7, Coyotes 4:** Colin Blackwell got his first career hat trick and Connor Bedard had two goals and an assist, leading host Chicago to the victory.  
 It was the last-place Blackhawks's highest scoring game of the season.  
 Clayton Keller had two goals for Arizona, running his team-best total to 25 on the season.



Wild goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury (29) celebrates with teammates after defeating the Predators in overtime on Sunday in St. Paul, Minn. Fleury was pulled in OT and Minnesota scored with the extra skater.



# AUTO RACING



DARRYL WEBB/AP

Christopher Bell does a burnout after his NASCAR Cup Series win at Phoenix Raceway on Sunday in Avondale, Ariz. After losing at Phoenix in November, Bell returned to secure an emotional victory.

## Bell gets emotional win for NASCAR's Gibbs at Phoenix

BY JOHN MARSHALL  
Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Christopher Bell and the rest of Joe Gibbs Racing have been through more than their share of heartbreak in the desert.

Owner Joe Gibbs' son, the team's vice chairman, died unexpectedly in Phoenix two years ago. Last fall, a broken brake rotor spoiled Bell's NASCAR Cup Series championship hopes in the Valley of the Sun.

Winning at Phoenix Raceway will never erase the anguish, but it's certainly another step in the healing process.

Bell surged into the lead when Martin Truex Jr. was forced to pit and then pulled away for an emotional NASCAR Cup Series win at Phoenix Raceway on Sunday.

"This one feels really good," Bell said. "You don't get cars like that very often, as you know. Just super, super proud to be on this 20 car."

JGR has been through a whirlwind of emotions in Phoenix.

In 2022, hours after Ty Gibbs won an Xfinity season championship for his grandfather's team, vice chairman Coy Gibbs was found dead in his hotel room. Ty's father was 49.

Bell and JGR returned to Phoenix Raceway in November as part of the championship four vying for

the Cup Series title. Instead of mending emotions, the team left dejected after Bell's car broke early in the race.

Given another shot, Bell held his emotions in check and the crew gave him the fastest car on a perfect afternoon in the desert that ended with a massive celebration on victory lane.

"It is a little bit cathartic," Bell's crew chief Adam Stevens said.

Bell's win in the No. 20 Toyota also ended Chevrolet's perfect start to the season after winning the first three races. He is the eighth different winner in eight races at Phoenix Raceway's mile tri-oval.

Chris Buescher finished second after wrecking 27 laps into last week's race in Las Vegas and Ty Gibbs was third for his career-best finish. Brad Keselowski and Ryan Blaney rounded out the top five.

"We had a rough go last week," Buescher said. "This was good to get everybody back to prove that we're in this together and we're going to win one of these things as a team."

The Phoenix race marked the debut of NASCAR's new aerodynamics package for short tracks in hopes of producing more passing on tracks of a mile or less and road courses. Goodyear also produced tires with thicker treads designed to retain heat and increase lap-

time falloff.

Starting 13th, Bell took advantage of the changes, overcoming a slow pit stop to charge back to the front. Bell moved into the lead with 40 laps to go when leader Truex had to pit for fuel and tires.

Bell led the final 49 laps for his seventh career Cup Series victory and the first since Homestead in October.

"I drove a rocket ship today," Bell said. "It just took off."

Truex and his crew made calculated gamble on lap 217, opting to stay out when most of the leaders went into the pits.

The JGR driver stayed in the lead, hoping he would have enough fuel and his tires would hold out long enough to reach the checkered flag. Neither happened and Truex was forced to the pits. He finished seventh.

Pole sitter Denny Hamlin took advantage of having the first stall to twice take the lead out of the pits, but ran into trouble with about 100 laps left.

Trying to pass Reddick, Hamlin's No. 11 car got loose and he spun out, causing a caution that sent most of the cars to the pits. Hamlin dropped to 23rd after a pit stop and finished 11th.

"Just got in too deep and tried not to wreck him," Hamlin said. "Just ended up wrecking ourselves."

## Newgarden, Penske dominate IndyCar opener amid gripes

BY JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Team Penske silenced recent criticism aimed at series leadership by dominating the IndyCar season-opening race with a Josef Newgarden win from the pole Sunday on the downtown streets of St. Petersburg.

Pato O'Ward of Arrow McLaren Racing broke up the Penske rout with a second-place finish, but Penske drivers Scott McLaughlin and Will Power finished third and fourth. The Penske trio finished ahead of every Andretti Global driver two days after team owner Michael Andretti called on Roger Penske to sell the IndyCar Series if he's not willing to increase his investments in promotion and marketing.

"I think for Roger, the Team Penske and the Penske Entertainment is very separate, and for him, he's got to put those hats on and see the good of the sport," McLaughlin said. "It's part of owning the series, you think, you're going to get called left, right and center from people upset with your adjustments or what you want from the series."

"You're never going to have it all fine and dandy."

Colton Herta in fifth was the highest-finishing driver for Andretti, which had a bust of a day with new driver Marcus Ericsson. The former Indianapolis 500 winner lost power midway through the race and finished 25th in the 27-car field. Ericsson was the defending race winner at St. Pete, which celebrated its 20th running

of the popular street course event.

Reigning IndyCar champion Alex Palou finished sixth for Chip Ganassi Racing and Felix Rosenqvist was seventh in his debut race with Meyer Shank Racing.

Alexander Rossi of McLaren was eighth, while Scott Dixon of Ganassi and Rinus VeeKay of Ed Carpenter Racing rounded out the top 10. Santino Ferrucci was an impressive 11th for A.J. Foyt Racing, which created an alliance with Penske.

The win for Penske is his third season-opening win this year alone. His IMSA sports car team won the Rolex 24 at Daytona and his other sports car team won the WEC opener in Qatar last week.

"As a team, we're stoked. We just put a lot of hard work into the season," McLaughlin said. "It's just a good team. It's a great business relationship. We're just going to keep winning."

Penske hugged Newgarden in victory lane and the NBC cameras caught their conversation: "I was thinking of you at the end of that race, keep it together, like you told me."

Newgarden then expanded on the conversation.

"Roger was telling me, if you have a big lead, you better hold onto it and not throw it in the wall," Newgarden said. "It's great to have these little intimate moments with RP. He wants us to be out there crushing it and winning."

He said that during the last 10 laps of the race, all he could think about was the look he'd see on Penske's face if he threw the win away.



MIKE CARLSON/AP

Team Penske driver Josef Newgarden of the U.S., right, celebrates his win with team owner Roger Penske after the IndyCar Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg race Sunday in St. Petersburg, Fla.



NBA

ROUNDUP

76ers top Knicks in low-scoring affair

Philadelphia’s 79-73 victory is smallest point total across league this season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When a miserable first quarter ended and they had just 15 points, the Philadelphia 76ers felt good about where they were.

The New York Knicks had been every bit as bad.

The 76ers kept up the good defense and eventually played just a little better offensively, holding the Knicks to the lowest points total in the NBA this season and winning 79-73 on Sunday night in the ugly opener of a two-game series.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the 76ers, who missed their first nine 3-point attempts before making one in the final minute of the first quarter, which ended in a 15-all tie.

“Any defensive coach would take that quarter,” swingman Buddy Hield said. “Offensively, no, but we got great possessions ... and we figured out a way to weather the storm and we made plays when we needed to make plays.”

Less than two months after Joel Embiid scored 70 points by himself to set a 76ers franchise record, it appeared for a while that neither team might get that many Sunday.

Philadelphia led 37-31 at halftime, the lowest-scoring first half in an NBA game since Portland led Detroit 34-31 on March 30, 2019, in a game the Pistons won 99-90.

The scoring picked up in the second half, when the 76ers finally got enough contributions to snap a three-game losing streak. Hield had 16 points and Paul Reed added 13.

Tobias Harris finished with 11 points and 12 rebounds for the 76ers, who had been handled by the Knicks in the two previous meetings this season but can now split the series with a victory when the teams meet again Tuesday at Madison Square Garden.

The Knicks shot 32.5% from the field and 22.5% from 3-point range. Jalen Brunson led the Knicks with 19 points but shot just 6-for-22.

“We were sending a lot of people at him and he was having to work really hard to get into the paint, and we weren’t letting him get there that often,” 76ers coach Nick Nurse said.

**Thunder 124, Grizzlies 93:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 23 points and six assists in three quarters and host Oklahoma City rolled past Memphis.

Rookie Cason Wallace scored a season-high 23 points, Josh Giddey had 16 points and 10 rebounds and Lu Dort scored 14 points and made all four of his 3-point tries



PETER K. AFRYIE/AP

Philadelphia 76ers guard Kyle Lowry is defended by Knicks guard Jalen Brunson during the second half Sunday in New York. The 76ers and Knicks combined to score just 152 points.

for the Thunder. Oklahoma City won its third straight to stay at the top of the Western Conference standings.

The only bad news for the Thunder came when No. 2 scorer Jalen Williams left in the second quarter with a sprained right ankle and did not return. Coach Mark Daigneault offered no update after the game, saying the team would look at it in the morning.

**Lakers 120, Timberwolves 109:** Anthony Davis had 27 points, a season-high 25 rebounds and a career-high seven steals while leading host Los Angeles over short-handed Minnesota.

Davis added five assists and three blocked shots in one of the most prolific games of his decorated career. The nine-time All-Star feasted on a Minnesota lineup missing its top two big men and four regulars due to injuries, grabbing 21 rebounds in the second half alone and leading a 21-4 rally to begin the fourth quarter while the Lakers pulled away to their 12th win in 17 games.

LeBron James had 29 points, nine assists and eight rebounds, while Austin Reaves added 19 points as the Lakers (36-30) improved to six games above .500 for the first time this season.

**Pacers 111, Magic 97:** Tyrese Haliburton and Pascal Siakam each scored 20 points and visiting Indiana closed within a game of Orlando in the Eastern Conference

standings.

T.J. McConnell and Obi Toppin each added 17 points for Indiana. Aaron Nesmith had 16.

Paolo Banchero had 19 points for Orlando, Cole Anthony added 16 and Wendell Carter had 13 points and 15 rebounds. The Magic have dropped two in a row for the first time since Jan. 22-26.

**Rockets 112, Kings 104:** Fred VanVleet scored 22 points, Jalen Green added 19 and visiting Houston beat Sacramento, but might have lost leading scorer Alperen Sengun to a right knee injury.

Sengun landed awkwardly while challenging a shot by the Kings’ Domantas Sabonis with under a minute to play in the fourth. Rockets coach Ime Udoka said after the game that Sengun, who left the court in a wheelchair, was getting an X-ray and he would “know more shortly.” ESPN reported that Sengun, averaging a career-high 21.2 points per game, will undergo an MRI on his right knee and ankle Monday.

**Bucks 124, Clippers 117:** Damian Lillard scored 16 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter of Milwaukee’s first victory on its California road trip, beating short-handed Los Angeles.

Lillard hit three of his seven 3-pointers during a stellar shooting display in the fourth, while Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds as the Bucks rebounded from back-

to-back losses to Golden State and the Lakers by outlasting the Clippers, who played without Kawhi Leonard and Paul George.

**Wizards 110, Heat 108:** Kyle Kuzma scored 32 points and visiting Washington held on to beat Miami for its second win in a row after ending a 16-game skid.

Corey Kispert finished with 22 points, Deni Avdija added 16 and Tyus Jones had 12 points and 16 assists for the Wizards, who got their first road victory since Jan. 29, ending an eight-game skid away from home.

**Pelicans 116, Hawks 103:** Trey Murphy III had 28 points off the bench to help New Orleans complete a perfect three-game road trip with a win over Atlanta.

Zion Williamson had 27 points, six rebounds and seven assists for the Pelicans, who have won four straight overall and snapped the Hawks’ three-game winning streak. Murphy was 6-for-13 from 3-point range and also had seven rebounds.

**Nets 120, Cavaliers 101:** Cam Thomas scored 29 points in 31 minutes, Mikal Bridges had 25 points and visiting Brooklyn pulled away to beat injury-riddled Cleveland.

Dennis Schroder added 17 points and eight assists, and Nic Claxton had 16 points and 10 rebounds for Brooklyn, which built a 26-point lead midway through the fourth quarter.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	49	14	.778	—
New York	37	27	.578	12½
Philadelphia	36	28	.563	13½
Brooklyn	26	39	.400	24
Toronto	23	41	.359	26½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	37	28	.569	—
Miami	35	29	.547	1½
Atlanta	29	35	.453	7½
Charlotte	16	48	.250	20½
Washington	11	53	.172	25½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	42	23	.646	—
Cleveland	41	23	.641	½
Indiana	36	29	.554	6
Chicago	31	33	.484	10½
Detroit	10	53	.159	31
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	39	25	.609	—
Dallas	36	28	.563	3
Houston	29	35	.453	10
Memphis	22	43	.338	17½
San Antonio	14	50	.219	25
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	45	19	.703	—
Denver	44	20	.688	1
Minnesota	44	21	.677	1½
Utah	28	36	.438	17
Portland	18	45	.286	26½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	41	22	.651	—
Phoenix	37	27	.578	4½
Sacramento	36	27	.571	5
L.A. Lakers	36	30	.545	6½
Golden State	33	30	.524	8

Saturday's games

L.A. Clippers 112, Chicago 102  
Charlotte 110, Brooklyn 99  
Dallas 142, Detroit 124  
Boston 117, Phoenix 107  
San Antonio 126, Golden State 113  
Denver 142, Utah 121  
Portland 128, Toronto 118, OT

Sunday's games

Milwaukee 124, L.A. Clippers 117  
New Orleans 116, Atlanta 103  
Washington 110, Miami 108  
Houston 112, Sacramento 104  
Indiana 111, Orlando 97  
Oklahoma City 124, Memphis 93  
Brooklyn 120, Cleveland 101  
Philadelphia 79, New York 73  
L.A. Lakers 120, Minnesota 109

Monday's games

Charlotte at Detroit  
Phoenix at Cleveland  
Dallas at Chicago  
Golden State at San Antonio  
Toronto at Denver  
Boston at Portland

Tuesday's games

Philadelphia at New York  
Indiana at Oklahoma City  
Washington at Memphis  
Houston at San Antonio  
Boston at Utah  
Milwaukee at Sacramento  
Minnesota at L.A. Clippers

Wednesday's games

Brooklyn at Orlando  
Toronto at Detroit  
Chicago at Indiana  
Denver at Miami  
Charlotte at Memphis  
Cleveland at New Orleans  
Golden State at Dallas  
Atlanta at Portland  
L.A. Lakers at Sacramento

Scoring leaders

Through Sunday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Doncic, DAL	56	662	399	1943	34.7
Gil.-Alex., OKC	63	692	492	1960	31.1
Antetokoun., MIL	62	713	451	1910	30.8
Durant, PHO	57	586	317	1615	28.3
Mitchell, CLE	47	454	248	1315	28.0
Booker, PHO	50	480	307	1377	27.5
Brunson, NY	59	567	307	1596	27.1
Fox, SAC	55	546	244	1487	27.0
Tatum, BOS	60	548	329	1613	26.9
Curry, GS	59	523	254	1590	26.9



## NFL/COLLEGE BASKETBALL



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Russell Wilson was 11-19 in two seasons with the Broncos after being acquired in a trade from Seattle.

## NFL BRIEFS

# Source: QB Wilson agrees to contract with Steelers

Associated Press

Russell Wilson is heading to the Pittsburgh Steelers.

The nine-time Pro Bowl quarterback has agreed to sign a one-year deal with the Steelers, a person familiar with the details told The Associated Press on Sunday night.

The person, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the contract hasn't been finalized, said Wilson will receive the veteran's minimum of \$1.21 million while the Denver Broncos pay the remainder of his \$39 million salary.

Wilson posted his intentions on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, saying: "Year 13. Grateful. @Steelers."

The 35-year-old Wilson was 11-19 in two seasons with the Broncos after being acquired in a trade from Seattle. He bounced back from a dreadful 2022 season and threw 3,070 yards, 26 touchdowns and only eight interceptions, but still lost his job to Jarrett Stidham after going 7-8 in coach Sean Payton's first season last year.

Wilson led Seattle to eight playoff appearances and a Super Bowl title in 10 seasons with the Seahawks.

Last week, the Broncos informed Wilson they'd release him when the new league year begins Wednesday, but gave him permission to speak to other teams.

## Source: Mayfield staying with Bucs

TAMPA, Fla. — Baker Mayfield is staying with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers after agreeing to a three-year contract worth up to \$115 million, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press on Sunday.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the agreement, which includes \$50 million guaranteed, had not been finalized.

The Tampa Bay Times reported Mayfield will receive \$30 million in 2024 and \$30 million in 2025, with

\$20 million guaranteed in the second year of the deal. The quarterback's salary would increase to \$40 million in 2026, the newspaper said.

Mayfield, who has played with four teams over the past three seasons, resurrected his career in 2023 after joining the Bucs on a one-year contract following the retirement of Tom Brady and leading the team to its third consecutive NFC South title.

The No. 1 overall pick from the 2018 draft threw for a career-best 4,044 yards and 28 touchdowns while cutting down on costly mistakes that undermined previous stints with the Cleveland Browns, Carolina Panthers and Los Angeles Rams.

Mayfield and Dak Prescott were the only NFL quarterbacks to throw for at least 28 TDs while tossing 10 or fewer interceptions last season.

## Eagles' Cox announces retirement

PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia Eagles six-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Fletcher Cox announced his retirement on Sunday.

Cox, a first-round pick in 2012, played all 12 of his seasons in Philadelphia and holds the franchise record for sacks (70) by a defensive tackle, trailing only Reggie White, Trent Cole, Clyde Simmons and Brandon Graham in career sacks.

He joins six-time All-Pro center Jason Kelce in retirement. Graham signed a one-year deal on Saturday to return to the Eagles for his 15th season.

"I fulfilled a lifelong dream by making it to the NFL. But what I didn't know at the time was how much of an honor and privilege it would be to represent the city of Philadelphia and the Eagles organization for the next 12 seasons," Cox wrote on Instagram.

Cox was selected No. 12 overall in 2012 in Andy Reid's last season in Philadelphia. He helped the Eagles beat Tom Brady and the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl following the 2017 season and had his best year in 2018 when he was a first-team All-Pro.

# Bite: Community has rallied around Cowboys

FROM PAGE 24

Wade added.

The Cowboys have become a celebrated and galvanizing source of pride in a community still working to bounce back from consecutive major hurricanes in 2020. McNeese's arena was damaged heavily and only reopened two years ago. This season, the Cowboys have sold out six home games and drawn near capacity crowds to others. Shroyer said basketball revenue has spiked more than five fold.

Junior forward Christian Shumate, an explosive scorer whose dunks have become known as "Shu slams" by Cowboys fans, said that after spending two seasons in virtual anonymity, he can't go anywhere in Lake Charles now without being recognized.

"I kind of embrace it," Shumate says. "It feels good to give these people something to look forward to."

After persuading Shumate to stay, Wade rebuilt the lineup around him with transfers — some from major conference programs, including TCU, Florida and Utah.

TCU transfer Shahada Wells, an adept perimeter shooter and the Cowboys' leading scorer (17.2 points per game), said he'd never heard of Lake Charles before Wade's staff began recruiting him and figured there might not be much fan support for a team with a recent history of losing.

"I didn't expect us to have the crowds we have now, the community coming out and supporting us," Wells said. "It's electric, man."

Wade got in trouble when the NCAA found that he'd funneled then-improper financial benefits to LSU players or their families.

Such payments have since become largely permissible since the NCAA began allowing athletes in July 2021 to earn money from their name, image and likeness (NIL). But Wade shows no bitter-

ness over his punishment — he'll remain under recruiting restrictions for another year — or the hit his reputation took.

"I'm not here to judge all that," Wade said. "We went through the process, they adjudicated it, and we've just got to move forward."

Wade even suggested he'll be better off in the long run.

"Sometimes you need to get knocked off the ladder a little bit to get a little bit better perspective," Wade said. "I look at it as a positive."

Wade, 41, was 34 when LSU hired him. He was so obsessed with building the Tigers into a national power, he said, that he was always focused on immediately addressing whatever went wrong during games — even when they won.

Now, Wade said, he's happier, more relaxed, makes sure to enjoy victories and looks for opportunities for players to have fun between games. Before playing at Michigan, the Cowboys went to a Pistons game. On their way to a game at Southeastern Louisiana, they stopped for dinner at a Baton Rouge oyster bar that Wade frequented when he was at LSU.

Wade also starred as "Willy the Kid" on a promotional video in which he's dressed like an outlaw from the Old West and rides a horse to a rendezvous with McNeese players wearing cowboy hats.

Wade's rapid success at McNeese could make him a hot commodity on the coaching market after this season. But he's expressed gratitude to McNeese by agreeing last month to a new five-year contract with a buyout as large as \$1.25 million if he leaves after this season.

"Eventually, you want to get back to the big-time," Wade said. "But I'm not in some rush to get back like I was before. ... We've got time. I'm just enjoying the hell out of what we're doing here."



MATTHEW HINTON/AP

McNeese State coach Will Wade, bottom left, watches forward Christian Shumate score a layup against New Orleans on March 6. Shumate's dunks have become known as "Shu slams" by fans.



# COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS

# DeVries lifts Drake to NCAA bid again

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Tucker DeVries scored 27 points, Darnell Brodie had four of his 17 in the last 67 seconds and Drake defended its Missouri Valley Conference Tournament title for an NCAA berth with an 84-80 win over Indiana State on Sunday despite blowing an 18-point lead in the last 10 minutes.

The second-seeded Bulldogs (28-7) recovered down the stretch with a 10-2 run in the last 3½ minutes to make their seventh trip to the NCAA Tournament while matching the school record for wins.

DeVries, the two-time MVC Player of the Year, hit a 3-pointer midway through the second half for a 67-49 lead. But Isaiah Swope led the charge back, hitting back-to-back 3-pointers and converting a four-point play with 4:08 to play that gave the top-seeded Sycamores a 73-72 lead, their first since 2-0.

Swope made three free throws for a 76-74 lead with 3:36 to go but DeVries tied the game and Conor Enright hit a 3-pointer with two minutes to go. Brodie had the next four points to make it 83-78.

“Credit Indiana State for never quitting, continuing to fight,” Drake coach Darian DeVries said. “I thought our guys showed incredible resolve there when all the momentum was gone ... just make the plays we needed to do. I’m incredibly proud of them.”

Atin Wright had 19 points for Drake, which was 11-for-18 from 3-point range (61%) and 31-for-60 overall. The Bulldogs had 10 new players come in after winning last year’s title.

“There’s been a lot of hard times throughout this year but the resilience of this group, it’s been a lot of fun,” Tucker DeVries said. “There’s no better way to do it than with 10 new guys. You look back to June, we had a long ways to go. To get to this point is really special.”

Jayson Kent, who had six points in the 24-5 rally, had 22 points and nine rebounds for the Sycamores (28-6), who were trying to get to their fifth NCAA Tournament and first since 2011. Swope had all 19 of his points in the second half. Robbie Avila added 15, Ryan Conwell 13 and Julian Larry 10.

## Big South

HIGH POINT, N.C. — Michael Christmas scored 18 points, Walyn Napper approached triple-double territory and fifth-seeded Longwood defeated No. 2 UNC Asheville 85-59 on Sunday.

The victory sends the Lancers to

the NCAA Tournament for the second time. They also qualified in 2022.

After scoring 42 points in the first half, the Lancers kept it going after halftime. They pushed their lead to 25 points within the first four minutes and they led by at least 25 throughout the final nine minutes. They shot 59.6% for the game, with 7 of 13 from 3-point distance, and were a solid 16-for-23 from the free-throw line.

Napper had 10 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds for Longwood (21-13). Szymon Zapala had 17 points and seven rebounds. Jesper Granlund and Johnathan Massie scored 11 points each.

Drew Pember led UNC Asheville (22-12) with 14 points.

Longwood dominated the first half, shooting 60% and scoring 30 points in the paint on the way to a 42-24 halftime lead. Zapala scored 10 points on 5-for-7 shooting and Napper had six assists. A 13-0 run led to a 22-6 advantage and the Lancers led by at least 13 points for the remainder of the half.

## Atlantic Sun

DELAND, Fla. — Jalen Blackmon scored a career-high 43 points, making 14 of 17 free throws, and Stetson defeated Austin Peay 94-91 on Sunday to secure the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Blackmon’s and-1 after a tough driving layup gave Stetson an 87-84 lead with 1:11 remaining. After a dunk by Austin Peay’s Sai Witt, Stetson went back ahead by three when Aubin Gateretse made two free throws.

Dezi Jones missed a 3-pointer for the Governors and Austin Peay had to foul with 34 seconds left. Blackmon made both free throws and Witt answered with a three-point play to make it 91-89. Blackmon made 3 of 4 from the line in the final 13 seconds to send Stetson (22-12) to the NCAA Tournament for the first time.



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Stetson’s Jalen Blackmon scored 43 points in the ASUN title game.

## Conference tournaments

<b>America East Conference</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> Bryant 84, Maine 58 Vermont 75, Albany (NY) 72 New Hampshire 77, Binghamton 64 Mass.-Lowell 94, UMBC 89	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Vermont vs. New Hampshire Mass.-Lowell vs. Bryant	<b>Atlantic 10 Conference</b> <b>At Brooklyn, N.Y.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Fordham vs. Davidson La Salle vs. George Washington Rhode Island vs. Saint Louis	<b>Second Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> George Mason vs. Saint Joseph's VCU vs. Fordham-Davidson winner St. Bonaventure vs. La Salle-George Washington winner Duquesne vs. Rhode Island-Saint Louis winner	<b>Atlantic Coast Conference</b> <b>At Washington, D.C.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Notre Dame vs. Georgia Tech NC State vs. Louisville Boston College vs. Miami	<b>Second Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Virginia Tech vs. Florida St. Wake Forest vs. Notre Dame-Georgia Tech winner Syracuse vs. NC State-Louisville winner Clemson vs. Boston College-Miami winner	<b>Atlantic Sun Conference</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Stetson 94, Austin Peay 91 <b>Big 12 Conference</b> <b>At Kansas City, Mo.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> UCF vs. Oklahoma St. Cincinnati vs. West Virginia	<b>Second Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> BYU vs. UCF-Oklahoma St. winner TCU vs. Oklahoma Texas vs. Kansas St. Kansas vs. Cincinnati-W. Virginia winner	<b>Big East Conference</b> <b>At New York</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Butler vs. Xavier Providence vs. Georgetown Villanova vs. DePaul	<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> UConn vs. Butler-Xavier winner Seton Hall vs. St. John's Creighton vs. Providence-Georgetown winner Marquette vs. Villanova-DePaul winner	<b>Big Sky Conference</b> <b>At Boise, Idaho</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> Sacramento St. 72, Idaho 64 Idaho St. 68, N. Arizona 60	<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Idaho St. 83, N. Colorado 76 Sacramento St. 74, E. Washington 69	<b>Monday, March 11</b> Weber St. vs. Montana St. Montana vs. Portland St.	<b>Big South Conference</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Longwood 85, UNC-Asheville 59	<b>Big West Conference</b> <b>At Henderson, Nev.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> UC Riverside vs. CS Bakersfield UC Santa Barbara vs. CS Northridge	<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Hawaii vs. UCSB-CS Northridge winner Long Beach St. vs. UC Riverside-CS Bakersfield winner	<b>Coastal Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Washington, D.C.</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Coll. of Charleston 83, Monmouth (NJ) 59 Towson 66, UNC-Wilmington 56 Stony Brook 91, Drexel 88, 2OT Hofstra 73, Delaware 58	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Coll. of Charleston vs. Towson Stony Brook vs. Hofstra	<b>Conference USA</b> <b>At Huntsville, Ala.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Jacksonville St. vs. FIU	<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Sam Houston St. vs. Jacksonville St.-FIU winner
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JOE PUETZ/AP

Drake’s Tucker DeVries drives against Indiana State’s Julian Larry during the Missouri Valley Conference championship game Sunday.

Louisiana Tech vs. Middle Tennessee	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Colgate 68, Bucknell 65 Lehigh 84, Boston U. 79, OT
Liberty vs. UTEP W. Kentucky vs. New Mexico St.	<b>Championship</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Colgate vs. Lehigh
<b>Horizon League</b> <b>At Higher-Seeded Schools</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Oakland vs. Cleveland St. N. Kentucky vs. Milwaukee	<b>Southeastern Conference</b> <b>At Nashville, Tenn.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Arkansas vs. Vanderbilt Georgia vs. Missouri
<b>Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Atlantic City, N.J.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Mount St. Mary's vs. Canisius Iona vs. Manhattan Niagara vs. Siena	<b>Second Round</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> LSU vs. Mississippi St. South Carolina vs. Arkansas-Vanderbilt winner
<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Quinnipiac vs. Mount St. Mary's-Canisius winner Fairfield vs. Iona-Manhattan winner	<b>Southern Conference</b> <b>At Asheville, N.C.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Samford 84, Furman 77 ETSU 85, Chattanooga 84, OT
<b>Thursday, March 14</b> Marist vs. Niagara-Siena-winner Rider vs. St. Peter's	<b>Championship</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Samford vs. ETSU
<b>Mid-American Conference</b> <b>At Cleveland</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Toledo vs. Kent St. Cent. Michigan vs. Bowling Green Akron vs. Miami (Ohio) Ohio vs. W. Michigan	<b>Southland Conference</b> <b>At Lake Charles, La.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> New Orleans 78, SE Louisiana 66 Texas A&M Commerce 69, Northwestern St. 64
<b>Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Norfolk, Va.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Norfolk St. vs. Coppin St. NC Central vs. Md.-Eastern Shore	<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Lamar vs. New Orleans Nicholls vs. Texas A&M-Commerce
<b>Thursday, March 14</b> Howard vs. Morgan St. SC State vs. Delaware St.	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> McNeese St. vs. TBD Texas A&M-CC vs. TBD
<b>Missouri Valley Conference</b> <b>At St. Louis</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Drake 84, Indiana St. 80	<b>Southwest Athletic Conference</b> <b>At Birmingham, Ala.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Alcorn St. vs. Alabama A&M Grambling St. vs. Alabama St.
<b>Mountain West Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas, Nev.</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Wyoming vs. Fresno St. Colorado St. vs. San Jose St. New Mexico vs. Air Force	<b>Thursday, March 14</b> Texas Southern vs. Jackson St. Southern U. vs. Bethune-Cookman
<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Utah St. vs. Wyoming-Fresno St. winner UNLV vs. San Diego St. Nevada vs. Colorado St.-San Jose St. winner Boise St. vs. New Mexico-Air Force winner	<b>Summit League Conference</b> <b>At Sioux Falls, S.D.</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> S. Dakota St. 79, Oral Roberts 63 Denver 61, UMKC 60
<b>Northeast Conference</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Tuesday, March 12</b> Merrimack vs. Wagner	<b>Sunday, March 10</b> St. Thomas (MN) 68, N. Dakota St. 58 Omaha 73, North Dakota 72
<b>Ohio Valley Conference</b> <b>Championship</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> Morehead St. 69, UALR 55	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> S. Dakota St. vs. St. Thomas Denver vs. Omaha
<b>Pac-12 Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas,</b> <b>First Round</b> <b>Wednesday, March 13</b> Washington vs. Southern Cal UCLA vs. Oregon St. California vs. Stanford Utah vs. Arizona St.	<b>Sun Belt Conference</b> <b>At Pensacola, Fla.</b> <b>Semifinals</b> <b>Sunday, March 10</b> Arkansas St. 67, Appalachian St. 65 James Madison 73, Texas St. 68
<b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Thursday, March 14</b> Arizona vs. Washington-Southern Cal winner Oregon vs. UCLA-Oregon St. winner Washington St. vs. California-Stanford winner	<b>Championship</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Arkansas St. vs. James Madison
<b>Patriot League</b>	<b>West Coast Conference</b> <b>At Las Vegas</b> <b>Quarterfinals</b> <b>Saturday, March 9</b> Santa Clara 104, San Diego 79 San Francisco 72, Portland 51
	<b>Semifinals</b> <b>Monday, March 11</b> Saint Mary's (Cal.) vs. Santa Clara Gonzaga vs. San Francisco



## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## Clark sparks Iowa's Big Ten 3-peat in OT win over Nebraska

By DAVE CAMPBELL  
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Caitlin Clark overcame a cold start to score 30 of her 34 points after half-time and help third-ranked Iowa rally past Nebraska 94-89 in overtime to win a third straight Big Ten Tournament on Sunday.

"It never gets old cutting the net," Clark said after black and gold confetti covered the court at Target Center to the delight of another sellout crowd packed with Hawkeyes fans. "I feel like we're pretty good at that."

Hannah Stuelke had 25 points and nine rebounds for Iowa (29-4), which trailed by 13 points late in the first half while their superstar Clark missed all nine of her 3-point attempts.

"You can maybe keep Caitlin down for a half. You're not keeping her down for a whole game," Hawkeyes coach Lisa Bluder said.

The all-time NCAA leading scorer finished 5-for-17 from deep, had 12 assists and hit the dagger 3-pointer with 51 seconds left in OT for an 89-87 lead just 16 seconds after Logan Nissley's 3-pointer put the Cornhuskers in front.

"I knew some shots were going to go in," Clark said. "That's just how it works."

Alexis Markowski had 23 points and 13 rebounds to lead Nebraska (22-11) in a valiant performance that fell short of a second victory over Iowa this season. The Huskers beat the Hawkeyes 82-79 on Feb. 11.

"Nobody else did, but we expected to win," said Nebraska coach Amy Williams, who had tears streaming down her face at the postgame interview podium as she praised Nissley's effort after her red-eyed players choked up dur-

ing some of their remarks.

Natalie Potts had 21 points and nine rebounds for the Huskers, who led 75-67 with 2½ minutes to go in regulation, before Clark drained one of her signature step-back 3-pointers. Her layup in traffic tied the game with 29 seconds left.

Nebraska played for the final shot, and Nissley's baseline jumper was short at the buzzer. Clark waved her arms at the Iowa-dominated sellout crowd, yelling: "Come on! Five more minutes!"

The Hawkeyes were well aware of Jaz Shelley — who had 16 points and 13 assists — on that last possession of regulation after the Australian hit a 3-pointer with 30 seconds left in their last meeting.

"They tightened things up," Williams said. "I would've, too."

The Huskers played their fourth game in four days, beating Purdue, Michigan State and Maryland to reach the conference final for the first time in 10 years. Despite the 11 a.m. Central tipoff and the lost hour for the daylight savings time clock change, they sure didn't lack for energy.

Markowski and Potts, the Big Ten Freshman of the Year award winner, played fearlessly inside after Iowa commanded a 54-16 points-in-the-paint advantage on Michigan the day before. Clark mostly found her usual playable looks at the hoop, but the long ball just wasn't her friend. The Hawkeyes matched every bit of the Huskers' fire, though, and made sure they stayed within striking range by getting the ball to the basket as much as they could and locking down on defense.

"That's probably what I'm most proud of, that we found a different way to win," Clark said.



CHRIS CARLSON/AP

South Carolina guard MiLaysia Fulwiley, middle, celebrates with the trophy and teammates after their win against LSU at the Southeastern Conference women's tournament final Sunday in Greenville, S.C.

# South Carolina tops LSU to win SEC Tournament

## Chaotic game marred by skirmish, ejections

By PETE IACOBELLI  
Associated Press

GREENVILLE, S.C. — It was a Southeastern Conference Tournament celebration like no other in South Carolina's history: Six subdued players in white championship hats stood on the podium while the rest of their teammates remained in the locker room.

"It was heartbreaking," guard Te-Hina Paopao said after the Gamecocks' 79-72 victory over No. 8 LSU was marred by a fourth-quarter fight that led to South Carolina leading scorer and rebounder Kamilla Cardoso being ejected.

MiLaysia Fulwiley, a freshman named the tournament's MVP, scored a career-high 24 points as South Carolina won its eighth tournament crown in the past 10 seasons.

"We couldn't have done it without them," Paopao said of missing Cardoso, Chloe Kitts, Tessa Johnson and Sakima Walker from the typically joyous postgame ceremony. "It was very hard for us, just a lot of emotions. We really wanted them to celebrate with us."

Kitts, Johnson and Walker were ejected for leaving the bench during the incident, which was sparked with just over two minutes left when the 6-foot-7 Cardoso shoved 5-10 Flau'jae Johnson of LSU after an intentional foul.

Paopao said the whole group

celebrated behind the scenes.

"We're a team," she said. "We're going to bounce back from that learn from our mistakes."

South Carolina (32-0) was ahead 73-66 when Fulwiley stole the ball from Johnson, who wrapped her up and was called for a foul. Johnson then bumped South Carolina's Ashlyn Watkins, and the 6-foot-7 Cardoso rushed over and pushed the 5-10 Johnson to the ground. Players from both benches rushed toward them.

Gamecocks coach Dawn Staley said Johnson came up to her after the game to apologize, telling Staley, "I'm not that type of player."

Staley, too, apologized on behalf of her program to the remaining South Carolina fans who filled the arena all weekend.

Staley's assessment of the dustup?

"What you saw were two highly competitive teams and they did not handle it well," she said.

The penalties, Staley said, were appropriate and she will spend time the next week or so before the NCAA Tournament reminding her players not to give in to emotions at heated times.

"People see that this is now part of our game," she continued. "We have to fix it."

Cardoso, too, apologized on social media after the game. The SEC did not open locker rooms to reporters.

"My behavior was not representative of who I am as a person or the South Carolina program, and I deeply regret any discomfort or inconvenience it may have caused. I take full responsibility for my actions," she posted.

Cardoso and three of her teammates were ejected. Two LSU players — Aalyah Del Rosario and Janae Kent — who logged minutes in the game and came off the bench were also sent off. South Carolina was left with six players and the Tigers five.

Cardoso can be expected to miss time in the NCAA Tournament for her actions. The Gamecocks enter March Madness as the clear-cut No. 1 seed and the only undefeated team left in Division I, men or women. And they did it against the defending national champion Tigers and SEC player of the year Angel Reese.

It was South Carolina's eighth tournament crown in the past 10 seasons and its 16th straight win over LSU (28-5), including all four meetings since Kim Mulkey became the Tigers' coach three seasons ago.

Fulwiley, the speedy, flashy freshman, put on a show in her first SEC Tournament and was named its most valuable player. She hit two 3s as South Carolina used a 24-11 run between the first and second quarters to move in front for good.



ABBIE PARR/AP

Iowa guard Caitlin Clark cuts the net down after an overtime win against Nebraska in the final of the Big Ten women's tournament Sunday in Minneapolis. Clark scored 34 points in Iowa's 94-89 victory.



# SPORTS



**US women add another trophy**  
Horan's goal lifts Americans over Brazil in Gold Cup final » **Soccer, Page 18**



COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MATTHEW HINTON/AP

McNeese State coach Will Wade, left, was suspended for the first 10 games of the season but the Cowboys put up a 28-3 record and finished first in the Southland Conference.

# Another bite of the apple

## Wade makes most of second chance by transforming McNeese State

BY BRETT MARTEL  
Associated Press

**H**iring former LSU basketball coach Will Wade came with no small measure of risk for McNeese State athletic director Heath Shroyer.

"I had a lot of people email me and tell me I was crazy, that I hired someone that's a criminal," recalled Shroyer, who wasn't even sure when he hired Wade a year ago how many games the NCAA would allow him to coach this season.

Now McNeese is 28-3, the No. 1 seed in the Southland Conference

tournament and just two victories away from its first NCAA Tournament appearance in 22 years. It's a stark turnaround for the Cowboys, who went 11-23 a season ago, and Shroyer will take it.

"Coach is a polarizing figure to some, you know, and I think no matter what, some aren't going to like him," Shroyer said. "For sure, some of them have come around and some of them haven't, and that's OK."

The Cowboys received a double-bye in the Southland tournament, which is being held in Lake Charles, La., at McNeese's 4,200-seat arena. The Cowboys open postseason play

**"McNeese needed to reboot the program. I needed to reboot my career."**

Will Wade  
McNeese State coach

in the semifinals Tuesday night.

Wade is not, in fact, a convicted criminal. But he was cited for recruiting violations by the NCAA while at LSU, which hired him in 2017 and fired him in 2022.

He spent a year out of college basketball, consulting for the scouting departments of some NBA teams, before returning to coaching at McNeese — albeit with school and NCAA-mandated restrictions, including a 10-game "show cause" suspension to open the season.

The Cowboys went 8-2 in the games Wade missed; 20-1 since he returned. Along the way have been

upset victories at VCU, Alabama-Birmingham and Michigan.

Wade gushes with gratitude toward McNeese, not only for hiring him but providing the support he needed to turn the program around.

"McNeese needed to reboot the program. I needed to reboot my career," Wade said. "They needed me and I needed them and that's why it's worked. And a lot of our players needed this situation as well."

"To see everybody rally around us and see everybody be excited is really, really fun and rewarding,"

**SEE BITE ON PAGE 21**

# Team Penske dominates IndyCar opener » Auto racing, Page 19

