

FACES

Marsha Warfield returns as bailiff to 'Night Court' **Page 20**



VIDEO GAMES

Prince of Persia sequel aims to bridge legacy of game's chapters **Page 15**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The good, bad and ugly of playoff as it gets set to expand **Page 32**



ISIS claims responsibility for suicide bombings in Iran » World, Page 12

STARS AND STRIPES

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JUSTIN WOLPERT/U.S. Navy

A sailor greets his loved ones during his ship's homecoming on May 31. Troops who live apart from their family will receive a \$150 monthly increase in their separation pay this year due to changes in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Separation pay boost for troops

Service members who live apart from family to see \$150 more a month

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

Troops who live apart from their family members will see a \$150 increase in their separation pay this year due to changes in the National Defense Authorization Act.

The NDAA for fiscal year 2024, signed on Dec. 22 by President Joe Biden, includes an increase from \$250 a month to \$400 a month for the Family Separation Allowance.

Rep. Tony Gonzales, R-Texas, was among the congressional sponsors of an amendment to increase the allowance.

"#Results: Proud to have secured an increase in the Family Separation Allowance (FSA) this year," he wrote Dec. 28 on X, formerly known as Twitter. "This is the first time the FSA has been raised in two decades — I'll always stand with our military families."

SEE PAY ON PAGE 5

Analysts: US likely to go on offense after Houthi attacks in Red Sea

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A warning issued this week by the U.S. and 12 other countries likely puts the American military on course to strike an Iranian-backed group that is brazenly attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea, according to analysts.

Houthi militants have emerged from nearly 10 years of civil war in Yemen with a missile and drone arsenal that they've launched at ships transiting the Red Sea as a show of support for Hamas in its war with Israel.

The Houthis were warned against further attacks in a Wednesday statement

from the White House that included the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Bahrain and eight other countries.

But the Houthis are unlikely to back down, meaning the U.S. will feel compelled to shift from protecting civilian sea traffic

SEE HOUSHI ON PAGE 5

MILITARY

US airstrike in Baghdad kills high-ranking militia leader as fears increase **Page 5**

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Computer chip firm to get \$162M for expansion

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is providing \$162 million to Microchip Technology to support the domestic production of computer chips — the second funding announcement tied to a 2022 law designed to revive U.S. semiconductor manufacturing.

The incentives announced Thursday include \$90 million to improve a plant in Colorado Springs, Colo., and \$72 million to expand a factory in Gresham, Ore., the Commerce Department

said. The investments would enable Microchip Technology Inc., which is based in Chandler, Ariz., to triple its domestic production and reduce its dependence on foreign factories.

Much of the money would fund the making of microcontrollers, which are used by the military as well as in autos, household appliances and medical devices. Government officials said they expected the investments to create 700 construction and manufacturing jobs over the next decade.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, emphasized that the funding would help to tame inflation.

“Semiconductors are the key input in so many goods that are vital to our economy,” said Brainard, adding that greater U.S. production of chips would have reduced the supply problems that caused the cost of autos and washing machines, among other goods, to rise as the country emerged from the coronavirus pandemic in 2021.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 5)	\$1.07	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
British pound (Jan. 5)	\$1.24	Britain (Pound)	1.2680
Japanese yen (Jan. 5)	130.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3358
South Korean won (Jan. 5)	1276.00	China (Yuan)	7.1154
		Denmark (Krone)	6.8140
		Egypt (Pound)	30.9004
		Euro	0.9136
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8092
		Hungary (Forint)	346.38
		Israel (Shekel)	3.6565
		Japan (Yen)	144.78
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3075
		Norway (Krone)	10.3431
		Philippines (Peso)	55.60
		Poland (Zloty)	3.97
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7498
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3299
		South Korea (Won)	1315.79
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8513		
Thailand (Baht)	34.57		
Turkey (NewLira)	29.7637		

(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	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.40
30-year bond	4.07

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



TODAY IN STRIPES

- American Roundup 21
- Comics 22-23
- Crossword 22-23
- Faces 20
- Opinion 24
- Sports 25-32

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MILITARY

Army accepting applications for recruiting jobs

Positions aim to boost sign-ups after service misses goal for second year

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Warrant and noncommissioned officers in the Army can now apply for new recruiting jobs designed to help sign up more soldiers following a second consecutive year that the service failed to meet its enlistment goal.

The jobs opened Wednesday and sergeants through master sergeants and warrant officers one through chief warrant officers three can apply to become full-time talent acquisition technicians, or 420T. The position will work to standardize operations and advise staff on recruiting, retention, operations, marketing and analytics, according to a job application announcement on Army Recruiting Command's website.

When Army Secretary Christine Wormuth announced the new job in October, among other changes to recruiting, she said the Army is aiming for a recruiting force styled after talent-acquisition models used by private businesses. There also are plans to create a permanent

recruiting force in the Army. About two-thirds of the Army's 8,000 recruiters are now working the job temporarily and were chosen through an administrative review.

"The competition for talented Americans is fierce, and it is fundamentally different than it was 50 or even 20 years ago," Wormuth said at the announcement. "Understanding that reality is key to designing new practices that will make us a more attractive and compelling career choice for young Americans."

The creation of the new job is part of several changes to address two difficult recruiting years for the Army. The service enlisted about 55,000 young Americans in fiscal 2023, which ended Sept. 30. That was about 10,000 enlistment contracts short of its 65,000-recruit goal, Wormuth told reporters in October. Despite missing its goal, she said she was pleased with her recruiters' efforts during the fiscal year, which saw a 10,000-recruit increase from fiscal 2022.

Warrant officers in any career



DAVID CAMACHO/U.S. ARMY

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael R. Weimer joins senior leaders of the U.S. Army Recruiting and Retention College and the U.S. Army Recruiting Command at a ceremony at Fort Knox, Ky., to honor the newest members of the recruiting force.

field can apply through Feb. 2 to be in the first training class of talent acquisition technicians and will undergo an in-person selection at Fort Knox, Ky., in March. Those with a recruiting background will be given preference.

The second training class will open to noncommissioned officers — staff sergeants to master ser-

geants — who are already recruiters, or 79R, and are qualified to attend warrant officer candidate school, among other requirements. Those applications are due March 4.

The third training class — open through April 1 — will lower rank acceptance to sergeants and be open to all career fields.

The Army will select up to 75 applicants for each training class. Those who make the cut should expect to attend training at multiple locations and make a permanent move within six months of selection.

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'Critical equipment' recovered from Osprey wreckage in Japan

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy salvage ship recovered the vast majority of the Air Force CV-22 Osprey that crashed off the coast of Japan in November, including equipment necessary for further investigation, according to the Air Force.

The USNS *Salvor* delivered the wreckage to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, where it will be "inspected as part of the ongoing investigations," Air Force Special Operations Command spokeswoman Lt. Col. Rebecca Heyse told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.



Spendlove

The *Salvor*, a Military Sealift Command rescue-and-salvage ship, joined recovery efforts near Yakushima, an island just south of Kyushu, on Dec. 23 alongside Japanese and civilian crews.

"Critical equipment identified by investigation officials has been recovered, including the Voice and Data Recorder, often called the black box. The equipment will be transported to laboratories for data retrieval with follow analysis of the data at AFSOC," she wrote.

The analysis process is expected to take several weeks, Heyse said.



CHELSEA MEILLER/U.S. Air Force

The USNS *Salvor* recovered the black box and a majority of the wreckage of the CV-22 Osprey that crashed off the coast of Japan in November.

The wreckage was raised Dec. 27 from the underwater crash site south of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, and arrived at the base on Saturday, according to a Sunday report by Japan Today that cited an anonymous source in the Iwakuni city government.

Air Force Special Operations Command, headquartered at Hurlburt Field, Fla., did not im-

mediately respond to a request for confirmation of the dates on Thursday afternoon.

The delivery of wreckage and equipment marks a significant milestone for the recovery operation and investigation underway since the Osprey went down Nov. 29.

The tiltrotor aircraft — callsign Gundam 22 — crashed on a routine training mission while en-

route from MCAS Iwakuni near Hiroshima to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, killing all eight crewmembers.

The remains of Staff Sgt. Jake Galliher, 24, of Pittsfield, Mass.; Maj. Luke Unrath, 34, of Riverside, Calif.; Tech. Sgt. Zachary Lavoy, 33, of Oviedo, Fla.; Capt. Terrell Brayman, 32, of Pittsford, N.Y.; Staff Sgt. Jake Turnage, 25, of Kennesaw, Ga.; Senior Airman

Brian Johnson, 32, of Reynoldsburg, Ohio; and Maj. Jeff Hoernemann, 32, of Andover, Minn., were recovered between Nov. 29 and Dec. 10.

The body of Maj. Eric Spendlove, 36, of St. George, Utah, is still unaccounted for, but the search is still underway, Heyse said in the Thursday email.

Spendlove's family remembered him as "kind of a hometown boy" who always "liked to keep to himself," his brother-in-law Tyler Murset told the St. George News last month.

Spendlove and his wife, Chelsea Spendlove, have four children, the report said.

Born in California, Spendlove moved to St. George at 13 and later majored in biology at Utah Tech University; he went to medical school at the University of Pikeville in Kentucky, part of which was funded by the Air Force, according to the article.

"He was willing to serve his country and was looking to offset some of his medical school expenses," Murset said, according to the St. George News.

"He was a family man. A man of faith. A man of God. A man of his country. Everything he did was for the benefit of his family and country."

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MILITARY

Mom says Marine guard died while assigned in Africa

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

A Marine security guard honored last year for stopping a stabbing in Virginia died several days before Christmas in the Republic of Congo.

Marine Lance Cpl. Nicholas Dural, 20, of Lafayette, La., died Dec. 19 while assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Brazzaville, his mother confirmed to Stars and Stripes.

Kimberly Dural said she was unable to provide any further information about the circumstances of her son's death because the matter is under investigation.

A State Department official confirmed the death of a U.S. service member in the Republic of Congo but declined to comment further. A Marine Corps official referred questions to the U.S. Embassy in Brazzaville.

Dural was one of three Marines who received the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal last April for intervening in a fight in which two teenagers attacked a third teenager at a Chick-fil-A in North Stafford, Va.

Witnesses told local police at the time that one male teenager was approached by the other two. The three boys got into an argument before a physical altercation ensued. As the two teenagers as-

saulted the other teen, one of them pulled out a knife, police said.

The three Marines jumped into action and attempted to separate the parties. One Marine broke the knife in half and the two suspects quickly fled.

Kimberly Dural said Nicholas was the Marine who broke the knife.

"Thank you to the hero Marines who stepped up. Without you, this altercation could have been a lot worse," the sheriff's office said at the time.

The three Marines were students at the Marine Security Guard School in Quantico, Va., taking a course to prepare them to act as security at U.S. embassies around the world.

His mother said Nicholas always wanted to be a Marine since he was a little boy. She did not know why he picked the Marines because they did not have any immediate family in the service branch.

"It's just something he always wanted to do," Kimberly Dural said.

Her son wanted to ship off to boot camp after high school. His sisters cried so much that he opted to go to college instead. When college didn't work out, he spent some time working on tugboats



KEEGAN BAILEY/U.S. Marine Corps

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Nicholas Dural poses for a photo on April 6 after receiving the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal at Quantico, Va. Dural, 20, of Lafayette, La., died Dec. 19, while assigned to the U.S. Embassy in the Republic of Congo.

along the Mississippi River.

One day, she found out Nicholas was going to boot camp when a letter from his job arrived at the family house, noting he resigned to join the Marines.

"We found out about two weeks before he shipped off," she said. "I was like, 'Sweetie, you weren't going to tell us?' He said, 'I was going to tell you, but I didn't want anyone to talk me out of it.'"

Dural excelled as a Marine, his mother said. Nicholas was a squad leader at boot camp. Drill instructors and new Marines alike came up to his parents during gradua-

tion commending them on their son.

"Nick was very mature for his age," Kimberly Dural said. "He was a natural leader. That's the thing. No matter where he was, whatever he did, he always rose up to be a leader."

After boot camp, he went to infantry training and then security guard training in Quantico.

Nicholas enjoyed being in the Republic of Congo where he got to see a new part of the world and meet new people. He kept busy by enrolling in college online studying psychology, according to his

mother. Nicholas organized the embassy's Marine Corps birthday ball in November.

"It's really hard to even comprehend what life is going to be like after this. What I can say is he did a lot in his 20 years," Dural said.

She said the family has been told their son's body will be transported to New Orleans on Jan. 10. Services will be held in Lafayette on Jan. 13. Nicholas Dural will be given full military honors.

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Emanuel repeats claim that China plans presence near Senkakus

BY ALEX WILSON
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

Beijing plans to keep ships around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea for 365 consecutive days this year to reinforce its claim on the Japanese-administered islands, according to a Japanese news agency.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping, during a Nov. 29 visit to a Chinese coast guard command office in Shanghai, highlighted the necessity to "constantly strengthen" Beijing's claim on the islands, Kyodo News reported Saturday, citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter.

The Chinese coast guard then drafted a plan to have ships near the islands every day and "conduct inspections of Japanese fishing boats in the sea area, if necessary," Kyodo's sources said in the report.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel lambasted the plan Tuesday in a post on X, for-



Wikimedia Commons

A Japanese citizen holds up a sign protesting the Chinese government's claim of ownership of the Senkaku Islands. Beijing plans to keep ships around the islands in the East China Sea for 365 consecutive days this year to reinforce its claim on the Japanese-administered islands, according to a Japanese news agency.

merly Twitter.

"On New Year's Day [Chinese] leadership announced that they

will keep ships in and around Japan's Senkaku Islands for 365 consecutive days, quite the New

Year's resolution," he wrote.

Asked for additional information or a source for Emanuel's post, embassy spokesman Yuji Okui in an email Wednesday referred Stars and Stripes to Kyodo's report, which did not mention a New Year's address. A transcript of Xi's speech released by China's foreign ministry did not include remarks about the Senkakus.

Eight Chinese ships were spotted in the contiguous zone on Monday, and four were reported there Tuesday through Thursday, according to the Japan coast guard's website. Chinese ships were spotted there on 352 days in 2023.

The Japanese government is aware of China's plans through media reports but "it is not confirmed if the Chinese government officially announced such a plan," a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' China and Mongolia Division said by phone Thursday.

The spokesman declined to comment on whether Japanese of-

ficials are attempting to confirm the reports with Beijing or if Tokyo plans to lodge a protest. Some government officials in Japan speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

"Japan's position regarding the Senkaku Islands stays the same, and we will take a resolute response to any movement to change the status quo," he said.

A spokesperson for Japan's Ministry of Defense did not immediately respond to requests for comment Thursday.

The Senkakus are about 100 miles northeast from Taiwan's northern coastline and about 250 miles west of Japan's Okinawa prefecture. The islands are strategically situated near key shipping lanes, rich fishing grounds and potentially significant oil and natural gas reserves, according to the CIA World Factbook website.

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MILITARY

US airstrike in Baghdad kills militia leader

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A U.S. airstrike on the headquarters of an Iran-backed militia in central Baghdad on Thursday killed a high-ranking militia commander, militia officials said.

Thursday's strike comes amid mounting regional tensions fueled by the Israel-Hamas war and fears that it could spill over into surrounding countries. It also coincides with a push by Iraqi officials for U.S.-led coalition forces

to leave the country.

The Popular Mobilization Force, or PMF, a coalition of militias that is nominally under the control of the Iraqi military, announced in a statement that its deputy head of operations in Baghdad, Mushtaq Taleb al-Saidi, or "Abu Taqwa," had been killed "as a result of brutal American aggression."

A U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide information that has not yet been

publicly released confirmed that U.S. forces conducted a strike on a vehicle in Baghdad on Monday against the group Harakat al-Nujaba.

The group, one of the militias within PMF, was designated a terrorist organization by Washington in 2019.

Iraqi military spokesman Yehia Rasool said in a statement that the Iraqi army blames the U.S.-led International Coalition Forces for the "unprovoked attack on an Ira-

qi security body operating in accordance with the powers granted to it by" the Iraqi military.

The primary mission of the U.S.-led coalition is to fight the Islamic State, the Sunni extremist militant group that continues to carry out periodic attacks in Iraq despite having lost its hold on the territory it once controlled in 2017. Since then, the coalition has transitioned from a combat role to an advisory and training mission.

The PMF, a group of Iranian-

backed, primarily Shiite militias, were also key in the fight against ISIS after it overran much of Iraq in 2014.

The PMF is officially under the command of the Iraqi army, but in practice the militias operate independently.

Thursday's strike killed two people and wounded five, according to two militia officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.



DEAN CATES

Petty Officer 2nd Class Dean Cates and Petty Officer 2nd Class Aimee Ford pose with their son, Lucas, in Virginia Beach last year.

Pay: Service members say boost helps with their home expenses

FROM PAGE 1

Petty Officer 2nd Class Dean Cates, a radio and video production supervisor for American Forces Network at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, has received \$250 a month in separation pay for two years, he said.

"I think the pay bump would give just a little more breathing room, but still not enough to be comfortable," said the San Francisco native. "As it stands, a majority of my paychecks go toward supporting my family, often leaving me to essentially live like a broke college student."

Cates' wife, Petty Officer 2nd Class Aimee Ford, is stationed with Naval Air Force Atlantic in Norfolk, Va., and cares for their son, Lucas, almost a year old.

"Some positives about receiving separation pay is that it helps to supplement mortgage payments, child care costs, an emergency fund and college fund," Cates said.

"As a dual military marriage and as a geo-bachelor I'm not entitled to basic housing allowance, just overseas housing allowance, if I had elected to live off base," he said. "However, in terms of financial responsibility, going that

route, living off base, I feel would not have been financially responsible, especially with the removal of Overseas Cost-of-Living Allowance for service members in our area."

To receive the Family Separation Allowance, service members must complete a DD Form 1561, Statement to Substantiate Payment of Family Separation Allowance, according to the Department of Defense official website.

Eligible service members are those involuntarily separated from their dependents, which includes troops whose dependents do not live at or near the member's permanent duty station.

Other eligible service members include those aboard a ship away from its homeport, or who are under orders to remain aboard the ship at the homeport for more than 30 continuous days.

Service members on temporary duty away from their permanent duty stations for more than 30 continuous days, whose dependents do not live at or near the temporary duty station, are also eligible.

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Houthis using exploding drone boats to target ships, commander reports

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Houthi rebels in Yemen, who have been threatening U.S. forces and commercial ships in the Middle East for weeks, are now using one-way, unmanned attack boats to target vital shipping lanes in the region, a top Navy commander said Thursday.

The Iranian-backed Houthis have been engaged in civil war in Yemen for a decade and have dramatically increased their attacks

in the region since the Israel-Hamas conflict began in October.

"There are no signs their irresponsible behavior is abating," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, who commands U.S. Navy operations in the Middle East. "Since Nov. 18, there have now been 25 attacks against merchant vessels transiting the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden."

On Thursday, U.S. forces spotted a new threat from the Houthis — an unmanned surface vessel, or USV. Cooper said the vessels was

packed with explosives and detonated about 50 miles off the coast of Yemen. It exploded just a few miles away from U.S. warships and commercial vessels. There were no injuries. Cooper, who is the commander of the 5th Fleet, described the unmanned vessels as low-profile drone boats and said they are "a concern."

Since Operation Prosperity Guardian was created in mid-December, over 1,500 commercial ships have safely navigated the shipping lanes, Cooper said.

Houthi: Official says US won't warn again if provoked

FROM PAGE 1

to offensive tactics if it wants to ensure the free flow of freight in an economically critical part of the world, experts said.

"The Houthis are starting to open up more, full throttle, in part because it doesn't seem to be that there's much perceived cost to the Houthis themselves," said Jonathan Lord, senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington.

The group should not expect another warning if attacks continue, a senior Biden administration official told reporters Wednesday without detailing rules of possible engagement.

The U.S. defensive posture in the Red Sea has included a naval task force dubbed Prosperity Guardian, which thus far is composed primarily of America's Navy and western allies. Aside from the task force, U.S. destroyers have shot down dozens of Houthi drones and missiles in recent months.

The militants have attacked cargo ships at least 23 times, a total that includes firing missiles and drones, attempted hijackings and small boat skirmishes, U.S. Central Command has said. The group says the attacks are meant to pressure Western countries into ending their support for Israel's offensive into Gaza.

U.S. officials say that the ships under attack aren't connected to Israel and that the disruptions affect a transit route for roughly 15% of global seaborne trade.

The Red Sea's commercial importance has garnered international attention for the Houthis, which gives them an incentive to keep going after cargo ships, according to analysts.

"Intercepting Houthi drones with expensive missiles is not going to stop the attacks," said Sam Tangredi, the director of the U.S. Naval War College's Institute for Future Warfare Studies.

Despite losing 10 people over the weekend after U.S. Navy helicopters sank three Houthi boats said to be firing on a civilian cargo ship, the militant group shows no signs of being deterred.

It will continue to prevent ships thought to be linked to Israel from navigating the Red Sea, a Houthi spokesman said Wednesday in a statement on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"The only way to make it clear that we will not tolerate their attacks on commercial ships and sailors of various nations is by destroying the means of attack," said Tangredi, a retired Navy captain.

The U.S. has the capability to detect the launch positions of Houthi missiles and drones as well as their storage locations, and

it should attack these sites, he said.

Such strikes on Yemen's soil would be the first, at least publicly, since 2016, when the U.S. launched Tomahawk missiles on three radar sites after two rounds of Houthi missile attacks on the destroyer USS Mason.

However, direct attacks on the Houthis risks galvanizing support for the group in Yemen, said Mohammed al-Basha, senior Middle East analyst for the Virginia-based Navanti Group.

The Houthis control Yemen's capital of Sanaa and much of the northwest coast along the Red Sea. They've survived a nearly nine-year bombing campaign by Saudi Arabia and allied countries, and the militants are confident in their ability to withstand U.S. barages, al-Basha said.

"The Houthis' string of victories has instilled in them a sense of euphoric hubris, perceiving divine intervention and an alignment with history on their side," al-Basha said.

He added that they seem to believe that the U.S. and Western countries do not want a full-scale war, which would undo years of peace talks on ending Yemen's civil war.

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MIDEAST



RICH PEDRONCELLI/AP

Protesters calling for a cease-fire in Gaza disrupt the first day of the California legislative session in Sacramento on Wednesday. The Assembly session was just getting started when protesters wearing matching black T-shirts stood up in the gallery and started singing "Cease-fire now" and "Let Gaza Live."

Jewish protesters seeking cease-fire disrupt California legislative session

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Hundreds of protesters calling for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war interrupted the first day of California's legislative session on Wednesday, forcing the state Assembly to adjourn just moments after convening.

Lawmakers had just listened to the opening prayer and said the Pledge of Allegiance when protesters wearing matching black T-shirts stood from their seats and started singing "Cease-fire now" and "Let Gaza live." A few people unfurled banners from the chamber's gallery that read: "Jews say never again for anyone."

At first, Jim Wood, a Democratic assemblymember from Healdsburg who was presiding over the

session, tried to continue the session despite the singing. Eventually though he called for a recess and adjourned a few minutes later.

Nearly all of the lawmakers left the floor. Protesters cheered when officials turned the lights off in the chamber, holding up the flashlights on their phones as they continued to sing, which included a lengthy call-and-response chant from the gallery.

"We are Jews and Californians, Assembly members, we call on you to join us in demanding a cease-fire now," they said.

Democratic Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas' office declined to comment. Assemblymember James Gallagher, the Republican leader, said the protesters obstructed their work.

"Look, we're trying to open up our session. Granted, we probably didn't have a whole lot of, you know, big business to do today. But if the objective is to shut down the government functions, I don't think that's a good way to go about getting your message across," he said. "We can't let them shut us down. We have to go about our business. We have big pressing issues this year."

Wednesday's protest was organized by groups including Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network. Binya Kóatz, a Jewish teacher and artist who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, said Americans have "not only the right but the responsibility to stop business as usual as long as our country is giving a blank check to Israel."

Thousands attend Hamas official's funeral in Beirut

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Thousands of people took to the streets of Beirut on Thursday for the funeral of top Hamas commander Saleh Arouri, who was killed this week in an apparent Israeli airstrike on an apartment in the Lebanese capital.

Draped in Palestinian and Hamas flags, Arouri's coffin along with those of two of his comrades were first taken to a Beirut mosque for prayers before being carried to the Palestine Martyrs Cemetery where top Palestinian officials killed by Israel over the last five decades are buried. Arouri's automatic rifle was placed on his coffin at the prayer service.

The funeral was attended by Palestinian officials, including top Hamas official Moussa Abu Marzouk, as well as representatives of some Lebanese political groups. People tried to touch the coffins that were surrounded by Hamas members wearing green caps. Some of the Hamas members were armed.

"The enemy is running away from its failures and defeats (in Gaza) to Lebanon," Hamas top leader Ismail Haniyeh said in a speech aired during the funeral. He added that the killing of Arouri in Beirut "is a proof of (Israel's) bloody mentality."

Lebanese officials and state media said an Israeli drone fired two missiles Tuesday at an apartment in Beirut's southern Musharafieh district that is a stronghold of Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah group, instantly killing Arouri

along with six other Hamas members, including military commanders.

Arouri, who was the deputy political head of Hamas and a founder of the group's military wing, had been in Israel's sights for years and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had threatened to kill him even before Hamas carried out its deadly surprise attack on Israel on Oct. 7 that triggered the ongoing brutal war in Gaza.

Israel had accused Arouri, 57, of masterminding attacks against it in the West Bank, where he was the group's top commander. In 2015, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Arouri as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, offering \$5 million for information about him.

Arouri's killing raises tensions in the already volatile Middle East.

On Wednesday, Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed nine Hezbollah members, including a local commander, in one of the highest death tolls for the group since the fighting along the Lebanon-Israel border began on Oct. 8. Since then, Hezbollah has lost 143 fighters.

On Thursday, an airstrike on the Iraqi capital Baghdad killed a high-ranking commander of an Iran-backed group. The group blamed the U.S. for the attack and an American official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't permitted to speak publicly, confirmed that the U.S. military carried out the strike.

2nd official resigns to protest US support for Israel in war

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An Education Department policy adviser appointed by the Biden administration quit Wednesday to protest the administration's military support of Israel's war in Gaza and its handling of the conflict's repercussions at home and abroad.

Tariq Habash, a Biden administration appointee who had worked in the Education Department to help overhaul the student loan system and address inequities in higher education, said he submitted his resignation Wednesday. That was after he and others had "done everything imaginable" to work within the system to try to register their objections, he said.

Habash becomes at least the

second official, and the first known official of Palestinian origin, to resign from the administration in protest of President Joe Biden's actions regarding the war. State Department veteran Josh Paul stepped down in October as the administration accelerated arms transfers to Israel.

Habash had been among the administration staffers taking part in meetings with senior White House officials and others in the administration in response to staffers' concerns on the U.S. role in the war.

The White House referred questions about Habash to the Education Department; a department spokesperson said "we wish him the best in his future endeavors."

Mother and uncle of US service member rescued from Gaza in secret operation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The mother and American uncle of a U.S. service member were safe outside of Gaza after being rescued from the fighting in a secret operation coordinated by the U.S., Israel, Egypt and others, a U.S. official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

It is the only known operation of its kind to extract American citizens and their close family members during the months of devastating ground fighting and Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. The vast majority of people who have made it out of northern and central Gaza through the Rafah crossing into Egypt fled south in the initial weeks of the war. An escape from the heart of the Palestinian territory through intense

combat has become far more perilous and difficult since.

Zahra Sckak, 44, made it out of Gaza on New Year's Eve, along with her brother-in-law, Farid Sukaik, an American citizen, a U.S. official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to confirm the rescue.

Sckak's husband, Abedalla Sckak, was shot earlier in the Israel-Hamas war as the family fled from a building hit by an airstrike. He died days later. One of her three American sons, Spc. Ragi A. Sckak, 24, serves as an infantryman in the U.S. military.

The extraction involved the Israeli military and local Israeli officials who oversee Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the U.S. offi-

cial said. There was no indication that American officials were on the ground in Gaza.

"The United States played solely a liaison and coordinating role between the Sckak family and the governments of Israel and Egypt," the official said.

A family member and U.S.-based lawyers and advocates working on the family's behalf had described Sckak and Sukaik as pinned down in a building surrounded by combatants, with little or no food and with only water from sewers to drink.

There were few immediate details of the operation. It took place after appeals from Sckak's family and U.S.-based citizens groups for help from Congress members and the Biden administration.

NATION

Trump asks court to overturn ballot ruling

Colorado decision came in response to former president's role in Jan. 6 attack on Capitol

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI
Associated Press

DENVER — Former President Donald Trump on Wednesday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a ruling barring him from the Colorado ballot, setting up a high-stakes showdown over whether a constitutional provision prohibiting those who “engaged in insurrection” will end his political career.

Trump appealed a 4-3 ruling in December by the Colorado Supreme Court that marked the first time in history that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment was used to bar a presidential contender from the ballot. The court found that Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol disqualified him under the clause.

The provision has been used so sparingly in American history that the U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled on it.

Wednesday's development came a day after Trump's legal team filed an appeal against a rul-

ing by Maine's Democratic Secretary of State, Shenna Bellows, that Trump was ineligible to appear on that state's ballot over his role in the Capitol attack. Both the Colorado Supreme Court and the Maine secretary of state's rulings are on hold until the appeals play out.

Trump's critics have filed dozens of lawsuits seeking to disqualify him in multiple states. He lost Colorado by 13 percentage points in 2020 and does not need to win the state to gain either the Republican presidential nomination or the presidency. But the Colorado ruling has the potential to prompt courts or secretaries of state to remove him from the ballot in other, must-win states.

None had succeeded until a slim majority of Colorado's seven justices — all appointed by Democratic governors — ruled last month against Trump. Critics warned that it was an overreach and that the court could not simply declare that the Jan. 6 attack was

an “insurrection” without a judicial process.

“The Colorado Supreme Court decision would unconstitutionally disenfranchise millions of voters in Colorado and likely be used as a template to disenfranchise tens of millions of voters nationwide,” Trump's lawyers wrote in their appeal to the nation's highest court, noting that Maine has already followed Colorado's lead.

Trump's new appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court also follows one from Colorado's Republican Party. Legal observers expect the high court will take the case because it concerns unsettled constitutional issues that go to the heart of the way the country is governed.

All the parties to the case have urged the court to move quickly. Trump's lawyers on Wednesday asked the court to overturn the ruling without even hearing oral arguments. The lawyers representing the Colorado plaintiffs have urged oral arguments but al-

so seek a vastly accelerated schedule, calling for a resolution by next month. Colorado's primary is March 5.

Sean Grimsley, an attorney for the plaintiffs seeking to disqualify Trump in Colorado, said late last month on a legal podcast called “Law, disrupted” that he hopes the nation's highest court hurries once it accepts the case, as he expects it will.

“We have a primary coming up on Super Tuesday and we need to know the answer,” Grimsley said.

The Colorado high court upheld a finding by a district court judge that Jan. 6 was an “insurrection” incited by Trump. It agreed with the petitioners, six Republican and unaffiliated Colorado voters whose lawsuit was funded by a Washington-based liberal group, that Trump clearly violated the provision. Because of that, the court ruled he is disqualified just as plainly as if he failed to meet the Constitution's minimum age requirement for the presidency of 35

years. In doing so, the state high court reversed a ruling by the lower court judge that said it wasn't clear that Section 3 was meant to apply to the president. That's one of many issues the nation's highest court would consider.

Additional ones include whether states such as Colorado can determine who is covered by Section 3, whether congressional action is needed to create a process to bar people from office, whether Jan. 6 met the legal definition of insurrection and whether Trump was simply engaging in First Amendment activity that day or is responsible for the violent attack, which was intended to halt certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory. Trump held a rally before the Capitol attack, telling his supporters that “if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore.”

Six of the U.S. Supreme Court's nine justices were appointed by Republicans, and three by Trump himself.

Biden, Trump make the Jan. 6 riot a political rallying cry

By WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump will spend Saturday's third anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection on the campaign trail in Iowa, holding two rallies in his bid to win back the White House.

That is set to come a day after President Joe Biden visits a site near Valley Forge, Pa., where George Washington and the struggling Continental Army endured a tough winter during the American Revolution. His advisers say the stop in a critical swing state will highlight Trump's role in the Capitol riot and be a chance for him to lay out the stakes of this year's election.

With Biden and Trump now headed toward a potential 2020 rematch, both are talking about the same event in very different ways and offering framing they believe gives them an advantage. The dueling narratives reflect how an attack that disrupted the certification of the election is increasingly viewed differently along partisan lines — and how Trump has bet that the riot won't hurt his candidacy.

Rioters loyal to Trump stormed the Capitol building in an attempt to stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory, forcing lawmakers and then-Vice President Mike Pence to flee for their lives. Many walked to the Capitol after a rally outside the White House in which Trump exhorted the crowd to



JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

Rioters gather on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.

“fight like hell” or “you're not going to have a country anymore.”

Nine deaths were linked to the attack and 700-plus people have gone to court for their roles in it, with more than 450 sentenced to prison.

Federal prosecutors in Washington have charged Trump in connection with the riot, citing his promotion of false and debunked theories of election fraud and efforts to overturn the results. Trump has pleaded not guilty and continued to lie about the 2020

election.

The former president has still built a commanding lead in the Republican primary, and his rivals largely refrain from criticizing him about Jan. 6. He has called it a beautiful day and described those imprisoned for the insurrection as “great, great patriots” and “hostages.” He has played at some of his rallies a recording of “The Star-Spangled Banner” sung by jailed rioters interspersed with him reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Republican strategist Alice Stewart said that “a lot of Republican voters don't love Jan. 6, but they're not obsessed about it either” and may support Trump because they oppose Biden's economic policies.

“Republican voters can hold two consecutive thoughts and say, ‘Jan. 6, that wasn't great, but that doesn't affect my bottom line,’” she said.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis called Jan. 6 a “protest” that “ended up devolving,” and has more

recently said Trump “should have come out more forcefully” against the rioters. Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley frequently tells crowds that Jan. 6 “was not a beautiful day, it was a terrible day.”

But views overall of the attack have hardened along partisan lines.

In the days after the attack, 52% of U.S. adults said Trump bore a lot of responsibility for Jan. 6, according to the Pew Research Center. By early 2022, that had declined to 43%. The number of Americans who said Trump bore no responsibility also increased to 32% in 2022 compared with 24% in 2021.

A Washington Post-University of Maryland poll released this week found that about 7 in 10 Republicans say too much is being made of the attack. Just 18% of GOP supporters say that protesters who entered the Capitol were “mostly violent,” down from 26% in 2021, while 77% of Democrats and 54% of independents say the protesters were mostly violent — essentially unchanged from 2021.

A December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, meanwhile, found that 87% of Democrats and 54% of independents believe a second Trump term would negatively affect U.S. democracy. Some 82% of Republicans believe democracy would be weakened by another Biden win, with 56% of independents agreeing.

NATION

Johnson pushes strict rules at border visit

By VALERIE GONZALEZ
AND STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

EAGLE PASS, Texas — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson led about 60 fellow Republicans in Congress on a visit Wednesday to the Mexican border to demand hard-line immigration policies in exchange for backing President Joe Biden's emergency wartime funding request for Ukraine. He expressed serious doubts about whether he would support a bipartisan compromise.

The trip to Eagle Pass, Texas, came as the Senate engages in delicate negotiations in hopes of striking a deal on border policies that could unlock Senate GOP support for Biden's \$110 billion package for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. security priorities.

But Johnson, R-La., told The Associated Press during the border tour that he was holding firmly to the policies of a bill passed by House Republicans in May without a single Democratic vote. The bill, H.R. 2, would revive many of the policies pursued by former President Donald Trump, build more of the border wall and impose new restrictions on asylum seekers. Democrats called the legislation "cruel" and "anti-immigrant," and Biden promised a veto.



ERIC GAY/AP

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, center left, and Texas Department of Public Safety chief Steve McCraw, center right, lead a group of Republican members of Congress during a tour Wednesday of the Texas-Mexico border in Eagle Pass, Texas.

"If it looks like H.R. 2, we'll talk about it," Johnson said of any border legislation that emerges from the Senate.

With the number of illegal crossings into the United States topping 10,000 on several days last

month, Eagle Pass has been at the center of Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star, his nearly \$10 billion initiative that has tested the federal government's authority over immigration and elevated the political fight

over the issue.

The GOP House members touted their event as the largest congressional border trip ever. They traveled in two large buses beneath an international bridge in Eagle Pass where just two weeks

ago illegal crossings prompted a large federal response that included closing railroad traffic and creating a large field for processing migrants. By Wednesday, the field sat empty with only stakes in the ground and orange fencing.

At a news conference, Johnson suggested he could use a looming government funding deadline as further leverage.

"If President Biden wants a supplemental spending bill focused on national security, it better begin with defending America's national security," he said. Johnson added: "We want to get the border closed and secured first."

Biden has expressed willingness to make policy compromises as the historic number of migrants crossing the border is an increasing challenge for his 2024 reelection campaign. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and White House staff have been involved in the Senate negotiations.

"We've got to do something," Biden told reporters Tuesday night. He said Congress should approve his national security proposal because it also includes money for managing the influx of migrants. "They ought to give me the money I need to protect the border," he said.

FBI say bomb threats to state capitols a hoax

Associated Press

A bomb threat emailed to officials in several states early Wednesday briefly disrupted government affairs and prompted some state capitol evacuations, but no explosives were found and federal officials quickly dismissed the threats as a hoax.

The threats follow a spate of false reports of shootings at the homes of public officials in recent days.

Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi and Montana were among the states that evacuated statehouse offices or buildings.

The FBI said it was aware of numerous hoax bomb threats at state Capitol buildings, but had "no information to indicate a specific and credible threat." The bureau said it was working with state, local and federal law enforcement to gather, share and act on information.

"The FBI takes hoax threats very seriously because it puts innocent people at risk," it said in a statement.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said on X that the Capitol was evacuated while state police investigated a threat received by the Secretary of State's Office. Lawmakers were elsewhere for ethics training, but Secretary of State spokeswoman Michon Lindstrom said some candidate filings were disrupted.

The "mass email" warned of multiple explosives that would go off in a few hours.

Public safety officials locked down the Mississippi Capitol on the second day of the legislative session



ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP

A Capitol Police officer warns off passersby as they respond to a bomb threat at the Mississippi State Capitol in Jackson, Miss., on Wednesday morning.

and the state Senate delayed its morning meeting. The building was evacuated and bomb-sniffing dogs circled before an all-clear was given.

"This is an ongoing investigation and there is no further threat to the Capitol or surrounding buildings," said Bailey Martin, a spokesperson for the Mississippi Department of Public Safety.

The closures were brief and disruptions minimal in most states.

Other states — including Wyoming, Oklahoma, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Missouri and Maryland — received threats, but didn't close.

Several public officials have been hit by "swatting" calls in recent days.

Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia was targeted by a fake emergency call on Christmas morning.

Imam killed outside New Jersey mosque, shooter still at large

Associated Press

A New Jersey imam was gunned down outside his mosque before dawn Wednesday, leaving authorities hunting for a shooter and saying they've found no evidence yet that an anti-Muslim bias played a part in the shooting.

Imam Hassan Sharif was in his car when he was shot more than once at about 6 a.m. near the Masjid-Muhammad Mosque in Newark, the state's largest city, Essex County Prosecutor Ted Stephens said at a news conference. He was taken to a nearby hospital but died in the afternoon.

"I know that in light of global events and with a rise in bias directed at many communities we're experiencing across our state — particularly the Muslim community — there are many in New Jersey right now who are feeling a heightened sense of fear or anxiety at the news of this slaying," Attorney General Matt Platkin said.

Despite that, Platkin said law enforcement has stepped up out-

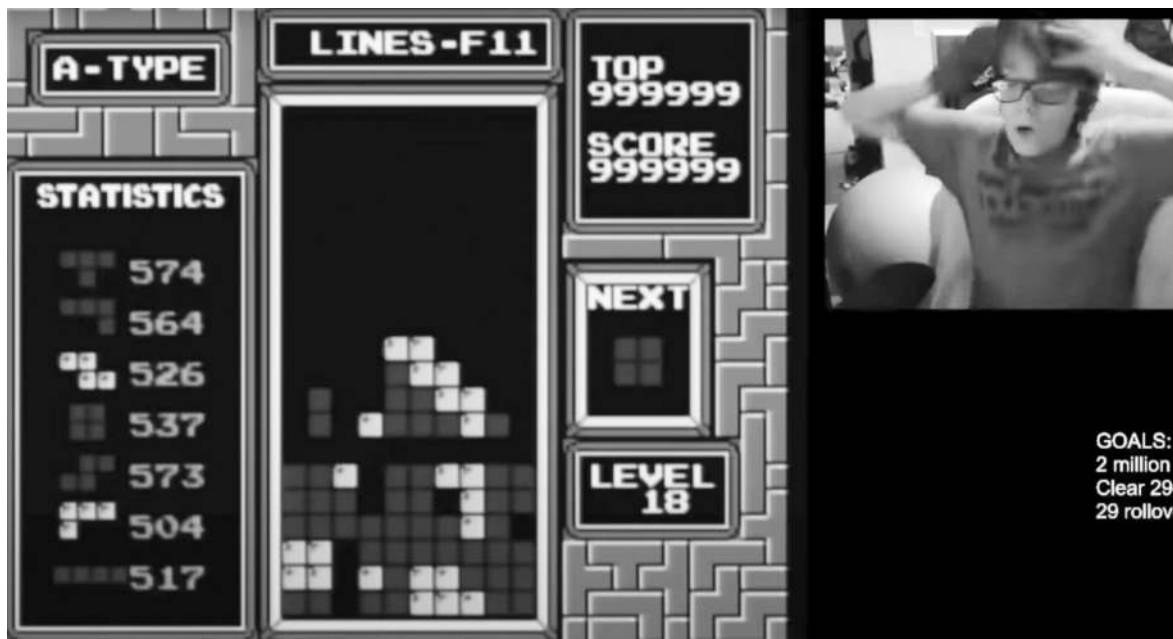
reach to houses of worship, particularly Jewish and Muslim ones, explicitly acknowledging the tensions unfolding in many parts of the world amid the fighting in Gaza.

Sharif had been a resident imam at the local mosque for five years, Newark Public Safety Director Fritz Fragé said. He remembered the imam as a leader in the interfaith community who worked to keep the city safe.

"We share your pain and we promise to utilize the full resources of those here and those who are continuing to partner with us to we make sure that this heinous crime is solved," he said.

The New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, called Sharif a "beacon of leadership and excellence" and said that while the shooter's motives are unknown, the group is advising all mosques to "remain cautious" while keeping their doors open.

NATION



WILLIS GIBSON/AP

13-year-old Willis Gibson reacts after playing a game of Tetris. Willis became the first player to officially “beat” the original Nintendo version of the game in late December.

13-year-old becomes first to beat ‘unbeatable’ Tetris by breaking it

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The falling-block video game Tetris has met its match in 13-year-old Willis Gibson, who has become the first player to officially “beat” the original Nintendo version of the game — by breaking it.

Technically, Willis — aka “blue scuti” in the gaming world — made it to what gamers call a “kill screen,” a point where the Tetris code glitches, crashing the game. That might not sound like much of a victory to anyone thinking that only high scores count, but it’s a highly coveted achievement in the world of video games, where records involve pushing hardware and software to their limits. And beyond.

It’s also a very big deal for players of Tetris, which many had long considered unbeatable. That’s partly because the game doesn’t have a scripted ending; those four-block shapes just keep

falling no matter how good you get at stacking them into disappearing rows. Top players continued to find ways to extend their winning streaks by staying in the game to reach higher and higher levels, but in the end, the game beat them all.

Until, that is, Willis managed on Dec. 21 to trigger a kill screen on Level 157, which the gaming world takes as a victory over the game — something along the lines of pushing the software past its own limits.

The makers of Tetris agree. “Congratulations to ‘blue scuti’ for achieving this extraordinary accomplishment, a feat that defies all preconceived limits of this legendary game,” Tetris CEO Maya Rogers said in a statement. Rogers noted that Tetris will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year and called Willis’ victory a “monumental achievement.”

It’s been a very long road. Early on, “the Tetris scene people didn’t even know how to get to these higher levels,” said David Macdonald, a gaming YouTuber who has chronicled the gaming industry for years. “They were just stuck in the 20s and 30s because they just didn’t know techniques to get any further.”

Level 29 posed an especially tough roadblock because the blocks began falling more quickly than the in-game controller could respond.

Willis appeared shocked when he crashed the game at Level 157. In his livestream video, he appears to hyperventilate before barely gasping “Oh my God” several times, clutching his temples and worrying that he might be passing out. After cupping his hands over his mouth in an apparent attempt to regulate his breathing, he finally exclaims, “I can’t feel my fingers.”

Hospitals urge masks amid flu, COVID-19 surge

By MIKE STOBBE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — More U.S. hospitals are requiring masks and limiting visitors as health officials face an expected but still nasty post-holiday spike in flu, COVID-19 and other illnesses.

While many experts say this season likely won’t prove to be as deadly as some other recent winters, it still could mean hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and many thousands of deaths across the country.

New York City last week instituted a mask mandate for the city’s 11 public hospitals. Similar measures were ordered last week at some hospitals in Los Angeles and Massachusetts. Some hospitals reinstated masking rules for employees months ago, in anticipation of a seasonal rush of sick people.

Flu and COVID-19 infections have been increasing for weeks, with high levels of flu-like illness reported in 31 states just before Christmas. Updated national numbers are to be released Friday, but health officials predict infections will grow in many states well into January.

“What we’re seeing right now, in the first week of January, is really an acceleration — of flu cases, in particular,” said Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There is some good news. Flu and COVID-19 cases may peak by the end of the month and then

drop, Cohen said. Though the flu has been skyrocketing, this year’s cases are being caused by a strain that usually doesn’t cause as many deaths and hospitalizations as some other versions. What’s more, signs suggest current flu vaccines are well-matched to the strain.

“I don’t think it’s going to be overwhelming,” said Dr. William Schaffner, Vanderbilt University infectious diseases expert. He deemed the current season “moderately severe.”

The CDC is pointing the public to an agency website where people can look up their county, which can help them make decisions about whether to wear masks or take other precautions. Cohen urged people to get vaccinated and to seek treatment for flu and COVID-19.

Vaccinations are down this year, officials say. About 44% of U.S. adults had gotten flu shots by Dec. 23, according to the most recently available CDC vaccination survey data. Only about 19% of U.S. adults were reported to have received an updated COVID-19 shot as of early December.

COVID-19 cases are causing more severe disease than the flu but have been rising less dramatically. Health officials are keeping an eye on JN.1, a new version of the ever-evolving coronavirus. The omicron variant was first detected in the U.S. in September and just before Christmas accounted for an estimated 44% of COVID-19 cases.

Nevada judge attacked by defendant during sentencing

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A Nevada judge was attacked Wednesday by a defendant in a felony battery case who leaped over a defense table and the judge’s bench, landing atop her and sparking a bloody brawl involving court officials and attorneys, officials and witnesses said.

In a violent scene captured by courtroom video, Clark County District Judge Mary Kay Holthus fell back from her seat against a wall and suffered some injuries but was not hospitalized, courthouse officials said.

A courtroom marshal was also injured as he came to the judge’s aid and was hospitalized for treatment of a bleeding gash on

his forehead and a dislocated shoulder, according to the officials and witnesses.

The attack occurred about 11 a.m. at the Regional Justice Center in Las Vegas.

The defendant, Deobra Delone Redden, 30, was wrestled to the floor behind the judge’s bench by several court and jail officers and courtroom staff members — including some who are seen throwing punches.

He was arrested and jailed at the Clark County Detention Center, where records showed he faces multiple new felony charges including battery on a protected person — referring to the judge and court officers.

“It happened so fast it was

hard to know what to do,” said Richard Scow, the chief county district attorney who prosecuted Redden on a case that stemmed from an arrest last year on allegations that Redden attacked a person with a baseball bat.

Redden’s defense attorney, Caesar Almase, did not respond to later telephone and email messages seeking comment.

Redden was not in custody when he arrived at court Wednesday. He wore a white shirt and dark pants as he stood next to Almase, asking the judge for leniency while describing himself as “a person who never stops trying to do the right thing no matter how hard it is.”



CLARK COUNTY DISTRICT COURT/AP

Deobra Redden, the defendant, is seen launching over the desk of Judge Mary Kay Holthus during his sentencing in a felony battery case Wednesday, in Las Vegas.

As the judge made it clear she intended to put him behind bars, and the court marshal moved to handcuff him, Redden yelled ex-

pletives and charged forward — amid screams from people who had been sitting with Redden in the courtroom audience.

NATION

Justice Department sues over migrants law

‘Texas cannot run its own immigration system,’ officials say of measure that allows for arrests

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The Justice Department on Wednesday sued Texas over a new law that would allow police to arrest migrants who enter the U.S. illegally, taking Republican Gov. Greg Abbott to court again over his escalating response to border crossers arriving from Mexico.

The lawsuit draws Texas into another clash over immigration at a time when New York and Chicago are pushing back on buses and planes carrying migrants sent by Abbott to Democrat-led cities nationwide. Texas is also fighting separate court battles to keep razor wire on the border and a floating barrier in the Rio Grande.

But a law Abbott signed last month poses a broader and bigger challenge to the U.S. government’s authority over immigration. In addition to allowing police anywhere in Texas to arrest migrants on charges of illegal entry, the law — known as Senate Bill 4 — also gives judges the authority to order migrants to leave the country.

The lawsuit asks a federal court in Austin to declare the Texas law unconstitutional. It calls the measure a violation of the Supremacy Clause, which establishes that federal laws in most cases supersede state law.

“Texas cannot run its own immigration system,” the Justice Department states in the lawsuit. “Its efforts, through SB 4, intrude on the federal government’s exclusive authority to regulate the entry and removal of noncitizens, frustrate the United States’ immigration operations and proceedings, and interfere with U.S. foreign relations.”

Abbott’s office did not respond to an email seeking comment.

“Biden sued me today because I signed a law making it illegal for an illegal immigrant to enter or attempt to enter Texas directly from a foreign nation,” Abbott said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. “I like my chances.”

The law is scheduled to take effect in March. Civil rights organizations and officials in El Paso County, Texas, filed a lawsuit last month that similarly described the new law as unconstitutional overreach.

The Justice Department sent Abbott a letter last week threatening legal action unless Texas reversed course. In response, Abbott posted on X that the Biden administration “not only refuses to enforce current U.S. immigration laws, they now want to stop Texas from enforcing laws against illegal immigration.”

On Wednesday, House Speaker Mike

Johnson and about 60 fellow Republicans visited the Texas border city of Eagle Pass, which has been the center of Abbott’s \$10 billion border initiative known as Operation Lone Star. Johnson suggested he could use a looming government funding deadline as further leverage for hard-line border policies.

President Joe Biden has expressed willingness to make policy compromises because the number of migrants crossing the border is an increasing challenge for his 2024 reelection campaign. Johnson praised Abbott, who was not in Eagle Pass, and slammed the lawsuits that seek to undo Texas’ aggressive border measures.

“It’s absolute insanity,” Johnson said.

Illegal crossings along the southern U.S. border topped 10,000 on several days in December, a number that U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Commissioner Troy Miller called “unprecedented.” U.S. authorities closed cargo rail crossings in Eagle Pass and El Paso for five days last month, calling it a response to a large number of migrants riding freight trains through Mexico to the border.

Authorities this week also resumed full operations at a bridge in Eagle Pass and other crossings in San Diego and Arizona that had been temporarily closed.

Legal experts and opponents say Texas’ new law is the most far-reaching attempt by a state to police immigration since a 2010 Arizona law that was partially struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. That law had made it a state crime to be in the U.S. without legal status and gave police some immigration enforcement powers. A Supreme Court ruling in 2012 affirmed that immigration enforcement is solely within the authority of the federal government.

Under the Texas law, migrants could either agree to a Texas judge’s order to leave the U.S. or be prosecuted on misdemeanor charges of illegal entry. Migrants who don’t leave could face arrest again under more serious felony charges.

Those ordered to leave would be sent to ports of entry along the border with Mexico, even if they are not Mexican citizens. The law can be enforced anywhere in Texas but some places are off-limits, including schools and churches.

For more than two years, Texas has run a smaller-scale operation on the border to arrest migrants on misdemeanor charges of trespassing. Although that was also intended to stem illegal crossings, there is little indication that it has done so.

Official: Iowa high school shooting suspect dead

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI
Associated Press

PERRY, Iowa — Multiple people were shot inside a small-town Iowa high school early Thursday as students prepared to start their first day of classes after their annual winter break, authorities said.

The suspect in the shooting in Perry, Iowa, has died of what investigators believe is a self-inflicted gunshot wound, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss details of the investigation.

The official also said that at least one of the victims is a school administrator.

Two gunshot victims were taken by ambulance to Iowa Methodist Medical Center in the state capital of Des Moines, a health system spokesperson said. Some other patients were transported to a second hospital in Des Moines, a spokesperson for MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center confirmed, declining to comment on the number of patients or their statuses.

The state capital is about 40 miles southeast of Perry, which has about 8,000 residents.

High school senior Ava Augustus said she was in a counselor’s office when she heard three shots. She and other people barricaded the door, preparing to throw things if necessary.

“And then we hear ‘He’s down. You can go out,’” Augustus said through tears. “And I run and you can just see glass everywhere,



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

Police respond to Perry High School in Perry, Iowa, on Thursday. Police say there was a shooting at the school.

blood on the floor. I get to my car and they’re taking a girl out of the auditorium who had been shot in her leg.”

The shooting occurred in the backdrop of the Iowa caucuses and not far from where Republican presidential candidates were campaigning.

An active shooter was reported at 7:37 a.m. Thursday morning and officers arrived seven minutes later, Dallas County Sheriff Adam Infante said.

Zander Shelley, 15, was in a hallway waiting for the school day to start when he heard gunshots and dashed into a classroom, according to his father, Kevin Shelley. Zander was grazed twice and hid in the classroom before texting his father at 7:36 a.m.

Rachael Kares, an 18-year-old senior, was wrapping up jazz band practice when

she and her bandmates heard what she described as four gunshots, spaced apart.

“We all just jumped,” Kares said. “My band teacher looked at us and yelled, ‘Run!’ So we ran.”

Kares and many others from the school ran out past the football field, as she heard people yelling, “Get out! Get out!” She said she heard additional shots as she ran, but didn’t know how many. She was more concerned about getting home to her 3-year-old son.

“At that moment I didn’t care about anything except getting out because I had to get home with my son,” she said.

FBI agents from the Omaha-Des Moines office were on scene to help with the investigation led by the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation.

Winter storm expected to wallop East

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A winter weather system moving through the U.S. is expected to wallop the East Coast this weekend with a mix of snow and freezing rain from the southern Appalachians to the Northeast — although it’s too early to say exactly which areas will get what kind of precipitation and how much.

Details on the storm’s path should firm up this week as the Pacific system moves through Colorado and New Mexico on Thursday and into Texas and the Southeast before moving up the East Coast, said Tony Fracasso, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Md.

“It’s still a few days away, so we’ll have to hash out the storm track — where the precipitation falls, and how long the cold air can stay,” he said Wednesday.

Major U.S. cities accustomed to white winters — such as Boston, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia — didn’t receive much snow last year due to a lack of cold air.

The National Weather Service in New York City posted on social media platform X on Wednesday that the city has a low probability of snow and sleet Saturday into Sunday, with significant snowfall expected in areas west and north of the city.

Earlier this week, the NWS of New York said that 2023 would go down as the city’s “least snowiness” year, with just 2.3 inches measured in Central Park.

WORLD

S. Korea: Kim's daughter is likely successor

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM**
AND **JIWON SONG**
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The young daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is seen as her father's likely heir apparent, South Korea's spy agency said Thursday, its first such assessment on the girl who was unveiled to the outside world a little more than a year ago.

There has been intense outside debate and speculation about the girl, reportedly about 10 years old and named Ju Ae, since she made her first public appearance in November 2022, when she watched a long-range missile test-launch with her father.

The girl has since accompanied her father at a number of major public events, with state media calling her father's "most beloved" or "respected" child and

churning out footage and photos proving her rising political standing and closeness with her father.

A senior general knelt and whispered to her when she clapped while watching a military parade at a VIP observation stand in September. She was photographed standing in front of her father at one point during a visit to the air force headquarters in November, with both Kims wearing sunglasses and long leather jackets. In a New Year's Eve celebration at a packed Pyongyang stadium Sunday, Kim Jong Un kissed her on the cheek and she did the same to her father.

Most of these scenes are something that had been unimaginable in North Korea, where Kim is the subject of a strong and loyal following that treats him like god.

South Korea's main spy agency, the National Intelligence Service,

said Thursday that it sees Kim Ju Ae as her father's highly likely successor, citing a comprehensive analysis of her public activities and the state protocols provided to her.

The NIS public affairs office told The Associated Press that it still considers all possibilities regarding the North's power succession process because Kim is still young, has no major health issues, and has at least one other child. Kim turns 40 on Monday.

Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said while the NIS currently sees a high possibility for Kim Ju Ae to be primed as her father's successor, few can predict whether she would eventually become the North's next leader. Cha added that Kim Ju Ae lacks political achievements that he said are essential to be formally anointed



KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY/KOREA NEWS SERVICE /AP

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter attend a performance Sunday in Pyongyang, North Korea. South Korean intelligence points to Kim Ju Ae as a likely successor to Kim.

as the country's future leader.

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said that Kim Jong Un likely believes his daughter

has the capacity and resolve to succeed him as leader. He said Kim Jong Un's obesity appears so serious that "it won't be surprising even if he collapses tomorrow."

Scenes of loss seen across Japan

Associated Press

SUZU, Japan — His face hidden under a humble straw hat, the man stood silent, watching several helmeted rescue workers carefully lift his wife's body from the rubble, wrapped in blue plastic on a stretcher.

He wiped his weary face with a rag. His eyes were red.

This scene in the city of Suzu was tragically repeated across Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions on the western coastline of Japan after Monday's 7.6 magnitude temblor that decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings.

The death toll stood at 84 people as of Thursday.

Ishikawa officials said 48 of those who died were in the city of Wajima and 23 were in Suzu. The 13 others were reported in five neighboring towns. More than 300 people have been injured, at least 26 seriously.

Those reported missing ballooned from 15 to 79 overnight, including a 13-year-old boy. Officials initially said 80 were missing but corrected the number later.

What exacerbated matters was people visiting to ring in the new year with their loved ones when the quake hit.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reinforced rescue operations with



KYODO NEWS/AP

A man stands Thursday in front of a house felled by earthquakes in Suzu, Japan. More soldiers have been ordered to the area to bolster rescue operations after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit the region Monday.

about 3,600 soldiers in addition to the initial 1,000. Their mission is to provide those affected with fresh water and hot meals, as well as set up bathing facilities for the 34,000 who lost their homes and are now staying at evacuation facilities.

Although Japan is reputed for relatively reliable disaster relief, essential supplies such as water, food and blankets have been running short.

"All we got was a couple of rice balls," said Yasuo Kobatake, cupping his hand in a tiny ball to show how small the meal was. He has been staying with his wife at an elementary school, an impromptu evacuation center. He was only given a tiny paper cup, half-filled with water that "vanished in a sip."

When the earth trembled, Kobatake was about to wear his shoes to head out. He ran out of the house barefoot with just one sock on. That first temblor was followed by

the main more destructive quake which flung him to the ground. A concrete wall came crashing down, barely missing him.

Kobatake can no longer access his destroyed house.

"So here I am with my wife sleeping beside all the others (taking shelter at the school). We talk to each other and we try to encourage each other," he said.

Kobatake hoped help was on the way.

However, many roads have been blocked by landslides or suffered cracks because of the strong quake, making it difficult for trucks delivering water and food supplies to reach those in need. The hardest hit spots were on the Noto Peninsula, the center of the quake, connected by a narrow land strip to the rest of the main island of Honshu, making alternative routes scarce.

Snow is expected over the weekend, so finding those trapped un-

der the rubble has become even more critical.

Three days after Monday's quake, rescuers are still pulling out people alive from under debris. But time is running out. Experts categorize the first 72 hours as crucial to finding survivors.

Authorities warned more quakes and tsunamis could follow, stressing extra caution over the coming days. Plans are also underway to fly some evacuated people out to safer areas.

Aftershocks continued to rock the coastal areas, near the epicenter in Noto, about 185 miles from Tokyo on the opposite coast, hit Monday.

Cars were perched crooked on roads scarred with deep giant cracks. Lopsided houses missing rooftop tiles sat sadly beside a home the quake flattened to the ground, reducing it to a pile of wood. Boats floated belly-up in the bay.

Hospitals, striking docs in England at deadlock

Associated Press

LONDON — The longest planned strike in the history of Britain's state-funded National Health Service entered its second day of six on Thursday with doctors in England at loggerheads with hospitals over requests for some to leave the picket line to cover urgent needs during one of busiest times of year.

The strike is the ninth organized by doctors in the early stages of their careers in just over a year amid their increasingly bitter pay dispute with the government. Ahead of the strike, plans were laid out for junior doctors, who form the backbone of hospital and clinic care, to return to work if hospitals got overwhelmed.

The British Medical Association, the union that represents the bulk of the 75,000 or so striking doctors, had agreed with NHS managers on a system for so-called derogations, in which junior doctors return to work in the event of safety concerns about emergency care, with hospitals expected to show they have "exhausted" all other sources of staffing before recalling medics.

On Wednesday, the first day of the strike, hospitals made 20 requests. None have so far been granted.

The BMA says newly qualified doctors earn 15.53 pounds (about \$19) an hour — the U.K. minimum wage is just over 10 pounds (nearly \$12.6) an hour — though salaries rise rapidly after the first year.

WORLD

ISIS claims responsibility for bombing in Iran

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Islamic State claimed responsibility Thursday for two suicide bombings targeting a commemoration for an Iranian general slain in a 2020 U.S. drone strike.

Experts who follow ISIS confirmed that the statement, circulated online among jihadis, came from the extremists, who likely hope to take advantage of the chaos gripping the region amid Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Wednesday's attack in Kerman killed at least 84 people and wounded another 284. It targeted a ceremony honoring Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, held as an icon by supporters of the country's theocracy and viewed by the U.S. military as a deadly foe who aided militants who killed American troops in Iraq.

The Islamic State claim identified the two attackers as Omar al-Mowahed and Seif-Allah al-Mujahed. The claim said the men carried

out the attacks with explosive vests. It also used disparaging language when discussing Shiites, which the Islamic State group views as heretics.

The statement did not mention which regional arm of the extremists carried out the attack, which other claims in the past have had. But Aaron Y. Zelin, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that some previous claims have not specified the regional arm, and that the latest claim came directly from an

account associated with the group.

The group likely hoped to see Iran strike at Israel, widening its war on Hamas into a regional conflict that Islamic State could potentially take advantage of, Zelin said.

"This falls under the modus operandi of IS, especially since it was such a mass casualty attack," Zelin said. "They are kind of like the Joker. They want to see the world burn. They don't care how it happens as long as it benefits them."

Islamic State, which once held

vast territory across Iraq and Syria, ultimately were beaten back by U.S.-led forces. It has been in disarray in the years since, though it has mounted major assaults.

An earlier death toll of 103 was twice revised lower after officials realized that some names had been repeated on a list of victims and due to the severity of wounds suffered by some of the dead, health authorities said. Many of the wounded were in critical condition, however, so the death toll could rise.



JENS KALAENE, DPA/AP

An Asian elephant plays with a Christmas tree during the annual Christmas tree feeding at Berlin Zoo, in Berlin, Thursday.

Unsold Christmas trees on menu at Berlin Zoo

Associated Press

BERLIN — There's a bit of post-Christmas cheer on the menu for elephants and other tenants at the Berlin Zoo: they can chomp on Christmas trees that didn't find a home.

The tree treats were unwrapped Thursday in what has become an annual event. Elephants tore off branches with their trunks and either gobbled

them or tossed them around their enclosure.

The European bison nestled into the trees before starting to munch on them. And reindeer sniffed and played with the conifers.

The zoo takes only fresh, unsold trees from select vendors. It doesn't accept trees from the public, which could contain chemicals or leftover decorations.

Floods persist in Germany as extreme cold cuts out power in Nordic regions

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Extremely cold temperatures compounded by gale-force winds and snow wreaked havoc across the Nordic region Thursday, leaving thousands without power while others braved the cold for hours stuck in their cars along clogged highways.

Heavy rains in Germany, France and the Netherlands again caused floods in regions that have seen persistent flooding in the last two weeks. One death was reported in France.

The deep freeze disrupted transportation throughout the

Nordic region amid reports of traffic chaos following closures of sections of highways and major roads. Problems with rail service have also been reported.

Electricity was cut to some 4,000 homes in Arctic Sweden where temperatures plummeted to minus 36.4 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Swedish public radio. In the southern part of the country, motorists were stuck in their cars or evacuated to a nearby sporting complex where they spent the night.

In Finnish Lapland, the municipality of Enontekiö, near the border with Norway and Sweden, rec-

orded the country's lowest temperature this winter on Thursday at minus 44.5 degrees F. Meteorologists are forecasting even colder temperatures the rest of the week.

In Germany, heavy rain has resumed in regions that have seen persistent flooding over the past two weeks.

After several days of rain and rising waters, several towns in northern France were left under water Thursday. Hundreds of people have been evacuated in recent days. The area was also hit by flooding in November and December, and some towns still hadn't recovered.

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A cyclist's nightmare

Being doored among some bikers' greatest fears, but such collisions can be prevented

BY ANGIE ORELLANA
HERNANDEZ
Los Angeles Times

The last time Yasmine Nasser Diaz spoke to her husband was in the early afternoon of Oct. 17 near their garage, where the couple stored their bicycles.

As Robert George, a Hollywood producer, walked his bike to the driveway of their home in Silver Lake, Calif., Diaz popped out to pick up a delivery. She had received a package containing a new belt, and they shared a laugh over her excitement. After exchanging goodbyes, George took off for the gym.

At 3:30 p.m., Diaz, 46, received a call from the Los Angeles General Medical Center notifying her that there had been an accident and that she “needed to come right away,” the artist said. Three hours earlier, according to a police report, George had been “doored.”

“Dooring” and “doored,” colloquialisms among bicyclists, refer to a collision caused by a driver or passenger opening a car door into an oncoming cyclist. For some cyclists, such as Diaz, it is among their greatest fears. But collisions such as these, they say, can be prevented with greater awareness and better infrastructure.

Developing bike infrastructure in LA is complicated by logistics and competing interests. Bicyclists say LA's car-centric culture hinders progress and argue that the city favors the comfort of drivers.

After being doored, George was flung by the impact onto North Edgemont Street in East Hollywood, where a second driver hit him, causing “traumatic head injuries,” the police report said. George was declared dead at 1:05 p.m., about an hour after the collision. He was 51.

“We were incredibly happy together and really excited about the future,” said Diaz, who described George as a “unicorn of a person, the most genuine and unconditionally supportive person” she's ever known. “My world is totally shattered.”

In California, motorists are mandated to not open a door “unless it is reasonably safe to do so and can be done without interfering with the movement of such traffic,” according to the

state vehicle code.

Nonetheless, drivers are “just not conscious” of cyclists and non-motorists on the road, mobility-justice advocate Yolanda Davis-Overstreet said.

“I truly think that the majority of people do not intend on opening their doors and slamming into a bicyclist,” Davis-Overstreet said.

But when car doors do collide with cyclists, the fallout can range from a few bumps and bruises to serious damage. Joshua Cohen, a personal injury attorney, said he's dealt with cases in which cyclists had severed fingers, as well as back, neck and head injuries.

“The edge of the car door where it strikes the human body — generally, if you think about the physics of that happening — it's almost like someone striking it with a sword because the leading edge of the car door is basically a thin piece of metal,” Cohen said.

Law enforcement will not arrest motorists who cause dooring collisions if no malicious intent can be proven, according to Los Angeles Police Department Capt. Benedict Fernandes.

Ken McLeod, the policy director for the League of American Bicyclists, characterized dooring as an “underreported issue,” adding that it often “gets overlooked.” That's why statistics are hard to come by.

“It definitely has a big psychological impact on people who bike,” McLeod said, “and it's a terrible experience.”

Six years ago, Caro Vilain was doored by the driver of a FedEx van as she headed to work in Culver City, Calif.

Though Vilain, 31, usually stays “on the very edge of the bike lane” to prevent dooring, she rode closer to the right on Venice Boulevard that day to avoid speeding traffic. When the van's door opened, Vilain said her “instinct kicked in.”

“I knew that there was a giant speeding SUV coming on my left, so I just couldn't fall over, otherwise I probably wouldn't be here,” Vilain, a video editor, said. “I just threw myself into the door and pushed through and managed to basically stay up.”

The driver, Vilain recalled, was “very apologetic,” swearing that he, too, was a cyclist and



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BLACKSHIRE, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

A cyclist rides through the busy intersection of Edgemont and Fountain Ave in Los Angeles, near where Hollywood producer Robert George was struck by an opening car door on Oct. 17.



Yasmine Nasser Diaz pours water on a plant at a Dec. 12 ghost bike vigil in memory of George, her late husband, at the intersection of Edgemont and Fountain Ave in Los Angeles.

should have known better.

Vilain didn't report the incident. She got back on her bike, her heart “pounding all the way to work.”

To avoid being doored, cyclists such as Vilain, Davis-Overstreet and Michael Schneider monitor as many telltale signs as possible: shadows, brake lights, the actions of people sitting in the driver's seat.

“When you ride a bicycle, your innate sense to protect yourself is different than if you're walking or in a car,” said Schneider, the founder of Streets For All, a nonprofit organization based in LA. “You look at things through a lens that is very specific to surviving and staying alive on a bicycle.”

Schneider and Damian Kevitt, the executive director of road safety advocacy group Streets Are For Everyone, also encouraged bicyclists to take up the full driving lane whenever they feel unsafe riding next to parked cars — even if drivers become impatient.

“Your life is more valuable than how long it takes them to get to Starbucks,” Kevitt said.

Drivers can prevent dooring by looking in their rearview mirror or by adopting the Dutch Reach, which Diaz hopes will become locally known as Robert's Reach in honor of her husband.

The maneuver refers to when drivers or passengers open car doors with the hand farthest from the door, which prompts them to turn their shoulder and look at the road.

“It is certainly something that could be adopted here with almost zero effort, zero expense,” said Kevin Claxton of the California Bicycle Coalition.

The issue of dooring is part of larger discussions of bike infrastructure, according to Davis-Overstreet.

Bike lane configurations in LA include “sharrows,” marked by a bicycle with a painted arrow. In those cases, cyclists either ride in the “door zone,” the 2- to 3-foot corridor next to a parked car, or take up the full lane, which may vex testy drivers.

Another common configuration includes a designated bike lane, which consists of two strips of paint to the left of parked cars.

These lanes, which are sometimes painted red or green, provide a bit more room for cyclists than sharrows.

However, Madeline Brozen, deputy director of the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, points to “protective infrastructure” as a means for better bicycle safety.

“You're having some type of physical protection between where people are riding bikes and moving traffic,” she said, “but sometimes that can even go further in terms of using parked cars as the actual protection.”

These parking-protected bike lanes contain buffer zones that separate cyclists from parked cars and oncoming traffic.

Reevaluating bike lanes is a matter of geometry, Brozen said, as well as the “political battle over convenience or delay for vehicles over the safety of people biking and walking.”

“It's really at the whim of the council member and the council member's office to decide whether they're willing to take on those battles or not,” Brozen said.

At the very least, Diaz wishes there were more painted bike lanes in LA or that drivers were more understanding of non-motorists on the road.

“As soon as we get behind a wheel, we become different people,” she said. “Suddenly, you have to get to where you're going as fast as possible.”

Three weeks after George's death, Diaz and her sister-in-law Jennifer George held a ghost bike vigil at the collision site. Along with a white bike, the memorial is adorned with bougainvillea, a plaque with George's name and a sign on a street pole.

Diaz wants people to know what happened on this street, so the sign recounts the events that occurred on Oct. 17. It then adds, “Please watch out for bicyclists.”

MOVIES

Filling in gaps of much-told disaster

‘Society of the Snow’ uses fresh techniques to relate its version of the 1972 Andes plane crash tale

By **LESLIE AMBRIZ**
Associated Press

When Gustavo Zerbino watched “La Sociedad de la Nieve,” the 1972 plane crash survivor felt as if he was being submerged “into boiling water,” reliving the roughly 70 days he and his teammates were stranded in the snow-covered Andes mountains.

Zerbino praised J.A. Bayona’s raw and unfiltered film, which was released this week as “Society of the Snow” on Netflix in the U.S., but said he also felt the same anxieties and emotions he felt while stranded as a young athlete more than 50 years ago.

“Fortunately, that feeling ended in 2½ hours,” Zerbino told The Associated Press this past October. (All interviews for this story were conducted in Spanish.)

Bayona’s movie is based on Pablo Vierci’s book of the same title, and follows the story of the Uruguayan Air Force plane disaster. The Old Christians rugby team was traveling with relatives and friends to Chile for a match when their plane crashed, stranding them in the mountains where they faced snow storms, avalanches and starvation, forcing them to eat the flesh of those who had died.

The tale of the tragedy has been told numerous times. It’s been referenced in shows like “Seinfeld,” dramatized in countless films like the 1993 narrative film “Alive” with Ethan Hawke, served as the subject of documentaries and plays and even inspired Showtime’s Emmy-nominated “Yellow-jackets.”

“We always felt something was missing,” says Zerbino, reflecting on past projects. “‘Society of the Snow’ is the book that filled in that missing piece.”

Tackling the complex story of endurance and survival, Bayona wanted to do more than just direct a dramatic interpretation of

real-life tragedy. He wanted to tell a story that honored the event’s survivors and victims and their Uruguayan culture.

“It’s more a reflection than an action book and ultimately helped me a lot in understanding the characters,” the Spanish director said of Vierci’s book. Vierci is an associate producer on the film.

Bayona, whose credits include 2018’s “Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom,” wanted to build on the connection between the living and the dead, including a seamless on-screen homage throughout the film to those who died.

“When he showed us the drafts of what he was

“I was always attracted to the possibility and the need to tell it from the point of the view of the dead.”

Pablo Vierci

author and associate producer of ‘Society of the Snow’

working on, it sent shivers down our spines; our hearts stopped. I mean, we already saw that it was very real, very powerful, and we saw that there was genius at work,” Zerbino said.

The Golden Globe-nominated film is narrated by Numa Turcatti, who died shortly before the rescue and is played here by Enzo Vogrincic. That decision was made by the director and supported by Vierci.

“I was always attracted to the possibility and the need to tell it from the point of the view of the dead,” Vierci said. “This is a story of 45 individuals providing a window through which we can observe how they endured major adversities and built a society where compassion

and mercy prevailed.”

Bayona’s film seeks to honor the story and strays away from glamorizing or sensationalizing the horrors the passengers and crew members endured. Beyond speaking to the survivors, victims’ loved ones and visiting the crash site, he wove in Candombe Uruguayan music at high points of tension and added Turcatti’s favorite song from a popular Uruguayan band into one of the film’s early blissful scenes.

“I was very interested in getting into the culture of Uruguay and the culture of the time,” he said.

His approach even included crash survivors, like Carlitos Páez, who turned 19 while stranded and plays his own father in the movie.

“I wanted to get as close to reality as possible,” said Bayona, who put his cast on a medically supervised weight-loss program and shot the avalanche scenes in freezing conditions.

The film is now shortlisted for best international feature film at the 2024 Academy Awards.

When Vogrincic heard about the project, the Uruguayan actor knew he had to be part of it.

“From a young age, you already know about it,” the actor said. “It fills you with a sense of pride because they’re Uruguayan ... but as you get deeper into the story, you realize that the story is much bigger. It talks about humanity as a whole.”

Zerbino watched the film with other crash survivors and victims’ family members. The end credits were met with a standing ovation, he said.

According to the former rugby player, this was the first time many victims’ relatives had engaged with retellings of the story.

“They hadn’t read or watched past books or movies around the event because they didn’t want to suffer. Some did, and others didn’t, and well, they reconciled with the story through this film,” said Zerbino, who feels he made a commitment to preserve his late team members’ legacies.

Bayona’s film champions Zerbino and the other survivors’ mission: to tell the story of those who gave up their literal selves to keep their friends alive.

“I have a commitment, a commitment from before leaving the mountain to be a witness and transmit the legacy of my dead friends,” Zerbino said.



“Society of the Snow”

Netflix

VIDEO GAMES

The Prince of Persia has returned



UBISOFT/TNS

In latest entry *The Lost Crown*, Ubisoft aims to bridge legacy of game's previous 2 chapters

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Mentioning *Prince of Persia* can bring up two different images, depending on the audience. The first is the original title by Jordan Mechner, a 2D classic that seems primitive now but was groundbreaking at the time. The second is the *Sands of Time* series that features more complex and elaborate gameplay in a 3D world.

Those constitute the two main chapters of the series, and Ubisoft is trying to ignite a third. Created by Ubisoft Montpellier, *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* aims to bridge the legacy of the two branches into one game. This entry follows the adventures of Sargon, a gifted warrior among the Immortals.

The elite force works together to defeat General Uvishka of the Kushan empire, which threatened Persepolis. The opening scene and victory offer a glimpse at the seven other Immortals, who play a bigger role in what's to come. It also reveals the game's heavy anime influence, according to cinematic lead Joseph-Antoine Clavet. During the celebration, Sargon's mentor Anahita kidnaps Prince Ghassan. Everyone is flabbergasted by the betrayal, and Queen Thomyris sends her army and the Immortals after her and the prince.

The pursuit leads everyone to Mount Qaf and the ruins of King Darius' home. Upon entering, the Immortals find that they're trapped in a place where time works strangely. The army chasing Anahita and Gassan appear to have aged and died. Later in the campaign, more curious deaths occur. The mystery about what happened on Mount Qaf is one of the central story drivers as players control Sargon and chase after the prince to fulfill the primary mission.

A Metroidvania with ambitions

I played about 3 hours of this 20- to 25-hour game. From the get-go, *The Lost Crown* follows the Metroidvania style. It's a 2D side-scrolling adventure across a labyrinthine map. Certain sections will be gated off until players acquire a power-up. There's a lot to take in, but thankfully, players can take pictures of areas and mark them on a map to remind them to return when they need to backtrack.

In the normal course of a Metroidvania campaign, players feel increasingly more powerful the more upgrades they earn, but with *The Lost Crown*, that isn't necessarily the case. Players will find that though they'll earn new abilities, those doesn't make the campaign easier. They won't enable them to mow through enemies.

Ubisoft infused *The Lost Crown* with a Team Ninja-esque difficulty when it comes to combat. Being a seasoned warrior, Sargon can swing his swords and perform combos against adversaries, but enemies don't go down easy. They often aggressively attack or perform unexpected moves.

That means players will have to rely on defensive measures such as a dodge, which is tied to the right trigger, and a block, which is mapped to the left trigger. Players can also parry when timed correctly. Enemies have tells about when players should dodge and parry: If the attack is yellow, it's safe to parry. If it's red, it's best to dodge.

In addition, players build up a resource called Athra. Once it's filled up, players can perform special techniques. The two I earned were a strong attack that deals heavy damage and another one that can create an explosion around Sargon but also can heal him within a certain field. I quickly learned that you should use meter liberally. There's no point to hoarding it, especially during a boss fight.

Lastly, the one weapon I acquired was Menolias' bow. He's an Immortal, and the bow turns into a chakram that can manipulate gear-requiring mechanisms in the game. The bow also allows for ranged attacks with limited arrows and is key to unlocking one of the first gates in the campaign.

Upgrading Sargon

Players initially have one potion to fill their limited health, but they can expand it through merchants. They can also extend the life bar by collecting four Soma Tree petals. The Soma Tree itself is a save point and health restoration spot in the game. Fast travel between the expansive map requires players to unlock Homa Statues.

Lastly, players have another element of customization: an amulet that allows them to add different charms that can boost their attack, add health or introduce other perks. These elements echo those of another newer series — *Ori: The Will of the Wisps*.

The difference between *Lost Crown*'s and Moon Studios' projects is that the combat seems more refined, complex and creative. Battling enemies feels more like it does in *Bayonetta*, where expert players can dispatch

enemies with alarming alacrity. They can block arrows, deal damage, dash away and return for an attack. Players can expertly parry fireballs and follow up with an extra attack.

The ability to read and react will serve players well, especially when it comes to boss fights, which will test players' skills. In many Metroidvania games, players feel like they plateau, said Clavet, the cinematic lead. But in this game, the challenges keep up with players all the way to the end.

"It's challenging but fair," he said. "If you lose, maybe you say my timing needs to be better." The journeys of Sargon and the player mirror each other. As players improve their skills, the protagonist also develops his powers. He doesn't start off as an exceptionally powerful warrior, compared to his peers.

Mind-bending puzzles

But just having quick-twitch reactions to challenging combat and platforming isn't enough. *The Lost Crown* will also test players' puzzle-solving abilities. I ran into a difficult one, in which I had to use the chakram to move pillars. The problem is with a single chakram, I could only move one gear at a time. It took a while to figure out what order to move objects in order to advance.

Clavet said there are more challenging mind-benders later in the game, and I assume that they will only get more difficult as the developers add more powers. One of the missing ones in the preview was the Shadow of Simurgh that lets players cast a marker, move and go back in time to the original spot, destroying enemies in between the two points. That was in the Ubisoft Forward demo, but I assume it would add to the complexity of the puzzles.

Ubisoft also got creative with the map and enemy design. One foe I ran across was a jailer. It's essentially an invincible enemy that has a sphere of detection and if you cross it, the foe will chase and try to catch you. If caught, players don't die. They're actually thrown in jail, and escaping becomes another challenge in and of itself.

On top of that, Mount Qaf is filled with secondary characters and other Immortals. The adventure doesn't feel like a lonely rescue campaign but a mystery with an ensemble of intriguing heroes. Players will even run into side quests (hey, it's a Ubisoft game after all), but these missions aren't distracting and actually go with the flow of exploration.

In my three hours, I felt I just scratched the surface of the narrative and the types of puzzles I would be seeing. When the game comes out on Jan. 18 on PC, PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X and Series S, and Luna, this new entry could mark the start of a new chapter for the longtime franchise, one that holds a lot of promise. Players will have a chance to check out a demo on Jan. 11.

MUSIC



MATIAS DELACROIX/AP

Mitski performs at the Primavera Sound festival in Sao Paulo on Nov. 5, 2022. The singer-songwriter is one of many leading indie acts adding country elements to their music.

A marriage of musical genres

For a new generation of indie rock acts, country music is king

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Singer-songwriter Mitski's "My Love Mine All Mine," plays out like a whispered dirge.

The song is gothic lounge music for a listener who only has about two minutes to have their heart broken — a silky soft slow burn stacked with a choir, organ, bass and, most critically, pedal steel guitar, the kind favored by country and western purists.

In no way does that description scream "mainstream hit," and yet, for 14 weeks, it has been on the Billboard Hot 100, an unusual metric of success for a wholly independent artist.

And for 10 weeks, her indie rock-meets-chamber pop-meets-country held the No. 1 position on Billboard's TikTok trending chart.

Mitski is not from the American South, though her discography has long considered small town U.S.A. and she relocated to Nashville a few years ago to mine the geography's humanity. ("Valentine, Texas" from last year's "Laurel Hell" album is an example, but there are many.)

She is, of course, not the first indie artist to explore weeping Americana sounds.

Many of the leading acts in contemporary indie rock pull from the South — like Mitski — or hail from there, like soloists



ALBERTO PEZZALI/AP

Angel Olsen performs at the All Points East festival in London on Aug. 25.

Angel Olsen and Waxahatchee, or groups like Plains, Wednesday and two-thirds of the Grammy-nominated band boygenius.

Lucinda Williams' "too country for rock 'n' roll, too rock 'n' roll for country" style is a clear predecessor; and every few generations, it seems like a great new

band pulls from alt-country's narrative specificity.

A world of country

Interestingly, indie rock's current adoption of country comes at a time of increased global interest in country music.

"I'm seeing this space as a kind of movement, rather than a trend. The sound will always have its peaks and valleys."

Carla Turi

Spotify's folk and acoustic music editor

According to the Midyear Music Report for data and analytics platform Luminate, country music experienced its biggest streaming week ever in 2023, a whopping 2.26 billion.

The genre has historically been enjoyed by English-speaking Americans, but their reporting shows growth in non-Anglophonic territories such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Mexico, Germany and Vietnam.

In March 2023, Spotify launched a new playlist dedicated to the phenomenon of

SEE GENRES ON PAGE 17

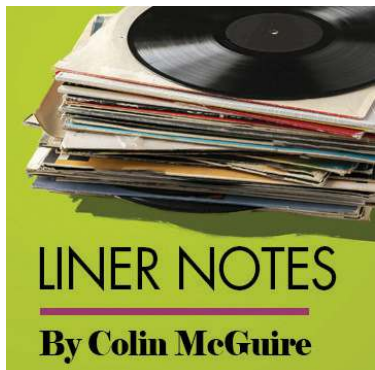
MUSIC

‘Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree’ is a No. 1 hit 65 years in the making

Billboard Hot 100 No. 1, Jan. 6, 2024: “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree,” Brenda Lee

Ubiquity in music is a powerful thing. Case in point: Brenda Lee topping Billboard’s Hot 100 in 2024 with a song that was written more than 65 years ago (and one, it should be noted, that she recorded when she was merely 13 years old). The resurgence also marked a brand new record in popular music — before “Rockin’” return, Lee’s most recent chart-topper came in 1960, meaning that the singer now holds the mark for longest-ever amount of time between two No. 1 hits at 63 years.

As for the song itself ... what’s left to say? If you watched any holiday movie at any point over the last month, chances are you heard it without it even regis-



tering. Her chipper, teenage delivery of a line like, “Voices singing let’s be jolly / Deck the halls with boughs of holly” is as synonymous with Christmas as cookies, lights and Santa Claus himself. On top of an upbeat rockabilly track that paved the way for a very specific type of Christmas song in a manner that

has never received the recognition it deserves, Lee sounds years beyond her actual age by not just leading the party, but ensuring it’ll continue beyond her performance.

It adds up to a timeless tune that will forever be at the center of the holiday music lexicon. There simply aren’t a lot of songs that could dethrone Mariah Carey’s “All I Want For Christmas Is You” from the Hot 100’s No. 1 spot around this time of year; Lee’s classic achieved the impossible (four weeks ago, for two weeks; it then dipped to No. 2 before retaking the top spot this week). That alone is reason enough to celebrate these two minutes and two seconds, no matter the age — and, of course, no matter the ubiquity.



AP PHOTO/Stars and Stripes illustration

Brenda Lee’s “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” topped the Billboard Hot 100 a record 63 years after her previous No. 1 hit.

Genres: New approaches to Southern sounds as present as ever

FROM PAGE 16

country influence in indie rock titled “Indie Twang.” It’s curated by Carla Turi, Spotify’s folk and acoustic music editor, who says the playlist was the result of conversations dating back to summer 2022, when they noticed growing “country influence in indie rock,” as she calls it. It’s a legacy that extends to the late 2010s when country iconography started cropping up in spaces not traditionally considered country: everything from Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” to Mitski’s 2018 album “Be the Cowboy.”

“I also think, through the lockdown we experienced in 2020, listeners sort of emerged craving more organic-sounding music as a way to connect with others,” she continued. The indie twang playlist was born out of all of that, amplified by successful indie artists like Ethel Cain and Plains.

“I’m seeing this space as a kind of movement, rather than a trend,” she adds. “The sound will always have its peaks and valleys. I do think that the fanbase, overall, continues to grow. I think that this sort of surge of Americana and singer-songwriter music here in the States has shifted listening habits across the entire country.”

Embracing traditions

In 2023, these indie artists offer an alternative to the pop-country acts dominating mainstream charts like Morgan Wallen, Luke Combs and Jason Aldean. The movement is led by female performers, for one, and artists who don’t immediately fit into a traditional genre format.



Jackie Lee Young

Jess Williamson, a solo artist and one half of the country-pop duo Plains, says she had to leave the South in order to return to it and fully appreciate her love for both it and country music.

They also offer an alternative to traditional images of indie rock: instead of shying away from their geographic identities — like moving to New York and smoothing out the “y’alls” and “ma’ams” from their speech and music — they’re embracing them. Banjos and lap steel abound. Songs about God, rural roads, trucks, guns, humidity and crickets do, too.

Like Turi, Jess Williamson of Plains sees the connection to country music from a more traditional indie rock audience as a post-COVID-19 lockdown revelation.

“We saw people leaving cities,



CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP

Lucinda Williams’ “too country for rock ’n’ roll, too rock ’n’ roll for country” style is a clear influence on the current crop of indie-rock musicians who are embracing country.

moving to smaller towns and out to the country. We saw people in cities baking bread, starting herb gardens, craving something simple, nostalgic, and that feels good,” she said.

“On tour, we covered ‘Goodbye Earl’ by the Chicks, everyone is singing along, and that’s the least cool s—I can imagine. People are through being cool and are embracing who we are and what we really like. And for a lot of people, that’s country music.”

She says she had to leave the

South in order to return to it and fully appreciate her love for both it and country music, the way “Texans leave and then immediately get a tattoo of the state of Texas,” she says, laughing.

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“I think affordability is a big factor for people trying to make it from their hometowns now instead of moving to big cities,” she says. “The internet makes that possible, obviously.”

It also means, for listeners on an Indie Twang playlist, or those at a rock club in a major city or a honky tonk in a small town, new approaches to familiar Southern sounds are more accessible than ever before.

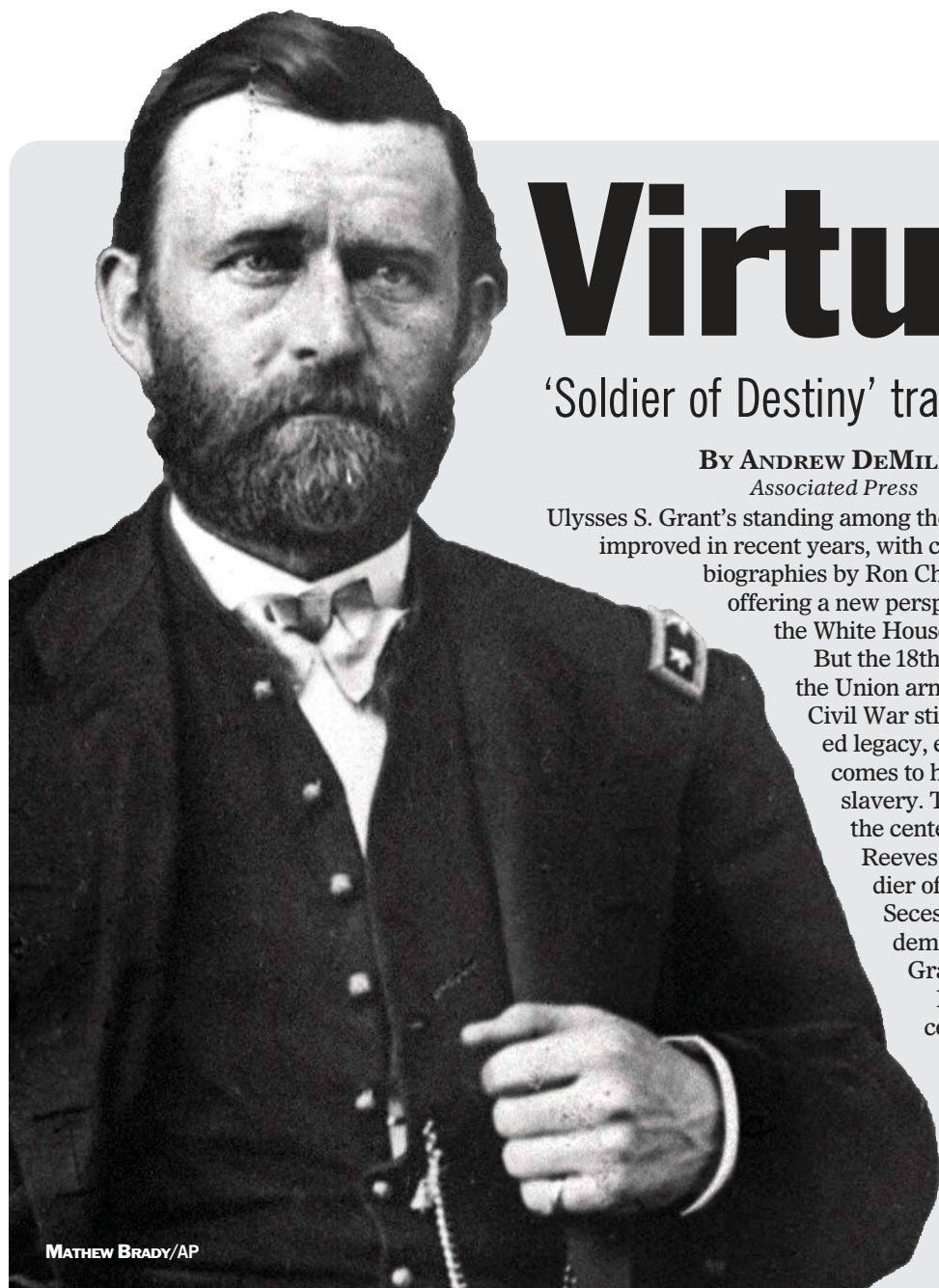
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Close to home

Karly Hartzman, frontperson of the Asheville band Wednesday, has never left North Carolina. “I think where we live is inseparable from our music at this point. Of course, we are influenced by country music, but country mu-

BOOKS



MATHEW BRADY/AP

Virtue and vice

‘Soldier of Destiny’ traces Grant’s complicated route before White House

By **ANDREW DEMILLO**
Associated Press

Ulysses S. Grant’s standing among the presidents has improved in recent years, with critically acclaimed biographies by Ron Chernow and others offering a new perspective on his time in the White House.

But the 18th president who led the Union armies to victory in the Civil War still leaves a complicated legacy, especially when it comes to his relationship to slavery. That relationship is the centerpiece of John Reeves’ enlightening “Soldier of Destiny: Slavery, Secession and the Redemption of Ulysses S. Grant.”

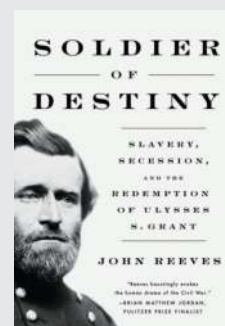
Reeves’ book isn’t a comprehensive biography, and it doesn’t cover Grant’s time in the White House. But it gives readers an enlightening look at how he benefited from slavery years

before he helped end the institution.

Reeves traces the evolution of Grant from someone who “actively participated in the slave culture of St. Louis” before the Civil War. Reeves is fair and blunt in depicting the role slavery played in Grant’s life as he tried to provide a “respectable middle-class lifestyle” for his family before the war.

“And this lifestyle, it must be remembered, was dependent on the ownership of human property,” Reeves writes. He also points out the ambivalence Grant displayed about slavery before the Civil War.

But he also examines the characteristics and skills that it took for Grant to go from an officer who was forced to resign from the Army to one of the most



revered military heroes in history. This includes a detailed look at the key battles he faced during the Civil War.

Reeves doesn’t shy from highlighting the stains upon Grant’s military legacy including the reports of drinking that dogged him throughout the years. He also devotes a chapter to the order Grant issued expelling Jewish people from a military district he oversaw, an effort that was intended to halt illegal cotton speculation and remains a “black mark on his character,” Reeves writes.

Reeves manages to stitch Grant’s flaws and virtues into a thought-provoking portrait of a key historical figure who never lost faith in himself or his country.

An antagonist applauds some corporate leaders

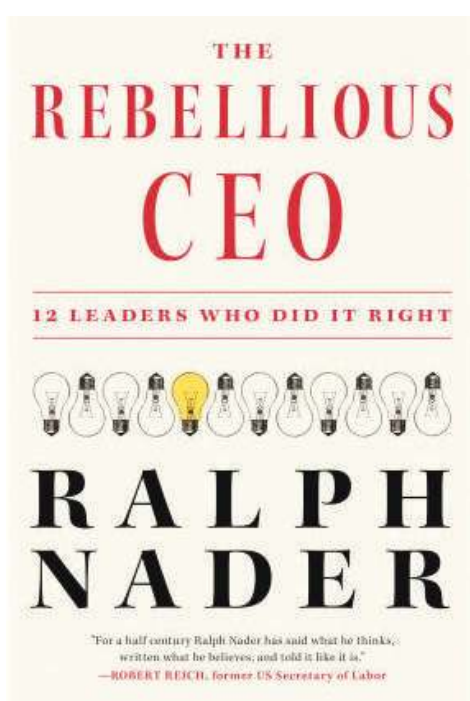
By **ANDREW DEMILLO**
Associated Press

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has built his reputation on his fights with corporate America. But it turns out there are some CEOs he actually likes.

At least that’s the premise of “The Rebellious CEO: 12 Leaders Who Did It Right,” Nader’s look at executives who he says “stood against the gray crowd” by putting a premium on social responsibility as much as they did on profits. The dozen leaders he profiles are presented as models for businesses on how to balance both those needs.

The brief biographies of the CEOs give Nader a chance to highlight what he sees as the shortcomings of today’s corporations. But, surprisingly, he commends the CEOs profiled for not forgetting the bottom line and notes that all of them insisted “nothing would be possible if they didn’t pay attention to profits.”

The chapters are sprinkled with Nader’s anecdotes from his interactions with the CEOs profiled, and leans on their own writings as well. The CEOs highlighted include Ray Anderson, the carpet-tile manufacturing executive who was spurred to set sustainability goals for his company, and Patagonia founder Yvon



Chouinard’s support for conservation efforts.

Nader also praises CEOs for their work at the consumer level, including Southwest Airlines — though also noting its cancellation of more than 16,000 flights last year over the holidays that eventually led to a multi-million-dollar settlement.

Nader strays into adulation at times, but the book offers an interesting perspective on business leadership from one of the most well known antagonists of corporations.

‘Loaded’ tells oral history of the Velvet Underground

By **MICHAEL HILL**
Associated Press

Before it became synonymous with downtown cool, the Velvet Underground played a multi-band bill at a suburban New Jersey high school in 1965. Parents and kids in the crowd were repelled by the “screeching urge of sound” from Lou Reed and his bandmates, a local reviewer wrote, and retreated in horror after their second song, “Heroin.”

The Velvet Underground soon found a more appreciative audience when artist Andy Warhol spotted the band and set it up at the Factory, his Manhattan studio-and-happening space. But wide success and fame eluded the Velvet Underground during its fractious run. Members became lionized as edgy musical ground-breakers later on — reversing the stereotypical rock band success story by breaking up and then conquering the world.

Veteran journalist and author Dylan Jones tells that unusual story in “Loaded: The Life (and Afterlife) of The Velvet Underground.” Or more precisely, Jones weaves together an oral history that relies on the voices of friends, Warhol “superstars,” fellow musicians and members of

the band. Jones interviewed a bunch of people who were in the orbit of Reed, John Cale and the other band members. The author also relies on past interviews from Reed and others who have died.

The staying power of the Velvet Underground stems from its songs, which could be beautiful, dissonant or hypnotic. But it also revolves around the band’s style, which has been widely copied by

rockers ever since. Band members wore sunglasses inside. They didn’t care what you thought. They could barely stand each other. “We hated everybody and everything,” Cale said.

This is largely a story about Reed, who was a restless artist, a canny songwriter and — quite often — a surly jerk. But some of the book’s most compelling pas-

sages describe Reed’s difficult and all-too-brief partnership with the equally intense Cale, a classically trained musician from Wales.

Good oral histories hit the right mix of insight, opinion and dish. And Jones mostly delivers. The off-the-wall stuff is in there too, like tales of Cale chopping the head off a chicken on stage and Reed slapping around David Bowie at a restaurant.



CROSSWORD AND COMICS

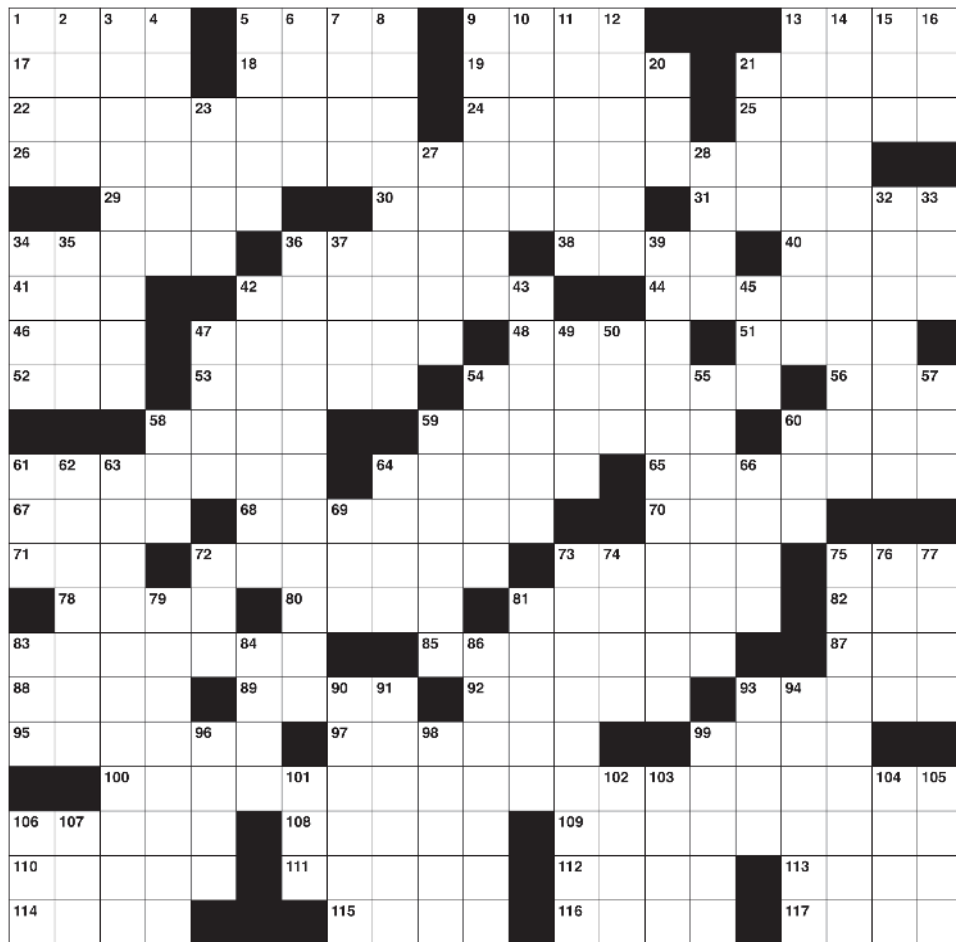
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

WRAP STARS

BY DREW SCHMENNER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Drew Schmenner, of Pacifica, Calif., is a technical writer and editor for an education nonprofit. He was formerly an investigative reporter for The Desert Sun newspaper in Palm Springs. This is Drew's fifth crossword for The Times and first Sunday. He and his wife have two daughters, ages 6 and 3, who were angels at their church's 2023 Christmas Eve pageant in San Francisco. — W. S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Using the bow, in music
- 5 Guesstimate
- 9 XXX
- 13 Private retreat, of a sort
- 17 Charged exclamation during a court trial
- 18 "La ___ de los Espiritus," debut novel for Isabel Allende
- 19 Littlest sucklings
- 21 Contents of a pot
- 22 Ancient landmark whose name translates to "high city"
- 24 Shadow
- 25 Reporter's coup
- 26 One who's not afraid to brag
- 29 Fermented honey concoction
- 30 Let
- 31 Bygone Seattle hoopsters
- 34 Sympathize with
- 36 Computer command
- 38 What you might get when you purchase Christmas ornaments on Dec. 26
- 40 Part of a sleigh
- 41 Contraction that's a homophone of 13-Across
- 42 Lover of Hero, in Greek myth
- 44 With significance
- 46 In the manner of
- 47 "Ithaca is ___" (punny slogan)
- 48 Actress Diana of "The Avengers"
- 51 Arthur Ashe Courage Award, for one
- 52 Number of lords a-leaping
- 53 Surprise birthday parties often involve them
- 54 Quantity of beer... or monkeys?
- 56 Max or X
- 58 Name of Lincoln's favorite dog
- 59 Branding need
- 60 ___ buco
- 61 End of autumn?
- 64 Highly prized collectibles, in lingo
- 65 Bad design feature for a Christmas stocking?
- 67 Fourth word in "Jingle Bells"
- 68 Hurt
- 70 Take a risk
- 71 "Illmatic" rapper
- 72 Skateboard tricks started by kicking with the back foot
- 73 Dry, as Italian wine
- 75 O'er and o'er
- 78 Bring on board
- 80 Actress Skye
- 81 Barks, perhaps
- 82 Mr. Potter vis-à-vis George Bailey, in "It's a Wonderful Life"
- 83 "King Lear" daughter
- 85 Fixes, as broken 93-Down
- 87 Scary sight at the beach
- 88 Olympic gymnast Korbut
- 89 Sign of approval
- 92 Kim's ex, in tabloids
- 93 Formal "you," in Spain
- 95 Muffle
- 97 Actress Wen of "The Mandalorian"
- 99 Dude, in modern slang
- 100 Workers seen in five squares in this puzzle?
- 106 Make ends meet
- 108 End of turn?
- 109 Binds tightly
- 110 Speedy Northeast train
- 111 Topples (over)
- 112 "___ Misbehavin'"
- 113 Relative of a cassowary
- 114 Midnight Mass leader
- 115 Hurdle for a prospective J.D.
- 116 Some cats, chameleons and chinchillas
- 117 Locale of the final scene in "Vertigo"
- DOWN**
- 1 "Regrettably..."
- 2 Like Ebenezer Scrooge
- 3 Sweet custardy concoction
- 4 Start of a well-known address in Verona
- 5 Dress down
- 6 "The Winter's ___"
- 7 Clearance-sale warning
- 8 Iconic features of "Under Pressure" and "Come Together"
- 9 What awaits a tragic hero
- 10 Bactrian pair
- 11 Hereditary
- 12 Walked assuredly
- 13 Brings to a boil
- 14 Colorful background
- 15 Uncle ___ ("Seinfeld" character)
- 16 Madrid's home, in the Olympics
- 20 Uncle ___
- 21 Regarding
- 23 Tree in "The Twelve Days of Christmas"
- 27 Dispatches
- 28 Capital just below the 60th parallel
- 32 Musical style associated with Harry Belafonte
- 33 What a filthy mess!
- 34 Order
- 35 Magazine based in Paris
- 36 Record kept on an employee
- 37 What transforms Bruce Banner into the Hulk
- 39 Spongy dessert
- 42 Article of clothing that might be decorated with candy canes
- 43 Full of sex or profanity, maybe
- 45 Business-card no.
- 47 Beam
- 49 Goddess of the rainbow
- 50 [I've had enough!]
- 54 Puts to sleep, say
- 55 Analyzes, as a metaphor
- 57 "The Bells" poet
- 58 Two or three
- 59 Big name in book publishing since 1817
- 60 "God bless us, every ___!"
- 61 1040 fig.
- 62 Down, at the casino
- 63 No longer at the top of one's game
- 64 Destruction
- 66 Aphrodite's frequent companion
- 69 "Hustlers" star, familiarly
- 72 She/___
- 73 Fictional band fronted by David St. Hubbins
- 74 Start of a playground rhyme
- 75 Not custom, as merchandise
- 76 ___ gras
- 77 Incline
- 79 Breezy, as a book
- 81 Incline
- 83 Word added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954
- 84 "___ everyone?"
- 86 Heart diagnostic, in brief
- 90 Heineken brand
- 91 Floral symbols of purity
- 93 See 85-Across
- 94 First-class
- 96 Mononymous Irish singer
- 98 Wafer brand
- 99 Tops
- 101 Pose
- 102 Member of a wet quintet
- 103 Word with witch or treasure
- 104 Repentant sort
- 105 Neuter
- 106 Hiatus
- 107 Prefix with friendly



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GUNSTON STREET



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FACES

Q&A

Summoned back to 'Night Court'

Actress Marsha Warfield returns as bailiff Roz Russell to sitcom that has 'big heart'

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Fans of the rebooted hit NBC sitcom "Night Court" might have been forgiven for tuning in all season long and asking, "Where's Roz?"

Roz Russell — played by comedian Marsha Warfield — was the salty, no-nonsense bailiff alongside Bull Shannon who had a world-weary view of the shenanigans in the courtroom during the show's original run from 1984 to 1992.

But Roz wasn't in the reboot that aired at the top of 2023. John Larroquette as prosecutor Dan Fielding was the only full-time cast member to return.

So fans were excited when Roz popped up in the season one finale, surprising Fielding as a defendant. "Roz?!" he exclaimed in disbelief. Seconds later, the screen went dark.

The reboot has been spearheaded by Melissa Rauch, a former star of "The Big Bang Theory" who is the new night court judge and the sunshine to Larroquette's gloom.

The revival earned the highest ratings for a comedy series on the

network since 2017. Season two begins Jan. 10 on AFN-Pulse, and Warfield's Roz has a lot of explaining to do.

She talked to The Associated Press about why the show became so popular and what it felt like to be back on the set.

AP: Was it hard to keep your appearance a surprise?

Warfield: Yes and no, but not really. I'm pretty good at keeping secrets, and especially when your job depends on it. I can pretty much handle that.

Were you OK not being a full-time part of the reboot?

I knew when they were talking about a reboot, in the way they were talking about it, being involved was not necessarily going to happen. That was OK. I wished them all the best from day one. You know, if they asked, I'd be happy to do it. But if they don't ask, I understand. So it was a pleasant surprise to get the call.

Did you expect to be on the original show so long?

I was only signed for one show and they were saying they didn't know what they were going to do with the role since the last two bailiffs had passed on. They didn't know if they were going to have re-



NBC/AP

John Larroquette as Dan Fielding, left, and Marsha Warfield as Roz in a scene from the "Night Court" episode titled "The Roz Affair." Warfield says that everyone involved in the reboot loves doing the show.

volving bailiffs or no bailiff or would just leave it to Bull or what. So when I got the gig, it was just the one and I had no expectations.

A steady gig must have been sweet.

An ensemble part on a Top 10 show? It was wonderful for me.

Why do you think the original struck such a nerve?

"Night Court" had a big heart. It was wacky. It was zany. It was misogynist. It was awkward. It was all of that. It was burlesque. But underneath it all was the heart of a puppy.

Does that apply to the reboot, too?

Yes, Melissa brings that same

kind of heart to this project. This is a love thing. This is not just, "Oh, we can make money doing this." She loves this show. The people involved love the show and they love doing it. We did, too.

What was it like stepping back on the set?

It was like going back to your prom when you're in your 70s.

Is Roz the role you're most associated with?

Pretty much, yeah, sure. I've done other things that have fortunately had positive responses and all that, but I did "Night Court" for six seasons and so a lot more people saw that and a lot of them now have fond memories. They also

have memories not so much for themselves, but they have memories of being with their family. They're like, "I used to sneak and watch with my brother" or "My dad used to let me stay up and watch it." So it's the memories that they have of their families and the times they spent with people they cared about.

Might you come back again?

If it's up to me, yeah, I'm back next week. But it ain't up to me. So if they call me, I'd be more than happy to. If they don't, again, I wish them all the best. I have no expectations, but I have tremendous affection for the show and I would be honored.

Rage Against the Machine drummer says band doesn't plan to ever play live again

Rage Against the Machine drummer Brad Wilk dashed the hopes of all of the fans who were optimistic the band would make its long-awaited return to the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in 2024.

"I know a lot of people are waiting for us to announce new tour dates for all the canceled RATM shows," he wrote on Instagram on Wednesday. "I don't want to string people or myself along any further. So while there has been some communication that this may be happening in the future ... I want to let you know that RATM (Tim, Zack, Tom and I) will not be touring or playing live again. I'm sorry for those of you who have been waiting for this to happen. I really wish it was ..."

After postponing a couple of times due to the pandemic and then touring conflicts, the band did hit the road for a short stint in 2022, but vocalist Zack de la Rocha suffered a leg injury during a stop in Chicago that ended up sidelining the remainder of the tour.

The Los Angeles-based rock band, consisting of de la Rocha, Wilk, guitarist Tom Morello and bassist Tim Commerford, formed in 1991 and were just inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2023.

After releasing successful albums including its



TNS

Tim Commerford, left, and Zack de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine perform July 11, 2022, in Chicago. Drummer Brad Wilk posted on Instagram on Wednesday that the band "will not be touring or playing live again."

self-titled album in 1992, 1996's "Evil Empire," 1999's "The Battle of Los Angeles" and its final studio album, "Renegades," in 2000, the group disbanded. The band reunited in 2007 and headlined the final day of Coachella. They took extended breaks in the years that followed.

The Orange County Register

Selena Gomez hints at ending music career to focus on acting

New York Daily News

Actor and singer Selena Gomez told the hosts of the "Smartless" podcast that she wants to focus on her acting career and hinted at concluding her music career with a final album.

"I do feel like I have one more album in me," she told hosts Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes and Will Arnett.

Gomez shared that, since a young age, she wanted to be a "serious actress" and added that "the older I get, the more I'm kind of like, I would like to find something to just settle on."

Gomez also spoke openly about the toll that juggling acting and music careers has had on her mental health — struggles that she talked about in the 2022 docuseries "Selena Gomez: My Mind & Me."

Gomez began making music in

the late 2000s, when Disney approached her to create an album during her time on the Disney Channel sitcom "Wizards of Waverly Place."

"I thought it would be fun and I thought more than anything it would be a hobby that I really enjoyed," she said of the career pivot. "I wanted

to be an actress. I never really intended on being a singer full-time, but apparently that hobby turned into something else."

Since 2013, Gomez has released three studio albums and earned two Grammy nominations.

She's also received two Emmy nominations as an executive producer for her Hulu series "Only Murders in the Building."



Gomez

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Border crossing set to reopen after influx

AZ LUKEVILLE — A border crossing on the most direct route from Phoenix to the nearest beaches is set to reopen, authorities said, one month after it closed in response to a large migrant influx.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said it was also reopening a pedestrian border crossing in San Diego and resuming full operations at a bridge in Eagle Pass, Texas, and a crossing in Nogales, Ariz.

The moves reflect a drop in illegal crossings from December highs, authorities said. Troy Miller, acting CBP commissioner, said last month that crossings had reached “unprecedented” heights, topping 10,000 on several days.

The Lukeville closure on Dec. 4 brought heavy pressure on CBP from Arizona’s top elected officials. While remote, it is used to travel to Puerto Peñasco, or Rocky Point, a resort area on Mexico’s Sea of Cortez.

Lukeville and other crossings closed because CBP said it needed to reassign officials to processing migrants.

City bans souvenir sellers from Brooklyn Bridge

NY NEW YORK — Visitors to New York City hoping to take home a souvenir from the Brooklyn Bridge will now have to settle for a photograph, as vendors are now banned from the iconic span.

The new rule aims to ease overcrowding on the bridge’s heavily trafficked pedestrian walkway, where dozens of trinket sellers currently compete for space with tourists and city commuters.

As crowds flocked to the bridge over the holiday season, the situation turned dangerous, according to New York City Mayor Eric Adams. He pointed to videos that showed pedestrians leaping from the elevated walkway onto a bike lane several feet below in order to bypass a human traffic jam.

The new rules apply to all of the city’s bridges — though none have close to as many vendors as the 140-year-old Brooklyn Bridge, which is often lined with tables offering phone cases, knock-off Yankees caps, novelty license plates and more.

Those who sell items on the bridge acknowledge that vendors have proliferated in recent years. In the middle span of the bridge, entrepreneurs have now set up nearly a dozen rotating selfie platforms where tourists can pay to take panoramic photos.

Licenses of 2 pot grow operations revoked

NM ALBUQUERQUE — New Mexico marijuana regulators on Tuesday revoked the licenses of two growing operations in a rural county for numerous violations and have levied a \$1



CORY MORSE, THE GRAND RAPIDS (MICH.) PRESS/AP

A fine line

Girls from Boy Scout Troop 345G are pictured through holiday lights as they skate at Rosa Parks Circle ice rink, in Grand Rapids, Mich.

million fine against each business.

One of the businesses — Native American Agricultural Development Co. — is connected to a Navajo businessman whose cannabis farming operations in northwestern New Mexico were raided by federal authorities in 2020. The Navajo Department of Justice also sued Dineh Benally, leading to a court order halting those operations.

A group of Chinese immigrant workers sued Benally and his associates — and claimed they were lured to northern New Mexico and forced to work long hours illegally trimming marijuana on the Navajo Nation, where growing the plant is illegal.

In the notice made public Tuesday by New Mexico’s Cannabis Control Division, Native American Agricultural Development was accused of exceeding the state’s plant count limits, of not tracking and tracing its inventory, and for creating unsafe conditions.

The other business to have its license revoked was Bliss Farm. The state ordered both to immediately stop all commercial cannabis activity.

Passerby directs police to remote site of car crash

IN GARY — A woman who was trapped in a car that crashed early on New Year’s Day was rescued after a passerby directed officers to the crash scene along a little-used northwest Indiana road, police said.

Police and emergency responders spent two hours searching unsuccessfully for the car after a woman called 911 about 3:40 a.m. Monday and said she and another woman were trapped in a car that had flipped over in Gary, police said.

One of the women eventually got out of the wrecked car, which was upside down, and flagged down a passerby who directed officers to the crash, the Lake County Sheriff’s Department said.

Greg Zellers, who’s a mechanic, said he was on his way to work about 6:30 a.m. when the woman flagged him down and walked him to where the car had crashed about 50 yards from the roadway.

He told WLS-TV the car’s headlights and tail lights weren’t visible and there is little traffic on the road in the Buffington Harbor area. Zellers directed first responders and two officers to the crashed car.

The woman trapped in the car was airlifted to a hospital.

Carbon monoxide sickens 22 parishioners at church

UT MONROE — Twenty-two people were hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning over the weekend at a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints church in central Utah, authorities said Monday.

Emergency personnel initially responded to two medical calls on Sunday at the church in Monroe, the Sevier County Sheriff’s Office said.

The calls involved a 4-year-old girl with breathing problems and a man who was feeling sick.

After a third call, the Monroe City Fire Department checked the building and found elevated levels of carbon monoxide, prompting the church to be evacuated.

More people reported being ill later in the evening and police said in all 22 individuals were taken to hospitals with hyperbaric chambers.

The source of the carbon monoxide poisoning had not been determined.

Ex-celebrity lawyer found competent to stand trial

CA LOS ANGELES — Disgraced Los Angeles celebrity lawyer Tom Girardi has been found competent to stand trial on charges that he stole more than \$15 million from his clients.

A federal judge filed a notice of the brief order Tuesday under seal. Lawyers for both sides were given five days to identify any information in it that they would like the judge to keep confidential.

Girardi, 84, is the estranged husband of “The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills” star Erika Jayne.

Girardi pleaded not guilty in Los Angeles last year to wire fraud on charges that he embezzled from clients, including a Los Angeles couple injured in a car wreck that paralyzed their son.

At the competency hearing, his lawyers argued that he was unable to take part in the trial because he

has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. He currently is staying in the memory care unit of a nursing home.

As one of the nation’s most prominent plaintiff’s attorneys, Girardi took on powerful corporations, movie studios and Pacific Gas & Electric Co. in a case that led to a \$333 million settlement, which was portrayed in the 2000 Julia Roberts film “Erin Brockovich.”

Police: Officer killed after witnessing a crime

NC GREENSBORO — An off-duty police officer was shot and killed in North Carolina after witnessing a crime at a gas station and approaching the two suspects, officials said.

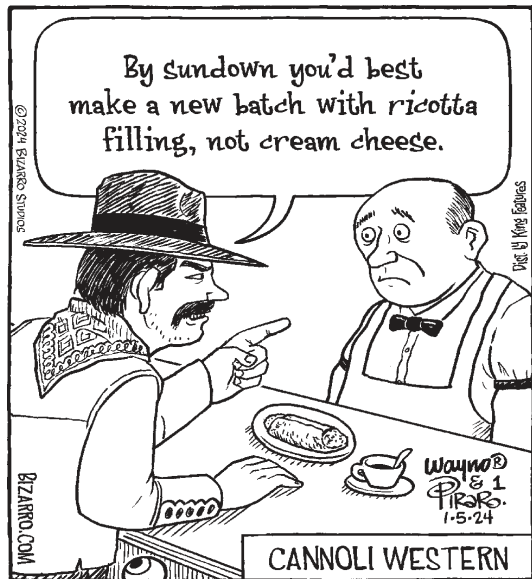
The police sergeant, Philip Dale Nix, was a 23-year veteran of the Greensboro Police Department, according to a Sunday news release from the agency.

Three men have been arrested in the case, according to police.

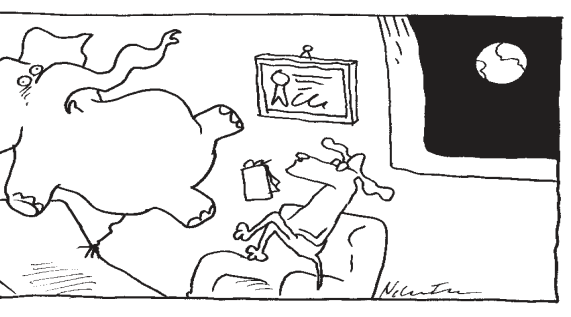
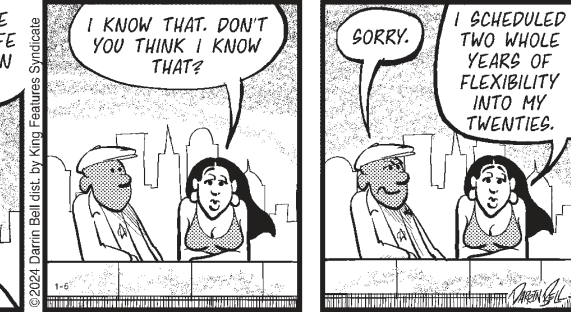
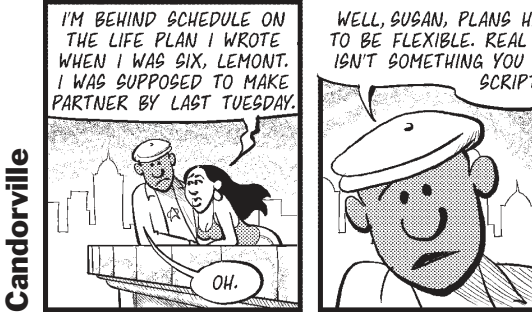
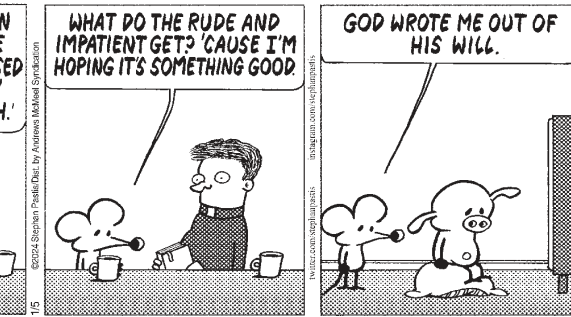
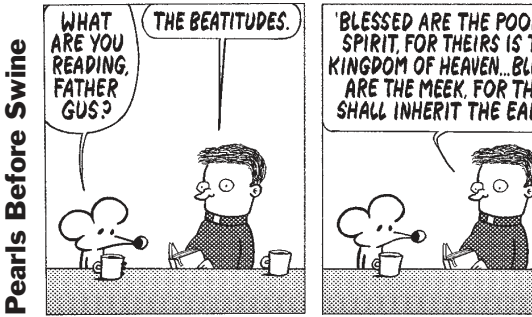
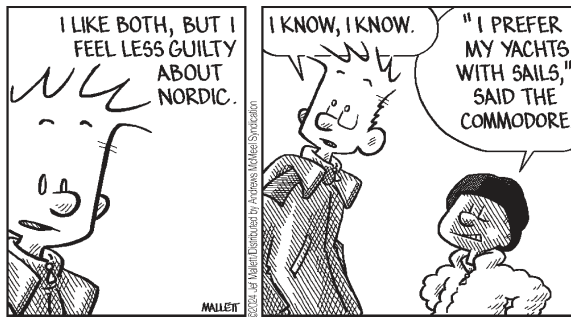
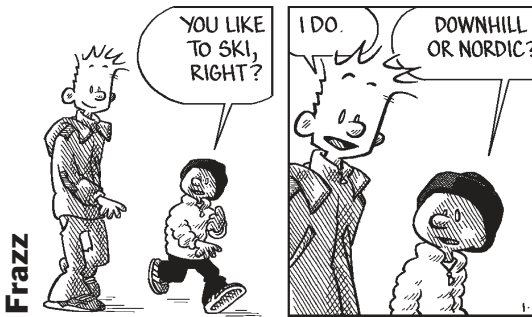
During a news conference Saturday night, Greensboro Police Chief John Thompson didn’t specify what crime Nix witnessed or provide additional details about the events leading up to the shooting.

Thompson said another off-duty Greensboro officer and a paramedic were on the scene when Nix was shot and immediately rendered aid. Nix was pronounced dead at a local medical facility.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16				17				
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28				29	30			
31	32	33						34				
35					36			37				
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
					45				46		47	
48	49	50	51								52	
53						54					55	
56						57					58	

ACROSS

- 1 Fella
- 4 Cowboys' org.
- 7 Spanish resort isle
- 12 Literary collection
- 13 Flamenco cheer
- 14 Got along
- 15 Glacial
- 16 Beyond control
- 18 Eastern "way"
- 19 Poker pot
- 20 Whirled
- 22 "Spring ahead" hrs.
- 23 Periodontist's concern
- 27 Online chats, briefly
- 29 Puccini works
- 31 Supreme Court Justice Kagan
- 34 City in Provence
- 35 Blockage
- 37 "Tasty!"
- 38 Long tale
- 39 Past
- 41 Con job
- 45 Actress De La Garza
- 47 Hearty quaff
- 48 Inappropriately
- 52 Actress Vardalos
- 53 Stage comment
- 54 Parking place
- 55 Sawbuck
- 56 Get more magazines

DOWN

- 1 Entices
- 2 Open a toothpaste tube
- 3 Marshy inlet
- 4 Cranny
- 5 Hydration needs
- 6 Playwright/actor Tracy
- 7 Dubious
- 8 "Humbug!"
- 9 Nest egg letters
- 10 Buddhist sect
- 11 Toss in
- 17 "Beetle Bailey" pooch
- 21 Martial arts mercenary
- 23 Bacteria
- 24 Web address

- 25 West of Hollywood
- 26 Sound from a hot wok
- 28 Goat's plaint
- 30 "The Office" character
- 31 Overhead trains
- 32 Mauna —
- 33 Nest occupier
- 36 Beer ingredient
- 37 Fifth president
- 40 French people of ancient times
- 42 Poem division
- 43 UFO pilot
- 44 Stands for
- 45 Not many
- 46 Pot starter
- 48 Rowing need
- 49 Exploit
- 50 Can material
- 51 Keats creation

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1-5

CRYPTOQUIP

LVTP OJIVP CDA JOTIJYU JR
 UKUHC NVJHDMHTNPDH'R
 STKDHJPU IUYHU DS OARJN?
 VJM MDM.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: COMMEMORATIVE IRANIAN COIN RELEASED FOR A HUNDRED-YEAR ANNIVERSARY: THE RIAL OF THE CENTURY.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals G

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbered squares from 1 to 53.

ACROSS

- 1 Cotillion celeb
4 Greek vowels
8 — of honor
12 Promising words?
13 For fear that
14 "Mamma Mia" group
15 Political strategist
16 Region
17 Authentic
18 "Lonesome Dove" author
21 USN rank
22 Snoop
23 A year in Paris
26 Golfer Hogan
27 — Alamos
30 Julia of film
31 Wee bit
32 High point
33 USSR spy org.
34 Springy dance
35 Grocery section
36 Lobbying gp.
37 — Lingus
38 Russian chess grandmaster
45 Director Kazan
46 Jazzy Fitzgerald
47 Seek restitution
48 Molecule part
49 Rip
50 TiVo precursor

- 51 Breaks down
52 Faxed
53 Saigon soup

- 20 Samovar
23 Noah's craft
24 Pester
25 Central point
26 Satchel
27 Maui souvenir
28 Rowing need
29 Blue hue
31 Box office buys
32 Law firm aide, for short
34 Comic Leno
35 Leave
36 Baby carriages
37 "Narnia" lion
38 Paraphernalia
39 Sax range
40 Funny person
41 Sheltered
42 Invitation notation
43 Smart remark?
44 — Beach, Fla.

DOWN

- 1 Use a rotary phone
2 — St. Vincent Millay
3 Wild hog
4 Booster of comedy
5 Semesters
6 In — (shortly)
7 Part of SASE
8 Tie the knot
9 Help a crook
10 Construction piece
11 Tony-winning Tyne
19 Stagger

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for previous puzzle with words like BUB, ANA, ICY, TAO, SPUN, ELENA, SAGA, OUTOFTURN, ASIDE, RENEW.

1-6

CRYPTOQUIP

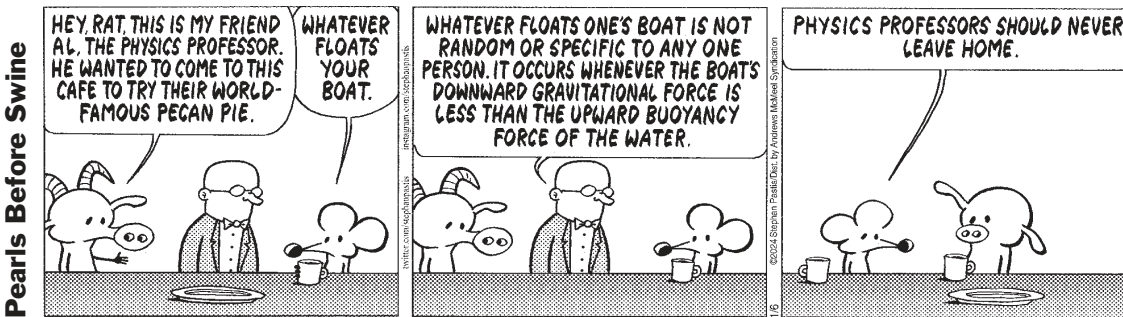
UGSH BGZWWLHT, L URB
SMWSIFLHT FZ DVC BLM IZOS
DZFFESB, DVF L LHRYJSNFSHFEC
WLIOSY BSJSH VW.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT YOU IMAGINE IS EVERY CHIROPRACTOR'S FAVORITE GENRE OF MUSIC? HIP POP.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals P



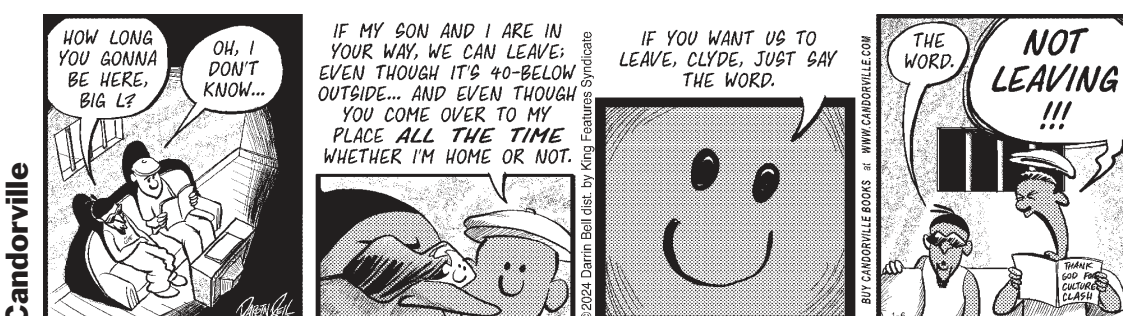
Frazz



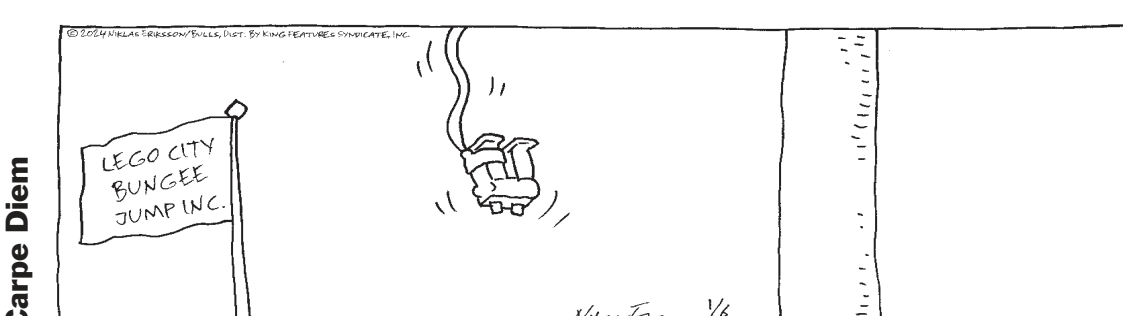
Pearls Before Swine



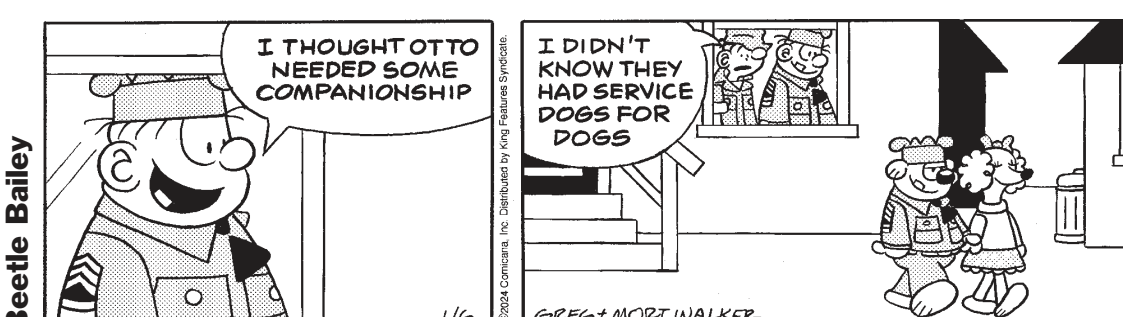
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

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OPINION

In defense of the right to remain silent

BY NANCY GIBBS

Special to The Washington Post

Who, besides suspected criminals, has the right to remain silent? No one, apparently, as leaders of universities, corporations and nonprofits are expected to stake out positions on all sorts of topics. As they enter a noisy year of political combat, campus protests, Facebook feuds and flaccid expressions of corporate social responsibility, it's more like a fight to remain silent, which no one ever wins.

But those who cherish free speech should likewise defend its muted twin. Protecting the right to free expression requires respecting silence as a legitimate response, not an act of cowardice or collusion, not a sign of indifference or neutrality. Coerced speech degrades both individual dignity and the norms most important for intelligent public debate. When someone demands that you make a statement, and you demur, as sure as night follows day, they will claim the power to impute opinions to you. Silence, Plato said, gives consent. If you refuse to take a stand, someone will foist one on you.

But there are many reasons we might choose not to share an opinion on every topic, or any topic for that matter. For one thing, demands for moral clarity can crowd out complexity. The first sentence is easy, but what's the second? The 10th? Our 280-character attention spans constrict the space to hold competing thoughts: that climate change is a true threat, and some of the responses are ridiculous; that Israel, savagely attacked, has a

right to self-defense, and that right is not unlimited; that the United States owes its success to its embrace of immigrants, and a country needs to be able to secure its borders. Opportunists and propagandists sketch a cartoon world in black and white. How can we make room for the revelations that linger in the watery gray spaces?

And then there's the banality of certainty. Crafting a statement that rings of moral urgency but offends no one often means reducing the moment to the obvious. Pursue peace. Seek justice. Play fair. Recycle. "Just Do It." Do what, exactly? To be unobjectionable is to be uninteresting.

History belongs to the bold, but statements drafted by consultants, reviewed by committees and drained of actual passion reek of stolen valor. By definition, expressions of true moral leadership are risky and radical, rather than reactive or machined to within an inch of their lives. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" defies our selfish nature. "All men are created equal" was a literally revolutionary concept. When institutions, whether universities or businesses, craft a statement in response to public pressure, they juggle priorities like chain saws, gauging how different constituencies will react, and if we have learned nothing else these past months, we should at least have figured out that no one will be satisfied, much less inspired.

It's no surprise that universities have rediscovered the virtues of the Kalven principles, conceived in 1967 by the University of Chicago in response to the issues of that era. Harry Kalven, an expert in the First Amend-

ment, chaired the faculty committee that argued that a university's mission was to seek and share knowledge. "There is no mechanism by which it can reach a collective position without inhibiting that full freedom of dissent on which it thrives," the committee wrote, and so argued for institutional neutrality. Let 1,000 arguments bloom; the university is the garden, not the gardener.

This is not an abdication of responsibility; it's an embrace of it. When institutions stay silent, individuals are freer to speak their minds, or not, as they choose, without calculating the professional cost. Making maximum space for people to collect evidence, explore ideas, weigh options, test assumptions — all are time-tested means of advancing knowledge and defying demagogues. And for those intent on persuasion, on building movements for one cause or another, the brute muscle of the mob more likely yields conformity than conversion.

Yes, sometimes silence is wrong. By the same token, it's long past time to defend the right to remain silent, not only to avoid incrimination, but because we will be smarter individually and collectively if we express ideas when we're ready, share opinions once they are ripe, and allow for our instincts and impressions to deepen into insights before we inflict them on one another.

Or, as the Quakers say, don't speak unless you can improve on the silence.

Nancy Gibbs is director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University and a former editor of Time.

An 'authoritarian' is already in the White House

BY GEORGE F. WILL

The Washington Post

Overcaffeinated Cassandras continue to forecast an "authoritarian" and anti-constitutional Donald Trump dictatorship. They are mistaken about the near future because, among other reasons, they misread the recent past. Also, they are oblivious to, or at least reticent about, the behavior of Trump's successor: Joe Biden is, like Trump, an authoritarian recidivist mostly stymied by courts.

When Trump wielded presidential power, he could not even build his border wall. But next time, the fevered forecasters warn, the entire federal apparatus, which mostly loathes him, will suddenly be submissive. Such alarmism, which evidently gives some people pleasurable frissons, distracts attention from the similarity of Trump's and Biden's disdain for legality. Instances of Trump's anti-constitutional behavior have been amply reported and deplored. Biden's, less so — although they (e.g., the eviction moratorium, the vaccine mandate, the cancellation of student debt), and judicial reprimands of them, have been frequent. Now, consider the lack of attention to his contempt for the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, and the Senate majority's supine complicity.

The president has plenary power to nominate principal officers of the federal government without seeking prior advice from the Senate. The Senate has plenary power to confirm — or reject — nominees, and it can somewhat condition the president's power by stipulating certain qualifications for particular offices.

Biden nominated Ann Carlson last March to be administrator of the National Highway

Traffic Safety Administration. Two months later, when it was clear that the Senate would not confirm her, Biden withdrew the nomination. But less than five weeks after that, he named Carlson acting administrator. His impertinence would perhaps be limited, by the Vacancies Act, to 210 days, which would expire Dec. 26. Furthermore, the Supreme Court has held that the act prohibits "any person who has been nominated to fill any vacant office from performing that office's duties in an acting capacity."

Biden, whose indifference to these legalities is Trumpian, is also unimpressed by several other provisions of the act that redundantly disqualify Carlson. In a masterpiece of understatement, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, says, "It would be odd indeed for the law to prohibit someone to serve as acting while nomination is pending but to allow them to serve as acting after their nomination was pulled."

In September, Cruz proposed an amendment to an appropriations bill that would have defunded Carlson by prohibiting anyone who was nominated and failed to get Senate approval for a position from being paid to act in that position. The Senate rejected the amendment 49-47, with one Democrat supporting it.

In Federalist 51, James Madison predicted that liberty would be protected because the separation of powers would give "to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachment of the others." Unfortunately, Madison's expectation that one branch's ambition would "counteract" the other presumed that, for example, the Senate's pride would make it jealous of its prerogatives in providing advice and consent — or withholding consent — concerning people

nominated to executive branch positions.

The Constitution's Madisonian architecture — the federal government's constitutional equilibrium — has been jeopardized by political tribalism. By party loyalty that breeds subservience to the president, and disloyalty to the Senate as an institution.

Such behavior is not new. Presidents acting as though their preferences supersede provisions of law predates Biden's and Trump's constitutional vandalisms. For example, in 1997 President Bill Clinton said, "I have done my best to work with the United States Senate in an entirely constitutional way. But ..." But. Because the Senate would not confirm his nominee to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, Clinton made — entirely unconstitutionally — Bill Lann Lee "acting" assistant attorney general in perpetuity. The Senate acquiesced in this erasure of a power central to the system of checks and balances.

Justice Joseph Story, who served on the Supreme Court from 1812 to 1845, said that "no serious abuse of the power can take place without the co-operation of two co-ordinate branches, of the government." Today, a Democratic executive and a Democratic-controlled Senate have cooperated in abusing power while histrionically warning against future authoritarian illegalities.

Perhaps because of the ruckus that Cruz raised calling attention to Carlson, and in spite of Senate Democrats defeating his proposal to defund her, she surrendered her office on Dec. 26. Contentment about this small victory for constitutional propriety should, however, be tempered by chagrin that such propriety, and legality (reread the Supreme Court's words in paragraph five, above), have become contested concepts.

SCOREBOARD/MLB

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Bowl schedule
Monday, Dec. 18
Famous Toastery Bowl
 Charlotte, N.C.
 W. Kentucky 38, Old Dominion 35, OT
Tuesday, Dec. 19
Frisco Bowl
 Frisco, Texas
 UTSA 35, Marshall 17
Thursday, Dec. 21
Boca Raton Bowl
 Boca Raton, Fla.
 USF 45, Syracuse 0
Friday, Dec. 22
Gasparilla Bowl
 Tampa, Fla.
 Georgia Tech 30, UCF 17
Saturday, Dec. 23
Camellia Bowl
 Montgomery, Ala.
 N. Illinois 21, Arkansas St. 19
Birmingham Bowl
 Birmingham, Ala.
 Duke 17, Troy 10
Armed Forces Bowl
 Fort Worth, Texas
 Air Force 31, No. 24 James Madison 21
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
 Boise, Idaho
 Georgia St. 45, Utah St. 22
68 Ventures Bowl
 Mobile, Ala.
 South Alabama 59, Eastern Michigan 10
Las Vegas Bowl
 Las Vegas
 Northwestern 14, Utah 7
Hawaii Bowl
 Honolulu, Hawaii
 Coastal Carolina 24, San Jose St. 14
Tuesday, Dec. 26
Quick Lane Bowl
 Detroit
 Minnesota 30, Bowling Green 24
First Responder Bowl
 Dallas
 Texas St. 45, Rice 21
Guaranteed Rate Bowl
 Phoenix
 Kansas 49, UNLV 36
Wednesday, Dec. 27
Military Bowl Presented
 Annapolis, Md.
 Virginia Tech 41, No. 23 Tulane 20
Duke's Mayo Bowl
 Charlotte, N.C.
 West Virginia 30, North Carolina 10
Holiday Bowl
 San Diego, Calif.
 Southern Cal 42, No. 16 Louisville 28
Texas Bowl
 Houston
 No. 22 Oklahoma St. 31, Texas A&M 23
Thursday, Dec. 28
Fenway Bowl
 Boston
 Boston College 23, No. 17 SMU 14
Pin Stripe Bowl
 New York
 Rutgers 31, Miami 24
Pop-Tarts Bowl
 Orlando, Fla.
 Kansas St. 28, No. 19 NC State 19
Alamo Bowl
 San Antonio, Texas
 No. 14 Arizona 38, No. 12 Oklahoma 24
Friday, Dec. 29
Gator Bowl
 Jacksonville, Fla.
 Clemson 38, Kentucky 35
Sun Bowl
 El Paso, Texas
 No. 15 Notre Dame 40, No. 21 Oregon St. 8
Liberty Bowl
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Memphis 36, Iowa St. 26
Cotton Bowl
 Arlington, Texas
 No. 9 Missouri 14, No. 7 Ohio St. 3
Saturday, Dec. 30
Peach Bowl
 Atlanta
 No. 11 Mississippi 38, No. 10 Penn St. 25
Music City Bowl
 Nashville, Tenn.
 Maryland 31, Auburn 13
Orange Bowl
 Miami
 No. 6 Georgia 63, No. 4 Florida St. 3
Arizona Bowl
 Tucson, Ariz.
 Wyoming 16, Toledo 15
Monday, Jan. 1
ReliaQuest Bowl
 Tampa, Fla.
 No. 13 LSU 35, Wisconsin 31
Citrus Bowl
 Orlando, Fla.
 No. 25 Tennessee 35, No. 20 Iowa 0
Fiesta Bowl
 Glendale, Ariz.
 No. 8 Oregon 45, No. 18 Liberty 6
Rose Bowl
College Football Playoff Semifinal
 Pasadena, Calif.
 No. 1 Michigan 27, No. 5 Alabama 20, OT
Allstate Sugar Bowl
College Football Playoff Semifinal
 New Orleans
 No. 2 Washington 37, No. 3 Texas 31
Monday, Jan. 8
CFP National Championship
 Houston
 No. 1 Michigan vs. No. 2 Washington

FCS playoffs
Semifinals
Friday, Dec. 15
 South Dakota St. 59, UAlbany 0
Saturday, Dec. 16
 Montana 31, North Dakota St. 29, 2OT
Championship
Saturday, Jan. 7
 South Dakota St. vs. Montana

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Miami	11	5	0	.688	482	370
Buffalo	10	6	0	.625	430	297
e-N.Y. Jets	6	10	0	.375	251	352
e-New England	4	12	0	.250	233	349

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	9	7	0	.563	354	334
Indianapolis	9	7	0	.563	377	392
Jacksonville	9	7	0	.563	357	343
e-Tennessee	5	11	0	.313	277	347

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
*-Baltimore	13	3	0	.813	473	263
x-Cleveland	11	5	0	.688	382	331
Pittsburgh	9	7	0	.563	287	314
e-Cincinnati	8	8	0	.500	335	370

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Kansas City	10	6	0	.625	358	282
e-Denver	8	8	0	.500	343	386
e-Las Vegas	7	9	0	.438	305	317
e-L.A. Chargers	5	11	0	.313	334	385

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Dallas	11	5	0	.688	471	305
x-Philadelphia	11	5	0	.688	423	401
e-N.Y. Giants	5	11	0	.313	239	397
e-Washington	4	12	0	.250	319	480

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
New Orleans	8	8	0	.500	354	310
Tampa Bay	8	8	0	.500	339	325
Atlanta	7	9	0	.438	304	325
e-Carolina	2	14	0	.125	236	407

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Detroit	11	5	0	.688	431	375
Green Bay	8	8	0	.500	366	341
Minnesota	7	9	0	.438	324	332
e-Chicago	7	9	0	.438	351	362

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
*-San Francisco	12	4	0	.750	471	277
x-L.A. Rams	9	7	0	.563	383	357
Seattle	8	8	0	.500	343	382
e-Arizona	4	12	0	.250	310	434

e-Eliminated from playoffs
 x-clinched playoff spot
 y-clinched division
 *-clinched home-field advantage

Thursday, Dec. 28
 Cleveland 37, N.Y. Jets 20

Saturday, Dec. 30
 Dallas 20, Detroit 19

Sunday, Dec. 31
 Arizona 35, Philadelphia 31
 Baltimore 56, Miami 19
 Buffalo 27, New England 21
 Chicago 37, Atlanta 17
 Houston 26, Tennessee 3
 Indianapolis 23, Las Vegas 20
 Jacksonville 26, Carolina 0
 L.A. Rams 26, N.Y. Giants 25
 New Orleans 23, Tampa Bay 13
 San Francisco 27, Washington 10
 Pittsburgh 30, Seattle 23
 Denver 16, L.A. Chargers 9
 Kansas City 25, Cincinnati 17
 Green Bay 33, Minnesota 10

Saturday's games
 Pittsburgh at Baltimore
 Houston at Indianapolis

Sunday's games
 Atlanta at New Orleans
 Cleveland at Cincinnati
 Jacksonville at Tennessee
 Minnesota at Detroit
 N.Y. Jets at New England
 Tampa Bay at Carolina
 Chicago at Green Bay
 Dallas at Washington
 Denver at Las Vegas
 Kansas City at L.A. Chargers
 L.A. Rams at San Francisco
 Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants
 Seattle at Arizona
 Buffalo at Miami

NFL calendar
Jan. 13-15 — Wild Card playoff games.
Jan. 20-21 — Division playoff games.
Jan. 28 — AFC and NFC championship games.
Feb. 11 — Super Bowl 58 at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas.
Feb. 27-March 4 — Scouting Combine at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.
April 25-27 — NFL Draft in Detroit.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST
 American 75, Lehigh 66
 Bucknell 70, Holy Cross 58
 Colgate 78, Loyola (Md.) 55
 Fordham 119, George Washington 113, 3OT
 George Mason 77, La Salle 62
 Lafayette 52, Army 47
 Navy 62, Boston U. 60
 Rhode Island 78, Saint Joseph's 74
 Seton Hall 61, Providence 57
 UMass 80, Duquesne 61
 Villanova 66, Xavier 65
 Yale 86, Howard 78, OT

SOUTH
 Dayton 72, Davidson 59
 ETSU 80, Mercer 69
 Florida St. 82, Georgia Tech 71
 High Point 85, Radford 73
 Louisiana Tech 96, Dallas Christian 55
 Marshall 68, Louisiana-Monroe 57
 Miami 95, Clemson 82
 Middle Tennessee 84, Reinhardt 47
 NC Central 112, Truett 70
 Presbyterian 68, Charleston Southern 61
 Samford 89, Chattanooga 74
 St. Bonaventure 89, VCU 78
 Tulane 84, Rice 59
 UNC-Asheville 95, SC-Upstate 67
 UNC-Greensboro 79, Furman 68
 Virginia 77, Louisville 53
 W. Carolina 80, The Citadel 71
 Winthrop 68, Longwood 60, OT
 Wofford 87, VMI 85, OT

MIDWEST
 Bradley 86, Valparaiso 61
 E. Washington 93, South Dakota 79
 Indiana St. 87, Evansville 73
 Loyola Chicago 80, Saint Louis 73
 Montana 96, N. Dakota St. 86
 N. Colorado 97, North Dakota 87
 N. Iowa 64, Missouri St. 62
 NC State 54, Notre Dame 52
 Nebraska 86, Indiana 70
 Ohio St. 76, Rutgers 72
 Omaha 81, N. Arizona 55

SOUTHWEST
 Cent. Arkansas 120, Champion Christian 54
 Oklahoma St. 72, Chicago St. 53

FAR WEST
 Denver 95, Idaho St. 82, OT
 Oral Roberts 82, Montana St. 76
 Sacramento St. 67, UMKC 64
 San Diego St. 74, Fresno St. 47
 Southern Cal 82, California 74
 St. Thomas (MN) 75, Idaho 67
 Stanford 59, UCLA 53
 Weber St. 75, S. Dakota St. 73

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST
 American 68, Lehigh 65
 Boston U. 62, Navy 51
 Colgate 73, Loyola (Md.) 65
 Fordham 65, St. Bonaventure 57
 Holy Cross 69, Bucknell 54
 Kent St. 73, Buffalo 64
 Lafayette 68, Army 42
 Md.-Eastern Shore 99, Lancaster Bible 37
 Providence 72, DePaul 65
 Saint Joseph's 67, George Washington 47

SOUTH
 Charleston Southern 61, Presbyterian 57
 Charlotte 66, South Florida 61, OT
 Chattanooga 65, NC Central 59
 Coastal Carolina 88, Southern Miss. 71
 Morgan St. 68, CCSU 65
 Oklahoma St. 68, UCF 61
 Radford 65, High Point 61
 Richmond 72, VCU 65
 SC-Upstate 71, UNC-Asheville 44
 UAB 65, Memphis 63
 Winthrop 58, Longwood 53

MIDWEST
 Ball St. 78, W. Michigan 56
 Bowling Green 65, Cent. Michigan 64
 E. Michigan 67, N. Illinois 49
 Georgetown 60, Butler 55
 Iowa St. 69, Kansas 61
 Kansas St. 72, Houston 38
 Loyola Chicago 74, Saint Louis 72
 Maryland 72, Minnesota 64
 Ohio 67, Akron 58
 St. Thomas (MN) 70, Sacramento St. 52
 Toledo 70, Miami (Ohio) 52
 UConn 94, Creighton 50
 UMKC 75, Portland St. 56
 Youngstown St. 70, Oakland 63

SOUTHWEST
 Baylor 71, TCU 50
 Oral Roberts 81, N. Colorado 80, OT
 Rice 76, Wichita St. 64
 Texas 74, Texas Tech 47
 Texas A&M-CC 73, Houston Christian 49

FAR WEST
 Air Force 71, San Diego St. 63, OT
 E. Washington 96, Omaha 82
 Fresno St. 70, San Jose St. 67
 Idaho 60, Denver 51
 Montana 74, South Dakota 61
 Montana St. 65, N. Dakota St. 45
 Nevada 58, Boise St. 57
 North Dakota 78, Idaho St. 72
 Oklahoma 75, BYU 63
 S. Dakota St. 110, N. Arizona 102, 2OT
 Wyoming 54, Utah St. 48

TENNIS

ASB Classic
Wednesday
At ASB Tennis Centre
Auckland, New Zealand
Purse: \$267,082
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Wang Xiyu, China, def. Wang Xinyu (6), China, 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (2).
 Emma Navarro (4), United States, def. Elina Avanesyan, Russia, 6-1, 6-2.
 Marie Bouzkova (5), Czech Republic, def. Amanda Anisimova, United States, 6-0, 6-1.
 Diane Parry, France, def. Lesia Tsurenko (3), Ukraine, 2-6, 6-4, 6-1.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League
BOSTON RED SOX — Agreed to terms with RHP Lucas Giolito on a one-year contract with an option for 2025. Designated RHP Mauricio Llovera for assignment.
National League
CINCINNATI REDS — Agreed to terms with LHP Justin Bruihl on a minor league contract.
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Acquired LHP Bryan Hudson from L.A. Dodgers in exchange for LHP Justin Chambers and a player to be named or cash. Activated SS Bryce Turang.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Named Ruben Niebla pitching coach, Ben Fritz bullpen coach, Tim Leiper third base coach/infield & base running instructor, David Macias first base coach/outfield & base running instructor, Victor Rodriguez hitting coach, Mike McCoy assistant hitting coach, Pat O'Sullivan assistant hitting coach, Brian Esposito catching coach & game strategy assistant, Ryan Barba major league field coordinator, Peter Summerville game planning & coaching assistant, Heberto Andrade bullpen catcher & coaching assistant and Morgan Burkhart major league coaching assistant. Agreed to terms with RHP Woo-Suk Go on a two-year contract with a mutual option for 2026.

FOOTBALL
National Football League
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Placed LT D.J. Humphries on injured reserve. Signed S Verone McKinley III to the practice squad. Released LB Caleb Johnson from the practice squad.
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed DB Jeremy Lucien to the practice squad. Designated DB Ar'Darius Washington to return from injured reserve to practice.
CHICAGO BEARS — Signed WR Collin Johnson to the active roster and LS Matt Overton to the practice squad.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed G Rodger Saffold to the practice squad.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Reinstated DL Villiam Fehoko from injured reserve. Placed RB Deuce Vaughn on injured reserve.
DETROIT LIONS — Released LB Bruce Irvin from the practice squad.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Designated WR Christian Kirk to return from injured reserve to practice.
LOS ANGELES RAMS — Designated DB Duke Shelley to return from injured reserve to practice. Signed WR Tyler Jensen and K Brett Maher.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Designated LB Jerome Baker to return from injured reserve to practice.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed LB Abraham Beaulieu to the practice squad.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Signed G Colby Gossett to the practice squad.
NEW YORK JETS — Designated OL Wes Schweitzer to return from injured reserve to practice. Signed OT Vitaly Gurman to the practice squad.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Designated G Phil Haynes to return from injured reserve to practice.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League
BOSTON BRUINS — Reassigned D Parker Wotherspoon to Providence (AHL).
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Claimed D Jaycob Megna off waivers from Seattle.
EDMONTON OILERS — Activated LW Dylan Holloway off long-term injured reserve and reassigned him to Bakersfield (AHL).
FLORIDA PANTHERS — Agreed to terms with D Uvis Balinskis on a two-year contract extension through the 2025-2026 season.
LOS ANGELES KINGS — Recalled D Brandt Clarke from Ontario (AHL). Placed D Tobias Bjornfot on waivers.
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Recalled F Graeme Clarke from Utica (AHL).
NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Recalled G Ken Appleby from Bridgeport (AHL).
NEW YORK RANGERS — Reassigned F Adam Sykora to Hartford (AHL) from Slovakia U20 (WJC). Recalled LW Brennan Othmann from Hartford (AHL).
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Promoted D Ryan Shea from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL) to the active roster. Reassigned G Taylor Gauthier to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton from Wheeling (ECHL).
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Reassigned G Georgi Romanov to Wichita (ECHL) from San Jose (AHL).
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Recalled RW Linus Linus Karlsson from Abbotsford (AHL).

SOCCER
Major League Soccer
FC CINCINNATI — Signed C Miles Robinson to a one-year contract with an option for 2025.
ORLANDO CITY SC — Acquired F Ivan Angulo from Brazilian side Palmeiras through 2025 with an option for 2026.
SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES — Announced D Carlos Akapo was called up to play for the Equatorial Guinea Men's National Team.

COLLEGE
MEMPHIS — Promoted Jordan Hankins to defensive coordinator for football.
NORTH CAROLINA — Announced assistant head football coach Gene Chizik agreed to part ways with the team.

Franco facing charges

By MARTÍN ADAMES
 ALCÁNTARA
 Associated Press

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic — Dominican prosecutors on Wednesday accused Wander Franco of commercial sexual exploitation and money laundering following allegations that the Tampa Bay Rays shortstop had a relationship with a minor whose mother also faces charges.



Prosecutors requested that a judge hold Franco on an \$86,000 bond, bar him from leaving the Dominican Republic and place him under house arrest. They noted the money laundering charges stem from allegations that Franco made payments to the minor's mother.

Prosecutors also asked that the judge prohibit the minor's mother from leaving the country and place her under house arrest. "These measures requested by the Public Ministry seek to guarantee the integrity of the process," the ministry said in a statement.

Prosecutors on Wednesday also delivered evidence to a judge who is expected to soon rule on Franco's future.

The judge is scheduled to analyze the documents and other evidence collected during a months-long investigation and issue a ruling Friday in a courtroom in the northern Dominican Republic province of Puerto Plata, where the alleged act occurred.

The judge has several options: release Franco on bond, temporarily arrest him, prevent him from leaving the Dominican Republic or demand that he make occasional appearances until the investigation or a trial has ended.

The 22-year-old All-Star player remains in jail for now after being detained on Monday in Puerto Plata.

His attorney, Teodosio Jáquez Encarnación, has declined to talk to media, saying only that Franco is doing fine.

Prosecutors also have declined comment.

Authorities have not shared details of the case, although prosecutors said on Aug. 14 that Franco was being investigated because of social media postings suggesting he had a relationship with a minor.

NHL



BAILEY HILLESHEIM/AP

Minnesota goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury makes a save against Winnipeg on New Year's Eve. It was the 1,000th game of Fleury's NHL career.

Reflecting on his career

Fleury has to smile when looking back, even if he'd rather avoid fuss

By DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

The two decades Marc-Andre Fleury has spent in the NHL have passed as quickly for him as the airborne pucks that speed toward him in the net each time he takes the ice.

Now the fourth goalie in history to appear in 1,000 games, a mark he made with Minnesota in a 3-2 loss to Winnipeg on Sunday, Fleury is on the verge of another lofty milestone in his 20th season in the league. He's one win away from a tie for second place on the career wins list, a perch he could reach this week with fellow Wild goalie Filip Gustavsson on injured reserve.

"I feel very fortunate that I was able to play hockey for so long and do something I love," Fleury said. "I think loving the game is something that kept me going through all the years."

Over 691 games with Pittsburgh, 192 with Vegas, 45 with Chicago and 73 and counting with Minnesota, Fleury has grown his reputation as one of the most personable and reliable goalies to ever put on the pads since the Penguins made him the first pick in the 2003 draft out of Quebec.

Fleury has backstopped three Stanley Cup championship teams, won the 2021 Vezina Award for the best goalie in the NHL and, most importantly for his legacy, gained the unrelenting trust and admiration of his teammates along the way.

"He's a natural born leader," Wild defenseman Brock Faber said. "The positivity he brings to the rink every day, that's something



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

Fleury, left, will get the bulk of the work in goal for the time being, with Filip Gustavsson, right, currently on injured reserve.

I've never seen before. It's truly an honor to be able to play in front of him and be a teammate of his."

Fleury has 550 wins in 1,001 games, trailing Patrick Roy (551 wins in 1,029 games) for second place behind career leader Martin Brodeur (691 wins in 1,266 games).

The only other goalie in NHL history to play in 1,000 games was Roberto Luongo (489 wins in 1,044 games). Brodeur, Luongo and Roy all recorded praise for Fleury in a video tribute the Wild assembled for him. His teammates let him take the ice for a solo lap to commence pre-game warmups on Sunday.

"The first thing that jumps out at you is just the quality person he is — his attitude, how he

is around the rink, his ability to communicate," said Wild coach John Hynes, who first got to know Fleury with the Penguins when he coached their AHL affiliate from 2009-15. "He's still the same guy."

With his easy smile and fondness for locker room pranks, Fleury's fun-loving disposition belies the intensity of his competitiveness on the ice. He has tried over the years to fight the temptation to smash his stick after a soft goal or a frustrating defeat, proudly noting in a recent interview with The Associated Press that he gave a stick away to a kid at the game in Edmonton instead of venting some anger on his equipment following a 4-3 loss.

"I try to smile, get back to work and practice and move on. I find that's how you get out of a slump quicker, if you always keep grinding," said Fleury, who is 6-7-2 with a 3.09 goals-against average this season.

The two-year, \$7 million contract Fleury signed with the Wild four months after he was acquired in a trade with the Blackhawks will expire this summer. He turns 40 on Nov. 28. The Wild have Gustavsson carrying a \$3.75 million annual salary cap charge for the next two seasons and 21-year-old prospect Jesper Wallstedt waiting in the AHL.

"I do this because I love it. I feel very fortunate to play. I take a lot of pride in winning games and helping my team, and hopefully I can be remembered as a guy who had some success along the way," said Fleury, who has three children between the ages of 4 and 10. "I can just go live a quiet life after this — no TV, no spotlight — and that's fine with me."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	36	23	7	6	52	118	92
Florida	37	23	12	2	48	111	94
Toronto	36	19	10	7	45	129	119
Tampa Bay	39	18	16	5	41	127	135
Detroit	38	18	16	4	40	137	131
Montreal	37	16	16	5	37	106	128
Buffalo	38	15	19	4	34	111	132
Ottawa	33	14	19	0	28	114	118

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Rangers	36	25	10	1	51	122	101
Carolina	38	21	13	4	46	130	118
N.Y. Islanders	37	17	10	10	44	114	124
Philadelphia	37	19	13	5	43	111	104
New Jersey	36	20	14	2	42	127	128
Washington	36	18	12	6	42	88	108
Pittsburgh	36	18	14	4	40	110	97
Columbus	39	12	19	8	32	120	144

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	38	24	11	3	51	139	115
Winnipeg	36	23	9	4	50	121	90
Dallas	36	22	10	4	48	131	111
Nashville	38	21	16	1	43	119	116
Arizona	36	19	15	2	40	111	103
St. Louis	36	18	17	1	37	105	118
Minnesota	36	16	16	4	36	111	116
Chicago	37	11	24	2	24	87	140

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	37	24	10	3	51	142	96
Vegas	38	22	11	5	49	127	106
Los Angeles	34	20	9	5	45	116	83
Edmonton	35	19	15	1	39	128	112
Seattle	38	15	14	9	39	102	114
Calgary	37	16	16	5	37	110	121
Anaheim	37	13	23	1	27	94	124
San Jose	38	9	26	3	21	78	158

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

Wednesday's games

New Jersey 6, Washington 3
Toronto 2, Anaheim 1, OT

Thursday's games

Buffalo at Montreal
Chicago at N.Y. Rangers
Columbus at Philadelphia
Pittsburgh at Boston
Calgary at Nashville
Colorado at Dallas
Tampa Bay at Minnesota
Vancouver at St. Louis
N.Y. Islanders at Arizona
Florida at Vegas
Ottawa at Seattle
Detroit at Los Angeles
Winnipeg at San Jose

Friday's games

Carolina at Washington
Chicago at New Jersey
Winnipeg at Anaheim

Saturday's games

Calgary at Philadelphia
Florida at Colorado
Buffalo at Pittsburgh
Minnesota at Columbus
N.Y. Rangers at Montreal
Tampa Bay at Boston
Toronto at San Jose
Vancouver at New Jersey
Nashville at Dallas
St. Louis at Carolina
N.Y. Islanders at Vegas
Ottawa at Edmonton

Sunday's games

Calgary at Chicago
Los Angeles at Washington
Winnipeg at Arizona
Detroit at Anaheim

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nikita Kucherov, TB	38	27	36	63
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	38	20	41	61
Connor McDavid, EDM	33	14	39	53
William Nylander, TOR	36	19	32	51
Artemi Panarin, NYR	36	23	28	51
J.T. Miller, VAN	37	16	34	50
David Pastrnak, BOS	36	22	28	50
Mikko Rantanen, COL	38	19	28	47
Quinn Hughes, VAN	37	10	36	46
Elias Pettersson, VAN	37	15	30	45
Jack Hughes, NJ	31	15	30	45
Sam Reinhart, FLA	37	24	21	45
Auston Matthews, TOR	35	30	15	45
Cale Makar, COL	33	8	36	44

2 tied with 43 pts.

GOLF/NBA

McIlroy eases off criticism of LIV

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

KAPALUA, Hawaii — Rory McIlroy has gone from being the harshest critic of LIV Golf to extending an olive branch. He said on a British soccer podcast Wednesday that he was too judgmental about players defecting and has accepted that LIV is “part of our sport now.”

He referred to Jon Rahm’s decision to join LIV Golf last month as a “smart business move.”

McIlroy also suggested he helped instigate discussions with the PGA Tour and the Saudi backers of LIV Golf. He said he met with Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the Public Investment Fund, at the end of 2022 in Dubai.

“When I got back to America, I was on the board of the PGA Tour and I said to the guys, ‘Someone has got to go talk to this guy.’ Then there was a plan put in place that one of the board members would try to develop a relationship with him,” McIlroy said.

He said on the “Stick to Football” podcast the surprise was how quickly a deal came together. Board member Jimmy Dunne and chairman Ed Herlihy arranged the first meeting after the Masters in April.

The PGA Tour and PIF announced the agreement for a commercial deal on June 6.

The podcast was posted a day before the PGA Tour begins a new year that includes eight “signature events” with limited fields and \$20 million purses, a model that McIlroy helped orchestrate over the last year.

He resigned from the policy board in November, saying it was taking up too much of his time. The framework agreement missed its Dec. 31 deadline to get finalized, and now the PGA Tour also is negotiating with a private group of U.S. investors.

McIlroy referred to early defections to LIV as players wanting to take the easy way out, and said that players were being duplicitous for pledging support and then taking the Saudi cash.

He had said no peace could be made as long as Greg Norman was in charge, and as recently as July said he “hates” LIV and hoped it went away. “If LIV Golf was the last place to play golf on Earth, I would retire. That’s how I feel about it,” he said in July.

His tone began to soften when Rahm, the Masters champion, became arguably the biggest name to leave, because the 29-year-old Spaniard is entering the peak of his career.

“I think, at this point, I was maybe a little judgmental of the guys who went to LIV Golf at the start, and I think it was a bit of a



MIKE STEWART/AP

Rory McIlroy, LIV’s biggest detractor at the outset, is softening his stance.

mistake on my part because I now realize that not everyone is in my position or in Tiger Woods’ position,” McIlroy said on the podcast.

“We all turn professional to make a living playing the sports that we do, and I think that’s what I realized over the last two years. I can’t judge people for making that decision.”

McIlroy said his biggest beef is players leaving and speaking poorly about the PGA Tour or European tour because that’s what gave players their start in the game.

He also said the tour’s deal announced June 6 legitimized what LIV is trying to do and “made it easier for guys to jump.”

“Jon Rahm has not got any of the heat that the first guys got for going,” McIlroy said. “I think Jon, he’s smart. And I think he sees things coming together at some point. ... I thought it was a smart business move. It was opportunistic.”

And because Rahm is exempt in all the majors for five years or more, McIlroy said, there was little risk of the Masters champion leaving.

“I have no problem with Jon going if that’s what he wants to do,” McIlroy said. “Who am I to say different?”

McIlroy said while he doesn’t feel he “lost the fight” against LIV, he has accepted that it is part of the sport. He says if anything, the concept of LIV Golf has exposed flaws in the tour system because the rival league guarantees all its stars will be at tournaments.

PGA Tour players can pick and choose where they play. McIlroy, for example, is the only eligible player not at Kapalua for the season-opening tournament. He said the PGA Tour is raising the cost to sponsor tournaments without being able to guarantee who will play.

“I can’t believe the PGA Tour has done so well for so long,” he said.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	26	7	.788	—
Philadelphia	23	10	.697	3
New York	19	15	.559	7½
Brooklyn	15	20	.429	12
Toronto	14	20	.412	12½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	20	14	.588	—
Orlando	19	15	.559	1
Atlanta	14	19	.424	5½
Charlotte	8	24	.250	11
Washington	6	27	.182	13½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	24	10	.706	—
Indiana	19	14	.576	4½
Cleveland	19	15	.559	5
Chicago	15	21	.417	10
Detroit	3	31	.088	21
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	21	14	.600	—
Dallas	20	15	.571	1
Houston	17	15	.531	2½
Memphis	11	23	.324	9½
San Antonio	5	28	.152	15
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	24	9	.727	—
Oklahoma City	23	10	.697	1
Denver	24	11	.686	1
Utah	16	19	.457	9
Portland	9	24	.273	15
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	21	12	.636	—
Sacramento	20	13	.606	1
Phoenix	18	16	.529	3½
L.A. Lakers	17	18	.486	5
Golden State	16	17	.485	5
Tuesday’s games				
Philadelphia 110, Chicago 97				
New Orleans 112, Brooklyn 85				
Oklahoma City 127, Boston 123				
Memphis 106, San Antonio 98				
Charlotte 111, Sacramento 104				
Golden State 121, Orlando 115				
Wednesday’s games				
Cleveland 140, Washington 101				
Indiana 142, Milwaukee 130				
Atlanta 141, Oklahoma City 138				
New Orleans 117, Minnesota 106				
Toronto 116, Memphis 111				
Houston 112, Brooklyn 101				
New York 116, Chicago 100				
Dallas 126, Portland 97				
L.A. Clippers 131, Phoenix 122				
Utah 154, Detroit 148, OT				
Miami 110, L.A. Lakers 96				
Sacramento 138, Orlando 135, 2OT				
Thursday’s games				
Milwaukee at San Antonio				
Denver at Golden State				
Friday’s games				
Atlanta at Indiana				
Utah at Boston				
New York at Philadelphia				
Oklahoma City at Brooklyn				
Washington at Cleveland				
Charlotte at Chicago				
L.A. Clippers at New Orleans				
Minnesota at Houston				
Portland at Dallas				
Miami at Phoenix				
Orlando at Denver				
Detroit at Golden State				
Memphis at L.A. Lakers				
Toronto at Sacramento				
Saturday’s games				
Boston at Indiana				
New York at Washington				
Utah at Philadelphia				
Milwaukee at Houston				
Sunday’s games				
San Antonio at Cleveland				
Portland at Brooklyn				
Atlanta at Orlando				
New Orleans at Sacramento				
Minnesota at Dallas				
Detroit at Denver				
Memphis at Phoenix				
Toronto at Golden State				
L.A. Clippers at L.A. Lakers				
Monday’s games				
Chicago at Charlotte				
Boston at Indiana				
Oklahoma City at Washington				
Houston at Miami				
Utah at Milwaukee				
Phoenix at L.A. Clippers				

League sees wild statistical night

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

There had never been a day in NBA history where five teams all scored at least 140 points. And there had never been a day where the league saw four teams all score at least 130 points in losses.

That is, until Wednesday — when both events happened.

Mark it down: Jan. 3, 2024 was perhaps one of the oddest statistical nights the league has seen. Utah, Detroit, Indiana, Atlanta and Cleveland all topped the 140-point mark.

“Obviously, it’s fun to score the ball,” Utah’s Lauri Markkanen said after the Jazz beat Detroit in overtime.

True, though some teams had more fun than others. Just ask the four teams that also scored a ton of points on Wednesday but lost anyway.

For the Pistons, Oklahoma City, Orlando and Milwaukee, scoring 130 points wasn’t even enough to win.

“We played a hell of a game,” said Paolo Banchero, who led the Magic with a career-high career-high 43 points but missed a potential tying 3 as the final buzzer sounded in the loss to Sacramento. “Despite everything that happened with injuries, we gave ourselves a shot and that’s all we can ask for.”

There was one previous instance of three teams scoring 130 in losses on the same day — that being April 10, 2019, when it happened to Utah, Sacramento and Atlanta.

“We didn’t have our best night, obviously,” Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said.

Scoring has been up — really up

— in the NBA this season, with teams averaging 115.5 points per game, the highest clip the league has seen since the average was 116.7 points in the 1969-70 season.

The scores of note in those super-high-scoring Wednesday games: Utah beat Detroit 154-148 in overtime, Indiana beat Milwaukee 142-130, Atlanta beat Oklahoma City 141-138, Cleveland beat Washington 140-101 and Sacramento edged Orlando in double overtime 138-135.

The previous record for teams scoring 140 or more points on the same day was four, done on Jan. 16, 2019. The four teams to do it that day were Brooklyn, Houston, Golden State and New Orleans — the Nets beat the Rockets 145-142, the Warriors beat the Pelicans 147-140.

Other stats of note on the wild Wednesday in the NBA:

■ The Jazz-Pistons game was the second this season to top 300 total points; the 302 combined points tied for the 25th-most in a game in NBA history. Utah also became the ninth team in league history to shoot at least 50% from the field, 50% from 3-point range and 90% from the foul line in an overtime game.

■ Miami beat the Los Angeles Lakers 110-96, and the Heat tied a franchise record by having eight players score at least 10 points.

■ There were 10 teams scoring at least 130 on Wednesday (the Los Angeles Clippers had 131, joining the Jazz, Pistons, Pacers, Bucks, Hawks, Thunder, Cavaliers, Kings and Magic with 130 or more). There have now been 128 such games in the NBA this season, putting the league on pace for about 310 this season — which would break the record of 266, set last season.



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

The Pacers’ Tyrese Haliburton celebrates during the second half Wednesday against the Milwaukee Bucks. Indiana won 142-130.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

McCarthy says scandal masked players' effort

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

The sign-stealing scandal that has hung over Michigan's season has overshadowed the work the team has put in to go unbeaten and reach the College Football Playoff championship game, quarterback J.J. McCarthy said Wednesday.

Michigan plays Washington for the national title in Houston on Monday as the NCAA continues to investigate allegations that the Wolverines, over three years extending into this season, had a staff member do in-person advance scouting against NCAA rules and used video equipment to pick off future opponents' play-call signs from the sideline.

Asked during a CFP media teleconference about the possibility of the NCAA ordering Michigan to vacate wins, McCarthy said it would be unfortunate for the players not to be recognized for what they've achieved.

"But at the end of the day," he said, "it's not going to change the amount of accomplishment and the amount of pride for being on

Huskies RB Dillon expected to play

SEATTLE — Washington coach Kalen DeBoer said Wednesday he expects injured running back Dillon Johnson to play in the College Football Playoff championship game against Michigan in Houston on Monday.

Johnson aggravated an injury to his right foot during Washington's final possession in a 37-31 win over Texas in the CFP semifinals.

Johnson has been battling a foot problem for two months. The nature of the injury was not disclosed.

Johnson has run for 1,162 yards and 16 touchdowns.

Associated Press

this football team and just everything that we accomplished because we know what we put in, we

know the work that we've put in, and we know that we did things the right way as players."

Coach Jim Harbaugh deflected a question about possible sanctions, saying he is focused on the game against Washington.

"I don't know if you want to live in rumorville or speculation, but we just don't really have any room to be doing that at this point," he said. "That's done elsewhere."

The NCAA does not directly ban the stealing of signs, but there are rules against using electronic equipment to record an opponent's signals and in-person, advanced scouting of future opponents in season. There are also rules against unsportsmanlike or unethical activities by coaches, and head coaches are generally considered to be responsible for violations that occur under them.

The Big Ten suspended Harbaugh for the final three regular-season games for violating the conference's sportsmanship policy. Harbaugh has denied having knowledge of sign-stealing activities. Michigan suspended Har-



KYUSUNG GONG/AP

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh and quarterback J.J. McCarthy have repeatedly downplayed the sign-stealing scandal that resulted in a three-game suspension for Harbaugh earlier this season.

baugh for the first three games of the season amid allegations of recruiting violations.

McCarthy estimated 80% of college football teams steal signs.

"It's just a thing about football," he said. "It's been around for years. We actually had to adapt because in 2020 or 2019 when Ohio State was stealing our signs — which is legal and they were doing it — we had to get up to the level that they were at, and we had to make it an even playing field."

McCarthy later clarified that comment to The Associated Press.

"When I said we need to level the playing field, I meant in terms of how we change our own signs,

how we develop our signs and how and when we distribute those changes when we know signs are likely to have been stolen," he said.

McCarthy and defensive lineman Mason Graham said they and their teammates put in significant time operating inside the rules to find clues about how opponents might react in different situations.

"We do watch so much film and look for those little tendencies and spend like 10, 15 minutes on one clip alone just looking at all the little details," McCarthy said. "You could say it's all sign stealing, but there's a lot more that goes into play."

Format: CFP has followed slow but logical step of evolution

FROM PAGE 32

tor of the BCS before moving into a similar role with the CFP.

It's easy to forget now, but the idea of a playoff was shunned by so many in college football at the time that merely uttering the "P" word was taboo.

There was no serious consideration given to going bigger than four. When the conference commissioners finally decided to move to a playoff, it was going to be the smallest possible version, even though it was an enormous change.

"It was a 100% expansion from two to four and have that experience, see how it worked," Swarbrick said.

Hancock said: "It was the obvious next step in the world of 2012, when all we'd ever known was the coalition, the alliance and the BCS for 22 years."

The CFP debuted in 2014 and was a smash hit, drawing record television ratings for ESPN, with New Year's Day semifinals in the Rose and Sugar bowls. And it produced the type of champion that never would have been possible before when an Ohio State team that suffered a bad early season loss peaked late and won it all as the last team in the field.

"Whether it's broadcast ratings, total attendance, whatever it may



CFP championship
No. 2 Washington (14-0)
vs. No. 1 Michigan (14-0)
AFN-Sports
1:45 a.m. Tuesday CET
9:45 a.m. Tuesday JKT

be, the game has never been more popular. And I think you have to give some credit to the playoff system for helping to make that happen," Swarbrick said.

But that first season also immediately put unintended consequences into focus when the Big 12 was thrown into a near-crisis because co-champions Baylor and TCU were leapfrogged by Ohio State and the conference was left out.

The negative

"It hurt conference brands," American Athletic Conference Commissioner Mike Aresco said. "Because if you didn't make a four-team playoff, man, there's some problem with your conference."

None more than the Pac-12,

among the Power Five conferences. The Pac-12 made the field just three times in 10 years, including a six-year drought from 2017-22 that was snapped by Washington.

To draw a direct line from CFP exclusion to the demise of the Pac-12 would be an overstatement.

"No, I don't think you could go that far," Aresco said. "On the other hand, did it help the Pac-12? No, of course not."

Even before the CFP, there had been a delineation of conferences in college football. The four-team playoff drew a more stark line and led to new nomenclature: Power Five and Group of Five conferences.

As hard as Aresco pushed back against those terms, they became ubiquitous, and it became apparent the CFP was mostly for the Power Five. AAC champion Cincinnati in 2021 is the only school from a Group of Five conference to reach the final four.

The CFP generated hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue, the vast majority of which went to the Power Five conferences.

The CFP seemed to create a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforced the idea that certain teams and conferences were superior. The Southeastern Conference never had a team left out, put two

teams in the field twice and won six of the first nine CFP titles.

Over 10 years, only 15 teams made the CFP, as the very top tier of programs capable of winning a national title seemed to shrink.

"A lot of the same teams kept making it, which gave them a huge advantage in recruiting and probably had a somewhat deleterious effect on some of the other schools that were competing with them," Aresco said. "Because if you're in the playoff time and time again, kids want to play in it."

Swarbrick disagrees. He said the consolidation of elite talent is a trend across all college sports over the last couple of decades that just happened to coincide with the four-team CFP.

That consolidation also led to a load of playoff blowouts. Only seven of 20 semifinals and three championship games have been decided by 10 points or fewer.

The decision by the conferences to accommodate bowl tradition, especially when it came to the Rose Bowl, and not play the four-team semifinals on Jan. 1 annually was an admitted mistake. That decision kept down CFP viewership and conceded New Year's Day as college football's biggest showcase.

As many, most notably Alabama coach Nick Saban, predicted,

the prestige of the bowls took a massive hit. Especially the top tier of games that were supposed to be rewards for playoff contenders who missed out.

Instead, they became consolation prizes, distorted by player opt-outs and coaching changes. The nadir came last weekend when a shell of an unbeaten Florida State team that was left out of the CFP lost to Georgia in the Orange Bowl by 60 points.

Nick Carparelli, a former Big East administrator who was part of the discussions that led to the creation of the four-team CFP, is now the executive director of Bowl Season.

"Bowl season is different, but it's still important," he said.

Aresco and Swarbrick said expansion ideally would have come much sooner, but that is far from consensus. SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey has often said his conference would have been fine with it staying at four.

Unlike the BCS, which became a punching bag for critics over 16 years, the postseason system itself was not constantly under attack over the last 10 years.

"I don't remember a groundswell after three, four or five years to do something different," Hancock said. "We just didn't have enough years to evaluate."

NFL

Mayfield determined to help win NFC South for Bucs despite injury

By FRED GOODALL
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Baker Mayfield has sore ribs and did not practice Wednesday, but the Tampa Bay quarterback said he'll do everything he can to be ready to try to help the Buccaneers clinch a division title and playoff berth against the Carolina Panthers.

Mayfield was injured last week when he took a late hit after releasing a pass on a 2-point conversion attempt in the final two minutes of a 23-13 loss to the New Orleans Saints.

The defeat kept the Bucs (8-8) from clinching a third consecutive division title. They'll get another shot at it Sunday against the Panthers (2-14).

"Pretty sore, but I'll be good. It's just one of those things — it's tender," Mayfield said. "I've dealt with rib injuries before, but rest and just (time) as the week goes on helps."

Instead of a normal mid-week practice, the Bucs held a walk-through session Wednesday. But coach Todd Bowles said if the team had practiced, Mayfield

would not have participated.

"I know he's going to do everything he can to play. I'm not a doctor, I can't feel what Baker is feeling, so I can't tell you how he's going to feel (or) if he's able to play," Bowles said. "If he can play, I know he's going to try and play."

If Mayfield doesn't play, the Bucs will turn to third-year backup Kyle Trask.

"It's always a concern when one of your star players (is) hurt. We'll see how it goes. We have confidence in Trask if he has to play," Bowles said. "Baker is going to try and play. If he's not healthy, he can't play. If he's healthy enough to play, he will."

Mayfield is trying to lead a team to the playoffs for just the second time in his six-year career. He's confident he'll be able to play Sunday.

"Obviously, I didn't exactly test it out today. Just more mental reps for everybody," the quarterback said. "I'm just going to see. ... I'm sure by the time we get closer to gametime, adrenaline will be rolling, especially with where we are sitting at right now, situationally."



SAM HODDE/AP

Dallas Cowboys defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence and defensive end Chauncey Golston celebrate after the Cowboys made a goal-line stand against the Detroit Lions in the first half last week in Arlington, Texas.

Cowboys' NFC East fate finally in their own hands

By SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Jayron Kearshe and the Dallas Cowboys chased Philadelphia for two months in the NFC East, needing help to take the division title from the Eagles.

Things changed suddenly on the second-to-last weekend of the regular season, with Arizona's upset of the Eagles putting the Cowboys (11-5) in control.

If Dallas wins at last-place Washington on Sunday, the Cowboys keep Philadelphia (11-5) from becoming the first repeat winner in the NFC East since the Eagles won four in a row from 2001-04.

Philadelphia, which is at the New York Giants, needs help because the Cowboys hold the first tiebreaker after head-to-head with a better record in NFC games. Both teams have qualified for the postseason.

Much more importantly, a victory gives Dallas the No. 2 seed in the conference behind San Fran-

cisco and a shot at consecutive playoff games at home. The Cowboys have a 16-game winning streak at AT&T Stadium, where they finished 8-0 this regular season.

"The conversations might change a bit just because we know now we're at a point now where we control this thing," said Kearshe, a safety who has made the playoffs all three years with Dallas. "We've been needing some help as the season went on. We got that help now, and now it's time for us to handle our business."

The Cowboys fell two games behind Philadelphia, the defending NFC champion, with a 28-23 loss on Nov. 5. Dallas won the rematch five weeks later to pull even with the Eagles, but Philadelphia still had the tiebreaker after that loss.

There's been plenty of losing from both teams since then.

Dallas had consecutive road losses before beating Detroit at home 20-19 last weekend with help from a disputed penalty that took a 2-point conversion away from the

Lions with 23 seconds remaining.

The Eagles have lost four of five since a 10-1 start, capped by a 35-31 loss to Arizona at home that made the Cardinals 2-0 this season — half of their victories — against the two playoff qualifiers from the NFC East. They beat Dallas 28-16 in Week 3.

Mike McCarthy, who has reached the playoffs in 12 of his 16 full seasons as a coach in Green Bay and Dallas, preaches 11 wins as the starting point for how the playoffs shake out.

He broke out in a smile as he fielded a question about the sudden change in fortunes.

"I'm laughing because I think you're trying to get me to say, 'I told you so. You just wait till 11 wins and it works out,'" McCarthy said. "I don't want to be that guy. That's what 11 wins does for you."

"I think it's a great reminder to focus on what's right in front of you," he said. "I like to think we've been doing that week in and week out. But we definitely have to do it this week."



PETER JONELET/AP

Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield is nursing sore ribs suffered in last week's loss to New Orleans.

On TV



Minnesota Vikings (7-9)
at Detroit Lions (11-5)
AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT



Atlanta Falcons (7-9)
at New Orleans Saints (8-8)
AFN-Sports2
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT



Philadelphia Eagles (11-5)
at New York Giants (5-11)
AFN-Atlantic
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT



Los Angeles Rams (9-7)
at San Francisco 49ers (12-4)
AFN-Sports
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT



Chicago Bears (7-9)
at Green Bay Packers (8-8)
AFN-Sports2
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT

NFL

Steichen has Colts on cusp of playoffs

Coach's new direction has made significant impact in 1st season

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indianapolis Colts hired first-year coach Shane Steichen to take them in a new direction.

He wasted no time hiring assistants the players could trust, installing an offense they could embrace and making sure his rookie quarterback knew the playbook while urging the backup to stay prepared.

Now they're on the playoff precipice because Steichen never viewed his first head coaching job as a rebuilding project. He expected to win from the start, and the players believed him.

"Shane made it very clear the expectations were very high," center Ryan Kelly said. "Execution fuels emotion and we've had a lot of fun doing it. I think you've seen that through the postgame (videos) and all the interviews he does, and the way we play. It's a combination of all those things and really believing that we can be whatever we want to be."

What they could be after Saturday, surprisingly, is playoff bound.

A fourth straight home victory would give the Colts (9-7) another season sweep of Houston (9-7) and their first postseason appearance since 2020. A win, coupled with a Jacksonville loss at Tennessee on Sunday, would give Indy its first AFC South title and first home playoff game since 2014, as well as a chance at its first postseason win in five years.

Outside of team headquarters, few saw this kind of turnaround



Houston Texans (9-7)
at Indianapolis Colts (9-7)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Sunday CET
10:15 a.m. Sunday JKT

coming after an abysmal 2022 season that included a constantly churning quarterback carousel, a rare midseason coaching change and seven straight losses to finish a 4-12-1 season.

"I think all of the trials and tribulations we went through last year, it prepared us for the highs and lows of this season," linebacker Zaire Franklin said. "I just think that every time something happened, we just came closer together."

There were many times Indy's season could have gotten derailed, but Steichen deftly navigated the ups and downs.

2021 All-Pro running back Jonathan Taylor missed seven games because of injuries, started the season mired in an ugly contract dispute and took only one official snap with rookie quarterback Anthony Richardson.

Right tackle Braden Smith missed seven games with an assortment of injuries, Kelly entered the concussion protocol twice and top receiver Michael Pittman Jr.



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Indianapolis Colts head coach Shane Steichen hugs quarterback Gardner Minshew after defeating the Pittsburgh Steelers 30-13 in Indianapolis on Dec. 16. The Colts are 8-6 and on the verge of a playoff spot.

also had a concussion after taking a big hit that led to a season-ending suspension for Pittsburgh safety Damontae Kazee.

Seven players served suspensions.

There also was the quarterback situation. Steichen selected Richardson as the opening day starter after one preseason game, an announcement that disappointed Gardner Minshew, who followed Steichen from Philadelphia so he could compete for the job.

It didn't take Minshew long to prove his worth.

He relieved an injured Richardson in three of Indy's first four games, won his first start, at Baltimore, and took over for good when

Richardson suffered a season-ending shoulder injury in Week 5.

Even after committing eight turnovers in Indy's next three games, all losses, Minshew didn't flinch, and Steichen didn't fret.

"He always gives us a chance to win and that's what you want in your quarterback," Steichen said when asked this week about Minshew. "Everytime you step out, the players have a belief in him, the coaches have a belief in him and I think that's where it starts."

Minshew rewarded their patience by winning four straight to get the Colts out of the division cellar and back in the playoff chase. And given the young roster, Minshew's playoff experience from

the past two seasons with Steichen and the Eagles allowed him to take on a more vocal late-season role.

So when the Colts came out flat for the second time in three weeks, a Week 16 loss at Atlanta, Minshew spoke up about playing with urgency. Steichen reinforced Minshew's message before and after last week's victory over Las Vegas, which put the Colts in this win-and-in scenario.

"I think his energy and confidence really come through," Minshew said. "This past game, he was fired up. He was fired up in the locker room before the game. I think everybody fed off that and I think it showed out there on the field."

Steelers veteran safety Peterson mentoring rookie Porter

By WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Patrick Peterson has been where he believes Joey Porter Jr. is going.

Pro Bowls. All-Pro teams. A decade-plus of being in the white-hot spotlight covering the best wide receivers in the world taught Peterson a few things. More than a few, if the ever-talkative Pittsburgh Steelers cornerback-turned-safety is being honest.

And while Peterson understands his primary job is trying to help Pittsburgh's battered secondary win in Baltimore on Saturday to boost its playoff hopes, he feels a very close second is helping Porter transition from talented rookie to the kind of shutdown corner defenses can build around.

"I was in (Porter's) shoes once upon a time," Peterson said Wednesday. "So I continue to pass



Pittsburgh Steelers (9-7)
at Baltimore Ravens (13-3)
AFN-Sports
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT



Peterson



Porter

film and a near-photographic memory to pass along tricks of the trade and whatever else comes to mind.

"It's just Professor Pat up there teaching," Porter said with a laugh. "We just let him go to work."

That professorial spirit is one of the reasons the Steelers signed Peterson to a two-year deal last spring. He has responded by doing whatever is asked, including switching from cornerback to safety full-time after injuries to Minkah Fitzpatrick, Keanu Neal

and Trenton Thompson and Damontae Kazee's suspension left the back end of Pittsburgh's defense seriously exposed.

Enter Peterson, an eight-time Pro Bowler and three-time All-Pro earlier in his career. He vowed one day that whenever he was asked to switch positions, it would be time for him to retire. The 33-year-old is no longer sure that's the case.

A shift borne out of necessity also produced something Peterson didn't expect: joy.

"It's something I've never done before and makes coming to work that much more fun," Peterson said. "I'm still getting my feet wet back there. We'll see where it goes from here."

After drafting Porter with the first pick of the second round, the Steelers brought him along slowly, having him come off the bench for the first six games before finally

putting him in the starting lineup. He has responded by making it a habit to ask defensive coordinator Teryl Austin to shadow players like D.K. Metcalf and Ja'Marr Chase, a request Austin has never refused.

Still, Austin is quick to point out that Porter is hardly a finished product.

"He's got a lot of room to jump and improve and we've got to push him that way," Austin said. "So it's been good and we were deliberate and I think it worked out well for him."

And Peterson, too. He has found a willing student in a player who says he's been sticking to Peterson's hip from their first meeting together during organized team activities.

"I ask (Peterson) one thing, he's going to tell me 30," Porter said. "I've just soaked it all in."

NFL



MATT DURISKO/AP

Buffalo Bills wide receiver Stefon Diggs rushes against the New England Patriots on Dec. 31 in Orchard Park, NY. Despite Diggs' lack of recent production, the Bills have still managed to win five of their last six games.

Diggs' downturn offset by Bills' winning record

BY JOHN WAWROW

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — No one is disputing Stefon Diggs' status as the Buffalo Bills' top playmaker. And quarterback Josh Allen once again insisted Wednesday that it's important to get Diggs more involved in the offense.

But all the talk lauding the receiver's ability doesn't match the sudden drop in his production over the past six weeks.

So what gives?

"There's a lot of stuff that goes into that," Allen explained.

Buffalo (10-6) closes the regular season Sunday night with a critical showdown at Miami (11-5). The AFC East title — and potentially the Bills' playoff chances — hang in the balance after they climbed back into postseason contention with Diggs playing a diminished role.

"Obviously, there's times where he wants the ball and deservedly so. He's one of the best, if not the best, receivers in the game," Allen said. "He gets a lot of attention from defenses, so sometimes it's just how it plays out. But I've got to be better in that aspect, too."

Bills coach Sean McDermott echoed Allen's comments by saying, "It's a little bit here, a little bit there."

The coach then suggested the focus on Diggs' numbers is overblown.

"I understand you guys want to make it about this thing over here, and that is important because it does help us win," McDermott said, referring to the media. "At the



Buffalo Bills (10-6)
at Miami Dolphins (11-5)

AFN-Sports
2:20 a.m. Monday CET
10:20 a.m. Monday JKT

same time, it's about making sure we're going with the ball where we need to go with the ball, and we're moving the chains and scoring points. So that's the goal."

McDermott has a point. Coincidentally or not, the Bills have won four straight games and five of six with Diggs producing less.

Following a 24-22 loss to Denver on Nov. 13 that dropped Buffalo to 5-5, Diggs was tied with Keenan Allen for the NFL lead with 73 catches. He was tied for second with seven touchdown receptions and ranked sixth with 868 yards receiving.

Six games later, the Bills are 10-6, and Diggs has plummeted down the rankings with only 27 catches for 228 yards and a score since.

Buffalo's running attack has made up part of the difference, with James Cook averaging 20 more yards from scrimmage since Week 11.

Also playing a role is Allen spreading the ball in finding secondary threats.

Khalil Shakir has doubled his yards receiving total to 506 over the past six weeks. During the same span, tight end Dalton Kincaid has 21 catches for 199 yards, while receiver Gabe Davis has 12 catches for 256 yards and two scores.

Playing time has also been an issue, with Diggs sitting out 83 of Buffalo's 192 offensive snaps over the past three games.

Interim offensive coordinator Joe Brady said that's partially on him, and partially by design to keep Diggs rested. Brady said he missed an opportunity to get Diggs back on the field to open the second half Sunday, when the receiver stood on the sideline watching Buffalo cap a nine-play, 75-yard scoring drive in a 27-21 win over New England.

"Look, I know we're better when Stef's on the field," said Brady, whose promotion after Ken Dorsey was fired following the loss to Denver coincided with Diggs' slipping numbers. "I have to continue working through finding ways to get (the ball) to him regardless. It's nothing Stef isn't doing."

Diggs hasn't spoken to reporters in three weeks, since saying he was frustrated by constant double-team coverage. While saying it's smart for opposing defenses to do so, he stressed it doesn't make him happy.

"I try to motivate guys. And I can't be in a low spirit or low energy.... And part of that kind of uplifts myself," Diggs said about trying to remain upbeat. "But it's damn sure frustrating. I'm not going to lie. I get furious out there."

Jags' Lawrence taking 'cautious,' 'aggressive' approach to returning

BY MARK LONG

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Trevor Lawrence is trying to be cautious and aggressive with his sprained throwing shoulder, hoping the approach could help him return to the starting lineup for Jacksonville's pivotal regular-season finale at Tennessee on Sunday.

Lawrence practiced in a limited capacity Wednesday, but he didn't throw during the portion of practice open to reporters. He missed all of last week while resting his right shoulder and sat out Sunday's 26-0 win against Carolina, ending a streak of 51 consecutive starts for the first overall pick in the 2021 draft.

"It's feeling better," Lawrence said Wednesday. "Obviously missing last week's game is a little slower than I would've liked it to be progressing, but it actually feels pretty decent. It's getting better every day. Just trying to be cautious but also aggressive in how I'm trying to treat it so I can get back as quick as possible, but also be smart. So it's a fine line."

Lawrence sprained an AC joint while diving for a first down on a fourth-and-1 play the previous week at Tampa Bay. He could barely lift his arm in the locker room afterward and has been unable to throw much since.

"Certain movements bother it more than others," he said. "There's some things that I can do and there's some areas where I have totally normal strength and it's functional and all that. But in certain positions, it does get a little bit ... there's some aggravation,



Jacksonville Jaguars (9-7)
at Tennessee Titans (5-11)

AFN-Atlantic

7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT

but that's getting better every day. Still would like to see that go down a little bit more before I just totally let it loose."

The Jaguars (9-7) need a victory against the Titans to secure the AFC South for the second consecutive season. They could still make the playoffs with a loss, but they would need Pittsburgh and Denver to lose to eke into the post-season as the AFC's No. 7 seed.

Lawrence wants to be on the field for it instead of watching from the sideline.

"The way I see it, if you can play, you play. If you can't, then you can't and you don't," Lawrence said. "I do think it can be difficult depending on the injury to make that decision sometimes. You got to weigh, one, can I play close to my best to help the team? And, two, is this going to affect me long term to where next week or the following week is it still going to be lingering if I decide to play?"

"I think you got to weigh that. That could be difficult, but I think that the whole commitment deal is this: This game is important and guys understand that on this team, and if you can play, you play."



DOUG MURRAY/AP

Jacksonville Jaguars QB Trevor Lawrence missed last week's game against Carolina, ending a streak of 51 consecutive starts.

SPORTS



On the cusp of the playoffs
Steichen, Minshew have helped
turn around Colts' season » **NFL, Page 30**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF



ERIC GAY/AP

Ohio State players celebrate on Jan. 12, 2015, after beating Oregon 42-20 in the inaugural College Football Playoff championship game. The Buckeyes won as the fourth seed.

The good, the bad and the ugly

Playoff format led to undisputed champion, but conferences and bowls took major hits

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

The four-team playoff changed college football. Not just the postseason and crowning of a national champion that finally could be called undisputed.

College Football Playoff 1.0, which wraps up a 10-year run Monday night when No. 1 Michigan (14-0) faces No. 2 Washington (14-0) in the national championship game, created a new standard for success — and failure — for teams and conferences. It helped the rich and powerful become more rich and powerful, further nationalized a sport with regional roots and was an imperfect but necessary step in the evolution of the postseason.

“I think what’s coming is going to be better, but this worked really well,” said Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick, one

of the architects of the 12-team system that goes into effect next season.

But with unintended consequences.

The positive

A four-team playoff made sense for college football when it was conceived in 2012, following 16 years of the Bowl Championship Series, which was implemented in 1998 and birthed from the Bowl Coalition and Bowl Alliance earlier in the 1990s.

The BCS gave only two teams a chance to win a national championship in the postseason and often produced unsatisfying results. The four-team playoff fixed that.

“We were able to eliminate any real controversy about who the champion was because it was decided on the field,” said Bill Hancock, who was the first executive direc-

SEE FORMAT ON PAGE 28



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Georgia defensive lineman Mykel Williams picks up a fumble after sacking Florida State quarterback Brock Glenn during the Orange Bowl on Dec. 30. After being left out of the CFP and having several opt-outs, the previously unbeaten Seminoles were routed 63-3.

Rays' Franco facing charges in Dominican Republic » **MLB, Page 25**