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STARS AND STRIPES

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LAURENT CIPRIANI/AP

Ukrainian infantrymen train with French soldiers to learn combat skills, in France, on Nov. 7, 2023. European leaders are discussing plans for forces to make sure Russia doesn't try to attack again.

Trump fires Joint Chiefs chairman, Navy head

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was fired Friday night by President Donald Trump as Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, was also relieved of duty.

"I want to thank General Charles 'CQ' Brown for his over 40 years of service to our country, including as our current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. "He is a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader, and I wish a great future for him and his family."

Reports have circulated Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth would fire senior officers who were promoted during former President Joe Biden's administration and replace them with others more aligned with Trump's agenda.

Brown and Franchetti were reported last week as being on the list of names to be fired. Franchetti was relieved of duty Friday, according to a military official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump in his social media post nominated retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"During my first term, Razin was instrumental in the complete annihilation of the ISIS caliphate."

SEE FIRES ON PAGE 6

RELATED

Dan 'Razin' Caine nominated as next top military official **Page 6**

Hurdles in EU plan for Ukraine

Leaders discuss how to aid Kyiv, hoping to bring in US support

By JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON — As the U.S. and Russia push ahead — so far without Ukraine at the table — on talks to end the war, political and military leaders in Europe are fleshing out details of a plan for European forces to help ensure Moscow doesn't attack again.

After months of quiet discussions, the proposal has become increasingly public. It will likely be on the agenda when U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, two major backers of the idea,

Zelenskyy says he'd give up presidency if it brought peace, NATO membership **Page 14**

visit Washington on separate days this week for talks with President Donald Trump.

Starmer, who will visit Thursday, has stressed that the force won't work without American military might to back it up. Persuading Trump to provide it could be a tall order.

The security guarantee that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy really wants is NATO membership. European members of the military alliance still back that goal, but the U.S. looks to have taken it off the table, along with Ukrainian hopes of regaining the 20% of its territory seized by Russia.

In the absence of NATO membership, Zelenskyy has said that more than 100,000 European troops could be needed in Ukraine to guarantee the conflict doesn't flare up again

SEE PLAN ON PAGE 14

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Thieves buy winning lottery ticket on stolen card

Associated Press

PARIS — Thieves used a stolen card to buy a winning French lottery ticket worth \$523,000. But they vanished before cashing in — and now they're among France's most famous fugitives.

The man whose card was stolen, identified in police documents as Jean-David E., is offering to split the cash with the lucky winners. He wants his wallet back, too.

The thieves, meanwhile, face the risk of arrest. As of Saturday, the state lottery operator La Fran-

caise des Jeux, or FDJ, said that no one had submitted the ticket to cash out.

"It's an incredible story, but it's all true," Jean-David's lawyer, Pierre Debuissou, told The Associated Press on Saturday.

Jean-David discovered earlier this month that his backpack had been stolen from his car in the southern city of Toulouse, including bank cards and other documents, the lawyer said. Jean-David asked his bank to block the card, and learned it had already

been used in a local shop.

At the shop, a vendor told him two apparently homeless men had used one of his cards to buy the winning scratch-off lottery ticket.

"They were so totally happy that they forgot their cigarettes and their belongings and walked out like crazy people," Debuissou said.

Jean-David filed a police complaint about the theft, but is ready to withdraw it if the thieves come forward so that they can share the money, Debuissou said.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Feb. 24)	0.93	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768
British pound (Feb. 24)	\$1.23	Britain (Pound)	1.2630
Japanese yen (Feb. 24)	146.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.4231
South Korean won (Feb. 24)	1399.00	China (Yuan)	7.2510
		Denmark (Krone)	7.1292
		Egypt (Pound)	50.5804
		Euro	0.9559
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7700
		Hungary (Forint)	385.88
		Israel (Shekel)	3.5655
		Japan (Yen)	149.09
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3085
		Norway (Krone)	11.1435
		Philippines (Peso)	57.89
		Poland (Zloty)	3.98
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3367
		South Korea (Won)	1437.81
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8973		
Thailand (Baht)	33.58		
Turkey (NewLira)	36.4558		

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

INTEREST RATES	
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.31
30-year bond	4.68

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MILITARY

US, Mexico agree to military collaboration

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Military commanders from the U.S. and Mexico have agreed to conduct coordinated patrols, share more information and establish channels for instant communication as part of increased border security each country has put in place in the past month.

“Both leaders expect their agreement will serve to enable further conversations and coordination in greater detail at varied levels to ensure the mutual security of the border,” Defense Department Chief of Staff Joseph Kasper said Wednesday.

The changes stemmed from a recently held meeting between Air Force Gen. Gregory Guillot, commander of U.S. Northern Command, and Gen. Ricardo Trevilla Trejo, secretary of national defense for Mexico.

The coordinated patrols will occur with each country's troops remaining on their respective sides of the Rio Grande, the river that divides the U.S. and Mexico, Kasper



ANDREW SVEEN/U.S. Army

A U.S. soldier conducts a visual inspection of a passing train traveling from Mexico to the U.S. in Uvalde, Texas, on Feb. 12.

said.

Guillot last week told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Pentagon had recently approved sharing more of the information that it has about the distribution and production of the synthetic drug fentanyl, which has caused a spike in U.S. overdose deaths in recent years.

“We have a better foundation

now that we have increased the intelligence to make rapid progress against this threat,” he said.

However, NORTHCOM could use more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to better combat the drug crossing the border as well as expanded authorities to allow for more advise and assist operations between U.S. and Mexican forces, Guillot said.

The military coordination is part of a bulked-up U.S. effort along the border after President Donald Trump signed executive orders on Jan. 20—his first day back in office—that have increased the number of active-duty troops supporting the Department of Homeland Security. There are about 4,200 troops working on border security with the expectation it will rise.

U.S. troops have been deployed to the southwest border since 2018, but Trump said he wants the mission to be a top priority for the Defense Department. Most of the work at the border is in a support role for the Department of Homeland Security such as air and ground surveillance monitoring and adding additional barriers to existing border wall.

The Army released photos last week from Texas that showed soldiers working in Uvalde, about 50 miles in from the border, inspecting trains for migrants alongside Customs and Border Protection agents.

Mexican officials ramped up the

country's border security in early February after Trump threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican imports unless it did more to prevent migrants from reaching its northern border and crossing between legal ports of entry into the U.S. and stop fentanyl from crossing into America.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum complied and sent about 10,000 National Guard troops to reinforce the border and they have also begun to increase security and search on vehicles leaving the country.

She also said Wednesday that she requested the U.S. government fly surveillance drone flights over Mexico, according to The New York Times. The flights were part of a Central Intelligence Agency program to uncover fentanyl labs in northwestern Mexico, but the CIA declined to comment about it.

The flights have been going on for many years, Sheinbaum said in a news briefing Wednesday, according to The Associated Press.

Senate advances \$150B in additional military spending

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Friday forged ahead with plans to give the military an additional \$150 billion in spending even as the Pentagon seeks to make sweeping changes and reductions in its budget.

Senators voted 52-48 in favor of a budget resolution that will unlock \$340 billion in spending for U.S.-Mexico border security, energy independence, Coast Guard modernization and military investments while mandating cuts elsewhere.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said the framework will reinforce the defense industrial base and allow the military to become “more lethal.”

How the money will be spent will be outlined by the Senate Armed Services Committee but Graham said he wants to see a larger Navy, integrated air and missile defense and a strengthening of the nuclear

defense posture.

“There's a lot of modernization we need of our nuclear triad fleet,” Graham said. “We need more weapons, our stockpile is low. There's a bunch of things we can spend \$150 billion on but we'll let the Armed Services Committee decide those priorities.”

Another \$20 billion is being earmarked for the Coast Guard to enhance its capability to deal with “drugs and national security threats,” he said.

The budget resolution adopted Friday is the first step of a long process called reconciliation that Republicans hope to use to pass President Donald Trump's economic agenda without the legislation being subject to a 60-vote threshold in the Senate. The House has its own version of a budget resolution that also calls for \$150 billion in defense spending in the next decade.

Trump has thrown his support behind the House's version of the

resolution, which would wrap border security and defense spending as well as \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts into one spending package. The Senate plans to address the tax cuts in a separate bill.

Senate Republicans said the situation at the southern border was so dire and the military so depleted “after four years of weakness” under former President Joe Biden that the Senate had to act quickly in case the House falters. Republicans control the House by a slim margin.

“We live in a dangerous world, the threats against the United States are higher than we have seen in decades,” said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wy. “Weakness invites conflict, strength deters war. This budget is a big step toward rebuilding our military, to protecting our nation.”

The move by the Senate to shore up defense spending comes amid a push by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to pull 8%, or about \$50 bil-

lion, from the Pentagon budget. Hegseth reportedly ordered senior leaders in a memo last week to develop plans to cut that amount in each of the next five years.

But Hegseth denied those reports in a video posted late Thursday and said he is looking for a shift this year of \$50 billion from “woke, Biden-era, non-lethal programs” to “President Trump's ‘America First,’ ‘peace through strength’ priorities.” Those priorities include southern border operations and an array of weapons programs.

“That's not a cut,” Hegseth said. “It's refocusing and reinvesting existing funds into building the force that protects you, the American people.”

The Pentagon's budget for 2025 is about \$850 billion. The memo outlining the spending changes Hegseth is proposing has not been publicly released.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Commit-

tee, has expressed support for Hegseth's memo and said Trump is committed to a “desperately needed military rebuild” that will require “significant real growth in the defense topline.”

Wicker on Friday praised the passage of the Senate's budget blueprint as a pathway for “much needed investments in defense.”

The resolution passed despite unanimous opposition from Democrats, who argue the resolution paves the way for massive tax cuts that will largely benefit the wealthy and require cuts in the social safety net.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said last week that Democrats have repeatedly voted for additional defense spending and there was no need to tack on more through a reconciliation process that will sideline Democrats.

“We spent \$850 billion and we added to it twice with a bipartisan vote,” he said. “You don't need reconciliation for that.”

Bomb threat hits US base in Tokyo after similar warnings on Okinawa

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Japanese police are investigating a bomb threat against this key U.S. military hub in western Tokyo that also serves as the headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan.

The threat was sent Thursday as a comment through the Fussa city website, demanding approxi-

mately \$120,000 to prevent an attack between Sunday and Monday, a city official told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.

The same amount of money was demanded in a Tuesday bomb threat against 32 U.S. military installations on Okinawa, which was sent via emails to the Okinawa prefectural and Naha city websites, according to local officials.

Fussa police and the North Kanto Defense Bureau, an arm of Japan's Ministry of Defense, were notified of the Yokota threat, the city official said. Police searched areas near the base and alerted U.S. officials, a Fussa police spokesman confirmed.

Officials declined to provide further details, such as the identity of a suspect or where the ransom money was to be sent, citing

the ongoing investigation.

Yokota's gates were closed for about a half-hour Thursday afternoon.

U.S. security officials are working with their Japanese counterparts to investigate the bomb threat to American military facilities in the country, USFJ spokesman Air Force Capt. Danny Rangel said by email Friday evening.

“At this time, we do not per-

ceive a credible threat to our SOFA population,” he said, referring to American personnel in Japan under the status of forces agreement between the two allies.

“Just as we do with natural disasters and other potential threats to our servicemembers and families, we will notify SOFA members if we believe they are at risk,” he wrote.

MILITARY

2 Navy captains want changes in 'Fat Leonard' rule

They also seek details of review on government misconduct in the case

BY ALEX RIGGINS

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Two former Navy captains who went to prison for taking bribes as part of the "Fat Leonard" corruption scandal have asked federal prosecutors to dismiss their felony convictions and instead allow them to plead guilty to misdemeanor crimes.

Retired Navy Capt. David Williams Haas and former Navy Capt. Jesús Vasquez Cantú, both of whom have finished their prison terms, have also requested that the San Diego-area U.S. Attorney's Office follow a request by the judge in the case to provide more specific details about the government misconduct that has marred the long-running prosecution of the Navy's worst-ever bribery and corruption scandal.

While government attorneys have admitted in court and in written filings to "serious issues" regarding government misconduct, prosecutors have only provided vague details of that misconduct and not a full reckoning either publicly or to defense attorneys. U.S. District Judge Janis Sammartino, who previously told prosecutors she wanted "legal and factual specificity through briefing with supporting declarations," has ordered the government to respond by March 3 with arguments why it should not have to disclose those details as part of a discovery process.

Attorneys for Haas and Cantú argued in the recent filings that their clients are similarly situated to nine other Navy and Marine Corps officers whose felony convictions were reduced to misdemeanors or dismissed altogether, arguing the only difference was that their clients had already been sentenced. The attorneys argued that Haas and Cantú received disproportionate sentences from those nine defendants, none of whom were sentenced to prison, and that the "disparity raises significant questions about the selective application of justice" by federal prosecutors.

"The public deserves to know exactly what happened here," Chuck La Bella, who is representing Haas, told the Union-Tribune.

Haas and Cantú were among the three dozen people, most of them Navy officers, charged with

taking bribes and committing other crimes as part of the corruption scandal centered around Leonard Glenn Francis, the Malaysian contractor known as "Fat Leonard" because of his enormous size. Francis, who plans to appeal the 15-year sentence he received in November, spent decades bribing a rotating cast of officers from the Navy's 7th Fleet in the Western Pacific with gourmet meals, five-star hotel rooms, premium liquor, prostitutes and cash.

Many officers in turn steered ships to the Southeast Asian ports controlled by Francis and his company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA). Francis then defrauded the U.S. government of at least \$35 million by charging heavily inflated prices for routine services such as security, tugboats, trash removal, food and water replenishment.

The corruption by Francis, who was arrested in 2013, reached the "highest levels of the U.S. Navy ... to an extent that has never been seen before," an assistant U.S. attorney said during his sentencing.

At a 2023 hearing, government attorneys admitted to "serious issues" involving prosecutorial misconduct, and last year the prosecutors filed a brief vaguely outlining those issues and arguing that four other defendants who had pleaded guilty to felonies should also have their charges reduced to misdemeanors, and one should have all charges against him dismissed. Sammartino eventually — and reluctantly — followed those recommendations.

Prosecutors have never said publicly what came of those reviews, but emails from the new lead prosecutor included as exhibits in the recent court filings indicate the government did not consider Haas or Cantú deserving of a reduction in charges. Their attorneys argued it's unclear if those reviews even happened.

To that end, both La Bella and Douglas Applegate, who is representing Cantú, filed nearly identical motions requesting the ability to conduct discovery.

Sammartino has not ordered the government to turn over such discovery but has ordered prosecutors to submit their arguments about whether they should have to turn over such evidence by the first Monday of March.



ARIF PATANI/U.S. Navy

Chief Petty Officer Davin James, right, provides instructions to Jordanian navy 1st Sgt. Mohammed Alqeesy before a dive during International Maritime Exercise 25 in Aqaba, Jordan, on Feb. 13.

Drones and AI take center stage in Navy-led Middle East exercise

BY SHANNON RENFROE

Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — A recent U.S.-led maritime exercise in the Middle East shifted its focus to building artificial intelligence and drone capabilities as the Navy and its partners work to address increasingly sophisticated threats in the region.

The emphasis represents a change at this year's International Maritime Exercise, which normally focuses on mines and explosive ordnance disposal, among other training.

It also comes as the Navy and other nations in the region prioritize adaptation to technology used by Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Yemen and other countries, service officials say.

For example, Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen have launched swarm drone attacks against ships in the Red Sea in the past year.

The U.S. and its partner navies in the region also are defending against cyberattacks on their systems, Vice Adm. George Wikoff, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet, said Thursday.

"Cyberattacks are a great example of where AI can make a real impact," Wikoff said, adding that it has "great promise" as a cyber protection tool.

AI also is becoming a bigger factor in stopping adversaries, Wikoff said.

Information picked up by Navy sensors in the sea regarding such activity as drug or weapons smuggling can be evaluated more efficiently using AI, which allows a better understanding of what is happening in regional waterways, he said.



STARS AND STRIPES

Sailors with the Navy's Task Force 59 launch a drone boat from a pier at Naval Support Activity Bahrain in 2022. The recent U.S.-led IMX 25 exercise in the Middle East focused on advancing artificial intelligence and unmanned systems.

"Our ability to get through that data and find what's really important is always a challenge, and AI is helping accelerate that," Wikoff said.

He noted that Task Force 59, a Bahrain-based unit focused on testing and deploying drones and using AI, has played an important role in leading Navy security efforts at sea.

Wikoff made the comments as the 12-day IMX25 ended Thursday. The exercise also included noncombatant evacuation, search and seizure, vessel defense, search and rescue, and mass casualty response, the Navy said.

It was linked to Cutlass Express, an exercise in eastern and southern Africa led by U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa. Together, there were about 30 countries and 5,000 personnel participating in the exercises, the Navy said.

The maritime portions took place in the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and northern Indian Ocean.

"If you look around the room today, you'll see naval personnel from every continent on the Earth with the exception of Antarctica," Wikoff said during the exercise's closing ceremony.

This year's IMX took place during a period of relative calm in the region. That is chiefly due to the Houthi militants' stoppage of their attacks on ships in the Red Sea because of a ceasefire reached between Israel and Hamas in Gaza last month.

Even so, there were about 50% fewer participants in the exercise than in previous years, Navy officials noted. In 2022, about 60 nations participated, they said.

Wikoff attributed the drop to the fact that navies are stretched by multiple global obligations, adding that participant numbers aren't the sole factor determining success.

"It's about the quality of the training and (whether) those that participate ... get what they want out of it," Wikoff said.

MILITARY

Navy fires Truman captain after cargo ship collision

By ALISON BATH
AND CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman has been fired following a collision with a cargo ship near the Suez Canal, the Navy announced Thursday.

Capt. Dave Snowden was relieved of duty on Thursday due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command, the service said in a statement the same day.

Snowden, who had served as the aircraft carrier's commanding officer since December 2023, will be temporarily assigned to Naval Air Forces Atlantic.

"The U.S. Navy holds commanding officers to the highest standard and takes action to hold them accountable when those standards are not met. Naval leaders are entrusted with significant responsibilities to their sailors and their ships," the Navy said.

Capt. Christopher Hill, commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, will temporarily serve as Truman's interim commanding officer, the Navy said.

Hill led the Eisenhower during its nine-month extended deployment last year in the Middle East.

The Eisenhower returned from its deployment in July and is currently undergoing scheduled maintenance at Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia.

Snowden's dismissal comes after Truman was involved in a late-night collision on Feb. 12 with Panama-flagged Besiktas-M in a congested area near the Suez Canal.

The mishap left the carrier with scrapes and gashes along its right back end, including a small slash that penetrated its hull well above the waterline.

There were no injuries, and there was no flooding. Truman's propulsion system was not damaged, the

Navy said at the time. The collision remains under investigation.

But the collision, which is under investigation, damaged a line handling space, the fantail and a platform above a storage space. The exterior walls of two storage rooms and a maintenance space also were included in initial damage assessments.

The ship, along with embarked Carrier Air Wing 1, remains at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete undergoing an extensive structural assessment.

That examination will cover Truman's hull and bulkheads to ensure they can bear weight. Bulkheads are interior vertical walls that form compartments within a ship.

It's too soon to say how long the inspection will take and when a comprehensive damage assessment will be available, but the evaluation won't include Truman's flight deck, Cmdr. Timothy Gorman, a spokesman for U.S. 6th Fleet, told Stars and



MICHAEL GOMEZ/U.S. Navy

An inspection team studies damage to the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman last week, at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete. The carrier collided with a cargo ship near the Suez Canal on Feb. 12.

Stripes.

He noted that the carrier conducted flight operations on Feb. 15, three days after the collision.

According to the Navy, the firing of Snowden will have no impact on the Truman's deployment schedule in the Mediterranean.

Unless more serious damage is discovered, the carrier could be quickly repaired and soon resume its deployment, analysts told Stars and Stripes.

Truman's absence from the Mid-

dle East probably won't hinder regional U.S. security efforts, which could include a surge in destroyers or other warships, if needed, they said.

The cruiser USS Gettysburg and the destroyer USS Stout, also part of the Truman Carrier Strike Group, are in the Red Sea. The destroyer USS Jason Dunham, escorting Truman at the time of the collision, remains in the Mediterranean.

Caitlyn Burchett reported from Washington.

Students stage walkout at DODEA school in Japan

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — More than 100 high school students — the children of Navy parents and Defense Department employees — staged a half-hour walkout Friday morning to protest Pentagon policies targeting diversity programs.

About 150 students at Nile C. Kinnick High School on Yokosuka, the headquarters of the U.S. 7th Fleet, circled the school courtyard, chanting and carrying banners.

"I love this school; I think one of its greatest strengths is its diversity," said senior Chase Hassell, president of the student council.

"I think we have such a great multicultural community, and I think that it's important for the development of all children — not just us — to have experiences with different people of different beliefs and backgrounds," Hassell told Stars and Stripes after the demonstration.

The protest pushed back on a



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Nile C. Kinnick High School student and senior class vice president Liam Boyd discusses the importance of diversity during a protest outside the school at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Friday.

Jan. 27 executive order by President Donald Trump ending diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, programs created under previous administrations.

"These actions undermine lead-

ership, merit, and unit cohesion, thereby eroding lethality and force readiness," Trump's order states. "They also violate Americans' consciences by engaging in invidious race and sex discrimina-

tion."

Among the direct impact on Department of Defense Education Activity schools are the screening and possible removal of books and classroom discussions of diversity, equity and inclusion; possible curtailing of some school clubs and extracurricular activities; the end to official observations like Black History Month; and the possible cancellation of Kinnick's annual Diversity Day on March 14.

The school was directed to "pause planned activities and events for cultural observances" to comply with DOD guidance, according to a Feb. 5 email from Kinnick principal Kira Hurst to students and parents. Diversity Day may be postponed or canceled, she wrote, according to a copy of the message obtained by Stars and Stripes.

At Friday's demonstration, which began about 30 minutes before the end of second period, students carried signs proclaiming, "Diversity is Strength, Not a Threat" and "Diversity Needs to

Be Seen," and chanted, "Our stories matter!" until departing for lunch.

Freshman Beau Tran said the walkout partially drew inspiration from a Feb. 11 protest by students at Patch Middle School in Stuttgart, Germany. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth was visiting Patch Barracks at the time.

"I was scared, of course, to actually do this," Tran said after the protest, adding he was emboldened by knowing others shared his concerns. "It really made me feel like we could do this. We could make a change. We can make a difference."

The Kinnick protest was organized through social media and the leaders of student groups, Hassell said.

Hurst, after Friday's protest, declined to comment on the event itself, but said students coordinated with the school administration ahead of time.

She also said books at Kinnick are not yet banned but are under review by DODEA.

Shooting after pursuit at New Mexico base kills airman, wounds another

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A shooting at a U.S. Air Force base in New Mexico early Saturday left one airman dead and another wounded, military officials said, adding that it was not an act of terrorism or an attack by an outsider.

A statement from Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque said security forces responded to a shooting near one of the entrances to the base at about 2 a.m. One airman died at the scene, and the other was taken to a hospital with a gunshot wound to a hand and

later discharged, the statement said.

An update in the afternoon said the shooting occurred following "an off-base pursuit." There was no threat to the public, it said.

The Air Force released few other details and did not immediately

say whether anyone was in custody. A spokesperson declined to say whether the shooter or shooters also were airmen.

The names of the airmen who were shot were not immediately released.

The Air Force Office of Special

Investigations was leading the probe.

FBI investigators were also at the scene being helped by Albuquerque police, said Gilbert Gallegos, a police spokesperson. Police were not searching for any suspects, he added.

MILITARY

Fires: Hegseth, Trump face criticism, questions over firings

FROM PAGE 1

It was done in record setting time, a matter of weeks," Trump said. "Many so-called military 'geniuses' said it would take years to defeat ISIS. Gen. Caine, on the other hand, said it could be done quickly, and he delivered. Despite being highly qualified and respected to serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the previous administration, Gen. Caine was passed over for promotion by Sleepy Joe Biden. But not anymore!"

Trump added he has directed Hegseth to solicit nominations for five additional high-level positions, which will be announced soon.

Minutes after the post, Hegseth in a statement said the Pentagon would be looking for chief of naval operations and Air Force vice chief of staff nominations.

Franchetti has served as the Navy's top officer since November 2023 and Air Force Gen. James Slife is the service's second-highest ranking officer.

Hegseth also said he is requesting nominations for the judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force.

"Under President Trump, we are putting in place new leadership that will focus our military on its core mission of deterring, fighting and winning wars," he said.

Brown served as the president's top military adviser and has been chairman since October 2023. Brown is the second Black man to serve as chairman. His four-year term was slated to end in 2027.

While the chairman is not in the direct chain of command and is not charged with commanding troops, the role is instrumental in shaping Pentagon policy and planning U.S. military operations worldwide.

Hegseth, prior to him becoming defense secretary, criticized Brown.

"First of all, you've got to fire the chairman of the Joint Chiefs," Hegseth said in a November appearance on the "Shawn Ryan Show." "But any general that was involved — general, admiral, whatever — that was involved in any of the DEI woke s— has got to go. Either you're in for warfight-

ing, and that's it. That's the only litmus test we care about."

Hegseth in his latest book, "The War on Warriors," also criticized Franchetti for her lack of combat experience and suggested she was hired because she is a woman.

"If naval operations suffer, at least we can hold our heads high. Because at least we have another first! The first female member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — hooray. For social justice ideologues, PR matters more than reality," he wrote.

Franchetti graduated from Northwestern University and was commissioned in the Navy in 1985. She became a career surface warfare officer, commanding ships, squadrons, carrier strike groups and fleets.

She served as commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet from 2018 to 2020 and was appointed as the Navy's second highest-ranking officer in 2022.

Franchetti is only the second female four-star admiral in the Navy's nearly 250-year history.

The president has the authority to remove any general or senior officer from their position and reassign them, should they refuse a request to resign. Three- and four-star generals or admirals only hold those ranks while in certain senior leadership roles. If forced out of a role, there might not be another opening available for them, and such relief of authority is generally a career-ender.

"There are valid reasons to remove a general or flag officer, but there must be clear, transparent, and apolitical criteria and processes associated with any such dismissal," a bipartisan group of House lawmakers with military backgrounds wrote in a letter to Hegseth on Friday.

Lawmakers said they recognized the president retains the authority to dismiss commissioned military officers but pointed out that officers swear an oath to the

Constitution that is "sacred and apolitical."

"The general and flag officers of this country are patriots who have dedicated their lives to the defense of the United States," the lawmakers wrote. "Most, if not all, of the current three- and four-star general and flag officers were general or flag officers under the first Trump administration and all have served honorably under many administrations of both parties."

Brown was nominated by President Donald Trump in 2020 to become the first Black Air Force chief of staff.

After George Floyd's killing in 2020 by a Minneapolis police officer sparked a nationwide reckoning on race, Brown released a video speaking frankly about the impact of racism on his military life.

"I'm thinking about some of the insensitive comments made by others without awareness," the general said in the five-minute video in which he details often being the only Black officer in his units. "I'm thinking about wearing the same flight suit with the same wings on my chest as my peers, and then being questioned by another military member, 'Are you a pilot?'"

Brown graduated from Texas Tech University in 1984 and was commissioned through the school's ROTC program. He commanded a fighter squadron, the Air Force Weapons School, two fighter wings and served as an adviser to top Air Force uniformed and civilian leaders. He also served as the No. 2 general for U.S. Central Command from July 2016 to July 2018, before taking command of U.S. Pacific Air Forces, his last assignment before becoming Air Force chief of staff.

Brown visited the troops along the U.S.-Mexico border Friday to assess the military's progress in fortifying sections of the wall, coming as the Pentagon rapidly expands its border mission. Hours before Trump's post, Brown posted on his official X account images of him meeting troops on the border.

At Hegseth's confirmation hearing last month, he danced



KEVIN WOLF/AP

Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. CQ Brown speaks during a press briefing last year at the Pentagon in Arlington, Va.

around a question about whether he would fire Brown when asked by Sen. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., if Brown might be on a list of senior officers to be removed from their jobs.

"Senator, every single senior officer will be reviewed based on meritocracy standards, lethality and commitment to lawful orders they will be given," Hegseth said.

As Hegseth climbed the Pentagon steps at the end of January to begin his first week as defense secretary, he responded to questions from reporters, including whether he would fire Brown or other Pentagon leaders. Hegseth appeared to sidestep the question, instead telling the reporters that he was "standing with him right now."

Moments before Hegseth was asked whether he would fire Brown, he thanked the general for welcoming him and said they would "get to work."

"Our job is lethality and readiness and warfighting and hold people accountable. I know the chairman agrees with that," he said. "The lawful orders of the president of the United States will be executed inside this Defense Department, swiftly and without excuse."

The firings come after reports of Hegseth ordering senior leaders at the Pentagon and through-

out the U.S. military to develop plans for cutting 8% — or \$50 billion — from the defense budget in each of the next five years.

In a video posted on X on Thursday night, Hegseth said the 8% will be pulled from non-mission-essential programs in the budget to direct the expenditures toward priorities at the top of the Trump administration's agenda.

"That's not a cut. It's refocusing and reinvesting existing funds into building the force that protects you, the American people," he said. "In short, we want the biggest, most badass military on the planet, on God's green earth."

The Pentagon on Friday evening also announced about 5,400 Defense Department civilian probationary employees will be fired beginning next week.

Defense officials for the past week have braced for the firings of probationary workers, which generally refers to people hired in the past year.

Hegseth addressed reviewing probationary employees and said jobs won't be eliminated in an across-the-board manner and performance will be considered.

"Common sense would tell us ... we start with the poor performers among our probationary employees because it's common sense that you want the best and brightest," he said.

Trump names Caine as his pick for Joint Chiefs chairman

BY TARA COPP
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's choice to be the top U.S. military officer, retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan Caine, endeared himself to the commander in chief through his military call sign, "Razin," during a meeting in Iraq years ago.

Officials who have served with Caine described him Saturday as measured and apolitical.

Trump said Friday night that Caine was his pick as the next Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, making the announcement in the same social media post in which he fired Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr., who had held that job for 16 months after a career as a history-



Caine

making fighter pilot.

Brown's ouster — followed soon by that of other military leaders — came as Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth are pushing out officers who have supported diversity, equity and inclusion in the ranks.

The new Republican administration says it is focused on a lethal fighting force.

Caine retired in December. It was not immediately clear

what it would take to recall him to active-duty service so he could go through Senate confirmation.

Caine does not meet the position's prerequisites, such as being a combatant commander or service chief, as laid out in a 1986 law that does allow a president to waive those requirements.

Trump's relationship with Caine dates to his first administration. They met during a trip to Iraq, as Trump recounted during a 2019

speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, where he spoke again on Saturday.

A question after Brown's firing was whether Trump was seeking a loyalist as chairman of the Joint Chiefs chairman.

Trump praised Caine — and condemned the current military leadership — at an unrelated appearance in Miami this past week.

Caine, like Brown, flew F-16 fighter jets.

MILITARY

Hegseth defends firings of Pentagon leaders

Defense secretary says Trump wants 'the right people,' might dismiss more

By WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON—Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is defending President Donald Trump's firing of the nation's senior military officer and a wave of dismissals at the Pentagon, insisting that they weren't unusual despite accusations that the new administration is injecting politics into the military.

"Nothing about this is unprecedented," Hegseth told "Fox News Sunday" about Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr. being dismissed Friday night as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The president deserves to pick his key national security advisory team."

Hegseth said "there are lots of presidents who made changes" citing former commanders in chief from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George H.W. Bush to Barack Obama who the defense secretary said "fired or dismissed hundreds" of military officials.

Months into his first term, Obama relieved Army Gen. David McKiernan as the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, making him the first wartime commander to be dismissed since Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Trump, however, vowed while running for his second term to eradicate "woke" ideologies from the military and mov-

ing swiftly to dismiss so many top leaders means keeping a campaign promise.

Brown was just the second Black general to serve as chairman. His 16 months in the post were consumed with the war in Ukraine and the expanded conflict in the Middle East.

Trump nominated retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine to be the next chairman.

Hegseth said Friday's dismissals affected six three- and four-star generals and were "a reflection of the president wanting the right people around him to execute the national security approach we want to take."

He called Brown "honorable" but said he is "not the right man for the moment." Of Caine, he said that Trump "respects leaders who untie the hands of war fighters in a very dangerous world."

Retired Gen. George Casey, commander of U.S. and multinational forces in Iraq from 2004 to 2007 under Republican President George W. Bush, called the firings "extremely destabilizing." He also noted that the Trump administration can change Pentagon policy without changing personnel, but added, that what happened is "within the president's prerogative."



MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, right, with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr., gives his opening statement before the start of their meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Pentagon, on Feb. 5. Hegseth defended President Donald Trump's firing of Brown on Friday. Trump nominated retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine to be the next chairman.

"That's his prerogative," Casey told ABC's "This Week." "He is the commander in chief of the armed forces."

Still, Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, told ABC that the firings were "completely unjustified" and that "apparently, what Trump and Hegseth are trying to do is to poli-

ticize the Department of Defense."

Hegseth was also asked on Fox News about officials potentially compiling lists of more defense officials they plan to fire. He said there was no list but suggested that more dismissals could indeed be coming.

"We have a very keen eye towards military leadership and their willingness to follow lawful

order," Hegseth said. "Joe Biden gave lawful orders. A lot of them are really bad" and that things like COVID vaccine mandates "eroded" the military ideologically.

"President Trump has given another set of lawful orders and they will be followed," the defense secretary said. "If they're not followed then those officers will find the door."

DOD expects to fire more than 5,000 civilian probationary employees

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The firings of Defense Department civilian probationary employees are expected to start this week, the Pentagon announced Friday.

"We expect approximately 5,400 probationary workers will be released beginning [this] week as part of this initial effort, after which we will implement a hiring freeze while we conduct a further analysis of our personnel needs," said Darin Selnick, performing the duties of undersecretary of de-

fense for personnel and readiness.

Selnick said the Pentagon anticipates reducing the department's civilian workforce by 5-8% as it refocuses the department on President Donald Trump's "priorities and restoring readiness in the force."

For the past week, defense officials have braced for the firings of probationary workers, which generally refers to people hired in the past year. CNN reported Friday that the Pentagon temporarily paused a plan to carry out mass firings of civilian employees that

could affect more than 50,000 people.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said in a video posted on X on Thursday night that he will begin immediately to shift billions of dollars in the defense budget away from nonlethal programs in a reorganization of military priorities.

Hegseth's comments come on the heels of reports that the Pentagon is looking to make sweeping reductions to its overall budget. The defense secretary said that is not the case.

"In short, we want the biggest,

most badass military on the planet, on God's green earth," he said.

Hegseth also addressed reviewing probationary employees and said jobs won't be eliminated in an across-the-board manner and performance will be considered.

"Common sense would tell us ... we start with the poor performers among our probationary employees because it's common sense that you want the best and brightest," he said.

Federal employee probation typically lasts one or two years after hiring. Many of those em-

ployees haven't had a performance evaluation, which usually comes after a year on the job.

"As the secretary made clear, it is simply not in the public interest to retain individuals whose contributions are not mission-critical," Selnick said. "Taxpayers deserve to have us take a thorough look at our workforce, top to bottom, to see where we can eliminate redundancies."

There are more than 950,000 civilian employees across the Defense Department, according to its civilian careers website.

Marine Corps shrinks Osprey fleet on Okinawa under Force Design plan

By BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps reduced its active fleet of MV-22 Ospreys on Okinawa last year, trimming the number from 24 to 20 aircraft as part of its evolving aviation strategy, according to Marine Corps spokesmen.

The cuts align with a broader reduction across the service's tiltrotor squadrons, which have each gone

from 12 to 10 operational Ospreys over the past two years, according to the 2025 Marine Corps Aviation Plan released Feb. 3.

The reductions include Medium Tiltrotor Squadrons 262 and 265, both based at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, according to a chart released with the plan.

Maj. Joseph Butterfield, a spokesman for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, declined by email Thursday to specify when the cuts

took place but noted the number of Ospreys on Okinawa could fluctuate depending on maintenance schedules and operational needs.

Squadron personnel levels have been adjusted accordingly, Butterfield said, without providing details.

The reductions are part of Force Design, the Marine Corps' ongoing effort to transition toward a more agile, expeditionary force capable of countering China's growing military presence in the Pacific.

The Project Eagle aviation strategy, outlined in Force Design, seeks to balance modernization efforts with budget constraints while maintaining combat readiness.

"Force Design realignment reflects a comprehensive evaluation of the structure and number of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadrons to enhance their overall effectiveness and responsiveness to meet Global Force Management (GFM) requirements," Marine Corps spokes-

man Capt. Pedro Caballero said in an email Thursday.

The Marines first deployed Ospreys to Okinawa in 2012 to replace the aging CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters, adding a second squadron the following year.

Okinawa is not the only location affected. In fiscal 2024, Marine Corps Air Stations Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and New River, N.C., each saw reductions, following similar cuts in California in fiscal 2023.

NATION

Key agencies balk at Musk's work directive

BY STEVE PEOPLES
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Key U.S. agencies, including the FBI and State Department, have instructed their employees not to comply with cost-cutting chief Elon Musk's demand that federal workers explain what they accomplished last week — or risk losing their jobs.

That resistance has intensified a pervasive sense of chaos and confusion, while highlighting a potential power struggle among President Donald Trump's allies, that is affecting federal employees across the country as a new workweek is about to begin.

Musk's team sent an email to hundreds of thousands of federal employees on Saturday giving them roughly 48 hours to report five specific things they had accomplished last week. In a separate message on X, Musk said any employee who failed to respond by the deadline — set in the email as 11:59 p.m. EST Monday — would lose their job.

Democrats and even some Republicans were critical of Musk's unusual directive, which came just hours after Trump encouraged him on social media to "get more aggressive" in reducing the size of the government through his so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

Sen. John Curtis, R-Utah, was among the members of Trump's own party who had concerns. Utah has 33,000 federal employees.

"If I could say one thing to Elon Musk, it's like, please put a dose of compassion in this,"



MORIAH RATNER/For The Washington Post

Federal workers rally at Upper Senate Park in Washington on Feb. 11, urging Congress to protect civil service jobs from political interference.

Curtis said. "These are real people. These are real lives. These are mortgages. ... It's a false narrative to say we have to cut and you have to be cruel to do it as well."

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., also questioned the legal basis the Trump administration would have for dismissing tens of thousands of workers for refusing to heed Musk's latest demand, though the email did not include the threat about workers losing their jobs.

Labor unions have threatened lawsuits, while several agency leaders, including

Trump appointees, encouraged their workers not to cooperate.

Newly confirmed FBI Director Kash Patel, an outspoken Trump ally, instructed bureau employees to ignore Musk's request, at least for now.

"The FBI, through the Office of the Director, is in charge of all of our review processes, and will conduct reviews in accordance with FBI procedures," Patel wrote in an email confirmed by The Associated Press. "When and if further information is required, we will

coordinate the responses. For now, please pause any responses."

Ed Martin, the interim U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia who has been nominated for the job by the Republican president, sent his staff a message Sunday that may cause more confusion. Martin noted that he himself responded to the request for last week's accomplishments.

"Let me clarify: We will comply with this OPM request whether by replying or deciding not to reply," Martin wrote in the email obtained by the AP, referring to the Office of Personnel Management "Please make a good faith effort to reply and list your activities (or not, as you prefer), and I will, as I mentioned, have your back regarding any confusion," Martin continued. "We can do this."

The night before, Martin had instructed staff to comply with Musk's order. "DOGE and Elon are doing great work. Historic. We are happy to participate," Martin wrote at that time.

Officials at the State Department, where Marco Rubio is Trump's secretary of state, were more direct.

Tibor Nagy, acting undersecretary for management, told employees in an email that department leadership would respond on behalf of workers. "No employee is obligated to report their activities outside of their Department chain of command," Nagy wrote, according to an email obtained by the AP.

Musk's DOGE says it has saved \$55B, but number likely inflated

The Washington Post

Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service claimed last week to have saved an estimated \$55 billion through a combination of layoffs, canceled contracts, lease renegotiations and other actions. But a list that it posted of contracts and leases suggests that number is inflated.

DOGE has pledged to significantly reduce the size of the federal government, both in terms of workforce and spending. Its representatives have been dispatched to more than a dozen agencies to assess programs and work to cut staff. Its rapid actions have drawn criticism from some who say the efforts are hurting essential work.

On its website, DOGE — which stands for Department of Government Efficiency — lists a select group of 1,125 contracts it has canceled, along with a purported \$7.2 billion in savings it has reaped. These contract savings account for just 20% of total savings from the past month, the office says.

Yet a Washington Post analysis of the contract data found that many of the canceled contracts were already complete, meaning canceling them didn't yield any money back because they had been fully paid out — and indeed, 417 of the deals on DOGE's list indicate that they saved \$0. Another 51 added up to savings of just under \$1 million.

The DOGE website has made several modifications to the data since it went live earlier in the week, wiping nearly \$9.3 billion from its originally listed savings.

The largest one addressed the cost of a terminated service-disabled veteran-owned management consultant contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Earlier versions of the contract in the FPDS database listed \$8 billion, but the most recent version of the contract listed \$8 million, which was earlier reported by the New York Times. The DOGE site listed initially the higher, older version of the number. DOGE said in a post on X that it has "always used the correct \$8M in its calculations."

In more than 80 other instances, the DOGE site lists and links to older, modified versions of contracts on the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS), according to a Post analysis. Experts said this could make the overall savings estimate inaccurate.

And at least \$1.35 billion worth of listed savings on the site come from a type of contract that lists a maximum payout to enable easier purchases, even though the government often doesn't wind up paying that full amount. The contracts are known as indefinite delivery vehicles, or IDVs.

In about 50 of those contracts,

DOGE counted the full amount as a savings. Some of those contracts also involved money that had already been paid and won't be recovered even though the contract has been canceled.

"For the vast majority of these contracts, certainly in the first few years, you don't spend the whole amount," said Steve Kelman, a professor of public management at Harvard Kennedy School and the administrator during the Clinton administration of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy, part of the Office of Management and Budget. "And for some of them you never spend the whole amount."

A White House official said that, "in many instances," such contracts do hit their maximum amount, and since the government could be liable for the full total, it is appropriate to count up to that limit.

For example, one contract on DOGE's canceled list, between the U.S. Agency for International Development and International Development Group, which works on economic development, is listed as saving nearly \$655 million. But that is close to the maximum amount the contract could be worth, split among multiple contractors, and there is no way to know whether the limit would actually have been paid.

FBI head plans to move up to 1,500 workers out of DC

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — New FBI Director Kash Patel has told senior officials that he plans to relocate up to 1,000 employees from Washington to field offices around the country and move an additional 500 to a large bureau facility in Huntsville, Ala., according to a person with knowledge of the discussions.

The plans were communicated Friday, the same day Patel was sworn in on the campus of the White House, and are in keeping with his oft-stated vision of reducing the size of the FBI's footprint in Washington and having more of a presence in offices in other cities.

"Director Patel has made clear his promise to the American public that FBI agents will be in communities focused on combating violent crime. He has directed FBI leadership to implement a plan to put this promise into action," the FBI said in a statement that did not provide any specifics.

The person who discussed Patel's vision did so on condition of anonymity to describe plans that have not been made public.

Patel was confirmed by the Senate on Thursday by a 51-49 margin, with two Republicans, Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, breaking party ranks and voting against him.

At his swearing-in ceremony,

Patel called the opportunity to lead the nation's premier federal law enforcement agency the "greatest honor" of his life.

"I think he'll go down as the best ever at that position," President Donald Trump told reporters Friday ahead of the ceremony, which was conducted by Attorney General Pam Bondi and attended by Republican supporters in Congress, including Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio.

Trump added that the "agents love this guy."

Patel will inherit an FBI gripped by turmoil as the Justice Department over the past month has forced out a group of senior bureau officials and made a highly unusual demand for the names of thousands of agents who participated in investigations related to the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Democrats had for weeks sounded the alarm about the appointment, saying they fear Patel will operate as a loyalist for Trump and abuse the FBI's law enforcement powers to go after the president's adversaries. They've cited past comments, such as his suggestion before he was nominated that he would "come after" anti-Trump "conspirators" in the government and media.

NATION

Luigi Mangione draws crowd for hearing

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The defendant wore a bulletproof vest and shackles. A woman in the crowd wore a “Free Luigi” scarf. Outside, throngs of people cheered and chanted his name.

So it went Friday at a court hearing for Luigi Mangione, the man accused of gunning down UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson outside a Manhattan hotel on Dec. 4.

Mangione, who has become something of a cause célèbre for people upset with the health insurance industry, made his first court appearance since his Dec. 23 arraignment on state murder and terror charges.

Mangione, 26, didn't speak at the hearing. Judge Gregory Carro ordered him to remain handcuffed, calling it a security measure. Mangione's lawyer, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, argued that the sight of Mangione in shackles in the closely watched case was robbing him of his presumption of innocence.

Carro set another hearing for June 26 but didn't schedule a trial date.

Mangione's state case is slated to go to trial before a parallel prosecution on federal charges that



STEVEN HIRSCH/AP

Luigi Mangione, accused of fatally shooting the UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York City, appears in court for a hearing, Friday in New York.

carry the possibility of the death penalty. The maximum sentence for the state charges is life in prison without parole.

Friedman Agnifilo told Carro that the dual prosecutions were complicating defense preparations. Federal prosecutors are still weighing whether to seek the

death penalty, she said.

Mangione also faces charges in Altoona, Pa., where he was arrested Dec. 9.

“We're talking about there are three separate prosecutions that are happening about one event,” Friedman Agnifilo said, renewing her complaint that Mangione is

treated differently because of the notoriety of the crime.

Among her grievances: New York City Mayor Eric Adams and a top police official making time to talk to an HBO film crew about a key piece of evidence — a notebook in which Mangione purportedly expressed hostility toward the health insurance industry — that she said has yet to be turned over to the defense.

“One of the issues here is that the two theories of prosecution are opposite and inconsistent with one another,” Friedman Agnifilo told Carro, urging him to hold off on setting deadlines for pretrial court filings. “By defending ourselves in state court we are potentially providing fodder for the federal case.”

Manhattan prosecutors said they have turned over more than 800 gigabytes of evidence, including surveillance video, police body camera footage and data from DNA testing.

Carro ordered Mangione's lawyers to file pretrial requests, known as motions, by April 9 and told prosecutors to file their responses by May 14. Friedman Agnifilo said she would seek to suppress some evidence seized during Mangione's arrest.

“I don't know about any other case in federal court or anywhere else. I'm dealing with this case,” Carro said, telling Friedman Agnifilo: “The sooner we order the hearings, the sooner you'll have your suppression hearing.”

Mangione has pleaded not guilty to multiple counts of murder, including murder as an act of terrorism.

The killing of Thompson as he walked to an investor conference sent shock waves through the corporate world, rattling executives who say they saw a spike in threats.

Mangione has attracted a cult following as a stand-in for frustrations over coverage denials and hefty medical bills. A poll taken in the wake of the shooting showed most Americans believe health insurance profits and coverage denials share blame.

About two-dozen people who showed up to support Mangione filed into the back of the courtroom gallery behind several rows of reporters.

Although the state case is slated to be tried first, Mangione is being held in a Brooklyn federal jail alongside high-profile defendants including Sean “Diddy” Combs and Sam Bankman-Fried.

Judge cancels NYC mayor's corruption trial, seeks info

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER AND MICHAEL R. SISAK

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge on Friday canceled the corruption trial for New York City Mayor Eric Adams and appointed counsel to advise the court about the Justice Department's controversial request to drop charges against the Democrat.

Judge Dale E. Ho's written order means he won't decide before mid-March whether to grant the dismissal of the case against the embattled mayor of the nation's largest city.

On Friday, Ho said he appointed Paul Clement, a former U.S. solicitor general under President George W. Bush, to present arguments on the government's case-drop request.

The judge noted that courts are normally “aided in their decision-making through our system of adversarial testing, which can be particularly helpful in cases presenting unusual fact patterns or in cases of great public importance.”

He said a Wednesday hearing had “no adversarial testing of the Government's position,” and the absence made it important to ap-

point Clement to assist the judge in reaching a conclusion.

At the hearing, Acting Deputy U.S. Attorney General Emil Bove defended his request to drop charges, saying the case came too close to Adams' reelection campaign and would distract from the mayor's ability to cooperate in providing assistance to the Trump administration's law-and-order priorities.

Adams confirmed at the hearing that he knew charges could later be reinstated — a feature of the request that has led some legal experts to speculate that the mayor can only escape trial if he helps Trump's plans to round up New Yorkers who are in the country illegally.

Adams was indicted in September on charges alleging he accepted over \$100,000 in illegal campaign contributions and travel perks from a Turkish official and others seeking to buy influence while he was Brooklyn borough president.

He faces multiple challengers in June's Democratic primary.

He has pleaded not guilty on all charges and insisted he is innocent.

Ho said he wanted all parties and Clement to address the legal standard for dismissing charges, whether a court may consider materials beyond the motion itself and under what circumstances additional procedural steps and further inquiry was necessary.

He also said he wants to know when dismissal without the ability to reinstate charges is appropriate.

He set a briefs deadline for March 7. Oral arguments, if necessary, would be March 14.

In his order Friday, Ho said Clement could review a 1977 case in which a judge rejected the government's demand to dismiss a case.

University of Richmond law professor Carl Tobias said Clement was a conservative lawyer, a sensible choice to be a neutral adviser for a recently appointed judge whose previous experience was primarily civil matters.

Late Thursday, three former U.S. attorneys — from New York, Connecticut and New Jersey — submitted a letter urging Ho to “hear from parties other than the government and the defendant in deciding about the appropriate next steps.”

Ex-Proud Boys leader arrested near Capitol

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Proud Boys national leader Enrique Tarrio was arrested Friday near the U.S. Capitol on a charge that he assaulted a woman protesting a gathering attended by Tarrio and others who received presidential pardons for crimes stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, riot in the nation's capital.

Capitol police said officers saw Tarrio strike the protester's cellphone and arm after the woman placed the phone close to his face as they walked near the Capitol. Tarrio had just left a news conference that had ended “without incident,” police said.

“The woman told our officers that she wanted to be a complainant, and the man was arrested for the simple assault,” police said in a statement.

An attorney who represented Tarrio in his Capitol riot case didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Tarrio, of Miami, was serving a 22-year sentence — the longest among hundreds of Capitol riot cases — when President Donald Trump granted clemency last month to all 1,500-plus people charged in the Jan. 6 attack.



JEN GOLBECK/AP

Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio is detained by U.S. Capitol Police officers at the Capitol on Friday in Washington.

A jury convicted Tarrio and three of his lieutenants of seditious conspiracy for a violent plot to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power from Trump to President Joe Biden after the 2020 election.

Tarrio posted on social media that he would be hosting a press conference Friday with other Proud Boys and Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who also was convicted of seditious conspiracy but freed from prison last month after Trump commuted his 18-year sentence.

NATION

Governor seeks \$40B for LA wildfire relief

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California Gov. Gavin Newsom has asked Congress to approve nearly \$40 billion in aid to help the Los Angeles area recover from January's devastating wildfires, which he said could become the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

Newsom sent a letter Friday asking for support from lawmakers including House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., the House Appropriations Committee chair.

"Los Angeles is one of the most economically productive places on the globe, but it can only rebound and flourish with support from the federal government as it recovers from this unprecedented disaster," Newsom wrote.

Estimates of the total economic loss from the firestorm have been estimated to surpass \$250 billion — with real estate losses from the Palisades and Eaton fires predicted to potentially top \$30 billion, according to a Los Angeles Times analysis. More than 16,200 structures were destroyed as flames ripped through Pacific Palisades, Malibu, Pasadena and Altadena.

Newsom vowed that the funding would be used to rebuild homes, infrastructure, businesses, schools, churches and health care facilities, while supporting the needs of people



CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP

An American flag is suspended from a charred bunny sculpture at the Bunny Museum, which was destroyed by the Eaton Fire in January, last week, in Altadena, Calif. Gov. Gavin Newsom has asked Congress to approve nearly \$40 billion in aid to help the Los Angeles area recover from last month's devastating wildfires.

affected by the devastation.

"Make no mistake, Los Angeles will use this money wisely," Newsom wrote.

His largest request is for an additional \$16.8 billion from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, mostly intended for

the rebuilding of property and infrastructure, with \$5 billion earmarked for debris cleanup.

Newsom also asked for \$9.9 billion from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for grants to fire victims, homeowners, businesses and renters, as well as \$5.29 billion from the Small Business Administration for homeowner and business loans.

Newsom thanked President Donald Trump for support for fast-tracking debris removal. The letter did not mention recent threats by the Trump administration that federal aid could come with strings attached.

"We are eternally grateful," Newsom said.

Trump has been a frequent critic of Newsom and California's water policies. Ric Grenell, a Trump ally serving as his envoy for special missions, said Friday that "there will be conditions" to any federal aid for the state.

He said one of the possible conditions being discussed was defunding the California Coastal Commission, which regulates coastal development and protects public beach access. Trump has criticized the agency as overly restrictive, bureaucratic and a hindrance to timely rebuilding efforts.

How IRS layoffs could affect taxpayers, refunds this year

By TOBI RAJI

The Washington Post

The Internal Revenue Service has begun firing thousands of employees as part of another round of layoffs targeting federal workers, The Washington Post reported last week. The mass firings come during a busy tax filing season, with taxpayers expected to file more than 140 million tax returns by the April 15 deadline.

Of the 7,000 IRS employees expected to be laid off, 5,000 come from the tax agency's enforcement and collections section, which in recent years has worked to increase audits of the country's wealthiest taxpayers and more strictly enforce rules governing certain businesses.

The layoffs are part of the Trump administration's goal to dramatically shrink the federal workforce — a move that has targeted health workers, immigration judges, aviation safety assistants and thousands of other government employees. The firings have imperiled services across the country, from disease prevention to forestry services.

Experts say the planned layoffs at the IRS could jeopardize tax collection and taxpayer services. Here's what you need to know.

■ How many people work at the IRS?

For years, the IRS has been starved of funding, leaving the tax agency understaffed and ill-equipped to assist taxpayers with filing tax returns, process returns and crack down on tax avoidance. In 2022, congressional Democrats narrowly passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which allocated \$80 billion to the IRS over 10 years, marking the biggest boost to the tax agency's budget in history. (Congress has clawed back some of that funding since then.)

Last year, the agency grew by about 10%—

from about 90,000 employees to 100,000 employees, according to The Post. About 7% of the agency will be laid off.

■ How will the layoffs affect tax returns and refund processing?

The IRS has said publicly that personnel critical to the tax filing season are ineligible for the "deferred resignation" plan that encouraged federal workers to quit, indicating that the layoffs may not affect employees who process tax returns or assist taxpayers with filing tax returns.

In a statement Thursday, former IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig said "there should not be a significant impact on current filing season operations," because the firings were confined to probationary employees who work in the Small Business Self-Employed Division of the IRS, not those who work in the Wage and Investment Division, which handles taxpayer services.

■ What if my refund is delayed?

Ari Glogower, a law professor at Northwestern University, said in an interview that there are statutory protections for taxpayers who receive delayed refund payments.

The IRS has 45 days from the tax return date to issue a refund, he said. "If they don't, then the taxpayer may actually be entitled to interest on late refund payments," he said.

■ How will enforcement and collection be affected?

Rettig, who served as IRS commissioner from 2018 to 2022, said the layoffs will have a "significant impact" on the agency's ability to expand the volume of audits. However, he noted that the IRS has modernized its enforcement and collection system, which has made it easier for the agency to identify "potential noncompliance and conduct meaningful issue-focused examinations."

Judge's order hasn't meant resumption of foreign aid

By ANNIE GOWEN

The Washington Post

Despite a federal judge's order for U.S. foreign aid to resume, humanitarian groups say that global response efforts to needy countries are in chaos, with millions of pounds of food still undelivered and a government payment system barely functioning.

As the Trump administration pushed back in court last week on U.S. District Judge Amir H. Ali's Feb. 13 order blocking a blanket freeze on foreign assistance, officials continued dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development — the nation's chief foreign assistance arm, which President Donald Trump adviser and billionaire Elon Musk has declared must "die."

Last week, more than 200 contractors with key functions such as serving in war zones and vetting food distribution received notice that they were being terminated, said Sarah Charles, the former head of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

"It seems like they're stalling until the agency is in fact destroyed," she said Thursday. With immediate aid held up and future food procurements in limbo, "it certainly feels like this is going to cause a global catastrophe."

Republicans in Congress and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have previously supported foreign assistance. But Peter Marocco, the Trump loyalist now overseeing USAID, and others "are not taking the steps necessary for these programs to continue," Charles said.

The State Department did not return requests for comment.

Aid agencies say they are racing against the clock in some war-torn parts of Africa teetering on the edge of famine. USAID's former inspector general warned in a report released Feb. 10 — shortly before the president fired

him — that more than \$489 million in food assistance was languishing in ports, in warehouses or in transit. In recent days, the U.N. World Food Program is one of the few entities that has been able to resume its operations.

One humanitarian official said Thursday that her organization has 22 metric tons of USAID nutrition supplies — peanut paste and high-energy biscuits — waiting in a warehouse in Tigray, Ethiopia, with more than 5,000 highly vulnerable children just 30 miles away. Other food is stranded in facilities that could either be looted — because so many staffers have been furloughed, no one is left to guard it — or soon will spoil.

Most aid officials interviewed for this article spoke on the condition of anonymity because of fears of retribution by the administration and further disruption of programs.

The Trump administration ordered a pause in all foreign assistance in late January, issuing stop work orders and moving to place more than 90% of USAID workers on paid leave. In the face of intense criticism, the administration then issued a waiver for programs deemed lifesaving — exemptions that aid groups say have been unevenly applied and added to the turmoil.

In a private meeting at the State Department this month, Marocco assured some of those organizations that a key USAID payment system would be up and running again by Feb. 18. He said a review of the agency's remaining programs was underway, adding that projects that do not "give the president real influence" will be cut, according to a readout of the event obtained by The Washington Post.

The aid groups say their teams have spent the past several days trying to access the payment system, still getting messages that it was down for maintenance or under review.

NATION

Officer killed in hospital shooting in Pennsylvania

By MARK SCOLFORO
Associated Press

YORK, Pa. — A man armed with a pistol and carrying zip ties entered a Pennsylvania hospital's intensive care unit Saturday and took staff members hostage before he was killed by police in a shootout that also left an officer dead, authorities said.

Three workers at UPMC Memorial Hospital, including a doctor, a nurse and a custodian, and two other officers were shot and wounded in the attack, York County District Attorney Tim Barker said. A fourth staffer was injured in a fall.

Gunfire erupted after officers went to engage the shooter, whom Barker identified as Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz, 49. He said Archangel-Ortiz was holding at gunpoint a female staff member who had her hands bound with zip

ties when police opened fire.

"This is a huge loss to our community," Barker said at a press conference following the shooting. "It is absolutely clear, and beyond any and all doubt, that the officers were justified in taking their action using deadly force."

Barker added that while the investigation is in its early stages, it appears Archangel-Ortiz had previous contact with the hospital's ICU earlier in the week for "a medical purpose involving another individual" and he intentionally targeted the workers there.

Noone answered the door Saturday at an address in York believed to be that of Archangel-Ortiz.



Duarte

The officer who died was identified as Andrew Duarte of the West York Borough Police Department.

"We all have broken hearts and are grieving at his loss," West York Borough Manager Shawn Mauck told The Associated Press.

Duarte was a law enforcement veteran who joined the department in 2022 after five years with the Denver Police Department, according to his LinkedIn profile. He described receiving a "hero award" in 2021 from Mothers Against Drunk Driving for his work in impaired driving enforcement for the state of Colorado.

"I have a type A personality and like to succeed in all that I do," his LinkedIn profile said.

Duarte also worked as a patrol officer in Denver, was highly regarded for his work and was close friends with other officers, the department there said in a state-



MATT ROURKE/AP

Leah Fauth gets a hug after leaving flowers in front of the West York Police Department after a police officer was killed responding to a shooting at UPMC Memorial Hospital in York, Pa. on Saturday.

ment.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said he met Saturday evening with Duarte's parents and fellow officers who were wounded.

"Their willingness to run toward danger helped save the lives of others," Shapiro said on the social platform X. "I'm grateful to them and all law enforcement who answered the call today in York."

At a makeshift memorial on the

front steps of the West York Borough Police Department, Linda Shields dropped off roses Saturday and dabbed tears as she thought of her son, a police officer in Maryland.

"He was so young," Shields said of Duarte. "It makes no sense at all."

Shapiro called the attack on police and health care workers "the act of a coward."

Trump hosts Black History Month event amid campaign against DEI

By BRIANNA TUCKER
The Washington Post

President Donald Trump, whose administration is in the midst of a sweeping campaign to terminate diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives aimed partly at reducing discrimination against Black Americans, hosted a reception in honor of Black history at the White House on Thursday.

Inside the East Room, dozens of donors, influencers, rappers and political figures gathered to hear from Trump, who entered with champion golfer Tiger Woods. The crowd—predominantly Black and overwhelmingly male—erupted in chants of "four more years" as Trump argued that his return to the White House "restored a nice, good, solid government."

Since returning to office last month, Trump has moved aggressively to ban government DEI programs, which he has called an "immense public waste and shameful discrimination," fire the federal employees associated with them and pressure the private sector to follow suit.

But during the Black History Month ceremony, which preserved a long-standing and bipartisan White House tradition, Trump omitted any mention of his anti-DEI efforts or his decision to revoke a decades-old executive order that required federal contractors to work to prevent discrimination at their firms.

"Today we pay tribute to the



JABIN BOTSFORD/The Washington Post

President Donald Trump with Tiger Woods during a Black History Month reception at the White House on Thursday.

generations of Black legends, champions, warriors and patriots who helped drive our country forward to greatness. And you really are great, great people," Trump said at the event. "We're going to look forward to honoring the contributions of countless Black Americans who fought to win and protect and expand American freedom from the very, very beginning."

Like many conservatives, Trump has long argued that DEI programs, which were created to encourage more diverse workplaces and reduce discrimination, are themselves discriminatory. That remains the White House's position: Less than two hours be-

fore the celebration in the East Room, White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller celebrated Trump's anti-DEI moves in a news conference, claiming that the programs had "crippled" the United States. Without providing evidence, he said that DEI initiatives had "strangled our economy" and "undermined public safety."

"It has made every aspect of life more difficult, more painful and less safe," Miller said.

Trump has declared he has "done more for the Black Community than any President since Abraham Lincoln," but Democrats and Republicans alike have long criticized his words and actions on race.

Trump mulls merging the Postal Service into Commerce Department

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he is weighing a move that would absorb the U.S. Postal Service, an independent agency, into the Department of Commerce, a sweeping change that comes as his administration looks to overhaul the U.S. federal government.

Asked about a move to shift the agency into the Commerce Department, Trump said the idea he is considering "will be a form of a merger, but it will remain the Postal Service, and I think it will operate a lot better than it has been over the years," in remarks from the White House on Friday.

"It's been just a tremendous loser for this country, tremendous amounts of money they've lost, and we think we can do something that will be very good, and keep it a very similar way," Trump said of the USPS. "But whether it's a merger or just using some of the very talented people that we have elsewhere so it doesn't lose so much, it's losing a tremendous amount of money."

Trump made his remarks alongside Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, just moments after he was sworn in as the new head of that department.

The Washington Post first reported Thursday that Trump was preparing an executive order that would dissolve the Postal Service leadership and absorb the agency

into the Commerce Department, citing unidentified people familiar with the plans.

A White House official said earlier Friday before Trump's remarks that no such executive order was being prepared.

The board overseeing the Postal Service plans to retain counsel to prepare for a possible fight should Trump move to absorb the independent agency into his administration, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The panel held a special meeting Thursday, during which it discussed revising its budget to hire outside lawyers, said the person, who asked not to be identified discussing a matter that isn't public. The move was made for precautionary reasons and the board was not aware of a specific plan by the administration to take over the Postal Service, the person said.

Mail service has long been considered one of the bedrock responsibilities of the U.S. government. Benjamin Franklin was named the first postmaster general a year before the Declaration of Independence was signed, and the Constitution explicitly gives Congress power to establish post offices and postal roads.

A 1970s law signed by President Richard Nixon established the Postal Service as an independent agency of the executive branch, outside the president's Cabinet.

WORLD

Pope in critical condition with early kidney failure

BY NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

ROME — Pope Francis remained in critical condition Sunday and blood tests show early kidney failure but he remains alert and “well-oriented,” and attended Mass, the Vatican said, as the 88-year-old pontiff battles pneumonia and a complex lung infection.

In a late update, the Vatican said Francis hadn’t had any more respiratory crises since Saturday night but was still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen.

Some blood tests showed “initial, mild, kidney failure,” but doctors said it was under control. The decreased platelet count, necessary for clotting, that was first detected Saturday was stable.

“The complexity of the clinical picture, and the necessary wait for drug therapies to provide some feedback, dictate that the prognosis remains reserved,” the doctors concluded.

Prayers for him poured in from around the world, from his native Argentina to the seat of Sunni Islam in Cairo to schoolchildren in Rome.

In New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan admitted what church leaders in Rome weren’t saying publicly: that the Catholic faithful were united “at the bedside of a dying father.”

“As our Holy Father Pope Francis is in very, very fragile health, and probably close to death,” Dolan said at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, without saying if he had independent information about the pope’s condition.

Doctors have said Francis’ condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign.

Francis was supposed to have celebrated Mass on Sunday morn-

ing in St. Peter’s Basilica and ordained deacons as part of the Vatican’s yearlong Holy Year commemoration.

The organizer of the Holy Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, celebrated the Mass in his place and offered a special prayer for Francis from the altar before delivering the homily the pope had prepared.

“Even though he is in a hospital bed, we feel Pope Francis close to us. We feel him present among us,” Fisichella told the hundreds of white-robed deacons.

A pre-written message that had been prepared for Francis to read Sunday but did not deliver said he was “confidently continuing my hospitalization at the Gemelli Hospital, carrying on with the necessary treatment; and rest is also part of the therapy!” The message asked for prayers for him — as he always asks — and noted the upcoming anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, “a painful and shameful



GREGORIO BORGIA/AP

People pray outside Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome, on Sunday. Pope Francis has been hospitalized at the facility since Feb. 14.

occasion for the whole of humanity.”

Meanwhile in Francis’ native Argentina, Catholics prayed for the pope at the Buenos Aires cathedral and the city’s iconic obelisk was lit up “Francis, the city prays for you.”

In Cairo, the grand imam of Al-

Azhar, the seat of Sunni learning who forged a close bond with Francis, wished him well.

And school children from around Rome deluged the Gemelli hospital with get-well cards, while Italian bishops led rosary prayers and celebrated special Masses across Italy.

Israel delays release of more Palestinian prisoners

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel says the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners is delayed “until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies” at handovers of Israeli captives in Gaza.

The statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office came early Sunday as military vehicles that normally move in advance of the buses carrying prisoners left the open gates of Ofer prison, only to turn around and go

back in.

The release of 620 Palestinian prisoners had been delayed for several hours and was meant to occur just after six Israeli hostages were released on Saturday. It was meant to be the largest one-day prisoner release in the Gaza ceasefire’s first phase.

Israel’s announcement abruptly put the future of the truce into further doubt.

The Palestinian Authority’s commission for prisoners’ affairs confirmed the delay “until further

notice.” Associated Press video in the West Bank showed prisoners’ families, waiting outdoors in near-freezing weather, apparently dispersing. One woman was shown walking away in tears.

Five of the six hostages freed Saturday had been escorted by masked, armed militants in front of a crowd — a display that the U.N. and Red Cross have criticized as cruel after previous handovers.

The Israeli statement cited “ceremonies that demean the dig-

nity of our hostages and the cynical use of the hostages for propaganda purposes.” It was likely a reference to a Hamas video showing two hostages who have yet to be released watching a handover in Gaza on Saturday and speaking under duress.

The six were the last living hostages expected to be freed under the ceasefire’s first phase, with a week remaining in the initial stage. Talks on the ceasefire’s second phase are yet to start.

The six included three Israeli

men seized from the Nova music festival and another taken while visiting family in southern Israel during the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the 16-month war in Gaza. The two others were held for a decade after entering Gaza on their own.

Israel’s government didn’t respond to questions about the delay in releasing prisoners. Hamas accused Israel of violating the ceasefire deal, with spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanou accusing Netanyahu of “deliberately stalling.”

STARS AND STRIPES

SERVICE DIRECTORY

The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

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WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy would step down for peace, NATO status

BY JUSTIN SPIKE
AND ILLIA NOVIKOV
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday he would be ready to give up the presidency if doing so would achieve a lasting peace for his country under the security umbrella of the NATO military alliance.

Speaking at a forum of government officials in Kyiv marking the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Zelenskyy said, "If to achieve peace, you really need me to give up my post, I'm ready."

Responding to a journalist's question on whether he'd trade his office for peace, Zelenskyy said, "I can trade it for NATO."

His comment appeared to be aimed at recent suggestions by

President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin that elections should be held in Ukraine despite Ukrainian legislation prohibiting them during martial law.

Earlier on Sunday, Zelenskyy said Russia launched 267 strike drones into Ukraine overnight on Saturday.

Three ballistic missiles had also been fired, the air force said.

One person was killed in the city of Kryvyi Rih because of the attack, according to the city military administration.

The attack came as leaders in Kyiv and across Europe are seeking to navigate rapid changes in U.S. foreign policy under Trump, who in a matter of days has upended years of firm support for Ukraine, leading to fears that he would join with Moscow to force a settlement to the war

without involving Ukraine and its European backers.

Trump's engagement with Russian officials and his agreement to reopen diplomatic ties and economic cooperation with Moscow marked a dramatic about-face in U.S. policy.

Zelenskyy has expressed fears that Trump pushing a quick resolution would result in lost territory for Ukraine and vulnerability to future Russian aggression, though U.S. officials have asserted that the Ukrainian leader would be involved if and when peace talks actually start.

Trump, however, prompted alarm and anger in Ukraine when last week he suggested that Kyiv had started the war and that Zelenskyy was acting as a "dictator" by not holding elections, despite Ukrainian legislation prohibiting them.



EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy answers media questions in Kyiv, Ukraine, Sunday.

Plan: Some European countries have limited ability to deploy troops

FROM PAGE 1

after a ceasefire.

But Western officials say what's being discussed is a "reassurance force," not an army of peacekeepers posted along the 600-mile front line in Ukraine's east.

The proposal supported by the United Kingdom and France would see fewer than 30,000 European troops on the ground in Ukraine — away from the front line at key infrastructure sites such as nuclear power plants — backed by Western air and sea power.

Under the plan, the front line would largely be monitored remotely, with drones and other technology.

Air power based outside Ukraine — perhaps in Poland or Romania — would be in reserve to deter breaches and reopen Ukrainian airspace to commercial flights. That could include American air power.

"There must be a U.S. backstop

because a U.S. security guarantee is the only way to effectively deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again," Starmer said on Monday.

Trump has long expressed the view that Washington's NATO allies don't pull their weight and that Europe must do more for its own security.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has told European allies that "there will not be U.S. troops deployed to Ukraine," but hasn't ruled out American support such as air transport or logistics.

Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's Ukraine envoy, said during a recent visit to NATO that all options must be kept on the table because the shape of any force will depend on the outcome of peace negotiations that have yet to be held.

Jamie Shea, a former senior NATO official, said that "different people in the administration are sending different signals ... Who do you believe is an issue."

It's unclear whether Ukraine will be happy with the proposal.

Russia, meanwhile, has rejected the idea outright. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that deployment of troops from NATO nations, even if not under the banner of the alliance, "will certainly be unacceptable for us."

The U.K., France and the Nordic and Baltic states that are the closest NATO nations to Russia appear most likely to play the main roles in any force.

Italy has constitutional limits on the use of its forces. In some countries including the Netherlands, deploying troops would need parliament's approval.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that his country, a key logistics base for support to Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion nearly three years ago, won't send troops in.

After a hastily arranged meeting of European leaders in Paris this week to discuss the war, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said talk of a Europe-led security force was "premature."

Scholz said that he was "a little irritated" that peacekeeping forces were even being discussed "at the wrong time." He insisted NATO — not an independent European force — must remain the foundation of security.

The success of the plan depends on the nature of any agreement to stop the fighting.

Russia has around 600,000 troops in Ukraine, and analysts say any ceasefire deal that leaves the bulk of them there is a recipe for renewed conflict.

France's military has just over 200,000 personnel, while the U.K. has less than 150,000. Matthew Savill, director of military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute, said that Europe would struggle to mount a force even in the tens of thousands.

"European countries will have a limited ability to deploy something that can be sustained for multiple rotations, potentially over several years," he said.

And it could be many years.

Michael Clarke, visiting professor in war studies at King's College London, noted that peacekeeping forces in Cyprus and Lebanon have remained in place for decades.

"If it is successful, it will last 20 or 30 years," he said. "If it is not successful, it will break down into fighting inside two years."

Lithuania's defense minister, Dovile Sakaliene, said that there was truth in the Trump administration's "painful" criticism of Europe's defense spending and military strength. "Russia is preparing for a long war," she told The Associated Press.

"They have now three times the manpower and their defense industry is moving quicker than that of Europe. Does anybody believe that this is only aimed at Ukraine?"

"What is the use of security guarantees from a weak party? Europe needs to muscle up right now to be actually able to provide security guarantees that will hold."

Russia: Trump-Putin summit preparations underway

Associated Press

Preparations are underway for a face-to-face meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia's deputy foreign minister said Saturday.

It marked a clear departure from previous Western efforts to isolate Moscow over its war in Ukraine.

Speaking to Russian state media, Sergei Ryabkov said a possible Putin-Trump summit could involve broad talks on global is-

suues, not just the war in Ukraine.

"The question is about starting to move toward normalizing relations between our countries, finding ways to resolve the most acute and potentially very, very dangerous situations, of which there are many, Ukraine among them," he said.

But he said efforts to organize such a meeting are at an early stage, and that making it happen will require "the most intensive preparatory work."

Ryabkov added that U.S. and

Russian envoys could meet within the next two weeks to pave the way for further talks among senior officials.

Russian and U.S. representatives meeting in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday agreed to start working toward ending the war in Ukraine and improving their diplomatic and economic ties, an extraordinary about-face in U.S. foreign policy under Trump.

Senior U.S. officials have suggested Ukraine will have to give up its goals of joining NATO and

retaining the 20% of its territory seized by Russia.

After the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told The Associated Press the two sides agreed broadly to pursue three goals: to restore staffing at their respective embassies; to create a high-level team to support Ukraine peace talks; and to explore closer relations and economic cooperation.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the Saudi meeting, which came as their beleaguered

country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops.

Trump on Friday appeared to walk back his earlier comments that falsely blamed Kyiv for starting the war, but insisted that Zelenskyy and former U.S. President Joe Biden should have done more to come to terms with Putin.

"Russia attacked, but they shouldn't have let him attack," he said during a radio interview with Brian Kilmeade of Fox News, referring to the Russian leader.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Vape distributors sued over candy e-cigarettes

NY ALBANY — New York is suing some of the country's biggest distributors of electronic cigarettes, accusing the companies of violating state laws that prohibit the sale of vaping flavors and designs that appeal to children.

Attorney General Letitia James announced the lawsuit targeting middlemen that distribute fruit- and candy-flavored e-cigarettes like Puff Bar and Elf Bar to hundreds of convenience stores and gas stations across the state. The approach differs from past litigation by New York and other states, which targeted vaping manufacturers, such as Juul Labs.

Chinese-made disposable e-cigarettes like Elf Bar have become the top choice among high school and middle school students. None of the products are approved by federal health regulators but they continue shipping into the U.S., often mislabeled as batteries, cell phones or other products.

The state's nearly 200-page legal complaint points to "widespread evidence of illegal conduct, including documents showing illegal shipments of flavored vapes to New York."

Trump eyes used planes to serve as Air Force One

DC WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he is considering buying used Boeing aircraft — perhaps from an overseas seller — to use as Air Force One when he's aboard, as he fumes over the U.S. plane-maker's delays in producing two specially modified ones for presidential use.

Speaking to reporters aboard one of the two nearly 35-year-old Boeing 747-200 aircraft in current use, Trump said, "We're looking at alternatives, because it's taking Boeing too long."

Boeing has the contract to produce updated versions, based on the more modern Boeing 747-8, but delivery has been delayed while the aircraft maker has lost billions of dollars on the deal, which was negotiated by Trump during his first term in office.

Delivery initially was set for 2024, but has been pushed to some time in 2027 for the first plane and in 2028 — Trump's final year in office — for the second, according to the U.S. Air Force.

Crow isn't only thing they eat at wild game dinner

PA PINE GROVE — The buffet line inside the fire hall in rural Pennsylvania was a familiar sight last weekend as a crowd of about 150 people heaped dinner onto their plates before sitting down to eat, hear a little live music and wait for the raffle.

Aside from a couple of vegetable dishes that were largely ignored, the food being served at the



KENDALL WARNER, THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT/AP

Monkey Bottom bounce

Blake Fanton, 11, and Kai Henderson, 11, leave their kayak behind as they go over a jump at the Monkey Bottom sledding hills in the West Ocean View area of Norfolk, Va., last week.

Taste of the Wild Outdoors dinner inside the Pine Grove Hose, Hook and Ladder Fire Company was anything but standard fare.

The menu of 14 species that included stingray casserole, bear stew, raccoon andouille and rabbit kielbasa was the centerpiece of a 12-year-old event organized by Larry Primeau, the volunteer rescue captain and a man with the cooking chops and network of sportsmen friends needed to pull it off.

There was roasted grey squirrel, bobcat lo mein, wild boar ham and coyote teriyaki on a stick. And the mystery meat this year, as a boy in the crowd correctly guessed, was alligator. For the less adventurous, there was also venison and salmon. In previous years, dishes have included wood duck, snapping turtle salami, smoked eel, beaver shepherd's pie, goose in sauerkraut and groundhog chili and chorizo.

Woman, child help bust man out of jail, cops say

AK NOME — A woman and child helped a man escape from lockup in a remote Alaska village, officials said.

The 35-year-old man was accused of driving an ATV while intoxicated, Alaska State Troopers said in a Feb. 18 dispatch. The man fled when police from Stebbins tried to arrest him on Feb. 14, troopers said, but officers eventually caught up to him and placed him in a holding cell.

Hours later, a 21-year-old woman and a juvenile, whose age wasn't provided, showed up to the public safety building, where they "assaulted the jail guard, broke cameras off the wall and damaged the cell door as they helped" the 35-year-old escape, troopers said.

Troopers based in Nome flew to the village on Feb. 15 and found the 35-year-old at home, where he was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, escape, resisting arrest, criminal mischief and a probation violation, troopers said.

The 21-year-old was arrested on suspicion of criminal mischief, assault, escape and contributing to the delinquency of a minor, according to troopers.

Police force put on leave after corruption cited

AL HANCEVILLE — A small Alabama city placed its entire police force on administrative leave a day after a grand jury recommended the department be disbanded, saying it has "operated as more of a criminal enterprise than a law enforcement agency."

Hanceville Mayor Jim Sawyer said Thursday in a statement that the Cullman County Sheriff's Department will temporarily take over law enforcement duties as city officials mull the next steps.

Cullman County District Attorney Champ Crocker announced that the grand jury had indicted

the Hanceville police chief and four of his officers, who are accused of mishandling or removing materials from the department's evidence room.

They have been charged with a variety of offenses, including misuse of state criminal databases and distribution of controlled substances to each other, according to the indictments.

Citing what it called a "rampant culture of corruption," the grand jury recommended that the department be "immediately abolished."

Scottish Highland bull on loose in rural hill country

CT KENT — A Scottish Highland bull is the talk of the town in the rural hills of western Connecticut, where it has been roaming for over a month in the frigid winter weather after escaping from its confines.

Local residents have reported sporadic sightings, including a few over the past week, said Lee Sohl, the animal control officer in Kent.



Scottish Highland bull in Connecticut.

It was recently seen just over the town line in New Milford.

The owner, Jo Ann Joray, said there have been people out looking for the bull, but they haven't been able to catch it.

Photos posted on social media by people who have spotted the bull have drawn a range of comments, with some expressing sympathy for the animal's plight, to others saying the bull is adorable to one saying it would produce good steaks.

Musk urges deorbiting of space station

FL ORLANDO — Elon Musk is calling for the International Space Station to be deorbited as soon as two years from now.

In posts to X, Musk said, "It is time to begin preparations for deorbiting the (space station). It has served its purpose. There is very little incremental utility. Let's go to Mars."

When pressed for whether or not he meant to up the current schedule that calls for it to be safely brought down after 2030, Musk said, "The decision is up to the President, but my recommendation is as soon as possible. I recommend 2 years from now."

SpaceX has a contract to build a deorbit vehicle based on its Dragon spacecraft to do the deed, but also has potentially several crewed trips to the space station for both NASA and commercial companies visiting the station as well.

SpaceX also flies cargo missions twice a year to the ISS.

STARS AND STRIPES

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OPINION

Firing officers as a litmus test poisons military ethos

BY JACK REED

Special to The Washington Post

Donald Trump's quest for power is endangering our military.

On Friday evening, the president dismissed Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, and a number of other senior officers — including the judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force — for perceived political disloyalty. He is also reportedly considering dismissing additional officers who lack "requisite leadership qualities."

The implications for our national security cannot be overstated. A clear message is being sent to military leaders: Failure to demonstrate personal and political loyalty to Trump could result in retribution, even after decades of honorable service. In particular, firing the military's most senior legal advisers is an unprecedented and explicit move to install officers who will yield to the president's interpretation of the law, with the expectation they will be little more than yes men on the most consequential questions of military law.

Trump has already fired the Coast Guard's top admiral, Linda Fagan, for reasons that appear political. He has taken partisan steps by stripping retired Gen. Mark Milley and former Defense Secretary Mark Esper of their protective details and removing their portraits from the Pentagon.

The firings are sure to create a dangerous ripple up and down the ranks. Leaders might hesitate to refuse illegal orders, speak their minds about best practices or call out abuses of power.

A commitment to provide the "best military advice" exists at every level in the ranks. Commanders expect their troops to give them the facts, straight and true, because lives are on the line. But firing officers as a political litmus test poisons this military ethos. It sends an immediate signal to service members that the best military advice might have career-ending consequences.

Congress expects the same candor from senior officers as presidents have enjoyed for decades. Lawmakers like me rely on senior officers to provide their best judgments — without fear of retribution — for both the security of our country and that of the 2 million service members who put themselves in harm's way.

As retired Gen. Martin Dempsey and Peter Feaver recently wrote: "Preemptively firing generals would only politicize the military and make it less candid, less ready, less professional and less lethal."

Trump's advisers have defended the firings and their "warrior board" proposal by pointing to Gen. George C. Marshall's "plucking board" of 1940, which removed senior military officers who had languished in the service for years. Marshall's actions did lead to a number of generals being dismissed. But the current administration fails to acknowledge that Marshall's board was not designed to cull senior leaders for their personal beliefs but rather to quickly create promotion opportunities for promising junior officers ahead of America's entrance to World War II.

The comparison is not relevant. Young officers at that time were stymied by a promotion system that rewarded seniority above merit, unlike today's system.

Further, Marshall was able to carry out his

review board only because Congress — through the Second Supplemental Appropriation Act of 1940 — reformed the criteria for military promotions by prioritizing merit over seniority. Trump is endangering our security by ignoring existing law and injecting politics and nonmerit principles into the military promotion system.

As in Marshall's era, the United States will face threats in the years ahead, and we must ensure that the rising generation of military leaders is prepared to meet them.

U.S. service members, like the nation they represent, are extremely diverse in racial, socioeconomic and political backgrounds. All of them should expect that they can have successful careers in the military. However, if young Americans perceive the military to be a place where leaders are punished at the whims of politicians, we will lose countless potential recruits.

When I joined the Army in the early 1970s, the military was rife with racial tension, women were prohibited from many roles and entire communities of Americans were banned from serving. Today, our military is fully integrated and every qualified individual, regardless of gender, race, religion or sexual orientation may pursue a military career. By no coincidence, our military is more lethal than ever.

We need it to remain so. Trump is entitled to a staff of civilians who are politically loyal to him. For the safety of all Americans, however, his military officers must remain free to give their best military advice without fear of reprisal.

Jack Reed, a Democrat, represents Rhode Island in the U.S. Senate and is a former Army paratrooper.

USAID is in dire need of reform. But not in this manner

BY MIHIR SHARMA

Bloomberg Opinion

President Donald Trump's abrupt "pause" to all U.S. foreign aid, alongside his adviser Elon Musk's attack on the personnel and institutions of the U.S. Agency for International Development, has unleashed chaos across the globe. Many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people seem to have been deliberately left stranded without the help they were promised. That this mayhem has been launched by a U.S. president, and greeted with relish by many of his voters, will unquestionably dent American prestige and power.

That's a pity. Because reform and restructuring of U.S. development assistance was long overdue. Here in India, as in much of the world, a modern approach to development assistance from Washington with a more equal partnership, and one informed by geopolitics and mutual interest, would certainly have been welcomed.

Questions about the usefulness of 20th century-style aid in the 21st century aren't unique to Trump's circle, or even to the U.S. In 2020 Britain, for example, merged its development agency into its foreign office and closely aligned their purposes and activity. Even some generous Nordic countries, including Denmark and Sweden, have moved to curb the independence of their overseas agencies, concerned that too much taxpayer money was going to unaccountable progressive nongovernmental organizations.

These countries may have changed how their aid operates and reduced bureaucrats' independence. But nobody in the developing

world saw that as a sign of churlishness or insularity. Britain, after all, remains committed enough to international development to largely maintain a decades-old spending promise even through biting austerity and crisis.

The reason development assistance should dovetail more closely with foreign policy is not to ensure that aid becomes an arm of politics. More often, it is to ensure that aid survives politics. Development assistance can never be entirely apolitical. The moment you spend money in a developing country, you create new interest groups and, sometimes, disadvantage old ones. You need to find partners within local establishments that help you identify how and where to spend the money; in the process, you empower those people.

Musk and others might claim that the problem is that USAID was pushing through progressive priorities like reproductive health and minority rights. Whether or not that is true, it misses the point. Even if you're going after entirely laudable health or education priorities of which everyone approves, you will have to work through existing institutions or displace old ones. And each time you do, you're making decisions that have a political impact. If bilateral grants don't just impact a country's development but also its politics, then you need the diplomats around to make sure that it doesn't work at cross purposes with your broader plans in that country. And you also need the diplomats to ensure that the country's leaders don't think your work is crossing some red line that your aid bureaucrats haven't been told about.

In other words, USAID — like all bilateral development agencies — is not a charity or a

non-governmental organization, but a state agency and a political actor. That is precisely what Secretary of State Marco Rubio has accused it of forgetting. Rubio said that diplomats told him: "They [USAID] undermine the work that we're doing in that country; they are supporting programs that upset the host government for whom we're trying to work with on a broader scale."

Rubio, as the new acting administrator of USAID, should indeed get to work fixing that problem. It's something that developing-world governments would be happy to partner with the Trump administration in achieving. But the chaos at USAID doesn't fix that problem; it creates new ones for the U.S.

Many in the developing world, including India, are sympathetic to the second Trump administration's broader aims — reworking global trade, combating China, restoring relations with Russia. They think these are good ideas, as is the reform of USAID.

But what's the lesson they will take from the past weeks? That even good ideas might purposefully be implemented poorly and disruptively, whether to grab headlines or inflict political damage on opponents at home.

Rubio, at least, understands how development assistance works, and what needs to be fixed. He needs to get to work doing that — so that the new president's policy priorities can be protected from his administration's own worst instincts.

Mihir Sharma is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. A senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, he is author of "Restart: The Last Chance for the Indian Economy." This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

Bizarro

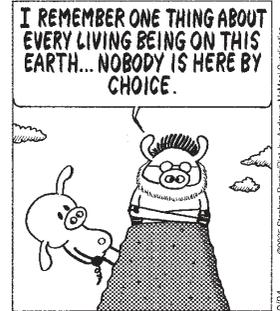
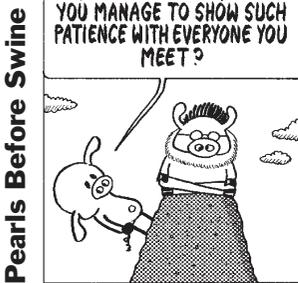
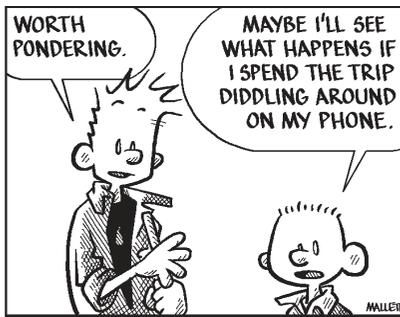


Loose Parts



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		



ACROSS

- 1 Begged
- 5 Rule, for short
- 8 Hendrix hairdo
- 12 So-so
- 14 Banister
- 15 Isolate
- 16 Bean of India
- 17 Guitar great Paul
- 18 Kampala's land
- 20 Prestigious prize
- 23 Whirl
- 24 Apple tablet
- 25 More impudent
- 28 Sleuth
- 29 Baby hooter
- 30 Marseilles monarch
- 32 Marie Curie, for one
- 34 Indy circuits
- 35 Elizabeth of "Jacob's Ladder"
- 36 Western flick
- 37 Wrapped garment
- 40 Show fatigue
- 41 "So be it"
- 42 Describe
- 47 Noncommittal answer
- 48 Soap opera units
- 49 Campus digs
- 50 Sailor
- 51 Round bread of India

DOWN

- 1 Downing St. VIPs
- 2 Shelter
- 3 D.C. summer hrs.
- 4 Used an old phone
- 5 Early TVs
- 6 Mess up
- 7 See red
- 8 Designer Giorgio
- 9 Satyr's cousin
- 10 Cantaloupe cover
- 11 Gymnast Korbut
- 13 Autobahn auto
- 19 Heart of the matter
- 20 Little louse
- 21 Oil cartel

22 "Coffee Cantata" composer

- 22 "Coffee Cantata" composer
- 23 Dip with chips
- 25 Playground equipment
- 26 Part of Q.E.D.
- 27 Rock climber's need
- 29 Portent
- 31 Leb. neighbor
- 33 Ohm or joule
- 34 Snorkeling site
- 36 Lummoxes
- 37 Stated
- 38 Arsenal supply
- 39 Caboose
- 40 Swizzle
- 43 Clean air org.
- 44 Vitamin stat
- 45 Afternoon social
- 46 QVC alternative

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

2-24

CRYPTOQUIP

B X B D B Q Y A G R S G M D Q X A

X B M D O D S M Q P X O A S G S M O Q S

D T M P S O D Q X A E Q P M P O D :

O Y E - R Q M O T M G E O D D P G X Q Y D .

Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHEN I WENT TO THE FARM PLANNING TO PURCHASE A HORSE OF TWO COLORS, I GOT A ROAN FOR MY MONEY.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals U

FACES

Veterans a huge part of new film

Morgan Freeman among the many former service members in 'My Dead Friend Zoe'

BY ALEXANDER BANERJEE
Stars and Stripes

Morgan Freeman is just one of the many veterans that make up 90% of the cast in "My Dead Friend Zoe," a comedy-drama that was directed by an Army veteran and produced by Kansas City Chiefs star Travis Kelce.

It opens in theaters Friday.

The film follows a female Army veteran named Merit, played by "The Walking Dead" and "Star Trek: Discovery" star Sonequa Martin-Green, as she reconnects with her veteran grandfather (played by Ed Harris of "Apollo 13" and "The Truman Show") and struggles with attending mandatory therapy sessions despite the pleas of her veterans affairs counselor (Morgan Freeman). Throughout the film, Merit is haunted by her dead friend, the titular Zoe (Natalie Morales).

It premiered at SXSW Film Festival in 2024, where it received the Audience Award, and has a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes with 19 critics weighing in at the time of this writing.

Veterans ad-libbing next to Morgan Freeman

Aside from Freeman, who served in the U.S. Air Force from 1955 to 1959, most of the primary cast have not served in the military. But even as minor characters, the veterans cast in the movie play an important role in recurring scenes of Department of Veterans Affairs group therapy sessions.

The scenes follow Merit's struggle to open up about her experiences since leaving Afghanistan but also show other veterans opening up. Their lines were not only entirely unscripted, but true stories, director Kyle Hausmann-Stokes told Stars and Stripes.

"They had to play opposite Morgan Freeman with no script. But I knew they'd be up for it, and they did a great job," Hausmann-Stokes said.

The presence of veterans on set was also helpful and inspiring for lead actor Martin-Green, who told Stars and Stripes that she listened closely to her castmates' stories.

Although several members of Martin-Green's family have served, she said that playing Merit was a challenge because so much of it was outside of her own experience. But she was able to ask and

learn from the veterans on set, and the director provided her with a lot of footage of veterans discussing their journeys.

A rare depiction of female veterans

Although the story revolves around a female Army veteran and her dead friend, it is heavily based on the experience of the director and his male platoonmates — who were in the Army at a time when women were not allowed to serve in ground combat roles.

Hausmann-Stokes, who received a Bronze Star for his combat tour in Iraq, said he was determined from the outset to tell a story that centered female service members because of his post-service experience chronicling veterans' mental health stories for the VA.

"I interviewed hundreds of veterans over the course of four years in every major city across the U.S. And half of those were women," he said. "And I was completely blown away by their stories and their courage and how they had done all the same things as the men I had spoken with, and then some. So I kind of made a deal with myself at that point."

The dynamic was also applauded by Kelce, an executive producer.

"Sonequa and Natalie bring depth and authenticity to their performances, highlighting the strength, resilience and leadership of women in the military," Kelce said in a statement.

A generational divide

Another unique aspect of the dark comedy is its depiction of the divide between different generations of veterans.

The film closely follows Merit's rocky relationships with two Vietnam veterans: her grandfather, recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and her VA counselor.

Merit's grandfather is heavily modeled after the director's grandfather, who served in Vietnam.

"When I got back from Iraq, I kind of thought that he and I would have this conversation about our experiences, and we really didn't," Hausmann-Stokes said. "And it kind of revealed something to me about this schism between Vietnam veterans and my generation of veterans. Because they were the opposite of wel-



JUNKET PRODUCTIONS, INC. PHOTOS

Actor Ed Harris plays a grandfather in "My Dead Friend Zoe."



"My Dead Friend Zoe" actresses Sonequa Martin-Green, left, and Natalie Morales play out a flashback scene set in Afghanistan. In the film, Martin-Green's character is haunted by memories of Morales.

comed home, to put it mildly, and my generation was."

"Most Vietnam veterans are kind," Hausmann-Stokes was quick to note, adding that generational differences are hardly unique to veterans.

Unique funding model and nonprofit collaboration

Hausmann-Stokes and Martin-Green touted the film's funding model. It was co-produced by Legion M, a fan-owned company that counts tens of thousands of people as shareholders and aims to support independent works.

Also of note is the film's three "impact partners," or nonprofits the audience is encouraged to support — The Bob Woodruff Foundation, The Mission Continues and Everytown for Gun Safety.

The film is using a unique Pay It Forward campaign, in which sup-



Actor and U.S. Air Force veteran Morgan Freeman plays the role of a veterans affairs counselor.

porters can donate tickets and support community screenings via The Bob Woodruff Foundation.

Kaylyn Barnhart contributed to this report.

Johnson, DiCaprio to star in Scorsese mob movie

Martin Scorsese's next film will pack a punch now that Leonardo DiCaprio and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson have been reportedly attached to star in it.

The Oscar-winning filmmaker behind New York City-set classics like "Taxi Driver" and "Goodfellas" will head to the Aloha State for his next star-studded flick — a mob movie set in Hawaii during the 1960s and '70s.

According to Deadline, Johnson, DiCaprio and Emily Blunt are in discussions for the project based on a real-life crime boss who tussled with mainland companies and rival gangs to exert control over the Hawaiian islands.

Vanity Fair journalist and screenwriter Nick Bilton also confirmed his involvement on Feb. 20.

Singer Jerry 'Iceman' Butler dies at 85

Jerry Butler, a premier soul singer of the 1960s and after whose rich, intimate baritone graced such hits as "For Your Precious Love," "Only the Strong Survive" and "Make It Easy On Yourself," has died at age 85.

Butler's niece, Yolanda Goff, said that Butler died Feb. 20 at his home in Chicago. Butler's "Iceman" show business nickname reflected his understated style.

A member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and a three-time Grammy Award nominee, Butler was a voice for two major soul music hubs: Chicago and Philadelphia. Along with childhood friend Curtis Mayfield, he helped found the Chicago-based Impressions and sang lead on the breakthrough hit "For Your Precious Love," a deeply emotional, gospel-influenced ballad that made Butler a star before the age of 20. A decade later, in the late '60s, he joined the Philadelphia-based production team of Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff, who worked with him on "Only the Strong Survive," "Hey Western Union Man" and other hits.

Butler was also an inspired songwriter who collaborated with Otis Redding, Gamble and Huff and others.

Erivo replaces DeBose as Tony Awards host

Cynthia Erivo will host the 2025 Tony Awards and might be a certified EGOT — Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony winner — when she does so this spring. The 38-year-old "Wicked" star will host the show, which celebrates the 2024-25 Broadway season, from Radio City Music Hall on June 8.

Erivo's newest role will take up the mantle from Tony nominee Ariana DeBose, who has emceed the last three consecutive ceremonies.

Erivo is up for an Academy Award for Best Actress on March 2 for her portrayal of Elphaba.

From news reports

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Saturday's men's scores

EAST

American 48, Boston U. 44
 Binghamton 71, Maine 69
 Boston College 69, Georgia Tech 54
 CCSU 67, Stonehill 41
 Cornell 85, Brown 81
 Dartmouth 76, Princeton 61
 Davidson 80, Fordham 69
 Drexel 64, Coll. of Charleston 55
 George Washington 74, UMass 52
 Harvard 79, Penn 78, OT
 Hofstra 78, Delaware 65
 Howard 87, Morgan St. 81
 LIU 76, Le Moyne 61
 Lafayette 78, Lehigh 70
 New Hampshire 71, Albany (NY) 60
 Norfolk St. 79, Coppin St. 63
 SC State 94, Delaware St. 88, OT
 Saint Joseph's 78, Richmond 62
 St. Bonaventure 70, Duquesne 63
 St. Francis (Pa.) 85, Fairleigh Dickinson 80, OT
 UMB 95, NJIT 91
 Vermont 85, Mass.-Lowell 61
 Yale 90, Columbia 64

SOUTH

Alabama 96, Kentucky 83
 Alabama St. 60, Florida A&M 59
 Auburn 82, Georgia 70
 Belmont 77, Indiana St. 75
 Bethune-Cookman 68, Alabama A&M 64
 Chattanooga 76, The Citadel 75
 Duke 110, Illinois 67
 E. Illinois 67, Morehead St. 62
 ETSU 73, Wofford 68
 Florida 79, LSU 65
 Furman 75, VMI 71
 Georgia St. 76, Old Dominion 70
 Hampton 83, UNC-Wilmington 70
 High Point 90, Gardner-Webb 67
 Jackson St. 71, Alcorn St. 63
 Jacksonville St. 73, UTEP 65
 James Madison 78, Georgia Southern 73
 Liberty 58, FIU 45
 La.-Lafayette 62, Southern Miss. 60
 Louisville 89, Florida St. 81
 Marshall 69, Appalachian St. 59
 McNeese St. 73, Texas A&M-CC 57
 Middle Tenn. 74, Sam Houston St. 70
 NC A&T 73, Stony Brook 72
 NC State 85, Wake Forest 73
 New Mexico St. 60, Kennesaw St. 49
 Nicholls 93, Texas Rio Grande Valley 84
 North Carolina 81, Virginia 66
 Northwestern St. 73, New Orleans 66
 Presbyterian 80, Radford 73
 SC-Upstate 79, Charleston Southern 69
 SE Louisiana 83, East Texas A&M 65
 Samford 93, W. Carolina 72
 South Carolina 84, Texas 69
 Southern U. 71, Grambling St. 64
 Tennessee Tech 77, Tennessee St. 74
 Towson 76, Campbell 67
 Troy 83, Coastal Carolina 66
 UNC-Asheville 87, Longwood 82
 UNC-Greensboro 78, Mercer 61
 VCU 70, George Mason 54
 Vanderbilt 77, Mississippi 72
 Virginia Tech 81, Miami 68
 W. Kentucky 64, Louisiana Tech 63
 William & Mary 79, Elon 70

MIDWEST

Ball St. 80, Buffalo 66
 Bradley 85, Murray St. 83, OT
 Butler 84, DePaul 72
 Cent. Michigan 86, W. Michigan 57
 Cincinnati 75, TCU 63
 E. Michigan 79, N. Illinois 76
 Ill.-Chicago 82, Evansville 77
 Illinois St. 70, Missouri St. 68
 Iowa 85, Washington 79
 Kansas 96, Oklahoma St. 64
 North Dakota 79, N. Dakota St. 77
 Notre Dame 76, Pittsburgh 72
 Ohio 84, Akron 67
 Omaha 93, South Dakota 85
 Oral Roberts 71, St. Thomas (MN) 66
 Oregon 77, Wisconsin 73, OT
 Penn St. 69, Minnesota 60
 S. Indiana 82, SIU-Edwardsville 68
 SE Missouri 74, Lindenwood (Mo.) 58
 Saint Louis 81, Rhode Island 66
 Valparaiso 83, S. Illinois 79

SOUTHWEST

Abilene Christian 80, Utah Tech 71
 Ark.-Pine Bluff 75, Prairie View 64
 Arkansas 92, Missouri 85
 Arkansas St. 95, Louisiana-Monroe 70
 Clemson 79, SMU 69
 Houston 68, Iowa St. 59
 Incarnate Word 63, Stephen F. Austin 61
 Lamar 66, Houston Christian 58
 Oklahoma 93, Mississippi St. 87
 Rice 71, Tulsa 50
 Tennessee 77, Texas A&M 69
 Texas Southern 79, MVSU 38
 Texas St. 93, South Alabama 92, OT
 Texas Tech 73, West Virginia 51
 Texas-Arlington 67, Tarleton St. 57
 UALR 75, W. Illinois 61

FAR WEST

Air Force 72, Fresno St. 69, OT
 BYU 96, Arizona 95
 Boise St. 70, Nevada 69
 CS Northridge 65, UC Davis 62
 Cal Poly 112, UC Riverside 100, OT
 Colorado 76, Baylor 74
 Colorado St. 61, UNLV 53
 Grand Canyon 66, Cal Baptist 64
 Idaho St. 83, Sacramento St. 66
 Loyola Marymount 93, Pepperdine 82
 Montana 89, Montana St. 85
 N. Arizona 87, E. Washington 67
 N. Colorado 92, Idaho 74
 Oregon St. 83, San Diego 73
 Portland 81, Pacific 73
 Saint Mary's (Cal.) 74, Gonzaga 67
 San Jose St. 82, Wyoming 73
 Santa Clara 109, Washington St. 79
 Stanford 66, California 61
 UC Irvine 73, CS Bakersfield 64
 UC San Diego 83, Hawaii 44
 UC Santa Barbara 58, Long Beach St. 56
 Utah St. 79, San Diego St. 71

Utah Valley St. 61, Seattle 55
 Wagner 64, Chicago St. 52
 Weber St. 60, Portland St. 58

Saturday's women's scores

EAST

Albany (NY) 67, New Hampshire 49
 Army 69, Bucknell 54
 Boston U. 82, American 72
 CCSU 84, Stonehill 68
 Colgate 68, Loyola (Md.) 57
 Columbia 64, Princeton 60
 Delaware St. 77, SC State 56
 Duquesne 84, Saint Louis 72
 Fairleigh Dickinson 60, St. Francis (Pa.) 33
 Harvard 60, Brown 57
 Le Moyne 83, LIU Brooklyn 53
 Lehigh 75, Lafayette 61
 Maine 54, Binghamton 53
 Marist 67, Niagara 56
 Marquette 55, Georgetown 50
 Merrimack 81, Iona 36
 Mount St. Mary's 76, Rider 49
 NJIT 83, UMB 65
 Navy 66, Holy Cross 57
 Penn 68, Cornell 63
 Quinnipiac 60, Manhattan 40
 Siena 72, Canisius 58
 St. Bonaventure 48, La Salle 41
 St. Peter's 54, Sacred Heart 44
 Vermont 57, Mass.-Lowell 35
 Wagner 58, Chicago St. 52
 Yale 76, Dartmouth 59

SOUTH

Alabama A&M 70, Bethune-Cookman 62
 Alcorn St. 64, Jackson St. 51
 Bellarmine 93, North Florida 65
 Charleston Southern 59, SC-Upstate 49
 Charlotte 58, FAU 53
 Chattanooga 51, ETSU 46
 Coastal Carolina 86, Arkansas St. 70
 Florida A&M 48, Alabama St. 40
 Florida Gulf Coast 60, North Alabama 50
 High Point 71, Gardner-Webb 63
 Howard 62, Morgan St. 53
 Jacksonville 80, E. Kentucky 72
 James Madison 83, Appalachian St. 57
 Liberty 73, FIU 57
 Lipscomb 66, Austin Peay 64
 Longwood 67, UNC-Asheville 59
 La.-Monroe 62, La.-Lafayette 58
 Marshall 70, Georgia St. 59
 McNeese St. 69, Texas A&M-CC 60
 Morehead St. 62, E. Illinois 61
 Norfolk St. 76, Coppin St. 54
 North Texas 75, East Carolina 73, 2OT
 Northwestern St. 76, New Orleans 74
 Old Dominion 68, Georgia Southern 66
 Presbyterian 78, Radford 71
 Queens (NC) 75, Stetson 64
 SE Louisiana 75, East Texas A&M 55
 Samford 73, Furman 62
 South Florida 80, Memphis 70
 Southern U. 70, Grambling St. 47
 Tennessee Tech 84, Tennessee St. 71
 Texas Rio Grande Valley 59, Nicholls 50
 Troy 86, South Alabama 71
 Tulane 68, Wichita St. 64
 Tulsa 72, UAB 68, OT
 UCF 61, Texas Tech 60
 UNC-Greensboro 57, W. Carolina 53
 W. Kentucky 78, Louisiana Tech 73
 Wofford 65, Mercer 64
 Wright St. 68, N. Kentucky 62

MIDWEST

Bowling Green 81, Toledo 72
 Buffalo 68, Miami (Ohio) 54
 Cent. Michigan 56, W. Michigan 43
 Cleveland St. 85, Robert Morris 53
 Dayton 62, Fordham 57
 E. Michigan 76, N. Illinois 72
 Green Bay 68, Milwaukee 45
 Kansas St. 90, Kansas 60
 Kent St. 60, Ball St. 54
 Lindenwood (Mo.) 70, SE Missouri 47
 Michigan 78, Penn St. 68
 Missouri St. 82, Drake 79, OT
 N. Iowa 87, S. Illinois 51
 Ohio 70, Akron 62
 S. Dakota St. 80, UMKC 60
 S. Indiana 79, SIU-Edwardsville 42
 St. Thomas (MN) 66, South Dakota 57
 UConn 86, Butler 47
 Youngstown St. 52, Oakland 51

SOUTHWEST

Arizona 74, Houston 72, OT
 Baylor 67, Iowa St. 52
 Cent. Arkansas 72, West Georgia 62
 Lamar 62, Houston Christian 30
 Middle Tenn. 59, Sam Houston St. 46
 Oklahoma St. 82, Colorado 65
 Oral Roberts 100, N. Dakota St. 84
 Prairie View 67, Ark.-Pine Bluff 65, OT
 Stephen F. Austin 73, Incarnate Word 68
 Tarleton St. 67, Texas-Arlington 57
 Texas Southern 81, MVSU 72
 Texas St. 62, Southern Miss. 57
 UALR 86, W. Illinois 80
 UTEP 52, Jacksonville St. 44
 UTSA 57, Rice 55

FAR WEST

Abilene Christian 71, Utah Tech 60
 Air Force 67, Fresno St. 66
 Arizona St. 85, BYU 73, OT
 Grand Canyon 74, Cal Baptist 56
 Idaho 77, N. Colorado 59
 Idaho St. 50, Sacramento St. 41
 Loyola Marymount 58, Pepperdine 49
 Montana St. 98, Montana 66
 N. Arizona 88, E. Washington 77
 New Mexico 73, Utah St. 65
 New Mexico St. 61, Kennesaw St. 57
 North Dakota 73, Denver 68
 Oregon St. 64, Santa Clara 51
 Portland 73, Santa Clara 66
 San Diego St. 82, San Jose St. 60
 San Francisco 70, Gonzaga 68
 UC Davis 66, CS Northridge 45
 UC Irvine 60, CS Bakersfield 49
 UC Riverside 74, Cal Poly 63
 UC Santa Barbara 73, Long Beach St. 58
 UNLV 69, Colorado St. 65
 Utah Valley St. 68, Seattle 51
 Washington St. 72, Saint Mary's (Cal) 62
 Weber St. 71, Portland St. 56
 Wyoming 45, Nevada 42

AUTO RACING

Bennett Transportation & Logistics 250

NASCAR-Xfinity Saturday

At Atlanta Motor Speedway
 Hampton, Ga.
 Lap length: 1.54 miles
 (Start position in parentheses)

- (2) Austin Hill, Chevrolet, 163 laps, 60 points.
- (4) Justin Allgaier, Chevrolet, 163, 46.
- (16) Aric Almirola, Toyota, 163, 39.
- (12) Sammy Smith, Chevrolet, 163, 37.
- (15) Nicholas Sanchez, Chevrolet, 163, 32.
- (20) Jeb Burton, Chevrolet, 163, 33.
- (13) Daniel Dye, Chevrolet, 163, 30.
- (29) Leland Honeyman, Chevrolet, 163, 29.
- (11) William Sawalich, Toyota, 163, 28.
- (19) Harrison Burton, Ford, 163, 29.
- (24) Jeremy Clements, Chevrolet, 163, 26.
- (30) Matt DiBenedetto, Chevrolet, 163, 25.
- (7) Brandon Jones, Toyota, 163, 24.
- (17) Sheldon Creed, Ford, 163, 32.
- (3) Josh Williams, Chevrolet, 163, 22.
- (1) Jesse Love, Chevrolet, 163, 36.
- (31) Brennan Poole, Chevrolet, 163, 20.
- (26) Ryan Ellis, Chevrolet, 163, 19.
- (25) Blaine Perkins, Chevrolet, 163, 18.
- (14) Ryan Sieg, Ford, 163, 17.
- (38) Joey Gase, Chevrolet, 163, 16.
- (34) Nick Leitz, Chevrolet, 163, 15.
- (8) Carson Kvapil, Chevrolet, 163, 20.
- (23) Garrett Smithley, Chevrolet, 163, 13.
- (21) CJ McLaughlin, Chevrolet, 163, 12.
- (28) Kris Wright, Chevrolet, 163, 11.
- (23) Parker Retzlaff, Chevrolet, 163, 10.
- (36) Mason Massey, Chevrolet, 163, 9.
- (9) Christian Eckes, Chevrolet, accident, 162, 13.
- (32) Josh Bilicki, Chevrolet, 162, 7.
- (37) Mason Maggio, Chevrolet, 162, 6.
- (35) Carson Ware, Chevrolet, 161, 5.
- (27) Kyle Sieg, Ford, 154, 4.
- (10) Connor Zilisch, Chevrolet, accident, 151, 11.
- (22) Dean Thompson, Toyota, 149, 2.
- (5) Sam Mayer, Ford, accident, 141, 18.
- (18) Anthony Alfredo, Chevrolet, accident, 141, 1.
- (6) Taylor Gray, Toyota, accident, 118, 8.

Race Statistics

Average Speed of Race Winner: 106.579 mph.
Time of Race: 2 hours, 21 minutes, 18 seconds.
Margin of Victory: 0.216 seconds.
Caution Flags: 8 for 49 laps.
Lead Changes: 12 among 7 drivers.
Lap Leaders: J.Love 0-3; S.Mayer 4; J.Love 5-11; A.Hill 12-47; L.Honeyman 48; A.Hill 49-71; J.Love 72-74; A.Hill 75-93; N.Leitz 94; A.Hill 95-161; A.Almirola 162; A.Hill 163; N.Sanchez 164
Leaders Summary (Driver, Times Led, Laps Led): A.Hill, 5 times for 146 laps; J.Love, 3 times for 13 laps; A.Almirola, 1 time for 1 lap; N.Sanchez, 1 time for 1 lap; L.Honeyman, 1 time for 1 lap; N.Leitz, 1 time for 1 lap; S.Mayer, 1 time for 1 lap.
Wins: A.Hill, 1; J.Love, 1.
Top 16 in Points: 1. A.Hill, 84; 2. S.Creed, 83; 3. J.Love, 78; 4. J.Allgaier, 76; 5. J.Burton, 66; 6. H.Burton, 61; 7. J.Clements, 55; 8. S.Mayer, 53; 9. C.Kvapil, 53; 10. M.DiBenedetto, 51; 11. S.Smith, 50; 12. L.Honeyman, 50; 13. T.Gray, 45; 14. R.Sieg, 44; 15. N.Sanchez, 42; 16. D.Thompson, 40.

Fr8 208

NASCAR Craftsman Truck At Atlanta Motor Speedway Hampton, Ga.

Lap length: 1.54 miles
 (Start position in parentheses)

- (9) Kyle Busch, Chevrolet, 135 laps, 0 points.
- (8) Stewart Friesen, Toyota, 135, 43.
- (7) Tyler Ankrum, Chevrolet, 135, 38.
- (30) Bayley Currey, Chevrolet, 135, 33.
- (28) Chandler Smith, Ford, 135, 34.
- (25) Kaden Honeycutt, Chevrolet, 135, 37.
- (10) Ben Rhodes, Ford, 135, 30.
- (12) Ty Majeski, Ford, 135, 28.
- (6) Jake Garcia, Ford, 135, 28.
- (2) Grant Enfinger, Chevrolet, 135, 44.
- (22) Giovanni Ruggiero, Toyota, 135, 26.
- (17) Michael McDowell, Chevrolet, 135, 0.
- (24) Matt Mills, Chevrolet, 135, 24.
- (13) Luke Fenhaus, Ford, 135, 23.
- (26) Tanner Gray, Toyota, 135, 23.
- (3) Daniel Hemric, Chevrolet, 135, 25.
- (15) Dawson Sutton, Chevrolet, 135, 20.
- (29) Josh Reaume, Ford, 135, 19.
- (27) Spencer Boyd, Chevrolet, 135, 18.
- (16) Layne Riggs, Ford, 134, 17.
- (5) Jack Wood, Chevrolet, 133, 31.
- (11) Matt Crafton, Ford, 133, 15.
- (19) Corey Heim, Toyota, 132, 20.
- (18) Toni Breidinger, Toyota, 132, 13.
- (1) Connor Mosack, Chevrolet, 131, 24.
- (21) Frankie Muniz, Ford, accident, 106, 11.
- (14) Andres Perez De Lara, Chevrolet, suspension, 96, 10.
- (32) Justin S Carroll, Chevrolet, engine, 75, 9.
- (4) Rajah Caruth, Chevrolet, accident, 74, 10.
- (23) William Sawalich, Toyota, accident, 74, 0.
- (20) Nathan Byrd, Chevrolet, accident, 73, 6.
- (31) Keith McGee, Ford, electrical, 43, 5.

Race Statistics

Average Speed of Race Winner: 116.735 mph.
Time of Race: 1 hour, 46 minutes, 52 seconds.
Margin of Victory: 0.017 seconds.
Caution Flags: 4 for 28 laps.
Lead Changes: 19 among 11 drivers.
Lap Leaders: C.Mosack 0-29; J.Wood 30-33; C.Heim 34-38; T.Majeski 39; K.Busch 40-63; R.Caruth 64-71; C.Mosack 72; K.Busch 73-116; G.Enfinger 117; K.Busch 118-119; L.Fenhaus 120-121; K.Busch 122; C.Smith 123; K.Busch 124; C.Smith 125; K.Busch 126-129; D.Hemric 130; K.Busch 131-133; S.Friesen 134; K.Busch 135
Leaders Summary (Driver, Times Led, Laps Led): K.Busch, 8 times for 80 laps; C.Mosack, 2 times for 30 laps; R.Caruth, 1 time for 8 laps; C.Heim, 1 time for 5 laps; J.Wood, 1 time for 4 laps; C.Smith, 2 times for 2 laps; L.Fenhaus, 1 time for 2 laps; S.Friesen, 1 time for 1 lap; T.Majeski, 1 time for 1 lap; G.Enfinger, 1 time for 1 lap; D.Hemric, 1 time for 1 lap.
Wins: C.Heim, 1.
Top 16 in Points: 1. G.Enfinger, 85; 2. T.Majeski, 84; 3. C.Smith, 79; 4. C.Heim, 69; 5. B.Rhodes, 66; 6. G.Ruggiero, 62; 7. S.Friesen, 62; 8. D.Hemric, 62; 9. J.Garcia, 53; 10. J.Wood, 50; 11. B.Currey, 49; 12. T.Gray, 43; 13. L.Riggs, 42; 14. T.Ankrum, 41; 15. K.Honeycutt, 39; 16. F.Muniz, 38.

DEALS

Saturday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball National League

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Agreed to terms with LHP Andrew Heaney on a one-year contract. Designated RHP Brett de Geus for assignment. Released RHP Yerry Rodriguez. Reassigned RHP Sean Sullivan to minor league camp.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association

WASHINGTON WIZARDS — Signed F Jalen McDaniels to a 10-day contract.
Women's National Basketball Association

CHICAGO SKY — Signed G Arella Cuirantes to a training camp contract.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Placed D Charlie McAvoy on injured reserve.
BUFFALO SABRES — Activated LW Jordan Greenway and D Mattias Samuelsson from injured reserve.

CALGARY FLAMES — Recalled RW Adam Klapak from Calgary (AHL). Reassigned D Yan Kuznetsov to Calgary.

CAROLINA HURRICANES — Activated C Tyson Jost from long-term injured reserve.

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Reassigned D Louis Crevier to Rockford (AHL).
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Activated C Nico Hischier from injured reserve.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Activated DS Ryan Pulock and Scott Mayfield from injured reserve.

OTTAWA SENATORS — Activated C Noah Gregor from long-term injured reserve. Activated C Nick Cousins from injured reserve.

SAN JOSE SHARKS — Activated C Nico Sturm from injured reserve.
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Reassigned C Emil Bemstrom to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned F Jesse Ylonen to Syracuse (AHL). Recalled G Matt Tomkins from Syracuse (AHL).

UTAH HOCKEY CLUB — Reassigned G Jaxson Stauber to Tucson (AHL).
VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Reassigned LW Jonas Rondbjerg to Henderson (AHL).

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Columbus	1	0	0	3	4	2
Philadelphia	1	0	0	3	4	2
Atlanta	1	0	0	3	3	2
Cincinnati	1	0	0	3	1	0
Charlotte FC	0	0	1	1	2	2
D.C. United	0	0	1	1	2	2
Inter Miami CF	0	0	1	1	2	2
NYC FC	0	0	1	1	2	2
Toronto FC	0	0	1	1	2	2
Nashville	0	0	1	1	0	0
New England	0	0	1	1	0	0
CF Montréal	0	1	0	0	2	3
New York	0	1	0	0	0	1
Chicago	0	1	0	0	2	4
Orlando City	0	1	0	0	2	4

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Jose	1	0	0	3	4	0
FC Dallas	1	0	0	3	2	1
Austin FC	1	0	0	3	1	0
LA FC	1	0	0	3	1	0
Seattle	0	0	1	1	2	2
Colorado	0	0	1	1	0	0
St Louis City	0	0	1	1	0	0
LA Galaxy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portland	0	0	0	0	0	0
San Diego FC	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vancouver	0	0	0	0	0	0
Houston	0	1	0	0	1	2
Minn. United	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sporting KC	0	1	0	0	0	1
Real Salt Lake	0	1	0	0	0	4

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday's games

Los Angeles FC 1, Minnesota 0
 New York City FC 2, Miami 2, tie
 Atlanta 3, CF Montréal 2
 Cincinnati 1, New York 0
 Columbus 4, Chicago 2
 Toronto FC 2, D.C. United 2, tie
 Philadelphia 4, Orlando City 2
 Austin FC 1, Sporting Kansas City 0
 FC Dallas 2, Houston 1
 New England 0, Nashville 0, tie
 Colorado 0, St Louis City 0, tie
 San Jose 4, Real Salt Lake 0
 Charlotte FC 2, Seattle 2, tie

Sunday's games

Vancouver at Portland
 San Diego FC at LA Galaxy
Saturday, March 1
 Atlanta at Charlotte FC
 Seattle at Real Salt Lake
 Columbus at New England
 Nashville at New York
 Toronto FC at Orlando City
 Cincinnati at Philadelphia
 D.C. United at Chicago
 San Jose at Sporting Kansas City
 CF Montréal at Minnesota
 FC Dallas at Colorado
 New York City FC at Los Angeles FC
 Austin FC at Portland
 St Louis City at San Diego FC

NHL

ROUNDUP

Steeves gets first goal in Leafs' win

Associated Press

TORONTO — Alex Steeves scored his first NHL goal as the Toronto Maple Leafs jumped out to an early lead and beat the Carolina Hurricanes 6-3 Saturday night.

Pontus Holmberg had two goals and an assist, John Tavares had a goal and an assist and David Kampf and Auston Matthews also scored for Toronto. Matthews and Holmberg had empty-net goals after Carolina cut the lead to 4-3 in the third. Holmberg was credited with his first goal after Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal accidentally put the puck in his own net.

Steeves, 25, who leads the AHL with 29 goals, also had an assist in his 12th NHL game. Anthony Stolarz made 31 saves.

Shayne Gostisbehere and Andrei Svechnikov each had a goal and an assist, and Jaccob Slavin also scored for Carolina. Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 17 shots.

The Hurricanes finally started to push after Kampf's 3-0 goal, but Stolarz was there to make a string of big saves. William Nylander then set up Tavares moments later to stretch the home team's lead to four goals.

Flyers 6, Oilers 3: Matvei Michkov and Sean Couturier each had a goal and two assists, and Owen Tippett scored two goals as host Philadelphia beat Edmonton.

In the first game back from the 4 Nations break for both teams, Michkov opened the scoring in the first period when he followed his own missed shot and put the rebound past Stuart Skinner, who made 26 saves.

In the second period, Michkov made two no-look passes that turned into Flyers' goals. He found Couturier with a cross-ice pass on the doorstep and later with a pass into the slot for Tippett's second tally on a 2-on-none breakaway.

Wild 4, Red Wings 3 (OT): Marco Rossi scored with 1:25 remaining in overtime as visiting Minnesota rallied for a victory over Detroit.

Rossi had just come out of the penalty box after being called for hooking. He wound up with a breakaway and his shot squirted past the goal line.

Matt Boldy had a goal and an assist for the Wild, who rallied from a 3-1 third-period deficit. Marcus Foligno and Vinnie Hinostroza also scored and Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 27 shots.

Capitals 8, Penguins 3: Jakob Chychrun scored twice during a second-period surge and visiting Washington raced past Pittsburgh.

Chychrun beat Alex Nedeljkovic



ARLYN McADOREY, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

The Toronto Maple Leafs' Alex Steeves, center, and Jake McCabe are congratulated by teammates after Steeves' goal against the Carolina Hurricanes during the first period in Toronto on Saturday.

vic twice in less than four minutes to break open a tie game. Aliaksei Protas and Tom Wilson pushed the Capitals' lead to 6-2 by the end of the period as Metropolitan Division-leading Washington improved to 13-1-6 in its past 20 games.

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby — fresh off Team Canada's victory at 4 Nations — scored his 18th goal of the season on a backhand 6:36 into the second that briefly tied the game before the Caps took firm control. The goal was the 610th of Crosby's career, tying him with Bobby Hull for 18th in NHL history.

Sabres 8, Rangers 2: Rasmus Dahlin scored twice and had an assist, and host Buffalo capitalized on a five-goal first period in a win over New York.

Tage Thompson and Ryan McLeod each scored twice, and Jason Zucker had three assists in the teams' return from the 4 Nations Face-Off break. Jack Quinn and Henri Jokiharju also scored. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 26 shots and the Sabres improved to 5-1 in their past six games.

The Rangers' Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad scored second-period goals. New York failed to build on the momentum of its pre-break 11-5-2 run that pushed it to within four points of eighth place in the Eastern Conference.

Ducks 3, Bruins 2 (OT): Leo Carlsson scored with 1:21 left in overtime to give visiting Anaheim a victory over Boston and extend its winning streak to four straight games.

Trevor Zegras and Frank Vatrano also scored for the Ducks. Anaheim goalie John Gibson, a topic of trade talks, stopped 19 shots be-

fore leaving after two periods with an unspecified upper-body injury; Lukas Dostal made 10 saves after replacing him.

The Ducks led 2-0 before Elias Lindholm scored on a five-on-three power play after David Pastrnak drew back-to-back tripping penalties. With goalie Jeremy Swayman pulled for an extra skater, Morgan Geekie tied it 2-2 with 1:11 left in regulation on a slap shot from the left circle.

Predators 2, Avalanche 1: Jonathan Marchessault scored at 9:11 of the third period to give host Nashville a victory over Colorado.

Justin Barron also scored and Juuse Saros made 31 saves for the Predators, who have won two straight.

Stars 4, Devils 2: Evgenii Dadonov and defenseman Thomas Harley scored first-period goals and Casey DeSmith made 31 saves as visiting Dallas defeated New Jersey.

Matt Duchene and Wyatt Johnston also scored for the Stars in the teams' first game after the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament break.

Kraken 2, Panthers 1: Jared McCann scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and visiting Seattle held on to beat Florida.

Kaappo Kakko also had a goal and Joey Daccord stopped 26 shots for the Kraken, who snapped a three-game losing skid and split the two-game season series against the Atlantic Division-leading Panthers.

Blue Jackets 5, Blackhawks 1: Zach Werenski scored and had two assists, and Kent Johnson scored twice for host Columbus in a victory against Chicago to end a four-game losing streak.

Denton Mateychuk and Adam

Fantilli each scored, Dmitri Voronkov had two assists and Elvis Merzlikins made 27 saves.

Jets 4, Blues 3 (SO): Gabriel Vilardi tied it with 28 seconds left with goalie Eric Comrie off for an extra attacker, Kyle Connor scored in the shootout and visiting Winnipeg beat St. Louis for its team-record ninth straight win.

Vilardi also scored in the first period. Nikolaj Ehlers added a goal in regulation and Comrie made 21 saves. The Jets had won eight straight on two previous occasions, the last coming from Oct. 9-26 this season.

Canadiens 5, Senators 2: Brendan Gallagher had a goal and an assist, Sam Montembeault made 25 saves and visiting Montreal beat Ottawa.

Cole Caufield, Patrick Laine, Josh Anderson and Juraj Slafkovsky also scored for the Canadiens. Nick Suzuki had two assists.

Kings 5, Utah 3: Drew Doughty had a goal and two assists to lead host Los Angeles past Utah.

Kevin Fiala, Alex Laferrriere, Trevor Lewis and Mikey Anderson also scored as the Kings improved their record at home to 18-3-2. Darcy Kuemper made 25 saves.

Golden Knights 3, Canucks 1: Brandon Saad scored off a rebound from the left circle 18 seconds into the third period to put host Vegas ahead for good and it extended its winning streak to three games with a victory over Vancouver.

The Golden Knights took sole possession of first place in the Pacific Division, moving two points ahead of the Edmonton Oilers. The Canucks' three-game winning streak ended.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	58	34	21	3	71	193	167
Toronto	56	34	20	2	70	175	159
Tampa Bay	55	31	20	4	66	197	153
Detroit	56	28	22	6	62	163	175
Ottawa	57	29	24	4	62	160	161
Boston	58	27	24	7	61	159	185
Montreal	57	26	26	5	57	168	196
Buffalo	55	23	27	5	51	179	187

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	56	37	11	8	82	204	143
Carolina	57	33	20	4	70	187	160
New Jersey	58	31	21	6	68	177	146
Columbus	57	27	22	8	62	189	187
N.Y. Rangers	56	27	25	4	58	167	176
N.Y. Islanders	55	25	23	7	57	152	162
Philadelphia	58	25	26	7	57	168	195
Pittsburgh	58	23	26	9	55	167	209

Western Conference

Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	57	40	14	3	83	206	137
Dallas	56	36	18	2	74	186	141
Minnesota	57	34	19	4	72	167	162
Colorado	58	33	23	2	68	187	176
Utah	57	24	24	9	57	161	175
St. Louis	57	25	26	6	56	157	175
Nashville	55	20	28	7	47	146	180
Chicago	56	17	32	7	41	150	196

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	57	34	17	6	74	188	156
Edmonton	56	34	18	4	72	185	158
Los Angeles	54	30	17	7	67	156	139
Vancouver	56	26	19	11	63	156	169
Calgary	55	26	21	8	60	148	165
Anaheim	55	25	24	6	56	140	167
Seattle	58	25	29	4	54	171	184
San Jose	57	15	35	7	37	148	216

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

Saturday's games

Toronto 6, Carolina 3
Philadelphia 6, Edmonton 3
Minnesota 4, Detroit 3, OT
Washington 8, Pittsburgh 3
Buffalo 8, N.Y. Rangers 2
Anaheim 3, Boston 2, OT
Nashville 2, Colorado 1
Dallas 4, New Jersey 2
Seattle 2, Florida 1
Columbus 5, Chicago 1
Winnipeg 4, St. Louis 3, SO
Montreal 5, Ottawa 2
Los Angeles 5, Utah 3
Vegas 3, Vancouver 1

Sunday's games

Edmonton at Washington
N.Y. Rangers at Pittsburgh
Anaheim at Detroit
Colorado at St. Louis
New Jersey at Nashville
Seattle at Tampa Bay
Toronto at Chicago
Dallas at N.Y. Islanders
San Jose at Calgary
Vancouver at Utah

Monday's games

San Jose at Winnipeg
Vegas at Los Angeles

Tuesday's games

Anaheim at Buffalo
Calgary at Washington
Carolina at Montreal
Dallas at Columbus
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia
Toronto at Boston
Edmonton at Tampa Bay
N.Y. Rangers at N.Y. Islanders
Detroit at Minnesota
Florida at Nashville
Seattle at St. Louis
Chicago at Utah

Scoring leaders

Through Saturday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	58	21	66	87
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	56	41	64	85
Nikita Kucherov, TB	52	25	57	82
Mitch Marner, TOR	55	16	55	71
Connor McDavid, EDM	50	22	49	71
Kyle Connor, WPG	57	30	40	70
Jack Eichel, LV	56	19	50	69
David Pastrnak, BOS	58	28	41	69
Mikko Rantanen, COL	56	26	41	67
Jack Hughes, NJ	58	26	41	67
Jesper Bratt, NJ	58	17	49	66
Martin Necas, COL	58	20	44	64

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	40	16	.714	—
New York	37	19	.661	3
Brooklyn	21	35	.375	19
Philadelphia	20	36	.357	20
Toronto	17	39	.304	23
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	28	30	.483	—
Miami	26	28	.481	—
Atlanta	26	30	.464	1
Charlotte	14	41	.255	12½
Washington	9	46	.164	17½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	46	10	.821	—
Indiana	31	23	.574	14
Milwaukee	31	24	.564	14½
Detroit	30	26	.536	16
Chicago	22	35	.386	24½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	37	19	.661	—
Houston	35	22	.614	2½
Dallas	31	26	.544	6½
San Antonio	24	30	.444	12
New Orleans	13	43	.232	24
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	45	10	.818	—
Denver	37	20	.649	9
Minnesota	31	26	.544	15
Portland	24	33	.421	22
Utah	14	42	.250	31½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	34	21	.618	—
L.A. Clippers	31	24	.564	3
Golden State	29	27	.518	5½
Sacramento	28	28	.500	6½
Phoenix	27	29	.482	7½

Friday's games				
Cleveland 142, New York 105	Milwaukee 104, Washington 101	Memphis 105, Orlando 104	Miami 120, Toronto 111, OT	Detroit 125, San Antonio 110
Dallas 111, New Orleans 103	Oklahoma City 130, Utah 107	Houston 121, Minnesota 115	Golden State 132, Sacramento 108	
Saturday's games				
Phoenix 121, Chicago 117	Brooklyn 105, Philadelphia 103	L.A. Lakers 123, Denver 100	Utah 124, Houston 115	Portland 141, Charlotte 88
Sunday's games				
New York at Boston	Dallas at Golden State	L.A. Clippers at Indiana	Detroit at Atlanta	Miami at Milwaukee
Phoenix at Toronto	Washington at Orlando	Memphis at Cleveland	San Antonio at New Orleans	Oklahoma City at Minnesota
Monday's games				
Brooklyn at Washington	Chicago at Philadelphia	Denver at Indiana	L.A. Clippers at Detroit	Miami at Atlanta
Minnesota at Oklahoma City	Portland at Utah	Charlotte at Sacramento		
Tuesday's games				
Boston at Toronto	Cleveland at Orlando	Milwaukee at Houston	Phoenix at Memphis	San Antonio at New Orleans
Charlotte at Golden State	Dallas at L.A. Lakers			

Scoring leaders					
Through Saturday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Gil.-Alexander, OKC	54	603	425	1741	32.2
Antetokoun., MIL	43	537	263	1343	31.2
Jokic, DEN	51	569	256	1499	29.4
Edwards, MIN	55	507	275	1520	27.6
Maxey, PHI	48	458	241	1316	27.4
Durant, PHO	43	426	215	1170	27.2
Tatum, BOS	53	480	270	1421	26.8
Booker, PHO	50	425	321	1302	26.0
Brunson, NY	55	496	314	1432	26.0
Davis, DAL	43	410	257	1107	25.7

ROUNDUP

Lakers win as Doncic breaks through

Associated Press

DENVER — Now, that's what the Los Angeles Lakers had in mind when they pulled off their shocking trade for Luka Doncic this month.

After going 1-2 and averaging 14.7 points in his first three games with the Lakers following his departure from Dallas, the 25-year-old superstar had by far his best game in an LA uniform Saturday night in Denver.

Doncic scored 32 points, grabbed 10 rebounds, dished out seven assists and stole four passes while leading the Lakers to a 123-100 wipeout of the Nuggets, who had won nine consecutive games.

"Finally feel like myself a little bit," Doncic said. "Playing this game, this is what I love. Just finally being myself a little bit, that's why I was smiling all game."

So was LeBron James, who chipped in 25 points, 10 rebounds, five assists and three blocks — and several times was on the receiving end of Doncic's long passes for fast-break buckets as Los Angeles led wire-to-wire against its recent nemesis.

"I am a natural-born wide receiver and he's a natural-born quarterback," cracked James.

Doncic said his chemistry with the Lakers, James included, is still budding.

"This is my fourth game," Doncic said. "Chemistry takes time. You saw today that it's getting better. Every day, it's getting better. ... Hard, different, but I'm happy to be playing basketball. Every day is going to get better for me. I'm happy to be here. I'm happy for the new journey."

The duo's performance in Denver should give LA and its followers a sense they can make the kind of deep playoff run that eluded them the last two years when the Nuggets bounced them in the first round, winning eight of nine when James was teamed with Anthony Davis.

The Lakers had just nine turnovers to Denver's 22 and 15 steals to the Nuggets' six. And while they took just one more shot, they made nine more baskets.

Although they surrendered Nikola Jokic's 26th triple-double of the season, Los Angeles held the reigning MVP to just 2-of-7 shooting and forced him into an uncharacteristic half dozen turnovers.

"It was their night," Jamal Murray sighed. "Offensively and defensively."

The Lakers never trailed in winning in Denver for the first time since April 10, 2022.

Doncic, who had 19 points by halftime, had been slowly adjusting to his new team since the big trade and working himself back



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Los Angeles Lakers head coach JJ Redick, left, congratulates guard Luka Doncic as he heads to the bench in the second half against the Nuggets on Saturday in Denver. Doncic scored 32 points in the Lakers' win.

into shape after missing several weeks with a calf injury. But on Saturday, James said he saw a dialed-in Doncic, the very version that led the Mavericks to the NBA Finals last year.

"Once he started hitting those stepback 3s, he could be yelling or barking, either at fans, or us or himself," James said.

Before tipoff, LA coach JJ Reddick said he wanted to see the passionate side of Doncic, "to have a blackout moment where he's yelling." He got that moment when Doncic hit a 3-pointer in the final minute of the first half and let out a big scream.

"It was great," Reddick said.

Doncic's passion was on display again moments later when he drew a technical for arguing that the Nuggets got away with hitting him in the head on his missed floater just before the halftime buzzer.

Aaron Gordon scored 24 points and Murray had 19 for Denver, which lost for the first time this month.

The Nuggets now hit the road for a four-game trip, and coach Michael Malone said now "no one's going to be afraid that the Denver Nuggets are coming to town."

Murray, for one, wasn't worried that this one loss portended an end to Denver's recent dominance of the Lakers.

"Give them credit, they played really good," Murray said. "We've had their number for a number of years. It's one game. We're not going to overreact."

Suns 121, Bulls 117: Devin

Booker had 29 points and eight assists, Kevin Durant scored 27 points and Bradley Beal had 25 in his return to the starting lineup to help visiting Phoenix beat Chicago to end a four-game losing streak.

Playing the third of five straight road games, the Suns overcame an early deficit and held off the Bulls. They won for the first time since Jan. 31 with the Big Three of Booker, Durant and Beal in the lineup together.

Josh Giddey led Chicago with 24 points and had 10 assists and eight rebounds. The Bulls have lost six straight.

Phoenix missed its first seven attempts and shot 29.2% in the first quarter. Chicago jumped out to a 10-point lead on a buzzer-beating floater from Tre Jones. The Suns were 16 of 21 from the field in the second quarter and led by two at the half.

Nets 105, 76ers 103: Nic Claxton scored 16 points and tipped in the winner as time expired, Cam Johnson had 23 points and visiting Brooklyn edged Philadelphia.

Tyrese Maxey buried a 3 with 25 seconds left that tied it at 103 and helped the 76ers rally from a 17-point deficit.

The game seemed set for overtime when Keon Johnson missed a long 3, only for Claxton to be in the right spot to score at the horn and send the Nets storming onto the court in a wild celebration.

Trendon Watford also scored 16 points for Brooklyn. Maxey led Philadelphia with 31 points.

Jazz 124, Rockets 115: Keyonte George scored 30 points and Lauri Markkanen added 23 points and 10 rebounds to rally host Utah to a victory over Houston.

Walker Kessler had 11 points and 17 rebounds, and Isaiah Collier added 12 points and 10 assists to help the Jazz snap a two-game skid.

Alperen Sengun led the Rockets with 27 points and 12 rebounds. Jalen Green added 25 points and 10 assists, and Amen Thompson had 23 points.

Aaron Holiday and Thompson made back-to-back 3-pointers to put Houston up 96-89. But Utah surged ahead for good behind a 21-5 run. Three straight baskets, capped by Cody Williams' layup, gave the Jazz a 110-101 lead with 5:59 left.

Trail Blazers 141, Hornets 88: Anfernee Simons hit five 3-pointers and scored 25 points in the largest blowout victory in Portland history, a romp over visiting Charlotte.

The 53-point margin topped the franchise record of 50 set in a 129-79 home victory over Cleveland on Nov. 21, 1982.

Toumani Camara added 20 points, 10 rebounds, six assists, a steal and two blocks for the Blazers. Shaedon Sharpe had 20 points off the bench, and Jabari Walker had 20 points and 14 rebounds.

Miles Bridges led the Hornets with 17 points. Nick Smith Jr. had 14 points. Jusuf Nurkic added 11 points, eight rebounds and five assists off the bench.

SKIING/MLB

Shiffrin gets milestone 100th World Cup victory

Associated Press

SESTRIERE, Italy — Mikaela Shiffrin is 100% the best in skiing's World Cup history book.

Shiffrin's record-extending 100th career World Cup race win Sunday fulfilled a quest put on hold by a serious crash in November.

Back to racing in her favored slalom event, Shiffrin kept and added to her first-run lead to finish 0.61 seconds ahead of Zrinka Ljutic. Shiffrin's U.S. teammate Paula Moltzan was third, 0.64 back.

Shiffrin, 29, also tied a World Cup record for men and women, as her 155th career top-3 finish on the podium matched Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark.

Shiffrin crossed the finish line and took a long look at the scoreboard showing her victory. She then looked again over her left shoulder with an expression of amazement.

She lay down on the snow with her right hand to her helmet, and was helped to her feet by Moltzan, who hugged her.



MARCO TROVATI/AP

Mikaela Shiffrin, of the U.S., celebrates after winning a World Cup slalom Sunday in Sestriere, Italy. Her 155th top-3 finish tied her for most — by a man or woman — with Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark.

Shiffrin cried at first when she was asked in a post-race interview what it meant after all she had been through in the past few months.

"Everyone had been so nice and so supportive. I am so grateful, thank you," she said.

Shiffrin's 99th win came exactly three months ago in a slalom at Gurgl, Austria.

No. 100 had been within clear sight one week later when Shiffrin crashed out of a giant slalom at Killington, Vt., while racing fast as the first-run leader.

The injuries she suffered in a tumbling fall — severe trauma to her oblique muscles and a deep puncture wound — sidelined her for several weeks and left "PTSD-like" anxiety about racing giant slalom.

In two giant slaloms at Sestriere, she placed 25th Friday and on Saturday finished outside the top-30 fastest racers in the first run for the first time since 2012.

Shiffrin showed no sign of nerves with an

aggressive second run to victory, a full half-second faster than Ljutic who is a three-time winner this season in World Cup slaloms.

"A lot of things had to go right in my direction for this to happen. But I did something right, too," a tearful Shiffrin said.

Shiffrin and Stenmark are the two greatest record-setters in the World Cup's 58-year history.

"She's much better than I was. You cannot compare," Stenmark said in an interview with The Associated Press in 2023.

Shiffrin broke his record of 86 World Cup wins in March 2023, almost 34 years after his last victory. Stenmark's 86th — a giant slalom at Aspen, Colo., in February 1989 — also was his 155th and last podium result.

Shiffrin matched Stenmark's tally of top-3 results in six fewer starts. Sunday was her 278th World Cup race and Stenmark's last podium was in his 284th, according to ski-db.com.

Technology: MLB will test ABS in 13 spring training ballparks

FROM PAGE 24

expanded to many calls for the 2014 season.

Only a batter, pitcher or catcher may challenge a call, signaling with the tap of a helmet or cap; and assistance from the dugout is not allowed. A challenge must be made within 2 seconds, and the graphic of the pitch and strike zone will be shown on the scoreboard and broadcast feed. The umpire then announces the updated count.

MLB estimates the process averages 17 seconds.

The first test of ABS went off without a hitch Thursday.

In Glendale, Ariz, Chicago Cubs pitcher Cody Poteet believed a 95 mph fastball he threw to Los Angeles Dodgers slugger Max Muncy was in the strike zone. Plate umpire Tony Randazzo disagreed and called it a ball.

Instead of arguing, Poteet simply patted the top of his cap.

After a few seconds, the verdict was ready on the video board in right-center field. Poteet was correct — the pitch was a strike, just catching the bottom of the zone. Instead of a 1-1 count for Muncy, the batter was in an 0-2 hole and struck out three pitches later.

"I felt like there was a good, high-percentage chance it was a strike," Poteet said. "And every strike matters."

Poteet played in Triple-A for part of last season, where the ABS system was tested, so he was used to the process and laughed at his minor place in baseball history.

"Using it a little last year, it felt more normal," the pitcher said. "It's cool to be the one to fire away."

Muncy couldn't blame Poteet for challenging the umpire's call. He thought it was a strike, too.

"I look out and the pitcher seemed very excited to challenge that one," Muncy said, grinning.

"When he challenged it, I knew it would be overturned and was like 'Aw, man, I'm going to be the first one.'"

On Saturday in Dunedin, Fla., the New York Yankees used a challenge to turn a strikeout into a walk, and then went on to score three runs in the top of the sixth against the Toronto Blue Jays.

New York's Everson Pereira was called out on strikes on a full count for what would have been the third out of the inning. The call was challenged and changed to a ball, putting Pereira on first base.

Spencer Jones followed with a two-run homer, and two batters later, Ismael Munguia added an RBI triple. The Yankees ultimately lost 6-4.

"The timing to challenge a close pitch was there, and obviously, he was right and convicted on it," Yankees manager Aaron Boone told MLB.com. "We'll continue to gain as much experience with it as we can."

Where will ABS be tested?

MLB has installed the system in 13 spring training ballparks that are home to 19 teams. The Florida stadiums, all in the Florida State League, are the stadiums of Detroit, Minnesota, the New York Mets, the Yankees, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Toronto, plus the ballpark shared by Miami and St. Louis.

Five test sites in Arizona all are shared: the Diamondbacks/Colorado, Chicago White Sox/Dodgers, Cleveland/Cincinnati, Kansas City/Texas and Seattle/San Diego.

About 60% of spring training games are slated for trial, although teams could play vastly different numbers of games with ABS testing. The Diamondbacks are slated for 29 ABS games, while the Cubs have just seven.

What is the technology?

A Hawk-Eye pose-tracking system of cameras was installed and used to track pitches and whether they are within a strike zone based on the height of each batter, who is measured without shoes before a team's first test game. MLB estimated the calibration process at less than one minute for each player.

There are eight cameras at most of the spring training ballparks in the test and 12

at the Diamondbacks/Rockies stadium.

While the strike zone actually called by big league umpires tends to be oval in shape, the ABS strike zone is a rectangle, as in the rule book.

Developing a consensus on what a computer strike zone should be has been an issue.

Some have questions about the precision of the technology, and about how big a role ABS should play in games that count.

"I'm curious to see how it plays out," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said to the Los Angeles Times before Thursday's Cactus League opener.

"Haven't made a decision on if I'm a fan or not."

When did MLB first start using ABS?

MLB started experimenting with ball/strike technology at the independent Atlantic League in 2019.

A challenge system was tried in 2021 at eight of nine ballparks that make up the Florida State League. ABS was promoted to five Triple-A parks in 2022 and expanded to all Triple-A stadiums in 2023, the robot alone for the first three games of each series and a human with a challenge system in the final three. That system was in place at the start of 2024, but MLB switched to an all-challenge system last June 25.

How successful were teams with challenges last year?

Overall return rate over the full Triple-A season was 51%, with challenges by the defense winning 54% and by the offense winning 48%. Challenges with the two-challenge limit in place averaged 3.9 per game, including 2.2 by the offense.

The success percentage has been slightly better for video reviews in the major leagues. Teams increased their success rate on video reviews to 53.7% last season, led by the Boston Red Sox at 67.9%.

Just 1.6% of first pitches were challenges, but the figure increased to 3.9% for two-strike pitches, 5.2% for three-ball pitches and 8.2% for full counts.

Challenge percentages were more likely later in the game. While 1.9% of pitches were challenged in the first three innings, 2.5% were challenged from the fourth through the sixth, 2.8% in the seventh and eighth and 3.6% in the ninth.

How has the computer strike zone changed over time?

MLB has changed the shape of the ABS strike zone several times.

It started with a 19-inch width in 2022, then dropped it to 17 inches — matching the width of home plate. Narrowing the strike zone led to an increase in walks and only small changes in strikeout rates.

The top of the strike zone was 51% of a batter's height in 2022 and 2023, then raised to 53.5% in 2024 after pitchers' complaints the top had been too low. The bottom of the strike zone has been 27% since 2022 after initially being set at 28%.

A batter's stance is not taken into account.

ABS makes the ball/strike decision at the midpoint of the plate, 8½ inches from the front and 8½ inches from the back. The contrasts with the rule book zone called by umpires, which says the zone is a cube, and a strike is a pitch that crosses any part.

Strikeout rates increased 0.5% and walk rates rose 1% in full ABS games and 0.8% in challenge games.

How will ABS impact broadcasts?

Concerned the strike zone box on broadcasts could tip whether to challenge and cause fans to yell at players to challenge, MLB plans to experiment with several broadcast alternatives, among them: show the box but not the ball; show the ball but not the box; and to show only corners of the box.

How can players give feedback?

Dugout iPads available to all teams will have an application called ProTABS that allows players to check pitches against their individual strike zone. Information will update after every plate appearance and players can give MLB comment on single pitches and the overall system.



Poteet

COLLEGE BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

No. 5 Houston holds off No. 8 Iowa State

Associated Press

HOUSTON — L.J. Cryer scored 28 points, Milos Uzan added 19 points and No. 5 Houston held on to beat No. 8 Iowa State 68-59 on Saturday.

Cryer and Uzan combined to shoot 18-for-27, including 8-for-12 on 3-pointers. Emanuel Sharp added 11 points for the Cougars (23-4, 15-1 Big 12), who won their sixth straight.

Milan Momcilovic scored all 16 of his points in the second half to lead a furious rally for the Cyclones (21-6, 11-5). Nate Heise added 12 points, and Tamin Lipsey scored 11.

Trailing by 16 midway through the second half, Iowa State used an 18-3 run to cut the lead to 48-47 on a 3-pointer by Heise with eight minutes remaining. Houston responded with four straight points to push the lead back to five.

No. 1 Auburn 82, Georgia 70: Johni Broome scored a season-high 31 points and added 14 rebounds as the host Tigers defeated the Bulldogs.

For the second straight game, Auburn (25-2, 13-1 SEC) found itself in a tight contest against an unranked opponent before pulling away in the final minutes.

Broome took over in the second half, including a run of seven straight points for the Tigers. The double-double was his 17th of the season.

Denver Jones added 17 points for Auburn, while Chad Baker-Mazara and Miles Kelly had 11 each.

No. 2 Florida 79, LSU 65: Reuben Chinyelu had a career-high 19 points to go with 13 rebounds and the visiting Gators roared back from an eight-point second-half deficit to beat the Tigers.

Thomas Haugh scored 16 points, Alijah Martin added 14 and Walter Clayton Jr. 13 for Florida (24-3, 11-3 SEC), which won its sixth straight.

The Gators surged into the lead for good with a 15-2 run that gave them a 53-48 lead. Chinyelu scored seven points during that spurt, including a put-back as he was fouled.

No. 3 Duke 110, Illinois 67: Cooper Flagg had 16 points in his Madison Square Garden debut and seven players scored in double figures for the Blue Devils in a blowout of the Illini.

Isaiah Evans paced Duke (24-3) with 17 points off the bench, and Kon Knueppel added 15. The Blue Devils built a 23-point lead in the first half and were never threatened while setting a season scoring high.

Tre White had 16 points for Illinois (17-11) in a nonconference matchup between programs that lost in the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament last year.

No. 4 Alabama 96, No. 17 Ken-



KAREN WARREN/AP

Houston guards Milos Uzan, right, and L.J. Cryer celebrate Uzan's 3-pointer during the first half against Iowa State in Houston on Saturday. The pair combined to shoot 8-for-12 on 3-pointers in the victory.

tucky 83: Mark Sears scored 30 points and the host Crimson Tide came from behind for a win over the Wildcats.

Alabama (22-5, 11-3 Southeastern Conference), which had lost its previous two games, got 19 points from Aden Holloway, who made five 3-pointers. Chris Youngblood had 14 points.

Koby Brea led Kentucky (18-9, 7-7 SEC) with 20 points.

No. 6 Tennessee 77, No. 7 Texas A&M 69: Chaz Lanier had a season-high 30 points, including 8 3-pointers to lead the visiting Volunteers over the Aggies.

Lanier, a senior transfer from North Florida, went 8-for-13 from beyond the arc and 10-for-18 overall in game that featured 11 lead changes and eight ties.

Jordan Gainey made a 3-pointer with 3:33 to left to give Tennessee (22-5, 9-5 Southeastern Conference) a 63-59 lead. Zakai Zeigler hit a 3 in front of the Vols' bench on an inbound pass with 21 seconds remaining to seal the victory.

No. 9 Texas Tech 73, West Virginia 51: JT Toppin scored 22 points, freshman Christian Anderson had a season-high 21 points with five 3-pointers in his first career start to help the host Red Raiders beat the Mountaineers.

Toppin and Texas Tech (21-6, 12-4 Big 12) overcame a slow start, with the 6-foot-9 reigning AP national player of the week making nine of his last 10 shots after missing his first six.

Oregon 77, No. 11 Wisconsin 73 (OT): Nate Bittle had 23 points and Jackson Shelstad made a desperation 3 to force overtime that led to a Ducks win over the host Badgers.

Bittle, a 7-foot center, scored six points in overtime to help snap Wisconsin's five-game winning streak. Shelstad scored 13 points as Oregon (20-8, 9-8 Big Ten) extended its winning streak to four.

Arkansas 92, No. 15 Missouri 85: Zvonimir Ivisic scored 20 points, Johnell Davis added 18 and the host Razorbacks beat the Tigers for their third win over a top-15 team this season.

Ivisic and Davis made back-to-back 3-pointers during a second-half run that saw Arkansas (16-11, 5-9 Southeastern Conference) turn a three-point deficit into a seven-point lead with less than eight minutes to play.

Missouri (20-7, 9-5) committed 18 turnovers and the Razorbacks took advantage, scoring 30 points off them.

No. 18 Clemson 79, SMU 69: Jaeden Zackery had 19 points, including a career-best five 3-pointers before halftime, plus six rebounds, seven assists and five steals to help the visiting Tigers beat the Mustangs.

Chase Hunter added 17 points and Viktor Lakhin had 16 for Clemson (22-5, 14-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), who are tied for second with Louisville and one-game behind Duke.

BYU 96, No. 19 Arizona 95: Richie Saunders scored 23 points, including two free throws with 3.2 seconds left, to give the visiting Cougars a win over the Wildcats.

It was BYU's fourth win in a row and second consecutive over a ranked opponent.

Saunders was 8-for-10 from the field and hit 3 of 4 3-pointers as the Cougars (19-8, 10-6 Big 12) shot 55.4% and made 14 of 31 from 3-point range.

Arizona (18-9, 12-4) got 27 points from Caleb Love, including two free throws with 13 seconds left to put the Wildcats up 95-94. He was one of five players in double figures for Arizona, which shot 10-for-22 from 3-point range.

Oklahoma 93, No. 21 Mississippi State 87: Jeremiah Fears had 27 points and a career-high 10 assists, as the host Sooners defeated the Bulldogs to snap a five-game skid and revive their NCAA Tournament hopes.

Fears, an 18-year-old freshman, made 7 of 12 field goals and 11 of 14 free throws. It was one of his most efficient performances overall and his second-best scoring effort of the season.

No. 23 Kansas 96, Oklahoma State 64: Hunter Dickinson had 16 points and 11 rebounds, and four other Jayhawks scored at least 14 as host Kansas demolished the Cowboys.

The Jayhawks (18-9, 9-7 Big 12) used a well-rounded offensive attack and held Oklahoma State to

almost 30 points below its season average. They led by 29 at half-time and stretched it to as many as 39 points in the second half.

Vanderbilt 77, No. 24 Mississippi 72: Chris Manon's 3-pointer with 4:53 left put the host Commodores ahead to stay as Vanderbilt snapped a three-game skid.

Manon finished with a season-high 16 points. Jason Edwards added 15, Tyler Nickel had 13 and Devin McGlockton scored 10.

First-year coach Mark Byington has the Commodores (18-9, 6-8 Southeastern Conference) closer to an NCAA Tournament berth after being picked to finish last in the SEC. Vanderbilt has three wins over ranked opponents.

No. 25 Louisville 89, Florida State 81: Chucky Hepburn made five free throws down the stretch as part of his 29 points, J'Vonne Hadley added 18 points as the host Cardinals withstood several second-half rallies to hold off the Seminoles for their fifth consecutive win.

Louisville (21-6, 14-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) led 39-19 late in the first half before Florida State closed within six points several times in the second half. Hadley and Terrence Edwards Jr. (16 points) made layups for a double-digit advantage, and Hepburn followed with a basket in the paint and two free throws for a 74-61 cushion.

Saint Mary's 74, Gonzaga 67: Mikey Lewis scored 18 points off of the bench to help lead the host Gaels over the Bulldogs in a matchup of the top teams in the West Coast Conference.

Lewis shot 5-for-7 from 3-point range, and went 3-for-3 from the line for Saint Mary's (25-4, 15-1 West Coast Conference). Mitchell Saxen added 16 points while finishing 7-for-13 from the floor with nine rebounds.

Gonzaga (21-8, 12-4) was led in scoring by Graham Ike, who finished with 19 points. Nolan Hickman added 14 points and two blocks for the Bulldogs. Ryan Nembhard had 11 points and eight assists. Gonzaga broke a five-game winning streak.

VCU 70, George Mason 54: Max Shulga scored 22 points as the host Rams beat the Patriots to create a tie atop the Atlantic 10.

Shulga also contributed five rebounds for VCU (22-5, 12-2 A-10). Jack Clark scored 12 points and added nine rebounds. Phillip Russell finished with 11 points. It was the sixth win in a row for the Rams.

George Mason (21-6, 12-2) was led in scoring by Darius Maddox and K.D. Johnson, who each added 12 points. Jalen Haynes also had 10 points and eight rebounds. The loss ended an 11-game winning streak for the Patriots.

SPORTS



Luka, Lakers get in sync
Doncic has best game yet with LA in victory over Nuggets » **NBA, Page 21**

MLB



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

The Texas Rangers' Josh Smith taps his helmet to challenge a strike three call by umpire John Bacon, left, during an exhibition game against the San Francisco Giants on Saturday in Surprise, Ariz. Bacon's call was upheld by the Automated Ball-Strike System., which is being tested by MLB during spring training after four years of testing in the minors.

Tapping into technology

Robot umps getting their 1st big-league test during spring training

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — A computerized system that calls balls and strikes is being tested during Major League Baseball spring training exhibition games after four years of experiments in the minor leagues.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred is an advocate of the Automated Ball-Strike System, which potentially as early as 2026 could be used to aid MLB home plate umpires, but not replace them.

Starting in 2024, MLB focused testing on

a challenge system in which the human umpire makes each original call. Data from the spring training test could cause MLB to make alterations to the system for Triple-A games this season.

How does the Automated Ball-Strike System work?

Stadiums are outfitted with cameras that track each pitch and judge whether it crossed home plate within the strike zone. In early testing, umpires wore ear buds and would hear “ball” or “strike,” then relay

that to players and fans with traditional hand signals.

The challenge system adds a wrinkle. During spring training, human umps will call every pitch, but each team will have the ability to challenge two calls per game, with no additions for extra innings. A team retains its challenge if successful, similar to the regulations for big league teams with video reviews, which were first used for home run calls in August 2008 and widely

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ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

A Trackman device, part of the Automated Ball-Strike System, is mounted on the balcony behind home plate before a spring training game between the Kansas City Royals and the Los Angeles Dodgers on Saturday in Surprise, Ariz.

Shiffrin wins No. 100, ties for most podiums » Skiing, Page 22

