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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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50¢/Free to Deployed Areas

## Thousands flee as Calif. wildfires burn out of control

BY JAIMIE DING,  
CHRISTOPHER WEBER  
AND JULIE WATSON  
*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Multiple massive wildfires tore across the Los Angeles area with devastating force early Wednesday, destroying more than 1,000 structures and killing at least two people as desperate residents escaped through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke.

At least four separate blazes were burning in the metropolitan area, from the Pacific Coast inland to Pasadena, home of the famed Rose Parade. With thousands of firefighters already attacking the flames, the Los Angeles Fire Department put out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help, and weather conditions were too windy for firefighting aircraft to fly, further hampering the fight. Fire officials hoped to get the flights up later Wednesday.

In addition to the two deaths, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said many others were hurt in the fires, which threatened at least 28,000 struc-

SEE WILDFIRES ON PAGE 10



ETHAN SWOPE/AP

Residents of a senior center are evacuated ahead of the Eaton Fire Tuesday in Altadena, Calif.



BENJAMIN WISEMAN/U.S. Air Force

Airmen conduct engine runs on an F-35A Lightning II aircraft on the ramp at Thule Air Base, Greenland, in 2023. President-elect Donald Trump has said that the U.S. must take possession of Greenland for national security reasons.

# Greenland envy

Why the territory and High North have had the Pentagon's growing attention for years

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — President-elect Donald Trump's assertion this week that the United States must take possession of Greenland cast a spotlight upon U.S. military operations on the landmass, as the Arctic ice thins and competition with Russia and China grows.

Since the 1940s, the Pentagon has valued Greenland, which serves as a gateway to the Arctic.

During the Cold War, the military had more than 10,000 troops in its territory, which hosts Pituffik Space Base, formerly known as Thule Air Base.

Today, the nuclear armed long-range bombers that were part of the original Cold War force are gone. But a ballistic missile early warning mission carries on. About 200 active-duty U.S. Air Force and Space Force personnel are part of that effort, which entails monitoring orbiting satellites for signs of

RELATED

Trump calls for 5% of GDP from NATO nations for defense

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attack.

Trump, during a news conference Tuesday, rattled some allies when he refused to rule out the possibility of seizing Greenland,

an autonomous territory of NATO member Denmark, by force.

"I'm not going to commit to that," Trump said after being asked if he would reject the notion of using military or economic coercion to control Greenland.

"We need Greenland for national security purposes," he added.

How Trump's public pressuring will play out isn't clear, but his emphasis on Greenland's value to

SEE GREENLAND ON PAGE 7



BUSINESS/WEATHER

Meta cuts fact-checking, moving a team to Texas

Associated Press

Meta chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg on Tuesday announced changes to content moderation on Facebook and Instagram long sought by conservatives. The move to replace third-party fact-checking with user-written "community notes" similar to those on social platform X comes on the four-year anniversary of Zuckerberg banning Donald Trump from his platforms after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Zuckerberg has been a target of Trump and his allies since he donated \$400 million to help local officials run the 2020 election during the coronavirus pandemic. Those donations became part of a false narrative that the 2020 election was rigged against Trump, although there has never been any evidence of widespread fraud or problems that would have changed that result. Zuckerberg released a video Tuesday using some of the language that conservatives have long

used to criticize his platforms, saying it was time to prioritize "free expression" and that fact-checkers had become "politically biased." Zuckerberg is moving Meta's content moderation team from California to Texas, and lifting restrictions on some immigration and gender discussions. Meta began fact checks in December 2016. For years, the tech giant boasted it was working with more than 100 organizations in over 60 languages to combat misinformation.

EXCHANGE RATES

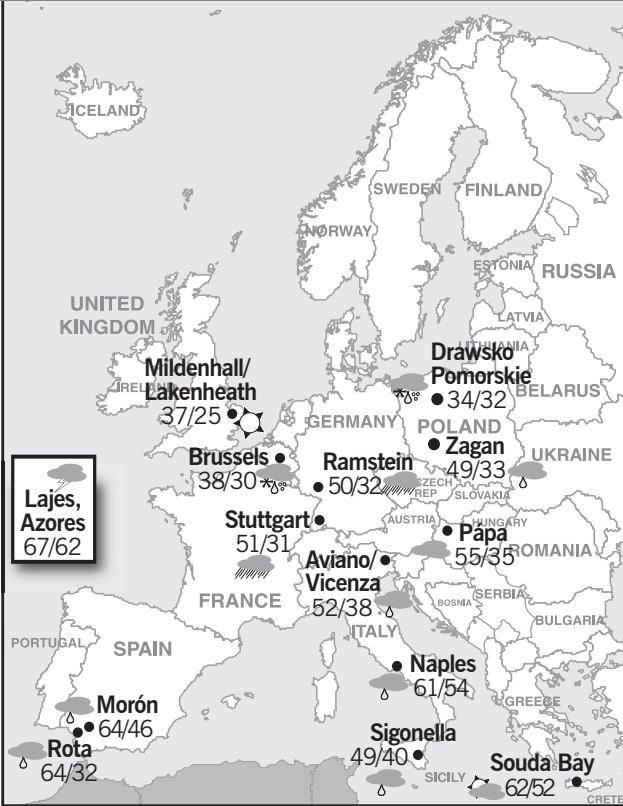
Military rates			
Euro costs (Jan. 9)	0.95	Switzerland (Franc)	.9110
British pound (Jan. 9)	\$1.21	Thailand (Baht)	34.69
Japanese yen (Jan. 9)	154.00	Turkey (NewLira)	35.3682
South Korean won (Jan. 9)	1413.00		
Commercial rates			
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3769	<p>(Military exchange rates are those available 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>	
Britain (Pound)	.8112		
Canada (Dollar)	1.4405		
China(Yuan)	7.3317		
Denmark (Krone)	7.2480		
Egypt (Pound)	50.5804		
Euro	.9713		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7799		
Hungary (Forint)	403.06		
Israel (Shekel)	3.6716		
Japan (Yen)	158.35		
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3083		
Norway (Krone)	11.4114	Prime rate	7.50
Philippines (Peso)	58.57	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Poland (Zloty)	4.15	Federal funds market rate	4.33
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7537	3-month bill	4.31
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3697	30-year bond	4.91
South Korea (Won)	1464.13		

WEATHER OUTLOOK

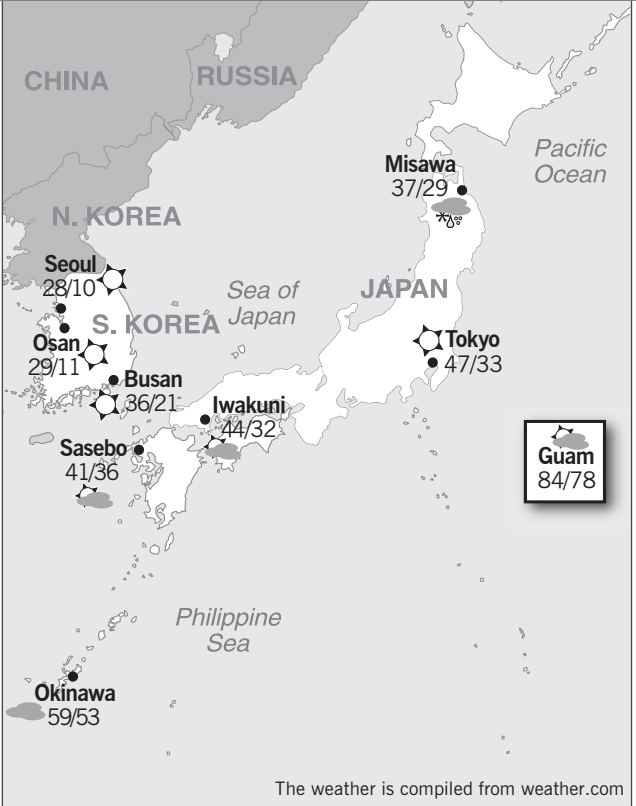
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THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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## MILITARY



MATT McCLAIN/The Washington Post

**Pete Hegseth, center, President-elect Donald Trump's choice for defense secretary, exits an elevator at the U.S. Capitol after meeting with senators in December.**

## Sen. Warren presses Hegseth to answer questions about his past

By TARA COPP  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Elizabeth Warren is pressing Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for defense secretary, to answer additional questions about his past actions and statements before next Tuesday's confirmation hearing.

In a letter to Hegseth sent Monday, the Massachusetts Democrat asked the former Fox News host and Army veteran to respond no later than Friday to questions on allegations of past drinking, sexual assault and mismanagement of veterans organization finances — all of which he denies. She also wants to know about statements he's made concerning minorities, women and LGBTQ people serving in the military.

Hegseth has the support of some veterans groups that believe

the military has overemphasized diversity at the cost of troop readiness. A group of former Navy SEALs is planning a rally in support of Hegseth in Washington next week.



Warren

“One of the biggest flaws in current leadership in the military and in the Pentagon is when you become more focused on things that don't matter,” said Bill Brown, a former SEAL who is organizing Tuesday's rally. “The military is not a social justice project.”

Hegseth's supporters have stressed that many of the questions about his past behavior arose from reports based on anonymous sources. But some relate to things

he's said in interviews or written in his books.

In “War on Warriors,” Hegseth wrote that Gen. CQ Brown's promotion to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff meant that “with the Pentagon now run by, and fully staffed by, so-called ‘leaders’ like CQ Brown, we can assume that 17 percent of all black officers in the Air Force are simply promoted because of how they look — and not how they lead.”

Hegseth also has openly criticized the role of women in combat, although in meetings with senators, he seemed to walk back some of those views.

Warren questioned if Hegseth would be able to lead, saying she was “deeply concerned by the many ways in which your past behavior and rhetoric indicates that you are unfit to lead the Department of Defense.”

# Court asked to block plea deal for 9/11 plotter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration asked a federal appeals court on Tuesday to block a plea agreement for accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed that would spare him the risk of the death penalty in one of the deadliest attacks ever on the United States.

The Justice Department argued in a brief filed with a federal appeals court in the District of Columbia that the government would be irreparably harmed if the guilty pleas were accepted for Mohammed and two co-defendants in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

It said the government would be denied a chance for a public trial and the opportunity to “seek capital punishment against three men charged with a heinous act of mass murder that caused the death of thousands of people and shocked the nation and the world.”

The Defense Department negotiated and approved the plea deal but later repudiated it. Attorneys for the defendants argue the deal is already legally in effect and that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who began the administration's efforts to throw it out, acted too late.

When the appeal was filed Tuesday, family members of some the nearly 3,000 people killed in the al-Qaida attacks already were gathered at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to hear Mohammed's scheduled guilty plea Friday. The other two men, accused of lesser roles in 9/11,

were due to enter them next week.

Family members have been split on the deal, with some calling it the best resolution possible for a prosecution mired for more than a decade in pretrial hearings and legal and logistical difficulties. Others demanded a trial and — they hoped — execution.

Some legal experts have warned that the legal challenges posed by the case, including the men's torture under CIA custody after their capture, could keep the aging detainees from ever facing verdicts and any possible sentences.

Military prosecutors this summer notified families of the victims that the senior Pentagon official overseeing Guantanamo had approved a plea deal after more than two years of negotiations. The deal was “the best path to finality and justice,” military prosecutors said.

But some family members and Republican lawmakers condemned the deal and the Biden administration for reaching it.

Austin has fought unsuccessfully since August to throw out the agreement, saying that a decision on death penalties in an attack as grave as the Sept. 11 plot should only be made by the defense secretary.

A military judge at Guantanamo and a military appeals panel rejected those efforts, saying he had no power to throw out the agreement after it had been approved by the senior Pentagon official for Guantanamo.

## Settlement to restore benefits for vets discharged for sexual orientation

By LINDA F. HERSEY  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has reached a class-action settlement with more than 35,000 LGBTQ+ veterans who claimed they were wrongfully discharged from military duty and denied benefits because of their sexual orientation.

The proposed settlement, which requires approval from a judge, will enable veterans who received other-than-honorable discharges to upgrade their status and request to have their benefits restored, according to court documents.

A court decision is expected within 90 days, according to the plaintiffs' attorneys. The Defense

Department indicated in court papers filed in U.S. District Court in the North District of California that it will not oppose approval of the settlement.

The settlement filed Monday in federal district court in San Francisco makes it easier and faster for veterans to have discharge papers changed to remove references to sexual orientation and ease access to health care, loans and tuition assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to court documents.

The military officially stopped banning people who are gay or lesbian from military service with the repeal of the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy in 2011. The policy had

prohibited service members from openly discussing or disclosing their sexual orientation without risk of discrimination and discharge, according to court papers.

About 30,000 of the 35,000 veterans discharged because of their sexual orientation received other-than-honorable discharges.

“The pain and injustice of being discharged under discriminatory policies like ‘Don't Ask, Don't Tell’ have lingered for years,” said Jules Sohn, a 46-year-old former Marine Corps captain from California who is among five plaintiffs named in the original claim filed in 2023.

Sohn, who served in Iraq, was involuntarily discharged from military service in 2008, after she be-

gan speaking out against “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policies, according to court documents.

Veterans who received other-than-honorable discharges were precluded from receiving benefits from the VA unless they could prove “mitigating circumstances” before a discharge review board.

Terms of the proposed settlement enable LGBTQ+ veterans to make an administrative request to have their discharges upgraded to honorable starting in mid-2025 without petitioning the Defense Department, according to court documents.

The class-action lawsuit was filed on behalf of veterans discharged from the armed forces be-

cause they were LGBTQ+ — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, nonbinary and intersex.

Veterans will be able to forgo a lengthy appeal before a military discharge review board. The proposed process for upgrading a discharge to honorable under the settlement will allow veterans to opt in for a group review.

“The settlement is fair, reasonable, adequate and an excellent outcome for LGBTQ+ veterans who have endured ongoing injury resulting from violations of their constitutional rights,” said Lori Rifkin, an attorney with Impact Fund, a legal foundation representing the plaintiffs.



MILITARY

# Health care help program starts in Japan

Test aims to connect DOD civilians with local providers without paying upfront service fees

**By SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A pilot program aimed at helping Department of Defense civilian employees find health care from Japanese providers is up and running, according to the DOD.

The program, which aims to connect the civilians with local health care providers without paying large, upfront service fees, among other advantages, began Jan. 1, according to a fact sheet emailed to employees Wednesday by the U.S. Army Civilian Human Resources Agency.

The program complements

existing health insurance coverage for eligible DOD employees. Eligible civilian employees in Japan can call 03-3560-8185, toll-free at 0120-983-990, or email [DODHealthcareSupport@internationalsos.com](mailto:DODHealthcareSupport@internationalsos.com) for 24/7 healthcare navigation support provided by the program.

A call center includes bilingual staff and nurses to help participants find health care providers, make appointments, secure direct billing and establish reimbursement procedures, according to the fact sheet.

The \$4.2 million, DOD-funded program is administered by International SOS Government Services Inc., the primary con-

tractor for the Tricare Overseas Program, the DOD health care plan for service members, their dependents and retirees.

Participating federal employee health benefit plans include: Federal Blue Cross Blue Shield; Foreign Service Benefit Plan; Hawaii Medical Service Association; Government Employees Health Association; and Mail Handlers Benefit Plan.

Non-appropriated fund employees in Japan are eligible for the services under the pilot program if they have elected coverage with Aetna International, according to the fact sheet.

The Defense Health Agency in 2022 reduced civilian em-

ployees' access to on-base health care facilities, saying federal law prioritizes service members' care at those sites.

The agency limited those employees to space-available appointments at military facilities and directed them instead to seek medical care in the local area.

DOD employees in response cited language barriers, time constraints and incidents of being refused service at Japanese hospitals and having to pay large bills upfront for service.

The human resources agency said the pilot program aims to streamline health care for DOD employees in Japan.

"These financial services will mitigate the burden of civilian employees paying upfront for care and locating a provider on their own," the fact sheet states.

Employees' dependents and contractors, however, are not eligible for the pilot program that runs until Sept. 29.

Monthly monitoring will begin in February to "test the feasibility and demand" for the program services, DOD spokesman Joshua Wick told Stars and Stripes in a Nov. 15 email.

At the time, Wick said it was "too early to speculate on future plans," including whether dependents or DOD contractors will be able to use the service.

## Failing concrete forcing moves

**By BRIAN McELHINEY**  
*Stars and Stripes*

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — Failing concrete in housing units has prompted the 18th Wing to move one family from its home and notify several others they must relocate by June 30.

The wing announced in December that the 18th Civil Engineer Group had found spalling concrete in several units at the Seville Manor housing area near Bob Hope Elementary School.

Spalling refers to cracking and delaminating steel-reinforced concrete.



The 18th Civil Engineer Group has found spalling concrete in several units at the Seville Manor housing area on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa.

One occupied home was identified as at high risk for spalling, and the family has been relocated, the wing wrote in an unsigned email Tuesday.

The wing defined high risk to include significant spalls in which "damage to the drop ceiling has occurred, or spalls have significantly delaminated, are separating from the roof slab and are expected to fall."

The wing declined to identify the family, the building in which they were living or when or where they were relocated.

Families in an unspecified number of homes with moderate-risk spalling — minor spalling with no damage to the drop ceiling or "early signs of delamination from the concrete slab" — will be moved by June 30, the

email stated.

The wing identified spalling in 32 quadplexes — 128 homes in total — at Seville Manor, according to a Facebook post on Dec. 19.

The affected buildings are 5437-5441, 5500-5507, 5510-5515, 5517, 5520, 5540, 5541, 5543, 5545, 5547 and 5549-5554, according to a Tuesday post on Kadena's official Facebook page.

Not all units in those buildings have been affected by spalling and no injuries have been reported, the email stated. The civil engineer group contacted residents via updated letters "detailing the situation and the inspection process."

Spalling is caused by pressure under the surface of the concrete, and most often occurs due to improperly constructed joints

or corrosion of rebar under the concrete, according to the U.S. General Services Administration.

Of all homes inspected, 81% are at low risk for spalling, meaning that no safety concerns have been observed, the email stated.

The wing declined to identify how many homes are at moderate or high risk for spalling, how many families will have to move or where they will move.

"We are actively working with families in moderate-risk homes to facilitate their relocation," the email stated.

No new families have been moved into the affected buildings since the spalling was discovered, according to the email.

The issue is unrelated to mold caused by leaky air conditioners in 50 recently renovated duplex-

## Army in Japan says missing teen found

**By SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — A missing at-risk teen, spotted leaving a U.S. Army housing area near the Japanese capital early Monday, has been found after a two-day search.

"Our missing person has been safely located," U.S. Army Garrison Japan, headquartered at Camp Zama, wrote Wednesday morning on Facebook.

Tupu Lamar Hawkins, 17, was seen leaving the Sagami-hara Family Housing Area near Zama at 3:16 a.m. Monday.

Someone recognized the missing teen based on information provided to the public, Mark Lunardi, a special agent with the Criminal Investigation Division, told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

"Mr. Hawkins was apparently en route back to the Sagami-hara Housing Area when he was located," he said.

The teen's mother, Tauai-upolu Tupu, thanked the American agents and Japanese police who searched around the clock for her son.

"I'm feeling grateful and thankful to [the] whole community for all the prayers and actively looking out for him," she told Stars and Stripes via Messenger on Wednesday.

Japanese police had combed train stations and other locations for Hawkins.

MILITARY

# Ramstein calls off plan for Frankfurt Airport shuttle

By JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — A Ramstein Air Base proposal for Frankfurt Airport shuttle service was scrapped for lack of bids, ending hopes in the largest U.S. military community overseas for a better option to get to the European hub.

There are no immediate plans to float the offer again, officials with the 86th Airlift Wing said Wednesday, citing the availability of “several other low-cost alternatives in the local area providing a similar service.”

The wing did not immediately respond Wednesday to questions about those alternatives.

Ramstein officials had intended to partner with a commercial shuttle operator by August 2024. A notice on sam.gov, the federal government’s contracting website, proposed shuttle service three times daily, transporting from one to 40 passengers per ride.

“The base-airport shuttle project was solicited as a concessionaire contract,” the wing said in a statement Wednesday. “There were no prospective bidders for the terms of the solicitation.”

Fares on door-to-door commercial airport shuttles, the most convenient option for military members and their families, have skyrocketed since before the COVID-19

pandemic, when adult riders could readily book a spot in a shuttle for 40 euros per person each way.

Since the pandemic, several local shuttle services require that single riders rent the entire shuttle for 200 euros each way, if they can’t find others to share the shuttle themselves.

Faced with a 400-euro round trip, some Americans have taken to social media pages seeking a ride with an offer to share gas money. Posts often solicit suggestions of other cheaper but less convenient ways to get to the airport.

Flix offers inexpensive bus service three times a day from Kaiserslautern’s main train station, which was a 30-minute ride away from Ramstein through highway traffic Wednesday afternoon. But the buses this week leave at 5:40 a.m., 11:45 a.m. and 10:35 p.m., which is inconvenient for many travelers.

Various parking options near the airport, some of which are outdoors and require a shorter bus ride to the terminals, cost anywhere from 50 euros to 269 euros for a week, according to a German parking comparison website. Drivers will need to factor in gas to cover 150 roundtrip miles.

Other travelers said they have paid about 110 euros for a one-way vehicle rental with drop-off at the airport. Or they’ve used



JARED LOVETT/U.S. Air Force

**A proposal for shuttle service between Ramstein Air Base in Germany and the major European air hub of Frankfurt Airport was shelved because of lack of contractor interest, the base’s 86th Airlift Wing said.**

Deutsche Bahn rail service, which requires longer travel times, train changes and is prone to cancellations because of strikes, maintenance or delays.

A prospective shuttle operator for the Air Force would have been able to determine its own cost for riders, according to the terms in the Ramstein notice.

Other overseas U.S. military bases provide airport shuttle services for leisure travel. In Japan, for example, Yokota Air Base provides two daily buses to and from Narita and Haneda airports in Tokyo. The Narita shuttle is \$40 for passengers ages 13 and up; \$30 for 12 and under. The shuttle to Haneda is \$20 per rider of all ages.

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MILITARY

Army doctor pleads guilty in sex abuse case

**By GARY WARNER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

An Army doctor charged with sexually abusing 41 male patients pleaded guilty Tuesday at the start of his court-martial at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington.

Maj. Michael Stockin, an anesthesiologist and pain management doctor at Madigan Army Medical Center, reached a plea deal that a lawyer representing some of the victims said would result in a sentence of 10 to 14 years in military prison.

"It's three to four months for each of the 41 victims," said Ryan Guilds, an attorney representing seven victims. "There is satisfaction that justice has been done. As

men in the Army, this has been difficult. A lot of guilt, a lot of shame. We have pride in their courage coming forward."

The start of the trial comes nearly three years after the Army pulled Stockin off medical duties with patients following complaints of improper conduct. He arrived at Madigan Army Medical Center in July 2019 and has been restricted to administrative duties since February 2022.

After an 18-month investigation, the Army charged Stockin with sexual abuse crimes in August 2023.

Under the deal, Stockin pleaded guilty to 36 charges of violating Article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the military's

laws. The charges are "abusive sexual contact."

Abusive sexual contact is defined in military law as "touching of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person."

Stockin also pleaded guilty to five charges of "indecent viewing" of disrobed patients under a separate subsection of Article 120.

Stockin's charge sheet said he acted "with intent to arouse and gratify his sexual desire by making a fraudulent representation that the sexual contact served a medical purpose."

According to written statements by victims submitted to the court, they were assigned to Stockin for diagnosis and treat-

ment of issues such as back pain or an arthritic shoulder. In each case, Stockin would wait until he was alone in a room with the patient, tell them to disrobe, and then fondle their genitals.

The Army's Criminal Investigation Division has also sought information on possible misconduct by Stockin at his earlier assignments at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and during a six-month deployment to Iraq. No charges were filed for incidents other than at Lewis-McChord.

Army and defense lawyers confirmed in September that a plea deal had been reached.

Michelle McCaskill, spokeswo-

man for the Army Office of Special Trial Counsel, which is leading the prosecution of Stockin, declined to discuss specifics of the agreement on Tuesday.

In addition to serving time in prison, military law calls for Stockin to be dismissed from the Army — the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge for officers. He would be required to relinquish all benefits and register as a sex offender. As a felon, he could lose the right to vote or own firearms.

At least 22 of Stockin's victims have filed federal claims against the Army, totaling at least \$110 million. The action is the first step in seeking the right to sue the government for civil damages.

Lawsuit blames racial, gender discrimination for contractor's death

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — On the night Stephanie Cosme died, her sister and brother said they received a curt explanation from a U.S. Air Force official who met them at the hospital: The civilian contractor was failing to follow protocol when she was hit by an aircraft's rotating propeller and killed.

The family would wait eight agonizing months to find out more about how the accident unfolded during relatively low-risk ground testing on a MQ-9A Reaper drone at Gray Butte Airfield in California on Sept. 7, 2023. They felt sure there was more to the story than Cosme, a 32-year-old testing engineer who worked for Air Force contractor Sumaria Systems, LLC, simply not following instructions.

A report from the U.S. Air Force Aircraft Accident Investigation Board eventually confirmed their instincts, finding that her trainer rushed the job and improperly instructed Cosme on how to take data readings from the drone, among other contributing factors.

But in a lawsuit filed last month against Sumaria, the family says

they see a darker explanation.

Citing witness testimony from the Air Force investigation, the family contends that Cosme's death was the culmination of a gender and racial discrimination campaign by the testing director, Derek Kirkendall, who they claim had a history of hostility against Hispanic employees at the company.

Saul Ewing, the law firm representing both the company and Kirkendall, said in a statement "the defendants deny any wrongdoing or liability whatsoever," and that they will "address the allegations of the lawsuit in court through the legal process."

The Air Force report, released in April, does not cite racial or gender discrimination as a contributing factor to Cosme's death. But the family's lawyers, Justin Green and Debra Katz, say they are basing their allegations on witness testimony from the Air Force in-



Cosme



ARIEL OSHEA/U.S. Air Force

A U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Reaper on the flight line in 2022 at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii.

vestigation showing that Kirkendall deliberately isolated Cosme on the day of her death, assigned her to dangerous tasks that kept her away from the rest of the team and failed to inform the ground crew of her role. The lawsuit also says Kirkendall, who is named as a defendant in the lawsuit, disparaged her using anti-Hispanic tropes, describing her as "lazy."

The lawsuit also cites a hostile workplace complaint filed against Kirkendall by Cosme's predecessor, who is not named in the filing but is also Latina and quit after raising her concerns. Katz and Green say Kirkendall was subjecting Cosme, who was of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent, to similar abuse, ultimately creating the unsafe conditions that led to her death.

In written testimony submitted to the Air Force investigator, one testing engineer said Kirkendall told him he was "hazing" Cosme by having her stand for hours in the sun by the aircraft for a seemingly unimportant task without any way to communicate with her colleagues back in the control station. The Air Force report said that none of the ground crew knew what Cosme's role was during the testing or that Kirkendall planned to have her approach the aircraft while its propeller was still running.

Kirkendall's treatment of Cosme is typical of the "way gender harassment works when women try to break into male-dominated fields. They make it much more difficult and they often make them feel unsafe," said Katz, a promi-

nent civil rights attorney who concentrates on sexual harassment and discrimination.

"Everybody knows he's hazing her, and this is so endemic to the culture that no one tells him to stop," Katz added. "We felt this suit was really important to name it for what it is. This is gender discrimination that led to somebody's death."

In his testimony to the Air Force investigator, Kirkendall acknowledged that Cosme's predecessor had filed a hostile environment complaint, saying it came as a shock to him because he thought he had "an excellent rapport" with the woman. Kirkendall said Sumaria completed its investigation into her complaint and "concluded that it was unfounded," but that the woman had already quit.

Police on Okinawa accuse another US service member of sex assault

**By BRIAN McELHINEY AND KEISHI KOJA**  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Police on Okinawa suspect a U.S. Marine of sexually assaulting and injuring a woman in November, the fourth such case to surface over the past year.

Okinawa Prefectural Police on Wednesday forwarded the case

against the Marine, in his 30s, to the Naha Public Prosecutors Office, a police spokesman said by phone that day.

The Marine, who was not identified, is suspected of sexually assaulting and injuring a woman older than 20 whom he did not know in a building on Okinawa in November, the spokesman said. The woman reported the incident

to police immediately after it occurred, he added.

Police sent the case to prosecutors after interviewing the woman and the Marine and reviewing footage from security cameras, the spokesman said. He declined to say where the incident took place.

The Marine is in U.S. military custody, he said.

The prosecutors office has received the case from police but hasn't made a decision on charges yet, a spokesman said by phone Wednesday.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

The III Marine Expeditionary Force is "aware of allegations of criminal misconduct against an

Okinawa-based U.S. service member," spokeswoman 1st Lt. Isabel Izquierdo said by email Wednesday. She declined to identify the service member or provide any further information, including his whereabouts.

The case follows three others last year that strained the U.S. military's relationship with Okinawa.



MILITARY



Photos by Stars and Stripes

The Ballistic Missile Early Warning System in Greenland, seen here in 2014, is one of three such installations that keep an eye out for long-range missiles leaving Russia. President-elect Donald Trump has said that the United States must take possession of Greenland for national security reasons.

Greenland: Pentagon has had Arctic, High North high on its radar for years

FROM PAGE 1

the United States suggests that military activities in the Arctic will be getting more attention during his second term.

The High North has taken on added importance in recent years given concerns about Russia’s growing military presence in the Arctic. China also has signaled an intent to play a larger role in the region, declaring itself in 2018 a “near-Arctic country” with vested interests.

Trump alluded to both countries Tuesday, saying that Russian and Chinese vessels navigating waters near Greenland pose a danger.

“You have Chinese ships all over the place. You have Russian ships all over the place. We’re not letting that happen,” Trump said.

Military and civilian ships alike typically have the right to freedom of navigation under international law. There are some restrictions on the actions they may take, particularly for warships, in territorial waters.

The Pentagon has sought to bring more attention to operations in the Arctic and updated its strategy for the region in 2024. But there haven’t been any major force posture adjustments there.

That could change given environmental factors. With melting sea ice, new commercial shipping lanes are opening up that will shorten travel routes between the Far East and northern Europe.

Arctic shipping increased by 37% between 2013 and 2023, according to the Arctic Council, an



The traditional signpost on remote military bases, here at Thule, Greenland in 2014, shows the base is slightly closer to Moscow than Washington.

intergovernmental forum.

The circumstances bring potential access to valuable minerals and oil, which also could be of interest to Trump.

The ice-free part of Greenland also has the potential to be a major source for in-demand rare earth minerals that support a wide range of industries, the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland said in 2023.

There are already indications of the Pentagon stepping up activities in Greenland.

In 2022, the U.S. Air Force awarded a nearly \$4 billion contract to ensure ongoing operations at Pituffik. And in 2023, four Air Force F-35s deployed for the first time at the base to show off the ability to operate in harsh terrain.

In August, the Washington-

based Atlantic Council think tank published an analysis that said the United States should “double down” on the development of Greenland as a cornerstone of its security strategy in the Arctic.

Given China’s overtures to Greenland to develop its mineral resources, “much more needs to be done to realize Greenland’s full potential in supporting the United States’ economic and security interests,” the Atlantic Council paper said.

Greenland was ruled directly by Denmark from the early 18th century until home rule began on the island in 1979. In 2009, Greenland approved a referendum granting it autonomy in all matters except defense, security and foreign policy.

Floating the idea of using coercion or force could be a negotiating tactic for Trump, who said Tuesday that he didn’t consider Denmark’s authority over Greenland legitimate.

But Trump has long had an eye on Greenland and his comments this week went further than past statements about wanting to acquire the territory.

The situation is likely to become a point of diplomatic tension inside NATO and a source of unease for Denmark, which has signaled that it has no intention of parting with Greenland.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen sought to solidify the island’s autonomy following Trump’s remarks, saying Tuesday that “Greenland belongs to Greenland” and wasn’t for sale.

Trump says NATO nations must raise defense spending

By Stephanie Lai  
Bloomberg News

President-elect Donald Trump said NATO nations should spend the equivalent of 5% of their economic output on defense, escalating his demands on European allies to more than double the current target.

“I think NATO should have 5%,” Trump said Tuesday at a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort Florida. “I’m the one that got them to pay 2%,” he said, referring to pressure he exerted during his previous term to meet the current spending target.

No member of the military alliance is currently spending 5% of gross domestic product on defense, including the U.S. The president-elect didn’t say whether he’d increase U.S. spending to that level.

Trump’s threats to abandon the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine have convinced many NATO members that they must enhance their own defenses.

Secretary General Mark Rutte has signaled that NATO is likely to raise its spending target to at least 3% of GDP as it seeks to set new requirements for weapons and defense spending for its members.

Another pressing issue for the alliance now is any future membership for Ukraine, which Kyiv says is crucial to reach a ceasefire with Moscow but which Russia

has said would be unacceptable.

At his press conference, Trump remarked that Russia had been vehemently opposed to NATO membership for Ukraine long before Putin’s time.

“And somewhere along the line, Biden said, ‘No, they should be able to join NATO.’ Well, then Russia has somebody right on their doorstep, and I could understand their feeling about that,” he added.

According to NATO’s latest assessment, 23 out of 32 allies were projected to reach the 2% goal in 2024. That compares with three in 2014.

There have been wide discrepancies between NATO members’ defense spending. Poland committed a record 186.6 billion zloty (\$45 billion) on defense last year, or 4.7% of GDP, while Germany, the European Union’s biggest provider of military aid to Ukraine, spent 2.1%, or 72 billion euros (\$75 billion), according to its defense ministry.

Marcus Faber, head of the defense committee in Germany’s parliament, the Bundestag, told Bloomberg News on Tuesday that the NATO states would have to agree on a new goal, “but it’s already clear now that this new goal will be three rather than five percent.”

“And of course, this will be decided and agreed on by consensus — and not by one member state alone,” he said.

pating countries wait to see whether it will be continued under Trump.

“Our focus will be on maintaining momentum, delivering results, and sending a clear message: The international community stands resolute in its support for Ukraine,” Austin told reporters traveling with him.

The weapons are funded through presidential drawdown authority, meaning they can be pulled directly from U.S. stockpiles. A senior defense official who briefed reporters traveling with Austin said the goal was to get those munitions into Ukraine before the end of the month.

To date the U.S. has provided Ukraine about \$66.5 billion in weapons assistance since Russia invaded nearly three years ago.

US plans to send \$500M in weapons for Ukraine

Associated Press

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The U.S. is set to provide Ukraine an additional \$500 million in weapons quickly pulled from its existing stockpiles as the Biden administration works to get Kyiv in a stronger negotiating position before President-elect Donald Trump takes office, two U.S. officials said.

The announcement is expected during Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s final trip to meet with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a consortium of about 50 partner nations that Austin brought together months after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 to coordinate weapons support.

The meeting on Thursday is the 25th and potentially last gathering of the U.S.-led group, as the partici-



# MILITARY

# US hits Houthi weapons hubs

BY LARA KORTE  
Stars and Stripes

American forces in the Middle East struck two underground Houthi weapons hubs in Yemen, U.S. Central Command said Wednesday.

The strikes were aimed at taking out advanced weaponry that had been used in recent attacks against U.S. Navy warships and merchant vessels in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, CENTCOM said in a statement on X. No U.S. personnel were injured nor equipment damaged in the attacks, the statement added.

U.S. forces have been working to degrade the capabilities of the Iranian-backed Houthis as the group continues targeting ships in the region. Late last month, CENTCOM confirmed striking several Houthi targets near the capital city of Sanaa, hitting a command hub and weapons production facility as well as a bun-

ker with missiles and drones.

The Houthis, who say they are fighting for an end to the war in Gaza, have made multiple, unsubstantiated claims of successful attacks against U.S. targets.

On Monday, the group claimed to have conducted an operation against the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, saying they had thwarted a major air attack.

The U.S. strike against the Houthis on Wednesday was deliberate and planned, and not a reactive response to any recent events, according to one defense official.

The Houthis also claimed credit for the downing of a U.S. Navy jet over the Red Sea last month that was apparently the result of a “friendly fire” accident involving the cruiser USS Gettysburg, according to CENTCOM.

Two flight officers were able to safely eject and an investigation is ongoing.

# US personnel based outside of UK face new registration requirement for travel

BY JENNIFER SVAN  
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — U.S. service members stationed in the U.K. are exempt from a new British arrival procedure, while those based in continental Europe will need to sign up for authorization like most other nonresident visitors before they travel.

A British government requirement for electronic travel authorizations went into force Wednesday, affecting visitors who don’t need a visa for short stays or who don’t have a U.K. immigration status.

The digital permission may take up to three working days to process and costs 10 pounds, or approximately \$12.75, according to U.S. Army Europe and Africa. Travelers may apply for other people and do not need to provide travel details.

Those with connecting flights at U.K. airports are required to apply, according to the British government’s website.

American military members who are stationed in the U.K. or traveling on official orders do not need to sign up, but they will need to show a common access card and travel orders to border control agents, a British government

**For electronic travel authorization, go to: <https://etauk.co.uk/>**

statement shared by RAF Lakenheath’s Facebook page said Wednesday.

Family members of U.S. personnel stationed in the U.K. must present their no-fee passport and sponsor’s orders, while civilians and their dependents must show a no-fee passport with a valid visa.

The new ETA is intended to enhance border security and is in line with similar requirements for foreign travelers to the United States and Australia, according to the British government statement.

“An ETA is a digital permission to travel. It is not a visa and does not permit entry” but rather authorizes an individual to travel to the country, the British government said.

Applicants will need to provide their biographic, biometric and contact details, and answer a short set of questions.

The travel authorization is valid for two years or until the expiration date of the person’s passport. It can be used for multiple trips to the U.K. for stays of up to six months at a time.



PHOTOS BY REBECCA HOLLAND/Stars and Stripes

**Shoppers at commissaries in Europe will have to purchase a reusable or recyclable bag, or bring their own bag, starting later this month.**

# Commissaries in Europe will stop providing single-use grocery bags

BY REBECCA HOLLAND AND PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Commissary shoppers in Europe will soon have to bring their own bags or purchase a reusable option as base grocery stores phase out single-use plastic bags this month.

The commissary in Naples announced recently on Facebook that stores around Europe will move to reusable bags starting in mid-January. About 450 miles to the northeast at the Army’s base in Vicenza, a sign at the commissary entrance tells customers to be prepared for the transition.

At Ramstein Air Base in Germany, which hosts the largest commissary in an area serving tens of thousands of U.S. personnel and their families, single-use bags were still available Wednesday.

The commissary is using its final pallet of disposable bags and is expected to run out during the week of Jan. 20, said a commissary official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they didn’t have immediate authorization to talk about the matter.

Customers will have the option of bringing their own bags or purchasing from an assortment. Recyclable, biodegradable plastic bags that workers say should last about five uses will cost 9 cents, and a large paper bag with handles will be 14 cents.

Prices on stronger, reusable bags range from around 50 cents to \$5 depending on the bag style, according to the Naples commissary.

A few miles from Ramstein at the Vogelweh commissary, workers said they expected the free bags to run out by the end of the



**Reusable bags will be available at base commissaries for a small fee as the Defense Commissary Agency phases out single-use plastic bags in Europe.**

month. The store had some thermal plastic bags on sale but none of the new bags yet.

Shoppers outside the Vogelweh store on Wednesday had mixed opinions on the change.

“I think it’s a great idea,” Emily Stinson said. “If you’ve never had to use reusable bags before, changing the habit of using bags over and over is going to be difficult. But I think it’s very good for the environment.”

It’s an especially good idea in Germany because it aligns the U.S. community with the rest of the country, which doesn’t use disposable grocery bags, said Jasper Hughes. It’s a bad look for Americans to bring their pollution with them, Hughes said.

“I don’t think it’s necessarily an inconvenience,” he said. “When I go out in town, I’m very conscious about it.”

Bryce Lacroix agreed that the shift to reusable bags was good but took issue with paying for them given the effect of inflation on paychecks.

“We’re already in the military, so why are we paying for bags?” Lacroix said. “When you come on base, it should be different. There should be more benefits.”

The move away from plastic bags is part of a push to meet European Union regulations and promote environmental sustainability in the U.S. military’s retail system, officials told Stars and Stripes last year.

Commissaries in Guam, California and Hawaii have already phased out plastic bags to comply with local and state regulations.

Last year, Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan announced it would eliminate plastic bags, before reversing course a few months later.



NATION



ALCIDES ANTUNES/ AP

A Tesla Cybertruck burns outside President-elect Donald Trump’s Las Vegas hotel early Jan. 1.

Police: Soldier used AI to plan Cybertruck explosion

By Mike Catalini  
Associated Press

The highly decorated soldier who exploded a Tesla Cybertruck outside the Trump hotel in Las Vegas used generative AI including ChatGPT to help plan the attack, Las Vegas police said Tuesday.

Nearly a week after 37-year-old Matthew Livelsberger fatally shot himself, officials said according to writings, he didn’t intend to kill anyone else.

An investigation of Livelsberger’s searches through ChatGPT indicate he was looking for information on explosive targets, the speed at which certain rounds of ammunition would travel and whether fireworks were legal in Arizona.

Kevin McMahon, sheriff of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, called the use of generative AI a “game-changer” and said the department was sharing information with other law enforcement agencies.

“This is the first incident that I’m aware of on U.S. soil where ChatGPT is utilized to help an individual build a particular device,” he said. “It’s a concerning moment.”

In an emailed statement, OpenAI said it was committed to seeing its tools used “responsibly” and that they’re designed to refuse harmful instructions.

“In this case, ChatGPT responded with information already publicly available on the internet and provided warnings against harmful or illegal activities. We’re working with law enforcement to support their investigation,” the emailed statement said.

Launched in 2022, ChatGPT is part of a broader set of technologies developed by the San Francisco-based startup OpenAI. Un-

like previous iterations of so-called “large language models,” the ChatGPT tool is available for free to anyone with an internet connection and designed to be more user-friendly.

During a roughly half-hour-long news conference, Las Vegas police and federal law enforcement officials unveiled new details about the New Year’s Day explosion.

Among the specifics law enforcement disclosed: Livelsberger stopped during the drive to Las Vegas to pour racing-grade fuel into the Cybertruck, which then dripped the substance. The vehicle was loaded with 60 pounds of pyrotechnic material as well as 70 pounds of birdshot but officials are still uncertain exactly what detonated the explosion. They said Tuesday it could have been the flash from the firearm that Livelsberger used to fatally shoot himself.

Authorities also said they uncovered a six-page document that they have not yet released because they’re working with Defense Department officials since some of the material could be classified. They added that they still have to review contents on a laptop, mobile phone and smartwatch.

Among the items released was a journal Livelsberger kept titled “surveillance” or “surveil” log. It showed that he believed he was being tracked by law enforcement, but he had no criminal record and was not on the police department’s of FBI’s “radar,” the sheriff said Tuesday.

The log showed that he considered carrying out his plans in Arizona at the Grand Canyon’s glass skywalk, a tourist attraction on tribal land that towers high

above the canyon floor. Assistant Sheriff Dori Koren said police don’t know why he changed his plans. The writings also showed he worried he would be labeled a terrorist and that people would think he intended to kill others besides himself, officials said.

Once stopped outside the hotel, video showed a flash in the vehicle that they said they believed was from the muzzle of the firearm Livelsberger used to shoot himself. Soon after that flash, video showed fire engulfing the truck’s cabin and even escaping the seam of the door, the result of considerable fuel vapor, officials said. An explosion followed.

Livelsberger, an Army Green Beret who deployed twice to Afghanistan and lived in Colorado Springs, Colo., left notes saying the explosion was a stunt meant to be a “wake up call ” for the nation’s troubles, officials said last week.

He left cellphone notes saying he needed to “cleanse” his mind “of the brothers I’ve lost and relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took.”

The explosion caused minor injuries to seven people but virtually no damage to the Trump International Hotel. Authorities said that Livelsberger acted alone.

Livelsberger’s letters touched on political grievances, societal problems and domestic and international issues, including the war in Ukraine. He wrote that the U.S. was “terminally ill and headed toward collapse.”

Livelsberger harbored no ill will toward President-elect Donald Trump, law enforcement officials said. In one of the notes he left, he said the country needed to “rally around” him and Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

Public release set for Trump election report

Findings on Trump’s efforts to undo 2020 loss split from classified docs case

Associated Press  
WASHINGTON — The Justice Department said Wednesday that it will release special counsel Jack Smith’s findings on Donald Trump’s efforts to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election but will keep under wraps for now the rest of the report focused on the president-elect’s hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

The revelation was made in a filing to a federal appeals court that was considering a defense request to block the release of the report while charges remain pending against two Trump co-defendants in the case accusing Trump of illegally holding classified documents. Aileen Cannon, the Trump-appointed judge presiding over the classified documents case, granted the request Tuesday, issuing a temporary block on the report.

The Justice Department said it would proceed with plans to release the first of two volumes centered on the election interference case but would make the classified documents section of the report available only to the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees for their private review as long as the case against Trump’s co-defendants — Trump valet Walt Nauta and Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira — is ongoing.

“This limited disclosure will fur-

ther the public interest in keeping congressional leadership apprised of a significant matter within the Department while safeguarding defendants’ interests,” the filing said.

It was not immediately clear when the election interference report might be released. The filing asks the Atlanta-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit to reverse Cannon’s order that appeared to at least temporarily halt the release of the entire report.

In its filing, the Justice Department said that the attorney general’s authority to publicly release the election interference section of the special counsel’s report is “clear” and that Trump’s co-defendants have no legal argument to block the disclosure of a section that has nothing to do with them.

The report is expected to detail findings and charging decisions in Smith’s two investigations.

The classified documents inquiry was dismissed in July by Cannon, who concluded that Smith’s appointment was illegal. Smith’s appeal of the dismissal of charges against Nauta and De Oliveira is still active.

Justice Department regulations call for special counsels appointed by the attorney general to submit a confidential report at the conclusion of their investigations. It’s then up to the attorney general to decide what to make public.

Trump asks high court to block sentencing for NY case

Associated Press  
WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump is asking the Supreme Court to call off Friday’s sentencing in his hush money case in New York.

Trump’s lawyers turned to the nation’s highest court on Wednesday after New York courts refused to postpone the sentencing by Judge Juan M. Merchan, who presided over Trump’s trial and conviction last May on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. Trump has denied wrongdoing.

The justices asked for a re-

sponse from prosecutors by Thursday.

Trump’s team sought an immediate stay of the scheduled sentencing “to prevent grave injustice and harm to the institution of the Presidency and the operations of the federal government.”

Merchan has indicated he will not impose jail time, fines or probation.

Trump’s convictions arose from what prosecutors said was an attempt to cover up a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels just before the 2016 presidential election.



NATION

# Storm threatens snow for Texas

## Icy weather also heads to Okla., Ark.

By **HANNAH FINGERHUT**  
AND **BEN FINLEY**  
*Associated Press*

NORFOLK, Va. — A developing winter storm threatens to drop snow, sleet and freezing rain on parts of Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas as frigid air that escaped the Arctic plunges temperatures to subfreezing levels in some of the southernmost points of the U.S.

National Weather Service meteorologists predicted wintry precipitation across the southern Plains region starting Wednesday night, with snow likely in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Farther south, snow could transition to sleet and freezing rain, which meteorologists warn could result in hazardous driving conditions.

An arctic blast descended on much of the U.S. east of the Rockies over the weekend, causing hundreds of car accidents and thousands of flight cancellations and delays. Several communities set up warming shelters this week, including one at a roller rink in Cincinnati and another in the Providence, R.I., City Council chambers.

As the cold front moved south, a cold weather advisory was issued for the Gulf Coast and pushed the low temperature in El Paso, along the Texas border with Mexico, to 31 degrees. The National Weather Service predicted a wind chill factor ranging from 0 to 15 degrees.

The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes ventures south into the U.S., Europe and Asia.

As points north and east dug out of snow and ice Tuesday, communities in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas were preparing. In Texas, crews treated the roads in the Dallas area amid forecasts of 1 to 3

inches of snow on Thursday, along with sleet and rain. National Weather Service meteorologist Sam Shamburger said up to 5 inches of snow was expected farther north near the Oklahoma line.

Kevin Oden, Dallas' director of emergency management and crisis response, said Tuesday, "Our city is in a preparedness phase."

The storm could make roads slick Friday as 75,000 fans head to AT&T Stadium in Arlington to see Texas play Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl. Arlington spokesperson Susan Shrock said crews are ready to address any hazardous road conditions around the stadium.

Parts of southeastern Georgia and northern Florida endured unusually frigid temperatures overnight into Tuesday and were under freeze warnings into Wednesday.

In northern Florida, with Valentine's Day just a month away, the main concern for growers fearful of cold weather is the fern crop used for floral arrangements.

Major damage to citrus trees, which typically occurs when temperatures drop to 28 degrees or below for several hours, was less likely. Florida's commercial citrus groves are primarily south of the central part of the peninsula.

An area stretching from the central Plains through the Ohio Valley into the mid-Atlantic region is likely to receive more snow and ice for a few days, which could cause the ground covering to melt and refreeze to form treacherous black ice on roadways, forecasters said.

Hundreds of car accidents were reported in Virginia, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky earlier this week, and a state trooper was treated for injuries after his patrol car was hit.



ETHAN SWOPE/AP

Flames lick the winding staircase of a residence in the Pacific Palisades area of Los Angeles on Tuesday.

# Wildfires: Residents race to safety

FROM PAGE 1

Images of the devastation that emerged overnight showed luxurious homes that had collapsed in a whirlwind of flaming embers. The tops of palm trees whipped against a glowing red sky.

At least 70,000 residents were ordered to evacuate, officials said. The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighborhoods home to California's rich and famous. Hollywood stars, including Mark Hamill, Mandy Moore and James Woods, were among those forced to flee.

The home of Vice President Kamala Harris in Los Angeles was included in one of the evacuation zones, although no one was there, according to a spokesperson.

"We are prioritizing life over everything else," Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said. Several hundred deputies were helping residents evacuate and responding to emergencies, he said.

Flames that broke out Tuesday evening near a nature preserve in the foothills northeast of LA spread so rapidly that staff at a senior living center had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot. Residents — one as old as 102 — waited in their bedclothes as embers fell around them until ambulances, buses and construction vans arrived to take them to safety.

Another blaze that started hours earlier ripped through the city's Pacific Palisades neighborhood, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity homes and memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA." In the race to get to safety, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases.

Sheriece Wallace was unaware there was a fire burning around her until her sister called at the moment a helicopter made a water drop over her house.

"I was like, 'It's raining,'" Wallace said. "She's like, 'No, it's not raining. Your neighborhood is on fire. You need to get out.'"

"As soon as I opened my door, it was like right there," she said. "The first thing I did was looked at the trees to see where the wind was blowing. Because it hit me. It blew me back." She was able to leave.

A traffic jam on Palisades Drive prevented emergency vehicles from getting through, and a bulldozer was brought in to push abandoned cars to create a path. Video along the Pacific Coast Highway showed widespread destruction of homes and businesses along the famed roadway.

Pacific Palisades resident Kelsey Trainor said the only road in and out of her neighborhood was blocked. Ash fell all around while fires burned on both sides of the road.

"We looked across and the fire had jumped from one side of the road to the other side of the road," Trainor said. "People were getting out of the cars with their dogs and babies and bags. They were crying and screaming."

A third wildfire started Tuesday evening and quickly prompted evacuations in Sylmar, a San Fernando Valley community that's the northernmost neighborhood in Los Angeles. A fourth fire was reported early Wednesday in Coachella, in Riverside County. The causes were under investigation.

Flames were being pushed by Santa Ana winds topping 60 mph in some places Tuesday, increasing to 80 mph by early Wednesday, according to reports received by the National Weather Service.

They could top 100 mph in mountains and foothills, including in areas that have not seen substantial rain in months.

California's wildfire season typically begins in June or July and runs through October, according to the Western Fire Chiefs Association, but January wildfires are not unprecedented. There was one in 2022 and 10 in 2021, according to CalFire.

The season is beginning earlier and ending later due to rising temperatures and decreased rainfall tied to climate change, according to recent data. Rains that usually end fire season are often delayed, meaning fires can burn through the winter months, the association said.

"This will likely be the most destructive windstorm seen (since a) 2011 windstorm that did extensive damage to Pasadena and nearby foothills of the San Gabriel Valley," the weather service said in a red-flag warning early Wednesday.

Gov. Gavin Newsom posted on X early Wednesday that California had deployed more than 1,400 firefighting personnel to combat the blazes. "Emergency officials, firefighters and first responders are all hands on deck through the night to do everything possible to protect lives," Newsom said.

Pasadena Fire Chief Chad Augustin said much of the city was under evacuation orders as his department waits for winds to die down so he can get aircraft up to starting dousing the flames. Until that happens, it's going to be difficult to get the blaze there under control, Augustin told KABC television, the ABC affiliate.

Fire departments across California were sending firefighters because crews in the Los Angeles area were stretched to the limit, he said.



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

A freeze warning sign is stands outside of an apartment complex ahead of a winter storm expected to hit North Texas on Tuesday.



## NATION



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE, POOL/AP

**Second gentleman Doug Emhoff and Vice President Kamala Harris place a wreath at the flag-draped casket of former President Jimmy Carter during a ceremony at the Capitol on Tuesday.**

## Carter eulogized by Harris as funeral events reach DC

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Nearly 44 years after Jimmy Carter left the nation's capital in humbling defeat, the 39th president returned to Washington on Tuesday for state funeral rites that featured the kind of bipartisan praise and ceremonial pomp the Georgia Democrat rarely enjoyed at his political peak.

The military honor guards, a procession down Pennsylvania Avenue and a service in the Capitol Rotunda continued public commemorations for Carter, who died Dec. 29 at age 100.

Services will continue through his state funeral Thursday at the National Cathedral, before Carter returns to his hometown of Plains, Ga., for burial beside his late wife, former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who died in 2023.

As the sun set outside the Capitol, Vice President Kamala Harris, House Speaker Mike Johnson

and Senate Majority Leader John Thune — none of whom were old enough to vote in Carter's first national campaign — celebrated his faith, military service and devotion to service more than anything he did in politics.

"To be sure, his presidency was not without its challenges and international crises," said Harris, for whom Carter cast his final presidential ballot this fall. But she described him nonetheless as "that all-too-rare example of a gifted man who also walks with humility, modesty and grace."

As a presidential candidate in 1976, Harris noted, he slept in the homes of his supporters to "share a meal with them at their table and listen to what was on their minds."

Thune, the newly elected majority leader, ticked through Carter's legacy beyond the White House, including his hands-on contributions to rebuilding homes through Habitat For Humanity.

"First and foremost a faithful servant of his creator, and his fellow man," said Thune, a South Dakota Republican.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican who was just four years old when Carter was inaugurated, recalled his fellow Southerner as a man "willing to roll up his own sleeves to get the work done."

The former president was to lie in state Tuesday night and again Wednesday before his remains are moved to National Cathedral. There, President Joe Biden will eulogize Carter, his longtime ally.

Carter's remains, which had been lying in repose at the Carter Presidential Center since Saturday morning, accompanied by his children and extended family. Special Air Mission 39 departed Dobbins Air Reserve Base and arrived at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland before Carter was brought to Washington.

## Justice alleges rent conspiracy

### Feds sue 5 major landlord firms

*AP/Report for America*

DENVER — The U.S. Justice Department is suing several large landlords for allegedly coordinating to keep Americans' rents high by using both an algorithm to help set rents and privately sharing sensitive information with their competitors to boost profits.

The lawsuit arrives as U.S. renters continue to struggle under a difficult housing market, with incomes failing to keep up with rent increases. The latest figures show that half of American renters spent more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities in 2022, an all-time high.

That means decisions between medications, groceries, school supplies and rent. It means eviction notices and protracted court cases in which children face the highest eviction rates, with 1.5 million evicted each year, according to Princeton University's Eviction Lab.

While the housing crisis has been assigned several causes, including a slump in homes built over the last decade, the Justice Department's lawsuit claims major landlords are playing a part.

The department, along with 10 states including North Carolina, Tennessee, Colorado and California, is accusing six landlords that collectively operate more than 1.3 million units in 43 states and the District of Columbia of scheming to avoid lowering rents.

The landlord Greystar Real Estate Partners LLC, a defendant in the case, declined a request for comment from The Associated Press, but published an unsigned statement on its website.

"Greystar has and will conduct its business with the utmost integrity. At no time did Greystar en-

gage in any anti-competitive practices," the statement read. "We will vigorously defend ourselves in this lawsuit."

The lawsuit accuses the landlords of sharing sensitive data on rents and occupancy with competing firms via email, phone calls or in groups. The information shared allegedly included renewal rates, how often they accept an algorithm's price recommendation, the use of concessions such as offering one month free, and even their approach to pricing for the next quarter.

The Justice Department said one of the six landlords agreed to cooperate with prosecutors. The proposed settlement would restrict how the company can use their competitors' data and algorithms to set rents.

"Today's action against RealPage and six major landlords seeks to end their practice of putting profits over people and make housing more affordable for millions of people across the country," said Doha Mekki, the acting assistant attorney general for the department's antitrust division in Tuesday's press release.

Those landlords were added to an existing lawsuit against RealPage, which runs an algorithm that recommends rental prices to landlords. Prosecutors say the algorithm uses sensitive competitive information, allowing landlords to align their prices and avoid competition that would otherwise push down rents.

Jennifer Bowcock, a RealPage spokeswoman, said in a statement to the AP that their software is used on fewer than 10% of rental units in the U.S., and that their price recommendations are used less than half the time.

## New labels will help people pick devices less at risk of hacking

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The federal government is rolling out a consumer labeling system designed to help Americans pick smart devices that are less vulnerable to hacking.

Under the voluntary program, called the U.S. Cyber Trust Mark Initiative, manufacturers can affix the label on their products if they meet federal cybersecurity standards. The types of devices that can seek to carry the label include baby monitors, home security cameras, fitness trackers, re-

frigerators and other internet-connected appliances.

The labels will include a distinctive shield logo as well as QR codes that consumers can scan for more information about the security of the device.

Products bearing the label should be available this year, once manufacturers begin submitting their devices for approval, said deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger, who briefed reporters on the new program Tuesday.

"It gives consumers an easy

way to check if a home alarm system or baby monitor is cyber safe," Neuberger said, noting that the average American household now has 21 devices that are connected to the internet — each presenting a possible entry point for cybercriminals.

Amazon, Best Buy, Google, LG Electronics USA, Logitech and Samsung are among industry participants.

Even though it's voluntary, the program will help consumers know which brands to trust — by clicking on the QR code, they'll be

able to access even more information about cybersecurity, including whether the manufacturer provides software updates to protect against new cyberthreats, according to Justin Brookman, director of technology policy at Consumer Reports.

First proposed by the Biden administration 18 months ago, the labels were approved last year by the Federal Communications Commission, the agency tasked with leading the program. Last month, the FCC selected 11 companies and organizations to over-

see the technical designation of products bearing the labels.

Officials compare the labels to the Energy Star program, which rates appliances' energy efficiency, and say the idea is to give consumers more information about the products they buy while also encouraging manufacturers to enhance their cybersecurity.

The proliferation of so-called smart devices has coincided with growing cybercrime in which one insecure device can often give cyberintruders a dangerous foothold on a home network.



# WORLD

## Finns seek guns, defense training

### Nation nervous as Russian threat looms

BY JAMES BROOKS  
Associated Press

KERAVA, Finland — Unsettled by Russia's expansionism and emboldened by its recent accession to NATO, Finland is rallying to strengthen its national self-defense beyond its traditional military capabilities.

The popularity of weapons training in the Nordic country has soared in recent months.

Few places tell the story of the rise in Finnish affinity for self-defense more than shooting ranges that are riding a boom of interest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's order for a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine — another big Russian neighbor — in February 2022 continues to resonate in many Finnish minds, and partially explains the ballistics binge.

The Vantaa Reservist Association, which operates a gun range in a warehouse once used to make sex toys, in Kerava, north of Helsinki, has more than doubled its membership over the last two years and now counts over 2,100 members.

"They have something in the back of their head ringing that this is the skill I have to learn now," said association chairman Antti Kettunen, standing among bullet-riddled targets. "I think that the wind has changed, now it's blowing from the east."

Earlier this year, the coalition government announced plans to open more than 300 new ranges — a big jump from the 670 in operation today.

Authorities are encouraging citizens to take up interest in national defense in the country with a 830-mile border with Russia, where firing shots in ice hockey has been more of a pastime than shooting bullets.

"Interest in national defense is traditionally very high in Finland and especially these days with the Russian aggression on Ukraine, the interest has risen even more," lawmaker Jukka Kopra, who chairs Finland's defense committee, said last month.

Inspired largely by concerns over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland became the 31st member of the NATO military alliance last year. Western neighbor Sweden followed suit in March. The two countries last year announced plans to boost their civil defense strategies, without mentioning Russia by name.

The surge in self-defense strategies doesn't stop at shooting ranges.

The National Defense Training Association says it has hosted a collective total of 120,000 training days this year, more than double the number three years ago.

The national reservists' association, which is about 90% composed of military reservists but also some hobbyists, has grown by more than two-thirds to over 50,000 members since the invasion of Ukraine.

And unlike some other European countries, Finland has kept around 50,000 Cold-War era civil defense shelters, which could ac-



Members of the Vantaa Reservists Association practice at a shooting range in a warehouse in Kerava on the outskirts of Helsinki, Finland.



Target practice is part of the workout at the Vantaa Reservists Association near Helsinki.

commodate roughly 85% of the population of about 5.5 million people.

"This is the new era of civil defense shelters, which is against the newest developments of war," said Tomi Rask, of Helsinki Rescue Services, during a recent tour of one shelter in the capital. "We know that all of our neighbors have the capability of harming us, of harming our citizens, and we think that we need to prepare."

Wearing camouflage at the range in Kerava, military reserv-

ists and firearm hobbyists bob and weave their way through an obstacle course, at times opening fire with deafening Glock handguns against human-shaped targets.

"Some people do this just for fun," said member Miikka Kallio, a 38-year-old firefighter. "Some (do) maybe because of our eastern neighbor: I've heard comments that they've joined the reservists because of the Russian attack (on Ukraine.)"

Finland is no stranger to tensions with Russia and a big part of the country's national identity was forged battling its eastern neighbor — gaining independence from the Russian empire in 1917 and then fending off a large Soviet force with its tiny, ill-equipped army in what become known as the Winter War at the start of the Second World War.

Kettunen said learning to shoot guns is a bit like learning to swim: Both require training and preparation.

"When you need to know how to shoot or swim, and you don't, it's too late," he said.

## Body of at least 1 Israeli hostage found

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli forces have recovered the body of a hostage held in Gaza, the military said Wednesday, adding that it was identifying additional remains that could belong to another captive held in the war-torn enclave.

The military said it recovered the body of Yosef AlZayadni, 53, from an underground tunnel during an operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

It said it found evidence that raised "serious concerns" for the life of AlZayadni's son Hamzah, who was also taken captive on Oct. 7, 2023, suggesting he may have died in captivity.

The body's recovery comes as Israel and Hamas are considering a ceasefire deal that would free the hostages and halt the fighting in Gaza. Israel believes at least a third of the remaining 100 hostages are dead.

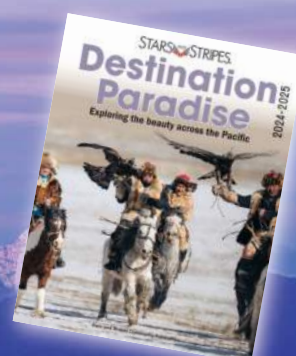
However, Yosef and Hamzah AlZayadni were believed to still be alive before Wednesday's announcement, and news about their fate could ramp up pressure on Israel to move ahead on a deal.

Yosef AlZayadni's name was on a list of 34 hostages shared by a Hamas official with The Associated Press earlier this week that the militant group said were slated for release.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz had said earlier Wednesday that troops recovered the bodies of both Yosef and Hamzah AlZayadni.

AlZayadni and his son, along with two of his other children, were taken captive during Hamas' attack on southern Israel in October 2023, among 250 hostages snatched by the militant group.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy: North Korea suffers nearly 4K casualties in Russia

By DAVID CHOI  
Stars and Stripes

Of the 12,000 North Korean troops deployed to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at least 3,800 have been killed or wounded, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Pyongyang could deploy up to 40,000 more troops to fill that, Zelenskyy said Monday during a three-hour interview on the Lex Fridman Podcast.

In addition to deploying its soldiers to Russia's western front, the North's communist regime provided Moscow with 3.7 million artillery shells for its fight, according to Zelenskyy.

North Korea "can bring many people," he said through an interpreter.

South Korea is continuing to monitor the North's military cooperation with Russia, including its

troop deployments, Ministry of National Defense spokesman Jeon Ha-kyu said Tuesday at a news conference in Seoul.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged mutual aid if either country was at war, following their June 18 summit in Pyongyang.

U.S. and South Korean military and intelligence agencies have estimated between 10,000 and 12,000 North Korean troops have deployed to Russia since October.

The allies have also accused North Korea of shipping ballistic missiles and thousands of containers filled with artillery shells to

Russia, an act that would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The latest casualty count comes nearly two weeks after a White House spokesman said the North Korean forces were suffering heavy losses on the battlefield.

North Korean troops were using "human wave tactics" in the Kursk region that led to over 1,000 casualties within their ranks in late December, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Dec. 27 in Washington, D.C.

Moscow and Pyongyang have regarded North Korean troops as "expendable" and have ordered them to conduct "hopeless assaults against Ukrainian defenses," Kirby said.

In a video address Monday, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were continuing to maintain a buffer zone around the Kursk re-



KCNA

Troops train at an undisclosed military base in North Korea in March.

gion.

Roughly 15,000 enemy troops have been killed and 23,000 wounded since Ukraine launched its Kursk offensive in August, Zelenskyy said Monday.

"What's important is that the occupier cannot currently redirect all this force to other directions, in particular the Donetsk, Sumy, Kharkiv or Zaporizhzhia regions," Zelenskyy said in his video address. "I thank all our warriors

who are bringing the war back to Russia and providing Ukraine with greater security and strength."

The White House on Dec. 30 authorized a security assistance package worth \$2.5 billion for Ukraine. The U.S. package of surface-to-air missiles, artillery shells and other military gear adds to \$3.5 billion in funds sent to aid Ukraine's government the same day.

Ukraine claims it struck a key military fuel depot deep inside Russia

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian military said Wednesday that it struck a fuel storage depot deep inside Russia, causing a huge blaze at the facility that supplies an important Russian air base.

Russian officials acknowledged a major drone attack in the area, and said that authorities had set up an emergency command center to fight the fire.

Ukraine's General Staff said that the assault hit the storage fa-

cility near Engels, in Russia's Saratov region, about 370 miles east of the Ukrainian border. The depot supplied a nearby airfield used by aircraft that launch missiles across the border into Ukraine, a statement on Facebook said.

Ukraine has been developing its arsenal of domestically produced long-range missiles and drones capable of reaching deep behind the front line as it faces restrictions on the range that its military can fire its Western-supplied mis-

siles into Russia.

The attacks have disrupted Russian logistics in the almost three-year war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year that his country has developed a weapon that could hit a target 400 miles away. Some Ukrainian drone attacks have hit targets more than 600 miles away.

The governor of the Saratov re-

gion, Roman Busargin, said that an unspecified industrial plant in Engels sustained damage from the falling drone debris that sparked a fire, but nobody was hurt.

Engels, which has a population of more than 220,000, is located on the left bank of the Volga River, and is home to multiple industrial plants. Saratov, a major industrial city of about 900,000, faces Engels across the river.

"The damage to the oil base cre-

ates serious logistical problems for the strategic aviation of the Russian occupiers and significantly reduces their ability to strike peaceful Ukrainian cities and civilian objects. To be continued," the statement from Ukraine's General Staff said.

Russian authorities restricted flights early Wednesday at the airports of Saratov, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and Nizhnekamsk, in an apparent response to the Ukrainian attack.

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# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Judge largely blocks porn site age check law

**TN** NASHVILLE — A Tennessee law requiring pornographic websites to verify their visitors’ age was largely blocked in court before it was to take effect Jan. 1, even as similar laws kicked in for Florida and South Carolina and remained in effect for more than a dozen other states.

On Dec. 30, U.S. District Judge Sheryl Lipman in Memphis ruled that Tennessee’s law would likely suppress the First Amendment free speech rights of adults without actually preventing children from accessing the harmful material in question. The state attorney general’s office is appealing the decision.

The Free Speech Coalition, an adult entertainment trade group, is suing over Tennessee’s law and those in a half-dozen other states. The coalition lists some 19 states that have passed similar laws. One prominent adult website has cut off access in several states due to their laws.

The issue will hit the U.S. Supreme Court for oral arguments regarding Texas’ law next week.

## McDonald’s rolls back diversity goals

**IL** CHICAGO — Four years after launching a push for more diversity in its ranks, McDonald’s is ending some of its diversity practices, citing a U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed affirmative action in college admissions.

McDonald’s is the latest big company to shift its tactics in the wake of the 2023 ruling and a conservative backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Walmart, John Deere, Harley-Davidson and others rolled back their DEI initiatives last year.

McDonald’s said Monday it will retire specific goals for achieving diversity at senior leadership levels. It also intends to end a program that encourages its suppliers to develop diversity training and to increase the number of minority group members represented within their own leadership ranks.

McDonald’s, which has its headquarters in Chicago, rolled out a series of diversity initiatives in 2021 after a spate of sexual harassment lawsuits filed by employees and a lawsuit alleging discrimination brought by a group of Black former McDonald’s franchise owners.

**Again, mockingbird a target over state bird title**

**FL** TALLAHASSEE — For nearly a century, the mockingbird has reigned supreme as the state bird of Florida, surviving multiple coup attempts by the Florida Legislature.

Once again, a lawmaker this



TRAVIS HEYING, THE WICHITA EAGLE/ AP

# Riders in the storm

**A group of cyclists make way through downtown Wichita, Kan., during a severe winter storm on Sunday.**

year wants to dethrone the bird known for its lilting sounds. Islamorada Republican Rep. Jim Mooney’s bill would actually designate two birds in its place: the American Flamingo as the state bird and the Florida scrub-jay as the state songbird.

As with past attempts, his bill will likely inspire much debate about which feathered species is most appropriate to represent the Sunshine State when the Legislature convenes for its regular spring session on March 4.

Being named the state bird won’t confer any added protection to the scrub-jay, which is already protected as a threatened species, but it is still important as an entry point to talking about conservation, said Julie Wraithmell, executive director for Audubon Florida.

**State House locked in party tie of 101-101**

**PA** HARRISBURG — A Democratic state representative from Western Pennsylvania suffered a health emergency and was expected to be absent from the first day of the legislative session on Tuesday, putting the party’s one-seat majority in the state House in jeopardy after Democrats narrowly hung on to control of the chamber in the 2024 election.

Rep. Matt Gergely, D-Allegheeny, suffered a medical emergency last week and was not expected to attend Tuesday’s swearing-in ceremony as he recovers, said House

Majority Leader Matt Bradford, D-Montgomery. Democrats are preparing for Gergely not to return to the chamber “for some foreseeable time thereafter,” he added.

Gergely’s absence means Democrats will be tied with Republicans at 101-101. Any measure requires at least 102 votes to pass the chamber, so House Democrats will need to lean on at least one Republican to reelect House Speaker Joanna McClinton, D-Philadelphia, as leader of the chamber and to approve their operating rules for the legislative session, both of which usually occur on the first day of a new legislative session.

**Teens break world record with shoe giveaway**

**CA** SAN DIEGO — A little more than 200 San Diego teens have broken the Guinness World Record for donating the most shoes in 24 hours.

The volunteers worked day and night Dec. 7 to unload thousands of boxes of shoes and give them out to folks in need for the holidays in a parking lot at the Sharp Spectrum Center in San Diego. By 6:30 a.m. the parking lot was filled with families awaiting the 8 a.m. start time.

The youths donated 21,604 pairs of shoes, totaling roughly \$1.1 million, as part of the St. Nick’s Kicks project organized by the youth-led Chula Vista-based nonprofit Youth Philanthropy Council along with Evolution Design Lab and their Jellypop footwear brand,

both based in the Los Angeles area. The last record was set by Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ) in Manila, Philippines, which donated 17,526 shoes to charity in 24 hours on April 29, 2016.

**Fraternity brothers face felonies after 1 burned**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Four members of a San Diego State fraternity are facing felony charges over an incident in which one of them, a pledge, was set on fire causing third-degree burns that left him in the hospital for weeks, prosecutors say.

It’s the latest chapter in the troubled history of Greek life at SDSU, where fraternities have gained a reputation for dangerous, alcohol-fueled hazing. In 2020, a 19-year-old pledge died after hitting his head when his blood alcohol level was almost three times above the legal limit. Then in 2023, a former student sued the school, saying he was dumped at a hospital in an alcohol-induced coma while pledging in 2021.

Now, Caden Cooper, 22; Lucas Cowling, 20; Christopher Serrano, 20; and Lars Larsen, 19, have each been charged with at least one felony for planning and performing a skit that involved setting Larsen on fire at a party, according to the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office. The students then attempted to cover up the incident by lying to police, deleting evidence and ordering other fraternity members to stay quiet and delete evidence, prosecutors said.

The charges filed against them include recklessly causing a fire with great bodily injury, conspiracy to commit an act injurious to the public and violating a local law that makes it illegal to provide an environment where underage drinking can occur. They have all pleaded not guilty.

**Couple sentenced over smoke bomb protest**

**PA** PITTSBURGH — A man convicted of injuring an officer with a homemade explosive at a 2023 campus protest over transgender rights at the University of Pittsburgh has been sentenced to five years in prison.

Brian DiPippa, 37, agreed to the sentence handed down on Monday as part of a plea agreement that also calls for his wife, Krystal Martinez-DiPippa, 42, to serve three years of probation.

The DiPippas were part of a group protesting an April 18, 2023, panel sponsored by the Pitt College Republicans that featured speakers opposed to transgender rights.

Federal prosecutors said DiPippa ignited and dropped two homemade smoke bombs near people waiting to attend the event, and later threw one at officers trying to keep protesters out of the building.

DiPippa pleaded guilty to conspiracy and obstructing law enforcement, while his wife pleaded guilty to the latter charge.



FACES

# Takeaways from a turbulent year

## Animated hits, rereleases helped the box office overcome fallout from 2023 Hollywood strikes

**BY LINDSEY BAHR**  
*Associated Press*

Movie ticket sales took a bit of a hit in 2024. The annual domestic box office ended up at around \$8.56 billion, down 4% from 2023, according to estimates from Comscore.

It's not as dire as it was in the pandemic years, but it's also not even close to the prepandemic norm when the annual box office regularly surpassed \$11 billion.

This is the year the business felt the effects of the Hollywood strikes of 2023, the labor standoff that delayed productions and releases and led to a depleted calendar for exhibitors and moviegoers. And yet it's not as bad as it could have been, or at least as bad as analysts projected at the start of the year.

"This has been a really incredible comeback story for the industry," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "Just a couple of months ago it was a question of whether we would even hit \$8 billion for the year."

Hollywood continues to learn lessons about what moviegoers really want, what works and what doesn't. Here are the biggest takeaways from 2024.

### Strike fallout was real

The Hollywood strikes ended in 2023, putting productions back into full swing and sending stars out on the promotional circuit again — but the ripple effect of the work stoppages and contract standoffs showed their real effects on the 2024 release calendar.

The first two quarters were hit hardest, with tentpoles pushed later in the year ("Deadpool & Wolverine," for one) or even into 2025 (like "Mission: Impossible 8"). With no Marvel movie kicking off the summer moviegoing season, the box office was down a devastating 27.5% from 2023 right before "Inside Out 2" opened in June.

"It's an unpredictable business but it thrives on stability," Dergarabedian said. "When the release calendar is thrown off, the momentum stops."

### PG (and animation) ruled

Sequels and franchises dominated the top 10 movies of the year, as has often been the case in the past 15 years. But this year, films carrying a PG rating did especially well, starting with the biggest movie of 2024: "Inside Out 2," which also became the biggest animated movie of all time, not accounting for inflation.

Family films with a PG rating — including "Despicable Me 4," "Moana 2," "Wicked," "Kung Fu Panda 4," "Sonic the Hedgehog 3," "Mufasa" and "The Wild Robot" — grossed more than \$2.9 billion this year, accounting for around 33% of the annual box office, according to Comscore. Movies rated PG-13, by contrast, made up about 30% of ticket sales.

### The Disney impact

After a quieter 2023 and several years without a film at the very top of the charts, the Walt Disney Co. came roaring back in 2024 with three of the top five movies of the



THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS/AP

**Ryan Reynolds, left, and Hugh Jackman starred in "Deadpool & Wolverine," one of Disney's big moneymakers of 2024.**

year: "Inside Out 2," "Deadpool & Wolverine" and "Moana 2." In mid-December, it crossed the \$2 billion domestic mark, the second time any studio has done so since 2019 (that was also Disney, in 2022). Its 20th Century division also played an important part with "Alien: Romulus" and "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes."

"It's a different industry when Disney commits to theatrical releases," said Daniel Loria, an executive at the movie data and analytics trade The Boxoffice Company.

### Redefining 'flops'

Every year has high-profile flops and disappointments, and this was no exception. Sony had a rough go with its "Spider-Man"-adjacent titles like "Madame Web" and "Kraven the Hunter." Universal had higher hopes for "The Fall Guy," as did Warner Bros. for "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" and "Joker: Folie à Deux."

Then there were the filmmaker-driven (and financed) passion projects that failed to take off like Kevin Costner's "Horizon: An

American Saga — Chapter 1" and Francis Ford Coppola's "Megalo-polis."

"It's a reductive way of thinking about those passion projects," Loria said. "Those movies didn't come out with huge expectations, meaning theaters didn't clear out the house and give them three auditoriums per site in hopes for money to come in."

### The nostalgia factor

Rereleases of movies in theaters that are also widely available in the home thrived this year. Some of the biggest successes included Christopher Nolan's "Interstellar," "Coraline" and "The Phantom Menace."

"It just shows our industry once again that audiences truly understand the difference between a communal, big-screen theatrical experience that they crave even on films that they've had the opportunities to see in the home," Nolan said in December. "That theatrical experience that we all know and love is so powerful and so exciting. It's a very clear demonstration of it."

## 'Wicked' tops SAG Awards nominations

*Associated Press*

The smash hit musical "Wicked" topped Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations on Wednesday, landing a leading five nominations including best ensemble, and individual nods for Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande and Jonathan Bailey.

The wildfires that swept across Los Angeles and Southern California on Tuesday forced the Screen Actors Guild to cancel its plans to announce the nominations live Wednesday morning. The nominations were instead issued by press release by SAG, which last year began a multiyear deal with Netflix to stream the awards.

"Wicked" saw its Oscar chances rise in the SAG nominations, which came the morning after the film was celebrated by the National Board of Review Awards.

The other best ensemble nominees are "Anora," "Conclave," "Emilia Pérez" and "A Complete Unknown."

The Bob Dylan drama "A Complete Unknown" received four nominations, including Timothée Chalamet for best male actor, and supporting nods for both Edward Norton and Monica Barbaro.

The best male lead nominees were largely as expected: Adrien Brody ("The Brutalist"), Daniel Craig ("Queer"), Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing"), Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave") and Chalamet.

Golden Globes winner Demi Moore was a SAG nominee for best female lead actor for "The Substance." She was joined by Erivo, "Emilia Perez" breakout Karla Sofia Gascón, Mikey Madison of "Anora" and Pamela Anderson for "The Last Showgirl."

The SAG Awards are among the most closely watched Oscar bellwethers. Their picks often align with those of the film academy.

The SAG Awards will be held Feb. 23 in Los Angeles.

# Peter Yarrow of folk-music trio Peter, Paul and Mary dies

**BY JOHN ROGERS**  
*Associated Press*

Peter Yarrow, the singer-songwriter best known as one-third of Peter, Paul and Mary, the folk-music trio whose impassioned harmonies transfixed millions as they lifted their voices in favor of civil rights and against war, has died. He was 86.

Yarrow, who also cowrote the group's most enduring song, "Puff the Magic Dragon," died Tuesday in New York, publicist Ken Sunshine said. Yarrow had bladder cancer for the past four years.

During an incredible run of success spanning the 1960s, Yarrow, Noel Paul Stookey and Mary Travers released six Billboard Top 10 singles, two No. 1 albums and won five Grammys.

They also brought early exposure to Bob

Dylan by turning two of his songs, "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and "Blowin' in the Wind," into Billboard Top 10 hits as they



Yarrow

helped lead an American renaissance in folk music. They performed "Blowin' in the Wind" at the 1963 March on Washington at which the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Yarrow played roles on-stage and offstage at the iconic Newport Folk Festival in 1965 when Dylan went electric. Yarrow was on the festival board and emceed the show, begging Dylan to go back on to play another song after his blistering set, a scene captured in the 2024 biopic "A

Complete Unknown." Dylan took Yarrow's acoustic guitar and played "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue."

After an eight-year hiatus to pursue solo careers, the trio reunited in 1978 for a "Survival Sunday," an antinuclear-power concert that Yarrow had organized in Los Angeles. They would remain together until Travers' death in 2009. Yarrow and Stookey continued to perform both separately and together.

After recording their last No. 1 hit, a 1969 cover of John Denver's "Leaving on a Jet Plane," the trio split up the following year to pursue solo careers.

That same year Yarrow had pleaded guilty to taking indecent liberties with a 14-year-old girl who had come to his hotel room with her older sister to ask for auto-

graphs. Yarrow, who resumed his career after serving three months in jail, was pardoned by President Jimmy Carter in 1981. Over the decades, he apologized repeatedly.

Yarrow wrote "Puff the Magic Dragon" during his Cornell years with college friend Leonard Lipton.

It tells the tale of Jackie Paper, a young boy who embarks on countless adventures with his make-believe dragon friend until he outgrows such childhood fantasies and leaves a sobbing, heartbroken Puff behind. As Yarrow explains: "A dragon lives forever, but not so little boys."

Some insisted they heard drug references in the song. Yarrow maintained it reflected the loss of childhood innocence and nothing more.





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OPINION

Biden’s true legacy: A bridge to nowhere

BY MATT BAI  
 The Washington Post

In the long run, we tend to remember one-term presidents more for their principled stands than for their ultimate failures. Gerald Ford’s pardon of Richard M. Nixon has become, over the years, a story of self-sacrifice. Jimmy Carter has been lauded by a bevy of recent historians for having challenged Americans to better themselves. George H.W. Bush is fondly recalled (by Democrats, at least) for raising taxes, consequences be damned.

That won’t be Joe Biden’s legacy. After a lifetime of noble service, he will be chiefly remembered — like so many in his generation — as a man who didn’t know when to leave.

It’s not that Biden didn’t achieve anything grand or lasting. He had, arguably, the most successful two-year legislative cycle of any president in memory, investing trillions of dollars in clean energy and high-tech industries. He led a rejuvenated NATO and managed to navigate the narrow gantlet between turning back Russian aggression, on one hand, and blundering into a nuclear war on the other. He deserves his due.

But none of that gets to the principal reason that most Americans took a chance on Biden in 2020, when he was making his third run at the presidency in his 78th year. Voters didn’t think they were buying into some New Deal sequel (no matter what the left might have read into the election results). They certainly didn’t elect Biden to guide the country through a second Cold War.

What the voters thought they were getting, amid a paralyzing pandemic and a teetering economy, is exactly what Biden held himself out to be: a transitional leader who would restore a sense of calm and normalcy. Biden

never actually promised to serve a single term, but the implication was clear, even to some of his closest aides. His job, as he himself put it, was to act as a “bridge” — from the political ruins of his generation to whatever the next one might erect in its place.

Why did Biden’s bridge collapse so spectacularly? There’s no single answer. After a half-century of ascending unsteadily to the apex of power, Biden seemed reluctant to yield it so easily. Jetting around the world, juggling mental and physical demands that would have crushed a lot of us who were substantially younger, he must have felt that the transition could wait a few more years.

Then there was the awkward problem of who, exactly, would succeed him. Having rallied around Vice President Kamala Harris in the tumultuous, racially charged summer of 2020, despite her rather abysmal showing as a short-lived presidential candidate, Democratic leaders and Biden’s own aides worried that she couldn’t win. (A competitive primary could have answered that question, of course, but modern Democrats are terrified of any process they can’t orchestrate.)

Improbably, despite flagging approval ratings throughout his presidency, Biden became convinced not only that he was the best candidate to run against Donald Trump but also that he was the only candidate who could defeat him. Those of us who even gently questioned that premise were dismissed as ageist and impractical.

By the time Biden took the stage for his debate with Trump in June, it was clear that history had been hijacked by a dangerous delusion — one shared and fostered by his senior aides and even the reporters who covered him most closely. It was one thing for the octogenarian president to read his State of the

Religious liberty in America: What’s past is prologue

BY FREDERIC J. FRANSEN  
 Tribune News Service

Before the new administration takes office and we discover whether the unofficial new Department of Government Efficiency can set the country on a new course, or whether the “new boss” ends up being the “same as the old boss,” as Pete Townshend and The Who lament in 1971’s “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” I want to reflect on a recent rare occurrence.

To wit: Dec. 25 marked the first of Christmas’ 12 days and the start of Hanukkah’s eight days. Since 1910, this is just the fifth time the two dates have aligned.

While the occurrence is rare, what isn’t rare is that we take it for granted in America when our neighbors celebrate different religious holidays.

Religious freedom is a fundamental American liberty. The Bill of Rights intentionally begins by stating that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Religious liberty is so well established that we forget how innovative the principle was at the time of America’s founding.

Until Martin Luther launched the Reformation in 1517, there was only one church: the Church of Rome. For the next 130 years, religious wars devastated the European continent. They ended in 1648 after the Thirty Years’ War left one-third of Germany’s population dead. The resulting Peace of Westphalia established religious freedom in Europe, but only for princes and kings, not individuals. If

your prince was Protestant, or Catholic, so must you be (or you could be tortured and killed).

Religious establishment remained the norm across Europe until relatively recently. Before 1829, Catholics in the United Kingdom could not vote, sit in Parliament or hold most public offices. Separation of church and state occurred in France in 1905. Until the 1970s, the Netherlands allowed religious groups to operate vertical “pillars,” controlling their members’ political, social and religious lives. Even today, at least nine European governments collect taxes on behalf of official churches.

Almost from the beginning, America was different. Many early colonists were fleeing religious persecution. While the Massachusetts Bay Colony imposed political and religious uniformity, within the first generation, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island (in 1636) as a refuge for religious tolerance. In 1649, Maryland passed the Toleration Act, the first of its kind in the world, establishing religious freedom for all its settlers. And it is no accident that protecting against religious establishment was at the top of the agenda of the Bill of Rights.

Returning to Hanukkah and Christmas, America was a welcome refuge not only to Christians but also to Jews fleeing religious persecution. Jacob Barsimson, the first known Jewish immigrant to America, arrived on August 22, 1654.

By the time of the Constitution in 1787, the total Jewish population of the United States was only about 2,500. Still, Jews played an out-

Union address off a teleprompter with a few ad-libs thrown in, the elated reaction to which would have made you think he had just articulated a new string theory for the universe while doing backflips. It was quite another to see him shuffle onstage and choke on his syntax while Trump grinned like Nurse Ratched.

Even now, during the waning hours of Biden’s term, it’s impossible to look at him and think: here’s a guy who should have been running for president again. Twenty years on, it will rank among the most self-evidently foolish acts of denial in which any incumbent party has ever engaged.

None of that should wipe away Biden’s very real achievements, which are probably more significant than those of any other one-term president in our lifetimes. If, in the coming years, Americans charge their electric cars at brand-new stations and power their computers on American chips, they will have Biden largely to thank. So might Europe have much to thank Biden for, if Vladimir Putin’s ambitions to re-create the Soviet empire are stymied.

But memory is brutally reductive, and that’s not what most people will associate with Biden’s legacy. While Ford and Bush were each awarded the Profile in Courage Award given by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Carter won the Nobel Prize, Biden, I fear, will have to satisfy himself with a train station in Wilmington, Del., and a rest stop on Interstate 95.

The enduring image of his presidency, however unfairly, will always be the bridge that didn’t hold.

Matt Bai, a Washington Post contributing columnist, is a journalist, author and screenwriter.

sized role in establishing religious liberty in the nation.

Throughout the summer of 1790, Jewish leaders from across the United States petitioned President George Washington to protect religious liberty, which he was known to champion. In August, he visited the Touro Synagogue in Newport, R.I. The congregation gave him a warm welcome, and the rabbi offered him some thoughts on religious freedom, comparing the Revolutionary War to the struggles of the ancient tribes of Israel, and Washington to King David.

Later the same day, Washington sent a letter to the congregation, responding that “ the Government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance (and) requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens.” Religious freedom, he said, was not an “indulgence” that one class of people granted to another but one of their “inherent natural rights.”

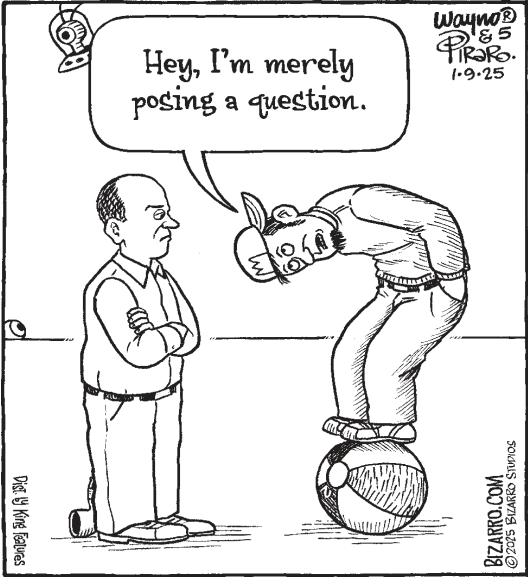
In short, so long as new arrivals were willing and loyal participants in the American experiment in liberty, the government would protect their right to worship in their own way.

Today, 13% of asylum seekers to the United States are fleeing religious persecution, according to the Department of Homeland Security. They should be as welcome to us today as they were to George Washington.

Frederic J. Fransen is president of Huntington (W.Va.) Junior College and CEO of Certell Inc. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

- 1 Sticks (out)  
5 Govt. loan agcy.  
8 Answer an invite  
12 Canyon comeback  
13 Chest muscle  
14 Andy's boy  
15 Israeli airline  
16 Dumpster explorer  
17 Spoken  
18 Costa Rica neighbor  
20 "Good as new," for one  
22 Crow's greeting  
23 French diarist Anais  
24 Pedestal  
27 Nevada gambling city  
32 Recipe abbr.  
33 "Sixth sense"  
34 U.K. recording label  
35 Document destroyer  
38 Love god  
39 Numerical prefix  
40 Discoverer's call  
42 Aid  
45 More serene  
49 La Scala melody  
50 Genesis vessel  
52 "Othello" villain

- 53 Taxpayer IDs  
54 Fish eggs  
55 Streetcar  
56 Wise one  
57 Summer hrs. in D.C.  
58 Robust

- 21 Bill of sale (Abbr.)  
24 "Dynamite" band  
25 Blond shade  
26 Tidying (up)  
28 Enzyme suffix  
29 Toothed wheel  
30 "I love," to Ovid  
31 Bro's sib  
36 Sheathe  
37 God, to Galileo  
38 Crude stone artifact  
41 "That's a laugh!"  
42 Lip  
43 — Major  
44 Exceptional  
46 Kate of "The Martian"  
47 Alike (Fr.)  
48 Apple variety  
51 Scepter

DOWN

- 1 Army transport  
2 Golden State sch.  
3 Compared to  
4 Comfort  
5 Really spread out  
6 Actress Arthur  
7 Performs  
8 Rent sharer  
9 Spaniel type  
10 Test tube  
11 Soccer legend  
19 Bell or Barker

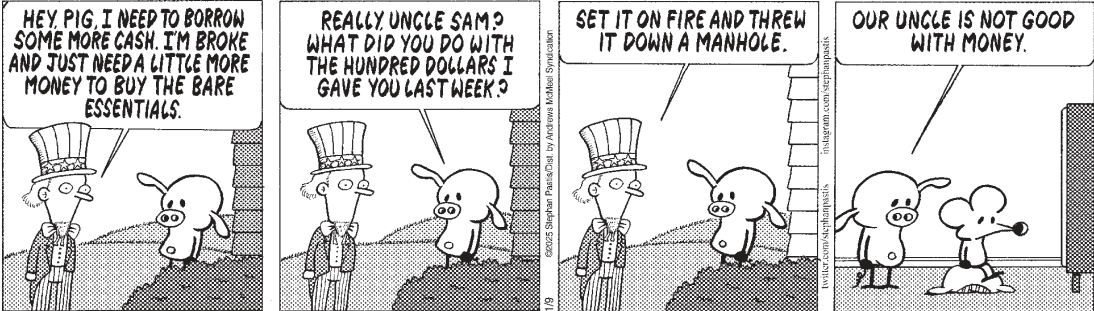
Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



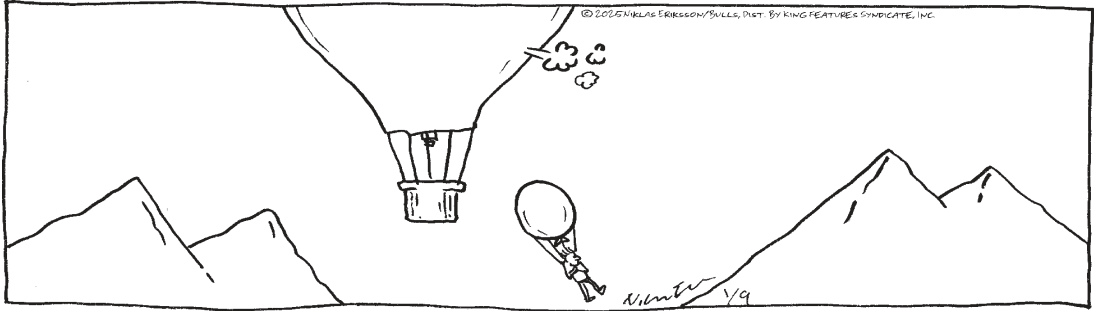
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



1-9

CRYPTOQUIP

VW 'H RQ HNMAMVHZ WCOW  
FQNRWOVRH SVDD ODSOXH  
FOJZ FZ YMOYJ NA DONECVRE.  
WCZX OMZ CVDD-OMZOH.  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE I CONSUME VERY FEW FOODS WITH ANY PROTEIN OR FAT, PEOPLE HAVE CALLED ME A CARBIVORE.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals N







NHL

ROUNDUP

Oilers blank Bruins, win 4th straight

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — Adam Henrique scored two goals and Connor McDavid scored on a power play midway through the second period as the Edmonton Oilers won their fourth straight game, 4-0 over the Boston Bruins on Tuesday night.

Stuart Skinner, who left the game late in the first period after a collision with Boston’s Nikita Zadorov before returning at the start of the second, stopped 26 shots in 55 minutes as Edmonton won for the 12th time in its last 15 games.

“He got me pretty good,” said Skinner. “I think that’s like the fifth hit I’ve got this year. He apologized after, at the start of the second period, which was really nice of him to do. It’s an NHL play. It happened.”

Viktor Arvidsson added an empty-netter for the Oilers, while center Leon Draisaitl’s point streak was halted at 14 games.

It was the Bruins’ fifth straight loss, their worst stretch since interim coach Joe Sacco took over for the fired Jim Montgomery on Nov. 19.

Jeremy Swayman made 35 saves but lost his fourth straight start.

Referee Chris Rooney, a Boston native, worked his 1,500th career game.

**Lightning 3, Hurricanes 2:** Brayden Point scored with 52 seconds to play and host Tampa Bay snapped a four-game skid with a victory over Carolina.

Brandon Hagel and Nick Paul also scored for the Lightning while Darren Raddysh finished with two assists. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 shots in the victory.

Andrei Svechnikov and Jordan Staal scored for the Hurricanes. Pytor Kochetkov finished with 31 saves.

Nikita Kucherov found Point cutting to the slot where he received the pass and spun around to his forehand to snap a shot past Kochetkov on the winning goal.

**Red Wings 3, Senators 2 (OT):** Patrick Kane scored on a power play with 2:39 remaining in overtime and host Detroit extended its winning streak to five games with a win over Ottawa.

Dylan Larkin scored on a power play in the first period and Joe Veleno also scored in regulation for the Red Wings. Larkin extended his goal streak to four games and his point streak to six games.

Alex Lyon started in goal for Detroit, but was removed after the first period due to an upper-body injury. Cam Talbot took over and the duo combined for 31 saves.

Brady Tkachuk and Thomas Chabot scored for the Senators, who have lost five of their last six



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Edmonton Oilers goaltender Stuart Skinner stretches after making a save against Bruins right wing Justin Brazeau during the third period Tuesday in Boston. Skinner made 26 saves as the Oilers won 4-0.

games. Anton Forsberg made 30 saves.

**Stars 5, Rangers 4 (OT):** Jamie Benn scored on a power play 2:17 into overtime and visiting Dallas rallied from an early three-goal deficit to defeat struggling New York.

Jake Oettinger made 21 saves and Stars defenseman Thomas Harley had a goal and two assists. Harley’s snap shot tied it 4-all at 17:21 of the third period following a terrible turnover by Rangers defenseman K’Andre Miller deep in his own end.

Benn’s 11th goal came with Artemi Panarin in the penalty box for hooking and gave Dallas its only lead. The Stars’ captain tipped in a centering pass from Jason Robertson. Harley also assisted on the play.

Dallas denied New York goalie Jonathan Quick his 400th career win.

**Blue Jackets 4, Penguins 3 (SO):** Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson scored in the shootout, and visiting Columbus rallied to beat Pittsburgh.

Elvis Merzlikins, who made 20 saves, stopped Bryan Rust and Sidney Crosby in the shootout, as the Blue Jackets came back from a 3-1 deficit in the third period.

Adam Fantilli scored a third-period power-play goal and Dmitri Voronkov scored twice, giving him nine goals in seven games. Columbus has goals with the man advantage in 12 of its last 15 games. Sean Monahan left with an upper-body injury.

Rickard Rakell scored twice and Michael Bunting set a career high with his eighth power-play goal. Crosby had two assists and

became the NHL’s all-time leader in faceoff wins since the league started tracking the stat in 1997.

**Maple Leafs 3, Flyers 2:** Auston Matthews and John Tavares each had a goal and an assist to lead visiting Toronto to a win over Philadelphia for its fifth straight.

Matthew Knies tallied the go-ahead goal with 6:39 remaining to help the Maple Leafs sweep a home-and-home set with the Flyers. Toronto defeated Philadelphia 3-2 in overtime on home ice on Sunday.

Leafs goalie Joseph Woll made 30 saves.

Travis Konecny scored both Flyers goals.

**Wild 6, Blues 4:** Matt Boldy’s tiebreaking goal early in the third period for host Minnesota completed its comeback from a two-score deficit to beat St. Louis for its fourth straight victory.

Boldy snapped in a shot off a pass from Mats Zuccarello on a 2-on-1 rush after Blues defenseman Jake Broberg’s stick broke in the neutral zone.

Joel Eriksson Ek scored for the Wild midway through the second period, and Jake Middleton tied the game 1:16 into the third. Marcus Johansson tacked on an empty-netter.

Jordan Kyrou, Jake Neighbours and Robert Thomas scored early in the second period for a 4-2 lead for St. Louis that prompted Minnesota to pull goalie Filip Gustavsson, who’d allowed a total of three goals over two earlier wins against the Blues this season.

**Jets 5, Predators 2:** Morgan Barron and Josh Morrissey scored 16 seconds apart to help Winnipeg goalie Connor Helle-

buyck record his 300th NHL career win over visiting Nashville.

Kyle Connor, Gabriel Vilardi and Nino Niederreiter also scored for the Jets, who halted a three-game losing skid. Mark Scheifele added a pair of assists.

Hellebuyck stopped 26 shots.

Filip Forsberg ended an 18-game scoring drought with his 10th of the season for the Predators. Juuse Saros made 26 saves for Nashville.

**Flames 3, Ducks 2 (OT):** Jonathan Huberdeau scored a power-play goal at 2:05 of overtime in visiting Calgary’s victory over Anaheim.

MacKenzie Weegar had a goal and an assist for the Flames, who stopped a two-game skid. Nazem Kadri scored and Dustin Wolf stopped 25 shots.

Mason McTavish tied it with 12:24 left in regulation for the Ducks, who have earned a point in five of their last six games. Alex Killorn also scored, and John Gibson made 30 saves.

Calgary’s Connor Zary apparently injured his left knee during the second period in an open-ice collision with Anaheim defenseman Drew Helleeson, who received a game misconduct.

**Golden Knights 4, Sharks 2:** Mark Stone had a goal and an assist as visiting Vegas beat San Jose.

Zach Whitecloud, Victor Olofsson and Tomas Hertl also scored to help the Golden Knights extend their winning streak to three games. Shea Theodore had two assists.

William Eklund had a goal and an assist for the Sharks. Timothy Liljegren also scored.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Toronto	42	27	13	2	56	132	115	
Florida	41	24	15	2	50	136	127	
Boston	43	20	18	5	45	111	135	
Tampa Bay	38	21	15	2	44	140	107	
Ottawa	39	19	17	3	41	114	114	
Montreal	40	19	18	3	41	122	136	
Detroit	40	18	18	4	40	110	128	
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	41	24	15	2	50	137	117	
Columbus	41	18	17	6	42	141	148	
Pittsburgh	42	17	17	8	42	128	156	
Philadelphia	41	17	19	5	39	125	147	
N.Y. Rangers	40	18	20	2	38	117	128	
N.Y. Islanders	40	15	18	7	37	108	128	

Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Winnipeg	42	28	12	2	58	152	106	
Minnesota	41	26	11	4	56	127	111	
Dallas	39	25	13	1	51	128	99	
Colorado	41	25	15	1	51	140	131	
St. Louis	42	19	19	4	42	118	129	
Utah	39	17	15	7	41	113	118	
Nashville	41	13	21	7	33	100	128	
Chicago	40	13	25	2	28	102	137	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	40	28	9	3	59	143	107	
Edmonton	40	25	12	3	53	132	109	
Los Angeles	38	23	10	5	51	118	96	
Vancouver	39	18	12	9	45	120	126	
Calgary	40	19	14	7	45	108	122	
Anaheim	40	17	18	5	39	103	121	
Seattle	41	17	21	3	37	118	130	
San Jose	43	13	24	6	32	112	153	

**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**

Edmonton 4, Boston 0  
Dallas 5, N.Y. Rangers 4, OT  
Detroit 3, Ottawa 2, OT  
Columbus 4, Pittsburgh 3, SO  
Tampa Bay 3, Carolina 2  
Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2  
Minnesota 6, St. Louis 4  
Winnipeg 5, Nashville 2  
Calgary 3, Anaheim 2, OT  
Vegas 4, San Jose 2

**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 Tuesday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	41	14	52	66
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	40	29	30	59
Mitch Marner, TOR	42	14	44	58
Mikko Rantanen, COL	41	24	34	58
Nikita Kucherov, TB	36	17	39	56
Connor McDavid, EDM	37	16	39	55
Jack Eichel, LV	40	11	42	53
Kyle Connor, WPG	42	23	30	53
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
Mark Scheifele, WPG	42	23	25	48
Martin Necas, CAR	41	15	32	47







COLLEGE BASKETBALL

No more unbeatens: Gators rout No. 1 Vols

By MARK LONG  
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Alijah Martin scored 18 points, Denzel Aberdeen added 16 and No. 8 Florida thumped top-ranked Tennessee 73-43 on Tuesday night to knock off the last unbeaten team in Division I basketball.

Alex Condon chipped in 12 points and 12 rebounds for his second double-double this season as the Gators (14-1, 1-1 Southeastern Conference) beat a No. 1 team for the third time in school history — the first in six tries at home — and extended their home-winning streak to 16.

Florida dominated from the opening tip. The Gators scored the first 12 points as the Volunteers (14-1, 1-1) missed their first nine shots.

Tennessee made four shots in the first 20 minutes and trailed by 36 points late.

Vols coach Rick Barnes walked into the locker room and delivered a brief message to his downtrodden team: “This is good for us.”

At least in the long run.

Tennessee got bullied in the paint, out-muscled on the boards and beaten up and down the court.

Condon and Rueben Chinyelu dominated down low against the Vols’ Igor Milicic and Felix Okpara. Chinyelu finished with a



ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/AP

Florida center Rueben Chinyelu blocks Tennessee guard Chaz Lanier's drive to the basket during the first half Tuesday. The Gators held the Vols to 43 points.

career-high 15 boards.

The result was the most lopsided victory against a No. 1 team since UCLA and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, then known as Lew

Alcindor, beat Houston 101-69 in the 1968 Final Four.

The point total was Tennessee's lowest during Barnes' 10 seasons in Knoxville.

“I have no idea some of the things I was looking out there watching,” Barnes said. “I don’t think it was our guys not trying to play hard. I just didn’t think we played very smart.”

Barnes believes his players started pressing amid the sluggish start and “lost our poise.”

“I thought we had the wrong guys shooting the ball at the wrong time,” he said.

Chaz Lanier, who played four seasons at North Florida before signing with the Vols, scored 10 points on 3-for-16 shooting for Tennessee.

“We didn’t want to give him no breathing room,” said Alijah Martin, who led Florida with 18 points. “We know he’s an unbelievable talent, unbelievable shooter. And that was the game plan, just don’t give him no space. Don’t give nothing easy.”

After allowing Kentucky to make 14 3-pointers in a 106-100 loss last week, the Gators held the Vols to 4-for-29 from behind the arc.

“I’m incredibly proud,” Florida coach Todd Golden said. “But now our biggest thing is this can’t be the highlight of our season. It’s awesome in the moment, and we’re going to enjoy it. But it certainly won’t feel as good if we don’t go and find a way to win (at Arkansas) on Saturday.”

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 2 Auburn holds off Texas

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Johni Broome had 20 points and 12 rebounds as No. 2 Auburn withstood a late Texas rally for an victory to give coach Bruce Pearl the school record for career wins.

The Tigers (14-1, 2-0 SEC) led by 21 in the second half, and bullied the Longhorns with their size and length for long stretches, only to watch Texas fight back behind Arthur Kaluma and Jordan Pope to get within three in the final minute.

Denver Jones and Tahaad Pettiford made four free throws over the final 17 seconds to seal it.

Pearl earned victory No. 214 in his 11th season at Auburn, pushing him past Joel Eaves, who coached the Tigers from 1949-63.

Kaluma had 34 points for the Longhorns (11-4, 0-2) on 12-of-16 shooting. Pope scored 17 of his 19 in the second half. Kaluma’s 3-pointer with 50 seconds left and Pope’s two free throws pulled Texas to 83-80.

**No. 3 Iowa St. 82, Utah 59:** Curtis Jones had 23 points off the bench to help the No. 3 Cyclones extend their winning streak to 10 games with a victory over the visiting Utes.

Jones, who tied his season high in points on 10-for-17 shooting, also had five rebounds, six assists and two steals for Iowa State (13-1, 3-0 Big 12).

Tamin Lipsey had 20 points, going 11-for-14 at the free-throw line, and he had a season-high seven rebounds to go with two steals.

**No. 4 Duke 76, Pittsburgh 47:** Star freshman Cooper Flagg scored 14 of his 19 points after halftime — including a jaw-dropper of a coast-to-coast dunk — to help the No. 4 Blue Devils beat the visiting Panthers.

Fellow rookie Kon Knueppel had 17 points and made four 3-pointers for Duke (13-2, 5-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), which won a matchup of unbeaten league teams behind another strong defensive effort.

Cameron Corhen scored 11 points to lead Pitt (12-3, 3-1), which shot 31% and went the last eight minutes without a point.

**Georgia 82, No. 6 Kentucky 69:** Freshman forward Asa Newell scored 12 of his 17 points after halftime and the host Bulldogs led the entire second half in beating the No. 6 Wildcats for their first win over a top-10 team in five years.

Blue Cain added 15 points and Silas Demary Jr. had 14 for Georgia (13-2, 1-1 Southeastern Conference).

Lamont Butler led Kentucky (12-3, 1-1) with 20.

Foul trouble hurt the Wildcats. Amari Williams went to the bench with four fouls early in the second

half. Andrew Carr and Ansley Almonor picked up their fourth fouls later in the game.

**No. 7 Marquette 74, Georgetown 66:** Chase Ross scored a career-high 27 points as the No. 7 Golden Eagles rallied from a 14-point first-half deficit to beat the visiting Hoyas.

Stevie Mitchell added 13 points, David Joplin scored 12 and Kam Jones had 11 for Marquette (14-2, 5-0 Big East), which won its fifth straight game.

Malik Mack led Georgetown (12-3, 3-1) with 18 points. Micah Peavy added 13 points, Thomas Sorber had 11 and Caleb Williams had 10. Sorber had 13 rebounds.

The Hoyas’ five-game winning streak was snapped.

**No. 14 Mississippi St. 76, Vanderbilt 64:** RJ Melendez scored 19 points and the No. 14 Bulldogs beat the host Commodores for their eighth straight victory.

Cameron Matthews added 16 points and Claudell Harris Jr. had 13 for Mississippi State (14-1, 2-0 Southeastern Conference).

Vanderbilt (13-2, 1-1) was trying to start 2-0 in league play for the first time since 2016-17. The Bulldogs snapped the Commodores’ seven-game winning streak under first-year coach Mark Byington.

**Arizona 75, No. 21 West Virginia 56:** KJ Lewis scored a career-high 21 points and the visiting Wildcats beat the No. 21 Moun-



ERIC GAY/AP

Auburn forward Johni Broome, left, shoots past Texas forward Kadin Shedrick on Tuesday. Broome had 20 points and 12 rebounds.

taineers for their fifth straight win.

Jaden Bradley added 15 points and Anthony Dell’Orso scored 10 for Arizona (9-5, 3-0 Big 12).

Javon Small led West Virginia (11-3, 2-1) with 17 points.

The Mountaineers, who entered the AP Top 25 this week for the first time in two years, were held to their lowest point total of the season.

**No. 24 Michigan 94, No. 22 UCLA 75:** Vladislav Goldin scored 21 of his career-high 36 points in the first half to lead the No. 24 Wolverines to their fourth straight victory.

The 7-foot-1 Russian asserted himself in the game’s opening minutes with back-to-back one-handed dunks over Tyler Bilodeau, who gave up 4 inches and 20 pounds to Goldin. On the second

jam, Bilodeau got knocked to the floor.

Tre Donaldson added 20 points for visiting Michigan (12-3, 4-0 Big Ten).

Bilodeau and Sebastian Mack each scored 17 points to lead four players in double figures for the No. 22 Bruins (11-4, 2-2).

**No. 25 Utah St. 85, San Jose St. 78:** Mason Falslev had 17 points and seven rebounds, Tucker Anderson added 15 points and the No. 25 Aggies held on for their fifth consecutive win.

Ian Martinez finished with 14 points and Deyton Albury had 13 for visiting Utah State (15-1, 5-0 Mountain West Conference).

Donavan Yap Jr. made a career-high six 3-pointers and finished with 22 points for the Spartans (7-10, 0-5) and Latrell Davis scored 20.



# COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

## Dominant: Remaining teams do plenty of defensive bullying

FROM PAGE 24

ondary that has punished receivers and anchored a defense that has produced turnovers in 23 consecutive games, the longest streak in the country.

In the quarterfinal win over Arizona State, safety Michael Taaffe's late-game hit on a receiver on the final drive of regulation was reviewed for targeting before it was determined to be legal, and Andrew Mukuba sealed the victory with an interception near the goal line in the double overtime thriller that ended 39-31, the most points Texas has allowed this season.

"I think our defense has been tremendous all year," Longhorns coach Steve Sarkisian said. "As far as football goes, hey, we don't play flag football, man. This isn't seven-on-seven. This is tackle football. We believe in playing a physical brand of football. We try to do it the right way within the rules."

Next up for the Texas secondary is trying to corral dazzling Ohio State freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith.

"You know, that kid can ball. He's a big baller. Strong, strong ability. He's a deep threat," Barron said. "He's a physical player, and I'll have to be physical."

The Buckeyes can also bully opponents, with bookend pass rushers J.T. Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer and All-American safety Caleb Downs on the back end. Ohio State has allowed just 12.1 points per game, just one 300-yard passer and two 100-yard rushers all season.

When top seed Oregon beat the Buckeyes at midseason, Ducks quarterback Dillon Gabriel had a clean pocket all afternoon. In the Rose Bowl rematch, No. 8-seeded Ohio State sacked him eight times, with two each from Tuimolou and Sawyer.

"When we're executing and we're at a high level, it's hard to do anything with us," Buckeyes de-

fensive tackle Tyleik Williams said. "The most violent team, the team that plays the fastest, executes the most, and exceeds their game plan the most is going to win this game."

Notre Dame and Penn State will feature their own style of violence in South Florida. Both units rank in the top 10 in total defense and scoring defense.

After cruising past Indiana in the first round, the No. 7 seed Irish held No. 2 Georgia to 62 yards rushing and 10 points. Notre Dame forced two turnovers, and stopped the Bulldogs on all three fourth-down attempts, most notably inside the Irish 10 with just under 10 minutes left.

And they did it despite being without standout defensive tackle Rylie Mills, who was knocked out of the playoffs with a knee injury in a quarterfinals win over the Hoosiers.

Still anchoring the Notre Dame defense is safety Xavier Watts, a two-time AP All-American, who has six interceptions this season.

The Nittany Lions ranked fifth nationally against the run this season, allowing just 101 yards per game. In their quarterfinal win over Boise State, Penn State held Jeanty to a season-low 104 yards and forced an early fumble.

The Nittany Lions took a hit in that game when All-American defensive end Abdul Carter, the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, left early with an unspecified upper body injury and did not return.

Carter leads Penn State with 11 sacks and is second among all FBS players with 21½ tackles for loss this season. Nittany Lions coach James Franklin seemed optimistic that Carter could return this week, even if he stopped short of saying he would.

"At this point, I don't think there's anything that is stopping him from playing," Franklin said Saturday.



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

**Bookend pass rusher Jack Sawyer is part of an elite Ohio State defense that has allowed an average of 12.1 points per game this season.**



MATTHEW HINTON/AP

**Notre Dame kicker Mitch Jeter kicks a 48-yard field goal during the first half against Georgia in the quarterfinals of the College Football Playoff on Jan. 2. He made three kicks longer than 40 yards in the game.**

# Special teams creating game-changing moments

By JIM VERTUNO  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Missed kicks and makes. Big returns. Shaky nerves.

Special teams have produced some nerve-wracking, game-changing and game-clinching moments so far in the College Football Playoff.

The potential for more blink-of-an-eye touchdowns and knee-knocking pressure on late game field goals gets even bigger heading into the semifinals with Notre Dame-Penn State on Thursday night at the Orange Bowl and Ohio State-Texas on Friday night at the Cotton Bowl.

### Makes and misses

The Fighting Irish seem to have resolved their kicking struggles just at the right time.

Notre Dame kicker Mitch Jeter, a graduate transfer from South Carolina, missed two games in the regular season with a hip injury and was just 8-for-15 on field goals heading into the quarterfinal against Georgia. Then he nailed kicks of 44, 48 yards, and 47 yards to become the first kicker in playoff history to make three from 40 yards or longer in a single game.

The Longhorns' Bert Auburn could use a boost of confidence like that. His 66 career field goals is a record at a school that has produced future pro standouts Phil

Dawson, Justin Tucker and Cameron Dicker. But he is just 16-for-25 this season, including a 6-for-14 mark beyond 40 yards.

In the quarterfinal win over Arizona State, he missed twice in the final 2 minutes of regulation. The first, from 48 yards, went wide right. Before he lined up 38 yards out with 3 seconds left, coach Steve Sarkisian tried giving him a pep talk. The ball doinked off the left upright. Texas prevailed in double overtime.

Auburn sent the SEC championship game into overtime with a tying kick in the final seconds. Teammates have insisted they believe he can deliver another big kick if needed.

"He's made a lot of amazing kicks for us in the past. He's going to come up big when we need him," Texas defensive back Jahdae Barron said. "So if he could just block out the noise. He knows we're riding with him. We've got his back through it all. That's what the culture is here."

### Big returns

The Longhorns and Fighting Irish both scored on kick returns in the quarterfinals.

Texas' Silas Bolden returned the first punt of the game 75 yards for a touchdown and a 14-3 lead against the Sun Devils. A senior transfer from Oregon State, the speedy Bolden hasn't delivered as much as

hoped as a receiver, where he has 22 catches for 243 yards, but he finally broke off the big play in the return game.

It was a Notre Dame kickoff return against the Bulldogs that swung the game for the Irish.

Jaydon Harrison's 98-yard return to open the second half stretched the Irish's lead to 20-3 and stunned Georgia, which had been tied 3-all in the final minute before halftime.

A Jeter field goal and a Beaux Collins touchdown catch made it 13-3 before Harrison delivered. Fifteen seconds into the second half, Notre Dame led 20-3.

### Getting tricky

The Irish closed out the win with a little special teams trickery.

Notre Dame had a fourth-and-short deep in his own territory when coach Marcus Freeman sent the punt team out before running all 11 players off the field and sending in the offense.

Surprised, the Bulldogs raced to match up and then jumped offside as the play clock ticked down. The Irish got the first down and kept the ball for another five minutes, bleeding away the game clock.

"We practiced it to a point where I felt like we couldn't get it wrong," Freeman said. "I thought they did a great job of not panicking, which the whole point of that is trying to get some other panic."



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Bigger game in mind for teams at Orange Bowl

By EDDIE PELLs  
Associated Press

DANIA BEACH, Fla.— In an era that is now long gone, a trip to the Orange Bowl meant a break from the rough weather up north and the capper to a successful season that, if things had gone great, ended with a championship trophy in the case.

This season, for Penn State (13-2) and Notre Dame (13-1), it's the latest stop in the "One and Done" tour that college football has become.

This pair of iconic programs arrived in South Florida on Tuesday to get ready for the Orange Bowl, which is doubling as the College Football Playoff semifinal this year. At stake in Thursday's game: a trip to Atlanta to play for the national title Jan. 20. The other semifinal, between Ohio State and Texas, is set for Friday at the Cotton Bowl.

"You get to this point in the season, and when you're out, you're out," Nittany Lions tight end Khalil Dinkins said of a season that could extend to 17 games for Penn State. "It's just an important thing to know when it comes to how you approach these games."

Only in college football is the



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

concept of "lose and you're out" in the postseason even remotely unique. The sport, which for decades revolved around bowl games like the Orange, Rose and Sugar, has now incorporated them into the 12-team playoff that's debuting this year.

Another unique part of this game is that either team playing Thursday could capture the national championship without fulfilling what used to be a virtually ironclad requirement to get that far — winning a conference title.

Back in the day, and even in the most recent four-team playoff, the biggest games were reserved (mostly) for conference champions, with a few runners-up and the Fighting Irish — who as independents don't have a conference



Ross D. FRANKLIN/AP

After defeating Boise State in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31, Penn State will look to continue advancing in its pursuit of the program's first national championship since 1986.

to win — sprinkled in.

"We realize what the stakes are," Notre Dame safety Xavier Watts said.

The Irish come in as 2½-point favorites, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. They traveled to the Miami area with one day less between games than had originally been built into the schedule. Their Sugar Bowl game was pushed back a day after the deadly New Year's Day truck attack in the French Quarter in New Orleans.

It has made for a seven-day turnaround for Notre Dame — nothing unusual for the regular season, but slightly condensed this week due to the extra day away from campus that comes with a bowl game, to say nothing of the importance of the game itself.

Among the biggest game-plan

challenges for Irish defensive coordinator Al Golden — the former Miami coach who has connections everywhere he looks this week — will be coming up with a way of controlling Tyler Warren, the Nittany Lions' 6-foot-6, 260-pound tight end who can catch, but can also throw and run.

"It's never about, like, me versus him," said Watts, who nevertheless will see Warren a lot in this game. "There will be a lot of people with different responsibilities, and whoever's covering him, it's just 'Go get the job done.'"

On the other side, Penn State faces a Notre Dame team that has shown a willingness to mix things up.

Irish quarterback Riley Leonard had almost as many yards rushing (80) as passing (90) in last

week's 23-10 win over Georgia, and his head-over-heels flip over a Bulldogs defender for a first down late in the game showed what he's willing to do for a win.

"How is this not common to see the quarterback doing everything he can to win?" Leonard said. "I just think that's common sense."

Leonard's play came not long after the Irish punt team hustled off the field on fourth-and-short, to be quickly replaced by the offense. That drew the Bulldogs off-sides and to keep a late, clock-draining drive going.

Receiver Jordan Faison said coaches aren't shy about introducing new twists and tricks throughout the season.

"It shows you the mental battle that's always going on in this game," Faison said.

Notre Dame, Penn State take different routes to semifinal

By BRETT MARTEL  
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — No. 3 Notre Dame and No. 5 Penn State are coming off rather divergent College Football Playoff quarterfinal experiences as they prepare to clash as semifinalists in the Orange Bowl next Thursday.

The Fighting Irish (13-1, CFP No. 7) mustered an opportunistic victory over SEC champion Georgia after an unprecedented delay and under emotionally trying circumstances stemming from a deadly terror attack in the Sugar Bowl's host city.

The Nittany Lions (13-2, CFP No. 6) overwhelmed a non-power conference team that looked overmatched in the Fiesta Bowl, during which social media was alight with football fans — and some analysts — questioning a CFP committee seeding process that had given eighth-ranked Boise State a No. 3 seed and a bye.

Notre Dame's Marcus Freeman isn't buying the notion that a



MARTA LAVANDIER/AP

Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman, left, and Penn State coach James Franklin shake hands during a news conference Wednesday.

team's performance in an upcoming game can be predicted by the path it took to get there.

In the case of the Sugar Bowl, Georgia earned a bye by winning the SEC title game against Texas, which is still playing in the semifinals at the Cotton Bowl against Ohio State. The Irish did not get as much rest. They had to play in the first round and looked sharp com-

ing off a convincing victory over Indiana.

"Whatever circumstances you're given, you make the most of them," Freeman said. "And if we would have had a first-round bye, I would have been the first one to say, 'Hey, this is great for us.'"

"I don't believe in my heart that the first game (against Indiana) had anything to do with this one (in

the Sugar Bowl)," he added. "It was about the preparation they did after the first game."

Notre Dame is listed as a 1.5-point favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. Neither offense airs it out on regular basis. Their yards-passing averages are outside the top 50 nationally. But both teams have rushed for more than 200 yards per game this season, and both have played some of the best defense in the country, each allowing fewer than 16 points per game.

Penn State ranks fifth nationally in yards allowed per game (288.8), while the Irish rank eighth (295.3).

"Running game and defense travels; that's going to show up throughout a season," Nittany Lions coach James Franklin said. "That's going to show up in bad weather. That's going to show up when you're trying to (run out the clock) at the end of the game."

In the Fiesta Bowl, Penn State outgained Boise State on the ground, 216 yards to 108. The Nittany

ny Lions largely contained Broncos star Ashton Jeanty, the Heisman Trophy runner-up, limiting him to 104 yards on 30 carries. Penn State also forced four turnovers, including three interceptions.

"Being able to control the line of scrimmage, whether it's your offensive line or our defensive line, is critical," Franklin said. "It showed up (against Boise State). ... It's really kind of shown up all season."

Notre Dame was outgained on offense by Georgia, 296 yards to 244, but outrushed the Bulldogs 154 yards to 62. Meanwhile, Irish defenders forced and recovered two pivotal fumbles — one inside their own 20-yard line and one inside Georgia's — and stopped all three of Georgia's fourth-down attempts.

"The red zone defense, the big fourth down stops. It's a great group," Freeman said of his defense. "Got great leadership, great players, and they're doing a heck of a job."



# SPORTS



**Perfect no longer**  
Top-ranked Tennessee handed first loss  
by No. 8 Florida » College basketball, Page 21



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

## Dominant defenses

Tough, old-school approach a calling card for 4 teams left

BY JIM VERTUNO  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The expanded College Football Playoff has a decidedly old-school feel: Smothering defenses have carried the last four teams still in the hunt for the national championship.

If you want offense, look elsewhere this weekend. The defenses, with All-Americans spread throughout the lineups, are the story of the semifinals. Ohio State, Texas, Penn State and Notre Dame all rank among the top eight defenses nationally this season.

The No. 8 seed Buckeyes (12-2) meet the No. 5 Longhorns (13-2) in the Cotton Bowl on Friday night. Ohio State is No. 1 in total defense and scoring defense. Texas is ranked third and fourth, respectively.

The Orange Bowl matchup Thursday night between the No. 7 Fighting Irish (13-1) and the No. 6 Nittany Lions (13-2) feature run-stuffing defenses that shut down Georgia and Boise State's Ashton Jeanty, the nation's top running back, in the quarterfinals.

Buckeyes quarterback Will Howard, who was 0-3 against the Longhorns when he was at Kansas State before transferring, summed up the Texas defense this way: "They got some dudes, man," Howard said.

Dudes indeed. Everywhere.

Longhorns senior cornerback Jahdae Barron won the Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back. Edge rusher Colin Simmons has a team-high nine sacks and won the Shaun Alexander Award as the nation's top freshman.

Barron leads a deep, experienced and physical sec-

SEE DOMINANT ON PAGE 22

Texas senior cornerback Jahdae Barron won the Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back.

BRYNN ANDERSON/AP



Source: Giants sign Verlander to \$15M deal » MLB, Page 18

