

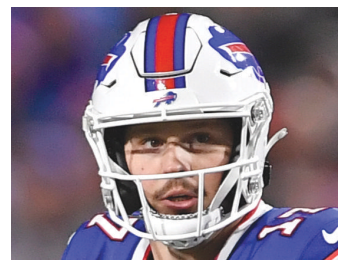
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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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MAXWELL ORLOSKY/U.S. Navy

Lt. Michael Burgoyne, assigned to the air department of the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, signals to launch an F/A-18E Super Hornet from the flight deck on Dec. 6. The Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group is currently operating in the Mediterranean Sea.

## Double duty

Analysts: Keeping 2nd carrier near Middle East adds strain on Navy

BY ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy's decision to keep two aircraft carriers near Israel will make it difficult to meet maintenance schedules unless one returns home by early next year, analysts say.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has ordered USS Gerald R. Ford and the cruiser USS Normandy to remain in the region for several more weeks, The Associated Press reported Friday.

Ford deployed from Norfolk, Va., in May, but had its November

homecoming delayed following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower arrived in the region in October for its scheduled deployment.

Beyond their immense combat and surveillance capabilities, the aircraft carriers serve as a potent political symbol of support for Israel, which has been criticized for civilian casualties and the displacement of most of Gaza's population during its war to annihilate Hamas.

But while the aircraft carriers have kept busy, they haven't



JACOB MATTINGLY/U.S. Navy

Aircraft carriers USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower sail with U.S. and allied ships in the Mediterranean on Nov. 3.

pushed their limits.

Ford conducted 2,489 sorties, or flights, from Oct. 9 through Dec. 7, Cmdr. Richlyn Ivey, a spokesperson for U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet, said in an Dec. 12 email. Eisenhower tallied 2,051 sorties from Oct. 24 through Dec. 7, she said.

That's a daily average of about

41 for Ford and 45 for Eisenhower. The carriers are designed to surge to as many as 270 and 240 sorties, respectively, over a 24-hour period, according to the Navy.

The service didn't offer additional details about the carriers' activities or operations. Besides

SEE DUTY ON PAGE 6

## Study says majority won't urge young adults to enlist

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
Stars and Stripes

A majority of Americans say they would discourage young people they know from joining the military, according to a new study in which nearly half of respondents also think veterans are likely to physically harm themselves.

The findings, detailed in a Rand Corp. report released Thursday, aimed to shed light on factors in the military's recent recruiting struggles.

However, when it comes to encouraging young people to seek a military career, much depends on whether that potential recruit is considering enlistment or joining the officer ranks, according to the study.

While 54.4% of people would discourage young people close to them from enlisting, 61.2% would encourage them to join through ROTC or a service academy, Rand said.

Although Democrats surveyed were less likely than Republicans to encourage enlistment, both groups were largely in favor of such pathways into the officer corps, the study found.

The negative sentiment toward enlistment exists even as most Americans hold generally positive views about those who have served in the military.

It's one of an array of conflicting views among respondents about service in the armed forces.

Meanwhile, overall public confidence in the military is declining.

Factors such as the end of the war in Afghanistan, heightened politicization of the military and increased polarization of the public shape that outlook, Rand said.

The report did not delve into

SEE ENLIST ON PAGE 6



BUSINESS/WEATHER

Southwest fined \$140M for holiday meltdown

*Associated Press*

DALLAS — Southwest Airlines will pay a \$35 million fine as part of a \$140 million agreement to settle a federal investigation into a debacle in December 2022 when the airline canceled thousands of flights and stranded more than 2 million travelers over the holidays.

Most of the settlement will go toward compensating future passengers, which the U.S. Department of Transportation considers an incentive for Southwest to avoid repeating last winter's mess.

The government said the assessment was the largest it has ever imposed on an airline for violating consumer protection laws.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said the settlement demonstrates his agency's resolve to make airlines take care of their passengers.

"This penalty should put all airlines on notice to take every step possible to ensure that a meltdown like this never happens again," he said.

Southwest said it was "grateful

to have reached a consumer-friendly settlement" giving the airline credit for compensation it already provided to customers. The airline said it has "learned from the event, and now can shift its entire focus to the future."

The assessment stems from nearly 17,000 canceled flights a year ago, starting as a winter storm paralyzed Southwest operations in Denver and Chicago and then snowballing when a crew rescheduling system couldn't keep up with the chaos.

EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (Dec. 19)	\$1.07	
British pound (Dec. 19)	\$1.24	
Japanese yen (Dec. 19)	138.00	
South Korean won (Dec. 19)	1268.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.2667	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3374	
China (Yuan)	7.1356	
Denmark (Krone)	6.8221	
Egypt (Pound)	30.9004	
Euro	0.9151	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7977	
Hungary (Forint)	352.05	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6523	
Japan (Yen)	142.98	
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3076	
Norway (Krone)	10.3674	
Philippines (Peso)	55.73	
Poland (Zloty)	3.97	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7513	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3321	
South Korea (Won)	1302.93	
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8684	
Thailand (Baht)	35.00	
Turkey (NewLira)	29.0554	
(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		5.40
30-year bond		4.01

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MILITARY

# N. Korea fires long-range ballistic missile

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

SUWON, South Korea — North Korea fired a long-range ballistic missile off its eastern coast at 8:34 a.m. Monday, hours after it fired a short-range missile the previous night, according to the South Korean military.

The long-range ballistic missile was launched at a lofted angle from the Pyongyang area toward the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, the Ministry of National Defense said in a text message to news reporters. It said the missile traveled over 620 miles.

South Korea's military can "overwhelmingly respond to any provocation" and "keep a close eye on North Korea's various activities," the ministry said in its message.

Monday's launch followed about 10 hours after North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile from the same area toward the East Sea at 10:38 p.m. Sunday. That missile flew 354 miles before splashing down.

The missile launch Sunday was "immediately captured, tracked and monitored" by South Korea, which shared the information with the U.S. and Japan, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement the same day.

The Joint Chiefs said the launch was "a clear provocation" that violated U.N. Security Council resolutions. North Korea has been banned by the Security Council from all ballistic missile activity since 2006.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in a statement said Sunday's short-range missile "does not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies."

The Monday launch marks the 24th ballistic missile fired by North Korea in 17 separate days of testing so far this year.



KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY/AP

**A photo from the North Korean government purports to show an intercontinental ballistic missile launched March 16 in Pyongyang, North Korea.**

An unidentified North Korean Defense Ministry spokesman on Sunday described the United States and South Korea as "hostile forces" that have destabilized the Korean Peninsula with their joint military drills, according to a statement in the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Washington and Seoul "have aggravated the situation in the Korean Peninsula with

their reckless military provocations" and "are going to finish the end of the year with a preview of a nuclear war," the statement said.

The launches also follow the arrival Sunday of a U.S. submarine arrived in South Korea. The USS Missouri docked in Busan, becoming the third American submarine to visit the Korean Peninsula this year, according

to a news release from the South Korean navy on Sunday.

The Missouri is a Virginia-class fast-attack sub whose mission includes anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, special operations and strike warfare, according to the Navy.

The USS Kentucky, an Ohio-class ballistic missile sub capable of launching nuclear weapons, arrived in Busan in July; the USS Santa Fe, a Los Angeles-class attack sub, docked four months later.

President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol agreed to regularly deploy strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula and to "engage in deeper, cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence" during a state visit at the White House in April, according to a joint statement at the time.

The U.S.-South Korea Nuclear Consultative Group, a collection of senior-level officials who jointly plan for Seoul's defense, convened their second meeting Friday in Washington, D.C.

The two sides acknowledged that their nuclear deterrent capabilities had deepened since their first meeting in July, according to a White House statement Friday.

"The United States reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to provide extended deterrence to [South Korea], backed by the full range of U.S. capabilities including nuclear," the statement said. "Any nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its allies is unacceptable and will result in the end of the Kim regime ..."

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## Aquilino 'very concerned' about China-Russia military ties

By MARI YAMAGUCHI  
*Associated Press*

TOKYO — The head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said Monday he is "very concerned" about increased joint military actions by China and Russia in the region.

Adm. John C. Aquilino spoke in Tokyo as another regional concern, North Korea, conducted its latest intercontinental ballistic missile test, underscoring the advancement of its capabilities.

Aquilino is meeting with Japanese defense officials ahead of a joint exercise, Keen Edge 24, early next year.

He urged China to stop escalating maritime confrontations with

its neighbors, and said its increasing military activity with Russia is a serious concern during Moscow's war in Ukraine.



Aquilino

the Russia-DPRK cooperation, and the fact that the only partner of the DPRK prior to that was (China), that's just a bad neighborhood and bad group to be in," Aquilino said.

North Korea has been pushing

to expand cooperation with Russia and China. There have been concerns that the North has supplied missiles and other ammunition to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, in exchange for obtaining Russian missile technology.

Chinese and Russian bombers had a joint flight last week over the East China Sea to the waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula, causing Japanese fighter jets to scramble against them, according to Japan's Defense Ministry.

Japan has territorial disputes with China over the Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands which Beijing also claims. It considers China a threat to national

security and is in the process of a rapid military buildup.

Japan is particularly concerned about China's increased joint activity with Russia's military around the Japanese coast.

China has growing tensions with other neighbors.

Standoffs between China and the Philippines over a number of disputed offshore areas in the South China Sea have escalated this year. The United States has warned China that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its treaty ally, if Filipino forces come under attack. China has warned the U.S. to stay away from what it calls a purely Asian dispute.

China also activated sonar in

waters where an Australian ship had divers working.

But China's flight and maritime close encounters with U.S. warplanes and ships have stopped since U.S. President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping agreed in November to stabilize their relationship and re-establish military communication.

But Aquilino's requested talks with his Chinese counterpart have been pending for three years, and he is waiting for China to respond to his renewed request.

"No reply yet," he said, other than the Chinese embassy saying they have to work out the technology to set up the call.

## Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria plan joint force to clear mines in Black Sea

By SELCAN HACAAGLU  
*Bloomberg News*

Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria plan a joint force to clear mines drifting into their areas of the Black Sea as part of the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The agreement, expected to be signed next month, would be the first major joint action of Black Sea

nations since President Vladimir Putin started the war on Ukraine in February 2022.

The defense ministers of the three countries are planning to hold a signing ceremony in Istanbul on Jan. 11, Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler said Saturday.

The coalition will try to tackle a

threat to a major trade route, especially for grains, and to protect energy-exploration vessels in the area. Turkey has detected an increasing number of Ukrainian and Russian mines drifting toward the Turkish straits, Guler said.

While all three countries in the joint force are NATO allies, it wouldn't be considered a NATO

operation, he said. Turkey opposes the presence of naval assets in the Black Sea from other NATO countries, including the US, arguing they could further fuel tensions in the region.

"The Black Sea can be managed by the countries that have a coast to the Black Sea, because we know that if someone from outside en-

ters, the peace of this place will be disturbed," Guler said. "But of course we will ask for help from our allies if we need it."

Turkey is working toward reviving a U.N.-backed deal that had eased global food prices by allowing Ukraine to ship its grain through the Black Sea, Guler also said.



PACIFIC

GAO to study care for DOD civilians in Japan

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

TOKYO — American civilians working on U.S. bases in Japan are celebrating plans for a probe into health care available to those supporting U.S. forces in that country and in the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Government Accountability Office study is required by the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill detailing defense policy, which was passed by the House on Thursday and is awaiting President Joe Biden’s signature.

American civilians working on military bases in Japan had complained when the Defense Health Agency, under a congressional mandate, on Jan. 1 limited chronic care at base hospitals to only beneficiaries under Tricare Prime, the military’s top-tier medical plan, which includes active-duty service members, their families and eligible retirees.

Department of Defense civilian workers, including agency employees, contractors, schoolteachers, analysts and others, were limited to space-available appointments only for sudden onset, or



**The 374th Medical Group, seen here Monday, treats civilian employees of the Defense Department at Yokota Air Base.**

acute ailments.

Two months later the DHA reversed itself and said DOD civilian employees in the Indo-Pacific region could seek treatment again at base hospitals for chronic health conditions like diabetes or high-blood pressure.

But they may only schedule appointments on a space-available

basis.

An earlier version of the defense legislation had required that the U.S. Indo-Pacific command study medical manning requirements and access to health care in the U.S. Forces Japan and Joint Region Marianas areas of responsibilities.

However, the law that was ultimately passed requires the study be conducted by the Comptroller General of the United States, who is the director of the GAO.

The office must submit an interim briefing to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees within 180 days of the bill’s enactment, with a final report to be submitted on a date agreed by the comptroller general and the committees.

The Japan Medical Advocacy group, which links civilians affected by changes to health care access on U.S. bases and has 1,500 followers, celebrated plans for the study in a Facebook post Saturday.

“After countless hours of tireless advocacy from our dedicated volunteers, Congress has officially taken a stand,” the post read. “They’ve called in the big guns — the Government Accountability Office — for an in-depth, independent study on healthcare access issues for both military and civilians stationed in Japan.”

The study isn’t just a routine check-up, the post states.

“Why does this matter? Because it’s about ensuring our total force receives the care they deserve,”

the post states.

One advocacy group follower, Jorgi Stever, left her job as a Department of Navy comptroller at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Friday for a position in the U.S., she said Monday.

“The medical situation was 70% of the reason I left,” she said by phone.

Stever, a government employee for 37 years, had recently extended her stay in Japan for another two years. But recent health issues, including arthritis and a thyroid condition, became an issue, she said.

The pressure of dealing with off-base medical facilities became too much of a distraction from her job, she said.

Civilians on military bases in Japan had hoped that the GAO would get involved, according to Alexandra Cumming, whose husband works as a DOD civilian attorney at Yokosuka.

“They are going to do a deep research drive,” Cummings, who volunteers with the advocacy group, said Monday by phone. “They can look at what health care is like out here and what it’s going to take to fix the problem.”

T-shirt campaign raises thousands for families of crash victims

**By KELLY AGEE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A woman in New Mexico with a connection to this airlift hub in Japan has raised thousands of dollars for the families of airmen killed in a November Osprey crash by selling T-shirts.

Staff Sgt. Brooke Ramirez, non-commissioned officer in-charge of information assurance at the 27<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Communications Squadron at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., made the T-shirt design and set up the fundraiser, which started Tuesday.

Ramirez, who enjoys drawing, started drawing the design displayed on the back of the shirts hearing about the crash, she said Thursday via a phone call.

The T-shirts come in black with the squadron insignia for the 353 Special Operations Wing, 21<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron and Detachment 1, 43rd Intelligence Squadron displayed across their fronts. A black bar crosses the front of each insignia, indicating memory and loss.

The back of the shirt carries the lost Osprey’s call sign, Gundam 22, with an image of an Osprey and the names of the eight airman who died in the crash. Across the bottom is the phrase “Til Valhalla.”

For many service members, Til Valhalla means until we meet again in Valhalla, Ramirez said.



**The front design of T-shirts for a fundrasier to help the families of a CV-22B Osprey crash.**

“No matter who or what you believe in – it is a sign of utmost respect and tells our Fallen that we will see them again one day.”

The CV-22B Osprey carrying eight American personnel crashed Nov. 29 off Yakushima, an island off the coast of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan’s four main islands, during a training mission. A preliminary investigation indicated equipment failure was the likely cause, Air Force Special Operations Command said Dec. 6.

The eight airmen killed in the crash were Maj. Jeffrey Hoernemann, Maj. Eric Spendlove, Maj. Luke Unrath, Capt. Terrell Brayman, Tech Sgt. Zachary Lavoy, Staff Sgt. Jake Turnage, Senior Airman Brian Johnson and Staff Sgt. Jake Galliher.

“I knew a few of the guys, any other military member knows another military member, we talked in passing, had a few good conversations,” Ramirez, from Newport, S.C., said. “I didn’t know them personally, but I knew them enough for their best to affect me.”

Ramirez and her husband, Adrien Ramirez, were stationed at Yokota from January 2020 to January 2023. Brooke Ramirez was part of the 374<sup>th</sup> Communication

As of Monday, 413 people have supported the fundraiser by purchasing 608 shirts and raising \$8,203 dollars, Ramirez said.

Some have left supportive messages on the fundraiser pages.

“Sending my love to all the family and friends affected by this tragedy,” Chelsea Morrison, spouse of a contractor at Yokota Air Base, posted on the fundraising page. “So proud of our Yokota community for pulling together and helping these families.”

Morrison, from Abilene, Texas, has lived in Japan for 10 plus years and told Stars and Stripes on Monday via Facebook Messenger that the crash “hits close to home” for her.

“I didn’t know any victims personally but have several friends who did and are connected to the squadron,” Morrison said. “This is home for me, and to see something so tragic happen to our community... it just breaks my heart, so I want to do as much as I can, even if it’s buying a shirt.”

The fundraiser is set to end Jan. 1, but will be extended if interest continues, Brooke Ramirez said.

All the money will be paid directly to the 353<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Wing for financial assistance to the Gundam 22 families, the T-shirt and donation site states.

“I just I hope it helps them,” Ramirez said. “I feel like even a little bit of support goes a long way.”



MILITARY

# Deadline approaching for Yokota toy drive

By **JUAN KING**  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan -- Airmen at this airlift hub are collecting toys, clothes and books until Wednesday for distribution to Japanese orphanages in western Tokyo.

The 374th Medical Group public health and mental health sections at Yokota Air Base, are taking donations of toys and other items for delivery until Wednesday, community health section chief Staff Sgt. Davin Alviento told Stars and Stripes by email Friday.

About six airmen from the group plan to deliver gifts to the Shisei-Gakusha orphanage in Tachikawa, approximately six miles south of the base.

"We feel honored that we can give back to the community and spread some holiday spirit during this time of the year to the children of Shisei-Gakusha," Alviento said. "Our Public Health flight is all about spreading positivity to others and it's our pleasure to continue this tradition every Christmas!"

Through collaboration with the city of Mizuho, airmen from the 374th Maintenance Group have delivered gifts for the past three years, according to maintenance commander Col. Michael Campos.



JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

**Airmen from the 374th Maintenance Group and Japanese citizens of Mizuho city pose inside city hall in western Tokyo, Japan, on Thursday.**

The maintenance group held a toy drive on base and delivered the donations on Thursday to the neighboring city.

"The bond that we have with the friendship association from Mizuho is phenomenal; they are always allowing us to participate in aspects of their culture, which is

great when you are overseas," Campos told Stars and Stripes in Mizuho.

"For us to be able to provide a little bit of our culture during the Christmas season, a period of friendship and gift-giving and it gives back to the community, we are definitely happy to do this," he

said.

Orphanages, including one in Mizuho, benefit annually from visits by units from the air base. Approximately 300 items were donated so far this year, including electronic toys, cameras, tableware, sporting goods, mini cars and books, base spokeswoman Sayano

Fukuoka told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

The collaboration between the base and Mizuho has been special to one resident of that Japanese community.

"They (airmen) are so friendly, they are all gentlemen and ladies and I just want to say thank you very much and the kids in this town will be very happy," Mizuho-Yokota Friendship Association member Emiko Yamazaki told Stars and Stripes during the toy drive.

Units at the base who have partnerships in the local communities can organize these toy drives any time.

"Units do not need to go through us unless it's an official base event," Yokota spokeswoman Kaori Matsukasa said by email Thursday.

Mizuho Mayor Hiroyuki Sugiura was glad for the visit and appreciated the donations.

"All the gifts from you will make all the kids happy," Sugiura said.

Items for infants to young adults can be brought to the base hospital and dropped off in those areas or at the United Services Organization's lobby until Wednesday. For more information call 225-5311.

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## US airman from Spangdahlem base charged in killing of German at fair

By **PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — An American airman is slated to be court-martialed on a murder charge connected to the summertime stabbing of a German man at a street festival.

Airman 1st Class Grant Harrison will face trial at Spangdahlem Air Base on May 28, 2024, the Air Force said in a statement Monday. If convicted of unpremeditated murder, he could be sentenced to life in prison.

Harrison is accused of killing martial arts athlete and instructor Michael Ovsjannikov in the early hours of Aug. 19 in Wittlich, a town about 12 miles east of Spangdahlem.

Ovsjannikov's body was found with stab wounds just yards from his home.

German police arrested two U.S. service members in connection with the stabbing later that day. Both were described as being in their mid-20s.

The two were transferred to the 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem pending an investigation, the wing said in a statement at the time.

The investigation into the second airman is still open, the wing said Monday in response to questions from Stars and Stripes.

The probe has been led by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Harrison was identified in the statement as an aircraft journeyman assigned to the 726th Air Mobility Squadron at Spangdahlem.

A preliminary hearing last month found probable cause to charge him with unpremeditated murder, aggravated assault with a dangerous weapon and obstruction of justice, the Air Force said.



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

**A memorial in Wittlich, Germany, for a man found dead with stab wounds is seen in August.**

A military judge and members of Ovsjannikov's family attended the Nov. 17 hearing, the statement added.

Ovsjannikov, 28, was a former member of Germany's national youth judo team and trained children at a martial arts school he founded in 2022, according to his family.

He also founded a security company with more than 25 employees, the family said.

Ovsjannikov's death resulted in an outpouring of grief. A makeshift memorial on Wittlich's Trierer Strasse marked the spot where the stabbing was thought to have occurred.

At the time, residents said they were surprised to learn that U.S. service members were suspects, as they were used to seeing the American presence in a positive light.

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## Japanese police arrest US Marine in suspected drunken driving crash

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**  
AND **MARI HIGA**  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japanese police say a U.S. Marine was driving under the influence of alcohol early Saturday when his car collided with another vehicle at a red light on Okinawa.

Police took Sgt. Artemio Sanchezbaltazar, 21, of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, into custody around 1:30 a.m. at the crash scene on Route 58 in Ginowan city, a Ginowan Police spokesman said by phone Monday.

No one was injured and Sanchezbaltazar was released from custody the next day, the spokesman said.

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

Sanchezbaltazar was southbound in the Mashiki area at 12:20 a.m. when his car struck from behind another vehicle slowing for a red light, the spokesman said. Both vehicles received only minor damage.

Three women in the other vehicle and two U.S. service members riding with Sanchezbaltazar were uninjured, the spokesman said.

He declined to provide further information on the passengers and the types of vehicles involved in the crash.

Sanchezbaltazar's blood-alcohol content, measured by a Breathalyzer, was 0.09% at the scene, three times the legal limit for driving in Japan, the spokesman said. By comparison, all 50 U.S. states have set 0.08 as the legal limit for driving under the influence or while impaired.

Police sent the case against Sanchezbaltazar to prosecutors on Sunday.

If convicted of violating Japanese traffic law, Sanchezbaltazar faces a maximum five years in prison or a \$7,000 fine. His passengers could face up to three years in prison or a \$3,500 fine if convicted of allowing him to drive while intoxicated.

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MILITARY

Duty: Ford due to return to US for maintenance, rest

**FROM PAGE 1**

flights, the carrier strike groups' myriad capabilities include long-range missile tracking and intelligence gathering.

But the flight activity suggests Ford could return stateside for needed maintenance and crew rest without undercutting U.S. efforts to keep Iran-backed proxies from broadening the war into a regional conflict, analysts say.

"The strategic signaling has fulfilled its purpose," said Johannes Peters, department manager of the Center for Maritime Strategy and Security at Kiel University in Germany.

Pro-Iran groups have launched dozens of drone and missile attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria since the war began, while the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have launched missiles at shipping in the Red Sea. However, Iran's national forces haven't publicly entered the fray.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah has skirmished with Israel from the Lebanon border. But Peters noted they aren't heavily engaged in the fighting. At current levels of conflict, two carriers aren't necessary, Peters said.

Ford's continued deployment could have future impacts upon the larger fleet, according to naval analysts. Maintenance backlogs, crew fatigue and shortages, and shipyard decay were among contributing factors found to be hurting Navy readiness, according to a Government Accountability Office report released in May.

"If we try to do it all, everywhere, we will strain the fleet once again and weaken ourselves should a hot war erupt that directly involves the U.S. as a combatant," said James Holmes, who chairs the maritime strategy pro-



JANAE CHAMBERS/U.S. Navy

**An F/A-18F Super Hornet fighter jet takes off from the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Persian Gulf on Dec. 1. The Eisenhower and its carrier strike group are deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations.**

gram at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

The Navy is still working through a maintenance backlog left over from the last time the U.S. kept a constant one- or two-carrier presence in the Middle East at the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Holmes said.

The Navy did not answer Stars and Stripes questions last week about the impact of an extended deployment on Ford's maintenance schedule.

While the dual-carrier operations are a strain on the service, the flexibility to take action is important, said Sebastian Bruns, a naval security expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

For example, there is still the possibility of a noncombatant evacuation operation from Lebanon.

And while a carrier deployment sends a political signal to a region, its departure sends one as well, Bruns said.

The service has 11 aircraft carriers, of which five are underway or deployed, according to a USNI News report Dec. 11.

Two are in various stages of maintenance, according to posts on official social media pages for USS John C. Stennis and USS George H.W. Bush, while USS Harry S. Truman ended its maintenance period Sunday.

USS Abraham Lincoln and USS George Washington appear to be readying for future deployment.

USS Nimitz is undergoing planned maintenance but is set for decommissioning in 2026, according to the Navy's 2024 shipbuilding plan.

There are some signs the Navy is adjusting its force posture in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Three U.S.-based destroyers transited the Strait of Gibraltar eastbound within the last week.

There are 19 Navy ships in the region, including at least seven in the eastern Mediterranean and 12 in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf, AP reported Friday.

That destroyer presence could pick up where Ford would leave off, analysts say.

The Navy's destroyer fleet has been active in bringing down missiles and drones heading Israel's way. The USS Mason, USS Carney and USS Thomas Hudner on duty in the Middle East have shot down 38 drones during their deployments, the Navy said Sunday.

Carney has shot down 33 drones, the most recent being 14 attack drones heading towards Israel on Saturday.

The Navy, citing DOD policy, wouldn't say how many or the types of weapons Carney and the other ships used during the operation.

"The carrier air wings make an important statement that Washington has options, but the destroyers are the workhorses on a daily basis," Holmes said.

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Enlist: Survey finds public believes many military veterans 'damaged'

**FROM PAGE 1**

other issues at the forefront of the debate around the recruiting crisis, such as conservatives' assertions that the military has become too "woke" and created a new stigma to counter.

Perceptions of veterans are largely positive, with clear majorities believing that people who had served in the military are more hardworking and reliable than the rest of society.

But those positive views don't necessarily translate into a perception that the enlisted ranks are a good career course.

One possible reason could be the widespread belief that former service members are somehow

damaged goods.

The survey found that 46% of respondents said they think it is likely or highly likely that veterans would do something violent toward themselves.

"Perceptions of veterans as potentially damaged physically or mentally by their service highlight that nearly 20 years of war have led to widespread familiarity with the wounds of war" such as post-traumatic stress disorder, Rand said.

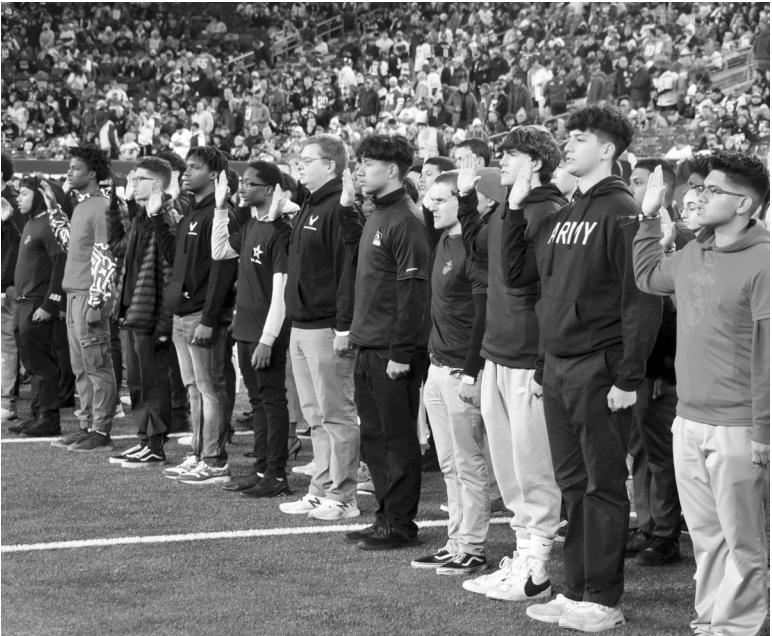
Currently, the top two reasons cited by young people for not wanting to join the military are the possibility of physical harm or violent death, and the risk of PTSD, Rand said.

About 15% of post-9/11 veterans had PTSD in the past year and 29% had it at some point in their lives, Rand said, citing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs data.

"The challenge remains of maintaining the right balance in drawing attention to and raising awareness of the difficulties veterans experience without perpetuating negative stereotypes about them," Rand said.

The report was based on surveys administered between February and June 2022. It did not cite a margin of error.

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MARK GETMAN/U.S. ARMY / Mark Getman/U.S. Army

**New military recruits are sworn into their respective branches during a ceremony at the New York Jets "Salute to Service" pre-game activities at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. on Nov. 6, 2023. A new Rand Corp. report released Dec. 14 found that a**



WAR IN UKRAINE

Gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's troops

BY SAMYA KULLAB  
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers nearly two years after Russia invaded their country.

Despite a disappointing counteroffensive this summer and signs of wavering financial support from allies, Ukrainian soldiers say they remain fiercely determined to win. But as winter approaches, they worry that Russia is better equipped for battle and are frustrated about being on the defensive again in a grueling war. Some doubt the judgment of their leaders.

Discontent among Ukrainian soldiers — once extremely rare and expressed only in private — is now more common and out in the open.

In the southern city of Kherson, where Ukraine is staging attacks against well-armed Russian troops on the other side of the Dnieper River, soldiers are asking why these difficult amphibious operations were not launched months ago in warmer weather.

"I don't understand," said a commander of the 11th National Guard Brigade's anti-drone unit who is known on the battlefield as Boxer. "Now it's harder and colder."

"It's not just my feeling, many units share it," said Boxer, who spoke on condition that only his battlefield name would be used.

Russia, which illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, controls about one-fifth of Ukraine. After 22 months of war the two countries are essentially in a stalemate along the 620 mile-long front line.

Russian forces aim to push deeper into eastern Ukraine this winter, analysts say, so that Russian President Vladimir Putin can cite this momentum as he campaigns for reelection, an outcome that is all but certain. Emboldened by recent gains on the battlefield, Putin said last week that he remains fully committed to the war and criticized Ukraine for "sacrificing" troops to demonstrate success to Western sponsors.

In the United States, which has



Ukrainian soldiers practice on a tank during military training in Ukraine on Dec. 6.

EFREM LUKATSKY/AP

already spent some \$111 billion defending Ukraine, President Joe Biden is advocating for an additional \$50 billion in aid. But Republican lawmakers are balking at more support — just as some lawmakers in Europe are on the fence about providing another \$50 billion to Ukraine, after failing to deliver on promised ammunition.

"The reason the Ukrainians are gloomy is that, they now sense, not only have they not done well this year ... they know that the Russians' game is improving," said Richard Barrons, a former British army general. "They see what's happening in Congress, and they see what happened in the EU."

Ukraine may be on the defensive this winter, but its military leaders say they have no intention of letting up the fight.

"If we won't have a single bullet, we will kill them with shovels," said Serhii, a commander in the 59th Brigade that is active in the eastern city of Avdiivka and who spoke on condition that only his first name be used. "Surely, everyone is tired of war, physically and mentally. But imagine if we

stop — what happens next?"

Bleak mood

The fatigue and frustration on the battlefield are mirrored in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, where disagreements among leaders have recently spilled out into the open.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month publicly disputed the assessment by Ukraine's military chief, Valery Zaluzhnyi, that the war had reached a stalemate. And the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has repeatedly lashed out at Zelenskyy, saying he holds too much power.

Disquiet in the halls of power appears to have filtered down to the military's rank and file, who increasingly have misgivings about inefficiency and faulty decision-making within the bureaucracy they depend on to keep them well-armed for the fight.

In the southern Ukrainian region of Zaporizhzhia, where momentum has slowed since the summertime counteroffensive, drones have become a crucial tool of war. They enable soldiers to keep an eye on — and hold back —

Russian forces while they conduct dangerous and painstaking operations to clear minefields and consolidate territorial gains. But fighters there complain that the military has been too slow in training drone operators.

It took seven months to obtain the paperwork needed from multiple government agencies to train 75 men, said Konstantin Denisov, a Ukrainian soldier.

Defense Minister Rustem Umerov insists Ukraine has enough soldiers and weaponry to power the next phase of the fight.

Defensive shift

The limited momentum Ukraine's forces had during their summertime counteroffensive has slowed — from the forests in the northeast, to the urban centers in the east, to the slushy farmland in the south.

With Russia hoping to take the initiative this winter, Ukraine is mainly focused on standing its ground, according to interviews with a half dozen military commanders along the vast front line.

Despite wet, muddy ground that

makes it harder to move tanks and other heavy weaponry around, the Russian army has bolstered its forces in the eastern Donetsk region, where it has recently stepped up offensive maneuvers.

"The main goal for the winter is to lose as few people as possible," said Parker, the Ukrainian commander of a mechanized battalion near Bakhmut who asked to go by his battlefield name to speak freely. Bakhmut is a city in eastern Ukraine that Russian forces took after months of heavy fighting.

"We have to be clear," Parker said. "It's not possible in the winter to liberate Donetsk or Bakhmut, because they have too many (fighters)."

Analysts say Ukraine may even be forced to cede patches of previously reclaimed territory this winter, though Russia is likely to pay a heavy price.

Drones and men

Some Ukrainian commanders across the front line say they lack the fighters and firepower needed to keep Russia's seemingly endless waves of infantrymen at arm's length as they fortify defenses to protect soldiers. That places ever more importance on attack drones — a weapon, they say, that Russia is currently better equipped with.

Indeed, while Ukrainian soldiers have proven to be resourceful and innovative on the battlefield, Moscow has dramatically scaled up its defense industry in the past year, manufacturing armored vehicles and artillery rounds at a pace Ukraine cannot match.

"Yes they're ahead of us in terms of supply," said Boxer, the commander in Kherson, who credited Russian drones with having longer range and more advanced software. "It allows the drone to go up 2,000 meters, avoid jammers," he said, whereas Ukrainian drones "can fly only 500 meters."

This poses a problem for his troops, who have been limited in their ability to strike Russian targets on the other side of the Dnieper River.

Ukraine's military chief says one of his offices was bugged

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's military chief said Monday that a covert listening device was found in one of the offices where he works, and hinted without elaborating that bugs were detected in other locations.

Army Cmdr. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi commented to local media about Sunday's revelation by Ukraine's Security Service that during a routine sweep a bug was found in a

room he used. The device wasn't working, the agency said.

Suspicion immediately fell on Russia amid the almost 22-month war between the two countries that is set to grind on into another year.

"I have several offices where I work. This happened in one of



Zaluzhnyi

them," Zaluzhnyi said. "We checked (the room) and found (the device)," he said.

He added that listening devices were not only found in the office where he worked, but he didn't provide further details and left it unclear whether more than one device was found in the Ukraine General Staff premises.

The murky developments left lots of questions unanswered. Officials did not comment further.

The intelligence services of both Russia and Ukraine have been active during the war.

Ukraine's military intelligence chief has survived 10 assassination attempts carried out by the Russian state security service, or FSB, according to Ukrainian authorities. Last month, his wife underwent hospital treatment after being diagnosed with heavy metals poisoning.

Ukraine's spy agency, mean-

while, reportedly has been active in sabotage operations far behind the front line.

Artillery bombardments continue to claim civilians lives as the front-line fighting becomes bogged down by wintry mud and snow.

Two Ukrainian civilians were killed and at least two were injured over the previous 24 hours, the president's office reported Monday.



## NATION

# Study: Severe obesity in youths up slightly

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A new study adds to evidence that severe obesity is becoming more common in young U.S. children.

There was some hope that children in a government food program might be bucking a trend in obesity rates — earlier research found rates were dropping a little about a decade ago for those kids. But an update released Monday in the journal *Pediatrics* shows the rate bounced back up a bit by 2020.

The increase echoes other national data, which suggests around 2.5% of all preschool-aged children were severely obese during the same period.

“We were doing well and now we see this upward trend,” said one of the study’s authors, Heidi Blanck of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “We are

dismayed at seeing these findings.”

The study looked at children ages 2 to 4 enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program, which provides healthy foods and other services to preschool-aged children in low-income families. The children were weighed and measured.

The researchers found that 2.1% of kids in the program were severely obese in 2010. Six years later, the rate had dipped to 1.8%. But by 2020, it was 2%. That translates to about 33,000 of more than 1.6 million kids in the WIC program.

Significant increases were seen in 20 states with the highest rate in California at 2.8%. There also were notable rises in some racial and ethnic groups. The highest rate, about 2.8%, was in Hispanic kids.

Experts say severe obesity at a very early

age is nearly irreversible, and is strongly associated with chronic health problems and an early death.

It’s not clear why the increase occurred, Blanck said.

When WIC obesity rates dropped, some experts attributed it to 2009 policy changes that eliminated juice from infant food packages, provided less saturated fat, and tried to make it easier to buy fruits and vegetables.

The package hasn’t changed. But “the daily hardships that families living in poverty are facing may be harder today than they were 10 years ago, and the slight increases in the WIC package just weren’t enough,” said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a Duke University childhood obesity researcher.

The researchers faced challenges. The number of kids in WIC declined in the past

decade. And the study period included 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic hit, when fewer parents brought their children in to see doctors. That reduced the amount of complete information available.

Despite its limitations, it was a “very well done study,” said Deanna Hoelscher, a childhood obesity researcher at the UTH-health Houston School of Public Health, “It gives you a hint of what’s going on.”

What’s happened since 2020 is not yet known. Some small studies have suggested a marked increase in childhood obesity — especially during the pandemic, when kids were kept home from schools, eating and bedtime routines were disrupted and physical activity decreased.

“We are thinking it’s going to get worse,” Hoelscher said.

## Senate overtime border security talks grind on

BY LISA MASCARO  
AND STEPHEN GROVES  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Time slipping, White House and Senate negotiators struggled Sunday to reach a U.S. border security deal that would unlock President Joe Biden’s request for billions of dollars worth of military aid for Ukraine and other national security needs before senators leave town for the holiday recess.

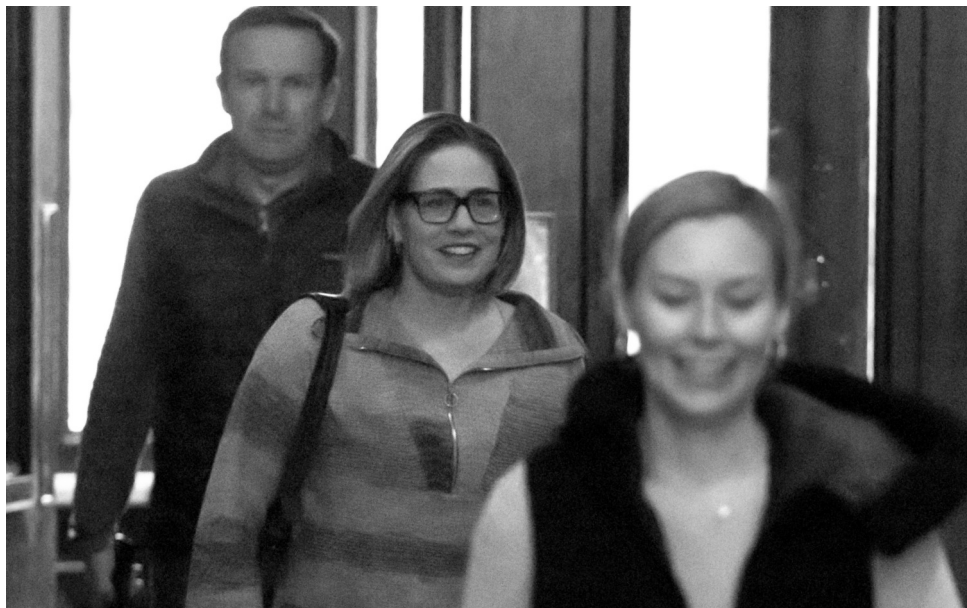
The Biden administration, which is becoming more deeply involved in the talks, is facing pressure from all sides over any deal. Negotiators insist they are making progress, but a hoped-for framework did not emerge. Republican leaders signaled that without bill text, an upcoming procedural would likely fail.

The talks come as Donald Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner in 2024, delivered alarming anti-immigrant remarks about “blood” purity over the weekend, echoing Nazi slogans of World War II at a political rally.

“They’re poisoning the blood of our country,” Trump said about the record numbers of immigrants coming to the U.S. without immediate legal status.

Speaking in the early-voting state of New Hampshire, Trump drew on words similar to Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” as the former president berated Biden’s team over the flow of migrants. “All over the world they’re pouring into our country,” Trump said.

Throughout the weekend, senators and top Biden officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, have been working intently behind closed doors at the Capitol to strike a border deal, which Republicans in Congress are demanding in exchange for any help for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs. Mayorkas arrived for more talks late Sunday afternoon.



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP

**Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., left, and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, I-Ariz., center, arrive for closed-door negotiations at the U.S. Capitol, on Sunday. Negotiators are rushing to reach a U.S. border security deal that would unlock President Joe Biden’s request for billions of dollars in military aid for Ukraine and national security.**

“Every day we get closer, not farther away,” said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., as talks wrapped up in the evening.

Their holiday recess postponed, Murphy and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, the Arizona independent, acknowledged the difficulty of drafting, and securing support for, deeply complicated legislation on an issue that has vexed Congress for years. Ahead of more talks Monday, it is becoming apparent any action is unlikely before year’s end.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said senators don’t want to be “jammed” by a last-minute compromise reached by negotiators.

“We’re not anywhere close to a deal,” Gra-

ham, whose staff has joined the talks, said Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Graham predicted the deliberations will go into next year. He was among 15 Republican senators who wrote to GOP leadership urging them to wait until the House returns Jan. 8 to discuss the issue.

Top GOP negotiator Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell also signaled in their own letter Sunday that talks still had a ways to go. Lankford said later that the January timeline was “realistic.”

The Biden administration faces an increasingly difficult political situation as global migration is on a historic rise, and many migrants

are fleeing persecution or leaving war-torn countries for the United States, with smugglers capitalizing on the situation.

The president is being berated daily by Republicans, led by Trump, as border crossings have risen to levels that make even some in Biden’s own Democratic Party concerned.

But the Biden administration, in considering revival of Trump-like policies, is drawing outrage from Democrats and immigrant advocates who say the ideas would gut the U.S. asylum system and spark fears of deportations from immigrants already living in the U.S. The White House’s failure to fully engage Latino lawmakers in the talks until recently, or ensure a seat at the negotiating table, has led to a near revolt from leaders of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

“It’s unacceptable,” said Rep. Nanette Barragan, D-Calif., chair of the Hispanic Caucus, on social media. “We represent border districts & immigrant communities that will be severely impacted by extreme changes to border policy.”

Meanwhile, Biden’s massive \$110 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other security needs is hanging in the balance.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a dramatic, if disappointing, visit to Washington last week to plead with Congress and the White House for access to U.S. weaponry as his country fights against Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion.

Many, but not all, Republicans have soured on helping Ukraine fight Russia, taking their cues from Trump. The former president praised Putin, quoting the Russian leader during Saturday’s rally while slamming the investigations against him as politically motivated — including the federal indictment against Trump for conspiring to overturn the 2020 election that resulted in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters.

## Car hits parked vehicle in Biden’s motorcade outside campaign HQ

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — A car plowed into a parked SUV that was guarding President Joe Biden’s motorcade Sunday night while the president was leaving a visit to his campaign headquarters. The president and first lady Jill

Biden were unharmed.

While Biden was walking from the campaign office to his waiting armored SUV, a sedan hit a U.S. Secret Service vehicle that was being used to close off intersections near the headquarters for the president’s departure. The sedan

then tried to continue into a closed-off intersection, before Secret Service personnel surrounded the vehicle with weapons drawn and instructed the driver to put his hands up.

Biden paused and looked over toward the sound, surprised, before he was

ushered into the vehicle, where his wife was already seated, before being driven swiftly back to their home. His schedule was otherwise unaffected by the incident.

The Secret Service did not immediately comment on the incident.



NATION

# Haley slams DeSantis for event with Massie

**By THOMAS BEAUMONT**  
*Associated Press*

ALTOONA, Iowa—Nikki Haley denounced Republican presidential rival Ron DeSantis in Iowa Sunday for campaigning in the state with Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie, the lone House Republican who voted last week against a GOP resolution condemning antisemitism on university campuses.

“You can’t be pro-Israel and bring the most anti-Israel Republican into this state, who voted against fighting antisemitism on college campuses,” Haley said. “And that’s who he brought to your state.”

Coming at the end of a campaign event at a suburban Des Moines bar and grill, Haley’s criticism of DeSantis for campaigning with Massie on Saturday marks the increased pressure for the two to emerge from Iowa as the stronger alternative to former President Donald Trump.

Trump is the heavy favorite to win Iowa’s leadoff caucuses on Jan. 15. Last week at a campaign event in eastern Iowa, Trump stressed that an Iowa blowout would help him rally the party early in the 2024 voting. “The margin of victory is very important, it’s just very important,” Trump told



Haley

his audience in Coralville.

DeSantis and Haley have increasingly sparred publicly, as they have during debates, while ads by groups supporting each have sought to stall the other’s movement in Iowa with less than a month until the caucuses.

DeSantis campaigned in Iowa with Massie when the two headlined a town hall-style event geared toward gun rights policy in Johnston, Iowa, a northern Des

Moines suburb.

Massie has previously critiqued antisemitism-related legislation as restricting free speech, voting against related GOP-sponsored resolutions since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Support for Israel is a top priority for most Republicans, especially evangelical Christians who form an influential bloc in the Iowa GOP and many of whom believe Jews are God’s chosen people and that Israel is their rightful homeland.

DeSantis has called for U.S. support of Israel, touted his effort from Florida to deliver medical supplies to the country and evacuate hun-

dreds of Americans from Israel in the wake of the Oct. 7 attack led by Hamas. DeSantis has also called for the destruction of Hamas.

DeSantis’ campaign dismissed the criticism of campaigning with Massie.

“Ron DeSantis has been the clearest, most consistent pro-Israel candidate in the race,” DeSantis’ campaign press secretary Bryan Griffin said. “He has unequivocally supported Israel in exterminating Hamas.”

Haley has called on Israel to “finish them,” referring to Hamas, the group responsible for the Oct. 7 attack.

## Trump says Nevada fake electors treated ‘unfairly’ during rally

*Associated Press*

RENO, Nev. — Former President Donald Trump called out three of Nevada’s fake electors Sunday, saying they’re being treated unfairly less than 24 hours before they were scheduled to be arraigned for signing certificates falsely stating Trump won the state in 2020.

Trump did not directly mention the charges nor the court date during a rally in Reno, but he cast the fake electors as victims in a brief portion of a speech that spanned more than an hour.

“A tremendous man, tremendous guy, gets treated so unfairly and he loves this country and he loves this state,” Trump said of Nevada GOP Chairman Michael McDonald, who was one of six Republicans indicted earlier this month by a Nevada grand jury.

Trump’s sympathy for the fake electors who tried to help him cling to power after his 2020 defeat comes amid growing alarm about his authoritarian rhetoric as he looks to return to the White House.

Nevada is the fourth state to

choose delegates for the Republican presidential nomination, the first in the West and the first with a sizeable Latino population. But it’s gotten little attention from the GOP contenders, who have focused their time in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

Trump, who is overwhelmingly favored in polls, is looking to sweep up all of Nevada’s delegates by winning the caucuses with more than 50% as part of his quest to sew up the GOP nomination early and turn his attention to a general election rematch against President Joe Biden. If he falls short of a majority in Nevada’s caucuses, he’ll have to split the delegates with his rivals.

Trump drew attention to the fake electors as they prepared for a court hearing in Las Vegas on Monday morning.

In December 2020, six Republicans signed certificates falsely stating that Trump won Nevada and sent them to Congress and the National Archives, where they were ultimately ignored. The scheme, which involved several battleground states, was an at-



GODOFREDO A. VASQUEZ/AP

Former President Donald Trump is introduced to the crowd during a rally Sunday in Reno, Nev.

tempt to create a pretext for Trump to remain president despite his loss.

Trump and his attorneys had a direct hand in the planning and execution of the fake elector scheme, including a conference call with McDonald, transcripts released last year show.

Trump said Clark County GOP Chairman Jesse Law is a “fantastic man” who is “treated very un-

fairly.” He also thanked another fake elector, Jim Hindle, the Storey County clerk and vice chairman of the Nevada GOP, at the rally.

The six fake electors have been charged with offering a false instrument for filing and uttering a forged instrument. Those two categories of felonies have penalties that range from one year up to either four or five years in prison.

McDonald and Law took the rally stage before Trump but both kept their remarks short and did not mention the charges against them. McDonald, the state party chair, spoke for two minutes about the party-run caucus, promising strong turnout would equal a Trump Republican nomination. Law, the Clark County GOP chair, sang the national anthem.

## Florida Republican Party suspends chairman amid rape investigation

*Associated Press*

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Republican Party of Florida suspended Chairman Christian Ziegler and demanded his resignation during an emergency meeting Sunday, adding to calls by Gov. Ron DeSantis and other top officials for him to step down as police investigate a rape accusation against him.

Ziegler is accused of raping a woman with whom he and his wife, Moms for Liberty co-founder

Bridget Ziegler, had a prior consensual sexual relationship, according to police records.

“Christian Ziegler has engaged in conduct that renders him unfit for the office,” the party’s motion to censure Ziegler said, according to a document posted on the social media platform X by Lee County GOP Chairman Michael Thomason.

Ziegler tried to defend himself during the closed-door meeting, but the party board quickly took

the action against him, Thompson said.

“Ziegler on soap box trying to defend himself, not working,” Thompson posted before confirming the votes.

The party’s executive committee will hold another vote in the future on whether to remove Ziegler.

The Sarasota Police Department is investigating the woman’s accusation that Ziegler raped her at her apartment in October. Police documents say the Zieglers

and the woman had planned a sexual threesome that day, but Bridget Ziegler was unable to make it. The accuser says Christian Ziegler arrived anyway and assaulted her.

Christian Ziegler has not been charged with a crime and says he is innocent, contending the encounter was consensual.

The accusation also has caused turmoil for Bridget Ziegler, an elected member of the Sarasota School Board, though she is not ac-

cused of any crime. On Tuesday the board voted to ask her to resign. She refused.

The couple have been outspoken opponents of LGBTQ+ rights, and their relationship with another woman has sparked criticism and accusations of hypocrisy.

In addition to DeSantis, Republican Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz and Florida’s Republican House and Senate leaders have all called for Christian Ziegler’s resignation.





ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/AP

A car drives on a flooded street in Philadelphia early Monday. A storm moving up the East Coast brought heavy rain and high winds to the Northeast, forcing flight cancellations and school closings.

# Storm’s winds, rain knock out power, flood parts of Northeast

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — A storm barreled up the East Coast on Monday, flooding roads and downing trees in the Northeast, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands, and forcing flight cancellations and school closures.

More than 5 inches of rain had fallen in parts of New Jersey and northeastern Pennsylvania by mid-morning, and parts of several other states got more than 4 inches, according to the National Weather Service. Wind gusts reached nearly 70 mph along the southern New England shoreline.

Power was knocked out for more than 700,000 customers in an area stretching from Virginia north through New England, including over 278,000 in Massachusetts and 263,000 in Maine, according to poweroutage.us.

In Maine, Gov. Janet Mills said all state offices would close for the afternoon.

“With the storm expected to grow stronger in the coming hours, I encourage all Maine people to be safe and vigilant and to

exercise caution when traveling,” she said in a statement.

The weather service issued flood and flash-flood warnings for New York City and the surrounding area, parts of Pennsylvania, upstate New York, western Connecticut, western Massachusetts and parts of New Hampshire and Maine.

“We are asking people to avoid traveling at this time if they can as most people are safest at home,” Vanessa Palange, a spokesperson for the New Hampshire Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, said in a statement.

Trees and power lines fell in many areas, including some that landed on homes and cars. In the coastal town of Guilford, Conn., a tree fell on a police cruiser but the officer escaped injury, officials said. Certain roads throughout the region were closed due to flooding or downed trees.

Heavy rain and high tides caused flooding along the Jersey Shore, leading authorities to block off roads near Barnegat Bay in

Bay Head and Mantoloking. The flooding was made worse by leaf piles that residents had put out for collection but was blocking water from reaching drains.

In northeastern and central Pennsylvania, heavy rain that fell overnight flooded ponds, streams and creeks in several counties, forcing authorities to close several major roadways.

The Delaware River spilled over its banks in suburban Philadelphia, leading to road closures. In the suburb of Washington Crossing, crews placed barriers along roadways and worked to clear fallen tree limbs. Seven people died after flash flooding in that area over the summer.

Many flights were cancelled or delayed across the region. Boston’s Logan International Airport grounded all flights Monday morning because of the poor conditions, leading to more than 100 canceled flights and about 375 delays, according to the flight-tracking service FlightAware. At New York City area airports, nearly 80 flights were canceled.

# Autopsy: Perry died from effects of drug ketamine

## Drowning deemed secondary factor

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Matthew Perry died from the acute effects of the anesthetic ketamine, according to the results of an autopsy on the 54-year-old “Friends” actor released Friday.

The Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner said in the autopsy report that Perry also drowned in “the heated end of his pool,” but that it was a secondary factor in his Oct. 28 death, deemed an accident.

People close to Perry told investigators that he was undergoing ketamine infusion therapy, an experimental treatment used to treat depression and anxiety. But the medical examiner said the levels of ketamine in Perry’s body were in the range used for general anesthesia during surgery, and that his last treatment 1½ weeks earlier wouldn’t explain those levels. The drug is typically metabolized in a matter of hours.

The report says coronary artery disease and buprenorphine, which is used to treat opioid use disorder, also contributed.

The amount of ketamine detected “would be enough to make him lose consciousness and lose his posture and his ability to keep himself above the water,” said Dr. Andrew Stolbach, a medical toxicologist with Johns Hopkins Medicine who reviewed the autopsy report at the request of The Associated Press.

“Using sedative drugs in a pool or hot tub, especially when you’re alone, is extremely risky and, sadly, here it’s fatal,” said Stolbach, who noted that both ketamine and buprenorphine can be used safely.

Perry was declared dead after being found unresponsive at his home in the Pacific Palisades area of Los

Angeles. Investigators performed the autopsy the following day.

The actor had taken drugs in the past but had been “reportedly clean for 19 months,” according to the report.

Perry had played pickleball earlier in the day, the report says, and his assistant, who lives with him, found him face down in the pool after returning from errands.

The assistant told investigators Perry had not been sick, had not made any health complaints, and had not shown evidence of recent alcohol or drug use.

Postmortem blood tests showed “high levels” of ketamine in his system, which could have raised his blood pressure and heart rate and dulled his impulse to breathe.

Buprenorphine, commonly used in opioid addiction and found in therapeutic levels in Perry’s blood, could have contributed to the breathing problem, the autopsy said. It would have been risky to mix the central nervous system depressant with ketamine “due to the additive respiratory effects when present with high levels of ketamine,” according to the autopsy report.

The report said his coronary artery disease would have made him more susceptible to the drugs’ effects.

Perry was among the biggest television stars of his generation when he played Chandler Bing alongside Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc and David Schwimmer for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004 on NBC’s megahit sitcom “Friends.”



Perry

# Storied US Steel to be acquired for more than \$14B by Nippon Steel

Associated Press

U.S. Steel, the Pittsburgh steel producer that played a key role in the nation’s industrialization, is being acquired by Nippon Steel in an all-cash deal valued at approximately \$14.1 billion.

The transaction is worth about \$14.9 billion when including the assumption of debt.

The price tag for U.S. Steel is nearly double what was offered just four months ago by rival Cleveland Cliffs. U.S. Steel, which rejected

that offer, confirmed the offering price from Nippon early Monday.

U.S. Steel will keep its name and its headquarters in Pittsburgh, where it was founded in 1901 by J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie. Nippon said that it will also honor all collective bargaining agreements in place with the United Steelworkers and other employees, and is committed to maintaining its relationship with workers.

Soaring prices have helped fuel consolidation in the steel industry

this decade. Steel prices more than quadrupled near the start of the pandemic to near \$2,000 per metric ton by the summer of 2021 as supply chains experienced gridlock, a symptom of surging demand for goods and the lack of anticipation of that demand.

Nippon, which will pay \$55 per share for U.S. Steel, said that the deal will bolster its manufacturing and technology capabilities. It will also expand Nippon’s production in the U.S. and add to its positions in

Japan, India and the ASEAN region.

Nippon said the acquisition is anticipated to bring its total annual crude steel capacity to 86 million tons and help it capitalize on growing demand for high-grade steel, automotive and electrical steel.

“The transaction builds on our presence in the United States and we are committed to honoring all of U.S. Steel’s existing union contracts,” Nippon President Eiichi Hashimoto said in a statement.

U.S. Steel CEO David Burritt said that the sale is beneficial to the U.S., “ensuring a competitive, domestic steel industry, while strengthening our presence globally.”

The acquisition has been approved by the boards of both companies and is targeted to close in the second or third quarter of 2024. It still needs approval from U.S. Steel shareholders. Shares of United States Steel Corp. soared more than 27% before the opening bell Monday.



VETERANS



Stars and Stripes

The Department of Veterans Affairs campus in Los Angeles contains 388 acres.

Calif. judge refuses to stop lawsuit demanding housing for disabled vets

By LINDA F. HERSEY  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A federal district court judge in California has refused to dismiss a class-action lawsuit demanding the Department of Veterans Affairs provide housing to thousands of disabled veterans living in encampments and on the streets of Los Angeles.

U.S. District Court Judge David O. Carter, in a ruling Thursday, described housing needs as urgent, stating the number of homeless veterans has tripled since an earlier lawsuit brought against the VA was settled in 2015 yet failed to yield adequate results.

“It is unclear how many veterans have died on the streets of Los Angeles in that time never having received housing or services,” Carter wrote in the Powers v. McDonough case, heard in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

The judge ordered both sides to “expedite a timeline” and move the lawsuit forward. The case is expected to advance to trial if a settlement is not reached. The next hearing date is scheduled for January 2024.

Defendants in the case are VA Secretary Denis McDonough, Steve Braverman, director of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, and Keith Harris, senior executive homelessness agent with the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

“This is the greatest legal decision on behalf of veterans,” said Mark Rosenbaum, an attorney for the plaintiffs. “We are ready to go to trial in June or July [2024] and we are going to win because of the story of these veterans taking on a nation that has not served them. The only remaining questions is whether the administration and Congress will fight the veterans or reach a settlement [finding] that ‘unhoused veteran’ is an oxymo-

ron in America.”

Jeffrey Powers, a 60-year-old Navy veteran, is among a dozen plaintiffs named in the lawsuit, along with the National Veterans Foundation. Plaintiffs were identified as homeless veterans in greater Los Angeles diagnosed with serious mental illness, brain injuries and/or physical disabilities.

“The judge has been very focused on what is best for the veteran and putting an end to the finger-pointing,” Powers said. “He wants to get this problem fixed and made it clear he will not allow [the VA] to do nothing.

“I am happy about this ruling for myself and the veterans who will come after me, so that they do not have to go through this,” said Powers, who lived in a tiny shed and before that a tent, which he abandoned because of a rat infestation at the encampment.

Los Angeles has roughly 4,000 unhoused veterans, according to a 2023 census count of homeless veterans conducted by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. That number represents a 12% rise from the previous year.

At issue is the future of a nearly 400-acre gated campus in West Los Angeles held in a charitable trust for housing and supportive services for veterans with disabilities. Veterans have camped on the sidewalk outside the campus, where VA health services are located.

The plaintiffs’ attorneys argued the land has been inappropriately leased by the VA for business developments unrelated to veterans’ health care and housing, breaching the VA’s fiduciary duty as trustee.

The lawsuit, filed in November 2022, further argued the Greater Los Angeles VA does not offer “anything close to adequate permanent supportive housing” at the campus.

Two buildings with veterans housing opened on the campus in the summer, bringing the number of housing developments for veterans to three.

A VA spokesman who spoke on condition of anonymity said the developments demonstrate “forward momentum on this critical project.”

“While there is still much work to do, VA is working aggressively to combat veteran homelessness in the Greater Los Angeles area, providing 1,464 homeless veterans with permanent housing thus far this year, which is the most of any city in America and on pace to exceed VA’s calendar year goal for 2023,” he wrote in an email.

More than \$140 million has been invested at the West LA campus by the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System in the past three years, according to the VA.

But the funding is not enough to meet the housing needs of the city’s homeless disabled veterans.

At the same time, portions of the campus have been leased by the VA for oil drilling, a private school and university athletic fields.

Disabled homeless veterans meanwhile “are unable to meaningfully access” VA health care services located on the campus, according to the complaint.

They are effectively denied access to medical, mental health and other services by the health care system because of their situations, attorneys said.

The complaint argued Powers and the other plaintiffs do not “want to live in an institution in order to receive services.”

“The government they served has refused to serve them and, far from welcoming them home, has left them homeless,” according to the complaint, which argued the veterans are shut out of services and live on the streets or in conditions outside “the magnificent WLA campus.”

New count shows vet homelessness currently rising

By LINDA F. HERSEY  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A single-night census in January of homeless shelters, temporary housing and unsheltered settings across the U.S. showed veteran homelessness rose by 7.4% from the previous year, the Department of Housing and Urban Development reported.

The federal agency released its annual point-in-time snapshot of homelessness nationwide that showed an overall 12% rise across the general population from the previous year.

The one-night census, conducted in January, counted 35,574 veterans who were homeless, the Department of Veterans Affairs reported Friday after HUD released its annual homelessness report.

There were more than 650,000 Americans experiencing homelessness nationwide, according to HUD.

Many factors can contribute to the reported rise, including higher costs for housing and basic goods from inflation and the end of coronavirus-related housing support and other forms of assistance that expired, the VA said.

“The VA will investigate these barriers and do everything in its power to help veterans overcome them,” the VA said Friday afternoon, when it released homelessness numbers for veterans.

HUD data also pointed to a sharp increase in first-time homelessness in the general population.

“Between federal fiscal years 2021 and 2022, the number of people who became newly homeless increased by 25%, even as the number of people who exited homelessness to permanent housing increased by 8%,” HUD reported.

The January point-in-time count also does not reflect the

VA’s push throughout 2023 to emphasize housing assistance and support.

The VA housed 38,847 veterans by Oct. 31, surpassing its calendar year goal of 38,000 veterans. The VA also awarded more than \$1 billion in funding assistance for homeless veterans.

The VA disclosed plans Friday to award “hundreds of millions of dollars” in 2024 to nonprofit agencies to handle “rapid rehousing” of veterans and their families at imminent risk of homelessness.

The funds are to keep veterans and their families from losing their housing and falling into homelessness. The funds also are used to help veterans find affordable housing alternatives and overcome other barriers. The exact funding amount has yet to be determined, the VA said.

Veterans and their families will also get help paying for legal assistance in 2024 to ensure access to safe housing and to assist with debt, the VA said.

Since 2010, veteran homelessness has fallen by 52%, the VA said.

When it released the data Friday, HUD said President Joe Biden’s administration has taken “sweeping new steps” to address homelessness since the census was taken nearly a year ago.

More apartment units are on track to be built than any year on record. HUD reported it has helped nearly 500,000 households connect with support services to avoid homelessness.

“We’ve made positive strides, but there is still more work to be done,” said Marcia Fudge, the HUD secretary. “This data underscores the urgent need for support for proven solutions and strategies that help people quickly exit homelessness and that prevent homelessness in the first place.”



VA.gov

A single-night census in January showed veteran homelessness rose by 7.4% from the previous year, the Department of Housing and Urban Development reported on Friday.



MIDEAST

‘Not here to dictate timelines,’ Austin tells Israeli counterpart

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin discussed with Israeli leaders Monday ways to scale back major combat operations in Gaza but said Washington was not imposing a timetable despite international calls for a cease-fire.

Austin and other U.S. officials have repeatedly expressed concern about the large number of civilian deaths in Gaza, even while underscoring American backing for Israel’s campaign aimed at crushing Hamas. Neither side elaborated Monday on what needed to change on the ground for a shift to more precise operations after weeks of devastating bombardment and a ground offensive.

At a press conference alongside Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Austin said, “This is Israel’s operation. I’m not here to dictate timelines or terms.” The U.S. has vetoed calls for a cease-fire at the U.N. and rushed munitions to Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will

keep fighting until it ends Hamas rule in Gaza, crushes its formidable military capabilities and frees the dozens of hostages still held in Gaza since the deadly Oct. 7 attack inside Israel that ignited the war.

Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with Hamas on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops.

Talks were underway Monday to broker freedom for more hostages, as CIA Director William Burns met in Warsaw, Poland, with the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency and the prime minister of Qatar, a U.S. official said.

It was the first known meeting of the three since the end of a weeklong cease-fire in late November, during which some 100 hostages were freed in exchange for the release of around 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

More than 100 people were killed in Israeli strikes on residential buildings in northern Gaza on Sunday, a Health Ministry official in the Hamas-run territory said.

The 10-week-old war has killed more than 19,000 Palestinians and transformed much of the north into a moonscape. Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza’s population — have fled their homes, with most packing into U.N.-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the besieged territory.

Austin, who arrived in Israel with Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said he and Israeli officials exchanged “thoughts on how to transition from high intensity operations” and how to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

American officials have called for targeted operations aimed at killing Hamas leaders, destroying tunnels and rescuing hostages. Those calls came after President Joe Biden warned that Israel is losing international support because of its “indiscriminate bombing.”

Speaking alongside Austin, Gallant said only that “the war will take time.” Last week, Gallant said Israel would continue major



Israel Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, right, shakes hands with his U.S. counterpart, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, following a joint statement after their meeting in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Monday.

combat operations for several more months.

European countries also appear to be losing patience. “Far too many civilians have been killed in Gaza,” European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell posted on X. “Certainly, we are witnessing an appalling lack of distinction in Israel’s military operation in Gaza.”

Under U.S. pressure, Israel provided more precise evacuation instructions earlier this month as troops moved into the southern city of Khan Younis. Still, casualties have continued to mount and Palestinians say nowhere in Gaza is safe.

Israel reopened its main cargo crossing with Gaza to allow more aid in — also after a request from the U.S.

But the amount is less than half of prewar imports, even as needs have soared and fighting hinders delivery in many areas.

Human Rights Watch on Monday accused Israel of deliberately starving Gaza’s population — which would be a war crime — pointing to statements by senior Israeli officials expressing the intent to deprive civilians of food, water and fuel or linking the entry of aid to the release of hostages.



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WORLD

Populist win likely as Serbian opposition party claims fraud

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia — An early official vote count of Serbia’s week-end election on Monday confirmed victory for the ruling populist party in a parliamentary vote in the Balkan country, but political tensions rose over reported irregularities in the capital, Belgrade.

An opposition group said it was robbed of victory in the local election in Belgrade, would not recognize the results and would demand a rerun of the ballot.

Sunday’s parliamentary and local election in the Balkan country pitted populist President Aleksandar Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party against the Serbia Against Violence opposition alliance.

Vucic’s SNS party won some 47% of the ballots in the parliamentary vote, followed by Serbia Against Violence with 23%, according to a near-complete preliminary tally by the state election commission.

Several smaller parties also competed in the election, which was held 18 months after the previous presidential and parliamentary vote.

If confirmed in the final count, the



Vucic

result means that the SNS party will have an absolute majority in the 250-member parliament and will form the next government on its own.

Officials results for the city hall in Belgrade are yet to be announced, but projections by polling agencies IPSOS and CESID said SNS won 38% of the ballots in Belgrade while Serbia Against Violence garnered 35%. However, Serbia Against Violence claimed fraud.

Irregularities also were reported by election monitors and independent media. One claimed ethnic Serbs from neighboring Bosnia were bused in en masse to vote in Belgrade. Serbia Against Violence charged that 40,000 identity documents were issued for people who do not live in the capital city.

Allegations have also emerged of voters being paid or pressured to vote for the ruling party.

Vucic and his party have denied the allegations.

Pope OKs same-sex blessings if rituals don’t resemble marriages

Associated Press

ROME — Pope Francis has formally approved allowing priests to bless same-sex couples, with a new document explaining a radical change in Vatican policy by insisting that people seeking God’s love and mercy shouldn’t be subject to “an exhaustive moral analysis” to receive it.

The document from the Vatican’s doctrine office, released Monday, elaborates on a letter Francis sent to two conservative cardinals that was published in October. In that preliminary response, Francis suggested such blessings could be offered under some circumstances if they didn’t confuse the ritual with the sacrament of marriage.

The new document repeats that rationale and elaborates on it, reaffirming that marriage is a lifelong sacrament between a man and a woman. And it stresses that blessings should not be conferred at the same time as a civil union, using set rituals or even with the clothing and

gestures that belong in a wedding.

But it says requests for such blessings should not be denied full stop. It offers an extensive definition of the term “blessing” in Scripture to insist that people seeking a transcendent relationship with God and looking for his love and mercy should not be subject to “an exhaustive moral analysis” as a precondition for receiving it.

“Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God,” the document said. “The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live.”

He added: “It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered.”

The Vatican holds that marriage is an indissoluble union between man and woman. As a result, it has long opposed same-sex marriage.

And in 2021, the Vatican’s Con-

gregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said flat-out that the church couldn’t bless the unions of two men or two women because “God cannot bless sin.”

That document created an outcry, one it appeared even Francis was blindsided by even though he had technically approved its publication. Soon after it was published, he removed the official responsible for it and set about laying the groundwork for a reversal.

In the new document, the Vatican said the church must shy away from “doctrinal or disciplinary schemes, especially when they lead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying.”

It stressed that people in “irregular” unions — gay or straight — are in a state of sin. But it said that shouldn’t deprive them of God’s love or mercy.

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# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Man pleads not guilty in \$99M wine fraud case

**NY** NEW YORK—A British man pleaded not guilty in a New York courtroom Saturday in connection with an alleged \$99 million, Ponzi-like fraud involving high-priced fine wine and duped investors.

Stephen Burton, 58, was extradited Friday to New York from Morocco, where he was arrested in 2022 after using a bogus Zimbabwean passport to enter that country, U.S. Attorney Breon Peace’s office said.

Burton was arraigned in Brooklyn federal court on Saturday and pleaded not guilty to charges of wire fraud, wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy. He is detained without bail pending his next court hearing on Jan. 22.

Prosecutors said Burton and another British man, James Wellesley, 56, ran a company called Bordeaux Cellars, which they said brokered loans between investors and wealthy wine collectors that were secured by their wine collections. They solicited \$99 million in investments from residents of New York and other areas from 2017 to 2019, telling them they would profit from interest on the loans, authorities said.

But prosecutors alleged the operation was a scam. They said the wealthy wine collectors did not exist, no loans were made, and Bordeaux Cellars did not have custody of the wine securing the loans. Instead, officials said, Burton and Wellesley used loan money provided by investors for themselves and to make fraudulent interest payments to other investors.

## Small plane crashes, catches fire on highway

**NC** ASHEVILLE—A small plane crashed on a western North Carolina highway and caught fire Thursday night, but the two people on board escaped life-threatening injuries, authorities said.

A single-engine Diamond DA-40 crashed on Interstate 26 near Asheville Regional Airport around 8:15 p.m. with two people on board, the Federal Aviation Administration reported.

The North Carolina State Highway Patrol said the plane hit power lines that cross I-26 and one wing hit a tractor-trailer, WLOS-TV reported. The plane was engulfed in flames.

The truck was damaged, but the driver was not injured, the highway patrol said.

## Judge vacates man’s murder conviction

**IL** CHICAGO — A Chicago man who spent 35 years behind bars for a murder he didn’t commit has been freed after a judge vacated his conviction and dismissed all charges.

Brian Beals, 57, struggled to find the right words to describe his feelings as he stood outside Robinson



AL DIAZ, MIAMI HERALD/AP

# Beach baby

**Rakesh Palpanoor and Harika Palpanoor, of New Jersey, pose for pictures Friday with their daughter, Shrenika Palpanoor, while vacationing in the South Beach neighborhood of Miami Beach, Fla.**

Correctional Center in Crawford County, some 210 miles south of Chicago, and embraced his sister and niece.

Beals was convicted in the 1988 murder of 6-year-old Demetrius Campbell. At the time, Beals, a 22-year-old student at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, was home in Chicago during Thanksgiving break. He was approached by a drug dealer and they argued, according to news accounts at the time. Attorneys say Beals got in his car and drove off. Bullets fired in Beals’ direction hit two bystanders, the boy and his mother, Valerie Campbell.

Despite three witnesses describing a different offender, Beals was convicted, namely on Campbell’s testimony. She said she saw Beals in the argument and believed he fired the shots. Beals maintained his innocence.

## Ex-Jaguars staffer pleads guilty to stealing \$22M

**FL** JACKSONVILLE—A 31-year-old former Jacksonville Jaguars financial manager accused of stealing more than \$22 million from the NFL franchise through its virtual credit card program pleaded guilty to federal charges and faces up to 30 years in prison.

Amit Patel pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of engaging in an illegal monetary transaction in U.S. District Court in Jacksonville. As part of his plea

agreement, he will forfeit property and assets funded with the money he admitted to stealing from the NFL franchise between 2019 and 2023. He also will be required to provide restitution to the team.

Patel’s lawyer said last week that Patel had gambled away “approximately 99%” of the misappropriated money. Patel said in court he is undergoing weekly treatment for a gambling addiction.

## Courts’ computer system set to return after hack

**KS** TOPEKA — The court system in Kansas has started bringing its computer system for managing cases back online, two months after a foreign cyberattack forced officials to shut it down along with public access to documents and other systems, the judicial branch announced Thursday.

The case management systems for district courts in 28 of the state’s 105 counties were expected to be back online by Monday, with others following by the end of the week. Online access to documents for the public will be restored after that, though counties that go back online will be able to offer access through terminals at their courthouses, the judicial branch said.

The Kansas Supreme Court’s seven justices, who oversee administration of the state courts, said last month that the judicial branch was the victim of a “sophisticated foreign cyberattack.” Criminals stole

data and threatened to post it on a dark website “if their demands were not met,” the justices said.

However, judicial branch officials have not publicly disclosed the hackers’ demands, whether a ransom was paid or how much the state has spent in restoring judicial branch systems.

The outages affected the courts in 104 counties — all but the state’s most populous one, Johnson County in the Kansas City area. Johnson County has its own systems and isn’t scheduled to join the state’s systems until next year.

## Doctor, wife charged in fake prescription scheme

**NY** NEW YORK—A doctor and his wife who appeared on the Bravo reality series “Below Deck” were arraigned in New York on Thursday on charges that they filled out bogus opioid prescriptions using the names of cast members from the show.

Urologist Francis Martinis and his wife, Jessica Martinis, of Fort Salonga, N.Y., were each charged with criminal sale of a prescription for a controlled substance by a practitioner and falsifying business records.

Both pleaded not guilty, according to their attorney.

“Below Deck,” which premiered on Bravo in 2013, follows crew members and the passengers they cater to aboard a luxury yacht.

The Martinises appeared on the spinoff “Below Deck Mediterranean” in 2019. Francis Martinis also appeared on “Below Deck Sailing Yacht” the following year.

## Air Jordans made for filmmaker up for auction

**OR** PORTLAND—The shiny, gold Nike sneakers were hard to miss in the donation pile at a shelter in Portland, Ore., earlier this year.

They were Air Jordan 3s, size 12½, and one of just a few custom pairs that had been made for filmmaker Spike Lee. Now they’re up for auction, where they could fetch \$20,000 to benefit the shelter.

The shoes were anonymously dropped in the donation chute at the Portland Rescue Mission in the spring. A formerly homeless man in the mission’s long-term shelter program found them while sorting through donations and brought them to the attention of the staff, according to a blog post on the mission’s website.

Nike designer Tinker Hatfield designed the kicks in 2019 for Lee, who wore his pair to the Academy Awards that year when he accepted an Oscar for his “BlacKkKlansmen” screenplay. The donated sneakers weren’t Lee’s personal pair, but were among a few made for him to give out to his inner circle, the Portland Rescue Mission said.

Hatfield visited the shelter and authenticated the shoes.



FACES

‘General Hospital’ dominates 50th Daytime Emmys

Thorsten Kaye and Jacqueline MacInnes Wood of the CBS soap “The Bold and the Beautiful” won lead acting honors at the Daytime Emmy Awards on Friday night, when “General Hospital” collected six trophies, including outstanding drama series and four for acting.



**Lucci**  
Susan Lucci was given the Lifetime Achievement Honor for her 40-year run as Erica Kane on “All My Children.” The actor, who turns 77 on Dec. 23, was nominated 18 times in the lead actress category without winning before she ended the wait in 1999.

Kelly Clarkson earned her third consecutive trophy for a daytime talk series and won for daytime talk host. The singer, who didn’t attend the ceremony, moved her syndicated show from Los Angeles to New York this year. “Entertainment Tonight” won its eighth trophy for outstanding entertainment news series.

The 50th annual ceremony honoring talk shows and soap operas was the first major awards show to return since the Hollywood writers and actors strikes ended. It was pushed back from its scheduled June date.

The awards were presented at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles.

Other news

■ **Mayim Bialik** posted news of her departure from “Jeopardy!” on Instagram. “The Big Bang Theory” actor says Sony Pictures Television informed her that she will no longer be hosting the syndicated version of the show. Former champion Ken Jennings has been hosting season 40 of “Jeopardy!” by himself.

■ **Bill Maher** has had a few second thoughts, or at least some variations on his first ones. Next June, Simon & Schuster will publish “What This Comedian Said Will Shock You,” in which the outspoken host of HBO’s “Real Time With Bill Maher” revisits some of his on-air commentary. The publisher says Maher reviewed more than a decade of his editorials for the book. Subjects range from free speech and drugs to religion and show business. Maher says in a statement that he and his guests aren’t journalists breaking news; they “break new ways of looking at stories.”

■ The rock band **AC/DC** confirmed on social media that its original drummer, Colin Burgess, has died. No cause of death was given. He was 77.

From The Associated Press



AP

Bryant Gumbel, pictured in 2015, is at peace with the end of his long-running HBO show “Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel,” but some fear that it also marks the end of a form of hard-hitting sports journalism.

Gumbel, ‘Real Sports’ reach the finish line after 29 years

BY DAVID BAUDER  
Associated Press

For the last few years of its life, HBO’s “Real Sports” taped its episodes on the same Manhattan block where CBS’ “60 Minutes” resides. They shared a sensibility along with a neighborhood.

While “60 Minutes” rolls along in its sixth decade, the monthly sports magazine helmed by Bryant Gumbel is calling it quits in its 29th year. The final, 90-minute episode premieres Tuesday in the States.

Sports was a lens through which the magazine looked at all manner of issues, winning awards for pieces on corruption at the International Olympic Committee, labor abuses as Qatar prepared for the World Cup, concussions in sports and children forced to be jockeys for camel races in the Middle East.

“Real Sports” told some inspirational stories, like Mary Carillo’s profile of the Hoyts — a father who ran marathons pushing the wheelchair of his cerebral palsy-afflicted son — and flashed humor.

Who won or lost? There were other guys for that. “I’m OK,” Gumbel said before taping the last episode. “I’m sad, but everything has to end at some point and this is the right time for this to end.”

A longtime endeavor

Gumbel is 75, at the end of a contract, and HBO is now controlled by a company, Warner Bros. Discovery, on the hunt for cost savings. While the show’s exit makes sense, the fear is that its form of sports journalism is leaving for good, too.

“It has been the gold standard in sports journalism on TV for the last three decades and it really is quite a loss,” said Mark Hyman, director of the Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism at the University of Maryland. “It checked all the boxes — timely, ambitious, well-funded, independent.”

Increasingly, sports news comes from outlets owned by leagues, like the NFL or MLB networks, or networks whose businesses depend greatly on winning rights deals, he said.

“The show tried to do some things in sports journalism that no one else was doing,” Gumbel said. “I think it was one of the few avenues that could honestly explore issues without having to worry about ratings or sponsorships or relationships.

“I’ve been on the other side of that coin,” he said.

“I’ve worked for networks who were what they would call now the ‘broadcast partner’ of a sports entity. And you’d only be a fool to think you can follow any story wherever it wants if it collides with that relationship. Life doesn’t work that way.”

When athletes agreed to appear on “Real Sports,” they knew they were agreeing to a challenging interview, much like “60 Minutes” guests knew what they were signing up for, Carillo said.

Now athletes can control their own messages through social media or outlets like The Players’ Tribune, she said.

“I wish we could have kept going,” she said. “But times have changed.”

Stories, disagreements that rippled

Carillo has been with “Real Sports” since 1997. Other prominent correspondents have included Jon Frankel, Andrea Kremer, Armen Keteyian, Soledad O’Brien and David Scott. The late sportswriting legend Frank Deford was on from 1995 to 2014.

Bernard Goldberg was a prolific correspondent until a bitter exit in 2020. He said he got angry with something Gumbel, who is Black, said about the extent of racism in society and abruptly quit after 22 years. Goldberg said he canceled HBO the day he quit, hasn’t seen “Real Sports” since and won’t watch the finale. He declined further comment.

Ask Gumbel about stories he did that have stuck with him, and he mentions one that resulted in the release of an athlete, Marcus Dixon, from prison and another about a recruiting scandal at St. Bonaventure University in which a university official committed suicide.

Gumbel takes pride in having never missed a show taping in 29 years despite a divorce, two bouts with cancer, seven surgeries and a particularly gruesome face injury — he showed a picture on his phone — that required 68 stitches.

He recalls conversations with Deford about age diminishing the ability of people in their line of work. “Frank used to tell me, ‘I can still turn a phrase. I just can’t do it as often as I used to,’” Gumbel said.

He can relate. Gumbel has considered what many athletes also contend with at the end of their careers. “I’ve always thought I’d rather leave a year too early than a day too late,” he said. “I never wanted to be the guy who overstayed his welcome.”

Chalamet-led ‘Wonka’ has strong debut

Associated Press

“Wonka” debuted with \$39 million in box-office sales in U.S. and Canadian theaters over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. It was a strong start for the Timothée Chalamet-starring Willy Wonka musical that underscored the young star’s draw.

Musicals have been tough sells in theaters in recent years, so much so that Warner Bros. downplayed the song and dance elements of “Wonka” in trailers. The studio instead emphasized Chalamet, the 27-year-old actor who, with “Wonka,” notched his second No. 1 movie following the 2021 sci-fi epic “Dune.” The earlier film recorded a \$41 million opening.

“Wonka,” which cost about \$125 million to produce and played at 4,203 locations, also was the first big Hollywood release to launch following the end of the SAG-AFTRA actors strike.

“Wonka,” directed by Paul King of “Paddington” and “Paddington 2,” is a prequel to 1971’s “Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory,” with Chalamet starring as a young Wonka trying to open a candy store. Its ensemble cast includes Hugh Grant, Olivia Colman and Keegan-Michael Key.

Warner Bros. last revived Roald Dahl’s classic with the 2005 Tim Burton-directed “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” starring Johnny Depp. It debuted with \$56.2 million and ultimately grossed \$475 million worldwide.

The other new wide release in theaters was “Christmas With the Chosen: Holy Night,” from Christian-theme distributor Angel Studios. It debuted with \$2.9 million in 2,094 theaters.

“The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” was No. 2 with \$5.8 million in its fifth week of release. The Lionsgate “Hunger Games” prequel, now up to \$145.2 million domestically and more than \$300 million globally, has held strong week after week.

Last week’s top film, Hayao Miyazaki’s “The Boy and the Heron,” dipped to third with \$5.1 million in its second week of release.



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/TNS

Timothée Chalamet notched his second No. 1 film when “Wonka” debuted with \$39 million at the box office over the weekend.





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OPINION

Are sanctions against Russia actually working?

By CHRISTINE ABELY  
Los Angeles Times

In February 2022, Russian troops mounted an invasion of Ukraine. Following Russia’s flagrant violation of Ukrainian territorial sovereignty, the U.S. joined with nations around the world to impose sanctions. Instead of military action against Russia, these countries turned to economic warfare.

The world now approaches two years of Russia’s war, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy came to Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress for support after Republican lawmakers rejected President Joe Biden’s proposed aid package to Ukraine. In this moment, the U.S. and other sanctioning nations face additional pivotal questions: Have sanctions and international trade measures made a difference? Should they be continued?

The first few rounds of economic sanctions — which are still in effect or else have been strengthened — isolated major Russian banks by limiting their ability to transact in the pound, euro and dollar and, in some instances, freezing their assets held in the sanctioning jurisdictions. Also frozen were the assets of many oligarchs, including some who funded Vladimir Putin and his war machine. Export controls limited the Russian military’s access to goods from sanctioning nations and attempted to reduce the shipment into Russia of certain goods such as semiconductors, which could be used in military equipment. Imports of select Russian-origin products were also banned from sanctioning jurisdictions.

Notably, the Group of 7 — which meets annually on economic policy and consists of the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.K. — along with Australia and the European Union, agreed to ban most imports of Russian-origin crude oil. They also imposed a price cap under which nationals of G-7 countries could provide services con-

nected to the shipment of Russian-origin oil to countries such as China and India, so long as the oil was priced at or below \$60 per barrel. The goal of the price cap was to ensure the continued flow of oil supplies around the world while limiting the amount of revenue Russia amassed from their sale.

Certainly, the sanctions have not caused Putin to pull troops back from Ukraine. But there could have been no reasonable expectation for such a result. Past sanctions and embargoes have generally been unable to trigger regime changes — think Fidel Castro in Cuba, Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Kim Jong Un in North Korea. The sweeping economic restrictions of the World War II era were insufficient to defeat Germany or Japan on their own, without military action.

The sanctions against Russia were merely some of the best tools available — perhaps second only to military aid to Ukraine—to respond to Russia’s violations of international law without direct military intervention. And to date, the sanctions have had a significant impact.

The blocking of Russian assets held in sanctioning countries, including assets of the Russian Central Bank, diminished the resources available to Russia for its war effort. In October, data provided by the European Council indicated that the Russian economy shrank in 2022, as did the volume of the country’s exports. Russia now faces significant inflation. In the long term, sanctions, paired with Russia’s ongoing diversion of resources into the war effect, may sap Russian economic growth and development.

But as of today, the data on how the sanctions have affected war production is mixed. Although Russia’s diversion of resources to military production and conscription has triggered labor shortages in other sectors, its production of missiles and tanks has climbed higher than prewar levels. Russia has found ways to overcome the oil price cap to keep revenue flowing, such as by using non-G-7 in-

surance providers and building up its own fleet. Ships from other countries also violate the price cap through tactics that include disguising, or “spoofing,” their maritime locations and moving oil via ship-to-ship transfers to conceal its Russian origins.

The sanctioning powers should, of course, be mindful that economic sanctions can trigger a heavy cost on civilians, both in the nations they target and in third-party countries. For example, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the sanctions were followed by global food and fertilizer shortages. To minimize that problem, the sanctioning nations have publicized existing carveouts for trade in these items and created further exemptions.

These nations could also impose measures that are less likely to trigger humanitarian consequences but can make sanctions more effective. More stringent enforcement of export controls on semiconductors, lasers and other higher-tech items would help deny resources to the Russian military, as would stricter enforcement of the price cap on oil. The U.S. recently announced additional sanctions on parties who violate or evade the price cap, strengthening that approach. Another way to enforce the cap would be secondary sanctions on entities from non-sanctioning nations, based on those entities’ support of Russian companies that are already subject to sanctions.

Despite their limitations, the sanctions and international trade measures imposed against Russia have been important multilateral responses to the illegal war in Ukraine. Russia is now adapting to their presence, but that is not reason to pull back on these strategies. Instead, the coalition of sanctioning powers should refine and reinforce these efforts as a crucial source of support for Ukraine.

Christine Abely is an assistant professor of law at New England Law Boston and the author of “The Russia Sanctions: The Economic Response to Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” which publishes this month.

Christmas is the world’s festival, its happy place

By LLEWELLYN KING  
Tribune News Service

I am an oddball. I like to work on Christmas. I don’t know how it is now, but when I was younger and worked for newspapers, variously in Africa, Britain and the United States, I always volunteered to work over the holiday and loved it. There was a special Christmas camaraderie, often more than a little nipping at the eggnog, and the joy to know that senior staff weren’t around — and, especially, to know that they weren’t needed. We, the juniors, could do it.

When you were unimportant otherwise, being in charge of a daily newspaper was the kind of Christmas gift one savored. It was a case of being news editor, city editor or chief correspondent for a day.

The senior editors were gone, and the junior staff had the run of the proceedings. Lovely fun, it was.

But not every worker is happy to labor on the great day. Consider the parish priest.

Once, I stayed with my wife, Linda Gasparello, at The Homestead, the grand hotel in Hot Springs, Va., where Washingtonians have been spending Christmas since the 1800s.

Having feasted happily but unwisely on Christmas dinner in the hotel’s baronial dining room, we felt the need for a little drive and

perhaps a walk. We fetched up at The Inn at Gristmill Square in Warm Springs. The town abuts the hotel’s 2,300 acres and is a delightful contrast, small and cozy.

At the bar was the local Episcopal priest. He was enjoying a little bottled Christmas cheer. Together, we had some more of what had brought him to his relaxed state and, looking dolefully at me, he said, “I love my job. I love my parishioners. But Christmas is so hard on a parish priest, that is why I am here with my friend.” He indicated the bartender.

He explained that apart from the additional services, he was expected to call on many families, attend many parties, eat lunches and dinners, and visit the sick and attend the everyday pastoral work of his office. The poor father was exhausted and enjoying Christmas in his private way, far from the madding crowd.

Clearly, this was nothing like the lark of working on newspapers at Christmas. But we shared more cheer, and he told me of how the real Christmas for him was in his daily pastoral work. He also liked working on Christmas, just that his lasted all year and got a bit hectic toward the 25th of December.

I marvel at Christmas. How it grips the whole world. How transcendental it is. How it sweeps up denominations. How Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and animists get into the spirit of it.

Also, I marvel at how Christmas has been modified globally to fit the Northern European tradition, with snow and mistletoe and songs that often have no religious relationship — like “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” or “White Christmas.”

My mother — who, like me, grew up in Africa — was against what she saw as the cultural appropriation of Christmas by the snowy European influence. She insisted on covering the house in ferns and other greenery, which she cut and hung on the 24th of December. Not an hour earlier. The 12 days of Christmas began for her on Christmas Eve and extended to Twelfth Night. Decorating earlier was heresy.

In vain, I pleaded for cotton wool snow, even though there was no snow in Bethlehem, and told her there was no greenery in the desert.

“Good King Wenceslas” was, it is believed, the Duke of Bohemia, now the Czech Republic. But to us in Africa, in the summer in the Southern Hemisphere, the snow lay deep and crisp and even in our imaginations.

That is the miracle of Christmas. It is for everyone, celebrated in its own way across the continents, inside and outside of Christendom.

Christmas is the world’s happy place. Enjoy!

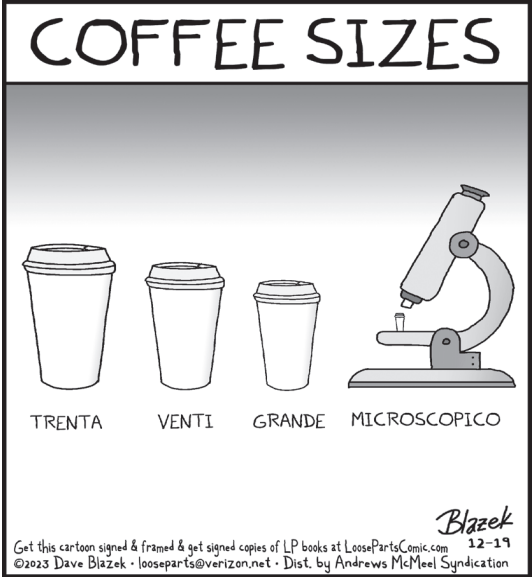
Llewellyn King is the executive producer and host of “White House Chronicle” on PBS. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

- ACROSS
- 1 Incubator noise

5 Fan's cry

8 Scat queen Fitzgerald

12 Thus

13 Flamenco cheer

14 13, to Cato

15 Hiker's snack

17 Harrow rival

18 Nine-digit ID

19 Non-dairy milk variety

20 Potpourri aroma

21 Heavy weight

22 Actor Ferrigno

23 Snug

26 Nudges roughly

30 "Understood"

31 Kenny G's instrument

32 Yard tool

33 Chinese leader

35 Nepal's neighbor

36 "Adorbs!"

37 Prom rental

38 "Swell!"

41 Poetic contraction

42 Rap sheet abbr.

45 Actor El-Masry

46 Spellbind

48 Conn of "Greasex"

49 Golfer Ernie

50 Give a hoot

51 "Roots" author Haley
- 52 Sailor's assent

53 Annoys
- DOWN
- 1 Favorites

2 Messes up

3 Novelist Jennifer

4 Luau bowlful

5 Kieran's role on "Succession"

6 Landed

7 Bewitch

8 Will VIP

9 Low-calorie

10 King of the jungle

11 "— She Sweet"

16 Booty

20 "Help!"

21 Hit sci-fi film with Keanu Reeves

22 Bagel topper
- 23 Bit of advice

24 Leb. neighbor

25 "My word!"

26 Cookie holder

27 Science room

28 Scrape (out)

29 Filming site

31 Stitch

34 — Jima

35 Rotate

37 Rib

38 Zilch

39 Actor Jannings

40 Staffer

41 Paris airport

42 Off in the distance

43 "Star Trek" captain

44 Chopping tools

46 Chai, e.g.

47 Biol. or chem.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

12-19

CRYPTOQUIP

MFTDVIAF, CNDWWFM WDF

A X W W D Z B ANIA VFGAIDZ

QNXGA-AIDTFM GXMfZAQ CXKTM

IMXGF: TfuUDZB UFGDZBKf.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE BOSSY PATIENT WITH A SEVERE PAIN WENT UP TO HIS DOCTOR AND CRIED, "YOU BETTER RELIEVE IT!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals G

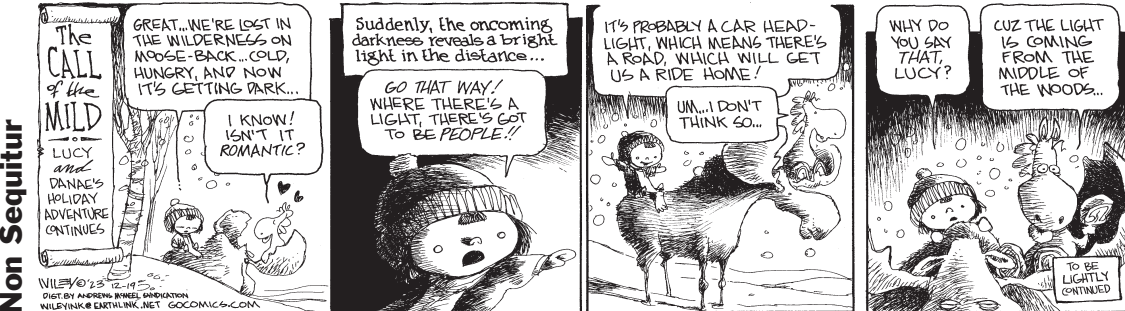
Frazz



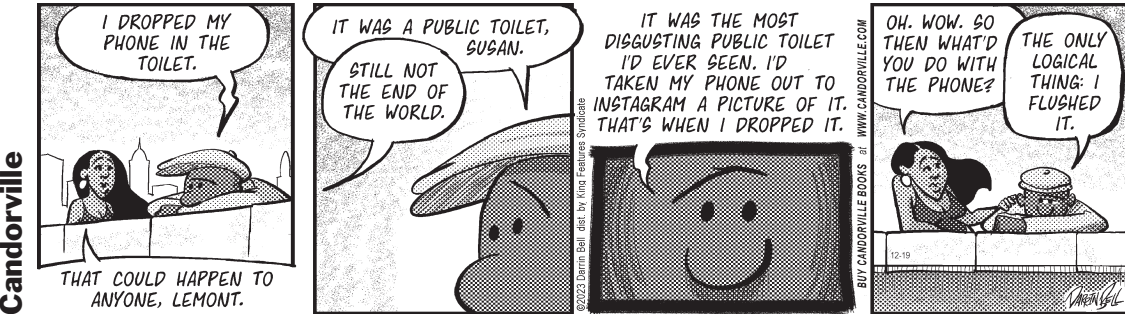
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey





# SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

<b>2023-24 Bowl Glance</b>	
<b>Saturday, Dec. 16</b>	
<b>Myrtle Beach Bowl</b>	
<b>Conway, S.C.</b>	
Ohio 41, Georgia Southern 21	
<b>Celebration Bowl</b>	
<b>Atlanta</b>	
Florida A&M 30, Howard 26	
<b>New Orleans Bowl</b>	
<b>New Orleans</b>	
Jacksonville St. 34, Louisiana 31, OT	
<b>Cure Bowl</b>	
<b>Orlando, Fla.</b>	
Appalachian St. 13, Miami (Ohio) 9	
<b>New Mexico Bowl</b>	
<b>Albuquerque, N.M.</b>	
Fresno St. 37, New Mexico St. 10	
<b>LA Bowl Hosted</b>	
<b>Inglewood, Calif.</b>	
UCLA 35, Boise St. 22	
<b>Independence Bowl</b>	
<b>Shreveport, La.</b>	
Texas Tech 34, California 14	
<b>Monday, Dec. 18</b>	
<b>Famous Toastery Bowl</b>	
<b>Charlotte, N.C.</b>	
W. Kentucky vs. Old Dominion	
<b>Tuesday, Dec 19</b>	
<b>Frisco Bowl</b>	
<b>Frisco, Texas</b>	
UTSA vs. Marshall	
<b>Thursday, Dec. 21</b>	
<b>Boca Raton Bowl</b>	
<b>Boca Raton, Fla.</b>	
USF vs. Syracuse	
<b>Friday, Dec. 22</b>	
<b>Gasparilla Bowl</b>	
<b>Tampa, Fla.</b>	
Georgia Tech vs. UCF	
<b>Saturday, Dec. 23</b>	
<b>Camellia Bowl</b>	
<b>Montgomery, Ala.</b>	
Arkansas St. vs. N. Illinois	
<b>Birmingham Bowl</b>	
<b>Birmingham, Ala.</b>	
Troy vs. Duke	
<b>Armed Forces Bowl</b>	
<b>Fort Worth, Texas</b>	
No. 24 James Madison vs. Air Force	
<b>Famous Idaho Potato Bowl</b>	
<b>Boise, Idaho</b>	
Georgia St. vs. Utah St.	
<b>68 Ventures Bowl</b>	
<b>Mobile, Ala.</b>	
South Alabama vs. Eastern Michigan	
<b>Las Vegas Bowl</b>	
<b>Las Vegas</b>	
Utah vs. Northwestern	
<b>Hawaii Bowl</b>	
<b>Honolulu, Hawaii</b>	
Coastal Carolina vs. San Jose St.	
<b>Tuesday, Dec. 26</b>	
<b>Quick Lane Bowl</b>	
<b>Detroit</b>	
Bowling Green vs. Minnesota	
<b>First Responder Bowl</b>	
<b>Dallas</b>	
Texas St. vs. Rice	
<b>Guaranteed Rate Bowl</b>	
<b>Phoenix</b>	
Kansas vs. UNLV	
<b>Wednesday, Dec. 27</b>	
<b>Military Bowl Presented</b>	
<b>Annapolis, Md.</b>	
No. 23 Tulane vs. Virginia Tech	
<b>Duke's Mayo Bowl</b>	
<b>Charlotte, N.C.</b>	

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

<b>Sunday's men's scores</b>	
<b>EAST</b>	
Fairfield 63, Wagner 51	
Jackson St. 81, Howard 44	
Navy 91, Washington College (Md.) 33	
Robert Morris 95, St. Vincent 46	
Stonehill 71, Hartford 44	
Stony Brook 78, Army 74, OT	
Syracuse 83, Oregon 63	
Texas Southern 79, Howard 78	
<b>SOUTH</b>	
Auburn 91, Southern Cal 75	
Jackson St. 68, NC A&T 60	
Longwood 68, VMI 49	
Louisville 85, Pepperdine 63	
McNeese St. 74, Louisiana-Lafayette 72	
Mississippi St. 72, North Texas 54	
N. Kentucky 85, E. Kentucky 75	
UAB 92, Montevallo 56	
Wofford 105, Kentucky Christian 54	
<b>MIDWEST</b>	
Akron 88, Miami-Hamilton 45	
E. Illinois 87, Blackburn 66	
Illinois 74, Colgate 57	
Illinois St. 75, N. Dakota St. 65	
Iowa St. 96, Florida A&M 58	
N. Iowa 100, Alcorn St. 82	
Nebraska 62, Kansas St. 46	
Omaha 88, Stetson 80	
SE Missouri 87, Lindsey Wilson 59	
Seton Hall 93, Missouri 87	
St. Thomas (MN) 85, Crown (Minn.) 66	
<b>SOUTHWEST</b>	
Abilene Christian 88, UTEP 82	
Oklahoma St. 81, Oral Roberts 60	
<b>FAR WEST</b>	
Boise St. 88, Cal St.-Fullerton 65	
Colorado St. 86, CSU-Pueblo 54	
Montana 86, San Jose St. 75	
Nevada 72, Hawaii 66	
Oregon St. 66, UTSA 65	
Stanford 82, Idaho 64	
Washington 100, Seattle 99, 2OT	
<b>Sunday's women's scores</b>	
<b>EAST</b>	
Binghamton 64, Coppin St. 52	
Bucknell 64, Merrimack 44	
Florida St. 76, Drexel 56	
Georgetown 60, Wake Forest 44	
Holy Cross 65, Northeastern 41	
James Madison 78, Maine 71	

## GOLF

<b>PNC Championships</b>	
<b>Saturday</b>	
<b>At Ritz-Carlton Golf Club</b>	
<b>Orlando, Fla.</b>	
<b>Yardage: 7,106; Par: 72</b>	
<b>Purse: \$1.085 million</b>	
<b>Final Round</b>	
Team Langer, \$200,000	60-59—119 -25
Team Duval, \$80,000	60-61—121 -23
Team Singh, \$57,250	60-62—122 -22
Team Goosen, \$50,000	60-63—123 -21
Team Woods, \$47,000	64-61—125 -19
Team Kucher, \$47,000	57-68—125 -19
Team Daly, \$47,000	61-64—125 -19
Team Lehman, \$47,000	62-63—125 -19
Team Cink, \$47,000	62-63—125 -19
Team Stricker, \$44,500	64-64—128 -16
Team Annika, \$43,750	62-67—129 -15
Team O'Meara, \$43,750	62-67—129 -15
Team Thomas, \$42,750	64-66—130 -14
Team Korda, \$42,750	64-66—130 -14
Team Leonard, \$42,000	64-67—131 -13
Team Price, \$41,500	68-64—132 -12
Team Faldo, \$41,000	68-35—133 -11
Team Trevino, \$40,500	69-66—135 -9
Team Harrington, \$40,125	67-70—137 -7
Team Furyk, \$40,125	66-71—137 -7

<b>TENNIS</b>	
<b>Open BLS De Limoges</b>	
<b>Sunday</b>	
<b>At Palais des Sports de Beaublanc</b>	
<b>Limoges, France</b>	
<b>Purse: Euro 100,000</b>	
<b>Surface: Hardcourt indoor</b>	
<b>Women's Singles</b>	
<b>Championship</b>	
Cristina Bucsa (5), Spain, def. Elsa Jacquemot, France, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2.	
<b>Women's Doubles</b>	
<b>Championship</b>	
Yana Sizikova, Russia, and Cristina Bucsa, Spain, def. Oksana Kalashnikova, Georgia, and Maia Lumsden (2), Britain, 6-4, 6-1.	

<b>DEALS</b>	
<b>Sunday's transactions</b>	
<b>HOCKEY</b>	
<b>National Hockey League</b>	
<b>BOSTON BRUINS</b> — Reassigned C Jesper Boqvist to Providence (AHL). Loaned D Ian Mitchell to Providence.	
<b>CALGARY FLAMES</b> — Activated G Jacob Markstrom from injured. Reassigned G Dustin Wolf and D Ilya Solovoyov to Calgary (AHL).	
<b>CAROLINA HURRICANES</b> — Recalled G Yaniv Perets from Norfolk (ECHL). Loaned G Antti Raanta to Chicago (AHL).	
<b>DETROIT RED WINGS</b> — Reassigned F Alexandre Doucet to Toledo (ECHL) from Grand Rapids (AHL).	
<b>LOS ANGELES KINGS</b> — Returned D Jacob Moverare to Ontario (AHL) from loan.	
<b>PHILADELPHIA FLYERS</b> — Reassigned D Mason Millman to Lehigh Valley (AHL) from Reading (ECHL).	
<b>SOCCER</b>	
<b>National Women's Soccer League</b>	
<b>HOUSTON DASH</b> — Acquired M Belle Briede, \$60,000 in allocation funds and a natural third-round 2024 draft pick from San Diego in exchange for M Sierra Enge.	
<b>UTAH ROYALS</b> — Sent LW Elyse Bennett to San Diego in exchange for \$40,000 in allocation funds.	

<b>AP SPORTLIGHT</b>	
<b>Dec. 19</b>	
<b>1913</b> — Heavyweight champion Jack Johnson fights to a 10-round draw with Battling Jim Johnson in Paris.	
<b>1917</b> — The NHL begins play. Joe Malone of the Montreal Canadiens scores five goals in a 9-4 victory over the Ottawa Senators. Harry Hyland of the Montreal Wanderers scores five goals in a 10-9 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs.	
<b>1943</b> — Harry Lumley, at 17 years and 38 days old, becomes the youngest goaltender in NHL history when he plays for the Detroit Red Wings in a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.	
<b>1948</b> — The Cleveland Browns complete an undefeated season by beating the Buffalo Bills 49-7 in the AAFC championship game.	
<b>1948</b> — The Philadelphia Eagles beat the Chicago Cardinals 7-0 in a major snowstorm for the NFL title. Philadelphia's Bucko Kilroy recovers a fumble on the 17-yard line in the fourth quarter, and Steve Van Buren later scores from the 5.	
<b>1976</b> — The Pittsburgh Steelers beat the Baltimore Colts 40-14 in an AFC playoff game. Ten minutes after the game, Donald Kroner, a former charter pilot, crashes a rented, low-wing, Piper Cherokee into the upper deck of Memorial Stadium. No one is seriously hurt as most of the capacity crowd of 60,020 left the one-sided contest early or were heading down the exit ramps.	
<b>1987</b> — Boston and St. Louis combine for the fastest two goals in NHL history. Ken Linseman puts the Bruins ahead 6-5 with 10 seconds left in the third period. Doug Gilmour of Boston wins the faceoff and shoots the puck into an empty net two seconds later to wrap up a 7-5 win over the Blues at Boston Garden.	
<b>1990</b> — Los Angeles Raiders running back Bo Jackson is named to the AFC Pro Bowl team, as a reserve, becoming the first athlete chosen for All-Star games in two sports.	



Texas' Madisen Skinner celebrates Sunday after beating Nebraska in the national championship match of the NCAA Tournament.

# Skinner, Longhorns claim national title

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Madisen Skinner had 16 kills and Ella Swindle became the fourth true freshman setter to lead her team to a national championship as Texas defended its NCAA Volleyball title by dominating No. 1 overall seed Nebraska 3-0 on Sunday.

With Skinner, named the Most Outstanding Player with 34 kills in the Final Four, the Longhorns (28-4) ran their tournament winning streak to 12 by becoming the first team to win consecutive championship matches 3-0. Texas won its fourth NCAA crown 25-22, 25-14, 25-11 by sweeping the Cornhuskers (33-2), who had lost just one set in the tournament.

“My teammates, oh my gosh, just the support,” Skinner said. “Just the belief we have in each other. Ever since I’ve been here, I just knew it was the place to be. I felt I’m part of a family, something bigger than myself. The people surrounding me made this all possible.”

Texas returned 11 players off its championship team, although MVP Logan Eggleston graduated. The experience showed against a Nebraska team that was trying to join the 1985 Pacific team as the only champions without a senior.

The young Cornhuskers were out of sync most of the day, with much of the credit going to the Longhorns’ service game that produced a championship-match record 12 aces.

The match ended on an ace by Asjia O’Neal, giving her a career-high five. Skinner had a career-high six aces in a 3-1 semifinal win over Wisconsin. Keonilei Akana, who played her first two seasons at Nebraska, ended the 2022 tournament with an ace for a 3-0 sweep of Louisville and had two more against her former team Sunday.

Skinner hit .273 with the 16 kills and seven errors on 33 total attempts. Jenna Wenaas added nine kills, hitting .293. Swindle had five kills, hit .333 and had 21 assists with seven digs. O’Neal, had four kills and hit .375. The sixth-year senior and daughter of former NBA player Jermaine O’Neal had just four errors in six NCAA tournament matches.

Skinner won a national championship as a freshman at Kentucky in 2020 by beating Texas. She won her third title, as did Longhorns’ coach Jerritt Elliott.

Texas was No. 1 in the preseason poll, but lost three of its first eight matches and fell out of the Top 10 while Nebraska opened the season with 27 straight wins and moved from fifth to first, staying there despite a 3-0 loss to Wisconsin.

“I think it has to do with our culture,” O’Neal said. “Our coaches do an incredible job of putting the right girls here who love each other and care for one another. Obviously we didn’t have the best start to our season ... but we trusted the process and because of our love for one another we were able to continue to get better and peak at the right time.”

Nebraska entered its 11th final leading the nation in hitting percentage defense at .135 and held its first five tournament opponents to .098 but Texas hit .264, including .481 in the final set. Meanwhile, the Cornhuskers, who hit .278 for the year, hit a season-worst .013, which was the best for the Longhorns this year.

Harper Murray had seven kills for Nebraska, which had 20 kills and 19 attack errors. The Cornhuskers had only one block after recording eight blocks in the first set of their semifinal sweep of Pittsburgh.

Texas lost championship games to Nebraska in 1995 and 2015.



Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Boston	29	19	5	5	43	94	73	
Toronto	28	16	6	6	38	106	90	
Florida	30	18	10	2	38	90	78	
Detroit	30	15	11	4	34	107	95	
Tampa Bay	32	14	13	5	33	105	114	
Montreal	30	13	13	4	30	84	104	
Buffalo	32	13	16	3	29	90	105	
Ottawa	26	11	15	0	22	88	89	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
N.Y. Rangers	29	21	7	1	43	96	80	
Philadelphia	30	17	10	3	37	90	79	
N.Y. Islanders	30	14	8	8	36	94	100	
Carolina	31	16	12	3	35	100	100	
Washington	28	15	9	4	34	70	80	
New Jersey	29	16	12	1	33	101	104	
Pittsburgh	29	13	13	3	29	83	81	
Columbus	32	10	17	5	25	96	117	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Colorado	31	19	10	2	40	113	96	
Winnipeg	29	18	9	2	38	97	76	
Dallas	29	17	8	4	38	103	92	
Nashville	31	18	13	0	36	99	94	
Arizona	30	15	13	2	32	93	86	
St. Louis	30	15	14	1	31	88	99	
Minnesota	28	12	12	4	28	86	91	
Chicago	30	9	20	1	19	70	109	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	32	21	6	5	47	113	81	
Vancouver	32	21	9	2	44	120	79	
Los Angeles	27	17	6	4	38	97	67	
Calgary	31	12	14	5	29	93	109	
Seattle	32	10	14	8	28	87	105	
Edmonton	28	13	14	1	27	97	97	
Anaheim	30	11	19	0	22	80	102	
San Jose	31	9	19	3	21	66	124	
<b>Note:</b> Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.								
<b>Sunday's games</b>								
Vancouver 4, Chicago 3								
Washington 2, Carolina 1, SO								
Anaheim 5, New Jersey 1								
Colorado 6, San Jose 2								
Vegas 6, Ottawa 3								
<b>Monday's games</b>								
Anaheim at Detroit								
Minnesota at Pittsburgh								
Montreal at Winnipeg								
Seattle at Dallas								
Florida at Calgary								
<b>Tuesday's games</b>								
Columbus at Buffalo								
Minnesota at Boston								
N.Y. Rangers at Toronto								
Philadelphia at New Jersey								
St. Louis at Tampa Bay								
Vegas at Carolina								
Edmonton at N.Y. Islanders								
Vancouver at Nashville								
Colorado at Chicago								
Ottawa at Arizona								
Los Angeles at San Jose								
<b>Wednesday's games</b>								
Detroit at Winnipeg								
N.Y. Islanders at Washington								
Seattle at Los Angeles								
<b>Thursday's games</b>								
Carolina at Pittsburgh								
Nashville at Philadelphia								
St. Louis at Florida								
Toronto at Buffalo								
Vegas at Tampa Bay								
Washington at Columbus								
Edmonton at New Jersey								
Montreal at Minnesota								
Vancouver at Dallas								
Ottawa at Colorado								
Calgary at Anaheim								
Arizona at San Jose								
<b>Scoring leaders</b>								
<b>Through Sunday</b>								
	GP	G	A	PTS				
Nikita Kucherov, TB	31	20	32	52				
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	31	14	33	47				
J.T. Miller, VAN	32	15	30	45				
Artemi Panarin, NYR	29	16	26	42				
Connor McDavid, EDM	26	11	30	41				
David Pastrnak, BOS	29	17	24	41				
William Nylander, TOR	28	15	25	40				
Quinn Hughes, VAN	32	9	30	39				
Elias Pettersson, VAN	32	12	27	39				
Mikko Rantanen, COL	31	15	24	39				
Sam Reinhart, FLA	30	17	21	38				
Cale Makar, COL	27	8	29	37				
Jack Hughes, NJ	24	14	23	37				
Brock Boeser, VAN	32	23	14	37				
3 tied with 36 pts.								

ROUNDUP

Kuznetsov lifts Caps in shootout

*Associated Press*

RALEIGH, N.C. — Evgeny Kuznetsov scored the deciding goal in the shootout to lead the Washington Capitals to a 2-1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday night.

Martin Fehervary scored for the Capitals while Darcy Kuemper made 28 saves and stopped all three attempts in the shootout.

Washington improved to 5-0 on the season in the second game of back-to-back sets.

“We’ve been in a few of these now of just grinding our way through where you can tell fatigue is a factor,” Washington coach Spencer Carbery said. “The penalty kill stepped up big. (Kuemper) was excellent. He made some massive saves for us and we found a way to win.”

The Capitals have earned at least a point in five of their past six games. They’ve been able to piece together points without a lot of production from star Alex Ovechkin, who hasn’t scored since Nov. 18.

“Structurally, we’re playing well,” Tom Wilson said. “It’s not always about winning games 6-5 and 7-4 and all that. We’re playing good and we feel good about our game. The goals will come.”

Sebastian Aho scored for the Hurricanes, who lost their second straight game. Carolina goalie Pyotr Kochetkov made 20 saves.

Both goalies were sharp early. Kochetkov stopped Wilson on a short-handed breakaway with 1:42 left in the first period. Kuemper robbed Jalen Chatfield early in the second period on a prime scoring chance.

Aho broke through for the game’s first goal on a feed from Seth Jarvis. Aho finished a shot from the slot at 7:41 in the second for the 1-0 lead.

Fehervary evened it at 1-1 at 11:33 in the second after a lead pass from Wilson. Fehervary was alone in the slot and beat Kochetkov to



KARL B DeBLAKER/AP

The Washington Capitals’ Evgeny Kuznetsov controls the puck after taking it away from the Carolina Hurricanes’ Michael Bunting during the first period Sunday in Raleigh, N.C.

the glove side.

“I saw an opportunity to join the rush,” Fehervary said. “I was open. I saw that they were cutting off (Ovechkin), not surprised, so I just shot it and it went in.”

Kochetkov started for the fifth time in seven games after the Hurricanes assigned veteran goalie Antti Raanta to Chicago in the AHL on Sunday.

Raanta, whose .854 save percentage ranks last in the NHL, was waived Saturday but went unclaimed. Yaniv Perets, an undrafted rookie, was called up from Norfolk in the ECHL to serve as the backup.

Since a four-game losing streak in early December, the Hurricanes have earned a point in four straight (2-0-2).

“We did everything we wanted to do, just didn’t score,” Carolina

coach Rod Brind’Amour said. “I thought we stuck with our game-plan really well and hit a few goal-posts. Couple of inches here or there and it would have been a much different story.”

**Ducks 5, Devils 1:** Adam Henrique scored three goals for his first career hat trick and visiting Anaheim snapped a five-game losing streak.

Alex Killorn had a goal and two assists, Troy Terry had a goal and an assist, and defensemen Pavel Mintyukov and Cam Fowler each had two assists for the Ducks, who were 1-13-0 since their last regulation win on Nov. 14.

John Gibson had 18 saves through two periods and Lukas Dostal stopped all 10 shots he faced in the third. The Ducks announced Gibson was pulled because he was feeling “under the weather.”

Michael McLeod scored for New Jersey, and Akira Schmid finished with 22 saves. The Devils had won two straight and five of six.

**Canucks 4, Blackhawks 3:** Brock Boeser, Ilya Mikheyev and Dakota Joshua scored in the middle period, and visiting Vancouver beat depleted Chicago.

Elias Pettersson also scored as the Canucks shook off a slow start. J.T. Miller and Tyler Myers each had two assists, and Thatcher Demko made 25 saves. Vancouver improved to 6-1-1 in the last eight games.

Nick Foligno had two goals for Chicago, and Connor Bedard had two assists against his hometown team. Cole Guttman scored in the

third period, and Petr Mrazek made 22 saves. The last-place Blackhawks lost their fourth straight game and dropped to 4-13-1 in their last 18.

**Golden Knights 6, Senators 3:** Jack Eichel and Ivan Barbashev each had a goal and an assist, and Logan Thompson came off the bench to make 20 saves as host Vegas beat Ottawa.

Jonathan Marchessault, Nicolas Roy, Chandler Stephenson and William Karlsson also scored for the Golden Knights. Adin Hill gave up one goal on three shots in his return to the net for the first time since Nov. 30 before leaving with an apparent injury 6:25 into the game.

Josh Norris, Ridly Greig and Brady Tkachuk each scored for the Senators and Joonas Korpisalo made 25 saves.

**Avalanche 6, Sharks 2:** Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and two assists to extend his point streak to 15 games, and host Colorado beat San Jose.

Mikko Rantanen, Ryan Johansen, Valeri Nichushkin and Miles Wood also had goals for the Avalanche. Alexandar Georgiev had 27 saves in a rebound game from a poor start last Monday.

MacKinnon’s streak ties his career high and also gives him at least one point in all 16 home games this season. He is second in the NHL in scoring with 47 points, trailing only Tampa Bay’s Nikita Kucherov (52).

Tomas Hertl scored two goals for the Sharks and MacKenzie Blackwood finished with 23 saves.



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Anaheim Ducks center Adam Henrique reacts after scoring a hat trick on an empty-net goal Sunday against the New Jersey Devils.



NBA

Warriors hold off Trail Blazers' rally

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Klay Thompson scored 28 points on a night Stephen Curry's NBA-record 3-pointer streak ended at 268 games and the Golden State Warriors held off the Portland Trail Blazers 118-114 on Sunday for their second straight victory.

Curry was 0-for-8 from 3-point range, 2-for-12 overall and scored seven points. He began the streak Dec. 1, 2018, at Detroit.

"We can't rely on Steph to bail us out on every single night," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "It was a tough night for him, but that's what a team is supposed to be about. Everybody filling in for each other, different guys stepping up each night. That's a great sign, because he's carried us for long enough this year. We need to give him more help."

Curry, the NBA career leader who recently made his 3,500th 3-pointer, last went without one in a regular-season game Nov. 8, 2018, when he went 0-for-4 against Milwaukee. He also owns the second-longest NBA streak at 157 games.

Andrew Wiggins, who was recently taken out of Golden State's starting lineup, had 25 points and seven rebounds.

"He did a little bit of everything. Rebounded, hit 3s, played above the rim," Thompson said. "That's



Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson dribbles the ball past Trail Blazers guard Anfernee Simons during the second half in Portland, Ore., on Sunday. The Warriors beat the Trail Blazers 118-114.

the Wigs we love."

Rookie Trayce Jackson-Davis had 14 points and eight rebounds to help the Warriors win consecutive games for the first time since the end of a five-game winning streak in early November.

Jerami Grant led Portland with 30 points. Anfernee Simons scored all 21 of his points in the second half.

Portland cut it to 113-111 with 39 seconds left. Chris Paul's jumper with 20.9 seconds left pushed the Warriors' lead to 115-111, and Si-

mon's 3-point play made it a 115-114 with 14.7 seconds to go.

"Chris Paul, what a gamer he is to hit those shots at the end," Thompson said about Paul, who scored all four of his points in the final 2:26.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	20	5	.800	—
Philadelphia	18	7	.720	2
New York	14	11	.560	6
Brooklyn	13	12	.520	7
Toronto	10	15	.400	10
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	16	9	.640	—
Miami	15	11	.577	1½
Atlanta	10	15	.400	6
Charlotte	7	17	.292	8½
Washington	4	21	.160	12
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	19	7	.731	—
Indiana	13	11	.542	5
Cleveland	14	12	.538	5
Chicago	10	17	.370	9½
Detroit	2	24	.077	17
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Dallas	16	9	.640	—
New Orleans	16	11	.593	1
Houston	13	10	.565	2
Memphis	6	18	.250	9½
San Antonio	4	21	.160	12
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	19	5	.792	—
Oklahoma City	16	8	.667	3
Denver	17	10	.630	3½
Utah	9	17	.346	11
Portland	6	19	.240	13½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	15	9	.625	—
L.A. Clippers	15	10	.600	½
L.A. Lakers	15	11	.577	1
Phoenix	14	12	.538	2
Golden State	12	14	.462	4

Sunday's games	
Golden State 118, Portland 114	
Milwaukee 128, Houston 119	
New Orleans 146, San Antonio 110	
Boston 114, Orlando 97	
Phoenix 112, Washington 108	
Monday's games	
Chicago at Philadelphia	
Houston at Cleveland	
L.A. Clippers at Indiana	
Charlotte at Toronto	
Detroit at Atlanta	
Minnesota at Miami	
Memphis at Oklahoma City	
Brooklyn at Utah	
Dallas at Denver	
Washington at Sacramento	
New York at L.A. Lakers	
Tuesday's games	
Memphis at New Orleans	
San Antonio at Milwaukee	
Boston at Golden State	
Phoenix at Portland	
Wednesday's games	
Charlotte at Indiana	
Miami at Orlando	
Minnesota at Philadelphia	
Utah at Cleveland	
Denver at Toronto	
New York at Brooklyn	
Atlanta at Houston	
L.A. Lakers at Chicago	
L.A. Clippers at Dallas	
Boston at Sacramento	

ROUNDUP

Antetokounmpo breaks team rebound record

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points and 17 rebounds, passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become the Bucks' career rebounding leader, and Damian Lillard scored 39 points in Milwaukee's 128-119 victory over the Houston Rockets on Sunday night.

Antetokounmpo's highest rebounding total of the season allowed him to pass Abdul-Jabbar after he had moved past the Hall of Famer for the team's scoring record during the 2021-22 season. He is also the Bucks' career leader in assists, joining Michael Jordan (Chicago), LeBron James (Cleveland) and Kevin Garnett (Minnesota) as the only players to lead a franchise in all three categories.

"It's a big compliment," Antetokounmpo said. "I don't think anybody assumed that the skinny kid from Greece that was drafted and supposed to play in the G-League would be in position to break Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's record. I know for sure there's going to be someone who is going to come along in time and break all of the records that Kareem set, Oscar Robertson, Marques Johnson, myself, Khris (Middleton)."



The Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo looks to shoot against the Houston Rockets' Jabari Smith Jr. on Sunday in Milwaukee.

The Bucks won their 13th straight home game and improved to 14-1 at home while snapping the Rockets' five-game winning streak. Houston (13-10) dropped to 2-9 on the road.

Middleton scored 14 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter as the Bucks finally pulled away. Middleton sank a 3-pointer to give the Bucks a 112-106 lead with 5:26 left, and a three-point play by Antetokounmpo made it 118-111 with 3:44 remaining.

"Khris does this all the time, where he just settles us down where we need a basket and he goes and gets us a bucket," Bucks coach Adrian Griffin said. "Sometimes he scores and sometimes it's an assist, but the fourth quarter is usually when Khris is at his best."

**Pelicans 146, Spurs 110:** CJ McCollum scored 29 points, Brandon Ingram added 26 and visiting New Orleans set a franchise record with 22 3-pointers in rolling past Victor Wembanyama and

San Antonio.

Wembanyama had 17 points and 13 rebounds in front of former San Antonio All-Star Tony Parker, his childhood idol in France and later mentor. Wembanyama's eighth consecutive double-double surpassed the previous NBA record by a teenager of seven straight set by Dwight Howard with Orlando in 2005.

**Celtics 114, Magic 97:** Jaylen Brown scored 17 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter and host Boston beat Orlando to improve to 14-0 at home.

Boston is off to its second-best start at home, behind the 1957-58 club that opened with 17 straight wins. The Celtics have won five straight overall to improve to 20-5, a half-game ahead of Minnesota for the NBA lead.

**Suns 112, Wizards 108:** Devin Booker shook off a subpar shooting night, scoring 11 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, and host Phoenix overcame a 16-point deficit to beat Washington on Sunday night.

Kevin Durant led the Suns with 28 points, including a dunk on a three-point play in the final minute. Jusuf Nurkic had 17 rebounds. Booker also had eight assists.

Scoring leaders					
Through Sunday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Embiid, PHI	22	251	226	752	34.2
Doncic, DAL	24	270	152	784	32.7
Antetokoun., MIL	25	293	189	785	31.4
Gil-Alex., OKC	23	258	167	707	30.7
Durant, PHO	22	232	160	673	30.6
Fox, SAC	18	190	104	542	30.1
Curry, GS	24	208	142	673	28.0
Young, ATL	23	201	164	644	28.0
Mitchell, CLE	21	198	113	573	27.3
Tatum, BOS	25	237	133	682	27.3
Jokic, DEN	26	272	129	703	27.0
Lillard, MIL	24	178	187	618	25.8
Haliburton, IND	21	189	85	540	25.7
Maxey, PHI	24	212	115	615	25.6
Brunson, NY	25	224	112	637	25.5



COLLEGE

# McCord goes from Ohio St. to Syracuse

Associated Press

Quarterback Kyle McCord, who started every game this season for Ohio State, announced Sunday that he is transferring to Syracuse.

McCord passed for 3,170 yards, 24 touchdowns and six interceptions in his third season at Ohio State, but first as a starter for the seventh-ranked Buckeyes (11-1). He was a four-star recruit out of Philadelphia and a high school teammate of Ohio State All-American receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.

McCord is the latest transfer addition for new Syracuse coach Fran Brown. The former Georgia assistant coach has also received transfer commits from former Bulldogs receivers Jackson Meeks and Zeed Haynes.

Brown is a New Jersey native who previously worked at Temple and Rutgers before spending two seasons with Georgia.

Georgia has had a total of 15 scholarship players enter the transfer portal during the December window, including linebacker Jamon Dumas-Johnson, a finalist for the Butkus Award in 2022, and freshman cornerback A.J. Harris, a former five-star recruit.

Dumas-Johnson's 2023 season was cut short by a forearm injury he suffered during a Nov. 4 victory over Missouri. He finished with



MORRY GASH/AP

**After starting every game this season for Ohio State, quarterback Kyle McCord announced Sunday that he is transferring to Syracuse to play under new coach Fran Brown.**

34 tackles, including 5.5 for losses and 3.5 sacks.

CJ Allen stepped into the lineup

in place of Dumas-Johnson, recording 24 tackles and earning a pair of SEC Freshman of the

Week awards over the final four games.

Harris was one of the top pro-

spects in the 2023 recruiting class, but decided to move on after seeing action in just seven games.

Mississippi also had a busy weekend in the transfer portal, adding former Florida defensive end Princely Umanmielen and two former Tennessee players, defensive end Tyler Baron and defensive back Tamarion McDouald.

Other notable transfer commitments announced by the players Sunday include:

■ Former Toledo quarterback Dequan Finn, who was the Mid-American Conference player of the year after throwing for 2,657 yards and 22 touchdowns and running for 563 yards and seven scores, committed to Baylor.

■ Former Utah quarterback Nate Johnson, who played in eight games as a freshman this past season, committed to Vanderbilt. Johnson threw for 499 yards and three scores and ran 235 and four.

■ All-Ivy League defensive lineman Joey Slackman from Penn said he is heading to Florida.

■ FCS All-America receiver Dymere Miller from Monmouth committed to Rutgers.

■ Former Illinois running back Reggie Love III committed to Purdue. Love led the Illini in rushing with 567 yards in eight games.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

## Balanced offense leads No. 16 Illinois over Colgate

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Coleman Hawkins scored 16 points and Quincy Guerrier and Marcus Domask each scored 15 to help Illinois lead from start to finish in a 74-57 victory over Colgate on Sunday.

Terrance Shannon Jr. had 14 points despite not scoring in the second half for the 16th-ranked Fighting Illini (8-2). The Big Ten's second-leading scorer had 20 or more points in six of his last seven games.

"We don't need Terrance to score 30 points in every game," said Illinois coach Brad Underwood. "He can help us in multiple ways."

The Raiders (6-5), who have qualified for the NCAA Tournament four times in five years, were led by Jeff Woodward with 14 points. Keegan Records, the preseason Patriot League Player and Defensive Player of the Year, was held to nine points.

Down by as many as 22 points in the second half (51-29), Colgate made eight straight field goals late in the half as part of a



CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

**Illinois' Coleman Hawkins shoots over Colgate's Keegan Records during the first half Sunday in Champaign, Ill. Illinois won 74-57.**

run that drew the Raiders within 62-53 with 3:35 left.

"We had a bad start. Against a

team the caliber of Illinois, that makes for a long afternoon," said Colgate coach Matt Langel.

### Former UNC great Montross, 52, dies

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Eric Montross, a former North Carolina and NBA big man, has died after a cancer fight, his family said. He was 52.

The school released the family's announcement Monday morning, saying Montross died Sunday surrounded by loved ones at his Chapel Hill home.

He had been diagnosed with cancer in March, leading to him stepping away from his duties as a radio

analyst for UNC game broadcasts.

Montross played for the Tar Heels under Dean Smith from 1990-94 and was a two-time Associated Press second-team All-American. He started on Smith's second NCAA championship team in 1993 before being the No. 9 overall pick by the Boston Celtics a year later and playing in the NBA until 2002.

Associated Press

"But we responded like I knew we would in the second half."

Underwood said the Illini's start set the tone for the game.

"You don't want to play from behind against Colgate because of their size and their pace. And they know how to win," he said.

**No. 17 Colorado State 86, CSU-Pueblo 54:** Isaiah Stevens had 18 points to move closer to taking over as the program's all-time leading scorer and the host Rams shook off a sluggish start to roll past the Division II Thunderwolves.

Nique Clifford, Taviontae Jackson and Patrick Cartier each finished with 13 points. Clifford also had nine rebounds. Colorado State (10-1) held a 36-12 advantage in points in the paint.

Armon Muldrew led CSU-Pueblo (6-5) with 16 points, while Brevin Walter contributed 13.

The Thunderwolves held the lead for 26 seconds in the first half. But the Rams used their size and speed to pull away. Colorado State led by as many as 24 in the first half.



NFL

# Cook leads way as Bills trample Cowboys

## Buffalo's running game takes over in rout

**By JOHN WAWROW**  
*Associated Press*

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Bills' offense has found its legs in time to make a playoff push.

Josh Allen played the role of happy spectator by standing back and watching James Cook run left, right and up the middle as Buffalo ran away with a 31-10 win over the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday.

"I felt like the kid that didn't do anything in a class project but got an A," Allen said after he threw for just 94 yards, with a touchdown passing and one rushing. "But I'll do this 10 times out of 10 times, man. Like, keep going."

A matchup of two of the NFL's top-scoring quarterbacks — Allen entered the week with 35 total touchdowns, and Dak Prescott was first in passing TDs with 28 — turned into a Buffalo stampede. Cook finished with 179 yards rushing and 221 yards from scrimmage, both career bests, while scoring on an 18-yard catch and a 24-yard run as the Cowboys' five-game winning streak was snapped.

"I just let it rip when I get my opportunity," said Cook, a second-year player who is the younger brother of New York Jets running back Dalvin Cook. "My O-linemen, they were opening it up and I was hitting it. Finding that rhythm."

The Bills (8-6) won consecutive games for the first time since a three-game winning streak ended on Oct. 1 and gained ground in the AFC playoff race, moving one game ahead of Denver and Pittsburgh.

The Cowboys (10-4) clinched their third straight playoff berth before kickoff thanks to losses by Green Bay and Atlanta on Sunday and Detroit beating Denver on Saturday. But nothing else went right for Dallas, which fell a game behind NFC-best San Francisco.

Buffalo rushed for 266 yards, held the ball for 10 minutes longer than Dallas and had 28 first downs to the Cowboys' 14.

The NFL's top-scoring offense was limited to a field goal through 57 minutes. Dallas is 7-0 at home, where it has outscored opponents 279-108, but fell to 3-4 on the road, where it has been outscored 156-152.

"It's a gap. That's part of my message. We play so well at home, and there's just too big of a gap in our road games," coach Mike McCarthy said. "We are conscious of it. We have a long flight home to continue to talk about, think about (it)."

Dallas, coming off a 33-13 win over Philadelphia, plays two of its last three on the road.

The Bills played keep-away by running the ball in a persistent rain, tripping up a Cowboys offense that finished with a season-low 195 yards.

"They got up on us and continued to control the ball, control the possession, kill the clock. And we didn't convert on our third downs, which is something we have been great on all year," Prescott said.

"That's been our way of winning the games. So they beat us in the formula."

Buffalo's injury-depleted defense, missing two more regulars



MATT DURISKO/AP

**Buffalo Bills running back James Cook breaks loose for a 24-yard touchdown during Sunday's game against the Dallas Cowboys in Orchard Park, N.Y. Cook finished with a 179 yards rushing.**

in edge rusher A.J. Epenesa and safety Micah Hyde, had three sacks and limited Prescott to 21-for-34 passing for 134 yards with an interception.

And a Cowboys offense that scored 40 or more points five times this season punted five times and was limited to eight first downs before gaining six on its final drive.

Four of the Bills' first five possessions lasted more than 4 minutes, 40 seconds.

Latavius Murray capped Buffa-

lo's 12-play, 75-yard opening drive with a 2-yard run. The Bills went up 14-0 on Cook's 18-yard touchdown catch on their third drive, which was extended after Sam Williams was flagged for roughing Bills punter Sam Martin.

The game was essentially over after the Bills' opening drive of the third quarter, which ate up 8:22 of the clock and ended with Tyle Bass hitting a 23-yard field goal to put Buffalo up 24-3.

Buffalo's 20 first downs rushing were tied for the second-most in

team history, and most since 1996. Cook's rushing total was the highest for a Bills player since Fred Jackson had 212 yards in a 2009 season-ending win over Indianapolis.

The Bills, coming off a 20-17 victory at Kansas City, are trying to secure their fifth straight playoff berth and stay in contention for a fourth consecutive AFC East title.

"It was kind of all systems go today," center Mitch Morse said. "We still have an uphill battle, but this is a great first step."

# Change: Latest loss puts Giants on brink of playoff elimination

FROM PAGE 24

Flacco knows all about the fickle nature of life in the NFL.

The former Super Bowl MVP was unemployed before the Browns signed him to the practice squad Nov. 20. He stepped into the starting lineup three weeks ago and has led Cleveland to consecutive wins with 300-yard passing performances in both games.

Flacco overcame three picks and rallied the Browns to a 20-17 victory over Chicago. Cleveland (9-5) leads the AFC wild-card race despite starting four quarterbacks this season.

"Obviously, Joe made some unbelievable throws there when we needed them," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "Just can't say enough good things about how he played in that fourth quarter."

The Chiefs avoided the first three-game losing streak in the Mahomes era with a 27-17 win



GERALD HERBERT/AP

**Giants quarterback Tommy DeVito is sacked by Saints defensive end Tanoh Kpassagnon. DeVito was sacked seven times in a 24-6 loss.**

over the hapless Patriots.

Mahomes threw for 305 yards and two TDs and also had two interceptions, including one on a

ball that bounced out of Kadarius Toney's hands. Mahomes, who threw a tantrum on the sideline last week after Toney's offside

penalty negated a go-ahead score in a loss to Buffalo, was fuming after the play.

But Toney's mistake didn't cost the Chiefs this time around.

"Losing three straight in this league really puts you in a tough spot and I thought the guys did a good job," Mahomes said. "That's a really good defense. Offensively, we scored points early. On defense, shut the door, kind of like they've been doing these last few weeks, but we have to continue to get better and better."

The Giants had won three in a row behind DeVito before running into New Orleans.

DeVito was sacked seven times in a 24-6 loss and the Saints mimicked his finger celebration after big plays.

The loss put New York (5-9) on the brink of playoff elimination.

The Eagles clinched a playoff berth without taking the field but

they made a big change. Coming off lopsided losses to San Francisco and Dallas, coach Nick Sirianni stripped defensive coordinator Sean Desai of playcalling duties and gave senior defensive assistant Matt Patricia that role.

With Jalen Hurts questionable because of an illness, the Eagles (10-3) have to beat Seattle (6-7) on Monday night to keep pace with the 49ers in the race for the No. 1 seed.

Purdy tossed four TD passes and McCaffrey had 187 scrimmage yards and three scores in a 45-29 rout of Arizona.

The 49ers (11-3) have won five in a row after losing three straight. They've been the NFL's most complete team and have the inside track on the NFC's No. 1 seed.

But with a showdown against the AFC-leading Baltimore Ravens (11-3) coming up Christmas night, that can change in a hurry.



Scoreboard

American Conference							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Miami	10	4	0	.714	441	294	
Buffalo	8	6	0	.571	379	254	
e-N.Y. Jets	5	9	0	.357	201	287	
e-New England	3	11	0	.214	186	299	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Houston	8	6	0	.571	306	295	
Indianapolis	8	6	0	.571	344	343	
Jacksonville	8	6	0	.571	319	313	
e-Tennessee	5	9	0	.357	257	301	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
x-Baltimore	11	3	0	.786	384	225	
Cleveland	9	5	0	.643	309	289	
Cincinnati	8	6	0	.571	307	311	
Pittsburgh	7	7	0	.500	223	280	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Kansas City	9	5	0	.643	319	245	
Denver	7	7	0	.500	304	351	
Las Vegas	6	8	0	.429	265	280	
L.A. Chargers	5	9	0	.357	303	345	
National Conference							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
x-Philadelphia	10	3	0	.769	342	321	
x-Dallas	10	4	0	.714	431	264	
N.Y. Giants	5	9	0	.357	189	338	
e-Washington	4	10	0	.286	281	423	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
New Orleans	7	7	0	.500	309	267	
Tampa Bay	7	7	0	.500	296	290	
Atlanta	6	8	0	.429	258	278	
e-Carolina	2	12	0	.143	206	348	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Detroit	10	4	0	.714	382	331	
Minnesota	7	7	0	.500	290	269	
Green Bay	6	8	0	.429	300	301	
Chicago	5	9	0	.357	287	329	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
y-San Francisco	11	3	0	.786	425	234	
L.A. Rams	7	7	0	.500	327	310	
Seattle	6	7	0	.462	280	318	
e-Arizona	3	11	0	.214	259	376	
e-Eliminated from playoffs							
x-clinched playoff spot							
y-clinched division							
Thursday's game							
Las Vegas 63, L.A. Chargers 21							
Saturday's games							
Cincinnati 27, Minnesota 24, OT							
Indianapolis 30, Pittsburgh 13							
Detroit 42, Denver 17							
Sunday's games							
Carolina 9, Atlanta 7							
Cleveland 20, Chicago 17							
Houston 19, Tennessee 16, OT							
Kansas City 27, New England 17							
Miami 30, N.Y. Jets 0							
New Orleans 24, N.Y. Giants 6							
Tampa Bay 34, Green Bay 20							
L.A. Rams 28, Washington 20							
San Francisco 45, Arizona 29							
Buffalo 31, Dallas 10							
Baltimore 23, Jacksonville 7							
Monday's game							
Philadelphia at Seattle							
Thursday, Dec. 21							
New Orleans at L.A. Rams							
Saturday, Dec. 23							
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh							
Buffalo at L.A. Chargers							
Sunday, Dec. 24							
Cleveland at Houston							
Detroit at Minnesota							
Green Bay at Carolina							
Indianapolis at Atlanta							
Seattle at Tennessee							
Washington at N.Y. Jets							
Jacksonville at Tampa Bay							
Arizona at Chicago							
Dallas at Miami							
New England at Denver							
Monday, Dec. 25							
Las Vegas at Kansas City							
N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia							
Baltimore at San Francisco							

ROUNDUP

Ravens top Jags, clinch playoff spot

*Associated Press*

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Lamar Jackson was sacked, or so it seemed.

Jacksonville Jaguars pass rusher Dawuane Smoot had Jackson in his grasp — until he didn't. The Baltimore Ravens star quarterback spun away from Smoot, rolled right and lofted a pass toward the goal line. Tight end Isaiah Likely outmaneuvered two defenders to bring down the ball — and bring home a win.

The play of the game propelled the Ravens to a 23-7 victory at Jacksonville that clinched a post-season berth Sunday night.

“I just had to make a play, make something happen,” Jackson said. “I just made something happen.”

Gus Edwards scored two plays later to put the Ravens (11-3) up 17-7. That was plenty against the mistake-prone Jaguars (8-6).

“It’s pretty unique,” Ravens linebacker Roquan Smith said of Jackson. “Some of the things he’s doing, he’s the only one doing it.”

Baltimore won its fourth in a row and moved a step closer to securing the No. 1 seed and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs.

The Jaguars lost their third straight — all against AFC North teams — and fell into a tie with Houston and Indianapolis atop the AFC South. Self-inflicted woes have been a common thread in Jacksonville’s skid.

“That’s the head-scratcher,” Jaguars coach Doug Pederson said. “That’s the frustrating part. We can’t get out of our own way and that’s the frustrating part.”

Trevor Lawrence fumbled twice in the latest letdown, including one in the fourth quarter that essentially sealed Baltimore’s eighth victory in its last nine games. He was placed in the NFL’s concussion protocol after the game and not allowed to speak to the media.

This one may have been costly for the Ravens.

Promising rookie running back Keaton Mitchell suffered a season-ending left knee injury early in the fourth quarter. He flashed a thumbs-up sign as he left the sideline on a cart.

“It’s heartbreaking,” Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. “He’s just got a great attitude and demeanor about him.”

**Browns 20, Bears 17:** Joe Flacco passed for 374 yards and led his team to 13 points in the fourth quarter, including Dustin Hopkins’ go-ahead 34-yard field goal with 32 seconds left, and host Cleveland withstood a Hail Mary on the final play to beat Chicago.

Flacco was intercepted three times but made some brilliant



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

**Baltimore Ravens defensive players celebrate after recovering a fumble by the Jaguars during the second half Sunday in Jacksonville, Fla. The Ravens won 23-7 to clinch an AFC playoff spot.**

throws in the closing minutes to rally the Browns, including a 51-yard touchdown pass to Amari Cooper with 3:08 left that tied it at 17-all.

The Browns (9-5) got the ball back with 1:50 left and the 38-year-old Flacco, who was signed on Nov. 20 and made his third start for Cleveland, completed two passes to tight end David Njoku for 65 yards to set up Hopkins’ kick.

**Texans 19, Titans 16 (OT):** Ka’imi Fairbairn kicked a 54-yard field goal as time expired in overtime, and visiting Houston rallied from a 13-point deficit without C.J. Stroud to beat Tennessee.

The Texans (8-6) entered the day one spot outside of the AFC’s seven-team playoff field. They kept pace by winning without several key players, including Stroud — their standout rookie quarterback — and top receiver Nico Collins, right tackle George Fant and a pair of defensive starters.

Case Keenum made his first start since Week 17 of the 2021 season for Cleveland. Keenum threw for 229 yards and helped Houston outgain the Titans 340-204. Devin Singletary ran for 121 yards.

**49ers 45, Cardinals 29:** Visiting San Francisco clinched its second straight NFC West title, getting three touchdowns from Christian McCaffrey to beat Arizona for its sixth straight win.

Charvarius Ward had two interceptions, including a pick-6, for the 49ers (11-3). Brock Purdy went 16-for-25 for 242 yards and tied a career high with four touch-

down passes.

The Niners have won each of their past six games by at least 12 points. They’ve also won 12 straight against NFC West opponents.

**Rams 28, Commanders 20:** Matthew Stafford passed for 258 yards and hit Cooper Kupp and Demarcus Robinson for touchdowns, leading host Los Angeles past free-falling Washington.

Kupp’s eight receptions for 111 yards were highlighted by a 62-yard TD catch right after halftime for the Rams (7-7), who have won four of five to push their way into one of the three NFC wild-card playoff positions alongside New Orleans and Minnesota.

**Buccaneers 34, Packers 20:** Baker Mayfield threw for 381 yards and four touchdowns, and visiting Tampa Bay beat Green Bay for its third straight win.

Mayfield went 22-for-28 and threw touchdown passes to Mike Evans, Rachaad White, Ko Kieft and David Moore to help the Buccaneers (7-7) keep pace with New Orleans atop the NFC North. The Packers (6-8) lost their second straight to deal their playoff hopes a major blow.

**Saints 24, Giants 6:** Derek Carr passed for 218 yards and three touchdowns, and host New Orleans sacked Tommy DeVito seven times in a win over New York.

The Saints remained tied atop the NFC South with Tampa Bay. DeVito and the Giants (5-9) had their three-game winning streak snapped. They are guaranteed a

losing record and have only a slight chance of making the playoffs.

**Dolphins 30, Jets 0:** Raheem Mostert scored two touchdowns to set his team’s single-season record with 20, Tua Tagovailoa threw for 224 yards and a score, and host Miami blanked New York without star receiver Tyreek Hill.

Jets quarterback Zach Wilson left late in the second quarter with a concussion. New York (5-9) was shut out for the first time since losing 26-0 at Denver in Week 3 of the 2021 season. The Jets were eliminated from playoff contention for the 13th straight season.

**Chiefs 27, Patriots 17:** Running back Jerick McKinnon threw for one touchdown and ran for another, and Patrick Mahomes passed for 305 yards and two scores to help visiting Kansas City beat New England.

The Chiefs (9-5) snapped a two-game skid and maintained control of the AFC West race. With Taylor Swift again on hand to cheer him on, Travis Kelce caught five passes for 28 yards, but also had a potential touchdown bounce off his hands.

**Panthers 9, Falcons 7:** Eddy Pineiro kicked a 23-yard field goal as time expired, and host Carolina dealt Atlanta’s playoff hopes a huge blow in a game played in a steady downpour.

The Falcons (6-8) entered the game tied with New Orleans and Tampa Bay for first place in the NFC South, but now need help to get into the postseason after the Saints and Buccaneers both won.



# SPORTS



**Destination decided**  
Former Ohio State QB McCord bound for Syracuse » College football, Page 21

## ANALYSIS

# How quickly things change

### Allen, Bills prove momentum can shift in just a few weeks

BY ROB MAADDI  
Associated Press

**T**urnarounds happen quickly in the NFL. Josh Allen and the Buffalo Bills have quieted talk about coach Sean McDermott's job security with a pair of impressive wins. The Dallas Cowboys suddenly look like pretenders because they can't win on the road. Joe Flacco has gone from his couch to becoming a Cleveland folk hero in less than a month. Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs just needed a trip to New England to get back on the winning track. Tommy DeVito was the toast of New York and New Jersey until the Saints whipped the Giants and mocked his celebrations. The Eagles are shaking things up like a desperate team searching for answers instead of a division leader battling for the No. 1 seed. The up-and-down Jaguars still sit in first place despite three straight losses. At least Brock Purdy, Christian McCaffrey and the San Francisco 49ers are consistent. The game of Week 15 turned in to a dud when Buffalo dominated

Dallas and exposed the Cowboys in a 31-10 victory Sunday. In the process, Dak Prescott's MVP bid took a hit. Allen helped the Bills (8-6) save their season in a win at Kansas City last week and watched James Cook carry the offense by leading a stellar rushing attack against the Cowboys. Allen completed only seven passes against Dallas because Micah Parsons and the rest of the defense couldn't stop Cook, who ran for 179 yards. "We weren't physical enough," Cowboys cornerback Stephon Gilmore said. "They were more physical than we were." Now nobody is talking about firing McDermott. Buffalo still has a shot to win the AFC East. The Bills need to gain one game on the Dolphins (10-4) to make their showdown in Miami in Week 18 for first place. The Cowboys (10-4) visit the Dolphins next week while the Bills visit the Chargers (5-9). "The NFL is a one-week-at-a-time league," McDermott said. "We're on a short week. We've got a couple guys banged-up. We have to go out West, so that'll be a challenge in itself."

SEE CHANGE ON PAGE 22



ADRIAN KRAUS, ABOVE, AND KIRK IRWIN, LEFT/AP



Above: Quarterback Josh Allen and the Bills have turned around their season with key victories the past two weeks over the Chiefs and Cowboys. Left: Joe Flacco has led the Browns to two straight victories after signing with them just three weeks ago. Both teams remain in the thick of the AFC playoff race.

## Antetokounmpo sets Bucks rebounding mark » NBA, Page 20

