

## FACES

Netflix banking on high-stakes sci-fi tale to be next hit  
Page 20



## MILITARY

Air Force conducts hypersonic missile test in West Pacific  
Page 3



## MARCH MADNESS

Players who were last-second heroes are back for more  
Page 32

Army tried to speed up Stryker debut but instead caused delay » Page 8

# STARS AND STRIPES

stripes.com

Volume 82 Edition 242 ©SS 2024

CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Free to Deployed Areas



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

The loadmaster on a U.S. Air Force C-130 cargo plane looks out the open bay door at the Mediterranean Sea prior to an airdrop of humanitarian aid into northern Gaza on Wednesday.

## Witnessing war from above

### US airmen send 3 tons of humanitarian aid in 14th airdrop for Gaza Strip

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
Stars and Stripes

OVER THE GAZA STRIP — The U.S. airmen aboard a C-130 cargo plane stole glances at the billowing black smoke and collapsed buildings below them, as they prepared to airdrop three tons of humanitarian aid.

Their mission Wednesday into the northern Gaza Strip was the U.S. military's 14th airdrop of aid into what was once the territory's largest population center.

Witnessing the scenes of devastation is eye-opening, said Lt. Col. Jeremy Anderson, airborne mission commander for Wednesday's airdrop.

## MILITARY

Navy crew from West Coast to help build Gaza port  
Page 7

"It hits home for a lot of the air crew, when they look out and they see firsthand the environment that they are providing aid to," said Anderson, who has flown on five missions to airdrop aid to Gaza since the beginning of March.

American officials say that the airdrops do help, while conceding that they won't alleviate

much of the need in Gaza.

More than 2 million people are estimated to be displaced by the war that began Oct. 7, when a Hamas terrorist attack killed 1,200 people in Israel. Gaza health authorities estimate the number of dead in the territory at more than 30,000 people, a figure that does not distinguish between bystanders and combatants.

The plane on Wednesday flew from Jordan across the West Bank, into Israel and then over the Mediterranean Sea, before approaching Gaza. Along for the mission were two MQ-9 Reaper drones. The drops are monitored

SEE ABOVE ON PAGE 7

## Leaders push expansion of allowance for basic needs

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Senior enlisted leaders threw their support behind a proposal to widen military family eligibility for a basic needs allowance on Wednesday, urging lawmakers to approve the measure to help lessen food insecurity.

The Defense Department in its fiscal 2025 budget request is asking Congress to expand the pool of troops that qualify for the monthly allowance by raising the household income cutoff from 150% of federal poverty guidelines to 200%.

Few service members and mostly only those with large families are taking advantage of the stipend in its present form, which became law in 2021, senior leaders told members of the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday. Troops must have at least one dependent to be eligible.

In the Army, only 16 people are receiving the allowance, according to Sgt. Maj. Michael Weimer. One of them, an E-4 rank that lives at Washington's Joint Base Lewis-McChord, had to have nine dependents to qualify for the supplemental.

"I had to have my team do the calculation on the whiteboard for me to truly understand between federal poverty guidelines and gross household income, and I felt

SEE ALLOWANCE ON PAGE 4

# 26%

Approximate percentage of active-duty troops considered to be food insecure, meaning they skip or cut meals or go hungry instead of eating, according to a 2023 study by the Rand Corp., based on 2018 data.

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## Reddit poised to make its stock market debut

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Reddit will enter a new era as a publicly traded company with a market value of \$6.4 billion after the social media platform's initial public offering was priced at \$34 per share.

The price announced late Wednesday came in at the top end of the target range set by Reddit's investment bankers as they spent the past few weeks gauging investor demand for the stock. It sets the stage for Red-

dit's shares to begin trading Thursday on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol "RDDL" in a debut likely to spur a flurry of commentary on Reddit's own platform, as well as competing social media outlets.

The interest surrounding Reddit stems largely from a large audience that religiously visits the service to discuss a potpourri of subjects that range from silly memes to existential worries, as well as to get recommendations from like-minded people.

The IPO raised about \$748 million, including about \$228 million for Reddit shareholders who opted to sell some of their stock. Another \$519 million is earmarked for Reddit, but the San Francisco-based company won't receive all that money because it still has to pay commissions and other costs associated with the offering.

Bankers still have a 30-day window to sell another 3.3 million shares that would raise an additional \$112 million, before deducting commissions and fees.

### EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (March 22)	\$1.06	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768
British pound (March 22)	\$1.24	Britain (Pound)	1.2707
Japanese yen (March 22)	147.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3502
South Korean won (March 22)	1293.00	China (Yuan)	7.1992
		Denmark (Krone)	6.8528
		Egypt (Pound)	46.6516
		Euro	0.9187
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8210
		Hungary (Forint)	361.99
		Israel (Shekel)	3.5983
		Japan (Yen)	151.43
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3075
		Norway (Krone)	10.6095
		Philippines (Peso)	56.03
		Poland (Zloty)	3.96
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7503
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3416
		South Korea (Won)	1332.45
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8978		
Thailand (Baht)	36.18		
Turkey (NewLira)	31.6724		

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

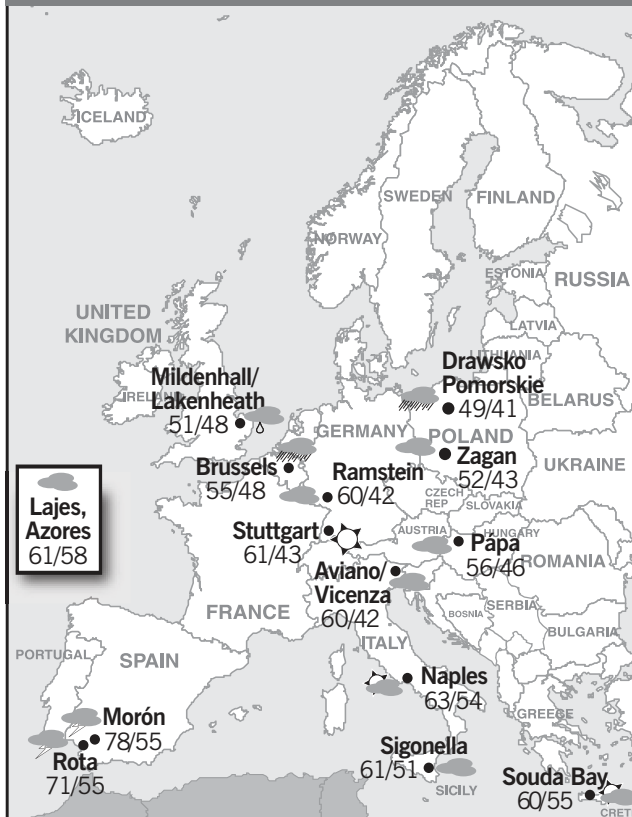
INTEREST RATES	
Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.38
30-year bond	4.46

### 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.

### TODAY IN STRIPES

- American Roundup ..... 21
- Comics ..... 22-23
- Crossword ..... 22-23
- Faces ..... 20
- Opinion ..... 24
- Sports ..... 25-32

## STARS AND STRIPES

However you read us, wherever you need us.

Mobile • Online • Print

### EUROPE

**ADVERTISING**

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

### MIDDLE EAST

**ADVERTISING**

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

### PACIFIC

**ADVERTISING**

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

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

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

Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.

## STARS AND STRIPES

Mobile • Online • Print

## MILITARY

# Air Force conducts hypersonic missile test

## Guam-based B-52H Stratofortress bomber used for weapon it had relegated to prototype status

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

The Air Force used a Guam-based B-52H Stratofortress bomber to test a hypersonic missile it had relegated to prototype status.

The AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon, or ARRW, was fired Sunday over the Reagan test site on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, according to an Air Force statement emailed Wednesday by Secretary of the Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek.

“This test launched a full prototype operational hypersonic missile and focused on the ARRW’s end-to-end performance,” the statement said. “The Air Force gained valuable insights into the

capabilities of this new, cutting-edge technology.”

The AGM-183 is a conventional, rocket-powered hypersonic gliding missile with a warhead of “kinetic energy” projectiles rather than explosives, according to a fiscal 2021 Air Force report.

Sunday’s test may be the AGM-183’s final flight.

The Air Force had asked for \$150.3 million for research and to test the weapon, Air Force assistant secretary Andrew Hunter told the House subcommittee on tactical and land forces March 29, 2023.

“While the Air Force does not currently intend to pursue follow-on procurement” of the AGM-183 once it develops a prototype,

“there is inherent benefit to completing” the test flights “to garner the learning and test data that will help inform future hypersonic programs and potential leave behind capability support,” according to a record of that testimony on the Armed Services Committee website.

The U.S. conducted its first hypersonic missile test in December 2022 and made several more tests last year. Both China and Russia have fielded their own hypersonic weapons that can travel five times the speed of sound and maneuver in flight like a cruise missile, making them harder to detect and shoot down.

North Korea reported the successful ground test of a solid-fuel

engine for a new type of intermediate hypersonic missile, a test overseen by the country’s autocratic leader Kim Jong Un, according to The Associated Press and media outlets Wednesday.

The Air Force isn’t releasing its test objectives, the Air Force statement said, but added the test acquired valuable, unique data and was intended to further a range of hypersonic programs.

“We also validated and improved our test and evaluation capabilities for continued development of advanced hypersonic systems,” the statement said.

ARRW maker Lockheed said it is ready to deliver hypersonic capabilities to the Air Force, according to a statement published

Wednesday by Defense News.

“Following the recent end-to-end flight test, Lockheed Martin has completed the test program with full confidence in ARRW’s revolutionary capabilities, and we stand ready to deliver this fully-qualified, hypersonic solution to the U.S. Air Force,” the company said.

Airmen trained on the ARRW on Guam in March and at Andrews Air Force Base, Calif., in September, according to the Air Force. Photographs of airmen on Guam checking out what appeared to be an ARRW were posted on Andersen’s website Feb. 29.

robson.seth@stripes.com  
@SethRobson1

# Training, industry program allows soldiers to bring skills to Army

By **ROSE L. THAYER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Nofziger’s love of all things Disney is so strong, his forearm permanently bears the image of Belle in her yellow dress and the Beast in a blue tuxedo jacket as they dance together and fall in love in the 1991 animated movie “Beauty and the Beast.”

He’s also a dedicated soldier and “tenacious” about advancing his career in Army public affairs, which led him to apply for the Army’s Training with Industry program, a highly competitive opportunity for active-duty soldiers to spend a year working in a civilian company and then bring back lessons learned to their peers in the service. In that classic happily-ever-after way that Disney stories go, Nofziger earned a spot in the program as the first soldier to work in the communications office of the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, Calif.

“It was, first, a really exciting and incredible opportunity to be a part of the program. To add Disney was just the cherry on top,” Nofziger said in an interview last month.

Just 138 soldiers participated last year in the program, and 146 are currently approved to hang up their uniforms and work alongside civilians in fields similar to their Army jobs, according to Army Human Resources Command.

When Nofziger applied last year, Disney only accepted Army musicians to come learn with their live entertainment division at Disneyland. But the theme park’s communications office saw the success of musicians over the past nine years and decided they wanted in as well.

Since August Nofziger has been learning the ins and outs of the Dis-



CHRISTIAN THOM/Disneyland Resort

**Maj. Roxy Thompson, officer-in-charge of Defense Media Activity’s Army Productions, conducts a formal reenlistment of Sgt. 1st Class Nicolas Nofziger at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., on Feb. 19.**

neyland communications office, while also getting to wear his favorite Disney-themed outfits to work.

“How they do their communications is way more heart focused. It’s more focused on the people and the magic and the joy and the good that this company does,” Nofziger said. “How do we get guests excited to come and spend what could be their life savings for a four- or five-day trip to the happiest place on Earth? We want them to feel great about doing that. ... I think it will really transfer when I get back to the Army, because we’re looking at how do we get parents excited about their kids joining the Army.”

Since the 1970s, the Army has been sending its soldiers to learn from industry leaders such as Exxon Corp., UPS, Armed Forces Bank, Google, Advent Health and Caterpillar, according to the ser-

vice. In fiscal year 2023, which ended in September, 78 companies hosted Army officers, and 26 hosted enlisted soldiers, according to Human Resources Command.

The officers came from 25 Army occupational specialties, and the soldiers from 15.

“The 10 soldiers that we’ve had stationed with us for their year of service ... have made a tremendous difference in what we do,” said Matt Conover, vice president of live entertainment at Disneyland. “I know from talking to the commandant of the [Army] School of Music, and other leaders across the service, that their time here has brought back so much to their field and to their individual units as they go back.”

One soldier project that can still be seen at Disneyland every day is a tiny float in the “Magic Happens” parade featuring Hei Hei,

the rooster from the animated movie “Moana.” Hutch Hutchinson was assigned to design that float alongside designers and technical experts as part of the Training with Industry program, Conover said. She has since left the Army and works as part of the theme park’s entertainment operations team and as stage manager for the Disneyland Band.

“She took on that whole project, helped design it, produce it, implement it and deliver it. That enabled her to understand all the dynamics of what goes into producing something. Even though the element was small, it was part of this very large thing,” he said.

Suzi Brown, vice president of Disneyland Resort communications, said seeing the entertainment division’s success sent her to the Army to see if her office could get a soldier as well through the program.

“It’s exceeded my expectations,” she said of the time Nofziger has spent at the resort. Her team has been working with other Disney offices in Florida that have other specialties with overlap into Army career fields.

“There’s no reason not to do it. It’s a win-win,” Brown said.

Once the soldiers return to the Army, they are typically put into a job position where they can share what they’ve learned over the previous months, said Capt. James “Jimmy” DiCarlo, an Army logistics officer who worked in 2021-2022 with Crowley Maritime, a company that moved petroleum around the globe.

He thought he knew a lot about fuel after a stint with an aviation unit at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, at the beginning of his officer career but quickly realized there’s so much more to it. On a busy day in

the Army, DiCarlo said he saw up to 25,000 gallons of fuel move. At Crowley that happened every half hour.

Since finishing his year with Crowley in Anchorage, Alaska, DiCarlo has worked at the military’s schoolhouse for all courses on moving fuel and water at Fort Gregg-Adams, Va., as the deputy director of the petroleum and water department.

“When I got to Crowley, it was my first time in a project coordinator position, and it gave me the exposure to see strategic petroleum acquisitions, distribution, safety procedures and management decision making processes that they utilize globally,” he said.

Back at Disneyland, Nofziger still has roughly four more months to soak in some Disney magic before returning to the Army — something he said he’s eager to do. After a promotion ceremony last month in front of Sleeping Beauty’s castle, he’ll be back in uniform with an extra stripe and fresh eyes as the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of Army productions at Defense Media Activity in Fort Meade, Md. He’s already begun sending a couple of proposals to his leadership.

“It’s one of those absence-makes-the-heart-grow-fonder situations. The day I joined the Army and set foot on the drill pad and basic combat training I knew this was what I was meant to do. I love the Army, and I love serving my country, and I love seeing it evolve,” he said. “I very much look forward to taking that piece of Disney with me into being a senior noncommissioned officer now and seeing where that takes me.”

thayer.rose@stripes.com  
@Rose\_Lori

## MILITARY

# US Reaper drone crashes during Poland operation

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — An MQ-9 Reaper surveillance drone crashed this week while carrying out operations in Poland, U.S. Air Forces Europe and Africa said.

The aircraft went down Sunday near the northeastern Polish city of Miroslawiec, USAFE said Monday in a statement.

The accident happened in an uninhabited area, and there were no reported injuries or damage to property, USAFE said.

“The unmanned aircraft was unarmed and conducting routine operations when the incident occurred,” the statement said.

An investigation into the cause of the crash is underway.

The U.S. has been flying drones out of Miroslawiec since 2018. The area serves as a hub for surveillance missions along NATO’s eastern flank.

Reapers from the Polish base are dispatched for missions stretching from Estonia on the Baltic Sea to Romania in southern



PRESTON CHERRY/U.S. Air Force

**An MQ-9 Reaper taxis toward the runway at Miroslawiec Air Base, Poland, in March 2019.**

Europe to monitor the Black Sea region.

The United States has stepped up surveillance missions in Europe ever since Russia’s initial 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Those efforts have intensified since the Russia-Ukraine war started in 2022.

On occasion, such patrols have resulted in close encounters with the Russians. In March 2023, a Russian fighter jet collided with a U.S. MQ-9 over the Black Sea, forcing the unmanned aircraft to crash.

vandiver.john@stripes.com  
@john\_vandiver

## Commodore of special warfare group relieved

*Stars and Stripes*

The commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group 8 was relieved of his command Wednesday, the service announced.

Capt. Richard A. Zaszewski was relieved by Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, “due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command,” the service announced in a news release. Deputy commodore Capt. Stig Sanness assumed the duties of commodore, with no impact to mission readiness, the Navy said.

Under federal privacy law, military officials are not required to disclose the reasons for removing or reassigning personnel. Military officials often cite “a loss of confidence” when commanders are removed from their posts without providing any specifics that led to the decision.

Zaszewski commissioned in 1997, according to his service record provided by the Navy, and he has received many military awards, including a Silver Star, three Bronze Stars, a Legion of

Merit and five Defense Meritorious Service Medals.

Naval Special Warfare Group 8 was established in August 2021 and assumed responsibility for all units in Naval Special Warfare Groups 3 and 10, which were disestablished at the same time, according to a Navy news release at the time.

The group was established to converge “undersea operational capabilities and advanced intelligence and communications capabilities.”

Zaszewski is the fifth commanding officer to be relieved by the Navy this year.

In January, the commander of the blue crew of the Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Georgia was relieved.

The commander of the Japan-based USS Howard and the commanding officer of Destroyer Squadron 2 were fired in February.

Earlier this month, Capt. Kurt Balagna, the commander of the gold crew of the USS Ohio, was relieved of duty.



ZACHARY FOSTER/U.S. Air Force

**U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Sarabrian Jackson unloads turkeys during a Nourish the Service event at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., on Nov. 17. Nourish the Service is a Blue Star Families supported annual event dedicated to bringing installation personnel donations during the holiday season.**

## Allowance: Officials say expanding eligibility will ease food stamp reliance

FROM PAGE 1

like I needed an accounting degree to truly understand how to get soldiers to take advantage,” Weimer said.

Raising the income ceiling would mean that a family of eight would need to make under about \$105,000 to qualify for the stipend instead of the current threshold of about \$80,000. An average allowance today is more than \$1,000 per month.

Pentagon officials said the eligibility expansion would cost \$245 million and help decrease service member reliance on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the food stamp program.

Nearly 26% of active-duty troops are considered to be food insecure, meaning they skip or cut meals or go hungry instead of eating, according to a 2023 study by the Rand Corp. think tank that examined 2018 data.

It is unclear if a larger group of candidates for the basic needs allowance will have the impact the Pentagon intends.

A recent survey by the nonprofit organization Blue Star Families found that the allowance is having a limited effect so far on alleviating hunger.

“Our limited, but novel, data shows that this new policy may not yet efficiently target food insecure military families, though this may change as more families become aware of the program,” the survey states. “Many families who could benefit are unaware of the program.”

Chief Master Sgt. John Bentivegna of the Space Force said it

“If we look after the well-being [of troops], and we pay our people appropriately, then we won’t have to worry about the basic needs allowance...”

James Honea  
U.S. Navy

was “unacceptable” for a military family to not have enough food on the table. But he said educating families, specifically young enlisted members, about budgeting and healthy eating was also an important part of addressing food insecurity.

“From a financial perspective, we have to make sure service members have at least enough money in the bank account so they can budget appropriately to make sure that they are buying the right foods and having the right access to the foods,” Bentivegna said.

The basic needs allowance is a helpful tool, he said, though it needs to be coupled with a broader effort to boost overall compensation and pay for troops who are stretched thin financially.

Master Chief Petty Officer James Honea of the Navy also advocated for that approach and said sailors and other service members need to be paid salaries that are reflective of their unique roles and responsibilities.

“That young 19-year-old that’s working at the Starbucks is not the same thing that we’re asking of our 19-year-olds who are serving

in harm’s way,” he said.

The Defense Department is proposing a 4.5% pay raise for troops next year but lawmakers have made clear that they also want to see targeted pay hikes that specifically focus on junior enlisted service members.

The White House has resisted proposals to make dramatic pay changes until the Defense Department completes its quadrennial review of military compensation.

Honea said on Wednesday that the review should result in pay models that account for the difficult work performed by troops and perhaps align with compensation models for first responders, who often receive hazard pay for dangerous work.

“If we look after the well-being [of troops], and we pay our people appropriately, then we won’t have to worry about the basic needs allowance or be overly concerned about food insecurity,” he said. “If we pay them appropriately, they’ll figure out how to feed themselves.”

shkolnikova.svetlana@stripes.com  
@svetashko

## PACIFIC

# Pentagon says aid to Ukraine deters China

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Sending Ukraine needed ammunition and other military support helps deter China from using its growing military might in the Pacific, including against Taiwan, top U.S. defense officials told lawmakers on Wednesday.

Ely Ratner, the assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, told House lawmakers they should take up and pass the \$95 billion security supplemental bill the Senate approved in February. The bill would provide some \$60 billion in wartime funding for Ukrainian forces who have run low on ammunition along the front lines of their fight against Russia's invading military.

"I think it is really important to underscore the degree to which standing with Ukraine will help strengthen deterrence in the Indo-Pacific," Ratner told the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday during a hearing to examine the U.S. military posture in the region. "It will demonstrate that there are costs and consequences for this kind of violence and that the free world will come

together."

Despite the Senate's 70-29 passage of the bipartisan bill Feb. 13, House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., declined to bring the bill up for a vote in the lower chamber, citing its lack of new funding for U.S. southern border security. Johnson has faced growing pressure, including from the Pentagon, to bring the bill to the floor.

Several House lawmakers have said they expected the bill would quickly pass if brought forward. Rep. Bill Keating, D-Mass., said Wednesday that passing the bill would send a strong deterrent message to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping about U.S. commitment to its partners.

"We're sitting here now talking about deterrence," Keating said, praising Ratner and Navy Adm. John Aquilino, who heads U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, for linking Ukraine aid to Indo-Pacific stability. "It's March 20, and we're sit-



Aquilino

ting here not acting on Ukraine assistance that's so vital as a deterrent, because if we fail there, it's just going to send a signal that counteracts all the good [deterrent] work ... that you're involved in [in the INDOPACOM region]. So, let's hope we can get that done."

In addition to Ukraine funding, the supplemental would provide billions of dollars in support to Israel, civilians in Gaza and U.S. service members in the Middle East. It also would include some \$4.8 billion in support for U.S. partners in the Indo-Pacific, namely Taiwan.

Aquilino, who is set to retire this year after leading INDOPACOM since 2021, said the Taiwanese have watched closely since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The admiral said the attack served as a "pretty good wake-up signal" for Taiwan to take seriously the potential of a Chinese attack on its sovereignty.

China has long viewed the democratically governed island nation as its own territory, and Xi has claimed so-called "reunification" between Taiwan and the mainland

is inevitable. China's military is likely to be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2027, Aquilino wrote in his prepared testimony.

He told lawmakers on Wednesday he believed that if attacked, the Taiwanese people would stand up to China, but they would rely heavily on U.S. weapons and support.

China has spent recent years building up the world's largest navy and will soon have the largest air force on the globe, Aquilino said Wednesday. Despite dips in its economy in recent years, China has continued to bolster its military spending by some 7% each year — building a modern nuclear arsenal and advancing its capabilities in space, long-range missiles and other areas critical to conducting large scale combat operations, the admiral said.

But despite China's military growth and its destabilizing actions — including building artificial, militarized islands in disputed parts of the South China Sea and flying combat aircraft and sailing military vessels close to Taiwan — Aquilino insisted that "conflict is not imminent or inevitable" in the

Indo-Pacific.

In fact, the admiral said, Xi would prefer to convince Taiwan to reunite with China peacefully.

"They're taking all actions to attempt to get the Taiwanese to capitulate," Aquilino said. "Now, I don't see that happening."

Ratner told the House lawmakers that the U.S. military remains more capable than China's in most areas, but the Chinese are rapidly advancing. He said China presents "the most comprehensive and serious challenge to our national security" of any other global threat, because China "remains the only country with the will and increasingly the capability to dominate the Indo-Pacific region and displace the United States."

Despite the challenges, Ratner said INDOPACOM's nearly 400,000 troops are well-positioned to ensure stability in the region, which covers nearly half of the world's land.

"Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific is real and strong," Ratner said. "And we're doing everything we can to keep it that way."

dickstein.corey@stripes.com

## US signs agreement for key Indo-Pacific access

BY WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A 20-year agreement between the U.S. and several small Pacific island nations significantly advances America's strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, a top Defense Department official told lawmakers Wednesday.

President Joe Biden signed legislation March 9 that provides \$7.1 billion over two decades to the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau.

The bipartisan renewal of the Compacts of Free Associations, or COFA, between the U.S. and the three nations "ensures that the United States — and only the United States — can maintain a military presence" in those countries, Ely Ratner, assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, said in a testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.

Approving COFA funding "marked one of the 118th Congress' most significant achievements to advance U.S. strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

The three nations lie in an expanse of sea east of the Philippines just above the Equator.

Renewing the COFA agreement was "critical," Suzanne Vares-Lum, a retired Army major general and now director of the Honolulu-

based East-West Center, said by phone Tuesday.

Crucially, the agreement precludes China from exerting more influence in the region by filling unmet needs within the three nations, Vares-Lum said.

"I think it shows our acknowledgement that we are not leaving any gaps in the relationship and that the COFA agreements fulfill the government functions of each of the countries for day-to-day requirements — education, health care, families, environment, the preservation of cultural resources — of their own security," she said.

The agreement somewhat mitigates China's successful foray into the Solomon Islands, which lies south of Micronesia.

American and Australian officials were stunned in early 2022 when Solomon Islands announced a security agreement with China, raising the possibility that Beijing could leverage that into greater military presence in the region.

Under the renewed COFA agreement, Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau gain more than just the billions of funding in exchange for America's exclusive military access to their land, waters and airspace.

Citizens of those countries are allowed to work and attend school in America, enlist in the U.S. armed services and access veter-



SHAINA MARIE O'NEAL/U.S. Navy

**Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro participates in a wreath-laying at the 81st Infantry Division Memorial in Peleliu, Palau, on March 1.**

ans' health care, Vares-Lum said.

The previous COFA agreement expired last fall, and renewal had been tied up in congressional gridlock, Robert York, director for regional affairs at Pacific Forum, a Honolulu-based policy research institute, said by phone Monday.

Some U.S. lawmakers were apparently shaken out of their complacency when a leaked letter from Palauan President Surangel Whipps Jr. to a U.S. senator was posted on X on Feb. 15, York said.

The letter, posted by Cleo Paskal, a non-resident senior fellow at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, warned that China was upping pressure on Palau to break its dip-

lomatic ties with Taiwan.

Palau is one of only 11 nations that maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan, a democratically governed island China maintains is a renegade province that must at some point concede to Beijing's control.

Whipps' letter urged the U.S. senator, whose name was redacted, to pass the COFA legislation.

"Every day it is not approved plays into the hands of the [Chinese Communist Party] and the leaders here (some of whom have done 'business' with the PRC) who want to accept its seemingly attractive economic offers at the cost of shifting alliances, beginning with sacrificing Taiwan," Whipps wrote.

In exchange for Palau breaking ties with Taiwan, China offered to "fill every hotel room ... and more if more are built" and to lease two acres for \$20 million a year for a "call center," Whipps wrote.

"There's a lot more concern about Chinese activities in the Pacific these days," York said, referring to the developments in the Solomon Islands. "If you look at the nations in question that are covered under this [COFA agreement], the U.S. attaches a great deal of strategic importance to them, particularly Palau, and its place in the first island chain."

olson.wyatt@stripes.com  
@WyattWolson

## EUROPE

# Russia launches 31 missiles at Kyiv

This was the first attack in weeks; Ukraine intercepted all projectiles

BY HANNA ARHIROVA  
AND ANTON SHTUKA  
*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia fired 31 ballistic and cruise missiles at Kyiv before dawn Thursday in the first attack on the Ukrainian capital in six weeks, officials said. Air defenses shot down all the incoming missiles, though 13 people including a child were injured by falling wreckage, they said.

Residents of Kyiv were awakened by loud explosions around 5 a.m. as the missiles arrived at roughly the same time from different directions, said Serhii Popko, head of the Kyiv City Administration.

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched two ballistic missiles and 29 cruise missiles against the capital.

Kyiv has better air defenses than most regions of the large country. The missile interception rate is frequently high, rendering Russian attacks on the capital significantly less successful than during the early days of the war.

Even so, Ukrainian officials warn that they need considerably more Western weapons if they are to prevail against Russia's invasion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had threatened Wednesday to "respond in kind" to Ukrainian aerial attacks in recent days on Russia's Belgorod region near the border with Ukraine.

At an event in the Kremlin, Putin said Russia "can respond in the same way regarding civilian infrastructure and all other objects of this kind that the enemy attacks. We have our own views on this matter and our own plans. We will

follow what we have outlined."

An 11-year-old girl and a 38-year-old man were hospitalized in Kyiv, the city administration said. Eight other people sustained light injuries, according to Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

Ukraine's Emergency Service said around 80 people were evacuated from their homes.

Falling wreckage from the intercepted missiles set fire to at least one apartment building, burned parked cars and left craters in streets and a small park. Some streets were littered with debris, including glass from shattered windows.

Survivors, some of them in tears and visibly shaken as emergency workers treated them in the street, recounted narrow escapes.

Raisa Kozenko, a 71-year-old whose apartment lost its doors and windows in the blast, said her son jumped out of bed just in time.

"He was covered in blood, in the rubble," she said, trembling from shock. "And all I can say is ... the apartment is completely destroyed."

Mariia Margulis, 31, said a decision to stay in the corridor throughout the attack saved her family.

"The blast wave blew out all the windows on the side where everything happened," she said. "My mom was supposed to sleep in that room, but I asked her to move to the corridor in time, which saved us."

The attack occurred hours after a visit to Kyiv by President Joe Biden's top foreign policy adviser, Jake Sullivan.

On Thursday, five people were injured in the latest attack on the



PHOTOS BY VADIM GHIRDA/AP

Firefighters work near a crater after a Russian attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Thursday.



A firefighter walks among the debris after a Russian attack.

Belgorod region, which damaged homes and the city sports stadium, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Russia's Ministry of Defense said it stopped 10 rockets over the region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged the country's Western partners to send more air defense systems so they can be distributed across the country where missile strikes

have become more common.

"Every day, every night such ... terror happens," he said on Telegram after Thursday's attack on Kyiv. "World unity is capable to stop it by helping us with more air defense systems."

Zelenskyy said Russia doesn't have missiles that can evade U.S.-made Patriots and other advanced air defense weapons.

European Union leaders were considering new ways to help boost arms and ammunition production for Ukraine at a summit in Brussels on Thursday.

Russia has largely turned its attention to other Ukrainian cities, targeting them with drones and ballistic missiles.

On Wednesday, Russian ballistic missiles killed five people and injured nine in the eastern Kharkiv region, and strike on southern Odesa last week killed 21.

## EU leaders gather, will focus on aid for Gaza, Ukraine ammo production

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — European Union leaders gathered Thursday to consider new ways to help boost arms and ammunition production for Ukraine and to discuss the war in Gaza amid deep concern about Israeli plans to launch a ground offensive in the city of Rafah.

Ukraine's munition stocks are desperately low, and Russia has more and better-armed troops. There is also a growing awareness that the EU must provide for its own security, with election campaigning in the U.S. raising questions about Washington's commitment to its allies.

Ahead of the summit in Brussels, EU Council President Charles Michel said the Europeans "face a pivotal moment. Urgency, intensity and unwavering determination are imperative." New plans are on the table, notably to use the profits from frozen Russian assets to buy Ukraine arms and ammunition.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will join the leaders at the start of their two-day meeting, in part to encourage some member countries to resume funding for the U.N. Palestinian relief agency, the main provider of aid in Gaza.

The Israel-Hamas war has driven 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes, and U.N. officials say a quarter of the population is starving. The agency is the main supplier of food, water and shelter but is on the brink of financial collapse.

In a draft of their summit statement, seen by The Associated Press, the leaders are set to underline that such an operation "would worsen the already catastrophic humanitarian situation and prevent the urgently needed provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance."

## Hungary, Slovakia still averse to sending arms to Ukraine

*Associated Press*

PRAGUE — Four Central European countries remain deeply divided over how to resolve Russia's war against Ukraine, their foreign ministers said Thursday.

The foreign ministers from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia met Thursday and discussed a Czech plan to acquire ammunition that Ukraine badly needs from third countries outside the European Union.

"It's necessary to boost support for Ukraine in all areas including military assistance," Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said.

Under the plan, the Czechs seek to obtain 800,000 artillery shells

for Ukraine. Czech leaders previously said the first shells should be delivered to Ukraine no later than June.

At least 18 countries have joined the initiative, Czech leaders have previously said.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski called the Czech plan an "excellent idea."

"We're very happy to contribute," he said. Sikorski said Poland would contribute funds as well as help deliver the ammunition to the front.

But the foreign ministers of Hungary and Slovakia said they are not ready to change their strict refusal to provide arms to Ukraine.

## MIDEAST

## West Coast crew adds to US effort to build Gaza port

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Navy will deploy 260 sailors and two U.S. naval ships from the West Coast to help build a temporary seaport to deliver aid into war-torn Gaza, officials said Wednesday.

The Pentagon announced nearly two weeks ago that about 1,000 U.S. troops would deploy a floating pier and a roughly 1,800-foot causeway in the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza's coast, where commercial vessels can dock and offload aid to be transported by smaller vessels and vehicles into Gaza.

The operation will use a make-

shift dock known as a Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, and include Navy and Army personnel, Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's top spokesman, said at the time.

Four Army ships departed Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., last week carrying dozens of soldiers from the Army's 7th Transportation Brigade. Army officials said about 500 soldiers were expected to deploy to support the pier-building operations. They followed the U.S. Army Vessel Frank S. Besson, which left Joint Base Langley-Eustis March 9, according to the Defense Department.

"Once in theater these vessels

and their crews will establish a roll-on, roll-off pier capability that allows ship-to-shore humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza," Ryder said last week. "We expect the pier to be fully operational in approximately 60 days, which will be able to facilitate the delivery of up to 2 million meals daily."

Navy officials, who spoke Wednesday on the condition of anonymity, said 260 sailors and the USNS 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo and USNS 1st Lt. Baldomero Lopez would be involved in the operation. The Bobo and Lopez are repositioning sealift ships, according to the Navy.

It was not clear when the sail-

ors and ships would be deployed, but officials said the Navy would support the 60-day window.

According to U.S. Central Command, which oversees operations in the Middle East, 14 humanitarian assistance drops alongside its partners from the Jordanian military have delivered more than 250,000 meals, over 110,000 bottles of water and 17,000 pounds of other food items since March 2.

President Joe Biden ordered construction of the temporary port, announcing it March 7 during his State of the Union speech. He and Pentagon officials have said no U.S. troops would enter Gaza at any time

during the building of the port or to deliver aid. Ryder said almost two weeks ago that the Pentagon was working with international partners to ensure security of the operation, including to U.S. troops working on the port. Combat operations have spanned most of Gaza since Israel launched a war on Hamas militants in response to the Palestinian group's surprise assault on Israelis on Oct. 7.

The U.N. said the roughly 2.3 million people in Gaza now face near-famine conditions since the fighting began.

adams.matthew@stripes.com  
@MatthewAdams60

## Above: 'It's a little bit, but we do what we can,' commander says

## FROM PAGE 1

through drone feeds and evaluated for problems with the landing, military officials said.

The U.S. mission Wednesday came amid parallel airdrop missions by Jordan, Egypt, Germany and Singapore. More countries are expected to contribute in the coming weeks.

On the American C-130 were 16 pallets carrying Jordanian-supplied rice, flour, milk, pasta and canned foods. The pallets were topped by Jordanian parachutes, which are designed for people, but can slow the pallets enough to prevent injuries to people on the ground.

Other American aid missions to Gaza have used C-17 Globemaster IIIs, which can carry more weight, flying out of Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. These flights drop pallets of American military rations and water bottles.

The airdrops are "woefully insufficient" but better than nothing, said Alex Plitsas, a senior fellow with the Washington-based

Atlantic Council.

But until the U.S. readies a temporary pier that could provide as many as 2 million meals a day, "air drops are a way of showing you're doing something," said Plitsas, an Army veteran, during a phone interview Wednesday.

Asked about whether these pallets of aid might inadvertently benefit Hamas and other terrorist groups, U.S. officials said they hope the supplies find their way to the civilians desperately short of food after months of intense ground combat.

Anderson, the airborne mission commander for Wednesday's airdrop, said the areas where these pallets land can't be called drop zones, because that implies that there are trusted personnel on the ground to receive them.

But he said air crews use electro-optic infrared sensors to make sure there are no people where the bundles are supposed to land.

Over Gaza, the back door of the plane opened. As the aircraft slowed to about 160 mph, the bundles rolled out of the back of the plane. All the parachute canopies opened and loose pieces of cardboard scattered into the sky like confetti.

The door remained open as airmen looked out over the city, the aid bundles with their parachutes appearing smaller and smaller as they drifted downward.

"Honestly, it's a little bit, but we do what we can," Anderson said. "We'll continue to maximize what's in our control, and what's in our control is airdropping."

lawrence.jp@stripes.com  
@jplawrence3



OHAD ZWIGENBERG/AP

Israeli soldiers move in a tank near the Israeli-Gaza border, as seen from southern Israel, on Thursday.

## Israeli official says forces will invade southern Gaza no matter what US says

By ETHAN BRONNER  
*Bloomberg News*

A top Israeli official said his country's military is ultimately going to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah and defeat Hamas "even if the entire world turns on Israel, including the United States."

"We are going to go in and finish this job, and anybody who doesn't understand that doesn't understand that the existential nerve of the Jews was touched" by the Oct. 7 attack when Hamas operatives killed 1,200 and abducted 250, Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer said on a U.S. podcast posted online Thursday.

A close confidant of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Dermer is headed to Washington early next week to listen to concerns from the Biden administration that such an invasion would cause many more civilian casualties at a

time when famine and disease are spreading in Gaza.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in the region pushing for a deal between Israel and Hamas that would lead to a six-week cease-fire and an exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners along with a big increase in humanitarian aid to the more than 2 million Palestinians in the coastal strip.

The Associated Press reported Blinken said the "gaps are narrowing" in indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas over another cease-fire and hostage release that the U.S., Egypt and Qatar have spent weeks trying to broker.

Blinken's sixth visit to the region since the start of the Israel-Hamas war began in Saudi Arabia before going to Egypt on Thursday with a stop in Israel planned for Friday. In an interview Wednesday with the Al-Hadath network in Saudi

Arabia, Blinken said the mediators worked with Israel to put a "strong proposal" on the table. He said Hamas rejected it, but came back with other demands that the mediators are working on, according to AP.

Israel went to war in Gaza right after the Hamas attack and has killed more than 31,000, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between fighters and civilians.

Dermer said the U.S. hasn't categorically rejected any Israeli military operation in Rafah.

"They said without a credible way of moving a mass of people out of Rafah and surging humanitarian assistance to them they don't see how this can be done effectively," he said. "And we are saying we agree with you that we have to move the people out, we agree we have to get humanitarian assistance to them, and we believe we can do it."



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

An airman on a U.S. Air Force C-130 cargo plane looks at northern Gaza on Wednesday after a humanitarian mission.

## MILITARY

## GAO: Army effort to expedite delayed new Stryker

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army's efforts to accelerate an upgrade of its Stryker combat vehicle — which the service says is needed to meet challenges posed by Russia and China — delayed its final rollout by at least a year, a government watchdog agency says.

Development of the latest Stryker variant, known as the Medium Caliber Weapon System, was plagued with software and hardware problems in 2022, according to a Government Accountability Office report released Wednesday.

Those problems could have been mitigated if the Army had obtained more information from manufacturer Oshkosh Defense before authorizing production to start in March of that year, a GAO audit found.

"The Army authorized the start of production prior to gathering sufficient knowledge of key production steps for a fully informed decision," the audit said.



DEVIN KLECAN/U.S. Army

**A 2nd Cavalry Regiment Stryker maneuvers in Krivolak Training Area, North Macedonia, in December. The Army's efforts to accelerate an upgrade of the Stryker delayed the final rollout of the new model by at least a year, according to Government Accountability Office findings.**

According to program officials, the green light was given so that the Army could provide soldiers with the MCWS as soon as possible at a cheaper cost.

But the ensuing complications

mean it now won't be possible to have an all-MCWS brigade until the first quarter of fiscal year 2025 at the earliest, a year longer than was planned originally, the GAO said.

The Stryker is an eight-wheeled armored vehicle that transports infantry into combat and then supports them on the battlefield. Two dozen Stryker variants exist. The MCWS model includes an uncrewed, turreted, 30 mm automatic cannon.

After the drawdown of U.S. Army armored combat vehicles from Europe in 2013, the Army reassessed threats in the region and determined its Stryker brigades did not have sufficient firepower compared with potential adversaries.

The MCWS variant is one of the Army's latest modernization efforts to increase the firepower of its Stryker Family of Vehicles Program, which the Army believes will help deter Russian aggression among other things, the GAO said.

The Army used best practices when designing the MCWS, according to the audit, which says the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Germany was used to field-test dozens of modified Strykers and provide feedback.

However, the Army did not use best acquisition practices, the

GAO said.

The service early on identified some "technical risks" with Oshkosh Defense's MCWS samples, stemming from software problems. Nevertheless, the Army placed a delivery for 269 vehicles, believing the glitches would be worked out.

In addition to lingering software problems, Army testing found safety hazards and issues with the ability to rotate the turret fully.

The challenges led to a halt in production in early 2023, after the Army already had accepted 19 vehicles, some of which were late and had missing or damaged parts.

The GAO's audit recommended the Army apply acquisition leading practices before beginning production of future Stryker upgrades. The Army concurred.

The estimated life-cycle costs for the 269 MCWS vehicles was said to be about \$1.1 billion. The acquisition cost was estimated at \$880 million.

wellman.phillip@stripes.com  
@pwwellman

## Chairman criticizes Austin for DOD no-show at House hearing on TAP

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Saying he was "sick and tired of getting lip service from the Department of Defense about our veterans," Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Minn., lashed out at Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin after no Pentagon officials showed up to testify at a House hearing Wednesday about changes proposed for the transition assistance program, called TAP, that is mandated for exiting military members.

"You have over 2 million service men and women that are underneath your purview, and you could not send one person here to show these veterans that you actually care about them — and that you actually care about the active-duty service men and women," said Van Orden, who chairs the House Veterans Affairs subcommittee on economic opportunity.

The panel heard testimony Wednesday about reforms proposed for the program operated by the Defense Department. TAP provides service members with information about jobs, education and benefits in their final months of military duty.

Van Orden at the start of the hearing noted the absence of representatives from the Defense Department without full explanation, noting that the department "declined" to send a representative.

He expressed anger and frustration later about lawmakers' inability

to receive feedback from the Defense Department on proposed changes the committee is considering for a military-to-civilian transition program that it operates.

Under the TAP Reform Act, military members would be provided with one-on-one counselors who would help guide them through the resources available to them.

Van Orden, a retired Navy SEAL, said that the TAP program in its current format often fails to address the needs of service members entering civilian life.

He said that veterans are at the greatest risk of dying by suicide in their first 12 to 24 months of leaving military service. "We are not equipping them well enough before they leave the military," he said.

Van Orden also suggested that there may be a perception by defense officials that improving TAP could compel service members to end military service sooner for opportunities in civilian life.

"Providing a good transition and off-ramp to the civilian community does not encourage people to get out of the military earlier," Van Orden said in closing statements at a subcommittee hearing that looked at proposed reforms, along with several other pieces of legislation to benefit veterans.

"Knock it off and show up, Mr. Secretary," Van Orden said, turning to Rep. Mike Levin, D-Calif., ranking member of the committee, for his agreement.

"The ranking member and I would like to extend a formal invitation to the secretary of defense to take one of those chairs and explain to us why he apparently doesn't care enough about the transition assistance program to send at least one of his subordinates," Van Orden said.

Levin echoed the concerns. "I share the chairman's frustration that we haven't gotten the time and attention of DOD on TAP, and I've been at this now for five years," Levin said. "We keep at it, though, and we just have to continue to collectively request their participation."

Asked why the Defense Department did not send a representative, a spokeswoman said after the hearing that the query was being looked into and a response would be forwarded.

Veterans advocates who testified largely supported the changes in the bill but said that commanders often need encouragement to emphasize attendance.

Marquis Barefield, assistant national legislative director at the Disabled American Veterans, said he hears from members that they need a more thorough explanation of benefits, including for education, and more guidance about how to best to use them.

"As it is now, the TAP program does not give enough time for those full discussions," he said.

hersey.linda@stripes.com

## 'Marine's Marine' Gray, was 29th commandant, dies at 95

BY MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

Gen. Al Gray, the 29th commandant of the Marine Corps, died Wednesday at his home in Alexandria, Va., after a brief stay in hospice care, the service announced.

"He was a 'Marine's Marine' — a giant who walked among us during his career and after, remaining one



Gray

of the Corps' dearest friends and advocates even into his twilight," said Gen. Eric M. Smith, the current commandant of the service. "Although he will be missed by all, his legacy will endure and his spirit will continue to live among us."

Gray, from Point Pleasant Beach, N.J., enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950 and commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1952, according to his official biography. He served a tour as an artillery officer with the 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, and a subsequent tour as an infantry officer with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.

Gray served for nearly three years in Vietnam before returning to Washington for duty in February 1968. Then-Maj. Gray received the Silver Star Medal for his actions on May 14, 1967, for rushing into a minefield to save an injured Marine, guiding medical attention to the Marine and administering first aid, according to his citation.

Gray was promoted to general and became commandant on July 1, 1987, and retired from the service on June 30, 1991. The general oversaw significant changes to the Marine Corps during his time, including the development and publication of Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, also known as "Warfighting."

"This document, barely over 100 pages, has become legendary among military doctrine and remains the foundation for how the Marine Corps thinks about, prepares for and executes all Marine Corps operations," the service said in a statement.

Gray also placed emphasis on large-scale operations in desert and cold-weather environments, as well as robust maritime special operations capabilities. His staunch advocacy for military education resulted in the establishment of Marine Corps University in August 1989 while he was commandant.

He was well known for being the first commandant to have his official photograph and portrait taken in the camouflage utility uniform, famously remarking that "every Marine is, first and foremost, a rifleman. All other conditions are secondary."

Flags will be flown at half-staff at all Marine Corps installations until April 18. The 29-day period will honor the 29th commandant, the service said.

adams.matthew@stripes.com  
@MatthewAdams60



## NATION



JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

President Joe Biden listens to Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger, left, as Intel factory manager Hugh Green and Intel manufacturing technician Michelle Blackwell listen, during a tour of the Intel Ocotillo Campus, in Chandler, Ariz., on Wednesday.

## Biden touts investment in chipmaker Intel

BY SEUNG MIN KIM AND JOSH BOAK  
Associated Press

CHANDLER, Ariz. — President Joe Biden on Wednesday celebrated an agreement to provide Intel with up to \$8.5 billion in direct funding and \$11 billion in loans for computer chip plants around the country, talking up the investment in the political battleground state of Arizona and calling it a way of “bringing the future back to America.”

The Biden administration has predicted that the cash infusion should help the U.S. boost its global share of advanced chip production from zero to 20%. The Democratic president highlighted the investment while visiting Intel’s Ocotillo campus in Chandler, Ariz., where he inspected silicon wafers and expressed amazement at how thin the chips are.

In remarks after a tour, Biden pivoted to the impact his policies could have on the U.S. economy as he tries to translate his policy wins into a political boost ahead of November’s election. Intel plans to invest in facilities in Arizona, Ohio, Oregon and New Mexico, with some of the government money helping to support workforce development.

“This isn’t just about investing in America,” Biden said, “It’s about investing in the American people as well.”

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said the deal reached through her department would put the United States in a position to produce 20% of the world’s most ad-

vanced chips by 2030, up from zero. The U.S. designs advanced chips, but its inability to make them domestically has emerged as a national security and economic risk.

“Failure is not an option — leading-edge chips are the core of our innovation system, especially when it comes to advances in artificial intelligence and our military systems,” Raimondo said on a call with reporters. “We can’t just design chips. We have to make them in America.”

The funding announcement came amid the heat of the 2024 presidential campaign. Biden has been telling voters that his policies have led to a resurgence in U.S. manufacturing and job growth. His message is a direct challenge to former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, who raised tariffs while in the White House and wants to do so again on the promise of protecting U.S. factory jobs from China.

Biden told Intel employees during his tour, “You’re bringing the future back to America.”

Biden narrowly beat Trump in Arizona in 2020 by a margin of 49.4% to 49.1%.

U.S. adults have dim views of Biden’s economic leadership, with just 34% approving, according to a February poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs. The lingering impact of inflation hitting a four-decade high in 2022 has hurt the Democrat, who had a 52% approval on the economy in July 2021.

# Congress’ \$1.2T plan would avert shutdown and end budget fight

BY KEVIN FREKING  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers introduced a \$1.2 trillion spending package Thursday that sets the stage for avoiding a partial government shutdown for several key federal agencies this weekend and allows Congress, nearly six months into the budget year, to complete its work in funding the government through September.

Democrats were largely able to swat back hundreds of policy mandates and some of the steeper budget cuts that House Republicans were seeking to impose on nondefense programs, though House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., highlighted some policy wins, including a nearly 24% increase in detention beds for migrants awaiting their immigration proceedings or removal from the country.

This year’s spending bills were divided into two packages. The first one cleared Congress two weeks ago, just hours before a shutdown deadline for the agencies funded through the bills. Now Congress is focused on the second, larger package, which includes about \$886 billion for the Defense Department, about a 3% increase from last year’s levels. The 1,012-page bill also funds the departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Labor, and others.

Nondefense spending will be relatively flat compared with the prior year, though some, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, are taking a hit, and many agencies will not see their budgets keep up with inflation.

When combining the two packages, discretionary spending for the budget year will come to about \$1.66 trillion. That does not include programs such as Social Security and Medicare, and financing the country’s rising debt.

The House is expected to take the measure up first, on Friday. Then it would move to the Senate where senators would have to agree on taking it up expeditiously to avoid a partial shutdown. Usually, such agreements include votes on proposed amendments to the bill.

Johnson promoted the bill as a serious commitment to strengthening national defense by moving the Pentagon toward a focus on its core mission while expanding support for those serving in the military. The bill provides for a 5.2% pay increase for service members.

One of the changes Johnson cited for Repu-

blicans was prohibiting funding through March 2025 for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, which is the main supplier of food, water and shelter to civilians in Gaza.

Republicans are insisting on cutting off funding to the agency after Israel alleged that a dozen employees of the agency were involved in the attack that Hamas conducted in Israel on Oct. 7.

But the prohibition does concern some lawmakers because many relief agencies say there is no way to replace its ability to deliver the humanitarian assistance that the United States and others are trying to send to Gaza, where one-quarter of the 2.3 million residents are starving.

Democrats also emphasized that humanitarian assistance will increase overall, though.

Sen. Patty Murray, the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, also highlighted a \$1 billion increase for Head Start programs and new child care centers for military families. And Democrats played up a \$120 million increase in funding for cancer research and a \$100 million increase for Alzheimer’s research.

“We defeated outlandish cuts that would have been a gut punch for American families and our economy,” said Murray, D-Wash.

Among the few policy provisions that House Republicans did secure was a requirement that only allows for the American flag and “other official flags” to fly over U.S. diplomatic facilities. Under the Biden administration, U.S. embassies have been invited to fly the pride flag or light up with rainbow colors in support of the LGBTQ+ community.

There is also a provision that prevents the Consumer Product Safety Commission from banning gas stoves. But the White House has said President Joe Biden would not support a ban, and the commission, an independent agency, says no such ban was in the works.

The spending in the bill largely tracks with an agreement that former Speaker Kevin McCarthy worked out with the White House in May 2023, which restricted spending for two years and suspended the debt ceiling into January 2025 so the federal government could continue paying its bills.

McCarthy, R-Calif., was ousted from the speaker’s role a few months after securing the debt ceiling deal.

## Georgia judge allows Trump to appeal Willis disqualification decision

BY DAVE GOLDINER  
New York Daily News

A Georgia judge on Wednesday gave former President Donald Trump the green light to appeal his decision allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to remain in charge of his RICO election interference case.

Judge Scott McAfee told Trump and several co-defendants they can ask a higher court to consider their demand to disqualify Willis from the case over her affair with top lieutenant Nathan Wade.

Despite handing a win to Trump, the judge said he would not halt proceedings in the case while the appeal process goes forward.

“The court intends to continue to address the many other pretrial motions, regardless of whether the petition is granted,” McAfee wrote in the brief order.

Trump and his co-defendants can now seek to convince the Georgia court of appeals that McAfee erred in permitting Willis to stay on the case if Wade stepped down.

The judge issued a harshly worded deci-

sion last week that criticized Willis and Wade for their affair but rejected the allegation that their affair amounted to an impermissible financial conflict of interest.

Wade resigned from the blockbuster case last Friday, leaving Willis to lead the sprawling prosecution of Trump for trying to overturn his 2020 loss to President Joe Biden.

The Georgia probe was launched when Trump infamously called Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to demand he somehow “find” just enough votes to overturn Bi-

den’s win in the Peach State.

An Atlanta special grand jury heard months of evidence that the call was part of a plot to steal the election culminating with the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The side-issue over Willis’ missteps has already delayed the case against Trump for months. No trial date has been set and there are no guarantees it would take place before the presidential election in which Trump and Biden face off in a cataclysmic rematch.

## NATION

# Pair at large after Idaho hospital ambush

BY GENE JOHNSON  
AND MARK THIESSEN  
Associated Press

Authorities are searching for a white supremacist Idaho prison inmate and an accomplice who fled after the accomplice shot and wounded corrections officers as they were transporting the inmate from a Boise hospital, according to police.

Police said Nicholas Umphenour is suspected of shooting two corrections officers during Wednesday's ambush in the ambulance bay at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center. A warrant with a \$2 million bond has been issued for his arrest on two charges of aggravated battery against law enforcement and one charge of aiding and abetting an escape, police said.

He and inmate Skylar Meade drove off early Wednesday after the shooting in a gray 2020 Honda Civic with Idaho plates. It's not known where they are or where they are headed, police said Wednesday evening.

Three corrections officers were shot and wounded during the at-



Umphenour



Meade

tack — two allegedly by Umphenour and one by responding police.

Officials described Meade, 31, as a white supremacist gang member. Meade was sentenced to 20 years in 2017 for shooting at a sheriff's sergeant during a high-speed chase.

The attack occurred at 2:15 a.m. as Idaho Department of Correction officers prepared to bring Meade back to prison. Department Director Josh Tewalt said during a news conference Wednesday afternoon that Meade was taken to the hospital at 9:35 p.m. Tuesday after he engaged in "self-injurious behavior" and medical staff determined he needed emergency care.

One officer shot by the suspect was in critical but stable condition, police said, while the second



SARAH A. MILLER, IDAHO STATESMAN/AP

**Three Idaho corrections officers were shot at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise, Idaho, on Wednesday.**

wounded officer had serious but non-life-threatening injuries. The third injured corrections officer also sustained non-life-threatening injuries when a responding officer — incorrectly believing the shooter was still in the emergency room and seeing an armed person near the entrance — opened fire.

"This brazen, violent, and apparently coordinated attack on Idaho Department of Corrections personnel, to facilitate an escape of a dangerous inmate, was carried out right in front of the Emergency Department, where people come

for medical help, often in the direst circumstances," Boise Police Chief Ron Winegar said in a written statement.

Umphenour, 5-foot-11 and 160 pounds, has brown hair and hazel eyes, police said. Detectives have confirmed that he is an associate of Meade, police said. Attempts by The Associated Press to reach Umphenour through social media were unsuccessful.

Meade, 5-foot-6 and 150 pounds, has face tattoos with the numbers 1 and 11 — for A and K, the first and 11th letters of the alphabet, repre-

senting the Aryan Knights gang he affiliated with, Tewalt said. Photos released by police also showed an A and K tattooed on his abdomen.

The Aryan Knights formed in the mid-1990s in the Idaho prison system to organize criminal activity for a select group of white people in custody, according to the U.S. attorney's office in the district of Idaho.

Meade had been held in a type of solitary confinement called administrative segregation at Idaho Maximum Security Institution in Kuna, about 12 miles south of Boise, because officials deemed him a severe security risk, Tewalt said.

Tewalt said earlier in the day that Meade had been escorted in the ambulance and at the hospital by two uniformed, unarmed officers wearing ballistic vests, tailed by armed staff. Later in the day Correction Department spokesperson Sanda Kuzeta-Cerimagic said in an email that officials had confirmed that one officer had been in the ambulance with Meade and two officers were in an escort vehicle.

## 5th former Miss. deputy gets prison for racist torture of two Black men

Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — A fifth former sheriff's deputy in Mississippi was sentenced Thursday to more than 27 years in prison for breaking into a home with a group of law enforcement officers as they tortured two Black men, an act the judge called "egregious and despicable."

Former deputy Brett McAlpin, 53, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Tom Lee after pleading guilty to the attack, which involved beatings, repeated uses of stun guns and assaults with a sex toy before one of the victims was shot in the mouth. The sixth and final member of the group, 32-year-old former Richland police officer Joshua Hartfield was set to be sentenced Thursday afternoon.

The judge sentenced Christian Dedmon, 29, to 40 years and Daniel Opdyke, 28, to 17.5 years on Wednesday. He gave nearly 20 years to Hunter Elward, 31, and 17.5 years to Jeffrey Middleton, 46, on Tuesday. All but Hartfield served with the Rankin County Sheriff's Department outside Mississippi's capital city, where some called themselves "The Goon Squad."

In March 2023, months before federal prosecutors announced charges in August, an investigation by The Associated Press linked some of the deputies to at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries.

The officers invented false charges against the victims, planting a gun and illegal drugs at the scene of their crime, and stuck to their cover story for months until finally admitting that they tortured Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker. Elward admitted to shoving a gun into Jenkins' mouth and firing it in what federal prosecutors said was meant to be a "mock execution."

For each of the deputies sentenced so far, Lee has handed down prison terms near the top of the sentencing guidelines.

The terror began Jan. 24, 2023, with a racist call for



ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP

**From top left, former Rankin County sheriff's deputies Hunter Elward, Christian Dedmon, Brett McAlpin, Jeffrey Middleton, Daniel Opdyke and former Richland police officer Joshua Hartfield.**

extrajudicial violence when a white person in Rankin County complained to McAlpin that two Black men were staying with a white woman at a house in Braxton. McAlpin told Dedmon, who texted a group of white deputies asking if they were "available for a mission."

"No bad mugshots," Dedmon texted — a green light, according to prosecutors, to use excessive force on parts of the body that wouldn't appear in a booking photo.

Dedmon also brought Hartfield, who was instructed to cover the back door of the property during their illegal entry.

Once inside, the officers mocked the victims with racial slurs and shocked them with stun guns. They handcuffed them and poured milk, alcohol and chocolate syrup over their faces. Dedmon and Opdyke assaulted them with a sex toy. They forced them to strip naked and shower together to conceal the mess, and Hartfield guarded the bathroom door to make sure the men didn't escape.

## Federal Reserve signals 3 rate cuts are still likely

BY STEVE MATTHEWS  
Bloomberg News

Federal Reserve officials maintained their outlook for three interest-rate cuts this year and moved toward slowing the pace of reducing their bond holdings, suggesting they aren't alarmed by a recent uptick in inflation.

Officials decided unanimously to leave the benchmark federal funds rate in a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, the highest since 2001, for a fifth straight meeting. Policymakers signaled they remain on track to cut rates this year for the first time since March 2020, but they now see just three reductions in 2025, down from four forecast in December, based on the median projection.

Chair Jerome Powell, speaking to reporters after the Fed's decision Wednesday, demurred when asked whether officials would lower rates at their coming meetings in May or June, repeating that the first reduction would likely be "at some point this year."

He largely shrugged off recent data showing an uptick in inflation in recent months, saying, "It is still likely in most people's view that we will achieve that confidence and there will be rate cuts."

At the same time, he said the data supported the Fed's cautious approach to the first rate cut, and added that policymakers are still looking for more evidence that inflation is headed toward their 2%

goal.

Powell also said it would be appropriate to slow the pace of the Fed's balance-sheet unwind "fairly soon," after policymakers held a discussion on their asset portfolio this week.

"The decision to slow the pace of runoff does not mean our balance sheet will shrink, but allows us to approach that ultimate level more gradually," he said. "In particular, slowing the pace of runoff will help ensure a smooth transition, reducing the possibility of money markets experiencing stress."

The S&P 500 index of U.S. stocks rose, while Treasury yields and the Bloomberg Dollar index fell. Traders boosted the probability that the Fed would begin rate cuts in June.

The Fed's post-meeting statement was nearly identical to January's, maintaining the guidance that rate cuts won't be appropriate until officials have more confidence inflation is moving sustainably toward their 2% target.

The Federal Open Market Committee also reiterated its intention to continue reducing its balance sheet by as much as \$95 billion per month. Some officials, including Dallas Fed President Lorie Logan, have called for an eventual slowing of the pace at which the Fed is shrinking its portfolio of assets.

## NATION

# GOP states mimic Texas on border arrests law

By JONATHAN MATTISE  
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Republican lawmakers across the country were already jockeying to push their states deeper into immigration enforcement when the Supreme Court, if only briefly, let Texas enforce a new law giving police broad powers to arrest migrants suspected of crossing the border illegally.

Within hours Tuesday, another court blocked the Texas law again. The same day, Iowa passed a similar bill.

In New Hampshire, lawmakers are nearing passage of legislation to let police bring trespassing charges against people suspected of illegally entering the U.S. from Canada.

Georgia Republicans have advanced a proposal requiring eligible cities and counties to seek agreements to perform some immigration-related enforcement in jails to help the federal government after

police accused a Venezuelan man of beating nursing student Laken Riley to death on the University of Georgia campus. Immigration authorities say the man unlawfully crossed into the U.S. in 2022. It is unclear whether he had applied for asylum.

On Wednesday, the state Senate honored Riley's family. During the ceremony, her father, Jason Riley, blamed immigrant-protecting sanctuary policies in Athens, where University of Georgia is located, for his daughter's death and urged Gov. Brian Kemp to declare an "invasion," Texas' argument to defend a series of escalating measures along the border. Last month, a federal judge in Texas rejected those claims while blocking the state's new arrest law.

"A man with an evil heart stole her life. He was in this country and in this state illegally," Jason Riley said. "My vision for every senator in

this chamber is that you protect citizens from this illegal invasion."

Meanwhile, it's yet to be seen what Republican-led states, many of which are pushing different bills and sending their National Guard members to the border, will embrace the Texas-style bill, particularly if another court ruling favors the policy. Oklahoma isn't waiting to test the waters — GOP House and Senate leaders embraced the idea of a Texas-style anti-immigration law, with House Speaker Charles McCall announcing plans Wednesday to immediately introduce a similar measure.

The Biden administration is suing to block the Texas measure, arguing it's a clear violation of federal authority that would cause chaos in immigration law and wreak havoc on international relations.

Tennessee lawmakers are approaching the finish line on a proposal to require law enforcement

agencies there to communicate with federal immigration authorities if they discover people are in the country illegally. For the brief time Texas had the all-clear to enforce its law Tuesday, the Tennessee House and Senate speakers expressed openness to considering a similar policy.

"We are monitoring the Texas situation as Gov. [Greg] Abbott works to protect his state," House Speaker Cameron Sexton said.

Under Iowa's bill, entering the state after previously being denied entry to the U.S. would become an aggravated misdemeanor, or a felony under some circumstances, including during an arrest for a different felony.

"The federal government has abdicated its responsibilities and states can and must act," Republican Rep. Steven Holt said.

Democratic Rep. Sami Scheetz argued immigration was constitu-

tionally reserved for the federal government.

"Illegal immigration is a serious problem that requires action, yet the approach laid out in this bill misses the heart of what it truly means to address this issue with compassion, wisdom and effectiveness," Scheetz said.

The bill awaiting Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds' signature would take effect July 1.

Immigrants were holding an advocacy day Tuesday at Tennessee's Capitol when the Supreme Court temporary ruling came down, shocking the group. Lisa Sherman Luna, the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition's executive director, said the Texas law sets a "horrifying precedent" for communities and the country.

"How 'united' will our states be when they each have different laws on who can call them home?" Luna said.

## Boeing sees massive cash drain as 737 Max episode takes toll

By JULIE JOHNSON  
Bloomberg News

Boeing predicted a massive cash drain for the first quarter as regulatory scrutiny and slower output of its 737 Max jetliner following a January midair accident take their toll on its finances.

Cash outflow will reach \$4 billion to \$4.5 billion in the first quarter, Boeing Chief Financial Officer Brian West told a Bank of America conference in London on Wednesday. For the full year, free cash flow will be in the low-single-digit billions of dollars, West said. Analysts expected \$5 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The outlook reflects a shift in priorities at Boeing as it grapples with the aftermath of a near-catastrophic fuselage failure on a 737 Max 9 air-



SAMUEL CORUM/Bloomberg News

**Dave Calhoun is chief executive officer of Boeing. The company's CFO on Wednesday predicted a massive cash drain for the first quarter.**

craft early this year. The company has slowed jet deliveries as it pours resources into eradicating so-called traveled work from across its com-

mercial product lines, West said. The out-of-sequence installation of parts is at the heart of a quality breakdown that has spurred a pain-

staking review of its manufacturing by U.S. regulators.

"We're not at the moment where we can manage the near term for these financial outcomes because of the work at hand around stability," West said. "Our expectation is that we'll get more predictable and better positioned, but it will take time."

Regulators have capped production of the 737, Boeing's largest source of cash, until they're satisfied Boeing has a firm grasp over the quality of work in its production system. West said production rates will be lower in the first half and the rise again in the latter part of the year toward 38 737 Max units a month. Anything beyond that "will be up to the FAA," West said, referring to the Federal Aviation Administration.

FAA Administrator Michael Whi-

taker told NBC News on Tuesday that he walked away from a recent visit to the manufacturer's Seattle-area industrial base concerned that the emphasis on boosting production rates had eroded Boeing's safety culture.

Given the uncertainty around the FAA's actions on the 737, analyst Robert Stallard of Vertical Research Partners suggested that Boeing should ditch its pre-crisis goal of generating \$10 billion in cash by 2025 or 2026 until it has made more progress on sorting out its problems.

"The first step towards fixing a problem is acknowledging that it exists," Stallard told clients. "Boeing's cut to its free cash flow guidance is an overdue recognition of the situation it is in, but we still worry that it is being overly optimistic."

## US pilot intoxicated pre-flight jailed in Scotland

By ANDREW JEONG  
The Washington Post

A Delta Air Lines pilot who reported to work with a blood alcohol level well above the aviation limit was sentenced to a 10-month jail term in Scotland, according to a court statement Tuesday.

Lawrence B. Russell Jr., 63, of the U.S. state of Georgia, was scheduled to fly a Boeing 767 from Edinburgh, Scotland, to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on June 16. But 80 minutes before take-off, security personnel found two bottles of Jägermeister — one of which "was just under half full" — in Russell's carry-on luggage. A blood test showed he had at least 49 milligrams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood.

The legal limit in Scotland is 20 milligrams for pilots and 50 milligrams for those driving cars, according to the Edinburgh Sheriff Court, which imposed the sentence. In the U.S., pilots are not authorized to fly with a blood alcohol level of 0.04 or higher. Federal rules say pilots cannot have consumed alcohol within eight hours of a flight.

Russell's flight was canceled and he lost his job, according to the court.

Russell has at least two previously recorded instances of driving under the influence, according to the court.

His 10-month sentence was reduced from "a headline sentence of 15 months," Sheriff Alison Stirling said. She said she took into account Russell's "personal mitigation" and his decision to plead "guilty at the earliest opportunity."

After the incident, Russell "successfully completed" a recovery program at a rehabilitation center. He was diagnosed with severe alcohol use disorder but is now in remission, Stirling added, noting that Russell had expressed remorse and had the support of his family.

In the United States, pilots cannot apply for a Federal Aviation Administration certificate or license for up to one year after a final conviction.

Delta, which did not comment on whether it would rehire Russell, said in an emailed statement that it had "removed the pilot from service while conducting a thorough investigation in coordination with Scottish authorities." It added that Russell is not "currently employed by Delta."

Russell and his lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

### Are you in the picture?

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

*No one covers the bases the way we do.*

STARS AND STRIPES®

In print • Online at [stripes.com](http://stripes.com) • Mobile for Android, iPhone & iPad

# WORLD

## Gangs target peaceful areas in Haiti capital

By **PIERRE-RICHARD LUXAMA**

*Associated Press*

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Armed gangs launched new attacks in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince on Wednesday, with heavy gunfire echoing across once-peaceful communities near the Haitian capital.

Associated Press journalists reported seeing at least five bodies in and around the suburbs, and gangs blocked the entrances to some areas.

People in the communities under fire called radio stations pleading for help from Haiti's national police force, which remains understaffed and outmatched by the gangs. Among the communities targeted in the pre-dawn hours were Pétion-Ville, Meyotte, Diègue and Métivier.

"When I woke up to go to work, I found I could not leave because the neighborhood was in the hand of the bandits," said Samuel Orelus. "They were about 30 men with heavy weapons. If the neighborhood had mobilized, we could have destroyed them, but they were heavily armed, and there was nothing we could do."

By Wednesday afternoon, another victim had been reported: a

police officer killed in broad daylight in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood known as Delmas 72, according to the SYNAPPOHA police union.

As the attacks continued, the U.S. State Department announced Wednesday that it had completed its first evacuation of American citizens from Port-au-Prince. Over 15 Americans were airlifted to neighboring Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

More than 30 U.S. citizens will be able to leave Port-au-Prince daily aboard the U.S. government-organized helicopter flights, the agency said.

"We will continue to monitor demand from U.S. citizens for assistance in departing Haiti on a real-time basis," the department said.

On Sunday, the agency evacuated more than 30 U.S. citizens from the coastal city of Cap-Haitien in northern Haiti to Miami International Airport.

"We hope that conditions will allow a return of commercial means for people to travel from Haiti soon. We and the international community and the Haitian authorities are working for that to become a reality," the State Department said.

## Russia's space agency aborts launch of 3 astronauts to ISS

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russia aborted the launch of three astronauts to the International Space Station moments before they were scheduled to lift off Thursday, but the crew was safe, officials said.

The Russian Soyuz rocket was to carry NASA astronaut Tracy Dyson, Oleg Novitsky of Roscosmos and Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus from the Russian-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan.

The launch was aborted by an automatic safety system about 20 seconds before the scheduled lift-off. Russia's Roscosmos space corporation and NASA said the crew was safe, and Roscosmos

chief Yuri Borisov said the next launch attempt is set for Saturday.

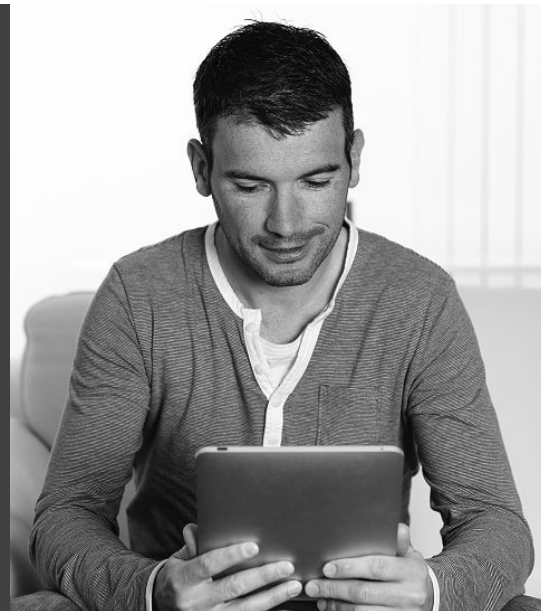
Borisov told reporters that experts quickly pinpointed the cause of the launch abort, saying it was triggered by a voltage drop in a power source

The three astronauts were to join the station's crew consisting of NASA astronauts Loral O'Hara, Matthew Dominick, Mike Barratt, and Jeanette Epps, as well as Roscosmos cosmonauts Oleg Kononenko, Nikolai Chub, and Alexander Grebenkin.

Russia has continued to rely on modified versions of Soviet-designed rockets for commercial satellites, as well as crews and cargo to the space station.

# Mobile

Mobile apps with constantly updating news, featuring breaking news and stories from reporters at overseas bases. Unique galleries of images available nowhere else presented in an uncluttered interface and a responsive, intuitive design. One iOS app serves both phone and tablet devices.



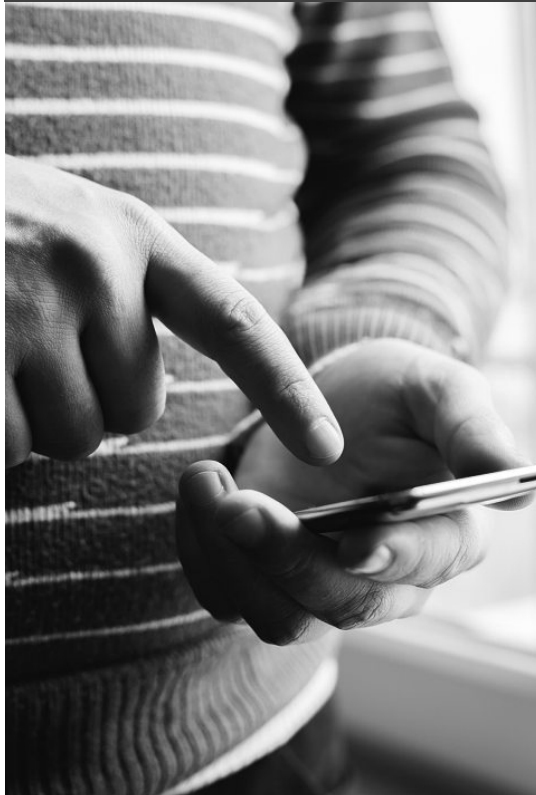
# Newspaper

In print, we serve military stationed overseas in contingency areas, Europe and Pacific. Daily editions focus on military news and include sports, comics and opinion. Available by mail delivery to any U.S. address.



# Web

Discover unique stories from reporters at bases around the world and embedded with downrange forces at Stripes.com, along with military news from every part of the country and photo galleries you'll see nowhere else. DoDDs sports also gets good coverage online. If it concerns our U.S. forces, you'll find it on our website.



# STARS AND STRIPES

UNBIASED NEWS WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT IT.

## HAVE YOU BEEN INJURED?

- Representing All Injured Contractors
- Know And Protect Your Legal Rights
- Defense Base Act Attorneys

**FREE**  
CONSULTATION

**888.732.3991**  
[injuredoverseas.com](http://injuredoverseas.com)  
[mail@barnettandlerner.com](mailto:mail@barnettandlerner.com)

**BARNETT LERNER**  
KARSEN, FRANKEL & CASTRO, P.A.  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

## TELEVISION

# Digging deeper into the details

‘Manhunt,’ about search for Lincoln killer Booth, retells events in our country’s past and how they still reverberate

By ALICIA RANCILIO  
Associated Press

A new series transforms the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln into a true crime thriller that goes deeper into the story than most textbooks.

Most who studied Lincoln in school learn he was assassinated by a man named John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln was watching a play with his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, at Ford’s Theatre when Booth came from behind and shot him.

What isn’t as widely remembered is that Booth killed the president just five days after the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee effectively ended the Civil War. It was a pre-planned, coordinated attack on the president, Vice President Andrew Johnson and the secretary of state. Only Booth was successful.

A Confederate sympathizer, Booth relied on a network of supporters to help him hide. Edwin Stanton, the secretary of war, led the search by the Army to track Lincoln’s killer down. He was found 12 days later hiding in a barn where he was shot and killed.

“Manhunt,” which streams on Apple TV+, dramatizes the hunt for Booth and the trial that followed. It’s based on the book “Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln’s Killer” by James L. Swanson. Tobias Menzies stars as Stanton, who also helped convict Booth’s conspirators.



Beletsky

“Most no one knows the details of this story unless they’ve done a Ph.D. or it’s a special

interest of theirs,” said creator-showrunner Monica Beletsky in a recent interview.

Bringing Stanton to life is exciting, Menzies said, because he had a close, respected relationship with Lincoln.

“A big part of Stanton’s journey is both a political loss and also a personal loss. He loses a friend. ... I studied very little American history, and I certainly didn’t do this period of history,” Menzies said. “As an actor, I’ve done quite a lot of period stuff and I find it enjoyable to get the chance to find out about a new part of these stories, and this is a really good example of that.”

Anthony Boyle plays Booth, and his awareness of the man began with an episode of “The Simpsons” where Bart portrayed



PHOTOS BY APPLE TV+/AP

Lili Taylor, left, and Hamish Linklater in a scene from “Manhunt.” Linklater portrays President Abraham Lincoln in the Apple TV+ series based on the book “Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln’s Killer” by James L. Swanson.



Anthony Boyle as John Wilkes Booth

him in a school play. He knew he needed to dig deeper to understand Booth’s psyche and read letters Booth had written between the ages of 15 until his death at 26. Boyle describes them as a “descent into madness.”

Beletsky hopes “Manhunt” underscores how Lincoln’s killing was especially shocking at the time.

“That kind of murder was so uncommon,” she said. “Lincoln famously left the White House door unlocked during the Civil War, even though he had piles of death threats. It wasn’t even imagined that kind of crime could happen in our culture. My costume designer told me that Booth, wearing all black that



Tobias Menzies as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton

night, is the origin of villains wearing all black in our storytelling.”

There was a boldness and conceit to the way Booth decided to kill Lincoln so publicly in front of an audience that fit his desire for attention.

“The theater was absolutely jammed,” said Menzies, a British actor who’s starred in “The Crown” and “Outlander.” “And then to run out and disappear into the night and then take 12 days to find this man, you couldn’t make it up.”

Booth was an actor in a family of actors, but lived in the shadow of his older brother Edwin, who was well-respected for his talent.

“I’m gonna be the most famous man in the whole world,”



Lovie Simone as Mary Simms

Booth says on the show, prior to the assassination.

While on the run, he reads newspaper articles about himself and loves the attention.

“It was like, Leonardo DiCaprio’s brother killed the president,” said Hamish Linklater, who plays Lincoln. “I mean, (Edwin) was the biggest celebrity of his time.”

“This was before the internet and before television; this was word of mouth,” Boyle added. “People were hearing about it (asking), ‘John Wilkes Booth, the actor, killed the President?’ Was this some sort of farce?”

Besides telling Stanton’s story, Beletsky introduces viewers to Mary Simms, a slave belonging to a physician named Dr. Samuel Mudd (played by Matt Walsh),

who treated Booth while he was on the run. She was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. The series depicts Simms — played by Lovie Simone — as interacting with Booth when he shows up at Mudd’s house to hide, but in reality, she never met him.

Simms went on to testify in the trial of Booth’s conspirators — which included Mudd — and confirmed his allegiance to the Confederacy. Because there is not a lot of information available on Simms, she was written as a composite of a number of people who helped to convict Booth’s co-conspirators.

“It was a real opportunity to bring some of these heroes to light, like Stanton and Simms, and also to sort of set the record straight in some ways of what happened in our past and how that still continues to affect us,” Beletsky said.

“It feels like a good time to be telling this story. You know, there is a big election coming up in November. Our story is partly a story about the fragility of democracy to some extent,” Menzies said. “I think that’s as true now as it was then. It has a relevance and a resonance which feels kind of rich to be telling now.”

## HEALTH &amp; FITNESS

# Is the bidet here to stay?

Despite the end of the pandemic, the bathroom appliance continues to gain new converts, even in the United States

By RACHEL KURZIUS

*The Washington Post*

While the toilet paper shortages that hit the United States during pandemic lockdowns in the spring of 2020 ultimately eased up, they've had a lasting impact on one industry: the bidet business.

"The industry here in the U.S. just blew up. You couldn't get a bidet if you wanted to," says James Lin, founder of BidetKing.com, an online marketplace for all varieties of the bathroom appliance. "We all sold out. ... There was a huge scramble to get more."

Bidets — which clean you up with a stream of water, reducing the need for tissue — certainly weren't the only items that people waited months for during that strange time. But while many have regretted buying their Peletons or even their homes, those who installed the bathroom fixture at the height of the Great Toilet Paper Shortage of 2020 are far from remorseful. Instead, they've become true believers, evangelizing to family and friends and trying to help the United States catch up with the rest of the world on bidet use.

Rosanne Orgill, who lives outside Salt Lake City, bought three bidet attachments for her toilets in spring 2020. (Bidet attachments and bidet seats get installed directly onto existing toilets, whereas bidets are stand-alone appliances.)

Orgill's husband, who had traveled to dozens of countries before they got together, "often talked about how wonderful bidets are and ... how weird it is that America doesn't have any because there's really no other way to clean yourself," she says.

So, with the supply of toilet paper dwindling, she saw bidet advertisements and decided to take the plunge. She installed the attachments herself, which wasn't without its challenges. One of them leaked water all over the floor, and she had to call a plumber.

Even that didn't sour her on the bidet experience.

"I just love them now," Orgill says. "I just don't know how people survive without them."

Like Orgill, Ryan Deitsch felt compelled by the threat of running out of TP to think about alternatives. Growing up in Florida, he experienced the stress of toilet paper shortages during hurricane season, when his family would stockpile rolls in case they sold out. Amid the shake-up of the pandemic, he began reevaluating his life choices.

"Are the things that we're doing — is that necessarily the right way? The best way? Are there other ways?" he remembers asking himself. "People really started to rethink parts of their day-to-day. And in the case of myself and many others ... we bought bidets."

He calls himself an "absolute fan." He loves that he has cut down his toilet paper usage, which saves him money and lessens his environmental impact. He feels cleaner. And now, as a renter in New York City, an important consideration for him

when choosing an apartment is whether the bathroom setup works with his bidet attachment.

Though Sydney Cano, of Arlington, Va., bought and installed her bidet attachment during the pandemic, she views the timing as coincidental rather than causal. Even before the pandemic, she says, her Muslim friends in particular had recommended the appliance. (The Quran has specific instructions about cleanliness, and bathrooms in Muslim countries tend to have bidets of some kind.) Cano only wishes she would have listened to them sooner: She is now a die-hard bidet lover, who has since converted her then-boyfriend and her mom.

"No exaggeration, my life was literally changed," she says. "I can't live without mine now. Realistically, I will never go through the rest of my life without using mine. I have a travel one, so I'm never without it."

Despite the wave of new converts, the United States still lags far behind many other countries when it comes to bidet ownership. (Americans, meanwhile, lead the world in per capita toilet paper usage.) About eight in 10 Japanese households, for example, have toilet-bidet combos, according to a 2018 government survey. In 1975, Italy passed a law requiring every residence to have a bidet. You'll find them throughout Europe, Asia and South America.

The market stateside appears only to be expanding. While just 6% of U.S. adults already have a bidet in their home, an additional 41% are interested in owning one, according to a YouGov poll.

Lin, of BidetKing.com, has recently sold his wares to American hotels and even highway rest stops.

He says he's observed a marked difference in Americans' attitudes toward bidets, especially in the comments on his company's Facebook ads. Pre-pandemic, "there's a lot of, 'Oh, my God, this is so weird.' 'Oh, why would anyone want to do this? I'll just wipe, thank you very much.'" Now, he says, those types of remarks appear much less frequently.

It helps, he says, that bidet converts tend to be an enthusiastic bunch: "A bidet user — they can't stop talking about it with their friends. They're telling their friends about it; they're telling their family. ... Just because you can go out again doesn't mean you're just going to switch back to toilet paper. We've got you for life."

Miki Agrawal, founder and chief creative officer of bidet-attachment startup Tushy, says the company saw fivefold revenue growth during 2020 that still hasn't flattened. In fact, she says revenue has continued to increase 20% year-over-year ever since.

Agrawal sees the toilet paper shortage as the push that helped the bidet-curious finally take the leap. For years, she says, companies like hers had been laying the groundwork, making the case to the mar-

ketplace that toilet paper is less hygienic and more expensive, and can exacerbate chronic conditions like urinary tract infections and hemorrhoids.

"And then 2020 rolls around, and we had millions of people who were peering over the edge and they all jumped," she says.

In fact, so many people jumped that consumers like Josh Stutte were boxed out. He couldn't find a bidet in his online searches (a lot of sites selling them during the pandemic were new and seemed like scams), so "we were just living on rations, like the one-ply that we were getting from Safeway and wherever," he says.

Then, for Christmas 2020, his brother-in-law bought his family the perfect gift: a bidet. In the end, Stutte says, it was worth the wait: "It's just better."

Giving bidets as gifts has become a surprisingly common practice, according to Bill Strang, president of operations and e-commerce at Toto, a Japan-based manufacturer of luxury toilets and bidets.

Typically, bathroom appliance sales settle down before Thanksgiving, he says, because people don't remodel as much during the holidays. But Toto has seen the opposite trend when it comes to its bidet business.

"It doubled and tripled in some cases [around the holidays]. It was remarkable," Strang says. Consumer research told them

that people saw the product as a luxury that loved ones weren't likely to buy for themselves.

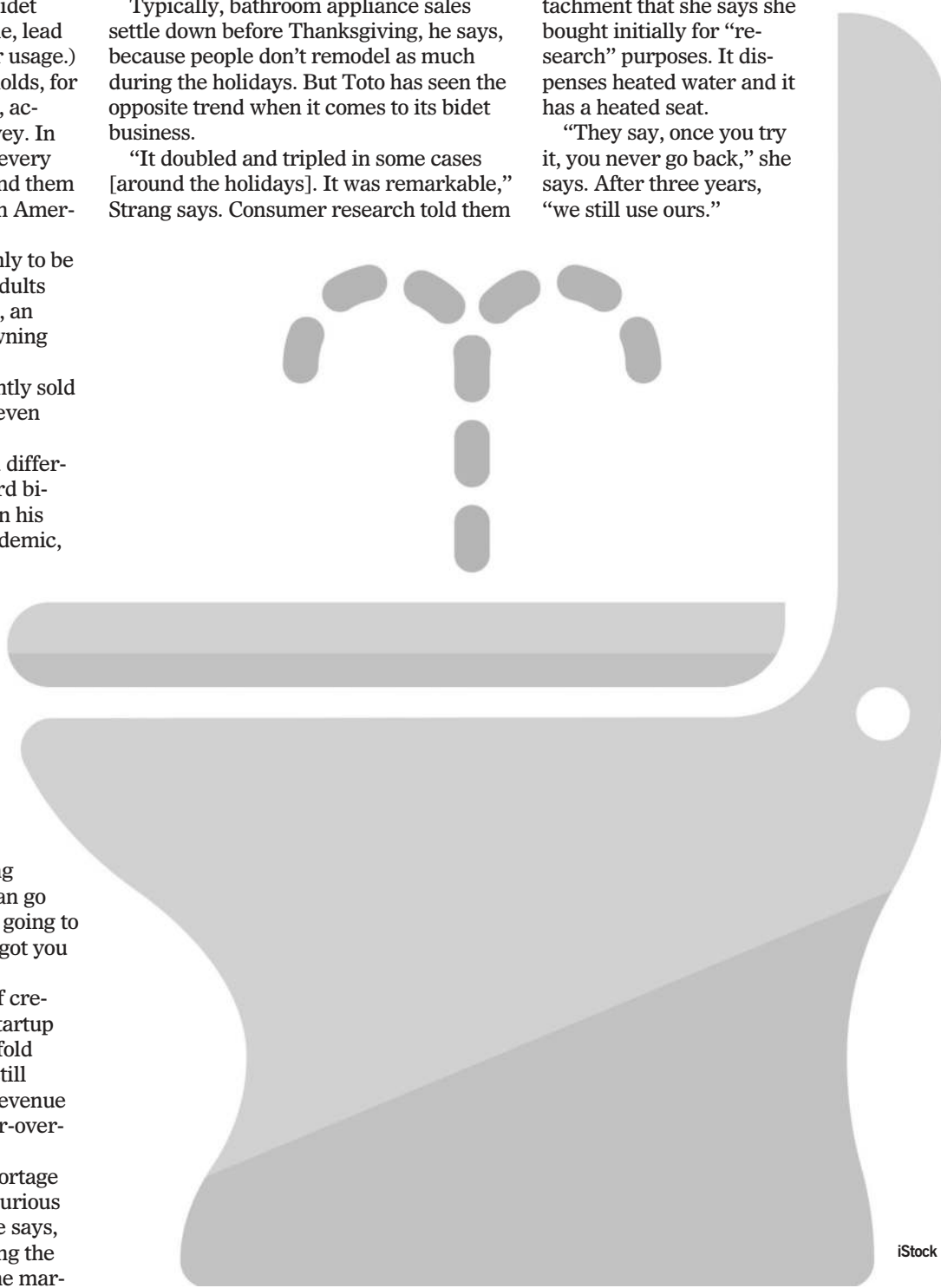
At the annual Kitchen and Bath Industry Show in Las Vegas in February, bidets continued to have a moment in the sun.

Nicole Krawcke, the chief editor of Plumbing & Mechanical and PM Engineer magazines, attended as she does every year. One trend for 2024: She saw the industry leaning hard into the appliance's benefits for the aging and people with mobility issues, adding handles and other safety features.

"Getting something like this in your home soothes the caregiver and also the person they're taking care of ... making it easier for them to go to the bathroom and not have to feel embarrassed about asking somebody for help," she says.

It's not as if Krawcke needed much convincing, though, of the myriad advantages of the bidet. She not only covers the industry as a journalist, she herself is the owner of a bidet attachment that she says she bought initially for "research" purposes. It dispenses heated water and it has a heated seat.

"They say, once you try it, you never go back," she says. After three years, "we still use ours."



## MUSIC

## LINER NOTES

By Colin McGuire



# Norah Jones lets the sun shine on 'Visions'

It might be tempting to view Norah Jones' latest, excellent LP, "Visions," as the logical counterpart to 2020's almost-as-excellent "Pick Me Up Off the Floor." The latter's dour vibe turned out to be a valuable companion in a time when the world endured its own dour vibes as it shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Her new effort, meanwhile, opens the shades that kept the darkness inside and allows in a healthy dose of sun — as well as a much-needed shot of optimism.

Yet while that may suggest the two sets are yinny and yanging their way in concert, the perfect precursor to these 12 songs is actually her magnum opus, 2009's "The Fall." Whereas that sad, lonely effort proved to be a perfect soundtrack to the autumn and winter months during which it was released, "Visions" feels ideal for the spring and summer seasons, serving as a welcome smile for someone who doesn't do much of it.

Her First Lady of Gen Z Alt Rock aura is still there and the music is equally as fuzzy as the tracks that make her better moments better than others' best, but the doom and gloom that sprinkles some of her most memorable albums are traded in for more expansive, almost existential thinking.

Or, for that matter, the desire to dance.

Case in point: The aptly titled "I Just Wanna Dance." Jangly in nature and low-key in energy, it sums up the entirety of "Visions" as a more-fun-than-you-think collection, complete with embedded horns and Southern Funk organ riffs. Plus, it's mindless. Jones, to her credit, vocally does little more than repeat the track's title, occasionally noting how she doesn't want to either talk or laugh about "it" as a precursor. Whatever "it" is, this song makes it sound like "it" was never needed in the first place.

That evolution begins from the start here. "All This Time" is a hopefully yearning R&B jaunt lush with backing harmonies and simple drums that could transport listeners to the best parts of '70s soul, complete with obligatory falsetto. Single "Paradise" follows that same template with a poppier edge that evokes "Last Time I Saw Him"-era Diana Ross. Jones' piano playing is



**Norah Jones**

Visions (Blue Note)

scrumptious on it as she trades in virtuosity for taste.

Actually, that's probably the set's secret ingredient: While Jones can hang with the best of today's pop pianists, she's actually better when she focuses on The Song rather than The Talent. "On My Way" is a fruitful left turn that embodies the dreamy aesthetics the singer was going for when she sat down to write the album (word has it that most of the ideas painting these songs came to Jones in the middle of the night as she was sleeping). "Running," meanwhile, is simple and charming with the way Jones leans heavily on the call-and-response attack to vocals. And then there's "Queen of the Sea," which is the type of garage blues that has become her signature in recent years.

It adds up to an impressive second outing for the singer and producer Leon Michels, who came over from working with the late Sharon Jones to initially begin collaborating with Norah on her 2021 Christmas album, "I Dream of Christmas." That holiday set marked a fuzzy, blurry change in sound for the songstress, and those values only increase with each spin here. It makes the future exciting because while "Visions" is a welcome collection, it leaves the feeling that these two have only scratched the surface of what they can do together.

"You get lost, you get found," Jones sings on the memorable final track, "That's Life," before ending the stanza with the regressing, "You break up, you break down."

Turns out, in the case of Norah Jones, sometimes breaking down can lead to seeing clearer than perhaps even she ever thought possible.

## Faye Webster

Underdressed at the Symphony (Secretly Canadian)



Faye Webster, known for her thoughtful blend of indie rock, folk and country, has a new album titled "Underdressed at the Symphony." The release journeys through a lifetime — looking back at childhood and ahead to adult relationships — without ever sounding rushed.

The Atlanta-based singer-songwriter's new record retains the warm, relaxed tone of her earlier work, but here, she has crafted a more balanced musical collage.

Her longtime band — including her now-signature pedal steel sound, courtesy of musician Matt "Pistol" Stoessel — sets the mood, as do the measured doses of jazz, hip-hop, classical and alt-country influences that defy simple categorization. All of the songs here are live-room recordings, giving Webster and her band the space to interact and improvise.

At 26, Webster is a decade into her professional career (the folky "Run and Tell," released when she was 16, marked her debut). Her veterancy is clear from the outset with the cool, downtempo opener, "Thinking About You." The track ends with a glockenspiel, the only one on the record, which playfully nudges the listener to wake up and pay attention to what is to come.

From there, the album is generally understated

## Justin Timberlake

Everything I Thought It Was (RCA)



In its better tracks, Justin Timberlake's first new album in six years, "Everything I Thought It Was," is a return to form for the musician.

In the moments when his immediately recognizable falsetto eases into a familiar kind of future funk, it works. In others, it feels like poorly timed nostalgia.

Once celebrated as one of the great performers of the 21st century for his clever R&B-pop, JT has had a remarkable career: from Disney's star-making "The Mickey Mouse Club" to fronting one of the most successful boy bands of all time, \*NSYNC, to finding a path towards individuation and embarking on a stellar solo stint.

The latter might be the most impressive — from 2002's "Justified" to 2006's "FutureSex/LoveSounds," and an acting career (lest anyone forget his performance in "The Social Network") to yet another triumphant return to his spot atop pop music's throne with 2013's "The 20/20 Experience" and "The 20/20 Experience — 2 of 2."

If only it would've lasted.

Timberlake's public perception faltered in the years that followed. The album between that era and this one, 2018's "Man of the Woods" leaned into "return to roots" iconography (Timberlake is from Tennessee, after all) and Americana, folk sounds — a divisive detour.

When, in the early 2020s, the "Free Britney Spears" movement picked up momentum, Timberlake was cast as a villain in her story, which was only amplified with the release of her 2023 memoir "The Woman in Me."

Several chapters are devoted to her relationship with Timberlake, including deeply personal details about a pregnancy, abortion and painful breakup.

Timberlake was also criticized for his role at the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show, in which a wardrobe malfunction led to Janet Jackson's breast being exposed, kneecapping her career.

He didn't experience the same effects and was

— like the breezy "Feeling Good Today" — a trademark of Webster's. On the select occasions when her reservations make way for musical fireworks, they hit the mark, particularly in the singles "But Not Kiss" and "Lego Ring."

"But Not Kiss" starts with soft strumming and a near whisper, "I want to sleep in your arms..." she sings, then jolts to complete the thought, "...but not kiss," atop theatrical piano. The song continues with a series of quiet-loud pairings of intimate and thunderous confessions. ("I want to see you in my dreams but then forget," in one verse, "I hope you're OK, but I won't ask" in another.)

"Lego Ring" is similarly explosive, fluctuating between fuzzy mid-tempo rock and dreamy hip-hop. Accompanied by Atlanta rapper Lil Yachty, whose voice is run through auto-tune, the song captures a yearning for childhood, warts and all. She sings, "I wanna Lego ring / I want it to hurt my finger / I want a Lego ring / Want it crystal clear." The impact may be disorienting on first listen, but infectious by the third.

Elsewhere on the album, longer tracks stretch and wander with hypnotic repetitions of choruses and extended instrumental jams. In that regard, "Lifetime" lands somewhere between the noir rock band Elysian Fields and 1950s jazz improvisation.

In all, Webster has built upon the solid foundation of her previous work.

This is an album designed for an end-to-end listen, and the fine musicianship, lyrics and thoughtful sequencing throughout make it a worthwhile journey.

— Jim Pollock  
Associated Press

invited back to perform in 2018.

That's all necessary context to bring the larger-than-life Timberlake into 2024.

The 18-track "Everything I Thought It Was," does not erase the "Man of the Woods" period, but it is an enjoyable — if often derivative — reminder of Timberlake at the height of his powers: from the slow-swig heartbreak track "Drown" co-written and co-produced by Timberlake, Louis Bell, Cirkut, Kenyon Dixon and Amy Allen to other elevated moments.

Like "No Angels," with its disco rhythms and idiosyncratic falsetto on "There ain't no angels here on the dance floor," or on the inverted gospel "Sanctified," which features rapper Tobe Nwigwe and stadium-sized rock instrumentation. The pop "Paradise" features all of \*NSYNC — if only a reunion was permanent.

Then there's "Selfish," the first single released from the album, an R&B ballad that bears striking resemblance to Nick Jonas' "Jealous" (which is odd, because "Jealous" steals from JT's early work — and much of Jonas' solo career, it seems, was designed to mirror Timberlake's successful break from his boy band. Snake, meet tail.)

Any rectifying with his past self — and his current public perception — is limited to the opener "Memphis." "I pray for peace within myself / And no more regrets with it," he sings. "Cause when I looked at my soul in the Mississippi / It reflected it." The rest of the album, it seems, focuses on love and the strength of his relationship with wife Jessica Biel.

In the press leading up to the release of "Everything I Thought It Was," Timberlake has said the album took four years to make, and that he wrote 100 songs for it. The work is somewhat evident on tracks like "Infinity Sex" and "F— Up the Disco," brassy, self-referential songs that serve as reminders of JT's heyday. They lack the impact of his previous records, but they are pleasant, nonetheless.

The reality is, for the nostalgic charms found on "Everything I Thought It Was," Timberlake's work is no doubt colored by an unfortunately timed return to the music game.

— Maria Sherman  
Associated Press

## MUSIC



CHARLES SYKES/AP

Kacey Musgraves performs on NBC's "Today" show at Rockefeller Plaza on March 15 in New York. Musgraves' new album, "Deeper Well," was released the same day.

# A deeper well

## How Kacey Musgraves opened herself back up to love on new set

BY MIKAEL WOOD  
*Los Angeles Times*

**K**acey Musgraves pulls her iPhone from the pocket of her black puffer vest and starts tapping her way to a recent exchange with a friend.

"We were literally just talking about this last night," she says. "Hold on — I want to see how I phrased it."

The 35-year-old country star is an enthusiastic user of Apple's audio message feature, which she says offers two advantages over regular texting: "less time staring at a god— screen," as she puts it, and the valuable emotional data contained in a person's voice. "I can read a note from someone and think they're mad at me," she says. "But then I'll hear it, and I'm like, Oh, they're not!"

Musgraves finds the previous evening's monologue and zeroes in on a section where she's musing about how "there's so much

encoded in us from childhood — past trauma, past experiences — and all that goes into falling in love with someone." She looks up and sighs. "It honestly freaks me out to think about just how much of chemistry with another person is beyond our control."

The precarity of romance is on Musgraves' mind because ... well, really, the idea is never not on her mind. "I'm always making something a little more sad than it needs to be," she says with a laugh of her music, including on her breakthrough 2018 LP "Golden Hour," which documented her whirlwind marriage to a fellow Nashville-based singer-songwriter, Ruston Kelly. Blissed-out yet laced with a stoner-ish melancholy, "Golden Hour" won the coveted album of the year prize at the Grammy Awards, vaulting Musgraves from insider-y critics' darling to pop-crossover fashion plate; three years later, she followed it up with "Star-Crossed," which presented the tale of her

**"I'm always making something a little more sad than it needs to be."**

**Kacey Musgraves**

On her songwriting process

and Kelly's divorce as a Shakespearean tragedy.

Now she's released "Deeper Well," a gorgeous new LP inspired in part by the act of welcoming love back into her life.

"Please don't make me regret / Opening up that part of myself / That I've been scared to give again," she sings in "Too Good to Be True," her close-miked vocal swaddled by finger-picked acoustic guitar. Later, in the

Celtic-accented "Heaven Is," she defines that place as "lying in your arms so safe and warm."

Yet "Deeper Well," released March 15, is also about cultivating one's own strength through the rituals of therapy and self-care. In the title track, she sings about setting aside her gravity bong and learning the lessons of her Saturn return — a trendy astrological reference similarly deployed lately by SZA and Ariana Grande. "Saturn can be a bitch of a planet," Musgraves acknowledges, "but it's having a moment." In another track, "Sway," she describes her determination to go with the flow like "a palm tree in the wind."

"Kacey just wants to grow," says Shane McAnally, the prolific Nashville songwriter who's counted Musgraves as a friend and collaborator for more than a decade. "And this record feels like roots — like something you put down with your feet solidly on the ground."

### Returning to roots

That goes for the album's sound as well as its outlook. After toying with the sleek textures of Y2K-era pop and R&B for "Star-Crossed," Musgraves returns on "Deeper Well" to the kind of rootsy, hand-played arrangements that defined her early work — and just as country music has become a go-to style for acts such as Beyoncé, Post Malone and Lana Del Rey, all of whom have country (or perhaps country-adjacent) projects on the way.

"Deeper Well" opens with the strummy "Cardinal," in which she recounts being visited by that bird — a favorite of her mentor John Prine — not long after Prine's death in 2020. Then there's the waltz-time "The Architect," a classic bit of down-home philosophizing she co-wrote with McAnally and Josh

**SEE DEEPER ON PAGE 17**



## MUSIC

## Deeper: Singer shows strength through self-care on latest album

## FROM PAGE 16

Osborne: “Even something as small as an apple / It’s simple and somehow complex / Sweet and divine, the perfect design / Can I speak to the architect?”

“‘Star-Crossed’ was more hard-edged and acidic than all my other music,” she says today. “It was more affected in terms of production. And that was fun to play with. But I was definitely craving something different for this.” What she landed on feels both cozy and exploratory — a homecoming disguised as a vision quest.

Says Reese Witherspoon, who teamed with Musgraves last year to create the Apple TV+ series “My Kind of Country:” “I think it’s her most ethereal and introspective work.”

It’s a few days before Musgraves is set to perform this month on “Saturday Night Live,” and the singer is seated at a corner table in a restaurant on the Upper East Side. Dressed in black athleisure wear, her long hair tucked beneath a Polo ball cap, she speaks wistfully about New York City, where she and her two producers, Ian Fitchuk and Daniel Tashian, decamped from Nashville last year to make “Deeper Well” amid a motivating change of scenery.

“There’s always something weird to see here,” Musgraves says. “Last night we got stuck behind this trash truck that for some reason had bouquets of flowers tied to it.” She fondly recalls a late night singing karaoke and another one downing Guinness at an Irish dive bar; she describes the smell of weed in Washington Square Park as though it were a cherished childhood memory.

Tashian identifies one benefit to their immersion in New York’s much-ness. “I think for someone who has maybe slight ADHD tendencies — I don’t know if Kacey’s copped to that, but I can tell you from experience that she most certainly has a little of that going on — sometimes you need to be overwhelmed by the world to focus,” the producer says.

Indeed, there’s an almost Zen-like quality to the sparsely arranged “Deeper Well” that makes even the tasteful “Golden Hour” sound busy by comparison. “The small details define everything,” says John Janick, chairman and chief executive of Musgraves’ record company, Interscope Capitol Labels Group. “Each song is a delicate expression of self.” With echoes of Jim Croce and Simon & Garfunkel in their heads, Musgraves, Fitchuk and Tashian set up in the same warmly appointed attic space that Jack Antonoff favors at the historic Electric Lady Studios in the Village; for “Heaven Is,” they

## Kacey Musgraves

Deeper Well (MCA Nashville)

Just over a decade ago, Kacey Musgraves emerged as a fresh new voice in country music — a mid-tempo storyteller with an incredible acuity both in her lyrics and in her instrumentation, knowing just when to pick up the harmonica, whistle a tune or break out the vocoder.

In the years and award-winning albums since, she’s proven herself to be malleable: weaving disco-pop into her narratives where fitting (most memorably on “High Horse” from 2018’s “Golden Hour,” the love-forward release that won album of the year at the 2019 Grammys), recording in Spanish (“Gracias a la Vida” from 2021’s divorce record, “Star-Crossed”) and, most recently, recording a feature with Zach Bryan, which became her first No. 1 hit (the sentimental “I Remember Everything,” one of AP’s picks for best of 2023.) In 2024, it has led to “Deeper Well,” a muted folk record with a warm kind of profundity.

The album opens with the ’60s folk-inspired “Cardinal,” a similar tone to its closer, “Nothing to be Scared Of” — acoustic guitars and Musgraves’ open-hearted narratives delivered through her glassy vocal delivery. Much of the album follows the format, but with quite a few surprises.

Those looking for capital-C country through Musgraves’ matured folk filter could skip to “The Architect,” a masterful acoustic rumination on a higher power. “Sometimes I look in the mirror and wish I could make a request / Could I pray it away? Am I shapeable clay? Or is this as good as it gets?” she asks.

On “Anime Eyes,” Musgraves describes a “Miyazaki sky” and talk-sings her way through a kaleidoscopic, psychedelic detour. “Lonely Millionaire” is a surprising near-reimagining of Atlanta rapper JID’s “Kody Blu 31.” Seriously: He received a songwriting credit, she does not rap and it’s a weeper.

For fans following Musgraves’ career since the very beginning, “Deeper Well” is a noted evolution from “Follow Your Arrow,” the celebratory country-as-heck LGBTQ+ anthem from her 2013 debut album, “Same Trailer Different Park.” But the spirit is the same: Musgraves has long pushed the boundaries of her formative genre, whether it’s touring with Willie Nelson and Katy Perry or when she made sure her co-writers Brandy Clark and Shane McAnally took the stage when she won the Country Music Awards Song of the Year Award in 2014 for her first hit; it was the first time two openly gay people stood on the CMA stage for an award. That she chooses to move her needle, here, in a softer direction feels fitting.

Sometimes, that means hyper-specific language of the current moment, like in the finger-picking title track “Deeper Well.” “My Saturn has returned / when I turned 27,” she sings, referencing the popular astrological conceit that also appears on Ariana Grande’s latest album, “eternal sunshine.” “Everything started to change / Took a long time, but I learned.” There’s another line, “You’ve got dark energy,” that feels more like a text message than an effective lyric — and runs the risk of dating itself the moment the listener hears it — but that, too, could be a tool. Here, Musgraves is interested in a kind of existential bloodletting, revealing the depths of her thoughts about love and death that trickle out in gorgeous-sounding songs with sweet melodies.

Like in the standout “Dinner with Friends,” her tear-jerkin’ response to “The Sound of Music” classic “My Favorite Things,” in which Musgraves, atop piano and acoustic guitar, sings about all of the things she loves — and will miss — “from the other side” of life.

“My home state of Texas / The sky there, the horses and dogs,” she sings, “Intimate convos that go way into the night / The way that sun on my floor makes a pattern of light.”

As a whole, “Deeper Well” is a soft-pedaled album, but also one that celebrates her humanity. It’s a nice change of pace — arguably the best kind — one with some familiarity.

— Maria Sherman  
Associated Press



moved out onto the building’s roof to catch a vibe.

Musgraves compares the album to “a walk through nature,” which she knows registers as an

irony in light of the urban setting. But there’s something to that in the way the music showcases the essentials of her astute songwriting and her high, clear voice.

“Kacey sings just like she talks,” says Chris Thile, whose band Nickel Creek will open for Musgraves on the road this fall. “The honesty of it disarms you at every turn.” Adds singer Madi Diaz, who recruited Musgraves to appear on her 2023 single “Don’t Do Me Good”: “She delivers the complexities of life the way we actually go through it.”

## Experiencing love

Does she ever regret writing so nakedly about relationships given that they’ve all eventually ended? (Some of the tenderest songs on “Deeper Well” refer to her romance with poet Cole Schafer, with whom she broke up last year.) Musgraves shakes her head.

“I think if you’re lucky, you’re able to experience love several times,” she says. “Some people just have one. Look at my sister, who met her husband when they were 14 and 16, and now they’ve got a kid. Or my grandparents, who met in second and third grade — they’ve literally lived their entire lives together. I’m just different in that way. I’ve experienced many loves, and I just gather more information about myself with each one.” She smiles. “And then I write about it.”

Musgraves grew up in tiny Golden, Texas, and started singing (and yodeling) as a precocious kid in an oversized cowgirl hat. At 18, she flamed out on the televised singing competition “Nashville Star,” but used the springboard to land work as a pro songwriter on Music Row; in 2011, she co-wrote “Mama’s Broken Heart” with McAnally and their pal Brandy Clark, then watched as Miranda Lambert turned the song into a No. 2 country hit.

Her success behind the scenes led to a major-label record deal of her own. Yet right away, Musgraves was scraping against country orthodoxy: “Follow Your Arrow,” from her 2013 debut, advised listeners to “roll up a joint” and to “kiss lots of boys — or kiss lots of girls, if that’s something you’re into.”

“From Day 1, I feel like people have known exactly what I’m about,” she says. “Still one of the greatest compliments anyone’s ever paid me has been people in the LGBTQ community saying, ‘I’ve always loved country music, but I never felt like I was invited to that party until I heard your music.’”

Nashville is more inclusive these days than it was a decade ago thanks in part to Musgraves, who’s maintained her efforts to diversify the industry, as with “My Kind of Country,” a competition show meant to spotlight talent from underrepresented

backgrounds.

Still, she says, “I don’t feel like I need to be the spokesperson for country music.” In 2018, genre purists debated what it meant that “Golden Hour” contained a disco song in the shimmering “High Horse”; in 2021, the Recording Academy ruled that “Star-Crossed” wasn’t eligible for the Grammys’ country album category. Musgraves finds all the gatekeeping a bit boring. “I just do my own thing,” she says with a shrug.

Six months after it debuted atop Billboard’s Hot 100, “I Remember Everything” is still hanging around inside the chart’s Top 10, which you can take as proof that the much-discussed country boom is real. But if Musgraves is always eager to reach new listeners — see her collaborations with Troye Sivan and Camila Cabello and her stint as Harry Styles’ warm-up act — she’s also wary of what she calls the “trap” of modern pop stardom, in which “people want you to be extremely authentic until your authenticity doesn’t align with whatever they want.”

There’s a song on “Deeper Well” called “Lonely Millionaire” that suggests she’s encountered fame’s illusory comforts. “Look, I’m not saying money doesn’t make things easier,” she says. “But the deeper I get into my career, the more I find refuge in the real, tangible, irreplaceable stuff.”

Next month, Musgraves is due to launch a world tour behind “Deeper Well,” and she’s been trying to figure out how to bring the album’s intimate truths into an arena. She’s also considering covering SZA’s “Nobody Gets Me” — “It’d be sick, right?” she asks — and Sivan’s “One of Your Girls.” “So sweet, that little boy,” she says of Sivan. “I just want to put him in my pocket.”

A couple of years ago, Musgraves would’ve viewed a tour as a welcome opportunity to leave home. She’d bought a big fancy place in Nashville after her divorce — you can watch her give a tour to Architectural Digest on YouTube — but discovered before long that she didn’t feel comfortable there by herself.

“I was kind of scared of alone time — not scared, but trepidatious,” she says. “I’d get anxiety about being alone and not having anything on my schedule.” One night in 2022, she started perusing Zillow; she found a spot in the woods she liked and decided to live there instead.

Now she’s “gotten really good at being alone,” she says. “I actually feel recharged by it, which is the opposite of how I used to be.” She laughs. “When I’m home now, I could not see anyone for days and not give a s—.”

## VIDEO GAMES

# Classic Nintendo rivalry reignited

Mario vs. Donkey Kong for Switch revamps look of hand-held game, adds levels and co-op play

BY GIESON CACHO  
The Mercury News

**B**efore Mario was Mario, Nintendo referred to him as “Jumpman,” and he was the protagonist who battled Donkey Kong in the legendary arcade game of the same name. The great ape kidnapped Pauline, Mario’s girlfriend, and held her atop a building with steel girders as he tossed barrels at Jumpman.

It’s a simple premise and one that occurred on a static screen. Players could see all the action as Mario leaped over barrels, grabbed power-up hammers and climbed to the top. Although Mario and Donkey Kong have gone their separate ways and had success in side-scrolling platformers, the concepts of leaping over obstacles, climbing ladders and grabbing hammer power-ups still had gameplay potential.

## An idea revisited

Nintendo revisited those ideas in Mario vs. Donkey Kong on the Game Boy Advance. For its time, the title punched above its weight with graphics and sound that pushed the system to its limits. Now, the Japanese company has brought it back on the Nintendo Switch with a revamped look, co-op play and new levels.

The project follows the beef between the title characters. While flipping through channels, Donkey Kong sees an ad for the Mini-Mario toys and becomes enamored with the product. He goes to buy one and discovers that others had the same idea and the item is sold out. Upset, Donkey Kong visits Mario’s factory and decides to steal his entire stock. That reignites the classic rivalry as Mario once again must battle Kong, to rescue his mini-mes.

## Simple gameplay

The first levels are simple. Unlike Super Mario Bros. games, Mario vs. Donkey Kong features a pared-down move set. Mario

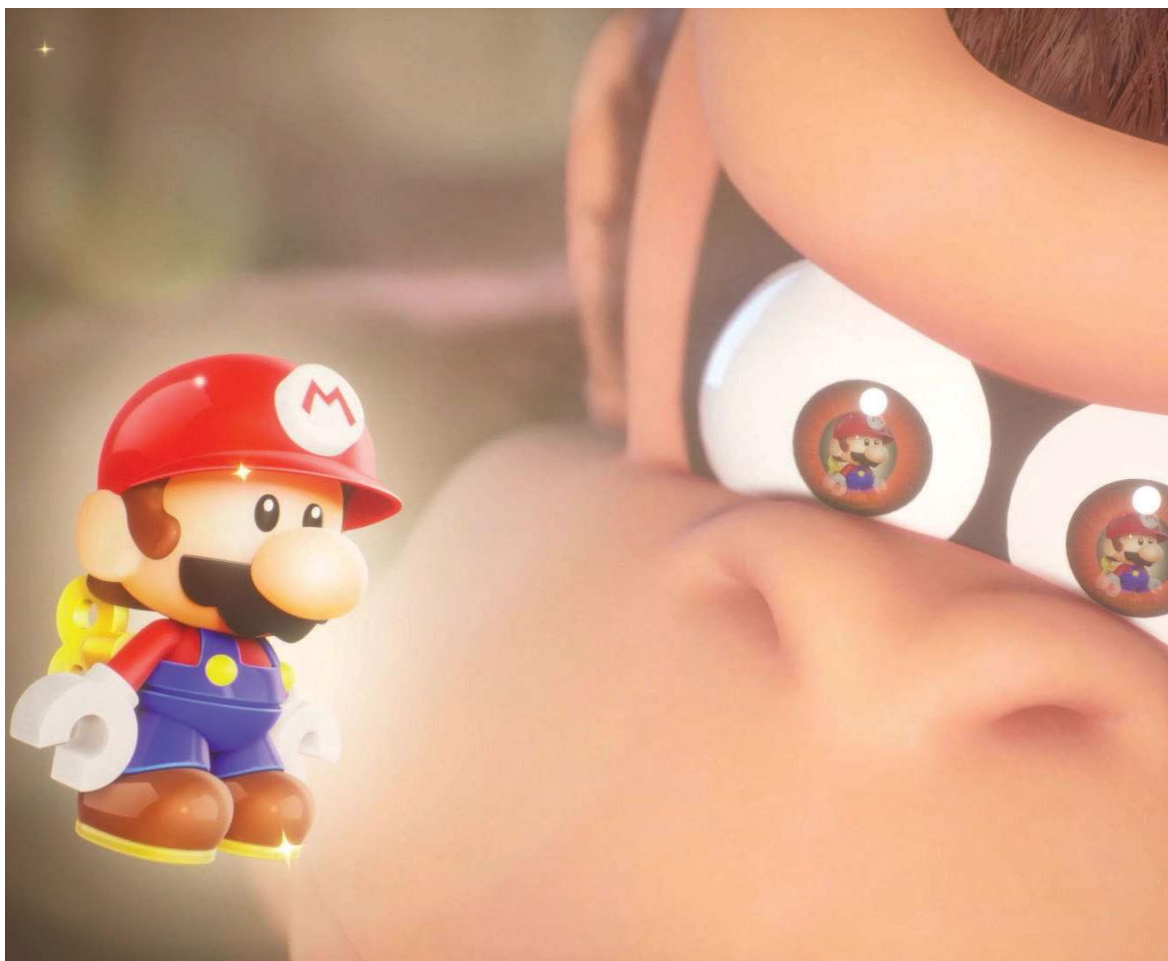
can’t sprint, toss fireballs or anything like that. The title is more puzzle-focused: Players negotiate obstacles as the hero tries to navigate a key to a door or Mini-Marios to a toy box.

Similar to those of the original Donkey Kong, the levels are essentially rooms that fit on a few screens. Mario will have to climb ladders, hit switches and deal with enemies. He has a few moves to handle the various situations. First off, he can jump, but not very high, and his leaps aren’t as floaty as in other games. He can pick up enemies and toss them. Most of the time it’s safe to rest atop their heads. Lastly, there’s a hammer power-up that lets him knock adversaries out of his way, just like in old-school Donkey Kong.

Mario also can do a handstand that lets him walk on his hands, protecting him from falling objects. This move also leads to a bigger jump with a second subsequent jump, giving him more air. He can also do a backflip that helps him reach higher areas at a moment’s notice. Along with these, the protagonist also has the ability to grab ropes and wires.

## Complex levels

Although the move set is simple, players learn that the levels



Nintendo photos

**In Mario vs. Donkey Kong, Nintendo’s most popular hero takes on his old rival. Donkey Kong becomes enamored with the protagonist’s Mini-Mario toys and decides to steal his entire stock.**

are complex. The worlds have themes that introduce a new enemy or hurdle such as conveyor belts, slippery floors or lasers. The goal for each stage is to get the key to the door, but that can be burdensome because the item disappears after 15 seconds if Mario puts it down. In order to complete the level, players will have to suss out the proper order of hitting switches or negotiate an intricate obstacle. That takes experimentation and a lot of dying and restarting.

Later in the Plus levels, Mario will have to ferry not only a key but also the Mini-Mario that carries it. The scenario adds another layer of complexity and difficulty. Beyond that, players have Mini-Mario levels where the protagonist has to herd six of his mechanical mini-mes to a toy box and boss stages where he must defeat the big ape himself. That adds up to more than 130 levels, which isn’t the best value for the \$49.99 price. It would be a perfect price at \$10 less.

It is, however, enough content to keep players busy for a few days, and most of the stages are a delight. The difficulty ramp-up is gradual, and nothing is too much of a problem until the fourth world, Merry Mini-Land. From there, the level design grows in complexity. If playing it in Classic mode, the game could be tossing-your-controller-at-the-wall challenging, but within Casual mode, it becomes more manageable and forgiving.

There’s also less pressure to keep an eye on the tally of player lives.

If players want a friend to join



**In Mario vs. Donkey Kong, players negotiate obstacles as the hero tries to navigate a key to a door or Mini-Marios to a toy box. Adding to the challenge: Keys disappear after 15 seconds if put down.**



**Mario vs. Donkey Kong has more than 130 levels, including boss stages, like the one shown here, where Mario must defeat the big ape himself. The difficulty ramp-up is gradual, and nothing is too much of a problem until the fourth world, Merry Mini-Land.**

in the fun, Mario vs. Donkey Kong also has a two-player mode. It’s couch co-op and adds even more complexity to the puzzle-solving with an additional key. It requires more coordination as the second player controls Toad.

As a remake, Mario vs. Donkey Kong won’t break any new

ground in the genre, but it does show how this style of puzzle-oriented platforming still has legs and the potential to surprise players despite its simplicity.

**Platform:** Nintendo Switch  
**Online:** [nintendo.com/us/store/products/mario-vs-donkey-kong-switch](https://nintendo.com/us/store/products/mario-vs-donkey-kong-switch)

# CROSSWORD AND COMICS

## NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

### RACK 'EM UP

BY ENRIQUE HENESTROZA ANGUIANO AND MATTHEW STOCK / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Enrique Henestroza Anguiano, of Oakland, Calif., is a data scientist. Matthew Stock, of Gainesville, Fla., is a master's student in school counseling. They met through the online indie crossword community as fans of each other's puzzle blogs. This puzzle was constructed entirely over email, but as Matthew writes, "We're long overdue for a video call!" Note: Once filled in, the contents of the six shaded squares will spell a word associated with this puzzle's theme.

#### ACROSS

- 1 New dog owner's purchase
- 6 Dog-adoption grp.
- 11 Pop group with an "army"
- 14 Setting for "Heidi"
- 18 "We're not standin' in their way!"
- 19 Pepper grinder?
- 20 Put to work
- 21 Word with good or blood
- 22 Extra lives or additional gems, for a freemium game
- 24 [Gasp!]
- 26 Pastoral setting?
- 27 "Who am I? Two-four-six-oh-\_\_\_\_!" ("Les Misérables" lyric)
- 28 Cracker shape
- 29 "\_\_\_\_-olution" (2002 rap album)
- 30 Avoided a tag, in a way
- 31 "The kids these days have gotten way better than me"
- 35 Two-million-year-old discovery in 2022 in the frozen soil of Greenland
- 36 Cereal bit
- 37 Something to butter up
- 38 Text communication inits.
- 41 Shaggy hairstyle
- 42 File-creating command

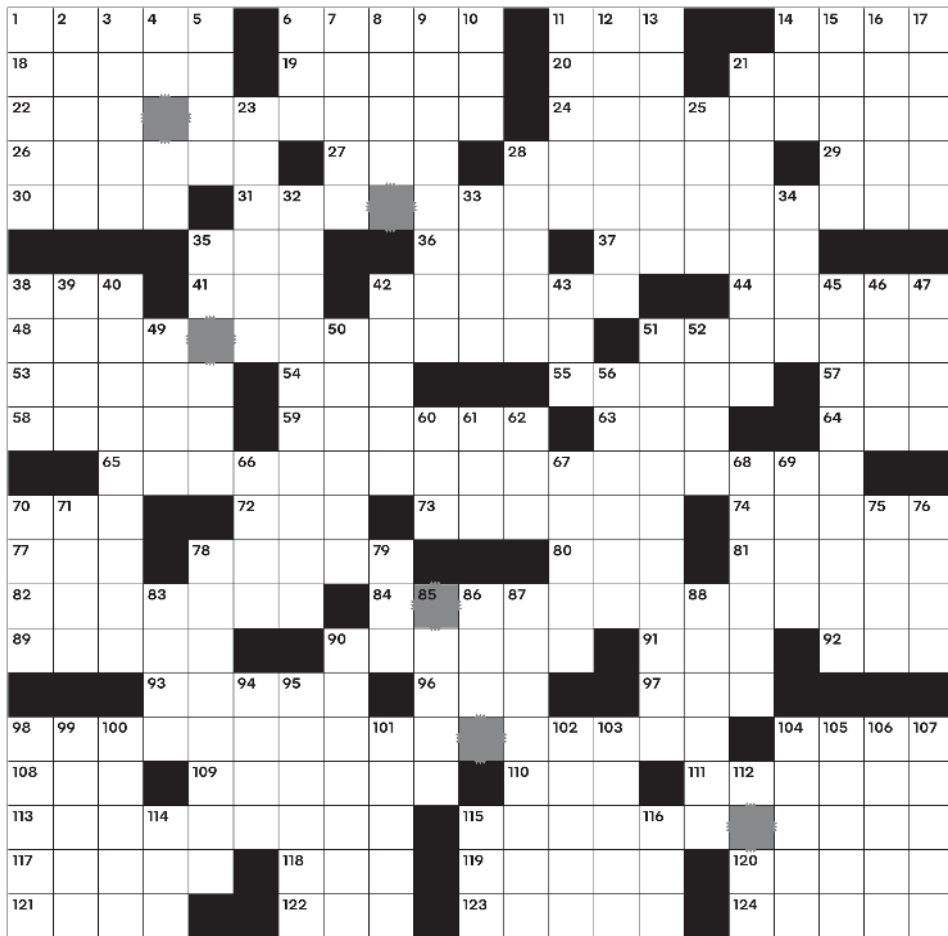
- 44 Actress Thompson
- 48 Former minor-league team that played at Aloha Stadium
- 51 Spot for food and craft beer
- 53 Opt
- 54 Significant stretch
- 55 Crane look-alike
- 57 "Do you really see me that way?"
- 58 Range rover . . . or something to do in a Range Rover
- 59 Craft that uses drafts
- 63 What a cracker might crack
- 64 Something for the rest of the military?
- 65 Scrabble bonus seen six times in this puzzle
- 70 "The Chase" channel
- 72 Was published
- 73 In which "Ciamar a tha thu?" means "How are you?"
- 74 Booped body parts
- 77 Member of the fam
- 78 Count for a jury
- 80 I, in German
- 81 Slip past
- 82 Product lines?
- 84 Something delivered by Jake Tapper or Anderson Cooper
- 89 Kofi of the U.N.
- 90 Pan feature
- 91 Yank
- 92 When repeated, ["Is this thing on?"]
- 93 Battle royale
- 96 Nickname next to a heart emoji, perhaps

- 97 Cyrillic letter pronounced like the "zz" of "pizza"
- 98 "The English Patient" actress
- 104 Attenuated
- 108 "South," in Hanoi
- 109 Place to chill, paradoxically
- 110 Home of the Hockey Hall of Fame: Abbr.
- 111 Device that works with CarPlay
- 113 Single guy?
- 115 Executive's acumen
- 117 Apt domain for basketball's King James
- 118 Scanning inits.
- 119 Something to believe in
- 120 Didn't just assume
- 121 Part of the body to slap
- 122 Queen \_\_\_\_\_
- 123 To be, in Spanish
- 124 Easily irritated

#### DOWN

- 1 Film-archive bits
- 2 Kidney-related
- 3 Maker of the Flashback console
- 4 Lukewarm
- 5 Birds with deep booming calls
- 6 "Better Call Saul" channel
- 7 Very sexy
- 8 Texas city that's home to Frito-Lay
- 9 Lawyer's bundle of work
- 10 "\_\_\_\_ you not entertained?"
- 11 "Au contraire!"

- 12 Cannon fodder, at times
- 13 Appear that one may
- 14 Urgent time to start gathering tax documents: Abbr.
- 15 TikTok star Gray
- 16 B.Y.U.'s city
- 17 Scatter about
- 21 "Here's the thing . . ."
- 23 A group of them is called a "crash"
- 25 Texter's reaction button
- 28 Post
- 32 Syrupy covering for ham
- 33 Protagonist in "2001: A Space Odyssey"
- 34 Crockpot filler
- 35 \_\_\_\_\_ Mendeleev, creator of the periodic table
- 38 "\_\_\_\_ All That" (1990s teen comedy)
- 39 Soda-shop order
- 40 Vegetable often eaten without utensils
- 42 Aviculture : bird :: heliciculture : \_\_\_\_\_
- 43 Campfire remains
- 45 Out-of-this-world outfit
- 46 Rikishi compete in it
- 47 Slightly
- 49 Taiwanese tech giant
- 50 Pink-furred cat in "Garfield"
- 51 Antipasto dish of tomatoes on grilled bread
- 52 Campus military org.
- 56 Make more meaningful
- 60 B.S., for one



- 61 Letter that rhymes with the letters before and after it
- 62 Direction giver's suggestion: Abbr.
- 66 Jab
- 67 Tony winner Renée \_\_\_\_\_ Goldsberry
- 68 High-strung
- 69 Coin collection
- 70 Enclosed rhyme scheme
- 71 Cereal bit

- 75 Poet St. Vincent Millay
- 76 Creep out, perhaps
- 78 Counterpart of "been there"
- 79 Sgt. or cpl.
- 83 Engine parts
- 85 Bigwig
- 86 Coup d' \_\_\_\_\_
- 87 Time when most people are asleep
- 88 One birthed in Perth
- 90 Shrug or wave

- 94 Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of war, takes the form of one
- 95 Place in a crypt
- 98 Announce one's presence, in a way
- 99 Invisible household hazard
- 100 "My luck's bound to turn around!"
- 101 Adorable sort
- 102 Beginning stage
- 103 Crete's highest point, for short

- 104 The ones nearby
- 105 Indicates "Out of my way!"
- 106 Miniature map
- 107 High-maintenance, say
- 112 Exam with "calculator" and "no calculator" math sections
- 114 G.I.'s rations
- 115 Dating inits.
- 116 Negative Boolean operator

## GUNSTON STREET



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

## RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

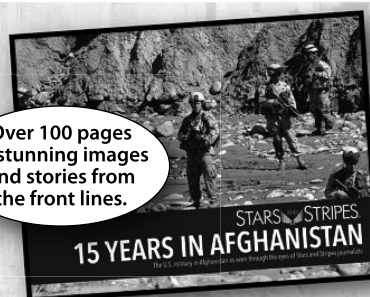


## STARS AND STRIPES 15 YEARS IN AFGHANISTAN



The story of the U.S. military's role in Afghanistan, as seen through the eyes of Stars and Stripes journalists covering America's longest war.

Only **\$14.99** with Free Shipping



**ORDER NOW** at [www.stripesstore.com](http://www.stripesstore.com)

# FACES

## Richard Simmons tells of experience with skin cancer

Fitness guru Richard Simmons this week announced his diagnosis with skin cancer, just after quelling fears he was dying.

The reclusive personality, 75, on Tuesday revealed in a Facebook post how he discovered a “blemish” on his face was actually cancerous.



Simmons

“Mirror mirror on the wall what’s that blemish which is so small? There was this strange looking bump under my right eye. I had a tube of Neosporin which I would put on [in] the morning and the evening ... it was still there,” he said.

Simmons recalled a subsequent nerve-racking trip to the dermatologist, where the doctor needed “to scrape it and put it under the microscope.”

Within 20 minutes, Simmons was told he had basal cell carcinoma. Though the Mayo Clinic notes this often presents as a “transparent bump” on parts of the skin exposed to the sun, like the head or neck, it can take other forms.

Simmons on Monday scared his followers when he posted that he was “dying.”

“The truth is we all are dying,” he added. “Every day we live we are getting closer to our death,” he said, reminding followers to “tell the ones that you love that you love them.”

Simmons issued an apology “for this confusion, noting: “I am not dying. It was a message about saying how we should embrace every day that we have.”

## ‘Blade Runner’ actor M. Emmet Walsh dies

M. Emmet Walsh, the character actor who brought his unmistakable face and unsettling presence to films including “Blood Simple”



Walsh

and “Blade Runner,” has died at age 88, his manager, Sandy Joseph, said.

Walsh died from cardiac arrest Tuesday at a hospital in St. Albans, Vt., Joseph said Wednesday.

The ham-faced, heavyset Walsh often played good old boys with bad intentions, as he did in one of his rare leading roles as a crooked Texas private detective in the Coen brothers’ first film, the 1984 neo-noir “Blood Simple.”

Joel and Ethan Coen said they wrote the part for Walsh, who won the first Film Independent Spirit Award for best male lead for the role.



Netflix photos

Jess Hong, left, and John Bradley are among the ensemble cast of “3 Body Problem,” which cost Netflix \$20 million an episode to produce.

# Is ‘3 Body Problem’ the solution?

Netflix banking on high-stakes sci-fi tale to be its next big hit

BY WENDY LEE  
*Los Angeles Times*

Netflix is about to find out whether it can get its own “Game of Thrones” without having “Game of Thrones.”

When Netflix executive Peter Friedlander finished reading the popular Chinese science-fiction trilogy “Remembrance of Earth’s Past” in 2016, he was sure it would be a great TV show. The books, in which Earth is faced with an alien invasion, told an epic, high-stakes story with intricate world-building, time-jumping and powerful themes.

Three years later he found a team of filmmakers who could turn it into a streaming TV phenomenon, if anyone could — David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, the pair who’d adapted George R.R. Martin’s sprawling fantasy saga “A Song of Ice and Fire” into a game-changing hit at HBO. He introduced them to Alexander Woo, co-creator of “The Terror: Infamy,” who joined as a co-showrunner.

It was clearly a risk. The resulting show, called “3 Body Problem,” would be expensive to produce, involve significant visual effects and be shot across England, Spain and the U.S. But Friedlander saw an opportunity to entice Netflix’s global audience to a sci-fi story that included different genres including drama, fantasy elements, mystery and history.

“There’s an opportunity for this show to be wildly popular, and I think it’s because it’s so bold,” Friedlander said. “It’s so innovative. It’s so entertaining and it’s been written and created to bring people onto the ride.”

The eight-episode series, which premiered its full first season Thursday, is part of Netflix’s

strategy of betting big on programming that it hopes will resonate with its 260 million global members and prospective subscribers. “3 Body Problem” reportedly cost \$20 million an episode to produce for a total budget of \$160 million, a big number even for a Netflix sci-fi spectacle, and similar to the per-episode cost of HBO “Thrones” prequel series “House of the Dragon.”

“It’s a big swing. A huge, cinematic bet,” said Bela Bajaria, Netflix’s chief content officer, at a January press event.

Unlike studios such as Walt Disney Co. and Universal Pictures, Netflix does not have a large back catalog of intellectual property it can rely on to keep churning out familiar hits. Instead, the streamer has invested in original stories like “Squid Game” and “Stranger Things” and gamble on producers who are willing to adapt stories from books and history.

Friedlander mentioned Cixin Liu’s books to Benioff and Weiss in 2019. The duo devoured the trilogy on the plane ride back from a “Game of Thrones” event in Japan and realized this was their next project. It had the scale they were interested in, but was also different enough from “Game of Thrones,” with its complex scientific concepts.

“As ‘Thrones’ was coming to a close, David and I knew that we weren’t dead yet,” Weiss said. “Thirteen years in high fantasy was fantastic, but 13 years of mud and horses and armor and more horses stomping through the mud and trying to make sure they didn’t stomp on you — like, we’ve had enough of almost getting stomped on by horses. So we wanted to do something different, science fiction, some-



Executive producers D. B. Weiss, left, and David Benioff, who adapted George R.R. Martin’s sprawling fantasy saga “A Song of Ice and Fire” into “Game of Thrones” for HBO, are behind “3 Body Problem.”

thing we both grew up with.”

Neither Netflix nor the showrunners would comment on the budget, but Benioff has said the series has “four movies’ worth” of visual effects. The show stars actors such as Benedict Wong from Marvel’s “Doctor Strange,” as well as familiar faces from “Game of Thrones” including Liam Cunningham, Jonathan Pryce and John Bradley.

“It looks like a very ambitious show,” said Susanne Daniels, former YouTube global head of original content. “Once in a while all these streamers should swing for the fences and make a little noise to try to stand out as a must-have for the subscribers.”

The high-profile series comes as popular Netflix shows like “The Crown” ended last year and “Stranger Things” and “Cobra Kai” are on their last seasons, leaving Netflix hungry for more expansive, marquee hits.

**“There’s an opportunity for this show to be wildly popular, and I think it’s because it’s so bold. It’s so innovative. It’s so entertaining and it’s been written and created to bring people onto the ride.”**

Peter Friedlander  
Netflix executive

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## 6 wounded in fight outside funeral home after service

**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — Six people were wounded, some of them severely, in a fight that broke out Tuesday outside a Utah funeral home among people who had just attended a service there, authorities said.

Officers arrived at the Neil O'Donnell Funeral Home near downtown Salt Lake City around 1:30 p.m. to find three people with stab wounds ranging from minor to severe, according to the Salt Lake City Police Department.

A fourth person was hospitalized in critical condition.

Witnesses told police a vehicle involved in the fight sped off just before they arrived at the scene, which spokesperson Brent Weisberg described as "chaotic."

After tracking down and stopping the car, police brought two passengers to the hospital with minor injuries and detained a third person for questioning after finding a gun in the vehicle, Weisberg said.

## State moves to protect horseshoe crabs

**MA** BOSTON — Wildlife protection advocates are welcoming a decision by the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission to approve protections for horseshoe crabs during spawning, which is when the creatures are at their most vulnerable.

The move comes as interstate regulators are limiting the harvest of the primordial species of invertebrate to try to help rebuild its population.

Horseshoe crabs predate the dinosaurs, having inhabited ocean environments for more than 400 years, but their populations have been depleted for decades due to harvest in part for bait to catch eels and whelk, a species of sea snail.

Their blood is also used to test for potentially dangerous impurities by drug and medical device makers.

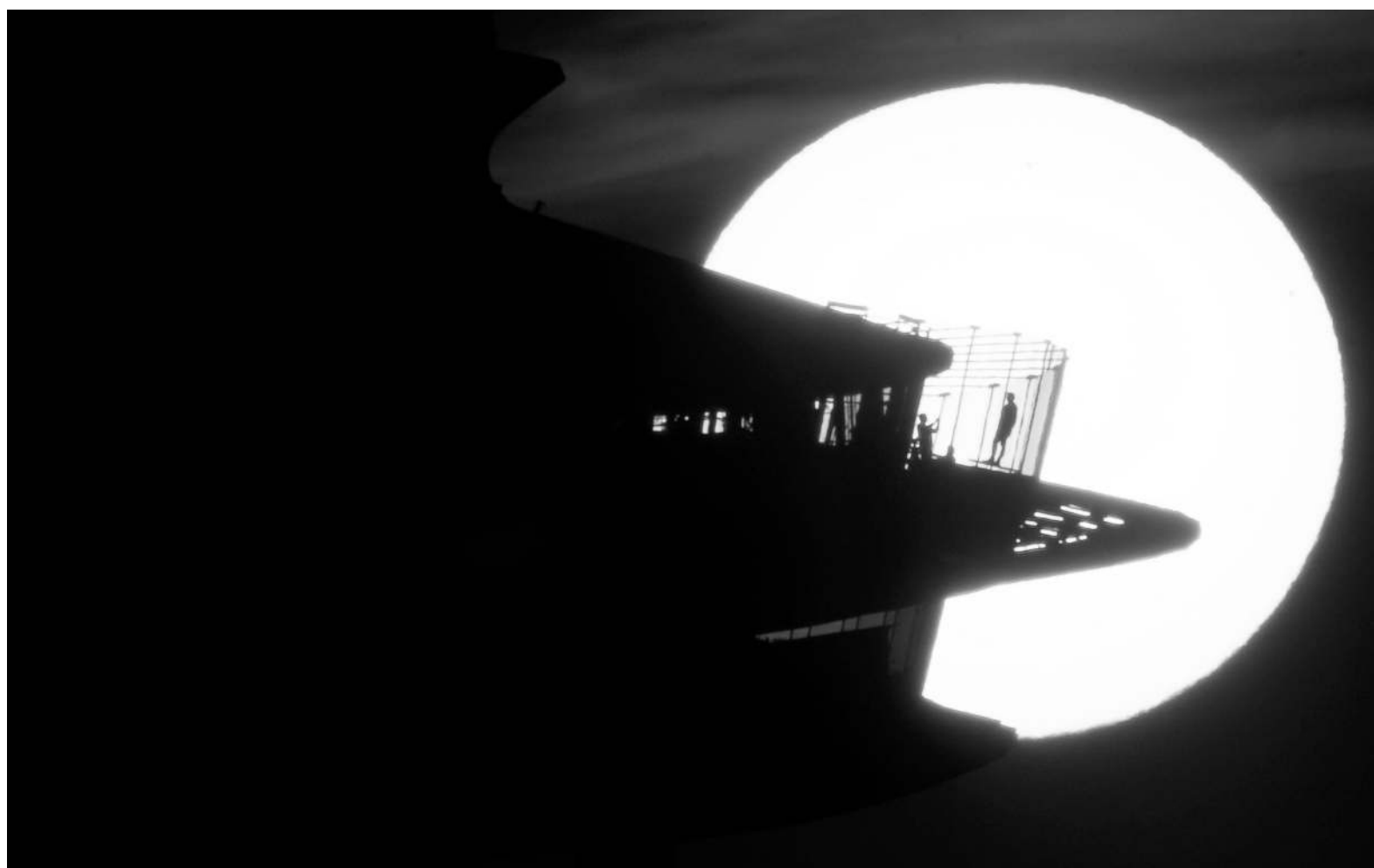
The regulation needs final approval by Gov. Maura Healey, expected in the coming months.

## 2 men die near waterfall made popular on TikTok

**WA** INDEX — The bodies of two people recovered over the weekend after they fell into the water at a dangerous swimming area in Washington state made popular by TikTok have been identified as men from Japan.

The Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office identified the men Tuesday as Hiroya Konosu, 21, and Takayuki Suzuki, 34, the Daily Herald reported.

Search and rescue personnel responded to the Eagle Falls area along the Skykomish River east of Index on Saturday after reports that two men had gone underwater and hadn't resurfaced. The two



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

## Through the eyes of a Needle

The sun sets behind the Space Needle as visitors take photos from the observation deck on the first day of spring, Tuesday, in Seattle.

men were reportedly part of a four-person group.

Their bodies were recovered Sunday.

The beautiful but dangerous swimming hole along U.S. Route 2 has soared in popularity because of social media, Sky Valley Fire Chief Eric Andrews said. The falls, videos of which went viral on TikTok in 2020, have become a "hot spot" for drownings in recent years, he said.

## Man guilty in polygamous sect sexual acts scheme

**AZ** PHOENIX — A businessman pleaded guilty Tuesday to conspiring with the leader of an offshoot polygamous sect near the Arizona-Utah border to transport underage girls across state lines, making him the first man to be convicted in what authorities say was a scheme to orchestrate sexual acts involving children.

Moroni Johnson, who faces 10 years to life in prison, acknowledged that he participated in a scheme to transport four girls under the age of 18 for sexual activity. Authorities say the conspiracy between the 53-year-old Johnson and the sect's leader, self-proclaimed prophet Samuel Bateman, occurred over a three-year period ending in September 2022.

Authorities say Bateman had created a sprawling network spanning at least four states as he tried to start an offshoot of the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which historically has been based in the neigh-

boring communities of Colorado City, Ariz., and Hildale, Utah. He and his followers practice polygamy, a legacy of the early teachings of the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which abandoned the practice in 1890 and now strictly prohibits it.

Bateman has pleaded not guilty to state and federal charges. He was ordered jailed until the resolution of his trial, now scheduled for Sept. 10.

## Pair accused of stealing from Tesla, starting firm

**NY** NEW YORK — Two men are accused of starting a business in China using battery manufacturing technology pilfered from Tesla and trying to sell the proprietary information, federal prosecutors in New York said Tuesday.

Klaus Pflugbeil, 58, a Canadian citizen who lives in Ningbo, China, was arrested Tuesday morning on Long Island, where he thought he was going to meet with businessmen to negotiate a sale price for the information, federal authorities said. Instead, the businessmen were undercover federal agents.

The other man named in the criminal complaint is Yilong Shao, 47, also of Ningbo. He remains at large. They are charged with conspiracy to transmit trade secrets, which carries up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

The technology at issue involves high-speed battery assembly lines that use a proprietary technology owned by Tesla, maker of electric

vehicles.

The two men worked at a Canadian company that developed the technology and was bought in 2019, authorities said in the complaint.

"The defendants set up a company in China, blatantly stole trade secrets from an American company that are important to manufacturing electric vehicles, and which cost many millions of dollars in research and development, and sold products developed with the stolen trade secrets," Breon Peace, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, said in a statement with officials with the Justice Department and FBI.

## Governor signs absentee ballot, anti-DEI bills

**AL** MONTGOMERY — Alabama lawmakers on Tuesday gave final approval to a bill that would outlaw paid assistance with absentee ballot applications and another that would restrict diversity, equity and inclusion programs at universities and state agencies.

Republicans had named the bills as priorities for the legislative session. The Senate, in votes divided along party lines, agreed to changes made by the House of Representatives. Gov. Kay Ivey signed both bills Wednesday.

The absentee voting bill makes it a misdemeanor to distribute a pre-filled absentee ballot application to a voter or return another voter's completed application. And it is now a felony to give, or receive, a payment or gift "for distri-

buted, ordering, requesting, collecting, completing, prefilling, obtaining, or delivering a voter's absentee ballot application."

Republican lawmakers across the country have pushed initiatives that would restrict diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, also known as DEI. The Alabama legislation prohibits universities, K-12 school systems and state agencies from sponsoring DEI programs.

## College to name building after Robert Gates

**VA** WILLIAMSBURG — Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates will have an academic building named after him at William & Mary, the university in Virginia where he holds the honorary position of chancellor, the school announced Wednesday.

Robert M. Gates Hall will be a hub for disciplines that include economic development and inequality, geopolitical conflict, national security and conservation, the school said in a statement.

Gates is the only defense secretary to be asked to stay in the post after a new president was elected, according to the Pentagon. He served under presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Gates was director of the CIA under President George H.W. Bush in the early 1990s.

A \$30 million gift from an anonymous donor is making the hall possible. The currently vacant Brown Hall will be renovated on the Williamsburg campus.

Bizarro

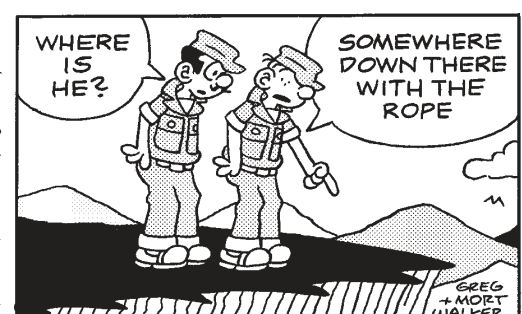
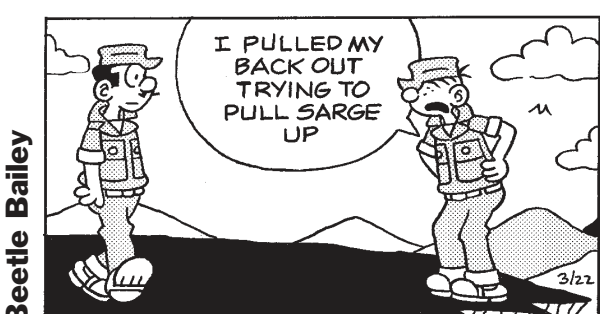
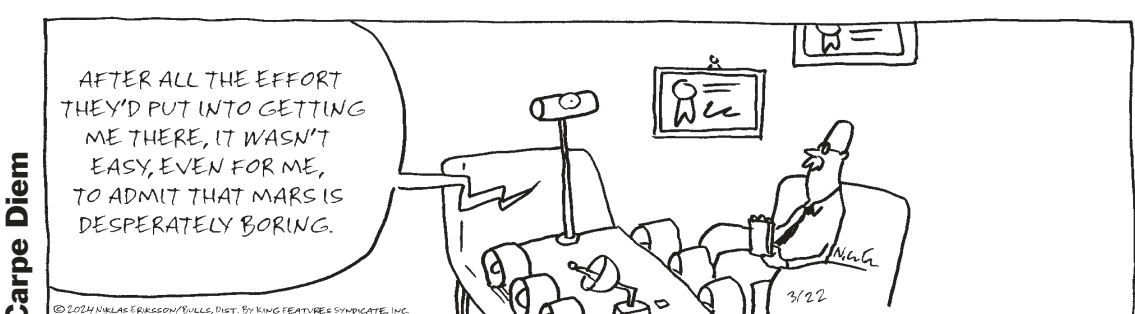
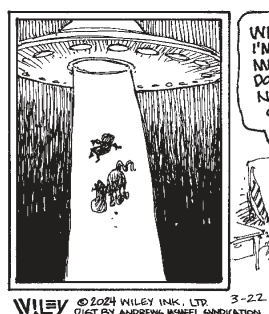
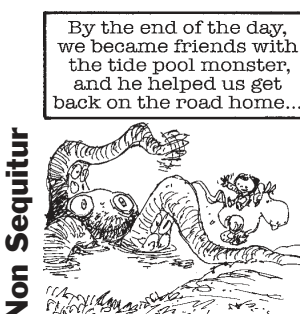
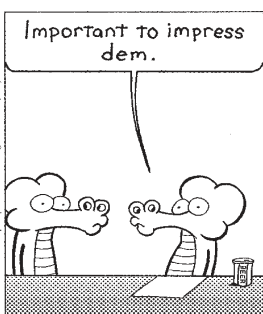
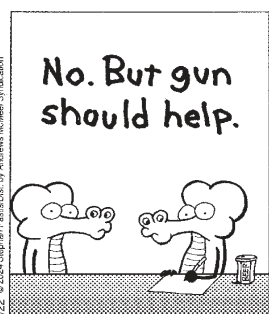
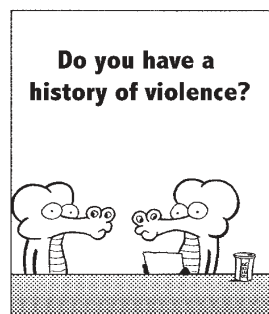
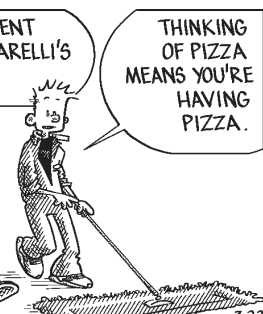


Loose Parts



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		



ACROSS

- 1 "So there!"
- 4 Stumble
- 8 Bell sound
- 12 Bordeaux summer
- 13 Actress Chaplin
- 14 — mater
- 15 Emergency aid group
- 17 Baseball stats
- 18 Resistance units
- 19 Autocrats
- 20 Arm bones
- 22 French cheese
- 24 Legal action
- 25 Indy vehicles
- 29 Mercedes-Benz models
- 30 Bowl of greens
- 31 506, in old Rome
- 32 Liquor-soaked desserts
- 34 "Frozen" reindeer
- 35 Regrets
- 36 Flies high
- 37 Painter's stand
- 40 — arms
- 41 Bond foe
- 42 Biennial golf competition
- 46 Alike (Fr.)
- 47 Cat call
- 48 Time line period

- 49 "Unh-unh"
- 50 Without
- 51 Carried out

- 21 Humdinger
- 22 Hay bundles
- 23 Some TVs
- 25 Croupier's tool
- 26 Moved forward
- 27 KOA patron
- 28 Transgressions
- 30 Author Bellow
- 33 Big Easy cuisine
- 34 Evening in France
- 36 Gushes
- 37 Genesis garden
- 38 Golden Fleece ship
- 39 Break suddenly
- 40 Japanese noodle actor Ei-Masry
- 42 Apt. divisions
- 43 Pro vote
- 44 Swiss canton
- 45 Writer's block?

DOWN

- 1 — Majesty
- 2 Packed away
- 3 Pursuit of pleasure
- 4 Crooner Mel
- 5 Aussie hoppers
- 6 Ones with power
- 7 Mas' mates
- 8 3.26 light-years
- 9 Exile isle
- 10 "Star Wars" actor Ei-Masry
- 11 Girl
- 16 Converse
- 19 Even
- 20 Cold War initials

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-22

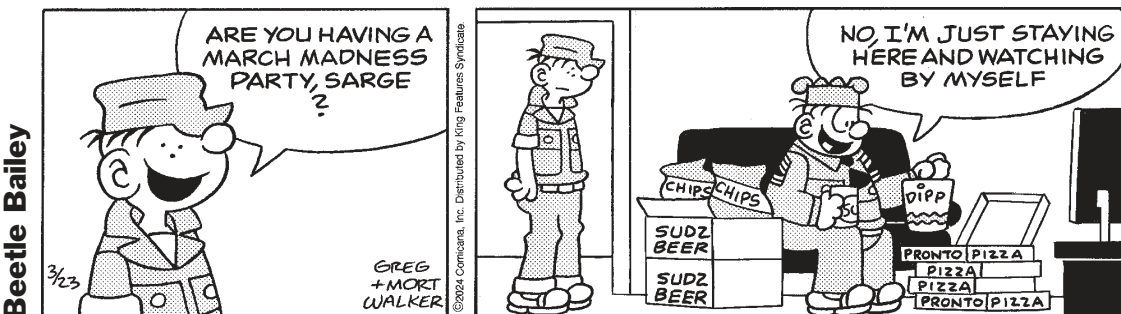
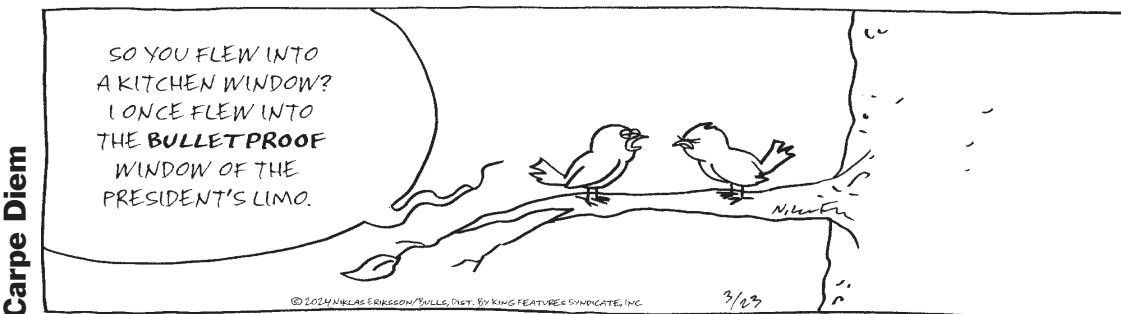
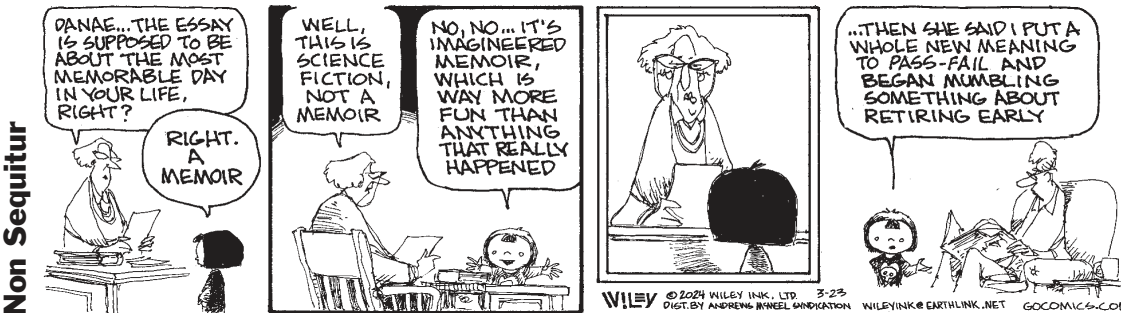
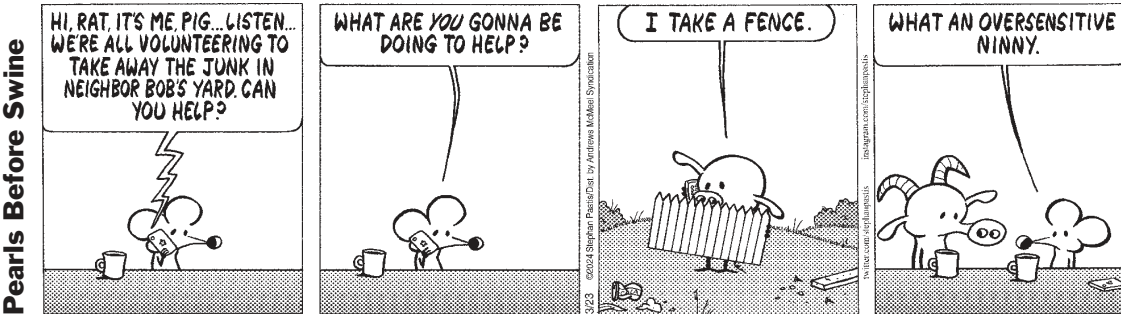
CRYPTOQUIP

OTNF CMQTF PYCKEYLX ZNGG  
 EMILP YR N RKNFTKI FTNF  
 AKIX GMFKINGGX PFMZU  
 FYQKFTKI? AKG-ZIYOP.  
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I RECKON THAT IF THE U.S. WERE TO STOP MANUFACTURING PENNIES, IT WOULD NO LONGER MAKE CENTS.  
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals L

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbers 1-56.

ACROSS

- 1 Actress Spelling
5 Tower city
9 Cranberry territory
12 Japanese noodle
13 Cries of aversion
14 Vegetable peeler brand
15 Optimum
16 Beans go-with
17 Wye follower
18 Merit badge holder
19 Expert
20 Charged bits
21 Supplement, with "out"
23 Samovar
25 Hand in
28 Country star West
32 Viny shelter
33 Swindler
34 Outdoor meal
36 Vast expanses
37 Rock producer Brian
38 Tier
39 Weak
42 Hollywood's Thurman
44 Oklahoma tribe
48 — glance
49 Ready for customers

- 50 Guns the engine
51 Sailor
52 Banner
53 Kardashian matriarch
54 Bashful
55 Lavish party
56 "Maureen" singer

- 11 Leaves
20 Being produced
22 Japanese beer
24 Golfer Mediate
25 Tree fluid
26 Mentalist Geller
27 Telly network
29 Bubble —
30 Actor McKellen
31 UFO pilots
35 Twosome
36 Yam color
39 Bits of butter
40 Nevada neighbor
41 Not even one
43 Deli array
45 Prefix with byte
46 "Metamorphoses" poet
47 Being, to Brutus
49 Broadway opener?

DOWN

- 1 Vats
2 Classic theaters
3 Singer Diana
4 Placing first, second or third
5 Thing on a string
6 Inventor Sikorsky
7 Cloak
8 Request
9 Chucklehead
10 Yoked team

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for previous puzzle with words like TRIP, PEAL, OONA, ALMA, CROSS, RBIS, OHMS, TSARS, BRIE, RACECARS, SALAD, DVI, CAKES, SVEN, RUES, SOARS, UPIN, RYDERCUP, MEOW, ERA, SANS, DID.

3-23

CRYPTOQUIP

Z P P Q Q C Y U N H G A H P M P T
I H N A O Q W V G N C Y C M A Y Y S U O W Y
U N V Y A W B I W B B Y W M Q A W N P A
U W N Q Y : G Y V U O H U Z H T A Y .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT SOMEBODY CALL BIRDS OF A FEATHER THAT VERY LITERALLY STICK TOGETHER? VEL-CROWS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals G

## STARS AND STRIPES.

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher

Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer

Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander

John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff

Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

Michael Ryan, Pacific chief of staff

## EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief  
reid.robert@stripes.comSean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation  
moores.sean@stripes.comAnn Pinson, Digital Managing Editor  
pinson.ann@stripes.com

## BUREAU STAFF

## Europe/Mideast

Erik Slaviv, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief  
slaviv.erik@stripes.com

+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

## Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief  
kidd.aaron@stripes.com

+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

## Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief  
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com

(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News  
bowers.brian@stripes.com

## CIRCULATION

## Mideast

David Schultz, District Manager  
schultz.david@stripes.com

xsscirculation@stripes.com

+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

## Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager  
aquino.carlo@stripes.com

memberservices@stripes.com

+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

## Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com

+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

## CONTACT US

## Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003

633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

## Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

## Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

## OMBUDSMAN

Jacqueline Smith

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper's independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at [ombudsman@stripes.com](mailto:ombudsman@stripes.com), or by phone at 202.886.0003.

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

The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

© Stars and Stripes 2024

stripes.com

## OPINION

## GOP lawmakers are overriding local will

BY FRANCIS WILKINSON

*Bloomberg Opinion*

Last April, the Memphis City Council unanimously passed a law to curtail the number of driving infractions that would officially justify a police stop. The list is limited to a handful of so-called pretextual traffic stops for minor infractions such as a loose bumper or a broken brake light, which would no longer be grounds for pulling over a driver. The law was named for Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who was beaten to death on Jan. 7, 2023, by five Memphis police officers after a traffic stop.

Last week, the Republican-controlled Tennessee legislature voted to overrule the elected representatives of Memphis, reversing the policy change. The legislation has been sent to Republican Gov. Bill Lee. Discussing the bill in February, Republican state Sen. Brent Taylor, whose district includes part of Memphis, characterized the law as a “knee-jerk reaction” to the Nichols killing. If the Tyre Nichols Driving Equality Act were allowed to stand, Taylor said, it would be only a matter of time before a “virtue-signaling” city council somewhere abolishes even more vital traffic laws. Besides, he said, “If you were to ask people, ‘How do police most often catch criminals?’ the number one answer on ‘Family Feud’ would be, ‘A traffic stop.’”

The folk wisdom of the television show “Family Feud,” at least as Taylor imagines it, is no doubt unassailable. But the pattern of Republican state officials overturning the acts of democratically elected local officials, and seizing local power, is growing ever more disconcerting.

As recent history confirms, democratic elections are not events that all Republicans

believe they must respect. Last year, Republican legislators in Montana and Tennessee silenced or expelled lawmakers who were duly elected representatives of thousands of Americans. Conflicts over policing and prosecution have frequently inspired Republican backlash. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended two elected prosecutors in his state, both Democrats, whose policies he criticized. As one of the summarily fired prosecutors said last year, “That’s what elections are for.”

Yet the notion that Americans vote for candidates, and then judge them on the results they achieve in office, is increasingly under attack. Pennsylvania Republicans impeached the twice-elected district attorney of Philadelphia, flagrantly abusing a constitutional process in an unsuccessful effort to reverse the outcome of an election. (Republicans made no effort to commandeer the Philadelphia Police Department, which has struggled in recent years to identify and arrest suspects in shootings and murders.) Republicans in Mississippi decided to take control of a range of police and judicial duties in Jackson, the state’s largest city, where a majority of the residents are Black. The city, which has a Black mayor, is also mostly Democratic. Republican legislators in Missouri similarly muscled in on St. Louis.

Republican claims that the power grabs reflect a commitment to public safety are not credible. The Republican majority on the U.S. Supreme Court has forced cities to permit public gun carrying contrary to the desires of voters and local leaders, and squarely against the interests of public safety. Meanwhile, GOP leader Donald Trump continues to glorify criminals who attacked the U.S. Capitol and threatened the lives of elected representatives. The former president refers

to Jan. 6 criminals collectively as political prisoners and “hostages.”

As Tennessee Sen. Taylor’s reference to “Family Feud” suggests, quality data is not a prerequisite in the rush to reverse democratic elections and the policy choices that flow from them. Some heinous criminals—Taylor mentioned terrorist Timothy McVeigh, for example—were caught or traced during traffic stops. Of course, the notorious “Son of Sam” murderer was traced in 1977 because of a New York City parking ticket. Does that mean that street parking restrictions shouldn’t be suspended on holidays?

Police pull over tens of thousands of motorists every day. Black motorists are stopped disproportionately. Determining how many and what kind of stops are necessary isn’t easy, but the harassment and sporadic police violence— and civilian deaths— that result provide strong incentives to find better policing methods.

The Tyre Nichols Driving Equality Act was based on a similar law implemented in Philadelphia in 2022. That law reclassified eight violations as secondary violations that should not trigger a traffic stop. In the eight months after the law was in place, a study showed that the total number of traffic stops for the targeted infractions, including for Black drivers, declined 54%.

It’s hard to gauge exactly what that means to the quality of life of Black drivers in Philadelphia. The Tennessee legislature has moved to ensure that Black drivers in Memphis never find out.

Francis Wilkinson is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering U.S. politics and policy. Previously, he was executive editor for the Week and a writer for Rolling Stone. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

## The more government ‘borrows,’ the more we pay

BY E.J. ANTONI

*The Heritage Foundation*

If you think the Treasury Department borrowing trillions of dollars is a problem only for future generations, think again. The interest rates on your credit cards, student loans—even your mortgage—are all up now because of the Treasury’s borrowing spree, and it’s costing you thousands.

The runaway spending in Washington has been a problem for decades, but it got a violent shove into overdrive during the last several years. The Biden administration and their big-spender allies in Congress—from both parties—have already racked up \$6.8 trillion of additional debt. And that money had to come from somewhere.

For the first couple years of the Biden administration, it came from the Federal Reserve, which simply created the money. That devalued the currency and caused 40-year-high inflation. When the Fed stopped its printing presses, however, the Treasury had to borrow from the public.

That forced interest rates on Treasury bills, notes and bonds to rise—and fast. Many Treasury yields have quadrupled in less than four years. Some yields have increased 75-fold. The reason is simple: The Treasury is competing with everyone else to borrow trillions of dollars annually.

You may not realize it, but when you apply at a bank for a mortgage, or online for a credit card, or at a dealership for an auto loan, you’re actually competing to borrow money. A lender has many options when it comes to loaning

out his money. And that means loan pricing is a competitive process.

We call the price to borrow money the interest rate. A higher interest rate means it’s more expensive to borrow, while a lower interest rate reduces the cost of borrowing.

Like other markets, when there is a surge in demand for loanable funds, the price rises. Hence, if people want to borrow much more money, interest rates offered on loans will march upward. Those borrowers who are willing to pay more will receive loans; the other would-be borrowers receive nothing.

The Treasury has provided just such a demand surge—in spades. The federal government is running a \$3 trillion annualized deficit for the current fiscal year. To lure lenders away from private borrowers, the Treasury was forced to offer higher interest rates.

But that left less money available for those private borrowers, both individuals and businesses alike. With potential borrowers competing for fewer dollars, the interest rate for private loans also rose.

To add insult to injury, 40-year-high inflation has so increased people’s cost of living that they’re able to save less, if anything at all. The average savings rate today is less than half of its pre-pandemic level, and the reduction in savings has decreased the amount of money available for lending.

The smaller supply of loanable funds has also pushed up the price of borrowing, driving interest rates even higher.

Furthermore, Treasuries are viewed as essentially guaranteed, having no default risk.

Any individual, no matter how creditworthy, will have some level of risk for which the lender will ask to be compensated. That means private borrowers will pay an interest rate premium compared to the federal government. The result has been a tripling of mortgage interest rates for many borrowers, record high interest rates on credit cards, and the highest student and auto loan interest rates in more than a decade.

Americans are paying over \$240 billion annually just in credit card interest, before they put a dime toward actually paying down their balances. For the first time ever, interest on non-mortgage debt has caught up to the interest families are paying on their mortgages.

Speaking of mortgages, higher interest rates have increased the monthly payment on a median price home by over \$1,000 compared to three years ago. That’s an extra \$12,000 each year—for 30 years—for the same house.

It’s the same story with student and auto loans: The typical American family is paying thousands more annually in interest payments now than in 2021.

The high borrowing costs punishing American families are here to stay as long as Congress continues its breakneck pace of deficit spending. Until that stops, the Treasury will continue sucking all the oxygen out of the room, while American families suffocate financially.

E.J. Antoni is a public finance economist at The Heritage Foundation and a senior fellow at Committee to Unleash Prosperity.



# SCOREBOARD/MLB

## PRO SOCCER

### MLS Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Inter Miami CF	3	1	1	10	13	5
Columbus	3	0	1	10	7	2
Cincinnati	2	0	2	8	4	2
CF Montréal	2	1	1	7	8	7
Toronto FC	2	1	1	7	3	2
New York	2	1	1	7	4	5
Atlanta	2	1	0	6	6	2
Nashville	1	0	3	6	5	4
D.C. United	1	1	2	5	6	6
Chicago	1	2	1	4	8	9
Charlotte FC	1	2	1	4	3	4
NYCFC	1	3	0	3	3	6
Philadelphia	0	0	3	3	5	5
Orlando City	0	3	1	1	2	10
New England	0	4	0	0	3	10

### MLS Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Minnesota	3	0	1	10	8	4
Vancouver	2	0	1	7	6	2
Portland	2	1	1	7	8	5
LA Galaxy	1	0	3	6	9	7
St Louis City	1	0	3	6	8	6
Sporting KC	1	0	3	6	4	3
Colorado	1	1	2	5	5	7
Real Salt Lake	1	2	1	4	5	5
Houston	1	1	1	4	3	3
LAFC	1	2	1	4	2	6
FC Dallas	1	3	0	3	5	8
Austin FC	0	1	3	3	5	6
Seattle	0	1	2	2	2	3
San Jose	0	4	0	0	3	9

**Saturday, March 23**  
 Chicago at New England  
 Miami at New York  
 Real Salt Lake at Vancouver  
 Columbus at Charlotte FC  
 New York City FC at Cincinnati  
 Austin FC at Orlando City  
 Atlanta at Toronto FC  
 LA Galaxy at Sporting Kansas City  
 D.C. United at St Louis City  
 Houston at Colorado  
 Nashville at Los Angeles FC  
 Philadelphia at Portland  
 Seattle at San Jose

### NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
North Carolina	1	0	0	3	5	1
Chicago	1	0	0	3	2	0
Kansas City	1	0	0	3	5	4
Bay FC	1	0	0	3	1	0
OL Reign	1	0	0	3	1	0
Orlando	0	0	1	1	2	2
Louisville	0	0	1	1	2	2
Gotham FC	0	0	0	0	0	0
San Diego	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portland	0	1	0	0	4	5
Angel City	0	1	0	0	0	1
Washington	0	1	0	0	0	1
Utah Royals FC	0	1	0	0	0	2
Houston	0	1	0	0	1	5

**Friday, March 22**  
 Angel City at Orlando  
 North Carolina at Utah Royals FC

**Saturday, March 23**  
 OL Reign at Chicago  
 Bay FC at Washington  
 Louisville at Houston  
 Kansas City at San Diego

**Sunday, March 24**  
 Gotham FC at Portland

## TENNIS

### Miami Open Wednesday At Miami Gardens Round of 128 Men's Singles

Luca van Assche, France, def. Pavel Kotov, Russia, 6-3, 7-5.  
 Botić Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, def. Rinky Hijikata, Australia, 7-5, 7-6 (3).  
 Denis Shapovalov, Canada, def. Luciano Darderi, Italy, 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-4.  
 Jack Draper, Britain, def. Taro Daniel, Japan, 6-3, 6-2.  
 Christopher O'Connell, Australia, def. Vit Kopriva, Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-4.  
 Tomas Machac, Czech Republic, def. Darwin Blanch, United States, 6-4, 6-2.  
 Flavio Cobolli, Italy, def. Yoshihito Nishioka, Japan, 1-6, 6-1, 6-4.  
 Marton Fucsovics, Hungary, def. Max Purcell, Australia, 6-2, 6-2.  
 Andrea Vavassori, Italy, def. Pedro Cachin, Argentina, 6-2, 6-2.  
 Thiago Seyboth Wild, Brazil, def. Nuno Borges, Portugal, 6-4, 7-5.  
 Andy Murray, Britain, def. Matteo Berrettini, Italy, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.  
 Juncheng Shang, China, def. Miomir Kecmanovic, Serbia, 7-6 (5), 4-6, 7-6 (5).  
 Martin Damm Jr, United States, def. Zhang Zhizhen, China, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (3).  
 Matteo Arnaldi, Italy, def. Arthur Fils, France, 6-3, 6-4.  
 Alex Michelsen, United States, def. Lukas Klein, Slovakia, 7-6 (5), 6-2.

## PRO HOCKY

### NHL Eastern Conference Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	70	41	14	15	97	237	192
Florida	68	45	19	4	94	224	165
Toronto	68	39	20	9	87	251	215
Tampa Bay	68	37	25	6	80	240	228
Detroit	69	35	28	6	76	236	232
Buffalo	70	33	32	5	71	209	207
Montreal	68	25	31	12	62	188	239
Ottawa	67	28	35	4	60	213	239

### NHL Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Rangers	69	45	20	4	94	231	189
Carolina	69	43	20	6	92	236	185
Philadelphia	69	35	26	8	78	206	211
Washington	68	33	26	9	75	184	215
N.Y. Islanders	68	29	24	15	73	203	226
New Jersey	69	33	32	4	70	225	238
Pittsburgh	68	30	29	9	69	199	204
Columbus	69	23	34	12	58	202	250

### NHL Western Conference Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	68	44	19	5	93	214	160
Colorado	69	44	20	5	93	258	207
Dallas	70	42	19	9	93	256	212
Nashville	69	40	25	4	84	227	206
Minnesota	70	34	28	8	76	216	225
St. Louis	69	36	30	3	75	197	209
Arizona	69	28	36	5	61	203	229
Chicago	69	19	45	5	43	152	248

### NHL Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	69	43	18	8	94	241	186
Edmonton	66	41	21	4	86	234	187
Los Angeles	69	36	22	11	83	216	180
Vegas	68	36	25	7	79	219	205
Calgary	68	33	30	5	71	213	220
Seattle	67	28	27	12	68	182	196
Anaheim	69	23	43	3	49	171	252
San Jose	68	16	45	7	39	150	276

### NHL Wednesday's games

Toronto 7, Washington 3  
 Dallas 5, Arizona 2  
 Los Angeles 6, Minnesota 0

### NHL Thursday's games

N.Y. Islanders at Detroit  
 N.Y. Rangers at Boston  
 Philadelphia at Carolina  
 St. Louis at Ottawa  
 Winnipeg at New Jersey  
 Nashville at Florida  
 Buffalo at Edmonton  
 Chicago at Anaheim  
 Montreal at Vancouver  
 Seattle at Vegas  
 Tampa Bay at San Jose

### NHL Friday's games

Carolina at Washington  
 Pittsburgh at Dallas  
 Columbus at Colorado  
 Seattle at Arizona

### NHL Saturday's games

Boston at Philadelphia  
 Winnipeg at N.Y. Islanders  
 St. Louis at Minnesota  
 Detroit at Nashville  
 Edmonton at Toronto  
 Ottawa at New Jersey  
 Florida at N.Y. Rangers  
 Calgary at Vancouver  
 Chicago at San Jose  
 Columbus at Vegas  
 Tampa Bay at Los Angeles

Dominik Koepfer, Germany, def. Marcos Giron, United States, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4.

### Women's Singles

Maria Timofeeva, Russia, def. Varvara Gracheva, Russia, 6-3, 6-3.  
 Zhu Lin, China, def. Marie Bouzkova, Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-4.  
 Elna Avanesyan, Russia, def. Erika Andreeva, Russia, 6-0, 3-6, 6-2.  
 Camila Giorgi, Italy, def. Magdalena Frech, Poland, 6-4, 6-2.  
 Sloane Stephens, United States, def. Angelique Kerber, Germany, 6-2, 6-3.  
 Claire Liu, United States, def. Petra Martić, Croatia, 6-4, 6-1.  
 Emiliania Arango, Colombia, def. Tatjana Maria, Germany, 6-2, 6-3.  
 Danielle Collins, United States, def. Bernarda Pera, United States, 3-6, 6-1, 6-1.  
 Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, def. Sara Sorribes Tormo, Spain, 6-0, 6-3.  
 Viktoriya Tomova, Bulgaria, def. Tamara Korpatich, Germany, 6-2, 6-4.  
 Shelby Rogers, United States, def. Linda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, 4-6, 6-4, 6-2.  
 Nadia Podoroska, Argentina, def. Ashlyn Krueger, United States, 6-4, 6-2.  
 Donna Vekic, Croatia, def. Karolina Pliskova, Czech Republic, 6-4, 2-6, 6-2.  
 Storm Hunter, Australia, def. Martina Trevisan, Italy, 6-3, 3-0, ret.  
 Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Italy, 6-3, 6-4.  
 Katie Volynets, United States, def. Sofia Kenin, United States, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3.

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

#### BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League

**BALTIMORE ORIOLES** — Optioned LHP Nick Vespi to the minor league camp.  
**CHICAGO WHITE SOX** — Reassigned RHPs Joe Barlow and Corey Knebel to the minor league camp. Optioned C Korey Lee outright to Charlotte (IL).  
**TORONTO BLUE JAYS** — Acquired RHP Chris McElvain from Cincinnati in exchange for INF Santiago Espinal.

#### National League

**ATLANTA BRAVES** — Reassigned Cs Drake Baldwin and Chadwick Tromp, INFs David Fletcher, Andrew Velazquez and Luke Williams and OF Eli White to the minor league camp.  
**COLORADO ROCKIES** — Reassigned RHPs Geoff Hartlieb and Jaden Hill and C Drew Romo to the minor league camp.

**LOS ANGELES DODGERS** — Placed RHPs Walker Buehler, Brusdar Graterol, Emmet Sheehan and Blake Treinen on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Landon Knack from Oklahoma City (PCL).  
**NEW YORK METS** — Optioned RHP Jose Butto to Syracuse (IL).

**PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES** — Traded RHP Jason Ruffcorn to Seattle and RHP Ezequiel Ventura to Minnesota for cash considerations. Optioned RHP Nick Nelson to Lehigh Valley (IL).  
**SAN DIEGO PADRES** — Selected the contracts of OF Jackson Merrill and INFs Graham Pauley and Tyler Wade from El Paso (PCL). Optioned C Brett Sullivan and RHP Woo Suk-Go to El Paso. Placed RHPs Glenn Otto and Luis Patino on the 15-day IL and INF Tucupita Marcano on the 10-day IL.

**SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS** — Reassigned RHPs Spencer Bivens and Cody Stashak to the minor league camp. Optioned INFs Casey Schmitt and David Villar outright to Sacramento (PCL).  
**BASKETBALL National Basketball Association**  
**DETROIT PISTONS** — Signed F Chimezie Metu to a 10-day contract.  
**MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES** — Signed G DeJon Jarreau and F Maozinho Pereira to 10-day contracts.  
**PHOENIX SUNS** — Signed G Isaiah Thomas to a 10-day contract.  
**TORONTO RAPTORS** — Recalled Gs Javon Freeman-Liberty and Jahmi'us Ramsey from the Raptors 905 of the G League.

#### FOOTBALL National Football League

**ARIZONA CARDINALS** — Signed OL Evan Brown to a one-year contract.  
**BALTIMORE RAVENS** — Re-signed CB Arthur Maulet. Signed LB Chris Board.  
**BUFFALO BILLS** — Signed S Mike Edwards, RB Ty Johnson and DE Casey Toohill to one-year contracts.  
**CAROLINA PANTHERS** — Signed WR David Moore and T Yosuah Nijman.  
**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Signed QBs Jameis Winston and Tyler Huntley and RB D'Onta Foreman.  
**DALLAS COWBOYS** — Signed RB Rico Dowdle.  
**DENVER BRONCOS** — Signed OT Matt Peart to a one-year contract. Re-signed LB Justin Strnad.  
**GREEN BAY PACKERS** — Named Todd Hunt strength & conditioning assistant.  
**HOUSTON TEXANS** — Re-signed DE Derek Barnett and WR Steven Sims. Released DB Ka'dar Hollman.  
**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Re-signed G Danny Pinter.  
**MINNESOTA VIKINGS** — Signed CB Shaquill Griffin, LB Jihad Ward and LB Kamu Grugier-Hill.  
**NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** — Re-signed S Johnathan Abram.  
**NEW YORK GIANTS** — Re-signed CB Darnay Holmes to a one-year contract.  
**NEW YORK JETS** — Signed WR Mike Williams.  
**PHILADELPHIA EAGLES** — Signed DT P.J. Mustipher and DB Tyler Hall.  
**SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS** — Signed QB Joshua Dobbs.  
**SEATTLE SEAHAWKS** — Signed DT Johnathan Hankins and DB K'Von Wallace.  
**TENNESSEE TITANS** — Signed K Nick Folk and DT Sebastian Joseph.

#### HOCKEY National Hockey League

**COLORADO AVALANCHE** — Reassigned RW Nikolai Kovalenko from Nozhny Novgorod (KHL) to Colorado (NHL).  
**DALLAS STARS** — Recalled G Matthew Murray from Texas (AHL).  
**NEW JERSEY DEVILS** — Recalled D Tyler Wotherspoon from Utica (AHL) loan.  
**NEW YORK RANGERS** — Agreed to terms with F Jaroslav Chmelar on a three-year, entry-level contract.  
**PHILADELPHIA FLYERS** — Reassigned D Mason Millman to Reading (ECHL).  
**ST. LOUIS BLUES** — Signed D Theo Lindstein to a three-year, entry-level contract.  
**VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS** — Reassigned D Joe Fleming to Henderson (AHL) from Savannah (ECHL).

#### SOCCER Major League Soccer

**ATLANTA UNITED** — Signed F Daniel Rios on loan from Liga MX side CD Guadalajara for the remainder of the 2024 season.  
**PORTLAND TIMBERS** — Acquired F Jonathan Rodriguez in a full transfer from LIGA MX side Club America and he will occupy a designated player/international spot pending a physical and receipt of his international transfer certificate (ITC) and P-1 Visa.  
**REAL SALT LAKE** — Announced the selection of W Andres Gomez to the Colombian National Team and F Diego Luna and G Gavin Beavers to the U.S. Youth National team.



AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP  
 The San Diego Padres' Manny Machado hits a three-run home run at the Gocheok Sky Dome on Thursday in Seoul, South Korea.

# Padres chase Yamamoto early to win slugfest

By STEPHEN WADE  
 Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — After chasing Yoshinobu Yamamoto from his major league debut after one inning and scoring their most runs ever against the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Diego's Xander Bogaerts was sad to leave the Gocheok Sky Dome.

"We got to come here more," he said.

Jake Cronenworth tied a career high with four hits and had four RBIs as the Padres outlasted the Dodgers 15-11 on Thursday night after Los Angeles fired Shohei Ohtani's interpreter following allegations of illegal gambling.

Interpreter Ipppei Mizuhara was let go from the team Wednesday following reports from the Los Angeles Times and ESPN about alleged ties to an illegal bookmaker.

Ohtani hit three deep flyouts on a 1-for-5 night, including a sacrifice fly, and was 3-for-10 with two RBIs in the series. He did not speak with reporters.

"I hope Sho is good, but you know, at the end of the day we have to make sure we take care of our jobs," said Mookie Betts, who had six RBIs along with four hits that included the first home run of the major league season. "No matter what cards we're dealt, we better go play them."

Yamamoto and Dodgers manager Dave Roberts insisted Mizuhara's situation didn't contribute to the defeat.

"I feel regret that I just couldn't keep the team in the game from the get-go, so I do feel the responsibility for it," Yamamoto said through a translator. "I just got to get ready for the next outing."

San Diego gained a split in the opening two-games series, Major League Baseball's first games in South Korea. After the Dodgers rebounded from a 9-2 deficit and closed to 12-11, Manny Machado hit a three-run homer in the ninth off J.P. Feyereisen.

San Diego outthit the Dodgers 17-16, and Los Angeles made three errors that led to a pair of unearned runs. Luis Campusano had three hits and 20-year-old center fielder Jackson Merrill got his first two major league hits. Yamamoto (0-1) signed a \$325 million, 12-year contract, a record amount for a pitcher that created high expectations. San Diego batted around against the two-time Pacific League MVP, and he left with a 45.00 ERA, allowing five runs, four hits, one walk, a hit batter and a wild pitch. Cronenworth's two-run triple, Ha-Seong Kim's sacrifice fly, Campusano's RBI double and Tyler Wade's run-scoring single built a 5-1 lead.

"Just didn't have the command and so it's not about the stuff," Roberts said. "When you're a command guy, which he's been his entire career, his life, and you just misfire, get behind in counts, hit batters, that's just not who he is. ... He's an easy guy that you know he'll bounce back from this."

Michael King (1-0) won in his Padres debut following his acquisition in the trade that sent Juan Soto to the New York Yankees. King allowed three runs in 3⅓ innings.

## NBA

# Defense gets tighter during playoff push

BY PAT GRAHAM  
Associated Press

New Orleans forward Herbert Jones learned a long time ago the critical component to being an elite defensive stopper was keeping whoever you're guarding in front of you.

It's that simple. It's that difficult, too.

"You do the best you can," Jones said.

Contrary to popular belief, there has been some defense played in the NBA this season (it's just been tougher). It's been on display more following the All-Star break and on the heels of that record-setting 211-186 All-Star Game when all signs of guarding anyone vanished.

The numbers post-break speak volumes about the commitment to defense: Entering Monday, NBA teams were averaging around four points per game less than they were before mid-February, dropping from 115.5 to 111.3.

NBA coaches and players have various explanations for that. Maybe defenders are being allowed to get away with more by officials, becoming wise to the tricks of the elite scorers. Or maybe it's because the NBA playoff race is tightening up down the stretch.

It's probably as simple as this: Fewer fouls are being called on each team (down from 19.4 per game to 17.5 post-break) and fewer free throws are being attempted (22.7 down to 19.8). Fewer free throws, fewer points.

The NBA has said it did not mandate fewer fouls being called.

"We haven't gotten a memo about it, or maybe I wasn't paying attention," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "That could be the case. Good. If the competitors and teams can figure it out between those four lines, we're all for it."

Spoelstra thinks it could be as simple as teams just locking in at an important time of year. Michael Malone, coach of the reigning champion Denver Nuggets, can see that.

"I just think our guys are more disciplined from a personal and game-plan standpoint. I think we're a lot more urgent," Malone said. "Our disposition is where it needs to be."

For Jones, guarding someone boils down to fundamentals. He was taught at Alabama to play defense with his chest. Basically, using his footwork to keep his upper body in front of an offensive player and not reaching with his hands.

As for any discrepancy between the amount of calls before and after the All-Star break, well, Jones said it just depends on the night.

"You really never know how things may go, and I think that's



New Orleans Pelicans forward Herbert Jones defends Atlanta Hawks guard Dejounte Murray during a game March 10. Jones takes pride in using the fundamentals he learned at Alabama to become an elite defender.



Minnesota Timberwolves center Rudy Gobert blocks a shot by L.A. Clippers forward Paul George. Gobert leads the NBA in defensive rating.

what the first quarter is about," Jones explained. "You're just trying to figure out the flow of the game. I mean, try to be physical coming out to see if you can get away with things. But at the end of the day, whatever the refs call, it's their call and you've got to deal with it."

San Antonio's 7-foot-4 center, Victor Wembanyama, impedes the way of just about anyone who dares enter his lane. In this particular instance, though, the rookie conceded a little ground by saying that fellow Frenchman Rudy Gobert has a good chance of earning his fourth NBA defensive player of the year award.

"Let him earn it now because afterward it won't be his turn," Wembanyama joked.

Gobert's presence in the middle has been big for a Minnesota team missing Karl-Anthony Towns due to a knee injury. Gobert leads the league in defensive rating and remains the heavy favorite to win the defensive award, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. Also in the mix are Wembanyama (the league's leader in blocks), Cleveland's Jarrett Allen, Miami's Bam Adebayo and Anthony Davis of the Lakers.

At the start of the season, defense took a backseat as high-scoring games became the norm. There have been 15 instances in which a player scored 50 or more points — 16 if you count Towns' 50 in the All-Star Game — including a 73-point outburst from Luka Doncic on Jan. 26.

But none have occurred since the break.

Earlier this season, when scorers were posting gaudy numbers, Spurs coach Gregg Popovich was asked if he would lobby for rule changes in an effort to return to old-school defensive games.

He scoffed.

"No, because that would be a waste of time," Popovich said. "The league has decided how they want this to be played, and we've been doing it for quite a while now and it's not going in the other direction because the fans love it."

"I don't know this for a fact, but I am going to guess that our '05 championship against Detroit had the entire league office just hiding and biting their lip and hoping it would be over quickly because it was so freakin' boring."

That 2005 NBA championship was a defensive gem the Spurs won in seven games, when only once did San Antonio or Detroit top 100 points.

This season, the Indiana Pacers are leading the way on offense by averaging 123.1 points a game. Every team averages at least 105.8.

"In this league, there's always an ebb and flow," Atlanta coach Quin Snyder said. "Defenses catch up to offenses and offenses adjust and defenses adjust. That's what makes it a unique league. ... You have to continue to adapt to what's going on in the game."

That's the consensus of Mavericks coach Jason Kidd, too.

"These players are very, very smart and understand how to trick the referees," said Kidd, a Hall of Fame guard who won a title in 2010-11 with Dallas. "What we're taught to do is get the rules and figure out how to turn them to our advantage as players."

"It will be a little more physical and players who can make that adjustment will have success."

## Scoreboard

### Eastern Conference

#### Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Boston	55	14	.797	—
New York	41	27	.603	13½
Philadelphia	38	31	.551	17
Brooklyn	26	43	.377	29
Toronto	23	46	.333	32

#### Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	41	28	.594	—
Miami	38	31	.551	3
Atlanta	30	38	.441	10½
Charlotte	17	52	.246	24
Washington	11	58	.159	30

#### Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	44	25	.638	—
Cleveland	43	26	.623	1
Indiana	39	31	.557	5½
Chicago	34	35	.493	10
Detroit	12	57	.174	32

### Western Conference

#### Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	42	26	.618	—
Dallas	40	29	.580	2½
Houston	33	35	.485	9
Memphis	23	47	.329	20
San Antonio	15	54	.217	27½

#### Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	48	20	.706	—
Denver	48	21	.696	½
Minnesota	47	22	.681	1½
Utah	29	40	.420	19½
Portland	19	50	.275	29½

#### Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	43	25	.632	—
Sacramento	40	28	.588	3
Phoenix	40	29	.580	3½
L.A. Lakers	37	32	.536	6½
Golden State	36	32	.529	7

x-clinched playoff spot

#### Tuesday's games

Orlando 112, Charlotte 92  
Houston 137, Washington 114  
New Orleans 104, Brooklyn 91  
Dallas 113, San Antonio 107  
Denver 115, Minnesota 112

#### Wednesday's games

Indiana 122, Detroit 103  
Miami 107, Cleveland 104  
Sacramento 123, Toronto 89  
Boston 122, Milwaukee 119  
Oklahoma City 119, Utah 107  
L.A. Clippers 116, Portland 103  
Phoenix 115, Philadelphia 102  
Golden State 137, Memphis 116

#### Thursday's games

New Orleans at Orlando  
Sacramento at Washington  
Brooklyn at Milwaukee  
Chicago at Houston  
Utah at Dallas  
New York at Denver  
Atlanta at Phoenix

#### Friday's games

Boston at Detroit  
Oklahoma City at Toronto  
Cleveland at Minnesota  
Memphis at San Antonio  
New Orleans at Miami  
Indiana at Golden State  
L.A. Clippers at Portland  
Philadelphia at L.A. Lakers

#### Saturday's games

Brooklyn at New York  
Sacramento at Orlando  
Charlotte at Atlanta  
Boston at Chicago  
Phoenix at San Antonio  
Toronto at Washington  
Utah at Houston  
Denver at Portland

#### Sunday's games

New Orleans at Detroit  
Philadelphia at L.A. Clippers  
Cleveland at Miami  
Golden State at Minnesota  
Oklahoma City at Milwaukee  
Indiana at L.A. Lakers

JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

## TENNIS/OLYMPICS



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Tennis could be on the verge of massive structural change if separate proposals formulated by the four Grand Slam tournaments and the WTA and ATP professional tours can succeed.

# Grand Slams, Saudi Arabia, tours all seeking revamp

BY HOWARD FENDRICH  
Associated Press

**O**n this, the leaders of tennis can agree: There is more money out there to be made. And they see eye-to-eye on this, too: The sport's current structure could stand to change.

The hows and whys and whens of it all? Well, that's open to discussion — and there is plenty of that happening now behind closed doors, conversations and negotiations about the future of tennis among the folks who run the Grand Slam tournaments and other events, the women's WTA and men's ATP professional tours, the players, their agents and others with a hand in the sport, including Saudi Arabia's Private Investment Fund (known as the PIF, it is the entity behind LIV Golf).

There are two main proposals, both aimed at increasing revenue, seeking support at the moment: One, driven by the four Slams, would get rid of the current WTA-ATP structure and create a new Premier Tour (that's the working title) for roughly 100 women and 100 men and a lower-level Contenders Tour (another working title) with 75 to 100 tournaments open to roughly 200 women and 200 men, with all events hosting both genders with equal prize money. The other, driven by the ATP, would form a venture with the WTA to sell media rights and sponsorships but keep two separate tours for playing purposes, while bringing in an infusion of cash from the

PIF in part by placing a Masters 1000 event in Saudi Arabia.

Why is this happening now? The sport is "underperforming," to use a word offered by Lew Sherr, the CEO of the U.S. Tennis Association, which runs the U.S. Open.

And that, he explained to The Associated Press this week in a joint interview with Sally Bolton — CEO of the All England Club, which runs Wimbledon — is why the four most prestigious and most-watched tennis tournaments, a quartet that includes the Australian Open and French Open, are working together in what Sherr called an "unprecedented way" in an effort "to unlock what we think is an enormous potential."

Making tennis more fan-friendly — an easier-to-understand and shorter season, for example, and more consistency in TV broadcasts from week to week — could bring roughly a \$1 billion increase in annual value, on top of the sport's current revenues of about \$2.5 billion, Bolton estimated, by way of rights packages and increased sponsorship deals that could arise from more viewership.

Bolton acknowledged nothing will happen "anytime before 2026," but said she thinks the project "can move relatively quickly" if they get others to buy in.

"The good news is we're sitting on the cusp of what could be generational change for the better for a global sport," Ahmad Nassar, the executive director of the Professional Tennis Players Association,

a group co-founded by 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic to represent the sport's athletes, said when asked for a general assessment of the state of play for tennis. "And that's exciting and a huge opportunity — as long as we don't squander it."

The ATP and WTA have said they are looking into forming a combined "commercial entity," but are otherwise mostly staying mum publicly about what is potentially a significant moment for both. The ATP recently struck a deal with the PIF that includes naming rights for the men's rankings; that followed the placement of a year-end tournament for young players in Saudi Arabia. There is already a provision to allow the ATP to add a 10th Masters tournament, and Saudi Arabia could get that spot on the calendar.

According to Bolton and Sherr, interviews with more than 5,000 fans around the world beginning in 2021 show 70% said the only tennis tournaments they watch are the Slams.

"The conclusion was that the season lacks consequence, that tennis is confusing to follow, and that fans don't understand which tournaments matter, and which don't, at any given point in the season. They know the four Slams. But other than that, there's not a compelling narrative," Sherr said. "We dilute and compete with ourselves by having two, three, four, five, six tournaments going on at any one point in time. And we're competing with our own product."

# US soccer will face Germany, Australia, France in openers

Associated Press

PARIS — The U.S. women's soccer team will face Germany and Australia at the Paris Olympics when incoming coach Emma Hayes looks to get off to a flying start in the job.

The draws for the men's and women's soccer tournaments were held at a ceremony in Saint-Denis on Wednesday.

The record four-time gold-medalist was drawn against fifth-ranked Germany and World Cup semifinalist Australia in Group B. Those teams will be joined by either Morocco or Zambia from the African Football Confederation.

Hayes takes up her role as U.S. head coach in May after finishing the season with Chelsea, where she is challenging for a quadruple of trophies in her final year. She has already won 14 major trophies at Chelsea, including six Women's Super League titles.

Twila Kilgore is serving as interim coach of the United States until Hayes can join the team. Kilgore recently led the team to the title in the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

"The bottom line is we're excited to have a path, to know who we're playing for the most part, to be able to start working on specific game plans," Kilgore said following the draw. "But also just to know the logistical path. There's so much that goes into an Olympics with a short turnaround and congested games."

The U.S. hasn't won Olympic gold since 2012 and is coming off a disappointing Women's World Cup last year, when it suffered its earliest exit from the tournament after being knocked out by Sweden on penalties in the round of 16. It had never finished worse than

third at previous World Cups.

Hayes has established herself as one of the sport's leading coaches. She can further add to her record by winning a clean sweep of trophies this season — including the Champions League, which is the one competition she has yet to deliver at Chelsea.

Defending champion Canada was drawn in Group A with host France, Colombia and New Zealand. Before winning the gold medal at the Tokyo Games, Canada won back-to-back bronze medals in London and Brazil.

"We know more than ever that there's not an easy game in the women's game, no matter what the ranking is," Canada coach Bev Priestman said. "We know the other routes we could have gone down. Pleased, excited, but taking nothing for granted."

World Cup winner Spain is in Group C with Japan and Brazil. Nigeria or South Africa will join that group as another CAF qualifier.

The U.S. men's team will face France at the Paris Games after being drawn in the same group as the host nation for the men's tournament.

The U.S. is competing at the Games for the first time since Beijing in 2008 and faces a potentially daunting task after being drawn alongside France, coached by soccer great Thierry Henry, in Group A.

Also in the group are New Zealand and the winner of a playoff between teams from the Asian and the African confederations.

The soccer tournament will begin two days before the opening ceremony of the Games on July 24, with the women's final concluding the event on Aug. 10.



CHRISTOPHE ENA/AP

Canadian soccer player Stephanie Labbe draws USA at the draw for the Olympic Women's Soccer tournament Wednesday outside Paris.

## WOMEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

# Star power this year centered on women

By DOUG FEINBERG  
Associated Press

As March Madness is set to tip off, three of the most recognizable names in college basketball are in the women's tournament: Caitlin Clark, Angel Reese and Paige Bueckers.

Clark drew record crowds and ratings all season long. Reese has LSU in contention for a second straight national championship. Bueckers is finally healthy and doing things on the court for UConn reminiscent of her freshman season when she was the AP Player of the Year.

Throw in a few stellar freshmen like JuJu Watkins and Hannah Hidalgo, and the game is reaching heights it's never seen.

"One thousand percent we've seen a shift in just the perception of women's college basketball in general," USC coach Lindsay Gottlieb said. "It doesn't have to be at the detriment of men's college basketball. The increased coverage and star power these players have; they are legitimate, popcorn-worthy type of players."

For countless seasons, the buzz around the NCAA tournaments have often been on the men's game. The one-and-done stars, the juggernaut blueblood programs, the buzzer beaters and athleticism all getting more attention. The women's game has pretty much all of that too, and the ratings and attendance this season suggest casual fans are fully engaged with a game that boasts star power and an increasingly high level of play.

It helps that the women's players stick around for three, four or even five years without the chance to leave early for the pros so fans get to know them and watch them grow. Three years ago, Clark said she thought women's players should be allowed to turn pro after their freshman year, like the men can.

Instead, she stuck around and had a record-setting year that grabbed the nation's attention.

"It's really, really evident that there's stars out there in this game," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "Whereas before I think they were there, but nobody wanted to acknowledge it and appreciate it as much. ... They're just really good. Everybody is going around telling everybody how good they are. They're all visible."

ESPN said it just saw the most watched women's college basketball regular season in more than 15 years, with viewership up 37% on



GERALD HERBERT/AP

**LSU forward Angel Reese reacts to the crowd during a game against South Carolina in Baton Rouge, La., in January. Reese led the Tigers to the national title last year and to a No. 3 seed this year.**

**"The increased coverage and star power these players have; they are legitimate, popcorn-worthy type of players."**

Lindsay Gottlieb  
USC coach

its platforms from last season. That doesn't really even include the Clark effect as Iowa's star wasn't on the network much this season. Iowa's ratings on Fox Sports were the highest in a generation.

ESPN plans to show all of Iowa's games, including a few on ABC, as far as the No. 1 seed advances in the tourney.

"It's not just UConn and Tennessee on TV," Auriemma said. "Those kids are on TV a lot. They're in the limelight a lot. They know how to handle it because



ABBIE PARR/AP

**Iowa guard Caitlin Clark claps during the first half against Nebraska in the final of the Big Ten women's tournament March 10 in Minneapolis.**

they're used to it now."

Clark, who broke the NCAA all-time scoring record this season, has helped six different networks reach all-time viewership marks for women's basketball over the past year, starting with last season's NCAA championship game that drew nearly 10 million viewers.

"I kind of get to be in the spotlight and I get to change people's viewpoint of how they see women's basketball," Clark said before the season. "The amount of people that



JESSICA HILL/AP

**UConn guard Paige Bueckers, center, celebrates UConn forward Ice Brady (25), and UConn guard Nika Muhl (10) during the first half in the semifinals of the Big East Conference tournament at Mohegan Sun Arena on March 10 in Uncasville, Conn.**

have come up to me and said, 'I've never watched women's basketball before before you and your team.' Some people could take that as a negative. But to me that's a positive. We're finally getting them to turn on the TV and watch it, but not only watch it once. They're coming back for more."

People aren't just watching, they are also coming to games. All five of the power conferences had huge crowds for their tournaments. The SEC and Big Ten had their best attendance ever. The Pac-12, ACC and Big 12 weren't far behind.

"The big names continue to put up big numbers and people are watching and the media is paying attention," Bueckers said. "The tournament will be great and will continue the rise of women's basketball."

Fans who pack the arenas are also sticking around afterward, hoping to get a coveted autograph. The importance of the moment isn't lost on the game's stars. Clark, Reese, Bueckers, Watkins and many others spend time postgame signing and taking pictures with not only young girls, but boys, too.

"There were 400 people in the stands before she got here and now we're selling out," Gottlieb said of Watkins. "We've got NBA players who want to see her, WNBA players, musicians and actors too. Regular fans also, it's a diversified crowd. Little boys and girls who ask me if I know JuJu. Could they meet JuJu? Grown men you run into in downtown LA."

Even when Clark leaves for the WNBA after the NCAA Tournament, the future of women's basketball is still strong with Bueckers, Watkins, Hidalgo and many other up-and-coming players.

"It's going to get even better. So many kids coming out of high school are just unbelievably good," Auriemma said.

## Scoreboard

### FIRST FOUR Wednesday, March 20

Presbyterian 49, Sacred Heart 42  
Vanderbilt 72, Columbia 68

### Thursday, March 21

Arizona (17-15) vs. Auburn (20-11)  
Holy Cross (20-12) vs. UT Martin (16-16)

### PORTLAND 4

#### First Round

#### Friday, March 22

#### At Austin, Texas

Texas (30-4) vs. Drexel (19-14)  
Alabama (23-9) vs. Florida St. (23-10)

#### At Stanford, Calif.

Iowa St. (20-11) vs. Maryland (19-13)  
Stanford (28-5) vs. Norfolk St. (27-5)

### Saturday, March 23

#### At Spokane, Wash.

Utah (22-10) vs. S. Dakota St. (27-5)  
Gonzaga (30-3) vs. UC Irvine (24-8)

#### At Raleigh, N.C.

Tennessee (19-12) vs. Green Bay (27-6)  
NC State (27-6) vs. Chattanooga (28-4)

### PORTLAND 3

#### First Round

#### Saturday, March 23

#### At Los Angeles (USC)

USC (26-5) vs. Texas A&M-CC (23-8)  
Kansas (19-12) vs. Michigan (20-13)

#### At Storrs, Conn.

Syracuse (23-7) vs. Auburn/Arizona  
UConn (29-5) vs. Jackson St. (26-6)

#### Friday, March 22

#### At Blacksburg, Va.

Baylor (24-7) vs. Vanderbilt (23-9)  
Virginia Tech (24-7) vs. Marshall (26-6)

#### At Columbus, Ohio

Duke (20-11) vs. Richmond (29-5)  
Ohio St. (25-5) vs. Maine (24-9)

### ALBANY 1

#### First Round

#### Friday, March 22

#### At Columbia, S.C.

S. Carolina (32-0) vs. Presbyterian (21-14)  
N. Carolina (19-12) vs. Michigan St. (22-8)

#### At Corvallis, Ore.

Nebraska (22-11) vs. Texas A&M (19-12)  
Ohio St. (24-7) vs. E. Washington (29-5)

### Saturday, March 23

#### At Bloomington, Ind.

Oklahoma (22-9) vs. Fla. Gulf Coast (29-4)  
Indiana (24-5) vs. Fairfield (31-1)

#### At South Bend, Ind.

Mississippi (23-8) vs. Marquette (23-8)  
Notre Dame (26-6) vs. Kent St. (21-10)

### ALBANY 2

#### First Round

#### Saturday, March 23

#### At Iowa City, Iowa

Iowa (29-4) vs. Holy Cross/UT Martin  
West Virginia (24-7) vs. Princeton (25-4)

#### At Los Angeles (UCLA)

Creighton (25-5) vs. UNLV (30-2)  
UCLA (25-6) vs. Cal Baptist (28-3)

#### Friday, March 22

#### At Manhattan, Kan.

Colorado (22-9) vs. Drake (29-5)  
Kansas St. (25-7) vs. Portland (21-12)

#### At Baton Rouge, La.

Louisville (24-9) vs. Middle Tenn. (29-4)  
LSU (28-5) vs. Rice (19-14)

## NCAA TOURNAMENT

## Top seed Gamecocks' youth could fuel run

By PETE IACOBELLI  
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — It has been a different run of perfection for South Carolina coach Dawn Staley, fueled by a lot of precocious, talented young players who make it difficult at times to know exactly what comes next.

"It feels a little bit different because they're so young," said Staley, who won NCAA titles in 2017 and 2022. "I mean, it's like every day is a new day."

Freshmen MiLaysia Fulwiley and Tessa Johnson and sophomores Chloe Kitts and Ashlyn Watkins have pushed the Gamecocks to the No. 1 overall NCAA Tournament seed and a 32-0 mark. The team is six victories away from the 10th perfect championship run in women's college basketball.

It's a vast change from a year ago when Staley's group, led by All-Americans Aliyah Boston and Zia Cooke, was coming off an NCAA title and dripping with college experience. Their bid for back-to-back championships ended with a 77-73 loss to Iowa in the Final Four.

"Last year was more like groundhog day: you just kind of get through the regular season and get to the Final Four because they knew what they had to do," Staley said. "This team, they just start over every day, every day is something new."

Take Fulwiley, who Staley offered a scholarship when she was a seventh-grader. She grabbed attention right away with a full-court



CHRIS CARLSON/AP

From left: South Carolina sophomores Chloe Kitts, Ashlyn Watkins and freshman MiLaysia Fulwiley celebrate during the SEC tournament. They are part of the youth movement that sparked the unbeaten Gamecocks.

drive and a behind the back finish in Paris as the Gamecocks throttled Notre Dame 100-71. The move even caught the attention of NBA Hall of Famer Magic Johnson.

But at practice, Staley has urged Fulwiley to rein in some of the flash for the simpler, winning play. Those words took hold as Fulwiley showed steadiness in leading the Gamecocks with 24 points in a 79-72 win over defending national champion LSU to take the Southeastern Conference Tournament

title. Fulwiley was tournament MVP.

"She's changing the women's game on the fly with how she plays and moves on the court," NBA champion Steph Curry said as his Curry Brand signed Fulwiley to an NIL deal last week.

Fulwiley is not alone in the South Carolina youth movement. Watkins, the 6-foot-3 sophomore, has gained attention for the first two dunks in program history. She had one at Clemson as a freshman

and added another in a win over Kentucky two months ago.

"Honestly, I think I'm just seeing it, I'm seeing the floor better, I'm looking to score. I'm seeing what my teammates are doing," Watkins said. "I'm communicating better and that's giving me confidence."

Kitts is a 6-2 sophomore who joined the program in midseason a year ago and mostly sat on the bench behind her experienced teammates. But the practice time a

year ago paid off with Kitts starting 28 games this season, averaging 9.2 points and six rebounds.

Kitts acknowledged feeling disappointed on the bench last year. Now she understands why it had to happen that way.

"How I feel now is completely different," she said. "That's trusting the process and the people around you."

Tessa Johnson, at 6-foot, has averaged more than 20 minutes the past seven games, up from 12 minutes over the first 25.

"I'm so proud of her," said TeHina Paopao, in her first season at South Carolina as a transfer from Oregon. "Just seeing her blossom on and off the court. I knew her time was coming."

South Carolina's young players were front and center of a late-game skirmish in the SEC finals against LSU. Fulwiley was fouled hard by LSU's Flau'jae Johnson, who then pushed Watkins.

When South Carolina senior Kamilla Cardoso shoved Johnson to the floor, both benches including Kitts and Johnson rushed to the spot before things settled down. Cardoso, Kitts and Johnson were among those ejected. Cardoso will miss South Carolina's NCAA Tournament opener on Friday.

Staley did not anticipate again entering the NAAs undefeated when the year began. As she's watched her young players grow, she became less surprised as the victories mounted.

"They figure it out," Staley said. "And it's kind of a scary, but cool, dynamic."

## Wisconsin's Hepburn savors 2nd chance after injury

By STEVE MEGARGEE  
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin's Chucky Hepburn has a knack for playing his best when the lights are the brightest.

He didn't expect to have to wait this long to return to college basketball's biggest stage.

Hepburn's freshman season ended when he injured his ankle early in an NCAA Tournament second-round loss to Iowa State. Two years later, Hepburn finally gets a second chance at March Madness when No. 23 Wisconsin (22-13) faces James Madison (31-3) on Friday at Brooklyn, N.Y.

"I don't want to just go make March Madness," Hepburn said Monday. "I want to make a deep run in this tournament."

Hepburn is accustomed to playing a lead role in these kinds of runs.

He played in three Nebraska state championship games and won one title during his high school career at Bellevue West. He highlighted his freshman year at Wisconsin by banking in a tie-



ABBIE PARR/AP

Wisconsin guard Chucky Hepburn celebrates after scoring to force overtime late in the second half against Purdue in the semifinal round of the Big Ten tournament March 16 in Minneapolis.

breaking 3-pointer with 1.5 seconds left in a victory over then-No. 8 Purdue that enabled the Badgers to clinch a share of the Big Ten regular-season title.

"He's never been afraid of the

moment," Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said.

Hepburn's value to Wisconsin's program became evident the last time the Badgers reached the NCAA Tournament. With Hep-

burn playing just 14 minutes against Iowa State, the Badgers lost 54-49 while committing a season-high 17 turnovers and producing their lowest single-game point total since November 2018.

"Not being able to fight out there with my brothers was definitely tough," Hepburn said. "Now I'm more experienced."

And now he finally gets another NCAA Tournament experience.

Wisconsin had to settle for an NIT appearance last year. The 6-foot-2 guard spent the offseason polishing his game and making sure Wisconsin wouldn't get left out of the dance again.

Hepburn is scoring just 9.3 points per game, down from 12.2 last season. But he has improved his numbers in just about every other category and is shooting a career-high 43.1%, up from 37.7% last year.

"You don't see him taking those hoist shots at the end of shot clocks anymore," Gard said. "He's inside the paint. He's in there, he's got a midrange game. He's got little floaters."

Hepburn has also set career highs in assists (3.9), rebounds (3.4) and steals (2.1) while reducing his turnovers. And he proved at the Big Ten Tournament last week that he can still score in bunches.

After missing a quarterfinal victory over Northwestern due to a lower-body injury, Hepburn came up huge in the final two runs.

In a 76-75 semifinal triumph over then-No. 3 Purdue, Hepburn scored a season-high 22 points, made a layup at the buzzer to force overtime and drew an offensive foul that set up Max Klesmit's winning basket.

He followed that up by scoring 20 points in a 93-87 championship game loss to then-No. 13 Illinois. Before the Big Ten Tournament, Hepburn hadn't scored as many as 20 points in a game since Wisconsin's season-opening victory over Arkansas State.

What has caused his increased assertiveness in the postseason?

"Thirsty for blood, that's all I've got to say," Hepburn said. "Thirsty for blood."

# MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

## Proven: Late heroics part of tournament lore

### FROM PAGE 32

jumper with 0.3 seconds left that sent North Carolina to the Final Four and eventually the championship a year later.

Butler owns a corner of history with that off-dribble 17-footer over the left arm of an FAU defender — coincidentally, Boyd — from the right side. He's the first to hit a Final Four winner with his team trailing and no time left.

They are all life-altering events and being part of a select club starts with recognition.

"I didn't understand how many people really watched and how many people that I knew really watched," said Boyd, who scored with 2.5 seconds left to beat Memphis. I was able to get back in touch with third-grade teachers, principals from my middle school, people I haven't talked to in 10 years."

College Basketball Reference accounted for 130 winning baskets or free throws in the final 2 seconds back to the 1944 tournament. Some times are estimates, coming before the clock stopped after made baskets or included tenths-of-second breakdowns.

Two players appear twice: Duke's Christian Laettner and Butler's Matt Howard. Laettner stands alone for hitting both with his team down and no time remaining: a double-pump jumper against Connecticut in the 1990 Elite Eight, then the famed catch-and-turnaround against Kentucky in the 1992 Elite Eight en route to a second straight championship.

Countless others have come oh-so-close to joining the list. Max Abmas is one; he missed a buzzer 3-pointer to beat Arkansas in the 2021 Indianapolis bubble, ending 15th-seeded Oral Roberts' unexpected Sweet 16 run.

"It was a tough one," said Abmas, now with seventh-seeded Texas in the Midwest. "That's one, of course, that I wanted back."

Few understand the challenge better than Keith Smart.

Indiana trailed Syracuse by one in the 1987 final when the 6-foot-1 junior took a feed on the left side, dribbled once to his left and swished a jumper with 4 seconds left in the Superdome. The shot secured Bob Knight's third title and made Smart the Final Four's most outstanding player.

A three-time NBA head coach and current Arkansas assistant, Smart points to college and pro players shooting all kinds of shots after practices or shootarounds: falling out of bounds, leaners, half-court shots, among them.

It's more than messing around. "Most of the time, the guys who take those shots have all kind of got a good feel about themselves," Smart said. "Mentally they're strong, and they can probably deal with the consequences."

"I've seen over my coaching ca-



JOHN LEYBA/AP

**TCU forward JaKobe Coles drives the lane for the winning basket past Arizona State forward Warren Washington in a first-round game last year. Coles hit the winner with 1.5 seconds left.**

### "Most of the time, the guys who take those shots have all kind of got a good feel about themselves."

**Keith Smart**

Arkansas assistant coach, 3-time NBA coach, who hit the title-winning shot for Indiana in 1987

reer, guys who won't take that shot, don't take it," he added. "I can even see it sometimes when guys are practicing after the shootaround in different places, who's actually up there shooting. And nine times out of 10, in that situation, here comes the guy taking that shot that's practiced shooting from all angles of the floor. You never know when that moment is going to come."

As for focus, Smart was con-

sumed with mechanics after front-rimming a jumper moments earlier against Syracuse.

"I've got to 'jump up, shoot up,'" Smart said, citing assistant coach Ron Felling. "I knew if I get that moment again, I would do that and that would put lift on my shot."

Forward to 2023, and Coles mirrored Smart's mindset before his tiebreaker against Arizona State.

Feeling his shot had been "kind of flat," he took a pass and dribbled into the paint to shoot a left-foot floater with Desmond Cambridge Jr. contesting and 7-footer Warren Washington nearby.

"I just remember when I drove that, 'I just need to get this ball a little higher than I have been throughout the game,'" Coles said.

The ball swished through with 1.5 seconds left for the 72-70 win.

The same night, Boyd's confidence spoke out of turn as FAU faced elimination with 5.5 seconds remaining.

"As we're walking to the timeout, my emotions are flowing and for some reason I'm saying, 'Coach, let me get it,'" Boyd recalled, adding: "Sometimes I just say things out of emotion, not

really meaning it 100%."

Dusty May promptly called an inbounds play for him.

Boyd squared up on the corner catch to take a 3-pointer, but Memphis' Elijah McCadden closed quickly. So he went off the bounce past Vladislav Goldin's postup-turned-screen.

The 6-3 Boyd elevated at the rim against 6-7 defender Chandler Lawson before falling to the court. The ball rattled around before dropping in for the 66-65 lead. Boyd scrambled to his feet for the Tigers' final futile possession in the win that ignited the Owls' unlikely Final Four run.

Butler knew from an earlier timeout that the plan was for him to look for a shot. Down one, Nathan Mensah grabbed a rebound and passed to Butler. The 6-2 guard crossed midcourt with 6 seconds left aiming to drive the baseline, only for Boyd to cut him off.

Time and options dwindling, Butler dribbled between his legs to get to his left hand, dribbled once more, then shot.

"I kind of knew it was good because it looked so high in the air," Boyd said.

The horn sounded. The ball swished. Aztecs reserves sprinted onto the court to mob Butler. Amid that chaos, Butler's biggest memory is seeing family members celebrating in seats near where he took the shot.

"I feel like that was one of the best moments, to be able to see them and they were all lit up," Butler said. "And to be bombarded by my teammates like that. Everybody was so happy, everybody's face was so shocked. It's definitely a moment I'll never forget."

That illustrates why Smart views those moments as about more than just one shotmaker.

"We're all connected by the ring. By the moment. By the shot," Smart said.

"I may get credit, talk in the paper about it. But you remember the teammates that were on your team. That's what goes with you the rest of your days. ... All those guys remember, 'Man, I remember that shot you made.' It's just a great moment for them."

The memories mean more to Boyd, too. He tries to "relive the moment" when he watches a replay, but not too often so it doesn't somehow diminish the emotions.

There might not be a choice. Those shots belong to tournament lore now.

"If it's on 20 years later and I see it, I'm going to have the same smile on my face," Coles said. "And hopefully one day my kids and grandkids will be able to see that video one day and be appreciative of it."

AP Sports Writer Stephen Hawkins in Fort Worth, Texas, and freelance writer Mark Rosner in Austin, Texas, contributed to this report.

## Scoreboard

### Men's NCAA Tournament

#### FIRST FOUR Tuesday, March 19 At Dayton, Ohio

Wagner 71, Howard 68  
Colorado St. 67, Virginia 42

#### Wednesday, March 20

Grambling St. 88, Montana St. 81, OT  
Colorado 60, Boise St. 53

#### EAST REGIONAL First Round Friday, March 22 At Brooklyn, N.Y.

UConn (31-3) vs. Stetson (22-12). **AFN-Sports, 7:30 p.m. Friday CET, 3:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
FAU (25-8) vs. Northwestern (21-11). **AFN-Sports, 5 p.m. Friday CET, 1 a.m. Saturday JKT**

#### At Spokane, Wash.

San Diego St. (24-10) vs. UAB (23-11). **AFN-Pacific, 6:45 p.m. Friday CET, 2:45 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
Auburn (27-7) vs. Yale (22-9). **AFN-Pacific, 9:15 p.m. Friday CET, 5:15 a.m. Saturday JKT**

#### Thursday, March 21 At Omaha, Neb.

BYU (23-10) vs. Duquesne (24-11)  
Illinois (26-8) vs. Morehead St. (26-8). **AFN-Sports2, 8 p.m. Thursday CET, 4 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Washington St. (24-9) vs. Drake (28-6). **AFN-Sports2, 3 a.m. Friday CET, 11 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Iowa St. (27-7) vs. S. Dakota St. (22-12). **AFN-Sports2, 12:15 a.m. Friday CET, 8:15 a.m. Friday JKT**

#### SOUTH REGIONAL First Round Friday, March 22 At Memphis, Tenn.

Houston (30-4) vs. Longwood (21-13). **AFN-Pacific, 2:15 a.m. Saturday CET, 10:15 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
Nebraska (23-10) vs. Texas A&M (20-14). **AFN-Pacific, 11:45 p.m. Friday CET, 7:45 a.m. Saturday JKT**

#### At Brooklyn, N.Y.

Wisconsin (22-13) vs. James Madison (31-3). **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 10:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
Duke (24-8) vs. Vermont (28-6). **AFN-Sports, Mid, Saturday CET, 8 a.m. Saturday JKT**

#### At Indianapolis

Florida (24-11) vs. Colorado (25-10)  
Marquette (25-9) vs. W. Kentucky (22-11)

#### Thursday, March 21 At Pittsburgh

Texas Tech (23-10) vs. NC State (22-14). **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Friday CET, 10:30 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Kentucky (23-9) vs. Oakland (23-11). **AFN-Sports, Mid, Friday CET, 8 a.m. Friday JKT**

#### MIDWEST REGIONAL First Round Friday, March 22 At Indianapolis

Purdue (29-4) vs. Grambling St. (21-14)  
Utah St. (27-6) vs. TCU (21-12)

#### Thursday, March 21 At Salt Lake City

Gonzaga (25-7) vs. McNeese St. (30-3)  
Kansas (22-10) vs. Samford (29-5)

#### At Pittsburgh

South Carolina (26-7) vs. Oregon (23-11). **AFN-Pacific, 8:50 p.m. Thursday CET, 4:50 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Creighton (23-9) vs. Akron (24-10). **AFN-Sports2, 6:30 p.m. Thursday CET, 2:30 a.m. Friday JKT**

#### At Charlotte, N.C.

Texas (20-12) vs. Colorado St. (25-10). **AFN-Pacific, 11:45 p.m. Thursday CET, 7:45 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Tennessee (24-8) vs. St. Peter's (19-13). **AFN-Pacific, 2:15 a.m. Friday CET, 10:15 a.m. Friday JKT**

#### WEST REGIONAL First Round Thursday, March 21 At Charlotte, N.C.

North Carolina (27-7) vs. Wagner (17-15). **AFN-Sports, 7:30 p.m. Thursday CET, 3:30 a.m. Friday JKT**  
Mississippi St. (21-13) vs. Michigan St. (19-14)

#### At Salt Lake City

Dayton (24-7) vs. Nevada (26-7)  
Arizona (25-8) vs. Long Beach St. (21-14)

#### Friday, March 22 At Spokane, Wash.

Saint Mary's (Cal.) (26-7) vs. Grand Canyon (29-4). **AFN-Sports2, 3 a.m. Saturday CET, 11 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
Alabama (21-11) vs. Coll. of Charleston (27-7). **AFN-Sports2, 12:15 a.m. Saturday CET, 8:15 a.m. Saturday JKT**

#### At Memphis, Tenn.

Clemson (21-11) vs. New Mexico (26-9). **AFN-Sports2, 8 p.m. Friday CET, 4 a.m. Saturday JKT**  
Baylor (23-10) vs. Colgate (25-9). **AFN-Sports2, 5:30 p.m. Friday CET, 1:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**

# MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT



ABBIE PARR/AP

From left: Purdue's Lance Jones, Mason Gillis, Braden Smith and Caleb Furst talk during the second half against Wisconsin in the semifinal round of the Big Ten tournament March 16 in Minneapolis.

## No. 1 Purdue has new look with stronger backcourt

By MICHAEL MAROT  
Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Purdue guard Fletcher Loyer can already sense a difference this March.

His legs feel stronger, more rested and better conditioned for NCAA Tournament play. It's a welcome change for the top-seeded Boilermakers.

A year ago, their weary freshmen backcourt of Loyer and Braden Smith struggled mightily against 16th-seeded Fairleigh Dickinson, resulting in a March Madness upset for the ages. Now they're back, plotting a rebound for the history books.

"You could feel your legs starting to wear down a little bit last year and you have to figure out what you need to do to get yourself ready to play and feel good about yourself," Loyer said Sunday following the NCAA Tournament draw. "So it's just doing that, finding a routine that works and now I'm really ready to go Friday."

Loyer and Smith made a concerted effort in the offseason to return this season stronger and more focused. Each trimmed five pounds off their listed weight from 2022-23, hit the weight room and worked steadily on improving their shooting and decision-making.

Smith responded by dishing out 240 assists and breaking the single-season school record that

stood for nearly a half century, flirted with multiple triple-doubles and earned first-team all-Big Ten honors. Loyer's shooting percentage increased from 32.9% in 2022-23 to 43.9% this season and he ranks second on the team with 54 3-pointers.

So as the Boilermakers start another opening tourney week studying two No. 16 seeds, Montana State and Grambling, Loyer and Smith sound much more confident they can get the job done in Friday night's first-round game in nearby Indianapolis.

"I think just knowing what all is coming, what all happens, how hard it is and the teams we play, figuring out different ways to take care of your body and just resting is different," Smith said. "I think we've done a lot better job this year than we did last year just because we've been through it and understand what's going to come."

Last March, most fans ignored what now seem like obvious warning signs.

Purdue went 4-4 in its last eight regular-season games, barely escaped the Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals and nearly blew a 17-point, second-half lead against Penn State in the tourney title game before clinching a No. 1 seed.

Despite shooting a combined 39.6% from the field and 34.4% on 3-pointers over the entire season, Smith and Loyer made just 35.7%

of their shots and 24.4% from beyond the arc over the 11 games leading into tourney play. Then in Game 35, against Fairleigh Dickinson, Smith and Loyer were 6 of 20 from the field, 4 of 14 on 3s and had seven assists and nine turnovers, looking uncharacteristically uncomfortable against the Knights.

This year's closing stretch was different.

As 7-foot-4 center and reigning national player of the year Zach Edey continued to dominate in the post and Big Ten Sixth Man of the Year Mason Gillis continued to excel doing the gritty dirty work, it was the play of the second-year guards, the addition of energetic guard Lance Jones and some timely 3-pointers that fueled Purdue.

They've gone 15-2 since mid-January and won five straight by single digits before an overtime loss to Wisconsin in overtime in the Big Ten Tournament semifinals. Those two losses came by a total of five points.

"It feels different because we have better shooters," coach Matt Painter said. "You get in that last four or five minutes, Gillis nails a 3-pointer. You have confidence you're going to be able to do that. I think that's the real separation for this team. We're the second-best 3-point shooting team in the country (40.8%) and that gives us such a balance with Zach."

## Shead's development has fueled Houston's 2nd straight top seed

By KRISTIE RIEKEN  
Associated Press

HOUSTON — Jamal Shead wasn't anywhere near the player he is now when he joined the Houston Cougars in 2020. His coach offered an unvarnished opinion about his talented guard.

"When he came in, I thought he was a long way away," coach Kelvin Sampson said. "I thought his immaturity was an issue. His day-to-day practice habits were an issue."

Four years later, the 21-year-old Shead barely resembles that freshman player, and his leadership and defensive tenacity has the second-ranked Cougars heading into the NCAA Tournament as a No. 1 seed for a second straight season.

Shead, who was named a first-team AP All-American on Tuesday, will lead Houston (30-4) in the first round of the tournament Friday night against 16-seed Longwood. The Cougars are in the tournament for a school-record sixth straight season.

Sampson reflected on Shead's journey this week after he received his latest accolade in a season where he's already become the first player in Big 12 history to win player of the year and defensive player of the year honors the same year. Sampson said Shead's parents didn't baby him even during those freshman struggles.

"He didn't have anybody to call home and cry to or to listen to excuses," Sampson said. "That was never going to be an issue. His mom and dad are unusual in that they say the coach is always right. They knew he needed the culture that we've established here."

So with the help of Houston's veterans, Shead began to develop and by January of his first season things started to click for him. By February, he started challenging the veterans or as Sampson recalls: "kicking their butts in practice some days."

"I think our program raised that kid from being a kid to being a man,

and this is the end result," Sampson said. "I think it is a great story in that when things were really tough for him, he didn't quit, he didn't transfer."

Shead admitted that dealing with Sampson's strong coaching style took a while to adjust to, and he still remembers a colorful one-liner he used to call him soft back in his early days on the team.

Now that he's grown into the team's leader, he appreciates how Sampson coached him.

"He has the utmost belief in you and the utmost trust in you when you earn it. And he never wavers with that," Shead said. "That guy has trusted me since Day 1. He's taught me so much. He might get on me the hardest, but I know it's out of love. I know he loves me, so I never take it personally."

Shead has a wealth of tournament experience after reaching the Final Four as a reserve as a freshman. He moved into the starting lineup as a sophomore when the Cougars advanced to the Elite Eight and won American Athletic Conference defensive player of the year honors last season when Houston made it to the Sweet 16.

He leads the Cougars this season by averaging 13.1 points a game and averages 6.2 assists and 2.3 steals. He has scored in double figures in 25 games this season, including 11 of the last 12.

He's confident that Houston is ready for a deep tournament run.

"Coach says it all the time, he doesn't compare teams, so I don't really try to," he said. "But I think this team is prepared because of our mindset right now, our preparation is always good because we have the best coach in America and probably the best coaching staff in America. So, our preparation is always going to be good because they're going to have us ready ... it's all about who's going to be the toughest and I think we'll be one of the toughest teams out there."



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Houston's Jamal Shead cuts down a piece of the net after winning the Big 12 regular season title against Kansas on March 9 in Houston.

# SPORTS



### Clamping down

Teams tighten defense during playoff push » **NBA, Page 26**

## NCAA TOURNAMENT



San Diego State guard Lamont Butler, center, celebrates with teammates after he hit the winning basket against Florida Atlantic in an NCAA Tournament semifinal on April 1 in Houston. Butler is the only player in NCAA Tournament history to hit a winning shot in the Final Four with his team trailing and with no time left.

# Proven winners

## Players who were 2023's last-second heroes are back for more

By **AARON BEARD**  
Associated Press

**N**early a year has passed since Lamont Butler hit a buzzer-beater that sent San Diego State to the NCAA championship game. He's seen it so often on social media and TV that he never had to search it out himself.

"It's kind of hard to miss it," he said. Especially in March Madness.

Last-second shots fuel the NCAA Tournament's allure. They are split-second moments that live for decades in highlights and memories. Butler is among those who did it last year and could get another chance as

the tournament begins this week.

"I never thought about how big it was and the willingness to take it," Butler told The Associated Press. "I was just like, 'All right, we've got to win this game.'

"It's just confidence. You've got to go out there and play fearless. Things are going to happen, mistakes are going to happen. The only way you can do something is if you go out there and try it."

Florida Atlantic's Nick Boyd and TCU's JaKobe Coles felt that with first-round winners. So did Butler's teammate, Darrion Trammell, whose free throw with 1.2 seconds left edged Creighton and gave the Az-

tecs a berth in the Final Four.

They're all back. The Aztecs are the East Region's No. 5 seed, Boyd's Owls are the East's No. 8 and Coles' Horned Frogs are the Midwest's No. 9.

Hitting one of those shots tests confidence and nerve. And they're hard to come by considering all the variables that must line up—health, matchup, foul trouble—to even be on the court to make one.

But when they do, there's magic like Villanova's Kris Jenkins hitting a 3-pointer at the horn for the 2016 title or Luke Maye's

**SEE PROVEN ON PAGE 30**



Clark Reese Bueckers

### INSIDE

This year, women are bringing the star power **Page 28**

Wisconsin's Hepburn savors second chance **Page 29**

No. 1 Boilermakers back with stronger backcourt **Page 31**

## USWNT grouped with Germany, Australia at Olympics » Page 27