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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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TREVARES JOHNSON/U.S. Army

**M1 Abrams tanks from the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, arrive on Polish soil in August 2023. The total price tag for an armored brigade's nine-month rotation is \$1.14 billion.**

## Navy wasted \$1.84B to fix old cruisers, IG reports

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Navy wasted nearly \$2 billion rehabilitating four aging cruisers that were ultimately decommissioned, according to a scathing report by a federal watchdog.

Since 2015, the Navy has spent about \$3.7 billion modernizing seven Ticonderoga class guided-missile cruisers. But only three will be delivered back to fleet, and none will gain five service life years, as intended, the Government Accountability Office said in a report released Tuesday.

“The Navy did not effectively plan the cruiser effort. This led to a high volume of unplanned work — 9,000 contract changes — resulting in cost growth and schedule delays. The Navy has yet to identify the root causes of unplanned work or develop and codify root cause mitigation strategies to prevent poor planning from similarly affecting future surface ship modernization efforts,” the report read.

SEE WASTED ON PAGE 4



SCOTT PITTMAN/U.S. Navy

**The USS Vicksburg is one of four cruisers whose combined repair bills totaled \$1.84 billion.**

# Rotating to permanency

Report: Long-term bases cost millions less than rotational forces

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — Rotating an Army tank brigade to Europe costs nearly \$70 million more per year than basing that unit permanently in either Germany or Poland, according to new research.

The findings, contained in an Atlantic Council report released Wednesday, come as debate about the future shape of the U.S. mission in Europe is likely to intensify in President-elect Donald Trump's new term.

At the end of his first tenure, Trump sought

to move 12,000 troops out of Germany, including the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Vilseck, and send a large portion of them back to the United States.

Pentagon officials, with a track record of favoring the flexibility and perceived efficiencies of a rotational force model, argued at the time that the loss of a combat brigade in Europe could be offset by boosting rotations to the Continent.

However, an analysis of several years' worth of Army data comparing the costs of rotating armored brigades to Europe versus basing

them there shows large savings would result from permanent overseas basing arrangements.

“Why isn't the United States pursuing it more aggressively? That remains unclear, but politics is probably partially to blame,” wrote Army War College professor John Deni, who conducted the analysis for the Atlantic Council think tank.

The total price tag for an armored brigade's nine-month rotation is \$1.14 billion, roughly

SEE ROTATING ON PAGE 5



# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## Amazon workers strike at multiple facilities

Associated Press

Workers at seven Amazon facilities went on strike Thursday, an effort by the Teamsters to pressure the e-commerce company for a labor agreement during a key shopping period.

The Teamsters say the workers, who authorized strikes in the past few days, are joining the picket line after Amazon ignored a Dec. 15 deadline the union set for contract negotiations. Amazon says it doesn't expect an impact on its operations during what the union

calls the largest strike against the company in U.S. history.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters say they represent nearly 10,000 workers at 10 Amazon facilities, a small portion of the 1.5 million Amazon employs.

At one warehouse, located in Staten Island, thousands of workers who voted for the Amazon Labor Union in 2022 and have since affiliated with the Teamsters. At the other facilities, employees have unionized with them but without holding elections.

The strikes happening Thursday are taking place at one Amazon warehouse in San Francisco, Calif., and six delivery stations in southern California, New York City; Atlanta, Ga., and Skokie, Ill., according to the union's announcement. Amazon workers at the other facilities are "prepared to join," the union said.

"Amazon is pushing its workers closer to the picket line by failing to show them the respect they have earned," Teamsters General President Sean M. O'Brien said.

### EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates			
Euro costs (Dec. 20)	0.94	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8978
British pound (Dec. 20)	\$1.23	Thailand (Baht)	34.56
Japanese yen (Dec. 20)	150.00	Turkey (NewLira)	35.0803
South Korean won (Dec. 20)	1413.00		
Commercial rates		(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.)	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3771		
Britain (Pound)	1.2581		
Canada (Dollar)	1.4335		
China (Yuan)	7.2964		
Denmark (Krone)	7.1763		
Egypt (Pound)	50.9217		
Euro	0.9618		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7714		
Hungary (Forint)	399.04		
Israel (Shekel)	3.6356		
Japan (Yen)	157.18		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3079		
Norway (Krone)	11.3477		
Philippines (Peso)	59.06		
Poland (Zloty)	4.09		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7581		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3581		
South Korea (Won)	1446.13		

### INTEREST RATES

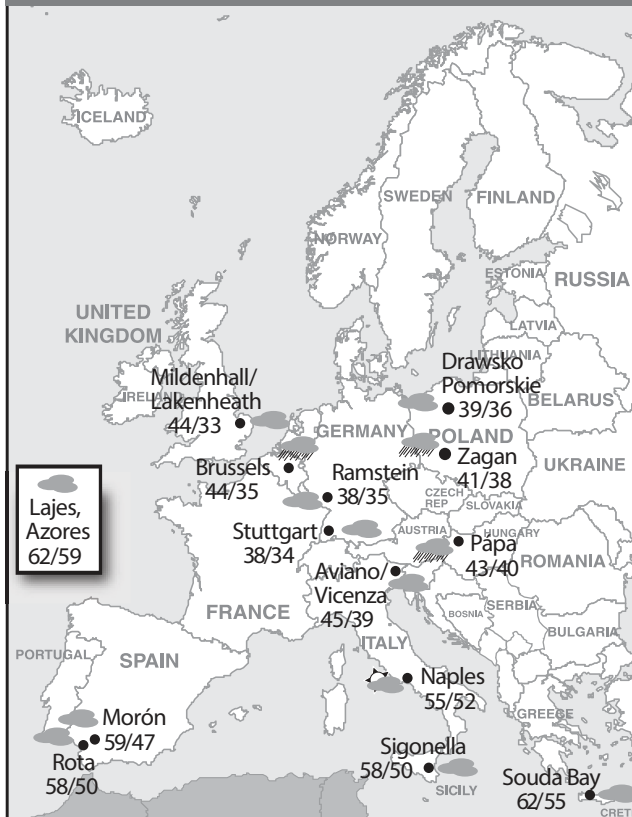
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.75
Federal funds market rate	4.58
3-month bill	4.36
30-year bond	4.68

## WEATHER OUTLOOK

### FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



### FRIDAY IN EUROPE



### SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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## MILITARY

# Active-duty troops eligible for health benefit

Many service members will be able to enroll in flexible spending accounts starting next year

By JONATHAN SNYDER  
Stars and Stripes

Many service members may enroll in a tax-advantaged flexible spending account starting next year to help pay medical expenses not covered by Tricare, a Department of Defense spokesman told Stars and Stripes.

“A Health Care Flexible Spending Account is an optional benefit that enables service members to set aside up to \$3,300 in pre-tax earnings to pay for health expenses such as co-pays and cost shares, vision, dental, and drug store items,” Joshua Wick wrote in a recent email.

Only active-component service members and Guard Reserve members on Title 10 orders are eligible to participate in the Health Care Flex-

ible Spending Account and Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account programs, according to fsafeds.gov website.

Reserve members not on Title 10 orders and U.S. Coast Guardsmen are not eligible for either program.

Uniformed service members may enroll during a special period March 3-31. Afterward, first-year service members may enroll during normal Federal Benefits Open Season that occurs mid-November to mid-December, Wick said.

One advocacy group is pleased that the department has extended flexible spending accounts to service members, but it has reservations.

For example, the accounts might justify increases to Tricare premi-

ums, Karen Ruedisueli, health affairs director for the Military Officers Association of America, said by phone Monday.

“Sometimes in the civilian sector the pre-tax savings that are realized through flexible spending accounts are used to justify health plan cost increases, and we would be adamantly opposed to that,” she said. “I know a lot of families face significant out of pocket costs for things like orthodontics, glasses, contacts or noncovered services like LASIK, but we want to make sure that the flexible spending account isn’t used to justify increases in Tricare fees.”

Wick recommends eligible service members calculate how much they spend on out-of-pocket health care such as co-payments, vision or

dental care for themselves and family over the course of a year.

“Service members who use an HCFSA can save on taxes while paying for these costs since using an HCFSA can lower their tax liability, or how much of their total earnings is subject to taxation,” he said.

If their calculations are off, service members may carry over up to \$660 of unused funds in their flexible savings accounts into the next year if they re-enroll during open season, he said.

“Service members can monitor the balance of their account and status of claims any time through the year using the FSAFEDS website or mobile app,” he said. “Participants who have unused funds totaling above \$660 in the last three months

of the year can assess whether they have HCFSA-eligible expenses to make and claim before the end of the year, and if they want to re-enroll to take advantage of the carryover.”

Don’t put more money in your flexible spending account than you think you’ll spend within a year, or risk losing anything above the carryover amount, according to health-care.gov.

“We recommend that Service members make informed decisions, based on their individual and family needs, on whether and how to take advantage of this benefit,” Wick said. “The Department offers service members personal financial managers or counselors, as well as tax counselors, free of charge to help decide.”

## Airlift Santas deliver 39 tons of supplies during annual drop

By ALEX WILSON  
Stars and Stripes

U.S. airmen put their Santa hats back into storage over the weekend after successfully concluding the 73rd Operation Christmas Drop, according to the 374th Airlift Wing.

The Defense Department’s longest-running humanitarian airlift exercise officially concluded Saturday after delivering 220 boxes of supplies to more than 58 islands in the Western Pacific, according to a news release Thursday from the wing at Yokota Air Base, Japan.

“Operation Christmas Drop 2024 showcased the strength of our international partnerships and our commitment to being a force for good in the Indo-Pacific region,” Col. Brett Cochran, 374th Air Expeditionary Wing commander, told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

Cochran is also the wing’s deputy commander.

“The collaboration among our close allies for such a complex and meaningful mission highlights

what we can achieve together and ensures we’re ready for anything,” he said.

Although the airlift wing at Yokota coordinates the event, the 36th Wing at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, is the host, the point where the airdropped bundles are prepared and from which the crews fly their delivery routes.

More than 300 airmen and volunteers from the Air Force and four partner nations — Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea — participated this year beginning Dec. 2.

C-130J Super Hercules and C-130H Hercules transport aircraft from all five countries flew a combined 224½ hours across 29 sorties to deliver approximately 77,300 pounds of supplies to the islands.

Operation Christmas Drop is a means to deliver necessities to the far-flung islands — many of which rely on the annual event — and a way to give air crews real-life experience in coordinating and executing low-altitude airdrops.

Volunteers load the supplies in-



ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

Senior Airman Juan Lucero, a loadmaster with the 36th Airlift Squadron, watches as Operation Christmas Drop bundles fall off the coast of Ifalik in the Pacific Ocean on Dec. 11.

to boxes and often embellish them with personalized holiday greetings. The essentials — food, water, clothing, tools and medical necessities — are augmented with toys for the children of the remote islands and atolls.

The event traces its origins to the Christmas season of 1952, when an aircrew aboard a B-29 Superfortress noticed islanders wav-

ing at them from Kapingamarangi, about 3,500 miles southwest of Hawaii. The crew ultimately dropped a bundle of supplies to the island, hoping to spread a little Christmas joy, according to Andersen’s website.

In its modern form, the operation delivers around 40 tons of supplies annually to more than 42,000 islanders while covering

approximately 1.8 million square miles of airspace, according to a Dec. 10 news release from the 374th Airlift Wing.

“Making OCD 2024 happen was a monumental effort, and I am deeply grateful for the dedication and professionalism of everyone involved who went to great lengths to bring joy to Pacific islander communities,” Cochran said.

## Confirmation hearing for defense secretary nominee set for Jan 14

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for Secretary of Defense is expected to face his first public questioning from U.S. senators on Jan. 14.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker,

R-Miss., told reporters Wednesday that the committee is planning to hold Pete Hegseth’s hearing in mid-January as the former Fox News host and veteran has visited Senate offices in an effort to rally Republicans around him. Some senators have questioned his fit-

ness for the role amid allegations of excessive drinking and sexual misconduct.

Hegseth has told senators that he wouldn’t drink while defense secretary and pushed back on the reports of misbehavior, and Trump has publicly boosted his

nomination, posting on his social media platform last week that “Pete is a WINNER, and there is nothing that can be done to change that!!!” Hegseth also attended the Army-Navy football game with the president-elect over the weekend.

More confirmation hearings are

expected after the new Republican Senate is sworn in on Jan. 3 and Trump is inaugurated on Jan. 20. Incoming Senate Majority Leader John Thune has said he wants to confirm Trump’s cabinet as quickly as possible once Trump is in office.



## MILITARY

# Fort Worth tapped to build helo components

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Bell Textron Inc. has chosen Fort Worth to build components for the next generation of military assault helicopters.

The news, announced Tuesday by Bell CEO Lisa Artherton and Gov. Greg Abbott at a Bell facility in northern Fort Worth, represents an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in North Texas. The company's new facility in Alliance is expected to create more than 500 high-paying jobs.

"We are truly a Texas company," Artherton said.

Bell considered at least two other locations in other states for its \$632 million plant. It will produce parts for the company's V-280 Valor to re-

place the Army's fleet of UH-60 Black Hawks, developed in the 1970s by the Lockheed Martin company Sikorsky.

Bell won the coveted defense contract in 2022 for its design of the V-280, a tiltrotor aircraft that can take off or land vertically and fly at over 300 mph. The contract could be worth up to \$70 billion over many years, depending on how many aircraft the Army and foreign governments purchase. Lockheed Martin and Boeing had competed during the Army's years-long selection process.

Bell named its prototype the V-280 Valor, but its technical military name is the Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft, or FLRAA. Even-



STEVE WILSON/TNS

**Bell's new tiltrotor V-280 Valor is touted as having twice the speed and twice the range of conventional military helicopters.**

tually, the aircraft could be named after a Native American tribe as the Army has traditionally done with

helicopters, such as the Apache, Comanche and Black Hawk.

In November, Bell announced the

FLRAA's fuselage will be assembled at a site in Wichita, Kan.. Bell is building a \$20 million facility in Grand Prairie, where the FLRAA will be tested.

Though it acts like a traditional helicopter during take off and landing, the FLRAA is designed to reconfigure itself in the air to fly faster than other helicopters.

"Combining the speed and range of the turboprop with advanced agility greater than a traditional helicopter, FLRAA offers better flight performance and lifecycle sustainability," Bell says on its V-280 website. "This weapon system was purpose built to revolutionize U.S. Army overmatch in multi-domain operations."

## Wasted: Watchdog blasts Navy's modernization program

FROM PAGE 1

The modernization plan dates back to 2012, when the Navy proposed retiring several cruisers due to budget constraints. Congress rejected the Navy's proposal and provided funding to modernize the ships.

In response in 2015, the Navy planned to use a phased approach to modernization that would refit 11 cruisers across a 10-year timeframe in an effort to keep them in the fleet into the 2030s.

In 2017, the plan cut four ships, reducing the modernization effort from 11 ships down to seven.

Four of those seven ships — USS Hue City, USS Anzio, USS Vicksburg and USS Cowpens — ate up \$1.84 billion being repaired and modernized, only to never de-

ploy again.

The Navy decommissioned the Hue City and the Anzio in 2022 after spending \$161.2 million and \$250.54 million, respectively.

The Vicksburg was decommissioned in June after the Navy spent \$678.56 million on it, followed by the Cowpens in August, which had \$754.1 million in repairs done.

After touring five cruisers and interviewing more than 100 Navy officials, the GAO found that weak oversight, lack of planning and poor-quality work drove the failure of the cruiser modernization program.

"Even though the Navy used more than \$2 billion of procurement funding for cruiser modernization, it did not implement

planning and oversight tools typical of high dollar major defense acquisition programs following the major capability acquisition pathways because it is not an acquisition program," the report read.

The Navy's cruiser modification plan will upgrade three ships — the USS Gettysburg, USS Chosin and USS Cape St. George for the price of \$1.9 billion. Originally, all 11 cruisers were meant to complete modernization by 2026.

To date, nearly \$599.4 million was spent on the Gettysburg, \$695.72 on the Chosin and \$601.39 on the Cape St. George. The Chosin and the Gettysburg have successfully completed modernization, with the Gettysburg deploying.

The point of the modernization was to extend cruiser service lives by five years each in an effort to keep more ships in the fleet. While the ships are not currently planned to see 40 years of service life, the sea service will get an extra three years from the ships.

In November the Navy announced in plans to extend service lives of the Gettysburg, Chosin and Cape St. George to 2029, with plans to decommission them in 2030.

The Gettysburg, Chosin and Cape St. George, which were commissioned in 1991, will now see 38 years of service before retirement.

Ultimately, the Navy saw approximately 36% cost growth on the cruisers it attempted to mo-

dernize and cumulatively experienced over 15 years of schedule delays.

The GAO recommended the Navy assess root causes of unplanned work by developing mitigation strategies and codifying the strategies in policy and re-assessing its overall approach to quality assurance to prevent similar issues in future surface ship modernization efforts.

"The Navy has other upcoming significant surface ship modernization efforts, such as for 23 destroyers. The success of these efforts is critical to the Navy having a combat-ready fleet," the report read.

The Navy agreed with the GAO's recommendations, the report read.

## Future missile frigate will be named after a historic female Navy officer

Stars and Stripes

A future constellation-class guided missile frigate (FFG 69) will be named USS Joy Bright Hancock, a tribute to one of the first female officers to serve in the U.S. Navy, according to a Navy news release.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro made the announcement Monday at the 11th Women, Peace and Security Symposium, hosted by the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

"We — men and women alike — must contribute to the meaningful participation of women in the armed forces to increase combat readiness and operational effectiveness," Del Toro said. "Captain Joy Bright Hancock was a trailblazer who paved the way for generations of women to proudly serve this great nation. That is why, I am

incredibly pleased to announce that a Constellation-class frigate, FFG 69, will be named the USS Joy Bright Hancock."



Hancock

This will be the first Navy vessel to be named after Hancock, and the 10th of the new constellation-class frigates. The future USS Joy Bright Hancock honors her namesake's service beginning as a yeoman in World War I, and her integral role in passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948.

Hancock was one of eight women to be sworn into the regular Navy and was subsequently appointed Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women. She received com-

mendations for her service to the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics and the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air) during World War II, as well as for her assistance in expanding opportunities for women in the Navy.

The Navy now annually awards the Joy Bright Hancock Award to honor the visionary leadership of officers whose ideals foster an inclusive culture while furthering the integration of women in the Navy.

The Constellation-class guided-missile frigate represents the Navy's next-generation small surface combatant. This ship class will be an agile, multimission warship, capable of operations in both deep water and littoral environments, providing increased combat-credible forward presence that provides a military advantage at sea.

## Drones spotted flying near Wright-Patterson AFB again

Springfield (Ohio) News-Sun

The drones have returned. But this time at least, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base airspace was not impacted.

Small "unmanned aerial systems" were spotted above and near Wright-Patterson Air Force Base's Area A and Area B late Monday and early Tuesday, the base said Tuesday morning.

"Installation leaders have determined that none of the incursions impacted base residents, facilities or assets," the 88th Air Base Wing said. "The Wright-Patterson AFB airspace was not affected by the incursions."

Wright-Patterson personnel have been investigating these flights after the military installation closed airspace due to unidentified drones Friday night and early Saturday, a base spokesman told the Dayton Daily News Sunday.

Robert Purteman, a spokesman for Wright Patterson, said Sunday that unmanned aerial systems were spotted in the vicinity of the base late Friday night.

The base said Tuesday that the number of drones has fluctuated, and "they have ranged in sizes and configurations."

"Our units continue to monitor the airspace and are working with local law enforcement authorities and mission partners to ensure the safety of base personnel, facilities and assets," the base said.

A statement from the Federal Aviation Administration to the Dayton Daily News Monday said the government prohibits drones from "flying over designated national security sensitive facilities like military bases, national landmarks and certain critical infrastructure such as nuclear power plants."

## EUROPE



ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during his annual news conference and call-in show at Gostinny Dvor in Moscow, Russia, on Thursday.

## Putin boasts of gains in Ukraine trying to reinforce his authority

Associated Press

MOSCOW — President Vladimir Putin boasted that his military operation in Ukraine has strengthened Russia and denied that the ouster of key ally Bashar Assad in Syria had hurt Moscow's prestige, as he held his annual news conference and call-in show Thursday.

He used the tightly choreographed event, which lasted for about 4 1/2 hours, to reinforce his authority and demonstrate a sweeping command of everything from consumer prices to military hardware.

He claimed that sending troops into Ukraine in 2022 has boosted Russia's military and economic power.

He also said that if he could go back in time, he "would have thought that such a decision should have been made earlier," and Russia should have "prepared for it in advance and more thor-

oughly."

"Russia has become much stronger over the past two or three years because it has become a truly sovereign country," he said. "We are standing firm in terms of economy, we are strengthening our defense potential and our military capability now is the strongest in the world."

Putin, who has held power for nearly a quarter-century and began another six-year term earlier this year, said the military was "advancing toward achieving our goals" in what he calls the special military operation in Ukraine.

In response to a question about a new hypersonic ballistic missile that Russia used for the first time last month to strike Ukraine, Putin scoffed at claims by some Western experts that it could be intercepted by NATO's air defenses.

He mockingly challenged Ukraine's allies to a "high-tech duel,"

suggesting that Moscow could give advance notice of a strike on Kyiv with the Oreshnik missile and see if the West could protect the city.

"Let them select a target, possibly in Kyiv, put their air defense assets there and we shall strike it with the Oreshnik," he said with a dry smile. "Let's see what happens."

Russia is making steady, if slow, advances in Ukraine, but has also suffered embarrassing setbacks. On Tuesday, Lt. Gen Igor Kirillov was killed by a bomb planted outside his apartment building in Moscow — a brazen assassination claimed by Ukraine that brought the conflict once again to the streets of the Russian capital.

Putin described Kirillov's killing as a "major blunder" of Russia's security agencies, noting they should learn from it and improve their efficiency.

# Rutte hoping to give Ukraine edge in talks

By LORNE COOK

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO's secretary-general said he wants to discuss ways to put Ukraine in a position of strength for any future peace talks with Russia during a meeting Wednesday with Ukraine's president and a small number of European leaders.

But Mark Rutte appeared frustrated at growing speculation in NATO capitals about when those peace talks might start and whether European peacekeepers would be involved, saying that speaking publicly about it plays into the hands of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"High on the agenda is to make sure that the president, his team in Ukraine, are in the best possible position one day when they decide so to start the peace talks," Rutte said as he welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to his residence in Brussels.

The focus, Rutte said, must be "to do everything now to make sure that when it comes to air defense, when it comes to other weapons systems, that we make sure that we provide whatever we can."

He said that another issue up for discussion would be "how to make sure that when peace comes one day that we also think about the economy of Ukraine now, but also after a future peace deal."

Zelenskyy posted on Telegram that he would hold talks with the leaders of the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Poland and

U.K. representatives, who were in Brussels. He's also due to take part in an EU summit in the Belgian capital on Thursday.

Zelenskyy that the meeting would provide "a very good opportunity to speak about security guarantees for Ukraine, for today and for tomorrow." Ukraine sees NATO membership as the ultimate security guarantee, but the U.S. and Germany lead a group of countries that oppose this while war continues.

After separate talks with Zelenskyy, French President Emmanuel Macron said his country is making reinforced support for Ukraine its "absolute priority" and will continue giving Ukraine "the means to defend itself and to make Russia's war of aggression fail," according to Macron's office.

Noting his recent meeting with Trump and Zelenskyy, Macron said he will maintain a "tight dialogue with Ukraine and its international partners to work for a return to a fair and lasting peace," the statement said.

At NATO headquarters earlier, Rutte had said the terms of any peace talks should be up to Ukraine, Russia and any others at the negotiating table. "If we now start to discuss amongst ourselves what a deal could look like, we make it so easy for the Russians," he said.

"I think we would be very wise to put some lid on this and focus on the business at hand, and the business at hand is to make sure that Ukraine has what it needs to prevent Putin from winning," Rutte added.

## Rotating: Expert says permanent basing would also send message to Russia

FROM PAGE 1

\$70 million more than the cost of stationing the same unit in Germany or Poland, his report said. The latest results corroborate research he did nearly a decade ago on the same issue.

Reasons for the higher cost include the expenses of moving troops and their gear from ports in the United States to Europe, along with predeployment training and sustainment requirements overseas.

Establishing a permanent presence also would reduce the family separations that come with long deployments and potentially send a stronger deterrence signal to

Russia, Deni said.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the U.S. military reduced its European footprint, which at one time was in the range of 300,000 troops.

Today, there are about 65,000 personnel based in Europe, with rotational forces augmenting the mission. Rotations increased following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and the start of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022.

The next Trump administration will likely take numerous factors into consideration when it assesses the U.S. European Command mission.

One aspect that drove Trump's push to pull forces out of Germany at the tail end of his first term was political tension with Berlin and frustration over Germany's many years of paltry defense spending.

It's unclear whether Trump will be satisfied with Germany's recent defense spending increases, which have put the country in compliance with NATO's benchmark of dedicating at least 2% of gross domestic product toward defense.

Another factor that could come into play in weighing the options is the potential threat posed by China and the competition for military resources in the Pacific.

China hawks in Trump's orbit and Vice President-elect JD Vance have argued that European countries should shoulder much more of the security burden on the Continent so that the U.S. can focus on China.

Deni argues that from a fiscal perspective, there should be little debate over the savings that could be achieved by shifting to a permanent basing model in Europe for armored units.

One obstacle could be resistance from politicians in states where the rotational troops are based, who are loath "to see their district or state lose a military unit" because of the jobs associat-

ed with it, Deni said.

But there are other drawbacks to rotations that the Army could be overlooking, he said. While advocates for the rotational approach talk up the training benefits of brigades packing up for big moves back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, the gains could be short-lived.

Just "as rotationally deployed US troops in Europe learn the rules of the road (literally) and gain an understanding of their operating environment, their nine-month rotation ends, and they re-deploy home, with most of the knowledge gained and the networks developed lost," Deni said.



## PACIFIC

# S. Korea: US info could have stopped Yoon

By DAVID CHOI  
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol likely kept the United States in the dark about his plan to declare martial law on Dec. 3 to avoid interference with his decree, the National Assembly speaker told reporters Thursday.

Woo Won-shik, a member of the South Korean opposition Democratic Party, said “it would have been difficult” for Yoon if the U.S. had known about his plans, which ultimately failed.

Woo didn’t elaborate on why he thought that was likely, or whether he believed the U.S. should have been consulted.



Woo

Spokesmen for the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, speaking the day after the attempted martial law, said their departments had no advance notice of Yoon’s plans.

The U.S. has about 28,500 troops stationed in South Korea, most of them at Camp Humphreys, about 40 miles south Seoul.

Woo met with U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg in Seoul on Dec. 12 to discuss Yoon’s martial law declaration and to reaffirm their

countries’ cooperation on economic and security matters.

“We both agreed that the U.S.-[South Korea] alliance is strong and enduring,” Goldberg said that day on social platform X.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington had no advanced notice of Yoon’s plans, according to a Reuters report Dec. 5.

“We are certainly not routinely informed of every decision that any partner may be making anywhere around the world at any given time,” he said in an interview with the news outlet in Brussels.

The National Assembly voted to overturn Yoon’s declaration in an

overnight vote about six hours later. Woo, sentenced to a three-year prison term for protesting former President Chun Doo-hwan, said he would climb over the National Assembly’s walls to veto another martial law attempt.

Yoon withdrew the declaration that night. Blinken the next day said he welcomed that decision.

“We continue to expect political disagreements to be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law, Blinken said.

Yoon’s abrupt declaration faced backlash from South Korea’s Democratic Party as well as members of the ruling People Power Party. He was impeached by the National Assembly on Saturday

after a failed attempt a week earlier.

Yoon defended his martial law decree in a televised speech Dec. 12, saying it was to prevent “anti-state forces” from impeding legislation and the Democratic Party’s series of impeachment motions against appointed government officials.

Woo described Yoon’s reasoning as “absurd” and vowed South Korea’s political climate will return to “normalcy.”

“[South Korea] is going through a process of forging our democracy,” he said Thursday. “After going through this process, [South Korea] will emerge as a more stable and advanced democracy.”



BRIAN McELHINEY/Stars and Stripes

Quadplexes in the Seville Manor housing area on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, are pictured on Thursday.

## Cracking concrete latest issue to plague housing complex at Kadena

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — The 18th Wing will inspect more than 100 homes on base after spalling concrete was discovered in several unrenovated buildings.

The wing identified spalling in 32 quadplexes — 128 homes in total — at Seville Manor near Bob Hope Elementary School, according to a statement posted Thursday on Kadena’s official Facebook page.

Spalling refers to cracking and delaminating steel-reinforced concrete. It is caused by pressure under the surface of the concrete,

and most often occurs due to improperly constructed joints or corrosion of rebar under the concrete, according to the U.S. General Services Administration.

The buildings affected are 5437-5441, 5500- 5507, 5510-5515, 5517, 5520, 5540-5541, 5543, 5545, 5547 and 5549-5554, according to the wing’s post. It is unclear how many families are affected.

“No injuries have been reported and the 18th Civil Engineer Group is conducting deliberate inspections of the impacted homes,” the post states.

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

es in Seville Manor. A wing memo issued earlier this month recommended that some families move by Feb. 28 to address potential health risks.

Thursday’s Facebook post does not state whether families living in the homes with spalling concrete will need to evacuate.

Residents should contact Kadena’s housing office at 634-4663 or fill out a housing maintenance request on Kadena’s website if they notice cracking or sagging ceilings, the post states. Damage photos can be emailed to 718ces.servicecall@us.af.mil.

The wing did not immediately provide responses to questions.

## US, South Korea practice drone defense, bombing

By JOSEPH DITZLER  
AND YOO KYONG CHANG  
Stars and Stripes

A pair of military exercises over South Korea emphasized air defense and ground support this week.

The country’s military branches trained Thursday to improve the nation’s air defense response to North Korean drone intrusions, according to the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The joint exercise, announced Wednesday, involved a simulated attack by multiple drones over the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, and the Yellow Sea, and rear areas, according to a news release by the Joint Chiefs.

“This training will simulate responses to potential provocations involving multiple small North Korean drones infiltrating South Korean land and sea, including operating a large number of small drones as virtual enemy aircraft,” the release states.

Units of the South Korean army, navy and air force worked to detect, identify and simulate the downing of small drones, according to the Joint Chiefs.

“The military is doing its utmost to monitor and prepare for North Korea, while continuing to conduct practical trainings in preparation for enemy provocations,” the release states.

North and South Korea both launched programs to upgrade their drone programs last year.

The flight of five North Korean drones into South Korea on Dec. 26, 2022, including one into the no-fly zone around the presi-

dential office in Seoul, exposed the South’s lack of defensive capability, according to a classified U.S. intelligence assessment cited five months later by The Washington Post.

South Korea scrambled fighter jets and helicopters in response but failed to shoot down any of the intruding drones.

On Monday and Tuesday, U.S. and South Korean fighter aircraft teamed up for live-fire training at a range southeast of Seoul, according to 7th Air Force.

Two F-16 Fighting Falcons with the 80th Fighter Squadron at Kunsan Air Base dropped Mk-82 general purpose, freefall bombs on simulated targets at Pilsung Range.

Two F-15K Slam Eagles in a separate drill dropped two GBU-38 Joint Direct Attack Munitions, or JDAMS, at the same range, according to information posted on the 7th Air Force website.

The 607th Air Support Operations Group took part in the close air support portion of the exercise as tactical air control specialists, according to 7th Air Force.

The allies last publicized a training exercise at Pilsung Range, about 100 miles southeast of Seoul, on Oct. 4, when two Air Force B-1 Lancers and two Slam Eagles flew close air support drills there.

On June 5, a Lancer and two Slam Eagles dropped 500-pound JDAMS at Pilsung, the first live-fire demonstration by a Lancer in South Korea in seven years.



## MILITARY

# West Point colonel arraigned for 2nd time

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army has again arraigned a West Point colonel on charges related to providing and drinking alcohol with at least one cadet, asking witnesses to lie about it and then lying himself during an investigation, according to court documents.

Col. William Wright pleaded not guilty Dec. 2 during an arraignment before military judge Lt. Col. Carrie Ward at the U.S. Military Academy, according to the Army's online court docket. He has requested a jury trial.

Wright, director of the academy's Geospatial Information Sci-

ence Program, was first arraigned June 18 but the charges were withdrawn on Oct. 18 — just days before he was expected to plead guilty to some or all of them.

In the new round, prosecutors dropped the charge of conduct unbecoming of an officer and added a count of interfering with an adverse administrative proceeding.

The new charges include three counts of interference alongside three counts of disobeying orders

or regulations and two counts of making false statements.

"As the legal process unfolds, Col. William C. Wright is present for duty at West Point," according to a statement from the academy. "He has been reassigned to a separate position within the academy and does not have contact with cadets. Allegations against Col. Wright are merely accusations, and he is presumed innocent until proven guilty."

Aimee Bateman, an attorney for Wright, declined to comment on the new charges.

The colonel was accused of providing alcohol to a cadet and drinking with the student on "a

personal social basis" twice in June 2023, once in Hilo, Hawaii, and again in Fort Greely, Alaska, according to the charge sheet.

Wright, who graduated from West Point in 1999, traveled with cadets as a chaperone for the tennis team as well as for research as part of his work at the Geospatial Information Science Program, according to his LinkedIn account.

Wright was accused of violating an order to stay away from cadets on the women's tennis team in January and asking three people to lie in their testimony about alcohol consumption during an administrative proceeding.

He was also accused of lying

twice in his own official statement to a colonel who was investigating the allegations.

All names except Wright's were redacted from the description of charges against him.

This is Wright's second time serving on the faculty at West Point. From 2008 to 2011, he served as an assistant professor in geospatial information science, according to his LinkedIn account. He then moved to Colorado to work for North American Aerospace Defense Command and later earned his Ph.D. in geomatics from the University of Florida.

The next hearing is scheduled for Jan. 6.



Wright



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Coast Guard officer has been putting on Christmas light shows since late November at his duplex on Yokota Air Base, Japan.

## Holiday cheer shines bright as officer hosts his final light shows

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A Coast Guard officer stationed at this airlift hub in western Tokyo is lighting up the holiday season one last time.

Lt. Cmdr. Irving Cintron has been putting on Christmas light shows since late November for any of his neighbors on Yokota's west side housing area who wants to watch. Each evening at 6 p.m., the 10- to 15-minute displays dazzle spectators with synchronized music, with a new genre featured each week.

Last week, Cintron played contemporary Christmas classics, such as the theme to National Lampoon's "Christmas Vacation," "Last Christmas" by Wham! and "All I Want for Christmas is You" by Mariah Carey.

The inspiration for Cintron's ho-

liday tradition goes back to his enlisted days.

"I was an electrician's mate during my enlisted career, so playing with electricity and electronics had been part of my duty before," he said Nov. 27 after that evening's show. "Looking at light shows throughout the country every time we [changed duty stations] made me want to try putting on my own."

He began his tradition in 2005, adding music synchronization in 2012.

Since arriving at Yokota in 2020, Cintron has adapted his displays to base living. Initially uncertain about how his quadplex neighbors would feel about his elaborate decorations, Cintron was met with an enthusiastic response.

"At our previous duty stations, we lived off base, so we had a house and no issues with decorat-

ing," he said.

Cintron's neighbors not only welcomed his displays, they encouraged him to expand them. By 2021, he was decorating the entire front of the building.

"Everybody has been so nice to allow me to continue to decorate," he said.

This year's light shows are the final chapter for Cintron at Yokota, as he plans to retire in June.

Yokota Air Base is home to the U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East headquarters, which routinely sends personnel, like Cintron, to inspect ports and ships bound for the U.S. in over 40 partner countries to ensure they comply with port security regulations.

"My wife is a civilian and will continue to work for the Air Force, so we'll have to see where we're going to see what happens next," he said.

## Australian officer earns the US Navy's 'dolphins'

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

An Australian naval officer recently became the first of his countryman to earn the U.S. Navy Submarine Warfare Device, often referred to as "dolphins."

The Australian lieutenant commander, identified only by his first name, James, received the award during a Dec. 12 ceremony at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, according to a Navy news release Tuesday. It did not list the officer's last name, citing Australian navy guidelines.

"It is always an honor to pin dolphins on a Sailor's uniform and welcome them into an elite community of undersea warfighters," Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander of Submarine Group 7, said in the release.

In January, the Navy identified Lt. Cmdr. James Heydon as one of three Australians who became the first to complete initial training for nuclear power operators at the Nuclear Power Training Unit at Goose Creek, S.C.

The Submarine Warfare Device is a mandatory qualification for all submariners in the U.S. Navy, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command website. Sailors must demonstrate a strong understanding of all systems, compartments and equipment aboard the submarine to earn the badge.

The Australian officer earned his dolphins while serving aboard the USS Vermont, a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine, according to the release.

Australian naval officers are training on U.S. Navy submarines as part of the 2021 trilateral AUKUS partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. More than 100 Australian officers participate in the program, according to the Tuesday release.



DANIEL PROVIDAKES/U.S. Navy

Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh poses with the first Australian officer to earn the U.S. Navy Submarine Warfare Device at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Dec. 12.

AUKUS was formed to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarine capabilities while ensuring they have submariners capable of safely operating and maintaining the vessels. The member states agreed to start training Australian navy personnel in 2023.

Australian officers and civilians began embedding with the U.S. and U.K. navies last year.

In August, the submarine tender USS Emory S. Land arrived at HMAS Stirling, near Perth, Australia, for several weeks of maintenance training on a U.S. nuclear-powered sub. In February, 37 Australian officers and sailors arrived at Naval Base Guam for similar training.

In March, President Joe Biden's administration trimmed plans to produce two Virginia-class subs in 2025 for Australia to one, according to Bloomberg.

The U.S. plans to sell three Virginia-class nuclear submarines to Australia after 2030 as part of the program, pending approval from Congress closer to the time of sale, according to a White House fact sheet released in March.



## MILITARY

# Coast Guard blamed for Arctic cutter delays

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A House panel on Wednesday leveled bipartisan criticism at the Coast Guard for delays in building Polar Security cutters needed to offset the growing Russian and Chinese activity in the Arctic.

U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez, R-Fla., chair of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, said he called the hearing in the final days of the current session of Congress to underline the urgency in the face of ramped-up joint military operations by Russia and China in the region.

“We are reviewing the progress — or lack thereof — of the Coast Guard’s Polar Security Cutter program,” Gimenez said.

Climate change has opened sea lanes in the polar region during the summer months, with Russia and China recently operating joint naval exercises around the Bering Sea near Alaska.

The Coast Guard has reported that Russia has 55 icebreakers, including seven heavy icebreakers capable of slicing through ice up to 2 meters in thickness. Some of the icebreakers are nuclear-powered, allowing them to operate without refueling.

China has declared itself a “near-Arctic” nation and has fast-tracked icebreaker construction. It has four icebreakers, with a fifth due to launch in 2025. The government of President Xi Jinping has



RYAN GRAVES/U.S. Coast Guard

**The Coast Guard operates just two icebreakers, including the 48-year-old heavy icebreaker Polar Star.**

cut the construction time for new icebreakers to 30 months.

The Coast Guard operates just two icebreakers — the 48-year-old heavy icebreaker Polar Star, and the 27-year-old medium icebreaker Healy.

Congress approved \$125 million to purchase the only commercially available icebreaker, the 12-year-old Aiviq, which was painted in U.S. Coast Guard colors and intended to be homeported in Juneau, Alaska.

The move was a stopgap mea-

sure while the Coast Guard attempted to catch up on its plan to build three new heavy icebreakers, called Polar Security Cutters, six years behind schedule.

“While the Coast Guard has thankfully awarded a contract to acquire a commercially available icebreaker, this is only a temporary fix,” Gimenez said.

U.S. Rep. Shri Thanedar, D-Mich., the ranking Democrat on the committee, pointed to a recent Congressional Budget Office report that showed the first Polar Se-

curity Cutters was unlikely to start service until 2030. The report put the price of the three-ship plan at \$5.1 billion — about 60% more than original estimates.

“There is something terribly wrong here,” he said. “Here we are in 2024, and the Coast Guard is only now starting work on the first new cutter.”

Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thomas Allan, deputy commandant for mission support, said he was not at the hearing to “make excuses.”

Allan was asked if he believed Russia and China have an advantage over the United States in the Arctic region because of their icebreaker fleets.

“Yes, I do,” Allan replied.

Allan said the U.S. had not built a heavy icebreaker in almost 50 years. Expertise in the design and construction of the ships has to be rebuilt. Just as several Navy programs for carriers, submarines, frigates and other ships are behind schedule and over budget, the Coast Guard faces the same challenges of too many vessels vying for work at too few shipyards short of experienced workers.

“I am clear-eyed about the issues,” Allan said.

Gimenez said the delays were still extraordinary.

“It’s been six years since this program was authorized, and we still don’t have a final design,” he said. “It only took us nine years to get to the moon.”

To compensate for the lack of icebreakers, Allan said the Coast Guard plans to increase the number of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft deployed to the region.

Allan said the Coast Guard needs its budget to grow from \$12 billion to \$20 billion and have up to nine icebreakers, including at least three capable of cutting through up to two meters of ice.

The number would place the U.S. behind Russia and China but would be capable of maintaining “sovereignty of our waters,” Allan said.

## Congress takes reins to return horse-drawn funerals to Arlington

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The iconic horse-drawn processions that have defined military funerals at Arlington National Cemetery for decades are on course to return after an 18-month suspension, under legislation included in the National Defense Authorization Act.

The Honoring Our Heroes with Dignity Act, sponsored by Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., was included as an amendment to the 1,800-page NDAA for fiscal year 2025, which was approved this week by both the House and Senate and will be sent to the White House for a presidential signature soon.

Language in the bill instructs the Secretary of the Army to complete renovations of historic stables that had fallen into disrepair at Joint Base Meyer-Henderson Hall. The Army must also ensure that equine handlers are trained and certified to manage the herd and take other steps to establish safeguards for the horses’ welfare before caisson services can return.

Buchanan’s spokesman, Josh

Gregory, said the congressman has not received an update from the Army on when those steps will be completed, and the Army had not responded to a request for an update.

The horse-drawn processions have been an integral part of Arlington funerals for 75 years. Funeral escort honors at Arlington with horse-drawn carriages were reserved for retired commissioned and warrant officers, Medal of Honor recipients, service members killed in action, sergeants major, U.S. presidents and unspecified special designees.

But unsanitary living conditions, malnourishment and a lack of open space for the herd led to the suspension of horse-drawn funerals conducted by the 3rd Infantry Regiment Caisson Platoon in May 2023, according to Maj. Gen. Trevor Bredenkamp, commander of the Army Military District of Washington.

The horses were infested with parasites, crowded into small fields filled with manure and construction debris, and suffering from malnutrition from low-quality feed. Two horses died.

“The Army reported that the horses had very little grass in the field where they lived, causing many to consume sand and gravel which eventually caused the deaths of the two horses. In fact, one horse that passed away was found to have 44 pounds of gravel and sand in his gut,” Buchanan said in October, when he requested that the Government Accountability Office investigate the treatment of the horses.

Eighteen out of 64 horses were retired, according to Buchanan’s office. The Army has been using hearses from area funeral homes and other vehicles since the suspension of the caisson service.

“Caisson-pulling military horses were dying in 2022 because of the Army’s failure to provide proper food, veterinary care, pastureland and stables for the herd,” said Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas, chairman of the subcommittee. “Our caisson platoon should be the most elite organization of its kind on the planet.”

The amendment for resuming the horse-drawn processions provides specific instructions that the herd must have four squads of 11



HUEY D. YOUNGER JR./U.S. NAVY

**The caisson platoon of the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division, also known as the Old Guard, leads a funeral procession at Arlington National Cemetery, Va.**

horses each. The horses’ health, fitness and training must be certified by the military in consultation with veterinarians and equine experts.

The Army may resume limited services before the conditions are fully met if it can attest to the health and sustainability of the herd and notifies congressional armed service committees in advance, according to the legislation.

More than 2,000 military funeral honors with escort services have been scheduled since the suspension of caisson operations, according to Arlington National Cemetery. During that time, 34 families opted to wait for the return of the caisson, which represents 1.7% of the total number of scheduled military funeral honors with escort services, according to the cemetery.



## NATION

# Trump's comments scuttle budget deal

By CHRIS MEGERIAN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump delivered a likely death blow to bipartisan congressional budget negotiations, rejecting the measure as full of giveaways to Democrats after billionaire ally Elon Musk whipped up outrage toward the bill and cheered on Republican lawmakers who announced their opposition.

Trump's joint statement Wednesday with Vice President-elect JD Vance stopped the bill in its tracks and punctuated a torrent of social media posts by Musk attacking the legislation for what he described as excessive spending.

Trump's opposition to what was considered must-pass legislation reinjected a sense of uncertainty and political brinkmanship that was reminiscent of his first term in office. It was a dramatic turn of events for House Speaker Mike Johnson, who negotiated the bill and has been undermined by Trump as he faces reelection for his post in just a couple of weeks. Republicans have a slim majority, raising the possibility of a replay of leadership disputes that paralyzed the House a year ago.

Many lawmakers were in the middle of holiday and year-end celebrations with staff when Trump came out against the legis-

stituents.

"My phone was ringing off the hook," he said. "The people who elected us are listening to Elon Musk."

In his statement with Vance, Trump said Republicans should restart negotiations over the legislation, arguing that "anything else is a betrayal of our country." He also called for including an extension of the debt ceiling while President Joe Biden is in office.

"Increasing the debt ceiling is not great but we'd rather do it on Biden's watch," they said. "If Democrats won't cooperate on a debt ceiling increase now, what makes anyone think they would do it in June during our administration? Let's have this debate over the debt ceiling now."

Trump's opposition to what was considered must-pass legislation reinjected a sense of uncertainty and political brinkmanship that was reminiscent of his first term in office. It was a dramatic turn of events for House Speaker Mike Johnson, who negotiated the bill and has been undermined by Trump as he faces reelection for his post in just a couple of weeks. Republicans have a slim majority, raising the possibility of a replay of leadership disputes that paralyzed the House a year ago.

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BRANDON BELL/AP

President-elect Donald Trump listens to Elon Musk as he arrives to watch SpaceX's mega rocket Starship lift off for a test flight from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, last month.

lation.

"I've been here 14 years, OK? So nothing up here surprises me anymore," said Rep. Steve Womack, a senior Republican appropriator from Arkansas. "We shouldn't be in this mess."

The Biden administration criticized the possibility of a shutdown.

"Republicans need to stop playing politics with this bipartisan agreement or they will hurt hard-working Americans and create instability across the country," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform and a veteran of Washington's budget battles, was concerned about the lack of a clear plan for resolving the dispute.

"There's got to be a second part of the strategy," he said.

Norquist has been enthusiastic about Musk's ability to generate public attention for efforts to reduce the size of government. But he suggested that the owner of a space rocket company wasn't the right person to spearhead a congressional spending debate.

"He doesn't know politics like

he knows physics," he said.

But others were thrilled with Musk's involvement.

"In five years in Congress, I've been awaiting a fundamental change in the dynamic," posted Rep. Dan Bishop, a Republican from North Carolina. "It has arrived."

Musk began criticizing the measure as soon as it was released Tuesday evening, and he continuously posted about it Wednesday.

"Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!" he wrote. He also called it "one of the worst bills ever written."

Sometimes Musk amplified false claims, such as the idea that the legislation included \$3 billion for a new football stadium in Washington. In reality, the legislation would transfer ownership of the land from the federal government to the city, paving the way for eventual development.

Musk appeared emboldened by the experience.

"The voice of the people was heard," Musk wrote. "This was a good day for America."

Democratic House leader Hakeem Jeffries said the fallout would be Republicans' fault.

"You break the bipartisan agreement, you own the consequences that follow," he wrote on X.

## Federal employees prepare to fend off attacks by Trump

By MICHAEL SCHERER,  
JONATHAN O'CONNELL

AND LISA REIN  
The Washington Post

Federal civil servants and their allies took steps this week to prepare for a coming fight with the incoming Trump administration, launching a new online clearinghouse to help workers and meeting privately to share best practices about how to protect themselves.

One education effort organized by public employee unions and watchdog groups was to launch Thursday, with a new online public resource center under the banner "Civil Society Strong" that provides information about employee rights, options for legal representation and news about what the group calls "ongoing attacks on the civil service."

"It is a one-stop shop site that we are hoping will help enable the American public, including civil servants, to be able to access the services they need," said Skye Perryman, the chief executive officer of Democracy Forward, one of the organizers of the effort. "We know people are going into the ho-

**"People aren't just afraid of losing their jobs, they're afraid of so much more than that at this point."**

Dana Gold  
attorney with the Government  
Accountability Project

liday with a lot of anxiety about the future. And there is a broad civil society coalition that is really committed that the government can do work for the American people."

A separate federal employee group, called the DOJ Gender Equality Network, held an online discussion Monday with more than 250 participants, mostly from the Department of Justice, to share advice about their legal rights and how to prevent their personal information from being posted broadly online, an intimidation tactic known as doxing.

The efforts are aimed at resisting what is expected to be a severe assault on public servants that goes beyond the intimidation and sidelining many federal employees felt during Donald Trump's first term. One of the biggest planks of his campaign was a promise to slash the civil service workforce and increase the power of political appointees in the government.

Federal employees from a number of agencies, including Justice, the Department of Homeland Security and the Defense Department, have had their names listed online as targets for firing by the American Accountability Foundation. The organization's director, Tom Jones, says it researches and identifies nonpartisan appointees whom it suspects will resist the policy goals of President Trump based on their registration as Democrats, social media posts, political donations or online writings.

The group recently posted online the names of 22 attorneys in the Justice Department's voting section and, with little or no information related to their actual job

performance, claimed they "have shown a concerning history of bias and political activity that raise questions about their ability to enforce the law fairly."

Trump's top political donor, Elon Musk, who is codirecting an effort to downsize the federal workforce and root out "woke employees," also recently named four government employees in posts on his X platform, where he has more than 207 million followers. Those employees work at the Departments of Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and the International Development Corporation.

Experts on the call, a recording of which was provided to The Washington Post, advised staffers on how to reduce their presence online to avoid sharing personal details.

Dana Gold, an attorney with the Government Accountability Project, said on the call that her firm and others were prepared to fight the administration's expected revival of a new job classification known as Schedule F, which would strip tens of thousands of

civil servants in policy roles of their job protections. Trump moved to implement Schedule F with an executive order at the end of his first term, but the administration ran out of time to assign employees to the new job category.

"People aren't just afraid of losing their jobs, they're afraid of so much more than that at this point," she said in an interview.

Stacey Young, a Justice Department attorney who is co-founder and president of DOJ GEN, said many staffers are frightened "by the well-known threats to our jobs and workplaces, and even to our safety."

"We are doing everything we can to help our members and others understand what's going on, and what federal employees can do right now to protect themselves," she said.

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D), whose Northern Virginia district includes tens of thousands of federal employees, said that Democrats and others sympathetic to civil servants who face being targeted by the new administration "have to get geared up."



## NATION

# EPA allows Calif. to forbid new gas car sales by 2035

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday granted two requests from California to enforce strict standards for vehicle emissions, including a rule aimed at banning sales of new gasoline-powered cars in the state by 2035. The incoming Trump administration is likely to try to reverse the action.

The California rule is stricter than a federal rule adopted this year that tightens emissions standards but does not require sales of electric vehicles.

EPA said its review found that opponents of the two waivers did not meet their legal burden to show how either the EV rule or a separate measure on heavy-duty vehicles was inconsistent with the federal Clean Air Act.

“California has longstanding authority to request waivers from EPA to protect its residents from dangerous air pollution coming from mobile sources like cars and trucks,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement. “Today’s actions follow through on EPA’s commitment to partner with states to reduce emissions and act on the threat of climate change.”

The new waiver is important not only to California, but to more than a dozen other states that follow its nation-leading standards on vehicle emissions.

Even so, the waiver is likely to be short-lived. President-elect Donald Trump has said he will move to revoke all California waivers as part of an industry-friendly approach that includes boosting production of fossil fuels and repealing key parts of a landmark 2022 climate law.

Trump rescinded California’s authority on emissions in 2019, only to be reversed three years later by the Biden EPA, which restored the state’s authority in 2022.

Any effort by the new administration is likely to spawn a new set of legal challenges that could delay any action.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who often touts California’s leadership on climate policy, said EPA’s approval of the advanced clean-cars rule was a vote of confidence in California’s accomplishments in “protecting our people by cleaning our air and cutting pollution.”

“Naysayers like President-elect Trump would prefer to side with the oil industry over consumers and American automakers, but California will continue fostering new innovations in the market,” Newsom said.

Ford, Honda, Volkswagen and other major automakers are meeting current California emission standards, but some major car companies questioned the latest EPA waiver.

Most of the Democratic-leaning states that have adopted California’s rules — clustered along the West Coast and in the Northeast — are not selling anywhere close to the 35% level of EV sales required for next year and remain unlikely to meet the 2035 target of 100% EV sales, according to the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a large industry group.

“Achieving the sales mandates under current market realities will take a miracle. There needs to be balance and some states should exit the (California) program,” said John Bozzella, the group’s CEO.

Automakers are producing electric vehicles, Bozzella said, “but there’s a huge gap between these EV sales mandates and a customer’s reasonable expectation they can still choose what kind of vehicle to drive.” He expects Trump to revoke the California waiver next year.



MARK VANCE/AVE/AP

Dan Beazley stands with the homemade cross he brought from Michigan for victims of a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School on Wednesday in Madison, Wis.

## School shooter got messages from man accused of plotting other attack

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — The shooter who killed a student and teacher at a Christian school in Wisconsin brought two guns to the school and was in contact with a man in California who authorities said was planning to attack a government building, according to authorities and court documents released Wednesday.

Police were still investigating why the 15-year-old student at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison shot and killed a fellow student and teacher Monday before shooting herself, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Two other students who were shot remained in critical condition Wednesday.

“We may never know what she was thinking that day, but we’ll do our best to try to add or give as much information to our public as possible,” Barnes said.

A California judge, meanwhile, issued a restraining order Tuesday under California’s gun red flag law against a 20-year-old

Carlsbad man. The order requires the man to turn his guns and ammunition into police.

According to the order, the man told FBI agents that he had been messaging Natalie Rupnow, the Wisconsin shooter, about attacking a government building with a gun and explosives. The order doesn’t say what building he had targeted or when he planned to launch his attack. It also doesn’t detail his interactions with Rupnow except to state he was plotting a mass shooting with her.

The student who was killed in Monday’s school shooting was identified in an obituary released Wednesday as Rubi Patricia Vergara, 14, of Madison. She was a freshman at the school and “an avid reader, loved art, singing and playing keyboard in the family worship band,” according to the obituary.

The Dane County medical examiner Wednesday evening identified the teacher who was killed as 42-year-old Erin Michelle West, after initially identifying her as

Michelle E. West.

Police, with the assistance of the FBI, were scouring online records and other resources and speaking with the shooter’s parents and classmates in an attempt to determine a motive for the shooting, Barnes said.

Police don’t know if anyone was targeted in the attack or if the attack had been planned in advance, the chief said.

“I do not know if she planned it that day or if she planned it a week prior,” Barnes said. “To me, bringing a gun to school to hurt people is planning. And so we don’t know what the premeditation is.”

While Rupnow had two handguns, Barnes said he does not know how she obtained them and he declined to say who purchased them, citing the ongoing investigation.

No decisions have been made about whether Rupnow’s parents might be charged in relation to the shooting, but they have been cooperating, Barnes said.

## Fed trims key rate but forecast of fewer future cuts sends stocks tumbling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve cut its key interest rate Wednesday by a quarter-point — its third cut this year — but also signaled that it expects to reduce rates more slowly next year than it previously envisioned, mostly because of still-elevated inflation.

The Fed’s 19 policymakers projected they will cut their bench-

mark rate by a quarter-point just twice in 2025, down from their estimate in September of four rate cuts. Their new projections suggest consumers may not enjoy much lower rates next year for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and other forms of borrowing.

The central bank’s expectation of just two rate cuts in 2025 rattled Wall Street, sending stock

prices plummeting in the worst day for the market in four months. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed down more than 1,100 points, roughly 2.5%. The Nasdaq composite was hit worse: It sank about 3.5% Wednesday. Higher interest rates can slow business expansion.

Speaking at a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell under-

scored that policymakers are slowing their rate reductions as their benchmark rate nears a level that policymakers refer to as “neutral” — the level that is thought to neither spur nor hinder the economy.

Wednesday’s projections suggest the policymakers think they may be close to that level. Their benchmark rate stands at 4.3% after the latest rate cut, which fol-

lowed a steep half-point reduction in September and a quarter-point cut last month.

“I think that a slower pace of (rate) cuts really reflects both the higher inflation readings we’ve had this year and the expectations that inflation will be higher” in 2025, Powell said. “We’re closer to the neutral rate, which is another reason to be cautious about further moves.”



# NATION

## Willis taken off election case against Trump in Ga.

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A state appeals court on Thursday removed Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis from the Georgia election interference case against Donald Trump and others but did not dismiss the indictment, leaving the future of the prosecution uncertain.

Citing “the appearance of impropriety” by Willis that might not typically warrant such a removal, the court said in a 2-1 ruling that “this is the rare case in which disqualification is mandated and no other remedy will suffice to restore public confidence in the integrity of these proceedings.”

The case against Trump and more than a dozen others had already been largely stalled for months while the Georgia Court of Appeals considered the pretrial appeal.

The 2-1 ruling by appeals court panel means it will be up to the Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council of Georgia to find another prosecutor to take over the case and to decide whether to continue to pursue it,



Fani Willis

though that could be delayed if Willis decides to appeal to the state Supreme Court. A trial judge in March had set conditions that allowed Willis to stay on the case.

It’s the latest legal victory for Trump as he prepares for a return to power in a second term, further underscoring how criminal cases that just one year ago threatened to impede Trump’s political career and put him in personal jeopardy have now tilted in his favor.

The allegations that Willis had improperly benefited from her romance with special prosecutor Nathan Wade resulted in a tumultuous couple of months in the case as intimate details of Willis and Wade’s personal lives were aired in court in mid-February. Trump and others also argued that public comments Willis made in the wake of the revelation of the relationship improperly disparaged the defendants and their lawyers.

## Supreme Court set to hear challenge to banning TikTok

The Washington Post

The Supreme Court said Wednesday that it will quickly take up TikTok’s challenge to a federal law that would shutter the popular platform next month unless the company divests from Chinese ownership.

The justices said they would consider whether the law, passed with bipartisan support to address national security concerns, violates the First Amendment rights of millions of TikTok users and the owners of the video-sharing platform.

In a sign of the significance of the issue, the court added a special hearing to its calendar, scheduling two hours for oral argument Jan. 10. A ruling could come any time after that.

TikTok had asked the high court to intervene before Jan. 19, the deadline Congress set for TikTok’s China-based parent company, ByteDance, to sell the platform or be

barred in the United States. The company wants the justices to put on hold a lower-court ruling that clears the way for the law, which was signed by President Joe Biden.

Lawmakers passed the measure in response to concerns from U.S. officials that TikTok could be pressured by the Chinese government to covertly manipulate public opinion in the U.S. or to provide access to Americans’ data.

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## UnitedHealthcare CEO killing suspect returning to NY on murder charges

Associated Press

HOLLIDAYSBURG, Pa. — The suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare’s CEO is being returned to New York to face murder charges after agreeing to be extradited Thursday during a court appearance in Pennsylvania where he was arrested last week after five days on the run.

Luigi Mangione waived his right to an extradition hearing and was immediately turned over to at least a dozen New York Police Department officers who were in the courtroom.

Mangione was immediately ushered out of the courthouse

while surrounded by police. He glanced side-to-side but stepped quietly into a black SUV, contrasting his last court appearance when he struggled with deputies and shouted at reporters.

The SUV pulled away, surrounded by law enforcement vehicles, beginning Mangione’s trip back to New York.

Blair County District Attorney Pete Weeks said he wanted to turn Mangione over to New York authorities as soon as possible.

Mangione, 26, has been charged in New York with murder as an act of terrorism and could face life in prison without parole if convicted.

He could appear in New York state court for arraignment Thursday afternoon or Friday.

The 26-year-old Ivy League graduate is accused of ambushing and shooting Brian Thompson on Dec. 4 outside a Manhattan hotel where the head of the United States’ largest health insurer was walking to an investor conference. The shooting was captured on security video, but the suspect eluded police before Mangione was captured about 277 miles west of New York.

Weeks said he was willing to put the Pennsylvania charges on hold while New York authorities prosecute Mangione.

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## WORLD

# Israeli airstrikes shake Yemen's rebel-held capital

By JON GAMBRELL  
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel.

Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor

have drastically impacted global shipping. The rebels have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fellow members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance."

Israel's military said that it conducted two waves of strikes in a preplanned operation that began early Thursday and involved 14 fighter jets. The military said the first wave of strikes targeted

Houthi infrastructure at the ports of Hodeida, Salif and the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea.

Then, in a second wave of strikes, the military said its fighter jets targeted Houthi energy infrastructure in Sanaa.

"After Hamas, Hezbollah and the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last remaining arm of Iran's axis of evil," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement released Thursday. "They

are learning and they will learn the hard way, that whoever harms Israel pays a very heavy price for it."

The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, posting videos of flames engulfing one structure, as civil defense workers doused it in water, trying to extinguish the fire.

The strikes on the two power plants will worsen the electricity

crisis faced by Sanaa, where those who can afford it run gas generators or get power from private providers because of the city's long-failing infrastructure.

"Approximately one quarter of Sanaa — particularly shops, stores and commercial facilities — will face immediate and severe disruptions," said Mohammed al-Basha, a Yemen analyst. "In a city already staggering under a profound economic crisis, 2025 is set to be exceptionally challenging."

## French woman's ex-husband guilty of drugging her, letting other men rape her

Associated Press

AVIGNON, France — A court in France on Thursday sentenced the ex-husband of Gisèle Pelicot to 20 years in prison for drugging and raping her and allowing other men to rape her while she was unconscious, in abuse that lasted nearly a decade.

The sentence against Dominique Pelicot was the maximum possible under French law. He was declared guilty of all charges against him. At age 72, it could mean that he spends the rest of his life in prison. He won't be eligible to ask for early release until at least two-thirds of the sentence has been served.

The shocking case stunned France and spurred a national reckoning about the blight of rape culture.

Roger Arata, the lead judge of the court in the southern French city Avignon, told Pelicot to stand for the sentencing. After it was de-

livered, he sat back down and cried.

Arata read out verdicts one after the other against Pelicot and the 50 other men tried in the case. Gisèle Pelicot's courage, grace and stoicism during the ordeal of hearings that stretched over more than three months also turned Gisèle Pelicot into an icon for campaigners against sexual violence, including outside of France.

"You are therefore declared guilty of aggravated rape on the person of Mme. Gisèle Pelicot," the judge said as he worked his way through names on the long list of defendants.

Gisèle Pelicot was seated on one side of the courtroom, facing the defendants and sometimes nodding her head as verdicts were announced. Delivering the guilty verdicts and sentences took Arata just over an hour.

Dominique Pelicot's lawyer, Béatrice Zavarro, said that she

would weigh a possible appeal, but also expressed hope that Gisèle Pelicot would find solace in the court's rulings.

"I wanted Mrs. Pelicot to be able to emerge from these hearings in peace, and I think that the verdicts will contribute to this relief for Mrs. Pelicot," she said.

Of the 50 accused of rape, just one was acquitted but was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault. Another man was also found guilty on the sexual assault charge that he was tried for — meaning all 51 of the defendants were found guilty in one way or another.

In a side room where defendants' family members watched the proceedings on television screens, some burst into tears and gasped as the sentences were revealed.

Protesters gathered outside the courthouse followed the proceedings on their phones. Some read out the verdicts and applauded as



LEWIS JOLY/AP

Gisèle Pelicot speaks to the press as she leaves the courtroom, in the Avignon courthouse, southern France, on Thursday.

they were announced inside. Some were carrying oranges as symbolic gifts for the defendants heading to prison.

Prosecutors had asked that Dominique Pelicot get the maximum penalty of 20 years and for sentences of 10 to 18 years for the others tried for rape.

But the court was more lenient than prosecutors had hoped, with

many sentenced to less than a decade in prison.

For the defendants other than Dominique Pelicot, the sentences ranged from three to 15 years imprisonment, with some of the time suspended for some of them. Arata told six defendants they were now free, accounting for time already spent in detention while awaiting trial.

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## MOVIES



LAURA RADFORD, PERRY WELL FILMS 2, NETFLIX/TNS

Kerry Washington, center right, and Tyler Perry, center, pose with cast members of Perry's "Six Triple Eight," about a Black female WWII battalion.

# Bringing 'Six Triple Eight' battalion to life

Stars discuss working on Tyler Perry's 1st historical drama, about the women who helped deal with a WWII postal disaster

By RODNEY HO

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

**T** Tyler Perry has tackled several different genres over the years, but it took the real-life story of the only Black female World War II battalion to inspire him to delve into historical drama for the first time.

"The Six Triple Eight" is now in limited movie theaters and on Netflix. "Scandal" star Kerry Washington plays Charity Adams, the tough-as-nails Army commander of the 6888th battalion. Composed of 855 women, the battalion helped the military disentangle a postal disaster and deliver millions of pieces of mail to soldiers and loved ones in Europe desperate for the morale boost four years into the war.

Despite incredible skepticism and resistance from the white male Army leadership, the women cleared a backlog of 7 million pieces of mail in Germany in three months, half the time originally allotted, then worked through millions more in France.

"Twice as good with half as much," Washington, also an executive producer, said in a Zoom call with *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. "They exceeded all expectations."

The film opens with a war scene and the eventual death of a white Jewish man whom Lena Derriecott King (Ebony Obsidian) had fallen in love with despite interracial relationships being taboo at the time. Her grief from his death led her to join the Army in 1944.

Perry framed the film around King, who was still alive at the time he wrote the screenplay, flying to her home in Las Vegas to pick her brain in person before production began.

"I got a chance to meet her on her 100th birthday," Obsidian said. "She was vibrant and so proud that the story was coming to the forefront. I hope we did her justice."

Before King died in January, Perry was able to show

her an early cut of the film. "She saluted the iPad," Washington said. "She was so grateful the world would have an opportunity to see this story and really know who these women were."

The battalion came into existence thanks to support from first lady Eleanor Roosevelt (Susan Sarandon) and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Sam Waterston).

Perry's mentor and close friend, Oprah Winfrey, plays a small role as activist, educator and civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune, who encouraged the Roosevelts. A scene was shot in the Oval Office of Perry's replica White House, which was used extensively on his BET+ show "The Oval."

When Perry first called Washington about doing an unspecified project, he sent her a sizzle reel sampling what he wanted to do.

"It was a Friday so I decided to wait until Monday to watch it so we could talk about it," she said. "I didn't know anything about it at that point. Over the weekend, I did a photo shoot about amazing Black women in history, and I dressed up like Lena on my Instagram. My social media director told the story about the Six Triple Eight and I fell in love with it. I said, 'Wouldn't it be cool to do a movie about this?' Then I watched the sizzle reel and realized this is what Tyler wanted to do. It was serendipity!"

Washington prepped for the role by reading Adams' memoir twice, sifting through historical accounts and watching Adams do interviews.

"I was rehearsing one day and we had a knock on the door and a man in transportation said they had found a trunk in an auction that had Charity Adams' name on the side," she said. "It was the actual trunk from her time in the Army. We kept getting signs like this that these women are with us. They want us to tell their story."

Much of the film features Adams going toe-to-toe with racist white men. At one point, a chaplain arrives to ber-

ate her battalion before she kicks him out. Dean Norris ("Breaking Bad") plays her boss, who regularly belittled and undermined her and her battalion.

"That was normal behavior back then," Obsidian said. "When you act, you feel things in your body and you remember things that weren't even your own experience. You are stepping in the shoes of people who did experience it. It was visceral. It was disheartening. It was difficult."

Washington said she gives a lot of credit to Norris for doing such a good job embodying the cynical general.

"It's not who Dean Norris is in reality," she said. "I feel this immense gratitude toward him. I never could have had that 'over my dead body' monologue unless he properly presented that evil, that disrespect. It enables Charity to have that heroic moment."

Obsidian has a long history with Perry, starring in his BET dramedy "Sistas," which is in its eighth season. For her, working at Tyler Perry Studios is "like home." She was there when Perry set up Camp Quarantine in 2020 to house cast and crew at the studio while shooting "Sistas" and other shows.

"It was good to come home in a very different way and experience it in a historical context," Obsidian said.

The land that holds Tyler Perry Studios was once used during the Civil War to mobilize Confederate troops. It later became Fort McPherson, an Army base that closed in 2011. In 2015, Tyler Perry bought 330 acres of the base, officially opening his studios in 2019. Many of the original Army buildings were used in "The Six Triple Eight."

"There is irony and poetry in the fact that this space was once occupied by a Confederate army trying to maintain the system of slavery as opposed to what it's being used for now — to uplift the stories of Americans of all shades and backgrounds," Washington said. "That is beautiful, creative justice happening on that land."

Obsidian added: "I think we baptized it."



## VIDEO GAMES

# Whipped into shape

Indiana Jones and the Great Circle finally gives Indy fans the satisfying adventure they've desperately wanted

By GIESON CACHO  
The Mercury News

Indiana Jones has been such an iconic character that he has inspired generations of new heroes, and nowhere is that more evident than in video games. Dozens of projects feature swashbuckling adventurers or daring archaeologists, all of whom owe a debt to George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's protagonist.

Unfortunately, his popularity on celluloid has never translated to video game pixels. In his place, the likes of Lara Croft, Nathan Drake and others have forged their own franchises, exploring the frontiers of the medium. That has left anyone working on an Indiana Jones title in a curious predicament. How do you create an Indy game that can stand shoulder to shoulder with masterpieces like *Uncharted 2* while still bringing something new to the genre?

## An authentic Indy adventure

That's the daunting challenge MachineGames faced when it took up the project, and the developer came up with a brilliant solution. The team didn't create another *Tomb Raider* but rather leaned hard into the lore and the films, capturing the essence of the famed archaeologist's adventures.

What it crafted was *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle*, a first-person action game where the developers worked meticulously to put players in the protagonist's shoes, fulfilling the childhood dreams of a generation. The key to this is that the studio used the likeness of Harrison Ford, whose looks and mannerisms are intrinsic to the character. It also cast the stellar Troy Baker, who worked on *The Last of Us* and *Death Stranding*, to voice a convincing Indiana Jones. Lucasfilm had the final say over the game's design.

All of this lends the project an air of authenticity that other Indiana Jones projects lack. For example, the Temple of the Forbidden Eye's animatronics were always a disappointing facsimile.

With that foundation, MachineGames built a campaign that's a better chapter than the past two movies and feels right at home among the first three films. *The Great Circle* takes place after "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and finds the archaeologist lamenting a breakup with the love of his life, Marion Ravenwood. Indy couldn't resist an expedition to retrieve a cat mummy in Siwa, and his absence led to their split, but that same artifact has attracted the notice of several parties, including a giant who ransacks the Marshall College museum to steal it.

## Open-world events

That kicks off an adventure that takes players through several locales but focuses on three major ones in the Vatican, Gizeh and Sukhothai. These are large open-world zones where Indy can purchase items, stumble onto side quests and discover other activities. Along the way, he'll meet Gina Lombardi, an Italian journalist, who is looking for her linguist sister, Laura. She became entangled with the Nazis. Gina acts as the sidekick and companion on the globe-trotting quest while a rival German archaeologist named Voss plays a deliciously evil antagonist.

Together they explore hidden temples, brawl with Nazis and flee from danger. *The Great Circle* has plenty



BETHESDA/TNS photos

**Indiana Jones' iconic whip plays a pivotal role in combat and traversal in *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle*. However, combat isn't as good as the rest of the game. Generally it's better (and more authentic) when Indy stalks foes — sneaking up behind them and knocking them out with a flyswatter or other improvised weapons — rather than shooting them or brawling with them.**



**MachineGames used the physical likeness and mannerisms of Harrison Ford and the voice of Troy Baker for the character of Indiana Jones. All of this gives *The Great Circle* an air of authenticity that other projects lack.**

of action sequences, but the developers purposefully wanted to explore Indy's other talents. They emphasize his intelligence and they do this through dozens of puzzles scattered throughout the world. The side quests fall into two types: Fieldworks, which are long side quests, and Mysteries, which are short localized puzzles. The two offer a good mix of activities that seamlessly fold into the narrative without being a burden.

The Fieldworks are more story-driven and complex. They highlight the stealth gameplay that MachineGames pushes players to pursue via disguises. Although Indy is armed with a revolver, it's almost always better to sneak behind an opponent and knock him out with a flyswatter or other improvised weapon. Players can hide the bodies and slowly take out fascists methodically. It's a gameplay loop reminiscent of those in *Thief*, *Dishonored* or *The Chronicles of Reddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*, a project that some at the studio worked on.

Mysteries are more like concentrated puzzles that re-

volve around figuring out lock combinations or exploring the detailed world. Unlike Fieldworks, they're brief and localized to a room. They're the type of brain teasers that nudge players to use pen and paper to figure out how ancient locks or traps work.

Finishing those activities usually rewards players with Adventure Points. Another way to earn them is by taking photos while exploring, which is another pillar of *The Great Circle* design. With a camera in hand, Indy documents the sites he has seen. Adventure Points are spent on unlocking skills and perks via books found while again searching through every nook and cranny.

## Side quests never feel like work

What's fantastic about the campaign is that the developer gives players the opportunity to advance the story but also lets them go back to previous places in flashbacks. It allows completionists to enjoy the adventure while eliminating the feeling of missing out on power-ups or key items. All of this is just a smart way to make side quests engrossing and rewarding without them feeling like work.

The other half of Indy's gameplay is the combat, which isn't as good compared to the rest of the game. Players have the option of going Rambo, but they'll quickly learn that enemies will overwhelm Indy in a gunfight, so it's better to go the stealthy route. When players are spotted, they'll go into first-person fisticuffs, which feels rougher than the shooting gameplay.

Players use the trigger buttons to throw left and right punches and the left bumper to block. It takes a while to adjust to the sloppiness of the fighting, but thankfully, it's not pushed too much. It's almost always better to carry a weapon and stalk foes rather than just running up to them and starting a brawl. Again, it's another decision that feels authentic to the character.

The only element that *The Great Circle* is missing is a great car chase scene, but the developers more than make up for it with a midgame sequence that's spectacular in its scope, and one of the more impressive set pieces. It's a level that has movie callbacks, but at the same time, it feels new and part of the Indiana Jones legacy. It's a balancing act MachineGames constantly performs and deftly navigates, giving fans what they desperately wanted since the film "The Last Crusade" — a satisfying Indy adventure.

**Platforms:** Xbox Series X and Series S, PC, PlayStation 5 (coming in 2025)

**Online:** indianajones.bethesda.net/en-US



## LIFESTYLE

# Hot Wheels sales powered by nostalgia

BY JACLYN PEISER  
The Washington Post

**A**s a boy, Bruce Pascal reveled in testing the limits of his Hot Wheels. He might squeeze a firecracker into one of the miniature metal cars and set it off, or flatten one with a hammer to see whether it still rolled.

Now 63, he wouldn't dare rough up his toys. His collection is so prolific that it literally fills a warehouse in suburban Washington and includes the Pink Rear Load Beach Bomb prototype, the rarest Hot Wheels ever made.

Though Pascal's 8,000-car fleet is singular, he is part of a growing contingent of enthusiasts fueling Hot Wheels dominance — it's the bestselling toy in the world, according to market research firm Circana. Though purchases are still primarily made for children, adults are buying them at a faster clip, said Roberto Stanichi, who oversees Hot Wheels at Mattel. He estimates that adult collectors drive about a third of global revenue.

The 56-year-old toy's enduring appeal makes it an outlier.

Though children today are quicker to shift from traditional toys and toward screens, engagement in Hot Wheels has only increased. In 2023, gross sales climbed 14 percent, to \$1.43 billion, year over year, Mattel said.

Starting at \$1.25 apiece, price is a draw, particularly for cost-conscious families. In fact, the toys cost less than they did in 1968, when they retailed for 69 to 89 cents; that's roughly \$6 to \$8 in today's dollars.

"What I think really makes Hot Wheels special is that it's an affordable toy for kids that many generations have grown up on now," said James Zahn, editor in chief of the trade publication the Toy Book and senior editor at the Toy Insider. And it continues into adulthood as the brand "makes this jump from the toy department into the real world."

## A vehicle for car culture

Hot Wheels' connection to car culture dates to its inception, Zahn said. The toy came onto the market on the heels of a hot-rod renaissance, in which car enthusiasts and gear heads gathered at expos and road shows to show off their rides, he said.

"If you're a person that loves cars today, chances are that the first car you ever owned was a Hot Wheel," Stanichi said.

That's how Pascal's fixation began. An enthusiasm for cars was a prerequisite in his family, he said during a recent tour of the 4,000-square-foot warehouse turned personal museum in a Maryland suburb of D.C., which

houses 10,000 cars and pieces of memorabilia. It includes curated Hot Wheels displays, comic books, artwork, original blueprints, hand-carved wood molds and patents. Parked inside is a 1913 Ford Model T Roadster — a real one, in lavender — and dozens of the 1968 Hot Heap Hot Wheels it inspired. His collection is valued north of \$2 million.

Pascal, a commercial real estate agent, also has interviewed nearly 400 former Mattel employees and co-wrote "Hot Wheels Prototypes," a history of the toy, with Michael Zarnock.

The earliest Hot Wheels cars were 1:64-scale versions of such popular muscle cars as the Camaro, Firebird and Mustang. Since then, Mattel has rolled out everything from Honda Civics to the Batmobile to the rides in "Ghostbusters," "The Simpsons" and "Scooby-Doo." The company recently announced a partnership with Formula 1, the world's most popular auto racing circuit.

A Hot Wheels movie also is in development with Warner Bros. and J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot production company.

The company also feeds collectors' appetite for new and exclusive cars. They can join the Red Line Club, where they get access to special collections. Mattel releases dozens of special collections a year, with about 10,000 to 50,000 cars available to buy. They're sold out within minutes, Stanichi said.

But Pascal says nothing compares to finding a box of Hot Wheels cars at an estate sale and unpacking a high-value surprise inside.

"It's hard to describe the feeling to non-collectors," he said, noting that it's like a chemical release in his body when he "fills a hole" in his collection.

## 'Kidulting' and nostalgia

Nostalgia has been a big draw in the toy industry in recent years, with insiders calling it "kidulting." Millennial and Gen X consumers, in particular, are reengaging with toys, Zahn said.

"They want to get those warm feelings of nostalgia that remind them of simpler times," he said.

While it had been more than two decades since Colby D'Anieri had zoomed a Hot Wheels car around a racetrack, he couldn't help but browse the toy aisle every time he was in a Target.

"It takes me back to when I was a kid," said the 33-year-old of Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley.

He finally caved a few years ago and added some die-cast cars to his shopping cart. Now he has hundreds, including his first car, a Ford Focus ZX3, which was released at 1:64 scale in 2003.



MARVIN JOSEPH/The Washington Post

Bruce Pascal houses his expansive Hot Wheels collection in a 4,000-square-foot warehouse in Maryland.

"What I think really makes Hot Wheels special is that it's an affordable toy for kids that many generations have grown up on."

James Zahn  
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## MUSIC



AP

Snoop Dogg, shown performing in 2023, is reunited with producer Dr. Dre on his 20th studio album, "Missionary," which was released Dec. 13.

# Building on their three-decade bond

Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre's brotherhood remains strong after 30 years with new album 'Missionary'

By JONATHAN LANDRUM JR.  
Associated Press

**W**hen it comes to music, there's one person in particular Snoop Dogg trusts enough to steer the ship without question: hit-making producer Dr. Dre.

Their bond, built over 30 years of brotherhood, began when Dr. Dre shaped Snoop's game-changing debut, "Doggystyle," a cornerstone of hip-hop history. From young dreamers chasing stardom to legends cementing their legacies, the duo has always moved in sync.

Now, the dynamic pair reunites for Snoop's "Missionary," his milestone 20th studio album, which was released Dec. 13. In a music industry where lasting relationships are rare, their bond remains solid.

"We were just playing on our raw ability, and it worked ... But now you're deal-

ing with professionals who are like perfectionists and skilled at what they do," Snoop said while smoking a blunt inside his dressing room trailer. The 15-track project features several big-name guest appearances, including Eminem, 50 Cent, Sting, Method Man, Jelly Roll, Tom Petty and Jhené Aiko.

## Snoop and Sting strike a chord

Before the interview, the ultra-smooth entertainer had just wrapped up rehearsals for "The Voice" with British musician Sting, delivering a performance that aired this week on NBC. Both hit the stage on the competition series to perform Snoop's album single "Another Part of Me," which was sampled from The Police's "Message in a Bottle," a 1979 song that Sting wrote

SEE BOND ON PAGE 17



JORDAN STRAUSS, INVISION/AP

Dr. Dre, left, and Snoop Dogg attend a ceremony honoring Dr. Dre with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on March 19 in Los Angeles.



## MUSIC

# Bond: Snoop has ascended to new heights through Olympics, ventures outside of music

FROM PAGE 16

and sang as lead singer.

Sting quickly approved the sample for “Another Part of Me,” getting to know Snoop’s personality during the superstar rapper’s meteoric rise at the Paris Olympics this summer, despite never meeting him in person. Snoop carried the Olympic torch, captivated audiences as NBC’s prime-time correspondent, swam with Michael Phelps, attended a U.S. women’s soccer game with Megan Rapinoe, danced with Simone Biles and Jordan Chiles and cheered on Caeleb Dressel alongside the swimmer’s wife and son.

When Sting first heard the track, he was impressed by Snoop’s vocal ability but found himself contemplating how he could contribute to the song.

“He asked me to sing a verse, which is difficult,” said Sting, who met Snoop for the first time on “The Voice” set. “It’s a different style from the one I normally sing. It’s a very, very rapid rap style, which is kind of challenging for me. But I love a challenge. I played the guitar on the track, so I feel very much a part of it. I think it’s going to be a hit.”

## A versatile businessman with a diverse portfolio

Like Sting, many others across the globe have witnessed Snoop ascend to new heights. Along with being a breakout star at the Paris Games, he’s been seen in TV commercials and co-hosting a cooking show with Martha Stewart. He stepped in during a Wrestlemania match and even threw out the first pitch at the Reds-Brewers MLB game before giving his unique play-by-play commentary.

Snoop’s daughter, Cori Broadus, has a new reality show about nuptials called “Snoop Dogg’s Fatherhood: Cori and Wayne’s Story,” a three-part docuseries that debuted last week on E!. Snoop and his son Cordell Broadus have a thriving ice cream brand launched in 2023.

This year, Dr. Dre and Snoop launched two alcohol brands: A canned cocktail, Gin & Juice, and the premium gin, Still G.I.N., which is a play on “Still D.R.E.,” the hit single from Dr. Dre’s multiplatinum “2001” album released in 1999.

“It’s like you don’t have to speak. Your work speaks for you now as opposed to you knocking on doors. Now, people are opening doors,” he said. “They understand who I am as a person and what my love vessel is and that makes them want to get next to me.”



LOUISE DELMOTTE/AP

**Snoop Dogg attends a women’s beach volleyball match between the U.S. and France at the Paris Olympics on July 31. Snoop was a breakout star at the Games, one of many moves outside music.**

## Snoop returns to the studio at behest of Dr. Dre

Amid Snoop’s hustle and bustle, he said Dr. Dre felt it was time to head back into the studio to start recording a new album — a process that began nearly two years ago. They recorded in spurts.

“(Dr. Dre) was watching me in the entertainment world and figuring that my music hand ain’t matching my entertainment hand,” Snoop said.

“He wanted to put music back in the foreground with his production. leadership and guidance on the project.”

While recording, Snoop said Dr. Dre musically knew him better than himself at times. He said no other producers — except for Pharrell and Battlecat — have the cachet to critique him like Dr. Dre.

“He would basically write it for me, tell me how to say it, give me the enunciation and the way I’m supposed to punctuate it,” Snoop said of Dr. Dre. “He’s like a real (expletive) producer, director. He acts for me and knows what I’m supposed to do in his body and then he makes me do it in my body. And if it’s not right, it ain’t right.”

Snoop credited Dr. Dre’s influence for enhancing the track “Now or Never,” a deeply sentimental song that left him feeling emotional at times. He described it as a “tears of joy” record, dedicated to the memory of recently deceased loved ones, including his younger brother, who died this year.

For Snoop, “Now or Never” was a difficult song to record, even though it was his favorite on the album.

“It’s really hard to make a track like that — especially because I’m always the life of the party,” he said. “I’m always happy, fun, upbeat. So, to have a moment of reflection sometimes makes the mood damp or a little bit light. But it’s needed. It’s necessary because it happens in life. It’s good to speak on it. ... My pen is my mightiest sword. I always write where I live.”

## A vision to rehabilitate Death Row Records

Snoop is determined to restore Death Row Records to its former glory. After acquiring the brand in 2022, he faced some skepticism — even from Dr. Dre and Interscope Records at first before eventually winning them over — due to the label’s troubled reputation. He’s on a mission to rewrite its story and steer it toward a brighter legacy — just like he’s done for his career.

Snoop’s new album was released in conjunction with his label, Dr. Dre’s Aftermath Records and Interscope, which was co-founded by music industry entrepreneur Jimmy Iovine. Death Row has released new apparel, an animated “Doggystyle” film and entered the gaming industry with a recent collaboration with Fortnite.

“We’re building Death Row into avenues that didn’t exist,” he said. “We’re taking it into places that it never thought it could go.”

Snoop has made tremendous strides since he broke through in the 1990s rap scene as a signed Death Row Records artist, navigating several run-ins with the law along the way. He credits his turning point to his acquittal on murder charges in 1996, a moment that marked a significant shift in his life and career.

“My mother raised me the right way, but I chose the wrong way,” he said. “I had to separate from certain people on Death Row (at the time). ... I could say that those were decisions that I’m happy I made, even though I may have ruffled feathers and made people look at me like I’m soft or weak.”

Snoop added: “Nah, I’m smart. I’m thinking. When you grow old, that’s called wisdom. And when you get old, that’s because you have wisdom.”

## REVIEW



AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

**Matt Berninger of The National performs on Sept. 22 in Louisville, Ky. The “sad dads” are rocking hard on their new live album, “Rome.”**

## The National

Rome (4AD)

The National brings an abundance of energy for a brooding, middle-aged indie rock band, as evidenced on their new live album, “Rome.”

The 21-track album — recorded in concert at the Parco della Musica auditorium in Italy’s capital in June — is a fan-friendly sing-along that strings together some of the best sounds of their 25-year career.

Eight of the band’s 10 studio albums are represented in “Rome,” released Dec. 13 from this Ohio-born and New York-based quintet fronted by the gravel-voiced Matt Berninger and fueled by two sets of brothers: Aaron and Bryce Dessner and Bryan and Scott Devendorf.

The opener, “Runaway,” is one of a handful of deeper cuts, this one from the 2010 album “High Violet.” The drumming brilliance of Bryan Devendorf shines throughout another “High Violet” cut, “Bloodbuzz Ohio” and spreads into “The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness,” the heart of their 2017 album, “Sleep Well Beast.”

The self-described “sad dads,” a self-deprecating nickname that shows up on some of their own merchandise, are rocking as hard as ever on this record.

Berninger, as he described during an interview last year with David Letterman, battled depression during the pandemic. “First Two Pages of Frankenstein,” one of two albums released last year in what became a revitalization for Berninger and his bandmates, has a significant presence on “Rome.”

An example: The angst in “Eucalyptus” over the impending breakup of a close relationship is palpable, but the genius of Berninger’s lyrics performed live lies in a mood-lightening list of household items — from bottled water to a ceiling fan. “What about the ornaments?” he sings. “What if I reinvented again? What about the moon drop light?”

Berninger’s baritone becomes scratchier by the song, as much a feature of a National performance as it is a bug. And for that reason, “Rome” is not the place to make a diehard fan out of a newbie listener. Berninger rarely holds back during a show, and 2023’s “Smoke Detector” is one of those songs that devolves into a cacophonous mess of top-of-the-lungs screaming.

The encore features a live-show staple, 2010’s “Terrible Love,” during which Berninger typically delights the crowd by trying to body surf as staff frantically try to feed him enough slack on the microphone cord to make the stunt work.

On the closer, “High Violet” cut “Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks,” Berninger lets the crowd take the first verse. As the horns from Benjamin Lanz and Kyle Resnick — frequent tour guests from the band Beirut — punctuate the breaks, the feel-good melody that belies every anxiety-ridden verse resonates to the end.

— Dave Campbell  
Associated Press



# TELEVISION



Netflix photos

**In “A Nonsense Christmas with Sabrina Carpenter,” viewers see two worlds: one that allows fantasy to reign free and another that gives fans a somewhat fictional peek behind the scenes of a Carpenter performance. Even the show’s promotional materials — photos of Carpenter and her guest stars (top and bottom of page) — were designed to deliver the sense of a retro yet glamorous Christmas.**

# Inspired nonsense

## Sabrina Carpenter, production designer found inspiration in sitcoms, Old Hollywood for new Netflix holiday special

By CHARLIE VARGAS  
*The Orange County Register*

Pop star and actor Sabrina Carpenter has had quite a year: she debuted a No. 1 album on the Billboard Top 200 (which landed her nominations in the Grammy Awards’ four big categories), completed her first arena tour, opened for Taylor Swift on the Eras Tour 25 times and was granted an unprecedented unlimited budget for her Netflix special, “A Nonsense Christmas with Sabrina Carpenter.”

OK, that last one was a nonsensical one-liner baked into Carpenter’s special, now streaming on Netflix.

“It was definitely a joke,” said Jason Sherwood, production designer of the special. “I do a lot of stuff in live entertainment, and there is always a pretty fixed and finite budget, and this was no different.”

Sherwood, a two-time Emmy Award-winning designer for television, concerts, tours, installations, plays and musicals, has worked on several stage design projects. His work has set the ambiance for major stars such as Camila Cabello, Elton John and Janelle Monáe.

When he was approached to produce an old-school holiday variety special with a comedic undertone, it felt like a perfect fit. His background in theater, television and design informed his collaboration with the production team and Carpenter.

“Sabrina is the kind of artist who has a clear visual identity, and she’s always working inside of a certain pop culture pot of references, bringing them up and reimagining them through her lens,” Sherwood said. “It felt right up my alley, just on a personal level, because of my interests. Every year, on Christmas morning, my family and I watch ‘White Christmas,’ so there are so many little Easter egg

ideas and aesthetics that I brought in from that movie to this particular project.”

In “A Nonsense Christmas with Sabrina Carpenter,” viewers are shown two worlds: one that allows fantasy to reign free and another that gives fans a somewhat fictional peek behind the scenes of what it looks like for one of Carpenter’s larger-than-life performances.

“We developed a creative vocabulary between the two worlds,” Sherwood said. “There’s a moment in the special where we pan over to the television and zoom in on the TV, then we go into the TV, and then we’re doing a musical number. It became sort of this device to toggle between moments that felt grander and bigger and then moments that felt more intimate or more comedic.”

During his meeting with the production team and Carpenter, they discussed the different elements they could draw from, including Christmas classics like “The Andy Williams Christmas Show” and “The Judy Garland Christmas Show.”

The team also studied the living room sets of “Sabrina the Teenage Witch” and “Friends” to understand what makes a set feel homey. A staple of every real-life home is a living room that looks like it has been lived in, and that’s what they went for on set. The set includes a Christmas-decorated living room with a cozy fireplace, a kitchen with a retro pink fridge, a Betty Crocker cake stand and a fruitcake, a nod to Carpenter’s holiday EP.

One of the more visually striking elements of the production was its references to Golden Age Hollywood films like “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.” The opening scene, set on a red-tiered cake platform stage, is a nod to “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend,” where dancers in tuxedos surround Marilyn Monroe. The color scheme is mostly the same, but Carpenter’s tuxedo-clad dancers are all women.





# CROSSWORD AND COMICS

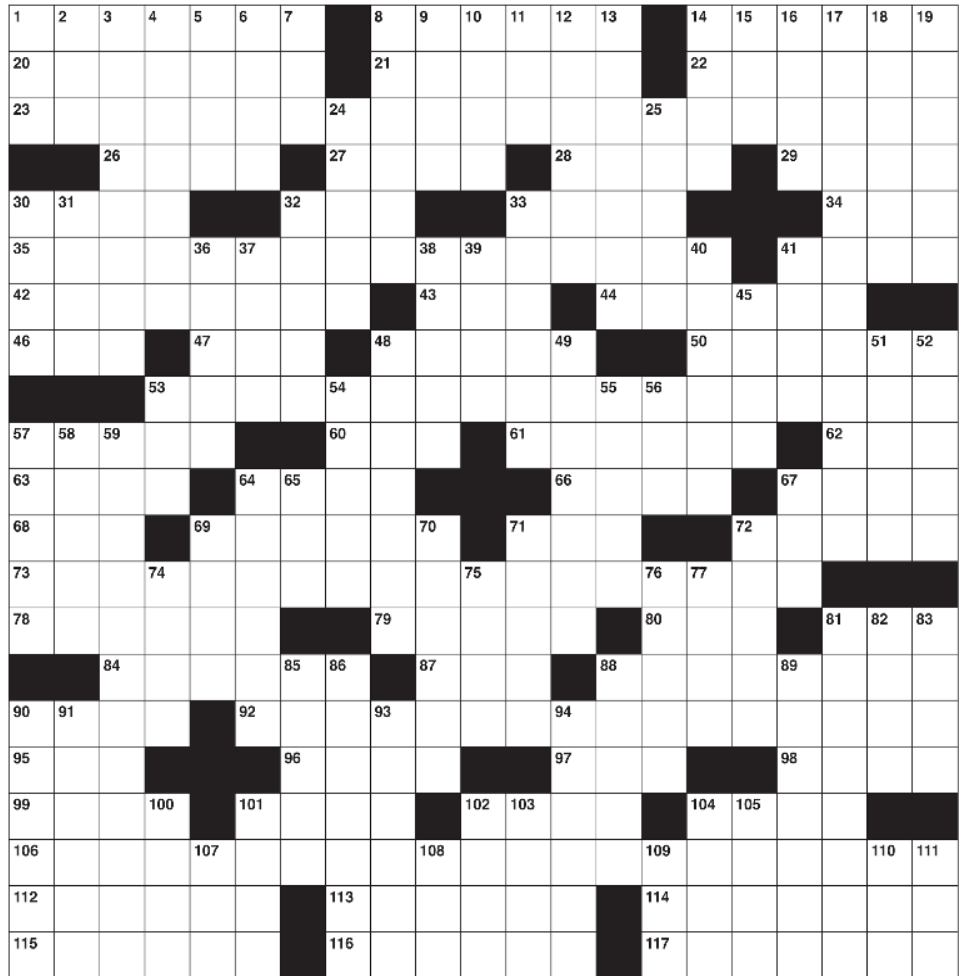
## NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

JUST FOR FUN

BY JOHN KUGELMAN / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

John Kugelman, of Gainesville, Va., is a software engineer and musician. Besides making puzzles, John likes to spend his time off rock climbing and attending weekly trivia competitions with his father, sister and niece. Despite what you might think, he laments that "being good at crosswords means jack squat on trivia night." Still, he's holding out hope: "One of these weeks they'll have a Yoko Ono-Brian Eno round and we'll show them all!"

- ACROSS
  - 1 Candy that resembles a tube of lipstick
  - 8 Italian title for Puccini's "Butterfly"
  - 14 Over the line
  - 20 "Nothing weird about that"
  - 21 Figure of speech?
  - 22 Tarot card group
  - 23 "What a beautiful tackle box!" "Nice casting!" and such?
  - 26 Youngest-ever World Cup winner
  - 27 Desire
  - 28 Hold 'em declaration
  - 29 "I'll handle that"
  - 30 Actor Steve of "The White Lotus"
  - 32 Month, in Monterrey
  - 33 Snail-paced
  - 34 Group formed from the 2023 W.W.E.-U.F.C. merger
  - 35 Lasso?
  - 41 Daytime TV staple
  - 42 Firebirds and Fieros
  - 43 \_\_\_ de toilette
  - 44 Canonized king of Norway
  - 46 Dump
  - 47 Utmost degree
  - 48 Fleece
  - 50 Ryan with 12 Olympic swimming medals
  - 53 Leaning forward and holding the reins?
  - 57 Certain erogenous zone, familiarly
  - 60 Ambulance destinations, for short
  - 61 Focus of a House committee
  - 62 Liable (to)
  - 63 Dutch astronomer for whom an ice cloud is named
  - 64 Singer Del Rey
  - 66 Country between Ghana and Benin
  - 67 Family \_\_\_
  - 68 A in French class?
  - 69 Commenced
  - 71 Branded item at a bank, maybe
  - 72 Instrument heard on the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black"
  - 73 Accidentally using salt instead of sugar, say?
  - 78 Fills in for
  - 79 Great Lakes people
  - 80 Cuisine with sticky rice
  - 81 Mascot of the Baltimore Ravens
  - 84 One-up, militarily
  - 87 \_\_\_ vez (once, in Spanish)
  - 88 Toy-centered theme park
  - 90 Tusked Warcraft race
  - 92 Marathon fee or campaign donation?
  - 95 Agcy. that determined fluoride prevents tooth decay
  - 96 Cousins of magpies
  - 97 Cause of a big bang
  - 98 It's bigger than a butte
  - 99 Saxophonist Getz
  - 101 Cowpoke's compadre
  - 102 Slacked, say
  - 104 Wharton major, in brief
  - 106 Not being allowed to lick the spatula clean?
  - 112 Bested a birdie
  - 113 Salt, say
  - 114 Join in
  - 115 Completes, as a circuit
  - 116 \_\_\_ Biggums, memorable character on "Chappelle's Show"
  - 117 "The other thing is..."
- DOWN
  - 1 \_\_\_-Man
  - 2 Troop grp.
  - 3 One of over 100 for Haydn
  - 4 "Fingers crossed that you're wrong"
  - 5 Sway
  - 6 Pooch in the funnies
  - 7 When doubled, something seen atop a pyramid?
  - 8 Philosophical believer in essential unity
  - 9 Kennedy Center focus
  - 10 Skedaddle
  - 11 Anti-trafficking org.
  - 12 Toddler's term for a farm animal
  - 13 Spice planet in the "Dune" universe
  - 14 Shadow
  - 15 Certain Boolean operators
  - 16 Number of eyes for a tarantula
  - 17 Squeamish
  - 18 Sorenstam of golf
  - 19 Convertible, casually
  - 24 Still-life vessels
  - 25 Larry \_\_\_\_, founder of Hustler magazine
  - 30 Hits with a ray gun
  - 31 Over and over
  - 32 Chewy Japanese dessert
  - 33 Fluffy footstool
  - 36 Merlot alternative
  - 37 Top section of the food pyramid
  - 38 \_\_\_ journey (story framework)
  - 39 Common sound from a white noise machine
  - 40 Totally lose it
  - 41 Can
  - 45 Dreaded hairstyle
  - 48 Animal that fights by "necking"
  - 49 Sways
  - 51 Far from laid-back
  - 52 Fruity-smelling compound
  - 53 "\_\_\_, meet kettle"
  - 54 Bocelli, e.g.
  - 55 Waterway through Lake Geneva
  - 56 Little celebration
  - 57 Cheese that's often smoked
  - 58 Like some waves
  - 59 Wand-waving words
  - 64 "Woo-hoo, that's awesome!"
  - 65 Suffix with block or stock
  - 67 Love all, say
  - 69 Exam for aspiring attys.
  - 70 Discussion sites
  - 71 Song of praise
  - 72 Bloodhound's trail
  - 74 Laptop brand
  - 75 Acronymic epithet for one who's not conservative enough
  - 76 Chin feature
  - 77 "Aladdin" character who hates crackers
  - 81 PG-13 word
  - 82 Burden
  - 83 Mrs. Krabappel's first name on "The Simpsons"
  - 85 Fix, as a printer
  - 86 "Advance to the \_\_\_ Railroad" (Monopoly directive)
  - 88 Carter who played Wonder Woman
  - 89 "Raging Bull" boxer Jake
  - 90 How freelancers work
  - 91 Confirmation, e.g.
  - 93 Capital of New South Wales
  - 94 Everlasting, poetically
  - 100 Lofgren of the E Street Band
  - 101 Many think-tank hires, in brief
  - 102 "Assuming that's true..."
  - 103 Word before jelly or Pie
  - 104 Gusto
  - 105 Morsel for Miss Muffet
  - 107 "What did I tell you!"
  - 108 Salt
  - 109 Résumé fig.
  - 110 Gives the nod
  - 111 Agent Smith's nemesis



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## GUNSTON STREET



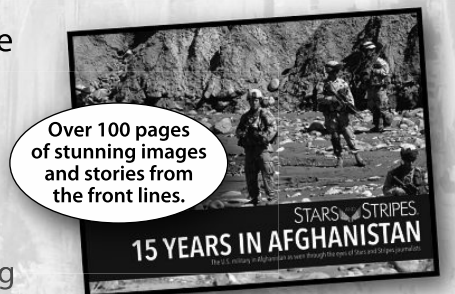
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## FACES

## Grammys like André 3000's new sound

Alt-jazz, 'no bars' solo album by former Outkast member up for 3 awards

By MARIA SHERMAN  
Associated Press

None was expecting it. Late last year, André 3000 released his debut solo album, "New Blue Sun," 18 years after his legendary rap group Outkast's last studio album, "Idlewild."

But "New Blue Sun" has "no bars," he jokes. It's a divergence from rap because "there was nothing I was liking enough to rap about, or I didn't feel it sounded fresh. I'm not about to serve you un-fresh (expletive.)"

Instead, he offered up a six-track instrumental album of ambient alt-jazz — with special attention paid to the flute.

"The sound, that's how I got into it," he says of the instrument. "The portability, too. You can't tote around a piano and play in Starbucks."

He's also invested in the flute's history — like learning about Mayan flutes made from clay, a design he had recreated in cedarwood. "There's all kinds of fables and, you know, indige-

nous stories that go along with playing the flute — playing like the birds or playing your heart like the wind — it kind of met (me) where I was in life," he says.

"Flutes — wind instruments in general — are the closest thing you get to actually hearing a human," he continues. "You're actually hearing the breath of a person."

"New Blue Sun" is a stunning collection, one that has earned André 3000 three new Grammy Award nominations: album of the year, alternative jazz and instrumental composition.

Those arrive exactly 25 years after the 1999 Grammys, where Outkast received their first nomination — for "Rosa Parks," from their third album, "Aquemini" — and 20 years after the group won album of the year for "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below."

"It matters because we all want to be acknowledged or recognized," André 3000 says of his new Grammy nominations. "It's a type of proof of connection, in some type of way ... especially with the Grammys, because it's voted on by a committee of musicians and people in the industry."

He's a bit surprised by the attention, too, given the type of album he created. "We have no singles on the radio, not even singles that are hot in the street," he says. "When you're sitting next to Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, these are highly, hugely popular music artists, I'm satisfied just because of that ... we won just to be a part of the whole conversation."

He theorizes that it may be because popular music listening habits are broadening. "A lot of artists are just trying different things. Even, you know, the album that



EPIC RECORDS/AP

"New Blue Sun" by Andre 3000, a six-track instrumental album of ambient alt-jazz, is a diversion from his usual rap.

Beyoncé is nominated for, it's not her normal thing," he says of her country-and-then-some record, "Cowboy Carter." "We're in this place where things are kind of shifting and moving."

For André 3000, "New Blue Sun" has allowed him to "feel like a whole new artist," but it is also an extension of who he's always been. "Being on the road with Outkast and picking up a bass clarinet at a pawn shop in New York and just sitting on the back of the bus playing with it — these things have been around," he says.

He's also always embraced "newness," as he puts it, experimenting creatively "even if it sounds non-masterful."

"Even producing for Outkast, I was just learning these instruments. If I ... put my hands down and play 'Ms. Jackson,' I'm not knowing what I'm playing. But I like it," he says.

As for a new Outkast album, "I never say never," he says. "But I can say that the older I get, I feel like that time has happened."

The 67th Grammy Awards will be held Feb. 2 in Los Angeles. The show will air on CBS and stream on Paramount+.

Andre Benjamin, aka Andre 3000, said he decided not to do another rap album because "there was nothing I was liking enough to rap about."

JORDAN STRAUSS, INVISION/AP

## Former co-stars Timothée Chalamet, Saoirse Ronan talk fame, friendship

By SIAN WATSON  
Associated Press

Timothée Chalamet and Saoirse Ronan may be juggling multiple releases and busy schedules, but the bright young stars managed to reunite on Wednesday in London for a conversation at the British Film Institute.

The former co-stars met on Greta Gerwig's 2017 high school film "Lady Bird" and were paired up again several years later in her adaptation of "Little Women."

Though professionally their lives have taken them in different directions, they've remained friends and will "dip back in every

few years" to catch up, Ronan said.

"That is what is so beautiful about this point in our lives, we're really lucky that the two of us are doing really well and our paths can continue to cross," Ronan added as her husband, Jack Lowden, supported from the audience.

Both had busy years appearing in multiple film releases that are now vying for awards recognition.

Chalamet took on the role of Bob Dylan in James Mangold's "A Complete Unknown," which is out Christmas day, and Ronan played a young alcoholic who tries to escape the depths of her addiction

by moving home to the Orkney Islands in Scotland in "The Outrun."

Chalamet also stepped back into the role of Paul Atreides in the epic sci-fi film "Dune: Part Two," and Ronan starred in Steve McQueen's "Blitz."

The audience watched back-to-back scenes of the collaborations with Gerwig. Chalamet quipped that a "'Lady Bird' scene is a lot better than I remember it being!"

The conversation then shifted to their relationship with fame. Chalamet said it's the "most boring thing to talk about in my life."

Ronan agreed: "I just pretended that all of that doesn't exist."



SCOTT A GARFITT, INVISION/AP

Saoirse Ronan, left, and Timothee Chalamet, shown Dec. 18, have a lot in common as favorites to receive Academy Award nominations.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Hunter dies after bear shot in tree falls on him

**VA** LUNENBURG COUNTY — A Virginia man has died after a bear in a tree shot by one of his hunting partners fell on him, state wildlife officials said.

The incident occurred Dec. 9 in Lunenburg County, which is between Richmond and Danville, Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources said in a statement.

A hunting group was following the bear when it ran up the tree, the department said. As the group retreated from the tree, a hunter shot the bear. The animal fell onto another hunter who was standing about 10 feet from the bottom of the tree.

The department identified the man as Lester C. Harvey, 58, of Phenix, Va. A member of the group rendered first aid before Harvey was rushed to two different hospitals. He died from his injuries Friday, the wildlife department stated.

## 2 die after fertilizing pot plants with bat poop

**NY** NEW YORK — Two New York men have died after contracting a rare fungal infection from the bat feces they used to fertilize their marijuana plants.

The men, both of Rochester, were cultivating cannabis for personal use when their health started to deteriorate, according to a case published in the journal *Open Forum Infectious Diseases*.

One of them, a 59-year-old man with a history of emphysema as well as heavy tobacco and marijuana use, was hospitalized after suffering serious weight loss over the course of about six weeks. He also had a sore throat when he was admitted to Strong Memorial Hospital.

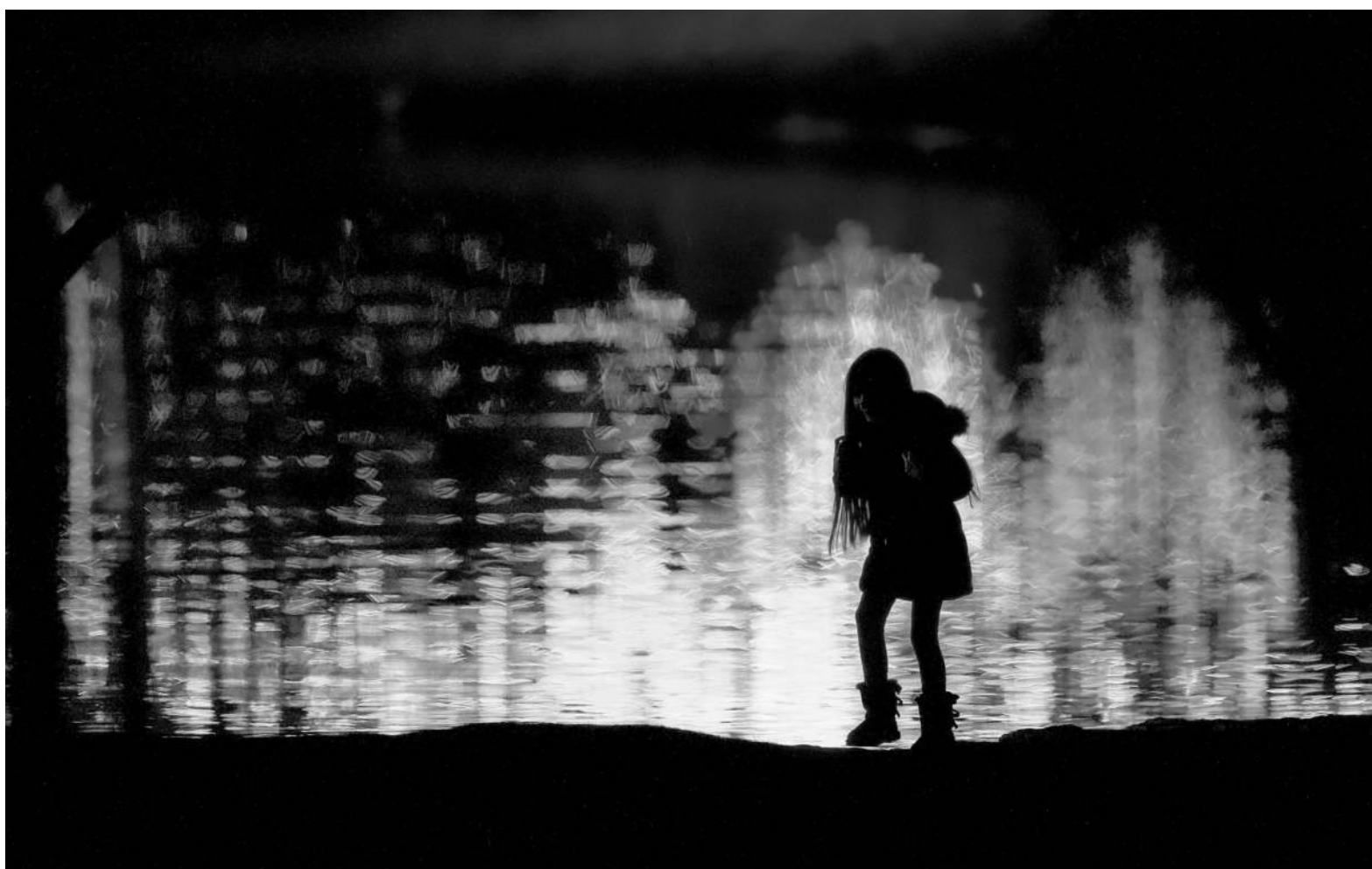
Doctors initially suspected carcinoma after scans showed a mass on his larynx — but a biopsy sample ultimately tested positive for a histoplasmosis infection, a type of pneumonia caused by breathing in spores of histoplasmosis capsulatum.

The other man, who was 64, was meanwhile hospitalized for hyponatremia — a condition in which sodium levels in the blood are abnormally low — difficulty eating, and severe weight loss. Doctors eventually determined he too was suffering from a histoplasmosis infection.

He told doctors there was "a heavy bat infestation of his attic," which, as a result, was covered in bat feces, or guano. He said he decided to use the waste to fertilize his marijuana, and then relayed his plan to the 59-year-old, who purchased his own guano online.

## Trump chooses Walker as ambassador to Bahamas

**DC** WASHINGTON — Herschel Walker, the football legend who unsuccessfully ran for a U.S. Senate seat in Georgia, has been chosen by President-elect Donald Trump to be ambassador to



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

## Reflecting on the holidays

A child is silhouetted against Christmas lights reflected on a pond at a park, Sunday, in Lenexa, Kan.

the Bahamas.

Trump made the announcement Tuesday in a post on Truth Social, his social media website. He described Walker as "a successful businessman, philanthropist, former Heisman Trophy winner."

Walker, a Republican, tried to unseat Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock two years ago with Trump's endorsement. Walker benefited during the campaign from nearly unmatched name recognition from his football career at the University of Georgia and in the NFL. But he fell short in his efforts, unable to overcome a bevy of damaging allegations, including claims that he paid for two former girlfriends' abortions despite supporting a national ban on the procedure.

He campaigned for Trump this year in his home state of Georgia.

To hold the ambassador position, Walker will need his nomination approved next year by the Republican-led Senate.

## Amazon ups investment in Ohio data centers by \$10B

**OH** COLUMBUS — Amazon Web Services will invest another \$10 billion to bolster its data center infrastructure in Ohio.

The company and Republican Gov. Mike DeWine announced the plan Monday. The new investment will boost the amount it has committed to spending in Ohio by the end of 2029 to more than \$23 billion.

AWS launched its first data centers in the state in 2016 and currently operates campuses in two counties in central Ohio, home to the cap-

ital city of Columbus. The new investment will allow AWS to expand its data centers to new sites, but the company said those locations have not been determined yet and noted that its investment plans are contingent upon the execution of long-term energy service agreements.

In June 2023, AWS said it would invest \$7.8 billion by the end of 2029 to expand its data center operations in central Ohio. That was on top of \$6 billion already invested through 2022.

## Group blasts state's toxic waste dumping settlement

**NJ** TOMSRIVER — Years of toxic waste dumping in a Jersey Shore community where childhood cancer rates rose caused at least \$1 billion in damage to natural resources, according to an environmental group trying to overturn a settlement between New Jersey and the corporate successor to the firm that did the polluting.

Save Barnegat Bay and the township of Toms River are suing to overturn a deal between the state and German chemical company BASF under which the firm will pay \$500,000 and carry out nine environmental remediation projects at the site of the former Ciba-Geigy Chemical Corp. plant.

That site became one of America's worst toxic waste dumps and led to widespread concern over the prevalence of childhood cancer cases in and around Toms River.

Save Barnegat Bay says the settlement is woefully inadequate and does not take into account the scope and full nature of the pollution.

The state Department of Environmental Protection defended the deal, saying it is not supposed to be primarily about monetary compensation; restoring damaged areas is a priority, it says.

## Probe clears Navajo leader, stokes political upheaval

**NM** SANTA FE — Political turmoil erupted within one of the largest Native American tribes in the U.S. as the attorney general for the Navajo Nation announced that an investigation had cleared the tribal president of sexual harassment allegations by the vice president.

Even as results of the investigation were announced Monday, Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch was removed from office by the Navajo Nation Council in a 13-6 vote without public discussion or a reason outlined in the legislation.

The tribe has been mired in political upheaval since April, when Navajo Vice President Richelle Montoya publicly outlined allegations of intimidation and sexual harassment against President Buu Nygren, stemming from interactions at an August 2023 meeting in Nygren's office.

Outside counsel investigated the allegations and found the incident doesn't constitute sexual harassment under tribal policies and is not a crime under tribal law, according to an excerpt of the findings.

Nygren expressed vindication and described a "need to heal from this and focus on moving forward." But he also warned that the removal of the attorney general without a

clear explanation sends a message of political instability, with implications for major government ventures.

## Ruling favors transgender people on designation

**MT** HELENA — A state judge in Montana has temporarily blocked policies that prevented transgender people from changing the sex designation on their birth certificates and driver's licenses.

District Judge Mike Menahan issued his order Monday, blocking the rule while the case moves through the courts.

Menahan said it was not necessary at this point in the litigation to determine whether transgender Montanans constitute a special class on the basis of their transgender status, but he disagreed with the state's argument that discrimination on the basis of transgender status is not discrimination on the basis of sex.

The case was filed in April by two transgender women on behalf of themselves and others who have been unable to obtain documents "that accurately reflect their sex," the complaint said.

One rule blocks transgender people born in Montana from changing the sex designation on their birth certificate. Another policy prevents transgender residents from changing the sex on their driver's licenses without an amended birth certificate — which they can't obtain if they were born in Montana.

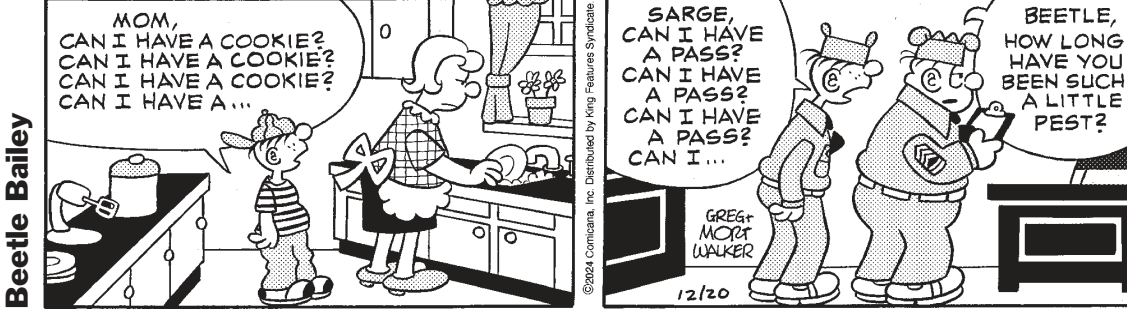
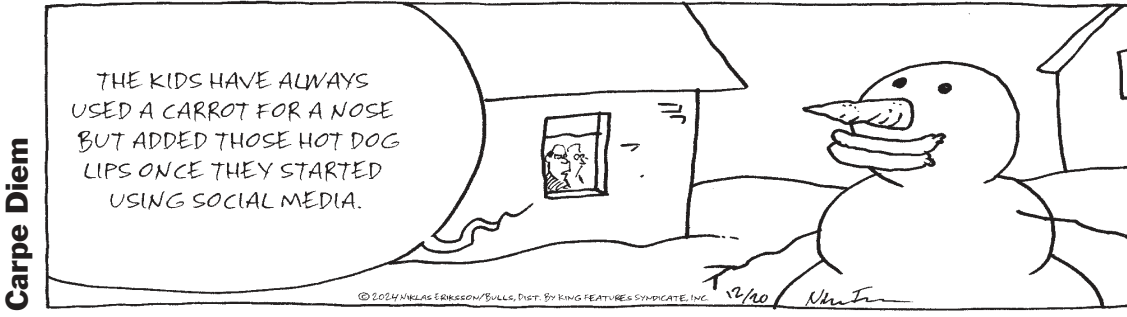
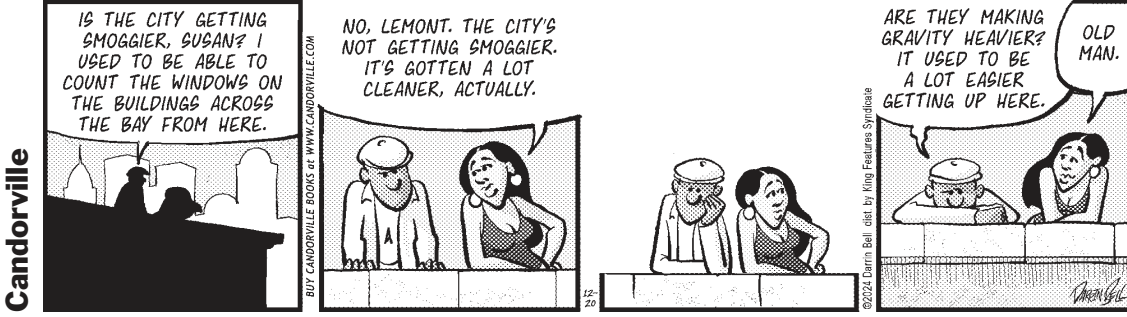
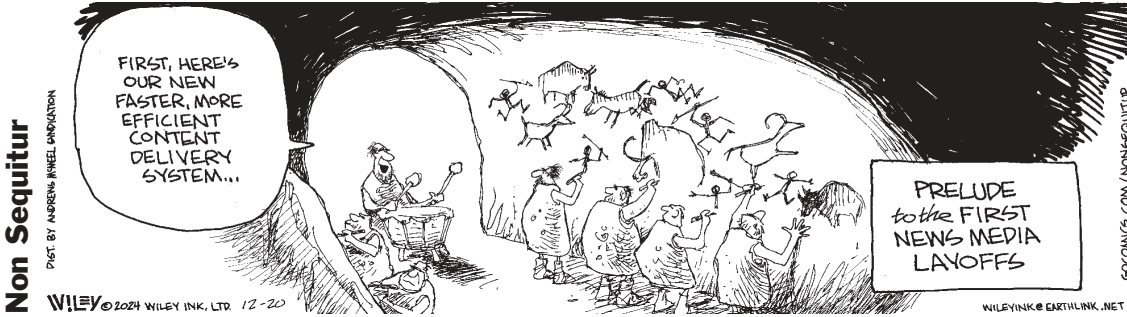
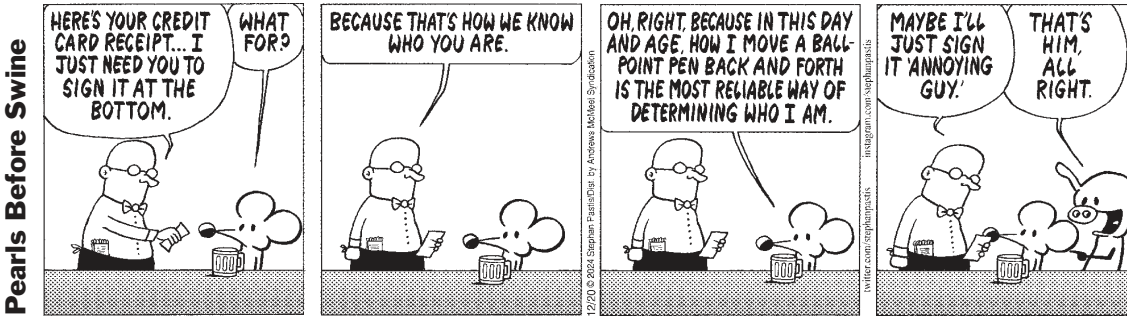
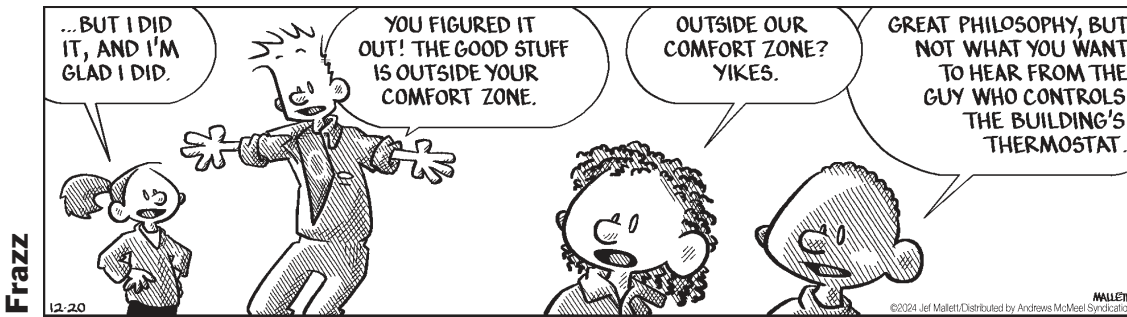
From wire reports



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

- ACROSS**
- 1 River blocker
  - 4 Buddies
  - 8 Study all night
  - 12 Mouths (Lat.)
  - 13 Guitarist Clapton
  - 14 Bylaws, briefly
  - 15 Warming winter quaff
  - 17 Tied
  - 18 Cling (to)
  - 19 "— the season ..."
  - 21 Cacophony
  - 22 "Oh boy!"
  - 26 Bamboo eater
  - 29 Hamilton bill
  - 30 Ruckus
  - 31 Follow orders
  - 32 Walgreens alternative
  - 33 Nile queen, informally
  - 34 Plant seeds
  - 35 Auto fuel
  - 36 Winning
  - 37 Chinese stew
  - 39 Roman 56
  - 40 Sinbad's bird
  - 41 Dawn-of-mammals epoch
  - 45 Pisa farewell
  - 48 Ski lodge cupful
  - 50 Tel —
  - 51 Buffalo's county
  - 52 Guffaw syllable
- DOWN**
- 1 Qatari capital
  - 2 Yankee nickname
  - 3 Algebra or trig
  - 4 Illinois city
  - 5 "As You Like It" setting
  - 6 Cover
  - 7 Wheat cutters
  - 8 Top of a wave
  - 9 Gun the engine
  - 10 Get older
  - 11 AOL rival
  - 16 Kennedy or Roosevelt
  - 20 Physics particle
  - 23 Valley
  - 24 Classic theaters
  - 25 Suitable
  - 26 Ritzy
  - 27 "Peek- —!"
  - 28 Salamander
  - 29 Boob tubes
  - 32 Ballpark figure
  - 33 Brother of Groucho
  - 35 Sticky stuff
  - 36 Long-legged shorebird
  - 38 Utah city
  - 39 Admit
  - 42 Reverberate
  - 43 Ham's dad
  - 44 Jug handles
  - 45 Soda container
  - 46 "— had it!"
  - 47 Football filler
  - 49 Mine yield

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

12-20 CRYPTOQUIP

DUEM DVJFX VRL IEFF IUGINLR  
R J W W L M A A L O Y L X E M E  
I V Z C L M G M G Y L A C O G R M G R W  
L Y L R M ? M O E I N Z L E M .  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: HOW MIGHT YOU DESCRIBE A FAMOUS FACILITY WHERE CHEESE AND BUTTER ARE MADE? LEGEND-DAIRY.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals C



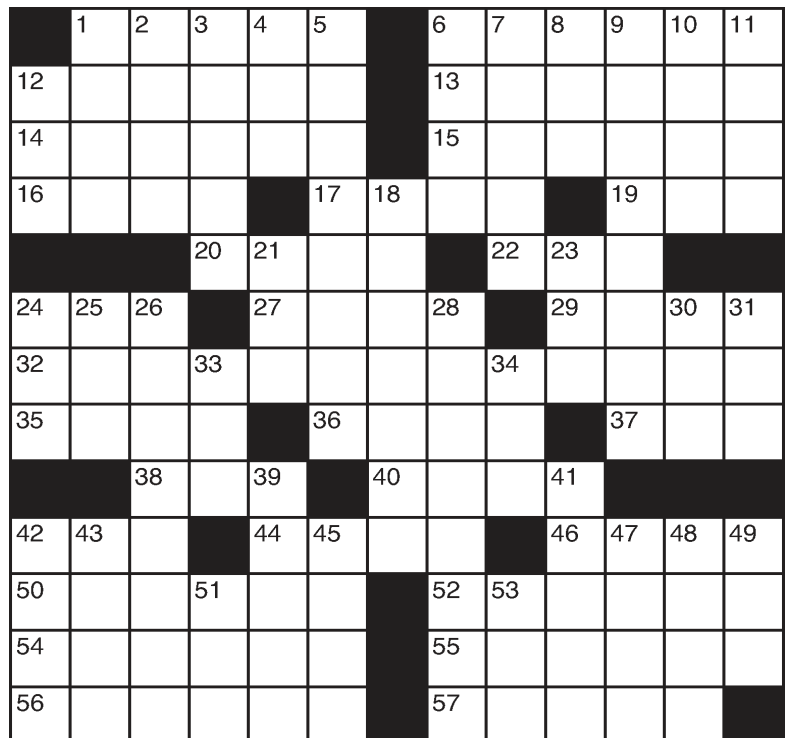
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

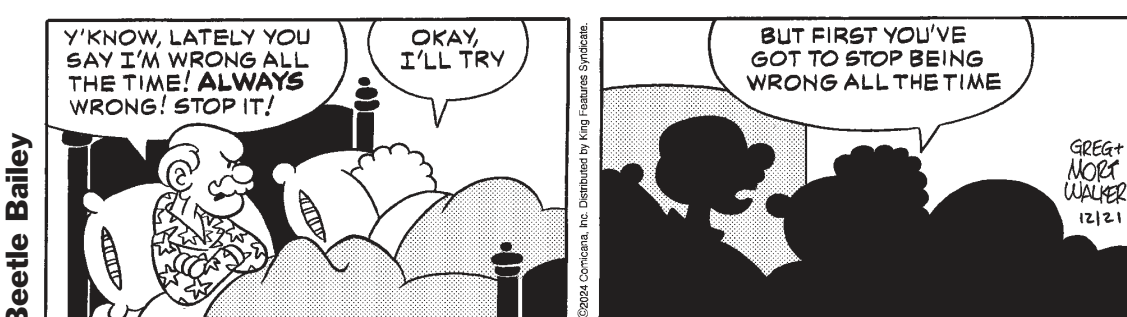
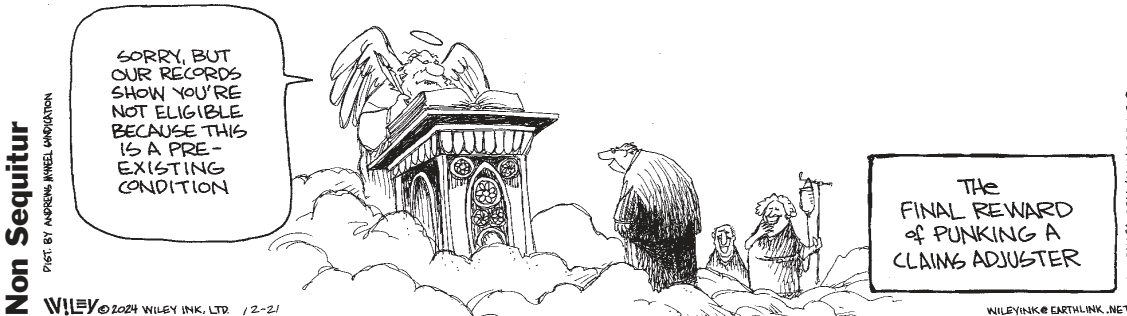
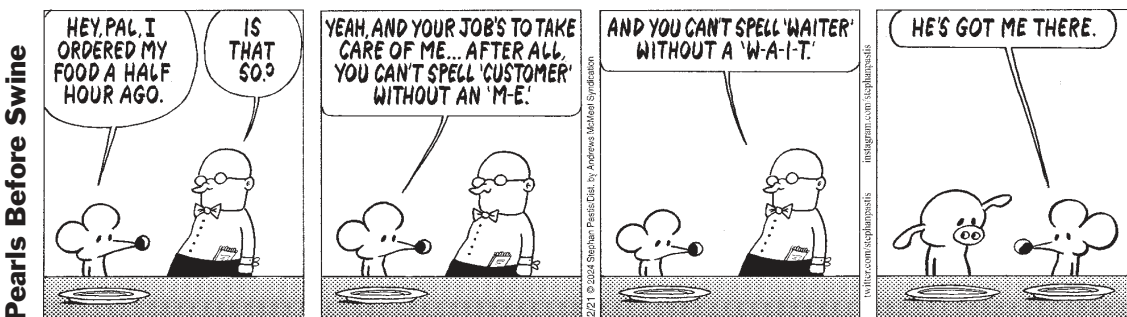
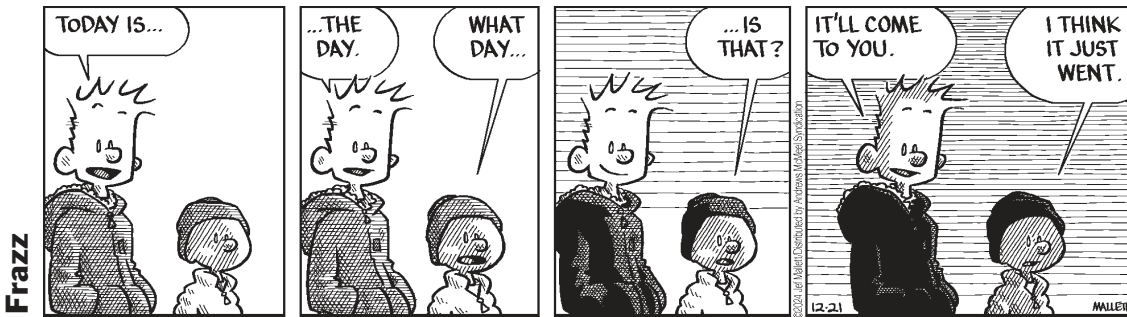
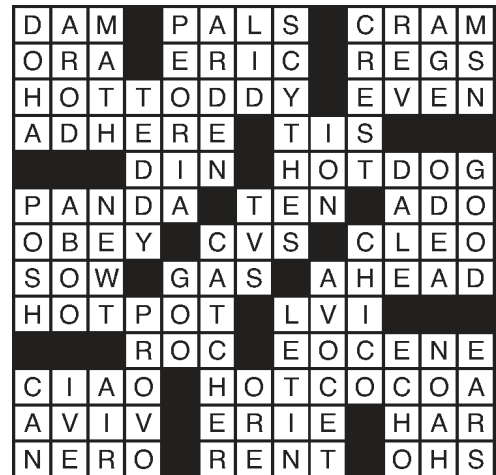
- 1 Cheech's partner
- 6 Living things
- 12 Asian sultanate
- 13 Tinseltown trophies
- 14 Aspirin's promise
- 15 Actor Kutcher
- 16 Move, in Realtor lingo
- 17 Head, to Henri
- 19 "— showtime!"
- 20 Bird beaks
- 22 "Hamilton" actress Phillipa
- 24 — jiffy
- 27 Partner
- 29 Winter blanket
- 32 Heart of a small town
- 35 Thick chunk
- 36 Faction
- 37 Parcel of land
- 38 Lettuce variety
- 40 Church service
- 42 New Deal agcy.
- 44 Recipe meas.
- 46 North —
- 50 Disney's "Love Bug"
- 52 Turkish inn
- 54 Sequentially
- 55 Break away

DOWN

- 1 Manitoba tribe
- 2 Ship's frame
- 3 Leek's kin
- 4 Formerly known as
- 5 Present holders
- 6 Gravy vessel
- 7 Road twists
- 8 German pronoun
- 9 The "N" of NPR
- 10 Cavern, poetically
- 11 Taxpayer IDs
- 12 "It's c-c-cold!"
- 18 Reverses
- 21 "— fan!"

- 23 Buckeyes' sch.
- 24 Hosp. hookups
- 25 Zero
- 26 Type of menu
- 28 Daydreamer
- 30 Acapulco gold
- 31 Drench
- 33 Wall St. deal
- 34 Gal. fractions
- 39 Mixes up
- 41 Astronaut's milieu
- 42 Tiny bit
- 43 Ballpoints
- 45 Nota —
- 47 Utah city
- 48 News story intro
- 49 Montreal summer
- 51 However
- 53 "I'm not impressed"

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-21

CRYPTOQUIP

FPM HGEETMG KZEIGW ZU T  
 QJGGEG EJZK'E SPWZS LZX  
 IJG HZUIJ ZL WGQGHFGX:

"EGTEZU'E MXTIPUME!"  
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD ONE CALL CHICKEN NUGGETS SERVED AT A COMPETITIVE SPRINTING EVENT? TRACK MEAT.  
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: M equals G



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## Drone panic says more about people than UFOs

By GARRETT M. GRAFF

Special to The Washington Post

The rising panic over mystery drones swarming the skies of Mid-Atlantic states reminds us that, in the centuries-long hunt to identify UFOs, humans are usually the weakest link.

America has real national security challenges in the new era of unmanned aerial vehicles in warfare. But an invasion of mystery drones over New Jersey isn't one of them.

As it turns out, just as eyewitnesses often bungle the details of, say, a car accident on the corner, we are notoriously unreliable when it comes to identifying and reporting UFOs. A huge percentage of "sightings" turn out, upon investigation, to be the planet Venus or other surprisingly bright astronomical phenomena; people on the ground regularly misjudge distances in the sky so that even objects miles away are perceived to be close by.

The UFO mistaken-identity problem is a big part of the reason that the military and scientists now refer to such sightings more precisely as UAP, or unidentified anomalous phenomena — a label meant to capture that many sightings might not be "objects" at all but are more likely to be known, or as yet unknown, astronomical and atmospheric phenomena.

Even skilled aviators make mistakes. On Oct. 1, 1948, Lt. George Gorman, a World War II veteran and pilot in the North Dakota Air National Guard, gave chase in his P-51 fighter after spotting the bright light of a UFO race past him in the skies over Fargo. At speeds of over 400 mph, he engaged it in a dogfight for nearly 30 minutes, the ball-shaped UFO bobbing and weaving around him as it executed turns that he felt were aerodynamically impossible. He finally

broke off the engagement, never identifying the bogey. "Just when we were about to collide, I guess I got scared," he told investigators, adding later: "It is hard to believe your own eyes when something with no wings walks off and leaves you standing still."

Investigators later determined that Gorman had been chasing a weather balloon launched about 10 minutes before he spotted it. The balloon had simply been floating along in the night sky, and he'd been diving and racing all around it.

J. Allen Hynek, the astronomer and godfather of "ufology," who spent a quarter-century working with the Air Force on its UFO studies and coined the phrase "close encounters of the third kind," told an interviewer late in his career, "Pilots have been known to swerve their planes violently when they suddenly encounter a very bright meteor or they think is on a collision course, but which later proves to have been 50 to 100 miles away."

There's a reason people who are serious about studying UAP are trying to get humans out of the reporting loop: At a congressional hearing last summer, Ryan Graves — a former Navy aviator who had his own experiences encountering UAP and now leads an advocacy organization called Americans for Safe Aerospace — proposed a more reliable alternative to the grainy, black-and-white (but supposedly revealing) photos that dot the internet: sensors. Similarly, Harvard astronomy professor Avi Loeb, one of the leading voices in UAP studies, argues that we need to far better understand what a "regular" sky looks like before trying to determine what's "anomalous." As Loeb told me last year: "Trust in data. People are a waste of time."

I've always been fascinated by the self-centered confidence that underlies so many

UFO reports, that people's first instinct upon spotting a bright, moving light in the night sky is not to assume the obvious — say, a star, meteor, satellite or faraway jetliner — but instead to imagine that, after an alien craft journeyed light-years across interstellar space to visit Earth. Occam's razor, the useful medieval theory that argues the simplest explanation is usually the best, would tell you that the sound of hoofbeats more likely means horses than zebras.

Partly, that instinct stems from something fundamental. The question "Are we alone?" is one of the three most basic questions that have fascinated humans since the first caveman campfires, a question that ranks alongside "What happens after death?" and "Is there a God?" as the most profound and potentially life-altering mysteries we wrestle with. Who wouldn't want to knock out an answer to one of the Big Three while taking out the garbage late at night?

Beyond that, our cultural fascination with UFOs stems from the fact that it is a rare area where we can all gaze upon the deepest frontier of knowledge. As an ordinary person, I can't add much to the already-advanced scientific and mathematical questions of our time: I'm not liable to crack string theory wide open during a weekend barbecue, nor is my tinkering in the garage likely to deliver to humanity the secret to nuclear fusion.

And yet, as the New Jersey drone mystery reminds us, every time any of us looks out the kitchen window, glances into the backyard sky or drives down an empty highway, we can believe we might see that one glowing light that changes everything.

Garrett M. Graff, a Washington Post contributing columnist writing about leadership, is a journalist, historian and author of nine books, including "Watergate: A New History."

## Don't credit any president when US economy is good

By JONAH GOLDBERG

Tribune Content Agency

One of Donald Trump's closing campaign arguments was that he would deliver a new "golden age" for America. This week, he announced that this Trump-powered golden age has already begun.

That's fitting insofar as Trump has rapidly eclipsed the current president, Joe Biden, in setting expectations and even an agenda for America at home and abroad. It feels as if the clock on the second Trump administration has already started.

So has the usual fight over who should get the credit — or blame — for the economy the next president inherits. This happens to some extent with every new president, and not just on the subject of the economy.

Ronald Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush, inherited his economy, but Bush's aides were quick to note that he also inherited an inevitable recession and a savings and loan crisis from the Gipper. In the closing days of this year's election, Barack Obama complained that Trump had inherited his economic successes in 2017.

Trump has reason to jump the gun on taking credit for the economy now: It's doing amazingly well.

That's not to minimize the pain of many Americans or ignore economic problems such as skyrocketing debt, inflation and dislocations in some regions and industries. Even

amid a macroeconomic boom, people live in microeconomic circumstances.

The U.S. economy is nevertheless the envy of the world. Don't take my word for it: The cover of a special issue of *The Economist* in October described the American economy as just that, the "Envy of the World," noting that the United States "has left other rich countries in the dust." The *Financial Times* reached the same conclusion this month.

It's a stark contrast to the 1990s, when many expected Europe's economies to leave ours in the dust. In 2008, the European Union's economy was 10% bigger than that of the United States. By 2022, it was 23% smaller. The EU grew 21% during this period, but the American economy grew 72%.

Today the U.S. economy generates about a quarter of global output. U.S. stocks account for 65% of global equities, while Japan, China and the United Kingdom combined account for just over 10%. If Britain were an American state, it would barely edge out Mississippi — our poorest state — in per capita gross domestic product.

There are many reasons for this. Americans simply work harder than citizens of other rich countries. Our productivity has outstripped the eurozone's by more than 3 to 1 since 2008. Our business culture is different too: We are the most entrepreneurial country in the world, and we regard business failure not as a cause for shame but as useful experience for the next attempt. America is also bet-

ter at assimilating immigrants than most countries, and the immigrants we tend to attract generally work very hard.

I could go on. The point is that we have had different presidents with very different policies and even more different rhetoric over the last 30 years. But U.S. economic trends — with the usual dips and spikes — have been largely positive through all of those presidencies.

As the Manhattan Institute's Brian Riedl put it in *National Affairs*, "The notion that there is a simple partisan pattern to the health of the economy is an extension of the exaggerated politicization of our understanding of contemporary American life."

Recent dissatisfaction with the economy, spurred by inflation, fueled the idea that America was doing especially awful under Biden. Again, we live in microeconomies, so it's understandable that many people had that view. But we've still been doing better than pretty much everyone else.

Trump's focus on the economic downside was typical for a presidential challenger and fair enough. But he was wrong to suggest that our competitors were eating our lunch.

None of this is to suggest that presidents and their economic policies don't matter. It's just that they don't matter as much as presidents and their partisans claim they do.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of *The Dispatch* and the host of *The Remnant* podcast.



# SCOREBOARD

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

### Wednesday's men's scores

#### EAST

Albany (NY) 74, Sacred Heart 66  
 Binghamton 62, Mercyhurst 60  
 CCSU 64, Fairfield 63  
 George Washington 82, Lafayette 62  
 Georgetown 81, Creighton 57  
 La Salle 77, Fairleigh Dickinson 72  
 Le Moyne 80, Dartmouth 76  
 Manhattan 80, Wagner 66  
 Mass.-Lowell 78, Stonehill 67  
 Mount St. Mary's 80, LIU 72  
 Saint Joseph's 84, American 57  
 Temple 62, Davidson 61  
 UConn 94, Xavier 89, OT  
 UMass 77, Northeastern 72  
 Vermont 75, Miami (Ohio) 67

#### SOUTH

Bethune-Cookman 77, South Florida 69  
 Chattanooga 99, Tenn. Wesleyan 52  
 ETSU 84, Elon 58  
 Furman 100, Montreat 75  
 Georgia Tech 91, UMBG 82  
 Hampton 108, Regent 65  
 Longwood 77, Campbell 55  
 La.-Lafayette 68, Appalachian St. 62  
 Memphis 64, Virginia 62  
 N. Kentucky 73, Detroit 60  
 Presbyterian 116, Va.-Lynchburg 53  
 Queens (NC) 73, Mercer 66  
 SC State 85, SC-Upstate 70  
 UAB 96, Alabama A&M 67  
 UNC-Wilmington 79, Florida Gulf Coast 66  
 Vanderbilt 105, The Citadel 53  
 William & Mary 93, Richmond 87

#### MIDWEST

Alabama 97, North Dakota 90  
 Bradley 66, San Francisco 64  
 Illinois St. 81, N. Illinois 60  
 Indiana St. 84, Murray St. 74  
 Loyola Chicago 72, Canisius 60  
 Marquette 80, Butler 70  
 Michigan Tech 72, Green Bay 70  
 Missouri St. 61, Lincoln (Mo.) 49  
 Ohio 78, Austin Peay 58  
 Wofford 74, Saint Louis 71  
 Youngstown St. 80, Wright St. 70

#### SOUTHWEST

East Texas A&M 68, Abilene Christian 67  
 Houston 78, Toledo 49  
 North Texas 83, MVSU 42  
 Oklahoma 87, Michigan 86  
 Oklahoma St. 66, Tarleton St. 61  
 Texas A&M-CC 117, SW Adventist 63  
 Texas-Arlington 80, Evansville 54

#### FAR WEST

Arizona 96, Samford 64  
 CS Bakersfield 81, Portland 64  
 Gonzaga 102, Nicholls 72

Loyola Marymount 60, UCSB 58  
 New Mexico 78, VCU 71  
 Portland St. 81, Pacific 75  
 Santa Clara 94, Kennesaw St. 74  
 Southern Cal 90, CS Northridge 69  
 Texas Rio Grande Valley 78, S. Utah 73  
 UC Davis 74, Idaho 66  
 UC Riverside 83, Montana St. 80  
 Utah Valley St. 70, Idaho St. 56  
 Washington 89, Washington St. 73  
 Weber St. 128, Lincoln (CA) 58

### Wednesday's women's scores

#### EAST

Dartmouth 60, Lafayette 47  
 Oakland 55, Robert Morris 53  
 Stonehill 65, Northeastern 49  
 Stony Brook 67, Georgian Court 29  
 Syracuse 87, Binghamton 60

#### SOUTH

Auburn 68, Louisiana-Lafayette 51  
 Coastal Carolina 96, UNC-Wilmington 64  
 Davidson 84, UNC-Pembroke 53  
 Duke 93, Wofford 58  
 East Carolina 48, VCU 46  
 Georgia Tech 88, Rice 57  
 Grambling St. 94, Arkansas Baptist 52  
 Liberty 75, Arkansas 61  
 Lipscomb 113, Oglethorpe 38  
 Longwood 105, Webber International 38  
 Morgan St. 54, Presbyterian 41  
 Norfolk St. 68, Drexel 56  
 North Carolina 77, Florida 57  
 SE Louisiana 58, Nicholls 54  
 Tennessee 90, Memphis 75  
 Toledo 70, Troy 62  
 UAB 66, New Orleans 60  
 West Georgia 63, Alabama St. 46

#### MIDWEST

Bowling Green 64, Marquette 62  
 Cincinnati 67, Marshall 64  
 Detroit 65, Youngstown St. 58  
 Kansas St. 83, New Mexico St. 39  
 Northwestern 79, UNLV 76, OT  
 Omaha 84, Bellevue 53  
 Oral Roberts 76, Missouri 63  
 Saint Louis 69, Valparaiso 59  
 South Dakota 78, Mount Marty 74

#### SOUTHWEST

Baylor 97, Utah Tech 34

#### FAR WEST

Boise St. 74, Furman 65  
 Denver 64, W. Colorado 58  
 FAU 71, Georgia Southern 66, OT  
 Grand Canyon 82, Wright St. 69  
 UC Davis 65, Idaho 58  
 UC Riverside 74, Utah St. 59  
 Washington 64, N. Dakota St. 51  
 Wichita St. 100, CS Bakersfield 69

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

### FCS playoffs

#### Semifinals Saturday, Dec. 21

Montana St. vs. South Dakota  
 North Dakota St. vs. South Dakota St.

#### Championship Monday, Jan. 6

Semifinal winners

### NCAA Division II playoffs

#### Championship Saturday, Dec. 21

Valdosta St. vs. Ferris St.

### NCAA Division III playoffs

#### Semifinals Saturday, Dec. 21

Susquehanna vs. North Central (Ill.)  
 Johns Hopkins vs. Mount Union

#### Championship Sunday, Jan. 5

Semifinal winners

### Bowl glance

#### Dec. 14 Celebration Bowl

Jackson St. 28, South Carolina St. 7

#### IS4S Salute to Veterans Bowl

South Alabama 30, W. Michigan 23

#### Dec. 17 Frisco Bowl

Memphis 42, West Virginia 37

#### Dec. 18 Boca Raton Bowl

James Madison 27, W. Kentucky 17

#### LA Bowl

UNLV 24, California 13

#### Dec. 19 New Orleans Bowl

Georgia Southern vs. Sam Houston

#### Dec. 20 Cure Bowl

Ohio vs. Jacksonville State

#### Gasparilla Bowl

Florida vs. Tulane

#### College Football Playoff First Round Dec. 20

No. 10 Indiana vs. No. 7 Notre Dame

#### Dec. 21

No. 11 SMU vs. No. 6 Penn State  
 No. 12 Clemson vs. No. 5 Texas  
 No. 9 Tennessee vs. No. 8 Ohio State

#### Dec. 23 Myrtle Beach Bowl

Coastal Carolina vs. UTSA

#### Potato Bowl

Fresno State vs. Northern Illinois

#### Dec. 24 Hawai'i Bowl

South Florida vs. San Jose State

#### Dec. 26 GameAbove Sports Bowl

Pitt vs. Toledo

#### Rate Bowl

Kansas State vs. Rutgers

#### 68 Ventures Bowl

Arkansas State vs. Bowling Green

#### Dec. 27 Las Vegas Bowl

Southern California vs. Texas A&M

#### Liberty Bowl

Texas Tech vs. Arkansas

#### Holiday Bowl

Syracuse vs. Washington State

#### Armed Forces Bowl

Oklahoma vs. Navy

#### Birmingham Bowl

Georgia Tech vs. Vanderbilt

#### Dec. 28 Fenway Bowl

North Carolina vs. UConn

#### Pinstripe Bowl

Boston College vs. Nebraska

#### New Mexico Bowl

TCU vs. Louisiana

#### Pop-Tarts Bowl

Miami vs. Iowa State

#### Arizona Bowl

Colorado State vs. Miami (Ohio)

#### Military Bowl

NC State vs. ECU

#### Alamo Bowl

BYU vs. Colorado

#### Independence Bowl

Army vs. Louisiana Tech

#### Dec. 30 Music City Bowl

Missouri vs. Iowa

#### Dec. 31 ReliaQuest Bowl

Michigan vs. Alabama

#### Sun Bowl

Louisville vs. Washington

#### Citrus Bowl

Illinois vs. South Carolina

#### Texas Bowl

Baylor vs. LSU

## PRO HOCKEY

### NHL

#### Eastern Conference Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	32	20	10	2	42	97	84
Florida	33	20	11	2	42	120	105
Boston	33	17	13	3	37	86	104
Tampa Bay	29	17	10	2	36	117	85
Ottawa	31	16	13	2	34	96	89
Detroit	31	13	14	4	30	84	98
Montreal	31	12	16	3	27	88	114
Buffalo	32	11	17	4	26	93	110

#### Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
New Jersey	34	21	10	3	45	114	87
Washington	31	21	8	2	44	118	83
Carolina	31	20	10	1	41	112	87
Pittsburgh	33	14	14	5	33	100	123
Philadelphia	32	14	14	4	32	97	112
N.Y. Rangers	31	15	15	1	31	92	93
N.Y. Islanders	33	12	14	7	31	86	103
Columbus	32	12	15	5	29	104	116

#### Western Conference Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	34	23	10	1	47	123	87
Minnesota	32	20	8	4	44	99	86
Dallas	31	19	12	0	38	101	80
Colorado	33	18	15	0	36	108	114
Utah	31	15	11	5	35	94	90
St. Louis	33	15	15	3	33	85	102
Chicago	32	11	19	2	24	81	101
Nashville	32	9	17	6	24	72	98

#### Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	31	20	8	3	43	108	92
Los Angeles	31	18	9	4	40	94	79
Edmonton	31	18	11	2	38	102	90
Vancouver	31	16	9	6	38	98	96
Calgary	32	15	11	6	36	87	99
Seattle	33	15	16	2	32	96	99
Anaheim	30	12	14	4	28	74	92
San Jose	34	11	18	5	27	94	122

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

#### Tuesday's games

Pittsburgh 3, Los Angeles 2, OT  
 Montreal 6, Buffalo 1  
 Tampa Bay 5, Columbus 3  
 Carolina 4, N.Y. Islanders 0  
 Nashville 2, N.Y. Rangers 0  
 New Jersey 4, St. Louis 1  
 Chicago 3, Washington 2  
 Boston 4, Calgary 3, OT  
 Ottawa 3, Seattle 0  
 Winnipeg 4, San Jose 3

#### Wednesday's games

Detroit 6, Philadelphia 4  
 Toronto 5, Dallas 3  
 Florida 6, Minnesota 1  
 Anaheim 3, Winnipeg 2  
 Utah 3, Vancouver 2, OT

#### Thursday's games

New Jersey at Columbus  
 St. Louis at Tampa Bay  
 Los Angeles at Philadelphia  
 Pittsburgh at Nashville  
 Seattle at Chicago  
 Boston at Edmonton  
 Ottawa at Calgary  
 Vancouver at Vegas  
 Colorado at San Jose

#### Friday's games

Carolina at Washington  
 Montreal at Detroit  
 St. Louis at Florida  
 Toronto at Buffalo  
 N.Y. Rangers at Dallas  
 Utah at Minnesota  
 Colorado at Anaheim

#### Saturday's games

Los Angeles at Nashville  
 Chicago at Calgary  
 San Jose at Edmonton  
 Buffalo at Boston  
 Columbus at Philadelphia  
 Detroit at Montreal  
 Minnesota at Winnipeg  
 N.Y. Islanders at Toronto  
 Pittsburgh at New Jersey  
 Ottawa at Vancouver  
 Seattle at Vegas

#### Sunday's games

Carolina at N.Y. Rangers  
 Florida at Tampa Bay  
 L.A. Kings at Washington  
 Anaheim at Utah  
 Seattle at Colorado  
 Ottawa at Edmonton

#### Monday's games

N.Y. Rangers at New Jersey  
 Winnipeg at Toronto  
 Washington at Boston  
 St. Louis at Detroit  
 Tampa Bay at Florida  
 Philadelphia at Pittsburgh  
 Montreal at Columbus  
 Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders  
 Carolina at Nashville  
 Chicago at Minnesota  
 San Jose at Vancouver  
 Dallas at Utah  
 Anaheim at Vegas

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

#### BASEBALL American League

**CHICAGO WHITE SOX** — Agreed to terms with RHP Bryce Wilson.

**LOS ANGELES ANGELS** — Designated RHP Davis Daniel for assignment. Acquired C Chuckie Robinson from the Chicago White Sox for cash considerations.

#### FOOTBALL National Football League

**ARIZONA CARDINALS** — Designated K Matt Prater to return from injured reserve. Signed P Michael Palardy to the active roster. Signed LB Keshawn Banks and RB Tony Jones Jr. to the practice squad.

**ATLANTA FALCONS** — Signed K Riley Patterson to the active roster. Placed K Younghoe Koo on injured reserve.

**CAROLINA PANTHERS** — Signed WR Dax Milne and LB Jackson Mitchell to the practice squad.

**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Placed RB Nick Chubb on injured reserve.

**CINCINNATI BENGALS** — Signed DL Isaiah Thomas to the practice squad.

**DETROIT LIONS** — Designated DB Ifeatu Melifonwu to return from injured reserve.

**HOUSTON TEXANS** — Activated OL Kenyon Green from injured reserve.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Designated DB JuJu Brents to return from injured reserve.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Activated OL Kenyon Green from injured reserve. Claimed DB Ambry Thomas off waivers from the San Francisco 49ers.

**LAS VEGAS RAIDERS** — Signed DL Andre Carter II to the active roster. Signed RB Chris Collier to the active roster. Placed DL Maxx Crosby and RB Sincere McCormick on injured reserve. Signed DL Ovie Oghoufo and RB Isaiah Spiller to the practice squad.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS** — Signed WR Alex Erickson to the practice squad.

**NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** — Signed RB Clyde Edwards-Helaire to the practice squad. Terminated the practice squad contract of DT Kendal Vickers.

**NEW YORK JETS** — Placed DB Jalen Mills on injured reserve. Signed RB Zach Evans, DL Bradlee Anae, and TE Neal Johnson to the practice squad. Designated DL Leki Fotu to return from injured reserve.

**PHILADELPHIA EAGLES** — Signed TE Kevin Foelsch to the practice squad. Designated DL Bryce Huff to return from injured reserve.

**SEATTLE SEAHAWKS** — Activated OL Stone Forsythe from injured reserve.

**TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS** — Declined to activate LB Markees Watts from injured reserve.

**WASHINGTON COMMANDERS** — Designated DL Jonathan Allen to return from injured reserve.

#### HOCKEY National Hockey League

**COLORADO AVALANCHE** — Waived LW Tye Felhaber.

**COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS** — Loaned G Jet Greaves to Cleveland (AHL



NFL

# Daniels maturing as pocket passer

BY STEPHEN WHYNO  
Associated Press

ASHBURN, Va. — When Jayden Daniels was starring in his first few games in the NFL with the Washington Commanders, his first college coach expected the rookie quarterback to handle whatever speed bump was coming. Herm Edwards also predicted that Daniels would evolve.

“He understands that you’re going to win games from the pocket,” Edwards said in October. “You’ve got to win games from the pocket. That running is good and people get all excited, but at the end of the day you’ve got to play good within the framework of the pocket and he knows that and he can do that.”

Daniels has done that to near perfection the past two games, completing nearly 82% of his passes after converting 61% the previous five games, when he was coming off a rib injury. It’s no coincidence then that the Commanders are on a two-game winning streak and at 9-5 remain on track to make the playoffs with Daniels leading the way.

“I would just say it’s just finding completions, getting the ball in my hands and letting the guys make plays,” Daniels said Wednesday, his 24th birthday. “That’s kind of where we’re at now.”

Daniels still has the scrambling and running element to his game and heads into a rematch with the NFC East-leading Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday coming off a 66-yard rushing performance at New Orleans. He and the team could do without the eight sacks, but perhaps more importantly he was 25 of 31 for 226 yards passing and a couple of touchdown throws to top receiver Terry McLaurin.

But fine-tuning the passing prowess has been an area of emphasis for Daniels and the coaching staff since he joined the organization as the second pick in the draft.

“One of the things that we’ve worked really hard on is (Daniels) remaining a passer inside of the pocket,” coach Dan Quinn said. “He’s got legs to move, and so for him, remaining a passer longer, the guys stay in coverage longer, the receivers down the field are working. I think that part of the game, there’s been improvement and I would say we’re still progressing in that spot.”

Quinn said Daniels came out of college — first at Arizona State under Edwards, followed by two years at LSU — with a really solid background of fundamentals. An intangible he has noticed is making good decisions with the football.

That also has been better lately. Daniels has five touchdowns and just one interception in the past two games after throwing three



BUTCH DILL/AP

Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels throws a touchdown pass against New Orleans last Sunday. He has completed nearly 82% of his attempts in the past two games with five TDs and just one interception.

## “I mean, you’re either getting better or you’re getting worse, and I don’t want to get worse.”

Jayden Daniels  
Commanders rookie QB

picks during Washington’s three-game losing streak in November.

Unsurprisingly, he remains a heavy favorite to win AP Offensive Rookie of the Year honors, and he’s the conference’s leading Pro Bowl vote-getter at quarterback. After getting serenaded and presented with a cake for his birthday by teammate Mike Sainristil, Daniels acknowledged he

has not thought much about the difference the past year has made and all the accolades and attention he has received.

“I’m doing really good, can’t complain,” Daniels said. “It’s just keeping the main thing the main thing and being where my feet are. That’s what my parents always told me growing up is just be where your feet are. Don’t worry

about the future, what happened in the past. All that matters in the moment.”

The next moment involves the Eagles coming to town with the league’s top defense overall and against the pass. They present another difficulty level for Daniels a month after coming back to beat him and the Commanders 26-18 in the division rivals’ first meeting of the season in Philadelphia.

Daniels looks to be an even better passer now, which he just chalks up to continuing to grow every game.

“I mean, you’re either getting better or you’re getting worse, and I don’t want to get worse,” Daniels said. “(I’m) finding little ways to improve each and every game.”

## Scoreboard

### American Conference

East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Buffalo	11	3	0	.786	445	310
Miami	6	8	0	.429	276	312
e-N.Y. Jets	4	10	0	.286	283	325
e-New England	3	11	0	.214	238	337

South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Houston	9	5	0	.643	328	300
Indianapolis	6	8	0	.429	280	329
e-Jacksonville	3	11	0	.214	263	377
e-Tennessee	3	11	0	.214	254	379

North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Pittsburgh	10	4	0	.714	336	265
Baltimore	9	5	0	.643	418	332
Cincinnati	6	8	0	.429	399	387
e-Cleveland	3	11	0	.214	239	356

West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Kansas City	13	1	0	.929	329	259
Denver	9	5	0	.643	336	247
L.A. Chargers	8	6	0	.571	294	247
e-Las Vegas	2	12	0	.143	245	376

### National Conference

East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Philadelphia	12	2	0	.857	369	247
Washington	9	5	0	.643	396	315
Dallas	6	8	0	.429	298	380
e-N.Y. Giants	2	12	0	.143	208	328

South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	8	6	0	.571	403	326
Atlanta	7	7	0	.500	293	342
New Orleans	5	9	0	.357	309	312
e-Carolina	3	11	0	.214	247	418

North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Detroit	12	2	0	.857	459	282
x-Minnesota	12	2	0	.857	369	252
Green Bay	10	4	0	.714	379	287
e-Chicago	4	10	0	.286	266	308

West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	8	6	0	.571	310	338
Seattle	8	6	0	.571	315	313
Arizona	7	7	0	.500	314	306
San Francisco	6	8	0	.429	314	320

e-Eliminated from playoffs  
x-clinched playoff spot  
y-clinched division

**Monday’s games**  
Minnesota 30, Chicago 12  
Atlanta 15, Las Vegas 9

**Thursday’s game**  
Denver at L.A. Chargers

**Saturday’s games**  
Houston at Kansas City  
Pittsburgh at Baltimore

**Sunday’s games**  
Arizona at Carolina  
Detroit at Chicago  
L.A. Rams at N.Y. Jets  
N.Y. Giants at Atlanta  
Philadelphia at Washington  
Tennessee at Indianapolis  
Cleveland at Cincinnati  
Minnesota at Seattle  
Jacksonville at Las Vegas  
New England at Buffalo  
San Francisco at Miami  
Tampa Bay at Dallas

**Monday, Dec. 23**  
New Orleans at Green Bay

**Wednesday, Dec. 25**  
Kansas City at Pittsburgh  
Baltimore at Houston

**Thursday, Dec. 26**  
Seattle at Chicago

**Saturday, Dec. 28**  
L.A. Chargers at New England  
Denver at Cincinnati  
Arizona at L.A. Rams

**Sunday, Dec. 29**  
Carolina at Tampa Bay  
Green Bay at Minnesota  
Indianapolis at N.Y. Giants  
Las Vegas at New Orleans  
N.Y. Jets at Buffalo  
Tennessee at Jacksonville  
Miami at Cleveland  
Dallas at Philadelphia  
Atlanta at Washington

**Monday, Dec. 30**  
Detroit at San Francisco



**Philadelphia Eagles (12-2) at Washington Commanders (9-5)**  
AFN-Sports  
7 p.m. Sunday CET  
3 a.m. Monday JKT



**Tennessee Titans (3-11) at Indianapolis Colts (6-8)**  
AFN-Atlantic  
7 p.m. Sunday CET  
3 a.m. Monday JKT



**Detroit Lions (12-2) at Chicago Bears (4-10)**  
AFN-Sports2  
7 p.m. Sunday CET  
3 a.m. Monday JKT



**Minnesota Vikings (12-2) at Seattle Seahawks (8-6)**  
AFN-Sports  
10 p.m. Sunday CET  
6 a.m. Monday JKT



**New England Patriots (3-11) at Buffalo Bills (11-3)**  
AFN-Sports2  
10 p.m. Sunday CET  
6 a.m. Monday JKT



**San Francisco 49ers (6-8) at Miami Dolphins (6-8)**  
AFN-Atlantic  
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET  
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT



## NFL



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson, right, is just 1-4 in his career against the rival Pittsburgh Steelers. His only home game against them was in 2020 with a pandemic-limited crowd of less than 5,000.

## Big home crowd should help Jackson's Steelers problems

BY NOAH TRISTER  
Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — Lamar Jackson's struggles against Pittsburgh are well documented.

He'll finally have help he's never enjoyed before in this rivalry — from a packed stadium that's actually cheering for him.

This weekend's showdown between Pittsburgh and Jackson's Baltimore Ravens is only the second time the star quarterback has faced the Steelers at home. The other was in 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic limiting the announced crowd to 4,345.

Expect a lot more than that Saturday, when Pittsburgh can clinch the AFC North with a victory and Baltimore will do its best to prevent that.

"Just being in front of our crowd, Flock Nation, just being in the building, knowing it's a rival game, knowing what's at stake for us," Jackson said. "I feel like the momentum, the momentum from our crowd, will just give us what we need — that extra boost."

Jackson is 1-4 as a starter against the Steelers, a remarkably small number of games against a divisional opponent for a quarterback in his seventh season in the league. He beat Pittsburgh in his first start against them in 2019, although even in that game he was sacked five times and threw three interceptions.



Pittsburgh Steelers (10-4)  
at Baltimore Ravens (9-5)

AFN-Sports2  
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET  
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

Jackson has never had a passer rating higher than 80.1 in a full game against the Steelers. He's thrown five touchdown passes and eight interceptions against Pittsburgh.

Almost all of that has come on the road in a pretty difficult environment. In his first MVP season of 2019, Jackson sat out the home game against the Steelers after the Ravens had already wrapped up the No. 1 seed in the playoffs. The same thing happened last season. In 2021 and 2022, Jackson was injured when Pittsburgh came to Baltimore.

Now the Ravens (9-5) have few excuses left if they can't take care of business at home. BetMGM had them favored by six points around midday Wednesday. Jackson is having a sensational season, with a passer rating of 120.7 that ranks among some of the best all time. He's thrown 34 touchdowns and

three interceptions.

"I think anytime he can make a play, he's going to try to make that play. I don't think he tries to hold anything back, especially at the end of the season," said Steelers linebacker Patrick Queen, who played for Baltimore before this season. "Everything's on the line at that point. There's no holding back on him. You definitely see that now, him lowering his shoulder, him stiff-arming a guy out of bounds — which is crazy — just him pushing the ball downfield is just a whole lot more plays he's trying to make."

Pittsburgh (10-4) arrives with a one-game lead in the division, a result of an 18-16 victory over the Ravens in Week 11. Baltimore has lost eight of its past nine to the Steelers, though it doesn't feel quite that lopsided to the Ravens. They rested starters for a couple of those games and didn't have Jackson for some others. This season, the head-to-head matchups could well decide the division.

"It'll get talked about. I think some people got a taste of it. There were a couple of skirmishes in the last game, but this is big," Baltimore cornerback Marlon Humphrey said. "This means a lot to a lot of people. It means a lot to me being here for a long time, and if you don't understand, the message will be very clear as the week goes on."

## After early injuries, Stingley shines with Texans in 3rd season

BY KRISTIE RIEKEN  
Associated Press

HOUSTON — Houston Texans coach DeMeco Ryans didn't hold back in his praise for cornerback Derek Stingley in the locker room Sunday after his second interception of the fourth quarter iced a win over the Miami Dolphins.

"That's probably the best play I've ever seen," Ryans told the team before giving Stingley a game ball after the 20-12 victory.

Tua Tagovailoa and Miami's offense got the ball back with just under two minutes left to try to tie it. But on the first play of the drive, Tagovailoa attempted a long pass to Tyreek Hill and Stingley stretched out to grab the ball in between Hill's hands.

Tagovailoa slowly undid his chin straps and shook his head as he watched Stingley and Houston's defense celebrate a fourth turnover of the game. Stingley and the entire defense raced to the end zone, where several teammates pretended to place a crown atop his head as he clutched the ball.

"It's very impressive," Ryans said. "It's very rare you see a player make a play that way to end the game. That was an All-Pro-type play. That's what it looks like when you're one of the top guys at your position in the league going up, matching it up against one of the best wideouts in the league."

Earlier in the quarter, Stingley snatched another ball before it could reach Hill inside the 10-yard line with about 10½ minutes to go.

Stingley has played well all season but has taken things up a notch in the past month, with four of his five interceptions coming in the last four games. He also had two tackles for loss Sunday to become the first cornerback in NFL history to have two interceptions and two tackles for loss in a game.

He was given AFC Defensive Player of the Week honors.

"Can't say enough about how



Houston Texans (9-5)  
at Kansas City Chiefs (13-1)

AFN-Sports2  
7 p.m. Saturday CET  
3 a.m. Sunday JKT

impactful Stingley has been throughout not only those plays (Sunday), but Stingley has been impactful throughout the entire year," Ryans said. "I think for the past three wins, he's been our defensive player of the game. So when he's making impact plays, it's putting us in position to win football games."

The Texans' win over the Dolphins coupled with a loss by Indianapolis on Sunday gave the Texans (9-5) their second straight AFC South title. Next, they travel to Kansas City on Saturday to face the two-time defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs.

Stingley, the third overall pick in 2022, was criticized for not living up to expectations in his first two seasons. He struggled to stay on the field, missing 13 games with injuries while fellow cornerback Sauce Gardner, taken a pick behind him by the New York Jets, won AP Defensive Rookie of the Year and twice was an All-Pro.

This year, Stingley has started every game and has defended 17 passes, has 46 tackles and four tackles for loss, all career highs.

The former LSU standout was asked if he thinks he's proved critics wrong with his play this season. He has insisted he doesn't care about that.

"My teammates, they know who I am," he said. "So really it's just showing my teammates that they can trust me."



ERIC CHRISTIAN SMITH/AP

Texans cornerback Derek Stingley (24) intercepts a pass to Dolphins wide receiver Tyreek Hill during the second half Dec. 15 in Houston.



## COLLEGE FOOTBALL/MLB

# Buffaloes get back to business, BYU

## Colorado, newly minted Heisman winner Hunter return to practice, prepare for Alamo Bowl

By PAT GRAHAM  
Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The fishing trips have been put on hold and the award-show excursions wrapped up. Now, it's time for newly minted Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter and the Colorado Buffaloes to get back to the business of a bowl game.

These postseason appearances don't come around all that often in Boulder. Not yet, anyway.

"This has been the plan," said coach Deion Sanders, whose 20th-ranked Buffaloes (9-3) returned to practice this week to get ready to face fellow Big 12 member and No. 17 BYU (10-2) in the Alamo Bowl on Dec. 28. "But we're not satisfied, and we're not done. We're still on our way."

Sanders has taken the Buffaloes from a four-win team his first season at Colorado to the Alamo Bowl in San Antonio, Texas. Granted, it's not the College Football Playoff — a late-season stumble at Kansas cost the Buffaloes — but still a big step. This marks only the program's third bowl appearance over the last 17 seasons (all to the Alamo).

The Buffaloes were so amped up at practice Tuesday that a scuffle broke out.

"I don't recommend that," Sanders said. "But I was proud of that."

Make no mistake: Sanders expects nothing but high-quality play out of two-way standout Hunter and quarterback Shedeur Sanders. Those two are projected to be high picks in the upcoming NFL Draft and don't want any sort of letdown.

None of them do.

"It's not just a bowl game where we're going to go be merry and have a Merry Christmas and exchange gifts and do all of that," Deion Sanders explained. "No, we want to go there and play Buff football."

"You think Travis wants to go out there



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

**Two-way star Travis Hunter, left, and quarterback Shedeur Sanders helped Colorado go from four wins last season to the cusp of the CFP, but both are headed for the draft.**

and get locked down with the Heisman in the house? You think Shedeur wants to go out there and play that hot garbage when he's one of the premier guys and probably, arguably the first pick of the whole draft? ... We've got guys who want to end on a great note."

It's been a whirlwind since Colorado wrapped up the regular season with a 52-0 win over Oklahoma State on Nov. 29. Deion Sanders found time to squeeze in some fishing back in Texas.

For Hunter, it's been a parade of honors, including the Heisman and The Associated Press player of the year. Shedeur Sanders also won the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm

Award for a season in which he broke the school's all-time single-season passing mark.

"Travis, with 'Coach Prime' and Shedeur, those are the three most influential people that have helped reestablish winning back here in Colorado," Colorado offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur said.

### Next in line

The Buffaloes have landed ex-Liberty quarterback Kaidon Salter out of the transfer portal to possibly step in and replace Shedeur Sanders next season.

Salter figures to compete with five-star high school recruit Julian "JuJu" Lewis for

the starting job. Lewis is expected to join Colorado in the spring semester.

A dual threat, Salter is coming off a regular season for the Flames in which he ran for 579 yards and seven TDs while throwing for 1,886 yards and 15 touchdowns. His total yards per game (224.09 yards) was fourth-most in Conference USA.

Salter led Liberty to an 8-3 mark this season. His former team will play in the Bahamas Bowl on Jan. 4 against Buffalo.

Colorado offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur recently spoke of the need to bring in a player such as Salter as Lewis develops. Shurmur called Lewis a "great decision maker."

"He has a real sense of timing. He's a very accurate passer," Shurmur added of Lewis, a star at Carrollton High School in Georgia. "He has a heroic nature. He has all those things you're looking for. ... If he does the things that he's done in high school and continues to improve at this level, then he will have a bright future."

There are big shoes to fill at quarterback once Sanders wraps up his career following the Alamo Bowl on Dec. 28 against BYU. Sanders broke many school records, including the single-season yards passing mark (3,926) and for passing TDs (35). The Johnny Unitas Golden Arm recipient has a TD throw in 48 straight games, dating to his days at Jackson State.

### Congratulations, Jackson State

Sanders applauded his former team, Jackson State, for beating South Carolina State 28-7 last Saturday in the Celebration Bowl. Sanders went 27-6 at Jackson State (0-2 in the Celebration Bowl).

"That's awesome. I love them. I appreciate them," Sanders said. "They've taken it to yet another level — and that was the plan all along."

# Sasaki could be next signing for Yankees after losing Soto

By RONALD BLUM  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — In pivoting to Plan B after losing Juan Soto, Brian Cashman went after a familiar name in Cody Bellinger.

"I acquired his dad back in the day. Now I acquired his son," the New York Yankees general manager said Wednesday.

In the first 10 days after Soto spurned the Yankees for a record \$765 million, 15-year contract with the Mets, the Yankees signed left-hander Max Fried to a \$218 million, eight-year contract, acquired closer Devin Williams from the Milwaukee Brewers and obtained Bellinger, a former NL MVP, from the Chicago Cubs.

Cashman said the Yankees also had been invited to meet in California with Roki Sasaki, the heralded 23-year-old Japanese pitcher who can sign with Major League Baseball clubs from Jan. 15-23.

"I'm just happy we have an opportunity," Cashman said. "Extremely talented, no doubt about it, has a chance to be one of the world's great pitchers. Be nice to be able to have Yankee Stadium be his home."

Because he is under 25, Sasaki is treated



AP

**The Yankees have been invited to meet with highly regarded pitcher Roki Sasaki, the heralded prospect who can sign with MLB clubs from Jan. 15-23.**

by MLB as an international amateur and subject to signing bonus pools for minor league contracts usually allocated to 16-year-old Latin American prospects. Teams have amounts ranging from roughly \$7.6 million to \$4.1 million they can spend; the Yankees are capped at around \$5.3 million.

Bellinger's father signed with the Yan-

kees in November 1996 and played for the big league team from 1999 to 2001, winning two World Series and three American League pennants. Cody turned 6 in his father's last season in pinstripes.

"Someone that wants to be here," Cashman said, a remark that some may read as aimed at Soto. "I've been hearing it for a long time, including his agent, Scott Boras, saying, 'Can you get him over here? He's driving me crazy. He wants to be a Yankee.' But that's not why I did it. Ultimately I did it because it's a fit."

Bellinger could play outfield or first base depending on moves the Yankees make.

"There's different ways of doing it," manager Aaron Boone said. "You're never going to have the perfect team and you'd never know going into an offseason what you're going to be able to do, whether it's hammering a strength, whether it's plugging a hole. It's kind of where the market and the matchups happen. And so far, I think the moves that we've made I'm really excited about. ... I feel like the winter's to this point been a good one."

Bellinger is guaranteed \$52.5 million for

the next two seasons. The left-handed-hitting 29-year-old has a \$27.5 million salary for next year and a \$25 million player option for 2026 with a \$5 million buyout.

"Honored to wear the pinstripes, ready and excited to get to work!!" he wrote on Instagram.

Chicago agreed to send the Yankees \$5 million: \$2.5 million next Sept. 1 and if the option is exercised, five payments of \$500,000 on the first of each month from May through September in 2026. If the option is declined, the Cubs would pay the Yankees \$2.5 million on Jan. 15, 2026.

Bellinger batted .266 with 18 homers and 78 RBIs in 130 games this year, sidelined between April 23 and May 7 by a broken right rib. He had a 1.035 OPS in 2019 when he made his second All-Star team and won the NL MVP award with the Dodgers. It has been above .800 once in the last five years.

"I do feel like offensively speaking, he'll play up in our yard and he's still a young man and a really good athlete," Boone said. "So you always hope for the ultimate upside but at the very least I know we're getting a really valuable player."



## COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF



JAY LAPRETE, LEFT, AND WADE PAYNE/AP

Ohio State quarterback Will Howard, left, and Tennessee QB Nico Iamaleava have different experience, but both share a common goal: find a way to advance to the Rose Bowl against top-seeded Oregon.

# Different perspectives but the same pressure

Buckeyes' Howard, Volunteers' Iamaleava share common goal

BY TERESA M. WALKER  
Associated Press

Nico Iamaleava has been learning on the job with each snap, and Saturday night will be his 14th start this year for the No. 7 Tennessee Volunteers. Will Howard's next start for No. 6 Ohio State could be his last in college.

The quarterbacks in Saturday night's first-round College Football Playoff game in Columbus, Ohio, couldn't be more different in terms of experience. The pressure is the same: Find a way to advance to the Rose Bowl against top-seeded Oregon on Jan. 1.

"I've been playing college football for five years now, and this is all I have left," Howard said. "I have four games max left in my college career, so there's no other option than to just empty the tank and leave it all out here. Because this is all we have left as college athletes. This is it."

Iamaleava has faced big expectations since signing with Tennessee as one of the top prospects in the country.

He spent his first season behind Joe Milton III, now with the New England Patriots. Iamaleava made his starting debut on Jan. 1 in a rout of Iowa in the Citrus Bowl. He then went 10-2, becoming the Vols' first quarterback to win 10 regular-season games since Casey Clausen in 2003.

The California native downplayed the pressure of playing quarterback at Tennessee, which won its last national title in 1998 — a year after Peyton Manning wrapped up his career.



Tennessee (10-2)  
at Ohio State (10-2)  
AFN-Sports  
2:10 a.m. Sunday CET  
10:10 a.m. Sunday JKT

"Shoot, I don't really think it was too much of a challenge, man," Iamaleava said. "I knew what I signed up for when I came here. And yeah, being quarterback is a hard thing to do. But that's what I came to do."

When it comes to experience, Howard has the edge.

The 6-foot-4, 235-pounder arrived at Ohio State as a graduate transfer with 34 starts at Kansas State. He made clear his job was getting the ball to the Buckeyes' elite offensive playmakers, letting the rest take care of itself.

Howard has been really good but not great at executing coordinator Chip Kelly's oddly conservative game plans. Without a lot of flash, Howard completed an outstanding 72.3% of his passes with at least one TD pass in every game. He has thrown for 2,860 yards, fourth in the Big Ten, and his 27 passing TDs are tied for second in the conference behind Dillon Gabriel of Oregon, who has 28.

Now Howard has to prove he can bounce back from his worst game of the season. That was the

Buckeyes' inexplicable 13-10 loss to Michigan on Nov. 30, in which he went 19-for-33 for 175 yards with a TD and two interceptions.

Ohio State coach Ryan Day sees Howard's resiliency and positive approach as evidence the veteran will be ready. The eighth-seeded Buckeyes (10-2, No. 6 CFP) are chasing their first national championship since 2014, when they were coached by Urban Meyer.

"You can see he's got a bounce in his step right now," Day said. "He wants to get back on the field as fast as he possibly can. You can see that. He wants to lead this offense, and it's going to be a very important part of this game on Saturday night is his leadership, and he'll be ready to go."

Iamaleava has gotten help from the Southeastern Conference's best rushing attack, but he is the key to an offense that comes in fourth in the Football Bowl Subdivision in yards per game at 492.9. The Vols rank eighth nationally in scoring (37.3 points/game), and both stats that might be higher had they not jumped out to early leads against nonconference opponents.

The 6-6, 215-pound Iamaleava has 2,512 yards passing, 19 TDs and only five interceptions for the ninth-seeded Vols (No. 7 CFP).

The pressure to deliver might be heavier on Howard, with the Buckeyes having home-field advantage. He understands the expectations.

"We can't go out any other way but winning it all," Howard said. "That's the way that I see it. I want this for this team so bad."

## High school rivals face off again in first round of CFP

BY JIM VERTUNO  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas' Quinn Ewers and Clemson's Cade Klubnik already have championship history between them.

Both quarterbacks hail from Texas, and in January 2021 they were two of the highest-rated junior recruits in the nation when they met on the biggest stage of high school football in the country: the Texas Class 6A state championship.

Klubnik got the best of Ewers that day, leading Austin Westlake to a 52-34 win over Southlake Carroll. They meet again Saturday when No. 12 seed Clemson (10-3) and No. 5 seed Texas (11-2) clash in the first round of the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff.

For Klubnik, the first step toward leading Clemson back to a national title begins in his hometown just a few miles from where he grew up and played at a high school that produced NFL quarterbacks Drew Brees, Nick Foles and Sam Ehlinger.

It promises to be an emotional return. When the Tigers and Longhorns were announced as first-round opponents, a camera quickly found Klubnik with a stunned look on his face as Tigers coach Dabo Swinney hugged him.

Then it was talk of the rematch with Ewers, with even bigger goals at stake this time.

"You know, Quinn and I go way back. We played each other in seventh or eighth grade and so on. My junior year in the state championship game was definitely a very high profile game," Klubnik said.

It was more than "high profile." Because of the two star quarterbacks and the pedigrees of their programs, their championship game against each other holds legendary status in a state that has produced too many great college players and games to count.

Klubnik and Westlake had won the state championship the previous year. The 2020 season was delayed by the pandemic, pushing the championship game into 2021. Ewers, the top-rated junior QB in the country, had already committed to Ohio State. Klubnik was ranked the No. 2 QB in Texas right behind him, but was still uncommitted.

Ewers passed for 351 yards and three touchdowns. Klubnik was just as good: 18-for-20 passing for 220 yards and a TD, and 97 yards rushing.

Klubnik's Westlake teammates included Michael Taaffe, now a Texas safety, and Ethan Burke and Colton Vasek, who are now Longhorns defensive linemen.

Taaffe this week described Klubnik as his "best friend" that season at Westlake. He noted the school and social disruptions of the COVID season before the



Klubnik



Ewers



Clemson (10-3) at Texas (11-2)  
AFN-Sports  
10 p.m. Saturday CET  
6 a.m. Sunday JKT

championship game.

"There was nothing we could do but throw the football around," Taaffe said. "We had nothing to do but become best friends. We were trying to win a state championship."

Taaffe did his part in the state championship game, intercepting a pass from Ewers in the second half. He'd love to do the same to Klubnik. Taaffe won't pull any punches if he gets a chance for a sack or big hit on his old friend.

"My job is my to take my opponent's soul," Taaffe said. "It doesn't matter if it's my best friend or the guy I hate the most on this planet."

After that 2021 state title game, Klubnik and Westlake won another state championship the next season. Some recruiting outlets rated Klubnik the No. 1 quarterback in the country in 2022.

He became Clemson's regular starter last season. His 33 touchdown passes this season helped revive Clemson after an ugly 34-3 season-opening loss to Georgia. Klubnik had four TD passes as the Tigers won the ACC championship to earn their playoff berth, the program's first since 2020.

Ewers left high school early after that championship game loss. He declared for college that spring and enrolled at Ohio State. His freshman season of 2021 was spent deep on the Buckeyes bench before transferring to Texas, where he led a Longhorns rejuvenation.

Texas won the Big 12 title last season and made the four-team playoff for the first time. The Longhorns reached No. 1 this season for the first time since 2008 and narrowly lost the SEC championship to Georgia in Texas' first year in the league.

As for facing Klubnik again, Ewers called it "cool."

"Me and Cade have a good relationship," Ewers said. "It's definitely cool to get to play each other again, come full circle."



## COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

## Winter adds old-school layer to CFP

Visiting teams say they're not concerned with cold temps, possible snow in first-round games

By GARY B. GRAVES  
Associated Press

Asked if playing in near-freezing weather at Ohio State might pose a challenge for his team, Tennessee coach Josh Heupel quickly noted that it wouldn't be the Volunteers' first rodeo with the cold.

Kicker Max Gilbert even posted a photo last week standing with teammates as light snow fell before a morning practice. And, Tennessee beat cross-state rival Vanderbilt last month on a tundra of sorts with a kickoff temperature of 41 degrees before dropping to the 30s in the fading daylight. A combination of heated benches, portable heaters and extra layers helped take the chill off, along with a 36-23 comeback victory.

The Saturday night forecast calls for temperatures in the high teens and low 20s with a slight chance of snow for the first-round College Football Playoff matchup in Columbus, Ohio. But with few degrees of separation between climates in the Tennessee and Ohio

valleys, it won't feel much different when the Vols venture 350 miles north to face the Buckeyes.

"Yeah, it's a June day in South Dakota," Heupel joked. "It's going to be great football weather. A couple of weeks ago we played in 30 degree weather. We practice in the morning, still a chill, as cold as it will be around this area. And at the end of the day, you get between the white lines, weather doesn't matter. The temperature doesn't. And we'll be ready to go play. It'll be a lot of fun."

The playoff for the first time is holding first-round games on campus and that opens things up in terms of potential weather. Whether this weekend's official start of winter has a chilling effect on the outcome in the 12-team playoff remains to be seen, but it's a definite departure from warm climates Power Four teams are used to for postseason games.

The prospect of spending the Christmas and New Year's Day holidays preparing for a bowl in a

sunny locale is considered an incentivizing finish to a long season.

Warmer destinations and indoor stadiums await the first-round winners in the quarterfinals, but no one's complaining about the chance to play in "ideal" football weather that many players grew up with. This additional postseason layer may require, well, layering for players, but cold comes with the territory and is worth the sacrifice of playing for a national championship.

"Whether there's snow or not snow, whether it's really cold or just kind of cold, it is what it is," said SMU coach Rhett Lashlee, who noted his players' aspirations of an NFL career certainly can should include the likelihood of wintry weather.

"They aspire to play championship football, which we're getting to do right now," said Lashlee, who played his high school and college football in Arkansas. "The weather is only going to be an issue if we allow it, so we know it's going to be

really cold. It's going to be really cold for them as well. So it's our 11 versus their 11."

The State College forecast calls for low 20s dropping into the low teens when Penn State hosts SMU on Saturday night. Lashlee jokingly lamented pleasant 70-degree temperatures in Dallas for workouts but doesn't expect a huge adjustment for his team after playing last month's Atlantic Coast Championship in the 30s in Charlotte, N.C.

The coach added that non-bowl December football is also new territory for Penn State, which means it will also be cold on the Nittany Lions' bench.

Temperature-wise (low to mid-20s), Indiana players and fans won't notice much change between Bloomington and what the Hoosiers will face 200 miles upstate in South Bend for Friday night's matchup at Notre Dame. The daytime forecast includes a 63% chance of snow, conditions the Fighting Irish embrace in a



BARRY REEGER/AP

**Penn State QB Drew Allar is bundled up following a victory over Maryland on Nov. 30 in State College, Pa. The forecast calls for temperatures dropping to the low teens Saturday night.**

hype video featuring clips of the white stuff.

Having won at Purdue in the snow and seeing it elsewhere while playing at Ohio, Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke looks forward to whatever awaits in Notre Dame Stadium — including noise to wake up the echoes.

"Having snow fall in the stadium, that was pretty cool," Rourke said. "Snow games are pretty fun, so I'm looking forward to it if that's the case."

## Frenzy: Indiana, SMU fans endured years of misery to get here

FROM PAGE 32

Ohio State vs. Tennessee and at Notre Dame against Indiana are sellouts, while the stands are expected to be close to full at 106,000-seat Beaver Stadium for SMU at Penn State, as well as Clemson's game at Texas. Fans seeking tickets are asked to look on the secondary online market.

For some, there's an extra challenge. Penn State, Indiana and SMU are holding commencements on their campuses this weekend. Indiana moved up its ceremonies several hours on Friday to give fans time to plan for the night game in South Bend.

For those who do their homework, there are hotel rooms available, although that might require extra travel and cost. Some fans are skipping the overnight stay. Howard, who requested the maximum-allowed eight game tickets at \$200 apiece, plans to fly into State College, Pa., on Saturday morning for a noon kickoff, then leave later that day.

## Have-nots no longer

National coach of the year Curt Cignetti has restored a spark to an Indiana program that has seen nothing like this in more than a half century.

"IU's been waiting for somebody to kind of come in and change the culture of the program," said Brett White, whose father and grandfather played football for the Hoosiers. "The fans have kind of just been waiting for an explosion to happen in Bloomington, and this season was just perfect. It's really been fun."



AP

**In this photo provided by Heather White, Indiana fan Brett White poses at his home in Bloomington, Ind. White and other Indiana fans are riding the euphoria of a great season that culminated in a berth in the College Football Playoff.**

Indiana went 9-1 in the 1967 regular season, then lost to O.J. Simpson and Southern Cal in the Rose Bowl. Coach Bill Mallory had three eight-win seasons from 1984 to 1996. The best chance came in 1987, when Indiana lost a key

matchup at Michigan State that sent the Spartans — not the Hoosiers — to the Rose Bowl. There was just one winning season from 1995 to 2018.

"If you're an IU fan, you kind of have post-traumatic stress disorder all the time," said Timber Tucker, an Indiana season ticket

holder since 2000.

Now, going to the College Football Playoff is "otherworldly," Tucker said. "Everybody's looking at each other going, 'what is going on? This is crazy.'"

## Back from the dead

SMU is in uncharted waters, appearing in the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game in its first season in the league. The school sat in obscurity for decades after receiving the so-called death penalty administered by the NCAA for a pay-to-play scandal that wiped out the 1987 and 1988 seasons. It took nine years for SMU to put together a winning record after that, and its first bowl in the aftermath didn't come until 2009 under coach June Jones.

Brian Cassidy's daughter is captain of SMU's cheer team. He plans to stay with family in Pennsylvania and attend Saturday's game at Penn State. He said there has been "40 years of just misery, and now we're on one of the highest of highs making the playoffs," Cassidy said. "The excitement is palpable."

## Clemson on the road

This is old hat for Clemson fans. The Tigers are making their seventh appearance in the CFP. But this quest starts on the road.

Chandler Bolt grew up near Clemson's campus and is now a book publishing company CEO in Texas. When the first-ever meeting between Clemson and Texas was announced, "everyone was

blowing up my phone," he said.

Clemson won national championships after the 2016 and 2018 seasons and lost in title games two other times. Bolt has attended nearly every one of those, but he's been to more Texas than Clemson games in the three years since moving to Austin.

Clemson made its way into the playoff on the final weekend by winning the ACC championship game after losing to South Carolina in its last regular-season game.

"This year feels different because it's an accident," Bolt said. "It just feels like we're playing with house money."

## Heading to the Horseshoe

From the moment Ohio State was matched against Tennessee, Earl Brown began searching for tickets.

Brown will see his 355th consecutive game, including bowls, on Saturday night, accompanied by his wife, Judy, along with several friends and relatives. The consulting company owner hasn't missed a game since midway through the 1996 season.

"Tennessee fans realize this is not regular season," said Brown, 75, of Louisville, Tenn. "This is big time. And our plans are to win four games."

The Browns will be outnumbered by scarlet and gray-clad Buckeyes fans and relish every moment.

"I've always heard about Ohio State football, and now I'm ready to go experience it," Brown said.



## COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

## Notre Dame, Indiana hit on transfer QBs

By MICHAEL MAROT  
Associated Press

Indiana coach Curt Cignetti pored through the transfer portal last December, looking for a proven quarterback with a winning résumé who could quickly become the cornerstone in another rebuilding project.

He landed on 23-year-old Kurtis Rourke, the 2022 Mid-American Conference MVP at Ohio.

Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman made a far simpler pitch to former Duke quarterback Riley Leonard — win a national championship and go down in Fighting Irish lore.

Both coaches took big swings on their respective one-year hired guns. On Friday, they'll reap the rewards when Rourke leads the 10th-seeded Hoosiers against the seventh-seeded Fighting Irish in what looked like an impossible first-round College Football Playoff matchup all those months ago.

"We've had to prove, a lot of us have had to prove we belong wherever we are," Rourke said. "It just fuels us, knowing that we're counted out and we're the underdog and we always will be — at least for this year — so we can go in and play freely and that we're capable of competing with anybody."

Rourke's ninth-ranked Hoosiers (11-1, No. 8 CFP) already have left quite a legacy.

They broke the school records for wins, scuttled preseason projections of a 17th-place finish in the 18-team Big Ten by tying for second and earned one of the 12 playoff bids.

Cignetti left nothing to chance. He brought most of his staff and 13 players from James Madison to



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

**Quarterback Kurtis Rourke was a perfect fit for Indiana in coach Curt Cignetti's first year. He had 33 career starts and was the MAC MVP in 2023.**

Indiana, and the continuity helped speed up the transition.

He also brought more than a dozen other transfers including Rourke, who looked like a perfect fit — mature, 33 starts and 21 wins in his career, a high completion percentage and low interception rate.

"He's played a lot of football, and you learn by doing," said Cignetti, who was named The Associated Press Coach of the Year on Tuesday. "He's gotten a lot of reps playing quarterback, a lot of successful reps. He's a quick thinker, and he processes quickly. He's extremely accurate, and he's good in the pocket. He doesn't panic. He has certainly taken his game to another level."

Rourke, who got married in February, wanted to play another year and was intrigued by Cignetti's

confidence, system and history of cultivating conference player-of-the-year quarterbacks at previous schools.

The results were impeccable despite Rourke suffering a late-season thumb injury on his throwing hand and missing one game. Rourke heads into the final month of this season as the most efficient passer in the FBS (181.38) and ranked near the top nationally in completion percentage (70.4%) and TD passes (27) on the highest scoring team (43.3 points) in the playoff.

Freeman has seen enough on tape to know what Notre Dame's defense is up against.

"Every great offense is led by a great quarterback and this is no different," Freeman said. "He's been in big games, he's played a lot of football games, and he



RYAN SUN/AP

**Notre Dame lured Riley Leonard from Duke after last season, telling the quarterback he could win a national title in his final college season.**

makes really good decisions. He knows where he's going with his throws, he knows what he's looking for and he executes at a high level."

Leonard poses different problems for the Hoosiers.

One of the nation's top rushing quarterbacks chose Notre Dame because of its tradition and the lure of leading one of college football's blueblood programs to end a 36-year title drought, the longest since Notre Dame claimed its first title in 1924.

Freeman took this journey last year when Sam Hartman left Wake Forest and spent his final college season in South Bend. He isn't necessarily married to the concept of recruiting a new starting quarterback every year.

"There's a process it takes to make sure your quarterback and



**Indiana (11-1)  
at Notre Dame (11-1)**  
AFN-Sports  
2:10 a.m. Saturday CET  
10:10 a.m. Saturday JKT

your offense are performing at the highest levels they can," he said. "But there are also ways to expedite the process as I think Riley and coach (Mike) Denbrock and coach (Gino) Guidugli have been doing. As far as moving forward, it's not something on worrying about in the future."

That's why the Irish (11-1, No. 3 AP) have made it to the playoffs for the first time since 2021 — and the first time with Freeman running the show.

A year ago, with Hartman, Notre Dame's title hopes were derailed by two early season losses. This year, Leonard helped the Irish rebound from their stunning September loss to Northern Illinois by leading them to 10 straight wins while joining five Power 4 quarterbacks to top 1,900 yards passing and 650 yards rushing.

And with the Irish just four wins away from their ultimate goal, Leonard is ready for one last ride.

"I've been in every situation, played in a lot of big-time games, too. So I've been in this situation, I know what it's like," said Leonard, who has rushed for 33 career TDs. "To make it where we are now is kind of why I came to Notre Dame. I came here to compete, to make the playoff and to compete for a national championship."

## SMU, Penn St. coaches criticize timing of portal window

By STEPHEN HAWKINS  
AND PAT GRAHAM  
Associated Press

SMU coach Rhett Lashlee took a moment while preparing his team for the College Football Playoff to address the ever-growing concern over the open transfer portal window.

His problem isn't with players wanting to transfer. Rather, Lashlee's issue, one shared with other coaches, is the timing for those with teams still playing, whether in the 12-team playoff like the Mustangs or in one of the many bowls into early January.

"I hate it for our players," Lashlee said Tuesday. "I told them ... I hate it that you guys, you get a chance to play in the College Football Playoff, yet you are either forced to decide do I go in the portal or not. Or let's call it like it is,



**SMU (11-2) at Penn State (11-2)**  
AFN-Sports  
6 p.m. Saturday CET  
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

people are bombarding our roster trying to pick people off our roster, and we're trying to focus on the playoff."

Not to mention, it's also time for final exams at many schools.

Players looking to transfer must enter the portal by Dec. 28, or have to wait until April 16. That timeframe was approved in October — a window reduced by 15 days after

earlier complaints from coaches.

Lashlee understands that players want the ability to transfer for more playing time elsewhere, or an opportunity to capitalize on name, image and likeness. But he insists that even players don't like the parameters in which they now have to make those decisions.

"We talk about making a system that is all great for them, but we haven't. I mean, that's part of your job as adults is to do what's best for young people, not what they want necessarily. They don't want this," he said. "There's no other sport at all that has free agency in the season. It's sad, it's terrible."

SMU (11-2) plays at Penn State (11-2) on Saturday in a first-round game. The primary backup quarterbacks for both teams are in the transfer portal.

Preston Stone, who was 13-3 as

SMU's starter before getting replaced by Kevin Jennings in the fourth game this year, is staying with the Mustangs in the playoffs. Sophomore Beau Pribula won't be with the Nittany Lions.

"You hear the story about their backup quarterback saying, I don't have a choice. ... That's wrong, that's unacceptable. That's not okay," Lashlee said. "He shouldn't have to make that decision."

Penn State coach James Franklin said Monday that Pribula didn't want to leave now, but didn't feel like he could wait until after their last game.

"The way the portal is, and the timing of it, when you play the position of quarterback and there's only one spot and those spots are filling up, he felt like he was put in a no-win situation," Franklin said.

"And I agree with him."

Too many departures in the portal can certainly have adverse affects on a program, such as Marshall pulling out of a bowl game after too many of its players decided to transfer in the aftermath of a coaching change.

Lashlee said the easiest solution would be to not open the transfer portal in December.

"We've got to look long and hard at the schedule. Coaches have been saying this for the last three or four years with all these changes," he said. "And what happens is we just make all these these random changes because we don't want to get sued, or we don't want to do this or we don't want to do that, and we don't think about the long-term effects it has on the young people that we're supposed to be serving."



# SPORTS



**Looking for an advantage**  
Jackson will get rare home start against Steelers » **NFL, Page 27**

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# A fan frenzy

### Supporters revel in CFP debuts at campus sites

By **JOHN RABY**  
*Associated Press*

Forget the cost, the frenzied planning and the timing around the holidays. SMU fan Will Howard is living the dream: His beloved Mustangs are in the 12-team hunt for a national championship, and he's going to ride it to the end.

"It's better than going to Disney World," Howard said. "Because we always knew that we could go to Disney World, right? We never knew that we'd actually have this type of opportunity."



**Howard**

SMU, Indiana, Penn State and Tennessee are all first-time participants in the playoff at campus sites starting Friday night,

joining a club dominated over the first 10 years by the titans of the sport that this year includes Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State and Texas. Although many fans will head into frigid conditions and enemy territory, the sense of bliss outweighs the unknown.

"I've been an SMU fan close to 30 years now, and I've never seen this level of excitement," Howard said.

The FBS has finally caught up to the Championship Subdivision, which for decades has held campus playoff games in early winter in places that don't show up on travel destination brochures.

But will fans travel this weekend?

By the looks of booked travel packages, the answer is a resounding yes. Games at

**SEE FRENZY ON PAGE 30**

## INSIDE

Visiting teams say cold weather not a concern  
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Transfer QBs transform Notre Dame, Indiana  
**Page 31**



**BARRY REEGER/AP**

**Penn State takes the field for a game against Washington amid a "whiteout" crowd at Beaver Stadium on Nov. 9 in State College, Pa. The stands are expected to be nearly full in the 106,000-seat stadium when SMU visits Saturday night for a first-round CFP game.**

# Heisman winner Hunter, Buffaloes get back to work » College football, Page 28