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STARS AND STRIPES

stripes.com

Volume 82 Edition 109 ©SS 2023

CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

Free to Deployed Areas



EMMA GRAY/U.S. Marine Corps

U.S. Marine Cpl. Armanjacob Celmar, left, and Staff Sgt. Jonas Ullmam, a Swedish marine, discuss simulated enemy positions.

Resolve in the face of aggression

US pairs with Swedes on exercise, learns lessons from watching Russia

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

BERGA NAVAL BASE, Sweden — A joint U.S.-Swedish military exercise this week in Sweden's archipelago in the Baltic Sea sends a strong signal of NATO's resolve in the face of Russian aggression, defense officials from the two countries said.

That determination comes as Sweden prepares to join the alliance and NATO carefully observes the war in Ukraine for important lessons, including ones about fortitude, adaptability and cunning, they said.

Although officials declined to go into detail, they said studying the actions of Russian and Ukrainian forces is instructive for the U.S. military and future NATO member Sweden.

"We are paying very close attention each

and every day to what they are using, what they are trying to use and some of the concepts they are trying to employ," Maj. Gen. Robert Sofge, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa, said Wednesday. "(The war) is a lab in many ways."

Sofge was in Sweden for Archipelago Endeavor 23, which included more than 100 sailors and Marines from the II Marine Expeditionary Force. The exercise ended Thursday.

The war also has served to fortify the determination of allies and partners should the Kremlin turn its attention beyond Ukraine, Sofge said.

That was echoed by Col. Adam Camel, commander of Sweden's 1st Marine Regiment.

"We're getting better and more lethal," Camel said.

Sweden announced a 28% increase in military spending earlier this week, The Associated Press reported Tuesday.

That would bring the country, which is on the brink of NATO membership, on track to reach the bloc's expectation that allies devote at least 2% of gross domestic product to defense expenditures, according to the AP report.

Previously worried about provoking Russia, Sweden and neighboring Finland reversed course after the Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine, applying to join NATO in May of that year.

Finland joined in April, but Sweden's bid had been held up by Turkey and Hungary. Turkish

SEE RESOLVE ON PAGE 8

Acting CNO says recovery from Tuberville's hold will take years

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The acting chief of naval operations said Thursday that it will take the Navy years to recover from the delay on promotions caused by Sen. Tommy Tuberville's procedural hold on military nominees.

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the nominee for the Navy's highest-ranking position, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that untangling the monthslong blockade of more than 300 nominations and appointments would take three to four months for three-star officers alone.

"The Navy's facing challenges all around the globe, threats from our adversaries. We want to have the right people with the right level of experience in those positions," Franchetti said. "And as we continue not to have the confirmed people that we've nominated with that experience, we're going to continue to see an erosion of readiness."

Her own nomination to permanent chief of naval operations is expected to be stalled by Tuberville, R-Ala., as he refuses to let

SEE NAVY ON PAGE 5



CARLOS BONGIOANNI/Stars and Stripes

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the acting chief of naval operations, testifies Thursday on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Delta to restrict access to Sky Club airport lounges

Associated Press

Delta Air Lines passengers who have long enjoyed access to free meals, alcohol and a quiet place to relax before their flight are in for some major cutbacks.

The Atlanta-based airline said it plans to cap the number of entries to its Sky Clubs starting Feb. 1, 2025, for holders of the American Express Platinum Card as well as the Delta Reserve American Express Card. Those holding the Platinum Card will be allowed six visits per year, while the Delta Re-

serve Card holders will get 10.

Those who book a basic economy ticket will no longer be allowed in Delta's lounges starting Jan. 1, 2024, regardless if they carry a Platinum Card or any other premium credit card. The news originally was leaked on a Portuguese-language website and was confirmed by a Delta spokesman.

The news may not come as a surprise to Delta customers who have visited a Sky Club at Delta's major hubs like JFK Airport or Atlanta, where lines to access Sky Clubs

have been a common occurrence. Delta will open a second lounge in Terminal 4 at JFK to relieve some of the overcrowding.

Without a premium AmEx card, the lounge was only available to those traveling on business or first-class flights or those willing to pay \$695 a year for a membership. Delta is also making it more difficult for customers to qualify for status on its SkyMiles program. Passengers will earn status based exclusively on the amount of money they spend with the airline.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Sept. 15)	\$1.05	Bahrain (Dinar)	.3770
British pound (Sept. 15)	\$1.28	Britain (Pound)	1.2424
Japanese yen (Sept. 15)	144.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3522
South Korean won (Sept. 15)	1293.00	China (Yuan)	7.2776
		Denmark (Krone)	6.9924
		Egypt (Pound)	30.9506
		Euro	.9377
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8288
		Hungary (Forint)	360.17
		Israel (Shekel)	3.8228
		Japan (Yen)	147.32
		Kuwait (Dinar)	.3089
		Norway (Krone)	10.7500
		Philippines (Peso)	56.75
		Poland (Zloty)	4.34
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7511
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3634
		South Korea (Won)	1329.79
Switzerland (Franc)	.8956		
Thailand (Baht)	35.78		
Turkey (New Lira)	26.9502		

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES	
Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.30
30-year bond	4.35

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

Air Force to miss active-duty recruiting goal

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force will miss its active-duty recruiting goal for the first time since 1999 by about 10%, Brig. Gen. Chris Amrhein said Wednesday.

“If we hadn’t deviated much from our former recruiting practices, this recruiting shortfall could have been much worse,” said Amrhein, who took over as the Air Force Recruiting Service commander in June.



Amrhein

The Air Force recruiting goal for fiscal 2023 was 26,877, but the service will miss it by about 2,700, Air Force Recruiting Service spokeswoman Leslie Brown wrote in an email.

In addition to the active-duty number falling short, Amrhein said the recruiting goals for the Air National Guard and Reserve will each come up short by nearly 30%.

Amrhein said he is still “cautiously optimistic” about seeing improvement in recruiting. Last September, the Air Force and Space Force announced a new pilot program that would grant certain applicants who test positive for THC a chance to retest and possibly join the ranks. THC is the



GABRIEL JONES/U.S. Air Force

Air Force Col. Layne Trosper leads a salute in June 2022 at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, with Brig. Gen. Christopher Amrhein, the commander of the unit.

main psychoactive component of marijuana.

“We realized with about three dozen states having legalized marijuana laws that this was not a policy that made sense,” Amrhein said. “Let’s make no mistake, drug usage has absolutely no place in our Air and Space forces. But allowing second tests in the recruiting process is the right thing to do.”

The policy change allowed

about 165 airmen into the service, the general said. In March, the Air Force announced additional changes to policies for hand and neck tattoos, body fat standards, and college loan repayment programs for enlisted troops.

As a result, Brown said the Air Force was able to bring in more than 1,200 new airmen who would have been disqualified in the past.

Amrhein said the Air Force still faces long-term challenges such

as expanding recruiter numbers and increasing people’s familiarity with the service and what it entails. The Air Force in April launched a “Go Blue, Stay Blue” campaign to encourage bases to open and have airmen and guardians engage with the community.

“After 9/11, and rightfully so, bases went very insular. This ‘Go Blue’ is about opening it back up and getting people back into the community to tell their story,” he

said.

Amrhein said he learned Tuesday that the Pennsylvania Air National Guard has a civic partnership in which they opened their base to youth baseball. It included about 24 kids, with their parents and coaches, who came to the base for a weekend.

“They let them out on their fields ... they showed them their simulators that they fly. They opened up their dining facility for them to eat at and just kind of took a tour of the base,” Amrhein said. “Ideas like that is where we can really get the maximum effect out of ‘Go Blue, Stay Blue.’”

The service has added 91 new recruiters who will begin work between February and June after going through training and being matched with an assignment. The Air Force also added 16 people to its e-recruiter program, expanding from 5 to 21.

“I challenged the team to go, ‘Hey, can we grow this even more?’ There is a lot of opportunity in that space,” Amrhein said. “It has a national approach rather than a specific region. The combination of our lead refinement center and growing our e-recruiter program is something to work at in the coming year.”

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Aviano cuts medical care for DOD civilians and families

BY KENT HARRIS

Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — The clinic at the largest Air Force community in Italy is no longer treating Defense Department civilians, their families and others who once paid for their own medical care, citing a lack of money and staff.

The decision has some military employees worried that they won’t be able to receive equivalent care at off-base Italian facilities, where fluent English isn’t a given and some prescriptions may not be available.

Col. Jeffrey Fewell, commander of the 31st Medical Group, made the announcement Tuesday to about two dozen Department of Defense Education Activity teachers.

“We have to prioritize our resources to our active-duty and Tricare enrollees,” he said during a briefing on the policy, which was adopted Sept. 1.

Active-duty service members receive free health care, while their families, which are covered by Tricare, pay significantly lower costs than many Americans.

Most DOD civilians are typically covered by large private insurance companies, which pay a varying

percentage of costs minus any copayments. But not all the money those patients pay for their care goes back to the Aviano clinic, base officials said.

A similar move to restrict on-base civilian health care sparked a furor last year in Japan, where many said in base forums that they had difficulty scheduling appointments with Japanese doctors.

In March, the Defense Health Agency partially reversed the move by allowing civilians with chronic conditions like diabetes to seek care on base in Japan, but only on a space-available basis.

Just how many people the new policy at Aviano will affect is unknown.

Base officials generally know the number of civilians employed there, 31st Fighter Wing spokesman 1st Lt. Steve Garrett said Tuesday. But factors such as family size, veteran status and the nature of their sponsorship aren’t as easy to determine.

A recent review of a seven-month period found that about 19% of slots in the Aviano Family Health Clinic had been devoted to paying patients.

Fewell said the new policy affects a small percentage of people at Aviano, which has an active-duty

population of about 4,600 airmen and soldiers and an equal number of their dependents.

Those attending the briefing Tuesday expressed frustration at being notified of the change only after the policy had gone into effect.

Some worried about expiring medications and a few mentioned specific drugs that are either unavailable or prohibited in Italy.

Jeff England, a fifth grade teacher who’s been at Aviano for 20 years, was among them. England and his wife, Rene Alexander, have a 20-year-old son who has been prescribed Concerta by the base for almost a decade.

Italian doctors cannot prescribe that drug and similar ones such as Adderall.

Others talked about increased costs or a language barrier with physicians. And some said that even Italian speakers have trouble getting an appointment if they’re not citizens.

“We have seen Italian doctors,” Alexander said. “But I also speak Italian fluently. It took me 10 years to find doctors for my kids. New families here? They’re just not going to be able to do that.”

Fewell said he understood those concerns and that his team will do its best to help on a case-by-case

basis.

“It’s not my intent to push anybody out,” he said. “But I do have to prioritize my resources. And I don’t have the resources that I once had. And that’s just a fact.”

Fewell also told the group of teachers that access to the pharmacy will be shut off Sept. 23 through Jan. 1.

That’s primarily because the base will be implementing MHS Genesis, a new computer system designed to consolidate electronic records for service members that military facilities worldwide are adopting.

Fewell expects a steep learning curve at his clinic, so the number of available care spots will be reduced for all patients during that time.

“I think it’s very, very likely that we’re going to be able to turn the pharmacy back on (for paying patients) at some point,” he said.

Told by England that many Italian doctors are required to handle large caseloads and that making appointments can be difficult for non-Italians, Fewell acknowledged unfamiliarity with the domestic health care system.

“We have some homework to do on that,” he said.

The clinic does employ Italian li-

aisons to engage with a network of local providers, but they don’t help those considered “pay patients,” including DOD civilians and family members.

The clinic makes approximately 6,000 off-base referrals for its Tricare population annually, as it employs almost no specialists.

The number of medical personnel on base has dropped dramatically since the Defense Department downgraded numerous military hospitals to clinics in 2017.

The Aviano family clinic has two general care doctors and two pediatricians assigned to it.

Not long after the hospital became a clinic, the base announced it would restrict pay patients’ access.

But that directive largely didn’t apply to school-age dependents, and some pay patients could still book appointments.

England and Alexander said the change reflects a deeper divide between services available to service members and their families, and others affiliated with the military.

“It just kind of reinforces the second-class citizen sentiment,” England said.

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MILITARY

US resumes flights, missions out of Niger

Coup temporarily halted activities in country, confining 1,100 forces

By TARA COPP
Associated Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. — The U.S. military has resumed flying drones and manned aircraft out of air bases in Niger more than a month after a military takeover temporarily halted all those activities there, the head of U.S. Air Forces for Europe and Africa said Wednesday.

Since the July coup, the 1,100 U.S. forces deployed in the country have been confined inside their military bases. Last week the Pentagon said some military personnel and assets had been moved from the air base near Niamey, which is the capital of Niger, to another in Agadez. Niamey is 572 miles away from Agadez.

In response to a question from The Associated Press on how the U.S. was able to continue its counterterrorism missions without those flights, Gen. James Hecker, the top Air Force commander for Europe and Africa, said in recent weeks some of those intelligence and surveillance missions have been able to resume due to U.S. negotiations with the junta.

“For a while we weren’t doing

any missions on the bases, they pretty much closed down the airfields,” Hecker said. “Through the diplomatic process, we are now doing, I wouldn’t say 100% of the missions that we were doing before, but we’re doing a large amount of missions that we’re doing before.”

In a statement, Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder confirmed that the U.S. was flying missions again but said they were confined to protecting U.S. forces.

Hecker, who spoke to reporters at the annual Air and Space Forces Association convention at National Harbor, Md., said the U.S. is flying both manned and unmanned missions and those flights resumed “within the last couple of weeks.”

The significant distance between the two bases also means that the while flights are going out, some missions are “not getting as much data, because you’re not overhead for as long” because of the amount of fuel it takes to get out and back, he said.

The U.S. has made Niger its main regional outpost for wide-ranging patrols by armed drones



JOHN VANDIVER/Stars and Stripes

Airmen work in the unmanned aerial device apron in Agadez, Niger, where drones will be parked when they are not in use. The U.S. has resumed manned and unmanned flights from air bases in the country.

and other counterterrorism operations against Islamic extremist movements that over the years have seized territory, massacred civilians and battled foreign armies.

The bases are a critical part of America’s overall counterterrorism efforts in West Africa.

The U.S. has also invested years and hundreds of millions of dol-

lars in training Nigerien forces.

In 2018, fighters loyal to the Islamic State group ambushed and killed four American service members, four Nigeriens and an interpreter.

West Africa recorded over 1,800 extremist attacks in the first six months of this year, which killed nearly 4,600 people, according to ECOWAS, the Eco-

nommic Community of West African States.

The Islamic extremist group Boko Haram operates in neighboring Nigeria and Chad.

Along Niger’s borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and al-Qaida affiliate Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin pose greater threats.

House punts on DOD funding bill as shutdown looms

By MARIANNA SOTOMAYOR
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — House Republicans on Wednesday failed to move forward on a procedural vote advancing a bill to fund the Defense Department after it became clear they did not have enough votes to secure its passage.

The usually noncontroversial step became tied up in a broader debate among the conference that threatens to derail negotiations over the budget as a Sept. 30 deadline to fund the government looms. Republican leaders Wednesday afternoon moved the scheduled vote off the House floor calendar, and it is unclear when the vote may happen.

House Republicans returned this week hoping to move forward on a tranche of funding bills that they believe will give Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., a stronger footing in negotiations with the Senate as Congress looks to avert a government shutdown.

The inability to move forward on a basic step to fund the government — the House’s top responsibility enshrined in the Constitution — offered an example of just how difficult it will be for McCar-

“There currently is not an appetite to ... blindly move forward with any one piece of the puzzle until we can ... look at the picture of the puzzle that we’re actually trying to assemble.”

Chip Roy
R-Texas

thy and the ideologically fractured Republican majority to find consensus, keep the government open and avert blame if a shutdown is triggered.

The House has less than a dozen days in session before the Sept. 30 deadline.

A handful of staunchly conservative lawmakers announced they would not vote to move the defense funding bill forward because of an unmet demand they made of leadership months ago. Several members of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus said they have yet to receive a top-line number for how much all 12 appropriations bills would cost once passed, and where offsets to curtail spending would be made across the 11 proposals the House has yet to consider on the floor.

“There currently is not an appetite to just, I would call it, blindly move forward with any one piece of the puzzle until we can actually look at the picture of the puzzle that we’re actually trying to assemble,” Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said. “I have no interest in grabbing a piece and just sticking it on a board and hoping.”

That top-line number may not come. The House Appropriations Committee already has not been able to overcome competing demands between moderate and far-right Republicans on the labor and justice appropriation bills, which have historically been the most controversial proposals to complete.

As a result, fulfilling the Freedom Caucus’s demands — including passing all 12 appropriation

bills individually — may be impossible.

House Republicans already had adjourned a day early in July after they couldn’t pass an agriculture funding bill — typically considered one of the least controversial appropriations bills — because of internal debates on policy that at times turned into shouting matches between lawmakers, according to multiple people familiar with the meetings who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to detail tensions testing the conference.

It remains unclear when the House will consider the defense funding bill — or any appropriation bill.

Given the myriad requests and leadership’s inability thus far to provide a top-line budget number, lawmakers had little insight into how Republicans break themselves from the logjam before the House leaves Washington for the weekend Thursday.

In addition to political opposition, several absences within the conference — including Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., who is battling cancer — is making the math tricky for Republicans. Complicating it further is the ex-

pected retirement of Rep. Chris Stewart, R-Utah, later this week, which will bring the Republicans’ already razor-thin majority down to four.

His replacement would not arrive in the House until late November.

McCarthy ignored questions about how he plans on overcoming the impasse Wednesday after devoting significant time to discussing Republicans’ impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden.

McCarthy’s ask of colleagues during Republicans’ weekly conference meeting Wednesday appeared to go unheard by a significant number of lawmakers.

Several shook their heads no when the speaker urged his colleagues to be cognizant of the little time they have to address government funding and to help pass as many appropriation bills as possible, according to people in attendance.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved all 12 of their appropriations bills with bipartisan support, and lawmakers are expected to approve three of them through the Senate next week.

MILITARY

Navy: Franchetti would be first woman among Joint Chiefs of Staff

FROM PAGE 1

the Senate move forward on senior military confirmations in a bid to force the Pentagon to rescind an abortion access policy.

Franchetti would become the first woman to lead the Navy and serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, if confirmed. She has been filling the role of chief of naval operations in an acting capacity following the retirement last month of Adm. Michael Gilday.

Officials serving on an acting basis are prevented from making long-term plans, such as hiring decisions, and cannot move into housing that comes with the job.

Franchetti told senators Thursday that she is personally seeing the impact of Tuberville's hold on military families, who have been left uncertain of when they will have to move or where they will live.

"We ask a lot of our families: to move, to uproot, find new schools, find new jobs for spouses," she said. "I have heard a lot of concerns from our families that they are having difficulty navigating that space right now."

The list of frozen military promotions includes Rear Adm. Yvette Davids, who was nominat-

ed in April to become the first female superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy. The academy for the first time in 60 years began the school year last month without a confirmed superintendent, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass, said.

"Every young person who is thinking right now about applying to the academy and every young person anywhere in the Navy must confront head-on the fact that Sen. Tuberville has turned the Navy and the Naval Academy into one more political football," Warren said.

Tuberville, a member of the Armed Services committee, told Franchetti on Thursday that he looked forward to working with her but did not address his hold.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., pushed back against accusations from Warren that Republicans did not care about military leaders or their families. When he asked Franchetti to comment, she said: "I believe that everyone in Congress supports everyone in our military."

The pressure to resolve the standoff between Tuberville and the Pentagon heightened this week as the Senate held confirmation hearings for Gen. David All-



CARLOS BONGIOANNI/Stars and Stripes

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the vice Chief of Naval Operations, testifies at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing where her nomination to be the next CNO was considered on Thursday on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

vin, nominated for Air Force chief of staff, and then Franchetti on Thursday.

Half of the eight seats on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a body of the most senior uniformed military leaders, will be vacant when Army Gen. Mark Milley, the group's

chairman, retires Oct. 1. The Pentagon said this week that the Joint Chiefs vice chairman would take over for Milley in an acting capacity if the Senate cannot confirm Air Force Gen. C.Q. Brown for the job in time.

The Army, Marine Corps and

Navy have all been left without Senate-confirmed leaders due to Tuberville's hold.

Tuberville and other Republicans have argued the Senate can easily go around the blockade by holding individual votes on nominees. But a memo released by Senate Democrats this week showed that process would last at least 89 days.

The memo, prepared by the Congressional Research Service in August, estimated it would take the Senate nearly 700 hours of floor time to vote on 273 military nominations. The number of affected nominees has since grown to more than 300.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., who has refused to hold roll call votes on any of the blocked promotions, said Thursday that only Republicans can end the blockade.

"The bottom line is this: this is a Republican problem. It was created by the senator from Alabama, no one else, and it's up to Republicans to put pressure on him to back off, plain and simple," he said.

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PACIFIC

General: Land forces keep China in check

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commander of U.S. Army Pacific said Wednesday that strong land forces — not just air and naval strength — will be crucial in defending allies in the Indo-Pacific region and deterring Chinese aggression in the coming years.

Gen. Charles Flynn emphasized the importance of ground troops during a conference call to discuss existing challenges in the region and potential obstacles to implementing the command's vision for the future.

"I contend that [the Indo-Pacific region] is not an air and maritime theater. It is a joint theater," Flynn said. "There is a natural tendency to look at the map and think you can solve this with air and maritime power alone. My thinking on this is that the land power network and armies out here are an essential part of the solution."

The U.S. Army Pacific's newly released 2023 Vision Book outlines many of the challenges facing U.S. allies and interests in the Indo-Pacific region, which includes about three dozen countries across Asia and the Pacific and Indian oceans, including South Korea, Japan, China, India and Australia.

Flynn acknowledged air and naval forces are vital to protecting the region, but he added that the land component has often been overlooked.

"In my view, the security architecture that actually binds this region together is the armies," he said. "These nations have large armies, they don't have large navies and air forces."

"There is a unique on-the-ground fingertip feel that you get when you're out in the villages ... out in the jungle, out in the mountains and operating amongst the people," Flynn said. "Do you want to know what's going on inside these countries? Ask somebody from the land force, because we are in these countries for extended periods of time. And I think we have a deeper understanding of what's actually happening."



TONIA CIANCANELLI/U.S. Army

Army Gen. Charles Flynn, commanding general of the U.S. Army Pacific, receives a salute from troops at the Hawaii Army National Guard Puunene Armory, Maui, Aug. 15.

Flynn said Army Pacific's vision is in step with the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy, which was released in the fall and identifies China as the top U.S. "pacing challenge." The Defense Department and President Joe Biden's administration have been alarmed by various actions by China recently, such as the new security agreement the country reached in early 2022 with the Solomon Islands, a small nation about 1,100 miles northeast of Australia. And there are many other small island countries in the region that could also be vulnerable to Chinese influence.

"The recent security agreement between the Solomon Islands and [China] underscores increased competition for influence in these island nations," according to the Army Pacific's vision statement.

The Indo-Pacific also includes Taiwan, which China claims as a breakaway territory. The United States has long had a strong

unofficial relationship with Taiwan and has often butted heads with China about the island. The U.S. ignored threats from China, for example, when then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., visited Taiwan in 2022.

"[China] is increasingly turning to [its military] as an instrument of statecraft as it adopts more coercive and aggressive actions in the Indo-Pacific region," the Army Pacific's Vision Book states. "Having purportedly achieved its 2020 modernization goal, the [Chinese army] now sets its sights to 2027 with a goal to accelerate the integrated development of mechanization, informatization and intelligentization of [China's] armed forces. If realized, this 2027 objective could give the [Chinese army] capabilities to be a more credible military tool for [China] to wield as it pursues Taiwan unification."

Flynn acknowledged 2027 could be a key

year for President Xi Jinping, China's leader for more than a decade, to make influential decisions about Taiwan — partly due to his advancing age.

"In my view, there are decisions he is likely going to have to make [at about that year]," Flynn said of the 70-year-old Xi. "His tenure in his current role would likely require him to be thinking about what his legacy is going to be, [and] he has stated publicly and unequivocally that he intends to unify [with Taiwan]."

Flynn, who has been the commander of Army Pacific for more than two years, is a graduate of the U.S. Naval War College, where he earned a master's degree in national security and strategic studies. He is the younger brother of Michael Flynn, who was former President Donald Trump's national security adviser for 22 days in 2017 before resigning amid reports that he misled the White House about his contacts with Russia's ambassador to the United States. After his resignation, Michael Flynn later pleaded guilty to a felony count of making false statements to the FBI.

Gen. Charles Flynn also said Wednesday that he "wasn't overly concerned" about the impact meetings between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un could have on the Indo-Pacific region.

Kim traveled to eastern Russia this week to meet with Putin. During talks Wednesday, the North Korean leader seemed to endorse Moscow's ongoing war in Ukraine. He said he's certain Russia will "emerge victorious in the fight to punish the evil forces that ambitiously pursues hegemony and expansion," according to Russia's state-run TASS news agency. The Russian news agency also reported Kim wants to deepen bilateral ties with Moscow and Putin reminded Kim that the Soviet Union came to Pyongyang's aid during its war against U.S.-aligned South Korea in the 1950s.

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China steps up naval, airpower demonstrations near Taiwan

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

China's military sent scores of ships and planes near Taiwan for a fifth day Thursday, its largest show of force since April, according to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense.

Between 6 a.m. Wednesday and 6 a.m. Thursday, Taiwan's military monitored 68 Chinese aircraft and 10 ships in the waters and airspace around the island, the ministry said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Forty of the aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line and entered the island's air defense identification zone from the southwest and southeast, the ministry said.

Farther west, the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong, two frigates, two destroyers and a support ship were in the Philippine Sea on Wednesday, approximately 400 miles south of Miyako Is-



AP

In this photo released by the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense, Taiwanese navy ship Keelung monitors the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong near the Taiwanese waters in September.

land, Japan's Joint Staff said in a news release that day.

Japan's military observed fighter jets and helicopters taking off and landing on the carrier, the Joint Staff said.

Thursday marked the largest number of Chinese aircraft operating near Taiwan since April 11, during a three-day series of drills that encircled the island. Taipei said it tracked 91 Chinese aircraft

and a dozen ships that day.

The April exercise, which included live-fire drills and simulated strikes on Taiwanese targets, was Beijing's response to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California the week prior. Between Aug. 8 and April 11, Taiwan's Defense Ministry reported at least 70 aircraft and nine ships near the island each day.

China's air and naval forces have kept up pressure on Taiwan since Sunday. The island's forces tracked 35 aircraft on Wednesday; 27 aircraft and 13 ships on Tuesday; 22 aircraft and 20 ships on Monday; and 26 aircraft and 13 ships on Sunday, according to a series of reports from Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

The scale of Chinese military activities has "constantly increased this year" and is intended as a political deterrent and a demonstration of China's "level of readiness," Norah Huang, director for international relations at the Prospect Foundation, a security and foreign affairs think tank in Taipei, told Stars and Stripes in an email Thursday.

Beijing's recent actions are likely a response to a joint U.S.-Canada transit of the Taiwan Strait on Saturday, Huang said by email Tuesday.

China considers the 110-mile-wide Taiwan Strait its territorial waters and views the functionally democratic island as a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland.

Beijing is "unwaveringly determined to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity" and considers Taiwan to be "an inalienable part" of its territory, China Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a news conference Wednesday. A readout of her remarks was posted online by the ministry.

"Relevant sides should immediately stop such provocative acts and stop being a troublemaker disrupting peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," she said, referring to the U.S.-Canada transit of the strait.

Stars and Stripes reporter Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.
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MILITARY

Space Force component set for Ramstein

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Ramstein Air Base will be the headquarters of a new Space Force service component for Europe and Africa, according to the Air Force.

A ceremony to stand up U.S. Space Forces Europe-Africa is planned for Dec. 8 at Ramstein, Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Jackie Lockett said in a statement Wednesday.

Gen. Chance Saltzman, chief of space operations, announced the new unit Tuesday during a keynote address at the Air Force As-

sociation's Air, Space and Cyber Conference in National Harbor, Md., Air and Space Forces magazine reported the same day.

The component will provide a subordinate space commander, space planning and employment expertise as well as space command and control specifically focused on the missions of U.S. European and Africa commands, Lockett said.

A cadre of Space Force mem-



Saltzman

bers currently assigned to U.S. Air Forces Europe-Air Forces Africa will realign under the new organization, Lockett said, adding that there are no plans as of now to increase their numbers in 2024 beyond the initial 30 guardians or so.

A need for interservice transfers isn't immediately expected, either, she said. Not all personnel under the new component will work from Ramstein. The service will send some assignments to Stuttgart, Lockett said.

The Germany-based organization will be the fourth Space Force component for a regional combatant command since the service

was established in December 2019 as the sixth branch of the armed forces.

It joins Space Forces Indo-Pacific, with headquarters in Hawaii in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; Space Forces Korea at Osan Air Base, in support of U.S. Forces Korea; and Space Forces Central in Tampa, Fla., to support U.S. Central Command.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin authorized the activation of the Europe-based space component on June 29, Lockett said.

Locating the new Space Force component at Ramstein puts it close to NATO's new space center,

which operates from the bloc's Allied Air Command on the base.

The space center was established about two years ago to coordinate space activities and share communications and satellite imagery with member countries.

At the 2021 Brussels summit, NATO acknowledged that attacks to, from or in space present a clear challenge to the security of the alliance and could lead to the invocation of Article 5, which would prompt collective defense measures by members.

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Bike giveaway set for another spin at Camp Humphreys

By CHRISTOPHER GREEN
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. Army retiree Daniel Melton has a new mission — restoring hundreds of abandoned bicycles at the home of Eighth Army, 2nd Infantry Division and U.S. Forces Korea.

Melton and five other volunteers spent nearly four hours Saturday cleaning, repairing and replacing parts on some of the bikes. By the end of the day, four were ready to roll.

"We want to give these bikes back to the community to service members who are coming in," he told Stars and Stripes that day. "So, they've got a bicycle they can use ... we give them that."

Abandoned bikes and scooters — rusted and cobweb-covered — accumulate quickly at Humphreys, the largest U.S. military installation overseas. More than 200, along with helmets and other gear, are stored in an on-base warehouse, many collected since the

last bike giveaway in 2020.

Two years ago, an Army staff sergeant with the provost marshal's office started rounding up forsaken two-wheelers littering the base.

Today, the Humphreys Bike Program, a garrison-sponsored charity started by Melton, a USO volunteer, helps connect would-be cyclists with rehabilitated two-wheelers.

Melton separates the discarded bikes and scooters into three categories: those that are fine as-is; some that need a few repairs; and others that will provide spare parts such as tires and chains.

Once he has the bikes ready, Melton plans another giveaway in December. In the past, the bikes found new owners among staff sergeants and below, who are precluded from owning a motor vehicle during their tours in South Korea.

The new owners are responsible for ensuring the bikes are properly registered on Camp Humphreys.

"You take the paperwork to the



CHRISTOPHER GREEN/STARS AND STRIPES

Army veteran Daniel Melton works on an abandoned bicycle Tuesday at Camp Humphreys, South Korea.

[pass and ID office] and get it registered and bring me a copy back to keep on file," he said. "We can track it, and before your departure date we're going to contact your unit and tell you to de-register the bike."

One of the volunteer bike me-

chanics, Sgt. 1st Class Jojo Alicaba, expects plenty of people will be interested in a free bike.

"I don't know how it's going to impact the community, but I hope that with a lot of soldiers walking around at least they'll have a bicy-

cle," Alicaba said. "This a good opportunity for I guess for the Garrison to give back to those soldiers in need."

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State Department greenlights \$5B sale of 25 F-35As for South Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The U.S. State Department has approved a potential sale of 25 F-35A Lightning IIs to South Korea for an estimated \$5.06 billion, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said Wednesday.

The department approved five more F-35As than South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration initially planned for in March. Seoul originally said it would ask for 20 of the joint strike fighters by 2028.

South Korea's plan to add "over 20" additional F-35As to its fleet would strengthen its capabilities against North Korean threats, a defense acquisition program officer told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. He declined to provide further details.

South Korean officials customarily speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The possible deal includes 26 Pratt and Whitney F135-PW-100 gasturbine engines capable of producing over 40,000 pounds of thrust, and other components, for

Lockheed Martin's fifth-generation fighter.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy goals and national security objectives of the United States by improving the security of a major ally that is a force for political stability and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific region," the agency said in its release.

Seoul's military already maintains roughly 40 F-35As purchased from the U.S. in 2014 for \$7 billion.

South Korea can "meet current and future threats" with new

F-35As and will ensure that its military and U.S. forces can operate together more seamlessly, the agency added.

The F-35 comes in three variants: the A can do conventional takeoffs and landings; the B is capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings; and the C is designed for arrested landings aboard aircraft carriers.

F-35As from the U.S. and South Korean air forces trained together for the first time in July 2022.

Six stealth jets from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, flew to the

peninsula for 10 days of "familiarization and routine training" with their South Korean counterparts, U.S. Forces Korea said at the time.

Since then, South Korean F-35As have flown numerous air drills with the U.S. Air Force. An unspecified number of South Korean F-35As took to the skies on July 28 for a "rapid and flexible response" drill with U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcons, according to a 7th Air Force news release.

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EUROPE

Former generals urge more aid for Ukraine

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two former generals are calling on Republican leaders in the House to put politics aside and quickly approve additional aid for Ukraine as the country's forces press their counteroffensive against entrenched Russian troops.

Retired Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, a former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, and retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the former commanding general for U.S. Army forces in Europe, made the appeal in a letter this week to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., who is attempting to build legislative consensus with a narrow Republican majority.

McCarthy is facing increasing pressure from hard-right Republicans to cut off Ukraine assistance and has indicated he will not include the White House's recent request for \$24 billion in additional aid in a spending bill that needs to pass by the end of the month to avoid a government shutdown.

"Now is not the time to allow partisan politics to get in the way



Breedlove



Hodges

of supporting an ally that is fighting for freedom, as well as their own existence," wrote Breedlove and Hodges. "Ukrainians need our help. They need both military and non-lethal aid, and they needed it yesterday."

The retired generals said Ukraine is at a critical juncture in the war and has the momentum to take back occupied territory despite a slower-than-expected counteroffensive. They defended the arming of Ukraine as vital to American strategic interests.

"Our economic prosperity at home is linked to Europe, and European prosperity depends on stability and security on the Continent," Breedlove and Hodges wrote. "American prosperity also depends on the respect of sovereign borders, the freedom of navigation on the high seas and the

credibility of international agreements. Russia has challenged each one of these pillars of American power."

Their arguments are shared by most Republicans in the Democrat-led Senate, where Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is regularly making speeches on the floor pushing back against Republican skeptics. McConnell said the Pentagon and other government agencies will brief Republican senators on oversight efforts for Ukraine aid, a frequent topic of conservative criticism.

Still, opposition to funneling more weapons and money to the war-torn country is growing from Republicans who contend the U.S. needs to focus on domestic priorities over foreign wars.

In July, 70 House Republicans voted for failed amendments to an annual defense policy bill that would strip all aid to Ukraine. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, joined other conservative groups Tuesday in calling on congressional leaders to reject continued support for Ukraine.

"Greenlighting the administra-

tion's recent request for an additional \$24 billion to fund the war does not serve the interests of the American people," the groups wrote in a letter to Democrat and Republican leaders in the House and Senate.

Congress has signed off on \$113 billion in military, economic, humanitarian, and other aid for Ukraine since last year. The latest request includes \$13 billion in military assistance, including weapon shipments to the Ukrainian military and the replenishment of Pentagon weapon stocks.

Breedlove and Hodges said the money has been well spent so far.

"Having spent a fraction of the annual U.S. military budget in security assistance, Ukraine managed to cut Putin's combat capacity in half," they wrote. "That is a significant and historic return on investment when it comes to our own national security and interests, and the investment in protections against the threats posed by Putin and Russia against NATO members."

The U.S. is the largest contributor to the Ukraine war effort, but it ranks 12th, behind the tiny

countries of the Baltics and others, when accounting for the size of its aid relative to the size of its economy, according to the Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

The next package of U.S. aid to Ukraine is caught up in a spending battle on Capitol Hill that is pitting the House against the Senate as lawmakers race to negotiate a stopgap spending bill before the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30. A government shutdown would go into effect Oct. 1 if an agreement is not reached.

Senate leaders are unlikely to approve legislation that does not include more assistance to Ukraine while McCarthy is reluctant to support measures that are unpopular with the hard-right House Republicans who helped propel him to his leadership post earlier this year.

House Republicans on Wednesday were forced to delay consideration of the Pentagon's 2024 budget due to the widening discord among their ranks.

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Resolve: American, Swedish marines show ability to work together

FROM PAGE 1

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the main hurdle, has since relented on his objections, putting Sweden on a path for accession this fall.

With Finland and Norway already in the NATO fold, the impending addition of Sweden offers the alliance unprecedented opportunities in the Baltic region, Sofge said.

Sweden's membership would make nearly the entire Baltic Sea coast NATO territory.

On Wednesday, U.S. and Swedish marines demonstrated their ability to work together in a mock

scenario involving the removal of forces under fire.

The Americans praised the professionalism and focus of their Swedish counterparts and were inspired by their littoral capabilities, including use of the Combat Boat 90, an assault craft.

The exercise allowed the two countries' forces to strengthen communication and equipment compatibility and also provided the Corps an opportunity to jointly experiment as it works to integrate across domains, Sofge said.

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EMMA GRAY/U.S. Marines

U.S. Marines and Swedish marines conduct a rapid extraction demonstration during Exercise Archipelago Endeavor 23 in Sweden on Tuesday. Exercise Archipelago Endeavor is an integrated, Swedish armed forces-led exercise that increases operational capability and enhances strategic cooperation.

8 US soldiers released from hospital after training accident

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Two soldiers were slated to be released from a Bavarian hospital Thursday after being treated for injuries stemming from a training accident that hurt eight in all, the Army said this week.

The injuries occurred Tuesday during a nighttime tactical movement at the Army's train-

ing area in Hohenfels, where two M113 armored personnel carriers collided at a slow speed, Joint Multinational Readiness Center spokesman Maj. John Ambelang said in a statement Wednesday.

The crash coincided with Saber Junction 23, a large drill involving several thousand troops.

Eight soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment were taken to a hospital in Re-

gensburg after the crash. Six of those soldiers were released Wednesday, Ambelang said, adding that an investigation is underway.

Ahead of every exercise, the training center at Hohenfels rehearses medical evacuations to prepare for the possibility of injuries, he said.

There have been a series of crashes involving military vehi-

cles in the area surrounding the Bavarian ranges at Hohenfels and Grafenwoehr in recent months.

In August, 1st Lt. Hailey Hodsdon, a platoon leader with the 2nd Cavalry Regiment's 4th Squadron, was killed when a semitruck collided with her armored Stryker vehicle on a highway near the village of Tirschenreuth.

In late July, eight soldiers in Vilseck were injured after their transport vehicle overturned while heading to a training range in the Grafenwoehr area.

Also, seven soldiers were injured in April after two armored vehicles conveying to the Grafenwoehr collided.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

IG finds lax security of weapons by US troops

BY PHILLIP WALTER
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Stars and Stripes

Weapons and ammunition that U.S. soldiers are moving across Europe and transferring to Ukraine at a logistics site in Poland risk being lost or stolen because security measures aren't being observed consistently, a Pentagon investigation has found.

In one lapse, a batch of Bradley Fighting Vehicles with machine guns inside was mistakenly left unguarded at the site, according to a Defense Department Inspector General report.

The watchdog agency's previously classified findings were released publicly on Monday.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S. alone has given Kyiv more than \$40 billion in security assistance.

Some donated military equipment is initially sent from the U.S. to air and sea ports in Europe. Other supplies come directly from U.S. military facilities on the Continent.

American service members transport all of it to depots on NATO's eastern flank, where it's transferred to Ukrainian trucks and trains.

The IG investigation focused solely on military aid being handed over at a major Polish logistics hub before it is moved by rail into Ukraine. The location's name was redacted in the report.

Overall, American military personnel have "effectively planned,

coordinated and executed" the ground movement and transfer of the aid, the report said.

But it also warned that personnel are not consistently adhering to security controls, which exist partly to prevent arms, ammunition and explosives from getting into the hands of criminals and terrorist groups.

The evaluation was conducted between January and June. Investigators traveled to Poland in March to observe two missions in which aid was brought to a railway yard and transferred onto Ukrainian trains.

One of the transfers was said to have involved 60 containers that arrived by German rail, along with six M109A6 howitzers and six M992 artillery ammunition carriers.

The other was a transfer of 14 M2A2 Bradleys, 12 howitzers and seven M992 ammunition carriers from commercial line haul trucks, according to the report.

In both cases, investigators found that troops tasked with guarding the equipment were "not completely prepared" for their mission.

"Specifically, we observed several instances where the guard force did not have the required documentation, communications equipment, or force posture for the sensitive cargo they escorted," the report said.

The noncommissioned officer in charge of the truck convoy was un-



ALLAN LAGGU/U.S. Army

Dozens of Bradley Fighting Vehicles are loaded onto German rail cars in Mannheim, Germany, in March 2022. A Defense Department Inspector General report says that, earlier this year, Bradleys with machine guns inside were mistakenly left unguarded at a logistics site in Poland before they went to Ukraine.

aware that machine guns were being transported in the Bradleys, the report said.

The officer told investigators that the team had not verified the cargo before departing from an installation in Mannheim, Germany, and therefore could not account for the weapons by serial number, which is required by protocol.

Military guards who arrived with some of the Bradleys at the railyard remained with the equipment overnight but returned to their home station the following morning, "leaving no armed guards to maintain surveillance

and checks on these vehicles containing weapons," which is also against protocol, the investigators found.

Two Polish police officers in a van were seen patrolling the site as part of the railyard's normal security, and nothing was reported missing, according to the report.

But in June, several boxes of ammunition were stolen from a train without the guard force's knowledge. Although that incident was outside the scope of the inspector general's investigation, it nevertheless illustrates the vulnerability of sensitive weapons and ammuni-

tion to theft, the report said.

The ammunition was later recovered, according to Polish police.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, the DOD Inspector General announced the arrival of a senior official at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and said more staffers will soon be sent to monitor U.S. security assistance to Ukraine.

It marks the first time the watchdog agency will have personnel based in the county since Russia's full-scale invasion.

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No sign of N. Korean leader on his Russian travels

BY KIM TONG-HYUNG
AND DASHA LITVINOVA
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was expected to tour a Russian plant that builds fighter jets and visit the country's Pacific Fleet, but his exact whereabouts remained uncertain Thursday following a summit at which he expressed unconditional support for Moscow.

Washington has warned that the summit on Wednesday between Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin could lead to a deal for North Korea to supply ammunition for Moscow's war in Ukraine. There's widespread concern in Seoul that North Korea would in return receive advanced weapons technologies from Russia, including those related to military spy satellites, which would increase the threat posed by Kim's military nuclear program.

"We express our deep concern and regret that despite repeated warnings from the international community, North Korea and Russia discussed military cooperation issues, including satellite develop-



KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY, KOREA NEWS SERVICE/AP

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un responds as Russian President Vladimir Putin sends him off from the Vostochny cosmodrome outside Tsiolkovsky, Russia, on Wednesday. Independent journalists were not given access to cover the event depicted in this image distributed by the North Korean government.

ment, during their summit," said Lim Soo-suk, South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

"Any science and technology cooperation that contributes to nuclear weapons and missile development, including satellite systems that involve ballistic missile technologies, runs against U.N. Security

Council resolutions," he said in a briefing.

Lim also pointed out that Kim's delegation in Russia includes several people sanctioned by the Security Council over involvement in illicit North Korean weapons development activities, including Korean People's Army Marshal Ri Pyong

Chol and Jo Chun Yong, a ruling party official who handles munitions policies. Lim said Moscow should realize there will be "very negative impacts" on its relations with Seoul if it proceeds with military cooperation with North Korea.

South Korean Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho, who handles affairs with North Korea, warned that potential arms transfers between the North and Russia would invite stronger responses from South Korea, the U.S. and Japan.

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Wednesday that North Korea would face consequences if it supplies arms to Russia.

"No nation on the planet, nobody, should be helping Mr. Putin kill innocent Ukrainians," Kirby said. If the countries move forward with an arms deal, the U.S. will take measure of the arrangement and "deal with it appropriately," he said.

The world has been largely relying on Russian and North Korean media for information about Kim's diplomacy in Russia, which underscores an aligning interest between the nuclear-armed countries locked

in escalating tensions with the West.

A day after giving intense coverage to the summit, Russian media outlets were silent on Kim as of Thursday afternoon. North Korean state media have been reporting on his activities in Russia a day late and crafting their reports to support the government's propaganda needs.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said on Thursday that Kim had invited Putin to visit North Korea at a "convenient time" and that Putin accepted with "pleasure and reaffirmed his will to invariably carry forward" the history of friendship between the nations. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that Putin had accepted the invitation and said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to visit North Korea in October.

During their meeting on Wednesday at Russia's spaceport in the Far East, Kim vowed "full and unconditional support" for Putin in what he described as a "just fight against hegemonic forces to defend its sovereign rights, security and interests," in an apparent reference to the war in Ukraine.

NATION

Federal judge declares revised DACA illegal

By JUAN A. LOZANO
Associated Press

HOUSTON — While a federal judge on Wednesday declared illegal a revised version of a federal policy that prevents the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, he declined to order an immediate end to the program and the protections it offers to recipients.

U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen agreed with Texas and eight other states suing to stop the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program. The judge's ruling was ultimately expected to be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, sending the program's fate before the high court for a third time.

"While sympathetic to the predicament of DACA recipients and their families, this Court has expressed its concerns about the legality of the program for some time," Hanen wrote in his 40-page

ruling. "The solution for these deficiencies lies with the legislature, not the executive or judicial branches. Congress, for any number of reasons, has decided not to pass DACA-like legislation. ... The Executive Branch cannot usurp the power bestowed on Congress by the Constitution — even to fill a void."

Hanen's order extended the current injunction that had been in place against DACA, which barred the government from approving any new applications, but left the program intact for existing recipients during the ongoing legal review.

Hanen also declined a request by the states to order the program's end within two years. Hanen said his order does not require the federal government to take any actions against DACA recipients, who are known as "Dreamers."

Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Edu-

cational Fund, or MALDEF, which is representing DACA recipients in the lawsuit, said it will ultimately be up to higher courts, including the Supreme Court, to rule on DACA's legality and whether Texas proved it had been harmed by the program.

"Judge Hanen has consistently erred in resolving both of these issues, and today's ruling is more of the same flawed analysis. We look forward to continuing to defend the lawful and much-needed DACA program on review in higher courts," Saenz said.

The Biden administration criticized the judge's ruling.

"We are deeply disappointed in today's DACA ruling from the District Court in Southern Texas," press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement Wednesday night. "... As we have long maintained, we disagree with the District Court's conclusion that DACA is unlawful, and will continue to defend this critical policy from legal

challenges. While we do so, consistent with the court's order, DHS will continue to process renewals for current DACA recipients and DHS (the Department of Homeland Security) may continue to accept DACA applications."

The Texas Attorney General's Office, which represented the states in the lawsuit, and the U.S. Department of Justice, which represented the federal government, didn't immediately return emails or calls seeking comment.

The states have argued the Obama administration didn't have the authority to first create the program in 2012 because it circumvented Congress.

In 2021, Hanen had declared the program illegal, ruling it had not been subject to public notice and comment periods required under the federal Administrative Procedures Act.

The Biden administration tried to satisfy Hanen's concerns with a

new version of DACA that took effect in October 2022 and was subject to public comments as part of a formal rule-making process.

But Hanen, who was appointed by then-President George W. Bush in 2002, ruled the updated version of DACA was still illegal as the Biden administration's new version was essentially the same as the old version, started under the Obama administration. Hanen had previously said DACA was unconstitutional.

The states have claimed they incur hundreds of millions of dollars in health care, education and other costs when immigrants are allowed to remain in the country illegally. The states that sued are Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, South Carolina, West Virginia, Kansas and Mississippi.

There were 578,680 people enrolled in DACA at the end of March, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Romney, 2012 GOP presidential nominee, won't seek Senate reelection

By MICHELLE L. PRICE
Associated Press

Utah Republican Sen. Mitt Romney said Wednesday that he will not run for reelection, ending a storied two-decade political career that included the 2012 Republican GOP nomination for president and a term as Massachusetts governor.

Romney, 76, said the country's many challenges call for a younger generation of leaders. He said the U.S. would be better served if the two front-runners for their parties' 2024 presidential nominations — Democratic President Joe Biden and Republican former President Donald Trump — stepped aside. Biden is 80 and Trump is 77.

"The times we're living in demand the next generation step up and express their point of view and to make the decisions that will shape American politics over the coming century," Romney said in a news conference at the Capitol. He said baby boomers like him are "not the right ones to be making the decisions for tomorrow."

He said after he leaves the Senate



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Utah Republican Sen. Mitt Romney says he will not run for reelection in 2024, as he speaks to reporters in his Capitol Hill office on Wednesday. Romney, 76, said the country's many challenges call for a younger generation of leaders.

he plans to focus on getting more young people voting and involved in the political process.

As the GOP's 2012 nominee for the White House, Romney cam-

paigned across America as a buttoned-up former Massachusetts governor and private equity executive. But with Trump's populist rise as the party's dominant figure,

Romney's brand of Republicanism shifted from establishment to outlier. He was the only GOP member of Congress to vote to convict Trump at both of his impeachment trials.

Romney said at the news conference that he belongs to the "wise wing of the Republican Party" and doesn't think it will fade away.

"My wing of the party talks about policy and about issues that will make a difference in the lives of the American people. The Trump wing of the party talks about resentments of various kinds and getting even and settling scores and revisiting the 2020 election."

He is the sixth incumbent senator to announce plans to retire after the end of the term in 2025.

Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell praised Romney in a statement, noting the breadth of experience he brought to the chamber and saying his deep faith and integrity had inspired his colleagues.

"The U.S. Senate is known to attract bright and proven public servants. However, we rarely get to welcome new Senators already as

accomplished and well-regarded as Mitt Romney," McConnell said.

More than a majority of Utah's population are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The faith arrived in the western state with pioneers fleeing religious persecution and spread globally with the religion's missionaries, a legacy that's left the church's conservative members embracing immigrants and refugees.

Romney, a Brigham Young University graduate and one of the faith's most visible members, has been a popular figure in the state for two decades. He burnished his reputation there by turning around the bribery scandal-plagued 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah, making it a global showcase for Salt Lake City.

Romney served as governor of Massachusetts from 2003 to 2007. During his tenure, he signed a health care law that had some of the same core features as the 2010 federal health care law signed by President Barack Obama, who would go on to defeat Romney in the 2012 White House election.

Biden's rules on clean cars face a test as challenges go to appeals court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Efforts by the Biden administration to limit pollution from automobile tailpipes — a major source of planet-warming emissions — face a crucial test as legal challenges brought by Republican-led states head to a federal appeals court.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit will hear arguments Thursday and Friday on three cases challenging Bi-

den administration rules targeting cars and trucks. Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming, and the legal cases could go all the way to the Supreme Court.

Republican attorneys general say the legal challenges are needed to curtail government overreach, while environmental groups and the Democratic administration say an adverse ruling could jeopardize protections against deadly pollution

that contributes to climate change.

The cases before the appeals court will test a 2021 Environmental Protection Agency rule that strengthened tailpipe pollution limits and a 2022 EPA decision that restored California's authority to set its own tailpipe pollution standards for cars and SUVs. At least 15 states and the District of Columbia have signed on to California's vehicle standards, which are stricter than federal rules and are designed to ad-

dress the state's severe air pollution problems. Seven of the 10 U.S. cities with the worst ozone pollution are in California.

A third case challenges mileage standards set by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is leading a coalition of GOP-leaning states and oil industry groups that are challenging the tailpipe rule.

"At a time when American gas prices are skyrocketing at the pump, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict shows again the absolute need for energy independence, (President Joe) Biden chooses to go to war against fossil fuels," said Paxton, who faces an impeachment trial in the Texas Senate on unrelated charges of corruption and bribery.

He said the rules will disadvantage Texas and other oil and gas producing states.

NATION

Soaked New England warily eyes hurricane

By DAVID SHARP
AND PATRICK WHITTLE
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Days of wild weather that produced torrential rain, flooding, sinkholes and a likely tornado in New England could be a prelude to something more dangerous lurking offshore — Hurricane Lee.

As the Category 1 system swirled southwest of Bermuda, Maine Gov. Janet Mills declared a state of emergency on Thursday, and the state was under its first hurricane watch in 15 years. The waterlogged region prepared for 20-foot waves and wind gusts up to 70 mph, along with more rain.

A dangerous storm surge was projected for Friday evening for Massachusetts' Cape Cod Bay and Nantucket Island, while the brunt of the storm was to arrive early Saturday.

Although Lee did not contribute to the recent flooding, it threatened to exacerbate conditions in a region that is already much too wet.

The Coast Guard and emergency management agencies warned New England residents to be prepared, and utility companies brought in reinforcements to deal with power outages.

At Boothbay Harbor Marina in Maine, the community came together to remove boats from the water to keep them out of harm's way.

"It's a batten-down-the-hatches



ROBERT F. BUKATY/AP

Public works officials examine the damage to a road and front yard that was washed away by recent flooding, on Wednesday, in Leominster, Mass. Mayor Dean Mazzarella said early estimates on city infrastructure restoration projects could be anywhere from \$25 million to \$40 million.

kind of day," owner Kim Gillies said Thursday.

Similar scenes played out at Kennebunkport Marina, where crews planned to take 100 boats out of the water, said Cathy Norton, marina manager.

Commercial lobster fisherman Steve Train said fishermen have been sinking gear in deeper water to protect against storm damage. Fishing boats were also headed to the safety of harbors.

In her emergency declaration on Thursday, the governor urged residents to take the storm seriously and to make preparations. Mills, a Democrat, also asked President Joe Biden to issue a preemptive presidential disaster declaration to give the state access to federal resources.

Earlier in the week, the region saw 10 inches of rain over six hours. Tornado warnings were posted Wednesday for communi-

ties in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and more heavy rain opened up sinkholes and brought devastating flooding to several areas.

The National Weather Service in Boston said radar data and videos indicated that a likely tornado damaged trees and power lines in Rhode Island and Connecticut on Wednesday.

In Lincoln, R.I., photos taken after the storm showed that at least

one roof was damaged, and the press box at the high school stadium tipped into the bleachers.

At midday Thursday, Lee was spinning 245 miles southwest of Bermuda, with maximum sustained winds of 90 mph, according to the National Hurricane Center. It was traveling north on a path that could lead to landfall in Nova Scotia, Canada, possibly as a tropical storm, forecasters said.

The system threatened to bring a mixed bag of threats. Ocean waves as tall as 20 feet could lash the coast, damaging structures and causing erosion; powerful wind gusts could knock down trees weakened by a wet summer; and rain could cause flash flooding in a region where the soil is already saturated, said Louise Fode, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Maine.

The state's eastern coast — known as the Down East region — and the coast of Nova Scotia was expected to bear the brunt of the storm, though the track could shift before the system arrives, Fode said.

One thing working in the region's favor: The storm surge will not be accompanied by an astronomical high tide, helping to lower the risk, she said.

New England has experienced its share of flooding this summer, including a storm that dumped up to two months of rain in two days in Vermont in July, resulting in two deaths.

NASA UFO report urges conversation shift 'from sensationalism to science'

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA said Thursday that the study of UFOs will require new scientific techniques, including advanced satellites as well as a shift in how unidentified flying objects are perceived.

The space agency released the findings after a yearlong study into UFOs.

In its 33-page report, an independent team commissioned by NASA cautioned that the negative perception surrounding UFOs poses an obstacle to collecting data. But officials said NASA's involvement should help reduce the stigma around what it calls UAPs, or unidentified anomalous phenomena.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said the agency wants to shift the conversation about UAPs "from sensationalism to science." Nelson added the panel found no evidence that UAPs had extraterrestrial origin.

The 16-member panel noted that artificial intelligence and machine

learning are essential for identifying rare occurrences, including UFOs.

"NASA will do this transparently," Nelson said.

At the one and only public meeting earlier this year, the independent team selected by the space agency insisted there is no conclusive evidence of extraterrestrial life associated with UFOs.

No top-secret files were accessed by the scientists, aviation and artificial intelligence experts, and retired NASA astronaut Scott Kelly, the first American to spend nearly a year in space. Instead, the 16-member group relied on unclassified data in an attempt to better understand unexplained sightings in the sky.

NASA said there are so few high-quality observations that no scientific conclusions can be drawn.

The government refers to unexplained sightings as UAPs versus UFOs. NASA defines them as observations in the sky or elsewhere that cannot be readily identified or scientifically explained.

Judge blocks NM governor's suspension of citizens' right to carry guns in public

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A federal judge has blocked part of a public health order that suspended the right to carry guns in public across New Mexico's largest metro area, with criticism mounting and political divides widening over the Democratic governor's action.

The ruling Wednesday by U.S. District Judge David Urias marks a setback for Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. The second-term governor imposed an emergency public health order last Friday that suspended the right to openly carry or conceal guns in public places based on a statistical threshold for violent crime that applied only to Albuquerque and the surrounding area. She cited recent shootings around the state that left children dead.

Urias, who was appointed to the federal bench by President Joe Biden, agreed Wednesday with plaintiffs who have accused Lujan Grisham of trampling on constitutional rights. Urias granted a temporary restraining order to block the governor's suspension of gun rights until another hearing is held in early Oc-



Lujan Grisham

tober.

Urias said his duty is to decide a much more narrow question regarding the rights afforded under the U.S. Constitution.

The governor in a statement issued Wednesday said she would not be resigned to the status quo.

"I see the pain of families who lost their loved ones to gun violence every single day, and I will never stop fighting to prevent other families from enduring these tragedies," she

said, although she acknowledged previously that criminals likely would ignore her order.

Connecticut-based attorney Cameron Atkinson, who represents We The Patriots USA and Bernalillo County resident Dennis Smith, characterized the governor's action as an emotional reaction to heart-breaking tragedies.

"We get that people's hearts are broken," he said outside the courthouse, "but the answer to tragedy is not to take away from the people who need it the most — the means to protect themselves and their families."

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HEALTH & FITNESS

Pickleball pointers for physical fitness

Physician explains the most common injuries from this increasingly popular pastime, offers advice to reduce risk

By JORDAN D. METZL

Special to The Washington Post

As more people pick up the paddle, pickleball injuries are becoming an increasingly common sight — both in emergency rooms and in sports medicine offices. Jordan D. Metz, a sports medicine physician at Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, offers pointers for folks diving into this relatively new and very popular pastime.

Metz: I've seen more injuries from pickleball than walking and swimming. But that shouldn't deter anyone from playing. The benefits — moving, having fun, building a community — far outweigh the risks.

So what should players watch out for? In pickleball, we see repetitive-use injuries, especially in the wrist and elbow, and sudden injuries from quick ballistic movements. Injuries commonly occur when lunging forward for a low shot, which can cause straining to a calf or hamstring.

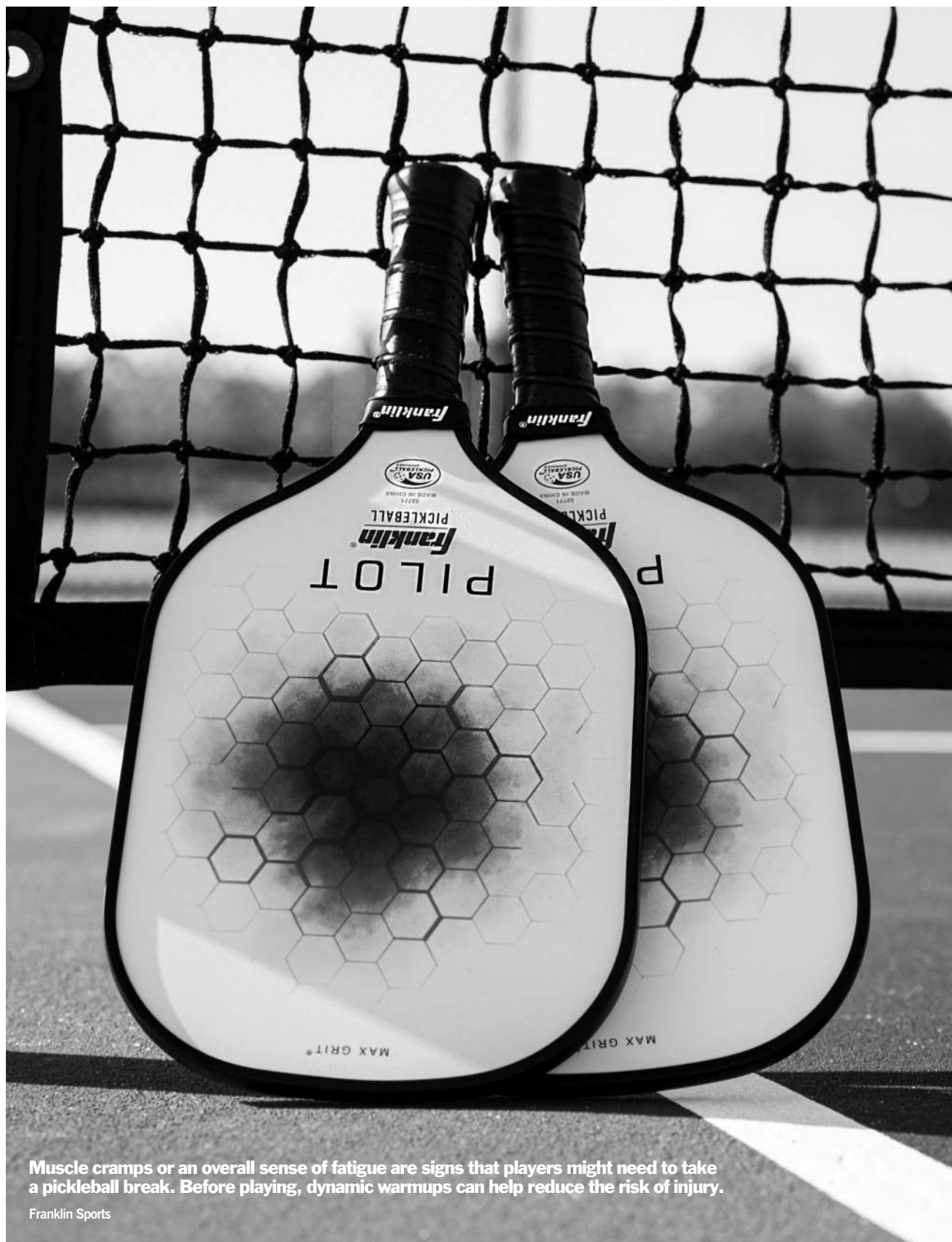
Here's what to know about common injuries from pickleball and how to treat them:

How to treat common pickleball injuries

Calf strain: Also known as “tennis leg,” a calf strain is often described by patients as feeling like being kicked in the calf. It commonly occurs when lunging forward for a low shot. Once you hobble off the court, check with your doctor to make sure this is a calf strain, which heals without surgery, and not an Achilles rupture, which is more serious. The age-old adage of RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) to treat injuries has been updated to MICE (movement, ice, compression and elevation) in the first 24-48 hours after injury. Although there's some controversy about the use of ice with acute injuries, it does reduce pain, so I tell my patients to ice the sore muscle for five to 10 minutes. Once you're through the initial stages, ice doesn't seem to help as much, but gradual movement and compression do. Depending on severity, calf strains can take anywhere from one to four months to heal.

Hamstring strain: This usually also occurs when lunging forward for a low shot, but it takes longer to heal than a calf strain. The treatment depends on the location of the injury. The top of the hamstring where the tendon comes off the ischial tuberosity (sit bone) takes months to heal, while an injury in the middle of the muscle can heal in weeks. In all cases, some gentle movement like riding a stationary bike and starting a graduated strength program can help speed healing.

Wrist injury: These occur with pickleball due to the twisting of the wrist, similar to Ping-Pong. The most common injuries are tendinitis in the wrist, best treated initially with a wrist splint and rest for a couple of weeks. If the pain persists, get it checked out.



Muscle cramps or an overall sense of fatigue are signs that players might need to take a pickleball break. Before playing, dynamic warmups can help reduce the risk of injury.

Franklin Sports

Elbow injury: Pain around the elbow (commonly known as tennis elbow) is less common in pickleball than in tennis, but it can still happen. This is generally tendinitis on the outside part of the elbow and is best treated with backing off playing for a week or two. A physical therapist can prescribe wrist and forearm stretches.

Achilles' tendon rupture: This is among the more serious type of pickleball injuries. Tendons, which connect muscles to bones, are difficult to heal because they have a poor blood supply. This injury is often treated with surgery, followed by physical therapy. It can take months or even a year to heal.

How to prevent pickleball injuries

With pickleball, the key to staying on the court and not in physical therapy is recognizing the warning signs. Small muscle cramps often precede a more serious injury, as does an overall sense of fatigue. If this is happen-

ing to you, back off for a bit and rest until you feel ready.

Before starting a game, do dynamic warmups — like jogging in place, jumping jacks, walking lunges and air squats. Stronger and more pliable muscles mean fewer injuries. In addition to warming up the body, I have my patients bring their foam roller or massage gun to the pickleball court and use it before they play.

Prioritize strength training: I prescribe strength training for all of my patients, from 10-year-olds to 80-year-olds. But this is especially important for aging players. As we age, our muscles get weaker. For this reason, a quick lunge to the left to get a shot in a 20-year-old player may go unnoticed, while the same shot in a 60-year-old can result in a two-month injury from tearing a calf muscle.

Getting out to play pickleball is great for one's health. To make pickleball as safe as possible, it's important to understand your body's limits and to employ strategies to keep yourself from getting injured.

VIDEO GAMES



Bandai Namco

In order to defeat certain opponents in *Armored Core VI: Fires of Rubicon*, players may need change the design of their mechs and experiment with different parts and weapons.

The closest you'll get to piloting a mech

Fires of Rubicon's level design, customization options, multiple endings make for a brilliant chapter in *Armored Core* series

BY GIESON CACHO
Bay Area News Group

Every FromSoftware game seems manageable at first. Players figure out the gameplay and overcome a few tough encounters, but then they run into a boss that's a brick wall. No matter how hard they try, the dangerous foe beats them down and turns their joy into frustration. It becomes a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

In *Elden Ring*, that boss is Margit the Fell Omen. Going up against him left plenty of players frustrated. In *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, that boss was Lady Butterfly, who seemingly got harder the more one fought her. In *Armored Core VI: Fires of Rubicon*, that boss, for me, was Balteus, an autonomous mech that has a shield, shoots out dozens of missiles and spews out fire when it's damaged.

I suffered through two agonizing nights trying to beat the mech. It haunted my dreams, but when I finally beat it, that's when I realized that I learned how to play the game. I mean really play it, not just mash buttons and hope for the best. I learned how to dodge attacks, track enemies' darting movements, memorize their attack patterns and adapt my fighting style to each opponent. I even had to learn how to hold the controller a new way.

FromSoftware titles have these challenging walls so that players not only appreciate the depth of gameplay but also gain confidence. They realize that once they scale a wall, the next one won't be as hard.

The story so far

Still, the first challenge is always the most brutal, and that will determine how much players enjoy *Armored Core VI*. The five-chapter campaign follows the exploits of an augmented human called 621, who sneaks onto the planet of Rubicon 3. The planet is home to a potent energy source and data conduit called Coral that was thought to have been destroyed when the planet was set aflame,

contaminating the star system.

But the tantalizing substance has been detected again, and as a mercenary under the command of Handler Walter, players have to infiltrate the planet and make a name as an ace armored core pilot. Doing well attracts the attention of the corporations that are searching for the energy source.

Fans of anime such as *Gundam* or of films such as *Pacific Rim* will love the setting and premise. *Armored Core VI* is the closest the medium has come to giving players the feeling of piloting a mech since *Zone of Enders* or *Lost Planet*. The mechs, which are called armored cores, are outfitted with up to four weapons and have quick short-range burst movements that act as dodges; longer-range flights can chew up real estate on the expansive maps.

Lastly, players have three repair kits that can help heal damage. They can upgrade their kits to heal more damage, but the machines don't get more than that. Thankfully in each mission, players will run across checkpoints that refill ammo and health. In other areas, usually before bosses, they'll also have an opportunity to resupply.

Well-crafted level design

These are the basic elements, but what's fantastic about *Armored Core VI* is that FromSoftware creates a diverse set of scenarios and gives players plenty of tools to tackle them. Players will encounter moments when they'll have to take down enormous land carriers the size of buildings. In other areas, the mechs land on battleships and players can take them out with several well-placed shots.

Elsewhere, FromSoftware creates stealth missions that aren't as well-designed but do enough to change the pace away from all-out action. Whatever the case, players will be amazed at how the team put together playable levels that would have been cutscenes or quick-time events in any other game a decade ago. Every stage feels like a

playable episode of a giant robot cartoon.

Customization is key

At the other end of the formula are the customization options. Players will find plenty of them, and they're encouraged to experiment with different parts. If players don't like a gun or a leg piece, they can sell it back for full credit. By going through the Arena, which consist of simulated virtual reality-like battles against the game's heavy hitters, players will earn OST Chips that let them tweak perks on their mechs such as creating a force field or upgrading a weapon damage type.

In *Armored Core VI*, players won't want to stick to one design. Some boss fights call for long-range fighting. Others require players to be bulkier to absorb damage while fighting in the midrange. Still others require players to be lighter so that they can dodge attacks and not strain their energy output, which acts almost like a stamina bar.

If players are having trouble with a boss, it's best to reconfigure the mech and try something new. With so many parts and weapons to mix and match, players will find multiple builds to overcome a troublesome mission.

What's more is that *Armored Core VI* has multiple endings, depending on which missions players take on. Certain inflection points in the campaign force players to make a choice and that alters how the finale unfolds, though the storytelling doesn't always fit together cohesively.

Despite that, *Armored Core VI* is a brilliant chapter in the series. It's an entry that has the challenge of other FromSoftware titles, but it also stays true to the other games in the series. It's the closest fans will get to piloting a giant robot in their lifetimes.

Platforms: PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox Series X and Series S, Xbox One, PC

Online: playarmoredcore.com

BOOKS

Q&A

Less-than-cozy murder

Author Chuck Palahniuk puts his own spin on English mystery genre with shocking, hilarious and original novel 'Not Forever, But For Now'

By PETER LARSEN
The Orange County Register

For Chuck Palahniuk, inspiration for his new novel, "Not Forever, But For Now," came from his unvarnished distaste for that most genteel of genres: the cozy mystery.

"I had bought a whole stack of cozy mysteries," says Palahniuk on a call from his home in Portland, Ore. "Barnes & Noble just always has a giant wall of cozies — these mysteries typically set in England or Ireland where cats and vicars and old ladies solve these grisly mysteries and murders.

"And I just hated every single one of them," he says, perhaps unsurprisingly for the author of "Fight Club" and other tales of horror beyond the milieu of the Miss Marples or Jessica Fletchers of the world.

But in them, Palahniuk says he saw something with which he could work.

"There was a common quality to them that I really loved," he says. "Where these mild-mannered people would come across this brutally murdered person and instead of having any kind of shocked reaction it was almost turned into a good thing.

"It's like, 'Oh, great, now we have a mystery,'" Palahniuk says. "There was never any upset. There was never any trauma over the loss of the person."

The lack of emotional response "seemed as bad as the murder itself," he says. "So I just thought I'd take the cozy and kind of push it to its limit."

That he did and then some in the horror satire of "Not Forever, But For Now," which unfolds like a bad acid trip of an English cozy mystery, alternately shocking and hilarious, disturbing and ultimately beautiful in its own peculiar way.



It's the story of Otto and Cecil, two brothers of indeterminate age, living mostly by themselves in a sprawling mansion in Wales. Their grandfather and mother are often away tending to the family business, which is assassinating the rich and famous and making their deaths look like anything but murder.

Father disappeared years ago, so the boys idle away the weeks, months and years watching gory nature documentaries and offing their maids, tutors and staff.

In an interview edited for length and clarity, Palahniuk talked about the voice of his narrator Cecil, themes of addiction and what he hopes readers take away from the book title.

Orange County Register: Talk a little about Otto and Cecil and their obsession with nature documentaries.

Palahniuk: Every once in a while, I'll remember something that was really upsetting and just emotionally engaging as a kid.

And one was always those nature documentaries where predators would come across a baby and its nest.

Whenever you saw a baby animal at risk, whether it was a kangaroo trying to get to the pouch or a baby fawn trying not to be torn apart, as a kid that just killed you. And so I wanted to revisit that because it hooked me so intensely.

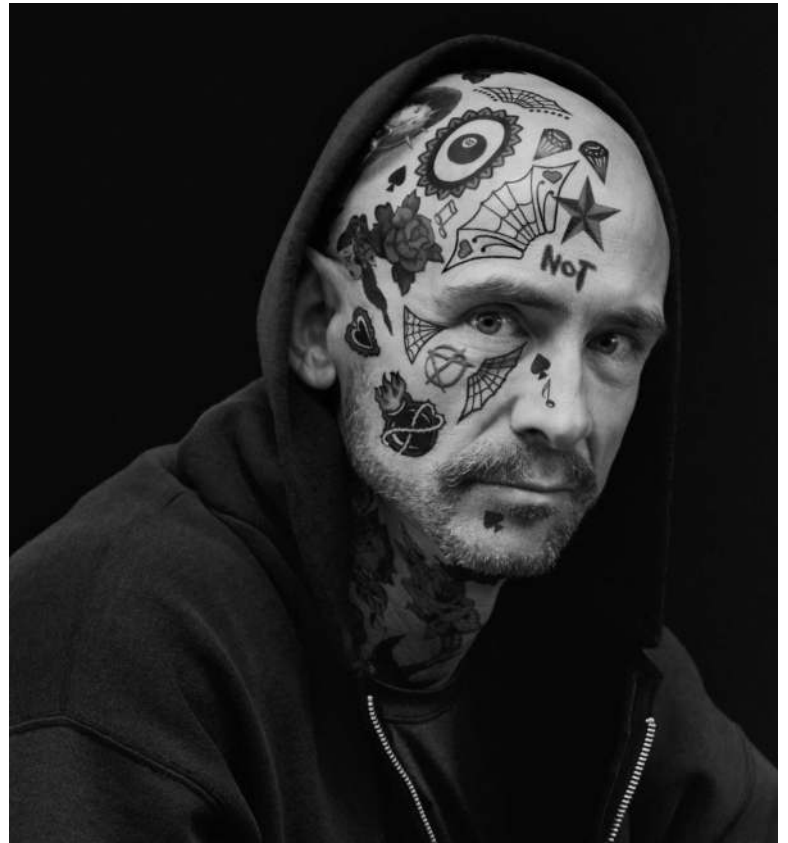
We're never really sure how old Otto and Cecil are. They seem like kids at the start, and then suddenly perhaps they're much, much older.

I was originally going to have them as little kids. And then one day, my editor, who was reading along as I was turning in chapters, he said, 'How old do you see these guys being?' I said, 'You know, secretly I think they might be like 35 and 38, or in their 40s.' He laughed so hard that I thought that's what it's gonna be.

And on another really powerful level, I wanted it to be a book about addiction and how, boom, once you kind of fall into that rut of addiction, 30 years can go by and you realize you're still kind of emotionally trapped back in whatever time you became addicted. And it feels like this enormous waste and you can't believe that so much of your life has just disappeared.

Mother is addicted to opiates. What did you see as Otto and Cecil's addictions — idleness, sex, killing the help?

I wanted to make it so nonspecific that it was all these euphemisms like 'having a go' and 'having it off.' Lemon syllabub



ADAM LEVY/Simon & Schuster

"Fight Club" author Chuck Palahniuk gives his own satirical spin on the British cozy murder mystery with "Not Forever, But For Now."

and all those sweets and candied rose petals. All of those things that it would seem really non-threatening. It would seem not like a big painful book about addiction, but the second or third time it could be read that way.

The casualness of violence, whether it's baby animals or celebrities getting bumped off, has led some to label your work as nihilistic, though you don't agree. How would you describe your writing?

In a way, I think of them all as romances, because it's always about somebody who is just wildly in love with somebody. In this case, it's Cecil who is just so in admiration of his older brother that he can depict all of Otto's actions, but it never really dawns on him that Otto is pretty despicable.

The book is very funny at times, such as the Queen having an ATM card worth 6 billion

pounds but it has a daily limit of 300 pounds. How fun are the funny bits for you to write?

I was more thrilled with the Queen falling victim for the old fish-and-chips delivery scam. That she would actually come to the door with her crown on and go, 'Oh, what the hell, can you break a 500-pound note.' By that point, the story is just writing itself. I'm kind of holding on. That was a toboggan ride at the end. Every moment was surprising me.

The title — 'Not Forever, But For Now' — shows up in the text in different forms every so often. What did you hope that meant for readers?

I wanted it to be a kind of bittersweet acknowledgment of the transitory nature of love. That even the people we care for the most, are only here for parts of our lives. Or we're only here for parts of their lives.

Maria Bamford's memoir finds hilarity in harrowing experiences

By ZACK RUSKIN
The Washington Post

The comedian Maria Bamford has always been willing to get uncomfortable while probing the deepest recesses of her psyche in search of laughs. Whether taping and performing one of her specials in her parents' living room or spending two seasons playing a warped version of herself on Netflix's "Lady Dynamite," she has a capacity for crafting candid punchlines forged in the fires of her own mental crises. Never simply joking at her own expense, she instead makes comic radical honesty part of her process of healing and recovery.

Bamford draws on those strengths once again in her debut memoir, "Sure, I'll Join Your Cult: A Memoir of Mental Illness and the Quest to Belong Anywhere." She



takes readers on a dizzying tour of the many, many 12-step programs she's joined over the years. Across three sections and over the course of 23 chapters, Bamford, 53, narrates her life story by chronicling her membership in the "cults" of family, fame and mental health care. She details the Dale Carnegie training course she attended with her father as a sophomore in high school, her diligent crusade to have a napping tent installed on the set of her television series and how becoming the star of a viral set of Target commer-

cial pushed her sanity to the brink.

Some of her misadventures — among them, being committed to a psych ward and accidentally killing a beloved pug — feel like anything but laughing matters. But it's a testament to Bamford that she's able to fill these pages with stories that are relatable and consistently hilarious, even when they're harrowing. Throughout, she rejects the appeal of tidy solutions, instead embracing messy self-acceptance.

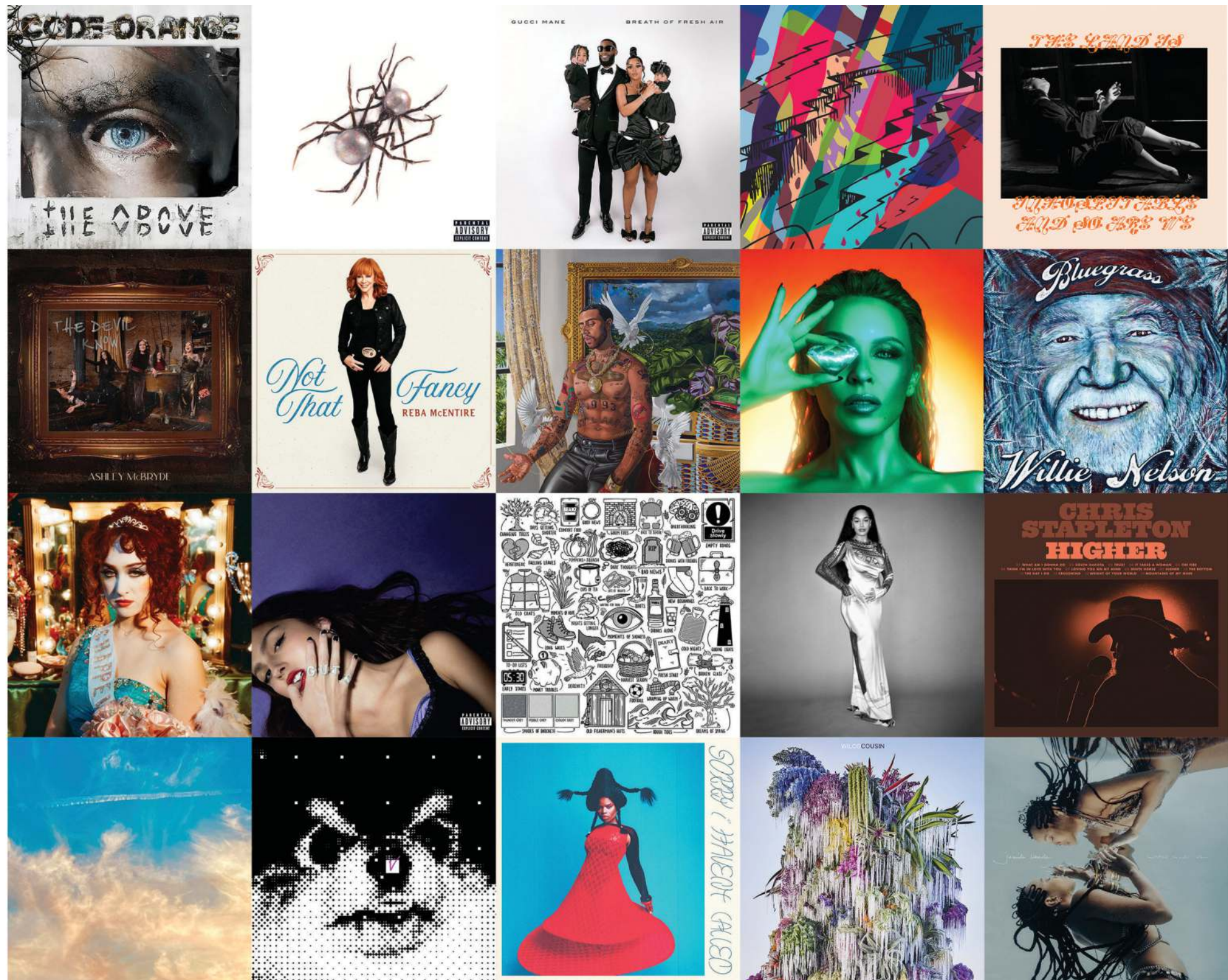
Take her description of Overeaters Anonymous as a live-action role-playing game, for example: "There are no dice, but there are plenty of plastic poker chips for lengths of abstinence." Or consider the recipes that close each chapter ("Psych Ward Graham Crackers") and her inclusion of a month's worth of her own financial details in appeasement of her

obligations to Debtors Anonymous.

Bamford comically plays with visual style and narrative: Passages that she deems "creepy" are winkingly rendered in bolded Comic Sans font (which she refers to as the "trigger font"), and a recycling bin icon pops up to denote previously performed material. She also makes occasional, amusing use of footnotes, including a lengthy justification for a joke at the expense of her dead mother and a comprehensive list of every psych med Bamford believes she's ever tried.

There's an authenticity to Bamford's words that elevates them into something beyond the category of comedy memoir. Bamford has created a work destined to shine much-needed light on mental illness. Illuminating those serious moments with humor is her true triumph.

MUSIC



This combination of album covers shows, top row, from left: “The Above,” Code Orange; “Scarlet,” Doja Cat; “Breath of Fresh Air,” Gucci Mane; “Insano,” Kid Cudi; and “The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We,” Mitski. Second row, from left: “The Devil I Know,” Ashley McBryde; “Not That Fancy,” Reba McEntire; “Victor,” Vic Mensa; “Tension,” Kylie Minogue; and “Bluegrass,” Willie Nelson. Third row, from left: “The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess,” Chappell Roan; “GUTS,” Olivia Rodrigo; “Autumn Variations,” Ed Sheeran; “Falling or Flying,” Jorja Smith; and “Higher,” Chris Stapleton. Bottom row, from left: “It’s the End of the World but It’s a Beautiful Day,” Thirty Seconds to Mars; “Layover,” V; “Sorry I Haven’t Called,” Vagabon; “Cousin,” Wilco; and “Water Made Us,” Jamila Woods.

Gearing up for sweater weather

Fall preview features pop powerhouses, hip-hop heavyweights, country classics

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Music fans, it is time to bid adieu to the sunny, slow summer months, and welcome fall — historically, one of the busiest times in the calendar year for new albums, EPs and mixtapes.

Trends have already begun to reveal themselves: Some of the biggest names in pop (and in pop’s future) are gearing up for

back-to-school releases. A-listers are returning after years. Country legends are taking on new genres. And hip-hop heavyweights are back in full force.

Others defy categorization — like a new Pretenders record (“Relentless”), the swoon-worthy “Live for Me” EP from Omar Apollo and Steve Aoki’s “HiRO-QUEST: Double Helix” — and even more have yet to be announced. Take a look at what’s in store with The Associated Press’

2023 fall music preview — a collection of releases scheduled to arrive between September and November.

Pop powerhouses

After a summer full of superstar tours — Taylor Swift, Beyoncé and Drake among them — surely it’s time to dive deep into a new hook or two. The season is stacked: Olivia Rodrigo just dropped her highly anticipated sophomore album. Kylie Mi-

nogue’s more than “Padam Padam,” with her new athletic-pop album “Tension.” Doja Cat’s “Scarlet” arrives.

Ed Sheeran has seemingly run out of mathematical symbols to name albums after and will return with an autumnal release. After HBO’s “The Idol,” Troye Sivan gears up to release his third full-length album. If the rest of the tracks contain songs half as sexy as the football chant homoeroticism of the lead single

“Rush,” listeners are in for a treat.

BTS member V has released his debut solo album; Korean American pop star Eric Nam also dropped a self-released record, centered on a pandemic-induced existential crisis.

Demi Lovato is reimagining some of her pop tunes as rock anthems; Taylor Swift’s re-recording series continues with

SEE PREVIEW ON PAGE 16

MUSIC

Rodrigo rages against the machine on 'GUTS'

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

On Sept. 8, Olivia Rodrigo — the Grammy winner best known for her 2021 smash single “drivers license” — released her highly anticipated sophomore album, “GUTS.”

It's an apt title, because audacious she is: Across 12 tracks, Rodrigo builds off the life experiences of a pop superstar now in the throes of fame — and her early 20s — with an acute wisdom.

From the bloodsucking piano ballad “vampire” to the cheeky backslide anthem “bad idea right?” (Rodrigo has kept the all-lowercase titles that styled her debut), “GUTS” is at times a pop-punk album unafraid of taking dynamic swings, and a diaristic bloodletting.

But those lead singles hide greater moments: opener “all-american bitch,” inspired by a



cast-off quote from a young hippie in Joan Didion's “The White Album” essay collection, is pop-punk informed by Liz Phair or, like, the most obscure Rose Melberg record. Irony and anger are her swords: “I'm grateful all the time / I'm sexy and I'm kind / I'm pretty when I cry,” she sings.

“pretty isn't pretty” recalls The Cure's dreamy guitar tones, a cutting treatise on the price of

impossible beauty standards.

It's easy to hear your favorite rock bands represented here, but in a style completely Rodrigo's own: Pavement punctuates “ballad of a homeschooled girl,” with lyrics that could double as an AOL away message. Pick your favorite: “Searchin' 'how to start a conversation?' on a website (How to flirt?),” or “Thought your mom was your wife / Called you the wrong name twice / Can't think of a third line.”

“the grudge” is born from “drivers license” — a courageous piano power ballad. Where whisper-singing has become the foundation for many contemporary young pop stars, whose biggest singles consequently feel restrained, Rodrigo's performance is pushed to the limits. Rage and disappointment will do that to you: They're perhaps pop's most underutilized tools — and rock's greatest asset.

At the top of her debut album, Rodrigo asked “I'm so sick of 17 / Where's my f—ing teenage dream?” in “brutal.” On “GUTS” she answers it in the closer “teenage dream:” “I'm sorry that I couldn't always be your teenage dream,” she sings, the same woman who made getting her driver's license a pop music concern for the world. Could adolescence be more damning?

Long has Rodrigo been compared to her musical antecedent Taylor Swift, but the points of evidence on “GUTS” are few and far between — and in the album's weakest moments, like “get him back!,” still far superior to a lesser artist's greatest up-tempo track. (Special mention goes to the lyric “I wanna meet your mom, just to tell her her son sucks.” Has devastation ever been so funny?)

“For me, this album is about growing pains and trying to

figure out who I am at this point in my life,” Rodrigo said in a press release when the album was first announced. “I feel like I grew 10 years between the ages of 18 and 20 — it was such an intense period of awkwardness and change. I think that's all just a natural part of growth, and hopefully the album reflects that.”

The musician once again teamed up with her close collaborator Dan Nigro, who produced “SOUL,” her first album that was a multiplatinum debut that won Rodrigo three Grammy Awards and made her the youngest solo artist ever to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

Few forces are more potent than a young creative woman's dissatisfaction — only, of course, if she chooses to wield it. For Rodrigo, it was never a question. She'll just punctuate it with a laugh.

Preview: Sheeran, Parton, Gucci Mane highlight strong slate of releases

FROM PAGE 15

“1989 (Taylor's Version).”

As for ones to watch: Chappell Roan, your favorite pop star from the future, will release her debut album. Madrileño Ralphie Choo is also gearing up for his debut, and La Doña's new EP promises to weave together cumbia, salsa, oldies and reggaeton.

Sept. 8: Olivia Rodrigo, “Guts”; V, “Layover”; Eric Nam, “House on a Hill.” **Sept. 15:** Demi Lovato, “Revamped”; Ralphie Choo, “Supernova”; La Doña, “Can't Eat Clout.” **Sept. 22:** Kylie Minogue, “Tension”; Doja Cat, “Scarlet”; Chappell Roan, “The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess.” **Sept. 29:** Ed Sheeran, “Autumn Variations.” **Oct. 13:** Troye Sivan, “Something to Give Each Other.” **Oct. 27:** Taylor Swift, “1989 (Taylor's Version).”

Hip-hop heavyweights

Blink, and you might miss a shifting release date: In 2022, rumors swirled that Kid Cudi would take a hiatus from music making. They proved to be just that — rumors — and a new album was announced for September. However, a little over a week before it was scheduled to arrive, the rapper announced the release would be pushed back to January.

A few days later, Drake announced a release date for his highly anticipated eighth studio album, “For All the Dogs.”

Are the days of dropping records without warning behind him?

Also, Vic Mensa has explored social work, sobriety, Ghana and himself, leading to an ambitious



AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

Country artist Ashley McBryde returns with her fourth studio album, “The Devil I Know.”

and self-reflective new record.

The legendary Gucci Mane returns; Chief Keef is also back.

Flo Milli's forthcoming album delivers her idiosyncratic — at times, absurdist — and certainly hard-as-hell raps. South African rapper Nasty C continues his global growth. And that's not even including all of the surprise releases that may drop in the next few weeks.

Sept. 15: Vic Mensa, “Victor.” **Sept. 15:** Nasty C, “I Love It Here.” **Sept. 22:** Drake, “For All the Dogs.” **Oct. 13:** Gucci Mane, “Breath of Fresh Air”; Chief Keef, “Almighty So 2.” **TBD:** Flo Milli, “Fine Ho, Stay.” **Delayed until January:** Kid Cudi, “Insano.”

Country classics

Reinvention and experimenta-

tion is in the air. Willie Nelson will release his first bluegrass record; Dolly Parton will release her first rock album.

Ashley McBryde just released her fourth studio album. If the single “Light on in the Kitchen” is any indication, we can't wait for more mandolin.

Reba McEntire returns with her first album in five years; a few months post-Super Bowl anthem performance, Chris Stapleton is back.

Margo Price preps a double album in three acts.

Sept. 8: Ashley McBryde, “The Devil I Know.” **Sept. 15:** Willie Nelson, “Bluegrass.” **Oct. 6:** Reba McEntire, “Not That Fancy.” **Oct. 13:** Margo Price, “Strays II.” **Nov. 10:** Chris Stapleton, “Higher.” **Nov. 17:** Dolly Parton, “Rockstar.”

Metal mavens

Cool air and a heavy riff — few partnerships make more sense. For metalheads, it is a stacked season: Baroness and Cannibal Corpse return, as do Pittsburgh punks Code Orange.

For the alternative crowd: Poppy continues her Nine Inch Nails-inspired industrial streak, Beartooth's melodic screamo powers on and Jared Leto's Thirty Seconds to Mars bring an optimistic take on the apocalypse.

Deftones fans will have to continue to wait for a new record from the only nu-metal act able to transcend the limitations of that genre — the California band is celebrated for taking an artful approach to a musical genre most commonly associated with backwards baseball caps and

machismo. In the meantime, they can enjoy a new one from +++ (Crosses), the dark wave side project of frontman Chino Moreno and Far guitarist Shaun Lopez.

Sept. 15: Baroness, “Stone”; Thirty Seconds to Mars, “It's the End of the World but It's a Beautiful Day.” **Sept. 22:** Cannibal Corpse, “Chaos Horrific.” **Sept. 29:** Code Orange, “The Above.” **Oct. 13:** +++ (Crosses), “Goodnight, God Bless, I Love U, Delete.” **Oct. 27:** Poppy, “Zig.”

Indie's not dead

At some point in the last few years, “indie” has morphed into a genre designation (think Taylor Swift's “folklore” and “evermore”) instead of shorthand for “independent” artists — you know, acts who self-release their own music and/or work with a niche record label.

Despite that confusion, truly “indie” releases aren't going anywhere, with forthcoming releases from established voices Sufjan Stevens (Asthmatic Kitty Records), Teenage Fanclub (Merge) and Wilco (released on the band's dBpm Records).

Nostalgia runs deep for Puerto Rican reggae artist PACHY-MAN, who preps the sentimental “Switched-On” for a late September release. Lead single “Trago Coqueto” is all vintage Korg Poly-800 synths and sunshine.

The newer talents, driven by women, are the most fascinating: Mitski (Dead Oceans), Cherry Glazerr (Secretly Canadian), L'Rain (Mexican Summer), Vagabon (Nonesuch), and the Indonesian power-pop-punk group GRRRL Gang (Kill Rock Stars).

Sept. 15: Vagabon, “Sorry I Haven't Called”; Mitski, “The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We.” **Sept. 22:** Teenage Fanclub, “Nothing Lasts Forever”; GRRRL Gang, “Spunky!” **Sept. 29:** Wilco, “Cousin”; PACHY-MAN, “Switched-On”; Cherry Glazerr, “I Don't Want You Anymore.” **Oct. 6:** Sufjan Stevens, “Javelin.” **Oct. 13:** L'Rain, “I Killed Your Dog.”

Long-awaited returns

Nostalgia rules the entertainment industry, but that doesn't necessarily make for derivative work. Often, it means celebrating the artists we love after years of inactivity, or a simply a break between albums.

Such is the case in this grouping. Diddy will release his first full-length album since 2006's “Press Play.”

In fact, it's a strong season for R&B returns: Jorja Smith will release her first album since 2018; Jamila Woods follows up 2019's “Legacy! Legacy!” with “Water Made Up.”

Elsewhere, the Bruce Springsteen-approved New Jersey band The Gaslight Anthem will release their first album in nearly a decade, “History Books.”

Nicki Minaj, leader of the Barbz, will bring back the “Pink Friday” franchise with “Pink Friday 2,” her fifth full-length album and first since 2018's “Queen.”

Sept. 15: Diddy, “The Love Album: Off the Grid.” **Sept. 29:** Jorja Smith, “Falling or Flying.” **Oct. 13:** Jamila Woods, “Water Made Us.” **Oct. 27:** The Gaslight Anthem, “History Books.” **Nov. 17:** Nicki Minaj, “Pink Friday 2.”

MUSIC

So, what was the song of the summer?

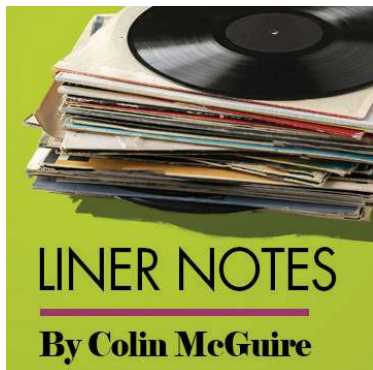
With Labor Day coming and going last week, we have officially unofficially said goodbye to summer. Where did it go? I'm not exactly sure, but wherever it went, it went there fast. So fast, in fact, that it seems like it was just yesterday we ran a story speculating on what the song of the summer would be. There were lots of ideas that spread across lots of genres. There was hope. There was anticipation.

But here's the thing about those yearly "Let's predict the song of the summer!" articles: Rarely do we see a follow-up. Writers and commentators look at the release schedule for the upcoming handful of months, pick the biggest names, throw in a few tracks already bubbling underneath the top tier of popular culture and call it a day. It makes no sense not to look back on what happened after you already made such a fuss over predicting it before it unfolded.

And so, here's a quick look at ... well, at what could have been the song of the summer. Everyone's experiences are different — I wouldn't dare speak for anyone who made memories while hitting the repeat button on one tune for the past three months. As for a consensus, though, I thought it might be worth it to take a look at what dominated the charts and the airwaves and try to make sense of what may just have been the song of summer 2023.

Literally any Taylor Swift song. Like, honestly. Really. Any one of them. It was the summer of Swift, no matter how you cut it, and not only did she redefine what it is to be a mega-star and tour football stadiums in North America, but she also set a template for future superstars to work smarter and not harder. Parachute into a city for a weekend, take the following week off, rinse, repeat. It worked — and it worked to such a degree that the "Taylor's Version" of both "Speak Now" and "1989" dominated headlines at varying times throughout the season (the former was released in July while the announcement of the latter was made on one of her last tour stops of the summer). You can pick "Anti-Hero" if you want. There's also "Karma" with Ice Spice. And don't forget "Cruel Summer." The woman owned the summer. Any of her songs, new or old, could hold this spot.

Luke Combs — "Fast Car." Awesome: Tracy Chapman is getting paid in 2023 for a song she wrote decades ago. Not entirely awesome: It's because a watered-down male country star



appropriated it for a new generation without really displaying that he has an imagination. OK, so maybe that last part is a bit harsh, but there's no denying the unexpectedness of how successful this cover turned out to be.

Combs was loyal to its original incarnation, for better or worse, and it's wild to think that Tracy Chapman's songwriting expertise was somehow prominently featured on pop radio in the year 2023. My only worry? None of these kids will take the time to check out the brilliant mind that actually wrote the song in the first place. It's to those people, I say, get off my lawn.

Miley Cyrus — "Flowers." I had high hopes for this, if only because of how much I liked it. Sure, that's selfish, but it also speaks to how light the song was and still is. With such a nice, laid-back summer-filled dance groove and a hook that's both self-loving and catchy as hell, I was hoping to see this reach higher heights than it did.

That's not to say none of us heard it on the radio — and rest assured that it belongs in the song of the summer 2023 discussion. But, man. This song bums me out because it didn't take over the world and it had the potential to do so. Ah, well. I'll just go buy myself flowers and write my name in the sand.

Olivia Rodrigo — "Vampire." While the edited version can go pound sand ... my goodness, does this young lady know how to cuss. I'm not sure why it feels unexpected that the first single off her sophomore album would be so epic — "Drivers License" is teenage melodrama at its best — but you won't hear a complaint from me. Rodrigo's anger has matured here, a step up from the naïveté that made her debut so charming, and as some of her contemporaries will settle for today's predictable pop formula, Rodrigo approached this one with movements, coming across as more Meatloaf than Miley. Here's hoping she can find a second single on "Guts" that will up her game even more than she already has.

Morgan Wallen — "Last Night." Love it or hate it (here's a



AP PHOTOS; ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN MOORES/Stars and Stripes

Clockwise, from left: Taylor Swift, Olivia Rodrigo, Luke Combs, Miley Cyrus and Morgan Wallen.

hint: I don't love it), you have to respect its longevity. I don't know what this guy's deal is, and he doesn't appear to be particularly likable, but he fully inhabited the "Uncle Kracker" space in the summer of 2023 pop music.

The song is simple, twangy and

all about a messy night with a romantic partner — all things to which the majority of the music-loving population can relate.

It's hard to tell what's next for him, but it sure is clear that he knows how to sing a song that people can dig in the summer-

time: While spending 31 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100, the song was as high as No. 3 as recently as last week. And as we head into autumn in earnest, it appears that perhaps he wasn't wrong when he said it ain't over yet.

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TELEVISION



Netflix photos

Nami (Emily Rudd), Roronoa Zoro (Mackenyu), Monkey D. Luffy (Iñaki Godoy), Kaya (Celeste Loots) and Usopp (Jacob Romero Gibson) in "One Piece."

'One Piece' more for the anime franchise

What to know about the long-running manga series that's been turned into an Americanized, live-action Netflix show

BY HERB SCRIBNER
The Washington Post

Forget "Pirates of the Caribbean," "Game of Thrones" and umpteen-dozen Marvel movies. Netflix has launched a show based on one of the world's most popular fantasy-adventure franchises, and many Americans have never heard of it.

"One Piece," a proudly goofy manga series about magical pirates hunting treasure under the nose of an oppressive world government, has sold millions of comics since it debuted in Japan in the mid-1990s. It has inspired dozens of animated movies, a defunct theme park and a TV anime series that's been running for a quarter century. But the new Netflix show marks the first time that the hat-wearing birds, magical fruit and rubber-boned protagonist of "One Piece" will appear in an American series — and a live-action one to boot.

Here's a breakdown of the "One Piece" universe — its characters, its stories and its legions of international fans:

'One Piece' is about pirates, authoritarianism and magic treasure

Since it debuted in 1997, the weekly comic series and its many adaptations have centered on Luffy (pronounced like "goofy"), a young boy who seeks a vaguely defined treasure called the "One Piece" that will turn him into a pirate king.

Spoiler: The treasure still hasn't been found or even seen a quarter century into the franchise, but the storyline has grown to epic proportions anyway, encompassing a bizarre and detailed world in which Luffy's ragtag crew of Straw Hat Pirates battle other crews and a corrupt World Government.

There are weird superpowers, too, conferred by eating magical fruit. Luffy can stretch his entire body like rubber. His ship's doctor is a former reindeer that gained superintelligence.

The franchise is massively popular — just not in the U.S.

"One Piece" has ballooned into a global mega-franchise in Asia and other parts of the world. Since it debuted in the Japanese manga magazine Weekly Shonen Jump in 1997, the franchise has released 105 volumes of stories and has sold more than 516 million copies of its books across the globe, according to Netflix.

The comics inspired a Japanese-language animated series in 1999 that still runs after more than 1,000 episodes.



Luffy and Nami on board their pirate ship.

There are more than a dozen animated movies in the franchise, too, including the 2022 film "One Piece Film: Red" — which outsold "Top Gun: Maverick" in Japan. There are 40 video game titles set in the world, with some One Piece characters appearing in other game franchises, too, according to Netflix.

"One Piece" even had a theme park. The One Piece Towers featured attractions such as Zoro's Soul of Edge, where gamers slashed cannons on a screen like the sword-wielding hero Roronoa Zoro, or a casino game centered on the thief Nami. The park closed after the pandemic hit in 2020.

But for all that, "One Piece" has remained relatively obscure among Americans, even after manga and anime projects such as "Pokémon" and "Attack on Titan" proved that Japanese series could attract large U.S. audiences.

Netflix hopes to change that. The streaming giant ordered an Americanized, live-action version of "One Piece" in 2020 as part of an effort to expand its cross-border appeal, which includes releasing two original anime series, "Aggretsuko" and "Castlevania," as well as the hit Korean-produced show "Squid Game."

Other anime adaptations have bombed

While a cartoon about magical pirates might not be an obvious choice for a live-action epic, early reviews have been relatively positive, with critics praising the series' cast and visual effects. Rolling Stone's Alan Sepinwall

wrote that the series is "incredibly faithful to the early stages of the anime" even if it feels bloated at times. A USA Today reviewer said that even though there is a lot to take in, the story doesn't go over the top and is well paced. However, the New York Times' Mike Hale opined that the show fails to "capture the corny, goofy spirit of the anime."

But animes and mangas have proved notoriously difficult to translate into a live-action format. Netflix's adaptation of the sci-fi series "Cowboy Bebop" was canceled less than one month after it debuted in 2021. The streamer's "Death Note," a film loosely based on a manga about a teen who finds a notebook that has the power to kill people, was widely panned by critics in 2017. Paramount's live-action adaptation of the cyberpunk franchise "Ghost in the Shell" bombed the same year.

One crucial supporter of the new show is Eiichiro Oda, the manga artist who created "One Piece" and has long wanted to see it turned into a live-action series. Oda told the New York Times that Netflix let him read scripts, offer notes and give final approval for the series, which he believes will work for Western audiences.

"The most important thing is whether the actors can reproduce the characters in a way that will satisfy the people who read the manga," he told the Times. "I think we did it well, so I hope audiences will accept it."

Can I read the original series and watch the other adaptations in English?

The first episode is titled "Romance Dawn," which is the same name as the comic strip's first volume. The trailers suggest the series will follow major events of the story even though Oda said it doesn't re-create the manga scene for scene. The show stars Iñaki Godoy as Luffy, Mackenyu as the swordsman Roronoa Zoro, Emily Rudd as the thief Nami and Jacob Romero Gibson as the adventurer Usopp.

If you're curious about the very, very wide world of "One Piece" lore that already exists, you can view a lot of it even if you don't know Japanese. Ten seasons of the animated "One Piece" show are available on Hulu so far, with options for subtitles as well as an English-dubbed version. The "One Piece" animated movies can be found on the anime streaming site Crunchyroll.

Since English translations of the series are difficult to come by, you can get a sense of their sweeping story arcs on the One Piece wiki page or the fan site OPfan-Page.com.

CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

COMPUTER GAMES

BY DYLAN SCHIFF / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

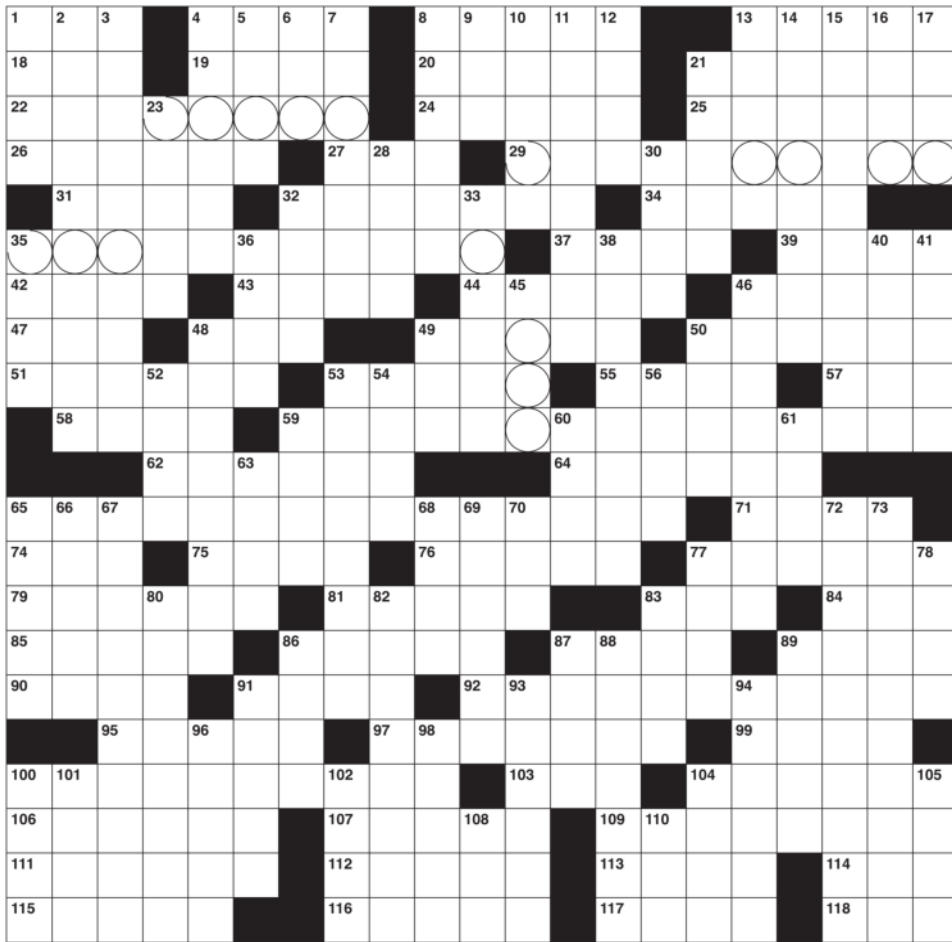
Dylan Schiff is a middle-school science teacher in Delaware whose extracurricular activities include cooking, bowling, watching game shows and editing Sporcle quizzes. This is his third crossword for The Times (and first Sunday). Dylan writes, "My students and fellow faculty members still can't get over the fact that real-life people — let alone someone they know — design crosswords!" — W. S.

ACROSS

- 1 C.E.O.'s deg.
- 4 Perch for a mountain goat
- 8 Airplane seating area
- 13 45s and LPs
- 18 Middle-earth creature
- 19 First class
- 20 Singer whose second album, in 2011, topped the Billboard chart for a record 24 weeks
- 21 Hindu scripture on meditation
- 22 Derby, for one
- 24 Writer Zora _____ Hurston
- 25 Biblical name that means "one who struggles with God"
- 26 Last-minute bidder on eBay
- 27 Fish-and-chips fish
- 29 Wander around online
- 31 "Quit stalling!"
- 32 Clumsy sorts
- 34 Paris is found in it
- 35 Chicago neighborhood with a namesake zoo
- 37 It's a lot, for some
- 39 Wild guess
- 42 Org. with a Click-N-Ship option
- 43 "Gently, now"
- 44 "_____ for Tinorns" ("Guys and Dolls" number)
- 46 Trattoria dessert
- 47 Comedian Margaret
- 48 A.A.A. service
- 49 What you get as you grow older, it's said
- 50 It ain't just a river in Egypt!
- 51 Impatient agreement
- 53 Fork over
- 55 Membership category
- 57 Cask contents
- 58 Pip or pit
- 59 Ancient manuscripts discovered in the Qumran Caves
- 62 Give up, in wrestling
- 64 Like medium vis-à-vis well done, say
- 65 What a paper clip may indicate online . . . as represented in 22-Across
- 71 Jonathan Van _____ of "Queer Eye"
- 74 Ways of doing things, in brief
- 75 Tilt
- 76 _____ of the world
- 77 Drink whose name derives from its country of origin
- 79 Medical attendants at boxing matches
- 81 Roger who wrote "Life Itself: A Memoir"
- 83 Darling
- 84 Hopper car contents
- 85 Subject of the 2003 book "Power Failure"
- 86 Italian fashion house
- 87 "_____ the Roof" (1962 hit for the Drifters)
- 89 Staff symbol
- 90 Henry VI founded it in 1440
- 91 "Achoo!" inducer
- 92 Excel offering . . . as represented in 29-Across
- 95 Entree often served with onions
- 97 Pitches in
- 99 Big name in magic
- 100 It may lead to a 404 error page . . . as represented in 35-Across
- 103 Class speakers, for short
- 104 World's largest peninsula
- 106 Ginger of old Hollywood
- 107 Relative of cream
- 109 Browser annoyances . . . as represented in 59-Across
- 111 Not inclined
- 112 Shiny balloon material
- 113 Tours with?
- 114 Broadway actress Phillipa
- 115 Like one-word commands
- 116 Hawks
- 117 House of _____-Coburg and Gotha
- 118 A little help around the holidays?
- 4 Snapped out of it
- 5 Sound heard at the start of every MGM movie
- 6 Grammy winner DiFranco
- 7 Alternatives to tablets
- 8 Honesty
- 9 Beverage suffix
- 10 Antichrist figure, in Revelation
- 11 Bad treatment
- 12 When Romeo says he "saw true beauty" before seeing Juliet
- 13 Soup stock in Japanese cuisine
- 14 With good sense
- 15 Have one's day in court
- 16 First Nations people
- 17 Preserve, in a way
- 21 Line on a spine
- 23 Hesiod's "Theogony" and "Works and Days"
- 28 Neutrogena competitor
- 30 Match making?
- 32 Bother, with "at"
- 33 "All right, you win"
- 35 Titular love object on old TV
- 36 Czech composer Janáček
- 38 Game over, so to speak
- 40 Even a little
- 41 Bucolic bundles
- 45 Food-safety agcy.
- 46 Tony-nominated actor Mann
- 48 Longtime host of Food Network's "Chopped"

DOWN

- 1 Eponymous mineralogist Friedrich
- 2 Waves aggressively
- 3 Martial artist's stance



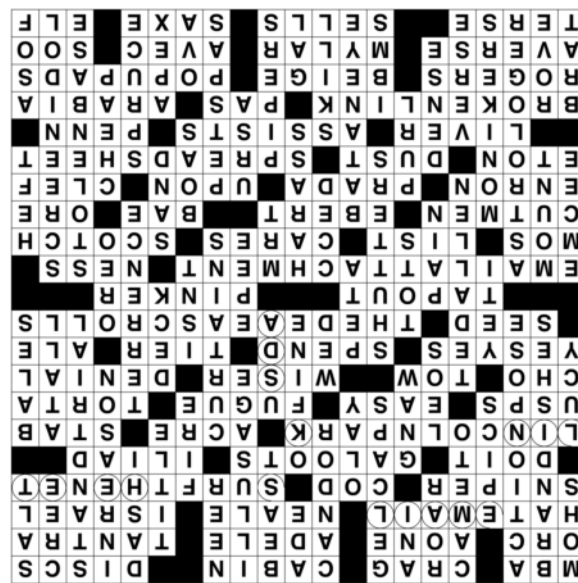
- 49 Unionized?
- 50 Something that's hand-cut?
- 52 Object of a dubious sighting
- 53 Closes
- 54 Org. opposed to fur farming
- 56 "Winning _____ everything"
- 59 Preschoolers
- 60 Fencing option
- 61 Frozen-yogurt mix-in
- 63 French bread
- 65 Run the show
- 66 Organize, as a campaign
- 67 Ptolemy was one, famously
- 68 Listed below a recipient, maybe
- 69 Torment
- 70 TV personality often referring to himself in the third person
- 72 Diamond theft
- 73 Film megastar
- 77 Word with dollar or bank
- 78 Weight
- 80 Handles
- 82 React, but just barely
- 83 Amazon wrappers?
- 86 Basic knitting stitch
- 87 Major in astronomy?
- 88 Establishments for shampooing pooches
- 89 Like a low blow
- 91 Slow to catch on
- 93 Group on "the 11th day of Christmas"
- 94 Zhuzh (up)
- 96 Writer's block?
- 98 Developed ability
- 100 Oktoberfest order, casually
- 101 Wander about
- 102 "Big Blue" machines
- 104 _____ predator
- 105 Since
- 108 "Wonder Woman" star Gadot
- 110 Fraternal twins come from different ones

GUNSTON STREET



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

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

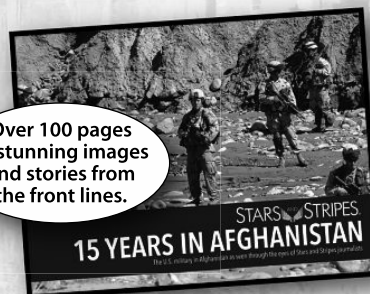


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FACES

Swift, Beyoncé reporters sought

Job postings by Gannett raises criticism, ire amid layoffs, lack of local market coverage

BY MARIA SHERMAN
AND DAVID BAUDER
Associated Press

This week, the United States' biggest newspaper chain posted to its site two unusual job listings: a Taylor Swift reporter and a Beyoncé reporter.

Gannett, which owns more than 200 daily papers, will employ these new hires through USA Today and The Tennessean, the company's Nashville-based newspaper. The chain is looking for "modern storytellers" adept in print, audio and visual journalism, said Michael Anastasi, The Tennessean's editor and Gannett's vice president for local news.

"Seeing both the facts and the fury, the Taylor Swift reporter will identify why the pop star's influence only expands, what her fanbase stands for in pop culture, and the effect she has across the music and business worlds," the company said in its job description.

Similarly, the company wants a

journalist who can capture Beyoncé's effect on society and the industries in which she operates.

Anastasi said the Tennessean already has a three-person music team and "I put our sophisticated coverage up against anybody." Gannett is always looking for opportunities to make itself essential for paying customers, he said.

Critics of the new roles cited layoffs at Gannett, where the workforce has shrunk 47% in the past three years because of layoffs and attrition, according to the NewsGuild. At some newspapers, the union said the headcount has fallen by as much as 90%. Last year alone, Gannett cut about 6% of its roughly 3,440-person U.S. media division.

Some journalists said that while hiring these artist-specific roles reflect their influence in pop culture, they do fail to invest in local journalism at a company known for its local dailies.

"At a time when so much seri-



AP and TNS photos

Taylor Swift and Beyoncé could be the sole focus of two Gannett reporters, a development that is drawing negative reactions.

ous news and local reporting is being cut, it's a decision to raise some questions about," Rick Edmonds, an expert at the journalism think tank Poynter Institute, said of the new positions.

Said Anastasi: "We're not hiring a Taylor Swift reporter at the expense of other reporters."

Some journalists criticized the job listings for presenting superfan behavior as a full-time journalism job. Music writer Jeremy Gordon said on social media that it "doesn't feel great to see 'full-time stan' go out as an actual journalism job." ("Stan" is slang for superfan.)

Representatives for Swift and Beyoncé did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Omise'eke Tinsley, academic and author of "Beyoncé in Formation: Remixing Black Feminism," says this type of role makes space for more positive stories about Black women.

But also, she adds, the existence of both jobs directly reflects Beyoncé and Swift's economic power. "If there wasn't that component to it, there wouldn't be a Beyoncé reporter," Tinsley said.

It is not uncommon for journalists to develop a beat on a specific figure, particularly in politics — as evidenced by Amy Chozick, whom the New York Times hired in 2013 to cover Hillary Clinton exclusively. But most entertainment journalists are responsible for reporting on a wide range of talent.

Tim Burton says AI 'Like a robot taking your humanity, your soul'

BY CARLOS DE LOERA
Los Angeles Times

Tim Burton is definitely not a fan of the use of artificial intelligence.

In July, BuzzFeed published an article that used AI to "Tim Burton-ize" Disney characters — to make them look as if they were crafted in Burton's distinctive animation style. The story garnered clicks for the website, but the "Corpse Bride" director was not a fan.

"They had AI do my versions of Disney characters," Burton told the Independent in a story published Sept. 9. "I can't describe the feeling it gives you. It reminded me of when other cultures say, 'Don't take my picture because it is taking away your soul.'"

He added the technology takes away from the essence of the craft and the humanity that goes into work like his.

"What it does is it sucks something from you," Burton noted. "It takes something from your soul or psyche; that is very disturbing, especially if it has to do with you. It's like a robot taking your humanity, your soul."

Others share Burton's reaction to AI-generated material that mimics a creator's style.

Buzzfeed also published an article that used AI to create Wes Anderson-styled Disney characters. Additionally, there has been a trend where people make AI-generated movie trailers of popular films like "Star Wars" that are fashioned in Anderson's unique approach.

"I'm very good at protecting myself from seeing all that stuff," Anderson told the Times

of London in June. "If somebody sends me something like that, I'll immediately erase it and say, 'Please, sorry, do not send me things of people doing me.' Because I do not want to look at it, thinking, 'Is that what I do? Is that what I mean?' I don't want to see too much of someone else thinking about what I try to be because, God knows, I could then start doing it."



Burton

Last week at the Toronto International Film Festival, "Pan's Labyrinth" director Guillermo del Toro spoke about AI-generated content. "People ask if I'm worried about artificial intelligence. I say I'm worried about natural stupidity. It's just a tool, right?" Del Toro said. "If anyone wants movies made by AI, let them get it immediately. I don't care about people who want to be fulfilled and get something s—, quickly ... Otherwise, why not buy a printer, print the 'Mona Lisa' and say you made it."

Animation legend Hayao Miyazaki spoke about what AI might mean for the soul of art in Kaku Arakawa's 2019 documentary "10 Years With Hayao Miyazaki."

"Whoever creates this stuff has no idea what pain is whatsoever. I am utterly disgusted," Miyazaki said when shown AI-powered graphics. "If you really want to make creepy stuff, go ahead and do it. I would never wish to incorporate this technology into my work at all. I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself."



CHARLES SYKES, INVISION/AP

Olivia Rodrigo performs Sept. 12 during the MTV Video Music Awards in Newark, N.J.

Olivia Rodrigo announces 2024 'GUTS' world tour

Olivia Rodrigo will take her new album, "GUTS," on the road next year as she embarks on her second world tour.

The "vampire" and "deja vu" singer revealed her touring plans in an Instagram post Wednesday morning. She said she is "soooo excited to announce the GUTS world tour!!!!"

Rodrigo, 20, will kick off her circuit next February with a show at the Acrisure Arena in Palm Springs, Calif., before making her way to more U.S. stops, Canada and Europe. She will return to the United States next summer.

The Breeders, PinkPantheSS, Chappell Roan and Remi Wolf will each join Rodrigo for various stops along the "GUTS" tour.

Rodrigo, whose debut album, "SOUR," earned her the pop vocal album prize at the 2022 Grammy Awards, released "GUTS" on Sept. 8.

From The Associated Press

'Full Swing' won't get full access at Ryder Cup

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

The Netflix golf documentary series "Full Swing" won't have full access at the Ryder Cup.

U.S. captain Zach Johnson says he spoke to all 12 players on his team when concerns were raised about a film crew in the team rooms, and the golfers unanimously decided to keep certain areas off limits.

"Netflix is going to be there," said Seth Waugh, CEO of the PGA of America. "I would say all things involving the team we leave to the team and the captain. I think there's a sanctity to the team room, and the experience is important to them. It's part of being a team, right? Netflix has been great for the game. They're doing great things. The team collectively decided there are areas of privacy that need to be respected."

Netflix is in production for its second season of the series that has been popular with golf fans and even those who didn't pay much attention to the sport.

The Ryder Cup, which starts the week of Sept. 25 outside Rome, presumably would be a big part of the upcoming season of "Full Swing."

But there were enough concerns from a few players about letting Netflix into the team room at Marco Simone that Johnson polled his players and they chose to keep the team room private.

"It was one of those where we all gathered, I talked to every individual and laid out scenarios," Johnson said in a telephone interview. "And they all felt like it was best to navigate that week of the tournament in a manner which the sanctity and sacredness of Team USA is preserved. We're eliminating scenarios."

A Netflix spokesperson declined comment.

Stefan Schauffele, the father of Xander Schauffele, said he first was aware of the Netflix presence when he received a player participation and benefits agreement in July, a month before Ryder Cup qualifying had ended.

"Apart from the fact the guys don't get paid, you cannot make a deal with a third party that we are not party to for rights into eternity," said Stefan Schauffele, who said his son did not sign the agreement without changes to the language.

The Americans and Europeans have a team room at the golf course and at the host hotel for the Ryder Cup that historically are off limits to the media and other VIPs who are not directly involved in the matches.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Suit accuses Beverly Hills police of racial profiling

CA BEVERLY HILLS — A lawsuit accuses Beverly Hills police of racially profiling nearly 1,100 Black people during traffic stops.

The suit announced Monday was filed on behalf of most of the Black drivers who were pulled over in the wealthy city between August 2019 and August 2021. Out of a total of 1,088 Black motorists stopped, only two were convicted of crimes, attorney Benjamin Crump said at a news conference.

About a third of all arrests made during the period involved Blacks, who make up only 1.5% of the city's population, Crump said.

"It wasn't to deter crime. It was to send a message to Black people that we don't want your kind around here," Crump said. "That is racial profiling 101!"

The city denied the allegations, saying in a statement, "The statistics presented referencing the number of convictions is a mischaracterization of the evidence in this case. In addition, the 1,088 arrests referenced includes people cited and released, not just custodial arrests."

The suit seeks \$500 million in damages.

Prisoner captured after a month on the lam

NY NEW YORK — A prisoner who used a rope made of bedsheets to escape from the fifth floor of a New York City hospital has been rearrested after a month on the lam, police said Wednesday.

The 44-year-old man was apprehended Tuesday in Queens after escaping from Mount Sinai Beth Israel hospital in Manhattan on Aug. 9, a police spokesperson said.

The man had been in custody on a drug charge since July 31 when he was brought to the hospital Aug. 4 after he complained of chest pains, authorities said.

He used a rope made of sheets to escape from a fifth-floor window five days later after asking to take a shower, police said. He rappelled to a rooftop below and from there made it to the street, where he got into a taxi.

The man was taken into custody Tuesday by U.S. Marshals and officers from the city's Department of Correction intelligence bureau, a correction department spokesperson said.

Shuttered nuclear plant is closer to reopening

MI COVERT TOWNSHIP — A company seeking to restart a southwestern Michigan nuclear power plant said Tuesday it has taken a major step forward with the signing of a power purchase agreement.

Holtec International said a subsidiary, Palisades Energy LLC, signed the deal this week with Wolverine Power Cooperative, a not-for-profit energy provider serving rural communities across Michi-



RYAN SUN/AP

Playing while there's still light

A man hits a ball with a paddle as the sun sets Tuesday, in Newport Beach, Calif.

gan.

Under the "multi-decade" agreement, Wolverine agrees to purchase up to two-thirds of the power generated by Palisades for its Michigan-based member rural electric cooperatives. A partner, Bloomington, Ind.-based cooperative Hoosier Energy, will purchase the rest. A Holtec spokesperson said he could not elaborate on "multi-decade." Financial terms were not disclosed.

If it begins generating power again, Palisades would be the first shuttered nuclear power plant to do so.

Holtec bought the former Palisades Nuclear Generating Station in Covert Township in June 2022 for the stated purpose of dismantling the plant after previous owner Entergy shut it down weeks earlier. But with support from Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and leaders in the Lake Michigan community where Palisades was a key economic player for 50 years, Holtec began a campaign to bring back the plant.

Schools take union to court over teacher absences

NV LAS VEGAS — School district officials in Las Vegas are asking a judge to put an end to what it claims is a coordinated union campaign of teacher absences during a bitter contract battle, forcing school closures and classroom disruptions in a state where it is illegal for public employees to strike.

Since Sept. 1, unexpected staff shortages have forced seven schools to cancel classes for the day and two others to combine classes, according to the Clark County School District, which includes Las Vegas. The district's motion seeking an emergency court order said one of those schools had 87% of its teachers call out sick on the same day.

"The absentee level at the affected schools is unprecedented," the motion said, "and these mass sick-outs have left students, parents, staff, and administrators scrambling to ensure students' wellbeing."

The Clark County Education Association — which represents about 18,000 licensed educators — has denied that it is behind the recent wave of absences.

Clinics halt transgender care for minors, cite law

MO ST. LOUIS — At least two Missouri health care centers have stopped prescribing puberty blockers and hormones to minors for the purpose of gender transition, citing a new state law that one clinic says "creates unsustainable liability" for health care workers.

Washington University Transgender Center at St. Louis Children's Hospital on Monday announced it stopped providing those services, and a spokesperson said University of Missouri Health Care stopped treatments for minors Aug. 28.

The new Missouri law, which took effect Aug. 28, outlawed puberty blockers, hormones and gender-affirming surgery for minors. But there are exceptions for youth who were already taking those medications before the law kicked in, allowing them to continue receiving that health care.

Both Washington University and University of Missouri said physicians there are referring current patients to other providers.

Bigger homes OK'd as slave descendants object

GA DARIEN — Descendants of enslaved people living on a Georgia island vowed to keep fighting Tuesday after county commissioners voted to double the maximum size of homes allowed in their tiny enclave, which residents fear will accelerate the decline of one of the South's few surviving Gullah-Geechee communities.

Black residents of the Hogg Hummock community on Sapelo Island and their supporters packed a meeting of McIntosh County's elected commissioners to oppose zoning changes that residents say favor wealthy buyers and will lead to tax increases that could pressure them to sell their land.

Commissioners voted 3-2 to weaken zoning restrictions the county adopted nearly three decades ago with the stated intent to help Hogg Hummock's 30 to 50 residents hold on to their land.

Hogg Hummock is one of just a

few surviving communities in the South of people known as Gullah, or Geechee, in Georgia, whose ancestors worked island slave plantations.

Located about 60 miles south of Savannah, Sapelo Island remains separated from the mainland and reachable only by boat. Since 1976, the state of Georgia has owned most of its 30 square miles of largely unspoiled wilderness. Hogg Hummock, also known as Hog Hammock, sits on less than a square mile.

Bull moose captured in capital, moved to habitat

NM SANTA FE — A wandering bull moose was captured in downtown Santa Fe and relocated to a suitable habitat in northern New Mexico, authorities said Tuesday.

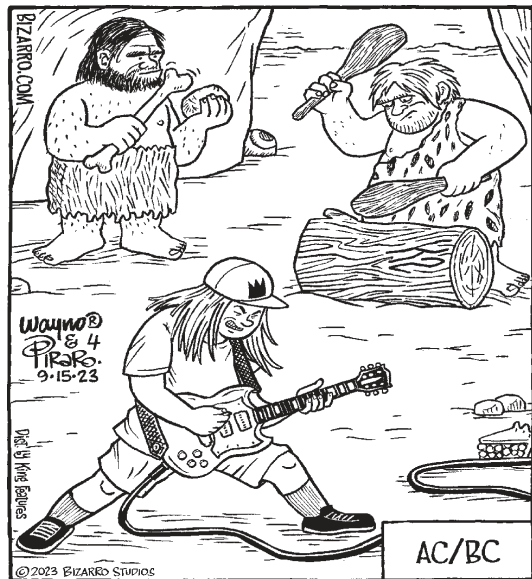
State Game and Fish officials and Animal Service Officers for the capital city said the moose was spotted around 8 a.m. near Fort Marcy Park. Officers set up a perimeter to protect residents and pedestrians in the park, which is a popular walking area.

The moose was sedated with a tranquilizer dart and loaded onto a trailer before being evaluated by a Game and Fish Department veterinarian and determined to be in good health.

Department biologists estimate the moose weighed over 900 pounds and was 4 to 5 years old.

From The Associated Press

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbers 1-58.

ACROSS

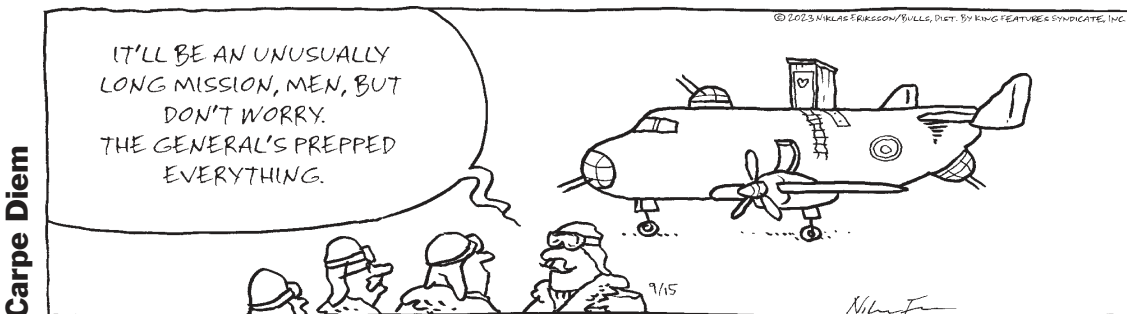
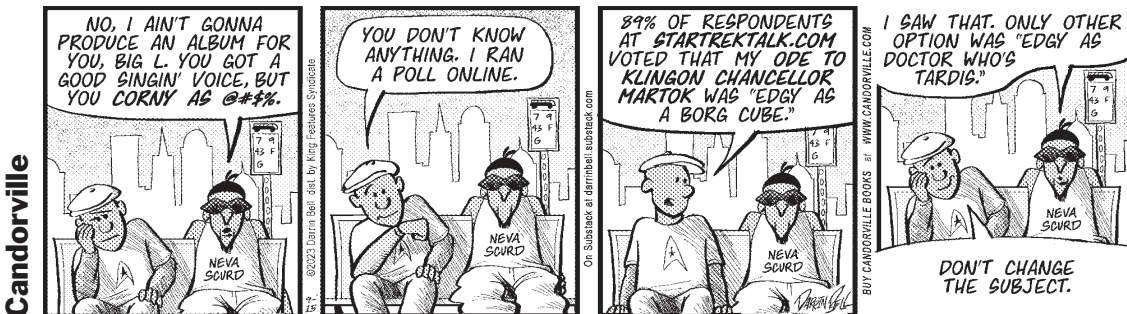
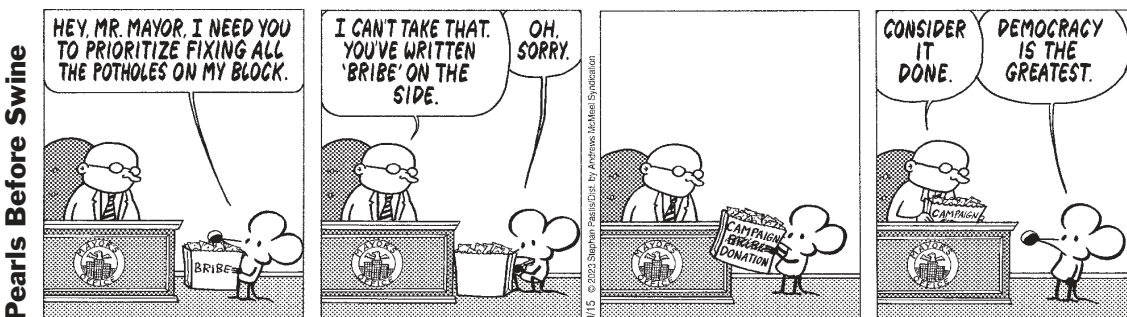
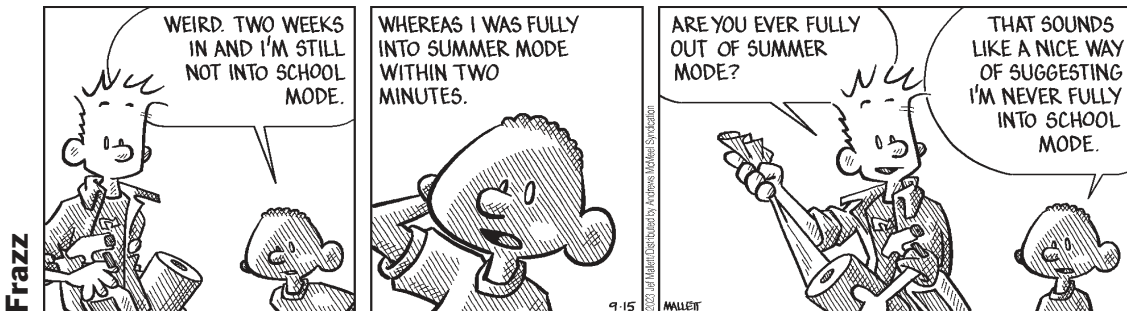
- 1 Pool unit
4 — Diego
7 "Mortal Kombat" agent
12 Comedian Gasteyer
13 Author Umberto
14 City-related
15 Bankbook abbr.
16 Survival drama series for which Lee Jung-jae won an Emmy
18 Aussie hopper
19 Quests
20 "Auld Lang —"
22 British verb ending
23 Casual shirt
27 Diner order
29 Like Zorro or Batman
31 Yarns
34 Stickum
35 Needing change
37 Cardinal cap letters
38 Lion's share
39 — Dhabi
41 Creche trio
45 Door handles
47 Aries
48 Kin of three-card monte
52 UFO fliers
53 Equine
54 StubHub buys, slangily
55 "The Bells" writer

DOWN

- 1 Hideaways
2 Pester
3 "Cry, the Beloved Country" author Alan
4 Meeting, in slang
5 Find not guilty
6 Subjects, usually
7 Beer, slangily
8 URL ending
9 Cagers' gp.
10 Orange tuber
11 Chemical suffix
17 Thing
21 Critic Roger
23 Sacred song
24 Approves
25 Allow
26 Praise in verse
28 Baton Rouge sch.
30 Suitable
31 Country singer McGraw
32 Year in Madrid
33 Opener at Vegas?
36 Tart flavor
37 Hand in
40 Marina sights
42 Venezuelan corn patty
43 Croc's kin
44 "No more for me, thanks"
45 Swiss artist Paul
46 Hot
48 — Na Na
49 Mischief
50 Notable time
51 U.S. military vessel

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for previous puzzle: WET SAPS TALL, IRE THEN AROO, TED LASSO NEAR, TAS ORIGAMI, OKAPIS ENE, MAL SAL CLUMP, ANKA NUT OPER, RESIN VAT LIE, MID REDINK, APPLAUD REF, RASE NARRATED, OTIS SINO ERA, NESS TSAR DRY



9-15

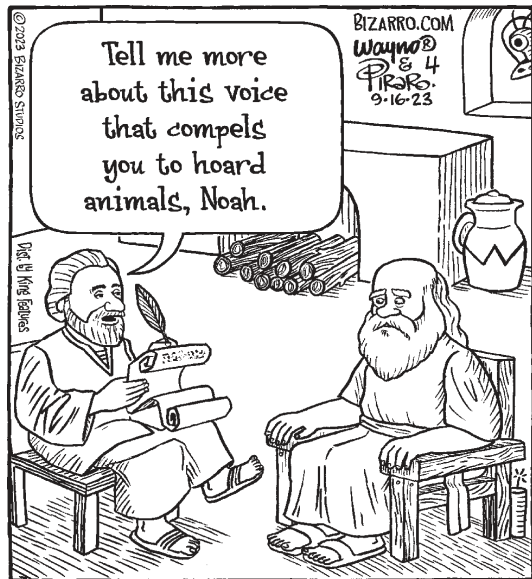
CRYPTOQUIP

R JYYM ZN LZNU BNKKYBZRJX
ZNJL NG GQRLFYYL PJM
QYBNQM PKFOEL. R'E QOJJRJX
NOZ NG MRLB LUPBY.

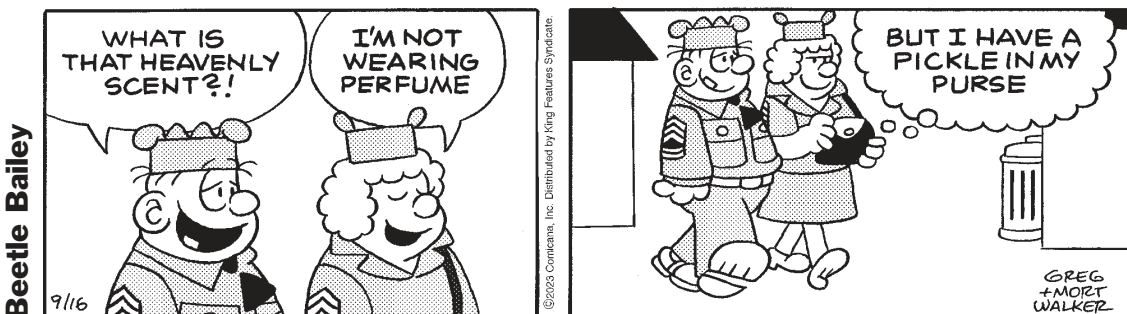
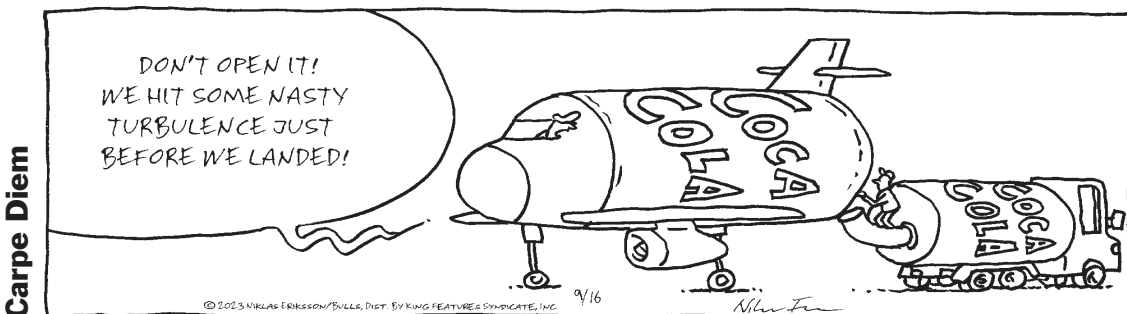
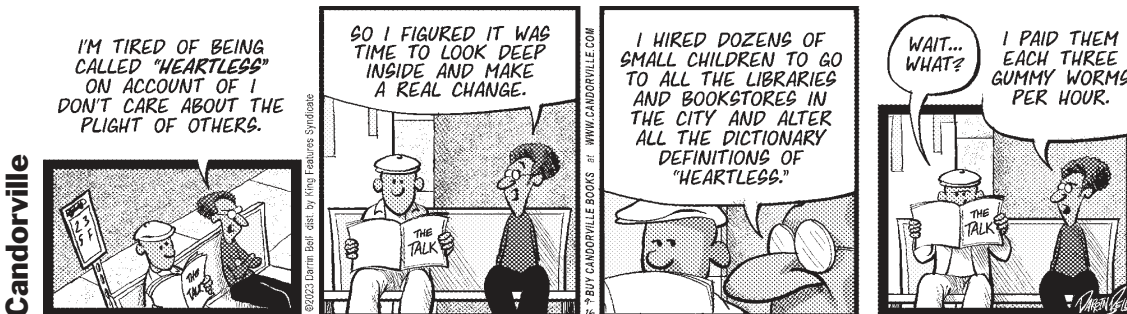
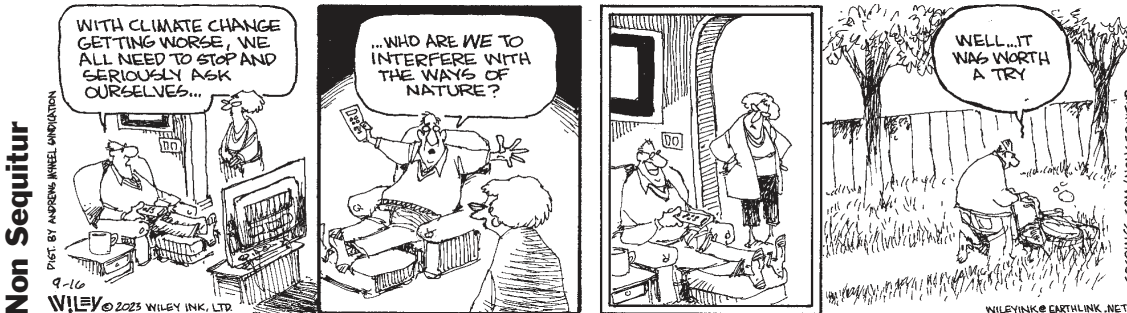
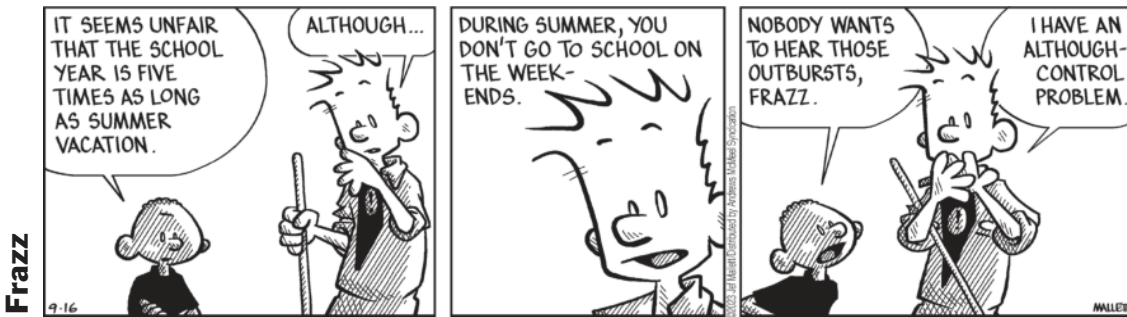
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A GUY LENDS A HELPING HAND TO A BAND OF FOUR-STRING GUITAR PLAYERS, HE ASSISTS BASSISTS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals G

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		

- ACROSS**
- 1 Addams cousin
 - 4 Palm starch
 - 8 Antitoxins
 - 12 Sorority letter
 - 13 Norwegian saint
 - 14 Experts
 - 15 Schedule abbr.
 - 16 Blaze
 - 17 Diner grub
 - 18 Emmy-winning creator/star of "Abbott Elementary"
 - 21 Thumbs-up
 - 22 "Acid"
 - 23 Poe's bird
 - 26 — Paulo
 - 27 Bird doc
 - 30 Yonder thing
 - 31 Opening
 - 32 "Toodle-oo!"
 - 33 Half dozen
 - 34 Inlet
 - 35 Grinding tooth
 - 36 Indian lentil dish
 - 37 Wine selection
 - 38 Emmy-winning HBO series set in a fictional resort
 - 45 Firetruck necessity
 - 46 Toy block name
 - 47 Friendly leader?
 - 48 Russian river
 - 49 Oklahoma city
 - 50 100 percent
 - 51 Go yachting
 - 52 Online crafts site
- DOWN**
- 1 Neighbor of Kuwait
 - 2 No — traffic
 - 3 Spelling or Amos
 - 4 Cushion
 - 5 Wanted poster info
 - 6 Attire
 - 7 Partially coincide
 - 8 Shell out
 - 9 Eventful periods
 - 10 Old newspaper section
 - 11 Org.
 - 19 Russian denial
 - 20 GI entertainers
 - 23 ACLU issues
 - 24 Sushi fish
 - 25 Preventive shot, in slang
 - 26 Utter
 - 27 Kilmer of "Top Gun"
 - 28 JFK info
 - 29 Sailor
 - 31 Biblical sea
 - 32 Commotion
 - 34 "Humbug!"
 - 35 "Co-dependent No More" author Beattie
 - 36 Reside
 - 37 Legendary TV host Philbin
 - 38 Ergo
 - 39 Circle dance
 - 40 Morales of "Ozark"
 - 41 Circus structure
 - 42 Rip
 - 43 Bruins' sch.
 - 44 Only

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

9-16

CRYPTOQUIP

DXBR - BXYYOLZ OLBRATGROFL
WILTIY VAORRXL DQ IL
IGGFWCYOBPK KOGX CYIQXA:

"RPOB OB PFV O AFYY."
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I NEED TO STOP COLLECTING TONS OF FRISBEES AND RECORD ALBUMS. I'M RUNNING OUT OF DISC SPACE.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals S

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Ernie Gates

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published week-days (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for \$1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DOD personnel are located.

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OPINION

Congress can be fixed. The leaders have to want to.

By STEVEN PEARLSTEIN

Special to *The Washington Post*

Something extraordinary is happening in the U.S. Senate. Before the long summer recess — and after extensive bipartisan negotiations — the Appropriations Committee approved all 12 of the annual appropriations bills with only 12 dissenting votes out of more than 300 cast. All 12 bills conform to the budget framework approved in the spring by bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate. And all 12 are expected to be approved in the coming weeks after ample opportunity for debate and amendment.

This sudden outbreak of cooperation and “regular order” has not been seen at the Capitol in decades. Moreover, as the Senate’s Democratic leaders were quick to boast, it stands in sharp contrast to the unfolding fiasco in the Republican-controlled House, where an already partisan appropriations process has been hijacked by a gang of right-wing renegades vowing to shut down the government unless their extreme budget-cutting demands are met.

The coming donnybrook brought on by Republicans will reinforce the smug conceit among Democrats that “it’s all their fault” that Congress has been unable to address the major problems facing the country. The reality, however, is far more complicated.

Consider the seven-month blockade of about 300 military appointments — including the top officers in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps — by a single Republican senator. Normally, the Senate routinely confirms military appointments by unanimous consent. In this case, Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama has vowed to continue withholding his consent until the Pentagon rescinds its policy of providing sick time and transportation funding to female service members traveling out of state

for an abortion.

At his press scrum last week, Chuck Schumer, the Senate’s Democratic leader, called Tuberville’s blockade “a problem created by Republicans, and it’s up to them to solve it.” That’s wrong on two counts.

First, senators and leaders of both parties have criticized Tuberville and asked him to stand down.

And second, there is nothing that prevents Schumer — or any other senator, for that matter — from moving to approve all 300 or so appointments as a group, either by suspending the Senate rules (requiring a two-thirds vote of the chamber) or changing the rules regarding military appointments (51 or 60 votes, depending on the parliamentary tactics used).

It is unclear whether Schumer could muster such majorities. Many Republicans would be reluctant to be seen as “soft on abortion” by voting to end Tuberville’s blockade. And members of both parties might be reticent to undermine their own privilege to hold up future nominations to win policy concessions. It’s possible Schumer has made the cynical political calculation that Tuberville’s stunt will help turn military families against Republicans while keeping the spotlight on abortion, a winning issue for Democrats these days.

Whatever the reason, as long as Schumer chooses not to put senators on the spot by making them vote, Tuberville is free to continue undermining both the military and the Senate while raising his national profile.

Democrats have played a similar blame game with the Senate filibuster.

Under Senate rules, while it requires only a majority of senators to approve a bill, or nomination, it takes 60 votes to end debate. That makes it possible for 41 senators to block action simply by talking things to death.

In the past, such filibusters were rare in part

because the mere prospect reinforced norms of bipartisanship and collegiality. These days, however, in an evenly divided Senate where anything Democrats favor Republicans are reflexively against, Republicans routinely threaten to filibuster everything just because they can. (Democrats did the same when they were in the minority.) As a result, only bills backed by 60 senators make it to the Senate floor — and there are precious few of those.

Lacking the votes to eliminate the filibuster, Democrats’ next best strategy is to raise the cost of filibustering by making Republicans actually stand and debate. By forcing Republicans to talk ... and talk ... and talk — 18 hours a day, seven days a week, week after week — until exhaustion, public pressure and the desire to see their families forces a compromise. After a few such experiences, the filibuster-everything threat would disappear.

The reason Democrats haven’t done that is simple. To maintain the necessary quorum and parliamentary control, they would all have to sit there and listen. Despite their bellyaching about Republican obstructionism, Schumer and his Democratic colleagues aren’t willing to sacrifice their three-day workweeks and monthly “district work periods” to fix the legislative plumbing.

The failure of the Senate to deal with climate change, immigration, runaway budget deficits, the opioid and mental health crises and the tidal wave of gun violence isn’t, as Schumer alleges, a Republicans problem that “is up to them to fix.” It’s a Senate problem that stems from the lack of political will on the part of leaders in both parties who are unwilling to put aside the gamesmanship and make Congress govern again.

Steven Pearlstein is the Robinson professor of public affairs at George Mason University and a longtime business and economics columnist at *The Washington Post*.

Combat false information, but uphold free expression

By ERWIN CHEMERINSKY

Los Angeles Times

A decision last Friday by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit puts in jeopardy one of the few tools that exist to deal with false speech on the internet.

The court ruled that the White House, the FBI, the surgeon general’s office and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cannot communicate with social media platforms to encourage them to remove false speech. Although it narrowed a federal district’s broader injunction issued in July, the appeals court left in place a restriction of important speech by the federal government.

False speech over the internet and social media can do great harm, even causing the loss of life. One aspect of the case involved the federal government’s concerns with false information being spread about COVID-19 and vaccines on social media. Officials rightly feared that false claims by anti-vaxxers would reduce vaccinations and put lives in jeopardy.

The lawsuit against the Biden administration was brought by Louisiana and Missouri along with a website owner and four people who opposed the government’s COVID-19 policy, among other issues. A federal district judge in Louisiana issued an injunction against the White House and many federal agencies.

The 5th Circuit ruling reversed the injunction against several agencies, but it left much

of the injunction in place for four agencies.

The court in its decision relied on a 1963 decision that involved the government threatening obscenity prosecutions against booksellers. Government coercion violates the First Amendment. But there is no evidence that the Biden administration threatened any social media company with prosecution or any enforcement action.

The court said Biden administration officials “threatened — both expressly and implicitly — to retaliate against inaction. Officials threw out the prospect of legal reforms and enforcement actions while subtly insinuating it would be in the platforms’ best interests to comply.” But telling someone that the failure to act could lead to new laws and regulations is not coercion. Never did the government warn the social media companies that they were violating the law and would face punishment if they did not accede to requests to remove content.

The court said the administration violated the First Amendment by encouraging the platforms to engage in content-moderation of false speech. It concluded that the officials “significantly encouraged the platforms to moderate content by exercising active, meaningful control over those decisions.” There is nothing, however, in the opinion that shows the government exercised “control” over the content on social media. Encouraging platforms to remove false content does not violate the First Amendment.

The panel declared that “social-media platforms’ content-moderation decisions must be theirs and theirs alone.” That is certainly right, but it is ironic to read this reasoning since the same court last year upheld the constitutionality of a Texas law that prohibits internet and social media platforms from engaging in content moderation. There is no way to reconcile that decision with the 5th Circuit panel now proclaiming that social media companies get total say over the content on their platforms.

A petition for review of last year’s case is now pending before the Supreme Court. Likewise, the Supreme Court will be asked to review last Friday’s ruling on an expedited basis. The Supreme Court should take both of these cases and make clear that internet and social media companies have the right to decide on the content on their platforms. The Texas law prohibiting content moderation is thus unconstitutional. But it should be constitutional for the government to encourage removal of false speech from social platforms, so long as no coercion occurs.

The challenge is to find ways to combat the spread of false information that can harm public safety without jeopardizing freedom of expression. The government identifying false speech and notifying social media companies is a sensible way to address this problem.

Erwin Chemerinsky, a contributing writer to Opinion, is dean of the University of California, Berkeley School of Law and author of “Worse Than Nothing: The Dangerous Fallacy of Originalism.”

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Schedule

Friday's games
EAST
 Virginia (0-2) at Maryland (2-0)
SOUTHWEST
 Army (1-1) at UTSA (1-1)
FAR WEST
 Utah St. (1-1) at Air Force (2-0)
Saturday's games
EAST
 Liberty (2-0) at Buffalo (0-2)
 Holy Cross (1-1) at Yale (0-0)
 Cornell (0-0) at Lehigh (1-1)
 Florida St. (2-0) at Boston College (1-1)
 Columbia (0-0) at Lafayette (1-1)
 Stonehill (1-1) at Georgetown (2-0)
 Wagner (0-2) at Sacred Heart (0-2)
 St. Thomas (Minn.) (1-1) at Harvard (0-0)
 Campbell (1-1) at Monmouth (NJ) (1-1)
 Penn (0-0) at Colgate (0-2)
 Davidson (0-2) at Marist (0-1)
 Norfolk St. (1-1) at Temple (1-1)
 Rhode Island (1-1) at Maine (0-2)
 Virginia Tech (1-1) at Rutgers (2-0)
 Howard (1-1) vs. Hampton (1-1) at Washington, D.C., Md.
 FIU (2-1) at Uconn (0-2)
 Brown (0-0) at Bryant (1-1)
 Va. Lynchburg (0-1) at Merrimack (0-2)
 Towson (0-2) at Morgan St. (1-1)
 St. Francis (Pa.) (0-2) at Delaware (1-1)
 Dartmouth (0-0) at New Hampshire (1-1)
 Pittsburgh (1-1) at West Virginia (1-1)
SOUTH
 Wake Forest (2-0) at Old Dominion (1-1)
 LSU (1-1) at Mississippi St. (2-0)
 VMI (1-1) at NC State (1-1)
 Florida Memorial University (0-0) at Grambling St. (0-2)
 Northwestern (1-1) at Duke (2-0)
 Delaware St. (0-2) at Richmond (0-2)
 Alabama (1-1) at South Florida (1-1)
 South Carolina (1-1) at Georgia (2-0)
 East Carolina (0-2) at Appalachian St. (1-1)
 Minnesota (2-0) at North Carolina (2-0)
 Tulane (1-1) at Southern Miss. (1-1)
 William & Mary (2-0) at Charleston Southern (1-1)
 Furman (1-1) at Kennesaw St. (1-1)
 Presbyterian (1-1) at Wofford (0-2)
 West Florida (0-0) at Florida A&M (1-1)
 Gardner-Webb (1-1) at Tennessee St. (1-1)
 Georgia St. (2-0) at Charlotte (1-1)
 W. Carolina (1-1) at E. Kentucky (0-2)
 NC A&T (0-2) at Elon (0-2)
 The Citadel (0-2) at Chattanooga (1-1)
 Villanova (2-0) at UCF (2-0)
 MVSU (0-1) at Delta St. (0-0)
 Duquesne (1-1) at Coastal Carolina (1-1)
 McNeese St. (0-2) at Alcorn St. (0-2)
 North Alabama (1-2) at Tennessee Tech (0-2)
 Houston Christian (1-1) at UT Martin (1-1)
 Murray St. (1-1) at Middle Tennessee (0-2)
 James Madison (2-0) at Troy (1-1)
 Samford (1-1) at Auburn (2-0)
 Stephen F. Austin (1-1) at Northwestern St. (0-2)
 Alabama A&M (1-1) at Southern U. (0-2)
 North Texas (0-2) at Louisiana Tech (2-1)
 Louisiana-Lafayette (1-1) at UAB (1-1)
 Tennessee (2-0) at Florida (1-1)
 ETSU (1-1) at Austin Peay (0-2)
 Akron (1-1) at Kentucky (2-0)

Georgia Tech (1-1) at Mississippi (2-0)
 FAU (1-1) at Clemson (1-1)
MIDWEST
 Penn St. (2-0) at Illinois (1-1)
 Kansas St. (2-0) at Missouri (2-0)
 CCSU (1-1) at Kent St. (0-2)
 Iowa St. (1-1) at Ohio (2-1)
 Indiana (1-1) vs. Louisville (2-0) at Indianapolis
 Georgia Southern (2-0) at Wisconsin (1-1)
 Taylor (0-1) at Dayton (1-1)
 Robert Morris (1-1) at Youngstown St. (1-1)
 Indiana St. (0-2) at Ball St. (0-2)
 Umass (1-2) at E. Michigan (1-1)
 Lamar (0-2) at South Dakota (1-1)
 Cent. Michigan (1-1) at Notre Dame (3-0)
 Illinois St. (2-0) at E. Illinois (1-1)
 W. Michigan (1-1) at Iowa (2-0)
 Cent. Arkansas (1-1) at N. Dakota St. (2-0)
 S. Dakota St. (2-0) vs. Drake (0-2) at Minneapolis
 W. Kentucky (2-0) at Ohio St. (2-0)
 Washington (2-0) at Michigan St. (2-0)
 Wabash (0-0) at Butler (1-1)
 Lindenwood (Mo.) (1-1) at W. Illinois (0-2)
 S. Illinois (2-0) at SE Missouri (1-1)
 Miami (Ohio) (1-1) at Cincinnati (2-0)
 San Jose St. (1-2) at Toledo (1-1)
 N. Illinois (1-1) at Nebraska (0-2)
 Syracuse (2-0) at Purdue (1-1)
 Bowling Green (1-1) at Michigan (2-0)
SOUTHWEST
 LIU Brooklyn (0-2) at Baylor (0-2)
 Oklahoma (2-0) at Tulsa (1-1)
 Louisiana-Monroe (2-0) at Texas A&M (1-1)
 Miles (1-0) at Ark.-Pine Bluff (0-2)
 Stony Brook (0-2) at Arkansas St. (0-2)
 Prairie View (1-1) at SMU (1-1)
 Tarleton St. (2-0) at Texas Tech (0-2)
 South Alabama (1-1) at Oklahoma St. (2-0)
 Texas Southern (0-2) at Rice (1-1)
 BYU (2-0) at Arkansas (2-0)
 Wyoming (2-0) at Texas (2-0)
 Incarnate Word (1-1) at Abilene Christian (2-0)
 TCU (1-1) at Houston (1-1)
 Jackson St. (2-1) at Texas State (1-1)
FAR WEST
 North Dakota (2-0) at Boise St. (0-2)
 Weber St. (2-0) at Utah (2-0)
 Stetson (2-0) at Montana St. (1-1)
 San Diego St. (2-1) at Oregon St. (2-0)
 North American University (0-0) at Portland St. (0-2)
 SE Louisiana (0-2) at E. Washington (0-2)
 Princeton (0-0) at San Diego (0-2)
 Idaho (2-0) at California (1-1)
 Utah Tech (0-2) at N. Arizona (0-2)
 NC Central (2-0) at UCLA (2-0)
 N. Colorado (0-2) at Washington St. (2-0)
 N. Iowa (0-2) at Idaho St. (0-2)
 Vanderbilt (2-1) at UNLV (1-1)
 New Mexico St. (1-2) at New Mexico (1-1)
 Sacramento St. (2-0) at Stanford (1-1)
 Hawaii (1-2) at Oregon (2-0)
 Lincoln University (CA) (0-0) at Cal Poly (1-1)
 Ferris St. (0-0) at Montana (2-0)
 S. Utah (0-2) at UC Davis (1-1)
 Colorado St. (0-1) at Colorado (2-0)
 Kansas (2-0) at Nevada (0-2)
 Fresno St. (2-0) at Arizona St. (1-1)
 UTEP (1-2) at Arizona (1-1)

TENNIS

San Diego Open

Wednesday
At Barnes Tennis Center
San Diego
Purse: \$780,637
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Maria Sakkari (3), Greece, def. Camila Osorio, Colombia, 6-3, 2-2, ret.
 Sofia Kenin, United States, def. Katie Volynets, United States, 1-6, 6-4, 6-2.
 Anastasia Potapova, Russia, def. Ons Jabeur (1), Tunisia, 6-4, 7-6 (4).
 Emma Navarro, United States, def. Aliaksandra Sasnovich, Belarus, 7-5, 6-4.
 Barbora Krejčíková (4), Czech Republic, def. Anhelina Kalinina, Ukraine, 6-3, 6-2.
 Danielle Collins, United States, def. Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.
 Caroline Garcia (2), France, def. Sloane Stephens, United States, 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.
 Beatriz Haddad Maia (7), Brazil, def. Marta Kostyuk, Ukraine, 7-5, 6-7 (3), 6-2.

Slovenia Open

Wednesday
At TC ZTK Ljubljana
Ljubljana, Slovenia
Purse: \$115,000
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Lucija Ciric-Bagaric, Croatia, def. Aliona Bolsova (2), Spain, 4-6, 6-3, 6-0.
 Marina Bassols Ribera (5), Spain, def. Sapfo Sakellari, Greece, 6-4, 6-3.
 Katarzyna Kawa, Poland, def. Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova (1), Slovakia, 7-5, 6-2.
 Zeynep Sonmez, Turkiye, def. Antonia Ruzic, Croatia, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Tiriac Foundation Trophy

Wednesday
At National Tennis Centre
Bucharest
Purse: \$115,000
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Noma Noha Akugue (7), Germany, def. Ilinca Dalina Amariei, Romania, 7-6 (4), 6-1.
 Maria Carle, Argentina, def. Jessica Bouzas Maneiro (6), Spain, 6-3, 6-1.
 Anca Alexia Todoni, Romania, def. Viktoria Tomova (2), Bulgaria, 4-6, 6-4, 6-1.

Japan Women's Open

Wednesday
At Regional Park Tennis Stadium
Osaka
Purse: \$259,303
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 32
 Wang Xinyu (3), China, def. Jil Teichmann, Switzerland, 7-6 (3), 6-3.
Round of 16
 Yulia Putintseva (6), Kazakhstan, def. Valeria Savinykh, Russia, 6-1, 6-2.
 Anna Kalinskaya, Russia, def. Harriet Dart, Britain, 7-6 (5), 6-2.
 Mai Hontama, Japan, def. Nadia Podoroska (5), Argentina, 6-3, 6-3.
 Ashlyn Krueger, United States, def. Jesika Ponchet, France, 6-4, 6-1.

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

	East				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Miami	1	0	0	1.000	36 34
N.Y. Jets	1	0	0	1.000	22 16
Buffalo	0	1	0	.000	16 22
New England	0	1	0	.000	20 25

	South				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Jacksonville	1	0	0	1.000	31 21
Houston	0	1	0	.000	9 25
Indianapolis	0	1	0	.000	21 31
Tennessee	0	1	0	.000	15 16

	North				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Baltimore	1	0	0	1.000	25 9
Cleveland	1	0	0	1.000	24 3
Cincinnati	0	1	0	.000	3 24
Pittsburgh	0	1	0	.000	7 30

	West				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Las Vegas	1	0	0	1.000	17 16
Denver	0	1	0	.000	16 17
Kansas City	0	1	0	.000	20 21
L.A. Chargers	0	1	0	.000	34 36

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

	East				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Dallas	1	0	0	1.000	40 0
Philadelphia	1	0	0	1.000	25 20
Washington	1	0	0	1.000	20 16
N.Y. Giants	0	1	0	.000	0 40

	South				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Atlanta	1	0	0	1.000	24 10
New Orleans	1	0	0	1.000	16 15
Tampa Bay	1	0	0	1.000	20 17
Carolina	0	1	0	.000	10 24

	North				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
Detroit	1	0	0	1.000	21 20
Green Bay	1	0	0	1.000	38 20
Chicago	0	1	0	.000	20 38
Minnesota	0	1	0	.000	17 20

	West				
	W	L	T	Pct	PF PA
L.A. Rams	1	0	0	1.000	30 13
San Francisco	1	0	0	1.000	30 7
Arizona	0	1	0	.000	16 20
Seattle	0	1	0	.000	13 30

Thursday's game

Minnesota at Philadelphia

Sunday's games

Baltimore at Cincinnati
 Chicago at Tampa Bay
 Green Bay at Atlanta
 Indianapolis at Houston
 Kansas City at Jacksonville
 L.A. Chargers at Tennessee
 Las Vegas at Buffalo
 Seattle at Detroit
 N.Y. Giants at Arizona
 San Francisco at L.A. Rams
 N.Y. Jets at Dallas
 Washington at Denver
 Miami at New England

Monday's games

New Orleans at Carolina
 Cleveland at Pittsburgh

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA playoffs

(x-if necessary)
First Round
(Best-of-three)
No. 1 Las Vegas 1, No. 8 Chicago Sky 0
Wednesday: Las Vegas 87, Chicago 59
Sunday: at Las Vegas
x-Wednesday, Sept. 20: at Chicago
No. 2 New York vs. No. 7 Washington
Friday: at New York
Tuesday, Sept. 19: at New York
x-Friday, Sept. 22: at Washington
No. 3 Connecticut 1, No. 6 Minnesota 0
Wednesday: Connecticut 90, Minnesota 60
Sunday: at Connecticut
x-Wednesday, Sept. 20: at Minnesota
No. 4 Dallas vs. No. 5 Atlanta
Friday: at Dallas
Tuesday, Sept. 19: at Dallas
x-Friday, Sept. 22: at Atlanta
Semifinals
(Best-of-five)
Sept. 24-Oct. 3
 Las Vegas-Chicago winner vs. Dallas-Atlanta winner
 New York-Washington winner vs. Connecticut-Minnesota winner

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	17	4	6	57	44	30
New England	13	5	9	48	46	32
Orlando City	13	6	8	47	41	31
Philadelphia	14	8	4	46	47	31
Columbus	13	8	6	45	54	37
Atlanta	11	8	9	42	51	43
Nashville	11	9	7	40	32	27
CF Montréal	11	14	2	35	28	40
D.C. United	9	12	7	34	37	38
Chicago	8	11	8	32	32	42
Charlotte FC	7	9	10	31	34	43
NYFC	6	10	12	30	28	36
New York	7	12	8	29	24	33
Inter Miami CF	8	14	4	28	30	39
Toronto FC	4	13	10	22	23	39

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Saint Louis SC	15	10	3	48	55	37
Seattle	11	9	8	41	34	29
LAFC	11	9	7	40	40	32
Real Salt Lake	11	9	7	40	38	39
Houston	11	10	6	39	36	31
Vancouver	10	8	8	38	43	36
Minnesota	9	8	10	37	34	33
San Jose	9	9	10	37	32	36
FC Dallas	9	10	7	34	29	30
Austin FC	9	12	6	33	38	43
Portland	8	11	9	33	34	44
Sporting KC	8	12	8	32	38	40
LA Galaxy	7	10	9	30	33	41
Colorado	3	13	10	19	16	39

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

Saturday's games

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

Sunday's game

Portland at Austin FC

Wednesday, Sept. 20

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

Saturday, Sept. 23

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

Sunday, Sept. 24

Miami at Orlando City
 LA Galaxy at Austin FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego	9	6	3	30	26	20
Portland	8	5	5	29	38	25
North Carolina	8	6	4	28	26	19
OL Reign	8	7	3	27	25	21
Gotham FC	7	5	6	27	21	19
Washington	6	4	8	26	24	25
Louisville	5	4	9	24	22	18
Angel City	6	6	6	24	22	25
Orlando	7	10	1	22	21	24
Houston	4	6	8	20	12	15
Chicago	6	10	2	20	22	39
Kansas City	6	11	1	19	19	28

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

Friday's game

Houston at Louisville

Saturday's games

Washington at Gotham FC
 Kansas City at San Diego
 OL Reign at Portland

Sunday's games

Angel City at Chicago
 North Carolina at Orlando
Thursday, Sept. 21
 Orlando at Angel City ppd.

MLB

Braves win 6th straight NL East title

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Crammed into the visitor's clubhouse, the Atlanta Braves puffed on their championship cigars, showered each other with bubbly, shot-gunned beers and danced in alcohol puddles — until the music briefly paused.

"Turn the music up! Some people want to party!" shouted reliever Kirby Yates.

On his command, the music was cranked to max volume and the NL East title celebration resumed. Yates was the one who closed another division title, so he got to call the shots in the locker room.

And as he surveyed the jubilation around him, and ran his fingers through hair matted by booze, Yates knew there was nowhere else he wanted to be.

"So far," he said, "it's the best part about being a baseball player."

It's just what the Braves do this time of year.

The Braves clinched their sixth straight NL East title, beating the Philadelphia Phillies 4-1 on Wednesday night behind Spencer Strider's major league-leading 17th win and Austin Riley's two-run homer.

"Now the real party starts," Strider said.

Yates struck out Brandon Marsh to end the game and the players danced in a mob near the mound as Phillies fans booed them off the field.

"Congratulations Atlanta Braves 2023 NL East Champions" flashed on the scoreboard.

Braves star Ronald Acuña Jr. re-



MATT SLOCUM/AP

The Atlanta Braves' Ronald Acuna Jr., left, and Brian Snitker celebrate after clinching their sixth consecutive NL East title by defeating the Phillies on Wednesday in Philadelphia. Atlanta won 4-1.

sponded to booing fans by raising both arms and signaling with his hands to bring it on.

"We've checked one box," manager Brian Snitker said.

Atlanta (96-50) clinched in 146 games, its second-quickest clinch in the divisional era. The division title was the Braves' record 26th, two more than the Los Angeles Dodgers and New York Yankees.

The Braves have seemingly made winning the East a rite of September since the 1990s and this year's team looks loaded enough to win their third World Series since moving from Milwaukee to Atlanta in 1966. Over that span, Atlanta won 11 straight NL East titles from

1995-2005, and the World Series in 1995 and 2021.

Atlanta took special satisfaction in clinching on the same Citizens Bank Park field where the Phillies eliminated them last October in the NL Division Series. The Phillies won that series 3-1 — just as Atlanta won this four-game set.

The Phillies lead the NL wild card and the teams could face each other in October.

For now, September belongs to the Braves.

"Did we want it to be on our field? No," Phillies slugger Kyle Schwarber said. "But they're going to have to do it somewhere. The focus is on us, still. We're going to

keep pushing until the very end."

Riley, one of many big boppers in the lineup, gave the Braves all the runs they needed when he connected off Christopher Sánchez (2-4) in the first for his 35th homer.

"I try not to think of moments like that," Riley said. "You just try and go up there and have a good at-bat. I've put a lot of pressure on myself this year to perform in those moments. I was able to put a good swing on there."

Sánchez struck out a career-best 10 in 7 1/3 innings, but the Phillies have still lost five of seven.

"We'll bounce back," manager Rob Thomson said. "This group has been resilient all year."

Scherzer to miss remainder of regular season

Associated Press

TORONTO — Texas right-hander Max Scherzer will miss the rest of the regular season, and likely wouldn't be able to pitch in the playoffs if the Rangers make the postseason, because of a strained muscle in his shoulder.

Rangers general manager Chris Young said an MRI on Wednesday revealed a low-grade strain of the teres major muscle that won't require surgery. That came a day after Scherzer departed his start at Toronto in the sixth inning.

"In some ways I was almost relieved that it's not worse. It's not surgery," Scherzer said. "Talking with the doctors, I fully expect to make a full recovery."

Young said team physician Dr. Keith Meister feels confident that the injury will fully heal with rest, and Scherzer said he needed a couple of weeks of not throwing. But there are only 2 1/2 weeks left in the regular season as the Rangers try to make the playoffs for the first time since 2016.



Scherzer

"Unfortunately, the timing of the schedule isn't going to line up to where we can provide him rest, and he'll still pitch again, certainly before the regular season," said Young, who was then asked about the postseason. "I don't want to rule it out at this point. We'll see where the next two weeks go and how he's feeling. That said, it's probably unlikely."

The Rangers recalled right-handed reliever Jonathan Hernández from Triple-A Round Rock. Young didn't say how they will fill Scherzer's spot in the rotation, other than that it will be somebody already on the 28-man roster.

Scherzer, whose 3,367 career strikeouts are the most among active pitchers, will be re-evaluated in two weeks. He finished the season 13-6 with a 3.77 ERA in 27

Wild card

AMERICAN LEAGUE				
	W	L	Pct	WCGB
Tampa Bay	90	57	.612	+8 1/2
Texas	81	64	.559	+ 1/2
Seattle	81	65	.555	—
Toronto	80	66	.548	— 1

NATIONAL LEAGUE				
	W	L	Pct	WCGB
Philadelphia	79	67	.541	+3 1/2
Chicago	78	69	.531	+2
Arizona	76	71	.517	—
Cincinnati	76	71	.517	—
Miami	75	71	.514	1/2
San Francisco	75	71	.514	1/2

starts for the Mets and Rangers, striking out 174 in 152 2/3 innings. Texas acquired the three-time Cy Young Award winner from New York just before the trade deadline, a deal that included Scherzer exercising his 2024 option that is worth \$43.33 million and will be paid mostly by the Mets.

"I've got to listen to what my body says," Scherzer said. "I'll throw a ball when I can throw a ball, but it sounds like I'm not go-

ing to be able to throw a ball for a little bit."

Toronto was his third consecutive abbreviated start. The eight-time All-Star allowed three hits and struck out two in 5 1/3 scoreless innings Tuesday night, getting the win as the Rangers leapfrogged Toronto into the second AL wild-card spot.

Scherzer allowed a season-high seven runs, all on three homers, while throwing 60 pitches in three innings against Houston on Sept. 6. That was five days after he threw one-hit ball over six scoreless innings against Minnesota, but left after 88 pitches and later said he had some forearm tightness.

"This team has shown a ton of resolve all season long. We've lost five of six All-Stars in the second half at different periods. We've now lost a future Hall of Fame pitcher," Young said. "Yet here we are in a great position to make a run here at the end of the season and make a playoff push."

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Baltimore	91	54	.628	—
Tampa Bay	90	57	.612	2
Toronto	80	66	.548	11 1/2
Boston	73	72	.503	18
New York	73	72	.503	18

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	76	70	.521	—
Cleveland	69	78	.469	7 1/2
Detroit	66	79	.455	9 1/2
Chicago	56	90	.384	20
Kansas City	46	101	.313	30 1/2

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	83	64	.565	—
Texas	81	64	.559	1
Seattle	81	65	.555	1 1/2
Los Angeles	68	79	.463	15
Oakland	46	100	.315	36 1/2

National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Atlanta	96	50	.658	—
Philadelphia	79	67	.541	17
Miami	75	71	.514	21
New York	67	78	.462	28 1/2
Washington	65	81	.445	31

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	81	64	.559	—
Chicago	78	69	.531	4
Cincinnati	76	71	.517	6
Pittsburgh	68	78	.466	13 1/2
St. Louis	65	81	.445	16 1/2

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	88	57	.607	—
Arizona	76	71	.517	13
San Francisco	75	71	.514	13 1/2
San Diego	69	78	.469	20
Colorado	53	92	.366	35

x-clinched division

Wednesday's games

Tampa Bay 5, Minnesota 4
 Seattle 3, L.A. Angels 2
 San Francisco 6, Cleveland 5, 10 innings
 St. Louis 1, Baltimore 0
 Texas 10, Toronto 0
 Cincinnati 4, Detroit 3
 Houston 6, Oakland 2
 Kansas City 7, Chicago White Sox 1
 Colorado 7, Chicago Cubs 3
 Atlanta 4, Philadelphia 1
 Pittsburgh 7, Washington 6
 N.Y. Mets 7, Arizona 1
 Miami 2, Milwaukee 0
 San Diego 6, L.A. Dodgers 1
 N.Y. Yankees at Boston, ppd.

Thursday's games

Washington at Pittsburgh
 Cincinnati at Detroit
 N.Y. Yankees at Boston, 2
 Miami at Milwaukee
 Arizona at N.Y. Mets
 Texas at Toronto
 Tampa Bay at Baltimore
 Minnesota at Chicago White Sox
 San Francisco at Colorado

Friday's games

N.Y. Yankees (TBD) at Pittsburgh (TBD)
 Atlanta (Elder 12-4) at Miami (TBD)
 Tampa Bay (Eflin 14-8) at Baltimore (Flaherty 8-8)
 Boston (TBD) at Toronto (Berrios 10-10)
 Cincinnati (Greene 4-6) at N.Y. Mets (Peterson 3-8)
 Texas (TBD) at Cleveland (Giolito 7-13)
 Minnesota (TBD) at Chicago White Sox (Scholtens 1-8)
 Houston (Javier 9-3) at Kansas City (Greinke 1-15)
 Washington (TBD) at Milwaukee (TBD)
 Philadelphia (Nola 12-9) at St. Louis (Thompson 5-5)
 San Francisco (TBD) at Colorado (Lambert 3-7)
 Detroit (TBD) at L.A. Angels (Canning 7-6)
 Chicago Cubs (Steele 16-3) at Arizona (TBD)
 San Diego (Lugo 6-7) at Oakland (Newcomb 1-0)
 L.A. Dodgers (Miller 9-3) at Seattle (Kirby 10-9)

Saturday's games

Boston at Toronto
 San Diego at Oakland
 Atlanta at Miami
 Texas at Cleveland
 N.Y. Yankees at Pittsburgh
 Tampa Bay at Baltimore
 Houston at Kansas City
 Cincinnati at N.Y. Mets
 Minnesota at Chicago White Sox
 Washington at Milwaukee
 Philadelphia at St. Louis
 Chicago Cubs at Arizona
 San Francisco at Colorado
 Detroit at L.A. Angels
 L.A. Dodgers at Seattle

MLB/NBA



MATT SLOCUM (ACUÑA), RYAN SUN (BETTS)/AP

The Braves' Ronald Acuña Jr., left, and the Dodgers' Mookie Betts, right, celebrate after hitting home runs. Acuña had been considered the favorite for the NL MVP for months, but Betts has been stellar in the second half of the season to lift the Dodgers to the top of the NL West.

Epic showdown for NL MVP highlights tight award races

BY DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

Ronald Acuña Jr. has the kind of numbers that make the young Atlanta Braves star a no-doubter for the National League MVP award.

Then again, so does Dodgers standout Mookie Betts. And his teammate, Freddie Freeman.

It's getting close to the postseason for Major League Baseball, which also means it's close to award season. Some of the races are tighter than others, and it appears the NL MVP race is a particularly epic chase.

Acuña has been the favorite for months. He's the catalyst for a robust Braves offense that leads the big leagues by scoring nearly six runs per game. The 25-year-old outfielder even created his very own club this season, becoming the one and only player in MLB history with at least 30 homers and 60 stolen bases.

Who could beat that?

Well, Betts is certainly trying. The 2018 AL MVP has somehow put himself into the discussion with a stellar second half that has propelled the Dodgers to the top of the NL West. He's batting .311 with 37 doubles, 39 homers, 103 RBIs and 11 stolen bases — all while moving between right field, second base and even shortstop.

If advanced metrics are your thing, Betts has a 7.9 Wins Above Replacement while Acuña is at 7.3, according to FanGraphs.

Then there's Freeman, the 2020 NL MVP, who is batting .339 with 55 doubles, 26 homers, 93 RBIs and 18 stolen bases.

NL MVP

The favorite: Acuña Jr.

In the mix: Betts, Freeman, Matt Olson (Braves).

The race: It still feels like Acuña is a sizable favorite thanks to a combination of speed and power. Betts and Freeman are also poised to receive plenty of love from voters. Olson, a 51-homer first baseman, has been a force all season.

AL MVP

The favorite: Shohei Ohtani, Los Angeles Angels.

In the mix: Corey Seager (Rangers), Marcus Semien (Rangers), Kyle Tucker (Astros).

The race: Ohtani's likely got this one wrapped up. His two-way prowess was derailed by a torn elbow

ligament in August, but for five months, he treated baseball fans to one of the most impressive performances in MLB history. Seager and Semien have been fantastic for the Rangers. Tucker has emerged as an under-the-radar star.

NL Cy Young

The favorite: Blake Snell, San Diego Padres.

In the mix: Zac Gallen (Diamondbacks), Justin Steele (Cubs), Spencer Strider (Braves).

The race: This one is still up for grabs in the season's final weeks. Snell probably has the best overall numbers, but he'll be hurt by the fact that the Padres have underachieved. Gallen recently pitched a shutout against the Cubs, helping his case, but then he was knocked around by the Mets on Wednesday. Steele has come out of nowhere to be the ace for the surprising playoff contenders. It's hard to ignore Strider's 250 strikeouts.

AL Cy Young

The favorite: Gerrit Cole, New York Yankees.

In the mix: Luis Castillo (Mariners), Sonny Gray (Twins).

The race: The Yankees have been a huge disappointment this season, but it's not Cole's fault. The veteran right-hander has a 13-4 record, 2.79 ERA and 204 strikeouts. Castillo has been a key cog for the Mariners, who have made an unlikely charge up the standings.

NL Rookie of the Year

The favorite: Corbin Carroll, Arizona Diamondbacks.

In the mix: Spencer Steer (Reds), Kodai Senga (Mets), Matt McLain (Reds).

The race: Carroll has slowed a little in the second half, but he's still hit 24 homers and stole 47 bases, helping the Diamondbacks stay in the playoff race all year.

AL Rookie of the Year

The favorite: Gunnar Henderson, Baltimore Orioles.

In the mix: Josh Jung (Rangers), Triston Casas (Red Sox), Tanner Bibee (Guardians).

The race: Henderson's clearly the favorite, particularly after Jung was sidelined with an injury in August.

New policy limits stars sitting out

BY DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NBA took steps Wednesday to try to ensure that its star players appear in more games, particularly nationally televised matchups and the in-season tournament that is being added this year.

The league's board of governors approved a new player participation policy that will take effect for this upcoming season, replacing the player resting policy that was implemented prior to the 2017-18 season. The new rules focus primarily on star players — someone who has been an All-Star or on the All-NBA team in any of the prior three seasons. There are 50 players who fit into the star category.

"It's a shared view by everyone in the league, it's not just coming from the league office," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "I think whether it's our teams, our players association, individual players, I think there's an acknowledgement across the league that we need to return to that principle that this is an 82-game league. ... I think there's a statement of principle that if you're a healthy player in this league, the expectation is that you're going to play."

Increased player participation is a top priority for Silver as the league negotiates a new media rights deal. The current deal ends in 2025.

Teams will have to manage their rosters to ensure only one star player is unavailable per game at the most.

"What we've tried to do as the league office is work through all the different issues recognizing the genuine concern from the fans and of course the media that's paying for the opportunity to broadcast those games," Silver said.

The league will have the ability

"If you're a healthy player in this league, the expectation is that you're going to play."

Adam Silver
NBA commissioner

to penalize teams that violate the policy by fining them \$100,000 for the first infraction and \$250,000 for the second. Each successive violation will increase by \$1 million.

The NBA also wants teams to maintain a balance between the number of one-game absences a star player has at home and on the road, as well as refrain from any long-term shutdowns where a star player stops playing games.

The league will allow teams to submit written requests in advance for older players for back-to-back games. This is for a small pool of stars who are either 35 or older at the start of the season or have played over 34,000 regular-season minutes or 1,000 games in their careers. LeBron James, Kevin Durant and Stephen Curry all fit in that category.

"The Players Association was very much a part of it," Silver said of discussions on the new policy. "We had extensive discussions with them and then with individual groups of players, particularly the veterans in the league, about how they thought we should be approaching it."

Teams will be able to make other requests to have players miss games that include personal reasons, player's prior injury history and end-of-season flexibility.



RICK BOWMER/AP

The Timberwolves' Karl-Anthony Towns, left, and Rudy Gobert sit on the bench during the first half of a game in February.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Two weeks in, SEC looking vulnerable

Surprising 1-4 record against ACC highlights lackluster start to season

By CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

The mighty Southeastern Conference, which has claimed 13 of the last 17 national championships, including four straight, looks far more vulnerable than anyone expected and the slow start could be important when teams are competing for playoff spots.

The SEC's 1-4 record against Atlantic Coast Conference teams ranks as perhaps the biggest surprise of the young season. The league also has been humbled in other high-profile matchups, including Texas beating then-No. 3 Alabama 34-24 and Florida falling at Utah, 24-11.

The SEC's 3-6 record against Power Five teams includes two attention-grabbing losses against ACC teams. Florida State beat LSU and North Carolina rolled past South Carolina on the opening weekend. Texas A&M was also clobbered at Miami.

More signs of SEC mediocrity came last week when Auburn had to rally to beat California 14-10 and Kentucky struggled to beat FCS team Eastern Kentucky, 28-17.

The league's customary strength-of-schedule advantage with the College Football Playoff committee may be in jeopardy this year. A one-loss team that is not the SEC champion may have a more difficult argument for a playoff spot against a one-loss team from another league, includ-

ing the ACC and Big 12.

Would No. 1 Georgia, the two-time defending national champion still sitting atop the AP Top 25, have more reason to worry about the implication of a loss? Georgia coach Kirby Smart noted all those SEC losses in the first two weeks came against quality opponents as his Bulldogs prepared for their SEC opener against South Carolina on Saturday.

"I really have no idea," Smart said when asked about the league's rough start. "I mean, I can't put a finger on it or explain it. I think that every team you mentioned that beat an SEC team is a really good team, really, really good teams. And most of those teams have been improving for a while."

Florida coach Billy Napier suggested patience when evaluating the league.

"I do think as we settle in here, the end of the year typically, I think you'll be able to evaluate that more," Napier said.

Kentucky coach Mark Stoops remained optimistic even after the Wildcats trailed Eastern Kentucky until late in the first half.

"We know we will get better," Stoops said. "... We are 2-0. And there are plenty of teams around the country that have a lot to do."

The league's only win over an ACC team came in Tennessee's 49-13 rout of Virginia on Sept. 2. The Vols dropped two spots to No. 11 in the Top 25 following their lackluster 30-13 win over Austin



DOUG MURRAY/AP

Miami safety Kamren Kinchens recovers the ball fumbled by Texas A&M running back Amari Daniels. Texas A&M's 48-33 loss to Miami is one four losses by the SEC against ACC teams.

Peay. The uninspiring performance led to a players-only meeting to refocus for this week's game at Florida.

"It was a great meeting for us honestly just because it allowed everybody to see that we all still have the same page, flush the game that happened and let's just continue to go work this week," said Vols defensive lineman Omari Thomas.

Mews giving big returns

Georgia's Mekhi Mews, a 5-foot-8 walk-on wide receiver, leads the SEC and ranks second in

the nation with 130 yards on five punt returns. He returned a punt 69 yards for a touchdown in last week's 45-3 win over Ball State. The speedy Mews also leads the Bulldogs with six catches for 102 yards.

"I've seen it every day since he came in here," said wide receiver Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint. "Him being on scout teams, just going out there against the ones and just giving everybody the blues. Every day he makes plays. That's all he does. Those little runs, that's what he does on a daily basis."

Tennessee's Dee Williams, a

cornerback, ranks third in the nation — right behind Mews — with 123 punt return yards in two games.

Williams, a junior-college transfer, is a senior in his second season with the Vols. After missing the first four games last season with an injury, he had 281 yards on 15 returns for an SEC-best 18.7 yards per return. He had a 73-yard punt return for a touchdown against Vanderbilt in the regular-season finale.

AP sports writers Gary Graves, Mark Long, Teresa Walker and John Zenor contributed to this report.

Florida's Napier trying to end skid in rivalries

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — A week after snapping a four-game losing streak, Florida has a chance to end another — arguably more important — slide.

The Gators (1-1) have dropped four consecutive rivalry games, going 0-4 against Tennessee, LSU, Georgia and Florida State in coach Billy Napier's first season in Gainesville. They will try to halt the skid against the 11th-ranked Volunteers (2-0) in the Swamp on Saturday night.

"It's a big week," Napier said. "Anytime you play a rival, it's a big game. Eastern Division opponent, SEC game. When it comes to the SEC, there's magnitude here as a program."

Napier became the first football coach in school history to lose to all four rivals in the same season, a dubious feat that much-maligned

**No. 14 LSU (1-1)
at Mississippi State (2-0)**
AFN-Atlantic
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

predecessors Jim McElwain, Will Muschamp and Ron Zook managed to avoid.

Napier clearly understands the stakes. He spent considerable time during training camp educating his players about their rivals: he showed highlight videos from games dating back decades and brought in guest lecturers who have experienced wins and losses in those all-important series.

Former Florida greats Kevin Carter, Mike Peterson and Brandon Spikes were among those who spoke. The trio enjoyed plenty of success against the Vols in their heydays, winning a combined 10 of 12 matchups.

"For me, it's understanding the

**South Carolina (1-1)
at No. 1 Georgia (2-0)**
AFN-Sports
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

emotion behind it, the passion," said Florida quarterback Graham Mertz, who transferred from Wisconsin. "I've been a part of rivalries. Just understanding the newness of it. For me, it's gaining that appreciation for what's come before me, really being able to honor that."

Carter (1991-94) and Peterson (1995-98) lost just once to Tennessee under coach Steve Spurrier; Spikes (2006-09) won all four meetings under coach Urban Meyer.

Spurrier tormented rivals over the years, whether it was with high-scoring offense or with not-so-playful barbs and one-liners. Meyer was more passive-aggres-

**No. 11 Tennessee (2-0)
at Florida (1-1)**
AFN-Sports
1 a.m. Sunday CET
8 a.m. Sunday JKT

sive, putting logos in urinals and refusing to call certain opponents by name.

Napier is taking a more systematic approach.

"We did some work there relative to going back and really educating everyone on the history and the magnitude of the game," he said. "Do you understand that this was THE GAME at one point in time in college football relative to the SEC, the Eastern Division and certainly the national championship picture?"

The Tennessee-Florida winner advanced to the SEC title games 12 times in 17 years between 1993 and 2009. Two-time defending national champion Georgia has since

become the team to beat in the East, having won the division five of the last six years.

Tennessee and Florida have the potential to close the gap on the Bulldogs. Napier, though, has some doubters.

While several second-year coaches enjoyed immediate turnarounds — TCU's Sonny Dykes, USC's Lincoln Riley and LSU's Brian Kelly — others have shown signs of being on the right track. Duke's Mike Elko, Miami's Mario Cristobal and Washington State's Jake Dickert notched signature wins early in Year 2.

Napier, meanwhile, has lost six consecutive games to teams ranked in the Top 25 since beating Utah to open the 2022 season.

Coming off a victory in Knoxville last season, the Volunteers are trying to win consecutive games in the series for the first time since 2003-04.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



CHRIS JACKSON/AP

West Virginia's Hudson Clement makes one his three touchdown catches in front of Duquesne's Javon Colston last weekend. Clement, who had 177 yards, gets his first chance to play against rival Pittsburgh.

Newcomers, transfers get taste of 'Backyard Brawl'

By JOHN RABY
Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — West Virginia's Hudson Clement has met every challenge so far in his young career.

The "Backyard Brawl" against rival Pittsburgh will test his mettle and then some.

The redshirt freshman will be among a group of players getting their first significant snaps in the rivalry being played for the 106th time Saturday night between schools separated by 75 miles and woven by mutual contempt.

The rosters for West Virginia (1-1) and Pittsburgh (1-1) have gone through considerable changes since the Panthers beat the Mountaineers 38-31 in Pittsburgh a year ago, when the rivalry resumed following an 11-year hiatus. West Virginia alone had to replace its top four receivers, its leading rusher and several players along the defensive line and the secondary.

A walk-on receiver, Clement didn't play at West Virginia last season. In 2021, he set a West Virginia high school record with eight touchdowns for Martinsburg High School in the state championship game and won the Randy Moss Award as the state's top receiver.

Minutes before kickoff last week, Clement learned he would get his first start against Championship Subdivision Duquesne when Devin Carter was held back after getting banged up at practice. Clement responded with 177

Pittsburgh (1-1)
at West Virginia (1-1)
AFN-Sports2
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

receiving yards and three touchdowns in the 56-17 win and was rewarded with a scholarship after the game.

His infectious smile only got bigger when asked about Pitt.

"Growing up, you see that rivalry all the time and you see the atmosphere and you just think about playing in it," Clement said. "Going into this, it's crazy."

On the other side, Panthers quarterback Phil Jurkovec (Boston College) and safety Donovan McMillon (Florida) transferred in this season and attended high school in the Pittsburgh area. Wide receiver Daejon Reynolds also arrived from Florida.

"I was pretty young the last time they played, what was it, 12 years ago?" McMillon said. "Not many memories."

Oh, but the stories that can be told.

As football-playing members of the original Big East conference, West Virginia was a four-touchdown favorite in 2007 when visiting Pittsburgh won 13-9 to deny the second-ranked Mountaineers a spot in the national championship game and close out the Rich Rodriguez era in Morgantown.

Two years later, Pittsburgh was ranked No. 8 when Tyler Bitancurt's fourth field goal of the game, a 43-yarder as time ex-

pired, lifted West Virginia to a 19-16 win. In 2011, West Virginia earned a comeback 21-20 win en route to an appearance in the Orange Bowl.

A year later, West Virginia joined the Big 12. Pitt left for the ACC in 2013 and the rivalry went on hiatus.

McMillon watched last year's Pitt win from his dorm room at Florida. He took video on his phone of cornerback M.J. Devonshire's fourth-quarter interception return for a touchdown that gave the Panthers the victory.

Earlier this month he showed the video to Devonshire when it popped up as an anniversary mention on his social media timeline.

"Now that I'm actually able to play this game, it's an awesome experience," McMillon said.

For the second straight year, Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi had West Virginia's fight song and John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads" blaring on loudspeakers during practices.

"We're playing all West Virginia music. Every day. At all times," McMillon said. "And making sure that it's so annoying that whenever we get out there, we're going to punch them in the mouth."

While conference realignment has changed the college football landscape and forced some rivalries to cease, Pittsburgh and West Virginia are set to play six more times through 2032. Both coaches have indicated they'd like the game to be played every season.

Depth: FSU especially effective on third down

FROM PAGE 32

ond season of Power Five football and help continue the program's ascent. While the sack numbers aren't there yet this fall, defensive coordinator Adam Fuller said, "I thought his game against Southern Miss was actually even a cleaner game than it was against LSU."

As Florida State (2-0) opens ACC play at Boston College (1-1) on Saturday — and with a showdown at Clemson looming on Sept. 23 — the Seminoles have shown off a veteran, deep front and are 15th in the FBS in third-down conversion defense (allowing just 6 of 23 conversions).

One unexpected source of pressure on opposing quarterbacks is defensive tackle Dennis Briggs, who has a sack in each game. Briggs had just four sacks in his prior five seasons at Florida State.

Another defensive tackle who has impressed is Joshua Farmer, who had a sack in his first start against LSU. All of this is happening without Darrell Jackson, a transfer who had his waiver to play this fall declined by the NCAA in August.

Behind an aggressive front, Florida State's defense halted LSU on all three of its fourth-down attempts and held the Tigers to 3-for-10 on third-down attempts. On Saturday, Southern Miss didn't convert any of its five third-down attempts in the first half.

"I thought we were dominant," Fuller said. "There were a lot of three-and-outs in there."

A dominant and rested line is one of the reasons why. And the Seminoles feel they are just getting started.

"We're not perfect," Lovett said. "We're not where we want to be. But we're working to get there."



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Florida State defensive lineman Braden Fiske, left, arrived in Tallahassee through the transfer portal from Western Michigan.

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Dolphins' defense looking to adjust

Miami won despite surrendering 234 rushing yards to Chargers

By ALANIS THAMES
Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Jevon Holland didn't want to make excuses after the Miami Dolphins' defense gave up 234 rushing yards in a season-opening win over the Los Angeles Chargers.

"We need to be better," the third-year safety said. "Plain and simple."

Growing pains were expected as the Dolphins transition to the scheme of new coordinator Vic Fangio. They struggled to get pressure with their front four in the opener and were gashed on the ground after finishing 2022 with the league's fourth-best run defense.

Coach Mike McDaniel praised the defense for ultimately sealing the win with two timely sacks of Justin Herbert on the Chargers' final drive, but said he wants to see a "constant mode of progression" from the unit this week as the team prepares to face New England on Sunday night.

"I think there's a lot of people with the right motivations that were trying to independently make plays and not thinking about technique and fundamentals," McDaniel said.

Miami made several changes in the offseason intended to bolster a defense that finished 18th overall and 27th against the pass in 2022 — partially because of injuries in the secondary.



**Miami Dolphins (1-0)
at New England Patriots (0-1)**
AFN-Sports
2:20 a.m. Monday CET
9:20 a.m. Monday JKT

The Dolphins traded for All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey in March, but he tore the meniscus in his left knee at the start of training camp and will miss the first part of the season. They also signed linebacker David Long Jr. after he spent the past four seasons with Tennessee.

Long played just 17 snaps against the Chargers, which McDaniel said was dictated by the game plan. Long, who had two interceptions last year, said he feels the defense will get better as players get more comfortable in the new scheme.

"Look to your left and your right," Long said Wednesday. "We've got dogs all across the board. We need to hold ourselves to a better standard, and I think we took that initiative today."

Linebacker Jaelan Phillips said the Dolphins didn't "earn the right" to rush the passer Sunday because they offered little resistance against the run. The Chargers aver-



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Los Angeles Chargers running back Austin Ekeler stiff-arms Miami Dolphins safety Jevon Holland during the first half Sept. 10 in Inglewood, Calif. The Dolphins won 36-34, overcoming a poor defensive performance.

aged 5.8 yards per rush and converted on 60% of their third-down attempts.

"They weren't really drop-back passing too often," Phillips said. "The few drop-back passes they did have, it's kind of hard to get in a rhythm when they're just running the ball on you. You've got to stop the run before you can actually get to those third-and-long situations."

Phillips, who combined with cornerback Justin Bethel for the game-sealing sack, added that it's something to correct with "discipline and technique" as the Dolphins

prepare for Week 2, knowing that Bill Belichick's team will look to exploit the defense in the same ways.

"It's a copycat league," he said, "so anytime you're assessing somebody on film and you see that a certain play or certain formation has success, you're most likely going to go out there and try to repeat that success. So we're going to have to go out there and set the tone and prove that we can stop the run."

The Dolphins have won four of their last five matchups with New England, including a 20-7 win in Week 1 last year when they held the

Patriots to 78 yards rushing. Miami sacked Mac Jones twice and intercepted him while limiting the Patriots to 271 total yards.

New England brought in coordinator Bill O'Brien in an attempt to improve its offense.

"Bill O'Brien has always done a really good job," McDaniel said, "and I think they're doing some things that — you can tell when there's connectivity between coach and quarterback, and there's stuff that he's playing very confident in. It's a good litmus test when the quarterback is playing better."

Pederson seeking 1st win against mentor, friend Reid

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Doug Pederson has known Andy Reid for nearly 30 years.

He played for Reid in Green Bay (1996-98) and then Philadelphia (1999). He spent seven years coaching under Reid in Philadelphia (2009-12) and then Kansas City (2013-15).

They share offensive philosophies, coaching principles and core beliefs.

They'll share the field for the third time in 10 months when Pederson and the Jacksonville Jaguars (1-0) host Reid and the Kansas City Chiefs (0-1) on Sunday. And Pederson is still looking for a breakthrough victory against his mentor and close friend.

"I got a ton of respect for Coach Reid and his career and what he's done," Pederson said Wednesday. "I've played for him. I worked for him and obviously you'd love to eventually win a football game against him."



ED ZURGA/AP

Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Doug Pederson, left, and Kansas City Chiefs head coach Andy Reid are set to meet for the first time since the Chiefs beat the Jaguars in a divisional playoff game Jan. 21.

Pederson is 0-3 in head-to-head matchups against Reid, with all three of those played at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City.

The Chiefs beat Pederson and Philadelphia 27-20 in Week 2 of the

2017 season; the Eagles rebounded and ultimately won the Super Bowl. The Chiefs swept the Jaguars last season, winning 27-17 in Week 10 and 27-20 in the divisional round of the AFC playoffs.

Pederson still laments the most recent one. His defense gave up a 98-yard drive with Patrick Mahomes (sprained ankle) sidelined in the second quarter. His offense had two chances to tie the game in the third and couldn't move the ball past midfield, and then turned the ball over twice in the fourth.

"There were some missed opportunities by us," Pederson recalled. "Those were critical and those were big and all of that. But I felt like, too, we just missed the opportunities that were there. Whether that's the outcome of the game or not, who knows?"

"Maybe fortunately for us it's a learning experience and something that our young football team can take away from moments like that. When you're playing good teams like this and defending world championship teams, you can't make those mistakes and expect to win."

Reid has noticed similarities between Kansas City and Jacksonville, especially on the offensive side of the ball.

It's no surprise, either, given how much Pederson studied and learned while playing and coaching under Reid.

"Everywhere you go, you take a piece of it and put it in there," Reid said. "I think he's probably put his own flair on things. I'm sure there are things he does that he took from here, but we were together a long time."

The Chiefs are 3½-point favorites, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. Jacksonville went 5-0 as home underdogs last season, the best single-season mark by any team in the Super Bowl era.

"It'll be a good test for early in the season to see where we're at," Jaguars receiver Christian Kirk said. "It's big for us, Week 2, to really get a taste of the caliber of football and the level of football that we want to play. We're going to have to beat teams like this to get to where we want to go."

"It's really important for us to approach it that way and see how we respond."

NFL



MATT DURISKO/AP

San Francisco 49ers wide receiver Brandon Aiyuk catches a touchdown pass Sept. 10 in Pittsburgh. Aiyuk is becoming one of the most dangerous players on a 49ers team that already has several playmakers.

49ers' Aiyuk earning focus, respect from other teams

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Defenses preparing to face the San Francisco 49ers have plenty to worry about with three playmakers who have been All-Pros in recent seasons.

There's running back Christian McCaffrey, who once topped 1,000 yards rushing and receiving in the same season. Then there's Deebo Samuel, who had 1,770 yards from scrimmage two years ago as a dynamic pass catcher and runner. Throw in George Kittle, who has the second-most yards receiving among all tight ends since 2018.

It might be time to add receiver Brandon Aiyuk to that mix.

Aiyuk showed how dangerous he can be in San Francisco's offense when he had eight catches for 129 yards and two TDs in a season-opening win at Pittsburgh that sent other defenses a message that he should be feared, too.

"I really don't care too much about respect no more," Aiyuk said. "I just come out here and do my job."

After following up a promising rookie year in 2020 with a stint in coach Kyle Shanahan's doghouse the following year, Aiyuk has done just that since the start of last season.

He led San Francisco last season with 78 catches for 1,015 yards, but still came into this season a little overlooked. Steelers coach Mike Tomlin told reporters earlier this



San Francisco 49ers (1-0)
at Los Angeles Rams (1-0)
AFN-Sports2
10 p.m. Sunday CET
5 a.m. Monday JKT

week that Aiyuk was able to capitalize on all the focus Pittsburgh put on slowing down McCaffrey, Samuel and Kittle to post the most productive opener for a Niners receiver in more than two decades.

"That's what makes awesome units challenging," Tomlin said. "They got a lot of capable people who are able to rise up and make plays when others garner attention. I don't think any of that is surprising to us. His evolution, particularly over the latter half of last year, is kind of reflective of that performance. So, we tip our cap to him. He made a combat 50-50 catch for a touchdown. He made some other significant plays. He played a really good football game."

Aiyuk caught all eight of his targets last week and became the first San Francisco receiver to have at least 100 yards receiving and two TDs in an opener since J.J. Stokes did it in 1998.

He also delivered one of the plays of the game for San Francis-

co when he wasn't running a pass route. Aiyuk's bone-crushing block helped spring McCaffrey on a 65-yard TD run that broke the game open in the second half and was a highlight of the film review for the team.

"It was fun, it was lit," Aiyuk said. "Everybody was juiced up. Those are the type of plays that get our team going."

The commitment to blocking in the run game and the discipline to run routes the way Shanahan wants were missing a bit early in Aiyuk's second season.

He didn't even get a single target in the opener that season and had just 13 catches in the first seven games before turning his season — and career — around. Shanahan said the talent was always there for Aiyuk, but the biggest difference has been the consistency.

That led to the big performance in the opener, when Aiyuk was the focal point of the passing game.

"You never know which direction it's going to go each week," Shanahan said. "But the coolest thing about B.A. is how ready he came to play regardless. You see him on some of those run plays and stuff and from the beginning to the end. Usually when he is like that in the run game, it carries over to the pass game. The pass game's just a little more out of your control, but (Sunday) it all fell to him and he was ready for the moment and had a big-time game."

Raiders' Garoppolo building chemistry with his receivers

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

With Denver Broncos cornerback Patrick Surtain sticking to Davante Adams throughout Sunday's meeting with the Raiders, Jakobi Meyers kept getting open and Jimmy Garoppolo kept finding him.

That connection between two of the newest Raiders was critical in Las Vegas opening its season with a 17-16 victory. Garoppolo threw 10 passes Meyers' way, and he caught nine for 81 yards and two touchdowns.

Now Garoppolo might have to look elsewhere when the Raiders play at Buffalo on Sunday because Meyers is in the concussion protocol. That could mean more than nine targets Adams received at Denver and certainly more than the zero Hunter Renfrow and rookie tight end Michael Mayer had.

Garoppolo is working with his receivers this week at The Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. The Raiders are there to acclimate to the Eastern time zone before playing the Bills.

"They all pull for each other," Garoppolo said. "It's even in the run game and you see those guys crack-block safeties. That takes some commitment as a receiver, and we got a good group of guys. They're fun to mesh with. I think our relationship is growing every day out here, but we're in a good spot."

Garoppolo showed his willingness against the Broncos to put his body on the line.

He ran up the middle for an 8-yard gain on the game's first drive and took a shot that temporarily sent him to the blue medical tent



Las Vegas Raiders (1-0)
at Buffalo Bills (0-1)
AFN-Atlantic
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

for a concussion check. Garoppolo sealed the victory with an 8-yard scramble on third-and-7.

He also showed mental toughness in bouncing back from an end-zone interception by leading the winning touchdown drive in the fourth quarter and then draining the final 5:08 off the clock.

"He's not going to tell you to do anything that he wouldn't do," Adams said. "He's the type of guy that you wouldn't mind getting behind because you can feel that passion and that fire, especially in the moment. He went out there and made a critical mistake in the red zone and then bounced back on the next drive with a hell of a drive. That's not easy to do."

It was Garoppolo's first game since breaking his left foot on Dec. 4 while playing for the San Francisco 49ers. He missed all of organized team activities and minicamp before hitting the field for training camp.

"Felt like a lifetime ago I played, so it was good to get back out there, get those juices flowing, the crowd, you can't hear anything at the line of scrimmage," Garoppolo said. "It's those moments that you live for as a quarterback, especially."



JACK DEMPSEY/AP

Las Vegas Raiders quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo (10) has been working to build chemistry with his receivers, including Davante Adams (17), before the Raiders' next game against the Buffalo Bills.

SPORTS



Six straight division titles

Braves clinch NL East with win over Phillies » **MLB, Page 26**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



Showcasing its depth

PHIL SEARS/AP

Florida State preseason All-American Jared Verse is part of a veteran defensive front that had four sacks in the opener against LSU and two more last week against Southern Miss.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Defensive lineman Fabien Lovett says the Seminoles are "going to be the best in the nation. It won't be no ifs, ands or buts about it."

Following championship model, Florida St. uses frequent rotation on defensive front

BY BOB FERRANTE
Associated Press

Expectations were extremely high for defensive end Jared Verse at Florida State, yet the preseason All-American has just two tackles and two quarterback hurries in two games.

Verse has drawn double teams and attention, but a veteran Seminoles' defensive front has demonstrated it is more than a one-man show. No. 3 Florida State had four sacks in the season-opening win over LSU and tacked on two more last week against Southern Miss, which scored just three points in the first half against the first-team defense.

"We're going to be the best in the nation," defensive tackle Fabien Lovett said. "It won't be no

**No. 3 Florida State (2-0)
at Boston College (1-1)**
AFN-Sports2
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

ifs, ands or buts about it. We're just focused on the best we can be each day, every rep."

Coach Mike Norvell and his staff have made an emphasis of accumulating defensive line talent in an effort to minimize how many reps the Seminoles will log each game. Verse arrived from FCS school Albany in 2022, while defensive tackle Braden Fiske (Western Michigan) and defensive end Gilber Edmond (South Carolina) arrived through the transfer portal this offseason.

"Every play that they play, we want at an elite level, chasing the

ball, everything that we're doing, physicality," Norvell said. "And when you have good players, you can do that. I did an offseason study, looking at the past three or four national champions and there's only one defensive lineman on those teams that played over 50% of the snaps defensively. But you saw a lot of guys around 30-45%. It shows depth, it shows quality."

Norvell paused briefly and underscored another key point: "There's a lot of first-round draft picks that came from that."

Verse was projected to be a first-rounder in the 2023 draft by some analysts but chose to return because he felt he could improve as a run-stopper, learn from a sec-

SEE DEPTH ON PAGE 29

New policy will restrict number of games stars can sit » **NBA, Page 27**