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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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Volume 83 Edition 92 ©SS 2024

FRIDAY, AUGUST 23, 2024

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 ¥100

\$1.00



MATT ROURKE/AP

Democratic vice presidential nominee Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz reacts during the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday in Chicago.

## Walz 'brings the joy' at DNC

Vice presidential candidate focuses on personal biography in speech

BY WILL WEISSERT  
AND JONATHAN J. COOPER  
*Associated Press*

CHICAGO — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz accepted his party's nomination for vice president Wednesday night, using his Democratic National Convention address to thank the packed arena for "bringing the joy" to an election transformed by the elevation of his running mate, Vice President Kamala Harris.

"We're all here tonight for one beautiful, simple reason: We love this country," Walz said as thousands of delegates hoisted vertical placards reading "Coach Walz" in red, white and blue.

### NATION

Trump continues criticism  
of Walz's military record  
with letter by veterans  
**Page 8**

Many Americans had never heard of Walz until Harris made him her running mate, and the speech was an opportunity to introduce himself. He leaned into his experiences as a football coach, his time in the National Guard and his recounting of his family's fertility struggles — all parts of his biography that Republicans have questioned in the days since Harris picked him.

While it's unclear if the speech will attract new voters, he further charmed Democratic supporters with his background and helped to balance Harris' coastal roots as a cultural representative of Midwestern states whose voters she needs this fall.

The Harris campaign said Walz had worked on his speech for multiple days and he used a teleprompter for the first time, practicing to ensure he was prepared. He told the crowd, "I

SEE WALZ ON PAGE 8

## VA treatment delayed for Iraq veterans sick from exposure

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

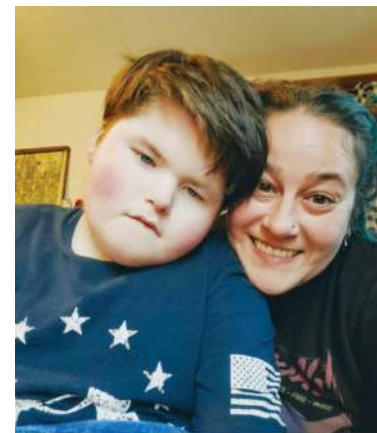
WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has identified 400 former service members who experienced "possible or probable" exposures to chemical weapons during the Iraq War with the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct clinical evaluations and offer consultations and treatment, according to VA officials.

Called VET-HOME, the newly formed VA veterans exposure team for "health outcomes [from] military exposure" is expected to facilitate contact tracing, clinical exams for chemical weapons exposure and medical care for impacted veterans.

But the VA is coming under criticism from some lawmakers and impacted veterans about lengthy delays in fully implementing the clinical program to monitor the health status of the 400 veterans and develop treatment plans for them.

Istvan Gabor, a sergeant who served with the Army's 41st

SEE EXPOSURE ON PAGE 4



Kendra Peachey-Lubin

**Hunter Peachey-Lubin, the son of Army veteran Kendra Peachey-Lubin, was diagnosed with a genetic disorder at birth.**

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.791	\$4.315	\$4.661	\$4.097	Azores	..	..	\$4.511	..
Change in price	-3.2 cents	-2.0 cents	-2.2 cents	-1.6 cents	Change in price	..	..	-2.2 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.696	\$4.975	\$4.802	Turkey	..	..	\$4.327	\$4.611*
Change in price	..	-4.6 cents	-4.2 cents	-4.4 cents	Change in price	..	..	-2.2 cents	No change
U.K.	..	\$4.315	\$4.611	\$4.097	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 23. The change in price is from Aug. 16.				
Change in price	..	-2.0 cents	-2.2 cents	-1.6 cents					

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$4.299	..	\$3.739	South Korea	\$3.469	..	\$4.339	\$3.769
Change in price	..	-3.0 cents	..	-2.0 cents	Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	-2.0 cents	-2.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.429	..	..	\$3.739	Guam	\$3.489**	\$4.019	\$4.359	..
Change in price	-4.0 cents	..	..	-2.0 cents	Change in price	-4.0 cents	-2.0 cents	-3.0 cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade									
Pacific price for the week of Aug. 23-29									

# EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates			
Euro costs (Aug. 23)	\$1.09	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8524
British pound (Aug. 23)	\$1.28	Thailand (Baht)	34.49
Japanese yen (Aug. 23)	141.00	Turkey (NewLira)	33.9104
South Korean won (Aug. 23)	1302.00		
Commercial rates		<p>(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)</p>	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3767		
Britain (Pound)	1.3105		
Canada (Dollar)	1.3601		
China (Yuan)	7.1413		
Denmark (Krone)	6.7117		
Egypt (Pound)	48.8103		
Euro	0.8996		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7969		
Hungary (Forint)	354.36		
Israel (Shekel)	3.7181		
Japan (Yen)	146.30		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3057		
Norway (Krone)	10.5891		
Philippines (Peso)	56.47		
Poland (Zloty)	3.85		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7522		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3094		
South Korea (Won)	1341.38		

## INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.16
30-year bond	4.08

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STARS AND STRIPES

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PACIFIC

# Japan restarts deliveries for airfield on Okinawa

## Quarried material once again being shipped after accident caused pause

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAGO CITY, Okinawa — Quarried material for a new U.S. military airfield is once again being shipped to a northern port after a nearly two-month pause spurred by a fatal truck accident.

Trucks began hauling loads of material to Awa port again on Thursday, a spokesman for Okinawa prefecture’s Seashore Disaster Prevention Division said by phone that day. The Okinawa Defense Bureau — an arm of Japan’s Defense Ministry — notified the division on Wednesday that shipments would resume.

The material, used to reclaim a portion of Oura Bay for the Marine Corps airfield under construction at Camp Schwab, is quarried on Okinawa, trucked to the port and moved by ships to the airfield site.

Work at Awa and Motobu ports stopped in July after a security guard was killed and a protester injured in a June 28 accident at Awa port.

A date to restart work in Motobu has not been decided, the spokesman said.

Security guard Yoshikazu Usami, 47, and an unidentified 72-year-old woman “for some reason” stepped into the path of a truck turning left from the port,

according to Okinawa Prefectural Police that day. Usami suffered severe head injuries and was declared dead at a hospital, a police spokesman said.

In a July 9 letter, the division asked the defense bureau to explain measures that will be taken to prevent another accident before restarting operations, the division spokesman said. “But we haven’t heard anything from the bureau yet,” he said.

Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

“We could visually confirm that the bureau installed a lamp with a siren at the entrance of the pier, and that the security guards will shut the sidewalks with net fences when trucks will be going in and out,” the spokesman said.

About 25 security guards and five protesters were at the exit to the port Thursday afternoon, with another 40 guards and five more protesters at the entrance. Prefectural police and the guards blocked the road at 1 p.m., and would not let protesters through until “all the trucks are in,” a police official said.

“Look at the amount of security guards,” said protester Hideko Yamada of Uruma city. “It’s ridiculous. The government took two



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

**More than 40 security guards and police officials block protesters at the entrance to Awa port in Nago city, Okinawa, on Thursday.**

months just to think of this as a security measure?”

Earlier this month the defense bureau asked the prefectural government to install guard rails at Awa port and “clarify that it is prohibited to enter the facilities” at Motobu port. Protesters opposed to the U.S. military presence on the island are a regular presence outside both ports.

“We cannot think or consider

what we can do as a prefecture” until the defense bureau explains what safety measures it will take at the port, Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said at a press conference Wednesday, the division spokesman said.

Workers on Tuesday began driving piles into the soft seabed at Oura Bay to begin the land reclamation process, according to the seashore division spokesman. The

ministry drove test piles into the bay in July.

The division asked again that construction be delayed until design discussions with the defense bureau concluded.

“As the prefecture, we are planning to send a request to the bureau to continue discussions and stop constructions while these discussions are ongoing,” the spokesman said.

# US consul general talks troops’ sex crime allegations with governor

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The new U.S. consul general on Okinawa, meeting with the prefecture’s governor this week, said he takes “very seriously” the indictments this year of U.S. service members for alleged sexual assaults, according to a prefectural spokesman.

U.S. Consul General Andrew Ou met Wednesday with Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki, said Nicole Lima Nucelli, spokeswoman for the U.S. Consulate General on Okinawa, by phone Thursday.

“I appreciated the positive and forward-looking nature of the conversation with Governor Tamaki and was heartened to hear him reiterate the importance of the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” Ou said by email Thursday. “In addition to continued cooperation between the United States and Okinawa on economic, social, and cultural issues, we discussed exploring new areas of collaboration such as humanitarian assistance/disaster relief.”



Okinawa prefecture

**U.S. Consul General Andrew Ou, second from left, meets with Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki, right, at the prefectural office in Naha, Okinawa, on Wednesday.**

The two met at 10 a.m. at the prefectural office, a spokesman from Okinawa’s Peace and Subnational Diplomacy Promotion Division said Thursday. Ou took over as consul general on Aug. 7 from Matthew Dolbow.

“There are complex, heavy issues here,” Ou said at the meeting, according to the spokesman. “So, the issues you raised, I take them very seriously — we all do, the U.S. government. What I can

pledge to you is that I will always be honest, always be communicative with you on any issue, even if it’s difficult.”

Tamaki stressed that he wanted to “cooperate to communicate in a daily manner” with the U.S. government, according to the spokesman. He said not all Okinawans are against U.S. bases, and that some service members live off base close to the local community.

“Many locals are aware of that,

so that’s why we think that it is extremely important to communicate with the U.S. military or local police to protect the safety and security of the citizens,” he said, according to the spokesman. “At the same time, we think that this is extremely important to keep the security system of Japan and the U.S.”

Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Senior Airman Brennon R.E. Washington pleaded not guilty July 12 in Naha District Court to charges of kidnapping and sexually assaulting a minor in December. His trial is scheduled to continue Friday.

Marine Lance Cpl. Jamel Clayton was charged in May with attempting to sexually assault a woman in Yomitan.

The indictments led to formal complaints from the prefecture and the Japanese government to the U.S. Embassy and military commands on the island, and a call for changes to the status of forces agreement governing the U.S. mil-

itary population in Japan.

U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp announced last month a “new forum of cooperation” with the Japanese and Okinawan governments and community members.

The Marine Corps has increased courtesy patrols in Okinawa’s popular nightlife spots and instituted near-100% outbound sobriety checks at all its Japan installations on weekends in response to the incidents.

Rupp, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel and III Marine Expeditionary Force commander Lt. Gen. Roger Turner have called for consistent liberty policies for all U.S. troops in Japan. But there was no update to those policies as of Thursday, a USFJ spokesman, Air Force Capt. Danny Rangel, said by phone.

Ou has been with the State Department since 2001 and previously served in consulates in Jamaica, South Korea, Hong Kong and China; as political officer at U.S. Embassy Tokyo; and as deputy foreign policy adviser at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

# MILITARY

## Exposure: Some from unit say kids have health issues

### FROM PAGE 1

Transportation Company in Iraq destroying abandoned munitions, said he has struggled to get a medical exam for possible chemical weapons exposure and benefits for Gulf War syndrome.

"I am still fighting just to get recognized by the VA and we're kind of getting nowhere," said Gabor, who worked at an Iraq weapons destruction site called Arlington Depot where abandoned arsenals were removed from bunkers and detonated.

The Arlington Depot, which was an Iraq base called Bayji, was about 120 miles northwest of Baghdad.

The Defense Department has not disclosed the locations where the 400 veterans were exposed to chemical weapons, and the VA does not grant disability benefits for chemical weapons exposures under the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, known as the PACT Act.

Conditions related to sarin, mustard gas and other chemical warfare agents were not included by Congress in the PACT Act, according to Terrence Hayes, the VA press secretary.

Veterans can receive disability compensation for exposure if their military record shows confirmed contact with the chemical weapons, according to the VA. Claims are decided on a case-by-case basis.

The VA said this week that it has granted 35 claims for disability benefits related to chemical weapons exposure in Iraq from 2003-11.

But Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., who is chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said the PACT Act has a framework that allows the VA to establish additional toxic-exposure presumptions.

"I urge VA to continue to use it to make sure this law is implemented the way Congress intended," he said. "Every veteran exposed to toxins during their military service deserves access to the health care and benefits they earned and were promised."

Some members of the Army's 41st Transportation Company are seeking medical exams for determining exposure to chemical warfare agents in Iraq.

But they said they have encountered roadblocks to obtaining evaluations with the VA and denials for disability benefits for serious health conditions from

which they are suffering or believe they have passed on to their children, according to the veterans and their advocates.

The 41st Transportation Company cleared out abandoned weapons from the Arlington Depot in 2003 and 2004. The location was never identified publicly by the military as a site that contained abandoned chemical weapons.

Gabor said he and fellow service members lost consciousness when they first uncovered a stash of weapons inside a bunker the size of a warehouse. They were not wearing protective gear.

"That was one of the first things that happened to us. When we went into this bunker and opened it up, everyone passed out. There was this oily liquid leaking from the rounds. We were like, 'Whoa something is wrong here.'"

Members evacuated the bunker but returned that evening. Several reported headaches, confusion, shortness of breath and extreme sweating and salivating after working there, he and others said.

"I was touching the weapons, loading them and taking them to the detonation site — doing this every day," Gabor said.

Morgan Hopson, an Army corporal who served with the 41st Transportation Unit, said he, Gabor and others raised questions about possible exposure to agents used in chemical weapons that were seen leaking from abandoned tanks and on the ground.

"There were no decontamination procedures in place," he said. "We were told to get the job done, but this was a secret mission and not to discuss it further."

Gabor, who was discharged in 2006 after five years of service, said he was later diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, which was treated.

He said he experiences symptoms of a chronic multisymptom illness — also known as Gulf War Syndrome.

Gabor said his son, Kevin, who was conceived after his military service ended, was diagnosed with brittle bone disease at birth. He uses a wheelchair and has had hundreds of bone fractures, his father said.

He also said he knows several other veterans from his unit with children who have serious disabilities. All the veterans were directly involved with weapons removal and detonation in Iraq, Gabor said.

"No one is looking at this," he



Courtesy of Kendra Peachey-Lubin

**Kendra Peachey-Lubin is shown in this 2023 photo with her son, Hunter, at Children's Hospital Colorado Springs, Colo.**



Courtesy of Istvan Gabor

**Istvan Gabor, a sergeant who served with the Army's 41st Transportation Company in Iraq destroying abandoned munitions, shown with his son, Kevin, who was diagnosed at birth with brittle bone disease.**

said.

Kendra Peachey-Lubin, a former private who joined the Army in April 2003, was a member of the same platoon and helped to remove and destroy caches of abandoned weapons.

"There was a lot of talk about the different colors of the plumes when the weapons were detonated," she said. The smoke was tinged in green, yellow and orange.

Peachey-Lubin said she left military service in December 2004 after becoming pregnant. She was married to a service member deployed at another location, she said.

Her son, Hunter, now 19, was

born with a rare genetic disorder that causes intellectual disability, respiratory illnesses, muscle weakness, impaired motor function and feeding issues.

"He is nonverbal and cannot walk. He is 100% dependent on us," said Peachey-Lubin, who is Hunter's full-time caregiver. His rare condition is called MECP2, which can be inherited, but neither parent was determined to be carriers.

She also developed asthma, neuropathy and severe headaches that persist now.

Peachey-Lubin said she has tried to get medical claims for chemical weapons exposure related to his condition.

**"I was touching the weapons, loading them and taking them to the detonation site — doing this every day."**

**Istvan Gabor**  
U.S. Army

She said she saw three doctors in 18 months. She also saw her veteran service officer to discuss how she believes chemical weapons exposure has affected her health and her son.

"I want this information in my files, so there is documentation," she said. "The VA is confused by this. They look at me like I have a third eye. They are clueless on how to process a claim for a child with his kind of medical issues."

"No one wants to touch this or do anything about it," she said. "They pretty much distance themselves from the situation."

Peachey-Lubin said she has not been contacted by the VA for her one-time medical assessment.

"I called several times on my own, but no one has returned my calls," she said.

Rep. Josh Brecheen, R-Okla., wrote a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough in July urging him to speed up the process by which former service members are medically evaluated and treated.

**SEE EXPOSURE ON PAGE 5**

MILITARY

Exposure: VA officials claim plans made to restart clinical program

FROM PAGE 4

ed for illnesses and conditions that might be connected to chemical weapons exposure.

Brecheen wrote in the letter that his office heard from constituents who are former members of the Army's 41st Transportation Company about difficulties establishing appointments for exams related to possible chemical weapons exposure.

"There has been a four-year delay in program activity between when the DOD offloaded the program to the VA and when the VA informed the surviving members of 41st Transportation Company that they were eligible for evaluation and for treatment as necessary," said Ben Decatur, communications director for Brecheen.

Brecheen has not heard directly from McDonough but was told by the VA secretary's staff that the VA has plans to restart the program, Decatur said.

"Congressman Brecheen will continue to work with the VA to improve its operations. Congress has an obligation and the constitutional power to provide our veterans with adequate medical care," he said.

In addition, Tester has introduced the Molly R. Loomis Research for Descendants of Toxic Exposed Veterans Act to fund research on connections between toxic exposures and birth defects in the children of exposed veterans.

The findings could be used to support benefits for children of exposed veterans who were born with serious birth defects, his office said.

Hopson said he underwent a clinical exam focused on chemical weapons exposure after being

contacted by VET-HOME in 2023.

"I was among the first ones to be assessed. But the VA does not seem to have the systems in place for treatment and the doctors are uncertain about how to deal with this," he said.

Hopson said his assessment supported a finding of chemical weapons exposure, but there is no plan for follow-up treatment.

"They're like, 'Hey you have these conditions from chemical weapons,' but they seem to have no doctors with knowledge about treatment. It's a problem. You cannot get appropriate care," he said.

He was medevaced from Iraq in 2003 with a high fever, abnormal blood tests and bleeding from his mouth, after his unit cleared out and destroyed the abandoned weapons, he said.

Hopson also said the munitions had an acrid odor, leached an oily liquid and produced unusual plumes upon detonation. He said he also observed leaking rounds that seemed to have been recently filled and stacked.

"The outside of the rounds was still wet and there was a trail of liquid to mobile mixing units," he said. "The units were these huge metal containers with tubes running from them. They had been emptied out and were laying on their sides when we found them."

Hopson was hospitalized in Germany, suffering from a high fever, confusion, extreme headaches, blistering on his hands and torso, and "blood sweating," a rare condition in which an individual's skin seeps blood.

After being medically discharged from the service in 2005, Hopson experienced a "watershed stroke" caused from a



Photos Courtesy of Morgan Hopson

**Morgan Hopson, an Army corporal who served with the 41st Transportation Company, said he and others raised questions about possible exposure to chemical weapons agents after observing liquid leaking from rounds, in abandoned tanks and on the ground.**

sudden drop in blood flow to the brain, he said.

He has continued to experience inflammation in different parts of his body that require immediate treatment. But he said he was denied disability benefits related to chemical weapons exposure.

"I can wake up in the morning and find that the skin is falling off my hands or have a rash that rapidly spreads throughout my body and that happens internally, too," Hopson said.

Doctors at the VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Center explained chemical weapons exposure can cause universal chang-

es in bodily systems, he said.

Gabor said he has never received disability compensation or health care benefits for medical problems related to what he believes was chemical warfare exposure.

Gabor said a VA claim he filed in 2023 for disability benefits for Gulf War Syndrome has not been acted upon and recently disappeared from his online claim history and records in the VA system.

"I'm trying to track it down to see what happened," he said.

Gabor contacted the VA on his own to schedule a one-time assessment related to chemical

weapons exposure after learning about the VET-HOME program.

He said he feels the issue of potential chemical weapons exposures by former service members during duty in Iraq is being avoided by military officials and the VA.

Gabor also believes his son's brittle bone disease — a rare medical condition — is the result of his own chemical weapons exposure.

"I feel let down by the entire system, especially for my child who has a lifelong untreatable condition. I have a lot of grievances and regrets. This service was something I wanted to do for my country."



**Members of the Army's 41st Transportation Company said they detonated chemical weapons in bunkers at Arlington Depot, 124 miles north of Baghdad. The depot formerly was used by Iraqi forces before coming under U.S. control.**



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PACIFIC

# Navy sends destroyer through Taiwan Strait

Trip marked first transit of the waterway in months, aimed to ‘uphold lawful use of sea’

**By ALEX WILSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer steamed through the Taiwan Strait on Thursday, the Navy’s first transit of the waterway in months and the fourth this year.

The USS Ralph Johnson went northeast through the strait, entering from the South China Sea and exiting in the East China Sea “to demonstrate the United States’ commitment to upholding lawful use of the sea for all nations as a principle,” U.S. 7th

Fleet spokeswoman Lt. j.g. Sarah Merrill wrote in an email Thursday.

The U.S. routinely sends warships, and, less frequently, aircraft through the 110-mile-wide channel that separates mainland China from the island of Taiwan.

“Ralph Johnson’s transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a stable, free and open Indo-Pacific,” Merrill wrote. “The U.S. military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows.”

Beijing views Taiwan, a func-

tional democracy, as a breakaway province that “does not qualify for sovereign status,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said July 31, and that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

While the Navy typically says the trips are intended to uphold “freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle,” Beijing views them as provocative.

China’s Eastern Theater Command said it “organized naval and air forces” to monitor the Ralph Johnson’s trip, which was

“publicly hyped up” by the U.S., spokesman Col. Xi Li wrote on the Weibo social media website.

“The theater troops are always on high alert and resolutely defend national sovereignty and security and regional peace and stability,” he wrote.

Merrill did not specify whether the Ralph Johnson encountered any Chinese forces in the strait but said “U.S. military vessels and aircraft routinely interact with foreign warships and aircraft while operating throughout the region.”

The Canadian frigate HMCS Montreal made a similar passage July 31, according to a post that day by Canadian Joint Operations Command on social platform X.

The U.S. Navy last sent a warship, the guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey, through the strait on May 8. Beijing at the time issued its own statement within an hour of the 7th Fleet’s announcement and again alleged the U.S. had “publicly hyped” the situation. China also scrambled naval and air forces to monitor the vessel, it said.

# Amphibious transport ship USS San Diego heads to Japan

**By ALEX WILSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego is on its way to Japan, where it will take the place of its sister ship USS Green Bay.

The San Diego sailed away from its namesake city on Aug. 14, U.S. Pacific Fleet announced Tuesday. The warship was homeported for 12 years at the naval base there.

The ship will make its way to Sasebo Naval Base on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan’s four main islands, as part of a swap announced last month by the U.S. 7th Fleet.

Task Force 76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike declined in a Thursday email to comment on the ship’s arrival date, citing security concerns.

The base is home to the America Amphibious Ready Group, led by the amphibious assault ship USS America, which routinely deployed with the Green Bay over the past decade.

The San Diego, commissioned in 2012, is three years younger than the Green Bay. The Navy in 2021 awarded BAE Systems a \$90.2 million contract for a year-



MARK FARAM/U.S. Navy

The amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego leaves San Diego on Aug. 14 for Sasebo, Japan.

long modernization period for the San Diego.

The work included hull maintenance, ballast tank repairs and refurbished living spaces.

The Green Bay underwent a similar, yearlong maintenance period prior to its deployment to Sasebo in 2015, U.S. Pacific Fleet said in a press release that year.

The San Diego will join the group to support a variety of missions by transporting personnel, equipment and vehicles that would be used as part of a landing force, and aircraft like the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor or Navy and Marine Corps helicopters, Mike said.

“Wherever San Diego operates, it provides naval power projection

capabilities that allow the Navy and Marine Corps team to rapidly insert and support forces ashore,” he wrote.

The new assignment will be “very rewarding for the crew and families,” and the San Diego is “prepared for the move,” according to the ship’s skipper, Capt. David Walton.

“We appreciate all the support and fond memories of the City of San Diego, but it’s time for the city’s namesake USS San Diego to lead the charge. America is counting on us to deter aggression, defend our national security interests, and preserve our way of life,” he said in the release.

Meanwhile, the Green Bay will make its way to San Diego, concluding a decadelong assignment at Sasebo.

It’s currently conducting routine operations somewhere in the 7th Fleet’s area of operations, Mike said.

He declined to comment on when the Green Bay will leave for San Diego or whether the ship will undergo maintenance when it arrives there.

U.S. warships may not spend more than 10 years at a time in Japan. Congress set the limit in the fiscal year 2019 defense budget following back-to-back collisions involving the destroyers USS John S. McCain and USS Fitzgerald. Both vessels were based in Japan for more than a decade when they separately collided with commercial vessels in 2017.

# Guam contractor gets \$21M to revamp terminal year after typhoon

**By ALEX WILSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Guam-based general contractor has secured a \$21.4 million deal to completely overhaul Andersen Air Force Base’s passenger terminal, with work expected to conclude in two years.

The Department of Defense on Aug. 5 awarded the contract to Fargo Pacific Inc., of Tamuning, to demolish and renovate the interior of the approximately 21,400-square-foot space.

Work is expected to be completed by July 26, 2026, according to the DOD contract announcement on Aug. 5.

The terminal — a stopping point for the government-contracted Patriot Express air service that transports U.S. service mem-

bers and their families — has been under repair for more than a year after the Category 4-equivalent Typhoon Mawar significantly damaged the building in May 2023.

Since then, the terminal has operated out of a temporary space that includes six portable offices that 734th Air Mobility Squadron commander Lt. Col. Michael Sadler has called the “Most Extraordinary Expeditionary Passenger Terminal,” according to an email Tuesday from a squadron spokesperson. The spokesperson did not identify themselves in the email.

The temporary terminal plays a “vital role” for active-duty and retired service members through the Patriot Express and other services like Space-Available and Space-Required travel opportunities, ac-

cording to the email.

While the repairs and renovations are in response to the Mawar damage, renovations have been in the works since at least 2020 because the base “required more robust facilities to meet the challenges and strategic focus of the Indo-Pacific theater,” the email states.

Designs for the new facility began in September 2020 and were approved in April 2023, a month before the eye of Mawar passed just north of the U.S. territory, bringing heavy rain, flooding and wind gusts up to 167 mph.

The temporary facility was always planned to be a part of the renovations, but storm damage led the 734th to expedite its setup, according to the email.

The renovations are planned to modernize the terminal through an “enhanced ergonomical design” that maximizes the area’s square footage while creating a “more efficient terminal experience,” the email states.

Those changes include an expanded, covered front entrance; ramp access; improved security measures; a larger lobby; and a streamlined service center and passenger check-in. The terminal’s inbound and outbound gates will also be larger, and a third gate will be added to accommodate larger passenger loads.

Overall, the changes are expected to increase the terminal’s capacity from 150 to 280 people, according to the squadron’s email.

MILITARY

# Navy lab seeks volunteers for COVID-19 study in Japan

BY KELLY AGEE  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — Four years after the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States, a Navy research lab is recruiting active-duty volunteers at two bases in Japan for a follow-up study on vaccines.

Singapore-based U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit Indo Pacific will collect blood and saliva samples at Yokosuka Naval Base and Naval Air Facility Atsugi, both south of Tokyo, later this month.

The study is a follow-up to a similar one last year that showed the XBB.1.5 booster is likely to decrease the number of duty days a sailor might lose to COVID-19 by hindering the transmission of the virus behind the respiratory disease, according to a Navy Medicine news release from Dec. 18.

“Although other elements in the U.S., including the Department of Defense, have done similar studies, as well as militaries outside of the U.S., Naval Medical Research Unit Indo Pacific’s study is the lar-

gest and most in-depth that has been conducted,” Capt. Andrew Letizia, the unit’s science director, said in a statement emailed by Tommy Lamkin, spokesman for Naval Medical Research Command.

The command’s COVID-19 research is focused on the active-duty population, with almost all participants in the range of 20 to 45 years old, Letizia said.

Each participant will provide 1.2 ounces of blood and 0.06 ounces of saliva, Lamkin said. They will also answer a questionnaire about past COVID-19 exposures, vaccination history and infections.

The collection will take place at Yokosuka from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 27 to Sept. 20 at the second-floor lab of the naval hospital, and at NAF Atsugi from 8 a.m. to noon Aug. 28 at the base health clinic, according to a news release Aug. 6 from the medical research unit.

Volunteers do not need to sign up beforehand and can show up to the respective labs during the hours

listed, Lt. Huy Nguyen, a principal investigator for the study, said in an email Wednesday.

The samples will be processed within four hours at Yokosuka Naval Hospital’s lab and then shipped to Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Diagnostics Surveillance Division and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research B Cell Biology, two DOD labs in Silver Spring, Md., for analysis.

“Most other researchers in academia are not studying this demographic of young adults whose immune systems are much different than children or older Americans,” Letizia said. “Therefore, we can’t rely on other researchers to answer this specific scientific question. Instead, we have designed the entire study around DoD members.”

The command conducts infectious disease research and studies viruses, microbes and insects in the Indo-Pacific to protect the medical readiness and health of service members, their families



U.S. Navy

**A hospital corpsman processes biological samples during a U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit Indo Pacific study on natural- and vaccine-derived immunity of respiratory diseases in U.S. sailors and Marines in September 2023.**

and partner nations, according to the research unit’s website.

The unit’s first COVID-19 study, the Survey Immune Response to Coronavirus Disease, took place last year at Yokosuka Naval Base with support from 7th Fleet, Lamkin said.

SARS-CoV-2, the respiratory virus that causes COVID-19, will continue to mutate, producing new variants that are more transmissible, immune-evasive and possibly

capable of causing a more severe disease, Nguyen said.

Also, immunity against infection, whether from a natural infection or a vaccination, usually decreases within three to four months, Nguyen said.

“It is important to gather the most up-to-date immunologic data of our troops against the latest circulating variants to see where we stand to inform future booster recommendations,” Nguyen said.

# Army boots soldier facing weapons, false statement charges

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Fort Liberty soldier with ties to a white supremacist group has been removed from the Army after his indictment on federal false statement and weapons charges, officials at the North Carolina Army post said Wednesday.

Former Pvt. Kai Liam Nix, 20, was separated from the Army on Tuesday after his Aug. 14 indictment, said Col. Mary Ricks, a spokeswoman for the Fort Liberty-based 18th Airborne Corps. Nix was arrested Aug. 15 near Fort Liberty after a federal grand jury indictment accused him of lying about ties to an anti-government organization on a 2022 security clearance appli-



Nix

cation and selling stolen guns.

Nix joined the Army in 2022 and served as an infantryman in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Liberty until his separation, according to the service. Ricks said he had not deployed since enlisting.

Nix made an initial court appearance on Monday, when a judge ordered him held until his next court appearance scheduled for Thursday, court documents show. A court-appointed attorney for Nix, Robert J. Parrott Jr., did not return a request for comment Wednesday.

The Justice Department said in a statement this week that Nix’s arrest was the result of an investigation by the FBI, ATF and Army Criminal Investigation Division that uncovered that Nix had been “a member of a group dedicated to the use of violence or force to overthrow the U.S. government.” The investigation by the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, is ongoing, according to the Justice Department.

Army regulations bar soldiers from active membership in groups that advocate “supremacist, extremist or criminal gang ideology or causes.”

The Justice Department said Nix lied when he denied membership in

such a group on his 2022 SF86 application for a security clearance. The department also charged Nix with a count of dealing in firearms without a license and two counts of selling a stolen firearm.

The charges carry a maximum 30-year prison sentence, according to the Justice Department.

Army officials said the stolen weapons that Nix is accused of selling did not belong to the military. Ricks said the service would continue to cooperate in the federal probe. Nix was not expected to be prosecuted by the military.

The Justice Department declined to name the anti-government organization with which Nix is accused of working. However, the Southern

Poverty Law Center identified Nix as a member of the Patriot Front, a white nationalist and neo-fascist hate group. The group describes itself online as aiming to “reclaim America for the European race and defend its sovereignty and cultural independence.” The law center is a nonprofit based in Montgomery, Ala., that specializes in civil rights litigation and monitoring hate groups.

Nix denied membership in the hate group in an interview with the New Yorker before his arrest. The law center’s Hatewatch publication said it linked Nix to Patriot Front via leaked documents and a Telegram account that he supposedly ran for far-right white supremacists.

# Army Reserve officer gets 12 years for defrauding Gold Star families

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

An Army Reserve major and financial counselor who defrauded grieving military families out of nearly \$4 million in survivor benefits has been sentenced to over 12 years in prison.

Caz Craffy, 42, of Colts Neck, N.J., admitted in April to stealing from Gold Star families and committing related crimes.

On Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Georgette Castner ordered him to serve a 151-month sentence, the Justice Department said in a

statement.

“Caz Craffy was sentenced to prison today for brazenly taking advantage of his role as an Army financial counselor to prey upon families of our fallen service members, at their most vulnerable moment, when they were dealing with a tragedy born out of their loved ones’ patriotism,” U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger said in the statement.

From November 2017 to January 2023, Craffy, also known as “Carz Craffy,” held a civilian post at the Army’s Casualty Assistance Office, where he provided general financial education to beneficiaries of fallen



Craffy

service members. Unbeknownst to the Army, Craffy simultaneously worked with two financial investment firms and encouraged beneficiaries to invest their survivor benefits in accounts he managed.

When service members die during active duty, their next of kin are entitled to a \$100,000 payment and the service member’s life insurance of up to \$400,000.

The families of the fallen troops

are known as Gold Star families. The military provides a range of services for them, including the assistance of a financial counselor.

From May 2018 to November 2022, Craffy obtained nearly \$10 million from Gold Star families to invest in accounts he managed privately, the Justice Department said. He earned more than \$1.4 million in commissions from executing trades — often without families’ authorization — while the family accounts lost more than \$3.7 million, according to the department’s statement.

Craffy, who joined the Army Reserve in 2003, pleaded guilty in April

to six counts of wire fraud and one count each of securities fraud, making false statements in a loan application, committing acts affecting a personal financial interest and making false statements to a federal agency. In addition to the prison term, Craffy was sentenced to three years of supervised release and ordered to forfeit the \$1.4 million he made in commissions.

The Justice Department statement indicated that Craffy is still a reservist. Typically, an administrative or judicial process ends with the eventual removal from service of a soldier convicted of felonies.

# Walz: Night three of DNC offers theme of ‘freedoms’

**FROM PAGE 1**

haven’t given a lot of speeches like this but I’ve given a lot of pep talks.”

“Some folks just don’t understand what it takes to be a good neighbor,” Walz said. “Take Donald Trump and JD Vance.”

Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, bashed the convention as a “charade” earlier Wednesday and noted that he has been a frequent topic of conversation. He also singled out his predecessor, former President Barack Obama, for a highly critical convention speech Tuesday night, saying Obama had been “nasty.”

## Walz lays out his biography

Walz described his upbringing in Nebraska and teaching and coaching football in Minnesota and told the crowd, “Thank you for bringing the joy to this fight.”

But he also criticized Trump and his runningmate, Vance, and took several swipes at Republican policies. “While other states were banning books from their schools, we were banishing hunger from ours,” he said.

Walz has been accused of embellishing his background. His wife this week clarified that she did not undergo in vitro fertilization, as Walz has repeatedly claimed, but used other fertility treatments. Republicans also have criticized Walz for a 2018 comment he made about carrying weapons in war. Though he served in the National Guard for 24 years, he did not deploy to a war zone.

Walz has made his family’s struggle with fertility a central part of his narrative, a tangible way to connect with voters alarmed at the erosion of reproductive rights in the U.S. But Gwen Walz on Tuesday issued a statement that detailed the experience more comprehensively and disclosed that they relied on a different process known as intrauterine insemination, or IUI.

“If you’ve never experienced infertility, I guarantee you know someone who has,” Tim Walz said Wednesday.

His daughter, Hope, made a heart with her hands and held it over her chest.

His son, Gus, openly wept throughout the speech, wiping his eyes with tissues while watching from the front row.

Through tears he mouthed, “That’s my

dad.”

**The Bill and Oprah Show**

Two prominent Harris boosters on Wednesday were people Trump has crossed paths during their shared decades in public life: Bill Clinton, the nation’s 42nd president, and Oprah Winfrey, the iconic talk-show host.

Ironically, she suggested years ago that Trump could be president one day, while Clinton was once close enough to Trump that he attended his 2005 wedding to his wife Melania.

In a convention designed to needle Trump, Clinton and Winfrey portrayed Trump as selfish and Harris as focused on the needs of everyday Americans rather than her own.

“We’ve got a pretty clear choice it seems to me. Kamala Harris, for the people. And the other guy who has proved, even more than the first go-around, that he’s about me, myself and I,” Clinton said.

Clinton returned to a place he knows well, the Democratic convention stage, firing up his party with his trademark off-the-cuff flourishes. He spoke about 10 minutes longer than Walz did in the headliner’s spot.

Now 78 — the same age as Trump — Clinton’s delivery was sometimes halting, his movements slower, and he mispronounced Harris’ first name twice. His left hand often shook when he wasn’t using it to grip the lectern.

Still, he delivered several memorable, homespun pronouncements including asking: “What does her opponent do with his voice? He mostly talks about himself. So the next time you hear him, don’t count the lies, count the I’s.”

Winfrey — who long filmed her famous talk show in Chicago — offered a full-throated endorsement of Harris and characterized her campaign by singing out, “Joy!”

“Decency and respect are on the ballot in 2024,” she said, adding, “Let us chose common sense over nonsense.”

**A focus on ‘freedoms’**

The night’s theme was “a fight for our freedoms,” with the programming focusing



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

**Democratic vice presidential nominee Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz celebrates with his family during the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday in Chicago.**

on abortion access and other rights that Democrats want to center in their campaign against Trump. Speaker after speaker argued that their party wants to defend freedoms while Republicans want to take them away.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis used a prop that has become a convention staple, an oversized book meant to represent the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, a sweeping set of goals to shrink government and push it to the right, if Trump wins. Polis even ripped a page from the ceremonial volume and said he was going to keep it and show it to undecided voters.

Florida Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz told the story of a woman in her state, which enacted new abortion restrictions after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, who was forced to carry to term a child with a fatal illness, only to watch the newborn die just hours after birth.

Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi spoke about the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. He chaired a congressional committee that investigated the mob overrunning the Capitol, saying, “They wanted to stop the peaceful transfer of power for the first time in American history.”

“Thank God they failed,” Thompson said.

Democrats also recognized the hostages still being held by Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack on Israel in which 1,200 people were killed. Jon Polin and Rachel Goldberg

brought some in the arena to tears as they paid tribute to their son Hersh, who was abducted in the attack.

Freeing hostages “is not a political issue. It is a humanitarian issue,” Polin said, adding that “in a competition of pain there are no winners.”

The Israel-Hamas war has split the Democratic base, with pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrating outside the United Center and several speakers this week acknowledging civilian deaths in the Israeli offensive in Gaza. More than 40,000 people have died in Gaza, according to local health authorities.

**Man from Hope talks about joy**

Some of the loudest cheers of the night were for Clinton, who seemed to relish being a warmup act for Walz. A two-term president and generational leader of his party, he noted that he attended his first convention in 1976 — then corrected himself by saying it was actually 1972.

“I have no idea how many more of these I’ll be able to come to,” Clinton said.

Still, he implored delegates about the Harris-Walz ticket, “If you can get them elected and let them bring in this breath of fresh air, you will be proud of it for the rest of your life.”

“Your children will be proud of it,” he said. “Your grandchildren will be proud of it.”

# Trump criticizes Walz’s military record with letter by 50 GOP vets

BY HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS  
*Los Angeles Times*

The Trump campaign Wednesday released a letter signed by 50 Republican lawmakers who are military veterans that criticizes vice presidential candidate Tim Walz for what they called “egregious misrepresentations” of his time in uniform.

“To be blunt, when you falsely claim military service that did not happen and abandon your post, you diminish the real sacrifices made by veterans who did serve in combat,” reads the letter, whose signatories include Florida Rep. Brian Mast, chairman of the Veterans and Military Families for Trump coalition.

The letter is part of a sustained attack by the Trump campaign — spearheaded by Sen. JD Vance, the vice presidential candidate and a U.S. Marine Corps veteran — on the military service record of Walz, who served 24 years in the Army National Guard before retiring to run for Congress.

Republicans have lambasted Walz for retiring in May 2005, two months before his unit received orders to deploy to Iraq. The letter accuses Walz of “abandoning the men and women under your leadership just as they were getting ready to deploy,” calling his decision to leave the service “not honorable.”

“When America asked you to

lead your troops into War, you turned your back on your troops,” it says. “You have violated the trust of our brothers and sisters in arms. ... Until you admit you lied to them, there is no way you can be trusted to serve as Vice President.”

The letter also highlights Walz’s characterization of his military rank, which critics say he exaggerated for political gain.

The Minnesota governor achieved the rank of command sergeant major, one of the Army’s highest enlisted ranks, but retired as a master sergeant because he did not complete the required coursework required to keep the higher title. His governor’s biography website calls him “Command

Sergeant Major Walz,” and his and Vice President Kamala Harris’ campaign site says he rose to that rank.

The Washington Post reported that the letter was reissued a few hours after its original release because it mistakenly said that some of the veterans had retired from the military when they had not served 20 years or been medically retired.

Vance, who has repeatedly accused Walz of “stolen valor,” doubled down on his attacks in a speech this week in a Philadelphia speech in which he joked that, “before the end of the campaign, Tim Walz is going to be talking about how he was carrying an M16 through the jungles of Vietnam.”

“The closest Tim Walz has ever come to combat ... is when he let rioters burn Minneapolis to the ground” after the police murder of George Floyd, said Vance, who was deployed to Iraq for six months in 2005 and did not see combat.

Walz addressed the scrutiny over his service during a speech to union workers in Los Angeles last week.

“I am damn proud of my service to this country,” Walz said, “and I firmly believe that you should never denigrate another person’s service record. For anyone who put on that uniform for our great country, including my opponent, I just have a few simple words: Thank you for your service and sacrifice.”

NATION

# Pro-Palestinian protesters march at DNC

Associated Press

CHICAGO — More than 2,000 pro-Palestinian protesters marched Wednesday past a park where pro-Israel demonstrators had gathered earlier and toward the arena hosting the third night of the Democratic National Convention.

The demonstration, which stayed largely peaceful, came a day after violent clashes between police and protesters led to 56 arrests at a much smaller unsanctioned protest outside the Israeli Consulate.

Organizers of Wednesday's demonstration drew on the Chicago area's Palestinian community, one of the largest in the country, by bringing buses from suburban mosques.

Raed Shuk, 48, came with his children from the suburbs, including his 2-year-old son, who sat on Shuk's shoulders ahead of the march. Shuk, whose parents are Palestinian, said they have come to so many rallies that his son knows the chants by heart.

"Everybody's humanity needs to be equally addressed here and there," he said of Gaza. "I want to help my children learn from this experience that you always like to stand up for your rights and always peacefully protest."

The march, one of the largest anticipated demonstrations of the week, took on a festive tone at times as a drum line led march-



NOAH BERGER/AP

Law enforcement members remove a protester from a train station during a demonstration outside the Democratic National Convention Wednesday in Chicago.

ers and a sea of Palestinian flags waved above the crowds. Some kids ate popsicles as they walked, and others were pushed in strollers or rode in wagons.

The crowd stopped outside a park that is roughly a block from the United Center and used megaphones and air horns to call out

elected leaders, including Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, for being "complicit" in the war in Gaza. The two-term Democrat, who was under consideration as Vice President Kamala Harris' running mate, criticized a cease-fire resolution Chicago approved in January.

As marchers passed under a new elevated train station near the United Center that was completed just before the DNC, officers were seen bringing a person to the ground on the platform above. In response, hundreds of protesters pushed against the edge of the station, banging on the glass with their hands and flag poles as they called on police to free the person. The person left through the station's emergency exit moments later, accompanied by officers but not in handcuffs, prompting cheers from the crowd.

The crowds of pro-Palestinian protesters included many families and people of different faiths. Small groups of Muslims gathered in prayer at a park just ahead of the march's kickoff, using keffiyeh as prayer rugs. Rabbis were among the leaders of the march, and a small group marched through in the crowd holding a sign that said "Christians for Ceasefire."

Rabbi Brant Rosen, a founder of the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council, condemned Democrats for not speaking out about the war in Gaza at the convention

"The word Palestine is not allowed inside the Democratic National Convention. The word cease-fire has barely been uttered," he said. "This is a Hollywood-style coronation of a candidate. They assume they are entitled to our votes, but they are not entitled to our votes."

## Parents of American held in Gaza appeal for release of all hostages

Associated Press

The parents of a 23-year-old American taken hostage by Hamas during the Oct. 7 attack on Israel gave a moving speech Wednesday at the Democratic National Convention, pleading for the release of the dozens of people who continue to be held captive in Gaza.

"This is a political convention. But needing our only son — and all of the cherished hostages — home is not a political issue. It is a humanitarian issue," said Jon Polin, whose son Hersh Goldberg-Polin lost part of his left arm and was kidnapped from Israel by militants who attacked the music festival he was attending.

Polin and his wife, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, were greeted with an extended ovation and chants of "bring him home" by the thousands of Democratic delegates in Chicago.

They steered clear of politics in their 10-minute speech, but Jon Polin said the families of the American hostages meet regularly in Washington and are heartened to see bipartisan support for securing the release of their loved ones. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, he said, are "both working tirelessly" for a deal between Israel and Hamas for a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of the remaining hostages.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Jon Polin, left, and Rachel Goldberg, parents of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, speak on stage during the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday in Chicago.

"Hersh, if you can hear us, we love you, stay strong, survive," Rachel Polin-Goldberg said.

She and her husband wore stickers with the number 320, drawing attention to the number of days their son has been held.

The speech put an emotional and human face on the Israel-Hamas conflict, a sensitive issue for Democrats, who face pressure from pro-Palestinian protesters to more forcefully press Israel to end the siege that has leveled much of the Gaza Strip and killed tens of thousands of people, according to the Gaza health ministry, which

does not distinguish in its death count between militants and civilians.

Delegates of the "uncommitted" movement, which was sparked by dissatisfaction with President Joe Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, announced to reporters late Wednesday that officials denied their request for a Palestinian to speak during the convention. The group of 36 delegates has outsized influence as they stem from pivotal battleground states like Michigan, which is part of the so-called "blue wall" critical to Democratic chances in November.

## Were maggots planted at DNC-related breakfast? FBI, police investigating

Los Angeles Times

Chicago police and the FBI are investigating whether maggots were intentionally placed in a hotel breakfast being served to delegates attending the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday, according to law enforcement and media reports.

Authorities said multiple women had reportedly been seen entering the Fairmont Hotel around 6:45 a.m. and placing "unknown objects" onto tables containing food before leaving the area.

It is not clear whether anyone has been arrested. Emergency responders treated one person at the scene, officials said, not specifying whether the patient had gotten ill or been injured.

The delegation breakfasts, which are held at various hotels across Chicago, begin at 7 a.m. and end at 9:30 a.m., according to a schedule of convention events.

"We were all coming down to breakfast, and there were these two women who had hidden themselves in the bathroom," Indiana delegate Karen Tallian told USA Today. "And they ran out and threw maggots into the breakfast buffet."

In a statement cited by CNN, Fairmont Hotel spokesperson Haley Robles said a group of individuals "caused a disruption at a

DNC-related breakfast event at our hotel this morning."

"Our team acted immediately to clean and sanitize the area, ensuring that the event could continue without further incident. We maintain the highest standards of food safety and cleanliness throughout our property and have strict protocols in place to handle any disruptions," she said.

Some attendees suspect the incident was a form of protest.

Last month, maggots were allegedly dumped at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was staying during his trip to the United States. The Palestinian Youth Movement, an advocacy group, posted a video to Instagram showing mealworms and maggots crawling across white linen tablecloths on banquet tables at the hotel, apparently placed there to protest the war in Gaza.

"The safety and well-being of our delegation is our top priority," Indiana Democratic Party spokesperson Sam Barloga said of the situation in Chicago on Wednesday. "All Americans have the right to peaceful protest, but ugly attacks like this have no place in our democracy. We thank the security team for responding swiftly."

# Bulletproof glass used at Trump's 1st outdoor rally

BY MICHELLE L. PRICE  
AND JILL COLVIN  
*Associated Press*

ASHEBORO, N.C. — At his first outdoor rally since last month's attempted assassination, Donald Trump spoke from behind bulletproof glass Wednesday in North Carolina at an event focused on national security. On politics, he called his predecessor Barack Obama "nasty" for his comments the night before at the Democratic National Convention.

Trump blamed President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for the deadly Afghanistan withdrawal and for wars in Ukraine and the Middle East while returning repeatedly in his remarks to the Democratic gathering in Chicago, where speaker after speaker has assailed Trump as a threat to the country should he return to the White House.

The former president, now the GOP nominee, asked the crowd gathered at the North Carolina Aviation Museum & Hall of Fame whether they had seen the

speeches given Tuesday by former President Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama.

"He was taking shots at your president. And so was Michelle. You know, they always say, 'Sir, please stick to policy. Don't get personal.' And yet they're getting personal all night long, these people," he said, asking: "Do I still have to stick to policy?"

Trump, who is facing Harris in the November election after Biden stepped aside, spoke from behind a podium surrounded by panes of bulletproof glass that formed a protective wall across the stage — part of ramped-up security measures aimed at keeping him safe after the attack by a Pennsylvania gunman on July 13.

Storage containers were stacked around the perimeter to create additional walls and block sight lines. Snipers were positioned on roofs at the venue, where old aircraft were sitting behind the podium and a large American flag was suspended from cranes.

The event, billed as focused on



JULIA NIKHINSON/AP

Former President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally Wednesday at North Carolina Aviation Museum in Asheboro, N.C.

national security issues, was part of Trump's weeklong series of counterprogramming to the Democratic National Convention, which is underway in Chicago. Allies have been urging him to focus on policy instead of personal attacks against Harris as he struggles to adjust to Biden's departure from the race.

The second night of the Democrats' convention Tuesday was a highly energized affair that featured speeches from both Obamas, who went after Trump in particularly biting terms.

"His limited and narrow view

of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people who happen to be Black," Michelle Obama said.

Barack Obama mocked Trump's obsession with his crowd sizes and called Trump "a 78-year-old billionaire who hasn't stopped whining about his problems since he rode down his golden escalator nine years ago."

"It's been a constant stream of gripes and grievances that's actually gotten worse now that he's afraid of losing to Kamala," the former president said.

After mentioning the Obamas early on in his speech, Trump came back around to the former president's comments.

"He was very nasty last night," Trump said. "I try and be nice to people, you know. But it's a little tough when they get personal."

He then polled the crowd on whether he should listen to advisers who he said have told him, "Please, sir, don't get personal. Talk about policy."

"Should I get personal or should I not get personal?" he asked. The crowd overwhelmingly chose the former.

# Trump allies press Kennedy for support amid possible retreat

*Associated Press*

PHOENIX — Close allies to Donald Trump are quietly urging independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to endorse the Republican nominee if he withdraws from the campaign for the White House as soon as this week.

Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., along with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson and GOP donor Omeed Malik are among those who have been working behind the scenes to lobby Kennedy to drop out of the race and back Trump, according to a person familiar with the efforts. The person requested anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Kennedy will speak Friday "about the present historical moment and his path forward," his campaign announced Wednesday, fueling growing speculation that he could drop out and support Trump. Kennedy's running mate openly discussed the possibility

on a podcast this week, saying the campaign was considering a move to "join forces" with Trump to limit the election chance of Kamala Harris, whose Democratic convention winds up Thursday night in Chicago.

The move would have once seemed unthinkable for Kennedy, a Democrat for most of his life and — as the nephew of President John F. Kennedy and the son of Robert F. Kennedy — a member of a beloved Democratic dynasty.

Last month, during the Republican National Convention, Kennedy's son posted and then quickly deleted a video showing a phone call between Kennedy and Trump, in which the former president appeared to try to talk Kennedy into siding with him.

Kennedy will give a speech in Phoenix, hours before Trump is scheduled to hold a rally in neighboring Glendale. A spokesperson for Kennedy, Stefanie Spear, declined to say whether he planned



STEFAN JEREMIAH/AP

Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. speaks to reporters at the Nassau County Supreme Court in Mineola, N.Y. on Wednesday.

to drop out or why he chose Arizona for his speech.

Trump and Kennedy have been in regular contact in recent weeks, including a meeting in Milwaukee as Republicans gathered for their national convention last month.

He told CNN Tuesday that he would "love" an endorsement from the independent candidate, whom he called a "brilliant guy."

He also said he would "certainly" be open to Kennedy playing a role in his administration if Kennedy drops out and endorses him instead.

# NY urges appeals court to uphold the civil fraud judgment against Trump

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — New York state lawyers urged an appeals court late Wednesday to uphold Donald Trump's nearly \$500 million civil fraud judgment, arguing there's "overwhelming evidence" to support a judge's finding that the former president lied for years about his wealth as he built his real estate empire.

In paperwork filed ahead of oral arguments next month, New York Attorney General Letitia James' office said the current Republican nominee's appeal is awash in "meritless legal arguments" and ignores volumes of trial evidence showing that he and his co-defendants engaged in "fraud and illegality on an immense scale."

"On appeal, defendants tellingly ignore almost all their deceptions," Assistant Solicitor General Daniel S. Magy wrote in a 168-page submission to the state's mid-level appeals court known as the Appellate Division.

Trump, his company and top ex-

ecutives including his sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr. "created and used financial statements rife with blatant misrepresentations and omissions to maintain loans worth more than half a billion dollars and to generate over \$360 million in ill-gotten profits," Magy wrote.

The Appellate Division said Wednesday that it will hear the case on Sept. 26, about six weeks before Election Day. The court typically rules about a month after arguments, meaning a decision could come before the presidential race ends.

If upheld, the judgment threatens to dent Trump's personal wealth, disrupt his Trump Organization and damage his identity as a savvy businessman. As of Wednesday, the Trump defendants owe over \$485 million. That includes interest that continues to accrue even after Trump posted a \$175 million bond in April to halt collection of the sum and prevent seizing of his assets while he appeals.

NATION

# Triple-digit temps scorch Texas, bringing record energy demand

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Summer heat scorched Texas and the Southwest on Wednesday, pushing Phoenix to nearly 90 consecutive days of triple-digit temperatures and putting millions of people under excessive heat warnings.

Meanwhile, energy demand in Texas hit an unofficial all-time high Tuesday, according to data from the state's grid operator.

A major heat alert is in place for Texas, reflecting what the weather service called "rare and/or long-duration extreme heat with little to no overnight relief." An extreme heat alert was issued for eastern New Mexico.

Record high temperatures were expected in cities such as Corpus Christi, San Antonio and Amarillo. In Phoenix, monsoon rains have provided brief respites since Sunday, although highs continue to top 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

About 14.7 million people are



ERIC GAY/AP

A tuber floats the cool Comal River as temperatures in South Texas hit triple-digit numbers, on Wednesday, in New Braunfels, Texas.

under an excessive heat warning, with heat indexes expected at 110 degrees Fahrenheit and above.

Despite the record heat in Texas, residents haven't been asked to cut back on their energy use like in years prior. One reason is that the

agency that manages Texas' independent energy grid and deregulated providers has improved the grid's capabilities to better control supply and demand, Doug Lewin, an energy consultant and president of Stoic Energy said.

## FAA is referring fewer airline passengers to FBI than in '21

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials say they are referring fewer unruly airline passengers to the FBI for possible prosecution than they did during the pandemic, although they say the number of incidents remains too high.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday that it referred 43 reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the past year. That brings the total to more than 310 since late 2021.

It is not clear how many cases resulted in prosecution.

Airlines have reported more than 1,240 cases to the FAA this year, compared with nearly 6,000 in 2021. Relatively few of them are deemed serious enough to be passed along to the FBI for investigation and potential filing of criminal charges.

The FAA said the rate of passenger misbehavior has dropped by more than 80% since early 2021, when many confrontations with flight attendants and other passengers started with travelers who objected to wearing a face mask in the

midst of the pandemic.

A federal judge struck down the mask rule in 2022, leaving airlines, airports and mass transit systems to make their own decisions about mask requirements. The Biden administration did not appeal the decision. Airlines and Republican politicians urged the administration to let the rule die.

"There's absolutely no excuse for unruly behavior," FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said Wednesday. "It threatens the safety of everyone on board, and we have zero tolerance for it."

Referrals in the past year included passengers who tried to break into the cockpit, assaulted airline crew members or other passengers, or threatened others on the plane.

The FAA can propose civil penalties up to \$37,000 but lacks authority to file criminal charges.

The agency announced a "zero-tolerance policy" in January 2021 under which it levied fines instead of issuing warning letters. Late that year, it struck a deal with the FBI to increase prosecutions.

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# Zelenskyy makes 1st trip to border since offensive in Russia

**BY ILLIA NOVIKOV**  
*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy toured the northeastern Ukrainian region of Sumy on Thursday in his first visit to the border area since his forces launched their surprise cross-border offensive more than two weeks ago, seizing dozens of Russian villages and the town of Sudzha.

Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces have claimed control of another settlement in the Russian region of Kursk and taken more Russian prisoners of war whom he hopes to swap for captured Ukrainians, adding to what he calls an “exchange fund.”

“Another settlement in the Kursk region is now under Ukrainian control, and we have replenished the exchange fund,” Zelenskyy wrote on X after hearing a report from the military commander, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi.

While he traveled to an area close to the area of the Ukrainian incursion into Russia, he did not go into Russia itself — a move that would have been regarded by Moscow as a provocation. He has previously said that Ukraine has

no plan to occupy the area long term but wants to create a buffer zone to prevent further attacks from that area into Ukraine.

After his meeting with local military authorities, Zelenskyy said the Kursk operation launched Aug. 6 has led to a decrease in Russian shelling and a reduction in civilian casualties in Ukraine’s northern Sumy region.

The daring Ukrainian foray into the Kursk region has rattled the Kremlin, showing Russia’s vulnerability and shattered President Vladimir Putin’s efforts to pretend that the country has been largely unaffected by the 2½ year war.

Authorities in Kursk began to put up concrete shelters at bus stops and other locations around the city to protect it from shelling and plan similar work in Zheleznogorsk and Kurchatov, where the Kursk nuclear power plant is located, the region’s acting Gov. Alexei Smirnov said on his Telegram channel.

Putin said in a video call with officials that he has ordered the creation of self-defense units in Russian regions bordering Ukraine.

Smirnov reported to Putin that



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, center, and Commander-in-Chief Oleksandr Syrsky, right, look at a map during their visit to Sumy, Ukraine, on Thursday.

over 133,000 people have left areas affected by the fighting in the Kursk region, while more than 19,000 have stayed.

The governor of Bryansk, another Russian region bordering Ukraine, said authorities in the region have conducted training for emergency evacuation from border areas in case it is needed.

Separately, the Defense Ministry reported repelling Ukrainian attacks near the villages of Komarovka, Malaya Loknya, Koreneva and several other settlements in the Kursk region.

Ukraine’s capture of Russian territory comes as Ukraine continues to lose ground in eastern

Ukraine. The Russian Defense Ministry said Thursday that its military has claimed control of the village of Mezhevo in Donetsk, part of the industrial Donbas region which Moscow seeks to take entirely.

Ukraine’s push into Russia marks the first capture of Russian territory since World War II.

## 2,492-carat diamond found in Botswana

*Associated Press*

GABORONE, Botswana — The largest diamond found in more than a century has been unearthed at a mine in Botswana.

The Botswana government says the huge 2,492-carat stone is the second-biggest ever discovered



2,492 carats

in a mine.

Canadian mining company Lucara Diamond Corp. said in a statement Wednesday that it recovered the “exceptional” rough diamond from its Karowe Mine in Botswana. Lucara said it was a “high-quality” stone and was found intact.

The weight would make it the largest diamond found in more than 100 years and the second-largest ever dug out of a mine after the Cullinan Diamond discovered in South Africa in 1905.

# Key mediator Egypt shares skepticism of proposal for urged Gaza cease-fire

**BY SAMY MAGDY**  
*Associated Press*

CAIRO — Key mediator Egypt expressed skepticism Wednesday about the proposal meant to bridge gaps in cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas as more details emerged a day before negotiations were expected to resume in Cairo.

The challenges around the so-called bridging proposal appeared to undermine the optimism for an imminent agreement that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken carried into his latest Mideast visit this week.

Diplomatic efforts have redoubled as fears grow of a wider regional war after the recent targeted killings of leaders of the militant Hamas and Hezbollah groups, both blamed on Israel, and threats of retaliation.

President Joe Biden spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, and stressed the urgency of reaching a cease-fire and hostage release deal, the White House said.

Officials in Egypt, in its unique role as both a mediator and affect-

ed party since it borders Gaza, told The Associated Press that Hamas won’t agree to the bridging proposal for a number of reasons — ones in addition to the long-held wariness over whether a deal would truly remove Israeli forces from Gaza and end the war.

One Egyptian official with direct knowledge of the negotiations said the bridging proposal requires the implementation of the deal’s first phase, which has Hamas releasing the most vulnerable civilian hostages captured in its Oct. 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war. Parties during the first phase would negotiate the second and third phases with no “guarantees” to Hamas from Israel or mediators.

“The Americans are offering promises, not guarantees,” the official said. “Hamas won’t accept this, because it virtually means Hamas will release the civilian hostages in return for a six-week pause of fighting with no guarantees for a negotiated permanent cease-fire.”

He also said the proposal doesn’t clearly say Israel will

withdraw its forces from two strategic corridors in Gaza, the Philadelphia corridor alongside Gaza’s border with Egypt and the Netzarim east-west corridor across the territory. Israel offers to downsize its forces in the Philadelphia corridor, with “promises” to withdraw from the area, he said.

“This is not acceptable for us and of course for Hamas,” the Egyptian official said.

A second Egyptian official, briefed on the latest developments in negotiations, said there were few chances for a breakthrough since Israel refuses to commit to a complete withdrawal from Gaza in the deal’s second phase.

He also said Egypt told the U.S. and Israel that it won’t reopen the Rafah crossing into Gaza, a crucial entry point for humanitarian aid, without the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian side and from the Philadelphia corridor.

Both Egyptian officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations. Mediators are scheduled to meet on Thursday and Friday in Cairo for more talks.

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# WEEKEND



**'Bad Monkey' brings  
Hiaasen story to life**  
**Television, Page 31**

## Here's to a new era

Post Malone reveals his country roots  
with seamless pivot into genre  
through 18-track album 'F-1 Trillion'

**Music, Page 29**



Post Malone, shown Aug. 11 at Outside Lands Music Festival in San Francisco, just released his first country album, "F-1 Trillion."  
AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

## WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

# App store revolution

The return of the blacklisted Fortnite mobile game reveals complicated efforts to wrest power from Apple and Google

By Shira Ovide  
The Washington Post

The popular game Fortnite, which was kicked out of the Apple and Google smartphone app stores four years ago over a business dispute, is available again for your phone. Sort of.

If you want to play Fortnite games on an iPhone ... well, you need to live in the European Union. There, as of Aug. 16, you can download Fortnite from several non-Apple mini app stores that exist under a new European law trying to spark more alternatives to Big Tech.

Android phone owners anywhere in the world can get Fortnite through a new backdoor app store, though that process is complicated.

This sort-of official return of Fortnite mobile games defies the blacklisting by Apple and Google. It's also a glimpse at the messy, uncertain, possibly bad but potentially thrilling changes underway to smartphone apps as you've known them for 15 years.

Here's why we're in an unruly mobile app revolution, and its connection to a big, knotty question in Washington and in your life: What does it take to undo illegal corporate behavior? And is the cure better or worse for you than the disease?

### The problems with apps

Apps are just fine the way they are, you might be thinking. And maybe they are!

But after writing about and obsessing over this topic for six years, I've come to believe it's worth trying to shake up the mobile app status quo.

Apple and Google have had nearly unchecked power over mobile apps in ways that raise prices for some of what you buy,

block you from trying clever ideas, push app makers to do scuzzy things to make money and impose Apple's and Google's wishes on all of us.

Patreon, which lets you financially support creative professionals like musicians or podcasters, said last week that users of its iPhone app will soon have to pay 30% more for each payment, or artists would have to take 30% less.

That's because Apple is now requiring Patreon to adhere to rules requiring in-app digital payments to route through Apple's payment system, from which Apple takes a 30% commission. You won't be able to pay with a credit card or PayPal anymore.

Apple didn't comment about the Patreon changes, but broadly says its app store and digital payment system provide a good value and experience for app makers and iPhone users.

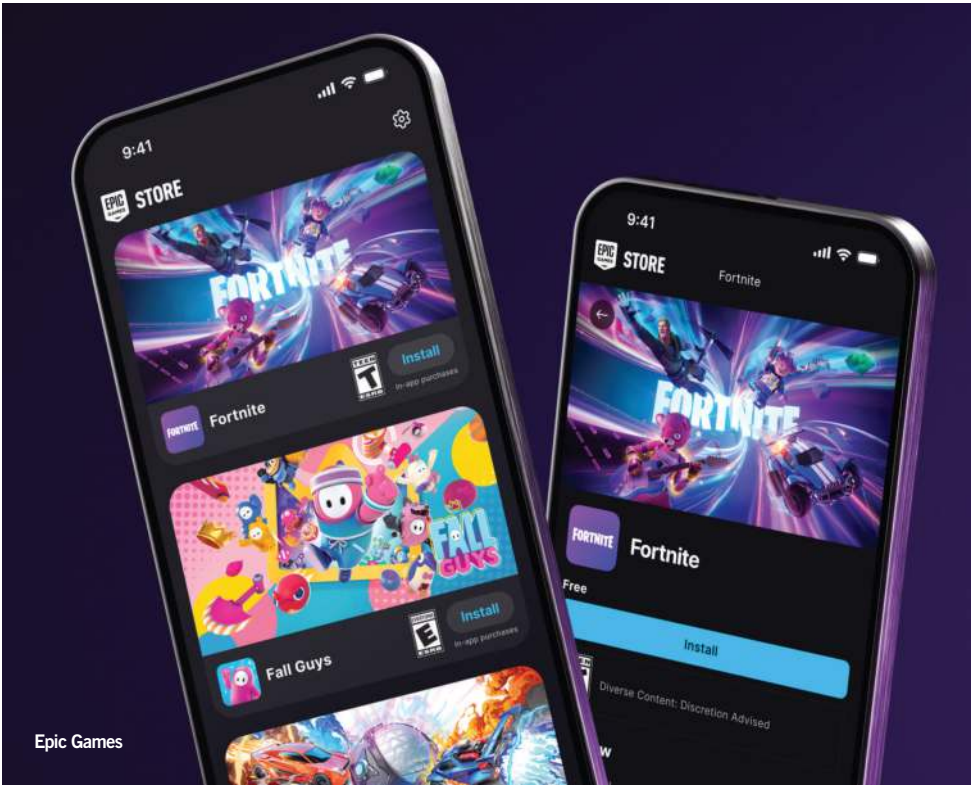
Plenty of other app companies are fine with Apple and Google and aren't itching for change. For you, Apple and Google make it easy to find apps, give confidence they're secure (in most cases) and allow you to buy digital stuff with an Apple or Google payment account that's connected to your phone.

But the doubters of the Apple and Google app dictatorship are growing louder and emboldened by courts and new regulations.

### The Fortnite vision

Epic Games, the creator of Fortnite, has been the chief complainer about apps as we know them and a key architect of what's starting to look like the biggest changes ever to smartphone apps.

A jury last year agreed with Epic that Google broke monopoly laws in how it



runs its Google Play mobile app store. A judge will decide soon how Google will have to "tear the barriers down," as U.S. District Judge James Donato said in court last week.

Epic mostly lost a 2021 court case that accused Apple of similar monopoly abuses, but the judge in that case is now figuring out how Apple must undo what she ruled were Apple's anticompetitive restrictions on how you buy digital stuff from iPhone apps like Patreon and Spotify.

Epic has proposed changes that may give you the choice on your iPhone or Android phone of cheaper subscriptions for Spotify and Netflix, depending on how you pay, or better rewards if you buy a game from an Epic app store and not from Google's.

A judge must decide on Epic's idea to let you download an Android app however you like.

Maybe you'd get it from Google's Android app store, or maybe from an alterna-

tive app store that's tailored to teens or to video game fans.

Google has said Epic's proposed changes to Google Play would hurt "the privacy, security, and overall experience of consumers, developers and device manufacturers."

Versions of these changes have started to happen, haltingly and unevenly, under an EU law. Fortnite wouldn't be returning to iPhones at all without those new checks on Big Tech's power.

Maybe all these app changes sound confusing or bad. They could be. Change is uncertain.

But Epic CEO Tim Sweeney says the downsides of the current app system hurt you and suppress innovation — often without you noticing.

"A lot of people can't even imagine a better world," he said in a news conference last week.

That's what all this app drama is about: dreaming up an alternative path and shaping it to be better than reality.

## Cut the cord with Ultenic's robotic pool cleaner

By Gregg Elluman  
Tribune News Service

The Ultenic Pooleco 10 Cordless Robotic Pool Cleaner is supposed to clean your pool while you're doing something else. The cleaner is designed for square or round pools, above-ground and in-ground. My testing was on a gunite in-ground pool, and the Ultenic site also lists compatibility with indoor or outdoor pools with tile, vinyl, plaster, fiberglass, mosaic and concrete surfaces and slopes of less than 10 degrees. It won't climb walls or stairs or run the waterline.

The cleaner has two large suction doors and a bottom-sided brush to capture dirt. It also has a filter basket and a 2.5-liter dust box, which obviously will have to be cleaned now and then. A top cover opens to empty out the debris, and the filter can be hosed off. The motor generates a suction of 30 gallons per minute and is virtually silent underwater.

There are no cords, tubes, poles or connections to the filter system as you would need with other pool vacuum systems. A robotic cleaner needs to be charged and turned on and then placed in the water to vacuum. After a few tests, the Pooleco 10 got most of the leaves and tiny rocks I planted in the pool for testing.

Working it is effortless. After it's charged, you just press a button and let it go. The run time is 90 minutes,



ULTENIC/TNS

**The Ultenic Pooleco 10 Cordless Robotic Pool Cleaner doesn't need to be connected to your pool's filter system, like other pool vacuums.**

and it's rated for cleaning pools up to 850 square feet. Inside the cleaner is a 5200 mAh rechargeable battery that is fully charged out of the water from an AC outlet connected to the top-sided charging port for 2.5 hours.

Getting the Pooleco 10 out of the pool is easy. A positioning float is included. Once the vacuuming is completed or the battery is low, it automatically parks near your pool's wall. The cleaner is pulled up to the surface with the cord connecting the float.

A few other things: Using the vacuum doesn't have to happen when people are out of the pool, but it's best. It also wouldn't be recommended for pools near a heavy amount of trees and such, generating a large amount of debris in the pool.

Online: [www.ultenic.com](http://www.ultenic.com); \$176.99

Satechi, a leader in smartphone charging accessories, has launched the **Qi2 Wireless Car Charger**, which has twice the power of the previous Qi1 model.

Qi2, which came out early last year, is the latest fast-charging technology. It delivers 15 watts of charging power to MagSafe-compatible iPhones (iPhone 12 through iPhone 15). Qi-enabled devices with a magnetic case or magnetic stickers will charge.

The 360-degree rotating soft silicone, space gray charging puck has a strong vent clamp with stabilizing support on the back to attach to a dashboard air vent. A rubber finish is on the inside of the clamps to prevent any damage to the vent. Compatible phones attach to the magnetic front, which keeps them securely in place.

Satechi states on its website that the Qi2 Wireless Car Charger will not work with credit card or wallet phone cases. A 3-foot, 3-inch USB-C cable and a 25-watt cigarette lighter adapter are included.

Online: [satechi.net](http://satechi.net); \$59.99

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

# Blossoming of an unlikely friendship

Pair of Va. college students develop close bonds with 2 World War II veterans despite 75-year-plus age gap

**BY CATHY FREE**  
*The Washington Post*

**K**ayla Smith was looking forward to taking a World War II history class in college two years ago when she learned on the first day of school that the class had been canceled with no explanation.

“I was so disappointed, because I’d really been looking forward to learning what the Greatest Generation went through,” said Smith, 23, a history and archaeology major at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va., who graduated last year.

As a college senior in 2023, Smith said she still felt cheated over not being able to take the World War II class. She thought there had to be a more hands-on and interactive way to learn about the war than reading books and watching movies.

“I started thinking, ‘There must be some World War II veterans who are still alive,’” she said. “I wondered if maybe I could find a few, and they could tell me about the war.”

She enlisted the help of a friend, Hannah Winton, and the two of them began calling veterans organizations in central Virginia.

“We were told that most of the World War II veterans were gone, but we decided to keep looking,” Smith said, noting that only about 119,000 of the 16 million Americans who served during World War II are still living.

That year, she and Winton were at the Virginia State Fair when they noticed a woman running a booth with information about Veterans of Foreign Wars. The woman put them in touch with a veterans support group in Norfolk, and that’s how Smith and Winton met Andy Valero and Leo Dormon, who are 99 and 100, respectively.

Valero, a U.S. Army veteran who survived the Battle of the Bulge, and Dormon, an aviator who served in the U.S. Navy, invited the college students to their homes in the Tidewater, Va., area to chat.

“Something unexpected happened,” Winton said. “We enjoyed talking to them so much that we wanted to keep going back.”

She and Smith now visit the men several times a month — often with freshly baked brownies — to talk or have lunch. They also accompany them to veterans events, funerals and World War II commemorations.

“I never thought that at 21,



PHOTOS BY KYLE CUMMINGS/Randolph-Macon College

**Kayla Smith, left, and Hannah Winton help U.S. Army veteran Andy Valero try on an Eisenhower jacket from the World War II era at his Virginia home. The two also befriended Leo Dormon, below, an aviator who served in the U.S. Navy.**

**“We savor every minute, because you never know when it might be the last time you see them. When they are gone, their history goes with them.”**

**Hannah Winton**

some of my best friends would be 99 and 100,” Winton said. “You can read about war and study it, but these guys actually lived it. I feel honored to be their friend.”

“I feel like it’s important for me to do this because in another lifetime, or in another story, it could have been me who was sent to France, Belgium, Germany or Japan,” Smith added.

Winton, a nursing student at Randolph-Macon College, said she became especially close with Dormon, while Smith quickly formed a connection with Valero. Both men still live at home with help from family and care providers.

Dormon is recovering from a recent stroke, Winton said, which has given her a deeper appreciation for the visits she has had with him and Valero.

“We savor every minute, be-



**“Taking the time to visit an aging person takes courage and patience, and they’ve made my life much happier. Bless them both,” Dormon told The Washington Post in a written statement.**

cause you never know when it might be the last time you see them,” she said. “When they are gone, their history goes with them.”

She and Smith said they spent hours asking the two veterans about their war experiences and looking through photos. Last month, Randolph-Macon College published a story about the friendship blossoming between the four despite their 75-year-plus age difference.

“It’s funny because we make an odd pair to most people,” Smith said about her relationship with Valero. “I get mistaken as his granddaughter frequently, and I always clarify and explain

that’s he’s one of my best friends.”

“I feel really bonded with Leo, and I love to listen to him,” Winton said. “Since his stroke, he has slower recall, but just being with him is important to me. We don’t always have to talk.”

Dormon, who was a Navy flight instructor, flew more than 35 different aircraft and trained more than 300 pilots during World War II. He also flew during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

“I’m an aviation nerd, and he’s a fighter pilot with more than 10,000 flight hours,” said Winton, who hopes to become a Navy pilot someday. “We took him and

Andy to an air show in June, and Leo was thrilled to go up in one of the vintage planes. He said it was almost like being back with the guys again.”

Dormon said he always looks forward to spending time with Winton and Smith.

“Hannah and Kayla have been regular visitors, and I have been so thankful to see both,” he told The Washington Post in a written statement. “Taking the time to visit an aging person takes courage and patience, and they’ve made my life much happier. Bless them both.”

Valero said he’d just arrived on the front lines in Belgium’s Ardennes Forest area in December 1944 when the Germans launched a massive attack on Allied forces.

“It was the worst winter in 25 years, and we had frozen fingers and trench foot,” he said, referring to the painful condition that results from standing for a lengthy time in a cold and wet environment.

Valero lost several of his close comrades in the battle.

“I didn’t talk about it for many years, but I felt comfortable talking about it with Kayla and Hannah,” he said. “They’re very caring, and they feel like family to me. They’re like angels who came out of nowhere.”

Smith said Valero has helped her cope with pain in her life as well. Her father died by suicide when she was a college sophomore, and two weeks after that, her grandfather died.

“My entire world was flipped upside down,” she said.

“After I met Andy, I felt I could open up to him,” Smith said. “I didn’t think I’d ever be happy again, but to hear him talk about the war and being numb, not wanting to feel anything, I saw how he’d been to hell and risen above it. I knew that was the kind of person I wanted to be.”

Valero and Dormon both attended her wedding in April, Smith said, and earlier this year, she and Winton accompanied Valero to Arlington National Cemetery for a ceremony honoring the 75,000 Americans who were casualties in the Battle of the Bulge.

“It’s wonderful that we can be there for each other’s milestones,” she said. “Andy introduced me to scotch, and I introduced him to FaceTime. Helping him has made me feel useful — like I have a spot in the world. Our friendship is something I never thought would come from a canceled college class.”

# WEEKEND: MOVIES

## Q&A



Searchlight Pictures

“The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat” follows lifelong best friends Barbara Jean (Sanaa Lathan, left), Odette (Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor) and Clarice (Uzo Aduba), known as “The Supremes,” who share the unbreakable bonds of sisterhood from decades of weathering life’s storms.

# The argument for a ‘heartwarming’ film

Director, stars of ‘The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat,’ now streaming, lean into its ‘feel-good movie’ label

BY HELENA ANDREWS-DYER

*The Washington Post*

“It’s all right to talk, yell at the screen,” instructs director Tina Mabry before the world premiere of her film “The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat” during the annual Martha’s Vineyard African American Film Festival. “That’s what movies are about. That’s what we are about,” added Mabry before the lights went down on the crowd of summer vacationers.

She didn’t have to tell them twice. From its opening scene to its rolling credits, “The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat” is the very definition of a feel-good movie (more on that later). Folks were guffawing, wiping away tears and clapping for the friendship triumvirate whose roller coaster ride from adolescence to their “wise women era” is chronicled in the film that arrived Friday on Hulu.

Based on the 2013 novel of the same name, Ma-

bry’s film follows soulmates Odette (Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor), Clarice (Uzo Aduba) and Barbara Jean (Sanaa Lathan) as they navigate the ’60s, men, marriage, death and dreams deferred. The story is an homage to grown women that treats the over-40 set as a demographic worthy of the spotlight. The friends are regular women with regular problems — a cheating husband, a bottle of clear liquor, menopause. The movie, which everyone involved described as a “rare treat,” was written by Black women, directed by a Black woman and stars Black women not commemorated on postage stamps.

The plan was to sit down and ask the cast and director a litany of questions. But like the characters they play on-screen, when the Supremes get together, it’s best to just stand back. The following conversation, which took place after the film’s premiere, digs into the lessons the women learned on set and why “heartwarming” isn’t a bad word; it has been edited for length and clarity:

**The Washington Post:** Aunjanue, last night you said that “The Supremes” was one of the first opportunities you got to actually talk to other women in a scene. That shocked me.

**Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor:** Well, I don’t want to speak for my castmates here, but it really has been my experience that the majority of the things I do, I’m talking to men. I did something a couple years ago and me and the other woman who was one of the leads, we had to request that we actually had a conversation. I just think it speaks to how women aren’t valued as communal storytellers. So this is why this experience is special for me.

**Sanaa Lathan:** I haven’t had that experience. But I understand where she’s coming from because early in my career I was always, like, the romantic lead, the ingenue ... it was a lot of working with men in a pre-#MeToo situation. There was definitely a hierarchy that I felt. And I had to go through a lot of ... stuff, you know what I mean? So I always cherish when I’m able to work with women and tell women’s stories. Gina Prince-Bythewood [who

SEE FEEL-GOOD ON PAGE 17

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Feel-good: Actor says Black female friendships hit more deeply because of experiences

**FROM PAGE 16**  
directed and wrote 2000’s “Love & Basketball”], when I think about it, was the only Black woman that I really worked with on a film before this. In all of these years. It’s just crazy.

**Uzo Aduba:** I do come from a slightly different lens. Pretty much the whole of my career has been working with women. Whether we’re talking about “Orange” or “Mrs. America.”

**Lathan:** That was a lot of women.

**Aduba:** I love feel-good movies, let me start there. I’d never been in these type of stories that, like, touch the heart, touch the spirit and is solely focused on our culture before.

**Often “feel-good” is used as a pejorative in the industry. Why is that? And how do we define “feel-good?”**

**Tina Mabry:** A feel-good movie is something that feeds your spirit. It builds you up. It doesn’t mean you don’t cry from time to time, but it will wipe your tears. We get very stuck into certain genres. But to me, in order for something to feel good, it must be authentic.

**Everyone:** Ummm-hmmm.

**Mabry:** For me, it’s a personal evolution to tell a story that really shows more joy. That’s lacking in this world in general.

**Lathan:** And in movies lately. It’s almost like feel-good movies are not considered. ... They don’t get the accolades. It’s almost like it has to be dark to acknowledge that this is deep art.

**Aduba:** That’s what I was going to say. It’s the suggestion that heartwarming can’t have stakes. And I don’t know if I necessarily think that’s so. There are plenty of movies like this with well-respected, esteemed actors. Whether it’s a “Fried Green Tomatoes” or a “Steel Magnolias.”

**Lathan:** What do you call that genre? What kind of movie is that?

**Aduba:** I don’t know.

**Lathan:** That’s what I hate about these boxes. I think we were all talking about “The Bear” [which the Emmy has placed in the comedy category]. People just want to label stuff. But it is what it is. Like, when I read the book, I was laughing and crying, and that’s life, right?

**During the film I kept thinking of the concept of “weathering,” and how helping others can eventually hurt us physically. Aunjanue, your character, Odette, takes care of everyone but herself. Did you think about how that affected her health?**

**Ellis-Taylor:** [pauses] Yeah.

**Mabry:** You did.

**Ellis-Taylor:** I don’t want to talk about it. We use all these terms, you know, like “burden” and “weight,” and that sounds pejorative. I see it as a privilege to be able to be an anchor. But you know it does take a toll. I’m just going to say that I hear you.

**Lathan:** Yes, it is a privilege. But what we need to learn is how to pour into ourselves as Black women. I mean, we know the history. I do believe that stress kills. It’s a fact.

**Aduba:** It makes me think of this expression “soft life.” Which also makes me

think for some reason of Maya Angelou’s “On the Pulse of Morning” and the quote “our passages have been paid for.” Whatever you’re carrying, the generations upon generations upon generations on both sides of the water have paid for you to be here. You don’t have to keep paying.

**Ellis-Taylor:** I hear you. But when you have a community of people, not just a family of people, who are relying on you to eat and to get educated ... How can I do both? To do the oxygen mask — I don’t know what that is.

**Lathan:** Well then we need to talk. I had to do it. I was having 10 panic attacks a day where I felt like I was going to die. In our community we pride ourselves on being so strong. You have such beautiful vulnerability. Your art is supreme — no pun intended — you have the benefit of channeling that through your characters.

**Black female friendship is at the heart of “The Supremes.” Why do those types of friendships seem to hit differently, more deeply?**

**Aduba:** We are already slugging through water and at points with a heavy foot. So, like, upon entrance to one another, I think the hope and expectation is one of aid and assistance. Like, I’m here to help you in some way. I got you. I don’t use the terms “sis” because I have two sisters. But I do use “sister friends” very deliberately. Because there is that thing. I don’t know how to fully articulate it.

**Lathan:** It’s an essence. It’s a heart thing. We’ve been through so much, just historically. And yet we still open our hearts and have that joy.

**Mabry:** And I feel safe. I feel like I can be vulnerable without being judged, because there are certain intangibles that you understand that I don’t have to explain.

**At one point in the film, Odette says, “Without each other, maybe we would have believed what the world told us about ourselves.” What has the world tried to tell you about yourself, and who told you different? Aunjanue, I see your eyes getting wide.**

**Ellis-Taylor:** [laughing] Did you? Probably because I was hoping somebody else took it. Somebody answer first.

**Lathan:** We have to be twice as good. That’s like a mantra that we say, right? But I tell my mentees, you are worthy just because you are you. You’re worthy now. And you teach what you need to learn. I was born into a family where it’s like when you achieve, that’s when you get the love. But I’m good now, regardless of what I’m doing next.

**Aduba:** The world has tried to tell me that my beauty is ugly. That my strength is not attractive. Whether it’s my lips, my gap, my almond eyes, the shape of my head, my name. That my differences were going to be my disadvantage. My mother was a force instilling and ensuring in me that I am enough, exactly as I am. That I had to make absolutely zero adjustment and no negotiation of that for anyone.

**Mabry:** I grew up in Mississippi, in a



Searchlight Pictures

**Director Tina Mabry on the set of “The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat.” Mabry encouraged audience members at the movie’s premiere to express their feelings about what they were seeing on-screen: Folks were guffawing, wiping tears and clapping.**

very impoverished home, and was the first one to go to college in my immediate family. When you’re the only one, it’s much harder to find your voice because you don’t have any backup. Also because I did grow up in the South, I was told that my sexual orientation is an abomination. What that does to self-worth ... I had an aunt who believed you love who you love. And how could love be a bad thing? And my father, who grew up in Jim Crow, believed the only way that you can fail is if you do not try. That is what has propelled me. I never felt like I’ve had the luxury to fail. And I for damn sure don’t have the luxury to quit. Not with this next generation coming behind us. I’ve got to make it better for them.

**Aunjanue, do you want to bring it home?**

**Ellis-Taylor:** You know, you started off this conversation with this idea of feel-good being a pejorative. There are a few of those pejoratives: “feel-good,” “chick flick.” All those are generally associated with the artistic work of women. There is a societal undervaluing of what we do. There is a constant push to justify that our work matters. That we can take up space and we can be competent in those spaces. And you will thrive because we occupy those spaces. That’s why I get up in the morning.

You know, I’m also from Mississippi, and my hero is Fannie Lou Hamer. Sixty years ago, in 1964, she testified in front of the Democratic National Convention. She had people who looked like her telling her that she did not belong because she was a Black woman from the South. People like Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights stalwarts, were telling her this. So this is the path that I walk in. So I know that the devil is a lie. I’m here because I need to be here. There’s people at home that cannot be here because you’re keeping them outside of the door. So. Yeah.

**Aduba:** That’s beautiful.

**Lathan:** Why you always got to go to church? I’m, like, it’s a Q&A!

## WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

# ‘Blink Twice’ never comes into focus

Suspense, but no clear message, in Zoë Kravitz’s directorial debut, a caustic social horror fable laced with black comedy

By Katie Walsh  
*Tribune News Service*

In her daring directorial debut, “Blink Twice,” writer/director Zoë Kravitz doesn’t flinch once — not even when her film might be served by looking away. She maintains a steely gaze in this caustic social horror fable, laced with black comedy, which nods to Jordan Peele’s “Get Out,” though Kravitz chooses to aim her artistic weapon at sexual politics, not necessarily race. Co-written with E.T. Feigenbaum, “Blink Twice” is a big, bold swing from the actress-turned-filmmaker, even if her message becomes muddled along the way. It’s clear Kravitz wants to make a statement with this film. What’s less clear is what exactly that statement might be.

“Blink Twice” opens with a dead-eyed scroll in a dingy bathroom; our protagonist, Frida (Naomi Ackie), thumbs her phone screen on the toilet catatonically, observing the lives of others on Instagram, before she and her roommate Jess (Alia Shawkat) rush to work, serving champagne and canapés at a swanky gala hosted by a disgraced tech mogul, Slater King (Channing Tatum). Yearning to feel a part of something bigger, the cater waiters slip into slinky gowns and join the party themselves, warmly welcomed into an inner circle of wealthy men as beautiful young women typically are. Jet off to Slater’s private island with his pals? Frida’s been longing for a vacation.

Kravitz observes this moneyed milieu

well, and what she capably achieves in “Blink Twice” is an absurdist comedy of gendered manners once the guys (Tatum, Simon Rex, Haley Joel Osment, Levon Hawke and Christian Slater) and gals (Ackie, Shawkat, Adria Arjona, Liz Cabel and Trew Mullen) touch down at Slater’s secluded colonial spread located in a lush tropical forest. Outfitted in matching white bikinis and resort wear, the girls are plied with fine wine, fine food and good drugs. The setting and its accoutrements couldn’t be more richly luxurious, but Kravitz presents this world with a sickening, unsettling hyperreality.

Everything feels off in “Blink Twice,” intentionally so. The style is quite jarring, with an abrasiveness that’s almost chafing to watch. The camera angles are strange, the edit jagged, as Kravitz and editor Kathryn J. Schubert construct scenes as if they’re all montage, with seconds and even minutes dropping out. The images created by cinematographer Adam Newport-Berra are saturated, too bright and have an almost burning lucidity and crispness; the sound design is also overly pronounced and too sharp. This postcard-perfect setting becomes almost unbearable to endure.

It’s a terrible truth to realize that you can have all of the nice things and still be having a bad time. Jess eventually realizes it, after a spree of endless nights spent bingeing on fun-fun-fun, the girls racing around the lawn in a champagne and psychedelics-induced stupor after



AMAZON-MGM/AP

**Naomi Ackie, left, plays cater waiter Frida and Channing Tatum a disgraced tech mogul, Slater King. King brings Frida and other waiters to his private island in “Blink Twice.”**

their stultifying dinners with the men. Of course something’s not right. They have no phones, no one knows what day it is, and mysterious injuries keep appearing. When Jess goes missing and no one seems to remember she was even there, it’s up to Frida to claw her way out of the fog and find out what happened to her best friend.

Kravitz nails the social analysis and the dark, satirical tone, but as the film becomes a horror/suspense thriller, her directorial execution falters. There are some dynamic shots and compositions and overt references to her inspirations, but the element of suspense and her ability to stage a horror sequence is lacking. She doesn’t shy away from the ugly truth at the center of her story, but Kravitz miscalculates the careful calibration of “conceal” vs. “reveal” that is necessary in horror filmmaking, making the mistake of showing us the monster clearly, forgetting that what the audience can’t see is far scarier than what it can.

Despite its flaws, what Kravitz demonstrates with “Blink Twice” is a directorial vision bursting with creative, audacious

choices, at least cinematically (narratively, the script is riddled with ideas that are rather facile and preposterous). It’s a fine first effort, and she pulls fantastic performances out of Ackie, Arjona and especially Tatum, his quiet, seductive menace boiling over impressively.

However, Kravitz never works out exactly what she wants to say about sex, power and revenge. A deeply cynical coda at the end of the film undercuts any “empowerment” themes that might naturally emerge from this story. Successfully blending righteous rage, sardonic humor and a fist-pumping “girl power” narrative is quite a challenging task, if that’s even what she wants to do (it remains a mystery). Ultimately, there’s a certain emotion and earnestness missing from “Blink Twice” that would undergird this entire endeavor and keep it from feeling so hollow. But the unrelenting cynicism robs the film of any impactful meaning. Maybe that’s the point, but it doesn’t feel good.

“Blink Twice” is rated R for strong violent content, sexual assault, drug use and language throughout and some sexual references. Running time: 102 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

## Stars have no chemistry in middling spy comedy ‘The Union’

By Lindsey Bahr  
*Associated Press*

“The Union,” an action comedy with Mark Wahlberg and Halle Berry, should have been more fun. Or more exciting. It certainly had a lot working in its favor, including big stars and a budget for globe-trotting.

But it’s lacking a certain charm that could help it be something more than the Netflix movie playing in the background.

“The Union,” now streaming, is a fairy tale — a very male one, about a middle-aged everyman (Wahlberg) whose life never quite got started and who gets recruited to be a spy out of the blue. Mike is a broke construction worker still living in his hometown of Patterson, N.J., (yes, there are Springsteen songs) with his mother, hanging with his old friends in bars. His biggest win of late was a one-night stand with his seventh grade English teacher, and the one event on his calendar is his friend’s wedding in a few weeks where he’s the best man.

That’s all to say that for Mike, it is a breath of fresh air when his old high school girlfriend Roxanne (Berry) walks into the bar one evening looking like a punk rock superhero. Glamorous and confident, she has clearly found a life outside of Patterson. The problem is that we already know what she does. Instead of putting the audience in Mike’s shoes, as the fish out of water trying to figure out why he’s awakened in a luxury suite in London



NETFLIX/AP

**Roxanne (Halle Berry) recruits her former high school boyfriend Mike (Mark Wahlberg) as a spy in The Union.**

after meeting his high school ex in his hometown bar, “The Union” starts on Roxanne. It begins with a kind of “Mission: Impossible”-style extraction gone wrong, in Trieste, Italy, where most of her team ends up dead.

The idea came from Stephen Levinson, Wahlberg’s longtime business partner, who together helped bring another middling Netflix action-comedy to life in “Spenser Confidential.” And it was directed very basically by

Julian Farino, a journeyman director who helmed many episodes of “Entourage,” and written by Joe Barton and David Guggenheim. There is a sort of charming fantasy about the notion that anyone could be an international spy given the opportunity and a few weeks of training. In the movies, women get to find out they’re secret royalty and men get to find out they’re secretly great spies.

“The Union” never quite hits its stride tonally. It’s not silly enough to be a comedy, but I think that’s what it would prefer to be. J.K. Simmons is given too little to work with as the head of this secret agency, which also employs underwritten characters played by Jackie Earle Haley, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje and Alice Lee.

Berry and Wahlberg are fine together, with an easy rapport but zero chemistry. This would not be a problem if the movie wasn’t also trying to be a will-they-or-won’t-they romance between a woman who forgot her roots and a guy who needs to. I never quite bought into the idea that either of them is actually still thinking about a high school relationship and what went wrong. There’s a lot of life in the interim to dwell on decisions made at 17.

There’s just not enough there — action, comedy, romance, art — to demand (or, rather, earn) your full attention.

“The Union” is rated PG-13 for sequences of strong violence, suggestive material and some strong language. Running time: 107 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Vibrant, historic Dresden worth a detour

Intriguing Dresden, Germany, winds up on far fewer American itineraries than it deserves to. Don't make that mistake. Since its horrific firebombing in World War II, the city has transitioned to a thriving cultural center that's well worth a visit. Even with only a day to spare, Dresden is a doable side trip from bigger attractions like Berlin or Prague.

The burg surprises visitors with fanciful Baroque architecture in a delightful-to-stroll cityscape, a history that mingles tragedy with inspiration and some of Germany's best museum-going. A generation ago, Dresden was dreary, but today it's young and vibrant, crawling with proud locals, cheery tourists and happy-go-lucky students who have no memory of communism.

Four eras have shaped Dresden: its golden age in the mid-18th century, the city's devastation in World War II, the communist regime (1945-1989) and the current "reconstruction after reunification" era. Each city sight provides a glimpse into this timeline, so I like to weave my sightseeing into a daylong stroll for the most comprehensive and meaningful visit.

On this visit I started at Theaterplatz, the main square and

home to the statue of King John of Saxony, a mid-19th century ruler who preserved Saxon culture in Germany. The buildings in this square — like many Dresden landmarks — are reconstructed to resemble their pre-bombing facades.

At the head of the square, the sprawling Zwinger palace was once the site of lavish royal celebrations hosted by the Wettin dynasty, which ruled Saxony for eight centuries.

Today, this Baroque complex is filled with fine museums, including the Old Masters Gallery, featuring works by Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt and more.

Across the street, the Royal Palace, once destroyed, was rebuilt in a yearslong project. Here, I visited the Historic Green Vault. Wettin dynasty big-shot Augustus the Strong began his Baroque treasury collection here in the early 1700s, and the extravagant trove is clearly designed to wow. The ivory, silver and gold knickknacks are examples of Gesamtkunstwerk — a symphony of artistic creations that take fancy to sometimes ridiculous heights.



Rick Steves



DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCELLI/Rick Steves' Europe

Martin Luther looms large outside the rebuilt Frauenkirche, which had lain in ruins for nearly six decades.

The highlight of my day is a stop at the symbol and soul of the city: the Frauenkirche (Church of our Lady). Destroyed in the firebombing, the Frauenkirche was left a pile of rubble and turned into a peace monument after the war. Only after Germany's 1990 reunification was the decision made to rebuild it. Over a decade and 100 million euros later, it reopened in 2005. Inside, circular nave features a twisted

old cross, once the bright golden cross atop the original church, which fell 300 feet into the bombed-out wreckage. Lost until found in the debris in 1993, it stands on the place where it was found — still relatively intact.

The Frauenkirche towers over Neumarkt, a once-central square ringed by rich merchants' homes. The districts that surround Neumarkt have been rebuilt with their facades resem-

bling the originals, and the area is once again alive with bustling cafés. A statue of Martin Luther — holding the Bible he translated from the Latin of the elites to the German of the commoners — reminds passersby of the Reformation that began in nearby Wittenberg.

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Summer's spectacles haven't concluded on the Continent

There may well be that back-to-school feeling in the air, but the summer season isn't quite over yet. As the crowds begin to thin out, it's a great time to enjoy some end-of-season spectacles and performances in stunning surroundings.

**Spectacles of sound and light:** Facades of monumental buildings and cathedrals are often used as backdrops for vibrant, motion-rich light projections to stunning effect. To keep the visuals fresh each year, a historical tale

loosely based on historical events of the region is often told. France, the country in which these shows originated, offers a wealth of such spectacles:

Rouen, capital of the Normandy region, is a highly visit-worthy port city along the Seine. Each summer, its Notre-Dame Cathedral is lit up by a free sound and light show lasting approximately 25 minutes. This year's show, created by American visual artist and playwright Robert Wilson, is based on texts by the African-American poet Maya Angelou and accompanied by the piano studies of Philip Glass. The projections can be seen at 10 p.m. nightly through Aug. 31, then at 9:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays only, through Sept. 28. Online: tinyurl.com/mumt9bv2

Orléans, the town in which Joan of Arc was martyred, hosts its Son et Lumière spectacle against the Sainte-Croix cathedral. Two shows, together lasting about one hour, light up the building: "Jeanne, lumière des arts" and "Orléans, ville Olympique." This free entry show is offered from approximately 10:40 p.m. Fridays through Sundays through Sept. 15 (note no shows will be held on Sept. 7-8). Online: tinyurl.com/bdfn6476

Saverne, in the Alsace region, is home to a spectacle titled "Furtif," described as a fusion of live performance and planned programming shown on the premises of the



LUKE RENDELL/adg-europe.com

The American Drama Group Europe performs high-quality theater in English at European castles each summer.

Cloître des Récollets, a 14th century Franciscan monastery. Shows will take place Aug. 23-24, Aug. 29-30 and Sept. 5-7. Admission costs 7 euros for those ages 12 and over. Online: tinyurl.com/255mpuec

**Shakespeare in the Castle:** The American Drama Group Europe, formed in Munich in 1978, performs high-quality theater in the English language, and embarks upon a European castles tour each summer. This year's production, Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," continues its tour with several stops in northern Europe, including: Norway: Utstein Monastery in Mosterøy Aug. 25; Bergenhusfestning-Courtyard in Bergen, Aug. 27; Akershus Festung in Oslo, Sept. 4-6. Sweden: Gunnebo Slott och Trädgårdar in Mölndal, Aug. 30; Salsta Slott in Vattholma, Sept. 2; Kungliga Djurgården in Stockholm, Sept. 3; Malmöhus in Malmö, Sept. 8-9. Denmark: Kunstmuseet Brøndlund Slot in Aabenraa, Sept. 10. Germany: Schloss Glücksburg in Glücksburg, Sept. 11;

Schloss Friedrichsruh in Friedrichsruh, Sept. 13; Schloss Gesmold in Melle, Sept. 16; Schloss Bückeburg in Bückeburg, Sept. 18; Schloss Gödens in Sande, Sept. 19; Barockschloss Störmthal in Grosspönsa, Sept. 20; Schloss Dyck in Jüchen, Sept. 23; Stadthalle Soest in Soest, Sept. 24; Schloss Haag in Geldern, Sept. 24. Netherlands: Croy Castle in Croylaan, Sept. 17; Kasteel Huis Bergh in Heerenberg, Netherlands, Sept. 27. Belgium: Courtyard of Kasteel van Groot-Bijgaarden in Dilbeek, Sept. 25; Courtyard of Kasteel Huis Doorn in Doorn, Sept. 26. Online: adg-europe.com

**Opera in a Roman amphitheater:** Verona, Italy, makes great use of its Roman ampitheater, which dates back to 30 A.D. Today the Arena di Verona is used for opera and appearances by major stars. Remaining performances of the 2024 season include Carmen on Aug. 23 and Sept. 7; Il Barbiere di Siviglia on Aug. 24, Aug. 31 and Sept. 6; VIVA VIVALDI - The four seasons immersive concert on Aug. 28; AIDA 1913 on Aug. 29 and Sept. 5; Tosca on Aug. 30 and Carmina Burana on Sept. 1. Online: arena.it/en

**Cinema beneath the stars:** Lovely Tricase, a seaside town on the southern tip of Italy's Apulia region, hosts the Salento International Film Festival Sept. 10-15. The festival prides itself on its thoughtful selection of independent works from all over the globe. The films screened are a mix of full-length features, shorts and documentaries. Warning: many of the foreign films shown here are subtitled only in Italian. Online: salentofilmfestival.com

**Lakeside music festivals:** Two more summer music festivals are still to come in Switzerland. The Summer-Days Festival takes place on the shores of Lake Constance Aug. 30-31; running parallel to that is the Seaside Festival, set in a bay nestled between vineyards, overlooked by a castle and the Bernese Alps. Just some of the headline acts set to appear at both festivals include James Blunt, Rag'n'Bone Man, Scooter, The Kooks and Tokio Hotel. Online: summerdays.ch and seasidefestival.ch

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# Getting shut-eye on your red-eye

Experts offer some tips for travelers who struggle to fall sleep on late-night flights

By Andrea Sachs  
*The Washington Post*

You may have seen these extraordinary beings on your red-eye flight: As soon as the plane takes off, they’re fast asleep, curled up in their coach seat like a baby in a bassinet. They sleep through meal service, turbulence and bawling infants.

It’s easy to resent these travelers because they have what you want: a solid night’s sleep on an overnight flight. But with the right mindset and preparation, you can join them.

“A lot of people say, ‘Oh, I can’t sleep on a plane.’ Well, sure you can,” said Chris Winter, a neurologist and sleep specialist. “You’re creating your own reality. If the plane flies long enough and you’re on it long enough, you will fall asleep.”

Red-eye flights are the best idea and the worst. On the plus side, you gain more time in your destination and fly outside work hours, so you don’t have to waste vacation days on transiting. Fares are often less expensive than daytime flights. The downside is that you might not sleep well — or at all — and you’re a wreck the next day.

Many travelers, however, are not ready to ditch red-eyes, especially since Southwest recently announced plans to start offering them as part of its company overhaul. We spoke with sleep experts about how to help nocturnal fliers catch a few winks.

### Take the latest flight

Philip Gehrman, an associate professor of clinical psychology at the University of Pennsylvania’s Penn Sleep Center, said super-late flights can work to your advantage. By the time you board, you will be so exhausted, you’ll need to prop up your eyelids.

Winter reminds travelers that it’s easier to force yourself to stay up late than to fall asleep if you’re not tired.

On connecting flights, the longest leg of the trip should occur during standard sleep times. Avoid layovers in the wee hours that will interrupt your sleep.

However, you should also consider your regular circadian rhythms. If you’re a night owl, pick a circa-midnight departure with a morning arrival that aligns with your usual wake-up time. If you’re more of a rooster, look for flights that leave and land earlier.

### Get a window seat

The window seat is the master bedroom of economy. It allows you to insulate yourself from aisle traffic and seatmates who need to squeeze by to use the lavatory. You also get the wall. If you are tall or suffer from restless leg syndrome, choose an aisle seat.

### Avoid last-minute workouts, meals

On the day of your trip, exer-

cise as usual, but avoid high-intensity workouts close to your departure time. Physical exertion can release endorphins and raise your core temperature, both of which can sabotage sleep. In addition, eat dinner before you board.

“We generally say to avoid a heavy meal or any aerobic exercise for about an hour or an hour and a half before you sleep,” Gehrman said, “so that would apply to a flight as well.”

Whether you dine at home or in the airport, avoid hard-to-digest or spicy foods that will sit in your belly. Stick with lean meats, nuts, dairy and complex carbs, which some sleep experts say can put the body in snooze mode. Winter said one of his favorite preflight snacks is hummus, which is high in tryptophan, an amino acid that helps produce melatonin and serotonin.

### Avoid caffeine, alcohol

Obviously, skip caffeinated beverages and hydrate with water. Alcohol can be a shortcut to dreamland, but Gehrman warns that too many boozy drinks can cause shallow or fragmented sleep.

“I’ve had lots of people tell me they have a few drinks on the plane and that helps them fall asleep,” he said. “They may sleep, but it’s probably going to be pretty poor quality sleep.”

### Block out light, noise

It seems so simple: You’re tired, so sleep. But airplane cabi-



iStock

**Red-eye flights are great for your travel schedule, but only if you can get some sleep en route. One of the ways to increase your chances is to pack an arsenal of sleep accessories, such as earplugs, an eye mask, a neck pillow and noise cancellation headphones.**

ns do not have the same cues and comforts as a bedroom, so your body struggles to shut out the world and succumb to sleep.

The ceaseless stimulation — the glow of the seat-back screen, the flight crew announcements, the ping of the seat-belt sign, the snorts and snores of fellow passengers — keeps your brain active and your body alert. In addition, seated sleeping requires the muscles to work overtime.

“Sleeping in unfamiliar situations in which we don’t have control over sound, light or tem-

perature can be challenging,” Joseph Dzierzewski, senior vice president of research and scientific affairs at the National Sleep Foundation, said by email. “Sleeping during flights also presents challenges regarding ideal sleeping position and the possibility of frequent uncontrollable interruptions.”

### Wear layers

During the sleep cycle, the body’s core temperature drops and skin temperature rises. Between the chilly airplane and your fluctuating internal ther-

is a fan of NapAnywhere, a travel pillow that resembles a tiny satellite dish and is less bulky than the more traditional model. He also suggests a hoodie with a built-in eye mask, such as the one by Dep Slepwear. Similar to new hiking equipment, test your sleep gear at home, to make sure it’s comfortable and works.

**Chris Winter**  
a neurologist and sleep specialist

mometer, you may feel as if you are bouncing between a sauna and a cold plunge. To avoid sweating or chattering teeth, dress in soft, loose-fitting layers, and bring a blanket and thick socks if you can’t sleep with your shoes on.

### Bring your bedtime routine aboard

To prepare your body for sleep, replicate some of your at-home routines on the plane. If you drink a cup of tea or read

before bed, practice these habits in your seat. Also, brush your teeth and wash your face in the airport bathroom or airplane lavatory.

“These sleep cues will help trigger your brain associations with bedtime,” Gehrman said.

### Speed up recovery in your destination

Experts say the optimal amount of sleep for healthy adults is seven to nine hours. However, quality is as important as quantity. Deep sleep should account for 20 to 25% of your snooze time. Unfortunately, the most restorative phase of sleeping can be elusive on a plane. Even if you “sleep” for the entire flight, you could still wake up exhausted, with red eyes.

“It’s just a matter of getting what you can, knowing you’re going to feel tired the next day and planning ahead,” Gehrman said. “On the first day in your destination, don’t plan anything that requires you to be alert and well-rested.”

To speed up recovery, exercise and get some sunlight. If you start dragging, take a short power nap, but don’t sleep for hours. And if you’re invited to dance the night away, politely decline until your circadian rhythms are back in their groove.

“You need to be really diligent about making sure your sleep is good for the next few nights,” Winter said. “You shouldn’t pull a red-eye and then party all night long in Prague.”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# Mountaintop retreats from heat, crowds

An insider tip: European ski destinations are cooler and less busy in the offseason

**By MICHELLE TCHEA**  
*Special to The Washington Post*

If you haven't spent much time in Europe, it's natural to gravitate to the big cities on a summer vacation: Milan one day, Paris the next and Barcelona to cap off an exhausting trip. But living here for the past decade has taught me a different lesson as I morphed into less of a tourist and more of a local. The truth is, the classics are overrated in the summer, with many family restaurants closed, overcrowding inevitable and temperatures scorching.

If you truly want to enjoy Europe this time of year, do what I do: Head to the mountains, for music festivals, art classes and lakeside adventures.

Not only is the mountain weather much cooler, but the reduced (if growing) crowds outside of ski season allow summer travelers to build in spontaneity. You don't have to book everything in advance.

Claudio Zemp, director of Switzerland Tourism America, said 11% more Americans are visiting Switzerland this year than in 2023, on track to beating records set before the pandemic.

"A big aim of ours is to invite guests to stay with us during times which are not so busy," he said.

Switzerland's reputation as a premier winter destination remains unrivaled, spanning east and west with alpine retreats in Zermatt and St. Moritz. But now, along with having the most open-air festivals in Europe, the Swiss Alps offer a stellar lineup of sporting and cultural activities that mostly are available only in summer, to keep visitors entertained without skiing, snowboarding or ice-skating on the itinerary. Other ski destinations such as the Dolomites, Megève in France and even regions of Finland and Sweden are also ramping up their warm-weather attractions.

But visiting in the summer is still considered "an insider tip," said Richard Leuenberger, general manager of Badrutt's Palace, a historic hotel in St. Moritz. Here's how to do it:

## How to adventure

In the Bernese Alps of western Switzerland, locals tackle trails that travel deep into alpine valleys, gorges and caves, as well as high up into the sky on glaciers and mountain peaks.

Switzerland's westerly winds make for perfect paragliding and hot-air ballooning conditions, too, in places like Interlaken. Fabrice Bielmann, a paragliding instructor in Rougemont, said he has seen a spike in summer interest in nearby Gstaad, known internationally as a ski destination.

"You're surrounded by waterfalls, mountain lakes for swimming and snow on the highest peaks — it's magical," Bielmann said.

If you're looking for a beach, eastern Switzerland offers lakes with both soft and extreme sports. I love to sail on Lake St.



iStock

**Switzerland's westerly winds make for perfect paragliding conditions. Here, a paraglider launches from the top of Mount Pilatus near Lucerne. Paragliding is one of the improved summer offerings at Badrutt's Palace, a historic hotel in St. Moritz.**

Moritz, which changes color from turquoise to lime green and dark blue as days move into night, but adrenaline-seekers can head to Lake Silvaplana for kite- and windsurfing that feels straight out of coastal Spain.

"We've improved our summer offerings over the years to cater to a growing interest from international travelers," said Leuenberger, who grew up in the Emmental Alps of central Switzerland. Among those improved offerings: horseback riding, paragliding and rock climbing.

Other countries' famed alpine resorts come with their own summer action. France's Megève, for instance, features supervised via ferrata, cave diving and self-guided hikes across natural wonders like Mont Blanc. Near Italy's Dolomites, it's possible to go summer skiing in the Rhaetian Alps, and there's also mountain biking, e-biking, and canyoning in Cortina and Trentino.

Austria's Stubai Valley region offers bungee jumping, for the brave, while Vorarlberg to the west is great for hiking and mountaineering. If you are traveling with young children, Austrian ski resorts in the summer offer activities like rock climbing and whitewater rafting, and free "kid parks" can provide hours of fun.

Farther afield, consider Lahti, the anchor of Finnish Lakeland, the Nordic region's premier cross-country-ski area and home to more than 800 lakes. In summer, you can more comfortably spend hours exploring the Pulkkilanharju ridge around the Salpausselka Geopark, which formed during the Ice Age more than 12,000 years ago. For a break, go boating, fishing or

swimming — or rappel down the ski jump at the Lahti Sports Center.

## How to take in the culture

Some of the world's finest jazz musicians visit the Alps for annual sellout festivals in spots including St. Moritz and Megève. In Lahti, the annual Sibelius Festival attracts classical music lovers, and a new visual arts museum is fun for families. Austria's Bregenzerwald region, meanwhile, displays sculptures in public spaces that function as "art stops."

Want a more hands-on approach to art? Many Swiss hotels offer creative classes, like watercolor painting or pottery, during the summer.

And while the Alps' mountaintop huts remain open to hungry hikers and bikers during the warmer months, Europe's ski resort areas offer more than just fondue. Megève is the culinary capital of the French Alps, with a growing list of Michelin-starred restaurants and food events that draw the best chefs from Paris during the summer. In Swedish Lapland, famed for the northern lights and daring heliskiing in the winter, celebrated chefs lead understated restaurants for which they forage, hunt and catch their own ingredients. Fuel up before fly-fishing in Sweden's mountains under the midnight sun.

## How to find a deal

European ski resorts are notoriously expensive during the winter season, but trip costs come down in summer, including for lodging.

Another perk is the transit discounts that some hotels will offer. In Switzerland, most hotels in St. Moritz and the region of

Crans-Montana and Gstaad provide guests with passes for free cable car rides and public transport during the summer season. Some hotels in France and Italy may offer free cable car passes, too, but it's not as common.

Explorer cards can offer extra summer discounts to museums in Switzerland and on excursions in Austria, so be sure to ask your concierge at check-in.

## How to get around

The easiest and most sustainable way to the Swiss Alps from major cities is by train.

"The compact size of Switzerland allows you to explore every day another highlight, with the mountaintops easily accessible by mountain railways, cable cars and funiculars," said Zemp, of Switzerland Tourism America.

The all-in-one Swiss Travel Pass allows unlimited travel on its robust rail network, plus buses, boats, funiculars and cable cars.

Driving may be the best way to reach the French Alps, unless you are patient with long train and bus connections, which can take five hours from Paris to Megève. If you do choose to drive to Europe's ski regions in summer, though, note that you may encounter road closures and detours when traveling to destinations during the offseason, when roadwork usually takes place. Scout out the conditions ahead of time by calling your hotel or contacting the local tourism office.

Any such delays may cause frustrations, but remember: You might just appreciate all that roadwork the next time you visit, in winter.

# WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



A close-up of tafoni, small cavelike formations on a sandstone wall in the Rumberg formation near Ludwigswinkel, Germany. These geological features form on rock surfaces, especially porous ones like sandstone and granite, as a result of weathering processes.



A slender sandstone tower rises dramatically from the forest floor, part of the stunning Rumberg formation near Ludwigswinkel, Germany.



A path winds between two colorful sandstone walls near Ludwigswinkel. The Rumbergsteig hiking trail offers easy access to hikers of all skill levels.

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

# A Palatinate Forest hike through time

Trails near Ludwigswinkel, Germany, feature sandstone marvels and US Army relics

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

Southwestern Germany’s Palatinate Forest can seem like a blur of green uniformity to car and rail travelers, but hidden adventure spots abound just beyond the hills.

The town of Ludwigswinkel, near the French border and an hour’s drive from Kaiserslautern, is among them.

It’s a gateway to a hike with a fascinating blend of history, nature and outdoor relaxation.

For military families and history buffs, walking through the forests here is a journey through time, from Cold War relics to stunning sandstone formations.

A convenient place to park is the Landgrafen Restaurant. The hike begins at a large map near the old schoolhouse, leading onto a fine gravel path where the surroundings quickly transition from village to forest.

Just as you find yourself enveloped by towering trees, the trail again opens into a clearing, and there it is: a remnant of a not-so-distant past.

The guard tower of Area 1 stands as a concrete reminder of America’s Cold War past in the region. Once part of the U.S. Army’s large Fischbach Ordnance Depot, this now-abandoned historic site was fortified with the kind of security that could rival Fort Knox.

Signposts placed by a local historical society guide visitors to 13 sights on 32



The guard tower of Area 1 near Ludwigswinkel, Germany, once watched over one of the largest U.S. Army ordnance depots in Germany.

acres of “the Palatinate’s youngest castle.”

Between guard bunkers and checkpoints, roads meander through the clearing, past a pond where frogs croak, a surprisingly peaceful contrast to the site’s once-ominous purpose.

This was where nuclear weapons were stored, ready for rapid deployment should the Cold War have turned hot. Today, the site’s graffiti-riddled remnants offer a sobering reminder of that era.

A row of structures on “bunker alley” still exhibits some of the security features of the “weapon access delay system,” including steel cages and barbed wire. The encroaching vegetation and forest now cover an area that was once completely cleared to allow guards a clear shot at intruders.

After absorbing the history of Area 1, follow the trail onward through the dense forest and up the Rumbergsteig trail. As you climb, you may notice your phone switching to a French provider, a subtle reminder of just how close you are to the border.



Water lilies float on the Pfälzerwoog. Their pink blooms add a splash of color to the tranquil lake, which is a popular stop for hikers seeking a moment of peace.

Soon, the first sandstone formations come into view, with the highlight being the five spectacular Rumberg towers. These colorful columns evoke the scenery of the American West. Lizards bask on sun-warmed stones and the scent of pine fills the air.

Pausing here for a break is a must. The sandstone formations are not just visually stunning. The rock’s texture, eroded over millennia, creates a striking scene that feels almost otherworldly.

Descending from the Rumberg, the trail gently guides you back toward Ludwigswinkel. A refreshing stop awaits at the Rösselquelle, where icy spring water bubbles up, offering a cool respite for weary hikers.

For those not yet ready to call it a day, the Wasgau Lake Tour provides an extended adventure. This 10-mile loop first leads to the Lindelskopf mount, where a short climb rewards you with panoramic views of the village below.

Continuing the journey, you’ll encounter the idyllic Pfälzerwoog, a lake that in sum-

## On the QT

**Address:** Landgrafenstrasse 33, Ludwigswinkel, Germany

**Hours:** Open year-round, but best visited in spring and summer

**Cost:** The trails are free; the barefoot path costs 2 euros.

**Information:** Online: [sites.google.com/view/ig-area-1-e-v/startseite](https://sites.google.com/view/ig-area-1-e-v/startseite)

Alexander Riedel

mer is adorned with pink water lilies that reflect beautifully in the still waters. Approaching Fischbach-bei-Dahn, you catch sight of the White Madonna, a 13-foot-tall concrete statue of the Virgin Mary that serves as a poignant symbol of peace.

The trail eventually loops back through dense forest and past more than five serene bodies of water, leading to the perfect way to end a summer day: a swim in the cool waters of the Saarbacherhammer Lake near Ludwigswinkel.

There is no fee to use the lake, which is a popular summer destination for nearby residents but was not too crowded even on a sweltering weekend day.

For those needing a final treat, the Ludwigswinkel barefoot path offers a fun, tactile experience that challenges your feet with a variety of textures from warm, soothing sand to a knee-high mud bath followed by cold river rocks.

Completing both trails in a single day is ambitious but realistic. For families with young children or those who prefer a slower pace, tackling just the Rumbergsteig and cooling off in the Mühlweiher is a perfect summer outing.

[riedel.alexander@stripes.com](mailto:riedel.alexander@stripes.com)  
X: @lexRiedel

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

# Taking a chance on Thai Mekong in Bavaria

Heroldsberg eatery offers large portions, reasonable prices

**BY LYDIA GORDON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

**T**hai food is likely not the first thought for hungry visitors to rural Bavaria.

But after a few months of living in this part of Germany, plenty of exposure to bratwurst and a persistent craving for Asian food, I took a chance on what I thought was Thai Imbiss Mekong in the village of Heroldsberg.

The restaurant had few, albeit positive, reviews and a single picture of a hut-like structure on Yelp and Google.

Using my phone as a guide, the photo I saw and my below-average land navigation skills, I circled a building attempting to find this mysterious hut, only to find that the photo was a red herring.

The replacement to what I found on Yelp is a full building, far from the usual size of a German imbiss, which is typically like a kiosk.

The rebranded Thai Mekong, sans imbiss, wasn't busy on a Friday evening at peak dinner hours. A few patrons were nestled on the shaded patio with a curtain of trees that dampened the sound of Heroldsberg's primary road, giving the patio a calm atmosphere.

Assuming I would have to stumble my way through my minimal knowledge of German, I tried to ask for a table, to no avail, then resorted to asking whether the waitstaff spoke English, to which they excitedly stated that they did.

The kind and friendly host explained the German menu while giving her personal recommendations for dishes.

The offerings test the taste buds with varying degrees of spice from an array of curries, noodles, rice plates and specialty items.

As an avid fan of Thai food, I ordered a couple of plates, not wanting to review the restaurant based on a single dish.

The pad thai felt like a good place to start. For 14 euros, I was pleased with the portion. As hungry as I was, this dish could easily have been shared.

Unfortunately, there was nothing special that stuck out to me. The sweet sauce, lemon and peanuts on the side added flavor, but the dish was ultimately average.

I held out hope for the curry and I wasn't disappointed.

The massaman curry was the



## Thai Mekong

**Address:** Hauptstrasse 94, Heroldsberg, Germany  
**Hours:** Tuesdays-Sundays, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.  
**Prices:** Main dishes are between 10 and 17 euros; cards and cash are accepted  
**Information:** Phone: 0911-1496-6715, Online: [thai-mekong.jimdo-free.com/speisekarte](http://thai-mekong.jimdo-free.com/speisekarte)

Lydia Gordon

**The pad thai at Mekong Thai, a family-run restaurant in Heroldsberg, Germany, a village outside of Nuremberg. For 14 euros, the portion was big enough to be shared. The dish, however, was average.**

PHOTOS BY LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes



**The massaman curry at Thai Mekong in Heroldsberg is sweet and spicy, with a hefty portion size.**

best meal I've had in a while. It was sweet with a hint of spice. The potatoes and chicken were tender, and it was all accented by the slight crunch of the sliced

carrots. While this dish also could have been a shared plate, I savored every bite of the curry and rice and wished for more. I did have to wait a while for



**Mekong Thai has a shaded patio with a curtain of trees that dampen the sound of Heroldsberg's primary road.**

the food to arrive, but good food should take time. Overall, Mekong is a charming, family-owned restaurant with affordable prices and large portions. Next

time I head toward Nuremberg, I may have to stop off in Heroldsberg for another plate of curry.

[gordon.lydia@stripes.com](mailto:gordon.lydia@stripes.com)  
[@Lydia\\_Stripes](https://www.instagram.com/Lydia_Stripes)

WEEKEND: FOOD

# Even ramen can't escape price hikes

Inflation has come for Japan's most beloved cheap meal

By Michelle Ye Hee Lee  
and Julia Mio Inuma  
*The Washington Post*

Ramen is an affordable comfort dish in Japan, where a bowl of warm noodles in hearty broth rarely costs more than 1,000 yen, or about \$6.80. It's a quick and reliable meal during a work lunch break, for teenagers hungry after school and salarymen taking a late train home.

But as Japan experiences inflation after decades of falling or stagnant prices, one of the country's favorite cheap meals is taking a hit. Ramen shops are closing at a record pace this year, as owners face the dilemma of raising their prices beyond the "1,000-yen wall" to cope with rising costs or shutting down.

As of July, 49 ramen shops filed for bankruptcy, on pace to set a record for most closures in one year, according to Teikoku Databank, a corporate research company based in Tokyo. The cost of ingredients, labor and electricity required for making ramen has gone up 10 percent over three years, the company found.

"Prices have been rising over the years, but the last three years or so have been unbelievable," said Tetsuya Kaneko, 44, who last year raised his price by 50 yen to 1,000 yen for a standard bowl at Mendokoro Isshou in western Tokyo. "I think everyone in the industry is struggling."

Of course, ramen culture in Japan isn't going anywhere. The 49 bankruptcies represent a small fraction of the 21,000-plus ramen eateries in Japan. Even on a humid 95-degree day, aficionados queued outside ramen shops at lunch time for a steaming bowl.

Each region of Japan touts its own style of ramen from noodle texture to ingredients in the broth, which includes creamy pork bone tonkotsu in the south, sweet corn and butter miso in the north, and even the tsukemen, a dipping ramen with noodles served separately from broth made of chicken, pork and fish.

Yet the increase in closures this year underscores larger economic trends in Japan: Inflation is rising after almost three "lost decades" of economic stagnation; the yen, although it has risen slightly in the past month, remains stubbornly weak; and energy prices have risen since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Although wages are rising at the fastest pace in three decades, they are not keeping up with inflation, making people feel like they're getting poorer.

"The ramen shop example is a really good one [of the economic trends] because they're struggling to pass on the increase in the cost to the final consumers," said Norihiro Yamaguchi, senior Japan economist at Oxford Economics. "Before 2022, consumers were hesitant to see any kind of price hikes, whether it's food, or rent, or whatever. But [now] ... they have to accept the increase in their living costs."

Such trends in the world's fourth-largest economy gained global attention earlier this month, when the central bank unexpectedly raised interest rates to try to contain inflationary pressures. Soon after, Japanese stock markets took their biggest daily dive since 1987, sending shock waves through global markets and highlighting the weakness of the yen.

The Japanese currency has lost more than 40 percent of its value against the dollar over the past five years, attracting investors who want to take advantage of the weak yen. It has made imports into resource-poor Japan dramatically more expensive, compounding energy shortages.

While many countries around the world have been grappling with a cost-of-living crisis, the sticker shock has hit Japanese consumers particularly hard because they had been used to stable prices for so long. Small businesses have struggled to pass on costs to consumers out of fear of ruining their reputation, experts say.

"If you ask your customers if you should be increasing pricing, of course they say, 'No,'" said Jesper Koll, a Tokyo-based economist and investor.

"But the cost pressures — rising food prices, rising energy prices in particular, the terms-of-trade pressure — are obviously very real," he said. "So you have to raise prices."

Many ramen shop owners agree: The squeeze on their business is very real.

## Apologetic ramen cooks

Taisei Hikage, 27, who runs Menya Taisei in western Tokyo, deftly strains noodles by tossing them in the air and



PHOTOS BY HIROKI KOBAYASHI/For The Washington Post

Customers fill up with ramen at Tokyo's Menya Taisei last week as all 14 seats were full.



Ramen noodles made at Menya Taisei. The shop's specialty is iekei ramen, which has pork marrow and soy sauce broth.



"It's starting to become unsustainable," Taisei Hikage says about inflation's impact on his ramen shop.



The price of nearly every ramen ingredient has gone up, Menya Taisei's owner says.

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STARS AND STRIPES

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Farm-to-table quality in Tokyo

See where the ingredients started at Farm Basel near Yokota Air Base

**BY KELLY AGEE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

**F**arm Basel, a farm-to-table restaurant, serves fresh-picked vegetables and locally sourced dairy and beef in an agrarian complex surrounded by urban Tokyo.

The restaurant is in Hachioji, not far from Yokota Air Base, in Tokyo Farm Village, which also includes the Isonuma Milk and Beef Farm and Nakanishi Farm, a fruit and vegetable farm.

Farm Basel provides an English menu and can seat 50 inside and 20 outdoors where dogs are allowed.

I opted for the grilled mixed vegetable salad with bread for 1,400 yen, or about \$9.50, and for dessert, the dark cherry pie with vanilla ice cream for 990 yen.

The salad was a mix of arugula, lettuce, kale, carrots, peppers and eggplant and topped with a creamy dressing.

ula, lettuce, kale, carrots, peppers and eggplant from Nakanishi Farm and topped with a creamy dressing with ingredients from Isonuma Milk Farm.

For the dark cherry pie, Farm Basel reduces large cherries with sugar and lemon juice, butter and kirsch liqueur and serves it hot with vanilla ice cream. This dish is available only on weekends.

Both the salad and the dessert were amazing, the fruits and vegetables very fresh and the vanilla ice cream creamy and delectable.

Other menu items include a beef stroganoff for 1,800 yen; French farmer's beef stew for 2,000 yen; and a Tokyo Farm Village burger topped with either Isonuma yogurt sauce or a homemade sauce made from cheddar cheese and ketchup for 2,300

yen. The burger comes with a side of fries.

Several juices are available, including apple, red grape and mango for 700 yen each. The restaurant serves a variety of teas, including a Basel original "smoky" blend of teas from India, China, Sri Lanka and Japan.

Other dessert options range from apple pie with vanilla ice cream for 990 yen to a variety of shortcake, cheesecake and tarts at 880 yen each.

Guests can indulge in a post-dinner stroll around the premises to visit the farms, which are just a three-minute walk from the restaurant.

At the milk and beef farms, at the bottom of a hill nearby, grass is available for free to feed the farm's cattle and sheep.

Nakanishi Farm — atop the hill adjacent to the restaurant —



Farm Basel

**Location:** 1673-1 Kobikimachi, Hachioji, Tokyo 193-0934  
**Hours:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday; 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday  
**Prices:** Most items cost between 900 yen and 2,300 yen.  
**Dress:** Casual  
**Directions:** A short walk from Yamada Station on the Keio Takao Line; free parking is available.  
**Information:** Online: [tokyofarmvillage.me/eat](http://tokyofarmvillage.me/eat)

Kelly Agee

grows lettuce, tomatoes, eggplants and much more. Fresh produce is available for sale at a farm stand.

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PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

The grilled mixed vegetable salad from Farm Basel in Hachioji, Japan, is a combination of arugula, lettuce, kale, carrots, peppers and eggplant and topped with a creamy dressing.



For the dark cherry pie, Farm Basel reduces large cherries with sugar and lemon juice, butter and kirsch liqueur and serves it hot with vanilla ice cream.



HIROKI KOBAYASHI/For The Washington Post

Taisei Hikage opened Menya Taisei last year and has already had to raise prices.

Ramen: Noodles no longer a 'one-coin meal'

**FROM PAGE 24**

catching them with a wire basket. His 14-seat shop specializes in iekei ramen, known for its pork marrow and soy sauce broth.

When Hikage started in Tokyo's ramen industry 10 years ago, the noodles were considered a "one-coin meal" because the basic dish could often be had for a single 500-yen (\$3.40) piece.

Hikage opened his restaurant in March 2023, offering a bowl for 750 yen (\$5.08) before extra toppings. But he has since raised prices twice because of soaring costs, and posted a detailed apology on social media. He now charges 950 yen (\$6.44) for a basic bowl.

"We [the industry] are at the breaking point of the 1,000-yen wall. It's starting to become unsustainable," Hikage said.

The price of nearly every ingredient in ramen has gone up in the past two to three years, ramen shop owners say: pork, chicken, wheat, seaweed, bamboo shoots, green onions, soy sauce and even oils.

Some of those food price increases were due to poor harvest, but they were also driven by Japan's high dependence on food imports, economists say.

Then, there is the energy required to simmer the broth over a long period of

time to bring out the complex flavors, often requiring shops to keep the power on for 24 hours a day.

Because more than 90 percent of Japan's energy supply is imported, according to the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, the country is highly susceptible to global energy supply disruptions.

"With the war [in Ukraine], energy costs also went up, so that had a huge impact," said Kaneko, the owner of Mendokoro Isshou. "Not only the gas costs for cooking but electricity costs. Keeping the air conditioner on is essential, since it's so hot [in the summer]. So we are using a lot of energy."

To enable people to cope with rising inflation, Japan has instituted several increases to minimum wages, taking the national average from 961 yen (\$6.45) to 1,054 yen (\$7.17).

The wage increases are good news for households but create another challenge for small businesses like Kaneko's.

**Little relief in sight**

It will take some time before consumers feel the benefit of the yen's 10 percent gain against the dollar in July, reaching a seven-month high.

Import prices fall as the yen appreciates, but there is about a 10-month lag until this makes it through to food retail prices, said Yamaguchi, the economist at Oxford Economics.

"At least until the end of this year, the pressure from food prices will continue," Yamaguchi said.

Until then, many ramen shop owners are cautiously raising their prices to or beyond 1,000 yen while keeping quality high so that customers will come back. Some ramen chains are moving to suburbs to bring cheap eats to families struggling with inflation, according to Nikkei Asia.

"Ramen has always been a staple for people with lower income or students and young people ... so I don't necessarily want ramen to become something out of reach for them," Kaneko said.

But at least some customers appear to be adjusting to the 1,000-yen ramen.

Yuya Henmi, a 28-year-old information technology worker who waited outside the Menya Taisei ramen joint for 30 minutes in the middle of a sweltering day, said he doesn't mind higher ramen prices — as long as the noodles are delicious.

"I like ramen a lot, so I think I'd pay up to 2,000 yen (\$13.63) if it's really good," said Henmi.

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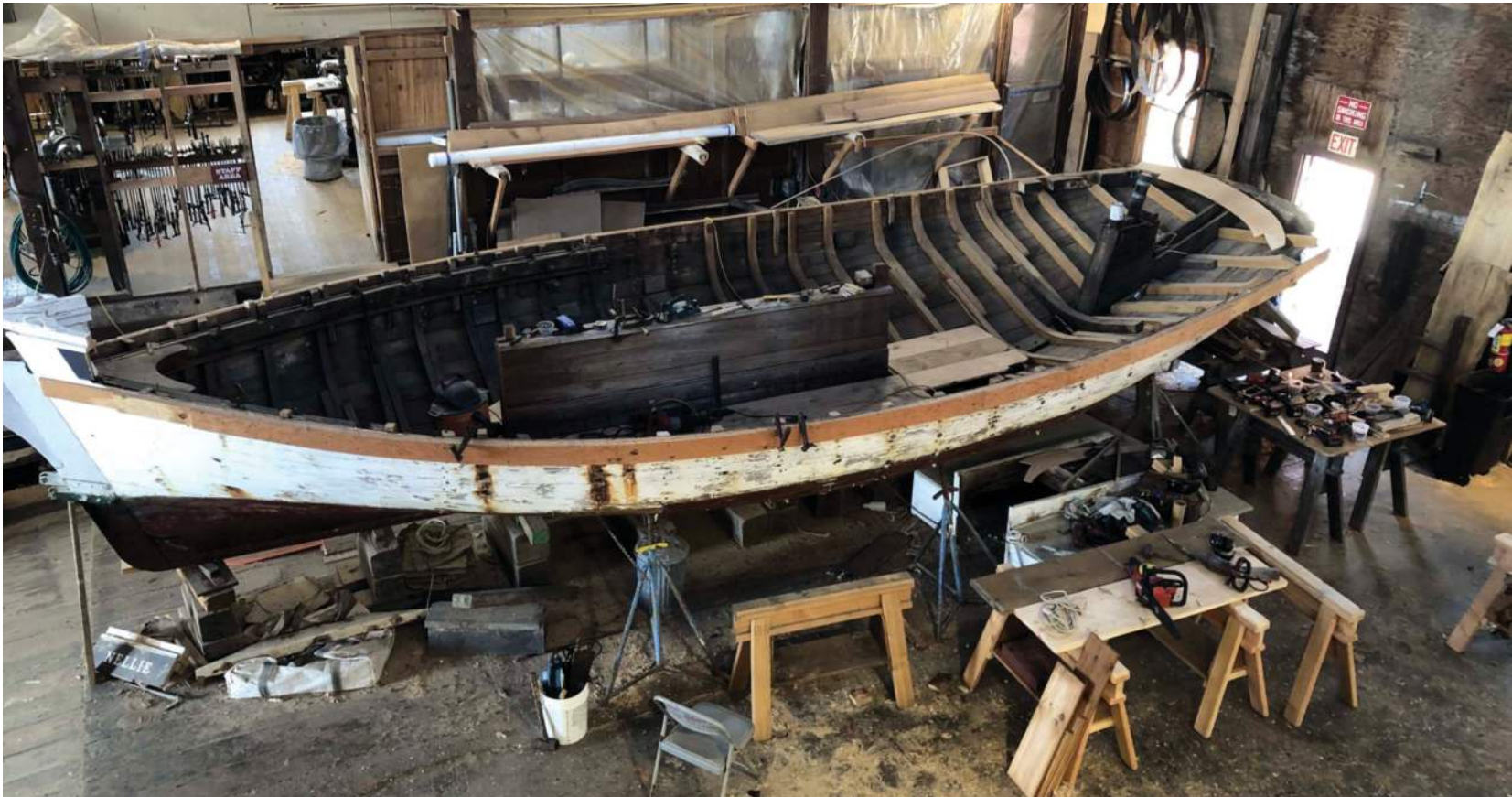
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STARS AND STRIPES

# WEEKEND: TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

A boat repair shop restores maritime vessels to their original, era-appropriate condition at The Mystic Seaport Museum, in Mystic, Conn.

## Dive into Mystic Seaport

Connecticut museum’s historic vessels and re-created village provide visitors with a glimpse into America’s maritime past

By JUAN KING  
*Stars and Stripes*

A trip to Connecticut’s vibrant coastline is incomplete without a visit to the Mystic Seaport Museum, which will whisk you away to seaside life in the mid-19th century.

The museum’s founders — industrialist Edward Bradley, lawyer Carl Cutler and physician Dr. Charles Stillman — acquired the self-sufficient seaport property in 1929 to preserve its 200-plus-year history.

My family ventured onto the 19-acre grounds during a vacation to the United States this summer. The smell of wood filled the air in the dusty, busy shipbuilding zone, the Henry B. Du Pont Preservation Shipyard, which is filled with the tools and materials common to maritime vessels of the era.

The shipyard features more than 500 historic vessels, including sloops, tugboats and a steamboat. A whaling ship, the Charles W. Morgan, built and launched in 1841, was moored to a pier nearby. Now the last of its kind, it was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966.

One large 19th-century fishing schooner, the L.A. Dunton, is being restored in the yard. We walked up an approximately two-story wooden staircase for a look inside the restoration process underway by professional shipwrights.

The Mystic Seaport Museum acquired the schooner in 1963, and it is one of a few remaining of its class. A nearby boathouse has rowboats, sailboats and pedal boats available to navigate yourself in the nearby Mystic River. It is open daily and is included in general admission.

A lobster shack down a gravel path is said to have brought in up to 500 lobsters a day at its peak.

A short walk from the yard are the old homes and working quarters of the re-created seaport village. Some large houses built during that era are the George Greenman House, erected for Greenman,

### If you go

**Address:** 75 Greenmanville Ave., Mystic, Conn. 06355  
**Times:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily Grounds close at 6 p.m. during spring and summer; times and schedules change according to the season and certain exhibits or events may not be available.  
**Costs:** \$31 for adults; \$27 for 13 to 17; \$21 for 4 to 12; \$29 for 65 and older; free for 3 and younger.  
**Food:** The Anchor Café near the museum entrance offers breakfast, lunch and other snacks and drinks.  
**Information:** Phone: 860-572-0711; Online: mystic-seaport.org

Juan King

one of the Greenman & Co. shipyard founders, and his wife, Abigail.

A small church, a bank and a school building are among other establishments in the village. Interior displays give a sense of the simple living of the era.

Trade shops worth a peek are the ship carvers, ship smiths and a rigging loft. A drugstore, with myriad bottled medicines from that era used to heal or cure certain ailments, is connected to a small doctor’s office. The office has some of the primitive instruments that you could imagine were used on patients of that period.

Before leaving, we checked out the museum store outside the south entrance. Hundreds of nautical-themed items were for sale, from books, hats and clothing to snacks and children’s toys. My son selected a small navigational telescope as a parting souvenir.

There are staff historians, scientists, storytellers and others on the grounds to help guide and explain the area. The museum strives to offer a learning atmosphere for visitors with not only the exhibits but also its workshops, classes and more.

king.juan@stripes.com  
@juanking\_17



A mid-19th century drug store and doctor’s office are re-created at The Mystic Seaport Museum, a 19-acre, historic seaport property.



Staff historians, scientists, storytellers and others are available on the museum grounds to help guide and explain the area.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

# Should parents still pay for a wedding?

As couples marry later, traditional etiquette doesn't always apply

BY LEANNE ITALIE  
*Associated Press*

**A**ttire, travel, food, liquor, flowers: There's no end to expenses when it comes to traditional weddings. Through time, though certainly not always, it was the bride's parents who were expected to pay the bulk of expenses, but like so many aspects of weddings, the etiquette has gotten more fluid. The ages of first-time bridal couples is going up. Parents might be older too, and thinking about saving for retirement or already on fixed incomes.

So who pays, and how much? Now, "it's really a candid conversation" between the couple and those who might want to contribute, said Lizzie Post, co-president of the Emily Post Institute and co-host of the "Awesome Etiquette" podcast. "Often it's parents, but that's not the case for everybody," she said. "Never assume that anyone else is going to contribute to your wedding."

Jove Meyer, a wedding planner and designer in New York, agreed. "We have found over the years that it's definitely shifted," he said. "It's hard to talk about money, but it's one of the most important questions couples have to ask." Among U.S. users of the wedding planning site The Knot, parents on average contribute slightly more than half the wedding budget, with bridal couples covering the rest, said editor Sarah Hanlon.

### Age and resources

The ages of first-time couples have steadily risen for both men and women since 1998. The median age for men getting married for the first time was 30.2 last year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. It was 28.4 for women. In 1947, the medians were 23.7 for men and 20.5 for women. "As couples marry later in life and are often more financially established, many choose to cover the majority of expenses, or even the entire wedding, themselves, sometimes accepting contributions from their families as a gesture of support rather than obligation," said Myka Meier of Beaumont Etiquette in New York. In other cases, parents might have saved over the years with a wedding fund. **What does a wedding cost?** The average combined cost of a non-destination wedding ceremony and reception last year among U.S. users of The Knot was \$35,000. That was up by about \$5,000 from what it was in 2022, likely due



A bride holds a bouquet during her wedding. In the past, floral arrangements were paid for by the bride's family.

**The average combined cost of a nondestination wedding ceremony and reception last year among U.S. users of The Knot was \$35,000.**

to inflation and the overall economic landscape. The average cost of a destination wedding and reception was \$41,000. First marriages tend to be more expensive than second marriages. Meyer said weddings can cost far more in places like New York City, where he sees costs as high as \$100,000-plus. Many young people look to Pinterest, Instagram and TikTok for wedding ideas, he said. The issue: Posters put up lovely photos with no price tags. "I think a lot of couples today, not to their own fault, have no idea what a wedding costs," he said. **Who used to pay what** Etiquette on ponying up was clearer in the past. The list for the bride's side was long: the engagement party, wedding planner, invitations, photography, videography, venue, bride's attire, floral arrangements, decor, wedding cake, most reception ex-



penses and more. Among a groom's responsibilities: The marriage license and officiant fee, corsages and boutonnieres for family members on both sides, rehearsal dinner costs and, sometimes, alcohol for the reception. All of those costs are now an open question for many couples for a number of reasons. **Cultural considerations** Meier, the etiquette expert, noted that religious and cultural norms often dictate which family pays for the wedding, and how much they spend. If steadfast etiquette isn't in place, Nick Leighton of the etiquette podcast "Were You Raised by Wolves?" said it's increasingly common for expenses to be shared among both families and the couple. "Each party contributes what they wish," he said. "That often means that each party will contribute a different amount, which is perfectly reasonable."

### Opting to spend the money on something else

With bridal couples getting older, wedding costs often collide with other pricey desires, like buying a home. And parents who have saved up to make their children's wedding dreams come true are more often leaving it up to offspring to decide what to spend those nest eggs on. At 55, Tammy Mickle in Holland Patent, N.Y., is a semiretired school teacher, working three days a week come fall. Her husband retired several years ago. Their only child, a 24-year-old daughter, is a school social worker living at home while she saves money. She and her boyfriend of about two years recently broke up. The Mickles have been socking away money every week for their daughter's wedding, amassing about \$60,000. That's \$5,000 less than their daughter makes in a year. "She's been looking at houses recently and just the other night said, Mom, do you think instead of using that money for my wedding, could I use it for a house now? I was like, if that's what you want to use it for, that's fine." Other parents said they, too, are leaving it up to the kids to decide how to spend wedding funds. Meyer warns that the money may not be enough in the long run to fulfill the wedding fantasies of their kids. "Of course, wealthy people have the resources to do what they like," he said. "We tell everyone a wedding isn't worth going into debt for. You know, it's an amazing party, but what else in your life are you looking forward to?"

## WEEKEND: MUSIC

# Not just ‘Nasty’

There’s more to Tinashe’s new album, ‘Quantum Baby,’ than meets the eye

BY GARY GERARD HAMILTON  
Associated Press

**T**inashe refuses to retreat from the unknowns of life — or the music industry — but instead, embraces them. That’s what makes the success of her cheeky, inuendo-filled hit, “Nasty,” taste oh so sweet.

“You never really know when that’s going to happen. You can’t really predict it,” she said of the song, which peaked at No. 61 on the Billboard Hot 100, her second-highest charting track as well as No. 2 on the TikTok Billboard Top 50. “It’s been a blessing and something that I’m just super excited about.”

Leading off her upcoming album “Quantum Baby,” which drops Friday, “Nasty” rocketed after a social media user combined a snippet of the song with an existing clip that had already made its viral rounds. The song also garnered acknowledgment or some form of shout-out from icons like Beyoncé and Janet Jackson, as well Christina Aguilera, Anitta and more. Her stand-out lyric of “match my freak” has become a popular catchphrase.

This project marks her seventh studio album and the second of a three-part trilogy. The title nods to quantum physics, as she hopes fans will enter her personal universe and rediscover her at the most fundamental, molecular level.

“I’ve been really lucky since leaving my major label, going independent, being able to focus on whatever I want to make creatively. And I’ve really honed that process over the last three albums,” said the songstress, whose previous album, “BB/ANG3L,” was released last year. “This second part of the trilogy is really focused on getting to know me a little bit deeper.”

The eight-track project, clocking in just over a swift 22 minutes, features production from Nosaj Thing, Ricky Reed and sdtroy, with Tinashe writing on every song.

Known for genre-bending, often fusing R&B, pop, dance and electronic elements with precise performance choreography to match, Tinashe debuted in 2014 with “Aquarius,” her highest-charting album to date. Despite not matching that success and often living in musical limbo, she chose to leave the support of RCA’s major label machine due to their rocky relationship.

However, she’s kept her career afloat, in part thanks to a loyal fan base.

“When I first came on the scene, I was young, I was green. I

feel like I’ve learned so much and gained so much, first of all, self-confidence,” explained Tinashe. “Being a young woman in these usually male-dominated spaces, there’s usually never

any other women in the room. And you’d come in with a producer who’s made all these amazing records and you don’t wanna tell them what to do — and they’re not probably gonna listen to you anyways. So, I think now, I just have a much stronger sense of what I want to do and being able to give that direction.”

Recorded at her home studio, “Quantum Baby” features songs like the sultry, trap-soul track “Thirsty” and the vibey, Kaytrana-reminiscent “Getting No Sleep,” which serves as her second and current single. Often incorporating moody and atmospheric sonics, there’s also the intro track, “No Simulation,” where she harmonizes, “We’re all looking for something/where are we going/what do we do?”

SEE NASTY ON PAGE 29



GARY GERARD HAMILTON/AP

Tinashe poses for a portrait on June 6 to promote her seventh studio album, “Quantum Baby.” Her recent hit “Nasty” peaked at No. 61 on the Billboard Hot 100 and No. 2 on the TikTok Billboard Top 50.

# WEEKEND: MUSIC

## Foster The People

Paradise State of Mind (Atlantic)

When you put on Foster the People’s new album and you’re happily bopping along to the infectious funk-disco beat of the first track, you might hardly notice the growing sense of dread in the lyrics, as dark as the music is silly-light. Welcome back, Mark Foster.



“My friends were going out last night and I still haven’t heard from them,” he sings in “See You in the Afterlife,” a tune that has scary newspaper headlines, an empty Colosseum and a reference to the war in Ukraine. “It’s like we’ve all been hypnotized.”

It’s been seven years since the 2017 album “Sacred Hearts Club,” and Foster and his bandmates haven’t lost a step, making thoughtful, first-rate pop for a jangled, insecure era with the 11-track “Paradise State of Mind,” the majority written with Isom Innis and with Foster producing the lion’s share for the first time.

Like the last collection, Foster the People has glistening pop beside complex tuners, with many of the songs eventually dipping into experimental territory or heavy distortion, like the unconventional flute solo on “Sometimes I Wanna Be Bad” and the hard-to-love “Glitch-zig,” which goes through a half-dozen time signatures, shrieking trumpet and elements of antiseptic Kraftwerk.

Highlights include “Lost in Space,” filled with a falsetto chorus and hand-claps, which sounds like it was designed for a roller rink in the ’70s — with unsteady lyrics like “I let the darkness in to teach me” — and “Let Go,” which starts out like a dreamy blast of positive vibes until the last third, when what can only be described as heavenly robots hijack the song, singing, “To be broken is to be set free.”

The heavily distorted, synthetic-sounding “Feed Me” is like a sexy come-on in the digital era — “I want to hack your code and be your anti-hero / Turn you on and let my one activate your zero” — while Foster reveals perhaps his motivation for all this wonderful, creepy weirdness on the last song, “A Diamond to be Born.”

“I look at myself through a broken lens,” he sings in the song, so spacey that it’s almost a prayer. “Try my best to keep from unraveling.”

You and us both, brother. Along the way, he’s given us another diamond.

— Mark Kennedy  
The Associated Press

# Nasty: Singer focused on ‘great art that’s timeless’

FROM PAGE 28

“What I’m mostly looking for at this point in my life is just great experiences and peace of mind,” she said. “I’m at the point where I’m not trying to force or create anything anymore.”

Despite past collaborations with platinum-selling artists like Britney Spears, Chris Brown, Future and Nick Jonas, she’s no longer chasing big features or producer placements in hopes of bettering her chances to scale the charts.

“‘2 On’ was my first single that I ever put out. So, I set the bar really high... and there was always that sense of like, ‘Can we do this?’ And that was always kind of on the forefront of my mind when creating records,” Tinashe said, reflecting on her Schoolboy Q-assisted track, which peaked at No. 24 on the Billboard Hot 100, her highest-charting song. “I think I’ve made better records since I’ve stopped considering how they will perform ... I just really focus on my instincts and making something that feels good to me.”

What feels best to Tinashe now? It’s being free from creative confinement and battling industry politics over her career. Her trendy style and fashion-forward eye makes her a frequent front-row guest at fashion shows and red carpet events, and she’s expressed an interest in returning to acting. In October, she’ll kick off her 23-date Match My Freak world tour, produced by Live Nation, to support the music.

The “All Hands on Deck” artist has managed to steady the ship of her career, and she’s willing to live with the results of navigating the turbulent music industry seas — as long as she’s the captain.

“Finding contentment in yourself and in your artistry is super important for a music artist in terms of feeling good about what you do because the music industry is so volatile ... where I started to feel that freedom and contentment was when I didn’t set any expectations for myself,” she said. “That’s really success right now, it’s just to make things that I love and to focus on creating great art that’s timeless.”

# Post Malone’s collab-heavy country debut worth the wait

By MARIA SHERMAN  
The Associated Press

Two days before Post Malone released “F-1 Trillion,” his sixth studio album and his first country record, he made his debut at the Grand Ole Opry.

A starry-eyed Brad Paisley introduced him, celebrating Malone for his incredible career accomplishments and “country heart.” When Malone took the stage, beer in hand, he was gracious and grateful — characteristic “sirs” and “ma’ams” flying out of his mouth with the same kind of effortless, anxious charm that allows Malone to slide into any genre as a collaborator, singer, rapper and instrumentalist. It simply made sense, and on the 18-track “F-1 Trillion,” so too does the idea of Malone as a Nashville superstar.

Paisley isn’t his only endorsement. Co-signs, Malone has a few: Dolly Parton, Hank Williams Jr., Morgan Wallen, Jelly Roll, Lainey Wilson, Tim McGraw, Blake Shelton, Chris Stapleton, Ernest, Sierra Ferrell, HARDY, Billy Strings and Luke Combs — who appears twice — are all featured on the album. It gives “F-1 Trillion” a gargantuan feeling, if not overstuffed, with tracks ripe for country radio. But is too much of a good thing, bad?

Take “I Had Some Help,” which features Wallen. The modern classic has spent more weeks at No. 1 than any other song this year so far; there’s no denying that honkytonk hook, Malone’s idiosyncratic autotuned vibrato or the singalong chorus. It hits less like a country music crossover and more like something completely organic — the sonic equivalent of a full embrace in the back of a truck bed, bright stars stretched out big and wide as if to reflect the curves of the earth.

“Guy For That” with Combs slows things down a bit, all heart-break and hangovers; “Pour Me A Drink” with Shelton breaks out the fiddle and celebrates a cold one at the end of a long day spent trying to make a decent living. “Losers” with Jelly Roll is an anthem for outsiders; “Never Love You Again” brings American roots musician Sierra Ferrell to the fore.

In fact, solo songs are so rare here, they’re limited to three. The decision serves a few purposes. It is a reflection of Malone’s position as an ever-featured artist on other people’s songs and his penchant for constant collaboration. This year alone, Malone was featured on Beyoncé’s “Levi-



AMY HARRIS/AP

Post Malone performs at Outside Lands Music Festival on Aug. 11 in San Francisco. His latest album, “F-1 Trillion,” is out now.



## Post Malone

F-1 Trillion (Mercury/Republic)

i’s Jeans,” from her country-and-then-some masterclass, “Cowboy Carter,” and harmonized with Taylor Swift on “Fortnight,” the lead single from “The Tortured Poets Department.”

But most importantly, the features on Malone’s album really showcase that unlike some pop acts who’ve flirted with country music recently as it continues to dominate the cultural zeitgeist — the ones who operate inside the genre but outside of its politics and the well-oiled Nashville machine — Malone asked for permission to join in. That particular industry is new territory for him, but the music is not. It’s formative, having grown up on outlaw country from his mom, and the ’90s stuff from his dad. Malone went to Nashville, entered the insular songwriting apparatus and came up with a sometimes traditional-

ist genre record.

That’s evident on the solo songs as well. “Right About You” is lovely ’90s country, and the closer, “Yours,” is a real tear-jerker about Malone’s daughter, now 2 years old, addressed to her future partner. “And she might be wearin’ white, but her first dress, it was pink,” he sings. “She might be your better half, but to me, she’s everything.”

On paper, “F-1 Trillion” may seem like a far cry from the melodic rap that made Malone one of the most popular voices in contemporary music. (Lest we forget that his previous work is by and far his most popular. Or the most popular of any artist: “Sunflower” featuring Swae Lee, written for the “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” soundtrack, became the first song to ever be certified double-diamond.) But that’s a myopic view. In the South, listeners of a certain age are raised on both rap and country. Malone’s seamless pivot into the latter is the most immediate and clear-cut example of that.

There’s a tweet from Malone, posted back in 2015, that has reemerged around “F-1 Trillion.” “When I turn 30 I’m becoming a country/folk singer,” he shared a few months before his cloud rap debut single, “White Iverson,” was heard ’round the world.

Now, he’s 29. The message is prescient. At age 29, his arrival is a bit early. It’s also right on time.

## WEEKEND: BOOKS

## Respecting privacy: a memoirist's dilemma

Authors writing about their own lives grapple with how to depict family and friends

By MARTHA ROSS

*The Mercury News*

**K**irsten Mickelwait had to wait until her ex-husband was dead to feel comfortable writing “The Ghost Marriage,” her memoir about surviving their catastrophic, 22-year marriage.

Writing a memoir can be grueling enough, as an author excavates painful memories and exposes secrets, character flaws or regrettable choices. It’s another thing when those secrets belong to the other people involved in your story. Writing about other people goes with memoir territory, of course, but for authors, it can raise a host of concerns that range from relationship betrayal to potential lawsuits.

San Jose, Calif.-reared Stephanie Foo, a former producer for the “This American Life” podcast, said one benefit of being painfully estranged from her parents is that she didn’t have to fear their reactions when she wrote about their abuse and abandonment in “What My Bones Knew,” her chronicle about learning to heal from complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

Estrangement was an issue, too, for East Bay writer Julia Scheeres, who portrayed her parents’ cruel form of Christian fundamentalism in her memoir, “Jesus Land.”

“I haven’t spoken to them since it was published, and they refuse to read it,” she said, adding that they cut her out of their will.

Those are extreme situations, of course. But it’s a rare memoirist who hasn’t grappled with how to depict family, friends, children or others they care about. It’s a familiar issue for Brooke Warner, the publisher of She Writes Press and a long-time memoir-writing coach, who is writing a book that includes her relationship with her ex-wife, with whom she’s raising a child.

“It’s scary,” Warner says. “You’re just like, what am I going to put out there? What are they going to think is OK? What is their story versus your story?”

With the growing popularity of memoir as a genre of literature and popular entertainment, debates have followed about what writers can or should disclose about ex-partners, family or friends, especially when those individuals are not public figures and may not appreciate being mentioned in a bestseller. Some writers feel especially protective of children. Memoirists can change names and identifying details, as Tara Westover did in her bestselling memoir, “Educated.” But people may still come forward, Warner says, to say that scenes involving them are exaggerated, wrong or nothing like they remember. Westover’s family went public with its rebuttal, when her mother, LaRee, published her own memoir, “Educating.”

Cries about invading other people’s privacy followed Prince Harry’s “Spare,” a ghostwritten memoir that offered an insider’s critique of his royal relatives. Harry was writing about very public people, but the New York Times review de-



KARL MONDON, BAY AREA NEWS GROUP/TNS

**Meredith May, who wrote “The Honey Bus” about growing up in Carmel Valley, Calif., wears her grandfather’s beekeeper overalls May 30 while posing for a portrait.**

scribed his “punishing invasions,” while CNN anchor Don Lemon reacted with visible discomfort over Harry’s claim that Prince William pushed him to the floor during a fight about Meghan Markle.

“Everyone has a family,” Lemon said. “I have arguments in my family. Am I going to put that out there for the whole world to see?”

Of course, many acclaimed memoirs involve writers putting things “out there” and creating compelling narratives around people who have done them wrong. When it comes to turning a loved one into an antagonist, writer Anne Lamott offers this dictum: “You own everything that happened to you. ... If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should have behaved better.”

The idea that writers own their experiences is core to the memoir ethos. Memoirs are not autobiographies. They represent one person’s subjective, “emotional truth” — about what they’ve lived through and “what they know” about others, Warner explains. Memoirs re-create scenes and dialogue, fill in memory gaps and interpret what happened.

“It’s about telling a story that is full of your reactive elements, your emotional connection to the story you’re telling,” says journalist Terry Winckler. His memoir, “Tule Town,” recounts the unique people he met while working at a small-town newspaper after a fall from grace.

“I think you develop some sense about the stories that belong to others, but if

their story happens to coincide with the story you’re trying to tell, then I think it’s fair game,” he says. “But you need to be careful in how you use it, because you don’t want to take advantage of somebody in a terrible position that maybe they don’t deserve.”

Journalist Meredith May, author of “The Honey Bus,” said writers should have a “greater good” in mind if they are going to reveal the “ugliness” of other people. May’s book recounts growing up in Carmel Valley, Calif., in the 1970s with a loving beekeeper grandfather who provided emotional ballast after her troubled mother checked out mentally. In initial drafts, May poured out her complaints about her mother, who died in 2017, but realized another “monster mom” memoir probably wouldn’t be interesting, so she shifted focus to her empowering relationship with her grandfather.

“There’s a difference between telling your story and then taking potshots,” May said. “It has to be in the service to the story, and you have to make those judgment calls carefully, because you have all the power as a writer.”

Indeed, fans of the genre say the best memoirs don’t voyeuristically dwell on personal pain and trauma. They offer one person’s real-life insight into the complexities of a universal human experience. Mickelwait’s book, for example, is a page-turner for anyone who has discovered that their great love isn’t the person they thought or who decides to forgive their

tormenter as a way to move on in life.

Meanwhile, Scheeres’ book continues to win praise for telling a story about resilience in the face of harsh parenting and for describing her deep bond with her adopted brother, David, who was the target of beatings by their father and faced racism in their rural Indiana community. Scheeres also is proud that her book helped lead to the closure of Escuela Caribe, a notorious, prisonlike Christian reform school in the Dominican Republic where she and her brother were sent to break their “rebellious teenage spirit.”

When teaching students, Warner urges them to just write their first drafts without worrying about others’ reactions or “getting things right.” Other writers agree, saying that first drafts almost never get published and subsequent drafts allow them to refine their portraits of others, change names or purge them entirely.

But writers still describe their concern about getting things “as factually accurate” as possible, especially when writing about other people, Winckler said. Writer James Frey provides an infamous example of why writers should consult the public record before describing someone’s involvement in crime or controversy, Scheeres explains. Frey was shamed by Oprah Winfrey when he admitted to fabricating crucial parts of his addiction-and-recovery memoir, “A Million Little Pieces,” including a lengthy jail stint that records show never happened.

In “What My Bones Knew,” Foo says that she had to “fact-check” her abuse, in part because her trauma left her questioning the reliability of her memory. She knew she couldn’t ask her parents, who long denied inflicting violence, but said she interviewed scientists and psychologists to better understand complex PTSD and returned to San Jose to interview former classmates, teachers and mental health experts to investigate the effects of trauma in Asian immigrant communities. When writing about an entire community, Foo “was really terrified about getting it wrong. ... That’s why it was important to do my due diligence and to ground it all in my personal experiences.”

But, as Foo found, there’s no hard rule on seeking input from people one writes about. Depending on the situation, writers can derail their process if they share their work with loved ones who are prone to contradicting their memories. They also can put themselves in jeopardy, if they try to engage their abuser, Warner says. But in less fraught situations, writers can allay others’ concerns by showing them portions of a final draft.

May found it helpful to interview people from her past, with friends remembering “wonderful” details that enriched scenes in her story. She also sought input from her father but was nervous about what he would think of her final draft. She wrote about him not being a regular presence during her childhood because he lived on the East Coast. But she said he was surprisingly OK with everything — except one detail. He told her he didn’t have a particular cat at the time of one of her summer visits. But when May offered to take the cat out, he said, “No, leave it in. It’s kind of funny.”

## WEEKEND: TELEVISION



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

From left, Natalie Martinez, Vince Vaughn, standing background, Meredith Hagner, Charlotte Lawrence and Ronald Peet, cast members in the Apple TV+ series "Bad Monkey," pose together at the Four Seasons Hotel, Aug. 6, in Los Angeles.

# Bringing Hiaasen's 'Bad Monkey' to life

Director Lawrence and actors Vaughn, Hagner, Monaghan, Peet discuss the Apple TV+ adaptation of the novel

BY ALICIA RANCILIO  
Associated Press

There's an old saying, "don't meet your heroes," but for TV creator, showrunner Bill Lawrence, it was a dream come true. Lawrence's new series, "Bad Monkey" for Apple TV+, is based on a novel by Carl Hiaasen, one of his favorite authors.

"I started reading Carl Hiaasen books when I was 15 years old. There's a direct line from Carl's surreal satires and wildly insane character pieces to, like, 'Scrubs,'" explained Lawrence, who also created that long-running Zach Braff sitcom. "The guy helped me to be a storyteller. He turned out to be as cool as I hoped and such a good dude."

"Bad Monkey" stars Vince Vaughn, whose observational humor and quick one-liners make him a good fit for the writing styles of both Hiaasen and Lawrence.

Vaughn plays Andrew Yancy, a former Miami police detective now living in the Florida Keys and working as a restaurant inspector. (A scene where we see Yancy on the job leads to a running joke about how he's lost his appetite for the foreseeable future and is Vaughn at his reactionary finest.)

A friend asks Yancy for a favor: deliver a human arm that washed up on the beach to a medical examiner (played by Natalie Martinez). When he later meets Eve (Meredith Hagner), the widow of the man whom the arm belonged to, Yancy finds himself unable to shake the case. The story unfolds, touching on themes of greed and power.

"He can't let himself leave something where he knows there's some wrongdoing there," Vaughn said about Yancy, whom he describes as "like the Energizer Bunny." "He can't help himself. And then no matter how many times he falls, gets hit in the face, or things

don't go his way, he's going to just keep marching forward. That's just such an inspirational quality to have."

Vaughn goes back more than 25 years with Lawrence — they played poker together. "He used to make me laugh. Just to watch his career do so well from afar, it was easy for me," Vaughn said about agreeing to the role.

For Lawrence, Vaughn's 1996 indie movie "Swingers" "helped shape a generation of writers: 'When he burst onto the screen saying, 'You're so money you don't even know it,' everyone wanted to write that type of dialogue.'"

Michelle Monaghan plays Bonnie, Yancy's sort-of girlfriend who flits in and out of his life. She's a minor presence in the novel and Monaghan credits Lawrence for fleshing out her story.

"She's equal parts very delusional but also very naive," said Monaghan, laughing. "When we first meet her she's very fun, playful and aloof, but as the show goes on we see she's also quite predatory. ... Bill creates characters that do outrageous things."

When it came time to try alternative takes and improvise, not everyone was as comfortable as Vaughn.

"Vince would encourage the other cast members like, 'I'll set you up if you say this. It will be funny,'" Lawrence recalled.

Ronald Peet, who plays a fisherman named Neville whose storyline runs concurrent to Vaughn's, said he had to grow accustomed to having freedom to deviate from the script.

"Every day I showed up to work, I was doing something that, you know, my mind was like, 'I don't know how I'm going to do this,'" Peet said. "That's how you grow, and that's how you expand, so I feel grateful."

Episodes were filmed on location in South Florida so

the cast experienced that kind of lazy humidity that slows down the pace of the everyday world.

"I don't know what's wrong with me. When I'm in a comfortable soundstage, I don't like it. When it's hot, I'm not in my head in the same way. And I kind of love being like, 'I'm not thinking,'" Hagner said.

"I think my hair had to be a little more hairsprayed," Vaughn recalled. "The Keys were spectacular. The nature, the ocean, the wildlife. I really enjoyed it."

Martinez is from Miami, so the job gave her an opportunity to connect with family.

"I've been in Los Angeles for 20 years, but I was born and raised in Miami. My entire family is there, so it was nice to be able to have my goddaughter or my aunt come on set and kind of see what I do. I had a break ... and I was able to go to my grandmother's house and have lunch with her."

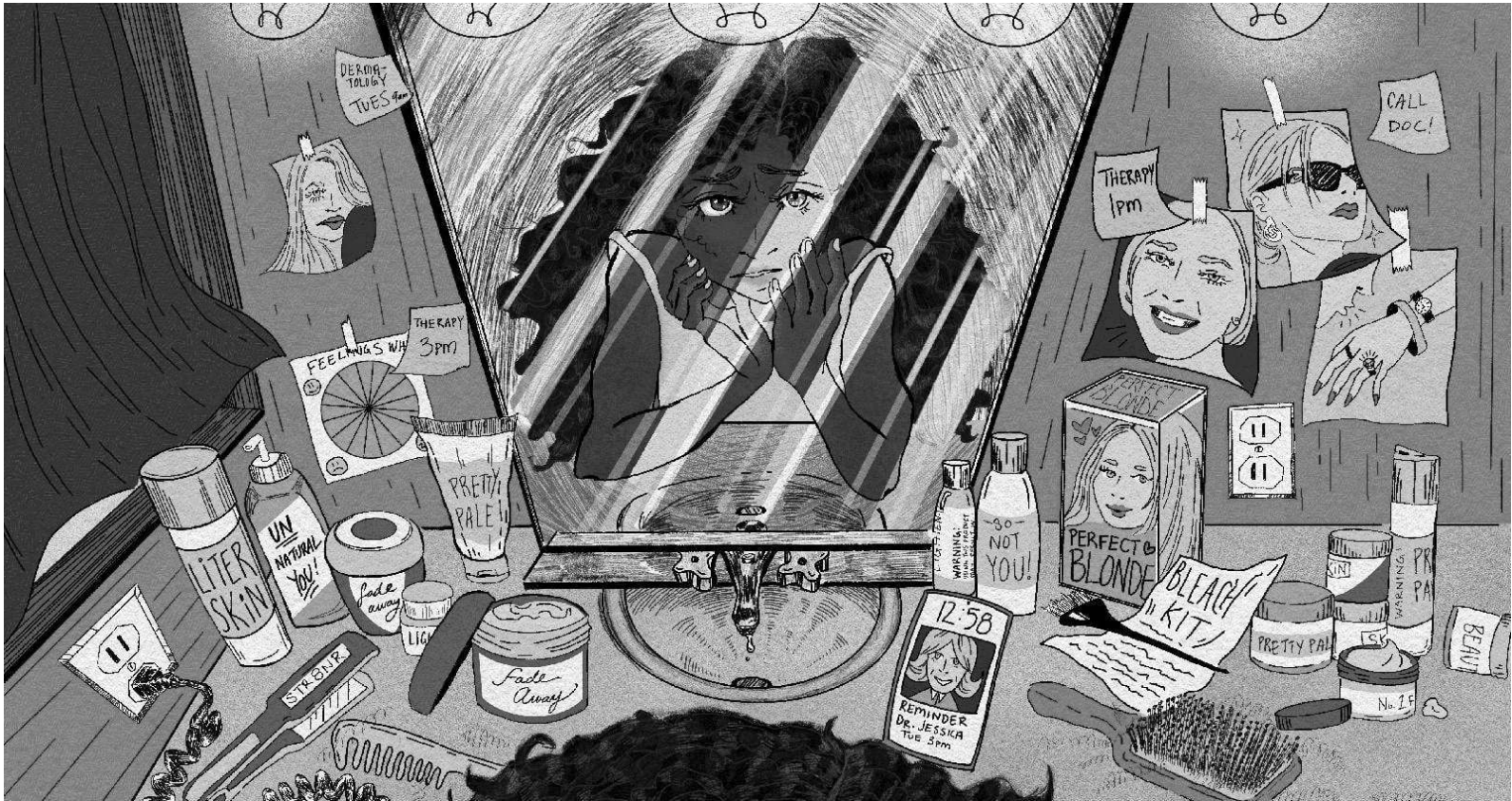
Making "Bad Monkey" gave Lawrence a cherished opportunity to work with his daughter Charlotte, who has a recurring role as Eve's stepdaughter, Caitlin. This was the first acting role for Charlotte, who is a singer-songwriter.

Charlotte is well aware of the nepo baby discourse and said she's grateful for the "massive chance" she was given.

"I was in musical theater and plays growing up, but I always just loved performing. I just never really connected the dots, you know, or actually envisioned myself being able to do this as a career," Charlotte said. "I think because my parents were so involved in it, I kind of wanted to rebel and do my own thing and not be connected to them. But it couldn't have been more fun."

"If you can work with your kids, do it forever," Lawrence said. "That's my advice to everybody. And who cares what other people say. It's awesome."

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



OONA TEMPEST, KFF HEALTH NEWS/ TNS

The term colorism — a form of prejudice and discrimination in which lighter skin is favored over darker skin — was popularized by author Alice Walker in her 1983 book, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose.”

‘I sometimes feel dismissed by people’

Dark-skinned individuals say health system fails them because professionals lack adequate cultural awareness, sensitivity

By CHASEEDAW GILES  
KFF Health News

Jonnae Thompson has felt for a long time that her dark brown skin and natural hair have made finding work in Hollywood especially hard.

“It’s like this negative connotation,” said the 37-year-old actress, singer and stand-up comedian, who said she is often asked to audition for villainous roles such as a bully, drug dealer or pimp.

Her quest for more equitable representation on the big screen isn’t just professionally exhausting. Thompson says anxiety about her skin complexion has affected her health.

“It definitely had a negative impact on my self-esteem,” she said. She recalls being called “charcoal” in kindergarten. “It was big, like, your skin is dark and that’s a problem.”

The term colorism — a form of prejudice and discrimination in which lighter skin is favored over darker skin — was popularized by author Alice Walker in her 1983 book “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose.”

Clinicians from various ethnic groups have recently begun to draw a direct line between colorism and poor health. A 2023 KFF survey found that, among Black and Hispanic adults, those with self-described darker skin tones reported more experiences with discrimination in daily life compared with those who have lighter skin tones. People who feel they experience daily discrimination can be at higher risk for depression, loneliness, increased alcohol and drug use, and anxiety, data shows.

And colorism can also lead to physical health concerns. Hair straighteners and skin lighteners commonly used by women

of color, sometimes to conform to racialized beauty standards, increase their exposure to toxic chemicals, research shows.

Because of the potential health implications, the health care system should pay more attention to colorism, said Regina James, a child and adolescent psychiatrist who heads the American Psychiatric Association’s Division of Diversity and Health Equity.

“Skin color discrimination is so insidious it can literally get under your skin,” she said. “And consciously or subconsciously, it can contribute to low self-esteem and self-confidence, and even be detrimental to one’s mental health.”

Conversations about skin complexion can remain overlooked by mental health professionals who do not have expertise about or awareness of a person’s cultural context, if the conversations happen at all, said Usha Tummala-Narra, a clinical psychologist and professor in the Department of Counseling, Developmental and Educational Psychology at Boston College.

“There’s no specific training on colorism. Many people are unaware that it exists,” Tummala-Narra said.

But the experience can negatively affect a person’s self-worth, relationships, sense of belonging and dignity.

“These are all really critically important things as human beings that we all need to secure to have good health, both physically and mentally,” she said.

The issue can emerge in childhood for Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, who must navigate fair skin often being seen as superior, a ramification of colonialization. Black children with the darkest complexions experience higher levels of depressive symptoms, found a 2020 study in the journal Society and Mental Health.

Shannon Brown, 34, a former college counselor from the Bronx, N.Y., who is Black, remembers being called “midnight” by classmates and having family members joke about his skin being difficult to light in family photos.

“I’ve just kind of accepted it and try to find the humor in it,” he said. “I feel like most folks aren’t intentionally trying to hurt me, but the jokes get tiresome.”

Shakun Kaushal, a 26-year-old digital communications specialist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, is Indian American and has a “darker complexion.” She said that in Indian culture one might hear comments like, “Oh, she’s so light and beautiful.”

“I sometimes feel dismissed by people,” said Kaushal, who has searched for an Indian or Black therapist in hopes they might better relate to her lived experience. She believes conversations about colorism should be intergenerational, start early and get introduced with great care.

“What you say to a child does affect them. They will remember, and it will impact how they feel about themselves and in their skin,” Kaushal said. “We must talk about it.”

The feeling of shame and embarrassment colorism produces in people is palpable and needs to be acknowledged in health care settings, said Roopal Kundu, a dermatologist who founded and directs the Northwestern Medicine Center for Ethnic Skin and Hair in Chicago. Kundu, who is of South Asian heritage, opened the center in 2005 and notes that some cases of diseases like psoriasis, skin cancer and eczema get diagnosed later, or misdiagnosed, because they present differently on diverse skin tones.

“How can we really make sure, as a field, that we’re taking care of every-

body?” she said. “Healthy skin is beautiful skin. And beauty is across every single skin tone that there is.”

Therapists, doctors and other clinicians from diverse backgrounds say that, in addition to clinical approaches that incorporate cultural competence, more efforts are needed to diversify the pool of mental health practitioners and to collaborate between disciplines.

Without cultural awareness and sensitivity, “you’re not going to get all the information that you need to appropriately diagnose and treat someone,” James said.

Black people are more likely to report difficulty finding mental health providers who understand their background and experiences, a KFF survey found. At the same time, programs that bolster diversity, equity and inclusion in medical schools are faltering in the wake of the 2023 Supreme Court decision outlawing affirmative action in higher education.

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, in 2022, about 5% of active psychiatric physicians identified as Black, 16% as Asian, 6% as Hispanic and fewer than 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native.

Thompson, Brown and Kaushal all said they had never been treated by a therapist who looks like them.

Thompson, the LA comedian, said she drank bleach when she was 10 years old, thinking it would lighten her skin. Fortunately, it caused only nausea.

If she could speak to her younger self, she would say: “You’re beautiful. You’re brilliant.”

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF — the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

# WEEKEND: FAMILY



JOSH REYNOLDS/AP

History teacher Matt Brophy, left, works with Flerentin “Flex” Jean-Baptiste, 16, of Medford, Mass., on making up late assignments during summer school at Medford High School on Aug. 2.

## Absenteeism still an issue

Schools work to address ongoing postpandemic problems with attendance

BY JOCELYN GECKER,  
BIANCA VAZQUEZ TONESS  
AND SHARON LURYE  
*The Associated Press*

Flerentin “Flex” Jean-Baptiste missed so much school he had to repeat his freshman year at Medford High outside Boston. At school, “you do the same thing every day,” said Jean-Baptiste, who was absent 30 days his first year. “That gets very frustrating.”

Then his principal did something nearly unheard of: She let students play organized sports during lunch — if they attended all their classes. In other words, she offered high schoolers recess.

“It gave me something to look forward to,” said Jean-Baptiste, 16. The following year, he cut his absences in half. Schoolwide, the share of chronically absent students declined from 35% in March 2023 to 23% in March 2024 — one of the steepest declines among Massachusetts high schools.

Years after COVID-19 upended American schooling, nearly every state is still struggling with attendance, according to data collected by The Associated Press and Stanford University educational economist Thomas Dee.

Roughly one in four students in the 2022-23 school year remained chronically absent, meaning they missed at least 10% of the school year. That represents about 12 million children in the 42 states and Washington where data is available.

Before the pandemic, only 15% of students missed that much school.

Society may have largely moved on from COVID-19, but schools say they’re still battling the effects of pandemic school closures. After as much as a year at home, school for many kids has felt overwhelming, boring or socially stressful. More than ever, kids and parents are deciding it’s OK to stay home, which makes catching up even harder.

In all but one state, Arkansas, absence rates remain higher than they were prepandemic. Still, the problem appears to have passed its peak; almost every state saw absenteeism improve at least slightly from 2021-22 to 2022-23.

Schools are working to identify students with slipping attendance, then providing help. They’re working to close communication gaps with parents, who often aren’t aware their child is missing so much school or why it’s problematic.

So far, the solutions that appear to be helping are simple — like letters to parents that compare a child’s attendance with peers’. But to make more progress, experts say, schools must get creative to address their students’ needs.

### Caring adults — and incentives

In Oakland, Calif., chronic absenteeism skyrocketed from 29% prepandemic to 53% in 2022-23 across district and charter schools. Officials asked students what would convince them to come to class.

Money, they replied, and a mentor.

A grant-funded program launched in spring 2023 paid 45 students \$50 weekly for perfect attendance. Students also checked in daily with an assigned adult and completed weekly mental health assessments.

Paying students isn’t a permanent or sustainable fix, said Zaia Vera, the district’s head of social-emotional learning. But many absent students lacked stable housing or were helping to support their families.

“The money is the hook that got them in the door,” Vera said.

More than 60% improved their attendance after taking part, Vera said. The program is expected to continue, along with district-wide efforts aimed at creating a sense of belonging. Oakland’s African American Male Achievement project, for example, pairs Black students with Black teachers who offer support.

Kids who identify with their educators are more likely to attend school, said Michael Gottfried, a University of Pennsylvania professor. According to one study led by Gottfried, California students felt “it’s important for me to see someone who’s like me early on, first thing in the day,” he said.

A caring teacher made a difference for Golden Tachiquin, 18, who graduated from Oakland’s Skyline High School this spring. When she started 10th grade after a remote freshman year, she felt lost and anxious. She later realized these feelings caused the nausea and dizziness that kept her home sick. She was absent at least 25 days that year.

But she bonded with an Afro-Latina teacher who understood her culturally and made Tachiquin, a straight-A student, feel her poor attendance didn’t define her.

“I didn’t dread going to her class,” Tachiquin said.

Another teacher had the opposite effect. “She would say, ‘Wow, guess who decided to come today?’” Tachiquin recalled. “I started skipping her class even more.”

In Massachusetts, Medford High School requires administrators to talk with students each morning, especially those with a history of missing school.

But the lunchtime gym sessions have been the biggest driver of improved attendance, Principal Marta Cabral said. High schoolers need freedom and an opportunity to move their bodies, she said. “They’re here for seven hours a day. They should have a little fun.”

## THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



## From vacuum tubes to digital banking magic

“Dad!” our daughter, Lilly, yelled down the back stairs recently, “Did you deposit my check?”

“I’ll do it now!” Francis bellowed back from the kitchen. He plodded to the countertop where we keep our mail.

Our family’s mail system consists of separating daily mail into piles: one for each of our five family members, periodicals and junk mail. In our unspoken marriage contract, my husband, Francis, has always managed bills and banking for the family, so the vast majority of our mail gets plopped into a wooden box on the countertop designated for him.

My eyes go glassy at the mere mention of mathematical calculations, so my mail tends to be somewhat non-essential — mostly solicitations from charity organizations, grocery store fliers and the odd magazine. Although two of our three young adult children have flown the coop, we still get mail for them all occasionally, which we sort and tuck into kitchen cubbies originally built for wine bottles.

Francis reached into Lilly’s cubby and plucked out the paycheck she receives every two weeks from her job as a hospital student nurse. Positioning Lilly’s check on the countertop, he took out his cell phone and held it in the air above the check. With a digital “SNAP!” sound effect, the deposit to Navy Federal Credit Union was complete.

Modern technology is mind-boggling, but especially for those of us born before the digital age. So much of today’s world seems to operate magically in a vague, invisible ether. There’s online banking, cloud computing, robo-investing, machine-learning algorithms, artificial intelligence, voice banking, digital signage, blockchain, PayPal, Venmo, Bitcoin and cybersecurity for data breaches. None of these items is physical. Rather, they exist in that preternatural space only accessed by humans through computers and smartphones.

Although I embrace modern conveniences, they are often difficult to fathom, because I grew up in a time when transactions were grounded in concrete equipment and tangible processes I could see, hear and touch.

I clearly recall sitting unbelted in the passenger seat of my mother’s sedan as she pulled into Savings & Trust Bank in my hometown. Digging into her pocketbook — usually packed to the gills with her glasses case, a bottle of Jergen’s lotion, a hairbrush, Wrigley’s gum, crumpled tissues, a powder compact, lipsticks, pens and, prior to 1977, a pack of Tareyton 100s — my mother pulled out her long wallet and unfastened the side containing her checkbook.

Mom carefully filled out a slip for three checks she was depositing, then wrote a check from her own checkbook to “Cash” for \$100 and endorsed all the checks in her perfect first-grade-teacher cursive. Just outside the driver’s door was a brick column with a metal mounted box on it. Mom took a perforated envelope from a slot on the box and placed her papers inside. Next, she pulled a plastic cylinder out of the box. Opening the tube, she put her papers inside along with her bank passbook, a small faux-leather booklet with a running tab of Mom’s deposits and withdrawals.

Placing the tube back into the box — “THWUMP!” — it disappeared. Inside the drive-up window, we could see the teller open the tube and take out Mom’s papers. The teller gave us a wave and a smile before returning the tube. Once we heard it clunk back into the box, Mom opened the tube to find her updated passbook, an envelope of crisp 20-dollar bills and a bright orange lollipop for me.

As a kid, I thought that vacuum tube was the epitome of modern technology.

Lilly, who has never written a check or filled out a deposit slip, called, “Thanks, Dad!” on her way out the door to meet friends at the beach. I envied Lilly’s carefree lifestyle, free of banking errands. But at the same time, I felt lucky to have received all those lollipops.

Read more at [themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com) and in Lisa’s book, “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.” Email: [meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com](mailto:meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com)

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

TAKE THE EL TRAIN

BY CARYN ROBBINS / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Caryn Robbins is a retired editor living on the east end of Long Island with her husband and two Havanese dogs. An avid lifelong solver, she discovered puzzle-constructing during the pandemic through an online course. This theme came to her in the throes of planning her daughter’s nuptials, inspiring the example at 23-Across. Her favorite theme clue is 38-Across, which paints a great mental picture.

- ACROSS**

1 Shoots for the moon

8 Saudi’s neighbor

13 Gets ready to surf, maybe

19 Annoyance for a shopkeeper

21 Japanese takeover option

22 Best of all possible worlds

23 Say “O di” instead of “I do”?

26 Le Mans race unit: Abbr.

27 Keep from happening

28 “Once Upon a Mattress” prop

29 Longtime hair-removal brand

30 Word with hose or line

32 Sewing-machine pioneer Howe

34 Expert conclusion?

37 Like some wits and wines

38 Eviction notice sent to a New York deli owner?

43 Roadwork might push it back, in brief

44 Like many London skies

45 Something fishy

46 Back in time

47 Scatterbrain

50 “This thing is SHARP! It handles potatoes and carrots with ease,” e.g.
- 56 “The Kiss” sculptor

57 Stage a hostile takeover of

60 Blue dye

61 Inits. for a hit

62 Dept.-store inventory

64 Face-planted

66 Dodge S.U.V.

69 Interior decorator’s assertion that bold colors are back in style?

73 Like the view from Big Sur

75 Kind of farm

76 Survive a round of musical chairs

77 Setting for the musical “Two by Two”

78 Inveigh (against)

81 E-bike alternative

83 Smother, as with sauce

87 Santa’s routes on Christmas Eve?

91 “I categorically deny that!”

93 Job-listing abbr.

94 One might be organized by habitat

95 “A Death in the Family” novelist

97 Wall St. debut

98 Advice after one’s rival scores a perfect 10?

104 “Me day” destination

106 Org. with a PreCheck option

107 What fumaroles emit

108 Like streets, but rarely alleyways

109 River through Florence

111 Give an allowance?
- 114 Lukewarm

116 Had a session

117 Airline’s promise to improve its timeliness?

124 Rim protector

125 “\_\_\_\_\_ is to place as eternity is to time”: Joseph Joubert

126 Where the entire “Newhart” series actually took place

127 Guiding principles

128 Hollandaise-sauce ingredients

129 They might get worn down while solving crosswords
- 17 Loser in the 2024 Stanley Cup final

18 Meanspirited

20 Regard highly

24 Dr. Marcus of old TV

25 Greek goddess of the earth

30 Alfresco dining spot

31 Positions that require flexibility?

33 Desertlike

35 Traffic jams

36 Intense demeanor

38 Compote fruit

39 Language whose name starts and ends with the same letter

40 Looney Tunes bunny

41 Admitted to a doctor’s office

42 Ending of a political address

48 Euphoric moments

49 Not go further than

50 Panini maker, e.g.

51 Textbook example

52 Purges

53 First word of a Stevie Wonder hit

54 Part of a joule

55 Romance

58 Likely victim on April Fools’ Day

59 Actress Hagen

63 Hollywood hopefuls

65 Final purpose, to Aristotle

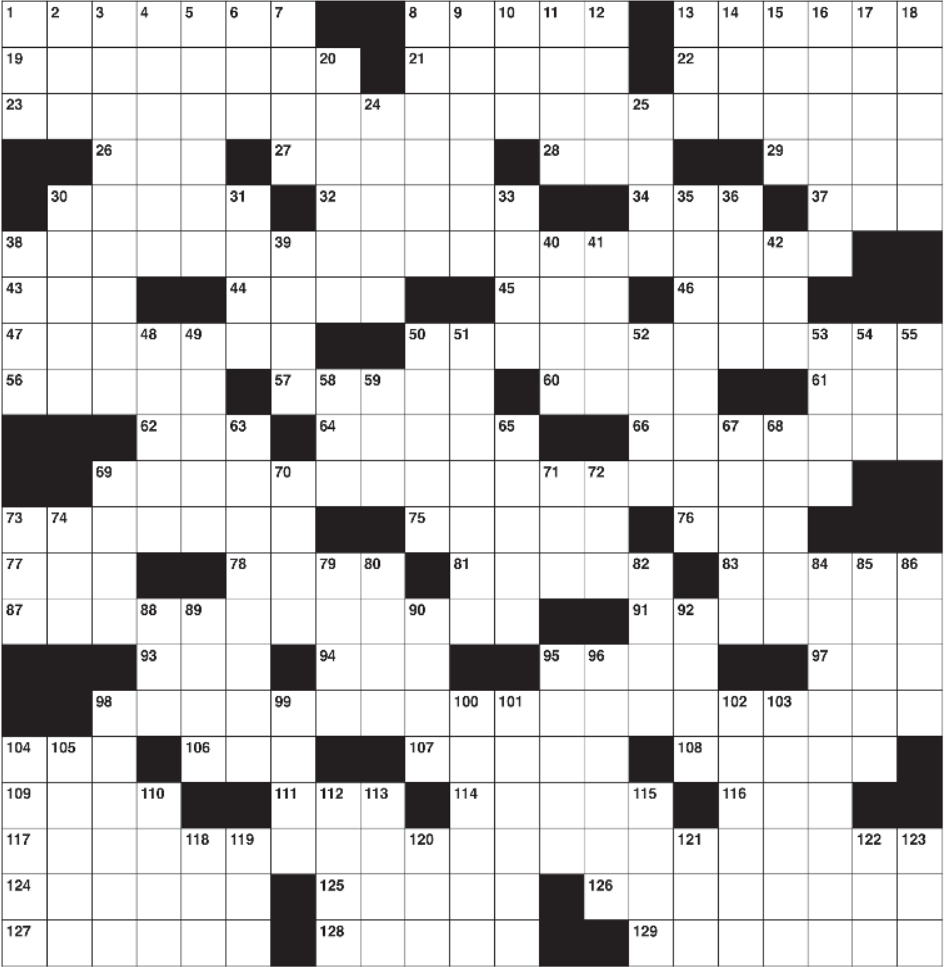
67 Surprise 100-Downs

68 “Ad \_\_\_\_\_” (2019 sci-fi film)

69 Hazard for a jet skier

70 Do in

71 Drink like a dog



- 72 Its prime minister is known as the Taoiseach: Abbr.

73 When doubled, a dance

74 “\_\_\_\_\_ y plata” (state motto of Montana)

79 Sparkling-juice brand

80 Ill-gotten gains

82 Milkweed leaves, for a monarch caterpillar
- 84 Athena’s gift to Athens

85 Totally exhausted

86 Bright light in the big city

88 Zodiac feline

89 Type of type

90 Academy endorsements, casually

92 Many a babysitter

95 Visibly stunned

96 Early NASA program
- 98 Europe’s second-longest river

99 Chutzpah

100 Go on the offensive

101 Some farm machines

102 Kappa follower

103 Mideast dignitaries: Var.

104 Drop in for a sec

105 Honored

110 Predator that can weigh up to six tons

112 Like child’s play
- 113 Embarassing mistake?

115 Sea-turtle nesting site

118 Indian lentil dish

119 Many debut releases, in brief

120 Mule of old song

121 Dent or scratch

122 Barber’s obstacle

123 Contacts on Instagram, informally

GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



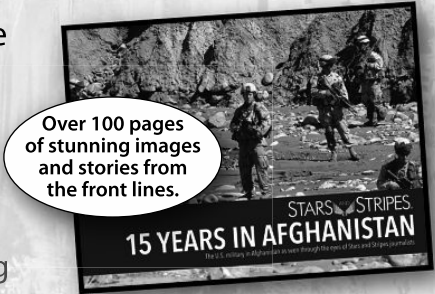
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FACES

# When will TV schedules return to normal?

Hollywood is slowly getting back to work, but the business might never be the same

By WENDY LEE,  
STEPHEN BATTAGLIO AND  
THOMAS SUH LAUDER  
*Los Angeles Times*

Ever since the actors' strike ended last year, Hollywood's workforce has been asking one question: When will the entertainment industry's production economy start its long-awaited comeback?

A full nine months after the debilitating "hot labor summer" and fall concluded, a picture is starting to emerge of an industry in a state of modest recovery. New data indicate that, after a long period of significantly reduced activity, some companies are commissioning more shows again, but the comeback remains incredibly slow.

Many entertainment executives and workers at various levels have become resigned to the idea that the film and TV business has become permanently smaller — and the heights of dealmaking in 2021 and 2022, the so-called peak TV era, will never return.

"We've been in a stage of reset," said Alice Thorpe of London-based Ampere Analysis, a market research firm focused on media and entertainment.

Recovery for the streaming sector has been led by Netflix and Amazon, which are responsible for a large share of the programming launched since the end of the writers' and actors' strikes. In the first half of 2024, Netflix commissioned 149 programs in North America, the most since the first half of 2022, according to Ampere data.

Traditional broadcast television, cable and streaming commissions in the U.S. and Canada by major entertainment companies increased 39% to 1,013 programs in the first half of 2024,

compared to the second half of 2023, Ampere said. The data, which factor in green-lights from Warner Bros. Discovery, Netflix, Amazon, Disney, Apple, Paramount and Comcast, did not include theatrical movies.

But that number was still down 9.9% compared with the first half of 2023, according to Ampere data. Even more striking is the decline from the first half of 2022, when those companies green-lighted 1,515 programs in the U.S. and Canada.

Back then, the streaming TV universe seemed limitless. Hollywood studios pumped out new shows, streamers paid big money for top talent and promotional discounts for subscribers were plentiful.

That golden era's demise began in 2022, when streaming leader Netflix reported subscriber losses, and continued as studios pared back expenses. They canceled shows and movies, raised subscription fees and laid off workers.

While Netflix has been declared the winner of the streaming wars by Wall Street and remains one of the few profitable companies in that space, it's unclear when the cuts will end at others such as debt-saddled Warner Bros. Discovery and soon-to-be-sold Paramount, which is in the process of cutting 2,000 jobs.

Hollywood insiders had been hopeful that business would bounce back after last year's strikes, but many workers are still struggling to find jobs. Now, "survive 'til '25" is the mantra for many. Others have moved out of town or switched careers.

Much of the renewed activity is happening outside the U.S.

Netflix and Amazon are green-lighting programs in North America. However, roughly 60% of their



AMAZON PRIME VIDEO/TNS

**"Maxton Hall — the World Between Us" is an example of an existing intellectual property that helps to fill the scheduling gaps. The German-language romantic drama launched in May and was Amazon Prime Video's most-viewed international original title in its first week.**

commissions in the first half of this year were on other continents, as they sought to expand their audiences by creating local-language content in hubs like India, Spain and Germany, according to Ampere.

The film business for years has had to contend with the flight of U.S. productions to locations that are cheaper and offer generous government incentives.

Making a show abroad for the small screen also can be significantly cheaper than producing it in the U.S.

It can cost \$8 million to \$10 million an episode for a drama series shot in the U.S., whereas the same show in Europe with tax credits can be made for as low as \$4 million an episode, according to estimates from industry experts.

Streamers are looking for safe bets: programs with big-name tal-

ent and existing intellectual property, such as popular books. In January, Amazon green-lighted a biblical series called "House of David." Netflix commissioned a horror show called "Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen" from the producers of "Stranger Things."

NBCUniversal said the company's content mix has remained consistent across its platforms and will continue to be so.

"The floodgates did not open, but it's been slowly and surely getting better," said Roy Ashton, partner and agent in the TV literary department at Beverly Hills talent agency Gersh. "It's just that the bar is just higher than it's ever been."

Amazon has green-lighted 49 U.S. productions so far this year, roughly the same as in 2023, according to a person familiar with

Amazon's business who was not authorized to comment publicly. More than 30% of Amazon Originals series are shot in the U.S., the person said.

London-based production company Fremantle and its divisions had several shows in different countries green-lighted by Amazon and Netflix this year.

Those include a couple of not-yet-announced U.S. unscripted programs for Netflix and a second season renewal of its popular German-language romantic drama "Maxton Hall — the World Between Us," which launched in May and was Amazon Prime Video's most-viewed international original title in its first week.

"There's activity everywhere," said Jennifer Mullin, chief executive of Fremantle. "The great thing about what we do is, the world needs great content."

## Trailer for Coppola's 'Megalopolis' recalled over fabricated quotes

From wire reports

Lionsgate recalled its new trailer for Francis Ford Coppola's "Megalopolis" Wednesday amid revelations that critics' quotes were fabricated.

"Lionsgate is immediately recalling our trailer for Megalopolis," a Lionsgate spokesperson said in a statement to The Associated Press. "We offer our sincere apologies to the critics involved and to Francis Ford Coppola and American Zoetrope for this inexcusable error in our vetting process. We screwed up. We are sorry."

The trailer, released earlier Wednesday, included quotes from critics like Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert of other Coppola films that did not actually appear in their reviews. The intent, it seems, was to highlight

the critical divisiveness of now-classics like "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now," leaning into some of the more negative reactions to "Megalopolis," the self-financed \$120 million epic opening in September.

The trailer attributed a quote to Kael that "The Godfather" was "diminished by its artiness." But Kael loved "The Godfather," and this phrase was not used in her March 1972 review of the film for The New Yorker. Ebert also did not write that Coppola's "Bram Stoker's Dracula" was "a triumph of style over substance." Quotes from Rex Reed and Vincent Canby, about "Apocalypse Now," did not appear in their reviews either.

"Megalopolis" has been decades in the making, and it received many mixed re-

views upon its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival this year.

Representatives have not responded to the AP's requests for comment about the videos.

The film is set to have its North American premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival next month before hitting theaters on Sept. 27.

### Travel guru Rick Steves reveals prostate cancer diagnosis

Guidebook author and PBS personality Rick Steves will take a break in his busy travel schedule to have surgery for prostate cancer.

Steves, 69, announced his diagnosis Wednesday in a statement posted to social

media, saying he will film two new TV shows in France before returning home to Washington state for a procedure in September.

According to the American Cancer Society, about 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime.

Steves recently celebrated the 40th edition of his first book, "Europe Through the Back Door," and is known for his prolific output of books, podcasts and episodes of "Rick Steves' Europe."

"I'm looking forward to many more years of happy travels, exciting collaborations, and beautiful friendships," Steves' statement said. "Thank you for your love and support (and any "travel tips" you may have for me as I set off on this journey)."

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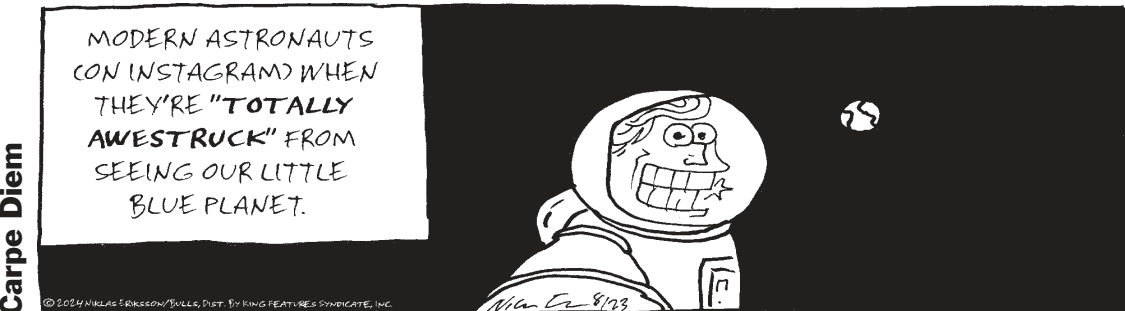
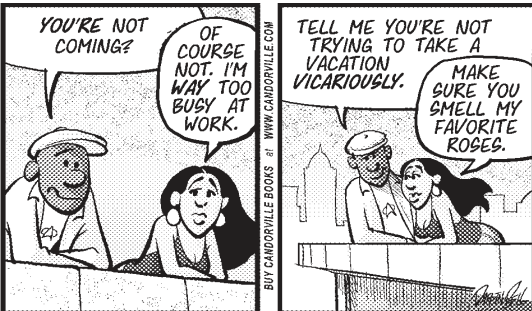
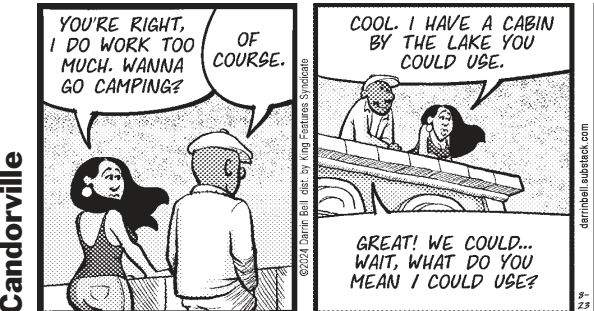
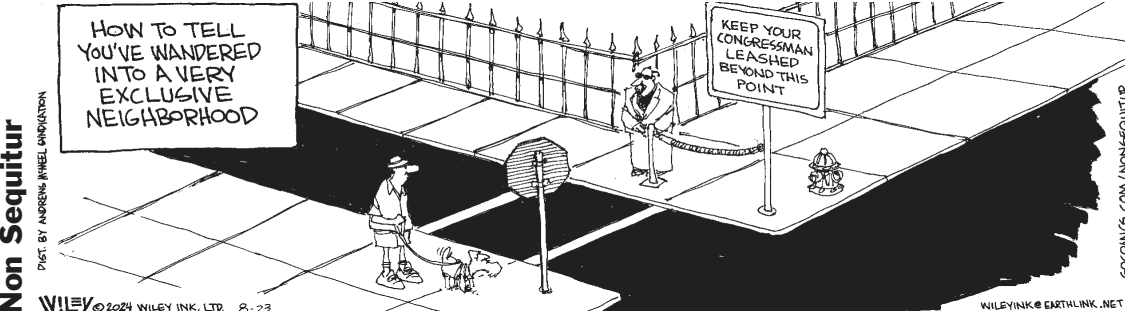
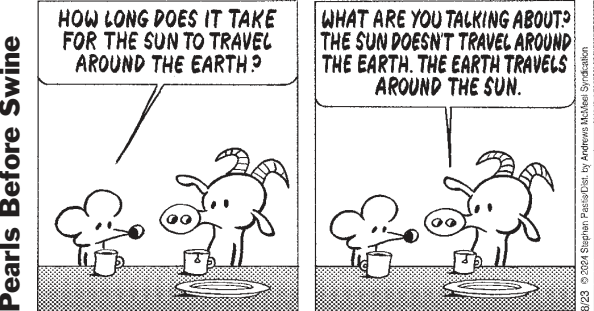
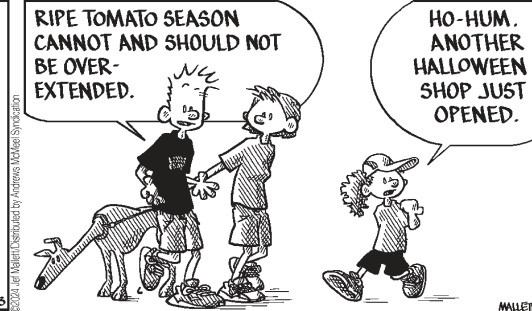
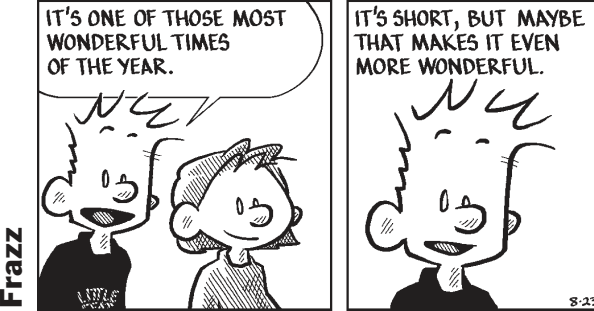


**SCAN**  
for more!

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

- 1 Taj —  
6 “Nova” aier  
9 Moo — pork  
12 Make twisty  
13 Fish eggs  
14 Signature piece?  
15 Handled  
16 Scrutinize  
18 ATM part  
20 Incite  
21 Compass dir.  
23 Elmer, to Bugs  
24 Pick up the tab  
25 Fellows  
27 “Holy cow!”  
29 Playwright Eugene  
31 Type of street  
35 Egg holders  
37 Scarce  
38 “Star Trek” genre  
41 “— a Rebel”  
43 Architect Maya  
44 Language of Pakistan  
45 Mexican liquor  
47 Peeper covers  
49 Amtrak express  
52 Stephen of “Still Crazy”  
53 Conk out  
54 Synthetic fabric  
55 Soon-to-be grads  
56 Bro’s kin  
57 Prolonged attack

DOWN

- 1 Brit. sports cars  
2 Literary collection  
3 Iowa native  
4 Prado display  
5 Frank — Wright  
6 Sermonize  
7 “Cheers” barman Woody  
8 Behold  
9 Memoir by Prince Harry  
10 Hägar’s wife  
11 Vacant, as a flat  
17 Stovetop feature  
19 Swimming spots  
21 Private aid gp.  
22 Cloister resident

- 24 Light brown  
26 Decadent  
28 Heston role  
30 Luau necklace  
32 Perchlike fish  
33 “Entourage” role  
34 Kyoto currency  
36 School papers  
38 Litigants  
39 Jon of “NCIS”  
40 Concepts  
42 Bar fight reminders  
45 1502, in Old Rome  
46 Antioxidant berry  
48 Check-cashing needs  
50 Journal  
51 Hydrocarbon ending

Answer to Previous Puzzle

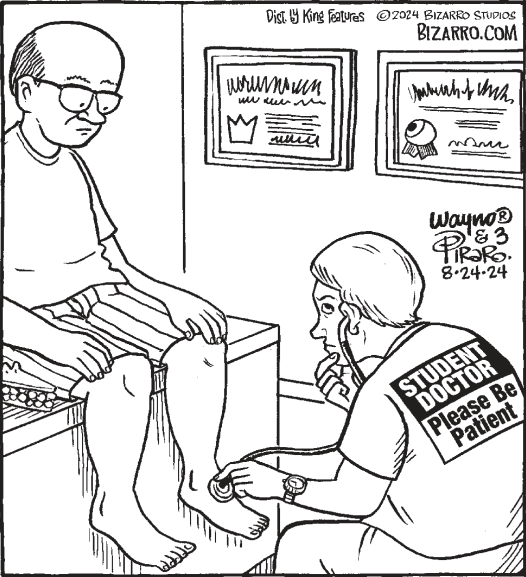
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H	E	R	A		Y	O	O		R	A	G	A	
A	B	E	L		C	H	O		I	G	E	R	
B	A	A	B	A	A			R	O	M	N	E	Y
				O	H	M			L	E	O		
W	A	W	A			O	H	R	E	A	L	L	Y
A	S	H				R	A	E			I	S	E
S	E	I	N	F	E	L	D			W	A	D	S
			T	O	A				M	R	I		
S	I	E	N	N	A			A	E	R	I	A	L
O	B	O	E			V	I	P		I	R	I	S
F	I	A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

8-23

CRYPTOQUIP

WJQKC D ZKYWRK GQWCQIKX  
ZO W IUTX YNDCBDSP DSGKYQ  
DS JCWSLJTCQ, D GNUTQKX,  
“PKCRWSO YCDYLKQ!”  
Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: WE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HOLD OUR ANNIVERSARY PARTY AT THE LIBRARY, BUT IT WAS ALL BOOKED UP.  
Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: P equals G

Bizarro



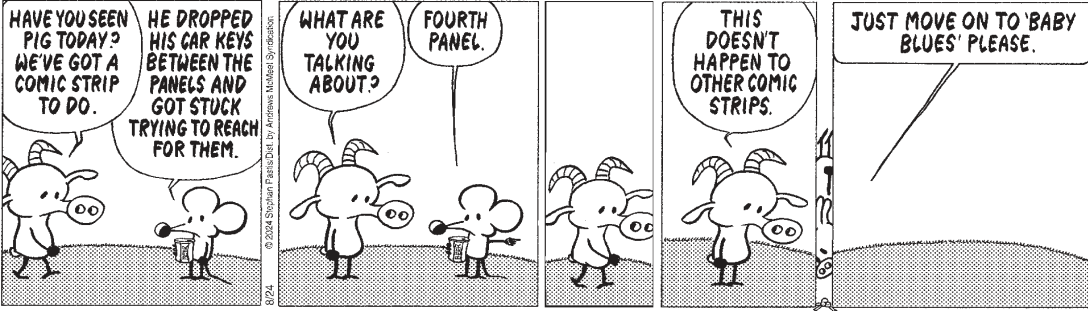
Loose Parts



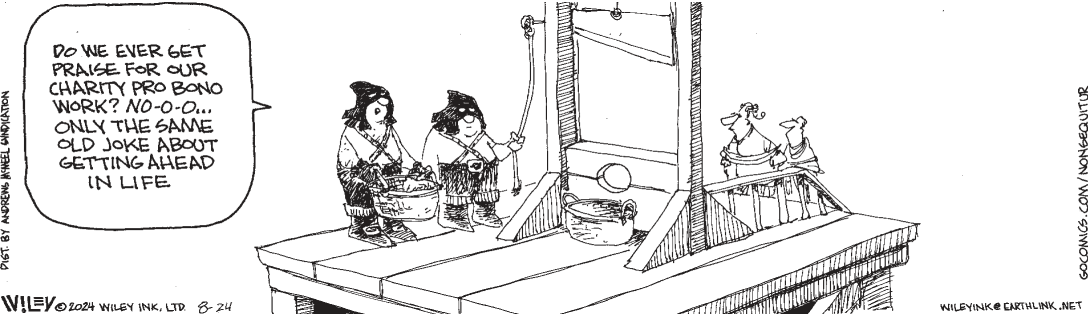
Frazz



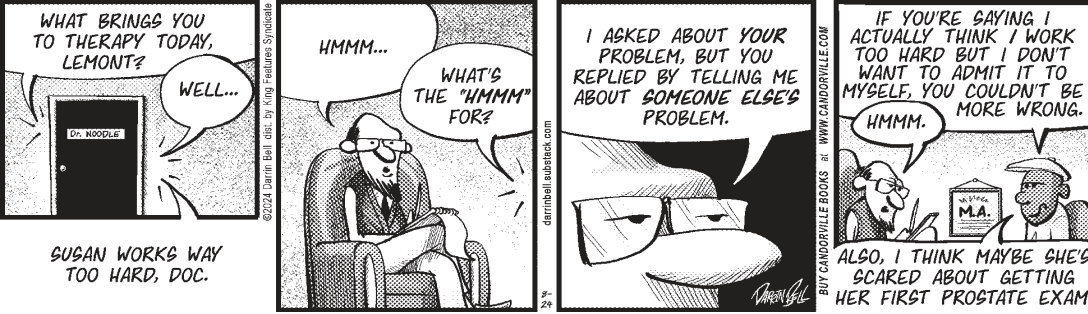
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

- ACROSS
- 1 Amy Winehouse song

6 Lucid

11 Like does and hens

12 Laundry container

14 Toy train maker

15 Urges forward

16 Toronto's prov.

17 Enjoy gumbo noisily

19 Roman 1004

20 Coral formation

22 Rock concert booster

23 React in horror

24 — Ababa

26 Bookish types

28 Napkin's perch

30 Badly lit

31 Censored

35 Neighbor of Tibet

39 Take five

40 Name

42 Pivot

43 Smartphone download

44 Fork prongs

46 Takeoff stat

47 Radio interference

49 Cry from a crow's nest
- 51 Recital piece

52 Salem's state

53 Bigwig

54 Seesaw
- DOWN
- 1 Checked

2 Acted badly?

3 Solo in space

4 Pub potables

5 "Twilight" heroine

6 Twittered

7 Genie's home

8 Hirohito's title (Abbr.)

9 Tarzan type

10 Put back on the market

11 Plant life

13 Answers an invite
- 18 Ref

21 Steak cut

23 Fun partner

25 Tree fluid

27 Cacophony

29 Human-powered taxi

31 Army bigwigs

32 Physics particle

33 Sevilla's nation

34 Press for payment

36 Take an oath

37 Book maker?

38 Enticed

41 Underneath

44 Bandleader

45 Poet Teasdale

48 Bar bill

50 The Silver St.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

8-24 CRYPTOQUIP

S T J W    S X V K L    X M C    G J K K

C N G K J Q J W O X M I    I V G T    J I    " I G Z J Q ,

I W J K K O X M ! "    J M L    " I G J W ,

I W C C L ! " ?    T X Z I C    I T X X I .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AFTER I BECAME STARTLED BY A LOUD CHIRPING INSECT IN FRANKFURT, I SHOUTED, "GERMANY CRICKET!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals C



Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer  
 Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander  
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff  
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief  
 reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation  
 moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor  
 pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief  
 slavin.erik@stripes.com

+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief  
 kidd.aaron@stripes.com

+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief  
 cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com

(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News  
 bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast

David Schultz, District Manager  
 schultz.david@stripes.com  
 xsscirculation@stripes.com  
 +49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager  
 aquino.carlo@stripes.com  
 memberservices@stripes.com

+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific

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

CONTACT US

Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003

633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

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Jacqueline Smith

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published week-days (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for \$1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DOD personnel are located. The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

OPINION

What Harris is missing on ‘price-gouging’

BY JONAH GOLDBERG  
 Tribune Content Agency

The best thing about Kamala Harris’ policy debut last week was the backlash.

I don’t mean the political backlash; Harris’ attack on “price-gouging” was probably smart politics. It amplified her campaign’s message that she’s “fighting for the people.” That economists scoff at the tools she would use in that fight probably doesn’t matter much.

Nonetheless, it’s reassuring that most economists roll their eyes at government price controls. Few lessons from economic history are more clear than the futility of that approach, as Robert L. Schuettinger and Eamonn F. Butler chronicled in their 1979 book “Forty Centuries of Wage and Price Controls: How Not to Fight Inflation.”

Amid the short-lived debate over private-sector “greed” occasioned by Harris’ proposal, we heard almost nothing about the avarice of the public sector.

By almost any measure, eggs and other staples have become much, much cheaper over the last century. Recent spikes in food prices were just statistical noise in that broader trend with well-known causes: the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain snarls, avian flu and general inflation.

Meanwhile, goods and services whose actual prices are occluded by government control or interference have become much more expensive. The costs of college tuition, health care, housing and other goods and services that are heavily regulated by state and local governments have markedly outpaced inflation, while cars, computers, clothing and other less regulated goods and services have generally become more affordable.

The average inflation-adjusted cost of college tuition has increased 130% since 1990.

The cost of K-12 public education has soared too. National health care expenditures rose from \$435 billion in 1970 to \$4.5 trillion in 2022 (in constant 2022 dollars). While the U.S. population grew 64% over that period, health care spending increased 934%.

The left rarely describes these increases as price-gouging or attributes them to greed. Sure, insurance companies are often denounced — usually for trying to keep costs down — while pharmaceutical companies are frequently cast as a bogeyman. And for-profit universities occasionally arouse progressive ire. But the affordability crises generated by the public sector more often get different responses: consumer or provider subsidies, or debt cancellation at taxpayer expense.

Taxpayers who want to keep more of their own money are dubbed greedy, while those who want to take it from them are cast as compassionate.

There’s no condemnation of the universities that have spent vast sums on administrators at the expense of professors. Since the 1970s, the number of full-time administrators and other non-teaching professionals in higher education has exploded. Paul Weinstein Jr. of the Progressive Policy Institute found that Caltech, University of California San Diego and Duke have more non-faculty employees than students. The ratio of students to faculty at Georgia Tech is 37 to 1, while the ratio of students to non-faculty employees is 11 to 1, according to Weinstein; MIT has almost nine times more non-faculty than faculty employees.

Public K-12 schools are doing worse while spending more. Math, civics and reading scores among 13-year-olds have been declining. Yet all we hear from Democrats is that we need to give the schools more money.

That’s partly because the education sector

is a vital part of the Democratic coalition, having served as a political ATM for the party for decades. In every election cycle since 1990, teachers’ unions have given at least 93 cents out of every dollar in political contributions to Democrats. Contributions from higher education and public sector unions generally follow a similar pattern. This doesn’t include additional political activities boosting Democrats.

But I don’t think crass donor capture is the entire explanation — in the same way I don’t think conservatives defend the private sector simply because they are bought and paid for by the rich. Going back at least to the philosopher John Dewey, education has been seen as a kind of secular, democratic, religious rite — and right. Much like another right according to progressives, health care, education is regarded as something the state should provide for everyone’s betterment. Concerns about costs are treated as heartlessness or heresy.

I obviously have philosophical disagreements with this worldview, but it’s not a sinister or indefensible perspective. But it is so myopically obsessed with well-intentioned ends that its adherents are blind to means.

Denizens of the public and nonprofit sectors have become a kind of new class that thinks it is or should be immune to the market forces that tend to make nearly everything outside the public sector more affordable over time.

The value of accurate prices is that they force necessary trade-offs. Progressives’ approach is to start with the ends — what they think the accurate price (or wage) should be — and reverse-engineer the means to fit them. That hasn’t worked for 40 centuries.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

Don’t give in to isolationists. Taiwan must not fall.

BY MIKE PENCE AND ED FEULNER  
 Special to The Washington Post

In 1950, Gen. Douglas MacArthur wrote a top-secret memorandum warning of the dire consequences of allowing Taiwan to be dominated by Communist China. “The strategic interests of the United States will be in serious jeopardy,” he wrote, concluding that China’s domination of Taiwan “would be a disaster of utmost importance.”

For more than 70 years, America heeded MacArthur’s warning. For decades, standing with Taiwan has been a cornerstone of American strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Our leaders have recognized that Taiwan is a crucial barrier to the expansion of communist influence in the region. With virtual unanimity, leaders of both political parties have acknowledged that abandoning Taiwan and allowing it to fall into the hands of the Chinese Communist Party would not only betray our values but also endanger the security and prosperity of the United States and the free world.

But now, even as Chinese President Xi Jinping has candidly admitted his intention to annex Taiwan, a new and troubling strain of isolationism is emerging within the Republican Party that advocates for turning our backs on Taiwan and other allies. This new isolationism, masquerading as realism, dismisses the strategic imperatives that have underpinned American foreign

policy since World War II. Former President Donald Trump recently epitomized this sentiment when he remarked in an interview with Bloomberg News, “Taiwan is 9,500 miles away. It’s 68 miles away from China.” Such comments reflect a dangerously narrow understanding of America’s role in the world and ignorance of the far-reaching consequences of American disengagement.

What is distance to a global superpower? The beaches of Normandy are 3,700 miles away. Iwo Jima is 7,600 miles. It’s roughly 7,000 miles from Washington, D.C., to Afghanistan. America remains the world’s only true superpower, fully capable of projecting forces to every corner of the Earth. Distance has no bearing on our responsibility to safeguard American interests.

Many commentators have noted that one of China’s goals in annexing Taiwan would be to gain a stranglehold over the global supply of semiconductors. There is also the risk of collateral damage if Taiwan is invaded. As home to more than half the world’s chip fabrication facilities, it’s easy to envision a scenario in which much of the world’s chipmaking capability is damaged or destroyed, thrusting the global economy into a deep and painful recession, if not an outright depression. And even if chip fabrication weren’t disrupted, China could use its consolidated control over the world’s high-tech supply chain to force its will on coun-

tries throughout the region and around the world.

Most concerning of all, the fall of Taiwan would probably spark a new nuclear arms race — not just between major powers, but including smaller Asian nations concerned about Chinese aggression but no longer confident in American deterrence. If Taiwan is annexed, American security commitments will be viewed as empty promises. Many nations would feel they had no choice but to develop their own nuclear arsenals if the United States is incapable or unwilling to stop China’s predatory behavior. The end result would be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of nuclear warheads added to global stockpiles — and a much higher risk of nuclear proliferation, or even nuclear war.

The stakes could not be higher. The United States must stand firm in its support for Taiwan, not because we view ourselves as a self-appointed global police force, but because it is in our national interest to do so. We cannot afford to be led astray by the isolationists, who promise the illusion of peace but guarantee the reality of a more dangerous world. Instead, we must continue to lead, to honor our commitments, and to ensure that Taiwan remains free and secure.

Mike Pence was the 48th vice president and is the founder of Advancing American Freedom. Ed Feulner is founder of the Heritage Foundation.

# SCOREBOARD/AUTO RACING

## PRO FOOTBALL

NFL preseason	
Thursday's games	
Indianapolis at Cincinnati Chicago at Kansas City	
Friday's games	
Jacksonville at Atlanta Miami at Tampa Bay San Francisco at Las Vegas	
TENNIS	

Monterrey Open	
Wednesday At Club Sonoma Monterrey, Mexico Purse: \$922,573	
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor	
Women's Singles	
Round of 16	
Yuan Yue (7), China, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-4, 6-1. Lulu Sun, New Zealand, def. Maria Carle, Argentina, 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (2). Linda Noskova (6), Czechia, def. Wang Xiyu, China, 6-4, 7-6 (11). Elina Svitolina (5), Ukraine, def. Elina Avanesyan, Russia, 6-4, 6-3. Ekaterina Alexandrova (3), Russia, def. Renata Zarazua, Mexico, 6-3, 6-4. Magdalena Frech (9), Poland, def. Lina Glushko, Israel, 6-7 (2), 6-3, 6-1. Emma Navarro (2), United States, def. Camila Osorio, Colombia, 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (2).	

Winston-Salem Open	
Wednesday At Wake Forest University Winston-Salem, N.C. Purse: \$779,780	
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor	
Men's Singles	
Round of 16	
Lorenzo Sonego (10), Italy, def. Jun-cheng Shang, China, walkover. David Goffin, Belgium, def. Arthur Rinderknech (12), France, 6-3, 6-3. Pavel Kotov (15), Russia, def. Zachary Svajda, United States, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4. Rinky Hijikata (16), Australia, def. Borna Coric, Croatia, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5. Learner Tien, United States, def. Thiago Seyboth Wild, Brazil, 6-4, 6-3. Alex Michelsen (11), United States, def. Zizou Bergs, Belgium, 6-1, 6-2. Christopher Eubanks, United States, def. Roman Safiullin (17), Russia, 6-3, 1-6, 7-6 (8). Pablo Carreno Busta, Spain, def. Aleksandar Vukic, Australia, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.	

Tennis in the Land	
Wednesday At Flats West Bank Cleveland Purse: \$267,082	
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor	
Women's Singles	
Round of 16	
Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, def. Viktoriya Tomova (7), Bulgaria, 6-3, 6-3. McCartney Kessler, United States, def. Wang Xinyu (4), China, 3-6, 6-4, 6-2. Anastasia Potapova (5), Russia, def. Clara Tauson, Denmark, 6-2, 6-2. Ana Bogdan, Romania, def. Greet Minnen, Belgium, 7-6 (3), 6-3. Beatriz Haddad Maia (1), Brazil, def. Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-2, 6-1. Katerina Siniakova (3), Czechia, def. Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, Spain, 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (2). Clara Burel, France, def. Sofia Kenin (8), United States, 6-4, 6-3. Peyton Stearns (6), United States, def. Sara Sorribes Tormo, Spain, 6-3, 6-2.	

## PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L Pct GB
x-New York	24 4 .857 —
Connecticut	20 7 .741 3½
Indiana	13 15 .464 11
Chicago	11 16 .407 12½
Atlanta	10 17 .370 13½
Washington	6 22 .214 18
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L Pct GB
Minnesota	20 8 .714 —
Seattle	18 10 .643 2
Las Vegas	17 10 .630 2½
Phoenix	15 14 .517 5½
Dallas	6 21 .222 13½
Los Angeles	6 22 .214 14
x-clinched playoff spot	
Wednesday's games	
Atlanta 72, Phoenix 63 Minnesota 98, Las Vegas 87	
Thursday's games	
Dallas at New York	
Friday's games	
Chicago at Connecticut Los Angeles at Washington Phoenix at Atlanta Las Vegas at Minnesota	
Saturday's games	
Connecticut at New York Indiana at Minnesota	

## PRO SOCCER

MLS	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L T Pts GF GA
Inter Miami CF	16 4 5 53 56 39
Cincinnati	15 7 3 48 44 33
Columbus	12 4 7 43 47 22
New York	10 4 11 41 42 31
NYCFC	11 9 5 38 36 30
Charlotte FC	10 8 7 37 30 27
Orlando City	9 9 7 34 39 38
Toronto FC	9 14 3 30 34 47
Atlanta	7 11 7 28 35 36
Philadelphia	6 10 9 27 45 42
CF Montréal	6 10 9 27 34 49
Nashville	6 11 8 26 26 39
D.C. United	6 11 8 26 35 50
Chicago	6 12 7 25 30 42
New England	7 14 2 23 23 47
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L T Pts GF GA
LA Galaxy	14 5 7 49 50 36
LAFC	14 5 5 47 48 30
Real Salt Lake	12 5 8 44 51 34
Colorado	12 9 5 41 50 43
Vancouver	11 8 5 38 43 35
Houston	10 7 7 37 35 30
Seattle	10 8 7 37 34 29
Portland	10 9 6 36 50 42
Minnesota	9 10 6 33 40 41
Austin FC	8 10 7 31 28 37
FC Dallas	8 11 6 30 38 39
Sporting KC	6 14 6 24 41 52
St Louis City	4 10 11 23 32 46
San Jose	4 19 2 14 31 61

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Wednesday's game	
Columbus at Philadelphia ppd.	
Saturday's games	
Seattle at Minnesota New York at Charlotte FC FC Dallas at D.C. United Cincinnati at Miami New England at CF Montréal Chicago at New York City FC Toronto FC at Houston Orlando City at Sporting Kansas City Austin FC at Nashville San Jose at Real Salt Lake Atlanta at LA Galaxy St Louis City at Portland	
Wednesday, Aug. 28	
Columbus at Philadelphia	
Saturday, Aug. 31	
Atlanta at Charlotte FC CF Montréal at Cincinnati New York City FC at Columbus Philadelphia at New York Nashville at Orlando City D.C. United at Toronto FC Vancouver at Austin FC Miami at Chicago Colorado at FC Dallas New England at Real Salt Lake Houston at Los Angeles FC Seattle at Portland Minnesota at San Jose	
Sunday, Sept. 1	
LA Galaxy at St Louis City	

NWSL	
	W L T Pts GF GA
Orlando	11 0 5 38 32 12
Kansas City	10 1 5 35 40 22
Washington	11 4 1 34 32 18
Gotham FC	9 3 4 31 19 13
Portland	8 5 3 27 27 20
North Carolina	8 7 1 25 20 17
Chicago	7 7 2 23 23 22
Bay FC	6 10 0 18 19 28
Louisville	3 6 7 16 21 22
San Diego	3 7 6 15 12 17
Angel City	4 9 3 15 16 26
Houston	3 8 5 14 11 23
Seattle	2 9 5 11 16 28
Utah Royals FC	2 11 3 9 8 28

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's games	
Orlando at Houston Bay FC at Utah Royals FC	
Saturday's games	
Portland at Gotham FC Angel City at San Diego Chicago at Louisville	
Sunday's games	
Kansas City at Washington North Carolina at Seattle	
Friday, Aug. 30	
Bay FC at Portland	
Saturday, Aug. 31	
Seattle at Louisville Utah Royals FC at Houston	
Sunday, Sept. 1	
Kansas City at North Carolina Chicago at Angel City Gotham FC at Orlando Washington at San Diego	

## DEALS

Wednesday's transactions	
BASEBALL	
Major League Baseball American League	
<b>BALTIMORE ORIOLES</b> — Designated RHP Nick Avila and SS Terrin Vavra for assignment. Selected the contract of LHP Cole Irvin from Norfolk (IL). Optioned RHP Dillon Tate to Norfolk. Claimed 3B Emmanuel Rivera off waivers from Miami.	
<b>CLEVELAND GUARDIANS</b> — Designated CF Anthony Gose for assignment. Recalled LHP Joey Cantillo from Columbus (IL).	
<b>HOUSTON ASTROS</b> — Reinstated RHP Justin Verlander from the 15-day IL. Placed RHP Kaleb Ort on the paternity list. Recalled RHP Seth Martinez from Sugar Land (PCL).	
<b>LOS ANGELES ANGELS</b> — Optioned RHP Hans Crouse to Salt Lake (PCL). Selected the contract of RHP Johnny Cueto from Salt Lake. Released RHP Jose Cisnero.	
<b>NEW YORK YANKEES</b> — Placed RHP Luis Gil on the 15-day IL. Recalled RHP Will Warren from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (IL).	
National League	
<b>COLORADO ROCKIES</b> — Selected the contract of RHP Jeff Criswell from Albuquerque (PCL). Placed RHP Victor Vodnik on the 15-day IL, retroactive to Aug. 19. Sent RHP Ryan Feltner to Albuquerque (PCL) on a rehab assignment.	
<b>LOS ANGELES DODGERS</b> — Activated RHP Blake Treinen. Optioned RHP Ben Casparius to Oklahoma City (PCL).	
<b>PITTSBURGH PIRATES</b> — Sent RHP Ryder Ryan outright to Indianapolis (IL).	
<b>SAN DIEGO PADRES</b> — Optioned SS Matthew Batten to El Paso (PCL). Selected the contract of SS Mason McCoy from El Paso. Placed SS Fernando Tatis Jr. on the 60-day IL.	
<b>ST. LOUIS CARDINALS</b> — Recalled SS José Fermín from Memphis (IL). Optioned 3B Nolan Gorman to Memphis.	
BASKETBALL	
National Basketball Association	
<b>CLEVELAND CAVALIERS</b> — Signed F Emoni Bates to a two-way contract.	
<b>WASHINGTON WIZARDS</b> — Waived F Eugene Omoruyi.	
FOOTBALL	
National Football League	
<b>ARIZONA CARDINALS</b> — Signed OL Hjalte Froholdt to a two-year contract extension. Waived WR Daniel Arias. Signed TE Sage Surra.	
<b>CAROLINA PANTHERS</b> — Waived G Nash Jensen from injured reserve with a settlement.	
<b>CHICAGO BEARS</b> — Placed WR Freddie Swain on injured reserve.	
<b>CLEVELAND BROWNS</b> — Signed LB Marvin Moody to a contract. Waived Brandon Bouyer-Randle with an injury designation.	
<b>DALLAS COWBOYS</b> — Signed DL Linval Joseph to a contract.	
<b>DETROIT LIONS</b> — Signed DB Rachad Wildgoose to a contract. Designated K Alex Hale as the player for the NFL International Player Pathway program.	
<b>GREEN BAY PACKERS</b> — Waived DL Kenneth Odumegwu. Placed RB Jarveon Howard on injured reserve after clearing waivers. Designated K Alex Hale as an international pathway player.	
<b>HOUSTON TEXANS</b> — Placed TE Dalton Keene on injured reserve. Signed RB Nick Bawden.	
<b>JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS</b> — Signed QB E.J. Perry.	
<b>KANSAS CITY CHIEFS</b> — Waived WR Jaaron Hayek with an injury designation.	
<b>LAS VEGAS RAIDERS</b> — Signed LB DaShaun White to a contract. Waived WR Jeff Foreman with an injury designation.	
<b>LOS ANGELES RAMS</b> — Waived DB Jerry Jacobs with an injury settlement.	
<b>MINNESOTA VIKINGS</b> — Signed OL Matt Cindric to a contract. Waived OL Jeremy Flax and DB Najee Thompson. Claimed TE Neal Johnson off waivers from the New York Jets.	
<b>NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS</b> — Released DL Mike Purcell.	
<b>NEW ORLEANS SAINTS</b> — Signed CB Joejuan Williams. Waived C Sincere Haynesworth. Activated TE Juwan Johnson from the PUP list.	
<b>NEW YORK GIANTS</b> — Waived TE Tyree Jackson from the injured reserve with a settlement. Placed WR Dennis Houston on injured reserve after clearing waivers.	
<b>PHILADELPHIA EAGLES</b> — Signed OL Jason Poe to a contract. Released TE C.J. Uzomah. Released DB Tyler Hall from injured reserve with a settlement.	
<b>PITTSBURGH STEELERS</b> — Placed LB Markus Golden o the Reserve/Retired list.	
<b>WASHINGTON COMMANDERS</b> — Placed LB Keandre Jones and DB Ben Nikkel on injured reserve after clearing waivers.	
HOCKEY	
National Hockey League	
<b>COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS</b> — Signed F Cole Sillinger to a two-year contract.	
<b>TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS</b> — Signed F Alex Steeves to a one-year, two-way contract.	
SOCCER	
National Women's Soccer League	
NJ/NY GOTHAM FC — Traded D Maycee Bell to the North Carolina Courage in exchange for \$80,000 in allocation money as well as \$10,000 in intra-league transfer funds.	

NASCAR Cup points leaders	
Through Aug. 19	
1. Tyler Reddick	814
2. Chase Elliott	804
3. Denny Hamlin	786
4. Kyle Larson	782
5. Ryan Blaney	732
6. William Byron	728



CARLOS OSORIO/AP

Tyler Reddick currently sits atop the NASCAR Cup points standings with two races left before the playoffs begin.

# Four playoff spots left in stretch run

By LARRY LAGE Associated Press	
BROOKLYN, Mich. — NASCAR has just two races remaining in the regular season and a pair of competitions are on the line.	
Tyler Reddick earned his second win of the season Monday at Michigan International Speedway, giving him the points lead in a closely contested, four-driver race for the regular-season championship.	
Reddick is 10 points ahead of Chase Elliott while Denny Hamlin and Kyle Larson are within striking distance.	
Reddick moved past Larson into the top spot in the Cup standings, and his win opened another spot in the playoffs because he was one of 12 drivers who already earned an automatic bid with a victory.	
That leaves four spots available in the 16-car playoffs with races left at Daytona on Saturday night and Sept. 1 at Darlington.	
Five drivers have a shot to get in without a win, but at least one will be left out.	
“It’s really tight on speed on the race track, tight on points,” Reddick said. “That’s what this Next Gen era has really done, brought us closer together from the front of the field to the back.”	
Martin Truex Jr. is No. 13 in the playoff standings with a 77-point cushion over the cutline, but no lead in the format can be considered safe.	
Ty Gibbs, Chris Buescher and Ross Chastain currently have the final three spots and Bubba Wallace slipped to 17th, one point behind Chastain.	
“We knew at the beginning of the year before we ever got to Daytona that the only way to really be comfortable at any point before	

playoffs was a win,” Buescher said.	
Kyle Busch, who won his first stage of the season on Sunday and finished fourth, is among the drivers who have to win to get in.	
Austin Dillon will be among the desperate drivers, needing to get to a checkered flag first to extend the season, unless he wins an appeal on Wednesday or a subsequent option to fight NASCAR’s decision to revoke his spot in the playoffs.	
Dillon was 17th in the FireKeepers 400, a week after he wrecked Joey Logano and Denny Hamlin on the final lap to win at Richmond.	
Reddick, meanwhile, is at the front of the pack in points thanks to his consistency, leading the series with 11 top-five finishes and 17 top 10s out of 24 races.	
He also won at Talladega four months ago in his No. 45 Toyota for 23XI, which is owned by Hamlin and Michael Jordan, to put himself and his team No. 1 in points for the first time.	
One wreck, as a slew of drivers experienced at Michigan, can change a lot of things in any race and in the standings.	
Larson, who was the BetMGM Sportsbook favorite to win the race, lost control of the No. 5 Chevrolet on lap 115 and several cars were tangled up in the mess.	
A few laps later, Logano took his damaged No. 22 Ford to the garage and Wallace’s No. 23 Toyota took a hit to stunt the relative success the on-the-bubble driver was having in the race.	
The pileup led to Logano finishing 33rd, with Larson one spot behind and Wallace 26th, pushing him from No. 15 to 17 in the playoff standings for the 16-car field.	

NFL

# No Nabers-Sauce on practice menu

## Giants prize rookie WR, Jets All-Pro CB barely face each other in joint session

**By TOM CANAVAN**  
*Associated Press*

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — The much-anticipated matchup between Giants playmaking rookie receiver Malik Nabers and Jets two-time All-Pro cornerback Sauce Gardner never materialized as the New York City-based teams staged a joint practice Wednesday.

Other than an incomplete pass from Daniel Jones to Nabers in an early 7-on-7 passing drill, the two men really didn't go head to head on any long passes in the two-hour practice at the Jets' practice facility.

The Giants and Jets will meet Saturday night in the final preseason game for both teams before coaches have to reduce their rosters to 53 players by Tuesday.

Nabers, the No. 6 overall pick in the draft, caught some passes in the workout, but most were 10- to 15-yard throws. He has put on a show going against the Giants' defensive backs all camp, going deep at least once a practice.

Giants coach and play-caller Brian Daboll didn't have Jones and Nabers go deep against Gardner, who has been one of the best shutdown cornerbacks in his two seasons in the league.

"That's a question for Dabs," Nabers said when asked about the matchup not happening.

Nabers did have a chance to go deep in the final 11-on-11 two-minute drill. Jones tossed a long pass down the left sideline after Nabers beat cornerback D.J. Reed. The LSU product twisted his body around and had the ball in his hands before dropping it.

"Yeah, it bothered me pretty

bad," Nabers said of the drop. "If I had to do it again, I would work on something different on catching the ball. I'll just go look at it, see what I can do better, and just practice that. Practice getting my eyes around faster and finding the ball in the air."

Nabers said the pass was on target but he lost sight of the ball when he spun his body and didn't pick it up quickly enough to make the catch.

"It was just a drop," he said. "I just have to try to catch it better, I guess," the 21-year-old said.

The Jets defense played well during the practice and the Giants did not score in either of their late two-minute possessions.

Gardner took the opportunity after the last drive under Tommy DeVito failed to wave goodbye to the Giants.

"I mean, they can do that," Nabers said. "They won on the day. Their defense came out here and executed well. We beat ourselves today. So, it's about really going back into our playbook, going back into trying to be us, trying to find this team that we trying to look for. It's going back to the preparation."

Jones wasn't overly disappointed with the way the offense played. He said it would have been a lift for the Giants had Nabers been able to haul in the pass near the goal line.

"We all got to make plays," said Jones, who is coming off ACL surgery. "Stuff like that's going to happen. You know, we had a chance to come back and still convert, so we got to do that. But, yeah, certainly feels different if we convert that two-minute situation."



JACOB KUPFERMAN/AP

**Panthers quarterback Bryce Young, left, greets teammates during the second half of a preseason game against the New York Jets on Aug. 17 in Charlotte, N.C. Young didn't play in the first two preseason games.**

# QB Young fine in new offense even with few preseason snaps

**By STEVE REED**  
*Associated Press*

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Panthers quarterback Bryce Young isn't concerned if he doesn't take a snap in the preseason.

The No. 1 overall pick in 2023 is coming off a rookie season in which he went 2-14 as a starter and ranked near the bottom of the league in most passing categories. And he enters Year 2 having been forced to learn a different offense under new coach Dave Canales.

Despite all that, Canales elected to hold Young out of Carolina's first two preseason games.

"They manage the team and they know what they're doing," Young said of the coaching staff. "For me and for us (as a team), we trust whatever they want to do. Whatever their calls are, we are comfortable with that."

Canales previously coached Geno Smith in as an assistant with Seattle and Baker Mayfield as Tampa Bay's offensive coordinator, getting solid performances out of both quarterbacks, before getting hired by Carolina.

The Panthers finished installing their offensive scheme about two weeks ago, and Young feels he has a strong understanding of what's

expected from him.

That's why he said he's OK if the doesn't play in Saturday's final exhibition game at the Buffalo Bills.

"I will be comfortable either way," Young said. "I know they are not just waking up and rolling the dice. There is a reason for everything and they are very calculated in what they are doing. They have our best interest at heart. They have had success as a start throughout different places, so I will be comfortable whatever the call is."

Canales said Tuesday it's too early in the week to make a decision on whether he'll play his starters against the Bills, but added that he is "open" to the idea.

Bills coach Sean McDermott won't be playing his starters.

Canales said that won't impact his decision. He said it will depend more on the health of the players around Young.

"We have to look at what does that (starting) group look like if we put everybody out there?" Canales said. "Are there enough of those guys (healthy) to say, 'Man, this is valuable for us to get these reps?' Once we start to get into the depth of different positions it kind of forces our hand sometimes on

can we play guys, or do we need to play them?"

Thus far, none of Carolina's starters have played in preseason losses to the New England Patriots and New York Jets. The Panthers held out 33 players against the Patriots and 38 against the Jets, prioritizing injury concerns over developing chemistry.

NFL teams have taken different approaches to playing QBs in the preseason.

Patrick Mahomes has seen action for the Kansas City Chiefs and Josh Allen has been on the field for the Bills. On the other hand, Deshaun Watson has yet to make his debut for Cleveland.

Canales has been impressed with how Young has picked up the offense.

And he's confident that the work Young has done in training camp and in last week's joint practice with the New York Jets has aided in his development.

Canales said if Young plays this week, he will be looking to see him operate the offense efficiently.

"I want to see things run smoothly and I want to see the communication, the in-between-drives conversation, all of that stuff is so valuable," Canales said.



SETH WENIG/AP

**Giants rookie WR Malik Nabers, left, talks with quarterback Daniel Jones during the team's training camp.**

# Nix wins Broncos' starting QB job

**By ARNIE STAPLETON**  
*Associated Press*

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Denver's unconventional quarterback competition concluded Wednesday with one final plot twist when Broncos coach Sean Payton walked up to his QBs during warmups and informed them rookie Bo Nix had won the starting job.

"He smiled," Payton said of the 12th overall pick out of Oregon and sixth QB selected in the 2024 NFL Draft. "We were getting ready to

practice, and that was it. You know, we didn't have cake and candles or anything like that."

Payton didn't even share the news with the team when he gathered everyone after practice.

"I haven't told the rest of the team yet," Payton said. "Because I'm not going to spend meetings with the rest of the team on every one of these other positions."

Besides, he said, "they've kind of seen this coming."

Nix has led the Broncos to

scores on six of the seven drives he's directed in the preseason.

Payton said one of his resolutions for this year was having a better relationship with the local media, so he made sure not to leak the news to the national media.

But he did inform about 50 local military members participating at "USAA's Salute to Service NFL Boot Camp" of his choice before taking the podium, saying he was in a hurry because he had to go announce Nix as his starter.

NFL

# Notable players still on roster bubbles

By ROB MAADDI  
Associated Press

Nick Sirianni was an assistant coach with the Chargers in 2017 when Austin Ekeler made the team following a strong performance in the final preseason game.

Ekeler is now in his eighth NFL season and first in Washington.

Sirianni, who is entering his fourth season as the Eagles head coach, used clips from Ekeler to motivate players going into Philadelphia's preseason finale last year. He'll try the same tactic before the Eagles face Minnesota on Saturday.

"Yeah, we'll probably do something similar to that," Sirianni said Wednesday. "But as far as the guys here, we had a good amount of undrafted free agents make it the last couple years."

Sirianni cited Eagles punt returner Britain Covey, cornerback Josh Jobe and linebacker Ben VanSumeren.

The final preseason game is an opportunity for players on the bubble to impress coaches and earn a roster spot before Tuesday's deadline for cuts. Late-round draft picks and undrafted rookies benefit most from the playing time.

Ekeler was an undrafted running back struggling to make the Chargers before he caught the coaching staff's attention by gaining 108 yards combined rushing and receiving. He eventually worked up to a starting role and had 38 touchdowns rushing and receiving in 2021-22. The Commanders gave him a two-year,



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

**Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Kadarius Toney struggled last season and sat out the Super Bowl.**

\$11.4 million contract in free agency.

While young players battle for roster spots this weekend, several veteran players are on edge because they could be on the way out.

Here are five veteran players on the bubble:

**Kadarius Toney:** Wide receiver Kadarius Toney, a 2021 first-round pick by the New York Giants, helped the Kansas City Chiefs win the Super Bowl two years ago after they acquired him in a trade during the season. In a three-minute span in the fourth quarter of Kansas

City's 38-35 win over Philadelphia in the Super Bowl, Toney made two monumental plays. First, he caught a 5-yard TD pass that gave the Chiefs a 28-27 lead. He then returned a punt 65 yards to the Eagles 5 to set up another TD.

But Toney couldn't build off that success. He struggled last season and was inactive from Week 15 through the playoffs and sat out Kansas City's Super Bowl win over San Francisco. His most memorable play of the 2023 season was an offside penalty that negated a go-ahead TD that he scored off a lateral from Travis Kelce late in the fourth quarter of a loss to Buffalo.

The Chiefs added veteran wideout Marquise "Hollywood" Brown and drafted Xavier Worthy in the first round to go with Rashee Rice. They also have Skyy Moore, Mecole Hardman and Justin Watson.

**James Bradberry:** Cornerback James Bradberry was a second-team All-Pro in 2022, playing an important role in helping the Philadelphia Eagles reach the Super Bowl. He had a poor season last year and the Eagles moved him to safety after selecting cornerbacks Quinyon Mitchell and Cooper DeJean in the first two rounds of the NFL Draft.

Bradberry has earned praise from de-

fensive coordinator Vic Fangio during camp, but he's still learning the position. The Eagles would take on about \$15 million in dead cap money by releasing Bradberry, but can spread that hit over two seasons with about \$4.3 million counting against this season's cap and the rest in 2025.

**Bailey Zappe:** Quarterback Bailey Zappe has started eight games for the New England Patriots in his first two seasons, going 4-4. But Zappe's future is likely elsewhere. Drake Maye was drafted to be the quarterback of the future and Jacoby Brissett was signed to provide veteran leadership. The Patriots also drafted Joe Milton in the sixth round to add depth.

New England has probably held onto Zappe to try to trade him, though there won't be much of a market for him unless a team loses a backup.

**La'el Collins:** Right tackle La'el Collins hasn't played in an NFL game since 2022 because a knee injury forced him to miss last season. He finished the season on Dallas' practice squad, returning to the Cowboys after starting 71 games for them from 2015-21 and spending 2022 with Cincinnati.

Buffalo signed Collins to be a swing backup for tackles Dion Dawkins and Spencer Brown. But he has struggled in training camp and was moved to guard as a last option to earn a roster spot.

**Mike Edwards:** Safety Mike Edwards, who won Super Bowl rings with Tampa Bay and Kansas City, is also battling to make the Bills. He missed the spring with a shoulder injury and much of training camp with an ankle injury. Edwards was eased into practice this week and is fighting to make up for lost time. He does have \$1.6 million guaranteed, but the Bills would save \$1.2 million on the salary cap if they cut him.

# Titans coach Callahan encouraged by QB Levis' progress

By TERESA M. WALKER  
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee coach Brian Callahan can't wait until the regular season starts to see just how much Titans quarterback Will Levis has improved.

The encouraging signs aren't how the 33rd pick overall out of Kentucky in 2023 throws the ball. He's already shown off a strong arm that allows him to throw deep all over the field. It's Levis' consistency with footwork, timing and accuracy he's shown in practice.

Or the mundane basics of football.

"That maybe doesn't look as exciting to the world when you watch him practice but really presents a smart quarterback that's playing efficient, which is a huge part of where we were trying to make improvement," Callahan said Wednesday.

The Titans went all-in this offseason, surrounding Levis with as much talent as possible. They signed wide receivers Calvin Ri-



MARK ZALESKI/AP

**Tennessee Titans head coach Brian Callahan, left, knows quarterback Will Levis, right, has a strong arm. He just needs some fine-tuning.**

dley and Tyler Boyd and center Lloyd Cushenberry III. General manager Ran Carthon drafted a new left tackle in JC Latham out of Alabama to better protect Levis.

Callahan also brought in his father, Bill, to coach the offensive line after Tennessee gave up 64 sacks

last season. Levis took 28 of those in nine starts, going 3-6. Knowing what Callahan can do with any quarterback is why Boyd decided to sign with Tennessee, joining a receiving group headed up by DeAndre Hopkins. Boyd saw what Callahan did with Jake Browning in

Cincinnati last season after Joe Burrow's season-ending injury.

Now it's fine-tuning timing with Levis and that strong arm for an offense that is quarterback friendly. Boyd expects Levis to flourish.

"Once you get the timing down pat, knowing the coverage and knowing where to go specifically when we call the plays, I mean, I think he's going to be among the top 10 (quarterbacks)," Boyd said.

Levis took over as Tennessee's starting quarterback last Oct. 29 and went 3-6 replacing Ryan Tannehill. From that point to season's end, he threw 32 passes of at least 20 yards or longer. That ranked him seventh in the NFL among all quarterbacks in that span and second only to fellow rookie C.J. Stroud in Houston, who had 41 such passes.

The 6-foot-4 quarterback also averaged 12.13 yards per completion, fourth among qualifying quarterbacks. Only Brock Purdy of San Francisco (13.9), Stroud (12.88) and Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford (12.16) were better. Levis fin-

ished the season throwing for 1,808 yards with eight touchdown passes and four interceptions.

Levis certainly has put in the work. There's lots of videos on social media of him working with Ridley and others between the end of Tennessee's offseason program and the start of training camp in late July.

Callahan plans to have Levis start the preseason finale Sunday in New Orleans along with much of Tennessee's starters to prepare for the season opener Sept. 8 in Chicago. He did not play in last week's win over Seattle after consecutive days of joint practices with the Seahawks.

Levis said he's been focusing on making sure to go through his progressions and take what's available.

"I think I've done a better job of just taking something if it's open on the first go-around and I might think based on how the play's developing that that bigger shot might be open as well," Levis said.

MLB

# Braves scramble to assemble lineup

Unrelenting series of injuries forcing Atlanta to become even more creative

**By PAUL NEWBERRY**  
*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — In sports, there's a mantra that everyone falls back on when the inevitable injuries strike. Next man up.

Only one problem for the Atlanta Braves.

"We're having a hard time finding the next man up," manager Brian Snitker moaned.

An unrelenting series of breaks, tears and strains have left the six-time reigning NL East champions scrambling to cobble together a lineup, putting their hopes of making it back to the postseason in serious jeopardy.

"We're just going through a really weird time right now," All-Star pitcher Reynaldo López said through a translator. "It just feels like as soon as someone comes off the IL, someone goes on it. Then someone else comes off and someone else goes on. It's just really strange, but there's nothing we can do."

Slugging third baseman Austin Riley was the latest to go down, his year in jeopardy after getting plunked with a 97 mph fastball. He'll need six to eight weeks to recover from a fractured right hand, which knocks him out for at least the rest of the regular season.

He's hardly the first to suffer such a fate:

■ NL MVP Ronald Acuña Jr. sustained a season-ending knee injury in late May, one year after becoming the first 40-70 player (40 homers, 70 stolen bases) in big league history.

■ Ace pitcher Spencer Strider, coming off a franchise record for strikeouts in 2023, made it through only two starts this season before a torn elbow ligament ended his campaign.

■ Second baseman Ozzie Albies has been sidelined since July 21 after



JASON ALLEN/AP

**Atlanta second baseman Ozzie Albies has been out since July 21 with a broken wrist, one of several major injuries the Braves have suffered as they look to extend their streak of division titles to seven straight years.**

breaking his left wrist while catching a throw on a stolen base. If his recovery goes well, he might be able to return for the final days of the regular season.

■ Center fielder Michael Harris II missed two months with a left hamstring injury.

■ Key reliever A.J. Minter is done for the season after undergoing surgery for a lingering hip ailment.

■ Catcher Sean Murphy, an All Star in 2023, was sidelined for nearly two months after a swing on opening day left him with a strained left oblique muscle.

■ Max Fried, another key member of the rotation, spent more than three weeks on the injured list with an inflamed nerve in his left forearm.

■ Outfielder Jorge Soler, acquired ahead of the trade deadline to help counter all the injuries, hasn't started in the past week as he deals with a sore hamstring.

Now, add Riley to the list.

"The guys that we're losing, you can't just go out and replace them," Snitker said. "You've gotta hope you

can keep fighting and keep your head above water until you get them back. Unfortunately, a lot of these guys we're not getting back."

For the opener of a crucial three-game series against the first-place Philadelphia Phillies, the Braves sent out a lineup that included three players who've been cut by other teams this season.

Whit Merrifield, released by the Phillies in July, started at second base. Ramón Laureano, let go by the Cleveland Guardians in May, held down right field. Gio Urshela got the nod at third base, a mere two days after he was cast aside by the Detroit Tigers.

All three contributed to a 3-1 victory, undoubtedly using their rejections as motivation. Merrifield tripled, doubled and scored Atlanta's first run. Urshela walked with the bases loaded in the eighth inning to drive in an insurance run. Laureano made two sliding catches in the ninth to seal the victory.

"You just play the best you can every night and a lot of times it's not

your night," Merrifield aid. "But to contribute and play well against a team that told you that you weren't good enough to play for them, it feels good. I'd be lying if I said it didn't."

In a twist on the injury storyline, López threw five strong innings with 10 strikeouts Tuesday night in his first appearance in more than three weeks. He had been on the injured list with a strained right forearm.

The Braves will continue to need contributions from stalwarts such as López and unlikely sources such as Merrifield if they're to have any chance of making the playoffs, much less pulling off the improbable goal of chasing down the Phillies for a seventh straight division title.

"That would be unbelievable," reliever Pierce Johnson said. "If we can pull that off, it's going to be a true testament of the character in this room. Even if we don't, everybody's battled all year and I'm proud of each and every one of these guys for showing up every single day. But look, we're going for it. There's no letting up."

# Former Reds star Votto retires after 17 seasons

*Associated Press*

TORONTO — Former NL MVP and six-time All-Star Joey Votto announced his retirement from baseball in a short video posted to social media Wednesday.

After recording the video outside Buffalo's Sahlen Field, where he'd been playing for the Blue Jays' Triple-A team, Votto drove across the border to Toronto's downtown stadium, where the Reds had just beaten the Blue Jays 11-7.

Votto went into the Cincinnati clubhouse to meet former teammates and manager David Bell, then spoke to reporters about his retirement decision.

The Toronto-born Votto signed a minor league contract with his hometown team in March and, following a lengthy layoff because of an ankle injury, had been playing at Triple-A. He went 6-for-42 with one homer and four RBIs in 15 games,



Votto

striking out 22 times.

"I had moments where I was like, 'Is this the right thing to do?' and 'Do I want the organization to tell me I'm done?'" Votto said. "I just decided, you know, you've played long enough, you can interpret what's going on, and I was awful. I was awful down there."

Votto said he had "zero regrets" about ending his career, but acknowledged disappointment in not playing for the Blue Jays this season.

"I wanted to play a year in Toronto at home, in front of family, in front of my country," he said. "I desperately wanted to participate in games here. I'm really saddened that I wasn't able to make it happen."

The 40-year-old first baseman became a free agent last fall following the end of a \$251.5 million, 12-year contract with the Reds, his only team over 17 major league seasons. Cincinnati declined Votto's \$20 million option for 2024.

Votto said baseball has changed in recent years, adding that he wasn't able to play at the top level any more.

"This game is faster," Votto said. "I'm not fast. This game is about more dynamic defense. This game has changed over the course of the back quarter of my career. I'm slower. The one thing I could attempt to do is perform offensively, and I've been awful, especially for my position. At some point, the writing is on the wall."

The 2010 NL MVP and a Gold Glove winner in 2011, Votto hit .294 with 356 home runs and 1,144 RBIs in 2,056 games.

## Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	74	53	.583	—
Baltimore	74	54	.578	½
Boston	67	59	.532	6½
Tampa Bay	64	62	.508	9½
Toronto	59	68	.465	15
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	73	53	.579	—
Kansas City	71	56	.559	2½
Minnesota	71	56	.559	2½
Detroit	62	65	.488	11½
Chicago	31	97	.242	43
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	68	58	.540	—
Seattle	64	64	.500	5
Texas	59	69	.461	10
Los Angeles	54	73	.425	14½
Oakland	54	73	.425	14½

National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	74	52	.587	—
Atlanta	67	59	.532	7
New York	66	61	.520	8½
Washington	57	70	.449	17½
Miami	46	81	.362	28½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	73	53	.579	—
St. Louis	62	64	.492	11
Chicago	62	65	.488	11½
Cincinnati	62	65	.488	11½
Pittsburgh	59	67	.468	14
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	76	52	.594	—
Arizona	72	56	.563	4
San Diego	72	56	.563	4
San Francisco	65	64	.504	11½
Colorado	47	80	.370	28½

Wednesday's games	
N.Y. Mets 4, Baltimore 3	Boston 4, Houston 1
Texas 1, Pittsburgh 0	Chicago White Sox 6, San Francisco 2
Washington 6, Colorado 1	N.Y. Yankees 8, Cleveland 1
Minnesota 11, San Diego 4	Philadelphia 3, Atlanta 2
Arizona 10, Miami 8	Kansas City 3, L.A. Angels 0
Detroit 8, Chicago Cubs 2	Cincinnati 11, Toronto 7
St. Louis 10, Milwaukee 6, 10 innings	Tampa Bay 4, Oakland 2
L.A. Dodgers 8, Seattle 4	
Thursday's games	
Colorado at Washington	Cleveland at N.Y. Yankees
Milwaukee at St. Louis	Detroit at Chicago Cubs
Tampa Bay at Oakland	Cincinnati at Pittsburgh
L.A. Angels at Toronto	Philadelphia at Atlanta
Houston at Baltimore	N.Y. Mets at San Diego
Friday's games	
Cincinnati (Abbott 10-10) at Pittsburgh (Falter 6-7)	Colorado (Freeland 3-5) at N.Y. Yankees (Rodón 13-8)
Houston (Brown 11-7) at Baltimore (Povich 1-6)	L.A. Angels (Kochanowicz 1-3) at Toronto (Bassitt 9-12)
Arizona (Nelson 8-6) at Boston (Bello 11-5)	Texas (Eovaldi 8-7) at Cleveland (Bibee 10-5)
Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 3-10) at Miami (Meyer 3-3)	Washington (Gore 7-11) at Atlanta (Sale 14-3)
Philadelphia (Walker 3-4) at Kansas City (Wacha 10-6)	Detroit (Montero 4-5) at Chicago White Sox (Flexen 2-12)
St. Louis (Pallante 5-6) at Minnesota (Festa 2-2)	N.Y. Mets (Blackburn 5-3) at San Diego (Mugrove 3-4)
Milwaukee (Civale 4-8) at Oakland (Sears 10-8)	San Francisco (Birdsong 3-3) at Seattle (Castillo 10-12)
Tampa Bay (TBD) at L.A. Dodgers (Miller 1-3)	

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Florida State hopes to build on ACC title

BY PETE IACOBELLI  
*Associated Press*

**M**ike Norvell and Florida State got a taste of the big time last season. The Seminoles are not about to let that slip away this season.

“It sets the stage and opportunity for us to continue to push and continue to elevate this program to ultimately where it deserves to be,” Norvell said after leading Florida State to its first Atlantic Coast Conference title in nine years last season. “That’s among the nation’s elite, when you look across the course of college football.”

That wasn’t everyone’s opinion, with the undefeated ACC champions getting snubbed by the College Football Playoff due in large part to an injury to starting quarterback Jordan Travis. The season ended with a a 63-3 bashing by equally passed-over Georgia in the Orange Bowl with the Seminoles hurting from injuries and opt-outs.

No matter, Norvell said. His 10th-ranked team, picked to defend its ACC title this season, wants to leave no doubt it belongs with the game’s very best.

“At the end of the day, a lot of people from the outside might have a perspective of who is great, who is the greatest,” said the fifth-year coach. “For us, let’s control the things that we can control. Let’s go out there and be the best that we can be.”

It won’t be easy with the talent Florida State lost on offense, including Travis, receivers Keon Coleman and Johnny Davis, tight end Jaheim Bell and tailback Trey Benson.

But Norvell believes he’s got plenty of skilled players, led by former Clemson quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei, who had plenty of big moments in three seasons with the Tigers and spent last year leading Oregon State. Offensive lineman Darius Washing-



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

**D.J. Uiagalelei takes over at quarterback for Florida State after playing three years at Clemson, then last season at Oregon State. The Seminoles are ranked No. 10.**

ton has seen a humble, friendly Uiagalelei bond with teammates since arriving.

“He can still make an impact to everybody on the team just by the way he is,” Washington said, “how he comes in every day and works with us.”

### If not Florida State, who?

No. 14 Clemson, which won seven ACC titles in eight seasons between 2015-2022, was picked second behind the Seminoles. The Tigers, the favorites a year ago entering the season, were out of contention before November with a 4-4 record. Five

straight wins to close the season has Clemson thinking it can go after fresh championship goals.

No. 19 Miami, led by Washington State transfer Cam Ward, should be right behind in coach Mario Cristobal’s third season. Ward is the preseason ACC player of the year after throwing for 6,963 yards and 48 touchdowns with the Cougars.

No. 24 North Carolina State, selected fourth in the preseason poll, comes off a season where it went 9-4 and adds three-time Sun Belt player of the year in ex-Coastal Carolina quarterback Grayson McCall.

### New teams to play

The ACC, like the other Power Four leagues, are welcoming new members in former Pac-12 teams California and Stanford and ex-American Athletic Conference team SMU.

The additions give the ACC a super-sized 17 teams competing for spots in the league title game in Charlotte, N.C.

Cal and coach Justin Wilcox have a pair of long trips early, playing at Auburn on Sept. 7 and Florida State on Sept. 21 — a couple of round trips at some 9,900 miles combined.

“Well, I guess if you would have asked me two or three years ago, I probably wouldn’t have thought of that,” Wilcox said. “I’ll tell you this: we’re glad to be doing it. We’re excited to play, to be in the ACC.”

### Conference of quarterbacks?

Several ACC teams got high-profile passers from some big programs. Maliik Murphy joined Duke after playing at Texas while Louisville added Tyler Slough, who was previously at Oregon and Texas Tech.

Add those to Washington State’s Ward at Miami, Oregon State’s Uiagalelei at Florida State and Coastal Carolina’s McCall at North Carolina State and the league could have a strong showing at the game’s most important position.

### Ongoing legislation

The ACC will continue defending itself from disgruntled members Clemson and Florida State, which have both sued to end the league’s grant-of-rights obligation that goes through 2036. The schools must let the league know by Aug. 15 if they plan to leave before the 2025-26 season. Count on the off-the-field fight to garner attention as the Tigers and Seminoles contend for the league title.

## Change: New conferences begin pursuit of 12 playoff berths

FROM PAGE 48

### Conference realignment

The fall of the Pac-12 caused the conference map to be revamped.

First, Southern California and UCLA decided to defect to the Big Ten and then Oregon and Washington bolted to make it an 18-team conference.

Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah are now in a 16-team Big 12. Stanford and California and former American Athletic Conference member SMU are in now in a 17-team Atlantic Coast Conference.

Pac-12 holdovers Oregon State and Washington State have a scheduling agreement with the Mountain West. All MWC teams will play a game against one or the other.

Texas and Oklahoma begin their long-awaited first year in the Southeastern Conference.

Army goes from being an independent to a football-only member of the AAC, replacing SMU, and Kennesaw State is in Conference USA after moving up from the Football Championship Subdivision.

### College Football Playoff

The expanded playoff will be spread over

a month beginning Dec. 20-21 and could require the last two teams standing to play an unprecedented 17 games.

The 12 playoff teams will be the five conference champions ranked highest by the CFP selection committee, plus the next seven highest-ranked teams.

The four highest-ranked conference champions will be seeded one through four and receive first-round byes. The fifth conference champion will be seeded where it was ranked or at No. 12 if it is outside the top 12.

Seeds 5 through 12 will play first-round games at the higher-seeded team’s stadium or venue it designates. Winners advance to quarterfinals played at bowl sites against the four highest-ranked conference champions. The highest seed will receive preferential placement for the semifinals, which will be hosted by the Orange and Cotton Bowl.

The championship game is Jan. 20 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, easily the latest it has ever been held.

### Georgia is preseason No. 1

Georgia is No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25 preseason poll for the second straight year. The Bulldogs return a Heis-

man Trophy candidate in quarterback Carson Beck and, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, are the favorites to win the national title, at 3-1.

No. 2 Ohio State and No. 3 Oregon are the top two teams from the Big Ten in the preseason Top 25, and the SEC’s Texas and Alabama are Nos. 4 and 5.

### Coach is in your ear

Football Bowl Subdivision teams will have the option to use coach-to-player communication through the helmet of one player on the field. That player will be identified by having a green dot on the back midline of his helmet. Communication will be turned off with 15 seconds left on the play clock or when the ball is snapped, whichever comes first.

For all three NCAA divisions, teams have the option of using tablets to view in-game video only. The video can include the broadcast feed and camera angles from the coach’s sideline and coach’s end zone.

### A question for each conference

**ACC:** Can Clemson, coming off its first four-loss season since 2011, ride the momentum of a 5-0 finish in 2023 and challenge Florida State?



Sanders

**Big Ten:** Where does Michigan fit in? The Wolverines, at No. 9, have the lowest preseason ranking for a defending national champion since 2011.

**Big 12:** Can Deion Sanders, after losing eight of nine to end his first season, get Colorado to a bowl in its first year back in the conference?

**SEC:** Will Texas, with its highest preseason ranking since 2009, really challenge for a conference title in its first year in a much more rugged league?

**AAC:** Will Seth Henigan-led Memphis hold off UTSA and Tulane for its first league title since 2019?

**Conference USA:** Is Liberty, which went 13-1 with its prodigious offense and just-OK defense, the real deal?

**Mid-American:** Can Miami stop Toledo from winning a third straight league title?

**Mountain West:** Does preseason favorite Boise State earn the Group of Five’s automatic playoff bid?

**Sun Belt:** How will James Madison, 11-2 last season, fare without Curt Cignetti and a number of top players who joined him at Indiana?

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Ranking changes coming this season

- 1 The College Football Playoff expands from four to 12 teams.
- 2 The national championship game will be played Jan. 20, making this the longest season in college football history. The season starts Aug. 24 with four games involving major college teams, including Georgia Tech vs. No. 10 Florida State in Dublin, Ireland.
- 3 Postseason games on campus. After decades of nothing but bowl games at the highest level of Division I college football, four first-round playoff games will be hosted by the higher seeds on Dec. 19 and 20.
- 4 The SEC adds Texas and Oklahoma.
- 5 The Big Ten goes West and adds USC, UCLA, Oregon and Washington to become an 18-team conference.
- 6 The Big 12 expands to 16 teams with the additions of Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah.
- 7 The ACC stretches coast-to-coast, adding SMU in Dallas and Stanford and California from the San Francisco Bay Area.
- 8 There is still a Pac-12, but it only has Washington State and Oregon State.
- 9 Washington State and Oregon State will play six games each against Mountain West schools, but they are not eligible for the conference title. Their schedules also include the annual rivalry games with Washington and Oregon, respectively, on Sept. 14.
- 10 Divisions are mostly a thing of the past, with the SEC and Big Ten dropping them this season. The only Bowl Subdivision conference still splitting its teams into divisions is the Sun Belt.
- 11 Army is joining a conference for the first time since a seven-year stint (1998-2004) in Conference USA. The Black Knights give up football independence to join rival Navy in the American Athletic Conference, but Army-Navy will still be a non-conference game played a week



Navy and Army are in the same conference after the Black Knights joined the American Athletic as a football-only member. They will still play a nonconference game after conference championship games.

By ERIC OLSON AND RALPH D. RUSSO  
Associated Press

Welcome to college football’s season of change. Three tumultuous years filled with conference realignment, playoff expansion and various reforms come to life in 2024. How much is new? Enough to rank the Top 25 changes you’ll see in college football this season.



Alabama coach Kalen DeBoer, left, and former Alabama coach Nick Saban chat during Southeastern Conference media days July 17. Saban retired after 17 seasons and six national titles with the Tide.

- after league championship games.
- 12 After 17 seasons of unprecedented success, Nick Saban is no longer Alabama’s coach. He retired with seven national championships and was replaced by Kalen DeBoer, who left Washington after leading the Huskies to the national title game.
- 13 Saban is joining ESPN’s popular “College GameDay” show as an analyst.
- 14 Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel starts his sixth season of college football with his third different school after three years at UCF and two at Oklahoma. Transfer quarterbacks have won five of the past seven Heisman trophies, but Gabriel, who is 4,353 yards passing from breaking Case Keenum’s FBS career record (19,217) would be the first two-time transfer to win the Heisman.
- 15 College football has its first ninth-year player. Cam McCormick, a 26-year-old tight end at Miami, began his career at

Oregon in 2016 and has had his eligibility extended multiple times because of season-ending injuries and the pandemic.

16 There is now a two-minute warning in college football at the end of the second and fourth quarters.



Texas coach Steve Sarkisian flashes the “Hook ‘Em Horns” sign at SEC media days July 17. The Longhorns join the league this year.

- 17 Coaches will be able to communicate with players on the field in games through radio devices in helmets. Only one player per team will be permitted on the field at a time with helmet-communication capabilities.
- 18 Helmet comms should lead to fewer teams relying heavily on sideline signals.
- 19 Players and coaches will now be permitted to use computer tablets on the sideline, coaches’ boxes and locker rooms to review in-game video.
- 20 The number of coaches who can do hands-on, technical coaching during practice and games is now unlimited. Previously, only 10 assistant coaches were allowed.
- 21 Chip Kelly is an assistant coach for the first time since 2008. After leading UCLA to three straight winning seasons, he took the offensive coordinator job at No. 2 Ohio State.
- 22 Bobby Petrino, whose successful four-year run as Arkansas’ coach had a scandalous ending in 2012, is back in Fayetteville as the Razorbacks’ offensive coordinator.
- 23 Bill O’Brien takes over at Boston College, his first college head coaching job since he led Penn State (2012-13) in the aftermath of the Jerry Sandusky scandal.
- 24 Kennesaw State is the latest school to move up from Division I’s second-tier (Championship Subdivision) to the top. The Owls join Conference USA to raise the overall total of FBS teams to 134.
- 25 This year marks the debut of the Snoop Dogg Arizona Bowl. It is the first partnership between an alcohol brand and a college bowl game.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



Oklahoma State quarterback Alan Bowman passes the ball to running back Ollie Gordon II during the second half of the Texas Bowl. Bowman is in his seventh college season after transferring from Texas Tech.

Players in their mid-20s becoming more common

BY STEVE MEGARGEE  
Associated Press

Each time he sees his freshman teammates, Oklahoma State quarterback Alan Bowman gets a reality check about the length of his college career.

“When I was playing as a true freshman at Texas Tech, they were probably in seventh grade,” Bowman said.

Bowman is entering his seventh year of college football and his situation isn’t all that unique in this era of college football. Four years after the pandemic-shortened 2020 season resulted in every player getting an extra year of eligibility, its impact on the game remains apparent as players extend their college careers into their mid-20s.

Hundreds of Bowl Subdivision players are in their sixth season of eligibility and dozens are in their seventh year or later. Miami tight end Cam McCormick is entering his ninth season of eligibility at the age of 26.

No. 17 Oklahoma State has two seventh-year players — Bowman and linebacker Justin Wright — and 14 others entering their sixth seasons.

To say there is a lot of experience on college football rosters is an un-

derstatement. Other schools with multiple seventh-year players include No. 12 Utah (QB Cam Rising and TE Brant Kuithe), No. 15 Tennessee (OT John Campbell and LB Keenan Pili), Rutgers (OL Reggie Sutton and WR Naseim Brantley), Toledo (LB Daniel Bolden and TE Anthony Torres) and Utah State (QB Spencer Petras and OL Wyatt Bowles).

Then there’s Indiana, which has four seventh-year players and 10 sixth-year players in its first season under coach Curt Cignetti. The seventh-year contingent includes one returning player (DL Jacob Mangum-Farrar) and three who followed Cignetti from James Madison (RB Ty Son Lawton, RB Solomon Vanhorse and OL Nick Kidwell).

Bowman believes this prevalence of older players produces crisper football. FBS teams averaged 5.83 penalties and 51.15 penalty yards per game last season, the lowest numbers in both categories since 2013.

“There’s a lot more good football being played,” Bowman said. “You don’t see as many mistakes from us older guys. I just think clean, better football. When you’ve got a lot of guys who’ve played a lot of games, you’re going to see less mistakes.”

Bowman, 24, has seen plenty in

his college career.

He made a combined 16 starts for Texas Tech from 2018-20, though a broken collarbone limited him to three games in 2019 before he took a medical redshirt. Bowman transferred to Michigan and played three games as a backup each of the next two years, getting another redshirt in 2021. He left behind a Michigan team that went on to win the national title in 2023 for the opportunity to regain a starting role at Oklahoma State.

Bowman’s two redshirt seasons and the COVID-19 year enabled him to earn a seventh year of eligibility and has helped him get a wide-ranging education.

He got his undergraduate degree in business management from Texas Tech and earned a master’s in supply chain management at Michigan. He’s now working toward a graduate certificate in leisure studies at Oklahoma State, and he also is getting a real estate license.

“I’ve been blessed, I would say,” Bowman said. “It’s been really awesome. I haven’t been in one spot for seven years, and I don’t think I could have done that mentally. I think each spot has kind of reset my clock, if that makes sense. I don’t really feel like I’ve been in college for seven years.”

BRIEFS

Sources: Iowa coach Ferentz suspended for QB recruiting violation

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz and an assistant coach will be suspended for the No. 25 Hawkeyes’ opener against Illinois State on Aug. 31 over a violation while recruiting quarterback Cade McNamara, according to multiple media outlets.

The Athletic, citing an unidentified source, first reported the suspension of Ferentz and wide receivers coach Jon Budmayr. Iowa football spokesman Matt Weitzel told The Associated Press he could not confirm or deny the report.

It was unclear whether the NCAA or Iowa imposed the suspensions.

Ferentz is beginning his 26th season at Iowa, where his 196 wins rank third all-time among Big Ten coaches. The Hawkeyes have won 10 games in three of the past five seasons and reached the Big Ten championship game last year, where they lost 26-0 to Michigan.

McNamara started 16 of 21 games for Michigan before he transferred to Iowa before the 2023 season. He started the first five games before a knee injury ended his season. McNamara is battling Northwestern transfer Brendan Sullivan for the starting job this year.

Ferentz was scheduled to meet with reporters Thursday afternoon.

MAC joins Big Ten with player availability reports

The Mid-American Conference will require teams to provide player availability reports to the league at least three hours before football games this season, following a similar policy implemented last year by the Big Ten.

The league announced the new policy Thursday, saying the Council of Directors of Athletics ratified it in July. Availability reports are part of efforts in college athletics to guard the integrity of games amid more legalized gambling.

The availability reports from all 12 teams will be made available on the MAC website and posted on the X social media platform. Teams that don’t comply could face disciplinary action. The league said the process and accuracy of the information will be evaluated throughout the season.

The Big Ten started requiring its teams to provide availability reports to the league office no more than two hours before kickoff last season.

The Big Ten is the only power conference with a league-wide availability report, though the Atlantic Coast Conference tried a loosely run midweek injury report several years ago and the Southeastern Conference is considering mandating it.



DOUG MCSCHOOLER/AP

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz talks with reporters during the Big Ten Conference media days at Lucas Oil Stadium on July 24 in Indianapolis. Ferentz and an assistant are reportedly suspended for the opener.

# SPORTS



**Calling it a career**  
Votto hanging up his cleats, retiring after 17 seasons » **MLB, Page 44**

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Season of change, upheaval

Larger conferences, expanded playoff forever alter landscape

By ERIC OLSON  
Associated Press

A new era has arrived in college football, with some of the most recognizable programs in history now playing in different leagues. The postseason is different, too. The College Football Playoff expands from four to 12 teams, changing the calculus of the championship chase. There's also change for some of the game's biggest names. Jim Harbaugh won a national championship at Michigan, his alma mater, and returned to the NFL. Nick Saban retired from coaching with a record seven national titles and becomes an analyst on ESPN's "College GameDay" show. The prolific Dillon Gabriel takes his big arm to his third school, Oregon, for his sixth and final season. Fans' biggest challenge will be remembering which teams are in which conferences. Save for the SEC, the era of coast-to-coast conferences is upon us. What's sure to be a wild ride takes off Aug. 24 with four Week Zero games headlined by No. 10 Florida State against Georgia Tech in Dublin.

SEE CHANGE ON PAGE 45



JOHN BAZEMORE, ABOVE, AND DAVID DERMER, LEFT/AP

Above: Quarterback Carson Beck and the Georgia Bulldogs begin the season as the top-ranked team. Left: Sherrone Moore takes over defending national champion Michigan, which is ranked No. 9. It's the lowest ranking for a defending champion since 2011, and two other Big Ten teams are ranked higher.



Playoff spots up for grabs in stretch run » Auto racing, Page 41

