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STARS AND STRIPES®

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ETHAN SWOPE/AP

Maintaining upper hand

Firefighters spray water on the Hughes Fire in Castaic, Calif., on Wednesday. More than 50,000 people in the Los Angeles area were ordered to evacuate or given warning.

Firefighters battle huge fire north of LA as more than 50K warned, ordered to evacuate

BY CHRISTOPHER WEBER AND MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ
Associated Press
CASTAIC, Calif. — Firefighters battled Thursday to maintain the upper hand on a huge wildfire that swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles and left over 50,000 people under evacuation

orders or warnings. The Hughes Fire broke out late Wednesday morning and in less than a day had charred nearly 16 square miles of trees and brush near Castaic Lake, a popular recreation area about 40 miles from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a

third week. The Hughes blaze didn't grow much overnight and crews hoped to increase containment before winds pick up again later in the day, fire spokesperson Jeremy Ruiz said Thursday morning. "We had helicopters dropping water until around 3 a.m. That

kept it in check," he said. As of Wednesday night, the fire was about 14% contained. Though the region was under a red flag warning for critical fire risk, winds were not as strong as they had been when the Palisades and Eaton fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to

dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant. Red flag warnings were extended through Friday morning in LA and Ventura counties. More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate from the

SEE MAINTAINING ON PAGE 10

Ukrainians learn from items found on N. Korean troops

BY SIOBHÁN O'GRADY AND SERHI KOROLCHUK
The Washington Post
SUMY REGION, Ukraine — "Resistance is futile." "Surrender." "You're all surrounded." The phrases, printed in Korean

with rough Russian transliterations on a weathered piece of paper Ukrainian troops said they took off a dead North Korean soldier this month, offer a remarkable insight into how Russia appears to have prepared their new

allies to take Ukrainian prisoners during their assaults on the front lines. Ukrainian troops are using such documents and other items they have recovered from the battlefield to better understand the

thousands of North Korean troops that have been assaulting their positions in recent weeks, in the latest global escalation in the war between Russia and Ukraine. The items and Ukrainian soldiers' accounts of encounters with

North Korean forces paint a picture of the secretive North Korean troops — whose existence has not been confirmed by Russia or North Korea — as highly motivated.

SEE LEARN ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Vegas hotel workers union reaches deal with casino

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The longest strike in decades by Las Vegas hotel workers ended Wednesday with a new contract between the union and a casino where hundreds of employees had walked off the job in November.

The Culinary Workers Union announced on X that it secured a five-year deal for about 700 employees at Virgin Hotels near the Las Vegas Strip. In a joint statement, the union and casino said they were ready to move past

their disagreements “for the benefit of all team members at the property” after the 69-day strike that began Nov. 15.

Bethany Khan, a spokesperson for the union, said the deal came together in recent days and was approved unanimously Wednesday by the union’s rank-and-file. That brings an end to the lengthy and highly contentious contract negotiations that had stalled in the public spotlight because of disagreements over pay.

The union’s previous contract with Virgin Hotels expired in June 2023.

The new one likely contains significant pay raises similar to what the rest of the union’s members on the Strip, downtown and at other off-Strip properties have gotten in the last year.

That includes what the union has described as a historic 32% increase in wages over five years, an amount Virgin Hotels had said isn’t “economically viable” for the casino’s future.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 24)	0.94	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
British pound (Jan. 24)	\$1.20	Britain (Pound)	1.2330
Japanese yen (Jan. 24)	152.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.4379
South Korean won (Jan. 24)	1400.00	China (Yuan)	7.2875
		Denmark (Krone)	7.1674
		Egypt (Pound)	50.2904
		Euro	0.9607
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7899
		Hungary (Forint)	394.09
		Israel (Shekel)	3.5723
		Japan (Yen)	129.25
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3083
		Norway (Krone)	11.2759
		Philippines (Peso)	58.69
		Poland (Zloty)	4.05
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7508
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3564
		South Korea (Won)	1437.81
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9080		
Thailand (Baht)	34.02		
Turkey (NewLira)	35.6487		

(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	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.32
30-year bond	4.83

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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EUROPE

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

MIDDLE EAST

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

PACIFIC

PacificAdvertising@stripes.com

+81 (42) 552.2511
DSN: 315.227.7310

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MILITARY

NSA Naples to tear down old barracks

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy is moving forward with demolition plans for a 130,000-square-foot building at Naval Support Activity Naples, as the installation faces a burgeoning need for office and operational space.

The \$5.7 million project will begin in May and is expected to take about a year, Lt. j.g. Valentine Mulango, a spokesperson for Naval Support Activity Naples, said in an email.

It wasn't clear what is planned for the site of the old barracks building, built in 1996 at the base's Capodichino site.

It had not been in use as a barracks for years. Unaccompanied sailors now are housed at the base's Support Site, about 14 miles away.

A building project for the barracks site is still in the design and planning development phase, and the structural details aren't yet



ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

A \$5.7 million demolition of this former barracks at Naval Support Activity Naples in Italy is slated to begin in May.

known, said Mulango, who added that remodeling was determined not to be the best use of the space.

Previously, the Navy told Stars and Stripes in May 2022 that a

four-story operations center, with two stories above ground and two below for offices, conference facilities and administrative spaces, was planned for the site.

U.S. 6th Fleet, which is headquartered at Capodichino, said at the time that the project would “support the future operational requirements of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa.”

There are more than 50 tenant commands and about 8,500 personnel at NSA Naples, according to the base. Many of those are located at the installation's Capodichino site, which is adjacent to Naples International Airport.

Capodichino also has a hotel, food court, chapel, gym and convenience store. Family housing, schools, a hospital, the commissary, another hotel, a recreational center and other services are located at Support Site.

This month, base officials began analyzing the room available at NSA Naples for operations, commands and personnel, Capt. John Randazzo, the installation commander, wrote in an email Jan. 8.

The base is looking at “potential

reconfigurations to alleviate the deficiency of space on the installation now,” Randazzo said.

NSA Naples has seen considerable growth in recent years. In March 2022, 6th Fleet stood up Task Force 61/2, a naval amphibious unit consisting of Marines and sailors from the II Marine Expeditionary Force.

And there has been a contingent of British navy sailors maintaining a presence at NSA Naples since at least 2023.

Last year, Naval Forces Europe-Africa and 6th Fleet said they would create two distinct staffs after operating as a single command for nearly 20 years.

To answer those needs, the base recently finished construction of a two-story addition to its command, control, communications, computers and intelligence facility.

Another building at Capodichino was partially renovated to allow for more workspaces.

101st Airborne promises to reform US operations with self-made drones

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

An Army division that became legendary for the World War II exploits of its paratroopers is carving out a new niche in the sky in anticipation of future battlefields.

The Kentucky-based 101st Airborne Division launched its own drone-making mission, which is aimed at getting cheap aerial systems into the hands of soldiers for experimentation, the unit said this week.

The initiative is the latest push by the Army to incorporate the commercial-type drones put into effective use by both sides in the Russia-Ukraine war into U.S. Army combat formations.

Relying on a 3D printing program, the groundbreaking effort will revolutionize how troops operate, the division said in a statement Tuesday.

“This is bigger than simply printing parts,” Col. Travis McIntosh, a deputy commander for the 101st, said in the statement. “We are reshaping the (small drone) enterprise at the tactical level.”

The plan is to produce 100 of the systems at the division's home base at Fort Campbell through a joint effort with the 5th Special Forces Group.

While the U.S. military has relied on large, long-range drones for many years, the war in Ukraine has showcased how cheap,

off-the-shelf technology can also make a difference on the battlefield.

In 2023, U.S. European Command's Gen. Christopher Cavoli singled out such devices as having “a paralytic effect” on Russian forces.

Russian troops also have been effective at using similar systems. Furthermore, China and Russia “are surging ahead in the realm of (small drones) while the United States moves at a relatively glacial pace,” the Modern War Institute at West Point said in March.

The institute's report noted that Ukrainian troops trained by Americans were shocked by U.S. soldiers' general ignorance of drone warfare tactics.

Soldiers at the small-unit level need to be supplied with large numbers of expendable drones so platoons and squads can experiment in the field and develop standard operating procedures, according to the report.

The 101st Airborne said its push to manufacture such systems came in response to requests from soldiers for more versatile, durable and expendable drones than what have so far been available.

The statement did not say how much production costs, but the new drones will be tested in the spring during an exercise dubbed Operation Lethal Eagle, which is focused on various Army prototypes and initiatives.



PHOTOS BY KADEN PITT/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers assigned to the 101st Airborne Division use a 3D-printed drone Oct. 10, at Fort Campbell, Ky. The division created its own drone-making program in response to soldiers' desire to have cheap, expendable unmanned aircraft to use for skill development.



A civilian working with the 101st Airborne Division's innovation program controls a 3D-printed drone.



The 3D-printed drone takes its initial flight.

PACIFIC

Impeached S. Korean leader's supporters rally

Supporters use American symbols to voice allegiance

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol are using American symbols to voice their allegiance following his arrest due to a failed attempt to impose martial law last month.

For weeks, thousands of pro-Yoon demonstrators rejecting the insurrection charges against him have rallied outside the National Assembly, presidential residence and courthouses.

Many wave American flags, while others carry banners with conservative U.S. political slogans, such as "Make Korea Great Again," linking Yoon's situation to the future of U.S.-South Korea relations.

Yoon was arrested Jan. 15 after a weeklong standoff between his security detail and investigators. Early Sunday, the Seoul Western District Court extended his detention for up to 20 days at prosecutors' request.

That decision stirred his supporters — many clutching U.S. flags — who stormed the building, broke windows and vandalized furniture and office equipment.

Fifty-six had been arrested as of Wednesday, according to the court.



DAVID CHOI/Stars and Stripes

American and South Korean flags hang from a tent where volunteers serve coffee to supporters of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol near the presidential residence Jan. 15 in Seoul, South Korea.

At a demonstration outside the court on Monday, protester David Heo donned a hat emblazoned with the stars and stripes.

"Since the founding of our country, people have waved the U.S. and South Korean flags together," he said. "Even during Park Geun-hye's administration, we waved both flags. It's not anything strange."

Park, who led the country from 2013 to 2017, was impeached and

served nearly five years in prison for abuse of power and bribery.

Another Yoon supporter, Park Jin-hee, carried a sign that read, "Stop the Steal," a phrase popularized by supporters of President Donald Trump. Yoon's backers claim his impeachment is a politically motivated scheme by opposition parties.

"The U.S. has helped South Korea in many ways, including building hospitals, churches and schools

during and after the Korean War," Park said. "That's why we're holding two flags."

Yoon declared martial law briefly on Dec. 3, prompting more than 1,000 protesters outside the National Assembly to demand his ouster.

However, demonstrations by Yoon's supporters now appear to outnumber those of his opponents.

Nearly 52% of 1,002 respondents to a poll released Monday by the Pen and Mike news agency said

they believe Yoon's arrest was justified. Nearly 45% said they still support the president.

The day Yoon was taken into custody, hundreds of his supporters braved freezing temperatures outside the presidential residence, some equipped with sleeping bags and blankets.

Scores of presidential security staff also gathered outside the residence, where Yoon had barricaded himself.

More than 3,000 police officers arrived to arrest him, according to the Reuters news agency, but Yoon surrendered "to prevent unsavory bloodshed."

"We believe in politicians like Trump ... so that's why we're waving the American flag," said Shin Hee-cha, who traveled 200 miles from Ulsan to attend Monday's rally. His car bore an American flag mounted on the hood.

The protests reflect generational divides in South Korea, according to Sung-Yoon Lee, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

"Conservative groups in South Korea, many composed of senior citizens, have a closer connection to the U.S. due to their upbringing in the wake of the Korean War," Lee said Friday.

South Korea relied heavily on U.S. support after the war, with 69% of imports between 1953 and 1962 funded by Washington, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Warthogs fly in final Buddy drills

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt IIs in South Korea are making their final flights this week during an annual joint exercise before the sturdy ground attack aircraft are retired.

The four-day Buddy Squadron exercise kicked off Tuesday with eight A-10s from the 51st Fighter Wing out of Osan, about 35 miles south of Seoul, wing spokesperson Maj. Kippun Sumner said on Thursday.

An unspecified number of FA-50 Fighting Eagles and KA-1 light-attack aircraft from the South Korean 8th Fighter Wing will also be participating in the drills, according to a South Korean air force news release on Wednesday.

Pilots will conduct combat patrol missions together "to ensure joint operational capabilities" in



SOUTH KOREAN AIR FORCE

An Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt II operates Tuesday at Wonju Air Base, South Korea.

South Korean airspace, the release said.

All 24 A-10s stationed in South Korea are scheduled to be retired this year as part of an Air Force effort to modernize its fleet.

The aircraft will be moved in phases to the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., where they will undergo maintenance and display

preparations, the 7th Air Force announced in November.

No replacement is imminent and existing U.S. aircraft on the Korean Peninsula, including F-35A Lightning IIs and F-16 Fighting Falcons, can fill the A-10's role, the 7th Air Force said at the time.

There is no specific date for the A-10s' final flight in South Korea, Sumner said.

PFAS chemicals linger near Misawa

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

High levels of chemicals used in firefighting foam have been detected near a U.S. Air Force base in northeastern Japan, officials announced Wednesday.

PFAS — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances — was found at five places near Misawa Air Base during a December survey, according to data posted on the Aomori Prefectural Office website.

The Air Force's 35th Fighter Wing and Japan Air Self-Defense Force operate from the base.

PFAS, and its components, PFOS and PFOA, are also found in many household products, from stainproof and waterproof fabric to nonstick cookware, according to the American Cancer Society. They are linked to an increased risk of certain tumors of the liver, testicles, breasts and pancreas.

U.S. Forces Japan announced in November that the U.S. military

had destroyed its last supplies of firefighting foam containing the chemicals at installations in the country.

The Misawa survey, conducted by local and central government officials, detected the highest chemical levels at one location since testing began in 2022, an official at Misawa city's environment protection section said Thursday.

The December survey found 760 nanograms of PFAS per liter in water from the reservoir. Seawater just over a half-mile offshore contained 0.8 nanograms of PFAS per liter, according to the data posted online.

Tests found 180 nanograms of PFAS per liter of water in drains connected to a reservoir in Tengu-mori, the data show.

Water in those reservoirs has not been used for drinking and the city will continue to monitor the situation, the Misawa city official said.

MILITARY

Estonia hails work with US, acquires 6 HIMARS

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

Estonia's push to strengthen deterrence against neighboring Russia is getting a boost from a U.S.-made mobile artillery weapon that has drawn widespread interest because of its battlefield performance in Ukraine.

The Baltic country, which has been a NATO member since 2004, received its first High Mobility Artillery Rocket System earlier this month, according to separate statements Wednesday by Estonia's Defense Ministry and the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn.

Six HIMARS launchers were officially handed over to Estonian defense officials at the Lockheed Martin production facility in Arkansas on Jan. 13 and will be shipped to Estonia in the coming months, the statements said.

"From this summer, we will gain long-range precision strike

capability with HIMARS, which will significantly expand the possibilities for defending Estonia," Maj. Tanel Tatsi, chief of staff of the Estonian military's artillery battalion, said in Tallinn's statement.

The high-profile acquisition underscores Estonia's commitment to modernizing its defense capabilities as well as NATO's broader reinforcement efforts, in light of persistent concerns about Russian aggression.

Estonia's location on the eastern flank of the NATO alliance makes it a potential flashpoint in the event of widening hostilities. The addition of HIMARS significantly upgrades its long-range firepower.

HIMARS has a proven track record in Ukraine, where the rocket launchers have allowed Ukrainian troops to hit Russian command posts and logistics hubs far behind the front lines.

The system's armored cab holds three operators — a driver, gunner and section chief — and is designed to withstand small-arms fire and artillery fragments.

Estonia signed the agreement to procure six HIMARS launchers in December 2022, in what the defense ministry described as one of the largest arms deals in the country's history, valued at more than \$200 million.

Magnus-Valdemar Saar, director of Estonia's National Center for Defense Investments, hailed the swift turnaround from contract signing to delivery.

"Developing such a strategic capability in cooperation with our largest ally, the United States, and achieving delivery in just two years is a vivid example of mutual trust and excellent cooperation," Saar said in a statement Wednesday.

Beyond the core equipment, the contract includes GMLRS preci-



JOSEPH NOVAK/U.S. Army

A U.S. High Mobility Artillery Rocket System is greeted last week by Estonian children during a parade in Rakvere, Estonia. Estonia signed a deal to procure six HIMARS launchers in 2022.

sion-guided rockets, communications systems, logistical support and personnel training.

According to defense officials, the package is designed to give Estonia an extended-range precision-strike capability, a critical deterrent in a region where Russian troops are deployed just across the border.

With the new rocket systems, Estonian forces will be able to strike targets out to roughly 40 miles using GMLRS-guided rock-

ets, and up to 180 miles with M57 ATACMS ballistic missiles.

In early 2024, the defense ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania pledged to cooperate on future HIMARS use, after each country had placed its own orders.

Altogether, the three Baltic states intend to field 20 launchers over the coming years. Lithuania's first HIMARS are expected to arrive later this year, while Latvia's are expected to be delivered in 2027.

Marine receives overdue Purple Hearts for TBIs

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP KINSER, Okinawa — Marine Cpl. William Faffler was two months into his only deployment to Afghanistan when his vehicle rolled over a 120-pound roadside bomb.

Faffler, now a chief warrant officer 2, was a combat cameraman recording video on a route clearance mission with the Army's Task Force Thor in Helmand Province, May 2, 2010.

"After four hours of rolling, I turned [the camera] off for a second, and, of course, that's exactly when it happened," Faffler, a visual information officer with 3rd Marine Logistics Group, said Wednesday.

The blast struck his mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle, or MRAP, and knocked him unconscious for two minutes, according to a Jan. 6 news release from the logistics group.

During a Jan. 6 ceremony at Camp Kinser, Faffler collected two Purple Hearts, long overdue. Both medals recognized Faffler had suffered traumatic brain injuries while in action, injuries that went undiagnosed until last May, he said.

He earned the second Purple Heart on Oct. 25, 2010, during a foot patrol with Bravo Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Cpl. Todd Love, walking point ahead of Faffler, stepped on an IED and lost both legs and his left arm.

"Half the guys from my team were pretty out of it. They got a good chunk of that blast," Faffler said.

Those blasts were among hundreds experienced by patrols during the deployment, retired Col. Robert Gardner, at the time the operations officer with 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, said Thursday.

"Many Marines were reluctant to acknowledge those invisible blast effects since a 'three strike rule' was in effect where if they suffered three blasts, they would not be able to go outside the wire for the rest of their deployment," he said. "And no Marine wants to let his fellow Marines down by not being there."

Many service members fear being stigmatized as weak or unfit for duty if they seek treatment for traumatic brain injuries, or TBI, according to Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Troy Black, who talked about TBI for a Health.mil podcast in March.

They may not recognize the symptoms, have concerns about their mental health or harbor other misconceptions about TBI, said Black and others on the podcast.

Faffler and his wife, Katie Faffler, both from Minneapolis, and their four children struggled for years with Faffler's symptoms, which included forgetfulness, personality changes and insomnia.

"You just don't realize all the sacrifice you're doing these years even after deployments and stuff and how it affects your family, because you just keep going," Katie Faffler said Wednesday. "Looking back now, I'm like, oh, all those things make sense now."

Faffler attributed some symptoms to post-traumatic stress disorder. He ex-



WESTON BROWN/U.S. Marine Corps

Brig. Gen. Kevin Collins, commander of the 3rd Marine Logistics Group, presents a Purple Heart on Jan. 6 to Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Faffler at Camp Kinser, Okinawa.

plained it as a "software-hardware issue."

"Software is like a bug fix, it just takes time to work it out; you're just processing a crazy thing that happened to you," he said. "And we did that — we got past that point, I feel like, that we could put it in its box. ... But then there was always this thing that I couldn't get over."

Faffler is taking supplements for the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid, or GABA, which has a calming effect, and is weighing other treatment options. He also wants to help other Marines with service-related brain injuries receive Purple Hearts.

"I know that there's so many people out there that don't have that validation, and you feel a little crazy," he said. "If you have these things and you know there's just something wrong, but everyone's telling you, 'Ah, no, you're OK,' that's a very weird spot to be in."

A-10s leave Sicily, return to Maryland

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Six Air National Guard jets stuck at a Navy base in Sicily for months have returned to the U.S., a Guard official said.

The A-10C Thunderbolt II aircraft departed from Naval Air Station Sigonella last week and arrived in the U.S. on Saturday, Maj. Benjamin Hughes, a Maryland National Guard spokesman, said Wednesday. Four of the jets, also known as Warthogs, were at Warfield Air National Guard Base at Martin State Airport in Maryland as of Monday, Hughes said.

The status of the remaining two attack jets, which are assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard, was unclear. A spokeswoman for the unit was verifying their location Thursday.

The Warthogs had been parked at Sigonella since November after a routine stop while returning from deployment to the Middle East. Five of the planes needed repairs before making the trans-Atlantic flight, leaving only one that was mission-ready. The timeline for repairs was dependent on parts availability, the Air Force said at the time.

Shortly after Stars and Stripes asked about the Warthogs, officials announced they were scheduled to leave on Jan. 16.

The Air Force is working to divest itself of the A-10, a combat workhorse popular for its ability to offer close-air support to troops on the ground. Still, the Warthog continues to have a presence in U.S. combat, especially in the Middle East where, among other missions, American personnel are helping with efforts to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

A-10s supporting ground forces recently in Iraq "were successful in eliminating the ISIS fighters within a cave," U.S. Central Command said in a Jan. 6 statement. And on Nov. 29, A-10s were flown to strike militants preparing a rocket rail near Mission Support Site Euphrates in Syria.

EUROPE

NATO chief warns of high price if Russia wins

Rutte says cost to restore credibility of alliance would far exceed cost to support Ukraine

By LORNE COOK
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned on Thursday that a Russian victory over Ukraine would undermine the dissuasive force of the world's biggest military alliance and that its credibility could cost trillions to restore.

NATO has been ramping up its forces along its eastern flank with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, deploying thousands of troops and equipment to deter Moscow from expanding its war into the territory of any of the organization's 32 member countries.

"If Ukraine loses then to restore the deterrence of the rest of NATO again, it will be a much, much higher price than what we are contemplating at this moment in terms of ramping up our spending and ramping up our industrial production," Rutte said.

"It will not be billions extra; it will be trillions extra," he said, on the sidelines of the World Eco-

nomie Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Rutte insisted that Ukraine's Western backers must "step up and not scale back the support" they are providing to the country, almost three years after Russia's full-fledged invasion began.

"We have to change the trajectory of the war," Rutte said, adding that the West "cannot allow in the 21st century that one country invades another country and tries to colonize it."

"We are beyond those days," he said.

Anxiety in Europe is mounting that President Donald Trump might seek to quickly end the war in talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on terms that are unfavorable to Ukraine, but Rutte appeared wary about trying to do things in a hurry.



Rutte

"If we got a bad deal, it would only mean that we will see the president of Russia high-fiving with the leaders from North Korea, Iran and China and we cannot accept that," the former Dutch prime minister said. "That would be geopolitically a big, big mistake."

Trump's new envoy for special missions, Richard Grenell, criticized allies who talk of continuing the war but still won't increase their defense spending to NATO guidelines. He said Americans think it is "outrageous" that the Biden administration refused to talk to Putin.

NATO leaders have agreed that each member country should spend at least 2% of gross domestic product on their military budgets. The alliance estimates that 23 members will reach that level this year, although almost a third will still fall short. Poland and Estonia spend most in GDP terms.

"You cannot ask the American people to expand the umbrella of NATO when the current members

aren't paying their fair share," Grenell said. The United States spends most within NATO on its own budget, in dollar terms, and allies rely on its military might for their defense.

"When we have leaders who are going to talk about more war, we need to make sure that those leaders are spending the right amount of money," Grenell said. "We need to be able to avoid war, and that means a credible threat from NATO."

He also insisted that former President Joe Biden was wrong not to talk to Putin, who was indicted for war crimes in 2023 by the International Criminal Court for the "unlawful deportation" of children from Ukraine to Russia.

"You should be able to talk to people," Grenell said. "Talking is a tactic, and you're not going to be able to solve problems peacefully unless you actually have conversations."

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski welcomed Trump's ac-

knowledge that Russia should make the first peace moves, but he cautioned that "this is not the Putin that President Trump knew in his first term."

On Wednesday, Trump threatened to impose stiff taxes, tariffs and sanctions on Moscow if an agreement isn't reached to end the war, but that warning will probably fall on deaf ears in the Kremlin. Russia's economy is already weighed down by a multitude of U.S. and European sanctions.

Sikorski warned that Putin should not be put at the center of the world stage over Ukraine.

"The president of the United States is the leader of the free world. Vladimir Putin is an outcast and an indicted war criminal for stealing Ukrainian children," Sikorski said.

"I would suggest that Putin has to earn the summit, that if he gets it early, it elevates him beyond his significance and gives him the wrong idea about the trajectory of this," he said.

Why meeting military spending target could be tough for Spain

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM
Associated Press

MADRID — While Europe's military heavyweights have already said that meeting President Donald Trump's potential challenge to spend up to 5% of their economic output on security won't be easy, it would be an especially tall order for Spain.

The eurozone's fourth-largest economy, Spain ranked last in the 32-nation military alliance last year for the share of its GDP that it contributed to the military, estimated to be 1.28%. That's after NATO members pledged to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense — a target that 23 countries were expected to meet last year that was largely motivated by concerns about the war in Ukraine.

When pressed, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and others in his government have emphasized Spain's commitment to European security and to NATO. Since 2018, Spain has increased its defense spending by about 50% from 8.5 billion euros (\$8.9 billion) to 12.8 billion euros in 2023. Following years of underinvestment, the Sánchez government says the spending increase is proof of the commitment Spain made to hit NATO's 2% target by 2029.

But for Spain to spend even more — and faster — would be tough, defense analysts and former officials say, largely because of the unpopular politics of militarism in the Southern European



VALENTINA PETROVA/AP

Bulgarian and Spanish air force personnel pose in front of Eurofighter EF-2000 Typhoon II aircraft and MiG-29, in Graf Ignatievo, Bulgaria.

nation. The country's history of dictatorship and its distance from Europe's eastern flank also play a role.

"The truth is defense spending is not popular in European countries, whether it's Spain or another European country," said Nicolás Pascual de la Parte, a former Spanish ambassador to NATO who is currently a member of European Parliament from Spain's conservative Popular Party. "We grew accustomed after the Second World War to delegate our ultimate defense to the United States of America through its military umbrella, and specifically its nuclear umbrella."

Spain joined NATO in 1982, a year after the young, isolated democracy survived a coup attempt

by its armed forces and seven years after the end of the 40-year military dictatorship led by Gen. Francisco Franco. Under a 1986 referendum, a narrow majority of Spaniards voted to stay in the alliance, but it wasn't until 1999 that the country that is now Europe's fourth-largest by population joined NATO's military structure.

In that sense, "we are a very young member of NATO," said Carlota Encina, a defense and security analyst at the Elcano Royal Institute think tank in Madrid.

Opinion polls generally show military engagement as unpopular among Spanish voters. An overwhelming majority of Spaniards were opposed to their country's involvement in the 2003 Iraq War, polls showed at the

time, but support for NATO in recent years has grown.

About 70% of Spaniards were in favor of NATO sending military equipment, weapons and ammunition to Ukraine soon after Russia began its full-scale invasion of the country, according to a March 2022 poll conducted by the state-owned Centre for Sociological Studies, or CIS. But only about half were in favor of Spain increasing its own defense budget, according to another survey CIS conducted that month.

Across the spectrum, political analysts and former Spanish politicians say militarism just isn't great politics. Madrid is nearly 1,800 miles west of Kyiv, unlike the capitals of Poland, Estonia or Latvia, which are closer and have

exceeded the alliance's 2% target based on last year's estimates.

Spain's leaders point out that while they have yet to meet NATO's budget floor, it's unfair to only consider the country's NATO contributions as a percentage of GDP to measure of its commitments to Europe and its own security.

Officials often point to the country's various EU and U.N. missions and deployments, arguing that through them, the country contributes in good form.

Spain also shares the Morón and Rota naval bases in the south of the country with the U.S. Navy, which stations six Aegis destroyers at the Rota base in Cádiz.

Analysts also point to the fact that Spain's government routinely spends more on defense than what is budgeted, through extraordinary contributions that can exceed the official budget during some years by 20% to 30%.

Pascual de la Parte, who was Spain's NATO ambassador from 2017 to 2018, said the 2% metric shouldn't be the only measure since not every NATO member accounts for their defense budgets in the same way.

"There is no agreement between allies in choosing which criteria decide the real spending effort," he said, adding that, for example, while some countries include things like soldiers' pensions in their accounting, others don't. "Ultimately, they can involve very disparate realities."

WAR IN UKRAINE

Learn: Documents found indicate how N. Koreans adapting

FROM PAGE 1

ed, organized, well-trained and better equipped than Russian infantry, even as they suffer heavy casualties.

Ukraine appears increasingly eager to gather evidence of North Korea's growing role in the war. President Donald Trump, who met several times with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during his last presidential term, has pledged to end the conflict.

The retrieved items are especially important because of how hard it has been for Ukrainian troops to capture and question North Koreans in the course of the fighting. Unlike many Russian troops, who Ukrainian soldiers say will often surrender willingly, the North Koreans have fought until their deaths or killed themselves with grenades to evade capture.

Ukrainian special forces troops showed Washington Post reporters the list of 23 Korean and Russian phrases, along with handwritten New Year's letters attributed to Kim, as well as body armor, equipment, first aid kits, military IDs, a shovel, a Ukrainian-made knife and two modern Russian assault rifles retrieved in recent weeks from dead North Korean troops.

Vlad, 31, a member of the 1st Battalion of Ukraine's 8th Special Operations Forces Regiment, the unit that showed the gear and documents to The Post, said Russia appears to have followed a "best for the guest" mentality when preparing their allies for battle.

"The Russians were much more poorly equipped," he said. "The Russians tried to show off for the North Koreans." Like other Ukrainian soldiers quoted in this article, he spoke on the condition that only his first name be used, in keeping with Ukrainian military rules.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that as many as 4,000 North Korean troops have been killed or wounded in recent weeks, with only two captured alive. Both men were wounded and transferred to custody in Kyiv, where Zelenskyy said they are being interrogated and treated for their injuries.

North Korean attacks have thus far been contained to the small enclave in the western Russian region of Kursk that Ukrainian troops have controlled since August last year. After weeks of relentless assaults, North Korean troops have hardly appeared on the battlefield, Ukrainian troops say, even as Russian assaults continue.

Their sudden absence could signal they are regrouping and assessing future moves, or could be a reflection of widespread injuries and exhaustion after recent attacks.

"They are licking their wounds," said Vitalii, 25, another soldier in the special forces battalion who spent eight hours locked in a firefight with North Korean troops last month.

"They are licking their wounds," said Vitalii, 25, another soldier in the special forces battalion who spent eight hours locked in a firefight with North Korean troops last month. The two handwritten pages relaying messages from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un were dated from Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. The documents were independently translated by The Post.

The origins of the letters, which shared New Year wishes and thanked the troops for fighting on behalf of their motherland, were not clear. They may have been sent to the troops from Pyongyang or written down by North Korean soldiers who listened to their commanders read the messages from Kim out loud.

"You experienced heartbreaking sacrifices and the joys of costly battle victories, many noble combat experiences, the priceless feeling of genuine camaraderie and patriotism, all so far away from the motherland," one of the messages read. "I don't even know how I can find the words to properly encourage and express gratitude for your dedication and tireless efforts."

"I really miss you comrades," the letter read.

A separate small booklet found on a soldier last week was filled with handwritten lyrics to patriotic North Korean songs.

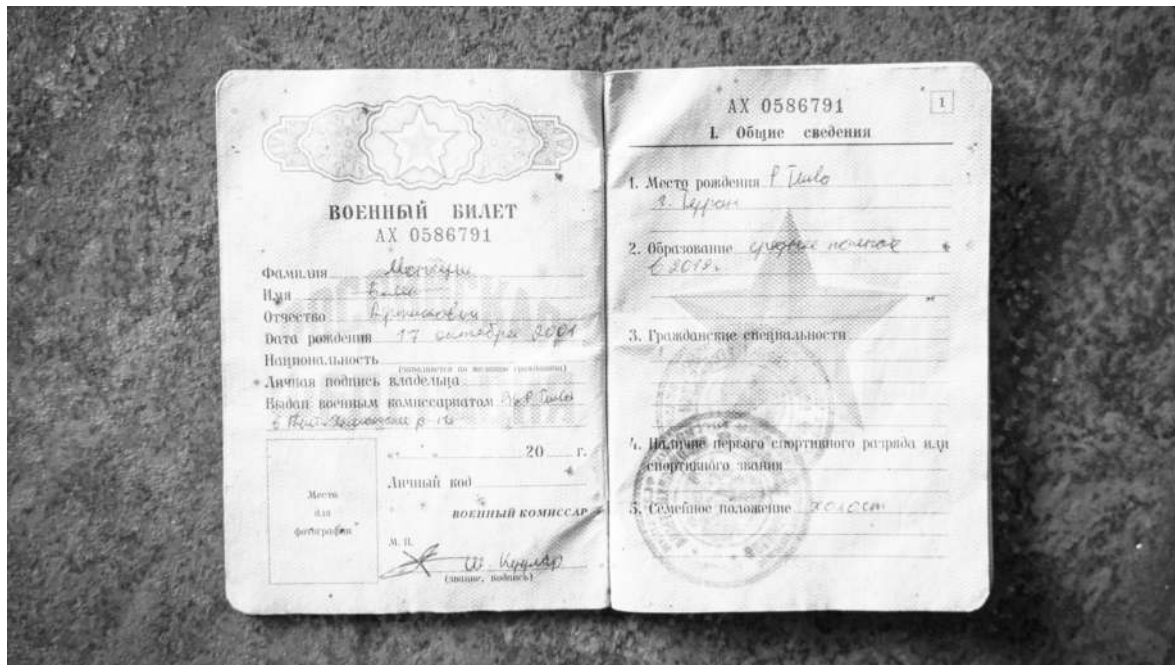
"My fate is always shared with the motherland," one of the lyrics read.

That the soldiers carried those messages in their pockets while on missions suggested to the Ukrainian troops that they are significantly more ideologically motivated than Russian soldiers, who are often fighting on contracts for large salaries.

When North Korean troops first appeared on the battlefield last month, Ukrainian soldiers were stunned by how they moved in large groups and did not even attempt to hide from Ukrainian drones.

Many were easily killed in those initial waves, but in ensuing battles, the new arrivals proved to be combat-ready, physically fit and skilled marksmen, the Ukrainians said.

In mid-December, Vitalii and eight other troops from his battalion were sent into Kursk with two



PHOTOS BY ED RAM/For The Washington Post

A Russian military ID found on a North Korean soldier in Russia's Kursk region, photographed on Tuesday in the Sumy region of Ukraine.



A backpack and shovel found on a North Korean soldier in Russia's Kursk region.



A Russian AK-12 rifle found on a North Korean soldier

tasks: one was to stabilize control over Ukrainian positions along a tree line; the other was to take a North Korean prisoner.

Once inside, Dmytro, 24, quickly made visual contact with North Korean troops just 20 meters away, and fired.

For the next eight hours, he said, the North Koreans — dressed in white camouflage to blend in with the snow — did not stop firing back. The Ukrainians could hear one distinct voice giving orders in Korean, his tone occasionally growing more desperate, they said. They only once heard a Russian voice, yelling "Stop! Don't go!"

The North Korean troops, who had previously taken other Ukrainian positions in Kursk, appeared surprised by the resistance from the nine Ukrainian special forces troops and four infantrymen at the position, soldiers who participated in the battle said. But the North Koreans also fought fiercely and aggressively, demonstrating advanced war tactics.

Ukrainian soldiers Vitalii and Volodymyr, 35, eventually identified one soldier they believed they could capture. They shot and wounded him, then Vitalii dragged him to the Ukrainian position, where a medic stabilized him. For four hours, they kept him alive, hoping he would be their first North Korean prisoner of war.

But as the Ukrainians retreated later that day, the North Koreans attacked again. In the course of a chaotic withdrawal under drones, artillery shells and gunfire, their prisoner and one of the Ukrainian soldiers were killed. Washington Post reporters viewed images of the body, which the troops examined and passed on to Ukrainian authorities.

The body intrigued local and foreign officials, the troops said, adding that both British and South Korean officials swabbed the body for DNA evidence of North Korea's presence on the battlefield.

Their group has not directly encountered North Korean troops since, but said they can see already how they are "adapting" to the battlefield, said Viktor, 30, commander of the special forces group that participated in that battle.

"They are trying to get smarter, they're not trying to be at one point like a herd of sheep," Viktor said.

Amed Khan, an American philanthropist who directly supports Ukrainian special forces units, showed The Washington Post a separate cache of North Korean documents he said Ukrainian troops had seized in Kursk, which he later had translated.

The Post could not independently verify the authenticity of the documents but they appeared consistent with other North Korean materials reviewed by The

Post and the descriptions of battles aligned with independent Ukrainian descriptions of North Korean behavior on the front.

The documents, which were typed in Korean, suggest that North Korean troops are recording their combat experiences in detail and appear to be using the battlefield experience to gain a better understanding of new technologies. Ukraine has warned that Pyongyang is seizing the opportunity as a chance to gain practical battlefield experience for potential future conflicts with the West.

As Viktor suggested, they also appear to be learning from their mistakes.

"In modern warfare, where real-time reconnaissance and drone strikes are conducted, failing to disperse combat teams into smaller units of two to three members could lead to significant casualties from enemy drones and artillery," one document read.

The documents also critically described the behavior of some North Korean troops, saying they killed some Ukrainian troops who attempted to surrender, a tactic that appeared to anger Ukrainians and ultimately "prolonged the battle." Some North Korean troops, the documents said, repeatedly rushed to rescue their fellow wounded soldiers despite the risks of enemy attacks, causing further casualties.

NATION

House passes Riley immigrant detention bill

BY STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House on Wednesday gave final approval to a bill that requires the detention of unauthorized migrants accused of theft and violent crimes, marking the first legislation that President Donald Trump can sign as Congress, with some bipartisan support, swiftly moved in line with his plans to crackdown on illegal immigration.

Passage of the Laken Riley Act, which was named after a Georgia nursing student who was murdered last year by a Venezuelan man, shows just how sharply the political debate over immigration has shifted to the right following Trump's election victory. Immigration policy has often been one of the most entrenched issues in Congress, but a crucial faction of 46 politically vulnerable Democrats joined with Republicans to lift the strict proposal to passage on a 263-156 vote tally.

"For decades, it has been almost impossible for our government to agree on solutions for the problems at our border and within our country," said Sen. Katie Britt, an Alabama

Republican. She called the legislation "perhaps the most significant immigration enforcement bill" to be passed by Congress in nearly three decades.

Still, the bill would require a massive ramp up in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's capabilities, but does not include any new funding.

Meanwhile, the new president has launched a slew of executive orders intended to seal off the border of Mexico to immigration and ultimately deport millions of migrants without permanent legal status in the U.S. On Wednesday, Trump also canceled refugee resettlement and his administration has signaled intentions to prosecute local law enforcement officials who do not enforce his new immigration policies.

Republican congressional leaders have made it clear they intend to follow suit, though their toughest challenge will be finding a way to approve the funding to actually implement Trump's hardline plans.

"What he's doing is kickstarting what will ultimately be our legislative agenda," said

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

House Republicans initially passed the legislation last year with support from 37 Democrats in a move that was intended to deliver a political rebuke to then-President Joe Biden's handling of the southern border. It then languished in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

This year, Republicans, now with control of both congressional chambers, have made it their top priority. When it came before the Senate, 12 Democrats voted in favor of passage, and when the House voted on a version of the bill earlier this month, 48 Democrats supported it.

The vast majority of U.S. adults favor deporting immigrants convicted of violent crimes, according to a recent survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. However, only about 37% of U.S. adults are in favor of deporting immigrants in the U.S. illegally who have not been convicted of a crime.

Under the legislation, federal authorities would be required to detain any migrant arrested or charged with crimes like shoplifting.

The scope of the proposal was widened in the Senate to also include those accused of assaulting a police officer or crimes that injure or kill someone.

The bill also gives legal standing to state attorneys general to sue the federal government for harm caused by federal immigration decisions. That gives states new power in setting immigration policy when they have already been trying to push back against presidential decisions under both the Trump and Biden administrations. Democrats unsuccessfully pushed to have that provision stripped from the bill in the Senate, saying it would inject even more uncertainty and partisanship into immigration policy.

Ultimately, even the Trump administration is likely to struggle to implement the new requirements unless Congress follows up later this year with funding. Republicans are currently strategizing how to push their priorities through Congress through a party-line process known as budget reconciliation. They have put the cost of funding Trump's border and deportation priorities at roughly \$100 billion.

Trump meets with at-risk Republicans on legislation

BY LISA MASCARO
AND CHRIS MEGERIAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump met Wednesday with a small contingent of the most politically endangered House Republicans as the party struggles to agree on a strategy for implementing the tax cuts and other priorities that it promised voters.

The meeting happened as Trump tried to advance other priorities during the first week of his second term. Roughly 160 aides at National Security Council were sent home while they are reviewed to determine if they align with Trump's agenda. The Pentagon planned to send as many as 1,500 active-duty troops to support border security efforts.

"The American people have been waiting for such a time as this," said Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary.

Stephen Miller, a top Trump adviser, met with Senate Republicans to update them on plans for deportations and reinstating what's known as Title 42, a policy that was put in place during the coronavirus pandemic to stop border crossings.

Although Republicans control the White House and both chambers of Congress, they have only thin majorities on Capitol Hill, and there are disagreements on how to move forward with so many issues on the table.

Trump's meeting unfolded amid a series of private "listening sessions" with House Speaker Mike Johnson, whose ability to unite



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., center, is joined by, from left, Rep. Jeff Hurd, R-Colo., Republican Conference Chair Lisa McClain, R-Mich., and House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., during a news conference at the Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington, on Wednesday.

his conference will be sorely tested in the weeks and months ahead. Trump has held his own dinners with Republican lawmakers at Mar-a-Lago, and he's preparing to address them next week at their private retreat in Doral, Fla., where the president owns a resort.

"We're working very closely in close coordination with the White House because this is an America First agenda that takes both of those branches of government to work in tan-

dem," Johnson said Wednesday at a news conference.

Those attending the meeting included Mike Lawler of New York, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania and Don Bacon of Nebraska. All three of their congressional districts were won by Democrat Kamala Harris in last year's presidential election.

A lengthy first meeting with Trump and Republican leaders at the White House on

Tuesday was described as more of a first date than a marriage, said one person granted anonymity to discuss the private session.

They've been debating the best strategy for advancing their agenda of tax cuts, deportations and massive reductions to the federal workforce, among other Trump promises.

Trump is fond of the idea of "one big, beautiful bill," which House Republican leaders also prefer.

Senate Republicans are skeptical of that approach, arguing that it could take months to compile the legislation only to watch it collapse under its own weight.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune continues to advocate for a two-step approach that would involve first providing money Trump needs to ramp up border wall construction and mass deportation plans, along with domestic energy development and other resources for the Pentagon.

That would save the thorny issue of tax and spending cuts for a second package.

It's not just strategy but substance that divides Republican lawmakers, despite their broad agreement on the need to lower taxes and reduce the size of the federal government.

For example, some are prioritizing restoring what's known as the SALT deduction, which allows taxpayers to deduct state and local taxes from their federal bill. It's important for lawmakers like Lawler, who hails from the high-tax state of New York.

Bid to block cancellation of birthright citizenship is in federal court

Associated Press

A federal judge in Seattle was to hear the first arguments Thursday in a multi-state lawsuit seeking to block President Donald Trump's executive order ending the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship regardless of the parents' immigration status.

U.S. District Judge John Coughenour scheduled the session to consider the request from Arizona, Illinois, Oregon and Washington. The case is one of five lawsuits being

brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups across the country. The suits include personal testimonies from attorneys general who are U.S. citizens by birthright.

The order, signed by Trump on Inauguration Day, is slated to take effect on Feb. 19. It could impact hundreds of thousands of people born in the country, according to one of the lawsuits. In 2022, there were about 255,000 births of citizen children to mothers living in

the country illegally and about 153,000 births to two such parents, according to the four-state suit filed in Seattle.

The U.S. is among about 30 countries where birthright citizenship is applied. Most are in the Americas, and Canada and Mexico are among them.

The lawsuits argue that the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizenship for people born and naturalized in the U.S., and states have been interpreting the

amendment that way for a century. Ratified in 1868, the amendment says: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." Trump's order asserts that the children of noncitizens are not subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and orders federal agencies to not recognize citizenship for children who don't have at least one parent who is a citizen.

NATION

Justice Department freezes civil rights cases

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's new Justice Department leadership has put a freeze on civil rights litigation and suggested it may reconsider police reform agreements negotiated by the Biden administration, according to two memos obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press.

Attorneys in the department's Civil Rights Division were ordered not to file any new complaints, amicus briefs or other certain court papers "until further

notice," one of the memos said.

Another memo directed attorneys to notify leadership of any settlements or consent decrees — court-enforceable agreements to reform police agencies — that were finalized by the Biden administration within the last 90 days.

It said the new administration "may wish to reconsider" such agreements, raising the prospect that it may abandon two consent decrees finalized in the final weeks of the Biden administration in Louisville, Kentucky, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Those agreements, reached after investigations found police engaged in civil rights violations, still need to be approved by a judge.

They were among 12 investigations into law enforcement agencies launched by the Civil Rights Division under Attorney General Merrick Garland.

The Minneapolis City Council earlier this month approved the agreement to overhaul the city's police training and use-of-force policies in the wake of the 2020 murder of George Floyd.

The Justice Department an-

nounced last month it had reached the agreement with Louisville to reform the city's police force after an investigation prompted by the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor in 2020 and police treatment of protesters.

The memos, sent by new chief of staff Chad Mizelle, is a sign of major changes expected in the Civil Rights Division under Trump. His pick to lead the division is Harmeet Dhillon, a well-known conservative attorney who last year made an unsuccessful bid for Republican National Committee chair.

The Justice Department under the first Trump administration curtailed the use of consent decrees, and the Republican was expected to again radically reshape the department's priorities around civil rights.

It's unclear how long the "litigation freeze" may last.

The memo said the move was necessary to ensure "that the federal government speaks with one voice in its view of the law and to ensure that the President's appointees or designees have the opportunity to decide whether to initiate new cases."

Cold snap chills New York City's rodents

Associated Press

NEW YORK — This week's frigid weather has many New York City residents shivering, scurrying into cozy spots and feeling sapped. Including the rats.

The United States' most populous city has been spared the Upper Midwest's extreme wind chills, not to mention the shock of record-breaking snow in the deep South, in this week's Arctic blast.

But temperatures peaked Monday around 26 degrees and roughly 20 degrees on Tuesday and Wednesday, well below average.

Such cold has, yes, a chilling effect on the Big Apple's notorious rodents. But it boosts efforts to get rid of them, says city "rat czar" Kathleen Corradi.

"It's stressing out rats. It's putting them in their burrows," she says. "So we kind of get to double down now while the rats are 'feeling the heat' from this cold snap."

New York City's wild rat species — *Rattus norvegicus*, also called the Norway rat or brown rat — doesn't hibernate in winter but does become less active when the weather is freezing for prolonged periods.

At the same time, the rodent's food source tends to shrivel because people are out less and therefore discarding few food wrappers and other rat snacks on the streets, Corradi said.

All that makes for stressed rats and suppresses breeding, which "is really their superpower," Corradi said.

Norway rats can reproduce many times a year, essentially any time conditions are suitable, though they tend to be most prolific from spring through fall.

Jason Munshi-South, a Drexel University ecology professor who has researched New York City's rats, said those that are already holed up in subway tunnels, sewers, crawlspaces or other nooks can weather the cold fairly well.

Rats that haven't secured a hideaway might venture to unusual places, such as car engine blocks. Or a tempting basement? Perhaps, if building owners haven't diligently blocked them out.

But Munshi-South said some of the animals likely will freeze to death, especially if they're already sick, malnourished or otherwise weakened.



SETH WENIG/AP

Frigid temperatures have a chilling effect on the Big Apple's notorious rats, like this one in Central Park.

"Harsh winters like we are having so far will keep the rat population at a lower level if we have sustained cold, freezing periods," he said in an email.

All of that, Corradi said, allows the city's rat-fighters to make headway ahead of the warmer months.

There's no official count of New

York City's rats, but no one disputes that they have long been legion.

Successive city administrations have tried various approaches to eliminating or at least reducing them.

Current Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat who has battled the critters at his own Brooklyn home,

created Corradi's position — officially, the director of rodent mitigation — about two years ago.

Adams' administration also has focused on requiring trash "containerization," otherwise known as putting household and business garbage into enclosed bins instead of piling refuse-filled plastic bags on the curb.

Saudi Arabia says it intends to invest \$600B in US

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Saudi Arabia's crown prince said Thursday the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the United States over the next four years, comments that came after President Donald Trump earlier put a price tag on returning to the kingdom as his first foreign trip.

Trump's 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia upended a tradition of U.S. presidents heading to the United Kingdom as their first trip abroad. It also underscored his administration's close ties to the rulers of the oil-rich Gulf states as his eponymous real estate company has

pursued deals across the region as well.

The comments from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reported early Thursday by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, came in a phone call with Trump.

It marked Trump's first call with a foreign leader since his inauguration Monday.

"The crown prince affirmed the kingdom's intention to broaden its investments and trade with the



Mohammed

United States over the next four years, in the amount of \$600 billion, and potentially beyond that," the report said.

The readout did not elaborate on where those investments and trade could be placed. The U.S. in recent years has increasingly pulled away from relying on Saudi oil exports, which once was the bedrock of their relationship for decades. Saudi sovereign wealth funds have taken large stakes in American businesses while also looking at sports as well.

Saudi Arabia does, however, rely predominantly on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems.

The White House on Thursday issued a statement acknowledging the call, saying the two leaders "discussed efforts to bring stability to the Middle East, bolster regional security and combat terrorism."

"Additionally, they discussed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia's international economic ambitions over the next four years as well as trade and other opportunities to increase the mutual prosperity of the United State and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the statement said, without elaborating.

The crown prince, the de facto ruler of the oil-rich kingdom, also

spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio early Thursday.

Trump's 2017 visit to the kingdom set in motion a yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations, including the kingdom.

Trump maintained close relations with Saudi Arabia, even after Prince Mohammed was implicated in the 2018 killing and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. The kingdom also had been talking for years with the Biden administration about a wider deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for U.S. defense protections and other support.

NATION

Sen. Murkowski to vote against Hegseth

BY LISA MASCARO
AND MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Lisa Murkowski announced Thursday that she will vote against confirming Pete Hegseth to lead the Pentagon, becoming the first Republican to oppose one of President Donald Trump's Cabinet picks ahead of a crucial test vote.

Murkowski, of Alaska, said in a lengthy statement that allegations of excessive drinking and aggres-

sive actions toward women, which Hegseth has denied, show that his behaviors "starkly contrast" with what is expected of the U.S. military. She also noted his past statements that women should not fill military combat roles.

"I remain concerned about the message that confirming Mr. Hegseth sends to women currently serving and those aspiring to join," Murkowski wrote on social media.

Murkowski said behavior that Hegseth has acknowledged, "in-

cluding infidelity on multiple occasions," shows a lack of judgment. "These behaviors starkly contrast the values and discipline expected of service members," she said.

"Above all, I believe that character is the defining trait required of the Secretary of Defense, and must be prioritized without compromise," she said.

Senate GOP leaders rushed to advance Trump's defense secretary nominee toward confirmation,

despite grave objections from Democrats and stirring unease among Republicans over his behavior and qualifications to lead the U.S. military.

It will take a simple majority senators to advance Hegseth's confirmation in a vote scheduled for later Thursday. Most Republicans, who hold a 53-seat majority in the chamber, have signaled they will back the nominee, though Vice President JD Vance could be called in to break a tie

vote.

Rarely has a Cabinet choice encountered such swirling allegations of wrongdoing. Trump is standing by Hegseth, and the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee has dismissed the claims as factually inaccurate.

A new president's national security nominees are often the first to be lined up for confirmation, to unsure U.S. safety at home and abroad.

Maintaining: Firm says fires caused \$28B in insured damage

FROM PAGE 1

Hughes Fire, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said. There were no reports of homes or other structures burned.

Parts of Interstate 5 near the Hughes Fire that had been closed reopened Wednesday evening. A 30-mile stretch of the major north-south artery had been closed for emergency vehicles, to move equipment and to prevent accidents due to smoke.

Winds in the area were gusting at 42 mph in the afternoon. They had reached as high as 65 mph in some mountain pockets by Wednesday night, according to David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Kayla Amara drove to Castaic's Stonegate neighborhood to collect items from the home of a friend who had rushed to pick up her daughter at preschool. As Amara was packing the car, she learned the fire had exploded in size and decided to hose down the property.

"Other people are hosing down their houses, too. I hope there's a house here to return to," Amara said as police cars raced through



JAE C. HONG/AP

A firefighter carries a drip torch as he ignites a backfire against the Hughes Fire along a hillside in Castaic, Calif., on Wednesday, the day parts of Interstate 5 near the Hughes Fire that had been closed reopened.

the streets and flames engulfed trees on a hillside in the distance.

Amara, a nurse who lives in

nearby Valencia, said she's been on edge for weeks as major blazes devastated Southern California.

"It's been stressful with those other fires, but now that this one is close to home it's just super stressful," she said.

Closer to Los Angeles, residents in Sherman Oaks received an evacuation warning Wednesday night after a brush fire broke out on the Sepulveda Pass near the I-405 Freeway. The blaze was first reported just after 11 p.m., but the Los Angeles Fire Department said Thursday that forward progress had been stopped at about 40 acres and the evacuation warning was lifted. No structures were damaged and no injuries were reported, fire officials said, but firefighters remained at the scene.

The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong winds came as firefighters continued battling the Palisades and Eaton fires. Officials remained concerned that those fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots. Containment of the Palisades Fire reached 70%, and the Eaton Fire was at 95%.

The Palisades and Eaton fires have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out Jan. 7.

Luna said Wednesday his department was still investigating 22 active missing person reports in both fire zones. All reported missing are adults, he said.

LA officials were preparing for potential rain even as some residents were allowed to return to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas. Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the weather service.

The California fires have overall caused at least \$28 billion in insured damage and probably a little more in uninsured damage, according to Karen Clark and Co., a disaster modeling firm known for accurate post-catastrophe damage assessments.

On the heels of that assessment, California Republicans are pushing back against suggestions by President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and others that federal disaster aid for victims of wildfires should come with strings attached. Trump plans to visit the state to see the damage Friday; it wasn't clear whether he and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom will meet during the visit.

Senate panel advances Collins nomination to lead VA

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on Thursday almost unanimously advanced the nomination of Doug Collins to be the next secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, paving the way for a vote by the full Senate.

The committee voted 18-1 in support of Collins, a 58-year-old Air Force Reserve colonel and military chaplain from Georgia who served as a Republican in the House from 2013 to 2020. A Senate vote to confirm him will likely take place next week.

"I appreciate his firsthand experience," said Sen. Jerry Mo-



Collins

maker. I also appreciate his commitment to putting veterans first and to being forthright and transparent with this committee."

The only opposition to Collins' nomination came from Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, who said she was worried Collins would further privatize VA care and overturn regulations that allow

the VA to provide abortion care in cases of rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother.

Collins told senators during his confirmation hearing this week that "we will be looking at that issue when I get in there to confirm that the VA is actually following the law."

He has been an outspoken critic of abortion and as a lawmaker in 2016 introduced a bill to ban federal funds for abortion services.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the committee, also expressed concern about Collins' "less than a completely explicit or clear answer" on abortion but

said he supported his nomination.

"I was impressed by many of his answers and commitments to continue the forward progress for our veterans, which has been such a bipartisan cause, particularly in seeking expansion of the PACT Act for toxic exposed veterans, upgrading the VA facilities nationwide, delivering more resources to prevent veterans homelessness and utilizing every resource possible to stop veterans suicide," he said.

Blumenthal and Moran said they were closely following the potential impact on the VA of the federal hiring freeze announced by President Donald

Trump earlier this week. Moran said the committee is seeking more details on the directive from Trump's transition team.

"It would be useful to have Secretary Collins confirmed, in a position to advocate for his department and for the veterans who that department serves, and he indicated a willingness to do so," Moran said.

If confirmed by the Senate, Collins will lead the second-largest agency in the federal government, with a \$369 billion budget and nearly 400,000 employees who provide health care, disability compensation and other benefits to 18 million veterans.

WORLD

Fatal attack puts migration in German election spotlight

By GEIR MOULSON
Associated Press

BERLIN — Germany's opposition leader vowed Thursday to bar people from entering the country without proper papers and to step up deportations if he is elected chancellor next month, as a knife attack by a rejected asylum-seeker spilled over into an election campaign in which he is the front-runner.

Two people, including a 2-year-old boy, were killed and three others wounded Wednesday in the Bavarian city of Aschaffenburg. The suspect, arrested shortly afterward, is a 28-year-old Afghan with a history of psychiatric problems and violence who said over a month ago that he would leave Germany voluntarily.

His asylum application was rejected in 2023 and authorities failed to send him back to Bulgaria, where he first arrived in the European Union, according to Bavarian officials, who pointed the finger at the federal migration office.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose center-left party trails in polls before Germany's Feb. 23 election, met with the heads of the country's security services on Wednesday evening and said that they will "draw the necessary consequences. Now." He didn't offer details.

His main election challenger, Friedrich Merz, whose center-right Union bloc leads polls, stepped up his party's vows to toughen migration policy. He said that Germany has had a "misguided asylum and immigration policy" for a decade — since Angela Merkel, a chancellor from his own party and a former Merz rival, allowed large numbers of migrants into the country.

Merz said that if he becomes chancellor, he would order the Interior Ministry on his first day in office to control all of Germany's borders permanently and "turn back all attempts at illegal entry without exception." He argued that EU



DANIEL LOEB, DPA/AP

A woman places a mourning candle on a bench next to flowers and cuddly toys in Aschaffenburg, Germany, on Thursday, following a fatal attack in a park that is informing the election campaign for chancellor.

rules are "recognizably dysfunctional" and Germany must exert a right to the primacy of national law.

Merz added that people who are supposed to leave the country must no longer be let go if they are picked up by police, and should be taken into custody and deported as quickly as possible, helped by an increase in detention capacity.

Merz, who may well have to form a coalition with center-left parties to become chancellor, insisted that "compromises are no longer possible on these issues."

The outgoing government already instituted temporary controls on all of Germany's borders. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the government has "massively tightened laws," for instance to ease deportations, and pointed to a yet-to-be-implemented agreement on revamped EU migration rules. She said that existing laws must be applied more consistently and "some things apparently went wrong" in opposition-run Bavaria too.

Faeser questioned whether Merz's vow to bar all irregular entry is possible under EU law — "I would say no." She said that "one

shouldn't use such a serious crime for electioneering," and added: "What is he promising people? If this is not fulfilled, that also destroys trust."

The Aschaffenburg attack followed knife attacks in Mannheim and in Solingen last year in which the suspects were immigrants from Afghanistan and Syria, respectively — in the latter case, also a rejected asylum-seeker who was supposed to have been sent to Bulgaria. In last month's Christmas market car ramming attack in Magdeburg, the suspect is a Saudi doctor who had come to various regional authorities' attention in the past.

Mainstream parties are feeling pressure from the strong poll ratings of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, with which all say they won't work after the election. Discontent about migration is a mainstay of its support, which recent surveys show at about 20%, putting it in second place.

Alice Weidel, the AfD's candidate for chancellor, posted on X that the outgoing parliament should vote next week on closing Germany's borders and turning back irregular migrants.

UK police make arrest after 5 people are injured in knife attack in south London

Associated Press

LONDON — Five people have been treated for injuries following a stabbing attack on Thursday morning in south London, emergency services said.

London's Metropolitan Police said that a man was arrested following the incident in Croydon. Local media reports said it happened near an Asda supermarket.

Police said it was too early to provide a motive for the stabbing

and said the suspect was not one of the injured.

The ambulance service said that one person was taken to a major trauma center in London and four other people were hospitalized.

"We sent a number of resources to the scene, including ambulance crews, a paramedic in a fast response car, an incident response officer, members of our Tactical Response Unit and London's Air Ambulance," the service said.

Police said "officers attended alongside the London Ambulance Service to treat five injured people who were taken to hospital." Their injuries "are thought to be non-life-threatening," the statement added.

The incident comes on the day that a teenager faced sentencing for fatally stabbing three girls at a Taylor Swift-themed summer dance class in the northwestern English town of Southport.

ICC prosecutor requests warrants for 2 in Taliban, cite treatment of women

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor announced on Thursday he had requested arrest warrants for two top Afghan Taliban officials for the repression of women.

Karim Khan said in a statement he asked judges to approve warrants for the group's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, and the head of Afghanistan's Supreme Court, Abdul Hakim Haqqani, accusing the men of crimes against humanity for gender-based persecution.

"These applications recognize that Afghan women and girls as well as the LGBTQI+ community are facing an unprecedented, unconscionable and ongoing persecution by the Taliban," Khan said.

Since they took back control of the country in 2021, the Taliban have barred women from jobs, most public spaces and education beyond sixth grade.

Human rights groups applauded the ICC move against the Taliban leadership.

"Their systematic violations of women and girls' rights, including education bans, and the suppression of those speaking up for women's rights, have accelerated with complete impunity. With no justice in

sight in Afghanistan, the warrant requests offer an essential pathway to a measure of accountability," Liz Evenson, international justice director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

It is the first time in the court's history that attacks on the LGBTQI+ community have been considered a crime against humanity.

Judges at the The Hague-based court approved a request in 2022 from the prosecutor to reopen the investigation into Afghanistan. The probe was shelved after Kabul said it could handle the investigation.

Khan said he wanted to reopen the inquiry because under the Taliban, there was "no longer the prospect of genuine and effective domestic investigations" in Afghanistan.

Khan's predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, got approval in 2020 to start looking at offenses allegedly committed by Afghan government forces, the Taliban, American troops and U.S. foreign intelligence operatives dating back to 2002. The decision to look into Americans led to the previous Trump administration slapping sanctions on Bensouda, whose term ended in 2021.

There is no deadline for judges to rule on a request for a warrant, but a decision typically takes around four months.

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NATION

Dumpster divers find treasures in retailers' trash

BY CATHY FREE
The Washington Post

Melanie Diaz was excited to stock up on January clearance items at her favorite stores in Tampa this month, so she put her usual battle plan into action.

First, she slipped into a pair of old sweatpants and her dirtiest sneakers. Then around 10 a.m., she headed to T.J. Maxx — the first store on her list — and drove around to the back to case the area and make sure nobody was watching.

Satisfied that she could make a clean getaway, Diaz put on a pair of rubber gloves and climbed into the store's dumpster to begin her free shopping spree. Everything from hand soap to puzzles and Christmas ornaments had been tossed out, most of it in original packaging. Diaz figures the store wanted to clear shelves of old merchandise and didn't or couldn't send it back from where it came.

Diaz, 22, bundled it up in clean trash bags and packed it into the back of her SUV. Then she hit the next dumpsters on her list at Burlington, HomeGoods, Michael's and Bath and Body Works, where she loaded up on holiday cards and wreaths, stuffed animals, bath gel and body lotion, T-shirts, dog toys and kitchenware.

"January is my favorite time to go dumpster diving," she said. "It's the time when the stores are throwing out all the Christmas stuff and gearing up for spring. But I usually find all kinds of treasures, seven days a week."

Sorting through broken glass, gooey paint and spilled lotion and makeup is worth it, she said, noting that she once found a dozen pairs of Air Jordans, which normally sell for about \$146 a pair. She estimated that she's found more than \$20,000 in after-Christmas merchandise since she started dumpster diving two years ago.

Diaz has plenty of company at the top of the trash heap.

Social media sites are full of videos from people in the U.S. and other countries showing off their latest fabulous (and free) dumpster finds. The Dumpster Diva is popular on YouTube, GlamourD-Dive has 530,000 followers on Instagram and the Dumpster Dive King (Diaz's favorite) has more than 4 million fans on TikTok.

"The Dumpster Dive King is the one who inspired me to give it a try," said Diaz, who stumbled

upon the TikTok page and was motivated a few days later to jump into a dumpster behind a Five Below discount store in Tampa.

She has developed her own fan base of 3.7 million followers combined on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. Diaz said she hopes to inspire others to save perfectly good merchandise from clogging up the nation's landfills.

Although store managers sometimes ask her to leave the property if they catch her sorting through thrown-out items, many don't seem to mind, she said.

Representatives from stores Diaz regularly visits, including Michael's and Burlington, did not respond to a request for comment from The Washington Post about merchandise thrown into dumpsters. A spokesperson representing HomeGoods and T.J. Maxx emailed a statement:

"Regarding our unsold merchandise, typically, should an item linger on our sales floor, we continue to mark that item down, encouraging its sale to customers at an even greater value," the spokesperson wrote. "Only a very small percentage of merchandise from our stores goes unsold. It is generally our practice that this unsold merchandise should not be thrown in the trash."

A lot still ends up there, Diaz said.

"I go home with armloads almost every day," she said, noting that she has turned her hobby into a career as a content creator on social media.

"I never go to a place where there's a 'private property' sign, and if they ask me to get out, I don't fight it, I just leave," Diaz said. "I used to be a little shy about what people would think if I was caught in a dumpster, but now I don't care."

She said she never sells what she finds, but donates many items, including clothing and shampoo, to charity or gives them to friends. She also keeps some for herself.

"Pretty much every present I give to people for Christmas or on their birthday came from a dumpster," Diaz said. "But it's all brand new and it's much better to give it to someone than let it be hauled away in the trash."

Shane Hurley, a transportation dispatcher from Malden, Mass., said that as a dedicated dumpster diver, he has the same philosophy.



SHANE HURLEY

Shane Hurley with candles found in a mall dumpster this month near Boston. He always puts on gloves and a mask before diving in.



SHANE HURLEY

Hurley found a dumpster full of fresh flowers in mid-January. He took some to give to friends.



TRYCE JOSE

Tryce Jose found a ring in a gift box in Portland, Maine.

"I'll take stuff that I have no use for just to make sure it doesn't go to the landfill," said Hurley, 24, explaining that he frequently drops his finds off at local thrift stores. "I like the idea of it ending up with somebody who needs it."

He said he sees each dumpster as a scavenger hunt.

"It's no-cost gambling — you never know what you're going to get," Hurley said. "I love the adventure aspect of it, especially in January, when more stuff is being thrown out. I've found brand new Christmas lights, press-on nails, video games, sporting goods, back massagers, flowers. You name it, you can probably find it."

Many stores throw items out if they're returned, especially if the original package has been opened, he said. "The stuff is still good, but they'll toss it," he said. "It's such a waste."

To avoid confrontation, Hurley said he makes his dumpster rounds at night, using a flashlight



MELANIE DIAZ

Melanie Diaz shows off some of her finds after a clearance dumpster run in Tampa, Fla.

and thick gloves to sort through the mess.

"Security guards generally don't like it when you dumpster dive, but they're never aggressive about it," he said. "I get in and out as quickly as possible, and I always make sure to clean up after myself."

Dumpster diving is generally legal on public property as long as it does not conflict with local laws. But experienced divers caution that it takes a strong stomach to withstand the smells and muck — and more important — there are risks of injury from falling or encountering sharp objects or other dangerous materials.

Tryce Jose, a mother of a 2-year-old daughter in Portland, Maine, said she's up for the challenge. She started dumpster diving in September after she saw a bunch of people posting about it on TikTok and YouTube.

Jose, 36, said she has already found enough after-Christmas

toys, cards and decorations to get her through next holiday season. And January isn't over yet.

"The first time I tried it, I found a dumpster packed with kids' sticker books at Five Below," she said. "I give a ton of stuff away, but my husband freaks out because I have stuff in the garage all the time."

Still, she's not slowing down. "Once you start, you can't stop," Jose said. "I've even gone dumpster diving on vacation."

She said she's in a friendly competition with another dumpster diver who tries to beat her to her favorite locations when she goes out several mornings a week.

"I go to seven or eight stores, and this guy will literally be camped outside sometimes, trying to beat me," she said. "Part of the thrill of the hunt is to get there before he does."

In Decatur, Ala., Heather Watson uses a headlamp and goes out after dark to avoid competition. She said she started climbing into dumpsters five months ago, using a long-handled hook to avoid handling the garbage bags.

"The first time, I found 50 12-packs of soda pop," she said. "Then I found a bunch of brand new Christmas trees in a dumpster at Michael's. I didn't have a tree, and now I have three."

More recently, Watson, 40, has gone home with two sewing machines, several curling irons and a T-shirt heat press used to print designs on clothing.

"The stores will spray paint these things or mark them up with something when they throw them out, but they still work just fine," she said.

She said she always tries to spread the wealth, rather than turn her house into a scene from the "Hoarders" television series.

Diaz said as long as stores are tossing new merchandise, she'll continue her dives for treasure.

"The waste in our country is crazy," she said. "If I can help remedy that even a little bit, why not?"

GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Great CES finds

Food tech makes a big impression at annual trade show

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

January's Consumer Electronics Show showcased the latest and greatest in technology and gadgets. This included miles and miles of trade show space that easily allowed you to get your 10,000 steps — I hit over 30,000 on several days. The show listed more than 4,500 exhibitors, more than 141,000 attendees and more than 6,000 media members.

With all that trolling, the show took time, as did going through my notes from the event. Here are some items that caught my attention:

Ice cream maker

As an ice cream fanatic, I favored the ColdSnap countertop ice cream maker. In minutes you can effortlessly have a bowl of frozen, delightful dessert. All it takes is placing a ColdSnap pod in the machine; in 2-3 minutes, you have a single-serving bowl of ice cream. Each drink-can-shaped pod is filled with premium liquid ingredients that freeze and then dispense into a bowl.

The ColdSnap premium ice cream has 14% milk fat and 300 to 320 calories per pod and is available in vanilla, chocolate, coffee and salted caramel flavors. Besides ice cream, the ColdSnap (\$3,000) machine makes frozen smoothies, nondairy frozen desserts, protein shakes and Snappuccino (frozen lattes with coffee). The pods go directly into the ColdSnap without any preparation, and even better, there's no cleanup since food never comes in contact with the machine. A 12-pack of ice cream is \$45; frozen shakes are \$51 for a 12-pack.

Online: coldsnap.com/product/cold-snap-machine

Laser projector

The Yaber Laser Projector K300 (on sale for \$999.99 from \$1,199.99) can project up to a 100-inch display from 9.7 inches away. A 120-inch picture can be displayed with the projector just 12.9 inches away. That is impressive enough, but it gets better after you see the quality of the image. Inside is a triple RGB laser for true-life colors, and the projector pumps out impressive sound from a pair of 15-watt JBL speakers. The cinema-quality sound has 50Hz deep bass and Dolby support. The speakers are built at an upward 16-degree angle for optimal sound direction toward the audience, and are behind gradient speaker grilles.

The portable projector can be used for schools, businesses and backyard movie nights, which is my personal preference. The longest part of the setup is taking it out of the box, but it's ready in just seconds after it's powered up. The autofocus and keystone correction happen almost instantaneously.

The Laser Projector K300 has safety features so as not to project any harmful blue light. According to Yaber, the Triple RGB laser technology naturally avoids the 415-455nm harmful blue light range.

For sports enthusiasts, a 60Hz high display refresh rate prevents image jitter for a smooth visual presentation. You can view content from more than 7,000 native



COLD SNAP/TNS

ColdSnap premium ice cream has 14% milk fat and 300 to 320 calories per pod and is available in vanilla, chocolate, coffee and salted caramel flavors.



COLD SNAP/TNS

The ColdSnap ice cream maker uses pods to make frozen treats like ice cream, left. Best of all? There's no cleanup since food never comes in contact with the machine.



KIRIN HOLDINGS/TNS

The Kirin Holdings Electric Salt Spoon uses a mild electrical current to enhance the saltiness and umami flavors of low-sodium foods.

apps, including YouTube, Netflix, Prime Video and Disney+.

Online: yaber.com/products/yaber-laser-projector-k300s

Electric salt spoon

Kirin Holdings, a Japanese company, showed off its Electric Salt Spoon, the first of its kind, at least that I've ever seen. According to Kirin, the spoon-shaped device is designed to enhance the saltiness and umami flavors of low-sodium foods, such as soups and curries, using a mild electrical current. And it works. I tried it right there on the trade show floor. A rechargeable lithium battery powers it.

The limited edition spoons are selling for \$127 in Japan, and Kirin hopes for

American sales in the future. The spoon is made of metal and plastic, developed with extensive research and designed to help us eat less salt.

Online: kirinholdings.com/en/newsroom/release/2024/1225_02.html

Portable espresso machine

OutIn is a company committed to delivering freshly brewed coffee without boundaries. They have achieved that with the hand-held OutIn Nano portable electric espresso machine, which makes a hot cup in minutes with a push of a button — from anywhere.

The travel-ready OutIn Nano (\$149.99; \$10 discount currently available) is the size of an average drink thermos, weigh-



OutIn/TNS

The hand-held OutIn Nano portable electric espresso machine battery is rated for more than 200 hot water brews.

ing about 1.5 pounds. It has an IPX4 water resistance rating, so it withstands quick splashes and a small rain shower. It reaches 198 degrees Fahrenheit and has a USB-C charging 7500 mAh battery inside, rated for more than 200 hot water brews. Once your coffee is loaded to brew (ground coffee or Nespresso Original coffee pods), press a button to activate the one-touch vacuum sealing process.

Online: outin.com/products

VIDEO GAMES



Sony PlayStation

The PlayStation VR2 and Meta Quest 3 are the latest entries into the world of virtual reality gaming. The PSVR2 is dependent on the PS5; the Meta Quest is a stand-alone device.

How to get started with VR gaming

Here are the best titles for both PlayStation VR2 and Meta Quest 3 headsets

BY SAMUEL R. WEINSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

My first taste of virtual reality came in a visit to Madame Tussauds Wax Museum in New York where I strapped a computer on my back so I could feel like I was hunting ghosts like a real Ghostbuster.

That was in 2015. It is now 2025, and VR has become a household product with an entry price of \$300.

This past holiday, the PlayStation VR2 was \$350 (currently at its original price of \$549.99), the Meta Quest 3S remained \$299.99 and the Meta Quest 3 was and still is \$499.99. This might have inspired some of you to get one of those headsets.

As an owner of the Meta Quest 3 and the PSVR2, I have purchased many games for my VR headsets. I have felt that the only place to find advice on which games to play was Reddit. I want to provide a comprehensive list for new VR users of games that I would recommend.

For those of you still deciding which headset to get, I will explain which headset is best for you.

If you own a PlayStation 5 and you seek a premium gaming experience in virtual reality, get the PSVR2. The headset is designed for the most immersive VR gaming experience.

There is haptic feedback in the headset and the controllers. The graphics generated for the PSVR2

are better than those of the Meta Quest 3 because the headset is dependent on the GPU and CPU of the PS5, making it more powerful. In addition to the graphics, the headset produces the image on an OLED screen with 110 degrees of view.

While the degrees of view are less than those of the Meta Quest 3, the OLED screen with eye tracking and haptic feedback makes for a great gaming experience. I also prefer the design of the controller. The hand tracking is better, and the controllers are rechargeable.

If you're a PC and Xbox gamer, the Meta Quest 3 is probably best for you. You can link up the Meta Quest 3 to Steam and play seamlessly, but the experience can be a drag if you do not have a Wi-Fi 6 router or a computer with a strong graphics card.

With that said, the Meta Quest 3 offers great games on a 4K screen. Since it is a stand-alone headset, it is more like a computer for your face. You can browse the internet, engage in VR games and play Xbox Game Pass on the headset.

(For those who might have tried streaming games on the Xbox Game Pass in 2021 and been upset with the streaming quality, a lot has changed. The quality is much better, and the graphics streaming quality rivals an Xbox Series X.)

Each headset is great in its respective ways, but I personally prefer the PSVR2 for VR gaming. The PSVR2 with a premium subscription is ideal for any



AP

The Meta Quest 3, at a developer conference in 2023.

user with a PlayStation 5. You start off with 12 free games with the premium subscription.

The games available for the PSVR2 are often sold at lower price points with sales that happen throughout the year. The Meta Quest also has a subscription service. There are constant sales in both stores, which allows users of both headsets to buy games for low prices.

The Meta Quest 3S isn't a bad choice either. If I had kids that wanted a VR headset or wanted to save money on my VR experience, the Meta Quest 3S is most likely what I would get. The battery life is even longer than that of the Quest 3, but the graphics and computing power is lower.

Listed on the next page are the games I recommend that are available on both headsets.

SEE VR ON PAGE 15

VIDEO GAMES

VR: Plethora of horror titles among exciting genre options on both systems

FROM PAGE 14

Arizona Sunshine & Arizona Sunshine 2

If you're looking for an ideal zombie shooter with a character as memorable as Duke Nukem himself, *Arizona Sunshine* lets you to play as a funny resident of Arizona who finds himself in a zombie apocalypse. As he is shooting his way to his destination in both games, you will have the opportunity to use myriad guns from a pistol to an M249 to a machine gun. It is wholesome family fun — if your family appreciates exploding heads. The *Fredy* bundle, which includes both games, is available for \$59.99 in the Meta Quest Store and PlayStation Store.

Alien: Rogue Incursion

If you are a fan of the "Alien" movie franchise, you have been waiting for a game just as good as *Alien Isolation*. This game delivers. If *Alien Isolation* captured the environment of the first film, "Alien," this captures the fun and terror of the sequel, "Aliens." You're a former Space Marine who is taking on hordes of aliens. You have access to a hand-held radar that does the same beeping as in "Aliens" and you also get the rifle used in the "Alien" series. I appreciated that it has a big VR map that didn't need much loading time. The backlash online about adding "Part One" to the title right before launch is amusing but distracting from the truth; this is a great stand-alone game in the series. The game is available for \$39.99 in both the PlayStation Store and the Meta Quest Store.

Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge

There is an enhanced edition only available on the PSVR2, which showcases the amazing graphics available with that system. However, the same fun can be experienced on both headsets. The game explains the story behind the latest addition to the Disney theme parks, which adds a layer of interest. The aspect that I enjoyed the most is that it brings you various parts of the "Star Wars" experience and allows you to appreciate them. The cost is \$24.99 in the Meta Quest Store and \$39.99 in the PlayStation Store for the Enhanced Edition, or free with a premium subscription.

7th Guest VR

If you're in the mood for a campy horror game, this is the game for you. You progress by solving puzzles that make it like a virtual escape room experience. I appreciate that the game also helps you understand the puzzles to progress. It allows for some individual approaches, but the storyline is firm and you're made aware of which locations you need to go to. The supernatural elements of the game make it spooky, but not scary, which make it ideal for all ages. The *7th Guest* is available for \$29.99 in both the PlayStation and Meta Quest Stores.

Red Matter & Red Matter 2

In this sci-fi space horror game, you are solving the mysteries of the base where you live. The story: A country like the Soviet Union is in a space race against a country similar to, but not nearly as amazing as, the United States. The game has plenty of twists and turns that make it a great story, but it also has surprising mo-



Sony Pictures Virtual Reality

Ghostbusters: Rise of the Ghost Lord allows you to play with friends across platforms. The story is entertaining and reads like the "Ghostbusters" the animated series.

ments that will keep virtual reality fans thoroughly entertained. It is easily one of my favorite series in virtual reality. The game bundle is available in the Meta Quest Store for \$49.99 and \$39.99 in the PlayStation Store.

The Room VR: A Dark Matter

This is another game that's somewhat spooky but not scary. It is a mystery game where you progress in the story by solving puzzles. You're a detective in 19th century London, and you encounter unique artifacts that transport you on a fun adventure. It is available for \$29.99 in the PlayStation Store and the Meta Quest Store.

Ghostbusters: Rise of the Ghost Lord

I bought this thinking it would be like the *Ghostbusters* game at Madame Tussauds, but I was wrong. With that said, I did enjoy it. There is a story in the game that allows you to play with friends across platforms. The story is entertaining enough for you to appreciate the "Ghostbusters" lore, and it reads more like "Ghostbusters" the animated series. The game is available for \$29.99 in both stores and is available for free with a PlayStation Premium subscription.

The Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Whether or not you were a fan of "The Walking Dead," this is a great zombie apocalypse story set in New Orleans. It arguably is the best game if you're a VR beginner because the controls are like those in all other games. In both the first and second chapters, you are exploring zombie-filled New Orleans. You can level up and equip your character by looting and finding resources. By upgrading your character, you are more capable of getting through difficult parts of the game. I highly recommend this game to folks who are looking for a traditional gaming experience using VR. I bought this on the Meta Quest and it is available for free with a PlayStation Premium subscription. The bundle costs \$59.99 on the PlayStation Store and \$79.98 if you bought both in the Meta Quest Store.

Propagation Paradise Hotel

This is one of my favorite horror games available in virtual reality. If you're someone who has loved any game made by an indie studio, this is the video game for you. The focus of the game is the narrative. For the sake of avoiding spoilers, I am just going to say that the story is about a mysterious series of events at a hotel. The game has an abrupt ending, which might make you believe that a sequel is coming, but the developers have made it clear that they are waiting to see if it is financially viable. For the sake of supporting storytelling for virtual reality platforms and supporting an indie studio, I highly recommend buying this game. It's available for \$19.99 in both the Meta Quest and PlayStation Stores.

Tetris Effect: Connected

Tetris is a really simple game. You line up different falling shapes to form a perfectly connected straight line. This prevents the screen from filling up and ending the game. It seems like an easy task, until the pieces fall faster and faster. This iteration of the game is my favorite of the franchise. It has been around for quite some time, but it is as enjoyable on a flat-screen television as it is on any VR headset. The music is pretty epic too. I highly recommend making this purchase for any VR headset. It is available with a Meta Quest Plus subscription for free, but it is available for purchase for \$39.99 in the PlayStation Store and \$29.99 in the Meta Quest Store.

Doctor Who: The Edge of Time

I am not going to say that this game is earth-shattering or the type of game that will get you to love virtual reality. But it is the type of game that you will want to play if you are a fan of "Doctor Who." It brings a classic "Doctor Who" adventure to the VR headset, allowing you to immerse yourself in the Who-universe. I doubt any Whovian could ask for anything more. You get to mess around with a sonic screwdriver, stand in the Tardis and be a Dalek. The game is available in the PlayStation Store for \$24.99 and the Meta Quest Store for \$19.99.

Pistol Whip

I avoided playing this game for a while because I didn't think much of the premise. You get a gun and shoot your way through a series of levels. Then I realized this is *Beat Saber* with guns, and that makes it pretty epic. The difficulty of the game varies according to the player's ability to duck bullets or obstacles while shooting targets. This is available for \$29.99 in both stores and free with a PlayStation Premium subscription.

Hubris

This fun sci-fi adventure forces you to find a missing agent in a strange world where your trusty gun and wits will help you get away from the madness. If you are interested in a sci-fi campaign with good graphics, this game is a fun way to go. It is normally \$29.99 in the Meta Quest Store and the PlayStation Store but is currently on sale in the PlayStation Store for \$13.49.

Among Us VR

If you're not familiar with *Among Us*, it is basically the party game *Mafia* in space. Two teammates are secretly trying to sabotage and kill the crew. You can either be the crew trying to fix the ship or the secret saboteurs. If you are looking for a cross-platform party game aside from *Ghostbusters*, this would be a fantastic choice. It is available for \$9.99 in both the Meta Quest and PlayStation Stores.

Jurassic World

Aftermath Collection

Don't go into this game expecting highly detailed dinos from the "Jurassic Park" films — this game takes an animated approach. The animation doesn't detract from the experience, however. The severity of each situation matches the intensity of the films, and the exciting plot brings "Jurassic World" lore into the game. I highly recommend this for all ages. It's available for \$29.99 on both platforms.

Resident Evil 4

When this was released, it seemed like an impossible feat was accomplished. An AAA game made for consoles was re-created for VR audiences. If you're a fan of the *Resident Evil* series, this is a no-brainer to purchase. Capcom's title reminds us what we value in the series. I played this on the Oculus Quest 2 when it first came out and thought it was amazing. The graphics are improved for PlayStation users and with a PlayStation Pro, you can experience a Pro Enhanced game for VR. It is \$39.99 on both platforms.

Beat Saber

Beat Saber is a must-buy for the folks who love to pass their time by just listening to music. It combines the fun of swinging a lightsaber with amazing music that can be expanded upon by buying more music packs. If you're looking for a game that would engage someone who barely plays video games, this would be the game that I recommend. An easy must-have for any VR player. It is available for both the PSVR2 and the Meta Quest for \$29.99.

These are not the only games available on both headsets, and there are plenty of other games worth mentioning. However, I wanted to provide a new user of VR a list of games that would not disappoint. I hope this list helps.

MUSIC

Is that act really a best new artist?

The long and complex tale of a controversial Grammy category

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

When is something old considered new? If you're talking about the Grammy Awards, that's often whoever lands in the best new artist category, easily the weirdest of the races.

Take Sabrina Carpenter, who finds herself nominated for best new artist this year — on her sixth full-length release. There's little doubt that the “Espresso” singer ruled the airwaves in 2024, but she was already making a mark on the Billboard Hot 100 chart as early as 2021 with the No. 48 song “Skin.”

The category of new artist is constantly evolving, trying to capture the zeitgeist each year as the process of categorizing fame gets more complicated, from raw LP sales in the 1970s to TikTok videos today.

“I do think that they are constantly tweaking that category to make a bigger splash with it,” said Theo Cateforis, director of undergraduate studies in music history at Syracuse University. “They are kind of gaming the system to say, ‘Yes, we want artists nominated for this category who will draw eyeballs, who will have an audience, who will make for a better kind of media representation.’”

The Grammy rules currently say nominations hinge on whether “the artist had attained a breakthrough or prominence” — and it delegates that determination to a screening committee. Eligible artists must have released at least five singles or one album, but there is no longer a maximum.

Under those rules, Carpenter fits. She had three top 10 hits in 2024 — “Espresso,” “Please Please Please” and “Taste” — and her album “Short n’ Sweet” spent four weeks at No. 1. Suddenly she was very prominent.

“I’ve got to confess, even as a pop music scholar, I wasn’t talking about Sabrina Carpenter’s fifth album, but I was talking about her sixth album,” said Joe Bennett, a forensic musicologist at Berklee College of Music in Boston.

A history of dubious definition

The Grammys have long stretched the meaning of “new” into a pretzel. Cyndi Lauper won best new artist in 1984 despite having released an album with the band Blue Angel four years before. Green Day were nominated after “Dookie,” but that was the trio’s third album.

Bennett recalls teaching a songwriting class that featured Amy Winehouse’s first album “Frank” in 2003 — a full five years before she won the crown for best new artist. Bon Iver won for their second album and Esperanza Spalding won after her third. Chance the Rapper walked up to accept the Grammy for best new artist in 2017 with a baseball cap that had a “3” stitched on it — the number of albums he’d created by then.

That loosey-goosey nature is in stark contrast to the strict past, when Whitney Houston famously wasn’t deemed eligible for best new artist in 1986 because she had already recorded duets with other artists.

Some best new artist candidates really are fresh, but that’s rare. Lil Nas X is one example — his major label debut EP contained “Old Town Road” in 2019 and a year later he was at the Grammys. Or



AP

Mike Dirnt, Billie Joe Armstrong and Tre Cool, of Green Day, appear at the 2010 Grammys in Los Angeles. The band was nominated for best new artist in 1994, after the release of their third album.

Olivia Rodrigo, whose debut “Sour” came out in 2021 and helped her be crowned best new artist in 2022.

“I think a large part of the issue is that it’s just a poorly named category,” said Jasmine Henry, a musicologist and sound engineer who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. “I think the way the public conceives of this category is as best debut artist award. And the reality is that it’s really a breakout award in its function.”

Lady Gaga leads the change

The rules for best new artist last came under a harsh spotlight in 2009 when Lady Gaga was barred from the category because her first single, “Just Dance,” had been nominated for best dance recording the year before.

The rules back then said best new artist nominees couldn’t appear on any Grammy-nominated recording, even if they were a feature. Under the 2010 revised rules, artists were eligible for the best new artist prize unless they had previously released an album or already won a Grammy.

In 2016, the Recording Academy updated its eligibility requirements again, “to remove the album barrier given current trends in how new music and developing artists are released and promoted.” In 2019, it expanded the number of nominations to

SEE NEW ON PAGE 17



AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

Sabrina Carpenter is a 2025 Grammy Award nominee for best new artist even though the “Espresso” singer has released six full-length albums and had a single on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 2021.

MUSIC

REVIEW

Mac Miller

Balloonerism (WEA)

To coincide with what would have been Mac Miller's 33rd birthday, his estate has given us all a present — an unreleased album by the late hip-hop star.

"Balloonerism" was shelved around 2014 in favor of the album "Watching Movies With the Sound Off" and the mixtape "Faces." To my ear, it's closer to "Faces" but rawer and less intense. Even so, just having Miller back in our ears is a reason to celebrate.

The 14-song album features Thundercat on bass and producing, as well as collaborations with SZA and Ashley All Day. Miller and SZA worked together often during that period, producing tracks that ended up on her third EP. SZA returns the favor on "Balloonerism" with contributions that are subtle, not showy.

It's an airy, experimental album that leans into neo-soul and jazz, often sounding dreamy and drug-addled. It's more scattered, more sprawling, than the music he officially released at the time. Be prepared for sudden changes in tempo and instruments, as well as ghostly studio murmurs. Miller also shows off some nifty drum work on three tracks.

Death and money are frequent subjects of Miller's meditation, as is a frequent nostalgia for childhood. "Whatever happened to apple juice and cartwheels?" he sings on "Excelsior."

The best track is the lead single — "5 Dollar Pony Rides" — which features a hand-drawn Miller reaching out to an old love, almost scating by the end. "Your daddy shoulda got you that pony / Let me give you what you want," he sings.

Miller's lyrics do his usual high-low thing, mixing frat house humor — "Just how super is a supermodel?" — with sudden, deep thoughts, like "Do I need to know the beginning to see the end?"

There is an appearance on "Transformations" by Delusional Thomas, Miller's alter ego, which means his usual flow is distorted by effects that make him sound like a helium-sucking imp and then like a demon, all pretty juvenile stuff. It's one of a few tracks that really didn't need to see daylight, including the final one, the indulgent "Tomorrow Will Never Know."

"Balloonerism" isn't the first posthumous release from Miller, who died in 2018. "Circles" came out in 2020, under the care of producer Jon Brion, and showed an artist in fabulous control of his sound, spare but full.

It's risky to unearth and release albums after an artist's death. Jeff Buckley's legacy was not enhanced by the far-from-finished "Sketches For My Sweetheart the Drunk." But Sophie's "Sophie" was already nearly completed and a triumph, as was Avicii's "Tim" and Juice WRLD's "Legends Never Die."

It's not clear why "Balloonerism" stayed on the shelf. Miller's output was remarkable, and maybe other projects seemed more pressing. But with his voice now silent, we're hungry to hear anything new, even estranged projects. Let him give you what you want.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press



David Lynch's musical legacy: 10 songs to go beyond the films

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

The loss of singular talent and visionary filmmaker David Lynch is not only felt in the world of cinema, but music, where he had inextricable influence on multiple generations of artists.

Lynch, whose death was announced Jan. 16, composed music for many of his films, collaborated with others, directed music videos, released albums and inspired legions of creatives.

You know his films; now learn about his musical legacy.

"In Heaven," from "Eraserhead":

Lynch composed much of the soundtrack to the clangorous "Eraserhead," his 1978 debut movie. It foreshadows both a long career in film and an enduring interest in using music to establish a surrealist ambience in his work. "In Heaven" holds particular resonance in the film. It's performed by a woman who lives in protagonist Henry Spencer's radiator, for one thing. It has been embraced by legions of indie rock fans. The Pixies have covered it and it is interpolated into Modest Mouse's "Workin' on Leavin' the Livin'."

Chris Isaak, "Wicked Game": Chris Isaak's 1989 desert ballad did not become a hit until it was included in Lynch's 1990 romantic crime drama "Wild at Heart" starring Nicolas Cage and Laura Dern. And that, my friends, is Lynch's musical power.

Angelo Badalamenti, "Twin Peaks" theme:

It would be a challenge to name a music and film collaboration stronger and more ideal than the one between Badalamenti and Lynch. They first worked together on 1986's "Blue Velvet," leading to a long partnership (and, no doubt, armies



Lynch

of new Roy Orbison fans, given his placement in the film). But it's Badalamenti's theme for "Twin Peaks" that fans no doubt think of first when their names appear. The singer Julee Cruise had a hit in the song, titled "Falling." It is the perfect distillation of the show's beauty, mystery and violence — and that of its setting, the foggy Pacific Northwest.

Moby, "Go": Moby sampled the "Twin Peaks" theme in his 1991 single, "Go," transforming the song into a career-making rave. Later, in 2009, Lynch would direct a music video for Moby's "Shot in the Back of the Head." He had quite the run as a music video director, working with everyone from Nine Inch Nails and Donovan to the German nu-metal band Rammstein.

David Lynch, "Thank You Judge": In 2001, Lynch released his debut album, "BlueBOB," a sometimes industrial, goth-y (no surprise there) blues-rock full-length. At times, it recalls the avant-garde no-wave of a cult classic band like Pere Ubu — particularly on the track "Thank You Judge." It is very distorted, very reverb heavy, and very much not for the faint of heart.

David Lynch and Karen O, "Pinky's Dream": In 2011, Lynch released the album "Crazy Clown Time," producing the standout electro-pop opener "Pinky's Dream." It features the great singer Karen O, frontwoman of the '00s New York rock band Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

David Lynch and Lykke Li, "I'm Waiting Here": On his third album, "The Big Dream," Lynch teamed up with Swedish

singer Lykke Li for the dreamy "I'm Waiting Here," a breathy, depressed doo-wop anti-hit that sounds like it was recorded in the spot where a sunset horizon hits an open road.

Chromatics, "Shadow": In 2017, 26 years after the end of the second season of "Twin Peaks," the show returned for a limited series, "Twin Peaks: The Return." It featured tons of performances from Lynch-approved acts — Nine Inch Nails, Eddie Vedder, Sharon Van Etten and of course Julee Cruise among them. But a performance by the Portland, Ore., synth-pop band Chromatics in Episode 2 stands out. The song is "Shadow," and it is so undeniably perfect for the show, the band appears as if they were made for it.

Flying Lotus, "Fire Is Coming": Lynch is the first voice heard on Flying Lotus' "Fire Is Coming" — a distinctive orator and storyteller, and a curious choice to open to a beat-heavy track from the inventive DJ. But looping Lynch saying the title track over and over again? That's an inspired decision.

Chrystabell & David Lynch, "Sublime Eternal Love": In her review, The Associated Press' Krysta Fauria describes Lynch's last album, "Cellophane Memories" a collaboration with the artist Chrystabell, as "surrealist" and "difficult to categorize within a genre." She argues it can only be defined by its "austere lyrics and ambient soundscapes carried by Chrystabell's hypnotic, reverbed vocals." Now that it has become Lynch's final album, it doubles as a fitting coda — as does its closing track, "Sublime Eternal Love." It's a haunting, romantic vocal performance atop modulating synthetic production, the kind sound long associated with Lynch.

New: Public opinion might outweigh criteria

FROM PAGE 16

include eight artists instead of five. In 2021, it removed the maximum amount of musical output — 30 singles or tracks or three albums.

"Best new artist is now viewed — and rightly, in my opinion — through the eyes of public opinion, not through some strictly applied set of grubby numerical criteria," said Bennett.

The current rules also allow best new artist nominees who were formerly in a duo or groups, "provided the duo/group had not attained prominence."

That means three past winners for best new artist — 1970's Crosby, Stills & Nash, 1988's Jody Watley and 1999's Lauryn Hill — likely wouldn't be eligible. David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash were all already known for their work in previous groups, as were Watley (in Shalamar) and Hill (the Fugees).

These days, there's a certain career momentum that best new artist nomi-

nees share, said Henry. It's a mix of red-hot singles and virality.

"We usually see the breakout song and then we'll see them do a Tiny Desk Concert, and then they may open up for Taylor Swift and have a viral moment. And then they're probably going to be on 'Saturday Night Live' or late night," she said. "You can really see that trajectory crystallizing over the last decade."

2025 nominees

In addition to Carpenter, this year's best new artist nominees are: Benson Boone; Doechii; Khruangbin; RAYE; Chappell Roan; Shaboozey and Teddy Swims.

'We were all flabbergasted'

Carpenter isn't the only act that got a best new artist nod after years of touring and album releases. So too was Khruangbin, a Texas trio that formed in 2010.

They got their nomination following

the release "A La Sala," their well-received fourth studio album that reached the top 40 of the Billboard 200, but not as high as their 2022 EP with Leon Bridges, the No. 23 "Texas Moon."

The band was at soundcheck before a concert in Berlin when news broke that they'd been nominated. They came offstage to congratulatory texts and a bouquet of flowers.

"We were all flabbergasted," said bassist Laura Lee.

None of the members were aware they were up for a Grammy and drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson researched how they became best new artist candidates. He understood it by explaining Carpenter's inclusion.

"She's been around for a minute, but 'Espresso' kind of made a big impact this year. I can definitely see she's by no means a quote-unquote new artist. But to most people who didn't know who she was, at a certain point, she's new," he said.

BOOKS



TNS

Bestselling author Scott Turow says public perception of the law has become far less idealized as it becomes much more familiar through legal thrillers, such as his, and TV shows.

'Presumed Innocent' sequel ignores Gyllenhaal TV series

BY CHRIS HEWITT

The Minnesota Star Tribune

A tricky task faces Scott Turow and "Presumed Guilty," his 38-years-later sequel to "Presumed Innocent": Accommodate last year's "Presumed Innocent" TV series or ignore it?

The Apple TV+ show starred Jake Gyllenhaal as attorney Rusty Sabich, charged with the murder of a colleague with whom he'd been having an affair. As he fights to prove his innocence, evidence mounts against him and, in the end, the killer turns out to be close to home. The series changed the book's culprit, though, and updated the story to the present. (The 1990 Harrison Ford film kept the original killer.)

"Guilty" was in the works before the Gyllenhaal series, but the latter complicates matters, since many people now think of Sabich as a 2020s guy who is in his 40s but, if the books were to observe real time, he's in his 70s. That's where Turow keeps him, ignoring the Apple changes.

Sabich is still dealing with the possibility that he lives in a house with a killer in "Presumed Guilty." This time, it's

his stepson Aaron. He returns, alone and days late, from camping in Wisconsin with his estranged girlfriend and then disappears when her corpse is discovered.

Turow's attorney experience shows in the courtroom scenes that effortlessly incorporate tricky legal matters and breathtaking reversals, exactly like "Law and Order" reruns do. "Presumed Guilty" has a lot to do with the specifics of a murder trial — particularly the decision whether to have Aaron testify on his own behalf — and Turow makes it all convincing and gripping.

The book's personal dynamics also are intriguing. When Sabich is chosen to represent his son (an outrageous idea that's set up believably) and begins to put together a case, it becomes clear that the killer is someone he knows — to the extent that you may find yourself wishing he'd examine if there's something about him that attracts homicidal pals.

Whenever things get heated, the book's tone feels off. But that's not all that often. I'd still be happy to have Sabich back for another adventure, hopefully involving a murderer who doesn't live with him.

Q&A

Throwback thrillers

Bestselling author Turow discusses why legal novels are still popular

BY SOPHIA NGUYEN

The Washington Post

Will poor Rusty Sabich ever catch a break?

Spoilers ahead, for novels that came out decades ago and are commonly credited with helping to invent the genre of the legal thriller: First, in "Presumed Innocent" — Scott Turow's 1987 fiction debut — the promising young prosecutor is charged with the murder of Carolyn, a colleague and former lover. Then, in "Innocent" (2010), Rusty, now a judge caught up in an affair with his senior law clerk, is accused of poisoning his wife, Barbara.

Turow's new novel, "Presumed Guilty," finds Rusty wiser and mellower. He has retired to a rural lakeside town and is planning to marry his new partner, Bea, a high school principal. He sits on a volunteer board that reviews books in danger of being banned in the local school. He catches and cures his own fish. But when Bea's son is arrested in connection with the disappearance of his troubled ex, Rusty is drawn into helping defend him in court.

Turow spoke to me over video from his home office in Naples, Fla. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

The Washington Post: Having written more than a dozen novels, what do you think makes for a successful legal thriller? And what differentiates it from a crime novel more generally?

Turow: Let me sort of go sideways at that question. When I started out, I wanted to be a classic literary novelist. When I became a prosecutor, I realized that I was experiencing on a daily basis the fundamentals of what could be a popular novel. Everybody seems to be interested in the contest that takes place in a courtroom — where the sides cast themselves as good and evil, where the accusations involve things that our entire society usually deems to be deeply wrong, where the search for the truth is inherently interesting, because the questions are.

That was important to me, because I was perplexed by the high-low division that existed, particularly at that time, in American literary culture. As much as I personally loved reading Saul Bellow, who was the great literary god as I was coming of age — certainly in Chicago — I also was sympathetic to the people who said: "What is happening in these books? It's a guy wandering around and thinking thoughts." I arrived in the courtroom and I realized, "Holy smokes, here it is — the magic of something that's both popular and interesting, but serious."

Your novels have this interesting mix of idealism and cynicism when it comes to the question of whether the legal process can really surface the truth. For Rusty, the process worked, in that he wasn't wrongfully convicted. But there's always some revelation after the trial. It's only outside the frame of the court where you can really learn what happened.

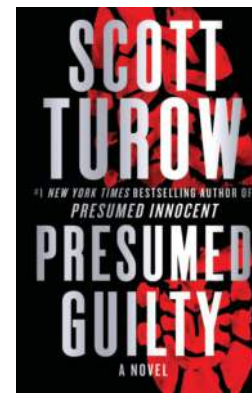
My attitude has been well expressed in these books, which is that the law is an unwieldy instrument for both doing justice and discovering the truth. It just happens to be the best we have — like what Churchill said about democracy. Lord only knows what's coming in the centuries ahead, when it comes to discovering the truth. They may laugh at us, the same way we laugh at drawings of performing surgery in the 17th century. But right now, this is what we've got.

When Rusty is back in the courtroom, he muses about how beautiful it is, how it brings out certain qualities in him. It's where he feels most alive. Is that an attitude you share?

I both loved and hated the courtroom — hated it because of the degree of my own personal anxieties. Hated it when I felt like things were going wrong. Hated it because of, you know, some of the inherent limitations: The jury just doesn't get it, or they're influenced by stuff they're not supposed to be influenced by. But on the other hand, I've been privileged to lead a life with a lot of exciting moments — and just in terms of my own personal voltmeter, nothing, *nothing* can compare with being in a courtroom.

When you were starting out, back in the 1980s and '90s, the white-shoe law firm or the prosecutor's office had a certain glamour and mystique in pop culture. Have readers' attitudes toward lawyers changed? And does that change what they expect out of your writing?

When "Presumed Innocent" appeared, the law was in its heyday in terms



of its hold on the popular imagination. You had "L.A. Law" on television, Steven Brill had started Court TV.

The law was increasingly the place where profound cultural issues were being decided. I thought that was the product of a lot of different social developments — the biggest one being the nationalization of the United States. We went through this period where local customs and differences were being slowly effaced. This huge national marketplace was created. Your sports teams suddenly went from coast to coast. You could go to Birmingham and get a bagel. As things got nationalized, you couldn't really look to local venues for answers to questions of value that everybody was going to accept. So here comes the courtroom to the fore.

Gradually the view of the law has become far less idealized. People have a hell of a lot more exposure to it. When I wrote "Presumed Innocent," I had to explain what a sidebar was — this strange procedure where everybody marches to the bench and whispers with the judge. You don't have to tell people anymore. They witness it in movies and on TV. People expect more, and they expect less, of the law at the same time.

Obviously, legal thrillers are still widely read. Yet when you think of the current practitioners of the genre, it's you, it's John Grisham, it's Michael Connelly. It's the same people who defined it at the beginning. You don't necessarily see new names jumping in and trying to make it their own. What do you make of that gap?

In the last 20 years, technology of all kinds has emerged as the force that is shaping this society, and so the public curiosity is focused there. The young writers who want to be on the social cutting edge are not as inclined to be writing about legal settings.

That doesn't mean I don't get at least one email every week from some young person with legal training who wants to supplant John and me and write the next great legal thriller. And God willing, they will do that.

CROSSWORD AND COMICS

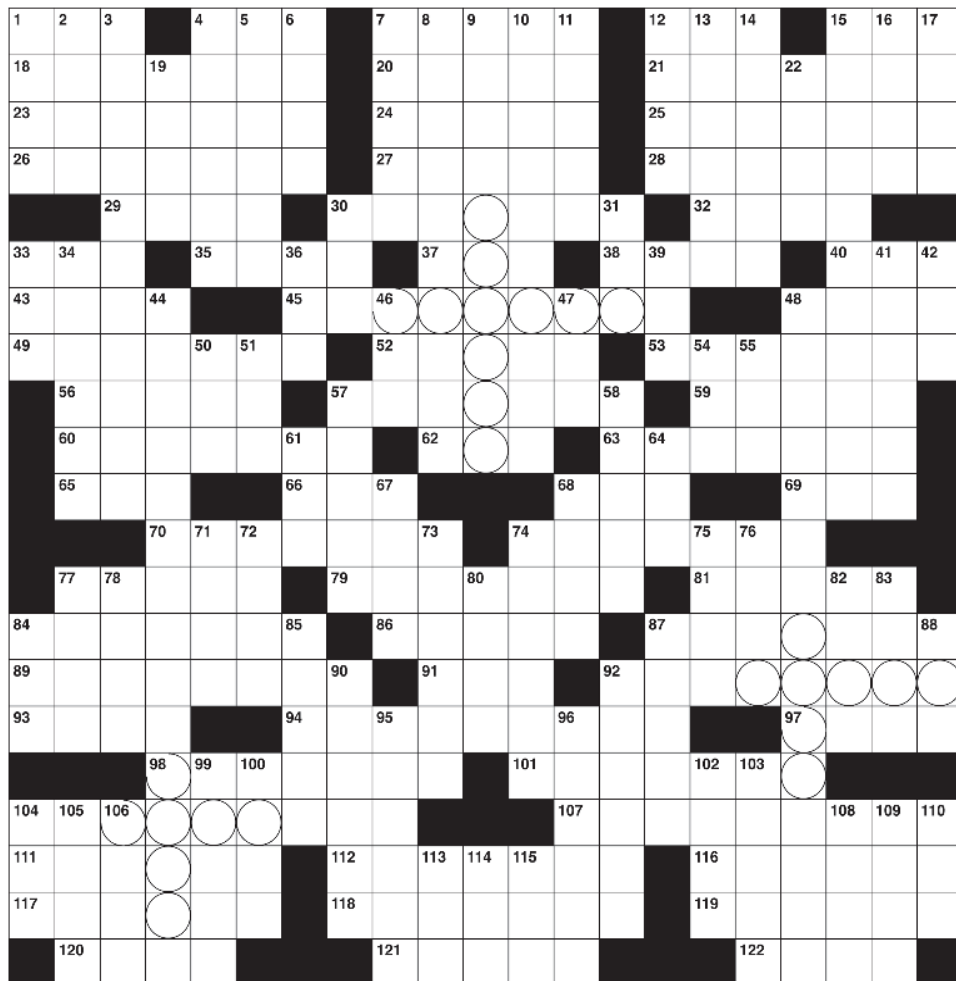
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

I THINK KNOT

BY JEFFREY MARTINOVIC / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Jeffrey Martinovic is a mechanical-engineering student at Western University, in London, Ontario. He has been solving crosswords since he was 10, helping his mother with the puzzle in the local paper. He was fascinated by the seemingly impossible across-and-down interlocks. He started constructing puzzles in high school. "The idea for this one came to me when I was lying in bed one night unable to fall asleep," Jeffrey says. "I figured I may as well do something useful and let my mind wander."

- ACROSS**
- 1 "It's fine, I guess"
 - 4 Dash follower
 - 7 Source of some insomnia
 - 12 Quick reads on the subway, perhaps
 - 15 Filing pro
 - 18 Treasure-seeking woodcutter of folklore
 - 20 More in need of a massage
 - 21 Group that works only for a few seconds at a time
 - 23 H.S. club with student "diplomats"
 - 24 In unison
 - 25 [Oh, puh-lease!]
 - 26 "To add on . . ."
 - 27 Witches' brew creatures
 - 28 Concocts
 - 29 Buffalo's county
 - 30 Feline
 - 32 Needles
 - 33 "The Situation Room" airtel
 - 35 Nicholas II was the last one
 - 37 Measure of resistance
 - 38 Cathedral feature
 - 40 Disco fan on "The Simpsons"
 - 43 Some professions
 - 45 Literary recommendations
 - 48 Stick in a bathroom cabinet
 - 49 Goofs
 - 52 Like the glow of the last embers in a fire
 - 53 Completely destroyed
 - 56 Doctoral hurdles
 - 57 Double- (hypermobile, medically)
 - 59 Gives an illegal assist
 - 60 Produce and discharge
 - 62 Some Korean smartphones
 - 63 R&B singer Williams
 - 65 Suffix with legal and official
 - 66 Publican's offering
 - 68 It's connected to the eustachian tube
 - 69 Org. with four divisions: Atlantic, Central, Pacific and Metropolitan
 - 70 Told (on)
 - 74 Accepts a ring, in a way
 - 77 Court figure
 - 79 Oxford institution, familiarly
 - 81 Many apartments in a warehouse district
 - 84 Lucky charms
 - 86 Like a porcupine's back
 - 87 Put in front of a fan
 - 89 Person who likes to go solo
 - 91 [I'm shocked!]
 - 92 Like many video game characters
 - 93 A long, long time
 - 94 Even . . . or like three pairs of answers in this puzzle
 - 97 Some drinks and breads
 - 98 Germs, on the playground
 - 101 Enthusiastic response
 - 104 Shots, for example
 - 107 The stuff of Persian myths?
 - 111 ____ 101, 508-meter skyscraper that was once the world's tallest
 - 112 Altoid alternatives
 - 116 "Count me in!"
 - 117 Goad
 - 118 It might be rolled out in a studio
 - 119 Archenemy of the Avengers
 - 120 "No thanks"
 - 121 U.S. president during the moon landing
 - 122 Walker with the 2015 triple-platinum hit "Faded"
 - 16 He was named Athlete of the Century by the I.O.C.
 - 17 Hole punchers
 - 19 Symbol of a downturn in the business world
 - 22 House, slangily
 - 30 French wine designation
 - 31 Was ill with
 - 33 Big letters in the pharmaceutical industry
 - 34 Like a situation that can't end badly
 - 36 Electrical unit
 - 39 Tire reading, for short
 - 41 Shiny festive décor
 - 42 Co. that may have a package deal?
 - 44 They watch from afar
 - 46 West Coast airport code
 - 47 Downed
 - 48 Title bestowed annually in New Orleans
 - 50 Photography inits.
 - 51 "What's the ____?"
 - 54 Grandma, endearingly
 - 55 Result of a hit single, maybe
 - 57 Ingredient in a certain "salad"
 - 58 Do-or-die occasions
 - 61 Self image?
 - 64 Destinations for ambulances, for short
 - 67 Slippery sorts
 - 68 Equestrian's command
 - 71 Over
 - 72 Dog whose name was Terry before her most famous film role
 - 73 Station locations
 - 74 Lightly burns
 - 75 Hip bones
 - 76 Blue tang fish of Pixar fame
 - 77 Ecological portmanteau since 1905
 - 78 Pull some strings, say?
 - 80 Opera character whose name might be heard in an opera singer's warm-up
 - 82 Country singer Keith
 - 83 Heavy part of a platform shoe
 - 84 Styled after
 - 85 List of candidates
 - 87 Muesli brand with mountains on the packaging
 - 88 Rock and roll Paul of fame
 - 90 Like some playful teasing
 - 92 Very precise sort
 - 95 Wound
 - 96 Slain king in "Macbeth"
 - 99 Frequently deconstructed dessert items
 - 100 Mythological owner of an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir
 - 102 Foe of a Saxon
 - 103 "Hi" or "bye" on Kauai
 - 104 Imperial energy meas.
 - 105 Grp. making after-work plans?
 - 106 Baltic capital city
 - 108 ____ cava
 - 109 English prep school with a shade of blue named after it
 - 110 Cry for help
 - 113 Tool used in many a sci-fi film
 - 114 Burden
 - 115 Part of a Latin trio



GUNSTON STREET



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

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES

Oscars big on 'Emilia Pérez'

Netflix narco-musical's leading 13 nominations sets a record for a non-English language movie

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

In the wake of devastating wildfires in Los Angeles that struck at the heart of the movie industry, an embattled Hollywood lined up behind "Emilia Pérez," the Netflix narco-musical about trans identity, in Oscar nominations announced Thursday.

Jacques Audiard's "Emilia Pérez," a Spanish-language, French-made film, dominated with a leading 13 nominations, including best picture and best actress for Karla Sofia Gascón, making her the first openly trans actor ever nominated for an Oscar. The film also landed nominations for directing, original screenplay, two of its songs and for Zoe Saldaña.

Netflix, despite its starring role in Hollywood, has never won best picture. Many of its top contenders have previously racked up large numbers of nominations (including "Mank," "The Irishman" and "Roma") but gone home with only a handful of trophies.

"Emilia Pérez," may be its best chance yet. It became the most nominated non-English language film ever, surpassing "Roma," which scored 10 nominations. Only three films — "All About Eve," "Titanic" and "La La Land" — have scored more nominations in Academy Awards history.

Another musical — "Wicked," the smash Broadway adaptation — came away with nearly as many nominations. Jon M. Chu's lavish "Wizard of Oz" riff scored 10 nominations, including best picture and acting nods for its stars Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande.

"The Brutalist," Brady Corbet's postwar epic filmed in VistaVision, also came away with a commanding 10 nominations, including best picture, best director and acting nods for Adrien Brody, Guy Pearce and Felicity Jones.

The nominees for best picture are: "Anora"; "The Brutalist"; "A Complete Unknown"; "Conclave"; "Dune: Part Two"; "Emilia Pérez"; "I'm Still Here"; "Nickel Boys"; "The Substance"; and "Wicked."

In a wide-open Oscar race, the six most honored films — "Emilia Pérez," "Wicked," "The Brutalist," "Anora" (six nominations), "Conclave" (eight nominations) and "A Complete Unknown" (eight nominations) — all fared as expected. The biggest surprises were the Brazilian film "I'm Still

Here," which also landed Fernanda Torres a best actress nomination, and RaMell Ross' "Nickel Boys," a POV-shot drama that had been overlooked by many guilds in earlier voting.

Those nominees likely displaced a few best-picture possibilities in "Sing Sing," "September 5" and "A Real Pain," although those films all landed nominations elsewhere.

One of 2024's most audacious films, "The Apprentice," landed a surprising pair of nominations, for Sebastian Stan and Jeremy Strong. The film dramatizes the formative years of President Donald Trump's emergence in New York real estate under the tutelage of attorney Roy Cohn.

In the best actor category, where Stan and Brody were nominated, the other nominees were Timothée Chalamet ("A Complete Unknown"), Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing") and Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave"). Most notably left out was Daniel Craig, acclaimed for his very un-James Bond performance in "Queer."

Best actress, a category that Demi Moore appears to have locked up for her full-bodied performance in "The Substance," saw nominations for Moore, Gascón, Torres, Erivo and the star of "Anora," Mikey Madison. That left out Marianne Jean-Baptiste ("Hard Truths"), Pamela Anderson, "The Last Showgirl"), Nicole Kidman ("Babygirl") and Angelina Jolie ("Maria").

In the directing category, "The Substance" filmmaker Coralie Fargeat managed to crack into the otherwise all-male group of Sean Baker ("Anora"), Corbet, Audiard and James Mangold ("A Complete Unknown"). Most had expected Edward Berger to be nominated for directing the papal thriller "Conclave."

Supporting actor was led by Kieran Culkin, the favorite for the award, for his performance in "A Real Pain." The other nominees were: Yura Borisov ("Anora"), Guy Pearce ("The Brutalist"), Edward Norton ("A Complete Unknown") and Strong.

The supporting actress nominations went to Grande, Saldaña, Jones, Monica Barbaro ("A Complete Unknown") and Isabella Rossellini ("Conclave").

Much of the usual frothiness of Hollywood's award season has been severely curtailed due to the



NETFLIX/AF

Karla Sofia Gascón, right, and Zoe Saldaña star in "Emilia Pérez." The Spanish-language, French-made film is up for 13 Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture, International Film, Best Actress for Gascón and Best Supporting Actress for Saldaña.

Academy Awards nominees list

Best Picture: "Anora"; "The Brutalist"; "A Complete Unknown"; "Conclave"; "Dune: Part Two"; "Emilia Pérez"; "I'm Still Here"; "Nickel Boys"; "The Substance"; "Wicked"

Best Actress: Demi Moore, "The Substance"; Cynthia Erivo, "Wicked"; Mikey Madison, "Anora"; Karla Sofia Gascón, "Emilia Pérez"; Fernanda Torres, "I'm Still Here"

Best Actor: Adrien Brody, "The Brutalist"; Timothée Chalamet, "A Complete Unknown"; Colman Domingo, "Sing Sing"; Ralph Fiennes, "Conclave"; Sebastian Stan, "The Apprentice"

Best Supporting Actress: Monica Barbaro, "A Complete Unknown"; Felicity Jones, "The Brutalist"; Ariana Grande, "Wicked"; Isabella Rossellini, "Conclave"; Zoe Saldaña, "Emilia Pérez"

Best Supporting Actor: Yura Borisov, "Anora"; Kieran Culkin, "A Real Pain"; Edward Norton, "A Complete Unknown"; Guy Pearce, "The Brutalist"; Jeremy Strong, "The Apprentice"

Best Director: Jacques Audiard, "Emilia Pérez"; Sean Baker, "Anora"; Brady Corbet, "The Brutalist"; James Mangold, "A Complete Unknown"; Coralie Fargeat, "The Substance"

Original Song: "El Mal" from "Emilia Pérez"; "The Journey" from "The Six Triple Eight"; "Like a Bird" from "Sing Sing"; "Mi Camino" from "Emilia Pérez"; "Never Too Late" from "Elton John: Never Too Late"

Original Score: "The Brutalist"; "Emilia Pérez"; "Conclave"; "Wicked"; "The Wild Robot"

Sound: "A Complete Unknown"; "Dune: Part Two"; "Emilia Pérez"; "Wicked"; "The Wild Robot"

Animated Film: "Flow"; "Inside Out 2"; "Memoir of a Snail"; "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most

fires. The film academy canceled its annual nominees luncheon. Other events have been postponed or downsized. Wednesday's announcement included the news that original song nominees won't be performed this year. Conan O'Brien is set to host the March 2 ceremony.

Unlike last year, when Holly-

wood rallied around "Oppenheimer," the 2024 movie year offered up no clear front-runner for the industry's top honor. With five weeks to go until the Oscar ceremony, at least four or five movies — including "The Brutalist," "Emilia Pérez," "Anora," "Conclave" and "Wicked" — are seen as having a shot at best picture.

New song by Tina Turner coming out

Associated Press

They call her the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll" for a reason.

The late, great Tina Turner, one of the world's most popular entertainers who died in 2023 after a long illness, left behind a vast catalog of classics. And now, there's a previously unreleased song to enjoy:



Turner

"Hot For You Baby," a rowdy '80s rock song marked by Turner's husky tone — effortlessly cool and cheery at the same time.

It is the first previously unreleased song featured on the forthcoming 40th anniversary edition of her career-defining album, "Private Dancer," out March 21. The record will be available in a number of formats, including a 5 CD/Blu-ray version that includes a few never-before-released tracks, live performances and music videos.

"Hot For You Baby," written by Australian singer John Paul Young and produced by John Carter, was originally meant to be included on the 1984 album.

"Private Dancer" peaked at No. 3 on the Billboard 200, but it produced Turner's sole No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100: "What's Love Got to Do with It." It is one of many timeless tunes across her body of work: "Proud Mary," "Nutbush City Limits," "River Deep, Mountain High," "We Don't Need Another Hero" and a cover of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" among them.

MrBeast not quite in the bidding race for TikTok

Jimmy Donaldson — better known online as MrBeast — isn't in the TikTok bidding race just yet, according to a representative for the YouTube star.

Donaldson stirred interest in a Jan. 13 post on X saying he'd "buy TikTok so it doesn't get banned." The next day, Donaldson added, "Unironically I've had so many billionaires reach out to me since I tweeted this, let's see if we can pull this off."

That seemed more certain this week when Donaldson was named in reports related to an investor group looking to buy TikTok's U.S. operations in an all-cash offer, led by Recruiter.com Ventures founder and CEO Jesse Tinsley.

But MrBeast spokesperson Matthew Hiltzik said Donaldson hasn't officially joined any bids.

"Several buyers are holding ongoing discussions with Jimmy," Hiltzik said Wednesday. "He has no exclusive agreements with any of them."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Murder charge upheld for suspect in Tupac killing

NV LAS VEGAS — The only suspect ever to be charged in the 1990s killing of rap icon Tupac Shakur in Las Vegas has lost a bid to have his murder case dismissed.

Clark County District Court Judge Carli Kierny said in a decision issued Tuesday that Duane “Keffe D” Davis had provided no proof of any immunity deals.

Davis and his lawyer had argued that he never should have been charged with murder because of immunity agreements he says he reached years ago with federal and local authorities. Attorney Carl Arnold said the indictment against his 61-year-old client is an “egregious” violation of his constitutional rights because of a 27-year delay in prosecution.

Arnold said after the hearing that they will decide in the coming days if they will appeal the judge’s decision to the state Supreme Court.

Davis’ trial in Las Vegas is currently scheduled for March 17. He has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder.

Prosecutors have said the evidence against Davis is strong, including his own accounts of the 1996 shooting in his tell-all memoir. Davis, an ex-gang leader, is accused of orchestrating the shooting near the Las Vegas Strip.

Shakur died a week later. He was 25.

Roller derby league loses bid to keep trans athletes

NY NEW YORK — A New York roller derby league has lost its bid to temporarily block a local ban on transgender female athletes.

Nassau County Supreme Court Judge Bruce Cozzens on Tuesday denied a request by the Long Island Roller Rebels to prevent Nassau County from enforcing its ban while its lawsuit is considered by the court.

In July, local lawmakers in the suburban county east of New York City banned transgender women and girls from playing on female sports teams at the county’s roughly 100 parks and recreational facilities.

The judge determined the new law does not exclude transgender women and girls from public facilities based on their gender identities as they can still play in coed sports leagues. He said allowing transgender women to play in female sports creates additional risk of injury and potential liability for the local government.

The roller derby league and the New York Civil Liberties Union intend to appeal the ruling.

Governor prioritizes reducing violent crime

NM SANTA FE — Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham is tasking lawmakers to come up with public safety solutions amid a persistently high vio-



SETH WENIG/AP

No toll required

A man walks on a path across the George Washington Bridge on a bright and snowy morning as seen from Fort Lee, N.J., on Monday.

lent crime rate that is twice the national average and has left many communities on edge.

She delivered her State of the State address Tuesday, kicking off a 60-day legislative session in which curbing crime and boosting child wellbeing will be top priorities.

“Everyone in this room knows that crime is out of control in New Mexico,” Lujan Grisham said. “Even our public safety professionals agree — we’re in a state of crisis. Too many of us simply don’t feel safe in our communities, and that is, frankly, unacceptable.”

In outlining her proposals, the governor asked lawmakers to clear the way for bankrolling the efforts.

Mother denies locking adopted teens in shed

WV CHARLESTON — A woman accused with her husband of forcing their adopted children to perform hard farm labor denied confining two of the children to a shed despite police finding them in the structure behind a locked door, news outlets reported.

Jeanne Kay Whitefeather took the stand Tuesday as the second week began in the trial of her and her husband, Donald Ray Lantz. They are accused of mistreating four of the five children, all of whom are Black. Whitefeather and Lantz, who are white, each face more than a dozen felony counts that include forced labor, civil rights violations, human trafficking and gross child neglect.

Whitefeather and Lantz were ar-

rested in October 2023 when neighbors called police to report seeing Lantz lock the oldest girl and her teenage brother in the shed and leave the property in Sissonville.

Whitefeather called the shed a “teenager hangout.”

“They weren’t locked in,” Whitefeather testified. “They had a key. They could come and go as they pleased.”

After the couple’s arrest, all five children were placed under the care of Child Protective Services. The couple adopted the five siblings while living in Minnesota.

Pastor guilty of violating fire code with shelter

OH BRYAN — A judge in northwestern Ohio found a pastor guilty on criminal charges Tuesday for failing to comply with the city fire code after he opened his church to let homeless people and others stay inside overnight to escape the winter chill.

Chris Avell, pastor of Dad’s Place Church in Bryan, could face a \$200 fine and up to 60 days in jail if he continues to let people stay inside his church around the clock without state approval that the building is up to code.

Bryan Municipal Court Judge Kent North’s decision is another step in a legal battle that began in late 2023.

The temperature in Bryan was in the single digits Tuesday.

North stayed the sentence, allowing Jeremy Dys, an attorney repre-

senting Avell, to appeal. Dys confirmed he plans to do so.

Last year police filed 18 criminal charges against Avell over allegations that the rented church building next to a separate homeless shelter along Main Street was in violation of the zoning ordinance, lacked proper kitchen and laundry facilities, and had unsafe exits and inadequate ventilation.

Forest Service authorizes controversial land swap

MT NYE — The Custer Gallatin National Forest on Friday authorized a controversial land swap involving more than 15 square miles of land in two different south-central Montana mountain ranges.

With the decision, consultants hired by the Yellowstone Club to facilitate the exchange can officially begin the title transfer process, which the Forest Service estimates will be complete “in the near future.”

Under the multi-part agreement, the Forest Service will transfer 3,855 acres to landowners in the Crazy Mountains and Gallatin Range. In exchange, 6,110 acres of private land will become public land that the Forest Service will administer.

The Forest Service’s decision to authorize the swap drew a mixed reception from groups in the conservation, recreation and public land space. Some expressed appreciation for the inclusion of conservation

easements and deed restrictions to limit residential and industrial development. Others argued that some of the lower-elevation properties the Forest Service is trading into private ownership will become more vulnerable to development and that the recreating public will be excluded from more accessible and desirable portions of the range.

Suit alleging excessive force at protests settled

OR PORTLAND — A lawsuit alleging that law enforcement agents sent by President Donald Trump to protect a federal courthouse in 2020 used excessive force against racial justice protesters has been settled, the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon said Tuesday.

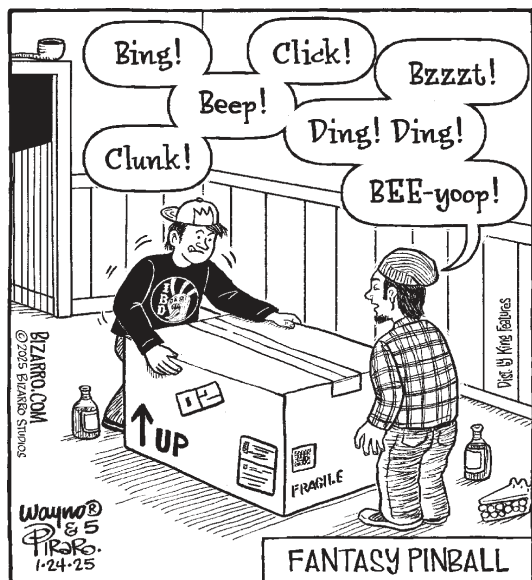
The settlement requires the federal government to compensate the individuals who filed the lawsuit for the injuries that federal law enforcement caused them, in exchange for the individuals’ agreement to dismiss the lawsuit, according to a news release from the ACLU. No information was released about specific compensation amounts.

The plaintiffs included three military veterans.

Thousands of protesters in Portland took to the streets for months in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, part of a wave of nationwide protests.

From wire reports

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

11x11 crossword grid with numbers 1-51 indicating starting positions for clues.

ACROSS

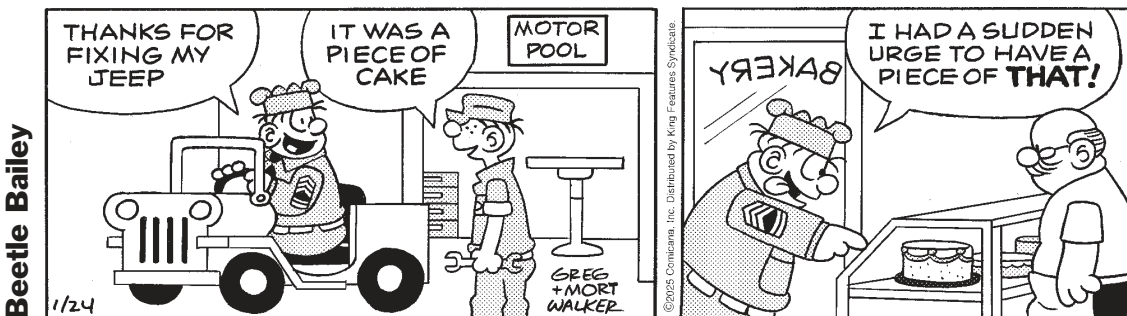
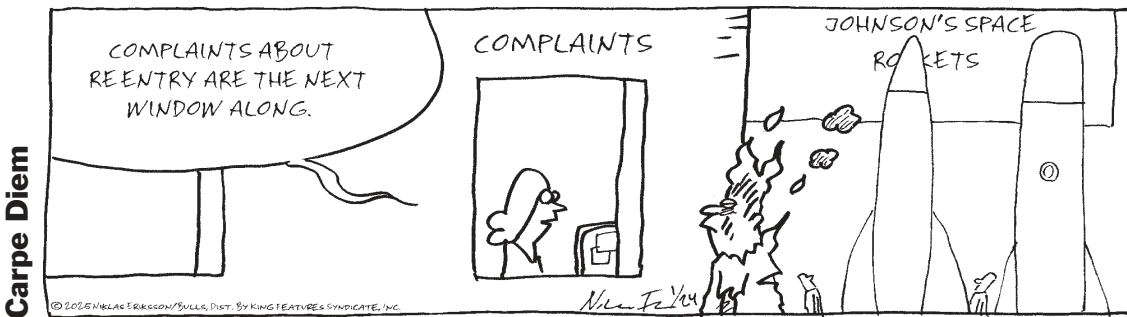
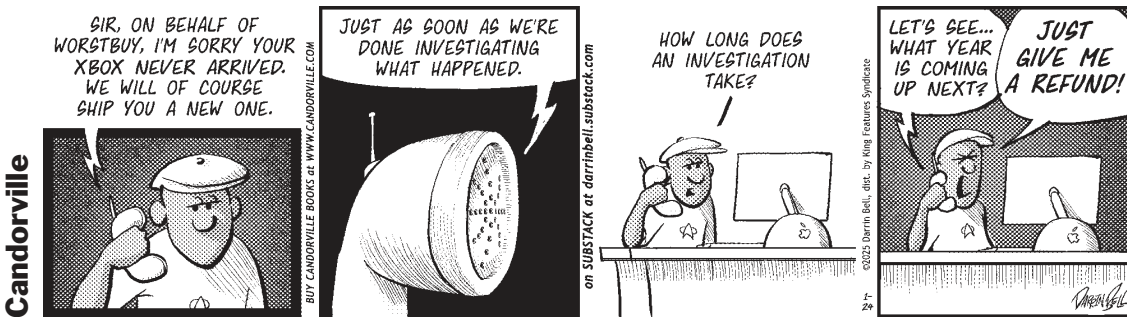
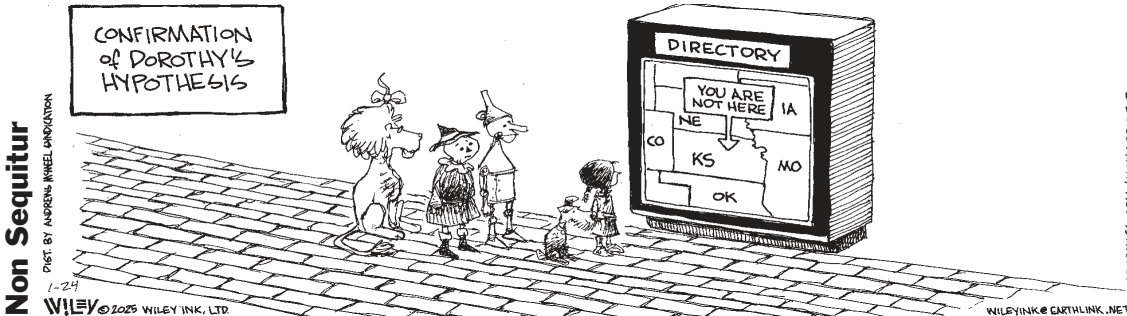
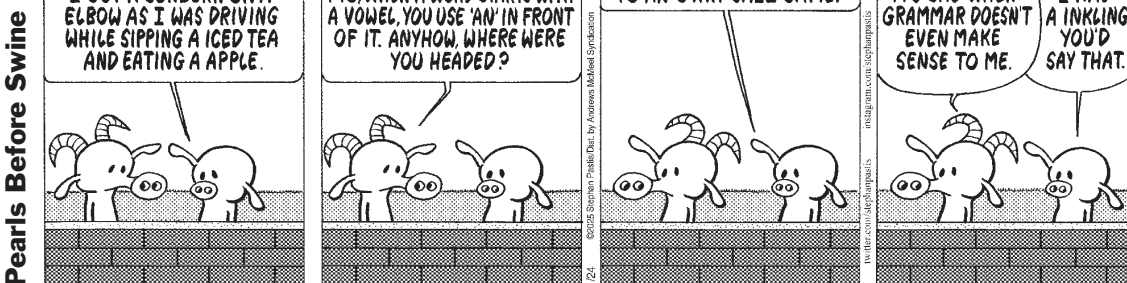
- 1 "Caught ya!"
4 Spring meltdown
8 Baby's bed
12 Barbecue seasoning
13 Meditative exercise
14 Verdi heroine
15 Muffin-like treats
17 General — Chicken
18 Couturier Christian
19 Bracelet site
20 Liniment targets
22 "Arrivederci —"
24 One-named supermodel
25 Castle features
29 Unruly group
30 Ram
31 Solidify
32 Short extracts
34 Taj Mahal site
35 TV host Kelly
36 Analyze
37 Poultry choice
40 Humdrum
41 Honker
42 Marching band section
46 Scrambled wd.
47 Gumbo need
48 Language akin to Thai

DOWN

- 49 Sleep phenomena
21 "Let's go!"
22 Indian yogurt dish
23 Unrefined metals
25 Get ready, briefly
26 Paint finish
27 Prefix with byte
28 Do in
30 Neat as —
33 Plug parts
34 Now, on a memo
36 Makeup brand
37 Scorch
38 Highly rated
39 Baby carriage
40 Duelist Aaron
42 Youngster
43 MGM rival
44 Eastern path
45 Boston team, for short

Answer to Previous Puzzle

11x11 crossword grid with the words SHOE, MOB, SSTS, EARP, ONA, EWER, EKGS, TEL, MIDI, DESIST, LEIF, UPBOW, IOS, ISE, NOUN, MAN, WELL, URL, EUR, LYSOL, MELISSALEO, HOPI, INMATE, PLOT, COB, IMAX, FORA, ABE, NONE, CONS, LIL, GIGS.



1-24

CRYPTOQUIP

OE M ZWTA ZPKKZ MZZTIGPR
ZJAAKOPZ ETI GWP UTIKR
XJA'Z ZATIG, O UTJKR XMKK
OG M ZTXXPI ZGTXCPI.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT DID THE SLIMY GASTROPOD CRY WHEN IT PERFORMED SOMETHING PERFECTLY? "SNAILED IT!"
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals S

Bizarro

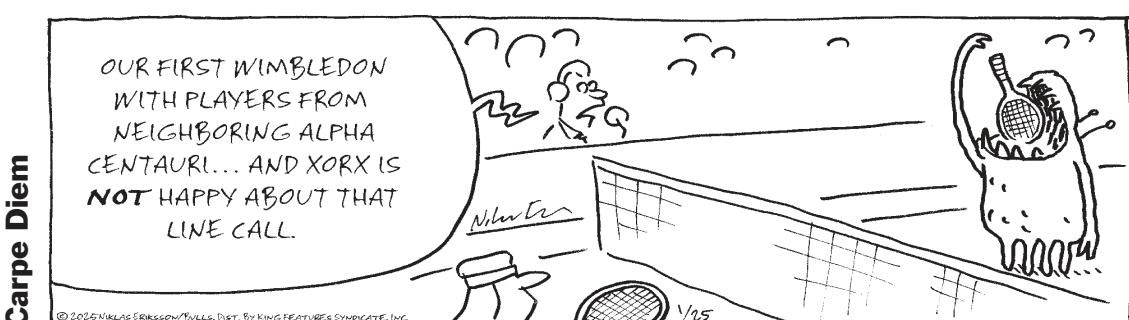
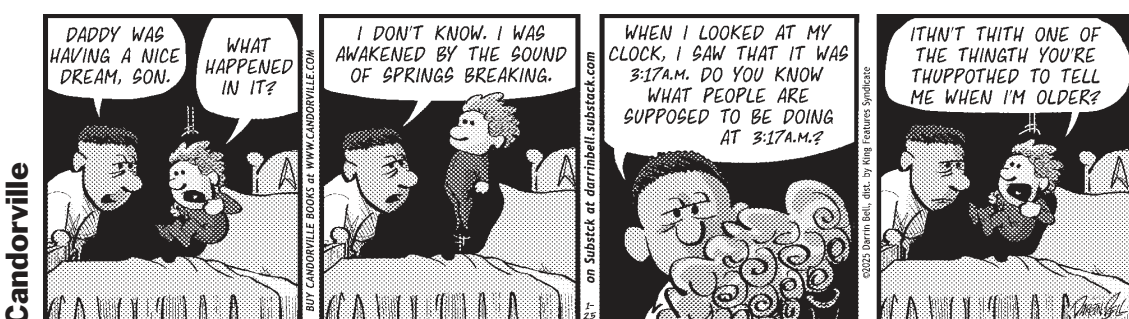
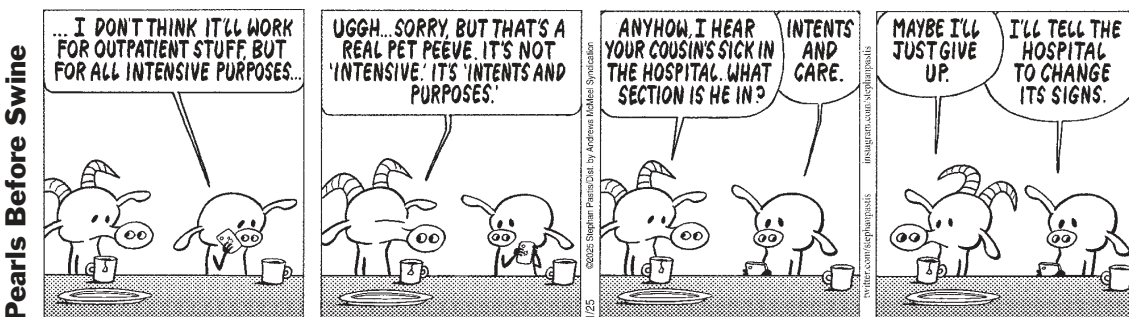
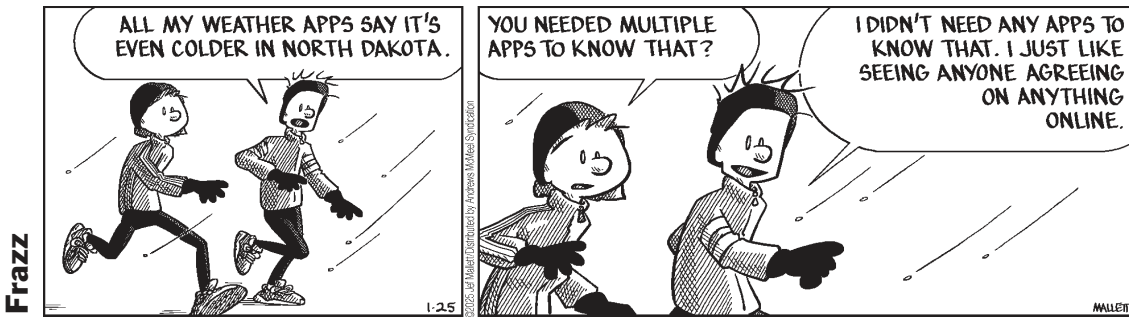


Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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



ACROSS

- 1 "Chocolat" actor
- 5 Audio giant
- 9 Prune
- 12 Antioxidant
- 13 Egg
- 14 — budget
- 15 Plumbing problem
- 16 Firsties
- 17 TiVo precursor
- 18 Foolproof
- 19 Sch. URL ender
- 20 Borscht base
- 21 Sailing hazard
- 23 — Victor
- 25 Daughter of Muhammad
- 28 Lynx
- 32 "West Side Story" role
- 33 Prefix meaning "water"
- 34 Ocean bottoms
- 36 Grapevine talk
- 37 Chow down
- 38 "— was saying ..."
- 39 Scoff
- 42 Half of bi-
- 44 Sod
- 48 Napoleon's title (Abbr.)
- 49 Mideast gulf
- 50 Verifiable
- 51 Brit. record label

DOWN

- 2 Beige
- 3 Two of a kind
- 4 Specialist in the heating/cooling industry
- 5 Grocery store
- 6 Roman poet
- 7 Outlying area
- 8 Ambulance letters
- 9 Zero, in tennis
- 10 Formerly
- 11 Section
- 20 Date night hire
- 22 D-Day beach

- 24 Some Pacific salmon
- 25 Passing craze
- 26 Chemical suffix
- 27 Gratuity
- 29 LP successors
- 30 NPR's Shapiro
- 31 Pinnacle
- 35 Recording site
- 36 Olympic swimmer
- 39 "M*A*S*H" vehicle
- 40 Tennis star
- 41 Grand tale
- 43 Legendary loch
- 45 Language of Pakistan
- 46 Carpets
- 47 Shoe fillers
- 49 Illustrations

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1-25

CRYPTOQUIP

W H A Z Y L X S U C V A I A H W V X
V X C B C S B P Q K S U A M W V C
D S W M A K T A P K Q K Y W D - K Y A D B ,
S Y Y V X A R I B T A R B W L C M C L .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A SHOP SELLS ASSORTED SUPPLIES FOR THE WORLD CUP'S SPORT, I WOULD CALL IT A SOCCER STOCKER.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals F

STARS AND STRIPES

OPINION

Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief
reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.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

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Jacqueline Smith

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Trump is president again. Did you feel the vibe shift?

BY JONAH GOLDBERG

Tribune Content Agency

As a second Trump administration dawns — or, for his opponents, descends — on America, an interesting and unusual discussion has emerged over the broader meaning of Donald Trump's victory. One thing that makes it unusual is that there's more consensus than disagreement about the fundamental point: There's been a significant "vibe shift" in American politics.

That's not the way things typically work. Every victorious party claims a "new era" of some kind, but the losing side usually dissents. That's because, historically, ideologues and activists are sufficiently confident (and invested) in their views to insist on mere electoral defeat was a fluke or one-off — flawed candidates, flawed campaigns, economic conditions, whatever. "Our ideas aren't the problem, we just nominated the wrong candidate" has long been the traditional ideological, psychological and political safe harbor for losers.

It's not that the 2024 election doesn't offer plenty of fodder for such interpretations. Trump's win was modest. His Electoral College margin ranks 44th out of 60 contests. He won the popular vote by 1.5 points. This was no landslide. Kamala Harris, far from an ideal candidate, had little time to put together a campaign. Joe Biden was enduringly unpopular and physically inadequate to the job. Inflation is political cancer for any incumbent. And we heard all that during the traditional re-cremations phase right after the election.

But the vibe-shift conversation is about something more fundamental than finger-pointing. Trump's "cultural victory" feels

"tectonic," in the words of New York Times columnist Ezra Klein. He suggests four factors for why this might be: The right has the upper hand on social media, corporations are looking for an opportunity to swing back to the middle after lurching left, Trump benefits from a bro backlash against allegedly feminized culture and Joe Biden allowed Trump to stay the center of attention during his own presidency.

I don't fundamentally object to any of these as partial explanations, but they don't fully capture what's happening or why progressives are willing to agree that something more fundamental has changed. For instance, another important factor is that MAGA is part of a global phenomenon. Populism and nationalism have been on the rise in Europe, Latin America and India. History is often punctuated by such moments (for example, student protest movements erupted around the world in the 1960s). The trends that have shaped American politics — the global financial crisis, mass immigration, COVID-19, inflation — were not contained within our borders.

But I think the most important driver of the vibe shift is that Trump and Trumpism have shattered a near metaphysical consensus about politics, on the right and left.

Pre-Trump American conservatism was dedicated to a few fundamental propositions: limited government, cultural traditionalism, anti-abortion politics, fiscal rectitude and free market economics. Now, I'm the first to concede the right often fell short of its ideals, but showing rhetorical fealty to the ideals was the binding firmament of conservatism. Those commitments still get some lip-service, but there's no denying that on all of these fronts,

loyalty to Trump is the more pressing litmus test. This has freed up Trump to move leftward on abortion, entitlements and economic policy generally.

As damaging as I think this has been to conservatism, Trump's victory may prove to be more damaging to the left. Because Trump didn't merely shatter the consensus on the right, he shattered the political consensus generally. Or maybe social media and those other trends were the battering rams and Trump merely benefited from the new landscape.

Either way, the fact remains that the bedrock assumptions about how politics "works" and the rules for what a politician can or can't do, no longer seem operative. We're all familiar with how Trump's behavior has demonstrated that, but it's also illuminated that the electorate itself is just different today. The FDR coalition is gone, the white working class is now operationally conservative, and the Latino and Black working classes are now seen as gettable by Republicans. The assumption that they are "natural Democrats" was obliterated in this election. Republicans have figured out how to talk to those constituencies.

Meanwhile, progressives who grew up knowing only the language of FDR-era class politics or post-civil rights-era racial and feminist discourse have found large numbers of voters — their voters — don't want to hear it anymore. That disorienting feeling, that sense that history or demography or the "moral arc of the universe" might not be bending in your direction anymore, is what some call a "vibe shift."

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

As border wall goes up, underground threat will grow

BY JOHN SPENCER

Special to The Washington Post

On Jan. 10, a tunnel was discovered beneath the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas. Two weeks before that, a tunnel was uncovered near Arizona, the third such tunnel found in the Yuma area within the past year. These latest discoveries reinforce a crucial lesson for the United States from conflicts worldwide: No matter how advanced, aboveground defenses often drive adversaries to seek alternate routes underground.

Across the globe — in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, North Korea and other conflict zones — tunnels have served as vital conduits for cross-border operations. As he took office on Monday, President Donald Trump repeated his pledge to resume and complete construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall — a project halted by President Joe Biden in 2021 — along the 1,954-mile boundary and signed an executive order allowing the deployment of troops to the region. This renewed push at fortification with additional physical barriers and heightened security measures will almost certainly drive an increase in tunneling attempts.

Israel provides a blueprint for dealing with underground threats. After suffering years of cross-border attacks by Hamas through tunnels, Israel undertook a massive project to create an underground wall along its Gaza border, using advanced detection technologies and engineering solutions. Aboveground, it reinforced the 40-mile Israel-Gaza border with a barrier that extends several feet underground and has proved effective at neutralizing Hamas' cross-border tunnel operations.

Similarly, Hezbollah has built and used tunnels in Lebanon and Syria, forcing Israel to constantly adapt its countermeasures. The United States and Israel have partnered for almost a decade on tunnel detection and anti-tunneling capabilities, but Washington is still playing catch-up in applying these lessons to its southern border. This needs to change.

The discovery of another tunnel in Texas is not an isolated incident. Since 1990, authorities have uncovered more than 230 cross-border tunnels, primarily for smuggling drugs, weapons and people, along the U.S.-Mexico border. In January 2020, U.S. officials uncovered the longest known drug tunnel at the time, stretching three-quarters of a mile from Tijuana to San Diego. Many of these tunnels are remarkably sophisticated, with rail systems, ventilation and lighting. The cartels behind them continually refine their techniques, mirroring the tunnel warfare strategies employed by Hamas and Hezbollah.

During Trump's first term, more than 450 miles of border wall were constructed along the U.S.-Mexico border, replacing outdated or ineffective fencing with 30-foot steel barriers. These reinforcements significantly reduced illegal crossings in key areas, forcing smugglers to adapt their methods. As aboveground routes became more challenging, underground smuggling operations surged. As the border wall expanded, the number of tunnels discovered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection increased, with 11 tunnels uncovered in 2020 alone.

With an anticipated surge in border enforcement policies, traffickers and smugglers will not stop. They will adapt. Tunnels provide

them with a direct, concealed route past surveillance technology and physical barriers.

The United States cannot afford to focus solely on aboveground solutions; a comprehensive border security strategy must aggressively address underground threats as well. Enhancing tunnel detection technology is crucial, requiring the expansion of seismic sensors, ground-penetrating radar, and AI-driven surveillance to identify subterranean activity before it becomes operational.

In addition, building underground barriers could serve as a formidable countermeasure, though such infrastructure would come at a significant cost. The Israeli border wall project that included the subterranean features cost an estimated \$1.1 billion and took more than three years to complete.

Equally important is strengthening international cooperation, particularly with Mexico, to ensure that tunnel networks are dismantled at their source before they can be fully developed. The Arizona tunnel discovery was made possible through the use of both drones and intelligence-sharing with Mexico.

Finally, the U.S. must establish rapid-response tunnel destruction teams capable of swiftly identifying, neutralizing and demolishing illicit tunnels before they pose a greater security risk.

Only by integrating all these elements into a cohesive strategy can the United States effectively combat the growing underground threat at the southern border.

John Spencer is a retired Army infantry officer, chair of urban warfare studies at the U.S. Military Academy's Modern War Institute and a founding member of the International Working Group on Subterranean Warfare.

SCOREBOARD/NHL

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball American League

ATHLETICS — Hired Dave Stewart as a Special Assistant to Player Development for the 2025 season.

CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Agreed to terms with RHP Paul Sewald on a one-year contract. Designated RHP Pedro Avila for assignment. Agreed to terms with RHP Riley Pint on a minor league contract.

SEATTLE MARINERS — Agreed to terms with OF Diago Machado and RHPs Alan Carpintero on minor league contracts, Po-Chun Lin and Maximo Rodriguez.

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Agreed to terms with INF Taylor Walls on a one-year contract.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Agreed to terms with LHP Richard Lovelady and C Christian Bethancourt on minor league contracts.

National League

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Agreed to terms with RHP Roki Sasaki on a minor league contract.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER — Signed C Branden Carlson to a 10-day contract.

TORONTO RAPTORS — Assigned Fs Jonathan Mogbo and Ja'Kobe Walter to the Raptors 905 of the G League.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed WR Anthony Miller to a reserve/futures contract.

BUFFALO BILLS — Signed DL Eli Ankou to the practice squad. Released QB Anthony Brown from the practice squad. Designated LB Baylon Spector to return from injured reserve.

CHICAGO BEARS — Signed DB Alex Cook and OT Joshua Miles to reserve/futures contracts.

DETROIT LIONS — Re-signed G Netane Muti.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Fired general manager Trent Baalke.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Declined to activate WR Mecole Hardman from injured reserve.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Hired Josh McDaniels as offensive coordinator and Terrill Williams to defensive coordinator. Retained Jeremy Springer as special teams coordinator.

NEW YORK JETS — Hired Aaron Glenn as head coach.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed TE Nick Muse and OL Cameron Erving to the practice squad. Released DL K.J. Henry from the practice squad. Designated WR Britain Covey to return from injured reserve.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Promoted

LW Jere Inala from Colorado (AHL). Recalled C Ivan Ivan from Colorado.

DALLAS STARS — Returned RW Matej Blumel to Texas (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Sent D David Jiricek to Iowa (AHL).

MONTREAL CANADIENS — Loaned C Owen Beck to Laval (AHL).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Reassigned G Alexei Kolosov and C Olle Lyckseff to Lehigh Valley (AHL). Called up C Anthony Richard from Lehigh Valley.

SAN JOSE SHARKS — Claimed RW Walker Duehr off waivers from the Calgary Flames. Placed C Nico Sturm on injured reserve. Acquired LW Pavol Regenda from Anaheim in exchange for RW Justin Bailey.

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned D Maxwell Crozier to Syracuse (AHL).

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Recalled C Jacob Quillan. Placed LW Max Pacioretty on injured reserve.

VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Reassigned G Arturs Silovs to Abbotsford (AHL). Placed D Noah Juulsen on injured reserve. Called up D Elias Pettersson from Abbotsford. Recalled RW Linus Karlsson from Abbotsford.

WINNIPEG JETS — Activated C Mason Appleton off injured reserve. Placed C Adam Lowry on injured reserve.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

CHARLOTTE FC — Acquired F Wilfried Zaha on loan from Galatasaray until January 17, 2026, with an option to extend the loan through June 30, 2026.

CHICAGO FIRE FC — Signed MF Robert Turdean to a homegrown player contract.

CINCINNATI FC — Acquired \$75,000 in 2025 General Allocation Money (GAM) from the Portland Timbers in exchange for the right of first refusal rights for F Kevin Kelsy.

COLUMBUS CREW — Signed G Stanislav Lapkes as a homegrown player through the 2027 season with club options for 2028 and 2029.

FC DALLAS — Signed F Logan Farrington to a new contract through the 2027 season, with club options for 2028 and 2029.

LAFC — Acquired MF Mark Delgado from the Los Angeles Galaxy in exchange for \$200,000 in 2025 General Allocation Money (GAM) and \$200,000 in 2026 GAM.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Signed D Damario McIntosh to a first-team contract as a homegrown player through the 2028 season, with an additional one-year club option for 2029.

ORLANDO CITY SC — Signed D Thomas Williams to a new contract through 2026, with a Club option in 2027.

PORTLAND TIMBERS — Signed F Kevin Kelsy through the 2028 season with a club option for 2029.

REAL SALT LAKE — Transferred G Gavin Beavers to Brondby IF.

SAN DIEGO FC — Acquired W Anders Dreyer as a Designated Player and signed him to a three-year contract through the end of the 2027 MLS season on a permanent transfer from R.S.C. Anderlecht.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

American 68, Lehigh 67
 Army 76, Holy Cross 71
 Lafayette 80, Loyola (Md.) 59
 Navy 62, Boston U. 47
 St. John's 79, Xavier 71, OT
 UMass 74, George Washington 61

SOUTH

Charlotte 69, South Florida 61
 Clemson 86, Syracuse 72
 ETSU 85, W. Carolina 58
 Florida 70, South Carolina 69
 Georgia Tech 71, Virginia Tech 64
 High Point 86, SC-Upstate 77
 James Madison 74, Old Dominion 60
 Longwood 77, Radford 74
 Mercer 79, UNC-Greensboro 78
 Presbyterian 71, Charleston Southern 61
 Texas A&M 63, Mississippi 62
 UNC-Asheville 61, Gardner-Webb 53
 VMI 91, Furman 82
 Wofford 79, The Citadel 68

MIDWEST

Cleveland St. 65, Detroit 50
 Drake 81, Valparaiso 71
 IU Indianapolis 86, Green Bay 77
 Ill.-Chicago 78, Evansville 67
 Loyola Chicago 70, Fordham 66
 Milwaukee 95, Wright St. 79
 Murray St. 74, S. Illinois 64
 Northwestern 79, Indiana 70
 Oakland 76, Fort Wayne 72
 Robert Morris 72, Youngstown St. 70
 Saint Louis 64, La Salle 52
 Southern Cal 78, Nebraska 73

SOUTHWEST

Arkansas 68, Georgia 65
 Baylor 70, Kansas 62
 Houston 70, Utah 36
 Kansas 74, TCU 61
 North Texas 76, Temple 67

FAR WEST

California 77, Florida St. 68
 Colorado St. 75, Boise St. 72
 San Diego St. 77, Air Force 76, OT
 Stanford 88, Miami 51
 Utah St. 90, Nevada 69

No. 24 Memphis (14-4) vs. UAB (11-7)

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST

Bucknell 71, Colgate 67, OT
 Buffalo 72, Ohio 55
 Duquesne 67, La Salle 57
 Georgetown 56, St. John's 54
 Holy Cross 61, Army 52
 Lafayette 60, Loyola (Md.) 59
 Lehigh 61, American 55
 Marquette 67, Providence 54
 Marshall 67, Georgia Southern 60
 Navy 74, Boston U. 64
 Rhode Island 60, UMass 58
 Saint Joseph's 83, St. Bonaventure 56
 UConn 100, Villanova 57
 VCU 65, George Washington 56

SOUTH

Charleston Southern 71, Presbyterian 58
 Charlotte 75, FAU 68
 Gardner-Webb 77, UNC-Asheville 65
 George Mason 81, Davidson 73
 Georgia St. 75, Coastal Carolina 72
 High Point 84, SC-Upstate 31
 Longwood 56, Radford 51
 Temple 69, East Carolina 52
 UAB 63, Rice 56, OT

MIDWEST

Creighton 63, Butler 52
 Dayton 87, Saint Louis 76
 DePaul 57, Xavier 50
 Fort Wayne 72, Detroit 65
 Iowa St. 82, BYU 59
 Kent St. 77, Cent. Michigan 56
 Miami (Ohio) 76, Akron 54
 Michigan 70, Minnesota 65
 Michigan St. 82, Penn St. 61
 N. Dakota St. 72, South Dakota 53
 N. Illinois 78, E. Michigan 70
 Oral Roberts 74, UMKC 61
 S. Dakota St. 83, St. Thomas (MN) 76
 Southern Cal 79, Purdue 37
 W. Michigan 63, Bowling Green 60

SOUTHWEST

Oklahoma St. 60, TCU 59
 Texas Tech 62, Houston 44
 UTSA 64, Tulsa 53

FAR WEST

Arizona 72, Cincinnati 62
 Denver 71, Omaha 56
 Iowa 85, Washington 61
 San Jose St. 68, San Diego St. 57
 UNLV 73, Fresno St. 48
 Utah 79, Kansas 61
 West Virginia 89, Arizona St. 59
 Wyoming 62, Air Force 50

Eichel raises play, hoping to keep Knights contending

By MARK ANDERSON
 Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Jack Eichel came to Las Vegas in 2021 with lofty expectations that he has mostly fulfilled, including helping lead the Golden Knights to the Stanley Cup championship two seasons ago.

Now he has taken his game to an even higher level.

He has 58 points in 46 games, putting him in position to set a series of career highs as well as plant himself at least in the fringe of the Hart Trophy conversation that goes to league MVP.

More important is the fact that Eichel has, despite this current 1-5-1 skid, taken Vegas to the top of the Pacific Division, though the Edmonton Oilers are just a point behind. The Golden Knights are there despite losing some key players in the offseason, such as Jonathan Marchessault, Chandler Stephenson and Alec Martinez.

“My feeling on this in general is (Eichel) walks into training camp in September, some guys that have had voices around here, some guys that have been here a while are no longer here,” coach Bruce Cassidy said. “I think he saw a little bit of a void and said, ‘I want to be that guy. I’m going to bring that.’”

Always a talented scorer, especially sniping shots from the circle, Eichel is an elite playmaker who has only gotten better. His 46 assists are fourth in the NHL and just eight short of his career high with nearly half the season to play.

Eichel has a 24 plus/minus rating also was fourth in the league and two behind his career best set two seasons ago.

His 12 goals aren’t on pace to match the 31 that he scored last season, one of his relative shortcomings.

Should Eichel begin to find the

back of the net more like he traditionally does, he could rise in the Hart odds. BetMGM Sportsbook lists him eighth, which would still be ahead of the highest finish for a Vegas player. Mark Stone was ninth four years ago.

Eichel said there wasn’t anything specific he worked on in the offseason to elevate his play.

“Consistency, trying to be dedicated to my routine and process as I can all the time,” Eichel said. “I do the same things day in and day out.”

Other players have noticed. “His preparation is the best in the game,” forward Ivan Barbashev said. “The night before the game, thinking about what he needs to do, he’s focused.”

Cassidy said getting that kind of commitment from one of the team’s best players helps set the tone.

“When your best players are your hardest working in practice and the guys that are the most professional, for a coach, GM, culture of your organization, that’s the first thing you would want,” Cassidy said. “Every young guy that walks through the door is going to look at that and say, ‘I guess that’s the way we do it around here, so that’s the way I’m going to do it if I want to stay around here.’”

Eichel’s dedication to his craft began well before this season, and Barbashev said his teammate has been on a different level since the Golden Knights won the Cup two seasons ago.

That’s the place Eichel hopes to help lead Vegas back to and before this downturn, the Golden Knights were on a championship-like tear.

“Obviously, the team’s been in a little bit of a funk lately,” Eichel said. “So I think the only thing on any of our minds now is just trying to find our game again and rattle off some wins.”

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference										
Atlantic Division										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
Toronto	49	30	17	2	62	153	142			
Florida	49	28	18	3	59	159	146			
Tampa Bay	46	25	18	3	53	167	131			
Ottawa	47	24	19	4	52	162	132			
Montreal	47	24	19	4	52	145	157			
Boston	49	23	20	6	52	134	158			
Detroit	47	21	21	5	47	132	152			
Buffalo	47	18	24	5	41	145	161			
Metropolitan Division										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
Washington	47	32	10	5	69	167	116			
Carolina	48	29	16	3	61	158	133			
New Jersey	50	27	17	6	60	153	126			
Columbus	48	23	18	7	53	162	159			
N.Y. Rangers	47	23	20	4	50	139	142			
Philadelphia	48	22	20	6	50	148	162			
Pittsburgh	49	20	21	8	48	148	180			
N.Y. Islanders	46	19	20	7	45	124	138			
Western Conference										
Central Division										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
Winnipeg	49	32	14	3	67	170	120			
Minnesota	47	28	15	4	60	140	134			
Dallas	47	29	17	1	59	149	117			
Colorado	49	28	19	2	58	162	153			
St. Louis	48	23	21	4	50	138	143			
Utah	46	20	19	7	47	132	139			
Nashville	46	17	22	7	41	122	144			
Chicago	47	15	28	4	34	123	162			
Pacific Division										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
Vegas	47	29	14	4	62	160	132			
Edmonton	47	29	15	3	61	153	129			
Los Angeles	45	26	14	5	57	131	111			
Calgary	45	22	16	7	51	120	132			
Vancouver	46	20	16	10	50	131	146			
Seattle	48	21	24	3	45	143	154			
Anaheim	47	18	23	6	42	113	150			
San Jose	50	14	30	6	34	130	182			

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

Tuesday's games

Philadelphia 2, Detroit 1, OT
 Montreal 3, Tampa Bay 2
 N.Y. Rangers 5, Ottawa 0
 Carolina 2, Dallas 1
 Nashville 7, San Jose 5
 Washington 3, Edmonton 2
 Buffalo 3, Vancouver 2
 Florida 5, Anaheim 2

Wednesday's games

New Jersey 5, Boston 1
 Columbus 5, Toronto 1
 Winnipeg 3, Colorado 2, OT
 Los Angeles 2, Florida 1

Thursday's games

Columbus at Carolina
 Montreal at Detroit
 Ottawa at Boston
 Philadelphia at N.Y. Rangers
 Utah at Minnesota
 Vegas at St. Louis
 Buffalo at Calgary
 Vancouver at Edmonton
 Pittsburgh at Anaheim
 Washington at Seattle
 Nashville at San Jose

Friday's games

Philadelphia at N.Y. Islanders
 Vegas at Dallas
 Tampa Bay at Chicago
 Utah at Winnipeg

Saturday's games

Colorado at Boston
 Buffalo at Edmonton
 Pittsburgh at Seattle
 Calgary at Minnesota
 Dallas at St. Louis
 Los Angeles at Columbus
 New Jersey at Montreal
 Tampa Bay at Detroit
 Toronto at Ottawa
 Carolina at N.Y. Islanders
 Florida at San Jose
 Nashville at Anaheim
 Washington at Vancouver

Sunday's games

Colorado at N.Y. Rangers
 Utah at Ottawa
 Calgary at Winnipeg
 Minnesota at Chicago
 Florida at Vegas



DAVID BECKER/AP

Vegas Golden Knights center Jack Eichel has 58 points in 46 games. His 46 assists and his 24 plus/minus rating both rank fourth in the league.

NBA

AROUND THE NBA

Haliburton back in Paris after gold

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

PARIS — This week in Paris is going to serve as a trip down memory lane for Spurs center Victor Wembanyama. He's the hometown hero, the French star coming back to put on a show for his country.

It's a memory-lane trip for the Pacers' Tyrese Haliburton as well.

He was among the players on the top step of the Paris Games medal stand when his last visit to France ended in August, part of USA Basketball's team that delivered a fifth consecutive Olympic men's gold medal. And these games this week — Indiana vs. San Antonio, Thursday and Saturday — will surely remind Haliburton what it was like to be atop the basketball world.

"It's a very special thing to be part of a special group of people and man, it's been a blessing," Haliburton said. "I think the biggest thing is once you start to feel what it's like to win a little bit, once you feel the importance of success, you want more of it."

Go back about 14 months or so, to a night in Miami — Nov. 30, 2023, to be exact — when Haliburton and the Pacers lost to the Heat, 142-132. Haliburton had a monster game with 44 points and 10 assists. But Indiana gave up 45 points in the fourth and let the game get away.

He sat at his locker after the game, completely calm, polite, engaging with reporters. And then Haliburton — already a max-contract player, getting that massive rookie extension in the summer of 2023 — offered The Quote, one that he knew as soon as he said it might follow him around for a while.

"I just wanna win," he said. "I'm tired of being a loser."

Those weren't just words. They were more like a vow. And evidently, he took it all to heart. Here's some of what he and/or the Pacers have done since that night:

- Made the championship game of last season's inaugural NBA in-season tournament, now



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton was part of the USA Basketball team that won a fifth straight Olympic men's gold in Paris last August, and is now back for the NBA Paris Games against the San Antonio Spurs.

called the NBA Cup.

- Made the Eastern Conference finals, his first postseason run.

- He scored 32 points in an All-Star Game, hitting 10 3-pointers, five of them in a span of about 90 seconds.

- He made his first All-NBA team.

- He won his first assist title.

- He was on the team that won Olympic gold.

"An unbelievable last year and a half for me," Haliburton said.

When Haliburton is right — and injuries have been an issue for him — Indiana is tough to beat. He's made more than 50% of his shots in 14 games this season; the Pacers are 12-2 in those games. He's scored 20 or more points 15 times this season; Indiana is 13-2 in those games. He's had 10 or more assists 16 times this season; the Pacers are 13-3 in those games.

Indiana has survived some rocky stretches and is 24-19, fifth in the Eastern Conference, just a game back of No. 4 Milwaukee — yet also only two games ahead of No. 8 Miami. A couple wins in France obviously wouldn't hurt the playoff positioning cause.

"We had a hellacious schedule at the beginning (of the season), probably in large part due to the Paris trip and everything being compressed," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said, explaining this stretch where Indiana has won nine of its last 11 games. "That's challenging, but it hardens your resolve and makes you tougher. What do they say about pressure? It bursts pipes or it makes diamonds, and you hope that is the kind of thing where it can bring out the best in us. So we're doing some good things, and we've got more work to do."

The Pacers know what they're

capable of. Haliburton knows what he's capable of. Yes, they are getting second-billing on the NBA marquee in Paris — no surprise considering that Wembanyama is, you know, French.

But he's faced the home team in Paris once before, and came away with Olympic gold. Last summer saw Haliburton forge deep ties with some of the best players the world has ever seen; the group chat has slowed in the months since, but it's still there. He's got Olympic jerseys with everyone's signature to frame. He's learned alongside some of the greats, the likes of Stephen Curry and LeBron James and Kevin Durant.

"It's a lot," Haliburton said. "And I'm thankful for all of it."

This much is certain: Win or lose in Paris, Haliburton isn't going to think he's a loser again anytime soon.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	31	13	.705	—
New York	29	16	.644	2½
Philadelphia	15	27	.357	15
Brooklyn	14	31	.311	17½
Toronto	11	32	.256	19½

Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	22	21	.512	—
Orlando	23	22	.511	—
Miami	21	21	.500	½
Charlotte	11	29	.275	9½
Washington	6	36	.143	15½

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	36	7	.837	—
Milwaukee	24	17	.585	11
Indiana	24	19	.558	12
Detroit	23	21	.523	13½
Chicago	19	25	.432	17½

Western Conference

Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	29	14	.674	—
Memphis	29	15	.659	½
Dallas	23	21	.523	6½
San Antonio	19	22	.463	9
New Orleans	12	32	.273	17½

Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	36	7	.837	—
Denver	27	16	.628	9
Minnesota	23	21	.523	13½
Portland	15	28	.349	21
Utah	10	32	.238	25½

Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	23	18	.561	—
L.A. Clippers	24	19	.558	—
Sacramento	23	20	.535	1
Phoenix	22	21	.512	2
Golden State	21	22	.488	3

Wednesday's games

Phoenix 108, Brooklyn 84
Detroit 114, Atlanta 104
Minnesota 115, Dallas 114
Memphis 132, Charlotte 120
Houston 109, Cleveland 108
Oklahoma City 123, Utah 114
Sacramento 123, Golden State 117
Boston 117, L.A. Clippers 113, OT
Milwaukee at New Orleans, ppd

Thursday's games

Indiana vs. San Antonio at Paris
Portland at Orlando
Miami at Milwaukee
Toronto at Atlanta
Dallas at Oklahoma City
Sacramento at Denver
Boston at L.A. Lakers
Chicago at Golden State
Washington at L.A. Clippers

Friday's games

Cleveland at Philadelphia
Portland at Charlotte
New Orleans at Memphis

Saturday's games

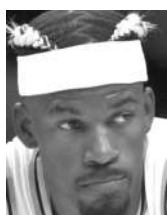
San Antonio vs. Indiana at Paris
Denver at Minnesota
Boston at Dallas
Miami at Brooklyn
Detroit at Orlando
New Orleans at Charlotte
Houston at Cleveland
Sacramento at New York
Toronto at Atlanta
Philadelphia at Chicago
Utah at Memphis
L.A. Lakers at Golden State
Washington at Phoenix
Milwaukee at L.A. Clippers

Heat suspend Butler 2 games for 'insubordinate conduct'

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

Jimmy Butler was suspended by the Miami Heat for the second time in three weeks, a move that adds to the possibility he has already played his final game for the franchise.

Butler drew the latest suspension — this one will last two games — for what the team in a statement Wednesday night called a "continued pattern of disregard of team rules, insubordinate conduct and conduct



Butler

detrimental to the team," including missing the Heat's flight to Milwaukee earlier in the day. Miami was scheduled to play the Bucks on Thursday and at Brooklyn on Saturday.

The earliest he could play for the Heat again is Monday, at home against Orlando.

And that would hinge on him still being on the roster, which seems far from guaranteed.

Butler told Miami in recent weeks that he wants a trade, a demand he has not made publicly because league rules do not allow players to do so. Any player who makes such a demand known is risking a fine of up to \$150,000.

But the Heat ultimately revealed that request when suspending him in early January for what they called conduct detrimental to the team, and said at that time that they will work to accommodate his trade request.

The NBA's trade deadline is Feb. 6.

Butler was banished for seven games earlier this month, costing him about \$2.4 million in salary. He returned last week and has played in each of the last three Miami games, averaging 13.0 points in 29.3 minutes.

The Heat left for Milwaukee around 2:15 p.m. Wednesday. That departure time is earlier than Miami leaves for most of its trips, and it's unclear if that was a factor for Butler.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Transfers bring winning ways to Louisville

By **STEPHEN HAWKINS**
Associated Press

DALLAS — Pat Kelsey started with a clean slate at Louisville, where he rebuilt the roster with transfers who had won at other places.

Now they are all winning together with the Cardinals, who after two historically bad seasons are on a nine-game winning streak and back in the Top 25 for the first time in four years.

“We were intentional about identifying guys that came from programs and have a background of winning,” the new coach said. “They just have that winning gene about them. ... Besides having that winning gene, it’s about how tough, we’ve got tough dudes. It’s how competitive, we’ve got competitive dudes. It’s basketball IQ, we have high basketball IQ guys.”

Louisville (15-5, 8-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) already has exceeded its combined overall and conference win totals from the past two seasons under Kenny Payne. He finished 12-52 in his first collegiate coaching job long after being a standout player for Hall of Fame coach Denny Crum and a member of the Cardinals’ 1986 national championship team.

In its first game as a Top 25 team since January 2021, Louisville won 98-73 at ACC newcomer SMU on Tuesday night. Reyne Smith, the Australian senior guard who came with Kelsey from the College of Charleston, set a single-game program record with 10 3-pointers while scoring 30 points, and Chucky Hepburn set the school record with 16 assists.

Hepburn had four lob passes that 6-foot-11 James Scott, another transfer from Charleston, converted into slam dunks against SMU. The guard’s record assist came on a banked 3-pointer by Scott.

“Coach did a great job of recruiting winners,” said Hepburn, Wisconsin’s starting point guard the past three seasons who is averaging 15.1 points and 6.4 assists per game for Louisville. “We knew how good we were going to be, and we just needed to figure it out.”

Smith is averaging 14.5 points a game and 78 of his 90 made field



PHOTOS BY LM OTERO/AP

Guard Reyne Smith, left, and forward James Scott followed coach Pat Kelsey from Charleston, which finished 27-8 last year. They are two of 11 Cardinals who played in the NCAA Tournament last season.

“We knew how good we were going to be, and we just needed to figure it out.”

Chucky Hepburn
Louisville guard

goals this season are 3-pointers. Terrence Edwards, who was the Sun Belt Conference player of the year for 32-4 James Madison last season, is scoring 13.3 points a game. J’Vonne Hadley averages 12 points a game and is Louisville’s top rebounder at 7.6 per game after helping Colorado reach the Sweet 16 last season.

Four of Louisville’s five losses came to ranked teams before Christmas. That included the ACC opener against now- No. 2 Duke on Dec. 8 — the only team in the league with a longer winning streak (12 games). The last loss was Dec. 15 to instate rival Kentucky.



Chucky Hepburn was Wisconsin’s starting point guard the past three seasons. He is averaging 15.1 points and 6.4 assists per game.

“They’re just unbelievably process oriented. ... These guys, they just been about business every day,” Kelsey said. “You can just feel how connected the guys are both on the offensive and defensive end. They’re selfless. You know, the old quote, it’s amazing how much can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit. I think that defines this team in a lot of ways.”

Winning ways

Before taking the Louisville job, Kelsey was 261-122 over 12 years including a stop at Winthrop. He was 27-8 last season at Charleston and 75-27 overall with consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances.

The Cardinals have 11 players who were on teams in the NCAA Tournament last season. They have 12 players who were on 20-win teams.

Plenty of experience

While all 11 active scholarship players are new to Louisville this season, they have plenty of Division I basketball experience.

Those 11 players entered this season with 19,898 minutes played, making it the most experienced group of players the Cardinals have had since Crum’s 1981-82 team that made the Final Four after entering that season with 13,298 minutes.

Four of the newcomers arrived already with more than 1,000 career points.

The only returning player was fifth-year walk-on guard Aidan McCool, who has one point in seven appearances this season.

Some road work to do

Louisville certainly seems on track to get to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019. That current five-season drought is its longest since missing seven NCAAs in a row from 1952-58.

After the trip to Dallas, the Cardinals have an extended break before wrapping up their January schedule next Tuesday at home against Wake Forest.

They then play five of their seven February games away from home, though they finish the regular season with three home games between March 1-8.



No. 21 Michigan (14-4)
at No. 11 Purdue (15-5)
AFN-Pacific
Saturday 2 a.m. CET
Saturday 10 a.m. JKT



No. 13 Texas A&M (14-4)
at Texas (13-6)
AFN-Atlantic
Saturday 8:30 p.m. CET
Sunday 4:30 a.m. JKT



No. 2 Duke (16-2)
at Wake Forest (15-4)
AFN-Atlantic
Saturday 10:30 p.m. CET
Sunday 6:30 a.m. JKT



No. 7 Houston (14-3)
at No. 12 Kansas (13-4)
AFN-Atlantic
Sunday 12:30 a.m. CET
Sunday 8:30 a.m. JKT



No. 6 Tennessee (17-2)
at No. 1 Auburn (17-1)
AFN-Atlantic
Sunday 2:30 a.m. CET
Sunday 10:30 a.m. JKT

AUSTRALIAN OPEN/NFL



NG HAN GUAN/AP

Madison Keys of the United States celebrates after defeating Iga Swiatek of Poland in their semifinal match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Thursday. Keys will face Aryna Sabalenka in the women's final match.

Keys upsets Swiatek, will face Sabalenka for title

By HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — When Madison Keys finally finished off her 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (10-8) upset of No. 2 Iga Swiatek in a high-intensity, high-quality Australian Open semifinal Thursday night, saving a match point along the way, the 29-year-old American crouched on the court and placed a hand on her white hat.

She had a hard time believing it all. The comeback. What Keys called an “extra dramatic finish.” The victory over five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek, who'd been on the most dominant run at Melbourne Park in a dozen years. And now the chance to play in her second Grand Slam final, a long wait after being the 2017 U.S. Open runner-up.

“I'm still trying to catch up to everything that's happening,” said the 19th-seeded Keys, who will face No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion, for the trophy Saturday. “I felt like I was just fighting to stay in it. ... It was so up and down and so many big points.”

Just to be sure, Keys asked whether Swiatek was, indeed, one point from victory. Yes, Madison, she was, while serving at 6-5, 40-30, but missed a backhand into the net, then eventually getting bro-

ken by double-faulting, sending the contest to a first-to-10, win-by-two tiebreaker.

“I felt like I blacked out there at some point,” Keys said, “and was out there running around.”

Whatever she was doing, it worked. Keys claimed more games in the semifinal than the 14 total that Swiatek dropped in her five previous matches over the past two weeks.

Sabalenka beat good friend Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-2 earlier Thursday. Sabalenka, a 26-year-old from Belarus, can become the first woman since 1999 to complete a threepeat.

“If she plays like this,” the 11th-seeded Badosa said, “I mean, we can already give her the trophy.”

Keys might have something to say about that.

Still, Sabalenka won her first major trophy at Melbourne Park in 2023, and she since has added two more — in Australia a year ago and at the U.S. Open last September.

The last woman to reach three finals in a row at the year's first Grand Slam tournament was Serena Williams, who won two from 2015-17. Martina Hingis was the most recent woman with a threepeat, doing it from 1997-1999.

“I have goosebumps. I'm so proud of myself,” Sabalenka said.

Swiatek had not lost a single service game since the first round, but was broken three times by Keys in the first set alone and eight times in all.

That included each of Swiatek's first two times serving, making clear right from the get-go this would not be her usual sort of day. And while Swiatek did eke out the opening set, she was overwhelmed in the second, trailing 5-0 before getting a game.

This was the big-hitting Keys at her very best. She turns 30 next month and, at the suggestion of her coach, former player Bjorn Fratangelo — who also happens to be her husband — decided to try a new racket this season, an effort both to help her with generating easy power but also to relieve some strain on her right shoulder.

It's certainly paid immediate dividends. Keys is now on an 11-match winning streak, including taking the title at a tuneup event in Adelaide.

She was good enough to get through this one, which was as tight as can be down the stretch.

“At the end, I feel like we were both kind of battling some nerves. ... It just became who can get that final point and who can be a little bit better than the other one,” Keys said. “And I'm happy it was me.”

Jets hire Lions DC Glenn as new coach

By DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

Aaron Glenn is back where his NFL journey began nearly 31 years ago.

He was a game-changing cornerback for the New York Jets then. Now he's tasked with helping turn around the fortunes of the franchise.

The Jets and Glenn agreed to terms Wednesday on making the Detroit Lions defensive coordinator their head coach.

Glenn, who oversaw the Lions' defense the past four seasons, beat out 15 other candidates for the job as New York went through an extensive search.

And they ended up choosing one of their former players — a first-round draft pick in 1994 who was mentored by Bill Parcells, became one of the Jets' best playmakers and developed into a well-respected and highly sought coach.

“This place is special for me,” Glenn said in a statement issued by New York, which announced the agreement Wednesday night. “From the time I was drafted and practiced on Long Island to the time I came back as a scout in New Jersey, this organization has always felt like home.”

The 52-year-old Glenn, who turned Detroit's defense into one of the best in the league, interviewed with Washington, Atlanta, Tennessee and the Los Angeles Chargers last year. And he met with the Jets, Jacksonville, Las Vegas and Chicago this year.

Glenn spoke with New York during a video call Jan. 9 and then interviewed in person Tuesday.

The Jets also interviewed Brian Flores, Jeff Hafley, Vance Joseph, Mike Locksley, Josh McCown, Matt Nagy, Ron Rivera, Darren Rizzi, Rex Ryan, Bobby Slowik, Arthur Smith, Steve Spagnuolo, Jeff Ulbrich, Mike Vrabel and Joe Whitt Jr. for the job.

But only Glenn received a second interview. And New York didn't need to think twice about talking to anyone else again.

“I'm excited to welcome Aaron Glenn home as the head coach of the New York Jets,” owner Woody Johnson said in a statement. “Aaron earned this opportunity through almost three decades of NFL experience — 10 with us as a player and a scout.

“He brings tremendous leadership skills and the vision this organization needs to be successful. I am thrilled to see him lead this team.”

Glenn becomes the third Black head coach in the franchise's history, joining Herm Edwards and Todd Bowles. He's also the first Black coach to be hired to lead an NFL team during this year's hiring cycle.

“I'm thankful to Mr. Johnson for this opportunity,” Glenn said. “To our players, prepare to be coached with everything we have. That is our responsibility. I ask that we share the same vision and that's working toward winning a championship.

“To our fans, simply put, expect a winning team that you will be proud of.”

The Jets are also going through a lengthy search for a general manager, and Commanders assistant GM Lance Newmark was at the team's facility Tuesday as well.

Newmark, one of 15 candidates to interview for the GM job, was the first to get a second meeting with New York — like Glenn — but hasn't agreed to a deal. The Jets are expected to have second interviews with Denver assistant GM Darren Mougey and Cincinnati executive Trey Brown.

Glenn and the new GM will be tasked with trying to revamp a franchise that has the NFL's longest active playoff drought at 14 seasons.



MIKE MULHOLLAND/AP

Newly hired Jets coach Aaron Glenn is returning to the team he began his playing career with in 1994, spending seven seasons in New York.

NFL PLAYOFFS



DERIK HAMILTON/AP

Los Angeles Rams defensive tackle Neville Gallimore tackles Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts during the second half of a divisional playoff game Jan. 19 in Philadelphia.

Eagles' Hurts set for NFC title game on balky knee

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jalen Hurts hobbled back to the Philadelphia Eagles' huddle after his left knee was twisted on a sack, an injury that forced him to the sideline medical tent for a quick exam after the drive.

Hurts got checked out — and backup Kenny Pickett started to warm up in case he was needed in the NFC divisional playoff game against the Los Angeles Rams.

No so fast.

"We looked up, and (Hurts) was warming up," wide receiver A.J. Brown said Wednesday. "So that tells you everything about him."

Hurts never missed a snap to help the Eagles win their ninth straight home game and usher them into their second NFC championship game in three seasons at Lincoln Financial Field.

Still banged up, Hurts isn't about to miss the biggest game of the season on Sunday against the Washington Commanders.

Philadelphia held a walk-through instead of a full practice Wednesday — perhaps in part to take stress off Hurts' knee — but that won't keep him off the field against the Commanders.

"I'm expecting him to come out and do what he does," Brown said. "He's a warrior."

His usual stoic self, Hurts kept his emotions more wrapped up than his knee. His answers Wednesday on his health were shorter than a shovel pass.

How's his knee?



NFC Championship
Washington Commanders (14-5)
at Philadelphia Eagles (16-3)
AFN-Sports
9 p.m. Sunday CET
5 a.m. Monday JKT

"Progressing."

Can he play on Sunday?
"Yeah."

Hurts has been remarkably durable throughout his career from training camp until November when injuries start to hit. Already playing with a broken finger on his non-throwing hand, he missed the final two games of the regular season after suffering a concussion in a Dec. 22 loss at Washington. A year ago, it was a mangled finger on his throwing hand that limited his effectiveness in a playoff loss at Tampa Bay. And two seasons ago, when Hurts led the Eagles to a Super Bowl, he suffered a sprained right shoulder in December that cost him two games.

"It's a part of the game," Hurts said. "I accept whatever comes with that."

Now it's a balky knee, which could limit the mobility of a quarterback who is one of the elite dual threats in the NFL. He rushed for 630 yards this season, and he

ripped off a career-long 44-yard TD run against the Rams before he was hurt.

"The combination of Saquon (Barkley) and Jalen in the backfield is really, really powerful," offensive coordinator Kellen Moore said. "They do an excellent job of having the threat of both of them. Jalen does an excellent job making decisions. He has to make decisions a lot of times in those runs whether to hand it or keep it. I thought that was a really, really cool play."

With Philadelphia riding Barkley and his 2,005 yards rushing this season, Hurts' passing numbers dipped. He threw for 2,903 yards after topping 3,000 in each of the previous three seasons. He has thrown for only a combined 259 yards and two touchdowns with no interceptions in playoff wins against Green Bay and Los Angeles.

True, passing yards aren't the final grade on a quarterback's performance, but the Eagles only had 65 net yards through the air against the Rams.

"Not ideal," Moore said.

Hurts had 18 touchdown passes and five interceptions this season. He threw only one pick after the Eagles returned from their Week 5 bye.

"He's the same guy all the time," coach Nick Sirianni said. "No matter who we're playing, when we're playing, practice, game, he's consistent. He loves football. He loves the process it takes."

Hype builds as Daniels has Commanders one win from Super Bowl

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

ASHBURN, Va. — Jayden Daniels has the Washington Commanders in the NFC championship game, and his list of admirers around the league continues to grow.

Just this week, Philadelphia Eagles defensive coordinator Vic Fangio called Daniels "a young quarterback by birth certificate, not by the tape." C.J. Stroud of the Houston Texans believes Daniels has "had the best rookie year of all time."

If he and the Commanders beat the Eagles on Sunday, Daniels would become the first rookie quarterback to lead his team to the Super Bowl. And even as the hype train picks up speed, Daniels remains the same laser-focused competitor and down-to-earth person he was when he walked through the door as the second pick in the draft.

"He stays as even-keeled as any player I've ever been around," top receiver Terry McLaurin said Wednesday. "We've played in some of the most hostile environments, we've been playing on some of the biggest stages and he's treating it the same each and every week. I love that about him."

Daniels is making a strong case to back up Stroud's opinion. The 24-year-old out of LSU is the first player in franchise history to throw for 25 touchdown passes with fewer than 10 interceptions, and his 891 yards rushing are the most of any rookie QB in NFL history.

After winning the Heisman Trophy in college and becoming the overwhelming favorite to win AP Offensive Rookie of the Year, Daniels said he was "not even thinking that far" about making the Super Bowl and the trail he would be blazing by facing the Buffalo Bills or Kansas City Chiefs in New Orleans on Feb. 9.

"It would obviously be a bless-

ing, but I'm just focused on how can I be better day by day," Daniels said. "There's countless teams that want to be in this position. ... You can't really take it for granted, but you also just got to be in the moment."

No problem there. Coach Dan Quinn likens Daniels on the sideline to "The Terminator" because of his steely-eyed demeanor and avoidance of distractions.

On the field, Daniels has led Washington to six consecutive victories — winning the first five on the final play of scrimmage and beating the 15-win Lions 45-31 in Detroit. He has thrown for 17 TDs during this stretch, and while the Commanders are an underdog at Philadelphia, Daniels' magic is the biggest reason to think Washington could pull off another upset.

"He's got rare, in-the-moment skills that have allowed us to be in to this spot," Quinn said. "When it's mental chaos going down and two minutes (left) and these tight moments where it can feel that tight, he's got the experience of somebody that's played a lot more football than a first-year player."

Daniels isn't sure when teammates stopped treating him like a rookie. It was Week 8 after his Hail Mary pass to Noah Brown when veteran tight end Zach Ertz asked that everyone outside the organization stop acting like Daniels is a rookie, because he had seen signs of it for months.

"He was very proactive in his approach to being great," said Ertz, who helped the Eagles win the Super Bowl seven years ago. "A lot of times when you're young in the league, it's a lot of trial and error to see what works for you. And, oftentimes, you're reactionary in terms of how your process is. And it's like, 'Oh, after I failed a couple times, maybe I'll do X, Y and Z a little more.' Whereas Jayden, the moment he first got here, he was the first one in the building studying as much as possible."



SETH WENIG/AP

The Washington Commanders' Jayden Daniels is looking to become the first rookie quarterback to lead his team to a Super Bowl appearance.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Mahomes defends refs 'doing their best'

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes doesn't believe NFL officials are doing the Kansas City Chiefs quarterback any favors.

Nor do the statistics support that assumption.

In last week's divisional-round win over Houston, the Texans were twice penalized for hits on Mahomes, and one of them came on third down to extend a drive that ended in points. And that led many fans — to say nothing of some members of the Houston defense — to believe the league's officials were blatantly favoring one of its biggest stars.

"I don't feel that way," Mahomes said Wednesday in his first media availability ahead of Sunday's AFC title game against Buffalo, where the two-time defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs will try to earn a chance at a threepeat.

"I just try to play football at the end of the day. The referees are doing their best to call the game as fair and proper as best they can," Mahomes said. "For me, it's go out there, play hard, try to do whatever I can to win the football game, and then live with the results based on my effort and how I play the game, and that's what we preach here in Kansas City."

While it may seem as though one of the NFL's most visible franchises gets more than its share of calls, the Chiefs have in fact been penalized 147 yards more than their opponents over the past three seasons, including the playoffs.



REED HOFFMANN/AP

Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes, center, doesn't feel that NFL officials are favoring the Chiefs more than any other team after some key penalties helped them beat the Houston Texans on Jan. 18.

And lest some think Kansas City benefits more in moments that matter most, opponents have gained 20 more first downs via penalties on third or fourth down since 2018, which is when Ma-

homes became the starter. In the fourth quarter or overtime of games decided by one score, the Chiefs have the seventh-worst penalty differential over that same time period.

Still, it appears the narrative that officials are helping Kansas City to win had reached the Texans' locker room before Houston ever reached Arrowhead Stadium last Saturday, where they lost 23-

14 in the divisional round of the playoffs.

"We knew it was going to be us versus the refs going into this game," Texans defensive end Will Anderson Jr. said afterward.

Then again, Mahomes didn't earn any latitude among fans by appearing to flop in an attempt to draw another flag. That came as he was scrambling toward the sideline, and when touched by Houston linebacker Henry To'oTo'o, the two-time NFL MVP dramatically threw himself to the ground — but failed to fool the officials.

It certainly drew the ire of former NFL quarterback Troy Aikman, who was calling the game for ESPN.

"He's trying to draw the penalty. Rather than just run out of bounds, he slows down," Aikman said. "That's been the frustration, and I get it. I understand it. That's been the frustration for these defensive players around the league."

Mahomes didn't seem perturbed by the sudden national discourse into penalties and flopping when he addressed the media Wednesday. Instead, he methodically answered questions about them and then turned his attention to the Bills.

"You get new referees every year. You get new circumstances," Mahomes said, "and you never can really tell because every play is different, and that's what makes the NFL so special. I feel like I just continue to play the game. I just try to win."

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NFL PLAYOFFS



ADRIAN KRAUS/AP

Amari Cooper, acquired from the Cleveland Browns in mid-October, produced career-low numbers this season but he says he's happy to put his pride aside and help the Bills pursue their first Super Bowl title.

Relishing a new role

Bills WR Cooper happy to trade stats for team success

BY JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Amari Cooper has enough catches, yards and touchdowns over his 10-year NFL career to satisfy his ego.

What's missing in the 30-year-old's career is playoff success, and Cooper wouldn't trade this run to the AFC championship game he's enjoying with the Buffalo Bills for anything.

"I'm very satisfied. I've never been this far in the playoffs," Cooper said following practice Wednesday as the Bills prepare to play the top-seeded and two-time defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday.

"Obviously, every receiver wants to have, you know, 10-20 catches a game. But that's not always how the cookie crumbles," he added. "Winning is way more important and there's many ways to win. So absolutely no complaints from me, because that's all I truly wanted. I mean, I've had it every other way and haven't really reached the pinnacle of this sport."

Though new to Buffalo in being acquired in a mid-October trade from Cleveland, Cooper's selfless approach folds seamlessly into a Bills team that's fed off an "Everybody Eats" mantra first introduced by offensive coordinator Joe Brady in May. The phrase was prompted out of necessity after Buffalo traded its top wide receiver Stefon Diggs to Houston in April and lost No. 2 option Gabe Davis to free agency.

Cooper's addition was initially anticipated to help fill that void, though that's failed to materialize on an offense that had 13 players catch a touchdown pass but no one top 900 yards.

Cooper's had his highlight moments, including a touchdown in his Bills debut and his memorable lateral to set up quarterback Josh Allen diving for a

touchdown in an AFC East-clinching win over San Francisco on Dec. 1.

And yet for someone who's topped 1,000 yards and 70 catches seven times, Cooper's overall production hit career lows this season with 44 catches (only 20 in Buffalo) for 547 yards (297 in Buffalo) and four touchdowns.

That's fine with him.

"You have so many players that are doing their job that they can get the job done without you," Cooper said. "So that's kind of where my ego dies and the pride is put aside for the sake of the team."

Brady credits Cooper for his easy-going approach while noting his presence on the field instantly draws the attention of opposing defenses.

"He's part of our group that makes our group kind of who they are, and he's leading it," Brady said. "He doesn't care about the stats right now, and he knows that him being on the field helps our offense."

Cooper has enjoyed success. In his freshman season at Alabama in 2012, he had 59 catches for 1,000 yards and 11 touchdowns in helping the Crimson Tide win a national championship.

At the NFL level, team success has eluded him. The No. 4 pick in the 2015 draft, Cooper celebrated one win in four previous playoff appearances in which he combined for 25 catches for 304 yards and two touchdowns. In Buffalo, he's won twice while combining for two catches for a mere 8 yards.

"I've had tremendous years in the league, Pro Bowls and all those things. But none of them will amount to winning that last game," Cooper said, knowing he's two wins away from a championship. "You keep preparing, and then you know one day everything will fall in place. That's how it feels. It feels like I've prepared for this moment all my life."



AFC Championship
Buffalo Bills (15-4)
at Kansas City Chiefs (16-2)

AFN-Sports
12:30 a.m. Monday CET
8:30 a.m. Monday JKT

Core: AFC streak began in Mahomes' 1st year as starter

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pionship games when the Chiefs face the Buffalo Bills on Sunday night at Arrowhead Stadium.

"I'm getting old," Jones, 30, said with a laugh. "It's fun, though. It's a challenge. Takes a lot of hard work, commitment, a lot of belief, a lot of encouragement throughout the year. A lot of unselfish play amongst the team to continue to do that."

"We had this message in chapel about climbing the mountaintop," Jones added. "You don't want to stay up there because you can't really breathe. The air is too thin. So you go back down. But the joy is climbing to the mountaintop."

Few teams have managed to knock the Chiefs from the top of the mountain.

They've won four of the past six AFC championship games, and both losses came in overtime: to the Patriots in the first of their title-game streak in 2019 and to the Bengals three years ago. When they've reached the Super Bowl, only Tom Brady and Tampa Bay have managed to stop Patrick Mahomes and Co. from hoisting the Lombardi Trophy.

Mahomes is another of the six Chiefs players who have been there for all seven conference championship games. The first came in his first year as the starter, when he shredded records on the way to earning the first of his two NFL MVP awards. In that matchup with the Patriots, he threw for 295 yards and three touchdowns without an interception in the losing effort.

To this day, Mahomes talks about how that loss inside Arrowhead Stadium fueled him to all those future championships.

"Obviously, you want to win three in a row," Mahomes said, "but building those memories with the guys and with the community every single year is special. When I look back at all the different Super Bowls we've won, I look back at special moments that

we've had and special games that we've had. We'll try to do that the same this year.

"I mean, it has been a fun run up to this point," Mahomes said, "but we want to get to that ultimate goal."

There's quite a few of them that know how to get there.

Along with Jones and Mahomes, four-time All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce — who had seven catches for 117 yards and a touchdown in the Chiefs' divisional win over Houston last Saturday — has been there for all seven AFC title games. So have Derrick Nnadi, a perpetually overlooked but solid defensive tackle, long snapper James Winchester and kicker Harrison Butker.

Sure, there have been supplemental stars. Tyrann Mathieu was the anchor of the defense at the start of the Chiefs' seven-year run, and Tyreek Hill was a big part of their record-setting offenses. And there have been role players, such as running back Damien Williams and wide receiver Demarcus Robinson, who shared in the collective success.

But those six that have been around for it all? They've combined to play 945 games for the Chiefs, and 121 of those have been in the playoffs, when one loss — one mistake, really — could have ended such an incredible run.

There is something to be said for that experience, especially when the calendar reaches the end of January.

"The experience helps," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "Especially with some of the younger guys to be able to talk to them and tell them about the urgency of this thing. It's single elimination. That's easier said than putting that in your brain and getting yourself right for every snap that you have at practice, to practice hard and be aggressive with. You just have to make sure you stay really focused and don't let the distractions in there the best you can."



ED ZURGA/AP

City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes talks on the sidelines with coach Andy Reid during the second half of an AFC divisional playoff game against the Houston Texans on Jan. 18 in Kansas City, Mo.

SPORTS



Transformative transfers
Louisville brings in players to restore winning ways » College basketball, Page 27

NFL PLAYOFFS



Center: Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

Clockwise, from top left: tight end Travis Kelce, defensive tackle Chris Jones, defensive tackle Derrick Nnadi, long snapper James Winchester and kicker Harrison Butker.

AP photos

Core strength

Mahomes, Kelce and 4 others have carried the Chiefs to 7 straight AFC title games

By Dave Skretta
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo.

Five years ago, after the Kansas City Chiefs had just rallied to beat the San Francisco 49ers in their first Super Bowl appearance in five decades, Chris Jones settled behind a dais and was asked about what the future held for him.

Now a three-time All-Pro defensive tackle, Jones was heading into free agency for the first time back then.

"Next year we're coming back," he replied with a smile. "We're coming back for a repeat."

This year, the Chiefs are going for a threepeat. And the good-natured, game-wrecking Jones has been there for it all.

Rather than hitting free agency back in

January 2020, and after getting franchised, Jones signed a long-term contract to stay in Kansas City. He signed another, bigger deal last March, one that could mean Jones plays his entire career here. And that makes him one of six elder statesmen for a franchise in the midst of a dynasty — those that will have played in seven consecutive AFC cham-

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■ Eagles QB Hurts set to play on balky knee
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Keys stops Swiatek's dominant run in Australian Open » Page 28