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CHRISTOPHER BOKUM/U.S. Coast Guard

USCGC Polar Star escorts an Australian-owned cruise ship out of pack ice in the Ross Sea after the vessel requested assistance amid Operation Deep Freeze 2026 on Jan. 17.

'It takes raw power'

Coast Guard called to help luxury cruise ship stuck in Antarctica

BY ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

On the 12th day of their Antarctica cruise, a group of passengers aboard the Scenic Eclipse II helicoptered into the McMurdo Dry Valleys, the largest ice-free area on the frozen continent. Hours later, they found themselves in the polar opposite situation.

Sea ice had surrounded the luxury cruise ship, hindering its pas-

sage to open water. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Australian-owned ship rang for help around 11 p.m. local time.

Polar Star, the U.S. military's only active heavy icebreaker, took two "passes," or laps, around the 551-foot cruise ship, slicing through the ice slabs as easily as a knife in soft butter.

"It was just a happy coincidence that she was there and it happened to be the ship's 50th birthday as well, which was a

pretty cool coincidence," James Griffiths, general manager of ocean operations at Scenic Group, said from New Zealand, the cruise's endpoint. "It was a great experience, and our guests loved it.

An unexpected show

On a danger scale of 1 to Endurance, the Scenic Eclipse II's predicament was low-risk, according to Griffiths. The ship's ice-strengthened hull is categorized as 1A Super, the strongest of the

Swedish-Finnish ice classes. The vessel can maneuver through ice; however, it can't chop through dense blocks with the same force and speed of an icebreaker like Polar Star, which the Coast Guard describes as the world's most powerful nonnuclear icebreaker.

"Sea ice can be three feet thick, or two or three times that if it's accumulated over multiple years," said Robert Sherrell, an

SEE POWER ON PAGE 5

Rubio touts progress in Venezuela

BY MATTHEW LEE,
STEPHEN GROVES
AND JOSHUA GOODMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Marco Rubio gave a full-throated defense Wednesday of President Donald Trump's military operation to oust and arrest then-Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, while also using his wide-ranging congressional testimony to touch on Greenland, NATO, Iran and China.

As Republican and Democratic members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee offered starkly different readings of the administration's foreign policy, Rubio addressed Trump's intentions and his often bellicose rhetoric that have alarmed U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere.

In the first public hearing since the Jan. 3 intervention to depose Maduro, Rubio said Trump had acted to take out a major U.S. national security threat in the Western Hemisphere. Trump's top diplomat said America was safer and more secure as a result and that the Republican administration would work with interim authorities to stabilize the South American country.

"We're not going to have this thing turn around overnight, but I think we're making good and decent progress," Rubio said. "We are certainly better off today in Venezuela than we were four weeks ago and I think and hope and expect that we'll be better off in three months and six months and nine months than we would have been had Maduro still been there."



Rubio

SEE RUBIO ON PAGE 10

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Amazon cuts 16,000 jobs in latest round of layoffs

Associated Press

Amazon is cutting about 16,000 jobs in the latest round of mass layoffs for the tech industry.

Beth Galetti, a senior vice president at the ecommerce company, made the announcement Wednesday in a blog post.

The latest reductions follow a round of job cuts in October, when Amazon laid off 14,000 workers.

She said U.S.-based staff would be given 90 days to look for a new role internally. Those who are unsuccessful or don't want a new job

will be offered severance pay, outplacement services and health insurance benefits, she said.

"While we're making these changes, we'll also continue hiring and investing in strategic areas and functions that are critical to our future," Galetti said.

The layoffs are Amazon's biggest since 2023, when the company cut 27,000 jobs.

Amazon's workforce doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic as millions stayed home and boosted online spending. But in the follow-

ing years, big tech and retail companies cut thousands of jobs to bring spending back in line.

Hiring has stagnated in the U.S. and in December, the country added a meager 50,000 jobs, nearly unchanged from a revised figure of 56,000 in November.

Labor data points to a reluctance by businesses to add workers even as economic growth has picked up.

Many companies hired aggressively after the pandemic and no longer need to fill more jobs.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates												
Euro costs (Jan. 29)	0.82	Switzerland (Franc)	0.7679									
British pound (Jan. 29)	\$1.34	Thailand (Baht)	31.115									
Japanese yen (Jan. 29)	151.00	Turkey (NewLira)	43.4125									
South Korean won (Jan. 29)	1395.00											
Commercial rates												
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744	<p>(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)</p> <div>INTEREST RATES</div> <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>6.75</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>3.75</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>3.62</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>3.66</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.85</td></tr></table>	Prime rate	6.75	Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75	Federal funds market rate	3.62	3-month bill	3.66	30-year bond	4.85
Prime rate	6.75											
Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75											
Federal funds market rate	3.62											
3-month bill	3.66											
30-year bond	4.85											
Britain (Pound)	1.3785											
Canada (Dollar)	1.3551											
China (Yuan)	6.9545											
Denmark (Krone)	6.2417											
Egypt (Pound)	46.8601											
Euro	0.8360											
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8017											
Hungary (Forint)	318.659											
Israel (Shekel)	3.0916											
Japan (Yen)	152.79											
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3057											
Norway (Krone)	9.6160											
Philippines (Peso)	58.827											
Poland (Zloty)	3.5155											
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7461											
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2619											
South Korea (Won)	1429.91											

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

N. Korea claims successful launcher test

By YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

North Korea fired four missiles from an improved version of a large-caliber multiple rocket launcher in a test overseen Tuesday by leader Kim Jong Un, according to the state-run news agency.

Japan and South Korea each reported ballistic missiles launched from the North fell off the Korean Peninsula's eastern coast.

Several short-range missiles were launched from north of Pyongyang around 3:30 p.m., the South's Ministry of National Defense said in a text message to reporters. They flew about 220 miles before dropping into the Sea of Japan, known on the peninsula as the East Sea.

The Korean Central News Agency, the official voice of North

Korea's ruling regime, said the test verified the improved system's strike capability, mobility, intelligence and accuracy.

"Today's test is of great significance in improving the effectiveness of our strategic deterrent," KCNA quoted Kim as saying. "The self-steered precisely guided flight system, which can neglect any outside intervention, is a major feature that demonstrates the superiority of this weapon system."

The launches marked the first time North Korea fired weapons since testing what it called hypersonic missiles early this month, the Associated Presse reported Tuesday. In December, the country test-fired what it called long-range, strategic cruise missiles and new anti-air missiles and released photos showing apparent

progress in the construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine.

The launches occurred during a visit to Seoul by Elbridge Colby, U.S. undersecretary of defense policy, to meet with South Korean Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back.

U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies tracked the movements of the launch and closely shared the related information, according to the ministry's text message.

North Korea may have also made the weapons demonstration ahead of the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress, according to analysts cited by the AP. The congress, scheduled for next month, would be the first of its kind in five years and is one of North Korea's biggest propaganda spectacles, the wire service reported.



KCNA

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observes a missile launch in this undated photo from the state-run Korean Central News Agency.



EDGAR GRIMALDO/U.S. Air Force

An Air Force EA-37B Compass Call from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., is parked at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on Monday.

Air Force's new electronic warfare aircraft makes its European debut

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Plane spotters were abuzz earlier this week when the Air Force's newest electronic warfare jet was observed in European skies.

Some speculated that the EA-37B Compass Call's maiden trans-Atlantic voyage and arrival at Ramstein Air Base on Monday could be related to the increased tensions in the Middle East amid ongoing political turmoil in Iran.

The plane traveled from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, where it's assigned to the 55th Electronic Combat Group. It's designed to suppress enemy defenses by preventing the transmission of information between adversaries, weapon systems and command-and-control networks.

The EA-37B uses a heavily modified Gulfstream G550 busi-

ness jet airframe and can fly at altitudes of over 40,000 feet and at speeds nearly double those of its C-130-retrofitted predecessor, the EC-130H.

But the aircraft's first foray into Europe is more ground-focused, with U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa describing the visit as a "short road show."

The purpose is to introduce the updated platform to airmen, units and some allies "as it transitions into its operational capacity," the command said in a statement Wednesday.

The plane is slated to continue on to Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany, the command said Wednesday, but a planned visit to RAF Mildenhall in England was canceled.

At Ramstein, the EA-37B was on static display only as part of a demo for base personnel, according to USAFE-AFAFRICA. Sever-

al familiarization briefs were also planned.

U.S. airmen and their NATO counterparts from Norway and Turkey were among personnel who saw the plane up close Monday while it was parked inside a hangar at Ramstein, according to Air Force photos published the following day.

The two-stop show marked the aircraft's first appearance in the European theater and builds off two previous tours in the Indo-Pacific region, according to USAFE-AFAFRICA.

Aviation observers on social media reported spotting the plane at Spangdahlem on Wednesday, a sighting confirmed by USAFE-AFAFRICA.

The aircraft is slated to return to Davis-Monthan, with no further European stops currently planned, the command said Wednesday.

Combat vet tapped to lead Marines in Japan

By BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A general with 35 years of experience that includes combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan has been tapped to lead the Marine Corps' operations in Japan.

Lt. Gen. Benjamin Watson was nominated by President Donald Trump to serve as commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Forces Japan, both headquartered at Camp Courtney on Okinawa, according to a Defense Department announcement Jan. 20.



Watson

If confirmed by the Senate, he will succeed Lt. Gen. Roger Turner, who has led the commands since January 2024.

III MEF is one of three expeditionary forces in the Marine Corps, and the only one permanently deployed in the Indo-Pacific.

A Marine expeditionary force is the largest air-ground task force and the principal organization of the Marines' combat power.

III MEF currently consists of about 27,000 Marines, according to a 7th Fleet news release from February 2022.

Watson would take over III MEF as the Marine Corps continues to implement its Force Design plan to counter China's moves in the Indo-Pacific.

Turner oversaw the integration of the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment's three subordinate units,

including logistics, anti-air and combat team elements.

The regiment's stand-in force operations are a key tenet of the island-fighting doctrine found in Force Design.

Watson since August 2024 has served as the head of Training and Education Command at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. He commanded the 1st Marine Division as a two-star from 2022 to 2024, according to his service biography.

Watson is a native of Syracuse, N.Y., according to a July 2024 division news release.

He was commissioned through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps program after graduating from Cornell University with a bachelor's in history in 1991, according to his biography.

He deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina as commander of Weapons Company and operations officer of 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines, from 1999 to 2002; and to Iraq as G-3 Future Operations Planner with I Marine Expeditionary Force from 2006 to 2007. While commanding 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, from 2008 to 2011, he deployed with the 31st MEU to Afghanistan.

He returned from January to November 2018 as commander of Task Force Southwest, his biography states.

His awards include two Defense Superior Service Medals with "C" device, the Legion of Merit, a Bronze Star with "V" device, two Meritorious Service Medals, three Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals and two Combat Action Ribbons.

MILITARY

Answers sought on weaponizing Lyme disease

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Congress tasked a government watchdog with researching whether the Defense Department weaponized ticks with Lyme disease as part of a Cold War-era bio-weapons program, in hopes that finding an origin can lead toward better testing, treatments and cures.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., added the amendment to the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, which specifically calls on the Government Accountability Office to review government documents from Jan. 1, 1945, through Dec. 31, 1972, regarding experiments with two forms of tick-borne bacteria, spirochaetales and rickettsiales.

“The hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans suffering from Lyme disease — in addition to the



Army Public Health Center

A highly magnified look at the underside of a deer tick, a primary vector for Lyme disease.

millions across the United States — deserve to know the truth about the origins of their illness. An enhanced understanding of how Lyme came to be will only assist in finding a cure for this debilitating disease,” Smith said in a state-

ment.

He is co-chair of the Congressional Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Caucus and put forward similar amendments in 2019 and 2021. Each passed the House but failed in the Senate.

Lyme disease is an illness caused by bacteria carried by black-legged ticks, or deer ticks. People can become infected when bitten by a tick that transfers the bacteria under the skin and causes an infection.

When diagnosed and treated early, many patients recover, but it can develop into a chronic illness, according to the Global Lyme Alliance, which funds research for the disease.

Early symptoms can include severe headaches and neck stiffness, joint and muscle pain, heart palpitations and facial paralysis, according to the alliance. In later

stages, symptoms can include debilitating neurological and cognitive impairments and difficulty sleeping.

Roughly 476,000 new cases of Lyme are diagnosed in the U.S. each year, according to the alliance.

The Comptroller General of the United States has two years to provide documentation of the Cold War research conducted by the Defense Department with help from the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Agriculture, according to the National Defense Authorization Act.

Documents should include any information about the use of ticks as hosts or delivery mechanisms for biological warfare agents, and any efforts on improving the effectiveness and viability of the two types of bacteria by combining it with other diseases or viruses.

The review should also uncover where the research facilities were located.

Smith said the amendment was inspired by a surge of Lyme disease in his state, and he looked toward military research after reading the book “Bitten: The Secret History of Lyme disease and Biological Weapons,” by Kris Newby.

The book included interviews with the late Dr. Willy Burgdorfer, the researcher who is credited with discovering Lyme disease and also served as a bioweapons specialist employed by the U.S. government.

“GAO will be fully empowered to leave no stone unturned, and now it’ll have a congressional mandate to get to the bottom of it,” Smith said last month during a Lyme disease discussion hosted by the Department of Health and Human Services.



JONATHAN BAEZ/Stars and Stripes

Daily rates at Defense Department hotels in Japan, including Yokosuka Naval Base’s Navy Lodge, seen here on Wednesday, have dropped following a price hike in late 2025.

On-base lodging prices fall in Japan after per diem hike

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Defense Department travelers headed to Japan can breathe easier now that on-base lodging in the region is returning to relatively normal prices following a rate hike last year.

The cost of an overnight stay at an on-base hotel skyrocketed in October — in some instances rising nearly 75% — after the Defense Travel Management Office on Sept. 25 raised the maximum per diem rates for lodging at more than a dozen locations in Japan to \$218.

Per diem rates for Japan as a

whole range from \$113 to \$448 as of Jan. 1, according to the office’s website.

Rates are updated monthly or as necessary.

While the maximum per diem rate remains the same for most locations, pricing at various base hotels has since dropped to pre-October prices.

At Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, a standard room at the Kanto Lodge has fallen to \$98 from \$171 in October.

The Misawa Inn at Misawa Air Base in northeastern Japan saw a similar decrease, dropping from \$171 to \$104.

DOD lodging facilities at Yoko-

suka, Sasebo and Okinawa were all \$125 per night, a slight increase over rates around \$91 in October, according to the DOD Lodging website.

Room rates are established at the “minimum amount necessary” to cover the cost of maintaining lodging facilities, with consideration given to local market conditions and operation costs, according to the DOD’s lodging policy.

Lodging rates for those traveling on official duty cannot exceed local per diem rates, but those traveling for leisure may face higher prices, according to the policy.

Obstruction, two other charges dropped after acquittal in NCO’s slaying

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Army prosecutors dropped the charges against a Fort Hood soldier accused of helping conceal the cause of a 2023 shooting death on post after the other soldier charged in the case was acquitted this month.

Spc. Rene Heber, 26, was charged with accessory to murder after the fact, accessory to manslaughter after the fact and obstructing justice in the death of Sgt. Alfredo Martinez, 30, according to the charging document.



Stars and Stripes

He had pleaded not guilty and was scheduled for an April jury trial.

He spent a night in August 2023 drinking alcohol with Martinez at Spc. Nicholas Lowery’s home.

The next morning, Heber called 911 at about 8 a.m., telling the operator that Martinez had shot himself in the head.

Investigators questioned the soldiers again after gathering more evidence, and Lowery told them that he shot Martinez.

Heber always maintained his initial story.

Despite the confession, Lowery, 24, was acquitted by a jury on Jan. 13 of killing Martinez.

“In every court-martial, Special Trial Counsel continually assess their cases in light of new evidence, information and case law,” said Michelle McCaskill, a spokeswoman for the Army’s Office of Special Trial Counsel, which was charged with prosecuting the case against Heber.

Following Lowery’s acquittal, prosecutors “reassessed the likelihood of obtaining and sustaining a conviction,” McCaskill said. A withdrawal and dismissal of charges “was the most appropriate way forward.”

All three soldiers were assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division’s Sustainment Support Brigade.

This is the second time the Army has withdrawn the charges against Heber, as the cases against him and Lowery have taken unusual turns through the legal system, including two appeals of pretrial motions sent up to the Army Court of Criminal Appeals.

Heber also spent time in pre-trial confinement, where he collected an assault charge for pushing another soldier in February 2024 while detained in the Bell County Jail.

MILITARY



A crew member of the Coast Guard icebreaker watches an Australian-owned cruise ship that requested assistance on Jan. 17. The call for help occurred during the U.S. National Science Foundation's Operation Deep Freeze 2026.

CHRISTOPHER BOKUM/U.S. Coast Guard

Power: Passengers sipped champagne as Polar Star broke through field of ice

FROM PAGE 1
associate professor in the Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences at Rutgers University in New Jersey. “It takes raw power to break through ice.”
Polar Star has been stationed in Antarctica since November in its 29th year with Operation Deep Freeze, a multi-armed-forces mission that provides operational and logistical support to the National Science Foundation’s U.S. Antarctic Program. One of the ship’s primary duties is to maintain a navigable channel by blasting through miles of ice as thick as 21 feet, according to the Coast Guard. An unobstructed path is critical to transporting fuel and supplies to scientists working in research stations and in the field.
Griffiths said Polar Star was visible, within 10 nautical miles, when the cruise captain asked for assistance. The cruise ship, he said, could have pushed through the ice but at a much slower pace, possibly delaying the 24-day itinerary from Tasmania to the South Pole to New Zealand.
“It took an hour, whereas without them, it might have taken five hours,” Griffiths said. “It made our life a little easier and allowed us to keep to the schedule we had in mind.”
Under the midnight sun, passengers gathered on the bow and the bridge to watch Polar Star in action.
Crew members served champagne, and the expedition staff provided commentary.
A few Americans, inspired by

“It takes raw power to break through ice.”
Robert Sherrell
Rutgers University in New Jersey

the icebreaker’s U.S. flag, sang the national anthem. Griffiths said about 50 of the 191 passengers stayed up late to observe the event.
According to the Coast Guard, Polar Star escorted the cruise ship about four nautical miles to open water.
“It’s a great example of cooperation in polar regions, and we are very grateful they were there,” Griffiths said. “It highlighted what a wonderful place Antarctica is and has given a little bit of visibility to the cooperation between everyone down there.”
The Scenic Eclipse II will wrap up its “Antarctica’s Ross Sea: Majestic Ice & Wildlife” journey in Timaru, New Zealand, on Thursday. After a quick turnover, the ship will set sail for its last Antarctic cruise of the season. The full fare starts at \$73,710 per person, or \$29,805 on sale.
‘Ice is unpredictable’
Antarctica cruising season generally runs from November to March, the continent’s austral summer. January is peak travel time, when the warm temperatures melt the icy formations.
However, wind and storms can

blow sea ice — slabs of frozen seawater, which are different from icebergs — and create pack ice. With little warning, a football field of pack ice can hem in a ship.
“Ice is unpredictable, especially with limited observations in the Southern Ocean,” Ellen Buckley, an assistant professor in the University of Illinois’ Department of Earth Science and Environmental Change, said from a research vessel in Antarctica. “Because satellite and in situ measurements are limited, unavoidable conditions arise that are challenging to navigate.”
Adriane Lam, an assistant professor in the Earth Sciences Department at Binghamton University, State University of New York, who is also on the 30-day research trip, said their ice-capable vessel encountered ice that was much thicker than anticipated.
Sherrell said a single piece of sea ice, or floe, can measure 10 feet to more than a mile across. Pushed together by wind, the slabs can form a stretch of ice extending for miles.
“It looks like you’re driving your ship through a winter cornfield in Nebraska,” he said.
A ship can free itself by repeatedly backing up and accelerating forward, ramming the ice. However, this tactic can be extremely slow and burns a lot of fuel, Sherrell said.
“Cruise ships are not meant to do that,” Sherrell said. “They’re meant to stay out of trouble and gently push some ice floes away.”

Report: Tanker’s skipper taken onto US cutter

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes
The captain and first officer of a runaway oil tanker seized in the north Atlantic Ocean by U.S. authorities earlier this month are now aboard a U.S. Coast Guard cutter after spending weeks in Scottish waters, according to U.K. news outlets.
Avtandil Kalandadze, the captain, and an unidentified first officer of the Russian-flagged tanker Marinera are aboard the USCGC Munro and were taken out of U.K. waters, the BBC reported on Tuesday. It was unclear whether Munro still was in the region Wednesday.
U.S. forces seized the Iran-linked oil tanker Jan. 7 near Iceland, capping more than two weeks of dogged pursuit after a failed boarding attempt in the Caribbean Sea in December.
The Justice Department notified Scotland of the transfer early Tuesday, the BBC reported, citing a Scottish attorney general.
The U.S. contacted Scottish authorities on Jan. 16 seeking help in starting extradition proceedings but withdrew the request Monday, according to the BBC report.
The Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Coast Guard, did not immediately respond Wednesday to requests

for confirmation of the transfer of the men to U.S. authorities. The DOJ also had no immediate response to Stars and Stripes’ questions.
Scottish First Minister John Swinney was scheduled to update the country’s parliament about the situation on Wednesday, a government spokesman said in an email.
Two Russian crew members had been released and were on their way back to their country, Russian state news agency Tass reported Wednesday.
According to the BBC, arrangements are being made to fly five others to the U.S. The remaining crew members are from India, Georgia and Ukraine, the BBC reported.
Formerly called Bella I, the vessel was targeted for violating U.S. sanctions, which were imposed in 2024. The U.S. said it was smuggling cargo for a company linked to Hezbollah, one of several Middle East proxy groups funded by Iran.
The tanker and Munro had been in Scotland’s Moray Firth following the U.S. seizure of the vessel, the British media outlet Sky News reported Tuesday.
The remaining crew members are being processed at an army reserve center in Inverness, Sky News reported.
Space operations jobs open to enlisted soldiers
By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Enlisted soldiers have until April 30 to apply for a new space operations specialty, the Army announced this week.
The new career field, known as 40D tactical space operations specialist, is expected to be in place by Oct. 1. The specialty is open to Army active duty, National Guard and Reserve component soldiers, the Army said in a statement.
“The establishment of 40D [Military Occupational Specialty] will alleviate the burden on other Army branches who are lending their soldiers to space operations,” Lt. Gen. Sean A. Gainey, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command commanding

general, said in August.
The Army forecasts about 1,000 40D billets, which could grow up to 1,500 by 2032.
Since U.S. Space Command was established by President Donald Trump in 2019, the military services have been building up their respective space capabilities. That same year, Trump also established the Space Force as a separate military branch.
The 40D soldiers will attend the Space and Missile Defense Center of Excellence at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo.
Notifications of selection board results are expected in the summer, and initial selectees will transition to the 40D MOS and attend training beginning Oct. 1, according to the Army.

NATION

2 officers fired shots when protester killed

In report to Congress
DHS also says agent
yelled, ‘He’s got a gun!’

BY SEUNG MIN KIM, MIKE CATALINI
AND STEVE KARNOWSKI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two federal officers fired shots during the encounter that killed Department of Veterans Affairs hospital ICU nurse Alex Pretti over the weekend in Minneapolis, a Customs and Border Protection official told Congress in a notice sent Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Ecuador’s minister of foreign affairs filed an objection saying immigration agents tried to enter the country’s consulate in the city without permission.

Officers tried to take Pretti into custody and he resisted, leading to a struggle, according to a notification to Congress. During the struggle, a Border Patrol agent yelled, “He’s got a gun!” multiple times, the official said.

A Border Patrol officer and a CBP officer each fired Glock pistols, the notice said.

Investigators from CBP’s Office of Professional Responsibility conducted the analysis based on a review of body camera footage and agency documentation, the notice said. The law requires the agency to inform relevant congressional committees about deaths in CBP custody within 72 hours.

The development came a day after President Donald Trump ordered border czar Tom Homan to take over his administration’s immigration crackdown in Minnesota in the wake of Pretti’s death, which was the second fatal shooting this month of a person



ADAM GRAY/AP

Federal agents make a traffic stop on a U.S. citizen as they provide their identification including a passport on Tuesday, in Minneapolis.

at the hands of immigration law enforcement.

By sending Homan to Minnesota, “we’re going to de-escalate a little bit,” Trump said on Fox News’ “Will Cain Show.”

The president added of Homan, “Tom, as tough as he is, gets along” with governors and mayors, even in Democratic areas.

As he left the White House on Tuesday, the president was asked whether Pretti’s killing was justified. He responded by saying that a “big investigation” was underway. In the hours after Pretti’s death, some administration officials sought to blame the shooting on the 37-year-old intensive care nurse.

Stephen Miller, Trump’s deputy chief of

staff who had initially called Pretti “an assassin,” issued a statement suggesting CBP officers in Minneapolis “may not have been following” protocol. He said the Homeland Security Department’s initial statements about what transpired on Saturday was “based on reports from CBP on the ground.”

A video of the Ecuadorian consulate entry attempt posted on social media shows a staffer running to the door to turn the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents away, telling them, “This is the Ecuadorian consulate. You’re not allowed to enter.” One ICE officer can be heard threatening to “grab” the staffer if he touched the agent before agreeing to leave.

Man wounded after trading gunfire with agents in Ariz.

Associated Press

A man who authorities say was involved in a human smuggling operation was shot Tuesday in an exchange of gunfire with the U.S. Border Patrol and after firing at a federal helicopter near the U.S.-Mexico border, authorities said.

Federal agents were attempting to apprehend the 34-year-old Arizona man during a traffic stop near Arivaca, Ariz., when he fled and shot at a Border Patrol helicopter and at agents, authorities said. Agents returned fire, striking the man and wounding him, FBI special agent Heith Janke said.

The suspect, Patrick Gary Schlegel, was transported to a hospital and was recovering from surgery Tuesday evening, authorities said. Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos said during a news conference that he believes the Border Patrol agent involved in the shooting “acted lawfully” based on what is known so far.

Prior to the shooting, agents had attempted to stop the same vehicle but the occupants drove away, Nanos said. Later in the morning, a border patrol agent saw the vehicle in the same area and attempted to stop it, but the driver fled on foot.

Schlegel was in federal custody and ex-

pected to be charged with assault on a federal officer, alien smuggling and felon in possession of a firearm, Janke said.

Schlegel has a criminal history that includes a December warrant for escape stemming from a human smuggling and firearms conviction, court records show. On Dec. 15, Schlegel signed out of the institution where he had been incarcerated, Dismas Charities in Tucson, to go to a counseling session but did not return.

Two years earlier, in 2023, Schlegel was charged with transporting illegal aliens for financial gain in Arizona after authorities said he loaded more than a dozen people near the border into a truck, hid them under a tarp and drove away, court records show.

Agents followed the truck before Schlegel crashed and fled on foot, then allegedly threw rocks at a government helicopter before he was apprehended, the records show. Two pistols were found in the truck.

The Pima County Sheriff’s Department said the FBI asked it to lead a use-of-force investigation of the Border Patrol.

Arivaca is about 10 miles from the border. The area is a common path for drug smugglers and migrants who illegally cross the border, so agents regularly patrol there.

Noem faces rising calls for her firing or impeachment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A groundswell of voices have come to the same conclusion: Kristi Noem must go.

From Democratic Party leaders to the nation’s leading advocacy organizations to even the most centrist lawmakers in Congress, the calls are mounting for the Homeland Security secretary to step aside after the shooting deaths in Minneapolis of two people who protested deportation policy. At a defining moment in her tenure, few Republicans are rising to Noem’s defense.

“The country is disgusted by what the Department of Homeland Security has done,” top House Democratic Reps. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, Katherine Clark of Massachusetts and Pete Aguilar of California said in a joint statement.

“Kristi Noem should be fired immediately,” the Democrats said, “or we will commence impeachment proceedings in the House of Representatives.”

What started as sharp criticism of the Homeland Security secretary, and a long-

International law generally prohibits law enforcement authorities from entering foreign consulates or embassies without permission, though sometimes permission may be assumed for life-threatening emergencies, like fires.

“Consulate officials immediately prevented the ICE officer from entering the consular building, thus ensuring the protection of the Ecuadorians who were present at the time and activating the emergency protocols issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility,” the ministry wrote on X.

A “note of protest” was filed with the U.S. Embassy in Ecuador so that similar attempts aren’t made at other consulates, the ministry said. The State Department, Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Immigration enforcement activity witnessed by journalists in Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs on Tuesday appeared comparable with recent weeks. As before, most didn’t result in major confrontations with agents. Activists say they continue to monitor enforcement operations through social media and chats on messaging apps.

The White House had tried to blame Democratic leaders for the protests of immigration raids. But after Pretti’s killing and videos suggesting he was not an active threat, the administration tapped Homan to take charge of the Minnesota operation from Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, along with the city’s police chief, met with Homan on Tuesday and agreed to keep talking. Homan posted on social media that the discussions “were a productive starting point.”

shot move by Democratic lawmakers signing onto impeachment legislation in the Republican-controlled House, has morphed into an inflection point for Noem, who has been the high-profile face of the Trump administration’s immigration enforcement.

Noem’s brash leadership style and remarks in the aftermath of the shooting deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good — in which she suggested Pretti “attacked” officers and portrayed the events leading up to Good’s shooting an “act of domestic terrorism” — have been seen as doing irreparable damage, as events on the ground disputed her account. Her alliance with Border Patrol chief Gregory Bovino, who was recalled from the Minnesota operation Monday as border czar Tom Homan took the lead, has left her isolated on Capitol Hill.

“What she’s done in Minnesota should be disqualifying. She should be out of a job,” said Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C.

President Donald Trump defended Noem on Wednesday at multiple junctures, strongly indicating her job does not appear to be in immediate jeopardy. Asked by reporters as he left the White House on Tuesday for a trip to Iowa whether Noem is going to step down, Trump had a one-word answer: “No.”



Noem

NATION



RICHARD TSONG-TAATARI, (MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MINN.) STAR TRIBUNE/AP

A man is tackled to the ground Tuesday after spraying an unknown substance on U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., during a town hall in Minneapolis.

Man arrested after spraying unknown substance on Omar

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A man sprayed an unknown substance on Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar and was tackled to the ground Tuesday during a town hall in Minneapolis, where tensions over federal immigration enforcement have come to a head after agents fatally shot an intensive care nurse and a mother of three this month.

The audience cheered as the man was pinned down and his arms were tied behind his back. In video of the incident, someone in the crowd can be heard saying, “Oh my God, he sprayed something on her.”

Just before that Omar had called for the abolishment of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to resign or face impeachment. Calls are mounting on Capitol Hill for Noem to step down after the shooting deaths in Minneapolis of two people who protested deportations. Few Republicans have risen to her defense.

“ICE cannot be reformed,” Omar said, seconds before the attack.

Minneapolis police said officers saw the man use a syringe to spray an unknown liquid at Omar. They immediately arrested him and booked him at the county jail for third-degree assault, spokesperson Trevor Folke said. Forensic scientists responded to the scene.

Police identified the man as 55-year-old Anthony Kazmierczak.

Omar continued speaking for about 25 more minutes after the man was ushered out by security, saying she would not be intimidated.

There was a strong, vinegarlike smell after the man pushed on the syringe, according to an Associated Press journalist who was there. Photos of the device, which fell to the ground when he was tackled,

showed what appeared to be a light-brown liquid inside. There was no immediate word from officials on what it was.

No one in the crowd of about 100 people had a noticeable physical reaction to the substance.

In social media posts, Kazmierczak described himself as a former network engineer who lives in Minneapolis. Among other things, he made comments critical of former President Joe Biden and referred to Democrats as “angry and liars.”

“[President Donald]Trump wants the US is stronger and more prosperous,” Kazmierczak wrote. “Stop other countries from stealing from us. Bring back the fear that enemies back away from and gain respect that If anyone threatens ourselves or friends we will (expletive) them up.”

In another post, Kazmierczak asked, “When will descendants of slaves pay restitution to Union soldiers families for freeing them/dying for them, and not sending them back to Africa?”



Omar

Trump seeks to speed up LA rebuilding

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — President Donald Trump announced Tuesday that he has signed an executive order to “cut through bureaucratic red tape” and speed up reconstruction of tens of thousands of homes destroyed by the January 2025 Los Angeles area wildfires.

Trump’s order seeks to allow

homeowners to rebuild without contending with “unnecessary, duplicative, or obstructive” permitting requirements, the White House said in a statement.

The order directs the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration to find a way to issue regulations that would preempt state and local rules for ob-

taining permits and allow builders to “self-certify” that they have complied with “substantive health, safety, and building standards.”

California Gov. Gavin Newsom scoffed at the idea that the federal government could issue local rebuilding permits and urged Trump to approve the state’s \$33.9 billion disaster aid request.

President aims to keep focus on affordability

Associated Press

CLIVE, Iowa — President Donald Trump on Tuesday made his first big pitch ahead of this year’s midterm elections on his administration’s economic performance, even as his White House remains mired in the fallout in Minneapolis over a second fatal shooting by federal immigration officers this month.

Trump gave a speech in a suburb of Des Moines where he talked up the tax cuts he signed into law last year and took credit for the soaring performance of the stock market, saying he “made a lot of people rich,” including some “that I don’t even like.”

“If we lose the midterms, you’ll lose so many of the things that we’re talking about,” Trump told Iowans, who are expected to reflect their feelings on his presidency when they vote in two highly competitive congressional races this year.

The trip for the Republican president was part of a White House push to focus more on affordability ahead of elections in November that will determine control of Congress.

But the president once again suggested that concerns about prices were exaggerated by his political opponents.

The visit was part of the White House’s strategy to have Trump travel out of Washington once a week ahead of the midterm elections to focus on economic issues facing everyday Americans — an effort that keeps getting diverted by crisis.

On the ground in Iowa, Trump first made a stop at a local restaurant, where he met some locals and sat for an interview with Fox News Channel — in which he said he was attempting to “de-escalate a little

bit” in Minnesota.

The latest effort comes as the Trump administration is grappling with the weekend shooting death of Alex Pretti, an ICU nurse killed by federal agents in Iowa’s northern neighbor.

As he greeted diners at an Iowa restaurant, Trump weighed in with comments that were likely to exacerbate frustration among some of his backers who are also strong Second Amendment proponents.

“He certainly shouldn’t have been carrying a gun,” Trump said of Pretti.

He called it a “very, very unfortunate incident” but said: “I don’t like that he had a gun. I don’t like that he had two fully loaded magazines. That’s a lot of bad stuff.”

Trump, speaking Tuesday in Clive, a suburb of Des Moines, talked up the wide-ranging tariffs he imposed on nearly all U.S. trading partners. He also promoted the deals he’s struck with drugmakers to get them to lower costs on some prescription drugs.

Some attending Tuesday’s event said they didn’t think immigration enforcement officers in Minnesota were being given a chance to do their job, even as they expressed sympathy over the two shooting deaths in Minneapolis.

“You can’t interfere with these people when they’re trying to enforce the law,” said Jerry Greif, 68, from Vinton, Iowa.

Iowa Democratic Party chair Rita Hart emphasized Tuesday that Trump’s tariff policies have hurt Iowa farmers.

“It’s laughable that Trump is coming here today to talk about affordability of all things when Iowans are literally paying more because of his disastrous policies,” Hart said.



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

People cheer as President Donald Trump speaks about the economy at a rally Tuesday in Clive, Iowa.

NATION

Supreme Court not rushing ruling on tariffs

By MARK SHERMAN
AND LINDSAY WHITEHURST
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When the Supreme Court granted an unusually quick hearing over President Donald Trump’s tariffs, a similarly rapid resolution seemed possible.

After all, Trump’s lawyers told the court that speed was of the essence on an issue central to the president’s economic agenda. They pointed to a statement from Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent warning that the “longer a final ruling is delayed, the greater the risk of economic disruption.”

But nearly three months have elapsed since arguments in the closely watched case and the court isn’t scheduled to meet in public for more than three weeks.

No one knows for sure what is going on among the nine justices, several of whom expressed skepticism about the tariffs’ legality at arguments in November. But the timeline for deciding the case now looks more or less typical and could reflect the normal back-and-forth that occurs not just in the biggest cases, but in almost all the disputes the justices hear.

Several Supreme Court practitioners and law professors scoffed at the idea that the justices are dragging their feet on tariffs, putting off a potentially uncomforta-



President Donald Trump announce new tariffs at the White House in April in Washington.

ble ruling against Trump.

“People suspect this kind of thing from time to time, but I am not aware of instances in which we have more than speculation,” said Jonathan Adler, a law professor at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

The time frame alone also

doesn’t point to one outcome or the other.

One possible explanation, said Carter Phillips, a lawyer with 91 arguments before the high court, “is that the court is more evenly divided than appeared to be the case at oral argument and the fifth vote is wavering.”

Even if the majority opinion has been drafted and more or less agreed to by five or more members of the court, a separate opinion, probably in dissent, could slow things down, Phillips said.

Just last week, the court issued two opinions in cases that were argued in October. All nine justices

agreed with the outcome, a situation that typically allows decisions to be issued relatively quickly. But a separate opinion in each case probably delayed the decision.

The court is generally moving more slowly in argued cases, perhaps because of the flood of emergency appeals the administration has brought to the justices. The first argued case wasn’t decided until January this year. Typically, that happens in December, if not November.

Over the last 20 years, the average turnaround time for a Supreme Court opinion was just over three months, according to data gathered by Adam Feldman, creator of Empirical SCOTUS. The timeline has increased in recent years, with the court releasing half or more of its cases in June.

Decision times can vary widely. The court can move quickly, especially in cases with hard external deadlines: The landmark *Bush v. Gore* case that effectively decided the 2000 election took just over a single day. The recent case over TikTok took seven days.

On the higher end, when the justices are on their own timelines, cases can take much longer to resolve. *Gundy v. U.S.*, a case argued in 2018 about how the sex-offender registry is administered, took more than eight months to be decided.

Trump warns Iraq against return of former PM al-Maliki to power

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump warned Iraq on Tuesday that the U.S. would no longer support the country if its former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, returns to power.

Trump made the threat days after the dominant political bloc known as the Coordination Framework, a collection of Shiite parties, announced it was backing the nomination of al-Maliki, who the U.S. administration views as too close to Iran.

“Last time Maliki was in power, the Country descended into poverty and total chaos. That should not be allowed to happen again,” Trump said in a social media post announcing his opposition to al-Maliki. “Because of his insane policies and ideologies, if elected, the United States of America will no longer help Iraq and, if we are not there to help, Iraq has ZERO chance of Success, Prosperity, or Freedom.”

Trump’s intervention into Iraqi politics comes at a fraught moment for Trump in the Middle East as he weighs carrying out

new strikes on Iraq’s neighbor Iran, which has maintained deep influence in Iraq’s government since the U.S. ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Trump has left open the possibility of military action in response to Tehran’s deadly crackdown on recent protests against the Islamic government.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani’s bloc won the largest share of seats in November’s parliamentary elections. But he stepped aside earlier this month after he was unable to form a government. That cleared the field for al-Maliki after the two had competed for the backing of the Coordination Framework.

Al-Maliki, who first served as prime minister in 2006, is the only Iraqi prime minister to serve two terms since the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003. Al-Maliki’s bid for a third term failed after he was accused of monopo-

lizing power and alienating the country’s sizable Sunni and Kurdish populations.

When he came to power in May 2006, al-Maliki was initially embraced by President George W. Bush. Al-Maliki took over as prime minister months after the bombing of the al-Askari shrine, a significant Shiite mosque. It was a moment that deepened sectarian tension in Iraq and sparked a period of intense violence in the country.

But within months, U.S. officials soured on al-Maliki. They saw his government as too often favoring Shiite factions and alienating Sunni populations, which exacerbated the security crisis.

For years, concerns were frequently raised in Washington about al-Maliki’s closeness to Iran and his ability to govern independently of Tehran’s influence.

By 2014, the Obama administration had lost confidence in al-Maliki’s ability to manage the security situation, particularly the rise of the Islamic State, which had seized large swaths of the country.



al-Maliki

More ‘No Kings’ protests scheduled for March 28

Associated Press

A third round of “No Kings” protests is coming this spring, with organizers saying they are planning their largest demonstrations yet across the United States to oppose what they describe as authoritarianism under President Donald Trump.

Previous rallies have drawn millions of people, and organizers said they expect even greater numbers on March 28 in the wake of Trump’s immigration crackdown in Minneapolis, where violent clashes have led to the death of two people.

“We expect this to be the largest protest in American history,” Ezra Levin, co-executive director of the nonprofit Indivisible, told The Associated Press ahead of Wednesday’s announcement. He predicted that as many as 9 million people will turn out.

“No Kings” protests, which are organized by a constellation of groups around the country, have been a focal point for outrage over Trump’s attempts to consolidate and expand his power.

“This is in large part a response to a combination of the heinous attacks on our democracy and com-

munities coming from the regime, and a sense that nobody’s coming to save us,” Levin said.

Last year, Trump said he felt attendees were “not representative of the people of our country,” and he insisted that “I’m not a king.”

The latest round of protests had been in the works before the crackdown in Minneapolis. However, the killing of two people by federal agents in recent weeks has refocused plans.

Levin said they want to show “support for Minnesota and immigrant communities all over” and oppose “the secret police force that is murdering Americans and infringing on their basic constitutional rights.”

“And what we know is, the only way to defend those rights is to exercise them, and you do that in nonviolent but forceful ways, and that’s what I expect to see in ‘No Kings’ three,” Levin said.

Trump has broadly defended his aggressive deportation campaign and blamed local officials for refusing to cooperate. However, he’s more recently signaled a shift in response to bipartisan concern over the killing of Alex Pretti in Minneapolis on Saturday.

NATION

Deaths rise as cold grips storm-socked states

Associated Press

Three Texas siblings who perished in an icy pond were among several dozen deaths in U.S. states gripped by frigid cold as crews scrambled Tuesday to repair hundreds of thousands of power outages in the shivering South and forecasters warned the winter weather is expected to get worse.

Brutal cold lingered in the wake of a massive storm that dumped deep snow across more than 1,300 miles from Arkansas to New England and left parts of the South coated in treacherous ice.

Freezing temperatures hovered Tuesday as far south as Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina and were forecast to plunge again overnight. Parts of northern Florida were expected to sink to 25 degrees Fahrenheit late Tuesday into early Wednesday.

The U.S. aviation system was returning to normal after a brutal weekend that saw more than 17,000 commercial flights canceled. There were about 6,300 cancellations in the U.S. Monday and about 2,500 Tuesday, according to FlightAware, a flight tracking and data company. Less than 500 were anticipated to be canceled Wednesday.

The arctic misery over the eastern half of the U.S. was expected to worsen Friday and Saturday. The National Weather Service said another winter storm could hit parts of the East Coast this weekend, and more record lows were forecast as far south as Florida.

“This could be the coldest temperature seen in several years for some places and the longest duration of cold in several decades,” the agency’s Weather Prediction Center warned Tuesday.

Crews were working feverishly to restore power to the more than 410,000 homes and businesses without electricity Tuesday evening. Over half the outages were in



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Emma Teske shovels out her car following a winter storm that dumped more than a foot and a half of snow across the region, on Tuesday, in Haverhill, Mass.



YUKI IWAMURA/AP

New York Waterway ferries move as ice floats on the Hudson River seen from the Edge sky deck at Hudson Yards, Tuesday, in New York.

Tennessee and Mississippi, where temperatures could bottom out at the end of the week. In Nashville, the low Friday night is predicted to dip to 4 F, while Oxford, in northern Mississippi, could hit 10 F, according to the National Weather Service.

Officials in states afflicted with severe cold reported at least 50 deaths.

Three brothers ages 6, 8 and 9 died Monday after falling through ice on a private pond near Bonham,

Texas, Fannin County Sheriff Cody Shook said Tuesday. The boys’ mother said she ran into the freezing lake and frantically tried to pull her sons from the water, but the ice kept breaking beneath them.

“They were just screaming, telling me to help them,” Cheyenne Hangaman told The Associated Press. “And I watched all of them struggle, struggle to stay above the water. I watched all of them fight.”

Dozens of Mississippi counties were in need of bottled water, blankets, tarps, fuel and generators, and the state’s National Guard is using aircraft to deliver supplies to hard-hit communities, Gov. Tate Reeves said Tuesday evening.

Three 18-wheeler trucks stalled on an icy Interstate 55 in northern Mississippi, causing a major backup Tuesday night, according to the state’s Department of Transportation. The governor said various resources from first responders to drones and tow trucks were being deployed to clear the highway and

help stranded drivers.

Jean Kirkland used a lighter and paper Tuesday to ignite her gas stove top. Her neighborhood in Lexington, Miss., lost power Sunday, and Kirkland and her daughter have been relying on the stove and a couple of gas-powered heaters to keep warm.

“When you’re used to certain things, you miss them when they’re gone,” said Kirkland, who’s been getting by without hot water and lights at night.

Health officials warn against using gas-powered stoves to heat a home. They can give off fumes that increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At least one carbon monoxide death was reported in Louisiana, according to the state Health Department.

North Carolina’s largest public school system closed schools again on Wednesday, with the Wake County school system saying on Facebook that it was “due to the continued threat of black ice.”

More than 110,000 outages remained in Nashville, Tenn., and neighboring communities Tuesday. Nashville Electric Service said on social media it had dispatched more than 740 workers to restore power.

Nashville officials said nearly 440 people spent Monday night at community centers being used as temporary shelters, while 1,400 more stayed at area homeless shelters. Many residents booked rooms at local hotels.

In New York City, officials said 10 people had been found dead outdoors in the cold. More deaths were reported across a dozen states. They included two people hit by snowplows in Massachusetts and Ohio, two teenagers killed while sledding in Arkansas and Texas and a man found in his home in the Indianapolis area with no heat.

Judge: Va. Dems’ redistricting resolution is illegal; Md. map advances

AP/Report for America

RICHMOND, Va. — Democrats ran into a setback on Tuesday in Virginia to fight back against President Donald Trump’s congressional redistricting efforts, but they took a step forward in Maryland, though obstacles remain for enacting a new congressional map there.

A Virginia judge ruled that a proposed constitutional amendment letting Democrats redraw the state’s congressional maps was illegal, setting back the party’s efforts to pick up seats in the U.S. House in November. In Maryland, a state House committee advanced a new map that could enable Democrats to defeat the state’s only House Republican, after Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, urged them in person to do so.

The latest developments are part of a national battle over unusual mid-decade redistricting attempts, launched last summer by Trump who urged Republican officials in Texas to redraw maps to help the GOP win more seats. He did so in hopes of holding on to a narrow House majority in the face of political headwinds that typically favor the party out of power in midterms.

Tazewell Circuit Court Judge Jack Hurley Jr. struck down the Virginia legislature’s actions on three grounds, including finding that lawmakers failed to follow their own rules for adding the redistricting amendment to a special session. His order also said Democrats failed to approve the amendment before the public began voting in last year’s

general election and failed to publish the amendment three months before the election, as required by law. As a result, he said, the amendment was invalid and void.

Virginia House Speaker Don Scott, who was listed in Republicans’ lawsuit over the resolution, said Democrats would appeal the ruling.

“Nothing that happened today will dissuade us from continuing to move forward and put this matter directly to the voters,” Scott said in a joint statement with other Democratic leaders.

Virginians for Fair Elections, a campaign that supports the redistricting resolution, accused conservatives of filing their lawsuit in a known GOP-friendly jurisdiction,

saying, “Republicans courtshopped for a ruling because litigation and misinformation are the only tools they have left.”

Hurley’s ruling came after lawmakers said they would unveil their proposed new districts to voters by the end of this week.

The state is currently represented in the House by six Democrats and five Republicans from districts whose boundaries were imposed by a court after a bipartisan redistricting commission failed to agree on a map after the 2020 census.

Moore, a Democrat who is the nation’s only serving Black governor, said Maryland needed to act to counter what he called “political redlining” by Trump in other states at the cost of Black representation in Con-

gress.

He compared Trump’s push for GOP-friendly redistricting to discriminatory housing practices, saying the president and his allies “are doing everything in their power to silence the voices and trying to eliminate Black leadership — elected leadership — all over this country.”

Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1 in Maryland and already hold a 7-1 advantage in the state’s U.S. House delegation, with Rep. Andy Harris the lone GOP representative.

Moore’s push for mid-decade redistricting has run into opposition by a key fellow Democrat: state Senate President Bill Ferguson, of Baltimore, who says it could backfire and potentially cost a Democratic seat.

NATION

Rubio: Democrat claims US ‘traded one dictator for another’ in Venezuela

FROM PAGE 1

The former Florida senator said that Venezuela’s current leaders are cooperating and would soon begin to see benefits. But he backed away from remarks prepared for the hearing that Washington would not hesitate to take further military action should those leaders not fully accept Trump’s demands.

“I can tell you right now with full certainty, we are not postured to nor do we intend or expect to have to take any military action in Venezuela at any time,” Rubio said. “I think it would require the emergence of an imminent threat of the kind that we do not anticipate at this time.”

He said Venezuela soon will be allowed to sell oil that is now subject to U.S. sanctions. The revenue would be set aside to pay for basic government services such as policing and health care. Oil sale money will be deposited in a U.S. Treasury-controlled account and released after the U.S. approves monthly budgets to be submitted by Venezuela, he said.

Republican senators, with few exceptions, praised the Venezuelan operation. Among Democrats, there was deep skepticism.

They questioned Trump’s policies in Venezuela and their potential for encouraging moves by China against Taiwan and Russia even more so in Ukraine, as well as his threats to take Greenland from NATO ally Denmark and his insults about the alliance’s contributions to U.S. security.

Rubio played them all down.

He said the uproar over Greenland within NATO is calming and that talks are underway about how to deal with Trump’s demands. The Republican president insists the U.S. needs Greenland to counter threats from Russia and China, but he recently backed away from a pledge to impose tariffs on several European countries that sent troops to the semiautonomous Danish territory in a show of solidarity.

“I think we’re going to get something positive done,” Rubio said.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Secretary of State Marco Rubio appears before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to explain President Donald Trump’s policy toward Venezuela at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, on Wednesday.

Rubio dismissed criticism that Trump was undermining the alliance, while repeating the long-running American complaint that member nations need to boost their defense budgets.

“NATO needs to be reimagined,” Rubio said. “I just think this president complains about it louder than other presidents.”

He said China’s stated goal to reunify Taiwan with the mainland would not be affected by any other world event, including the Maduro operation.

“The situation on Taiwan is a legacy project” that Chinese President Xi Jinping has made “very clear that that’s what he intends to do and that’s going to be irrespective anything that happens in the world,” Rubio said.

As Trump once more threatens Iran with military action, Rubio said there was no current plan to attack. Asked about the potential for a change of government in Tehran, Rubio said that would require “a lot of careful thinking” because it would be “far more complex” than ousting Maduro.

The committee chairman, Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, praised Trump’s decisions to remove Maduro, continue deadly military strikes on boats suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean and seize sanctioned tankers.

Risch also offered new details

on the operation in the Venezuelan capital, saying it involved “only about 200 troops” and a “firefight that lasted less than 27 minutes.”

“This military action was incredibly brief, targeted and successful,” Risch said, adding that the U.S. and other nations may have to assist Venezuela when it seeks to restore democratic elections. “Venezuela may require U.S. and international oversight to ensure these elections are indeed free and fair,” he said.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the committee’s top Democrat, questioned whether that operation was worth it, considering most of Maduro’s top aides and lieutenants still run Venezuela and the economic situation there remains bleak.

“We’ve traded one dictator for another, so it’s no wonder that so many of my constituents are asking, why is the president spending so much time focused on Venezuela instead of the cost of living and their kitchen table economic concerns?” she asked. “From Venezuela to Europe, the United States is spending more, risking more and achieving less.”

Congressional Democrats have condemned Trump’s moves as exceeding the authority of the executive branch, while most Republicans have supported them as a legitimate exercise of presidential power.

Immigration policy is cited in drop in growth rate in ‘25

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — President Donald Trump’s crackdown on immigration contributed to a year-to-year drop in the nation’s growth rate as the U.S. population reached nearly 342 million people in 2025, according to population estimates released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The 0.5% growth rate for 2025 was a sharp drop from 2024’s almost 1% growth rate, which was the highest in two decades and was fueled by immigration. The 2024 estimates put the U.S. population at 340 million people.

Immigration increased by almost 1.3 million people last year, compared with 2024’s increase of almost 2.8 million people. If trends continue, the annual gain from immigrants by mid-2026 will drop to only 321,000 people, according to the Census Bureau, whose estimates do not distinguish between legal and illegal immigration.

In the past 125 years, the lowest growth rate was in 2021, during the height of the coronavirus pandemic, when the U.S. population grew by just 0.16%, or 522,000 people and immigration increased by just 376,000 people because of travel restrictions into the U.S. Before that, the lowest growth rate was just under 0.5% in 1919 at the height of the Spanish flu.

Births outnumbered deaths last year by 519,000 people. While higher than the pandemic-era low at the beginning of the decade, the natural increase was dramatically smaller than in the 2000s, when it ranged between 1.6 million and 1.9 million people.

The immigration drop dented growth in several states that traditionally have been immigrant magnets. California had a net population loss of 9,500 people in 2025, a stark change from the previous year, when it gained 232,000 residents, even though roughly the same number of Californians already living in the state moved out in both years.

The difference was immigration since the number of net immigrants who moved into the state dropped from 361,000 people in 2024 to 109,000 in 2025.

Florida had year-to-year drops in both immigrants and people moving in from other states. The Sunshine State, which has become more expensive in recent years from surging property values and higher home insurance costs, had only 22,000 domestic migrants in 2025, compared with 64,000 people in 2024, and the net number of immigrants dropped from more than 411,000 people to 178,000 people.

New York added only 1,008 people in 2025, mostly because the state’s net migration from immigrants dropped from 207,000 people to 95,600 people.

South Carolina, Idaho and North Carolina had the highest year-over-year growth rates, ranging from 1.3% to 1.5%. Texas, Florida and North Carolina added the most people in pure numbers. California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Vermont and West Virginia had population declines.

The South, which has been the powerhouse of growth in the 2020s, continued to add more people than any other region, but the numbers dropped from 1.7 million people in 2024 to 1.1 million in 2025.

“Many of these states are going to show even smaller growth when we get to next year,” Brookings demographer William Frey said Tuesday.

Tuesday’s data release comes as researchers have been trying to determine the effects of the second Trump administration’s immigration crackdown after the Republican president returned to the White House in January 2025. Trump made a surge of migrants at the southern border a central issue in his winning 2024 presidential campaign.

The numbers made public Tuesday reflect change from July 2024 to July 2025.

GOP candidate for Ala. governor challenges Tuberville residency

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A Republican opponent is challenging U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville’s eligibility to run for governor of Alabama, accusing the football coach-turned-politician of not meeting the legal requirement to have lived in the state for seven years.

Ken McFeeters, who is running against Tuberville for the Republican nomination for governor, filed

the challenge Tuesday with the Alabama Republican Party. McFeeters in a phone interview said he believes Tuberville lives in a multimillion-dollar beach home in Florida instead of a smaller home that he has listed as his residence in Auburn, Ala.

Property tax records show the former Auburn University football coach has a home in Auburn with an appraised value of \$291,780 on

which he claims a homestead exemption. He also has a beach home in Walton County, Fla., with an estimated market value of \$5.5 million, according to property records.

The Auburn house was initially purchased by Tuberville’s wife and son in 2017. The senator’s name was later added to the property, and the son’s name removed. Both homes appear to have recently been put in a revocable trust with Tuberville’s



Tuberville

wife as trustee.

Mallory Jaspers, a spokeswoman for Tuberville, called the challenge a “ridiculous PR stunt from a desperate candidate.”

“Senator Tuberville has proudly represented Alabama in the United States Senate for the past six years.

This made-up narrative didn’t work when he was running for Senate in 2019, and it certainly isn’t going to work now,” Jaspers wrote in an email.

Tuberville told The Associated Press this month that he believes he meets the residency requirement. He voted in Florida in 2018, then registered to vote in Alabama on March 28, 2019, about two weeks before announcing his Senate run.

TECHNOLOGY

‘It’s like your buddy, your pal’

Not ready for robots in homes? The maker of a friendly new humanoid thinks it might change your mind

By MATT O'BRIEN
Associated Press

NEW YORK — As the new robot called Sprout walks around a Manhattan office, nodding its rectangular head, lifting its windshield wiper-like “eyebrows” and offering to shake your hand with its grippers, it looks nothing like the sleek and intimidating humanoids built by companies like Tesla.

Sprout’s charm is the point. A 5-year-old child could comfortably talk at eye level with this humanoid, which stands 3.5 feet tall and wears a soft, padded exterior of sage-green foam.

Forged by stealth startup Fauna Robotics over two years of secret research and development, Sprout’s public debut on Tuesday aims to jump-start a whole new industry of building “approachable” robots for homes, schools and social spaces.

The robot is in many ways the first of its kind, at least in the United States, even as rapid advances in artificial intelligence and robot engineering have finally made it possible to start building such machines. If its emotive expressions and blinking lights seem vaguely familiar, it might be from generations of Star Wars droids and other endearingly clunky robotic sidekicks dreamed up in animation studios and children’s literature.

“Most people in this industry take inspiration from the science fiction that we grew up with,” said Fauna Robotics co-founder and CEO Rob Cochran. “I think some do so from ‘Westworld’ and ‘Terminator.’ We do from WALL-E and Baymax and Rosie Jetson.”

Making the case

The usual hypothesis for the commercialization of humanoid robots is that they will get their first jobs in warehouses or factories long before they are ready for homes. That’s the path proposed for two of today’s best-known prototypes: Tesla’s Optimus, which CEO Elon Musk sees as the car-maker’s future, and Boston Dynamics’ Atlas, which parent company Hyundai plans to deploy in car manufacturing by 2028.

Fauna looks to skip that step for an entirely different clientele: other robot tinkerers. Much as early personal computers and, later, smartphones sparked a culture of developers designing new games and applications, Sprout is a software developer platform more than just a robot. It’s also a mechanically complex one that will cost buyers \$50,000.

That’s a price some university research labs and technology entrepreneurs are already spending on China’s Unitree, which sells a



PHOTOS BY SETH WENIG/AP

Fauna Robotics co-founder and CEO Rob Cochran high-fives Sprout, the company’s new robot, at their offices in New York earlier this month.



Kel Guerin, Fauna Robotics VP of platform architecture, demonstrates how to operate Sprout remotely.

lightweight humanoid often seen at robotics conferences and competitions. Others have avoided Chinese hardware due to tariffs and broader security concerns.

Cochran believes Fauna is “the first American company to be actively shipping robots as a developer platform” and has been hand-delivering the first models. Early customers include Disney and Boston Dynamics.

“You take it out of the box and you can start walking it around immediately,” said Marc Theermann, chief strategy officer at Boston Dynamics, in a recent interview.

“Seeing their robot for the first time really lets you see the future a little bit. And if you squint, you can

see how a robot like that would be welcomed into people’s homes.”

Inside the testing ground

Sprout can’t lift heavy objects, but it can dance the Twist or the Floss, grab a toy block or teddy bear, or hoist itself from a chair to take a long stroll along the wood floors of Fauna’s headquarters in New York City’s Flatiron District.

Cochran and co-founder Josh Merel, the company’s chief technology officer, demonstrated the robot to The Associated Press in mid-January ahead of its public launch. Fauna employees and an AP reporter piloted the robot, using a video game controller, a phone application and a virtual-reality headset. Sprout also knows

the office layout enough to be sent on a planned mission, such as to check out the inventory of the break room refrigerator.

It walks slowly but steadily on uneven ground. Only once it came close to tripping, taking a sharp turn to avoid a person and instead hitting its foot on a protruding table wheel too low to the ground to be seen by Sprout’s camera eyes. But the robot, built to handle what engineers call perturbation, quickly recovered its balance and kept walking, much like a clumsy person might.

“If you step in front of it, it won’t crash into you, it’ll plan a new path around you,” said Ana Pervan, a Fauna research scientist who works on the robot’s mapping and navigation. Among the first batch of Fauna’s 50 employees, and a fan of science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, she previously worked on self-driving cars but was excited about joining a startup building something that might one day serve as a robot butler.

“It’s cute, and it’s not too humanoid, and I think that actually makes it a lot more fun,” Pervan said. “It’s not verging on creepy or trying to be too human. It’s like your buddy, your pal, that’s a different thing than you.”

Betting on humanoids

Starting a robot company can be unforgiving, especially one designing personal robots. One of the few successes, Roomba vacuum maker iRobot, had a decades-long run before filing for bankruptcy protection last month.

Most others didn’t last that long, like Anki, maker of the playful toy robot Cozmo, or Jibo, which went out of business less than a year after its dynamic talking speaker made the cover of Time Magazine’s 2017 “best inventions” edition.

“There were a lot of really brilliant attempts. I think the technology wasn’t quite there,” Cochran said. “I do think we’re right on the precipice now where you could build a companion that is present, engaging, delightful to be around, and can also move around a space in a way that nothing ever has before.”

Merel, an expert in robot locomotion, previously worked for Google’s DeepMind, where he focused on teaching robots using AI learning techniques in simulated environments, a controversial approach but now increasingly how robots are built. The science journal Nature published his study on an AI-powered virtual rat, co-authored with another of Fauna’s research scientists, Diego Aldaron-do.

Cochran and Merel later worked together at CTRL-labs, a wearable neurotech company sold to Facebook in 2019. Cochran jokes that he then “spent a misguided four years at Goldman Sachs” before they decided to team up again.

Improvements in AI, motors and batteries have accelerated humanoid development. But Fauna’s founders agreed that the dystopian aesthetic of many prototypes — what Cochran calls “industrial automotive machismo” — conveyed strength and confidence but wouldn’t work for intimate human spaces.

“They were generally quite big and physically dangerous to be around,” Cochran said. “Strong, heavy. If they fell on you, it’d be a real problem.”

The duo brought in Anthony Moschella, who helped design Peloton’s exercise bikes, treadmills and rowers and is an admirer of the abstract designs of Star Wars robots like R2-D2 and BB-8.

“Let’s build a system that human beings actually want to be around,” said Moschella, now Fauna’s vice president of hardware. “I think it’s incredible that so many robotics companies are not versed in the cultural context of what it means to be around a robot.”

Moschella said what happens next with Sprout will depend on how developers play around with it and what they learn. For Cochran, some of the most important judges have already approved. In a home video he keeps on his phone, his 2-year-old twins excitedly jump up and down as Sprout greets them.

WORLD

Mideast anxious over possible US strike

Area leaders tell Iran they won't allow airspace use for attack

By JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iranian officials reached out to the wider Middle East on Wednesday over the threat of a possible U.S. military strike on the country, a month since the start of protests in Iran that soon spread nationwide and sparked a bloody crackdown.

Two nations, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have signaled they won't allow their airspace to be used for any attack. But America has moved the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided missile destroyers into the region, which can be used to launch attacks from the sea.

It remains unclear what President Donald Trump will decide about using force, though he laid down two red lines — the killing of peaceful demonstrators and the possible mass execution of detainees. The protests saw at least 6,221 people killed as Iran launched a bloody crackdown on the demonstrations, with many others feared dead, activists said Wednesday.

Iran's state-run media, which now only refers to protesters as "terrorists," remains the sole source of news for many as Tehran cut off access to the global internet some three weeks ago. But Iranians have become angry and anxious in the weeks since, seeing footage of protesters shot and killed while worrying about what may happen next as the country's economy sinks further.

"I feel that my generation failed to give a better lesson to younger ones," said Mohammad Heidari, a



People walk in front a billboard Sunday with graphic showing a U.S aircraft carrier with damaged fighter jets on its deck, and sign reading in Farsi and English: "If you sow the wind, you'll reap whirlwind," at the Enqelab-e-Eslami (Islamic Revolution) square, in Tehran, Iran.

59-year-old high school teacher in Tehran. "The result of decades of teaching by my colleagues and me led to death of thousands, and maybe more injured and prisoners."

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said its top diplomat, Badr Abdelatty, separately spoke with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff to "work toward achieving calm, in order to avoid the region slipping into new cycles of instability."

The statement offered no details, though Iranian state media quoted Araghchi as saying third-party mediators had been in touch. Witkoff, a billionaire real estate developer and Trump's friend, had earlier negotiated over Iran's nuclear program. There was no immediate

acknowledgment from the White House of the call.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held a call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, saying the kingdom would "not allow its airspace or territory to be used for any military actions against Iran or for any attacks from any party, regardless of their origin." That follows a similar pledge by the UAE.

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE host American air assets and troops. Both also have faced attacks in the last decade. A 2019 assault believed by the West to have been carried out by Iran briefly halved Saudi oil production. The UAE faced several attacks claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels in 2022.

However, America's biggest

base in the region is Qatar's vast Al Udeid Air Base, which serves as the forward operating headquarters of the U.S. military's Central Command. Both Araghchi and Ali Larijani, a top Iranian security official, held calls with Qatar's Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Qatar acknowledged the calls, but offered few specifics on what was discussed.

Iran attacked Al Udeid in June in response to Trump sending American warplanes to bomb Iranian nuclear enrichment sites after Israel launched a 12-day war on the Islamic Republic.

"Our position is exactly this: Applying diplomacy through military threats cannot be effective or constructive," Araghchi told journalists Wednesday outside of a Cabi-

net meeting. "If they want negotiations to take shape, they must abandon threats, excessive demands, and the raising of illogical issues. Negotiations have their own principles: they must be conducted on an equal footing, based on mutual respect, and for mutual benefit."

While the protests have been halted for weeks after the crackdown, information slowly trickling out of Iran via Starlink satellite dishes is reaching activists, who have been trying to tally the carnage.

On Wednesday, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which has been accurate in multiple rounds of unrest in Iran, said at least 6,221 dead it counted included at least 5,858 protesters, 214 government-affiliated forces, 100 children and 49 civilians who weren't demonstrating. More than 42,300 have been arrested, it added.

The group verifies each death and arrest with a network of activists on the ground in Iran. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll.

Iran's government has put the death toll at a far lower 3,117, saying 2,427 were civilians and security forces, and labeled the rest "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

The protests began on Dec. 28, sparked by the fall of the Iranian currency, the rial, and quickly spread across the country. They were met by a violent crackdown, the scale of which is only starting to become clear as the country has faced more than two weeks of internet blackout — the most comprehensive in its history.

Iran on Wednesday also announced the execution of Hamidreza Sabet, a man it convicted of spying for Israel. Sabet's execution marks the 13th carried out by Iran against alleged spies for Israel since the June war.

S. Korea's ex-first lady sentenced to 20 months

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The wife of South Korea's ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to 20 months in prison for corruption Wednesday, as her husband awaits a verdict on a high-stakes rebellion charge that could result in the death penalty or life imprisonment.

The presidential couple, who have been jailed separately for months, suffered a spectacular fall from grace after Yoon's martial law debacle in December 2024 led to his impeachment and eventually



Kim

his removal from office. Yoon was handed a five-year prison term this month for defying authorities' attempts to detain him and other charges related to the martial law decree.

Investigators say Kim was not involved in Yoon's martial law enforcement.

On Wednesday, Seoul Central District Court sentenced Kim for receiving luxury gifts like a Graff

diamond necklace and a Chanel bag from the Unification Church in return for promises of political favors.

"Being closest to a president, a first lady can exert significant influence on him and is a symbolic figure who represents the country together with a president," the court said in a televised verdict. "But the defendant exploited her position to seek personal gains."

Kim said via her lawyers that she would "humbly accept" the court's view and "apologizes again to everyone for causing concerns."

The 20-month sentence was a surprise after independent counsel Min Joong-ki called for a 15-year prison term for Kim on three charges including stock price manipulation, political funding law violations and accepting bribes. The court acquitted Kim of two other charges, citing a lack of evidence and other reasons.

Min's team responded that it cannot accept the ruling and will appeal to a higher court. The governing liberal Democratic Party, which led to Yoon's ouster, slammed the verdict as sending a

wrong signal that "abuse of power like Kim Keon Hee's can be tolerated."

Kim's lawyer Choi Ji-woo said Min's investigation was politically driven. He said Kim's defense team thanked the court for its verdict but said the 20-month prison term was "relatively high." He said his team will discuss whether to appeal.

Kim has been in jail since August when the Seoul court approved a warrant to arrest her, citing the chance she might destroy evidence.

WORLD

Denmark, Greenland hold European talks after US deal

Bloomberg News

Denmark and Greenland's leaders are in Berlin and Paris this week to shore up European backing after a framework deal with the U.S. paved the way for negotiations on the Arctic island.

In Berlin, Mette Frederiksen and Jens-Frederik Nielsen attended the Welt Economic Summit on Tuesday, meeting policymakers and diplomats to discuss the the geopolitical situation.

They also spoke with Chancel-

lor Friedrich Merz, according to a spokesperson for the German government.

It comes after U.S. President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte last week agreed to a "framework" over Greenland, with discussions expected to focus on areas including mining rights, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's role on the island and the defense relationship between Denmark and the U.S.

Trump has said he needs control of Greenland for national security purposes, though he has confirmed he won't use force to take over the territory.

Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark but has its own government.

Frederiksen and Nielsen will travel to Paris for a working lunch with French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday.

They are set to discuss security issues in the Arctic and the eco-

nomic and social development of Greenland, "which France and the European Union are ready to support," the Elysee said in a statement.

On Monday, Frederiksen reiterated Denmark seeks a permanent NATO presence in Greenland, similar to the Baltic Sentry operation in the Baltic Sea.

"This would not only be important for NATO's northern flank, but would also send a very strong geopolitical signal to Russia and

China," she said at a wind energy summit in Hamburg. "We are working toward this and at the same time we are talking bilaterally with the United States about issues that concern us and the United States."

Merz on Tuesday told Frederiksen that "Germany, as a European NATO ally, would also do more for security in the High North within the framework of NATO. This is a common transatlantic interest," the spokesperson said.

Combined casualties in war in Ukraine could soon hit 2 million

BY KAMILA HRABCHUK
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A new report warns that the number of soldiers killed, injured or missing on both sides of Russia's war on Ukraine could hit 2 million by the spring, with Russia suffering the largest number of troop deaths recorded for any major power in any conflict since World War II.

Tuesday's report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies came less than a month before the fourth anniversary of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

As the war grinds through another bitterly cold winter, Russian strikes hit an apartment block Wednesday on the outskirts of Kyiv, killing two people.

Nine others were also injured in different attacks in the Ukrainian cities of Odesa and Kryvyi Rih and the front-line region of Zaporizhzhia.

The CSIS report said Russia



EFREM LUKATSKY/AP

Relatives and colleagues attend the funeral of rescuer Oleksandr Zibrov, 36, who was killed in a Russian drone strike on a residential building, at a fire station in Kyiv, Ukraine, Wednesday.

suffered 1.2 million casualties, including up to 325,000 troop deaths, between February 2022 and December 2025.

"Despite claims of battlefield momentum in Ukraine, the data

shows that Russia is paying an extraordinary price for minimal gains and is in decline as a major power," the report said. "No major power has suffered anywhere near these numbers of casualties

or fatalities in any war since World War II."

It estimated that Ukraine, with its smaller army and population, had suffered between 500,000 to 600,000 military casualties, including up to 140,000 deaths.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv gives timely data on military losses, and each side seeks to amplify the other side's casualties.

The report estimated that at current rates, combined Russian and Ukrainian casualties may be as high as 1.8 million and could reach 2 million by spring.

The figures from the CSIS were compiled using the Washington, D.C.-based think tank's own analysis, data published by independent Russian news site Mediazona with the BBC, estimates by the British government and interviews with state officials.

Reports about military losses have been repressed in Russian media, activists and independent journalists say.

Mediazona, together with the BBC and a team of volunteers, has so far collected the names of over 160,000 troops killed by scouring news reports, social media and government websites.

The report also said that Russian forces were advancing at a sluggish pace since they seized the initiative on the battlefield in 2024, despite their much larger size.

Officials said Wednesday that two people were killed near the Ukrainian capital and at least nine others were injured in attacks across Ukraine.

A man and a woman died in an overnight attack in the Bilohorodka area on the outskirts of Kyiv, according to Mykola Kalashnyk, head of the regional military administration.

Officials in the Ukrainian cities of Odesa and Kryvyi Rih, as well as the Zaporizhzhia region, also reported Russian strikes overnight, wounding at least nine people and damaging infrastructure.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Waffle House to offer Valentine's Day dinner

GA NORCROSS — Cupid has struck his arrow at select Waffle House across the country, giving couples the chance to reserve a uniquely affordable dinner date experience for Valentine's Day.

Since 2008, Waffle House has made Valentine's Day an extra special occasion at their locations. While there are approximately 2,000 Waffle Houses in the Southeast, only 218 locations are accepting reservations for this special day.

A reservation entails a dim lit atmosphere, special dinner items off the menu and classic Valentine's Day themed decorations.

This is the only time of the year Waffle House takes reservations, so spots get filled up pretty quickly, sometimes weeks in advance.

Their website (<https://reservations.getwisely.com/location-search?g=waffle-house>) offers a locator option to make reservations.

Charlotte man pleads guilty to monkey abuse

NC CHARLOTTE — A Charlotte man last week pleaded guilty to federal charges related to abuse of monkeys.

Robert M. Craig pleaded guilty based on his involvement with online groups dedicated to creating and distributing videos depicting extreme acts violence and sexual abuse of monkeys, according to a Department of Justice release.

According to court documents, Craig conspired with others to create and distribute so-called "animal crush videos" which depicted acts of sadistic violence against baby and adult monkeys.

Craig signed a statement of facts saying he shared a video in which a monkey was mutilated, and other videos shared by the conspirators also depicted mutilation and sodomization of monkeys.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and FBI investigated the case.

Suburban school district fights rare state takeover

NJ LAKEWOOD — Lakewood's school board says it will fight the state's plan to take over its school district, arguing the unusual move is "neither warranted nor in the best interest" of the Ocean County community.

Outgoing state Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer announced earlier this month that the state initiated a process to take over Lakewood Township School District. State officials said the suburban district has had years of financial and operational problems that are denying students a proper education.

The Lakewood Board of Education issued a statement last week saying it plans to "defend the integrity" of the district and fight the



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

Taking shoveling to a whole new level

Jack Grimes shovels snow off of his roof before it could do damage to the building, on Monday in Wardsboro, Vt., after a winter storm dropped several inches of snow.

state's plan.

New Jersey has previously taken over school districts in Jersey City, Paterson, Newark and Camden amid concerns about mismanagement and poor test scores. If successful, Lakewood would be the first full state takeover in a suburban area.

Body found in dunes in search for missing man

NC CAPE HATTERAS — The search for a missing Arkansas man on North Carolina's Outer Banks took an unexpected turn when a different body was found, according to investigators.

The identity of the person and a cause of death have not been released.

"On Jan. 25, a Cape Hatteras National Seashore visitor found a deceased male in the dunes south of off-road vehicle Ramp 2," the park said in an email to The Charlotte Observer.

"The incident appears to be unrelated to any ongoing investigations in Dare County."

A search has been ongoing since Jan. 16 for Christopher Lee Palmer, 39, after the Arkansas man's Ford F-250 was found stuck on the beach at Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Traffic cameras show the pickup was in Dare County as early as Jan. 9, and it was hauling a blue and white kayak, officials say. That kayak

was not in the truck when it was found Jan. 12 at Cape Point, park officials said.

Palmer's father, Bren Palmer, says his son was dealing with a terminal illness and may have chosen to die at sea rather than face treatments. Chris Palmer was traveling with his 11-year-old dog Zoey, who is also believed to be dead, the family said in a Facebook post.

Vet, key to 1st Trump impeachment, seeks seat

FL TALLAHASSEE — Alex Vindman, who became a key player along with his twin brother in President Donald Trump's first impeachment, announced on Tuesday that he is running for the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in Florida.

Vindman, an Army veteran, was serving on the National Security Council in 2019 when the Republican president pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate Joe Biden, then a Democratic candidate. He and his brother, Eugene, a lawyer on the National Security Council, reported their concerns and sparked investigations.

Eugene Vindman now serves as a congressman from Virginia. If Alex Vindman clinches the Democratic nomination, he'll challenge Republican Sen. Ashley Moody, a former state attorney general who was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Marco Rubio as he became secretary

of state.

The winner of November's special election will finish the last two years of Rubio's term.

Vindman was forced out of the National Security Council and later retired from the Army after testifying against Trump during impeachment hearings. He said "this president unleashed a reign of terror and retribution, not just against me and my family but against all of us."

Ex-Olympian pleads not guilty to drug charges

CA SANTA ANA — A former Canadian Olympic snowboarder pleaded not guilty to running a billion-dollar drug trafficking ring and orchestrating multiple killings, as one of the FBI's top fugitives made his first U.S. court appearance Monday since he was arrested in Mexico last week and flown to California.

U.S. authorities say Ryan Wedding, who competed in a single event for his home country in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, had been hiding in Mexico for more than a decade. He was added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list last March when authorities offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

Authorities say Wedding moved as much as 60 tons of cocaine between Colombia, Mexico, Canada and Southern California and be-

lieve he was working under the protection of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico's most powerful drug rings. His drug trafficking group was the largest supplier of cocaine to Canada, according to a 2024 indictment.

Mexican officials said he turned himself in at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City last week and was flown to Southern California after a yearlong effort by authorities in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Colombia and the Dominican Republic to arrest him.

Carthage Museum celebrates 25 years

NC CARTHAGE — The Carthage Museum is marking its 25th anniversary, celebrating a quarter century of preserving and sharing the everyday history of the town of Carthage and the people who have called it home.

Founded on Jan. 27, 2001, the museum offers visitors a close look at daily life in Carthage from the Victorian period through the 1960s. The collection includes household items, tools, photographs, documents and personal artifacts that tell the story of how ordinary people lived, worked and raised families.

As part of the anniversary year, the board and volunteers are taking inventory of the collection and planning thoughtful updates to refresh exhibits while honoring the museum's roots.

From wire reports

FACES

Who will achieve Grammys glory?

AP music writers predict Sunday's winners

By MARIA SHERMAN
AND JONATHAN LANDRUM JR.
Associated Press

The competition is fierce. Kendrick Lamar's dominance continues at the 2026 Grammy Awards, where he leads the nominations with nine. He's followed closely by Lady Gaga, Jack Antonoff and Canadian record producer/songwriter Cirkut, who boast seven each. Then it's Sabrina Carpenter, Bad Bunny, Leon Thomas and Serban Ghenea with six.

But who will win? Who will make history at the 68th Grammy Awards on Feb. 1?

The Associated Press' Maria Sherman and Jonathan Landrum Jr. break down some of the biggest and closest races.

Album of the year

"Debí Tirar Más Fotos," Bad Bunny; "Swag," Justin Bieber; "Man's Best Friend," Sabrina Carpenter; "Let God Sort Em Out," Clipse, Pusha T and Malice; "Mayhem," Lady Gaga; "GNX," Kendrick Lamar; "Mutt," Leon Thomas; "Chromakopia," Tyler, the Creator.

Sherman: Starting off with the big guns. Last year's "Cowboy Carter" victory was long overdue for Beyoncé. That, and an evolving Recording Academy electorate, is enough to inspire hope that winners may soon be in sync with the current cultural zeitgeist. But change is slow, and it is most likely Lady Gaga will be awarded. "May-



Lady Gaga

hem" is a great album, but her victory will be more about narrative — recognizing a game-changing artist with her return-to-form record — instead of what should really win this year. That's Bad Bunny's "Debí Tirar Más Fotos." (Let's not forget that all Latin Recording Academy members were invited to join the Recording Academy in 2025, but it is not clear how many can actually vote.) The world would love to see a Spanish-language album win for the very first time — Bad Bunny was once again the most streamed artist, globally, on Spotify last year.

Landrum: I understand the appeal of a breakthrough narrative here, especially with such a globally representative field. But this category tends to land with the project that moved most cleanly across multiple spaces without explanation. Lamar's "GNX" stayed active across music, sports and everyday culture throughout the year. Let's not forget that songs "luther" and "squabble up" sustained long-term engagement; "tv off" entered everyday language with the "mustard" catchphrase; and "dodger blue" extended the project into sports culture during the Los Angeles Dodgers' championship run. Much respect to the other nominees here, but Lamar deli-

vered a tightly structured album that circulated naturally. That kind of sustained presence usually carries more weight than momentum built around a single lane.

Record of the year

"DtMF," Bad Bunny; "Manchild," Sabrina Carpenter; "Anxiety," DoeChii; "Wildflower," Billie Eilish; "Abracadabra," Lady Gaga; "luther," Kendrick Lamar with SZA; "The Subway," Chappell Roan; "APT.," Rosé and Bruno Mars.

Landrum: If one song feels both inescapable and effortless, it's "APT." I look at what songs listeners — especially younger ones, including my soon-to-be 6-year-old — still keep in rotation. The song easily translates across age groups, platforms and borders. Mars brought a proven sense of structure that voters respond to, while Rosé's presence reflects the academy's growing comfort with global pop influence. If this wins, which I believe will happen, Rosé would become the first K-pop artist to take the record of the year milestone. I think it's time to make history.

Sherman: For all of the reasons you've listed above — as well as its total ubiquity and cultural meshing — "APT." is the most likely candidate. But because record of the year is meant to highlight performance and production (as opposed to song of the year, which focuses on songwriting and composition), "luther" should win.

Song of the year (songwriter's award)

"Abracadabra," Henry Walter, Lady Gaga and Andrew Watt; "Anxiety," Jaylah Hickmon; "APT.," Amy Allen, Christopher Brody Brown, Rogét Chahayed, Henry Walter, Omer Fedi, Philip Lawrence, Bruno Mars, Chae-young Park and Theron Thomas; "DtMF," Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, Scott Dittrich, Benjamin Falik, Hugo René Sención and Tyler Thomas Spry; "Golden," EJAI and Mark Sonnenblick; "luther," Jack Antonoff, Roshwita Larisha Bacha, Matthew Bernard, Ink, Scott Bridgeway, Sam Dew, Kendrick Lamar, Mark Anthony Spears, Solána Rowe and Kamasi Washington; "Manchild," Amy Allen, Jack Antonoff and Sabrina Carpenter; "Wildflower," Billie Eilish O'Connell and Finneas O'Connell.

Sherman: There's no "Not Like Us" this year, but there is a lot of competition. Eilish and Mars are back — two established favorites of Grammy voters — it would be a third win for both in this category, the most of any artist. And it wouldn't be wise to count out the gargantuan "Golden," though it may be awarded elsewhere. Signs point to Lady Gaga for this one. She has been nominated in this category four times with no



Rosé



AP

Rapper Kendrick Lamar, shown performing at last year's Super Bowl halftime show on Feb. 9, leads the field with nine Grammy nominations.

victories. "Abracadabra" could take it home — and it will feel more justified than an album of the year win for many.

Landrum: I agree. The competition is strong here. But this category often comes down to precision. And "Abracadabra" is tightly constructed and intentional, shaped by Lady Gaga's renewed focus on lyric construction and melodic intent. You hear that discipline in the writing itself with every line pulling its weight.

Best new artist

Olivia Dean; Katseye; The Marias; Addison Rae; sombr; Leon Thomas; Alex Warren; Lola Young.

Landrum: This category increasingly rewards artists who arrive with a fully formed identity. Thomas separated himself by presenting a cohesive body of work rather than a moment driven by visibility alone. "Mutt" reflects songwriting discipline, genre fluency and a clear point of view shaped by years of experience. That foundation tends to resonate when voters are thinking long term.

Sherman: Points have been made! Thomas is an exemplary candidate. But there are other factors. If streaming was the final metric, this would go to "Ordinary" singer Warren. But it rarely is. In this category, Dean's name has been uttered the most.



Dean

Best pop duo/group performance

"Defying Gravity," Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande; "Golden," HUNTR/X: EJAE, Audrey Nuna, REI AMI; "Gabriela," Katseye; "APT.," Rosé and Bruno Mars; "30 for 30," SZA with Kendrick Lamar.

Sherman: Three of these could be considered K-pop, or at least K-pop-adjacent: "Golden," "APT." and "Gabriela." If any of them win, it will be the first time any K-pop act has won a Grammy — and who wouldn't want to see that? "Golden" feels most likely.

Landrum: This is a toss-up between "Golden" and "APT." But I'm going to give a slight nod to "APT." What sets this one apart is balance. It also features Mars, a voter favorite. The collaboration with him and Rosé feels settled, with neither competing for space. Mars understands how to shape performances that voters consistently recognize, and Rosé fits into that seamlessly.

Best rap album

"Let God Sort Em Out," Clipse, Pusha T and Malice; "Glorious," GloRilla; "God Does Like Ugly," JID; "GNX," Kendrick Lamar; "Chromakopia," Tyler, the Creator.

Landrum: If I believe "GNX" deserves album of the year, then this category shouldn't even be a debate. Same logic would apply to Tyler, the Creator: You shouldn't crown the album at the top and ignore it in its home genre. "GNX" is cohesive, quotable and culturally dominant. That's rap at its highest level.

Sherman: It's a no-contest pick. "GNX" is more than an album; it's a paragon.

Best contemporary country album

"Patterns," Kelsea Ballerini; "Snipe Hunter," Tyler Childers; "Evangeline vs the Machine," Eric Church; "Beautifully Broken," Jelly Roll; "Postcards from Texas," Miranda Lambert.

Sherman: This year, the Grammys renamed country album to contemporary country album and added a traditional country album category. But the news arrived right after "Cowboy Carter" won best country album, inspiring backlash. In this first edition, "contemporary" seems to mean "country that includes elements of other genres and/or left-of-center narratives." Church's inventive country-rock may sway voters over Ballerini's pop affectations, Jelly Roll's hip-hop-informed phrasing or Childers' eclecticism.

Landrum: Jelly Roll's album fits the newly defined category almost too perfectly: emotional, honest, genre-fluid production and storytelling that connects beyond traditional country audiences.

Best R&B album

"Beloved," Giveon; "Why Not More?," Coco Jones; "The Crown," Ledisi; "Escape Room," Teyana Taylor; "Mutt," Leon Thomas.

Landrum: There's only one album in this category that's also up for album of the year, and that matters. "Mutt" distinguished itself through restraint, allowing songwriting and performance to lead rather than production excess. This should be a lock.

Sherman: "Mutt" is a clear standout.



Jelly Roll

Bizarro



Loose Parts



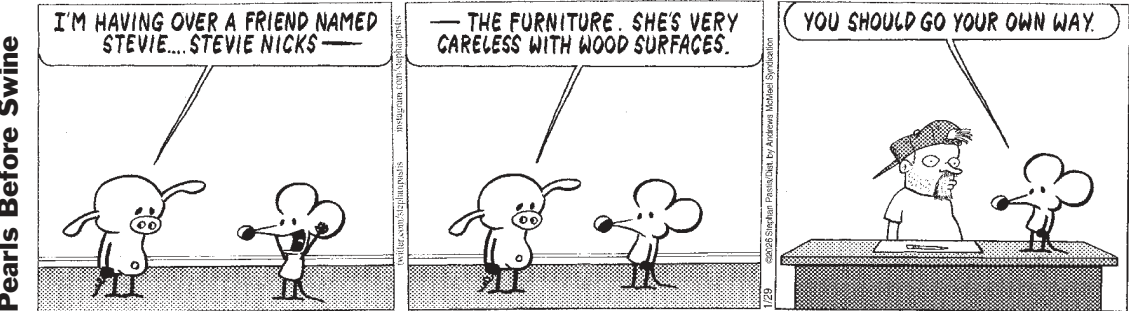
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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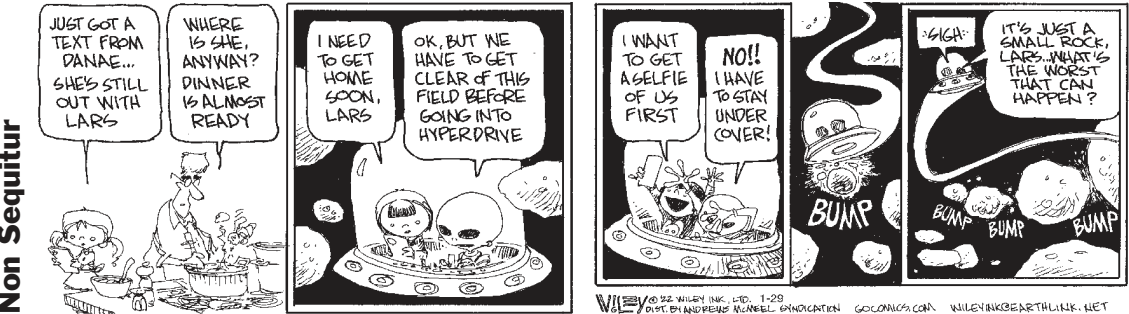
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



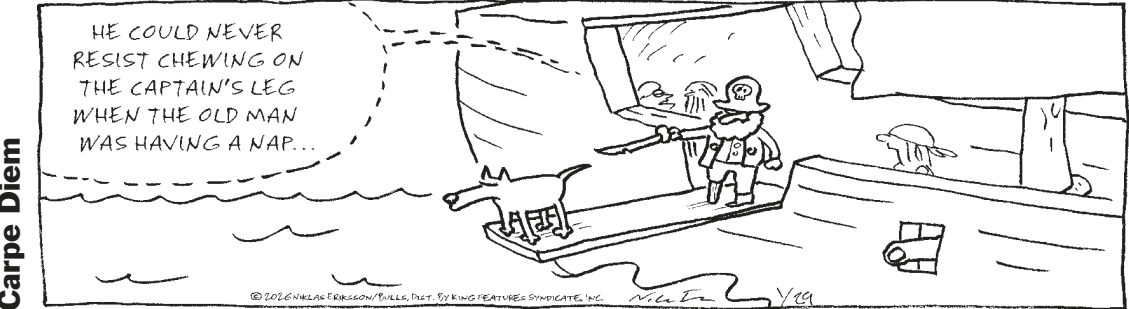
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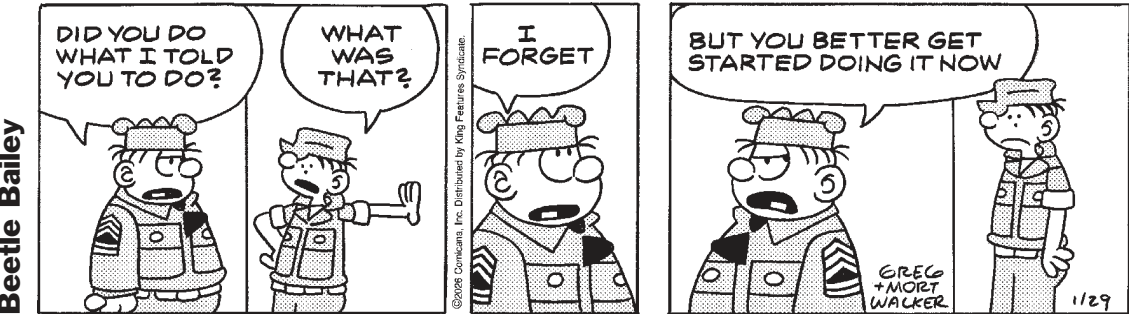
Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



- ACROSS
- 61 "Misery" director Reiner
- 23 "— the season ..."
- 27 Droid
- 29 Greatest of all time
- 30 Huron, for one
- 31 New York canal
- 33 "Jay Kelly" star George
- 35 Purse
- 38 Thither
- 40 Rich cakes
- 43 Coyote calls
- 45 Nay undoer
- 46 Recognize
- 47 Tiny bit
- 48 Heath
- 49 Pump, for one
- 53 Jurist Fortas
- 54 Punk-rock subgenre
- 55 Massage
- DOWN
- 1 Mined matter
- 2 "Lion" star Patel
- 3 Katniss in "The Hunger Games"
- 4 Word with sticker or crop
- 5 Year, in San Juan
- 6 Titles for knights
- 7 Pricey
- 8 Stew flavorer
- 9 Sci-fi fleet
- 10 Pasta sauce brand
- 11 Snare
- 16 Rule, for short
- 20 Skill
- 21 Smile broadly
- 22 Celestial bear
- 1 Verse by Pablo Neruda
- 4 Low range
- 8 Lancaster of "Atlantic City"
- 12 Speed (up)
- 13 Military group
- 14 Miles away
- 15 Eternally
- 17 "Lotus position" discipline
- 18 Agent
- 19 Makes airtight
- 21 Spending plan
- 24 Season opener?
- 25 Before
- 26 Chest bone
- 28 Eating area
- 32 In — (shortly)
- 34 Weep
- 36 Dread
- 37 Virile
- 39 Make lace
- 41 Enjoy Aspen
- 42 Reaction at a magic show
- 44 Small beard
- 46 Kabuki outfits
- 50 Deli bread
- 51 Lunch hour
- 52 "I don't care"
- 56 Oklahoma tribe
- 57 Earring site
- 58 Flightless bird
- 59 Cautious
- 60 Beholds

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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O	R	B		T	E	A	L	S		M	A	E
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1-29

CRYPTOQUIP

QM MTL GRRZ HTRO D JPHTLZ

MR BUQDW MTL UQHM NJRPO

RG NJQOLH, FPM HRWLRKL

FLQM WL MR MTL FPKBT.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT YOU CALL COWS WHEN THEY QUIT MAKING NUTRITIOUS, WHITE-COLORED LIQUID? MILK DUDS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals B

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference									
Atlantic Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Tampa Bay	51	33	14	4	70	179	130		
Detroit	54	32	17	5	69	168	162		
Buffalo	52	30	17	5	65	179	159		
Montreal	53	29	17	7	65	180	177		
Boston	54	31	20	3	65	180	168		
Florida	52	28	21	3	59	160	169		
Toronto	53	24	20	9	57	174	183		
Ottawa	52	24	21	7	55	174	174		

Metropolitan Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Carolina	52	32	15	5	69	180	150		
Pittsburgh	51	26	14	11	63	169	152		
N.Y. Islanders	52	28	19	5	61	150	146		
Philadelphia	51	24	18	9	57	154	162		
Washington	53	25	21	7	57	170	159		
New Jersey	53	27	24	2	56	141	163		
Columbus	51	24	20	7	55	158	169		
N.Y. Rangers	53	22	25	6	50	143	165		

Western Conference									
Central Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Colorado	50	35	6	9	79	198	122		
Minnesota	54	30	14	10	70	175	157		
Dallas	53	30	14	9	69	176	147		
Utah	53	28	21	4	60	167	146		
Nashville	52	24	23	5	53	150	177		
Chicago	53	21	23	9	51	144	168		
Winnipeg	52	21	24	7	49	153	161		
St. Louis	53	19	25	9	47	130	183		

Pacific Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA		
Vegas	52	25	14	13	63	173	164		
Edmonton	54	27	19	8	62	186	175		
Anaheim	53	28	22	3	59	177	188		
San Jose	51	27	21	3	57	161	176		
Los Angeles	51	22	16	13	57	137	144		
Seattle	51	23	19	9	55	143	154		
Calgary	52	21	25	6	48	132	156		
Vancouver	53	17	31	5	39	141	196		

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									
N.Y. Islanders 4, Philadelphia 0 Tampa Bay 2, Utah 0 N.Y. Rangers 4, Boston 3, OT Edmonton 7, Anaheim 4									
Tuesday's games									
Montreal 3, Vegas 2, OT Boston 3, Nashville 2, OT Utah 4, Florida 3 Buffalo 7, Toronto 4 Los Angeles 3, Detroit 1 Winnipeg 4, New Jersey 3 Dallas 4, St. Louis 3 Minnesota 4, Chicago 3, SO San Jose 5, Vancouver 2 Seattle 5, Washington 1									
Wednesday's games									
N.Y. Rangers at N.Y. Islanders Colorado at Ottawa Philadelphia at Columbus									
Thursday's games									
Chicago at Pittsburgh Colorado at Montreal Los Angeles at Buffalo N.Y. Islanders at N.Y. Rangers Nashville at New Jersey Philadelphia at Boston Utah at Carolina Winnipeg at Tampa Bay Washington at Detroit Calgary at Minnesota Florida at St. Louis San Jose at Edmonton Anaheim at Vancouver Dallas at Vegas Toronto at Seattle									
Friday's game									
Columbus at Chicago									

Scoring leaders				
Through Wednesday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	54	33	59	92
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	50	38	50	88
Nikita Kucherov, TB	47	26	54	80
Macklin Celebrini, SJ	51	27	51	78
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	51	25	49	74
David Pastrnak, BOS	49	22	47	69
Mikko Rantanen, DAL	50	19	45	64
Kirill Kaprizov, MIN	54	28	36	64
Mark Scheifele, WPG	52	26	37	63
Martin Necas, COL	50	22	40	62

ROUNDUP

Kane ties record in Wings' loss

Assist pulls veteran even with Modano for points by American-born player

Associated Press

DETROIT — Anton Forsberg made 26 saves and the Los Angeles Kings beat the Red Wings 3-1 on Tuesday night as Detroit winger Patrick Kane moved into a tie with Dallas' Mike Modano as the highest-scoring American-born players in NHL history.

Kane matched Modano by recording his 1,374th point on an assist on a goal by Alex DeBrincat late in the third period. He accomplished the feat just a couple of months after turning 37, while Modano was 40 when he scored a goal to register point No. 1,374. For his career, Kane has 500 goals and 874 assists in 1,341 NHL regular-season games. Modano retired in 2011 with 561 goals and 813 assists in 1,499 games.

“Nothing really went right for us tonight, so it’s tough to really think about (the record) right now, but hopefully next game’s a better result and (I) can move past Mike next game,” Kane said after the game. “That’d be nice, to do that and do it with a win.”

Kane has been one of the faces of American hockey since getting taken with the first pick in the 2007 draft by Chicago. He helped the Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup three times from 2010-15 as a co-headliner of one of the most successful runs since the league’s salary cap era began in ’05.

Samuel Helenius, Andrei Kuzmenko and Corey Perry scored for the Kings, who won their third straight game.

Detroit’s John Gibson made 19 saves and had his eight-game win streak halted, surrendering a goal midway through the second period and a power-play score early in the third.

The Kings have earned points in their last six games (3-0-3). The Red Wings lost for just the second time in six games and third time in their last 11.

Helenius got Los Angeles on the board at the 10-minute mark of the second period, scoring his second of the season by converting a feed from Jeff Malott from behind the net.

Kuzmenko extended the lead to 2-0 for the Kings at 6:46 of the third period, scoring on the power play on assists from Adrian Kempe and Kevin Fiala. The goal was the 24th of the season with a man advantage for the Kings, who rank last in the NHL on the power play.

DeBrincat scored and pulled Detroit within 2-1 at 17:45 of the third period after the Red Wings pulled Gibson for the extra skater. Kane and Moritz Seider assisted.

The Kings iced the game when Perry scored into an empty net at 18:47.

Jets 4, Devils 3: Mark Scheifele scored his 26th goal of the season, reigning MVP Connor Hellebuyck stopped 26 of the 29 shots he faced and visiting Winnipeg ended its two-game skid by beating New Jersey.

The Devils have lost back-to-back games after winning three in a row at the start of their Western Conference road trip. They traded veteran winger Ondrej Palat to the New York Islanders in a deal that was consummated before he left the arena prior to warmups and finalized during the first period.



DUANE BURLESON/AP

Detroit Red Wings right wing Patrick Kane, left, attempts to get a goal past Los Angeles Kings goaltender Anton Forsberg during the third period on Tuesday in Detroit.

Bruins 3, Predators 2 (OT): David Pastrnak scored 15 seconds into overtime and host Boston beat Nashville.

Jeremy Swayman stopped 28 shots for the Bruins, who improved to 8-1-1 in their last 10 games.

Roman Josi and Nick Blankenburg scored for Nashville, which has lost four of five since a three-game winning streak. Steven Stamkos had an assist and Saros finished with 25 saves.

Canadiens 3, Golden Knights 2 (OT): Jake Evans scored at 3:58 of overtime, leading Montreal to a home victory over Vegas.

Cole Caufield, with his 30th goal of the season, and Phillip Danault also scored for Montreal, as the Habs halted a two-game losing skid.

Mammoth 4, Panthers 3: Mikhail Sergachev scored in the third period to put Utah ahead to stay in a road win over Florida.

Nick Schmaltz, Sean Durzi and Barrett Hayton also scored goals for the Mammoth, who have won nine of their last 11 games and played without top goal-scorer Dylan Guenther, who has a lower-body injury.

Sabres 7, Maple Leafs 4: Rasmus Dahlin had the first hat trick of his NHL career to go along with two assists and visiting Buffalo beat Toronto.

Tage Thompson, with a goal and an assist in his 500th NHL game, Josh Doan, Alex Tuch and Jack Quinn also scored for Buffalo, which has won four straight.

The Maple Leafs came home from a successful road trip, but finished their disastrous five-game homestand with a solitary point (0-4-1) and have dropped seven of eight overall.

Stars 4, Blues 3: Thomas Harley’s goal with just over a minute left short-circuited a late rally by St. Louis and lifted Dallas to a road win.

Matt Duchene scored a pair of goals for his first multigoal game since Feb. 8. Roope Hintz also scored and Jake Oettinger made 23 saves, as the Stars won for the third time in their last four games and improved to 10-2-1 against St. Louis going back to Nov. 28, 2022.

Wild 4, Blackhawks 3 (SO): Kirill Kaprizov scored the shootout winner as host Minnesota defeated Chicago.

Kaprizov was Minnesota’s second shooter and beat Spencer Knight with a wrist shot. Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt stopped all three shootout attempts as the Wild came back from a 3-0 deficit to beat Chicago for the 17th time in 18 games.

Sharks 5, Canucks 2: Macklin Celebrini had a goal and three assists, visiting San Jose scored three first-period goals in a span of 4:04, and went on to beat Vancouver.

Adam Gaudette, Tyler Toffoli, Will Smith and John Klingberg also had goals for the Sharks, and Yaroslav Askarov improved to 17-13-1 with 23 saves.

Kraken 5, Capitals 1: Jared McCann had two goals and two assists as host Seattle beat Washington.

Jordan Eberle and Matty Beniers each added a goal and an assist. Ryker Evans also scored for Seattle, and Philipp Grubauer made 19 saves.

Alex Ovechkin scored his 22nd goal of the season for Washington, and Logan Thompson stopped 27 shots. It was the 919th career goal for Ovechkin, extending his NHL record.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Nebraska's perfect season ends with loss to Michigan

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Major college basketball's longest winning streak ended at 24 games Tuesday night with No. 5 Nebraska's 75-72 loss at No. 3 Michigan.

"To beat Michigan, you have to play almost perfect and we had a lapse at the end," Cornhuskers guard Sam Hoiberg said.

Nebraska did not score over the final 3:20, missing its last five shots after leading most of the game despite two key players being out of the lineup. The Wolverines' Trey McKenney made a tiebreaking layup with 1:07 left, and Morez Johnson Jr. had 17 points and 12 rebounds.

"That just proved, hopefully to everybody, most importantly to the guys in the locker room, that we can compete with anybody," coach

Fred Hoiberg said.

Rienk Mast missed the game with an illness as did double-digit scorer Braden Frager, who was out for a second straight game with an ankle injury.

"It's unfortunate, but I give our guys a lot of credit for the fight they showed in the game from start to finish," Fred Hoiberg said.

The 24-game winning streak was an improbable run for a school with a modest history in men's basketball. Nebraska has emerged as the feel-good story of the season before hitting a bump in the road at the Crisler Center in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The Cornhuskers' previous loss came in last year's final regular-season game, 83-68 to Iowa at home March 9. The streak started when they swept through four games to win the inaugural College



Michigan center Aday Mara celebrates after Nebraska missed the final shot during the second half Tuesday in Ann Arbor, Mich. The Cornhuskers lost their first game of the season, ending their winning streak at 24.

Basketball Crown tournament in Las Vegas last April.

"We haven't had this feeling in a long time. It's been almost a year," Hoiberg said. "They were hurt by it. We're going to find out what we're made of."

Nebraska will have some time to regroup before hosting No. 9 Illinois on Sunday.

The Huskers' 20-1 start remains the program's best and their No. 5

ranking in this week's AP Top 25 poll is the highest in school history.

The 24-game streak was the longest in Division I since Gonzaga reeled off 35 in a row between 2019-21.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

UConn tops Providence behind Reed's late flurry

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — Tarris Reed Jr. scored seven of his 19 points in the final five minutes as second-ranked UConn beat Providence 87-81 on Tuesday night to become the first team to open 10-0 in Big East play in seven years.

Solo Ball had 17 points, Silas Demary Jr. added 15 points and six assists, and Eric Reibe had 14 points and eight rebounds for the Huskies. They opened a season 20-1 for the sixth time, but the first since 1998-99. Villanova in 2018-19 was the last team to start 10-0 in the Big East.

Malachi Smith, 1 for 8 from 3-point range in his previous 13 games, made his first four and had 12 points and seven assists as UConn won its 16th straight game.

Jamier Jones had 20 points and Jaylin Sellers added 18 for Providence (9-12, 2-8).

No. 7 Michigan State 88, Rutgers 79 (OT): Jeremy Fears scored 27 of his career-high 29 points in the second half and overtime, and the visiting Spartans outlasted the Scarlet Knights.

Fears also had nine assists, including a pass to Divine Ugochukwu for the tying 3-pointer from the corner with 11 seconds left in regulation.

When Michigan State (19-2, 9-1 Big Ten) scored the first points of overtime on two free throws by



UConn forward Tarris Reed Jr. shoots as Providence forward Oswin Erhunmwunse defends in the second half Tuesday in Storrs, Conn.

Jaxon Kohler, it was its first lead since its were ahead 9-8. The Spartans pushed ahead 78-73 and led comfortably from there on the way to their seventh straight win.

Indiana 72, No. 12 Purdue 67: Lamar Wilkerson had 19 points, Nick Dorn added 18 and Conor Enright scored five of his eight points in the final 71 seconds to help the host Hoosiers hold off the Boilermakers.

Indiana won its second straight game and gave coach Darian DeVries the biggest win of his first season with the Hoosiers (14-7, 5-5 Big Ten). It came in his first matchup against Indiana's biggest

rival and on the same night college football's new national champions were honored during a pregame ceremony on the same court where coach Curt Cignetti once proclaimed "Purdue sucks."

Trey Kaufman-Renn led the Boilermakers (17-4, 7-3) with 23 points and Braden Smith added 14 points, five rebounds and five assists. But they still extended their losing streak to a season-worst three games.

No. 15 Arkansas 83, Oklahoma 79: Freshman star Darius Acuff Jr. had 21 points and nine assists, and the visiting Razorbacks held off the Sooners.

Meleek Thomas added 16 points for Arkansas (16-5, 6-2 Southeastern Conference), which has won four of its past five games.

Nijel Pack scored 22 points for Oklahoma (11-10, 1-7 SEC), which lost its seventh straight.

No. 17 Virginia 100, Notre Dame 97 (2OT): Thijs De Ridder scored a career-high 32 points and the visiting Cavaliers matched the biggest comeback in school history, rallying from a 19-point first-half deficit to beat the Fighting Irish in double overtime.

Sam Lewis added 21 points, nine rebounds and six assists for Virginia (17-3, 6-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), and his 3-pointer with 3 seconds left in the first OT tied it at 85-all. Lewis also scored the Cavs' final four points after De Ridder fouled out with 45 seconds left in the second OT.

Cole Certa led Notre Dame (11-10, 2-6) with a career-high 34 points. Jalen Haralson added 20, Braeden Shrewsberry scored 18 and Brady Koehler had 16 for the Irish, who have lost six of seven.

No. 18 Vanderbilt 80, Kentucky 55: Tyler Tanner and Tyler Nickel each scored 19 points, and the host Commodores rolled to their largest victory over the Wildcats since 2008.

Devin McGlockton added 11 points and 12 rebounds for Vanderbilt (18-3, 5-3 SEC), which

raced to a 20-point lead at halftime and never let Kentucky in the game.

No. 21 Saint Louis 79, George Washington 76: Robbie Avila scored a season-high 22 points and hit a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 3 seconds left to lift the host Billikens to a win over the Colonials.

Trey Green matched career bests with 23 points and six 3-pointers for Saint Louis (20-1, 8-0 Atlantic 10), which won its 14th straight game and is off to the best 21-game start in school history.

No. 23 Alabama 90, Missouri 64: Latrell Wrightsell scored 21 points, all on 3-pointers, and Labaron Philon Jr. had 18 as the host Crimson Tide routed the Tigers.

Aiden Sherrell added 16 points and Charles Bediako had 14 for Alabama. Wrightsell went 7 for 10 from 3-point distance and took only one shot inside the arc.

No. 24 Miami (Ohio) 86, Massachusetts 84: Eian Elmer scored a career-high 30 points and the host RedHawks improved to 21-0, rallying in the second half and then holding on for a victory over the Minutemen.

Miami is one of two unbeaten teams in Division I after fifth-ranked Nebraska lost 75-72 at No. 3 Michigan earlier Tuesday night. Top-ranked Arizona is 21-0 following an 86-83 win over No. 13 BYU on Monday night.

WINTER OLYMPICS/NFL

Brazil's Pinheiro Braathen could make history

BY DANIELLA MATAR
Associated Press

MILAN — When Lucas Pinheiro Braathen tells people in Brazil that he represents the country in Alpine skiing, he says they don't believe him.

They just might if he wins Brazil's first Winter Olympics medal next month.

"When I meet someone new (in Brazil) ... it's always this mind-blowing moment and it always sparks a very interesting conversation," Pinheiro Braathen said with a smile in a recent interview with The Associated Press in Milan. "And funny enough, I actually think it's those interactions that maybe prove the most how fulfilling it is for me to represent Brazil in something like skiing because it just shows me how foreign it is. So that's really fun."

If Pinheiro Braathen does finish on the podium, it would also be a first Winter Olympics medal for any South American country, something he wasn't aware of.

"I mean thanks you just added a whole other layer of pressure so I'll happily bring that along," he laughed. "The greater the challenge, the greater the difference that I can bring and I believe it is the more pressure you feel, the bigger the difference that you can create."

Pinheiro Braathen's mother is Brazilian and his father is Norwegian. He had raced for Norway until abruptly retiring on the eve of the new season in 2023, only to come back a year later representing Brazil.

The 2023 World Cup slalom champion has already racked up a series of firsts under his new flag, becoming the first Brazilian skier to finish on a World Cup podium last year before claiming the country's first victory this season to add to his five for Norway.

"The greater the challenge, the greater the difference that I can bring and I believe it is the more pressure you feel, the bigger the difference that you can create."

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen
Brazilian skier

Snow samba

Pinheiro Braathen likes to entertain. When he got his first podium result for Brazil, he celebrated with a samba dance. His reaction after claiming his first win was more visceral, as he fell to his knees and screamed "yeah!" with both arms in the air.

The 25-year-old admits he has no clue what he would do if he was to succeed in Bormio, where the men's Alpine ski racing will take place at the Olympics.

"If you achieve immense success in something that you've dedicated your life to, at least for me, it is impossible to curate what those moments look like," Pinheiro Braathen said. "It is truly whatever you feel that sees the light of day and that's what I think is so beautiful about those moments and it is simply what I chase every single day waking up. Yet another day getting to

experience that feeling."

Pinheiro Braathen is one of skiing's most vibrant personalities, known for painting his fingernails and having a taste for fashion. He brings to the slopes the energy of Brazil and the discipline of Norway, having spent much of his childhood in both countries.

"I'm a person of cultural duality," he said. "Two perspectives always presented from birth and so for me I always find that I've never been living a life where I'm only presented to one reality, one culture or one way of living. It's always been these polar opposites and so I think that has shaped me to become who I am today and how I want to live my life."

A father's love

Pinheiro Braathen has a close relationship with his father, Björn Braathen. So much so that he named the reindeer he won as part of the traditional winner's prize at the World Cup in Levi after him.

It was his father who introduced him to skiing, when he was 4 or 5, though Pinheiro Braathen didn't take to it initially.

"I bought everything for him, like shoes, like boots and skis and everything, and we went out and he would complain the whole time," Braathen said. "Like 'I'm cold, I'm not cut out for this, I'm freezing,' and, 'I'm Brazilian and this is not for me.'"

A love for the sport eventually arrived. Braathen, who also serves as his son's team manager, doesn't mind that his son switched allegiances.

"As a Norwegian, people expect me to feel very bad about that, but I don't," he said. "It's my son and I just want him to be happy."



TERRANCE WILLIAMS/AP

New Cleveland Browns head coach Todd Monken served as the Baltimore Ravens' offensive coordinator for three seasons.

Source: Browns hiring Monken as new coach

BY JOE REEDY
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Browns are naming Todd Monken as their head coach, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced Monken's hiring.

Monken had been Baltimore's offensive coordinator for the past three seasons. He first interviewed Jan. 10 and had a second interview Jan. 20.

He has also interviewed for Tampa Bay's offensive coordinator opening and was tied to the New York Giants offensive coordinator spot after John Harbaugh was named coach.

Cleveland defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz and Los Angeles Rams pass game coordinator Nate Scheelhaase were also finalists.

The Browns fired Kevin Stefanski on Jan. 5 following six seasons and a 46-58 record. Stefanski — who was hired as Atlanta's coach Saturday — was a two-time AP NFL Coach of the Year and led Cleveland to the playoffs in 2020 and '23.

The Browns were 5-12 this season and 8-26 the past two years.

Monken does have previous history with the Browns, serving as offensive coordinator on Freddie Kitchens' staff in 2019.

The Ravens were second in the league this season in rushing yards per game (156.6 yards) and 11th in scoring, averaging 24.9 points per game.

Baltimore was the league's top-ranked offense in 2024, when it became the first team in NFL history to have at least 4,000 passing yards and 3,000 rushing yards in the same season.



GIOVANNI AULETTA/AP

Brazil's Lucas Pinheiro Braathen speeds down the course during an alpine skiing men's World Cup slalom event in Val d'Isere, France, on Dec. 14. Braathen could win the first Winter Olympics medal not just for Brazil, but for any South American country.

‘Meant to be’

McCarthy officially introduced as head coach of hometown Steelers

By WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The tears started early for Mike McCarthy. Really early.

Considering the setting, it was hard to blame him.

There the kid who grew up rooting for Pittsburgh from his family’s home in the city’s Greenfield neighborhood was Tuesday, sitting on dais wearing a black suit with a gold tie, a Steelers pin affixed to his lapel.

The job McCarthy always wanted, but never let himself imagine he would get, his at last.

“I thought I’d at least be able to get started,” the new Pittsburgh head coach said, trying unsuccessfully to choke back his emotions while looking at a wide swath of the McCarthy family spread across the first few rows of a posh club inside Acrisure Stadium.

McCarthy collected himself then gamely soldiered on. Yes, the feel-good vibes of his homecoming are undeniable to a man who admits “Pittsburgh is my world.”

Yet the 62-year-old is only too aware of why the Steelers hired him to replace Mike Tomlin, who stepped down earlier this month after 19 seasons.

The ‘obvious’ choice

The trophy case inside the team’s facility just a couple of miles away from where McCarthy

grew up at 1137 Greenfield Avenue has remained frozen in time for nearly two decades and counting. McCarthy’s handiwork is part of that drought after he led the Green Bay Packers over Pittsburgh in the Super Bowl 15 years ago.

Neither McCarthy nor his hometown team have been back since. The clock is ticking.

“It’s time to bring another championship back to this great city,” McCarthy said.

One that grew increasingly antsy during the final years of Tomlin’s tenure as solid if unremarkable regular seasons were followed by largely noncompetitive playoff losses, the last a 30-6 blowout at home to the Houston Texans two weeks ago that set the stage for Tomlin’s abrupt exit.

The Steelers, conducting a head coaching search for just the third time since hiring Chuck Noll in 1969, interviewed a wide swath of candidates, many of them the kind young assistants in the vein of Noll, Tomlin and Bill Cowher, all of whom arrived in Pittsburgh as relative unknowns and left with Super Bowl rings and Hall of Fame-worthy resumes.

Ultimately the Steelers turned to the one candidate who understands better than most how the team is hard-wired into the city’s DNA, one who also happens to have a Super Bowl ring of his own and a long



Mike McCarthy, center, poses for a photo after being introduced as the new head coach of the Steelers by team owner Art Rooney II, left, and general manager Omar Khan in Pittsburgh on Tuesday.

track record of churning out teams capable of competing for a title.

“It wasn’t an easy decision, but it was an obvious decision for us,” said Pittsburgh president Art Rooney II, who noted McCarthy’s hiring became official on the 125th birthday of franchise patriarch Art Rooney Sr.

Rooney II admitted his grandfather would have loved bringing McCarthy home, though he stressed McCarthy’s deep roots “had little to do” with making him just the club’s fourth head coach in 57 years.

“We had an open mind about it I think and really just said, ‘We found the best coach,’” Rooney II added.

Not ready to walk away

McCarthy went 185-113-2 (.608) across 18 seasons (playoffs included) with Green Bay and Dallas. His tenure with the Cowboys ended after an injury-marred 7-10

finish in 2024. He took 2025 off to reconnect with his family, though the urge to coach never left.

The circadian rhythms of an NFL season are difficult to shake. He could feel time start to speed up when teams reported for training camp last summer, and even as he leaned into his somewhat unexpected break, he knew he wasn’t finished.

“I’m not ready to walk away from this,” McCarthy said. “To have this opportunity, it just seemed like it was meant to be on so many different levels.”

He called the 72 hours after reaching a verbal agreement with Pittsburgh “a whirlwind” that tugged at both the heartstrings and the daunting task ahead as he tries to assemble a coaching staff.

McCarthy figures he’s received twice as many texts of support as he did when he led the Packers to a title, though he knows the honeymoon will be short if he can’t find a

way to return the Steelers to legitimate contention in the AFC.

While Pittsburgh’s current run of 22 seasons of finishing .500 or better are an NFL record, the club also hasn’t won a playoff game since the 2016 season, tied with Atlanta for the sixth-longest active streak in the league.

McCarthy is inheriting a team with a talented — if expensive — defense and an offense filled with question marks, most notably at quarterback. Rookie Will Howard and veteran backup Mason Rudolph are currently the only two players at the game’s most important position under contract.

Aaron Rodgers, who spent 13 seasons alongside McCarthy in Green Bay, will become a free agent in March after helping the Steelers win the AFC North at age 42. McCarthy certainly seems open to a reunion.

“Definitely,” McCarthy said. “I don’t see why you wouldn’t.”

Snub: ‘Spygate’ scandal likely played a role in Belichick’s snub

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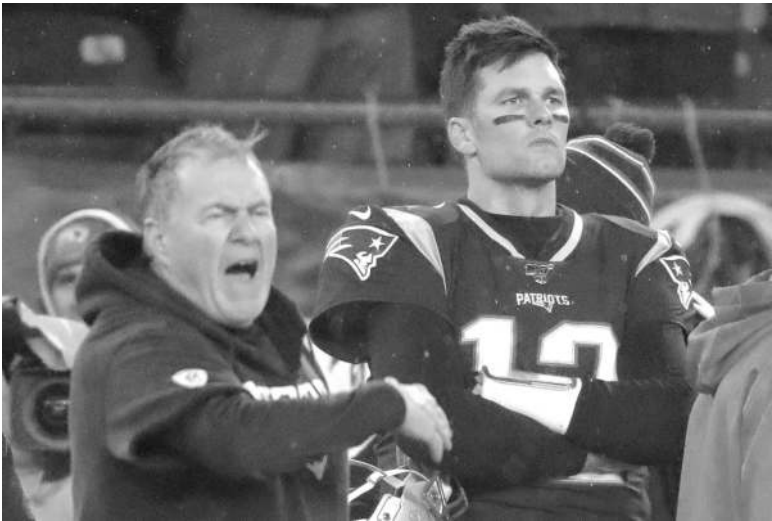
that here, and would say as much to their face. Their votes sunk Belichick’s chances and embarrassed the Hall of Fame in the process.

“They make all selectors look bad, and they shouldn’t hide behind their minority vote to protect themselves at the expense of the wider group. I know it’s a wider group because I’ve spoken with a lot of selectors since our meeting, and they agreed with my vote for Belichick.”

Salguero, who is a longtime voter for the AP All-Pro team and the AP NFL awards, said the “Spygate” scandal kept Belichick out of the Hall.

Belichick was implicated in a sign-stealing scheme during the 2007 season and was fined \$500,000 after New England was caught filming defensive signals from the New York Jets during a game.

“Spygate was the reason several selectors could not bring themselves to vote for Belichick, be-



Bill Belichick, left, and Tom Brady won six Super Bowls together with the New England Patriots from 2002-2019, forming arguably the most dominant coach-quarterback duo in NFL history.

cause they felt it sullied his records,” Salguero wrote.

In his presentation, Salguero said he pointed out that Belichick had a higher winning percentage (.693 to .580) after “Spygate” and

won three Super Bowls and six conference titles. He had 14 double-digit win seasons and won more regular-season games after “Spygate” than 22 of the 28 coaches in the Hall of Fame.

“Those facts may have changed some minds on Belichick. But it didn’t change enough of them,” Salguero wrote.

Belichick was one of five Hall finalists among coaches, contributors and senior players who last appeared in a game in 2000 or earlier. Patriots owner Robert Kraft was the contributor finalist, with Roger Craig, Ken Anderson and L.C. Greenwood the players.

Between one and three of those finalists will be inducted into the Hall along with between three and five modern-era players from a group of 15 finalists.

The process for selection changed in 2025. The 50 voters now each pick three of the five and between one to three make it if they get at least 40 votes. A new rule also made coaches eligible one year after retiring instead of five.

Belichick sat out one season after his 24-year tenure with the Patriots ended in 2023. He just finished his first year coaching in col-

lege at North Carolina, where he went 4-8.

Mike Sando, an NFL writer for The Athletic, said he voted for Belichick and explained the process that could’ve led to the snub.

“Whatever the case, I would see this as a repudiation of the new voting rules implemented for 2025, not of Belichick or any candidate not making it,” Sando wrote on X.

The 73-year-old Belichick was a top defensive assistant coach with the Giants under Bill Parcells. He left New York to coach Cleveland from 1991-95, joined the Patriots as an assistant in 1996, spent three seasons with the Jets and was hired by New England in 2000.

He led the Patriots with Tom Brady to six Super Bowl wins in nine appearances and had one 16-0 regular season. Belichick’s 333 wins in the regular season and playoffs with New England and Cleveland are the second-most to Don Shula’s 347. He won AP NFL Coach of the Year three times.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Djokovic ‘lucky’ to set up semifinal against Sinner

By John Pye
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — After a walkover and an in-match retirement, 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic will meet two-time defending champion Jannik Sinner in the semifinals.

Djokovic dropped the first two sets of his quarterfinal 6-4, 6-3 Wednesday to fifth-seeded Lorenzo Musetti, but was up a break in the third when the 23-year-old Italian retired with an injured right leg.

The 38-year-old Djokovic admitted he was “lucky this time.”

It wasn’t really the way Djokovic wanted to cap yet another record — his 103rd win at Melbourne Park, one better than Roger Federer’s previous all-time mark — but he accepted any route through.

Sinner was all business in a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win over eighth-seeded Ben Shelton in a night match to extend his streak to 19 at Melbourne Park.

Sinner conceded he was lucky to still be in the tournament, too, after struggling with cramps and staggering in his third-round match until the roof was closed and he went back on court reinvigorated.

The top four seeds have reached the final four in the men’s draw, with No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz and No. 3 Alexander Zverev set to meet in the other semifinal.

Sinner has a 6-4 lead in head-to-heads with Djokovic, but he’s won the last five. That sequence includes semifinals at the 2024 Australian Open and at Roland Garros and Wimbledon last year. It was the semifinal here two years ago that propelled Sinner toward his first major title.

“As a 24-year-old, I’m lucky to have someone like him in front of my eyes and I can hopefully learn something. I feel like every day, every time he plays, I can learn something about him.” Sinner said of his matches with the tennis great.

Since capturing his 24th Grand Slam singles title in 2023, unprecedented among men and for anyone in the Open Era, Djokovic has been bidding for a 25th and to become the most decorated tennis player of all time.

Djokovic’s dramatic win

Djokovic was two sets down, slowed by a serious blister on his foot and already thinking about his flight home when fifth-seeded Musetti called it quits.

Musetti needed a medical timeout for treatment on his upper right leg after being broken in the third game of the third set. He played on for almost two games but couldn’t continue.

After serving a double-fault in the fifth game to give Djokovic a breakpoint chance, Musetti wiped a hand across his face, walked toward the net and removed his headband before exchanging a handshake and quick hug.

“I honestly have no words to describe how I’m feeling right now and how tough it is for me with this injury in this moment,” Musetti said.

Djokovic said he felt for Musetti.

“It happened to me a few times. But being in the quarters of a Grand Slam, two sets to love up and being in full control — I mean, so unfortunate,” Djokovic said. “He should have been a winner today.”

Musetti was also forced to retire from the French Open semifinals last year — with a similar injury — against eventual champion Alcaraz.

Late in the second set, Djokovic conceded a point after telling the chair umpire his racket frame had touched the ball — barely and inaudibly — before it went out. He soon lost that game and the set.

The situation appeared to get more dire for Djokovic when he needed a medical timeout after the second set for the blister on the ball of his right foot.



DAR YASIN/AP

Jessica Pegula, of the United States, celebrates after defeating fellow American Amanda Anisimova during their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia, on Wednesday.

Pegula beats Anisimova to finally reach semis

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — After three previous losses in Australian Open quarterfinals, Jessica Pegula defeated Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 7-6 (1) on Wednesday to advance to the final four at Melbourne Park for the first time.

It marked Pegula’s 14th win in her past 15 matches against fellow Americans, continuing her strong run of domestic dominance.

In the earlier quarterfinal at Rod Laver Arena, Elena Rybakina defeated Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-1 to prevent the Polish player from completing a career Grand Slam of singles titles.

Pegula meets Rybakina in one semifinal Thursday, while top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka will play Elina Svitolina in the other.

The 31-year-old Pegula also beat Madison Keys, another American and the defending champion, in her previous match to advance to the quarterfinals.

Pegula is looking for her first Grand Slam title while Rybakina is after her second after winning Wimbledon in 2022.

Pegula was almost perfect in winning the first set and closed it

out with an ace. The second set was much closer, with each breaking the other twice.

“I’ve been waiting for the time when I can kind of break through,” she said of her semifinal appearance. “I feel like I really play some good tennis here and I like the conditions.”

Pegula said she knew Anisimova would step up in the second set.

“I felt like I could win the rallies and I could put pressure on her serves,” Pegula said. “I just told myself to gear right back up. You’ve got to win the tiebreak unless you want to go to a third set, and I really didn’t want to.”

Rybakina and Pegula are 3-3 in head-to-head play.

Swiatek is a four-time French Open champion and has won the U.S. Open and Wimbledon. She was trying to become the 11th woman to complete a career Grand Slam.

The first set took an hour and Rybakina broke Swiatek in the final game. The second was almost the opposite.

Rybakina, who was born in Russia but represents Kazakhstan, broke her Polish opponent

twice to start the set and moved to a 3-0 lead. She served two aces to go ahead 4-1, broke in the sixth game and finished the match with an ace.

The two played each other five times last season.

“We know each other pretty well,” Rybakina said. “In the first set, for both of us, the first serve was not really working so we were trying to step in on the second serve and put pressure on the other.”

“In the second I just started to play more freely and served better. For now the serve is really helping, so hopefully I can continue like this.”

Rybakina spoke for most players about the grind of the Grand Slam tournaments — two weeks of trying to stay focused.

“There is always, like, challenging days,” she said, “You can play indoor, you can play outdoor, sun, it can be night match. So all these conditions a bit tricky. Also, how quick you can adapt to these circumstances.”

“When it’s the first final and you go so far in the tournament, of course you are more emotional,” she added.



DITA ALANGKARA/AP

Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, plays a forehand return to Lorenzo Musetti, of Italy, during their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia, on Wednesday.

SPORTS



Perfect no more
Michigan hands Nebraska first loss
this season » College basketball, Page 20



ON FOOTBALL

'Insane' first-ballot snub

Belichick's exclusion from Hall of Fame criticized by voters, fans

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

Bill Belichick won six Lombardi Trophies as a head coach with the Patriots, two as an assistant with the Giants and has more Super Bowl rings than anyone in NFL history.

Yet somehow he's not a first-ballot Pro Football Hall of Famer.

Belichick didn't get the required votes in his first year of eligibility, according to a report from ESPN on Tuesday that cited four unidentified sources.

Belichick needed 40 votes from the 50-person panel of media members and other Hall of Famers.

News of the snub stunned players, coaches, fans and anyone who has watched football. Patrick Mahomes called it "insane." LeBron James said it's "impossible, egregious, and quite frankly disrespectful."

If Belichick's résumé isn't worthy of a gold jacket and bronze statue, what constitutes a Hall of Fame career?

The Hall of Fame declined to comment before its class of 2026 is announced at NFL Honors in San Francisco on Feb. 5. Several voters immediately revealed they voted for Belichick and some called for those who didn't to publicly say it.

Armando Salguero, OutKick's Senior NFL Writer and Hall of Fame voter, was the one who presented Belichick in the Hall's subcommittee meeting that selected him to advance to the full 50-member selection body. Salguero then presented Belichick to the full selector's committee in a meeting Jan. 13.

He is among the voters who selected Belichick and are urging the others to reveal themselves.

"They should identify themselves as the people who kept Belichick out of the Pro Football Hall of Fame this year," Salguero wrote in his column. "I am saying



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

SEE SNUB ON PAGE 22

Former New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick has an NFL-record eight Super Bowl championships, six of which came as a head coach.

Pegula, Djokovic advance to semifinals » Australian Open, Page 23

