



FACES

After 'Yellowstone,'
Luke Grimes starts
new on debut album
Page 15

MIDEAST

1K US troops will
deploy for ops to
move aid into Gaza
Page 8

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

UNC's Cormac Ryan
had dominant role
in victory over Duke
Page 24



US Marines reinforce embassy in Haiti, evacuate some staff >> **Page 3**

STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

Volume 82 Edition 233 ©SS 2024 **MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024**

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

50¢/Free to Deployed Areas



FRENCH ARMY/AP

This undated photograph shows three Russian mercenaries in northern Mali. After the death of Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin in a plane crash on Aug. 23, northwest of Moscow, Russian officials moved quickly to take control of the Wagner military contractor's personnel and assets abroad. U.S. Gen. Michael Langley told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Russia is moving in on African countries.

Africa falling prey to Russia

US general warns senators big moves being made in several countries

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Russia is making aggressive moves in Africa in a bid to dominate regions spanning from NATO's southern doorstep in Libya to resource-rich parts of central Africa, a top U.S. general told Congress.

Russia and China both have long-term plans for Africa but Russia is moving "at an accelerated pace," U.S. Africa Command's Gen. Michael Langley said during the Senate Armed Services Committee testimony Thursday.

"A number of countries are at the tipping point of actually being captured by the Russian Federation," Langley said.

Like China, Russia has made inroads in Africa on multiple fronts. Langley said Russian operatives have taken advantage of unrest in western Africa, where there have been a series of coups in recent years.

American involvement in places such as Niger and Mali has been curtailed because of government overthrows. But that also has opened the door to a larger Russian presence.

Langley said Russian security forces, both private contractors and state actors, have upped their presence in the coup-wracked countries, as well as Libya and the Central African Republic.

"They want power projection capabilities," Langley said, adding that gaining access to natural resources, including rare-earth minerals, are part of the attraction.

"I think at an accelerated pace, the Russian

SEE PREY ON PAGE 7

Pentagon IG starts probe into Navy's suicide rate

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department inspector general is sending investigators to several Navy installations to evaluate suicide rates, the Pentagon confirmed Thursday.

Site visits are planned for Naval Base Kitsap in Washington, Naval Base San Diego, Naval Station Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and Naval Air Station Norfolk in Virginia, according to a memo about the review. It will also look at suicides and suicide attempts on ships at sea. Dates for inspections at each facility have not been announced.

The Pentagon said investigators could visit additional installations as the review moves forward. The timing and scope of the review will not be released in advance.

The suicide review was mandated in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets policy and spending priorities for the Pentagon.

The Navy has reported an increase in suicides and suicide attempts in recent years, with 71 suicides by active-duty sailors in 2022. The service reported 65 suicides in 2020 and 59 in 2021. Final statistics for 2023 are not yet available.

Suicide rates differ because of fluctuations in the number of Navy personnel each year. The rate per 100,000 active-duty sailors was 20.6 in 2022, 17 in 2021 and 19 in 2020, according to the Pentagon's 2022 annual report on suicide in the military.

A federal study in 2021 found 30,177 active-duty personnel and veterans in all service branches who served in the military died from suicide in the 20 years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was more than four times higher than

SEE PROBE ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Microsoft says it can't shake Russian state hackers

Associated Press

BOSTON — Microsoft said Friday it's still trying to evict the elite Russian government hackers who broke into the email accounts of senior company executives in November and who it said have been trying to breach customer networks with stolen access data.

The hackers from Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service used data obtained in the intrusion, which it disclosed in mid-January, to compromise some source-code repositories and internal systems,

the software giant said in a blog.

A company spokesman would not characterize what source code was accessed and what capability the hackers gained to further compromise customer and Microsoft systems. Microsoft said Friday that the hackers stole "secrets" from email communications between the company and unspecified customers — cryptographic secrets such as passwords, certificates and authentication keys — and that it was reaching out to them "to assist in taking mitigat-

ing measures."

Cloud-computing company Hewlett Packard Enterprise disclosed on Jan. 24 that it, too, was an SVR hacking victim and that it had been informed of the breach two weeks earlier, coinciding with Microsoft's discovery it had been hacked.

"The threat actor's ongoing attack is characterized by a sustained, significant commitment of the threat actor's resources, coordination, and focus," Microsoft said Friday.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates												
Euro costs (March 11)	\$1.07	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8773									
British pound (March 11)	\$1.26	Thailand (Baht)	35.36									
Japanese yen (March 11)	144.00	Turkey (NewLira)	31.9346									
South Korean won (March 11)	1292.00											
Commercial rates												
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768	<p>(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)</p> <div>INTEREST RATES</div> <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>8.50</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>6.00</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>5.33</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>5.38</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.26</td></tr></table>	Prime rate	8.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00	Federal funds market rate	5.33	3-month bill	5.38	30-year bond	4.26
Prime rate	8.50											
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00											
Federal funds market rate	5.33											
3-month bill	5.38											
30-year bond	4.26											
Britain (Pound)	1.2857											
Canada (Dollar)	1.3485											
China (Yuan)	7.1859											
Denmark (Krone)	6.8128											
Egypt (Pound)	49.3986											
Euro	0.9139											
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8204											
Hungary (Forint)	360.36											
Israel (Shekel)	3.5742											
Japan (Yen)	147.06											
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3071											
Norway (Krone)	10.4247											
Philippines (Peso)	55.55											
Poland (Zloty)	3.93											
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7504											
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3312											
South Korea (Won)	1317.52											

WEATHER OUTLOOK



TODAY IN STRIPES

American Roundup	14
Classified	13
Comics	17
Crossword	17
Faces	15
Opinion	16
Sports	18-24



However you read us,
wherever you need us.

Mobile • Online • Print

EUROPE

ADVERTISING

CustomerService@stripes.com	+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111 DSN: 314.583.9111
-----------------------------	---

MIDDLE EAST

ADVERTISING

CustomerService@stripes.com	+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111 DSN: 314.583.9111
-----------------------------	---

PACIFIC

ADVERTISING

PacificAdvertising@stripes.com	+81 (42) 552.2511 DSN: 315.227.7310
--------------------------------	--

Round-the-world news for America's military.

Stripes.com supplies constant updates, on news of interest — including reports from our overseas military bases in Europe, Pacific, Southwest Asia and the Mideast, and coverage of the Pentagon and Capitol Hill.

Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.



Mobile • Online • Print

MILITARY

US Marines reinforce embassy in Haiti

Some staff evacuated as country's capital turned into battlefield by heavily armed gangs

By JACQUELINE CHARLES
Miami Herald

As heavily armed gangs continue to challenge Haiti's weak government and turn the country's capital into a battlefield, the State Department on Sunday flew in U.S. Marines to reinforce its embassy and evacuate non-essential personnel.

The middle-of-the-night operation was conducted via helicopter by the U.S. military at the re-

quest of the State Department, the U.S. Southern Command said in a statement.

"This airlift of personnel into and out of the embassy is consistent with our standard practice for embassy security augmentation worldwide, and no Haitians were on board the military aircraft," the statement said.

The airlift comes amid ongoing gang attacks in multiple locations around metropolitan Port-au-

Prince, including Tabarre, where the U.S. embassy is located. Several nearby businesses have been looted and overtaken by armed gangs that today control more than 80% of the capital.

Since last Thursday, armed groups have led a coordinated attack, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and targeting key Haitian government institutions. After taking control of several police stations,

they targeted the main seaport before orchestrating a mass prison break at the two largest prisons. Thousands of inmates were freed by the gangs, including several notorious gang leaders.

The gangs have also launched attacks against the international and domestic airports. Heavy gunfire around the airports has led to the suspension of international flights into the country. Henry, who is under pressure

by the United States and the Caribbean Community to resign, remains outside of the country, unable to return.

In response to the attacks, Haiti recently extended a 72-hour state of emergency and curfew to a month, and deployed members of its fledgling army to assist the Haiti National Police. To help in the fight against gangs, the U.S. government recently provided the police with additional ammo.

2 National Guardsmen, border agent killed in Texas helo crash ID'd

Associated Press

LA GRULLA, Texas — A National Guard soldier from New York who was seriously injured in the crash of a helicopter flying over the U.S.-Mexico border remained hospitalized Sunday while authorities released the names of the two National Guard soldiers and a Border Patrol agent who were killed.

The three killed Friday in the crash near Rio Grande City were: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Casey Frankoski, 28, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 John Grassia, 30, both with the New York National Guard; and Border Patrol Agent Chris Luna, 49. The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

The UH-72 Lakota helicopter was assigned to the federal government's border security mission when it went down, according to a statement released by Joint Task Force North, a military unit that supports Customs and Border Protection.

The injured soldier is from the New York National Guard, according to the National Guard Bureau. The soldier, whose name isn't being released, is the aircraft crew chief. The soldier remained hospitalized, according to a release posted by the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said in the release that they are "shocked and devastated" by the deaths of Frankoski and Grassia, and are "praying for the quick recovery" of the injured crew chief.

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Commissioner Troy Miller said in a statement that they were "heartbroken" by the death of Luna, who is survived by his wife and two children, parents and brother.

Secretary of Homeland Security

Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement that they are hoping for the injured national guardsman's "swift recovery," and said his thoughts and the "deepest condolences" of the department were with the families of those killed.

Grassia, who was a New York state trooper, was from Schenectady, N.Y., and he enlisted in the New York Army National Guard in 2013 as a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter maintenance specialist, according to the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs. The release said that Frankoski, of Rensselaer, N.Y., enlisted in the New York Army National Guard in 2016 and she trained to become a UH-60 Black Hawk and UH-72 Lakota helicopter pilot.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement that she was "deeply saddened" by the deaths of Grassia and Frankoski.

"There is no greater calling than service to and defense of your country," she said.

Frankoski and Grassia were assigned to Detachment 2, Company A, 1st Battalion, 244th Aviation Regiment. Luna was assigned to the Border Patrol's Rio Grande City Station.

The helicopter that crashed was assigned to the District of Columbia Army National Guard, according to the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs release.

In January, a Texas Department of Public Safety helicopter patrolling the state's border with Mexico lost power and crashed, officials said at the time.

The co-pilot suffered a minor hand injury and the helicopter was significantly damaged. That helicopter was flying as part of Operation Lone Star, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's nearly \$10 billion border mission.



U.S. MV-22B Osprey transport aircraft are parked at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Okinawa, on Sept. 6. The Osprey fleet has been approved to return to flight after a fatal crash in Japan in November.

Ospreys cleared to fly 3 months after latest fatal crash in Japan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Osprey, a workhorse aircraft vital to U.S. military missions, has been approved to return to flight after an "unprecedented" part failure led to the deaths of eight service members in a crash in Japan in November, Naval Air Systems Command announced Friday.

The crash was the second fatal accident in months and the fourth in two years. It quickly led to a rare fleet-wide grounding of hundreds of Ospreys across the Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy.

Before clearing the Osprey, which can fly like an airplane and then convert to a helicopter, officials said they put increased attention on its proprotor gearbox, instituted new limitations on how it can be flown and added maintenance inspections and requirements that gave them confidence it could safely return to flight.

The entire fleet was grounded Dec. 6, just a week after eight Air Force Special Operations Com-

mand service members were killed when their CV-22B Osprey crashed off Yakushima island.

Before lifting the flight restrictions the military also briefed officials in Japan, where public opinion on the Osprey is mixed, on the crash findings and new safety measures. In a statement Friday, Japan defense minister Minoru Kihara said his nation would likewise return its 14 Ospreys to flight status following an "adequate" analysis of the cause of the crash, extremely detailed information on the accident and the steps to mitigate the issue in the future.

Kihara said Japan and the United States will closely coordinate the timeline for resuming flights in Japan, to give the government time to "thoroughly" explain the issue to its citizens.

However, Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki did not support the return to flight. Okinawa is home to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and its 24 MV-22B Ospreys and is where the public has been most vo-

cal in its opposition to the aircraft.

"It would be best if they stay on the ground, as we have all along requested scrapping of the Osprey deployment," Tamaki said.

A former Osprey pilot familiar with the investigation confirmed that the component in question is part of the proprotor gearbox, a critical system that includes gearing and clutches that connect the Osprey's engine to the rotor to turn it.

The services have done a "deep dive" into the proprotor gearbox, and the new safety measures "will address the issues we saw from that catastrophic event," the head of Air Force Special Operations Command, Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, said Wednesday.

"I have confidence that we know enough now to return to fly," he said.

The investigation, known as an accident investigation board, will be made public and is expected to be completed within the next two months.

PACIFIC

Forces reflect on key takeaways as Cobra Gold ends

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

RAYONG, Thailand — Thousands of troops from 30 nations started for home Friday as the largest military exercise in mainland Asia officially came to a close.

More than 9,000 service members from 30 countries — including 4,500 troops from the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps — gathered throughout Thailand beginning Feb. 27 for Cobra Gold, the world's longest-running annual exercise of its kind.

Over nearly two weeks, those troops made amphibious assaults and airborne drops, fired live artillery rounds, trained for jungle survival and took part in community relations projects and other activities.

Lt. Col. Lindsay Mathwick, commander Combat Logistics Battalion 15 and Marines aboard the amphibious transport dock USS Somerset, said she visited each training area where members of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit were engaged.

"We learned so much as a force," she told Stars and Stripes by email Friday.

"Some of our Marines also had

the opportunity to participate in community relations events with locals — a truly memorable experience," Mathwick wrote. "But what truly moved me and showed me the impact we have coming to participate in these exercises, was seeing the Marines laughing, eating, and sharing stories with each other during their breaks."

Marines also exchanged photos, uniform patches and information that "makes us a more powerful team," she said.

This year's exercise served as a reminder that the United States and its allies share common goals, said Army Maj. General Matthew McFarlane, deputy commander of I Corps, the overall joint force command for Cobra Gold.

"Everyone is interested in participating here to build relationships with regional partners that are interested in a stable and secure, free and open Indo-Pacific," he said on a conference call Thursday. "That's a key message that we got from everybody."

Thailand, the host nation, is a "key partner in the region" for building those relationships and maintaining readiness, McFarlane said. The nation has main-



ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Marine and a Thai soldier exchange contact information ahead of a Cobra Gold amphibious assault on Hat Yao Beach, Thailand, on March 1.

tained official diplomatic ties with the United States since 1833, nearly 200 years.

Cobra Gold is "a positive example of multilateral cooperation, as is demonstrated by the continued increase in participating nations; everyone walks away from this better and able to solve problems together," he said.

A key takeaway this year is the growing importance of cybersecurity and cyberwarfare, McFarlane said. Other lessons included the importance and utility of

equipment and technology, such as those used to communicate between nations.

This was McFarlane's fourth Cobra Gold; his first was in 1996. Since then, the exercise has grown from primarily combat operations between U.S. and Thai forces to vast, multinational training with many more scenarios and drills.

"So, it's certainly a wider variety and a larger contingent working at multiple echelons," he said.

Planning for next year's Cobra Gold is already underway, though

it's too early to provide details, McFarlane said.

"We're building upon the progress to date, but that doesn't mean we'll do the exact same thing and just do it bigger," he told Stars and Stripes. "Sometimes we'll add different things. You know, the senior Thai military leadership are going to be specific about different aspects that they want to train or be better at."

wilson.alex@stripes.com
@AlexMNWilson

US Marines make 'lasting impression' on migrant kids in Thailand

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

PATTAYA, Thailand — Children clad in bright pink polo shirts laughed, danced and cheered during a visit from U.S. Marines taking a community-relations break from two weeks of Cobra Gold military drills.

Around a dozen members of the 15th Marine Expeditionary unit joined more than 40 kids at the Martin Brands Childcare center in Pattaya for local games and a dance competition in the courtyard. Upstairs, Marines did arts and crafts with the younger children.

"I love doing stuff like this — I try to get out and help or interact with the communities wherever I go. I did a lot of this when I was in Japan," Staff Sgt. Jimmy Sannon, a maintenance chief, told Stars and Stripes during Wednesday's visit. "I love seeing the smile on their faces; that's what it is."

The day care visit was one of several community relations projects the Marines took on as part of Cobra Gold, the largest military



ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Marine works on an art project with a student at Martin Brands Childcare center in Pattaya, Thailand, on Wednesday.

exercise in mainland Asia, which drew to a close on Friday.

The day care students, many of them the children of migrant workers, come predominantly from neighboring Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia and are unable to

enroll in Thai schools, said Peter Thorand, president of the Navy League of the United States — Siam Council.

At the Martin Brand center, the children are supervised and given Thai and English language les-

sons while their parents are away during the day, he said.

"I think when you see the result, the kids love it and it's a good experience for your people," Thorand said.

U.S. troops rarely interact with people from those three countries, he added.

Thailand, a comparatively prosperous country in the region, is a key destination for "migrants, displaced persons and asylum seekers," according to a United Nations report from 2019, the most recent on the country's migration trends.

Before the pandemic, migrants, especially from neighboring countries, were coming to Thailand in increasing numbers and constituted about 10% of the nation's labor force, the report states.

Thorand, a retired maintenance engineer from Vancouver, Canada, said he and the Siam Council have been involved in Cobra Gold community projects for decades. He said the projects not only benefit the community, they provide an

opportunity for Cobra Gold participants to see the "real country."

"These community relations projects are maybe one of the most important things you guys can do," he said.

Many students have never interacted with Americans.

"You leave a lasting impression on the people," Thorand said.

The students also get a chance to practice their English, said Staff Sgt. Kyle Peterson, a utilities specialist with the 15th MEU. Some tried the teach Marines phrases in Thai during the arts-and-craft session, he said.

"Honestly, it's just really humbling how much they're willing to learn and how much effort they're actually putting into it here," he said.

"I think it's just as simple as it is; it's about being where you can be somebody's hero," Peterson said. "It's not just painting butterflies, but just something as simple as going to play with them downstairs or painting pictures with them up here."

MILITARY

Government: Rape claim a worker's comp issue

Officials ask court to dismiss lawsuit regarding incident on transport ship

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. government has asked a New Jersey federal court to pause a lawsuit that alleges the Navy's negligence led to a civilian engineer's rape aboard a transport ship so the woman can instead file a claim for a work-related injury with the Labor Department, according to court documents.

The arguments "demonstrate a shocking lack of concern for the circumstances" in which Elsie Dominguez claims she was raped by the captain of the Navy transport ship on which she worked, said Christine Dunn, an attorney representing Dominguez in the lawsuit filed in November.

Dominguez, a 2014 graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, was working as the first assistant engineer aboard the USNS Carson City, an expeditionary fast transport vessel, in December 2021 when she said the ship's captain used a master key code to access her private room overnight and rape her in her bed. The Navy failed to care for and protect her when she reported the attack the next morning using the proper reporting procedures, according to the suit.

The Navy also failed to have appropriate security measures in place to prevent the assault from occurring, according to the suit, which does not name the civilian captain. The ship, part of the Navy's Military Sealift Command,

lacked oversight of the captain's use of a master key code that gave him complete access to the vessel, as well as working security cameras and complete logs of crew members coming and going from the ship.

The Labor Department manages claims under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act, the federal law that pays medical expenses and compensation benefits to workers for injuries obtained while performing their duties.

In court documents, attorneys for the Justice Department argued Dominguez was aboard the ship because her job required it, and that makes it a worker's compensation issue.

"The ship was deployed, and as a practical matter she had no other place to live. The alleged assault occurred in her stateroom, a government premises. On these facts, a substantial likelihood of [worker's compensation] coverage exists," according to the document.

"She was living on that ship for years, and it really can't be the case that absolutely everything that happens to her on that ship would be worker's comp. That doesn't make sense — certainly not for something like being raped in her sleep in her bed," Dunn said.



Dominguez



HALEY NACE/U.S. Navy

The USNS Carson City, an expeditionary fast transport ship, in 2016.

If the court were to agree with the government, Dominguez would be able to return to the lawsuit if the Labor Department denied the claim, according to court documents. If the court disagrees, the case will continue. The court is expected to rule on the government's motion March 18.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service has an ongoing investigation into the allegations, according to court documents.

The Navy's Military Sealift Command operates 130 civilian-crewed ships that replenish Navy ships, conduct special missions and strategically move and preposition cargo at sea around the world, Tom Van Leunen, command spokesman, said last year.

At that time, the workforce was comprised of 5,547 civilian mariners working aboard ships, 1,434 civilians in shore jobs, 347 active-duty service members and 956 reservists.

The Carson City, the ship on which Dominguez worked, is a catamaran with a flight deck for helicopter operations and a loading ramp to enable vehicles to drive on and off the ship quickly.

On the night that Dominguez said she was raped, she believes someone drugged her while at a bar in Brindisi, Italy, where the ship was docked. After one beer and one shot, she felt overly intoxicated and required two people to bring her back on the ship to her room, where she was left alone and unconscious, accord-

ing to court documents. During the night, the captain of the ship entered her room using a master key code and raped her, she claims.

She attempted to report the assault the next day but was given false information that discouraged her from making the report, according to court documents.

After the assault, Dominguez still lived in the room where the rape occurred for nearly two years, though she was able to have a deadbolt lock installed on the door. She filed a criminal report in June and took leave in October, her attorney said.

thayer.rose@stripes.com.
@Rose_Lori

Army lieutenant colonel dies in noncombat incident in Israel

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army Lt. Col. Orlando Bandeira died Monday while serving as a member of the security staff at the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

Bandeira, 54, of Tampa, Fla., died from noncombat related injuries, and the incident is under investigation. He was found unre-



Bandeira

sponsive in his residence, the Army said in a statement.

Bandeira served as deputy chief of operations at the embassy for two months, according to a LinkedIn page with his name and background.

He enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1997 as an administrative specialist.

He joined the Army Reserve in 2019, the service said.

Bandeira served time in the Reserve elements of U.S. Central Command in Tampa. In 2023, he was assigned to the 3rd Brigade of the 94th Training Division in Indianapolis.

His awards and decorations in-

clude two Defense Meritorious Service Medals; a Meritorious Service Medal; an Army Commendation Medal; an Army Achievement Medal; a Joint Meritorious Unit Award; an Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal; a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal; a Global War on Terrorism Service Medal; an Iraq Campaign Medal with two campaign stars; an Army Reserve

Component Overseas Training Ribbon; an Armed Forces Reserve Medal with "M" device and 20-year Silver Hourglass; a Humanitarian Service Medal; two Army Service Ribbons; two Overseas Training Ribbons; a National Defense Service Medal; and a Korea Defense Service Medal.

adams.matthew@stripes.com
@MatthewAdams60

Motorcycle collision kills Camp Foster-based Marine on Okinawa

By HANA KUSUMOTO
AND JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Marine assigned to Camp Foster died Thursday evening when his motorcycle collided with a vehicle on an Okinawa roadway, according to Japanese police.

The 24-year-old Marine was

southbound on Route 58 in the Oyama section of Ginowan city around 6:50 p.m. when he struck a vehicle turning right at a T-junction, a spokesman for Okinawa Prefectural Police told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.

The Marine suffered a head injury and was confirmed dead at a

local hospital at 7:29 p.m., the spokesman said. The vehicle's driver was not injured, he said. A III Marine Expeditionary Force spokesman, Capt. Alejandro Arteaga, said the collision happened while the Marine was off duty.

"We are cooperating with local authorities in their investigation

of the accident," Arteaga said by email Friday. "Pending official notification of the Marine's next of kin, no further details will be released at this time. We extend our heartfelt condolences to those impacted by this tragedy."

A witness reported the accident to police, the police spokesman

said. The crash's cause is in under investigation.

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

kusumoto.hana@stripes.com
@HanaKusumoto
snyder.jonathan@stripes.com
@Jon_E_Snyder

MILITARY

Army soldier accused of selling military info

Intelligence analyst allegedly conspired to disclose photos, documents since 2022

By **KIMBERLEE KRUESI**
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — An Army soldier has been arrested on accusations of selling sensitive information related to U.S. military capabilities, Justice Department officials said Thursday.

Sgt. Korbein Schultz, who is also an intelligence analyst, was accused in a six-count indictment of charges including conspiring to obtain and disclose military defense information and bribery of a public official. The 24-year-old was arrested at Fort Campbell, which straddles the Tennessee-Kentucky border, shortly after the indictment was released Thursday.

“The men and women of the United States Armed Forces dedicate their lives to maintain our national security,” Henry C. Leventis, U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, told reporters. “Our laws protecting national



Leventis

fellow citizens, members of our military and our allies at risk.”

According to the indictment, Schultz — who had a top-secret security clearance — allegedly conspired with an individual identified only as “Conspirator A” to disclose various documents, photographs and other national defense materials since June 2022. The indictment claims that Schultz was recruited by the individual not only due to his security clearance but also because he was tasked with gathering sensitive U.S. military information.

Some of the information that Schultz supposedly gave to the in-

dividual included information related to the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, hypersonic equipment, studies on future developments of U.S. military forces and studies on military drills and operations in major countries like China.

The indictment outlines that Schultz was initially asked to provide documents detailing lessons that could be learned from Russia's war with Ukraine and how those lessons could be applied to the U.S. helping Taiwan in the event of an attack. Schultz was paid \$200 for that information, which then prompted Conspirator A, to ask for a “long-term partnership.”

Conspirator A, who was described in the indictment as a foreign national purporting to reside in Hong Kong, later suggested that Schultz could earn more money if he handed over “internal only” material rather than unclassi-

fied documents.

In total, Shultz received at least 14 payments totaling \$42,000.

“The defendant and his co-conspirator also discussed recruiting another member of the U.S. military to join their conspiracy and to provide additional national defense information in order to conceal their illegal conduct,” Leventis said.

Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Ruth Castro said in a statement that Schultz has been in the Army since November 2018 and his hometown is Wills Point, Texas.

Schultz was previously assigned to Fort Cavazos, Texas, and was deployed once to Eastern Europe, according to Lt. Col. Tony Hoefler, a spokesperson for Fort Campbell.

The case is the latest in a series of federal prosecutions of current or former military members accused of illegally disclosing sensitive government secrets.

For instance in April 2023, Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira was charged with leaking highly classified military documents about Russia's war in Ukraine on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games.

He pleaded guilty on Monday in a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to serve at least 11 years in prison.

In August, two U.S. Navy sailors were charged with providing sensitive military information to China — including details on wartime exercises, naval operations and critical technical material.

And more recently, the Justice Department announced charges this week against a civilian Air Force employee and retired Army lieutenant colonel for allegedly sharing classified information about the war in with Ukraine on a foreign dating site.

Probe: Site visits set for Kitsap, San Diego, Hawaii, Virginia

FROM PAGE 1

the 7,057 service members killed in combat during the same time.

The review will “determine whether the Department of Navy effectively took actions to prevent and respond to incidents of deaths

by suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation among members of the Navy assigned to sea duty or shore duty,” according to a Feb. 27 memo from the inspector general's office.

“Additionally, we do not dis-

close our tactics, techniques or procedures used to perform our evaluations,” said Mollie Halperin, a spokeswoman for the Defense Department Office of Inspector General.

Installations visited by investi-

gators must also assign a rear admiral or high-ranking civilian employee to respond to questions. The Navy's Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Defense Health Agency will lead the

review. When the review is completed, it will be published on the inspector general's website.

The memo said the review could lead to revisions in how the Navy manages and evaluates its programs.

Philippines strikes security deals as tensions rise with China at sea

By **REGINE CABATO**
The Washington Post

MANILA — The Philippines has been striking new defense agreements with other countries at a rapid clip, seeking to build what officials here call a “network of alliances” that could deter Chinese aggression in disputed waters.

The Philippines has signed or entered discussions over new security agreements with at least 18 countries since a Chinese coast guard vessel flashed a military-grade laser at a Philippine coast guard ship in the South China Sea last year, according to the Philippine Defense Department.

While the deepening Philippine alliance with the United States — which includes granting the U.S. military expanded access to Philippine military bases — has drawn much attention, Manila's security campaign goes beyond Washington.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made nearly a dozen overseas visits in 2023, many to seek security assistance and military equipment. This year, his schedule in-

cludes delivering a rare address before the Australian Parliament as well as the keynote speech at Asia's premier defense summit, the Shangri-La Dialogue, in Singapore.

Since 2022, the Philippines has inked new defense agreements with the European Union, India and Britain. Japan, Canada and France are looking at signing visiting-forces agreements with the Philippines, which would allow those countries to send troops to Philippine bases, according to their embassies.

If adopted, these agreements would give the Philippines one of the most robust security networks in Asia, expanding the global stakes in the rising tensions over the South China Sea, Philippine officials say. “Given that we are the underdog, we leverage our relationships with other countries,” said Jonathan Malaya, assistant director of the country's National Security Council. “Our network of alliances is critical.”

China claims much of the South China Sea, part of the Pacific Ocean that is bounded by China,

Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei. In recent years, China has stepped up its presence in these waters.

Off the coast of the Philippines, Chinese ships have swarmed Philippine vessels and ignored appeals by Philippine officials to stop their aggression.

Last week, a Chinese coast guard ship fired water cannons at a Philippine coast guard vessel, shattering a windscreen and injuring four personnel, Philippine authorities said.

Last year, Marcos's administration responded with what it called a policy of “assertive transparency,” broadcasting videos of aggressive Chinese actions at sea. But in recent interviews, top officials said the country needs more than a publicity campaign to defend its sovereignty.

China has previously accused the Philippines and the United States of fueling tension in the South China Sea. Asked by reporters last year about joint air and maritime patrols between the Philippine and U.S. forces that



DEMETRIUS FREEMAN/The Washington Post

President Joe Biden and Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. meet in the Oval Office of the White House on May 1.

launched in November, Wu Qian, a spokesperson for China's Defense Ministry, said Washington had “instigated and emboldened the Philippine side to infringe upon China's sovereignty.”

More recently, Ji Lingpeng, spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Manila, said that “bringing in outside forces and forming ‘small circles’ will not help resolve disputes in the South China Sea, but only complicate the regional situation [and] undermine regional peace and stability.”

Philippine officials disagree, saying their country is standing up

for its sovereignty, not acting on behalf of Washington. And with a third of the world's shipping passing through South China Sea, diplomats in Manila say many countries — not just the United States — have good reason to deter Chinese aggression.

If other nations don't defend international law, the “right of might” wins, Luc Véron, the European Union's ambassador to the Philippines, said in an interview. “We cannot accept that our freedom of navigation in South China Sea will be impeded ... by any players,” he added.

EUROPE

Prey: AFRICOM head contrasts US goals with rivals'

FROM PAGE 1

Federation is really trying to take over Central Africa as well as the Sahel," Langley said.

Central and southern African countries in particular have little trust in China and Russia but need infrastructure investments, inexpensive equipment and financial support, which can take the form of predatory loans that leave them vulnerable to domination, Langley said.

"These countries are in a dilemma. They must balance their development needs against risks to national sovereignty," Langley said.

The U.S. offers a different approach, one that is centered on development of civilian and defense institutions and doesn't hold its partners' natural resources hostage, Langley said.

"Instead of demanding financial and political concessions, we demand accountability on the fundamentals: respect for human rights and the rule of law," Langley said.

While it's unclear which approach will win out, the



Gen. Michael Langley, head of U.S. Africa Command, addresses the media during a visit to Morocco last month.

stakes are high, given global military reliance on minerals such as chromium, cobalt, manganese and tantalum that are vital for various industries.

"If we don't support host nations in securing these resources, the implications for America's defense edge will be grim," Langley said. "These are critical minerals for our adversaries too."

vandiver.john@stripes.com
@john_vandiver

Pope's 'white flag' comment met by criticism from Ukraine and its allies

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian and allied officials criticized Pope Francis for saying that Kyiv should have the "courage" to negotiate an end to the war with Russia, a statement many interpreted as a call for Ukraine to surrender.

The foreign minister of Poland, a vocal ally of Kyiv, and Ukraine's ambassador to the Vatican, both used World War II analogies to condemn the pope's remarks. And a leader of one of Ukraine's Christian churches on Sunday said that only the country's determined resistance to Moscow's full-scale invasion, launched by Russian President Vladimir Putin on Feb. 24, 2022, had prevented a mass slaughter of civilians.

In an interview recorded last month with Swiss broadcaster RSI and partially released on Saturday, Francis used the phrase "the courage of the white flag" as he argued that Ukraine, facing a possible defeat, should be open to peace talks brokered by international powers.

"How about, for balance, encouraging Putin to have the courage to withdraw his army from Ukraine? Peace would immediately ensue without the need for negotiations," Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski responded with a post on X, formerly Twitter.

In a separate post, Sikorski drew parallels between those calling for negotiations while "denying (Ukraine) the means to defend itself" and European leaders' "appeasement" of Adolf Hitler just before World War II.

Andrii Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See, said that it was "necessary to learn lessons" from



EFREM LUKATSKY/AP

Ukrainian servicemen of the 28th Separate Mechanized Brigade fire a 122 mm mortar toward Russian positions at the front line, near Bakhmut, Donetsk region, Ukraine, this month.

that conflict. His tweet appeared to compare the pope's comments to calls for "talking with Hitler" while raising "a white flag to satisfy him."

Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunelli later clarified that the pope supported "a stop to hostilities (and) a truce achieved with the courage of negotiations," rather than an outright Ukrainian surrender. Brunelli said that the journalist interviewing Francis used the term "white flag" in the question that prompted the controversial remarks.

"I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates," Francis said, when asked to weigh in on the debate between those who say that Ukraine should agree to peace talks and those who

argue that any negotiations would legitimize Moscow's aggression.

Kyiv remains firm on not engaging directly with Russia on peace talks, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said multiple times that the initiative in peace negotiations must come from the country that has been invaded.

Throughout the war, Francis has tried to maintain the Vatican's traditional diplomatic neutrality, but that has often been accompanied by apparent sympathy with the Russian rationale for invading Ukraine, such as when he noted that NATO was "barking at Russia's door" with its eastward expansion. The RSI interview appears to mark the first time when the pope publicly used terms such as "white flag" or "defeated" while discussing the war.

Poland changes its view on NATO troops in Ukraine

BY VANESSA GERA
Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's foreign minister says the presence of NATO forces in Ukraine "is not unthinkable" and that he appreciates the French president for not ruling out that idea.

Radek Sikorski made the observation during a discussion marking the 25th anniversary of Poland's accession to NATO in the Polish parliament Friday, and the Foreign Ministry tweeted the comments later in English.

They reflect a larger European debate over how to help Ukraine as Russia has gained some momentum on the battlefield and Kyiv is running low on ammunition. The U.S. Congress is withholding aid that Ukraine says it critically needs to hold off the Russians, putting more pressure on Europe to respond to the war that has shattered peace on the Continent.

Last month French President Emmanuel Macron said the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine could not be ruled out, a comment that broke a taboo among allies and prompted an outcry from other leaders. French officials later sought to clarify Macron's remarks and tamp down the backlash, while insisting on the need to send a clear signal to Russia that it cannot win its war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin has warned that if NATO sends combat troops, a direct conflict between the alliance and Russia would be inevitable. Russian President Vladimir Putin

said such a move would risk a global nuclear conflict.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk was among those European leaders who initially ruled out sending troops to Ukraine after Macron's remarks, saying: "Poland does not plan to send its troops to the territory of Ukraine."

But less than two weeks later Sikorski struck a different tone.

"The presence of #NATO forces in Ukraine is not unthinkable," he said, according to the Foreign Ministry's tweet. He said he appreciated Macron's initiative "because it is about Putin being afraid, not us being afraid of Putin."

Sikorski's remark is part of a broader shift to align with Macron's position, wrote Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

"The issue of sending European forces to help Ukraine was never one to be dismissed—it was always a possibility," O'Brien wrote in an email analysis sent to subscribers Saturday. "In fact it has become more of one as the USA has stepped back and withdrawn aid. Europe is now faced with a terrible dilemma — watching Ukraine potentially run out of ammunition, or stepping in and helping Ukraine more directly."

Polish President Andrzej Duda and Tusk will travel to Washington for a meeting at the White House on Tuesday, a visit the Poles hope they can use to spur the United States to do more to help Ukraine.

Moldova cites threats from Russia as it seeks to join EU

Associated Press

CHISINAU, Moldova — The past two years have been the hardest and most tumultuous for European Union candidate Moldova in more than three decades as it faces threats from Russia in multiple spheres of public life, the country's foreign minister says.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, its neighbor Moldova has faced a litany of crises that have at times raised fears the country is also in Russia's crosshairs. These included errant missiles landing on its territory; a severe energy crisis after Moscow dramatically reduced gas supplies; rampant inflation; and protests by pro-Russia parties against the pro-Western government. Moldova has also tak-

en in the highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita of any country.

"This past two years without exaggeration have been by far the most difficult in the past 30 years," Mihai Popsoi, appointed foreign minister in late January, told The Associated Press in an interview.

Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but Russia continues to see the country as within its sphere of influence.

Moldovan officials have repeatedly accused Russia of funding anti-government protests, meddling in local elections and running vast disinformation campaigns to try to derail Moldova from its path toward full EU membership. Russia has denied the accusations.

MIDEAST

Biden: Netanyahu ‘hurting Israel’ in war actions

By Zeke Miller
Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — President Joe Biden said Saturday that he believes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is “hurting Israel more than helping Israel” in how he is approaching its war against Hamas in Gaza.

The U.S. leader expressed support for Israel’s right to pursue Hamas after the Oct. 7 attack, but said of Netanyahu that “he must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken.” Biden has for months warned that Israel risks losing international support over mounting civilian casualties in Gaza, and the latest remarks in an interview with MSNBC’s Jonathan Capehart pointed to the increasingly strained relationship between the two leaders.

Biden said of the death toll in Gaza, “it’s contrary to what Israel stands for. And I think it’s a big mistake.”

Biden said a potential Israeli invasion of the Gaza city of Rafah, where more than 1.3 million Palestinians are sheltering, is “a red line” for him, but said he would not cut off weapons like the Iron Dome missile interceptors which protect the Israeli civilian populace from rocket attacks in the region.

“It is a red line,” he said, when asked about



ARIEL SCHALIT/AP

An aircraft airdrops humanitarian aid over the northern Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, on Sunday.

Rafah, “but I’m never going to leave Israel. The defense of Israel is still critical, so there’s no red line I’m going to cut off all weapons so they don’t have the Iron Dome to protect them.”

Biden said he was willing to make his case

directly to the Israeli Knesset, its parliament, including by making another trip to the country. He traveled to Israel weeks after the Oct. 7. attack. He declined to elaborate on how or whether such a trip might materialize.

The U.S. leader had hoped to secure a tem-

porary cease-fire before Ramadan begins this week, though that appears increasingly unlikely as Hamas has balked at a deal pushed by the U.S. and its allies that would have seen fighting pause for about six weeks, the release of additional hostages held by Hamas and Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, and a surge in humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Israel remains committed to continuing its invasion and annihilating Hamas, which killed about 1,200 people in Israel and took about 250 hostages on Oct. 7. The militant group freed dozens of hostages during a November truce, but it refuses to release more without guarantees of a complete end of hostilities.

Meanwhile, more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza according to the Hamas-run health ministry, with the majority being women and children, and hundreds of thousands going hungry.

Biden noted CIA Director Bill Burns is in the region currently trying to resurrect the deal.

Biden’s comments came after he was captured on a hot mic following Thursday night’s State of the Union address telling Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo. that he and the Israeli leader will need to have a “come to Jesus meeting.”

1,000 troops will deploy for temporary port ops near Gaza

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon will soon deploy about 1,000 American troops to build a temporary seaport just off the coast of war-torn Gaza to provide its inhabitants some 2 million meals per day, a Defense Department spokesman said Friday.

The American troops will deploy a floating pier and a roughly 1,800-foot causeway in the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza’s coast, where commercial vessels can dock and offload aid to be transported by smaller vessels and vehicles into Gaza, said Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon’s top spokesman.

The operation will use a makeshift dock known as a Joint Logistics

Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, and include Navy and Army personnel, Ryder said.

None of the American forces will enter Gaza at any time, including to deliver aid or build the temporary pier, he said at the Pentagon. Ryder said the pier should be operational within about 60 days.

“We’re working to set this up as quickly as possible, but we expect that it will take several weeks to plan and execute,” he said. “Once operational the actual amount of aid delivered will depend on many variables and will likely scale over time. However, we expect that deliveries via JLOTS could provide more than 2 million meals to the citizens of Gaza per day.”

Not all the forces to be used in the operation had been selected as of Friday, Ryder said. However, the Army’s 7th Transportation Brigade based at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia had already been notified it would be deployed, he said.

President Joe Biden announced Thursday during his State of the Union speech that he ordered the Pentagon to conduct the new aid mission. He also called on Israel to do more to protect civilians and ensure they receive humanitarian aid as the Israelis fight Hamas militants in the Palestinian enclave.

The U.N. said the roughly 2.3 million people in Gaza now face near-famine conditions amid the fighting launched in the wake of Hamas mil-

itants’ surprise assault on Israelis on Oct. 7.

Humanitarian aid has been slow getting into Gaza for reasons including blockades at land crossings and tight controls of aid trucks by Israel, which has accused Hamas of stealing humanitarian goods.

The U.S. in recent days has begun airdropping some humanitarian aid into Gaza via Air Force C-130s. The U.S. and Jordanian militaries airdropped about 11,500 meals into northern Gaza on Friday, according to U.S. Central Command, which oversees American military operations in the Middle East.

It was not clear Friday how much the new aid operations would cost U.S. taxpayers, Ryder said.

The Navy will deploy the floating pier and causeway toward Gaza via ships, and soldiers and sailors will prepare them for use, Ryder said. Commercial vessels will be able to dock at the floating pier, where their cargo can be offloaded and reloaded onto smaller Navy logistics support vessels, he said.

Those Navy ships will then deliver the aid onto the causeway, where it will be loaded onto trucks that will drive it onto the beach in Gaza for delivery, Ryder said.

The aid will be driven into Gaza by vetted U.S. partners and not American troops, he said.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com
@CDicksteinDC

CENTCOM leader: US strikes deter actions of Iran proxies in Iraq, Syria

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

U.S. strikes in early February on Iranian proxies in the Middle East have deterred militant groups in Iraq and Syria from attacking American forces but have not been as effective against Houthi rebels in Yemen, the top U.S. general in the region said Thursday.

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, including those responsible for the Jan. 28 drone attack in Jordan that killed three U.S. soldiers, have not fired at American troops in more than a month, Army Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla told the Senate Armed Services Committee. He credited the retaliatory strikes on some 85 targets in Iraq and Syria with restoring an informal cease-fire in those countries.

“Iran has to understand there are consequences to their actions. I think that on that last attack that we did ... our messaging matched our actions ... and I think that sent a very strong deterrent message, and we have not had an attack in 32 days in Iraq or Syria,” said Kurilla, who leads U.S. Central Command and is responsible for American forces in the Middle East and central Asia. “But I will tell you deterrence is always temporary.”

While violence has dropped in Iraq and Syria, it has increased off Yemen’s coast. Repeated U.S. strikes on Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are also backed by Iran, have not deterred the group from its attacks on commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, Kurilla said.

Houthis target Singapore-flagged ship as US, allies shoot down their drones

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — An attack by Yemen’s Houthi rebels set off explosions ahead of a Singapore-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Aden, authorities said, the latest in a campaign of assaults by the Iranian-backed group over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attack on Friday targeted the bulk carrier Propel Fortune, which continued on its way, according to U.S. Central Command. “The missiles did not impact the vessel,” the U.S. military said. “There were no injuries or damages reported.”

The Houthis said Saturday they were behind the attack. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed that along with targeting the Propel Fortune, the

Houthi forces also launched 37 drones targeting American warships.

American officials said early Saturday that the U.S. Navy, allied warships and aircraft have shot down 15 bomb-carrying Houthi drones in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

Friday’s attack on Propel Fortune came after a Houthi missile struck a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden on Wednesday, killing three of its crew members and forcing survivors to abandon the vessel. That was the first fatal strike in the Houthis’ campaign over the war in Gaza. The Houthis describe the attacks as trying to pressure Israel into stopping the war, but their targets increasingly have little or nothing to do with the conflict.

NATION

Biden, Trump issue dire warnings of the other

Associated Press

ATLANTA — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump warned of dire consequences for the country if the other wins another term in the White House as the pair held dueling rallies in Georgia Saturday fresh off strong wins in Super Tuesday contests that positioned them for an all-but-certain rematch this November.

The state was a pivotal 2020 battleground — so close four years ago that Trump finds himself indicted here for his push to “find 11,780 votes” and overturn Biden’s victory — and both parties are preparing for another closely contested race in the state this year.

Biden opened his speech at a rally in Atlanta noting that Trump was across the state with Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, the firebrand lawmaker who has gone from the fringes of her party to the fore. “It can tell you a lot about a person who he keeps company with,” Biden said to applause. Biden noted that Trump had hosted Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán — who has rolled back democracy in his country — at his Florida club the day before.

“When he says he wants to be a dictator, I believe him,” Biden said of Trump. “Our freedoms are literally on the ballot this November.”

Biden hosted the rally at Pullman Yards, a 27-acre arts and entertainment venue in Atlanta that was formerly an industrial site to receive the endorsement of Collective PAC, Latino Victory Fund and AAPI Victory Fund, a trio of political groups representing, respectively, Black, Latino, and Asian Americans and Pacific Island voters. The groups were announcing a \$30 million commitment to mobilize voters on Biden’s behalf.

Trump, meanwhile, hammered Biden on the border and blamed him for the death of 22-year-old Georgia nursing student Laken Riley last month. An immigrant



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

President Joe Biden waves to supporters after speaking at a campaign event, Saturday in Atlanta.

from Venezuela who entered the U.S. illegally has been arrested and charged with her murder. He hosted Riley’s family at his rally in Rome, Greene’s hometown.

“What Joe Biden has done on our border is a crime against humanity and the people of this nation for which he will never be forgiven,” Trump said, promising the largest deportation in history. “What a tremendous shame,” he said.

Ahead of his rally, Biden expressed regret for using the term “illegal” during his State of the Union address to describe Riley’s suspected killer, drawing more criticism from Trump’s team.

Trump, who took the stage at the same moment Biden was still speaking at another part of the state, skewered the president for the apology and said, “Are we going crazy?”

“I say he was an illegal alien. He was an illegal immigrant. He was an illegal migrant. And he shouldn’t have been in our country and he never would have been under the Trump policy,” he said to loud cheers.

Trump also highlighted the very things Biden knocked him for, saying that he “had dinner last night with a great gentleman from

Hungary, Viktor Orbán” and praised Greene for yelling at Biden during his State of the Union about Riley, calling her “very brave.”

Trump’s rally opened with a message asking attendees to rise to support the hundreds of people serving jail time for their roles in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, when thousands of pro-Trump supporters tried to overturn the 2020 presidential election by halting the counting of Electoral College votes.

The intensity of the rhetoric presaged a grueling eight months of campaigning ahead in the state.

“We’re a true battleground state now,” said U.S. Rep. Nikema Williams, an Atlanta Democrat who is also state party chairwoman.

Trump, while repeating his lies about the 2020 election on Saturday, declared, “With your vote, we are going to win the state of Georgia in an epic landslide.”

Once a Republican stronghold, Georgia is now so competitive that neither party can agree on how to describe today’s divide. A “52-48 state,” said Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, whose party controls state government. “We’re not blue, we’re not red,” Williams countered, but “periwinkle,” a



MIKE STEWART/AP

Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump arrives at a campaign rally Saturday in Rome Ga.

claim she supports with Biden’s 2020 win and the two Democratic senators, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, Georgia sent to Washington.

There is agreement, at least, that Biden and Trump each have a path to victory — and plenty of obstacles along the way.

“Biden’s numbers are in the tank for a lot of good reasons, and we can certainly talk about that. And so, it makes it where Trump absolutely can win the race,” Kemp said at a recent forum sponsored by Punchbowl News. “I also think he could lose the race. I think it’s going to be a lot tougher than people realize.”

Biden’s margin was about a quarter of a percentage point in 2020. Warnock won his 2022 Senate runoff by 3 points. Kemp was elected in 2018 by 1.5 percentage points but expanded his 2022 reelection margin to 7.5 points, a blowout in a battleground state.

In each of those elections, Democrats held wide advantages in the core of metro Atlanta, where Biden was Saturday. Democrats also performed well in Columbus and Savannah and a handful of rural, majority-Black counties. But Republicans dominated in other rural areas, small towns and the

smallest cities — like Rome.

At Trump’s rally, at a city in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, more than 3,000 people packed inside an event center Saturday to hear the former president speak. His campaign handed out signs featuring the image of Laken Riley.

Candace Duvall, from Hampton, Ga., wearing a white “Trump 2024,” T-shirt, a gold purse that said “Trump” and a pair of earrings that said “Never surrender” on one earring and Trump’s mugshot on the other, declared that her candidate is “going to save this country.”

She faulted Biden for fumbling the pronunciation of Riley’s name during his State of the Union speech Thursday.

“That happened right here in Georgia. That hits home for us. We know why that happened. We know why,” she said, adding that there were too many migrants coming into the country.

Duvall said she thinks Trump is winning over voters who didn’t like him before “because they see the difference now” with Biden.

“If somebody gives you sirloin and then they take it away and give you a hamburger, you’re going to want sirloin again,” she said.

Biden signs \$460B funding package, averts shutdown

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed into law a \$460 billion package to fund part of the U.S. government until September, finalizing legislation that averts a partial government shutdown.

The package sets spending for about a quarter of agency funding through September, including the departments of Commerce, Justice, Transportation, Energy and Veterans Affairs.

Funding for other parts of the government is set to expire on

March 22, creating the next deadline.

The next round of negotiations is expected to include money for the Defense and Homeland Security departments, which has sparked tensions between parties as Republicans demand strict border legislation.

While the funding deadline formally elapsed at midnight Friday, the White House said its budget office had enough leeway to allow continued operation of federal agencies into Saturday.

Biden says he’ll sign proposed TikTok ban

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Friday endorsed legislation that could lead to the popular video-sharing app TikTok being banned in the United States, a move that comes amid growing concern in Washington about keeping Americans’ data out of China’s hands.

The legislation that passed through the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee unanimously on Thursday calls on China’s ByteDance to divest its ownership of TikTok — or effectively face a U.S. ban. Republican House

Speaker Mike Johnson also supports the bill and has indicated it would soon come up for a full vote in the House.

“If they pass it, I’ll sign it,” Biden said.

The White House had provided technical support in the drafting of the bill, though White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said last week the TikTok legislation “still needs some work” to get to a place where Biden would endorse it.

Former President Donald Trump, the likely Republican nominee, came out in a Truth So-

cial post on Thursday saying he opposed a ban because it would help rival social media platform Facebook.

Trump’s opposition to the legislation comes after he issued — and then rescinded — an executive action late in his presidency intended to ban TikTok and another popular app, WeChat.

Trump’s pushback puts him on the opposite side of the debate of powerful Republicans, including Johnson and Republican House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who has called the legislation a “critical national security bill.”

DOJ opens criminal probe of blowout on 737 Max plane

The Washington Post

The Justice Department is looking into the Jan. 5 blowout of a portion of the fuselage of a Boeing 737 Max jetliner operated by Alaska Airlines, according to two people briefed on the matter.

Federal prosecutors have interviewed several witnesses in connection with the criminal investigation, including the pilots and aircrew of the Alaska flight, according to two individuals who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak publicly about the probe. A grand jury has been convened to examine evidence, one person said.

Boeing declined to comment. A Justice Department spokesman also declined to comment. Alaska Airlines said in a statement Saturday that it was cooperating with the investigation.

“In an event like this, it’s normal for the DOJ to be conducting an investigation,” Alaska Airlines said. “We are fully cooperating and do not believe we are a target of the investigation.”

Spirit AeroSystems, a Boeing supplier that initially installed a panel that came off the jet in midair, said it has received requests for information from “multiple government agencies” and was cooperating with ongoing investigations.

The inquiry comes as an audit

by the Federal Aviation Administration identified multiple instances where Boeing failed to comply with quality control requirements in its manufacturing process, an unwelcome reminder of safety problems that led to a 20-month grounding of the fleet following two fatal crashes involving 737 Max 8 jetliners in 2018 and 2019.

The Justice Department is investigating whether any factors that contributed to the Jan. 5 incident violated the terms of an earlier agreement with Boeing to resolve any criminal liability for the two crashes involving 737 Max jets, according to a person familiar with the probe.

Boeing reached that deal with the Justice Department in 2021 over employees’ concealment of a critical safety flaw implicated in crashes that killed 346 people in Ethiopia and Indonesia. Boeing agreed to pay more than \$2.5 billion in penalties and admitted that two of its technical pilots deceived federal safety regulators about a software system blamed for the accidents.

As part of the agreement, Boeing would avoid criminal prosecution if it met other conditions for a period of three years, including promptly reporting any evidence that its employees or agents committed fraud against any government agencies, regulators or its customers.

ALS drug maker: Study says therapy failed to help

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The maker of a much-debated drug for Lou Gehrig’s disease said Friday its therapy failed to help patients in a large follow-up study, but stopped short of committing to follow through on a prior pledge to pull the drug from the U.S. market.

The Food and Drug Administration approved Amylyx Pharmaceuticals’ Relyvrio in September 2022, following a years-long advocacy campaign by patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a fatal muscle-wasting disease.

Amylyx said Friday it would discuss its plans for Relyvrio with patients and the FDA, which “may include voluntarily withdrawing” the drug. Executives said in a statement they were “surprised and disappointed” by the results

and hoped to announce their plans in the next two months.

The latest company study showed that the drug did not slow the disease compared with a dummy treatment. The drug also failed to show improvement on any secondary measures, such as muscle strength.

Amylyx’s medication is part of a string of drugs for deadly, degenerative diseases that have won FDA approval in recent years despite questionable proof that they work.

The 2022 approval was mainly based on results from one small, mid-stage study that was criticized by some of the agency’s own internal scientists. An outside committee of experts also voted against the drug initially, before being swayed to back it at a follow-up meeting requested by patients.



Job seeker Johannes Oveida looks over a brochure at a job fair at Lehigh Carbon Community College in Allentown, Pa., on Thursday.

Another burst of hiring shows off resilience of the US job market

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America’s employers delivered another healthy month of hiring in February, adding a surprising 275,000 jobs and again showcasing the U.S. economy’s resilience in the face of high interest rates.

Last month’s job growth marked an increase from a revised gain of 229,000 jobs in January. At the same time, the unemployment rate ticked up two-tenths of a point in February to 3.9%. Though that was the highest rate in two years, it is still low by historic standards. And it marked the 25th straight month in which joblessness has remained below 4% — the longest such streak since the 1960s.

Yet despite sharply lower inflation, a healthy job market and a record-high stock market, many Americans say they are unhappy with the state of the economy — a sentiment that is sure to weigh on President Joe Biden’s bid for reelection. Many voters blame Biden for the surge in consumer prices that began in 2021. Though inflationary pressures have significantly eased, average prices remain about 17% above where they stood three years ago.

Friday’s report gave the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve some encouraging news: Average hourly wages rose just 0.1% from January, the smallest monthly gain in more than two years, and 4.3% from a year earlier, less than expected. Average pay growth has been exceeding inflation for more than year, but when it rises too fast it can feed inflation. The latest figures reflected the job market’s sustained ability to withstand the 11 rate hikes the Fed imposed in its drive against inflation, which made borrowing much costlier for households and businesses. Employers have continued to hire briskly to meet steady demand from consumers across the economy.

The February figures will likely make Fed officials more comfortable about cutting rates sometime in the coming months. With December and January job gains revised sharply down, wage growth easing and the unemployment rate up, the Fed’s policymakers aren’t likely to worry about an overheating economy. Most economists and Wall Street traders expect the first rate cut to come in June. The Fed stopped raising rates in July and has sig-

naled that it envisions three rate cuts this year.

The unemployment rate rose last month in part because more people began looking for a job and didn’t immediately find one. The Fed could be reassured by the influx of job seekers, which typically makes it easier for businesses to fill jobs without having to significantly raise pay.

Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial Services, said he was impressed by the breadth of hiring last month: Among industries, health care companies added 67,000 jobs, government at all levels 52,000, restaurants and bars 42,000, construction companies 23,000 and retailers 19,000.

When the Fed began aggressively raising rates in March 2022 to fight the worst bout of inflation in four decades, a painful recession was widely predicted, with waves of layoffs and high unemployment. The Fed boosted its benchmark rate to the highest level in more than two decades.

Inflation has eased, more or less steadily, in response: Consumer prices in January were up just 3.1% from a year earlier — way down from a year-over-year peak of 9.1% in 2022.

OpenAI has ‘full confidence’ in Altman

Associated Press

OpenAI is reinstating CEO Sam Altman to its board of directors and said it has “full confidence” in his leadership after the conclusion of an outside investigation into the company’s turmoil.

The ChatGPT maker tapped the law firm WilmerHale to look into what led the company to abruptly

fire Altman in November, only to rehire him days later. After months of investigation, it found that Altman’s ouster was a “consequence of a breakdown in the relationship and loss of trust” between him and the prior board, OpenAI said in a summary of the findings Friday. It did not release the full report.

“I’m pleased this whole thing is over,” Altman told reporters Friday, adding that he’s been disheartened to see “people with an agenda” leaking information to try to harm the company. At the same time, he said he’s learned from the experience and apologized for a dispute with a former board member.

NATION

Illegal homemade machine guns fuel surge in shootings

BY LINDSAY WHITEHURST
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eleven-year-old Domonic Davis was not far from his mom’s Cincinnati home when a hail of gunfire sprayed out from a passing car. Nearly two dozen rounds hurtled through the night at a group of children in the blink of an eye.

Four other children and a woman were hurt in the November shooting that killed Domonic, who had just made his school basketball team. “What happened? How does this happen to an 11-year-old? He was only a few doors down,” his father, Issac Davis, said.

The shooting remains under investigation. But federal investigators believe the 22 shots could be fired off with lightning speed because the weapon had been illegally converted to fire like a machine gun.

Communities around the U.S. have seen shootings carried out with weapons converted to fully automatic in recent years, fueled by a staggering increase in small pieces of metal or plastic made with a 3D printer or ordered online. Laws against machine guns date back to the bloody violence of Prohibition-era gangsters. But the proliferation of devices known by nicknames such as Glock switches, auto sears and chips has allowed people to transform legal semi-automatic weapons into even more dangerous guns, helping fuel gun violence, police and federal authorities said.

“Police officers are facing down fully automatic weapon fire in amounts that haven’t existed in this country since the days of Al Capone and the Tommy gun,” said Steve Dettelbach, director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and

Explosives. “It’s a huge problem.” The agency reported a 570% increase in the number of conversion devices collected by police departments between 2017 and 2021, the most recent data available.

Guns with conversion devices have been used in several mass shootings, including one that left four dead at a Sweet Sixteen party in Alabama last year and another that left six people dead at a bar district in Sacramento, Calif., in 2022. In Houston, police officer William Jeffrey died in 2021 after being shot with a converted gun while serving a warrant. In cities such as Indianapolis, police have seized them every week.

The devices that can convert legal semi-automatic weapons can be made on a 3D printer in about 35 minutes or ordered from overseas online for less than \$30. They’re also quick to install. Once in place, they modify the gun’s machinery. Instead of firing one round each time the shooter squeezes the trigger, a semi-automatic weapon with a conversion device starts firing as soon as the trigger goes down and doesn’t stop until the shooter lets go or the weapon runs out of ammunition.

“You’re seeing them a lot in stunning numbers, particularly in street violence,” said David Pucino, deputy chief counsel at Giffords Law Center.

In a demonstration by ATF agents, the firing of a semi-automatic outfitted with a conversion device was nearly indistinguishable from an automatic weapon. Conversion devices with differing designs can fit a range of different guns, enabling guns to fire at a rate of 800 or more bullets per minute, according to the ATF.

“It takes two or three seconds to



PHOTOS BY ALEX BRANDON/AP

A semi-automatic pistol with a conversion device installed making it fully automatic is fired as four empty shell casings fly out of the weapon, at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, National Services Center, this month, in Martinsburg, W.Va.

put in some of these devices into a firearm to make that firearm into a machine gun instantly,” Dettelbach said.

Between 2012 and 2016, police departments in the U.S. found 814 conversion devices and sent them to the ATF. That number grew to more than 5,400 between 2017 and 2021, according to the agency’s most recent data.

They took hold in Minneapolis in 2021, and helped fuel record-breaking gun violence that year, said police Chief Brian O’Hara. Along with spraying out bullets at a dizzying speed, switches make a gun more difficult for the shooter to control, so more people can be hit by accident.

“The thing is shaking as it’s firing, so we wind up getting multiple victims, people hit in extremities during the same shooting incident, because the person cannot control the weapon,” O’Hara said.

While the devices are considered illegal machine guns under federal law, many states don’t have their own specific laws against them. In Indiana, police were finding them so often — multiple times a week in the



A handful of fully automatic conversion devices is displayed above semi-automatic pistols, some with conversion devices installed making them fully automatic, at the ATF facility.

state’s capital — that the state changed the law to ensure it included switches.

But long before any prosecution, police have to find the conversion devices. Often about the size of a quarter, they can easily go unnoticed by the untrained eye after being installed, said Dettelbach.

Davis struggles to talk about the loss of his son. Domonic would often

come with his dad on Fridays to get a haircut at the barber shop where Issac Davis works. He hopes to start a foundation called For Every Eleven to fight gun violence and honor his son’s memory.

“I still want to keep his name going,” he said. “He deserved to be still relevant. So I have to keep going. No matter how much grief I grieve him in private.”

Prosecutor quits after rebuke over conjugal visits for informants

BY JOSHUA GOODMAN
Associated Press

MIAMI — A veteran prosecutor in Miami has resigned after a judge found that state investigators manipulated witnesses, including possibly providing conjugal visits to jailhouse informants in exchange for their testimony, in a high-profile death penalty case against a notorious gang leader.

During his career Michael Von Zamft has led some of the biggest murder, conspiracy and racketeering cases in the Florida state attorney’s office in Miami and at times served as a trainer and supervisor to younger prosecutors.

He resigned last week following a

stunning rebuke by the judge, who disqualified him and another prosecutor, Stephen Mitchell, from the resentencing trial of gang leader and convicted murderer Corey Smith.

Judge Andrea Ricker Wolfson said she found evidence of “witness testimony manipulation” and “severe recklessness” by prosecutors stretching back to the case’s origins 24 years ago and continuing to the present.

State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said Friday that she accepted the resignation of Von Zamft, her colleague of almost 30 years, and reaffirmed her commitment that all prosecutors seek “truth and justice” lawfully and with

“honesty, integrity and professionalism.”

Her office did not respond to questions by The Associated Press about whether she had initiated any discipline actions against the prosecution team behind the case or filed a complaint to the Florida Bar.

“I will ask my top litigators to examine every aspect of this case and determine the best path forward,” Rundle said in a statement, in which she also defended the decision to seek the death penalty for Smith.

Von Zamft declined to comment.

Among the irregularities the judge found was testimony from inmates who said they were granted favors including conjugal visits

when they were brought to the Miami Police Department’s Homicide Unit to coordinate their testimony against Smith as state witnesses.

But the most damaging allegations against Von Zamft came from recordings of his conversations with an inmate in which, in anticipation of the resentencing trial, he discussed arranging jailhouse meetings among several witnesses so they can coordinate their testimony — something Smith’s lawyers were never told, as is required in criminal prosecutions. In a 2022 phone call, Von Zamft also discussed sidelining another witness whose version of events had shifted over the years, saying that if she didn’t testify as he

wanted, “I will find a way to make her unavailable” and read her previous testimony into the record.

Smith was an alleged leader of what’s known as the John Doe Gang, a drug organization that sold marijuana and crack cocaine in a poor, predominantly Black neighborhood of Miami in the late 1990s. His conviction in 2004 in the killing of four individuals was touted at the time as a major victory against gangs.

Smith was sentenced to death for two of the killings on the recommendation of a majority of jury members, but in 2017 state law changed to require a unanimous vote in capital punishment cases. As a result the death sentence was vacated.

WORLD

Gunmen kidnap 300 students in northwest Nigeria

Associated Press

KURIGA, Nigeria — Rashidat Hamza is in despair. All but one of her six children are among the nearly 300 students abducted from their school in Nigeria’s northwest, riddled with Islamic extremists and armed gangs.

It has been more than two days after her children — ages 7 to 18 — went to school in the remote town of Kuriga in Kaduna state only to be kidnapped by gunmen. She was still in shock Saturday.

Authorities said at least 100 children aged 12 or younger were among the abductees in the state known for violent killings lawlessness and dangerous roads where people get regularly snatched.

“We don’t know what to do, but we believe in God,” Hamza told

The Associated Press during a visit to the town.

The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week; a group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another northwestern state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days earlier 200 people, mostly women and children displaced by conflict, were kidnapped in northeastern Borno State.

No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school abductions on herders who are in conflict with the settled communities.



MARCO UGARTE/AP

Keeping the legacy alive

People dance near a giant papier-mache bull stuffed with fireworks as roman candles and bottle rockets shower them with sparks, during the annual festival honoring Saint John of God, in Tultepec, Mexico, on Friday. Every year, in the first week of March, hundreds of giant papier-mache bulls stuffed with fireworks are erected in the front yards of Tultepec. The celebration, now its 35th year, pays homage to the patron saint of the poor and sick, St. John of God, who the fireworks’ producers view as a protective figure. The festivities are a way for the town of Tultepec, just north of Mexico City, to keep their craft alive and draw people to the town after a massive, devastating explosion at workshops in 2018 killed 25 people and wounded twice that number.

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

SERVICE DIRECTORY

The Daily Guide to Navigating the European Business Market





Transportation 944

VEHICLE SHIPPING SERVICES

- International Shipping
- Import & Export
- Inland trucking (U.S. & Europe)
- Door to door pick-up/delivery service
- Customs clearance
- All Risk Marine Insurance
- Auto Insurance (Germany only)

For Further Information Please Contact

GERMANY	UNITED KINGDOM	U.S.A.
Phone: +49-(0)6134-2592730	+44-(0)1638-515714	+1-972-602-1670 Ext. 1701
Toll-free: 0800-CARSHIP (Germany only)		+1-800-264-8167 (US only)
E-Mail: info@transglobal-logistics.de	enquiries@carshipuk.co.uk	info@tgal.us
WEB: www.transglobal-logistics.de	www.carshipuk.co.uk	www.tgal.us

For 2nd POV Shipments - Offices / Agencies near Military Installations



LOGISTICS EUROPE GMBH



Are you in the picture?



outage

Army colonel punished in Abu Ghraib scandal

Into the fire

Reading Stars and Stripes gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.

No one covers the bases the way we do.

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Transportation 944

Ship Cars and Containers to and from the USA



WORLDWIDE SHIPPING AGENCY


OPENING HOURS: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon - Fri

0800-522-6274 or 800-WSA-SHIP (972-7447)

For a free rate request, please email: info@worldwide-ship.de

Visit our Website: www.worldwide-ship.de

Off Duty? Amuse Yourself!



Concert, events, TV, movies, music, video games, celebrity antics...

Get entertained with...

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill would apply ‘stand your ground’ to bears

FL TALLAHASSEE — So long as they don’t eat them, stuff them or turn them into hats for the British royal guard, Florida residents will be allowed to kill black bears threatening them on their property with no consequences under a bill sent to Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday.

The once-threatened Florida black bear population has increasingly wandered into neighborhoods and private property, especially in more rural areas of north and central Florida. The legislation is similar to the “stand your ground” law that allows people to use deadly force against other people threatening them.

Supporters say Floridians have the right to defend themselves, their families, pets and property against bears coming around looking for food. But opponents fear people will become trigger happy and not take other precautions against bears.

Xcel Energy admits role in igniting large wildfire

TX CANADIAN — The utility provider Xcel Energy said Thursday that its facilities appeared have played a role in igniting a massive wildfire in the Texas Panhandle that grew to the largest blaze in state history.

Texas officials have said they are still investigating the cause of the fire that has burned nearly 1,700 square miles and destroyed hundreds of structures. The Minnesota-based company said in a statement that it disputes claims that “it acted negligently” in maintaining and operating infrastructure.

“Based on currently available information, Xcel Energy acknowledges that its facilities appear to have been involved in an ignition of the Smokehouse Creek fire,” the company said in a statement.

Bill to criminalize death of ‘unborn person’ OK’d

IA DES MOINES — Republicans in Iowa’s House of Representatives approved a bill Thursday that would criminalize the death of an “unborn person” — over Democrats’ concerns about how it might apply to in vitro fertilization, after an Alabama court found frozen embryos can be considered children.

Iowa’s law currently outlines penalties for termination or serious injury to a “human pregnancy,” but the proposed bill would amend the language to pertain to “causing of death of, or serious injury to, an unborn person,” defined as “an individual organism ... from fertilization to live birth.”

It’s one of many bills being considered by state Legislatures around the country that would expand legal and constitutional pro-



THOMAS PEIPERT/AP

Horsing around

A skijoring team competes in Leadville, Colo. Skijoring draws its name from the Norwegian word skikjoring, meaning “ski driving.” It started as a practical mode of transportation in Scandinavia and became popular in the Alps around 1900. Today’s sport features horses at full gallop towing skiers by rope over jumps and around obstacles as they try to lance suspended hoops with a baton, typically a ski pole that’s cut in half.

tections for embryos and fetuses, a long-time goal of the anti-abortion movement.

The bill still would need to pass the state Senate and be signed by Gov. Kim Reynolds to become law.

City council to change locks on perk apartment

LA NEW ORLEANS — The New Orleans City Council voted Thursday to change the locks on a coveted city-owned apartment in its latest dispute with Mayor LaToya Cantrell, whose use of the French Quarter property drew scrutiny and figured in a failed recall effort.

The newly flaring dispute centers on one of 50 units in the 19th-century building known as the Upper Pontalba. It’s steps away from the Mississippi River and, along with St. Louis Cathedral, is among five historic structures bordering the green space known as Jackson Square.

Previous mayors have said they had used the apartment for meetings, special events or to house visiting dignitaries. Cantrell came under criticism for her personal use of the unit after a series of reports by WVUE-TV that used public surveillance video to document her long hours there, including time with her police bodyguard and an overnight stay with guests

during the summer Essence Festival.

White House lifts its COVID-19 testing rule

DC WASHINGTON — The White House recently lifted its COVID-19 testing requirement for those who plan to be in close contact with President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and their spouses, bringing to an end the last coronavirus prevention protocol at the White House.

The White House said the change aligns its policies with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance. The agency recently relaxed its recommendation that those who test positive for COVID-19 isolate for five days. Now, the agency says people can return to work or regular activities if their symptoms are mild and improving and it’s been a day since they’ve had a fever.

Jail phone restricted for school shooter’s father

MI PONTIAC — A judge restricted the use of a phone and tablet by the father of a Michigan school shooter after he used them to make “threatening statements” from jail, authorities said Friday.

James Crumbley is on trial for

involuntary manslaughter in the deaths of four students killed by his son Ethan Crumbley at Oxford High School in 2021. He’s being held in the Oakland County jail.

Judge Cheryl Matthews said she would sign an order agreed to by Crumbley’s attorney and the prosecutor’s office. But the judge made no mention of threats as the reason. She suggested the matter would be unflattering to Crumbley and urged both sides to simply agree to an order and avoid a public airing.

Judge: Rail firm alone should pay for cleanup

OH EAST PALESTINE — Norfolk Southern alone will be responsible for paying for the cleanup after last year’s fiery train derailment in eastern Ohio, a federal judge ruled.

The decision issued Wednesday threw out the railroad’s claim that the companies that made chemicals that spilled and owned tank cars that ruptured should share the cost of the cleanup.

An assortment of chemicals spilled and caught fire after the train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 3, 2023. Three days later, officials blew open five tank cars filled with vinyl chloride because they feared those cars might explode. Residents still worry about potential health conse-

quences from those chemicals.

The Atlanta-based railroad has said the ongoing cleanup from the derailment has already cost it more than \$1.1 billion. That total continues to grow, though EPA officials have said they expect the cleanup to be finished at some point later this year.

Cruise employee accused of hiding camera on ship

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A Royal Caribbean cruise employee is accused of hiding cameras inside bathrooms of passenger cabins to spy on guests, including underage girls.

Arvin Joseph Mirasol, 34, was arrested last week on federal charges of production and possession of child sexual abuse material after the Symphony of the Seas arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., according to a probable cause affidavit filed in the U.S. District Court of Florida. He also faces six counts of voyeurism in state court.

A guest staying in a cabin where Mirasol was an attendant found a camera in the bathroom Feb. 25. It was “affixed to the counter underneath the sink,” according to the affidavit.

She reported it to ship officials, who sent security to the room to investigate.

FACES



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Actor-singer Luke Grimes poses for a portrait on Feb. 20 in Nashville. The longtime musician dropped “Luke Grimes” on March 8.

‘Yellowstone’ star Luke Grimes ready to reintroduce himself on debut country album

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

There are countless reasons to self-title an album: It can be an introduction, an assertion of some definitive work, an easy avenue to labeling a collection of songs that feel otherwise impossible to classify. In the case of Luke Grimes, best-known for his portrayal of the complex cowboy Kayce Dutton on the hit show “Yellowstone,” it is also an invaluable tool.

Grimes’ debut country album, “Luke Grimes,” released March 8, is a declaration that speaks volumes: Think you know him? Guess again.

From a Nashville studio, the actor-musician told The Associated Press that he hopes his album establishes “who I am, and where this music is coming from — and I’m trying to be honest here; I’m trying to do this the right way.”

“Country music is at its greatest, I think, when it’s really honest. So that was important to try to accomplish on this first album,” he said.

That personal vulnerability differs from his job as an actor on “Yellowstone.”

“The other thing that I do is to very much not be myself,” he says. “To do that correctly is to take on a different persona, a different name, to say someone else’s words, and in a lot of cases, someone else’s clothes. The whole point is to escape who you really are and to make someone believe who you’re not.”

Though this is Grimes’ debut album, he’s no novice. Music has always been a part of his life — from listening to worship music and playing drums in church at age 11 to discovering the outlaw greats through his dad and on country radio, his first taste of secular music.

Later, he’d play drums in a Wilco-inspired Americana band in Los Angeles, and in 2012, write a country song for the film “Outlaw

Country,” which he also acted in.

“I’ve never not played music,” he says. “I always have a guitar. It keeps me inspired, too. And any time I’ve prepared to do anything creatively, music has been a huge part of that.”

Produced by the legendary Dave Cobb, “Luke Grimes” is diaristic at times, an open-book record with songs about love, loss, God and rural living, universal topics from an artist with a knack for articulating truths, warts and all. Take “Oh, Ohio,” for example.

Grimes says there are a lot of songs about love, heartbreak and hometowns in country

“If you go get famous making ketchup, it’s hard to turn around and make mustard and have everybody take you seriously, you know? But he’s great.”

Aaron Raitiere

songwriter who contributed to “Luke Grimes”

music, and “Oh Ohio” accomplishes all of that while flipping the common conceit on its head: It’s not so flattering about where he comes from.

“I didn’t maybe feel like I totally belonged there,” he said of his home state. “I just hadn’t heard that in a lot of songs. Usually when you hear songs about people’s hometown, it’s kind of a love letter. And this was more of a breakup letter.”

Aaron Raitiere, a songwriter for Cobb who contributed to two songs on the album — the slow-burn highway ballad “South on 75” and the Western stomp “Ain’t Dead Yet” — says Grimes is a “musician in his soul.”

“He may very well be one of the best songwriter/singer/performers of our generation, trapped in a superstar actor’s body,” Raitiere said. “If you go get famous making ketchup, it’s hard to turn around and make mustard and have everybody take you seriously, you know? But he’s great.”

On the upbeat “Ain’t Dead Yet,” with its sing-along chorus, clap-a-long percussion, campfire harmonica and hazy guitar pedals, Grimes demonstrates a kind of creative range associated with artists in their veterancy.

“We were saying, ‘Wouldn’t it be funny to write a song, just as an exercise, if (Nirvana front man) Kurt Cobain was country? Like, if he would have been born in a holler in Kentucky somewhere and hadn’t died early and lived to be an old man and had a wife and kids, like, what would those songs sound like? And that literally was how that idea started,” Grimes says. It’s impossible not to hear the connection in the opening power chords.

“That’s kind of the magical part of the whole process, that there are no rules,” says Grimes.

The other magic? Getting to reveal more about himself to his listeners — and, in the process, connect with them.

“Certain albums that have stuck with me through the years, it’s just kind of made me feel like there’s someone out there that I can relate to,” he says. “Whatever this feeling or emotion is that I don’t know how to articulate, someone else has articulated it really well and through music, and in a way that I feel like a connection to. And so, if I could just do that for some people, then I think that’d be mission accomplished.”

Influential ‘Dragon Ball’ creator dies

Associated Press

Akira Toriyama, the creator of the bestselling “Dragon Ball” and other popular anime who influenced Japanese comics, has died, his studio said Friday. He was 68.

Toriyama’s “Dragon Ball” manga series, which started in 1984, has sold millions of copies globally and was adapted into hugely popular animated TV shows, video games and films.

Toriyama died March 1 of a blood clot in his brain, Bird Studio said in a statement.

“He was working enthusiastically on many projects, and there was still much he was looking forward to accomplishing,” the studio wrote.

A new TV adaptation of Toriyama’s “Sand Land,” a desert adventure story released in 2000 and later adapted into a 2023 anime movie, is due to be released on Disney+ in the spring.

Messages of condolences and grief from fellow creators and fans filled social media.

Eiichiro Oda, creator of the blockbuster manga “One Piece,” said Toriyama’s presence was like a “big tree” to younger artists.

“He showed us all these things manga can do, a dream of going to another world,” Oda said in a statement. His death leaves “a hole too big to fill,” Oda added.

Born in Aichi prefecture, Japan, in 1955, Toriyama made his manga debut in 1978 with the adventure comic “Wonder Island.”

His “Dr. Slump” series, which Toriyama started in 1980, was his first major hit.

“Dragon Ball,” the story of a boy named Son Goku and his quest for seven magical balls that can make wishes come true, has sold 260 million copies altogether, according to the studio.

Toriyama also designed characters for the Dragon Quest video game series. He received awards in the manga industry and beyond, including France’s Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Other news

■ **Natalie Portman**, 42, and Benjamin Millepied, 46, have divorced after 11 years of marriage and two children. The Oscar-winning actor and Millepied, a choreographer and director, finalized the divorce last month in France, where they live. People magazine reported the news, citing a representative for Portman.

■ **Steve Lawrence**, a singer and top stage act who as a solo performer and in tandem with his wife, Eydie Gorme, kept Tin Pan Alley alive during the rock era, died March 7. He was 88. Lawrence died from complications of Alzheimer’s disease, a spokesperson for the family said.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3			4	5	6		7	8	9	10
11			12		13				14			
15					16				17			
18				19		20		21				
			22		23		24			25	26	27
28	29	30				31		32				
33					34		35		36			
37				38		39		40				
41					42		43					
			44			45		46		47	48	49
50	51	52			53		54		55			
56					57				58			
59					60					61		

- ACROSS
- 60 However
- 61 D-Day vessel
- 23 Designer monogram
- 25 Writer Morrison
- 26 Oodles
- 27 Wee
- 28 Bikini parts
- 29 Summer month, in Arles
- 30 iPhone voice
- 31 Journalist Koppel
- 35 Tonic's mixer
- 38 R-V link
- 40 Understood
- 42 Repentant
- 45 Fill up
- 47 Inventor Jethro
- 48 Big fusses
- 49 Salamander
- 50 Short do
- 51 Gardner of "Mogambo"
- 52 Author Deighton
- 54 Drench
- DOWN
- 1 Sci-fi fleet
- 2 "Brave New World" drug
- 3 Utah city
- 4 Actress Dawber
- 5 Idle of Monty Python
- 6 Yule tune
- 7 Unsupported, as a wall
- 8 "Awesome, dude!"
- 9 "I — Rock"
- 10 Highland hat
- 12 "Dallas" spin-off starring Donna Mills
- 19 Sushi fish
- 21 — Moines
- 1 GI show org.
- 4 Chest muscle
- 7 Dorm alternative
- 11 Salad utensil
- 13 Palindromic constellation
- 14 Hindu deity
- 15 Portent
- 16 Russian space station
- 17 Dutch cheese
- 18 Pacific island group
- 20 Secret language
- 22 Your
- 24 Anne Rice character
- 28 Rock band guitar player
- 32 Vodka brand
- 33 Stir up
- 34 Journey part
- 36 Soon, poetically
- 37 Ambiences
- 39 Self-respect
- 41 Brief jobs
- 43 Silent assent
- 44 Pairs
- 46 Giant
- 50 Java neighbor
- 53 Cold and damp
- 55 Undraped
- 56 It takes the cake
- 57 Numbered rd.
- 58 Radiate
- 59 Backfire sound

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-11 CRYPTOQUIP

VMNBX RMIXANDA BKIX DE

TANQL HUTX EDA BUNWWXRR

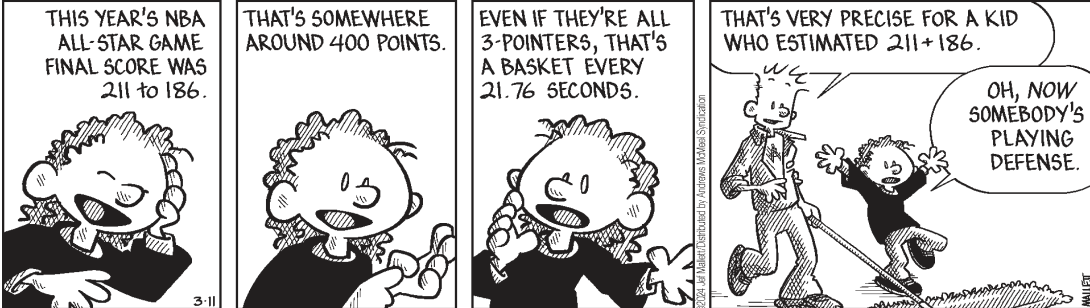
UMRBAUWNUQ HUARMINUWR:

VMUWNBK LDUWU BXU.

Saturday's Cryptoquip: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE ONLY UNRENTED UNIT IN AN APARTMENT COMPLEX? LAST BUT NOT LEASED.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals Q

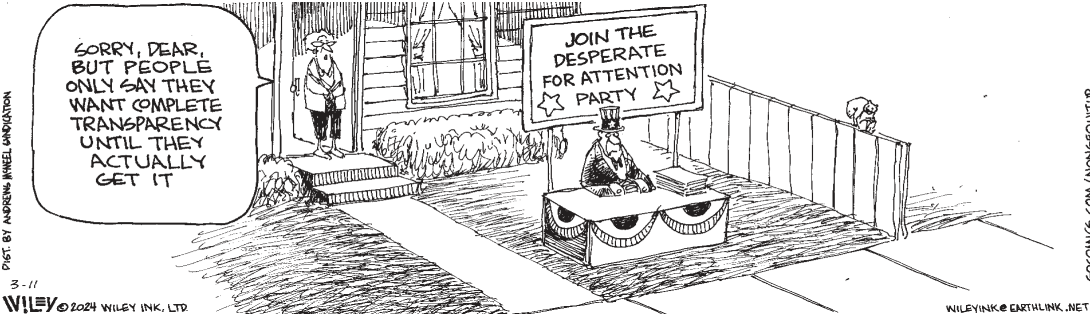
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



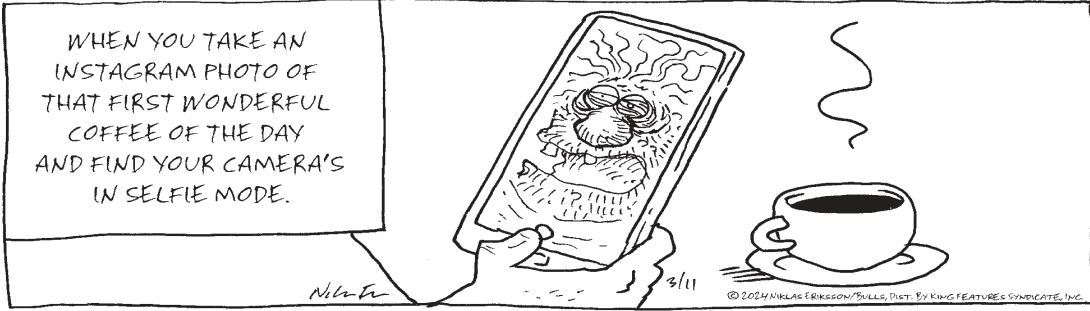
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Florida	65	44	17	4	92	217	153	
Boston	66	38	13	15	91	222	179	
Toronto	64	37	19	8	82	231	201	
Tampa Bay	65	34	25	6	74	224	219	
Detroit	64	33	25	6	72	221	211	
Buffalo	65	30	30	5	65	189	195	
Montreal	64	24	30	10	58	180	229	
Ottawa	62	25	33	4	54	200	220	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
N.Y. Rangers	63	41	18	4	86	210	172	
Carolina	63	38	19	6	82	209	175	
Philadelphia	65	33	24	8	74	192	194	
N.Y. Islanders	62	28	20	14	70	191	205	
Washington	62	30	23	9	69	170	194	
New Jersey	64	31	29	4	66	211	224	
Pittsburgh	62	28	26	8	64	180	180	
Columbus	64	22	32	10	54	192	232	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Dallas	66	40	17	9	89	242	199	
Winnipeg	63	40	18	5	85	193	153	
Colorado	65	40	20	5	85	241	197	
Nashville	65	37	25	3	77	208	197	
St. Louis	64	32	29	3	67	179	199	
Minnesota	64	30	27	7	67	200	212	
Arizona	64	26	33	5	57	188	211	
Chicago	64	16	43	5	37	131	229	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vancouver	66	42	17	7	91	234	178	
Edmonton	62	38	21	3	79	218	180	
Los Angeles	63	32	20	11	75	194	171	
Vegas	64	34	23	7	75	207	191	
Calgary	63	31	27	5	67	198	199	
Seattle	63	28	24	11	67	174	179	
Anaheim	63	23	37	3	49	166	223	
San Jose	63	16	40	7	39	139	250	
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.								
Saturday's games								
Nashville 2, Columbus 1								
Buffalo 3, Edmonton 2, SO								
Carolina 4, New Jersey 2								
Boston 5, Pittsburgh 1								
Florida 5, Calgary 1								
Washington 4, Chicago 1								
San Jose 2, Ottawa 1								
Tampa Bay 7, Philadelphia 0								
Toronto 3, Montreal 2								
N.Y. Rangers 4, St. Louis 0								
Vancouver 5, Winnipeg 0								
Vegas 5, Detroit 3								
Dallas 4, Los Angeles 1								
Sunday's games								
Edmonton at Pittsburgh								
Nashville at Minnesota								
Calgary at Carolina								
Arizona at Chicago								
N.Y. Islanders at Anaheim								
Monday's games								
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers								
St. Louis at Boston								
Washington at Winnipeg								
N.Y. Islanders at Los Angeles								
Tuesday's games								
Columbus at Montreal								
Detroit at Buffalo								
N.Y. Rangers at Carolina								
Pittsburgh at Ottawa								
San Jose at Philadelphia								
Arizona at Minnesota								
Florida at Dallas								
Anaheim at Chicago								
Colorado at Calgary								
Vegas at Seattle								
Wednesday's games								
Los Angeles at St. Louis								
Nashville at Winnipeg								
Washington at Edmonton								
Colorado at Vancouver								
Scoring leaders								
Through Saturday								
	GP	G	A	PTS				
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	65	40	71	111				
Nikita Kucherov, TB	64	38	69	107				
Connor McDavid, EDM	60	23	77	100				
David Pastrnak, BOS	66	40	53	93				
Artemi Panarin, NYR	63	35	52	87				
J.T. Miller, VAN	66	32	53	85				
Mikko Rantanen, COL	65	31	53	84				
William Nylander, TOR	64	34	50	84				
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	62	32	50	82				
Auston Matthews, TOR	63	54	26	80				
Elias Pettersson, VAN	66	31	48	79				

ROUNDUP

Tuch, Sabres down Oilers in SO

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Alex Tuch scored the decisive shootout goal and the Buffalo Sabres overcame a two-goal deficit and a disallowed overtime goal in a 3-2 win over the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday.

Jacob Bryson scored the tying goal with 8:21 remaining and Tage Thompson scored 15½ minutes into the first period as Buffalo snapped an 0-2-1 skid. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 30 shots through overtime, and two more in the shootout, and sealed the win by getting his stick and blocker out to stop Ryan Nugent-Hopkins on the Oilers’ third-and-final shootout attempt.

Ryan McLeod and Warren Foegele had a goal and assist each for Edmonton, which lost its second straight following a five-game winning streak. Stuart Skinner stopped 25 shots through overtime and one of three shootout attempts.

Oilers captain Connor McDavid had his points and league-best assist streak end at 13 games despite enjoying several set-up and scoring opportunities, including a shot off the post in the final minute of the first period.

Canucks 5, Jets 0: All-Star goalie Thatcher Demko left midway through the second period after stopping all 12 shots he faced in host Vancouver’s victory over Winnipeg.

The Canucks said only that Demko would not return to the game.

Elias Pettersson, Nils Hoglander and Pius Suter each had a goal and assist and J.T. Miller and Philip Di Giuseppe also scored. Quinn Hughes had two assists.

Golden Knights 5, Red Wings 3: Jonathan Marchessault scored three times, including the go-ahead goal with 2:44 left, to help host Vegas top Detroit and snap a four-game skid.

Pavel Dorofeyev and Brayden McNabb also scored for the Knights. Jack Eichel had three assists, Noah Hanifin and Ivan Barbashev each had two and Adin Hill stopped 23 shots.

Michael Rasmussen had a goal and assist and J.T. Compher and Shayne Gostisbehere also scored for Detroit, which has dropped five straight. James Reimer made 31 saves.

Panthers 5, Flames 1: Vladimir Tarasenko scored his first two goals with his new team and host Florida won for the 17th time in 20 games.

Tarasenko was acquired by the Panthers from the Ottawa Senators in a trade Wednesday.

Aleksander Barkov, Sam Bennett and Kevin Stenlund also scored for Florida while Anthony



JEFFREY T. BARNES/AP

The Edmonton Oilers’ Connor McDavid tries to get a shot on Sabres goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen during the third period Saturday in Buffalo, N.Y. McDavid’s point streak came to end at 13 games.

Stolarz made 34 saves.

Yegor Sharangovich scored for the Flames.

Bruins 5, Penguins 1: David Pastrnak reached 40 goals for the third consecutive season, and host Boston beat fading Pittsburgh.

Pavel Zacha had two goals and an assist for Boston. Brad Marchand and Jake DeBrusk each had a goal and an assist, and Linus Ullmark made 38 saves.

Kris Letang scored for Pittsburgh, and Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 17 shots.

Rangers 4, Blues 0: Igor Shesterkin made 26 saves for his 13th career shutout in his 200th career NHL game, Vincent Trocheck and Jimmy Vesey scored first-period goals and host New York won for the ninth time in its last 10 at Madison Square Garden..

Chris Kreider and Kaapo Kakko also scored for the Metropolitan Division-leading Rangers, who improved to 13-3-2 in their last 18 games. Artemi Panarin and Adam Fox each had two assists.

Hurricanes 4, Devils 2: Jesperi Kotkaniemi broke a tie with a bad-angle shot early in the third period and Pyotr Kochetkov made 24 saves to lead visiting Carolina over New Jersey.

Martin Necas also scored, and Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen added empty-net goals as the Hurricanes swept the three-game season series with New Jersey and improved to 8-2-1 in their last 11 games.

Nico Hischier and Timo Meier scored for the Devils.

Stars 4, Kings 1: Radek Faksa

and Jason Robertson scored 18 seconds apart in the second period, Joe Pavelski had a goal and an assist, and visiting Dallas extended its winning streak to a season-high five games with a win over Los Angeles.

Wyatt Johnston added a power-play goal nearly seven minutes into the third period. Scott Wedgewood stopped 24 shots in his first game since Feb. 26. The win keeps Dallas atop the Central Division with 89 points.

Maple Leafs 3, Canadiens 2: John Tavares broke a tie with 6:46 left with his 20th goal of the season and visiting Toronto defeated Montreal.

Max Domi and Bobby McMann also scored and Ilya Samsonov made 29 saves.

Mike Matheson had a goal and assist for Montreal. Alex Newhook also scored and Sam Montembeault stopped 24 shots.

Predators 2, Blue Jackets 1: Luke Evangelista scored a tie-breaking goal in the third period, Kevin Lankinen made 32 stops and visiting Nashville beat Columbus for its 10th win in 11 games.

Kiefer Sherwood also scored for Nashville, whose only loss since Feb. 15 was in overtime to Montreal on Tuesday. The Predators have moved up into the top wildcard playoff spot in the Western Conference.

The Blue Jackets wasted an outstanding game by goaltender Daniil Tarasov, whose 47 saves tied his career high. Alexandre Texier scored the only goal for Columbus.

Lightning 7, Flyers 0: Defense-

man Darren Raddysh had five assists and host Tampa Bay won a game that saw irate Philadelphia coach John Tortorella reluctantly leave the bench after he was ejected in the first period.

On a night that the 2004 Stanley Cup-winning Lightning team that Tortorella coached was honored, he lasted just 10:49 into the game when he received a bench minor and game misconduct after Philadelphia fell behind 4-0.

Victor Hedman scored twice and added an assist for Tampa Bay. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 25 saves for his second shutout of the season and 34th overall. Nicholas Paul, Conor Sheary, Brayden Point, Anthony Duclair and Brandon Hagel also scored for the Lightning.

Capitals 4, Blackhawks 1: Tom Wilson scored for a second consecutive game, Charlie Lindgren robbed Connor Bedard among his 29 saves, and host Washington beat Chicago to keep pace in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Hendrix Lapierre, Michael Sgarbossa and Sonny Milano also scored for Washington, which is 7-2-1 in its last 10.

Sharks 2, Senators 1: Thomas Bordeleau scored two power-play goals, Magnus Chrona made 31 saves for his first NHL win and host San Jose beat Ottawa to snap a nine-game losing streak.

It was Bordeleau’s first career multigoal game.

Mikael Granlund had two assists and William Eklund added an assist to extend his point streak to a career-long five games.

NBA/SPORTS BRIEFS

NBA ROUNDUP

Doncic has 6th 30-point triple-double in a row

Associated Press

DETROIT — Luka Doncic became the first NBA player to record six consecutive 30-point triple-doubles as the Dallas Mavericks pulled away in the second half and beat the Detroit Pistons 142-124 on Saturday night.

Doncic finished with 39 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds, eclipsing Russell Westbrook’s mark of five straight 30-point triple-doubles. He also extended his own record with a fifth straight 35-point triple-double.

“That just shows what level he’s playing on right now,” Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. “He knows he can score the ball, and he’s also able to find his teammates and lastly, he’s able to rebound the ball.”

Kyrie Irving added 21 points for Dallas, which has won two in a row after a three-game losing streak.

Cade Cunningham had 33 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for the Pistons, who have lost 10 of 12. Simone Fontecchio added a career-high 27 points, but struggled against Doncic after Auser Thompson left the game with an illness.

The Mavericks led 69-65 at half-time, helped by 21 points from Doncic in the second quarter.

Doncic had 10 more points in the third and Dallas moved out to a 104-88 lead after Michigan star Tim Hardaway Jr. hit three 3-pointers in the final 2:16 of the period — the last, a buzzer-beater.

Celtics 117, Suns 107: Jayson Tatum scored 29 points, Jaylen Brown added 27 and NBA-leading Boston beat host Phoenix.

The Celtics came into the game on a rare two-game skid after dropping games to Cleveland and Denver. Boston still hasn’t lost three in a row and improved to 49-14 overall.

The Suns — playing without injured All-Star Devin Booker — were led by Kevin Durant’s 45 points on 18-for-26 shooting. Bradley Beal added 25 points while Jusuf Nurkic scored 11 and grabbed 11 rebounds.

Spurs 126, Warriors 113: Keldon Johnson had 22 points and 11 rebounds, and a visiting San Antonio team without Victor Wembanyama beat a Golden State team without Stephen Curry.

Jeremy Sochan and Malaki Branham each scored 20 points for San Antonio, which had dropped seven of nine. Julian Champagnie had 17 points and seven rebounds.

Klay Thompson came off the



The Mavericks’ Luka Doncic drives for a layup against the Pistons’ Jaden Ivey on Saturday.

bench to score 27 points for Golden State.

Nuggets 142, Jazz 121: Nikola Jokic played through a bruised right arm that kept him out of shootaround and finished with 26 points, six rebounds and eight assists as host Denver beat short-handed Utah.

Jamal Murray scored 37 points and Michael Porter Jr. added 19 points for Denver, which led by as many as 39 points in the first half, which helped to withstand a third-quarter letdown.

Keyonte George led Utah with 29 points.

Hornets 110, Nets 99: Miles Bridges had 24 points and 10 rebounds, Brandon Miller added 23 points and host Charlotte delivered another blow to Brooklyn’s sagging playoff hopes.

Cam Thomas returned from a six-game absence due to an ankle injury and scored 31 points, but the Nets (25-39) fell 4½ games behind the Atlanta Hawks for the 10th and final play-in spot in the Eastern Conference with their third loss in four games.

Trail Blazers 125, Raptors 118 (OT): Deandre Ayton returned from a right hand sprain and had a season-high 30 points and 19 rebounds to help visiting Portland beat Toronto.

Dalano Banton had 25 points and Anfernee Simons added 23 to help the Blazers snap a three-game losing streak.

Immanuel Quickley scored 29 points and Gary Trent Jr. added 23 for Toronto, which has won just once in the last five games.

Clippers 112, Bulls 102: Paul George scored 22 points, Kawhi Leonard added 19 and host Los Angeles rallied for its third straight victory and fourth win in six games.

DeMar DeRozan had 24 points and 10 assists, but the Bulls had their three-game winning streak snapped.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	49	14	.778	—
New York	37	26	.587	12
Philadelphia	35	28	.556	14
Brooklyn	25	39	.391	24½
Toronto	23	41	.359	26½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	37	27	.578	—
Miami	35	28	.556	1½
Atlanta	29	34	.460	7½
Charlotte	16	48	.250	21
Washington	10	53	.159	26½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	41	22	.651	—
Milwaukee	41	23	.641	½
Indiana	35	29	.547	6½
Chicago	31	33	.484	10½
Detroit	10	53	.159	31
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	38	25	.603	—
Dallas	36	28	.563	2½
Houston	28	35	.444	10
Memphis	22	42	.344	16½
San Antonio	14	50	.219	24½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	44	19	.698	—
Minnesota	44	20	.688	½
Denver	44	20	.688	½
Utah	28	36	.438	16½
Portland	18	45	.286	26
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	41	21	.661	—
Sacramento	36	26	.581	5
Phoenix	37	27	.578	5
L.A. Lakers	35	30	.538	7½
Golden State	33	30	.524	8½
Friday's games				
Washington 112, Charlotte 100				
New Orleans 103, Philadelphia 95				
New York 98, Orlando 74				
Oklahoma City 107, Miami 100				
Atlanta 99, Memphis 92				
Cleveland 113, Minnesota 104, OT				
Houston 123, Portland 107				
L.A. Lakers 123, Milwaukee 122				
Saturday's games				
L.A. Clippers 112, Chicago 102				
Charlotte 110, Brooklyn 99				
Dallas 142, Detroit 124				
Boston 117, Phoenix 107				
San Antonio 126, Golden State 113				
Denver 142, Utah 121				
Portland 128, Toronto 118, OT				
Sunday's games				
Milwaukee at L.A. Clippers				
Houston at Sacramento				
Indiana at Orlando				
New Orleans at Atlanta				
Washington at Miami				
Brooklyn at Cleveland				
Memphis at Oklahoma City				
Philadelphia at New York				
Minnesota at L.A. Lakers				
Monday's games				
Charlotte at Detroit				
Phoenix at Cleveland				
Dallas at Chicago				
Golden State at San Antonio				
Toronto at Denver				
Boston at Portland				
Tuesday's games				
Philadelphia at New York				
Indiana at Oklahoma City				
Washington at Memphis				
Houston at San Antonio				
Boston at Utah				
Milwaukee at Sacramento				
Minnesota at L.A. Clippers				



The United States’ Mikaela Shiffrin reacts after winning a women’s World Cup slalom in Are, Sweden on Sunday.

BRIEFLY

Shiffrin wins 1st race after six-week layoff

Associated Press

ARE, Sweden — All Mikaela Shiffrin has been really looking for in her first race back after a six-week injury layoff was “good skiing.”

What she got, though, was even by the American star’s standards “an insane way to return.”

Shiffrin made a triumphant comeback to the World Cup Sunday, dominating the season’s penultimate slalom for career win 96 and locking up her record-equaling eighth season title in the discipline.

Racing for the first time since hurting her left knee in a downhill crash in Italy, the two-time Olympic champion posted the fastest times in both runs to beat Croatian prodigy Zrinka Ljutic by a massive 1.24 seconds and third-placed Michelle Gisin of Switzerland by 1.34.

“It feels like we’re in a dream right now,” Shiffrin said after her sixth slalom win of the season and 59th overall. “There has been so much uncertainty coming into this race. The biggest goal I had was just... good skiing in the final races of the season, so I could sort of prove I have the right pace and the right mentality to close out the season, so next year I start in a better place.”

Shiffrin got much more than that. While she just edged out her competitors in the opening leg, she crushed the field in a free-flowing second run.

“This is an insane way to return,” she said. “It was so nice to race again today and some nerves and all the emotions that I hoped to feel. Really proud of my team, and for sure proud of myself to get back here and show the skiing. The second run was some of my best skiing. I am just so happy to be able to do that again this season.”

Shiffrin had been out since she sprained the MCL and tibiofibular ligament in her knee in January,

while also still recovering from a bone bruise she had sustained at the start of the season.

“The season has been just a wild one, full of ups and downs, I think for everybody,” Shiffrin said. “My own personal journey, there’s definitely been some frustrating moments these past weeks, so I was just trying to get back and hoping that I could get back.”

Verstappen cruises to win at Saudi Arabian GP

Max Verstappen stayed firmly on course for another season of dominance in Formula 1 on Saturday by winning the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

Even after just two races, and despite turmoil at Red Bull, Verstappen seems in near-total control on the track as he aims for a fourth consecutive title this year. Still, he had to share the attention with 18-year-old Oliver Bearman, who was a surprise seventh in his first F1 race as a Ferrari stand-in.

“A fantastic weekend for the whole team and also for myself. I felt really good with the car,” Verstappen said.

The Dutch driver won easily ahead of his teammate Sergio Perez by 8.6 seconds on the road, 13.6 once a time penalty for Perez was factored in. Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc was third.

Patriots agree to trade QB Jones to the Jaguars

A person familiar with negotiations says the Jacksonville Jaguars have agreed to acquire New England Patriots quarterback Mac Jones for a sixth-round pick in next month’s NFL Draft.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Sunday because the trade cannot become official until the new league year begins Wednesday and after Jones passes a physical.

MMA/NFL



Sean O'Malley, right, lands a blow against Marlon Vera during a bantamweight title bout at UFC 299 on Saturday night in Miami.

O'Malley keeps belt by controlling Vera; Poirier wins by KO

By ALANIS THAMES
Associated Press

MIAMI — Sean O'Malley emphatically defended his bantamweight belt Saturday night, unanimously outpointing Marlon "Chito" Vera in UFC 299.

In a fight that he controlled from the opening round, O'Malley (18-1) outclassed Vera with his quickness, precision striking and footwork.

The champion threw 344 punches, landing more than 50% of them. He was the more active fighter throughout, hurting Vera (23-9-1) with shots to the body, knees to the face, and countering nearly every one of Vera's connections with one of his own.

It was O'Malley's first defense of his bantamweight title after stopping former champion Aljamain Sterling 51 seconds into the second round at UFC 292 last August.

UFC CEO Dana White called the performance a "clinic" by O'Malley, who is fast becoming one of the biggest stars in the sport. White added that the card was the fourth-highest grossing UFC event ever, with a gate of \$14.14 million.

"He's on his way," White said of O'Malley, who some believe has star power of Conor McGregor. "He's the biggest star ever in bantamweight history. You can say that right now."

Vera handed O'Malley the only defeat of his career nearly four years ago by landing a leg kick that caused O'Malley's right foot to go numb in the first round of UFC 252.

O'Malley has often downplayed that loss — the kick shut down the peroneal nerve in his lower leg, causing temporary loss of feeling — and vowed to dominate in the re-

match.

"That one feels good getting that one back," O'Malley said. "I'm guessing we can all agree that I'm undefeated still."

He added that he wants to fight featherweight champion Ilia Topuria next.

"Dana," he said, "Give me a jet to Spain, baby."

Immediately after the five-round fight, O'Malley sat down on the canvas after Vera hurt him late with a shot to the body — one that could have been much more significant if it was landed earlier in the match.

"I tried to stay toe to toe with him and catch him," said Vera, the Ecuadoran fighter who received a massive amount of cheers from the fans at Kaseya Center. "At the end of the fifth round I landed a nice body that hurt him, but I ran out of time."

Former interim lightweight champion Dustin Poirier knocked out up-and-comer Benoit Saint Denis with a right hand in the second round of their lightweight match. Saint Denis had hurt Poirier with punches in the early round before the veteran dropped him with a right hook at 2:52 in the second round. The victory moved Poirier into a tie for the fourth-most wins in UFC history with 22.

Jack Della Maddalena stretched his winning streak to 17 with the biggest victory of his career. He stopped Gilbert Burns in the third round of their bout with a crushing knee to the head, moments after it appeared Burns had secured a fight-clinching takedown. Della Maddalena followed the knee with a series of elbows on the ground for a TKO victory at 3:43 in the final round of the 170-pound fight.

Chiefs keep DT Jones off market with massive deal

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs and star Chris Jones have agreed to the framework of a five-year contract that includes \$95 million guaranteed and keeps the All-Pro defensive tackle off the upcoming free-agent market, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press late Saturday.

The person spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the contract details were still being finalized. But the money that is guaranteed is expected to come over the first three years with another two years that are not guaranteed.

Jones, who turns 30 in July, becomes one of the highest-paid defensive players in NFL history, falling just behind the \$34 million average annual salary that is being earned by San Francisco pass rusher Nick Bosa. The deal eclipses the \$31.6 million average of Rams defensive end Aaron Donald, who had long represented the financial benchmark for a defensive player.

Jones' agents, Michael and Jason Katz, tweeted their congratulations in a post on X, formally known as Twitter, to "the highest-paid defensive tackle in NFL history."

Jones tweeted moments later: "KC....5 more years of greatness! 3x"

Jones made it clear immediately after the Chiefs beat the 49ers in overtime in the Super Bowl last month in Las Vegas, allowing them to raise their second straight Lombardi Trophy and third in five years, that he was eager to chase a three-peat. But he first needed to reach an agreement to remain in Kansas City, which had proven difficult over the past two off-seasons.

In fact, Jones and the Chiefs were at such an impasse entering the final year of his previous contract that he skipped the entire offseason program, including a mandatory minicamp and training camp, and Week 1 of the regular season. Jones piled up nearly \$4 million in fines before agreeing to an incentive-laden one-year deal that got him back on the field this past season.

Jones responded by starting every game the rest of



All-Pro defensive tackle Chris Jones and the Chiefs have agreed on the framework of a five-year deal that includes \$95 million guaranteed.

the way, including a meaningless regular-season finale against the Chargers, when he got the last sack he needed to reach 10½ for the season and trigger a \$1.25 million bonus in his contract.

Jones had another half-sack in a wild-card win over Miami in one of the coldest games in NFL history, then helped Kansas City win road games over Buffalo and Baltimore to return to the Super Bowl. In that game, the Chiefs fell behind early before rallying to force overtime, then winning the game on Patrick Mahomes' touchdown pass to Mecole Hardman.

The Chiefs have been aggressive in trying to keep the core of the league's second-ranked defense together next season.

Earlier in the week, the Chiefs used the franchise tag on L'Jarius Sneed, giving them the option of keeping one of the best cover cornerbacks expected to hit free agency on a \$19.8 million contract next season. The Chiefs also could sign him to a long-term deal or even trade him, which not only would provide some draft capital but also some salary cap relief.

Shortly after tagging Sneed, the Chiefs signed pending free-agent linebacker Drue Tranquill to a \$19 million, three-year deal that included a \$4.5 million signing bonus and \$12.5 million guaranteed.

Broncos sending Jeudy to Browns

By ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos have agreed to send wide receiver and former first-round pick Jerry Jeudy to the Cleveland Browns for a pair of 2024 draft picks, two people with knowledge of the trade told The Associated Press on Saturday.

The people, who spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the impending deal wasn't immediately announced by either team, said the Broncos would receive fifth- and sixth-round picks in next month's NFL Draft when the trade becomes official next week.

The Browns are getting a complement for No. 1 receiver Amari Cooper and another major target and deep threat for quarterback Deshaun Watson.

The Broncos will save \$13 million in both cash and salary cap

space by moving on from Jeudy. The first of the two draft picks they're receiving is the first pick of the fifth round. That gives Denver eight selections in the April draft.

The Broncos have cleared nearly \$50 million in cap space in the last few days after informing quarterback Russell Wilson they would release him when the new league year begins next week.

Potential landing spots for Wilson include the Steelers and Giants.

The Broncos released All-Pro safety Justin Simmons on Thursday and renegotiated wide receiver Tim Patrick's contract.

The Broncos used the 15th overall pick in 2020 to draft Jeudy, the highest they ever selected a wide receiver. He never lived up to that billing, in large part because Denver continued to churn through middling quarterbacks.

Jeudy often showed his frustration on the field, especially last season when he caught just two touchdown passes after a strong 2022 campaign in which he set career highs with 972 receiving yards and six TD receptions.

Jeudy has 11 career touchdown catches in four seasons. He is entering the final year of his contract after the Broncos exercised their fifth-year option on him.

The Browns were linked to Jeudy last year but were unable to finalize a deal at the trade deadline.

Cleveland figured to explore adding a top-tier wideout in free agency but was able to acquire a proven one in Jeudy, who like Cooper played at Alabama.

Jeudy's speed is expected to be an asset for Watson, who likes to throw deep and showed signs of being an elite QB again before suffering a season-ending shoulder injury in 2023.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Kentucky wins 5th straight

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Antonio Reeves and Reed Sheppard each scored 27 points as No. 15 Kentucky spoiled No. 4 Tennessee’s late-season run with an 85-81 victory Saturday.

The Wildcats (23-8, 13-5 Southeastern Conference) have now won five in a row and seven of their past eight. The win wrapped up a double-bye in the SEC Tournament. Sheppard came off the bench to hit six 3-pointers in the second half and seven for the game. Justin Edwards scored 16 and Rob Dillingham had 11.

“(Reeves) is a high-level scorer,” said Tennessee coach Rick Barnes. “He does a good job getting in the right position. He’s surrounded by guys who can play. They were able to get the angles on us.”

The Volunteers (24-7, 14-4) were led by SEC Player of the Year candidate Dalton Knecht with a career-high 40 points. Zakai Zeigler had 17 points and nine assists. Jonas Aidoo had 11 points, eight rebounds and five blocks.

No. 2 UConn 74, Providence 60: Alex Karaban scored 16 points and Tristen Newton had 12 points, eight rebounds and five assists as the visiting Huskies bounced back after falling behind 15-2 early in the teams’ regular-season finale.

Stephon Castle added 14 points for UConn (28-3, 18-2 Big East), which finished with four straight wins and 18 victories in its last 19 games.

Big East player of the year candidate Devin Carter had 24 points and 15 rebounds for Providence (19-12, 10-10).

Southern California 78, No. 5 Arizona 65: DJ Rodman and Kobe Johnson scored 19 points each and the host Trojans defeated the Wildcats for their first three-game winning streak of the season.

Arizona (24-7, 15-5 Pac-12) clinched its 18th regular-season league title outright at UCLA on Thursday and had won 10 of 11 coming in.

Oumar Ballo and Keshad Johnson scored 17 points apiece for the Wildcats. Ballo had 10 rebounds.

Kansas State 65, No. 6 Iowa State 58: Arthur Kalluma scored 23 points, Cam Carter added 21 and the host Wildcats beat the Cyclones, giving their flickering NCAA Tournament hopes a big boost heading into the Big 12 Tournament.

David N’Guessan added 11 points and a career-high 16 rebounds on senior day for Kansas State (18-13, 8-10 Big 12), which held on for its third win over a top-10 team this season.

Curtis Jones had 16 points and Keshon Gilbert and Tamin Lipsey 13 apiece for the Cyclones (24-7, 13-5), who had their four-game winning streak snapped.

No. 8 Marquette 86, Xavier 80: Kam Jones scored 30 points and Oso Ighodaro added 24 as the visiting Golden Eagles snapped a two-game losing streak.

Marquette (23-8, 14-6 Big East), which was without injured guard Tyler Kolek for the third straight game, secured the No. 3 seed in the upcoming Big East Tournament.

No. 10 Creighton 66, Villanova 67: Trey Alexander hit a fadeaway jumper with 0.2 seconds left and finished with 17 points as the visiting Bluejays survived a furious late rally to beat the Wildcats.

Baylor Scheierman scored 11 of his 18 points in a dominating first half for Creighton (23-8, 14-6 Big East).

Eric Dixon scored 25 points and Justin Moore had 17 points for Villanova (17-14, 10-10), which lost a game that it needed in an effort to improve its chances at an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Texas Tech 78, No. 11 Baylor 68: Pop Isaacs scored 20 points, including the first of the his team’s four consecutive 3-pointers after the Bears had taken their only lead after halftime, and the host Red Raiders went on to win in their regular-season finale.

Texas Tech (22-9, 11-7 Big 12) had missed its first



WADE PAYNE/AP

Kentucky’s Antonio Reeves shoots against Tennessee’s Josiah-Jordan James on Saturday. Reeves scored 27 points in the Wildcats’ win.

five 3s of the second half before Issacs connected with 7:03 left for a 56-54 lead. RayJ Dennis then made a tying layup for Baylor before Tech scored 11 points in a row, going ahead on a 3 by Darrion Williams.

Ja’Kobe Walter had 15 points for Baylor (22-9, 11-7).

No. 13 Auburn 92, Georgia 78: Denver Jones scored a season-high 21 points, making 7 of 9 3-pointers, and the host Tigers closed the regular season with a win.

Auburn (24-7, 13-5 Southeastern Conference) secured the No. 4 seed and a double bye in the SEC Tournament with its third straight victory.

No. 16 Alabama 92, Arkansas 88 (OT): Mark Sears scored 22 points and Latrell Wrightsell Jr. had 20, including a game-tying 3-pointer with 22 seconds to go to force overtime as the host Crimson Tide rallied past the Razorbacks.

Sam Walters scored seven of his 10 points in OT, including a go-ahead 3-pointer, for Alabama (21-10, 13-5 Southeastern Conference), which never led in regulation and secured a double bye in the SEC Tournament with the win.

No. 17 South Carolina 93, Mississippi State 89 (OT): B.J. Mack had 25 points and Collin Murray-Boyles scored 19 to lead the visiting Gamecocks.

Mack had seven points in overtime for South Carolina (25-6, 13-5 Southeastern Conference).

Freshman Josh Hubbard had 28 points for the Bulldogs (19-12, 8-10), who dropped their fourth straight game.

No. 20 BYU 85, Oklahoma State 71: Fousseyni Traore scored 19 points and Jaxson Robinson added 17 to lead the host Cougars over the Cowboys.

Spencer Johnson had 14 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for BYU (22-9, 10-8 Big 12), which earned its sixth straight home win and clinched the fifth seed in the upcoming Big 12 Tournament.

No. 22 Utah State 87, New Mexico 85: Darius Brown II hit the winning 3-pointer with five seconds to play, Ian Martinez scored 22 points on 7-for-11 shooting, and the host Aggies secured their first outright Mountain West regular-season title.

Great Osobor had 21 points — his 12th 20-point game of the season — and Brown finished with 19 for Utah State (26-5, 14-4).

Tulsa 76, No. 24 South Florida 67: Freshman PJ Haggerty scored 26 of his career-high 32 points in the second half and the host Golden Hurricanes stopped the Bulls’ 15-game winning streak.

South Florida (23-6, 16-2) was led by Kasean Pryor’s 29 points and 11 rebounds. Chris Youngblood had 12 points and Selton Miguel 11 for the Bulls.

Conference tournaments

America East Conference At Higher-Seeded Schools First Round Saturday, March 9 Bryant 84, Maine 58 Vermont 75, Albany (NY) 72 New Hampshire 77, Binghamton 64 Mass.-Lowell 94, UMBC 89 Semifinals Tuesday, March 12 Vermont vs. New Hampshire Mass.-Lowell vs. Bryant Atlantic 10 Conference At Brooklyn, N.Y. First Round Tuesday, March 12 Fordham vs. Davidson La Salle vs. George Washington Rhode Island vs. Saint Louis Second Round Wednesday, March 13 George Mason vs. Saint Joseph's VCU vs. Fordham-Davidson winner St. Bonaventure vs. La Salle-George Washington winner Duquesne vs. Rhode Island-Saint Louis winner Atlantic Coast Conference At Washington, D.C. First Round Tuesday, March 12 Notre Dame vs. Georgia Tech NC State vs. Louisville Boston College vs. Miami Second Round Wednesday, March 13 Virginia Tech vs. Florida St. Wake Forest vs. Notre Dame-Georgia Tech winner Syracuse vs. NC State-Louisville winner Clemson vs. Boston College-Miami winner Atlantic Sun Conference At Higher-Seeded Schools Semifinals Thursday, March 7 Stetson 88, Jacksonville 87 Austin Peay 77, North Alabama 71 Championship Sunday, March 10 Stetson vs. Austin Peay Big 12 Conference At Kansas City, Mo. First Round Tuesday, March 12 UCF vs. Oklahoma St. Cincinnati vs. West Virginia Second Round Wednesday, March 13 BYU vs. UCF-Oklahoma St. winner TCU vs. Oklahoma Texas vs. Kansas St. Kansas vs. Cincinnati-W. Virginia winner Big Sky Conference At Boise, Idaho First Round Saturday, March 9 Sacramento St. 72, Idaho 64 Idaho St. 68, N. Arizona 60 Quarterfinals Sunday, March 10 E. Washington vs. Sacramento St. N. Colorado vs. Idaho St. Monday, March 11 Weber St. vs. Montana St. Montana vs. Portland St. Big South Conference At High Point, N.C. Quarterfinals Friday, March 8 High Point 77, Radford 63 Longwood 69, Winthrop 56 UNC-Asheville 60, Charleston Southern 55 Gardner-Webb 61, Presbyterian 60 Semifinals Saturday, March 9 Longwood 80, High Point 79 UNC-Asheville 83, Gardner-Webb 72 Championship Sunday, March 10 UNC-Asheville vs. Longwood Coastal Athletic Conference At Washington, D.C. First Round Friday, March 8 William & Mary 79, NC A&T 62 Hampton 56, Elon 55 Second Round Saturday, March 9 Monmouth (NJ) 90, Campbell 67 Townson 67, William & Mary 56 Stony Brook 75, Northeastern 65 Delaware 80, Hampton 50 Quarterfinals Sunday, March 10 Coll. of Charleston vs. Monmouth (NJ) UNC-Wilmington vs. Towson Drexel vs. Stony Brook Hofstra vs. Delaware Horizon League Conference At Higher-Seeded Schools Quarterfinals Thursday, March 7 Cleveland St. 82, Youngstown St. 70 Oakland 75, Fort Wayne 65 N. Kentucky 99, Wright St. 97 Milwaukee 95, Green Bay 84 Semifinals Monday, March 11 Oakland vs. Cleveland St. N. Kentucky vs. Milwaukee	Missouri Valley Conference At St. Louis First Round Thursday, March 7 Missouri St. 60, Murray St. 35 Belmont 86, Valparaiso 61 Evanville 59, Illinois St. 53 UIC 84, S. Illinois 82 Quarterfinals Friday, March 8 Indiana St. 75, Missouri St. 59 N. Iowa 67, Belmont 62 Drake 79, Evanville 58 Bradley 74, UIC 47 Semifinals Saturday, March 9 Indiana St. 94, N. Iowa 72 Drake 72, Bradley 67 Championship Sunday, March 10 Indiana St. vs. Drake Northeast Conference At Higher-Seeded Schools Semifinals Saturday, March 9 Merrimack 61, Le Moyne Dolphins 51 Wagner 66, CCSU 56 Championship Tuesday, March 12 Merrimack vs. Wagner Ohio Valley Conference At Evansville, Ind. Semifinals Friday, March 8 UALR 82, W. Illinois 57 Morehead St. 84, UT Martin 78 Championship Saturday, March 9 Morehead St. 69, UALR 55 Patriot League Conference At Higher-Seeded Schools Quarterfinals Thursday, March 7 Lehigh 76, Lafayette 61 Colgate 81, Holy Cross 64 Bucknell 80, American 57 Boston U. 70, Navy 61 Semifinals Sunday, March 10 Colgate vs. Bucknell Boston U. vs. Lehigh Southern Conference At Asheville, N.C. First Round Friday, March 8 Mercer 84, The Citadel 76 ETSU 98, VMI 66 Quarterfinals Saturday, March 9 Samford 70, Mercer 57 ETSU 73, UNC-Greensboro 62 Chattanooga 75, Wofford 57 Furman 79, W. Carolina 76 Semifinals Sunday, March 10 Samford vs. Furman Chattanooga vs. ETSU Southland Conference At Lake Charles, La. First Round Sunday, March 10 SE Louisiana vs. New Orleans Northwestern St. vs. Texas A&M-Commerce Quarterfinals Monday, March 11 Lamar vs. SE La.-New Orleans winner Nicholls vs. Northwestern St.-Texas A&M-Commerce winner Summit League Conference At Sioux Falls, S.D. Quarterfinals Saturday, March 9 S. Dakota St. 79, Oral Roberts 63 Denver 61, UMKC 60 Sunday, March 10 St. Thomas vs. N. Dakota St. North Dakota vs. Omaha Sun Belt Conference At Pensacola, Fla. Second Round Thursday, March 7 Georgia Southern 76, South Alabama 71 La.-Lafayette 80, Coastal Carolina 66 Texas St. 75, Southern Miss. 59 Marshall 86, Georgia St. 74 Quarterfinals Saturday, March 9 Appalachian St. 85, Georgia Southern 80 Arkansas St. 89, La.-Lafayette 62 Texas St. 74, Troy 68 James Madison 81, Marshall 64 Semifinals Sunday, March 10 Appalachian St. vs. Arkansas St. James Madison vs. Texas St. West Coast Conference At Las Vegas Second Round Friday, March 8 San Diego 57, Pepperdine 52 Portland 78, Loyola Marymount 70 Quarterfinals Saturday, March 9 Santa Clara 104, San Diego 79 San Francisco 72, Portland 51 Semifinals Monday, March 11 Saint Mary's (Cal.) vs. Santa Clara Gonzaga vs. San Francisco
---	--

COLLEGE BASKETBALL



Houston's Jamal Shead celebrates Saturday after making a 3-point basket against Kansas during the first half in Houston. Shead had 13 points, six rebounds and eight assists.

DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Houston crushes Kansas to wrap up Big 12 crown

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Jamal Shead had 13 points, six rebounds and eight assists, Damian Dunn added 12 points and No. 1 Houston claimed the Big 12 regular-season title in its first season in the conference, dominating No. 14 Kansas 76-46 on Saturday.

L.J. Cryer scored 11 points and J'Wan Roberts had 10 points and eight rebounds for the Cougars (28-3, 15-3), who shot 46% from the field and hit 6 3-pointers on the way to a 40-21 lead at the half.

"Showing them what we've been doing all year," Shead said. "They didn't get our best shot at Kansas, we got theirs. I guess we gave them our best shot today."

Houston shot 44% for the game and hit 11 of 29 shots from long distance, while forcing 18 turnovers and converting them into 30 points.

"It's gratifying," Houston coach Kelvin Sampson said of winning the Big 12. "I'm happy for everybody. There's so many people that

have an inferior complex about ... we're the University of Houston. This is a damn good school. We live in a damn good city, and we're a damn good basketball program. We should never ever, ever take a backseat to anybody."

The Cougars closed out their regular season by winning their ninth straight game and extending their home winning streak to 22 games.

"It's almost like people thought the only teams we played were American (Athletic Conference)," Sampson said of Houston's former conference. "You don't get to the Final Four or Elite Eight or Sweet Sixteen without beating other really, really good teams. The only difference was playing them every night, but they had to play us, too."

Hunter Dickinson had 11 points and six rebounds for Kansas, but left with 11:08 remaining holding his right shoulder after battling for a rebound.

Kansas coach Bill Self said Dickinson dislocated his shoulder, but it popped back in.

"He will have an MRI to see what the diagnosis is and try to get a game plan moving forward for him," Self said.

Kevin McCullar Jr., who tweaked his knee earlier in the week against Kansas State, was scoreless in 15 minutes in the first half. He didn't play in the second half.

"Kevin, he hadn't done anything since K-State much, and then, today, he felt better, thought he'd try," Self said. "I wish we wouldn't have played Kev. It's a pretty level of concern when your two best players are questionable moving forward."

Self added that it was too soon to know if either would be available for the upcoming Big 12 Tournament.

Kansas (22-9, 10-8) has lost three of its last four games. The Jayhawks shot 33% and were 3-for-21 from 3-point distance.

Bay: Transfers having big impact on Tar Heels

FROM PAGE 24

The Tar Heels won the first meeting with Duke behind a monster effort from Stanford transfer Harrison Ingram. They won Round 2 behind the other transfer starter in Ryan, who shot 8-for-12 overall, including 6-for-8 from 3-point range, and 9-for-10 from the foul line.

He ended with the best scoring total by a UNC player against Duke since eventual national player of the year Antawn Jamison had 35 points in a February 1998 win that stood as a 1-vs.-2 national matchup.

It was also the highest-scoring output by a UNC player at Duke's famed Cameron Indoor Stadium since Davis had 35 in a loss in March 1992.



BEN McKEOWN/AP

North Carolina head coach Hubert Davis shouts toward the court during the second half Saturday in Durham, N.C.

"Cormac, I mean, he's got that dog in him," UNC veteran big man Armando Bacot said, adding that Ryan "brought the fire today."

"To go out there and be that unconscious in a big game like this with so much at stake, it just speaks to how crazy he is," Bacot added.

Ryan certainly looked comfortable even in Cameron's hostile confines, though it makes sense considering it's nothing he hasn't seen before. Even in today's older game with the transfer portal, he's a college-ancient 25 years old who started his college career at Stanford during the 2018-19 season.

He arrived having played 145 college games, including one in which he had 28 points with four 3-pointers for the Fighting Irish in a February 2021 win.

That one came here in front of no Cameron Crazies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This time, everyone was packed into the venerable campus arena to see it — shots, celebrations and all.

Those first two 3s from the right corner set the tone for everything, both for himself and as part of UNC's game-opening 10-2 run on the way to a 15-point margin.

"You've got to not give Ryan two open 3s to start the game," Duke coach Jon Scheyer said. "You would feel pretty good if coming into Cameron, it's just two wide-open 3s to start off. And that sets

the tone for the night."

Indeed, UNC never trailed and repeatedly turned back push after push by the Blue Devils. Ryan was at the center of it all.

There was Ryan taking a kick-out feed from Bacot to smoothly bury an NBA-range 3-pointer, then running back up court screaming and sticking his tongue out with the Tar Heels back up 10 at the 10-minute mark.

Several minutes later, he buried another one for a 75-66 lead at the 3:49 mark and held his finger to his lips in a silence-please message to the Crazies.

Then came his biggest: a clean, catch-and-fire, long 3 with Jeremy Roach hovering inches away. That gave UNC a 78-69 lead with 1:38 left, and Ryan started screaming in Roach's direction as he retreated back up the court.

Ryan closed his scoring by swishing two clinching free throws with 4.7 seconds remaining. Moments later, as the horn sounded, Ryan immediately raised his right hand to wave goodbye and pointed with his left arm directly into the center of the Crazies at midcourt.

"Listen, it's not personal, that's just who I am," Ryan said. "I'm a fiery guy. That's what you come here to do, to play in front of these fans and these environments and just feed off that. And I sure do and I know these guys do, too."

Minix scores 26 to help Morehead win OVC Tournament

Associated Press

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — Riley Minix scored 26 points and Drew Thelwell added 21, including 13 in the final 8-plus minutes, and Morehead State blew a 17-point lead before the Eagles beat No. 1 seed Arkansas-Little Rock 69-55 Saturday night in the championship game of the Ohio Valley Conference Tournament.

Third-seeded Morehead State (26-8), which played in the championship game



Minix

for the third time in four seasons, set a program record for single-season wins and won its sixth OVC tourney. The Eagles will make their ninth NCAA Tournament appearance, their first since 2021.

Little Rock scored nine of the first 12 second-half points to take a 36-35 lead with 15:44 to play and Bradley Douglas

hit a 3-pointer 2 minutes later that made it 39-all. Minix ripped off seven consecutive points to spark an 18-5 run that gave the Eagles a 57-44 lead with 6:59 remaining and UALR trailed the rest of the way.

Douglas led Arkansas-Little Rock (21-12) with 14 points, Robinson scored 13 and Jamir Chaplin 11.

UALR missed six consecutive shots and committed three turnovers during a 6-plus minute scoring drought in the

first half as the Eagles went on a 17-0 run to take a 21-4 lead midway through the first half. The Trojans got right back in it with a 14-0 run of their own to trail 21-18.

Morehead State shot 50% (25-for-50) from the field while limiting the Trojans to 41% (23-for-56) shooting and outscoring UALR 10-2 from the free-throw line.

UALR won the lone regular-season meeting between the teams, who finished tied with UT Martin atop the conference standings at 14-4.

SPORTS



Historic night
Mavs' Dončić first player to have 6 straight 30-point triple doubles » **NBA, Page 20**

COLLEGE BASKETBALL



PHOTOS BY BEN MCKEOWN/AP

North Carolina's Cormac Ryan reacts in front of Duke's Jared McCain after hitting a 3-pointer during the second half Saturday in Durham, N.C. Ryan scored a career-high 31 points.

Keeping the Crazies at bay



Duke's student section, known as the Cameron Crazies, yell at North Carolina's RJ Davis as he waits to inbound the basketball.

UNC's Ryan dominant in victory over Duke

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — It took roughly two minutes before North Carolina guard Cormac Ryan caught a pass and buried a corner 3-pointer with no hesitation in front of Duke's rowdy fans.

He followed with another 16 seconds later from the same spot, then turned to face the "Cameron Crazies" and curse at them.

And the graduate transfer from Notre Dame never shut up, either — yapping, screaming, shushing the crowd and shaking his head with his tongue wagging about after making big shot after big shot. He finished with a career-high 31 points as the seventh-ranked Tar Heels secured the program's first Atlantic Coast Conference outright regular-season title since 2017.

It was an output that ranked among the best by a UNC player in decades in the rivalry, offering a reminder of the veteran's unflappable confidence and competitive zip that could prove critical deeper into March.

"That's just who I am, man," Ryan said of his demonstrative celebrations in Saturday night's 84-79 win against the ninth-ranked Blue Devils. "I can't control it. I love playing in these environments. I love being in front of the fire. I love it."

UNC coach Hubert Davis added Ryan as part of an offseason overhaul after a disappointing flop from preseason No. 1 to missing the NCAA Tournament last year. He wanted the 6-foot-5 guard's veteran presence along with a feisty competitive edge.

SEE BAY ON PAGE 23

O'Malley defends UFC bantamweight crown » MMA, Page 21

