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Gillibrand says military needs major reform on sex assault

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Congress has provided the military more than \$1 billion, enacted 249 legislative provisions and chartered panels, commissions and committees to address sexual assault in the military, yet the statistics from the past 15 years show little progress, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said Wednesday during a Senate hearing.



Gillibrand

“Not one of these steps has reduced sexual assaults within the ranks. We are right where we were when we started, nothing has changed,” said Gillibrand, who is the chairwoman of the subpanel for military personnel on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Senators on Wednesday focused on sexual assault in the military during the hearing, which had three panels featuring survivors of sexual assault and those who advocate on their behalf and those who study the problem for the government, nonprofits or for academic research.

“Nearly every secretary of defense since Dick Cheney” has promised to do better, yet the number of assaults have remained at about 20,000 almost every year that the Defense Department has

SEE GILLIBRAND ON PAGE 6

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Civilian advocates, veterans join Pentagon commission on military sexual assault
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EXTREMISM IN THE MILITARY



MARIE PIHULIC/U.S. Army

Sgt. Maj. Viridiana Lavalle shares her role in ensuring extremism is not tolerated in the ranks March 15 in Haymond Conference Center at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has directed all military leaders to discuss extremism with their units.

Training gets mixed reviews

Soldiers divided on stand-down kicking off DOD's fight against extremism

By SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Faced with the herculean task of combating extremism in the ranks, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin directed all military leaders to gather with their units by the first week of April to discuss what it is, how and when to report it, and what it means to serve.

The extremism stand-down is taking place at bases around the world for all branches, and it's getting mixed reviews. The Army, as the largest force, has the most people going

RELATED

Lawmakers voice concerns over the Pentagon's lack of centralized extremism data
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through the training.

Some soldiers expressed frustration at “check-the-blocks” training led by military officials who were not prepared to answer complex questions about extremist activity.

Others said the training was effective when skilled instructors led honest, open discussions.

Stars and Stripes interviewed soldiers who completed training, some who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

A staff sergeant at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, said the training needed more real discussion about extremism.

“You had a few people who were very loud and boisterous about their opinion, but then

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<h1>EXCHANGE RATES</h1>		
Military rates		
Euro costs (March 26)	\$1.15	
Dollar buys (March 26)	0.8255	
British pound (March 26)	\$1.34	
Japanese yen (March 26)	106.00	
South Korean won (March 26)	1107.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.3718	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2605	
China(Yuan)	6.5445	
Denmark (Krone)	6.2974	
Egypt (Pound)	15.7296	
Euro	.8469	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7695	
Hungary (Forint)	308.64	
Israel (Shekel)	3.3165	
Japan (Yen)	109.11	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3021	
Norway (Krone)	8.6147	
Philippines (Peso)	48.52	
Poland (Zloty)	3.93	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7501	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3466	
South Korea (Won)		1136.36
Switzerland (Franc)		.9354
Thailand (Baht)		31.13
Turkey (NewLira)		7.9551

(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.)

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

CHINA

RUSSIA

N. KOREA

S. KOREA

Sea of Japan

JAPAN

Pacific Ocean

Seoul 63/49

Osan 65/49

Busan 65/58

Sasebo 70/52

Iwakuni 64/45

Okinawa 73/68

Misawa 48/73

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Philippine Sea

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

TODAY

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MILITARY

N. Korea launches ballistic missiles, US and Japan say

By SETH ROBSON
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

North Korea has fired two ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast, according to reports from U.S., South Korean and Japanese officials Thursday morning.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the launch of a single "unidentified projectile" at 7.06 a.m. and a second at 7.25 a.m. They traveled about 280 miles, reaching an altitude of about 37 miles.

It was North Korea's first launch of ballistic missiles since President Joe Biden took office. Analysts told The Associated Press they expect the North to gradually dial up its weapons displays to gain bargaining power as it angles to get back into stalled talks aimed at leveraging nuclear weapons for badly needed economic benefits.

The South Korean government convened an urgent meeting of the country's National Security Council at 9 a.m. in response to the launches.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga described the projectiles as "ballistic missiles" in a tweet that morning. An unnamed U.S. official quoted by The New York Times also referred to them as "ballistic missiles."

"It threatens the peace and se-

curity of Japan and the region, and is a violation of U.N. resolutions," Suga wrote, referring to the U.N. Security Council ban on North Korea developing and testing ballistic missiles. "I strongly protest and strongly condemn it. The government has confirmed that it has fallen into the Sea of Japan outside Japan's exclusive economic zone."

Japan's coast guard has warned vessels in that body of water, which is known in South Korea as the East Sea, to steer clear of any fallen objects and pass on their location, Nikkei Asia magazine reported.

U.S. Forces Korea has been consulting closely with South Korea and Japan and will continue to monitor the situation, spokesman Col. Lee Peters told Stars and Stripes in an email Thursday afternoon.

"This activity highlights the threat that North Korea's illicit weapons program poses to its neighbors and the international community," he wrote. "The U.S. commitment to the defense of [South Korea] remains ironclad."

Recent launches by North Korea have been a serious issue for the international community, including Japan, said a statement Thursday from Japan's defense ministry.

"We will do everything we can to collect and analyze information,

and to monitor the situation in order to protect the lives and properties of Japanese citizens," it said.

The launches come less than a week after Pyongyang fired multiple short-range missiles in the wake of a visit to Seoul by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

North Korea topped a list of issues they tackled during two days of talks with their South Korean counterparts.

The allies' goals are clear, Blinken said: the denuclearization of North Korea, reducing the threat that country presents and "improving the lives of all Koreans, including North Koreans who suffer systematic abuses at the hands of their leaders."

Last week North Korea, in its first statement geared toward the Biden administration, warned the United States not to ruffle any feathers.

"If [the U.S.] wants to sleep in peace for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step," North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, said in a statement published March 16 in the state-run Rodong Sinmun newspaper.

This month's computer-simulated military drills between U.S. and South Korean forces drew Kim Yo Jong's wrath.

"The South Korean government



AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

People watch a TV showing a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at the Suseo Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday.

yet again chose the 'March of War,' the 'March of Crisis,' " she said.

Biden, speaking to reporters Tuesday at the White House, said he didn't consider last weekend's missile tests to be a provocation.

"No, according to the Defense Department it's business as usual," he said. "There's no new wrinkle in what they did."

Asked if the tests affect diplomacy, the president laughed.

The latest missile launch is most likely a reaction to Biden's downplaying of the weekend missile tests, Harry Kazianis, senior director of Korean studies at the Center for the National Interest, said in emailed comments Thursday.

The North, just like during the Trump administration, will react to even the slightest of what it feels are any sort of loss of face or disparaging comments coming out of Washington, he said.

"While Biden's comments and chuckle were clearly not meant to trigger a reaction, the North Koreans will use any pretext that is offered to raise the ante — moving us closer and closer to the dark days of 2017," he said.

In the months ahead, it's likely the North Koreans will test bigger and more advanced missiles, he said.

"We should also expect a fiery response when the Biden North Korea policy is announced, which likely will be a pressure strategy to get the Kim regime to give up its nuclear weapons," Kazianis said.

The stage is set for another round of North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile and potentially even nuclear testing — and another U.S.-North Korea showdown, he said.

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DOD OKs request for housing migrant children at Texas bases

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Joint Base San Antonio and Fort Bliss in Texas will soon house migrant children who were detained crossing the U.S.-Mexico border alone, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

"[The Department of Defense] will provide [Department of Health and Human Services] officials access to these locations immediately to begin initial actions to prepare for receiving unaccompanied migrant children as soon as preparations are complete," John Kirby, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said in a statement.

The approval comes a day after the Pentagon announced the two bases had been requested by the Department of Health and Human Services to temporarily house the children. The U.S. border with Mexico has experienced rising numbers in migration, including unaccompanied children, since April due to violence, natural disasters, food insecurity, and poverty in Central America, ac-



ELI HARTMAN/AP

Migrant teenagers play soccer behind the fence of a temporary holding facility for migrant minors from the southern border of the United States on Wednesday south of Midland, Texas.

cording to a Department of Homeland Security statement issued March 13.

Children who are found by U.S. Border Patrol agents must be transferred to HHS within 72 hours, but more than 3,000 children have been held for longer and in unfit facilities, according to

recent news reports.

Kirby told reporters earlier Wednesday at the Pentagon that the HHS request for support at the bases would last until the end of the year. He would not say how many children HHS expects to house at each location.

Children sent to Joint Base San

Antonio will stay in a vacant dormitory. Land at Fort Bliss will be used to build temporary housing facilities. The support is "on a fully reimbursable basis" and will "not negatively affect" military operations or readiness, according to the statement.

While this would not be the first

time that unaccompanied children have been housed at military installations, the coronavirus pandemic does add to health concerns among the children and base community, Kirby said.

The children will be under the care of HHS, including their supervision and meals, when they are at the bases. The Defense Department could help with contracting support to help expedite the process, Kirby said.

HHS also conducted a site survey Wednesday of Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., the headquarters for U.S. Space Command, as an additional site to house children, Kirby said, but the results from the visit are still unknown.

HHS had looked at Fort Lee near Richmond, Va., as a site for the children. It was determined, however, that the infrastructure was not suitable for them and is no longer being considered, Kirby said.

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MILITARY

Training: One-day stand-down is start of prevention program

FROM PAGE 1

the majority of people were just [like], 'This was kind of a waste of time,' " he said late last week.

The one-day stand-down is the start of the Defense Department's renewed approach to preventing extremism.

The Pentagon chief directed the stand-down to address extremism in February in response to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol in Washington. Thirty-seven military veterans and active-duty service members have been charged for their involvement.

"This is just a step in what the secretary believes will be [a] very deliberate process to try and tackle this problem. ... It might bring to light concerns and experience that he might not be aware of," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in February.

The Defense Department provided loose guidelines on what form the stand-down should take, including discussions about prohibited activities, reporting extremist behavior, case studies and answers to common questions. Unit heads and supervisors could then tailor the training.

The Army's message: "Extremist activity is incongruent with military life and will not be tolerated," according to the office of public affairs.

Active-duty members have until April 6 to complete the training, while reserve forces have an additional month to finish.

Ramón Colón-López, the senior enlisted adviser to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters last week that the stand-down was delegated to the lowest levels of unit command because the majority of troops are at that level.

"The people that are actually affecting the mission, that's where they live. For us here at the Pentagon, we're far detached from that," Colón-López said. "So we have to trust those commanders in the field to be able to fix their behavior."

Inconsistent experiences

Colón-López described the training as a "conversation" with legal experts, military police and others.

Still, "death by PowerPoint" came up in conversations with members of the Army last week after their training. Outside experts were not always there to help facilitate the discussions, which left supervisors without subject matter expertise on their own.

A sergeant at Fort Sam Houston said his training was focused on Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention training, or SHARP, as well as Equal Opportunity training, which is designed to prohibit discrimination.

"It kind of felt like they were trying to pack in all of the mandated trainings in at once," he said. "A lot of people were like, 'What was the point of this?'"

A logistics officer at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri said his training did a good job of focusing on extremism, highlighting that a person from any background can be recruited or be active in an extremist organization. He said he was frustrated by how hard it is to identify red flags.

In front of 50 soldiers in an auditorium, the sergeant first class leading the training asked the group to point out the warning signs after each case study.

"That was the frustrating part because there really were no



DAVID CROZIER/The NCO Leadership Center of Excellence

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Yairick McFadden, executive officer to the NCO Leadership Center of Excellence commandant, kicks off an extremism stand-down training at the NCOLCoE on Fort Bliss, Texas, last week.

warning signs. ... They can hide it or lie to you," he said.

The case studies, he said, were blatant examples of extremism, like a terrorist attack, which left less-obvious "gray areas" for officers to figure out on their own. He would have preferred a clear list of examples with action items, a sentiment that was shared by others.

The bulk of the training focused on the examples, defining extremism and reporting extremist behavior, and the rest was giving "proof that it exists," he said.

Political, not partisan

In interviews, soldiers drew equivalencies between the Black Lives Matter racial protests last year and the storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6. They questioned the timing of the stand-down and asked why it wasn't done last year, when protests occurred in Seattle, sparked by the murder of George Floyd.

Colón-López said last week that he was "concerned" over the number of troops who shared that view, from "every echelon."

The answer, he said, is simple: "When the military was called upon to go ahead and support an effort, we did. We never got called for the law enforcement issue that was happening in Seattle."

Christina Bembek, a U.S. Army War College fellow who has written about extremist theories and the military, said in an interview Monday that to ensure troops know the difference between the two events, it's important to make them understand that while the military is not partisan, it is political.

"We follow the orders of the elected politicians in the government. ... We are political. But we are not partisan. And that's where I think we need to more clearly de-

scribe things" and talk about what partisan means, she said.

She said that having a rich discussion on what the First Amendment is, the intent of the individuals who were outside the Capitol and people who entered a government building unlawfully would be fruitful.

"You don't have to have any type of partisan discussion on that," she said, when you focus on the Constitution.

Success story

Tyler Santangelo, a sergeant in leadership school to become a staff sergeant at the Fort Sill Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in Oklahoma, said his nine-hour-long training was valuable, but training at the academy was different than it is for most units.

"I got lucky enough to where I did it at a noncommissioned officer academy where there [are] trained instructors who know how to lead open discussion."

The training started with discussing how the soldiers define extremism and what it means under Army doctrine, and "how [extremism] counteracts our values," Santangelo, 26, said in an interview last week.

Santangelo said that he and others thought the training would be a way to "weed out people on the right side of the political spectrum," but that it opened his eyes to the types of extremism in the ranks.

The Virginia native said he learned how to identify red flags — noticing people who actively disengage from the group, no matter the situation, for example — and how to target young people to combat isolation early.

One way to prevent loneliness is to encourage new soldiers to contact their parents when they get to the unit. The key is also fostering

an environment of empathy and talking to each other, and not being "afraid to send it up [the chain of command] if something's going wrong," Santangelo said.

"The idea now is that taking the time to care about your soldiers and talk to them and make them feel like they're actually part of the team is the No. 1 way to combat [extremism]," he said.

What's next

The DOD stand-down guidelines do not require unit heads to provide feedback, but Colón-López said that the services will share lessons and identify gaps with the defense secretary.

That could lead to more formalized annual or professional military training, or the establishment of a task force on extremism in the military, he said.

Bembek, the U.S. Army War College fellow, has ideas on ways to address extremism beyond the basics.

Media literacy should be incorporated into the training to equip soldiers with critical thinking skills to decode fact from fiction online, she said.

A bolstered civic education would also help, she said, so that troops better understand the military oath. However, the most important part of combating extremism for her is having a constant dialogue so soldiers can openly express their beliefs and views.

"It's good to be in an environment where soldiers can ask the tough questions and leaders can think about it, research it, talk to outside sources and then come back and say, 'All right, let's talk more about this,'" she said. "This is just the start of this conversation."



KEVIN SPENCE/U.S. Army

Capt. Heath Kennedy, 1-409th Brigade Engineer Battalion Alpha Team Observer, Coach and Trainer officer in charge, leads a discussion on extremism earlier this month in Radcliff, Ky.

MILITARY

Lawmakers seek extremism data

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers on Wednesday voiced concern over an absence of centralized Defense Department data on how many extremists there are in the military as Congress looks for ways to tackle the issue after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Data on extremism in the military “is indeed really poor. It is hard to have a conversation about this when we don’t have the data and when we don’t have the Department of Defense to talk through these issues,” Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., said during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the issue.

The witness panel for the hearing did not include Defense Department officials and was made up of experts from the Southern Poverty Law Center and the legal nonprofit First Liberty Institute, as well as a professor from American University.

Slotkin said if the committee is discussing Defense Department action on extremism in the ranks, Pentagon officials should be given the “opportunity to talk about the breadth of the problem, once they’ve had a full chance to review it.”

During the hearing, lawmakers sparred over ways to get at the problem as extremism stand-downs take place at bases around the world for all branches of the military at the direction of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. Military leaders must gather with their units by the first week of April to discuss what extremism is, how and when to report it, and what it means to serve.

Austin ordered the stand-downs in February in response to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. Thirty-seven military veterans and active-duty service members have been charged for their involvement, so far, according to a recent analysis from CBS News.

Audrey Kurth Cronin, director of the Center for Security, Innovation and New Technology at American University, told the committee Tuesday that the most urgent problem in finding ways to address extremism is an “absence of good data.”

“The 2021 Capitol insurrection leaves the impression that the number of extremists in the military is increasing. Yet, DOD officials repeatedly claim that the number is small. No one truly knows. No serious plan can be built without defining the scope of the problem,” she said.

When the defense secretary announced the stand-down in Feb-

ruary at a news conference, he said he expects the numbers of extremists “to be small. But I would just say that, you know, small numbers in this case can have an outsized impact.”

Lawmakers on the committee largely agreed Wednesday that while the vast majority of those who serve do not espouse extremist views, any risk to national security should be examined and any military member who seeks to delegitimize the government needs to be weeded out of the ranks.

Cronin explained Defense Department services and agencies are not collecting centralized data to measure “allegations, disciplinary infractions, discharges, or reprimands related to extremism.” It is also unclear how many military members are identified as extremists and how many crimes they have committed.

“Military leaders like to say that you cannot fix what you cannot measure, and no serious plan can be built without defining the scope of the problem,” Cronin said.

Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., agreed.

“We seem to lack an agreed upon baseline in fact from which we could even measure an increase or decrease in extremism,” he said.

Without clear data and without Defense Department witnesses to testify on the issue, Gallagher said: “I fear we’re left making somewhat wild suppositions based on our ideological priors, which is never a good place to be.”

Rep. Mike Rogers, of Alabama, the ranking Republican on the committee, said if “there’s better data to be had, then we should address that in the [National Defense Authorization Act],” the annual bill that sets Pentagon policy and spending priorities.

Cronin told lawmakers that one way to collect data is to use command climate surveys that are used to assess the readiness of a command. A question about extremism could be added to the assessment that service members take anonymously to get a better sense of the extent of the problem.

She also proposed creating a consistent discharge code that can be tracked. Congress should direct the services to provide them with a regular report that includes cases that are reported through the discharge process, as well as cases that naturally come up independent of that process.

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Dutch to invest millions to expand US Army weapons depot in Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The Netherlands will spend more than \$40 million to expand a U.S. Army weapons depot in the country, where gear is pre-positioned for soldiers to draw from in a crisis, defense officials said.

“The planned improvements are necessary due to the fact that the U.S. wishes to expand and intensify its use of (the depot),” the Dutch Defense Ministry said in a statement Wednesday.

The funds will be used to renovate storage hangars at the site and improve infrastructure, including a rail connection adjacent to the site.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa has in recent years added numerous pre-positioned stock sites on the Continent. The pre-positioning program was developed as a way to add combat power that forces could quickly access in a crisis or during exercises, military officials said. Other stock locations are in Germany, Belgium, Italy and Poland.

The Dutch location in Eygelshoven, which opened in 2016, includes 450,000 square feet of warehouse space and 50,000 square feet of paved storage for heavy vehicles. Some 7,000 pieces of Army equipment are stored



405TH ARMY FIELD SUPPORT BRIGADE

Dutch Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld delivers remarks at the 405th Army Field Support Brigade's Army Prepositioned Stock-2 site at Eygelshoven in the Netherlands, on Wednesday.

there, including 765 vehicles.

During a visit Wednesday to the site, Dutch Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld said the expansion project “not only contributes to bilateral relations between the U.S. and the Netherlands, but also to trans-Atlantic and European security.”

Expanding Eygelshoven will “improve military mobility in Europe and contribute to deterrence,” Bijleveld said. “It gives further meaning to our role as ‘gateway to Europe,’ as transit and host nation.”

By next year, Army depots

around Europe will house an Armored Brigade Combat Team’s worth of equipment, as well as engineer, artillery, military police, logistical and medical capabilities, according to U.S. Army Europe and Africa.

Earlier this month, about 35 next-generation M109A7 Paladin Artillery Systems and M992A3 Field Artillery Ammunition Support Vehicles were put into storage at the Army’s Coleman Barracks in Mannheim, Germany.

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MILITARY

Vets, experts are part of sexual assault board

By Caitlin M. Kenney
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military veterans and experts on violence against women are among the 12 new members of the Pentagon’s Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, the organization’s chairwoman announced Wednesday.

“I think that these folks who we’re bringing in will be looking at this with fresh eyes,” Lynn Rosenthal said during a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The 12 members are split into four “lines of effort”: accountability, prevention, climate and culture, and victim care and support. The commission is made up mostly of women and slightly more than half of the members are veterans, according to Rosenthal.

They include military academy graduates, prosecutors, and victim advocates, according to member biographies on the Pentagon’s

website regarding the commission.

The commission members are Cindy Dyer, retired Marine Corps Brig. Gen. James Schwenk, Meghan Tokash, Dr. Debra Houry, Neil Irvin, retired Air Force Maj. Gen. James Johnson, Army Lt. Col. Bridgette Bell, Kris Fuhr, Kyleanne Hunter, Indira Henard, Kristina Rose and Kayla Williams.

The organization’s first meeting was held Wednesday and was attended by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as well as Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“Sexual assault and sexual harassment in our military remains a significant problem, but we are taking action,” Austin said in a series of tweets about the commission. “Their recommendations will be taken with the utmost gravity, and I look forward to reviewing them upon completion.”

The commission was formally announced Feb. 26 following an order from President Joe Biden to establish the organization to find solutions to sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Austin has tasked the top uniformed leaders for each of the Defense Department’s five military services to submit internal reviews of each service’s prevention policies and also asked the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness to find data and information on the latest initiatives for preventing violence.

At the same time the commission’s members were announced, the Senate Armed Services Committee was holding a hearing with victim advocates and experts on sexual assault in the military. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., was skeptical that another commission on the subject would really fix the problem.

“Not one of these steps has re-



Andrew Harnik/AP

Lynn Rosenthal, chairwoman of the Department of Defense's Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, speaks during a media briefing at the Pentagon, on Wednesday.

duced sexual assault within the ranks. We are right where we started. Nothing has changed,” she said in her opening remarks.

But at the Pentagon, Rosenthal highlighted the untapped expertise and experiences that the members bring to addressing military sexual assault.

“You will see that there are more women than men serving on this panel, that there are experts in gender integration into the forces serving on this panel, that there are civilian advocates,” she said. “These are folks whose views, quite honestly, haven’t re-

ally been solicited in this debate. And I think that’s part of what’s different, new voices at the table.”

Along with the 12 executive members, the commission has an “advisory support team” consisting of senior Pentagon leaders, including members of the Joint Staff and the acting service secretaries. In addition, each “line of effort” has a working group made up of Defense Department leaders and subject-matter experts for the military services.

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Gillibrand: Retired airman says fewer cases are being prosecuted

FROM PAGE 1

conducted prevalence surveys, Gillibrand said. “Military leadership has come before us and said that the chain of command would solve this problem. They’re not solving the problem. They have failed.”

Many of the witnesses, including Quinton McNair, a retired Army veteran with more than seven years in the field of victim advocacy, offered suggestions on how the military could do a better job, including by holding perpetrators accountable.

“People who commit sexual assault are like sharks hunting. You aren’t aware of them until they attack. Through accountability, we can make the water so hostile to the shark that they are afraid to hunt,” he said. “Lack of accountability emboldens them.”

No accountability also contradicts the effort of service members and civilians working within units to support victims and prevent future assaults, McNair said.

Gillibrand introduced legislation in 2013 that would overhaul the military justice system and take the decision to prosecute certain serious crimes such as sexual assaults out of the hands of commanders and give it to independent, trained military prosecutors.

“The justice system simply is in the wrong hands,” she said.

Gillibrand has not yet reintroduced the bill into this year’s leg-

islative session.

“There is no accountability right now in the military,” said Natalie Khawam, attorney for the family of Spc. Vanessa Guillen, a soldier who was killed by another soldier at Fort Hood, Texas, nearly one year ago. Guillen told her family that she faced sexual harassment at the base but was too afraid to report it because some of those harassers were in her chain of command.

“A lot of people have a loyalty to the chain of command, but it’s proven a failure. It’s proven to have failed, and we need improvement,” Khawam said. “I’m here to support any kind of improvement reform to the military so our soldiers have a voice, they have the rights that we all have and they have the protections that they deserve.”

The attorney also worked last year with the Guillen family to introduce the I am Vanessa Guillen Act, which is similar to Gillibrand’s bill, but only applies to sex crimes. It also makes sexual harassment a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and changes the options for service members who report assaults.

Khawam said they intend to reintroduce the legislation this year.

Guillen’s death also resulted in the creation of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee, which released a report in December that found the base had a

climate “permissive” of sexual assault and harassment. It also included specific ways that the Army’s program to respond to and prevent sexual assault and harassment is failing soldiers.

Military leaders have told Congress that removing prosecution decisions from commanders undercuts their authority and ability to maintain unit discipline.

Sen. Thom Tillis, of North Carolina, the ranking Republican on the committee, said Wednesday that he warned service secretaries about a month ago that they are losing ground.

“There are members that are beginning to wonder whether or not we should keep the current structure,” he said, citing the Fort Hood report for sowing doubt.

Tillis said the challenge of sexual assault in the military is no different than in society or on college campuses.

“I don’t want the young men and women who are considering going into the military to think it’s a more dangerous environment say at the service academies than what they’re going to find in any fine U.S. institution across this country,” he said.

Amy Braley Franck, founder of Never Alone, which provides advocacy and support for victims, disagreed.

“All the Gold Star mothers that I talk to [said] when their children, their soldiers, were deployed, or out of the country and

being sexually assaulted, they have no bug out plan. They can’t just go to a rape crisis center when they’re in Afghanistan. They’re not like a college student, they can’t say, ‘Mom and Dad, come get me,’” she said. “They can be prosecuted if they just leave to make themselves safe.”

Meanwhile, Gillibrand said prosecution and conviction rates have gone down. In 2010, the military had a 24% conviction rate. In 2019, it dropped to 7%, which amounted to 264 cases, she said. In 2014, there were 422 cases with convictions.

Retired Air Force Col. Don Christensen, president of Protect Our Defenders, further broke down those numbers in his testimony. In fiscal year 2014, there were 4,660 unrestricted reports of sexual assault or rape. Of those, 588, or about 12.4%, were prosecuted and resulted in 204 nonconsensual sex convictions.

By fiscal year 2019, the number of unrestricted reports rose to 5,699, but prosecutions and convictions plummeted to 363 with 138 sex crime convictions, he said.

“They’re taking fewer, not more cases to trial, and they’re losing them at a much greater rate,” Christensen said. “Sexual assault and rape appropriately put the military justice system under the spotlight, but I ... would strongly advocate for professionalizing and modernizing the justice system, even if there was not a

single sex offense in the military. After 246 years, it’s time for Congress to give the men and women serving our nation, a justice system worthy of their sacrifices.”

Retired Army Col. Lawrence J. Morris, chief of staff and counselor to the president of the Catholic University of America, was the main objector among the hearing’s witnesses.

“If this act were to pass, commanders would be just as responsible for their service members as they are today. They would just have an emptier toolbox. It’s paradoxical to leave this responsibility to commanders, but to take away a key element of authority and undermine good order and discipline and military readiness, even more true in a deployed environment which the legislation doesn’t account for,” he said.

“Three percent of commanders have convening authority for felonies and above,” Gillibrand said. “So your testimony is saying that 3% of commanders will have less tools in their toolbox. Is that not, therefore, saying that 97% of commanders will have the same tools they have today?”

Morris disagreed.

“It’s not just a matter of preferring a case to trial. It’s a collaborative in developing impact on the case, from when it starts into the system,” he said.

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MILITARY

IG: Ex-Navy auditor harassed female workers

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former Navy civilian auditor sexually harassed at least a dozen female employees for more than two decades as part of a pervasive pattern of misconduct and retaliation, according to a government watchdog report released Wednesday.

The report by the Defense Department’s inspector general found that former Navy Auditor General Ronnie Booth engaged in “quid pro quo sexual propositions when interacting with female subordinates at the Naval Audit Service.” It said he requested “sexual favors in exchange for career advancement, all under the guise of professional career ‘mentoring.’” Booth also was in a “sporadic long-term sexual relation-

ship” with one subordinate in exchange for job promotions and other professional help, the report said.

The report said Booth’s interactions with female employees created a hostile and intimidating work environment, causing a number of the women to leave their jobs or ask for transfers. It also concluded that employees had an “unfavorable perception” of how complaints were handled, and so were discouraged from reporting his behavior.

The release of the report comes as the Defense Department continues to struggle with efforts to curtail sexual assault and harassment across the force. Soon after his confirmation, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin created an independent review commission to

conduct a 90-day assessment of the problem and make recommendations for changes in prevention, the treatment of victims and the military justice system for perpetrators.

Booth resigned in September 2019, shortly after the probe into his behavior began. During his interviews, he denied sexually harassing female subordinates and said “he had an open door policy for mentoring” and there was “no difference between how he mentored men and women,” the report said.

According to the report, when the inspector general informed Booth of its conclusions, he left a voicemail saying, “The comments that I gave during my interview, I stand by those. Again, I don’t know where these accusa-

tions are coming from as I stated in my comments.”

The inspector general did not substantiate allegations that the Navy’s former acting secretary, Thomas Modly, knew about sexual harassment accusations against Booth but promoted him anyway. It found that Modly relied on staff to alert him to any problems with Booth’s promotion and that he was told there were none.

The report noted that some employees complained about Booth’s behavior in anonymous comments in the 2018 job climate survey that workers fill out.

“We determined that Mr. Modly complied with DoD and Navy standards when he was informed of the sexual harassment allegations against Mr. Booth by having

his staff and advisors, including legal advisors, vet Mr. Booth and other candidates before making a selection,” the report said.

U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and Sen. Kristen Gillibrand, D-N.Y., have been pressing the Pentagon for action on the matter.

On Wednesday, Speier called the report a “sickening and stunning indictment,” which is “all the more appalling because he was allowed to retire with a full pension.”

Speier, who is head of the House Military Personnel Subcommittee, added, “Every senior federal agency leader must read this report and consider what they are doing to prevent, detect, and stamp out toxic sexual harassment anywhere it occurs in their agencies.”

Airstrikes ‘pummel’ ISIS in Iraq as US preps for Baghdad talks

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

The U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State has conducted more airstrikes in Iraq this month than it did all of last year, destroying scores of enemy positions and killing dozens of terrorists.

Coalition jets carried out over 150 strikes against ISIS fighters in the mountains south of Mosul this month, U.S. and Iraqi military officials said earlier this week. An analysis of previous coalition strike data shows fewer than 120 airstrikes were carried out against ISIS in Iraq all of last year.

Including Iraqi air force and army aviation operations, a total of 312 airstrikes have destroyed 120 enemy positions and killed 27 terrorists, Col. Wayne Marotto, a spokesman for the military coalition, said in a tweet Wednesday.

“The mission was to destroy Daesh hiding out in some tough terrain of caves and tunnels, ostensibly the last redoubt of the so-called caliphate,” Marotto said in an email, using an Arabic term for ISIS.

The new data were released ahead of the latest round of talks between Baghdad and Washington about continued cooperation.

“The meetings will further clarify that coalition forces are in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government and solely for the purpose of training and advising Iraqi forces to ensure that ISIS cannot reconstitute,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at a briefing Wednesday. “We are committed, first and foremost, to Iraqi sovereignty.”

A first round of the “strategic dialogue” was held last year amid high tensions after a series of attacks between Washington and Tehran since late 2019 that have played out largely on Iraqi soil, including a drone strike outside the Baghdad airport that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran’s elite Quds Force, a U.S.-designated a terrorist organization.

In the wake of the assassination, Iraqi lawmakers called for U.S. and coalition forces to leave the country. The Pentagon roughly

halved its troop strength in the ensuing months, closing several bases and consolidating forces onto a few larger installations.

Rocket attacks, which the Pentagon has blamed on Iran-backed Shiite militias, continue to target diplomatic areas and military bases housing U.S. forces and other American personnel.

Some 8,000 to 16,000 ISIS militants also remain a threat in both Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon’s Inspector General said in a February report. A year earlier, those numbers were estimated to be at 14,000 to 18,000, it said.

But since the group was ousted from the last of its territorial holdings, coalition and Iraqi forces have been sweeping the deserts and mountains where insurgents are holding out.

The coalition strikes this month were part of Operation Ready Lion, which began March 9 in a rugged mountain range near an internal border between areas controlled by the Iraqi federal government and others in the Kurdish region. During the “first of its



TREVOR MCBRIDE/U.S. Air Force

A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft departs after receiving fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft during a mission in southwest Asia, on Feb. 16.

kind” operation, Iraqi counterterrorism snipers have been watching caves in hard-to-reach, high-elevation areas, where ISIS fighters have been hiding out, Iraqi Defense Ministry spokesman Yehia Rasool said in a series of translated tweets Wednesday.

The strikes “caused their killing and fleeing,” Rasool wrote. “They received the fire of truth from the anti-terror snipers, which prompted ISIS members to an-

nounce their surrender to our brave men.”

On Tuesday, Marotto shared one of Rasool’s tweets that said coalition jets had carried out 133 strikes in the first 10 days of the operation. On Tuesday, coalition jets conducted “another 18 precision airstrikes pummeling 39 Daesh dwellings,” Marotto said.

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Mildenhall airman sentenced for possessing child pornography

Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — An airman who participated in child pornography chat rooms and collected thousands of illegal pornographic files was sentenced to nine years in prison after being found guilty of related charges at a court-martial Thursday.

Tech. Sgt. Garret Souders, of the 488th Intelligence Wing out at RAF Mildenhall, was also sentenced by military judge Col.

Charles J. Weidie to a reduction to E-1, forfeiture of all pay and a dishonorable discharge.

Souders was found guilty on counts of viewing indecent material and possessing and viewing child pornography, but was acquitted of attempted sexual assault of a child and one count of committing a lewd act on a child.

An investigation began in January 2019 after Souders’ wife found chat conversations on his phone

under the alias Mdreder1982, which discussed fantasies involving harm to their own family. The wife left the home and reported Souders to the Air Force Office of Special Investigations the following day.

The first few weeks after leaving home “were like a surreal nightmare,” Souders’ wife said during testimony. “I didn’t sleep, I forgot to eat.”

Eric Hernandez, a digital foren-

sic analyst, testified that nearly 8,000 files involving child pornography were found on Souders’ laptop dating back to May 2018.

“I cannot begin to express how sorry I am for my actions,” Souders said in an unsworn statement during the sentencing phase of the trial. “I am deeply ashamed of my actions.”

“For the rest of my life, I will live with the guilt of hurting my family. I know I am deserving of

punishment. I ask that (the court) show mercy.”

Following the trial, the 100th Air Refueling Wing credited the trial team for their efforts in a statement.

“The Government is satisfied with the outcome of the trial ... we feel justice has been served,” the statement said.

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

Lawmaker urges vaccine required for US troops

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden should make coronavirus vaccinations mandatory for American troops, a House lawmaker wrote in a letter sent Wednesday to the White House.

Rep. Jimmy Panetta, D-Calif., urged Biden to issue a waiver to allow the Pentagon to make coronavirus vaccinations mandatory for troops, about one-third of whom are declining the inoculations, according to Pentagon estimates. The Defense Department cannot mandate service members receive any of the three coronavirus vaccines being provided to the American public because the Food and Drug Administration approved them on an emergency authorization.

Only the president has the power to override that regulation, Panetta said, asking Biden to issue a waiver as soon as possible.

"Vaccinating every eligible service member will improve readiness and have an immediate and positive impact on the communities in which they serve," Panetta, a Navy veteran, wrote in the letter signed by six other House Democrats. "Requiring DOD to obtain informed consent prior to vaccination is not only harmful to our national security, but contrary to the best interests of service members, their families, communities, and colleagues."

Reps. James McGovern, of Massachusetts; Sara Jacobs, of California; Cindy Axne, of Iowa; Marc Veasey, of Texas; Marilyn Strickland, of Washington; and Jahana Hayes, of Connecticut, also signed the letter.

Defense officials have ac-

knowledgeed they have had difficulty convincing some troops to receive the shot, largely due to skepticism about the vaccines' safety and efficacy. They have said at least some of that hesitancy is due to vaccine misinformation rampant on social media. Top Pentagon officials including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin have repeatedly implored troops to take the vaccination as soon as they are eligible, insisting the shots are safe.



Panetta

Other service members have declined the shots simply because they have the power to refuse it unlike other fully FDA-authorized inoculations required by the Defense Department, defense officials have concluded.

In his letter, Panetta, a veteran of the Afghanistan War and a House Armed Services Committee member, insisted the Defense Department would undoubtedly make the vaccine mandatory once it gains full authorization, and speeding that process up via a presidential waiver could "save lives."

"The bureaucratic process of final approval of these vaccines ... will waste precious time in the department's fight against this virus," Panetta wrote. "The end result of mandatory vaccinations for members of the armed forces will almost certainly be the same."

Stars and Stripes reporter Caitlin M. Kenney contributed to this report.
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AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

People visiting an observation point check out housing towers and other buildings at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on March 19.

Adviser: Coronavirus rate among US military in Japan is below 1%

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The U.S. military in Japan and South Korea reported 14 new coronavirus patients as of 6 p.m. Thursday, some dating back nearly three weeks.

The winter coronavirus surge has tapered to a stubborn daily baseline of hundreds of fresh cases each day in both countries.

In Japan, however, the infection rate is just 0.02% for the approximately 107,000 U.S. troops, civilian employees, contractors and family members, the senior enlisted adviser for U.S. Forces Japan said Thursday on American Forces Network Radio.

U.S. installations do not uniformly publicize the number of active patients, but USFJ reported 35 on March 18. Public health measures like wearing masks and washing hands, along with distribution of vaccines, appear to help stem the virus' spread.

"We're not out of the woods, yet," Command Chief Master Sgt. Richard Winegardner said Thursday. "We're close; we're close. But we're not out of the woods yet."

Two U.S. bases in Japan report-

ed five new coronavirus patients Wednesday evening and Thursday. Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni on Thursday said one person tested positive and went immediately into quarantine after recently arriving in Japan.

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa had four people contract the coronavirus, according to a base Facebook post Wednesday. One individual fell ill with COVID-19 symptoms and self-isolated before testing positive. The second person tested positive after contact with a previously infected individual, and the third patient tested positive after a co-worker contracted the virus. The fourth person tested positive upon arriving in Japan.

South Korea reported 430 new infections Wednesday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. New, one-day case numbers there have ranged from 469 on March 17 to 346 on Tuesday, according to the World Health Organization.

Seoul reported 125 new cases Wednesday, according to the agency. Gyeonggi province, the home of Camp Humphreys and Osan Air Base, had 147.

U.S. Forces Korea reported Thursday that seven service members have tested positive after arriving on the peninsula since March 8. Three arrived from the U.S. at Osan on the Patriot Express, a government-chartered air service, on March 8 and Monday. Four arrived on commercial flights at Incheon International Airport on March 11 and Monday.

Four tested positive before entering the mandatory two-week quarantine, and three came up positive on the test required to exit quarantine. All were subsequently isolated at Osan or Camp Humphreys.

Late Wednesday, Camp Hovey, a small Army installation just south of the Demilitarized Zone, had one person test positive Tuesday after becoming ill with COVID-19 symptoms, according to a USFK news release. On Thursday, the camp reported a second person had contracted the virus from someone recently infected. Both patients are quarantined at Humphreys.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
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US jobless claims fall to 684,000, fewest since pandemic

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people seeking unemployment benefits fell sharply last week to 684,000, the fewest since the pandemic erupted a year ago and a sign that the economy is improving.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims fell from 781,000 the week before. It is the first time that weekly applications for jobless aid have fallen below 700,000 since mid-March of last year. Before the pandemic tore through the economy, applications had never topped that level.

Still, a total of 18.9 million people are continuing to collect jobless benefits, up

from 18.2 million in the previous week. Roughly one-third of those recipients are in extended federal aid programs, which means they've been unemployed for at least six months.

Their prolonged joblessness could prove to be a long-term hindrance: Typically, many people who have been unemployed for extended periods struggle to find work even as the economy regains its health.

The economy has been showing signs of emerging from the pandemic crisis with renewed vigor, with spending picking up, manufacturing strengthening and employers adding workers. Hiring increased in February, with 379,000 added jobs — more

than double January's total.

Credit card data from JPMorgan Chase showed that consumer spending jumped last week as the \$1,400 checks that are going to most adults under President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion emergency aid package began to be paid out. The Treasury says it has so far distributed 127 million payments worth \$325 billion.

Last week, Federal Reserve policymakers substantially boosted their forecast for the economy this year, anticipating growth of 6.5% for 2021, up from an estimate of just 4.2% three months ago. That would be the fastest pace of expansion in any year since 1984. The Fed also projects that the unem-

ployment rate will reach 4.5% by the end of this year, down from the current 6.2%.

Across the country, economic activity slowed in February as severe winter weather caused sharp drops in home sales, retail spending and orders for heavy factory goods. Most economists, though, say they think the economy is now rebounding as the weather improves and additional support from the new \$1.9 trillion federal rescue package kicks in.

There are still risks that could frustrate such hopes. The number of new daily coronavirus infections has leveled off, though hospitalizations and deaths continue to fall.

VIRUS OUTBREAK

Better US outlook: Vaccinations rise, deaths fall

Associated Press

More than three months into the U.S. vaccination drive, many of the numbers paint an increasingly encouraging picture, with 70% of Americans 65 and older receiving at least one dose of the vaccine and COVID-19 deaths dipping below 1,000 a day on average for the first time since November.

Also, dozens of states have thrown open vaccinations to all adults or are planning to do so in a matter of weeks. And the White House said 27 million doses of both the one-shot and two-shot vaccines will be distributed next week, more than three times the number when President Joe Biden took office two months ago.

Still, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, said Wednesday he isn't ready to declare victory.

"I'm often asked, are we turning the corner?" Fauci said at a White House briefing. "My response is really more like we are at the corner. Whether or not we're going to be turning that corner still remains to be seen."

What's giving Fauci pause, he said, is that new cases remain at a stubbornly high level, at more than 50,000 per day. The United States on Wednesday surpassed 30 million confirmed cases, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University. The number of deaths now stands at more than 545,000.

Nonetheless, the outlook in the U.S. stands in stark contrast to the deteriorating situation in places like Brazil, which reported more than 3,000 COVID-19 deaths in a single day for the first time Tuesday, and across Europe, where another wave of infections is leading to new lockdowns.

The gloom in Europe is compounded because the vaccine rollout on the Continent has been slowed by production delays and questions about the safety and effectiveness of AstraZeneca's shot.

Public health experts in the U.S. are taking every opportunity to warn that relaxing social distancing and other preventive measures could easily lead to another surge.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, sees red flags in states lifting mask mandates, air travel roaring back and spring break crowds partying out of control in Florida.

"We're getting closer to the exit ramp," Topol said. "All we're doing by having reopenings is jeopardizing our shot to get, finally, for the first time in the American pandemic, containment of the virus."

Across the country are unmistakable signs of progress.

More than 43% of Americans 65 and older — the most vulnerable age group, accounting for an outsize share of the nation's more than 540,000 coronavirus deaths — have been fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. The number of older adults showing up in emergency rooms with COVID-19 is down significantly. Vaccinations overall have ramped up to 2.5 million to 3 million shots per day.

Deaths per day in the U.S. from COVID-19 have dropped to an average of 940, down from an all-time high of over 3,400 in mid-January.

Minnesota health officials on Monday reported no new deaths from COVID-19 for the first time in nearly a year. And in New Orleans, the Touro Infirmary hospital was not treating a single case for the first time since March 2020.

And Fauci cited two recent studies that show negligible levels of coronavirus infections among fully vaccinated health care workers in Texas and California.

"I emphasize how we need to hang in there for just a little while longer," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease



Rick Bowmer/AP

Porter Jones receives his Pfizer vaccination Wednesday in Sandy, Utah. All people in Utah age 16 and older became eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations Wednesday.

Control and Prevention, said Wednesday. That's because "the early data are really encouraging."

Nationwide, new cases and the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 have plummeted over the past two months, though Walensky remains concerned that such progress seemed to stall in the past couple of weeks. New cases are running at more than 53,000 a day on average, down from a peak of a quarter-million in early January.

That's uncomfortably close to levels seen during the COVID-19 wave of last summer.

Biden has pushed for states to make all adults eligible to be vaccinated by May 1. A least a half-

dozen states, including Texas, Arizona, Utah and Georgia, are opening up vaccinations to everyone over 16. At least 20 other states have pledged to do so in the next few weeks.

Microsoft, which employs more than 50,000 people at its global headquarters in suburban Seattle, has said it will start bringing back workers on March 29 and reopen installations that have been closed for nearly a year.

New York City's 80,000 municipal employees, who have been working remotely during the pandemic, will return to their offices starting May 3.

Still, experts see reason to worry as more Americans start traveling and socializing again.

The number of daily travelers at U.S. airports has consistently topped 1 million over the past week and a half amid spring break at many colleges.

States such as Michigan and New Jersey are also seeing rising cases.

National numbers are an imperfect indicator. The favorable downward trend in some states can conceal an increase in case numbers in others, particularly smaller ones, said Ali Mokdad, professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The more contagious variant that originated in Britain has now also been identified in nearly every state, he said.

Most US personnel in Middle East could be vaccinated by early April

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A large batch of the one-dose Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine heading to the Middle East and Afghanistan could allow U.S. Central Command to inoculate most overseas personnel who want the shots by early April, military officials said Thursday.

About 26,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are expected to arrive at overseas bases in the next couple of weeks, CENTCOM officials said. The new batch follows a shipment of 20,000 doses that arrived earlier this month.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is 85% effective in preventing severe or critical cases of COVID-19 at least 28 days after vaccination, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which authorized the vaccine for emergency use in late February.

About 20,000 military and civilian personnel in CENTCOM, or about 35% of the eligible population, have completed vaccinations with either the Johnson & Johnson or Moderna vaccine, command spokeswoman Lt. Col. Karen Roxberry said.

That includes 3,600 personnel in Afghanistan, 2,900 in Iraq and Syria, and 460 at Al Udeid Air

Base in Qatar, Roxberry said in a statement.

Troops and civilian personnel in Afghanistan first received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine March 15, NATO Resolute Support said. Inoculations with the two-shot Moderna vaccine began in mid-January.

Military and civilian DOD personnel are eligible for the vaccine, the statement said, in addition to coalition and military members working with or training under U.S. advisers. Troops will continue to wear masks and practice social distancing.

The initial batches of vaccine prioritized those supporting oper-

ations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

"We expect to fully finish vaccinating those troops soon," Roxberry said. Those in other parts of CENTCOM will have increased access when more than 5,000 doses arrive in Qatar before the end of March, she added.

Prior to the arrival of the latest batch of vaccines, the Qatar government offered 5,000 doses from their supply to troops at Al Udeid Air Base a few weeks ago out of "goodwill and generosity," said Brig. Mohamed Al Nassr, security attache for the Qatari Embassy.

U.S. military officials said they appreciated the gift but have

enough doses of their own to vaccinate everyone in the region who wants it, Roxberry said in the statement.

The United States declined the vaccines despite shortages, delays and vaccine appointment cancellations at some bases in Europe in recent weeks.

More than 170,000 service members and about 90,000 combined family members, civilians and contractors have tested positive for the virus as of Wednesday, the Defense Department's coronavirus website reported.

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VETERANS

DNA databases help unite US vets, children

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

David Clark traveled the world as an Army noncommissioned officer, serving in South Korea, Germany, Iraq and Vietnam in support of President Bill Clinton's historic visit in 2000.

At the time, he never would have guessed that he had Vietnamese family living nearby.

Clark, 50, a civilian employee of Military Sealift Command living in Norfolk, Va., got a surprise after sending a DNA sample to Ancestry.com in December. In addition to finding out he is 44% French and has Scottish, English, Irish and Jewish blood, he discovered a Vietnamese cousin.

Phan Thi Nuoi, was born Nov. 15, 1971, and had her DNA sent to Ancestry.com in September 2017, in an effort to track down her father, an American GI who served there during the war.

That man turned out to be Clark's late uncle, Donald Pelkey, of Fort Fairfield, Maine, who served three tours with the Army at Cam Ranh Bay and Pleiku, Vietnam, between 1968 and 1971.

Pelkey had been in love with Phan's mother, Phan Thi Loan, but lost touch after he came home from the war, Clark said in a recent telephone interview.

"Nowadays finding people is easy, but in the 1970s it was just letters and telephone calls," he said. "And I'm sure the telephone system wasn't that good."

Copenhagen connection

When Clark saw that he had a long-lost cousin, he sent an email to the address listed with her name on Ancestry.com.

He got a response from Brian Hjort, 50, an antique furniture repairman from Copenhagen, Denmark, who has been helping Amerasians in Vietnam and the Philippines find their fathers since the early 1990s.

Hjort first traveled to Vietnam as a 21-year-old in 1992 and was interested in meeting people his age who called themselves Americans, he said in a phone interview.

Once back home in Denmark, he got a request from one of his Vietnamese friends to help find the American father of a person in her village. Hjort filed a military records request with the help of the



Courtesy of Jim Reischl

Air Force veteran Jim Reischl reunited in 2016 with Nguyen Thi Hanh, the pregnant girlfriend he left behind in 1970 after a tour to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam.



BRIAN HJORT

Brian Hjort, right, poses with friends in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in 2016. The antique furniture repairman from Copenhagen, Denmark, helps Amerasians in Vietnam and the Philippines find their American service member fathers.

U.S. Embassy and received a name and address.

"The first father I found was in 1995," he said. "After that, people started writing to me."

Hjort estimates he has reunited dozens of GI dads with their Vietnamese and Filipino children. But it has gotten easier in recent years thanks to the internet — he operates a website called www.father-founded.org — and DNA.

Hjort has been sending samples from Amerasians looking for their

American fathers to services such as Ancestry.com, MyHeritage, 23andMe, Y-DNA and Family Tree DNA, he said.

'Never came back'

Vietnam veteran Jim Reischl, 73, of St. Cloud, Minn., hopes DNA will help him find the daughter he left behind after serving as an Air Force clerk from 1969-70 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam.

Reischl shared an off-base apartment with the woman who became

the girl's mother.

"Her name was Hoa, which means flower in Vietnamese," he said in telephone interview early this year.

He keeps a photograph of Hoa, whose real name is Nguyen Thi Hanh, and a friend singing Vietnamese nursery rhymes in their apartment.

"I told her in late April of 1970 that I was probably going to be leaving," he said. "I told her I would be with her another month, but I don't think she understood me. She didn't speak a lot of English."

A week later, Hoa told Reischl she was pregnant.

"It scared me at the time," he said. "[The Air Force] had told us that women would tell us a lot of things, but it doesn't mean it's true."

Hoa told Reischl she wanted to come back to America with him, he recalled.

"The military told me, if I get to know a woman and want to bring her back expect to be there longer than my original term," he said.

Reichl left his pregnant girlfriend behind in Vietnam but wrote to her soon after arriving in the United States. He never heard back, he said.

He eventually married in the States, and it wasn't until he di-

vorced in 2001 that he started searching for his child, making a trip to Vietnam every year, he said.

Reichl found Hjort online and, after a decadelong search, contacted Hoa, who responded to an advertisement placed in a Vietnamese newspaper, he said.

Hoa, who declined to be interviewed for this article, was living in the Mekong Delta, and the pair met for the first time since the war when Reichl visited in 2016.

"She said our daughter was born Dec. 18, 1970, in Vinh Long at a clinic," he said. "A lady who was with her offered to watch the baby and the lady took her and never came back. She had talked about taking her to an orphanage."

It seems like DNA is the only hope of finding their daughter, said Reichl, who plans to return to Vietnam once the pandemic recedes.

Proof required

Meanwhile, Clark has been in touch with his cousin, communicating through Facebook with her adult son, Nguyen Van Anh.

In a Facebook message, the son said he's interested in meeting his newly found relatives and would travel to the U.S. to visit them if possible.

Nguyen Chi, a U.S. Consulate worker in Ho Chi Minh City, has been helping Clark communicate with his Vietnamese relatives and said they're excited by the news of their American cousins.

"I spoke with [Phan] on the phone and she seems very happy to find her father's relation," Nguyen Chi said in a recent email.

If Clark's Vietnamese relatives want to move to the U.S., they must submit evidence that Pelkey is Phan's father, said Clark, who is attempting to obtain his uncle's service records to show that he was in Vietnam at the time she was conceived.

Pelkey, who has no other known children and served as commander of the Paul Lockhart Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in Fort Fairfield, would have welcomed his daughter and grandson with open arms if he was still alive, Clark said.

But, he added, the rest of their American family won't be able to help much.

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Under new law, VA required to offer vaccines to 24 million more people

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs must offer coronavirus vaccines to 24 million more people after President Joe Biden signed a bill into law Wednesday requiring the agency to vaccinate all veterans and spouses.

Biden signed the Saves Lives Act, which passed through Congress unanimously. The bill removes legal barriers that prevented the VA from vaccinating veterans who aren't enrolled in the department, as well as their spouses and caregivers.

The action expands the popula-

tion that the VA is responsible for vaccinating from about 9 million to 33 million, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said. The department will need a greater supply of vaccines to reach the larger population, he said, equating to an increase of about 400,000 doses each week.

In addition to all veterans, spouses

and caregivers, the new law also tasks the VA with vaccinating overseas veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program, as well as recipients of the VA's CHAMPVA program. The CHAMPVA program serves spouses and children of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-relat-

ed disability.

Under the new law, "veteran" means any person who served in the armed forces and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

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NATION

Biden doubles goal of COVID vaccines to 200 million doses

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden opened his first formal news conference Thursday with a nod toward the improving picture on battling the coronavirus, doubling his original goal by pledging that the nation will administer 200 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of his first 100 days in office.

The administration had met Biden's initial goal of 100 million doses earlier this month — before even his 60th day in office — as the president pushes to defeat a pandemic that has killed more than 545,000 Americans and devastated the nation's economy.

But while Biden had held off on holding his first news conference so he could use it to celebrate progress against the pandemic and passage of a giant COVID-19 relief package, he was certain to be pressed at the question-and-answer session about all sorts of other challenges that have cropped up along the way.

A pair of mass shootings, rising

international tensions, early signs of intraparty divisions and increasing numbers of migrants crossing the southern border are all confronting a West Wing known for its message discipline. Biden had been the first chief executive in four decades to reach this point in his term without holding a formal news conference.

While seemingly ambitious, Biden's vaccine goal amounts to a continuation of the existing pace of vaccinations through the end of next month. The U.S. is now averaging about 2.5 million doses per day. An even greater rate is possible. Over the next month, two of the bottlenecks to getting Americans vaccinated are set to be lifted as the U.S. supply of vaccines is on track to increase and states lift eligibility requirements to get shots.

The scene looked very different from what Americans are used to seeing for formal presidential news conferences.

The president still stood behind a podium against a backdrop of flags. But due to the pandemic, on-

ly 30 socially distanced chairs for journalists were spread out in the expansive room. The White House limited attendance due to the virus, and aides will sanitize microphones before they are shuttled to the reporters called upon by Biden.

"It's an opportunity for him to speak to the American people, obviously directly through the coverage, directly through all of you," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters aboard Air Force One on Tuesday. "And so I think he's thinking about what he wants to say, what he wants to convey, where he can provide updates, and, you know, looking forward to the opportunity to engage with a free press."

While Biden has been on pace with his predecessors in taking questions from the press in other formats, he tends to field just one or two informal inquiries at a time, usually in a hurried setting at the end of an event or in front of a whirring helicopter.

Pressure had mounted on Biden



EVAN VUCCI/AP

President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference in the White House on Thursday.

to hold a formal session, which allows reporters to have an extended back-and-forth with the president on the issues of the day. Biden's conservative critics have pointed to the delay to suggest that Biden was being shielded by his staff.

West Wing aides have dismissed the questions about a news conference as a Washington obsession, pointing to Biden's high approval ratings while suggesting that the general public is not concerned about the event.

Assessment sought for Colo. suspect

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The suspected gunman in the Boulder supermarket shooting that killed 10 people appeared in court Thursday for the first time, and a defense attorney immediately asked for an assessment of his mental health.

Kathryn Herold, the lawyer for suspect Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, provided no details about what condition he might suffer from.

During the brief hearing, Alissa did not speak other than to say "yes" to a question from the judge, who advised him of the 10 charges of first-degree murder he faces. He did not enter a plea, which will come later in the judicial process.

Alissa entered court in a wheelchair, presumably because of the gunshot wound to the leg that he suffered in the shooting. One of his attorneys leaned down to talk to him before the hearing began, and Alissa nodded his head as the attorney spoke to him. Four deputies with black bands of mourning across their badges stood close by.

Alissa appeared alert and attentive.



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WEEKEND



Fantasy titles to play
as lockdowns drag on
Video games, Page 18

‘Saul’ gets serious

Bob Odenkirk excited to step into action-star role in ‘Nobody’

Page 16

Universal Pictures

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

The future is not quite ‘Rosey’

Robot butlers face many complex challenges before they take over your household chores

BY DALVIN BROWN
The Washington Post

For at least a decade, robotics and AI firms have flexed their ability to create machines that can complete various practical household tasks. Last month, Boston Dynamics showed its Spot robot dog picking up clothing. Miso Robotic’s Flippy has been flipping burgers for years. Other start-ups have demonstrated laundry-folding machines. The list goes on. More recently, news broke that Amazon may be closer to introducing a home robot capable of carrying things and following its owner’s commands.

But how probable is it that you’ll ever be able to own a true robotic butler?

Robots are getting more complex. As AI continues to advance, it allows machines to figure out more complex problems and reliably chat with humans. Still, robotics and AI firms say you’ll have to wait quite some time before you’re able to own anything remotely similar to Rosey the Robot from “The Jetsons.”

In fact, companies are having a hard time commercializing anything more complex than a robot vacuum — which has been cleaning houses for 20 years.

“We’ve been talking about home robots coming for a long time, and all we have so far is the vacuum cleaner,” said Jeff Burnstein, president of the Association for Advancing Automation. “You see demos, but taking it from a demo to something that actually works, then something you can afford, that’s the issue right now.”

Chore robots are doing well in factories where there’s plenty of space, no small kids around and employees wearing protective gear. They’re really good at completing a single repetitive task, such as screwing on a wheel.

But imagine introducing machinery with legs and lifting capabilities into your home

where things can and do go wrong. What if it falls on someone, or a software update causes it to go haywire? It’s funny on “The Jetsons,” but it would not be so comical if your grandmother were on the receiving end.

That’s a significant challenge.

The biggest problem is safety, according to Marc Raibert, chairman and former CEO of Boston Dynamics, a robotics pioneer responsible for agile, animallike robots.

“The more complicated the robot, the more safety concerns. If you have a robot in close proximity to a person, and anything that goes wrong, that’s a risk to that person,” Raibert said.

Things have gone wrong on the job. In 2015, a 22-year-old man was killed while helping to set up a stationary robot at a Volkswagen plant in Germany. The robot pushed him against a metal plate and crushed him. In another case that year, a robot’s arm malfunctioned, and it hit and crushed a woman’s head in a Michigan auto plant.

It’s not that the safety issues at home cannot be solved. It’s that they have not been solved yet, robotics companies say. And making elaborate machines more household-friendly will raise the price.

Today’s mobile robots for factories can cost twice as much as an average new car. Take the robotic dog Spot. It runs for about \$75,000 without the arm attachment that makes it useful for transporting things. Without the arm, it’s basically a mobile surveillance machine. A humanoid robotic butler capable of autonomously completing a variety of tasks today could easily cost 10 times as much.

And robotics experts say people on the market for such a thing would not be willing to pay more than a few thousand dollars. It might be cheaper to pay a human to do the job. And humans might do it better.



Misty Robotics/The Washington Post

Misty Robotics created a droid to take users’ temperatures. The reality of having a robot butler doing your household chores has many complex challenges to overcome.

Robots also have a dexterity problem. Most can pinch, grasp or use suction to hold an object. Meanwhile, humans can manipulate things that come in various shapes and textures. Robotic limbs with humanlike flexibility do exist, but they cost tens of thousands of dollars to produce.

“The age of grasping is still a long way away,” said Tim Enwall, CEO of Misty Robotics, a hardware company that builds personal robots for homes and offices. “It is a very hard problem to solve at a mass consumption price point.”

Another challenge is that robots do not know much about the world they’re operating in. You can teach them what an object looks like, but robotic butlers would also need to understand where in your home it’s located.

Take, for example, a simple task such as putting a drink into the fridge. A machine would need to understand your command and be capable of autonomously navigating your home’s layout without spilling anything. It also needs to understand which room in your house is the kitchen.

That type of data requires collaborative input from consumers, and it’s something iRobot is working on by letting Roomba users mark where things are in their homes.

“The reason why iRobot doesn’t sell a robot with an arm is because we don’t know where anything is,” said Colin Angle, chairman and founder of iRobot. “We’re trying to get a better idea of what you actually want to do. That’s useful for your cleaning robot, but it’s imperative for whatever next robot you’re interested in buying.”

So when will something more advanced than a smart vacuum cleaner actually make an impact? Most say it’ll be decades from now.

Robots probably will continue to crop up in new places as firms lay the groundwork for something more advanced to come along.

“I do think we’ll find uses for home robots in the next eight to 10 years,” Raibert said. “Someone will pioneer a lower-cost mechanism that does a useful set of things. I do believe it; it’s just not tomorrow.”

GADGETS

Rolling speaker that’s the life of the party

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The **iLive Bluetooth (5.0) Tailgate** party speaker is an all-anything speaker.

It has wheels and a retractable ergonomic handle to easily transport from tailgate gatherings to a backyard dance party. Whatever the atmosphere, it can adapt with endless features to be the life of the party.

When you look at the list of the features packed into the 9.84-by-9.25-by-16.93-inch speaker, it’s easy to see why it adapts easily to any environment.

There’s a microphone input to sing along (there’s no one on the planet who wanted me to test this part), color-changing LED light effects, a 3.5 mm auxiliary input, and an FM scan with presets, to name just a few.

The sound comes from the bass-rich 8-inch full-range speaker, which produced good sound in all the environments I rolled the speaker to. There’s also a built-in microSD slot and USB port to supports audio file playback.

The built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery life will go for



iLIVE ELECTRONICS/TNS

The iLive Bluetooth (5.0) Tailgate has wheels and a retractable handle for easy mobility.

six hours at 50 percent volume and charges in four hours. A USB charging cable is included.

Online: iliveelectronics.com; \$69.99

On the other end of the wireless speaker spectrum is the compact and solid **Enacfire Soundtank** portable wireless Bluetooth speaker.

Inside the portable (6.3-by-2.91-by-2.91 inches) hexagonal-shaped speaker are two high-performance 20-watt vibrating drivers, which produce true 360-degree surround sound. With the six sides, top and bottom, the Soundtank can lay in any position.

Boosting the bass is easy with the Bass+ feature; press a button on the speaker for 50 percent more bass. It without a doubt gives the bass a little oomph. Bass heads will love it; my playlists sounded great.

Bluetooth 5.0 is inside, allowing dual stereo mode to pair with a second Soundtank for stereo sound, and doubling the amount of bass. The Enacfire website has

a special to save an extra 20 percent when you buy two Soundtank speakers.

Controls for power, selections, and pairing are on the side. The Soundtank is built with an IPX7 water resistance rating, so it can take a pool-side splash.

The battery life is rated to last 24 hours, and recharges with a USB-C connection.

Online: enacfire.com; \$89.99, or \$49.99 on Amazon



ENACFIRE/TNS

Enacfire Soundtank portable wireless Bluetooth speaker

WEEKEND: MOVIES



NETFLIX/AP

Matthew Modine portrays William “Rick” Singer at left in a re-created scene for the documentary “Operation Varsity Blues.” At right, Singer exits federal court March 12, 2019, in Boston after he pleaded guilty to charges in a nationwide college admissions bribery scandal.

Mechanics of a scheme

‘Operation Varsity Blues’ doc explores wealth, privilege and college admissions scandal

BY KATE FELDMAN
New York Daily News

Parents are supposed to do anything to help their children succeed. But where’s the line?

That’s the question posed in “Operation Varsity Blues,” a Netflix documentary released March 17, that explores the college admissions scandal that imploded in 2019.

More than 50 people have been charged in the scheme to fraudulently get students into top schools, most notably actresses Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman. But at the top of the food chain was mastermind Rick Singer, who took at least \$25 million in bribes from wealthy parents between 2011 and 2018 through his college counseling nonprofit The Key Worldwide Foundation. Then, he either paid co-conspirators to cheat on college entrance exams like the SAT or to bribe college coaches to have the prospective students classified as athletic recruits.

For filmmaker Chris Smith, he wanted more than the prison sentences. He wanted to know why.

“In terms of where to focus, there was so much media coverage that existed, but a lot focused on Felicity and Lori and I felt that that was well covered,” Smith, who wrote and directed “Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened” and served as an executive producer on “Tiger King,” told the Daily News.

“Our hope was to tell parts of the story that people didn’t know about. It was an opportunity to really look at how the scheme actually worked.”

“Tiger King” had extensive interviews with the wild cast of characters. “Fyre” had hours of social media footage. But almost no one directly involved in the college admissions scandal would talk to Smith on camera. So instead, his collaborator, Jon Karmen, suggested using the wiretapped phone calls between Singer and his co-conspirators, collected by the FBI as the scam fell apart, and having actors re-create the conversations.

Then they brought in Matthew Modine to play Singer, with his silver Caesar haircut and his gym clothes.

“Rick was sort of an enigma,” Smith told The News. “We had to reverse engineer who this person



PHILIP MARCELO/AP

Lori Loughlin departs federal court Aug. 27, 2019, in Boston after a hearing in the bribery scandal.

is based on these conversations he had, talking about the scheme and how it would work. You’d get little glimpses of his character, a small joke he would make, some conversation with a soccer coach about his relationships.”

Around Modine and the re-created conversations are interviews with journalists, lawyers and admissions counselors. Only one person indicted in the conspiracy agreed to talk on camera: former Stanford sailing coach John Vandemoer, who pleaded guilty to accepting bribes between \$110,000 and \$160,000 that he then reinvested into the team to hire assistant coaches. Vandemoer’s story is one of desperation, but few if any others engender such sympathy.

Instead, the American elite who enlist Singer rarely pause to consider the morality of the checks they’re cutting.

“We’re supposed to be a meritocracy,” Smith told The News. “If you work hard, you can achieve and realize all your dreams. This stood in the way of that.”

That’s why the scandal was so unsettling, Smith said, not just because of the corruption within the education system but because of how blatantly it proved that we’re not all playing by the same rules.

“There’s so many facets of American life where there’s two tiers, a different set of rules for people who have wealth and privilege. It’s almost like, ‘oh this is how this is done. This is how all the other people are doing it. This is the unspoken way that wealthy people or connected people get their kids into school,’” he said.

“If you’re at an amusement park and you buy a fast pass and you cut the line, this is just an extension of that.”

‘Operation Varsity Blues’ is little more than a recap

BY NINA METZ
Chicago Tribune

If you know nothing about the 2019 college admissions scandal — and I mean nothing — have I got a film for you.

For everyone else, the Netflix documentary “Operation Varsity Blues” offers little more than a recap of the scam that enabled wealthy parents to buy their kids into elite universities.

Director Chris Smith, working with writer Jon Karmen, opens with a collage of overlapping TV news clips. There have to be more creative ways to introduce a film’s subject than this numbing and overused trope. The film is visually slick and easy to follow, but not particularly ambitious, thematically or even in terms of how it’s shot, especially if you’re familiar with the facts of the case.

With an abundance of wiretaps at their disposal, Smith and Karmen transform those transcripts into re-enactments, with an ensemble of actors portraying the real-life parents on one end of the phone line, and Matthew Modine as Rick Singer on the other. Singer was the linchpin who set this fraudulent process in motion. Working as an independent college counselor, he guaranteed admission to Ivy League schools and other prestigious colleges, for a price, through a combination of what he called “side door” methods. His strategies included monkeying around with standardized tests, submitting students as top-tier athletes in sports they never played, and deliberately misidentifying white applicants as Black or Latino.

The documentary notes this last detail, but doesn’t actually think about it all that deeply, and this might be one of its biggest flaws. There is so much racism and cynical opportunism wrapped up in the idea of falsely presenting affluent white students as part of a marginalized community, particularly when you consider there are the concerted efforts that also exist attempting to dismantle these types of admissions policies that are meant to kind of, sort of level the playing field. This demands more thought. More analysis. More explanation than the brief acknowledgment it gets here of the racism that led Singer to this specific deception, because people of color are still getting the short end of the stick, even after the fallout of this case.

Instead, Smith and Karmen are more interested in spending time with Singer and his rich clients, which strikes me as a damning commentary of the film itself.

Drone footage and interviews (with an assortment of journalists

and higher education experts) bridge the scenes that re-enact the many many many phone conversations between Singer and his demanding clients.

The upside of this approach? The names of parents willing to cheat the system are once again at the forefront. There are all kinds of services one might hire to bury these kinds of embarrassing headlines in a Google search, but here’s a movie making sure you know a few of them anyway — and it’s a movie likely to be seen by plenty of people just by virtue of the fact that it’s on the country’s largest streaming platform.

Interestingly — weirdly, actually — neither Lori Loughlin nor Felicity Huffman get this re-enactment treatment, despite being the most famous of those indicted. Their involvement is handled with cursory attention, and it’s not really clear how or why the filmmakers decided to focus on who they did.

After a while, these endless phone conversations bleed together into sludge of sleaze, but the film itself has no larger take-away about either Singer as a person, or the circumstances that enabled his scam to work.

“Operation Varsity Blues” is simply a presentation of what happened. This gives the film a view-from-nowhere quality that makes you wonder about what it’s missing. Every movie is an opportunity for innovation. As a documentarian, if you’re not uncovering significant new information or telling a story lost to the sands of time, you have to ask yourself: What else can I accomplish?

New Yorker staff writer Naomi Fry is among the journalists interviewed, and her assessment of Singer is apt: “He’s a cipher,” she says. When the person at the center of your film is opaque and unknowable, that’s a creative problem.

Singer’s web of deceit ultimately collapsed because someone ratted him out. And in turn, the FBI was able to flip him to gather evidence against his clients. “But that’s only going to work with these white-collar professionals,” says a lawyer interviewed in the film. “Historically, white-collar defendants have almost no filter on the phone.”

This is something else the film could have, should have, explored further. Imagine if the filmmakers had not merely re-enacted this truism, but examined how and why it exists — and what that means for everyone else.

“Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions Scandal” is rated R. Running time: 99 minutes. Now playing on Netflix.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



Universal Pictures photos

Bob Odenkirk plays a family man who snaps after burglars appear to have stolen a cat bracelet in “Nobody.”

Becoming ‘Nobody’

‘Better Call Saul’ actor Bob Odenkirk shares his journey to becoming an action star

BY PETER SBLENDORIO
New York Daily News

Bob Odenkirk got a kick out of playing a punch-throwing, weapon-wielding action hero.

Known for his decades of comedy and leading role in the drama series “Better Call Saul,” the actor is excited for the world to see him star as a suburban dad with a suppressed set of skills in the new thriller “Nobody.”

“Most of the action stars, we’ve just seen them do so much amazing stuff, and they sort of live in that genre,” Odenkirk told the Daily News. “They stay there. You just don’t for a second buy them as a regular person. By having me do this, I think the audience [knows] what they’re coming to see, but they still go, ‘I don’t know if this guy’s going to be able to win this fight.’”

Odenkirk, 58, portrays Hutch Mansell, a man with a mysterious backstory who left behind a career in combat to start a family. He’s thrust back into action after a break-in at his home taps into the pent-up frustration he’s feeling amid the monotony of his new life.

The concept for the movie, now playing in select theaters, came together after Odenkirk’s brother-in-law texted him about an advertisement in China for “Better Call Saul,” the popular spinoff of the crime drama “Breaking Bad” that stars Odenkirk as lawyer Jimmy McGill.

The presence of that ad overseas inspired Odenkirk to consider other projects that could reach people all around the world.

“I started thinking about my character in ‘Better Call Saul’ that people in other countries know me from,” Odenkirk said. “They don’t know my comedy. They know ‘Breaking Bad’ and ‘Better Call Saul.’ That character is Jimmy McGill. He’s like a striver who fails over and over and never quits, and is very earnest in his drives and kind of puts his heart on his sleeve. I thought, that’s basically an action character, except he doesn’t fight, but otherwise all the other components are there.”

Derek Kolstad, creator of the “John Wick” movies, signed on to write the script for “Nobody,” while Ilya Naishuller joined as director.

Preparation for the role included rigorous training for Odenkirk, who learned how to do his own stunts and was coached on how to use guns for the movie.

“Most of the action stars, we’ve just seen them do so much amazing stuff ... You just don’t ... buy them as a regular person. By having me do this, I think the audience [knows] what they’re coming to see, but they still go, ‘I don’t know if this guy’s going to be able to win this fight.’”

Bob Odenkirk



Bob Odenkirk, left, and David Leitch confer with director Ilya Naishuller and producer Kelly McCormick on the set of “Nobody.” Odenkirk says he makes a refreshing addition to the action genre because it’s truly unclear if he’s going to be able to win a fight, unlike other stars of similar movies.

Odenkirk trained with celebrated stuntman Daniel Bernhardt — a process that saw the actor begin by practicing the basic moves and exercises “over and over and over,” he said.

“It was a long road, man,” Odenkirk recalled. “Look, I was a comedy writer for 25 years. I started exercising when I was around 30, just cardio. The core of this screen fighting is movement from your hips, so I hadn’t really done any of that until I started doing this training. It was a long road, man. It was embarrassing for most of it.”

Odenkirk won Emmys as a writer for “Saturday Night Live” and “The Ben Stiller Show,” and has received nine nominations as an actor and producer for “Better Call Saul.”

“Nobody” — which also stars Connie Nielsen, Christopher Lloyd and RZA — allowed Odenkirk to challenge himself in ways he never had before.

“No film as violent and bloody as this film was ever made with more love,” Odenkirk said with a laugh. “I’m not kidding. Everyone contributed. If you go down that list of credits, everyone is the best at what they do, and all still very excited to do what they do.”

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Lean, mean and brutish

Dadsploitation action flick ‘Nobody’ best enjoyed as the juicy piece of pulp it is

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Hutch (Bob Odenkirk) is stuck in a rut. Or, perhaps he’s stuck in a Talking Heads song, finding himself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife (Connie Nielsen), asking himself, “how did I get here?” His existence has been distilled into a deadening middle-class suburban routine: jog, coffee, trash, bus, work. Jog, coffee, trash, bus, work. When people ask him, “who are you?” and he answers, “nobody,” he means it, and we believe him.

But in Ilya Naishuller’s nasty little dadsploitation action flick “Nobody,” that moniker can have a loaded meaning. Hutch feels like a nonentity in his own life, beaten down by the ennui of routine; cowed by his own reluctance to violently engage a few burglars, which garners ridicule from his family, friends and the beat cop who takes his statement. Yet, sometimes, the most menacing and dangerous people are the ones who are no one on purpose. Hutch happens to be both, and that menacing and dangerous part of himself is about to be roused.

“Nobody” is a riff on the “John Wick” model, which makes sense, because it’s written by “John Wick” screenwriter Derek Kolstad, who’s had some fun with the formula, adapting it for comedian-turned-dramatic-actor Odenkirk. While the highly trained assassin Wick was spurred to action by the loss of his pup, for Hutch, it’s a “kitty cat bracelet” that he assumes the burglars took. Perhaps it’s because his young daughter (Paisley Cad-orath) is the only person who deigns to give her father attention, but one plaintive request for the kitty cat bracelet, and suddenly the seemingly beta Hutch is spoiling for



PHOTOS BY UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Bob Odenkirk stars in “Nobody” as a father, Hutch, whose initial reluctance to engage burglars spurs him to action.

all kinds of trouble.

He finds some trouble, in gruesome fashion, on a city bus, and it turns out that one of the obnoxious young drunkards he’s rendered immobile with a broken pole is the brother of local Russian mob berserker Yulian (Alexey Serebryakov). When Hutch went looking for trouble, he was not expecting this particular scale of trouble (“well-funded and sociopathic,” as Yulian is described). But he has a very specific set of skills that come from his top-secret past as an “auditor for the three-letter agencies,” and a file with such gruesome details that it inspires Yulian’s hired hacker to quit with a swift, “I’m out; no need to pay.”

In 2013, Naishuller directed a bloody POV-style music video for his band, Biting Elbows, which inspired his directorial debut, the clever POV action movie “Hardcore Henry.” With this more traditional action flick, Naishuller demonstrates his chops for shooting fight and action scenes, as well as the kind of ruthlessly efficient cine-

matic storytelling that best fits a film like this. The rapid-fire edit lends a sense of cheekiness, and Naishuller shows off his musical talent and ability to master mood with sound, speed and music; the soundtrack of standards, jazz, soul and rock is a big part of the storytelling and the film’s impish tone.

Lean, mean and brutish, “Nobody” is best enjoyed as the juicy piece of pulp that it is. But Odenkirk, stepping into an action-hero role for the first time, brings a sense of dolefulness and rue to this performance. Hutch’s character arc is fascinating, because his turn to violence doesn’t necessarily render him virile, but vulnerable, which allows him to connect to his family, and himself. “I got emotional,” he explains about one of his bombastic acts. Opening up means risking a body count, but staying closed off killed Hutch’s soul. Nobody can stand that.

“Nobody” is rated R for strong violence and bloody images, language throughout and brief drug use. Running time: 92 minutes. Now playing in select theaters.

‘Courier’ a throwback to spy thrillers not made anymore

BY ANN HORNADAY
The Washington Post

Benedict Cumberbatch delivers an appealing, technically tricky performance in “The Courier,” in which he plays Greville Wynne, a British salesman who in the 1960s became an improbable player in Cold War trade-craft at its most high-stakes.

Wynne really did exist, a fact that bears noting because his story is often too wildly dramatic to believe. In “The Courier,” Cumberbatch plays him with sodden, people-pleasing bonhomie; he’s a decent bloke but a bit of a lightweight, simply interested in making his next sale and getting home for cocktails with his witty, pretty wife, Sheila (Jessie Buckley), and their adorable 10-year-old son.

When Wynne is approached by CIA operative Emily Donovan (Rachel Brosnahan) and her opposite number at MI6 (Angus Wright), Wynne is nonplussed:



LIONSGATE AND ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS/TNS

Merab Ninidze and Benedict Cumberbatch star in “The Courier,” about real-life British salesman Greville Wynne (Cumberbatch) who is asked to spy for the CIA and MI6 in the 1960s during the Cold War.

He’s not a spy. But that’s the point. He’s above suspicion, with his only job being to travel to Moscow, do what he would usu-

ally do trying to drum up trade with a foreign market, and — oh yeah, make the acquaintance of a Soviet official and World War II

hero named Oleg Penkovsky (Merab Ninidze), who wants to avoid the nuclear confrontation he is certain Nikita Khrushchev is about to unleash.

Directed by Dominic Cooke from a script by Tom O’Connor, “The Courier” is enormous fun in its first hour and a half, while Cumberbatch makes the most of his good-humored character, who develops a genuine friendship with Penkovsky, portrayed by Ninidze with touching soulfulness. The filmmakers use Prague as a convincing stand-in for Moscow’s drab postwar brutalism. Fans of the wonderful “Dear Comrades!” will appreciate seeing another side to the same period, as Wynne is entertained with seemingly endless supplies of vodka, caviar and ballet. When Penkovsky informs him that his remit hinges on the ability to hold his liquor, Wynne replies with a twinkle: “It’s my one true gift.”

Cumberbatch delivers that line

with the same jaunty, self-aware tone that gives “The Courier” its lift and high spirits, at least until the story takes a far darker and more drastic turn. That emotional shift isn’t always quite as graceful as what’s gone before, with Cumberbatch at one point literally overplaying his hand to portray Wynne at a terrifying mental and physical breaking point.

Still, “The Courier” makes a smart, stylish stand for the kind of old-fashioned period spy thriller that is increasingly being turned into bingeable series for streaming services. Its modesty and carefully managed ambitions define its strong suit at a time when such films are scarcer every day. “The Courier” isn’t a great movie, but it’s a good one. And right now, that’s enough.

“The Courier” is rated PG-13 for violence, partial nudity, brief strong language and smoking throughout. Running time: 111 minutes. Now playing in select theaters.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

ELECTRONIC
ESCAPES

A year into the pandemic, digital distractions are still welcome. Here are some new and upcoming titles worth diving into.



505 Games

Control: Ultimate Edition contains the original version of the third-person supernatural action-adventure title, plus all subsequent expansions and modes.

BY BRITTON PEELE
The Dallas Morning News

Historically, March is not exactly the busiest time for new video game releases (though we lucked out last year when *Animal Crossing* and *Doom Eternal* arrived just in time for the pandemic to lock us all in). But as 2021 trudges on, a lot of people are still looking for things to do safely indoors. So what can you play?

If you're looking for things to keep you busy, here are some worthwhile games that came out this year, as well as some you might have missed as 2020 wound down.

Immortals Fenyx Rising

Do you like Greek mythology? Did you like *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*? Do you want to play a colorful open-world game in which you can fly and also hang out with Hermes? Then have I got the game for you.

While it has some suggestive content and earns its T for Teen rating, you could also look at *Immortals Fenyx Rising* as a somewhat more family-friendly alternative to the most recent games in the *Assassin's Creed* series. Sure, it's got some off-color jokes, but at least it doesn't have gory decapitations.

Platforms: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S, Nintendo Switch and PC.

Online: ubisoft.com/en-us/game/immortals-fenyx-rising

Bravely Default II

If you're an old-school gamer that misses the roleplaying games of the Super Nintendo era, *Bravely Default II* is likely up your alley. It's as if the *Final Fantasy* series went back to its '90s gameplay roots but with a storybook-esque graphical overhaul that takes advantage of the more modern Nintendo Switch hardware.

Fair warning: The game does also have elements of an old-school RPG, so you'll spend a lot of time walking back and forth in dungeons trying to get into fights with monsters just so you can level up before facing off against a boss. Still, nostalgia is a powerful drug, so there are plenty of people (myself included) for whom that game play is weirdly relaxing.

Don't mind the "II" in the name, by the way. While it's a sequel (technically the third in a series — Square Enix is bad at naming things), knowledge of the previous game(s) is not required.

Platform: Nintendo Switch

Online: nintendo.com/games/detail/bravely-default-ii-switch

Control: Ultimate Edition

One of my personal favorite games of 2019, *Control*, is getting a new lease on life on the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X|S with improved graphics and frame rates thanks to the power of the new consoles. This supernatural action



Ubisoft

Immortals Fenyx Rising puts players on a quest to save Greek gods and their home from a dark curse.

game is intentionally (and amazingly) weird, drawing on all the intrigue of stories like "Twin Peaks" and "The X-Files" and pairing it with stellar shooting and some really fun paranormal powers.

Platforms: PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S and via cloud streaming on the Nintendo Switch. Previously available on PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC.

Online: 505games.com/games/control-ultimate-edition

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2

As a teen, the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* games almost got me into skateboarding. Almost. The problem, though (aside from my complete lack of balance and fear of injuring myself), is that unlike in a video game, I can't grind my way through an abandoned mall or through a secret lab at Roswell.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2 is, in many ways, an ideal remake. It doesn't just mimic the original gameplay with a fresh coat of paint. It re-creates these classic games in the

SEE ESCAPES ON PAGE 19

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Escapes: Fantasy titles ever-popular



Activision

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2 is a third-person skateboarding video game designed to mimic a classic arcade-style experience.

FROM PAGE 18

way you remember them playing. Improvements made in later games have been retrofitted (including the revert from THPS3), and pulling off tricks across iconic levels feels fantastic. All of the levels from the first two games are present here, alongside a decent level creator and some fun online multiplayer modes. Much of the memorable pop music soundtrack has made the transition, too. Given the disappointing recent history of skateboarding video games, the fact that the developers stuck the landing on this one feels somewhat miraculous.

Platforms: PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC. Coming soon to PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S and Nintendo Switch.

Online: Tonyhawkthegame.com

Valheim

This is the game all the cool kids on Twitch are playing. Valheim is like if someone took the survival elements of games like Rust and Ark and asked, “But what if there were vikings?” You must hunt, fight and build your way through a randomly generated world, either alone or with friends.

The game is currently only on PC and is unfinished (available in early access on Steam), but it’s found its way into a lot of people’s hearts already. Also, it’s only \$20 and can be played online with up to 10 people, so there’s a lot to love on your way to Ragnarok.

Platform: PC

Online: valheimgame.com

Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity

It sounds like we may still be waiting a while until we see the next great adventure in the Zelda series. The latest original game to grace the Nintendo Switch doesn’t even have the name Zelda in the title, and for good reason: It’s an action game in the vein of Dynasty Warriors in which you spend hours mowing down hundreds upon hundreds of enemies in a story that serves as a sort of prequel to Breath of the Wild.

Still, it has enough of the right Zelda elements in it to tickle the right parts of my brain, and as I celebrate the series’ 35th anniversary this year, I’m willing to spend time with just about any Hyrule-based gameplay I can get my hands on.

Platform: Nintendo Switch

Online: zelda.com/hyrule-warriors



Coffee Stain Studios

The Viking-themed survival game Valheim is currently available only on PC and Steam, but it has already gained a legion of fans.

Valheim’s legend grows

Developer reflects on bugs, updates and prospects of acquisition

BY SHANNON LIAO

The Washington Post

Be wary when you chop down a tree in Valheim. Fans have learned this the hard way, running out of the way when chopping down a large tree only to have the trunk swing back — defying physics — and crush them.

If you’ve died this way, it’s not just the Norse gods who are laughing at your misfortune.

“We kind of hoped that the tree falling on your head thing would be a thing that many got to experience because it was kind of intended to work like that,” said Henrik Törnqvist, co-founder of Iron Gate Studios and designer on Valheim. “We find it pretty hilarious ourselves.”

Valheim, a Viking-themed survival game, has attracted frenzied attention from content creators and players with moments like these. The indie game, which was released as an early access title on Feb. 2, commands a large audience on the PC games storefront Steam, at one time logging just under half a million concurrent players. Coming in just behind classic titles such as PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and Dota 2, Valheim is the most popular indie game on Steam, according to Steam Charts. Its publisher Coffee Stain estimates it has sold more than five million copies, at \$19.99 a copy.

“We’re still struggling to grasp exactly how big this can become,” said Sebastian Badylak, Coffee Stain Publishing’s executive producer.

The game is a potent combination of Minecraft and Terraria-like exploration and building features and combat that recalls the Dark Souls games. The player

begins almost naked and in a field surrounded by rune stones. Collecting rocks and branches nets them resources to craft their first tools, which are useful for collecting food, crafting clothing and armor and eventually constructing a home. The world map is expansive, and as players venture further out, they face more challenging enemies across a varied landscape.

The attention the game has garnered in the past month has left the five-person team at Iron Gate Studio, based in Sweden, “quite overwhelmed,” said Törnqvist.

“We’re still struggling to grasp exactly how big this (game) can become.”

Sebastian Badylak

executive producer, Coffee Stain Publishing

While supporting the game, Valheim developers have had to work some weekends and put in extra time. But the studio has a no crunch policy, referring to a practice in the games industry that involves working extensive overtime to make deadlines, according to Törnqvist.

Iron Gate is now hiring for another programmer, animator and a quality assurance manager to “handle the flood of incoming bugs,” Törnqvist said. But while Iron Gate is looking to expand, the developers have said they don’t see an acquisition in their future.

“The main drawback of working at the bigger AAA studio is that it’s very easy

for individual employees to feel like just a cog in a bigger piece of machinery,” Törnqvist said. Having a small team means decisions get made quickly and fewer approvals are needed.

Valheim developers are planning four major content updates this year. One will focus on building, another will expand on exploration and combat, a third is focused on ships and fourth update later this year will aim to complete the Mistlands, an unfinished biome in the game.

Valheim may be in for some balancing, too. The bow and arrow weapon is “probably a bit overpowered right now,” Törnqvist said, adding, “it will probably get nerfed in a later patch.”

He said that after the studio has dealt with more serious bugs in the game, it will shift to adding more content.

Ambitious fans have found ways to keep busy in the game. A Reddit user posted his replica of the Millennium Falcon in game, and another player recreated Sauron’s gloomy tower from the Lord of the Rings franchise.

“After playing the game for probably about a couple hundred hours, I just don’t understand how people can actually come up with these things, let alone execute on those ideas,” said Badylak, executive producer at Coffee Stain.

Some fans even started a player-versus-player tournament, toggling a feature that allows you to damage other players, and assembling teams to compete for three rounds.

“Valheim” is still mostly a player-versus-environment game, and the player-versus-player mode is just for “bash[ing] your friends over the head,” but if it grows more popular, the developers will consider doing more with the mode, said Törnqvist.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Florence: Birthplace of the Renaissance

Here’s a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this pandemic.

After my first day in Florence, I remember thinking, “I’ve seen more great art in a few hours than many people see in a lifetime.”

Geographically small but culturally rich, Florence is home to some of the finest art and architecture in the world. In that single day, I looked Michelangelo’s David in the eyes, fell under the seductive sway of Botticelli’s Birth of Venus, and climbed the first great dome of the Renaissance, which gracefully dominates the city’s skyline today as it did 500 years ago.

After Rome fell in AD 476, Europe wallowed in centuries of relative darkness, with little learning, commerce or travel. Then, around 1400, there was a Renaissance: a rebirth of the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. Starting in Florence, it swept across Europe. Wealthy merchant and banking families showed their civic pride by commissioning great art.

With the Renaissance, artists rediscovered the beauty of nature and the human body, ex-

pressing the optimism of this new age. The ultimate representation of this: Michelangelo’s David. Poised confidently in the Accademia Gallery, David represents humankind stepping out of medieval darkness — the birth of our modern, humanist outlook. Standing boldly, David sizes up the giant, as if to say, “I can take him.” The statue was an apt symbol, inspiring Florentines to tackle



Rick Steves

their Goliaths.

The Uffizi Gallery holds the finest collection of Italian paintings anywhere, sweeping through art history from the 12th through 17th centuries, with works by Botticelli, Raphael, Giotto, Titian, Leonardo and Michelangelo. In the long, arcaded courtyard, a permanent line of tourists (who ignored my guidebook’s advice to book reservations online in advance) waits to buy tickets.

For me, a highlight of the Uffizi is Venus de’ Medici. Revered as the epitome of beauty, Venus is a Roman copy of a 2,000-year-old Greek statue that went missing.



Rick Steves

The cathedral’s sublime dome dominates the skyline of Florence, a city chock-full of art treasures.

Classical statues like this clearly inspired Sandro Botticelli, my favorite Florentine painter. His greatest paintings, including the Birth of Venus, hang in this gallery. According to myth, Venus was born from the foam of a wave. This newborn beauty with flyaway hair floats ashore on a clam shell while flowers tumble in slow motion. For me, Botticelli’s Birth of Venus represents the purest expression of Renaissance beauty.

The small, uncrowded Bargello Museum features the best collection of Florentine sculpture anywhere, including works by Michelangelo, Donatello, and Ghiberti. And hiding out at the underrated Duomo Museum, you’ll see one of Michelangelo’s Pietàs and Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise panels. Revolutionary in their realism and three-dimensionality, these panels were created in response to a citywide competition in 1401 to build new doors for

the Baptistery. Across the street from the Duomo Museum towers Florence’s famous cathedral.

Gaping up at the first great dome built in Europe in more than a thousand years, I celebrated the structure that marked the start of the architectural Renaissance.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

Europe’s Stations of the Cross represent Good Friday

On Good Friday — April 2 in 2021 — Christian communities worldwide commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The day is observed across Europe with somber processions and poignant plays. In Rome, the Pope leads the Via Crucis, a reenactment of the Passion of the Christ, at the Colosseum. In Seville, Spain, La Madrugá processions begin on Holy Thursday and spill over into Good Friday. In the town of Sartène on the French island of Corsica, the “catenacciu” is a candlelit procession led by a penitent whose identity is a mystery to all but the priest.

Measures meant to stifle the spread of COVID-19 continue to scuttle large-scale gatherings, religious and secular alike. Any travel over Easter seems destined to be local, should it take place at all.

A visual representation of Jesus’ death inviting contemplation not just at Easter but through the year is presented in the form of a Stations of the Cross. Also referred to as the Way of the Cross, Way of Sorrows or the Via Crucis, the term refers to a series of images, often numbering 14, that depict Jesus Christ on the day of his crucifixion. The route and stations are based on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, held to be the actual route Jesus walked while bearing his cross to Mount Calvary. Each image is meant to be accompanied by reflection and a specific prayer. Stations can be found inside churches, in church courtyards or along outdoor routes. Today we look at some sacred sites appropriate for Holy Week exploration.

Germany

Since the 18th century, Catholic churches in Germany have been urged by the Vatican to erect “Kreuzwege.” The number of stations has changed over time from two to 7 to 14 and most recently, to 15, with the final station depicting the resurrection of Jesus.



en.bamberg.info

The oldest surviving medieval Way of the Cross in Germany leads through Bamberg’s Altstadt.

Adenau: This community in the High Eifel of the Rhineland-Palatinate is known as a “Johanniterstadt” in remembrance of a branch of the Order of Saint John established there in the 12th century. Within walking distance of its handsome market square, a circa-1863 neo-Gothic Stations of the Cross beckons exploration. Rare plants and trees are planted along its approximately half-mile route. Online: tinyurl.com/445hhmec

Bamberg: The Bamberger Kreuzweg is Germany’s oldest, fully preserved Way of the Cross. A donation by Heinrich Marschalk von Raueneck to his town in 1503, he measured the distances between the stations on his own trip to the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem and adjusted the Bamberg route accordingly. The representation unfolds across seven well-preserved sandstone panels. The way starts in front of the portal of St. Elizabeth Church and depicts the house of Pilate where Christ took up his cross, and ends inside the St. Getreu Church with the scene of the crucifixion and entombment of Christ. Online: tinyurl.com/377k3ahp

Kevelaer: This town in North Rhine-Westphalia is an important Catholic pilgrimage location, attracting more than one million pilgrims annually. According to tradition, in 1641, a local merchant heard a voice requesting him to build a chapel, while his wife saw a vision of a chapel alight. This Chapel of Mercy (Gnadenkapelle) houses a copperplate engraving of Our Lady of Luxembourg that is considered to have miraculous healing powers. Kevelaer’s Great Stations of the Cross, inaugurated in 1874, passes 15 stations along a ¾-mile route passing through a leafy park. Online: tinyurl.com/8uw2whxu

St. Martin: This village along the German Wine Road in the Rhineland-Palatinate has a Stations of the Cross that typically serves as a pilgrimage site on Good Friday morning. At the intersection of Burgweg and Kreuzweg streets, a circa-1865 statue depicts Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The way with its 14 stations begins in front of the Kropsburg hill and concludes with a crucifixion group on the Ottilienberg. Online: tinyurl.com/af9dhjyw

Italy

The Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and of Lombardia is a collective name for nine groups of 16th and 17th-century chapels and structures built on mountains in northern Italy. They were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003.

Sacro Monte di Varallo in Varallo Sesia, the oldest of the group, offers the faithful a symbolic pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The complex is comprised of a Baroque basilica and more than 40 lavishly decorated chapels. Sacro Monte di Domodossola, the northernmost of the Sacred Mountains, is a Capuchin Calvary with 15 chapels dedicated to the Stations of the Cross. Sacro Monte di Belmonte, above the town of Valpergo, is a Calvary with a sanctuary dating back to medieval times and is made up of 13 chapels dedicated to the Passion of Christ laid out upon a circular route. Online: whc.unesco.org/en/list/1068

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

A view of the iconic stadium in the Olympiapark in Munich, Germany. The stadium’s tent-like, Plexiglas roof was unique in 1972, when the Olympic Games were held there.

A mental journey
Recalling times past at Munich’s Olympiapark

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

The best daytrip can sometimes be the one we take in our minds that reminds us of places we once visited, and will be able to go to again when things reopen.

For me, that means remembering the Olympiapark in Munich, which I visited last year, when lockdowns were lifted between the first and second waves of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe.

Despite its sometimes tragic and controversial history, the park became one of my happy places.

It was built for the 1972 Olympic Games, the first games in Germany since 1936, when Adolf Hitler tried to use the games to showcase the supremacy of the Aryan race. African-American athlete Jesse Owens’ four gold medals helped show that to be a myth.

The 1972 games were marked by tragedy, when 11 members of the Israeli team were taken hostage and killed by Palestinian terrorists, and by controversy, such as when the Soviet basketball team won gold by a single point over the U.S. after officials twice extended the game by

three seconds. It was the first time the Americans hadn’t won Olympic gold in basketball. They boycotted the medals ceremony.

The centerpiece of the park is the Olympic stadium, where the U.S. won six track and field gold medals, including Dave Wottle’s come-from-behind victory in the 800 meters.

The stadium has a tent-like, transparent roof, which is said to have been an architectural first. It still hosts sports events, as well as concerts — Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen have played there — and dayslong music festivals. But now, like similar venues in Germany, it’s closed because of the coronavirus.

A positive thing the 1972 Olympics are remembered for is the record-breaking success by U.S. swimmer Mark Spitz, the first person to win seven gold medals at the games.

You can swim in the same 50-meter pool as Spitz did when Germany’s pandemic restrictions end. The swimming complex has five pools, and houses the largest fitness center in Munich.

I would also recommend going up the Olympic Tower when restrictions are lifted. The viewing platform, more than 620 feet

On the QT

Location: Spiridon-Louis-Ring 21, 80809 Munich

Food: Occasional street vendors, and when restrictions are lifted, there’s a beer garden near the tower and stadium and a cafe in the pool complex.

Hours: The park is open 24 hours a day, but facilities like the stadium, tower or swimming complex have restricted opening hours and are currently closed.

Cost: Entry to the park is free, but there is a charge to visit the stadium or tower, and to use many of the facilities.

More information: Online: olympiapark.de/en/olympiapark-munich; Phone: +49 (0) 89 30 67 0

Immanuel Johnson

above the park, offers a bird’s-eye view of Munich and what was the Olympic village.

The park is roughly two hours away from Grafenwoehr and Vilseck and can be accessed by car, or train and public transportation. If you bring a bike or your running gear, you could visit now and jog or cycle around the park’s many outdoor trails. But make sure to come back when things reopen and make a day of it.

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The view from the Olympic Tower in the Olympiapark. The tower’s viewing platform is more than 620 feet above the ground.



A view from the Olympic Tower in the Olympiapark of what was the athletes’ village during the 1972 games. Tragedy unfolded in the village when Palestinian terrorists took members of the Israeli Olympic team hostage and killed them.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



Lamb sac kavurma from the Istanbul Restaurant in Wiesbaden, Germany, is lamb sautéed with onions, peppers, tomatoes and spices. It came with rice and flatbread.

PHOTOS BY DAVID EDGE/Stars and Stripes

It's all in the technique

Istanbul in Wiesbaden delights with rich, flavorful Turkish cuisine

BY DAVID EDGE
Stars and Stripes

Turkish food is often at its best when its techniques bring out the depth in otherwise humble ingredients.

Not unlike southern barbecue masters, the country's chefs take the tougher cuts of meats and use low and slow cooking to make them tender, while giving them a deep, rich flavor.

The Istanbul Restaurant has an extensive menu that offers everything from Turkish-style pizzas, doner kebabs, main courses and the decadent desserts Turkey is known for.

Because of the coronavirus restrictions in the German state of Hessen, I chose to have my food delivered. It was still hot when it arrived.

For starters, I ordered yaprak sarma — Turkish for grape leaves stuffed with a tasty mixture of minced chicken and rice — and sigara borek, fried dough filled with feta cheese and served with a yogurt sauce.

My main course was lamb sac kavurma, one of my all-time



favorite Turkish dishes. Kavurma is a meat dish that has been fried or sautéed, in this case with onions, peppers, tomatoes and spices. At Istanbul, it was served with rice and flatbread, and was mouthwateringly delicious.

I don't normally eat dessert, but I decided to try their baklava. It was made of layers of filo dough pastry and finely chopped pistachios, drenched in honey and baked to a golden crisp. It was good, but super sweet.

The prices are reasonable, and the portions are a good size.

Starters cost between 4 euros and 8.50 euros, and doners and lahmacun — Turkey's version of pizza — start at around 4 euros for a small doner or lahmacun with salad and sauce, and go up to around 14 euros for a meal with all the fixings. Dishes for vegetarians include falafel, starting at 5 euros, and main courses



Yaprak sarma from the Istanbul Restaurant are grape leaves stuffed with chicken and rice.

The Istanbul Restaurant

Address: Michelsberg 28, 65183 Wiesbaden
Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. daily
Menu: lieferando.de/en/menu/istanbul-restaurant-wiesbaden. It's in German, and they don't speak English.
Information: +49 (0)611 5049557; Online: facebook.com/IstanbulWiesbaden

David Edge

start at around 8 euros and go up to around 19 euros.

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Rich, savory Khichidi is staple in Indian cuisine

BY AMY DREW THOMPSON
Orlando Sentinel

Lentils and rice and veggies and spice.

Funny how rhymes occur naturally when your belly is full and warm and happy. Also funny: how there are different kinds of full.

When I'm full of say, giant, bacon-slathered hamburger, I don't generally feel this wonderful. Or energetic. Or healthy. Nothing against bacon-slathered hamburgers — all things in moderation, after all — but "research" for the Orlando Sentinel Foodie Awards is not a moderate undertaking.

For the second March in a row, I'm coming in like a lion — full of meat. Fortunately, March is National Nutrition Month, and I'm looking to purge the wings and tacos and barbecue and go out like a lamb on lentils.

That's where Hari Pulapaka and his book, "Dreaming in Spice: A Sinfully Vegetarian Odyssey" come in.

Pulapaka is a jack of all trades to be sure, and though he strayed from his vegetarian roots not long after moving to the States from his native Mumbai, he's found his way back with a tome featuring some 251 globally inspired recipes.

Many are simple — like the one I landed on for my first foray back to this cooking column: khichidi.

Pronounced with the same cadence as "chickadee," khichidi has been a staple in Indian cuisine for centuries.

"It's modest, nutritious, protein-dense and savory," says Pulapaka of the dish. "In fact, often in many households, it's the first type of solid food that a baby would eat, as it is savory and relatively soft in texture without garnishes."

Khichidi's two staples: grain and legume. Any two could form the foundation of the dish, he says, but the book's version is decidedly Indian: lentils and rice.

The dish is finished with a technique known as tadka, or tempering. Popular in Indian and other Asian cuisines, tadka is the process of briefly frying whole spices in hot oil, releasing wonderful flavors and aromas. The pan's entire contents are then poured over and incorporated into the dish.

Don't skip it. Tempering is easy and for the flavors in the dish, life-changing. And like the khichidi itself, tempering is also a great place for experimenting if you're keen.

In the end, you'll have a rich, flavorful and gorgeous dish, veggie-laden and exceedingly nutritive.



AMY DREW THOMPSON/Orlando Sentinel

Khichidi is a healthy, satisfying staple of Indian cuisine.

Khichidi

Ingredients

- 1 small onion, diced
- ½ cup carrots, diced
- ¼ cup edamame or green peas
- 1-inch piece ginger, minced
- 2 green chilies or 1 jalapeño, minced
- ½ cup cremini mushrooms, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 cup green, brown or red lentils — rinsed and drained
- 4 cups vegetable stock
- 1 cup rice, rinsed several times and soaked
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon cumin seed
- ½ teaspoon cayenne or red chili powder
- Pinch of ground asafoetida (substitute: onion and garlic powders)
- Salt and pepper, in stages and to taste
- Suggested: fresh curry leaves, generally available at Indian markets

Directions

In a shallow pot, heat some oil and sauté onions, carrots, ginger, bay leaf, mushrooms and chilies over medium heat for about 10 minutes.

Season with salt, add lentils and turmeric. Cook about 15 minutes more, stirring frequently.

Add rice and edamame, stir well, season with salt, then add stock. Taste to ensure it is seasoned to your liking. Cover pot reduce heat — low to medium — and cook 20 minutes.

Open lid once at the end to ensure lentils are cooked.

This is the tadka, or tempering, stage: heat some oil in small pan over medium-high heat. Once hot, add peppercorns, cayenne, asafoetida cumin seeds and curry leaves. Fry about 15 seconds. Pour everything, including infused oil, over the rice and lentils. Gently mix.

Serve with a wedge of lime and cilantro garnish. A dollop of yogurt is a nice optional add, as well.

Serves 4.

Recipe from "Dreaming in Spice: A Sinfully Vegetarian Odyssey," by Hari Pulapaka

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

A salvage operation

Unable to sail ships, companies pivot to Alaskan ‘dry cruises’

BY FRAN GOLDEN
Bloomberg

Cruising may be on hold, but thousands of Holland America Line and Princess Cruises loyalists are still hoping to head to Alaska this summer with their favorite travel companies. And they probably will manage to do so — just not on a ship.

Call it a “dry cruise.”

Instead of admiring glaciers and frolicking whales off the shores of Alaska’s southern coastal towns, they will bus through the wilds of Denali National Park and Preserve to spot bear, moose and caribou. They’ll glimpse North America’s largest peak and spend time in Anchorage, with a boat tour of Portage Glacier. Rather than connecting the dots on their itinerary via 5,000-passenger cruise ships, they’ll traverse the state on trains with viewing domes, hitting landlocked Fairbanks to learn about life up north.

All this is being facilitated by Carnival’s Princess and Holland America cruise lines, which have recently found themselves unable to do business here otherwise. Cabotage laws dating to the late 1800s require foreign-flagged ships like Carnival’s to call at an international port along every U.S. voyage — making a trip to Alaska impossible without Canada’s cooperation. And in February the country banned cruise ships from its ports until March 2022.

Enter Carnival’s land trips. They intend to salvage business for two sister brands that together make up nearly half the lucrative Alaska cruise market — which had projected a record-breaking 1.4 million passengers last summer before the pandemic brought that number to zero. In 2019, of the nearly 2.5 million people who visited Alaska, more than half were on ships.

Dry cruises aren’t as radical as they sound. Carnival may be most famous for its ships, but in Alaska it also owns the massive Gray Line Alaska ground operation, including a fleet of deluxe motor coaches, 20 private rail cars (pulled by Alaska Railroad trains), and 10 hotels.

In a normal year, many of

these facilities would attract passengers who want to extend their vacations to explore Alaska’s interior. Typically it’s the ancillary business; now it’s the only one.

“The idea is salvaging some of the season,” says Charlie Ball, who heads Alaska operations for the two cruise lines. “There are many hand-raisers who want to go to Alaska.”

Here’s how dry cruises in Alaska will work in 2021: Those who book escorted packages, priced from \$2,599 per person, will fly into Anchorage on their own accord before joining a tour director and group of 26 for an all-inclusive vacation with train tickets, activities and meals. They’re designed to be like “a cruise on land,” says Ball.

“The idea is salvaging some of the season. There are many hand-raisers who want to go to Alaska.”

Charlie Ball

Head of Alaska operations for Princess and Holland America

Unescorted packages, from \$1,699 per person, offer the full itinerary without the group or guide. Bookings are via Gray Line Alaska, for a season that stretches from late May into the first week of September.

The cruise lines are reopening two seasonal lodges for the trips, initially at 25% to 28% capacity to allow for social distancing. Near the entrance of Denali National Park is the 60-acre, riverfront complex called McKinley Chalet Resort, which normally accommodates almost 1,200 guests (mostly Holland America Line cruise-goers); farther south, on the Kenai River in Copper Landing, is the Kenai Princess Wilderness Lodge, whose 86 bungalow-style rooms have wood-burning stoves and private balconies.



Meg Roussos/Bloomberg

Boat slips stand empty at a dock last year in Juneau, Alaska. The Alaskan economy took a massive hit when the pandemic brought cruising to a standstill. Cruise companies are hoping to inject some much-needed money into that shattered economy and salvage some of the season with “dry cruises.”

Both properties are considered first class by Alaska standards.

From those home bases — along with Holland America Line’s 400-room Westmark Fairbanks Hotel and the independently owned Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage — the cruise lines will be able to provide a revenue stream to local tourism businesses, like flightseeing and rafting operators. Among them there’s even a local cruise company called Riverboat Discovery, which does touristy yet popular four-hour trips on the Chena and Tanana rivers from its three-deck stern-wheeler.

The goal is to expand these tour options to the financially hard-hit communities in the southeast, including Juneau and Skagway, where Holland America Line has another hotel. “We’re still looking at that,” Ball says. “We have great ability to scale this business pretty quickly.”

Another summer without tourism would be catastrophic for Alaska’s local communities.

The economic loss is estimated at nearly \$1 billion from missed cruise passenger spending and taxes and fees paid by the cruise lines to state and local communities. That big number has even bigger implications. In the tourism-reliant Denali Borough, for instance, the bed tax at hotels pays much of the school system’s budget.

While it’s unclear how much of that money can be salvaged with land tours, the trips offer a minimum guarantee for locals: hundreds of newly available jobs. Likely in the mix will be drivers to shuttle passengers on motor coaches and teachers-turned-tour guides.

Carnival is also looking to retain its full-time Alaska workforce of more than 600, which was temporarily furloughed during last year’s pandemic shutdown. “A decent mechanic in



Tim Rue/Bloomberg

The Princess Cruise Lines Island Princess cruise ship passes in front of Margerie Glacier in 2019 in Glacier Bay, Alaska. The cruise company, along with Holland America, is hoping a shift to land-based tourism will help salvage part of the 2021 season.

Alaska can walk down the street and get a new job in five days,” says Ball, adding that a loss of such talent would be detrimental to the company’s “intellectual capital.”

The exact number of employees this year will depend on sales, he adds, acknowledging that it will likely be a full order of magnitude lower than normal years. “The model is to start small and hope for growth.”

There are Hail Mary efforts under way to bring back cruises this season. If passed, legislation filed by members of the state’s congressional delegation in early March would allow temporary exemptions to those currently prohibitive cabotage laws. But even then, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would have to clear ships to sail — which so far seems a distant prospect.

“We have seen double-digit employment declines in Southeast [Alaska] and a more than 30% drop in revenue statewide,” said Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) in a statement. “Missing another cruise season would only compound the economic fallout that has been devastating

for so many families.”

Whether on land or sea, cruise companies will have to address COVID-19 protocols ahead of the season’s start.

The plan is to have 100% of the staff vaccinated. Ball says that unvaccinated guests will be welcome, but all guests — regardless of antibodies — will be asked to mask up and social distance. Deep cleaning procedures will be in place, motor coaches and restaurants will operate at reduced capacity, and a local health-care company will execute COVID testing for any visitor who arrives without negative PCR results or develops symptoms.

Ball says Carnival was confident about interest in its land program based on preview discussions with travel agents and tour operators. Since bookings opened earlier this month, he says the company is “very pleased” with the initial response.

“There are people who want to get out and travel,” Ball says, adding that Alaska has both wide-open spaces and a high rate of resident vaccination. “If not Alaska this summer, then where?”

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



Beans, near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, sells a selection of raw coffee beans that are on display in wooden barrels.

PHOTOS BY DANIEL BETANCOURT/Stars and Stripes

Roasted to perfection

Spilling the beans on Beans, a one-man coffee roastery near Yokosuka Naval Base

BY DANIEL BETANCOURT
Stars and Stripes

A one-minute stroll from Higashi-Zushi Station near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, will land you inside a beautifully decorated shop serving freshly roasted coffee beans to your exact specification.

Beans is a quaint shop in the quiet town of Higashi-Zushi. At first glance I was captivated by little details, like the coffee bean displays outside the shop, but I was pulled in by the alluring aroma of fresh coffee beans.

I was greeted by the owner, a friendly, elderly man who speaks some English. Signage in English allowed me to move easily throughout Beans and take in everything on offer.

The shop sells a selection of raw coffee beans that are on display in wooden barrels. A variety of choices are available from places like Colombia, Indonesia, Jamaica, Guatemala and Yemen, and Beans will roast your selection to your liking.



Coffee aficionados may take Beans' high-quality roasted beans home whole or ground.

Coffee aficionados may take the roasted beans home whole or ground. Bags are sold in quantities of 200 grams, or 7 ounces.

The roasting process takes about 20 minutes with some variation depending on your selection. There are seven levels of roast available, from American to Italian. Each type has a detailed description displayed in English in terms of flavor profile so you can make the best decision for yourself.

The shop has only one little bench that seats two. Many customers poke their heads in to give an order and return later for pickup.

I decided to stick around and enjoy the relaxing ambiance and aromas inside the store. The owner was kind enough to spark some conversation with me and even brewed me up a fresh cup of coffee on the house as I

Beans

Address: 1 Chome-5-1 Numama, Zushi, Kanagawa 249-0004
Hours: Open daily, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Prices: Most 200-gram coffee bags cost between 800 yen and 1,400 yen.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A one-minute walk from Higashi-Zushi Station in Kanagawa prefecture, Japan.
Information: 046-872-2272

David Betancourt



A short stroll from Higashi-Zushi Station will bring you to Beans, a beautifully decorated shop serving coffee beans freshly roasted to your exact specification.



The roasting process at Beans takes about 20 minutes. There are seven levels available, from American to Italian.



The owner of Beans prepares a fresh cup of coffee at his quaint roastery near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

waited. The light roast I was offered highlighted the quality of the beans.

Coffee bean prices per bag range from 800 yen, about \$7.40, to 1,400 yen, apart from the Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee beans that were going for 4,000 yen.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Lending a hand

As Australia heals, there’s a host of ways for visitors to help

By ELIZABETH HEATH
Special to The Washington Post

While most parts of the world suffered a terrible 2020, Australia’s trifecta of tragedies seemed especially cruel. Stoked by a yearslong drought, fires ravaged huge swaths of the continent and killed or displaced billions of animals. A massive coral bleaching event fueled by the warming ocean further threatened the already fragile Great Barrier Reef. Then came the coronavirus, which shut down international and most domestic travel in a nation struggling to recover — financially and emotionally — from the bush fires.

But in an almost on-brand manner, Australia is bouncing back. With some human assistance, animal populations and habitat are rebounding — even the Great Barrier Reef is getting IVF treatments. Hotels left in piles of ash are being rebuilt. Smoke-tainted grapes are being used to flavor gin. Australians themselves are discovering more of the wonders of their own ample backyard. And, in a case of tragedy spawning trend, a new genre of travel has emerged from the annus horribilis that was 2020 — restorative tourism.

In this form of more engaged travel, international visitors can participate in activities — such as replanting eucalyptus trees, counting cockatoos or surveying coral growth — that will help the country’s many affected areas come back to life. “People around the globe have such an affinity with Australia’s unique wildlife,” says John Daw, executive officer of Australian Wildlife Journeys. “We believe that giving visitors a sense of custodianship over our wildlife and habitats will make them care about it even more.”

As the pandemic nears a possible end, “people are craving deeper, more meaningful connections with the places they visit,” says Phillipa Harrison, managing director of Tourism Australia. “When borders are open once again, Australia is ready and waiting with exactly those sorts of experiences.”

Travelers keen to visit Australia will still have to wait, because borders are unlikely to fully open until at least late 2021. But once international visitors can enter, they’ll find ample opportunities to assist in bush fire and reef recovery. (Some restorative tourism opportunities can be found at

australia.com.) Many of the hoteliers and tour operators in fire-affected regions, as well as near the reef, already offered programs where visitors could lend a hand, and 2020 events have brought those efforts into sharper focus. On Tasmania, for example, 2019 bush fires scorched the remote Overland Track, home to ancient stands of montane conifers. The upside? The fires spurred the production of conifer cones, which had not happened since 2015. On guided walking tours organized by Tasmanian Walking Company in partnership with the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, visitors map tree locations, collect seeds and learn about Tasmania’s alpine flora.

On Kangaroo Island, restorative tourism opportunities include bird banding and re-wilding, ride-alongs to check remote cameras and monitor wildlife populations, and, depending on the season, helping with tree-planting programs for long-term habitat restoration.

On the mainland, high-end Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley runs a dedicated “Conservation Experience,” giving guests the chance to participate in seed collection, habitat reconstruction, animal counts and tree planting. Echidna Walkabout tours offer one- to three-day Koala Recovery Experience trips to habitats west of Melbourne, where participants plant eucalyptus trees and learn about the importance of koalas to the ecosystem. In Far North Queensland, FNQ Nature Tours takes visitors on daylong treks in search of the spotted-tail quoll — a marsupial that is endangered and, like its cousin the Tasmanian devil, also carnivorous.

Over on the Great Barrier Reef, experienced divers can join Passions of Paradise’s weekly eco-tour and collect data about reef health and coral gardening efforts. Snorkelers can take a guided snorkel safari with Reef Magic Cruises and survey a coral stabilization project installed over a cyclone-damaged coral rubble field. When the Great Reef Census resumes in October, Ridley says, tourists will be able to take part via a range of reef tour and dive companies by taking photos of the reef and submitting them online.

And for those who aren’t interested in counting coral, petting koalas or planting eucalyptus trees, there are more passive ways to give back. Across wide swaths of Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales wine



SOUTH AUSTRALIA TOURISM COMMISSION/The Washington Post

A koala and joey on Kangaroo Island. As Australia recovers from a multitude of disasters, tour companies and hotels are educating visitors on ways they can help, from planting trees to counting endangered birds.

country, fires or smoke taint — the infiltration of smoke in grapes on the vine — ruined the 2020 vintage for several vineyards. But Reed & Co. Distilleries, based in Bright, Victoria, teamed with local vintner Billy Button Wines to make lemons out of lemonade.

“We were determined to not be defeated by the fires,” says Hamish Nugent, who runs the distillery and bar with his wife, Rachel Reed. “So instead of the smoke-tainted grapes going to waste, we found new ways to showcase them in the 2020 vintage of our

two grape-based spirits.” Spirit Lab Mistelle and Spirit Lab Gin & Juice were top sellers last year, enough so that new releases are planned in 2021.

Well-intentioned tourists aren’t going to slow global warming or bring the Great Barrier Reef back from the brink. Yet for Ridley and others, the collective response to Australia’s 2020 disasters was ultimately encouraging. “For all the horrors of the pandemic,” Ridley says, “it has proven the capacity for people and governments in many places around the world to step beyond

politics, get organized and dramatically adapt to the massive challenges facing their people.”

That ability to take it all in stride and adjust course as circumstances require may not be a uniquely Australian trait, but it is one that sparks national pride. When visitors can finally return to Australia, Nugent says, they will find a country rife with “creativity, strength and determination” and that offers visitors plenty of ways to take part in the compelling recovery of a natural world that is altered but unbowed.

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WEEKEND: FOOD



HAVEN DALEY/AP
A customer drinks an alcohol-free cocktail Feb. 12 at San Francisco's zero-proof bar Ocean Beach Cafe.

Buzz without the booze

A new wave of low- and non-alcohol bars is opening around the world, catering to the sober, curious or medically challenged

BY DEE-ANN DURBIN
Associated Press

There's something missing from a new wave of bars opening around the world: Alcohol.

Aimed at the growing number of people exploring sobriety, the bars pour adult drinks like craft cocktails without the booze. At 0% Non-Alcohol Experience, a futuristic bar in Tokyo, patrons can sip a mix of non-alcoholic white wine, sake and cranberries from a sugar-rimmed glass. On a recent evening at Sans Bar in Austin, Texas, customers gathered at outdoor tables, enjoying live music, bottles of alcohol-free IPA and drinks like the watermelon mockarita, which is made with a tequila alternative.

Sober bars aren't a new phenomenon. They first appeared in the 19th century as part of the temperance movement. But while previous iterations were geared toward non-drinkers or people in recovery, the newer venues welcome the sober as well as the curious.

"A lot of people just want to drink less," said Chris Marshall, Sans Bar's founder.

Marshall, who has been sober for 14 years, opened the bar after serving as an addiction counselor. But he estimates 75% of his customers also drink alcohol

outside of his bar.

"It's just easier," said Sondra Prineaux, a regular customer at Sans Bar. "I don't have to worry about leaving my car here and getting an Uber home. I'll wake up without a headache."

Abstinence challenges like Dry January — which began in 2013 — and a growing interest in health and wellness are behind the trend, said Brandy Rand, chief operating officer for the Americas at IWSR Drinks Market Analysis.

Last year, alcohol consumption in 10 key markets — including the U.S., Germany, Japan and Brazil — fell 5%, IWSR said. Consumption of low- and no-alcohol drinks rose 1% in that same time period.

Alcohol still far outsells low- and no-alcohol drinks. Drinkers in those key markets consumed 9.7 billion 9-liter cases of alcohol in 2020, compared to 292 million

"This type of thing, it's not a fad. People don't wake up to the negative impact alcohol is having on their life and then change their mind."

Billy Wynne
Co-owner of Awake in Denver



JOSEPH B. FREDERICK/AP
Alcohol-free spirits for sale at Spirited Away, New York's first "booze-free bottle shop," are shown March 4. According to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, global consumption of zero-proof beer, wine and spirits is growing two to three times faster than overall alcohol consumption.

9-liter cases of low- and no-alcohol beverages. But Rand notes that global consumption of low- and no-alcohol beer, wine and spirits is growing two to three times faster than overall alcohol consumption.

An explosion of new products is also fueling sales. There are drinks from smaller makers like Chicago's Ritual Zero Proof — which opened in 2019 and makes no-alcohol whiskey, gin and tequila — and big companies like Anheuser-Busch, which introduced alcohol-free Budweiser Zero last year.

"I have the wonderful problem of too many great options," said Douglas Watters, who opened Spirited Away, a New York shop that sells nonalcoholic beer, wine and spirits, in November.

Watters said the pandemic lockdown caused him to rethink his usual pattern of ending each day with a cocktail. He started experimenting with nonalcoholic beverages, and by August he had decided to open his store. Many of his customers are sober, he said, but others are pregnant or have health issues. Some are training for marathons; others just want to cut back on alcohol.

"There are a lot of people, this past year more than ever, thinking more critically about what they're drinking and how it's making them feel," he said.

Joshua James, a veteran bartender, had a similar realization during the pandemic. After a stint at Friendship House, a substance abuse treatment center, he recently opened Ocean Beach Cafe, an alcohol-free bar in San Francisco.

"I wanted to destigmatize the words addiction, recovery and sober," he said. "There's a thousand reasons to not want to drink as much."

The coronavirus, James said, "warp-speeded" the change in many people's drinking habits. But it has also hurt the nascent nonalcoholic bar scene.

Some bars, like The Virgin Mary Bar in Dublin and Zeroliq in Berlin, have temporarily closed their doors due to regulations. Getaway, a nonalcoholic bar in New York, transitioned

into a coffee shop to weather the pandemic. Owner Sam Thonis has added outdoor seating and hopes to reopen the bar soon.

Billy Wynne, the co-owner of Awake in Denver, is also selling coffee and bottles of nonalcoholic spirits out of a carryout window for now. But he plans to open the doors to a nonalcoholic bar next month.

Wynne says the price of drinks will be comparable to a regular bar. Alcohol is cheap, he said, and the process for extracting it from some beverages makes them more expensive.

Alcohol delivery site Drizly charges \$33 for a 700 ml bottle of Seedlip Spice 94, a nonalcoholic spirit. That's slightly more than a 750 ml bottle of Aviation Gin, which sells for \$30. But Wynne thinks customers are willing to pay for the craft that goes into a cocktail or a flavorful wine whether it has alcohol or not.

He said his customers tend to be in their 30s or 40s, and the majority are women. Some tell him they've been waiting their whole lives for a bar like his to open.

"This type of thing, it's not a fad," he said. "People don't wake up to the negative impact alcohol is having on their life and then change their mind."

WEEKEND: BOOKS

New places, new perspectives

Comic novel about man on ‘journey of curiosity’ about his identity dedicated to teachers who helped author find his own

BY CHRIS HEWITT
Star Tribune

When Chang-rae Lee begins a project, the writer always asks himself: “Why do I need this story?”

“My Year Abroad,” his comic novel, is about a young New Jerseyan named Tiller who’s “twelve and one-half % Asian.” Tiller, 20, drifts from his father’s home to a relationship with an older woman to a series of mentors, passively taking in their business, relationship, food and sexual tips.

Initially, Lee dedicates the novel to another main character. He first dreamed up Pong, a shadowy, Chinese American businessman who meets Tiller on a golf course and ends up spiriting him to Hong Kong, where many of the picaresque’s outlandish events take place.

“Pong is not cowed by being a minority or immigrant in a culture. He’s someone with power and means and I thought, ‘Gosh, I really like this character,’” said Lee by phone. “But I started to interrogate that story and think, ‘Why do I need it? Why do I find this figure so appealing?’ And that’s when I came up with Tiller.”

Because Tiller is not sure what he wants from life, he’s in a rut. That’s something Lee could relate to. After 14 years as a creative writing teacher at Princeton, he switched coasts and moved to Stanford University in 2016, around the time he started the book.

“I was feeling fairly established and comfortable, and I needed — as we all do — a new perspective,” said Lee, 55.

Shifting to the San Francisco area, a

“ready doorway to Asian culture,” had a big impact on his sixth novel.

“What is emerging from Tiller is his Asianness and his interest in Asian things. That’s always been something that is in the background for me,” said Lee, whose “Aloft,” “Native Speaker” and “A Gesture Life” all grapple with cultural dislocation. “Some of my earlier books, the characters are much deeper in thinking about this but Tiller is a young guy, and because of his smaller percentage ... he’s just beginning a journey of curiosity.”

Lee, too, has been on a journey of curiosity about his identity. His family moved from South Korea to New York’s suburban Westchester County when he was a toddler, and his earliest understanding of his new world came at the library.

“My first-grade teacher and mother had a little compact to help me try to learn English,” Lee said.

Instead of dictating what books to read, librarians made an effort to learn who he was.

“I remember winning a library contest for reading the most books when I was in first grade,” he said. “I was one of those kids who was voracious.”

Since then, Lee has had plenty of instructors who are adept, as a character notes in “My Year Abroad,” at conning a student into believing he’s better than he thought he was.

“I would say the moments I have realized I was really learning something, not even necessarily from the subject at hand but about life, was when these teachers started or challenged me,” Lee said. “It wasn’t about a transfer of knowledge but a kind of human moment when I felt something visceral. One thing I believe is that the body knows before

the mind does ... There’s so much sound in this book, with singing [karaoke plays a key role] and Tiller hearing his mother’s thrumming sound. It’s really about the extremes of human fascination. That, to me, is a part of what Tiller is finding in the book: going to the limits and maybe finding his own thing.”

His job as a teacher, of course, is to help writers find their own things.

“Any book should unsettle, whether it’s a humorous romp or a serious historical fiction. What’s the point otherwise?” he said.

Lee’s early jobs included dealing with the romantic fiction “slush pile” of novels submitted to Dell Publishing. He found Patrick Suskind’s “Perfume” in the pile and loved it, but another publisher already had snagged the eventual bestseller about a man whose obsession with scents leads him to murder.

“This is what I tell students: It’s not about comforting people. Uproot them and give them a new rooting,” Lee said. “Get readers out of their place and put them in fresh ground.”

Chang-rae Lee’s tinkering with a few ideas for a new book, but the end of a project always makes him grateful for those who helped him become a writer in the first place.

“It’s kind of an occasion to think about the folks who have inspired me, or gave me great advice, or sometimes yelled at me,” Lee said.

Those inspiring yellers thought there was something special in Lee’s work before he did, and — like the character in “My Year Abroad” — conned him into believing it.

“My best writing teachers would read something I wrote, and I would be glib and try to blow it off and be cool about it. But they’d say, ‘No, don’t do that. You wrote something real here. Take it seriously,’” Lee



MICHELLE BRANCA LEE, MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/TNS

Chang-rae Lee says both he and the protagonist in “A Year Abroad” benefited from mentors who saw them not for who they were but who they could be.

recalled. “It made me think, ‘Holy crap. Yes. I should take it seriously. This is not just a posture, not just me being cool.’”

The novelist thinks those teachers looked past the Chang-rae Lee in front of them to the Chang-rae Lee he could become.

Now, he pays that forward in his teaching. “I try to be honest, not harsh, and I try to see them not just as the writer of a particular piece of fiction or essay but as a whole person,” Lee said. “I think good teachers can present a version of you that you haven’t yet come to subscribe to.”

Throughout “My Year Abroad,” mentors do just that for Tiller. They help him discover skills he didn’t realize he had, just as mentors persuaded Lee to pursue a course that led to being a Pulitzer Prize finalist for 2010’s “The Surrendered” and a PEN/Hemingway winner for his 1994 debut, “Native Speaker.”

All of which is the reason Lee needed to tell the story in “My Year Abroad.” It’s also the reason for its simple, profound dedication: “For my teachers.”

Cosimano’s adult novel a morality tale, screwball comedy

BY OLIVE H. COGDILL
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Years ago, a story circulated about a woman telling a colleague how she left her kids, ages 3 and 5, alone at home all day, fed them once a day and had no plans to send them to school. The conversation was overheard by



another woman with a reputation for causing problems at work, starting rumors and lying about her co-workers. The next day, the first woman was surprised when the police and a children’s services representative showed up at her home to rescue those youngsters, only to find two well-cared-for, healthy and energetic shih tzus — the “kids” in question.

That story — whether true or legend — became a cautionary tale about the intersection of

gossip, rumors and nasty co-workers.

The story also parallels what happens to Finlay Donovan, the stressed-out and hapless, but also appealing, heroine of “Finlay Donovan Is Killing It,” the first adult novel from YA author Elle Cosimano. Part screwball comedy, part morality tale, the amusing “Finlay Donovan Is Killing It” is also a tale about parenting, bad divorces, reinventing oneself, rising above misery and, well, becoming a hit woman. It’s a solid, thoughtful and funny yet poignant mystery that never once becomes a one-note story.

Finlay is at a low point. She’s months behind even starting her latest romantic suspense novel; her darling children, ages 2 and 4 (and they really are human kids), are out of control; she is broke, and her despicable ex-husband wants her to pay him rent and is threatening to take custody of the children.

Late to a meeting with her agent, Finlay first must disguise herself because the suburban

Virginia restaurant has banned her for life — a little matter of dumping a bowl of soup over the head of her ex-husband’s girlfriend. In discussing plot twists in the novel she can’t seem to write, Finlay is mistaken for a real killer planning her next hit. Eavesdropping at the next table, Patricia Mickler offers Finlay \$50,000 to dispatch her husband,

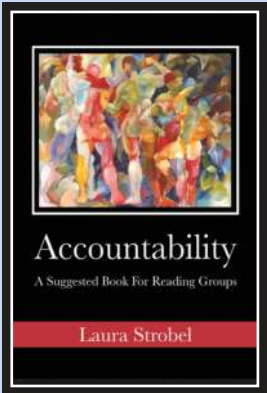
Harris, “a very, very bad man.”

Finlay is appalled at the idea, though she wonders just how bad Harris is. And she’s appalled at herself for realizing that \$50,000 could solve many problems. As Finlay looks into Harris’ life, she finds an unlikely ally in her nanny, Vero, who has school loans to pay.

“Finlay Donovan Is Killing It”

balances the morality of being a hit woman with the morality of ridding the world of an evil man. Cosimano infuses her novel with large swaths of humor while adding realistic terror.

“Finlay Donovan Is Killing It” sets a new career path for Cosimano, and Finlay discovers a new income stream as she will find no shortage of bad men.



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WEEKEND: MUSIC

By MARK KENNEDY

Associated Press

Freshly minted Grammy-winning songwriter Starrah has long helped others be stars. Now it's her turn to shine.

The hitmaker for the likes of Drake, Rihanna, Maroon 5, Camila Cabello, Nicki Minaj, Halsey and Katy Perry released her debut full-length album last week, a natural extension for the self-taught studio prodigy.

"I just really love hearing new sounds and experimenting with music," she says. "I just feel like a little mad scientist in the lab when I put stuff together and just see what it does."

The 13-track "Longest Interlude" showcases her command of R&B, hip-hop and pop skills, all delivered in an achingly personal collection she likens to opening her diary.

"I personally feel like the only thing that's missing from a lot of music right now is just the raw emotion and honesty, like vulnerability," she says. "Everybody wants to be cool. Nobody wants to be vulnerable."

Starrah has tapped some musical royalty for producing help, including James Blake, Skrillex, Boi1da and Nile Rogers. She recorded some of the songs at Abbey Road Studios, where the Beatles recorded. She says it's all a bit surreal.

"The only time I heard about the Beatles was a music class, so it's crazy to think that I recorded my music in the studio that they worked, with Rogers — a legend," she says. "It's hard to wrap my mind around it sometime, but it's really cool. It's like a dream."

She's co-written songs that have more than 14 billion streams, among them Cabello's "Havana," Maroon 5's "Girls Like You," Drake's "Fake Love," Halsey's "Now or Never," Maroon 5 and SZA's "What Lovers Do" and Perry's "Swish Swish" featuring Nicki Minaj.



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Grammy-winning songwriter Starrah poses for a portrait in Beverly Hills, Calif., on Sept. 16. The hitmaker for the likes of Drake, Rihanna, Maroon 5, Camila Cabello, Nicki Minaj, Halsey and Katy Perry released her debut full-length album, "Longest Interlude," last week.

Leaving the lab

A mad scientist in the studio, Starrah is rising

More of her songs include The Weeknd's "Starboy" album cut "True Colors," Rihanna's "Needed Me" and Beyoncé's "Already" from "Black Is King." She also worked on tracks for Madonna's latest album, "Madame X."

Starrah won a Grammy on March 15 for working on Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage Remix" featuring Beyoncé. She previously scored a 2018 ASCAP Pop Music Songwriter of the Year award — becoming the first woman in nearly two decades.

She also landed a spot in Forbes' 30 Under 30 in 2019.

Not bad for a Black, LGBTQ woman in a male-dominated field who was working in public storage when she first got noticed. "To see her go from public storage to the Forbes list is something nobody can take away," says her manager, Nick Jarjour.

She grew up as Brittany Hazard in a small town in Delaware, the youngest of eight siblings. Music was always a big part of her life. She used to fall asleep to

music and wake up to it the next morning. "When I was a kid, I just used to just play around with music all day," she says.

Starrah experimented with online programs like FruityLoops and Audacity, watching YouTube tutorials and learning how to loop instrumentals. "Anything I could do to try to learn how to make beats or learn how to make music," she recalls.

Jarjour remembers first hearing Starrah while listening to a college radio R&B show. Her

song "Drank Up" came on, and he immediately spent hours searching her SoundCloud profile.

"From the first second I heard her, chills went through my whole body and I couldn't believe what I was hearing," he says. "It is really astonishing to see how far she's come, but it's no surprise because she had that drive inside her from the beginning."

Her appetite for music is broad. As a kid, she was raised on a sonic diet of Britney Spears, Eve, Ruff Ryders and Lil' Bow Wow. These days, she feeds her "eclectic palate" everything.

"I don't limit myself to what I listen to, honestly," she says. "One day I could be listening to NBA YoungBoy or Kodak Black. And the next day I'm listening to Marvin Gaye and Sam Cooke or Coltrane or Skrillex."

Trust and mutual respect are key whenever Starrah decides to help someone on their song, and she hopes for just "good vibes." She's working on Normani's next album and the upcoming animated musical "Century Goddess."

"When I'm writing for an artist, I feel like it's important for me to sit down and have a conversation with them and see where they're at in life and just what kind of music do they want to make," she says. "I'm highly empathetic so I can pretty much put myself in that person's shoes and write, if necessary for them, from their perspective."

Despite her impact, she usually shuns the limelight, even preferring to distort photo portraits or partially cover her face. She says she values her privacy and didn't get into the music business for fame.

"If you think of anything other than the music, it's a distraction to me. If you're focused on a personality attached to the music, it just takes away from the music," she says. "I just feel like that should be the focal point."

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Lana Del Rey's dreamy escapism

Pop music's most glamorous headline-maker sings about getting away from the glare of fame

By MIKAEL WOOD
Los Angeles Times

You can't fire Lana Del Rey; she quits.

Months after a cascading series of attempted cancellations — here she was centering her white privilege; here she was wearing a mesh face mask in the middle of a pandemic; here she was insisting she's obviously not racist because she's had rappers for boyfriends — pop music's most glamorous headline-maker is back with a riveting new album about exiting the limelight to find a simpler place where the haters can't get her down.

Again and again on “Chemtrails Over the Country Club,” which dropped March 19, Del Rey sings of casting off her renown as though it were a heavy coat. She dreams of leaving Los Angeles, the adopted home that figured so prominently on 2019's “Norman F--- Rockwell!” for “a little piece of heaven” in Arkansas or Nebraska. She describes doing the laundry and washing her hair with the kind of breathy sensuality she used to employ while singing about getting high by the beach.

In the LP's piano-ballad opener, “White Dress,” the 35-year-old even looks back fondly to her pre-stardom days as a struggling waitress: “I wasn't famous, just listening to Kings of Leon,” she sings — an oddly poignant indication of how eager she is to get out from under the microscope.

Del Rey's unfolding PR crisis, which began in May with an Instagram post about how she's treated differently than other female pop stars — most of those she named, including Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj, were women of color — closely followed the rapturous reception of “NFR!,” which earned best-of-2019 reviews and a Grammy nomination for album of the year and paved the way for the publication of a real-deal book of poetry by the singer.

The whiplash, then, was no doubt severe. Yet, in fact it's unclear how attentively Del Rey tracks her perception, or at least how seriously she takes it all. In interviews she talks about living a happily basic life offstage; she says she likes to go to Starbucks and to brunch with her girlfriends — not ex-



Lana Del Rey

Chemtrails Over the Country Club
(Interscope and Polydor)

actly an image in alignment with the themes of glamour and danger that run through her music.

This is the tricky thing about analyzing Del Rey's records. Since she emerged a decade ago with “Video Games” — an instant-classic meditation on modern celebrity that touched off countless debates about her artistic authenticity — the singer has seemed alternately like the most and least media-savvy musician in pop.

Often in the past year, as she set flame to her accumulated goodwill, you could wonder if she knew what she was doing — maybe her baffling moves were part of some larger creative project about the diseased American soul in the age of Donald Trump.

What's inarguable is that she's become one of the finest songwriters of her generation, with a lyrical and melodic flair that encourages emotional investment in her music beyond whatever it reflects of her life. On “Chemtrails,” her singing reaches a new peak as well; she's never inspired as much empathy as she does moving between her airy head voice and her sultry chest voice in these vividly detailed songs about escape and loss and memory.

Working again with Jack Antonoff, who produced “NFR!,” Del Rey invites comparisons to Taylor Swift's double-down approach on 2020's “folklore” and “Evermore” (which Antonoff also had a hand in): Where each of the singer's previous records took up a distinct sonic character — from the trip-hop of 2012's “Born to Die” to the garage rock of 2014's “Ultraviolence” to the slow-mo torch songs of 2015's “Honeymoon” — this one stays right in the gentle

psych-folk zone that she and Antonoff devised for its predecessor.

If the sound is familiar — think of the very sweet spot triangulated by Sandy Denny, k.d. lang and the Velvet Underground's self-titled third album — the scenarios can still flatten you, as in the gorgeous “Wanderlust,” about somebody defending her impulse to hit the road, and “Wild at Heart,” in which Del Rey draws a line connecting generations of relentlessly examined women from Princess Diana to Kim Kardashian:

*I left Calabasas, escaped all the
ashes, ran into the dark
And it made me wild at heart
The cameras have flashes, they
cause the car crashes, but I'm not a
star*

*If you love me, you love me 'cause
I'm wild at heart*

In “Dance Til We Die,” which begins as a bleary last-call lament before erupting into a funky '70s-rock strut, Del Rey further populates the lineage she introduces in “Wild at Heart” with shoutouts to Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, Stevie Nicks and Courtney Love.

She closes with a stunning rendition of Mitchell's “For Free” that she shares with two of present-day ladies of Laurel Canyon: Zella Day and Weyes Blood.

“Me, I play for fortunes and those velvet curtain calls,” Del Rey sings, comparing herself a bit shamefully to a street musician plying his trade for nothing.

Forgiveness she can ask for; her need for attention may prove harder to shake.

Paul Stanley's Soul Station

Now and Then
(uDiscover)

The love guns have all been unloaded and securely holstered, and Detroit is soul city, not rock city this time out as Paul Stanley, ringleader of the four-ring circus known as Kiss, pays homage to classic soul on a new solo album.

The starry-eyed singer and guitarist covers some of the greatest soul songs ever written, and writes five new tracks very much in that spirit. It may surprise, if not shock, many Kiss fans. But then, they embraced Peter Criss' orchestral ballad “Beth,” and didn't mind (much) when Gene Simmons covered the Disney classic “When You Wish Upon a Star.”

There's no arena rock to be found here. Crooning and falsetto abounds on The Spinners' “Could It Be I'm Falling In Love,” The Temptations' “Just My Imagination,” and Smokey Robinson's “The Tracks of My Tears.” Stanley even retains the electric sitar on “You Are Everything” by The Stylistics.

And not since Barack Obama crooned a few bars of it has there been a more unexpected cover of Al Green's “Let's Stay Together.”

Some of Stanley's originals are quite good as well, and would have had a decent chance of being AM radio hits in the '70s, including “Save Me” and “Whenever You're Ready.”

Current Kiss drummer Eric Singer is part of the 11-member band of top-notch musicians and singers Stanley has assembled.

— Wayne Parry
Associated Press

Valerie June

The Moon and Stars:
Prescriptions for Dreamers
(Fantasy)

At the heart of Valerie June's fifth album, there's a 25-second track called “African Proverb” that's read by Carla Thomas, the Memphis soul singer that June has called “the fairy godmother of the record.”

The saying goes: “Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet.” It's a sly reference to Thomas' 1963 hit “What a Fool I've Been,” and also a lead in to “Call Me a Fool,” the luxurious, old-school soul song that features Thomas and is “The Moon and Stars”' first single.

The proverb advises caution. But “Call Me a Fool” endorses an opposite point of view. It's a love song about letting go, taking chances, dreaming big. Call June a fool if you like. It's not her style to dip a toe. She's diving in.

What's so impressive about “The Moon and Stars” is it expands that vision in collaboration with producer Jack Splash, who's worked with mainstream acts like John Legend and Alicia Keys, without losing sight of what makes June's spiritually entrancing American roots music unique.

On the contrary, June sounds more herself than ever, whether being pushed forward by a martial drumbeat and swelling strings on “Stay” or experimenting with Fela Kuti polyrhythms or simply accompanying herself on banjo. The meditative “Moon and Stars” was recorded pre-pandemic, but it soothes as if designed for stressful times. Rooted in the real world, it gazes overhead, into the mystic.

— Dan DeLuca
The Philadelphia Inquirer



WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Still worth celebrating

Pisces and Aries, who turned a year older in lockdown, are evaluating how much effort to put into their second pandemic birthdays

The Washington Post

Colette Komm and her friends walked up Central Park West on March 13, carrying what looked like an enormous coronavirus particle hanging from PVC pipe, “like a giant pig we were going to roast.”

New Yorkers enjoying the gorgeous day kept stopping the crew to request a photo and the answer to the natural question: What the heck is that? Komm explained it was a seven-pound piñata that they were taking to the park to destroy with a wooden stick.

The group of 10 tied it to a tree branch, and each took a swing or two. One swung underhand, imagining smacking the virus “in its balls.” The death blow went to the respiratory therapist in the group because, Komm said, “if anyone deserves to smash this thing to smithereens, it’s him.”

He put quite the hole in it, candy and hand sanitizer flying everywhere. But the bottom still clung on. Like the actual virus these days, it found itself on its last protein spikes. So Komm took one more big swing to finish it off.

“Everyone was like, ‘This is the most fun we’ve had in a year,’” she said.

The cause for occasion: celebrating her second pandemic birthday.

Remember those birthdays last March, when COVID-19 still felt new? Zoom was still a novelty. Friends drove by and honked their horns. They were decent enough substitutes. Maybe even charming ones.

Some didn’t get to have celebrations at all. Plans were ruined, trips canceled. Even still, it all had the feeling of a once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing — a story to tell.

But now these unfortunate Pisces and Aries have to do it all

again. Some still feel too burned by last year’s disappointment to muster any effort, while others have decided on some sort of safe celebration, pandemic be damned. There’s no right answer here. Maybe you can turn these lemons into lemon cake. But for some, it’ll still taste sour.

D.C.’s Sarah Rutherford, who just turned 31, is one of the few whose celebration improved with her second coronavirus birthday, which she spent hiking in Big Bend National Park in West Texas after two months as a “digital nomad” in Austin. A far cry from her first, when her co-workers were packing up the office and couldn’t buy her a pie from her favorite local shop — so they handed her a photograph of one instead.

Then there’s Komm and her piñata. The cathartic Central Park festivities were a far cry from her 38th, which she calls “the birthday that was lost to history.” She returned to New York City from a trip minutes into her birthday, a little after midnight March 13, 2020. The dinner she had planned with her friends was quickly replaced with trips to five stores to stock up for shutdown.

“It was really the worst pandemic birthday, because it wasn’t really a birthday,” she said. It was the day the United States declared a national emergency, when everything shut down. “It wasn’t before it happened, when people could still celebrate, and it wasn’t after, when people could commiserate.”

The second one had to be special. So, she made the coronavirus piñata.

For some, the occasion of a second pandemic birthday can conjure wistful memories of a first.

Nicole Shanique had what promised to be a life-altering 35th birthday. She was headed



Colette Komm

Colette Komm celebrates her second pandemic birthday in Central Park on March 13 with friends and a coronavirus piñata. She calls her last birthday, when she turned 38, “the birthday that was lost to history.”

from her home in New York to London on her first solo trip.

Her flight would have been March 13.

“I was very, very sad on the day of. I was ready to push myself out of my comfort zone,” Shanique said. The idea of traveling to a foreign country by herself as a woman originally gave her pause, but she planned to push through her fear. She never got the chance.

This year, she doesn’t want her hopes dashed again. She’s going to wait until things normalize and finally take her trip. She is grateful that nothing like this ruined her childhood birthdays.

“We’re adults. We can say, ‘OK, fine. This happened. We’ll do something else,’” Shanique said. “But if you’re a kid and this happens to you, I can’t even imagine.”

Parker Boynton can. Her first pandemic birthday in April originally promised to be a true barn-burner, by a 4-year-old’s standards. She’d been talking about it nonstop for months, said her mom, Kelly Boynton. It was going to be her first big birthday party.

Instead, Kelly was forced to improvise. She used the video service VidDay to compile birth-

day messages from Parker’s preschool teachers, classmates and extended family.

“We sat her down on her birthday and played it for her,” Kelly said. “She replayed it another five times.”

“She spent the next year talking about ‘When COVID is over, I’m going to have a party,’” Kelly added. They live in California, where cases remain high. Maybe they’ll have a small outside gathering of Parker’s preschool friends. Maybe she’ll see her grandparents, who are vaccinated. “I just don’t know yet what to do.”

Some families have seen multiple pandemic birthdays. Jade Brooks-Bartlett turned 26 a few weeks after shutdown began, trading a night out for a couple of glasses of wine in her parent’s neighbor’s yard. Even more dispiriting to the self-described workaholic who freelances in theater was that work was drying up as venues shut down.

“I was in a state of work withdrawal,” Brooks-Bartlett, who lives in Silver Spring, Md., said. “I was not doing well emotionally at all.”

Perhaps the best part of her looming 27th is that she might get to spend it working, since

many theaters have transitioned to staging shows on Zoom.

When lockdown began, her mother, Heather Brooks, was just about to celebrate her 50th with a 1970s-themed party replete with a vintage breakfast cereal bar, the drawing game Spirograph and candy cigarettes. She had a rainbow-striped sequined jumpsuit picked out. Instead, she opened gifts on Facebook Live.

This year will be another quiet one — just her, her husband and her mother-in-law. She joked she’s “holding on to 49 until we can have a party.”

Brooks now sees birthdays in a slightly different light. Sure, the pared-down events feel unsatisfactory. But the ability to have one offers ample cause for gratitude. Having a second pandemic birthday is actually a blessing. After all, more than 500,000 can’t, her father-in-law among them.

“It is an accomplishment to make it another year,” she said. “I don’t care if you’re turning 25 or turning 75. The pandemic makes you understand how fragile and precious life is, to a degree we didn’t have to look at before. So, I think I will give my birthdays a little more honor than I used to.”

“It is an accomplishment to make it another year. I don’t care if you’re turning 25 or turning 75. The pandemic makes you understand how fragile and precious life is, to a degree we didn’t have to look at before. So, I think I will give my birthdays a little more honor than I used to.”

Heather Brooks
Laurel, Md., resident who turned 50 in lockdown

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

NEW ON DVD

“Wonder Woman 1984”: The 2017 “Wonder Woman” was a critical and commercial success, with director Patty Jenkins and star Gal Gadot infusing new life into a well-trod genre. Now the dynamic duo is back with “Wonder Woman 1984.” But this time around, things are different for the title character.

As Tribune News Service film critic Katie Walsh explained: “The Diana of 1984 is no longer the wide-eyed innocent we met in the first film. She’s more mature but also sad, and lonely, having experienced war and lost her love, Steve (Chris Pine). In this world of ’80s excess, she saves kids from burglars at the mall and works at the Smithsonian as a cultural anthropologist. But her greater purpose is lacking, until she encounters a powerful ancient crystal, a wishing stone of sorts, being investigated by a new nerdy co-worker, Dr. Barbara Minerva (Kristen Wiig).”

Walsh wrote that the film doesn’t hit the heights of the original, but it doesn’t disappoint: “‘1984’ doesn’t have the same jaw-dropping impact of ‘Wonder Woman’ (how could it?), but Jenkins maintains a steady hand on the character and her story, giving us more of what we loved about the first film.”

And ultimately, Gadot’s Wonder Woman is a hero worth rooting for: “Why does she want to save the world? Because she believes in humanity, and that’s just what she does,” Walsh wrote.

Also available on DVD: “Our Friend”: Dane (Jason Segel) moves in with Matt (Casey Affleck) and his family after a devastating diagnosis. Based on a true story.

“55 Steps”: A patients-rights lawyer and her client help each other transform their lives. Stars Hilary Swank and Helena Bonham Carter.

“A Perfect Planet”: Sir David Attenborough delivers dire warnings about our perfect planet in this BBC documentary.

“Another Round”: Four pals test the theory that life is better if you are a little bit drunk all the time. Trouble ensues.

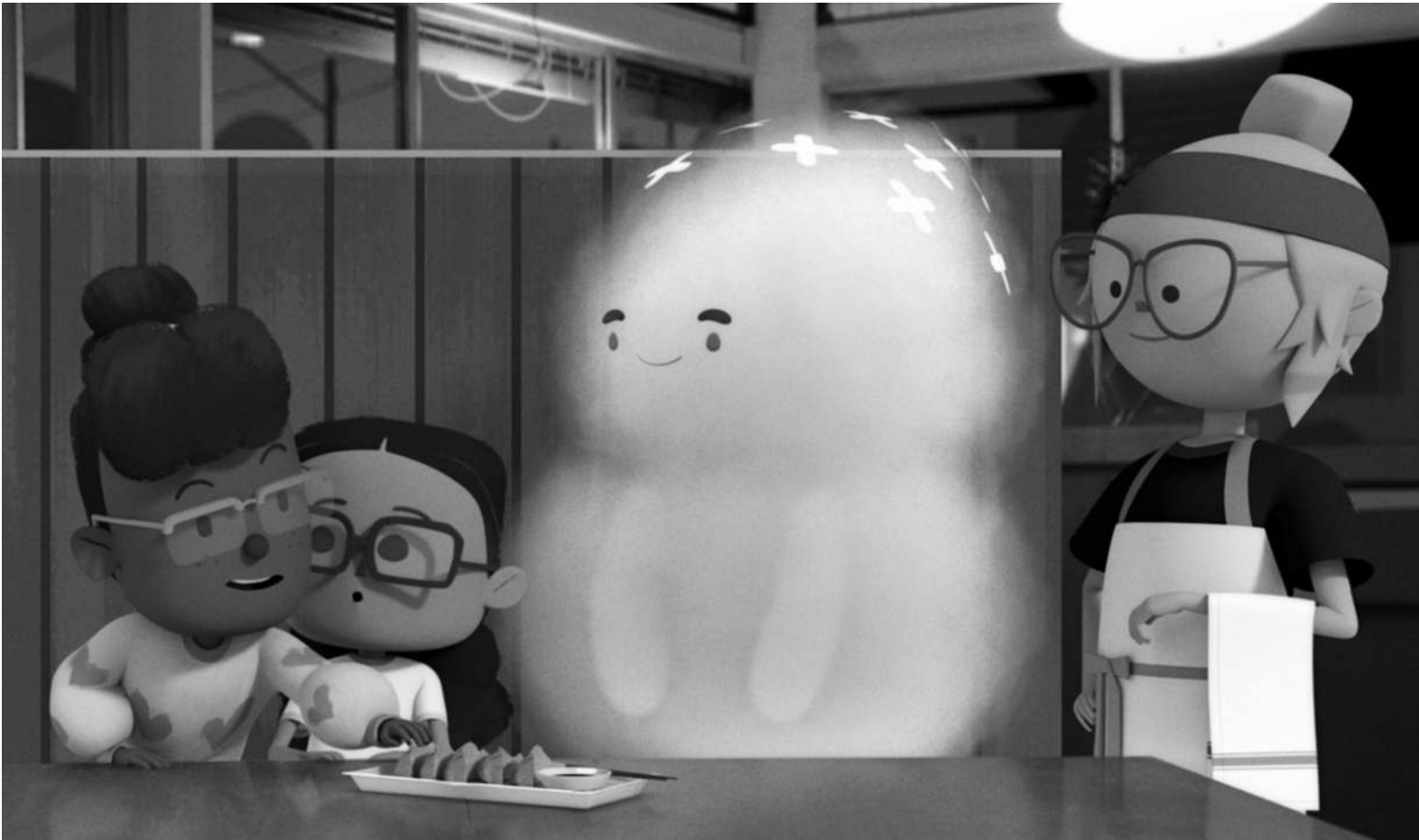
“The Toll”: A supernatural threat haunts a driver and his passenger.

— Tribune News Service



Warner Bros. Pictures

Gal Gadot stars in “Wonder Woman 1984,” now on DVD.



Netflix

Kirikoiu Muldrew stars as Eva and August Nunez as Zelda in “City of Ghosts,” a Netflix show about a group of kids who form a club to look for ghosts around Los Angeles. In talking with the ghosts as well as living residents, they learn more about the city and its diverse neighborhoods.

Learning from the living, the dead

‘City of Ghosts’ showrunner suggests the show is a gentle love letter to Los Angeles, its diversity

By Tracy Brown
Los Angeles Times

“City of Ghosts” is Elizabeth Ito’s rebuttal to the people that say they hate Los Angeles without really knowing anything about her beloved hometown.

“There’s a lot you’re saying that you hate when you’re saying you hate Los Angeles,” said Ito, the Emmy Award-winning “Adventure Time” alum whose new animated series is streaming on Netflix.

Mixing 2D and 3D animation over live-action settings, “City of Ghosts” follows a group of kids who have formed a club to look for ghosts around the city to learn about their stories (often helping adults in the process). Over the course of the six-episode season, their adventures take them from a new restaurant in Boyle Heights to a skate park in Venice to a vegan cafe in Leimert Park and beyond.

Through their interviews with ghosts as well as living residents, members of the Ghost Club learn about different LA neighborhoods and their histories. There is even an episode where they learn about the Tongva, the Indigenous people of LA. The gentle love letter to the city and its diverse communities is presented in a kid-friendly format, but it’s plenty informative for adults too.

The series is partly inspired, Ito said, by “reading a lot of articles about how our neighborhoods are just changing and kind of being whitewashed over and [wanting] to talk about what our communities are and what used to be here.”

As LA continues to change, she added, the episodes can live on as a reminder of “all the great cultures and things that exist here.”

As for the series’ supernatural twist? It’s inspired by the showrunner and executive producer’s experience with the paranormal.

“When I was a little kid, I saw a ghost,” Ito said. “I think a lot of little kids see ghosts. They don’t always talk about it like that. [But] there’s a lot of really funny stories that little kids have about seeing ghosts.”

Presented as a homemade documentary series anchored by Ghost Club member Zelda, the show celebrates kids and their inquisitiveness, intelligence and quirky turns of phrase. Everyone in the Ghost Club — which also includes Thomas, Eva and Peter — lives in a different neighborhood and they generally meet up at the library to discuss the cases they’re investigating.

“The hardest part is writing dialogue for kids that is as good as the funny way that kids can talk sometimes,” Ito said. Fortunately, she found that recording sessions with the young actors were a good barometer: If a kid keeps stumbling over a line, it’s probably because it’s something they wouldn’t say.

The ability to capture how people actually speak when telling their personal stories is one of the aspects of the documentary approach that appealed to Ito. The production process involved interviews with LA residents who voice animated versions of themselves to convey an authenticity that Ito said can be lost in more traditional scripts.

“The documentary approach to stuff is really rewarding because it lets you let each person dictate the way things are said,” Ito said. “The way that people talk and the things that they say ... it’s so important to it feeling believable.”

The show’s animation is layered over photos of real locations and plenty of familiar local sites — Koreatown’s Soot Bull Jeep, Leimert Plaza Park, the Bob Baker Marionette Theater and the Central Library — make an appearance.

Ito admits that choosing which neighbor-

hoods to spotlight wasn’t easy, but with the help of writer Jenny Yang, who studied urban policy and planning at UCLA, she was able to step back and consider what was happening in the city before determining which stories were approachable for kids.

Some of the episodes were shaped by Ito’s interest in learning more about neighborhoods and history she wasn’t as familiar with, such as Koreatown.

“I wanted to do an episode about Koreatown, but I didn’t think any of [the episodes] were going to be so on the nose,” Ito said. “Like, ‘It’s Koreatown, so we’re talking about Korean culture.’ Because nothing in LA is really like that.”

The completed episode offers a nuanced and accurate look at the neighborhood’s diverse communities — it features an Oaxacan music teacher, the Zapotec language and a trip to a Korean barbecue restaurant.

There are also episodes that involve locations that are meaningful to Ito.

“I knew I wanted to do one about Bob Baker [Marionette Theater] because that was something from my childhood where I was like, ‘This is a weird thing that people outside of LA do not have,’” she said.

Before the kids get there, they meet the ghost Atomic Nancy and learn about Little Tokyo and Japanese American history. It’s a quirky mashup that works because it’s LA.

Ultimately, Ito hopes “City of Ghosts” can help people realize there is more to LA than shallow generalizations and see how fun it is to learn more about the city’s rich diversity.

“It’s really a place that has a lot of history and a lot of stories to be uncovered,” Ito said. “It was really rewarding to be connected to all of these people and all of their cultures and all their families that I didn’t know before, so I feel really fortunate.”

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Caregiving between classes

Number of children who have become caregivers to ill or disabled family members has grown during pandemic

By HEIDI DE MARCO

Kaiser Health News

On a recent Thursday afternoon, Rhianna Alvarado struggled to don her protective gloves, which were too big for her petite hands.

With her mom coaching her every move, she edged close to her father and gently removed the plastic tube from his throat that allows him to breathe. She then cautiously inserted a new one.

"What's next?" asked her mom, Rocio Alvarado, 43.

"I know, I know," replied Rhianna, her eyes constantly searching for her mom's approval.

Rhianna is only 13. When she finished the delicate task of changing her father's tracheostomy tube, usually performed only by adults, she went back into her room to doodle on her sketch pad and play with her cat.

Rhianna's father, Brian Alvarado, is an Iraq War veteran and neck and throat cancer survivor.

Like most kids, Rhianna has been stuck at her home in Long Beach, Calif., during the COVID-19 pandemic and attends school online. But unlike most other eighth graders, Rhianna is a caregiver, tending to her dad between her virtual classes.

Rhianna is among more than 3 million children and teens who help an ill or disabled family member, according to Caregiving in the U.S. 2020, a national survey published by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. The survey also found that Hispanic and African American children are twice as likely to be youth caregivers as non-Hispanic white children.

Carol Levine, a senior fellow at the United Hospital Fund, a nonprofit that focuses on improving health care in New York, said the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the worsening opioid epidemic, has increased the number of youth caregivers because more children are homebound and must care for ill or addicted parents.

The pandemic has also made caregiving harder for them, since many can no longer escape to school during the day.

"In school they have their peers; they have activities," Levine said. "Because of the contagion, they aren't allowed to do the things they might normally do, so of course there is additional stress."

Levine was an author of a national survey in 2005 that found there were about 400,000 youth caregivers between ages 8 and 11. The survey has not been updated, she said, but that number has likely grown.

Kaylin Jean-Louis was 10 when she started helping to care for her grandmother and great-grandmother, who have Alzheimer's disease and live with Kaylin and her mother in Tallahassee, Fla..

Now 15, Kaylin has assumed a larger caregiving role. Every afternoon after her online classes end, the high school sophomore gives the women their medicine, and helps them use the bathroom, dress and take showers.



HEIDI DE MARCO, KHN/TNS

Rocio Alvarado watches over daughter Rhianna, 13, to make sure she takes the correct steps to change her father's trach tube, which must be done once a month. "I've been slowly teaching her for the past year," Rocio said.

3 million children and teens help an ill or disabled family member. Hispanic and African American children are also twice as likely to be youth caregivers as non-Hispanic white children.

Caregiving in the U.S. 2020 national survey

"Sometimes they can act out and it can be challenging," she said. The hardest thing, she said, is that her grandmother can no longer remember Kaylin's name.

COVID-19 has added another level of stress to an already complex situation, Kaylin said, because she can't decompress outside the house.

"Being around them so much, there has been a little tension," Kaylin acknowledged. She uses art to cope.

"I like to paint," she said. "I find it very relaxing and calming."

Kaylin's mother, Priscilla Jean-Louis, got COVID-19 last month and had to rely on Kaylin to care for the elder women while she recovered.

"She isn't forced to do it, but she helps me a great deal," Priscilla said. "If there are moments when I'm a little frustrated, she may pick up on it and be like 'Mommy, let me handle this.'"

Rhianna's dad, Brian, 40, never smoked and was healthy before joining the Marine Corps. He believes he got sick from inhaling smoke from burn pits during the Iraq War.

He was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma of the neck and throat in 2007. He also has PTSD, as well as an inflammatory disease that causes muscle weakness and a rash, and hyperthyroidism from chemotherapy and radiation.

Rhianna's mom is Brian's primary caregiver, but Rhianna helps her change her dad's trach tube and feed him through a feeding tube in his abdomen.

"I'm still learning how to do it," Rhianna said. "I get nervous, though."

The two look after him on and off all day.

"Our care for him doesn't end," Rocio said.

Rhianna is quiet and reserved. She has autism, struggles with communication and has trouble sleeping. She has been talking to a therapist once a week.

The trach has had the biggest impact on Rhianna, because Brian doesn't join them for meals anymore.

"I feel sad that he can't eat anything," she said.

Despite the growing number of youth caregivers, they have little support.

"If you look at all state and national caregiving programs and respite funding, they all begin at the age of 18," said Melinda Kavanaugh, an associate professor of

social work at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Kavanaugh is researching Alzheimer's and caregiving in Latino and African American communities in Milwaukee.

"We had a number of kids who were much more stressed out because they had no outlet," she said. "Now they're suddenly 24/7 care, and there was absolutely no break."

Adult and youth caregivers often suffer from anxiety, depression and isolation, but there is little data on how caregiving affects young people over the long term, Kavanaugh said.

Connie Siskowski, founder of the American Association of Caregiving Youth, helped care for her grandfather as a child.

"I was not prepared," she said. "It was traumatic."

Her Florida-based group connects young caregivers and their families with health care, education and community resources. The goal is to identify problems such as stress or isolation among the children, and address them so they won't harm them as adults, Siskowski said.

But long-term care experts said caregiving can also enrich a young person's life.

"It can help kids develop a sense of responsibility, empathy and confidence," Levine said. "The problem comes when their schoolwork, their friendships, their lives as a child are so affected by caregiving that they can't develop in those other important ways."

WEEKEND: FAMILY



JEN GUYURON/AP

This combination of photos shows Suzy and Ricky Stone visiting with their granddaughter Gigi Guyuron through a window of their daughter Jen Guyuron’s home on April 18 in Cleveland, left, Guyuron’s brother Bryan Stone visiting on March 21, center, and Jen and Jason Charet visiting with Gigi on April 23.

‘We were in survival mode’
Moms detail how COVID affected the experience of labor, life with a newborn

BY LEANNE ITALIE
Associated Press

Pregnancy, birth and life with a newborn in the middle of a pandemic has brought on high anxiety, ever-shifting hospital protocols and intense isolation for many of the millions of women who have done it around the world.

As the pandemic stretches into a second year and economic worry persists, demographers are studying the reasons for an anticipated pandemic baby bust. Women, meanwhile, have learned to go through labor in masks and to introduce fresh arrivals to loved ones through windows.

Fear, anxiety and chaos were particularly acute in New York City during the early months of the pandemic in what was one of the country’s most devastating hot spots.

Nneoma Maduike was masked when she gave birth Aug. 1 to her second child, a son, after a pregnancy filled with unknowns.

“The anxiety was absolutely awful. Information was evolving as quickly as anything you can imagine,” said Maduike, who lives in Brooklyn. “I didn’t know what guidance to follow. My husband’s a doctor and he was still going in every single day, and that brought on even more anxiety.”

Twenty-four hours after a cesarean section, Maduike was cleared to go home. Hospitals at the time were attempting to protect new mothers and babies from the virus by shuffling them out early, lightening the load as well on skeleton staffs.

While her husband was on hand for the birth, neither knew the hospital would require their newborn to stay in Maduike’s room, rather than the nursery, as a precaution. Her husband went home to be with their older child, leaving her to care for the baby alone soon after surgery. Then it was a struggle getting her husband back inside the hospital due to safety concerns.

There were no visitors, of course, in stark contrast to her first delivery. No friends were permitted to drop by the hospital with balloons, flowers and food. Maduike’s mother, who lives in Texas, didn’t move in for an extended stay after the baby came home, a tradition in their Nigerian culture. Her mother did manage a far shorter visit, but with little time to gather the many ingredients for ji mmiri oku, a yam pepper soup offered to new moms after birth.

Maduike won’t soon forget meeting her baby in a mask.

“There’s something so sad about that,” she said.

“You’re terrified to eliminate that barrier because you just don’t know.”

Due to pandemic travel restrictions, her father remains

stuck in Nigeria and still hasn’t met her baby.

Liz Teich and her husband moved with their 3-year-old in February 2020 from Brooklyn to suburban New Rochelle before she gave birth to their second child about two months later. They landed within a containment zone in one of the earliest COVID surges in the U.S. The hospital, under pressure from women due to deliver there, had just lifted its ban on birth partners in the delivery room when Teich went into labor.

Thirty hours after giving birth, Teich and her baby were home.

“I didn’t even shower. I was too scared to touch the bathroom. We didn’t know if the virus was airborne or whether it was on surfaces, or really anything about the virus at all. I mostly labored at home because I was too scared to go,” she said.

Teich found herself doubled over in a hospital parking garage during contractions less than two minutes apart after circling with her husband looking for a spot because valet service had been eliminated. She didn’t want to be dropped off, fearing he wouldn’t be allowed in on his own.

“I thought, you know, if I give birth in the car it might be safer than in the hospital,” she said, laughing.

Jen Guyuron, in Cleveland, gave birth last March to a girl, Gigi, and she’s pregnant again.

“Nobody met Gigi and now we’re coming out with two babies,” she said. “The hospital was basically shutting down right as we walked in. I vividly remember telling my husband that he better not cough or sneeze. We were in survival mode.”

Her mom, who with her dad waited in their car at the hospital while she was in labor, wrote Guyuron a poem after Gigi arrived. It inspired Guyuron to write a poem to her new daughter. She turned her words into a children’s book, “The Baby in the Window,” which she self-published as a way to let other pandemic moms know they aren’t alone.

The story looks forward to easier times, when parents can freely let others hold their babies, visit with loved ones without masks and let their children out to play without pandemic worry.

In Gigi’s case, siblings, grandparents, cousins and friends first met her through the windows of Guyuron’s home. There were socially distanced dinners in her parents’ garage and meals on her patio wrapped in blankets by a heat lamp.

“There’s a lot of sadness being isolated in our houses without family around,” Guyuron said. “It’s been really hard as a new mom. You expect to come home to all these big hugs and happiness and family, and we didn’t have any of that.”

THE MEAT AND
POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Living with a not-so-smoothie operator

My husband has been working from home since the pandemic began more than a year ago. Francis took his cybersecurity job in 2017 after retiring from the Navy, and initially commuted to New York City weekly. For those years, his neglected home office on the third floor of our house was more of a shrine than anything else. He would take friends up there on weekends to show off his military coins, plaques and photos.

I called it his “Yay me!” room.

Now Francis uses his home office for work. He’s there from sunup to sundown, in virtual meetings and on phone calls, every weekday. A creature of habit, Francis takes short breaks I can set my clock by, to hit the head, refill his coffee, grab lunch or make a smoothie.

During his breaks, Francis, an admitted narcissist, rattles off his work schedule to anyone within earshot. He’s very important, after all. “I had three meetings this morning, I’ve got to interview a candidate for that open position, then I’ll check the mail,” he’ll say, regardless of who’s listening.

When his break is over, he starts back up the stairs to his office, but not before calling out, “Back to the salt mines!”

We giggle at Francis’ inflated sense of self-importance, but we keep the house quiet so as to not interrupt his work.

As a military spouse, I’ve worked from home for two decades. My writing, military nonprofit work and Zoom meetings all take place at our kitchen island. After a year of creeping around in hushed tones so as to not disturb Francis, one would think he would extend me the same courtesy.

One would think.

Last week, the house was empty. The girls were out, and Francis was at the VA Hospital getting his first COVID-19 vaccination. All was quiet — the perfect time for a work-related Zoom call. My other meeting participant was running late, so I sat at our kitchen island, waiting for her to click in.

Suddenly, the front door opened, and I heard Francis rattling off his schedule. “The shot went quick, so I stopped and got a haircut, but I’m gonna try to make my two-thirty meeting,” he announced as he clopped into the kitchen.

I put a finger to my lips, “Shh, Zoom meeting.” But Francis had more important matters to tend to.

He scanned the kitchen counter, then opened the fridge. “Where’s the smoothie cup?” he blared. I extended a leg and kicked the fridge door closed, just as my meeting participant appeared on my laptop screen.

“Hi! Thanks so much for taking the time to —” I began, as Francis appeared, swung the fridge doors open again, and put ice into his cup with a “CLUNKCLUNKCLUNK!”

“I’m sorry, my husband is making a smoo —” Before I could explain, the Nutribullet’s jet engines squealed, “WHRRRRRRRR!” I held a finger up to my laptop, the universal sign for, “Just gimme a minute.” But Francis prefers his smoothies thick, so he took his sweet time blending while we waited. Finally, the whirring stopped, and I dared, “So, about the military scholarship program — ”

“Did anyone feed the dog?”

I shook my head, and Francis tsked his disapproval. Once again, I extended a leg and kicked the fridge doors closed.

“So, scholarship funding,” I re-started, but heard a loud crash. Francis’ smoothie cup spun wildly on our tile floor, splattering to a rest in the kitchen corner.

“Oops, I dropped it!” Francis blurted, relieved that only a little spilled where the cap had popped off. He set the cup on the island beside my laptop, and pounded the cap back on with his fist, “THUMPTHUMPTHUMP!”

Sucking on his straw, Francis finally climbed the stairs back to his office — now able to finish his very important work, thanks to the life-giving sustenance of an extra-thick strawberry smoothie — but not before stopping to reassure us, “Back to the salt mines!”

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

THEY ALL LAUGHED

BY JACOB STULBERG / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Jacob Stulberg, of Otis, Mass., is a second-year law student at New York University, currently taking classes remotely. He's been making crosswords for The Times since 2013. Jacob is a longtime fan of the publication mentioned in 101-Across. When he was 11, he wrote a letter to the editors, which they published, correcting their use of the term "gluteus maximus." — W.S.

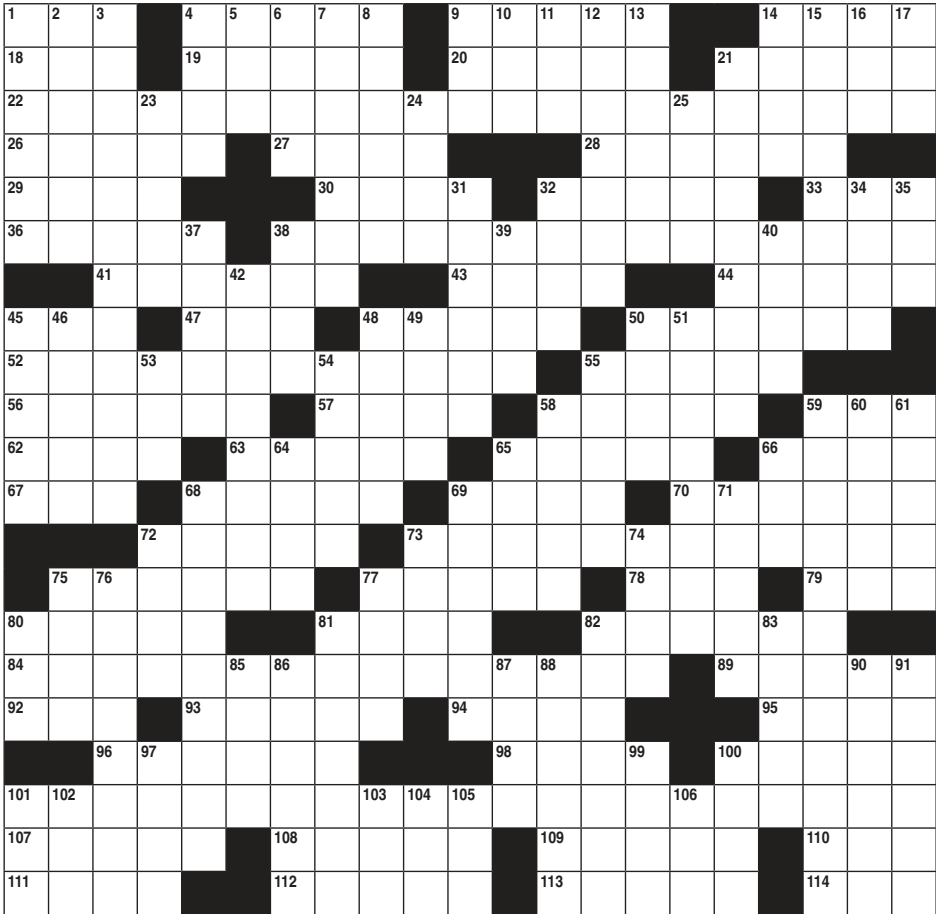
ACROSS

1 Some rappers
4 Music genre for Carmen Miranda
9 Pioneer in 35mm. cameras
14 Bit of bait
18 His face overlooks Havana's Plaza de la Revolución
19 Fire ____
20 See 67-Across
21 Refurbish
22 Architectural innovation jokingly predicted by 101-Across in 1982
26 Actress Perez
27 Performer's showcase
28 Gave out
29 God of love
30 Goofy images, perhaps?
32 Kitchen brand whose name becomes an animal after adding a T
33 Old N.Y.C. subway inits.
36 Wish-list items
38 Grooming tool jokingly predicted by 101-Across in 1979
41 "Gotcha"
43 ____ Sea, whose eastern basin has become a desert
44 Either spy to the other in "Spy vs. Spy"

45 Prop in a Shakespeare tragedy
47 Abbr. at the end of a planner
48 Classic board game derived from pachisi
50 Place to order a cassoulet
52 Writing aid jokingly predicted by 101-Across in 1967
55 Therefore
56 ____ block
57 Midnight trip to the fridge, say
58 "Yellow Flicker Beat" singer, 2014
59 Type of headsail
62 Super-duper
63 Shake off
65 Hammer out, say
66 "____ Lisa"
67 With 20-Across, yearly
68 Some sports car options
69 Painter Paul
70 "Them's the breaks!"
72 Butler played by Gable
73 Winter sport jokingly predicted by 101-Across in 1965
75 Treadmill settings
77 They're not known for neatness
78 Word connecting two place names
79 Word connecting two last names
80 Taters
81 Ragamuffin
82 Nominee's place

84 Telephone feature jokingly predicted by 101-Across in 1961
89 Porters, e.g.
92 Stampede member in "The Lion King"
93 Manual readers
94 "____ fun!"
95 Early smartphone model
96 Italian lager
98 Square thing
100 Like some rights and engineers
101 Satirical cartoonist, born 3/13/1921, known for dreaming up ridiculous inventions . . . or are they?
107 Ransacks
108 Peter the Great and others
109 Eponym of an M.L.B. hitting award
110 Jellied British delicacy
111 Goes down
112 Fender product, for short
113 Windows forerunner
114 Droll

9 Language not traditionally written with spaces between words
10 Ambient musician Brian
11 Like Bach's first two "Brandenburg" Concertos
12 Like dice, shapewise
13 Finding it funny
14 Off the mark
15 Substance that helps a spaceship's fuel burn
16 Direct
17 It's greener the higher it is, for short
21 Glow, in a way
23 Narrow inlet
24 Part
25 ____ of Man
31 Exposed to high heat, in a way
32 Cosmetics brand with "Face Anything" ads
34 Ex-QB football analyst Tony
35 Word repeated before "again"
37 Move stealthily
38 Big part of the S&P 500
39 "It's co-o-old!"
40 Toss in a chip, maybe
42 Hid
45 Org. concerned with performance rights
46 Mace, for one
48 Oodles
49 "____ From Muskogee" (Merle Haggard hit)
50 Cartoonist Dave famous for "The Lighter Side of . . ."



- 51 How anatomy charts are drawn
53 Mormon church, for short
54 Blow
55 "Mountain of God," in Exodus
58 Longtime name in cinemas
59 Hire calling?
60 Like slapstick comedies
61 Feature of a Care Bear's belly
64 Oodles
65 Hazard on an Arctic voyage
66 1960s style
68 Blues ensemble?
69 Slices easily (through)
71 Brush brand
72 Command+Y, on a Mac
73 Swizzle
74 Cartoon speech bubble, often
75 Whirled around
76 Sting, e.g.

77 Egg holders
80 Droop
81 Most sinewy
82 Its coat of arms features a marlin and flamingo, with "the"
83 Baseball's "Big Papi"
85 Since
86 Principles
87 Russian assembly
88 Gutter nuisance in cold climates
90 Apt surname for a ho-dog vendor?

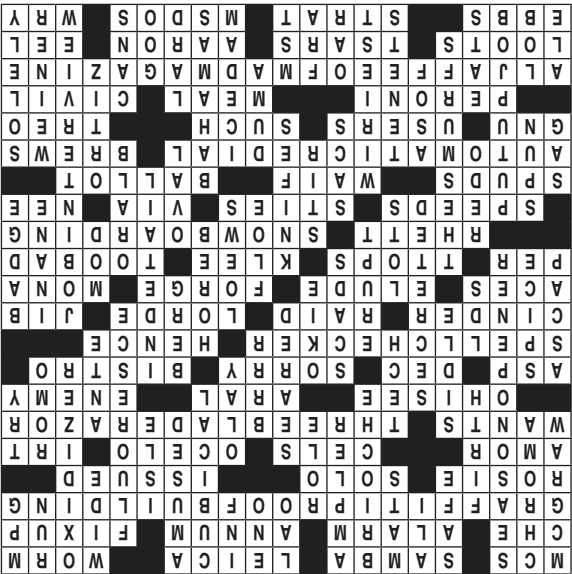
91 Alone
97 Gobbles up
99 Suet alternative
100 Survivalist's stockpile
101 It might come in a yard glass
102 High toss
103 Crew's control?
104 ____ diavolo (in a peppery tomato sauce)
105 Year-round Phoenix hrs.
106 Sticky stuff

GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

3 fishermen rescued after ice drifts away on lake

VT NORTH HERO — Firefighters on Tuesday rescued three men trapped on ice that drifted out on Lake Champlain. The North Hero Volunteer Fire Department said the three men were fishing when the ice they were on drifted toward the Canadian border, WCAX-TV reported. Firefighters from Vermont and Quebec responded. They used an airboat to get to the men and bring them back to shore, the news station reported.

Popcorn machine brings firefighters to Capitol

ND BISMARCK — A popcorn machine has been removed from the North Dakota Capitol after it twice triggered fire alarms that brought firefighters to the building this week and caused legislators to evacuate. Rep. Mary Johnson was on her third batch of popcorn Monday afternoon when the machine triggered the alarms for the second time that day. Johnson said she wasn't aware of a policy that bans popcorn poppers, toasters and other food appliances from the building, with the exception of the Capitol Cafe.

House Majority Leader Chet Pollert said the popcorn helped bring together House Republicans, whose caucus has been "a little strained" due to the coronavirus pandemic and the House expulsion of former Rep. Luke Simons, the Bismarck Tribune reported. Facility Management Director John Boyle said the policy was established to prevent the activation of fire alarms.

Man's conviction follows attempt to eat evidence

NC RALEIGH — A Mexican national has been convicted on child pornography charges after authorities say he tried to swallow memory cards containing pornographic images when he was detained following a traffic stop. Federal prosecutors say David Sierra Orozco, 31, was convicted Tuesday of possessing child pornography after a two-day jury trial in Raleigh. Deputies in Harnett County stopped Orozco in July 2017 after they say he was driving his Lexus erratically. During the traffic stop, deputies noticed a hidden compartment in the car and found more than \$100,000 in cash. Orozco was taken to the county jail on a charge of driving without a license. While being searched, officers found a folded \$100 bill. When they unfolded it, memory cards fell to the floor. At a preliminary hearing, an agent testified that Orozco grabbed the memory cards and tried to eat them. He swallowed one and chewed another that deputies were able to retrieve, the agent said.



SHAFKAT ANOWAR/AP

A puncher's chance

Sunny Akhibge, left, trains Ayo Ayodele during an outdoor fitness session at Grant Park on Tuesday in Chicago.

Three other cards were unscathed, and they contained multiple images and videos of child pornography. He faces up to 20 years in prison when sentenced in June.

Fuel tanker catches on fire, shutting down I-70

MD MOUNT AIRY — A stretch of Interstate 70 in Maryland was forced to shut down for several hours in both directions after a fuel truck caught fire.

The crash occurred Tuesday before 3 p.m. on eastbound I-70 near the Mount Airy exit. The Frederick News-Post reported that Maryland State Police Frederick Barrack Lt. Stephen Johnson happened to be on the highway in that area when the tanker overturned. He was approaching the truck with a fire extinguisher when it became fully engulfed in flames. Frederick County Fire and Rescue said on Twitter about two hours after the fire began that it had been extinguished, but that closures on I-70 were expected to continue into the evening.

Kitchen worker arrested after jail contraband probe

KS WICHITA — A contract kitchen worker has been arrested on suspicion of bringing contraband into the Sedgwick County jail, authorities said Tuesday. The Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that it received information concerning the worker on Monday. Its investi-

THE CENSUS

130 The approximate number of robberies authorities say members of a criminal ring committed. Federal prosecutors and FBI officials in Connecticut said Joseph Cartagena, Alexander Santiago and Douglas Noble, all of New York City, and Justin Herrera, formerly of Levittown, N.Y., stole millions of dollars of goods from businesses in multiple states. An indictment against them was unsealed Monday. Prosecutors said the men usually committed the crimes at night and often eluded police in high-speed car chases that had to be called off for safety reasons.

gation determined that probable cause existed to arrest Natalie Willis, 42, for one count each of possession of hallucinogenic drugs, trafficking contraband and possession of a controlled substance. Contract employees go through a background check before they are allowed to work inside the detention facility.

Man charged with wielding chainsaw at motels

NC RALEIGH — A white man arrested after police say he menaced Black guests with a chainsaw at a North Carolina hotel over the weekend was arrested in California last year on charges of carrying a loaded gun on the beach. Jacob Vanderburg, 27, was arrested Sunday morning by Raleigh police on nine charges, including kidnapping and assault. WRAL-TV reported Vanderburg is accused of waving a chainsaw at three people at a Red Roof Inn, a Super 8 and a Claremont Inn in Raleigh. Chainsaw marks were left on at least one of the guest rooms. Police in nearby Garner say Vanderburg also rammed his vehicle into a home-improvement store Saturday night and stole another

chainsaw. In July 2020, WRAL reported Vanderburg was arrested in Santa Monica, Calif., for carrying a loaded gun on a beach. Witnesses to that incident told police Vanderburg said he was upset with liberals and Black Lives Matter protests.

\$150K for teen arrested by classmate's dad

HI HONOLULU — The Honolulu City Council has approved a \$150,000 settlement in a lawsuit that accused a police officer of improperly arresting a boy who had a personal dispute with his son. The family's federal lawsuit alleged that Officer Kirk Uemura had the teen arrested because the teen and the officer's son were at odds and had fought after school in 2018. The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii and attorney Eric Seitz represented the family and announced the settlement Tuesday. Their lawsuit said Uemura was "motivated solely by a personal vengeance" in abusing his police power. In a statement, the Honolulu Department of Corporation Counsel called the settlement a "reasonable

resolution of the litigation" and said that the city's "position in this case was that HPD's current policies and standards of conduct were sufficient in providing direction to officers and addressing conflicts of interest in this particular situation." After the lawsuit was filed in October, police spokeswoman Michelle Yu said Uemura and his supervisor were disciplined, but she was unable to provide details. On Tuesday, Yu said Uemura is on full duty and that "disciplinary action is pending."

Drag strip closes its gates after 63 years

IN OSCEOLA — A northern Indiana drag strip has closed its gates after more than six decades of playing host to drag races. The Osceola Dragway announced last Friday in a Facebook post that it will not be opening for the 2021 season and that "after 63 years, our gates will be permanently closed." Track officials wrote that the decision to close the site "was not an easy one" but said the coronavirus pandemic had affected ongoing efforts that began in 2016 to sell the property, which is located a few miles west of Elkhart. The International Hot Rod Association-sanctioned track had opened for a pandemic-shortened season in 2020, The Elkhart Truth reported. The track was founded in 1957 and features a quarter-mile drag strip with adjacent bleachers.

Stripes

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- People saying Free Dog (different breeds) for adoption.

Automotive140

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A U.S. Army Reservist Soldier reads some of the 58,307 names etched into the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. (U.S. Army by Sgt. Ken Scar)



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OMBUDSMAN

Ernie Gates

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OPINION

Reopening as COVID-19 fades is not a science

BY FAYE FLAM
 Bloomberg Opinion

The accelerating reopening of businesses in the U.S. doesn’t violate “the science” of COVID-19. Some individual scientists are warning of increased virus deaths associated with these choices, but there’s no science that can tell us precisely how to balance public health with other human needs. Some people want to minimize COVID-19 cases at all costs — but that’s a moral stance. It’s not “the science.”
 Yet as tension grows over governors’ decisions to reopen restaurants, gyms and other venues, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky not only warned that the U.S. could see a surge in new cases, but also pleaded with Americans to continue with public health measures like masks, solitude and avoiding travel. This sort of public health advice conflates science, morality, values and partisan politics. We’ve seen too much of it in the past 12 months.
 Risk communication consultant Peter Sandman made the distinction this way: “I am simply not interested in an epidemiologist’s opinion on whether schools should be reopened. I’m interested in an epidemiologist’s opinion on how much more the virus will spread if schools are reopened. Whether schools should be reopened — that’s not their field. It bothers me when they try to pretend that it is.”
 University of California, San Francisco physician Vinay Prasad took a similar view. “Science can only articulate our best esti-

mate of what would happen if we did something or if we did something else. But science can’t tell you how to value those things. Those will always be decisions for the body politic.”
 At this point most people know the vaccines aren’t perfect, but the signs are everywhere that many people think they’re good enough to return to travel, restaurants and other activities. That means public health officials need to be more specific and less draconian.
 Sandman says he thinks the public health community is still compensating for the early 2020 blunders downplaying COVID-19’s risks. “I think when they realized their mistake they overcompensated and became excessively pessimistic instead,” he wrote me in an email this week. He sees this in the way they’re still recommending that fully vaccinated people shouldn’t travel, and the long months it took to allow public schools to open with a more realistic 3-foot social distancing rule.
 When I asked him whether this pessimism is related to any conflict between science and people’s needs, he said public health officials’ excessive caution “is much less grounded in ‘the science’ than they would have us believe.”
 Prasad admits there has been a lot of educated guessing about which restrictions to impose. “How many things did we do to fight SARS-CoV-2? I conservatively estimate ten thousand to a hundred thousand different interventions,” he says. Those ran the gamut from closing national borders to removing basketball hoops. “You’ll never

know if that one basketball rim was the culprit. You just won’t have enough data to tease that out.”
 It’s fine to warn people that the crisis isn’t over; we don’t know whether the new, more transmissible variants will cause a new wave. But we’re seeing a more dysfunctional relationship in which scientists suggest untenable rules and people get called selfish for failing to follow them. It could be driving people toward indifference, fatigue, distrust and suspicion that rules are being imposed with ulterior motives.
 Whatever the CDC says, Sandman says he suspects even many compliant Americans will go back to normal after vaccines are widely available. “All along, they have assumed that vaccines, if and when they became available, would replace this menu of burdensome non-pharmaceutical interventions with a much less burdensome pharmaceutical one: a shot, or maybe a couple of shots,” he says. “Now they’re told that after they’re vaccinated they should nonetheless keep taking most of the precautions they’ve been taking for a year already. That doesn’t just feel like a betrayal. It feels like an exercise in futility.”
 There’s a lot science can tell us about relative risks of returning to normal activities, and it’s important for public health officials to keep people informed on any risks that might persist post-vaccine. But it’s time to stop disguising their preferred goals and trade-offs as “the science.”

Faye Flam is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and host of the podcast “Follow the Science.”

Netanyahu now might have to work with Israeli Arabs

BY HENRY OLSEN
 Special to The Washington Post

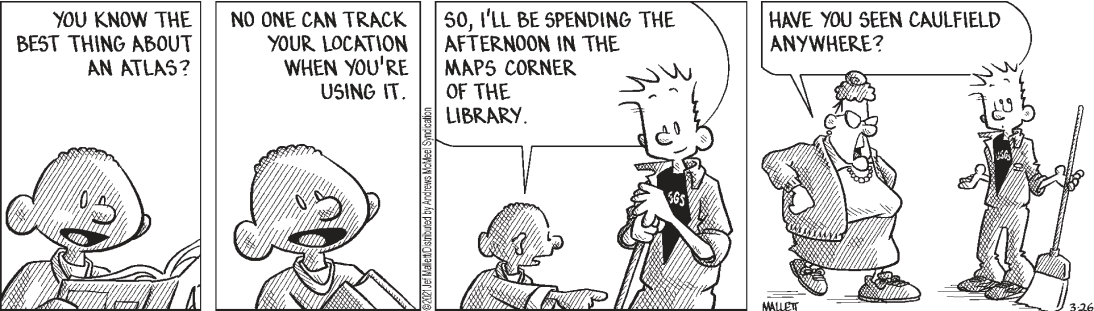
Israel’s fourth election in two years looks to have ended like the others: The country is about evenly divided between those who support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and those who don’t. If he does survive, it will likely be because of an unlikely demographic: Israeli Arabs.
 Netanyahu faces a clear math problem. With about 90% of the vote counted, his Likud party is on track to win 30 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. Three religious parties allied with him — Shas, United Torah Judaism and Religious Zionism — look to be winning another 22 seats. That gives him 52 seats, nine short of the majority he needs. Even if the right-wing Yamina party, which is currently winning seven seats, were to join his coalition, he would still be short. About 450,000 votes remain to be counted, but that will likely only marginally change the final numbers. Only one other party with Knesset representation is open to backing his re-election: the conservative Islamist United Arab List.
 The UAL, known as Ra’am in Israel, broke away from its previous alliance with three other Arab parties to run on its own in this election. Its leader, Mansour Abbas, has argued that Israeli Arabs need to be able to leverage their votes to gain tangible benefits for their communities, such as greater protection against soaring crime. He pledged that his party was neither for nor against Netanyahu and that it would support any coalition that supports its aspirations. The party did well enough in its base among Bedouins to surmount the 3.25% threshold and gain at least four seats.

Netanyahu has said he won’t deal with Ra’am, but that stance could easily soften in light of the election results. There’s also another reason he might make the unlikely arrangement: Likud’s own campaign to gain Arab votes. Likud has traditionally performed extremely poorly among Arabs, but the party launched a strong effort to increase its share of the vote on the basis of the Abraham Accords. Netanyahu campaigned in some Arab communities, placed an Arab on the Likud party list and even said there could be direct flights from Tel Aviv to Mecca if he were reelected.
 The unprecedented effort paid off. Likud received significantly more votes in Arab towns such as Umm al-Fahm and Nazareth than it did last year, getting as much as 6% of the vote in the predominantly Bedouin town of Rahat. Coupled with a large decline in Arab voting overall, this means Likud’s share of the Arab vote, while still small, went up a lot. In Israel’s proportional representation system, that small rise is likely to be enough to have given Netanyahu’s party one or two extra, crucial seats. Turning its back on Ra’am might show these new Arab Likud voters that the party’s apparent change was just a mirage.
 Alternatives to a Netanyahu-Arab alliance are fraught with difficulty. The anti-Netanyahu bloc runs the gamut from the Arab Joint List, which includes the communist Balad party and the pro-Palestine Ahmed Tibi, to Ysrael Beytenu, whose leader Avigdor Liberman has previously called for Arab towns in Israel to be given back to any Palestinian state. The bloc would also need the hard-right Yamina party, which wants Israel to immedi-

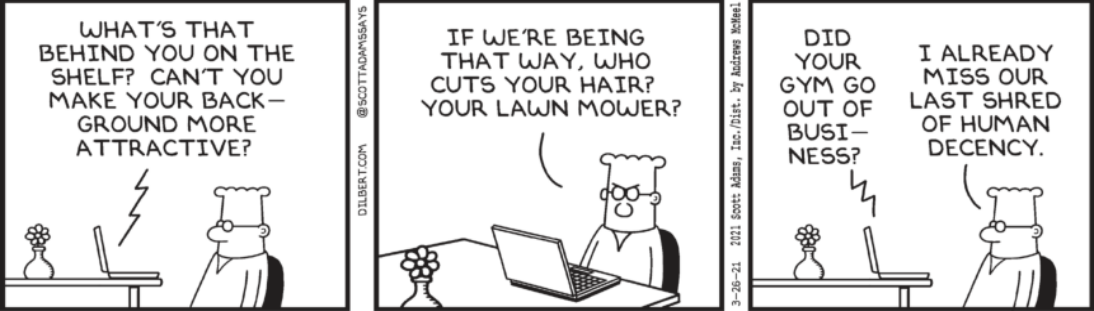
ately annex West Bank settlements, to get a majority. That’s a hard coalition to put together.
 The wily prime minister could try to get Knesset members to defect from opposition parties and back him. That’s what he did last year, breaking up the main opposition party, Blue and White, while also persuading three members of the Meretz-Labor-Gesher slate to join him. Hard-line Likudniks want Bibi to try this route again, and they might only need one or two defectors if Yamina joins the pro-Netanyahu coalition. Netanyahu could then have his cake and eat it too by making a private deal with Ra’am to support its priorities in exchange for it not propping him up.
 Likud’s first targets would likely be the former party members who defected this year to join the New Hope party, led by former Likudnik Gideon Sa’ar. That party started strong, polling as high as 22 seats when it was launched to great fanfare in December. Despite hiring chief strategists from the Lincoln Project to run his campaign, Sa’ar’s break-away effort fizzled. The party won a paltry six seats Tuesday, and it’s easy to imagine Netanyahu telling former Likud members that all will be forgiven if they return — and that their political careers will be over if they don’t.
 Netanyahu didn’t become Israel’s longest-serving prime minister by being a political naif. It would be highly ironic, though, if his legendary political skills resulted, directly or indirectly, in the first real rapprochement between Israel’s Jews and Arabs. Politics makes strange bedfellows, indeed.

Henry Olsen is a Washington Post columnist and a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

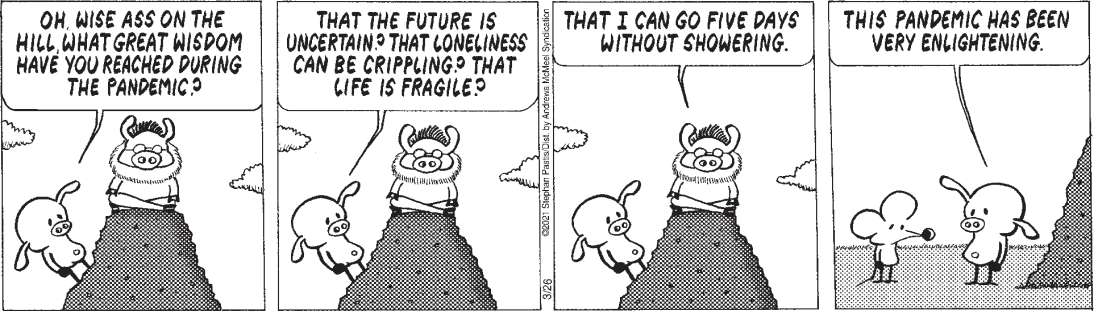
Frazz



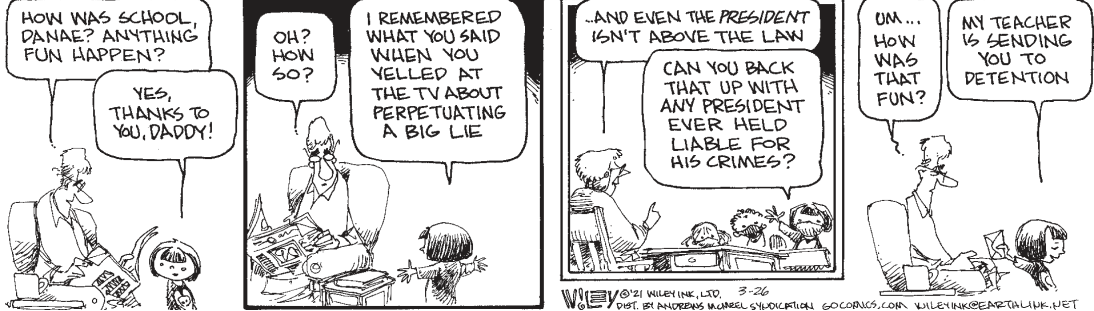
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



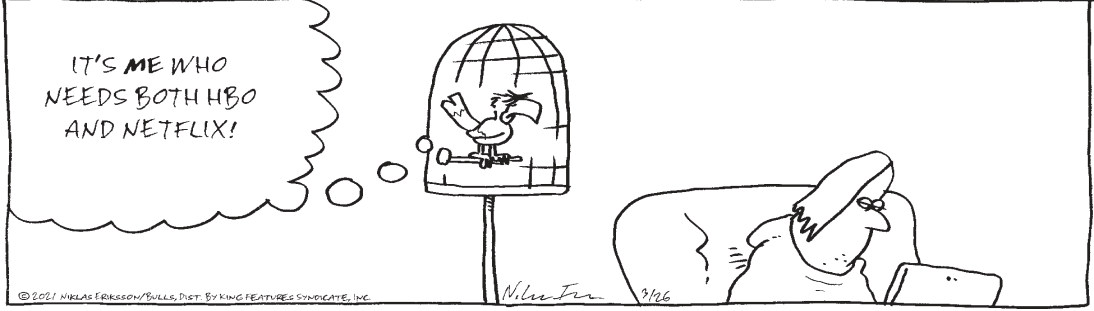
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



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					
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37	38	39					40					
41					42	43					44	45
46					47					48		
49					50					51		

- ACROSS
- 51 Calligrapher's instrument
- 23 Leg joint
- 25 Lushes
- 26 Dining surface, e.g.
- 1 "GMA" network
- 4 Kate of "The Martian"
- 8 Fibs
- 12 Pair with an air
- 13 Big-screen format
- 14 Ad agcy. client
- 15 Anise-flavored liqueur
- 17 Head, to Henri
- 18 Yoga class pads
- 19 Fusses
- 20 Abounds
- 22 Fine
- 24 Feedbag filler
- 25 Catch some rays
- 29 Calendar abbr.
- 30 Theater boxes
- 31 — Lingus
- 32 Strip
- 34 Slope transport
- 35 Right on the map?
- 36 Surveys
- 37 Pristine
- 40 — gin fizz
- 41 Galley supply
- 42 Gilbert & Sullivan opera
- 46 Oklahoma tribe
- 47 Fat
- 48 Tic-tac-toe win
- 49 Some July babies
- 50 Ocean motion
- DOWN
- 1 Oklahoma city
- 2 Fella
- 3 Type of surgery
- 4 Breath fresheners
- 5 Quantities (Abbr.)
- 6 Fan's cry
- 7 Chopper
- 8 Janet Jackson's sister
- 9 Chilled
- 10 Outside (Pref.)
- 11 Fr. holy women
- 16 Pet food brand
- 19 Bar bills
- 20 Bean curd
- 21 Deserve
- 22 Should, with "to"
- 27 Make well
- 28 Messes up
- 30 Cash advance
- 33 Rental contracts
- 34 Animated figure
- 36 Dish
- 37 "Neato!"
- 38 Overdue
- 39 Slangy suffix
- 40 "Citizen Kane" prop
- 42 Follower (Suff.)
- 43 French "yes"
- 44 Weeding tool
- 45 A billion years

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-26 CRYPTOQUIP

RE PC RU DP RJ PHHDOADU

PJ QDBRARYPAD PHNTJJ

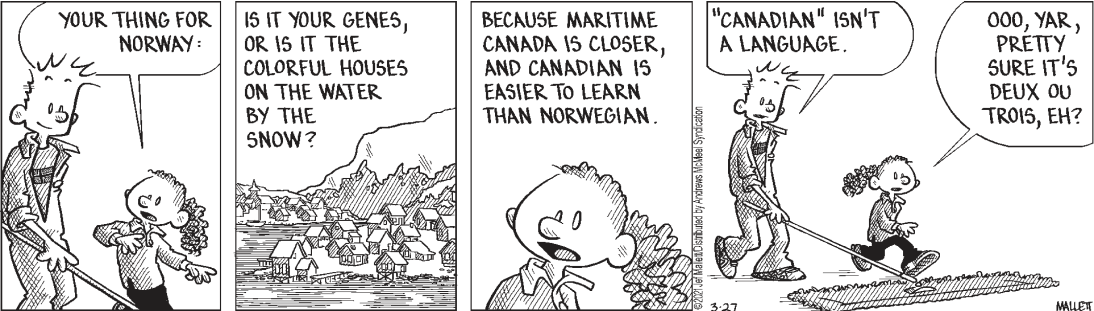
YIQAROQD HTICANRDJ, R

BIDJJ RA'J RCADN-CTARTCPQ.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SUPPOSING AN ANIMAL HAD WEIRD, ABNORMALLY LONG FRONT PAWS, THEY MIGHT BE FOUR-FEET FOREFEET.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals N

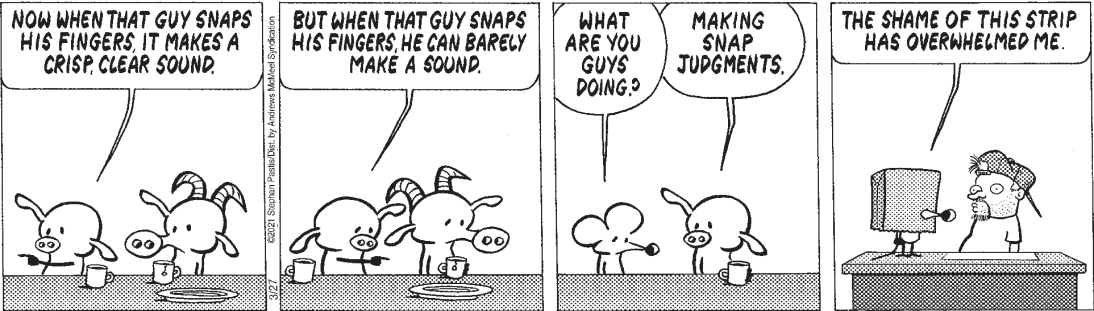
Frazz



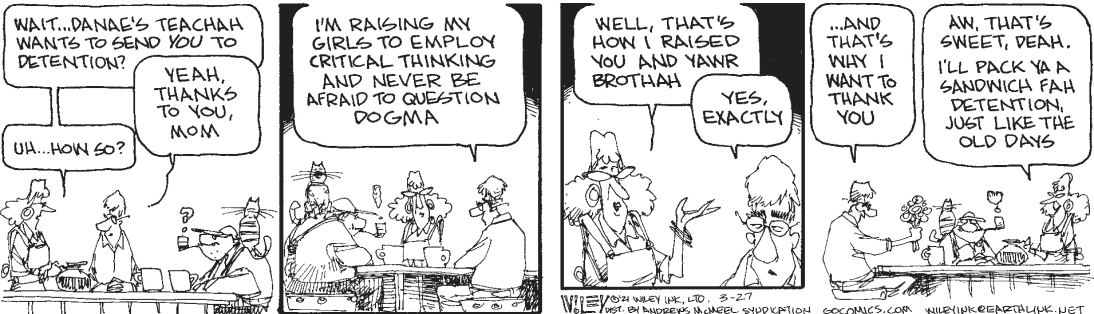
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



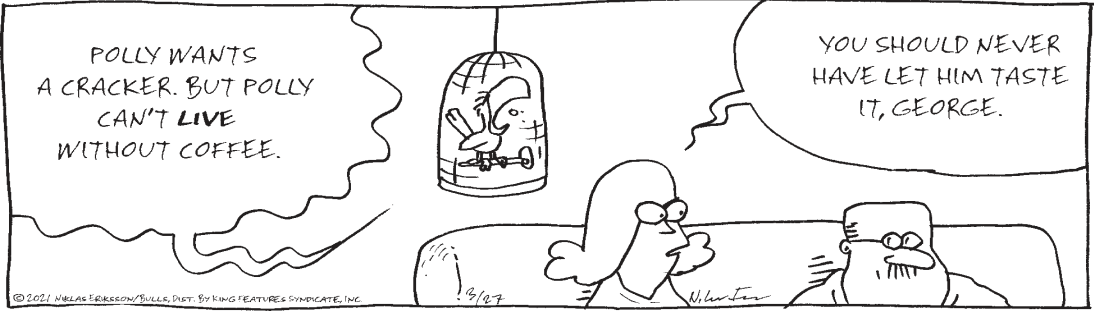
Non Sequitur



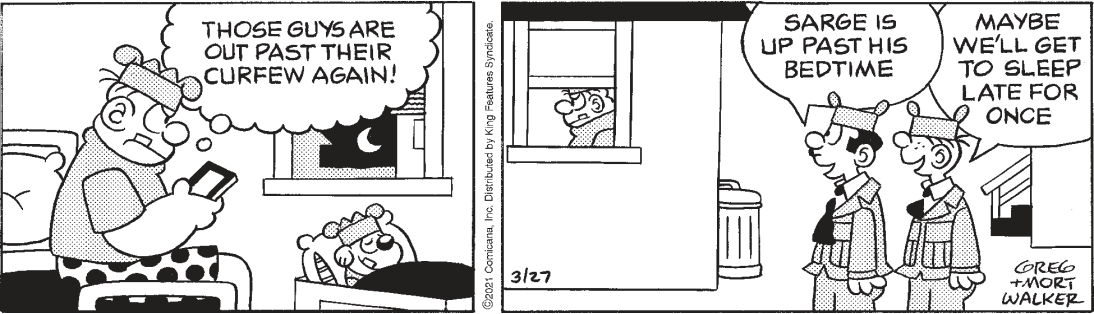
Candorville



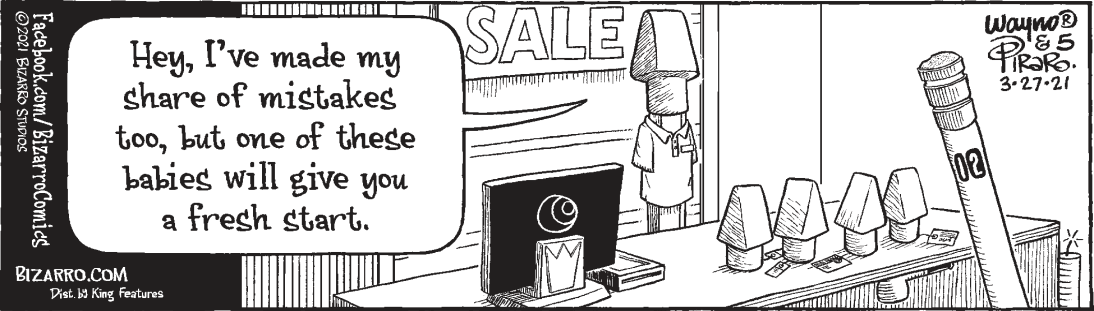
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
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39	40	41			42	43			44	45	46	47
48				49					50			
51				52					53			
54				55					56			

- ACROSS
- 1 Get bigger

5 Flag creator

9 "The Office" character

12 Asta's mistress

13 Flightless birds

14 Flamenco cheer

15 Cold War initials

16 Scruff

17 Opener at Vegas?

18 "Scram!"

19 Inseparable

20 Ritz

21 Calendar abbr.

23 "Norma —"

25 Retort

28 Wild parties

32 Troublesome car

33 Quartet doubled

34 Turned bad

36 Prepared potatoes

37 Ruby or Sandra

38 "Guinness Book" suffix

39 Madhouses

42 Kiev's land (Abbr.)

44 First person

48 iPhone download

49 Rights advocacy org.

50 "Damn Yankees" vamp
- 51 Standard

52 Sediment

53 Young foxes

54 Devious

55 "Got it"

56 Sports figure?
- DOWN
- 1 Wildebeests

2 — Hashanah

3 Approximately

4 Heated debate

5 "The Bathers" painter

6 Muscat's land

7 Excellent

8 Away from NNW

9 Casual shirt

10 Regrettably

11 Netting
- 20 Conflict-ending negotiations

22 Soprano Fleming

24 Palliative plants

25 Gore and Pacino

26 Ultramodernist

27 Dallas sch.

29 Cardinal cap letters

30 Golf prop

31 Norm (Abbr.)

35 Low cards

36 Read

39 Microwaves

40 Milky gem

41 Nashville venue

43 Swiss artist Paul

45 "Act now!"

46 Utah ski resort

47 Sail support

49 Will Smith biopic

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-27 CRYPTOQUIP

TRYL SDIXZ S HZIUUPVPA

UPVTXLP DIZZYP TVIL SJ

RHYSJA HIXZC IT HRMRYN:

"ZCP LSYZPHP TYSMIJ."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF AN IDEA IS ACCEPTED AS LEGITIMATE ACROSS MULTIPLE COUNTRIES, I GUESS IT'S INTER-NOTIONAL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals M

SCOREBOARD/MLB

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Men’s NIT
At Frisco, Texas
Quarterfinals
Thursday, March 25
Colorado State vs. NC State
Boise State vs. Memphis
Mississippi State vs. Richmond
W. Kentucky vs. Louisiana Tech

College Basketball Invitational
Championship
Wednesday, March 24
Pepperdine 84, Coastal Carolina 61

NCAA Men’s Division II
Tournament
Quarterfinals
At Evansville, Ind.
Wednesday, March 24
Lincoln Memorial 90, Colorado Mines 76
West Texas A&M 97, Daemen 83
NW Missouri St. 98, West Liberty 77
Flagler 70, Truman 69

Semifinals
At Evansville, Ind.
Thursday, March 25
West Texas A&M vs. Lincoln Memorial
NW Missouri St. vs. Flagler

Women’s NIT
Semifinals
At Collierville, Tenn.
Friday, March 26
Rice vs. Delaware
Mississippi vs. N. Iowa

NCAA Women’s Division II
Tournament
Semifinals
Wednesday, March 24
Drury 74, Lander 65
Lubbock Christian 63, Cent. Missouri 61

Championship
Friday, March 26
Drury vs. Lubbock Christian

TENNIS

Miami Open
Wednesday
At Tennis Center at Crandon Park
Miami
Purse: \$3,343,785
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men’s Singles
Round of 128

Pierre-Hugues Herbert, France, def. Pedro Sousa, Portugal, 6-1, 6-3.
Alexei Popyrin, Australia, def. Feliciano Lopez, Spain, 6-4, 7-6 (4).
Cameron Norrie, Britain, def. Yoshihito Nishioka, Japan, 6-1, 3-6, 7-5.
Mikael Ymer, Sweden, def. Alejandro Tabilo, Chile, 6-3, 6-1.
Yen-hsun Lu, Taiwan, def. Sam Querrey, United States, 6-3, 6-4.
Marcos Giron, United States, def. Tommy Paul, United States, 7-6 (5), 6-4.
Hugo Gaston, France, def. Dominik Koepfer, Germany, 6-1, 6-4.
Ernesto Escobedo, United States, def. Paolo Lorenzi, Italy, 6-3, 6-2.
Yannick Hanfmann, Germany, def. Steve Johnson, United States, 7-5, 6-2.
Ricardas Berankis, Lithuania, def. Federico Gaio, Italy, 7-6 (4), 6-2.
James Duckworth, Australia, def. Mischa Zverev, Germany, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4.
Lloyd Harris, South Africa, def. Emilio Nava, United States, 6-4, 7-6 (7).
Mackenzie McDonald, United States, def. Vasek Pospisil, Canada, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.
Laslo Djere, Serbia, def. Jiri Vesely, Czech Republic, 6-3, 5-7, 6-1.
Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, def. Carlos Alcaraz Garfia, Spain, 6-4, 2-6, 7-5.
Frances Tiafoe, United States, def. Stefano Travaglia, Italy, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2.

Women’s Singles
Round of 128
Andrea Petkovic, Germany, def. Zhang Shuai, China, 7-5, 6-1.
Danielle Collins, United States, def. Kristina Mladenovic, France, 6-3, 6-3.
Ana Konjuh, Croatia, def. Katerina Sinikova, Czech Republic, 7-6 (3), 7-5.
Anna Kalinskaya, Russia, def. Irina-Camelia Begu, Romania, 6-4, 7-6 (5).
Sara Sorribes Tormo, Spain, def. Bernarda Pera, United States, 6-2, 2-6, 7-5.
Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, def. Xiyu Wang, China, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-1.
Renata Zarazua, Mexico, def. Nao Hibino, Japan, 6-4, 4-6, 6-1.
Zheng Saisai, China, def. Fiona Ferro, France, 2-6, 6-4, 6-3.
Katie Boulter, Britain, def. Kristyna Pliskova, Czech Republic, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.
Tereza Martincova, Czech Republic, def. Yaroslava Shvedova, Kazakhstan, 6-4, 6-2.
Alize Cornet, France, def. Svetlana Kuznetsova, Russia, 2-6, 6-2, 6-1.
Wang Qiang, China, def. Aliona Bolsova Zadoinov, Spain, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.
Caroline Garcia, France, def. Mihaela Buzarnescu, Romania, 6-1, 6-2.
Anastasija Sevastova, Latvia, def. Olga Danilovic, Serbia, 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (3).
Nina Stojanovic, Serbia, def. Heather Watson, Britain, 6-4, 6-1.
Tsvetana Pironkova, Bulgaria, def. Marta Kostyuk, Ukraine, 7-6 (4), 3-6, 6-3.
Storm Sanders, Australia, def. Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Italy, 6-1, 5-7, 6-1.
Liudmila Samsonova, Russia, def. Camila Giorgi, Italy, 6-2, 6-4.
Kristina Kucova, Slovakia, def. Hailey Baptiste, United States, 6-4, 2-6, 7-5.
Sloane Stephens, United States, def. Oceane Dodin, France, 6-7 (6), 6-4, 6-2.

GOLF

Dell Match Play
Wednesday
At Austin Country Club
Austin, Texas
Purse: \$10.5 million
Yardage: 7,108; Par: 71
Ian Poulter (60), England, def. Rory McIlroy (11), Northern Ireland, 6 and 5.
Cameron Smith (25), Australia, def. Lanto Griffin (46), United States, 1 up.
Xander Schauffele (6), United States, halved with Andy Sullivan (57), England.
Scottie Scheffler (30), United States, def. Jason Day (44), Australia, 2 up.
Daniel Berger (14), United States, def. Erik van Rooyen (62), South Africa, 6 and 4.
Harris English (19), United States, def. Brendon Todd (47), United States, 1 up.
Jon Rahm (3), Spain, def. Sebastian Munoz (56), Colombia, 1 up.
Ryan Palmer (24), United States, def. Shane Lowry (38), Ireland, 4 and 2.
Patrick Cantlay (10), United States, def. Brian Harman (54), United States, 1 up.
Carlos Ortiz (42), Mexico, def. Hideki Matsuyama (23), Japan, 4 and 3.
Patrick Reed (7), United States, halved with Bubba Watson (55), United States.
Joaquin Niemann (26), Chile, halved with Christiaan Bezuidenhout (33), South Africa.
Jordan Spieth (49), United States, def. Matt Fitzpatrick (15), England, 3 and 1.
Matthew Wolff (20), United States, def. Corey Connors (37), Canada, 3 and 1.
Matt Kuchar (52), United States, def. Justin Thomas (2), United States, 3 and 2.
Kevin Kisner (34), United States, def. Louis Oosthuizen (22), South Africa, 2 and 1.
Dylan Frittelli (64), South Africa, def. Tony Finau (12), United States, 6 and 5.
Jason Kokrak (29), United States, def. Will Zalatoris (40), United States, 1 up.
Antoine Rozner (58), France, def. Bryson DeChambeau (5), United States, 2 up.
Tommy Fleetwood (21), England, halved with. Si Woo Kim (45), South Korea.
Kevin Streelman (53), United States, def. Viktor Hovland (13), Norway, 4 and 2.
Abraham Ancer (27), Mexico, def. Bernd Wiesberger (43), Austria, 3 and 2.
Collin Morikawa (4), United States, halved with J.T. Poston (63), United States.
Billy Horschel (32), United States, def. Max Homa (35), United States, 1 up.
Webb Simpson (9), United States, def. Talor Gooch (59), United States, 6 and 5.
Mackenzie Hughes (48), Canada, def. Paul Casey (17), England, 3 and 2.
Tyrrell Hatton (8), England, halved with Matt Wallace (51), England.
Sergio Garcia (39), Spain, def. Lee Westwood (18), England, 4 and 3.
Sungjae Im (16), South Korea, def. Russell Henley (50), United States, 1 up.
Victor Perez (31), France, def. Marc Leishman (36), Australia, 2 and 1.
Dustin Johnson (1), United States, def. Adam Long (61), United States, 2 up.
Bob MacIntyre (41), Scotland, def. Kevin Na (28), United States, 2 and 1.

PRO BASEBALL

Spring training			
AMERICAN LEAGUE			
	W	L	Pct.
Kansas City	13	7	.650
Toronto	14	8	.636
Boston	13	8	.619
New York	13	8	.619
Texas	12	8	.600
Los Angeles	12	9	.571
Oakland	12	9	.571
Seattle	10	9	.526
Detroit	10	11	.476
Minnesota	9	12	.429
Chicago	8	11	.421
Baltimore	8	14	.364
Tampa Bay	8	14	.364
Cleveland	8	16	.333
Houston	5	12	.294
NATIONAL LEAGUE			
	W	L	Pct.
Miami	10	5	.667
Chicago	13	7	.650
Los Angeles	10	8	.556
Milwaukee	12	10	.545
Pittsburgh	12	10	.545
St. Louis	8	7	.533
New York	10	9	.526
Atlanta	11	11	.500
Colorado	11	11	.500
San Francisco	10	10	.500
Washington	8	8	.500
Philadelphia	10	12	.455
San Diego	9	12	.429
Arizona	8	11	.421
Cincinnati	6	16	.273
Wednesday’s games			
St. Louis 3, N.Y. Mets 0			
Tampa Bay 7, Minnesota 6			
Detroit 4, Philadelphia 1			
Pittsburgh 6, Atlanta 3			
Toronto 5, N.Y. Yankees 0			
Oakland 14, Chicago White Sox 4			
Colorado 9, Milwaukee 8			

DEALS

Wednesday’s transactions
BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League
BOSTON RED SOX — Named Bekah Salwasser executive vice president, social impact.
DETROIT TIGERS — Agreed to terms with RHP Julio Teheran. Placed RHP Spencer Turnbull on IR.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Reassigned RHP Kyle Barraclough, OFs Socrates Brito and Ryan LaMarre and RHP Asher Wojciechowski to minor league camp.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Optioned C Austin Allen to Las Vegas (Triple-A West).
SEATTLE MARINERS — Reassigned Cs Jose Godoy and Cal Raleigh to minor league camp.
TEXAS RANGERS — Announced that the club has exercised its 2022 option on the contract of manager Chris Woodward. Optioned LGPs Kolby Allard and Joe Palumbo to Round Rock (Triple-A West).
National League
ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Optioned C Daulton Varsho to Reno Aces (Triple-A West).
NEW YORK METS — Optioned RHP Jordan Yamamoto to Syracuse (Triple-A Northeast). Reassigned RHP Corey Oswalt, C Bruce Maxwell and INF Brandon Drury.
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Optioned RHPs Sean Poppen and Miguel Yajure and INF Cole Tucker. Reassigned INF Will Craig, Cs Joe Hudson and Andrew Susac, OF Troy Stokes, Jr. Reassigned LHP Braedon Ogle and OF Hunter Owen to minor league camp.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned RHP Anderson Espinoza to San Antonio (Double-A South).
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Optioned LHP Sam Selman and INF Jason Vosler to minor league camp. Reassigned RHPs Silvino Bracho and Rico Garcia, OF Joe McCarthy and LHP Phil Pfeifer to minor league camp.
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Optioned RHPs Ryne Harper and Dakota Bacus to Rochester (Triple-A Northeast).
FOOTBALL
National Football League
ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed DB Fabian Moreau to a one-year contract.
BUFFALO BILLS — Signed DE Efe Obada to a one-year contract.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed K Matt Ammendola to a contract.
CHICAGO BEARS — Signed LB Christian Jones and RB Damien Williams.
CINCINNATI BENGALS — Re-signed RB Samaje Perine to a two-year contract. Re-signed S Ricardo Allen.
DENVER BRONCOS — Signed S Kareem Jackson to a one-year contract.
DETROIT LIONS — Signed LB Alex Anzalone and WR Darnion Ratley.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed LS Joe Fortunato. Re-signed TE Mercedes Lewis to a two-year contract.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed DB Terrence Mitchell, WRs Chris Moore and

Andre Roberts and LB Kevin Pierre-Louis. Re-signed TE Pharaoh Brown. Signed RB Mark Ingram II and LB Christian Kirksey.
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Signed T Sam Tevi. Re-signed WR T.Y. Hilton.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed QB C.J. Beathard.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Re-signed LB Elandon Roberts.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Re-signed RB Ameer Abdullah.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed LB Laroy Reynolds. Re-signed RB James White. Re-signed DL Lawrence Guy to a four-year contract.
NEW YORK GIANTS — Re-signed LB Devante Downs to a one-year contract. Signed TE Kyle Rudolph.
NEW YORK JETS — Signed DE/LB Vinny Curry to a contract. Signed RB Tevin Coleman to a two-year contract.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Signed TE Nick Vannett to a thgree-year contract.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Re-signed LBs Robert Spillane and Cassius Marsh to a one-year contract.
SAN DIEGO CHARGERS — Signed LB Kyle Fackrell to a contract.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Re-signed CB K’Waun Williams and DE Jordan Willis.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Re-signed DE Benson Mayowa. Signed DE Kerry Hyder and G Jordan Simmons.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Re-signed DT Ndamukong Suh. Signed LT Donovan Smith to a two-year contract, \$31.8M extension.
WASHINGTON FOOTBALL TEAM — Signed WR Cam Sims to his restricted free agent tender.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League
ANAHEIM DUCKS — Recalled C Lukas Dostal, D Andy Welinski and Kodie Curran from the minor league taxi squad.
BUFFALO SABRES — Recalled G Michael Houser and RW Rasmus Asplund from the minor league taxi squad.
CALGARY FLAMES — Recalled LW Zac Rinaldo and C Clark Bishop from the minor league taxi squad.
MINNESOTA WILD — Recalled C Joseph Cramarossa from the minor league taxi squad. Placed LW Zach Parise on Injured reserve COVID-19 protocol.
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Signed F Tye Thompson to a two-year, entry-level contract.
OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled LW Alex Formenton from the minor league taxi squad.
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Recalled C Radim Zohorna, RW Colton Sceviour, C Frederick Gaudreau and RW Anthony Angello from the minor league taxi squad.
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
COLORADO RAPIDS — Loaned G Andre Rawls and D Jeremy Kelly to Phoenix Rising FC retaining right to recall either player.

COLLEGE
KANSAS STATE — Agreed to terms with Gene Taylor on a contract extension through 2027 as athletic director.

COLLEGE HOCKEY

NCAA Division I Tournament
BRIDGEPORT REGIONAL
At Bridgeport, Conn.
First Round
Friday, March 26
Wisconsin (20-9-1) vs. Bemidji St. (15-9-3)
UMass (16-5-4) vs. Lake Superior St. (19-6-3)
Championship
Saturday, March 27
Wisconsin-Bemidji St. winner vs. UMass-Lake Superior St. winner
FARGO REGIONAL
At Fargo, N.D.
First Round
Friday, March 26
Minn. Duluth (14-10-2) vs. Michigan (15-10-1)
North Dakota (21-5-1) vs. American International (15-3-0)
Championship
Saturday, March 27
Minn. Duluth-Michigan winner vs. North Dakota-AIC winner
ALBANY REGIONAL
At Albany, N.Y.
First Round
Saturday, March 27
Boston College (17-5-1) vs. Notre Dame (14-13-2)
St. Cloud St. (17-10-0) vs. Boston U. (10-4-1)
Championship
Sunday, March 28
Boston College-Notre Dame winner vs. St. Cloud St.-Boston U. winner
LOVELAND REGIONAL
At Loveland, Colo.
First Round
Saturday, March 27
Minnesota St. (20-4-1) vs. Quinnipiac (17-7-4)
Minnesota (23-6-0) vs. Omaha (14-10-1)
Championship
Sunday, March 28
Minnesota St.-Quinnipiac winner vs. Minnesota-Omaha winner
FROZEN FOUR
At Pittsburgh
National Semifinals
Thursday, April 8
Fargo Regional Champion vs. Bridgeport Regional Champion
Albany Regional Champion vs. Loveland Regional Champion
National Championship
Saturday, April 10
Semifinal winners

League watching baseballs

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball is increasing its monitoring of baseballs in an attempt to suppress any use of foreign substances by pitchers.

Mike Hill, newly hired as executive vice president of baseball operations and disciplinarian, wrote in a memorandum to team officials on Tuesday that “players are subject to discipline ... regardless of whether evidence of the violation has been discovered during or following a game.”

“Examples of prohibited conduct include, but are not limited to, handling foreign substances, advising a pitcher how to use or otherwise mask the use of foreign substances, interfering with the collection of game-used baseballs and failing to report observed violations of these rules by players or staff.”

Hill said team leaders may be held responsible for violations by staff.

In a two-page memo to owners, CEOs, team presidents, general managers and mangers first reported by ESPN and the New York Post, Hill outlined three new enforcement components.

■ Gameday compliance monitors and electronics compliance officers will check for violations in dugouts, clubhouses, tunnels, batting cages and bullpens, and they will file daily reports to the commissioner’s office.

■ Umpires, equipment authenticators and compliance personnel will submit baseballs that come out of play to the commissioner’s office for inspection and documentation, both suspicious equipment and randomly selected balls. A third-party lab will be used for examinations, and suspicious balls will be traced back to pitchers.

■ MLB Statcast data will be reviewed by the commissioner’s office to analyze spin rate changes among pitchers suspected of using foreign substances, comparing game data with career norms.

“As a reminder, all club personnel are prohibited from assisting players in the use of foreign substances and also will be subject to discipline by the commissioner, including fines and suspensions,” Hill wrote.



Hill

ANALYSIS

Don't forget about CP3

Paul deserves to be in conversation when deciding who should be MVP

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

There is no definition for what makes someone the Most Valuable Player in the NBA.

If it's the best player, LeBron James should have way more than four trophies. If it's the best player on the best regular-season team, then Giannis Antetokounmpo has been the correct pick in each of the last two seasons. Of late, it's often been the leading scorer; Kevin Durant, Stephen Curry, Russell Westbrook and James Harden recently won MVPs in scoring-title seasons.

If it's the player most valuable to a contending team, a case can be made for Chris Paul.

Let's be clear: Paul is almost certainly not going to win the award this year. He's averaging 16 points and nine assists. That's not enough to move voters. The last time someone with numbers that weren't eye-popping won the MVP vote was when Steve Nash got his back-to-back trophies in 2005 and 2006. Every MVP since has averaged at least 23.8 points, and four have averaged at least 30 points.

This year's race is as wide open as it has been in years. And with no clear favorite, there will likely be even more debates about the "most valuable" part of the MVP award.

James seemed like the front-runner, then the Los Angeles Lakers lost a few games without Anthony Davis and now James is likely out for at least a few weeks with a high ankle sprain. Philadelphia's Joel Embiid moved into that unofficial MVP favorite spot, then he got hurt, as well. Harden has been brilliant since joining Brooklyn, which means he's in the mix once again.

Denver's Nikola Jokic could win it this year. So could Portland's Damian Lillard. It would be foolish to rule Antetokounmpo out in his quest for three in a row. James, Embiid and Harden all still could be the winner. It's as wide open as it has been in years.

If one criteria — though not usually a top consideration — will be "player most valuable to a contending team," then Paul deserves a major look.

Let's start with the obvious reason. The Suns are good.

They weren't bad before Paul's arrival. Phoenix made some noise by going 8-0 in the restart bubble at Walt Disney World last summer in an ultimately futile longshot quest to make the playoffs, but this team

.600

Minimum winning percentage of all five teams — the Hornets, the Los Angeles Clippers, Houston, Oklahoma City and Phoenix — during the regular season for which Chris Paul has played over the last 14 years when he appears in a game.

SOURCE: Associated Press

is better than that group was — their veteran point guard being one of the big reasons why.

"He's just such a smart player, man," Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said. "Still obviously skilled, still athletic. If you give Chris Paul a team of guys that want to follow — and that's the key, Chris can be tough, but he's with the right group, they want to follow, they want to be led — then there's no better player in the NBA for that."

They're 29-14 so far this season, second in the Western Conference behind Utah. Anything short of all-out collapse will have the Suns in the playoffs for the first time since 2010 and end the second-longest current drought in the NBA; only Sacramento, which hasn't been in a playoff game since 2006, has waited longer.

This should be no surprise. Paul's teams win.

This is his 16th season and the 14th consecutive in which Paul's team has a winning record when he plays. They don't just win, they win big: all five of Paul's teams over those past 14 seasons — the Hornets, the Los Angeles Clippers, Houston, Oklahoma City and now Phoenix — have at least a .600 winning percentage in his regular-season appearances.

Put another way, for every three games Paul plays, his teams win two of them. That's pretty good.

On Sunday, he became the sixth player to reach 10,000 assists, and either toward the end of this season or early next season — barring injury — he'll have enough points to be the first member of the 20,000-point, 10,000-assist club. James is 331 assists away from joining him.

Paul was second in the MVP voting 13 seasons ago. He was third in 2012, fourth in 2013, has been sixth or seventh three other times along the way. And he's never been to the NBA Finals, one of the few empty boxes on his résumé.

No, he won't win the MVP award this year, either.

But, at minimum, he's earned a spot in the conversation.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	31	13	.705	—
Brooklyn	30	15	.667	1½
New York	22	22	.500	9
Boston	21	23	.477	10
Toronto	18	26	.409	13
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Charlotte	22	21	.512	—
Miami	22	22	.500	½
Atlanta	22	22	.500	½
Washington	15	27	.357	6½
Orlando	15	29	.341	7½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	29	14	.674	—
Indiana	20	23	.465	9
Chicago	19	24	.442	10
Cleveland	17	27	.386	12½
Detroit	12	31	.279	17
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Dallas	23	19	.548	—
San Antonio	22	19	.537	½
Memphis	21	20	.512	1½
New Orleans	19	24	.442	4½
Houston	12	31	.279	11½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Utah	32	11	.744	—
Denver	26	18	.591	6½
Portland	25	18	.581	7
Oklahoma City	19	25	.432	13½
Minnesota	10	34	.227	22½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	29	14	.674	—
L.A. Clippers	29	16	.644	1
L.A. Lakers	28	16	.636	1½
Golden State	22	22	.500	7½
Sacramento	19	25	.432	10½
Wednesday's games				
Indiana 116, Detroit 111 Toronto 135, Denver 111 Milwaukee 121, Boston 119 Memphis 116, Oklahoma City 107 Cleveland 103, Chicago 94 Orlando 112, Phoenix 111 Dallas 128, Minnesota 108 Charlotte 122, Houston 97 L.A. Clippers 134, San Antonio 101 Utah 118, Brooklyn 88 Sacramento 110, Atlanta 108				
Thursday's games				
Portland at Miami Washington at New York L.A. Clippers at San Antonio Golden State at Sacramento Philadelphia at L.A. Lakers				
Friday's games				
Brooklyn at Detroit Boston at Milwaukee Phoenix at Toronto Denver at New Orleans Houston at Minnesota Miami at Charlotte Portland at Orlando Indiana at Dallas Memphis at Utah Atlanta at Golden State Cleveland at L.A. Lakers				
Saturday's games				
Detroit at Washington Houston at Minnesota New York at Milwaukee Chicago at San Antonio Boston at Oklahoma City Dallas at New Orleans Memphis at Utah Cleveland at Sacramento Philadelphia at L.A. Clippers				
Sunday's games				
Phoenix at Charlotte Portland at Toronto Atlanta at Denver Orlando at L.A. Lakers				



ISAAC BREKKEN / AP

Free safety Lamarcus Joyner was one of several veteran players cut by the Raiders. He then signed a deal with the New York Jets.

Lower cap means more cuts in NFL

BY JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

If it seemed as if NFL teams have been shedding contracts nearly as fast as signing them in recent weeks that's because it's almost true.

With a shrinking salary cap in a sport with few contracts that are fully guaranteed, teams have spent the weeks leading up to free agency and the first few days of the new league year getting out of deals signed in recent years when there was more money available to spend.

Whether it was Kansas City getting rid of banged-up and expensive starting offensive tackles Mitchell Schwartz and Eric Fisher, the Raiders cutting ties with Lamarcus Joyner and Tyrell Williams after building their free-agent class around them, or Tennessee shedding starting defensive backs Adoree Jackson, Malcolm Butler and Kenny Vaccaro, veterans around the league have been sent to the chopping block.

In all, according to transactions data from SportRadar and contract information from Spotrac and Over The Cap, teams have released players with a combined total of approximately \$600 million left on the deals they originally signed between the Super Bowl and the end of the first week of the league year. That figure excludes players who were on rookie or minimum-level deals.

The cuts have come after the salary cap was reduced from \$198.2 million in 2020 to \$182.5 million in 2021 in response to the reduced revenues resulting from mostly empty stadiums last year because of the coronavirus.

The bloodletting could have been even more severe had the league and the NFLPA not agreed to spread those losses over multiple years.

"I think the unprecedented part being, for the first time in modern era, the cap decreases instead of increases," Rams general manager

Les Snead said. "But again, I think many people on this planet, not just us in NFL football, have had to make sacrifices, some probably harder than others over the past year."

Cutting high-salaried players is nothing new in the NFL, where most free-agent contracts have teams often committing to paying lucrative signing bonuses and guaranteed money in the first couple of years of a deal and then deciding whether to keep the player or get rid of him to create salary cap room.

But the rate of it increased substantially this season because of the lowered cap with the total amount of contracts cut in the same time period equaling about \$445 million in 2020 and \$227 million in 2019.

One of the teams in a cutting mode was the Raiders. Coach Jon Gruden bragged in 2019 about the free-agent haul he brought in after trading away stars Khalil Mack and Amari Cooper instead of giving them big extensions.

He said at the owners meeting that year that the Raiders wouldn't have been able to get players such as Antonio Brown, Trent Brown, Williams and Joyner without those deals.

Antonio Brown didn't even last with the team until the opener that season because of run-ins with general manager Mike Mayock and frustration over the type of helmet the league made him wear.

The other three all were sent packing this offseason, with Trent Brown traded to New England as part of a 2022 pick swap with two years left on his \$66 million, four-year contract, and Williams and Joyner cut this offseason with more than \$38 million remaining on their contracts.

The Raiders also cut guard Richie Incognito and brought him back on a cheaper deal, and traded away starting offensive linemen Rodney Hudson and Gabe Jackson for mid-round picks when they refused to take pay cuts.

NHL

Scoreboard

East Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Islanders	33	21	8	4	46	98	73
Washington	31	20	7	4	44	106	92
Pittsburgh	33	20	11	2	42	105	90
Boston	28	16	8	4	36	77	66
Philadelphia	31	15	12	4	34	97	111
N.Y. Rangers	31	14	13	4	32	94	82
New Jersey	30	12	14	4	28	75	93
Buffalo	31	6	21	4	16	66	111
Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	32	24	6	2	50	117	74
Carolina	31	21	7	3	45	104	78
Florida	32	20	8	4	44	107	91
Chicago	33	15	13	5	35	98	108
Columbus	33	13	13	7	33	86	106
Nashville	33	15	17	1	31	79	103
Dallas	29	10	11	8	28	81	77
Detroit	33	10	19	4	24	71	106
West Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	30	22	7	1	45	100	67
Colorado	31	20	8	3	43	106	71
Minnesota	31	20	10	1	41	92	78
St. Louis	32	16	11	5	37	97	104
Arizona	33	14	14	5	33	83	101
Los Angeles	32	13	13	6	32	91	90
San Jose	31	13	14	4	30	89	106
Anaheim	34	9	19	6	24	74	115
North Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	32	20	10	2	42	107	83
Winnipeg	33	20	11	2	42	109	92
Edmonton	34	21	13	0	42	116	97
Montreal	31	14	8	9	37	100	87
Vancouver	37	16	18	3	35	100	120
Calgary	34	15	16	3	33	89	102
Ottawa	35	12	20	3	27	92	132
Wednesday's games							
Ottawa 3, Calgary 1 Minnesota 3, Anaheim 2 Pittsburgh 5, Buffalo 2 Winnipeg 5, Vancouver 1 San Jose 4, Los Angeles 2 Edmonton at Montreal, ppd							
Thursday's games							
Buffalo at Pittsburgh Carolina at Columbus N.Y. Islanders at Boston N.Y. Rangers at Philadelphia New Jersey at Washington Toronto at Ottawa Detroit at Nashville Florida at Chicago St. Louis at Minnesota Tampa Bay at Dallas Vegas at Colorado							
Friday's games							
Edmonton at Montreal, ppd New Jersey at Washington Anaheim at St. Louis San Jose at Arizona Winnipeg at Calgary							
Saturday's games							
Buffalo at Boston N.Y. Rangers at Philadelphia Columbus at Detroit Vegas at Colorado Edmonton at Toronto N.Y. Islanders at Pittsburgh Tampa Bay at Carolina Florida at Dallas Nashville at Chicago San Jose at Arizona Winnipeg at Calgary							
Sunday's games							
N.Y. Rangers at Washington Columbus at Detroit Anaheim at St. Louis New Jersey at Boston Florida at Dallas Ottawa at Montreal, ppd Nashville at Chicago							
Scoring leaders Through Wednesday							
	GP	G	A	PTS			
Connor McDavid, EDM	34	21	39	60			
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	34	18	32	50			
Patrick Kane, CHI	33	12	32	44			
Mitchell Marner, TOR	32	12	28	40			
Mark Scheifele, WPG	33	13	26	39			
Mark Stone, LV	29	12	26	38			
Mikko Rantanen, COL	31	19	19	38			
Anze Kopitar, LA	32	8	29	37			
Aleksander Barkov, FLA	31	13	24	37			
Jonathan Huberdeau, FLA	32	11	25	36			
Auston Matthews, TOR	29	21	15	36			
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	27	10	25	35			
Brad Marchand, BOS	28	12	22	34			
Nicklas Backstrom, WSH	31	12	22	34			
Sidney Crosby, PIT	32	13	21	34			

AROUND THE LEAGUE

Players look for ‘clarity’ on hits

Penguins’ Crosby, Capitals’ Wilson agree there’s confusion

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Sidney Crosby and Tom Wilson have found something they agree on after years spent battling on opposite sides of the Penguins-Capitals rivalry.

Crosby, the longtime Pittsburgh captain, broached the topic of NHL players wanting to better understand the line between clean and dirty hits after teammate Brandon Tanev was given a major penalty for a hit on Boston’s Jarred Tinordi that appeared to many to be legal.

After serving a seven-game suspension for boarding, Wilson cited Crosby’s comments when pointing out there’s some confusion around the league.

“I hope as players we can get some clarity on what’s a good hit and what’s not,” Crosby said. “I know it’s fast, but right now it’s really hard to know what is in fact clean and what’s not and when you’re out there playing it’s important that you do know that.”

Wilson added: “There’s a lot of guys talking out about it around the game right now, captains on other teams saying things about the physical aspect of the game.”

The history between these two players is dotted with controversy. Wilson has been suspended multiple times for questionable hits, including one that gave Pittsburgh’s Zach Aston-Reese a concussion and a broken jaw. Crosby has all but called Wilson a head-hunter.

This season, Crosby and Wilson appear to be on the same page for once and each acknowledged officials have a tough job.

Joshua Smith, who runs the Scouting the Refs site that tracks officials’ calls and more, said players watching replays on iPads on the bench during games has had an effect.

“Guys aren’t just talking about a hit that happened in the first period: They’re watching it, they’re critiquing it on the bench and they’re talking about it and they’re seeing the replays,” said Smith, who has run the site since 2013. “They’re more informed, and that leads to some sharper criticism.”

The NHL declined comment on player criticism of officiating, which is nothing new in pro sports. In an interview earlier this season, director of officiating Stephen Walkom said he was pleased with



Nick Wass / AP

Washington Capitals right wing Garnet Hathaway, left, and right wing Tom Wilson, right, check Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman Mike Matheson. Wilson said he’s looking for clarity on what a clean hit is.



Keith Srakocic / AP

The Pittsburgh Penguins’ Sidney Crosby, center, said players need better guidance on what hits should be allowed.

how referees and linesmen were doing, especially given health and safety protocols limiting their time together. The league also has a video rulebook of examples of various penalties on its site.

There have been 22 major penalties this season, not counting fights. Some of the 95 fights, of course, have come after big hits, with all divisional play increasing the fisticuffs.

The league recently gave officials the ability to review certain situations, but only if it’s deemed a major at first. Wilson’s hit that injured Bruins defenseman Brandon Carlo wasn’t called anything on the ice, leading Boston coach Bruce Cassidy to yell from the bench that it has to be a penalty because it was going to be a multi-game suspension.

“You can’t call what you don’t see, so if they don’t know to call it a major, there’s never any chance to

review it,” said Smith, who wondered if adding an off-ice official with a clear view from high above the play with the ability to buzz down in major situations would solve that problem. “Maybe that’s not such a bad idea to try to clean up the game or get those hits out of the game.”

Retired referee Paul Stewart said the onus is on officials to be in the right position to see potential penalties when they happen. He was always taught, “Look to where your partner isn’t looking” so as not to miss something.

“Positioning is something that needs be constantly coached,” said Stewart, the first American to referee more than 1,000 regular-season NHL games and a 2018 inductee of the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame. “My suggestion is improve your positioning. Get the fellas to skate closer to the play and see it and feel it.”

Sometimes seeing is believing, which is why Smith said a lot of officials don’t reverse their own calls when given the opportunity.

The NHL’s Department of Player Safety has doled out eight suspensions for a total of 20 games this season after 20 for 51 games all of last season.

“It’s hard as a player to know,” Crosby said. “We look at a hit and we think, ‘Oh that’s a suspension’ and it’s not, or we think it’s a penalty and it’s not and then you see a hit like (Tanev’s), you don’t expect a five-minute major and it ends up being one. It seems like it’s a little gray right now.”

Knoblauch’s audition

The New York Rangers are 3-1 with Kris Knoblauch filling in as acting coach while David Quinn and his staff are in the NHL’s COVID-19 protocol. Knoblauch, who’s in his second season coaching the American Hockey League’s Hartford WolfPack after two years as a Philadelphia Flyers assistant, insisted players deserve the credit.

“Ultimately, it takes a while to really coach a team the way you want to coach it,” he said. “The groundwork has been laid out for us and it’s been well-prepared and we’re just trying to follow the game plan.”

But this could be an opportunity for Knoblauch to again show what he can do. He coached Connor McDavid with the Erie Otters at the junior level, won an Ontario Hockey League title and is likely a future NHL head coach — somewhere.

Toronto goalie controversy?

Frederik Andersen is the Toronto Maple Leafs’ No. 1 goaltender when healthy, but for how long? Backup Jack Campbell has battled his own injuries this season and only played four games, but he has won all of them and leads the league with a .965 save percentage.

“When he goes in the net, (players) know that he’s going to compete and they want to compete right alongside him,” coach Sheldon Keefe said of Campbell.

NCAA WOMEN’S TOURNAMENT



Maryland forward Mimi Collins grabs a rebound during her team’s 100-64 rout of Alabama on Wednesday in San Antonio.

ROUNDUP

Maryland routs Alabama

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Maryland and its offensive juggernaut are rolling fast and easy into the Sweet 16, getting 19 points from Angel Reese and overwhelming Alabama 100-64 on Wednesday.

The second-seeded Terrapins (27-2) came into the women’s NCAA Tournament with the nation’s highest-scoring offense and have yet to take their foot off the gas. The Terps are averaging 99 points in their two tournament wins after scoring 91.3 per game in the regular season.

Maryland hit the 100-point mark for the seventh time this season. The Terps also played aggressive, suffocating defense against the seventh-seeded Crimson Tide.

Maryland advanced to play No. 6 Texas in the Hemisfair Region.

Jasmine Walker led Alabama (17-10) with 23 points.

Texas 71, UCLA 62: Celeste Taylor scored 24 points and Kyra Lambert added 17, leading the Longhorns to the victory.

The start of the game was delayed about 25 minutes because Iowa State and Texas A&M went into overtime on the court on the other side of the Alamodome.

Alamo

Missouri State 64, Wright State 39: Elle Ruffridge had a ca-

reer-high 20 points with five three-pointers, Jasmine Franklin had a double-double and the fifth-seeded Lady Bears are going to their second consecutive Sweet 16 after knocking off Wright State.

Missouri State (23-2) pulled away in the second half when Ruffridge had 17 of her points. Franklin had 11 points and 11 rebounds.

Oregon 57, Georgia 50: Sedona Prince scored 22 points, Nyara Sabally took over late and the sixth-seeded Ducks beat the No. 3 Bulldogs to advance to its fourth straight Sweet 16.

Sabally scored six straight points — including a putback of her own missed shot — to break open a tie game and give Oregon a 54-48 lead with less than a minute to go. She finished with 15 points.

Louisville 62, Northwestern 53: Kianna Smith scored 16 points and the No. 2 seed Cardinals advanced to the Sweet 16 by rallying from an early 18-point deficit to beat the seventh-seeded Wildcats

Louisville (25-3) got off to another rough start, trailing 25-7 late in the first quarter. The Cardinals slowly started to chip away on offense and played stellar defense. The deficit was 40-28 midway through the third quarter before Louisville scored 17 straight points.

Northwestern (16-9) closed to 53-50 on Jordan Hamilton’s three-

Scoreboard

Alamo Region
Second Round Tuesday, March 23
Stanford 73, Oklahoma St. 62
Wednesday, March 24
Missouri St. 64, Wright St. 39
Oregon 57, Georgia 50
Louisville 62, Northwestern 53
Regional Semifinals Sunday, March 28
Stanford vs. Missouri St.
Louisville vs. Oregon
Hemisfair Region
Second Round Tuesday, March 23
South Carolina 59, Oregon St. 42
Georgia Tech 73, West Virginia 56
Wednesday, March 24
Texas 71, UCLA 62
Maryland 100, Alabama 64
Regional Semifinals Sunday, March 28
South Carolina vs. Georgia Tech
Maryland vs. Texas
River Walk Region
Second Round Tuesday, March 23
Michigan 70, Tennessee 55
UConn 83, Syracuse 47
Iowa 86, Kentucky 72
Baylor 90, Virginia Tech 48
Regional Semifinals Saturday, March 27
UConn vs. Iowa
Baylor vs. Michigan
Mercado Region
Second Round Tuesday, March 23
NC State 79, South Florida 67
Wednesday, March 24
Indiana 70, Belmont 48
Arizona 52, BYU 46
Texas A&M 84, Iowa St. 82, OT
Regional Semifinals Saturday, March 27
NC State vs. Indiana
Texas A&M vs. Arizona

Few Black women coaches lead Power 5 basketball programs

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

Dawn Staley and Joni Taylor embraced before and after the Southeastern Conference Tournament championship, savoring a historic moment in women’s basketball.

It took 41 years for two Black women head coaches to meet in a tournament championship of a Power Five conference. For it to happen quicker was statistically improbable with the few Black women coaching at the highest level of the college game.

And it remains a longshot to happen again in a Power Five league other than the Southeastern Conference.

In the last five years, there have been a total of 16 Black women head coaches at Power Five schools, and this past season there were just 13 — with four hired last year. Of those 13, seven resided in the SEC.

“You can’t dream what you can’t see,” said Taylor, whose Georgia squad came up short against Staley and South Carolina on March 7. “So (the SEC title game) was a chance for people to dream something that they haven’t seen before.”

The Big 12 was the only Power Five league on the women’s side this season without a Black head coach — male or female. The Atlantic Coast Conference had three Black female head coaches, and two Black male head coaches; the Pac-12 had two Black women head coaches, and Rutgers’ Hall of Famer C. Vivian Stringer was the only Black female head coach in the Big Ten.

It is clear there still is work to be done when it comes to diversity even as women held 45 of the 65 head coaching jobs at Power Five conferences this season.

Staley said her phone was swamped by text messages from other Black coaches around the country congratulating and thanking her and Taylor after the SEC game “for giving them hope that one day they can be in this position, assistant coaches as well.”

The pipeline of potential candidates appears full, and hiring managers don’t have to look far to find them. Of the 65 Power Five schools, 62 have at least one Black assistant on staff.

But there is disconnect somewhere in the hiring process.

“There are a lot of assistant coaches out there who have had as long a career as I have assistant coaching, Black, white, all of them. But Black women haven’t got a whole lot of opportunities to be head coaches in Division I basketball,” said Staley, who noted her



ERIC GAY / AP

South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley is one of only 13 Black women head basketball coaches at Power Five schools, including seven in the SEC.

success has come because she has worked with people who believed in her.

Promoting assistants falls on athletic directors, where there’s an even greater lack of diversity. There are only five women ADs at Power Five schools, and two are in the ACC. And of the five female athletic directors, only Carla Williams at Virginia and Vanderbilt’s Candice Lee are Black.

Lee became the third straight Black athletic director at Vanderbilt and the first full-time woman AD in the SEC last May. She also played basketball for the Commodores. The Vanderbilt AD also noted race and gender aren’t the only factors to look at when scrutinizing her peers around the country.

Lee, one of only two Black ADs in the SEC along with Auburn’s Allen Greene, said clearly white ADs have hired Black coaches in women’s basketball.

“Sometimes we exclude people because we use words like pedigree and pipeline when the reality is that we’re not making it a priority,” Lee said. “And if we believe that representation matters, and many of our women’s basketball student athletes are Black and brown, then I think it would come to bear that you would see more diversity in the coaching ranks. And I just think we’ve got to be intentional about rewarding opportunities.”

Taylor has a suggestion of how ADs can help improve diversity when hiring new coaches.

“People who are making decisions need to make sure they’re talking to different people when they’re compiling their list to make sure that list is diversified,” said Taylor, who led Georgia to the second round of the women’s NCAA Tournament.

NCAA TOURNAMENT



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Loyola Chicago's Cameron Krutwig, left, grabs a rebound above Illinois' Trent Frazier during the the second round of the NCAA Tournament at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on Sunday.

Senior savvy

Experience pays dividends as March Madness continues

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

Michigan's second-round game against LSU was intense from the start. Up and down the court the teams went, trading runs and momentum swings with the season on the line.

One player for the Wolverines seemed calm and steady — guard Eli Brooks.

"I think just all the amount of reps we get in practice and being a senior, you see a lot of things through your time in college," Brooks said. "Just being able to be on the court and have those experiences when I was younger I think really helped me out a lot."

College basketball long ago reached the point when a team could make a deep run in the NCAA Tournament while relying on freshmen or sophomores. In fact, Brooks' coach — Fab Five standout Juwan Howard — played a big role in setting that trend. But under the pressure of a win-or-go-home scenario, experience can still be an asset. Brooks had 21 points, seven assists and only one turnover in Michigan's 86-78 win Monday night. Chaundee Brown Jr., another senior for the Wolverines, scored 21 off the bench.

Elsewhere in this tournament, seniors like Gonzaga's Corey Kispert, Loyola Chicago's Cameron Krutwig and Oregon State's Ethan Thompson have been crucial in leading their teams to the



PAUL SANCYA/AP

Oregon guard Chris Duarte, left, drives on Iowa guard CJ Fredrick during the second round of the NCAA tournament on Monday.

Sweet 16. Baylor's whole starting lineup is juniors and seniors. Oregon's three senior starters — Chris Duarte, LJ Figueroa and Eugene Omoruyi — combined for 61 points in a second-round win over Iowa.

Loyola coach Porter Moser, who started four seniors in his team's second-round victory over top-seeded Illinois, mentioned that type of experience when discussing the factors that can create more parity in the sport.

"I think there's just kids getting developed and being old," Moser said. "Having programs that have kids in the program — two, three, four years — that they develop and learn a system, get better."

That kind of continuity is not a given at Michigan, where top players often have NBA potential and might leave early for the draft. Isaiah Livers and Brooks have been with the Wolverines for four years, and this season Howard added some experience via the transfer route. Grad transfer Mike Smith has taken over at point guard, and Brown arrived at Michigan after three seasons at

Wake Forest.

In Oregon's 95-80 win over Iowa, a key stretch came near the end of the first half. At one point, coach Dana Altman had Duarte, Figueroa and Omoruyi in the game together, even though each had two fouls.

"I told them we've got to be really careful here, but we can't get behind these guys. We can't be chasing them," Altman said. "I stressed to them when I put them back in, 'Fellas, I trust you here, can't have stupid fouls, got to pull back, no stupid reaches, let's finish the half, let's get in the half with all three of you.'"

Those players rewarded Altman's trust, and Loyola's seniors have certainly stepped up for Moser. Krutwig and guard Lucas Williamson both averaged over 20 minutes a game as freshmen in 2017-18, when the Ramblers went to the Final Four. Now they need two more wins to repeat that run.

"The similarities are it's just a group of guys believing and playing for each other," Moser said. "They listen, they lock in, they execute, they defend."

Sampson's Cougars not only team getting boost from transfers

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Kelvin Sampson never set out to take a once-proud Houston program back to national prominence by leaning on transfers.

"Sometimes that's just the way it works out," Sampson said.

And there's no reason to change that approach, either. Not after the transfer-led Cougars are back in the Sweet 16 for the second straight NCAA Tournament — making them one of multiple teams still alive in Indianapolis with a boost from players who started their college careers on other campuses.

"That's just the way it is today," Sampson said. "Thirty years ago, people that didn't know what they didn't know turned their nose up at transfers. They thought something was wrong with them. It shows you how little they knew, though."

"Now, if you're not taking transfers, you're behind."

That philosophy has worked for the Cougars (26-3), the No. 2 seed in the NCAA's Midwest Region, in continuing the program's best sustained run since the "Phi Slama Jama" days of Hakeem Olajuwon, Clyde Drexler and coach Guy Lewis in the 1980s.

Houston has started four transfers in the past five games: Associated Press third-team All-American Quentin Grimes (Kansas), No. 3 scorer DeJon Jarreau (Massachusetts), Justin Gorham (Towson) and Reggie Chaney (Arkansas).

They've helped Houston rank seventh in KenPom's adjusted offensive efficiency (119.1 points per 100 possessions), 11th in defensive efficiency (89.9) and second nationally by grabbing nearly 40% of available offensive rebounds.

The other top seeds in each re-

gion have transfers playing a key role, too, from top-ranked Gonzaga adding point guard Andrew Nembhard from Florida, to fellow No. 1 seed Baylor adding a third-team AP All-American in Davion Mitchell (Auburn) and MaCio Teague (UNC Asheville) as double-digit scorers.

"I think it all comes back to one thing, and that is knowing your team and knowing your culture: who's going to fit in and represent your program the way you want it represented, if you bring in people that add to that," Baylor coach Scott Drew said. "No matter which avenue you look to bring in someone, do they meet what you're really looking for?"

In the case of No. 1 seed Michigan and No. 3 seed Arkansas, they've had transfers elevate their games to ensure their teams advance out of tough second-round matchups.

The Wolverines are playing without senior forward Isaiah Livers, who is out indefinitely with a foot injury. They needed and got a big game from Wake Forest transfer Chaundee Brown Jr. against LSU, with the 6-foot-5 senior scoring a season-high 21 points to exceed his output from the previous three games combined.

The Razorbacks, meanwhile, have five transfers among their top nine players — earning the nickname "Transfer U" from Sampson. That group includes Indiana graduate Justin Smith, a 6-7, 230-pound forward who enters the Sweet 16 having gone from reliable contributor to the Razorbacks' best player of late.

"I certainly think that NBA teams are taking note of his play," Arkansas coach Eric Musselman said. "We've gotten several calls of people just inquiring about him as a player."



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Quentin Grimes, right, an Associated Press third-team All-American, transferred to Houston from Kansas.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

This year's Sweet 16 is historic

Sum of seed numbers sets NCAA record

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

By at least one measure, this is the most chaotic Sweet 16 field to date. The seed numbers of the 16 remaining teams add up to 94, the highest total since the NCAA Tournament expanded in 1985. The previous record of 89 was set in 1986. This year's regional semifinals include 15th-seeded Oral Roberts, 12th-seeded Oregon State, 11th-seeded Syracuse, 11th-seeded UCLA and eighth-seeded Loyola Chicago. Three No. 1 seeds did make it through — Gonzaga, Michigan and Baylor. It's the sixth straight Sweet 16 appearance for Gonzaga and the fourth for Michigan, the nation's longest two active streaks. Gonzaga coach Mark Few could appreciate how difficult it was to emerge from these first two rounds unscathed. "There are a lot of good teams out there," Few said. "When you play them on the biggest stage, and it's just one game, it's not a seven-game series, anything can happen. And there's a lot of great coaches out there. You give them enough time to game plan for stuff like this, they're going to take away your strengths." Here are the other seasons with the highest seed totals in the Sweet 16:

1986
Sum of seeds: 89
 In just the second year of the expanded 64-team tournament, the Sweet 16 included eighth-seeded Auburn, 11th-seeded LSU, 12th-seeded DePaul and 14th-seeded Cleveland State. LSU became the first 11 seed to reach the Final Four. Seventh-seeded Navy, led by David Robinson, made it all the way to the regional finals.

1990
Sum of seeds: 88
 Three double-digit seeds made this Sweet 16: 10th-seeded Texas, 11th-seeded Loyola Marymount and 12th-seeded Ball State. Loyola made it to the Elite Eight in the aftermath of star Hank Gathers' death. The Lions scored a tournament-record 149 points in a second-round win over defending champion Michigan. They also al-



Oral Roberts players celebrate after a victory over Florida in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Oral Roberts won 81-78 to advance to the Sweet 16.



Oregon State guard Ethan Thompson and head coach Wayne Tinkle celebrate beating Oklahoma State 80-70 in the second round.

lowed 131 — the second-highest total in tournament history — against UNLV in the regional final. 1999
Sum of seeds: 88
 A record five double-digit seeds made the Sweet 16 in this tournament, although only 10th-seeded Gonzaga went any further, losing in the regional final. The other four were 10th-seeded Purdue, 10th-seeded Miami of Ohio, 12th-seeded Missouri State and 13th-seeded Oklahoma. 2000
Sum of seeds: 85
 Two 8 seeds reached the Final Four in 2000: North Carolina and Wisconsin. Gonzaga made the Sweet 16 again as a 10, and 10th-seeded Seton Hall was there, as

well. Only two No. 1s and one No. 2 made it past the first weekend. 2018
Sum of seeds: 85
 Top-seeded Virginia was eliminated by 16th-seeded UMBC, which then lost to ninth-seeded Kansas State with a Sweet 16 spot on the line. Another No. 1 seed went out when Xavier lost to Florida State in the second round. Loyola Chicago went to the Final Four as an 11 seed, and Syracuse also made the Sweet 16 as an 11. 2013
Sum of seeds: 81
 This was the year Florida Gulf Coast became the first 15 seed to reach the regional semifinals. Joining FGCU were 12th-seeded Oregon and 13th-seeded La Salle — and ninth-seeded Wichita State made the Final Four. 2010
Sum of seeds: 80
 The Ivy League made it to the Sweet 16 in this tournament with 12th-seeded Cornell, and ninth-seeded Northern Iowa got there, too, with a memorable upset of Kansas. Saint Mary's made it as a 10 and Washington as an 11. 2011
Sum of seeds: 80
 There were four double-digit seeds in this Sweet 16, including 11th-seeded Virginia Commonwealth, which ended up in the Final Four. VCU lost in the national semifinal to eighth-seeded Butler. The regional semifinals also included 10th-seeded Florida State, 11th-seeded Marquette and 12th-seeded Richmond.

Scoreboard

East Regional
First Round
Saturday, March 20
 Michigan 82, Texas Southern 66
 LSU 76, St. Bonaventure 61
 Colorado 96, Georgetown 73
 Florida St. 64, UNC-Greensboro 54
 UCLA 73, BYU 62
 Abilene Christian 53, Texas 52
 Maryland 63, UConn 54
 Alabama 68, Iona 55
Second Round
Monday, March 22
 Michigan 86, LSU 78
 Florida St. 71 Colorado 53
 UCLA 67, Abilene Christian 47
 Alabama 96, Maryland 77
Regional Semifinals
Sunday, March 28
 Michigan vs. Florida St. **AFN-Sports, 10:30 p.m. Sunday CET; 6:30 a.m. Monday JKT.**
 Alabama vs. UCLA. **AFN-Sports, 1:15 a.m. Monday CET; 9:15 a.m. Monday JKT.**
Regional Championship
Tuesday, March 30
 Semifinal winners
South Regional
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Baylor 79, Hartford 55
 Wisconsin 85, North Carolina 62
 Villanova 73, Winthrop 63
 North Texas 78, Purdue 69, OT
 Texas Tech 65, Utah St. 53
 Arkansas 85, Colgate 68
 Florida 75, Virginia Tech 70, OT
 Oral Roberts 75, Ohio St. 72, OT
Second Round
Sunday, March 21
 Baylor 76, Wisconsin 63
 Villanova 84, North Texas 61
 Arkansas 68, Texas Tech 66
 Oral Roberts 81, Florida 78
Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 27
 Baylor vs. Villanova. **AFN-Sports, 9:45 p.m. Saturday CET; 5:45 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Arkansas vs. Oral Roberts. **AFN-Sports, 12:15 a.m. Sunday CET; 8:15 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
Regional Championship
Monday, March 29
 Semifinal winners
Midwest Regional
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Illinois 78, Drexel 49
 Loyola Chicago 71, Georgia Tech 60
 Oregon St. 70, Tennessee 56
 Oklahoma St. 69, Liberty 60
 Syracuse 78, San Diego St. 62
 West Virginia 84, Morehead St. 67
 Rutgers 60, Clemson 56
 Houston 87, Cleveland St. 56
Second Round
Sunday, March 21
 Loyola Chicago 71, Illinois 58
 Oregon St. 80, Oklahoma St. 70
 Syracuse 75, West Virginia 72
 Houston 63, Rutgers 60
Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 27
 Loyola Chicago vs. Oregon St. **AFN-Sports, 7:30 p.m. Saturday CET; 3:30 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Houston vs. Syracuse. **AFN-Sports, 2:45 a.m. Sunday day CET; 10:45 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
Regional Championship
Monday, March 29
 Semifinal winners
West Regional
First Round
Saturday, March 20
 Gonzaga 98, Norfolk St. 55
 Oklahoma 72 Missouri 68
 Creighton 63, UC Santa Barbara 62
 Ohio 62, Virginia 58
 Southern Cal 72, Drake 56
 Kansas 93, E. Washington 84
 Oregon vs. VCU, no contest
 Iowa 86, Grand Canyon 74
Second Round
Monday, March 22
 Gonzaga 87, Oklahoma 71
 Creighton 72, Ohio 58
 Southern Cal 85, Kansas 51
 Oregon 95, Iowa 80
Regional Semifinals
Sunday, March 28
 Gonzaga vs. Creighton. **AFN-Sports, 8 p.m. Sunday CET; 4 a.m. Monday JKT.**
 Oregon vs. Southern Cal. **AFN-Sports, 3:45 a.m. Monday CET; 11:45 a.m. Monday JKT.**
Regional Championship
Tuesday, March 30
 Semifinal winners
Final Four
At Lucas Oil Stadium
National Semifinals
Saturday, April 3
 TBD
National Championship
Monday, April 5
 Semifinal winners

NCAA TOURNAMENT

ANALYSIS

More madness likely in Sweet 16

BY JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Your bracket is shot. We know it. Ours is, too.

A year after the NCAA Tournament was canceled, the madness returned with an opening weekend full of upsets.

No. 1 seed Illinois, gone. So is Ohio State. High seeds Texas and Virginia also are out, replaced by upstarts and mid-major noise-makers.

And we have Sister Jean, the 101-year-old nun who serves as team chaplain for Loyola Chicago. So good to have her back.

It was a wild opening ride to be sure and the tournament is all but guaranteed to have a few more unexpected twists and turns.

Here's what to look for:

The regulars

Gonzaga — The Zags are the only team to reach the Sweet 16 in six consecutive seasons. They're also four wins from completing perfection, trying to become the first undefeated champion since Indiana 45 years ago.

Baylor — The big, bad ball-hawking Bears appear to have found the form they had before a second COVID-19 pause.

Michigan — The Wolverines have looked like a No. 1 seed, even without Isaiah Livers.

Alabama — The Tide's mauling of Maryland in the second round shows just how potent this team can be.

Houston — The Cougars sport that same swagger as the Phi Sla-

ma Jama teams back in the '80s.

The upstarts

Loyola Chicago — Sister Jean and the lovable Ramblers are back in the Sweet 16 for the first time since that 2018 Final Four run. Seeing her on the sideline warms the heart. The Ramblers have some heart of their own.

Oral Roberts — The Golden Eagles aren't Dunk City, but they are the first No. 15 seed to reach the Sweet 16 since Florida Gulf Coast became the first eight years ago.

Oregon State — The Beavers were picked to finish 12th in a conference with 12 teams. After two wins as a No. 12 seed, you'd be wise not to pick against these underdogs.

UCLA — Hard to call the all-time leader in national championships an upstart, but the Bruins barely got into the bracket. With three wins and a trip to the Sweet 16, they proved they belong.

Arkansas — The Muss Bus has the Razorbacks chugging into their first Sweet 16 appearance since 1996. Quite a job by coach Eric Musselman in two years.

Star players

Corey Kispert, Gonzaga — All-American playing like one to put the Zags four games from the first perfect season since 1976.

Evan Mobley, USC — The freshman has the length of a big man, the skills of a guard and the ability to dominate both ends of the floor.

Jared Butler, Baylor — The junior All-American stands out,

even on a team oozing with talent.

Jahvon Quinerly, Alabama — There's almost nothing he can't do and nothing opponents can do when he gets it going.

Marcus Zegarowski, Creighton — Forgot some of the shooting woes he had at times during the regular season. This is the junior sharpshooter's time to shine, and he's leaning into it.

Buddy Boeheim, Syracuse — There's a reason they call him Buddy Buckets. He's been filling it up in Indy, too.

Rising stars

Max Abmas, Oral Roberts — High-volume scoring from this biomedical chemistry major has the Golden Eagles in the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1974.

Cameron Krutwig, Chicago Loyola — Remember that beefy, agile-footed, deft-passing big man during the 2018 Final Four run? Well, he's back and he's rockin' a wispy mustache. The Krustache plays the harmonica, too.

Quentin Grimes, Houston — Leaving Kansas worked out out well for the high-scoring guard. It wasn't a bad deal for coach Kelvin Sampson and his Cougars, either.

Chris Duarte, Oregon — Playing on the West Coast has limited his national visibility, but believe us, he was one of college basketball's best guards long before this Ducks' run.

Ethan Thompson, Oregon State — He scores, dishes and rebounds. He's a big reason the underdog Beavers have gotten this far.



DOUG MCSCHOOLER/AP

Virginia guard Casey Morsell walks off the court after the team's loss to Ohio in a first-round game in the NCAA men's tournament on Saturday at Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Ind.

Time: Gonzaga's Timme had best game of career against Oklahoma

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talented player."

It was on display against Oklahoma on Monday. With Kispert slowed early due to foul trouble, Timme responded with a career-best game of 30 points and 13 rebounds against the Sooners.

At times, Timme outwitted Oklahoma's post defenders. In other moments, he was simply tougher, scoring through contact or being first to a loose ball.

The tournament is a pretty good time to have one of the best games of your career.

"It's great. Obviously, it's a childhood dream," Timme said. "This feeling is only going to last the rest of the night and then we've got to prepare and a lot of work to do. We've got a lot of things we can work on."

Timme averaged 18 points and seven rebounds while shooting an absurd 65% from the field during the regular season. And his performances didn't go unnoticed — he was a second-team All-American selection. But with Kispert re-



RICK BOWMER/AP

Gonzaga forward Drew Timme (2) averaged 18 points and seven rebounds while shooting 65% from the field during the regular season.

writing parts of the Gonzaga record book and the talk of whether Suggs could be in line for the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA Draft, it was easy for discussion about

Timme to get shuffled back.

That would be unfair to what he's provided his team. In six games against teams from Power Five conferences this season —

Kansas, Auburn, West Virginia, Iowa, Virginia, Oklahoma — Timme is averaging 24 points and 8.2 rebounds. Of that group, only Auburn did not make the tournament field.

And this is not a Gonzaga team with great interior depth aside from Timme and backup Anton Watson. Even without the guard-oriented lineup, the Bulldogs still averaged 50.5 points per game in the paint during the regular season, the most in the past 15 years. That was largely due to Timme.

The Bulldogs had 38 points in the paint against Norfolk State and another 34 against Oklahoma.

Watson has played well in both games, including 17 points against Norfolk State, and played 18 solid minutes off the bench against Oklahoma. He could be an important complementary piece for the Bulldogs the rest of the tournament.

"This team needs that desperately out of Anton. We've been asking and begging, yelling and doing whatever we got to do to try to get him more aggressive and more assertive in every phase of

the game, quite frankly," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "Shooting, driving, making post moves, rebounding, defending the rim, all of those. Just kind of hustling."

Gonzaga's lack of depth on the front line may not matter in the round of 16 against Creighton. The Bluejays don't have a player in their primary eight-man rotation taller than 6-foot-7.

And while Creighton will certainly be a challenge for the Bulldogs, it's hard not to look ahead and what what might loom in the region al final and a potential matchup against Southern California should both the Trojans and Zags advance.

The Trojans are led by 7-footer Evan Mobley, the Pac-12 player of the year, and his 6-foot-10 brother Isaiah. It would be another formidable frontline for Timme and the Bulldogs to face."

There are a lot of good teams out there and when you play them on the biggest stage and it's just one game, it's not a seven-game series, anything can happen," Few said.

SPORTS



Feeling the squeeze

Shrinking salary cap will mean more cuts » **Page 42**

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Timme time

Bulldogs' big man is key to Gonzaga's bid for perfection

By **TIM BOOTH**
Associated Press

He was already enjoying a terrific season, and now Drew Timme is one of the stars of March after two games of the NCAA Tournament.

His game? It's pretty good, as evidenced by what he did in Gonzaga's second-round victory over Oklahoma, helping keep the top-seeded Bulldogs unblemished in their quest for perfection.

His mustache? It might be even better than his game, even if his mom isn't a huge fan of his latest facial hair experiment.

"After this game, I think she'll be OK if I keep it," Timme told CBS after beating the Sooners.

On a team filled with stars, all carrying the expectations of trying to complete the first undefeated championship season in 45 years, Timme could be the key for Gonzaga in making that happen.

He's the big guy for the Bulldogs. The one who has to be respected by opponents, but also the player who can sometimes be left to feast at the offensive end because of all the other problems the Zags create.

Corey Kispert was deservedly a first-team AP All-American selection for Gonzaga. Jalen Suggs is likely to be the highest NBA Draft pick of the current crop of Zags.

But the Bulldogs don't sit at 28-0, riding a 32-game winning streak, if it's not for the inside presence Timme provides.

"We've talked a lot about kind of feeding off each other and make sure we get each other going on the floor," Kispert said. "Drew's put in the time and he's an ultra, ultra

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INSIDE

Record number: Sum of seeds in Sweet 16 sets new tourney mark
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Gonzaga forward
Drew Timme
RICH PEDRONCELLI
Associated Press

MLB will be monitoring balls for tampering » **Page 41**

