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STARS AND STRIPES®

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Volume 83 Edition 217 ©SS 2025 **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025** 平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く) 発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価￥50 **50¢/Free to Deployed Areas**

DOD sends probationary worker list to DOGE team

By Tony Capaccio, Gregory Korte and Courtney McBride
Bloomberg News

The Pentagon is sending Trump administration officials the names of probationary workers who could be targeted in an upcoming round of federal employee cuts, according to people familiar with the matter.

It's not yet clear if the entire list submitted on Tuesday will be eliminated from the Pentagon's workforce or if the staff reductions will affect a smaller subset, said one of the people, who declined to speak publicly on personnel matters that were not yet final.

Military staff creating the list were also asked to list justifications for personnel they wanted exempted from termination, one person said, adding that the list only included civilian employees — not active-duty service members.

President Donald Trump has said the Defense Department will be among the next targets as Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency fans out across the federal workforce cutting thousands of staff and identifying contracts and other expenses to eliminate.

Probationary employees — those within their first year or two on the job — have been the focus of staff cuts at many agencies because they aren't subject to the same federal workforce protections as those who have been employed longer.

The Pentagon declined to comment. The White House and the Office of Personnel Management did not immediately respond to re-

SEE DOGE ON PAGE 4

Oleg Petrasiuk, Ukraine's 24th Mechanised Brigade/AP

Ukrainian servicemen prepare to fire an MRLS BM-21 'Grad' toward Russian army positions in Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Saturday.

Weary of war, wary of peace

Many Ukrainians long for an end to conflict but fear it will come on unfavorable terms

By Justin Spike
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — After nearly three years of living under constant threat of Russian airstrikes while their troops fight a grinding campaign against Russia's invasion, many Ukrainians long for an end to the war — but now fear it could come on unfavorable terms.

Top U.S. and Russian officials plan to meet Tuesday in Saudi Arabia to discuss an end to the war — without Kyiv's participation — rankling some Ukrainians who worry they will be sidelined.

"We are being destroyed, Ukraine is suffering, Ukraine is fighting. And our president does not participate?" Lidiia Odyntsova, 71, said with disbelief of the upcoming talks. "We are the victims. We should play first fiddle in these talks."

Standing with tears in her eyes beside a snow-covered memorial to fallen Ukrainian soldiers in central Kyiv, she said: "I will not forgive them! I will never forgive!"

While Ukraine will not take part in Tuesday's talks, U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said any actual peace negotiations would only take place with Ukraine's involvement.

Still, many Ukrainians are watching a barrage of developments from the United States with apprehension. Ukrainian social media has been flooded with posts reflecting deep unease, and many remain anxiously glued to their phones for updates.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week sent shockwaves across both sides of the Atlantic after he agreed by phone with Russian

SEE WEARY ON PAGE 7

■ Zelenskyy warns Trump listening to 'disinformation'
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BUSINESS/WEATHER

Americans' confidence in air travel safety dips

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans' confidence in air travel and the federal agencies tasked with maintaining air safety has slipped a little from last year, following a recent crash in Washington, according to a new poll, but most still believe air transportation is generally safe.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 64% of U.S. adults say plane travel is "very safe" or "somewhat safe." That's down slightly from last year, when 71% said that. About 2 in 10 U.S. adults now say air transportation is very or somewhat unsafe, up from 12% in 2024.

Faith in government agencies' ability to ensure safe air travel dipped as well. Just over half of U.S. adults have "a great deal" or "a moderate amount" of confidence in federal government agencies to maintain air safety, down slightly from about 6 in 10 last year.

The poll was conducted Feb. 6-10, shortly after the Jan. 30 collision between an American Airlines passenger jet and an Army helicopter in Washington. The accident, which killed all 67 people aboard the two aircraft, was the country's deadliest aviation disaster since 2001. The decline in confidence, while small, suggests that the event may have rattled some Americans.

Overall, Americans think traveling by plane is about as safe as walking or taking a car. About two-thirds say either walking or driving are safe forms of transportation. Only about half of U.S. adults say a local subway, metro or light rail system is safe, in line with 2024.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Feb. 20)	0.93
British pound (Feb. 20)	$1.23
Japanese yen (Feb. 20)	147.00
South Korean won (Feb. 20)	1,404.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
Britain (Pound)	1.2592
Canada (Dollar)	1.4206
China (Yuan)	7.2796
Denmark (Krone)	7.1487
Egypt (Pound)	50.6111
Euro	0.9583
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7773
Hungary (Forint)	385.43
Israel (Shekel)	3.5434
Japan (Yen)	151.34
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3088
Norway (Krone)	11.1287
Philippines (Peso)	58.08
Poland (Zloty)	4.00
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7504
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3421
South Korea (Won)	1,441.96
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9028
Thailand (Baht)	33.70
Turkey (New Lira)	36.3023

(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.)

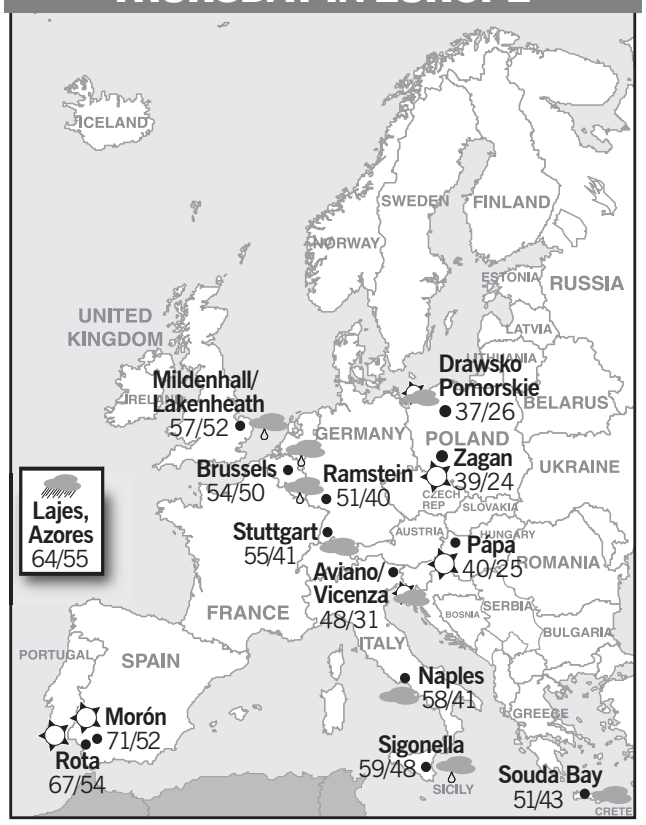
INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.34
30-year bond	4.77

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is compiled from weather.com

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MILITARY

Air Force reviews extended federal holidays

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is scrutinizing the extra day given to troops that turn federal holidays into four-day weekends as the U.S. government hunts for ways to streamline operations.

At many bases, service members receive an automatic "family day," typically scheduled alongside a Friday or Monday holiday.

In the coming weeks, the Air Force "will evaluate Family Days to ensure they align with our ability to support warfighter readiness," Gwendolyn DeFilippi, acting assistant secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve affairs, wrote in a Feb. 11 memo.

The review comes as the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, drives cost-cutting and efficiency measures across the executive branch of the federal government.

Family days have been a welcome perk for Senior Airman Andrew Clark, who transferred to Yokota Air Base, Japan, from Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M.

"Coming from a base that didn't practice it to one that does is night and day," he said Wednesday at the Army and Air Force Exchange Service at Yokota, an airlift hub in western Tokyo.

Clark said he uses the extra time off to recharge before the next workweek.

"I think we should keep them," he said.

Kweku Akyeampong, an Air Force spouse and civilian worker at Yokota, also supports the policy, citing the long hours worked by airmen.

"If they get a holiday off, I think it's cool," he said.

DeFilippi's memo emphasized that federal law does not permit the Air Force to grant civilian employees additional leave on family days. Unless otherwise exempted, civilians are expected to report to work, and contractors must adhere to their respective requirements and employer policies.

Commanders, directors and supervisors are encouraged to treat family days as "liberal leave" days whenever possible, DeFilippi wrote, meaning airmen may use previously earned leave, compensatory time, or preapproved time-off awards.

"The Department of the Air Force (DAF) routinely uses Family Days to recognize our teams' contributions to the mission and our families' enduring support of our efforts," the memo said.

On family days, the Air Force will limit meetings and scheduled activities, and supervising authorities may approve a regular pass for military members, DeFilippi wrote.

"For military members requested to perform duties on these dates, commanders, directors, and supervisors may grant compensatory time off, mission requirements permitting," she wrote.

Other service branches did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

US Coast Guard, Navy save crew before ship sinks in Persian Gulf

By Lara Korte
Stars and Stripes

A pair of American military vessels responding to a mayday call this week saved the crew of a sinking cargo ship in the Persian Gulf, according to U.S. Central Command.

The Navy mine countermeasures ship USS Devastator and Coast Guard cutter USCGC Clarence Sutphin Jr. came to the aid of five Iranians and two Indians aboard the Shayesteh before their ship sank Tuesday, Naval Forces Central Command said in a statement Wednesday.

After receiving a distress call, the Coast Guardsmen boarded a rigid hull inflatable boat and brought the seven mariners back to their ship, CENTCOM said. The cargo ship crew members were aboard the Navy ship and receiving medical care as of Tuesday.

"Providing assistance at sea to mariners in distress is a core Coast Guard mission," said Lt. Michael O'Dell, Clarence Sutphin Jr.'s commanding officer. "It is inherently dangerous, but the team executed without hesitation—without fear—to extend their compassion to people in a dire situation. I'm incredibly proud of to be a part of this team."

CENTCOM did not specify the exact location of the rescue but said the ship was flying a Qatari flag, which is customary in territorial waters.

The Shayesteh had departed from the Iranian port city of Bushehr on Sunday, according to marinetraffic.com, a maritime tracker.

X/U.S. Central Command

A U.S. Coast Guard rescue team evacuates the crew of the cargo ship Shayesteh in the Persian Gulf on Tuesday. Before the ship sank, the seven crew members were transferred to the Navy's USS Devastator.

The ship was last located just off the coast of Bahrain.

As part of an international naval partnership, the Coast Guard regularly monitors the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea to deter the movement of illicit weapons and drugs.

Last week, another Coast Guard cutter, the USCGC Emlen Tunnell intercepted 5,300 pounds of hashish from a ship in the Arabian Sea.

Judge questions motives for ban on transgender troops

By Michael Kunzelman
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Tuesday questioned President Donald Trump's motives for issuing an executive order that calls for banning transgender troops from serving in the U.S. military, describing a portion of the directive as "frankly ridiculous."

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes indicated that she won't rule before early March on whether to temporarily block the Trump administration from enforcing the order, which plaintiffs' attorneys have said illegally discriminates against transgender troops.

But her questions and remarks during Tuesday's hearing suggest that she is deeply skeptical of the administration's reasoning for ordering a policy change. Reyes also lauded the service of several active-duty troops who sued to block the order.

"If you were in a foxhole, would you care about these individuals' gender identity?" the judge asked a government attorney, who answered that it "would not be a primary concern of mine."

Trump's Jan. 27 order claims the sexual identity of transgender service members "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness. It requires Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to issue a revised policy.

Six transgender people who are active-duty service members and two others seeking to join the military sued to block the Trump administration from enforcing the order. In a court filing, plaintiffs' lawyers argued that Trump's order openly expresses "hostility" and constitutionally impermissible "animus" toward transgender people.

Reyes said the order's language smears thousands of transgender troops as dishonest, dishonorable and undisciplined.

She asked Justice Department attorney Jason Lynch: "How is that anything other than showing animus?"

"I don't have an answer for you," Lynch responded.

"No, you have an answer. You just don't want to give it," the judge shot back.

Trump's order also says that "use of pronouns that inaccurately reflect an individual's sex" is inconsistent with a government policy to "establish high standards for troop readiness, lethality, cohesion, honesty, humility, uniformity, and integrity."

Reyes said it is "frankly ridiculous" to suggest that pronoun usage could impact the military readiness of the U.S. armed forces.

"Because it doesn't. Because any common sense, rational person would understand that it doesn't," said Reyes, who was nominated by President Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Reyes peppered Lynch for several hours with questions about the executive order. They disagreed on whether the language of the executive order explicitly bans transgender people from serving in the military.

Reyes asked Lynch if Trump himself would call it a ban, then added, "He would say, 'Of course it is,' because he calls it a transgender ban." Lynch said the order itself doesn't require the discharge of service members while Hegseth crafts a policy that reflects it.

"Everyone knows a change is coming. I'm not denying that," Lynch said.

Reyes was expected to hear more arguments on Wednesday and again on March 3.

Plaintiffs' attorneys contend Trump's order violates transgender people's rights to equal protection under the Fifth Amendment, marking them as "unequal and dispensable, demeaning them in the eyes of their fellow service members and the public."

"The ban is an irrational and prejudicial attack on service members who have risked their lives to serve their country," they wrote in a court filing.

MILITARY

Panel asks all services to list potential funding cuts

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The leaders of the House Armed Services Committee are calling on the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force to identify obsolete programs and weapons for potential cuts as Congress begins crafting its annual defense policy bill.

Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the Republican chairman of the committee, and Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the panel, said they want the services to present a list by March 1 of infrastructure, weapon systems, programs or processes "that are no longer a priority" and "could be divested, right-sized or made more efficient."

"Identifying these will allow the committee to redirect resources to higher priority items that support the National Defense Strategy and achieve real deterrence," the lawmakers wrote in a letter.

The request comes as President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk's government efficiency team seek to purge federal government personnel and cut agency budgets. It also follows efforts started by congressional Republicans last week to add at least $100 billion in defense spending in the next decade.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees are tasked each year with crafting the National Defense Authorization Act, a massive must-pass bill that sets expenditures and policies for the Defense Department. The Pentagon employs 3 million troops and civilians and has a budget of more than $850 billion.

Rogers and Smith said service members and the American public deserved a defense budget that "deters our enemies at the greatest possible value."

"We are committed to eliminating waste, reforming our acquisition processes and ensuring each dollar within the defense budget is spent wisely," they wrote. "We have a unique opportunity at this time to make quantifiable progress toward these goals."

The letter was sent a day after the House Budget Committee signed off on a spending blueprint that, if approved by Congress, will ask the House Armed Services Committee to write a bill detailing up to $100 billion in additional defense spending in the next 10 years.

The Senate is working on its own version of the budget resolution, which mandates $150 billion in extra defense spending. The two chambers must agree on a compromise budget resolution before Congress can pursue legislation that would beef up spending on defense, security at the U.S.-Mexico border and energy independence while providing for trillions in tax cuts.

Lawmakers have at times balked at the Pentagon's efforts to retire outdated weapon systems, vehicles and ships and added expenses the services did not request. In December, Congress approved two Virginia-class attack submarines despite the Navy only wanting one and authorized three Arleigh Burke-class destroyers instead of the two that the Navy had requested.

Max Lonzanida/U.S. Navy

Marines donate blood in February 2024 at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown, Va., as part of an armed services blood drive.

Tricare users notified to download records amid system change

By Caitlyn Burchett
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military health care beneficiaries are being urged to download their digital health records from the Tricare online patient portal before April 1 to retain copies.

The Defense Department is decommissioning the Tricare patient portal as part of its transition to the new MHS Genesis records system. Patient records on the older, Tricare system will not transfer to MHS Genesis.

Health records must be downloaded by individual patients. Failure to do so could result in gaps in medical history, Tricare said.

"All military hospitals and clinics have transitioned to MHS Genesis. We encourage you to take these important steps to save your personal health records before the [Tricare online] patient portal decommissions," said Rear Adm. Tracy Farrill, an official for the Defense Health Agency.

To download the records, beneficiaries should log on to www.TRICAREOnline.com and click the blue "Health Record" button to view and download personal health data. Beneficiaries can also choose the person, data types, date range and format for the records that they need to download.

Medical providers will have records, but after April 1 patients will need to request physical copies by completing a form in person and then return at a later designated time to pick up the records.

"Your medical history is a valuable resource for managing your health and saving your records now ensures you have access if you need it," Farrill said.

MHS Genesis came online in October 2023. It was developed as a "state-of-the-market electronic health record system" for the military health system under a $4.3 billion contract signed in 2015 with Leidos Partnership for Defense Health.

The change from the Tricare online portal to MHS Genesis is meant to streamline electronic health records management.

DOGE: Cuts may conflict with GOP interests

FROM PAGE 1

quests for comment.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has been keen to emphasize that the Pentagon is eager to work with Musk's team, saying earlier this month "we welcome DOGE to the Pentagon."

Hegseth is also planning to seek reductions to forecasted military spending over the next five years and shift those dollars toward still-undefined defense priorities favored by the Trump administration, Bloomberg News has reported.

Trump, for his part, has suggested that he wants to increase military spending in the short term, but wants to decrease the costs of some weapons programs in the future, telling Fox News in an interview earlier this month that it was "crazy" to spend money on some bombs that may not be used.

Musk's role in auditing the Pentagon's expenses has also raised conflict-of-interest questions. His company SpaceX has received billions of dollars in federal contracts, including at the Department of Defense in recent years.

Military spending accounted for nearly half of the $1.8 trillion worth of U.S. discretionary spending in fiscal year 2024, making it the largest pool of federal money outside of mandatory spending on entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and other benefits.

Cutting defense money and staff could spark a political firestorm in Congress, where several Republicans are seeking to increase military spending. The Defense Department's budget is politically resilient because military bases, other facilities and programs are located in so many states and districts that historically any suggestion of cutbacks has prompted members of Congress to defend their own parochial interests.

Earlier on Tuesday, a federal judge denied a request to temporarily bar DOGE teams from accessing internal systems and removing employees from U.S. agencies, handing a win to Trump over one of his signature initiatives.

The ruling rejected a bid for immediate court intervention from Democratic state attorneys general who contend Musk is exercising power to reshape the U.S. government that is supposed to be reserved only for high-level, Senate-confirmed officials.

Local worker walkout expected at several US bases in Germany on Friday

By Zade Vadnais
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — German and local national employees at U.S. military installations in the state of Rheinland-Pfalz are scheduled to strike Friday, the trade union Ver.di announced in a statement Wednesday.

The trade union organized the one-day "warning strike" in response to stalled wage negotiations for employees following the most recent round of collective bargaining talks on Tuesday.

The first round of negotiations ended Jan. 31 with a "completely inadequate offer" of a 1.4% annual raise, the Ver.di statement said.

The union is calling for a one-time payment of 320 euros and an annual 3% salary increase for employees over a 10-month period. It is also seeking an additional pay hike for fire department employees of two euros per hour.

Short-duration strikes have occurred sporadically in recent years at bases in Germany. Most base services are typically able to continue uninterrupted but with some delays.

Rheinland-Pfalz includes several Army installations, Spangdahlem Air Base and Ramstein Air Base. It's home to tens of thousands of U.S. service members and their families.

The walkout will coincide with public transportation strikes scheduled by Ver.di for the same day, which are expected to disrupt local bus, tram and underground train services in Rheinland-Pfalz. The strikes also are expected in the states of Baden-Württemberg, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia.

MILITARY

Soldier's wife convicted in his death at Fort Riley

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

An Army wife who shot her husband in the head during a verbal argument at their Fort Riley, Kan., home and then fled with her children without calling emergency services, has been convicted of murder in federal court, according to court records.

Spc. Gregory Shafe, 35, had stayed home from a deployment to Poland with the 1st Infantry Division when he was shot Feb. 19, 2024, by his wife, Margaret Shafe, 31, according to court documents and the soldier's obituary. He died the following day.

She was convicted Friday of second-degree murder following an eight-day trial in Topeka, according to court records. She had faced the charge of premeditated, first-degree murder.

Margaret Shafe faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. She has been in Shawnee County Jail since May 2, according to online jail records.

Margaret Shafe

Gregory Shafe

During the February argument that began after 7 p.m., Margaret Shafe's 9-year-old daughter was home, as was the couple's 1-year-old daughter, according to court records. Investigators found an audio recording of the argument on the soldier's phone, in which his wife is heard saying she hated him, and hoped he would die.

The recording ended when another soldier came to the home to borrow a helmet. As Gregory Shafe exited the house to meet the other soldier in his driveway, Margaret Shafe followed him outside and continued to shout at her husband, according to a statement from the soldier to law enforcement.

"Within minutes of the co-worker leaving the residence, the victim is shot," according to the court document.

Margaret Shafe, who had been drinking, then put her children in the front seat of her husband's truck and drove from the home, according to the court document. She exited Fort Riley through a security gate, then immediately turned around and tried to re-enter the base, where she was stopped by security and eventually arrested.

Police were called to the home by the 9-year-old's biological father, who lived in Nebraska, according to court documents. She placed a video call to him after the shooting and told him what happened.

After her arrest, Margaret Shafe told investigators that she believed her husband had been watching child sexual abuse material online, and she was concerned for her older daughter, who was the soldier's stepdaughter.

Gregory Shafe had stayed behind from the deployment to support his wife, who was hospitalized in Kansas City for the end of her pregnancy, and then while their baby was in the neonatal intensive care unit.

District Judge Toby Crouse had scheduled a hearing March 12 to get a status update on the case.

Marine at Camp Lejeune arrested and accused of sex with child

By Caitlyn Burchett
Stars and Stripes

A Marine based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., has been arrested and faces three felony charges of sex with a child, according to local authorities.

Lance Cpl. Zayne Melton, 22, was charged by the Onslow County Sheriff's Office with statutory rape, another statutory sex offense and taking indecent liberties with a child under the age of 15. Melton was arrested Feb. 13 by local authorities in coordination with Camp Lejeune's Provost Marshal's Office.

Melton

The charges against Melton date to September, when the sheriff's office received a report from the county Department of Social Services that a child was sexually abused, according to a social media post by the sheriff's office.

Detectives with the sheriff's office determined Melton as a suspect. The detectives, assisted by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, interviewed Melton on Feb. 7. The warrant for his arrest was issued Feb. 12, the sheriff's office said.

Authorities did not say how they determined Melton as a suspect, nor detail the accusations brought against him.

Melton is being held at the Onslow County Detention Center on an $800,000 bond. His next court date is March 6.

Melton is a motor vehicle operator assigned to the 2nd Marine Logistics Group as part of the II Marine Expeditionary Force based at Camp Lejeune, according to a spokesperson for the force.

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MILITARY

Houthis have halted attacks on merchant ships

By Lara Korte
Stars and Stripes

Houthi rebels in Yemen are abiding by their pledge to halt attacks on Middle East commercial shipping a month after a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, according to a regional industry group.

The Joint Maritime Information Center, which operates in close coordination with the multinational Combined Maritime Forces, said in a report this week that it has had no word of hostile activity from the Houthi rebels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since the Iran-backed group's Jan. 19 announcement of a pause.

After the outbreak of the Gaza war on Oct. 7, 2023, the Houthis targeted commercial vessels for supporting Israel, though many of the ships attacked by drones and missiles had no apparent link to the country.

Attacks by the militants have resulted in a drastic slowdown in commercial traffic throughout the region.

The Navy has kept a nearly constant carrier strike group presence in the Middle East since the Hamas terrorist attacks in Gaza that began the conflict.

U.S. forces and allies seeking to protect vessels in the Red Sea and nearby waterways launched counterstrikes at a tempo unseen since World War II, Navy officials have said.

The maritime center noted a slight uptick in traffic in the Suez Canal and Bab el Mandeb between Feb. 10 and Feb. 16, but it cautioned that shipping volume there is still well below normal.

Despite the pause, the shipping industry should remain vigilant, JMIC said in the report.

The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman spent several months in the region supporting strikes on Houthi weapons and command facilities in Yemen.

Other vessels from the Truman Carrier Strike Group, including the cruiser USS Gettysburg and the destroyer USS Stout, are now on duty in the Red Sea, USNI News reported Tuesday.

US, Japan train for island defense in Iron Fist

By Brian McElhiney and Keishi Koja
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HANSEN, Okinawa — U.S. and Japanese troops on Wednesday kicked off an exercise aimed at strengthening island defense and amphibious capabilities amid regional security concerns.

Iron Fist, which runs through March 7, comes as Japan faces "the most severe security environment it has seen since the end of World War II," Maj. Gen. Hajime Kitajima said during the opening ceremony at Camp Hansen.

"No one can deny the possibility that a crisis like the invasion of Ukraine may occur anywhere in the world," he told a formation of 240 U.S. Marines, sailors and Japanese soldiers. "We need to strengthen our deterrence and response capabilities now more than ever. Strengthening island defense capabilities is one of the most urgent issues."

China has increased military activity near Taiwan, which it claims as its own, and spent a record 355 days in 2023 patrolling waters near the Senkaku Islands, administered by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan.

Iron Fist focuses on expeditionary advanced base operations and cross-domain operations, key concepts of the Marine Corps' Force Design restructuring plan, according to Brig. Gen. Trevor Hall, commander of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade and deputy commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force.

"The combined field training that we'll conduct during this exercise will clearly demonstrate our ability to operate together," he told the troops. "It will further enhance our capabilities to rapidly deploy and respond across the range of military operations throughout the region."

The drills are taking place at multiple locations, including Camp Hansen, Kin Blue Beach Training Area, Camp Courtney, the Northern Training Area, Ie Shima Auxiliary Airfield and Japan's Camp Naha. Additional training is scheduled at Vice-Camp Takayubaru and Camp Ainoura on Kyushu and Okinoerabu Island, 43 miles northeast of Okinawa.

Keishi Koja/Stars and Stripes

Brig. Gen. Trevor Hall speaks alongside Maj. Gen. Hajime Kitajima during the Iron Fist opening ceremony Wednesday.

An amphibious operation at Kin Blue Beach on March 1 will serve as the "key bilateral training event" of the exercise, according to 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit spokesman Maj. Edward Pingel.

Now in its 19th year, Iron Fist focuses on "combined planning to improve preparedness through real-world amphibious training," Pingel wrote in an email Wednesday. The exercise includes advanced marksmanship, amphibious reconnaissance, fire and maneuver assaults, bilateral logistics, medical support and fire support operations such as mortars, artillery and close-air support.

Approximately 2,700 U.S. Marines and sailors and 1,300 Japanese troops are expected to participate. Military observers from England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia and the Philippines are also attending.

French army chief of staff Gen. Pierre Schill and German army chief Lt. Gen. Alfons Mais are expected to meet with U.S. and Japanese commanders, including III MEF commander Lt. Gen. Roger Turner and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force chief of staff Gen. Yasunori Morishita, Morishita said at a Feb. 13 news conference.

USS Truman gets structural check following collision

By Alison Bath
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Navy inspectors are evaluating the structural integrity of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman after a collision with a cargo ship last week left scrapes and gashes along its right back end, including the hull.

That assessment, which began Sunday at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, will cover Truman's hull and bulkheads to ensure they can bear weight, U.S. 6th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Timothy Gorman said Wednesday.

Bulkheads are interior vertical walls that form compartments within a ship.

A small slash penetrated the ship's hull high above the waterline, Gorman said, adding that it's too soon to say how long the inspection will take and when a comprehensive damage assessment will be available.

The evaluation won't include Truman's flight deck, said Gorman, noting that the carrier conducted flight operations Saturday, days after the Feb. 12 late-night collision with the Panama-flagged Besiktas-M near the Suez Canal.

Jose Hernandez/U.S. Navy

Exterior damage to USS Harry S. Truman is viewed from a helicopter on Feb. 13.

There were no injuries or flooding in the collision, which damaged a line handling space, the fantail and a platform above a storage space. The exterior walls of two storage rooms and maintenance space also were included in initial damage assessments.

The ship's nuclear propulsion plants were unaffected, and damage appeared to be above the waterline, the service said last week.

Those initial assessments, along with photographs showing mostly superficial damage to the ship's starboard quarter side, likely mean Truman could be patched up and soon resume its deployment, analysts told Stars and Stripes.

"The maintenance capabilities at Souda Bay should be able to (provide) temporary repairs that should carry the ship through the rest of its deployment to the point where permanent repairs can be made," said Steven Wills, a naval analyst with the Center for Maritime Strategy at the Navy League of the United States.

Wills and other analysts also pointed out that there are other suitable locations for repairs in the region, such as Croatia, France or Italy.

Unless more significant problems are discovered, such as something involving Truman's propulsion system, the Navy likely will keep the carrier on station, said James Holmes, chair of the maritime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

A shortened deployment and return to Norfolk, Va., could complicate a tight maintenance and deployment schedule for the service's other 10 carriers, something the Navy would be eager to avoid, he said.

"You don't lightly bring a ship home from deployment," Holmes said.

Truman deployed in September, entering the Red Sea on Dec. 14 to defend against Houthi militant threats to shipping in the strategic waterway.

It remained there for nearly two months before departing from the Middle East and arriving along with embarked Carrier Air Wing 1 and the destroyer USS Jason Dunham at Souda Bay on Feb. 6 for a port visit.

The collision with Besiktas-M occurred after Truman had left Souda Bay, presumably to return to the Red Sea. The mishap remains under investigation.

Truman's absence from the Middle East likely won't hinder regional U.S. security efforts, which could include a surge in destroyers or other warships, if needed, Holmes said.

With an uneasy truce in Gaza and the Russian presence in the region reduced after the fall of the Bashar Assad regime in Syria, "things are relatively quiet," he said.

"The region remains unsettled but in no obvious need of major firepower like a carrier air wing," he said. "You don't need a carrier warplane for everything. That's why we have surface action groups."

WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy, Trump trade barbs as relations sour

By Hanna Arhirova And Justin Spike
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Relations between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Donald Trump deteriorated rapidly Wednesday as Zelenskyy said Trump was living in a Russian-made "disinformation space" and Trump called Zelenskyy "a dictator without elections" in comments that were sure to complicate efforts to end the war.

Zelenskyy also said he would like Trump's team "to be more truthful" as he offered his first response to a series of striking claims that Trump made a day earlier, including falsely suggesting that Kyiv was to blame for the war, which enters its fourth year next week.

Trump also warned Zelenskyy that he "better move fast" to negotiate an end to Russia's invasion of Ukraine or risks not having a nation to lead.

The comments from Trump and Zelenskyy were a staggering back-and-forth between leaders of two countries that have been staunch allies in recent years under Trump's predecessor. While former President Joe Biden was in the White House, the U.S. provided crucial military equipment to Kyiv to fend off the invasion and used its political weight to defend Ukraine and isolate Russia on the world stage.

The Trump administration has started charting a new course, reaching out to Russia and pushing for a peace deal. Senior officials from both countries held talks Tuesday to discuss improving ties, negotiating an end to the war and potentially preparing a meeting between Trump and Putin after years of frosty relations.

Trump lashed out at Zelenskyy in a social media post, calling him "a modestly successful comedian" who "talked the United States of America into spending $350 Billion Dollars, to go into a War that couldn't be won, that never had to start, but a War that he, without the U.S. and 'TRUMP,' will never be able to settle."

Turkish Presidency/AP

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, poses for a photo with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during their meeting at the presidential palace in Ankara, Turkey on Tuesday.

Trump went on to say that the only thing Zelenskyy "was good at was playing Biden 'like a fiddle.'" He advised Zelenskyy to "move fast or he is not going to have a Country left."

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he would like to meet with Trump.

Russia's army crossed the border on Feb. 24, 2022, in an all-out invasion that Putin sought to justify by saying it was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine and prevent the country from joining NATO. Ukraine and its allies denounced it as an unprovoked act of aggression.

"I would like to have a meeting, but it needs to be prepared so that it brings results," Putin said Wednesday in televised remarks. He added that he would be "pleased" to meet Trump but noted that Trump has acknowledged that a Ukrainian settlement could take longer than he initially hoped.

The Russian leader hailed Tuesday's talks between Russian and U.S. senior officials in the Saudi capital of Riyadh as "very positive."

He said officials who took part in the talks described the U.S. delegation to him as "completely different people who were open to the negotiation process without any bias, without any condemnation of what was done in the past," and determined to work together with Moscow.

Putin said "the goal and subject" of Tuesday's talks "was the restoration of Russia-U.S. relations."

"Without increasing the level of trust between Russia and the United States, it is impossible to resolve many issues, including the Ukrainian crisis. The goal of this meeting was precisely to increase trust between Russia and the United States," Putin said.

He brushed off Zelenskyy's complaints about Ukraine being left out of the U.S.-Russian talks, saying that Kyiv's reaction was "unfounded."

"President Trump told me during our phone call that the United States are proceeding from the assumption that the negotiations process will involve Russia and Ukraine," Putin said. "No one is going to exclude Ukraine out of it."

Putin reiterated the Kremlin's official line that Russia never rejected the possibility of talks with Kyiv or its European allies.

"The Europeans have stopped contacts with Russia. The Ukrainian side has forbidden itself to negotiate," he said in a reference to Zelenskyy's 2022 decree that rejected any talks with Moscow.

Zelenskyy's remarks Wednesday came shortly before he was expected to meet with Keith Kellogg, the U.S. special envoy for Ukraine and Russia as part of the administration's recent diplomatic blitz.

Ukraine and its European supporters have expressed concern that they weren't invited to the talks between top American and Russian diplomats in Saudi Arabia, amid larger worries that the deal taking shape could be unfavorable to Kyiv.

At a news conference Tuesday, Trump showed little patience for Ukraine's objections to being excluded. He also said, without providing the source, that Zelenskyy's approval rating stood at 4%, while telling reporters that Ukraine "should have never started" the war and "could have made a deal" to prevent it.

Zelenskyy replied Wednesday at his own news conference: "We have seen this disinformation. We understand that it is coming from Russia." He said that Trump "lives in this disinformation space."

Zelenskyy said he hoped Kellogg would walk through Kyiv and ask Ukrainians "if they trust their president? Do they trust Putin? Let him ask about Trump, what they think after the statements made by their president."

Weary: Ukrainians worry peace talks may not be enough

FROM PAGE 1

President Vladimir Putin to begin negotiations — abruptly upending a longstanding U.S.-led effort to isolate Moscow over its invasion. That came the same day that U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia, signaling a view of a potential settlement that is remarkably close to Moscow's.

Ukraine, which has been slowly losing ground to Russia's larger army, was already facing a difficult negotiating position, and Hegseth's comments poured cold water on two key Ukrainian aspirations. While support for an end to the fighting among the country's war-wearied population is widespread, there remains broad agreement that it must not come at the expense of those living in territories occupied by Russia or at the risk of future incursions by Moscow.

Speaking to Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" program, U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff didn't directly respond to a question about whether Ukraine would have to give up a "significant portion" of its territory. "Those are details, and I'm not dismissive of the details, they're important. But I think the beginning here is trust-building," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has dismissed the upcoming talks, saying they would "yield no results" given the absence of Ukrainian officials.

Valerii Semenii, a 59-year-old fighting with Ukraine's armed forces, meanwhile, said he feared the worst.

"Trump is marching towards a world war, because the aggressor cannot be pacified," Semenii said. "He does not know history, because maybe today you will pacify (Putin), but tomorrow it will provoke a world war. There is nothing else I can say about these negotiations."

That sentiment reflected fears by many in Ukraine's government and population that bringing an end to the fighting without building a lasting security infrastructure to prevent any future Russian aggression would allow Moscow time to regroup and launch future attacks, both in Ukraine and the wider region.

"We have to understand that Russia is a danger not only for Ukraine," said Oleksandr Shyrshyn, a battalion commander fighting in the Russian region of Kursk, where Ukrainians troops have occupied some territory but suffered heavy losses. European countries "have to have a part in this negotiation as well because, as we see, all Europe is afraid of Russia and they don't want the same scenario that we have."

Shyrshyn said he thought both of Ukraine's major goals — the restoration of its Russian-occupied territories and membership in the NATO military alliance — would be attainable if the Trump administration "would support us with all their power."

"If the USA is not willing to support us, we will have more deaths, more losses," he said, "but we will continue to fight, because it's a question of our existence."

NATION

Trump orders expansion of access to IVF

By Darlene Superville and Michelle L. Price
Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order meant to expand access to and reduce costs of in vitro fertilization and issued a presidential memorandum calling for "radical transparency requirements" from the government, which he suggested could reduce wasteful spending.

On the campaign trail, Trump called for universal coverage of IVF treatment after his Supreme Court nominees helped to overturn Roe v. Wade, leading to a wave of restrictions in Republican-led states, including some that have threatened access to IVF by trying to define life as beginning at conception.

Trump, who was at his Florida residence and club Mar-a-Lago, also signed another executive order as well as a presidential memorandum.

The second executive order outlined the oversight functions of the Office of Management and Budget, while the memo requires the government to detail the "waste, fraud and abuse" that's found as the Department of Government Efficiency, overseen by billionaire Elon Musk, looks to cut government spending.

DOGE has often fallen short of the administration's promises of transparency.

Musk has taken questions from journalists only once since becoming Trump's most powerful adviser, and he's claimed it's illegal to name people working for him. Some DOGE staff members have demanded access to sensitive government databases with little explanation.

Trump took more than 30 minutes of questions Tuesday on a range of topics and bashed the Biden administration throughout, highlighting issues such as its handling of the U.S.-Mexico border, Venezuela policy and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Trump said he thought he had a "good chance" to end Russia's war in Ukraine but bristled at suggestions that the U.S. and Russia had begun negotiations to end fighting without Ukraine playing a role. He even seemed to suggest that Ukraine was to blame for a war that began only after Russia invaded the country.

In anticipation of questions about his administration's efforts to slash federal spending, the president said he wrote down examples of government programs around the world which he then listed off at length. They included funding to promote voter turnout in India and social cohesion initiatives in Mali — all of which Trump suggested collectively amounted to fraud.

Trump said he thinks "women and families, husbands, are very appreciative" of his executive order on IVF, which offers a possible solution when a woman has trouble getting pregnant.

The procedure involves retrieving her eggs and combining them in a lab dish with a man's sperm to create a fertilized embryo, which is then transferred into the woman's uterus in an attempt to create a pregnancy. IVF is done in cycles, and more than one may be required.

Barbara Collura, president and CEO of RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, said that what the White House put out "looks extremely promising."

"The biggest barriers for people to building their families are the out-of-pocket costs, the lack of insurance coverage for this care," she said.

Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat, said if Trump is going to follow through on his campaign promise to provide free IVF, he can start by supporting her legislation that would require insurance plans to cover IVF.

Trump, who spent the morning at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida, spoke to reporters hours before his first joint TV interview with Musk aired in prime time on Fox News Channel.

The president acknowledged during it that "inflation is back," but noted that he'd only been in office a few weeks and insisted "I had nothing to do" with prices that remain stubbornly high.

Trump moves swiftly, a departure from first-term stumbles

By Chris Megerian
Associated Press

AP

President Donald Trump speaks at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., Tuesday.

WASHINGTON — Months into his first term as president, Donald Trump was furious with the snowballing Russia investigation and ordered White House counsel Don McGahn to make sure that special counsel Robert Mueller got fired.

"Mueller has to go," McGahn recalled Trump saying. "Call me back when you do it."

But McGahn didn't do it, and Trump didn't even bring it up the next time they saw each other. Such incidents were common during Trump's initial experience in the White House, where officials would soften or ignore his most outrageous decisions and the president seemed unwilling to enforce his will.

It's hard to imagine the same thing happening during Trump's second term. Instead of repeating his laissez-faire attitude toward his own administration, the Republican president is asserting control at every opportunity, backed up by loyalists at all levels of government. Despite occasional disorganization and confusion, there's a headstrong determination to push through any obstacles.

Trump doesn't just want to change course from Joe Biden's presidency, his team is holding back congressionally authorized funding championed by his Democratic predecessor.

Not only did Trump officials tell the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to stop working, his team set up a tip line so people could report unauthorized actions taken by staff at the agency.

Trump wasn't satisfied with simply firing all the board members at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He made himself chairman.

This time, Trump seems to be saying, his orders will not be ignored.

The White House summarizes Trump's approach with the mantra "promises made, promises kept." Administration officials also dismiss concerns that the president is exercising too much control. They say Trump is entitled to impose his vision on the government that he was elected to lead.

Others see something darker and more menacing for the country and its future.

"Donald Trump's instincts haven't changed," said Timothy Naftali, a Columbia University historian. "He's just angrier, meaner and more effective than he was in his first term."

Trump often felt as though he was undermined in his first term by the "deep state," a term used by his allies to describe civil servants and career officials. Now, he's moving swiftly to cut the federal bureaucracy with the help of Elon Musk, the billionaire entrepreneur Trump has empowered to oversee the downsizing of the workforce.

"We've never had a president come into office with such a deep desire for revenge," Naftali said. "Donald Trump is trying to hollow out institutions that he thinks embarrassed him."

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was created to protect Americans from financial fraud, abuse and deceptive practices, has been brought to a standstill. The U.S. Agency for International Development, a leading distributor of humanitarian assistance, was shut down.

A prime target is the Department of Justice, which infuriated Trump by investigating him during his first term and after leaving office. He was indicted twice by federal authorities, although the cases were dropped after he won last year's election because sitting presidents can't be prosecuted while in office.

Now Trump has filled leadership positions with loyalists, such as Emil Bove, the acting deputy attorney general, who was previously Trump's defense attorney.

Last week, Bove pushed to drop corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams, saying it was more important for Adams to help Trump enact stricter immigration policies.

"The pending prosecution has unduly restricted Mayor Adams' ability to devote full attention and resources to the illegal immigration and violent crime that escalated under the policies of the prior Administration," Bove wrote.

Several prosecutors in New York and Washington resigned in protest.

Trump said that he wasn't involved in the decision to drop the case against Adams, but he's previously said that the Democratic mayor had been unfairly targeted for political reasons.

Another example of Trump's heavy-handed approach this time has been his handling of criminal charges against supporters who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Hours after taking the oath of office a month ago, the president pardoned roughly 1,500 people, including those who attacked police officers.

Then his administration decided to push even further. Thousands of FBI employees are being questioned about their role in Jan. 6 investigations, with suggestions that they could face punishment.

Bove said agents "who simply followed orders and carried out their duties in an ethical manner" were not at risk, adding that "the only individuals who should be concerned ... are those who acted with corrupt or partisan intent."

NATION

ALLISON DINNER/AP

Jaqueline Benitez, who depends on California's SNAP benefits to help pay for food, shops for groceries at a supermarket in Bellflower, Calif., last week.

Trump officials to renew effort to ban junk food from SNAP

BY JONEL ALECCIA
Associated Press

A push to ban sugary drinks, candy and more from the U.S. program that helps low-income families pay for nutritious food has been tried before — but it may soon get a boost from new Trump administration officials.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the newly confirmed health and human services secretary, and Brooke Rollins, the new agriculture secretary, have both signaled that they favor stripping such treats from SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Kennedy has been most vocal, calling for the government to stop allowing the nearly $113 billion program that serves about 42 million Americans to use benefits to pay for "soda or processed foods."

"The one place that I would say that we need to really change policy is the SNAP program and food stamps and in school lunches," Kennedy told Fox News host Laura Ingraham last week. "There, the federal government in many cases is paying for it. And we shouldn't be subsidizing people to eat poison."

In one of her first interviews after being confirmed, Rollins said she looked forward to working with Kennedy on the issue.

"When a taxpayer is putting money into SNAP, are they OK with us using their tax dollars to feed really bad food and sugary drinks to children who perhaps need something more nutritious?" Rollins said. "These are all massive questions we're going to be asking and working on in the coming months and years."

But removing certain foods from SNAP — known for years as food stamps — isn't as simple as it sounds. The program is run by the USDA, not HHS, and is administered through individual states. It is authorized by the federal Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, which says SNAP benefits can be used for "any food or food product intended for human consumption," except alcohol, tobacco and hot foods, including those prepared for immediate consumption.

Excluding any foods would require Congress to change the law — or for states to get waivers that would let them restrict purchases, said Katie Bergh, a senior policy analyst for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research group. Over the past 20 years, lawmakers in several states have proposed stopping SNAP from paying for bottled water, soda, chips, ice cream, decorated cakes and "luxury meats" like steak.

"None of those requests have ever been approved under either Republican or Democratic presidents," Bergh said.

In the past, Agriculture Department officials rejected the waivers, saying in a 2007 paper that no clear standards exist to define foods "as good or bad, or healthy or not healthy." In addition, the agency said restrictions would be difficult to implement, complicated and costly.

Anti-hunger advocates point to research that shows SNAP recipients are no more likely than other low-income Americans to buy sugary drinks or snack foods. And they say that limiting food choices undermines the autonomy and dignity of people who receive, on average, about $187 per month, according to latest figures.

"This is just another way to cut benefits," said Gina Plata-Nino, a deputy director at the Food Research and Action Center, a nonprofit advocacy group. "It's like, how do we restrict people more? How do we stigmatize them more?"

Bills are pending in Congress and in several states to restrict SNAP benefits from paying for soda, candy and other items.

Rep. Josh Breechan, an Oklahoma Republican, sponsored the Healthy SNAP Act.

"If someone wants to buy junk food on their own dime, that's up to them," he said. "But what we're saying is, 'Don't ask the taxpayer to pay for it and then also expect the taxpayer to pick up the tab for the resulting health consequences.' "

One SNAP recipient said she uses her monthly $291 benefit to buy necessities such as meat, oil, milk and coffee. Martina Santos, 66, of New York City, supplements those foods with fresh vegetables and fruits from a pantry run by the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, where she's also a volunteer. Because she has diabetes and other health conditions, she said she understands the importance of using the benefits only for nutritious options.

"For me, SNAP is to be used toward healthy food to get people to avoid all the disease they're having around right now: obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure," Santos said.

The momentum behind Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" movement could spur a new focus on solutions to poor diets that account for leading risk factors for early disease and death.

"When we talk about the SNAP program, we have to remind people that the 'N' stands for nutrition," said Dr. Anand Parekh, chief medical officer of the Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. "It's about time that both parties can come together and see what are the innovations here to improve diet quality and nutrition."

Judge won't halt DOGE layoffs, data access right away

BY LINDSAY WHITEHURST
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge refused Tuesday to immediately block billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency from accessing government data systems or participating in worker layoffs.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan found that there are legitimate questions about Musk's authority but said there isn't enough evidence of grave legal harm to justify a temporary restraining order.

Musk

The decision came in a lawsuit filed by 14 Democratic states challenging DOGE's authority to access sensitive government data. The attorneys general argued that Musk is wielding the kind of power that the Constitution says can be held only by those elected or confirmed by the Senate.

The Trump administration has maintained that layoffs are coming from agency heads and asserted that despite his public cheering of the effort, Musk isn't running DOGE's day-to-day operations himself.

DOGE has tapped into computer systems across multiple agencies with the blessing of President Donald Trump, digging into budgets and searching for what he calls waste, fraud and abuse.

Chutkan recognized the concerns of the states.

"DOGE's unpredictable actions have resulted in considerable uncertainty and confusion," she wrote. Their questions about Musk's apparent "unchecked authority" and lack of congressional oversight for DOGE are legitimate and they may be able to successfully argue them later, she found.

Still, at this point, it remains unclear exactly how DOGE's work will affect the states, and judges can only issue orders to block specific, immediate harms, she found.

Chutkan, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama, previously oversaw the now-dismissed criminal election interference case against Trump in Washington, D.C.

In other DOGE lawsuits, two other judges in Washington have similarly declined to immediately block DOGE from access to agency systems. A federal judge in New York has blocked DOGE's access to Treasury Department data for now.

White House: Musk is adviser, not DOGE head

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House says billionaire Elon Musk is not technically part of the Department of Government Efficiency team that is sweeping through federal agencies, but is rather a senior adviser to President Donald Trump.

Musk's exact role could be key in the legal fight over DOGE's access to government data as the Trump administration moves to lay off thousands of federal workers. Defining him as an adviser rather than the administrator in charge of day-to-day operations at DOGE could help the administration as it pushes back against a lawsuit arguing Musk has too much power for someone who isn't elected or Senate-confirmed.

The declaration was filed Monday as the Trump administration fends off the lawsuit from several Democratic states that want to block Musk and the DOGE team from accessing government systems. The litigants say Musk is wielding "virtually unchecked power" in violation of the Constitution.

The Trump administration, on the other hand, says Musk is not a DOGE employee and has "no actual authority to make government decisions himself," Joshua Fisher, director of the White House Office of Administration, said in court papers. The documents do not name the administrator of DOGE, whose work Musk has championed in posts on his social-media platform X and in a public appearance at the White House.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt declined Tuesday to tell reporters at the White House who the DOGE administrator is, though minutes before she said in an interview with Fox News Channel that Musk has been tasked with overseeing the effort on behalf of the president.

Layoffs, she told reporters, are up to individual agency heads. "Elon Musk, just like everybody else across the federal government, works at the direction of President Trump," Leavitt said.

NATION

A look at DOGE's firings, layoffs so far

By Meg Kinnard
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of federal government employees have been shown the door in the first month of President Donald Trump's administration as the White House and its Department of Government Efficiency fire both new and career workers, tell agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions in force" and freeze trillions of dollars in federal grant funds.

It is affecting more than just the national capital region, home to about 20% of the 2.4 million members of the civilian federal workforce, which does not include military personnel and postal employees workers. More than 80% of that workforce lives outside the Washington area.

There is no official figure available of the total firings or layoffs. The Associated Press tallied how agencies are being affected based on AP reporting and statements from lawmakers and employee unions.

Here is a look at some of the broad and specific ways federal agencies and employees are being affected by the administration's reductions, as of Wednesday:

■ **'Deferred resignation' proposal for federal workers.** The White House offered a "deferred resignation" proposal in exchange for financial incentives, like months of paid leave, to almost all federal employees who opted to leave their jobs by Feb. 6.

But just before that deadline, a federal judge blocked Trump's plan, wanting to hear arguments from the administration and the labor unions, which said the offer was illegal.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, about 75,000 federal employees had accepted the offer as of Feb. 12.

■ **Probationary employee layoffs.** There have also been wide-ranging layoffs of probationary employees — those generally on the job for less than a year and who have yet to gain civil service protection. Potentially hundreds of thousands are affected.

On Feb. 13, the administration ordered agencies to lay off nearly all such workers. According to government data maintained by OPM, 220,000 federal employees had less than a year on the job as of March 2024.

■ **Department of Veterans Affairs.** On Feb. 13, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the dismissal of more than 1,000 employees who had served for less than two years. According to Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., that included researchers working on cancer treatment, opioid addiction, prosthetics and burn pit exposure.

ETIENNE LAURENT/AP

A demonstrator holds a poster of Elon Musk during a rally to protest President Trump's policies Monday in Los Angeles.

■ **Education Department.** At least 39 people have been fired from the Education Department, including special education specialists and student aid officials, according to a union that represents agency workers.

There have also been nearly $900 million in cuts to the department's Institute of Education Services, which tracks the progress of America's students.

It is unclear to what degree the institute would continue to exist. Industry experts said at least 169 contracts were terminated Feb. 10.

■ **Energy Department.** Hundreds of federal employees tasked with working on the nation's nuclear weapons programs were laid off Feb. 13, but that move was largely rescinded hours later, according to a memo obtained by the AP. Three U.S. officials who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation said as many as 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were ousted, with some losing access to email before they had learned they were fired.

■ **Department of Health and Human Services.** More than 5,000 employees' jobs are on the line at the Department of Health and Human Services.

At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 700 probationary employees — roughly one-tenth of the agency's total workforce — are being forced out. The Atlanta-based agency's leadership was notified of the decision Feb. 14, according to a federal official who was at the meeting and was not authorized to discuss the orders and spoke on condition of anonymity.

■ **Department of Homeland Security.** The probationary cuts included more than 130 employees at the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure, including the federal efforts to secure election systems. It is not clear whether those included 17 employees who had worked on election security and had already been placed on leave.

Four employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency — its chief financial officer, two program analysts and a grant specialist — were fired Feb. 11 over payments to reimburse New York City for hotel costs for migrants.

■ **Internal Revenue Service.** The IRS will lay off thousands of probationary workers in the middle of tax season, according to two people familiar with the agency's plans who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

It is unclear how many IRS workers will be affected or when the cuts will happen.

■ **National Park Service.** The administration has fired about 1,000 newly hired National Park Service employees who maintain and clean parks, educate visitors and perform other functions.

The firings were not publicly announced but were confirmed by Democratic senators and House members. Adding to the confusion, the park service now says it is reinstating about 5,000 seasonal jobs that were initially rescinded last month.

Seasonal workers are routinely added during the warm-weather months to serve more than 325 million annual visitors who descend on the nation's 428 parks, historic sites and other attractions.

■ **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.** The administration has ordered the agency — created after the 2008 financial crisis and subprime mortgage-lending scandal — to stop nearly all its work, effectively shutting it down.

■ **Agriculture Department.** The new agriculture secretary, Brooke Rollins, said on Feb. 14 that her agency had invited Elon Musk's DOGE team with "open arms" and that layoffs "will be forthcoming."

■ **Foreign aid and development.** Trump swiftly ordered a halt to much of the aid that the United States sends abroad. Several weeks later, the pause is on pause.

In his first week in office, Trump issued an executive order directing a 90-day hold on most of the foreign assistance disbursed through the State Department.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued several specific exemptions, including emergency food programs and military aid to Israel and Egypt from the freeze on foreign assistance. But thousands of U.S.-funded humanitarian, development and security programs worldwide stopped work or prepared to do so.

Without the money to pay staff, aid organizations including the U.S. Agency for International Development began laying off hundreds of employees. Crews removed the agency's signage from its Washington headquarters.

But on Feb. 13, a federal judge considering some of the lawsuits challenging agency cuts ordered the administration to temporarily lift the funding freeze.

■ **Federal grants and loans.** The White House said last month it was pausing federal grants and loans as the Republican administration began an across-the-board ideological review.

The freeze could affect trillions of dollars and cause widespread disruption in health care research, education programs and other initiatives. Even grants that have been awarded but not spent are supposed to be halted.

"The use of Federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve," said a memo from Matthew Vaeth, the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Democrats and independent organizations said the move was illegal because Congress had already authorized the funding.

■ **Inspectors general.** Each of the federal government's largest agencies has its own independent inspector general who is supposed to conduct objective audits, prevent fraud and promote efficiency.

Trump has fired at least 17 of them, including watchdogs he appointed in his first term. At least one Democratic appointee, Michael Horowitz at the Justice Department, was spared.

Trump told reporters that "it's a very common thing to do" and that he would "put good people in there that will be very good."

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said the firings were a "chilling purge." Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a top Trump ally, acknowledged that the firings may have violated the law, but he added, "Just tell them you need to follow the law next time."

■ **Department of Justice.** It's normal for politically appointed U.S. attorneys to be replaced, but it is not standard procedure for career prosecutors to be ousted with a change in administrations.

The Justice Department said last month that it had fired more than a dozen employees who worked on criminal prosecutions of Trump by special counsel Jack Smith's team.

By tradition, career employees remain with the department across presidential administrations regardless of their involvement in sensitive investigations.

Multiple senior career officials were also reassigned.

■ **State Department.** A large number of senior career diplomats who served in politically appointed leadership positions — as well as in lower-level posts at the State Department — left their jobs at the demand of the new administration.

It was not immediately clear how many nonpolitical appointees were being asked to leave.

NATION

GOP pushes bill to fund border wall

By Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans pushed ahead late Tuesday on a $340 billion package to give the Trump administration money for mass deportations and other priorities, as Democrats prepare a counter-campaign against the onslaught of actions coming from the White House.

On a party-line vote, 50-47, Republicans launched the process, skipping ahead of the House Republicans who prefer President Donald Trump's approach for a "big, beautiful bill" that includes $4.5 trillion in tax cuts that are tops on the party agenda. Senate Republicans plan to deal with tax cuts later, in a second package.

"It's time to act," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., on social media, announcing the plan ahead as the House is on recess week. "Let's get it done."

This is the first step in unlocking Trump's campaign promises — tax cuts, energy production and border controls — and dominating the agenda in Congress. While Republicans have majority control of both the House and Senate, giving a rare sweep of Washington power, they face big hurdles trying to put the president's agenda into law over steep Democratic objections.

The Senate GOP package would allow $175 billion to be spent on border security, including funding for mass deportation operations and to build the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border; a $150 billion boost to the Pentagon for defense spending; and $20 billion for the Coast Guard.

The Senate Budget Committee said the package would cost about $85.5 billion a year, for four years of Trump's presidency, paid for with new reductions and revenues elsewhere that other committees will draw up.

Eyeing ways to pay for the package, Senate Republicans are considering a rollback of the Biden administration's methane emissions fee, which was approved by Democrats as part of climate change strategies in the Inflation Reduction Act, and hoping to draw new revenue from energy leases as they aim to spur domestic energy production.

Senate confirms commerce secretary

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed wealthy financier Howard Lutnick as commerce secretary Tuesday, putting in place a staunch supporter of President Donald Trump's hardline polices.

At the Commerce Department, Lutnick, who was CEO at the investment firm Cantor Fitzgerald, will oversee 50,000 employees who do everything from collecting economic statistics to running the census to issuing weather reports. But he's likely to spend a lot of time — along with Jamieson Greer, Trump's nominee to be the top U.S. trade negotiator — managing the president's plans to impose import taxes on U.S. trading partners, including allies and adversaries alike.

Lutnick

The Senate vote to confirm Lutnick was 51-45.

Trump views the tariffs as a versatile economic tool. They can raise money to finance his tax cuts elsewhere, protect U.S. industries and pressure other countries into making concessions on such issues as their own trade barriers, immigration and drug trafficking. Mainstream economists mostly view tariffs as counterproductive: They are paid by import companies in the United States, which try to pass along the higher costs to consumers and can add to inflation throughout the economy.

At his confirmation hearing last month, Lutnick dismissed as "nonsense" the idea that tariffs contribute to inflation. He expressed support for deploying across-the-board tariffs "country by country" to strong-arm other countries into lowering barriers to American exports.

Trump last week announced plans for "reciprocal" tariffs — raising U.S. import tax rates to match the higher taxes that other countries impose on goods from the U.S. The move would shatter the rules that have governed world trade for decades. Since the 1960s, tariff rates have mostly emerged from negotiations between dozens of countries. Trump is commandeering the process.

The president has also imposed 10% tariffs on Chinese imports and effectively raised U.S. taxes on foreign steel and aluminum. He has threatened — and delayed until March 4 — 25% tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico.

Eric Gay/AP

A border patrol agent prepares to patrol along the Rio Grande at the U.S.-Texas border Feb. 13, in McAllen, Texas.

'Trump Effect': Border arrests plummeted 39% in January

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico plummeted 39% in January from a month earlier, authorities said Tuesday, an early gauge of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

The Border Patrol made 21,593 arrests during the month, down from 47,316 in December and the lowest mark since May 2020, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"Call it the Trump Effect," the White House said in a statement.

Border arrests fell sharply well before Trump took office from an all-time high of 250,000 in December 2023. Mexican authorities increased enforcement within their own borders and then-President Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June.

Arrests sank even further after Trump was sworn in on Jan. 20 and issued a slew of orders on immigration, including one to suspend asylum on grounds that the United States is under "invasion" at the southern border.

Border czar Tom Homan said Monday that there were 229 border arrests in a 24-hour period, the lowest he remembered since becoming a Border Patrol agent in 1984. Homeland Security Department officials say they want to drive that to zero.

Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks said Friday in Edinburg, Texas, that he will "not be satisfied that our border is secure until we have operational control of our border, which means anyone that crosses illegally is apprehended or no one crosses."

Homeland Security said Tuesday that it launched a multimillion-dollar video ad campaign in the U.S. and internationally that features Secretary Kristi Noem warning people to leave or not to come. "If you are here illegally, we will find you and deport you. You will never return," she said in the video.

US Catholic bishops sue Trump over halt in funding for refugees

Associated Press

Catholic bishops sued the Trump administration on Tuesday over its abrupt halt to funding of refugee resettlement, calling the action unlawful and harmful to newly arrived refugees and to the nation's largest private resettlement program.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says the administration, by withholding millions even for reimbursements of costs incurred before the sudden cut-off of funding, violates various laws as well as the constitutional provision giving the power of the purse to Congress, which already approved the funding.

The conference's Migration and Refugee Services has sent layoff notices to 50 workers with additional cuts expected in local Catholic Charities offices that partner with the national office, the lawsuit said.

The conference is trying to keep the program going, but it's "financially unsustainable," he said, adding that it's trying to hold the U.S. government to its "moral and legal commitments."

The conference is one of 10 national agencies, most of them faith-based, that serve refugees and that have been sent scrambling since receiving a Jan. 24 letter informing them of an immediate suspension of funding pending a review of foreign-aid programs.

The lawsuit notes that the resettlement program isn't even foreign aid. It's a domestic program to help newly arrived refugees — who arrive legally after being vetted overseas — meet initial needs such as housing and job placement.

Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, recently accused the bishops conference for resettling "illegal immigrants" in order to get millions in federal funding — an apparent reference to the resettlement program, which involves legally approved refugees. The lawsuit noted that federal reimbursements don't cover the entire cost of the program and that in 2023 the conference paid $4 million more than it received, while additional donors supported resettlement efforts by local Catholic Charities and other recipients.

Vance's criticisms drew a rebuke from Pope Francis, who said Christian charity requires helping those in need, not just those in one's closest circles.

NATION

A$AP Rocky acquitted on 2 charges of felony abuse

By Andrew Dalton
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — "Thank y'all for saving my life," A$AP Rocky shouted to jurors as they left his trial.

It's no ordinary life they sent him on to when they quickly returned not guilty verdicts Tuesday on two counts of felony assault with a semiautomatic handgun.

The rapper could've left the Los Angeles courtroom in cuffs, awaiting a long prison sentence. But he instead found himself literally leaping with joy into the lap of his superstar partner Rihanna in the audience behind him.

"There was a moment when, before we heard the words from the clerk, he didn't know if he was going to be spending the next two decades in jail or going home," his attorney Joe Tacopina said.

Rocky had a banner year of fame and glamor in the works that he can now freely embrace.

In the same city as his acquittal, he is set to bask in the height of hip-hop as headliner of the Rolling Loud music festival next month. On the other coast, he'll be at the height of fashion's biggest night, the Met Gala, as a celebrity co-chair along with LeBron James and Pharrell Williams in May. And in summer, he adds major motion picture actor to his resume as the co-star — with Denzel Washington — in director Spike Lee's film "Highest 2 Lowest."

Damian Dovarganes/AP

A$AP Rocky gestures out of the window of a vehicle while leaving court after he was found not guilty in his trial Tuesday in Los Angeles.

The trial arguably came at the height of his fame, if not the pinnacle of a music career that began with acclaim in his native New York and later led to a pair of No. 1 albums and three Grammy nominations.

It would have been very easy — and many would say smart — for him to have accepted a relatively generous pretrial offer: Just six months in jail, along with probation and other conditions, for a guilty plea to one count.

He declined, and said bring it on to a three-week trial and the possibility of a prison sentence of up to 24 years and spending the foreseeable future away from Rihanna and their children, 2-year-old RZA Athelston Mayers and 1-year-old Riot Rose Mayers

Rocky and Rihanna pushed their way through a crush of photographers, reporters, YouTubers and fans to get into a waiting SUV.

"I'm thankful ... to be here right now, to be a free man talking to y'all," he said with a smile.

Prosecutors and their witnesses said Rocky was beefing with a former friend, A$AP Relli, with whom he had been in a crew who called themselves the A$AP Mob since high school. They said the two men met up in Hollywood on Nov. 6, 2021, and after a scuffle that also included their high school mates A$AP Twelvyy and A$AP Illz, Rocky pulled the gun and fired twice at Relli, who said one of the shots grazed his knuckle but was not seriously hurt.

Rocky's lawyers and witnesses they called said Rocky had shot a prop gun that only fires blanks, which he had been carrying for security since taking it from a music video set months earlier. They cast Relli as a lying opportunist who had only gone to police because he was seeking Rocky's money. He has filed a separate civil suit that is pending.

Black bear makes Calif. home its own

By Clara Harter
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A second black bear has taken up tenancy in the crawlspace of a home evacuated during the Eaton fire, prompting local frustration and fear about the furry creature's destructive capabilities.

The bear has been making himself comfortable, lounging by the pool during the day and bringing food back to the crawlspace from neighbors' trash at night, said homeowner Sean Lorenzini.

"I think it found refuge under the house during the fire, and it's definitely not moving — that's its home," he said.

The bear has left claw marks on neighborhood trash bins, torn insulation out from underneath the house and is probably the culprit behind several broken fuses as well as a recent attack on his neighbor's pet goat, he said. Lorenzini estimates it weighs 500 to 600 pounds.

And he's not the only local resident to discover an unbearable problem when returning home after the fire.

At the end of January, an Altadena homeowner could not get their power turned back on because crews were too scared of the 525-pound black bear living underneath the house.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife officials were able to lure that bear out using peanut butter and rotisserie chicken and relocate it to the Angeles National Forest.

Now Lorenzini is trying to get the agency to do the same thing with his uninvited guest.

"I feel really sorry for this bear. I know we're encroaching on their territory, so I'm sympathetic to that," he said. "But at the same time, I've got a property to protect and I'm exposed if anyone gets hurt. This is a wild animal."

A spokesperson for the Department of Fish and Wildlife said the agency was aware of the Pasadena bear and working on a response.

Lorenzini said he filed a report about the bear Thursday and still didn't know when Fish and Wildlife planned on sending a crew to relocate it. The agency did tell him that, once the bear is removed, it is important he seal the crawlspace as the creature will probably try to return, he said.

"In the foothills of bear country, it's important to close crawlspaces with bear-proof material in advance of winter months to discourage bears from denning and damaging property," the Department of Fish and Wildlife said in a post on the Altadena bear.

He is eager to have the bear moved so he can get the gas and heat turned back on and start assessing the smoke and bear damage his property has endured.

Plumbers are naturally reluctant to go under the house and fix his gas due to the presence of the bear.

Transportation 944

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PACIFIC

Japan's first cherry blossoms forecast for late March

By Hana Kusumoto
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan's cherry blossoms, a hallmark of spring, are expected to bloom on schedule this year, with Tokyo's first flowers appearing on March 25, according to commercial weather forecasters.

The Japan Meteorological Corp. predicts cherry trees will begin flowering in the capital before spreading to other major cities, including Kochi, Fukuoka and Kagoshima on March 26 and Nagoya on March 27. In Sapporo, the blossoms are expected by April 28, according to the company's Feb. 13 news release.

"In many places across the country, cherry blossoms will bloom at the same rate as an average year or later than usual," the forecast said. "They are expected to start blooming in Tokyo on March 25, followed by Kyushu and Shikoku regions."

The forecast covers Somei Yoshino trees, the most common ornamental cherry variety in Japan, and includes approximately 1,000 popular viewing locations from Sapporo in northern Hokkaido to Kagoshima in the south. The company has updated its cherry blossom predictions four times so far this year.

Full bloom is expected around April 1 in Tokyo, April 4 in Fukuoka and April 24 in Aomori, according to the release.

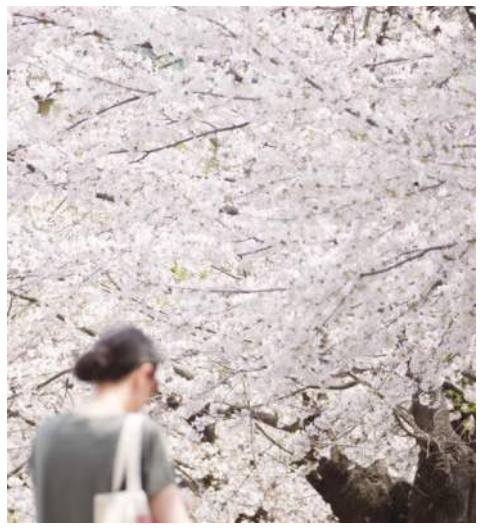
Another private forecaster, Weathernews Inc., predicted cherry blossoms will arrive around the same time as an average year or slightly earlier. It forecast Tokyo, Fukuoka and Kochi will see their first blooms on March 21, followed by Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Hiroshima and Yokohama on March 22.

Weathernews projected full bloom about a week after the blossoms first appear in western and eastern Japan, while in Hokkaido, peak bloom is expected at the end of April, roughly a week earlier than average.

The company also predicted normal temperatures in the Tokai region of central Japan, while the Hokuriku and Kanto-Koshin regions could see slightly above-average temperatures. Northern Japan is expected to experience warmer-than-usual conditions this spring.

The first blossoms appeared on Okinawa on Jan. 5, which was 11 days earlier than an average year, according to Weathernews. Hikanzakura, also known as Ryukyu kanhinzakura, are the most common type of cherry trees on the island.

The Japan Meteorological Agency, the government's weather authority, stopped issuing cherry blossom forecasts in 2010, leaving private companies to provide the widely anticipated predictions.



Akifumi Ishikawa/Stars and Stripes

Cherry blossoms bloom at Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo in 2023.

Philippine village battling dengue by offering bounties for mosquitoes

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — A village in the densely populated Philippine capital region launched a battle against dengue Wednesday by offering a token bounty to residents for captured mosquitoes — dead or alive.

The unusual strategy adopted by the Addition Hills village in Mandaluyong City reflects growing concern after the nearby city of Quezon declared an outbreak of the mosquito-borne illness over the weekend. Eight more areas reported an upsurge in cases of the potentially deadly viral infection.

At least 28,234 dengue cases have been recorded in the Philippines this year up to Feb. 1, a 40% increase compared to the same period last year, according to health department statistics. Quezon City declared a dengue outbreak Saturday after deaths this year reached 10 people, mostly children, out of 1,769 residents infected.

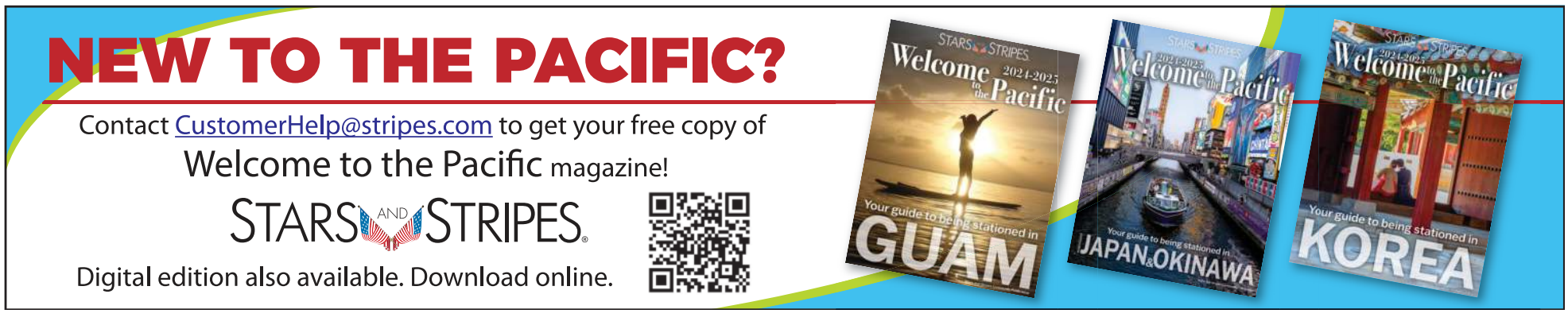
A urban village of more than 100,000 residents living in crowded neighborhoods and residential condominium towers, Addition Hills has done clean-ups, canal declogging and a hygiene campaign to combat dengue. But when cases spiked to 42 this year and two young students died, village leader Carlito Cernal decided to intensify the battle.

"There was an alarm," Cernal told The Associated Press. "I found a way."

Residents will get a reward of one Philippines peso (just over 1 cent) for every five mosquitoes or mosquito larva they turn in, Cernal said.

Critics warned the strategy could backfire if desperate people start breeding mosquitoes for the reward. Cernal said that was unlikely because the campaign would be terminated as soon as the uptick in cases eases.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral infection found in tropical countries worldwide. It can cause joint pain, nausea, vomiting and rashes, and in severe cases can cause breathing problems, hemorrhaging and organ failure. While there is no specific treatment for the illness, medical care to maintain a person's fluid levels is seen as critical.



WORLD

Rubio concludes trip in UAE after landmark Russia talks

BY MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Wednesday with the leader of the United Arab Emirates, wrapping up an overseas trip that saw the highest-level outreach between the United States and Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Rubio's talk with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, also the ruler of Abu Dhabi, comes as the U.S. also tries to continue a shaky ceasefire in the Gaza Strip between Israel and the militant Hamas group.

The UAE, which diplomatically recognized Israel in 2020 during President Donald Trump's first term, also has been key in mediating prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine.

Rubio offered his thanks in the meeting to the UAE "for the strength and enduring nature of the relationship, one marked by strong economic ties, defense cooperation and mutual interests in regional stability," State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

The meeting included discussions on artificial intelligence, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon and the Red Sea, which had been the site of attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels until the Gaza ceasefire, Bruce added.

There was no immediate comments from the UAE on what Rubio, Sheikh Mohammed and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's foreign minister, discussed in their roughly 30-minute meeting. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Sheikh Mohammed on Monday.

However, the state-linked newspaper The National later reported Sheikh Mohammed had told Rubio "that the UAE strongly opposes any attempt to displace the Palestinian people from Gaza."

Trump has said he wants to empty Gaza permanently of its more than 2 million Palestinians, saying they would not be allowed to return and suggesting at one point he might force Egypt and Jordan to take them in by threatening to cut off U.S. aid.

Sheikh Mohammed also reportedly stressed that reconstruction in Gaza be backed by a "comprehensive and lasting peace" based on a two-state solution, which would see the Palestinians have their own future state out of Gaza and the West Bank.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been discussed as possible sites for peace talks to end the war in Ukraine, which marks its third anniversary on Monday. Saudi Arabia also has been mentioned as the possible venue for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, providing a potential diplomatic boon to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler.

The leaders met Rubio at an Abu Dhabi convention center that's hosting the biennial International Defense Exhibition and Conference this week, where both Ukraine and Russia have displayed weapons — even as Moscow faces Western sanctions over the war.

Russian money continues to flood into Dubai's booming real estate market. Daily flights between the Emirates and Moscow provide a lifeline for both those fleeing conscription and the Russian elite. Ukrainians as well have fled to the Emirates, an autocratically ruled federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula.

Rubio also visited Abu Dhabi's Abrahamic Family House, which houses a Catholic church, a Jewish synagogue and an Islamic mosque.

EVELYN HOCKSTEIN, POOL/AP

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, center, walks with United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, front, as they meet at ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

Migrant groups: Racist attacks rise in German city after Christmas violence

Associated Press

MAGDEBURG, Germany — When Haben Gebregergish first immigrated to the German city of Magdeburg seven years ago, the Eritrean immigrant was walking to the supermarket with her child when an intoxicated woman approached her on the street.

At the time, Gebregergish did not speak German well enough to comprehend what the woman was saying. But Gebregergish says that when the woman threw a beer bottle at her head, she immediately understood.

It was one of her first encounters with racism, but certainly not the last. In the aftermath of a deadly attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg late last year, Gebregergish and other migrants who have settled in the city say they have experienced a sharp increase in racism and anti-immigration sentiments.

"We are the same as you," Gebregergish said earlier this month. "We are not different. Just like you, we have feelings. Sometimes we are sad, sometimes we are happy, just like everyone else."

The Christmas market violence was one of five high-profile attacks committed by immigrants in the past nine months that have made migration a key issue as the country heads toward an early election on Sunday. The suspect, a Saudi doctor, drove into the holiday market teeming with shoppers and left five women and a 9-year-old boy dead and 200 people injured.

Just one day after Dec. 20 violence, there was a large right-wing demonstration in Magdeburg, and verbal and physical attacks on people with a migrant background have increased significantly in the city since then, according to the German-Syrian Cultural Association in Magdeburg.

Mayor Simone Borris, in a statement, said: "Cohesion and community are fundamental values of a city that are inviolable." The mayor also referred media to online services for migrants, and said the city's Cooperation with the Advisory Council for Integration and Migration will be expanded.

EBRAHIM NOROOZI/AP

Defaced election posters of Green Party top candidate and federal minister for economy Robert Habeck, right, and FDP top candidate and former Finance Minister Christian Lindner, are seen in Magdeburg, Germany, on Feb. 7.

Pakistan steps up Afghan arrests; Kabul chides move

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Authorities have stepped up arrests of Afghan citizens in Pakistan's capital and a nearby city in an effort that the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad described on Wednesday as a push to force the expulsion of all Afghan refugees from the country.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry promptly dismissed the allegation, saying that the authorities were only trying to facilitate conditions for the swift return of Afghans to their home country.

Pakistan has long threatened to deport Afghans living in the country illegally.

Separately, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif last month approved a March 31 deadline to deport those awaiting relocation to third countries unless their cases are swiftly processed by the governments that have agreed to take them, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press.

More than 800,000 Afghans have returned home or have been expelled by force from Pakistan since 2023, according to the International Organization for Migration, a U.N. agency that tracks migrations.

In a strongly worded statement on Wednesday, the Afghan Embassy — which represents the Taliban-run government of Afghanistan — criticized "the short timeframe" given by the authorities in Islamabad and "the unilateral nature of Pakistan's decision."

Afghans in Islamabad and the nearby garrison city of Rawalpindi have been subjected to arrests, searches, and orders from police to leave the two cities and relocate to other parts of Pakistan, the embassy said.

It further claimed that for all Afghans, "expulsion is imminent" — something the embassy said Pakistani authorities had not communicated to Kabul "through any formal correspondence."

More than half a million Afghans who fled the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 have been living without papers in Pakistan, thousands of them waiting for resettlement in the United States and elsewhere.

Ultimately, the embassy said, "Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that there is a definitive and final plan to deport all Afghan refugees not only from Islamabad and Rawalpindi but also from the entire country in the near future."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

High court: Official could not challenge voting van

WI MADISON — A divided Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that a Republican Party official lacked the standing to bring a lawsuit challenging the use of a mobile voting van in 2022.

The lawsuit sought to ban the use of mobile voting vans in any future election in the presidential battleground state. The court did not address the legality of mobile voting sites in its ruling, meaning mobile voting vans could be used in future elections.

A single van has been used only once — in Racine in a primary election in 2022. It allowed voters to cast absentee ballots in the two weeks leading up to the election. Racine, the Democratic National Committee and others argue that nothing in state law prohibits the use of voting vans.

But the court did not rule on the merits of the case. Instead, it ruled 4-3 to dismiss the case, with four liberal justices in the majority and three conservative justices dissenting.

The Supreme Court ruled that the Racine County voter who brought the lawsuit, the county's Republican Party chairman, Ken Brown, was not "aggrieved" under state law and therefore was not permitted to sue.

KRISTOPHER RADDER, THE BRATTLEBORO (VT.) REFORMER/AP

Snowy sleigh ride for charity

Clair Embry, a horse sled driver at Fairwinds Farm/Wild Carrot Farm in Brattleboro, Vt., takes a group of people on a sleigh ride Tuesday as part of a fundraiser for the farm after the 4-year-old 40x100 foot hoop barn at the farm collapsed under a snow and ice load.

Senator resigns before ethics panel decision

CO DENVER — Embattled Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis has resigned from the Colorado Senate, just days before an ethics committee was set to decide whether to pursue a formal investigation into her treatment of aides.

Jaquez Lewis, a Longmont Democrat, posted the announcement on her official Facebook page about 5:45 a.m. after notifying the top Senate leader Monday night. As the reason for her resignation, she cited an opportunity to serve with a regional not-for-profit that develops women and LGBTQ+ people as leaders. Her announcement did not mention the ethics investigation.

Jaquez Lewis had faced escalating reprimands for her alleged mistreatment of legislative aides. Last year, Senate leadership quietly removed her as the chair of a senate committee — a powerful position for steering legislation through the chamber — over repeated complaints about her behavior toward aides and staff.

Upgrades to Capitol could relocate lawmakers

HI HONOLULU — A major upgrade of the Hawaii State Capitol to refurbish core functions of the historic structure could cost as much as $100 million and keep the building closed for a prolonged period of time.

State Comptroller Keith Regan said basic building infrastructure such as the electrical, water and wastewater systems in the Capitol are outdated and aging, and components of the air conditioning system also need to be replaced.

Regan said estimates of the total cost range from $50 million to $100 million, but it is not yet clear when construction will start or how long the work will take. The project will require the Legislature and the offices of the governor and lieutenant governor to temporarily relocate.

Gov. Josh Green's proposed budget for the next two years includes $2 million for preliminary planning for the project, including identifying alternate sites where lawmakers, the top executive branch leadership and their staffs could operate during construction.

Chief of staff takes attorney general post

FL TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis on Monday named his former chief of staff, James Uthmeier, as Florida's attorney general, handing the state's top law enforcement role to a trusted aide who has helped orchestrate and defend some of his most divisive initiatives.

Uthmeier was sworn in Monday during a ceremony in Tallahassee. The 37-year-old becomes one of the youngest state attorneys general and the latest person to benefit from the political shuffle sparked by President Donald Trump's drafting of Sunshine State Republicans for his new administration. Uthmeier is poised to spearhead Florida's legal battles to bolster Trump's sweeping conservative agenda, at a time when the state's leaders are eager to pass new laws and challenge legal precedent to demonstrate their allegiance to the president.

Uthmeier succeeds former Attorney General Ashley Moody, whom the governor tapped to fill the U.S. Senate seat of Marco Rubio, Trump's pick to be U.S. secretary of state.

Sheriff, a Republican, plans run for governor

CA RIVERSIDE — Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said Monday he is running for governor of California in 2026, becoming the first major Republican to announce a bid for an election nearly two years away.

Bianco, an outspoken supporter of President Donald Trump and his policies, was first elected sheriff in 2018 and has been in law enforcement for more than 30 years. He is joining a growing number of candidates looking to replace Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose term limit runs out in 2027, as the GOP struggles to field a serious statewide candidate.

During his campaign announcement in downtown Riverside, Bianco criticized Democratic policies that he says have led to the homeless crisis on city streets and the state's housing affordability problems.

The Democratic candidates include former Los Angeles Mayor and Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis, former Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins, former state Controller Betty Yee and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond. Polling from the Public Policy Institute of California shows former Vice President Kamala Harris would be in a strong position if she runs, but she hasn't said what she'll do.

Fewer gifts reported after ethics concerns

NV LAS VEGAS — Last year, Clark County commissioners did without the free tickets to Formula One racing, Las Vegas Raiders games and National Finals Rodeo that they'd accepted in previous years, according to their annual financial disclosure statements filed in January.

The commission's seven members reported a total of just one trip and one gift for the year — and no tickets.

A lot can happen in a year, ethics-wise.

In June, the Nevada Commission on Ethics notified county commissioners they were under investigation for accepting tickets to the inaugural Formula One Las Vegas Grand Prix. Five commissioners each accepted a $10,900 ticket, with some incorrectly disclosing the ticket and one failing to disclose all together until the Review-Journal reported on the matter.

State law requires elected officials to file annual disclosure forms reporting gifts "in excess of an aggregate value of $200 for a donor" as well as meetings, trips or events sponsored by third parties.

Commissioner William McCurdy disclosed $2,850 in costs for a trip to Germany, sponsored by the American Council on Germany, to attend the American-German Young Leaders Conference. The council — a nonpartisan nonprofit — was founded in 1952 "to strengthen German-American relations."

Commissioner Jim Gibson disclosed a gift of a $300 guitar from Ryman Hospitality, a lodging and hospitality real estate investment trust.

From wire reports

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Jacqueline Smith

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) published daily (except Saturday, Sunday, 25 December and 1 January) for 50 cents (Monday through Thursday) and one dollar on Friday by Stars and Stripes Pacific, OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, OPC 706 BOX 7, AP 96301-9001.

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OPINION

Trump's DOJ crisis was an unforced error

By Noah Feldman
Bloomberg Opinion

Here's the most important yet overlooked fact about seven Justice Department prosecutors who resigned rather than drop charges against New York Mayor Eric Adams: The Trump administration could have avoided the whole debacle with the stroke of a pen.

Had President Donald Trump simply pardoned Adams the way he pardoned 1,600 Jan. 6 rioters, public corruption prosecutors would have been angry, but the decision, on its own, wouldn't have violated Justice norms. Since the prosecutors wouldn't have been implicated in a decision that could have been made without their participation, there would have been no need for them to decide between resigning or following orders that violated their principles.

It matters that Trump didn't choose the pardon option because dropping the Adams prosecution created real long-term costs for the president and his Justice Department. I'm not talking about Democratic opprobrium or even the damage to department morale — Trump doesn't care about those things. I'm talking about the message sent by the resignation of some of the most ambitious, intelligent, qualified conservatives in the U.S. government.

Consider who wrote some of the harshest resignation letters accusing Trump's Justice Department of violating the department's professional norms. Former acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Danielle Sassoon is a high-flying Harvard Law School graduate and Federalist Society member who clerked for Justice Antonin Scalia: in short, conservative legal aristocracy in the making, the kind of person ordinarily destined for high office and maybe a judgeship. Hagan Scotten, a decorated Special Forces combat veteran who finished at the top of his Harvard Law School class and clerked for then-Judge Brett Kavanaugh and Chief Justice John Roberts, was also well on his way to conservative legal greatness.

Their resignations tell the Supreme Court's conservatives and Federalist Society-approved lower court judges that the Trump administration doesn't care about protecting the credibility of the Justice Department — or the rule of law. The Trump administration needs conservative justices like Roberts, Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, who herself clerked for Scalia. Without them, it would face regular defeats in court. Those justices know Sassoon and Scotten. They know what kind of principled conservatives they are. When the story is written of how Trump lost a Supreme Court to which he appointed three members, the Adams resignations will form a crucial, turning-point chapter.

So why didn't the Trump administration take the easier path? Two different answers are possible. One is that Trump and his attorney general, Pam Bondi, wanted to force a show of loyalty and didn't care about the consequences. The other is that they were just too inexperienced, too unaware of how principled conservatives think, and yes, too stupid to realize that they would cause a rebellion among the best and brightest conservative prosecutors. Take your pick of the answers: Both augur serious future problems for the department in litigating before the federal courts in the months and years to come. And there will be a lot of litigation because Trump's team has repeatedly chosen the illegal path over the much easier legal one.

The result is that the federal courts, particularly the conservative Supreme Court, will be tested more seriously than at any time in living memory. If they hold the line and preserve the rule of law, much of what Trump has already done and proposes to do will be reversed.

In his first term, Trump outsourced the most critical judicial picks to the Federalist Society. In turn, the Federalist Society promoted numerous qualified, highly conservative candidates in the Sassoon and Scotten molds. They now populate the judiciary. It is they, the principled conservative Trump appointees, who will be tested most personally. They should naturally be role models for the younger Sassoon and Scotten. Instead, Sassoon and Scotten are likely to be role models for them. If the younger versions could torch their promising careers on principle, then sitting judges, with the safety of life tenure, can certainly do their bit by standing up to Trump.

Scotten's resignation letter highlighted his conservative bona fides. "Some will view the mistake you are committing here in the light of their generally negative views of the new Administration," he wrote to the deputy attorney general. "I do not share those views." Scotten did not blame Trump personally, suggesting, "I can even understand how a Chief Executive whose background is in business and politics might see the contemplated dismissal-with-leverage as a good, if distasteful, deal."

Then Scotten lowered the boom: "Any assistant U.S. attorney would know that our laws and customs do not allow using the prosecutorial power to influence other citizens, much less elected officials, in this way." That's the principled conservative's credo of laws and customs, delivered bluntly by an American whose bravery and loyalty to his country are beyond question. If principled judicial conservatives listen, as I hope and trust they will, that credo can save the rule of law.

Noah Feldman is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

Why everything, in AI and elsewhere, is so 'deep' now

By Katy Steinmetz
Special to The Washington Post

When the news broke in late January that a Chinese start-up called DeepSeek had supposedly developed cutting-edge AI for a relative song, the story reverberated across the world's boardrooms and social feeds. But in the corners of the internet devoted to professional naming, a question quickly followed: Have we reached peak "deep"?

True, the D-word has been a cultural touchstone for decades, and the contexts reflect the rich multitudes of the word. A yogi takes a deep breath. A quarterback throws a deep pass. We can do a deep clean or fear the deep state or have a deep thought. We might be deeply in love or deeply in debt, and sometimes both. "Deep" has associations with everything from secrecy and sexuality (Deep Throat) to interplanetary travel ("Star Trek: Deep Space Nine").

But lately, one meaning has become trendier than the rest. Close ties to artificial intelligence have led to a surge in "deep" being used for AI-related endeavors, to the point that the word is fast becoming shorthand for "cutting-edge tech" -- and is already starting to feel derivative. In 2025, "deep" is to the tech world what the plus sign (+) became a few years ago to streaming platforms such as AppleTV+, Disney+ and Paramount+.

Tech didn't always own "deep" the way it does today. The OG "deep" is the ocean, whose depths have always promised adventure, riches and understanding to those bold enough to plumb them. It has been on trend in other ages, too: From "deep-fried" to "deep cuts" to "Deep South," the word has fulfilled our need to describe the relationship between us and the beyond. The thread that connects all these is an exploratory instinct, a going into something, but what follows can be bad (sadness, defeat, death) or wonderful (revelation, relaxation, breading).

DeepSeek may have extra resonance in the wake of IBM's Deep Blue, a supercomputer that bested a world chess champion in the 1990s, and Google's DeepMind, an AI outfit founded in 2010. Uses of "deep" in computing go back at least to the 1960s, according to Oxford English Dictionary, in reference to models with multiple layers. In ensuing years, we get variations such as "deep tech," a term for solutions that involve substantial engineering challenges, and "deep learning," a reference to machines imitating thinking processes.

Though the association between "deep" and "tech" is well-established, the word has lately become more widely deployed, as a simple way to suggest complex stuff that is otherwise a mouthful to explain. A search of start-up indexer Crunchbase returns hundreds of results for "deep," many of them companies in the AI space. There's Deepwave Digital (AI + radio frequency), Deep Instinct (AI + cybersecurity), Deepgram (AI + voices), DeepL (AI + translation), Deep Vision (AI + images and video) and DeepMap (AI + um, maps).

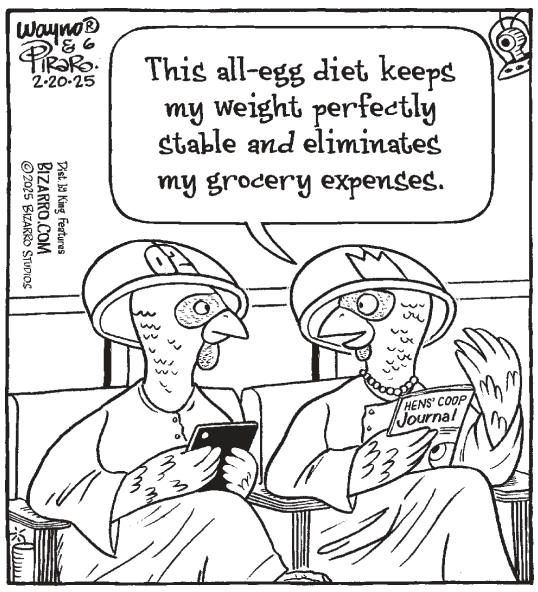
In the wake of DeepSeek's splashy arrival, OpenAI announced its own offering this month: a "deep research" AI agent. The company said it was "launching deep research in ChatGPT, a new agentic capability that conducts multistep research on the internet for complex tasks." Sounds great, but "agentic capability?" Robert Frost was right: These woods are lovely, dark and deep.

Best of all, though "deep" evokes visions of neural networks and unprecedented superskills, it makes no specific promises that a company must deliver on -- much like previous buzzwords "bright" or "cyber" or "micro." The appeal is generic, analogous to the long-lost fervor around words such as "green" (vague promises of environmental responsibility) or "smart" (vague promises that something is beneficial to use).

A general sense of ineffable progress is part of tech's appeal, of course. Things must be oversimplified not only for commercial reasons but also for our sake, as we come along for a ride with baffling mechanisms and an uncertain destination. "Deep" may be veering into cliché, but it also works because, let's be honest, most of us have no idea what layers are involved here. We're little more than ankle-deep, at the deepest.

Katy Steinmetz is a creative director at Catchword, a naming agency based in Oakland, Calif., and former San Francisco bureau chief for Time.

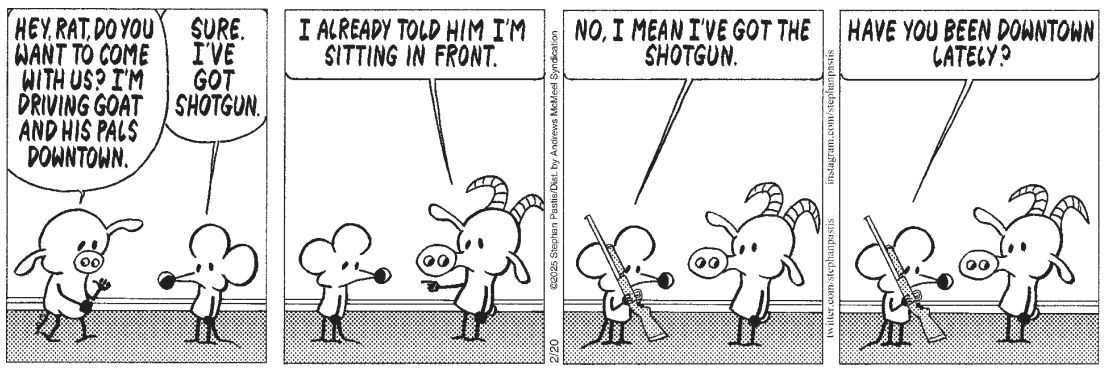
Bizarro



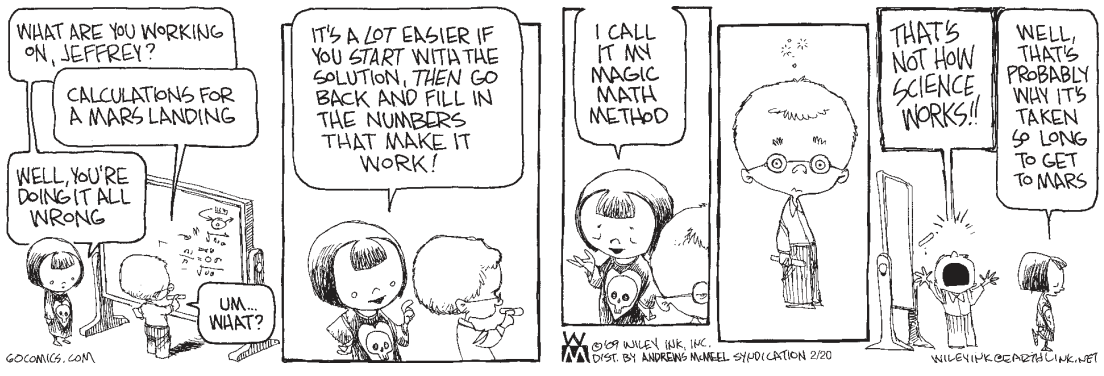
Loose Parts

Frazz

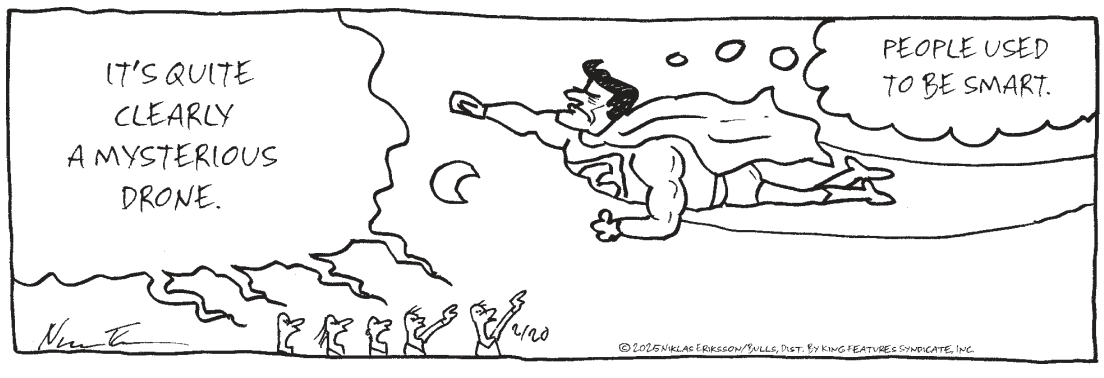
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur

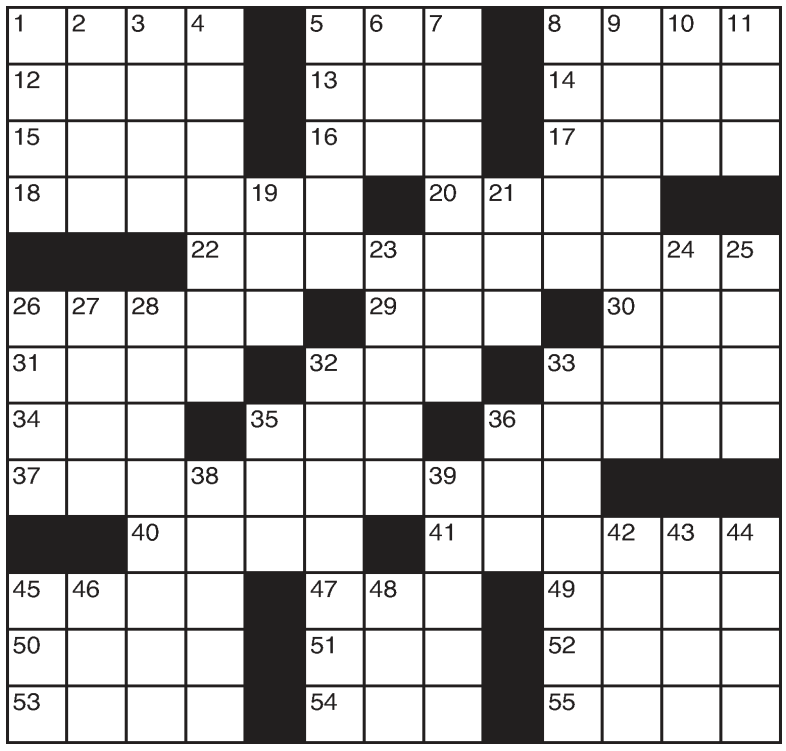


Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 A deadly sin
5 "O Sole —"
8 Bar fight souvenir
12 Sandwich treat
13 "Bow-wow!"
14 Ginormous
15 Kvetch
16 Half- — (latte option)
17 "Roots" author Haley
18 Largest U.S. state
20 Homer's son
22 Makeup applicator
26 Seine city
29 WWII service person
30 Seminary subj.
31 Serving customers
32 Volleyball barrier
33 Self-referential
34 U.K. fliers
35 Golf prop
36 Elizabeth of cosmetics
37 Game show contestant, often
40 On deck
41 Hockey needs
45 Afrikaner
47 Big Apple sch.
49 TV's "Warrior Princess"
50 Rotate
51 Suffix with hotel
52 Privy to
53 Sagacious
54 Lock opener
55 Body pics

DOWN

1 "Livin' La Vida —"
2 Russian river
3 Antitoxins
4 Tennis tactic
5 Showy parrot
6 Roth svgs. plan
7 Quirky
8 Pointy
9 Like some pearls
10 Candle count
11 Actor Harrison
19 Decks in the ring
21 Rainbow shape
23 Nerd
24 Lavish party
25 Spanish custard
26 Sweet wine
27 On — with
28 Oil companies
32 Tidy type
33 Handy guy
35 StubHub buys, slangily
36 Astern
38 Nemo's creator
39 Loan shark's crime
42 Wrestler John
43 Shoelace snarl
44 Without
45 "Incidentally," to texters
46 "Yes" in 26-Across
48 "— -haw!" (cowgirl cry)

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

2-20 **CRYPTOQUIP**

AGPQ LPM HIB LPTT P KWIBO IC OVIOTV YC QGVH PWV APQLGYMK P OIQPQI UPLN WPLV? UOVL-QPQVWU.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN YOU'VE GOT A HEAVY AND MUSCULAR BUILD, WHAT MIGHT PEOPLE CALL YOUR TEETH? BURLY WHITES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals C

FACES

Q&A

‘We are moving forward anyway’

Carl Lumbly discusses the fraught politics of film ‘Captain America: Brave New World’

BY GREG BRAXTON
Los Angeles Times

Anthony Mackie’s Sam Wilson is at the center of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in “Captain America: Brave New World” as the first Black Captain America. Joining Mackie in his groundbreaking journey is Carl Lumbly, who made his own historic mark as a Black superhero three decades ago.

Lumbly co-stars as Isaiah Bradley, a supersoldier who is the lone survivor of a vicious government experiment that claimed the lives of 300 Black soldiers. The veteran actor previously played Bradley in the 2021 Disney+ series “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier,” set after Wilson, aka The Falcon, was presented with Captain America’s shield.

In the new film, which opened last week, Bradley has settled into a quiet life as a boxing gym owner. But his life is upended when he is activated to assassinate U.S. President Thaddeus Ross (Harrison Ford).

The role is a juicy one for Lumbly, who made an impression when he starred in Fox’s 1994 drama “M.A.N.T.I.S.,” becoming TV’s first Black superhero.

The crime fighter was the alter ego of Dr. Miles Hawkins, a brilliant biophysicist who was paralyzed after being shot during an urban riot while saving a young boy. After the tragedy, Hawkins developed an exoskeleton that enabled him to leave his wheelchair.

As M.A.N.T.I.S., Hawkins could run with lightning speed, leap over pursuing cars and toss criminals through the air with ease. He was equipped with a high-tech vehicle that could fly and go underwater.

While Lumbly has enjoyed a long and varied career, including his featured turn as field operative Marcus Dixon in ABC’s spy thriller “Alias,” he said there are two roles that seem to stand out for fans.

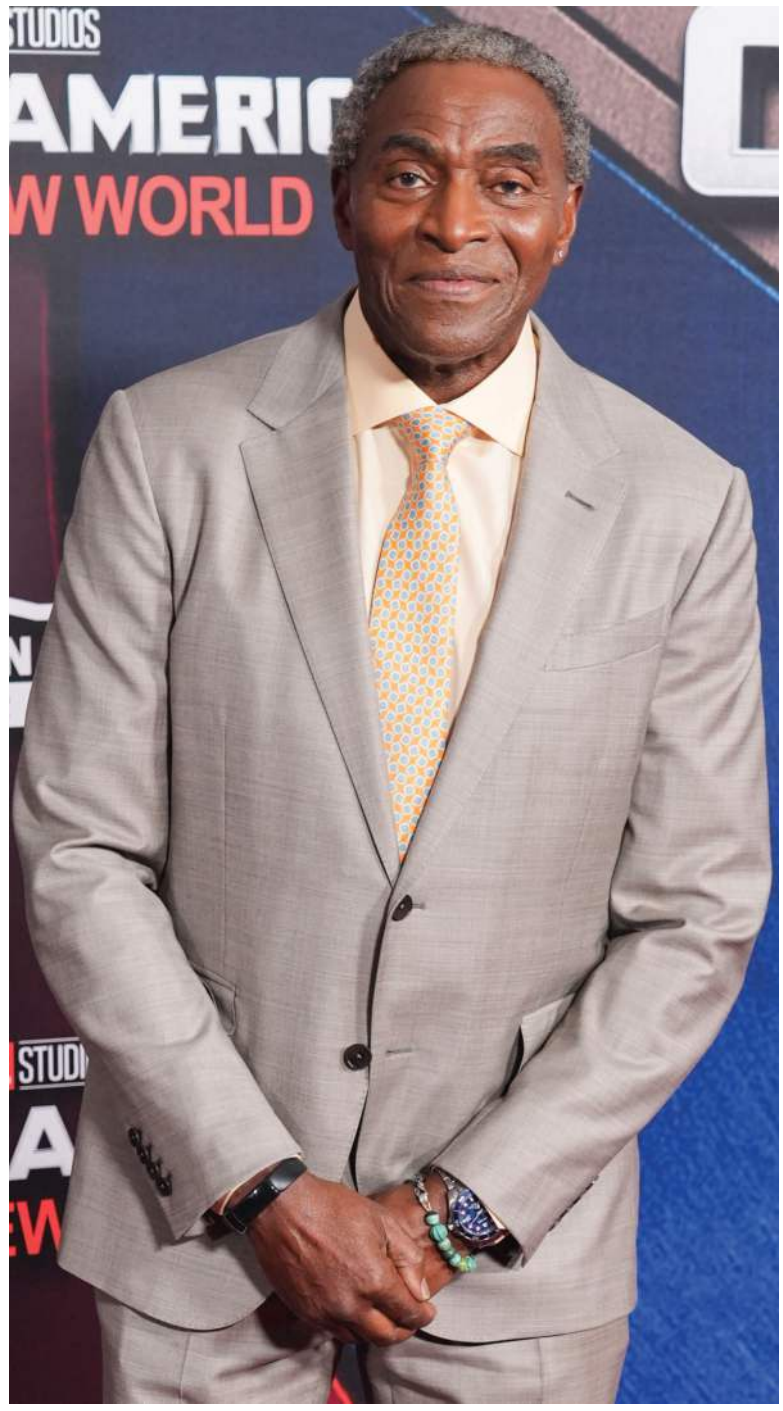
“Since I’ve been in the MCU, a lot of people come up and tell me how proud they are,” said Lumbly, adding with a hearty laugh, “And then there are a lot of people who remember ‘M.A.N.T.I.S.’”

The Fox series lasted just one, controversy-shrouded season. After the pilot episode aired, several months before its official premiere, executive producer Sam Raimi (“The Evil Dead” and “Spider-Man” franchises), who wrote the pilot, was let go, along with four Black supporting characters.

The new producers were accused of racism by an advocacy group and two cast members from the pilot, who complained that the diversity of the cast had been reduced and that the tone of the series radically changed from the pilot in order to de-emphasize Black identity and attract more white viewers.

For its part, “Brave New World” arrives at an uncertain political moment for Hollywood. As executives at many studios, including Disney, seek to chart a neutral course, the Trump administration has accelerated its attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, and scrutiny of films and TV series and the talent behind them remains as heightened as ever. Some have lambasted the film as too “woke” or faulted the perceived parallels between Ross and Trump.

In a phone interview, Lumbly addressed his portrayal of Bradley and the politically charged response to “Brave New World.”



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Carl Lumbly, photographed Feb. 11 at the Los Angeles premiere of “Captain America: Brave New World,” is no newcomer to the world of superheroes. Lumbly starred in Fox’s 1994 drama “M.A.N.T.I.S.,” becoming TV’s first Black superhero.

Los Angeles Times: What has being a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe been like?

Lumbly: A joyride. I love this character and what he stands for. I love that he exists in the MCU. His story is based on certain actions taken officially by the government that ended in dire, dire, dire consequences for a group of Black men who had enlisted to make the country better but were duped and betrayed. Isaiah is the single survivor. But out of all of that, he survives in the names of those who were so brutally sacrificed. It’s a brutal story but also a privilege to be given this task. I welcomed it in “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier,” and I couldn’t be happier that it continues in this movie.

What has it been like working with Anthony?

He is such a wonderful actor, and now I have experienced what a great leader he is. But he is also a lot of fun. There is a lot of joy in the way Anthony goes about things. He requires that people not only have a good time, but that they feel included. He is operating with his heart wide open.

I’m interested in your reaction when you learned that Isaiah is going to attempt to assassinate the president.

That was tricky [Laughs]. Isaiah being in the world again was so filled with caution. After being recognized for his contribution in “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier,” he thought he could return to a kind of normalcy. He feels that the world Sam sees is one he wants to believe in, but he’s not sure he can. He gets his boxing gym and he is free in the world. You would think he would not give that up for some act of revenge or some imagined righting of the wrong. My first impression was that it’s kind of impossible to play and deal with. But if it’s possible, what would it look like?

So what do you make of the comparisons between the movie and the political climate in the country?

The parallels that people are able to see were not in existence when the film was written or being shot. Those things have come into existence at the same time as the film, or the film has come into existence as a way to speak to what we find in the world at this moment. It’s almost like alchemy, the timing of history coinciding with the timing of our film.

What do you feel is the significance?

There’s the title “Brave New World.” It matters less to me that we transgress, that we fall back or fall prey to our lesser angels. It matters more that we address what’s real, what’s true and then move forward with the knowledge that there is much to be afraid of but that we are moving forward anyway. I think that’s what this film is saying. There’s a lot about this film that speaks about love, compassion and empathy.

Everyone who sees “Captain America: Brave New World” will take away their own movie to rerun in their heads. The “Captain America” I saw I am extremely proud of, and it gives me hope at a time I want to feel hope. The idea of connection is for us to come together with our fears and to be brave enough to be connected.

Spielberg film in 2026 to star Blunt, O’Connor

Steven Spielberg is gearing up to direct a new film starring Josh O’Connor and Emily Blunt. The still-untitled “event film” is set for a theatrical release on June 12, 2026, Universal Pictures said Tuesday.

Details are scarce about the new project, which will be based on a story by Spielberg. Screenwriter David Koepp, who wrote the scripts for “Jurassic Park” and its sequel, “War of the Worlds” and “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull,” is writing the screenplay. Colman Domingo, Colin Firth and Eve Hewson are also set to star.

The summer 2026 season is already packed with blockbuster projects, including “Avengers: Doomsday” (May 1), “The Mandalorian and Grogu” (May 22), “Toy Story 5” (June 19), “The Odyssey” (July 17) and “Spider-Man 4” (July 24).

Paul Simon launching North American tour

Paul Simon’s retirement from touring is officially over.

Seven years after completing his farewell tour, the legendary singer-songwriter and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee announced Tuesday that he will embark on an extensive North American tour. Simon’s “A Quiet Celebration Tour” will begin April 4 in New Orleans and conclude Aug. 3 in Seattle. It will showcase the music from his Grammy-nominated 2023 album, “Seven Psalms,” along with new arrangements of some of his best-known songs.

The return of Simon, 83, to the road is a welcome surprise for fans, not only in light of his 2018 farewell tour but because the severe hearing loss he subsequently suffered in his left ear while recording “Seven Psalms” led him to declare he would not be able to tour again.

Setzer reveals toll of autoimmune disease

For rockabilly musician Brian Setzer, his hands “cramping up” while on tour with Stray Cats last year was an early sign of a larger health issue.

The 65-year-old rocker got candid about his health last week, writing on social media that he discovered after returning from tour “that I have an auto-immune disease.” Setzer, the pompadoured vocalist who rocks with drummer Slim Jim Phantom and bassist Lee Rocker for Stray Cats and also runs his own big-band orchestra, said Feb. 13, “I cannot play guitar.”

“There is no pain,” he reassured fans, “but it feels like I am wearing a pair of gloves when I try to play.”

Setzer did not share additional details about his condition but said that for a while it was so bad he couldn’t hold a pen or tie his shoes.

From wire reports

SCOREBOARD/TENNIS

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Tuesday's men's scores

EAST

Boston College 54, Virginia Tech 36
Pittsburgh 80, Syracuse 69
UConn 66, Villanova 59
W. Michigan 97, Buffalo 64

SOUTH

E. Kentucky 66, Lipscomb 57
Florida 85, Oklahoma 63
Florida Gulf Coast 72, Jacksonville 56
LSU 81, South Carolina 67
Loyola Chicago 77, Davidson 69
Mississippi St. 70, Texas A&M 54
North Alabama 80, West Georgia 62
North Florida 79, Stetson 71
Queens (NC) 89, Cent. Arkansas 72
Tennessee St. 86, UT Martin 75

MIDWEST

Akron 73, N. Illinois 63
Bellarmine 94, Austin Peay 68
E. Michigan 76, Miami (Ohio) 66
Iowa St. 79, Colorado 65
Kent St. 91, Bowling Green 84
Marquette 80, Seton Hall 56
Michigan St. 75, Purdue 66
Ohio 84, Cent. Michigan 82
Toledo 67, Ball St. 66
Wisconsin 95, Illinois 74
Xavier 76, Butler 63

SOUTHWEST

TCU 69, Texas Tech 66

FAR WEST

BYU 91, Kansas 57
Colorado St. 79, Nevada 71
Houston 80, Arizona St. 65
Minnesota 64, UCLA 61
San Diego St. 83, Fresno St. 60
Wyoming 69, Air Force 62

Men's Top 25 schedule

Thursday's games

No. 20 Maryland (20-6) vs. Southern Cal (14-11)

Friday's games

No. 12 Michigan (20-5) vs. No. 14 Michigan St. (20-5)
No. 16 Marquette (19-6) at Villanova (15-11)

Saturday's games

No. 1 Auburn (23-2) vs. Georgia (16-10)
No. 2 Florida (22-3) at LSU (13-12)
No. 3 Duke (22-3) vs. Illinois (17-9) at New York
No. 4 Alabama (21-4) vs. No. 17 Kentucky (17-8)
No. 5 Houston (21-4) vs. No. 8 Iowa St. (20-5)
No. 6 Tennessee (21-5) at No. 7 Texas A&M (20-5)
No. 9 Texas Tech (20-5) vs. West Virginia (15-10)
No. 11 Wisconsin (20-5) vs. Oregon (18-8)
No. 15 Missouri (19-6) at Arkansas (15-10)
No. 18 Clemson (21-5) at SMU (19-6)
No. 19 Arizona (17-8) vs. BYU (17-8)
No. 21 Mississippi St. (18-7) at Oklahoma (16-9)
No. 23 Kansas (17-8) vs. Oklahoma St. (12-13)
No. 24 Mississippi (19-7) at Vanderbilt (17-8)
No. 25 Louisville (20-6) vs. Florida St. (15-10)

Sunday's games

No. 10 St. John's (22-4) vs. UConn (17-8)
No. 13 Purdue (19-7) at Indiana (15-11)
No. 22 Memphis (21-5) vs. FAU (15-10)

Tuesday's women's scores

SOUTH

South Florida 70, Charlotte 52
UT Martin 73, Tennessee St. 52

MIDWEST

Kansas 63, UCF 58

SOUTHWEST

Rice 72, FAU 39

FAR WEST

Boise St. 78, Wyoming 73
Oklahoma St. 68, Utah 64

Women's Top 25 schedule

Thursday's games

No. 1 Notre Dame (22-2) at Miami (13-12)
No. 3 UCLA (24-1) vs. No. 25 Illinois (21-5)
No. 6 South Carolina (23-3) vs. Arkansas (9-18)
No. 7 LSU (25-2) vs. Georgia (10-16)
No. 8 Ohio St. (21-3) at Indiana (16-9)
No. 9 North Carolina (23-4) at Syracuse (10-15)
No. 11 Duke (20-5) vs. Louisville (18-7)
No. 13 NC State (20-5) at No. 20 Georgia Tech (21-5)
No. 14 Kentucky (20-4) at Missouri (13-14)
No. 15 Tennessee (19-6) vs. No. 18 Alabama (20-5)
No. 16 Oklahoma (19-6) vs. Vanderbilt (19-7)
No. 21 Maryland (19-6) at Northwestern (8-15)

Saturday's games

No. 5 UConn (24-3) at Butler (14-14)
No. 12 Kansas St. (24-3) vs. Kansas (14-11)
No. 19 Baylor (22-5) vs. Iowa St. (18-9)
No. 24 Oklahoma St. (20-5) vs. Colorado (17-8)

DEALS

Tuesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BOSTON RED SOX — Agreed to terms with RHP Adam Ottavino on a minor league contract.

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with OF Jake Marisnick on a minor league contract.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

CHARLOTTE HORNETS — Signed G Elfrid Payton to a 10-day contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Re-signed P Ryan Rehkow to a two-year contract extension.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Released RB Nyheim Miller-Hines.
DETROIT LIONS — Hired Kacy Rodgers as defensive line coach/run game coordinator, John Morton offensive coordinator, David Shaw pass coordinator, Bruce Gradkowski offensive assistant, Tyler Roehl tight ends coach and Tashard Choice as running backs coach.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed LB Tucker Addington to a reserve/futures contract.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed QB John Wolford and WR Louis Rees-Zammit to reserve/futures contracts.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Placed DB Keenan Isaac on waivers. Signed WR Kyle Philips to a contract.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Hired Joel Thomas as running backs coach and Scott Tolzien as quarterbacks coach.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Released C Nick Gates.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Released OL Preston Smith.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Released LB Demetrius Flannigan-Fowles.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Hired Rick Dennison as run game coordinator/senior offensive advisor and Justin Outten as run game specialist and assistant offensive line coach.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Recalled D Michael Callahan, C Matthew Poitras, G Riley Tufte and LW Michael Dipietro from Providence (AHL).
CAROLINA HURRICANES — Recalled D Riley Stillman from Chicago (AHL).
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Recalled D Ethan Del Mastro from Rockford (AHL).
DALLAS STARS — Recalled D Lian Bichsel from Texas (AHL).
DETROIT RED WINGS — Recalled C Marco Kasper from Grand Rapids (AHL).
MINNESOTA WILD — Recalled Fs Liam Ohgren and Devin Shore and G Dylan Ferguson from Iowa (AHL).
NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Acquired LW Grigori Denisenko from Vegas in exchange for future considerations.
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Placed G Jacob Markstrom and D Jonas Siegenthaler on injured reserve. Recalled RW Chase Stillman, G Seamus Casey and Ds Simon Nemec and Tyler Brennan from Utica (AHL).
NEW YORK RANGERS — Recalled G Dylan Garand from Hartford (AHL).
OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled LW Cole Reinhardt from Belleville (AHL).
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Recalled C Emil Bemstrom and G Joel Blomqvist from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL). Returned G Tristan Jarry to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Recalled RW Collin Graf and D Jack Thompson from San Jose (AHL).
TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Recalled LW Gabriel Fortier and C Gage Goncalves from Syracuse (AHL).
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Recalled C Alex Steeves from Toronto (AHL).
UTAH — Recalled G Jaxson Stauber and RW Josh Doan from Tucscon (AHL).
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Agreed to terms with F Drew O'Connor on a two-year contract. Recalled D Elias Pettersson, G Arturs Silovs, C Nils Aman and LW Arshdeep Bains from Abbotsford (AHL).
WINNIPEG JETS — Recalled G Kaapo Kahkonen from Manitoba (AHL).

Professional Women's Hockey League

PWHL — Fined Montreal Fs Marie-Philip Poulin $500 and Dara Greig $250 as a result of their actions in Saturday's game against New York.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

CHICAGO FIRE FC — Signed D Christopher Cupps to a four-year contract via homegrown that includes 2029 and 2030 club options.
HOUSTON DYNAMO — Acquired D Michael Halliday from Orlando City SC in exchange for a 2026 first-round draft pick.
NASHVILLE SC — Signed M Ahmed Qasem to a three-year contract.
ORLANDO CITY SC — Agreed mutually with M Nico Lodeiro to terminate his contract.
PHILADELPHIA UNION — Signed F Bruno Damiani to a four-year contract.
PORTLAND TIMBERS — Re-signed D Zac McGraw to a contract extension.
REAL SALT LAKE — Waived D Andrew Brody.

National Women's Soccer League

NORTH CAROLINA COURAGE — Waived M Bianca St. Georges by mutual agreement.

TENNIS

Dubai Duty Free Championships

Tuesday
At Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Purse: $3,664,963
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles
Round of 32

Paula Badosa (9), Spain, def. Elise Mertens, Belgium, 6-2, 6-1.
Elena Rybakina (6), Kazakhstan, def. Moyuka Uchijima, Japan, 6-3, 6-2.
Linda Noskova, Czechia, def. Diana Shnaider (11), Russia, 7-6 (8), 4-6, 6-3.
Jasmine Paolini (4), Italy, def. Eva Lys, Germany, 6-2, 7-5.
Jessica Pegula (5), United States, def. Liudmila Samsonova, Russia, 6-0, 6-4.
Iga Swiatek (2), Poland, def. Victoria Azarenka, Belarus, 6-0, 6-2.
Dayana Yastremska, Ukraine, def. Anastasia Potapova, Russia, 6-2, 6-3.
Sofia Kenin, United States, def. Marta Kostyuk, Ukraine, 5-7, 7-6 (7), 7-6 (5).
McCartney Kessler, United States, def. Coco Gauff (3), United States, 6-4, 7-5.
Aryna Sabalenka (1), Belarus, def. Veronika Kudermetova, Russia, 6-3, 6-4.
Karolina Muchova (14), Czechia, def. Emma Raducanu, Britain, 7-6 (6), 6-4.
Clara Tauson, Denmark, def. Elina Svitolina, Ukraine, 7-6 (5), 3-6, 7-6 (4).

Qatar ExxonMobil Open

Tuesday
At Doha, Qatar
Purse: $2,760,000
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 32

Luca Nardi, Italy, def. Zhang Zhizhen, China, 6-4, 6-3.
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Otto Virtanen, Finland, 7-6 (6), 6-3.
Alex de Minaur (2), Australia, def. Roman Safiullin, Russia, 6-1, 7-5.
Botic Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, def. Abdullah Shelbayh, Jordan, 7-5, 6-3.
Andrey Rublev (5), Russia, def. Alexander Bublik, Kazakhstan, 6-3, 6-4.
Zizou Bergs, Belgium, def. Roberto Bautista Agut, Spain, 6-4, 7-6 (4).
Tallon Griekspoor, Netherlands, def. Jan-Lennard Struff, Germany, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (7).
Daniil Medvedev (4), Russia, def. Karen Khachanov, Russia, 4-6, 7-5, 6-3.
Felix Auger-Aliassime, Canada, def. Quentin Halys, France, 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (2).
Matteo Berrettini, Italy, def. Novak Djokovic (3), Serbia, 7-6 (4), 6-2.
Hamad Medjedovic, Serbia, def. Stefanos Tsitsipas (6), Greece, 7-6 (6), 5-7, 7-6 (5).

NHL

Eastern Conference
Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	57	34	20	3	71	192	165
Toronto	55	33	20	2	68	169	156
Tampa Bay	55	31	20	4	66	197	153
Ottawa	56	29	23	4	62	158	156
Detroit	55	28	22	5	61	160	171
Boston	57	27	24	6	60	157	182
Montreal	56	25	26	5	55	163	194
Buffalo	54	22	27	5	49	171	185

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	55	36	11	8	80	196	140
Carolina	56	33	19	4	70	184	154
New Jersey	57	31	20	6	68	175	142
Columbus	56	26	22	8	60	184	186
N.Y. Rangers	55	27	24	4	58	165	168
N.Y. Islanders	55	25	23	7	57	152	162
Pittsburgh	57	23	25	9	55	164	201
Philadelphia	57	24	26	7	55	162	192

Western Conference
Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	56	39	14	3	81	202	134
Dallas	55	35	18	2	72	182	139
Minnesota	56	33	19	4	70	163	159
Colorado	57	33	22	2	68	186	174
Utah	56	24	23	9	57	158	170
St. Louis	56	25	26	5	55	154	171
Nashville	54	19	28	7	45	144	179
Chicago	55	17	31	7	41	149	191

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Edmonton	55	34	17	4	72	182	152
Vegas	56	33	17	6	72	185	155
Los Angeles	53	29	17	7	65	151	136
Vancouver	55	26	18	11	63	155	166
Calgary	55	26	21	8	60	148	165
Anaheim	54	24	24	6	54	137	165
Seattle	57	24	29	4	52	169	183
San Jose	57	15	35	7	37	148	216

Saturday's games

Minnesota at Detroit
Edmonton at Philadelphia
Washington at Pittsburgh
N.Y. Rangers at Buffalo
Colorado at Nashville
Dallas at New Jersey
Seattle at Florida
Anaheim at Boston
Carolina at Toronto
Chicago at Columbus
Montreal at Ottawa
Winnipeg at St. Louis
Utah at Los Angeles
Vancouver at Vegas

ASANKA BRENDON RATNAYAKE/AP

Emma Raducanu lost her second-round match Tuesday after a spectator, who previously "exhibited fixated behavior," was ejected.

Spectator incident during loss leaves Raducanu in tears

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2.

After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and courtside screening before Muchova moved over to console her.

Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match.

The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tiebreaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova.

Organizers of the women's tour issued a statement later saying Raducanu was approached in a public space Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behavior" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday ... and subsequently ejected."

"He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment."

The WTA said it was working with Raducanu and her team "to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary support."

A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022.

Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property.

Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the U.S. Open as a qualifier, one of the the most unlikely achievements in tennis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries.

The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5.

Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023.

Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot int the quarterfinals.

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eliminated Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-4, and defending champion Jasmine Paolini defeated Eva Lys 6-2, 7-5.

Elena Rybakina , Jessica Pegula and Paula Badosa also advanced.

HOCKEY/MLB/NFL

JOE PUETZ/AP

The Canucks' Quinn Hughes had missed some games with Vancouver but returned to practice this week. Now the U.S. is hoping to have him replace Charlie McAvoy for the 4 Nations final.

McAvoy ruled out for 4 Nations final

US hoping Canucks' Norris Trophy winner Hughes can replace Bruins defenseman for matchup with Canada

BY JIMMY GOLEN
Associated Press

BOSTON — The United States didn't have to sacrifice much when looking for a replacement for injured defenseman Charlie McAvoy in the 4 Nations Face-Off final: Reigning Norris Trophy winner Quinn Hughes was ready to step in.

American coach Mike Sullivan said Tuesday "Quinn Hughes is coming" when asked about reinforcements for the championship game against Canada. But Hughes was at the Canucks' practice in Vancouver on Tuesday afternoon, according to videos posted on social media.

Hughes, who has missed the Canucks' last four games and was a last-minute scratch from the United States' 4 Nations roster, was wearing a non-contact jersey. Vancouver plays the Golden Knights in Las Vegas on Saturday night, when the NHL returns after the tournament that brought the world's best players back to the international stage after they missed the past two Winter Olympics.

Hughes, 25, was a first-round draft choice who joined the Canucks after two years at Michigan, where he was a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award as a sophomore. He had career highs of 17 goals and 75 assists for Vancouver last season, when he was the runaway winner of the award for the NHL's top defenseman and finished seventh in voting for the Hart Trophy that goes to the league MVP.

According to the 4 Nations rules, the Americans can only add him to the roster if they drop below six "able-bodied" defensemen; that would mean one more

4 Nations Face-Off Final
USA vs. Canada
AFN-Sports
Friday 2 a.m. CET
Friday 10 a.m. JKT

U.S. defenseman would have to be ruled out. The rules allow them to apply for emergency relief on an "as-needed" basis, an application that would be considered by tournament chairs Bill Daly and Rob Zepp.

"Right now, we're just taking each day as it comes," Sullivan said. "We'll see what potential options might be available for us for the championship game and then we'll make decisions accordingly from there."

A 27-year-old Boston University product and top Bruins defenseman who has twice finished in the top five of the Norris Trophy voting, McAvoy had been a key contributor to the American team whose big hits on Canadian stars Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby were credited with setting a tone in the round-robin matchup between the North American rivals. Thursday's championship will be at the TD Garden, the Bruins' home ice.

The Bruins announced on Tuesday that McAvoy was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital on Monday night with an unspecified upper-body injury.

"He's obviously disappointed that he won't have the ability to participate in the championship game. This tournament means a lot to him," said Sullivan, who is also McAvoy's father-in-law. "I'm disappointed for him because first and foremost, he's a great kid and he's a terrific hockey player, and I know this meant a lot to him."

Veteran SS Adames excited to start training with Giants

BY JAY COHEN
Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Willy Adames started spring training a while ago. He has been working out in Arizona for about a month, looking to ease his transition to life with the San Francisco Giants.

Even with all that extra time, he felt like Monday's first full-squad workout for the team was an exciting day.

"It gets to the point when you're practicing every day, it's like, 'I just want spring training to start,' you know, and then today was the first day," Adames said. "And I mean, I can't complain. It's been great."

The addition of Adames was the centerpiece of San Francisco's offseason after the team went 80-82 last year. The veteran shortstop signed a $182 million, seven-year contract with the Giants in free agency, leaving Milwaukee after three-plus seasons.

In making that tricky move to a new organization — made all the more difficult by the pressure that goes along with a big contract — Adames is leaning on previous experience.

"After getting traded twice, I think it makes it easier to try to get along with everybody and just try to get comfortable," said Adames, who homered during live batting practice on Monday. "And that's why I've been hanging out for the last month here, because I wanted to get that going early and created that bonding with the guys before spring training started."

Adames, 29, was a minor league prospect in Detroit's organization when he was traded to Tampa Bay in July 2014 as part of a three-team deal. He made his big league debut in 2018 and played for the Rays for more than three seasons before he was traded to Milwaukee in May 2021.

Adames flourished with the Brewers, becoming one of baseball's best all-around shortstops. He set career highs with 32 homers, 112 RBIs, 93 runs scored, 153 hits and 21 steals in 161 games last year.

"He's a unique guy, and (it's) why we targeted him and why we wanted him because we felt like he can come in and make an impact right away," San Francisco manager Bob Melvin said. "I don't think there's any of the transition problems with him."

While Adames was productive at the plate last season, he also committed a career-high 20 errors. He had six errors in a nine-game stretch in August.

CAROLYN KASTER/AP

San Francisco Giants shortstop Willy Adames, right, and third base Matt Chapman high-five on Monday during spring training at the team's training facility in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Adames, who committed 14 errors in each of the previous two years, said he lost confidence for a while before finding his form toward the end of the season.

"I mean I have my confidence back and just going to go out there and be the same guy," he said.

He could be helped in San Francisco by playing with third baseman Matt Chapman, a five-time Gold Glove winner. Chapman also has a long-term deal with the Giants, agreeing to a $151 million, six-year contract in September.

"That's something that I'm looking forward to, you know, playing along his side. ... You know he's going to catch everything," Adames said. "He already told me, like, you're not going to have to worry about the backhand. So I'm like, man, I just have to work on my glove side."

Chargers to open season in Brazil

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Chargers will play their 2025 season opener in Brazil, making the franchise the first to play on five continents, the NFL announced Wednesday.

The Chargers' opponent is expected to be announced in May, when the NFL's regular-season schedule is released.

The Chargers will be the home team for the Friday, Sept. 5 game at Neo Quimica Arena in São Paulo. The venue hosted a Week 1 matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and Green Bay Packers last season in the first NFL game in South America.

Led by quarterback Justin Herbert, the Chargers finished 11-6 in 2024 in their first season under coach Jim Harbaugh before losing 32-12 to Houston in the wild-card round of the playoffs.

"It's an honor to once again represent the NFL on an international stage," said A.G. Spanos, the Chargers' president of business operations. "It's also a tremendous opportunity to help grow the game and bring the Chargers brand to millions of sports fans across Brazil and Latin America."

Since 1976, the Chargers have played regular-season or preseason games in Mexico City, London, Tokyo, Berlin and Sydney.

The Chargers are scheduled to host AFC West rivals Denver, Kansas City and Las Vegas along with Houston, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh and Minnesota.

Since the Super Bowl champions usually get to open the following season at home, the league is unlikely to schedule the Eagles for back-to-back trips to South America, while the Colts and Steelers are already scheduled to be the designated hosts of their own international games.

The NFL has announced that seven regular-season games will be played internationally during the 2025 season.

Three will be played in London. The Cleveland Browns and New York Jets are the designated home teams for the games at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium while the Jacksonville Jaguars will make their yearly appearance at Wembley Stadium.

The Pittsburgh Steelers will host the league's first regular-season game in Dublin, Ireland, and the Miami Dolphins are the home team for the game in Madrid, Spain. Berlin will host the Germany game for the first time with the Indianapolis Colts as the home team.

The NFL can schedule up to eight international matchups, beginning with this upcoming season.

MLB

SETH WENIG/AP

Teammates celebrate with DJ LeMahieu, center, after he hit a walk-off RBI single during the 10th inning against the Toronto Blue Jays at Yankee Stadium on Aug. 4 in New York.

Yankees' LeMahieu looking to regain form after injuries

BY RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — DJ LeMahieu reacted to his poor play the way many New York Yankees fans did.

"Definitely lost a lot of sleep," he said Tuesday.

A three-time All-Star infielder, LeMahieu hasn't had a fully healthy season since 2020. With his 37th birthday approaching in July, he hopes to again be the dominant hitter he once was.

"For a majority of my career, I would pretty much play unless my leg was cut off," he said. "I'd just kind of strap it on every day and played. It's just the last few years, just bumps, bruises, this, that. I had the foot fracture. Stuff that I could kind of play through in the past. It just kind of it escalates and it gets — it compounds."

Yankees manager Aaron Boone is shifting Jazz Chisholm Jr. to second following the departure of Gleyber Torres to Detroit as a free agent. LeMahieu will get a chance for playing time at third.

"The hit tool is one of those things that ages usually pretty well," Boone said.

"With health, I do believe there's reason to believe that there's a role to be played there. It it an everyday role? Is it some kind of platoon role? His body will kind of dictate that."

LeMahieu left Colorado as a free agent to sign a $24 million, two-year contract with New York in January 2019 and hit a career-high .364 with a 1.011 OPS in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season to win his second batting title. He again became a free agent and the Yankees retained him with a $90 million, six-year contract.

He dropped to a .268 average the following year and missed the postseason because of a sports hernia that required core muscle repair surgery on Oct. 12.

LeMahieu rebounded to hit .272 in the first half of 2022, but had a cortisone injection to his right big toe at the All-Star break and slumped to .228 in the second half. The turning point was during a weekend series at Fenway Park on Aug. 12 and 13, 2022.

"I remember we're in Boston watching his at-bats just change overnight," Boone said. "It just really zapped him."

Since then, LeMahieu is hitting .226 with 17 homers, 73 RBIs in 224 games with a .637 OPS.

"It's tough to be a guy that the team can't rely on at times," he said.

LeMahieu missed the 2022 playoffs because of the injury, eventually diagnosed as a broken sesamoid bone in his right big toe that led to ligament damage in his second toe.

> **"I know if I can just be myself and continue to work to be that, that'll be fine"**
>
> **DJ LeMaheiu**
> New York Yankees infielder

LeMahieu hit .220 in the first half of 2023 and rose to .273 in the second. Then he broke his right foot when he fouled off a pitch during a spring training game last March 16, delaying his season debut until May 28.

In a season cut short Sept. 3 by right hip impingement, LeMahieu batted a career-low .204 with two homers and 26 RBIs in 228 plate appearances. He understands there are people who doubt he can bounce back.

"That's fine," he said. "Plenty of times in my career people haven't always been the most confident in me. I'll obviously use that as motivation but at the same time I've got enough to worry about. I know if I can just be myself and continue to work to be that, that'll be fine."

He took a two-month break from hitting until he reported to the Yankees' minor league complex in mid-January, trying to give his body time to heal.

"I felt good," he said, "But it's easy to feel good in January."

Surge: Skenes already more poised in sophomore season

FROM PAGE 24

tice Saturday. The first pitch the left-handed hitting Frazier saw was a splinker that darted down and away while catching the outside corner of the strike zone.

Frazier's bat never moved as the ball whizzed by, a pitch "nobody is going to do anything with," as the former All-Star put it.

"If you hit it, you're hitting it straight in the ground," Frazier added. "So it's like, 'All right, strap it on and get ready.'"

Frazier, second baseman Nick Gonzales and first baseman Darick Hall all failed to make solid contact off Skenes during a 25-pitch session in which a few dozen fans surrounded one of the practice fields at Pirates City, many of them with their phones raised to capture the first glimpse of Skenes in 2025.

Skenes called the attention he commands "a privilege." It's also, however, not a priority. The admitted perfectionist is too consumed with his craft to cultivate his celebrity. And for as dominant as he was at times last summer, Skenes knows he's hardly a finished product after 23 major league starts.

Yes, his numbers as a rookie — an 11-3 record with a 1.96 ERA and 170 strikeouts in 133 innings — were dazzling. They were also just the beginning.

Eyeing efficiency

While Skenes stressed he is not looking to get away from his identity as a strikeout pitcher, he is trying to find a way to get to strike three a little more quickly.

"Getting ahead, winning the 0-0, 0-1, 1-1 (pitches), winning those counts, that stuff is important," he said.

That's where adding a couple of more options to a repertoire that already includes six different pitches comes in.

"Anything that looks like a fastball and doesn't end up being a fastball (helps)," pitching coach Oscar Marin said. "I think we all know how special his fastballs are. (More options are) just something that is going to really open up the zone for him as well."

There is a sense of ease around Skenes that he didn't necessarily have when he arrived at spring training a year ago as a rookie just trying to make the team.

He didn't initially, not because he wasn't good enough, but because it was part of the team's plan to methodically build him up rather than rush him to the majors.

While Skenes admits that was "frustrating," he understands it was the right call.

"They did a really good job with me last year," he said. "I kind of knew, as much as I didn't want to believe it, that that was how it was going to be when I came into camp."

Not this time. Skenes is a lock to be on the roster when Pittsburgh breaks camp. The questions now are whether he'll be the opening day starter — something Skenes thinks would be "really cool" — and if the Pirates are ready to take a step forward into contention despite a relatively quiet offseason.

Different vibe

Skenes knows his performance at the top of the rotation is a vital part of that equation. He also knows it's hardly only up to him. It's one of the many reasons he plans to take on a more visible leadership role in 2025.

There were small signs under a near-cloudless mid-February sky. Wearing long sleeves underneath his black No. 30 jersey, his gray pants pulled up to the knees to expose Pittsburgh-centric socks, Skenes dapped up support staff, chatted with video coordinator Kevin Roach and made it a point to wait for veteran pitcher Mitch Keller to finish before the two slowly walked off the practice fields together.

The jitters he felt in 2024 are a rapidly fading memory. He has a little more experience to go with his ever-present swagger and the kind of stuff that few can match.

Skenes wasn't sure how fast he was throwing Saturday, though he smiled while noting that it was probably faster than 94 mph because if it wasn't "some other people would have been concerned if it were."

GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

The Pirates' Paul Skenes, left, watches a game in Pittsburgh from the dugout with fellow pitchers Jared Jones, center, and Mitch Keller.

NBA/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Knicks hit ground running after break

BY PETER SBLENDORIO
New York Daily News

NEW YORK — The Knicks won't exactly be able to ease back into action after the NBA All-Star break.

Three of New York's next five games are against the NBA's elite, including the only two teams in the Eastern Conference with a better record than theirs.

The Knicks (36-18) are set to resume play Thursday with a soft spot on their schedule as the Chicago Bulls visit Madison Square Garden.

At 22-33, the 10th-seeded Bulls are clinging to the East's final spot in the play-in tournament, but they traded away their leading scorer, Zach LaVine, this month and entered the break on a four-game losing streak.

After that, it gets much more difficult.

New York is scheduled to visit the Eastern Conference-best Cleveland Cavaliers (44-10) on Friday, followed by a trip to Boston to face the second-seeded Celtics (39-16) on Sunday.

The Knicks' lone meeting with the Cavaliers came back in October, when Cleveland eked out a 110-104 victory at the Garden.

That was only the third game of the season, and new-look New York was still finding its chemistry after swinging offseason trades for Mikal Bridges and Karl-Anthony Towns.

But the Cavs are a different team now, too.

In one of the biggest deals before this month's trade deadline, Cleveland acquired sharp-shooting forward De'Andre Hunter from the Atlanta Hawks, bolstering what was already one of the NBA's best offenses.

Hunter, who is averaging 18.8 points per game, joined a group led by Donovan Mitchell (23.9 points per game), Darius Garland (21.6) and Evan Mobley (18.5).

MELISSA TAMEZ/AP

Knicks forward OG Anunoby, left, missed New York's last five games before the All-Star break with a foot injury, but is set to return soon with the break now over and the Knicks needing the extra depth.

Boston, meanwhile, pummeled the Knicks in both of this season's previous matchups.

Those included a 132-109 win on opening day in which the Celtics tied an NBA record with 29 made 3-pointers; and this month's similarly decisive 131-104 victory at TD Garden.

New York forward OG Anunoby (right foot strain) missed the latter of those meetings, but so did Boston starters Jrue Holiday and Kristaps Porzingis.

The Knicks wrap up this month with a Feb. 28 trip to Memphis to face a Grizzlies team boasting the NBA's highest-scoring offense at 123.3 points per game.

Buoyed by a career-best season from Jaren Jackson Jr. and the resurgence of Ja Morant, Memphis is 36-18, tying it with New York for the NBA's fourth-best record.

That trip kicks off an 11-game stretch in which the Knicks will play on the road nine times. That includes games against the Lakers (32-20) and Clippers (31-23) in Los Angeles during the first week of March.

Overall, New York has the eighth-hardest remaining schedule in terms of opponent win percentage, according to Tankathon.

The returns of Anunoby, who has missed the last five games, and rim-protecting center Mitchell Robinson, who is nearing his long-awaited debut after May's left ankle surgery, should give the Knicks their deepest and most-balanced team of the season.

"It's a tremendous group," head coach Tom Thibodeau said going into the break. "I tell them all the time I'm fortunate to be coaching them. You enjoy the effort they put forth. They're together. They're committed. They're all sacrificing something for the team."

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	39	16	.709	—
New York	36	18	.667	2½
Philadelphia	20	34	.370	18½
Brooklyn	20	34	.370	18½
Toronto	17	38	.309	22

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	27	29	.482	—
Atlanta	26	29	.473	½
Miami	25	28	.472	½
Charlotte	13	39	.250	12
Washington	9	45	.167	17

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	44	10	.815	—
Indiana	30	23	.566	13½
Milwaukee	29	24	.547	14½
Detroit	29	26	.527	15½
Chicago	22	33	.400	22½

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	36	18	.667	—
Houston	34	21	.618	2½
Dallas	30	26	.536	7
San Antonio	23	29	.442	12
New Orleans	13	42	.236	23½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	44	10	.815	—
Denver	36	19	.655	8½
Minnesota	31	25	.554	14
Portland	23	32	.418	21½
Utah	13	41	.241	31

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	32	20	.615	—
L.A. Clippers	31	23	.574	2
Sacramento	28	27	.509	5½
Golden State	28	27	.509	5½
Phoenix	26	28	.481	7

Wednesday's games

Charlotte at L.A. Lakers

Thursday's games

Boston at Philadelphia
Memphis at Indiana
Chicago at New York
Cleveland at Brooklyn
Orlando at Atlanta
L.A. Clippers at Milwaukee
Charlotte at Denver
Phoenix at San Antonio
L.A. Lakers at Portland

Illinois plays through rough stretch as virus hinders team

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Illinois wasn't showing any hard feelings toward its opponent when it declined to participate in a postgame handshake.

As several players deal with a virus, the Fighting Illini just wanted to make sure they didn't spread germs while congratulating Wisconsin after losing 95-74 to the 11th-ranked Badgers on Tuesday night.

"They don't need this," Illinois coach Brad Underwood said after the game. "In 38 years (as a head coach and assistant), I've never seen anything like what's gone through our team."

The Illini (17-10, 9-8) remain in good position to earn a fifth consecutive NCAA Tournament bid. Illinois entered Tuesday as a projected No. 6 seed, according to Bracket Matrix.

"We're going to survive," Underwood said. "We're going to be fine. We're a really good basketball team. We've proved that."

But the Illini are dealing with all sorts of setbacks on and off the court as they face the most demanding part of their schedule.

Freshman forward Morez Johnson Jr. broke his wrist while blocking a shot on Saturday, but most of Illinois' roster issues are due to illness rather than injury.

Tomislav Ivisic, the Illini's leading rebounder and second-leading scorer, came off the bench for the first time all season Tuesday as he tried to play while sick. Underwood said Ivisic didn't travel with the team, instead driving to Wisconsin on his own.

Ivisic finished with seven points and three rebounds in 21 minutes. He already dealt with mononucleosis and an ankle injury earlier this year.

Underwood said reserve forward Jake Davis wanted to play but got sick after pregame warmups.

"We don't know who we have from day to day," Underwood said. "I didn't know who I was starting today."

Illinois' leading scorer Tuesday was Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn, who was sick earlier this month. After going scoreless and playing a total of 14 minutes in the three games leading up to this one, Gibbs-Lawhorn had 17 points and five assists against Wisconsin.

"Right now we're going through a stretch that's difficult," said forward Ben Humrichous, who scored 13 points Tuesday. "But we're a good basketball team, and we know it."

The stretch isn't getting any easier. The Illini are taking a break from Big Ten competition and heading to New York to face No. 3 Duke at Madison Square Garden on Saturday.

"It's David playing Goliath in the next one," Underwood said. "We're going to show up and we're going to fight."

KAYLA WOLF/AP

Illinois head coach Brad Underwood, left, criticizes a foul call during the first half of against Wisconsin on Tuesday in Madison, Wis.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

PHOTOS BY ROB GRAY/AP

Kansas head coach Bill Self reacts to a play against BYU during the first half Tuesday night in Provo, Utah. The Jayhawks lost 91-57, matching their largest margin of defeat in Self's tenure.

No. 23 Kansas reaches low point in loss to BYU

BY JOHN COON
Associated Press

PROVO, Utah — Kansas has reached a low point with its uncharacteristic struggles in Big 12 play.

The No. 23 Jayhawks lost 91-57 to BYU on Tuesday night, matching their largest margin of defeat in Bill Self's tenure, after previously losing 85-51 to USC in the second round of the 2021 NCAA Tournament. It also marked the first time Kansas — the preseason No. 1 in the AP Top 25 — lost by 30-plus points against an unranked team since the poll began in 1948.

The Jayhawks have not led through their last 80 minutes of basketball after also falling to Utah 74-67 on Saturday. They have lost four of six games since the start of February.

"Obviously we're going to catch a lot of flak, whether it's fans or national media, and rightfully so because we just lost by damn near 40," said senior center Hunter Dickinson, who finished with 12 points and 14 rebounds. "Nobody is going to feel bad for us now that NIL is the thing, and players are getting paid and everything like that. Nobody is going to feel bad for you. They're going to expect you to perform like a paid player."

Richie Saunders led BYU with 22 points.

Trevin Knell added 15 points and Mawot Mag had 13 as the Cougars (18-8, 9-6 Big 12) won their third straight. Saunders, Knell and Mag combined to make 11 of te Cougars' 14 3-pointers.

Kansas guard Dajuan Harris Jr. (3) reaches for the ball while guarding BYU forward Richie Saunders, who led BYU with 22 points.

Kansas never came close to threatening BYU, which shot 52% from the field.

"We were one foot in and one foot out in how we guarded and a lot of other things right from the jump," Self said. "It was crystal clear how we wanted to try to guard them and right from the jump we doubted and ended up hurting ourselves."

BYU finished with 24 assists and 14 steals. It marked the first game against a ranked opponent over the past 25 seasons where the Cougars totaled more than 20 assists and 10 steals.

"I think BYU could have beat anyone tonight," Self said. "They were great and then we didn't do anything to make them play less than great."

The Cougars looked impressive on both ends of the court en route to moving into fifth place in the Big 12 standings.

They had 15 assists on 15 baskets in the first half and forced eight turnovers on their way to a 20-point halftime lead. BYU led by 38 in the second half.

It was a statement win for the Cougars as much as a statement loss for the Jayhawks. BYU started 2-4 in Big 12 play but has won seven of nine since.

"We've been waiting for a win against a really storied program and a team that's good," BYU coach Kevin Young said. "Tonight was impressive by how our guys carried out the game plan on both ends of the floor."

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 2 Florida dominates in big win over Oklahoma

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Walter Clayton Jr. scored 18 points, Will Richard added 14 and No. 2 Florida steamrolled Oklahoma 85-63 on Tuesday night for its fifth consecutive victory.

Alijah Martin chipped in 14 points off the bench for the Gators (23-3, 10-3 Southeastern Conference), who tied a season-low with six turnovers and improved to 13-1 at home.

Clayton, Richard and Martin — Florida's top three scorers — combined to make 15 of 31 shots, including nine 3-pointers. They scored 25 of the team's first 37 points as the Gators opened a double-digit lead and never looked back.

No. 5 Houston 80, Arizona State 65: L.J. Cryer scored 18 points, Emanuel Sharp added 17 and the visiting Cougars dominated the Sun Devils.

Houston (22-4, 14-1 Big 12) moved up a spot in the latest AP Top 25 after grinding out a 62-58 victory over No. 19 Arizona on Saturday.

The Cougars had a much easier time on the second leg of their desert trip, building a 16-point halftime lead and stretching it to 23. Houston has won 18 of 19 and has the nation's longest active road winning streak at 12.

Alston Mason had 26 points and B.J. Freeman added 17 to lead Arizona State (12-14, 3-12), which has lost six straight.

No. 21 Mississippi State 70, No. 7 Texas A&M 54: Josh Hubbard scored 25 points, reserve Claudell Harris Jr. added 12 of his 15 in the second half, and the Bulldogs beat the visiting Aggies.

Mississippi State (19-7, 7-6 Southeastern Conference) began the second half with a 14-3 run to grab control en route to its first win this season over a top-10 opponent.

Zhuric Phelps scored 13 points for Texas A&M (20-6, 9-4). Wade Taylor IV and C.J. Wilcher each had 11, but Wilcher was scoreless after halftime.

The Bulldogs trailed 31-30 at the break. Hubbard opened the second-half scoring with a 3-pointer and Mississippi State never trailed again.

No. 8 Iowa State 79, Colorado 65: Milan Momcilovic and Dishon Jackson scored 13 points each as the host Cyclones beat the Buffaloes for the third time this season.

Iowa State (21-5, 11-4 Big 12) beat Colorado 99-71 at the Maui Invitational in November and 79-69 in Boulder in December.

Joshua Jefferson and Tamin Lipsey added 12 points each, and Nate Heise scored a season-high 11 points off the bench.

Bangot Dak scored a career-high 20 points to lead the Buffaloes (10-16, 1-14) and Harrison Carrington added 11.

TCU 69, No. 9 Texas Tech 66: Noah Reynolds scored 16 points, including the last seven for the Horned Frogs in a victory over the visiting Red Raiders.

Reynolds' turnaround jumper with 11.6 seconds left was the first field goal in more than four minutes for TCU (15-11, 8-7 Big 12), and it put the Horned Frogs ahead 68-63 before Chance McMillian hit a long 3 for Texas Tech.

After Reynolds made the second of his two free throws with four seconds left, the Red Raiders (20-6, 11-4) had a chance to tie it. But JT Toppin, the reigning Associated Press player of the week, had his 3-pointer blocked by David Punch and rebounded by Reynolds.

No. 11 Wisconsin 95, Illinois 74: John Tonje scored 31 points as the Badgers beat the visiting Illini to earn their fifth straight victory and end their recent run of futility in the series.

Wisconsin (21-5, 11-4 Big Ten) had lost its last nine matchups with the Illini, including an 86-80 defeat Dec. 10 at Illinois. Wisconsin had won 15 straight meetings immediately before that stretch.

Tonje's big performance came three nights after he had 32 points in a 94-84 win at No. 13 Purdue, which was ranked seventh at the time. He's the fourth player in school history to score at least 30 points in consecutive games.

Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn had 17 points, Ben Humrichous 13 and Will Riley 11 for Illinois (17-10, 9-8).

No. 14 Michigan State 75, No. 13 Purdue 66: Jase Richardson had 12 points and Frankie Fidler scored 11, leading the Spartans past the visiting Boilermakers.

Michigan State (21-5, 12-3 Big Ten) has won three of four to pull within a half-game of conference-leading and 12th-ranked Michigan, heading into the rivals' matchup on Friday night at Crisler Center.

Trey Kaufmann-Renn scored 24 and Braden Smith added 17 for the defending Big Ten champion Boilermakers (19-8, 11-5), who have lost three straight for the first time in five years.

No. 16 Marquette 80, Seton Hall 56: Kam Jones scored 14 points, Chase Ross added 11 points and the host Golden Eagles cruised to a win over the Pirates.

Ben Gold had 10 points for Marquette (20-6, 11-4 Big East).

Seton Hall (7-19, 2-13) was led by Isaiah Coleman with 13 points and Scotty Middleton with nine.

SPORTS

No time to rest

Knicks facing plenty of compeitive teams right away after break ›› NBA, Page 22

MLB

Year 2 surge

Pirates ace Skenes looks for more tools after electric debut

By Will Graves
Associated Press

BRADENTON, Fla. — Paul Skenes spent his rookie season dutifully following the Pittsburgh Pirates' plan to bring their young ace along as slowly and safely as possible.

It worked. Maybe better than all involved imagined during an electrifying 2024 in which the towering right-hander started the All-Star Game and captured the National League Rookie of the Year award while becoming perhaps the game's hottest young star in a decade.

It was an incredible ride to be sure. Yet when Skenes arrived this week for his second spring training, he did it with the kind of freedom he lacked a year ago.

Oh, and a couple of new pitches, too.

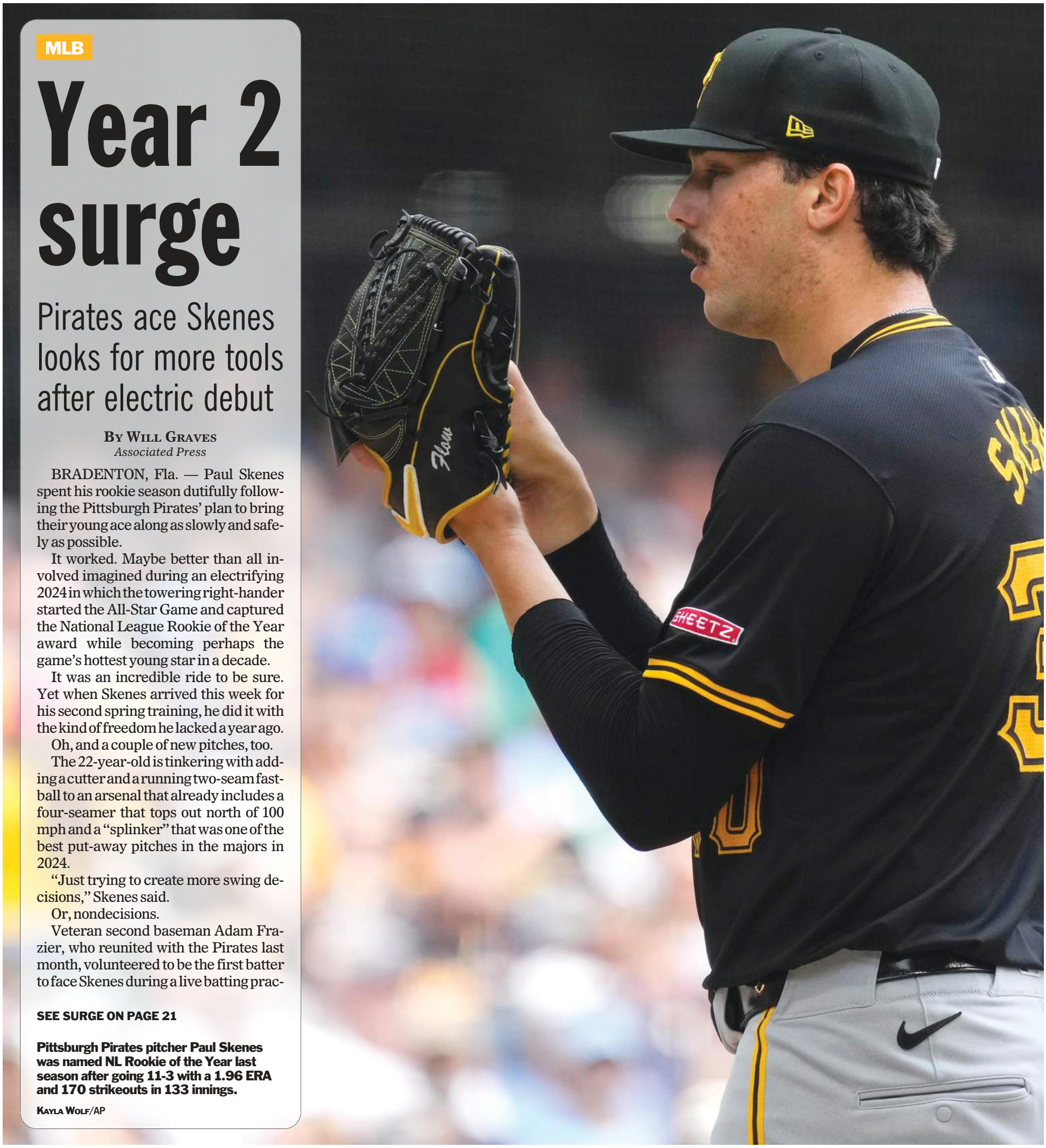
The 22-year-old is tinkering with adding a cutter and a running two-seam fastball to an arsenal that already includes a four-seamer that tops out north of 100 mph and a "splinker" that was one of the best put-away pitches in the majors in 2024.

"Just trying to create more swing decisions," Skenes said.

Or, nondecisions.

Veteran second baseman Adam Frazier, who reunited with the Pirates last month, volunteered to be the first batter to face Skenes during a live batting prac-

SEE SURGE ON PAGE 21



Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Paul Skenes was named NL Rookie of the Year last season after going 11-3 with a 1.96 ERA and 170 strikeouts in 133 innings.

Kayla Wolf/AP

McAvoy hurt, out for US in 4 Nations final

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