

FACES

'Special Forces,'
Ethel Cain album
new this week
Page 15



MILITARY

CBO: \$85B more
each year needed for
Navy shipbuilding
Page 7



NBA

Thunder-Cavaliers
matchup is a historic
clash of league's best
Page 24

AFRICOM strike in Somalia on New Year's Eve kills 10 rebels >> Page 4

STARS AND STRIPES®

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Volume 83 Edition 186 ©SS 2025 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2025

平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く)
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価 ¥50

50¢/Free to Deployed Areas



MAHSIMA ALKAMOONEH/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, Georgia Army National Guard, load a CH-47 Chinook helicopter during a mission in support of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve near Al-Tanf Garrison Syria, in October.

Isolationism vs fighting ISIS

US military mission in an uncertain Syria will pose an early dilemma for Trump

By MISSY RYAN,
DAN LAMOTHE,
MICHAEL BIRNBAUM
AND MUSTAFA SALIM
The Washington Post

The Assad regime's abrupt collapse has thrust America's long-standing military mission in Syria into uncertainty, as the Pentagon's chief battlefield partner fights for survival and a U.S. leader skeptical of foreign military commitments prepares

to retake power.

President-elect Donald Trump will encounter a transformed Middle East when he begins his second term next month and increasingly urgent questions about the future for roughly 2,000 U.S. troops positioned in eastern Syria where, for more than a decade, Washington has used an array of outposts to combat the Islamic State and monitor the activities of adversary Iran.

The new realities in Syria un-

derscore the dramatic changes wrought across the region in the wake of Hamas militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, which unleashed punishing wars in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, set off unprecedented attacks between Iran and Israel, and left Tehran's most powerful proxies severely weakened.

Trump, who repeatedly threatened to pull U.S. forces from Syria during his first term and has sought in recent days to distance

the United States from the upheaval now gripping the country, has not revealed his plans for the U.S. military mission there. But he and his advisers have signaled that a top priority will be containing ISIS, which no longer boasts the vast pseudo-state it once controlled but has regrouped in Syria's southern desert, where U.S. forces have pounded the militants with intense airstrikes in recent

SEE DILEMMA ON PAGE 5

N. Korea tests a hypersonic intermediate range missile

By KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Tuesday its latest weapons test was a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile designed to strike remote targets in the Pacific as leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further expand his collection of nuclear-capable weapons to counter rival nations.

The North Korean state media report came a day after South Korea's military said it detected North Korea launching a missile that flew 685 miles before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launch, conducted weeks before Donald Trump returns as U.S. president, came off a torrid year in weapons testing.

North Korea demonstrated multiple weapons systems last year that can target its neighbors and the United States, including solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles, and there are concerns that its military capabilities could advance further through technology transfers from Russia,

SEE MISSILE ON PAGE 4



Korean Central News Agency/ AP

A test fire of a purported new intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile at an undisclosed place in North Korea on Monday.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Chinese tech firms protest US listings as army-linked

Associated Press
HONG KONG — The U.S. Defense Department has added dozens of Chinese companies, including games and technology company Tencent, artificial intelligence firm SenseTime and the world's biggest battery maker CATL, to a list of companies it says have ties to China's military, prompting some to protest and say they will seek to have the decision reversed. In recent years, Washington has sought to restrict sharing of advanced technology, including

semiconductors and AI, deeming it to be a threat to national security. The U.S. Defense Department updates its list of "Chinese Military Companies," or CMC list, annually. With the latest revision, it includes 134 companies. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2024 bans the Defense Department from dealing with the designated companies beginning in June 2026. Tencent's Hong Kong-traded shares fell 7.3% on Tuesday and

the company said it would "initiate a reconsideration process to correct this mistake." Tencent is the world's largest video gaming company and operates Chinese messaging platform WeChat. Battery maker CATL said in a statement posted on its website that the company "has never engaged in any military-related business or activities." AI company SenseTime said in a statement that the decision to include it on the list had "no factual basis."

EXCHANGE RATES

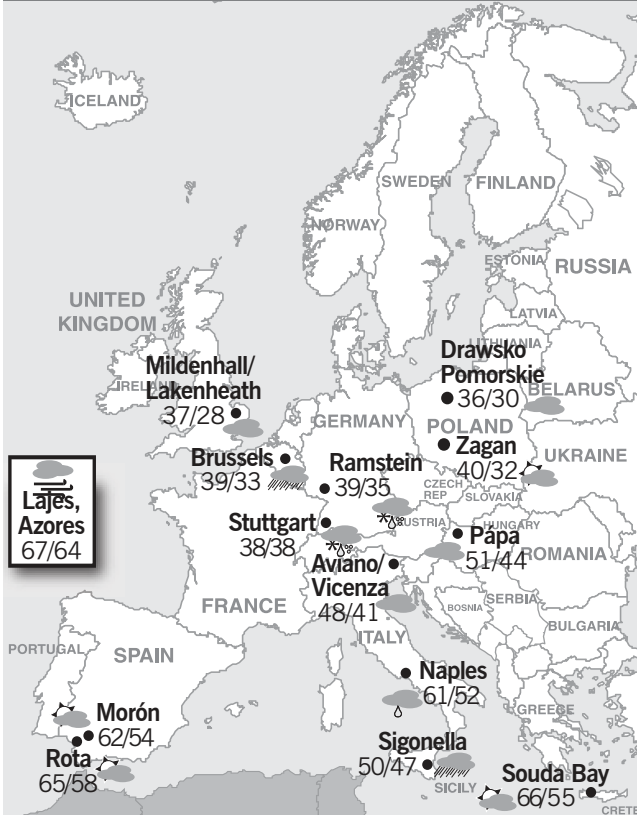
Military rates													
Euro costs (Jan. 8)	0.94	Switzerland (Franc)	.9087										
British pound (Jan. 8)	\$1.22	Thailand (Baht)	34.40										
Japanese yen (Jan. 8)	154.00	Turkey (NewLira)	35.3238										
South Korean won (Jan. 8)	1418.00												
Commercial rates													
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3768	<p>(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)</p> <div>INTEREST RATES</div> <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>7.50</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>4.50</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>4.33</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>4.27</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.84</td></tr></table>		Prime rate	7.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50	Federal funds market rate	4.33	3-month bill	4.27	30-year bond	4.84
Prime rate	7.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50												
Federal funds market rate	4.33												
3-month bill	4.27												
30-year bond	4.84												
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Canada (Dollar)	1.4337												
China(Yuan)	7.3255												
Denmark (Krone)	7.1883												
Egypt (Pound)	50.6509												
Euro	.9635												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7773												
Hungary (Forint)	400.40												
Israel (Shekel)	3.6230												
Japan (Yen)	157.79												
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3082												
Norway (Krone)	11.3225												
Philippines (Peso)	58.08												
Poland (Zloty)	4.10												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7542												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3626												
South Korea (Won)	1453.49												

WEATHER OUTLOOK

WEDNESDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



WEDNESDAY IN EUROPE



THURSDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

Nearly 8K Guard troops to support inauguration

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Nearly 8,000 National Guard troops have been requested by the U.S. Secret Service to provide support for the presidential inauguration Jan. 20, the Pentagon said.

The request for 7,800 troops, said Sabrina Singh, deputy spokeswoman for the Defense Department, is expected to be approved by the Pentagon in the coming days. The Secret Service is the lead agency for the inauguration. Once approved, the troops will join 500 National Guards troops already approved to support security operations during the counting and certification of electoral votes on Monday. Layers of tall black fencing flank the U.S. Capitol complex in a stark reminder of what happened four years ago, when thousands of sup-

porters of President-elect Donald Trump rioted, battled police and stormed the building. As Trump prepares to return to office, no violence, protests or procedural objections in Congress are expected this time. The 2025 presidential inauguration was designated a “national special security event” by the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. When an event is designated as a special security event, the federal government, as well as state and local partners, can funnel significant resources to ensure a robust security plan is in place, said Nate Herring, a spokesperson for the Secret Service. He declined to provide specifics, citing operational security reasons. Guard members have historically provided support for presidential inaugurations, going back to the one for President George

Washington. But the last transition of presidential power in 2021 departed from U.S. tradition and was marred with conflict. In November, Guard officials said more than two dozen states had indicated they would be willing to send National Guard troops to Washington if requested in the weeks following the presidential election and in the run-up to the inauguration, The Associated Press reported. In the days following the Jan. 6, 2021, riot, more than 25,000 National Guard troops were on the ground in Washington, hailing from all 50 states and three territories. The troops, along with local and federal law enforcement, locked down the city for the inauguration, securing the Capitol, monuments, Metro entrances and the perimeter of the central part of the city.



TACKORA HAND/U.S. Army National Guard
Soldiers with the Indiana National Guard provide security during the 2021 inauguration in Washington, D.C.

Outside D.C., 6,565 members of the National Guard protected state capitals throughout the country, the Guard said. There were no protests or violence during the 2021 inauguration. In an opinion piece published Sunday in The Washington Post, President Joe Biden decried the 2021 attempt to overrun the Capitol to block certification of the 2020

election — seeking to contrast that day’s chaos with what Biden promises will be an orderly transition returning Trump to power for a second term. “We should be proud that our democracy withstood this assault,” Biden wrote. “And we should be glad we will not see such a shameful attack again this year.” The Associated Press contributed to this report.

China sets record for vessels spotted near Japanese islets

By BRIAN McELHINEY AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes
Chinese coast guard ships sailed near the Senkaku chain a record 355 times last year, as Beijing made good on its promise to increase its presence around the islands. China topped the record it set the year before, when its vessels were spotted 352 times in the contiguous zone around the Senkakus, a territory administered by Japan, a spokesman with Japan’s coast guard said by phone Tuesday.

The contiguous zone is a 24-mile-wide band beyond the 12-mile territorial limit. Nations may exercise limited control in their contiguous zones, according to the United Nations. The Senkakus, also claimed by China and Taiwan, include five uninhabited islets and three reefs 105 miles east of Taiwan and 254 miles west of Okinawa. The vessels sailed within the Senkakus’ 12-mile territorial limit 39 times in 2024. The record is 52 times in 2013, the spokesman said. Of the 2024 instances, 18 involved Chinese coast guard ships chasing Japanese fishing vessels, according to the spokesman. Chinese vessels last intruded into territorial waters around the Senkakus on Dec. 6, according to a Japan coast guard news release that day. Four vessels that looked

to be armed with deck-mounted machine guns were spotted and warned away with radio and electronic message boards. The Japanese government has lodged numerous protests with Beijing over the incidents, including in September when four Chinese vessels armed with what appeared to be deck-mounted machine guns crossed the 12-mile limit. China set another record in 2023 and 2024 for consecutive days sailing within the contiguous zone near the Senkakus. Vessels were spotted for 215 straight days from Dec. 22, 2023, to July 23, the spokesman said. “The situation in the waters

around the Senkakus is still severe and we cannot let our guard down,” Seishiro Sakamoto, commander of Japan’s 11th Regional Coast Guard, said in a statement Dec. 29, the day Chinese vessels broke the record for sightings around the Senkakus. “We will respond resolutely while working closely with related authorities and take every measure to protect our territorial waters,” he said. China has stepped up its presence around the Senkakus following a visit by President Xi Jinping in November 2023 to his country’s coast guard command in which he stated the necessity to “constantly strengthen” Beijing’s claim on the

islands, Kyodo News reported at the time. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel lambasted China’s plan to “keep ships in and around Japan’s Senkaku Islands for 365 consecutive days” in a January 2023 post on X. The area around the Senkakus reportedly contains oil reserves and other resources, which has led to Chinese challenges to Japan’s claim over the islands since the 1970s, according to Japan’s Foreign Affairs Ministry. The Pentagon identified China as an aggressive presence in the East and South China seas and a global “pacing challenge” in its 2022 National Defense Strategy.

Search continues for at-risk teen missing from Army housing area

By SETH ROBSON AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes
TOKYO — Police were still searching Tuesday for an at-risk American teen last seen leaving a U.S. Army housing area near the Japanese capital the previous morning. Tupu Lamar Hawkins, 17, “has been determined to be at significant risk by law enforcement,” according to a missing person alert issued Monday evening by the Army Criminal Investigation Division. Hawkins was last seen leaving the Sagami-hara Family Housing Area at 3:16 a.m. Monday, the Ar-

my said. He may have been walking toward the nearest 7-Eleven convenience store. Hawkins is approximately 5-foot-9 with black hair and brown eyes, according to the alert. He was wearing a blue sweatshirt, blue jeans and brown dress shoes. The Criminal Investigation Division has no new information about the case, division spokesman Thomas Hamilton told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday evening.



Hawkins

Japanese police in Sagami-hara received a report about the missing teen from the Army on Monday, a police spokesman said by phone Tuesday morning. Police are searching for Hawkins at places such as train stations, said the spokesman, who declined to provide further details about the ongoing investigation. Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity. The missing person alert prompted dozens of comments on U.S. Army Garrison Japan’s Facebook page, including from someone who said they had put up flyers about the missing teen at a local

train station. However, the garrison posted a Facebook update Tuesday morning from the Criminal Investigation Division discouraging people from hands-on involvement. “We understand and appreciate that our local community members would like to take further action to aid in the investigation but respectfully ask that you allow law enforcement to conduct and lead this official investigation,” the post said. Unofficial actions could unintentionally and negatively impact the investigation, according to the update. “We are not advising any official

community search parties at this time,” it said. “If we decide that an official search party should be conducted, we will lead that effort and communicate that need to the community through various channels, to include this [U.S. Army Garrison] Japan Facebook page.” Anyone with information about Hawkins should contact Army CID Far East Field Office Japan at (571) 637-8561, according to the Army. Anonymous tips can be sent to the Criminal Investigation Division at www.cid.army.mil/tips. Community members should refrain from hanging posters off post without permission, the update added.

MILITARY

Attack kills 10 rebels in Somalia

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. forces helped evacuate Somali troops from harm's way during a recent operation against insurgents that resulted in the deaths of 10 militants from al-Shabab, U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday.

The operation, carried out on Dec. 31, comes on the heels of a separate AFRICOM airstrike that killed a top al-Shabab commander a week earlier.

The New Year's Eve strike happened in a town called Beer Xaani, which is about 20 miles northwest of an operational base used by U.S. and Somali forces in Kismayo, according to an AFRICOM statement.

On Monday, AFRICOM confirmed the Dec. 24 death of Mohamed Mire, described as a top official in the al-Qaida-aligned militant group.

In the Dec. 31 airstrike, U.S. forces also rescued Somali counterparts who were attacked while fighting the terrorist group, the AFRICOM statement said without elaborating on the evacuation.

AFRICOM did not specify what units and assets were involved, citing operational security. The U.S. has several hundred troops in Somalia, where they are tasked with training and assisting local forces.



KATHLEEN LACORTE/U.S. Air National Guard

Marine MV-22 Osprey aircraft take off from Kismayo, Somalia, in July. A U.S. airstrike on Dec. 31 killed 10 al-Shabab insurgents about 20 miles from the Kismayo base, U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday.

Al-Shabab has been waging a long-running armed insurgency against Somalia's weak central government, whose military has been bolstered by U.S. troops.

Over the years, AFRICOM has carried out periodic airstrikes against militants, but the pace of those strikes has slowed. In 2020, AFRICOM conducted a record 63 strikes in the country, compared with roughly a dozen in 2024.

President Joe Biden in 2022 directed U.S. personnel back to Somalia on a continuous basis, reversing former President Donald

Trump's order in late 2020 to withdraw some 700 troops from the country.

Biden's decision came in the wake of criticism from AFRICOM's commander at the time, Gen. Stephen Townsend, who said the rotational approach that replaced the full-time presence in Somalia amounted to "commuting to work" and allowed insurgents to gain ground.

It's unclear what Trump's plans are for the U.S. mission in Somalia or whether he intends to pull forces out once again after returning to the White House later this month.

Coalition soldiers killed, hurt in Mideast

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military led strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in the past week that resulted in the capture of an ISIS leader but caused the death of a non-U.S. coalition soldier and injured two non-U.S. personnel, U.S. Central Command said Monday.

CENTCOM and Iraqi forces conducted multiple attacks from Dec. 30 to Jan. 6 in the Hamrin mountains of Iraq against ISIS locations. During the operations, ISIS fighters engaged coalition forces.

But the U.S.-led coalition forces conducted airstrikes using F-16s, F-15s and A-10s.

The A-10s tasked to support ground forces in the area were successful in eliminating the ISIS fighters within a cave, according to CENTCOM.

The coalition member killed and the two wounded were from two different countries.

CENTCOM did not name the countries but said there no injuries to U.S. personnel or damage to U.S. equipment.

On Jan. 2-3, Syrian Democratic Forces supported by American forces conducted a strike against ISIS militants near Dayr az-Zawr in Syria resulting in the capture of an ISIS attack cell leader.

"Partnered operations like these are critical to maintaining pressure on ISIS and preventing the terrorist group from taking advantage of the rapidly changing security environment in the region," said Army Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, commander of CENTCOM, which oversees U.S. military operations in the Middle East.

The U.S. has stepped up airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria in the wake of the fall of former President Bashar Assad's government last month. Syria remains unstable following the collapse of Assad's regime, with rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham looking to install a new government.

The U.S. now has about 2,000 troops in Syria as part of an American-led coalition in that country and Iraq working to prevent a resurgence of ISIS.

The Pentagon previously reported 900 U.S. service members, and an undisclosed number of contractors are operating in Syria, where they support local Kurdish forces.

An additional 2,500 American troops are in Iraq.

Missile: S. Korea believes capabilities exaggerated

FROM PAGE 1

as the two countries align over the war in Ukraine.

North Korea in recent years has flight tested various intermediate-range missiles, which if perfected, could reach the U.S. military hub of Guam. In recent months, North Korea has been testing combining these missiles with purported hypersonic warheads to improve their survivability.

North Korea since 2021 has been testing various hypersonic weapons designed to fly at more than five times the speed of sound. The speed and maneuverability of such weapons aim to withstand regional missile defense systems. However, it's unclear whether these missiles are consistently flying at the speeds the North claims.

The North's state media said Kim supervised Monday's launch, and that the weapon traveled 932 miles, during which it reached two different peaks of 62 miles and 26.4 miles and achieved a speed amounting to 12 times the speed of sound, before accurately striking a sea target.

Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the South Korean military believes North Korea was

exaggerating capabilities of the system, saying the missile covered less distance and that there was no second peak.

Lee said the test was likely a followup to another hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile test last April and said it would be difficult to use such systems in a relatively small territory like the Korean Peninsula. He said the South Korean and U.S. militaries were continuing to analyze the missile.

Kim described the missile as a crucial achievement in his goals to bolster the North's nuclear deterrence by building an arsenal "no one can respond to," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"The hypersonic missile system will reliably contain any rivals in the Pacific region that can affect the security of our state," the agency quoted Kim as saying.

Kim reiterated that his nuclear push was aimed at countering "different security threats the hostile forces posed to our state," but KCNA didn't mention any direct criticism toward Washington, Seoul or Tokyo.

The launch took place while U.S. Secretary of State Antony



AP

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends a new year's event in Pyongyang on Dec. 31.

Blinken was visiting Seoul for talks with South Korean allies over the North Korean nuclear threat and other issues.

In a news conference with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul on Monday, Blinken condemned North Korea's launch, which violated U.N. Security Council resolutions against the North's weapons programs. He also reiterated concerns about the growing alignment between North Korea and Russia in Moscow's war on Ukraine. He de-

scribed the military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow as a "two-way street," saying Russia has been providing military equipment and training to the North and "intends to share space and satellite technology."

According to U.S., Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war campaign. There are concerns that Russia could transfer to North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, which could potentially enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear-armed military.

At a year-end political conference, Kim Jong Un vowed to implement the "toughest" anti-U.S. policy and criticized the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo, which he described as a "nuclear military bloc for aggression."

North Korean state media did not specify Kim's policy plans or mention any specific comments about Trump. During his first term as president, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear program.

MIDEAST

Dilemma: Trump has said keeping lid on ISIS is top priority

FROM PAGE 1
days.

James Jeffrey, who served as Syria envoy during Trump’s first term, noted that Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Sunni Islamist movement that toppled Assad and has embraced a role as Syria’s new government, had been successful in battling the Islamic State in the past, a fact that could intensify questions for the incoming president.

“Trump is going to ask, ‘Why do I have to keep ... troops on to fight ISIS, when essentially all of our fighting is mainly bombing them in the desert?’ ” Jeffrey said. “And it’s going to be very hard to answer that question.”

Rep. Michael Waltz, R-Fla., the retired Special Forces officer whom Trump tapped to be national security adviser, has said that Trump will prioritize limiting foreign entanglements but also has described preventing an ISIS resurgence as a “number one priority,” leaving it unclear what military strategy the new administration might pursue.

“The President has been crystal clear on and his mandate from the voters was to do everything he can to avoid us getting [dragged] into more Middle East wars,” Waltz told Fox News in a recent interview. “But in Syria, he is clear-eyed about the threat of ISIS that’s still there ... We have to keep a lid on it.”

Trump’s transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

Both Trump’s team and the Biden administration, which sent senior diplomats to Syria this week for the first time in more than a decade, are proceeding with caution in dealing with HTS, which was first formed as an offshoot of al-Qaida. While the group has promised stability and inclusion, it remains on the U.S. list of foreign terrorist groups.

Syria’s new interim leader, HTS commander Ahmed al-Sharaa, has called for militias across Syria to be demobilized but has not explicitly said whether his government would like the United States to stay.

Officials at the Pentagon and U.S. Central Command, which oversees operations across the Middle East, have held planning meetings that examined how the fate of Syria is intertwined with the ongoing upheaval across the Middle East, according to a defense official, who like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive deliberations.

The stakes for the United States, with American personnel operating at small, exposed bases, are high, as they are in neighboring Iraq and Jordan. Since the Gaza war began, Iran-backed militias have carried out at least 211 attacks on U.S. forces with one-way



JAMIE ROBINSON/Defense Department

U.S. soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, Georgia Army National Guard, conduct a tactical movement in Northeast Syria.



MAHSIMA ALKAMOONEH/Defense Department

U.S. soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, Georgia Army National Guard, conduct a live fire exercise with Syrian Free Army soldiers near Al-Tanf Garrison, Syria, in October.

attack drones, rockets, and other munitions, including one that killed three U.S. soldiers just over the Syrian border in Jordan last January, according to Pentagon data. More than 130 of those attacks targeted American positions in Syria.

The mounting questions come as the Pentagon for the first time on Thursday acknowledged that senior military officials had for months withheld that the military presence in Syria had more than doubled this year from roughly 900 troops to about 2,000. Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a spokesman, said he had just become aware of the expansion, and that officials sometimes withhold such information due to “diplomatic and operational security considerations.”

The United States is not the only foreign nation forced by Assad’s ouster to rethink its military presence in Syria. For years Tehran sent forces and funds to Syria,

which served as a base for Iran to threaten archrival Israel. With Assad gone, those links are severed. Since 2015, Russia played a key role enabling the former regime’s fight against rebel challengers. Moscow has consolidated its forces in coastal Syria in recent days and, like Washington, has made no definitive statements about its future there.

A chief factor in shaping the future of the U.S. mission will probably be the future arrangements between Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria and the new HTS-led government in Damascus, and how far the United States will go in protecting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurdish-led group that has been the United States’ chief partner in battling ISIS.

While the SDF has proved a dogged companion in that fight, its hope of securing lasting autonomy has long generated friction between Washington and its NATO

ally Turkey, which considers the SDF to be part of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the Kurdish group it has battled for decades.

Under pressure from Ankara, the United States brokered a deal between the SDF and Turkish-backed Arab militias pushing to assert control in northern Syria. That agreement, which required the SDF to withdraw from the city of Manbij, represented a loss as the group seeks to keep Arab forces away from Kobane, a majority-Kurdish city close to Syria’s border with Turkey. It now appears likely that Turkish-backed Syrian fighters will attempt to take Kobane, a symbolic priority for Syria’s Kurds.

According to Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, the SDF is in a “very, very challenged” position as non-Kurdish fighters within the group’s ranks have fled and leaders question how long they will have U.S. support. “They’re more vulnerable than they’ve ever been,” he said.

Also of top concern for U.S. officials are the prisons and camps housing ISIS militants and family members that are now guarded by SDF forces.

Farhad Shamsi, a spokesman for the SDF, said his group’s coordination with American forces had intensified because of the evolving threat from ISIS. Shamsi warned that militants were attempting to push into northeast Syria and some, he claimed, were joining Turkish-backed groups the SDF has battled in recent days.

“We hope that they will maintain their presence here in Syria, especially in this critical situation, because we think that ISIS will be resurging,” Shamsi said, adding

that the SDF was worried Turkey would not heed American efforts to defuse tensions and the new authorities in Damascus had not provided firm guarantees about the group’s role in a future Syria if a broad national pact can be reached.

Joseph Votel, a retired general and former CENTCOM commander, said the United States’ standing with other partners could suffer if it abandons them.

“I think we ought to be putting more and more pressure on Turkey to cease their operations and those by the SNA,” he said, referring to the Syrian National Army, a military forced backed by Ankara. Kurdish forces have more experience than do other groups in Syria countering the Islamic State, Votel said, warning, “We could be creating a situation here where ISIS can regain and reestablish themselves,” he said.

The turmoil in Syria has also raised questions about the future of the U.S. mission in neighboring Iraq, which has served as a security and logistics hub for counterinsurgency operations in both countries. While U.S. forces have helped Iraq combat its own challenges with ISIS and acted as a counterweight to Iran’s influence in the region, the American troop presence is a sensitive topic for the country’s leaders.

Talks are ongoing with the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Baghdad about the implementation of a bilateral agreement that would dismantle by the fall of 2025 the U.S.-led military coalition established to fight ISIS in Iraq. While American officials have not said whether any of the U.S. force of roughly 2,500 would stay beyond that time, Iraqi officials say an additional agreement would remove most of them by 2026.

Now, that may be changing. One senior Iraqi official said there has been a shift in how senior Iraqi officials regard a potential U.S. withdrawal “after recent developments in the region.”

The existing deadline for withdrawing troops “now seems distant,” the official said. But as it nears, he added, “I highly anticipate that Iraq will officially request an extension” permitting U.S. forces to stay.

In a Dec. 13 meeting in Baghdad with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Sudani seemed to have a fresh appreciation for the U.S. deployment given the upheaval in Syria, according to a U.S. official familiar with the conversation.

Iraqi officials were also more welcoming than they had been of U.S. requests to station reconnaissance assets near Iraq’s border with Syria, the official said, though Sudani did not request an extension of the American military presence.

MILITARY

Bill would help vets subjected to military testing

OATH Act eyes Vietnam-era veterans with easier path to apply for benefits

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Veterans who signed secrecy oaths that kept them from disclosing to doctors or anyone else the nature of injuries connected to covert operations could seek benefits retroactive to their discharge date under a bill before Congress.

The Obligations to Aberdeen's Trusted Heroes Act, or OATH Act, would lift a mandate that requires veterans to apply for benefits within one year of leaving military service to receive compensation dating back to their discharge.

The restriction would be waived for former service members who participated in secrecy oath programs that prevented them from disclosing a mission or seeking benefits for service-connected illnesses or injuries.

Sponsored by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the legislation specifically identifies Vietnam-era service members who were human test subjects from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s in Army experiments using chemical warfare agents and hallucinogenic drugs.

"Government-employed scientists including former Nazi Germany scientists, tested mustard agents, psychedelics, nerve agents and other dangerous chemicals," according to the legislation.

Service members in experiments at the former Edgewood Arsenal Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland were sworn to secrecy and threatened with court-martial or criminal charges if they violated it.

"Upon leaving service in the Army, veterans of the program could not seek benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for disabilities relating to the program without violating their secrecy oaths," according to the legislation.

After leaving the military, the veterans could not seek compensation for injuries connected to the experiments until the secrecy oath was lifted in 2006, according to the legislation.

The bill was introduced in November and referred to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Blumenthal is a committee member.

As the incoming top Democrat

of the committee, Blumenthal plans to reintroduce the legislation in the new Congress and will continue fighting to ensure Edgewood veterans receive full benefits, his office said.

"I was experiencing health problems before the oath was lifted but was not able to file a claim for compensation," said Army veteran Frank Rochelle, 71, of North Carolina.

"Compensation should not be timed to when the secrecy oath ended because injuries were incurred prior to that," said Rochelle, a former corporal whose service from 1968-70 included a tour in Vietnam.

Vietnam-era service members were considered volunteers in the classified studies by the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. They signed consent agreements prior to participating.

But veterans later said they were not fully informed about the nature of the tests or the risks to their health.

"We have boxes and boxes of papers we've collected over the years about the testing, but we got nothing when we filed claims for compensation," said Michelle Josephs, wife and full-time caretaker of 76-year-old Army veteran Tim Josephs, another Edgewood participant. "We were told it was 'informed consent.' Tim and the others had volunteered. But these were a bunch of 18- and 19-year-old guys who had no idea the government would give them things harmful to them."

"We fought for years for benefits and then finally gave up," she said.

Because the statute governing veterans benefits requires veterans to apply within one year of discharge to receive retroactive benefits, veterans of the program were only eligible for benefits beginning from the date of their disability application, according to the legislation.

Rochelle took part in the military studies in 1968 at the former Edgewood Arsenal, where he received drugs orally and by injection.

"I never knew what they were giving me," he said. "I pretty much lost consciousness after 10 minutes. I was delirious for about two days. All I remember is breathing in this one inhalation."



U.S. ARMY

Troops in an undated photo enter a chamber where they were exposed to chemical agents as part of military experiments at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland.

The chronic medical problems that Rochelle developed after the experiments made him unemployable, according to VA records.

Rochelle obtained his military medical records in 2001 and found he was administered a chemical known by the code name, CAR-302,668. The drug was described as a "deliriant drug" developed in the 1960s and tested at Edgewood.

He also learned from medical records that he received a drug called EA-2233, a high-potency, synthetic form of THC, a psychoactive ingredient found in cannabis. Rochelle said he developed significant problems with his concentration and memory after receiving the drug.

"In my VA files, my medical problems are documented as due to the Edgewood experiments," said Rochelle, who is 100% disabled.

He is now seeking disability compensation dating back to his discharge in 1970 and he continues to have respiratory problems that doctors determined were related to aerosol sprays that he and other service members inhaled through a mask.

Rochelle also has a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder connected to his service at Edgewood.

His case is on appeal before the U.S. Veterans Court of Appeals, which ordered retroactive com-

penensation in 2024 in three other cases involving Edgewood veterans.

"By complying with their secrecy oaths, the veterans of the program lost the ability to receive the full veterans' benefits they earned," the legislation said.

The legislation would require no later than three months after a secrecy oath is lifted, the military must identify and notify the affected veterans about their ability to apply for full benefits retroactive to their date of discharge.

"Veterans of other secrecy oath programs may face the same hurdles to obtaining benefits. While some veterans of secrecy oath programs received limited relief in the courts, there is uncertainty about the scope of benefits available to those veterans," according to the legislation.

A 2023 ruling in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington enabled service members who volunteered at Edgewood to obtain VA disability compensation retroactive to their date of discharge, potentially affecting 3,000 to 5,000 veterans believed to be alive.

If signed into law, the OATH Act would codify this decision for Edgewood veterans — "allowing them to avoid litigation and inconsistent outcomes between cases" — and enable veterans who served in other secrecy oath programs to backdate their benefits, Blumenthal's office said.

US transfers 11 Yemenis to Oman from Guantanamo

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said Monday it had transferred 11 Yemeni men to Oman this week after holding them for more than two decades without charge at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The transfer was the latest and biggest push by the Biden administration in its final weeks to clear Guantanamo of the last remaining detainees there who were never charged with a crime.

The latest release brings the total number of men detained at Guantanamo to 15. That's the fewest since 2002, when President George W. Bush's administration turned Guantanamo into a detention site for the mostly Muslim men taken into custody around the world in what the U.S. called its war on terror. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and military and covert operations elsewhere followed the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaida attacks.

The men in the latest transfer included Shaqawi al Hajj, who had undergone repeated hunger strikes and hospitalizations at Guantanamo to protest his 21 years in prison, preceded by two years of detention and torture in CIA custody, according to the U.S.-based Center for Constitutional Rights.

Rights groups and some lawmakers have pushed successive U.S. administrations to close Guantanamo or, failing that, release all those detainees never charged with a crime. Guantanamo held about 800 detainees at its peak.

The Biden administration and administrations before it said they were working on lining up suitable countries willing to take those never-charged detainees. Many of those stuck at Guantanamo were from Yemen, a country split by war, with its capital held by the Iranian-allied Houthi militant group.

The sultanate of Oman, on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, did not acknowledge taking in the prisoners early Tuesday.

The key Western ally has taken in some 30 prisoners in the past since the founding of the prison.

However, those prisoners have since been released in circumstances unexplained by Oman.

The transfer announced Monday leaves six never-charged men still being held at Guantanamo, two convicted and sentenced inmates, and seven others charged with the 2001 attacks, the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, and 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia.

MILITARY

Billions more needed for ships

Navy needs \$85B more each year to meet shipbuilding plan, CBO says

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy will need a budget boost of at least \$85 billion annually to realize an ambitious goal to grow its fleet by nearly 100 ships over the next three decades, according to a recent Congressional Budget Office analysis.

The service would need an estimated annual budget of \$340 billion to operate, purchase and maintain a fleet of 381 battle force ships as outlined in its most current shipbuilding proposal, the CBO said in a report released Monday.

That's roughly one-third more under current valuations than the Navy's \$255 billion budget in 2024, said the CBO, which analyzed the service's 30-year shipbuilding plan submitted to Congress in March.

That plan would grow the fleet to a level not seen since 2001, according to the report. The service now has about 296 numbered battle force ships, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines and combat logistics vessels, among others.

"Over the past decade, funding for ship construction reached its highest level since the Reagan Administration's defense buildup in the 1980s," the CBO said. "Since 2015, lawmakers have appropriated an average of \$2.5 billion more per year for shipbuilding than the President has requested, partly because of concerns that the fleet is too small to perform all of its



BRANDEN BOURQUE/U.S. Navy

The attack submarine USS Texas departs Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine on Dec. 6 for sea trials.

missions."

The Navy needs a larger, more flexible fleet to address growing threats in the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East, officials and naval analysts have argued.

An inadequately sized force is one reason why there are fewer Navy ships currently on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean Sea than in recent years, analysts recently told Stars and Stripes.

Presence in the Mediterranean is "partly threat-driven and situation-driven, and it's all conditioned by (the fact that) there aren't enough ships in the Navy," said Bradley Martin, a retired Navy surface warfare officer and director of the Rand Corp. National Security Supply Chain Institute.

Under the Navy's 2025 shipbuilding plan, the service would buy fewer next-generation attack submarines and large surface ships, favoring proven current-

generation submarines, destroyers and other vessels, according to the CBO report.

For example, in its 2024 plan the Navy envisioned purchasing as many as 35 next-generation attack submarines. Its 2025 proposal includes buying just 14 of them.

Instead, the service is opting to buy 36 Virginia-class fast-attack submarines in the coming decades. In 2024, the Navy said it would buy as few as 10 of those submarines.

Over the next 30 years, the Navy would buy 364 ships, or an average of about 12 annually, for an estimated \$903 billion.

That cost likely is higher — \$1.075 trillion in current-year dollars — when all expenses, such as outfitting new ships or purchasing oceanographic survey, sealift and other vessels not considered part of the battle force are included, the CBO said.

The Navy and CBO cost calculations also vary in the way they determine the design and capabilities of some future ships, as well as labor and other costs, the report stated.

The CBO cautioned that the estimates don't include costs for adding 134 surface and undersea drones in the Navy's plan, which would bring its total platforms to 515 by 2054.

The report cast doubt on the Navy's ability to achieve its acquisition goals, which also include more missiles and unmanned systems on ships to make it more difficult for an opponent to destroy the fleet's offensive capability.

"If the Navy is unable to reduce the maintenance delays that it has been experiencing for more than a decade, it would not be able to deploy as many ships as achieving its 381-ship goal would suggest," the CBO said.

Soldier sentenced to 3 years in abuse case

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A Fort Bliss soldier was sentenced to three years in prison after pleading guilty to sexually abusing an underage family member, Army prosecutors said.

Pvt. Alex Moon, 28, pleaded guilty during his court-martial held Dec. 19 before Military Judge Lt. Col. Mathew Rick. The judge also sentenced Moon to a dishonorable discharge.

"My client wanted to own up and take responsibility for what he did," said Justin Scheider, an attorney for Moon.

Moon, who enlisted in October 2019, was an infantryman assigned to the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division at Fort Bliss in west Texas, according to the Army.

He was being held Monday at the Otero County Prison in New Mexico awaiting transfer to a military prison, according to the Army Office of Special Trial Counsel, which prosecuted the case.

Once released, Moon must register as a sex offender.

In an unsworn statement read in court, Moon apologized to his victim and described his behavior as a terrible mistake that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

To move forward, he said he will take advantage of behavioral health programs in prison.

"My shame and regret constantly remind me of a person I never wanted to be nor will be again," he said, according to a written copy of the statement.

The sexual abuse occurred against a girl younger than 16 years old between Feb. 1 and March 31, 2023, while Moon was stationed at Fort Bliss, according to his charge sheet.

Moon touched the girl in a sexual manner and recorded a video of her without her consent and at a time that she had a reasonable expectation of privacy, according to the charge sheet.

The abuse came to light after Moon's spouse saw concerning photos and a video of the victim on the soldier's phone and reported it to military law enforcement, according to prosecutors.

While speaking with a licensed social worker, the victim stated Moon had inappropriately touched her.

Moon, who first arrived at Fort Bliss in August 2021, admitted to agents with the Army Criminal Investigation Division to taking the video as well as inappropriately touching the victim.

Hawaii wildfire shuts road near Schofield Barracks

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A road south of Schofield Barracks in central Oahu was closed for several hours Monday afternoon as firefighters responded to a wildfire, U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii said in a Facebook post Monday.

Kunia Road was closed in both directions between Lyman Gate at Schofield and Kunia Drive about a half-mile south of the base.

The garrison's emergency alert advised drivers to use alternative routes and avoid the area.

Firefighters from the Honolulu Fire Department contained the

fire at about 4 p.m., and the road was reopened shortly after, Hawaii News Now reported Monday.

Brush fires are commonplace on Oahu.

In August, the Honolulu Fire Department was battling three separate wildfires in the grassy highlands of Oahu.

Several thousand acres of grassland have burned in recent years on and near the Army's 132,000-acre Pohakuloa Training Area on the Big Island.

A series of wildfires on Maui in early August 2023 turned deadly as high winds swept flames through the town of Lahaina, decimating it and killing 102 people.



U.S. Army

A wildfire burned for several hours Monday just south of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

Biden: New Orleans mourners are not alone

BY COLLEEN LONG AND MICHELLE L. PRICE
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — President Joe Biden told mourners in New Orleans on Monday that they are not alone as he paid tribute to victims of the deadly New Year's attack and channeled the pain felt by their loved ones.

Biden made the remarks at St. Louis Cathedral in the city's historic French Quarter, not far from the area where an Army veteran drove a truck into revelers last week, killing 14 and injuring 30 more.

Biden praised "so many that ran toward the chaos, trying to help save others," including first responders. He noted the city's enduring strength and resilience amid tragedy, invoking past devastation like Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"The city's people get back up," Biden said. "That's the spirit of America as well."

Biden met privately with grieving families, survivors and first responders before the prayer service. He also stopped at a makeshift memorial where the attack had begun to unfold. It is being investigated as an act of terrorism inspired by the Islamic State mil-



STEPHANIE SCARBROUGH/AP
President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden lay flowers at the site of the deadly New Years truck attack, in New Orleans on Monday.

itant group.

Biden has made dozens of visits to sites of violence, natural disaster and other calamities during his four years in office. With two weeks left, Monday's visit to New Orleans could be his last such trip.

In his remarks Monday, Biden alluded to the personal loss in his own life and recounted words of collective grief he's delivered time and again as president. He acknowledged the searing loss the grieving families will feel at holi-

days and birthdays to come, along with the small details they will miss about their loved ones.

"We know what it's like to lose a piece of our soul. The anger. The emptiness," he said.

He told the grieving families that they will eventually reach a day when the memory of their loved ones will make them smile before it makes them cry.

"It will take time, but I promise you, it will come. I promise you," he said.

Before he met privately with the victims' families, Biden and first lady Jill Biden made their first stop in the city at a memorial that sprung up on Bourbon Street at the spot where the attack started.

Flowers and messages were left at the bases of the crosses erected on the sidewalk. After Jill Biden placed white flowers at the memorial, she and the president stood in silence and bowed their heads.

At the public prayer service at the cathedral, a rendition of "Amazing Grace" was performed with a New Orleans jazz spin. The Bidens placed a candle at the altar. The president then returned to his seat in front pew, shutting his eyes tight in prayer.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard Air Force One on the way to Louisiana that Biden "believes this is also an important part of the job that he believes he needs to do as president."

It's a grim task that presidents perform, though not every leader has embraced the role with such intimacy as the 82-year-old Biden, who has experienced a lot of personal tragedy in his own life. His first wife and baby daughter died in a car accident in the early 1970s, and his elder son, Beau, died of

cancer in 2015.

"I've been there. There's nothing you can really say to somebody that's just had such a tragic loss," Biden told reporters Sunday in a preview of his visit. "My message is going to be personal if I get to get them alone."

The Democratic president will continue on to California following his stop in New Orleans. With a snowstorm hitting the Washington region on Monday, Biden's trip began with Air Force One starting its takeoff from inside a large hangar instead of on the tarmac as thick snow covered the ground at Joint Base Andrews and snowplows worked to clear the runway.

In New Orleans on Jan. 1, the driver plowed into a crowd on Bourbon Street. Shamsud-Din Jabbar, who steered his speeding truck around a barricade and plowed into the crowd, later was fatally shot in a firefight with police.

Jabbar, an American citizen from Texas, had posted five videos on his Facebook account in the hours before the attack in which he proclaimed his support for the Islamic State militant group and previewed the violence that he would soon unleash in the French Quarter.

City holds first parade of Carnival 5 days after attack on Bourbon St.

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Women dressed as angels, hands clasped in prayer, passed through New Orleans to celebrate the first parade of Carnival season, just blocks from where 14 people were killed five days earlier by a rampaging driver.

Hundreds filled the streets Monday evening for the annual Joan of Arc parade through New Orleans' historic French Quarter. Organizers said they wanted the event to convey the city's spirited grit as it grapples with the violent New Year's Day attack but still persists with beloved traditions.

"We are celebrating life," said Antoinette de Alteriis, a captain of the Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc. "We are choosing hope and we are

choosing joy."

Before the parade, President Joe Biden paid tribute to victims at the nearby St. Louis Cathedral.

The attacker, a U.S. citizen who had proclaimed support for the Islamic State militant group, was fatally shot in a firefight with police.

The Joan of Arc Parade, which began in 2008 and falls on the French hero's birthday, marks the end of the Christmas season, arrival of Carnival and the countdown to Mardi Gras.

The next eight weeks are spent with feasting, drinking and revelry before Ash Wednesday and the fasting associated with Lent.

Life Sacco, 17, served as Joan of Arc in the parade, donning a costume and raising a sword. The weight of the parade, which tells

the story of Joan of Arc's life — from military bravery to burning at the stake to sainthood — is not lost upon Sacco.

She said that the patron saint of France represents what the city needs: courage, endurance and the power of hope.

"It's such an emotional time right now for the city of New Orleans, you can see it on everyone's faces," she said. "But I feel like the first parade of the year could help lift spirits."

New Orleans has the largest and best-known Carnival celebrations in the U.S., with street parties, balls and parades from simple neighborhood-based walking clubs to elaborate high-tech extravaganzas with massive floats with giant animated figures.



GERALD HERBERT/AP
A person dressed as Joan of Arc holds a sword on top of a horse during the annual Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc parade, kicking off the Mardi Gras season in New Orleans on Monday.

Unpaid medical bills banned from appearing on credit reports

Associated Press

Unpaid medical bills will no longer appear on credit reports, where they can block people from mortgages, car loans or small business loans, according to a final rule announced Tuesday by the Biden administration.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau rule will remove

\$49 billion in medical debt from the credit reports of more than 15 million Americans, according to the bureau, which means lenders will no longer be able to take that into consideration when deciding to issue a loan.

The change is estimated to raise the credit scores by an average of 20 points and could lead to 22,000

additional mortgages being approved every year, according to the bureau. Vice President Kamala Harris said in a statement that it would be "lifechanging" for millions of families.

"No one should be denied economic opportunity because they got sick or experienced a medical emergency," she said.

Harris also announced that states and local governments have used a sweeping 2021 pandemic-era aid package to eliminate more than \$1 billion in medical debt for more than 700,000 Americans.

The administration announced plans for the rule in fall 2023.

The CFPB said that medical debt is a poor predictor of an indi-

vidual's ability to repay a loan. Experian, Equifax and TransUnion, the three national credit reporting agencies, said last year that they were removing medical collections debt under \$500 from U.S. consumer credit reports.

The new rule is set to take on the outstanding bills appearing on credit reports.

NATION

Trump: Island, canal vital to US

Won't rule out military force to gain Greenland, Panama Canal

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday said he would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of the Panama Canal and Greenland, as he declared U.S. control of both to be vital to American national security.

Speaking to reporters less than two weeks before he takes office on Jan. 20 and as a delegation of aides and advisers that includes Donald Trump Jr. is in Greenland, Trump left open the use of the American military to secure both territories. Trump's intention marks a rejection of decades of U.S. policy that has prioritized self-determination over territorial expansion.

"I'm not going to commit to that," Trump said, when asked if he would rule out the use of the military. "It might be that you'll have to do something. The Panama Canal is vital to our country." He added, "We need Greenland for national security purposes." Greenland is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a longtime U.S. ally and a founding member of NATO.

Trump, a Republican, has also floated having Canada join the United States, but he said he would not use military force to do that, saying he would rely on "economic force."

Earlier Tuesday, Trump told residents of Greenland that



IDA MARIE ODGAARD, RITZAU SCANPIX/AP

Local residents walk in the settlement Attu, in the Qeqertalik municipality, western Greenland, in July.

"we're going to treat you well" as his oldest son visited the mineral-rich Danish territory that's home to a large U.S. military base, heightening speculation that the incoming U.S. administration could seek to acquire it.

Trump posted a video showing a plane emblazoned with the word TRUMP landing in Nuuk, the Arctic territory's capital, in a landscape of snow-capped peaks and fjords.

"Don Jr. and my Reps landing in Greenland," Trump wrote. "The reception has been great. They, and the Free World, need safety, security, strength, and PEACE! This is a deal that must happen. MAGA. MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!" Supporters

later posted video of Trump speaking by phone to locals.

In a statement, Greenland's government said Donald Trump Jr.'s visit was taking place "as a private individual" and not as an official visit, and Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him.

Trump Jr. was in Greenland for a day trip to shoot video content for podcasting, according to a person familiar with the plans who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Trump's eldest son has become a prominent player in his father's political movement and has served on his presidential transition team.

Mininguaq Kleist, permanent

secretary of the ministry of statehood and foreign affairs, said authorities were informed that Trump Jr. would stay for about four to five hours. Neither Trump Jr.'s delegation nor Greenlandic government officials had requested a meeting, Kleist said.

During his comments Tuesday, Trump promised a "Golden age of America," saying he would move to try to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America," saying that has a "beautiful ring to it."

Trump also used his press conference to complain that President Joe Biden was undermining his transition to power a day after the incumbent moved to ban offshore energy drilling in most federal waters.

Extension approved for indictment in CEO death

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The man accused of gunning down UnitedHealthcare's CEO outside a New York City hotel is unlikely to appear in Manhattan federal court again before mid-February after prosecutors and lawyers on Monday requested more time to prepare the case for trial.

The lawyers agreed in a letter to the court that the deadline to bring an indictment against Luigi Mangione can be extended from Jan. 18 to Feb. 17.

Mangione, 26, is now charged in a criminal complaint, a document that is lodged against individuals prior to the return of an indictment.

Prosecutors said they consulted with the defense and agreed that extending the deadline was necessary "to permit both parties adequate preparation for pretrial proceedings and the trial itself."

Lawyers for Mangione and federal prosecutors declined to comment.

The case is unusual because at least one charge carries the possibility of the death penalty, but whether to pursue that penalty must be made by the Justice Department in Washington, where top officials will be changed as President-elect Donald Trump takes office later this month.

Authorities say Mangione fatally shot Brian Thompson on Dec. 4 as he was walking to an investor conference in midtown Manhattan.

The killing shocked the business community and galvanized some health insurance critics. Mangione posted frequently online about his struggles with back pain, though he was never a UnitedHealthcare client.

Judge: Trump's sentencing in hush money case on track

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump remains on track to be sentenced this week in his hush money case after a judge on Monday denied his request to halt proceedings while he appeals a ruling that upheld the historic verdict.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan ordered sentencing to proceed as scheduled on Friday, a little more than a week before Trump's inauguration. The judge rejected a push by Trump's lawyers to postpone it indefinitely while they ask a state appeals court to reverse his decision last week that let the conviction stand.

Trump, on course to be the first president to take office convicted

of crimes, can still ask the appeals court to delay sentencing or seek to have another court intervene. His lawyers have previously suggested taking the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Trump's lawyers have told Merchan that if his sentencing happens, he will appear by video rather than in person. The judge had given him the option, acceding to the demands of the presidential transition process.

Last Friday, Merchan denied Trump's bid to throw out his conviction and dismiss the case because of his impending return to the White House, but signaled he is not likely to sentence the Republican to any punishment for his conviction on 34 felony counts of

falsifying business records.

Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform after Merchan ruled that it "would be the end of the Presidency as we know it" if it is allowed to stand.

Trump's lawyers, who are also challenging Merchan's prior refusal to toss the case on presidential immunity grounds, filed appeal paperwork Monday in the appellate division of the state's trial court.

Trump's lawyers did not immediately ask the appeals court to halt Trump's sentencing.

In a separate filing with Merchan, they argued that the appeal should automatically pause the case. If it didn't, they said he should step in and do it himself —

an idea he rejected.

Manhattan prosecutors had urged Merchan to proceed with sentencing as scheduled, "given the strong public interest in prompt prosecution and the finality of criminal proceedings."

Prosecutors blamed Trump for pushing his sentencing to the brink of his second term by repeatedly seeking to postpone his sentencing, originally set for July.

"He should not now be heard to complain of harm from delays he caused," they wrote in a court filing Monday afternoon, hours before Merchan ruled.

Any delay in sentencing could run out the clock on closing the case before Trump's second term begins Jan. 20. The Justice De-

partment's Office of Legal Counsel, which provides legal advice and guidance to federal agencies, has said that a sitting president is immune from criminal proceedings. If sentencing doesn't happen before Trump is sworn in, waiting until he leaves office in 2029 "may become the only viable option," Merchan said in his ruling.

In upholding the verdict and rejecting Trump's bids for dismissal, Merchan wrote that the interests of justice would only be served by "bringing finality to this matter" through sentencing. He said giving Trump what's known as an unconditional discharge — closing the case without jail time, a fine or probation — "appears to be the most viable solution."

NATION

Family sparks push to ID serial killer's victims

By RICK CALLAHAN
Associated Press

WESTFIELD, Ind. — Decades after investigators unearthed thousands of human bones and bone fragments on a suspected Indiana serial killer's property, a renewed quest is playing out in laboratories to solve a long-running mystery: Who were they?

A new team working to identify the unknown dead says the key to their success will be getting relatives of men who vanished between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s to provide samples of their own DNA.

Those samples can then be screened against DNA profiles scientists are extracting from the remains, which were found starting in 1996 on Herbert Baumeister's sprawling suburban Indianapolis property.

The original investigators believed that at least 25 people were buried at Baumeister's 18-acre Fox Hollow Farm estate in Westfield, based on evidence that included 10,000 bones and bone fragments, as well as handcuffs and shotgun shells.

Baumeister, a 49-year-old thrift store owner and married father of three, killed himself in Canada in July 1996 before police could question him, taking with him many secrets, including the names of his presumed victims.

Investigators believed that while his family was away on trips, Baumeister, who frequented gay bars in Indianapolis, lured men to his home, where he killed and buried them.

By the late 1990s, authorities had identified eight men using dental records and available DNA technologies. But then those efforts stopped, although the remains of at least 17 people may have still been unidentified.

Hamilton County Coroner Jeff Jellison said the renewed identification effort revealed that county officials at the time decided not to fund additional DNA testing, which "essentially halted further efforts to identify the victims and placed the cost of a homicide investigation on family members of missing people."

"I can't speak for those investigators, but it was just game over," Jellison said.

An unfinished job

As decades slipped by, the bones and fragments sat in boxes at the University of Indianapolis' Hu-

man Identification Center, whose staff helped excavate the remains.

That changed after Eric Pranger sent Jellison a Facebook message in late 2022. The Indianapolis man's family had long believed his older cousin, Allen Livingston, was among Baumeister's victims.

Livingston was 27 when he vanished in August 1993 after getting into someone else's car in downtown Indianapolis. After hearing about Baumeister three years later, his mother, Sharon Livingston, and other relatives began suspecting that Allen, who was bisexual, was among the dead.

Jellison was about to take office when Pranger asked if he could help get some answers for his aunt, who had serious health problems.

"How do you say to no to that? That's our job as coroners by statute, to identify the deceased," Jellison said.

In late 2022, police took DNA samples from Sharon Livingston and one of her daughters. Jellison began working with a team that includes the Indiana State Police, the FBI, the Human Identification Center, local law enforcement and a private company that specializes in forensic genetic genealogy.

Some closure for family

Staff at the Human Identification Center, where the remains are stored in a temperature- and humidity-controlled space, selected some of the most promising bones for DNA analysis.

At the Indiana State Police Laboratory, scientists cut out sections of bone, froze them with liquid nitrogen and pulverized them into a fine powder. They then used heat and chemicals to break open bone cells in the first step toward extracting a full DNA profile.

Nearly a year after hearing from Pranger, Jellison announced in October 2023 that a ninth Baumeister victim had been identified: Allen Livingston.

Sharon Livingston finally received some form of closure. She died in November 2024.

"It made me happy to be able to do this for my aunt," Pranger, 34, said. "After Allen was identified I was so excited and then after the fact I asked myself, 'Now what? I got answers, but what about all the other families?'" Pranger added.

The other victims

Jellison said about 40 DNA samples have been submitted by people who believe a missing male rel-



RICK CALLAHAN / AP

White doves are released on Aug. 29, 2024, in Westfield, Ind., during the dedication of a memorial to the nine known victims of suspected serial killer Herbert Baumeister.



RICK CALLAHAN / AP

Shannon Doughty and her cousin, Eric Pranger, embrace during the dedication of the memorial. Her brother, Allen Livingston, was one of the victims.

ative may have been killed by Baumeister. He said those are entered into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS, but are used solely for identifying missing people.

The coroner and his partners hope to get more DNA samples from relatives of men from across the U.S. who vanished between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. They noted the men may have been traveling and stopped in Indianapolis to visit friends or sample its nightlife.

To date, scientists have extracted eight unique DNA profiles — all male — from more than 70 of the 100 bones that were sent to the Indiana State Police Laboratory by Dr. Krista Latham, the Human Identification Center's director.

One matched DNA samples provided by Livingston's mother and sister. Four matched four of the eight men first identified in the 1990s: Jeffrey Jones, Manuel Resendez, Johnny Bayer and Richard Hamilton.

The three other DNA profiles remain unidentified and two are still undergoing testing. Those three have boosted Baumeister's presumed victims to 12.

Jellison and his partners say their identification effort could take several more years to complete.

Most of the bones were crushed and burned, reducing their potential to yield usable DNA. Latham, a professor of biology and anthropology, said bone fragments deemed in poor shape are being held back from the destructive testing process in hope that future DNA technologies can unlock their secrets.

She noted some of the men may have been estranged from relatives or ostracized because of their sexuality.

For the ongoing work, Jellison has obtained DNA reference samples from relatives of seven of the eight men originally identified in the 1990s. The eighth man, Steven Hale, was adopted and efforts to lo-



DARRON CUMMINGS / AP

Pranger holds an urn that contains the ashes of Allen Livingston.

cate biological relatives have thus far failed, the coroner said.

Honoring the victims

As remains are identified, piece by piece, families can opt to have them cremated and interred at a memorial dedicated in August in Westfield. It includes a plaque with the names of the nine identified victims, with room for more names.

Linda Znachko, whose nonprofit Indianapolis-based ministry He Knows Your Name, paid for the monument, said at the memorial's dedication that the identification campaign "will bring honor to those who lost their lives at the Fox Hollow tragedy." Remains belonging to Livingston and Jeffrey Jones were added to the memorial's osuary and white doves were released during the dedication.

Livingston's younger sister, Shannon Doughty, attended with several relatives, including Pranger. She said it was a relief finally knowing what happened to her brother, despite his tragic end.

"At least you know," said Doughty, 46. "You wanted to know but you didn't want to know. But you needed to know."

NATION

Many states reexamining historical markers

BY ERIKA BOLSTAD
Stateline.org

Most Revolutionary War history buffs know the story of Francis Marion, the Continental Army officer called the Swamp Fox for his guerrilla-style attacks that bedeviled British forces in South Carolina's backcountry. But volunteers and historians have identified 560 Revolutionary War battle sites and other places of interest with connections to the state's role in the nation's founding.

"While we all love Francis Marion, let's talk about some other people," said Molly Fortune, executive director of SC250, the commission charged with restoring the public memory of the state's Revolutionary War legacy. To do that, they're reviving forgotten historical markers as well as installing new ones and making them all easier to find from the highway or online.

As the United States prepares to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, many states are inventorying, mapping and repairing old historical markers, as well as installing hundreds of new roadside signs, plaques and interpretive panels. In South Carolina, the focus is on sharing lesser-known stories of women, children, Native Americans, enslaved and free Black people and even the Loyalists who sympathized with King George III.

Beyond re-engaging with lesser-known stories, many states see the national commemoration, known as America250, as an opportunity to refresh their heritage tourism offerings. But it's also an occasion to reexamine markers or monuments with questionable historical facts or outdated language.

The renewed interest in the accuracy or cultural sensitivity of the nation's historical markers is part of the wider discourse over who or what belongs on a pedestal or a bronze plaque, and where they should be sited. Since the 2020 murder of George Floyd, those efforts have led to the removal of Confederate monuments as well as the toppling of statues honoring Christopher Columbus and artwork that extols westward expansion without telling the story of the effects on the Indigenous people displaced by settlement.

Markers that reflect more inclusive stories make history relevant to more people, said Jason Hanson, the chief creative officer of History Colorado, which operates museums around the state and administers Colorado's register of historic places. When history is incomplete or told only by those with the money or power, it strips complexity and nuance from the American story, rendering it less accurate and vibrant. The roadside panels and bronze

plaques affixed to buildings are how many people encounter the nation's history, Hanson said.

"They really are some of the most accessible and valued history lessons that we have," he said.

Satanic imps

That history can be lopsided, inaccurate or racist, according to an NPR investigation in 2024 that looked at 180,000 historical markers across the nation. For example, the investigation found that about 70% of markers for historic plantation homes failed to mention that its owners bought and sold enslaved people and used their labor to construct the mansions.

Among the problematic examples NPR found was a Michigan marker celebrating a woman who "successfully defied frenzied Indians who invaded the premises and lapped from the basement floor whiskey which she had emptied from the barrels." In Texas, a marker praises Primus Kelly, an enslaved Black man, for demonstrating loyalty during the Civil War — describing him as "typical of most Texas Negro slaves. Hundreds 'went to war' with their masters."

Many markers, especially those installed by private individuals, stretch the definition of "history." A Massachusetts marker, for example, indicates the former site of a mill operated by a wizard who employed satanic imps to run it at night, while a sign in New Hampshire marks the spot where a Portsmouth couple had a close encounter with a UFO in 1961 — and experienced two hours of "lost time."

In Colorado, the state found recently that 96% of listings on its state register of historical sites were places connected primarily to the history of white men, Hanson said. To mark the state's 150th anniversary in 2026, Colorado will begin adding 150 new sites and markers highlighting the history of women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people and other histor-



JOHN J. LaROSA/TNS

Men dressed as Revolutionary War soldiers march towards boats ready to cross the Delaware River during a Washington Crossing reenactment in Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania in December 2022.

ically underrepresented communities. The state will ask community groups to nominate who and what should be on the markers.

Markers or monuments often were paid for by people who wanted to tell a particular story, meaning that those with money were the only ones leaving a lasting mark. Even now, historical markers are expensive. In Michigan, for example, large markers cost \$4,700, before installation. Some states appropriate money for new markers, but often, local communities must find the cash.

But an investment in heritage tourism can and does pay off, said South Carolina's Fortune. She and other public historians have persuaded their state legislature not only to fund new markers but also to pay for new highway signs alerting visitors to historic sites. It's an effort she says boosts the rural communities where many markers are located.

"People want to walk and listen and hear and connect with their ancestors," Fortune said.

'The whole story'

In 2023, Virginia's Department of Historic Resources began adding dozens of historical markers signifying Green Book sites, places that accommodated Black travelers safely during the Jim Crow era. They're also adding nine new markers that, among other things, tell the origin story of Mountain Dew soda, the discriminatory racial history of the first heart transplant in the state, and the backstory of lesser-known Virginians who participated in the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The Washington State Historical Society began taking a closer look at its markers in 2020, identifying 42 as potentially problematic. Most commemorate white settlement and were placed by a handful of individuals who "just decided that these were the places that they were going to put monuments up," said Dylan High, the statewide partnerships coordinator for the agency.

In recent months, the historical society has hosted public meetings to examine how the markers portray the history of westward expansion. Among those under review is a 1925 marker with a statement asserting that the "civilization of Washington started at Vancouver," the site of an 1806 fort on the Columbia River for the Lewis and Clark expedition, and a subsequent Hudson's Bay Company fur trading post.

Such statements erase the presence of Indigenous people who lived in the area for thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers. The narratives weren't created in consultation with tribal people of the land, said Polly Olsen, who is Yakama and the tribal liaison for the Burke Museum in Seattle. It comes from a settler narrative of "the first schools, the first church, these civ-

ilized practices or, you know, 'civilization began here,'" Olsen said in an interview with KIRO Newsradio.

As they've traveled the state of Washington, High said, they've found that most people don't want old markers removed. Sometimes, it's impractical: The Vancouver marker sits in a traffic island, unnoticed by most passersby, and would be costly to move. Instead, High said, people want to add new interpretive panels or new markers nearby to tell "the whole story of the history." Most people are wary of anything that seems as though it is "rewriting history," a phrase the state agency tries to avoid.

"That kind of implies that the history of what happened somehow is somehow changed," High said. "What we are really interested in saying is that there is more to the context of that history of what happened than just what that monument represents or implies."

"And to be very specific about it," High added, "what is not represented is very often the tribe's perspective and the experience of our tribal communities around the state."

Sometimes, states must point out hard truths, Fortune said. She points to Henry Laurens, a wealthy South Carolinian planter who was president of the Continental Congress in 1777 and 1778 and the only American to be held captive in the Tower of London. He was also a partner in a Charleston firm that brokered the sale of more than 8,000 enslaved Africans.

"We're in the business of telling history the way it was," Fortune said. "So it can be good, bad and ugly. Henry Laurens owned slaves. That's just a fact. Just say it's a fact."



MATT ROURKE/AP

A car passes a Pennsylvania Historical Marker for Revolutionary War Gen. Anthony Wayne in Paoli, Pa., in November 2021.

NATION

Southern US to feel next round of bitter cold

BY PATRICK WHITTLE
AND BRIAN WITTE
Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The next round of bitter cold was set to envelop the southern U.S. on Tuesday, after the first significant winter storm of the year blasted a huge swath of the country with ice, snow and wind.

The immense storm system brought disruption even to areas of the country that usually escape winter's wrath, downing trees in some Southern states, threatening a freeze in Florida and causing people in Dallas to dig deep into their wardrobes for hats and gloves.

On Tuesday morning, the wind chill temperature was 16 degrees Fahrenheit at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, according to the National Weather Service. A low-pressure system was expected to form as soon as Wednesday near

south Texas, bringing the potential of snow to parts of the state that include Dallas, as well as to Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

"As we go through the next few days, we're still going to be seeing those colder-than-normal temperatures," said Peter Mullinax, a meteorologist with the weather service in College Park, Md. "We're going to see areas of snow and ice start to take shape across northern Texas, southern Oklahoma as we get into Thursday morning."

Snow and ice are expected to make their way farther south into the lower Mississippi Valley, some of it "pretty disruptive," he said.

Lingering snow and ice in the central Plains through the Ohio Valley into the Atlantic is likely to stick around for a few days, Mullinax said. That will create opportunities for constant re-freezing, and black ice, which may create treacherous travel conditions in



ROBERT COHEN / AP

Jason Stirling of Terry's Towing hooks up a semi-trailer that got stuck in the snow Monday when its driver turned west onto Big Bend from Kirkwood Road in Kirkwood, Mo.

some areas for the next few days.

The polar vortex that dipped south over the weekend kept much of the country east of the Rockies in its frigid grip Monday, making many roads treacherous, forcing school closures, and causing widespread power outages and flight cancellations. Some experts say such cold air outbreaks are happening more frequently, paradoxically, because of a warming world.

Ice and snow blanketed major roads in Kansas, western Nebraska and parts of Indiana, where the

National Guard was activated to help stranded motorists. The weather service issued winter storm warnings for Kansas and Missouri, where blizzard conditions brought wind gusts of up to 45 mph. The warnings extended to New Jersey into early Tuesday.

A Kentucky truck stop was jammed with big rigs forced off an icy and snow-covered Interstate 75 on Monday just outside Cincinnati. A long haul driver from Los Angeles carrying a load of rugs to Georgia, Michael Taylor said he saw numerous cars and trucks

stuck in ditches and was dealing with icy windshield wipers before he pulled off the interstate.

"It was too dangerous. I didn't want to kill myself or anyone else," he said.

The eastern two-thirds of the U.S. dealt with bone-chilling cold and wind chills Monday, with temperatures in some areas far below normal.

More than 2,300 flights were canceled and at least 9,100 more were delayed nationwide as of Monday night, according to tracking platform FlightAware.

Death toll in Honolulu fireworks blast rises

Associated Press
HONOLULU — A 3-year-old boy who died Monday was the fourth person to succumb to injuries from a massive explosion of fireworks on New Year's Eve at a Honolulu home, and a doctor said six others faced long recoveries in Arizona, where they were sent to be treated for severe burns.

The blast also killed three women and injured more than 20 people, many of whom have burns over most of their bodies.

The Honolulu medical examiner identified the toddler as Cassius Ramos-Benigno. The cause and manner of death were listed as pending.

After the disaster, Hawaii's leaders intensified their oft-repeated calls to crack down on the state's vast illegal fireworks trade with stepped-up enforcement and greater penalties.

The U.S. military flew six of the injured to Phoenix for treatment on Saturday because Hawaii's lone burn unit doesn't have enough capacity to care for all the victims.

They are all in their 20s or 30s



MARCO GARCIA / AP

People walk past the home where a New Year's Eve fireworks explosion killed and injured people on Wednesday in Honolulu.

and have extensive burns, Dr. Kevin Foster, the director of the Arizona Burn Center, said at a news conference streamed online.

The person with the least has burns over 45% of their body while the most has burns over nearly 80% of their body. Each of the six is using a breathing tube and five are in medically induced comas.

Foster said they are all doing "very well" and have good vital signs. But it will be six months to a year before any are able to return to anything resembling a normal life, Foster said. Four patients will likely have to remain intubated and in a coma for weeks, he said.

The patients will likely suffer post-traumatic stress disorder,

Foster said, adding the burn center has two full-time psychologists and a psychiatrist hospital on staff to help them.

"There's something uniquely and particularly horrifying about being burned, especially from this type of injury," Foster said. "And we anticipate that all of these patients are going to have some adjustment issues."

Honolulu authorities say a person attending a party lit a bundle of aerial fireworks, which fell on its side and shot explosives into two crates that contained additional aerials. Video of the resulting explosion shows a rapid series of blasts shooting fireworks in the air and around the front of a house.

Forecasters warn of fire risks with strong winds in California

Associated Press
LOS ANGELES — Winds began gaining strength across Southern California on Tuesday, as forecasters warned of powerful, dry gusts that could bring down trees, damage homes and bring extreme fire risk to areas that haven't seen substantial rain in months.

The National Weather Service said what could be the strongest windstorm in more than a decade would begin in the afternoon across Los Angeles and Ventura counties and peak in the early hours of Wednesday, when gusts could reach 80 mph. Isolated gusts could top 100 mph in mountains and foothills.

The weather service warned of possible downed power lines and knocked-over big rigs, trailers, and motorhomes. Strong offshore gusts will also bring dangerous conditions off the coasts of Orange and Los Angeles counties, including Catalina Island, and potential delays and turbulence could arise at local airports.

Southern California Edison said it was considering preemptively cutting power starting Tuesday to

more than 415,000 utility customers across seven counties. San Diego Gas & Electric said it could shut service to more than 64,000 customers. In recent years, California utilities have routinely de-energized electrical lines as a precaution against weather conditions that might damage equipment and spark a fire.

The upcoming winds will act as an "atmospheric blow-dryer" for vegetation, bringing a long period of fire risk that could extend into the more populated lower hills and valleys, according to Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with the University of California, Los Angeles and the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

"We really haven't seen a season as dry as this one follow a season as wet as the previous one," Swain said during a Monday livestream.

Southern California hasn't seen more than 0.1 inches of rain since early May. Much of the region has fallen into moderate drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Meanwhile, up north, there have been multiple drenching storms.

WORLD

Trip to Kyiv by Trump’s Ukraine envoy is on hold

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — An upcoming trip to Kyiv by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump’s special envoy for Ukraine and Russia has been canceled but will be rescheduled, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Tuesday. The planned meetings between Keith Kellogg, a retired three-star general who has long been Trump’s top adviser on defense issues, and Ukrainian officials are

“extremely important,” Sybiha said. “I am confident that this meeting will take place in its own time,” he said during a news conference with his visiting Icelandic counterpart. “We are in contact to clearly define the timeline for its organization and to ensure that the meeting is as meaningful as possible.” Trump’s arrival in the White House on Jan. 20 injects another

measure of uncertainty into how the almost 3-year-old war might unfold and whether it can end in the foreseeable future. Ukraine relies on Western — and especially U.S. — military backing to keep fighting. But Trump has criticized the billions of dollars the Biden administration has spent on Ukraine. He has also said he could end the war in 24 hours, though he hasn’t elaborated on how he might

do that. Ukrainian officials are eager to sway Trump on sticking with Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised Trump’s “strength” and said the American president’s “unpredictability” could work in Ukraine’s favor. Ukrainian forces are clinging on to their diminishing defenses in the eastern stronghold of Kurakhove, where Russian attackers have recently pushed forward af-

ter a monthslong battle, a military official said Tuesday. Russia’s Defense Ministry claimed Monday its units had taken Kurakhove. Defending troops are holding their positions on the town’s western outskirts, as Russian forces pummel urban areas in a tactic they have used across eastern and southern Ukraine, according to Viktor Trehubov, the local Ukrainian army spokesperson.

Rain leads to flooding, travel disrupted in parts of the UK

Associated Press

LONDON — Dozens of people were rescued Monday from flooded homes and stranded cars as a soggy and cold spell continued to disrupt life across parts of the U.K. and more wintry weather was expected. Hundreds of schools were closed for the first day of classes of 2025, trains were halted and commuters experienced headaches as sections of highways and major roads were closed from high water and snow that made driving hazardous. Much of the U.K. has been hit by strong winds and periods of precipitation that struck before New Year’s Day and snuffed out several fireworks displays and other celebrations. Several communities have faced significant flooding since the start of the year. Warnings that flooding was expected were issued in nearly 200 places in England by late Monday afternoon. Several train lines were shut down or experiencing delays due to floodwaters or trees that had fallen on tracks. The body of a man found Monday in a

flooded area near the River Aire in northern England was believed to have gone in the water over the weekend, North Yorkshire police said. They were seeking his identification. Leicestershire and neighboring Lincolnshire in the English Midlands declared major incidents as they responded to hundreds of calls for help as waterways spilled over their banks and turned roads into rivers, burying cars up to their roofs. Nearly 60 people were rescued from swamped homes and vehicles, the Leicestershire fire service said on the X social media platform. Emergency workers were trying to pluck children from a school in Edenham, where they were safe but stranded, the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum posted on X. One woman was rescued from a car by a pub owner who waded up to his chest in frigid floodwaters to pull her from the vehicle and carry her to safety. Cimi Kazazi, the owner of the Italian Greyhound in Great Glen, had arrived at his business in the morning to find it partially



JON SUPER/AP

People walk their dogs through heavy snowfall in Saddleworth, England, on Tuesday.

under water, Luigi Salcini, the pub manager told The Associated Press. The woman had tried to drive to her house when her car, covered with a dusting of snow from the night before, got stuck. Eventually the water rose up to the win-

dows. “She started to drive but realized the car was deeper and she started going down with the water,” Salcini said. “She started to scream, ‘Help’ and we came out and Cimi went to rescue her.”

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man trapped in a circling Waymo misses his flight

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles man said he recently missed his flight home after getting trapped on his way to the airport in a Waymo that wouldn't stop making circles in a parking lot.

L.A. tech entrepreneur Mike Johns posted a video three weeks ago on LinkedIn of his call to a customer service representative for Waymo to report that the car kept turning in circles and that he was nervous about missing his flight.

"I got a flight to catch. Why is this thing going in a circle? I'm getting dizzy," Johns said. "It's circling around a parking lot. I got my seat belt on. I can't get out of the car. Has this been hacked? What's going on? I feel like I'm in the movies. Is somebody playing a joke on me?"

The customer service representative told Johns to open his Waymo app and that she would try to pull the car over, but seemed to struggle with getting the vehicle to stop.

1 person killed, another injured in large avalanche

WY JACKSON — An avalanche killed one skier and injured another after the group they were in triggered the large snowslide while ascending a mountain in western Wyoming.

The avalanche happened Saturday in a backcountry area about 20 miles east of Grand Teton National Park.

As the group of four people went up a steep slope at an elevation of 10,400 feet, a large slab of snow about 5 feet thick broke away and slid, fully burying the victim and partially burying a second skier, according to Teton County Search and Rescue and the Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center.

Authorities received an alert about the accident just before noon. It took rescuers almost four hours to reach the scene by skis after a helicopter tried to reach the site but had to turn around because of stormy weather.

Plan to enable voters to repeal, create state laws

WI MADISON — Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers is reviving his plan to let voters repeal and create state laws without legislative involvement, this time through the state budget.

Evers told reporters on Friday the state budget he plans to unveil next month will include a mandate that legislators take up a constitutional amendment allowing voters to petition for ballot proposals to repeal state statutes and create new ones. The Democratic governor crafted a similar proposal in 2022 for voters to repeal the state's 1849 abortion ban, but Republicans killed the plan.

Wisconsin is one of 24 states that do not provide a way for people to



WILLIE J. ALLEN JR., ORLANDO SENTINEL/AP

There she is

Confetti falls around Abbie Stockard, Miss Alabama 2024, as she's crowned the new Miss America 2025 at the Walt Disney Theatre at the Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts in Orlando, Fla., on Sunday.

reject or enact statutes outside of the legislative process, according to Ballotpedia.

Pope names like-minded ally as new archbishop

DC WASHINGTON — Pope Francis on Monday named Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego as the archbishop of Washington, tapping one of his most progressively like-minded allies to head the Catholic Church in the U.S. capital at the start of Donald Trump's second administration.

McElroy, 70, replaces Cardinal Wilton Gregory, who at 77 is two years beyond the normal retirement age for bishops and steps down after having navigated the fallout of a new eruption of the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

The Vatican announced the appointment in a bulletin Monday, the Catholic feast of the Epiphany.

Supreme Court asked to halt special election

MN ST. PAUL — The state Republican Party and conservative Minnesota Voters Alliance have asked the state Supreme Court to void Gov. Tim Walz's decision to hold a special election Jan. 28 for a DFL-held House seat.

The legal challenge is among the unsettled issues that will determine which party controls the Legislature in the 2025 session, which starts in just more than a week. Republicans will begin the

session with a 67-66 advantage in the House because the Roseville-area seat was left open after a court order voided a DFLer's victory.

Until the December court order, the DFL and GOP were to open the session tied at 67 members each and had been discussing a power-sharing agreement. But now Republicans say the 67-66 advantage will allow them to elect a speaker and control committee assignments. DFLers disagree; they say 68 votes are needed for any House action, including the election of a speaker.

The GOP petition seeks to delay the special election — and prolong the party's advantage.

Fire department slams congestion pricing plan

NY NEW YORK — As New York City ushered in its long-awaited congestion pricing plan, the FDNY sounded the alarm over what it calls a looming public safety crisis — one they warn could mean slower response times, longer shifts and millions of dollars in extra costs.

The tolling program, the first of its kind in the United States, was introduced just after midnight on Sunday, and imposes a toll on drivers entering Manhattan's busiest areas, including parts of the Financial District, Midtown, and Lower Manhattan. The additional \$9 fee has long sparked controversy, but the city's firefighters are now raising urgent concerns about its impact on emergency services.

According to Jim Brosi, president of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association, a number of New York's bravest use their personal vehicles to drive to firehouses in need of additional personnel — but the newly imposed toll is making that financially unfeasible for many, forcing the department to rely on a fleet of just 15 vans to transport firefighters. These vehicles, typically reserved for other tasks — like picking up equipment or visiting injured members — will now be stretched thin in order to shuttle firefighters between stations, he argued.

Lawsuit alleges ex-host harassed hairstylist

CA LOS ANGELES — A woman who worked as a hairstylist for Fox Sports alleges in a lawsuit that former host Skip Bayless made repeated, unwanted advances toward her — including an offer of \$1.5 million to have sex with him.

Attorneys for Noushin Faraji, who was a hair stylist at Fox for more than a decade, are seeking unspecified damages from Bayless, Fox Sports and its parent company, Fox Corporation, according to a copy of the lawsuit filed Friday in California Superior Court in Los Angeles.

The complaint claims Fox executives fostered a hostile work environment that allowed senior managers and on-air personalities including Bayless to abuse workers without fear of punishment.

Fox Sports said in a statement

that it takes the allegations seriously but had no further comment given the pending lawsuit.

Spider monkey wearing pink tutu escapes home

MO JEFFERSON COUNTY — Deputies in Missouri encountered a "bananas" situation when they came face to face with a nearly-naked suspect. But the suspect — a spider monkey dressed in a tutu — was no match for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

The department said in a Jan. 3 post on Facebook that the spider monkey was staying at a home when it pried open a door and went outside.

Multiple people reported the tiny creature "monkeying around" near an intersection, according to the sheriff.

"The monkey actually kind of came up (to a deputy K-9 handler) and tugged on his pant leg, and so he didn't really know what to do. He squatted down and was trying to offer some sort of safety," Public Safety Information Coordinator Grant Bissell told KTVI.

"After careful negotiations and some coaxing, deputies were able to get close enough to go 'hands on' with the subject and bring this bananas situation under control without incident," the sheriff's office said.

The monkey was then brought back to its caretaker, according to the department.

FACES

Seacrest spins ratings gold as ‘Wheel of Fortune’ host

By **STEPHEN BATTAGLIO**
Los Angeles Times

There is nothing like a familiar face to serve up TV’s ultimate comfort food.

In September, Sony Pictures Television handed the keys to its game show “Wheel of Fortune” to Ryan Seacrest, broadcasting’s iron man. Nielsen data show “Wheel of Fortune” averaging 7.9 million viewers through Dec. 1, up 3% from a year ago during long-time host Pat Sajak’s final season.

“Wheel” has more viewers than every network nonsports prime-time series, with the exception of CBS’ “60 Minutes” and “Tracker.” More than 58 million people have tuned into some portion of the program this season. More people watch “Wheel” and its companion show “Jeopardy!” in the 7 p.m. hour than on any single streaming service, including Netflix.

The bump in ratings for “Wheel” comes as traditional TV viewing continues to decline. The show gained viewers as the number of people watching TV overall fell 9% during the same period.

Durability has been a hallmark of “Wheel,” which on Monday marked 50 years since it premiered on NBC’s daytime lineup. The game, where contestants guess the letters of a mystery word or phrase, has been part of the TV landscape ever since, surviving huge changes that have splintered the mass audience.

But a major test for the popularity of any TV show is when the star is replaced. Sajak had hosted the syndicated version of “Wheel” since it launched in 1983 and became an evening ritual for millions of viewers. He decided to hang it up at the end of the 2023-24 season.

“It was a pivotal moment for



TNS

“Wheel of Fortune,” which premiered 50 years ago, has strong ratings behind hosts Vanna White and Ryan Seacrest.

us,” said Suzanne Prete, president of game shows for Sony. “It’s personal to the viewers. Pat is like a family member to them.”

Seacrest is a well-known quantity. He holds down mornings on KIIS-FM in Los Angeles, hosts “American Idol” and counts down the ball drop in Times Square for “Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve.” In 2023, he finished a successful six-year run as Kelly Ripa’s co-host on the daily talk show “Live.” He has largely steered clear of controversy.

When Sony considered successors for “Wheel,” Seacrest was at the top of Prete’s wish list. “If I had the choice of anybody in the world, it would have been Ryan,” she said.

Once he secured the job, Seacrest asked for videos of past shows so he could study the nuances of the game. Prete was ready to send him 50 recent episodes.

“He said, ‘No, I want to see every episode,’” Prete said. There are 8,000.

“When he stepped on the set, it was like he’d been doing it his whole life,” Prete said.

Golden Globes ratings hold steady

From wire reports

An average of 10.1 million viewers tuned into the 82nd Golden Globes across CBS and Paramount+, Dick Clark Productions said Monday, roughly matching the audience for last year’s broadcast.

CBS reported ratings figures from VideoAmp rather than the industry standard audience measurement service, Nielsen. Paramount Global, which owns CBS, is in a contract dispute with Nielsen.

At a time when most traditional linear telecasts are in decline, holding steady from last year’s Globes audience is sure to count as a success for the Nikki Glaser-hosted broadcast. Last year’s show, the Globes’ first on CBS, drew an audience of 9.4 million, according to Nielsen.

Before the pandemic, though,

the Globes typically drew closer to 20 million viewers. In 2020, 18.4 million watched the Globes.

Zendaya, Holland engaged

“Spider-Man: Homecoming” co-stars Zendaya Coleman and Tom Holland are engaged according to several media reports, nearly nine years after meeting on set of the superhero film.

Despite the 28-year-old “Dune” star’s solo appearance on the Golden Globes red carpet on Sunday, eagle-eyed red carpet onlookers spotted a ring on Zendaya’s left hand that fueled engagement speculation.

It appears the supplier of the ring was indeed longtime beau Holland, 28. A source close to the famously private couple confirmed to TMZ that the couple got engaged over the holidays.



FOX

On “Special Forces: World’s Toughest Test,” celebrities such as professional athletes Cam Newton, second from right, and Marion Jones-Thompson, right, endure a boot camp led by former operatives.

Coming soon: Ethel Cain, psychics, ‘Special Forces’

Associated Press

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

Movies

■ One of the best American documentaries of last year, Lana Wilson’s “Look Into My Eyes,” will be available to stream on Max on Wednesday. The film takes views into the lives of several New York City psychics — their sessions, their homes, their own stories — creating a rather profound portrait of humanity. Wilson, who has also made documentaries about Taylor Swift with “Miss Americana” and Brooke Shields with “Pretty Baby,” came to understand that perhaps it doesn’t matter whether it’s real or not. “I had trivialized it and seen it as this silly thing, despite the fact that millions of people around the world engage in it,” Wilson said. “You can believe or not believe the supernatural part of this, but there’s this human connection that is undeniably going on.”

■ British comedian Nick Frost (“Hot Fuzz”) wrote and stars in the comedic horror “Get Away,” about a family on a vacation to an unwelcoming island that’s full of strange and sinister happenings. But they’re stubbornly determined to continue the holiday in spite of it. “Get Away” begins streaming on Shudder on Friday.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

Music

■ Ethel Cain, the Southern Gothic persona of Hayden Anhedonia, has long entranced her listeners with a kind of lethargic approach to pop songwriting — opting for plain-sung dirges on religiosity and Americana like an edgier, alternative universe Lana Del Rey than full-on bangers (with the exception of her best-known cut, “American Teenager.”) On Wednesday, she will release a follow-up to her debut “Preacher’s Daughter,” the provocatively titled “Perverts,” further journeying into her meditative approach to music-making. The first song shared from the album is a nearly seven-minute droning pi-

ano lament, “Punish.” Expect more ambience, cold and slow moving.

— AP Music Writer Maria Sherman

Television

■ Two popular and addictive reality competition shows featuring celebrities return this week with new seasons. First up is Fox’s “Special Forces: World’s Toughest Test,” premiering Wednesday, where acting, reality TV and sports stars convene for a boot camp led by former Special Forces operatives. Season 3 features Denise Richards, Brody Jenner, Cam Newton, Stephen Baldwin and Trista Rehn and Ali Fedotowsky-Manno of “The Bachelorette.” They attempt grueling tasks like jumping onto a helicopter from a speedboat and treading water for a long time (while they’re being berated) in the name of toughness and bragging rights. Episodes stream on Hulu.

■ Peacock’s hit “The Traitors,” hosted by Alan Cumming, returns on Thursday. Here, famous faces come together in Scotland for a compelling game of strategy and manipulation with a cash prize at the end. “The Traitors” won outstanding reality competition program at last year’s Emmy Awards.

■ “Yellowstone” meets “Game of Thrones” on Netflix’s new limited series called “American Primeval,” premiering Thursday. The six-episode show follows settlers during the westward expansion and stars Taylor Kitsch and Betty Gilpin. Like the “Yellowstone” prequel “1883,” this new series depicts how the fight for land in the American west was a violent one.

■ Noah Wyle returns to where we first met him — in the emergency room — for his new series “The Pitt.” This time, Wyle’s character, Dr. Michael “Robby” Robinavitch, is an experienced doctor at a fictional Pittsburgh hospital. Each episode follows one hour of Dr. Robby’s 15-hour shift. John Wells, who was the showrunner of “ER,” is an executive producer. Writer Michael Crichton wrote the pilot script for “ER,” and his estate has sued Warner Bros. Television, calling “The Pitt” an unauthorized rebranded version of “ER.” “The Pitt” debuts Thursday on Max.

— Alicia Rancilio

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16				17			
18							19	20				
			21		22	23		24				
25	26	27			28		29			30	31	32
33				34						35		
36				37					38			
		39	40			41		42				
43	44				45			46		47	48	49
50					51	52	53					
54					55				56			
57					58				59			

ACROSS

- 1 Banner
5 Invoice fig.
8 Experts
12 Earring site
13 Brit's restroom
14 Carry on
15 Capital of Paraguay
17 Slender weapon
18 Rationed (out)
19 Urges forward
21 "La Dolce —"
24 Granola morsel
25 Luke's teacher
28 Folklore monster
30 Mel of Cooperstown
33 "Caught ya!"
34 Welcome
35 Bankroll
36 "Tasty!"
37 Give temporarily
38 Burden
39 Navarro on "The View"
41 Mausoleum
43 Continue
46 Skiers' mecca
50 Bank statement no.
51 Capital of India
54 Close
55 Crime lab evidence
56 Motown genre

57 Bouquet

- 58 Tofu source
59 Norms (Abbr.)

DOWN

- 1 Two-stroke drumbeat
2 Misplace
3 Border on
4 Swiss metropolis
5 Foreman foe
6 Cattle call
7 Author Morrison
8 Venezuelan corn patty
9 Capital of South Africa
10 Daring Knievel
11 Beholds
16 Roman 401
20 Champagne brand
22 Ripped
23 Rep
25 Candied veggie
26 Resistance unit
27 Capital of Syria
29 Make over
31 Sigma follower
32 QBs' goals
34 Glitzy rock genre
38 Fixate
40 Peculiar
42 Irate
43 Grate
44 Canyon comeback
45 Concludes
47 Conspiracy
48 Barak of Israel
49 Guitarist Lofgren
52 Rock producer Brian
53 Method

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1-8

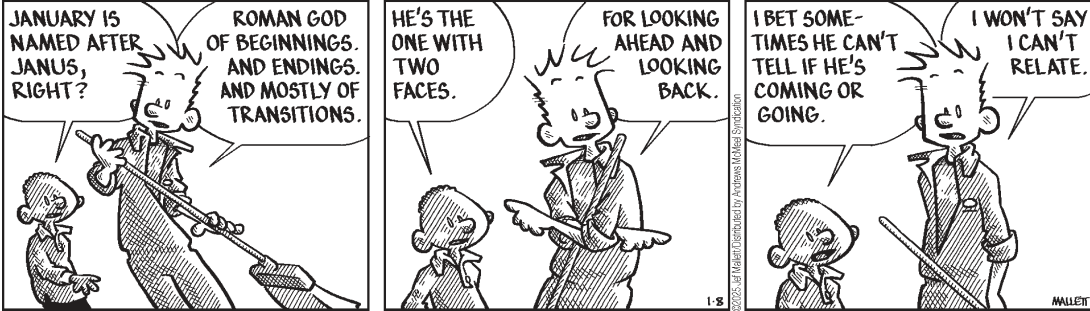
CRYPTOQUIP

T N E L F H N W E I G H F K N S N P U
R N D R I I Y H D W M Z L G U Q P I M N W G
I P R L M, Q N I Q X N Z L S N E L X X N Y
K N L E L P T W S I P N.

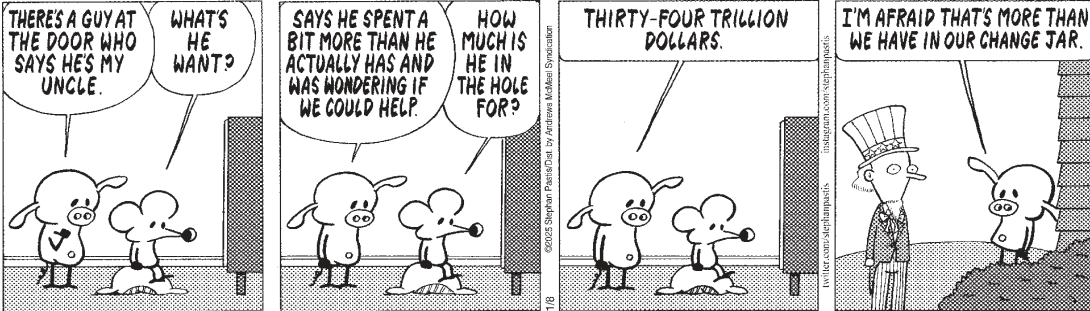
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN SEVERAL RESEARCH LABS ARE CULTIVATING SIMILAR BACTERIA, THERE MIGHT BE A CULTURE WAR.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals P

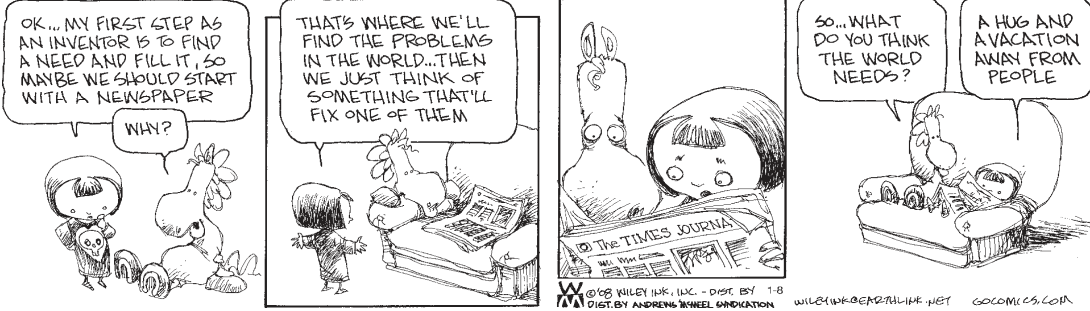
Frazz



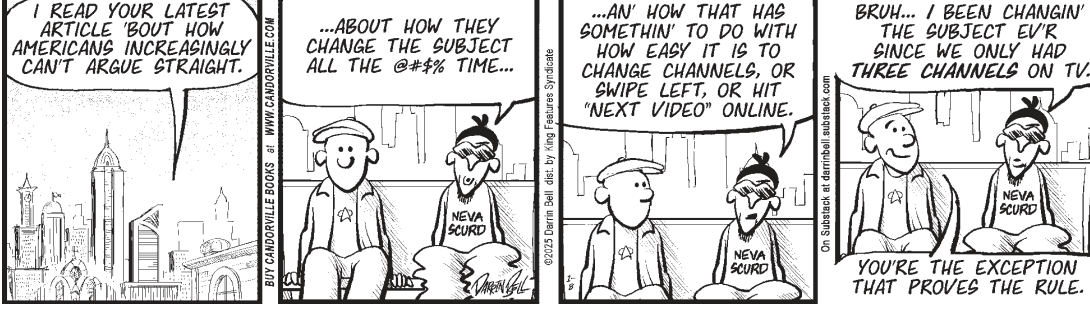
Pearls Before Swine



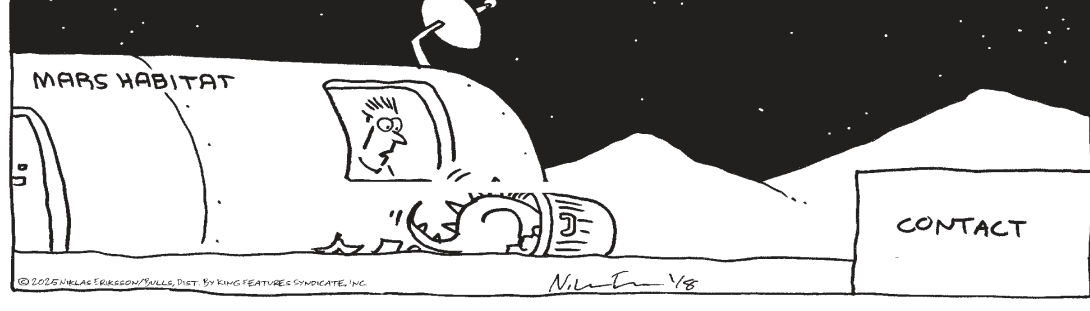
Non Sequitur



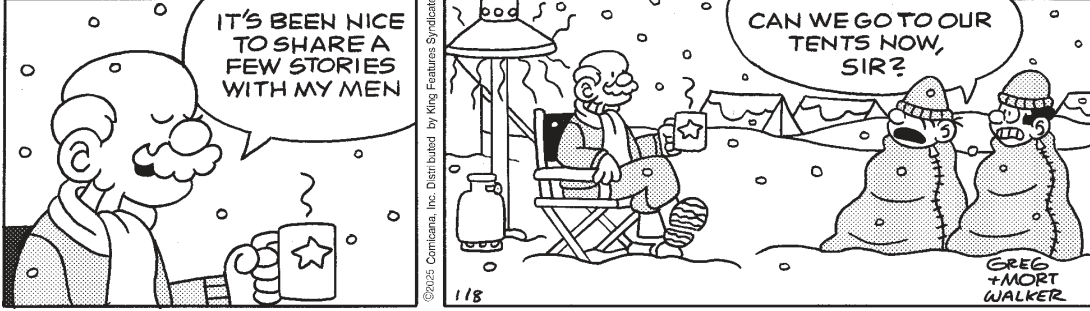
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



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Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) published daily (except Saturday, Sunday, 25 December and 1 January) for 50 cents (Monday through Thursday) and one dollar on Friday by Stars and Stripes Pacific, OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, OPC 706 BOX 7, AP 96301-9001.

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Privatize USPS? Not in an era of crony capitalism

By TYLER COWEN
Bloomberg Opinion

President-elect Donald Trump is said to be interested in the privatization of the U.S. Postal Service, a prospect that also appeals to his DOGE project and its allies in Congress. Yet debating this issue — and privatization more generally — is almost pointless without first defining terms. “Privatization” can be good, bad or uncertain.

The best kind of privatization is when private suppliers can replace state provision outright. Consider Poland in the 1980s, when most of the economy was state-owned and state-run. After the fall of communism in 1991, many of those state-owned businesses were replaced with private corporations. Since then, Poland has gone from being a poor country to one with living standards close to those of Western Europe.

Privatization is not the only reason, of course, but it was an essential part of the story. When it comes to food and consumer products, for instance, it is much better to let the market operate.

But Poles did not privatize everything. They generally left water companies and electricity providers in the public sector, for example. This is the second category of privatizations: those that are uncertain in their impact.

Water and electricity are two essential services where there is no easy way to get privatization exactly right. It is simply impractical to have many firms selling the product to a single group of households — not in the same way that, say, many cow farmers can produce and sell cheese. It costs too much to lay the basic piping or wires.

One option is to have a private entity with monopoly privileges but regulated prices. Another is to have a set of “common carrier” wires and allow multiple producers to use the network on regulated terms of access. A third is just to have the government own and run the company.

Involving the private sector may give better incentives for cost reduction as well as innovation, since profit maximization is a strong impetus for those kinds of improvements. The efficiency of the private company, however, is also a source of problems. A private company may be efficient at lobbying the government for cronyist privileges. That may lead to higher prices, overly generous reimbursement for cost increases, tougher barriers to entry, or entrenched technologies that favor the incumbent.

In other words: If embedded in an imperfect system, corporate efficiency is not always a pure virtue.

In the U.S., privately owned and publicly owned water utilities show, on average, roughly equal performance. Perhaps that is a disappointing result, but it is consistent with the “public choice” theories favored by many free-market economists.

A third kind of privatization is when business adds a layer of activity to a preexisting government function. For instance, some states have “privatized” their Medicaid services by outsourcing Medicaid provision to private health insurers. The Medicaid program has not gone away or been turned over to the private sector — rather, companies have a role in administering the system.

This kind of “layered” privatization, like the second kind of privatization, can work out either for the better or for the worse. One re-

cent study shows this privatization increased the costs of Medicaid significantly without providing offsetting benefits. The private companies have done a good job — for themselves — of extracting more revenue from the system. Yet Medicare Cost Advantage, which creates a private layer of service on top of Medicare, run by insurance companies, does offer significant benefits to those who opt for it.

The lesson here is that talk of “privatization” per se is meaningless without elucidating which kind of privatization is under consideration. One class of privatizations, such as in Poland, is close to an unalloyed good, and economists are right to tout it. But in a large number of other cases, which are frequent in modern Western democracies, privatization works only when judiciously applied.

Given those categories, what about the USPS? Under a 2018 plan, a privatized postal service would save money by delivering the mail fewer days per week and sending it to more centralized locations, rather than to people’s doorsteps. Not everyone, including many members of Congress, finds that desirable. I have questions of a different sort: Namely, how good would a newly involved private company be at manipulating the federal government to get extra delivery subsidies, entry barriers and price privileges?

Maybe postal privatization can work, but it is unlikely to succeed in an environment of crony capitalism. And at least so far, that seems to be what is on tap from the Trump administration.

Tyler Cowen is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist, a professor of economics at George Mason University and host of the Marginal Revolution blog. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

Look beyond media’s scare stories to see progress

By ARTHUR I. CYR
Special to Stars and Stripes

“Let a smile be your umbrella ... a smile will always pay.” That is from a tune which became very popular through a 1957 recording by singer Bing Crosby.

By custom and habit, this writer regularly — though not always — devotes a column relatively early in the New Year to positive and encouraging economic, political, social and other trends in our world.

That becomes increasingly necessary, as well as more educational, as the years go by. Our television and radio media more and more focus on catastrophes of various kinds: geophysical, meteorological and human.

This does not mean our world has become more dangerous, difficult or disaster prone. Rather, radical transformation is overturning established media, and many other areas of our lives, driven significantly by technology.

Holman Jenkins, contrarian columnist for The Wall Street Journal, writes regularly with great insight on media hysteria. This constant fear reflects not objective reality but rather the tremendous challenges confronting those businesses.

Theirs is not the real world in which the vast majority of the population lives and works.

Consequently, describing significant positive developments and trends is more necessary than ever. First on the list, and perhaps most important, from which many oth-

er great benefits derive, is the dramatic increase in the average human lifespan.

This is particularly pronounced in economically advanced nations. In industrial nations, the average human lifespan doubled in the 20th century. Stephen Moore and Julian Simon describe and analyze this transformation in detail in the Cato Institute’s “It’s Getting Better all the Time.”

Second, there is the extraordinary recent movement of the vast mass of people in the world out of abject poverty. As recently as 1980, approximately one-half of the population on the planet lived in “extreme poverty.”

The World Bank defines that condition as below \$2.15 per day valued in 2017 dollars, an estimate that takes account of drastically different cost and price structures in various countries and regions. Less than that amount means essential conditions of life cannot be met.

Through the long sweep of human history, the vast majority of the population lived in destitution, unhealthy misery, and often starvation. Imminent death was a fact of life. That is no longer the case.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this progress. Nevertheless, still less than 10% of the world’s population is now in that terrible state.

Third, democracy is spreading. As recently as four decades ago, the people of Latin America lived almost uniformly in various degrees of authoritarian regime.

Today, Cuba is the only remaining dictatorship in the Americas. Despite pervasive

and ruthless state political control, the desperate need for foreign investment is forcing even Havana’s geriatric communists to loosen their iron grip.

Once tiny Costa Rica was a beacon of freedom south of our border. Now that light spreads throughout the Americas. Even the autocrats currently in charge in Venezuela are obliged to face the people, in referenda as well as elections.

Likewise, genuinely representative governments are spreading in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are sometimes overshadowed by negative news from China and North Korea. That is unfortunate. The three democracies represent vital progress.

Undeniably, free competitive economies and representative democracies are interconnected. Adam Smith’s classic “The Wealth of Nations” appeared in 1776, the year the American Revolution began.

A principal exception to the prevailing good news is the danger and prevalence of wars, large and small. Ukraine remains a costly, devastating tragedy, in danger of spreading. Armed conflicts in Africa in fact are becoming more prevalent.

Our military vigilance remains essential. Yet, for Americans, perhaps our greatest danger is our own media-fueled fears, reflected today in sensationalist and extremist sentiments.

Calm realism is required. Successful businessman Bing Crosby would agree.

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Boston	26	10	.722	—	
New York	24	13	.649	2½	
Philadelphia	14	20	.412	11	
Brooklyn	13	23	.361	13	
Toronto	8	28	.222	18	
Southeast Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Orlando	22	16	.579	—	
Atlanta	18	18	.500	3	
Miami	17	17	.500	3	
Charlotte	7	27	.206	13	
Washington	6	27	.182	13½	
Central Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Cleveland	31	4	.886	—	
Milwaukee	18	16	.529	12½	
Indiana	19	18	.514	13	
Detroit	18	18	.500	13½	
Chicago	17	19	.472	14½	
Western Conference					
Southwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Houston	23	12	.657	—	
Memphis	24	13	.649	—	
Dallas	20	16	.556	3½	
San Antonio	18	18	.500	5½	
New Orleans	7	29	.194	16½	
Northwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Oklahoma City	30	5	.857	—	
Denver	20	14	.588	9½	
Minnesota	18	17	.514	12	
Portland	12	23	.343	18	
Utah	9	25	.265	20½	
Pacific Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
L.A. Lakers	20	15	.571	—	
L.A. Clippers	20	16	.556	½	
Golden State	18	17	.514	2	
Sacramento	18	19	.486	3	
Phoenix	16	18	.471	3½	
Monday's games					
Detroit 118, Portland 115 Phoenix 109, Philadelphia 99 Milwaukee 128, Toronto 104 Indiana 113, Brooklyn 99 Orlando 103, New York 94 Memphis 119, Dallas 104 Chicago 114, San Antonio 110 Minnesota 108, L.A. Clippers 106 Sacramento 123, Miami 118, 2OT					
Tuesday's games					
Houston at Washington Phoenix at Charlotte L.A. Lakers at Dallas Minnesota at New Orleans Atlanta at Utah Boston at Denver Miami at Golden State					
Wednesday's games					
Chicago at Indiana Oklahoma City at Cleveland Washington at Philadelphia Detroit at Brooklyn Toronto at New York Portland at New Orleans L.A. Clippers at Denver San Antonio at Milwaukee					
Thursday's games					
Golden State at Detroit Minnesota at Orlando Toronto at Cleveland Houston at Memphis Portland at Dallas Atlanta at Phoenix Miami at Utah Charlotte at L.A. Lakers					
Scoring leaders					
Through Monday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Antetokoun., MIL	28	349	182	884	31.6
Jokic, DEN	31	372	162	977	31.5
Gil.-Alexander, OKC	35	386	247	1,095	31.3
Tatum, BOS	33	307	186	928	28.1
Durant, PHO	24	233	135	658	27.4
Fox, SAC	35	345	172	933	26.7
Davis, LAL	33	310	213	857	26.0
Edwards, MIN	35	317	116	897	25.6
Wembanyama, SA	31	287	117	794	25.6
Maxey, PHI	28	244	132	711	25.4
Brunson, NY	36	311	206	912	25.3
Towns, NY	34	309	168	859	25.3
Lillard, MIL	27	203	169	668	24.7
Cunningham, DET	32	292	116	780	24.4
Irving, DAL	30	269	98	729	24.3

ROUNDUP

DeRozan, Kings hold off Heat in 2OT

Associated Press

Sacramento, Calif — DeMar DeRozan scored nine of Sacramento's 11 points in the second overtime, and the Sacramento Kings beat the Miami Heat 123-118 to extend their winning streak to a season-high five games under interim coach Doug Christie.

DeRozan finished with 30 points on 12-for-26 shooting. Domantas Sabonis had 21 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists as the Kings (18-19) won their second straight without injured point guard De'Aaron Fox.

Malik Monk scored 23 points, Keon Ellis had 17 and Keegan Murray added 14 points and 12 rebounds.

Jaime Jaquez Jr. had a triple-double with 16 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for the Heat (17-17). Tyler Herro scored 26 but was called for a costly 8-second violation toward the end of the fourth quarter.

Terry Rozier added 18 points and Haywood Highsmith had 14.

Pistons 118, Trail Blazers 115: Cade Cunningham had 32 points and nine assists as host Detroit reached .500 for the first time after New Year's Day since 2019 with a win over Portland.

Tim Hardaway Jr. added 26 points for Detroit and Jalen Duren had 14 points and 12 rebounds. The Pistons (18-18), who were 3-33 after 36 games a season ago, have won seven of eight.

Anfernee Simons had 36 points and nine assists for Portland, while Shaedon Sharpe had 20 points, eight assists and eight rebounds. The Trail Blazers led by 22 points in the first half.

Suns 109, 76ers 99: Bradley Beal came off the bench for the first time in nine years and scored 25 points as visiting Phoenix ended a four-game skid with a win over Philadelphia.

Beal was shifted to a reserve role before the game and scored 20 points in the second half as the Suns overcame an early 12-point deficit and won for the second time in nine games.

Tyrese Maxey had 31 points and 10 assists for the Sixers, who were missing Joel Embiid, who



SARA NEVIS/AP

Sacramento Kings forward DeMar DeRozan drives to the basket with Miami Heat guard Jaime Jaquez Jr. defending during the second half Monday in Sacramento, Calif. The Kings won 123-118 in double overtime.

was sidelined with a left foot sprain. Kelly Oubre added 26 points as Philadelphia lost for the third time in four games.

Pacers 113, Nets 99: Tyrese Haliburton scored 23 points, Bennedict Mathurin added 20 and visiting Indiana beat Brooklyn.

Pascal Siakam contributed 19 points and Obi Toppin scored 11 for the Pacers, who have won three straight and nine of 12.

Day'Ron Sharpe had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Tyrese Martin added 15 points and Noah Clowney scored 14 for the Nets, who have lost 10 of 13.

Magic 103, Knicks 94: Cole Anthony scored 24 points, Wendell Carter Jr. had a season-high 19 off the bench and visiting Orlando shut down a New York team missing Karl-Anthony Towns for a victory.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 15 points for the Magic, who are missing their top four scorers

because of injuries but didn't need too much offense the way they defended. They limited the Knicks to 4-for-22 shooting from 3-point range and didn't allow a make in the second half until Cam Payne's basket with 8.2 seconds remaining.

Bucks 128, Raptors 104: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 11 points, 13 assists and 12 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season, Damian Lillard scored 25 points and visiting Milwaukee beat struggling Toronto.

Bobby Portis scored 20 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 17 against his former team and Brook Lopez added 16 for the Bucks. Milwaukee outscored the Raptors 63-24 in bench points and handed Toronto its 13th loss in 14 games.

Bulls 114, Spurs 110: Coby White made a go-ahead layup with 47 seconds left, and host Chicago topped Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio.

Zach LaVine had 35 points, 10

rebounds and eight assists for the Bulls, who trailed by 19 before rallying in the fourth quarter. Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 11 boards, and White finished with 23 points.

Grizzlies 119, Mavericks 104: Jaren Jackson Jr. had 35 points, 13 rebounds and five assists to lead host Memphis to a victory over Dallas.

Scotty Pippen Jr. finished with 18 points, while Jaylen Wells added 17 points and 11 rebounds as the Grizzlies won for the 10th time in their last 11 home games.

Timberwolves 108, Clippers 106: Anthony Edwards scored 28 of his 37 points in the second half and host Minnesota overcame a 19-point first-half deficit to beat Los Angeles.

Edwards, who had a career-high 53 points in Saturday's loss at Detroit, finished 14 of 29 from the field, including a pair of late 3-pointers for his eighth game this season of 30-plus points.

Mavericks guard Irving out with back injury

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Dallas guard Kyrie Irving is expected to miss one to two weeks with a bulging disk in his back, and Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said a timeline for his return was not immediately known.

Kidd, speaking before Dallas lost to Memphis 119-104 Monday night, didn't shed much light on the injury or when Irving could return.

"He's out, so there's nothing I can speculate or comment (on)," Kidd said. "It's been reported



Irving

he's out a week or two."

When asked to give a timeline for Irving's recovery, Kidd said: "Give me 48 hours to get that answer."

Irving is the Mavericks' second-leading scorer at 25.6 points per game, shooting close to 50% from the field, including 41.1% from 3-point range.

Irving's injury is another blow to Dallas' attack.

Leading scorer Luka Doncic, who is averaging 28.1 points, 8.3 rebounds and 7.8 assists, was also out Monday, missing his sixth game due to a left calf strain.

With Irving and Doncic out, the Dallas offense is missing 52.4 points per game.

"It's important for everyone in uniform," Kidd said of making up the scoring shortage. "Being short-handed, it's the next-man-up mentality. ... We can't replace Luka or Ky, so it's going to take a team effort."

NHL/NBA



Sabres right wing Alex Tuch celebrates after scoring during the second period in Buffalo, N.Y., on Monday. The Sabres won 4-3 in a shootout.

NHL ROUNDUP

Tuch, Peterka lift Sabres in shootout win over Capitals

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Alex Tuch scored twice, JJ Peterka had the deciding goal in the shootout and the Buffalo Sabres defeated the Washington Capitals 4-3 on Monday night.

Tage Thompson also scored for the Sabres. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 25 saves and stopped three of four shooters in the shootout to end their three-game losing skid. Tuch also scored during the shootout.

Tom Wilson scored twice, Aliaksei Protas added a goal and an assist, and Charlie Lindgren made 24 saves for the Capitals.

Peterka's shootout winner came after he skated slowly to the right of Lindgren and snapped a shot that beat him low to his left-hand blocker side.

Canadiens 5, Canucks 4 (OT): Nick Suzuki scored a power-play goal 48 seconds into overtime and also had two assists as host Montreal beat Vancouver.

Lane Hutson also had a goal and two assists, Cole Caufield had a goal and an assist, and Kaiden

Guhle and Kirby Dach also scored for the Canadiens. Sam Montembeault stopped 16 shots to help Montreal win for the fifth time in six games and eighth in its last 10.

J.T. Miller had two goals and two assists, and Jake DeBrusk and Jonathan Lekkerimaki also scored for the Canucks, who have lost seven of their last nine. Kevin Lankinen made 19 saves.

Avalanche 3, Panthers 1: Devon Toews scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with 11:06 remaining, and host Colorado beat Florida.

Mikko Rantanen added a late empty-net goal to help the Avalanche wrap up a four-game homestand at 3-0-1. Rantanen's score allowed him to extend his points streak to 14 games.

Devils 3, Kraken 2: Ondrej Palat scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, and visiting New Jersey beat Seattle.

Dawson Mercer had a goal and an assist, and Paul Cotter also scored to help the Devils snap a four-game losing streak. Jacob Markstrom had 21 saves.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Toronto	41	26	13	2	54	129	113	
Florida	41	24	15	2	50	136	127	
Boston	42	20	17	5	45	111	131	
Tampa Bay	37	20	15	2	42	137	105	
Montreal	40	19	18	3	41	122	136	
Ottawa	38	19	17	2	40	112	111	
Detroit	39	17	18	4	38	107	126	
Buffalo	41	15	21	5	35	126	140	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Washington	40	26	10	4	56	148	108	
New Jersey	43	25	15	3	53	137	109	
Carolina	40	24	14	2	50	135	114	
Pittsburgh	41	17	17	7	41	125	152	
Columbus	40	17	17	6	40	137	145	
Philadelphia	40	17	18	5	39	123	144	
N.Y. Rangers	39	18	20	1	37	113	123	
N.Y. Islanders	40	15	18	7	37	108	128	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Winnipeg	41	27	12	2	56	147	104	
Minnesota	40	25	11	4	54	121	107	
Colorado	41	25	15	1	51	140	131	
Dallas	38	24	13	1	49	123	95	
St. Louis	41	19	18	4	42	114	123	
Utah	39	17	15	7	41	113	118	
Nashville	40	13	20	7	33	98	123	
Chicago	40	13	25	2	28	102	137	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	39	27	9	3	57	139	105	
Los Angeles	38	23	10	5	51	118	96	
Edmonton	39	24	12	3	51	128	109	
Vancouver	39	18	12	9	45	120	126	
Calgary	39	18	14	7	43	105	120	
Anaheim	39	17	18	4	38	101	118	
Seattle	41	17	21	3	37	118	130	
San Jose	42	13	23	6	32	110	149	

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

Monday's games

Buffalo 4, Washington 3, SO
Montreal 5, Vancouver 4, OT
Colorado 3, Florida 1
New Jersey 3, Seattle 2

Tuesday's games

Carolina at Tampa Bay
Columbus at Pittsburgh
Dallas at N.Y. Rangers
Edmonton at Boston
Ottawa at Detroit
Toronto at Philadelphia
Nashville at Winnipeg
St. Louis at Minnesota
Calgary at Anaheim
Vegas at San Jose

Wednesday's games

Colorado at Chicago
Vancouver at Washington
Florida at Utah
Calgary at Los Angeles

Thursday's games

Boston at Tampa Bay
Buffalo at Ottawa
Dallas at Philadelphia
Edmonton at Pittsburgh
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers
Seattle at Columbus
Toronto at Carolina
Anaheim at St. Louis
Colorado at Minnesota
N.Y. Islanders at Vegas

Friday's games

Chicago at Detroit
Montreal at Washington
Vancouver at Carolina
Los Angeles at Winnipeg
San Jose at Utah

Scoring leaders Through Monday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	41	14	52	66
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	39	29	30	59
Mikko Rantanen, COL	41	24	34	58
Mitch Marner, TOR	41	14	42	56
Nikita Kucherov, TB	35	17	38	55
Connor McDavid, EDM	36	15	39	54
Jack Eichel, LV	39	11	41	52
Kyle Connor, WPG	41	22	30	52
Kirill Kaprizov, MIN	34	23	27	50
Cale Makar, COL	41	13	36	49
Jesper Bratt, NJ	43	14	34	48
Jack Hughes, NJ	43	15	33	48
Martin Necas, CAR	40	15	32	47
Sam Reinhart, FLA	41	22	24	46
Mark Scheifele, WPG	41	23	23	46

Collide: Early matchup of league's best teams could be Finals preview

FROM PAGE 24

Game. And at this rate, it won't be long before phrases like "home-court advantage" and "No. 1 seed" get bandied about in Cleveland and OKC.

"It's so hard to win in this league. You know, there's so much parity," Atkinson said. "I do think you catch a wave, kind of a confidence wave and then everything flows. It seems like that's what we've caught. And it's a collective confidence. Sometimes it's two or three guys. We have 12 or 13 guys that are playing with great confidence on both ends."

There's a lot of that going around the league right now.

There have been 16 teams this season — more than half the league — that have already had at least one winning streak of five or more games. New York just had a nine-game winning streak broken by the Thunder last Friday. Boston, Dallas, Milwaukee, Phoenix and Oklahoma City (exclusive of its current 15-game streak) have all had seven-game streaks so far this season.

But what the Cavs and Thunder are doing is historic on multiple levels. They are the first teams to have winning streaks of 15 games or more in the same NBA season since Toronto and Milwaukee did it in 2019-20.

And Wednesday will mark just the third game in NBA history when two teams on winning



Oklahoma City Thunder (30-5) at Cleveland Cavaliers (31-4)
AFN-Sports
1:15 a.m. Thursday CET
9:15 a.m. Thursday JKT

streaks of at least 10 games go head-to-head. The others: Feb. 29, 2000, when the Los Angeles Lakers played the Portland Trail Blazers (both were on 11-game streaks) and Jan. 26, 1995, when the Utah Jazz played the Seattle SuperSonics, before they moved to OKC and became the Thunder (both were on 10-game streaks).

Plus, this is the second time that two NBA teams have gotten off to 30-5 starts, or better, in the same season. The other was 1971-72, when the Lakers started 32-3 and the Milwaukee Bucks started 30-5. They wound up meeting in that season's playoffs; Los Angeles beat Milwaukee in the West finals on its way to the NBA title.

If Cleveland and Oklahoma City meet in this season's playoffs, it'll be with the Larry O'Brien Trophy on the line in the NBA Finals. And with the way these clubs are playing, there's no reason to say that isn't a real possibility.



The Thunder won their last matchup against the Cleveland Cavaliers 128-120 on Nov. 8, 2023, in Oklahoma City.

NFL

Final statistics

AFC individual leaders						NFC individual leaders					
Quarterbacks						Quarterbacks					
	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int		Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
Burrow, Cin	652	460	4918	43	9	Goff, Det	539	390	4629	37	12
Jackson, Bal	474	316	4172	41	4	Mayfield, TB	570	407	4500	41	16
Mahomes, KC	581	392	3928	26	11	Smith, Sea	578	407	4320	21	15
Rodgers, NYJ	584	368	3897	28	11	Darnold, Min	545	361	4319	35	12
Herbert, LAC	504	332	3870	23	3	Purdy, SF	455	300	3864	20	12
Nix, Den	567	376	3775	29	12	Murray, Ari	541	372	3851	21	11
Allen, Buf	483	307	3731	28	6	Stafford, LAR	517	340	3762	20	8
Stroud, Hou	532	336	3727	20	12	Daniels, Was	480	331	3568	25	9
Tagovailoa, Mia	399	291	2867	19	7	Ca.Williams, Chi	562	351	3541	20	6
Ru.Wilson, Pit	336	214	2482	16	5	Cousins, Atl	453	303	3508	18	16
Rushers						Rushers					
	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD		Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Henry, Bal	325	1921	5.9	87t	16	Barkley, Phi	345	2005	5.8	72t	13
Taylor, Ind	303	1431	4.7	70t	11	Robinson, Atl	304	1456	4.8	37t	14
Pollard, Ten	260	1079	4.2	41	5	Gibbs, Det	250	1412	5.6	70t	16
Harris, Pit	263	1043	4.0	36t	6	Jacobs, GB	301	1329	4.4	38t	15
Mixon, Hou	245	1016	4.1	59	11	K.Williams, LAR	316	1299	4.1	30	14
Cook, Buf	207	1009	4.9	65t	16	Hubbard, Car	250	1195	4.8	38t	10
C.Brown, Cin	229	990	4.3	40	7	A.Jones, Min	255	1138	4.5	41	5
Jackson, Bal	139	915	6.6	48t	4	Irving, TB	207	1122	5.4	56	8
Achane, Mia	203	907	4.5	61	6	Conner, Ari	236	1094	4.6	53	8
Dobbins, LAC	195	905	4.6	61	9	Dowdle, Dal	235	1079	4.6	27	2
Receivers						Receivers					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD		No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Chase, Cin	127	1708	13.4	70t	17	Jefferson, Min	103	1533	14.9	97t	10
B.Thomas, Jac	87	1282	14.7	85t	10	London, Atl	100	1271	12.7	39	9
Jeudy, Cle	90	1229	13.7	89t	4	St. Brown, Det	115	1263	11.0	66t	12
Bowers, Las	112	1194	10.7	57t	5	Nabers, NYG	109	1204	11.0	59t	7
McConkey, LAC	82	1149	14.0	60t	7	Lamb, Dal	101	1194	11.8	65t	6
Wilson, NYJ	101	1104	10.9	42	7	McBride, Ari	111	1146	10.3	37	2
Sutton, Den	81	1081	13.3	47	8	Smith-Njigba, Sea	100	1130	11.3	46	6
D.Adams, NYJ	85	1063	12.2	71t	8	Kittle, SF	78	1106	14.2	43	8
Flowers, Bal	74	1059	14.3	53t	4	McLaurin, Was	82	1096	13.4	86t	13
Meyers, Las	87	1027	11.8	43	4	A.Brown, Phi	67	1079	16.1	67t	7
Punters						Punters					
	No	Yds	Lg	Avg			No	Yds	Lg	Avg	
Cole, Las	65	3304	71	50.8	Fox, Det	45	2295	68	51.0		
Stonehouse, Ten	73	3691	75	50.6	Dickson, Sea	76	3756	68	49.4		
Scoring Touchdowns						Scoring Touchdowns					
	TDRush	Rec	Ret	Pts			TDRush	Rec	Ret	Pts	
Cook, Buf	18	16	2	0	108	Gibbs, Det	20	16	4	0	120
Henry, Bal	18	16	2	0	108	Jacobs, GB	16	15	1	0	96
Chase, Cin	17	0	17	0	102	K.Williams, LAR	16	14	2	0	96
Allen, Buf	13	12	1	0	78	Barkley, Phi	15	13	2	0	90
Kicking						Kicking					
	PAT	FG	LG	Pts			PAT	FG	LG	Pts	
Boswell, Pit	35-35	41-44	57	158	Aubrey, Dal	30/30	40/47	65	150		
Dicker, LAC	33-36	39-42	59	150	McLaughlin, TB	54/56	30/32	56	144		
AFC team statistics						NFC team statistics					
AVERAGE PER GAME OFFENSE						AVERAGE PER GAME OFFENSE					
	Yards	Rush	Pass				Yards	Rush	Pass		
Baltimore	424.9	187.6	237.4			Detroit	409.5	146.4	263.2		
Cincinnati	365.5	92.6	272.9			Tampa Bay	399.6	149.2	250.4		
Buffalo	359.1	131.2	227.9			San Francisco	376.3	127.2	249.1		
Indianapolis	334.8	137.1	197.7			Green Bay	370.8	146.8	223.9		
Kansas City	327.6	105.3	222.4			Atlanta	369.8	130.5	239.3		
Miami	325.4	105.6	219.8			Washington	369.6	154.1	215.6		
Denver	324.6	112.2	212.4			Philadelphia	367.2	179.3	187.9		
L.A. Chargers	324.2	110.7	213.5			Arizona	358.2	144.2	214.1		
Houston	319.7	112.3	207.4			Minnesota	346.9	109.1	237.8		
Pittsburgh	319.4	127.4	192.0			Seattle	332.2	95.7	236.5		
N.Y. Jets	310.3	91.8	218.5			L.A. Rams	331.4	103.8	227.5		
Jacksonville	306.2	101.7	204.5			Dallas	327.5	100.3	227.2		
Tennessee	304.2	109.1	195.1			New Orleans	320.1	114.9	205.2		
Las Vegas	303.2	79.8	223.4			Carolina	298.0	110.5	187.5		
Cleveland	300.8	94.6	206.2			N.Y. Giants	294.8	104.9	189.9		
New England	292.0	115.8	176.2			Chicago	283.5	102.0	181.5		
DEFENSE						DEFENSE					
	Yards	Rush	Pass				Yards	Rush	Pass		
Tennessee	311.2	133.9	177.3			Philadelphia	278.4	104.2	174.2		
N.Y. Jets	313.8	121.1	192.6			Green Bay	314.5	99.4	215.2		
Miami	314.4	103.7	210.7			San Francisco	317.4	124.6	192.8		
Houston	315.0	114.0	201.0			Washington	326.9	137.5	189.5		
Denver	317.1	96.4	220.7			Seattle	332.7	120.8	211.9		
Kansas City	320.6	101.8	218.8			Minnesota	335.4	93.4	242.0		
Baltimore	324.2	80.1	244.1			Tampa Bay	341.8	97.8	243.9		
L.A. Chargers	324.4	117.5	206.9			Detroit	342.4	98.4	244.0		
Pittsburgh	326.7	98.7	228.0			Arizona	342.5	126.4	216.1		
Las Vegas	333.1	116.9	216.2			Atlanta	345.2	120.6	224.5		
Buffalo	341.5	115.5	226.1			N.Y. Giants	346.8	136.2	210.6		
Cleveland	342.1	129.7	212.4			L.A. Rams	353.1	130.0	223.1		
New England	342.9	131.4	211.5			Chicago	354.2	136.3	217.9		
Cincinnati	348.3	124.8	223.5			Dallas	355.2	137.1	218.1		
Indianapolis	361.2	131.8	229.4			New Orleans	379.9	141.4	238.5		
Jacksonville	389.9	132.6	257.4			Carolina	404.5	179.8	224.7		



GENEVA HEFFERNAN/AP

Denver Broncos wide receiver Courtland Sutton celebrates after catching a pass against the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday. Sutton reached the playoffs for the first time and earned a \$500,000 bonus.

BEHIND THE CALL

For players, incentives went beyond playoffs, draft order

By ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

DENVER — It’s not about the money until it is.

The final weekend of the NFL regular season brought the usual intrigue over which teams would clinch the final playoff spots — the Buccaneers and Broncos — and who would get the No. 1 overall draft pick — the Titans — presumably to choose between Colorado QB Shedeur Sanders and his teammate, Heisman Trophy-winning, two-way star Travis Hunter, in the NFL draft in Green Bay.

Then, there were the smattering of money-packed milestones for some players who were within reach of lucrative contract incentives in Week 18.

Tampa Bay receiver Mike Evans had the most at stake. He needed five catches totaling 85 yards for an extra \$3 million, which is one reason Baker Mayfield didn’t just take a knee when the Bucs got the ball back with 36 seconds left up 27-19 on the Saints with Evans sitting at eight receptions for 80 yards.

That put his season total at 995 yards, threatening to end his streak of 10 consecutive 1,000-yard seasons.

So Mayfield threw to Evans, whose 9-yard reception on the final play of the game allowed him to surpass the 1,000-yard mark for the 11th straight season, tying Jerry Rice for the most ever in the NFL and setting off a wild celebration by teammates glad he got a piece of history and that big bonus.

Seattle quarterback Geno Smith needed 185 yards passing against

the Rams on Sunday to claim a \$2 million bonus, and he threw for 223 yards and four touchdowns in Seattle’s 30-25 victory.

And Buffalo pass rusher Von Miller’s sack of Drake Maye on Sunday was his sixth of the year, good for a \$1.5 million bonus.

Baltimore running back Derrick Henry needed one touchdown against Cleveland to earn a \$500,000 bonus, and he scored twice in the final seven minutes of the Ravens’ rout of the Browns.

Denver wide receiver Courtland Sutton needed 82 yards receiving against Kansas City for a \$500,000 bonus, and he got 98 yards on five catches in the Broncos’ 38-0 white-wash of the Chiefs’ backups.

“Today, with you know, trying to keep track of some of those bonuses, those are good problems,” coach Sean Payton said after leading Denver into the playoffs in his second season with the Broncos. “It’s hard to keep track of yards, catches are easy. Sutton needed 82 yards.”

In that game, three-time All-Pro wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins, who was acquired by Kansas City in a midseason trade with Tennessee, had \$1 million worth of bonuses that would have been triggered by catching nine passes (\$250,000), for 140 yards (\$250,000) and a touchdown (\$500,000).

“We want the guys to be able to reach them if they’re reachable,” Chiefs coach Andy Reid said.

But Reid decided it was better to hold Hopkins out along with the other starters so they could rest up for the playoffs.

Among others who fell short

were Cardinals QB Kyler Murray, who threw four TD passes in leading Arizona over the 49ers, but he needed to run for 50 yards and a touchdown for a \$750,000 bonus. He ran for 22 yards and no TDs.

Commanders tight end Zach Ertz stood to earn an extra \$250,000 each for reaching 90 yards receiving and two TD catches Sunday, and had 44 yards and one TD catch.

Payton recalled when Emmanuel Sanders approached him on the eve of the season finale when they were both in New Orleans.

“When Emmanuel Sanders needed six or seven catches in New Orleans, he came up to me and I said, ‘Look, I already know why you’re here,’ I said, ‘You’ll have six catches before the end of the first quarter, but you’re staying in the game,’ and I think he had like, nine or 10 catches,” Payton said. “But yards are different, some of those things are different, and I want all of them to realize all those things they earned.”

More than securing his bonus, Sutton was elated to clinch his first trip to the playoffs in his seven-year career in Denver.

“Through those dark times, through those seasons where we were playing the last three, four games of the season without playoff contention, those are those times where you have to lean on faith,” Sutton said. “You have to understand that the picture is going to get bigger and better in the long haul. You just have to continue to have that faith that it’s going to get there.”

That bonus was, well, a bonus.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

TOP 25 THIS WEEK

Dominant SEC teams now start to beat each other

By Dave Skretta
Associated Press

The SEC spent the first couple weeks of the men's college basketball season beating up on the rest of the nation, and the result was No. 1 Tennessee and second-ranked Auburn leading nine teams from the league into this week's AP Top 25.

Now, after opening up conference play last weekend, they begin to beat each other up in earnest.

The Vols hit the road to face eighth-ranked Florida on Tuesday, the same night sixth-ranked Kentucky headed to Georgia, which is among three more SEC teams receiving votes in the poll. On Wednesday, it is No. 23 Ole Miss visiting Arkansas — which just fell out this week following a lopsided loss to Tennessee — and No. 10 Texas A&M visiting No. 17 Oklahoma.

Then comes what can only be described as Super Saturday: Among other games, the Vols head to Texas, No. 5 Alabama visits the Aggies, sixth-ranked Kentucky travels to No. 14 Mississippi State, the Gators head to Arkansas and Oklahoma visits Georgia.

"In this league, every game you're going to play is going to be a hard game. Every one," said Arkansas coach John Calipari, whose team was whipped 76-52 by Tennessee on Saturday, the first of three straight it will have against ranked SEC foes.

Alabama plays four of its first five conference games against teams in the Top 25. So do Kentucky and Texas A&M.

Auburn gets a relatively mild start to conference play by opening against Missouri, Texas and

South Carolina. But the Tigers will make up for it later with three straight Top 25 games to start February and four in a row to wrap up the league race.

"We're good enough to win every game on the road. We're good enough to lose every game at home. That's how good the league is," said Auburn coach Bruce Pearl, who earned his 213th win on the Plains with the win over Missouri on Saturday, and who can break a tie with Joel Eaves for the most in program history by beating the Longhorns on Tuesday night.

The Tigers have won seven straight against SEC opponents dating to last season.

"Honestly, nobody enjoys winning more than me. Nobody hates losing more than me. I'm a really bad loser," Pearl added. "But you know me. You have to know I'm on to Texas, on to the next one. The only thing I'd rather do on (discussing the record) is talk about Joel Eaves, or some of the great coaches I get to join because I'm the coach at Auburn right now."

One thing is certain: As SEC teams begin to fight amongst themselves, some winning streaks are bound to end.

The Vols (14-0) can match the second-longest streak in school history by beating the Gators, trailing only a 19-game run during the 2018-19 season. The Aggies (12-2) have won eight in a row since their loss to No. 15 Oregon, tied for the fourth-longest streak in men's Division I basketball. Mississippi State and Vanderbilt, both 13-1 and among the biggest surprises so far this season, have won their last

seven apiece, while Auburn and Alabama are riding six-game winning streaks.

"We're in it now," Crimson Tide coach Nate Oats said simply. "We're in SEC play."

Big 12 battles

While the SEC has established itself as the preeminent league this year with three in the top 5 and six in the top 10, the Big 12 — which has long been considered the nation's toughest basketball conference — continues to produce marquee teams.

Iowa State (13-1) has won nine straight since its 83-81 loss to Auburn at the Maui Invitational, while No. 11 Kansas showed why it was the preseason No. 1 by following a last-second loss to West Virginia with a record-setting rout of UCF last weekend.

The Jayhawks play Arizona State on Wednesday night before heading to Cincinnati.

Mid-major markers

No. 18 Gonzaga takes on San Diego on Wednesday night before facing Washington State and Oregon State, who joined the West Coast Conference when the Pac-12 fell apart. The Cougars are 13-3 and have won their first three games in their new league, and the Beavers are 12-4 with two of those losses to Oregon and Nebraska.

Memphis, which climbed two spots to No. 19, plays East Carolina on Saturday in its only American Athletic Conference game of the week. No. 25 Utah State puts its new ranking on the line with games against San Jose State and Boise State.



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

North Dakota State quarterback Cam Miller reacts after running back CharMar Brown scored against Montana State during the second half of the FCS Championship game Monday in Frisco, Texas.

North Dakota State wins 10th FCS title

By Stephen Hawkins
Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Cam Miller ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more in his 54th consecutive start as North Dakota State's quarterback, and the Bison won their record 10th Football Championship Subdivision title, beating top-seeded and previously undefeated Montana State 35-32 on Monday night.

North Dakota State (14-2) made the trip from Fargo to Frisco for the 11th time in 14 seasons. Its previous title there was three years ago, in a game that also had Miller and the Bobcats' Tommy Mellott as the starting quarterbacks.

Miller completed 19 of 22 passes for 199 yards and ran 18 times for 121 yards to win his 45th game (out of 56 starts) and his second national title.

"Cam Miller was the best quarterback on the football field today. There was no doubt about it," said first-year NDSU coach Tim Polasek, who was an assistant for the Bison's first two titles in Frisco at the end of the 2011 and 2012 seasons. "Tommy's a good football player, there's no question about that either. But all year long, these guys have answered the bell with complimentary football."

Montana native Mellott had a 44-yard touchdown run that got the Bobcats (15-1) within 28-25 early in the fourth quarter. He won the Walter Payton Award this season as the FCS' top offensive player in a close vote over Miller.

Mellott ran for 135 yards on 14 carries and was 13-for-24 passing for 195 yards and two touchdowns. He threw a 19-yarder to Taco Dowler with 1:09 left before an unsuccessful onside kick attempt.

"Our offense was a little bit stagnant there in the first half un-

fortunately and we came up short because of it," Mellott said. "Guys kept fighting, it's very easy 21-3 to quit ... and we came back out there and we had a group of guys that fought for this team, fought for the seniors."

NDSU never trailed after Miller capped the game's opening drive that took more than seven minutes with a 2-yard plunge. Miller had an empty backfield behind him on their second possession when he got the snap and sprinted 64 yards untouched up the middle for another touchdown.

"It was a draw play with an option to pass as well ... they played the perfect front and the perfect coverage for it for us. It just parted," Miller said. "It didn't feel real honestly. Usually when we run draws, you've got to make a few guys miss. And there was nobody there."

Miller threw a 1-yard TD to Bryce Lance right before halftime for a 21-3 lead. Lance's FCS-best 17th TD came one play after a catch near the front pylon when he was ruled out of bounds inside the 1 after a replay review. He is the younger brother of former Bisons quarterback Trey Lance, who made his first start for the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday before attending the FCS title game.

Bryce Lance, who finished with nine catches for 107 yards, had a diving 38-yard reception on the final play of the third quarter to set up Miller's 1-yard TD pass to Joe Stoffel to restore a 10-point lead.

"The way the game played out, they played better than us and, you know, ultimately put ourselves in a big hole," said Montana State coach Brent Vigen, a former NDSU player and assistant coach. "Obviously this is a low point ... having 15 victories and you can't finish it off."



WADE PAYNE/AP

Tennessee guard Zakai Zeigler, left, drives for a shot past Arkansas forward Jonas Aidoo during the first half Saturday in Knoxville, Tenn. The No. 1 Vols are one of three SEC teams in the nation's top 5.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Final four a collection of big programs

By EDDIE PELLs
Associated Press

In the first round of the College Football Playoff, the teams seeded 5-8 all won. In the second round, they all won again.

The moral of this story: who knows, other than something doesn't totally add up when not a single one of the top four teams, all of which received the advantage of a first-round bye, advances into college football's final four.

The semifinals are set: Thursday in the Orange Bowl, it will be No. 6 Penn State vs. No. 7 Notre Dame. Then, Friday in the Cotton Bowl, it will be No. 5 Texas vs. No. 8 Ohio State.

Appropriately enough considering the way the second round played out, it's the team with the worst seed, the Buckeyes, that are now the favorite—and fairly overwhelmingly at that—listed at 11-10 to win it all by the BetMGM Sportsbook.

These matchups ensure that a team with a long pedigree and a big name will carry the championship trophy when the first 12-team playoff concludes in Atlanta on Jan. 20.

The Penn State-Notre Dame matchup also guarantees either James Franklin or Marcus Freeman will have a chance to become the first Black coach to win the title at college football's highest level.

One thing this expanded tournament could still use: a well-played, truly great football game. Other than the two-overtime win by Texas over Arizona State, all these playoff games have been double-digit snoozefests.

A quick look at the four contenders.

No. 5 Texas (13-2)

The Story: The Longhorns are 0-2 against Georgia and don't have to worry about the Dawgs anymore. They are 13-0 against the rest of the country.

The Player: Receiver Matthew Golden had seven catches for 149 yards, a touchdown and a key two-point conversion in the second overtime in the win over Arizona State to help erase a lot of questionable stuff by his quarterback, Quinn Ewers.

Money Matters: The On3 NIL tracker has Arch Manning — nephew of Peyton and Eli — leading the country at \$6.6 million in earnings. Not bad for a backup quarterback, though Manning stepped in capably, starting two games in place of the injured Ewers in September to guide the Longhorns to wins.

History's Mysteries: The program with the third-most bowl appearances hasn't won a national title since 2005.



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith scores a touchdown against Oregon defensive back Kobe Savage in the Rose Bowl. Smith has 290 yards and four touchdowns in two playoff games.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP

Penn State tight end Tyler Warren pulls in a pass for a touchdown as Boise State safety Ty Benefield defends in the Fiesta Bowl. Two of Warren's six catches in the game went for touchdowns.

He said it: "We're not in awe that, 'Hey, this is where we are.' This is where we're supposed to be." — Coach Steve Sarkisian after the Arizona State win.

No. 6 Penn State (13-2)

The Story: After a loss to Oregon in the Big Ten title game, Franklin's record against teams in

the AP Top 10 dropped to 3-19. Oregon isn't playing anymore, Ohio State is and Franklin's record against the Buckeyes is 1-10.

The Player: Tyler Warren might have played himself into the top tight end on the NFL draft board this season. In the 31-14 win over Boise State, two of his six catches were for touchdowns.

Money Matters: Quarterback Drew Allar makes around \$4 million. He has committed to returning for his senior season, though this strong playoff run might change the calculus.

History's Mysteries: The Nittany Lions and Notre Dame used to be the country's two most notable independents, so it made sense they played every year from 1981-1992. But their only bowl meeting was a little-noticed 20-9 Notre Dame win in the 1976 Gator Bowl.

He said it: "A lot of college coaches I saw this week were talking about, 'This is a four-game season.' It's not. It's a one-game season." — Franklin, after a first-round win over SMU, on the week-to-week nature of the first 12-team college playoff.

No. 7 Notre Dame (13-1)

The Story: When the Irish lost 16-14 at home to Northern Illinois on Sept. 7, Notre Dame's odds of winning the national title ballooned to 100-1. Twelve wins later, including two by double digits in the playoffs, and they are listed at 7-1.

The Player: Let's give this one to a coach. Marty Biagi is in charge of the special teams unit that returned a kickoff for a touchdown, kicked three field goals and baited Georgia into a key offside penalty in the fourth quarter by quickly subbing out its entire punt team for the offense on fourth-and-1.

Money Matters: QB Riley Leonard is thought to be making around \$1 million after his move to the South Bend from Duke.

History's Mysteries: Until Thursday, Notre Dame hadn't



Penn State (13-2)
vs. Notre Dame (13-1)
AFN-Sports
1:40 a.m. Friday CET
9:40 a.m. Friday JKT



Ohio State (12-2)
vs. Texas (13-2)
AFN-Sports
1:40 a.m. Saturday CET
9:40 a.m. Saturday JKT

won a big-time bowl game since Jan. 1, 1994, when it beat Texas A&M in the Cotton Bowl. The program that gave us everyone from The Gipper to Joe Montana seeks its first title since 1988.

He said it: "We've been here before. Now it's time to get it fixed. We've got to get it fixed and get back to playing football the way we know how to play, we've played before, and we can, and we will." — Freeman after the Sept. 7 loss to Northern Illinois.

No. 8 Ohio State (12-2)

The Story: After punctuating a fourth straight loss to Michigan by standing on the field looking lost while the Wolverines triggered a melee by planting the team flag at the 50-yard line, there was good reason to think coach Ryan Day could only keep his job by somehow rallying to win a national title that felt unlikely.

The Player: WR Jeremiah Smith has 290 yards and four touchdowns in the playoffs. He cradled in a pair of one-handed catches in an early season win over Michigan State that put the label "playmaker" all over this highly touted freshman.

Money Matters: Smith is thought to have around \$3.7 million in NIL deals.

History's Mysteries: With Urban Meyer coaching, Ohio State won the CFP's first playoff, the four-team affair that closed out the 2014 season. Since then, the Buckeyes are 3-4 over five playoff appearances.

He said it: "At the end of the day, we wanted to win a national championship, and the way that we got here wasn't what we expected." — Day after the win over Oregon.

SPORTS



Double digits
QB Miller leads North Dakota State to 10th FCS championship » College football, Page 22

NBA



Kyle Phillips, left, and Sue Ogrocki, right/AP

Guards Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Donovan Mitchell have helped lead the Oklahoma City Thunder and Cleveland Cavaliers, respectively, to the best records in the NBA.

Basketball's best collide

Thunder-Cavaliers matchup is historic clash of teams on winning streaks

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

Best in the Eastern Conference. Best in the Western Conference. The best shooting team in the NBA vs. the best defensive team in the NBA. A matchup like only two others in league history. Clear the calendar for Wednesday night, when Oklahoma City goes to Cleveland. Technically, any game between an East team and a West team is a potential NBA Finals preview — but this one especially deserves that billing. A Thunder team on a

15-game winning streak, taking on a Cavaliers team on a 10-game winning streak (after having its own 15-game streak earlier this season). “Every game is a challenge, and every game is an opportunity to get better,” Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said. “There’s a different challenge every single night in the NBA season. Every game tests you in different ways.” He’s not wrong. But his team is 30-5. Cleveland is an NBA-best 31-4. Combined, that’s 61-9. Every game might test these teams, sure, but the Thunder and Cavs are

passing just about every one of those tests with flying colors. “We expect to win every game,” Cleveland guard Donovan Mitchell said. He laughed when he said that. The thing is, he might not have been joking around. And Oklahoma City, less than three years removed from going 24-58, should probably be expecting to win every time it takes the floor as well. “It’s cool,” Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander said. “I try not to think about where we were or where we’re going and just stay in the moment.”

These teams — the first game of an ESPN doubleheader Wednesday, one with Giannis Antetokounmpo and Milwaukee taking on Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio in the nightcap — are truly a clash in styles. They’re the best in just about everything. The Cavs lead the NBA in field-goal percentage (.504). Oklahoma City leads the NBA in field-goal percentage defense (.426). Cleveland is second in the league in points per game (122.5). The Thunder lead the league in points allowed per game (103.0). The

Cavs lead the league in 3-point percentage (.404). Oklahoma City — you guessed it — leads the league in 3-point percentage defense (.327). There’s still a long way to go this season. It’s not even half over. But Cleveland has a big lead over Boston in the East and the Thunder are running away with the West. Barring all-out collapses over the next month, it’ll be Daigneault, Cavs coach Kenny Atkinson and their staffs heading to San Francisco to coach in the All-Star **SEE COLLIDE ON PAGE 20**

Sabres snap skid with SO win against Caps » NHL, Page 20

