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STARS AND STRIPES

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CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2023

Free to Deployed Areas

China looks to inspect cargo moving in Taiwan Strait

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

China plans to inspect cargo ships and other vessels during a three-day "special joint patrol" of the Taiwan Strait announced Wednesday ahead of the Taiwanese leader's meeting with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

Beijing launched the special patrol just hours before McCarthy and Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen met, according to Chinese state media CCTV.com.

Taipei immediately protested the announcement, which it said includes "on-site inspections" of cargo ships. The island's Ministry of Transportation and Communications advised shipping companies to refuse boarding or inspection and alert the Taiwanese coast guard.

During a press conference Wednesday at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum in Simi Valley, Calif., Tsai and McCarthy lauded the U.S.-Taiwan relationship.

"The friendship between the people of Taiwan and America is a matter of profound importance to the free world and it is critical to maintain economic freedom,

SEE CHINA ON PAGE 3



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Taiwanese troops patrol the southern end of the Taiwan Strait, Jan. 12.



PHOTOS BY AGUSTIN MONTANEZ/U.S. Army National Guard

An M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle and Abrams tanks are on display during the opening ceremony for the Army's new weapons depot in Powidz, Poland, on Wednesday.

US weapons depot opens in Poland; largest NATO buy in decades

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A sprawling U.S. Army weapons depot in central Poland opened this week, giving NATO allies a readily accessible site with thousands of pieces of armor and other equipment that can be mobilized in a crisis.

In Powidz, a logistics hub that has become central to U.S. military efforts on the alliance's eastern flank, a project six years in the making came to fruition Wednesday as top U.S. and Polish officials lauded the strategic impact of the site.

"There will be seven gigantic warehouses stationed here on Polish soil full of heavy equipment,

over 2,700 pieces from tanks to Bradley (Fighting) Vehicles, all of it belonging to the U.S. armored brigade combat team," Mark Brzezinski, the U.S. ambassador to Poland, said during an opening ceremony.

The facility will enable U.S. forces to dispatch an entire armored brigade faster, cutting down deployment timelines with the pre-positioned weaponry, he said.

The \$360 million facility, which was funded by NATO, is the largest single infrastructure investment for the alliance in 30 years, the Army said.

SEE DEPOT ON PAGE 4

Six years in the making



Mariusz Blaszczak, the Polish defense minister, speaks in Powidz on Wednesday at the opening of a U.S. Army weapons depot.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

New Ram e-truck can go up to 500 miles on charge

Associated Press

DETROIT — An electric Ram pickup truck with up to 500 mile of range per charge and a battery-powered people-hauling Kia SUV are among the new vehicles being introduced Wednesday at the New York International Auto Show.

The two debuts in New York on Wednesday are among only nine automaker news conferences, far short of previous years. Many of the new models have been rolled out previously as automakers

move away from auto shows and introduce new products virtually.

The Ram 1500 Rev joins pickups from Ford, General Motors, Rivian and Lordstown Motors in a field that's growing increasingly crowded. Tesla is supposed to start selling its long-awaited Cybertruck later in the year.

The Ram looks more like the current gas-powered model than a more futuristic concept vehicle the company showed off in January. But it's full of new technology.

The Rev will come with a choice

of two battery packs, the standard one with up to 350 miles of range and an optional larger pack with an expected range of 500 miles.

The company says it also can tow up to 14000 pounds and carry 2700 pounds in its bed. The 654-horsepower truck also can travel from zero to 60 mph in 4.4 seconds, exceptionally quick for a vehicle that size.

The truck isn't due in showrooms until the fourth quarter of 2024. The price will be announced closer to the on-sale date.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (April 7)	\$1.06
British pound (April 7)	\$1.22
Japanese yen (April 7)	128.00
South Korean won (April 7)	1283.00
Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Britain (Pound)	1.2422
Canada (Dollar)	1.3503
China (Yuan)	6.8770
Denmark (Krone)	6.8380
Egypt (Pound)	30.9014
Euro	0.9177
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8500
Hungary (Forint)	345.18
Israel (Shekel)	3.6148
Japan (Yen)	131.79
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3068
Norway (Krone)	10.4727
Philippines (Peso)	54.60
Poland (Zloty)	4.30
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7514
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3311
South Korea (Won)	1320.13

Switzerland (Franc)	0.9057
Thailand (Baht)	34.16
Turkey (NewLira)	19.2587

(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

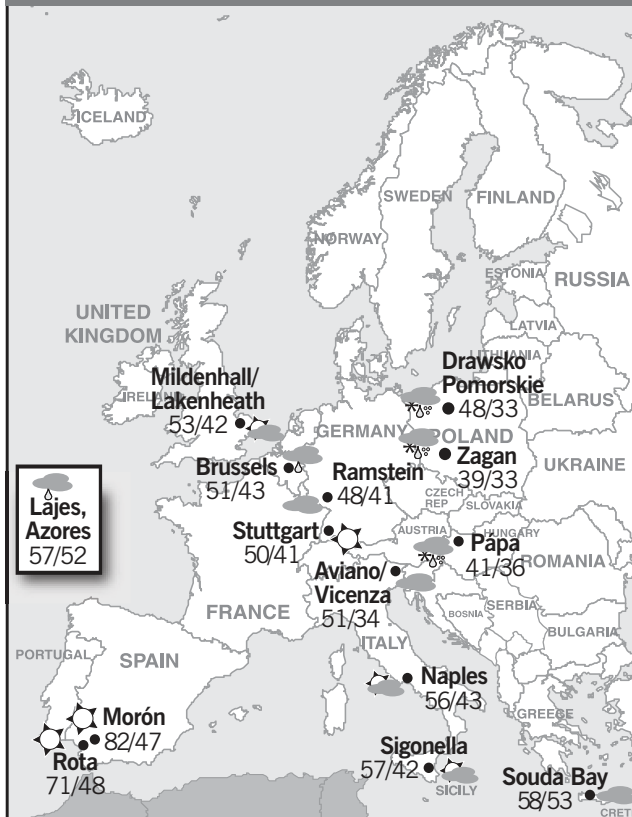
Prime rate	8.00
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.50
Federal funds market rate	4.58
3-month bill	4.86
30-year bond	3.57

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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STARS AND STRIPES MILITARY MATTERS



MILITARY



ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

Lt. Col. Robin A. Eskelson salutes after assuming command of the reactivated 95th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion during a ceremony Thursday. The unit was deactivated in Germany in 1972.

Battalion that will supply troops in Europe and Africa reactivated

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

BAUMHOLDER, Germany — The U.S. Army reactivated the 95th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion on Thursday, a move service officials say will allow them to move supplies more efficiently to troops in Europe and Africa.

The unit is expected to grow to 700 soldiers and will be responsible for transporting munitions, maintenance, food, fuel and other supplies.

Lt. Col. Robin Eskelson assumed command Thursday and was joined by enlisted leader Command Sgt. Maj. Luis Ortiz-Escalera during a ceremony at Smith Barracks in Baumholder.

Soldiers will be based out of Baumholder and Kaiserslautern but will support operations spanning at least 31 nations.

The reactivation of the battalion “comes at a critical moment” during Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine, Eskelson said.

Russia has struggled to supply its troops, leading to low morale and failed advances toward sev-

eral Ukrainian cities.

“What we’re seeing with the Russian incursion is sustainment really has failed them in a lot of ways,” Eskelson said.

The battalion is part of the 16th Sustainment Brigade.

The reactivated unit’s presence alongside the 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion effectively doubles the brigade’s ability to support exercises and operations.

“We are in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order,” said Col. Angel Estrada, the brigade’s commander. “Now, more than any other time in recent history, (we are) required to take on a larger, more impactful role inside an active theater of operations that sees our supported commands, allies and partners in urgent need of our support.”

Brigade soldiers already have traveled nearly 400,000 miles collectively, delivering over 9.2 million pounds of materiel in support of Ukraine, Estrada said.

Recent developments, including Finland’s accession to NATO,

mean expanded support requirements among U.S. partners and allies.

“It increases the mileage that we now have to protect and sustain and is a challenge in its own right,” Eskelson said. “Our goal is to grow our NATO alliance through sustainment and making the theater more sustainable ... from the High North in Finland all the way to the south and continent of Africa.”

The reactivated battalion is scheduled to support exercises in Africa and Eastern Europe even before all its soldiers arrive.

The 95th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion was reactivated 81 years to the day after it was first activated as the 95th Quartermaster Bakery Battalion in 1942, at Fort Meade, Md. During World War II, its soldiers supported four field campaigns, including Normandy.

The battalion was deactivated in Germany in 1972.

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N. Korea decries US, South drills

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea’s state-run news agency on Thursday condemned the United States and South Korea for their largest-ever joint military drills and warned that they raised regional tensions to an “extremely critical phase.”

The “unprecedented” military drills last month targeted Pyongyang, which will respond “through offensive action,” according to a column on the Korean Central News Agency website. The author was identified as Choe Ju Hyon, a purported international security analyst.

The U.S. and South Korean armed forces completed several large-scale drills throughout South Korea last month, including demonstrations on land, in the air and at sea. Presidents Joe Biden and Yoon Suk Yeol promised in May to increase the size and pace of the allies’ military exercises in response to continuing North Korean ballistic missile tests.

The two militaries most recently drilled on Wednesday with South Korean F-35A and U.S. F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters, F-16 Fighting Falcons and a B-52H Stratofortress bomber, according to a South Korean Ministry of National Defense news release the same day.

KCNA on Thursday described the allies’ recent military maneuvers as bringing “dark clouds of a nuclear war” over the Korean Peninsula. U.S. and South Korean commanders consistently describe their drills as defensive preparations for a Northern attack.

On the ground, the U.S. and South Korean armies conducted Warrior Shield, the largest field exercise by the two countries in six years. The four-day exercise, which ended March 23, included live-fire artillery drills and roughly 1,200 troops at sites as close as 16 miles from the Demilitarized Zone separating the two Koreas.

At sea, thousands of U.S. sailors

and Marines joined their South Korean counterparts for the two-week Ssangyong Exercise, which featured more than 30 ships, 70 aircraft and roughly 50 amphibious assault vessels. Ssangyong included an amphibious landing staged by South Korean and U.S. Marines and the Navy’s Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group.

A cross-section of the U.S. warplane inventory took part in Warrior Shield and Ssangyong — Army AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt II Warthogs and Marine Corps V-22 Ospreys. Air Force and South Korean bomber and fighter formations flew over the Korean Peninsula in separate training and airpower demonstrations.

In a separate naval exercise Monday, the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group and South Korean destroyers were joined by Japan’s JS Umigiri destroyer to practice their defense against North Korean underwater and missile threats. The drills — the first of their kind in seven years — included maritime assistance scenarios, according to the Ministry of National Defense.

North Korea has fired 11 ballistic missiles in eight separate days of testing so far this year. The communist regime last fired two short-range ballistic missiles on March 27.

South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the most recent missile launches as a demonstration of the North’s “vulnerability and insecurity,” according to a statement released the day of the launches.

North Korea’s latest missile comes roughly three weeks before Biden and Yoon are scheduled to meet at the White House. The state visit on April 26 will celebrate “the historic 70th anniversary” of the U.S. and South Korean alliance, Yoon’s presidential office said in a statement last month.

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China: Beijing protests McCarthy’s meeting with Taiwanese leader

FROM PAGE 1

peace and stability,” McCarthy said. “We will honor our obligations and reiterate our commitment to our shared values behind which all Americans are united.”

While the two carefully avoided mentioning Beijing’s aspirations of reunification, Tsai inched closer to the topic.

“It is no secret that today the peace that we have maintained and the democracy which we have

worked hard to build are facing unprecedented challenges,” she said. “We once again find ourselves in a world where democracy is under threat and the urgency of keeping the beacon of freedom shining cannot be understated.”

Beijing considers self-governing Taiwan a breakaway province that must be reunited with the mainland, by force if necessary.

The meeting is likely to trigger a “show of resolve” from Beijing in-

tended to discourage U.S. acknowledgement of Taiwanese independence, something that will feed a “vicious circle of reaction” between the U.S. and China, said Michael Swaine, senior researcher for the bipartisan think-tank Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, in an email.

Beijing again protested the meeting, calling the “Taiwan question” the “core of China’s core interests and the first red line

that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations,” according to a Thursday statement from China’s Foreign Ministry.

China further promised to take “strong and resolute measures” to defend its sovereignty and territory and said Taiwanese independence and peace within the Taiwan Strait are “as irreconcilable as fire and water.”

The situation echoes former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s

visit to Taipei in August, which China responded to with a week-long military exercise around Taiwan that effectively blockaded the island and included live-fire drills and ballistic missile launches.

Since then, China has almost daily and without notice sent large numbers of aircraft and warships across the 110-mile-wide strait.

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MILITARY

DOD detains guest in hotel training mix-up

Associated Press

BOSTON — Participants in a Department of Defense training exercise at a Boston hotel entered the wrong room Tuesday and mistakenly detained a guest instead of the person assigned the role of the person to be detained, according to the FBI.

The mistake happened about 10 p.m. with the Boston Division of the FBI helping the U.S. Department of Defense in conducting the Defense Department exercise.

The exercise was meant to sim-

ulate a situation that personnel might encounter during an actual incident.

“Based on inaccurate information, they were mistakenly sent to the wrong room and detained an individual, not the intended role player,” an FBI said in a written statement. “Thankfully nobody was injured.”

A Department of Defense official said the department apologizes to the person affected by the training exercise.

“The training was meant to en-

hance soldiers’ skills to operate in realistic and unfamiliar environments.

The training team, unfortunately, entered the wrong room and detained an individual unaffiliated with the exercise,” Lt. Col. Mike Burns of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command said in a statement.

“The Boston Police Department responded to the scene and confirmed that this was indeed a training exercise. The safety of civilians in vicinity of our training is

always our number one concern. We are reviewing this serious incident with our partners and no further details will be released at this time,” the statement added.

Burns declined to identify the person wrongly detained.

The FBI also called safety a priority for the agency and its law enforcement partners.

“We take these incidents very seriously,” the FBI statement added. “The Boston Division is reviewing the incident with DOD for further action as deemed appro-

priate.”

A spokesman for Delta Air Lines said the airline was looking to see if anyone from the airline might have been mistakenly caught up in it.

“We are looking into reports of an alleged incident in Boston that may involve Delta people,” the spokesperson said in a written statement. “We have nothing further to share at this time other than to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of our people.”

Depot: Location features 7 warehouses, 2,700 pieces

FROM PAGE 1

The opening of the weapons depot follows the recent establishment of the first permanent U.S. garrison in Poland in the west-central city of Poznan, which serves as a forward headquarters for the Army’s V Corps.

In recent years, Washington and Warsaw have invested heavily in a network of sites used by American forces in Poland. The developments have made Poland the centerpiece of the U.S. military’s efforts to deter Russian aggression along NATO’s eastern flank.

Following Russia’s initial military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the Army began rebuilding its mission in Europe after years of cutbacks.

A key part of that effort has been getting a wide range of weaponry into pre-positioned locations, which troops can access as needed, whether for training or crisis response.

While the number of permanently stationed soldiers in Europe has increased slightly in recent years, the Army relies heavily on forces rotating in and out of the Continent to carry out its mission.

Having gear in a network of depots streamlines those efforts.

The Powidz site, formally known as the Long-Term Equipment Storage and Maintenance Complex, cements the town as a key logistics node for the Army.

“This base is important because thanks to this, we increase our deterrence capabilities and we also show solidarity within NATO,” Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said at the ceremony.

Lt. Gen. Steven Basham, deputy commander of the Stuttgart, Germany-based U.S. European Command, added that Poland serves as “a linchpin of regional security” in the region.

And the “proof is right before our eyes” with the establishment of the weapons site, he added.



PHOTOS BY AGUSTIN MONTANEZ/U.S. Army

Soldiers mark the opening of the U.S. Army weapons depot in Powidz, Poland, on Wednesday.



Mark Brzezinski, the U.S. ambassador to Poland, speaks at the opening ceremony for the Army weapons depot in Powidz on Wednesday.

Senior NCO at Fort Polk charged with child porn

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

A command sergeant major accused of distributing child pornography, adultery and sharing explicit photographs of himself while in uniform will face a court-martial next month at Fort Polk, La., according to court documents.



Compton

Command Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Compton, 44, served as the top enlisted soldier of the 46th Engineer Battalion at Fort Polk for two years before his arraignment on six counts of sexual misconduct Nov. 8.

Compton pleaded not guilty, according to online court records. He is charged with four counts of owning and distributing digital images of a minor, or what appears to be a minor, engaging in sexually explicit conduct, according to Compton’s charge sheet. Two of the charges are for incidents that occurred between Aug. 23, 2020, and Sept. 8, 2020, and two charges occurred between April 20, 2021, and June 21, 2021.

Compton, who is married, is accused of having sex with someone who was not his spouse in Little Rock, Ark., on or about May 1, 2021, according to the charge sheet.

The final charge against Compton alleges he distributed images of himself dressed in his military uniform exposing himself at least once between April 2, 2021, and April 30, 2021.

A court-martial with a jury panel is scheduled for May 30. Compton, who is not confined, is represented by two military attorneys, according to online court records.

PACIFIC

IRS relents on tax bills for Red Hill funds

By **WYATT OLSON**

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Defense Department civilians who received money for temporary relocation during the Red Hill water contamination disaster in Hawaii last year do not have to pay income taxes on those funds, the Internal Revenue Service said Wednesday.

The IRS in a Wednesday announcement said the U.S. Treasury Department had determined the Red Hill fuel spill is “a qualified disaster” under the Internal Revenue Code and thus the relief payments are not taxable.

Scores, even hundreds, of resi-

dents of military communities on or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam welcomed the policy reversal. Earlier this year, they were stunned by a tax bill on emergency funds they received in 2022 to pay for hotel stays, meals and personal property damage after leaving their homes.

Some residents saw their gross incomes inflated by more than \$20,000, in some cases moving them into a higher tax bracket.

The unexpected tax bill outraged the affected residents, primarily federal employees, contractors and retirees who balked at paying a tax on a crisis of the Navy’s own making.

In one case, a retired Navy veteran learned she owed \$6,500 in taxes on \$22,000 she received from the government to temporarily relocate her family in early 2022 after jet fuel from the Navy’s Red Hill underground fuel storage facility leaked into their drinking water.

Active-duty service members who received the same relief payments were apparently exempted from the tax from the start.

In early March, Hawaii’s congressional delegation wrote to the acting commissioner of the IRS urging him to waive taxation on the Red Hill emergency funds.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro

approved payments for civilians on Feb. 25, 2022, under the Emergency and Extraordinary Expense authority provided for in federal statutes, the IRS said.

The Defense Department then made three types of emergency payments to affected civilians.

First were payments made to reimburse lodging and meal expenses by affected civilians who had no clean water at home and opted to temporarily relocate to hotels.

Second were reimbursements of meal expenses for civilians opting to remain in their homes even though their water was contaminated. Third were payments to reimburse the expenses of personal

property damage.

The IRS advises those who have not yet filed their 2022 income tax returns to simply exclude the amount stated on the form received earlier this year from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Those who have already filed returns that included the emergency funds can amend it by filing Form 1940-X.

Further details can be found in the announcement at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/a-23-07.pdf.

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‘Sushi terrorism’ trend lands pair of Japanese men in jail

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**

AND **KEISHI KOJA**

Stars and Stripes

Japanese police have arrested two Osaka men who appeared in a viral video, part of a social-media trend known as “sushi terrorism,” in which participants do things like licking soy sauce bottles or spitting on conveyor-belt sushi rolls.

Ryu Shimazu, 35, was arrested March 9, and his childhood friend, Toshihide Oka, 34, was taken into custody on Monday, after a video surfaced on social media in February of Shimazu eating pickled ginger from a communal pot using his own chopsticks, a spokeswoman from the Suminoe Police Department in Osaka city told Stars and Stripes by phone on Thursday.

Police said the incident, which could transmit germs and get other patrons sick, happened at a Yoshinoya beef bowl restaurant in Osaka on Sept. 29.

Both men admitted guilt and remained in police custody on Thursday, the spokeswoman said. Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

“I asked Shimazu to do something funny, and he suddenly started eating the pickled ginger with his chopsticks,” Oka said, according to the spokeswoman. “I thought that was

so funny and ... uploaded the video on social media.”

Shimazu told police he “wanted to make people laugh.” The video had nearly 6 million views on Twitter as of Thursday.

The term “sushi tero,” or sushi terrorism, became a trending topic worldwide earlier this year after videos of sushi restaurant patrons licking unused cups or touching other people’s sushi after licking their fingers generated tens of millions of views online. The practice drew sharp condemnation from greater Japanese society, which prides itself on cleanliness and civility.

In certain cases, the restaurants have pressed charges against the perpetrators.

The video, which shows Shimazu shoveling ginger into his mouth while Oka laughs off camera, was discovered online by a Yoshinoya customer in February, the police spokeswoman said. The customer informed the restaurant, which notified police on Feb. 9.

Shimazu was arrested at his home in Osaka’s Nishinari district March 9, and charged the next day with damaging property and forcible obstruction of business, the spokeswoman said. If convicted, he faces up to six years in prison and \$6,100 in fines.

Oka turned himself in on Monday, the spokeswoman said. He has not yet been charged.



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

Two Japanese men were arrested recently after one of them ate pickled ginger from a communal pot using his own chopsticks.

The viral video caused that Yoshinoya location to shutter for a few hours Feb. 5 so conditions could be changed and utensils disinfected, spokesman Yuji Terasawa told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. The chain is asking employees to be more vigilant in watching patrons.

Incidents like this “are causing anxiety and

discomfort among customers,” Terasawa said. “It causes us anger that the safety and security of restaurants is being questioned because of these issues.”

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Coronavirus border-control measures for those entering Japan to end

By **HANA KUSUMOTO**

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan will lift all of its pandemic-related border control measures for incoming travelers next month and downgrade COVID-19 to a common disease, a top Japanese spokesman announced this week.

“As the classification of COVID-19 under the Infectious Diseases Act is to be changed on May 8, border control measures regarding COVID-19 are also scheduled to end,” said Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno at a news conference Monday.

COVID-19 will be classified in the same category as seasonal influenza after the change and Japan will introduce a new regime, genomic surveillance of infectious diseases, to monitor new infectious diseases entering the country, Matsuno added.

The new system will routinely screen incoming travelers with symptoms, such as fever and cough, on a volunteer basis, he said. The tests will be conducted at Narita, Haneda, Chubu, Kansai and Fukuoka airports, the Yomiuri newspaper reported Saturday.

Current border control measures

require returnees and entrants to show proof of three COVID-19 vaccinations, or a negative COVID-19 test result within 72 hours of departing for Japan.

The country suffered nearly 73,000 deaths related to the coronavirus respiratory disease, which infected 33.3 million people within its borders, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. The center stopped tracking new cases on March 10.

Japan’s border control measures, first imposed in February 2021 and tightened in November 2021, are some of the strictest in the Group of

7 nations.

Those measures required returning Japanese nationals to be quarantined at designated hotels and forbid most nonresident foreigners from entering the country at all. U.S. troops and others under the status of forces agreement were among the exception.

Japan in March 2022 gradually increased the maximum daily number of incoming nonresident foreigners and lifted those limits completely in October 2022.

Downgrading COVID-19 in Japan is a major step toward a return to normal social and economic ac-

tivities although many people still wear masks and refrain from large gatherings.

Matsuno also said that provisional border measures for travelers entering from mainland China would be eased Wednesday. Japan will no longer require them to show a negative COVID-19 test as long as they can present proof of three COVID-19 vaccinations, he said.

These requirements will also end on May 8 when all border control measures are lifted.

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MILITARY

Strike may indicate expanded pro-Iran militant campaign

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The drone behind a deadly strike on a U.S. base in Syria last month may signal a new phase of Iranian-backed attacks on American troops in the region, analysts said.

A Qasef-1 one-way attack drone was what mostly likely struck the Rumalyn Landing Zone in northeast Syria on March 23, weapons experts and a U.S. official said.

Iranian-backed militant groups in Yemen have used the drone, but it hasn't often been seen in Iraq and Syria, said Nicholas Heras, director of strategy and innovation at the Washington-based New Lines Institute.

The Qasef-1 is durable, has a relatively high payload and operates quietly, Heras said.

Its deployment in Syria would be unusual and "a potential indicator that Iran might be looking to expand its campaign against U.S. forces in Syria," Heras said in a text message Thursday.

The U.S. military said a one-way attack drone of Iranian origin struck a base in northeastern Syria as part of a series of attacks March 23-24 that left a U.S. contractor dead and 13 personnel injured.

U.S. Central Command in an emailed statement said the model of the drone that struck Rumalyn Landing Zone remains classified.

But a U.S. official who asked for anonymity to speak freely said Wednesday that it was likely an IRN-12, which is what the United States calls the Qasef-1.

A video posted by the militant group that claimed the attack on its Telegram channel appeared to show the launch of a drone similar in appearance to the Qasef-1, said Jeremy Binnie, an analyst at the defense intelligence firm Janes.

The militant group, Islamic Resistance Liwa al-Ghaliboun, is most likely a front for militias closely linked with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, analysts said last week.

CENTCOM in a statement Wednesday declined to identify the group it deems responsible for the attack, saying only that it holds Iran accountable.

The Qasef-1 has been used extensively by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels against government forces in Yemen and in attacks on airports and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, Binnie and other weapons experts said.

It was unveiled by Houthi rebels in 2017 and is the modified

form of the Iranian Ababil-2, Binnie said.

It has a range of about 93 miles one way and can carry a 66-pound payload consisting of either a warhead or reconnaissance cameras.

Pro-Iranian Iraqi militias usually show off their Samad model drones, which have a longer range than Qasef models, Binnie said.

But Qasef drones are harder for air defenses to detect and intercept, which could be why they're being used now in Syria and Iraq, Binnie said, adding that the drawback is how launch teams have to be closer to their targets.

Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have not explicitly displayed the Qasef-1, but they are likely to have it, Binnie said.

A U.S. official close to the operations said the drone attacked at a trajectory lower than what U.S. troops typically have seen.

This mirrors tactics developed by drone operators in the war in Yemen, Binnie said.

A lower-than-expected approach would have allowed operators to use the flat terrain around the Rumalyn Landing Zone to give radars at the base less time to detect the drone, Binnie said.

One of the three defense systems at the base also was down for maintenance at the time of the attack, The New York Times reported last month.

Iran's drones are among the most advanced in the world and have had an outsized impact in wars in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Ukraine, experts and U.S. military officials have said.

The Pentagon has said that Iranian drones have wrested "localized air superiority" away from the U.S. in some parts of the Middle East, and that neutralizing their threat is a priority.

There are about 900 U.S. service members in Syria, part of joint efforts with Kurdish fighters to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State, according to U.S. Central Command.

The U.S. also has about 170 contractors in Syria, CENTCOM spokesman Lt. Col. Dave Eastburn said last week.

Iran and Saudi Arabia, which backed opposing forces in the war in Yemen, formally restored diplomatic ties Thursday in a move that could bolster efforts to end the nine-year-old conflict.

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ANDREA ALEXANDRU/AP

Changing of the guard

U.S. military personnel arrive for a transfer of authority ceremony from the 101st Airborne Division to the 10th Mountain Division in Bucharest, Romania, on Wednesday. U.S. troops are deployed to Romania along with forces from other NATO member states as the alliance looks to boost security on its southeastern flank amid Russia's war in Ukraine.

Racial slur, swastika left painted across airman's home at Minot Air Force Base

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Graffiti that included a swastika, profanity, gang references and a racial slur was spray painted across the Minot Air Force Base home of an airman and his family last weekend and security forces are still searching for culprits, according to officials at the North Dakota base.

The incident happened early Saturday morning at the on-base duplex where Airman 1st Class Justin Rutledge and his wife MacKenzy have lived for more than a year.

"This is just a little too close [for comfort] with me having a 4-month-old [son] and my husband being at work all day," MacKenzy Rutledge said.

She said she was up late with her son Friday night and left home at

about 2 a.m. Saturday to purchase a beverage from the nearby shopette. MacKenzy returned about 30 minutes later and found the garage door covered with the black spray-painted graffiti. The Rutledges share a driveway with their neighbor whose garage had some black squiggles painted on it.

But MacKenzy said she felt her family was targeted and she immediately called the base police about the incident. The Rutledges, who are white, requested to rent a different home at the base. In the meantime, she said civil engineers for the base have covered the graffiti with white paint.

Maj. Jhanelle Haag, Minot Air Force Base spokeswoman, said this is the only incident of graffiti at an on-base home in the past year. The base's population is more than 12,000 people, including about

5,470 active-duty and Reserve service members assigned to Minot, she said.

"Minot Air Force Base has a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination of any kind," said Col. Dan Hoadley, commander of the 5th Bomb Wing at Minot. "This type of behavior is abhorrent, unacceptable and does not align with our Air Force core values."

Hoadley said base security forces are investigating the incident. The Ward County Sheriff's Department and the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation have been called in to help with crime scene analysis.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the 5th Security Forces at 701-723-3096.

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Japan army copter with 10 crashes in ocean

Associated Press

TOKYO — A missing Japanese army helicopter carrying 10 crew members is believed to have crashed into the sea off a southern island after objects appearing to be aircraft parts were spotted in the area, an official said Thursday.

The UH-60JA Black Hawk helicopter disappeared from radar on Thursday afternoon while on a reconnaissance mission north of Miyako island, the head of the Ground Self Defense Force, Yasunori Morishita, said at a news conference.

Debris believed to be aircraft parts was spotted in the area, about 1,120 miles southwest of Tokyo, he said.

The government is aggressively building up its defense capability in southwestern Japan in response to China's increasingly assertive military activity in the region, including Taiwan.

Kyodo News said Japanese coast guard ships also found traces of oil that may be related to the missing helicopter, but officials declined to confirm the report.

Morishita said the helicopter was stationed at a key regional ar-

my base in Kumamoto prefecture on the southern main island of Kyushu, and one of its 10 crew members is the division commander, Yuichi Sakamoto.

Morishita said the helicopter disappeared from radar earlier than previously thought.

NHK public television earlier said the helicopter disappeared from radar about an hour after it departed from Miyako island and about half an hour before its scheduled return.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the Defense Ministry is investigating.

EUROPE

Russian official: Ukrainian kids can leave

The commissioner for children's rights has been charged for war crimes for taking children

By EDITH M. LEDERER
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Russia's commissioner for children's rights, who is being sought for war crimes for deporting children from Ukraine, told a U.N. meeting Wednesday that the children were taken for their safety and Moscow is coordinating with international organizations to return them to their families.

Ambassadors from Western countries boycotted the informal U.N. Security Council meeting, sending low-level diplomats instead. Diplomats from the United States, Britain, Albania and Malta

walked out when the commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, started to address the meeting by video link.



Lvova-Belova

The International Criminal Court last month issued an arrest warrant for her and Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing them of abducting children from Ukraine.

Russia, which holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month, called the meeting to counter what it claims is disinformation about the Ukrainian children.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters before the session that the United States strongly opposed the briefing and joined the United Kingdom in blocking the United Nations from outside broadcast of the meeting.

Lvova-Belova should not be allowed "to have an international podium to spread disinformation and to try to defend her horrible actions that are taking place in Ukraine," Thomas-Greenfield said.

An Associated Press investigation, published in October, on Lvova-Belova's involvement in the abduction of Ukrainian children found the open effort to put Ukrainian children up for adoption in Russia was well underway.

The exact number of Ukrainian children taken to Russia has been difficult to determine. A statement posted Wednesday on Twitter by Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Serhiy Kyslytsya, said more than 19,500 children had been seized from their families or orphanages and forcibly deported.

Russia's ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said the aim of Wednesday's meeting was "to unmask the blatant double-standards of the West."

"Part of this propaganda campaign is the hushing up by the West of the fact that in European countries Ukrainian refugees are having their children taken away," he said. Videos were then shown of some women claiming their children had been taken in Europe.

Nebenzia also insisted that contrary to Western claims there have been "no forced adoptions." He said some Ukrainian children are in foster care and claimed there were "no obstacles" for them to maintain contact with their families in Ukraine.



MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV, SPUTNIK, KREMLIN POOL/AP

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, left, and Russian President Vladimir Putin talk prior to the Supreme State Council of the Union State Russia-Belarus meeting in Moscow, Russia, on Thursday.

Russia and Belarus hold talks on defense and economic ties

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart on Thursday discussed expanding the economic cooperation and bolstering the defense ties between their nations, which include a plan to deploy Russia's nuclear weapons to Belarus amid the fighting in neighboring Ukraine.

The Kremlin talks involved senior officials from both countries and followed Putin's one-on-one meeting with President Alexander Lukashenko on Wednesday.

Putin said there would be "close work" on boosting cooperation under a union agreement that envisions close political, economic and military ties between Belarus and

Russia.

Russia used Belarusian territory as a staging ground for invading neighboring Ukraine and has maintained a contingent of troops and weapons there.

Last month, Putin declared that Moscow planned to put some of its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, an announcement that marked another attempt by the Russian leader to dangle the nuclear threat to discourage the West from supporting Ukraine.

Such weapons are intended to destroy enemy troops on the battlefield and have a relatively short range and a much lower yield compared with nuclear warheads fitted to long-range strategic missiles, which are capable of obliterating whole cities.

In opening remarks at Thursday's talks, Lukashenko warned that "if necessary, we will use all we have to protect our countries and peoples."

"We aren't blackmailing anyone. It will be so," he added.

The Belarusian leader cited the importance of close defense cooperation and asserted that Belarusian factories have developed the expertise to replace Western companies as a source of electronic components for Russian weapons.

"We oriented ourselves toward the West in the past, but now we have come to realize that they aren't our friends and we need to produce all that ourselves," Lukashenko said.

Sweden: State actor likeliest culprit for sabotage on pipeline

Associated Press

HELSINKI — Swedish prosecutors said Thursday a state actor was the most likely culprit for the explosions that incapacitated the Nord Stream gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea last year, an act deemed as sabotage. However, they cautioned that the identity of the perpetrator was still unclear and hinted that it was likely to remain so.

Public prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist from the Swedish Prosecution Authority said in a statement that his office's investigation is focused on examining if Swedish interests or Swedish security were threatened by the act.

The Swedish authorities are also keen to find out whether the explosions were prepared on their territory. "Our hope is to be able to confirm who has committed this crime" but "it should be noted that it likely will be difficult given the circumstances," Ljungqvist said.

Last month, a German media investigation quoted unnamed officials as saying that five men and a woman used a yacht hired by a Ukrainian-owned company in Poland to carry out the attack. The Ukrainian government has denied involvement.

Ljungqvist stressed that the case — labeled by Swedish prosecutors as "gross sabotage" — is complex, and hence time-consuming to investigate. The prosecutors' office gave no estimate on when the Swedish investigation would wrap up.

"This concerns a crime whose circumstances are difficult to investigate. The detonations took place 262 feet under the water on the ocean floor in the Baltic Sea,"

Ljungqvist said.

Separately, he told Swedish media that prosecutors' main line of investigation is on whether a state actor was behind the explosions, given the substantial resources and skills needed to carry out such an attack.

"We aren't ruling out that there could be non-state actors capable of doing this," Ljungqvist told the Swedish news agency TT. "But then we're dealing with very few companies or groups. Considering all the circumstances, our main (investigation) track is that it is a state that is behind it."

A total of four leaks were discovered on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines that run from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea, on Sept. 26 and 27 respectively.

Two of the leaks were in the Swedish economic zone, northeast of the Danish island of Bornholm, and two in the Danish economic zone, southeast of Bornholm. Both Swedish and Danish seismic measurements showed that explosions took place a few hours before the leaks were discovered.

Authorities and investigators in Denmark, Sweden and other countries early on suspected the explosions were deliberate attacks and consider them sabotage. The pipelines were not operational at the time, due to disputes between Russia and the European Union amid the war in Ukraine.

The United States and some of its allies have long criticized the pipelines, warning that they posed a risk to Europe's energy security by increasing the continent's dependence on Russian gas.

NATION

Trump's bravado put to test amid legal challenges

BY JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

NEW YORK — When Donald Trump stepped into a Manhattan courthouse Tuesday afternoon, his usual bravado was replaced with palpable anger and notable silence as the former president was reduced to a criminal defendant in custody.

By the time he returned to his Mar-a-Lago club hours later, he was ready to unleash.

"The only crime that I have committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it," the first former president to be indicted told a crowd of hundreds of loyal supporters.

Trump made an unlikely transformation from reality television star to U.S. president by tapping into the grievance of Republican voters disillusioned with the political establishment. As he wages a comeback bid for the White House, Trump and his campaign hope his indictment will serve as a rallying cry that will galvanize the same voters. Already, he has raised millions of dollars off the news.

It's an approach that will test Trump's "all publicity is good publicity" adage as his decades-long history of bending the world to his will collides with cold legal reality.

Trump, the early frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, now faces the unprecedented prospect of mounting another campaign for the White House while simultaneously on trial for charges stemming from hush money payments to women during his 2016 campaign. He remains under investigation in Georgia and Washington, raising the prospect of multiple trials in sev-

eral jurisdictions, all unfolding as Republicans begin voting on their next nominee.

In the meantime, Trump's rivals for the Republican presidential nomination are struggling to emerge from his ever-growing shadow, even as the proceedings raise serious questions about Trump's viability in a general election.

"A lot of times you have a candidate who's in trouble, you create a diversion," said Trump campaign pollster John McLaughlin. "They're indicting Trump, Trump consumes all the headlines and media coverage."

While most defendants would see an arrest as an indignity to be handled quietly, Trump — a man who has always craved the media spotlight — seized the PR and fundraising opportunity, blasting out his itinerary and narrating a play-by-play on social media.

"Heading to Lower Manhattan, the Courthouse. Seems so SUR-REAL — WOW, they are going to ARREST ME. Can't believe this is happening in America. MAGA!" he wrote on Truth Social as his motorcade headed toward the courthouse, his every movement captured by news helicopters hovering overhead.

His campaign further hyped the appearance in fundraising solicitations. "My last email before my arrest," one read.

As he was behind closed doors at the courthouse being booked and fingerprinted, his campaign began advertising a "NEW ITEM" to donors: A t-shirt featuring a doctored black-and-white "mug shot" of Trump, complete with an exaggerated height chart and the words, "NOT GUILTY."

In reality, Trump was not sub-



EVAN VUCCI/AP

Former President Donald Trump arrives to speak at his Mar-a-Lago estate Tuesday in Palm Beach, Fla.

jected to a mug shot Tuesday — one of several exceptions from normal operating procedure made for the former president — underscoring the contrast between the image he hoped to project and his actual appearance as he faced 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first degree.

After being caught off guard by the charges, Trump appeared unmistakably livid as he left Trump Tower Tuesday afternoon and arrived at the lower Manhattan courthouse. He was stone-faced and silent as he entered the courtroom alone, pushing the door open himself.

"What do you expect his reaction was?" Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche said outside the courthouse immediately following the appearance. "He's frustrated, he's upset. But I'll tell you what: He's motivated. And it's not going to stop him. It's not going to slow him down."

During the hearing, Trump was subdued. He spent the proceeding mostly listening and spoke just 10 words in total, including "Not guilty," "Yes," "Thank you," and "I do." At one point, after a discussion about whether one of his law-

yers might have a conflict of interest, Trump was told by the judge he had the right to conflict-free representation and was asked if he understood. Trump's response was so faint that the judge gestured to his ear, signaling he hadn't heard the answer. "Yes," Trump then offered.

Before the proceeding, Trump declined to speak to assembled reporters, as had been expected.

"He is angry," Barbara Res, a longtime former employee who was a vice president at the Trump Organization, said of the former president after watching the proceedings. "He has a look on his face and I've seen that look. That look is, 'I'm going to kill you.'"

Trump, according to people who had spoken to him in recent days, had seemed both resigned and angry as he processed the reality of the pending charges, which remained under seal until the hearing.

"He is angry. He is frustrated, but he is dedicated to defeating this," said U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican who appeared at a pro-Trump rally in New York across the street from the courthouse and joined the former president at Mar-a-La-

go Tuesday night.

On Tuesday at the courthouse, he was described as resolute and calm — mad about the circumstances, but also pleased by his respectful treatment by court officers, U.S. Secret Service and staff from the District Attorney's office.

"The GREAT PATRIOTS inside and outside of the Courthouse on Tuesday were unbelievably nice, in fact, they couldn't have been nicer," Trump said in a statement. "Court attendants, Police Officers, and others were all very professional, and represented New York City sooo well. Thank you to all!"

Trump, after the hearing, flew straight back home to Florida, where he delivered a grievance-filled primetime speech, again criticizing the prosecution and judge presiding over the case despite being admonished hours earlier about incendiary rhetoric.

It remains unclear how the charges will reverberate long term, especially if Trump faces additional indictments in Georgia and Washington, where prosecutors are investigating his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election and his handling of classified documents.

Pence won't appeal order compelling grand jury testimony

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A spokesman for Mike Pence said Wednesday that the former vice president will not appeal a judge's order compelling him to testify in the Justice Department's investigation into efforts by Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The decision sets up a possible appearance by Pence in the coming weeks before a federal grand jury scrutinizing attempts by the former president and supporters

before the riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, to undo Democrat Joe Biden's victory.



Pence

Multiple Trump administration officials have testified in that investigation, as well as in a separate inquiry examining Trump's possession of classified documents, but Pence would be the highest-profile witness to answer questions

before a grand jury. His closed-door testimony could offer investigators a firsthand account of Trump's state of mind in the pivotal weeks after he lost to Biden and further expose the rift in their relationship since the end of their administration.

The strain could grow as Pence approaches a likely 2024 run for the presidency and a challenge to Trump, who already is in the race for the Republican nomination.

After Pence was subpoenaed months ago by the Justice Depart-

ment's special counsel, lawyers for Trump objected on executive privilege grounds. But a federal judge in Washington last week rejected those arguments, forcing Pence to testify.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg did give Pence a win by accepting arguments from Pence's lawyers that, for constitutional reasons, he could not be questioned about his actions on Jan. 6. They had argued that because Pence was serving in his capacity as president of the Senate that day,

he was protected from being forced to testify under the Constitution's "speech or debate" clause, which is intended to protect members of Congress from questioning about official legislative acts.

"Having vindicated that principle of the Constitution, Vice President Pence will not appeal the judge's ruling and will comply with the subpoena as required by law," Pence spokesman Devin O'Malley said in a statement Wednesday.

NATION

Storms helped fill California reservoirs

Associated Press

FOLSOM, Calif. — Water levels fell so low in key reservoirs during the depth of California's drought that boat docks sat on dry, cracked land and cars drove into the center of what should have been Folsom Lake.

Those scenes are no more after a series of powerful storms dumped record amounts of rain and snow across California, replenishing reservoirs and bringing an end — mostly — to the state's three-year drought.

Now, 12 of California's 17 major reservoirs are filled above their historical averages for the start of spring. That includes Folsom Lake, which controls water flows along the American River, as well as Lake Oroville, the state's second largest reservoir and home to the nation's tallest dam.

It's a stunning turnaround of water availability in the nation's most populous state. Late last year nearly all of California was in drought, including at extreme and exceptional levels. Wells ran dry, farmers fallowed fields and cities restricted watering grass.

The water picture changed dra-



NOAH BERGER/AP

A car crosses Enterprise Bridge over Lake Oroville's dry banks on May 23, 2021, left, and the same location on March 26, in Butte County, Calif.

matically in December, when the first of a dozen "atmospheric rivers" hit, causing widespread flooding and damaging homes and infrastructure, and dumping as many as 700 inches of snow in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

"California went from the three driest years on record to the three

wettest weeks on record when we were catapulted into our rainy season in January," said Karla Nemeth, director of California Department of Water Resources. "So, hydrologically, California is no longer in a drought except for very small portions of the state."

All the rain and snow, while

drought-busting, may bring new challenges. Some reservoirs are so full that water is being released to make room for storm runoff and snowmelt that could cause flooding this spring and summer, a new problem for weary water managers and emergency responders.

The storms have created one of

the biggest snowpacks on record in the Sierra Nevada mountains. The snowpack's water content is 239% of its normal average and nearly triple in the southern Sierra, according to state data. Now as the weather warms up, water managers are preparing for all that snow to melt, unleashing a torrent of water that's expected to cause flooding in the Sierra foothills and Central Valley.

"We know there will be flooding as a result of the snowmelt," Nemeth said. "There's just too much snowmelt to be accommodated in our rivers and channels and keeping things between levees."

Managers are now releasing water from the Oroville Dam spillway.

The abundant precipitation has prompted Gov. Gavin Newsom to lift some of the state's water restrictions and stop asking people to voluntarily reduce their water use by 15%.

Newsom has not declared the drought over because there are still water shortages along the California-Oregon border and parts of Southern California that rely on the struggling Colorado River.

Former Mich. pot board head charged in bribery

Associated Press

The former head of a Michigan medical marijuana licensing board has agreed to plead guilty to accepting \$110,000 in bribes to influence his decisions when he led the panel over a two-year period, authorities said Thursday.

Charges against Rick Johnson and three other men were announced by U.S. Attorney Mark Totten at a press conference in the capital, Lansing.

Johnson was chairman of the marijuana board for two years until spring 2019. The Republican also was one of the most powerful lawmakers in the Capitol, serving as House speaker from 2001-04.

"Public corruption is a poison to any democracy. ... That poison is especially toxic here," Totten said. "The marijuana industry has been likened to a modern-day gold rush, a new frontier where participants can stake their claim and just maybe return big rewards."

The marijuana board reviewed and approved applications to grow and sell marijuana for medical purposes.

Johnson and the others have signed agreements to plead guilty in coming weeks and the investigation is ongoing, said Totten, the federal prosecutor in western Michigan.

A message seeking comment



DALE G. YOUNG, DETROIT NEWS/AP

Rick Johnson

from Johnson's attorney wasn't immediately returned.

A man who was seeking a license was charged with paying bribes, and two lobbyists were charged with a bribery conspiracy.

Report: 'Staggering' church abuse in Md.

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — More than 150 Catholic priests and others associated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore sexually abused over 600 children and often escaped accountability, according to a long-awaited state report released Wednesday that revealed the scope of abuse spanning 80 years and accused church leaders of decades of coverups.

The report paints a damning picture of the archdiocese, which is the oldest Roman Catholic diocese in the country and spans much of Maryland. Some parishes, schools and congregations had more than one abuser at the same time — including St. Mark Parish in Catonsville, which had 11 abusers living and working there between 1964 and 2004. One deacon admitted to molesting over 100 children. Another priest was allowed to feign hepatitis treatment and make other excuses to avoid facing abuse allegations.

The Maryland Attorney General's Office released the findings of their yearslong investigation during Holy Week — considered the most sacred time of year in Christianity ahead of Easter Sunday — and said the number of victims is likely far higher. The report was redacted to protect confidential grand jury materials, meaning the

identities of some accused clergy were removed.

"The staggering pervasiveness of the abuse itself underscores the culpability of the Church hierarchy," the report said. "The sheer number of abusers and victims, the depravity of the abusers' conduct, and the frequency with which known abusers were given the opportunity to continue preying upon children are astonishing."

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, in a statement posted online, apologized to the victims and said the report "details a reprehensible time in the history of this Archdiocese, a time that will not be covered up, ignored or forgotten."

"It is difficult for most to imagine that such evil acts could have actually occurred," Lori said. "For victim-survivors everywhere, they know the hard truth: These evil acts did occur."

Also on Wednesday, the state legislature passed a bill to end a statute of limitations on abuse-related civil lawsuits, sending it to Gov. Wes Moore, who has said he supports it. The Baltimore archdiocese says it has paid more than \$13.2 million for care and compensation for 301 abuse victims since the 1980s, including \$6.8 million toward 105 voluntary settlements.

Jobless aid claims rising but still low

Associated Press

The number of Americans seeking unemployment aid was higher over the past few months than the government had initially reported, reflecting a modest rise in layoffs as the economy has slowed in the face of higher interest rates.

The Labor Department reported Thursday the number of applications has exceeded 200,000 since early February — above previous estimates, still relatively low by historical standards.

The department has revised its estimates of the number of weekly applications for jobless benefits under a new formula it is using to reflect seasonal adjustments. The new formula is intended to more accurately capture seasonal patterns in job losses.

For the week that ended April 1, the number of Americans applying for jobless aid was 228,000, the government estimated. That was down from 246,000 in the previous week and 247,000 in the week be-

fore that. Using its new seasonal adjustment formula, the government revised each of those figures by nearly 50,000.

"The trend in seasonally adjusted initial claims is noticeably higher than previously estimated, which does suggest that the flurry of layoff announcements so far this year has begun to show up in these data," Stephen Stanley, chief U.S. economist of Santander U.S. Capital Markets, wrote in a research note.

NATION

DeSantis visits Whitmer's Michigan, the 'anti-Florida'

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. — Ahead of a highly anticipated presidential announcement, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will visit Michigan for his first appearance this year in the state transformed by Democratic majorities under high-profile Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

The visit will put the contrasting leadership styles of the Republican and Democrat on display after they scored landslide 2022 reelection victories that vaulted them to be their parties' brightest emerging stars.

In Florida, DeSantis and the GOP-dominated Legislature have moved the state further right, waging a culture war on what the governor has called "woke" agendas. In Michigan, Whitmer has led the way on codifying abortion rights and advancing sweeping gun reform with Democrats in full control for the first time in decades.

Whitmer has been a top ally to President Joe Biden and a kind of proxy for his leadership in their party — and what's possible under Democrats. DeSantis is one of the top potential candidates looking to unseat Biden next year.



JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks to a crowd at Adventure Outdoors gun store on March 30 in Smyrna, Ga.

Thursday's visit is also one of DeSantis's first out-of-state appearances since former President Donald Trump was indicted. With all eyes on Trump and his charges, it has been difficult for those vying for the GOP nomination to gain much notice.

Trump frequently targets DeSantis — a similarity that the gov-

ernor shares with Whitmer, who Trump labeled "that woman from Michigan" during his presidency. Recently, Trump has ramped up his DeSantis criticism, saying during a rally in Waco on March 25 that the Florida politician was disloyal and "dropping like a rock."

Potentially the fifth state to hold its Republican primary, Michigan

could prove pivotal for the GOP presidential nomination winner. Michigan House Republican Speaker Bryan Posthumus flew to Florida in December to deliver a letter signed by 18 other state House Republicans encouraging DeSantis to run for president.

"When he becomes an actual candidate, I will be doing another letter saying we endorse you for President of the United States of America," Posthumus told The Associated Press.

DeSantis will first travel Thursday morning to central Michigan to speak at a Midland County GOP event. State Rep. Bill G. Schuette, a Midland-area Republican, said the county party wanted to hear more about DeSantis's perspectives and proposals, in comparison to Michigan, which Schuette described as the "anti-Florida."

In the three weeks since Florida's legislative session began, DeSantis has worked to expand the state's so-called Don't Say Gay law, ban diversity and equity programs at public universities and eliminate concealed carry restrictions. The state has also begun passing a six-week abortion ban backed by DeSantis.

"What Gov. DeSantis has done

in Florida versus what Gov. Whitmer and the Democrats have done in Michigan is polar opposite," Posthumus said.

DeSantis is also scheduled to speak at Hillsdale College, a small, Christian classical liberal arts college in southern Michigan. The school has become a model for DeSantis's transformation of a small liberal arts school, New College of Florida, that he says is indoctrinating students with leftist ideology and should be revamped into a more conservative institution.

DeSantis's Midland event is expected to draw over 200 demonstrators to rally outside, protest organizers said.

Michigan voters have overwhelmingly rejected Republicans in the seven years since Trump won the state. Democrats control the statewide offices of governor, attorney general and secretary of state in addition to holding majorities in the Legislature.

With full control of the Statehouse for the first time in 40 years, Michigan Democrats have prioritized further protecting reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights that are being rolled back in Republican-led states across the nation.

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NATION

Idaho governor signs 'abortion trafficking' bill

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho Gov. Brad Little signed a bill into law Wednesday that makes it illegal for an adult to help a minor get an abortion without parental consent.

The law is the first of its kind in the U.S. and creates a new crime of "abortion trafficking," barring adults from obtaining abortion pills for a minor or "recruiting, harboring or transporting the pregnant minor" without the consent of the minor's parent or guardian.

Anyone convicted of breaking the law will face two to five years in prison and could also be sued by the minor's parent or guardian. Parents who raped their child will not be able to sue, though the criminal penalties for anyone who helped the minor obtain an abor-

tion will remain in effect.

To sidestep violating a constitutional right to travel between states, Idaho's law makes illegal only the in-state segment of a trip to an out-of-state abortion provider.

Opponents have promised a legal battle.

"Yet again, Idaho's governor disregarded constituents and signed HB 242 into law, creating the nation's first crime of so-called 'abortion trafficking.' This legislation is despicable, and we're going to do everything in our power to stop it," Idaho State Director for Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates-West said Wednesday on Twitter.

Idaho is one of 13 states that already effectively ban abortion in all stages.

Kansas bans trans athletes from female school sports

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — Kansas is banning transgender athletes from girls' and women's sports from kindergarten through college, the first of several possible new laws restricting the rights of transgender people pushed through by Republican legislators over the wishes of the Democratic governor.

The Legislature on Wednesday overrode Gov. Laura Kelly's third veto in three years of a bill to ban transgender athletes, and came a

day after state lawmakers passed a broad bathroom bill. Nineteen other states have imposed restrictions on transgender athletes, most recently Wyoming.

The Kansas law takes effect July 1 and is among several hundred proposals that Republican lawmakers across the U.S. have pursued this year to push back on LGBTQ rights. Kansas lawmakers who back the ban are also pursuing proposals to end gender-affirming care for minors and restrict restroom use.

Indiana and Idaho governors sign bans on gender-affirming care

By ARLEIGH RODGERS
Associated Press/Report for America

INDIANAPOLIS — Republican governors in Indiana and Idaho have signed into law bills banning gender-affirming care for minors, making those states the latest to restrict transgender health care as Republican-led legislatures continue to curb LGBTQ+ rights this year.

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb signed legislation Wednesday that will prohibit transgender youth from accessing medication or surgeries that aid in transition and

mandate those currently taking medication to stop by the end of the year.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little had signed legislation Tuesday evening that criminalizes gender-affirming care for youth.

More than a dozen other states are considering bills that would prohibit transgender youth from accessing hormone therapies, puberty blockers and transition surgeries, even after the approval of parents and the advice of doctors. Other proposals target transgender individuals' everyday life.

"Permanent gender-changing

surgeries with lifelong impacts and medically prescribed preparation for such a transition should occur as an adult, not as a minor," Holcomb said in a statement about the Indiana bill.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana filed a lawsuit rapidly after Holcomb signed the Indiana legislation — something the group had promised to do after Republican supermajorities advanced the ban this session. The American Civil Liberties Union of Idaho announced Wednesday it also planned to sue over that state's new law.

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WORLD

Saudi Arabia, Iran move to formally restore ties

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Long-time Mideast rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia took another significant step toward reconciliation Thursday, formally restoring diplomatic ties after a seven-year rift, affirming the need for regional stability and agreeing to pursue economic cooperation.

The agreement was reached in Beijing during a meeting between the Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers, a month after China had brokered an initial reconciliation agreement between the two regional powerhouses.

The latest understanding further lowers the chance of armed conflict between the rivals, both directly and in proxy conflicts around the region. It could bolster efforts by diplomats to end a long war in Yemen, a conflict in which both Iran and Saudi Arabia are deeply entrenched.

Thursday's announcement also represents another diplomatic victory for the Chinese as Gulf Arab states perceive the United States slowly withdrawing from the wider region.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian laid out details of Thursday's agreement in a tweet, after his talks with Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

The minister wrote that Thursday marked the beginning of "official diplomatic relations ... economic and commercial cooperation, the

reopening of embassies and consulates general, and the emphasis on stability, stable security and development of the region." Amirabdollahian said that the issues are "agreed upon and on the common agenda."

The official Iranian news agency, IRNA, said that in addition to reopening embassies in the two capitals, diplomatic missions would start operating in two other major cities — Mashhad in Iran and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The report said both sides also agreed to study the prospects of resuming flights and official and private visits between the two nations, in addition to how to facilitate the visa process for their people.

China's Foreign Ministry last month reported that both sides had agreed to reopen their embassies and missions within two months.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the two foreign ministers signed a joint statement and expressed their determination to improve ties in line with their talks in Beijing last month.

Thursday's talks in Beijing marked the first formal meeting of senior diplomats from the two nations since 2016, when the kingdom broke ties with Iran after protesters invaded Saudi diplomatic posts there. Saudi Arabia had executed a prominent Shiite cleric with 46 others days earlier, triggering the demonstrations.

Rockets fired from Gaza raise tension amid holidays

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Militants in Lebanon fired a heavy barrage of rockets at Israel on Thursday, forcing people across Israel's northern frontier into bomb shelters, wounding at least two people and ratcheting up regional tensions a day after Israeli police raided Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site.

Israel's military said 34 rockets had been fired across the border, and that 25 were shot down by its Iron Dome aerial defense system. Another five rockets struck Israeli territory and the rest of the strikes were being investigated, security forces added. The army's response would come after "a situational assessment" and meeting by Israel's Security Cabinet later Thursday, it said.

The unusually large salvo of rockets raised fears of a wider conflagration, as Israel's bitter enemy, the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah, holds sway over much of southern Lebanon. Over the past two days, tensions have skyrocketed at the sacred compound home to the

Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and along Israel's tense border with Gaza.

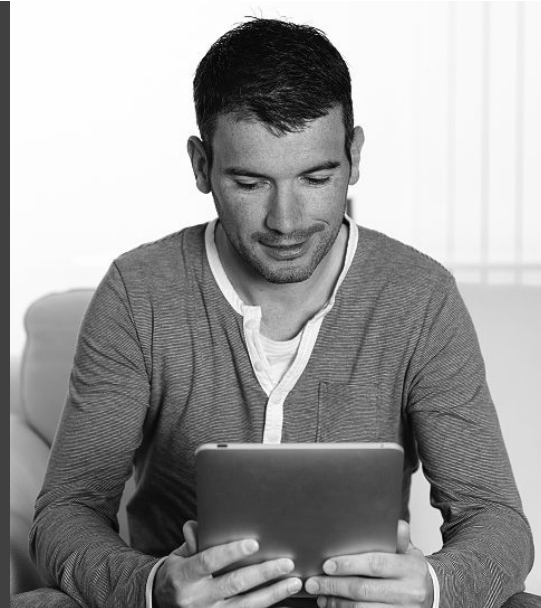
In a briefing with reporters, Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an Israeli military spokesman, said the army drew a clear connection between the rocket fire and the recent unrest in Jerusalem.

"It's a Palestinian-oriented event," he said, adding that either the Hamas or Islamic Jihad militant groups could be involved. But he said the army believed that Hezbollah and the Lebanese government were aware of what happened and also held responsibility. He declined to say how Israel might respond, saying there were "all sorts of scenarios."

Earlier on Thursday and late Wednesday night, Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired several rockets toward Israel in protest over Israeli police storming into the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City with tear gas and stun grenades. Hezbollah condemned Israel's storming of Al-Aqsa, calling it "a flagrant violation."

Mobile

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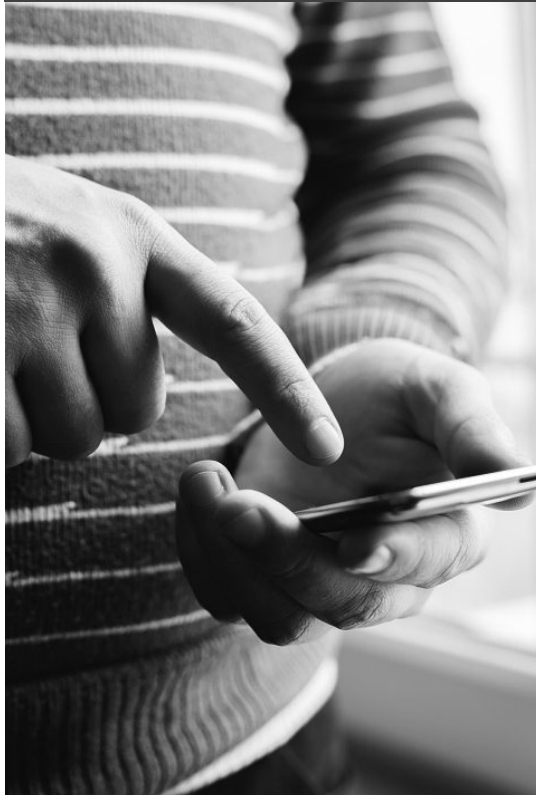
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STARS AND STRIPES

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HEALTH & FITNESS

Too much of a gut thing

Probiotic supplements claim to boost one's digestive health but can unbalance the microbiome

BY ANAHAD O'CONNOR
The Washington Post

Probiotic supplements have grown into a multibillion-dollar industry, spurred by claims that the products will populate your gut with bacteria that can boost your health in numerous ways.

But beware of the hype: In healthy people, probiotic supplements offer little benefit, and they can potentially do more harm than good.

Studies show that taking probiotic supplements — for overall health or to counter the effects of antibiotics — can alter the composition of your microbiome and reduce the levels of microbial diversity in your gut, which is linked to a number of health problems.

Probiotic supplements come in the form of capsules, gummies, powders and pills that contain live microorganisms believed to boost gut health. There is a subset of people who may benefit from taking them, including people with gastrointestinal ailments. Studies have found that probiotic supplements can reduce symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease. They can prevent traveler's diarrhea and reduce some side effects of antibiotic medications.

But for most people, more reliable ways are available to nourish your gut microbiome.

First, eat a variety of vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and whole grains, which provide gut microbes the fiber-rich fuel that they need to thrive. Researchers have found that eating fermented foods such as yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi and kefir, which contain probiotics and other beneficial compounds, have positive effects on your health and gut microbiome.

Your gut microbes are part of a vast ecosystem of bacteria, viruses, archaea and fungi located largely in your colon. People who harbor diverse gut microbiomes tend to age more healthfully and develop fewer diseases.

These microbes thrive on the fiber found in fruits and vegetables, turning it into new compounds or "postbiotics," including butyrate, acetate and other short-chain fatty acids that appear to be exceptionally good for your health.

But like residents of any community, the microbes in your gut can work together and compete against one another. Sometimes the proportion of good and bad bacteria in your gut can get out of balance — a condition known as dysbiosis.

Although there are numerous brands of probiotic supplements, many of them contain a limited number of bacterial strains, primarily from the groups lactobacillus, bifidobacterium and a few others. These microorganisms are quite common and have been associated with many health benefits.

But taking concentrated doses of a few strains of bacteria can upset the balance in your gut, said Lorenzo Cohen, a professor and director of the Integrative Medicine Program at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

"You can inadvertently create a form of dysbiosis by having too much of a good thing," he said. "You're not only crowding out the bad things, but crowding out the other good things that you want in there to create high microbiome diversity."

It's common for people to take probiotics alongside antibiotic medications. Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, but they can also wipe out beneficial bacteria. The



iStock

In healthy people, nourishing the gut microbiome is best done by eating a variety of vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and whole grains instead of taking a probiotic supplement.

idea behind taking a probiotic supplement with an antibiotic is to rebalance the gut microbiome and minimize side effects. Studies have shown, for example, that probiotics can prevent antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

But one study of probiotic use with antibiotics produced surprising results. Researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science recruited healthy adults and gave them a weeklong course of antibiotics.

Then one group took a popular probiotic supplement for four weeks that contained at least 10 species of bacteria. Another group received stool transplants containing their own gut microbes, which were collected before the antibiotics were administered. A third group served as the control.

The microbiomes of people in the control group re-

not take probiotics and served as the controls.

After 18 weeks, the scientists found that some people taking the probiotic supplement had improvements in their blood pressure and triglyceride levels. But others in the probiotic group showed a worsening of their blood sugar and insulin levels.

The researchers say that differences in diet could have played a role in the results, but it's not clear. The findings underscore that probiotic supplements can have very different effects in different people, said Erica Sonnenburg, an author of the study and senior research scientist in microbiology and immunology at Stanford.

"It's a common theme," she added. "Probiotics can be beneficial for some individuals. But it also seems that for some individuals they can make things worse."

So what should you do? If you've been prescribed an antibiotic, or you have a digestive ailment, you should talk to your doctor about whether it makes sense for you to take a probiotic supplement — and if so, which brand or product. You may be advised to skip probiotics altogether if you have a severe illness or compromised immune system because of the risk of developing an infection.

Some doctors might recommend adding fermented foods to your diet instead of taking a supplement.

"When I do recommend live microbes, it's often in the context of fermented foods," said Chris Damman, a gastroenterologist at the Digestive Health Center at the University of Washington Medical Center. "Fermented foods are like nature's probiotics."

One of the benefits of fermented foods is that they typically contain not just probiotics (the live microbes) but also prebiotics (the fiber the microbes eat) and postbiotics (the vitamins and other nutrients they produce). In a study published in the journal *Cell*, Sonnenburg and her colleagues at Stanford found that assigning people to eat fermented foods every day over a 10-week period lowered their levels of inflammation and increased their gut microbiome diversity.

If you're new to fermented foods, Damman recommended introducing them gradually.

Try using sauerkraut or kimchi as a garnish with your meals. Have a bowl of plain yogurt for breakfast. Drink a cup of unsweetened kefir as a snack or use it to make a fruit smoothie.

"I don't take a probiotic, but I do eat a variety of fermented foods — and that's generally the advice that I give people," Damman said.

"When I do recommend live microbes, it's often in the context of fermented foods. Fermented foods are like nature's probiotics."

Chris Damman

gastroenterologist, at the Digestive Health Center,
University of Washington Medical Center

turned to normal about three weeks after taking the antibiotics. The microbiomes of people who received the stool transplants after the antibiotic treatment fared the best, returning to normal within days.

But the microbiomes of people who took the probiotics had not returned to normal even after five months. The scientists found that they also had less gut microbiome diversity compared to people in the control or transplant groups.

In another recent clinical trial, scientists at Stanford recruited adults with metabolic syndrome — a combination of risk factors for Type 2 diabetes, such as abdominal obesity, high blood pressure and high triglycerides — and then split them into two groups. One was given a probiotic containing several strains of bacteria thought to be good for metabolic and digestive health. The second group did

TELEVISION

'I don't think anyone wants to fire Bart'

Voice-over actor Nancy Cartwright discusses her 34 years playing the mischievous 'Simpsons' icon

By SCOTT MERVIS
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Other than being a little older than you remember, or being out of costume, most celebrities that you might run into on the street, or at a pop culture conference, look like the people you see on screen.

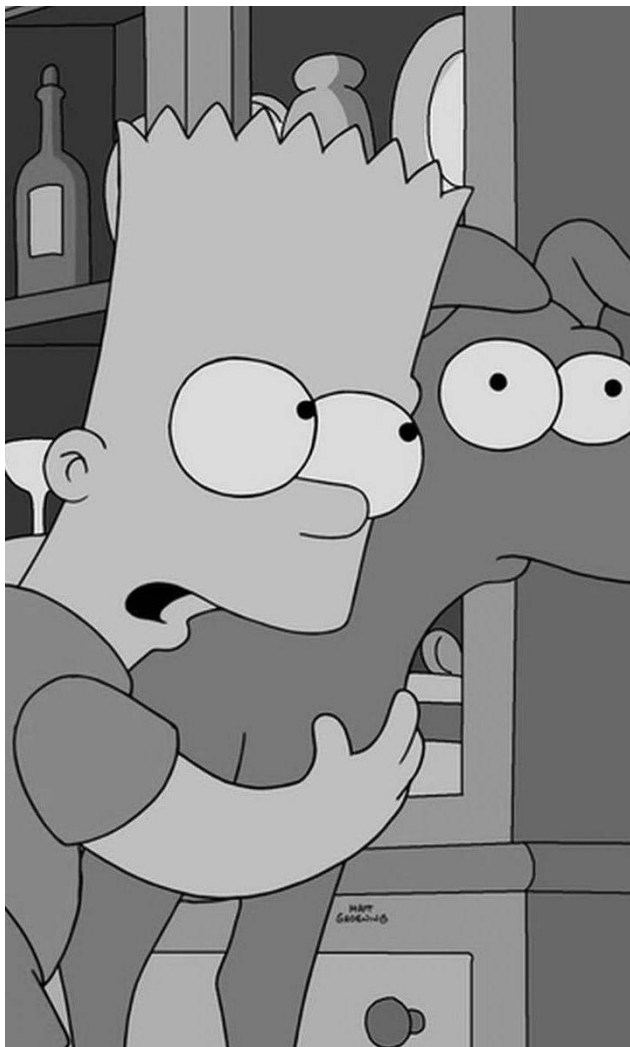
Nancy Cartwright, even though she has blonde hair, is not yellow. And she's not a 10-year-old boy. She has never looked like Bart Simpson.

But she is Bart Simpson.

Cartwright has been voicing the mischievous icon from "The Simpsons" since it launched as a sketch piece on "The Tracey Ullman Show" in 1987. On Dec. 17, 1989, it premiered as a half-hour sitcom on Fox and now, with 34 seasons and 745 episodes, it is the longest-running American sitcom, and the longest-running scripted prime-time series.

The 65-year-old Dayton, Ohio, native, who ad libbed one of Bart's famous lines, "Eat my shorts!", has never grown tired of being Bart, partly because she's more than just Bart. She voices Nelson Muntz, Ralph Wiggum, Todd Flanders, Kearney, Database and baby Maggie. She's also the voice of Chuckie in "Rugrats" and "All Grown Up!" (since 2002), Daffney Gillfin in "Snorks," Rufus in "Kim Possible," Mindy in "Animaniacs" and more.

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette caught up with Cartwright when she was in town for a recent fan convention, Steel City Con:



Fox/TNS

Bart, voiced by Nancy Cartwright, is an underachieving, school-hating 10-year-old kid on "The Simpsons."

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: What is it like for you to attend a convention? Can you walk around without people knowing who you are?

Cartwright: It's the funniest thing, but I do feel like, with all the social media and the attention I get from my postings, I am still pretty anonymous. There are 8 billion people on this planet and I used to think the world revolved around Miss Cartwright, but it definitely is not true, and I can still pretty much go anywhere and most people don't know who I am. I just kind of blend in.

Occasionally, there will be a follower or a fan and they will recognize me. But I also find that people are so kind, they're hesitant to come up to me. They're very respectful. But sitting in a restaurant, for example, I've got radar and I can sense when I'm recognized sometimes. When I finish my meal, I'll go by that table and say [in Bart's voice], "HEY, WHAT'S HAPPENIN', MAN!" and they're just like, "Whaaaaa!"

That must be a lot of fun.

It's as fun for me as it is for them. The fans are the ocean that keeps this boat afloat. Where would I be without all the fans that love the show?

So, when you're at one of these conventions, do people want you to do the voice?

Oh, sure they do. Absolutely. And you know what, back in 2008, 2007, when I was touring internationally and speaking to audiences, I started realizing pretty quickly that it's a little upsetting for the audience to have me come out and start speaking to them, and if I don't stay right from the start [in Bart's voice] "Hi, I'm Bart Simpson, who the hell are you?!" there is tension. It's not what I'm saying. They're sort of stuck goin', "Do the voice! We want to hear the voice!" So, I do and it kind of melts [the tension], and melds us together, if you will.

Yeah, you're doing it to me right now, actually, when you do that voice. So, when you first auditioned, what were their thoughts on a woman doing Bart?

You know what, I don't think Matt [Groening] had any idea. Matt was a comic-strip writer, and he didn't know anything from animation. That's where Jim Brooks came in, and because of all of his success with "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and "Taxi," and after that doing films, he knew that three-act sitcom structure.

Matt sort of knew a structure, but it wasn't quite the same as doing it for television and a whole script, so when



GETTY IMAGES/TNS

Cartwright, shown at the 2019 premiere of Disney Channel's "Kim Possible" movie, has also voiced other animated characters including Rufus on the TV show.

I came in to audition, actually for Lisa Simpson, he was very open to anything, and I'm telling you, there were not, like, long lines. Mike Myers and Jim Carrey were not in line in front of me, like, ready to audition. I was the only one there at that time and I went in to read for Lisa, and I saw also the audition piece for Bart. And between the two of them, there is no way I was ever going to do Lisa.

She was like "8-year-old middle child," and that's about all it said. And then for Bart, it was an "underachieving, school-hating 10-year-old kid," and it just pulled at my heartstrings. Who wouldn't want to do that? So, I went in and I said, "Is it OK if I read for Bart instead of Lisa?" and he was like, "OK, that's fine." I could tell he was totally laid-back and cool. And I went 'Blah b-blah b-blah b-blah' and he said "Omigod, that's it!" He hired me right on the spot.

So they weren't thinking they needed a 10-year-old kid for this?

I think they might've known that that wouldn't have worked right away. Look at the history of female voice-over actresses. "Crusader Rabbit," that was Lucille Bliss. She also did Olive Oyl and Betty Boop. Then, June Foray, of course, did Rocky J. Squirrel. And Bartholomew J. Simpson, that's a tip of the hat to Jay Ward ["Crusader Rabbit" and "Rocky & Bullwinkle" creator].

So when you were a little kid, were you constantly doing voices?

You know, actually, the earliest I remember, it wasn't so much doing voices as I was just entertaining people. OK, this is a truism here: My parents subscribed to Reader's Digest and there was this regular article that would come out called Laughter is the Best Medicine.

I remember looking forward to reading that because it would have the stupid jokes in there, and I would memorize it and say it to my family and relatives and friends, and people would laugh. And then, I don't know how this started, but I started doing sound effects — sounds like motorboat, cement mixer, dripping faucet — and that was the thing that got my heart like, "Wow, I can make people laugh," and so I from that moment on I continued to do things that would make people laugh.

When you went in that day, did you think the show had potential?

SEE SIMPSONS ON PAGE 15

TELEVISION

Simpsons: Actor credits staying power to streaming

FROM PAGE 14

Oh, heavens no. The opposite. What I was told about the audition was that it was for a 30-second interstitial to connect the show “The Tracey Ullman Show” to the commercial. So, I thought “Wow, this isn’t even a show; it sounds like it’s no big deal.”

I think, honestly, that kind of served me well in a way because I didn’t put a lot of significance on it. It’s just like it was another audition, so I went in a little bit laissez-faire about it in a way, and I did it and it made him laugh, and look what happened because of it. So, I thought, “OK, this is just this interstitial thing, no big deal,” but after we did like 47 of them or something, they decided to pick it up and do it as a half-hour sitcom, and that’s when it was like, “Wow.”

But it wasn’t like we were going to be a hit. It was more like, “There is nothing like this on television right now. There is no prime-time animation,” and I was old enough to have lived through prime-time animation. “The Flintstones” were prime time at one point. “Jonny Quest” was a prime-time show. So, when they picked it up in 1989, it was really different, and that’s the thing that’s stuck. Not that we were gonna be a hit, believe me. The negotiations were nerve-racking. I mean, losing sleep, and every two years we were doing a negotiation, and getting all the psychosomatic illnesses that go with that. That was all a part of it.

So, why do you think it’s lasted this long? How does it stay fresh for everybody?

I think nobody wants to be the one who gets rid of Bart Simpson. I don’t think anyone wants to fire Bart, you know what I mean, and Homer and Marge and Lisa and Maggie. They don’t want to be the network that pulls the plug on the show. That’s one philosophy.

Another one is that it still holds its own. Now there are 8-year-olds who are avid watchers of it on Disney+, because all of it can be streamed. The statistics went up during COVID, because people were marathoning their favorite shows, and now families were watching “The Simpsons,” all of them together. You have an 18-year-old, a 15-year-old, an 11-year-old and an 8-year-old watching it with their mom and dad who watched it when they were kids. It has that staying power that I just think will go on forever.



APPLE TV+/AP photos

From left: Gabrielle Dennis, Chris O’Dowd and Djouliet Amara in a scene from “The Big Door Prize.” O’Dowd’s character, a high school teacher who is married to Dennis’ character, is unmoored by the destabilizing effect of the happiness machine.

Curiosity about roads not taken

‘Big Door Prize’ characters discover what would make them happy, but not how to achieve it

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Not to be rude, but are you living your best life? Are you sure? Might you be destined to be something else? Do you know what that could be?

Those are some of the deep questions residents of the fictional town of Deerfield are dealing with as they confront fulfilling their life potential in the new Apple TV+ series “The Big Door Prize,” which premiered March 29.

“The show is in many ways about the idea of the road not taken, and that no matter how happy or fulfilled you think you are, there’s always this curiosity about the other path,” says David West Read, showrunner and executive producer.

The premise is this: One day a mysterious machine appears in a local store, offering to reveal to every user a specialized card printed with what they should be, like “Meteorologist,” “Healer,” “Storyteller” and “Undertaker.”

“This isn’t something you typically see on television. Definitely not wrapped in the form of comedy and magic,” says show star Gabrielle Dennis. “It definitely has you looking within and asking these questions, which can be both a beautiful and scary experience.”

Each of the 10 half-hour episodes of “The Big Door Prize” takes turns exploring how members of the community are han-



Unlike his character, O’Dowd says he rarely stops to consider his own happiness despite outside pressures.

dling their results. Some quit their jobs, some begin new hobbies, others act differently.

The school principal gets “Biker” and soon is riding on a motorcycle until she crashes it and goes to the hospital, where she meets a doctor and falls in love. At her wedding, she credits the machine for connecting her to her new husband, but was that what the machine meant?

The series is based on a novel by M.O. Walsh, which appealed to Read’s love of stories that mix humor and heart with a magical or sci-fi element. He happened to read it during the pandemic, and the book seemed more timely than ever.

“In real life, I saw people hitting the pause button for the first time in a long time and thinking about, like, ‘What’s that thing I haven’t done — like learning guitar, baking bread, taking up a hobby or breaking up with my partner?’” he says.

The spine of the series is a married couple played by Chris

O’Dowd and Dennis. O’Dowd’s character — a cheerful high school teacher — is unmoored by the destabilizing effect of the machine. When he suddenly learns that his wife enjoys spicy food and men with tattoos, he asks her: “What will I find out next? That you also enjoy meth?” O’Dowd says it was interesting to play a man wondering about his life’s destiny because the actor says he himself almost never stops to consider his own happiness, despite outside pressures.

“We are given in the modern world just such a high bar for what happiness can be, I think, because of social media and because of this kind of constant portrayal of the wonderful and the beautiful out there,” he says.

Read, an Emmy-winning writer from “Schitt’s Creek” who penned the story for the Broadway hit “& Juliet,” says the couple at the center of the new series get curious answers from the machine.

“Part of what’s compelling for me about them is that they don’t know how to get there. They don’t have a clear directive. Their cards are ambiguous and frustrating,” he says. “If only life were that simple that we all knew exactly what it was that was going to make us happy and we could just go out and do it. But knowing that, on some level, you feel like maybe you could be happier, but you don’t know how to get there, is much more interesting to me.”

One of the show’s most compelling characters is the town’s priest, played by Damon Gupton. It’s the priest who must try to understand whether the machine is part of some grander plan and how faith fits in, not to mention grief and addiction.

“This show is heartfelt and aspirational, but I wanted it to also contain some darkness to feel like it represented the full spectrum of experiences that people can have with this machine,” Read says.

On the lighter side, Dennis’ character uses the disruption to speak up for herself, start doing things for herself. “For her, it’s a very big question to explore because sometimes as a mom and a wife, some women feel that they lose themselves,” she says.

As for what O’Dowd wishes he’d see if he asked such a machine, the answer is a sense of humor. “I would want it to on both sides be written the words ‘Please Turn Over,’” he says, laughing.

MUSIC REVIEWS

Strength in togetherness

Boygenius is cohesive and powerful on new album, 'The Record'

By NARDOS HAILE
Associated Press

The internet's favorite indie girls welcome you into the brilliant, colorful world of boygenius, again.

The supergroup, consisting of best friends Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker, formed and released their critically well-received self-titled EP in 2018. Five years later, the powerhouse women of boygenius masterfully recapture the same magic in their first full-length album, "The Record."

Cohesion within the group sneaks up on you like a shadow in the night. The album is soft, brutal and a reflection of a cruel, unrelenting world full of fatalistic imagery, but the love they've discovered in each other and in the music they craft together saves and reignites them.

Album single "Emily I'm Sorry" dives into Bridgers' perspective on a past relationship, apologizing for all the wrongdoing she inflicted on Emi-

ly. Dacus and Baker seamlessly harmonize with Bridgers as she sings anxiously, "I'm 27 and I don't know who I am (Don't know who I am) / But I know what I want."

"Not Strong Enough" is an uptempo, guitar-heavy, folksy song focused on self-hatred and loathing where Baker's softness shines. She croons, contemplating death: "Drag racing through the canyon / Singing 'Boys Don't Cry' / Do you see us getting scraped up off the pavement?"

Standout "Revolution 0" wistfully tells the story of falling in love on the internet, Bridgers said in a Rolling Stone interview. Some speculate that the song examines the breakup between Bridgers and actor Paul Mescal, her former fiancé. "If it isn't love / Then what the f-- is it? / I guess just let me pretend," she whispers sorrowfully with backing from the rest of boygenius.

An ultimate rock jam riddled with electric guitar and drums, the witty "Satanist" forces the group to ponder

SEE RECORD
ON PAGE 17



boygenius

The Record (Interscope)

Boygenius, from left, Lucy Dacus, Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker, recently released "The Record," an album filled with imagery.

Matt Grubb



MUSIC REVIEWS



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Morgan Wallen performs “You Proof” during the 56th Annual CMA Awards in 2022 at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville.

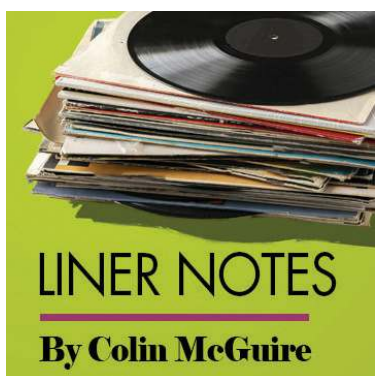
Hot 100 No. 2

Morgan Wallen — ‘Last Night’

Note: For the second month in a row, Miley Cyrus’ “Flowers” came in at No. 1 on the Hot 100 for the first week of the month. Because we wrote about it in March, we figured we’d move on to what landed at No. 2 this week.

It’s a formula that’s as old as time: Take an acoustic guitar, tell the tale of a half-breakup/make-up that unfolds in front of a soaked night drinking whiskey, never be afraid to repeat a musical phrase more than a song calls for it, and viola. A pop-country hit is born. The ethos is nothing new, but the modern wrinkles are, what with the rise of bro-country and an audience’s insatiable appetite for more tales of messy, booze-fueled nights that make anyone with a flannel shirt grin through their hard-earned tears.

Enter Morgan Wallen. Perhaps one of today’s biggest country stars who shouldn’t start a song with “Last night we let the liquor talk / I can’t remember everything we said but we said it all,” before eventually offering up a line about splitting a fifth of Jack Daniels (what was that about throwing a drunken fit outside Kid Rock’s Nashville bar a few years ago?), Wallen has perfected what works in contemporary country music. And what works, it turns out, is “Last Night.”



There isn’t much to it. The song barely eclipses 2½ minutes and even if it feels like it should end with a full-band coda, all we get is a steady dose of Wallen’s southern drawl, finger-snaps and a pop-fueled acoustic guitar.

It’s fine for all the formulaic fans of 2023 country music who are happy to pay 16 bucks for a White Claw at your local amphitheater; it’s just hard to think this is what Hank Williams had in mind when he penned “I’m So Lonesome, I Could Cry” more than half a century ago.

Still, we all know by now that traditionalist arguments in country music are beyond fruitless, and above all else, tired. There’s something to be said for mindless pop-twang that connects with millions of Red Solo Cup holders.

It’s just in Wallen’s case, after his very public snafus in recent years, “mindless” takes on a whole new meaning.

Record: Supergroup bares truths on latest set

FROM PAGE 16

philosophical questions and if they’re deal breakers. Dacus asks confidently, “Will you be a nihilist with me? / If nothing matters / That’s a relief to me.”

“Letters To An Old Poet” is an exemplary closing piano ballad with beautiful production, breathing life throughout the three minutes. Bridgers sings, “You think you’re a good person

because you don’t punch me in the stomach.” Dacus and Baker join her in support when she sings she wants to be happy.

During the journey into “The Record,” Baker, Dacus and Bridgers bare truths from the deepest parts of themselves, but there’s strength in their togetherness — their truths are a little less formidable when they join as one.

Lucero

Should’ve Learned by Now
(Thirty Tigers)

It would be selling Lucero short to say the Memphis band’s new album feels like what you’d take away from a visit to the Lucero store. As in, you know just what you want, you pay your money for it, and you walk away satisfied with another tasty set of rock ‘n’ roll comfort food.

“Should’ve Learned by Now” is more than that, for sure, but it’s that, too. And yet the reason it tastes good is because it comes from a band that has polished its sound over more than two decades but still has too many rough edges to come off as complacent or ordinary.

Sure, Lucero sounds less like a garage band than it once did.

But the serrated edges of Brian Venable’s guitar-playing and the gravel in frontman Ben Nichols’ voice prevent it from slipping into the over-polished category. It also helps that Nichols writes compelling songs and growls them out with energy and conviction.

Nichols’ Arkansas roots might account for why the band’s music tends to land in the alt-country bin, but his songwriting owes more to the Replacements and Tom Petty than anything coming out of Nashville.

That’s obvious from the first cowbell and electric guitar riff on the opener, “One Last F.U.” It continues into the second cut, “Macon if We Make It,” a song about a road trip through Georgia during a hurricane that rides the gale-force energy of Venable’s electric guitar.

Plenty of aging rockers boast enough true believers to sell records and make a living even if they’re mailing it in, and Lucero has a dedicated following. But Nichols is too good of a songwriter, and this band is still having too much fun to settle for anything ordinary.

The new stuff is good enough that the loyal followers will stay, and any newcomers who stray into Lucero’s orbit will discover a still-underrated band that just keeps serving up good music.

— Scott Stroud
Associated Press



Deerhoof

Miracle-Level
(Joyful Noise Recordings)

On their 19th album, Deerhoof remains as playful and experimental as ever. The title of the first track on “Miracle-Level” serves as a polite command, “Sit Down, Let Me Tell You a Story,” and this oddball, guitar-driven release merits attention throughout.

The band self-produced its first 18 releases before deciding to try something different. In 2022, they brought in producer Mike Bridavsky to take themselves out of their home-recording comfort zone and into the studio. The impact is most notable in the spare instrumentation and the punchy garage band-feel of the guitars.

On first listen, the album is like a visit to an unfamiliar city — it feels anarchic and unstructured until the listener has some time to acclimate to its rules and norms. But the band is a musical micro-culture unto itself, and within two or three songs, the unique logic of Deerhoof starts to fall into place.

Singer and bass-player Satomi Matsuzaki was born in Japan, and “Miracle-Level” is the first Deerhoof release sung entirely in her native language. Japanese poetry and songwriting leans away from simple rhyming couplets (think “remember” and “September”). On “Everybody, Marvel,” for example, the band offers more impressionistic imagery: “view through a distorted, broken window / a comfortable filter.” The freeform lyrical structure further liberates the band from familiar song formats.

Deerhoof tends to toggle between apocalyptic fatalism and childlike wonder, and “Miracle-Level” is an album that focuses mostly on small miracles. “My Lovely Cat!” is a frenetic slice of feline life that channels a catnip-addled brain. The title track, “Miracle-Level,” declares, “we need only love songs.” The song “Phase Out All Remaining Non-Miracles by 2028” is a brief manifesto on magical thinking that crystallizes the mood of the release.

— Jim Pollock
Associated Press



Depeche Mode

Memento Mori
(Columbia Records)

And then there were only two. Depeche Mode have always been a genre unto itself: a vibe, a sort of feedback loop that is timeless yet nostalgic, dark, edgy, a little too dark sometimes but always so cool. Their 15th studio album titled “Memento Mori” (Latin for “remember you will die”) feels both like a tribute to founding member and keyboardist Andy Fletcher who died in May 2022 and left them a duo (Dave Gahan and Martin Gore) and a mission statement of their music.

The 12 tracks are fully Depeche, fully intoxicating in sound, artistically evocative and sometimes puzzling (like the compelling but strange “Caroline’s Monkey”). The music is staring lovingly into the abyss and asking it to love it back; death is always hovering on the periphery of the sound, a grunge, industrial, rainy sound also filled with a strange kindness.

“Soul with Me” is an incredible ballad, while “Before We Drown” is an electro sexy tune, while “My Cosmos Is Mine” has a dramatic tempo to it that works. “Ghost Again” hooks you with its deep fry bass, and “People are Good” engages the aural with an unusual vibrato.

Depeche Mode might be facing their own mortality, but their power as musicians stretches into infinity.

— Cristina Jaleru
Associated Press



Kali Uchis

Red Moon in Venus
(Geffen Records)

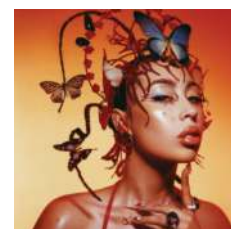
Kali Uchis’ new studio album, “Red Moon in Venus,” follows her Grammy-nominated Spanish-language album that was released in 2020. Since then, Uchis had multiple wins at the Billboard Latin Music Awards and “Telepatía,” an album highlight, was a multi-week Billboard chart topper.

Uchis is an R&B artist who isn’t afraid to lean into her signature vibe, which can only be described as soft, ethereal and fully femme. The record’s femme-forward tone starts with “in My Garden...” where the listener is transported to a fantasy land with wind chimes and birds chirping.

“I Wish you Roses” is the first single and second track. The song follows the narrative of the album, which is love and its nuances. The song is about releasing people with love, rather than resentment: “But I wish you love, I wish you well / I wish you roses while you can still smell ‘em.”

Uchis blends R&B seamlessly with soul and funk in tracks like “Blue,” where smooth saxophones sound off with a slow groove. The album showcases Uchis’ unique voice with slow R&B beats that highlight the soft quality of her voice. “Deserve Me,” featuring Summer Walker, holds true to the steady R&B arrangement but weaves in Uchis’ breathy voice. Uchis closes the album with a more upbeat vibe in “Happy Now,” where she embraces beats that are reminiscent of sweet melodic pop.

— Karena Phan
Associated Press



VIDEO GAMES

Making vampires popular again

Redfall beautifully meshes Arkane Studios' hallmark gameplay with an open-world, cooperative experience

BY GIESON CACHO
Bay Area News Group

It's been a minute since vampires were explosively popular. The heyday for bloodsuckers had come and gone after the likes of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "True Blood" wrapped up and zombie epics such as "The Walking Dead" took off in the public's imagination.

That could all change, and one of the first projects that could make vampires popular again is Redfall. Arkane Austin's latest game has been in the works for five years and takes the studio's hallmark gameplay and adds a fresh twist to it.

"All Arkane games, there's two things we try to do," co-director Ricardo Bare said. "One is to invest in the world building and build a sense of place and the second is to invest in gameplay mechanics that let you be creative."

That paid dividends in games such as Prey, Dishonored and most recently Deathloop. With Redfall, Bare said the team is doing two things they've never done: They built an open world and are letting players jump in with friends for a cooperative experience.

Meet the cast

I had a chance to experience the open-world gameplay at a recent demo event in San Francisco. I had a choice between four characters, though Bare said two extra heroes would be available down the road. They were the following:

■ Jacob Boyer — Although all characters can be stealthy, this special-operations commando specializes in the play style. He has a ghostly raven that he can summon to scout and a gadget that allows him to cloak for a limited time. His ultimate move allows him to go into a super-sniper mode to take down targets fast.

■ Layla Ellison — She's a college student who volunteered for a medical trial because she had trouble making ends meet. In the process, she ended up with crazy telekinetic powers. She can summon an elevator that can lift players or enemies into the air. She has an umbrella shield and a vampire ex-boyfriend, whom she can summon for help.

■ Remedios "Remi" De la Rosa — She's a search and rescue specialist and has a robot companion that can take aggression and heat from enemies. Her powers are related to her robot: Players can use the little helper to distract enemies to escape or use it to bait them for ambushes. For example, she can toss explosives on the bot and send it off into a patrol. Her abilities revolve around buffing and healing.

■ Devinder "Dev" Crousley — He's an internet-famous author known for his research into cryptids. Finding out that vampires really exist is a boon for him. He gets around quickly with a teleportation



BETHESDA/TNS

In Redfall, players explore a open-world island town of the same name in Massachusetts that has been taken over by vampires.

device. He can throw one node in a multitude of spots like a roof and whisk himself there. He has a javelin that shoots out lightning that stuns enemies and a staff that releases ultraviolet light that turns enemies to stone and can also heal him and others nearby

Getting used to the tools

I liked the idea of throwing a disc to teleport to different areas, so I chose Dev. I wasn't disappointed. He was the perfect character to explore Redfall, Mass., the setting of the game. This island town has been taken over by ridiculously powerful vampires. They're strong enough to freeze all the water surrounding Redfall, trapping the survivors inside while also attracting cultists who believe that the most powerful of them are gods.

Despite being on an island, Redfall has a large and detailed environment that's full of points of interest. On my first outing, I ran into cultists at a house and took them down with a bit of trouble. Although characters have two special skills and an ultimate, the combat relies heavily on three weapons and a handgun players carry with them. Players can collect more arms and store them on their person but they have to equip them to different slots to switch them out in combat.

Players have to differentiate between arms that specialize in defeating vampires and ones that kill humans. Guns like the Snipe Hunter that shoots out stakes are excellent at killing vampires but aren't as strong against armored cultists. Meanwhile, an automatic assault rifle does wonders against humans but may not be as effective against the vampires.

Don't get me wrong, players can still gun down vampires and stun them long enough until they can stake them with a bayonet, but doing so may not be as efficient. In fact, there are just three ways to

kill vampires: a stake through the heart, burning them to death or using ultraviolet light to turn them to stone and smash them.

Going to the movies and a nest

One of the two side quests I did involved fixing the popcorn maker at the Fire Station base. I had to venture to the movie theater to fulfill that request. Unfortunately, it's infested with vampires and their cultists. In classic Arkane fashion, I was able to sneak by them by tossing my teleporter to the top of the marquee and sneaking in through the second floor.

From there, it was easy to wander through the cinema and pick up the parts I needed. It wasn't all easy, though. I did run into a vampire miniboss, and I nearly ran out of ammo while using it with the stake launcher and flare guns.

The other side quest I tried out was the vampire nests, which proliferate on the map. Players need to deal with them or else vampires within its radius will be tougher to take down. They operate almost like instances: Once players touch the portals, they're transported into a dream-like world where different parts of Redfall are mashed together.

They feel like randomized dungeons, where players hunt down vampires until they get to a beating heart. They'll have to knock out the nodes connected to the heart in order to eliminate the core of the nest and destroy it. In the end, the nest collapses and players will have to hunt for an exit to survive. It's a fun diversion that rewards players with perks that do things such as boost health or attack power.

In between those two side quests, I managed to free a safe house by destroying the vampires guarding it and restarting a generator. Once established, it acts as a fast travel spot and a hub where players can restock ammo and even take

on safehouse-specific side quests. It starts off empty, but it eventually fills with survivors.

Melding gameplay, storytelling

The main mission in the demo was called House of Echoes, and I had to investigate the origins of the Hollow Man, one of Redfall's vampire gods. An investigation revealed his ties to a mansion, and I had to search for clues on how to defeat him.

Of course, that's easier said than done. It's patrolled by vampires, including Watchers that are stationary and act almost like security cameras. I had to sneak up behind them and kill them from behind before advancing. The mansion and the estate were multilayered, but what's notable is how Arkane Studios blended the narrative of the Hollow Man's beginnings with the environment itself.

Every room in the mansion offered some insight into the Hollow Man's previous life. It revolved around a hospital and a young girl named Amelia. Part of the quest had players looking for dolls inside the house. The key to the whole mission lies in the mansion's attic, and if players can make the right connection between the setting and a dollhouse, they can figure out how to get to the bottom of the Hollow Man's backstory.

It's masterfully done and shows how Arkane can blend narrative and gameplay effortlessly, even in an open world. It will be interesting to see how this subtle storytelling meshes with the chaos of a cooperative game, but if anyone can find a way to do it, it's Bare and his team. Perhaps in the process, Redfall can start the ball rolling on a vampire renaissance that fans of "Buffy" and "True Blood" are looking for.

Redfall is scheduled for release on May 2 on Xbox Series X, Xbox Series S and PC.

CROSSWORD AND COMICS

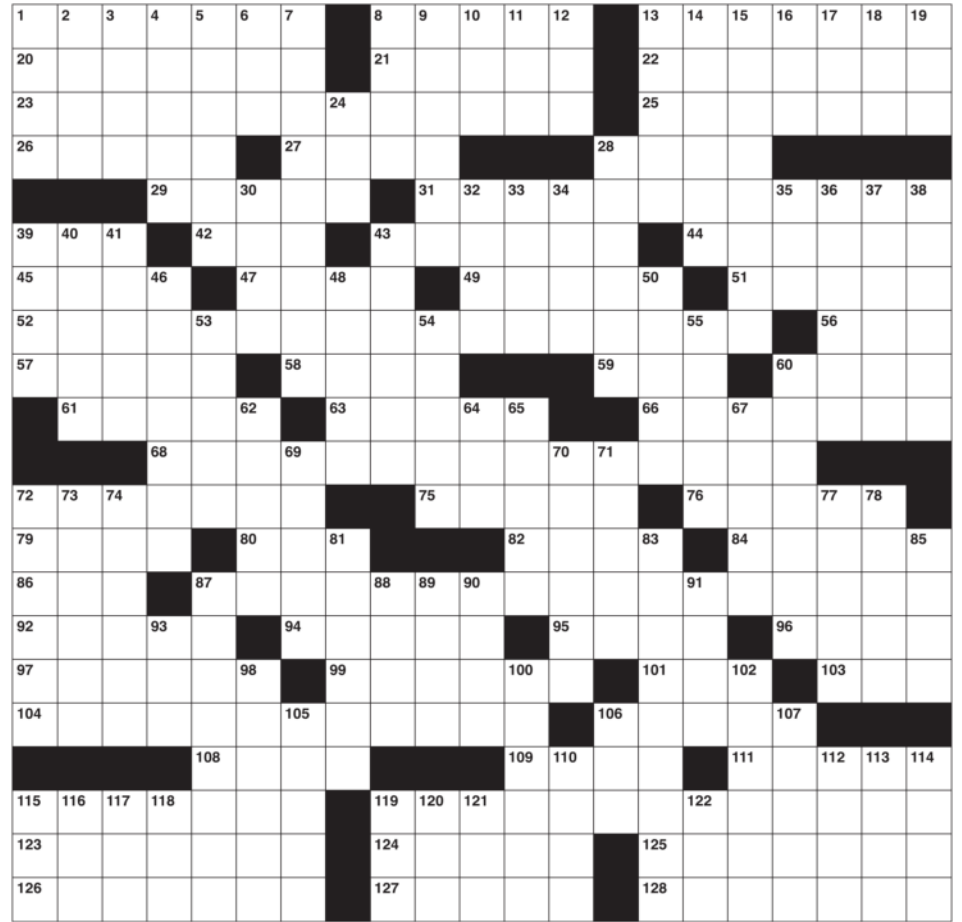
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

I DO, I DO ... DO!

BY DAVID KARP / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

David Karp, of Victoria, British Columbia, is a civil servant who works on economic policy for his provincial government. This was his second attempt at building a puzzle around 119-Across, which is his favorite band. The first attempt, in a themeless grid, didn't work out because the fill wasn't flashy enough. But here, the band's name sets up some clever thematic wordplay, which is even better ... and you don't need to know anything about the band to get it. — W. S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Businesses that might offer "pawdicures"
 - 8 Subject in sexology
 - 13 Feeling of auditory bliss, in a modern coinage
 - 20 Stacked haphazardly
 - 21 Some religious artwork
 - 22 Band stan
 - 23 Preparing to put earrings in an ogre?
 - 25 Understood
 - 26 Treat, as wood
 - 27 Revealer of the Wizard of Oz
 - 28 Hostile parties
 - 29 Nickname for Luigi
 - 31 The Macy's in New York's Herald Square, and others?
 - 39 Harbor boat
 - 42 Downside
 - 43 Had trouble with, as an icy road
 - 44 Defeat decisively
 - 45 Home to five U.S. national parks
 - 47 Instruction in a meringue recipe
 - 49 E.M.T.'s apparatus, informally
 - 51 Org. that facilitates adoptions
 - 52 Pentad for a poetry performance?
 - 56 Outdo
 - 57 Infection fighter
 - 58 In ____ (as found)
 - 59 What "O" might stand for
 - 60 "What's ____ ..."
 - 61 TV spy drama of the early 2000s
 - 63 Watch all at once, say
 - 66 Supreme Court surname
 - 68 Shopping for some cereal?
 - 72 Deep-fried appetizer often served with chutney
 - 75 Big fuss
 - 76 One side of a battery
 - 79 "Good heavens!"
 - 80 The "L" of L.V.
 - 82 Vegan alternative to gelatin
 - 84 Literary character described as "a stout little fellow with red cheeks"
 - 86 What "X" might stand for
 - 87 Prize in a chowder cook-off?
 - 92 Gen Zer who might be into faux freckles and anime
 - 94 Start of many a Father's Day card
 - 95 Campy stuff?
 - 96 ____ mater
 - 97 Was completely depleted
 - 99 Smartphone, e.g.
 - 101 "Well, ____-di-dah!"
 - 103 You might need just the "last four" of it: Abbr.
 - 104 Old-timey wizard who needs to learn some manners?
 - 106 Fly
 - 108 Be overly sweet
 - 109 "No chickening out!"
 - 111 Faith founded in Persia
 - 115 "Black" or "Pink" animal
 - 119 Band with the 1997 hit "Semi-Charmed Life" ... or a phonetic hint to this puzzle's theme
 - 123 They might wipe the slate clean
 - 124 Spine-tingling
 - 125 Klingon speaker, say
 - 126 Deadlock
 - 127 C-suite members
 - 128 Pots and pans, e.g.
 - 17 What some people use to solve a New York Times crossword
 - 18 German "you"
 - 19 Rx request
 - 24 Slimy stuff
 - 28 Lacquer, e.g.
 - 30 Home to wild Bactrian camels
 - 32 Clears (of)
 - 33 Lead-in to -logue
 - 34 N.F.L. quarterback Jared
 - 35 Surgery sites, in brief
 - 36 Toronto N.B.A. player
 - 37 Usher
 - 38 Tot's geometry lesson, perhaps
 - 39 Clump of hair
 - 40 City at the foot of the Adirondacks
 - 41 What may bring a meeting to order
 - 43 Cholesterol-lowering drug
 - 46 Landing site
 - 48 Cover, of a sort
 - 50 Words for a cover
 - 53 Like many a lumberjack's shirt
 - 54 Certain footholds
 - 55 Ancient marketplace
 - 60 Spanish resort island, to locals
 - 62 "Do"-to-"do" delivery
 - 64 Understood
 - 65 Pioneering computer
 - 67 National park in the Canadian Rockies
 - 69 Former retail giant
 - 70 Captivate
 - 71 Cousin of a stingray
 - 72 Dwindles, with "out"
 - 73 It's 2.3 years for the average heterosexual American couple
 - 74 Something made in a press
 - 77 Things a plangonologist collects
 - 78 Some semihard cheeses
 - 81 Stubbornly old-fashioned
 - 83 "The museum of social decay," per Gary Oldman
 - 85 The so-called Pearl of Arabia
 - 87 Strapless accessories
 - 88 As above, in citations
 - 89 ____ bean
 - 90 "Groovy!"
 - 91 Like some tradition
 - 93 Spoil
 - 98 Some bathroom contractors
 - 100 Comedy's ____ the Entertainer
 - 102 Cartoon character who said "Van Gogh would've sold more than one painting if he'd put tigers in them"
 - 105 Like the goddess Hel
 - 106 March 14 dessert, appropriately
 - 107 "The birds and the bees" and others
 - 110 Pope writings
 - 112 Sharp increase
 - 113 Kapoor of "Slumdog Millionaire"
 - 114 Two weeks after calends, approximately
 - 115 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame architect
 - 116 River offshoot
 - 117 Power ____
 - 118 Wand-waving org.
 - 119 Merch-table offering
 - 120 Spell of bad luck?
 - 121 Seething state
 - 122 Before, in poetry



GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES



NEON/AP photos

The movie creators of “How to Blow Up a Pipeline” decided to adapt the source material of the book by the same name as more of a heist thriller than a merely a cautionary tale of climate activism.

Handling a volatile idea with care

‘How to Blow Up a Pipeline’ explores vigilante eco-sabotage

By KRISTA FAURIA
Associated Press

When the creators of “How to Blow Up a Pipeline” initially set out to adapt the book of the same name, which critiques the docility of climate activism, director Daniel Goldhaber had in mind a very different movie than what they eventually made.

“I was very much in a place of anger and feeling very powerless and I was like, ‘Let’s make a big old propaganda piece,’” he said.

Goldhaber recalled his writing partners Ariela Barer, who also stars in the film, and Jordan Sjol talking him out of that place and convincing him that idea would ultimately “make for a very boring movie.”

They decided instead on a kind of heist thriller, opening in theaters this weekend, that follows a group of young activists who plot to take down an oil pipeline in West Texas.

While the group is composed of people with starkly different backgrounds and reasons for being there, many of its members are personally affected by climate change and are united in their desperation to fight it — not unlike the young creative team themselves.

Neon’s “How to Blow Up a Pipeline” is decidedly less prescriptive than Andreas Malm’s 2021 book, which argues that climate activists ought to look to past movements, such as the abolitionists and suffragettes, to see that substantial reforms in modern history have rarely been propagated by pacifism.

Goldhaber said he took into account critiques of the book and hopes the film is seen as a nuanced adaptation.

“If there’s a political viewpoint of the

film, it’s not, ‘Go out and blow up a pipeline,’” he said.

But the movie does rely heavily on arguments that Malm puts forward, an idea which came from Sjol’s musings about “adapting a work of academic theory into a movie,” Goldhaber explained.

Malm is a scholar of human ecology, an interdisciplinary field of research that focuses on human relationships to their environments across cultures. In his work on the climate movement, Malm has been an outspoken critic of nonviolence and a proponent of property destruction, calling it the only viable response to the enduring power of the fossil fuel industry.

“How to Blow Up a Pipeline” joins a growing list of films exploring the issue of climate change and how best to fight it, from dark dramas like Paul Schrader’s “First Reformed,” to allegorical satires, such as Adam McKay’s “Don’t Look Up.”

Lukas Gage, who joins Barer and other breakout actors in the ensemble cast, recalled getting sent Malm’s book along with the script.

“I read the book first and I thought to myself, ‘How the hell is this going to be a narrative film?’” he said.

Already a fan of Goldhaber’s feature directorial debut, “Cam,” Gage was ultimately persuaded by what he felt was an important story that could facilitate conversations about a way forward in combating the climate crisis.

“Because of Congress’ failure to do anything about this, it has definitely made me think about what little we can do, but maybe not so little,” he said. “I think it will stick with us forever.”

Gage’s character, Logan, is the obvious



Ariela Barer stars in and helped write the script for “How to Blow Up a Pipeline.”

outlier of the group, a privileged punk motivated more by love for his girlfriend, Rowan (Kristine Froseth), than by his concern for the environment.

“I grew up in the punk scene in Los Angeles and also in activist spaces and those people are always there. Like, there’s always a Logan and a Rowan,” Barer said, laughing. “We wanted to have a degree of empathy for people coming in, being so well-meaning, while also unpacking the position their privileges would grant them.”

Despite his position of privilege, Logan has a redemptive character arc, a point Goldhaber felt was important to make.

“Something that was really inherent in the DNA of the project was to just try to combat some of these narratives that I think kind of create a self-perpetuating toxic culture on the left, like the narrative that we can’t come together,” he said.

Goldhaber, who is the son of climate scientists, said he hopes the film adds vulnerability and complexity to their theoretical source material.

“I think that there’s something very provocative in that idea,” he said.

DreamWorks considering 5th ‘Shrek’ film

From wire reports

DreamWorks is reportedly working to expand the beloved “Shrek” franchise more than a decade after the titular ogre voiced by Mike Myers lumbered onto movie screens in 2001.

In an interview with Variety published Tuesday, Illumination founder and Chief Executive Chris Meledandri said he wants to return to the world of “Shrek” with some familiar names.

“It’s not that dissimilar to the process that we went through with ‘Mario,’ where you look at what the core elements are that audiences have loved, and you do your very best to honor those core elements,” the “Super Mario Bros. Movie” producer said. “And then you’re hard at work to build story elements and new characters that take you to brand new places. The original cast is a huge part of that.”

Set in the fictional land of Duloc, “Shrek” starred Myers as a grumpy green ogre tasked with saving damsel not-so-in-distress Princess Fiona (Cameron Diaz), along with hyperactive sidekick Donkey (Eddie Murphy). The computer-generated film’s snark, sneaky adult humor and play on fairy-tale tropes made it an animated classic and box-office smash that brought in more than \$484 million worldwide.

DreamWorks followed the first film with several sequels, the “Puss in Boots” spinoff franchise and several television specials.

Meledandri, who serves as a creative partner to DreamWorks Animation, said he and the studio “anticipate the cast coming back,” though no deals have been made yet.

“Talks are starting now, and every indication that we’ve gotten is there’s tremendous enthusiasm on behalf of the actors to return,” he added.

Decades after its premiere, “Shrek” has stood the test of time, living on in pop culture, internet memes and a Broadway musical adaptation.

‘Jeanne du Barry,’ starring Johnny Depp, to open Cannes

The historical drama “Jeanne du Barry,” starring Johnny Depp as King Louis XV, will open the 76th Cannes Film Festival.

Organizers of the French festival announced Wednesday that this year’s edition will get underway with the period film directed by and starring Maïwenn, the French actress and filmmaker. She plays Louis XV’s favorite courtesan, Jeanne du Barry.

“Jeanne du Barry” has been billed as Depp’s comeback film following his explosive trial last year with Amber Heard, his ex-wife.

“Jeanne du Barry” will premiere May 16 at Cannes and, sticking with tradition, it will be released the same day in French theaters. No U.S. release has been announced.

Other news

■ The Jonas Brothers will perform their first-ever concert at Yankee Stadium in New York on Aug. 12, they announced Tuesday. The show is scheduled to take place three months after the May 12 release of their sixth studio album, “The Album.” The band’s next single, “Waffle House,” comes out Friday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dairy Queen's big red spoon found after stolen

AZ PHOENIX — A giant red spoon that was stolen from an Arizona Dairy Queen and sparked a mystery on social media was found, and it's partly thanks to Pokémon GO.

Michael Foster, 52, was playing the outdoor mobile game when he spotted the 15-foot spoon. It was lying on the ground behind a fence that surrounds a Phoenix middle school baseball field, just 2 miles from the scene of the heist.

"The first thing I did was send a picture to my wife and I said, 'It's the spoon.' She said call the police," Foster told The Associated Press.

Detectives are continuing to search for the suspects who took the spoon, he added.

Volunteer searcher finds 2-year-old safe in woods

MO TECUMSEH — A 2-year-old boy who followed his dog into the woods near his Missouri Ozarks home is safe, after one of the nearly 100 people searching for him heard a faint whimper and found the child just before the sunset.

KYTV-TV reported that Waylon Loftis was supposed to be napping at his family's home in Tecumseh, near Norfolk Lake. Instead, he made his way out of the house despite safety devices on the doors, Ozark County Sheriff Cass Martin said.

Among the scores of volunteers who joined in the search was Jonathan Belt, a veteran and now a paramedic, who headed to a wooded area.

Waylon's mother, Marinda Loftis, was grateful to Belt and all of the volunteers.

"He's a hero, everyone who showed up was a hero," she said.

Jogger has close encounter with cow

ME FARMINGTON — A Maine jogger encountered an angry cow, and it was no joke.

The Farmington Police Department shared details of the encounter on April Fools' Day, a day after the actual encounter, and assured that this was no prank.

The 43-year-old woman was preparing for a jog on the Whistle Stop Trail when she was charged by the cow, which had escaped from a farm. The cow lifted her off the ground with its horns, causing a cut that required stitches, before the jogger escaped, police said.

The bovine's owner was contacted and secured the animal, along with a pig that had escaped.

Spectator dies of 'cardiac event' after game brawl

VT ALBURGH — An autopsy has determined



JOHN MAZO, AROOSTOOK UAS/AP

Bringing it around town

Volunteers creating a giant ice carousel on a frozen lake work on a path on the ice on Long Lake in Madawaska, Maine. Northern Maine Ice Busters had to cut through ice nearly 30 inches thick on a path painstakingly measured by survey crews to create a perfect circle measuring nearly six football fields across, a diameter of 1,776 feet and weighing an estimated 146,000 tons. It's a laborious-but-fun way to provide entertainment during the long, cold winter, and it has turned into something of a rivalry in places like Finland, Minnesota and Maine.

that a 60-year-old spectator who died after being involved in a brawl at a Vermont middle school basketball game in late January died of an acute cardiac event, state police said.

The investigation is ongoing, and police are working with county prosecutors to review the case and any potential charges for people involved in the fight, state police said.

Russell Giroux, of Alburgh, died Jan. 31 at Northwestern Medical Center in St. Albans over two hours after he was involved in the altercation among multiple spectators during a seventh- and eighth-grade boys basketball game between Alburgh Community Education Center and St. Albans City School, police said. The medical examiner determined that the cause of death was an "acute cardiac event following altercation in an individual with coronary artery atherosclerosis," state police said.

Student accused of threatening Congressman

NH CONCORD — A college student has been accused of making a threatening phone call to a member of Congress.

The Keene State College student is accused of making the cell-phone call to the congressional office of a U.S. House member leav-

ing a message on a voicemail saying, "if you keep on coming for the gays, we're gonna strike back," according to an FBI affidavit.

The message said, "We will kill you if that what it takes," and the caller left a name and number.

The representative was not identified.

The student told investigators he did not actually plan to harm others or himself, does not own firearms, and was "emotional and intoxicated" when he left the message, the affidavit said.

Judge temporarily blocks state's anti-drag law

TN NASHVILLE — A federal judge temporarily blocked Tennessee's first-in-the-nation law placing strict limits on drag shows just hours before it was set to go into effect, siding with a group that filed a lawsuit claiming the statute violates the First Amendment.

The decision comes after Memphis-based Friends of George's, an LGBTQ+ theater company, filed the federal lawsuit against Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy and the state.

U.S. District Judge Thomas Parker wrote that the state has failed to make a compelling argument as to why Tennessee needed the new law, adding that the court also agrees the statute is likely vague and overly broad.

The word "drag" doesn't ap-

pear in the new law, which instead changed the definition of adult cabaret in Tennessee to mean "adult-oriented performances that are harmful to minors." Furthermore, "male or female impersonators" are now classified as a form of adult cabaret, akin to strippers and topless, go-go and exotic dancers.

Native Scouts feted 67 years after Navy rescue

AK GAMBELL — Bruce Boolowon, then a lean 20-year-old, and a group of friends were hunting for murre eggs in a walrus skin boat on a remote Alaska island in the Bering Strait when they saw a crippled airplane flying low.

"Something was wrong," Boolowon, now 87, recalled of that day in 1955. "They came in and one engine was smoking."

A U.S. Navy P2V-5 Neptune maritime patrol aircraft had been attacked at about 8,000 feet by two Soviet MiG-15 fighters roaring out of nearby Siberia. The plane's right engine was destroyed and the pilot was making a controlled crash landing.

Its 11 crewmen had injuries in varying degrees of severity, caused either by the bullets sprayed by the two jet fighters, shrapnel or the fireball that erupted when the Neptune landed wheels up on the tundra of St. Lawrence Island.

The guardsmen were honored with Alaska Heroism Medals, giving the Alaska Native men the recognition that wasn't available 67 years ago. Boolowon, then a corporal, is the sole survivor, and family members of the other 15 received the medals on their behalf.

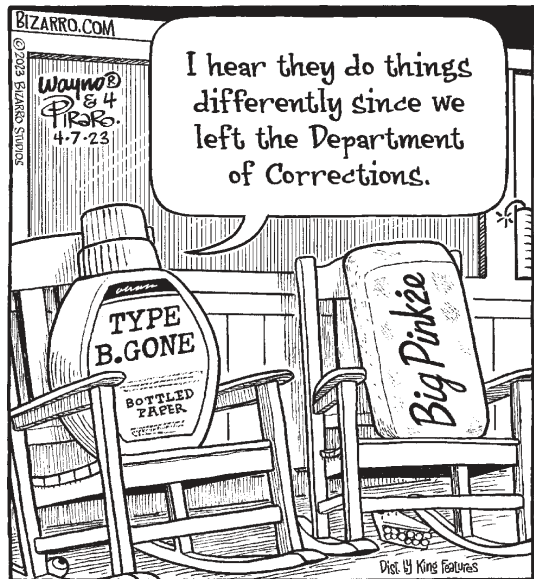
State OKs 99 more pot shop licenses after ruling

NY NEW YORK — New York regulators approved 99 new provisional licenses for recreational marijuana dispensaries as they try to speed up the rollout of a legal market that had been impeded by a court ruling.

New York legalized recreational marijuana for adult use two years ago, although only seven shops have opened so far. The rollout was slowed in part by a federal court ruling last fall that put retail licensing on hold in some regions, including Brooklyn and the Buffalo area, and legal operations are also undermined by a proliferation of unlicensed stores.

A federal appeals court lifted most of that injunction, paving the way for the Cannabis Control Board to provisionally approve licenses in those areas as part of the 99 green-lighted. Applicants still need to complete a supplemental application.

Bizarro

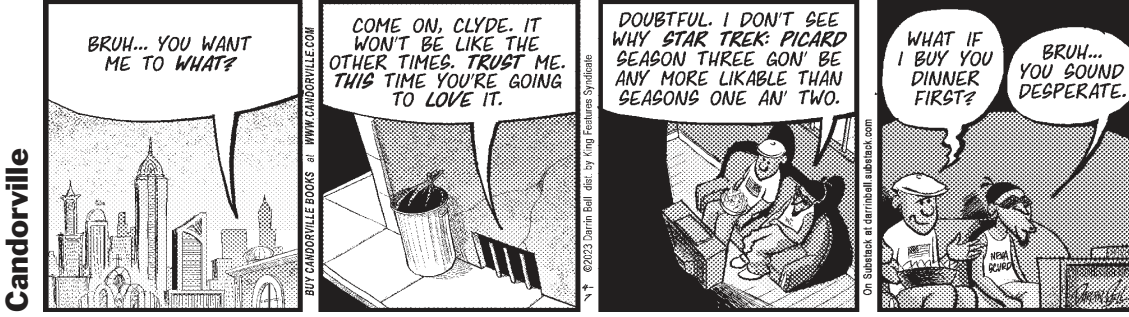
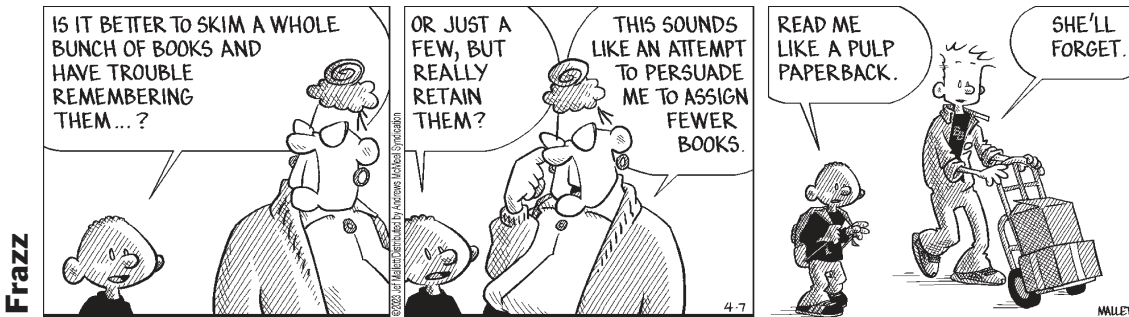


Loose Parts



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				



- ACROSS**
- 1 Mamas' mates
 - 6 Spinning toy
 - 9 Hot tub
 - 12 Florida city
 - 13 Ram's mate
 - 14 French article
 - 15 Carried on, as war
 - 16 Charm
 - 18 Glorifies
 - 20 — account (never)
 - 21 CEO's degree, often
 - 23 Golf peg
 - 24 Boring tool
 - 25 Gum flavor
 - 27 Riyadh residents
 - 29 Luggage attachments
 - 31 Glanced sideways
 - 35 Bumpkin
 - 37 Challenge
 - 38 Rudd and Revere
 - 41 Doo-wop syllable
 - 43 Wee dollop
 - 44 Arsenal supply
 - 45 Florentine family
 - 47 Full of energy
 - 49 Civil rights org.
 - 52 Away from WSW
 - 53 Speck
 - 54 Sea birds
 - 55 "Le Coq —"
 - 56 Gorilla
- DOWN**
- 1 "Wham!"
 - 2 Obamacare initialism
 - 3 Easter performance
 - 4 "Roots" author
 - 5 Nasser's successor
 - 6 Wobble
 - 7 Has
 - 8 Chest muscle
 - 9 Word on the street?
 - 10 Tubular pasta
 - 11 John Jacob —
 - 17 Put up
 - 19 Tether
 - 21 2001, to Cato
 - 22 Auction action
 - 24 Honest politician
 - 26 "Red" singer
 - 28 Vocally
 - 30 Xenon, for one
 - 32 Glowing
 - 33 Geological period
 - 34 Cotillion celeb
 - 36 "Swan Lake" princess
 - 38 Macadamized
 - 39 Acid in proteins
 - 40 Brown shade
 - 42 Excavated
 - 45 L-Q bridge
 - 46 Singer Alessia
 - 48 Oklahoma city
 - 50 Middling grade
 - 51 Letter addenda, for short

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

4-7 CRYPTOQUIP

ANBDORN H YHEN XGSLHBDY

A H Z I - F T X D Q X T Q R S N Z R ,

F L N Q H K N S I N U Z N R R N I H

S L H Q E L D Z U G S L T O K L S R .

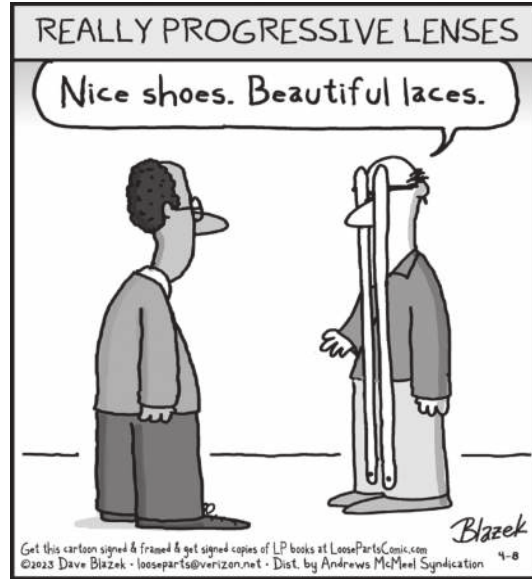
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT COULD FOLKS CALL THE PRESIDENT OF A LONG-HAUL TRUCKING CORPORATION? THE BIG-RIG BIGWIG.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals H

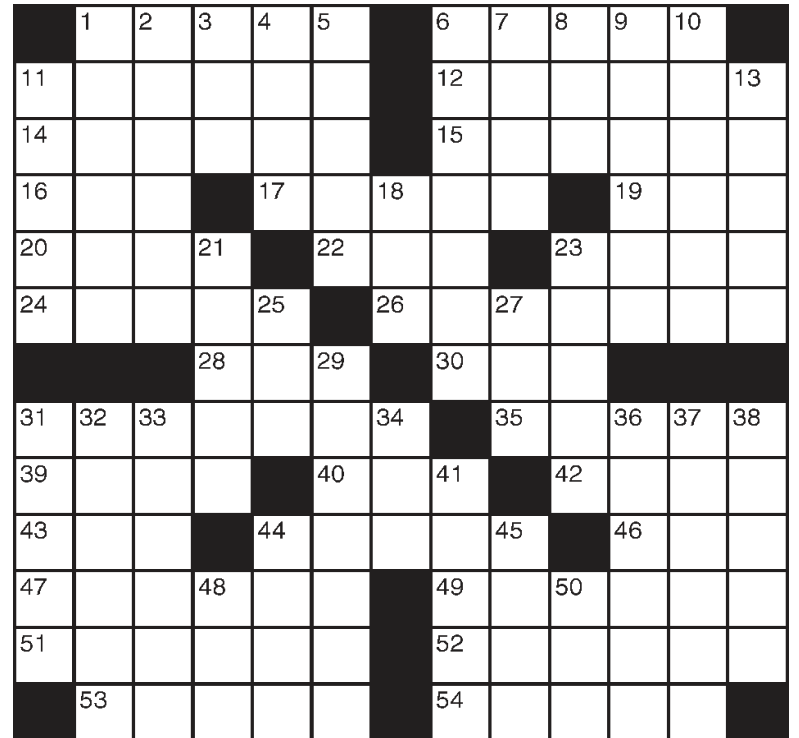
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Muscle
- 6 Request from the boss
- 11 Restaurant fan
- 12 Vast expanses
- 14 Strong points
- 15 Pat of "The Karate Kid"
- 16 Half of bi-
- 17 Bridge material
- 19 Light brown
- 20 Saturn feature
- 22 Norm, for short
- 23 Uttered
- 24 Painter's stand
- 26 Garden bloomer
- 28 Melancholy
- 30 "- hoo!"
- 31 Ruby of song
- 35 Salamanders
- 39 - Domini
- 40 Still
- 42 Go yachting
- 43 TV type
- 44 Nebraska city
- 46 Secret-protecting doc.
- 47 Rio Grande city
- 49 "No need to explain!"
- 51 Encourage
- 52 Banister posts

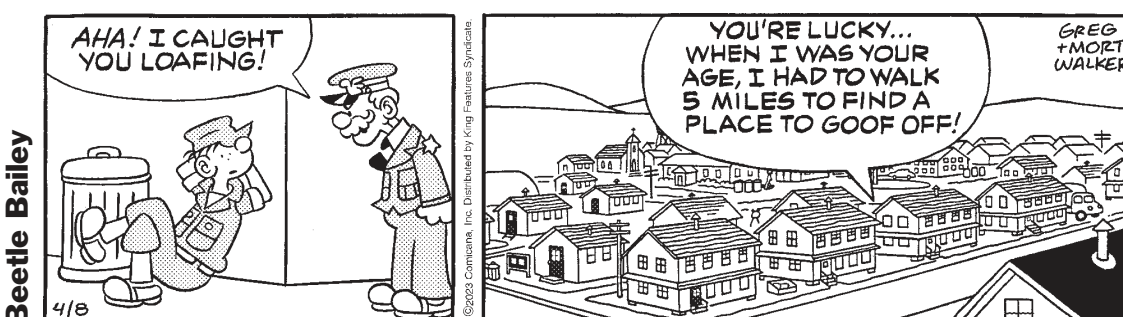
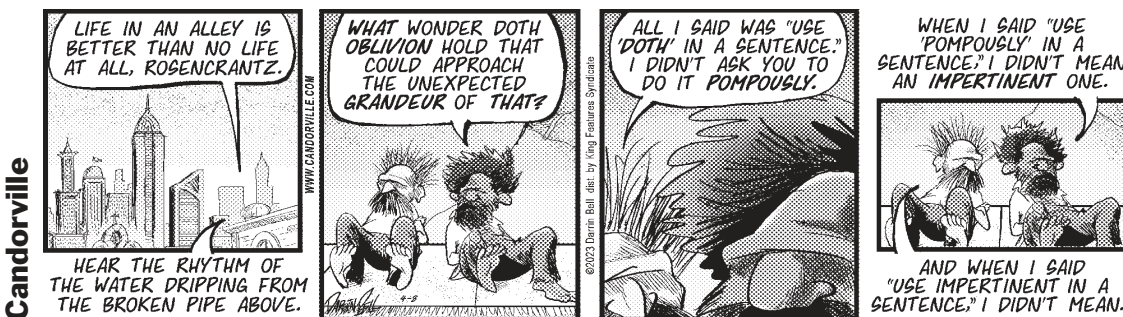
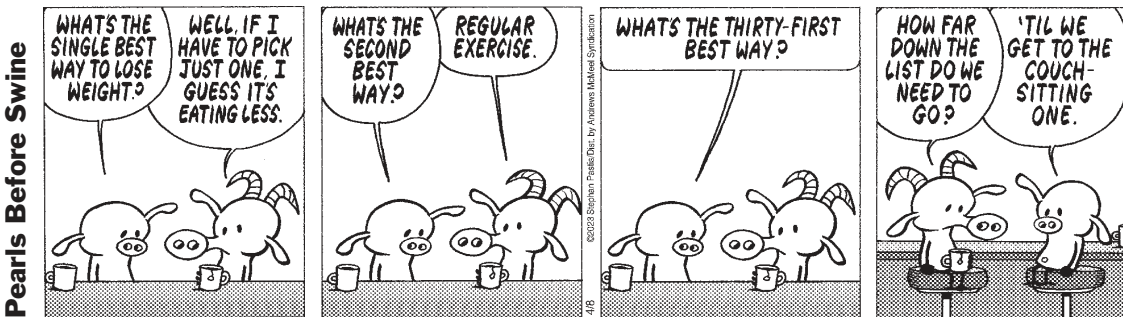
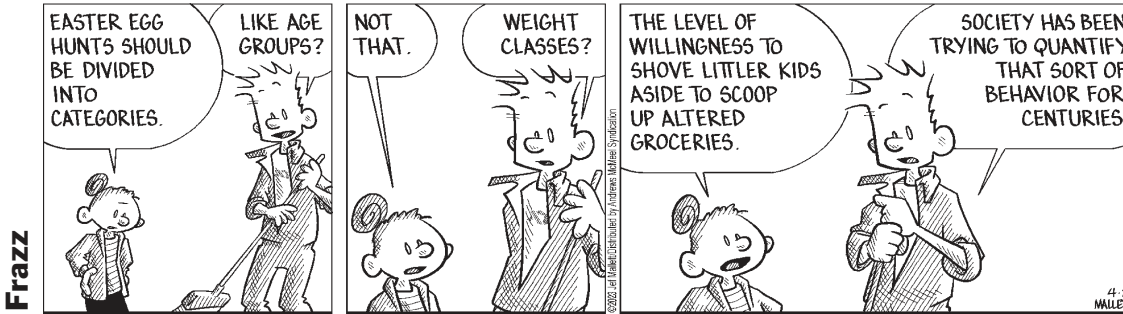
- 53 Mortimer the dummy
- 54 Run-down

- 21 Painter's undercoat
- 23 Plum relatives
- 25 Young fellow
- 27 Thither
- 29 "Shark Tank" star - John
- 31 Some latte sizes
- 32 Opens, as a tube
- 33 Evasive maneuver
- 34 Pro vote
- 36 Desired
- 37 In a neat manner
- 38 Bed boards
- 41 Dilutes
- 44 Bloodhound's clue
- 45 Baseball's Tommie
- 48 Before
- 50 Farm female

DOWN

- 1 Sarajevo locale
- 2 Cello bow applications
- 3 Citrus drink
- 4 Funny folks
- 5 Egg holders
- 6 Eventually
- 7 Earth Day subj.
- 8 Always, in verse
- 9 Rum cocktail
- 10 Involve Gabriel
- 11 Composer Annie's pooch
- 13 Annie's pooch
- 18 Takeoff stat

Answer to Previous Puzzle



4-8

CRYPTOQUIP

LKO JRPBDSO LKDL CRZ WJ
 RJWVC BNP KWJ SPDBLWVC WJ
 LWVZ, YRL W CROJJ WL'J D
 QNPXDYEO QNPXLDYEO.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE I LIKE MYTHICAL BIRD-WOMAN MONSTERS, WHEN I GET DEPRESSED I THINK HARPY THOUGHTS.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals G

STARS AND STRIPES.

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Finland and the new world order

By RONALD SUNY

University of Michigan

In the world of geopolitics, great powers make, break and play by their own rules. Smaller states largely have to make do with adjusting to the world as determined by others.

Which is why the decision by Finland — a country of just 5.5 million people, noted for decades as a neutral presence in Europe — to join NATO is so important. It underscores just how the Russian invasion of Ukraine has upset global realities long thought settled, at least by the Western powers.

The vaunted “rules-based order” that the United States and its NATO allies have touted as the best way to run the world is changing — attracting some, yet more suspicious in the eyes of nations not privy to club membership. Meanwhile, Russia and China are disputing the hegemony of the U.S. and the West over global affairs and seek a system in which power is distributed regionally, with Moscow and Beijing holding sway over what they they see as their parts of the world.

Smaller nations all over the globe are recalculating how they fit into this renewed division of the world.

Finland is one such state and has made a dramatic choice. For centuries it has had to consider its own interests in conjunction with — and in accommodation of — those of its gigantic neighbor: czarist Russia, then the Soviet Union and today Vladimir Putin's Russia. Through the years of the Cold War, Finland adopted a model of neutrality and accommodation in order to coexist with Russia. That was known as “Finlandization.”

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago, decision-makers in Helsinki have seemingly driven the final nails into the coffin of Finlandization. The worry for Putin — and perhaps the West — is that the model has not only been killed off for Finland; it is also dead as a potential off-ramp solution to the conflict in Ukraine.

After more than a hundred years within the czarist empire, Finland gained its independence in 1917. For the next roughly 20 years it became an anti-Soviet outpost pre-

cariously positioned next to the USSR.

Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin saw Finland as a gateway to the communist state's enemies. After annexing eastern Poland and the Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — after the signing of the German-Soviet Pact of 1939, Stalin demanded serious territorial concessions from Finland.

The resulting war saw the Finns lose much of their eastern provinces, but they managed to preserve their independence — at some cost. The price for maintaining its democratic state and capitalist economy in domestic affairs during the Cold War was Finlandization.

Through the adapted model for neutrality, Finland was able to convince Moscow for more than a half-century that it was no threat but a loyal trading partner.

With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, doubts about Finlandization grew among Finns.

But it was Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that tipped the scales and finally convinced Helsinki that its security would be enhanced by becoming a member of NATO.

The invasion also killed off any idea of Finlandization being a model for post-Soviet Ukraine as well.

For the past 30 years, independent Ukraine was viewed as a problem for Putin, who feared its gravitation toward the West. Similarly, even before the invasion last year, Russia was a problem for Ukraine, with authorities in Kyiv fearing dominance from the East.

Before the present war, the Finnish model of independence and neutrality was touted as a viable alternative to Ukraine joining either NATO or drawing closer to the Russian-led strategic alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Finland's experience in preserving its sovereignty by compromising its right to act completely independently in foreign policy might have been a viable model for former Soviet states, some observers held, especially in regards to Ukraine.

Finlandization might have also, so the thinking went, provided a solution to Ukraine's internal divisions on the question of which to favor: the West or Russia.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Ukraine swung between a pro-Russian orientation favored in eastern Ukraine, and a more Ukrainian nationalist identity powerfully evident in western Ukraine. A Finlandization of Ukraine, coupled with the federalization of the various provinces of Ukraine, might have lessened political polarization with Ukraine and allayed the fears of the Russians, and Putin in particular.

Events forced Ukraine's hand. As Russia gravitated toward authoritarianism and used its oil and gas as a weapon against Ukraine, the attractions of the West — democracy, prosperity and a shiny modernity — seemed far more enticing.

On the initiative of the United States, the West vaguely promised Ukraine NATO membership, which Russia found completely unacceptable. And the European Union offered Ukraine closer economic and political ties, stirring up fears in Moscow that this was the first step toward NATO.

After the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014, Ukrainians turned even more sharply toward the West and became more receptive to Western promises of NATO membership.

In hindsight, hopes that Ukraine could “Finlandize” or federalize were both casualties of Putin's increasingly hard line toward Ukraine.

Finland's entry into NATO marks the likely end of the Finlandization model. Even Finland has abandoned it; neutral Sweden is now anxious to join the Western alliance; and other states, even Switzerland, are questioning the efficacy of nonalignment in a polarized world.

In its place, we have the “NATOfication” of Eastern Europe — something that Putin unwittingly accelerated and which leaves Putin's Russia with less accommodating neighbors. Meanwhile, countries like Finland and Sweden have been left with fewer options. “A small nation can disappear,” the Czech writer Milan Kundera reminds us, “and knows it.”

Ronald Grigor Suny is the William H. Sewell Jr. Distinguished University Professor of History and professor of political science at the University of Michigan.

Hulking SUVs, trucks deadly to pedestrians

Los Angeles Times Editorial Board

American car buyers' love of big SUVs and trucks is one reason pedestrian deaths have hit a 40-year high.

The heavier vehicles now make up 80% of car sales in the U.S., and a growing body of research shows they are more deadly when drivers hit pedestrians and cyclists. The mass of SUVs and trucks means they take longer to stop and strike with more force.

They also have larger blind spots than smaller cars. With reduced visibility, drivers turning at an intersection are more likely to hit pedestrians, according to one study. Drivers are also less likely to see small children directly in front of the vehicle. With a higher profile, when an SUV or truck crashes into a person, the front hits the chest and head for more traumatic injuries.

And it's not just the gas guzzlers that are the problem. The head of the National Transportation Safety Board, Jennifer Homendy, warned earlier this year that heavi-

er, more powerful electric vehicles could increase the risk of serious injury and death from vehicle collisions.

Yet, despite the research and rising number of pedestrian deaths, the federal government has done little to address the risk of having so many bigger, heavier vehicles.

In the absence of federal action, California lawmakers are considering a proposal that could eventually charge car owners a fee for registering heavier vehicles. Assemblymember Chris Ward has introduced Assembly Bill 251 to create a task force to study the costs and benefits of a vehicle weight fee.

This shouldn't be a controversial bill. The task force is an incremental but critical first step — one that is already overdue — toward addressing the serious danger posed by ever larger vehicles on the roads.

California already charges a weight fee on commercial vehicles. This would be the first such fee for passenger vehicles in the state. Several other states currently base

registration fees on vehicle weight.

The idea is to charge motorists a lot more because their cars have an outsize impact — not only are mega-vehicles more dangerous to pedestrians and cyclists, but they're also harder on the roads and bad for the environment. The money is supposed to be used for street safety around schools. The D.C. law does let electric vehicle owners subtract 1,000 pounds from the total weight, so as not to discourage residents from switching to zero-emission models.

As EV technology improves, the battery packs are expected to become smaller. But that advancement will be of little help if automakers and consumers continue to buy vehicles with little regard toward danger to people in front of the windshield. Federal regulators should push automakers to design vehicles that are safer not just for the driver but for the pedestrians and bicyclists. Until that happens, California lawmakers can pass AB 251 to help create momentum for change.

SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	4	0	2	14	8	4
Atlanta	4	1	1	13	13	9
New England	4	1	1	13	8	6
Columbus	3	2	1	10	15	8
Nashville	3	2	1	10	6	2
NYFC	2	2	2	8	6	7
Orlando City	2	2	2	8	5	6
Philadelphia	2	3	1	7	8	8
Toronto FC	1	1	4	7	8	7
Inter Miami CF	2	4	0	6	6	7
Chicago	1	1	3	6	7	7
New York	1	2	3	6	4	5
D.C. United	1	3	2	5	7	10
Charlotte FC	1	3	2	5	6	11
CF Montréal	1	4	0	3	3	12

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Saint Louis SC	5	1	0	15	15	5
Seattle	4	1	1	13	12	3
LAFC	3	0	2	11	9	3
Minnesota	3	0	2	11	6	3
San Jose	3	2	1	10	6	7
FC Dallas	2	2	2	8	8	7
Austin FC	2	2	1	7	6	7
Houston	2	3	0	6	5	7
Vancouver	1	2	3	6	10	7
Portland	1	3	2	5	6	11
Real Salt Lake	1	4	0	3	3	13
LA Galaxy	0	2	3	3	3	6
Sporting KC	0	3	3	3	2	7
Colorado	0	3	3	3	2	8

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, April 1

Atlanta 1, New York 0
 Cincinnati 1, Miami 0
 Columbus 4, Real Salt Lake 0
 Seattle 2, LA Galaxy 1
 New York City FC 1, New England 1, tie
 Nashville 2, Orlando City 0
 Sporting Kansas City 0, Philadelphia 0, tie
 Charlotte FC 2, Toronto FC 2, tie
 D.C. United 0, Chicago 0, tie
 Portland 1, FC Dallas 1, tie
 Minnesota 1, Saint Louis City SC 0
 Los Angeles FC 0, Colorado 0, tie
 San Jose 2, Houston 1
 Vancouver 5, CF Montréal 0

Saturday's games

Philadelphia at Cincinnati
 Columbus at D.C. United
 Austin FC at Los Angeles FC
 FC Dallas at Miami
 CF Montréal at New England
 San Jose at New York
 Atlanta at New York City FC
 Minnesota at Chicago
 LA Galaxy at Houston
 Colorado at Sporting Kansas City
 Toronto FC at Nashville
 Charlotte FC at Real Salt Lake
 Saint Louis City SC at Seattle
 Portland at Vancouver

Saturday, April 15

Colorado at Charlotte FC
 New England at Columbus
 D.C. United at CF Montréal
 Houston at New York
 Nashville at New York City FC
 Atlanta at Toronto FC
 Vancouver at Austin FC
 Philadelphia at Chicago
 Real Salt Lake at FC Dallas
 Orlando City at Minnesota
 Cincinnati at Saint Louis City SC
 Seattle at Portland
 Sporting Kansas City at San Jose

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Portland	2	0	0	6	8	1
San Diego	2	0	0	6	6	3
Washington	1	0	1	4	3	2
Houston	1	0	1	4	2	1
OL Reign	1	1	0	3	2	1
Angel City	1	1	0	3	3	3
Gotham FC	1	1	0	3	2	3
North Carolina	1	1	0	3	2	3
Louisville	0	0	2	2	2	2
Chicago	0	2	0	0	3	5
Kansas City	0	2	0	0	1	5
Orlando	0	2	0	0	1	6

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, April 1

Portland 4, Kansas City 1
 Houston 2, Chicago 1
 Washington 2, Louisville 2, tie
 OL Reign 2, Gotham FC 0
 San Diego 3, North Carolina 1

Sunday, April 2

Angel City 2, Orlando 1

Friday, April 14

Houston at Portland

Saturday, April 15

Washington at North Carolina
 Gotham FC at Orlando
 Kansas City at Chicago
 Louisville at Angel City
 San Diego at OL Reign

TENNIS

Copa Colsonitas

Wednesday
At Centro de Alto Rendimiento
Bogota, Colombia
Purse: \$259,303
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Tatjana Maria (2), Germany, def. Carolina Alves, Brazil, 6-2, 6-4.
 Francesca Jones, Britain, def. Carol Zhao, Canada, 6-2, 6-1.
 Kamilla Rakhimova (4), Russia, def. Eugenie Bouchard, Canada, 6-0, 6-7 (7), 6-4.
 Laura Pigossi (6), Brazil, def. Natalija Stevanovic, Serbia, 7-5, 5-7, 6-4.

Women's Doubles
Round of 16
 Sara Errani, Italy, and Irina Bara, Romania, def. Maria Fernanda Herazo Gonzalez and Emiliana Arango, Colombia, 6-3, 4-6, 10-8.
 Katarzyna Piter, Poland, and Oksana Kalashnikova, Georgia, def. Jessy Rompies, Indonesia, and Prarthana Thombare, India, 7-5, 6-2.
 Yuliana Lizarazo and Maria Paulina Perez Garcia, Colombia, def. Andrea Gamiz, Venezuela, and Aliona Bolsova (3), Spain, 6-7 (1), 7-6 (9), 10-7.

Charleston Open

Wednesday
At Family Circle Tennis Center
Charleston, S.C.
Purse: \$780,637
Surface: Green clay
Women's Singles
Round of 32
 Daria Kasatkina (3), Russia, def. Madison Brengle, United States, 6-2, 6-1.
 Julia Grabher, Austria, def. Sachia Vickery, United States, 6-1, 6-2.
 Diana Shnaider, Russia, def. Veronika Kudermetova (5), Russia, 6-4, 6-3.
 Paula Badosa (12), Spain, def. Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, 7-5, 7-6 (6).
 Ekaterina Alexandrova (7), Russia, def. Yulia Putintseva, Kazakhstan, 6-1, 6-3.
 Bernarda Pera, United States, def. Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-3, 6-4.
 Madison Keys (9), United States, def. Hailey Baptiste, United States, 6-1, 6-2.
 Caroline Dolehide, United States, def. Linda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, 6-2, 5-7, 6-3.

Jessica Pegula (1), United States, def. Anna Blinkova, Russia, 6-2, 6-0.
 Irina-Camelia Begu (15), Romania, def. Sofia Kenin, United States, 6-1, 6-4.
 Magda Linette (8), Poland, def. Varvara Gracheva, Russia, 6-7 (3), 7-5, 6-4.
 Shelby Rogers, United States, def. Caty McNally, United States, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-1.
 Belinda Bencic (4), Switzerland, def. Katherine Sebov, Canada, 6-0, 6-3.

Women's Doubles
Round of 16
 Vera Zvonareva, Russia, and Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Miyu Kato, Japan, and Marie Bouzkova, Czech Republic, 2-6, 6-0, 10-7.
 Nicole Melichar-Martinez and Alycia Parks (4), United States, def. Alicia Barnett and Olivia Nicholls, Britain, 5-7, 7-6 (8), 10-8.

Danielle Collins and Desirae Krawczyk, United States, def. Anna Danilina, Kazakhstan, and Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-1, 4-6, 10-8.
 Taylor Townsend, United States, and Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, def. Katarzyna Kawa and Alicja Rosolska, Poland, 6-4, 6-3.

Quarterfinals

Ena Shibahara, Japan, and Giuliana Olmos (1), Mexico, def. Aldila Sutjiadi, Indonesia, and Yana Sizikova, Russia, 6-3, 6-2.

Estoril Open

Wednesday
At Clube de Tennis do Estoril
Estoril, Portugal
Purse: Euro 562,815
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Round of 16
 Marco Cecchinato, Italy, def. Fabio Fognini, Italy, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.
 Sebastian Baez (5), Argentina, def. Pedro Cachin, Argentina, 6-4, 7-6 (2).
 Casper Ruud (1), Norway, def. Joao Sousa, Portugal, 4-6, 6-2, 6-2.
 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (3), Spain, def. Luca van Assche, France, 6-3, 7-5.

Men's Doubles
Round of 16
 Robin Haase, Netherlands, and Philipp Oswald, Austria, def. Hugo Nys, Monaco, and Andreas Mies (1), Germany, 7-6 (4), 6-1.
 Cristian Rodriguez, Colombia, and Diego Hidalgo, Ecuador, def. Marcelo Melo, Brazil, and John Peers (2), Australia, 7-6 (5), 6-7 (7), 10-6.

Nikola Patic and Miomir Kecmanovic, Serbia, def. John-Patrick Smith and Andrew Harris, Australia, 6-2, 6-4.
 Nuno Borges and Francisco Cabral, Portugal, def. Romain Arneodo, Monaco, and Tristan-Samuel Weissborn, Austria, 6-3, 7-6 (3).

Gonzalo Escobar, Ecuador, and Fabien Reboul (3), France, def. Marco Cecchinato, Italy, and Quentin Halys, France, 6-0, 6-3.

Grand Prix Hassan II

Wednesday
At Royal Tennis Club de Marrakech
Marrakech, Morocco
Purse: Euro 562,815
Surface: Red clay
Men's Doubles
Round of 16
 Albano Olivetti, France, and Maxime Cressy (5), United States, def. Hendrik Jebens, Germany, and Petros Tsitsipas, Greece, 6-3, 7-6 (5).

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball American League
BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Recalled RHP Grayson Rodriguez from Norfolk (IL). Placed RHP Kyle Bradish on the 15-day IL, retroactive to April 4.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Placed OF Eloy Jimenez on the 10-day IL, retroactive to April 4. Recalled INF Jake Burger from Charlotte (IL).

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with C Chris Burke on a minor league contract. Placed OF Kyle Isbel on the paternity list. Recalled 1B Nick Pratto from Omaha (IL).

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Claimed OF Jordan Luplow off waivers from Atlanta and optioned him to Buffalo (IL). Transferred LHP Hyun Jin Ryu from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL.

National League
ATLANTA BRAVES — Sent RHP Kyle Wright to Gwinnett (IL) on a rehab assignment.

CINCINNATI REDS — Designated LHP Bennett Sousa for assignment. Optioned RHP Joel Kuhn on to Louisville (IL). Selected the contract of RHP Kevin Herget from Louisville.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Signed DE Tarell Basham to a one-year contract.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed OL Chandler Brown and OT Josh Wells.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed OT Yodny Cajuste to a restricted free agent tender.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

ANAHEIM DUCKS — Recalled G Olle Eriksson Ek from San Diego (AHL). Activated C Adam Henrique from injured reserve.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS — Recalled G Jon Gillies from Cleveland (AHL). Returned G Jet Greaves and D Jake Christiansen to Cleveland.

DALLAS STARS — Reassigned G Dylan Wells from Texas (AHL) to Idaho (ECHL).

DETROIT RED WINGS — Recalled G Alex Nedeljkovic from Grand Rapids (AHL).

LOS ANGELES KINGS — Recalled D Jordan Spence from Ontario (AHL).

NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Reassigned F John Leonard to Milwaukee (AHL).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Returned G Samuel Ersson to Lehigh Valley (AHL) from loan.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Signed G Joel Blomqvist to a three-year, entry-level contract.

SAN JOSE SHARKS — Reassigned RW Darnil Gushchin to San Jose (AHL). Recalled C Kyle Crisculo from San Jose.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Reassigned D Mikko Kokkonen from Toronto (AHL) to Newfoundland (ECHL). Recalled F Wayne Simmonds from Toronto.

SOCCER

National Women's Soccer League

WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Named Mami Yamaguchi assistant coach.

GOLF

World rankings

Through April 3

1.	Scottie Scheffler	10.50
2.	Rory McIlroy	9.13
3.	Jon Rahm	9.02
4.	Patrick Cantlay	7.00
5.	Max Homa	5.86
6.	Cameron Smith	5.84
7.	Xander Schauffele	5.98
8.	Will Zalatoris	5.26
9.	Viktor Hovland	4.99
10.	Justin Thomas	4.87
11.	Sam Burns	4.82
12.	Collin Morikawa	4.74
13.	Tony Finau	4.46
14.	Cameron Young	4.36
15.	Matt Fitzpatrick	4.34
16.	Jordan Spieth	4.02
17.	Tyrell Hatton	3.79
18.	Sungjae Im	3.74
19.	Tom Kim	3.62
20.	Kurt Kitayama	3.32
21.	Hideki Matsuyama	3.17
22.	Keegan Bradley	3.11
23.	Shane Lowry	3.05
24.	Billy Horschel	2.93
25.	Joaquin Niemann	2.90
26.	Tom Hoge	2.88
27.	Tommy Fleetwood	2.84
28.	Corey Connors	2.76
29.	Brian Harman	2.54
30.	Sahith Theegala	2.53
31.	Abraham Ancer	2.46
32.	Chris Kirk	2.46
33.	Sepp Straka	2.45
34.	Seamus Power	2.44
35.	Jason Day	2.43
36.	Justin Rose	2.43
37.	Ryan Fox	2.34
38.	Russell Henley	2.29
39.	Si Woo Kim	2.18
40.	Adam Scott	2.16
41.	Alex Noren	2.05
42.	Harris English	2.04
43.	Kyung-Hoon Lee	2.04
44.	Thomas Pieters	2.01



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

South Carolina's Aliyah Boston decided to forgo her COVID year and enter the WNBA Draft as the likely No. 1 overall pick.

Women players have few options

WNBA, overseas spots even more limited

By DOUG FEINBERG

Associated Press

DALLAS — March Madness may have been the last time for fans to see many of the talented college women players compete.

Players' options for professional basketball careers are limited, whether in the U.S. or overseas — the jobs just aren't there.

"You can be a great college player and not make a WNBA roster," ESPN WNBA analyst LaChina Robinson said. "You're not only competing with players that are currently on roster, but also a ton of women's basketball players overseas that have been honing their skills and waiting for opportunity to break into the WNBA."

The numbers paint a challenging picture. There are only 12 WNBA teams and 144 roster spots with most of those being filled by returning players.

Over the past six seasons, 64% of players drafted made WNBA rosters according to basketball website 'Beyond Women's Sports'. The high mark was 28 of the 36 draftees in 2019. The low was only 20 the year before.

Even if a player does get into the league, it's a battle for playing time. Only 60% of players drafted got on the court to play minutes their first year since 2017 according to the basketball website 'Her Hoop Stats.' It's part of the reason why five of the first-round picks in 2021 are no longer in the league.

There has been talk of WNBA expansion, but nothing has come to fruition yet. Players often turn to playing professionally overseas, working on their games and looking for another shot to play at home.

Now those jobs are also at a premium.

Brittney Griner's nine-month incarceration in Moscow along with the war with Ukraine has led to the elimination of dozens of potential jobs in Russia.

Griner is back in the WNBA after her nine-month legal fight in Russia, during which she was detained when customs officials said they found vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage, then later arrested before being released in a high-level prisoner exchange between the U.S. and Russia.

The lost jobs in Russia has a trickle down on openings in other countries as top players who once played there are looking elsewhere for work.

Longtime agent Brian Dyke said that there are fewer countries now that he can send players to. Besides Russia, China and Korea stopped signing foreign players a few years ago because of the coronavirus. Neither has started again. That's roughly another three dozen jobs gone.

"In Korea, everyone used to get \$25,000 a month," Dyke said. "It's a huge loss not having those jobs as those are two of the biggest markets."

It all makes the path to a professional basketball career for women harder than ever.

The new name, image and likeness (NIL) opportunities women basketball players also have is playing into their decisions on turning pro.

"NIL definitely plays a major role," said South Carolina star Aliyah Boston, who decided to forgo her COVID year and enter the WNBA Draft as the likely No. 1 overall pick. "NIL is something that's a blessing. It gives you a head start on life before you need to get there."

THE MASTERS

Rahm looking to regain form after rough March

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Jon Rahm looked nearly unbeatable just a month ago.

Now, the world's No. 3-ranked player suddenly finds himself looking for a way to regain his top form this week at the Masters.

After winning three tournaments in a six-week span culminating in a two-shot victory over Max Homa at Riviera, Rahm endured a rough March — making it anyone's guess as to what to expect from the 28-year-old Spaniard at Augusta National.

Rahm's issues began at the Arnold Palmer Invitational when he followed up a stellar opening-round 7-under 65 with back-to-back 76s, eliminating him from contention at Bay Hill. He ultimately finished tied for 39th, snapping a streak of 10 straight top-10 finishes.

He followed that with a first-round 71 at the Players Championship, but was forced to withdraw because of a stomach illness.

Then came a disappointing effort at the WGC-Dell Match Play where he lost to Rickie Fowler and Billy Horschel, becoming the only top six seed not to advance to the round of 16.

The question now becomes can he return to his dominant form and win his first green jacket — or has he lost that momentum?

Rahm, for one, downplayed the

idea of momentum being a factor, calling himself a “week-to-week type of guy.”

Translation: He's plenty confident he'll turn things around this week.

“If you believe that something like that can stop positive momentum, when you get on a negative run, you know, how can you change that, right?” said Rahm, who has won nearly \$45 million during his professional career. “If you're waiting for something outside yourself to change things, I don't think that's the best way to look at it, in my mind.

“Every single tournament I go to, my plan is to win, and my mindset doesn't deviate from that.”

Despite his recent struggles, Rahm remains among the favorites to win the Masters according to the FanDuel Sportsbook at 19-2 odds, which ranks behind only defending champion Scottie Scheffler (7-1) and Rory McIlroy (15-2).

Those three golfers have separated themselves from the rest of the pack in the world rankings, although Rahm refuses to classify them as the next “big three” of men's professional golf.

“I think for us to be compared to something like that, we have a very long way to go,” Rahm said. “It could be the start. But still a long way to go.”

Rahm should know.

A self-described “golf junkie,” Rahm said he regularly wakes up

at 5:30 in the morning to watch videos of other golfers — past and present — on YouTube because he feels as if he can always learn something from others. He's become a historian of the game, and he's well aware of the high bar set by Seve Ballesteros, Jose Maria Olazabal and Sergio Garcia, three Spaniards who have combined to win five Masters.

He's quick to point out this is the 40-year anniversary of Ballesteros winning his second green jacket.

And while he wasn't alive when Olazabal won his first Masters in 1994 — and hadn't even started playing golf when he won his second in 1999 — he's gone back and watched the videos of those wins, gaining a better understanding of what a great source of pride and inspiration they were for his country.

Rahm's first appearance at the Masters came in 2017 when Garcia outlasted Justin Rose to win his first major, something that has emboldened Rahm's desire to win the Masters.

“It's something that's important to me,” Rahm said of the prospect of winning here.

History suggests Rahm will play well. He's finished in the top 10 in four of his six appearances, finishing tied for fifth two years ago and fourth in 2018.

But can Rahm regain that momentum from earlier this season when he surged to No. 1 in the world?



MARK BAKER/AP

Jon Rahm won three times in a six-week span before struggling in March. He is one of the three favorites in this week's Masters.

McIlroy, who had breakfast with Rahm on Tuesday, doesn't see why not.

McIlroy said it's difficult to imagine Rahm and Scheffler not being in contention on Sunday.

“I look at both of those guys, and it's hard to see them not consistent-

ly finishing in the top 10 of every tournament that they play,” McIlroy said. “They both do it a different way. They both sort of have different attitudes towards the game. But it just seems like every week that we're playing, one of us has got a chance to win that tournament.”

Storylines to watch for this weekend at Augusta

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — From the renegade LIV tour to Scottie Scheffler's bid for a second straight green jacket to an elongated 13th hole, golf's first major of the year provides its usual abundance of compelling storylines.

Oh, and let's not forget Tiger Woods.

Welcome to the Masters, where the golf year really gets started on Thursday amid the blooming azaleas and towering pines of Augusta National Golf Club.

Here are some things to watch for over the next four days:

Super Bowl of golf

The Masters marks the biggest showdown yet between the established PGA Tour and brash challenger LIV.

While there were no outward signs of hostility during the practice rounds and champions dinner, the rivalry between those players



JAE C. HONG/AP

British Open champ Cameron Smith is one of the 18 LIV golfers playing in this week's Masters.

who stuck with the PGA and those who chose the generational wealth doled out by LIV's Saudi backers is unavoidable.

All eyes will be on the scoreboard to see how LIV's 18 entrants

are faring against the rest of the field.

If one of them claimed the green jacket, it would undoubtedly draw comparisons to the New York Jets beating the Baltimore Colts in the third Super Bowl — an astounding result that put the neophyte American Football League on equal footing with the NFL.

Golf is an individual game, of course, but so many harsh words have been exchanged over the past year that it's impossible to ignore the significance of the Masters to both tours.

“I'd love to see one of us guys get up to the top of the leaderboard and really give it a nice shot,” said Cameron Smith, the reigning British Open champion who defected to LIV.

Unlucky 13th

The 13th, nicknamed “Azalea,” has long been the easiest hole on the course.

Finally, it's playing like a par-5.

After acquiring a chunk of land from neighboring Augusta Country Club, the tee box at 13 was pushed back 35 yards.

That increased the distance of the hole to 545 yards, more in line with other par 5s at major tournaments. If all goes according to plan, expect a lot more intrigue on the back nine Sunday.

Taming a Tiger

Woods is just a part-time player these days, but no one knows their way around Augusta National better than the five-time champion.

Woods stunningly made the cut a year ago, still hobbling after a devastating car wreck.

A slight limp remains, a reminder of all the physical tribulations he has endured over the past decade and a half.

But that swing looks as smooth as ever.

“You know, if he didn't have to walk up these hills and have all of that, I'd say he'd be one of the favo-

rites,” McIlroy marveled. “He's got all of the shots.”

Woods never plays without believing he has a chance to win, but he knows the odds are stacked heavily against capturing a sixth green jacket.

Persnickety weather

The unpredictable weather of early April is expected to be on full display this week, which could lead to big changes on the course.

Augusta National was baked by temperatures approaching 90 degrees the day before the tournament, and more of the same was forecast for the opening round.

But a storm front was bearing down on east Georgia, bringing potentially heavy rainfall and knocking temperatures into the low 50s by the weekend, forecasters said.

The player that proves most adaptable to that wide range of conditions will likely be the one wearing the green jacket come Sunday evening.

THE MASTERS

McIlroy returns in search of 1st title

BY DAVE SKRETTA

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Rory McIlroy has had plenty of memorable moments on the back nine on Sunday, but two of the best have had nothing to do with the four-time major champion holding up a trophy at the end.

One came in 2018, when McIlroy was paired with Tiger Woods in the final group at the Tour Championship. McIlroy faded that Sunday at East Lake, but he was left with the best view possible to watch Woods win for the first time in five years.

The other came just last year, down the hill from the stately clubhouse at Augusta National, where McIlroy holed out from the bunker on the 18th to finish off his Masters — and then watched Collin Morikawa do the same right behind him.

“Obviously the last time this tournament was played I walked away from the course and the tournament pretty happy with myself, as you can see over there,” McIlroy said Tuesday, gesturing to a nearby photograph of him standing in the bunker, his club raised and the vestiges of a joyful cry still spread across the Northern Irishman’s face.

What could top those two moments this Sunday? Perhaps a green jacket and a career Grand Slam.

That bunker shot that sent Woods-like roars through the towering Georgia pines last year left McIlroy with a 64, matching the best final-round score in Masters history, and three shots back of winner Scottie Scheffler in second place.

Yet it also left McIlroy with a feeling he carries into his 15th try



MARK BAKER/AP

Rory McIlroy, of Northern Ireland, hits out of a bunker on the 16th hole during a practice round for the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on Monday in Augusta, Ga. McIlroy has yet to win the Masters.

at Augusta National this week: confidence.

“The only thing I could say is I proved to myself I could do it,” McIlroy explained. “As much as I didn’t really get into contention, there was part of me on the back nine last year that thought I had a chance. To play the way I did, and eagle 13 and have those feelings, in my mind anyway, I felt like it was a breakthrough.

“So any time I see an image like that,” McIlroy said, glancing again at the photograph of him on 18, “or the video of me and Collin doing what he did as well, it brings back those good vibes.”

The vibes haven’t always been

good at Augusta National.

By most rights, McIlroy should have slipped into the first of many green jackets 12 years ago. He had opened with a 65, reached 12 under by the end of the third round and was still leading when he made the turn on Sunday. But a wayward tee shot ricocheted through the trees to the left of the 10th and McIlroy made triple bogey. He made another bogey at the next. And when he splashed a shot into Rae’s Creek at the par-3 12th, his meltdown was complete.

He shot a final-round 80, and the lasting image was not of the 33-year-old McIlroy standing triumphantly in a bunker a dozen years

later but of a 21-year-old McIlroy, so publicly wounded, doubled over his club in anguish.

“I don’t think every experience is going to be a good experience. That would lead to a pretty boring life,” said McIlroy, whose life is anything but these days as he becomes one of the PGA Tour’s leading voices in its showdown with LIV Golf.

“You have to learn from those challenges,” McIlroy said, “and learn from some of that scar tissues that built up.”

If anyone knows about scar tissue, figuratively and literally, it would be Woods. He played a practice round with McIlroy on Mon-

day, and the five-time Masters champion might be the one person more confident in McIlroy than himself.

“It’s just a matter of time. Rory has the talent. He has the game. He has all the tools,” said Woods, the most recent player to join Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus in completing the modern Grand Slam.

“Last year he made a great run, put himself right there,” Woods said, “but I think it’s just a matter of time, whether it’s this year or next or whenever it comes. He will get it done. He will have a career Grand Slam. It’s just a matter of when it will be.”

It might be this week. McIlroy’s game is certainly on point. He won in January in Dubai and was second at Bay Hill before advancing to the semifinals of the Dell Match Play a couple of weeks ago, where he lost to Cameron Young.

Those results, coupled with the way McIlroy has learned to navigate Augusta National, are why oddsmakers picked him, along with defending champion Scottie Scheffler, to have his most memorable moment on the 18th green this Sunday.

“It looks like this is another prime year,” 1992 Masters champion Fred Couples said after watching McIlroy in a practice round this week. “He’s playing very, very well. What does he have to do? I don’t know. Is it surprising he’s never won this? Of course it is, the way he plays and the way he putts and how high he hits and how far he hits it. But it’s not that easy.

“He just does his own deal and plays like Rory can, he’ll be just fine. Then he’s got to beat two, four, five people on Sunday.”

LIV and let live: Tournament still about who wins jacket

BY DOUG FERGUSON

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Masters Chairman Fred Ridley sat among 33 champions in green jackets at golf’s most exclusive dinner. It was a time to celebrate Scottie Scheffler as the most recent winner, to share laughs, memories and even a few tears.

That’s how it is every year at Augusta National.

“I would not have known that anything was going on in the world of professional golf other than the norm,” Ridley said on the eve of a Masters unlike any other. “So I think — and I’m hopeful — that this week might get people thinking in a little bit different direction and things will change.”

There’s a full menu of activity at this Masters.

Tiger Woods returns for his 25th appearance with hopes his course knowledge can compen-

sate for battered legs as he pursues another green jacket. Rory McIlroy gets another crack at the one major that keeps him from the career Grand Slam. No one has won the Masters back-to-back since Woods in 2002, and with Scheffler the No. 1 player in the world, he has an excellent chance.

The forecast is for the weather to turn nasty on the weekend. The real storm has been brewing for the last 10 months since the launch of LIV Golf and the 18 players at the Masters who defected to the rival league for its Saudi riches.

There have been accusations that LIV Golf isn’t serious competition with its 54-hole events, and even some name-calling — Fred Couples referred to Phil Mickelson as a “nut bag” — of LIV players for turning their backs on the tour that made them famous.

“Everyone thinks we suck now, so I want to play great,” said Ha-



JAE C. HONG/AP

Phil Mickelson and Jon Rahm talk on the range before a practice round at Augusta National Golf Club on Wednesday in Augusta, Ga.

rold Varner III, an LIV player with “Golf Saudi” on his bag. Varner joined for the money. He

makes no secret about that.

All that gets set aside on Thursday when the players — profes-

sional and amateur, PGA Tour loyalists and those with LIV — have one thing in common.

“We talk about all these issues in golf, but we are here this week — these 88 players — and that’s all that’s on their mind is playing for that green jacket,” Ridley said. “It’s a great symbol of celebration of this game. And we’re looking forward to seeing someone donning it on Sunday afternoon.”

Normalcy is hard to find these days.

The PGA Tour and LIV Golf are involved in an antitrust lawsuit — a case management conference before a federal judge is scheduled for Friday afternoon, about the time Woods should be headed to Amen Corner.

A London-based arbitration panel will reportedly rule this week in favor of the European tour’s ability to sanction LIV players.

MMA/MLB



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Israel Adesanya, top, works against Alex Pereira during their middleweight bout at UFC 281 on Nov. 13, 2022. Pereira stopped Adesanya in the fifth round while Adesanya led on all scorecards.

Adesanya favored in rematch with Pereira for title

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

Israel Adesanya could've taken the easier path by fighting lesser opponents and building back his résumé after losing to Alex Pereira in November at UFC 281.

Adesanya didn't want to wait. He will be back in the Octagon on Saturday for UFC 287 in Miami for a rematch for the middleweight championship.

Even though he is the challenger, the 33-year-old Adesanya is a minus-142 favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. He was either unaware of the betting line or chose to ignore it, offering his own narrative of a comeback that he called "one of the greatest storylines in MMA history."

"Not many people get the opportunity to show how great they are, to rise to the occasion when all the odds are stacked against them, when people have counted them out," Adesanya said. "For me, this fight I feel like the underdog. I feel like everyone's counting me out. They've forgot what I've done in this game. They've forgot who I am, and it's time to remind people how great I am."

Maybe one reason Adesanya (23-2) wants this fight against Pereira (7-1) so quickly was because he was beating the Brazilian 39-37 on all three scorecards entering the fifth and final round at Madison Square Garden in New York. Pereira could only win by knock-out, and that's what he got 2:01 into the round.

That loss ended Adesanya's 12-match winning streak at middleweight, one short of Anderson Silva's record. It also stripped Adesanya of the belt he held since 2019.

"I know how I can beat this guy," Adesanya said. "I know every time I fight this guy I'm dominating him and beating him, and then he has this special ability to recover and

put his foot on the gas. So I have to find a way to take take him out of the driver's seat, which I will."

Pereira has never lost to Adesanya, who was born in Nigeria but lives in New Zealand. Before the two met in November, Pereira defeated Adesanya twice in kickboxing.

Even in the most recent match, Pereira said he believed he had the upper hand despite trailing in points, and he proved that with the KO.

Pereira, 35, easily could have passed on Adesanya's rematch wish when considering which opponent he wanted for his first title defense.

"He was a dominant champion," Pereira said through an interpreter. "Maybe he could've done two or three (fights) before that, but he wanted to do it right away. I said, 'No problem.'"

Fifth-ranked welterweight contender Gilbert Burns (21-5) will face No. 11 Jorge Masvidal (35-16) in the lead-up fight to the main event.

UFC President Dana White said he preferred Adesanya's desire for a quick rematch over a fighter choosing the more cautious route.

"This guy's a real fighter that wants to prove himself against the best, wants to be looked at as the best, wants to be looked at as one of the greatest of all time," White said. "What you want to do is create a legacy for yourself and prove to the world that not only are you the best in the world, but you're the greatest of all time. That's what everybody should be striving to do."

Pereira is giving Adesanya that chance, but said one rematch was enough. He didn't plan on creating the possibility for a UFC trilogy.

"I believe that me beating him this Saturday," Pereira said, "I will never face him again."

Ohtani violates pitch clock on the mound, at the plate

Associated Press

SEATTLE—Shohei Ohtani was called for pitch clock violations on the mound and at the plate Wednesday, as the Los Angeles Angels' two-way star made more major league history.

Starting against the Seattle Mariners, Ohtani was hit with a violation in the top of the first inning while working against Cal Raleigh. Angels manager Phil Nevin said that his right-hander was not trying to violate the rule by intentionally throwing a pitch before Raleigh was ready.

"Part of this rule, when we first put it in, there were some pitchers that were taking advantage of it and quick-pitching some hitters," Nevin said. "(Max) Scherzer did it in spring training, and they're just trying to get away from that. In no way is Shohei trying to do that. It's

just his set position is a little different than most and I was trying to explain to (umpire) Pat (Hoberg) what he does."

Nevin said Hoberg told them that while the pitcher can throw whenever he wants once the clock is in the final 8 seconds, before that the batter has to signal that he's ready in the box.

Ohtani was flagged again in the top of the sixth before his at-bat against Mariners reliever Matt Brash.

Ohtani became the first player to be called for clock violations as a pitcher and hitter, but said he understands the rules.

"I had a chance to talk to the umpires after the game, and it cleared things up," Ohtani said. "So, I know what I need to do, and the adjustments I need to do. It should be fine."

Leaders

American League						National League					
Through Wednesday's games						Through Wednesday's games					
BATTING						BATTING					
	G	AB	R	H	BA		G	AB	R	H	BA
Chapman, TOR	6	23	4	12	.522	Anderson, MIL	6	18	7	9	.500
Duvall, BOS	5	21	7	10	.476	Swanson, CHC	5	20	6	10	.500
Moncada, CHW	6	25	3	11	.440	Arraez, MIA	7	24	2	11	.458
Torres, NYY	6	19	5	8	.421	Goldschmidt, STL	6	20	3	9	.450
Franco, TB	6	24	4	10	.417	Gorman, STL	5	16	3	7	.438
Larnach, MIN	6	23	4	9	.391	Happ, CHC	5	16	6	7	.438
Ward, LAA	6	27	6	10	.370	Stott, PHI	6	23	0	10	.435
Trout, LAA	6	19	5	7	.368	Smith, LAD	5	19	5	8	.421
Arozarena, TB	6	22	7	8	.364	Reynolds, PIT	6	24	6	10	.417
Guerrero Jr., TOR	6	22	3	8	.364	Bogaerts, SD	6	22	5	9	.409
HOME RUNS						HOME RUNS					
Raley, TB					3	Reynolds, PIT					4
Gallo, MIN					3	10 tied					3
Tucker, HOU					3	RUNS BATTED IN					
RUNS BATTED IN						Anderson, MIL					10
Alvarez, HOU					10	Smith, LAD					10
Duvall, BOS					9	Thompson, LAD					8
O'Hoppe, LAA					8	Vosler, CIN					7
Siri, TB					8	Winker, MIL					7
Mullins, BAL					8	Bogaerts, SD					7
Tucker, HOU					8	Cron, COL					7
Kwan, CLE					8	Reynolds, PIT					7
STOLEN BASES						Olson, ATL					7
Straw, CLE					5	STOLEN BASES					
Torres, NYY					5	Carroll, ARI					3
SLUGGING PERCENTAGE						Marte, NYM					3
Duvall, BOS					1.000	SLUGGING PERCENTAGE					
Moncada, CHW					.840	Anderson, MIL					1.056
Franco, TB					.792	Reynolds, PIT					1.000
TOTAL BASES						Smith, LAD					1.000
Duvall, BOS					21	Bogaerts, SD					.955
Moncada, CHW					21	TOTAL BASES					
Franco, TB					19	Reynolds, PIT					24
Tucker, HOU					18	Bogaerts, SD					21
INNINGS PITCHED						Olson, ATL					20
Cole, NYY					12.1	Anderson, MIL					19
López, MIN					12.1	Smith, LAD					19
Bieber, CLE					12.0	Soler, MIA					19
Gibson, BAL					12.0	INNINGS PITCHED					
McClanahan, TB					12.0	Alcantara, MIA					14.2
Ohtani, LAA					12.0	Luzardo, MIA					12.2
Valdez, HOU					12.0	Urias, LAD					12.0
STRIKEOUTS						Keller, PIT					11.2
Cole, NYY					19	Márquez, COL					11.1
Cease, CHW					18	Scherzer, NYM					11.1
Ohtani, LAA					18	Webb, SF					11.0
deGrom, TEX					18	STRIKEOUTS					
López, MIN					16	Webb, SF					16
Valdez, HOU					13	Keller, PIT					15
Castillo, SEA					12	Luzardo, MIA					15
McClanahan, TB					12	Mikolas, STL					12
Springs, TB					12	Urias, LAD					12
Javier, HOU					11	Gallen, ARI					10
						Peterson, NYM					10

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	6	0	1.000	—
New York	4	2	.667	2
Baltimore	3	3	.500	3
Toronto	3	3	.500	3
Boston	2	4	.333	4
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	5	2	.714	—
Minnesota	4	2	.667	½
Chicago	3	3	.500	1½
Detroit	2	4	.333	2½
Kansas City	1	5	.167	3½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	4	2	.667	—
Texas	4	2	.667	—
Houston	3	4	.429	1½
Oakland	2	4	.333	2
Seattle	2	5	.286	2½
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	5	1	.833	—
Miami	3	4	.429	2½
New York	3	4	.429	2½
Philadelphia	1	5	.167	4
Washington	1	5	.167	4
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	5	1	.833	—
Pittsburgh	4	2	.667	1
Cincinnati	3	2	.600	1½
Chicago	2	3	.400	2½
St. Louis	2	4	.333	3
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	4	2	.667	—
Arizona	3	3	.500	1
San Diego	3	3	.500	1
San Francisco	2	3	.400	1½
Colorado	2	4	.333	2
Wednesday's games				
Miami 5, Minnesota 2				
N.Y. Yankees 4, Philadelphia 2				
Tampa Bay 7, Washington 2				
Pittsburgh 4, Boston 1				
Texas 5, Baltimore 2				
Houston 8, Detroit 2				
Chicago White Sox 7, San Francisco 3				
Cleveland 6, Oakland 4, 10 innings				
L.A. Angels 4, Seattle 3				
Toronto 3, Kansas City 0				
Atlanta 5, St. Louis 2				
Pittsburgh 4, Boston 1				
Milwaukee 7, N.Y. Mets 6				
Chicago White Sox 7, San Francisco 3				
Chicago Cubs at Cincinnati, ppd.				
Thursday's games				
Boston at Detroit				
San Francisco at Chicago White Sox				
Toronto at Kansas City				
N.Y. Yankees at Baltimore, ppd.				
Houston at Minnesota, ppd.				
Washington at Colorado				
San Diego at Atlanta				
L.A. Dodgers at Arizona				
Miami at N.Y. Mets, ppd.				
Cincinnati at Philadelphia, ppd.				
Friday's games				
Texas (Eovaldi 1-0) at Chicago Cubs (Stroman 1-0)				
N.Y. Yankees (TBD) at Baltimore (Kremers 0-0)				
Houston (Urquidy 0-0) at Minnesota (Gray 1-0)				
Seattle (Gilbert 0-1) at Cleveland (Civale 1-0)				
Chicago White Sox (Giolito 0-0) at Pittsburgh (Hill 0-1)				
Kansas City (Keller 0-1) at San Francisco (Cobb 0-0)				
Oakland (Waldichuk 0-1) at Tampa Bay (Eflin 1-0)				
Toronto (Bassitt 0-1) at L.A. Angels (Sandoval 1-0)				
Miami (TBD) at N.Y. Mets (Megill 1-0)				
Cincinnati (Greene 0-0) at Philadelphia (Wheeler 0-1)				
San Diego (Martinez 0-1) at Atlanta (TBD)				
St. Louis (Flaherty 1-0) at Milwaukee (Woodruff 0-0)				
Washington (Gore 1-0) at Colorado (Ureña 0-1)				
L.A. Dodgers (Kershaw 1-0) at Arizona (Bumgarner 0-1)				
Saturday's games				
Houston at Minnesota				
Kansas City at San Francisco				
Texas at Chicago Cubs				
Boston at Detroit				
Oakland at Tampa Bay				
Seattle at Cleveland				
Chicago White Sox at Pittsburgh				
N.Y. Yankees at Baltimore				
Toronto at L.A. Angels				
Cincinnati at Philadelphia				
Miami at N.Y. Mets				
St. Louis at Milwaukee				
San Diego at Atlanta				
L.A. Dodgers at Arizona				
Washington at Colorado				

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Milwaukee	58	22	.725	—
y-Boston	55	25	.688	3
x-Philadelphia	52	27	.658	5½
x-Cleveland	50	30	.625	8
x-New York	47	33	.588	11
Brooklyn	44	36	.550	14
Miami	42	37	.532	15½
Atlanta	41	39	.513	17
Toronto	40	40	.500	18
Chicago	38	42	.475	20
Orlando	34	45	.430	23½
Indiana	34	46	.425	24
Washington	34	46	.425	24
Charlotte	26	54	.325	32
Detroit	16	64	.200	42

Western Conference				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Denver	52	27	.658	—
y-Memphis	50	30	.625	2½
y-Sacramento	48	32	.600	4½
x-Phoenix	44	35	.557	8
L.A. Clippers	42	38	.525	10½
Golden State	42	38	.525	10½
L.A. Lakers	41	39	.513	11½
New Orleans	41	39	.513	11½
Minnesota	40	40	.500	12½
Oklahoma City	38	42	.475	14½
Dallas	38	42	.475	14½
Utah	36	43	.456	16
Portland	33	46	.418	19
San Antonio	20	59	.253	32
Houston	20	60	.250	32½

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference

Wednesday's games

Brooklyn 123, Detroit 108
New York 138, Indiana 129
Milwaukee 105, Chicago 92
Boston 97, Toronto 93
Atlanta 134, Washington 116
New Orleans 138, Memphis 131, OT
Dallas 123, Sacramento 119
L.A. Clippers 125, L.A. Lakers 118

Thursday's games

Cleveland at Orlando
Miami at Philadelphia
Portland at San Antonio
Oklahoma City at Utah
Denver at Phoenix

Friday's games

Detroit at Indiana
Houston at Charlotte
Miami at Washington
Orlando at Brooklyn
Philadelphia at Atlanta
Toronto at Boston
Memphis at Milwaukee
New York at New Orleans
Chicago at Dallas
Golden State at Sacramento
Phoenix at L.A. Lakers

Saturday's games

Denver at Utah
Minnesota at San Antonio
Portland at L.A. Clippers

Sunday's games

Atlanta at Boston
Charlotte at Cleveland
Detroit at Chicago
Houston at Washington
Indiana at New York
Milwaukee at Toronto
Orlando at Miami
Philadelphia at Brooklyn
Golden State at Portland
L.A. Clippers at Phoenix
Memphis at Oklahoma City
New Orleans at Minnesota
Sacramento at Denver
San Antonio at Dallas
Utah at L.A. Lakers

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Embiid, PHI	65	719	659	2162	33.3
Doncic, DAL	65	715	510	2125	32.7
Lillard, POR	58	556	510	1866	32.2
Gil-Alex., OKC	67	697	662	2113	31.5
Antetokoun., MIL	63	707	498	1959	31.1
Tatum, BOS	73	720	524	2204	30.2
Mitchell, CLE	68	679	319	1922	28.3
Irving, DAL	60	594	247	1623	27.1
Brown, BOS	67	679	263	1784	26.6
Morant, MEM	60	561	370	1584	26.4
Young, ATL	72	590	554	1887	26.2
Markkanen, UTA	66	571	349	1691	25.6
Fox, SAC	72	676	343	1813	25.2
Randle, NY	77	658	402	1936	25.1
LaVine, CHI	76	667	359	1896	24.9
Jokic, DEN	68	644	339	1684	24.8
DeRozan, CHI	73	650	455	1800	24.7
Edwards, MIN	77	686	309	1887	24.5
Siakam, TOR	70	622	365	1701	24.3

Bucks, Nuggets wrap up No. 1 seeds

BY TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

The road to the NBA Finals now goes through Milwaukee. The road out of the Western Conference goes through Denver for the first time ever.

And the rest of the top half of the Eastern Conference playoff bracket is set as well.

The Bucks will have the No. 1 overall seed and home-court advantage for the entirety of their time in the NBA playoffs, after beating Chicago 105-92 on Wednesday night. Milwaukee is 58-22 this season; no other team can get to more than 57 wins.

"It's just a credit to the players," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "The players have really stepped up. I think they've embraced the challenge. Night in and night out in this league, it's hard. There's great opposition. ... To have the best record, it is something that matters. It is important."

The No. 1 seed in the West was decided Wednesday night as well. The Nuggets will have home-court throughout the West playoffs, after New Orleans beat Memphis in overtime — and took away the last bit of hope the Grizzlies had of catching the Nuggets for the top spot out West.

The Bucks are a No. 1 seed for the first time since 2020. Denver has never previously been a No. 1 seed.

Boston (55-25) will be the No. 2 seed in the East, clinching that Wednesday by topping Toronto. That locked Philadelphia (52-27) into the No. 3 seed and a likely first-round matchup with Brooklyn. The Nets (44-36) beat Detroit and now need only one more win or one Miami loss to wrap up the No. 6 seed.

Another first-round Eastern Conference matchup was set earlier this week; No. 4 Cleveland will meet No. 5 New York. They'll meet on either April 15 or 16 for Game 1, with the NBA playoffs opening that weekend.

Still unclear in the East is the order of the teams headed to the play-in tournament, which starts Tuesday.

Miami is the leader and currently in seventh, ahead of the three other play-in bound teams — Atlanta, Toronto and Chicago. The winner of the No. 7 vs. No. 8 game on Tuesday (as it stands now, the matchup there would be Atlanta at Miami) will draw Boston in Round 1; the other team to emerge from the East play-in tournament will open against the top-seeded Bucks.

Clinching a seed now gives some teams the chance to rest players before the playoffs start, and in many cases, that figures to be welcomed. The Bucks won



MORRY GASH/AP

The Milwaukee Bucks' Khris Middleton tries to get past the Chicago Bulls' Patrick Williams during the first half Wednesday in Milwaukee. The Bucks won 105-92 to clinch the best record in the NBA this season.

without Giannis Antetokounmpo on Wednesday and with Khris Middleton — who has battled injuries for much of the season — sidelined after eight minutes with a recurrence of knee pain.

"Now we get to take a breath," Budenholzer said. "I have no idea what we'll do Friday and Sunday."

Chicago will be on the road to open the play-in tournament; the Bulls are locked into No. 10 in the East and will visit whichever team finishes ninth — Toronto or Atlanta.

And when the playoffs start for the Bucks, they'll try to defy some recent trends. There hasn't been a No. 1 seed to win the East title since Cleveland in 2016, and no team with the best regular-season record has gone on to win the NBA Finals since Golden State in 2017.

"I think we're ready, well-prepared," Bucks guard Jrue Holiday said. "I think we've been through a lot ... really excited to be going into the postseason."

What's left

Most of the drama remains in the West, where Denver, Memphis, Sacramento and Phoenix have clinched playoff spots — and eight teams are still in the running for the six remaining playoff or play-in berths.

Defending champion Golden State, the Los Angeles Clippers, the Los Angeles Lakers, New Orleans and Minnesota can do no worse than make the play-in tournament. Oklahoma City, Dallas and Utah are all vying for play-in berths.

As of Thursday morning, Golden State and the Clippers — both 42-38 — would be in the playoffs,

while the Lakers, Pelicans, Timberwolves and Thunder would have the play-in spots. The Clippers beat the Lakers (41-39) on Wednesday night.

Dallas helped itself Wednesday by topping Sacramento 123-119. The Mavericks (38-42) remained 11th, but are tied with No. 10 Oklahoma City, both teams with two games left. Oklahoma City visits Utah on Thursday, Dallas plays host to Chicago on Friday, and then on Sunday the Thunder play

host to Memphis while the Mavs entertain San Antonio.

"At this point in the season, it is what it is in terms of the reality of the standings," Mavs guard Kyrie Irving said. "We just have to take it one minute at a time."

New Orleans' win assured the Pelicans of no worse than a play-in berth.

"Is this crazy or what?" Pelicans broadcaster Joel Meyers mused after New Orleans' overtime win.

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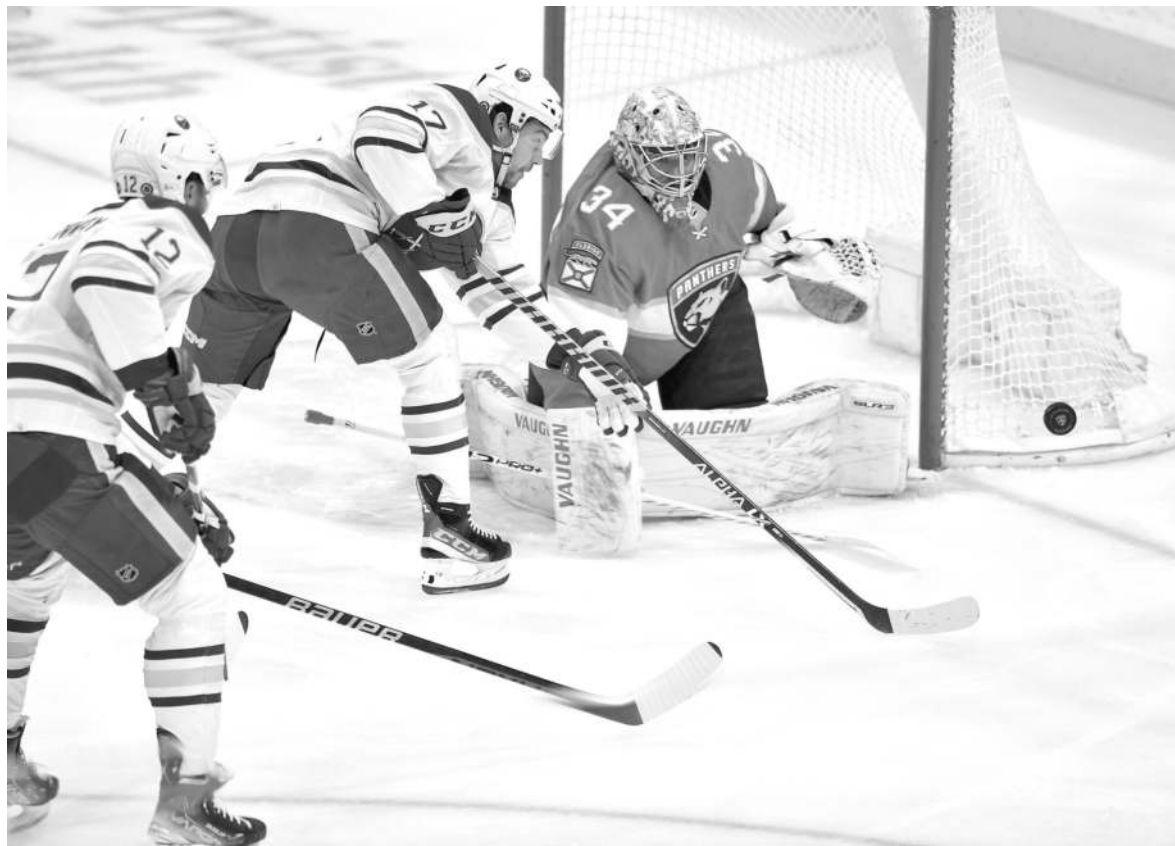
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M-F 8am-8pm EST
SAT 9am-4pm EST

NHL



MICHAEL LAUGHLIN/AP

Buffalo Sabres center Tyson Jost tries to score on Florida Panthers goalie Alex Lyon on Tuesday in Sunrise, Fla. The Panthers won 2-1 to just barely take first place in the Eastern Conference wild-card standings.

Panthers grab slim edge in East wild-card contest

BY TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Alex Lyon's goaltending résumé is no joke.

The 30-year-old who has spent the majority of his pro career in the minors owns no fewer than seven records at Yale, where he's the all-time wins leader. He had a shutout to clinch the American Hockey League's Calder Cup championship last season for the Chicago Wolves. He once stopped 94 of 95 shots to win a five-overtime AHL playoff game.

And over the last week, he may have helped save the Florida Panthers' season.

They play the soundtrack to "The Lion King" in the Panthers' dressing room after wins these days — a nod to Lyon, who has gone 4-0-0 with starting netminder Sergei Bobrovsky sidelined by illness. The latest victory came Tuesday when Lyon stopped 39 shots and Florida beat Buffalo 2-1 to move atop the super-tight Eastern Conference wild-card standings.

"I don't want to say it was playoff hockey," Lyon said. "But it felt more toward that direction."

Florida has jumped from being outside the playoff picture to controlling its own destiny in these last four games — somehow the first four-game winning streak all season for a club that had the NHL's best regular-season record a year ago.

As of Thursday morning, the Panthers hold the first wild-card spot in the East with 87 points. The New York Islanders also have 87 points and would be behind Florida in a tiebreaker, but still hold the second of the conference's two wild-card berths. Pittsburgh is now on the outside, its 5-1 loss to New Jersey on Tuesday leaving the Penguins stuck on 86 points.

Florida, the Islanders and Pittsburgh all have four games left. Other teams are still alive, but need a series of miracles to grab one of the last two berths. Florida's odds didn't look great a week ago when the Panthers had lost four in a row; winning four in a row since won't cause the team to relax, coach Paul Maurice said.

"There's not enough separation," Maurice said. "We're running neck-and-neck is the way it feels. We don't have a lead here. We're just at the finish line, full-on sprint, as hard as you can. Feels like we're running alongside each and the push will come right to the end."

Florida was home for Ottawa on Thursday, will be at Washington on Saturday then home for games Monday against Toronto and April 13 against Carolina. Ottawa is alive more in the mathematical sense than anything else, Washington has been eliminated and by next week, Toronto and Carolina could be locked into their playoff seeding.

The Islanders hosted Tampa Bay on Thursday, will host Philadelphia on Saturday, go to Washington on Monday and close April 12 at home against Montreal. It's not exactly daunting: Tampa Bay knows it'll be playing Toronto in Round 1, and everyone else on the Isles' slate of remaining games is soon to be on vacation.

Pittsburgh played host to Minnesota on Thursday, goes to Detroit on Saturday, hosts Chicago on April 11 and finishes at Columbus on April 13. Again, not exactly a rugged stretch.

"We've got some important games coming up," Penguins star Sidney Crosby said Tuesday night.

That they do. So does Florida. So do the Islanders. The only certainty is if the Panthers and Islanders both go 4-0-0 the rest of the way, the Penguins can't catch them. Any slip-ups by either of those clubs opens the door nice and wide for Pittsburgh again.

It'll be a frantic final few days in the East. And Florida, which spent much of this season outside the playoff picture, now has a chance again thanks in large part to a goalie who had seven wins — combined — over his first five NHL seasons and only three this season for the Panthers before this four-game run.

"Can't really change your approach," Lyon said. "Can't get too high, can't get too low. Just keep going."

Avs navigate injuries ahead of title defense

BY PAT GRAHAM

Associated Press

DENVER — Nathan MacKinnon punctuated his recent overtime goal by throwing a right jab into the air as he glided along the ice.

A fitting celebration for the Colorado forward after reaching the 100-point mark for his first time in an NHL season. An even more apropos gesture to announce the Avalanche were, indeed, ready to come out swinging to defend their Stanley Cup title.

Through all the injuries and mini-slumps, the Avalanche are right back to where everyone figured they would be — among the favorites. They clinched a playoff spot in San Jose on Tuesday, with MacKinnon wrapping up the night on his franchise-best 10th career OT winner. MacKinnon and his teammates are soaring into the postseason in spite of playing without their captain, Gabriel Landeskog, all season and using an Avalanche-record 43 different players.

"We're facing our share of adversity but the guys that are healthy and able to play are digging in and playing hard as a team," coach Jared Bednar said. "That's all you can ask for."

This season has been an exercise in stick-to-itiveness for Colorado, which hoisted the Stanley Cup for a third time in franchise history in June. The banged-up Avalanche tumbled out of the playoff picture on New Year's Day and weren't back in until Jan. 20, where they've remained for all but four days, according to NHL Stats.

At one stage, they trailed the Central Division leader by 14 points.

Now, the team is in the running for the division crown (tied with Minnesota and Dallas — all with

98 points). The Avalanche also trail the Western Conference-leading Vegas Golden Knights by six points with six games to play. Vegas has four.

"All things considered, we're in a good spot," said defenseman Erik Johnson, who's back after missing 19 games due to a broken ankle in February. "I think with just as short as the summer was last year, we just wanted to put ourselves in the best position possible this time of year. And we have. So that's good."

They're trying to become the third team to repeat as Stanley Cup champions in the cap era that began in 2005, joining Tampa Bay (2020, 2021) and Pittsburgh (2016, 2017). Colorado is plus-700, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, to repeat as champion. It's a figure that trails the high flying Boston Bruins (plus-380).

All season long, Colorado's dealt with one ailment after another, with 429 man-games lost. It's the third-highest total in Avalanche history, behind only the 2014-15 squad (495) and 2010-11 team (474). They're currently without goaltender Pavel Francouz (lower body), Landeskog (knee procedure in October), forward Artturi Lehkonen (finger) and defenseman Josh Manson (lower body). But all joined the team for a four-game West Coast swing.

"We feel like it's a good time of year, before we finish up here next week, to get everyone together and have a little team bonding and make sure we're moving in the right direction for playoffs," Bednar explained after a win Tuesday in which defenseman Cale Makar and forward Darren Helm were scratched. "Hopefully we get a few of these guys back off injury."



TONY AVELAR/AP

Colorado Avalanche center Nathan MacKinnon (29) gets a fist bump from J.T. Compher after scoring a goal against the San Jose Sharks during the second period Tuesday in San Jose, Calif.

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
z-Boston	77	60	12	5	125	286	166
x-Carolina	77	50	18	9	109	251	198
x-New Jersey	78	49	21	8	106	271	217
x-N.Y. Rangers	78	46	21	11	103	267	210
x-Toronto	77	46	21	10	102	262	213
x-Tampa Bay	78	45	27	6	96	270	237
Florida	78	40	31	7	87	274	261
N.Y. Islanders	78	39	30	9	87	227	214
Pittsburgh	78	38	30	10	86	249	254
Buffalo	76	37	32	7	81	271	278
Ottawa	78	37	34	7	81	246	254
Detroit	77	35	33	9	79	231	252
Washington	77	34	34	9	77	240	243
Philadelphia	77	29	35	13	71	209	257
Montreal	78	30	42	6	66	219	289
Columbus	77	24	45	8	56	205	307

Western Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-Vegas	78	48	22	8	104	259	223
x-Edmonton	79	47	23	9	103	312	257
x-Los Angeles	78	45	23	10	100	267	245
x-Colorado	76	46	24	6	98	256	210
x-Dallas	77	42	21	14	98	267	213
x-Minnesota	77	44	23	10	98	232	209
Seattle	77	43	26	8	94	272	243
Winnipeg	78	43	32	3	89	235	218
Calgary	79	37	27	15	89	256	246
Nashville	77	39	30	8	86	216	227
St. Louis	78	36	35	7	79	255	288
Vancouver	77	34	36	7	75	263	290
Arizona	78	27	38	13	67	216	282
San Jose	77	22	39	16	60	226	295
Chicago	77	25	46	6	56	190	280
Anaheim	78	23	45	10	56	196	320

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.

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference

Wednesday's games

N.Y. Rangers 6, Tampa Bay 3
Calgary 3, Winnipeg 1
Edmonton 3, Anaheim 1

Thursday's games

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

Friday's games

No games scheduled

Saturday's games

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

Sunday's games

Boston at Philadelphia
Colorado at Anaheim

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	79	62	86	148
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	77	51	72	123
Nikita Kucherov, TB	78	29	78	107
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	75	39	64	103
David Pastrnak, BOS	77	56	47	103
Jason Robertson, DAL	77	43	58	101
R. Nugent-Hopkins, EDM	79	36	64	100
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	65	36	64	100
Elias Pettersson, VAN	75	37	60	97
Erik Karlsson, SJ	77	22	74	96
Mitch Marner, TOR	76	28	67	95
Mikko Rantanen, COL	76	49	45	94
Jack Hughes, NJ	74	40	51	91
Tage Thompson, BUF	73	44	46	90
Brayden Point, TB	78	48	41	89

Gaps: Wild have hardly missed Kaprizov

FROM PAGE 32

than maybe some other sports. We emphasize it's a team game, it's a team sport and there's 20 other guys that are still going to try to get the job done."

Minnesota, Vegas, Carolina and New York have combined to go 45-22-12 since each team's significant injury.

In the Wild's case, the emergence of young winger Matt Boldy and strong goaltending have made up for not having Kaprizov, by far their leader in goals and assists and a legitimate MVP candidate. Boldy has 13 goals and five assists for 18 points in 12 games since Kaprizov went down.

"It's a good time for him to really get that hot and get those goals for us," forward Joel Eriksson Ek said.

Vegas has been used to injuries in recent years, including several to goalies this season that have tested the organization's depth. It's impossible to replace Stone, a strong defensive winger who was on track for his eighth 20-goal season, but the Golden Knights used the All-Star break and their annual father's road trip to reset mentally and physically without him. They have won 20 of 33 games since.

"It was really good for us," first-year coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Timing was perfect. Some guys got a breather that were a little banged up as well. ... In general, it was a great time for us and it showed coming out of it."

Before the break, the Islanders made a move that ultimately ensured that Barzal getting injured wouldn't doom their chances of getting back in the playoffs. Veteran GM Lou Lamoriello pounced early by getting center Bo Horvat in a trade with Vancouver, and the 30-goal scorer has fit in just about as well as anyone could have expected.

"He's extremely strong, he's great on the puck, can score goals and make plays," captain Anders Lee said. "He's made a huge impact in the faceoff dot, on the power play and just up and down the ice. Just having a center like him, you don't find many guys like him around the league."

Of course, there aren't many teams like the Islanders, who pushed the then-defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning to seven games in the Eastern Conference finals in 2021 after losing Lee to a major knee injury. If anyone's built to withstand the loss of a top player, it's New York, thanks to depth down the middle and smart decisions all over the ice.

"We got four good centermen still. That helps," veteran forward Cal Clutterbuck said. "I think just generally the style of game that we play and the structure that we play with allows us to get through



KARL B. DEBLAKER/AP

However far the Carolina Hurricanes go in the playoffs, they'll have to do it without winger Andrei Svechnikov, who has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a torn ACL.

situations like that. It's just kind of a credit to the guys who have been in and the way that they've been following the plan."

No teams can plan for a devastating injury like what happened to Svechnikov — Carolina's sec-

ond significant departure after winger Max Pacioretty re-tore his right Achilles tendon. Waddell thought the Hurricanes initially played like they felt sorry for themselves before figuring out how to win without Svechnikov

and Pacioretty.

"We know we're not going to score as many goals, so we've got to be better even defensively," Waddell said. "We think we've got a really top defense and if our goalies stay healthy and continue to play like they have been, particularly lately, that can make up for losing a big-time goal scorer."

The Hurricanes need their stars to shine for that to be a winning recipe in the playoffs, and Waddell also pointed to the opportunities available for other players in Svechnikov's absence as a factor.

The same is true for the Islanders, with centers Brock Nelson and Jean-Gabriel Pageau among those picking up the slack without Barzal. Rookie head coach Lane Lambert pointed to contributions all over the lineup as a reason Barzal's injury has not hurt as much as it could have.

"When you lose somebody like that, or anybody, you have to have other guys fill in and step in," Lambert said. "Sometimes it's just about them getting an opportunity and relishing that opportunity and taking advantage of that opportunity."

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Double offender

Angels' Ohtani violates pitch clock on mound, at plate » **MLB, Page 28**

NHL


Minnesota Wild left wing Matt Boldy has 13 goals and five assists for 18 points in 12 games since MVP candidate Kirill Kaprizov went down with an injury.

ABBIE PARR/AP

Filling in the gaps

Several contenders thriving despite major injuries

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Mark Stone missing two months and counting after back surgery threatened to sink the Vegas Golden Knights. Instead, they've risen to the top of the Western Conference.

Losing Kirill Kaprizov for several weeks looked like a big blow to the Minnesota Wild. They've since moved into a tie for first place in the Central Division.

Similarly, in the East, the New York Islanders have more than compensated for

INSIDE

Panthers grab slim edge in East wild-card race

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the absence of Mathew Barzal and the Carolina Hurricanes have found their game since Andrei Svechnikov was ruled out for the remainder of the season with a torn ACL.

With the NHL playoffs on the horizon, those four contenders have not only sur-

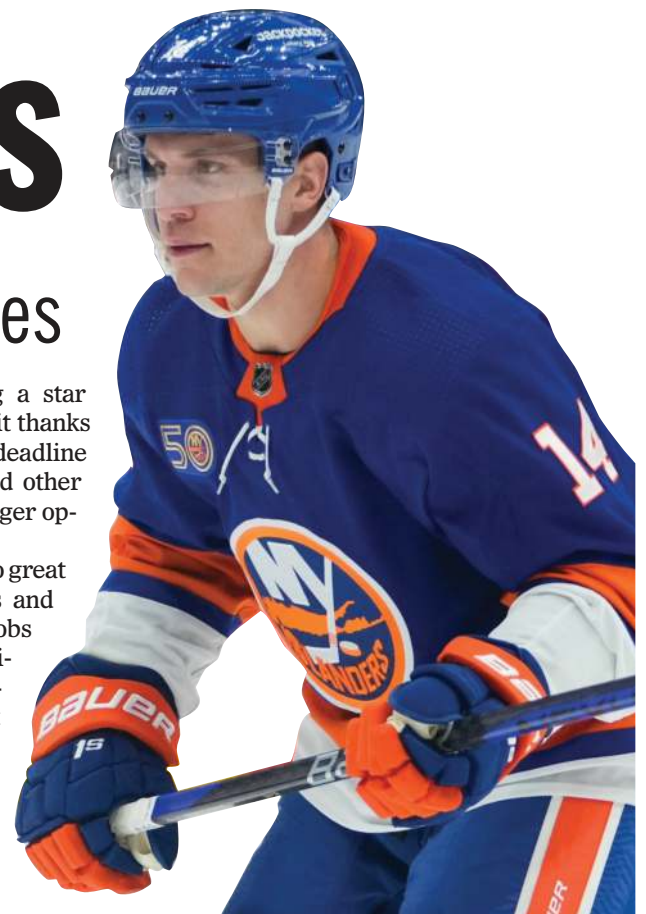
vived but thrived after losing a star player to injury. They've done it thanks to a combination of savvy trade deadline acquisitions, good coaching and other players taking advantage of bigger opportunities.

"That's what makes hockey so great is teams have lost top players and continued to go about their jobs and win hockey games," Carolina general manager Don Waddell said. "Our sport's different

SEE GAPS ON PAGE 31

Before the All-Star break, the New York Islanders acquired center Bo Horvat in a trade with Vancouver, ensuring that Mathew Barzal's injury wouldn't doom their chances of getting back in the playoffs.

FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP



Bucks, Nuggets lock up No. 1 seeds in each conference » **NBA, Page 29**