

MILITARY

Airman who set himself on fire had anarchist past
Page 4



MIDEAST

Biden signals truce is possible; Israel and Hamas say otherwise
Page 13



COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Knecht shoots up NBA draft boards, helping Vols chase Final Four
Page 24

Medical privacy laws cited in Austin's health disclosure failure » Page 3

STARS AND STRIPES®

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Guam Customs and Quarantine Agency

A no-visa policy permits Chinese citizens to enter Saipan, part of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth separate from Guam, and stay up to two weeks.

Unlawful entries

Chinese citizens use Northern Marianas as illegal pathway to Guam, authorities say

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

In early January, U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and Guam first responders hurried to a distress call from a 23-foot recreational boat taking on water on the seas 30 miles northwest of the island.

Six Chinese citizens were lifted aboard a Navy helicopter and their boat was left to founder in six-foot waves.

The rescued boaters were among a stream of Chinese citi-

zens coming from Saipan and intent on seeking asylum on Guam or entering illegally to find work, according to U.S. Homeland Security and Guam customs officials.

The lure for Chinese to make the trip is a no-visa policy that permits them to enter Saipan, part of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth separate from Guam, and stay up to two weeks.

For Guam, ending that waiver is mired in a jurisdictional web of territorial and federal law. Illegal

118

The number of Chinese nationals who have entered or attempted to enter Guam illegally since 2022.

immigration to Guam, while not the cascade typical of the U.S.-Mexican border, presents risks of intelligence gathering at U.S. bases on the island, drug smuggling and cheap, undocumented labor, said Guam Customs and Quarantine spokeswoman Alana Chargualaf-Afaissen.

Since 2022, the agency has reported 118 unlawful or attempted unlawful entries by Chinese citizens, she told Stars and Stripes by email last month.

Entries peaked in 2022 with 85 cases, followed by 27 in 2023 and six so far this year, Chargualaf-Afaissen said.

They come to Guam, a U.S. territory, seeking jobs, according to a Homeland Security agent, although the island's first-term con-

SEE ENTRIES ON PAGE 5

Army cutting thousands of jobs in major force revamp

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Army is slashing the size of its force by about 24,000, or almost 5%, and restructuring to be better able to fight the next major war, as the service struggles with recruiting shortfalls that made it impossible to bring in enough soldiers to fill all the jobs.

The cuts will mainly be in already-empty posts — not actual soldiers — including in jobs related to counter-insurgency that swelled during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars but are not needed as much today. About 3,000 of the cuts would come from Army special operations forces.

At the same time, however, the plan will add about 7,500 troops in other critical missions, including air-defense and counter-drone units and five new task forces around the world with enhanced cyber, intelligence and long-range strike capabilities.

According to an Army document, the service is “significantly overstructured” and there aren’t enough soldiers to fill existing units. The cuts, it said, are “spaces” not “faces” and the Army will not be asking soldiers to leave the force.

Instead, the decision reflects the reality that for years the Army hasn’t been able to fill thousands of empty posts. While the Army as it’s currently structured can have up to 494,000 soldiers, the total number of active-duty soldiers



Wormuth

SEE REVAMP ON PAGE 5

BUSINESS/WEATHER

US sues to block Kroger, Albertsons merger

Associated Press

The Federal Trade Commission sued to block a proposed merger between grocery giants Kroger and Albertsons, saying the \$24.6 billion deal would eliminate competition and lead to higher prices for millions of Americans.

The FTC filed an administrative complaint against the companies Monday, which will be considered by an administrative law judge at the agency. It also filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court in Oregon requesting a temporary in-

junction blocking the merger. That lawsuit was joined by the attorneys general of eight states and the District of Columbia.

Kroger and Albertsons, two of the nation's largest grocers, agreed to merge in October 2022. The companies said a merger would help them better compete with Walmart, Amazon, Costco and other big rivals. Together, Kroger and Albertsons would control around 13% of the U.S. grocery market; Walmart controls 22%, according to J.P. Morgan analyst

Ken Goldman.

Both companies, immediately after the FTC announcement, said that they will challenge the agency in court.

The merger, announced at a time of high food-price inflation, was bound to get tough regulatory scrutiny.

U.S. prices for food eaten at home typically rise 2.5% per year, but in 2022 they rose 11.4% and in 2023 they rose another 5%, according to government data. Inflation is cooling, but gradually.

EXCHANGE RATES

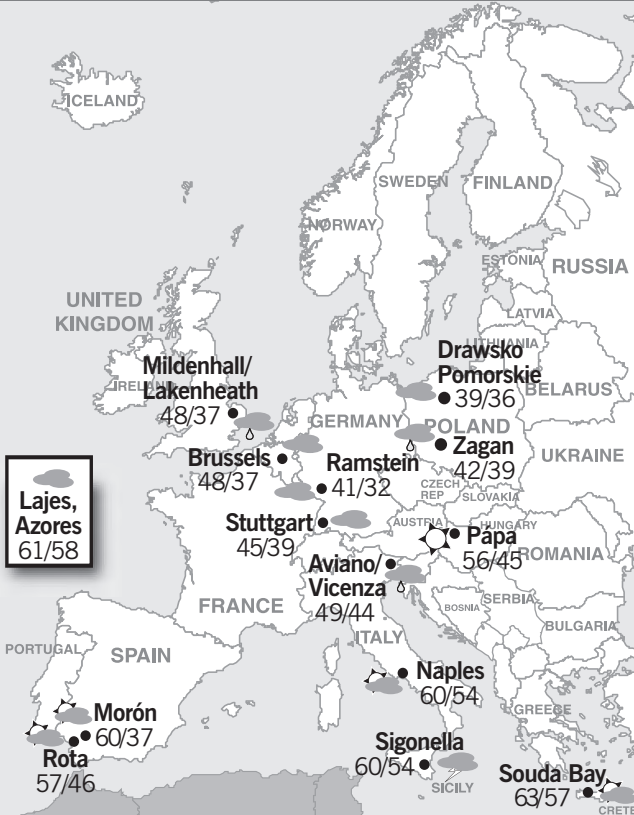
Military rates												
Euro costs (Feb. 28)	\$1.06	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8793									
British pound (Feb. 28)	\$1.24	Thailand (Baht)	35.83									
Japanese yen (Feb. 28)	147.00	Turkey (NewLira)	31.1493									
South Korean won (Feb. 28)	1297.00											
Commercial rates												
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.) INTEREST RATES <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>8.50</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>6.00</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>5.33</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>5.40</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.40</td></tr></table>	Prime rate	8.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00	Federal funds market rate	5.33	3-month bill	5.40	30-year bond	4.40
Prime rate	8.50											
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00											
Federal funds market rate	5.33											
3-month bill	5.40											
30-year bond	4.40											
Britain (Pound)	1.2679											
Canada (Dollar)	1.3511											
China (Yuan)	7.1979											
Denmark (Krone)	6.8737											
Egypt (Pound)	30.8985											
Euro	0.9220											
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8242											
Hungary (Forint)	359.97											
Israel (Shekel)	3.6215											
Japan (Yen)	159.42											
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3077											
Norway (Krone)	10.5332											
Philippines (Peso)	56.08											
Poland (Zloty)	3.98											
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502											
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3443											
South Korea (Won)	1332.45											

WEATHER OUTLOOK

WEDNESDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



WEDNESDAY IN EUROPE



THURSDAY IN THE PACIFIC



TODAY
IN STRIPES

American Roundup 14

Classified 13

Comics 17

Crossword 17

Faces 15

Opinion 16

Sports 18-24

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MILITARY

Privacy laws behind Austin disclosure failure

Staff hesitancy also led to issues notifying leaders about cancer surgery

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Privacy restrictions and staff hesitancy is being blamed for the failure to notify the president and other U.S. officials about Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's prostate cancer and subsequent hospitalization for complications from surgery, according to an internal review released Monday by the Pentagon.

Austin's staff was limited in the information that they could provide due to medical privacy laws preventing what information could be shared with them by medical staff, according to an unclassified summary of the review. The review, which was conducted by Jennifer Walsh, director of administration and management at the Pentagon, does not mention any punishments or reprimands for staff members. Austin has previously stated he did not instruct anyone on his staff to withhold information about his health.

"There was no finding of ill-intent or an attempt to obfuscate," Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's top spokesman, said Monday.

The review made eight recommendations, and two are already being implemented. In a memorandum from Austin, the six remaining recommendations will be implemented in the next 90 days, unless specified otherwise. Some of the actions include ensuring key defense officials in the order of succession are familiar with relevant processes and procedures,

as well as the department reviewing and updating internal reporting practices associated with the transfer of duties, Ryder said.

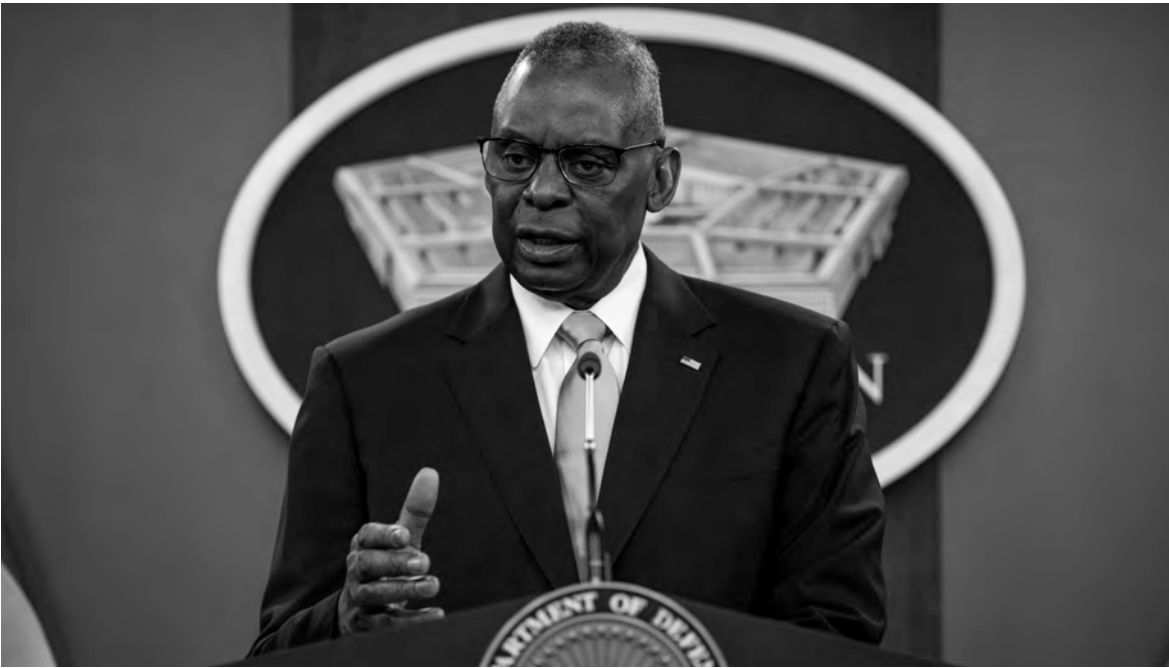
"As hindsight has shown, the process for making decisions to transfer the secretary's authority could and should be improved. Additional written guidance and support plans would aid in setting optimal conditions for the secretary's and deputy secretary's teams to provide appropriate support for the deputy secretary when assuming the functions and duties of the secretary as acting secretary," according to the summary of the review.

Ryder also said the classified version of the review has been sent to Congress.

Austin is scheduled to testify before the House Armed Services Committee on Thursday about his failure to notify the White House and Congress about his illness. The Defense Department inspector general is still conducting a separate investigation into Austin's handling of his hospitalization.

Austin, 70, returned to the Pentagon on Jan. 29 after being absent from the building for nearly a month because of his health. The secretary had been released from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., on Jan. 15 after spending about two weeks there following the surgery, which was conducted Dec. 22.

He did address reporters at the Pentagon on Feb. 1 and apologized



ALEXANDER KUBITZA/U.S. Navy

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin speaks during a press briefing at the Pentagon on Feb. 1.

for not disclosing his prostate diagnosis, the surgery that followed and complications that led to an extended hospital stay.

"I want to be crystal clear: We did not handle this right. I did not handle this right," Austin said. "I should have told the president about my cancer diagnosis. I should have told my team and the American people, and I take full responsibility."

His cancer was discovered during a regular health screening in early December. He was admitted to the hospital about three weeks later for surgery, which required general anesthesia. He left the hospital the following morning.

On Jan. 1, Austin returned to Walter Reed after experiencing pain in his abdomen, hip and leg. He was later found to have a uri-

nary tract infection, and Austin spent days in the intensive care unit before he was moved to a private section of the hospital.

But during Austin's medical treatments, no one at the Defense Department notified the White House, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, Congress or the public for several days.

The summary of the review states Austin's staff was "hesitant to pry or share any information" that they learned and as long as the secretary remained in the ICU "timely secured communications" could not be ensured.

On Jan. 2, Austin transferred some of his more pressing responsibilities to Hicks.

Austin said he had been experiencing fever, chills and shallow breathing on that day, and doctors

decided to move him to the intensive care unit for several days of close monitoring.

Yet Biden did not learn of Austin's prostate cancer until Jan. 9. That same day, the White House ordered all Cabinet members or secretaries must immediately notify the administration if at any time they cannot perform their duties.

The secretary returned to Walter Reed on Feb. 11 where he was admitted to a critical unit and underwent non-surgical procedures to correct a bladder problem. The secretary was discharged from the hospital on Feb. 13 and returned to work at the Pentagon two days later.

adams.matthew@stripes.com
@MatthewAdams60

Military health records system out of action 'intermittently'

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes
The online military medical records system, MHS Genesis, was experiencing "intermittent network outages" Tuesday, according to the Defense Health Agency.

Without Genesis, patients in the military health care system cannot schedule appointments or lab tests or fill prescriptions online, among other services.

"The problem has been identified, and we are currently working to restore connectivity," DHA announced on its official Facebook page at about 8 a.m. Tuesday in Japan.

The post did not identify the nature of the problem, and a DHA representative did not respond to an email from Stars and Stripes seeking further comment after hours in Hawaii.

Service was restored around



JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

The hospital at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, in June 2023.

noon for the hospital at Yokosuka Naval Base south of Tokyo, according to a post on the hospital's official Facebook page. Other facilities in Japan reported continued outages on their pages.

DHA recently completed global installation of the digital record-keeping and appointment system with its implementation at U.S.

military hospitals and clinics across the Indo-Pacific.

Bases in Japan reported intermittent or no service from Genesis beginning at about 9 a.m. Tuesday into the afternoon.

Naval Hospital Okinawa reported "widespread system outages" and service limited to urgent and emergency patients, according to a Tuesday morning Facebook post.

At Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, the 374th Medical Group also reported an "enterprise-wide" Genesis outage at around 9 a.m.

"The Defense Health Agency is experiencing an enterprise-wide MHS GENESIS outage, with no estimated time of fix," read a post on the group's Facebook page.

"Please keep an eye out for further announcements from the 374th Medical Group," the post states.

The 673rd Medical Group at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, reported its Genesis network access restored after about seven hours Monday, according to a post on its official Facebook page.

A survey of Facebook pages for health care providers at other bases in the United States, Germany and South Korea showed no posting regarding a Genesis outage.

MHS Genesis was developed as a "state-of-the-market electronic health record system" for the Military Health System under a \$4.3 billion contract signed in 2015 with Leidos Partnership for Defense Health. The partnership includes the Leidos, Accenture, Oracle and Henry Schein One corporations.

The system's rollout was delayed while the Defense Department reviewed and tested it for

functionality and cybersecurity, according to a November 2016 health.mil newsletter, The Scope.

Installation of MHS Genesis at U.S. military bases worldwide concluded in mid-January at bases on Guam.

However, the appointment function of the Genesis online patient portal was disabled at some military health care facilities because it allowed users worldwide to mistakenly make appointments at the wrong clinics, overwhelming personnel who had to review and erase those appointments.

A cyberattack last week on Change Healthcare, the nation's largest commercial prescription processor, had a follow-on effect of also crippling MHS Genesis pharmacy services, according to DHA.

ditzler.joseph@stripes.com
@JosephDitzler

MILITARY

‘It’s horrifying what happened’

Airman who set himself on fire outside Israeli Embassy grew up on religious compound, had anarchist past

BY EMILY DAVIES,
PETER HERMANN
AND DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

Less than two weeks before Aaron Bushnell walked toward the gates of the Israeli Embassy on Sunday, he and a friend talked by phone about their shared identities as anarchists and what kinds of risks and sacrifices were needed to be effective.

Bushnell, 25, mentioned nothing violent or self-sacrificial, the friend said.

Then on Sunday, Bushnell texted that friend, who described the exchange on the condition of anonymity to protect his safety.

“I hope you’ll understand. I love you,” Bushnell wrote in a message reviewed by The Washington Post. “This doesn’t even make sense, but I feel like I’m going to miss you.”

He sent the friend a copy of his will on Sunday. In it, he gave his cat to his neighbor and a fridge full of root beers to the friend.



Bushnell

Twelve minutes later, Bushnell, who was a senior airman in the U.S. Air Force, doused himself with a liquid and set himself on fire. He had posted a video online saying he did not want to be “complicit in genocide.” He shouted “Free Palestine” as he burned.

Secret Service officers extinguished the blaze. Bushnell died seven hours later at a hospital.

His suicidal protest instantly won him praise among some antiwar and pro-Palestinian activists, while others said they were devastated that he would take an action so extreme. But how a young man who liked The Lord of the Rings and karaoke became the man ablaze in a camouflage military uniform remains a mystery, even among some of his closest friends.

Bushnell was raised in a religious compound in Orleans, Mass., on Cape Cod, according to Susan Wilkins, 59, who said she was a member of the group from 1970 to 2005. She said that she knew Bushnell and his family on the compound and that he was still a member when she left. Wilkins said she heard through members of Bushnell’s family that he eventually left the group.

Wilkins’s account is consistent with those of multiple others who said Bushnell had told them about his childhood in the religious group or who had heard about his affiliation from his family members.

The group, called the Community of Jesus, has faced allegations



Twitter

A still image from video shows Senior Airman Aaron Bushnell, moments before he ignited an accelerant fluid he poured over himself in front of the Israeli Embassy on Sunday. Bushnell livestreamed his action on the online platform Twitch, which later removed the video.

of inappropriate behavior, which it has publicly disputed. In a lawsuit against an Ontario school, where many officials were alleged to be members of the U.S.-based religious group, former students called the Community of Jesus a “charismatic sect” and alleged that it “created an environment of control, intimidation and humiliation that fostered and inflicted enduring harms on its students.” The school, now defunct, disputed the allegations. Last year, an appeals court in Canada awarded \$10.8 million Canadian dollars to the former students, who attended the Ontario school between 1973 and 1997.

A receptionist who answered the phone at the Community of Jesus declined to put a call from a reporter through to someone in authority. Emails to the group were not answered.

Multiple people who said they were former members of the Community of Jesus described their years after leaving the compound as particularly challenging. They said former members, soon after they depart the group, often long for a sense of belonging.

“A lot of us that got out are very much into social justice, trying to defend those who don’t or can’t defend themselves, because that is what we went through,” said Bonnie Zampino, 54, who said she was a member of the group for three years in the 1980s.

Wilkins also said it is common for members of the Community of Jesus to join the military, describing the transition as moving from “one high-control group to another

high-control group.”

The Air Force said in a statement Monday night that Bushnell’s death is under investigation by military officials, a common practice after the death of a service member. He was a cyberdefense operations specialist with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas, and had been in the Air Force since May 2020, the service said.

Lupe Barboza, 32, said she met Bushnell in San Antonio in 2022 at an event for a socialist organization. She said they bonded over their politics and started working together to deliver clothing and food to people experiencing homelessness.

“He was outraged, and he knew that no one who is in charge is listening to the protesters out there every week,” Barboza said. “He knows that he has privilege as a white man and a member of the military.”

Other friends from San Antonio said they had talked with Bushnell about the Palestinians and their shared distaste for the U.S. role in the Israel-Gaza war. But he had not expressed to them any indication of what would take place in Washington on Sunday.

They also said he moved to Ohio earlier this year for a course for service members transitioning out of the military.

One of his friends, Levi Pierpont, 23, met him for lunch in Ohio in January. Over plates of butter chicken, the two talked about their involvement in the military and

what they hoped to do after leaving the force. They had met in basic training in May 2020, when they were both still excited about joining the military and how it could help them experience more of the world, Pierpont said.

Pierpont said he grew disillusioned with the military over time — concerned with what he saw as flippant attitudes toward violence within the force — and said he left as a conscientious objector. (The Air Force did not immediately respond to a request for comment on his account.) By 2024, Bushnell had become more open about his objections to the military, Pierpont said. In the wake of George Floyd’s killing by police in Minneapolis in 2020, Bushnell told Pierpont he had started to research the history of the United States and wanted to take a stand against all state-sanctioned violence.

Bushnell had considered leaving the military early, Pierpont said, but he had decided he was close enough to the end of his required service to stick it out. Bushnell was scheduled to leave the military in May, Pierpont said.

At the January lunch, Bushnell told Pierpont that he planned to find a job that would let him make enough money to support himself while engaging in political activism on the side. Pierpont said he encouraged his friend to go to university and get a degree in something related to his beliefs.

Self-immolations are rare, but a number are connected to antiwar protests, perhaps most famously that of a Buddhist monk, Thich

Quang Duc, who set himself on fire in Saigon during the Vietnam War. An American Quaker self-immolated in 1965 at the Pentagon.

During the Iraq War, an antiwar protester self-immolated near the Kennedy Expressway in Chicago. In 2010, a street vendor self-immolated in Tunisia, an act of defiance that served as a spark for the Arab Spring, in which numerous heads of state were forced out in uprisings. In December, a woman self-immolated outside the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta. She had a Palestinian flag with her, authorities said at the time.

U.S. service members are prohibited from acts of political protest, under the Pentagon’s long-standing policy of remaining non-partisan while civilian leaders oversee policy decisions. While no one else in uniform has stepped out against the war in Gaza as stridently as Bushnell, some service members do have misgivings about it and frustration that critics of the war blame U.S. military support for Israeli military actions.

Since the Israel-Gaza war began in October, at least 29,782 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Israel estimates that about 1,200 people were killed in Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack and says 240 soldiers have been killed since the start of its military operation in Gaza.

Hamas and allied fighters took more than 250 people hostage during the attack. More than 100 were freed in exchange for more than 200 Palestinian detainees during a November pause in fighting. Israeli authorities believe that more than 100 hostages remain in Gaza.

On Monday afternoon, about 80 demonstrators showed up at the Israeli Embassy to support Bushnell and condemn Israel for the war. Among them was Sam Osta, playing an audio recording of Bushnell setting himself on fire.

“I wish I would have known. I would have stopped him,” said Osta, 55, who first met Bushnell at a protest at the Lincoln Memorial in 2022. “His life means a lot, and it’s horrifying what happened.”

Some of Bushnell’s friends, including Barboza, said they last saw him in January at his going-away party in San Antonio. It was at a karaoke bar. He belted out song after song, many of which were from “Les Misérables,” which he was known to love. And one was Mandy Moore’s “Wind in My Hair” from the TV series based on the movie “Tangled.”

“I got a smile on my face,” Bushnell sang, “and I’m walking on air.”

MILITARY

Entries: DHS says migrants’ ‘primary objective really is economic’

FROM PAGE 1

gressional delegate, Republican James Moylan, said he’s concerned about more sinister motivations.

These migrants could be involved in drug or human trafficking, cybersecurity breaches or threats to national security, Moylan said by email Monday.

“While we understand there are those who are entering the island to seek better opportunities for themselves and their families, when it comes to an ongoing migrant influx which has now spanned over a few years, there are certainly apprehensions when considering that bad actors could exist,” Moylan wrote.

He offered no examples of anyone arrested or charged with any of those offenses.

‘Economic’ objectives

The Department of Homeland Security sees the situation as one motivated more by employment or asylum than espionage, said Special Agent in Charge John Tobon of Homeland Security Investigations in Honolulu.

“What we have found is that their primary objective really is economic,” he said by phone Feb. 2. “The one thing about all those individuals is that they are all vetted before they are admitted into Saipan.”

They are checked there against “a whole host of government databases” before being allowed to travel, Tobon added.

“Once they’re in Saipan, they may try to come over to Guam, but the overwhelming majority are really doing it for economic reasons,” he said.

The Chinese passengers rescued Jan. 6 likely entered Saipan through the visa waiver program implemented by the Department of Homeland Security in 2009, said Col. Phil Taijeron, assistant chief for the agency’s Special Enforcement Division. That case is still under investigation, Charguaf-Afaisen said.

The program has been amend-



Guam Customs and Quarantine Agency

A Guam Customs and Quarantine agent speaks with Chinese nationals who allegedly tried to enter Guam illegally. Chinese citizens can travel to Saipan but not Guam through a 2009 U.S. visa waiver program.

“It’s not the same as if we encountered somebody that had just crossed the border from Mexico into the U.S.”

John Tobon

Special agent in charge, Homeland Security Investigations, Honolulu

ed, at times allowing both Chinese and Russian citizens to enter Guam and the Northern Marianas. The waiver now applies only to Chinese citizens entering the Northern Marianas.

Homeland Security amended the program on Jan. 18 to require anyone using it to submit to an electronic travel authorization.

Previously, paper forms limited Customs and Border Protection’s “ability to implement an essential part of its national security strategy” and vet people before they

travel, according to a Jan. 18 Homeland Security assessment of the waiver program.

“That may have a positive impact down the road, and should help us curb some of these issues,” Tobon said.

Once in Saipan, the commonwealth’s capital and largest island, many file for asylum, but they potentially face waits longer than nine years, Taijeron said.

Chinese workers often turned to construction, primarily at the struggling, shuttered multimil-

lion-dollar Imperial Pacific Resort Hotel or casinos on the island, he said.

When construction work was disrupted by several typhoons, and the FBI raided the hotel’s casino, Chinese workers were left to “seek dramatic measures,” Taijeron said.

Those measures included intentionally getting arrested, which may move them up in the asylum lines. Federal agencies are aware of this, Taijeron said, and find ways to return them to the Northern Marianas or seek other legal action.

“Their other pursuit is to go to Guam where construction employment is better than in the [Northern Marianas],” he said. “Hence why they pay \$3,000 to \$6,000 per person to get some boat operator to deliver them to

Guam illegally.”

‘Too vital’

The problem is exacerbated by legal complexities unique to Guam and the Northern Marianas. Each have their own governments and governors, as well as government agencies, including customs.

“It’s not the same as if we encountered somebody that had just crossed the border from Mexico into the U.S.,” Tobon said.

Traveling from Saipan to Guam, from one territory to another, is not considered crossing an international border.

With separate customs agencies comes differing policies as well, Tobon added, which is why Chinese citizens can travel to Saipan but not Guam through the visa waiver program. Those nuances make actively addressing the situation via legislation or agency programs more complicated, he said.

Tobon and Taijeron said their respective agencies are working with everyone involved to address the problem.

Moylan said he hopes to speak with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and that Congress will address the situation.

“We are requesting for more resources and manpower,” he wrote. “Guam’s importance from a national security perspective is too vital not to take this illegal migration issues at our shores too lightly.”

But the complex nature of federal and territorial jurisdictions, for example, still poses problems, Tobon said.

“For the past 18 months, we’ve been working with Guam’s customs, [the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands], the Department of Public Safety, CNMI’s customs, the Coast Guard and the U.S. Attorney’s Office,” he said.

“It’s not straightforward at all.”

wilson.alex@stripes.com
@AlexMNWilson

Revamp: Army job cuts include 10,000 tied to counterinsurgency missions

FROM PAGE 1

right now is about 445,000. Under the new plan, the goal is to bring in enough troops over the next five years to reach a level of 470,000.

The planned overhaul comes after two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan that forced the Army to quickly and dramatically expand in order to fill the brigades sent to the battlefield. That included a massive counterinsurgency mission to battle al-Qaida, the Taliban and Islamic State.

Over time the military’s focus has shifted to great power competition from adversaries such as

China and Russia, and threats from Iran and North Korea. And the war in Ukraine has shown the need for greater emphasis on air-defense systems and high-tech abilities both to use and counter airborne and sea-based drones.

Army leaders said they looked carefully across the board at all the service’s job specialties in search of places to trim. And they examined the ongoing effort to modernize the Army, with new high-tech weapons, to determine where additional forces should be focused.

According to the plan, the Army will cut about 10,000 spaces for

engineers and similar jobs that were tied to counterinsurgency missions. An additional 2,700 cuts will come from units that don’t deploy often and can be trimmed, and 6,500 will come from various training and other posts.

There also will be about 10,000 posts cut from cavalry squadrons, Stryker brigade combat teams, infantry brigade combat teams and security force assistance brigades, which are used to train foreign forces.

The changes represent a significant shift for the Army to prepare for large-scale combat operations against more sophisticated ene-

mies. But they also underscore the steep recruiting challenges that all of the services are facing.

In the last fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30, the Navy, Army and Air Force failed to meet their recruitment goals, while the Marine Corps and the tiny Space Force met their targets. The Army brought in a bit more than 50,000 recruits, falling well short of the publicly stated “stretch goal” of 65,000. The previous fiscal year, the Army also missed its enlistment goal by 15,000. That year the goal was 60,000.

In response, the service launched a sweeping overhaul of

its recruiting last fall to focus more on young people who have spent time in college or are job hunting early in their careers. And it is forming a new professional force of recruiters, rather than relying on soldiers randomly assigned to the task.

In discussing the changes at the time, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth acknowledged that the service hasn’t been recruiting well “for many more years than one would think from just looking at the headlines in the last 18 months.” The service, she said, hasn’t met its annual goal for new enlistment contracts since 2014.

MILITARY

Reservists earn victory in housing allowance case

More than 40 plaintiffs will be repaid and cleared of wrongdoing after five-year legal fray

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Dozens of Army reservists who endured criminal probes, reprimands and crushing debt after the service seized hundreds of thousands of dollars in housing allowance payments have prevailed in a contentious legal fray spanning more than five years.

The 41 plaintiffs will be repaid and have their service records cleared of wrongdoing, the Army said in a court filing this week, a decision that appears to bring the case to an end.

“Everyone who joined the lawsuit is getting monetary relief of some fashion,” attorney Patrick Hughes of the Patriots Law Group said in a statement Monday. He called the outcome a “huge victory.”

In a Feb. 22 memo filed in federal court Monday, the Army said it will follow through with recommendations by its highest review panel to repay the reservists who sued.

They argued that the Army was violating federal law by demanding repayment after renegeing on allowances it had initially authorized. The action proved financially ruinous for many of those involved.

Signed by Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army Michael Mahoney, the memo states that administrative action to correct the soldiers’ records is to be taken no later than Aug. 26.

William Schneck, one of the reservists involved in the lawsuit and a de facto spokesman for the group, said the victory will result in financial awards adding up to more than \$2 million collectively. That number could go higher as the calculations are completed, he said.

“We began this process in 2017, and the years that followed yielded some of the worst instances of regulatory departure and retaliation that I have ever experienced,” Schneck said.

“One soldier contemplated suicide, another nearly went to prison for five years, and all of our careers were derailed in the process,” he said.

The plaintiffs encountered an Army Criminal Investigation Division that was “weaponized” against them, he added. Stars and Stripes reported in August 2021 that Schneck was owed about \$56,000.

The dispute centered on a decision by Army finance officials in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 2016. Re-

versing long-standing precedent, they said reservists mobilized from the U.S. for assignments abroad aren’t entitled to receive a basic housing allowance for their American residence and also an overseas housing allowance if the Army fails to provide on-post accommodations.

They reinterpreted the Joint Travel Regulation to permit only one allowance and applied the change retroactively.

As a result, the Army began imposing claims against soldiers reaching six-figure sums. Many of the soldiers had their wages garnished and received letters of reprimand.

But in 2021, the Army’s Board of Corrections ruled in favor of the reservists, saying the service’s actions violated federal regulations and led to “unjust actions.”

The board ordered that the reservists were to be paid back and have their records cleared because of the Army’s erroneous “investigative and disciplinary actions.”

At the time, the matter seemed settled, but in 2022, the Army argued that it couldn’t pay the reservists as ordered because the Defense Finance and Accounting Service said the decision was in

conflict with certain family separation regulations.

Now, the situation appears to be resolved by the latest Army ruling. It calls for a second housing allowance for reservists with dependents, and those without dependents will get per diem in lieu of a second housing allowance.

The allocation of per diem means those reservists will receive more money than they would have gotten with a second housing allowance, Hughes said. DFAS could raise a new issue to counter the reservists’ claims, but Hughes thinks that is unlikely.

The issue likely affects thousands of other soldiers, who either were unaware of the wrong done to them or were too afraid to speak up, Hughes said.

As of December 2022, the lawsuit had 33 plaintiffs. Eight more reservists subsequently joined them, bringing the number to 41.

Schneck said congressional assistance could be needed on behalf of soldiers not covered by the lawsuit.

“Given my prior position with U.S. Army Europe, I estimate that approximately 1,000 more reservists may be similarly affected,” he said.

Plaintiff Richard Gulley, a for-

mer colonel who was serving at U.S. Africa Command headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, had his Army career cut short because of the housing allowance issue.

“Like others, I lost promotions, money, reputation and had the legal issues used against us in various other ways,” Gulley said.

In 2017, military law enforcement officers read him his rights, fingerprinted him and arrested him. The Army never prosecuted the case, but the arrest trailed Gulley for years.

Besides the \$103,000 in debt he accumulated as a result, Gulley, a commercial airline pilot, was always stopped for questioning at customs checkpoints because he was flagged by the electronic trail of charges against him.

The situation points to a broader issue in Army corporate culture that has tarnished the service’s image, according to Schneck.

“Congress can correct pay regulation, but it cannot force leaders to do the right thing when no one’s looking,” he said. “How can we expect our veterans to actively recruit when their own experiences can be so damaging?”

vandiver.john@stripes.com
@john_vandiver

US, Japanese forces practice island defense during recent exercise

By SETH ROBSON
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines and sailors and Japanese troops have begun three weeks of amphibious training amid concern in both countries about Chinese military moves around Japan and Taiwan.

Troops will practice recapturing an island during the Iron Fist 24, which is “focused on island defense,” a spokesman from Japan’s Ground Staff Office said by phone Tuesday. Japanese government spokespeople typically speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The commander of Japan’s 2nd Amphibious Rapid Deployment Regiment, Col. Hajime Tsuji, and the head of the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, Col. Matthew Danner, gave troops a pep talk Sunday during Iron Fist’s opening ceremony at Camp Ainoura in Nagasaki prefecture.

“By comprehensively practicing a series of actions, we will improve the ability of Japan and the U.S. to carry out joint amphibious operations for the defense of islands in the southwest region and demonstrate the strength of the unity of the Japan-U.S. alliance,” Tsuji told the troops.

Iron Fist marks a milestone as U.S. forces integrate more deeply with the Japanese marines, Danner said in a Feb. 5 Marine Corps statement.

“With each bilateral event that we, as the 31st MEU, have participated in, I’ve wit-



CHRISTOPHER LAPE/U.S. Marine Corps

U.S. and Japanese marines stand at attention during the opening ceremony for the Iron Fist exercise at Camp Ainoura in Sasebo, Japan, on Sunday.

nessed our combined knowledge and ability to rapidly integrate grow significantly,” he said in the statement.

Camp Ainoura is a few miles from Sasebo Naval Base, homeport of the amphibious assault ship USS America, which is participating in the drills.

Japan in recent years has strengthened its amphibious capabilities in response to a rapid Chinese military build-up, aggression toward neighboring countries and a promise by Chinese President Xi Jinping to reunify Taiwan, by force, if necessary.

Iron Fist, in its 18th year, is taking place

on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan’s four main islands, on Okinawa and at sea, according to the Marines’ statement.

The three-week exercise focuses on advanced marksmanship, amphibious reconnaissance, fire and maneuver assaults, bilateral logistics and medical support, and fire support operations, such as mortars, artillery and close-air support, the statement said.

The key training event is a bilateral amphibious operation March 12 on Okinawa, the statement said.

Iron Fist, which concludes March 17, in-

volves 2,100 U.S. and Japanese personnel, Capt. Pawel Puczko, a 31st MEU spokesman, told Stars and Stripes in an email Tuesday.

Participating U.S. units and vessels include Combat Logistics Battalion 31, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, U.S. Navy Amphibious Squadron 11 and the amphibious transport dock USS Green Bay, Puczko said.

Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265 Reinforced is supporting the exercise with CH-53 Sea Stallion, UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper helicopters, Puczko said by phone Tuesday.

The squadron’s MV-22 Ospreys remain grounded, along with all U.S. military Ospreys, while the Pentagon investigates a tiltrotor crash that killed eight Air Force crew members Nov. 29.

Japanese units and vessels include the 2nd Amphibious Rapid Deployment Regiment, Landing Ship Division 1 and the tank landing ship JS Kunisaki, he said.

The drills include 600 Japanese soldiers, 200 Japanese sailors, 700 U.S. Marines and 600 U.S. sailors, the Ground Staff Office spokesman said.

The United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, the Philippines, and the Netherlands have sent observers to the exercise, according to the spokesman.

robson.seth@stripes.com
@SethRobson1
higa.mari@stripes.com
@MariHiga21

MILITARY

Germany, Poland won't send troops to Ukraine

Announcement comes as Kremlin warns of direct conflict with NATO, expansion of war

By LORNE COOK
AND KAREL JANICEK
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — European military heavyweights Germany and Poland affirmed Tuesday that they would not be sending troops to Ukraine, after reports that some Western countries may be considering doing so as the war with Russia enters its third year.

The head of NATO also said the U.S.-led military alliance has no plans to send troops to Ukraine, after other central European leaders confirmed that they too would not be providing soldiers.

The Kremlin, meanwhile, warned that a direct conflict between NATO and Russia would be inevitable if the alliance sends combat troops. “In this case, we need to talk not about probability, but about the inevitability (of conflict),” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Moscow’s warning came a day after French President Emmanuel Macron said that sending in Western ground troops should not be “ruled out” in the future, after hosting a conference of top officials from more than 20 of Ukraine’s Western backers.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz appeared to have a different view of what happened in Paris. He said the participants had agreed “that there will be no ground troops, no soldiers on Ukrainian soil who are sent there by European states or NATO states.”

Scholz said there was also consensus “that soldiers operating in our countries also are not participating actively in the war themselves.”

The idea of sending troops has been taboo, particularly as NATO seeks to avoid being dragged into a wider war with nuclear-armed

Russia. Nothing prevents NATO members from joining such an undertaking individually or in groups, but the organization itself would only get involved if all 31 members agree.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told The Associated Press that “NATO allies are providing unprecedented support to Ukraine. We have done that since 2014 and stepped up after the full-scale invasion. But there are no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine.”

At a meeting in Prague on Tuesday, Polish Prime Minister Do-

nald Tusk said, “Poland does not plan to send its troops to Ukraine.” Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic insisted that his country “certainly doesn’t want to send its soldiers.”

Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico has said his government is not planning to propose a deployment, but that some countries were weighing whether to strike bilateral deals to provide troops to help Ukraine fend off the Russian invasion.

Fico did not provide details about which countries or what the troops would do in Ukraine.

Ramstein Air Base eyeing start of Frankfurt Airport shuttle service

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The Air Force wants to establish an airport shuttle between Ramstein Air Base and Frankfurt this summer, a move that may save time and money for service members living in the largest overseas U.S. military community.

The intent is to partner with a commercial shuttle operator starting around Aug. 1, according to a notice on Sam.gov, the federal government’s contracting website.

The notice lists potential terms of service for prospective businesses, including a shuttle that departs and returns three times daily from both Ramstein and Frankfurt Airport, transporting from one to 40 passengers per ride.

The schedule must align with the timetables of the major U.S. carriers flying in and out of the airport, according to the notice.

A shuttle could alleviate much of the hassle and expense Americans in the Kaiserslautern Military Community encounter when making the roughly 75-mile trip to the airport, which is a major European hub.

Fees for commercial shuttles can be as much as \$400 round trip for a single rider. Costs have remained high since the COVID-19 pandemic, when shuttle operators were forced to raise prices because they could transport only one family at a time. Before the pandemic, round trips in a commercial van were generally \$80 per person.

Bus or train transportation to and from the airport is less expensive but not always convenient for larger families or service members living on base without a car. Trains require at least one con-



JARED LOVETT/U.S. Air Force

The Air Force is looking for a contractor to provide commercial shuttle service between Ramstein Air Base in Germany and Frankfurt Airport. The intent would be to have the service begin in August and provide three shuttles daily in either direction, according to a notice posted on a U.S. government website.

nection and strikes have occurred frequently in recent months.

The cost for riders at Ramstein would be determined by the shuttle operator, according to the announcement, which says the contract length is five years.

Other overseas U.S. military bases provide airport shuttle services for leisure travel. In Japan, for example, Yokota Air Base provides two daily buses to and from Narita and Haneda airports in Tokyo.

Riders ages 13 and up pay \$40 for a seat to or from Narita; for those under 13 the cost is \$30. The price for Haneda service is \$20 per trip for all ages.

For the Ramstein shuttle, the vendor would have to return a portion of sales to the 86th Force Support Squadron, most likely through a fixed monthly rate of \$7,500, according to the notice.

Besides setting passenger fees, the contractor would be responsible for customer reservations, service, cancellations, scheduling, refunds and ridership liability.

The notice was first published in December and has been amended several times. Last week, the Air Force posted an invitation to prospective vendors to attend Industry Day on March 13 at Kapaun Air Station in Kaiserslautern.

Hosted by the 700th Contracting Squadron and the 86th Force Support Squadron, the event is intended to ensure that bidders understand the shuttle requirements before a formal solicitation goes out, according to the document.

The request for information notice is set to expire March 30.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com
@stripesktown



TAYLOR CURRY/U.S. Air Force

Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons and South Korean KF-16s taxi to the runway in 2014 at Seosan Air Base, South Korea.

South Korean military to surrender real estate for local development

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Roughly 130 square miles of land scattered across South Korea and reserved for military use will be turned over for local development, the Ministry of National Defense announced this week.

The ministry announced plans Monday to lift property restrictions that citizens and local governments have complained for years limit development opportunities in their communities, according to a ministry news release.

This is the South Korean military’s largest turnover of land since 2007. Military zones still account for roughly 8.2% of the country, according to the release.

Relinquishing the land will have no impact on military operations but will promote “economic revitalization” and ease building codes that limited building heights, according to the release.

Around 54 square miles in South Chungcheong province on the western coast will be turned over, the largest batch of real estate in the plan. Other areas include 18 square miles in Seoul, 0.02 square miles in Pyeongtaek city and roughly 14.6 square miles

near the border with North Korea.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in a televised speech Monday at Seosan Air Base said a military runway there will be repurposed to accommodate a civilian airport by 2028.

Yoon said the military’s capabilities have changed since the 1970s, when the land restrictions were first introduced, and that “rapid urbanization of the whole country” has prompted the need for change.

“I expect this to be a model of great success and for the civilian and military to ... achieve regional economic development,” he said.

Real estate previously occupied by the U.S. military has also been returned to the South Korean government as part of a \$10 billion relocation plan, paid mostly by Seoul.

Around 70 U.S. military outposts have been closed or partially returned since 2002 to consolidate American forces.

Yongsan Garrison in the heart of Seoul previously housed the headquarters of U.S. Forces Korea, U.N. Command, Combined Forces Command, 2nd Infantry Division and Eighth Army. All the commands moved to Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, leaving about 500 troops at Yongsan.

NATION

Biden presses lawmakers to avoid shutdown

President also urges passage of bill to send aid to Ukraine, Israel

BY COLLEEN LONG
AND DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden implored the top four leaders of Congress Tuesday to act quickly to avoid a looming government shutdown early next month and to pass emergency aid for Ukraine and Israel, as a legislative logjam in the GOP-led House showed no signs of abating.

Biden hosted House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., in the Oval Office along with Vice President Kamala Harris.

“The need is urgent,” Biden said of the Ukraine aid. “The consequences of inaction every day in Ukraine are dire.”

He noted that Israel also needs U.S. funding to replenish its supply of Iron Dome interceptors that it uses to protect against inbound rockets.

Republicans in the House have thus far refused to bring up the \$95 billion national security package that bolsters aid for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific. That measure cleared the Senate on a bipartisan 70-29 vote this month, but Johnson has resisted scheduling it for a vote in the House.

Central Intelligence Agency Di-

rector Bill Burns also joined Tuesday’s meeting. Burns has played key roles coordinating the U.S. response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as well as efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas after its attack on Israel.

Apart from the national security package, government funding for agriculture, transportation, military construction and some veterans’ services expires Friday. And funding for the rest of the government, including the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department, expires a week later, on March 8, the day after Biden is set to deliver his State of the Union address.

“It’s Congress responsibility to fund the government,” Biden added. “A government shutdown would damage the economy significantly. We need a bipartisan solution.”

The Senate’s top two leaders also urged that the government be kept open. Parts of the government could start to scale back operations as early as Friday unless a deal is reached on spending and legislation is sent to Biden for his signature.

Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor ahead of the White House meeting that he hoped it would be an “important, timely and fruitful discussion” and urged Johnson to tune out demands from hardline conservatives.



INTUITIVE MACHINES/AP

The Odysseus lunar lander captured this image approximately 35 seconds after pitching over during its approach to the landing site.

Toppled moon lander sends back more images, with only hours left

BY MARCIA DUNN
Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A moon lander that ended up on its side managed to beam back more pictures, with only hours remaining before it dies.

Intuitive Machines posted new photos of the moon’s unexplored south polar region Tuesday.

The company’s lander, Odysseus, captured the shots last Thursday shortly before making

the first U.S. touchdown on the moon in more than 50 years. Odysseus landed on its side, hampering communication and power generation.

Once sunlight can no longer reach the lander’s solar panels, operations will end. Intuitive Machines expects that to happen sometime between Tuesday afternoon and early Wednesday. The mission, part of NASA’s effort to boost the lunar economy, was sup-

posed to last until at least Thursday, when lunar nighttime sets in. NASA has six experiments on board.

Intuitive Machines is the first private business to land a spacecraft on the moon without it crashing.

Another U.S. company launched its own lunar lander last month, but a fuel leak doomed the mission and the craft came crashing back to Earth.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

President Joe Biden, shakes hands with House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana., joined at left by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., at the conclusion of the National Prayer Breakfast, on Feb. 1, at the Capitol.

Biden and Trump both plan trips to Mexico border, vying for advantage

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will make dueling trips to the U.S.-Mexico border on Thursday, as both candidates try to turn the nation’s broken immigration system to their political advantage in an expected campaign rematch this year.

Biden will travel to Brownsville, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley, an area that often sees large numbers of border crossings, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday.

He will meet border agents and discuss the need for bipartisan legislation. It would be his second visit to the border as president. He traveled to El Paso in January last

year.

“He wants to make sure he puts his message out there to the American people,” Jean-Pierre said.

Trump, for his part, will head to Eagle Pass, Texas, about 325 miles away from Brownsville, another hotspot in the state-federal clash over border security, according to three people who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

Biden, speaking in New York on Monday, said he had planned to head to the border on Thursday and didn’t know “my good friend apparently is going,” too. The White House announcement of the trip came after Trump’s plan to visit the border had been re-

ported. The president declined to say whether he would meet with migrants on the trip.

The trips underscore immigration’s central importance in the 2024 presidential race, for Republicans and increasingly for Democrats, particularly after congressional talks on a deal to rein in illegal migration collapsed.

Biden has excoriated Republicans for abandoning the bipartisan border deal after Trump came out in opposition to the plan to tighten asylum restrictions and create daily limits on border crossings.

Trump, meanwhile, has dialed up his anti-immigrant rhetoric, suggesting migrants are poisoning the blood of Americans.

NATION



JEFF CHIU/AP

A crowd listens to speakers at a reparations rally outside of City Hall in San Francisco, on March 14.

San Francisco to formally apologize to Black residents

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco’s supervisors plan to offer a formal apology to Black residents for decades of racist laws and policies perpetrated by the city, a long-awaited first step as it considers providing reparations.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote Tuesday on the resolution apologizing to African Americans and their descendants. All 11 members have signed on as sponsors, guaranteeing its passage. It would be one of the first major U.S. cities to do so.

The resolution calls on San Francisco to not repeat the harmful policies and practices, and to commit “to making substantial ongoing, systemic, and programmatic investments” in Black communities. There are about 46,000 Black residents in San Francisco.

“An apology from this city is very concrete and is not just symbolic,

as admitting fault is a major step in making amends,” Supervisor Shammann Walton, the only Black member of the board and chief proponent of reparations, said at a committee hearing on the resolution earlier this month.

Others say the apology is insufficient on its own for true atonement.

“An apology is just cotton candy rhetoric,” said the Rev. Amos C. Brown, a member of the San Francisco reparations advisory committee that proposed the apology among other recommendations. “What we need is concrete actions.”

An apology would be the first reparations recommendation to be realized of more than 100 proposals the city committee has made. The African American Reparations Advisory Committee also proposed that every eligible Black adult receive a \$5 million lump-sum cash payment and a guaranteed income

of nearly \$100,000 a year to remedy San Francisco’s deep racial wealth gap.

But there has been no action on those and other proposals. Mayor London Breed, who is Black, has stated she believes reparations should be handled at the national level.

Facing a budget crunch, her administration eliminated \$4 million for a proposed reparations office in cuts this year.

Cheryl Thornton, a San Francisco city employee who is Black, said in an interview after the committee hearing that an apology alone does little to address current problems, such as shorter lifespans for Black people.

“That’s why reparations is important in health care,” she said. “And it’s just because of the lack of healthy food, the lack of access to medical care and the lack of access to quality education.”

Supreme Court doubts efforts to curb social media

By MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court cast doubt Monday on state laws that could affect how Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube and other social media platforms regulate content posted by their users. The cases are among several this term in which the justices could set standards for free speech in the digital age.

In nearly four hours of arguments, several justices questioned aspects of laws adopted by Republican-dominated legislatures and signed by Republican governors in Florida and Texas in 2021. But they seemed wary of a broad ruling, with Justice Amy Coney Barrett warning of “land mines” she and her colleagues need to avoid in resolving the two cases.

While the details vary, both laws aimed to address conservative complaints that the social media companies were liberal-leaning and censored users based on their viewpoints, especially on the political right.

Differences on the court emerged over how to think about the platforms — as akin to newspapers that have broad free-speech protections, or telephone companies, known as common carriers, that are susceptible to broader regulation.

Chief Justice John Roberts suggested he was in the former camp, saying early in the session, “And I wonder, since we’re talking about the First Amendment, whether our first concern should be with the state regulating what we have called the modern public square?”

Justices Samuel Alito and Cla-

rence Thomas appeared most ready to embrace arguments made by lawyers for the states. Thomas raised the idea that the companies are seeking constitutional protection for “censoring other speech.”

Alito complained about the term “content moderation” that the sites employ to keep material off their platforms.

“Is it anything more than a euphemism for censorship?” he asked, later musing that term struck him as Orwellian.

But Justice Brett Kavanaugh, seemingly more favorable to the companies, took issue with calling the actions of private companies censorship, a term he said should be reserved for restrictions imposed by the government.

“When I think of Orwellian, I think of the state, not the private sector, not private individuals,” Kavanaugh said.

The precise contours of rulings in the two cases were not clear after arguments, although it seemed likely the court would not let the laws take effect. The justices posed questions about how the laws might affect businesses that are not their primary targets, including e-commerce sites like Uber and Etsy and email and messaging services.

The cases are among several the justices have grappled with over the past year involving social media platforms. Next month, the court will hear an appeal from Louisiana, Missouri and other parties accusing administration officials of pressuring social media companies to silence conservative points of view.

Beverly Hills middle school rocked by AI-generated nude images

By JON HEALEY
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — The new face of bullying in schools is real. It’s the body below the face that’s fake.

Last week, officials and parents at Beverly Vista Middle School in Beverly Hills were shocked by reports that fake images were circulating online that put real students’ faces on artificially generated nude bodies. According to the Beverly Hills Unified School District, the images were created and shared by other students at Beverly Vista, the district’s sole school for sixth to eighth grades. About 750 students are enrolled there,

according to the latest count.

The district, which is investigating, joined a growing number of educational institutions around the world dealing with fake pictures, video and audio. In Westfield, N.J., Seattle, Winnipeg, Almedralejo, Spain, and Rio de Janeiro, people using “deepfake” technology have seamlessly wed legitimate images of female students to artificial or fraudulent ones of nude bodies. And in Texas, someone allegedly did the same to a female teacher, grafting her head onto a woman in a pornographic video.

Beverly Hills Unified officials said they were prepared to impose

the most severe disciplinary actions allowed by state law. “Any student found to be creating, disseminating, or in possession of AI-generated images of this nature will face disciplinary actions, including, but not limited to, a recommendation for expulsion,” they said in a statement mailed to parents last week.

Deterrence may be the only tool at their disposal, however.

Dozens of apps are available online to “undress” someone in a photo, simulating what a person would look like if they’d been nude when the shot was taken. The apps use AI-powered image inpainting technology to remove the pixels

that represent clothing, replacing them with an image that approximates that person’s nude body, said Rijul Gupta, founder and chief executive of Deep Media in San Francisco.

Other tools allow you to “face swap” a targeted person’s face onto another person’s nude body, said Gupta, whose company specializes in detecting AI-generated content.

Versions of these programs have been available for years, but the earlier ones were expensive, harder to use and less realistic. Today, AI tools can clone lifelike images and quickly create deepfakes; even using a smartphone, it

can be accomplished in a matter of seconds.

AI tools “have escaped Pandora’s box,” said Seth Ruden of BioCatch, a company that specializes in detecting fraud through behavioral biometrics. “We’re starting to see the scale of the potential damage that could be created here.”

If kids can access these tools, “it’s not just a problem with deepfake imagery,” Ruden said. The potential risks extend to the creation of images of victims “doing something very illicit and using that as a way to extort them out of money or blackmail them to do a specific action,” he said.



EVAN VUCCI/AP

President Joe Biden eats ice cream at Van Leeuwen Ice Cream on Monday, in New York, alongside Seth Meyers, during a rare media appearance to mark the 10th anniversary of “Late Night With Seth Meyers.”

Biden blasts Trump, feeds memes in ‘Late Night’ chat with Meyers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Joe Biden joked Monday that a potential 2024 endorsement by Taylor Swift is a “classified” matter as he made a rare media appearance to mark the 10th anniversary of “Late Night With Seth Meyers.”

Biden’s arrival was nominally a surprise to the audience: He stepped on stage after the announced guest — comedian and actor Amy Poehler — noted that Biden had been a guest on Meyers’ first show when he was vice president. Poehler said she could get him to return, prompting Biden to enter to “Hail to the Chief.”

“It’s good to be back,” Biden told Meyers. “Why haven’t you invited me earlier?”

Going into this year’s presidential election, Biden is seeking additional ways to reach out to voters, having largely avoided White House press conferences and on-the-record sit-downs with text reporters. Biden also skipped the traditional pre-Super Bowl presidential interview.

Meyers quizzed Biden about a conspiracy theory spread among

some conservatives on social media that Swift and Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce are part of an elaborate plot to help Democrats win the November election.

“I have you on the hotspot here,” Meyers asked. “Can you confirm or deny that there is an active conspiracy between you and Miss Swift?”

“Where are you getting this information, it’s classified,” Biden retorted, adding that Swift endorsed him for president in 2020. Meyers followed up to ask if she would endorse Biden again, prompting the president to laughingly add, “I told you it’s classified.”

Meyers also asked Biden what he thought of the “Dark Brandon” meme, which features Biden with lasers for eyes. Biden quipped, “I resent the hell out of it,” then donned a pair of his signature aviator sunglasses. The meme, which first surfaced in conservative circles, has been embraced by Biden’s campaign and supporters, and is a top driver of sales in his campaign merchandise.

Biden, at 81 the oldest-ever U.S. leader, also addressed concerns

about his age, saying, “You got to take a look at the other guy, he’s about as old as I am, but he can’t remember his wife’s name.”

It was an apparent reference to Donald Trump’s appearance at the Conservative Political Action Conference outside of Washington last weekend, when the former president praised his wife Melania and also referenced “Mercedes” — Mercedes Schlapp, his former aide who helps run the group and was in the audience. Some on social media, as well as Meyers in his monologue, suggested that Trump had used the wrong name for his wife.

Biden added that what truly matters is “how old your ideas are” and proceeded to blast Trump and Republicans for supporting rolling back abortion access and other policies that have been “solid American positions” for decades.

After recording the interview, Biden stopped off for some mint chip ice cream from Van Leeuwen, with Meyers joining him and getting the honeycomb flavor. Earlier, he attended an event with donors at a midtown hotel.

DA wants Trump gag order, cites previous remarks

By MICHAEL R. SISAK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Prosecutors in Donald Trump’s New York hush-money criminal case asked a judge Monday to impose a gag order on the former president ahead of next month’s trial, citing what they called his “long history of making public and inflammatory remarks” about people involved in his legal cases.

The Manhattan district attorney’s office is asking for what it described as a “narrowly tailored” order that would bar Trump from making or directing others to make public statements about potential witnesses and jurors, as well as statements meant to interfere with or harass the court’s staff, prosecution team or their families.

The district attorney’s office is also seeking approval to show jurors the infamous “Access Hollywood” video, made public in the final weeks of Trump’s 2016 White House campaign, in which he bragged about grabbing women’s genitals without asking for permission.

Prosecutors contend the release of the 2005 footage, followed by a flurry of women coming forward to accuse Trump of sexual assault, hastened his efforts to keep negative stories out of the press, leading to one of the hush-money arrangements at the heart of the case.

Trump’s lawyers wrote in court papers Monday that the “Access Hollywood” video “contains inflammatory and unduly prejudicial evidence that has no place at this trial about documents and accounting practices.”

The judge, Juan Manuel Merchan, didn’t rule immediately on the requests. Jury selection is scheduled to start March 25. Barring a last-minute delay, it will be the first of Trump’s four criminal cases to go to trial.

Imposing a gag order on Trump would add to restrictions put in

place after his arraignment last April that prohibit him from using evidence in the case to attack witnesses. Prosecutors are also proposing that the names of jurors be kept from the public to “minimize obstacles to jury selection, and protect juror safety.”

Without limits, prosecutors said, Trump’s rhetoric would “create a significant and imminent threat to the trial by distracting personnel, diverting government resources, and delaying the administration of justice.”

A spokesperson for Trump’s presidential campaign called the gag order request “election interference pure and simple” and called the hush-money case a “sham orchestrated by partisan Democrats desperately attempting to prevent” Trump from returning to the White House.

Trump lawyer Susan Necheles said the defense will respond in court papers later this week.

The Manhattan case centers on allegations that Trump falsified internal records kept by his company to hide the true nature of payments made to his former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen. The lawyer paid porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 as part of an effort during Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign to bury claims he’d had extramarital sexual encounters. Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records, a felony punishable by up to four years in prison.

Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner, has lashed out about the case repeatedly on social media, warning of “potential death & destruction” before his indictment last year, posting a photo on social media of himself holding a baseball bat next to a picture of District Attorney Alvin Bragg and complaining that Merchan is “a Trump-hating judge” with a family full of “Trump haters.”

Music producer latest to accuse Combs of sexual misconduct

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sean “Diddy” Combs was sued Monday by a music producer who accused the hip-hop mogul of sexually assaulting him and forcing him to have sex with prostitutes.

The suit, filed in federal court in New York, accuses Combs of repeated instances of unsolicited groping and sexual touching. It also says the man had to work in a bathroom while Combs showered and

walked around naked.

A lawyer for Combs called the events described in the lawsuit “pure fiction.”

“We have overwhelming, indisputable proof that his claims are complete lies,” said Combs attorney Shawn Holley. “We will address these outlandish allegations in court and take all appropriate action against those who make them,” he added.

A lawyer, Tyrone Blackburn,

who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the producer did not immediately return an email seeking comment. The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to being identified or decide to tell their stories publicly.

In the lawsuit, the producer claims Combs made him solicit prostitutes and pressured him to have sex with them. It also described a time when the producer

woke up in bed with two sex workers, suspecting he had been drugged.

The legal claim is one of several sexual assault lawsuits filed against Combs in recent months, including a lawsuit from the R&B singer Cassie that was settled last year. Another



Combs

of Combs’ accusers was a woman who said the rap producer raped her two decades ago when she was 17.

Combs has denied the allegations. In a statement in December, he said the “sickening” claims had been made by people “looking for a quick payday.”

“Let me be absolutely clear: I did not do any of the awful things being alleged. I will fight for my name, my family and for the truth,” he said.

WORLD

Grim reality in Russian penal colonies

Political prisoners experience poor meals, isolation, arbitrary penalties

By DASHA LITVINOVA
Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia — Vladimir Kara-Murza could only laugh when officials in Penal Colony No. 6 inexplicably put a small cabinet in his already-cramped concrete cell, next to a fold-up cot, stool, sink and latrine.

That moment of dark humor came because the only things he had to store in it were a toothbrush and a mug, said his wife, Yevgenia, since the opposition activist wasn't allowed any personal belongings in solitary confinement.

Another time, she said, Kara-Murza was told to collect his bedding from across the corridor — except that prisoners must keep their hands behind their backs whenever outside their cells.

"How was he supposed to pick it up? With his teeth?" Yevgenia Kara-Murza told The Associated Press. When he collected the sheets, a guard with a camera appeared and told him he violated the rules, bringing more discipline.

For political prisoners like Kara-Murza, life in Russia's penal colonies is a grim reality of physical and psychological pressure, sleep deprivation, insufficient food, health care that is poor or simply denied, and a dizzying set of arbitrary rules.

This month brought the stunning news from a remote Arctic penal colony, one of Russia's harshest facilities: the still-unexplained death of Alexei Navalny, the Kremlin's fiercest foe.

"No one in the Russian penitentiary system is safe," says Grigory Vaypan, a lawyer with Memorial, a group founded to document repression in the Soviet Union, especially from the Stalinist prison system known as the gulag.

"For political prisoners, the situation is often worse, because the state aims to additionally punish them, or additionally isolate them from the world, or do everything to break their spirit," Vaypan said. His group counts 680 political prisoners in Russia.

Kara-Murza was convicted of treason last year for denouncing the war in Ukraine. He is serving 25 years, the stiffest sentence for a Kremlin critic in modern Russia, and is among a growing number of dissidents held in increasingly severe conditions under President Vladimir Putin's political crack-



KIRILL ZARUBIN/AP

Penal Colony No. 2, known for its particularly harsh conditions, is seen in 2021 in Pokrov, in the Vladimir region, 53 miles east of Moscow, Russia.

down.

Gulag's legacy

Former inmates, their relatives and human rights advocates paint a bleak picture of a prison system that descended from the USSR's gulag, documented by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" and "The Gulag Archipelago."

While undergoing reforms, it "more or less still has the backbone of the Soviet system," says Oleg Kozlovksy, Amnesty International's Russia researcher.

Most often, inmates live in barracks tightly packed with bunk beds. Konstantin Kotov, an activist who spent over a year in Penal Colony No. 2 in the Vladimir region — Navalny's prison from 2021 until June 2022 — recalls cramped quarters of up to 60 men per room.

Not even the pandemic changed that, Kotov told AP. Masks were required from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., but he doubts they helped much. "Every now and then, people had high fever. They were taken to the infirmary, then brought back, and that was it," he said.

Meals are basic and unsatisfying.

Breakfast was porridge, lunch was soup with little or no meat, mashed potatoes and a meat or fish cutlet; as was dinner, Kotov said.

Inmates got two eggs a week, and fruit and vegetables were a luxury almost always sold out at prison kiosks, he added.

"The ration is not enough, and often it's inedible. So almost no one lives on rations alone," Navalny once said. His wife described his meals as porridge for breakfast, soup and porridge for lunch, and porridge with herring for dinner.

Additional food is sold, or relatives can send parcels, within limits. Those in punishment cells get no packages.

"No one in the Russian penitentiary system is safe."

Grigory Vaypan
lawyer with Memorial

There is a strict regimen of menial tasks and duties, like cleaning and standing at attention.

Andrei Pivovarov, serving four years for running a banned political organization, must clean his solitary cell for several hours a day and listen to a recording of prison regulations, says his wife, Tatyana Usmanova. But he can't do both at the same time, or finish quickly and rest, she added. Guards watching via CCTV punish rule-breakers.

'System of slavery'

There are just under 700 penitentiary facilities in Russia, and most are penal colonies of varying security, from minimum to "special regime." There are about 30-40 penal colonies for women.

Political prisoners tend to be sent to those whose administrations hold tighter controls, says Zoya Svetova, a journalist and prisoner rights advocate.

Inmates are required to work, but often there are not enough tasks for men. Women usually sew uniforms for the military, police and construction workers, working long hours for meager pay, said prisoner advocate Sasha Graf.

Nadya Tolokonnikova, a member of Pussy Riot protest group who was in prison for nearly 22 months in 2012-13, recalls sewing for 16- to 18-hour shifts. "It's a system of slavery, and it is truly horrible," she told AP.

Inmates are supposed to be paid not less than minimum wage — about \$200 a month in 2024 — but in reality it's as little as about \$3.20 — enough to buy cigarettes and sanitary products at the prison



THOMAS PADILLA/AP

A replica of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's jail cell from last year that was installed on a square near the Louvre Museum in Paris is pictured on March 14.

a faster online service.

Toll on prisoners' health

Health care is almost nonexistent, current and former inmates and advocates say, with only basic drugs available, if at all.

"Prison guards by default believe the inmate is faking and only complaining about health issues to get some kind of extra privileges," said Tolokonnikova.

Not surprisingly, inmates don't fare well in such conditions.

Yevgenia Kara-Murza said her 42-year-old husband's health has worsened in solitary.

He suffered two near-fatal poisonings in 2015 and 2017 and developed polyneuropathy, a condition that deadens the feeling in his limbs. While he received some treatment in pretrial detention in Moscow, there has been none at the penal colony in Omsk.

"He needs physical therapy, exercise," which is hardly possible in his cell, she said.

Alexei Gorinov, a former member of a Moscow municipal council serving seven years for speaking against the war in Ukraine, suffers from a chronic respiratory condition and had part of a lung removed before imprisoned. His health deteriorated during six weeks in solitary confinement, and he is still recovering.

In December, Gorinov, 62, was not strong enough to sit up in a chair or even speak, his allies quoted his lawyer as saying. Eventually moved to a prison hospital, he is still awakened every two hours because he's labeled a flight risk and authorities must regularly confirm his whereabouts, supporters say. He considers it a form of torture.

While public pressure helped stop prison abuses in recent years, Memorial's Vaypan believes a line has been crossed with Navalny's death.

It's a "worrying signal" that things could get worse, he said.

kiosk, Graf said.

Intimidation, repression

Tolokonnikova said when she arrived at Penal Colony No. 14 in the Mordovia region, the warden described himself as a "Stalinist." She said he told her: "You may be a somebody outside of this colony, have a voice, people who support you and care for you, but here, you are in completely in my power, and you need to understand this." Although prisons are technically overseen by commissions that do inspections and advocate for inmates, their members in recent years have been replaced by government loyalists, says Svetova, who served on a commission from 2008-16.

She said the current government uses prisons for intimidation and oppression.

Reports of physical abuse are common for ordinary inmates but rare for political prisoners, advocates say. Instead, intimidation often comes via enforcing minor infractions, said Amnesty's Kozlovsky.

Navalny spent months in a punishment cell for not buttoning his uniform properly or not putting his hands behind his back when required.

He once described it as a "concrete kennel" of 8-by-10-feet that, depending on the season, was "cold and damp," or "hot and there's almost no air."

Long stints in punishment cells or other types of solitary confinement are a reality for many, and their only lifeline is a visit from a lawyer or writing letters that are censored and sometimes take weeks to arrive; some colonies use

VA health coverage will expand to all veterans exposed to toxins

Copayments for medical treatments related to exposures will be waived for new enrollees. Fees can range from \$15 to \$50 depending on the type of medical service.

Veterans can enroll online at VA.gov/PACT. The VA will use information in military records, including service dates and loca-

The expansion is a result of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or PACT Act. The PACT Act has sought to improve access to disability benefits for veterans who developed certain medical condi-



Lance Cpl. Nathaniel Fink, left, and Lance Cpl. Garrett Camacho dispose of trash in a burn pit in Afghanistan in 2012.

They also cover exposure to nerve agents, biological weapons

The expansion is for health care enrollment and not for monthly disability compensation.

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MIDEAST

Biden signals possible truce; Israel, Hamas say otherwise

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — President Joe Biden signaled that a cease-fire in Gaza could be at hand, saying that Israel has agreed to pause its offensive during the upcoming Muslim holy month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some hostages held by Hamas.

But both Israel and Hamas downplayed on Tuesday the idea that a breakthrough was imminent.

The president's remarks came on the eve of the Michigan primary, where he faces pressure from the state's large Arab American population over his staunch support of Israel. Biden said he had been briefed on the status of talks by his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, but said his comments reflected his optimism for a deal, not that all the remaining hurdles had been overcome.

In the wake of Hamas' attack on southern Israel, Israel's air, sea and ground campaign in Gaza has killed tens of thousands of people, obliterated large swaths of the urban landscape, displaced 80% of the battered enclave's population



OHAD ZWIGENBERG/AP

Israelis stand on tanks during an event for families of reservists outside a military base in southern Israel, on Tuesday.

and sparked concerns that a famine could be imminent, according to the United Nations.

Now the prospect of an invasion of Rafah has prompted global alarm over the fate of civilians trapped there.

Talks to pause the fighting gained momentum recently and were underway Tuesday. Negotiators from the United States, Egypt and Qatar have been work-

ing to broker a cease-fire that would see Hamas free some of the dozens of hostages it holds in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners, a six-week halt in fighting and an increase in aid deliveries to Gaza.

The start of Ramadan, which is expected to be around March 10, is seen as an unofficial deadline for a deal. The month is a time of heightened religious observance

and dawn-to-dusk fasting for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. Israeli-Palestinian tensions have flared in the past during the holy month.

"Ramadan's coming up, and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out," Biden said in an appearance on NBC's "Late Night With Seth Meyers" that was recorded Monday.

In separate comments the same day, Biden said that he hoped a cease-fire deal could take effect by next week.

At the same time, Biden did not call for an end to the war, which was triggered when Hamas militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted roughly 250 people, according to Israeli authorities.

Israeli officials said Biden's comments came as a surprise and were not made in coordination with the country's leadership. A Hamas official played down any sense of progress, saying the

group wouldn't soften its demands.

The Israeli officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media, said Israel wants a deal immediately, but that Hamas continues to push excessive demands. They also said that Israel is insisting that female soldiers be part of the first group of hostages released under any truce deal.

Hamas official Ahmad Abdel-Hadi indicated that optimism on a deal was premature.

"The resistance is not interested in giving up any of its demands, and what is proposed does not meet what it had requested," he told the Pan-Arab TV channel Al Mayadeen.

Hamas has previously demanded that Israel end the war as part of any deal, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called "delusional."

At a news conference Tuesday in Doha, Qatar Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said "we feel optimistic" about the talks, without elaborating.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Lithium ion battery caused fatal fire, officials say

NY NEW YORK — A lithium ion battery sparked a fire that killed one person and injured 17 others at a New York City apartment building, fire officials said Saturday.

Friday’s two-alarm fire began just after 2 p.m. on the third floor of a six-story building in Harlem. New York Police Department video shows firefighters being lowered by ropes from the roof to rescue people trapped on the building’s upper floors.

The city has seen hundreds of fires linked to the lithium ion batteries that power electric bikes and scooters in the last few years. The Fire Department has repeatedly issued warnings and safety tips.

FDNY Chief of Operations John Hodgens said an apartment door of the burning apartment was left open, intensifying the fire and hampering efforts to extinguish it.

“If you could, imagine flames coming out that door and blocking off the stairwell,” he said. “Normally we go directly up to the floor above the fire, but we were even unable to get past those flames.”

Lack of snow cancels major sled dog race

ME PORTLAND — The organizers of the longest sled dog race in the eastern United States said Monday that they are canceling the event due to a lack of snow on the ground.

The Can-Am Crown International Sled Dog Races have taken place in northern Maine for more than three decades, including a 250-mile event that is the marquee sled dog race in New England. But this year, snowfall has been well below average in Maine, and it’s not safe to run the races, organizers said.

A forecasted heavy rainstorm and period of unseasonably warm weather also bode poorly for trail conditions, said Can-Am president Dennis Cyr.

The races are held in Fort Kent, more than 300 miles north of Portland near the border with Canada. The town has had 46.8 inches of snow this year and would normally have had more than 80 inches by now, the National Weather Service said.

Fellow student charged in death of college wrestler

KY CAMPBELLSVILLE — A college wrestler in Kentucky was killed by a fellow student at a private Christian university over the weekend, authorities said.

Josiah Kilman, 18, was pronounced dead at a hospital after police officers were called early Saturday to Campbellsville University in central Kentucky, city police said in a news release. He was found unresponsive in his dorm room, and the state will conduct an autopsy.

A campus lockdown was lifted



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Not too cold

Swimmers dressed as narwhals take a lap during the 25-meter hat competition of the winter swimming festival on frozen Lake Memphremagog on Friday in Newport, Vt.

after a 21-year-old student was arrested Saturday evening by state police following a report of a suspicious person in a barn, police and school officials said. He was charged with murder and second-degree burglary, and bond was set at \$2 million, court records show.

Ex-commander charged in illegal recording of officers

PA PITTSBURGH — A now-retired Pittsburgh police commander has been charged with using police-issued body-worn cameras to illegally record other police officers last year, authorities said.

Allegheny County police said they were asked in October to investigate after a body-worn camera was found hidden in an unmarked Pittsburgh police vehicle. Investigators later determined that multiple Zone 2 officers “were recorded without their knowledge on cameras that were placed inside unmarked police vehicles,” county police said Friday in a Facebook post.

Former Zone 2 Commander Matthew Lackner, 50, was charged Friday with four third-degree felony counts of interception, disclosure or use of wire, electronic or oral communications. Lackner has retired from the force since the investigation began, officials said.

According to the complaint, Lackner told officers he’d recorded that it was part of a federal investigation of an unnamed person and

ordered them not to speak of it again, but county police said federal authorities had confirmed that no such probe authorized any such activity.

AT&T will give \$5 to each customer hit by outage

TX DALLAS — AT&T says it will give affected customers \$5 each to compensate for last week’s cellphone network outage that left many without service for hours.

The Dallas-based company said on its website that customers will get the \$5 credit on their account within two billing cycles. The credit does not apply to AT&T Business, prepaid service or Cricket, its low-cost wireless service. AT&T said prepaid customers will have options available to them if they were impacted, although it did not elaborate on what those options might be.

The outage knocked out cellphone service for thousands of its users across the U.S. starting early Thursday before it was restored. AT&T blamed the incident on an error in coding, without elaborating, and said it was not the result of a cyberattack.

Man convicted in disabled brother’s starvation death

MI MUSKEGON — A Michigan man who pleaded guilty in his disabled brother’s starvation death was sen-

tenced Monday to a minimum of 30 years in prison by a judge who said the defendant is “one step away from becoming a psychopath.”

Paul Ferguson, 21, pleaded guilty in December to first-degree child abuse in the death of 15-year-old Timothy Ferguson. He was sentenced Monday to a minimum 30 years and maximum 100 years in prison.

Timothy Ferguson, who had autism and was speech- and motor-impaired, weighed only 69 pounds when he died in July 2022 at the family’s western Michigan home in Norton Shores, authorities said.

The brothers’ mother, Shanda Vander Ark, 44, of Norton Shores, was sentenced in January to life in prison without a chance of parole after a jury convicted her of murder and child abuse in the teen’s death.

Mohegan tribe to end management of casino

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — The Mohegan tribe will end its management of Atlantic City’s Resorts casino at the end of this year, both parties said Monday.

The move will conclude an agreement the tribe’s gambling arm, Mohegan Gaming Advisors, made with Resorts in 2012 six months after the casino’s co-owner, veteran gambling executive Dennis Gomes, died. Gomes’ death left Resorts without crucial experience and know-how to compete in the ever-more-crowded northeast-

ern U.S. casino market.

Mohegan’s successful operation of casinos in markets including Connecticut and Pennsylvania made it attractive to Resorts, which in 1978 became the first casino in the U.S. to open outside Nevada. Now, Resorts says, the casino is able to stand on its own two feet.

“Mohegan has been a valuable partner, and we are grateful for their contribution to our success,” said Morris Bailey, who owns Resorts.

1993 World Trade Center bombing victims honored

NY NEW YORK — New York City marked the anniversary of the 1993 bombing at the old World Trade Center that blew apart a van parked in an underground garage, killing six people and injured more than 1,000.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey held a memorial Mass on Monday morning at St. Peter’s Church in Manhattan.

That was followed by a ceremony at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum for victims’ family members, survivors, first responders, and lower Manhattan residents and workers.

A bell was tolled at 12:18 p.m. to mark the time of the Feb. 26 attack and a moment of silence was held to honor the victims, whose names are inscribed on one of the Sept. 11 memorial pools.

FACES



FX/AP

From left: Eita Okuno as Saeki Nobutatsu, Anna Sawai as Toda Mariko and Hiromoto Ida as Kiyama Ukon. Sadanaga in a scene from “Shogun.” The first two episodes of the 10-part series are streaming on Hulu.

An epic undertaking

FX reaches back more than 400 years in new ‘Shogun’ adaptation

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

When FX sent screenwriter Justin Marks a copy of James Clavell’s hit 1975 novel “Shogun” with the idea of turning it into a series, he initially couldn’t put it down. That’s because he was reluctant to pick it up.

The book about a British navigator shipwrecked in feudal Japan was massive — over 1,000 pages. And old: “It was the book that was on our parents’ nightstand.” Plus it sounded culturally out of step. He assumed it couldn’t be adapted for 2024.

Marks laughs that he “was being a jerk” and judging a book by its cover. With urging from his wife, novelist Rachel Kondo, he picked it up and soon realized why Clavell’s novel was so celebrated.

“When you open it and you go through it, it is a remarkably modern story,” he said. “It really does get to the core of what it is to encounter another culture and to encounter oneself in that culture.”

Marks and his wife plunged into the fish-out-of-water tale and now are ready for the world to see their 10-episode fictional limited series “Shogun.” Set in Japan in 1600, it’s rooted in the real history of the period, a dangerous time when several warlords jockeyed for ultimate power as European powers warily circled the island nation.

The arrival of a shipwrecked Englishman — John Blackthorne — disrupts the balance in Japan and yet offers intriguing possibilities since he knows important global information. A pawn at first, he rises to become a trusted adviser and ally.

“It really came down to being the story about agency and this story about characters who are trying to exert control over the path of their own destiny in a very chaotic world where you can literally lose your head at any moment,” said Marks.

The series has elements of intrigue and spectacle like “Game of Thrones,” with beheadings, people boiled alive or sliced open with katanas, blood splashing on window screens and fire-tipped arrows. It also shows the hesitant understanding growing between

Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis) and Lord Toranaga (Hiroyuki Sanada) and a love story between Blackthorne and translator Lady Mariko (Anna Sawai).

Sanada says the cast and creators came at the project hoping to respect the novel but also to ground it in historical reality and make the characters believable. “Our North Star was authenticity from the beginning,” he said.

The series is riding a wave of new TV offerings that embrace Asian culture, including Max’s “Ninja Kamui,” “Warrior” and “Tokyo Vice,” Paramount+’s “The Tiger’s Apprentice,” and “Avatar: The Last Airbender” and “House of Ninjas,” both on Netflix.

The 1975 book “Shogun” sold millions and a 1980 TV miniseries, starring Richard Chamberlain and Toshiro Mifune, was watched by 1 in 3 U.S. households, winning three Emmys and three Golden Globes. Both the series and book triggered a wave of interest in feudal Japan, from kids playing with toy katanas to video games to Tom Cruise starring in “The Last Samurai.”

The new series — with Clavell’s daughter Michaela as a producer — adjusts the story. Sanada said that if the book was “blue eyes watching Japan,” the FX series puts on “Japanese lenses.” Blackthorne is less the hero here than a catalyst, as co-creators Marks and Kondo explore power dynamics.

Sanada said it was appropriate that Western and Japanese crew members worked together to create the show. “The making of ‘Shogun’ itself has great drama and overlaps the story,” he says. “This is another good message for now: If we get together, we can create a better future together.”

Marks, who also served as showrunner and executive producer, says the “Shogun” team tried hard to fix mistakes in the novel, but such errors are always going to happen when bridges are built between cultures.

“We’re never going to get to a place where we don’t make mistakes. What we do reach, hopefully, is every 40 years, whatever it may be, we reach a point where we just make better mistakes.”

“It is a remarkably modern story.”

Justin Marks
screenwriter, on adapting James Clavell’s novel “Shogun”

New this week: ‘Elsbeth,’ Sandler in space, ‘Shogun’

Associated Press

Here’s a collection curated by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists of what’s arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

Movies

■ Ridley Scott’s “Napoleon” is finally making its debut on Apple TV+ on Friday. The historical epic starring Joaquin Phoenix as the French leader and Vanessa Kirby as his wife Joséphine divided critics upon its release, for its unexpected tone and humor.

■ Adam Sandler is Jakob Procházka, an astronaut on a solo mission to the edge of the solar system, in the sci-fi drama “Spaceman,” debuting on Netflix on Friday. Isabella Rossellini is his commanding officer; Carey Mulligan plays the wife he left behind on earth. And Paul Dano voices an extraterrestrial spider named Hanuś. From director Johan Renck (who helmed all five episodes of HBO’s chilling “Chernobyl” series), the film is based on a 2017 novel “Spaceman of Bohemia.”

■ For families looking for something new, Peacock Kids has a DreamWorks sequel in “Megamind vs. the Doom Syndicate,” streaming Friday, with Keith Ferguson replacing Will Ferrell as the voice of the reformed villain.

— AP Film Writer
Lindsey Bahr

Music

■ Paula Cole will this week release “Lo,” her first collection of entirely original songs in nearly a decade. The Grammy winner has released three singles from the 11-track set, including “Invisible Armor,” a very personal ballad in which she sings “I am lonely at the center of my life.” Other singles are the funky “The Replacements & Dinosaur Jr.” and the haunting “Green Eyes Crying.”

■ The use of rap lyrics as evidence in criminal trials is common but controversial. The new Paramount+ documentary “As We Speak: Rap Music on Trial” reveals how law enforcement has quietly used artistic creation against defendants for decades. Directed by J.M. Harper and featuring rapper Kemba, the movie doesn’t ask whether someone is innocent or guilty; it asks whether lyrics can be used for conviction. The doc played the Sundance Film Festival and hit the streaming platform Tuesday.

■ Celebrate the sound of Manchester by checking out the teaming up of Oasis’ singer Liam Gallagher and guitarist John Squire from The Stone Roses. Two singles — “Just Another Rainbow” and “Mars To Liverpool” — mix rock ‘n’ roll, indie sludge and ‘60s psychedelia. Their self-titled album, out Friday, features Greg

Kurstin, who produced and played bass, and drums by Joey Waronker (Beck, R.E.M., Atoms For Peace). Gallagher and Squire, long-term friends, sparked the idea of a collaboration when Squire joined Gallagher onstage at his recent shows at Knebworth, the site of Oasis’s iconic two-night stand in 1996. Pop the champagne for these two supernovas.

— AP Entertainment Writer
Mark Kennedy

Television

■ FX’s newest series is the Japanese historical drama “Shogun” based on a novel published in 1975 by James Clavell. Some may also remember a 1980 miniseries, also based on the book, that starred Richard Chamberlain and was a huge hit at the time. This 10-episode version is described as a more faithful adaptation to the scope of the novel, as Clavell’s daughter, Michaela, is an executive producer. The epic tale is set hundreds of years ago in Japan under the rule of military dictators known as Shogun. The first two episodes of “Shogun” premiered Tuesday on FX and Hulu.

■ A new Disney+ animated series called “Iwájú” is a coming-of-age story set in the future in Lagos, Nigeria. Presented in a comic book-style, the story follows Tola and Kole, two best friends with a strong bond despite coming from different class systems. Their friendship is tested by a tech guru who uses his expertise to distract from a secret criminal underworld. All six episodes of “Iwájú” stream Wednesday on Disney+.

■ There were many great recurring characters on “The Good Wife” and “The Good Fight,” but one of the best was Carrie Preston’s Elsbeth Tascioni as a scatterbrained, sweet, whip-smart lawyer who is often underestimated. In the new drama “Elsbeth,” premiering Thursday on CBS, Tascioni is the star of her own story, starting over in New York with a new job working as an investigator for the NYPD. Episodes also stream on Paramount+.

■ Jamie Dornan is back as “The Tourist,” and you can find him on Netflix. The series originally aired on BBC where it drew strong ratings, and season one streamed on Max. Now, Netflix has acquired both of the show’s two seasons. Season one is already streaming and season two becomes available Thursday. The series begins with Dornan known as The Man after a car crash in the Australian Outback wiped his memory. He has no idea who he is or why he’s there, and any clues point to a dark past. Season two takes Dornan’s Man and his girlfriend to Ireland as the mystery continues.

— Alicia Rancilio



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EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief
reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast

David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

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OPINION

Liberals know conservatives won the courts debate

BY RAMESH PONNURU

Special to The Washington Post

Democrats, having lost the Supreme Court, are increasingly turning their attention to putting liberal judges on state courts. The way they are doing it shows they have lost the debate about the role of courts in our democracy, too.

Over the past two generations, conservatives developed a comprehensive strategy, including politically powerful rhetoric, for bringing the federal courts closer to their understanding of the enterprise of judging. Judges shouldn't rewrite the law in the guise of interpreting it, they said; judges should be umpires, not players taking a turn at bat. Conservatives warned against letting judges have wide leeway to fill in the meaning of apparently vague language, instead urging them to be constrained by what the informed public understood the words of the law meant when it was ratified.

This vision of the judicial role has drawn intense criticism, especially in the legal academy, where conservatives remain a small minority. The most recent high-profile political critique came from President Barack Obama, who often said judges should rule with "empathy." Obama's view was already a climb-down from the freewheeling judicial liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s, which he suggested went too far.

But Obama's modified liberalism didn't take. During their confirmation hearings, the justices he nominated to the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, explicitly rejected the empathy standard—even though they were testifying before a Democratic-controlled Senate. Kagan went so far as to say that, in a sense, "we are all originalists." Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson made similar remarks

during her hearings.

Progressives have not just failed to popularize an alternative to judicial conservatism; they have barely even come up with one. No justice in history had a following as large as Ruth Bader Ginsburg's, but she left behind no school of thought in the way Justice Antonin Scalia did. Former Justice Stephen Breyer continues to write in favor of a theory of judicial pragmatism in contrast to Scalia's originalism. None of the Democratic appointees still on the court has adopted it.

When they dissent from conservative decisions, the liberal justices are more likely to accuse the majority of inconsistently applying originalism than they are to dispute it. Or they will cite precedents from the earlier liberal era on the Supreme Court, a tactic that will grow less useful the longer today's conservative supermajority is in place.

The new effort by Democrats at the state level is similarly defensive. The New York Times reports groups are setting up a new fund to win governors' races by highlighting their power to make appointments to the state courts. But none of the Democrats quoted in the Times story say anything about advancing progressive values from the bench. They speak only of upholding "the rule of law," something Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz contrasts with "supporting an ideology."

Nobody should have any illusions about such comments. Judges backed by Democrats are, by and large, going to deliver policy results that Democratic politicians like, just as Republican appointees do for Republican politicians. The most charitable way of putting it is that each side has a systematically different view of what "the rule of law" means. That's true whether judges are appointed by partisan officials or win elections that are effectively partisan.

Wisconsin provides the latest example. Democratic voters there, as in most places, cluster in urban areas while Republicans are more dispersed. Democrats want to maximize their strength in the state legislature by drawing district lines that reflect the balance of partisan voters statewide more than they respect municipal and county boundaries (and, of course, more than they respect Republicans' desire to maximize their own showing). The swing justice on the state Supreme Court campaigned for the job saying she would tilt toward the Democratic view, and the court has now delivered, which should move the state's politics and policies in a more progressive direction.

Looking at these results, one might conclude that debates over judicial method are pointless and that conservatives have won only a rhetorical triumph. If everyone is an originalist, does the term have any content? Jackson, after saying the Constitution is "fixed in its meaning" during her confirmation hearings, joined an opinion saying its meaning could "evolve."

But the cynical view is not the full truth. Today's liberal justices are less adventuresome in their legal reasoning than their predecessors were, limiting the scope of their activism. The politics of confirmation hearings have changed, too, with "originalism" no longer used as a marker for extremism.

Winning the public debate has made Democrats more cautious and Republicans bolder about who they nominate. It's one reason conservatives have a supermajority on the Supreme Court — and why progressives have been reduced to seeking solace on state courts.

Ramesh Ponnuru, a contributing columnist for The Washington Post, is the editor of National Review and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Criticizing a president is always OK, even Biden in '24

BY PERRY BACON JR.

The Washington Post

Democrats and others on the left need to stop slamming fellow liberals for criticizing President Joe Biden. The argument that defending democracy means people should keep their concerns about the most powerful person in the country to themselves because it's an election year is antithetical to robust public debate, free thought and other principles at the heart of democracy itself.

Thousands of Michigan Democrats are expected to vote "uncommitted" Tuesday in the party's presidential primary, to show their opposition to Biden's support of Israel's military actions in Gaza.

I assume Democrats strongly aligned with the president will attack the "uncommitted" voters for such a public rebuke of Biden, which they will say hurts the president and therefore automatically helps former President Donald Trump's campaign. Some Biden backers are already making that argument. And the "you're helping Trump" charge has been used against left-leaning writers who have said Democrats should reconsider putting up Biden as the party's candidate and against liberal talk-show host Jon Stewart for suggesting the president's age is a legitimate issue. (To his credit, Biden himself never makes these "shut up and fall in line" type of arguments.)

"If you're not willing to just support the president now ... you might as well just get

your MAGA hat, because you now are helping Trump," Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., said during an interview on MSNBC last week.

Democrats pushing back against any criticism of Biden do have a strong argument: They say that everything possible must be done to prevent a second term of the radical, anti-democratic Trump—even discouraging legitimate criticism of the president. And it's difficult to imagine it helps Biden electorally to have fellow Democrats saying he is old, unpopular, afraid of taking questions from the media and bungling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (We shouldn't automatically assume these criticisms will hurt Biden in November. Barack Obama resoundingly won the 2008 election, despite his supporters' claims that Hillary Clinton's extended primary run against him that spring was severely damaging Obama's general election prospects.)

Left-leaning critics of Biden are in a complicated position. Criticizing Biden now could result in Trump winning and turning the U.S. into an autocracy where, in the future, it would be much harder to slam a sitting president.

But even if Democratic criticism of Biden increases Trump's chances of winning, I still support people airing their concerns. Biden critics are engaging in essential acts of democracy: showing up and protesting at a political leader's events; slamming him in writing; voting against him in primaries to signal frustration. Democracy is what so many of us on the left claim we are fighting to defend from Trump. We shouldn't be against democratic

acts because they are electorally inconvenient.

If democratic actions must be paused anytime an election is near, to prevent the ascent of an autocratic leader, we are already living in something less than a full-fledged democracy.

Yes, you might say, because of the radicalism of today's Republicans, America is a quasi-democracy and it's essential for Biden to win to keep the "quasi" part. But in a democracy, the right way to win an election isn't trying to suppress alternative views; it is convincing people that your side's arguments are better.

In the case of the Democrats, either defending Biden's Gaza policy on the merits (very hard) or pushing him to change course (easier) are much more democratic alternatives than telling critics they shouldn't express their concerns publicly. Arguing that Biden is a capable president is a far superior course than suggesting people shouldn't bring up his age.

I deeply fear a Trump victory. But part of democracy is that sometimes a terrible candidate wins. A bigger subversion of democracy would be if the tens of millions of people who are likely to vote for Biden this fall were browbeaten into never publicly disagreeing with him before the election. "To protect democracy, people should not criticize the sitting president, the most powerful person in the country," is a ridiculous and highly contradictory argument. Democrats like Fetterman should stop making it.

Perry Bacon Jr. is a Washington Post columnist.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16				17				
18			19				20					
			21		22	23		24		25	26	27
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33				34				35		36		
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41				42		43						
			44		45			46		47	48	49
50	51	52				53	54			55		
56					57					58		
59					60					61		

ACROSS

- 1 With it, once
- 4 Castle defense
- 8 Viral phenomenon
- 12 Jurist Lance
- 13 Designer Gucci
- 14 Exam format
- 15 Holy Fr. woman
- 16 Misdirected
- 18 "Poison" shrub
- 20 Homer's lament
- 21 Floor cleaners
- 24 Jazz genre
- 28 Pro bono service
- 32 Wander
- 33 Rowing tool
- 34 Thousand, in France
- 36 Lincoln or Ford
- 37 Forehead
- 39 Undefeated boxer nicknamed "Madame Butterfly"
- 41 "Enigma Variations" composer
- 43 Missile shelter
- 44 Pen filler
- 46 "As — and breathe!"
- 50 Tibetan terrier
- 55 Tic-tac-toe win
- 56 Sunrise direction
- 57 Endure
- 58 Victory
- 59 Lodge members

- 60 Way out
- 61 Billboards

DOWN

- 1 Radiator sound
- 2 Words to Brutus
- 3 Wordsworth work
- 4 "Outliers" author Gladwell
- 5 Flamenco cheer
- 6 Put two and two together?
- 7 Frog's kin
- 8 Beyonce, to Blue Ivy
- 9 Blunder
- 10 Goat's cry
- 11 TV Tarzan Ron
- 17 Cry
- 19 Docs' org.
- 22 Sandbox toy
- 23 George Eliot's Marner
- 25 — Raton
- 26 Cameo shape
- 27 Actress Gilpin
- 28 Earring site
- 29 Hoops great Monroe
- 30 Pirate's drink
- 31 552, in old Rome
- 35 Rapper Missy
- 38 Belted areas
- 40 "You've got mail" co.
- 42 Genetic letters
- 45 Curly cabbage
- 47 Corn Belt state
- 48 Nullify
- 49 Eternities
- 50 Golfer Trevino
- 51 "2001" computer
- 52 Request
- 53 Peace, to Caesar
- 54 Govt. stipend

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

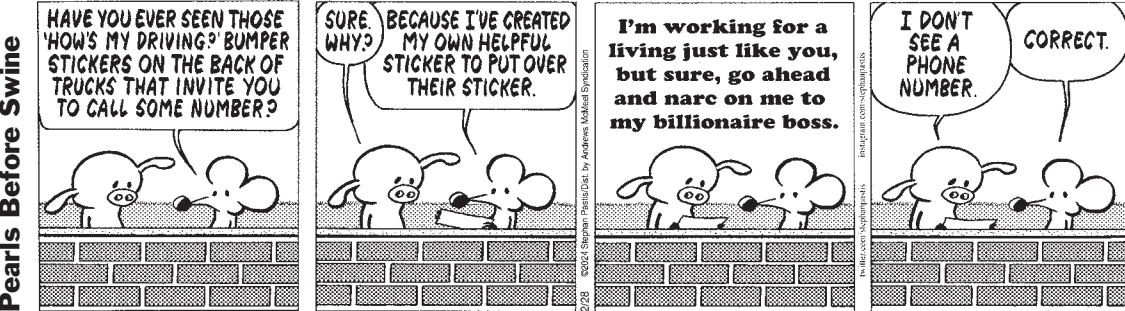
2-28

CRYPTOQUIP

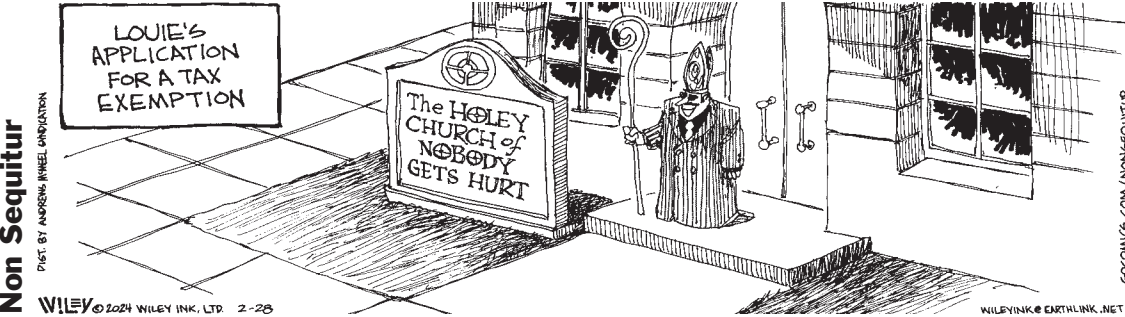
G VGIXDVGIYWYGQ OEKIDL CO
G NGHTD GLLYIYEQ KRVPEN
EQ XYK EAAYWD LEEH. Y'L
KGR YI'K G PYT ONCK.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: POP VOCAL TRIO WHOSE MEMBERS CREATE ART ON A BIG CANVAS WHILE SINGING: THE PAINTER SISTERS.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals F

Frazz



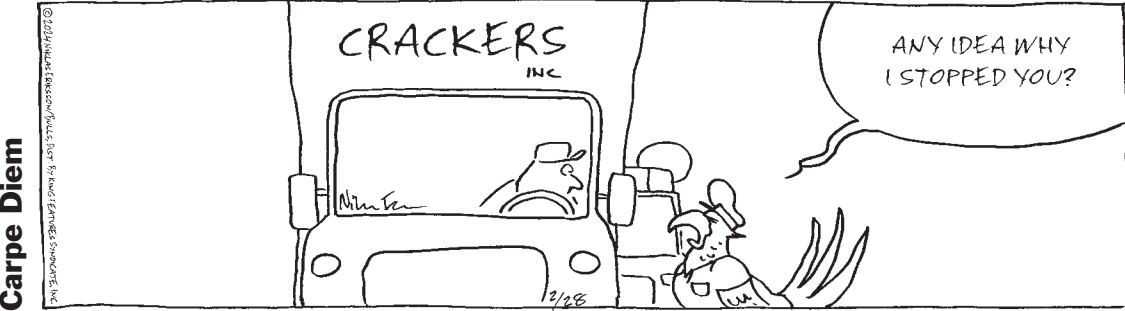
Pearls Before Swine



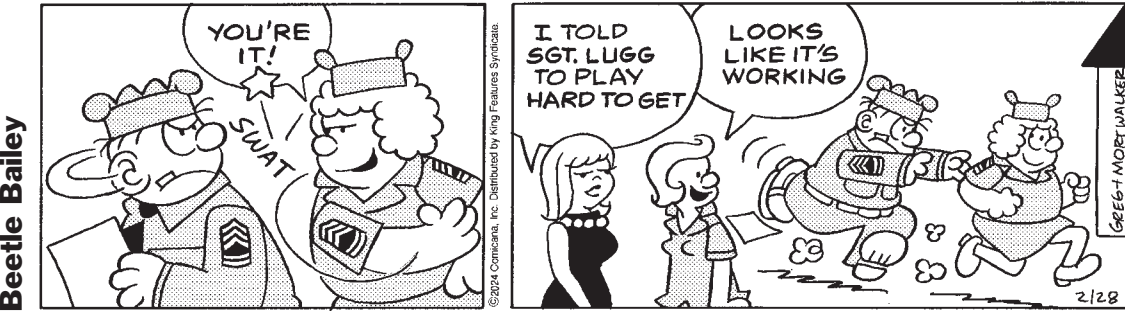
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

MLB



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Manuel Margot participates in spring training workouts for the Los Angeles Dodgers at Camelback Ranch in Phoenix on Feb. 19. Margot will fly across the country to Florida after being traded to the Minnesota Twins.

Twins acquire Margot in 3-player deal with Dodgers

By DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Twins acquired outfielder Manuel Margot, minor league shortstop Rayne Doncon and cash on Monday from the Los Angeles Dodgers for minor league shortstop Noah Miller.

In conjunction with the trade, the Dodgers announced a \$4 million, one-year contract to keep Kiké Hernández.

The 29-year-old Margot just joined the Dodgers two months ago with starting pitcher Tyler Glasnow in a trade with Tampa Bay. Margot hit .264 with a .686 OPS in 99 games for the Rays last season while playing center field and right field. He has also played left field.

“A guy that can complement you very well against left-handed pitching,” Twins manager Rocco Baldelli said. “He helps you in the middle of the field. He does a lot of things skill-set wise. We talked about rounding our team out with the right kinds of players — he is that kind of player. He’s a great character add for our team off the field and in the clubhouse.”

Margot made his major league debut with San Diego in 2016 and was the primary center fielder for the Padres from 2017-19, before being traded to the Rays. In 788 career games, he’s batted .255 with a

.694 OPS, 52 home runs and 91 stolen bases.

“Normally at that age, some guys are really slowing down. He’s not,” Baldelli said. “His foot speed is literally pretty close to what it’s been previously, and he’s a really good athlete.”

Margot has a \$10 million salary this season as part of a \$19 million, two-year contract he signed with the Rays, a deal that includes a \$12 million mutual option for 2025 with a \$2 million buyout. If the option is not exercised, the Rays must pay the Dodgers an additional \$2 million as part of the Glasnow trade.

The Rays agreed to send the Dodgers an additional \$2 million toward Margot’s salary for 2024, and Twins president of baseball operations Derek Falvey said his club will receive that \$4 million commitment as well as an unspecified amount on top of that from the Dodgers to cover Margot’s salary. The Twins have pared back their payroll in 2024 in light of a reduction in regional television revenue.

Margot will essentially replace Michael A. Taylor, who became a free agent after hitting a career-high 21 homers and playing 126 games in center field last season while star Byron Buxton was limited to designated hitter duty due to knee trouble. Buxton is healthy again and on track to be the regular

center fielder, with Matt Wallner in left and Max Kepler in right, but utilityman Willi Castro was the only other sure bet for the opening day roster with reliable outfield experience.

Margot was a player the Twins had targeted for a while as a fit for his exceptional defensive ability in the corners, as well as his capability of handling center field when Buxton is out of the lineup.

“Everything we’ve gathered from guys who’ve been with him in Tampa and other spots is how instinctive he is, how good he is off the bat, how good his reads are, his ability to go in both directions to go get it,” Falvey said.

The 20-year-old Doncon played last season for Class A Rancho Cucamonga. He was signed out of the Dominican Republic.

Miller was the 36th overall pick by the Twins in the 2021 amateur draft. The 21-year-old finished last season with Class A Cedar Rapids.

Hernández hit .237 with 11 home runs and 61 RBIs in 140 games with the Red Sox and Dodgers in 2023 while playing all four infield and all three outfield positions. The 33-year-old was reacquired by the Dodgers from Boston on July 25 and became a free agent after the World Series.

Hernández has played in 10 major league seasons, including parts of seven with the Dodgers.

Bernabel looks to make mark for Rockies after getting shot in robbery

By PATRICK SAUNDERS
The Denver Post

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Considering what happened to Warming Bernabel, the question had to be asked: Does he feel lucky to be alive and playing baseball?

“Absolutely,” the Rockies’ soft-spoken, 21-year-old third base prospect said. “It was very scary.”

On Dec. 3, in his hometown of Bani in the Dominican Republic, Bernabel was shot through the back. The bullet entered one side of the small of his back and exited the other. Miraculously, the bullet missed his spine and didn’t damage any organs.

Bernabel remembers all of the details of that night.

“We were feeling hungry and my wife and I wanted to go out to dinner at a restaurant,” Bernabel recalled through interpreter Aaron Munoz, the Rockies’ bullpen catcher.

When Bernabel and his wife, Wilvely, got to the restaurant, Bernabel was assaulted by three men.

“They tried to steal the gold chain from around my neck,” Bernabel said. “They attempted to rob me.”

According to Bernabel, the owner of the restaurant noticed the scuffle, came outside, then shot his gun at the robbers.

“He started firing at them, he helped me out,” Bernabel said.

But then the robbers fired back and one of the shots struck Bernabel. The bullet went through his back and struck his wife in the biceps. Wilvely was not seriously injured and Bernabel only had to spend one night in the hospital.

Nonetheless, it was a traumatic event.

“That week after, I was a little bit scared,” Bernabel said. “I wasn’t able to walk or shower, but after that, it got better.”

The Rockies, led by Rolando Fernandez, the club’s vice president of international development and scouting, were with Bernabel every step of the way during his recovery. One of the alleged suspects was arrested, Bernabel said, but the other two have not been.

The 6-foot-2, 190-pounder arrived at spring training having lost 18 pounds and in the best shape of his professional career.

“I came to camp to improve on everything and just compete the best I can,” Bernabel said.

Bernabel entered 2023 with a spot on the 40-man roster and a lot of momentum after a solid 2022 season in which he finished ranked as Colorado’s No. 8 overall prospect by MLB Pipeline. He earned MiLB All-Star recognition after slashing .313/.370/.499 at Low-A Fresno and High-A Spokane, with 14 home runs and 71 RBIs in 91 games.

But Bernabel, slowed by a lower back injury that sidelined him for more than a month, struggled last season at Double-A Hartford. Bernabel put up a modest .225/.270/.338 slash line with six homers in 83 games (302 plate appearances).

Bernabel signed with Colorado in 2018 for \$900,000 as an international free agent. He didn’t shine during his first pro season in 2019 with Colorado’s Dominican Summer League teams, hitting .250 with four homers in 55 games. But in 2019, he heated up for the Rockies’ rookie team in the Arizona Complex League, posting a 1.197 OPS in 22 ACL games.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP

Colorado Rockies third base prospect Warming Bernabel was shot through the back on Dec. 3 in the Dominican Republic.

ROUNDUP

Horvat, Islanders beat Stars in OT

Associated Press

DALLAS — Bo Horvat scored at 2:54 of overtime, his second extra-period winner against Dallas this season, as the New York Islanders beat the Stars 3-2 on Monday night.

Ryan Pulock had a goal and an assist and Kyle MacLean also scored for the Islanders in their second win in seven games (2-3-2). Ilya Sorokin stopped 30 shots.

In overtime, Horvat took a pass from Mathew Barzal and scored from the slot moving toward the net on one knee. He also ended New York's 3-2 win over Dallas at home on Jan. 21 in Patrick Roy's debut as Islanders coach.

"I don't know if it's just ... we've got their number this year," said Horvat, second on the team with 23 goals.

The Islanders are tied with New Jersey, seven points behind Tampa Bay for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. Washington is one point ahead of the Islanders and Devils.

"We know every game matters for the rest of the season," Horvat said. "That's a big two points today."

Logan Stankoven had a goal and an assist for his first two NHL points in his second game, and Matt Duchene scored for his 800th career point as the Stars lost for the fifth time in six games (1-3-2) and lead the Central Division by two points. Scott Wedgewood had 25 saves.

Kraken 4, Bruins 3 (SO): Kailer Yamamoto scored the only goal in a shootout and host Seattle overcame David Pastrnak's hat trick to beat Boston.

Jordan Eberle, Vince Dunn and Oliver Bjorkstrand scored for the Kraken. Philipp Grubauer denied all three Bruins shootout attempts, the last of which was by Pastrnak.

It was Boston's sixth straight game that went beyond regulation time. By earning one point, the Bruins tied idle Vancouver for the most points in the NHL at 82.

Oilers 4, Kings 2: Leon Draisaitl and Evan Bouchard each had a goal and an assist as host Edmonton beat Los Angeles to snap a three-game skid.

Zach Hyman and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins also scored, and Connor McDavid had two assists to help the Oilers move two points up on the Kings for third place in the Pacific Division.



LM OTERO/AP

New York Islanders center Bo Horvat celebrates his game-winning goal in overtime with teammate Mike Reilly against the Stars in Dallas on Monday. The Islanders won 3-2.

sion. Stuart Skinner stopped 38 shots.

Trevor Moore and Alex Laferriere scored for the Kings, who had won five of six. David Rittich finished with 27 saves.

Capitals 6, Senators 3: Hendrix Lapierre scored twice and host Washington inched closer to playoff position by beating Ottawa.

John Carlson, Max Pacioretty, Aliaksei Pro-

tas and Beck Malenstyn each had a goal as the Capitals won for the fourth time in five games. They've picked up a point in seven of their past eight since ending a six-game losing streak.

As a result, they're four points back of Philadelphia for third place in the Metropolitan Division, with two extra games left to play.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Boston	60	35	12	13	83	202	164	
Florida	58	38	16	4	80	191	140	
Toronto	57	33	16	8	74	214	179	
Detroit	58	32	20	6	70	205	183	
Tampa Bay	60	32	23	5	69	206	201	
Buffalo	58	27	27	4	58	169	175	
Ottawa	56	25	28	3	53	189	199	
Montreal	58	22	28	8	52	163	209	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
N.Y. Rangers	59	39	17	3	81	197	163	
Carolina	58	34	18	6	74	191	163	
Philadelphia	59	30	22	7	67	177	175	
Washington	57	27	21	9	63	150	178	
New Jersey	58	29	25	4	62	191	203	
N.Y. Islanders	58	24	20	14	62	170	197	
Pittsburgh	55	26	21	8	60	166	151	
Columbus	57	19	28	10	48	170	210	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Dallas	60	35	16	9	79	217	182	
Winnipeg	56	36	15	5	77	172	133	
Colorado	59	35	19	5	75	216	188	
Nashville	59	32	25	2	66	184	187	
St. Louis	57	30	25	2	62	167	178	
Minnesota	58	28	24	6	62	186	193	
Arizona	57	23	29	5	51	166	188	
Chicago	59	15	39	5	35	123	208	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vancouver	60	38	16	6	82	218	166	
Vegas	58	32	19	7	71	186	165	
Edmonton	56	34	20	2	70	201	168	
Los Angeles	57	29	18	10	68	176	156	
Calgary	58	28	25	5	61	181	182	
Seattle	58	24	22	12	60	162	169	
Anaheim	58	20	35	3	43	151	207	
San Jose	56	15	36	5	35	118	215	

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

Monday's games

Washington 6, Ottawa 3
N.Y. Islanders 3, Dallas 2, OT
Edmonton 4, Los Angeles 2
Seattle 4, Boston 3, SO

Tuesday's games

Arizona at Montreal
Buffalo at Florida
Tampa Bay at Philadelphia
Vegas at Toronto
Washington at Detroit
Carolina at Minnesota
Ottawa at Nashville
St. Louis at Winnipeg
Los Angeles at Calgary
Dallas at Colorado
Pittsburgh at Vancouver
New Jersey at San Jose

Wednesday's games

Columbus at N.Y. Rangers
St. Louis at Edmonton

Many from Beijing Olympics already making impact

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Just two years ago, hockey at the Beijing Olympics went ahead without NHL players because of COVID-19 pandemic-related scheduling issues.

"Gosh, that feels like so long ago," said Matthew Knies, who played for the United States. "It's crazy."

Crazy that since then, more than two dozen of those 2022 Winter Games participants have already played in the NHL — including Knies and several others making a big impact. Seattle's Matty Beniers, Minnesota's Brock Faber and Ottawa's Jake Sanderson were teammates of Knies, Canada has had a handful of prospects turn into professionals,



Knies



Faber

from Buffalo's Owen Power to Anaheim's Mason McTavish, and Juraj Slafkovsky of Slovakia is growing into his game with Montreal after being the No. 1 pick in the 2022 draft.

"It's crazy how fast it goes once you're there and in a couple years you're playing in the NHL against the best players in the world," said Slafkovsky, who led all scorers in Beijing with seven goals and was the tournament MVP. He and

now-New Jersey defenseman Simon Nemec helped Slovakia win its first Olympic medal.

Slafkovsky had been on a heater recently, with 11 points in an earlier seven-game stretch, pushing for a bigger role with the Canadiens before he turns 20. Captain Nick Suzuki is impressed, knowing Slafkovsky is just getting started 24 months after his Olympic coming-out party.

"Most of us were in junior (hockey) or in college, and he's playing at the highest level against the top players," Suzuki said.

The same can be said for Beniers, Power, Faber, Sanderson, McTavish and Knies, who made his debut late last season with Toronto and is considered a big piece of the Maple Leafs' long-term fu-

ture. A total of 29 players from the Beijing Olympics have been in the NHL from March 2022 until now, including 16 this season.

Knies called it a good taste of what was to come in the NHL and a boost in confidence once that day arrived. Faber learned a lot from his first chance to "play some grown-up hockey" against experienced adults.

"Being in college and world juniors, obviously it's such a high level, but playing there it was just a whole different level of physicality and speed and skill and obviously every guy is just so smart," Faber said. "It helped me take a step for my game, that's for sure, and kind of helped me realize what it takes to play at the next level."



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

Montreal Canadiens left wing Juraj Slafkovsky was the MVP of 2022 Olympics playing for Slovakia before being drafted No. 1 overall later that year.

NBA/SOCCER



Knicks guard Jalen Brunson, top, jumps on Josh Hart after Hart made the winning basket with 2.8 seconds left against Detroit on Monday.

NBA ROUNDUP

Hart gets winner after missed call

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson missed a 3-pointer, eventually got the ball back and passed it to Josh Hart for the go-ahead basket.

In between were three turnovers and a missed foul call in one of the most chaotic and controversial possessions of the season.

Hart ended it with a layup with 2.8 seconds left and the New York Knicks beat the Detroit Pistons 113-111 on Monday night.

“We won. This is the NBA, man. We don’t care how we win. We don’t care how ugly it is,” Hart said.

Brunson had 35 points and 12 assists for the Knicks, and it was his missed 3-point attempt with 20 seconds remaining that started the wild back-and-forth that led to Hart’s basket and left Pistons coach Monty Williams irate afterward.

Detroit chased down the rebound but threw it away, then appeared to recover when Ausur Thompson stole a pass by Donte DiVincenzo. But then Thompson lost the ball during a collision with DiVincenzo along the sideline, the Knicks came up with it and Brunson found Hart under the basket for his layup while being fouled.

“Donte dove for the ball and the ball came loose and then I looked at the clock, looked up the floor, saw Josh was open and just got around their defense and hit him,” Brunson said.

Referees determined afterward that DiVincenzo fouled Thompson.

“Upon postgame review, we determined that Thompson gets to the ball first, and then was deprived of the opportunity to gain possession of the ball,” crew chief

James Williams said. “Therefore, a loose-ball foul should have been whistled on New York’s Donte DiVincenzo.”

After the Pistons lost their sixth straight, Williams went onto the court to yell at one of the officials near where Thompson went down.

“The absolute worst call of the season,” Williams said during his brief postgame remarks. “No call, and enough’s enough.”

It left the Pistons with the same anger the Knicks had after a Feb. 12 loss in Houston, when officials said afterward they shouldn’t have called a foul on Brunson with 0.3 seconds remaining, giving Aaron Holiday the free throws that gave the Rockets a 105-103 victory. The Knicks have filed a protest.

“I’d say livid,” Detroit guard Cade Cunningham said. “That’s the word of the day. Livid.”

Hart added 23 points and DiVincenzo had 21 for the Knicks, who beat the Pistons for the 14th straight time.

Cunningham scored 32 and Jalen Duren had 11 points and 16 rebounds for Detroit.

Heat 121, Kings 110: Bam Adebayo scored 28 points, Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 26 and short-handed Miami beat host Sacramento for its fourth straight win.

Kevin Love provided a spark with 19 points off the bench and Caleb Martin scored 16 for the Heat, who were missing three starters because of injuries or suspensions.

Sacramento’s Domantas Sabonis had 14 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists for his NBA-high 21st triple-double of the season.

Raptors 130, Pacers 122: All-Star Scottie Barnes had 21 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for his fourth triple-double of the season

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	45	12	.789	—
New York	35	23	.603	10½
Philadelphia	33	24	.579	12
Brooklyn	22	35	.386	23
Toronto	22	36	.379	23½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	32	25	.561	—
Orlando	32	26	.552	½
Atlanta	25	32	.439	7
Charlotte	15	42	.263	17
Washington	9	48	.158	23
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	37	19	.661	—
Milwaukee	37	21	.638	1
Indiana	33	26	.559	5½
Chicago	27	30	.474	10½
Detroit	8	49	.140	29½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	34	24	.586	—
Dallas	33	24	.579	½
Houston	25	32	.439	8½
Memphis	20	38	.345	14
San Antonio	11	47	.190	23
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	40	17	.702	—
Oklahoma City	40	17	.702	—
Denver	39	19	.672	1½
Utah	27	31	.466	13½
Portland	15	41	.268	24½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	37	19	.661	—
Phoenix	34	24	.586	4
Sacramento	33	24	.579	4½
L.A. Lakers	31	28	.525	7½
Golden State	29	27	.518	8
Monday's games				
Toronto 130, Indiana 122				
New York 113, Detroit 111				
Brooklyn 111, Memphis 86				
Miami 121, Sacramento 110				
Tuesday's games				
Brooklyn at Orlando				
Dallas at Cleveland				
Golden State at Washington				
New Orleans at New York				
Philadelphia at Boston				
Utah at Atlanta				
Charlotte at Milwaukee				
Detroit at Chicago				
San Antonio at Minnesota				
Houston at Oklahoma City				
Miami at Portland				
Wednesday's games				
Dallas at Toronto				
New Orleans at Indiana				
Cleveland at Chicago				
Memphis at Minnesota				
Sacramento at Denver				
L.A. Lakers at L.A. Clippers				
Thursday's games				
Milwaukee at Charlotte				
Utah at Orlando				
Atlanta at Brooklyn				
Golden State at New York				
Oklahoma City at San Antonio				
Houston at Phoenix				
Miami at Denver				
Washington at L.A. Lakers				

for visiting Toronto.

RJ Barrett scored 24 points for the Raptors, who won their third straight.

All-Star Tyrese Haliburton struggled for Indiana, finishing with nine points.

Nets 111, Grizzlies 86: Dennis Schroder scored 18 points, Dorian Finney-Smith added 13 points and nine rebounds, and visiting Brooklyn gave Kevin Ollie his first win as an NBA coach.

Lamar Stevens scored 17 points on 8-for-9 shooting, but Memphis, shot 38.7% overall.

US falls to Mexico for just 2nd time

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

CARSON, Calif.— Mexico beat the United States for the second time ever, getting goals from Lizbeth Ovalle and Mayra Pelayo for a 2-0 victory Monday night in the CONCACAF Women’s Gold Cup.

The U.S. entered the game 40-1-1 against its rival, with its only previous loss a 2-1 decision during Women’s World Cup qualifying in 2010.

It was the first loss for the U.S. under interim coach Twila Kilgore, who took over after the team’s dramatic exit from the Women’s World Cup last summer in the round of 16. Emma Hayes will take over for Kilgore this spring.

Mexico, which failed to qualify for last year’s World Cup, finished atop Group A in the Gold Cup while the United States finished second. Both teams advanced to the knockout round.

“They went out and they were bold, they were brave with the dream of playing a good game against the United States,” Mexico coach Pedro Lopez Ramos said.

Ovalle, who plays for Tigres of Monterrey, put Mexico ahead in the 28th minute. U.S. defender Becky Sauerbrunn tried to defend Ovalle but kicked the ball right at her. Ovalle floated a shot over goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher and two U.S. defenders and into the net.

It was the first goal conceded by the U.S. to a CONCACAF opponent in 33 matches.

“I think it just shows how far the game is coming and there’s no easy games anymore. And if we don’t take care of business and we don’t execute, this is to be expected,” Kilgore said. “We’ll step up and take ownership in that and I think anytime you have a group that is willing to take ownership in things like this, it’s a good thing for

the future of the tournament. Everything’s still on the table and we’ll be motivated, that’s for sure.”

Sauerbrunn took full responsibility for the goal, both on the field and in the locker room afterward.

“As a veteran, you know, you have some rough days at the office and tonight is definitely a rough day,” she said. “But luckily, you’ll have another day at the office and it’s just what you make out of it.”

Mexico nearly scored again in first-half stoppage time but Karla Nieto’s shot from distance hit the crossbar.

Kiana Palacios had a good chance to give Mexico a cushion but her shot hit defender Abby Dahlkemper and bounded away.

By that time, Mexico could feel its momentum.

Pelayo scored from distance in stoppage time and Mexico’s players celebrated wildly on the field.

“If we lose in the quarterfinals, then the beautiful win of today is useless,” Lopez Ramos said through a translator. “I hope that this is not an isolated moment.”

The United States saw success from its teenagers in the first two games of the tournament. Olivia Moultrie, 18, scored twice in a 5-0 victory over the Dominican Republic and Jaedyn Shaw, 19, scored a pair in a 4-0 victory over Argentina.

But Mexico played surprisingly tough and the United States could not rebound after conceding that first goal.

This is the first-ever Women’s Gold Cup, created to give women’s teams in the CONCACAF region more competitive matches.

The teams will be re-seeded following the group stage, so Mexico and the United States will have to wait to learn their opponents in the quarterfinals.



United States forward Sophia Smith, front, tries to control the ball in front of three Mexico players during Monday night’s match.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Duke's Scheyer says ACC needs to act now

Coach wants measures in place to stop court storming after injury to Filipowski

By Aaron Beard
Associated Press

Duke coach Jon Scheyer wants the Atlantic Coast Conference to implement measures to prevent court storming after star big man Kyle Filipowski was hobbled following a collision with a fan during a weekend loss at Wake Forest.

Scheyer said Monday that Filipowski was “a little bit sore” following the incident, which left him sporting a bag of ice on his knee after banging his right leg into the leg of a fan running by him toward mid-court.

“Absolutely we shouldn’t wait until next year, something should be done right now,” Scheyer said during the weekly league coaches teleconference, adding: “At the end of the day, players and coaches and officials are the only people that belong on a court.”

Scheyer — who initially mis-spoke Saturday when he said Filipowski hurt his ankle — said Monday that the preseason Associated Press All-American didn’t require any type of diagnostic internal imaging for his knee to search for a structural injury. Filipowski didn’t have a significant limp when he spoke to a few reporters after the game, though his status wasn’t immediately clear for the 10th-ranked Blue Devils’ game Wednesday against an eight-win Louisville team.

Scheyer followed his postgame

call to ban court storming with a plea for the ACC to put such a policy in place now, even with Duke down to four regular-season games and only one on the road (at North Carolina State on March 4).

The ACC requires member schools to have detailed safety procedures in place for managing court stormings. But it historically has not levied fines, something four of the six major basketball conferences do for a first offense.

The ACC has no plans to issue a fine to Wake Forest, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Monday. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the league hasn’t commented publicly beyond commissioner Jim Phillips’ statement Saturday night.

Still, the image of Filipowski having to be helped off the court amid the chaos only added to the discussion on the dangers of court storming in a season with multiple run-ins, the highest-profile one being when Iowa star Caitlin Clark was accidentally knocked down by a fan running onto the court after a January upset loss.

Alabama athletic director Greg Byrne went as far as saying he thinks teams should have to forfeit in scenarios like the Duke-Wake Forest game.

“You have two kids run out there, no, but when you have a sustained rush like what just hap-



Duke's Kyle Filipowski is fouled by Wake Forest's Matthew Marsh during Saturday's game in Winston-Salem, N.C. Filipowski was injured after the game when Wake Forest fans stormed the court.

pened the other day at Wake, you lose the game,” Byrne told reporters in Birmingham on Monday. “That will get people to stop.”

Purdue coach Matt Painter raised concerns about court-storming security measures after a loss at Nebraska, less than two weeks before Clark’s collision. And on Sunday, after his Boiler-makers had beaten Michigan, Painter reiterated those concerns while noting that court-storming fans can simply overwhelm security measures.

“But also watch the weather, because when they say it’s snowing, you’ve got to be ready for the

snow,” Painter told the AP. “You know Duke’s coming to town or you know Kansas is coming to town or the (then-) No. 1-ranked team in the country, UConn, is coming to town. If they get upset, it’s probably going to happen.

“Well, they probably should make a rule so it doesn’t happen, period. Just period.”

Painter went on to say: “The NCAA has got to step in here and show some leadership on this. Because what’s happened to Caitlin Clark, what happened to Filipowski, should not happen.”

It’s a position echoed by Kansas coach Bill Self, who said the court-

storming at Wake Forest “was one of the quickest ones I’ve ever seen.”

“That happened so fast,” Self told a small group of reporters Monday. “And if you don’t have the proper security in a situation like that, it would be hard to imagine that fans do not come into contact with visiting players, which could lead obviously to injuries or maybe legal things down the road. I would hope they could totally do away with them.”

AP basketball writer Dave Skretta in Lawrence, Kansas, and AP sports writers Larry Lage in Ann Arbor, Mich., and John Zenor in Alabama contributed to this report.

Stock: Tennessee coach asks Knecht to be best player on court



Dalton Knecht chose to play for Rick Barnes at Tennessee because Barnes coached Knecht's favorite player, Kevin Durant, when he was at Texas.

FROM PAGE 24

“My teammates, they just told me it was going to be like this. But maybe I didn’t think it’s going to be like this much,” Knecht said. “But it’s just really cool just to see our work pay off and be with great teammates and great coaching staff.”

The shooter from Thornton, Colo., led the Big Sky at Northern Colorado last season by averaging 20.2 points. That was good enough to rank 23rd nationally in Division I.

Knecht knew he needed to hone other parts of his game, especially his defensive skills.

The chance to play for the man who at Texas coached Kevin Durant, Knecht’s favorite player growing up, made playing for Barnes the easy choice.

Barnes, who notched his 800th career victory Saturday night when the Vols beat Texas A&M, has asked Knecht to be the best player on the court, and not just when it comes to scoring.

“Every single time on defense, offense, rebounding,” Knecht said. “In every aspect of the game, he wants me to be consistent and the best.”

Knecht has been dazzling since the Volunteers started their SEC slate. He became the first Tennessee player to score at least 30 points in four of five games and the first SEC player to do that in 14 years. He became the seventh Tennessee player with five 30-point games in a season.

He credits his new teammates with helping ease his transition into the mighty SEC, which features five other ranked teams this week.

After he scored 32 in a win at Vanderbilt, they crowded around as he took questions from reporters, one asking how it felt to be nicknamed the “White Mamba.”

“That’s what y’all call me,” said Knecht, with a chuckle.

To improve defensively, coaches wanted Knecht more active in the passing lanes. He did just that two weeks ago in a road win at Arkansas. Assistant coach Gregg Polinsky said Knecht was asked to use his length defending the Razorbacks’ top scorer, guard Tramon Mark.

“Sure enough, Dalton blocked a shot,” Polinsky said. “Great move, great matchup. But at the same time, that’s Dalton. Like

give him credit for kind of upping his game, if you will, at the defensive end of the floor. And we still know there’s a lot more to go in a good way, so Dalton can keep getting better there.”

Knecht shook off a cold start last week at Missouri, after missing his first eight attempts. He then hit 6 of 8 shots in less than five minutes in the second half. He scored 15 of his 17 points in the final 13:18 as Tennessee pulled out a 72-67 win. He also finished with 10 rebounds for his first double-double this season.

With the return of fifth-year seniors Josiah Jordan-James and Santiago Vescovi, the Volunteers came into this season targeting that elusive Final Four berth. Knecht’s ability to score when a bucket is needed most gives Tennessee that chance.

Playing in the SEC against faster, stronger players has been just what Knecht was looking for, as well.

“You’re playing against top draft picks every single game almost,” Knecht said. “And, yeah, it’s just real fun just to go out there and compete against the best and with my teammates.”

COLLEGE BASKETBALL



North Carolina guard RJ Davis drives against Miami guards Matthew Cleveland, left, and Paul Djobet during the first half on Monday in Chapel Hill, N.C. Davis had 42 points as the Tar Heels won 75-71.

CHRIS SEWARD/AP

MEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

North Carolina tops Miami, Davis has record 42 points

Associated Press
CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — After a huge first half, RJ Davis saw no reason to back off.
Davis poured in four straight 3-pointers during a riveting second-half stretch on his way to a career-high 42 points, and No. 9 North Carolina held off skidding Miami 75-71 on Monday night.
“I kind of felt good most of the game,” Davis said. “Came out hot. I told myself since I had a good first half to continue to stay on it. I was aggressive and shots were falling. For me to have a performance like that tonight means the world to me.”
Davis, a senior guard who set a single-game Smith Center scoring record, had 21 points in each half. He picked up the pace with a dazzling display with less than 7½ minutes to play, and ended up shooting 7 for 11 on 3s.
The only player for the Tar Heels (22-6, 14-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) to score in double figures, Davis went 1 for 2 at the free-

throw line with 24.4 seconds remaining to give UNC a 73-70 advantage.
“It wasn’t just his points,” coach Hubert Davis said. “I thought he was great defensively, took care of the ball. We needed every bit of his 42.”
Norchad Omier had 22 points, Bensley Joseph scored 21 and Kyshawn George added 14 to lead Miami (15-14, 6-12), which lost its seventh game in a row.
Omier missed a hook shot in the lane that could have tied it with about 45 seconds left. Then twice in the last 25 seconds, North Carolina secured offensive rebounds off missed free throws.
“That was a valiant effort on our part,” Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. “RJ Davis had an answer every time we made a run.”
North Carolina, with three regular-season games remaining, stretched its ACC lead to 1½ games over second-place Duke.
Davis racked up the most points for a Tar Heels player since Sham-

mond Williams scored 42 in a 1998 double-overtime win at Georgia Tech.
“He put us on his back and took over the game,” forward Harrison Ingram said. “RJ took the ball and (let’s) see what he does.”
No. 15 Baylor 62, TCU 54: Ja’Kobe Walter scored 13 of his 16 points after halftime, and the standout freshman started and capped a game-turning spurt by the visiting Bears in a win over the Horned Frogs.
Yves Missi, a 7-foot freshman, also finished with 16 points and Jalen Bridges scored 15 as Baylor (20-8, 9-6 Big 12) snapped a two-game skid. RayJ Dennis had nine points, nine rebounds and nine assists.
Jameer Nelson Jr. had 11 points and Emanuel Miller 10 for TCU (19-9, 8-7), which made 33% (17 of 51) of its shots. That included 10 consecutive misses to end the first half, and a span of nine misses in a row over 7½ minutes after half-time.

WOMEN'S TOP 25 THIS WEEK

No. 1 South Carolina still unbeaten with season almost over

By DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press
Dawn Staley has South Carolina in a familiar place with a week left in the regular season.

For the second straight year, the No. 1 Gamecocks haven’t lost a game heading into March — a feat they hadn’t accomplished before last season. Even with all five starters from last year’s Final Four run gone, the Gamecocks sit at 27-0 with two games left.
They visit Arkansas on Thursday before hosting Tennessee on Sunday. The Gamecocks clinched their third consecutive outright Southeastern Conference regular-season championship and eighth in 11 years after Sunday’s win over Kentucky.

“We haven’t lost a game and our players are thinking this is the way it is. The competition gets better and better as we approach the postseason,” Staley said after beating Kentucky on Sunday. “We want to give our players their flowers, but want them to know there’s work to do.”

Staley has been impressed with her squad and how even when they have been down in games, have rallied.

“They find a way to win basketball games,” she said. “That’s the sign of a really good team. I’m not gonna say that we’re not a good basketball team. We’re a really good basketball team when we are playing like we played today.”

It’s been a balanced effort for the Gamecocks, who have seven players averaging 8.5 points or more this season.

Once again, South Carolina won’t have to go far for the SEC

Tournament as it’s played in Greenville. The Gamecocks are poised for the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament. They will have the first two games at home and then will most likely travel to Albany, N.Y., for the regional, meaning they won’t have to leave the Eastern time zone. The other regional is out in Portland, Ore.

While the Gamecocks have wrapped up the SEC already, there are a bunch of other big games this week.

Home finale for Clark?

Sunday’s matchup against No. 2 Ohio State could be sixth-ranked Iowa star Caitlin Clark’s final regular season game at home. The NCAA’s all-time scoring leader has a fifth year of eligibility left if she wants it. She hasn’t announced whether she’ll come back for a fifth-year or enter the WNBA draft, where she would be the presumed No. 1 pick.

Clark will have potentially two more games at home in the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament, as the top 16 teams host those games.

Big 12 title up for grabs

No. 3 Texas visits 20th-ranked Oklahoma on Wednesday with first-place in the Big 12 Conference on the line.

The Sooners have a one-game lead over the Longhorns. Oklahoma won the first meeting by four points last month. If Texas wins and the two teams end up tied in the standings — they each have one game left after Wednesday — then they’d share the regular season crown.

Dawn Staley
South Carolina coach



JAMES CRISP/AP

South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley, center, talks with her staff in the second half against Kentucky on Sunday in Lexington, Ky.

SPORTS



Chaotic ending

Knicks edge Pistons on layup at buzzer after missed foul call » **NBA, Page 21**

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Improving his stock

Knecht adds to draft value, helps Vols chase Final Four

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

Dalton Knecht's decision to transfer to Tennessee and hopefully improve his NBA Draft stock sure seems poised to pay off. Both for him and the fourth-ranked Volunteers.

The 6-foot-6 forward is second in the Southeastern Conference with 20.1 points per game since league play started in January. His ability to knock down layups, dunks and 3-pointers has skyrocketed Knecht to a potential lottery pick this June.

"It's worked out great for me," Knecht said.

Not only has Knecht played his way into consideration for both SEC and national player of the year, his ability to get key buckets could provide the missing link for coach Rick Barnes and Tennessee to finally earn the program's first Final Four berth.

"We didn't have a guy that could go get the points like Dalton did tonight when we needed them," Barnes said last week after a win at Missouri.

Knecht's scoring has put him in company with Tennessee legends like Bernard King, Ernie Grunfeld, Chris Lofton and Allan Houston. With four regular-season games remaining, these Vols are tied with No. 14 Alabama atop the standings in the chase for the Southeastern Conference regular-season title.

SEE STOCK ON PAGE 22

Dalton Knecht's scoring average has barely changed at Tennessee since transferring from Northern Colorado. He led the Big Sky Conference last season with 20.2 points per game, and averages 20.1 points in the Southeastern Conference.

WADE PAYNE/AP



Twins acquire Margot in trade with Dodgers » MLB, Page 19

