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 Commanders to victory
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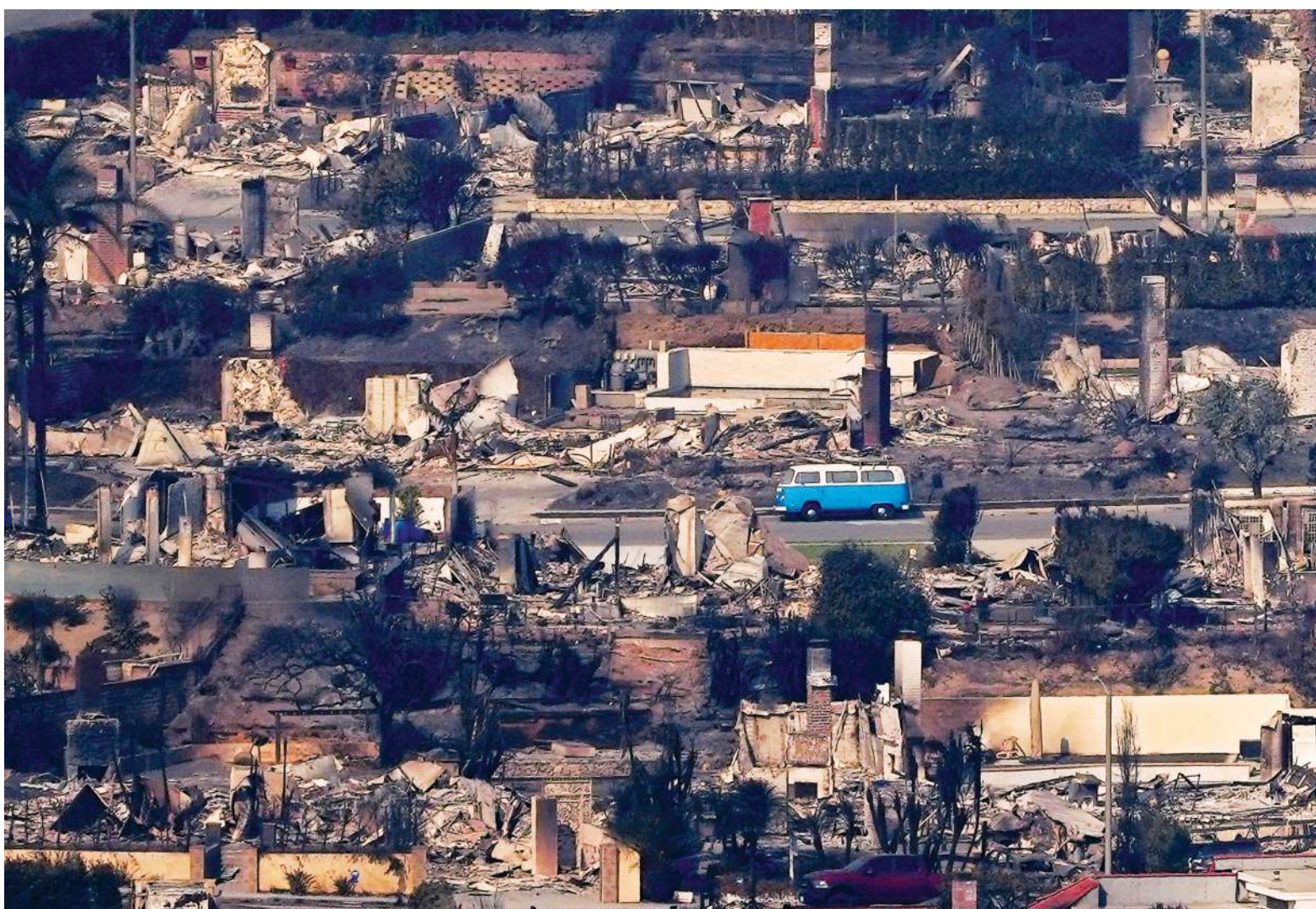
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MARK J. TERRILL/AP

A VW van sits among burned out homes, Thursday, in Malibu, Calif., after a wildfire raged through the Los Angeles area.

Military still struggling with mental health stigma

By ALEX HORTON
The Washington Post

The fiery New Year's Day suicide of an Army Green Beret exposed the Pentagon's struggle to identify and treat brain injuries and mental health issues, raising alarm among some lawmakers, medical experts and former military personnel who question if enough is being done to improve care and prevent similar tragedies.

Matthew Livelsberger, 37, a career Special Forces soldier with extensive wartime service in Afghanistan, died from a self-inflicted gunshot moments before the rented Tesla Cybertruck he was



Livelsberger

driving exploded outside the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas, authorities have said. Livelsberger had struggled with what he endured in combat and confided in an ex-girlfriend that he experienced health problems linked to repeated concussions.

Such invisible wounds can hinder a person's ability to regulate their behavior and lead to substance abuse, insomnia and other serious problems such as suicide, experts say. Recent legislation and Pentagon programs have emphasized screening and self-reporting for such injuries, but critics cast doubt on whether the Defense Department and individual commanders are moving with suitable alacrity.

A particular concern, they said, is the culture inherent to Green Berets and other Special Operations forces, a high-speed, secretive working environment where

SEE LACK ON PAGE 5

More wind-driven fires expected

Canada and Mexico send manpower, equipment to help fight LA blazes

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER
 AND HOLLY RAMER
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A growing force of firefighters moved into the Los Angeles area Monday as more powerful winds were expected to trigger new wildfires that could set back the recent progress made in containing blazes that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people.

Crews and equipment arrived from across the U.S., and from Canada and Mexico — including water trucks and planes that drop fire-

fighting chemicals — as the National Weather Service warned that the coming days could become “particularly dangerous.”

It predicted severe fire conditions will last through Wednesday, with wind gusts in the mountains reaching 65 mph. The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behavior analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting Sunday night.

The relative calm Sunday allowed some people to return to previously evacuated areas. But even as containment increased in the worst of the fires, more bad news emerged

from the ashes: The death toll surged late Sunday with an update from the Los Angeles County medical examiner. At least 16 people were missing, a number authorities said was also likely to rise.

Fierce Santa Ana winds have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires sparked last week into infernos that leveled entire neighborhoods around the nation's second-largest city where there has been no significant rainfall in more than eight months.

SEE FIRES ON PAGE 8

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Blue Origin calls off debut launch of new rocket

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Blue Origin called off the debut launch of its massive new rocket early Monday because of technical trouble.

The 320-foot New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. But launch controllers had to deal with an unspecified rocket issue in the final minutes of the countdown and ran out of time. Once the countdown

clock was halted, they immediately began draining all the fuel from the rocket.

Blue Origin did not immediately set a new launch date, saying the team needed more time to resolve the problem.

The test flight already had been delayed by rough seas that posed a risk to the company's plan to land the first-stage booster on a floating platform in the Atlantic.

New Glenn is named after the first American to orbit Earth, John Glenn. It is five times taller

than Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket that carries paying customers to the edge of space from Texas.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos founded the company 25 years ago. He took part in Monday's countdown from Mission Control, located at the rocket factory just outside the gates of NASA's Kennedy Space Center about 50 miles east of Orlando, Fla.

No matter what happens, Bezos said Sunday, "We're going to pick ourselves up and keep going."

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 14)	0.96	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768
British pound (Jan. 14)	\$1.18	Britain (Pound)	1.2151
Japanese yen (Jan. 14)	154.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.4404
South Korean won (Jan. 14)	1434.00	China (Yuan)	7.3322
		Denmark (Krone)	7.3078
		Egypt (Pound)	50.5089
		Euro	0.9795
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7858
		Hungary (Forint)	404.94
		Israel (Shekel)	3.6715
		Japan (Yen)	157.37
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3075
		Norway (Krone)	11.4725
		Philippines (Peso)	58.70
		Poland (Zloty)	4.18
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7541
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3730
		South Korea (Won)	1468.43
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9180		
Thailand (Baht)	34.76		
Turkey (NewLira)	35.4874		

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

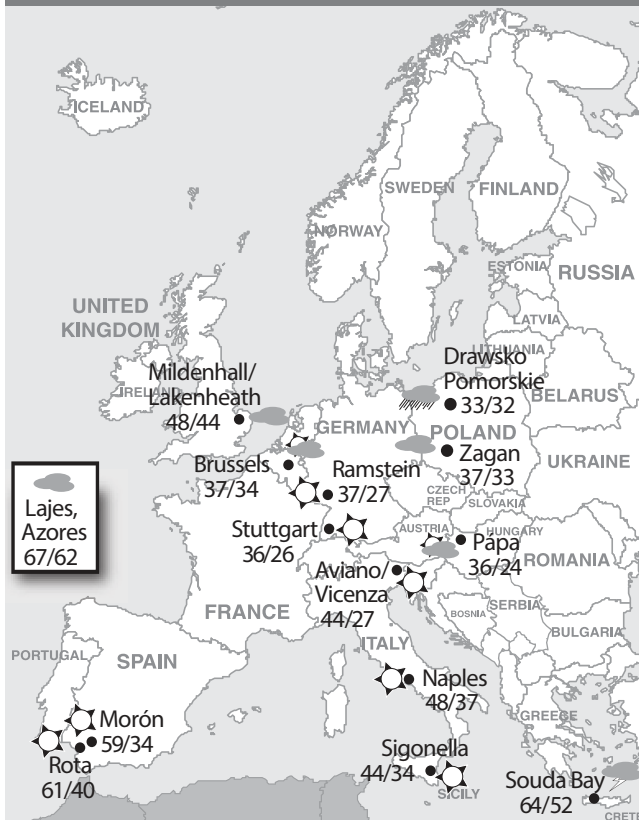
INTEREST RATES	
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.32
30-year bond	4.95

WEATHER OUTLOOK

TUESDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



TUESDAY IN EUROPE



WEDNESDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

Soldiers more likely to use nicotine pouches

Study finds military use of product far outweighs use by general public

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

Soldiers at the largest military base in the U.S. were found to be eight times likelier to use nicotine pouches than the average American adult, according to a new survey.

University of Virginia researchers polled roughly 2,000 soldiers at Fort Liberty, N.C., and released a statement on the findings last week.

Nearly 24% of the Fort Liberty soldiers surveyed said they had used nicotine pouches in the previous 30 days, compared with about 3% of all American adults who reported ever using the pouches in a 2022 University of Nebraska survey.

"We are currently working on addressing these high rates of nicotine pouches by developing tailored interventions for military personnel," Melissa Little, director of the Center for Nicotine and Tobacco Research at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, said in the statement.

"Given everything that military personnel sacrifice to serve our country, providing them with the tools to lead the healthiest lives possible is the best way we can give back."

The addictive microfiber sachets filled with flavored nicotine powder are billed by manufactur-

ers as a safer alternative to cigarettes and vaping, as they aren't inhaled into the lungs.

However, they have been linked by medical experts at the University of Virginia and other institutions to a range of ailments, including cardiovascular risks, lung and stomach problems and narrowing arteries, which can lead to heart attacks.

The study analyzed anonymous responses from 1,957 soldiers surveyed in 2022 and 2023.

Nicotine pouch use grew in popularity during the survey period, with 24.7% of soldiers queried in 2023 reported having used them, compared with 20.2% in 2022.

Zyn, the most popular brand of nicotine pouches in the U.S., was introduced in 2014 but experienced a sales boom in 2023. Some 350 million tubs of the product were sold that year, an increase of 62% from the previous year, CNN reported.

The increasing popularity of nicotine pouch use also has drawn it into politicization.

On his podcast in early 2023, right-wing pundit Tucker Carlson spoke of his love for Zyn. He then distanced himself from it last year and launched his own brand.

Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., early last year called for Zyn to be regulated, which received pushback from some lawmakers across the aisle.



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

A soldier buys Zyn nicotine pouches at an Army and Air Force Exchange Service store Friday in Kaiserslautern, Germany. A recently released survey of almost 2,000 soldiers at Fort Liberty, N.C., showed a higher use of the pouches among military personnel at the base than among the general public.

Rep. Richard Hudson, a North Carolina Republican, posted a picture of himself in camouflage holding a Zyn packet with the text: "Come and take it!"

In the Fort Liberty survey, 27% of those between the ages of 17 to 24 used the pouches, according to researchers. About 15% of soldiers age 30 and above used them.

"Military personnel historically use tobacco and nicotine products at much higher rates than their ci-

vilian counterparts," Little said. "Our results show that these same disparities are continuing with new and emerging products, like nicotine pouches."

With approximately 200,000 American service members leaving the military each year, more research is needed to develop ways to reduce nicotine and tobacco consumption as they return to civilian life, the study authors said.

Sweden to send up to 3 warships to Baltic Sea

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Sweden will contribute up to three warships to a NATO effort to increase the alliance's presence in the Baltic Sea as it tries to guard against sabotage of underwater infrastructure, the government said Sunday.

The Swedish military also will contribute an ASC 890 surveillance aircraft, the government said in a statement. And the country's coast guard will contribute four ships to help monitor the Baltic, with a further seven vessels on standby.

Sweden became the Western military alliance's 32nd member in March. It followed neighboring Finland into NATO after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The government said this will be the first time that Sweden as a NATO ally contributes armed forces to the alliance's defense and deterrence.

The decision comes as a string of incidents in the Baltic has heightened concerns about possible Russian activities in the region.

The undersea cables and pipelines that crisscross the sea link Nordic, Baltic and central European countries, promote trade, energy security and, in some cases, reduce dependence on Russian energy resources.

Ten Baltic Sea cables have been damaged since 2023, affecting Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Germany and Lithuania. At least two incidents involved ships later accused of dragging their anchors.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said at an annual security conference Sunday that Sweden is not at war, but there is also no peace, Swedish news agency TT reported.

Report: F-22 makes emergency landing at Kadena base

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — An Air Force F-22A Raptor made an emergency landing at Kadena Air Base over the weekend, according to a local newspaper.

The \$350 million stealth fighter, deployed to the base on a rotational basis, landed around 2 p.m. Sunday, the Ryukyu Shimpo reported, citing a photo and unnamed witnesses.

The aircraft was returning after participating in routine training that began Wednesday and is scheduled to continue through Thursday, the report said.

Firefighters inspected the aircraft before it was towed to the tarmac, according to the newspaper.

The spokeswoman for Kadena's 18th Wing, Maj. Alli Stormer, declined to confirm



LUIS E. RIOS CALDERON/U.S. Air Force

The Air Force has rotated advanced warplanes through Kadena since 2022.

the incident in an email Monday but said "precautionary landings are standard procedure when pilots notice something out of the ordinary with their aircraft."

"We are committed to conducting safe flight operations as we uphold our defense commitments," she wrote.

The Air Force has rotated advanced warplanes through Kadena since December 2022, when it announced a plan to replace 48

legacy F-15s stationed on Okinawa. Kadena, situated northeast of Taiwan at the eastern edge of the East China Sea, is sometimes called the "keystone of the Pacific" because of its strategic location.

In June, the Air Force announced it would permanently deploy 36 F-15EX Eagles to Okinawa as part of a broader plan to station advanced fighter aircraft across Japan over the next several years.

Currently, F-35A Lightning IIs from the 34th Fighter Squadron at Hill Air Force Base, Utah; F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 77th Fighter Generation Squadron at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina; and F-22 Raptors from the 525th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, are deployed at Kadena, Stormer wrote.

As of Nov. 26, 14 Fighting Falcons, 11 Rap-

tors, 12 Lightning IIs and 10 F-15s were stationed at Kadena, according to a visual inspection by Okinawa Defense Bureau staff, a spokesman for Japan's Ministry of Defense said. Some Japanese officials speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

Sunday's landing follows other recent mishaps involving Raptors at Kadena.

On Oct. 18, two Raptors experienced tire issues: one had "two tire failures" while landing, and another had a "tire malfunction prior to takeoff," according to the 18th Wing.

Earlier in October, another Raptor made a precautionary landing, following a similar incident in September involving a Raptor deployed from Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va.

No injuries or runway damage were reported in those incidents, the wing said.

Stars and Stripes reporter Keishi Koja contributed to this report.

PACIFIC

Japan should brace for 'unpredictable diplomacy'

New US administration could destabilize region, foreign policy expert says

By HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration has the potential to bring uncertainty to an already tense security situation around Japan, a foreign policy expert recently told reporters in Japan's capital city.

"The Trump administration's unpredictable diplomacy could destabilize the region," Chuo University professor Taizo Miyagi said Friday

at a press briefing hosted by the Foreign Press Center.

The Trump administration may put American interests at the heart of dealings with other nations, Miyagi said, and Trump himself may conduct "deal-like" diplomacy with foreign leaders.

"It is necessary to think of possibilities that President Trump may make deals with China or North Korea, directly bypassing Japan," he added. A potential upside of deals

made by Trump could be invigorated Japanese diplomacy in the region, Miyagi said.

The pillar of Japan's foreign relations will continue to be the U.S.-Japan alliance, but a change in America's approach could spur Japan to launch its own initiatives to try to soften tensions with neighbors, he said.

Japan has set a target of spending 2% of its gross domestic product for defense, aiming to strengthen its de-

terrence capabilities.

"There is no doubt that there are certain needs for Japan to maintain or strengthen deterrence and defense capabilities," Miyagi said.

However, Japan is facing economic pressures that could constrain its investment in security. The country may look at the possibility of reducing tensions in East Asia by diplomacy, Miyagi told reporters. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe greatly expanded Japan's diplomat-

ic influence in the Indo-Pacific, he said.

One challenge facing Japan is that no strong leader, nor public sentiment, backs stronger diplomacy today, Miyagi said.

Instead, Japan's public wants a hardline position against China and North Korea due to territorial disputes with Beijing and the unresolved issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea, Miyagi said.

Strong Japanese leadership could overcome these obstacles and lead diplomacy to ease tensions in the region, he said.

Blue Angels pilots' tour makes stop in Hawaii

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII — Navy pilot Lt. Cmdr. Lilly Montana has a brief bit of advice for anyone planning to watch the Blue Angels flight demonstration team as it performs this August at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii.

"There's a couple surprises, one or two sneak passes," Montana, a member of the team, told reporters Friday morning at Marine Corps Base Hawaii.

"I won't spoil the surprise, but folks that come to K-Bay and come to the air show, bring your hearing protection," she said.

Montana and fellow Blue Angels team member Marine Corps Maj. Scott Laux were in Hawaii this week to lay the groundwork for the squadron's performance at the Kaneohe Bay Air Show Aug. 9-10.

The visit was also part of the team's country-wide publicity blitz for the 32 air show demonstrations scheduled for 2025, kicking off March 15 with the Naval Air Facility El Centro Festival of Flight in California.

The team last performed at the Kaneohe Bay Air Show in 2022.

The stated mission of the Blue Angels, established in 1946 by Adm. Chester Nimitz, "is to showcase the teamwork and professionalism of the United States Navy and Marine Corps by inspiring a culture of excellence and service to country through flight demonstrations and community outreach."

Laux said that the Blue Angels team is "one of the most effective tools" the Defense Department has in executing that mission by performing across the nation each year.

"Our aircraft are painted blue and gold, not gray," he said. "We want to be seen. We want to be in the public's eye. We want the public to know what the Navy and the Marine Corps are doing for the country."

He pushed back on those who question whether funding the team — roughly \$37 million a year — is worth the expense.

"[H]aving the ability to put members of the active-duty Navy, the Marine Corps, in front of the public to promote that culture of excellence and service to country, I would challenge anyone who



WYATT OLSON/Stars and Stripes

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Lilly Montana and Marine Corps Maj. Scott Laux, aviators with the Blue Angels demonstration flight team, pose Friday at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay.

asked that question to find a better resource than the Blue Angels to execute that mission," he said.

"Obviously, we're all the way out here in Hawaii right now," he said. "We've got Key West on the schedule as well, so the exact opposite corner of the country. We've got Portsmouth, New Hampshire, other places in the South, the Midwest, the Northwest, the Southwest."

There is also a human cost to performing precision aerial maneuvers, which at times bring the F/A-18 Super Hornet jets within 18 inches of each other and as low as 50 feet above the ground.

Twenty-six team members have died during practice or performance since 1946, a relatively large number given that there have been fewer than 300 demon-

stration pilots during that time.

The pair of pilots heads back to the West Coast on Saturday to continue visiting upcoming air show sites.

"Most places we go are excited to see us," Laux said. "Air shows are exciting things so the energy is always high. And we're excited to bring a pretty awesome product to each of these towns."

FBI director: China, its cyber program 'defining threat of our generation'

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

China's cyber program has already infiltrated critical American infrastructure and is poised to "wreak havoc" at a whim, the outgoing FBI director told "60 Minutes" on Sunday.

Christopher Wray, who plans to resign as President-elect Donald Trump takes office later this month, described the Chinese government as "the greatest-long-term threat" and the "defining threat of our generation," due in part to its massive, state-funded cyber program.

During the interview with CBS's

Scott Pelley, Wray said Beijing can leverage those programs to target water treatment plants, the electrical grid, natural gas pipelines, telecommunications and other systems.



Wray

China has already pre-positioned malware to "lie in wait on those networks," where it can "inflict real-world harm at a time and place of their choosing," he said.

The FBI also believes that Beijing has already listened in on com-

munications by high-level officials.

Wray didn't confirm whom he suspects China has surveilled, but "60 Minutes" said it independently confirmed Beijing spied on communications from Donald Trump, Kamala Harris' presidential campaign and U.S. national security figures, according to the televised interview.

The program did not disclose how it confirmed those statements.

China is the "most active and persistent cyberthreat to U.S. Government, private-sector, and critical infrastructure networks," according to the Office of the Director

of National Intelligence's annual threat assessment released Feb. 5.

"If Beijing believed that a major conflict with the United States were imminent, it would consider aggressive cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure and military assets," the report said. A cyber strike of that scale would aim to impede the deployment of U.S. troops, induce societal panic and otherwise interfere with U.S. military actions, according to the report.

China over the past decade has been accused of multiple state-sponsored hacking campaigns aimed at the U.S. — as well as Euro-

pean and Asian countries — but it routinely denies involvement.

The U.S. Treasury on Jan. 3 sanctioned Integrity Technology Group Inc., a Beijing-based cybersecurity company, for its alleged involvement in multiple hacking attempts against the U.S.

The hacks were connected to Flax Typhoon, which the Treasury described as "a Chinese malicious state-sponsored cyber group that has been active since at least 2021, often targeting organizations within U.S. critical infrastructure sectors," according to the Treasury news release announcing the sanctions.

MILITARY

Lack: Troops in special ops often hesitate to seek assistance**FROM PAGE 1**

Livelsberger spent the majority of his military career. Operators pride themselves on toughness and resiliency, and often elect to gut out mental and physical ailments for fear that acknowledging they need help will put them at risk of being pulled from their duties.

While senior leaders have sought to change that culture, such efforts do not always take hold among rank-and-file troops, for whom reliability is important social currency, said Katherine L. Kuzminski, a military policy expert at the Center for a New American Security.

"I don't think that that permeates to the interpersonal relationships between those in Special Operations," Kuzminski said of the institutional push to destigmatize behavioral health care. "There is always the risk that your personal reputation could be harmed if it's known that you're really having a problem."

The FBI and local authorities in Las Vegas have said that Livelsberger is "likely" to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that can include depression, anxiety or other behaviors, but they did not say how they arrived at that conclusion.

Military officials have not made such a declaration, citing privacy laws.

Law enforcement authorities have not disclosed a motive but recovered writings from Livelsberger's phone and other messages he wrote indicating he wanted to "relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took" and draw attention to alleged war crimes in Afghanistan.

At the time of his death, Livelsberger was on authorized leave from his duty station in Germany with the Army's 10th Special Forces Group, where he had recently begun a specialization in drone warfare.

He had access to and used a program for Special Operations troops that provides "holistic care in physical, cognitive, medical and support resources as appropriate to each individual," said the Army's chief spokesperson, Brig. Gen. Amanda Azubuike. He did not display any "concerning behavior" before being granted time off, she said.

The Army is conducting its own investigation of the circumstances surrounding Livelsberger's suicide, officials said, which is standard when soldiers die in uniform. The inquiry is expected to scrutinize whether leaders or fellow soldiers in his unit, or his health care providers, missed signs of distress.

A military official familiar with the matter, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid, defended Livelsberg-



LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT/AP

The government ID belonging to Matthew Livelsberger was found inside a Tesla Cybertruck involved in an explosion outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

er's leaders, calling them "engaged," and sought to distance his care team from what happened outside the Trump hotel.

"No one tells their mental health provider they plan to blow up a building," the official said. "I truly think that was a snap decision."

Col. Allie Weiskopf, the director of public affairs for U.S. Special Operations Command, said personnel assigned to elite military units are screened annually to assess their psychological health. Additionally, once every three months senior leaders are expected to discuss with their troops the resources available to them and work to dispel persistent myths about seeking behavioral health care, she said.

Typically, providers can see patients in less than two weeks, often within three days, or the same day if they have an emergency, Weiskopf said.

"Our data shows that service members are seeking help," Weiskopf said. The Washington Post requested the command's data but was told it was not readily releasable.

The deep bonds forged within such units are vital for completing the complex missions they are assigned, but that codependency can exact a cost, former Special Operations troops said, describing feelings of guilt that can occur if they were to miss a combat deployment or important training. That leads many to downplay or ignore mental and physical ailments, they explained. Rather, people who need help often wait

until the end of their military service to seek care.

"Sometimes you don't necessarily get the full military medical treatment that you should because you're worried about how it could impact you while you're in service," said a former Special Forces officer who served with Livelsberger in Afghanistan. "Stigma," he said, "still exists for mental health help."

A recent study funded by the military's Special Operations Command set out to understand why some troops may or may not seek care, Weiskopf said. The results are not finalized, but preliminary findings "do not indicate that the stigma of behavioral health was a primary barrier," she said.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who co-led legislation intended to improve treatment and screening for head trauma among service members, told The Post that Congress must "take a closer look at how Master Sgt. Livelsberger's apparent brain injuries may have contributed to the tragedy" in Las Vegas. Bipartisan reforms passed last year were a start, she added, "but we need to do much more."

There is an evolving understanding in the Pentagon that brain injuries aren't just a combat problem and can manifest as a result of normal duties, too, including through smaller shock waves in weapons used in training, said Kuzminski, the military policy expert.

Yet the Defense Department has been an obstacle to some



LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT/Shutterstock

The remains of the Tesla Cybertruck that exploded rest in front of the Trump International Hotel.

change, according to a Senate aide, who said the Pentagon moved to block additional reforms from inclusion in the most recent defense policy bill. "Despite the obvious need for more research and data, DOD has been resistant to creating blast exposure logs," the aide said. The Senate's version of the bill included provisions for exposure logs, but they were not in the final version signed into law.

The Pentagon disputed that assertion and defended its approach for handling traumatic brain injuries, saying it has made strides and boosted resources and care.

A program launched in 2022 has focused on collaboration between military and medical communities to focus on brain health, mitigate hazards and reduce long term impacts, said Joshua Wick, a Pentagon spokesman.

An initiative launched last year will screen all incoming troops and establish a baseline of brain health that can be followed over time to better inform treatment, Wick said, and those with increased exposure will be tested more frequently.

Brain injuries in troops have presaged other high-profile violence.

Robert Card, the Army reservist who killed 18 people in a shooting in Maine in 2023, grew paranoid and heard voices before the attack, family and colleagues said. A study of his brain after Card took his life found significant damage consistent with blast exposure that probably played a role in his behavioral changes.

The injuries were linked to his work at a grenade-training range, where he may have endured thousands of low-level blasts.

The Army downplayed the ties between his job and brain trauma but concluded leaders in his unit failed to act on warning signs of his erratic behavior before the attack.

Special Operations troops, who often deploy more than conven-

tional military personnel and commonly have long careers in those jobs, face substantial risk for issues such as post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. In training and in combat, U.S. commandos deploy explosive charges to breach doors, fire anti-armor weapons and absorb a lot of other wear and tear.

Cumulatively, the job's demands can jar the brain in big and small ways.

Researchers have labeled such health challenges "Operator Syndrome."

Alicia Arritt, a nurse who dated Livelsberger on and off from 2018 to 2021, told The Post previously that he had shared with her that he struggled with a cloudy memory, poor concentration, difficulty maintaining relationships and intense guilt over his actions on the battlefield.

Such difficulties are common issues reported by troops with histories of blast exposure and multiple deployments, said James Stone, professor and vice chair of radiology research at the University of Virginia, who studies brain injuries among service members.

In particular, there is mounting evidence that Special Operations troops like Livelsberger have a high degree of exposure to blasts from training and deployments, according to a study led by Stone. The study found explosions increased brain inflammation and reduced volume and thickness of brain structures, impacting functions such as memory, motor skills and emotional regulation.

Screening for brain injuries has become more prevalent in the operator community, the former Special Forces officer said, though considerable challenges remain.

"Most in the [Special Operations forces] community have some level of TBI," he said. "The issue is figuring out how severe. It is not easily screened for ... the physiological signs are not easy to catch."

EUROPE

NATO takes over air defense in Poland from US

German troops set to replace Army Patriot missile team later this year

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — NATO has taken command and control from the United States of air defense in Poland, where an Army Patriot missile team also is expected to soon be replaced, according to U.S. military officials.

NATO's new role as the command hub for air defense in Poland is the latest push to have the alliance shoulder more responsibility, U.S. Army Col. Martin O'Donnell, spokesman for Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe, said Monday.

"This milestone would not have been possible without NATO Allied Air Command, Poland as hosting nation and so many others, and the recent contributions of Germany and Norway," O'Donnell said of the command shift, which went into effect Thursday.

The previously U.S.-led air defense mission in Poland, launched in the aftermath of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, is focused on safeguarding allied logistics nodes used for getting weaponry into Ukraine.

Last month, NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine began taking over work previously led by U.S. European Command's Security Assistance Group—Ukraine, which is located at the Army's Europe headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany.

"The support of nations is vital to this effort, which is crucial to Ukraine and its ability to prevail," O'Donnell said.

The moves come ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House. NATO officials have characterized the establishment of an alliance command to oversee efforts for assisting Ukraine as a way to bring more stability and predictability to the mission.

Some alliance observers also have described the shift as an attempt to "Trump-proof" Ukraine support initiatives, given Trump's past statements about reducing military aid to the country.

But having allies play a more prominent role in coordinating Ukraine aid and defending airspace also could signal to Trump that NATO members are stepping up. Trump has long complained that European allies are overly reliant on the U.S. military for defense.

Since 2022, U.S. troops have been at the center of air defense in Poland, where the Army has repeatedly deployed Patriot batteries near Poland's border with Ukraine.

That mission is now being filled by the Baumholder, Germany-based 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, which began a nine-month rotation in July, according to the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command.

Soon, a European NATO ally is poised to play the lead role in that effort. Germany announced in November that it will send one of its Patriot units to Poland in early 2025 to undertake the mission now being carried out by U.S. troops.



CHRISTOPHER SMITH/U.S. Army

U.S. Patriot missile batteries in Poland are expected to be replaced by a Patriot unit from Germany later this year.



BRIAN ERICKSON/Stars and Stripes

Airmen get an up-close look at the HH-60W Jolly Green II combat rescue helicopter Friday during an official welcome ceremony at Aviano Air Base, Italy.

Aviano officially welcomes new Jolly Green II rescue helicopters

By BRIAN ERICKSON
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — Airmen in the 31st Fighter Wing have their transition to a new cutting-edge combat rescue helicopter underway, putting Aviano's fleet of two HH-60W Jolly Green II aircraft on display for the first time.

On Friday, the wing held an official welcome ceremony for the Jolly Green II, which serves as the Air Force's replacement for the venerable HH-60G Pave Hawk.

Aviano received its first of the new helicopters last month and is scheduled to have a total of six by October.

It was crucial to bring the Jolly Green II to Aviano because the helicopter was specifically designed to operate in a joint theater like U.S. European Command, Lt. Col. Theodore Rodgers, the wing's

division chief for the HH-60W program integration office, said Friday.

The Jolly Green II has a wider core blade and weighs about 4,000 pounds less than the Pave Hawk, offering pilots more power and allowing the aircraft to carry more equipment, ammunition and passengers, Rodgers said.

The helicopter is made by Sikorsky, which also produces the Army's Black Hawk. It represents a significant boost in capabilities over its precursor, with better avionics, threat detection and countermeasures as well as greater fuel capacity, according to the Air Force.

The name Jolly Green II pays homage to the Vietnam War-era Sikorsky HH-3E Jolly Green and HH-53 Super Jolly Green, whose crews are regarded as the pioneers of aerial combat search and

rescue, the Air Force said in 2020.

The upgrades reflect a focus on protecting crews and evacuees in hostile environments, Air Force Air Education and Training Command said in a December statement.

Later in December, Aviano airmen took a farewell flight in a Pave Hawk, giving a sendoff to a combat rescue helicopter that enjoyed a long run of use in saving American service members all over the globe.

The Jolly Green II provides the agility, survivability and lethality needed on future battlefields, 31st Fighter Wing commander Brig. Gen. Tad Clark said in a speech Friday.

"This moment, although exceptional, is not just about the arrival of the new aircraft; it's about embracing the challenges of today," Clark said.

Woman on footpath in Germany dies after being struck by US military police vehicle

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A U.S. soldier is under investigation on suspicion of negligent homicide following the death of a pedestrian who was struck by a military police car in Ansbach over the weekend, German police said Monday.

The soldier, 19, was driving off-post Sunday at around 7:30 a.m. near Urtas Kaserne in the direction of Katterbach when he lost control of the patrol vehicle and drove onto a nearby footpath, Mit-

telfranken police said in a statement later that day.

The car drove about 300 feet before striking a 33-year-old Ansbach woman who was walking on the path, the statement said.

The seriously injured woman was transported by an ambulance to a local hospital, where she was later pronounced dead, according to Mittelfranken police.

The driver, whose identity hasn't been disclosed, was not injured.

"The reason for (the vehicle) coming off the road is still un-

clear," Mittelfranken police spokeswoman Janine Mendel said Monday.

The investigation is taking place in the context of an accident, Mendel said. It is being led by German law enforcement in coordination with the Army, according to a service statement Sunday.

"Our deepest condolences and sympathies go out to those directly affected by this tragic event," the Army statement said.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this report.

NATION

Hegseth's past could be problematic at Pentagon

By TARA COPP
AND LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — If Pete Hegseth were still in uniform, his extramarital affairs and a decision to flatly ignore a combat commander's directive would not just be drawing the attention of senators — they could have run afoul of military law.

That is raising questions among current and former defense leaders and veterans about whether Hegseth would be able to enforce discipline in the ranks if confirmed as President-elect Donald Trump's defense secretary. Hegseth would oversee more than 2 million troops who could be disciplined or kicked out of the service for the same behavior he has acknowledged or been accused of in the past.

Hegseth, a 44-year-old Army National Guard veteran and former Fox News Channel weekend host, has acknowledged having multiple extramarital affairs — which occurred while he was in the military, according to divorce records — and has said he told his troops to ignore commands about when to fire on potential enemies. Both violate the Uniform Code of Military Justice and can get troops court-martialed and dishonorably discharged.

He's also facing questions over his past drinking — which, had it occurred in uniform, also could have led to disciplinary action.

Hegseth, however, has the support of some veterans' groups that say his past indiscretions are not as important as getting in the job someone who will focus on improving military readiness to fight.

Four defense officials pointed to Hegseth's acknowledged problems and said senior officers have expressed unease about having him at the helm because the defense secretary often sits in judgment of generals and admirals ac-

cused of bad behavior — including infidelity and refusal to obey orders.

Service members expect those holding them accountable to set an example and meet equally high standards, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to relay private discussions.

"Character is everything in an institution," said former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, who served in the Obama administration and was a longtime Republican senator. "You can't minimize how important character is in leadership."

While it's very rare for service members to be disciplined solely for consensual affairs, it's more likely to be done as part of a broader incident that affects the good order and discipline of a unit or their ability to lead.

Those instances would include fraternization within a unit, anything involving an assault or a relationship between a service member and a subordinate's civilian spouse.

A test before the Senate

The issues are expected to come up Tuesday at Hegseth's Senate confirmation hearing, which will be an early test of Trump's ability to ensure loyalty among a slim Republican majority.

In a letter to Hegseth last week, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee holding the hearing, asked that he answer a number of questions about his previous conduct. The Massachusetts Democrat said she was "deeply concerned by the many ways in which your past behavior and rhetoric indicates that you are unfit to lead the Department of Defense."

Asked about his ability to discipline others under the Uniform Code of Military Justice considering his own behavior, Hegseth said on the "Megyn Kelly Show" last month that "my job is to follow

the law, the UCMJ, and I will do that."

Hegseth also has promised not to drink on the job and has denied a 2017 sex assault allegation but acknowledged paying the woman a settlement. He was going through a divorce at the time after having a child with a Fox News producer who became his current wife, according to court records and his social media posts.

Trump and his supporters have rallied around Hegseth, saying he will strengthen what they see as a "woke" military.

He "is an incredibly tough and smart candidate that will fight to put America First," Steven Cheung, Trump's communications director, said in a statement. "With Pete as our Secretary of Defense, America's enemies are on notice and our military will be great again."

Only one other Cabinet nominee in the last 60 years has gone through the confirmation process only to be rejected by the Senate. Texas Republican Sen. John Tower, President-elect George H.W. Bush's choice for defense secretary, was voted down in 1989 after contentious confirmation hearings looking into allegations of Tower's drinking and womanizing.

In meetings with senators on Capitol Hill, Hegseth has worked to assuage concerns. Trump's base also has piled pressure on those seen as not fully on board.

Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate Maine Republican, said after meeting Hegseth last month that she pressed him about the drinking allegations and settlement payment and would wait to decide on his nomination until the confirmation hearing and a background check.

Strict code of conduct

Hegseth's indiscretions could impede his ability to lead by example, said the chief executive of-



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

President Donald Trump, right, appears on Fox & Friends with co-host Pete Hegseth at a Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride event in the East Room of the White House, on April 6, 2017.

ficer of the nation's largest group of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

"The average American might scratch their head that you can literally be kicked out of the military for cheating on your spouse. But it is fact. And that's just because the military holds itself to a higher standard when it comes to character," said Allison Jaslow, who served as an Army officer in Iraq and now heads the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a group of about 425,000.

In a November podcast, Hegseth said he told his platoon in Iraq in 2005 to ignore a commander's directive not to fire on someone unless they raised their weapon to shoot at U.S. troops.

"Clear as day, I remember walking out of that briefing and pulling my platoon together and being like, 'Guys, we're not doing that,'" Hegseth said. "If you see an enemy, engage before he's able to point his weapon at you and shoot."

Asked whether that had given Trump's team pause, transition spokesman Brian Hughes said "all nominees and appointees will comply with the ethical obliga-

tions of their respective agencies."

Hegseth was awarded a Bronze Star for his service in Iraq from 2005 to 2006 and earned a second for his tour in Afghanistan in 2012.

Gaining some vet support

He has gotten a boost from 32 House Republicans who served in the military, who asked the Senate to evaluate him on his service and vision. They don't vote on his nomination, however.

A group of Navy SEALs is hosting a rally for him this week in Washington, and one of those involved said Hegseth's indiscretions are not as important as refocusing the military on readiness.

"I think the core of my support ... kind of goes back to the fact that I was a SEAL on 9/11 and that changed my life forever," Bill Brown said.

He said Hegseth understands their anger and sense of betrayal over failures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Regarding potential military code violations, "the No. 1 rule of engagement is you come home," Brown said. "The military is not a social justice project."

Incoming Trump team questioning NSC workers about loyalty

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Incoming senior Trump administration officials have begun questioning career civil servants who work on the White House National Security Council about who they voted for in the 2024 election, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by President-elect Donald Trump's team, according to a U.S.

official familiar with the matter.

At least some of these nonpolitical employees have begun packing up their belongings since being asked about their loyalty to Trump — after they had earlier been given indications that they would be asked to stay on at the NSC in the new administration, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

Trump's pick for national se-

curity adviser, Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, in recent days publicly signaled his intention to get rid of all nonpolitical appointees and career intelligence officials serving on the NSC by Inauguration Day to ensure the council is staffed with those who support Trump's agenda.

A wholesale removal of foreign policy and national security experts from the NSC on Day 1 of the new administration could deprive

Trump's team of considerable expertise and institutional knowledge at a time when the U.S. is grappling with difficult policy challenges in Ukraine, the Middle East and beyond.

Such questioning could also make new policy experts brought in to the NSC less likely to speak up about policy differences and concerns.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan is making a

robust case for the incoming Trump administration to hold over career government employees assigned to the NSC at least through the early going of the new administration.

"Given everything going on in the world, making sure you have in place a team that is up to speed, and, you know, ready to continue serving at 12:01, 12:02, 12:03 p.m. on the 20th is really important," Sullivan said on Friday.

NATION

Beyoncé donates \$2.5M to fire relief

Wildfires have deep impact on entertainment industry

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Weaker winds and intense firefighting efforts over the weekend boosted containment of fires burning in and around Los Angeles, but the effects of the blazes on the entertainment world continue.

Several projects and awards shows have been delayed, with the Producers Guild opting not to announce its nominations Sunday due to ongoing effects of the fire. Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, also announced she would postpone the launch of a Netflix lifestyles program until March.

Celebrities and entertainment organizations are pledging millions to help those who have been displaced or lost their homes, with Beyoncé directly donating millions to help families in the Eaton fire area.

Beyoncé contributed \$2.5 million to a newly launched LA Fire Relief Fund created by her charitable foundation, BeyGOOD.

The announcement arrived via

the BeyGOOD foundation Instagram account on Sunday. “The fund is earmarked to aid families in the Altadena/Pasadena area who lost their homes, and to churches and community centers to address the immediate needs of those affected by the wildfires,” the caption read.

Founded in 2013, the BeyGOOD foundation concentrates on economic equity, by “supporting marginalized and under-resourced programs,” according to its mission statement.

Last week, Beyoncé’s mother Tina Knowles shared that her Malibu bungalow was destroyed in the Los Angeles-area fires.

The Screen Actors Guild announced over the weekend it would commit \$1 million to help members affected by the fires. While a lot of attention has been paid to stars who have lost homes, numerous less-famous industry workers have also lost homes or been displaced by the fires.

The disaster has also affected

upcoming programs. The Duchess of Sussex has pushed back the release of her new Netflix series due to the wildfires that have ravaged the LA-area.

“With Love, Meghan” was set to debut Wednesday, but the streaming service said Sunday that it supports her request to push the premiere to focus on helping those affected by the fires.

The Duchess was born and raised in Los Angeles and now lives in Montecito, Calif., with Harry, the Duke of Sussex and their two children.

On Saturday, the royal couple visited Pasadena to hand out food and water to fire victims and thank first responders.

The publisher of Arnold Schoenberg’s works says original manuscripts and scores from the composer were lost in the Los Angeles wildfires.

Belmont Music Publishers, located in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood, made the announcement Sunday.



SCOTT STRAZZANTE, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE / AP

A sculpture is all that remains at a burned homesite Sunday in the aftermath of the Palisades Fire in Malibu, Calif.

Born in Austria, Schoenberg moved to the U.S. when the Nazis took power and settled in Los Angeles, where he died in 1951.

Schoenberg gained attention for a 12-tone technique of composition and along with his students,

including Alban Berg and Anton Webern, became known as the Second Viennese School. Among his most-known works are “Erwartung,” “Gurre-Lieder,” “Verklärte Nacht” and “Pierrot lunaire.”

Fires: Crews are preparing for more destructive winds

FROM PAGE 1

In less than a week, four fires around the nation’s second biggest city have ignited more than 62 square miles, roughly three times the size of Manhattan.

Most of that destruction has been from the Eaton Fire near Pasadena and the Palisades Fire, in a wealthy enclave along the Pacific Coast. Firefighters have made progress on both fronts in recent days, with the Eaton Fire roughly one-third contained.

The returning high winds could trigger explosive growth of the existing fires and new outbreaks in areas untouched so far, creating new challenges for firefighting crews already stretched thin.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone said 70 additional water trucks arrived to help firefighters fend off flames spread by renewed gusts. “We are prepared for the upcoming wind event,” Marrone said.

Fire retardant dropped by aircraft will act as a barrier along hillsides, officials said.

A group of artists, musicians, and friends in Topanga Canyon banded together to stop fires breaking out in new areas by turning off gas lines and propane tanks.

“We helped hopefully save a couple houses and we put out a couple spot fires,” Derek Mabra said as he drove along the coast looking at the destruction. “It’s complete and total devastation.”



MARK J. TERRILL / AP

A home stands Sunday above debris from the Palisades Fire in Malibu, Calif.

Some residents have been able to return to their homes to survey the damage.

Jim Orlandini, who lost his hardware store in Altadena, a hard-hit neighborhood next to Pasadena, said his home of 40 years survived.

“Tuesday night we didn’t sleep at all because we figured the house was gone,” he said Sunday as he recalled the moment the fires spread to his neighborhood.

Sixteen of the 24 deaths were attributed to the Eaton Fire and eight to the Palisades Fire, according to the Los Angeles County coroner’s office.

Twelve people were listed as missing within the Eaton Fire zone and four were missing from the Palisades Fire, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

In the meantime, LA city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley urged people to stay away from scorched neighborhoods.

“There are still active fires that are burning within the Palisades area, making it extremely, extremely dangerous for the public,” Crowley said Sunday. “There’s no power, there’s no water, there’s broken gas lines, and we have unstable structures.”

Officials warned the ash can

contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials.

About 50,000 people in Los Angeles County remained under evacuation orders, with more than 700 residents taking refuge in nine shelters, Luna said. Officials said most of the orders in the Palisades area were unlikely to be lifted before the red flag warnings expire Wednesday evening.

“Please rest assured that first thing Thursday we will begin talking about repopulation,” Marrone said.

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes nearly

1,400 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico.

Firefighters over the weekend managed to fight back flames in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities near Pacific Palisades not far from the coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill.

But the fires are not the only issue in the area. Looting continued to be a concern, with authorities reporting more arrests as the devastation grew. Those arrested included two people who posed as firefighters going into houses, Los Angeles Police Department Capt. Michael Lorenz said.

With California National Guard troops on hand to guard properties, Gov. Gavin Newsom posted on X: “California will NOT allow for looting.”

The fires that began Tuesday just north of downtown LA have burned more than 12,000 structures. No cause for the largest fires was determined.

AccuWeather’s early estimates suggest the fires could be the nation’s costliest ever, topping \$250 billion including what’s to come in the next days.

Newsom issued an executive order Sunday aimed at fast-tracking rebuilding by suspending some environmental regulations and ensuring that property tax assessments were not increased.

NATION

‘Whatever it is ... we’re going to get the result’

Trump gives GOP senators no set strategy as leaders struggle to craft his priorities

BY LISA MASCARO
AND KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump likes the idea of “one, big beautiful bill” for his top legislative priorities, but he emerged from a lengthy closed-door meeting with Republican senators late Wednesday open to other strategies as GOP leaders strain to develop a plan before the party gains full power in Washington.

Trump said it “feels great” to be back inside the U.S. Capitol for the first time since he left office four years ago, after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by his supporters. With his wife, Melania, he also paid tribute to the late President Jimmy Carter lying in state in the Rotunda ahead of the funeral services that were held Thursday.

With Trump taking the oath of office on Jan. 20, Republicans have no time to waste.

“We’re looking at the one bill versus two bills, and whatever it is, it doesn’t matter,” Trump said about the conflicting strategies as he arrived. “We’re going to get the result.”

More than 90 minutes later, after bantering with GOP senators on a wide range of topics, Trump exited with the same message: “One bill, two bills, doesn’t matter.”

Trump’s return to Capitol Hill marked a changed era in Washington as he strode through the corridors where four years ago a mob of his supporters had laid siege to the U.S. Capitol as senators fled to safety in a failed attempt to salvage Trump’s election defeat to President Joe Biden.

Inside the private meeting, Trump received applause and bursts of laughter from the Republican senators, staying late into the evening to confer with him behind closed doors. He took questions as the conversation roamed—from his designs on Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal to the fires raging in California and even the North Dakota Bison game,



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., left, joined from left by Sens. James Lankford, R-Okla., and Ted Budd, R-N.C., talk to reporters about the Laken Riley Act, a bill to detain unauthorized immigrants who have been accused of certain crimes, at the Capitol, on Thursday.

senators said.

At stake are tax cuts, border security, money to deport immigrants and efforts to boost oil and gas energy production — priorities for Republicans coming to the White House, House and Senate.

He first met privately with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D. Thune said afterward the Republican senators and Trump want the same results. “It’s an ongoing conversation,” he said.

Political capital is almost always at its peak at the start of a new presidential term, even more so because this is Trump’s second and he is prevented under the Constitution from a third. Moving swiftly is all the more important because the GOP majorities are slim, particularly in the House, where House Speaker Mike Johnson can’t afford to lose hardly any votes.

Johnson, who greeted Trump at

the Capitol, has said he sees himself operating as the GOP quarterback with Trump as their coach calling plays. But Republicans are quickly finding themselves in a dilemma: What happens when the coach changes his mind?

Trump has given Republicans on Capitol Hill mixed signals, flipping over what is the best approach. At first he said he wanted “one big, beautiful bill.” A few days later he reopened the door to two.

House Republicans want a single package. Senate GOP leaders are proposing at least two.

At one point during the meeting, Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D. said he suggested, “Well, Mr. President, you love a horse race and then whatever works best is great.”

Hoeven said, “He prefers one big, beautiful bill but hey you know he wants to get all this done.”

Republicans are relying on per-

haps the most complicated legislative tool at their disposal, the budget reconciliation process, as the vehicle to advance Trump’s priorities.

It’s a strategy with high risk, but also potentially high reward.

Reconciliation allows Congress to pass bills on a majority basis, without the threat of a filibuster in the Senate that could delay or kill action. But it is also a difficult, strict and time-consuming process that can fall apart at any moment.

Democrats used the same tool during the Obama era to approve the Affordable Care Act in 2010 without any Republican support. Republicans used it during Trump’s first term to pass the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act without Democrats.

Using reconciliation is a herculean task. Doing it twice could prove doubly difficult.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Pete Aguilar of California said what’s at stake is that Trump and the Republicans are proposing a tax giveaway to the wealthy and budget cuts that will cut social services and other programs that Americans rely on.

Republicans are “huddling behind closed doors” focused on “how they provide tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires and how they cut programs that hurt people,” he said.

Thune has said one could be approved within the first 30 days of the new administration with provisions for border security and mass deportations, energy development and military funds. The tax cuts would come later, in a second package.

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, a member of GOP leadership who invited the president-elect to meet with senators, said she could go with one or two bills.

“But I still think the two-bill strategy is better simply because I think we can get a victory in early, which will show the American people and the president we mean business,” she said.

Johnson, R-La., revived his football metaphor last week.

“We have very well-designed plays,” he said. “Now we are working out the sequence of those plays, working with a new head coach, in that metaphor, President Trump.”

Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., said he supports the House’s one-bill approach.

“You’re not going to get everything that you want,” he said. “So how do we put something together that everybody can get something?”

During his first term, Trump was known for changing his mind, a habit that members of Congress became accustomed to as they navigated his presidency.

Trump ally Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., said Trump just “wants all of it done.”

Vance: Violent Jan. 6 rioters shouldn’t be pardoned

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President-elect JD Vance says people responsible for the violence during the Capitol riot “obviously” should not be pardoned, as President-elect Donald Trump is promising to use his clemency power on behalf of many of those who tried on Jan. 6, 2021, to overturn the results of the election that Trump lost.

Vance insisted in an interview on “Fox News Sunday” that the pardon question is “very simple,”



Vance

saying those who “protested peacefully” should be pardoned and “if you committed violence on that day, obviously you shouldn’t be pardoned.” He later said there was a “bit of a gray area” in some cases.

Trump said he would issue pardons to rioters on “Day 1” of his presidency, which begins Jan. 20.

“Most likely, I’ll do it very quickly,” he said recently on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” He added that “those people have suffered long and hard. And there may be some exceptions to it. I have to look. But, you know, if somebody was radical, crazy.”

More than 1,500 people have been charged with federal crimes stemming from the siege that left more than 100 police officers injured and sent lawmakers running into hiding as they met to certify Democrat Joe Biden’s 2020 victo-

ry.

Hundreds of people who did not engage in destruction or violence were charged only with misdemeanor offenses for illegally entering the Capitol. Others were charged with felony offenses, including assault for beating police officers. Leaders of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys extremist groups were convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors described as plots to use violence to stop the peaceful transfer of power from Trump, the

Republican incumbent, to Biden.

In a post on X, Vance responded to criticism from supporters of the Capitol rioters that his position did not go far enough to free all convicted. “I’ve been defending these guys for years,” he said.

“The president saying he’ll look at each case (and me saying the same) is not some walkback,” Vance said. “I assure you, we care about people unjustly locked up. Yes, that includes people provoked and it includes people who got a garbage trial.”

NATION

Tough-on-crime again mantra in state capitols

Approach back after period of more relaxed sentencing laws

BY DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Within minutes of his inauguration Monday, new Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe is expected to issue a variety of orders targeting crime. The tone-setting move reflects a national trend.

After a period of relaxed sentencing laws, a tough-on-crime approach is back in political favor in the U.S.

Republicans and Democrats alike are promoting anti-crime initiatives as a new year of lawmaking gets underway in state capitols. That comes after voters in several states approved ballot measures in the fall imposing stricter penalties for crimes ranging from shoplifting to deadly drug dealing.

Kehoe, a Republican who cruised to election, is set to take the oath of office at noon. He plans a "Day One Action Ceremony" shortly afterward.

"As soon as my hand comes off the Bible, the Kehoe administration will be relentless in our efforts to make Missouri safer," Kehoe pledged.

In some states, the anti-crime measures are intertwined with efforts to crack down on those living in the U.S. illegally, mirroring an emphasis of President-elect Donald Trump. Many also propose tougher penalties for trafficking fentanyl, a synthetic opioid blamed for tens of thousands of overdose deaths annually in the U.S.

Other measures go beyond that. Some seek stricter sentences for sexual offenses involving children, violent crimes or retail theft rings, which have gained attention from social media videos showing shoplifting crews rampaging through stores.

In Maryland, Democratic state



DAVID A. LIEB/AP

Missouri Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe celebrates after winning the Republican primary for governor, on Aug. 6, in Jefferson City. Now governor, Kehoe plans to issue a variety of orders targeting crime, saying his administration "will be relentless in our efforts to make Missouri safer."

Sen. Ron Watson is sponsoring legislation he said would let prosecutors file felony charges against everyone involved in a group theft if the total value exceeds \$1,500, even if each person stole less than that.

Criminals "have become emboldened because they can get away with things and pretty much get a slap on the wrist," Watson said. "Violent or nonviolent, a crime is a crime. And that crime needs to be punished."

Utah state Rep. Matthew Gwynn, a Republican, is among many lawmakers targeting fentanyl traffickers. Gwynn said his bill would impose heftier penalties for selling large quantities of illicit fentanyl than for other drugs like heroin and methamphetamine.

The federal government and many states have backed away from 1980s policies that imposed harsher sentences on crack cocaine than powder cocaine, as civil rights activists noted a disproportionate impact on minorities. But Gwynn, who is police chief of the Salt Lake City suburb of Roy, said sentencing enhancements for fen-

tanyl are justified.

"I believe fentanyl to be almost terroristic in nature because of the amount of people it can kill," Gwynn said.

Many types of crimes rose during the coronavirus pandemic. More recently, the rates of violent crimes and many property crimes have trended back down, though shoplifting remains above pre-pandemic levels, according to the Council on Criminal Justice, a non-partisan think tank.

But people's sense of security isn't necessarily tied to statistics. High-profile crimes such as the New Year's Day attack in New Orleans, the burning of a woman on the New York subway or the fatal shooting of a health insurance executive outside a New York City hotel can impact perceptions of public safety.

"When you see randomness, brazenness, that makes people feel vulnerable and suggests there is a sense of lawlessness, a breakdown of behavioral norms," said Adam Gelb, president and CEO of the Council on Criminal Justice.

"Many people seem to think that

the reforms over the past two decades overshot the mark and there needs to be a rebalancing," Gelb added.

Nearly 8 in 10 voters in the U.S. said they were "very" or "somewhat" concerned about crime in their own communities, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters conducted during the fall election. The percentage saying they were very concerned was higher than the national rate in several states including Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Alabama and California.

California voters gave overwhelming approval in November to a ballot initiative making shoplifting a felony for repeat offenders and increasing penalties for some drug charges, including those involving fentanyl. The measure rolled back parts of progressive law passed by voters in 2014 that downgraded several nonviolent crimes to misdemeanors, including theft valued under \$950 and some drug offenses.

In Colorado, voters approved a ballot initiative lengthening the time people must serve in prison

before they can be paroled for certain categories of murder, assault, sexual assault, kidnapping, arson, burglary and robbery.

Arizona voters approved measures boosting penalties for deadly fentanyl sales and mandating life imprisonment for certain child sex trafficking crimes.

Other states have backtracked just years after relaxing sentencing laws. Democratic Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek signed a measure rolling back a 2020 voter-approved law that had made possession of small amounts of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine only punishable by a ticket and a maximum fine of \$100. A new law that took effect last year makes that a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in jail and imposes harsher penalties for selling drugs near parks and other places.

Republican Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry signed numerous anti-crime laws last year, including longer sentences for carjacking and fentanyl crimes, the elimination of parole for most offenders and the reversal of a 2016 law that had treated 17-year-olds charged with crimes as juveniles instead of adults.

In Missouri, lawmakers in 2014 approved an overhaul of the state's criminal laws that reduced possible prison sentences for some non-violent drug crimes. In 2019, they added a law exempting some non-violent offenders from requirements to serve between 40% and 80% of their prison terms, making hundreds of people eligible for release sooner.

This year, Missouri lawmakers are backing numerous anti-crime measures, including bills targeting fentanyl, stunt driving, rioting, retail theft and resisting arrest. Other measures encourage recruiting more police.

"Too many Missouri families are being torn apart by violence and crime," House Speaker Jon Patterson said on the Legislature's opening day. "Nothing is more harmful to the growth of our state than criminals who roam our streets with little fear of punishment."

Biden's proposed rules on exporting AI chips see industry pushback

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is proposing a new framework for the exporting of the advanced computer chips used to develop artificial intelligence, an attempt to balance national security concerns about the technology with the economic interests of producers and other countries.

But the framework proposed Monday also raised concerns of chip industry executives who say

the rules would limit access to existing chips used for video games and restrict in 120 countries the chips used for data centers and AI products. Mexico, Portugal, Israel and Switzerland are among the nations that could have limited access.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on a call with reporters previewing the framework that it's "critical" to preserve America's leadership in AI and the develop-

ment of AI-related computer chips. The fast-evolving AI technology enables computers to produce novels, make scientific research breakthroughs, automate driving and foster a range of other transformations that could reshape economies and warfare.

"As AI becomes more powerful, the risks to our national security become even more intense," Raimondo said. The framework "is designed to safeguard the most ad-

vanced AI technology and ensure that it stays out of the hands of our foreign adversaries but also enabling the broad diffusion and sharing of the benefits with partner countries."

A tech industry group, the Information Technology Industry Council, warned Raimondo in a letter last week that a hastily implemented new rule from the Democratic administration could fragment global supply chains and

put U.S. companies at a disadvantage.

"While we share the U.S. government's commitment to national and economic security, the rule's potential risks to U.S. global leadership in AI cannot be emphasized enough," said a statement from Naomi Wilson, the group's senior vice president for Asia and global trade policy. She called for a more extensive consultation with the tech industry.

NATION

Finding gaps in aviation security

Spate of incidents cause of concern

By JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

What is going on with aviation security?

Passengers panicked when a man onboard a JetBlue plane taxiing for takeoff at Boston's Logan International Airport opened an exit door over a wing, triggering an emergency slide to inflate on Jan 7. Other passengers quickly restrained the man, and the plane never took off, but clearly it was a scary moment.

On Monday, two dead bodies were found inside the landing gear compartment of a different JetBlue plane after it landed in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

In late December, a body was found in the wheel well of a United Airlines plane after it landed in Maui from Chicago.

Also in December, a passenger without a ticket was discovered aboard a Delta Air Lines flight as that plane was rolling across the tarmac in Seattle before it took off for Honolulu.

A separate stowaway was arrested in November after a Delta Air Lines flight from New York landed in Paris. That Russian national had somehow bypassed security to board the flight.

These incidents are being investigated, so we don't know yet exactly where security failed. But clearly there were gaps in security. So it's natural to wonder: Is my flight safe?



ANGUS MORDANT / Bloomberg

A Southwest Airlines Boeing 737-800 airplane at Baltimore-Washington Airport in Baltimore, Md.

Why worry?

If a stowaway can get inside a plane's wheel well or sneak aboard the cabin, what would prevent someone with malicious intent from getting access?

"The challenge we run into is we have a system with gaps, and those gaps are sometimes exploited," said Jeff Price, professor of aviation at Metropolitan State University of Denver.

The Transportation Security Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration, the airlines and the airports are all trying to find where those gaps are and plug them. But Price said that by design there are gaps in the system.

The fact that people are getting access to these planes makes pilots worried about the system. An entire generation has grown up since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks without any major catastrophes, and that has allowed some in the system to get complacent, said Dennis Tajer, a longtime airline pilot and spokesman for the Allied Pilots Association union.

"Right now we're seeing some fissure cracks. They're unacceptable. And we've been lucky that it hasn't been somebody with broader nefarious intent," said Tajer.

Experts have also said that a shortage of air traffic controllers, outdated plane-tracking technology and other problems are eroding the margin of safety in air travel.

Crashes are rare

The National Safety Council es-

timates that Americans have a 1-in-93 chance of dying in a motor vehicle crash, while deaths on airplanes are too rare to calculate the odds. Figures from the U.S. Department of Transportation tell a similar story.

The last deadly crash involving a U.S. airliner occurred in February 2009, an unprecedented streak of safety. But planes have crashed elsewhere around the world. And there are other concerns.

Safety regulators are worried about a number of close calls at airports in the past couple years.

But preventing accidents is a lot better than reacting to them.

"The time for action is now because fate will come in and slap you across the face and you'll be going to memorials rather than press conferences about how safe you are and how safe you're going to be," Tajer said.

Emergency doors

This is not the first time that a passenger has opened an emergency door on a plane on the ground. In one incident in Australia last year, a man opened a door and walked out onto the wing of a stationary plane and was arrested after he climbed down to the ground.

Emergency doors are supposed to be able to be opened when a plane is on the ground so passengers can quickly escape if there is a problem.

Passengers can take comfort in the fact that emergency doors are extremely difficult to open during a flight. There are locks that keep

a door in place in flight that are armed after takeoff. And once a plane is above 10,000 feet, the air pressure inside the plane holds the door in place. Most of them are designed so that they must be pulled inward before they can be opened.

But in January 2024, a panel plugging the space reserved for an unused emergency door blew off an Alaska Airlines jetliner 16,000 feet above Oregon. Pilots landed the Boeing 737 Max safely, but videos from passengers showed the terrifying scene. The rapid loss of cabin pressure caused oxygen masks to drop from the ceiling, and suction as air rushed from the hole exerted force on people inside the plane.

Investigators have said it appears that four bolts used to help secure the panel were missing after the plane was worked on at a Boeing factory in Renton, Wash.

Key takeaways

Even with the flaws in the system, aviation is still remarkably safe overall. More than 3 million people fly every day and make it to their destinations without incident. And Price said incidents like this will make aviation safer because everyone will now re-examine everything they are doing and work to close the gaps.

"I don't worry too much when I fly and I'm aware of a lot of the issues in the system," Price said.

He said travelers should keep an eye open when they fly and report anything "that gives you that gut feeling that something's not right."

Probe of 1921 Tulsa Massacre concludes

By SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The first-ever U.S. Justice Department review of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre concluded Friday that while federal prosecution may have been possible a century ago there is no longer an avenue to bring a criminal case more than 100 years after one of the worst racial attacks in U.S. history.

The Department of Justice said at the outset of its probe it had no expectation anyone would be prosecuted, but in a more than 120-page report federal investigators outlined the scope and impact of the massacre, an attack by a white mob on a thriving Black district that left as many as 300 people dead and 1,200 homes, businesses, schools and churches destroyed.

"Now, the perpetrators are long dead, statutes of limitations for all civil rights charges expired decades ago, and there are no viable avenues for further investigation," the report states.

Among the findings in the DOJ investigation were federal reports from just days after the massacre, in 1921, conducted by an agent with the precursor agency to the FBI. But today's investigators said they found no evidence that any federal prosecutors ever evaluated those reports.

The report also examined the role of various people and organizations in the massacre, including the Tulsa Police Department, local sheriff, Oklahoma National Guard and then-Tulsa Mayor T.D. Evans, determining that each played a role in the chaos and destruction, either by failing to act or by actively participating in the attack.

A researcher working for a state commission in 1999 estimated the damage from the attack to be \$1.8 million in 1921 dollars, a figure the report said would be about \$32.2 million today.

'Pizzagate' gunman killed by police in NC after traffic stop

Associated Press

A man who fired a gun inside a Washington D.C. restaurant, motivated by a fake online conspiracy theory called "Pizzagate" nearly a decade ago, was shot and killed by North Carolina police during a weekend traffic stop.

Edgar Maddison Welch was a passenger in a vehicle stopped by officers in Kannapolis on Saturday night, according to a Kanna-

polis Police Department news release. One of the officers recognized the SUV as one he'd seen Welch drive before, police said. The officer had arrested Welch before and knew he had an outstanding warrant for a felony probation violation at the time, according to authorities.

When the officers approached the vehicle to arrest Welch, police said the man pulled out a handgun

and pointed it at one of the officers. After he was instructed to drop the weapon but didn't, two officers shot Welch, authorities said.

Emergency responders took Welch to the hospital and he died from his injuries two days later, according to the release. None of the officers, nor the driver and another passenger, were injured.

In 2016, authorities said, Welch drove from North Carolina with an

assault rifle to Comet Ping Pong restaurant in Washington after believing an unfounded conspiracy theory that prominent Democrats were operating a child sex trafficking ring out of the pizzeria. The fake theory, dubbed "Pizzagate," began circulating online during the 2016 presidential election.

He entered the restaurant armed, and as customers fled the scene, Welch shot at a locked clos-

et inside. After realizing there were no children held captive in the pizzeria, Welch peacefully surrendered. No one was injured.

Welch later pleaded guilty to interstate transportation of a firearm and ammunition and assault with a dangerous weapon in 2017. His judge, now Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, subsequently sentenced him to four years in prison.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy offers to exchange N. Korean POWs with Russia

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has released a video of the first North Korean soldiers captured in Russia's Kursk region and said Kyiv is willing to swap the prisoners of war for its troops held by Moscow.

In a video posted Sunday on Zelenskyy's Facebook and X accounts, two bedridden and apparently injured North Korean soldiers are questioned by Ukrainian forces through an interpreter.

The unnamed soldiers were captured by Ukrainian special operations forces in the past week and were receiving medical care in Kyiv, Zelenskyy wrote.

One of the soldiers, with cuts on his lip and a bandage across his face, nodded his head in agreement when asked if he had family in North Korea. He also nodded after being asked if he wanted to return to the North.

A second soldier with a bandage

on his hand shook his head in disagreement when asked if he knew where he was and if he knew he was fighting against Ukraine.

"They said it was realistic training," the soldier said in an accent primarily used in North Korea.

The soldier said he wanted to stay in Ukraine, but added, "If they tell me to leave, I'll leave."

The soldiers have not yet expressed a desire to defect to South Korea, South Korean Reps. Lee Seong-kweun and Park Sun-won said Monday during a press conference in Seoul. They cited a closed-door briefing from National Intelligence Service officials earlier that day.

North Korean soldiers from the battlefield also possessed notes that indicate they were encouraged to kill themselves, rather than be captured, the lawmakers said, citing the intelligence briefing.

Ukraine "is ready to hand over Kim Jong Un's soldiers to him if

he can organize their exchange for our warriors" held in Russia, Zelenskyy wrote in a statement with the video, referring to the North Korean leader.

Ukraine and Russia have exchanged prisoners of war throughout their 23-month-old conflict. Both sides released around 150 prisoners last month, the 10th such exchange mediated by the United Arab Emirates, according to a UAE Foreign Affairs Ministry news release Dec. 30.

Zelenskyy wrote "there will undoubtedly be more" North Korean prisoners of war and "there may be other options available" for those who do not want to return to their country.

"In particular, those who express a desire to bring peace closer by spreading the truth about this war in Korean will be given that opportunity," he said.

North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency has yet to confirm that Pyongyang has de-



ZELENSKYY/UA/X

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted this image of a captured North Korean soldier on X, on Saturday.

ployed soldiers to fight alongside Russia against Ukraine. The North has characterized the Russia-Ukraine war as an affront against Moscow instigated by the United States and its European allies.

Meanwhile, militaries and intelligence agencies from the U.S., Ukraine and South Korea have estimated that up to 12,000 North Korean troops have deployed to Russia since October. The three countries have also accused Py-

ongyang of supplying Moscow with munitions ranging from artillery shells to ballistic missiles.

At least 3,800 North Korean troops were killed or wounded during heavy fighting in Russia's western front, Zelenskyy said in an interview with the Lex Fridman Podcast on Jan. 6.

Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin during a June summit in Pyongyang pledged to provide each other with immediate military aid if either was at war.

Ukraine official: Russians bypass stronghold in bid to cut off supplies

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces are bypassing a key stronghold in eastern Ukraine that they have fought for months to capture and are focusing instead on cutting supply lines to it, a Ukrainian official said Monday.

Russian troops are going

around the vital logistics hub of Pokrovsk, where a steadfast Ukrainian defense has kept them at bay, and are taking aim at a highway that leads from there to the central Ukraine city of Dnipro, Maj. Viktor Trehubov, a local Ukrainian army spokesperson, told The Associated Press.

That route is crucial for supplies feeding Ukrainian forces in the entire region. Cutting the highway traffic would also severely weaken Pokrovsk.

"So far, they have not achieved their goal and (Ukrainian forces) are working to ensure that they do not achieve it in the future — just

as they have not been successful in other attempts to bypass the city," Trehubov said in a WhatsApp message.

Ukraine's army is under severe strain along parts of the approximately 600-mile front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where Pokrovsk is located.

After almost three years of war, Ukrainian units are depleted and are outnumbered by Russian forces.

Though its battlefield progress has been slow and costly, momentum in the war is in Russia's favor and its onslaught has gradually swallowed up towns and villages.

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The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

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WORLD

Officials: Progress made in talks regarding Israel-Hamas ceasefire

Associated Press

CAIRO — U.S. and Arab mediators made significant progress overnight toward brokering a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the release of scores of hostages held in the Gaza Strip, but a deal hasn't been reached yet, officials said Monday.

Four officials acknowledged that progress has been made and said the coming days would be critical for ending more than 15 months of fighting that has destabilized the Middle East. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the talks.

A U.S. official briefed on the negotiations said all sides are "closer than we've ever been, but it could still fall apart." The official declined to predict the timing of a potential agreement because he said it is just too uncertain, with multiple moving parts still in play.

Two other officials, including one associated with Hamas, said that there were still a number of hurdles to clear. On several occasions over the past year, U.S. leaders have said that they were on the verge of reaching a deal, only to have the talks stall.

Another person familiar with the talks said there had been a breakthrough overnight and that there was a proposed deal on the table. Israeli and Hamas negotiators will now take it back to their leaders for final approval, the person said.

The person said that mediators from the Gulf country of Qatar had put renewed pressure on Hamas to accept the agreement, while U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, was pressing the Israelis. Witkoff recently joined the negotiations and has been in



OHAD ZWIGENBERG/AP

An Ultra-orthodox Jewish man walks past graffiti that displays portraits of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, in Jerusalem, on Monday.

the region in recent days.

The person said that the mediators had handed off the draft deal to each side and that the next 24 hours would be pivotal.

An Egyptian official said that there had been good progress overnight, but that it would likely take a few more days, and that the sides were aiming for a deal before Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20.

The Biden administration, along with Egypt and Qatar, has spent more than a year trying to broker an agreement to end the deadliest war ever fought between Israelis and Palestinians and secure the release of scores of hostages captured in Hamas' attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the conflict.

Magnitude 6.6 earthquake rattles southwestern Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan issued a tsunami advisory on Monday after a magnitude 6.6 earthquake struck the southwest of the country. The public warnings to stay away from coastal areas were later lifted.

The agency initially gave the magnitude estimate at 6.9, but later revised it down. An official first told reporters the lowered magnitude was 6.7, but the agency then released a statement with the magnitude revised to 6.6.

There were no immediate reports of damage. Residents in some coastal areas were told to evacuate as a precautionary measure.

One man was slightly injured in Kyushu after falling down some stairs, NHK TV reported. Trains stopped running in Miyazaki Station, stranding passengers.

NHK said a tsunami, estimated to be as high as 3.2 feet, reached land within 30 minutes of the quake. The waters detected at Miyazaki Port measured 0.7 feet high, the reports said.

Tsunami advisories were issued for Miyazaki prefecture, where the quake was centered, in the southwestern island of Kyushu, as well as nearby Kochi prefecture in Shi-

koku island, shortly after the quake struck at 9:19 p.m. according to the agency. They were all called off shortly before midnight.

People were warned to stay away from the waters, including rivers. Agency official Shigeki Aoki told reporters that people should watch for landslides as well as falling objects in homes. Aftershocks are possible, especially in the next two or three days, he said.

The quake, centered at a depth of 22 miles, shook a wide area in Kyushu, the southwestern main island, Japan's Meteorological Agency said. The agency initially gave the depth as 18.6 miles.

NHK TV footage showed moving traffic and well-lit streets, meaning that electric power was still working. No problems were detected at the various monitoring posts for nuclear plants in the area.

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes due to its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

Experts at the meteorological agency met late Monday to gauge how the latest temblor may be related to the so-called Nankai Trough quakes, but decided not to take any extraordinary measures for the time being.



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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Americans can't run on Dunkin's donut shortage

NE OMAHA — Dunkin' dropped the "Donuts" from its brand name years ago. Now — at least across Nebraska, New Mexico and some other states — it doesn't have doughnuts on the shelves either.

Dunkin' stores in Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island in Nebraska all had no doughnuts in their cases Thursday and Friday and put up signs on their doors and drive-thru kiosks informing customers that the pastries were unavailable "due to a manufacturing error." Some locations did offer "Munchkins," or doughnut holes, on Friday.

Some employees chalked it up to a supply chain issue and others said simply that delivery trucks had been arriving without the cargo that the chain is most famous for. Employees said they hoped stocks would be replenished by this week.

But checks of locations in other regions, including St. Joseph, Mo., and Boston — where Dunkin' has a near cult-like following — found no shortage of the sweet treats.

Students could get free meals under new plan

NY ALBANY — Every student in New York could get free breakfast and lunch at school under a proposal announced by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

If approved by state lawmakers, the plan would cover more than 2.7 million students in the state regardless of income, the Democratic governor said.

Students in New York can already receive free or discounted meals at school through a federal program that is dependent on a family's income level. Hochul's proposal would remove any income requirements, expanding free meals to about 300,000 more kids in New York, her office said.

"To be singled out and your classmates know that you are the one who has to get subsidized help for your meals, that's a mark on you. Our kids don't need that, right?" the governor said at a news conference.

Largest health care strike in state's history begins

OR PORTLAND — Some 5,000 hospital health care workers walked off the job as they picketed all eight Providence hospitals in Oregon, in what the state health workers union described as the largest health care strike in Oregon history — and the first to involve doctors.

Most of those participating in the open-ended strike are nurses. But in a rare move, dozens of doctors at a Portland hospital and at six women's health clinics are also partaking, making it the state's first physicians strike, according to the Oregon Nurses Association union.



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Supersized snowman

Brooklyn Brye, 4, looks up at a giant snowman, in Nashville, Tenn., on Friday.

The strike came after more than a year of negotiations failed to produce an agreement over staffing levels, pay and benefits.

Providence said it expected up to 70 doctors to strike at Providence St. Vincent in Portland, including hospitalists, obstetrics hospitalists who provide care for pregnant women and palliative care physicians working with patients with serious illness or injury. It added that surgeons and emergency doctors were not on strike.

Altice to spend millions on internet upgrades deal

WV CHARLESTON — The parent company of one of West Virginia's largest internet providers has reached a settlement with the state to resolve thousands of consumer complaints.

Under the settlement announced by Attorney General Patrick Morrissey, Altice USA will make \$40 million in additional upgrades in West Virginia through 2027, provide \$4 million in credits to customers' accounts and pay the state \$500,000.

Altice entered into the agreement without admitting that its practices violated the state Consumer Credit and Protection Act.

Altice operates in West Virginia under the Optimum brand. Suddenlink Communications, Optimum's former name, was fined \$2.2 million in 2022 by the state Public Service Commission. The PSC found that Suddenlink ignored customer complaints, re-

duced the number of full-time employees and its maintenance work and budget, and changed its method of communicating with customers.

4 hurt after Delta jet aborts takeoff

GA ATLANTA — Four passengers were injured at the Atlanta airport after a Delta Air Lines jet bound for Minneapolis aborted its takeoff.

The plane had experienced an engine problem, Delta spokesperson Morgan Durrant said. The incident happened while a snowstorm was causing widespread cancellations and delays in Atlanta, the world's busiest airport. But officials can't say if the problem had anything to do with the weather.

The 201 passengers, two pilots and five flight attendants aboard evacuated the Boeing 757-300 using inflatable slides and were bused back to a concourse. One of the injured passengers was taken to a hospital, while three were treated at the airport for minor injuries.

Durrant said the flight crew "followed established procedures to suspend the takeoff."

Workers try to stabilize sinkhole that killed 1

PA UNITY — A sinkhole where a Pennsylvania woman fell to her death last month is now being filled with hundreds of cubic yards of grout in a bid to

stabilize the site.

The work in the village of Marguerite, about 40 miles east of Pittsburgh, started just days after emergency responders found the remains of 64-year-old Elizabeth Pollard on Dec. 6, four days after she went missing while searching for her cat. The sinkhole was near a restaurant about half a mile from her home.

Crews have since pumped more than 3,300 cubic yards of grout into the site, the Pittsburgh-Tribune-Review reported, but it's not yet known when the work will be completed. The work was put on hold this week due to snow and extremely cold temperatures, but officials hope to resume working soon.

AG: Text scammers stole \$2M in cryptocurrency

NY NEW YORK — Scammers stole millions of dollars in cryptocurrency from people seeking remote work opportunities as part of an elaborate scheme, according to New York's attorney general.

Attorney General Letitia James said she's filed a lawsuit in order to recover more than \$2 million that she said was stolen from New Yorkers and others around the country.

James said the unknown network of scammers used unsolicited text messages to target people looking for remote work.

They told victims that the job involved reviewing products online in order to help generate "market

data," James' office said. But in order to begin earning money, victims were told they had to open cryptocurrency accounts and had to maintain a balance equal to, or greater than, the price of the products they were reviewing.

The victims were assured they would get their investments back plus commission, but the funds simply went into the scammers' crypto wallets, James' office said. The product reviews were also conducted on a website set up as part of the scheme.

Prosecutors seek death penalty after 2-year halt

AZ PHOENIX — Prosecutors in Arizona are seeking to execute a prisoner in what would mark the state's first use of the death penalty after a two-year pause. The Arizona Attorney General's Office asked the state Supreme Court to issue a warrant for the execution of Aaron Brian Gunches, who pleaded guilty to murder in 2007.

The court had issued a death warrant for Gunches nearly two years ago, but the sentence wasn't carried out because the state's Democratic attorney general agreed not to pursue executions during a review of the state's death penalty protocol.

The review ended in November when Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs dismissed the retired federal magistrate she had appointed to examine execution procedures.

FACES

Heist flick gained new life on Netflix

‘Second surge’ on streaming service helped earn sequel

By **RODNEY HO**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The heist movie “Den of Thieves” opened in 2018 to so-so reviews and a marginal performance at the box office, grossing about \$80 million worldwide. When it landed on Netflix, though, the film found a wider audience and generated enough buzz to inspire the producers to create a sequel seven years later.

“Den of Thieves 2: Pantera” debuted atop the box office over the weekend with \$15.5 million, according to studio estimates.

“There was this second surge,” said O’Shea Jackson Jr., who was in Atlanta with co-star Gerard Butler and spoke with *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* at the Four Seasons in Midtown. “It became a bit like a cult classic. We now have a bigger fan base that can hopefully bring in new fans when this one comes out.”

This sequel begins soon after the first movie ends. Jackson’s character, the enigmatic Donnie Wilson, a former Marine who is now a thief with charm and quiet confidence, had absconded with a ridiculous amount of cash from the Federal Reserve, money earmarked for shredding. Donnie was clearly rich enough to never have to steal again. But alas, he quickly landed in Europe targeting a diamond exchange and pulling off yet another heist.

Butler plays a character that is not unfamiliar to viewers: the slightly unhinged, macho detective who can’t believe Donnie fooled him in the first film. Seeking revenge, Big Nick convinces his bosses to allow him to fly to Europe to chase down Donnie. He somehow convinces Donnie that he has gone dirty and helps him swipe a gargantuan load of diamonds.

The characters are classic op-



LIONSGATE/AP

Gerard Butler, left, and O’Shea Jackson Jr. are shown in a scene from “Den of Thieves 2: Pantera.”

posites “who need each other to exist,” Butler said.

“We make each other crazy, but we kind of complement each other. Although there is a lack of trust between the two of them, they are curious about each other, and a surprising bond develops. It’s part ‘Lethal Weapon,’ part ‘The Odd Couple,’” he added.

But, as Jackson said, his character is difficult to read, a true chameleon who can use accents and guile to get what he wants. “He has skills,” Jackson said. “We haven’t seen all of them yet. We aren’t even sure his name is Donnie.”

Better for Jackson, Donnie doesn’t get constantly beaten up by Big Nick as he did in the first movie. Instead, they talk — a lot. “Big Nick is able to open up and be vulnerable with Donnie,” Butler said.

Butler said.

Jackson said the first movie was

“rough. I hated all the fake blood. It’s sticky, goopy. It dries and scabs on you. This time was much cleaner. I got to wear nice suits and drive a Porsche Taycan Turbo while Gerard is shooting a machine gun out the window. This is the life!”

Big Nick is deeply out of his element in a world where he has trouble properly pronouncing “croissant.”

“He isn’t necessarily steering the ship this time,” Butler said. “He has to bow down or pay much more attention to others and work as a team. He also has to maneuver through a treacherous underworld.”

Back in 2017, the original “Den of Thieves” was shot largely in metro Atlanta masquerading as Los Angeles.

Both Jackson and Butler are well familiar with Georgia. Jack-

son’s résumé includes “Godzilla: King of the Monsters” and the gripping legal drama “Just Mercy,” both shot in the state and released in 2019, while Butler spent time in Atlanta shooting the Amazon Prime disaster flick “Greenland” (2020) and action thriller “Copshop” (2021).

The sequel was set in a very different setting: the Canary Islands in Spain. “It’s like Spain’s Hawaii,” Jackson said. “We made it look like Nice, France.”

If the second film gets a strong enough positive reaction, “Den of Thieves” has franchise potential that could cause it to land on multiple continents like the “Fast and the Furious” series of films, Butler said.

“I want a heist movie in Japan so bad,” Jackson said. “Just think of the shots they could get, how dope it could be!”

‘Den of Thieves 2’ No. 1 at box office

On a quiet weekend in movie theaters, while much of Hollywood’s attention was on the wildfires raging in Los Angeles, Lionsgate’s “Den of Thieves 2: Pantera” debuted atop the box office with \$15.5 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Mid-January is often a slow moviegoing period, and that was slightly exacerbated by the closures of about 10 theaters in Los Angeles, the country’s top box-office market.

A sequel to the Gerard Butler 2018 heist thriller, “Den of Thieves 2” performed similarly to the original. The first installment, released by STX, opened with \$15.2 million seven years ago. O’Shea Jackson Jr. co-stars in the sequel, which debuted in 3,008 North American theaters.

“Den of Thieves 2,” made for about \$40 million, was a bit more costly to make. Audiences liked it well enough, giving it a “B+” CinemaScore. Reviews (58% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) weren’t particularly good. But it counted as Lionsgate’s first No. 1 opening since “The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes” in November 2023.

Also entering wide release was the Robbie Williams movie “Better Man,” one of the more audacious spins on the music biopic in recent years. The British pop star is portrayed by a CGI chimpanzee.

The Paramount Pictures release tanked, with \$1.1 million in ticket sales from 1,291 locations.

From The Associated Press

Chalamet returning to ‘SNL’ as host — and musical guest

Associated Press

Timothée Chalamet will return to “Saturday Night Live” for his third stint as a host — but this time, he’ll be pulling double duty.

NBC announced Friday that comedian Dave Chappelle will host the sketch show Jan. 18, with musical guest GloRilla, while Chalamet will be the host and musical guest on Jan. 25.

It’s Chappelle’s fourth time hosting. The trio of announced performers are all in the thick of



Chalamet

awards season. Chappelle and GloRilla, one of *The Associated Press’* Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024, are each nominated for Grammys at the Feb. 2 show. Chalamet has been nominated for a slew of acting awards for “A Complete Unknown” and is considered a contender for the Oscars, whose

nominations will be announced Jan. 19.

For “A Complete Unknown,” Chalamet sang and learned to play the guitar and harmonica to embody Bob Dylan. It’s not clear what the actor will sing during the live show (he also sang in “Wonka” and dedicated fans may be hoping for a “Statistics” reprise), but he did previously identify Dylan songs to which he was drawn.

“I like the more intimate songs like ‘Girl From the North Country’

or ‘Boots of Spanish Leather’ or ‘One Too Many Mornings’ or ‘Tomorrow Is a Long Time,’” he told the AP late last year. “But then I also liked ‘North Country Blues’ and ‘Rocks and Gravel’ or ‘Ballad of Hollis Brown’ — things where you hear the iron ore in Bob’s voice, the North Country in Minnesota, the Hibbing.”

Dylan himself has appeared on “SNL” — once, as the musical guest, in 1979. Current cast member James Austin Johnson, who

portrayed Dylan in a skit earlier this season, briefly appears in “A Complete Unknown.”

Other news

■ The cover of PGA Tour 2K25 will feature **Max Homa, Matt Fitzpatrick and Tiger Woods**. 2K announced Monday that the three golfers are on the cover of the game’s standard and deluxe editions together. Woods alone is on the legend edition. Homa is making his franchise debut.

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stripes.com

OPINION

Trump should temper expectations with N. Korea

BY DANIEL R. DEPETRIS

Los Angeles Times

To say that President-elect Donald Trump has a lot of plans for his second term would be a gross understatement. He has vowed to implement the largest deportation operation in American history, secure the U.S.-Mexico border and negotiate a peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia.

Yet for Trump, all of these items may be minor when compared to one other issue: resolving the North Korea nuclear conundrum. Taking Pyongyang's nuclear program off the board is Trump's proverbial white whale, a feat that none of his predecessors managed to accomplish. Members of Trump's inner circle told Reuters in late November that the next president was already talking about restarting the personal diplomacy with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that had begun during his first term.

Talk is one thing, reality another. If Trump enters office thinking he can easily resurrect his relationship with Kim, then he's going to set himself up for disappointment. Resolving the North Korean nuclear issue was hard five years ago, but it will be even harder today.

During his first term, Trump was able to push for personal engagement with North Korea's head of state despite resistance among his national security advisers. This was the right move at the time. After all, bottom-up attempts by the Bush and Obama administrations to negotiate with Pyongyang proved to be both laborious and unsuccessful.

After nearly a year of fire-breathing rhetoric and talk about a "bloody nose" strike that would scare Pyongyang into talks, Trump opted to gamble on direct diplomacy. This was partly because his other options — more economic sanctions or military action — ranged from ineffective to disastrous, and partly because the South Korean president at the time, Moon Jae-in, was able to convince Trump that a direct channel of communication to Kim might be the key to cementing a nuclear deal of historic importance.

Despite three Trump-Kim meetings, face-to-face diplomacy failed to produce anything over the long-term. While Trump managed to get North Korea to suspend missile tests for a year — no small accomplishment given its past activity — the flashy summitry ultimately crashed and burned. In the end, Trump and Kim, their personal chemistry notwithstanding, were unable to come to terms — Trump, pushed by his hawkish advisers, advocated for North Korea's complete denuclearization; Kim, meanwhile, was only willing to demobilize his main plutonium research facility at Yongbyon.

U.S.-North Korea diplomacy has been dead ever since. The Biden administration's overtures to Pyongyang over the last four years have been repeatedly slapped down, apparently a consequence of what the North Korean leadership views as a lack of seriousness on the part of Washington as well as U.S. attempts to solidify a trilateral military relationship between the U.S., South Korea and Japan.

In other words, on Jan. 20, the perennial North Korean nuclear problem will be as thorny as ever. And probably thornier: Kim is far less desperate for a nuclear agreement and an end to U.S. sanctions now than he was during Trump's first administration.

First, Kim hasn't forgotten his previous meetings with Trump. He sees the summitry of 2018 and 2019 as a waste of time at best and a personal humiliation at worst. This shouldn't be a surprise; the North Korean dictator staked significant capital on negotiating an agreement to lift U.S. sanctions and to normalize Pyongyang-U.S. relations. His entreaties failed on both accounts. Three summits later, U.S. sanctions remained intact and U.S.-North Korea relations remained in their usual acrimony.

Kim will be more cautious this time around. "We have already explored every possible avenue in negotiating with the U.S.," he said in November, adding that the result had been more U.S. aggression. And in a December speech, he promised to deliver the "toughest ... counteractions" against the U.S., an expres-

sion of his commitment to resisting what he perceives as a hostile bloc underwritten by Washington.

The geopolitical environment has evolved as well. Back in 2018-2019, North Korea was isolated, and the suspension of U.S. sanctions was seen as a critical to its economic growth.

But now Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has provided the Kim regime a golden opportunity to diversify its foreign relations away from China by cozying up to Moscow, not least by sending thousands of North Korean troops to the Ukraine-Russia front lines. Russia, which used to be a partner in the United States' desire to denuclearize North Korea, is now using North Korea as a way to frustrate America's grand ambitions in East Asia.

For Kim, the advantages of his relationship with Russia are equally clear: Putin needs arms and men; Kim needs cash and military technology. And thanks to Russia's veto at the U.N. Security Council, additional sanctions are a pipe dream for the foreseeable future, while those on the books already are meekly enforced. As long as the Russia-North Korea relationship continues as its current pace, Trump will be hard pressed to bring the North Koreans back to the negotiating table.

None of this is to suggest that Trump shouldn't try another diplomatic foray with North Korea. Regardless of the criticism he received at the time, Trump's decision to shake things up and go straight to the source was an admirable attempt to manage an issue that has defied U.S. presidents for more than three decades.

Yet if Trump wants a second roll of the dice, he needs to keep a healthy dose of skepticism front-of-mind. Given the continued improvement of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, any agreement the United States signs with the Kim regime will be less impressive than it could have been in 2019 — assuming we get an agreement at all.

Daniel R. DePetris is a fellow at Defense Priorities and a foreign affairs commentator for the Spectator.

How to prepare for the faster-moving fires of today

BY JENNIFER BALCH
AND RALPH BLOEMERS

Special to The Washington Post

The fires burning in Southern California involve tens of thousands of acres, tiny in the context of all wildfires. And they moved with what might seem to some to be astonishing speed. In just 24 hours, the Palisades Fire grew more than 15,000 acres. That's several football fields a minute.

But fast-growing fires are now the norm. Using NASA satellite data, we studied more than 60,000 fires in the United States over nearly two decades. During that time, we saw a 250% increase in the average growth rate of fires in the United States. In California, we saw a 400% increase in how fast fires grew. In other words, fires are getting faster, more than doubling in speed nationwide and more than quadrupling in speed in California.

These are fearsome accelerations. And we found a relationship between the higher speed with which fires now move and the number of structures lost. Fires that grow by 4,000 acres a day often involve some loss of buildings. Fires that grow faster, by roughly 21,000 acres a day, typically destroy more than 100 buildings. The number of structures destroyed in

Los Angeles County, more than 9,000, will likely keep growing.

Why are fires picking up speed? Our hunch is that just a little bit of warming can cause a lot more burning. But there are other factors, too.

We have indiscriminately built homes in the line of fire. Nearly 59 million American homes stood less than half a mile from wildfire between 2000 and 2024. Embers ignite homes, and these homes become the fuel to ignite other homes. As the number of homes on fire increases — essentially a series of mini-conflagrations all their own — fires quickly become impossible to fight. Aerial resources are grounded by smoke; with hundreds, if not thousands, of homes in a fire's path, the risk to firefighters' lives is simply too high to take.

This is a particular crisis in the West, where Americans have been busy building at the edge — and often in the interior — of flammable forests, shrublands and grasslands, and often on hillsides. Odd as a winter fire in an urban area might seem, we expect to see more such disasters in coming years.

What is to be done? We need to change how we think about our homes and neighborhoods. First, we need to retrofit and harden our homes against fire long before the flames arrive. Experts have fire-tested homes and

buildings of various types and are showing us how to live with fire, rather than be overwhelmed by it.

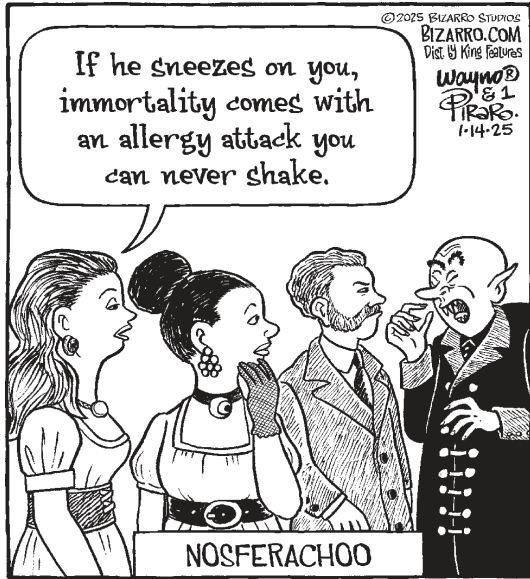
With as little as a few thousand dollars, owners can retrofit a home to lower the risk of ignition. Remove shrubs, bark mulch and other combustible materials that stand within five feet of the home. Homes can ignite if vents are not properly screened with mesh to prevent wind-driven embers from entering an attic or crawl space. And though most homes are ignited by embers (and not a wall of flames from nearby trees), it is important to trim nearby and overhanging limbs.

Americans also need to be much more realistic about their vulnerabilities. There are now many one-road-in, one-road-out neighborhoods near or in mountain-state towns that live with impossibly high wildfire risk. Residents must think about escape routes in advance and always be ready to go.

In short, we need to prepare. By the time a fast fire ignites, it is too late. To support firefighters and protect our communities, we need to be ready long before fire comes.

Jennifer Balch is a fire scientist and director of the Environmental Data Science Innovation and Inclusion Lab at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Ralph Bloemers is director of fire-safe communities for the Green Oregon Alliance.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

11x11 crossword grid with numbers 1-53.

ACROSS

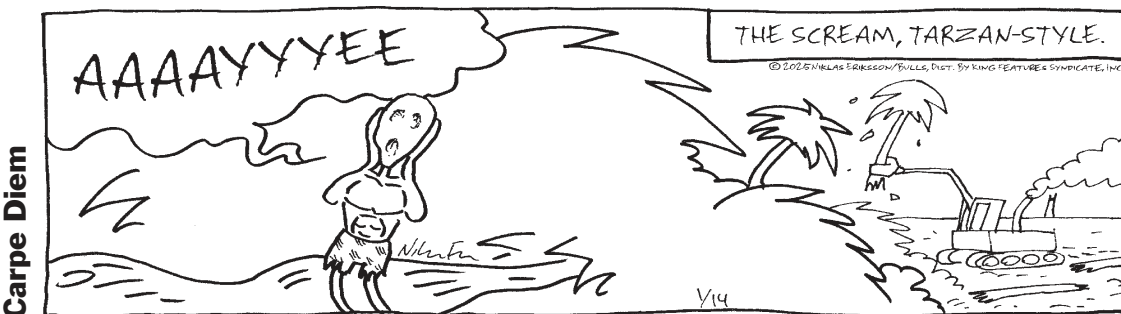
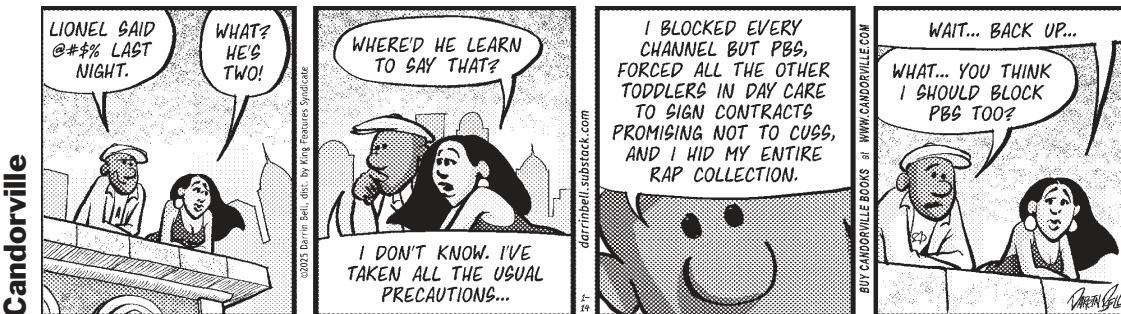
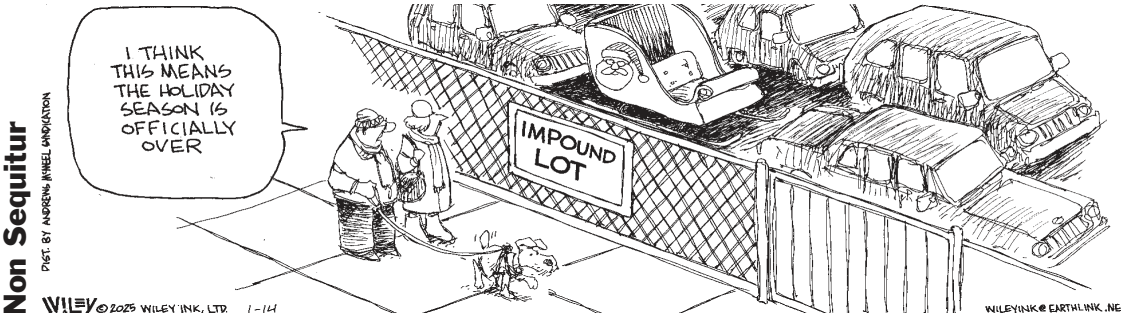
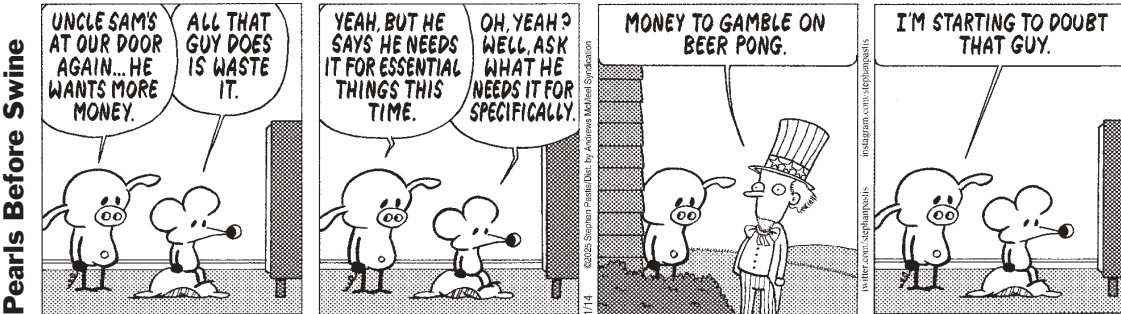
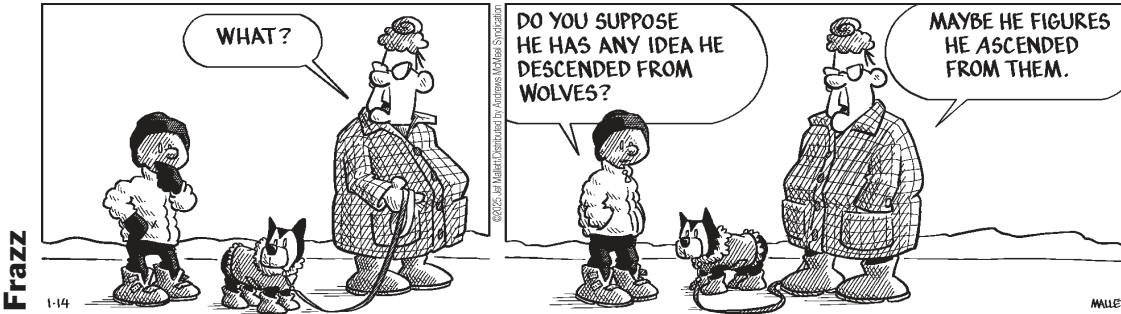
- 1 Spruced up
5 Comedian Margaret
8 Arduous journey
12 Taj Mahal city
13 Unprocessed
14 Conceal
15 Buffets with Mexican food
17 Rocker — Pop
18 Yoko from Tokyo
19 Astern
20 Unravels
21 Blaster's need
22 Tease
23 Neighbor of Chad
26 Wilma and Fred's kid
30 Piglet's pop
31 Author Fleming
32 Ethereal
33 Rabbi's religion
35 Fall bloom
36 Buddy
37 Canonized Fr. woman
38 Prima donnas
41 Carnival city
42 Co. that created Watson
45 Pizza cooker
46 Home to the Buccaneers
48 Social standing
49 Wall St. wheeler-dealer
50 Deadly septet
51 Picnic invaders

- 52 Pot pie morsel
53 Whispered "Hey!"

- 22 "Community" actor Jeong
23 JFK's veep
24 Chit
25 Abysmal
26 Shriver of tennis
27 Topsy
28 Before
29 Aleppo's land (Abbr.)
31 Equi-
34 1040 org.a
35 On
37 "The Lion King" lion
38 TV explorer
39 Author Turgenev
40 Air outlet
41 Scarce
42 Nile wader
43 Proscribes
44 Island in a computer game
46 Spigot
47 Nile biter

Answer to Previous Puzzle

11x11 crossword grid with letters.



1-14

CRYPTOQUIP

VGGNTGGN PYIQJH Y JXSTMB
GU BMVQRML UGB CQIMBLM
FERML GU SMYF LYXVML:

"UQUFE LPYCML GU HBYIE."
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN YOU WANT TO CATCH UP ON THE LATEST GOSSIP, ALWAYS ASK A GARDENER. THEY KNOW ALL THE DIRT.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals O

SCOREBOARD/NHL

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Sunday's men's scores

EAST

LIU 54, CCSU 52
Le Moyne 79, Mercyhurst 63
Marist 61, Fairfield 51
Merrimack 69, Manhattan 62
Mount St. Mary's 73, Sacred Heart 71
Oregon 82, Penn St. 81
Quinnipiac 63, Iona 62
Rider 68, Niagara 65
Robert Morris 75, Wright St. 72
St. Francis (Pa.) 75, Fairleigh Dickinson 71
St. Peter's 62, Canisius 49

SOUTH

Chattanooga 91, VMI 66
UAB 81, FAU 76
W. Carolina 85, Mercer 82

MIDWEST

Michigan 91, Washington 75
Michigan St. 78, Northwestern 68
Purdue 104, Nebraska 68

SOUTHWEST

Tulsa 69, Charlotte 63
UALR 78, S. Indiana 58

FAR WEST

Stonehill 68, Chicago St. 52
West Virginia 78, Colorado 70

Sunday's women's scores

EAST

George Mason 71, Rhode Island 65
Hofstra 60, Drexel 53
Lehigh 90, Army 51
NC A&T 61, Towson 59
Nebraska 69, Rutgers 62
Pittsburgh 72, SMU 59
Stony Brook 87, Coll. of Charleston 83, OT
Syracuse 66, Miami 61
UMass 67, St. Bonaventure 58
UNC-Wilmington 51, Northeastern 48
William & Mary 83, Monmouth (NJ) 74

SOUTH

Alabama 84, Mississippi 73
Belmont 67, Valparaiso 58
Campbell 72, Hampton 42
Cent. Arkansas 66, Queens (NC) 57
Duke 60, Virginia 55
Kentucky 80, Auburn 61
Louisville 69, Georgia Tech 60
Mississippi St. 79, Georgia 68
Murray St. 67, Ill. Chicago 60
North Carolina 80, Boston College 67
Notre Dame 67, Clemson 58
Richmond 63, Davidson 41
South Carolina 67, Texas 50
VCU 57, Saint Joseph's 50
Virginia Tech 61, Wake Forest 54
W. Carolina 64, ETSU 60
Wofford 68, Furman 51

MIDWEST

DePaul 62, Providence 56
Drake 85, Illinois St. 64
Florida 93, Missouri 67
Fort Wayne 78, Cleveland St. 75
Indiana 74, Iowa 67
Indiana St. 90, Evansville 74
Michigan St. 80, Washington 68
Missouri St. 75, S. Illinois 37
N. Iowa 67, Bradley 44
Ohio St. 69, Oregon 60
Wright St. 77, Youngstown St. 62

SOUTHWEST

Oklahoma 77, Texas A&M 62
Rice 70, Memphis 59
Tennessee 78, Arkansas 63
UALR 89, S. Indiana 83, OT

FAR WEST

California 82, Florida St. 70
Hawaii 54, Cal St.-Fullerton 44
NC State 81, Stanford 67
Southern Cal 95, Penn St. 73
UNLV 88, New Mexico 73

DEALS

Sunday's transactions

FOOTBALL

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Released DL Travis Bell from the practice squad.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Hired Mike Vrabel as head coach.

HOCKEY

NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE
CAROLINA HURRICANES — Sent D Ty Smith to Chicago (AHL). Reinstated D Shayne Gostisbehere from injured reserve.
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Sent G Trent Miner to Colorado (AHL).
COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS — Recalled G Daniil Tarasov from Cleveland (AHL). Sent G Jet Greaves to Cleveland.
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Placed C Evgeni Malkin on injured reserve.
UTAH — Sent D Maverik Lamoureux to Tucson (AHL).
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Waived D Erik Brannstrom.
VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Reinstated RW Jakob Demek from the injured non-roster list and assigned to Tahoe (ECHL). Reinstated C Nicolas Roy from injured reserve.

GOLF

Sony Open

Saturday
At Honolulu
Purse: \$8.7 million
Yardage: 7,044; Par: 70
Final Round
(x-won on second playoff hole)

x-Nick Taylor, \$1,566,000 66-68-65-264 -16

TENNIS

Australian Open

Monday
At Melbourne, Australia
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
First Round

Jakub Mensik, Czechia, def. Nikoloz Basilashvili, Georgia, 6-1, 6-7 (3), 6-3, 6-3.
Alex Michelsen, United States, def. Stefanos Tsitsipas (11), Greece, 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4.
Roberto Carballes Baena, Spain, def. Alejandro Tabilo (23), Chile, 1-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-6 (1).
James Duckworth, Australia, def. Dominic Stricker, Switzerland, 6-2, 6-4, 6-2.
Frances Tiafoe (17), United States, def. Arthur Rinderknech, France, 7-6 (2), 6-3, 4-6, 6-7 (4), 6-3.
James McCabe, Australia, def. Martin Landaluce, Spain, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Alexandre Muller, France, 6-7 (2), 6-3, 6-2, 7-5.
Jannik Sinner (1), Italy, def. Nicolas Jarry, Chile, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (5), 6-1.
Fabian Marozsan, Hungary, def. Thiago Seyboth Wild, Brazil, 6-3, 6-7 (5), 7-5, 5-7, 7-5.
Jordan Thompson (27), Australia, def. Dominik Koepfer, Germany, 7-6 (3), 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

Tristan Schoolkate, Australia, def. Taro Daniel, Japan, 6-7 (6), 7-6 (4), 6-1, 6-4.
Aleksandar Vukic, Australia, def. Damir Dzumhur, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6-7 (3), 6-0, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.
Yoshihito Nishioka, Japan, def. Aziz Dougaz, Tunisia, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (3), 6-3.
Jaime Faria, Portugal, def. Pavel Kotov, Russia, 6-1, 6-1, 7-5.
Jack Draper (15), Britain, def. Mariano Navone, Argentina, 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.
Arthur Cazaux, France, def. Sebastian Baez (28), Argentina, 6-3, 5-7, 3-6, 6-0, 6-3.
Thanasi Kokkinakis, Australia, def. Roman Safiullin, Russia, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (5).
Sebastian Korda (22), United States, def. Lukas Klein, Slovakia, 6-3, 0-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6).
Felix Auger-Aliassime (29), Canada, def. Jan-Lennard Struff, Germany, 6-3, 6-0, 4-6, 6-1.

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Spain, def. Juncheng Shang, China, 7-6 (1), 5-2, ret.
Carlos Alcaraz (3), Spain, def. Alexander Shevchenko, Russia, 6-1, 7-5, 6-1.
Francesco Passaro, Italy, def. Grigor Dimitrov (10), Bulgaria, 7-5, 2-1, ret.
Jacob Fearnley, Britain, def. Nick Kyrgios, Australia, 7-6 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (2).
Benjamin Bonzi, France, def. David Goffin, Belgium, 6-1, 6-2, 7-6 (7).
Novak Djokovic (7), Serbia, def. Nishesh Basavareddy, United States, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Tommy Paul (12), United States, def. Christopher O'Connell, Australia, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1, 6-7 (5), 7-5.

Women's Singles

First Round

Jodie Burrage, Britain, def. Leolia Jeanjean, France, 6-2, 6-4.
Liudmila Samsonova (25), Russia, def. Kamilla Rakhimova, Russia, 6-2, 6-4.
Olga Danilovic, Serbia, def. Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, 6-4, 6-4.
Diana Shnaider (12), Russia, def. Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Italy, 7-6 (4), 6-4.
Coco Gauff (3), United States, def. Sofia Kenin, United States, 6-3, 6-3.
Rebecca Sramkova, Slovakia, def. Katie Volynets, United States, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2.
Talia Gibson, Australia, def. Zeynep Sonmez, Turkiye, 3-6, 7-6 (5), 6-1.
Moyuka Uchijima, Japan, def. Magda Linette, Poland, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (8).
Magdalena Frech (23), Poland, def. Polina Kudermetova, Russia, 6-4, 6-4.
Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, def. Ashlyn Krueger, United States, 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.
Elina Svitolina (28), Ukraine, def. Sorana Cirstea, Romania, 6-4, 6-4.
Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Hailey Baptiste, United States, 4-6, 7-5, 6-4.
Lucia Bronzetti, Italy, def. Victoria Azarenka (21), Belarus, 6-2, 7-6 (2).
Iga Swiatek (2), Poland, def. Katerina Siniakova, Czechia, 6-3, 6-4.
Caroline Dolehide, United States, def. Sara Bejlek, Czechia, 7-6 (5), 6-2.
Anastasia Potapova, Russia, def. Tamar Zidansek, Slovenia, 6-2, 7-5.
Harriet Dart, Britain, def. Jana Fett, Croatia, 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7).
Jule Niemeier, Germany, def. Maja Chwalinska, Poland, 6-0, 6-1.
Belinda Bencic, Switzerland, def. Jelena Ostapenko (16), Latvia, 6-3, 7-6 (6).
Jessica Pegula (7), United States, def. Maya Joint, Australia, 6-3, 6-0.
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (27), Russia, def. Yuan Yue, China, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.
Marta Kostyuk (17), Ukraine, def. Nao Hibino, Japan, 3-6, 6-3, 6-1.
Jaqueline Cristian, Romania, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (7).
Karolina Muchova (20), Czechia, def. Nadia Podoroska, Argentina, 6-1, 6-1.
Elise Mertens, Belgium, def. Viktorija Golubic, Switzerland, 4-6, 7-6 (8), 6-4.
Destanee Aiava, Australia, def. Greet Minnen, Belgium, 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (5).
Danielle Collins (10), United States, def. Daria Snigur, Ukraine, 7-6 (4), 6-3.
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Caroline Garcia, France, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Hailey Baptiste, United States, 4-6, 7-5, 6-4.
Lucia Bronzetti, Italy, def. Victoria Azarenka (21), Belarus, 6-2, 7-6 (2).
Iga Swiatek (2), Poland, def. Katerina Siniakova, Czechia, 6-3, 6-4.
Caroline Dolehide, United States, def. Sara Bejlek, Czechia, 7-6 (5), 6-2.
Anastasia Potapova, Russia, def. Tamar Zidansek, Slovenia, 6-2, 7-5.
Harriet Dart, Britain, def. Jana Fett, Croatia, 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7).
Jule Niemeier, Germany, def. Maja Chwalinska, Poland, 6-0, 6-1.
Belinda Bencic, Switzerland, def. Jelena Ostapenko (16), Latvia, 6-3, 7-6 (6).
Jessica Pegula (7), United States, def. Maya Joint, Australia, 6-3, 6-0.
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (27), Russia, def. Yuan Yue, China, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.
Marta Kostyuk (17), Ukraine, def. Nao Hibino, Japan, 3-6, 6-3, 6-1.
Jaqueline Cristian, Romania, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (7).
Karolina Muchova (20), Czechia, def. Nadia Podoroska, Argentina, 6-1, 6-1.
Elise Mertens, Belgium, def. Viktorija Golubic, Switzerland, 4-6, 7-6 (8), 6-4.
Destanee Aiava, Australia, def. Greet Minnen, Belgium, 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (5).
Danielle Collins (10), United States, def. Daria Snigur, Ukraine, 7-6 (4), 6-3.
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Caroline Garcia, France, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

N. Echavarria, \$948,300 66-67-66-65-264 -16
Stephan Jaeger, \$513,300 68-68-62-67-265 -15
J.J. Spaun, \$513,300 66-66-65-68-265 -15
Eric Cole, \$356,700 64-67-67-68-266 -14
Keegan Bradley, \$283,838 69-66-64-68-267 -13
Patrick Fishburn, \$283,838 65-65-68-69-267 -13
Adam Schenk, \$283,838 64-69-69-65-267 -13
Jackson Suber, \$283,838 66-70-66-65-267 -13



JOSE JUAREZ/AP

Red Wings left wing J.T. Compher is congratulated by teammates after scoring a goal against the Seattle Kraken during the first period Sunday in Detroit. The Red Wings won their seventh straight game.

NHL ROUNDUP

Red Wings cruise to 7th straight win

Associated Press

DETROIT — Patrick Kane scored during Detroit's fast start, and the Red Wings beat the Seattle Kraken 6-2 on Sunday for their seventh consecutive victory.

Marco Kasper, J.T. Compher, Alex DeBrincat and Kane scored as Detroit opened a 4-0 lead 7:53 into the first period. Erik Gustafsson and Dylan Larkin added second-period goals for the Red Wings.

It's the longest win streak for Detroit in nearly 13 years. The Red Wings had two seven-game streaks during the 2011-12 season, mostly recently Jan. 12-23, 2012.

Oliver Bjorkstrand and Matty Beniers scored for Seattle.

Kraken goaltender Philipp Grubauer was replaced by Joey Daccord after giving up three goals in four shots. Daccord had 16 saves in the Kraken's fifth loss in six games.

Cam Talbot made 31 stops for Detroit.

Lightning 5, Penguins 2: Nikita Kucherov had two goals and an assist, and visiting Tampa Bay beat Pittsburgh.

Brandon Hagel also scored for the Lightning, and Anthony Cirelli and Nick Paul had empty-net goals.

Tampa Bay recorded points in both halves of back-to-back games for the first time this season. It lost in overtime against New Jersey on Saturday.

Jake Guentzel had two assists to become the second player in Lightning history with at least 20 goals and 40 points in his first 40 games with the franchise.

Rickard Rakell scored his 22nd goal of the season for Pittsburgh, and Sidney Crosby recorded his

1,040th career assist to tie Marcel Dionne for 11th on the NHL's career list.

Senators 3, Stars 2: Leevi Merilainen made 24 saves in his home debut and visiting Ottawa ended Dallas' seven-game winning streak with a victory.

Merilainen was coming off his first NHL shutout Saturday in a 5-0 victory in Pittsburgh. The 22-year-old Finn's five previous starts this season were on the road.

Josh Norris, Tim Stutzle and Matthew Highmore scored for Ottawa.

Evgenii Dadonov and Jason Robertson scored for Dallas.

Ducks 3, Hurricanes 2 (OT): Cutter Gauthier scored two goals, including one 1:52 into overtime, as visiting Anaheim beat Carolina.

Jansen Harkins also scored, and Lukas Dostal stopped 35 shots to help the Ducks snap a three-game losing streak. Jackson LaCombe added two assists.

Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov scored a power-play goal midway through the third period, and Seth Jarvis tied it with 56 seconds remaining in regulation.

Golden Knights 4, Wild 1: Pavel Dorofeyev had two power-play goals and added an assist and host Vegas broke open a tie game with three third-period goals to beat Minnesota.

The Golden Knights joined Washington and Winnipeg atop the NHL with 61 points, avoiding their first three-game losing streak of the season.

Tomas Hertl added a goal and an assist, Keegan Kolesar scored the tiebreaker and Mark Stone and Shea Theodore each had two assists. Adin Hill made 15 saves.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	44	27	15	2	56	135	124
Florida	43	25	15	3	53	143	132
Tampa Bay	41	23	15	3	49	151	113
Boston	45	21	19	5	47	116	142
Ottawa	42	21	18	3	45	122	120
Detroit	42	20	18	4	44	121	133
Montreal	42	20	18	4	44	126	140
Buffalo	43	16	22	5	37	132	146

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	43	28	10	5	61	156	113
New Jersey	45	26	15	4	56	142	114
Carolina	44	26	15	3	55	147	123
Columbus	43	20	17	6	46	149	151
Pittsburgh	45	18	19	8	44	135	169
N.Y. Rangers	42	20	20	2	42	122	131
N.Y. Islanders	42	17	18	7	41	114	129
Philadelphia	43	18	20	5	41	132	151

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	44	29	12	3	61	156	108
Minnesota	44	27	13	4	58	132	122
Dallas	42	27	14	1	55	136	104
Colorado	44	26	17	1	53	147	138
St. Louis	44	20	20	4	44	125	133
Utah	42	18	17	7	43	117	125
Nashville	42	13	22	7	33	101	132
Chicago	43	14	27	2	30	111	147

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	43	29	11	3	61	148	114
Edmonton	42	26	13	3	55	139	117
Los Angeles	40	24	11	5	53	121	99
Vancouver	42	19	13	10	48	124	130
Calgary	41	20	14	7	47	110	123
Anaheim	43	18	20	5	41	108	135
Seattle	44	18	23	3	39	128	144
San Jose	45	13	26	6	32	114	158

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

Sunday's games

Detroit 6, Seattle 2
Tampa Bay 5, Pittsburgh 2
Ottawa 3, Dallas 2
Anaheim 3, Carolina 2, OT
Vegas 4, Minnesota 1

Monday's games

Florida at Philadelphia
Calgary at Chicago
Los Angeles at Edmonton

Tuesday's games

Anaheim at Washington
Dallas at Toronto
Philadelphia at Columbus
San Jose at Detroit
Seattle at Pittsburgh
Tampa Bay at Boston
Florida at New Jersey
Ottawa at N.Y. Islanders
Calgary at St. Louis
Vancouver at Winnipeg
Vegas at Nashville
Montreal at Utah
N.Y. Rangers at Colorado

Wednesday's games

Carolina at Buffalo
Edmonton at Minnesota

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	28	11	.718	—
New York	26	14	.650	2½
Philadelphia	15	22	.405	12
Brooklyn	13	26	.333	15
Toronto	8	31	.205	20
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	23	18	.561	—
Miami	20	17	.541	1
Atlanta	19	19	.500	2½
Charlotte	8	28	.222	12½
Washington	6	31	.162	15
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	33	5	.868	—
Indiana	22	18	.550	12
Milwaukee	20	17	.541	12½
Detroit	20	19	.513	13½
Chicago	18	21	.462	15½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	25	12	.676	—
Memphis	25	14	.641	1
Dallas	22	17	.564	4
San Antonio	18	19	.486	7
New Orleans	8	32	.200	18½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	32	6	.842	—
Denver	23	15	.605	9
Minnesota	20	18	.526	12
Portland	13	25	.342	19
Utah	10	28	.263	22
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	20	16	.556	—
L.A. Clippers	20	17	.541	½
Sacramento	20	19	.513	1½
Phoenix	19	19	.500	2
Golden State	19	19	.500	2

Sunday's games
 Denver 112, Dallas 101
 New York 140, Milwaukee 106
 Sacramento 124, Chicago 119
 Indiana 108, Cleveland 93
 Boston 120, New Orleans 119
 Oklahoma City 136, Washington 95
 Orlando 104, Philadelphia 99
 Utah 112, Brooklyn 111, OT
 Phoenix 120, Charlotte 113

Monday's games
 Minnesota at Washington
 Detroit at New York
 Golden State at Toronto
 Memphis at Houston
 Miami at L.A. Clippers
 San Antonio at L.A. Lakers

Tuesday's games
 Cleveland at Indiana
 Oklahoma City at Philadelphia
 Phoenix at Atlanta
 New Orleans at Chicago
 Sacramento at Milwaukee
 Denver at Dallas
 Brooklyn at Portland

Wednesday's games
 Boston at Toronto
 New York at Philadelphia
 Atlanta at Chicago
 Dallas at New Orleans
 Golden State at Minnesota
 Memphis at San Antonio
 Orlando at Milwaukee
 Charlotte at Utah
 Houston at Denver
 Miami at L.A. Lakers
 Brooklyn at L.A. Clippers

Scoring leaders
 Through Sunday

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Antetokoun., MIL	31	389	192	974	31.4
Gil.-Alexander, OKC	38	419	275	1,192	31.4
Jokic, DEN	33	392	175	1,031	31.2
Tatum, BOS	36	337	202	1,010	28.1
Durant, PHO	28	272	152	759	27.1
Fox, SAC	36	354	176	959	26.6
Maxey, PHI	31	272	156	799	25.8
Davis, LAL	34	317	220	878	25.8
Brunson, NY	39	339	227	996	25.5
Towns, NY	37	337	186	939	25.4
Edwards, MIN	38	336	135	965	25.4
Wembanyama, SA	32	291	117	804	25.1
Booker, PHO	33	266	203	821	24.9
Lillard, MIL	30	228	187	745	24.8
Irving, DAL	30	269	98	729	24.3

ROUNDUP

Brunson has 44, Knicks rout Bucks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson scored 44 points despite missing part of the third quarter with an apparent injury, and the New York Knicks beat the Milwaukee Bucks 140-106 on Sunday.

Brunson had 23 points in the first quarter, one off his career high for any period, and was off to another strong start in the third when he was slow to get up after having his shot blocked on a drive to the basket. Once he did stand up, he immediately motioned to the bench that he needed to come out and walked directly to the locker room area.

New York never announced an injury, and Brunson eventually emerged from the tunnel about six minutes later to a loud ovation and checked back into the game. He reached 40 points for the 17th time as a Knick, tying Carmelo Anthony for third on the franchise list.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 30 points and 18 rebounds for New York, which had lost four of five before shooting 58% from the field.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points and 13 rebounds for Milwaukee, which had its three-game winning streak snapped. Damian Lillard added 22 points.

Nuggets 112, Mavericks 101: Russell Westbrook had 21 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists and Nikola Jokic added 19 points, 18 rebounds and nine assists as visiting Denver rallied in the fourth quarter to beat Dallas.

The Nuggets trailed by 19 points late in the third period and by 12 early in the fourth. They outscored the Mavericks in the fourth period 33-12. After hitting only four of 25 3-pointers through three quarters, Denver shot 3 for 7 down the stretch while Dallas missed all 11 3-point tries in the fourth.

The Nuggets won for the 12th time in 17 games.

Kings 124, Bulls 119: Domantas Sabonis had 22 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists, and visiting Sacramento beat Chicago to extend its season-high winning streak to seven games.

De'Aaron Fox scored 26 points and grabbed nine rebounds for the Kings after missing three games because of a bruised right glute. Malik Monk had 18 points, nine assists and eight rebounds.

DeMar DeRozan got a warm reception in his return to Chicago and finished with 21 points. The six-time All-Star spent three seasons with the Bulls before leaving for Sacramento in a three-team trade in July.

Pacers 108, Cavaliers 93: Andrew Nembhard scored 19 points, Pascal Siakam had 18 points and



PAMELA SMITH/AP

The Knicks' Jalen Brunson dribbles past the Milwaukee Bucks' Andre Jackson Jr. during the first half Sunday in New York. Brunson scored 44 points as the Knicks won 140-106.

nine rebounds and visiting Indiana ended NBA-leading Cleveland's winning streak at 12 games.

Myles Turner added 15 points and 10 rebounds, and Jarace Walker had eight points and 12 rebounds off the bench to help the Pacers win their sixth straight. Indiana held the Cavaliers to a season low in points and outscored them 68-40 in the second half.

Cleveland lost for the first time since Dec. 8 at Miami. It is 33-5 overall and 20-2 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

Celtics 120, Pelicans 119: Jayson Tatum scored 38 points with 11 rebounds and Kristaps Porzingis had 19 points and 11 rebounds as host Boston overcame the return of Zion Williamson to New Orleans' lineup to win.

Trey Murphy III scored 30 points and Williamson scored 16 in his return from a one-game suspension for being late to team activities. The 2019 draft lottery prize also had seven rebounds in 28 minutes.

The Pelicans led by as many as 11 points in the first quarter, taking advantage when the Celtics made just one of their first 11 3-point attempts. Boston finished 13 for 44 from long distance and shot

just 43.6% overall from the floor.

Thunder 136, Wizards 95: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 of his 27 points from the foul line to overcome his worst shooting performance of the season and help visiting Oklahoma City to a rout of Washington.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot only 29.4% (5 of 17) from the floor over 30 minutes, well below his previous worst of 35% against San Antonio on Oct. 30.

But Gilgeous-Alexander's ability to draw fouls, combined with another strong showing by the NBA's best defense, lifted the West-leading Thunder to their largest margin of victory and sent the NBA-worst Wizards to their most lopsided defeat.

Magic 104, 76ers 99: Cole Anthony had 27 points, Paolo Banchero scored seven points in the final 1:32 and host Orlando beat Philadelphia.

Banchero finished with 20 points, eight rebounds and six assists in his second game back after being sidelined by a torn oblique.

Tyrese Maxey led the 76ers with 29 points. Paul George had 25 points, 10 rebounds and six assists before fouling out with Philadelphia leading 94-91 with 2:49 left.

Jazz 112, Nets 111 (OT): Isaiah Collier drove for the go-ahead lay-up with 2 seconds left to lift host Utah to an overtime victory over Brooklyn.

Collier finished with a career-high 23 points, seven rebounds and seven assists, and Collin Sexton added 21 points to lead the Jazz, snapping a three-game losing streak. Svi Mykhailiuk and Brice Sensabaugh chipped in 16 points apiece.

Evbuomwan led the Nets with 22 points and Ziaire Williams added 19. Ben Simmons and Nic Claxton each tallied 14 points. Simmons added nine assists and Claxton collected 12 rebounds.

Suns 120, Hornets 113: Devin Booker scored 30 points, Kevin Durant added 27 and host Phoenix rallied in the final minutes to beat Charlotte.

The Suns have won three straight and four of five. The Hornets have lost 10 of 11.

Charlotte — which was trying to beat Phoenix for the second time in a week — pushed to a 98-93 lead after the third quarter and led for much of the fourth. Durant hit a step-back jumper to give the Suns a 111-110 advantage with just over three minutes left.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Shaky play outside of conference hurts ACC's stated goals

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

Tough start

RALEIGH, N.C. — It's still early for the Atlantic Coast Conference. No one knows that better than N.C. State coach Kevin Keatts, whose team last year found a never-before-seen form just in time to improbably win the league tournament and reach the Final Four.

That doesn't change the fact this isn't the place the ACC wanted to be as teams dive into the meat of the league schedule.

A season that began with the publicly stated goal of earning more NCAA Tournament bids — backed by the league continuing to outperform its peers in March Madness — instead had a jarring nonconference showing. That brought the league into 2025 with just one AP Top 25 team, while others faced the question of how much they can improve their standing in a league offering a limited universe of chances for high-end wins.

"At this point, you have to control what you can control," Keatts said Friday, a day before his team faced rival North Carolina in a rematch of last year's ACC final. "Most of the talking heads are going to have us with four (bids), maybe an outside chance for five. I just don't think you can worry about it. I just think you've got to lock into your team and figure out how to win games."

Indeed, though that's how the trouble began.

The ACC was 16-52 against the Big 12, Big East, Big Ten and Southeastern conferences as of Friday, a win rate of 23.5%, according to Sportradar. That's by far the worst of those top leagues, led by the SEC (59-19, .756), then followed by the Big Ten (31-23, .574), Big East (18-23, .439) and Big 12 (21-28, .429).

The low point was the SEC's 14-2 romp against the ACC in that annual interleague contest. The ACC's wins were No. 4 Duke handing No. 2 Auburn its only loss in a March-worthy throwdown featuring preseason AP All-Americans Cooper Flagg (Duke) and Johni Broome (Auburn), and Clemson beating No. 6 Kentucky. Multiple coaches on Monday's league teleconference had no answer for why the league-wide results had been so shaky.

"I don't know, I haven't watched all the teams, I certainly haven't seen a lot of the games," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said. "We're all a little disappointed with some of the results."

And the impact lingers by establishing a pecking order when it comes to perceived league strength, particularly now as teams dive into conference play to continue building their resumes.

For example, the ACC had six teams in the top 50 of Friday's NET rankings, the constantly shifting sorting tool used by the NCAA selection committee; that



ALLISON LEE ISLEY/AP

North Carolina State coach Kevin Keatts led his team on an improbable run through the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament and into the Final Four last season.

trailed the SEC (14), Big Ten (10) and Big 12 (nine). That could ultimately impact the committee's decisions on everything from bubble teams on the fringes of the 68-team field, to seeding lines for top teams playing for the most favorable bracket path to San Antonio.

"Unfortunately, when results go that way, decisions are made for really the rest of the year," Duke coach Jon Scheyer said. "And it's unfortunate that it happened that way."

Going forward

It's an ill-timed stumble considering league coaches and officials had spent the offseason examining why the league has been getting its lowest bid totals since expanding to 12 teams and beyond. The league has managed just five bids for three straight seasons from its 15-team membership, which has expanded with this year's additions of California, Stanford and SMU.

The ACC keeps winning in March, such as putting four different teams (Duke, UNC, Miami and N.C. State) in the past three Final Fours and six dating to 2015 with three national titles in that span.

Past tournament performance isn't part of the bid evaluation. The goal was to bump up that bid haul through quality wins early in the season. That will be hard to do now considering how things went in November and December.

Where things stand

Fourth-ranked Duke (13-2, 5-0) looks every bit like the team picked as preseason ACC favorite. That includes Tuesday's 31-point win against Pittsburgh, with Panthers coach Jeff Capel pointing to Flagg's hyper-competitive edge as a key.

"In my opinion, that's what makes this Duke team different from last year's," Capel said afterward, "because when your best player's like that, it kind of per-

meates through the whole team."

Pitt (No. 20 in NET), UNC (39th), Louisville under first-year coach Pat Kelsey (40th) and Clemson (41st) are best positioned from there. That group secured quality nonconference wins against AP No. 21 West Virginia (Louisville and Pitt) and No. 22 UCLA (UNC) to go with Clemson's Kentucky win, among others.

For everyone else, the reality is there aren't as many Quadrant 1 wins that top an NCAA résumé available to provide a boost. Instead, as Keatts noted, there's "a bunch of Quad 2s, especially at home."

The only thing to do is win games, then hope those wins hold up on Selection Sunday.

"When you don't win those (ACC-SEC Challenge) games that are already scheduled and then you go outside and play some more nonconference games, and we have some ups and downs, it really hurts," Keatts said.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 15 Oregon pulls away from Penn State in final minute

Associated Press

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Jackson Shelstad scored 17 points, Keeshawn Barthelemy added 15, Jadrian Tracey had 13 and No. 15 Oregon held on to beat Penn State 82-81 on Sunday.

Nate Bittle had 11 points while TJ Bamba and Kwame Evans Jr. added 10 apiece for the Ducks (15-2, 4-2 Big Ten), who trailed for most of the second half before regaining the lead in the final minute.

The game was tied at 78 with just over a minute to go before Shelstad hit a midrange jumper that put Oregon up two with 47 seconds left. Kern tried a layup the other way, but the shot was off. Oregon gained possession, drew a foul and closed out the game with

a pair of Tracey free throws.

Freddie Dilione V scored a career-high 21 points, Nick Kern added 19 and Puff Johnson had 15 for the Nittany Lions (12-5, 2-4) who lost their third in a row.

No. 16 Michigan State 78, Northwestern 68: Jaden Akins scored 14 points and the visiting Spartans extended their winning streak to nine games.

Michigan State (14-2, 5-0 Big Ten) closed the first half on a 33-12 run and led 47-28 at intermission after all 10 players chipped in at least a field goal. The Wildcats (10-6, 1-4) finally got their deficit under 10 points in the game's final minute.

Jase Richardson scored 13 points and Jeremy Fears Jr. had 12 points and eight assists for the

Spartans, whose six dunks in the first half drew plenty of roars from visiting fans who seemed to make up half of the sellout crowd.

No. 20 Purdue 104, Nebraska 68: C.J. Cox scored a career-high 23 points and Fletcher Loyer added 19 to help the host Boilermakers roll past the Cornhuskers.

Cox, a freshman who was averaging 5.4 points, made 9 of 11 shots, including 5 of 7 3-pointers. Loyer hit 5 of 6 3-point shots for Purdue (13-4, 5-1 Big Ten)

Purdue hit four of its first six shots from long distance and finished 19 for 33 from 3-point range.

Trey Kaufman-Renn scored 13 of his 15 points in the first half and Myles Colvin added 14 points for Purdue. Braden Smith had a team-leading 14 assists.

Connor Essegian scored 17 points and Brice Williams added nine, well off his 19.4 scoring average, for the Cornhuskers (12-4, 2-3).

Purdue shot 64% in the opening half and built a 45-28 lead. The Cornhuskers shot 52%, but made just 2 of 11 3-point attempts.

Purdue had a 33-20 rebounding edge and held a 22-11 advantage in points off turnovers. The Boilermakers had 10 turnovers, seven less than Nebraska

No. 21 West Virginia 78, Colorado 70: Javon Small scored 26 points and Joseph Yesufu added 18 as the Mountaineers held off host Colorado in the teams' first meeting as members of the Big 12 Conference.

The Mountaineers (12-3, 3-1 Big

12) overcame foul trouble and used a late 13-4 run to thwart Colorado, which had cut the deficit to two points with 5:28 left. Yesufu had eight points in that spurt.

Julian Hammond III had 23 points and Assane Diop added 13 for Colorado (9-6, 0-4), which lost its fourth straight game.

No. 24 Michigan 91, Washington 75: Vladislav Goldin had 19 points and Nimari Burnett scored 16 to lead the host Wolverines over the Huskies.

It was Michigan's (13-3, 5-0 Big Ten) fifth straight victory.

Great Osobor scored 23 points, including 16 in the first half, and Zoom Diallo and Mekhi Mason added 13 apiece for Washington (10-7, 1-5).

AUSTRALIAN OPEN/COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF



ASANKA BRENDON RATNAYAKE/AP

Novak Djokovic, left, of Serbia, talks with his coach Andy Murray during his first-round match against Nishesh Basavareddy, of the United States, at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Monday.

Djokovic, new coach Murray get win vs. US teen in debut

By HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic's first match with former rival Andy Murray as his coach did not start all that well, even against a 19-year-old making his Grand Slam debut.

Still, after dropping his opening set at the 2025 Australian Open on Monday night to Nishesh Basavareddy, an American who left Stanford University and turned pro last month, Djokovic eventually asserted himself for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 victory to begin his bid for an 11th championship at Melbourne Park and a record 25th major title overall.

"I'm obviously thrilled to have him in my corner," Djokovic said about Murray. "I must say, it was a little bit of a strange experience to have him at courtside in my box. We played for over 20 years against each other at the highest level. Great to have him on the same side of the net. He gave me some great advice mid-match."

Before heading out into Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic and Murray chatted in the gym. They wrapped up the conversation with a fist bump, before Djokovic hopped on the treadmill to warm up.

During the match, apart from an extended conversation before the fourth set, there was only the occasional interaction between player and coach — a pairing between 37-year-olds born a week apart, and opponents from the age of 12, including in a series of Slam finals as pros. Murray retired at the Paris Olympics in August; Djokovic proposed teaming up in November.

Djokovic showed some of his

usual fire when that vital break came at the 1½-hour mark. He watched the 107th-ranked Basavareddy's forehand land wide and let out a yell, clenched a fist, pointed a finger at his ear. That was the beginning of the end for Basavareddy, who started stepping gingerly between points and grabbing at his legs, and took a medical timeout before the third set.

On a busy and warm Day 2, which included nine Grand Slam champions with a combined 43 major trophies in action plus another half-dozen players with runner-up showings, the winners included No. 2 Iga Swiatek, No. 3 Coco Gauff, No. 7 Jessica Pegula and Naomi Osaka among the women, and No. 1 Jannik Sinner and No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz among the men.

Osaka, who won two of her four major titles in Australia, defeated Caroline Garcia 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in Monday's last match at Rod Laver Arena.

Noteworthy exits came from two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko and two-time major finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. Ostapenko's 6-3, 7-6 (6) loss came against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic, who is ranked outside the top 400 after returning in October from maternity leave.

Also one-and-done, but not that surprisingly: Nick Kyrgios, who lost to Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final and played one match the past two seasons because of injuries. Kyrgios dealt with a strained abdominal muscle in the lead-up to this week and was defeated by Jacob Fearnley 7-6 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (2).

"Sorry for Nick," said Fearnley, a 23-year-old from Scotland who played college tennis at TCU in Fort Worth, Texas. "I could tell he was dealing with some stuff."

The intensity and physicality of the points against Djokovic wore on Basavareddy. Another key: Djokovic's backhand grew faster in the second set, while Basavareddy's shots off that wing slowed. One more: Djokovic hit 23 aces.

At 3-all, a half-hour in, Basavareddy moved out front by breaking Djokovic with a backhand return winner. Soon enough, that set belonged to the youngster, who is not shy about saying the Serb is his favorite player. Basavareddy showed off some great touch with drop shots and lob winners while hanging in there at the baseline with the consummate baseliner.

"Very complete player," Djokovic said. "He did very pleasantly surprise me with all of his shots and his fighting spirit toward the end."

They are currently separated by exactly 100 spots in the ATP rankings. The gulf is far wider, of course, when it comes to experience and accomplishments.

This outcome left Basavareddy's career record at 0-1 in Grand Slam tournaments; his tour-level debut came in December. Djokovic picked up his record-extending 378th victory at a major on Monday; he hasn't lost in the first round of one since bowing out at that stage of his first two Australian Opens in 2005 and 2006.

"He didn't get carried away by the significance of the moment," Djokovic said about Basavareddy. "I'm sure we'll see a lot of him in the future."

Irish OL Knapp out of title game; Buckeyes CB Burke good to go

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Notre Dame's Anthonie Knapp has been ruled out of the College Football Playoff championship game against Ohio State with an ankle injury, but coach Marcus Freeman said Sunday Rocco Spindler is on track to play.

The Buckeyes' Denzel Burke, who has been dealing with what coach Ryan Day described as an "upper extremity issue," will be available against the Irish in Atlanta on Jan. 20.

Notre Dame has battled numerous injuries all season and a flu bug last week as it's won 13 straight games to position itself to play for its first national championship since 1988.

Day said his team, going for its first national title since 2014, planned for the possibility of playing an extended season and attempted to put in some safeguards in place if it happened. They were intentional in building their roster and managing pace of play, he said.

"We looked at a lot of different things and metrics about playing this many games, playing our 16th game, what that was going to be like," Day said.

"We knew it was going to be a little bit of a battle of attrition at times. So depth was certainly a critical part of roster management and talent acquisition, but also how we practice, how we play. So we've taken all those things into consideration so that we're still really, really fresh going into the end of the season."

The Irish's Knapp and Spindler were hurt in the second quarter of the semifinal win over Penn State in the Orange Bowl on Thursday. Freeman said Jeremiyah Love, the 1,000-yard rusher who played on a sore knee and scored a touch-

down against the Nittany Lions, is expected to be at full strength. Wide receiver Beaux Collins, who's dealing with a calf strain, is working toward being ready.

Notre Dame's problems began in preseason practice when offensive lineman Charles Jagusah went out with a pectoral injury. Offensive lineman Jordan Botelho and defensive lineman Jordan Botelho were lost to season-ending injuries against Purdue in September.

Cornerback Benjamin Morrison, a projected first-round NFL draft pick, was lost to a hip injury against Stanford in October. Defensive lineman Rylie Mills sustained a season-ending knee injury in the first-round playoff game against Indiana.

Knapp suffered a high ankle sprain against Penn State, and Freeman said it hadn't been determined how the Irish would adjust their offensive line for the championship game.

"We have a week of preparation to make sure we have the right guys to start this game," he said, "and we'll see what that is here in the next couple of days."

Ohio State's Burke, a four-year starter at cornerback, was limited to 28 snaps in the Cotton Bowl win against Texas and gave way to Jermaine Mathews Jr. for the second half. Day said the decision to remove Burke from the game was based on feedback from the player and doctors.

Day said Mathews has earned the trust of his teammates and coaches.

"He graded out a champion," Day said. "He's a very competitive player. He loves the competition. He loves his teammates. He's a gritty type of guy that loves being a Buckeye, loves his teammates, loves, again, to compete."



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Notre Dame offensive lineman Anthonie Knapp is assisted on the field in the first half of the Orange Bowl on Thursday in Miami Gardens, Fla.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Washington gets 1st postseason victory since '06

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — New owners. New general manager. New coach. New franchise quarterback.

That's the formula — with an emphasis on the QB — that Washington rode to playoff success after nearly two decades of futility.

Jayden Daniels ran for a critical first down to set up Zane Gonzalez's 37-yard field goal that clanged off the right upright and went through as time expired, and the Commanders beat the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 23-20 in an NFC wild-card game Sunday night for the franchise's first playoff victory in 6,945 days.

Daniels, playing with a bandage beneath his right eye after his face was bloodied, became the third rookie quarterback in three years to win a playoff game.

The Commanders (13-5) will face the No. 1 seed Detroit Lions (15-2) in the divisional round.

"It means a lot, man," Daniels said. "You could just see all the fans over here, man, they're waiting for us. They've waited a long time for this moment and this feeling, so I'm just so happy for them."

Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers (10-8) missed several opportunities and the veteran quarterback committed a costly turnover in the fourth quarter. The Bucs couldn't get 1 yard on two tries from the Commanders 12 and settled for a tying field goal before Washington's winning drive.

Daniels threw for 268 yards and two touchdowns, joining C.J. Stroud and Brock Purdy as rookie QBs to win playoff games in the past three seasons.

Washington hadn't won in the postseason since beating the Buccaneers in Tampa Bay 17-10 in a wild-card game on Jan. 7, 2006.

The turnaround for the organization began when Daniel Snyder sold the team in 2023 to a group led by Josh Harris that includes NBA Hall of Famer Magic Johnson. They hired GM Adam Peters and coach Dan Quinn after their first season in control and selected Daniels with the No. 2 pick in the draft in April.

"You gotta give Josh a lot of credit because we picked the right people," Johnson said. "When you

pick Adam Peters and you pick coach Quinn and they picked the right players, the culture changed. You went from a losing culture to a winning culture. But it's about those players. They decided they wanted to win. They didn't worry about what all the analysts said. And, the right quarterback. Enough said right there."

The Buccaneers opened the season with a 37-20 victory at home against the Commanders in Daniels' first game. Daniels went on to have an outstanding season, was selected to the Pro Bowl and helped Washington improve from 4-13 to 12-5.

Now, he has them headed to Detroit to face Jared Goff and the Lions' high-octane offense.

After Tampa Bay's defense held inside

the 5 in the opening minute of the fourth quarter to preserve a 17-13 lead, Mayfield gave the Commanders the ball right back when he fumbled an exchange on a handoff to Jalen McMillan. Washington recovered at the Buccaneers 13. On fourth-and-2 from the 5, Daniels connected with Terry McLaurin in the back of the end zone for a 20-17 lead.

"It's disappointing because I believe in this team because we have the talent and the coaching staff to go far," Mayfield said. "I did some dumb stuff and it'll wear on me for a while."

Mayfield drove the Bucs to a second-and-1 at the Commanders 12 but they settled for a 32-yard field goal by Chase McLaughlin that tied it at 20-20 with 4:41 left.

The Bucs never got the ball back, thanks to Daniels, who calmly led his team downfield. With less than a minute left, he was hit behind the line of scrimmage but scrambled for 4 yards on third-and-2, allowing him to take a knee to set up Gonzalez's winning kick.

Quinn passed up short field-goal attempts on fourth down twice and the offense failed to convert before McLaurin's TD catch.

On fourth down from the Buccaneers 4 less than a minute into the fourth quarter, Daniels threw incomplete. He was pressured and threw incomplete on fourth-and-2 from Tampa Bay's 20 on Washington's first possession of the game.

"We were going to be bold but not reckless," Quinn said.

6,945

Days between Washington playoff victories. The team's previous postseason win, also at Tampa Bay, was in a wild-card game on Jan. 7, 2006.

Associated Press



CHRIS O'MEARA/AP

Washington Commanders kicker Zane Gonzalez, right, is congratulated by teammates after kicking the winning field goal against the Buccaneers in a wild-card playoff game Sunday night in Tampa, Fla.

Daniels: Commanders QB has been providing late-game heroics all season

FROM PAGE 24
fourth quarter.

After the Buccaneers settled for a field goal that tied it despite driving to the 12, Daniels got another chance to display more late-game heroics.

He threw a 52-yard Hail Mary TD pass to beat Chicago in Week 8 and led five comeback wins after trailing in the fourth quarter during the regular season.

This time, he only needed to get the Commanders in field-goal range.

Daniels connected with Brown for 21 yards on third-and-6 from Washington's 34 to extend the final drive. On third-and-2 from Tampa Bay's 15, he eluded a tackle in the backfield and ran 4 yards for a first down that allowed the Commanders to run the clock down until Zane Gonzalez doinked a 37-yard field goal off the right upright and through as time expired for the win.

"I think you just kind of find that zone," Daniels said about playing in pressure moments. "And you don't hear (anything) — you just focus on your fundamentals and you focus on playing in the playoffs."

Daniels was 24 of 35 for 268 yards and two TDs. He also ran for 36 yards and was sacked just once. He completed 9 of 15 for 108 yards and two TDs on third and fourth downs, picking up eight first downs.

The Commanders selected the Heisman Trophy winner from LSU with the No. 2 overall pick in the draft last April. He lost to the Buccaneers on the same field in his NFL debut and went on to

have an impressive season that earned him a Pro Bowl selection.

But Daniels and his teammates aren't satisfied with just getting here. They went from 4-13 to 12-5 and then became the first road team to win this season in the playoffs.

They'll face the No. 1 seed Detroit Lions (15-2) next Saturday night in the divisional round as an 8½-point underdog, according to Bet MGM Sportsbook.

Daniels won't be overwhelmed.

"This is what he's been doing all season," McLaurin said. "It's the preparation that we put in and I know people may be tired of hearing 'winning-time moments' but that's real and it shows up and I think that is what the playoffs are about. You may not play the perfect game but if you have the ball to go down there and have a chance to win the game, we trust our preparation in the moments we've been in this year."

"And to see Jayden continue to just get us in the right calls, execute what (offensive coordinator) Kliff (Kingsbury) is calling, showing some poise, just taking complete command of the game, complete command of the huddle, is - I'm fortunate to play with him and see how much he's grown this year but that's who he is. He's been blessed with unbelievable ability but his ability to just be ready for any moment that comes his way is, I think, definitely special for a rookie."

Daniels is a favorite for the AP Offensive Player of the Year award. He's three wins away from hoisting the Vince Lombardi trophy.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Bills' Allen leads balanced offense in rout of Broncos

By JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Josh Allen and the Buffalo Bills' spread-the-wealth approach on offense that was so productive in the regular season proved unstoppable in their playoff opener.

Whether it was Allen completing a 24-yard touchdown pass to sliding running back Ty Johnson on fourth down, or James Cook racking up 120 yards rushing, including a 5-yard touchdown run, the Bills leaned on a balanced attack in a 31-7 victory over the Denver Broncos in a wild-card playoff game Sunday.

"I don't think there was one certain thing over another. We just wanted to come out and execute well," Allen said. "At the end of the day, we just wanted to come out and play our best football, and I feel like we did that today."

With Allen completing 20 of 26 attempts for 272 yards passing and two TDs, and the running game combining for 210 yards, Buffalo methodically wore down the Broncos by scoring on six of its first seven drives in a game where the Bills finished with a 23-minute edge in time of possession.

Allen completed passes to eight players, including getting receiver Curtis Samuel involved by essentially sealing the win with a 55-yard TD catch on the opening snap of the fourth quarter.

"I'll speak on behalf of Curtis. He probably didn't have the season that he wanted to have," Allen said of the eighth-year player who was limited to 31 catches for 253 yards and a touchdown. "But he just continued to work hard, and that's kind of the mentality we've had all year is everybody eats. And today was his day."

Five-time defending AFC East champion Buffalo, which became

the NFL's first team to score 30 touchdowns rushing and passing in a season, advanced to the divisional round for a fifth straight postseason, and will face the third-seeded Baltimore Ravens next Sunday night.

The Ravens, coming off a 28-14 win over Pittsburgh on Saturday, routed the Bills 35-10 at Baltimore in Week 4 this season. The outing will mark the second playoff meeting between Allen and Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson after Buffalo defeated Baltimore 17-3 in the 2020 divisional round.

"This is what everyone's been waiting for, right?" coach Sean McDermott said. "So it'll be a nice week and everyone will be looking forward to it, and they're a great football team. I mean they handled us pretty good the first go around and they're certainly playing well."

Seventh-seeded Denver was outclassed in its first playoff appearance since its Super Bowl-winning season in 2015.

The Broncos' offense essentially stalled after rookie Bo Nix capped a five-play opening drive with a 43-yard touchdown pass to former college teammate Troy Franklin. Nix finished 13 of 22 for 144 yards in an outing where Denver punted four times and turned the ball over on downs twice.

The game served as a lesson in how much further the first-round pick and the Broncos still have to go after a promising season in which Nix threw 29 TD passes — two shy of the NFL rookie record.

"I'm really proud of these guys. We've overcome a lot and not really been counted in many games," Nix said. "But to make the playoffs was a special moment for this group. It's something we can build off of. ... Our goals are changing."



JEFFREY T. BARNES/AP

Bills quarterback Josh Allen had two touchdowns and 272 yards passing in Buffalo's 31-7 win over the Denver Broncos on Sunday.



DERIK HAMILTON/AP

Eagles tight end Dallas Goedert stiff-arms Green Bay Packers cornerback Carrington Valentine before scoring a touchdown during the second half of a wild-card playoff game Sunday in Philadelphia.

Hurts, Goedert lift Eagles over banged-up Packers

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Dallas Goedert fired one stiff-arm to a Packers defender, smacked him again and then — in a sports city known for its Broad Street Bullies — dispatched one final shot to the face on his way to end zone.

Goedert refused to be stopped — and neither were the Philadelphia Eagles in game in which they welcomed back Jalen Hurts and had the book on a Green Bay team that couldn't get past a myriad of injuries.

Hurts tossed two touchdown passes in his first game since a late-season concussion, Goedert threw those three stiff-arms on a rugged TD catch and the Eagles rode their NFL-best defense to a 22-10 wild-card playoff win Sunday night.

Hurts threw for a modest 131 yards, but played with no hesitation in his return from a three-week layoff after a concussion in December. He started strong — six straight completions to open the game — and held off the Packers with a 24-yard TD pass to Goedert in the third quarter that will be forever stamped on the franchise's postseason highlight reel as he pushed around Carrington Valentine on his way for the score.

"That was a really fun play. It might be my favorite touchdown of my career," Goedert said. "I had one guy to beat and I was able to do

Scoreboard

Wild card	
Saturday, Jan. 11	
Houston 32, L.A. Chargers 12	Baltimore 28, Pittsburgh 14
Sunday, Jan. 12	
Buffalo 31, Denver 7	Philadelphia 22, Green Bay 10
Washington 23, Tampa Bay 20	
Monday, Jan. 13	
Minnesota at L.A. Rams	

that. I'm not ready to go home, and I was going to do whatever it took to help the team get the 'W.'"

Philadelphia's defense handled the rest.

The Eagles turned a recovered fumble on the opening kickoff into Hurts' first TD pass three plays later and the defense picked off Jordan Love twice in the first half. Holding a 19-10 lead in the fourth, Philadelphia forced a turnover on downs when Green Bay had a fourth-and-3 on its own 41 with five minutes left in the game.

Quinyon Mitchell had one final interception of Love with 1:51 left that sealed the win for NFC East champion Philadelphia, which will host a divisional round game next Sunday against the winner of Monday night's wild-card game between the Minnesota Vikings and Los Angeles Rams in Arizona.

Hurts said the Eagles need to "find our rhythm earlier in the game."

"I think it's been an odd year in a sense of how choppy it's been, and

obviously me kind of being on leave the last couple weeks or so," Hurts said. "Being back and just getting into that rhythm and leaving it all out there right now, that's what it's about."

Saquon Barkley, who led the NFL in rushing with 2,005 yards, had 119 yards in his Eagles post-season debut.

"A year ago, I put out a tweet when I was on my couch watching playoff football that I gotta find a way to get back in it," said Barkley, who spent his first six NFL seasons with the New York Giants. "So I'm just happy to be here."

"And shoutout to my teammates and, most importantly, we move on. And we get another home game, so that's good."

Love threw for 212 yards and was intercepted three times and sacked twice as he nursed a sore right elbow that was hurt in the regular-season finale against Chicago. Though Love was able to stay in the game, he wasn't able to overcome a rash of injuries to key Packers players throughout the evening. Green Bay lost receivers Romeo Doubs (concussion) and Jayden Reed (shoulder), offensive linemen Elgton Jenkins (stinger) and Josh Myers (left leg) as well as several defenders.

"That was their goal to take away the run, and they did a good job of that," Love said. "It just comes down to executing and making plays out there, and it just wasn't good enough."

SPORTS



Injury bug bites again

Irish OL Knapp ruled out of title game against Buckeyes » College football, Page 21

ON FOOTBALL

Mark of a winner

Bloody face didn't stop QB Daniels from rallying Commanders to victory

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Jayden Daniels doesn't get fazed, even when a crunching hit leaves his face bloodied.

The rookie quarterback played with poise all season to lead the Washington Commanders to a dramatic eight-win improvement from 2023 and he wasn't going to let a little blood bother him in his biggest game yet.



JASON BEHNKEN/AP

Daniels, shown after the game, suffered a cut on his face in the first half.

He kept running around, making plays and did whatever was needed to lead Washington to the franchise's first playoff win since he was 5 years old.

With blood dripping down his face beneath his right eye, Daniels tossed a 10-yard TD pass to Dyami Brown for a 7-3 lead over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers early in the second quarter of a 23-20 victory Sunday night in an NFC wild-card game.

He went to the sideline, got the gash closed up with sterile super glue and went back to work the next series.

"I didn't know I was bleeding until they told me," Daniels said. "I wiped it and was like, 'Oh, I'm bleeding.'"

Daniels twice threw incomplete passes on fourth downs when coach Dan Quinn passed up short field goals. No problem.

With the game on the line, he stayed cool, calm and delivered more magic to help Washington win its first playoff game since Jan. 7, 2006, a span of 6,945 days.

Daniels fired a 5-yard TD pass to Terry McLaurin on fourth-and-2, giving the Commanders a 20-17 lead in the

SEE DANIELS ON PAGE 22

Washington Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels scrambles against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers during Sunday's wild-card game in Tampa, Fla.

CHRIS O'MEARA/AP



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