WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Friday nominated Adm. Lisa Franchetti to be the Navy’s next top officer, which would make her the first woman to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if she is confirmed by the Senate.

"Franchetti will bring 38 years of dedicated service to our nation as a commissioned officer, including in her current role of vice chief of naval operations," Biden said. "She is the second woman ever to achieve the rank of four-star admiral in the United States Navy, and when confirmed, she will again make history as the first woman to serve as the chief of naval operations and on the Joint Chiefs."

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, vice chief of naval operations, during a tour of Marine Corps Base Hawaii, on Dec. 13, 2022.

CODY PURCELL/U.S. Marine Corps

Making history
Navy admiral picked to be first woman on Joint Chiefs of Staff

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

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SEE HISTORY ON PAGE 5

Marines, more aircraft and ships deploy to Middle East

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States is deploying more aircraft, ships and troops to the Middle East to bolster security in the region amid a rise in threatening actions by Iranian forces, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the deployment of a portion of the Bataan Amphibious Readiness Group with a Marine Expeditionary Unit. The force includes Marines, the USS Bataan, an amphibious assault ship, the USS Carter Hall, a dock landing ship, and associated personnel and equipment.

“These additional forces provide unique capabilities which, alongside our partner nations in the region, further safeguard the free flow of international commerce and uphold the rules based international order, and deter Iranian destabilizing activities in the region,” said Army Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla, who leads CENTCOM.

In the past two years, Iran has attacked, seized or attempted seizure of nearly 20 internationally flagged merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global shipping channel, CENTCOM said.

The move follows the Pentagon announcement last Monday that the USS Thomas Hudner, a new Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and fighter jets, including F-35s and F-16s, were deploying to the region near the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman to defend U.S. interests.

“We have seen Iran continue to harass vessels in the Strait of Hormuz,” Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said last Monday. “So [Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Kurilla] felt it was appropriate to move more assets into the region."
Cupkin children’s cups recalled over lead levels

Associated Press

NEW YORK — More than 345,000 children’s cups are being recalled due to lead levels that exceed the federal content ban, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said Thursday.

Soojimus is recalling 8-ounce and 12-ounce models of its Cupkin Double-Walled Stainless Steel Children’s Cups — sold in various colors on Amazon and the Cupkin website from 2018 through earlier this year.

Consumers in possession of the recalled Cupkin cups are urged to stop using them immediately and contact Soojimus for a full refund. No illnesses or injuries related to the recall have been reported to date.

According to Cupkin, liquid in the now-recalled cups is “not exposed to lead due to the double-walled construction.” The exposure to lead can occur if the cup bottoms are mistreated, the brand said.

In a response to the recall on its website, Cupkin noted that it initiated the voluntary recall after receiving consumer feedback and conducting additional testing. Lead was not detected during the products’ initial development, the brand added.

Soojimus and Amazon will be directly contacting all known purchasers of the recalled Cupkin cups, the CPSC said Thursday. To receive a refund, consumers can submit photographs of the cups showing their destruction and fill out a form on Cupkin’s website.

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Firepower shows signal start of Australian drills

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

SHOALWATER BAY TRAINING AREA, Australia — Dozens of mortar shells and rockets screamed across the Australian bush into a mountainside over the weekend, one of two live-fire demonstrations that kicked off the largest-ever Talisman Sabre exercise.

Troops from seven countries gathered at Shoalwater Bay Training Area — 442 miles north of Brisbane in eastern Australia — on Saturday to watch American, Australian, South Korean and Japanese crews fire artillery during a simulated attack. Behind the scenes, support personnel from France, Germany and New Zealand also participated.

“This event here is very, very important for us, because it’s not just the missiles shooting, it’s about us working with each other; being able to work with another military or another nation is about the human connectivity,” Brig. Gen. Nicholas Foxall, commander of the Australian army’s 1st Brigade, told reporters before the demonstration. “That is what this event is all about.”

At Beeacroft Weapons Range, 1,000 miles south of Shoalwater Bay near Jervis Bay on Australia’s eastern coast, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force kicked off Talisman Sabre with its own live-fire demo. It launched a Type 12 surface-to-shoot missile from Australian soil for the first time, the Australian Defence Force said in a Saturday news release.

Now in its 10th year, the biennial Talisman Sabre is expected to bring over 30,000 personnel, nearly double the number of troops deployed in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, with additional participants from the United Kingdom, Canada, Indonesia, Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea.

The exercise provides an opportunity for the individual nations to practice teamwork and communication in the event of “whatever crisis may exist in our region in the future,” Lt. Gen. Greg Bilton, the Australian Defence Force chief of joint operations, said Friday during the exercise’s opening ceremony in Garden Island.

That threat isn’t from any specific country, according to Talisman Sabre officials.

A Chinese surveillance ship was already off Australia’s east coast, not an unusual event, Bilton said at the ceremony, according to an Australian Defence Force transcript.

“They’ve done this for a number of years,” he said. “We’re well prepared for it.”

Foxall said every nation has the right to navigate international waters.

“We just expect those who are in those international borders to respect our rights and we ask them for that space,” he told reporters Saturday.

Saturday’s three-hour demonstration at Shoalwater began with four U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters from the amphibious assault ship USS America waiting off the coast. The jets launched 500-pound laser-guided missiles at a fictitious enemy stronghold.

U.S. Army, Marine Corps and Australian army crews quickly followed the strike with their own barrage from M777 howitzers. South Korean crews manning a K9A1 Thunder howitzer, and a K239 Chunmoo missile launcher entered the fray as well. The exercise also marked the first use of a Talisman Sabre official.

Italy considers allowing commercial flights at US Navy base

By Alison Bath
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Italian officials are considering using a military base in Sicily for commercial air flights, but it’s unclear whether the plan would impact U.S. operations on the shared installation.

Renato Schifani, the governor of Sicily, announced that the Italian Defense Ministry said it would be possible to use the base at Sigonella as an emergency alternative to a nearby international airport damaged in a recent fire, the Italian news agency Ansa reported Thursday.

The report did not say when commercial flights at the Italian base could begin, nor did it offer details such as how passengers would be transported to and from the area.

The base, about 12 miles from Catania Airport, is shared with U.S. Naval Air Station Sigonella, which operates independently as a tenant of the Italian base.

Naval officials did not respond Friday to questions about potential effects to flight operations if commercial airline traffic uses the Italian side of the base.

Sicilian officials have been grappling with dozens of flight cancellations and delays during the summer tourist season since a fire damaged the main terminal at the airport Sunday.

In May, more than 1 million passengers traveled through the airport, according to a news report.

The terminal was expected to reopen midweek, but officials announced it will remain closed until at least Monday, Ansa reported.

The Italian Civil Aviation Authority and the airport manager said Wednesday they were working to expand another terminal to allow a gradual increase in flights.

NAS Sigonella is home to more than 34 commands, among them Commander Task Force 67, which operates maritime patrol, rotary wing and electronic attack aircraft.

Those operations include flights over the Mediterranean, North, Baltic and Black seas in anti-submarine, anti-surface, and surveillance roles, according to Navy.mil.

Earlier in the week, NAS Sigonella officials said they expect minimal travel disruptions for service members and their families during the busy change-of-station season.

Many personnel travel to and from the base on Defense Department-chartered commercial flights.

Fiery crash appears to damage US Army tank in Australia

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Army M1A2 Abrams tank was involved in a seven-vehicle collision on an Australian highway Wednesday ahead of large-scale drills by Indo-Pacific allies.

Video of the accident’s aftermath, aired Thursday by Australia’s 9 News, showed plumes of black smoke rising above Bruce Highway in Queensland and a fireman extinguishing flames in the wreckage. The tank could be seen on a semi-trailer in the footage.

The accident occurred near Rockhampton, ahead of Saturday’s start for Talisman Sabre.

Three vehicles caught fire and multiple explosions were heard following the 11:30 a.m. collision, 9 News reported.

Six people were taken to hospitals, the report said. The incident involved two trucks, including one carrying recreational vehicles, three cars and a four-wheel-drive vehicle toting a travel trailer.

Officials closed the highway, which reopened 24 hours later, and a rail line around the tank, according to the report.

The Abrams belongs to the 1st Armored Division and is one of 15 deployed for Talisman Sabre. Army spokesman Jimmy Sheehan said an email Thursday to Stars and Stripes.

U.S. and Australian military officials didn’t respond to questions emailed Thursday about damage to the tank and whether it could participate in the training.

Photographs of drill preparations posted by the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service show an Abrams tank driving off the USNS Bob Hope, a logistics naval vessel, at the port in Gladstone, Australia, on July 15.

Bruce Highway links Gladstone with Rockhampton, near Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area, where much of the Talisman Sabre training will take place.

“We’re grateful to the Australian first response team for their quick action in providing medical, police, and fire services,” Sheehan said. “We are working closely with the Australian Defence Force and local law enforcement on the recovery of this equipment. The investigation is on-going.”

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No signs that soldier, N. Korea conspired

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — There are no indications yet that Army Pvt. Travis King’s crossing into North Korea this week was planned or that the soldier, N. Korea, conspired to “bring him home,” she said.

“I don’t think there was any anticipation that he was going to not board his flight,” Singh said.

Army investigators are also trying to piece together King’s actions for multiple hours between the time he left the airport and the moment he sprinted across the DMZ. Officials have said he joined a civilian tour of the border village of Panmunjom immediately before he crossed into North Korea.

Some of King’s relatives have speculated the soldier might have decided to flee to North Korea because he was feeling overworked with his legal problems and a possible discharge from the Army.

“I can’t see him doing that intentionally,” he said in his right mind,” Carl Gates, King’s maternal grandfather, told The Associated Press.

“I don’t understand why he would do that, because it seemed like he was on his way back here to the United States,” the soldier’s uncle Myron Gates said. “He was on his way home.”

First leg of comedian’s USO tour hits Yokota

By KELLY ACEE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Comedian Iliza Shlesinger’s USO show packed the enlisted club Thursday at this Air Force airlift hub in western Tokyo.

The fan consensus: She, along with fellow comics Laura Peek and Hunter Hill, slayed.

“Definitely could be heard,” Shlesinger said as she started her half-hour stand-up set. “We wanted to kick off the tour and I was, like, take me to the place where we have the smartest military, the best looking, so we’re going to a naval base tomorrow.”

Extra seats were brought in to fit approximately 400 people into the enlisted club ballroom to see Shlesinger, who has evolved from “party goblin” to a mother and a YouTube staple — the star of six Netflix specials, an author and a YouTube staple — toured the base with Peek and Hill, who warmed up the crowd with their tales of being on 15-minute acts.

“A tour highlight was a helicopter ride from Yokota’s flightline, Shlesinger told Stars and Stripes during a pre-show event with about 50 airmen and their families at the base.

“Going up in a Huey and touring above downtown Tokyo in a helicopter was a once in a lifetime for us,” she said. “It’s several times in a week for them.”

The comedians also visited the Yokota Fire Department, the Air Force Exchange and ate lunch at the Samurai Café Dining Facility.

“Every base has its vibe and here definitely feels more family oriented,” Shlesinger said. “I asked somebody yesterday what it was like to have kids here and he said it’s like Mayberry.”

Shlesinger’s USO tour included stops Friday at Yokosuka Naval Base’s Fleet Theater and Saturday at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni’s Club Iwakuni. A scheduled show in Tokyo is canceled, according to Shlesinger’s Facebook page.

During the meet-and-greet, fans lined up to take photos with the comedian.

“At any time I’ve had a bad day at work I watch ‘Elder Millennial,’ [Shlesinger’s 2018 Netflix special] on TV,” said Tech. Sgt. Nichole Worthig, of the 374th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, at the event. “She is one of the few people that makes me laugh when I’m already mad.”

On stage, Shlesinger combined current events with her signature style. She said she met a guy at a Kansai airport who was “so hot” and “so charming,” she could only watch intently, though he had a down side.

“He was definitely at Jan. 6,” she said, referring to the day a mob of former President Donald Trump’s supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol building in 2021.

An apprehensive “ohhh,” spread through the audience, followed by an outbreak of laughter.

“I’m just talking to him,” Shlesinger said. “Listen, lunatics can be attractive.”

Airmen 1st Class Alan Watson, on temporary duty at Yokota from Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., said her performance was good for morale.

“A lot of times these people — entertainers and comedians — they aren’t seen as patriotic people, so to know there are entertainers that still support the military means a lot,” he said.

Comedian Iliza Shlesinger headlines a comedy show at Yokota Air Force Base’s enlisted club in western Tokyo on Thursday.

N. Korea: US sub’s visit may warrant nuke strike

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The presence of a nuclear-capable U.S. ballistic missile submarine in South Korea could meet the conditions set by North Korea for a preemptive nuclear strike, according to the regime’s defense minister.

The USS Kentucky’s arrival Tuesday in Busan could trigger Pyongyang’s preemptive strike policy, Defense Minister Kang Sun-nam said in the state-run Korean Central News Agency on Thursday.

The regime said it’s like Mayberry.”

“I remind the U.S. military of the fact that the ever-increasing visibility of the deployment of the strategic nuclear submarine and other strategic assets may fall under the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons specified in [North Korea’s] law,” Kang said in an article posted online by KCNA.

“(North Korea’s) doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons allows the execution of necessary action procedures in case a nuclear attack is launched against it, or it is judged that the use of nuclear weapons against it is imminent.”

North Korea has “misinterpreted” the purpose of the Kentucky’s visit, the South’s Ministry of National Defense said in a news release Friday.

Seoul and Washington’s decision to deploy the submarine is a “legitimate defensive response” and “is not a plot to use nuclear weapons or a nuclear threat against North Korea,” according to the ministry.

Yoon went aboard the Kentucky on Wednesday and in a speech said a nuclear attack by North Korea “would lead to the end of the defense minister.

The submarine is one of 14 Ohio-class submarines in the Navy’s fleet and can carry nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles that have a range of 4,000 miles.

North Korea has fired 17 ballistic missiles so far this year. The communist regime last fired a Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday.

North Korea’s Supreme People’s Assembly codified an “irreversible” nuclear weapons program and a preemptive-use policy in September. The law broadly states that the regime may conduct a preemptive nuclear strike against its leaders or nuclear operations were threatened by hostile forces.

U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies have said that Pyongyang is prepared to carry out its seventh nuclear test.

The explosion from North Korea’s last nuclear device in 2017 was estimated to be equivalent to 250 kilotons of TNT, or roughly 16 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, according to a study published in the Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth.

In addition to the nuclear tests, North Korea is believed to have “reached a significant level in the miniaturization of nuclear weapons” and has a stockpile of around 150 pounds of plutonium, South Korea’s defense minister said in his annual military report in February.
MILITARY

Prove: Faulty clutch caused fatal Osprey crash

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — A mechanical failure of the clutch in an MV-22 Osprey caused the crash that killed five Marines in June 2022, a service investigation revealed Friday.

“It is clear from the investigation that there was no error on the part of the flight crew and nothing they could have done to anticipate or prevent this mishap,” the Marine Corps said in a statement. “They were conducting routine flight operations in accordance with applicable regulations when this catastrophic and unanticipated mechanical failure occurred.”

The report also ruled out any issues with weather, birds or other external factors. The investigation concluded there should be no disciplinary actions or administrative actions against any Marines. The Marine Corps had not previously released specifics about the crash that killed the Marines on June 8, 2022, during a training flight near Yuma, Calif., a remote desert area about 35 miles north of the border with Mexico and 50 miles west of Yuma, Ariz.


“The loss of these five Marines is tragic and, while there will always be ways to inherently reduce risk in military aviation, we are working tirelessly to identify and mitigate risks to our aviation platforms,” said Col. Brian Taylor, a program manager for the Marine Corps. “The Osprey is a hybrid aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter, but during flight it can rotate its propellers to a horizontal position to cruise like a conventional airplane. Versions of the aircraft are flown by the Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force.

The more than 400-page report found the cause of the crash was due to the failed engagement of aircraft’s dual clutch. When the clutch failed, the aircraft was then unable to thrust with the propeller on the right side of the Osprey. This caused “unrecoverable departure from controlled flight,” the service said.

A “hard clutch engagement” happens when the clutch in the gearbox that connects one of aircraft’s two engines to the propeller rotor slips and then suddenly reengages, causing the aircraft to lurch.

The report said there were no direct witnesses to the accident, and due to the fiery crash, the data recorder was not recovered.

The investigation also found there were 16 similar clutch failures in the fleet, but due to the Ospreys in flight since 2010.

The clutch problem with Ospreys forced the V-22 joint program office in February to ground an undisclosed number of the aircraft across the military services. It was at that time that they began replacing a piece of equipment on the aircraft.

The office said Friday that it has eliminated the risk of a similar clutch malfunction by 99%.

James McConville, the Army chief of staff, said that the accident on a trip to Indonesia in May.

“None of the leaked emails that were reported came from a [Defense Department] email address,” deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said last Monday.

When a Defense Department email address is used to send something to a .mil address, the email will bounce back because it can’t be sent to that address, Singh said. Personal accounts do not offer the same protection.

Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gorman said Wednesday that the Defense Information Systems Agency, or DISA, at the start of the year was blocking outbound emails to 135 accounts within the .mil subdomains. Earlier in July, DISA began blocking outbound email to the entire .mil domain but procedures were put in place to allow legitimate business emails to be sent. Emails that originate outside of the Defense Department network and sent to a .mil address are out of the Pentagon’s control.

“The [Defense Department] is reinforcing to all personnel that personal email accounts should not be utilized to store and process sensitive unclassified information,” Gorman said.

The latest email incident comes after the Pentagon in February discovered U.S. Special Operations Command emails were publicly available online for about two weeks because of an information technology misconfiguration.

Typo causes emails meant for DOD to be sent to Mali

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A simple typo caused millions of emails intended for Pentagon employees to be inadvertently sent to email accounts in Mali, according to a Dutch technology who discovered the problem.

The emails were intended for “.mil” accounts, the internet domain owned by the U.S. military. The typo caused the emails to be sent instead to “.mil” accounts, which is the email domain for the West African country of Mali.

None of the emails are said to be classified, according to the Financial Times, which first reported the story. Details of the emails range from diplomatic documents, tax returns, passwords and travel details of senior military officials.

The problem was first noticed about a decade ago by Johannes Zurburier, a Dutch internet entrepreneur, who has a contract to manage Mali’s domain.

The Daily Beast, a financial Times that he has been collecting misdirected emails since January to persuade the U.S. to take the issue seriously. Hundreds of emails to 117,000 misdirected messages.

Some other contents of the emails include X-rays and medical data, travel itinerary information, a crew lists for ships, staff lists at bases, maps of installations, photos of bases, naval inspection reports, contracts, criminal complaints against personnel, internal investigations into bullying, official travel itineraries, bookings, and financial records.

One of the misdirected emails contained travel plans for General James McConville, the Army chief of staff, on a trip on a trip to Indonesia in May.

TARS AND TRIPES

History: Confirming Paparo, Kilby, Koehler also likely delayed

FROM PAGE 1

Adm. Linda Fagan became commandant of the Coast Guard in June but her service is not part of the Joint Chiefs. The Coast Guard is operated by the Department of Homeland Security, not the Defense Department.

Franchetti, 59, joined the Navy in the mid-1980s and has held several commands, including the 6th Fleet, Naval Forces Korea, the USNS Kenya and multiple carrier-strike groups.

She will succeed Adm. Michael Gilday as chief of naval operations — the highest-ranking officer in the Navy and key adviser to the president.

Gilday retires Aug. 21.

A graduate of Northwestern University, Franchetti grew up in New York and was commissioned in the Navy in 1985. She’s served on several ships and was once assistant to the Navy secretary.

Franchetti has also attended the Naval War College in Rhode Island and earned a master’s degree in national security and strategic studies.

Biden on Friday also nominated three other Navy leaders. He nominated Vice Adm. James Kilby as commander of naval operations, Adm. Samuel Paparo as commander of Indo-Pacific Command, and Vice Adm. Stephen Koehler as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

“They represent the best of the United States Navy. Together, these four highly decorated naval officers have extensive operational and command experience,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

“TARs and tripes” are military terms referring to the list of senior military officials.

James Paparo, 58, has served in the military for 37 years and has held numerous positions, including as deputy commander of the Pacific Fleet.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.
VA burial benefits for family could be permanent

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Burial benefits for family members who die before service members could be extended permanently under new legislation introduced by a bipartisan group of senators.

The measure would give the Department of Veterans Affairs lasting authority to bury the spouse or child of a dependent child of an active-duty service member in a national cemetery and provide a memorial headstone or marker for cases in which remains are unavailable.

Such benefits have been provided for years on a temporary basis and are due to expire Oct. 1, 2024, without congressional action.

Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., described the bill as “common sense.” Peters, a former lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserves and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced the legislation alongside Sens. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D.

“Service members and their families sacrifice immensely in service to our country,” Peters said in a statement. “The least that we can do is ensure they can remain together in their final resting place.”

The VA operates more than 100 national cemeteries across 42 states and Puerto Rico. Burial benefits for eligible spouses and children include perpetual care, inscription of the spouse’s or child’s name, and birth and death dates on the veteran’s headstone at no cost to the family.

The legislation, called the Keeping Military Families Together Act of 2023, has been endorsed by Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

“During unfortunate times when a spouse or child passes away before the service member, it is paramount for provisions to exist that allow for a choice of final rest together at a VA national cemetery,” said Quandrea Patterson, associate director of the VFW’s disability assistance and memorial affairs.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs for consideration.

DOD seeks help to speed visa process for Afghan interpreters

By J.P. Lawrence
Stars and Stripes
The Pentagon is asking for proposals that would improve a chronically slow visa process for Afghan interpreters and others who worked alongside American forces during the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

A Defense Department notice last week asked companies for ideas on how they could help verify past employment for Afghans seeking Special Immigrant Visas, many of whom worked for contractors that no longer exist or didn’t maintain adequate employment documentation.

The process has left applicants who face threats from the Taliban in limbo, military veterans and legal advocates have said.

The recent notice solicits companies willing to serve as contractors or subcontractors for the DOD for Afghan Special Immigrant Visa support team, or DAS-T.

The contract responsibilities would include creating a web portal where former employers can input applicants’ work histories, verifying information, identifying people with employment records and researching hard-to-verify cases.

While some veterans and advocates cautiously welcome the Pentaga- on’s notice, they also point out that the program has grappled with problems since its inception in 2021.

Challenges have included understaffing, delays and what they have said is a disconnect between the U.S. military and the State Department.

“I myself am a little bit skeptical but hopeful that (the DOD notice) was made to specifically address some of the shortcomings of the program,” said Kim Staffieri, co-founder of the Association of Wartime Allies, which assists Afghan SIV applicants.

The DOD-T program so far has processed 8,890 applicants, DOD spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gorman said Friday.

It was originally founded under the name Project Rabbit, after the military’s effort, said Gorman, adding that it has improved since its inception.

“The system required a specific kind of cleanness that just wasn’t present in so many of the cases that SIV would be really needed for,” said Rob Hargis, former chief operating officer of the contracting company IAP.

Hargis said he saw dozens of applications get rejected because of differences in how Afghans and Americans write dates.

When the U.S.-backed government in Kabul fell in the summer of 2021, Project Rabbit was an ad hoc effort without dedicated funding.

It was staffed by two DOD personnel who also had other duties, said a statement in June by Lt. Col. Rob Lo-rence, an Afghanistan spokesman for the Pentagon at the time.

The program was initially successful in matching thousands of applicants, internal documents from the time said. But Project Rabbit’s limitations soon became evident.

A program document obtained by the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project in February 2022 noted that Project Rabbit could only process 100 cases per week, compared with a backlog of 30,000.

A measure introduced in Congress last week, the Keep Military Families Together Act of 2023, has been endorsed by Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs for consideration.

Deploy: US officials have expressed repeated concern over Iran’s maritime activity

FROM PAGE 1 region.

The Air Force already has A-10 Thunderbolt IIs “Warthogs” in the region, and they have been patrolling since Iranian naval forces attempted July 5 to seize oil tankers near the waterway, even opening fire on one of the vessels. Iran backed off after the U.S. Navy intervened and the tankers continued through the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.

U.S. military officials have said they are becoming increasingly concerned about recent maritime activity from Iran and its possible cooperation with Russia and Syria.

Those three countries are aligned in the ongoing Syrian civil war between Syrian Democratic Forces and others fighting the government forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Last week, a Russian surveillance plane hovered over a U.S. base in southeastern Syria trying to collect intelligence, U.S. defense officials said, and a Russian fighter jet intercepted an American MQ-9 drone over Syria in an “unprofessional” manner. Roughly 900 U.S. service members are based in Syria to support operations against the Islamic State group and train partner forces.
By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Efforts to widen a pathway for non-citizens to join the U.S. military are being reignited with a new Senate bill aimed at easing recruitment troubles in the armed forces.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., is leading a renewed push to allow the Defense Department to enlist illegal immigrant citizens who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years, including those who entered the country unlawfully as children and are now protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program.

Residents who have temporary protected status and individuals who have an approved petition for an immigrant visa would also be eligible to serve in the military under the legislation as long as they meet the qualifications of the service branch.

“Allowing highly qualified, long-time residents of our great nation the opportunity to serve the country they’ve come to love is a commonsense way to give the services better access to talented potential recruits and improve our military’s readiness in the process,” said Duckworth, a former Army Black Hawk pilot and Iraq War veteran.

Non-citizens who want to join the military must have a permanent resident card, also known as a green card, and be able to speak, read and write fluently in English.

In 2008, the Defense Department began an initiative to expand recruitment to certain non-citizens with medical, foreign language and other in-demand skills but the controversial program, called the Military Accessions Via the National Interest, was suspended in 2017.

In the years since, nearly all the service branches have seen the gap between their recruitment goals and enlistment numbers widen. Only about 24% to 27% of young people ages 18 to 24 meet the requirements to serve and even fewer have the desire to enlist.

“Our military services are facing unprecedented challenges meeting their recruitment goals — in part due to a historically small pool of eligible recruits,” Duckworth said.

She said the bill, named the Enlist Act, would expand the pool of candidates and help the military fill its dwindling ranks. It would also give individuals who enlist under the proposed legislation an opportunity to become naturalized citizens, as non-citizen service members are now able to do through an existing process.

Previous legislative proposals to open the military to non-citizens and “Dreamers,” as young people impacted by DACA are often called, have failed to gain traction in Congress. But Duckworth said she is confident her latest effort, which also has been filed as an amendment to the Senate’s version of the annual Defense policy bill, could make progress.

She told reporters that she developed the bill with significant input from Republicans and has conferred with the leaders of Senate committees charged with overseeing the judiciary, homeland security and the armed services.

Air Force Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, the nominee to become the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed support for the measure during his recent confirmation hearing in the Senate.

“I do think about those who love this country, want to serve, want to raise their right hand and take an oath of office or an oath of enlistment,” he said. “If they want to serve and meet the qualifications, I think they all should be provided the opportunity.”

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Russian barrages damage landmark Orthodox cathedral

By Hanna Arhirova and Elise Morton

ODESA, Ukraine — Russia struck the Ukrainian Black Sea city of Odesa on Sunday, keeping up a barrage of attacks that has damaged critical port infrastructure in southern Ukraine in the past week. At least one person was killed and 22 others wounded in the early morning attack, officials said.

Four children were among those wounded in the blasts, which severely damaged 25 landmarks across the city, including the historic Transfiguration Cathedral.

Russia has been launching repeated attacks on Odesa, a key hub for exporting grain, since Moscow canceled a landmark grain deal on April 2 for exporting grain, since Moscow's claims on Crimea and an attempt to retake territory from Russia, Russian military officials reported. A 52-year-old woman was wounded four others on Saturday, Ukrainian officials said.

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After the fires were put out at the Orthodox cathedral, volunteers donned hard hats, shovels and brooms to begin removing rubble, combing through to salvage any artifacts — under the watchful gaze of the saints whose paintings remained intact. Local officials said the icon of the patroness of the city was retrieved from under the rubble.

“The destruction is enormous, half of the cathedral is now roofless,” said Archdeacon Andriy Palchuk, as firefighters brought damagings and valuables out of the building, its floor inundated with water used by firefighters to extinguish the blaze.

Palchuk said the damage was caused by a direct hit from a Russian missile that penetrated the building down to the basement. Two people inside at the time of the strike were wounded.

“But with God’s help, we will restore it,” he said, bursting into tears.

A woman who came to help with the cleanup said she loved the cathedral “for its tranquility and grace.”

“When you enter this church, you feel like you’re beyond the world,” said Liudmyla, who gave only her first name. “I have a feeling that God, to protect apartments, took this pain, this explosion upon himself.”

Anna Fetchenko, who came to Odesa for a volunteer meeting, also pitched in to clear the debris. “I wanted to go to the seaside, but last night was so frightening that I cried for the first time in 2023,” she said.

“This is our Ukrainian heritage, and now it’s taken away from us,” said Ivetta Palchuk, who came to help with the clean-up.

Later Sunday, Palchuk urged people to gather in front of the destroyed part of the cathedral for an outdoor service and to pray in front of a sacred icon that “miraculously survived.”

“We will pray that it protects us from the Russians,” he said.

The cathedral belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has been accused of links to Russia. The church has insisted that its loyalty to Ukraine, has denounced the Russian invasion from the start and even declared its independence from Moscow.

But Ukrainian security agencies have claimed that some in the Ukrainian church have maintained close ties with Moscow. They’ve raided numerous church holy sites and later posted photos of rubles, Russian passports and leaflets with messages from the Moscow patriarch as proof that some church officials have been loyal to Russia.

Odesa’s historic center was designated an endangered World Heritage Site by UNESCO earlier this year despite Russian opposition.

Regional Gov. Oleh Kiper said six residential buildings were destroyed by the strikes.

Some people became trapped in their apartments following the attack, which left rubble strewn in the street and partly blocking the road.

Svitlana Molcharova, 85, was rescued by emergency workers. But after she received first aid, she refused to leave her destroyed apartment.

“I will stay here,” she said to the worker who advised her to leave.

“I woke up when the ceiling started to fall on me. I rushed into the corridor,” said Ivan Kovalenko, a 19-year-old resident of the building. “That’s how I lost my home in Mykolayiv, and here, I lost my rented apartment.”

His unit revealed a partially collapsed ceiling and a balcony that came off the side of the building. All the windows were blown out.

Ukraine’s air force reported on the Telegram messaging app that Russia had launched 19 missiles in the Odesa region, including five high-precision winged Onyx missiles and four sea-to-shore Kalibr cruise missiles. It said Ukrainian air defenses shot down nine.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said Sunday that its forces attacked sites in Odesa “where terrorist acts against the Russian Federation were being prepared.”

In a later statement, the ministry denied that its attacks struck the Transfiguration Cathedral, claiming the destruction of the cathedral was likely due to “the fall of a Ukrainian anti-aircraft guided missile.”

People attend a Mass outside the Odesa Transfiguration Cathedral after it was heavily damaged following Russian missile attacks in Odesa, Ukraine, on Sunday.

Drone hits Crimean ammunition depot, kills civilians, journalists

By Felipe Dana

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian drone strike Saturday caused a massive explosion at an ammunition depot in Russia-annexed Crimea, forcing the evacuation of nearby homes in the latest attack since Moscow canceled a landmark grain deal amid Kyiv’s grinding efforts to retake its occupied territories.

The attack on the depot in central Crimea sent huge plumes of black smoke skyward and came five days after Ukraine struck a key bridge that links Russia to the peninsula illegally annexed in 2014 and after Moscow suspended a wartime deal that allowed Ukraine to safely export its grain through Crimea.

Sergey Aksyonov, the Kremlin-appointed head of Crimea, said in a Telegram post that there were no immediate reports of casualties from the strike, but that authorities were evacuating civilians within a 3-mile radius of the blast site.

Crimean military authorities took credit for the strike, saying it destroyed an oil depot and Russian military warehouses in Oktyabrskoe, the Kraiskoye district of Crimea, though without specifying which weapons it used.

A Crimean news channel posted videos Saturday showing plumes of smoke rising above rooftops and fields near Oktyabrskoe, a small settlement next to an oil tank farm.

In one video, a man can be heard saying the smoke and blast noises seemed to be coming from the direction of the airport.

The strike came during a week in which Ukraine attacked the Kerch Bridge and Russian, in what it described as “retribution” for the bridge attack, bombarded southern Ukrainian port cities, damaging critical infrastructure including grain and oil terminals.

Ukraine also attacked the bridge in October, when a truck bomb blew up two of its sections, which took months to repair. Moscow accused that assault as an act of terrorism and retaliated by bombarding Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure, targeting the country’s power grid over the winter.

The Kerch Bridge is a conspicuous symbol of Moscow’s claims on Crimea and an essential land link to the peninsula. The $3.6 billion, nearly 12-mile bridge is the longest in Europe and is crucial for Russia’s military operations in southern Ukraine.

Speaking at the Aspen security forum via video link, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called the bridge a legitimate target for Ukraine, noting Russia has used it to ferry military supplies and that it must be “neutralized.”

In a video address to the nation later Saturday, Zelensky said he had a phone call with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to discuss “our steps to unblock and ensure the stable operation of the grain corridor” following Russia’s withdrawal from the grain deal.

Zelensky said they agreed to hold a meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Council in the nearest days for consultations on the issue. “We can overcome the security crisis in the Black Sea,” he said.

As fierce fighting continues in Ukraine’s bid to retake territory from Russia, Russian shelling killed at least two civilians and wounded four others on Saturday, Ukrainian officials reported. A 52-year-old woman died in Kupiansk, a town in the north-eastern Kharkiv region, while another person was killed in a cross-border Russian attack on a village in the neighboring Sumy province.

Earlier Saturday, Ukrainian officials reported that Russian attacks on 11 regions across the country on Friday and overnight had killed at least eight civilians and wounded others.

A DW cameraman was injured Saturday by shrapnel from Russian cluster munitions that also killed one Ukrainian soldier and wounded several others near the town of Druzhkivka, in the eastern Donetsk region, the German broadcaster said in a statement. Cameraman Ievgen Shylko was part of a team sent to report from the Ukrainian army training ground about 14 miles away from the frontline, it said.

“We were filming the Ukrainian army during target practice when suddenly we heard several explosions,” DW correspondent Matthias Böllinger said. “We lay down, more explosions followed, we saw people were wounded. Later, the Ukrainian army confirmed that we had been fired at with cluster munitions.”

Cluster munitions, which open in the air and release multiple small bomblets, are banned by more than 100 countries because of their threat to civilians, but they have been used extensively by both sides in the war.
Scholarships help Afghan students find homes

By Jamie Stengle
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will establish a national monument honoring Emmett Till, the Black teenager from Chicago who was abducted, tortured and killed in 1955 after he was accused of whistling at a white woman in Mississippi, and his mother, a White House official said Saturday.

Biden will sign a proclamation Tuesday on the 72nd anniversary of Emmett Till’s life and death at age 14, the acquittal of his white killers and his mother’s activism. Till’s mother’s insistence on an open casket to show the world how her son had been brutalized and Jet’s magazine’s decision to publish photos of his mutilated body helped galvanize the Civil Rights Movement.

Biden’s decision also comes at a fraught time in the United States over matters concerning race. Conservative leaders are pushing back against the teaching of slavery and Black history in public schools, as well as the incorporation of diversity, equity and inclusion programs from college classrooms to corporate boardrooms.

On Friday, Vice President Kamala Harris criticized a revised Black history curriculum in Florida that includes teaching that enslaved people benefited from the skills they learned at the hands of the people who denied them freedom. The Florida Board of Education approved the curriculum to satisfy legislation signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican presidential candidate who has aquatic public schools of liberal indoctrination.

“How is it that anyone could suggest that in the midst of these atrocities that there was any benefit to being subjected to this level of dehumanization?” Harris asked in a speech delivered from Jacksonville, Fla.

DeSantis said he had no role in devising his state’s new education standards but defended the components on how enslaved people benefited.

“All of that is rooted in whatever is factual,” he said in response.

Mega Millions jackpot grows to $820 million

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Mega Millions has upped the ante by another $100 million.

The lack of a jackpot winner in the lottery game’s latest drawing on Friday night sent the top prize soaring to an estimated $820 million.

The numbers drawn late Friday were: 29, 40, 47, 50, 57 and gold Mega Ball 25. No tickets were sold hitting all those numbers for the estimated grand prize of $422 million.

The estimated $820 million in the next drawing on Tuesday night would only be distributed to a winner who chooses an annuity in paid over 29 years. Nearly all grand prize winners opt to take a cash payout, which for Tuesdays drawing is an estimated $442 million.

The potential jackpot is now the fifth largest in the history of the game.

By AMIE MAGNUSON-TENGLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Taliban swept back into power in Afghanistan, in the summer of 2021, Fahima Sultani and her fellow university students tried for days to get into the Kabul airport, only to be turned away by gun-wielding extremists.

“Education, just go back home,” she recalled one shouting.

Nearly two years later, Sultani, now 21, is safely in the U.S. and working toward her bachelor’s degree in data science at Arizona State University in Tempe on a scholarship. When she’s not going to a museum and going to a basketball game, she scoured the internet, reading about everything from U.S. history and Black history in public schools to corporate boardrooms.

“Women of Sultani’s generation, within minutes of the collapse of the government in Kabul, U.S. universities said, ‘We’ll take one;’ ‘We’ll take a student,’” said Susan Edgington, executive director and head of operations of ASU’s Global Academics Initiatives.

After making their way to universities and colleges across the U.S. over the last two years, many are nearing graduation and planning their futures.

Azez and three other Afghan students arrived at Northwestern University in Boston in January 2022 after first being taken to Qatar and then a military base in New Jersey. She graduated this spring with a bachelor’s degree in finance and accounting management and plans to start work on her master’s degree in finance this fall at Northeastern.

Just two days after the fall of Kabul, the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma announced it had created two scholarships for Afghans seeking refuge in the U.S. Later, Clemson University created five more scholarships that went to some of the young Afghans who had settled in the area. Five more Afghans have received scholarships to study there this fall.

Danielle Macdonald, an associate anthropology professor at the school, has organized a regular meetup among students and college-aged Afghans who have settled in the Tulsa area.

Around two dozen young people attend the events, where they’ve talked about everything from U.S. slang to how to find a job. Their outings have included visiting a museum and going to a basketball game.

“It’s become a really lovely community,” she said.

Sultani, like many others who left Afghanistan, often thinks about those who remained behind, including her sister, who had been studying at a university, but now must stay home.

“I can go to universities where millions of girls back in Afghanistan, they do not have this opportunity that I have,” Sultani said. “I can dress the way I want and millions of girls now in Afghanistan, they do not have this opportunity.”

Fahima Sultani does homework on campus at Arizona State University on April 7, in Tempe, Ariz.
Scientists say high heat shows warming world

By Seth Borenstein
Associated Press

The summer of 2023 is behaving like a broken record about broken records. Nearly every major climate-tracking organization proclaimed June the hottest June ever. Then July 4 became the globe’s hottest day, albeit unofficially, according to the University of Maine’s Climate Reanalyzer. It was quickly overtaken by July 5 and July 6. Next came the hottest week, a tad more official, stamped into the books by the World Meteorological Organization and the Japanese Meteorological Agency.

With a summer of extreme weather records dominating the news, meteorologists and scientists say records like these give a glimpse of the big picture: a warming planet caused by climate change. It’s a picture that comes in the vibrant reds and purples representing heat on daily weather maps online, in newspapers and on television.

Beyond the maps and the numbers are real harms that kill. More than 100 people have died in heat waves in the United States and India so far this summer. Records are crucial for people designing infrastructure and working in agriculture because they need to plan for the worst scenarios, said Russell Vose, climate analysis group director for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He also chairs a committee on national records.

In the past 30 days, nearly 5,000 heat and rainfall records have been broken or tied in the U.S. and more than 10,000 records set globally, according to NOAA. Texas cities and towns alone have set 369 daily high temperature records since June 1.

Since 2000, the U.S. has set about twice as many records for heat as those for cold.

“Records go back to the late 19th century and we can see that there has been a decade-on-decade increase in temperatures,” said Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, one of the agency’s climate records.

“What’s happening now is certainly increasing the chances that 2023 will be the warmest year on record. My calculations suggest that there’s, right now, a 50-50 chance.”

The larger the geographic area and the longer stretch of time during which records are set, the more likely the conditions represent climate change rather than daily weather. So the hottest global June is “extremely unlikely” to happen without climate change, as opposed to one city’s daily record, Texas state climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon said.

Still, some local specifics are striking: Death Valley has flirted with heat: 110 degrees Fahrenheit or more. It kept going, reaching a record stretch of nights that never fell below 90 Fahrenheit.

“Everybody’s drawn to extremes,” Vose said. “It’s like the Guinness Book of World Records. Human nature is just drawn to the extreme things out of curiosity.”

But the numbers can be flawed in what they portray.

The scientific community “doesn’t really have the vocabulary to communicate what it feels like,” said Stanford University climate scientist Chris Field, who co-chaired a groundbreaking United Nations report in 2012 warning of the dangers of extreme weather from climate change.

“I don’t think it captures the human sense, but it really does underscore that we live in a different world,” Field said of the records.

Think of the individual statistics as brush strokes in a painting of the world’s climate, Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald said. Don’t fixate on any specific number.

She and other climate scientists say long-term warming from burning coal, oil and natural gas is the chief cause of rising temperatures, along with occasional boosts from natural El Nino warmings across parts of the Pacific, like the planet is experiencing this year.

Weather won’t worsen each year and that should not become a common expectation, but it will intensify over the long run, she said.

The University of Michigan’s Richard Rood used to blog about climate records for Weather Underground, but in 2014 he got sick of continuously new extremes and stopped.

“I think we need to get away from that sort of record-setting sensationalism at some level and really be getting down to the hard work,” he said, addressing the need for people to adapt to a warmer world and get serious about slashing emissions causing hotter, more extreme weather.

Police narrow search for infant, after sister’s body found

Associated Press

WASHINGTON CROSSING, Pa. — Search teams in Pennsylvania were focusing on one underwater area Sunday as they tried to find a 9-month-old boy swept away in a flash flood, hours after authorities confirmed that the body of his 2-year-old sister was recovered from the Delaware River.

Upper Makefield Township police said in a Facebook post Sunday that although 2-year-old Matilda Sheils had been “brought home to her loving family” after her body was recovered Friday, officials are “devastated that we have not yet been able to reunite Conrad with his sister and family.”

Hundreds of people including search and rescue teams, marine units and police and fire personnel have scoured the area with the aid of K-9s, sonar, drones, boats, divers, heavy equipment, GPS mapping and air units,” police said, adding that they were now at the point that “our search will be dependent upon the conditions of the river.”

Authorities have centered their efforts on an area near where the creek that flooded enters the Delaware River, and plan to use divers there when possible and also put K-9 units on islands in the river as water levels recede. Agencies to the south will also be checking their sections along the river, police said.

“We have no words to describe how we are feeling except truly heartbroken. But the pain we feel is nowhere near what these families have been through,” the police statement said, vowing to the missing boy “we will never stop until we can bring you home.”

The girl’s body was found early Friday evening in the river near a Philadelphia wastewater treatment plant about 30 miles from where she was carried away, authorities said Friday night. The Philadelphia medical examiner on Saturday completed an investigation and “ruled that Matilda Sheils’ cause of death was drowning and the manner is accidental,” a spokesperson for the office said.

Four other people drowned in the suburb about 35 miles north of Philadelphia, according to the Bucks County Coroner’s office: Enzo Deipiero, 78, and Linda Deipiero, 74, of Newtown; Yuko Love, 64, of Newtown; and Susan Barnhart, 53, of Titusville, N.J.

Weekend shootings across Chicago leave at least 6 dead, 20 hurt

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Six people have died and at least 20 others were wounded in weekend shootings across Chicago.

A shooting early Saturday in the city’s North Lawndale neighborhood killed one man and wounded four other men, police said.

Three people, including two women, were shot Saturday night on Chicago’s South Side when gunfire rang out from an alley at a group of people. A man was found shot inside an overturned vehicle at about 1:25 a.m. Sunday. He later was pronounced dead at a hospital, police said.

A 16-year-old boy was pronounced dead at a hospital after being shot Friday night, also on the city’s South Side.

Since Friday, Chicago police responded to at least nine separate shooting scenes. Forty people were shot, four fatally, across Chicago over the July 14 weekend, according to WLS-TV.
By Scott Bauer
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin’s Supreme Court will flip from majority conservative to liberal control in August, and Democrats have high hopes the change will lead to the state’s abortion ban being overturned and its maps redrawn to weaken GOP control of the Legislature and congressional districts.

Democrats in the perennial battleground state focused on abortion to elect a liberal majority to the court for the first time in 15 years. The Democratic Party spent $8 million to tilt the court’s 4-3 conservative majority by one seat with the election of Janet Protasiewicz, who spoke in favor of abortion rights and against the Republican-drawn map in a campaign. Her April victory broke national spending records for a state Supreme Court race.

Still, there are no guarantees.

Republicans were angered when conservative candidates they backed in 2019 turned out to some times side with liberal justices.

While the court is widely expected to weigh in on abortion and redistricting, liberals are also talking about bringing new challenges to school choice, voter ID, the 12-year-old law that effectively ended collective bargaining for most public workers and other laws backed by Republicans.

“The court is an easy target to understand,” said Lotus Paul, president of the Milwaukee chapter of Moms for Liberty.

“The court’s decisions have swung to the right,” she said.

When you don’t know the extent of the battle you may have to fight, it’s concerning,” said attorney Rick Eisenberg, president of the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty. “It’s very concerning.”

Some issues could take years to reach the court, said liberal attorney Lester Pines, who, like Eisenberg, has argued numerous times before the state Supreme Court. Unlike under the conservative majority, Pines said the new liberal court will be unlikely to rule on cases before lower courts have heard them.

“They’re not going to do it,” Pines said.

There is already a pending case challenging Wisconsin’s pre-Civil War era abortion ban, and a circuit court judge ruled earlier this month that it can proceed, while also calling into question whether the law actually bans abortions.

The case is expected to reach the Supreme Court within months. Protasiewicz all but promised to overturn the ban by repeatedly speaking out for abortion rights, winning support from Planned Parenthood and others.

“When you’re a politician and you’re perceived by the voters as making a promise, and you don’t keep it, they get angry,” Eisenberg said.

There is no current redistricting lawsuit, but Democrats or their allies are expected to file a challenge this summer for new districts before the 2024 election.

The state Supreme Court upheld Republican-drawn maps in 2012. Those maps, widely regarded as among the most gerrymandered in the country, have helped Republicans increase their hold on the Legislature to near supermajority levels, even as Democrats have won statewide elections, including Tony Evers as governor in 2018 and 2022 and Joe Biden in 2020.

Protasiewicz declared those maps to be “rigged” and said during the campaign they should be given another look. Democrats also hope for new congressional maps improving their chances in the state’s two most competitive House districts, held by Republicans.

“What we want to see is maps that are fair and that represent the will of the people and the actual make up of their state,” Democratic strategist Melissa Baldauff said.

Then-Supreme Court candidate Janet Protasiewicz, right, holds hands with Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Rebecca Dallet, left, at a watch party in Milwaukee on April 4.

Conservative ‘mama bears’ among most coveted voters early on

By Sara Burnett
Associated Press

In many election cycles, there’s a snappy shorthand used to describe the type of voters who may help decide the winner. Think soccer moms or security moms. Even NASCAR dads.

And now, the “mama bears.”

These conservative mothers and grandmothers, who in recent years have organized for “parental rights,” including banning discussion of gender identity in schools, have been classified as extremists by the Southern Poverty Law Center. They have also been among the most coveted votes in the 2020 Republican presidential primary.

Donald Trump praised their work, saying organizations such as Moms for Liberty had taught the liberal left a lesson: “Don’t mess with America’s moms.”

Ron DeSantis said “woke” policies had “awakened” the most powerful political force in the country: mama bears.

His wife, Casey DeSantis, who launched “Mamas for DeSantis” in leadoff-voting Iowa, said moms and grandmas were the “game changers” before he ran for president.

“It’s one thing when your policies come after us as mammas,” Casey DeSantis said in a talk peppered with stories about raising kids in the governor’s mansion. “It’s another thing when your policies come after our children, and that’s when the claws come out.”

These so-called mama bears whom DeSantis and other Republicans are courting are conservative women living across the United States. They are largely white and belong to official groups such as Moms for Liberty, which says it has 120,000 members nationally, or smaller groups like No Left Turn in Education.

“The mama bear movement is a contemporary iteration of a trend we’ve seen before,” said Linda Beall, a professor at Point Loma Nazarene University and the author of a book about Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican vice presidential nominee.

 Palin was a game changer in many ways, Beall said. In the 2010 midterms, Palin used the phrase “mama grizzlies” to describe the conservative women she said would stop Democrats. It portrayed women as fiercely protective, defending a traditional way of life and motivated by their children.

“It’s hard to argue with,” Beall said. “It’s selflessly protecting your cubs, right?”

Opponents have said the warm-fuzzy image of a mama bear is a way to mask a cruel, extreme agenda that hurts children.

“Republicans have decided that this is, I think, their golden ticket for the primaries to rile up their base,” said Katie Paris, who runs Red, Wine and Blue, a network of women pushing back on GOP-backed policies such as the anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans efforts of Moms for Liberty.

In 2024, being a mama bear may also provide a space for conservative women who have not been politically active before or who may have sat out previous elections. If the mama bear narrative is persuasive, Beall said, there are a lot of women who could say, “That’s the spot for me.”

Missouri school board, now led by GOP, revokes anti-racism resolution

By Brian Branch-Carter
Associated Press

O’FALLON, Mo. — In the national reckoning that followed the police killing of George Floyd three years ago, about 2,000 protesters took to the streets in St. Louis suburban city of O’Fallon and other communities across the state.

Francis Howell School District to address racial discrimination. The school board responded with a resolution promising to do better.

Now the board, led by new conservative board members elected since last year, has revoked that anti-racism resolution and copies of it will be removed from school buildings.

The resolution passed in August 2020 “pledges to our learning community that we will speak firmly against any racism, discrimination and senseless violence against people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or ability.”

“We will promote racial healing, especially for our Black and brown students and families,” the resolution states. “We will no longer be silent.”

The board’s decision follows a trend that began with backlash against COVID-19 pandemic policies in places around the nation.

School board elections have become intense political battlegrounds, with political action groups successfully electing candidates promising to take action against teachings on race and sexuality, remove books deemed offensive and stop transgender-inclusive sports teams.

The Francis Howell district is among Missouri’s largest, with 17,000 students, about 87% of whom are white. The vote, which came during an often contentious meeting Thursday, rescinded resolutions 75 days after “a majority of current Board of Education members were not signatories to the resolution or did not otherwise vote to adopt the resolution.”

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“Opponents have said the warm-fuzzy image of a mama bear is a way to mask a cruel, extreme agenda that hurts children.

“Republicans have decided that this is, I think, their golden ticket for the primaries to rile up their base,” said Katie Paris, who runs Red, Wine and Blue, a network of women pushing back on GOP-backed policies such as the anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans efforts of Moms for Liberty.

In 2024, being a mama bear may also provide a space for conservative women who have not been politically active before or who may have sat out previous elections. If the mama bear narrative is persuasive, Beall said, there are a lot of women who could say, “That’s the spot for me.”
After 1 year, climate law charges energy tech

By ISABELLA O’MALLEY and MICHAEL PHILLIS

FRANKFORT, Ky. — On a recent day under the July sun, three men heaved solar panels onto the roof of a roofer, two-story home nestled near the Kentucky River, a few miles upstream from the state capitol where lawmakers have promoted coal for more than a century.

The U.S. climate law that passed one year ago offers a 30% discount off this installation via a tax credit, and that’s helping push clean energy even into places where coal still provides cheap electricity. For Heather Baggett’s family in Frankfort, it was a good deal.

“For us, it’s not politically motivated,” said Baggett. “It really came down to financially, it made sense.”

On Aug. 16, after the hottest June ever recorded and a scorching July, America’s long-sought response to climate change, the Inflation Reduction Act, turns 3 year old. In less than a year it has prompted investment in a massive buildout of battery and EV manufacturing across the states. Nearly 80 major clean energy manufacturing facilities have been announced, an investment equal to the previous seven years combined, according to the American Clean Power Association.

“It seems like every week there’s a new factory facility somewhere” being announced, said Jesse Jenkins, a professor at Princeton and leader of the REPEAT Project, which has been deeply involved in analysis of the law.

“We’ve been talking about bringing manufacturing jobs back to America for my entire life. We’re finally doing it, right? That’s pretty exciting,” he said.

The IRA is America’s most significant response to climate change, after decades of lobbying by oil, gas and coal interests, while carbon emissions climbed, creating a hotter, more dangerous world. It is designed to spur clean energy buildout on a scale that will bend the arc of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. It also aims to build domestic supply chains to reverse China’s and other nations’ early dominance of this vital sector.

One target of the law is cleaner transportation, the largest source of climate pollution for the U.S. Siemens, one of the biggest tech companies in the world, produces charging stations for EVs. Executive says this alignment of U.S. policy on climate is equal to the previous seven years combined, according to the American Clean Power Association.

But these changes, significant as they are, may just be the beginning, experts say.

“I think we’re about to see a quite a flood of investment in wind and solar-related manufacturing in the U.S.,” Jenkins said, adding that 2026 to 2028 is when the country will see the law’s full impact.

Other countries, some of them ahead of the U.S. in addressing climate change, have enacted their own further efforts to speed the changeover to clean energy.

Canada has announced a matching policy and Europe has its own measures to attract manufacturing, similar to the IRA.

“European and Japanese automakers are trying to think about how to change supply chains in order to try and compete,” said Neil Mehrotra, assistant vice president and policy advisor at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and contributor to a report about the U.S. law published by the Brookings Institution.

The European National Budget Office initially estimated the IRA’s tax credits would cost about $27 billion over a decade, but Brookings says businesses might take advantage of the credits far more aggressively and the federal government could pay out three or four times more.

The law is supposed to reduce the emissions of the U.S.—the country most responsible for greenhouse gases historically—by as much as 41% by 2030, according to a new analysis by Princeton researchers. That’s not enough to hit U.S. goals, but is a significant improvement.

But those crucial greenhouse gas cuts are partially at risk if the U.S. electric grid cannot grow enough to connect new wind and solar farms and handle new demands, like mass vehicle charging.

Despite the new investment in red states, not everyone likes it. Republicans recently proposed repealing major elements of the law.

And Frankfort resident Jessie Decker, whose neighbor has solar panels, said he wouldn’t consider them, and doesn’t think the federal government should be “wasting money” on dubious climate programs.

“Nor does the law mean climate-warming oil and gas are going away. ‘Frankly, we are going to be using fossil fuels for many decades to come,’ said Fred Eames, a regulatory attorney with the law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth.

Up on Baggett’s roof, Nicholas Hartnett, owner of Pure Power Solar, is pleased that business is up and homeowners are opening up to solar once they see how they can financially benefit.

“You have the environmental side, which handles the left, and then you have the option to use your own tax money that the government would have otherwise taken, which gets the right checked off,” he said.

Judge: Montana health clinic must pay nearly $6M over false asbestos claims

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BILLINGS, Mont. — A health clinic in a Montana town plagued by deadly asbestos contamination must pay the government almost $6 million in fines and damages after it submitted hundreds of false asbestos claims, a judge ruled.

The 337 false claims made patients eligible for Medicare and other benefits they didn’t have received. The federally funded clinic has been at the forefront of the medical response to deadly pollution from mining near Libby, Mont.

The judgment against the Center for Asbestos Related Disease clinic comes in a federal case filed by BNSF Railway in 2019 under the False Claims Act, which allows private parties to sue on the government’s behalf.

BNSF — which is itself a defendant in hundreds of asbestos-related lawsuits — also alleged the center submitted claims on behalf of patients without sufficient confirmation they had asbestos-related disease.

The clinic appeared to have a “reckless disregard for medical procedure and the legal requirements of government programs,” the judge wrote.

As instructed by the law, the judge tripled the $1 million in damages found by the jury, to almost $3.3 million, and imposed $2.6 million in additional penalties.

Energy Department proposes green water heater standards

THE WASHINGTON POST

The Biden administration proposed a rule Friday that would make new water heaters more efficient by setting standards that encourage companies to upgrade roughly 80-year-old technology, the biggest step yet in a series of appliance regulations aimed at reducing Americans’ utility costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Department of Energy said its proposal would save consumers $1.4 billion on their energy and water bills each year. To comply with the rule’s efficiency standards, which would take effect in 2029, new electric storage water heaters in the most common size would have to use heat pumps, and some gas-fired instantaneous heaters would have to use condensing technology. The change would reduce harmful carbon dioxide emissions by 501 million metric tons over a 30-year period, the department says. It would also save Americans $198 billion over the same time span.

Regulators and experts say the proposed rule is significant because water heating accounts for about 13% of U.S. consumers’ annual residential energy use and utility costs.

Heat pumps are more than twice as efficient as current technology.
Greece evacuates 19,000 as wildfire blazes on Rhodes

By Demetris Nellas
Associated Press
ATHENS, Greece — Some 19,000 people have been evacuated from the Greek island of Rhodes as wildfires continued burning for a sixth day on three fronts, Greek authorities said Sunday.

The Ministry of Climate Change and Civil Protection said it was “the largest evacuation from a wildfire in the country.”

Local police said that 16,000 people were evacuated by land and 3,000 by sea from 12 villages and several hotels. Six people were briefly hospitalized with respiratory problems and were later released. A person who fell and broke their leg during a hotel evacuation and a pregnant woman remain hospitalized, the latter in good condition, authorities say.

Package holiday companies TUI and Jet2 have canceled flights to Rhodes. Jet2 said it was canceling five planes to Rhodes empty to bring back customers on the island.

British tourist Kevin Evans was evacuated twice on Saturday with his wife and three young children — first from Kiotari to Gennadi, then as the fire approached the island’s capital in the northeast, he told Britain’s PA news agency.

“There were lots of people in Gennadi sent from the hotels — many in just swimsuits having been told to leave everything in the hotel,” he told PA. “As night fell, we could see the fire on the top of the hills in Kiotari. They said all the hotels were on fire.”

Rhodes travel agent Stelios Kotiadis confirmed to the Associated Press that the evacuation was hasty. “There was panic. ... The authorities were overwhelmed,” he said.

But, he said, the abandoned hotels “are in much better condition than reported in social media.... They will be ready to reopen very soon if Civil Protection gives the go-ahead.”

Fire Brigade spokesman Yannis Artopios said that early Sunday afternoon 266 firefighters and 49 engines were operating on the ground, together with volunteers. Ten firefighting planes, including two from France, two from Turkey and one from Croatia, are operating in the area, as well as eight helicopters.

Authorities have designated an unprecedentedly large part of the mainland, the whole eastern part of central and southern Greece, plus the islands of Evia and Rhodes as well as large swaths of the southwest, as Category 5, the highest for risk of fire outbreaks as of Sunday.

Evacuees sit inside a stadium following their evacuation during a forest fire on the island of Rhodes, Greece, on Sunday. Photographs by Thanasis Stavrakis, EURONEPSS/AP

Dozens missing in flash floods in Afghanistan

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD — Heavy flooding from seasonal rains in Afghanistan has killed at least 12 people and left dozens missing, according to a Taliban spokesman and local officials.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Sunday that about 40 people are missing after the flash flooding late Saturday night in the Jabrez district of Maidan Wardak province, west of Kabul.

He added that all relevant authorities have been ordered to provide necessary assistance to the people in the affected areas.

The provincial governor’s office in a statement said that hundreds of homes are either damaged or destroyed and the missing people are believed to be under the rubble of collapsed homes.

The statement also said that hundreds of acres of agricultural land were washed out and destroyed and the highway between the capital Kabul and the central Bamiyan province is also closed due to the floods.
Netanyahu gets pacemaker as key vote nears

By Tia Goldman

Associated Press

TEL AVIV — Israel—Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was recovering in a hospital on Sunday after an emergency heart procedure, while opposition to his government’s contentious judicial overhaul plan reached a fever pitch and unrest gripped the country.

Netanyahu’s doctors said Sunday the heart pacemaker implantation went smoothly and that Netanyahu, 73, felt fine. According to his office, he was expected to be discharged later in the day. But tensions were surging as lawmakers began a marathon debate over the first major piece of the overhaul, ahead of a vote in parliament enshrining it into law on Monday.

Mass protests continued, part of seven straight months of the most sustained and intense demonstrations the country has ever seen. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across Israel on Saturday night, while thousands marched into Jerusalem and camped out near the Knesset, or parliament, ahead of Monday’s vote.

Netanyahu’s sudden hospitalization added another dizzying twist to an already dramatic series of events that are certain to shape Israel’s future. It comes as the longest-serving Israeli leader, who is battling the domestic crisis of his lengthy tenure, which has shaken the economy, forged cracks in the country’s military and tested the delicate social fabric that holds the polarized country together.

Lawmakers began their debate despite the hospitalization. In a fiery speech launching the session, Simcha Rothman, a main driver of the overhaul, denounced the courts, saying they damaged Israel’s democratic fundamentals by arbitrarily striking down government decisions.

“This small clause is meant to restore democracy to the state of Israel,” Rothman said. “I call on Knesset members to approve the bill.”

Still, Netanyahu’s health woes disrupted his routine. The weekly Cabinet meeting scheduled for Sunday morning was postponed. Two upcoming overseas trips, to Cyprus and Turkey, were being rescheduled, his office said.

Netanyahu’s office said that he was sedated during the implantation and that a top deputy, Justice Minister Yariv Levin, stood in for him while he underwent the procedure. Levin, a close confidant of the prime minister, is the mastermind of the overhaul.

In a video from his hospital room on Sunday afternoon, Netanyahu, wearing a white dress shirt and dark blazer, said he felt fine. He said he was pushing forward with the legislation but also pursuing a compromise with his opponents.

Israeli media said last-ditch efforts were underway to find a solution out of the impasse. But it wasn’t clear whether those would bear fruit.

Lawmakers are set to vote on an overhaul measure that would limit the Supreme Court’s oversight powers over government decisions, making by elected officials. Critics say removing the standard, which is invoked infrequently, would allow the government to pass arbitrary decisions, make improper appointments or firings and open the door to corruption.

The overhaul also calls for other sweeping changes aimed at curbing the powers of the judiciary, from limiting the Supreme Court’s ability to challenge parliamentary decisions, to changing the way judges are selected.

Speaking in parliament, opposition leader Yair Lapid called for Netanyahu to resume compromise talks and lauded the protesters for standing up to the government.

The rally beneath the Knesset was dotted with silver-colored tents, many draped with Israeli flags. A large protest against the overhaul was expected later Sunday in Jerusalem, as was a counter-protest of government supporters in Tel Aviv.

Protesters, who come from a wide swath of Israeli society, see the overhaul as a power grab fueled by personal and political grievances of Netanyahu—who is on trial for corruption charges—and his partners who want to deepen Israel’s control of the occupied West Bank and perpetuate controversial draft exemptions for ultra-Orthodox men.

Netanyahu was rushed to the hospital in the middle of the night a week after being hospitalized for what doctors said was dehydration. They released him then after implanting a device to monitor his heart but he was hospitalized again Sunday because it showed anomalies, prompting the need for a pacemaker.

Voters could make Spain latest EU country to swing to the right

By Ciarán Giles

Associated Press

MADRID — Voters in Spain braved soaring summer temperatures to cast ballots in a general election Sunday that could make the country the latest European Union member to swing to the political right.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called the early election after his Spanish Socialist Workers Party and its far-left partner, Unidas Podemos, took a severe beating in local and regional elections in May. Sánchez has been Spain’s head of government since 2018.

Most opinion polls have put the right-wing Popular Party, which won the last vote, ahead of the Socialists but likely needing the support of the extreme right Vox party to form a government.

Such a coalition would return a far-right force to the Spanish government for the first time since the country transitioned to democracy in the late 1970s following the nearly 40-year rule of dictator Francisco Franco.

A PP-Vox government would mean another EU member has moved firmly to the right, a trend seen recently in Sweden, Finland and Italy. Countries such as Germany and France are concerned by what such a shift would portend for EU immigration and climate policies.

Spain’s two main leftist parties are pro-EU participation. On the right, the PP, led by Alberto Núñez Feijóo, is also in favor of the EU. Vox, headed by Santiago Abascal, is opposed to EU interference in Spain’s affairs. The election comes as Spain holds the EU’s rotating presidency. Sánchez had hoped to use the six-month term to showcase the advances his government had made. An election defeat for Sánchez could see the PP taking over the EU presidency reins.

Sánchez was one of the first to vote, casting his ballot in a polling station in Madrid.

Commenting later on the large number of foreign media covering the election, he said: “This means that what happens today is going to be very important not just for us but also for Europe and I think that should also make us reflect.”

“I don’t want to say I’m optimistic or not. I have good vibrations,” Sánchez added.

The Socialists and a new movement called Sumar that brings together 15 small leftist parties for the first time hope to pull off an upset victory. Sumar is led by second Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, the only woman among the top four candidates.

Díaz called for a first vote, recalling that the freedom to vote didn’t always exist in Spain.

“A lot is at risk,” said Díaz after voting. “For people of my generation, they are the most important elections.”

At stake is “waking up tomorrow with more rights, more democracy and more freedom.”

The Interior Ministry said voter turnout at 6:00 p.m. local time stood at 53%, compared with 56% at the same point in the country’s last national election, in November 2019.

The election was taking place at the height of summer, with millions of voters likely to be vacating away from their regular polling places. However, postal voting requests soared before Sunday.

Without any party expected to garner an absolute majority, the choice is basically between another leftist coalition and a partnership of the right and the far right.

Marchers who completed the last leg of a four-day, 45-mile trek from Tel Aviv camp outside Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, in Jerusalem, on Sunday. The protest, against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s plan to overhaul to country’s judiciary, came ahead of a critical vote on the legal changes.

Candidates wave Spanish flags during the closing campaign rally at Colon square in Madrid, on Friday. Voters in Spain went to the polls Sunday in an election that could make the country the latest European Union member swing to the populist right.

Spanish citizens cast their ballots in general elections Sunday. If the center-left Socialists and the far-left Unidas Podemos can form a coalition, they could become the latest EU country to vote back to the right.
Mom charged with trying to hire hitman to kill son

MIAMI — An 18-year-old Miami woman is accused of trying to hire a hitman to kill her 3-year-old son.

The woman appeared before a Miami-Dade County judge Wednesday following her arrest on charges of solicitation of murder and unlawful use of a communication device.

The woman visited a parody hit-for-hire website — intended to assist law enforcement — in an attempt to have the boy “taken away, far, far, far away and possibly be killed but ASAP,” Miami-Dade police said in a report. She said it was “precious to me,” the report said.

Police said she provided an address where the boy lives with his grandmother, a recent photo of him and her phone number when she made contact with the website.

A man who runs the website contacted Miami-Dade police and detectives tracked down the woman on Tuesday, using the IP address and phone number provided.

Souvenir seekers haunt ‘Beetlejuice II’ filming

EAST CORINTH — Souvenir hunters are haunting the “Beetlejuice II” movie set in Vermont.

State police are investigating two thefts, one of a large lamp post topped with a distinctive pumpkin decoration and the other a 150-pound abstract art piece taken from the vicinity of a cemetery.

Someone bundled up the lamp post, covered it with tarp and fled from the vicinity of a cemetery. The sequel to the 1988 movie is being filmed in East Corinth, near the New Hampshire border.

Wife of suspect in serial killings files for divorce

MASSAPEQUA PARK — The wife of Rex Heuermann, charged in the deaths of three women whose remains were found along a Long Island beach roadway, filed for divorce Wednesday, her attorney said.

Asa Ellerup filed the complaint in Suffolk County Supreme Court. Her attorney, Robert Macedonio, declined any additional comment.

Meanwhile, authorities spent another day at the Massapequa Park home where the couple had lived, continuing their search of the premises.

Heuermann, an architect, was charged this month with murdering the three women, and is a suspect in a fourth death, a prosecutor said.

He has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody under suicide watch.

Alcohol sales now allowed at college sporting events

MI LANSING, Mich. — A new state law allows alcoholic drinks to be sold at college sporting events in Michigan.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed legislation allowing liquor licenses to be issued to sporting venues at public universities, including Michigan State in East Lansing and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

“Authorizing the legal sale of alcohol at sporting events will bring us on equal footing with other universities, help reduce the likelihood of binge drinking before games, and bring in a heck of a lot more revenue that we can use to improve the student experience,” Whitmer said in a statement.

Whitmer also signed legislation making liquor-to-go permanent, which is expected to generate revenue for restaurants and small businesses.

Pastor gets 18-month prison sentence for theft

CONCORD — A New Hampshire executive pastor has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for stealing about $3,000 from his church’s funds to pay off gambling debts and make purchases.

Gregory Neal, of Barrington, 45, was sentenced in federal court Wednesday and ordered to pay back the Journey Baptist Church and the insurance company that covered a portion of the losses.

He pleaded guilty in April to one count of wire fraud.

“A man who abused his position of trust — as a leader of his church — and stole from his congregation to support his gambling habit has now been brought to justice,” U.S. Attorney Jane Young said in a statement.

Prosecutors said that between January 2017 and March 2020, Neal made unauthorized withdrawals of the church’s funds to pay off his debts and made unauthorized purchases with church credit cards.

His lawyer asked for a sentence of five years of probation to allow Neal to continue running his carpentry business so he can pay back the church and support his family.

Video shows judge on phone in murder trial

OK CHANDLER — A new judge in Oklahoma is facing scrutiny after courtroom video showed her scrolling through social media and texting on her cellphone throughout the murder trial for a man accused in the fatal beating of a 2-year-old, a newspaper reported.

Security video obtained by The Oklahoman shows Lincoln County District Judge Traci Soderstrom texting or messaging for minutes at a time during jury selection, opening statements and testimony in the trial for a man in the death of his girlfriend’s son. At one point, Soderstrom searched for a GIF, an animated image.

Soderstrom, 50, can also be seen checking Facebook during the trial, which began last month in Chandler, about 45 miles north-northeast of Oklahoma City, the newspaper reported.

Soderstrom was sworn in on Jan. 9 after being elected in November. Her four-year term expires in January 2027.

Soderstrom declined to comment Thursday because the verdict could still be appealed, saying judges are prohibited from discussing pending cases.

Sea otter harassing surfers builds fan club

ORLANDO — Librarians who feared fines for hosting drag queen story hour events and Pride parade organizers who worried about citations for including drag performers can breathe a bit easier now that a judge has ruled that his injunction blocking Florida’s anti-drag law extends to all Florida venues, an attorney who is helping challenge the law said Thursday.

A pair of orders that U.S. District Judge Gregory Presnell issued in the past month makes clear that drag performances in themselves are not lewd or lascivious behavior, said Gary Israel, one of the attorneys for an Orlando restaurant that filed a lawsuit challenging the new Florida law championed by Gov. Ron DeSantis as unconstitutional.

The state has a very weak hand in this litigation,” Israel said. “It is no accident that this freedom is enshrined in the First Amendment.”

From The Associated Press
China is serious about winning the new space race

BY DAVID IGNATIUS
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON

Fully the potential threats that China poses to the United States, the most worrisome for me is future domination of space. Quietly but persistently, the Chinese are developing an arsenal of weapons that could change the nature of warfare in the future. The recent photographs taken by the James Webb Space Telescope is a reminder of the majesty and transcendence of space. But, unfortunately, there is abundant evidence of aggressive Chinese military moves on this frontier.

The Chinese tested the first anti-satellite weapon in 2007, which left a field of thousands of pieces of debris that still endanger other satellites. Since then, they have tested satellites that can catch other objects and carry them to a distant orbit known as the “graveyard zone.” They have also shown that they can capture objects in orbit and have talked about building bases on the moon. Their researchers have described ways to use satellites to control cyberattacks in space. And then there is the acupuncture of access to space – the point is: Beijing recognizes that space is the ultimate “high ground” and wants to control it.

The United States, the space pioneer, was slow to recognize China’s ambitions. NASA controlled civilian space flight, but when the moonshots ended and the Space Shuttle retired, the U.S. had no effective space policy. The Air Force was responsible for all military aspects of space, but its attention was closer to the “low Earth orbit” of commercial communications and surveillance networks in low-Earth orbit. The Pentagon is in charge of that, but it has no more than 130 of these companies, Plumb said. China can’t match this explosion of private entrepreneurial effort.

As an observer, the Pentagon published a detailed “space strategic review” discussing the Chinese threat and what to do about it. Unfortunately, like nearly everything else that emanates from the White House on space, it was a mishmash of government systems and commercial ventures that defies the orthodoxies of either party. The Pentagon, for example, seemed to want to fire some of its own satellites, though there’d be no way to do that.

I agree with the critics of No Labels that we should be prepared for a kind of cyberwar in space that would jam or disable satellites. That was the gist of Pentagon documents allegedly leaked by Arman Jak Teixeira that were published by The Washington Post. One document said China could use cyberattacks “to seize control of a satellite, rendering it ineffective to support communications, weapons, or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems.”

I wish these officials would heed the 2021 advice of Gen. John Hyten, at the time vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Deterrence does not happen in the classified world.” The closest any Pentagon official has come to confirming that the United States is building weapons to deter China in space was Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall’s comment in March explaining his plans to spend money for “offensive capabilities” in fiscal 2024. “There are hard kill and soft kill capabilities, if you will, that’s what we’re funding. But I’m not sure I can go very far beyond that.”

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Chinese journalists have reported some of Beijing’s cyber plans. A researcher at a People’s Liberation Army-supported think tank wrote that the United States should consider a Disneyfication of soft and hard kill methods should be adopted to make some of Starlink’s satellites lose their functions and destroy the constellation’s “operating system,” according to a May 25, 2022 article in The South China Morning Post. China could use “high-power microwave weapons” against the Starlink satellites, argued a March 30 article by that paper’s Beijing correspondent.

As thousands of satellites maneuver in this newly contested domain, there’s an obvious need to establish norms and standards of conduct. I asked Uzo-Okojo from the White House whether there had been any discussion with China about such rules of the road. “Not particularly,” she said. That has to change. Otherwise, the U.S. could find itself surrendering its once-formidable lead on the final frontier.

How No Labels is ruining the label of ‘independent’

BY BATT BAI
The Washington Post

Among my Democratic friends, just the mention of No Labels elicits a Yosemite Sam, steaming-comring-from-the-ear kind of rage. They see the bipartisanship, which is talking about drafting a third-party presidential candidate, as a stalking horse for Republicans looking to steal votes from President Joe Biden.

As a committed independent, politically and temperamentally, I have a different problem with No Labels. I believe they have a bunch of mushy, meet-in-the-middle policies, it advances a dated and uninspiring idea of what a dissenting political movement should be.

No Labels unveiled its agenda in recent days, with two centrists essentially exiled by their own parties — West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a Democrat, and former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, a Republican — acting as spokesmen. Billed as a “blueprint for where the split was just a threat. The wisdom came in wisdom: That’s a label thoughtful independents can do without. If I were laying out such an agenda, for instance, I’d embrace a more urgent and centralized response to climate change, and I’d argue that the Second Amendment doesn’t mean testing (which is, after all, more pro­linchless than the Second Amendment). The idea of a political left. As my Washington Post colleague Paul Waldman put it, declaring himself to be anti-common-sense: “When you hear someone make an appeal to common sense, as countless politicians in both parties do, there is a good chance they’re leading you down a path in which reality is denied and solutions have little or nothing behind them.”

It is my hope, the fact of No Labels’ failure is not that it’s trying to find a reform agenda that defies the orthodoxies of either party. The problem is in assuming that such an agenda can be found. I believe centrists are the problem with No Labels, neither did Dickinson, the head of Space Command. I wish these officials would heed the 2021 advice of Gen. John Hyten, at the time vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Deterrence does not happen in the classified world.”
**ACROSS**
1 Shred
4 Surgery reminders
9 Watch chain
12 Green prefix
13 Trig ratio
14 Commotion
15 Good poker hand
17 Roulette bet
18 Moray, for one
19 Crosses a threshold
21 Malign
24 TV/radio host John
25 Simile part
26 Goof up
28 Volleyball putaway
31 Hardly hirsute
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36 Writer Sontag
38 Showbiz job
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41 Ancient Dead Sea land
43 Untie
45 Odorless gas
47 Wall St. debut
48 Piccadilly privy
49 “This Kiss” singer
54 Tourist’s aid
55 “Glee” guitarist
56 Itinerary word
57 Praise in verse
58 Turkic language
59 “Delicious!”

**DOWN**
1 Game official
2 Hosp. area
3 D.C. figure
4 Plot
5 Picnic containers
6 Tempe sch.
7 Bowling lane button
8 Act parts
9 Bus ticket increases
10 Baltic feeder
11 Physiques
16 Meadow
20 Recipe amts.
21 Uses finger paint, say
22 Isaac’s eldest
23 Misplaced optimism
27 Floor cover
29 Flying toy
30 Biblical garden
31 Hardly hirsute
32 Baby’s father
33 Bottom line
35 Lose traction
36 Writer Sontag
38 Showbiz job
39 Chipmunk’s kin
40 Paris summer
41 Ancient Dead Sea land
43 Untie
45 Odorless gas
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48 Piccadilly privy
49 “This Kiss” singer
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57 Praise in verse
58 Turkic language
59 “Delicious!”

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**CRYPTOQUIP**

HA J VX JK V J V Q A X Q E Y C X Q N
RCXQ BK U LES VQY HU B R K LS
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Y H U T H U T T K V V - A L K K Z?  
Saturday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU TURNEI PERNAMENTLY STUBBORN STARTING RIGHT NOW WHAT ARE YOU? FROM THIS POINT “FROWARD.”

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: J equals P
**‘Best in the business’**

Tony Bennett, stylist singer of American musical standards, dies at 96

By CHARLES J. GANS
Associated Press

Tony Bennett, the eminent and timeless stylist whose devotion to classic American songs and knack for creating new standards such as “I Left My Heart In San Francisco” graced a decadeslong career that brought him admirers from Frank Sinatra to Lady Gaga, died Friday. He was 96, just two weeks short of his birthday.

Publicist Sylvia Weiner confirmed Bennett’s death to The Associated Press, saying he died in his hometown of New York. There was no specific cause, but Bennett had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in 2016.

The last of the great salon singers of the mid-20th century, Bennett often said his lifelong ambition was to create “a hit catalog rather than hit records.” He released more than 70 albums, bringing him 19 competitive Grammys—all but two after he reached his 60s—and enjoyed deep and lasting affection from fans and fellow artists.

Bennett didn’t tell his own story when performing; he let the music speak instead—the Gershwins and Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern. Unlike his friend and mentor Sinatra, he would interpret a song rather than embody it. If his singing and public life had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, Bennett patiently encouraged the insecure young singer through a performance of “Body and Soul.”

His final album, the 2021 release “Love For Sale,” featured duets with Lady Gaga on the title track, “Night and Day” and other Porter songs.

For Bennett, one of the few performers to move easily between pop and jazz, the collaborations were part of his crusade to expose new audiences to the Great American Songbook.

“Tony’s music has given the world such great music,” Bennett said in a 2015 interview with Downbeat Magazine. “Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern. Those songs will never die.”

Ironically, his most famous contribution came through two unscrupulous, George Cory and Douglass Cross, who in the early 60s provided Bennett with his signature song at a time his career was in a lull. They gave Bennett’s musical director, pianist Ralph Sharon, some sheet music that he thought it would be good material for San Francisco,” Bennett said. “We were rehearsing and the bartender in the club in Little Rock, Ark., said, ‘If you record that song, I’m going to be the first to buy it.’”

Released in 1962 as the B-side of the single “Once Upon a Time,” the reflective ballad became a grassroots phenomenon, staying on the charts for more than two years and earning Bennett his first two Grammys, including record of the year.

By his early 40s, he was seemingly out of fashion. But after turning 60, an age when even the most popular artists often settle for just pleasing their older fans, Bennett and his son and manager, Danny, found creative ways to market the singer to the MTV Generation. He made guest appearances on “Late Night with David Letterman” and “The Tonight Show,” and became a celebrity guest artist on “The Simpsons.”

“Tony Bennett: MTV Unplugged,” which won two Grammys, including album of the year, Bennett, born Anthony Dominick Benedetto in the New York City borough of Queens, studied commercial art in high school, but had to drop out to help support his family. He was a tenor who sang like a baritone, drifters run most nights.

Viewers will get to see rare sharks off the coast of South Africa, examine deadly shark attacks off the漫长 benchmark beaches of Egypt’s Red Sea and investigate whether sharks in Florida waters are getting their fill on cocaine. The week kicked off with “Belly of the Beast: Feeding Frenzy,” in which researchers tried to reproduce a great white shark feeding frenzy by building a life-sized dead whale carcass decoy.

They put veteran “Shark Week” biologist Dr. Austin Gallagher and cameras inside the cavity—along with 200 pounds of chum and 50 gallons of blood—to try to make dozens of sharks go mad.

“There are a few moments during the show where I was pretty freaked out,” Gallagher said. “It’s a healthy respect there and I don’t want that ever to go away because I know what these animals are capable of.”

“Cocaine Sharks,” which premieres Wednesday, examines whether the occasional bricks of cocaine abandoned by drug smugglers affect shark behavior. Momoa watched “Shark Week” growing up, and says he couldn’t wait to meet the scientists behind the program.

“I’m going to be every other fan,” he said in an interview before the Hollywood strike. “This is my life’s passion.”

Momoa hosts Discovery’s ‘Shark Week’

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Discovery Channel has landed the perfect host this year for “Shark Week,” none other than a huge fan of all ocean creatures—Aquaman.

Jason Momoa, who in real life dreamed of a career as a marine biologist before finding success in Hollywood, is going back to his roots to celebrate all things shark.

“My heart is in the ocean,” he said. Momoa said from Tahiti, moments before taking a trip to swim with some of the apex predators. “Don’t call Shark Week is a “hit catalog rather than hit records.”

Momoa will be the week’s recurring master of ceremonies, dipping in and out of the channel’s roughly 20 new hours of programs that started Sunday. Episode encores run most nights.

Viewers will get to see rare sharks off the coast of South Africa, examine deadly shark attacks off the posh beaches of Egypt’s Red Sea and investigate whether sharks in Florida waters are getting their fill on cocaine.

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O’Hearn rallies Orioles over Rays

Associated Press
ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Ryan O’Hearn had a pinch-hit RBI single in the ninth inning and the AL-East-leading Baltimore Orioles rebounded after blowing a five-run lead to beat the Tampa Bay Rays for the second time in three days, 6-5 on Saturday.

The Orioles, who won 11 of 14, took one game lead over the second-place Rays. Baltimore started July 6% games behind Tampa Bay, which dropped to an AL-worst 1-13 in July.

Pinch-hitter Adam Frazier had a ninth-inning leadoff single off Pete Fairbanks (0-4), went to second on James McCann’s sacrifice bunt on a high-and-tight pitch and scored on O’Hearn’s liner to right.

“When we talked about McCann’s bunt?” O’Hearn said. “That should be circulating on the internet because that is unbelievable that he got that bat back on line. It’s the loudest I’ve ever seen on a bunt.”

O’Hearn’s liner to right. Fairbanks (0-4), went to second on Fairbanks and visiting Pittsburgh ended a nine-game losing streak.

The Baltimore Orioles’ Ryan O’Hearn watches the ball after hitting an RBI single against the Tampa Bay Rays during the ninth inning Saturday in St. Petersburg, Fla. The Orioles won 6-5.

The visiting Dodgers, who won their second game in three days, 6-5 on Saturday.

The Baltimore Orioles’ Ryan O’Hearn watches the ball after hitting an RBI single against the Tampa Bay Rays during the ninth inning Saturday in St. Petersburg, Fla. The Orioles won 6-5.
Colin Morikawa, U.S. 69-64-68-68—269 -2
Patrick Cantlay, U.S. 69-70-65-65—279 +3
Cameron Smith, Australia 69-67-67-68—271 -7
Rory McIlroy, Northern Ireland 70-69-65-68—272 -7
J. H.克拉克森, 法国 71-68-70-66—275 +3
Emiliano Grillo, Argentina 66-74-70-66—276 +3
Sungjae Im, South Korea 70-74-67-66—277 +3
Jon Rahm, Spain 69-67-68-66—270 -5
J. D. ORRISON /AP

Decision: Ohtani says his focus is on helping Angels make playoffs

"I’ve never really had any sit-down talks like that," Ohtani said when asked if he had considered short-circuiting this whole drama by committing to the Angels before free agency. "I see Perry like once a week in the clubhouse, and we’re never really had conversations about that."

Strong arguments can be made on both sides of this debate, and the sheer volume of opinions on the topic has become noticeable even to Ohtani, whose ascetic lifestyle usually makes it a challenge to discuss himself at his sharpest Friday night, but he earned his eighth mound win of the year despite allowing four homers by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"We’re in midseason, obviously, and I’m trying to focus on the season, and block everything else out," Ohtani said. "I think we’re in a decent spot to make a playoff run, which is all I’m really focused on at this moment."
Fans flock to camp to get first look at Rodgers

By Dennis Waszak Jr.
Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — The loud “Aaron! Rodgers!” chants started almost as soon as the New York Jets quarterback stepped on the practice field.

The cheers turned near deafening Saturday when Rodgers acknowledged the fans with a quick wave.

“That’s my QB! Let’s go!” someone shouted.

“Sure!” said another.

The Jets’ third practice of training camp marked the first session open to the public — giving about 2,000 ecstatic fans their first in-person glimpse of their team’s new quarterback.

“It’s exciting, you feel the energy from the fans,” said Claudia Juarez, a 43-year-old from the New York City borough of Queens. “It’s like, you wake up and you’re like, ‘Hello, Mr. Rodgers!’ Good morning! And everybody’s like, ‘Good morning! It’s hype, it’s exciting and it’s a lot of optimism that has been lacking in the past, Rodgers put on a show with a terrific practice that included some precise passing and a few jaw-dropping throws.

“I’m just happy we have a competitive team,” said Phil DeMee, a 30-year-old from the New York City borough of Staten Island. “I’m not looking for a Super Bowl or bust. I’m hoping for a playoff win. A home playoff win would be awesome.”

New York acquired Rodgers from Green Bay in April, and the four-time NFL MVP wants to help end the league’s longest playoff drought at 12 years.

“Man, I’m pumped up,” said Greg Muscaro, a 30-year-old fan and eight-year-season ticket holder from Staten Island. “We got this. We’re going all the way this year. Rodgers, Sauce (Gardner), Garrett (Wilson) — the boys are gonna cook. We’re in.”

The Jets have plenty of work to do before they can even think about the postseason. But this is the type of optimism having a quarterback with the credentials of Rodgers, even at 39, breeds among a fan base that’s hungry for a winner.

“I’m hoping we turn over a new leaf,” said Ira Max, a 72-year-old Jets season ticket holder for 45 years. “I’m hoping we tear it up and have an awesome season.”

“INTERMI"NTLY, anyway. The wait was officially over Saturday.

From the you-can’t-make-this-up department: “Worth it,” Beckham said earlier in the week.

“IT’S SUCH A MOMENT FOR THIS COUNTRY,” Beckham said. “IT’S SUCH A MOMENT FOR THE LEAGUE. AND IT’S A VERY PROUD MOMENT FOR ME.”

Nobody even left their seats when the halftime whistle blew. The reason: Messi was on the field. He warmed up for about 5 minutes during intermission with the other reserves before they all left for the locker room.

That’s when the fans, finally, could put their phones down and take a breath. Temporarily, anyway. The wait was officially over Saturday.

“When was Messi coming in?” he asked. “He warmed up while the second half was getting under way, jogging around behind the end line near Miami’s supporter section, and fans roared in delight when he gave them a wave.

And about eight minutes into the second half, the answer: It was Messi time.

Messi checked in early in the second half with Inter Miami leading 1-0. He hogged the spotlight as replacing midfielder Benjamin Cremaschi, then trotted onto the field.

He made it sound so easy. Made it look so effortless.

“IT’S A MOVIE THAT WE HAVE SEEN BEFORE,” James said.

“It’s common for him, you know,” Martino said. “It looks absolutely normal, but it’s like, ‘Hello, Mr. Rodgers!’ Good morning! It’s hype, it’s exciting and it’s a lot of optimism that has been lacking in the past, Rodgers put on a show with a terrific practice that included some precise passing and a few jaw-dropping throws.”

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Jamaica holds France to surprising 0-0 draw

By James Robson

SYDNEY — Hervé Renard knows all about World Cup shocks. He also knows an early setback can be overcome in international soccer.

With that in mind, the France coach was not unduly concerned by his team’s 0-0 draw with Jamaica on Sunday, which was one of the biggest surprises so far at the Women’s World Cup.

Renard led Saudi Arabia to a famous win against Argentina at the men’s World Cup in Qatar last year, before Lionel Messi’s team rebounded and went on to lift the trophy for their country.

“I’ve already won competitions after drawing my first two games,” Renard said. “Let’s talk about the World Cup 2022. I don’t think that we should be getting ahead of ourselves.

“I’ve already won competitions after drawing my first two games,” Renard said. “Let’s talk about the World Cup 2022. I don’t think that we should be getting ahead of ourselves.

“We are going to get out of the starting blocks.”


during the first half of the Group E match against Portugal in Dunedin, New Zealand, on Sunday.

Stefanie van der Gragt scored on a corner with a minute left in regulation time.

The meeting with the Netherlands, ranked No. 9 in the world, marked Portugal’s first-ever tournament appearance.

Though most of the crowd appeared to be Dutch fans, a small but vocal group of Portuguese supporters with flags and team apparel banged on drums throughout the game, the beat echoing off the stands, ranked No. 9 in the world, during a Group F match on Sunday.

The Dutch defender gathered herself as teammate Sherida Spitse lofted a corner kick her way, then headed the ball across the box, but vocal group of Portuguese supporters with flags and team apparel banged on drums throughout the game, the beat echoing off the stands, ranked No. 9 in the world, during a Group F match on Sunday.

The Dutch victory raises the stakes for their upcoming match with the two-time defending world champion Americans, who beat Netherlands 2-0 in that 2019 final. A winner in that match will gain control of Group E and could very well wrap up a berth in the knockout stage.

Sweden produced a grab opening performance on a gloomy night of mist and rain in Wellington, New Zealand, but managed to fend off plucky South Africa.

South Africa caught Sweden off guard when Hidalg Maga scored in the 48th minute to take a 1-0 lead.

Sweden dominated a scoreless first half with 71% of possession and eight corners.

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The Netherlands’ Stefanie Van der Gragt, left, celebrates with teammates after her goal was confirmed during the first half of the Group E match against Portugal in Dunedin, New Zealand, on Sunday.

A毫米SANDRA TANANTHONG/AP

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The Dutch victory raises the stakes for their upcoming match with the two-time defending world champion Americans, who beat Netherlands 2-0 in that 2019 final. A winner in that match will gain control of Group E and could very well wrap up a berth in the knockout stage.

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Big decision

Ohtani’s future still uncertain as Angels try to figure out if they should trade him

By Greg Beacham
Associated Press

A ngels fans rose and roared when Shohei Ohtani walked toward the dugout after a tumultuous Friday night on the mound. The Big A echoed with “M-V-P!” chants for the unique talent who has revolutionized baseball over the last six seasons in Orange County.

The chants and cheers had a melancholy note, however. Most of those fans were aware this might be their final chance to thank him.

Ohtani’s future has been the talk of baseball all year long, and the forecast isn’t much clearer as the Los Angeles Angels reach the last 10 days before the MLB trade deadline. Ohtani is in the final year of his contract before unrestricted free agency, and the Angels must decide whether to trade their generational superstar for a probable mother lode or risk the possibility of losing him for practically nothing in the winter.

Every serious Angels fan understands the stakes of the next several days — and of the next few months, if the Halos don’t trade Ohtani at the deadline. Ohtani also understands the nature of the current spotlight on him, but the major league home runs leader claimed he isn’t thinking about a potential farewell to his only major league team.

“That did not cross my mind at all,” Ohtani said through his translator Friday of the possibility he had just made his last home mound appearance for the Angels, who will be on the road next week.

“Obviously, I’m a part of the Angels at this moment, and I feel like we’re in a decent spot to make a playoff run, so I just try not to really think about that.”

Ohtani said he has no assurances he won’t be traded, and he didn’t acknowledge any discussions about a contract extension. His representatives have previously said he’s likely to explore free agency, increasing the stakes of the Angels’ decision.

It seems Ohtani, his teammates and their fans are all waiting on a move — or no move at all — by Angels owner Arte Moreno and general manager Perry Minasian.

SEE DECISION ON PAGE 21

At 50-48 and four games out of the final AL wild-card spot, the Angels don’t have an easy decision when it comes to trading two-way star Shohei Ohtani.

Ashley Landis/AP