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EFREM LUKATSKY/AP

Ukrainian soldiers carry bottles of water as they cross a minefield on the front line in the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine on Friday.

Obstacles to the offensive

Ukraine faces mines and manpower challenges in campaign's early weeks

By MISSY RYAN, DAVID STERN
AND ROBYN DIXON
The Washington Post

Ukrainian forces are navigating giant minefields and mounting initial attacks on Russian positions along a sprawling front line, U.S. and Ukrainian officials said, as Kyiv takes the first, halting steps of what is expected to be a prolonged and punishing counteroffensive campaign.

Ukrainian officials say they have thus far reclaimed about 50 square miles in the country's south from Russian forces, which have spent

months hardening fortifications and positioning reinforcements in their bid to protect territory seized since President Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion.

ANALYSIS

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week said that the offensive was moving "slower than desired" since it began this month, but that an operation against an adversary with a deeper arsenal and a far larger force shouldn't be expected to unfold at an action-movie pace.

A U.S. military official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive

battlefield assessments, said Ukraine's military was now "fighting through the initial security zone" before hurling the bulk of its manpower at Russia's main lines.

"You don't commit your whole force until you have an idea of where the areas are where you're going to find the most success," the official said. "The Ukrainians have to figure out where the Russian defenses are the weakest and most porous."

The operation is unfolding as Western officials are assessing the fallout of the stunning

SEE OBSTACLES ON PAGE 7

Air Force is introducing new cycle for deployments

By KYLE ALVAREZ
AND ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is moving away from individual deployments in favor of sending teams on long-term temporary assignments, while providing those units more time at home after they're finished.

The latest changes to the deployment tempo under the new Force Generation model will be in place by October, the service said in a statement Tuesday.

Under the current decades-old model, most airmen spent six months on a deployment, followed by at least 12 months back at their permanent duty station. The new system normally will provide units with at least 18 months between six-month deployments.

The new model is a departure from past deployment practices, when individual or small-element deployments were based on "tempo bands," or groupings, determined by job specialties.

"We have been able to get away with taking three airmen from this base, five airmen from this base, and two airmen from that base, deploying them and expecting them to come together on day one and be a team," Lt. Gen. James Slife, Air Force deputy chief of staff for operations, said at the Air Warfare Symposium on March 8. "We don't actually think that's the way the future operating environment is going to permit us to operate."

Service leaders have attempted to move from deploying individual or small teams for years by releasing incremental changes to the force deployment model in 2008

SEE CYCLE ON PAGE 3

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Italian group drops pasta strike after costs fall

Associated Press

MILAN — Italians can celebrate lower pasta prices, but must face higher prices across the board for fruit and vegetables.

Italy's industry ministry reported last week that prices of pasta had fallen by an average of 0.3% in May compared with a month earlier, saying that a monitoring system it set up had the intended effect of reducing prices.

As a result, the Assoutenti consumer group called off a pasta strike planned for this week, intended to

force down prices by reducing demand.

President Furio Truzzi told The Associated Press, however, that despite the overall decreases, pasta prices are obstinately high in some cities and that the group was still considering targeted strikes later this summer.

The price of 2.2 pounds of pasta had dropped to \$2.32 in the Adriatic port city of Ancona from a high of \$2.67 in March, and to \$2.21 in Genova from a peak of \$2.61. The price dipped below \$2.19 in many cities.

But inflation is still an issue for Italian kitchens. Vegetable prices in May rose an average of nearly 15% over the previous year, accelerating from an 11% increase in April, while potato prices went up 22%, compared with the 9% increase registered a month earlier, according to the Italian statistics agency, ISTAT.

Assoutenti is pushing for a similar monitoring board for fruit and vegetable prices, which it said could be the result of speculation tied to recent storms that damaged some crops.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		
Euro costs (June 29)	\$1.07	
British pound (June 29)	\$1.24	
Japanese yen (June 29)	140.00	
South Korean won (June 29)	1,270.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.2642	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3257	
China (Yuan)	7.2511	
Denmark (Krone)	6.8095	
Egypt (Pound)	30.9033	
Euro	.9143	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8325	
Hungary (Forint)	339.62	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6778	
Japan (Yen)	144.30	
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3074	
Norway (Krone)	10.8090	
Philippines (Peso)	55.34	
Poland (Zloty)	4.10	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7508	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3529	
South Korea (Won)	1,311.48	
Switzerland (Franc)	.8966	
Thailand (Baht)	35.62	
Turkey (New Lira)	26.0610	

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

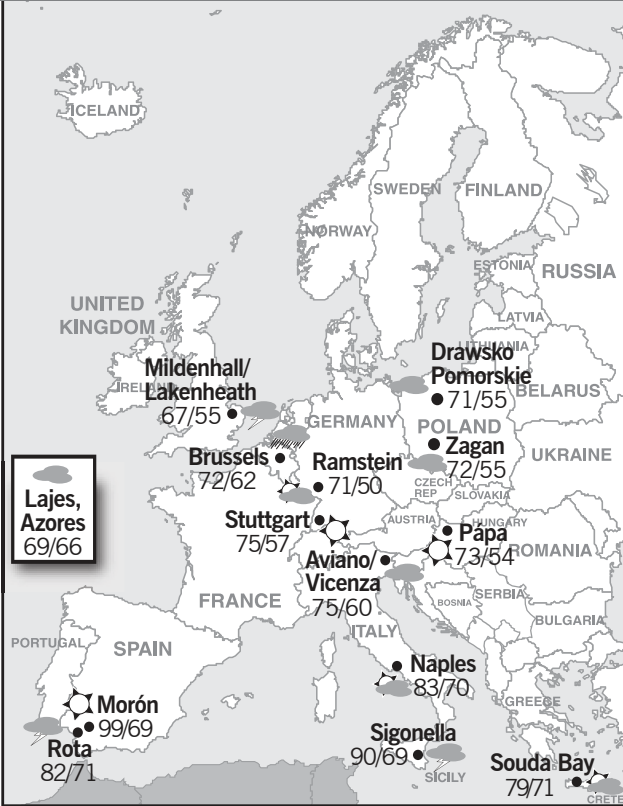
INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	8.25	
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.75	
Federal funds market rate	5.08	
3-month bill	5.35	
30-year bond	3.85	

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

Taiwan tracks pair of Russian warships

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

Taiwan scrambled aircraft and dispatched ships late Tuesday to monitor the passage of two Russian warships off its eastern coast, according to the island's Ministry of National Defense.

Two Russian frigates traveled northward along the coast toward the East China Sea around 11 p.m. Tuesday, the ministry said in a news release Tuesday. It did not specify how far off-

shore the ships were.

In response, Taiwan's military used "joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance methods" and "dispatched mission aircraft, ships and shore-mounted missile systems to closely monitor" the Russian vessels, according to the release.

The ships continued on course and left Taiwan's "response area" southeast of Suao, a city on the island's northeastern edge that is also home to a logistics support naval base, according to

the Defense Ministry.

While Taiwan reports near-daily activity from the Chinese military off its western coast in the Taiwan Strait — 49 Chinese aircraft and 20 ships have been reported in the waterway since Sunday — Russian activity is less common.

The warships' passage comes less than a week after the Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary outfit, organized a brief, two-day rebellion against the Russian government that began

Friday with the group taking over military headquarters in Rostov-on-Don and concluded Saturday after they stood down and withdrew from the city.

It also comes just over a week after Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Beijing to meet with high-level Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, which Blinken described as "candid and constructive" but failed to secure the United States' top priority of renewed communication between the two

countries' militaries.

Beijing considers Taiwan, a functionally independent democracy, to be a breakaway province and aims to reunite it with the mainland.

China and Russia remain close allies, with the two countries regularly coordinating military exercises together, although Beijing has not openly endorsed Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

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MICHAEL N. MOWRY/U.S. Navy

The Virginia-class attack submarine USS Delaware arrived in Torshavn for a scheduled port visit Monday, marking the first time a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine has moored in the Faroe Islands.

US nuclear-powered sub makes historic stop in Faroe Islands

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A port call in the Faroe Islands this week marked the first-ever visit by a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine to the North Atlantic archipelago, the Navy said.

The USS Delaware's stop at the capital of Torshavn on Monday follows a similar visit by a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine in Iceland that came amid rising NATO and U.S. concerns about significant Russian underwater activity in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Faroe Islands and the High North are vital areas for U.S. submarine operations, Rear Adm. Stephen Mack, director of maritime operations for U.S. Naval

Forces Europe-Africa, said in a statement Tuesday.

In April, the USS San Juan made a stop for supplies and personnel off the coast of Iceland after such brief visits were approved with assurances that the country and its territorial waters would remain free of nuclear weapons.

That stopover came as Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, the top U.S. military officer in Europe, told a congressional committee that Russian submarine patrols in the Atlantic were at higher levels than those seen in years.

The port call by Delaware, a Virginia class attack submarine, also comes after a Faroese gov-

ernment restriction earlier this month limited Russian access to its ports solely to fishing boats.

The self-governing island group, part of Denmark, is working to reduce the risk of espionage and has faced criticism following renewal of a bilateral fisheries accord with Russia in November, the news service Agence France-Press reported June 1.

The Faroe Islands comprise 18 mountainous islands located halfway between Iceland and Scotland in the North Atlantic. It has a population of about 50,000, of which about 40% is in Torshavn.

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Cycle: Airmen will now deploy in groups based on mission-focused projects

FROM PAGE 1

and 2013.

For more than two decades, airmen were deployed in fragmented groups from different bases across the Air Force, with their deployment pace largely determined by their career fields.

Instead, they now will be assigned to capabilities-based force elements. These teams will be composed of airmen in different jobs who share a mission focus, such as flying and supporting air crews or opening and expanding air bases in combat zones.

The new model breaks a 24-month rotational cycle into four phases.

During the first phase, units prepare for the deployment and train together. In the second phase, the units prove their readiness to deploy in exercises and certification events.

After the six-month deployment, they return for a six-month reset phase that allows for leave, reintegration with families and recovery.

Force elements will train, deploy and recover as units throughout each phase of the cycle.

The Force Generation model is part of Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. C.Q. Brown's strategy to make the service less dependent on static bases overseas.

Units will be smaller, more mobile and able to establish airfields quickly to outmaneuver an enemy under the envisioned concept.

Air Force units have been training under the new model for more than a year as part of a soft rollout, with Air Combat Command certifying its first lead wing to deploy under Force Generation in July 2022.

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STEVEN CARDO/U.S. Air Force

Airmen board an aircraft at Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., last year.

MILITARY

Lieutenant colonel sentenced to two months for assault

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Lt. Col. Jon-Paul Depreo went from commanding an engineer battalion at Fort Johnson to prison-bound in less than six months after he pleaded guilty Monday to charges of assault and conduct unbecoming an officer in a courtroom at the Army post in Louisiana.

Military judge Col. Maureen Kohn sentenced Depreo, 42, to spend two months in prison, which was consistent with the terms of the plea agreement, according to a statement from Shelby Waryas, a spokeswoman for Fort Johnson, formerly Fort Polk.

He pleaded guilty to one count of assault consummated by a battery and one count of conduct unbecoming.



Lt. Col. Jon-Paul Depreo, 42, was fired in January as commander of the 46th Engineer Battalion at Fort Johnson, La.

enlisted soldier, was fired amid a separate criminal investigation.

Compton pleaded guilty June 1 to distributing child pornography, adultery and sharing explicit photos of himself while in uniform.

He was sentenced to 20 months in prison.

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Italian employees from U.S. military bases in the country march to the front gate of the Capodichino base in Naples in 2010. A worker walkout could cause potential disruptions to base services this week after two unions representing 4,000 Italian workers announced a strike.

US military base workers in Italy to walk off job over contract demands

By BRIAN ERICKSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. military installations in Italy are facing potential disruptions this week after two unions representing 4,000 Italian workers announced strikes scheduled for Thursday and Friday.

The two-day walkout could affect a range of services that employ the workers, including exchanges, food courts, child care facilities and vehicle registration offices, military officials said.

At Army and Air Force bases, such as U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza and Camp Darby near Livorno, it is planned for Thursday. The work stoppage is scheduled Friday at Navy bases in Naples and Sicily, according to a June 8 statement posted to the website of one of the unions.

The contract between the workers and U.S. military installations in Italy expired Oct. 30, 2021, according to the union statement. The union did not immediately respond Wednesday to a Stars and Stripes request for further comment. The workers want a new agreement and for the U.S. military in Italy to address several issues, including improvements in communication with the unions, the statement said.

Base services and operations staffed by union-represented workers could be reduced or closed, much like what happens on Italian holidays, the Army garrison said on its official Facebook page Tuesday. Army officials also advised supervisors to use telework for affected personnel.

While the strike includes all

workers represented by the unions, demonstrations are planned only in Vicenza on Thursday and at Naval Support Activity Naples on Friday.

The Vicenza demonstration could include a sit-in and a march to the main gate, the garrison said in its Facebook post.

NSA Naples expected similar impacts. In a basewide message sent Tuesday, officials warned that traffic flow at its Capodichino and Support Site locations could be worse because of the strike.

“We advise all community members to not interfere with any striking demonstrations,” officials said in their message.

Stars and Stripes reporter Alison Bath contributed to this report.
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Moody to get F-35s as Air Force moves to retire A-10 Warthogs

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

ATLANTA — The Air Force will base F-35A Lightning II stealth fighter jets at Moody Air Force Base in the coming years as the installation retires its A-10 attack aircraft, the service announced Monday.

The Air Force will base two squadrons of the service’s most advanced fighters at the south Georgia base with the first aircraft set to arrive in fiscal 2027, according to the announcement. The decision comes as Congress appeared poised to allow the Air Force to retire much of its fleet of A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft, affectionately known as Warthogs, a move long requested by the service.

“The decision to host the F-35 mission at Moody AFB came after assessing the area’s ability to facil-

itate the mission and infrastructure capacity, while accounting for community support, environmental factors and cost,” the Air Force said.

Basing the two F-35 squadrons at Moody will require an increase of about 500 troops at the base, the service said. It was not immediately clear Tuesday what kind of infrastructure improvements might be needed to house the fifth-generation fighters.

The service said it will soon launch an environmental impact study to ensure Moody can safely house the F-35s. That analysis is expected to be completed by fall 2025, according to the Air Force.

The plan comes as the Air Force intends to retire the 54 A-10s now housed at the base. The popular attack jets have been based at Moody since 2009. The base is home to the 23rd Fighter Group

and the 476th Fighter Group of the Air Force Reserve.

Congress appeared likely to approve an Air Force plan to retire 42 of its 281 A-10s, including six from Moody through fiscal 2024, based on legislation approved by key panels last week in both chambers. Moody’s remaining 48 A-10s would be retired by fiscal 2028, and simultaneously replaced by F-35s, according to the service plan. Congress has pushed back for years on Air Force plans to scrap its A-10s, largely because no other U.S. aircraft matches its precise mission to provide close air support to ground troops in combat. But the Senate and House Armed Services committees last week approved A-10 retirement plans included in their versions of the fiscal 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA, an annual bill that sets policy and

spending priorities for the Pentagon, must be passed by both chambers and reconciled before it can be signed into law by the president.

The A-10s are beloved by front-line ground forces who relied on them in combat in the Middle East and Afghanistan for many years. Air Force officials, however, have said the more than 50-year-old jet has outlived its use and would fare poorly in a conventional fight with a near-peer power such as China or Russia. They have argued the F-35A — the most expensive fighter jet ever built — can provide close air support, among the dozens of other types of missions that it is capable of flying.

“The F-35A brings an enhanced capability to survive in the advanced threat environment in which it was designed to operate,” the service’s Moody announce-

ment said. “With its aerodynamic performance and advanced integrated avionics, the F-35A provides next-generation stealth, enhanced situational awareness and reduced vulnerability.”

Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., applauded the Moody decision in a statement Monday, calling the decision a “major step forward” for the base.

“Moody is a critical national security asset and a vital job creator for South Georgia,” he said. “The men and women who serve at Moody are among the finest in our armed forces.”

The Air Force also announced Monday that Gowen Field Air National Guard Base in Idaho will receive F-16s to replace the A-10s based there.

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PACIFIC

Guam's oldest daily newspaper goes all-digital

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

News consumers on Guam have one less option available on the small U.S. territory after the Pacific Daily News published its final print edition on March 31.

Meanwhile, the paper's main competitor, the Guam Daily Post, stopped selling printed copies in the island's 11 Navy Exchange stores in January, exchange spokeswoman Kristine Sturkie said in an email June 20.

The Pacific Daily News — founded in 1950 as the Guam Daily News — based the decision to curtail its print edition on readership trends and resources, according to a March 27 statement on its website. It had suspended its Saturday and Sunday editions in January.

"Guam's readers have shown us that they prefer to receive their news via our digital platforms," Rindraty Celes Limtiaco, the newspaper's president, said in the statement. She promised to continue producing "the best news content on Guam."

Former Daily News publisher Lee Webber called the move a "cruel joke."

"With the death of the Pacific Daily News print edition, we are once again a community with only one daily newspaper of general circulation," he wrote in a May 2 opinion piece. "Even more importantly, we are dealing with a Fourth Estate that has lost track of its original and much-needed purpose in a democratic republic. That of being



NICHOLAS CHOPP/U.S. Army

Guam Daily Post reporter Oya Ngirairiki interviews a soldier from 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery following a live-fire exercise last year on Palau.

the watchdog on government, community informant and a beacon of freedom for its readership."

During the past 20 years, more than 200 local daily newspapers have either reduced their publication frequency or ceased publishing altogether, according to a May 24 report by the Congressional Research Service.

Most Americans get at least some of their news from digital devices, according to a 2022 survey by the Pew Research Center.

The Post continues to print a newspaper on the island of 170,000, including 18,000 active-duty service members and their families.

The paper remains dedicated to a print product, executive editor Phill Leon Guer-

rero told Stars and Stripes by phone earlier this month.

Though it's no longer available at the Navy Exchanges, the Post can be purchased from a coin-operated box at the Wendy's restaurant on Naval Base Guam and island-wide through home delivery, a service that includes U.S. military installations, Guerrero said.

"We're in plenty of places," he said, adding that the Post sees heavy traffic online from military communities.

The Post has never been sold by the Army & Air Force Exchange Service at Andersen Air Force Base, according to AAFES spokesman Chris Ward.

While the paper has not yet been sold on Marine Corps Camp Blaz, which is still under construction, Guerrero hopes to expand readership there soon, he said.

The Post was founded in 2004 as the Guam edition of Marianas Variety, Guerrero said. It has just over 10,000 print subscribers, 7,500 digital subscribers and receives more than 1.5 million page views per month on its website.

The Daily News boasts more than 3 million page views a month on its digital platforms and 250,000 followers on Facebook and Instagram, according to its statement. It also provides a text alert service with 30,000 subscribers.

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Royal Hawaiian HOLOKU BALL

Witness as we turn back the hands of time and take a peek into a Golden Era, when Hawaii was under Monarchical rule. The Iolani Palace was often the gathering center of the people and the Ball took place in the Throne Room, with The Royal Hawaiian Band performing. These are still held annually in Hawaii and now you too can experience a Holoku Ball right here at The New Sanno Hotel.

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PACIFIC

Yokosuka Pride reflects on ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Twelve years ago, the U.S. military prohibited LGBTQ+ service members from disclosing their sexuality — what one sailor described as a “silent attack” on her existence — but those sentiments were nowhere to be found at a Pride Day parade here Wednesday.

Rather than hiding part of their identity or their support for the LGBTQ+ community, about 70 sailors and civilians paraded through the streets of this naval base sporting rainbow-themed outfits and flags.

Starting at Purdy Gym, the group steadily gathered more people along its route until it concluded at Kosano Park. The event wrapped up with speeches, games and refreshments, and participants cheerily chatted among themselves as they celebrated LGBTQ+ culture and history.

“I’m here to tell you, right now, this is where we come together to

celebrate our individual differences and to really talk about equality and unity and respect for one another,” said Capt. Les Sobol, base commander, as the parade kicked off.

Cheerful moments were interspersed with somber reflections on the history of LGBTQ+ service members and personal anecdotes of struggles from active-duty sailors.

“When I joined in 2008, I felt accepted by my community — those who I felt the most secure and safe around — but ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ was a silent attack on my existence,” Petty Officer 1st Class Steph Bolding said in a speech after the march.

DADT was the official U.S. policy that prohibited non-heterosexual service members from disclosing their sexuality between 1994 and 2011.

Bolding, the lead organizer behind Wednesday’s event, said she is proud to be in the Navy. As a masculine-presenting woman, she was “forced to hide a huge piece” of herself during her first



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

People stop for a selfie during a Pride Day parade at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Wednesday.

three years of service, she said.

“When Obama repealed ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’ I never imagined the freedom, the relief I would feel once I could show up as my full self in all areas of my life,” she said. “For the first time in the military, I felt validated, and I refuse to go back in hiding.”

In addition to Pride Month and Pride Day, the parade served as a reminder that Yokosuka is “pro-people,” said Larry Criner, chief information officer and director of fleet and family services.

“You can’t be pro-people and

not pro-Pride,” he told Stars and Stripes after the parade. “This event is exactly that. It shows how accepting [Yokosuka Naval Base] is as a command and how accepting it is as a community.”

U.S. military bases at home and abroad are hosting Pride events this month but several, including two in Japan, canceled drag shows after the Biden administration banned them from military bases on June 1. The ban followed Republican condemnation of drag shows and general criticism of LGBTQ+ events.

Drag events were canceled at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa; Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo; Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.; and Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

“I will say this, vote for your rights. Participate in those difficult conversations, not only with your peers but with your chain of command, because that matters,” Bolding said in her speech. “Don’t allow yourself to be silenced; make your voice heard.”

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Okinawa police accuse teen of DUI after crash

**By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An American teen remained jailed Wednesday on Okinawa on suspicion of drunken driving after rear-ending another vehicle at a traffic light the previous day, according to Japanese police.

The girl, 17, lives on Kadena Air Base but police declined to say whether her sponsor is a U.S. service member or Defense Department contractor or civilian employee. The 18th Wing did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday.

Police arrested the girl at 4:40 p.m. Tuesday in Okinawa city, about an hour after the incident on southbound Route 85 in the Kaiho district, a prefectural police spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

No injuries resulted from the collision and the girl’s Honda Spark received minor front-end damage, the spokesman said. He declined to provide information on the other car and driver.

The girl, whom police declined to identify, had only a U.S. military-issued driver’s license that does not authorize driving off base, the spokesman said.

A Breathalyzer at the scene measured the girl’s blood alcohol content at 0.12%, four times the legal limit for driving in Japan, the spokesman said. By comparison, all 50 U.S. states have set 0.08% as the



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

Okinawa police say an American teen remained jailed Wednesday, on suspicion of drunken driving after rear-ending a vehicle with her Honda Spark the previous day.

legal limit for driving under the influence or while impaired.

Prosecutors may receive the case on Thursday, the spokesman said. If convicted in a Japanese court, the girl faces a maximum five years in prison or a \$7,000 fine.

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

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Marine in Japan admits to drunken auto theft

By HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Marine stationed at an air base in Japan faces sentencing July 7 for car theft and drunken driving, charges he admitted, according to local news reports.

On April 2, Japanese police stopped Lance Cpl. Helder Molina, 30, in a car reported stolen less than an hour earlier, a spokesman for Iwakuni Police said April 4. Molina, stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, was held on suspicion of auto theft and drunken driving.

Molina pleaded guilty to both charges Tuesday in Yamaguchi District Court, the Chugoku newspaper reported that day.

A prosecutor told the court that Molina drank about 10 bottles of beer at bars on and off the base between 8 p.m. April 1 and 5 a.m. the next day, the newspaper reported.

The Marine got into a parked car, its engine running, and drove off although his co-workers and the car’s owner tried to stop him, the report said.

The prosecutor in court said Molina drove “dangerously” and

crashed into another car and a wall, the Mainichi newspaper reported Wednesday.

At the hearing, Molina told the court he was drunk that night and doesn’t clearly remember what happened, the Yamaguchi Broadcasting Co. reported Tuesday.

The Marine said he was treated for alcoholism for about a month last year, the Chugoku report said.

The prosecutor called the incident a “selfish crime” and recommended a 1½-year sentence with hard labor, the newspaper reported.

Molina’s defense attorney said his client regrets the incident and intends to pay for the damage he caused. He asked the court to suspend Molina’s eventual sentence.

Another Iwakuni Marine, Lance Cpl. Dominic Youngren, received a suspended sentence earlier this month for stealing a car from a local dealer, driving under the influence of alcohol and crashing into another vehicle at a stop light, injuring two people.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

Man accused of helping missile strike arrested

BY HANNA ARHIROVA

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities on Wednesday arrested a man they accused of helping Russia direct a missile strike that killed at least 11 people, including three teenagers, at a popular pizza restaurant in eastern Ukraine.

The Tuesday evening attack on Kramatorsk wounded 61 other people, Ukraine's National Police said. It was the latest bombardment of a Ukrainian city, a tactic Russia has used heavily in the 16-month-old war.

The strike, and others across Ukraine late Tuesday and early Wednesday, indicated that the Kremlin is not easing its aerial onslaught, despite political and military turmoil at home after a short-lived armed uprising in Russia last weekend.

There has been no apparent military push by Ukraine to exploit that turmoil, though the government has been tight-lipped about recent battlefield developments as it seeks to gain momen-



NATIONAL POLICE OF UKRAINE/AP

In this photo provided by the National Police of Ukraine, emergency services work next to a restaurant RIA Pizza, destroyed by a Russian attack in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

tum in its recently launched counteroffensive.

The Kremlin reeled from the weekend mutiny led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, owner of the Wagner private army of prison recruits and other mercenaries. Wagner has played a key combat role for

Russia in Ukraine. The rebellion posed the most serious threat so far to Russian President Vladimir Putin's grip on power.

Prigozhin went into exile in neighboring Belarus on Tuesday, according to Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, after

Russia said he wouldn't face charges for the revolt. Prigozhin's whereabouts could not be independently confirmed.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday that the unrest had weakened Putin, though he added that it's "hard to tell" to what extent.

"He's clearly losing the war in (Ukraine)," Biden said of Putin before departing Washington for Chicago. "He's losing the war at home and he has become a bit of a pariah around the world."

Two sisters, both age 14, died in the Kramatorsk attack, the city council's educational department said. "Russian missiles stopped the beating of the hearts of two angels," it said in a Telegram post.

The other dead teenager was 17, according to Prosecutor General Andrii Kostin.

The attack also damaged 18 multistory buildings, 65 houses, five schools, two kindergartens, a shopping center, an administrative building and a recreational building, regional Gov. Pavlo Ky-

rylenko said.

Rescuers are still searching the rubble for bodies and more survivors in a city where last year, about six weeks after the start of war, 52 civilians were killed in a Russian missile strike on a train station.

Officials initially blamed the strike in Kramatorsk on an S-300 missile, a surface-to-air weapon that Russia's forces have repurposed for loosely targeted strikes on cities, but the National Police later said Iskander short-range ballistic missiles were used.

Kramatorsk is a front-line city that houses the Ukrainian army's regional headquarters. The pizza restaurant was frequented by journalists, aid workers and soldiers, as well as local residents.

The Security Service of Ukraine said the man it detained, an employee of a gas transportation company, is suspected of filming the restaurant for the Russians and informing them about its popularity. It provided no evidence for its claim.

Obstacles: Limited scale of gains a reminder of uphill battle

FROM PAGE 1

weekend rebellion by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose forces have played a key role in expanding Russia's combat power in Ukraine. The incident underscored the deep strains the war has caused within Russia and injected a new element of unpredictability into the conflict's course.

American officials caution against drawing conclusions in the offensive's early weeks and say the absence of traditional offensive moves — akin to the advancing armored columns of World War II — does not indicate trouble but rather a new sort of 21st-century maneuver warfare, one that has included probing strikes, sabotage attacks behind enemy lines, and artillery and missile strikes deep into Russian-held areas.

But the recaptured areas, which Ukrainian officials say include at least a half-dozen villages near the borders of the eastern Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions, represent a tiny fraction of the vast area the Kremlin controls, which still amounts to roughly a fifth of the country.

The limited scale of the gains to date is a reminder of the challenges Zelenskyy faces in his effort to force Putin to reconsider his desire to cement control over much of Ukraine. The Russian leader has sought to sow doubts about Ukraine's battlefield prowess, arguing without evidence that Kyiv has suffered losses exponentially greater than Russia's and that much of its Western-donated weaponry has already been destroyed.

"Everything with which they fight and everything that they use is brought in from the outside," he told the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in recent days. "You can't fight for long like that."

Putin has claimed that Western tanks, in-

cluding German-donated Leopards, have been destroyed and that Ukraine has lost 923 tanks and armored vehicles since June 4. He vowed that F-16 fighter jets, which some European nations are now working to supply, "will also burn, there is no doubt."

Throughout the war, neither government has provided a reliable accounting of its combat casualties, though U.S. assessments revealed earlier this year suggest that those figures are astronomical.

In areas north of the war-scarred city of Bakhmut, Russian forces are attempting their own offensive thrusts, which a senior Ukrainian official said were blocked this week, even as the Kremlin continues its regular standoff strikes on Ukrainian cities.

Despite Putin's warnings, Ukraine's backers in the West are continuing to supply Ukraine with an expanding array of weapons, including British Storm Shadow cruise missiles, which have increased Kyiv's reach into Russian-held territory. On Tuesday, the Biden administration said it was sending an additional \$500 million in military aid, including dozens of armored vehicles to augment or replace those damaged or destroyed.

Military experts say Ukrainian forces have focused their efforts to inflict Russian losses in three main areas, including Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia region and Velyka Novosilka and Bakhmut in Donetsk, in an attempt to break through toward areas that could split the occupied Crimea region from other Russian-held territory.

So far they appear to have committed only some of the new brigades created to boost Ukraine's odds in the fight, keeping other units in reserve so they can be employed as an exploitation force if breakthroughs occur.

Privately, U.S. military officials concede that their expectation from early this year,

described in leaked intelligence documents, that Ukraine is likely to make only modest gains in its counteroffensive has not changed, despite public pronouncements seeking to downplay fallout from the disclosure. But administration officials also argue that even a modest advance could illustrate to Russian elites — and potentially to Putin himself — that hopes for expanding Russia's grip are futile.

Rob Lee, who served as a U.S. Marine infantry officer and is now a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said this fight will be different from Ukraine's successful counteroffensive last fall, in part because now Russia is taking the prospect of an Ukrainian offense more seriously than it did before Ukraine's recapture of Kharkiv and because it will be easier for Russia to resupply front-line troops now than it was last year in the city of Kherson, on the west bank of the Dnieper River.

This time, Russia had time to create formidable defenses and bring in more drone aircraft.

Lee said that resources, not time, ultimately will determine who prevails. "If Ukraine can afflict enough attrition, if they can isolate the objective, prevent reinforcements from arriving, supplies, you can still maybe achieve a breakthrough," he said. "And that could lead to kind of success."

An initial obstacle for Ukraine's military leadership is the sheer scope of the 600-mile front line, meaning Kyiv has had to thin out and disperse its limited force.

Ukrainian officials say that Russia has positioned up to 360,000 troops inside Ukraine and that, unlike last fall when Kyiv was able to retake major cities in a two-pronged push, Russia has had time to build up three or four layers of defenses including trenches and other fortifications.

Another challenge is the heavily mined

areas that constitute an outer layer of Russian defenses. Ukrainian officials say the territory mined by Russia covers more than 77,000 square miles.

Pentagon officials expect Ukrainian forces to eventually push through them. "Minefields don't beat an offense; they slow an offense," the U.S. military official said.

Ukraine also lacks both air superiority and the 3-to-1 offensive to defensive troop ratio that Western militaries typically want for this kind of push. Ukrainian officials say Russian helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft give the Kremlin another advantage along the line of contact.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, said Ukrainian forces are seeking creative solutions to those problems even as they intensify shelling of Russian logistics and staging facilities behind the front lines.

"I understand that sometimes the word 'counteroffensive' means a 'blitzkrieg' — they started in the morning and finished in the evening," he told The Washington Post. "But it is not."

Podolyak said the current objective is to determine Russian vulnerabilities, weaken their defenses and make "thoughtful" use of resources.

"That is why we say that this stage is difficult and requires a more patient attitude. Including from observers," he said. He noted that the incremental pace of outside arms supplies had also shaped the operation's speed.

One Ukrainian soldier near Velyka Novosilka, who asked to be identified by his call sign, Mansur, said he believes the campaign will be more difficult in Donetsk than it has been elsewhere. Unlike in other areas, Russian troops have had years to fortify positions and build support from local residents. "It motivates the enemy more," he said. "This area will be tougher."

NATION

Airline delays get worse ahead of holiday weekend

BY DAVID KOENIG
Associated Press

Travelers were getting hit with delays at U.S. airports again early Wednesday, an ominous sign heading into the long July 4 holiday weekend, which is shaping up as the biggest test yet for airlines that are struggling to keep up with surging numbers of passengers.

As of early morning, nearly 1,300 flights had been delayed in the United States, according to FlightAware. Cancellations neared 700 flights.

Cancellations and delays were most severe along the East Coast early and were growing worse rapidly. Disruptions are expected to spread West.

The delays are being compounded by thunderstorms that raked the Northeast on Tuesday. At various times, the Federal Aviation Administration held up flights bound for LaGuardia Airport in New York and Reagan Washington National and Baltimore-Washington airports near the nation's capital.

About 6,500 flights were delayed and about 1,900 canceled on the East Coast on Tuesday. United Airlines, with a major hub in Newark, N.J., canceled about 500 flights or 18% of its schedule, and JetBlue canceled 16% of its flights, according to FlightAware.

Call it the storm before the storm.

Travel has picked up steadily every year since bottoming out during the pandemic and on Tuesday, the number of people flying neared 2.4 million, up 11% from last year on the same day, according to the Transportation Security Administration.

Travel is expected to peak on Thursday with more than 52,500 total flights, likely the biggest travel day of the holiday period.

People whose travel plans were disrupted took to social media to vent against the airlines. Some swore they would never fly again on whichever airline had done them wrong.

If large numbers of passengers are stranded or delayed this weekend, expect federal officials and the airlines to blame each other for the mess.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, whose department includes the FAA, has been beating up on the airlines for more than a year. He has accused them of failing to live up to reasonable standards of customer service and suggested that they are scheduling more flights than they can handle.

The airlines are punching back. United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby blamed a shortage of federal air traffic controllers for massive disruptions last weekend at its Newark hub.

"We estimate that over 150,000 customers on United alone were impacted this weekend because of FAA staffing issues and their ability to manage traffic," Kirby wrote in a memo to employees Tuesday night.

United could be contributing to its struggles. The Association of Flight Attendants, which represents the airline's cabin crews, said it complained about wait times of more than three hours for workers who called a crew scheduling center that had "limited telephone lines and personnel." The union told flight attendants near the end of their shifts to tell supervisors and find a hotel room.

The FAA has admitted that it is understaffed at key facilities including one in the New York City region. It is training about 3,000 new air traffic controllers, but most of them won't be ready anytime soon.



MINH CONNORS/The Washington Post

A news crew outside the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday.

High court rejects legislative theory, allows for 2024 election challenges

Associated Press

The U.S. Supreme Court shot down a controversial legal theory that could have changed the way elections are run across the country but left the door open to more limited challenges that could increase its role in deciding voting disputes during the 2024 presidential election.

The court's 6-3 ruling Tuesday drove a stake through the most extreme version of the so-called independent state legislature theory, which holds that legislatures have absolute power in setting the rules of federal elections and cannot be second-guessed by state courts. That decision cheered voting rights groups.

"We beat back the most serious legal threat our democracy has ever faced today," said Kathay Feng of Common Cause, whose lawsuit challenging congressional districts drawn by North Carolina's Republican-controlled legislature triggered the case.

But for some critics of the theory, the danger is not entirely past.

The court found that state courts still must act within "ordinary bounds" when reviewing laws governing federal elections. That gives another set of tools for those who lose election lawsuits in state courts to try to persuade federal judges to overturn those rulings.

"They've rejected a lot of the extreme stuff, but there is still a lot of room for ideological and partisan judging to come into play," said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California Los Angeles who filed an amicus brief in the case urging the court to reject the theory across the board.

Conservatives who had advocated for limits on the role of state courts in federal elections agreed with Hasen that the court didn't settle the question of when, precisely, state courts need to stay out of federal elections. The issue may only get resolved in a last-minute challenge during the presidential election, they warned.

"Unfortunately, it's going to be 2024 on the emergency docket,"

said Jason Torchinsky, a Republican attorney who filed an amicus brief urging the court to adopt a more limited version of the theory.

The high court this week will decide whether to hear another case that touches on similar issues, an appeal by Ohio Republican lawmakers of a pair of state supreme court rulings directing them to draw fair congressional maps. The issue could come up in other cases where a state supreme court overturns congressional maps, such as in Wisconsin, where Democrats hope a new liberal majority on that state supreme court will reverse what they have claimed is a Republican gerrymander there.

Neal Katyal, a former acting solicitor general who argued the case for voting rights groups at the Supreme Court, said the ruling is "a signal that this United States Supreme Court, with a solid six justices behind it, will resist attempts by state legislatures to mess with the integrity of the 2024 election."

US arrests 4 Mexican nationals in 2022 deaths of 53 trapped migrants

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — U.S. authorities on Tuesday announced the arrests of four men they said were part of a human smuggling effort last year that ended in the deaths of 53 migrants, including eight children, who were left in a tractor-trailer in the scorching Texas summer.

Authorities said on the anniversary of the June 27, 2022, tragedy that the four Mexican nationals

had a planning role in the smuggling operation, and were aware that the trailer's air-conditioning unit was malfunctioning and would not blow cool air to migrants trapped inside during the sweltering three-hour ride from the border city of Laredo to San Antonio.

When the trailer was opened in San Antonio, 48 migrants were already dead. Another 16 were taken to hospitals, where five more died.

It was the deadliest tragedy to

claim the lives of migrants smuggled across the border from Mexico. The dead included 27 people from Mexico, 14 from Honduras, seven from Guatemala and two from El Salvador.

The driver and another man were arrested shortly after the migrants were found. They were charged with smuggling resulting in death and conspiracy.

The four new arrests were made Monday in Houston, San Antonio

and Marshall, Texas. Riley Covarrubias-Ponce, 30, Felipe Orduna-Torres, 28, Luis Alberto Rivera-Leal, 37, and Armando Gonzales-Ortega, 53, were all charged with conspiracy to transport immigrants resulting in death, serious bodily injury and placing lives in jeopardy. Each faces a maximum penalty of life in prison if convicted.

A federal grand jury indictment unsealed Tuesday reveals some

details of a "patchwork association" of smugglers that allowed them to "consolidate costs, spread out risk and operate more profitably."

The indictment alleges the men worked with human smuggling operations in Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, and shared routes, guides, stash houses, trucks and trailers, some of which were stored at a private parking lot in San Antonio.

NATION

Detroit air quality plummets from Canadian fires

By COREY WILLIAMS
Associated Press

DETROIT — The Detroit area woke up Wednesday to some of the worst air quality in the United States as smoke from Canada’s wildfires settled over most of the Great Lakes region and unhealthy haze spread southward, as far as Missouri and Kentucky.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s AirNow.gov site showed Detroit in the “hazardous” range and warned that “everyone should stay indoors and reduce activity levels.”

Drifting smoke from the wildfires has lowered curtains of haze on broad swaths of the United States, pushing into southern Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, and moving into parts of West Virginia. The AirNow.gov site listed air quality Wednesday in Cleveland, Ohio, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, Pa., as “very unhealthy.” A wider circle of unhealthy air spread into St. Louis, Mo., and Louisville, Ky.

“Another round is going through western New York, western Pennsylvania later today,” National Weather Service meteorologist Byran Jackson said Wednesday. “And then that continues over the northern Mid-Atlantic. It will persist there into Thursday.”

“There’s particularly poor air quality ... over southern Wisconsin, Illinois, central Indiana and also another area over southeast Michigan, Detroit and northeast Ohio around Cleveland,” Jackson added. “This is particularly thick



KIICHIRO SATO/AP

A person walks along the shore of Lake Michigan as the downtown skyline is blanketed in haze from Canadian wildfires Tuesday in Chicago.

smoke.”

Minnesota issued a record 23rd air quality alert for the year through late Wednesday night, as smoky skies obscured the skylines of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Michigan also issued an air quality alert, and Wisconsin put out an air quality advisory.

In Chicago, a visit to the Lincoln Park Zoo became a different sort of adventure. “Just driving into the zoo ... you could just see around the buildings, kind of just haze,”

visitor Shelly Woinowski said Tuesday.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson urged young people, older adults and residents with health issues to spend more time indoors while unsafe conditions continue, and pledged “swift action to ensure that vulnerable individuals have the resources they need to protect themselves and their families.”

Across Canada, 490 fires are burning, with 255 of them consi-

dered to be out of control.

The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre reported Monday that 29,393 square miles of land including forests has burned across Canada since Jan. 1. That exceeds the previous record set in 1989 of 29,187 square miles, according to the National Forestry Database.

Some wet weather in Quebec gave firefighters a chance to get ahead of some of the flames, but there hasn’t been enough rain to extinguish the wildfires. Environ-

ment Canada meteorologist Simon Legault said he expects rain to stop falling by Wednesday morning in the regions most affected by forest fires. Many of the fires burning in Canada are in Quebec and Ontario, nearer to North America’s most populated areas than western wilderness areas.

Earlier this month, massive fires burning stretches of Canadian forests blanketed the northeastern United States and the Great Lakes region with smoke, turning the air yellowish gray and prompting warnings for people to stay inside and keep windows closed.

The small particles in wildfire smoke can irritate the eyes, nose and throat, and can affect the heart and lungs, making it harder to breathe. Health officials have said it’s important to limit outdoor activities as much as possible to avoid breathing in the particles.

President Joe Biden has noted that hundreds of American personnel have joined Canadians to fight the fires, which he has described as clear evidence of climate change.

The warming planet will produce hotter and longer heat waves, making for bigger, smokier fires, said Joel Thornton, professor and chair of the department of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency said a cold front will bring cleaner air from the west across the Great Lakes region by early Thursday.

Nearly a dozen West Texas deaths blamed on heat dome

Associated Press

West Texas could see scorching temperatures that are blamed for nearly a dozen deaths return to a more typical level by the weekend as a heat dome is expected to move eastward, a National Weather Service meteorologist said Wednesday.

Daily temperatures have exceeded 100 degrees and heat indexes have topped 115 degrees, leading to

deaths that include nine people in Webb County, which includes Laredo.

“We don’t see this in our county. Laredo knows heat. Webb County knows heat,” county Medical Examiner Dr. Corine Stern told county commissioners during a meeting Monday. “These are unprecedented temperatures.”

Two Florida hikers also died while hiking in extreme heat at Big

Bend National Park.

The scorching temperatures were brought on by a heat dome that has taxed the Texas power grid and brought record highs to parts of the state, according to meteorologists.

That dome is spreading eastward and by the weekend is expected to be centered over the mid-South, said meteorologist Bryan Jackson with the National Weather Service in College Park, Md.

Texas temperatures should then begin to drop from highs above 100 degrees to daily temperatures in the 90s, Jackson said.

“It’s relief from the extreme heat,” Jackson said. “It’s not really an end to a heat wave; it’s just an end to the extreme part of the heat wave.”

Another dome of heat has already developed on the West Coast, and an excessive heat warning is in

place in a wide swath in the central part of the state, according to Jackson.

“By this weekend, there is a risk for record high temperatures exceeding 100 degrees ... close to 110 degrees in the Central Valley of California,” Jackson said. “Then some of the more typical mid-summer heat of getting above 115 degrees in the hottest areas of the desert Southwest.”

Over 1K people told to evacuate as brushfire threatens homes in Arizona

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — A brushfire threatened dozens of homes in northern Scottsdale and prompted evacuations as about 250 firefighters aided by air tankers battled the blaze, fire officials said.

More than 1,000 people were under evacuation orders Tuesday night, authorities said.

The blaze, called the Diamond Fire, broke out at around 5:15 p.m.

and within hours had burned 3.9 square miles of land without any containment, fire officials said. The fire was near McDowell Mountain Regional Park.

Carlos Aguirre lives in a new community in north Scottsdale and said his wife called saying that their community was being evacuated.

“She got out and didn’t take the dog, so we’re a little nervous,” he said.

Brendan Birdoes said he is building a home in the area that was being evacuated.

“Our friend told us this was happening,” Birdoes said. “He was out here mountain biking and so we came out to see what was going on.”

No homes had burned and no injuries were reported. There was no immediate word on what sparked the fire.

Scottsdale Fire Capt. David Fo-

lio said at a news conference that the fire began in Scottsdale but has since moved into county and state lands to the east and the command post has been turned over to the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management.

Officials have not been able to assess damage, forestry department spokesperson Tiffany Davila said.

“The fire was just too active,” she said. “It was producing erratic

fire behavior.”

The fire has been fueled by grass and brush that dry out quickly once things start to warm up, Davila said.

“We’re about a month behind,” she said. “This is the activity that we usually see in May. But because we had all of that winter and spring moisture, we’re delayed for our start. So now is really the time we could start seeing an uptick in our fire activity.”

NATION

Billions in COVID-19 aid may have been stolen

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than \$200 billion may have been stolen from two large COVID-19 relief initiatives, according to new estimates from a federal watchdog investigating federally funded programs that helped small businesses survive the worst public health crisis in more than a hundred years.

The numbers issued Tuesday by the U.S. Small Business Administration inspector general are much greater than the office's previous projections and underscore how vulnerable the Paycheck Protection and COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan programs were to fraudsters, particularly during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic.

The inspector general's report said "at least 17 percent of all COVID-EIDL and PPP funds were disbursed to potentially fraudulent actors." The fraud estimate for the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan program is more than \$136 billion, which represents 33% of the total money spent on that program, according to the report. The Paycheck Protection fraud estimate is \$64 billion, the inspector general said.

In comments attached to the report, a senior SBA official disputed the new numbers. Bailey DeVries, SBA's acting associate administrator for capital access, said the inspector general's "approach contains serious flaws that significantly overestimate fraud and



A sheet of uncut \$100 bills is inspected during the printing process at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing Western Currency Facility in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2013.

unintentionally mislead the public to believe that the work we did together had no significant impact in protecting against fraud."

The SBA inspector general had previously estimated fraud in the COVID-19 disaster loan program at \$86 billion and the Paycheck Protection program at \$20 billion.

The Associated Press reported June 13 that scammers and swindlers potentially swiped about \$280 billion in COVID-19 emergency aid; an additional \$123 billion was wasted or misspent. The bulk of the potential losses are

from the two SBA programs and another to provide unemployment benefits to workers suddenly unemployed by the economic upheaval caused by the pandemic. The three initiatives were begun during the Trump administration and inherited by President Joe Biden. Combined, the loss estimated by AP represents 10% of the \$4.2 trillion the U.S. government has so far disbursed in COVID relief aid.

The federal government has now reported \$276 billion in potential fraud, a figure that aligns with the AP's analysis.

Gene Sperling, a senior White House official overseeing pandemic relief spending, said in an interview Tuesday that 86% of the fraud, or potential fraud, in the emergency loan programs happened during the first nine months of the pandemic when President Donald Trump was in office.

"\$200 billion is a very big number, but this, again, should be remembered as potential fraud," Sperling said. "We think the amount of likely or actual fraud is significantly less, significantly under \$100 billion, perhaps around \$40 billion."

But he added, "whichever it is, it's unacceptably high."

The SBA inspector general, Hannibal "Mike" Ware, said in a statement Tuesday that the report "utilizes investigative casework, prior (inspector general) reporting, and cutting-edge data analysis to identify multiple fraud schemes used to potentially steal over \$200 billion from American taxpayers and exploit programs meant to help those in need."

Ware, in an interview with The Associated Press earlier this month, said these latest fraud figures won't be the last ones issued by his office.

"We will continue to assess fraud until we're finished with the investigations on these things," Ware said. That could be a long while. His office has a backlog of more than 90,000 actionable leads into pandemic relief fraud, which amounts to nearly a century's

worth of work.

SBA issued its own report Tuesday detailing anti-fraud measures it has adopted. The agency's administrator, Isabella Casillas Guzman, said in an emailed statement that the report outlines "the effective measures added to fight fraud and hold bad actors responsible."

SBA previously told The Associated Press the federal government has not developed an accepted system for assessing fraud in federal programs. Previous analyses, the agency said, have pointed to "potential fraud" or "fraud indicators" in a manner that conveys those numbers as a true fraud estimate when they are not.

For the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, the agency said it's "working estimate" found \$28 billion in likely fraud.

Fraud in pandemic unemployment assistance programs stands at \$76 billion, according to congressional testimony from the Labor Department's inspector general, Larry Turner. That's a conservative estimate. An additional \$115 billion mistakenly went to people who should not have received the benefits, according to his testimony.

The Biden administration put in place stricter rules to stem pandemic fraud, including use of a "Do Not Pay" database. Biden also recently proposed a \$1.6 billion plan to boost law enforcement efforts to go after pandemic relief fraudsters.

Georgia official to speak to prosecutors probing Trump's response to loss

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger is scheduled to speak to federal prosecutors from the office of special counsel Jack Smith, who is investigating efforts by former President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn his 2020 election loss.

In a rambling phone call on Jan. 2, 2021, Trump suggested Raffensperger, the top elections official in Georgia, could help "find" the votes necessary to reverse Democrat Joe Biden's narrow presidential election win in the state. The call came after Trump and his allies spent weeks insisting without evidence that widespread election fraud was the cause of his loss in Georgia and publicly berating Raffensperger for failing to take steps to reverse it.

The secretary of state's office on Tuesday confirmed that he would speak to special counsel Jack

Smith's prosecutors Wednesday in Atlanta. The planned interview was first reported by The Washington Post.

Efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn his loss in Georgia are also the subject of a separate investigation by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis in Atlanta. Raffensperger testified before a special grand jury in that case last June. Willis has indicated that she will announce charging decisions later this summer.

Raffensperger previously received a subpoena from Smith's team for communications "to, from or involving" Trump, his campaign, lawyers and aides. Similar subpoenas were sent to officials in other states and counties that Trump and his allies targeted as they tried to overturn the election.

Smith was appointed by U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland to lead teams investigating the ac-



Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger speaks in Atlanta in 2020.

tions by Trump and his allies in the aftermath of the 2020 election, including the violent riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and Trump's handling of classified documents.

The documents investigation resulted in a 38-count indictment against Trump and his valet Walt Nauta earlier this month.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to the 37 counts against him. Nauta's arraignment was set for Tuesday but has been delayed until next week.

Giuliani interviewed as part of Jan. 6 investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rudy Giuliani, who as a member of Donald Trump's legal team sought to overturn 2020 presidential election results in battleground states, was interviewed recently by investigators with the Justice Department special counsel's office.

A spokesman for Giuliani confirmed he met with the special counsel. "The appearance was entirely voluntary and conducted in a professional manner," Ted Goodman said in a statement.

A person familiar with the matter said the interview was not done before a grand jury. The person, who insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation, would not say what questions investigators asked.

The interview is an additional sign of busy investigative activity by special counsel Jack Smith as his team of prosecutors scrutinizes efforts by Trump and his allies to undo the results of the election in the weeks before the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol.

Smith filed a separate case earlier this month charging Trump with illegally retaining classified documents at his Florida home, Mar-a-Lago.

As a lawyer for Trump, Giuliani pushed bogus legal challenges to the presidential election results. The legal team filed lawsuits in battleground states raising unsupported claims of vast election fraud even though officials, including Trump's own attorney general, William Barr, said no such pervasive problems existed.

Giuliani's efforts have made him a key figure in investigations. He was interviewed last year by a House committee that investigated the run-up to the Jan. 6 attack and by prosecutors in Fulton County, Ga., who have been investigating efforts to subvert that state's election.



Giuliani

NATION

Biden eager to run on economy; voters doubtful

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is eager to take full political ownership of the U.S. economy — a reflection of the White House belief that inflation is fading, job growth is solid and voters need to know about it.

But polling has consistently shown the economy to be a weak spot for Biden’s reelection hopes. Just 33% approve of his leadership on the issue, according to a May survey by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs.

For much of his presidency, Biden has blamed high gasoline prices, painfully rising food costs and other cost-of-living expenses on the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. He said those two factors were beyond his control as inflation hit a 40-year high last summer and crushed his approval ratings.

In a Chicago speech on Wednesday, Biden was expected begin a new effort to actively convince a worried public that the U.S. economy is not heading for recession but actually thriving because of his leadership. For him, there’s a happy confluence of the coming 2024 reelection campaign and a

favorable turn in recent economic data, leading the White House to believe that public messaging about “Bidenomics” will help to rally Democratic voters going into next year.

The message is not a new one, though the White House believes it bears repeating so that it soaks in. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at Monday’s news briefing that the president’s upcoming remarks would be a “cornerstone” speech and part of a larger administration-wide effort.

“It’s a vision about growing the economy from the middle out and the bottom up — you hear us say that over and over again, because we believe that trickle-down economics does not work,” Jean-Pierre said. “We have the data to prove it.”

Indeed, the rate of inflation has fallen over the past year while the job market has remained solid, a combination that seemed unlikely to many economic analysts who expected efforts to bring down inflation would cause layoffs and a recession. Goldman Sachs has put the odds of a recession in the next 12 months at 25%, down from its previous estimate of 35%.

Consumer prices rose at an an-



EVAN VUCCI/AP

White House Deputy Press Secretary Olivia Dalton listens as Director of the National Economic Council Lael Brainard speaks during a briefing at the White House on Tuesday.

nual pace of 4% in May, down from 9.1% last June. That’s still higher than the Federal Reserve’s 2% target, indicating that inflation remains a challenge. But employers added a robust 339,000 jobs last month in a sign that the economy appears poised to keep growing. And the inflation-adjusted annual increase in what people earn each hour turned positive in May, one of the main indicators that White House officials had been looking at for proof the economy was helping workers.

Biden’s GOP rivals have said that the president has broken the U.S. economy. They’ve tip-toed around the healthy 3.7% unemployment rate and focused instead on prices at the gas pump, grocery bills, the debt tied to Biden’s \$1.9

trillion in pandemic relief and the administration’s focus on shifting away from fossil fuels in order to combat climate change.

“I will stop Joe Biden’s inflation nightmare, save the U.S. economy,” said former President Donald Trump, the Republican frontrunner, in a speech to evangelical Christians last weekend.

“You would think that with these economic problems with inflation, you may want to tap into more domestic energy,” Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said in an Iowa speech. “But no, Biden is deliberately trying to kneecap our energy production and he’s trying to force Americans into electric vehicles, which will make us more reliant on China, who provides most of the materials for the batteries.”

Part of Biden’s challenge is that confidence in his economic leadership has waned. In March 2021 just after his round of pandemic relief became law, 60% of U.S. adults approved of how the president was handling the economy, according to an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs poll. Since then, that figure has essentially halved.

Still, there are signs that people’s views of the economy are improving. The University of Michigan’s survey of consumer sentiment showed that Democrats, Republicans and unaffiliated voters generally feel better about the current state of the economy than they did a year ago. But confidence among Democrats is still weaker than it was during Biden’s first year.

Threats of impeachment, censure becoming routine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans have held it over Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for months. Attorney General Merrick Garland is facing it too. And President Joe Biden seemingly isn’t far behind.

Driven by the demands of hard-right members, Republicans in the House are threatening impeachment against Biden and his top Cabinet officials, creating a backbeat of chatter about “high crimes and misdemeanors” that is driving legislative action, spurring committee investigations, raking in fundraising money and complicating the plans of Speaker Kevin McCarthy and his leadership team.

Long viewed as an option of last resort, to be triggered only for the most severe wrongdoing, the constitutionally authorized power of impeachment is rapidly moving from the extraordinary to the humdrum, driven in large part by Republicans and their grievances

about how Democrats twice impeached President Donald Trump.

Republicans remain so opposed to Trump’s impeachments, in fact, that they are pressing for votes to expunge the charges altogether — an attempt to clear his name that is without direct precedent in congressional history.

“We’re seeing a generation of Republicans who are much more willing to test the boundaries of how much you can weaponize procedures,” said Julian Zelizer, a Princeton University historian and political scientist.

McCarthy on Sunday made Garland the latest target of a potential impeachment investigation as Republicans examine how the Department of Justice handled the prosecution of Hunter Biden for federal tax offenses. It capped a tu-



Boebert

multuous week in which hard-right Republicans forced a vote to send articles of impeachment against Biden to a committee for investigation and also voted to censure Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff for his remarks and actions during the 2017 investigation into Trump’s ties to Russia.

Some Republicans are pushing for another censure action, this time against Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson for leadership of the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 insurrection.

In the past, lawmakers have reserved censure, a punishment one step below expulsion, for grave misconduct. When former Rep. Charles Rangel, a New York Democrat, was censured in 2010 on a bipartisan vote for ethics violations, then-speaker Nancy Pelosi solemnly summoned him to the well of the House, where censured members must stand as the resolution is read in a moment of public shaming.

“We really tried hard to put

aside the partisan considerations because we knew how sharp and potent the weapon (of censure) was,” said former Rep. Steve Israel, Democrat of New York, who was among Pelosi’s closest confidantes. “This thing used to be rare. Now, it’s in every cycle, in breaking news.”

When Schiff was censured last week, the proceedings quickly took on a carnival-like quality. Democrats, Pelosi included, streamed forward to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the well of the House. They heckled McCarthy as he read the charges — calling out “Shame!” “Disgrace!” and “Adam! Adam!” — until the speaker left the dais.

The fervor in the House for doling out punishment shows no signs of breaking — in part because lawmakers are reaping the media attention and fundraising dollars that are steadily replacing committee chairmanships as the locus of power in the House.

Yet there’s a risk that Republi-

cans’ appetite for using the punishment powers could easily escalate into a more serious test of whether Congress is legitimately wielding power — and nowhere does that possibility loom larger than when it comes to Biden.

Rep. Lauren Boebert, a Colorado Republican who won reelection last year by fewer than 600 votes, forced a vote last week on an impeachment resolution against Biden for “high crimes and misdemeanors” over his handling of the U.S. border with Mexico.

Republican leaders were able to bottle up Boebert’s resolution, holding a vote that sent the matter to congressional committees.

Some Republicans, however, view it as a question of when, not if, Biden is impeached. Floor debate on the resolution took on the air of a dress rehearsal, as Democrats and Republicans debated whether Biden has committed “high crimes and misdemeanors” with his handling of border and immigration policy.

SCIENCE/MEDICINE

Stem cells used to study earliest days via embryo models

BY LAURA UNGAR
Associated Press

Scientists have created embryo models to help study the mysteries of early human development, the medical problems that happen before birth and why many pregnancies fail.

These models are made from stem cells, not egg and sperm, and can't grow into babies.

"They're complete enough to give you a picture of what may be happening in the embryo during pregnancy, but they're not so complete that you could actually use them for reproduction," said Insoo Hyun, an ethicist and director of life sciences at Boston's Museum of Science. "It just will not work."

Using models also avoids the controversy of using real embryos in research, he said.

Several groups are working on the research. Teams with researchers from the United States and England shared their work in two studies published Tuesday in the journal Nature. Other scientists in Israel and China published studies on their work earlier this month that

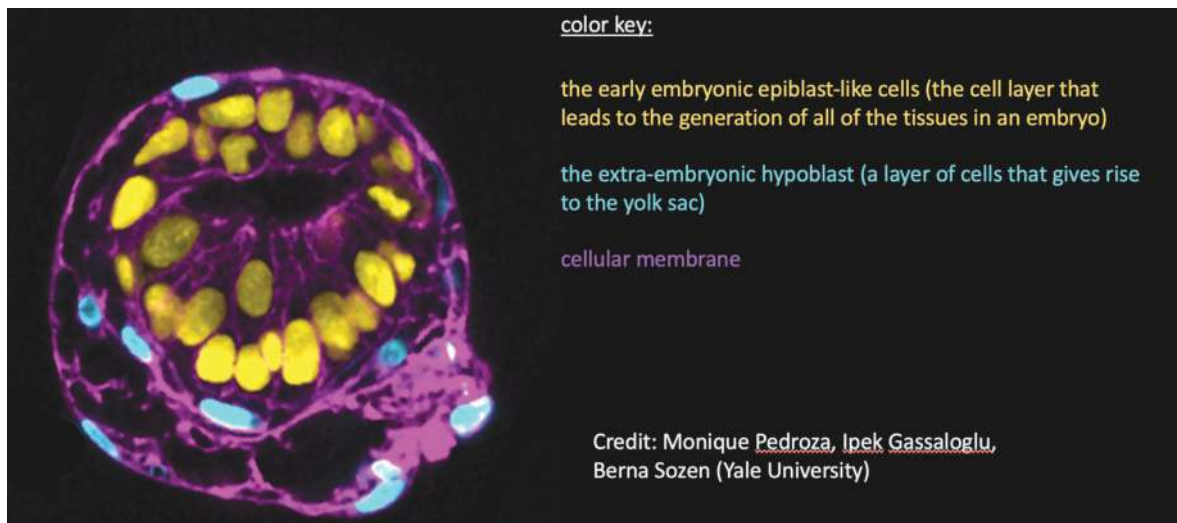
have not yet been reviewed by peers.

While previous models mimicked pre-embryos, Hyun said the latest ones model an embryo after it has implanted in the uterus. Real human embryos can be extremely hard to see at that stage because they burrow into the uterus. Each team's models vary in the techniques used and how complete they are, he said, with some mirroring not just the embryo but the very beginnings of the placenta and yolk sac, too.

For these types of models, scientists use a kind of stem cell that is capable of developing into many different types of cells or tissues in the body. They can be from embryos or reprogrammed from adult tissues.

The authors of one Nature paper described models that resemble human embryos nine to 14 days after fertilization.

"If we can experimentally model this period, then we can finally start asking questions about how human development happens in those very early stages that are normally hidden within the body of the mother,"



said author Berna Sozen, who studies developmental stem cell biology at Yale University.

Scientists will also be able to study embryonic failure, developmental disorders and pregnancy loss, Sozen said. At this point, we don't understand how it goes awry, she said.

In the other Nature paper, Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz, an expert in stem cell biology at the California Institute of Technology and the University of Cambridge in England, and colleagues said their model mirrors development up to 14 days from fertilization. That model contains embryonic tissues and tissues that can go on to produce structures surrounding the embryo such as the placenta and yolk sac.

Jacob Hanna of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, an author of a yet-to-be-reviewed paper, said in an email that his group's model also mirrors human embryo

development up to day 14 after fertilization. He said the structures include all embryonic membranes as well as membranes outside the embryo.

Both Hanna and Zernicka-Goetz previously helped create mouse embryo models.

Down the road, Zernicka-Goetz said human embryo models could be used to explore the effects of the environment and chemicals on early development. They could even be used to generate tissues used in new medical treatments, she said.

Sozen also envisions testing drugs on embryo models and exposing them to germs — experiments that can't be done on people who are pregnant.

Guidelines from the International Society for Stem Cell Research say scientists cannot put any human embryo model into either a human or non-human uterus. For decades,

the society had a related "14-day rule" that guided researchers on how long actual embryos can be grown in the lab — which the group recommended relaxing under limited circumstances in 2021. But because the models are not embryos, they're not subject to the rule.

Experts said some in the public have the wrong idea about these models, believing they might be able to create pregnancies. But scientific hurdles prevent this. For example, they don't develop a proper placenta. Even in the future, as the field progresses, there are ways to guard against bad actors who may want to try and create pregnancies from embryo models, said Hyun, who is also a member of Harvard Medical School's Center for Bioethics.

The ethical reason for not making them complete, he said, is that "the whole point of these models is to avoid the embryo controversy."

Nearly 36M in Europe may have experienced long COVID

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Nearly 36 million people in Europe may have had long-lasting health problems from coronavirus infections they got during the first three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization's regional director said Tuesday.

Dr. Hans Kluge said "long COVID" remained "a complex condition (that) we still know very little about" and "a glaring blind spot in

our knowledge."

"Unless we develop comprehensive diagnostics and treatment for long COVID, we will never truly recover from the pandemic," Kluge said, reiterating that older adults, people with underlying medical conditions and others with weakened immune systems should continue getting vaccinated.

While most people recover from COVID-19 within a few weeks after infection, some people have re-

ported experiencing ongoing fatigue, shortness of breath and brain fog.

WHO's Europe region covers 53 countries from Ireland to Uzbekistan with a combined population of more than 900 million. Statistics from University of Washington researchers indicate that about one in 30 of the region's residents have experienced "long COVID" in the past three years, Kluge said.

The origin of the virus that trig-

gered once-unthinkable lockdowns, upended economies and killed millions of people worldwide has not been pinpointed.

Last month, the World Health Organization said COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency. The announcement was made more than three years after WHO declared the coronavirus an international crisis. The U.N. health agency said that did not mean the pandemic had ended,

noting recent spikes in cases in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

In Europe, "COVID-19 exploited an epidemic of diseases, including cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic lung illnesses, which account for 75% of mortality," Kluge said.

"Those with such underlying conditions were, and still are, far more vulnerable to severe forms of COVID-19," he added.

Area of tropical forest as big as Switzerland was lost in 2022

BY ELIZABETH KIM
Bloomberg

The world lost 11 soccer fields' worth of tropical forest per minute in 2022 — a total area about the size of Switzerland and 10% more tropical forest than was lost in 2021. The carbon emissions associated with that disappearance were equivalent to all of India's fossil fuel emissions, according to the University of Maryland's 2022 data on tree-cover loss, presented by World Resources Institute's Global Forest Watch.

Forests are vital to sequestering carbon and maintaining

Earth's biodiversity, and millions of people depend on them for their livelihoods. But they are threatened by deforestation, fire and drought, and efforts to protect them have not kept pace.

"Humanity is not on track to meet major forest-related commitments," write the authors of the Global Forest Watch analysis, released Tuesday.

Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Bolivia, countries with large tropical rainforests, lost the most acreage in 2022, with Brazil losing the most by far: 4.4 million acres.

Brazil's forests experienced steep losses under President Jair Bolsonaro, who rolled back environmental protections. Primary (or old-growth) forest loss increased 15% in Brazil from 2021 to 2022.

Bolivia saw a 32% increase in primary forest loss from 2021 to 2022, mainly due to commodity agriculture. Soybean, sugar cane, corn and sorghum production contributed to the rise.

Ghana's rate of loss also jumped. The majority of its losses were in protected areas associated with cocoa production,

fires and gold mining.

Not every country saw forest loss worsen.

Indonesia, Costa Rica and Malaysia saw slowdowns. In Indonesia, government action to increase fire protection and restore peatlands and mangroves likely played a role.

In Malaysia, policies like stronger certification requirements for sustainable palm oil production appear to have contributed.

In contrast to the higher loss of primary tropical forest, overall global tree-cover loss was actual-

ly 10% lower in 2022 than the year before, due in large part to a below-average 2022 fire season in Russia.

In 2021, representatives of 145 countries agreed to work together to stop forest loss and land degradation by 2030 and acknowledged it was key to meeting Paris agreement climate goals.

The 2022 data underscores that urgent action is needed as irreplaceable ecosystems like the Amazon approach "tipping points" that could affect the whole planet's climate system.

NATION

EPA drops probe into state's link to cancer risk

By MICHAEL PHILLIS
Associated Press

The Biden administration has dropped an investigation into whether Louisiana officials put Black residents living in an industrial stretch of the state at increased cancer risk, despite finding initial evidence of racial discrimination, according to a federal court filing Tuesday.

The Environmental Protection Agency said a resolution "is not feasible" by a July deadline. It ends an inquiry that some activists in majority-Black communities had praised as finally offering a chance to improve their health.

The agency said it has taken several "significant actions" involving Denka, a polymer plant at the heart of the investigations, including an agreement to cut emissions. It also filed a lawsuit against the company alleging it imposed an unacceptable cancer risk to nearby residents, and tightened regulations. But the investigation did not compel Louisiana to make any commitments of its own.

Louisiana had argued in a recent federal court filing that the



GERALD HERBERT/AP

Myrtle Felton, from left, Sharon Lavigne, Gail LeBoeuf and Rita Cooper, members of RISE St. James, conduct a live stream video on property owned by Formosa in 2020 in St. James Parish, La.

administration had improperly "weaponized" a part of civil rights law in pursuing the investigations.

The Biden administration has prioritized environmental justice, drawing praise from activists for going so far as to create a new office last year to focus on cases of alleged environmental discrimination. Those activists were dismayed to learn of the retreat in

Louisiana, saying it would be "deeply problematic" if it represents a broader curtailment of civil rights investigations.

"It is a dangerous precedent," said Patrice Simms, an attorney with Earthjustice, one of the environmental groups that asked the EPA to investigate Louisiana.

Last year, the agency accepted complaints from activists to inves-

tigate Louisiana's regulation of air emissions in an industrial corridor called the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor but colloquially referred to as "cancer alley." It said there was initial evidence of racial discrimination. The federal government and state officials had been in informal talks to resolve the allegations.

That process has now come to an end without a formal finding of discrimination by the EPA.

"We are disappointed in the EPA," said Sharon Lavigne, resident and founder of Rise St. James, a group that filed a complaint that prompted the EPA to investigate.

"We were hopeful because we thought we were going to win this," she said.

The EPA said it would analyze how residents — especially those who live near the Denka plant — are exposed to a variety of dangerous emissions. The study would aim to "characterize the current baseline cumulative health risks and burdens" in the community and provide recommendations. The EPA wants the community to

participate in the process and they invited the state to take part as well, although it is not forced to.

The EPA also disposed of a complaint over emissions from a proposed chemical plant to be operated by FG LA, a Formosa Plastics affiliate, in the same industrial corridor. The agency noted that permits for the facility had been vacated and were now in litigation in state court.

The EPA's initial findings said it appears that for decades, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality let a Denka polymer plant expose people who live nearby and children at an elementary school to enough chloroprene, a chemical used to make synthetic rubber, to increase their cancer risk. The EPA had said Black residents "along the entire corridor" bear a disproportionate health risk from pollution, including near the proposed Formosa facility.

Denka has reduced its emissions in recent years. It called the investigation "ill-conceived" and said the EPA should focus on "science, not politics."

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WORLD

France heightens security following violence

Associated Press

NANTERRE, France — France's government on Wednesday announced heightened police presence around Paris and other big cities and called for calm after scattered violence erupted over the death of a 17-year-old delivery driver who was shot and killed during a police check.

The killing prompted nationwide concern and widespread messages of indignation and condolences, in-

cluding from soccer star Kylian Mbappe. French President Emmanuel Macron called the young man's death "inexplicable and inexcusable."

It also triggered unrest in multiple towns around Paris. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said 31 people were arrested, 25 police officers injured and 40 cars burned in overnight unrest.

The tensions focused around the Paris suburb of Nanterre, where

lawyers say 17-year-old Nael M. was killed Tuesday during a traffic check. The police officer suspected of firing on him was detained and faces potential manslaughter charges, according to the Nanterre prosecutor's office.

The Nanterre neighborhood where Nael lived remained on edge Wednesday morning, with police on guard around the regional administration, and burned car wreckage and overturned garbage bins still

visible in some areas. Bouquets of orange and yellow roses were tied to the post where the car crashed after the shooting, on Nanterre's Nelson Mandela Square.

Nael's mother appealed online for a silent march on Thursday in her son's honor, near the scene of his death.

Videos purported to be of the incident were "extremely shocking," Darmanin said, pledging a full investigation. The images show two

police officers leaning into the driver-side window of a yellow car, before the vehicle pulls away as one officer fires into the window. The car is later seen crashed into a post nearby.

Macron called for calm and for respect for Nael's loved ones. Asked about police abuses, he said justice should be allowed to run its course.

"Nothing justifies the death of a young person," he told reporters in Marseille.

Muslims brave heat during Hajj pilgrimage

Associated Press

MINA, Saudi Arabia — Hundreds of thousands of Muslim pilgrims on Wednesday braved intense heat to perform the symbolic stoning of the devil during the Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.

With morning temperatures rising past 107 degrees Fahrenheit, huge crowds of pilgrims walked or took buses to the vast Jamarat complex just outside the holy city of Mecca, where large pedestrian bridges lead past three wide pillars representing the devil.

Using pebbles collected the night before at a campsite known as Muzdalifa, the pilgrims stone the pillars. It's a reenactment of the story of the Prophet Ibrahim — known as Abraham in Christian and Jewish traditions — who is said to have hurled stones at Satan to resist temptation.

The ceremony was marred by tragedy on a number of occasions in the 1990s and 2000s, when hundreds died in stampedes during the stoning ritual. Saudi authorities have since built an expanded

network of massive pedestrian bridges and redesigned the site to make it safer for pilgrims.

This year, the biggest danger might be the heat.

Temperatures soared past 113 F on Tuesday, as Muslims marked the spiritual high point of the pilgrimage by spending the day praying at Mount Arafat, where there was no breeze and almost no shade.

Pilgrims huddled under umbrellas, dousing themselves with bottled water. Cellphones were almost too hot to hold and shut down after just a few minutes of use.

Saudi authorities have deployed tens of thousands of health workers for the pilgrimage and volunteers were handing out water. The Health Ministry said late Tuesday that it had treated 287 cases of sunstroke and heat exhaustion.

The annual Hajj pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam, and all Muslims are required to undertake it at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially able.



BADERKHAN AHMAD/AP

Hamrin Alouji, the mother of 13-year-old Peyal Aqil, goes through her daughter's photographs at their family home in Qamishli, Syria, on June 5.

Recruitment of children in Syria by armed groups is on the rise

Associated Press

QAMISHLI, Syria — A 13-year-old Kurdish girl went missing on her way home from a school exam last month, after being approached by a man from an armed group. Her parents immediately feared the worst — that she had been persuaded to join the group and was taken to one of its training camps.

The girl, Peyal Aqil, was with friends when she encountered the man who turned out to be a recruiter for a group known as the Revolutionary Youth. She followed him to one of the group's centers in the city of Qamishli in northeast Syria. Her friends waited for her outside, but she never emerged.

Peyal's mother, Hamrin Alouji, said she and her husband complained to local authorities, to no avail.

The group later said Peyal joined willingly, a claim rejected by Alouji. "We consider that at this age, she cannot give consent, even if she was convinced" by the group's program, Alouji said, sitting for an interview in her daughter's

room, filled with stuffed animals and school texts.

Armed groups have recruited children throughout the past 12 years of conflict and civil war in Syria. A new United Nations report on children in armed conflict, released Tuesday, says the use of child soldiers in Syria is growing, even as fighting in most parts of Syria is winding down.

The number of children recruited by armed groups in Syria has risen steadily over the past three years — from 813 in 2020 to 1,296 in 2021 and 1,696 in 2022, the U.N. says.

Among those allegedly recruiting children is a U.S. ally in the battle against Islamic State extremists — the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, according to the U.N. In 2022, the U.N. attributed half the cases, or 637, to the SDF and associated groups in northeast Syria.

The report also said the U.N. had confirmed 611 recruitment cases by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army, which has clashed

with the SDF in the past, and 383 by the al-Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham in northwest Syria. The report cited 25 cases of child recruitment by Syrian government forces and pro-government militias.

Children are being recruited across Syria, said Bassam Alahmad, executive director of Syrians for Truth and Justice, an independent civil society organization.

In some cases, children are forcibly conscripted, he said. In others, minors sign up because they or their families need the salary. Some join for ideological reasons, or because of family and tribal loyalties. In some cases, children are sent out of Syria to fight as mercenaries in other conflicts.

Attempts to end such recruitment have been complicated by the patchwork of armed groups operating in each part of Syria.

A month after her May 21 disappearance, Peyal came home. She had run away from one of the group's training camps, her mother said.

London jury is seated in Spacey's sex assault trial

Associated Press

LONDON — Two-time Oscar winner Kevin Spacey walked into a London courtroom Wednesday to face trial on charges of sexually assaulting four men as long as two decades ago.

The actor was dressed in a dark blue suit, light blue shirt and pink tie as he was called by his full name and asked if he was Kevin Spacey Fowler.

"I am," he said as he stood behind a window in the dock.

Spacey, 63, has pleaded not guilty to a dozen charges including sexual assault, indecent assault and causing a person to engage in sex activity without consent. He could face a prison sentence if convicted.

Spacey nodded and smiled at po-

tential jurors as Justice Mark Wall told them that they may know Spacey by name or have seen his films.

More than two dozen entered the courtroom and the first 14 were seated without objection from the prosecution or defense. Thirteen people were then excused.

Spacey stood with his hands clasped behind his back as nine men and five women, including two alternates, were sworn in as jurors to hear evidence in the case expected to last four weeks in Southwark Crown Court.

"I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will faithfully try the defendant and give true verdicts according to the evidence," jurors asserted.

Opening statements are scheduled Friday.

WORLD



POMPEII ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK/AP

The wall of an ancient Pompeian house with a fresco depicting a table with food. The fresco was found in the atrium of a house in Insula 10 of Regio IX under excavation, to which a bakery was annexed.

Wall painting found in Pompeii doesn't depict iconic dish, pizza

Associated Press

MILAN — A still-life fresco discovered recently in the Pompeii archaeological site looks like a pizza, but it's not, experts at the site said Tuesday. They noted that key ingredients needed to make Italy's iconic dish — tomatoes and mozzarella — were not available when the fresco was painted some 2,000 years ago. Tomatoes were only introduced to Europe from the Americas a few centuries ago, and some histories have it that the discovery of

mozzarella led directly to the invention of pizza in nearby Naples in the 1700s. The image is instead believed to be a focaccia covered with fruit, including pomegranate and possibly dates, finished with spices or a type of pesto, experts said. In the fresco, it is served on a silver plate and a wine chalice stands next to it. The contrast of the frugal meal served in a luxurious setting, denoted by the silver tray, is not unlike modern-day pizza, "born as a

poor-man's dish in southern Italy, which has won over the world and is served even in starred restaurants," said Gabriel Zuchtriegel, director of the Pompeii archaeological site. The Coldiretti ag lobby immediately seized on the discovery of the fresco to promote pizza — invented as a quick meal for the working poor — as a national treasure. Today, pizza represents one-third of the food budget of foreign visitors and generates total annual revenues of \$16.4 billion in Italy.

Italy looking for tourist seen in video carving names into Colosseum wall

By TRISHA THOMAS AND REBECCA PRECCIUTI Associated Press

ROME — Italy's culture and tourism ministers have vowed to find and punish a tourist who was filmed carving his name and that of his apparent girlfriend in the wall of the Colosseum in Rome, a crime that resulted in hefty fines in the past. The message reading "Ivan+Haley 23" appeared on the Colosseum at a time when Romans already were complaining about hordes of tourists flooding the Eternal City in record numbers this season. A fellow tourist, Ryan Lutz, of Orange, Calif., filmed the incident and posted the video on YouTube and Reddit. The video received over 1,500 social media views and was picked up by Italian media. Lutz told The Associated Press on Tuesday he was "dumbfounded" that someone would deface such an important monument.

Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano called the writing carved into the almost 2,000-year-old Flavian Amphitheater "serious, undignified and a sign of great incivility." He said he hoped the culprits would be found "and punished according to our laws." Italian news agency ANSA noted that the incident marked the fourth time this year that such graffiti was reported at the Colosseum. It said whoever was responsible for the latest episode risked \$15,000 in fines and up to five years in prison. Tourism Minister Daniela Santanchè said she hoped the tourist would be sanctioned "so that he understands the gravity of the gesture." Calling for respect for Italy's culture and history, she vowed: "We cannot allow those who visit our nation to feel free to behave in this way." Lutz, who is on a two-month backpacking trip through Europe, said he had just finished a guided tour of the Colosseum on

Friday when he saw the person "blatantly carving his name" in the Colosseum wall. Lutz told the AP he took out his phone to film the man because he was so shocked at what he was doing. "And as you see in the video, I kind of approach him and ask him, dumbfounded at this point, 'Are you serious? Are you really serious?'" Lutz recalled. "And all he could do is like smile at me." Lutz, a recent graduate of Cal Poly Pomona, said he tried to get a guard to take action, but neither the guard nor his supervisor did anything, even after Lutz identified the man and offered to share the video. He said he decided to post the video online the following morning, after he had calmed down. While saying he appreciates graffiti and art, "carving your name seems like a pretty selfish act." He said visitors to foreign countries cannot repay their hosts "with blatant disrespect like this."

Philippine raids save 2K forced fraud workers

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine police backed by commandos staged a massive raid on Tuesday and said they rescued more than 2,700 workers from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and more than a dozen other countries who were allegedly swindled into working for fraudulent online gaming sites and other cybercrime groups. The number of human trafficking victims rescued from seven buildings in Las Pinas city in metropolitan Manila and the scale of the nighttime police raid were the largest so far this year and indicated how the Philippines has become a key base of operations for cybercrime syndicates. Cybercrime scams have become a major issue in Asia with reports of people from the region and beyond being lured into taking jobs in countries like Myanmar and Cambodia. However, many of these workers find themselves trapped in virtual slavery and forced to participate in scams targeting people over the internet. In May, leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed in a summit in Indonesia to tighten border controls and law enforcement and broaden public education to fight criminal syndi-

cates that traffic workers to other nations, where they are made to participate in online fraud. Brig. Gen. Sydney Hernia, who heads the national Philippine police's anti-cybercrime unit, said police armed with warrants raided and searched the buildings around midnight in Las Pinas and rescued 1,534 Filipinos and 1,190 foreigners from at least 17 countries. It was not immediately clear how many suspected leaders of the syndicate were arrested. Police raided another suspected cybercrime base at the Clark freeport in Mabalacat city in Pampanga province north of Manila in May where they took custody of nearly 1,400 Filipino and foreign workers who were allegedly forced to carry out cryptocurrency scams, police said. Some of the workers told investigators that when they tried to quit they were forced to pay a hefty amount for unclear reasons or they feared they would be sold to other syndicates, police said, adding that workers were also forced to pay fines for perceived infractions at work. Workers were lured with high salary offers and ideal working conditions in Facebook advertisements but later found out the promises were a ruse, officials said.

Israel seizes cryptocurrency used to finance Hezbollah, Iran's Revolutionary Guard

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Israeli government said Tuesday that it seized millions of dollars in cryptocurrency from accounts that had sent or received funds in alleged financing schemes for a powerful arm of the Iranian military and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said he issued an order to seize the cryptocurrency wallets and turn over the funds to the Israeli government. He described the "extensive" operation as Israel's first to target the Hezbollah militant group and the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force — two organizations

sworn to Israel's destruction. Both have been designated by the United States and some other governments as terrorist organizations and locked out of the traditional global financial system. It was a multi-agency effort, Gallant said, involving Israel's Mossad spy agency, the Israeli military intelligence office, the Israeli police and others. Israel has previously seized cryptocurrency belonging to the paramilitary arm of Gaza's Hamas rulers as part of counterterrorism financing investigations. "This is the first incident of this magnitude," Gallant said, noting that the effort took place earlier this week. "We have effectively cut off the flow of terror funds via this channel."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Day care worker charged in child porn case

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire woman who worked at a Massachusetts day care center is accused of taking sexually explicit photos of children and sending them to a former partner.

Lindsay Groves, 38, of Hudson, was charged Thursday with sexual exploitation of children and distribution of child pornography. According to federal investigators, she took nude photos of children at Creative Minds in Tyngsboro, Mass., and texted them to “an individual with whom she was previously in an intimate relationship.”

Massachusetts authorities did not identify Groves’ former partner. But according to Nashua Police, the same investigation led to the arrest of a former state lawmaker who is charged in New Hampshire with distributing child sex abuse images.

Stacie Laughton, of Derry, resigned from the New Hampshire House in December after being charged with stalking Groves. Court documents do not list an attorney for Groves, and it is unclear whether Laughton has a lawyer to speak on her behalf.

Hackers steal info on pilot applicants at airlines

TX DALLAS — Personal information for more than 8,000 applicants to become pilots at American Airlines and Southwest Airlines was stolen when hackers broke into a data base maintained by a recruiting company.

The breach at Austin, Texas-based Pilot Credentials occurred April 30, and the airlines learned about it on May 3. They notified affected job seekers last week.

According to letters that the airlines were required to file with regulators in Maine, hackers gained access to names, birth dates, Social Security and passport numbers, and driver and pilot-license numbers of applicants for pilot and cadet jobs.

According to filings, 5,745 applicants to American and 3,009 at Southwest were affected.

Florida man who killed 2 sentenced to death

FL FORT MYERS — A judge in southwest Florida handed down a death sentence Monday for a man convicted of killing an 11-year-old girl and her babysitter more than 30 years ago.

Lee Circuit Judge Robert Branning was following last month’s 10-2 jury recommendation in favor of death for Joseph Zieler, according to court records. The same panel had found Zieler, 61, guilty of two counts of first-degree murder.

Zieler was jailed on an unrelated assault charge in 2016 when his DNA matched to the cold-case



DAVE ZAJAC/AP

A S.C.U.B.A. summer

Connor Martin, 15, of Meriden steps into the pool with assistance from instructor Jeff Cinciripino during a S.C.U.B.A. lesson at Maloney High School, in Meriden, Conn., on June 20. Cinciripino is the founder of the nonprofit Scuba Education Alliance of CT.

murders of Robin Cornell, 11, and Lisa Story, 32, authorities said.

NYC will add Diwali as a public school holiday

NY NEW YORK — New York City will add the festival of Diwali to the list of public school holidays in recognition of the growth of the city’s South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities, Mayor Eric Adams announced Monday.

Diwali, known as the festival of lights, happens October or November, depending on the lunar calendar.

However, this year it falls on Sunday Nov. 12 — meaning the 2023-24 school calendar will not be affected by the change.

The new holiday will become official if Gov. Kathy Hochul, also a Democrat, signs a bill passed by the New York state legislature earlier this month making Diwali a public school holiday in New York City.

Dolphin moms use baby talk to call to their young

DC WASHINGTON — You know instantly when someone is speaking to an infant or small child. It turns out that dolphin mothers also use a kind of high-pitched baby talk.

A study published Monday found that female bottlenose dolphins change their tone when addressing their calves. Researchers recorded the signature whistles of 19 mother dolphins in Florida, when accompanied by their

young offspring and when swimming alone or with other adults.

The dolphin signature whistle is a unique and important signal — akin to calling out their own name.

When directing the signal to their calves, the mother’s whistle pitch is higher and her pitch range is greater than usual, according to the study published in the journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Obtaining this data was no simple feat. Over more than three decades, scientists placed special microphones multiple times on the same wild dolphin mothers in Florida’s Sarasota Bay to record their signature whistles.

Opioid money distribution set to begin soon

WV CHARLESTON — West Virginia is finalizing the leadership for a newly created foundation tasked with distributing the lion’s share of the more than \$1 billion in opioid lawsuit-settlement money coming to the state with the nation’s highest overdose death rate.

That means funding for opioid treatment and addiction services can soon begin going out to communities after years of litigation, Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said Monday in his state Capitol office in Charleston.

Morrisey said the state has hired the Arlington, Va.-based search firm DRiWaterstone Human Capital to find an executive director for the West Virginia First Foundation, the private nonprofit that will distribute just un-

der three quarters of the money. About a quarter will go directly to counties and a small percentage — around 3% — will be held in trust.

Over the past four years, drug manufacturers, distribution companies, pharmacies and other companies with roles in the opioid business have reached settlements totaling more than \$50 billion with governments.

Drivers to pay extra tolls to reduce NYC congestion

NY NEW YORK — New York has received a critical federal approval for its first-in-the-nation plan to charge big tolls to drive into the most visited parts of Manhattan, part of an effort to reduce traffic, improve air quality and raise funds for the city’s public transit system.

The program could begin as soon as the spring of 2024, bringing New York City into line with places like London, Singapore, and Stockholm that have implemented similar tolling programs for highly congested business districts.

Under one of several tolling scenarios under consideration, drivers could be charged as much as \$23 a day to enter Manhattan south of 60th Street, with the exact amount still to be decided by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which is overseeing the long-stalled plan.

The congestion pricing plan cleared its final federal hurdle after getting approved by the Federal Highway Administration, a

spokesperson for New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said on Monday.

Budget covers \$32B deficit without reserves

CA SACRAMENTO — California Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Democrats who control the state Legislature agreed late Monday on how to spend \$310.8 billion over the next year, endorsing a plan that covers a nearly \$32 billion budget deficit without raiding the state’s savings account.

The nation’s most populous state has had combined budget surpluses of well over \$100 billion in the past few years, using that money to greatly expand government.

But this year, revenues slowed as inflation soared and the stock market struggled. California gets most of its revenue from taxes paid by the wealthy, making it more vulnerable to changes in the economy than other states. Last month, the Newsom administration estimated the state’s spending would exceed revenues by over \$30 billion.

The budget, which lawmakers are scheduled to vote on this week, covers that deficit by cutting some spending — about \$8 billion — while delaying other spending and shifting some expenses to other funds.

The plan would borrow \$6.1 billion and would set aside \$37.8 billion in reserves, the most ever.



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OPINION

Putin’s big mistakes in Wagner revolt

By ANDREAS KLUTH
Bloomberg Opinion

Russian President Vladimir Putin is damaged goods. He may have survived this weekend’s mutiny by Yevgeny Prigozhin and his Wagner Group of mercenaries. In reacting as he did, though, Putin not only made himself even weaker, but planted the idea of his impotence in the minds of Russians and the world.

Of course Putin had to show himself and say something to the nation as Prigozhin’s mercenaries seized the southern Russian city of Rostov and started driving north toward Moscow. But what exactly? The mutineers were “betraying” the nation in its fight against “neo-Nazis” and the West, Putin asserted imply. That much was expected. The mistakes came next.

The first one was comparing Prigozhin’s coup attempt to the mutiny of Russian soldiers in early 1917. That planted three parallels in Russian minds that’ll be hard to erase. First, there’s a weak and unpopular Tsar — Nicholas II, later executed with his family, then, Putin today. Second, there’s a war going on that Russia is losing — World War I then, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine now. Third, there’ll soon be revolution and civil war, so start thinking about which side to be on.

The second mistake was even graver. Putin promised his response “will be harsh.” The mutineers will “inevitably be punished,” he said. The traitors “will be held to account.”

With this macho talk he was channeling his old strongman persona, forgetting to pause and think whether he still had the power to make good on his bluster. Appar-

ently, it occurred to him only later that he didn’t, for he decided to take a deal brokered by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko instead. It lets Prigozhin, and presumably some of his mercenaries, move to Belarus, while Russia formally drops all charges against him. Harsh punishment looks different.

The cognitive dissonance of Lukashenko making the phone call made Putin’s climb-down even more humiliating. In recent years, it’s been the dictator in Moscow who’s had to rescue the one in Minsk from the revolutionary energies of their subjects. In their meetings, Putin was always careful to display a silverback body language that made the physically towering Lukashenko look like a minion of the Kremlin. Now the roles have reversed.

How long can either of these strongmen — or, rather, weakmen — still have in power?

The reality — as everybody knows not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also in Beijing, Kyiv, Washington and everywhere else — is that while shooting may have been averted on Saturday, absolutely nothing is resolved. Prigozhin, who runs a private army that kills and maims for profit, from Africa to Syria and Ukraine, isn’t the type to retire and play Bingo. He’ll be up to something before long. After all, he’s a meme hog on social media already.

It’s in that role that Prigozhin threw another Molotov cocktail into Putin’s story. In the barrage of Telegram videos he posted in the run-up to his seizure of Rostov, the Wagner boss casually and profanely wrecked the entire propaganda narrative Putin has been selling to his population. In that topsy-turvy reality, remember, Russia

Saudis tightening screws on US oil shipments

By JAVIER BLAS
Bloomberg Opinion

When Saudi Arabia needs to quickly convince the oil market that supply is tightening, putting upward pressure on prices, nothing beats reducing its crude exports into the U.S.

Riyadh has promised to slash oil production next month by 10%, a unilateral cut that would reduce output to just 9 million barrels a day, the lowest since 2011 — save for brief disruptions from COVID and the Yemeni attack on its facilities. Crucially, as important as the cut itself, is where it’s going to be felt: The signals point to the U.S. and Europe.

Focusing on the U.S. would telegraph the reduction clearly to traders. Fluctuations in American crude imports, and ultimately, oil stockpiles have an outsize impact because Washington publishes the data weekly. In other regions, traders only get official figures on a monthly basis, or sometimes not at all, as in China and India.

It’s a tactic that Saudi Arabia used to great effect six years ago when the kingdom targeted American buyers to rewrite the market’s narrative. “Exports to the U.S. will drop measurably,” Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said in May 2017 after an OPEC+ meeting. By July, Saudi oil shipments to America had fallen to a 30-year low. The price of West Texas Intermediate, an oil benchmark, rose 20% from the day Al-Falih spoke to the end of the year.

Whether it can work again remains to be seen.

For one, the U.S. is now far less dependent on Saudi crude. Back in mid-2017, the U.S. regularly bought 1 million barrels a day of Saudi crude. So far this year, it has bought an average of less than 500,000 barrels a day.

Still, it’s probably the best chance Riyadh has to jump-start prices. Despite robust demand growth this year, a flood of crude from Russia, Iran and Venezuela — all under Western sanctions — has overwhelmed consumption. As a result, West Texas Intermediate has struggled to sustain the \$70-a-barrel level. Going after the U.S. and European markets has an advantage for Riyadh: Neither can switch to Russian or Iranian supplies, something that refiners in Asia do every day.

After the production cut, the Saudis would have less than 6 million barrels for export.

The bulk of that would go east of Suez, where Saudi Aramco, the state-controlled oil giant, has told several Asian refiners they would get as much crude as they requested. That means any cuts will be felt west of Suez: Europe and the U.S.

Saudi Arabia can unilaterally reduce supply, but U.S. refiners may decide to buy less Saudi oil if prices are too high vs. similar varieties of crude. And Riyadh is making sure that’s the case.

For July, Aramco set the premia for Arab Light, its flagship export oil grade, at an all-

is not the aggressor but the victim, defending itself against Nazi Satanists in Ukraine and their NATO puppet masters in the West. In fact, Prigozhin said, that storyline is total bunk, and the “so-called special operation was launched for completely different reasons,” mainly pillaging. Since then, he added, it’s turned into a “monstrous shame show” run by “mentally ill scum.”

This insight hardly comes as a shock to any lucid person, in Russia or anywhere. But it’s notable hearing it from somebody who until recently was billed as Russia’s most competent (or only competent) warlord in that said shame show. Kremlin propaganda will never be the same again. In that sense, Prigozhin is like Toto pulling back the curtain to reveal that the fearsome Wizard of Oz is a humbug.

In all of these ways, Putin continues, 16 months after his unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, to be the opposite of his Ukrainian counterpart and namesake, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Where Putin spreads lies, Zelenskyy hews to the truth wherever possible (this is war, after all). Where the man in Moscow is at heart a coward, the one in Kyiv has found his inner hero.

“I need ammunition, not a ride,” Zelenskyy countered when the Americans, in the early hours of the Russian attack against him, offered to spirit him out of the country. As Prigozhin’s warriors pointed their guns at Moscow, Twitter turned that meme on its head and attributed it to Putin: “I need a ride, not ammunition.” Whether by ride or other conveyance, this wannabe tsar appears a big step closer to retirement.

Andreas Kluth is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering European politics.

time high of \$7.15-a-barrel above the reference for U.S. sales. That’s more than double the highest ever premia set before the pandemic. As such, Aramco is pricing itself out of the market, and refiners would opt to buy cheaper crude varieties.

Aramco also controls the largest refinery in America, Motiva Enterprises, capable of processing about 630,000 barrels a day, giving it another lever to reduce shipments. Motiva’s Port Arthur, Texas, refinery accounted for nearly 45% of all the Saudi crude that the U.S. imported in the first quarter, buying roughly 182,000 barrels a day, according to government data.

Energy Aspects, a London-based consultancy, reckons that Motiva will buy only about 25,000 barrels a day of Saudi crude in July.

If that’s the case, and considering a tanker’s 40-day trip from the kingdom to the U.S., Saudi flows into America will plunge in August and September. I wouldn’t be surprised if we see shipments near zero in some weeks during that period — something seen only twice in the past 40 years.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, who replaced Al-Falih as Saudi energy minister, has so far kept the market largely in the dark about where the Saudi oil production cuts would be felt. Only the size of the cut is known. Savvy oil traders will have to read the tea leaves for the rest of the story.

Javier Blas is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering energy and commodities.

FACES

Super casting

Corenswet, Brosnahan are DC's new Superman, Lois Lane for 2025 film

By DAVID BETANCOURT
The Washington Post

The Daily Planet has two new hires.

David Corenswet and Rachel Brosnahan are the new it couple of the DC Universe, as they've been cast as Clark Kent and Lois Lane in 2025's "Superman: Legacy."

DC Studios co-head James Gunn, who is looking to create a new cinematic vision for the company in the mold of the first decade of Marvel Studios, will write and direct the film.

Certain comic book particulars are still being kept under wraps. Will this latest iteration of Lois and Clark be meeting each other for the first time? Will they be rivals in the newsroom? Friends? Lovers? Spouses? Variety reports that it will be a "workplace origin story," but other details, such as the time period, are unclear, so perhaps they meet while stuck in a meeting about gaining more subscribers and tweeting out their stories. Safe to say that Lois probably wouldn't know that Clark has a big "S" on his chest underneath his shirt and tie.

There's no suspense quite like the magic of: When will Lois find out? Comic book history teaches us that Lois eventually marries Clark after also finding out who he is when his glasses come off. Will Gunn follow a similar path



"Superman: Legacy" writer/director James Gunn has found his new Superman and Lois Lane in David Corenswet, left, and Rachel Brosnahan, right, according to DC Studios.



AP

with his first (and not last) dynamic duo?

Corenswet is known for roles in "The Politician" and "Pearl." He stands at 6-foot-4 and looks to give DC Studios a Superman in the mold of the lean and fit Christopher Reeve, as opposed to that of Henry Cavill, who was most recently DC's Man of Steel on-screen. Even still, Corenswet has probably been handed a protein shake and been doing triceps pull-downs while you've been reading this.

Corenswet told Entertainment Weekly in 2019 that, yes, he has been told that he bears a striking resemblance to Cavill, and he said his ambition is "definitely to play Superman. I would love to see somebody do an upbeat, throwback [take on Superman]. I love the Henry Cavill dark and gritty take, but I would love

to see the next one be very bright and optimistic."

Brosnahan comes from an award-winning run on "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" and also appeared on Netflix's "House of Cards."

The Hollywood Reporter recently reported that "Superman: Legacy" will feature the debut of the Authority, a superhero team created in the late '90s by Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch, probably giving Superman not just one foe but an entire pack of them, plus Lex Luthor. The role of one of DC's most prominent villains has yet to be cast.

The news comes faster than a speeding bullet after the disappointing box office numbers of "The Flash," and it makes it clear that, for DC Studios, the future is now.

Seacrest to be next 'Wheel of Fortune' host

By HERB SCRIBNER
The Washington Post

Ryan Seacrest has signed a multiyear deal to host the game show "Wheel of Fortune" beginning in 2024, Sony Pictures Television announced Tuesday.

Seacrest will replace longtime host Pat Sajak, who announced this month that he would step down from the show next year after four decades at the wheel. Sajak will stay on as a consultant, according to Sony, and Seacrest will become a consulting producer in addition to being the new host.

"I'm truly humbled to be stepping into the footsteps of the legendary Pat Sajak," Seacrest said in a statement Tuesday. "I can say, along with the rest of America, that it's been a privilege and pure joy to watch Pat and Vanna [White] on our television screens for an unprecedented 40 years, making us smile every night and feel right at home with them."

Seacrest is one of the most recognizable personalities in media, having been a host for 21 seasons on "American Idol," previously appearing on "Live with Kelly and Ryan" (for which he won an Emmy), and ringing in each new year with "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest." He also hosts a radio program called "On Air with Ryan Seacrest" in Southern California, where "Wheel of Fortune" films its episodes.

The letter-guessing show has more than 20 million viewers, Sony said in a news release. More than 3,000 people audition every year for the show, with fewer than 500 making the final cut, according to the History Channel.

Seacrest will take over after Sajak's final and 41st season, which starts airing in September. He hosted the show's daytime edition from 1981 to 1989 and started hosting the show's syndicated version in 1983. The show's co-host, Vanna White, first joined in 1982, kicking off four decades of the pair appearing on home screens everywhere.

Sajak has the record for the longest career as a game show host for the same show, according to the Guinness World Records.

Seacrest has also been seeking a job like this for his entire career, it would seem. He told the New York Times in 2009 that he hoped to emulate the career of the late Merv Griffin, a television host and media personality who created several hit programs — including "Wheel of Fortune."

Netflix slammed for streaming 'Titanic' too soon

From wire reports

James Cameron's "Titanic" is set to return to Netflix on July 1 — a little over a week after it was confirmed that five people had died aboard a submersible diving to the site of the Titanic shipwreck. Some are calling the entertainment company "rude and insensitive" for streaming the title so soon after the disaster.

Though critics have accused the streaming giant of acquiring the movie after the Titan submersible imploded — in an alleged effort to "capitalize" on the situation — the Los Angeles Times has confirmed that the deal to bring "Titanic" back to Netflix in July was struck several months ago.

The 1997 blockbuster starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet will be available to watch on the platform in the United States and Canada starting Saturday.

When news of the film's imminent return to Netflix surfaced over the weekend, many social media users were quick to denounce the streamer's "bad timing" and "lack of compassion." Others made jokes about the grim coincidence — in line with how the internet has reacted to the tragedy as a whole.

"I love Titanic but I kind of think it's rude and insensitive that they're doing adding it back on Netflix NOW," one person tweeted. "People literally died on the submarine a few days ago??? But they don't care they just know they'll get lots of streams/\$\$\$\$. Sad."

"And the award for unbelievably insensitive

timing goes to @netflix," another person echoed.

Netflix declined to comment.

Missing actor's body found

Actor Julian Sands, who starred in several Oscar-nominated films in the late 1980s and '90s including "A Room with a View" and "Leaving Las Vegas," was found dead on a Southern California mountain five months after he disappeared while hiking, authorities said Tuesday.

An investigation confirmed that it was Sands whose remains hikers found June 24 in wilderness near Mount Baldy, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said. The 65-year-old actor was an avid and experienced hiker who lived in Los Angeles and was reported missing Jan. 13 after setting out on the peak that rises more than 10,000 feet east of the city. Crews aided by drones and helicopters had searched for him several times, but, severely hampered by wintry conditions that lasted through spring, no sign of him was found until the civilian hikers came upon him.

Sands, who was born, raised and began acting in England, amassed more than 150 film and television credits in a 40-year career. During a 10-year span from 1985 to 1995, he played major roles in a series of acclaimed films.



Sands

Bluegrass pioneer Osborne dies

Bobby Osborne, a mandolin player who with his brother Sonny Osborne formed the bluegrass music duo The Osborne Brothers, has died. He was 91.

Bobby Osborne's clear tenor voice has been associated with "Rocky Top," the state song of Tennessee, since The Osborne Brothers first recorded it in the 1960s. They were inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in 1964 and went on to the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Kentucky Music Hall of Fame.

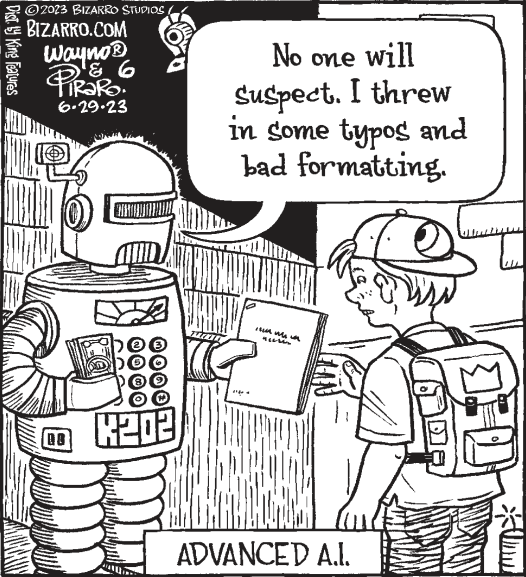
Bobby Osborne and Sonny Osborne, a banjo picker, performed together for more than 50 years, until Sonny's retirement in 2005. Sonny Osborne died in 2021 at age 83.

Bobby Osborne's career spanned more than 70 years, and he was still performing at the Grand Ole Opry with his band, Rocky Top X-Press this year, according to recent posts on his Facebook page.

Other news

■ **Low Palter**, a Brooklyn-born actor whose dozens of film and TV performances included a role in James Cameron's "Titanic," died May 21 at his home in Los Angeles following a battle with lung cancer, his family said. He was 94. Palter, who also had many roles on popular shows throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, played former Macy's co-owner Isidor Straus, who died on the ship, in 1997's "Titanic."

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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- ACROSS
- 1 — Wilson, whose alter ego is the title character in 2018's "Deadpool 2"
- 5 Bro, maybe
- 8 Queue after Q
- 12 Israeli airline
- 13 — Maria (coffee liqueur)
- 14 Comic actor Roscoe
- 15 Tora —
- 16 Televisé
- 17 Like ganders
- 18 Casino customer
- 20 Played loudly
- 22 Conclusion
- 23 They play before blockbusters
- 24 Cold War news agency
- 27 Ship in 1898 headlines
- 32 Flight stat
- 33 Filming site
- 34 "Gosh!"
- 35 Chinese brew
- 38 Division word
- 39 — Speedwagon
- 40 Hwys.
- 42 "No cheating!"
- 45 Girl Scout units
- 49 Yale students
- 50 Crew tool
- 52 French cheese
- 53 Otherwise
- 54 Numbered rd.
- 55 "The Thin Man" dog
- 56 Slangy refusals
- 57 Talk and talk
- 58 Crowd noise
- 25 Completely
- 26 Five-armed sea creature
- 28 Observe
- 29 Sci-fi series that released summer blockbusters in 2009, 2013, and 2016
- 30 Court divider
- 31 Fair-hiring letters
- 36 Stops
- 37 Japanese pond carp
- 38 Weather map line
- 41 AMA member
- 42 Existed
- 43 First lady of scat
- 44 "Gilmore Girls" daughter
- 46 Approximately
- 47 Pocket bread
- 48 Burn somewhat
- 51 — premium
- DOWN
- 1 "Dagnet" star Jack
- 2 Body lotion ingredient
- 3 Scurry
- 4 Cheers up
- 5 2007 summer movie based on a Neil Gaiman book
- 6 King Charles —
- 7 Biting remark
- 8 Holiday Inn rival
- 9 Zodiac symbol
- 10 Conference leader?
- 11 Secondhand
- 19 Atop
- 21 Felon's flight
- 24 Indent key

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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6-29

CRYPTOQUIP

VTYY-JTATEUTH MTYTUEWENR

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CNYXW VIN GJT MTJJEQYT

ANNXW: "QG XERF QGH."

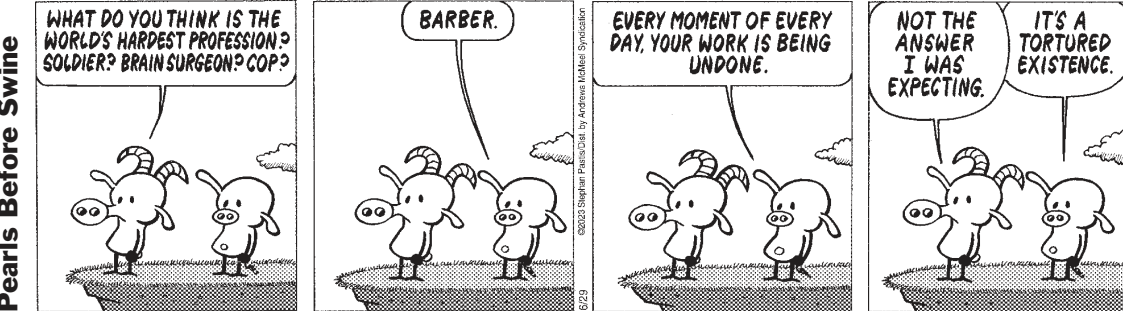
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WOW, CHECK OUT THIS GLORIOUS WORK FROM FRENCH PAINTER EDOUARD. IT'S A MANET-SPLENDORED THING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals G

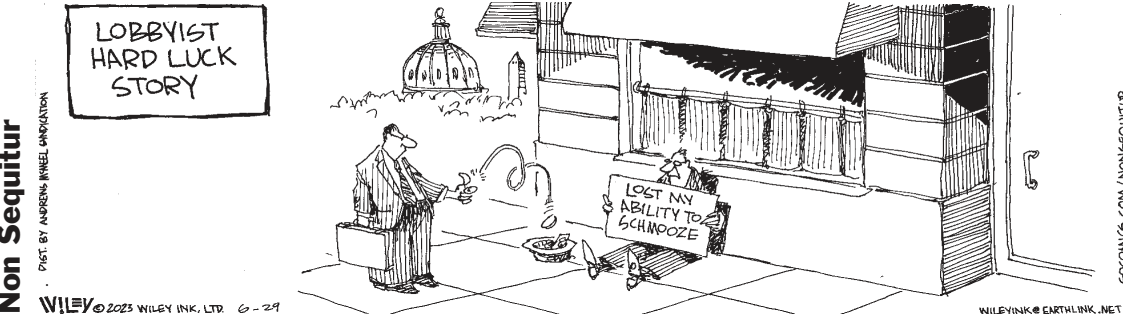
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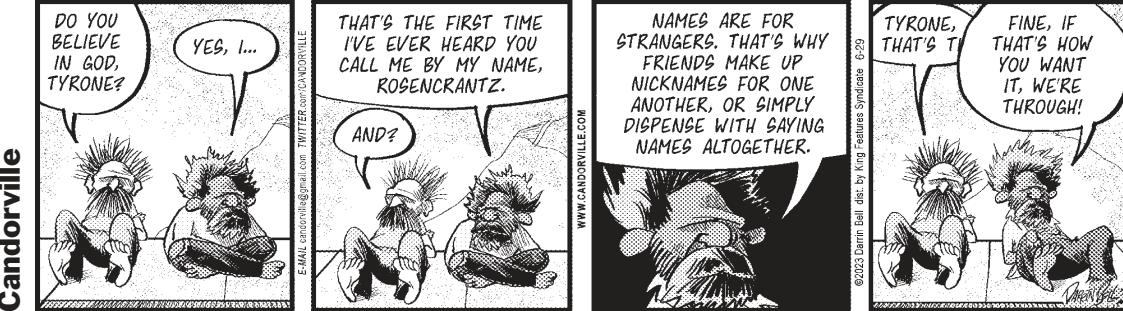
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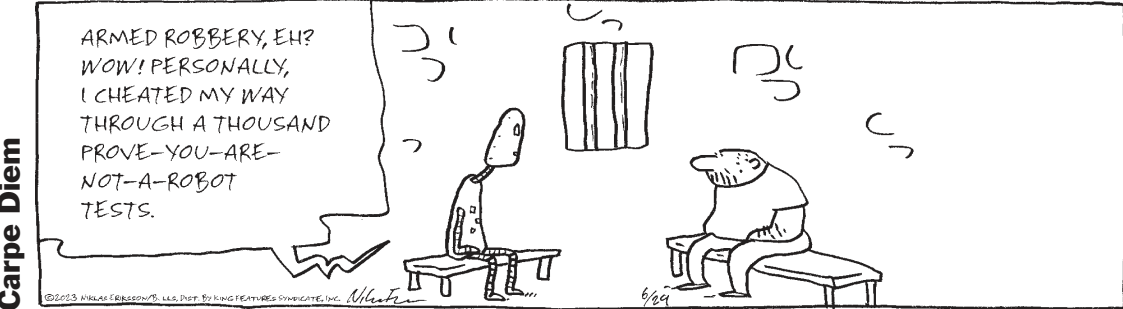
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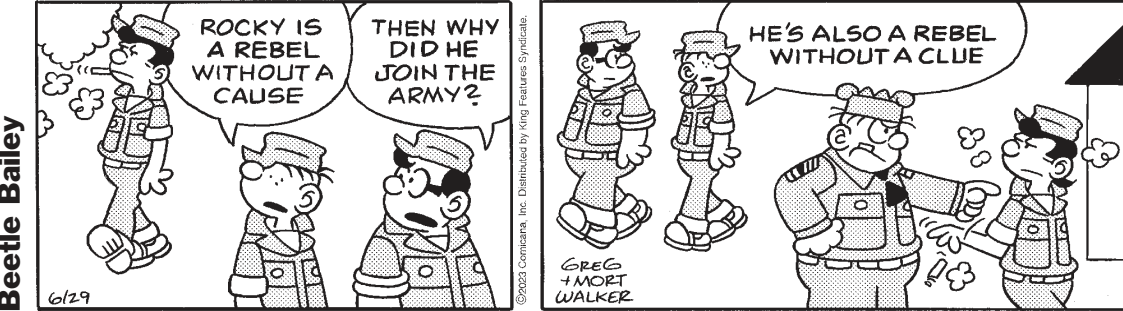
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



NBA/WOMEN'S WORLD CUP



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

76ers guard James Harden is said to be leaning toward declining his \$35.6 million option on Thursday, entering this summer as an unrestricted free agent and not returning to the 76ers for a third season.

76ers unsure of future with Harden, Harris up in the air

BY DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — James Harden might have side-eyed questions this week — much like he did in a playful reaction in his Houston days — about his future with the Philadelphia 76ers.

But the issue is real in Philly: Will Harden return to the 76ers for a third season?

All signs point to Harden declining his \$35.6 million option on Thursday and entering this summer as an unrestricted free agent. That leaves the 2018 NBA MVP and 10-time All-Star free to sign with any team.

A return to the Rockets? Perhaps, if he prioritizes cash over a championship chase. The 76ers? Depends. Does Harden really enjoy playing as the second option to NBA MVP Joel Embiid?

Plan C?

Harden might not have planned much beyond a potential Houston reunion or Sixers return. Philadelphia has the home-contract edge: The 76ers have the right to offer Harden a \$210 million, four-year deal, \$8 million more overall than any other team.

Houston, though, where Harden blossomed into a surefire Hall of Famer, is a city that still tugs at his heart.

Nick Nurse, hired earlier this month to replace Doc Rivers as coach of the 76ers, wants a shot at coaching Harden.

“James has a decision to make, and I’d be very happy if he came back,” Nurse said when he was hired.

Tobias Harris, himself in a bit of a contract quandary this summer, also stumped for a Harden return

as he grabbed rebounds and posed for selfies with children Tuesday at a Fanatics promotion.

“There’s not many guys that can go out and drop 40 in a playoff game. I think that goes under the radar a little bit too much,” Harris said. “I think James is a phenomenal player, somebody who works his tail off, and somebody’s who’s an overall great leader. Of course I want him back.”

Harden, who turns 34 in August, played the last few months with nagging left Achilles soreness and flashed only glimpses of his Houston prime. He scored 45 points in Game 1 and 42 in Game 4 victories of the Eastern Conference semifinal loss against Boston, and was 0-for-6 on threes in Game 2 and Game 6 losses. He scored only nine points in Game 7, and that included going scoreless in the second half.

Stuck in the muck of salary cap restrictions, the 76ers have few real options to replace Harden should he sign elsewhere. Not only that, the Sixers are fielding trade offers for Harris, who enters the final season of a \$180-million, five-year contract. Harris averaged 14.7 points last season, well behind NBA scoring champ Embiid, Harden and Tyrese Maxey.

Torrel Harris, Tobias Harris’ father and agent, blasted the way the 76ers have used Harris since 2018 and said on the “Business of Sports” podcast his son was an “assassin scorer.”

“I mean, they can’t stop him,” Torrel Harris said on the podcast. “Nobody in the league can stop him. So he’s proven that over his career, even when he was with the Clippers.”

Harris has the all-important expiring contract that the 76ers can dangle as trade bait. While his dad believed Harris is still a prime scorer, the 76ers forward wants to put a freeze on public negotiations.

“When I’m a father, I’m going to tell my kid he’s better than LeBron James,” Harris said. “But I’ve also told him as a dad and agent not to speak for me when it comes to the media. Obviously, he has his viewpoint on that. But that’s not the way I feel. I knew going into last year what my role was and I was going to be the fourth option offensively. I knew that going in.”

Harris said he was “OK” with that role and knew if the 76ers were going to win a championship, he would be the player to “sacrifice from that group.”

Sometimes, the dip in production meant a dip in popularity.

“Trade speculation, casual Sixers fans, they would trade me for a Crumbl Cookie,” he said.

The cookie certainly crumbled for the Sixers in the playoffs, where they were eliminated in the second round for the third straight season. The early exit for a team that won 54 games marked 22 seasons since the franchise reached the Eastern Conference finals. It cost Rivers his job.

It’s up to Nurse, who won a championship with Toronto in 2019, to find a formula that can win the 76ers a championship.

With or without Harden and Harris.

“I believe we have the right talent to be a championship team,” Harris said. “We have the right pieces and the right culture. With a new coach, I’m excited with what we can bring to the table.”

Rapinoe’s new role: leadership and more

BY ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

CARSON, Calif. — Megan Rapinoe’s role is changing as the United States prepares for the Women’s World Cup.

The outspoken 37-year-old known for her Easter egg hair colors and the iconic victory pose she struck at the 2019 World Cup is the oldest player on the team now, so change was inevitable heading into the tournament that opens in three weeks in Australia and New Zealand.

“She certainly is going to have different types of minutes. But her role, first from the leadership standpoint is so important, but also her performance on the field is very valuable for us,” said coach Vlatko Andonovski.

Rapinoe has been nursing an apparent calf injury she suffered on June 10 while playing for her club team, OL Reign, in the National Women’s Soccer League. But she’s not expecting it to hold her back.

“It was quite minor, not amazing timing, but such is life for an athlete. It’s nothing I’m worried about for the start of the tournament,” Rapinoe said Tuesday at the team’s media day. “We have a little bit of time and we’ll have quite a bit of time down in New Zealand before we actually get going. I’m feeling good, training is going well and looking forward to getting back out there.”

Rapinoe, whose hair is a bright teal blue now, hasn’t played for the Reign since the injury, likely out of caution. Her Reign teammate, midfielder Rose Lavelle, has also been held out since April because of a knee injury.

When he announced his roster for the World Cup last week, Andonovski said he expects both Rapinoe and Lavelle to play when the United States hosts Wales in San Jose on July 9, before the team departs for its camp in New Zealand.

Rapinoe has long been a critical part of the team.

At the 2019 World Cup in France, Rapinoe scored six goals and three assists and claimed the Golden Boot and the Golden Ball for the best overall player.

Rapinoe first played for the U.S. senior team in 2006. She has won two Women’s World Cup titles and an Olympic gold medal with the United States. She also took home the Ballon d’Or and the Best FIFA Women’s Player awards — the game’s top individual honors — for her play in 2019.

“First, she’s an amazing player, so on the field you already know where the level needs to be and stuff like that. And off the field, she’s so funny and makes me feel comfortable even though like I’m so young and she’s, like, much older than me,” said forward Alyssa Thompson, at 18 the youngest player on the roster.

“She just makes me feel like I’m supposed to be here, too. Her not treating me differently and just like keeping that high energy makes me feel really comfortable and like happy in the environment,” Thompson added.

The U.S. squad will need Rapinoe’s experience and leadership. The team has 14 players on the roster who are making their World Cup debuts. The United States kicks off the tournament in Auckland with a match against Vietnam on July 21.

“It’s obviously a little different but the vibe is still the same,” Rapinoe said. “Just wanting to constantly strive for whatever the next thing is. This is not a team that does any resting on its laurels, it’s always about the next game, the next type of progress we can make, the next thing we can fight for, where we can use our platform, and how we continue on the field to be the absolutely best team that we possibly can.”



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Megan Rapinoe speaks to reporters during the Women’s World Cup media day for the United States Women’s National Team on Tuesday.

ROUNDUP

Nimmo, Peterson lift slumping Mets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The slumping New York Mets did their best to ensure team owner Steve Cohen had a good result before his planned state-of-the-team press conference.

Brandon Nimmo homered twice and David Peterson threw six scoreless innings in his return to the majors on Tuesday night as the Mets beat the Milwaukee Brewers 7-2, hours after Cohen announced plans to speak to the press Wednesday for the first time since opening day.

The Mets won for the third time in 10 games and for the sixth time in 22 games.

Cohen grabbed everyone’s attention earlier Tuesday when he tweeted: “I will be doing a press conference tomorrow before the game. You will get it from me straight.”

Hours later, general manager Billy Eppler — who built the team that began the season with a record \$355 million payroll — held a rare press conference in the Mets’ dugout before the game.

“We know we have all the pieces, it’s just putting it together,” Nimmo said. “Obviously, Billy put this team together for a reason. He believes in it and we believe in it as well. But we just need to put the pieces together this season.

“This is a great start, but by no means is this like all things are fixed.”

Nimmo opened the fourth with a 422-foot homer, the first of four by the Mets. Francisco Lindor hit his 200th career homer with one out and Nimmo hit a 396-foot, two-run homer just beyond the left-center field fence in the fifth. It was the third career multi-homer game for Nimmo.

Tommy Pham had an RBI double in the sixth, when Daniel Vogelbach hit a two-run homer.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 0: Clayton Kershaw carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning, J.D. Martinez homered twice to reach 300 for his career, and visiting Los Angeles blanked Colorado.

Kershaw (10-4) gave up one hit and faced the minimum in six innings, throwing only 79 pitches. He struck out two. He got the first two batters in the sixth before Brenton Doyle looped a 2-2 curveball between third and short to end his no-hit bid. Evan Phillips picked up his 11th save.

Martinez hit a two-run shot in the third and led off the sixth with his 18th homer of the season.

Diamondbacks 8, Rays 4: Corbin Carroll and Christian Walker hit back-to-back homers in a five-run first, Evan Longoria also homered against his former team and host Arizona beat Tampa Bay.



The Mets’ Brandon Nimmo, right, celebrates with teammate Francisco Lindor after hitting a two-run home run during the fifth inning against the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday. Nimmo homered twice.

Ketel Marte also homered for the Rays, who still have the best record in the big leagues at 54-28, but have lost six of their last nine games.

The D-backs scored five runs in the first off Rays starter Taj Bradley. Carroll hit a three-run homer to center and Walker followed with a solo homer to left field. Gabriel Moreno’s sacrifice fly made it 5-0.

Athletics 2, Yankees 1: Paul Blackburn pitched into the sixth inning, allowing one run on Josh Donaldson’s homer in his return to the lineup in host Oakland’s win over New York.

The slumping Donaldson connected in the fifth in his first action since Friday, but that was it for New York.

Seth Brown homered for the second consecutive day as the last-place A’s beat the Yankees for the first time this season after they were swept in a three-game series in the Bronx in May.

Braves 6, Twins 2: Ronald Acuña Jr. hit two of Atlanta’s five homers — all in the first two innings — in a win over visiting Minnesota.

Acuña sparked the barrage of long balls by hitting Ryan’s first pitch into the Braves’ bullpen in right field. The Braves lead the majors with 146 homers. They hit five homers in their first 10 at-bats in winning their fourth straight game and 12th in 13 outings.

Austin Riley hit a two-run shot and Sean Murphy also hit a homer in the Braves’ four-run first inning. Michael Harris II and Acuña added back-to-back shots in the second. Bryce Elder (6-1) overcame four walks to allow two runs in six innings, leaving his NL-leading ERA at 2.44.

Giants 3, Blue Jays 0: Thairo Estrada had a two-run double and scored a run, Alex Wood and three relievers combined on an eight-

hitter as visiting San Francisco won for the 13th time in 15 games and improved to 10-0 on the road in June.

After opener Ryan Walker pitched the first, Wood (3-2) followed with five-plus innings, allowing five hits. He walked none and struck out seven.

Marlins 10, Red Sox 1: Bryan De La Cruz hit a two-run homer, Jean Segura added a solo shot and visiting Florida banged out 19 hits and beat Boston for its fourth win in five games.

Jazz Chisholm contributed three RBIs in his return from a 38-game absence with a right turf toe injury.

Luis Arraez struck out for the first time since June 14. He had a single and RBI double to extend his hitting streak to 10 games. He went 2-for-5 and his batting average stayed at .399.

Cardinals 4, Astros 2: Jordan Montgomery pitched six-hit ball into the seventh inning in his second straight win, and host St. Louis beat Houston.

Paul DeJong homered for the Cardinals and Nolan Arenado had two hits, including an RBI double in the first meeting between the teams since July 2019.

Pirates 9, Padres 4: Nick Gonzales homered and tripled in his first home game at PNC Park, and Pittsburgh beat San Diego.

Gonzales tripled in the second inning for his first major league hit and poked a 442-foot solo homer in the seventh. Carlos Santana had three hits, including his seventh homer of the season.

Phillies 5, Cubs 1: Brandon Marsh homered twice and drove in three runs, helping visiting Philadelphia beat Chicago for its second straight win.

Lefty Ranger Suárez (2-2) pitched four-hit ball into the eighth

inning in a game played in a strong smoky haze caused by Canadian wildfires. He was charged with one run and struck out eight in 7½ innings.

Guardians 2, Royals 1: Gavin Williams held Kansas City to one hit through seven innings in his second major league start, Will Brennan hit a two-run double in the ninth inning, and visiting Cleveland rallied for the victory.

Williams, Cleveland’s top pitching prospect, struck out six, walked one and needed only 92 pitches to get through seven innings.

Guardians manager Terry Francona missed the game. He felt ill earlier Tuesday and was taken to a hospital to be evaluated because of his medical history.

Rangers 8, Tigers 3: Ezequiel Duran’s solo home run into the second deck in left sparked a five-run eighth inning as host Texas topped Detroit.

After Duran’s 10th homer of the season, Texas pulled away with RBI hits by Corey Seager and Nathaniel Lowe, and Adolis Garcia’s two-run homer, all off Anthony Misiewicz.

Reds 3, Orioles 1: Andrew Abbott struck out eight and Matt McLain and TJ Friedl homered in visiting Cincinnati’s win over Baltimore in a game delayed for 1 hour, 43 minutes by rain after the seventh inning.

McLain also hit an RBI double for the Reds, who had dropped three in a row following a 12-game winning streak.

Nationals 7, Mariners 4, 11: Jordan Weems worked out of a bases-loaded, none-out jam in the 10th inning against the heart of Seattle’s order and Lane Thomas hit a two-run double in the 11th to give visiting Washington the victory.

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	54	28	.659	—
Baltimore	48	30	.615	4
New York	43	36	.544	9½
Toronto	43	37	.538	10
Boston	40	40	.500	13
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	40	41	.494	—
Cleveland	38	40	.487	½
Detroit	34	44	.436	4½
Chicago	34	47	.420	6
Kansas City	22	57	.278	17
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Texas	48	31	.608	—
Los Angeles	44	37	.543	5
Houston	42	37	.532	6
Seattle	38	40	.487	9½
Oakland	21	60	.259	28
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	52	27	.658	—
Miami	46	34	.575	6
Philadelphia	41	37	.526	10½
New York	36	43	.456	16
Washington	31	48	.392	21
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cincinnati	42	38	.525	—
Milwaukee	41	38	.519	½
Chicago	37	40	.481	3½
Pittsburgh	36	42	.462	5
St. Louis	33	45	.423	8
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Arizona	48	32	.600	—
San Francisco	45	34	.570	2½
Los Angeles	44	34	.564	3
San Diego	37	42	.468	10½
Colorado	31	50	.383	17½
Monday's games				
Atlanta 4, Minnesota 1 Baltimore 10, Cincinnati 3 Detroit 7, Texas 2 L.A. Angels 2, Chicago White Sox 1 Seattle 8, Washington 4 Milwaukee 2, N.Y. Mets 1				
Tuesday's games				
Miami 10, Boston 1 Cincinnati 3, Baltimore 1 San Francisco 3, Toronto 0 Atlanta 6, Minnesota 2 St. Louis 4, Houston 1 Cleveland 2, Kansas City 1 Texas 8, Detroit 3 Arizona 8, Tampa Bay 4 Oakland 2, N.Y. Yankees 1 L.A. Angels 4, Chicago White Sox 2 Washington 7, Seattle 4, 11 innings Pittsburgh 9, San Diego 4 N.Y. Mets 7, Milwaukee 2 Philadelphia 5, Chicago Cubs 1 L.A. Dodgers 5, Colorado 0				
Wednesday's games				
Minnesota at Atlanta Washington at Seattle Cincinnati at Baltimore San Francisco at Toronto Miami at Boston Houston at St. Louis Detroit at Texas Cleveland at Kansas City Chicago White Sox at L.A. Angels N.Y. Yankees at Oakland Tampa Bay at Arizona San Diego at Pittsburgh Milwaukee at N.Y. Mets Philadelphia at Chicago Cubs L.A. Dodgers at Colorado				
Thursday's games				
Detroit (Olson 1-2) at Texas (Gray 6-3) Cleveland (Bieber 5-5) at Kansas City (Greinke 1-8) N.Y. Yankees (Schmidt 2-6) at Oakland (Kaprielian 2-6) Tampa Bay (Chirinos 3-3) at Arizona (TBD) Chicago White Sox (Lynn 4-8) at L.A. Angels (Sandoval 4-6) Miami (Luzardo 6-5) at Boston (Bello 5-4) San Francisco (TBD) at Toronto (TBD) Houston (France 2-3) at St. Louis (TBD) San Diego (Mugrove 6-2) at Pittsburgh (Ortiz 2-3) Milwaukee (Houser 2-2) at N.Y. Mets (Scherzer 7-2) Philadelphia (Walker 8-3) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 3-2) L.A. Dodgers (Sheehan 1-0) at Colorado (Anderson 0-2)				
Calendar				
July 9-11 — Amateur draft, Seattle July 10 — Home Run Derby, Seattle July 11 — All-Star Game, Seattle				

MLB

Ohtani strikes out 10, dazzles at plate

Angels pitcher adds two home runs while helping shut down White Sox

By JOE REEDY
Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani’s combination of power and pitching is unmatched by any player in baseball.

On Tuesday, the superstar from Japan used them to accomplish something that had not been done by an American League pitcher in nearly 60 years.

Ohtani hit two homers and struck out 10 Chicago batters in the Los Angeles Angels’ 4-2 victory over the White Sox, adding another extraordinary performance in what has been one of his best months since coming to the majors in 2018.

“We’re seeing things every day that we’ve never seen before and you try not to take it for granted. I don’t think many of us do,” manager Phil Nevin said.

Ohtani, who leads the majors with 28 home runs, hit solo shots in the first and seventh innings, the first time he has gone deep twice while also pitching. The second blast came after he threw 6½ innings, but came out because of a cracked fingernail.

“It was a small crack before the game and gradually got worse. I came out of the game before it got too bad so the plan is to go on schedule,” Ohtani said through his interpreter.

The last AL player before Ohtani to hit at least two homers and strike out at least 10 was Cleveland’s Pedro Ramos on July 31, 1963. That came in the nightcap of

DID YOU KNOW?

The last American League player to hit at least two homers and strike out at least 10 was Cleveland’s Pedro Ramos on July 31, 1963. That came in the nightcap of a doubleheader against the Angels.

SOURCE: Associated Press

a doubleheader against the Angels.

It has been done four other times in the majors: by Baltimore’s Milt Pappas (1961), Philadelphia’s Rick Wise (1971), San Francisco’s Madison Bumgarner (2017) and Arizona’s Zack Greinke (2019).

“The first one came in a good spot to give us the lead. The second one gave us an insurance run,” Ohtani said.

Ohtani (7-3) struck out at least 10 for the sixth time in 16 starts and allowed one run on four hits and two walks. He leads the majors in opponent batting average (.180) and is third in strikeouts with 127.

Ohtani’s 3.02 ERA nearly mirrors his batting average, which is .304 after he went 3-for-3 with a walk.

“He’s extremely talented. He’s probably the best player in the game. He was tough to hit and he’s tough to pitch to,” Chicago manager Pedro Grifol said.

The last AL starting pitcher to hit multiple home runs was Boston’s Sonny Siebert on Sept. 2, 1971, against Baltimore. The des-



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Los Angeles Angels starting pitcher Shohei Ohtani delivers during the seventh inning of Tuesday’s game against the Chicago White Sox in Anaheim, Calif. Ohtani struck out 10 and hit two home runs.

ignated hitter was introduced to the league two years later.

“Every game somehow seems to get even crazier watching him play,” catcher Chad Wallach said. “To watch him pitch like that and then go hit two homers, it somehow still surprises you every time.”

Mike Moustakas had two hits and an RBI in his second start since being acquired from Colorado Saturday night.

Carlos Estevez picked up his 20th save despite allowing the first four White Sox batters to reach in the ninth and giving up an RBI single to Andrew Vaughn. Estevez then struck out Seby Zavala and

induced a game-ending double-play grounder from Elvis Andrus.

Eloy Jimenez had three hits for the White Sox, who have dropped four of six. Gavin Sheets had an RBI single in the seventh inning.

Ohtani drove a 95 mph fastball from Michael Kopech (3-7) in the first 418 feet into the elevated stands in right-center. It was the ninth time in his career and fourth time this season he homered while also on the mound.

His homer to right-center off Touki Toussaint in the seventh was his fourth homer in five games, extended the Halos’ advantage to 3-1 and gave Ohtani his third multi-homer game this sea-

son. Ohtani has 13 homers this month, which ties the franchise record for June.

Ohtani, who also had 13 home runs in June 2021, shares that mark with Albert Pujols (2015) and Tim Salmon (1996).

The Angels extended their lead to 2-0 in the fourth. Luis Rengifo hit a one-out triple into the right-field corner and scored two batters later on David Fletcher’s grounder.

“I feel like we’re in a really good spot right now. We played a good game last night and tonight obviously. We need to stack up as many wins as possible going into the All-Star break,” Ohtani said.

Push: Last year’s World Series had no US-born Black players

FROM PAGE 24

World Series was the first since 1950 without a U.S.-born Black player.

There are tangible reasons to believe the percentage of Black players might go up soon.

Four of the first five players picked in last summer’s amateur draft were Black for the first time ever. Those four were among the hundreds who had participated in diversity initiatives such as the MLB Youth Academy, DREAM Series and the Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) program. MLB has also pledged \$150 million in a 10-year partnership with the Players Alliance. The nonprofit organization of current and former players works to increase Black involvement at all levels.

Many of those programs started several years ago, and the younger participants are starting to hit draft-eligible age.

6.2

Percentage of Black U.S. players on MLB opening day rosters, down from last year’s record low of 7.2%.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Rose is among them. He said the diversity initiatives didn’t just provide exposure to scouts, but also opened a vital pipeline for minority players to connect, share experiences and see faces similar to their own. The catcher said that Black former MLB players and coaches were also in attendance at many of the tournaments, providing role models. He cited Reds pitcher Hunter Greene as a big influence.

“I met most of my best friends at those camps,” Rose said. “Just being able to see people your color playing the game, being able to re-

late to them, that’s been important.”

Homer Bush Jr. — whose dad played in the big leagues for seven seasons for the Blue Jays, Yankees and Marlins — said baseball is also doing a better job of being social media savvy. The outfielder just finished his junior season in college at Grand Canyon.

Bush said it’s important that baseball portrays itself as a fun sport. Baseball’s trend of elaborate celebrations for home runs and big hits — like Pittsburgh’s swashbuckling routine — is a good start.

He also said he believes having more Black players in the big leagues should create a snowball effect that brings more young minority players into the game.

“I could talk about it for hours,” Bush said. “But I feel like one of the biggest things is just representation. I had a dad who played in

the big leagues, so I had someone to look up to and admire. But most guys — when you click on MLB Network or ESPN — there’s not a ton of Black baseball players.”

Of course, there are other variables to getting more minority players to the big leagues — mainly money and time.

Simply put, developing a big-league ballplayer is usually expensive. There’s the equipment, the costs of joining a travel team and the pricey individual instruction that is sometimes needed — expenses that can easily total thousands of dollars per year. There’s also the time commitment: weekends completely filled with two and sometimes three games each day.

Karin Rose, Zion’s mom, said she was fortunate that she has a job as a school nurse, which allowed her to travel with Zion during much of the summer baseball

season while Shaun worked at his barber shop. Money wasn’t a huge problem, because both had good jobs and some family members chipped in.

Zion took the additional step of transferring from Brother Rice High School in Chicago to IMG Academy in Florida for his senior season, so he could take advantage of the facilities and year-round baseball weather. He’s ranked by MLB.com as the 144th best prospect in this year’s draft, projecting for roughly the fifth round, where the recommended signing bonus is around \$400,000.

“We understood the sacrifice, but it was Zion’s will to be a great player that put us in this position,” Karin Rose said. “We’ve been really blessed with travel ball, lots of support from friends and family.”

AP sports writers Aaron Beard and Will Graves contributed to this report.

SPORTS



Uncertain future

Sixers in a bit of a quandary with Harden, Harris deals still unresolved » **NBA, Page 21**

MLB DRAFT



MATT YORK/AP

Zion Rose, 18, from Chicago, participates in the draft combine on June 20 in Phoenix. Rose is ranked by MLB.com as the 144th best prospect in this year's draft.

Push for inclusion

Baseball hopes new efforts bring more Black US players

By DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

Zion Rose is well aware that the percentage of Black U.S. players in Major League Baseball has been on the decline for decades.

But the 18-year-old catcher from Chicago, still sweaty from a workout during MLB's Draft Combine this week at Chase Field in Phoenix, said he's got some news: That's not going to be the case for long.

"You'll see," he said. "We're starting to come through."

Rose was one of more than 300 players of all backgrounds in Phoenix this week to take part in the combine, which featured workouts, interviews and games in an effort to showcase some of the game's best amateur talent at the high school and college levels before July's draft. MLB said that approximately 15% of the players in the showcase were Black.

The hope is that the next Aaron Judge, Mookie Betts or Andrew

McCutchen will be in that bunch. Possibly several.

A recent study from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at Central Florida found Black U.S. players represented just 6.2% of players on MLB opening day rosters, down from last year's previous record low of 7.2%. Both figures are the lowest recorded in the study since it began in 1991, when 18% of players were Black. Last year's

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Grand Canyon outfielder Homer Bush Jr., the son of a major leaguer, says it's important that baseball portrays itself as a fun sport.

RICK SCUTERI/AP

Michigan's Fantilli hasn't ruled out return

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