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CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

Free to Deployed Areas



ANTHONY FORD/U.S. Army

Soldiers assigned to 2nd Armored Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division run toward a defensive position during an exercise at Bemowo Piskie Training Area in Poland on March 11.

‘Transforming in contact’

US general: Lessons from Ukraine war include faster adaptation for troops

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Fake command posts, electromagnetic decoys and fast-moving mission control hubs are some of the ways the war in Ukraine has transformed U.S. Army training in Europe, according to a top American general in the wake of a rotation on NATO’s eastern flank.

The new focus is on getting troops to adapt faster to a more complex battlefield, the 3rd Infantry Division’s Maj. Gen. Christopher Norrie said in an Army statement Wednesday.

His team wrapped up a nine-month deployment this spring overseeing Army units across Poland and the Baltics.



Norrie

The Army’s approach to training has evolved over the past couple of years with an emphasis on so-called “transforming in contact,” which involves drawing lessons learned by troops in the field that are rapidly tested by the larger Army.

“We’re observing the world, and then we’re transforming in contact,” Norrie said.

In the past, ensuring the mobility of a brigade command post wasn’t a major priority for the Army, which during two decades of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan didn’t face adversa-

ries with long-range strike capabilities.

However, the war in Ukraine and the widespread use of drones and precision strikes have revealed how exposed command posts can become.

During the 3rd Infantry Division’s deployment, which concluded in May, soldiers coordinated with the U.S. European Command’s Security Assistance Group — Ukraine team and learned about how Ukrainian forces carried out combat operations against Russian counterparts.

That information was delivered to other

SEE CONTACT ON PAGE 7

All military services see rebound in recruiting

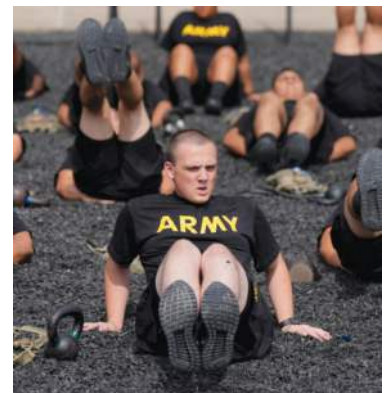
By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

FORT JACKSON, S.C. — After several very difficult years and a swath of new programs and enticements, the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Space Force will all meet their recruiting goals by the end of this month and the Navy will come very close, the military services say.

The results represent a slight uptick in young people joining the military, reversing a dismal trend as the services struggled to overcome severe restrictions on in-person recruiting mandated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the low unemployment rate and stiff competition from private companies able to pay more and provide similar or better benefits.

But Army leaders looking to the future worry that an expected drop in the youth population may signal more difficult times ahead. And other military officials say that while they are seeing im-

SEE REBOUND ON PAGE 7



CHRIS CARLSON/AP

Recruits participate in the Army’s future soldier prep course at Fort Jackson on Wednesday in Columbia, S.C.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

10th death in Boar's Head deli meat listeria outbreak

Associated Press

A 10th person has died in the listeria outbreak that shuttered a Boar's Head deli meat plant, federal health officials said Wednesday.

At least 59 people in 19 states have been sickened by the bacteria first detected in liverwurst made at the Jarratt, Va., plant. Illnesses were reported between late May and late August, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. All of those who fell ill were hospitalized.

The latest fatality was reported in New York, bringing the total deaths to two each in New York and South Carolina and one in Illinois, New Jersey, Virginia, Florida, Tennessee and New Mexico.

The Sarasota, Fla.-based company announced on Sept. 13 that it was closing the Jarratt plant and discontinuing production of liverwurst. The moves came after inspection reports revealed problems including mold, insects, dripping water and meat and fat residue on walls, floors and equipment

dating back to at least two years.

Boar's Head faces multiple lawsuits related to the deaths and illnesses.

The plant hasn't operated since late July, when officials with the U.S. Agriculture Department suspended inspections and the firm recalled more than 7 million pounds of deli meats because of potential contamination.

Boar's Head officials have said they "regret and deeply apologize" for contamination in their products.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		
Euro costs (Sept. 27)	\$1.09	
British pound (Sept. 27)	\$1.30	
Japanese yen (Sept. 27)	139.00	
South Korean won (Sept. 27)	1296.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	
Britain (Pound)	1.3366	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3478	
China (Yuan)	7.0115	
Denmark (Krone)	6.6935	
Egypt (Pound)	48.3430	
Euro	0.8977	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7802	
Hungary (Forint)	355.62	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6930	
Japan (Yen)	144.61	
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3052	
Norway (Krone)	10.5659	
Philippines (Peso)	55.98	
Poland (Zloty)	3.83	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7509	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2853	
South Korea (Won)	1324.50	
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8492	
Thailand (Baht)	32.52	
Turkey (NewLira)	34.1518	

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

INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	8.00	
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00	
Federal funds market rate	4.83	
3-month bill	4.63	
30-year bond	4.05	

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MILITARY

Hold dropped on pick for Pacific Army job

Senate confirms fourth star for defense secretary confidant after Tuberville releases block

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Senate confirmed a fourth star for Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Clark on Tuesday just hours after Sen. Tommy Tuberville dropped a brief hold on his nomination to lead the service's forces in the Indo-Pacific region, congressional records show.



Tuberville

Tuberville, R-Ala., imposed the block on Clark's promotion earlier this month over concerns about the general's role in keeping quiet Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's hospitalization after complications from surgery to treat prostate cancer. The senator dropped the hold after meeting Tuesday with Clark, said Mallory Jaspers, his spokeswoman.

"After a detailed discussion, Sen. Tuberville dropped his hold," she wrote Wednesday in an email. "While there were certainly failures elsewhere, the senator is confident that Lt. Gen. Clark more than fulfilled his duties during the secretary's hospitalization. Sen. Tuberville is thankful for Lt. Gen. Clark's many decades of service to our nation and wishes he and his family the best in his new assignment."

Tuberville drew fire from Democrats and Republicans last year when he blocked promotions of generals and admirals from February until December in protest of



MARC LOI/U.S. Army

Army Lt. Gen. Ronald P. Clark speaks at the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks at a ceremony Sept. 11, 2021, at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

a Pentagon policy that allowed travel reimbursements for service members in locations with restrictions on reproductive health, including abortions. Tuberville's hold ultimately stalled promotions for more than 400 top officers. The Pentagon never altered its policy.

Clark, 58, was one of dozens of top military officers confirmed for promotions on Tuesday by the Senate. The 36-year Army veteran has served as Austin's top military aide since July 2022. He will replace Army Gen. Charlie Flynn as the chief of U.S. Army Pacific in

Hawaii in the coming weeks.

Tuberville's brief hold of his promotion came over concerns that Clark, one of Austin's closest confidants, had been involved in the missteps when the secretary was hospitalized in January days after his prostate surgery. Austin's condition and hospitalization status was not revealed to White House staffers and President Joe Biden for days, according to a February review of the incident. Austin and his staff faced condemnation from lawmakers for failing to report the defense secretary's

condition to the White House and Capitol Hill.

A summary of the Pentagon's review of the incident did not name Clark but said Austin's staff faced a difficult situation given health privacy laws. The review concluded Austin's staff had no "ill intent" and made "no attempt to obfuscate" the secretary's condition to the White House or the public.

Austin, 71, spent about two weeks in the hospital. Pentagon officials said there was never a lapse of military command and control

during that period. In February, Austin apologized publicly to the American public, admitting he "did not handle this right."

Clark is a 1988 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., who served as an infantry officer in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and the more recent Operation Inherent Resolve, the mission to defeat Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria. He has spent much of his recent career based in Hawaii, serving as the chief of staff at U.S. Army Pacific, the commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division at Hawaii's Schofield Barracks, and as the chief of staff of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, according to his Army biography. He served as the commanding general of U.S. Army Central before becoming Austin's top military aide.

In addition to Clark, the Senate on Tuesday approved promotions for other top generals and admirals. Senators approved Air Force Lt. Gen. Steven Nordhaus' promotion to four stars and becoming the next chief of the National Guard Bureau. They approved Navy Vice Adm. Alvin Holsey's confirmation to four stars to lead U.S. Southern Command. They also approved Air Force Lt. Gen. Randall Reed's promotion to four stars to lead U.S. Transportation Command. And the Senate confirmed Army Lt. Gen. Xavier Brunson's promotion to four stars to command U.S. Forces Korea, records show.

Report: China surpasses US ability to respond to Asian conflict

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

For the first time, China enjoys a slight edge over the United States should war break out in Asia, according to an Australian think tank's annual report on regional military power.

The Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index still rates the U.S. as the region's most powerful nation, leading China on six out of eight measures.

However, America's military advantage is eroding, according to the report released Tuesday by the Sydney-based think tank.

"For the first time, experts surveyed for the Asia Power Index judged that China is better able to deploy rapidly and for a sustained period in the event of an interstate conflict in Asia," researchers wrote in the report.

The index rates 27 countries in the region on military alliances and capability, economic resources, diplomatic and cultural

influence, trade, resilience and future trends.

"China has continually improved its Military Capability and has closed more than a quarter of the lead that the United States held in this measure in 2018," the report states.

It falls short in terms of long-range power projection and lacks America's network of regional alliances, according to the report.

China will not exceed the U.S. in terms of overall military capability for the foreseeable future, the report states, adding: "That may not be needed to achieve its strategic objectives in East Asia, including with respect to Taiwan and the South China Sea."

Chinese President Xi Jinping has said he wants his military ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.

However, New Zealand-based security expert Paul Buchanan said Beijing has a limited advantage in regional force projection.

"The [People's Republic of

China] would have difficulty projecting and maintaining a dominant military presence in places like Indonesia, or the [southwest] Pacific Rim should the U.S. and its allies decide to seriously contest it," he told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

"Plus, the sea lanes to and from the PRC mainland would become obvious choke points for adversaries to focus on, assorted intelligence capabilities would be deployed against them."

Beijing would struggle to extend forces beyond Taiwan and other small island chains close to the Chinese mainland, Buchanan wrote.

"This is especially true if the U.S. is joined by allies like those in the Quad [U.S., Australia, India, Japan] and smaller states such as the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore and Indonesia, should any of these allies perceive the PRC power projection as inimical to their national in-



Russian Defense Ministry Press Service via AP

Chinese military sailors attend a welcome ceremony of their joint naval forces exercise in Zhanjiang in Guangdong province on July 14. According to a new report, for the first time, China is better able to deploy rapidly than the U.S. in the event of a conflict in Asia.

terests," he said.

China has built extensive bases on its territory and offshore in the South China sea, said Brad Glosserman, deputy director and visiting professor at the Center for Rule-Making Strategies at Tama University in Tokyo.

However, the U.S. has more modern, sophisticated and battle-tested forces, as well as allies, and has been deploying new assets to the region, such as Typhoon missiles, that could have a significant impact, he said by email Wednesday.

MILITARY

US Army base in Baumholder starts work on facilities

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Work is underway on new annex facilities at the U.S. Army's garrison in Baumholder, Germany, where \$500 million worth of construction is taking place in anticipation of the transfer of special operations troops from Stuttgart.

Last week, Army officials held a groundbreaking ceremony for the annexes at the installation. The development program entails creation of new buildings and restoration of operational ones, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe said in a statement Sept. 19.

Four annexes are slated to be built as part of Baumholder's expansion, but the statement didn't say how many are under construction in the wake of the groundbreaking.

Two of the annexes are scheduled to be completed by 2027, and the two others will come online the following year.

About 1,000 special operations troops, family members and support staff are expected to make the move from Stuttgart to Baumholder by 2026.

The projects will improve the quality of life in Baumholder and also put the incoming personnel closer to Ramstein Air Base, "the premier power projection platform in

Germany," according to the statement.

Part of U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz, the Baumholder base is about a 40-minute drive from Ramstein. By contrast, the garrison in Stuttgart is over two hours away from the Kaiserslautern-area air base.

The facilities are part of more than 60 projects intended to redevelop the Baumholder garrison, which at one time was scheduled for closure as part of the Army's post-Cold War drawdown in Europe.

But the service reversed course on that decision years ago and has since been pouring in resources to improve living conditions at the base. Hundreds of new family housing units are being built.

More than one-third of the projects have already been completed, military officials said in the statement.

For special operations forces, the shift to Baumholder will offer access to larger ranges for shooting and maneuvers than what is available in Stuttgart, a major metro area that hosts U.S. European and Africa Command headquarters.

While the Baumholder move will affect special operators, the command's headquarters will remain in Stuttgart.



Smith Barracks climbs the hill above Baumholder, Germany. The U.S. military presence in the town is set to grow, as ground was broken Sept. 19 for new annexes at the installation.



F-35C Lightning IIs and F/A-18E/F Super Hornets fly over Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 is preparing to reactivate as an F-35 squadron based in Cherry Point, N.C.

Marine squadron's first F-35 opens up path to reactivation

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

A Marine Corps aviation unit's return to action is waiting in the wings, pending delivery of enough additional F-35C Lightning II jets to allow it to get going.

The first of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251's planes arrived on Sept. 17 in Cherry Point, N.C., the new home of the squadron nicknamed the Thunderbolts. It was formerly based at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort in South Carolina.

A fully staffed Marine Corps F-35 squadron consists of 10 aircraft, according to the service. Neither Marine Corps headquarters nor 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman 2nd Lt. John Graham provided a timeline for the arrival of the remaining jets.

The Thunderbolts could still restart without their full inventory of F-35s, Graham said Wednesday.

"The squadron's official reac-

tivation is dependent on the arrival of more aircraft," he said. "However, achieving full operational capability is not a prerequisite."

The fifth-generation fighter jet is the first model of its kind to reach the Corps' East Coast air wing. The squadron is set to support the Navy's Carrier Air Wing 8.

For 34 years, the unit was an F/A-18 Hornet squadron, but the Marine Corps is replacing its aging fleet of Hornets with the state-of-the-art F-35C.

The squadron was deactivated in 2020 after returning from a deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

In addition, the service's transition to the F-35 will eventually spell the end for the AV-8B Harrier jets in its fleet. They will give way to the F-35B, a short-takeoff-

and-vertical-landing aircraft.

According to the service's 2022 aviation plan, the Harrier will remain in operations until 2027 but is slowly being phased out.

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542, which is the Thunderbolts' sister squadron at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, will fly the B variant of the F-35. Their activation in April marked the completion of their transition from the Harrier, Graham said.

The F-35 is more stealthy, maneuverable and has better sensor network and fuel capacity, according to the service.

"The one-two punch provided by the F-35C's increased range and the F-35B's (short takeoff and vertical-landing) capability will give ... a significant advantage in the future fight," Col. Benjamin Grant, commander of Marine Aircraft Group 14, the squadrons' parent command, said in the Sept. 17 statement.

Lawmakers urge support for caregiver services to help disabled vets

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers on Wednesday urged the swift passage of legislation to better support family caregivers and home health aides who help veterans with serious disabilities continue to live at home and stay out of institutional care.

Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., who is chairman of the House Veterans'

Affairs Committee, said he soon plans to bring to the floor the Sen. Elizabeth Dole Act, which would increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs for noninstitutional alternatives to nursing home care.

The legislation also would address the needs of family members serving as full-time caretakers, including providing them with mental health care services,

respite care, home health aide and other assistance. It was introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., in 2023, and would authorize agreements with non-VA medical and social service agencies to offer community and at-home services that are comparable to what veterans receive in nursing homes.

Expenditures for at-home care cannot exceed 65% of what the

cost would be if the veteran lived in a nursing home. The change would increase the amount to 100% under the Sen. Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act.

The program provides elderly and disabled veterans — or their designated family caregiver — with a small monthly budget to pay for help with daily living activities, such as bathing, dressing and meal preparation, so

they can continue to live at home.

Some veterans and their advocacy groups said there is a lack of sufficient services to support caretakers in the community.

Bost cited new findings from the nonprofit Rand Corporation on challenges and hardships of families that are caring for veterans with serious disabilities.

PACIFIC

US military mum on liberty changes in Japan

No word on expansion of restrictions after recent spate of reported sex assaults on Okinawa

BY BRIAN McELHINEY AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The third indictment of a U.S. service member on sexual assault charges this year prompted fresh complaints from an Okinawa city this week.

Nago City Assembly approved a protest letter and petition Wednesday in response to Marine Lance Cpl. Michael Hofmaster's recent indictment on charges of sexually assaulting and injuring a woman in the city in June.

Charges leveled against two other service members this year had already elevated popular discontent before Hofmaster's indictment.

Senior Airman Brennon R.E. Washington pleaded not guilty July 12 in Naha District Court to charges of kidnapping and sexually assaulting a minor in Decem-

ber. Marine Lance Cpl. Jamel Clayton was charged in May with attempting to sexually assault a woman in Yomitan.

Although U.S. military authorities suggested changes to the liberty policy across Japan in July, so far only a crackdown on off-base alcohol consumption, courtesy patrols in nightlife districts and universal sobriety checks at military gates have materialized.

There may be little else the U.S. military can do to restrict troops in Japan, said Marc Gallicchio, the Mary M. Birle Chair in American history at Villanova University in Pennsylvania and a former Fulbright lecturer at the University of the Ryukyus in 2004 and 2005.

"The armed forces, from everything I can tell as far as reading and talking to people, makes a pretty concerted effort to educate people on the proper conduct that's expected of them — this sort

of cultural awareness training," Gallicchio said in a video call last month. "I don't know that anything else can be done other than restricting the movement of people off base."

The Nago letter and petition is the latest in a series of formal complaints, petitions, letters and personal visits by Okinawa government members to the U.S. Embassy, military commanders and Japanese government officials since July.

The Nago documents, copies of which were provided to Stars and Stripes on Thursday, ask the U.S. military to "provide a sincere response" to the women in each case, educate troops on the island about human rights, enforce discipline and "take effective preventative measures."

It also asks for "drastic changes" to the status of forces agreement governing the U.S. military

community in Japan.

"We are feeling strong indignation because the situation does not improve despite the Japanese government and U.S. military stating they will prevent reoccurrences," the letter and petition state.

The city plans to present the petition next week to Japanese officials, including Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Minoru Kihara, a spokeswoman for the city assembly said Thursday.

The protest letter will be sent to U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel and U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp, among other U.S. officials, she added.

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

Rupp, who is set to relinquish

his command Oct. 8 to Air Force Lt. Gen. Stephen Jost, announced in July a "new forum of cooperation" with the Japanese and Okinawan governments and community members. He has also called for consistent liberty policies for all U.S. troops in Japan.

USFJ in an unsigned email Thursday acknowledged questions emailed Wednesday about liberty rules and the forum but has not provided responses.

Kihara in a news conference Tuesday also said he had no update on the proposed measures.

The III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa reminded its Marines of the penalty for drunken driving on the island, along with reiterating its ongoing measures to reduce the risk of sexual assault and other bad behavior, according to a statement Wednesday from spokesman 1st Lt. Owen Hitchcock.

Joint venture secures \$113M contract for work at Guam base

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A joint venture between a California construction company and a Japanese developer acquired another contract for more facilities at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz as the Guam installation inches closer to full operation.

For \$113 million, Granite Construction Inc., of Watsonville, Calif., and Obayashi Corp., of Tokyo, will build an auto organization shop, an organic storage facility, an electrical and communications maintenance shop, a vehicle wash rack and a vehicle laydown area, according to a news release Tuesday from Granite.

This contract with Naval Facilities Systems Command Pacific falls under a multiple award contract that, so far, has yielded at least \$404 million in work at Blaz for the joint venture since 2017, according to a Sept. 9 news release from NAVFAC Pacific.

The project supports III Marine Expeditionary Force's 9th Engineer Support Battalion. Construc-

tion is expected to begin in October and finish in January 2027.

"We are honored to continue our partnership with NAVFAC Pacific on this critical mission," Curt Haldeman, Granite's vice president of regional operations, said in the release. "This contract not only strengthens our relationship with NAVFAC Pacific but also reinforces our role as a key contributor to the successful realignment of Marines from Okinawa to Guam."

The project was one of several announced Sept. 9 by NAVFAC Pacific. The command awarded a second, \$14.5 million contract to the Guam-based company Pacific Federal Management to build a training complex, also for the 9th Engineer Support Battalion. It is expected to be completed in March 2026.

A spokesperson for NAVFAC Pacific did not respond to phone and email requests for additional details as of Thursday afternoon. Granite could not be reached by phone after business hours in Cal-

ifornia on Thursday.

Blaz, activated in 2020 as the first new Marine Corps installation since 1952, is an approximately 4,000-acre facility on the northwest edge of Guam.

It's expected to house 1,300 members of III MEF and another 3,700 Marines as a rotational force. Blaz is scheduled to reach full operational capacity by 2028, base spokeswoman Maj. Diann Rosenfeld said in December.

As of July 2024, there are 23 completed projects and more than 50 projects under construction, she told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

The construction is part of the Defense Policy Review Initiative, an agreement by the United States and Japan to relocate some Marine assets from Okinawa to Guam. The deal includes Japan paying \$3 billion of the estimated \$8.6 billion cost to build Blaz and its surrounding infrastructure.

The latest project is at least the third at Blaz for the joint venture. In 2017, NAVFAC Pacific award-



JOSEPH DITZLER/Stars and Stripes

Camp Blaz, activated in 2020 as the first new Marine Corps installation since 1952, is set to reach full operational capacity by 2028.

ed Granite and Obayashi \$165 million to prepare 400 acres of the base's main cantonment for future construction.

In March 2023, Granite and Obayashi secured \$126 million to

build an auto shop, electrical and communications building, a vehicle wash facility, a vehicle laydown area and infrastructure work. That project is expected to wrap next year.

Report: Japanese destroyer made rare trip through Taiwan Strait

BY BRIAN McELHINEY AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

A Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force warship sailed through the Taiwan Strait for the first time on Wednesday, according to a local media report.

The destroyer JS Sazanami, along with Australian and New Zealand vessels, sailed south from

the East China Sea and through the 110-mile-wide channel separating the island from mainland China, Kyodo News reported, citing an unnamed source who was "familiar with the matter."

The ships were believed to be headed to the South China Sea to participate in exercises, the report said.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secreta-

ry Yoshimasa Hayashi declined to comment on the transit during a news conference Thursday.

"In recent years, China's military activities around our country have been expanding and becoming more active," he said. "We will continue closely monitoring with strong interest and exert all efforts to ensure surveillance and monitoring activities can be car-

ried out properly."

A Ministry of Defense spokesman acknowledged but did not immediately respond to questions emailed Thursday.

Beijing views trips through the strait as provocative and regularly condemns them as support for Taiwan. China does not consider the strait an international waterway and holds that Taiwan itself is

a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland.

The U.S. Navy routinely sends warships through the strait and describes those transits as a routine means of traveling between the South China and East China seas. Last week, a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon flew through international airspace over the strait, the U.S. 7th Fleet said.

MILITARY

Seoul: N. Korea can build numerous bombs

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea has likely enriched enough uranium to build a “double-digit” number of bombs and is making progress in its efforts to develop more powerful and accurate missiles targeting rival South Korea, Seoul’s spy agency told lawmakers on Thursday.

The closed-door parliamentary briefing by the National Intelligence Service came after North Korea offered a rare glimpse into a secretive facility to produce weapons-grade uranium earlier this month as leader Kim Jong Un reiterated his goal to “exponentially” increase his stock of nuclear weapons.

The South Korean agency assessed that Kim’s disclosure of the facility was likely a statement of defiance toward Washington ahead of the U.S. presidential election and meant to domestically showcase his military accomplishments amid deepening economic struggles, according to Lee Seong-kweun, one of the lawmakers who attended the briefing.

When asked about North Korea’s bomb fuel capacity, the agency said North Korea likely has about 154 pounds of plutonium and an unspecified but considerable amount of weapons-grade uranium that would be enough to build “at least a

double-digit number” of weapons, Lee said.

While North Korean state media did not disclose the location of the uranium enrichment facility that Kim visited on Sept. 13, the South Korean agency said it was likely to be a site in Kangson, near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, said Park Sun-won, another lawmaker who attended the briefing.

Along with the North’s main nuclear complex in the town of Yongbyon, the Kangson plant is one of two known sites in North Korea that has been linked to uranium enrichment activities. Some analysts say North Korea likely has other hidden sites for enriching uranium.

Kim’s visit to the uranium enrichment site was followed by a North Korean missile test days later, as the country continues to flaunt its weapons capabilities in the face of deepening confrontations with Washington and Seoul.

North Korean state media said the test launches on Sept. 18 involved two types of new missiles — one designed to deliver “super-large” conventional warheads and the other a “strategic” cruise missile, a term that implies it was developed for nuclear strikes.

North Korean state media reports on the tests suggested that North Korea was improving the capabilities of the weapons, which

are designed for delivering precision strikes on South Korean targets, the lawmakers paraphrased the South Korean spy agency as saying.

Some analysts speculate that North Korea could attempt to dial up pressure on Washington by conducting a nuclear test ahead of the U.S. presidential election.

But the South Korean spy agency assessed that North Korea could wait on a nuclear test until after the election since there are other steps it may want to try first, such as test-firing a long-range missile targeting the U.S. mainland or launching a military reconnaissance satellite, Lee said.

Navy sailor convicted of beach attack gets suspended sentence

By Alex Wilson
and Hana Kusumoto
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA, Japan — The U.S. sailor accused of running into and injuring several people near a popular Japanese beach in 2022 was found guilty on all counts Friday but avoids jail time with a suspended sentence.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Daniel Krieger, 31, a logistics specialist aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Milius, was sentenced to two years and four months of prison with hard labor, suspended for four years by the Yokohama District Court Yokosuka Branch.

Krieger hasn’t decided whether he will appeal the sentence, lead defense attorney Takashi Takano said after the sentencing.

“I think the decision was wrong,” Takano told reporters after the hearing.

At a prior hearing, Krieger admitted to charging into five people

and knocking them down near Zushi Beach on July 9, 2022.

However, he pleaded not guilty on March 8 to four counts of bodily injury. His attorneys argued that he suffers from a pre-existing brain injury and was severely intoxicated at the time of the incident.

All five people were injured, the most severely a man, 33 at the time, with multiple sprained vertebrae and a woman, 58, with a broken upper jaw, broken nasal bone and other facial injuries.

The woman, now 60, said she was happy with the verdict, but disappointed by the suspended sentence.

“I hope he recognizes his crime after this decision, because he hasn’t apologized or shown any remorse,” she told reporters after the sentencing. She declined to provide her name.

In a summary, the three-judge panel led by Judge Yasushi Katada said they noted the two most in-

jured parties required two months of medical treatment or recovery, and the remaining two required between one and two weeks.

Prosecutors ultimately indicted Krieger on four counts of causing bodily injury.

Krieger’s wife, Rina Krieger, testified April 25 that the sailor had consumed at least 11 alcoholic beverages over the course of several hours that day.

She said her husband struggles with memory lapses and has problems with balance, the result of a 2015 brain injury he suffered while breaking up a fight.

The judges said Krieger’s health and intoxication played a part in the case, but they didn’t believe it excused his actions or absolved him of responsibility.

The incident, during which Krieger kicked one of the injured parties, constituted “dangerous brutality,” according to the summary. They also described it as “indiscriminate violence commit-



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Zushi Beach is a popular spot near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

ted in public against people who were not at fault.”

Katada in the summary said the judges felt Krieger was unable to control himself because he was drunk and his actions were a way to “relieve his stress” about the overall situation and his ongoing health issues.

The judges found Krieger intentionally injured the 33-year-old man and a second man, and by negligence injured the other two people, Katada told the court.

Japanese police interviewed Krieger after the incident; afterward he was restricted to the naval base throughout the trial.

Krieger testified that he consumed between 10 and 20 drinks that day and remembers very little of the incident.

“It was like a dream, when a monster chases you, but you don’t know why,” he said.

Krieger also faces a civil lawsuit, with the injured parties asking for about \$153,000.

Soldier jailed for child rape pleads not guilty to murder, desertion charges

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

A soldier convicted of child rape pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges that he deserted to avoid the rape trial and killed a taxi driver while trying to flee from the Seattle area.

Pvt. Jonathan Kang Lee, 25, was arraigned at Joint Base Lewis-McChord on charges of premeditated murder, murder while perpetrating a robbery, desertion, resisting arrest, wrongful use of a controlled substance, and failure to obey a lawful order, according to the online case docket.

Lee pleaded not guilty to all the charges and asked for a court-martial panel of enlisted personnel.

Under reforms approved by Congress in late 2023, the newly created Army Office of Special Trial Counsel handles murder, kidnapping, rape and most sex crime prosecutions. Previously, the cases were handled by senior commanders.

The Army is not seeking the death penalty for Lee, according to Michelle McCaskill, spokeswoman for the special trial counsel. The maximum penalty that Lee faces is life in prison without the chance of parole.

Though the death penalty for the charge of premeditated murder remains a possible sentence under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, no soldier has been executed since 1961.

The Army said pretrial motions

will be heard Nov. 5 and Jan. 3. Lee’s court-martial is scheduled for March 3-14.

Lee is already serving a 64-year sentence for rape and sexual assault against two family members — one younger than 16 and the other younger 11 — between 2020 and 2022. He is confined at the Northwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility, a medium-security military jail at Lewis-McChord.

Lee was an Army specialist in an intelligence unit when he was charged with child rape. He was due to go to trial in January. As with most defendants without prior criminal records, Lee was not in pre-trial detention at the jail. He was confined to the base and re-

quired to check in daily with an officer.

When Lee did not report on Jan. 14, the Army Criminal Investigation Division issued a “Be On The Lookout” alert with photos of Lee and a vehicle that CID believed the soldier was driving.

Lee either flagged down or contacted a RediCab taxi, according to authorities. The company is based in Olympia but serves the Lewis-McChord area.

Prosecutors said the taxi went to the sprawling parking lot of Westfield Southcenter Mall in Tukwila, just east of Sea-Tac International Airport. The body of the driver, Nicholas Hokema, 34, was found the next morning of Jan. 15 amid the

mostly empty 6,700-space lot. He had been stabbed several times. The red Toyota taxi was gone.

On Jan. 19, a court-martial at Lewis-McChord found Lee guilty in absentia of the child sex charges. He was sentenced to 64 years confinement, reduction to lowest rank — private, and a dishonorable discharge.

Authorities found Hokema’s RediCab on Jan. 26 parked near a residential area in Redmond, Wash., about 50 miles north of Lewis-McChord. Tukwila police and Army investigators located Lee at a nearby apartment complex, where he was apprehended — the new court-martial charges Lee with resisting arrest.

MILITARY

Rebound: Last-minute recruits have left Navy unable to reach its goal

FROM PAGE 1

provements, they will still face tough challenges and must keep transforming their recruiting going forward.

Military leaders note that only about 23% of young adults are physically, mentally and morally qualified to serve without receiving some type of waiver. Moral behavior issues include drug use, gang ties or a criminal record. And of those qualified to serve, many are wary of taking on a job that puts their life or health at risk.

The Army has made the biggest comeback, after falling far short of recruiting goals for the past two years.

Two years ago, the Army brought in 45,000 recruits, far less than the 60,000 it needed, and last year it again fell 15,000 short of what leaders publicly set as a “stretch goal” of 65,000 recruits.

This year, with a lower goal of 55,000, the service will meet its target, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said Wednesday, and she plans to now set a higher goal for 2025.

“We not only met our goal, we exceeded it,” she said. “Our goal was 55,000 new contracts and 5,000 young people in our delayed entry program. We exceeded that goal of 55,000 by a few hundred, and we put 11,000 young people into the delayed entry program, which is going to give our recruiters a really strong jumping-off point to start towards our recruiting target for next year.”

Still, she noted, “the headwinds that we’ve been facing are not going to stop blowing.” Wormuth said that an expected drop of about 10% in the number of college-age young people in 2026 is a significant concern. The dip comes 18 years after the financial recession in 2008, which triggered

a decrease in the number of children born.

It’s a big issue, she said, because the Army and the other services recruit from that population. And other challenges will also continue.

“I think we’re going to probably continue to see pretty low unemployment. We’re still going to see 60% go to college. It’s a more competitive labor market,” Wormuth said. “So we’re going to have to kind of keep fighting hard for our new recruits.”

A key to the recruiting success, she said, has been the Army’s future soldier prep course that gives lower-performing recruits up to 90 days of academic or fitness instruction to help them meet military standards.

This year more than 13,000 recruits — or 24% of the 55,000 — came in through the program, which was started as a test two years ago.

The Navy is the only service that won’t hit its goal this year. While the service was able to sign up 40,600 recruits as hoped, the crush of last-minute enlistments means it won’t be able to get them all through boot camp by next month. As a result, the Navy will fall about 5,000 short of its target to get all of the recruits into the 10-week training course at Great Lakes, Ill., by the end of the fiscal year.

“I’m excited that even though we can’t get everybody that we’ve signed up right now through boot camp by the end of this month, we now have a delayed entry pool for the beginning of next year, which will really prime the pump,” said Navy Adm. Lisa Franchetti.

The Navy fell short of its recruiting goal by about 7,000 last year, prompting leaders to take more dramatic steps than the other services. It has worked to great-



ANNA VAN NUYS/U.S. Navy

Recruit division commanders salute graduating divisions as they enter Midway Ceremonial Drill Hall during a pass-in-review graduation ceremony at Recruit Training Command where Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy James Honea was the reviewing officer, Sept. 5.

ly expand its pool of applicants by bringing in recruits who don’t have high school diplomas or a GED and by taking young adults who score very low on the armed services test. Both are rare steps that the other services greatly limit or avoid.

Navy leaders also followed the Army and created a future sailor prep course that gives underperforming recruits academic or physical fitness training to help them qualify for enlistment. That course, said Franchetti, “is having really good results for our teammates that want to be in the Navy.”

The Air Force, which fell short of its recruiting target last year by about 10%, will hit its goal to recruit at least 27,100 this year while also managing to bolster its pool of delayed entry applicants and will start the next fiscal year with more than 13,000.

All of the services try to have a pool of applicants ready to go when they start the year, but they all had to dip heavily into that bank of recruits to make their numbers in recent years.

Brig. Gen. Christopher Amrhein, who heads Air Force recruiting, told the AP that there wasn’t one “silver bullet” change and the service was able to make some adjustments “without actually changing the quality of the members that are coming in.”

The service expanded its ability to bring in legal permanent residents, beefed up its social media presence and has looked for improved partnerships with sports events, including NASCAR.

“It was several initiatives, thoughts, discipline training, all working in harmony, plus some really hard work by our recruiters to have a very strong year,” he said, but added, “We’ve got to

keep our foot on the gas on this. We’re not out of the woods.”

The Marine Corps and the tiny Space Force — the two smallest services — have consistently met their goals. The Space Force brought in 716 recruits — a bit more than its goal of 659.

And the Marine Corps hit its target of roughly 28,000 recruits, and for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic will go into the next year with a larger delayed-entry pool than the previous year.

“Our recruiters, who are assigned to every ZIP code across the nation, knew this year would be challenging, but they never stopped fighting to accomplish the mission,” said Maj. Gen. William Bowers, head of Marine Corps Recruiting Command, adding that they “are going into the next fiscal year more confident, focused and determined to meet or exceed the 2025 mission.”

Contact: US incorporates tactics used by Ukrainian forces to improve, evolve

FROM PAGE 1

units preparing in the United States for their own deployments to Europe. The arrangement resulted in combat scenarios that incorporated technology such as tethered drones and electromagnetic decoys to assist in protecting U.S. forces from becoming targets, the Army said.

The deception tactics included creating fake command posts to lure in the simulated enemy. “This allowed them to destroy the ad-

versaries’ assets while preserving the real command post,” the Army statement said.

Before his time in command of the 3rd Infantry Division, Norrie did multiple stints in Europe that included leading the 7th Army Training Command in Grafenwoehr.

That has given him an up-close look at how the Army’s mission on the Continent has changed.

“In just a few short years, we have command posts that move in

minutes,” Norrie said, adding that the Army also has gotten faster at issuing mission-style battlefield orders.

In 2017, he convoyed a full armored brigade of soldiers from a port in Germany to locations in Poland, marking the beginning of the Army’s effort to establish a continuous rotation of tank power in central and Eastern Europe.

Since then, Army operations along NATO’s eastern flank have steadily evolved.



ANTHONY FORD/U.S. Army

U.S. Army Cpl. Austin Douglas, front, and Pvt. Thomas Bryd maintain a defensive position during a NATO drill at Bemowo Piskie Training Area in Poland on March 11.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy visits DC as election builds on divide

BY CHRIS MEGERIAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy huddled with U.S. leaders on Thursday to shore up American support for his country's fight against Russia as the war faces a partisan reckoning in this year's presidential election.

Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, has pledged to continue sending military assistance to Ukraine if she's elected. She'll have her own meeting with Zelenskyy after the Ukrainian leader sits down with President Joe Biden, who announced billions of dollars more in missiles, drones, ammunition and other supplies. The weapons include an additional Patriot missile defense battery and a new shipment of glide bombs that can be deployed from Western fighter jets, increasing their strike range.

"The United States will provide Ukraine with the support it needs to win this war," Biden said in a statement, pledging to ensure that all approved funding is disbursed before he leaves office. He also said he would convene a meeting with other world leaders focused on Ukraine's defense during a visit to Germany next month.

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy's tumultuous relationship with former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, continued to deteriorate this week. Instead of meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump criticized him. As for U.S. support for Ukraine, Trump complained that "we continue to give billions of dollars to a man who refuses to make a deal" to end the war. His message dovetails with Russian propaganda that claims intransigence by Kyiv — not aggression from Moscow — has prolonged

the bloodshed.

It's the most politically treacherous landscape that Zelenskyy has encountered in Washington since Russia invaded nearly three years ago. Ukrainian officials are anxious to maintain good relations with whoever becomes the next president of the United States, which is its biggest and most important provider of arms, money and other support.

But the effort risks slipping into the political blender of the presidential campaign, polarizing the discussion around a war that used to be a bipartisan cause célèbre in Washington. About two-thirds of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents said the U.S. has a responsibility to help Ukraine, compared with one-third of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, according to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in July.

Americans are also split on which presidential candidate would do a better job handling the war. An AP-NORC poll from August found that about one-third of Americans said they trusted Harris more, while a similar share said the same about Trump.

Zelenskyy is expected to present Biden with a plan to push the war toward an endgame that would involve a negotiated settlement with Russia. He's trying to secure leverage before Biden leaves office — including acquiescence to fire long-range Western weapons deeper into Russia — as a hedge against the possibility that American support erodes after the election.

On Thursday, Zelenskyy found some bipartisan support as he visited Capitol Hill, where he was greeted by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, center, walks with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., left, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., as he arrives for a briefing with lawmakers about the war effort against Russia, at the Capitol, on Thursday.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, said Zelenskyy asked to use long-range weapons, such as British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles or U.S.-made ATACMS, for "maximum benefit to bring (Russian President Vladimir) Putin to the table" and increase Ukraine's negotiating position.

"If we don't make that fundamental choice this week, I think the outcome for Ukraine is dire," Graham said.

Administration officials have been skeptical of Zelenskyy's request, believing the weapons could have limited benefits but increase the risk of escalating the conflict. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, said senators gave Zelenskyy advice on how to persuade Biden to loosen restrictions.

Rep. Jim Himes, another Connecticut Democrat and the ranking member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said Zelenskyy wanted "more, faster."

"He was politely frustrated," Himes said, and specifically requested more Patriot missile de-

fenses as Russia escalates strikes on Ukraine's cities and energy grid before the winter.

Despite support from some Republicans on Capitol Hill, Zelenskyy faces a much more tense situation with Trump. The latest round of sniping started on Sunday, when The New Yorker published an interview with Zelenskyy in which he criticized JD Vance, Trump's running mate, as "too radical" for suggesting that Ukraine needs to give up some territory to end the war. Zelenskyy also dismissed Trump's boasts that he could quickly negotiate a solution, saying "my feeling is that Trump doesn't really know how to stop the war even if he might think he knows how."

On the same day, Zelenskyy toured a Pennsylvania factory producing munitions for the war. He was joined by Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro, a top surrogate for Harris, and Republicans criticized the visit as a political stunt in a political battleground state.

House Speaker Mike Johnson demanded that Zelenskyy fire the Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S., alleging that the tour was "de-

signed to help Democrats and is clearly election interference." The Louisiana Republican didn't attend any of lawmakers' meetings with Zelenskyy on Thursday.

Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Zelenskyy is in a "no-win situation" where he "can't even visit a U.S. weapons manufacturer to say thank you without being attacked."

Zelenskyy's trip to Washington coincides with the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, where the Ukrainian leader spoke on Wednesday. Last week, Trump said he would "probably" meet with Zelenskyy while he was in the U.S., but a senior campaign official said there was never a meeting on the books.

The official, who requested anonymity to discuss private conversations, said Trump had told Zelenskyy back in July that it would probably be better not to sit down together until after the election. A Zelenskyy aide did not respond to questions about the potential meeting.

Biden to convene Ukraine allies in Germany, surge military aid

BY JENNY LEONARD AND
VOLODYMYR VERBIANYI
Bloomberg News

President Joe Biden announced nearly \$8 billion in new military assistance for Ukraine on Thursday and plans to convene a leader-level meeting of key allies to coordinate additional support when he visits Germany next month.

The announcement, which

came ahead of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the White House later in the day, includes \$2.4 billion for the U.S. to buy weapons and equipment directly from U.S. companies and an additional \$5.5 billion to be shipped from existing U.S. weapons stocks.

The shipments will include additional air defense systems, drones, and munitions. Biden is

also providing Ukraine with a new long-range munition known as the Joint Standoff Weapon, and has asked the Pentagon to refurbish an additional Patriot air defense battery and expand the F-16 training program for Ukrainian pilots. The Pentagon will also push to allocate the full remainder of Ukraine assistance authorized by Congress before the end of Biden's term, in a push to accel-

erate delivery.

"There is more work to do," Biden said in a statement. "That is why, today, I am announcing a surge in security assistance for Ukraine and a series of additional actions to help Ukraine win this war."

Additionally, the U.S. is moving to disrupt a cryptocurrency network it says has been helping Russia evade sanctions over its in-

vasion of Ukraine. And Biden said he was working to ensure that restrictions on the drawdown of U.S. equipment didn't prevent Ukraine from receiving assistance.

The new steps are in addition to a \$375 million weapons package that included rocket systems and artillery announced Wednesday as leaders met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

NATION

Helene strengthens as South preps for ‘impacts’

BY KATE PAYNE AND
HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH
Associated Press

CRAWFORDVILLE, Fla. — Fast-moving Hurricane Helene was advancing Thursday across the Gulf of Mexico toward Florida, threatening a “catastrophic” storm surge in northwestern parts of the state as well as damaging winds, rains and flash floods hundreds of miles inland across much of the southeastern U.S., forecasters said.

Helene was upgraded Thursday morning to a Category 2 storm and is expected to be a major hurricane — meaning a Category 3 or higher — when it makes landfall on Florida’s northwestern coast Thursday evening. Hurricane warnings and flash flood warnings extended far beyond the coast up into south-central Georgia. The governors of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia have all declared emergencies in their states.

Rain was beginning to blow in the predawn darkness Thursday along coastal U.S. Highway 98, which winds through countless fishing villages and vacation hideaways along Florida’s Big Bend. Shuttered gas stations dotted the two-lane highway, their windows boarded up with plywood to protect from the storm.

The storm was expected to make landfall in the Big Bend region, where Florida’s panhandle and peninsula meet, according to Jack Beven, senior hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

“Regardless of how strong it is, it



MIKE STEWART/AP

Jose Gonzales and his son Jadin Gonzales, 14, fill sandbags ahead of Hurricane Helene, expected to make landfall Thursday evening, on Thursday, in Clyattville, Ga. The governors of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia have all declared emergencies in their states.

is a very large storm,” Beven said. “It’s going to have impacts that cover a large area.”

Mandatory evacuation orders stretched from the panhandle south along the Gulf Coast in low-lying areas around Tallahassee, Gainesville, Cedar Key, Lake City, Tampa and Sarasota.

The National Weather Service office in Tallahassee forecast storm surges of up to 20 feet and warned they could be particularly “catastrophic and unsurvivable” in Flor-

ida’s Apalachee Bay. It added that high winds and heavy rains also posed risks.

“This forecast, if realized, is a nightmare surge scenario for Apalachee Bay,” the office said. “Please, please, please take any evacuation orders seriously!”

This stretch of Florida known as the Forgotten Coast has been largely spared by the widespread condo development and commercialization that dominates so many of Florida’s beach communities. The sparsely

populated region is loved for its natural wonders—the vast stretches of salt marshes, tidal pools and barrier islands; the dwarf cypress trees of Tate’s Hell State Forest; and Wakulla Springs, considered one of the world’s largest and deepest freshwater springs.

Anthony Godwin, 20, found one gas station outside Crawfordville where the tanks were still running Thursday morning to fill up before heading west toward his sister’s house in Pensacola.

Godwin lives about a half-mile from the water in the coastal town of Panacea, and during Hurricane Michael in 2018, Godwin said the water came up to the end of the driveway of his family’s home when the storm surge reached about 12 feet. This time, they’re bracing for much worse.

“We’re not really hopeful about it. We’re being realistic,” Godwin said. “It’s a part of life. You live down here, you run the risk of losing everything to a bad storm. It is what it is.”

Along Florida’s Gulf Coast, school districts and multiple universities have canceled classes.

Helene was about 320 miles southwest of Tampa on Thursday morning and moving north-northeast at 12 mph with top sustained winds of 100 mph. Forecasters said it should become a Category 3 or higher hurricane, meaning winds would top 110 mph.

While Helene will likely weaken as it moves inland, its “fast forward speed will allow strong, damaging winds, especially in gusts, to penetrate well inland across the southeastern United States,” including in the southern Appalachian Mountains, the hurricane center said. The center posted lesser tropical storm warnings as far north as North Carolina, and warned that much of the region could experience prolonged power outages, toppled trees and dangerous flooding.

Helene had swamped parts of Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula on Wednesday.

NYC mayor charged with taking bribes from foreign sources

BY JAKE OFFENHARTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City Mayor Eric Adams was indicted Thursday on federal charges alleging that he took bribes and illegal campaign contributions from foreign sources.

The U.S. attorney’s office in Manhattan alleges in the indictment that Adams “compounded his gains” from the illegal contributions by gaming the city’s matching funds program, which provides a generous match for small dollar donations. His campaign received more than \$10,000 in matching funds as a result of the false certifications, according to the indictment.

Adams allegedly “solicited and demanded” bribes, including free and heavily discounted luxury travel benefits from a Turkish official, the indictment alleges, noting that the official was seeking Adams’ help pertaining to regulations of the Turkish Consulate in Manhattan.

FBI agents entered the mayor’s official residence and seized his phone early Thursday, hours be-



SETH WENIG/AP

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, shown on Sept. 16, was indicted Thursday on federal charges alleging that he took bribes and illegal campaign contributions from foreign sources.

fore the indictment was made public.

“Federal agents appeared this morning at Gracie Mansion in an effort to create a spectacle (again) and take Mayor Adams[’] phone (again),” Adams’ lawyer, Alex

Spiro, said in a statement hours before the indictment was made public. “They send a dozen agents to pick up a phone when we would have happily turned it in.”

In a video speech released Wednesday night, Adams vowed

to fight any charges against him, claiming he had been made a “target” in a case “based on lies.”

“I will fight these injustices with every ounce of my strength and my spirit,” he said.

The indictment caps off an extraordinary few weeks in New York City, as federal investigators have honed in on members of Adams’ inner circle, producing a drumbeat of raids, subpoenas and high-level resignations that have thrust City Hall into crisis.

The U.S. attorney’s office in Manhattan has declined to comment on the investigation, though it said it would announce “significant public corruption charges” at an 11:30 a.m. news conference. An FBI spokesperson declined to comment. A spokesperson for the mayor did not immediately respond to questions Thursday morning.

Gov. Kathy Hochul has the power to remove Adams from office. Her spokesperson, Avi Small, issued a statement late Wednesday that said “Governor Hochul is aware of these concerning news reports and is monitoring the sit-

uation. It would be premature to comment further until the matter is confirmed by law enforcement.”

Federal prosecutors are believed to be leading multiple, separate inquiries involving Adams and his senior aides, relatives of those aides, campaign fundraising and possible influence peddling of the police and fire departments.

In the last two weeks alone, the city’s police commissioner and head of the school’s system have announced their resignations.

FBI agents had seized Adams’ electronic devices nearly a year ago as part of an investigation focused, at least partly, on campaign contributions and Adams’ interactions with the Turkish government. Because the charges were sealed, it was unknown whether they dealt with those same matters.

In early September, federal investigators seized devices from his police commissioner, schools chancellor, two deputy mayors and other trusted confidants both in and out of City Hall.

All have denied wrongdoing.

Harris, Trump go different economic paths

By Zeke Miller,
Steve Peoples
and Josh Boak
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Vice President Kamala Harris on Wednesday pledged to build an economy that is both pro-business and helps the middle class as she pushed back against Republican nominee Donald Trump’s claims that she’s advancing “communist” ideas.

The Democratic nominee said in remarks at the Economic Club of Pittsburgh in battleground Pennsylvania that she “would take good ideas from wherever they come” as she promised to double the number of people being trained in registered apprenticeships and outlined her support for more home ownership.

“As president, I will be grounded in my fundamental values of fairness, dignity and opportunity,” Harris said. “And I promise you, I will be pragmatic in my approach.”

Little more than an hour before her speech, Trump offered his own competing vision of the economy while visiting a furniture-maker in Mint Hill, N.C. He defended his idea for a special lower tax rate for U.S. manufacturers and pledged to impose tariffs high enough that there would be an “exodus” of auto factory jobs from Japan, Germany and South Korea.

“I’m imposing tariffs on your competition from foreign countries, all these foreign countries that have ripped us off, which stole all of your businesses and all of your jobs years ago,” Trump said.

The dueling speeches by the two candidates reflected how they’re honing their economic messages for voters in battleground states. Both are trying to counter criticism while laying out their best cases for a public that still worries about the economy’s health. Trump is focused on the idea of U.S. dominance over foreign competitors, while Harris is stressing the importance of sup-



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris addresses the Economic Club of Pittsburgh on the Carnegie Mellon University campus in Pittsburgh, on Wednesday.

porting the middle class and entrepreneurs.

Harris later sat down for an interview with MSNBC and reacted to Trump’s calls for tariffs, saying, “You don’t just throw around the idea of, just tariffs across the board.” She added of her opponent: “He’s just not serious about very many of these issues.”

In the interview, the vice president also renewed her calls for raising corporate tax rates, saying, “I’m not mad at anyone for achieving success, but everyone should pay their fair share.”

Those remarks came after Harris’ speech focused on her broader philosophy and what she’s trying to achieve for the economy. That was in contrast to Trump’s, which was more freestyle, including insinuations about Iranian connection to the two assassination attempts against him.

The former president said the corporate tax rate would drop from 21% to 15% for companies that make their products domestically if he were elected. The Republican nominee suggested that his support for broad tariffs as high as 20% have made him an interna-

tional target.

“This is why people in countries want to kill me,” he said. “They’re not happy with me.”

The candidates are each emphasizing the economy at a time when polls show that it is one of the most important issues for voters as they consider who to support. A recent AP-NORC poll found that neither candidate has a decisive edge with the public on the issue.

Both say their own approach will do more to ensure that the U.S. economy — and not China’s — leads the world in this century. Both are eager to embrace an image as a tax cutter and are accusing the other of backing massive tax hikes on the middle class. It’s a meaningful shift in messaging as inflation concerns have ebbed somewhat with the Federal Reserve cutting its benchmark interest rates last week.

Harris rebutted Trump by saying that she is a capitalist who believes in an “active partnership between government and the private sector.” She said Trump has “no intention to grow our middle class — he’s only interested in making life better for himself and



NELL REDMOND/AP

Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign event in Mint Hill, N.C., on Wednesday.

people like himself.”

The Democratic nominee plans to provide \$100 billion worth of tax breaks and other incentives to build up U.S. manufacturing and emerging technologies, according to a person familiar with her plans who provided details on the condition of anonymity. She has a forthcoming brochure to outline her vision for the economy.

Elsewhere, billionaire Mark Cuban said business leaders like him are backing Harris because she has taken considered stances that companies can understand even when they have a different perspective.

“I want a president that for business goes into details and has a policy team that understands all the ramifications of what’s been proposed,” Cuban said on a Tuesday call with reporters set up by the Harris campaign.

The Harris campaign’s efforts to show business support have overlapped with Trump’s in offering a host of populist ideas. In addition to wanting no taxes on tips, Social Security or overtime pay, Trump wants to limit the interest rate on credit cards to 10% and set

up low-tax zones on federal lands to lure employers. Trump also wants to ditch the cap on the deduction of state and local taxes that he put into the tax code in 2017 while president.

Both candidates see an opportunity to trash the other’s tax ideas. Trump recently dubbed Harris the “tax queen.” She wants to raise the corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%, as well as tax the unrealized capital gains of people worth more than \$100 million. She would use the revenue from that and other policies to sustain tax cuts for the middle class that are set to expire after 2025 as well as offer new tax breaks to parents and entrepreneurs. Many of her policies build on ideas initially proposed by President Joe Biden.

Trump claims her tax hikes would ultimately trickle down to the middle class.

Harris has shown that two can play that game. She labeled his call for tariffs a “national sales tax,” as it could increase the cost of coffee, clothes, electronics, autos and almost anything that gets imported or depends on imported parts.

Congress OKs stopgap as lawmakers punt decisions to December

By Kevin Freking
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress on Wednesday passed a temporary measure that keeps government agencies funded into December, avoiding a shutdown for now while punting final spending decisions until after the Nov. 5 election.

The Senate approved the measure by a vote of 78-18 shortly after the House easily approved it. The bill generally funds agencies at current levels through Dec. 20. But an additional \$231 million was included to bolster the Secret Service after the two assassination at-

tempts against Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. Money was also added to aid with the presidential transition, among other things.

The bill now goes to President Joe Biden’s desk to be signed into law.

“This bipartisanship is a good outcome for America,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said moments before the vote. “I hope it sets the tone for more constructive, bipartisan work when we return in the fall.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., billed the measure as doing “only what’s absolutely neces-

sary,” a statement directed at members of his own conference concerned about spending levels.

Still, it was a no-go for some Republicans, which forced House GOP leadership to rely on Democratic votes to pass the bill through a process that requires at least two-thirds support from voting members. The final vote was 341-82, with Republicans supplying all the no votes in both chambers. Johnson said the only alternative to the continuing resolution at this stage would have been a government shutdown.

“It would be political malpractice to shut the government

down,” Johnson said. “I think everyone understands that.”

The House floor was largely empty during debate on the measure. Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, was the lone critic among the speakers, saying, “We end up in a vicious circle every year, the same vicious circle.”

Lawmakers in both chambers are anxious to return to their home states and districts to campaign, smoothing the path for passage of the temporary funding fix. But more arduous fiscal negotiations await them at the end of the year.

Under terms of a previous deal to avoid a federal default and al-

low the government to continue paying its bills, spending for defense and nondefense programs would rise 1% next year.

The Senate has been charting a course to go above that level, while House Republicans have been voting for steep cuts to many non-defense programs, and they have attached policy mandates to the spending bills that Democrats overwhelmingly oppose. So a final agreement will be difficult to reach.

In the meantime, the temporary bill will mostly fund the government at current levels, with a few exceptions.

NATION

Fluoride in drinking water poses enough risk to merit new EPA action, judge says

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge has ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to further regulate fluoride in drinking water because high levels could pose a risk to the intellectual development of children.

U.S. District Judge Edward Chen cautioned that it's not certain that the amount of fluoride typically added to water is causing lower IQ in kids, but he concluded that mounting research points to an unreasonable risk that it could be. He ordered the EPA to take steps to lower that

risk, but didn't say what those measures should be.

It's the first time a federal judge has made a determination about the neurodevelopmental risks to children of the recommended U.S. water fluoride level, said Ashley Malin, a University of Florida researcher who has studied the effect of higher fluoride levels in pregnant women.

She called it "the most historic ruling in the U.S. fluoridation debate that we've ever seen."

The judge's ruling is another striking dissent to a practice that has been hailed as one of the greatest

public health achievements of the last century. Fluoride strengthens teeth and reduces cavities by replacing minerals lost during normal wear and tear, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Last month, a federal agency determined "with moderate confidence" that there is a link between higher levels of fluoride exposure and lower IQ in kids. The National Toxicology Program based its conclusion on studies involving fluoride levels at about twice the recommended limit for drinking water.

\$600M settlement is approved for residents near Ohio derailment

Associated Press

A federal judge on Wednesday approved a \$600 million class-action settlement Wednesday that Norfolk Southern railroad offered to everyone who lived within 20 miles of last year's disastrous derailment in East Palestine, Ohio.

Judge Benita Pearson gave the deal final approval after a hearing where the lawyers who negotiated it with the railroad argued that residents overwhelmingly supported it, attorneys for the residents and railroad spokesperson Heather Garcia told The Associated Press. Roughly 55,000 claims were filed. Only 370 households and 47 businesses opted out.

Those who did object to the deal were vocal in their concerns that the settlement won't provide enough and that the deal was rushed through so quickly that they can't possibly know what the po-

tential health impact from the derailment will be. They say it's hard to know all the risks, given the way test results have been reported by the EPA and the fact that the lawyers haven't disclosed everything they learned in their investigation.

The objectors had hoped the judge would order the plaintiff's lawyers to release the tests their own expert did after the derailment and address their concerns about a toxicologist who told them at one of the lawyers' town meetings that they shouldn't worry because he doesn't think anyone will develop cancer. That angered residents who have been complaining about unexplained ailments since the derailment and talking with doctors who are conducting studies to try and determine what the health impacts will be. Experts say it's too soon to know the health impacts.

Suicide deaths remain at high level in 2023

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. suicides last year remained at about the highest level in the nation's history, preliminary data suggests.

A little over 49,300 suicide deaths were reported in 2023, according to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That

number that could grow a little as some death investigations are wrapped up and reported.

Just under 49,500 were reported in 2022, according to final data released Thursday. The numbers are close enough that the suicide rate for the two years are the same, CDC officials said.

U.S. suicide rates have been rising for nearly 20 years, aside from a two-year drop around the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. So "a leveling off of any increase in suicide is cautiously promising news," said Katherine Keyes, a Columbia University public health professor who studies suicide.

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WORLD



Dogs are seen in cages at a dog farm in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, in June 2023. South Korea announced plans Thursday to compensate farmers and others in the country's dwindling dog meat industry before a formal ban goes into effect in 2027.

South Korea sets pre-ban plan for dog meat farmers

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea announced plans Thursday to compensate farmers and others in the country's dwindling dog meat industry before a formal ban goes into effect in 2027, a move that is drawing opposition from both farmers and some animal rights activists.

South Korea's parliament passed a landmark bill in January that will ban slaughtering, breeding or selling dog meat for human consumption after a three-year grace period. It will be punishable by 2-3 years in prison. The Agriculture Ministry said that farmers would receive compensation starting from \$170, and rising up to \$450 per dog if they agree to shut down early.

An association of farmers rejected the offer, saying in a statement that they cannot relinquish their dogs for such low prices. Farmers earlier called for \$1,505 per dog. They've said the ban infringes on their right to choose their own jobs and will aggravate their economic difficulties.

The association said that farmers will keep fighting even if they end up being jailed. Earlier this week, they called for the law to be amended to

extend the grace period and add appropriate compensation plans.

Sangkyung Lee, a campaign manager at the Korean office of the anti-animal cruelty group Humane Society International, called the South Korean announcement "an important milestone in this historic ban that will see the ban through to completion and end our country's dog meat era for good."

But Lee said his office is "disappointed" at the South Korean plan because it would pay farmers based on the number of dogs they have, "potentially increasing dog breeding to get more money from the scheme and more puppies being born into suffering."

The Korean Animal Welfare Association, a Seoul-based animal rights group, said that local governments must strictly monitor farms to prevent them from increasing their number of dogs through breeding. It praised the government for trying to take "reasonable" steps to phase out the industry but criticized farmers for seeking excessive compensation.

Dog meat consumption is a centuries-old practice on the Korean Peninsula.

Taliban: No Afghans face discrimination

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban said Thursday it was absurd to accuse them of gender discrimination and other human rights violations, as four countries vow to hold Afghanistan's rulers accountable under international law for their treatment of women and girls.

Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands are set to start legal proceedings against the Taliban for violating a U.N. convention on women, to which Afghanistan is a party.

The countries launched the initiative on Wednesday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, which is taking place in New York until Monday.

Despite promising more moderate rule after they seized power in 2021, the Taliban have barred women and girls from education beyond sixth grade, many public spaces and most jobs. In August, the Vice and Virtue Ministry issued laws banning women's bare faces and prohibiting them from raising their voices in public.

More than 20 countries expressed their support Thursday for the proposed legal action against the Taliban.

"We condemn the gross and systematic human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan, particularly the gender-based discrimination against women and girls," the coun-

Netanyahu demurs on talk of cease-fire with Hezbollah

By BASSEM MROUE AND MELANIE LIDMAN
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Dimming hopes for a cease-fire, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that Israel plans to continue striking Hezbollah "with full force" and will not stop until all of its goals are achieved.

Netanyahu spoke as he landed in New York to attend the annual U.N. General Assembly meeting and as U.S. and European officials were pressing for a 21-day halt in fighting between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah to give time for negotiations.

Only a short time before his statement, the Israeli military said it killed a Hezbollah drone commander in an airstrike on an apartment building in the suburbs of the Lebanese capital.

Netanyahu said Israel's "policy is clear. We are continuing to strike Hezbollah with full force. And we will not stop until we reach all our goals, chief among them the return of the residents of the north securely to their homes."

Israel has dramatically escalated strikes in Lebanon this week, saying it is targeting Hezbollah. Israeli leaders have said they are determined to stop more than 11 months of cross-border fire by the militant group into Israel, which has forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of Israelis from communities in the north.

The statement tempered hopes for the international initiative aimed at halting increasingly heavy exchanges of fire that have killed hundreds of people in Lebanon and threatened to trigger an all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel has talked of a possible ground invasion into Le-

banon to push the militant group away from the border.

Soon after the statement was issued, Hezbollah TV station Al-Manar reported an Israeli airstrike in a suburb of Beirut. It and other stations showed a damaged apartment building in Dahiyeh, the mainly Shiite suburb where Hezbollah has a strong presence.

The Israeli military later said the strike killed Mohammed Hussein Surour. Hezbollah offered no immediate comment on the claim.

Two people were killed and 15 wounded in the strike, the Lebanese Health Ministry said.

Over the past week, Israel has carried out several strikes in Beirut targeting senior Hezbollah commanders. Earlier in the day, a strike in eastern Lebanon killed 20 people, most of them Syrian migrants, according to Lebanese health officials.

Israel has dramatically stepped up its bombardment in Lebanon, saying it is determined to stop Hezbollah's near-daily rocket volleys over the past 11 months that have forced tens of thousands to evacuate homes in northern Israel. Strikes since Monday have killed more than 630 people in Lebanon, around a quarter of them women and children, according to local health authorities. Intensifying Hezbollah barrages have wounded several people in Israel.

Hezbollah has not yet responded to the proposal for a pause in fighting. Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati welcomed it, but his government has no sway over the group.

Hezbollah has insisted it would halt its strikes only if there is a cease-fire in Gaza, where Israel has battled Hamas for nearly a year. That appears out of reach despite months of negotiations led by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

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TELEVISION

Doctoring with dignity

Quinto's role in medical drama 'Brilliant Minds' was inspired by famous physician Oliver Sacks

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

There's a great moment in the first episode of the new NBC medical drama "Brilliant Minds" when it becomes very clear that we're not dealing with a typical TV doctor.

Zachary Quinto is behind the wheel of a car barreling down a New York City parkway, packed with hospital interns, abruptly weaving in and out of lanes, when one of them asks, "Does anyone want to share a Klonopin?" — a drug sometimes used to treat panic disorders.

"Oh, glory to God, yes, please," says Quinto, reaching an arm into the back seat. The intern then breaks the pill in half and gives a sliver to the driver, who swallows it, as the other interns share stunned looks.

Quinto, playing the character Dr. Oliver Wolf, is clearly not portraying any dour, by-the-rules doctor here — he's playing a character inspired by Dr. Oliver Sacks, the path-breaking researcher and author who rose to fame in the 1970s and was once called the "poet laureate of medicine."

"He was someone who was tirelessly committed to the dignity of the human experience. And so I feel really grateful to be able to tell his story and to continue his legacy in a way that I hope our show is able to do," Quinto says.

He's a fern-loving doctor

"Brilliant Minds" takes Sacks' personality — a motorcycle-riding, fern-loving advocate for mental health who died in 2015 at 82 — and puts him in the present day, where the creators theorize he would have no idea who Taylor Swift is or own a cellphone. The series debuted Monday on NBC stateside.

"It's almost as if we're imagin-

ing what it would have been like if Oliver Sacks had been born at a different time," Quinto says. "We use the real-life person as our North Star through everything we're doing and all the stories that we were telling, but we were able to find our own flavor and our own perspective in the telling of those stories as well."

In upcoming episodes, Wolf and his team deal with a biker friend whose brain tumor is affecting his memories, a mother who after surgery feels disconnected from her children and a 12-year-old girl who gets seizures whenever she laughs.

Aside from the weekly emergencies, there is also a longer, serieslong narrative exploring Wolf's personal life and his fraught relationship with his doctor parents, especially his late father, who had mental illness.

"I think over the course of the season, we see Dr. Wolf start to let his guard down a little bit by helping his patients and by mentoring the interns. And he's learning from them as much as they're learning from him," says creator and showrunner Michael Grassi.

The series hopes to satisfy viewers who come for the complex medical mysteries — with delicious jargon like "elevated intracranial pressure" and "abnormal neurocardiogenic reflex" — but also the very human connections between patient and doctor.

"I always say if people watch our show and they see themselves and the stories that we're telling, then we're doing our job," Quinto says.

'A place of optimism'

This isn't the first time Sacks has been portrayed. His 1973 book, "Awakenings," about hospital patients who'd spent decades in a kind of frozen state



NBC/AP

Zachary Quinto plays Dr. Oliver Wolf, a character inspired by real-life Dr. Oliver Sacks, in "Brilliant Minds."

until he tried a new treatment, led to a 1990 movie in which Sacks was played by Robin Williams.

The real Sacks lived in self-imposed celibacy for more than three decades, only coming out late in life. But Quinto and Grassi were not interested in having their hero closeted.

"If we were going to be having a gay male lead of our show in 2024, I really wanted them to be out and proud and that not to be something that he was hiding," Grassi said.

Grassi said when he was cre-

ating the show he always had Quinto in mind, being a fan of the actor's depth but also his humor. Grassi knew it was the perfect fit while filming the driving scene for the pilot when the intern offers her pill.

"Zach on that day ad-libbed, like, a million different responses," Grassi says. "And they were all funnier than the last. Editing was so hard to choose which one. But that's when I knew. I'm like, 'This is going to be great.'"

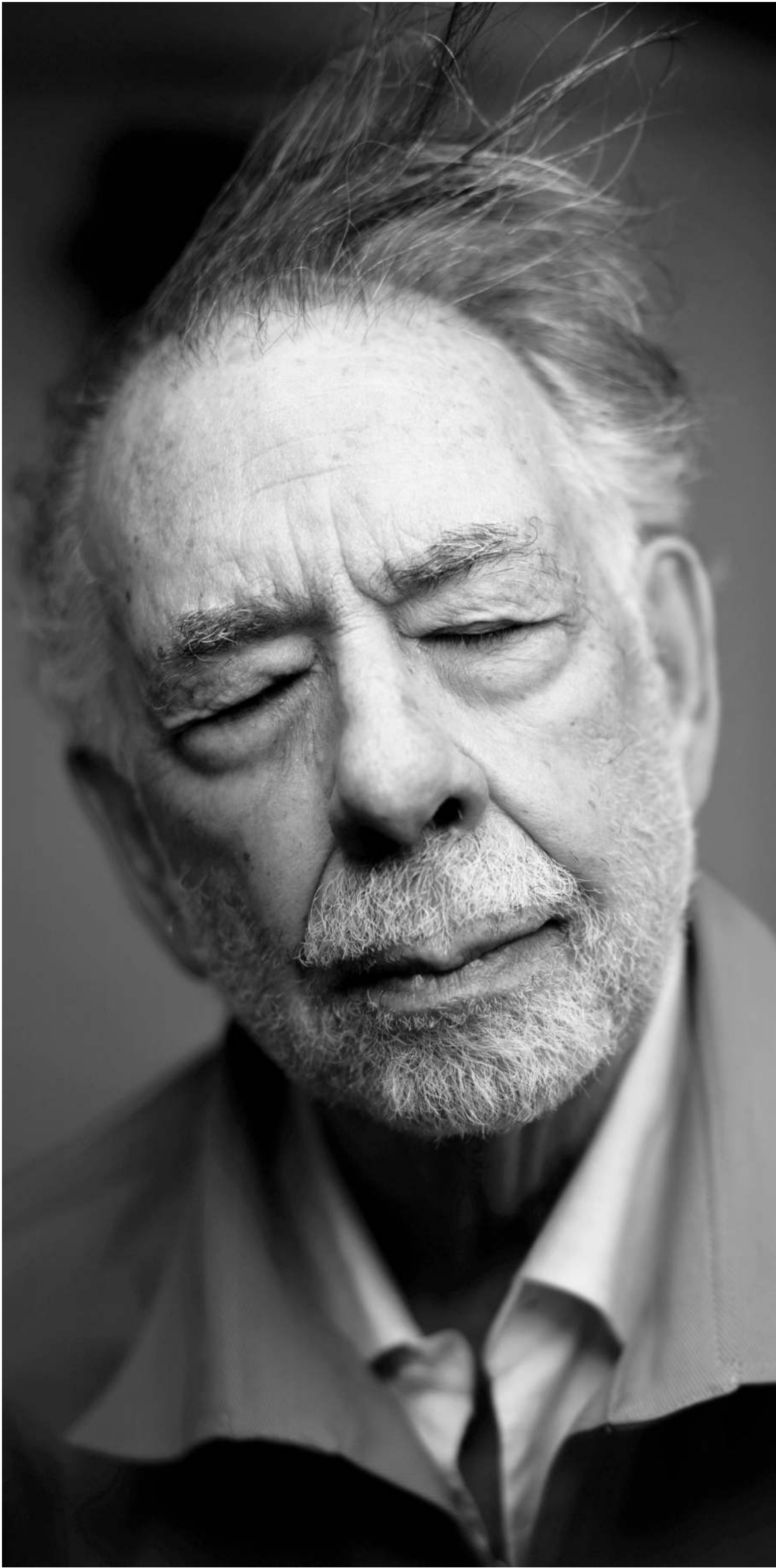
For Quinto, "Brilliant Minds" offers a chance to play a charis-

matic, empathic hero. While Quinto broke out as Mr. Spock in "Star Trek," his résumé also includes some less savory characters — a serial killer who tore out the brains of superheroes in "Heroes," the deranged Dr. Oliver Thredson on "American Horror Story: Asylum" and a demonic drifter in AMC's "NOS4A2": "After all the dark and villainous characters that I've played, it's really nice to anchor a story playing a character who is really operating from a place of optimism, hope, compassion and love and joy," he said.

"It's almost as if we're imagining what it would have been like if Oliver Sacks had been born at a different time. We use the real-life person as our North Star through everything we're doing and all the stories that we were telling, but we were able to find our own flavor and our own perspective in the telling of those stories as well."

Zachary Quinto
Dr. Oliver Wolf in "Brilliant Minds"

MOVIES



“Megalopolis” director Francis Ford Coppola is photographed May 17 at the 77th Cannes international film festival in southern France. One of its stars — Giancarlo Esposito, who first sat for a reading of the script 37 years ago — calls it “some deep, deep dream of consciousness” from Coppola.

Ahead of time

‘Megalopolis’ an astonishingly sincere message from director Coppola as his final years beckon

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Francis Ford Coppola believes he can stop time.

It’s not just a quality of the protagonist of Coppola’s new film “Megalopolis,” a visionary architect named Cesar Catilina (Adam Driver) who, by barking “Time, stop!” can temporarily freeze the world for a moment before restoring it with a snap of his fingers. And Coppola isn’t referring to his ability to manipulate time in the editing suite. He means it literally.

“We’ve all had moments in our lives where we approach something you can call bliss,” Coppola says. “There are times when you have to leave, have work, whatever it is. And you just say, ‘Well, I don’t care. I’m going to just stop time.’ I remember once actually thinking I would do that.”

Time is much on Coppola’s mind. He’s 85 now. Eleanor, his wife of 61 years, died in April. “Megalopolis,” which is dedicated to her, is his first movie in 13 years. He’s been pondering it for more than four decades. The film begins, fittingly, with the image of a clock.

“It’s funny, you live your life going from being a young person to being an older person. You’re looking in that direction,” Coppola said in a recent interview at a Toronto hotel before the North American premiere of “Megalopolis.” “But to understand it, you have to look in the other direction. You have to look at it from the point of view of the older looking at the younger, which you’re receding from.”

“I’m sort of thinking of my life in reverse,” Coppola says.

You have by now probably heard a few things about “Megalopolis.” Maybe you know that Coppola financed the \$120 million budget himself, using his lucrative wine empire to realize a long-held vision of a Roman epic set in a modern New York. You might be familiar with the film’s clamorous reception from critics at the Cannes Film Festival in May, some of whom saw a grand folly, others a wild ambition to admire.

“Megalopolis,” a movie Coppola first began mulling in the aftermath of “Apocalypse Now” in the late 1970s, has been a subject of intrigue, anticipation, gossip, a lawsuit and sheer disbelief for years.

What you might not have heard about “Megalopolis,” though, is that it’s an extraordinarily sincere message from a master

filmmaker nearing the end of his life. Giancarlo Esposito, who first sat for a reading of the script 37 years ago with Laurence Fishburne and Billy Crudup, calls it “some deep, deep dream of consciousness” from Coppola.

At a time when many are consumed by bitterly partisan politics and climate change anxiety, Coppola has spent every opportunity this year pleading that we are “one human family.” His movie, a delirious dream of the future, is an unwieldy but heartfelt fable about the boundlessness of human potential. As implausible as optimism may seem in 2024, it’s Coppola’s *cri de coeur* — one that he connects less to his perspective as an elder statesman than he does to his abiding, childlike sense of possibility.

“I realized that the genius of human invention usually happened when we were playing with our kids. It’s in the act of play that we’re so creative,” Coppola says. “The cave paintings, you see hands, but there are big hands and little hands.”

“Megalopolis” is in wide release this weekend, including on many IMAX screens, culminating what has been arguably Coppola’s biggest gamble — which is saying something for the filmmaker who plunked down his own millions to shoot “Apocalypse Now” in the Philippines jungle and plunged his production company, Zoetrope, into bankruptcy to make 1982’s “One From the Heart.” That title has remained symbolic of Coppola, an eminently personal filmmaker, regardless of the success of “The Godfather,” who has often done his best work far out on a limb.

“On our first day of shooting, at one point in the day he said to everybody, ‘We’re not being brave enough,’” Driver recalled in Cannes. “That, for me, was what I hooked on for the rest of the shoot.”

In the film, Driver’s Cesar is at odds with a backward-looking mayor, Franklyn Cicero (Esposito), but falls for his daughter, Julia (Nathalie Emmanuel). Cesar’s powers as a time-stopper and an architect are derived from a substance called Megalon that could alter the fate of the metropolis dubbed New Rome.

A lot is thrown into the mix, including Aubrey Plaza’s TV personality Wow Platinum and Shia LaBeouf’s Clodio Pulcher. Coppola spent years assembling

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MOVIE REVIEW

A wild fever dream of excess and idealism

Coppola's 'Megalopolis' best left for cinephiles

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

If anything is clear about "Megalopolis," it's that Francis Ford Coppola has a lot on his mind.

The legendary filmmaker spent decades on this Roman-style epic, set in the present day, about a civilization on the brink of collapse. A wealthy and powerful few of the old guard are running the gilded city of New Rome into the ground, a new generation is embroiled in a stalemate of a culture war between hedonists and puritans, and a visionary architect caught in the middle is dreaming up a different future.

But none of that captures the wild experience of actually watching "Megalopolis," a sprawling, operatic, clumsy and fascinating film that should inspire discussions for many years to come.

"Megalopolis" is not a disaster, but it's far from a success. It's a bacchanalia that's bursting with so many ideas, so many characters, so many great lines and truly terrible ones as well that it's nearly impossible to digest in a single, baffling viewing.

If there is a center to this story, it's Adam Driver's Cesar Catilina, an artist who can stop time and who believes that a substance called Megalon, a shimmering people-mover that can be used to make a translucent (but not naked) dress or reconstruct a face mangled by a gunshot, is the way to a utopia. Driver is a great

actor who is utterly misused here as a grief-stricken, alcoholic, "Hamlet"-quoting, megalomaniac aristocrat who spends his days in an art deco ivory tower (the Chrysler Building) fretting about time and what the corrupt Mayor Cicero (Giancarlo Esposito) is doing to the city.

We're supposed to believe that Cesar is a widely desired catch who would attract the mayor's beautiful daughter Julia (Nathalie Emmanuel) to his side. But Kylo Ren had more charisma than Cesar. The story's ability to sell Cesar as something special is not helped by Julia, more symbol than character despite plentiful screentime, whose leaden dialogue is not given any life or spark by Emmanuel.

Their Romeo-and-Juliet love story is labored, to say the least, despite some stunning shots that might suggest otherwise. It's a problem with much of the conflicts and connections in the film, which all sound great on paper — they should, as much of it is drawn from juicy Roman history — but fumble in execution.

That's not to say that all the actors wither under the excess. The great Talia Shire, as Cesar's cold mother, does more than either Driver or Emmanuel, with just a handful of lines and scenes. Aubrey Plaza, too, seems to have understood exactly what "Megalopolis" needed from a character named Wow Platinum, a social-climbing broadcast journalist who marries Jon Voight's bank scion Hamilton Crassus III: a



Lionsgate

Adam Driver's time-stopping artist Cesar Catilina attracts Nathalie Emmanuel's Julia, the daughter of corrupt Mayor Cicero, in "Megalopolis." The film is a Roman-style epic based in the present day.

high dose of camp. She embraces the silliness of her dialogue, seeing the comedic potential in every ridiculous moment.

It's hard to stress just how much there is stuffed into two hours and 18 minutes. Shia LaBeouf is Clodio Pulcher, the rich-kid son of Crassus, who has Mae West eyebrows and long feral hair. He is in love with Julia, jealous of Cesar and may be having an incestuous relationship with his party girl socialite sister Clodia (Chloe Fineman). He attempts his own political bid, preying on the city's desperate peasant class. Laurence Fishburne is Cesar's driver (and the narrator of the film). Dustin Hoffman is a fixer. Jason Schwartzman is around (and

delightful, as always). There's a pop star named Vesta Sweetwater (Grace VanderWaal) who has taken a virginity pledge. Even Romy Mars plays a teen reporter!

"Megalopolis" shines brightest with its crafts, including Milena Canonero's decadent Roman-inspired frocks, Osvaldo Golijov's sweeping, romantic score and Mihai Malaimare Jr.'s golden cinematography that makes the feast of the production design glow lovingly.

But this is a film that I can only in good conscience recommend fully to cinephiles, who were most certainly going to see it regardless. It's Coppola's first in 13 years, after all, and one that he boldly and admirably self-fi-

nanced. I hope that it's the movie he wanted to make. For anyone else, it's a tougher sell — not unworthy of someone's time and money, but also not guaranteed to be especially rewarding or satisfying for anyone hoping that he's made another "Godfather" (and who hasn't watched "Twixt" or "Tetro").

Coppola is an artist whose films sometimes take time to find their place in audiences' hearts and minds. No one understands that as pointedly as he does. Whether or not there's a drastic reappraisal somewhere down the line, "Megalopolis" will forever be a fascination.

"Megalopolis" is rated R for sexual content, nudity, drug use, language and some violence. Running time: 138 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

Time: Filmmaker, film both note value of taking risks, following one's heart

FROM PAGE 14

a scrapbook of inspirations for the film, though you could wonder if Cesar isn't ultimately derived from himself.

"I thought about Francis, but I wasn't thinking I'm going to do a version of Francis," Driver said. "All movies, I kind of feel, are their directors, in a sense."

Esposito was surprised to find the script hadn't changed much over the years. Every morning, he would receive a text from Coppola with a different ancient story. On set, Coppola favored theater games, improvisation and going with instinct.

"He takes his time. What we're used to in this modern age is immediate answers and having to know the answer," Esposito says. "And I don't think Francis needs to know the answer. I think the question for him is sometimes more important."

Reports of disorder on the set led to Driver making a statement that, to the contrary, it was one of the best shooting experiences of his career. Later, just before the film was to premiere in Cannes, a report alleged Coppola behaved inappropriately with extras. Variety later posted a story with a video shot by a crew member showing Coppola, in a nightclub scene, walking through a dancing crowd and then stopping to apparently lean in to several women to hug them, kiss them on the cheek or whisper to them.

Earlier this month, Coppola sued Variety, claiming its report was false and libelous. The trade publication said it stood by its reporters.

Asked about the reports in Toronto, Coppola said, "I don't even want to (discuss it). It's a waste of time."

Later in the interview, he separately noted: "I'm very respectful of women; I always have been. My mother, she always taught me: 'Francis, if you ever make a pass at a girl, that means you disrespect her.' So I never did."

None of the major studios or streaming services ("Another word for home video," Coppola says) sought to acquire "Megalopolis" after Cannes. He also first showcased it to executives and friends in Los Angeles before the festival but found little interest.

"I'm a creation of Hollywood," Coppola says. "I went there wanting to be part of it, and by hook or crook, they let me be part of it. But that system is dying."

If Coppola has a lot riding on "Megalopolis," he doesn't, in any way, appear worried. Recouping his investment in the film will be virtually impossible; he stands to lose many millions. But speaking with Coppola, it's clear he's filled with gratitude.

"I couldn't be more blessed," he says. "Everyone's so worried about money. I say: Give me less money and give me more friends," Coppola says. "Friends are valuable. Money is very fragile. You could have a million marks in Germany at the end of World War II and you wouldn't be able to buy a loaf of bread."

Coppola has lately been watching a lot of films from the 1930s ("The Awful Truth" is a favorite). But his mind is mostly on the cinema of the future.

In recent years, Coppola has experimented with what

he calls "live cinema," trying to imagine a movie form that's created and seen simultaneously. In festival screenings, "Megalopolis" has included a live moment in which a man walks on stage and addresses a question to a character on the screen.

"The movies your grandchildren will make are not going to be like this formula happening now. We can't even imagine what it's going to be, and that's the wonderful thing about it," Coppola says. "The notion that there's a set of rules to make a film — you have to have this; you have to have that — that's OK if you're making Coca-Cola because you want to know that you're going to be able to sell it without risk. But cinema is not Coca-Cola. Cinema is something alive and ever-changing."

Coppola has hoped to include the live moment in screenings nationwide. As of Tuesday, there weren't details available on those showings. He's even come up with a way to "simulate for the home an experience that is somewhat theatrical," he said.

Regardless of whether moviegoers will flock to "Megalopolis," it's clearly a passionate late-career statement from a titan of American movies, made without a whiff of an algorithm, that embodies a line heard several times in the film: "When we leap into the unknown, we prove that we are free."

"There have to be," Coppola says, "filmmakers who make the film without risk and jump into it and say, 'Well, it feels right to me, but who knows? Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm right; it doesn't matter. It's in my heart.'"

Thriving in the chaos

Urban’s latest set tackles love, life and his late father



By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Decades into one of the most consistent careers in contemporary country music, and you’d think Keith Urban has this whole album thing worked out. But his 11th studio album, “High,” out Sept. 20, was no walk in the park. It’s been four years since 2020’s “The Speed of Now Part 1,” and in that time, Urban wrote another record, “615,” and scrapped it.

“It’s the only time I’ve ever gone into the studio with a very clear sort of intent to make a particular kind of record, that had focus. I started to wonder if my musical adventurousness on records needed a little more discipline,” he laughs. “The end result was this thing that was just a bit linear. It was just a lot of the same kind of thing, and it was missing the spirit of the curiosity of the edges and places that I’m interested in exploring and going to.”

So, instead, Urban returned to what he knows best — fluidity in the studio, un beholden to genre limitations, the magic of uninhibited songwriting — channeling one of his favorite albums, the New Radicals’ 1998 alt-rock classic “Maybe You’ve Been Brainwashed Too,” with its oscillating qualities.

One song has impeccable structure and recording, the next is “stream of consciousness, random, I don’t even know what it is,” he says. “The album had this beautiful flowing energy of organized and chaos ... The spirit of most of my albums has contained some element of that.”

As does “High” — from the sexy, playful duet “Go Home W U,” co-written with BRELAND and featuring Lainey Wilson, the road trip romance of “Heart Like a Hometown” and the honky-tonk headrush “Laughin’ All the Way to the Drank” to the not-so-indirect ballad “Love Is Hard,” and the slow-burn “Dodge in a Silverado.”

Tempo changes punctuate the album, mirroring its emotional range.

The first gut punch arrives early: the jovial “Straight Line” hits like a rowdy night, “Messed Up As Me” provides the sobering light of day.

For Urban, those sensibilities make up life. “I’ve got a dutiful, responsible, reliable side. And I’ve got this animalistic, wild, reckless, irresponsible, ‘what does this button do?’” he says. “The spirit of those two things is very much a part of who I am, and this album hopefully captures that.”

To express that specific human experience, the sequencing of “High” was crucial. It had to end with “Break the Chain,” a soulful rumination on dysfunctional family dynamics.

“It’s a lot to do with my dad and being born into a family with an alcoholic father and the challenges that come with that,” he says of the song. “My job is to now maybe break that chain and do something different. But I never mentioned alcohol in the song once because I didn’t want the song to be about that. It’s really about behavioral patterns that we all learn very quickly to survive in whatever environment that we’re in.”

Urban has been sober for nearly two decades.



SEE URBAN ON PAGE 17

Keith Urban performs during a free pop-up concert on Sept. 19 in Nashville.
GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

MUSIC REVIEWS

Katy Perry returns with the uninspired ‘143’

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Katy Perry’s new album title, “143,” is code for “I love you,” based on the number of letters in each word of the phrase. She may love us, but the album is more like 144 — “I made mush.”

Perry’s first LP since 2020’s lackluster “Smile” is just as lackluster, a blur of thick electronic programming and simplistic lyrics. There’s none of her past cheeky humor, virtually no personality. Even the title is filler.

The rollout has been snakebit from the jump, with the artist under fire for collaborating with music producer Dr. Luke and the video for “Woman’s World” emerging as a sloppy, puzzling attempt at satire. Then her video shoot on a Spanish beach for “Lifetimes” was investigated for potential environmental damage.

It doesn’t help that the first three singles are just OK. “Wom-



Katy Perry
143 (Capitol Records)

an’s World” is a frothy Lady Gaga-esque arena pop anthem, the techno-stomper “Lifetimes” smacks of Calvin Harris from the 2010s and “I’m His, He’s Mine,” featuring Doechii, lazily lifts Crystal Waters’ “Gypsy Woman (She’s Homeless)” from 1991. It’s a trio of tunes that doesn’t scream 578 (“Katy’s totally relevant”).

“Gimme Gimme,” featuring 21 Savage, just lacks bite, a nursery rhyme from a new mother masquerading as a pop song (with crib-adjacent lyrics like “Say the right thing, maybe you can be / Crawling on me, like a centipede”).

“Gorgeous” with Kim Petras is marred by what sounds like a dog’s squeaky toy repeatedly going off in the mix, undercutting the notion of two women “coming out tonight, grab your man and hold him tight.” Squeak!

“Crush” isn’t bad, but it’s built on the repetitive, unyielding

synths you’d find in Eastern European discos in the ’90s. That’s a complaint for all the Dr. Luke tracks, really — Perry may rue their reunion simply based on the ugly, unsophisticated production. “All the Love” has the phrase “back to me” repeated 23 times during its 3:15 length.

“My intuition’s telling me things ain’t right,” she sings on “Truth,” a lyric that may sum up her album and a song that includes a fake voicemail at the end. Other artists are incorporating real dialogue and recorded snippets of their lives. Perry is faking it.

She has always preferred gangs of songwriters, but “143” pushes it to an insane level, with “Nirvana” credited to an even dozen.

Listen to it and see if 12 songwriters were necessary for a song that sounds like a warmed-over club track from La Bouche.

If the best song on “143” is “Lifetimes,” the worst is easily the closer, a sticky-sweet, wide-eyed plea for innocence in “Wonder,” sticking out like a sore



Katy Perry performs during the Rock in Rio music festival in Rio de Janeiro on Sept. 21. Her new album, “143,” lacks personality.

thumb. This is a cynical attempt to have moms in the audience wave their hands in unison as balloons float up, even as it decries cynicism.

“One day when we’re older / Will we still look up in wonder?”

she sings, name-checking her daughter, Daisy, who also makes a cute appearance.

But by this point, she’s lost our trust, with the 10 previous songs a sonic slog. “143” has no soul or emotion; it’s just a number.

Urban: ‘High’ offers hope in song, message

FROM PAGE 16

He wrote the song with Marc Scibilia the first day they met. Urban walked into Scibilia’s Nashville studio, barely having spoken to one another, and started writing. It began with the guitar, the overdubs, the melody, a second verse, and then a particularly devastating lyrical line flows out of Urban: “Never sure / What made him so mad at the world / Mad at me / I was just a kid / I won’t do the same.”

“I just burst out crying on this guy’s couch, just like in a fetal position, like I’m in therapy,” Urban recalls. “He looks over and he just goes, ‘Hmm, must be true.’ And then went back to work. And it was the perfect reaction because it wasn’t judgmental. It was of no opinion. And he just let me stay in it and finish out the song. And then that was it.”

Then he suggests, like all of the songs on this record, from the clear-as-day goodtime records and the others that might center on more complicated emotions, it’s “a hopeful song.”

“It’s offering hope and a way through a situation that a lot of people might find themselves in,” he says, because it assures they have the power to get out.

Miranda Lambert

Postcards From Texas (Republic/Big Loud)



Miranda Lambert’s 10th studio album begins with a plucky honky-tonk stomper, full of folksy imagery and a jaunty vibraslap sound:

“Well I met an armadillo / Out in Amarillo / And he asked me for a light,” Lambert’s voice swings, “I said a where ya goin’ / He said ‘I don’t really know’ / And I said, ‘Brother I’ve been there twice.’”

It might be an outlier, for listeners expecting a collection more in line with the album’s lead single, the classic rock-channeling “Wranglers,” but it’s also the perfect tone-setter.

Across the 14-track release, Lambert aims to deliver sometimes-traditional country with a lot of heart.

Throughout, “Postcards From Texas” is a sonic road trip across Lambert’s home state — from the steel guitar-led ballad “Looking Back on Luckenbach” to the funny, trash-talking divorce anthem “Alimony,” with its not-so-thinly veiled lyrical geography.

“I called that lawyer up in Dallas,” she sings in the chorus. “If you’re gonna leave me in San Antone / Remember the alimony,” the last word teased out to turn “Alamo” into “alimony.” It’s such a rewarding lyric reversal, it feels almost prototypical — as if plucked from some great country music songbook instead of written into it.

Lambert’s voice is where “Postcards From Texas” finds its cohesion, from dreamy ballads, like “Way Too Good At Breaking My Heart” and country-rock swagger, like on “B— On the Sauce (Just Drunk)” to classic covers, like in the case of “Living on the Run,” from David Allan Coe’s 1976 album, “Longhaired Redneck.”

Lambert co-produced the album with Jon Randall, and recorded the entirety of it at Austin, Texas’ Arlyn Studios, the first time since she was 18 that she’s recorded a full album in her home state. In those days, long before becoming a stalwart of Nashville’s Music Row, it’s easy to imagine she wasn’t thinking about a homecoming — especially in a state where those considered Texas country greats are overwhelmingly male.

At this stage in her career, Lambert doesn’t have anything to prove — and that’s one of many reasons why “Postcards From Texas” is a ride that works.

— Maria Sherman
Associated Press

The Cactus Blossoms

Every Time I Think About You (Walkie Talkie Records)



“I’m a big fan of appreciation,” the Cactus Blossoms’ brothers Jack Torrey and Page Burkum sing on “Keep Walkin’,” a cut from their new album.

That sounds like the cue for a compliment: “Every Time I Think About You” might be the duo’s best record yet.

Torrey and Burkum have built a career on classic sibling singing, but on the new album, harmony vocals are only part of the charm.

Handsome melodies make these 10 songs shimmer; there’s also an elemental but sturdy ’50s-style structure to uncluttered arrangements framed by tuneful electric guitars. Even the instrumental solos are catchy.

“Every Time I Think About You” was released Aug. 30, coinciding with the Minnesotans’ Grand Ole Opry debut. The new songs are rooted in country and the blues (with lyrics referencing Jimmie Rodgers and Howlin’ Wolf), ensuring a tasteful mix of savory with their familiar sweetness.

The Torrey-Burkum vocal blend remains the anchor, and the songs tend to, yes, blossom when those harmonies arrive. Rounding out the group are drummer Jeremy Hanson and guitarist Jacob Hanson, who are also brothers, and bassist Phillip Hicks. Longtime collaborator, engineer and mixer Alex Hall helped fill out the sound. All took part in full-band sessions at Creation Audio, where they recorded the album, the same Minneapolis studio that produced classic records by the Trashmen, Dave Dudley and the Replacements.

The songs, all originals, are fuzzy on details but strong on feeling. There’s a recurring theme of moving on, as suggested by several titles. “Keep Walkin’” evokes the late Marc Bolan, “There She Goes” is a deceptively breezy breakup tune, and “Go On” soars as a ballad worthy of fellow Minnesotans the Jayhawks.

The set opens with the funky rock of “Something’s Got a Hold on Me,” while “Be What I Wanna” rides a mossy groove. Guitars swap licks as the simile-centric “Is It Any Wonder” celebrates the romance of discovery and discovery of romance. “You’re like a mountain I can’t get over,” the brothers sing.

The album turns topical on “Statues,” a ballad distinguished by tremolo guitars, a “Blue Bayou” beat and concise, clever lyrics.

“Statues,” the duo sings, “cast shadows that fall on you. Statues — they’re falling, too.”

That’s a couplet to appreciate.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press

VIDEO GAMES



Nintendo

The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom has wide-open fields and plenty of nooks and crannies hidden all over the kingdom of Hyrule.

More power to Zelda

Combat-heavy Echoes of Wisdom gives character a starring role

BY GENE PARK
The Washington Post
Halfway through my first adventure with Princess Zelda as the protagonist, she became a summoner who conjures dark knights at will and swims through airborne blocks of water she creates with her magic staff.

She is also prone to summon beds and take naps during battle. She can also disappear stealthily into a corner only for the guards to find nothing but a chair, leaving them to question their faculties. Zelda is a trickster goddess in her first starring role in a game, *The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom*, released Sept. 26 on the Nintendo Switch. Co-developed by Nintendo and the studio Grezzo, the first Zelda game starring a woman is also the first to be directed by a woman.

Last year’s *Tears of the Kingdom* was massive, and although *Echoes* is a smaller experience, it’s also the largest top-down Zelda game ever made as far as I can tell, with wide-open fields and hidden nooks and crannies hidden all over its new version of the kingdom of Hyrule, and secrets still to uncover dozens of hours later.

The Zelda series is a daisy chain of interconnected and

evolving ideas. Here, as in *Tears*, the priority is the player’s freedom to overcome challenges.

In *Echoes*, Zelda is accused by her own kingdom of opening dimensional rifts that entrap people and places within the



“Still World,” a frozen abyssal hellscape. She is assisted by a fairy named Tri who gives her a magical staff that can create copies, or echoes, of people and objects in the world. This is why she’s able to conjure blocks of water to swim through the air, while her summoned colony of bats protect her. She treks across a Hyrule that’s reminiscent of the map featured in the Super Nintendo classic *Link to the Past*, except here it’s expanded and clarified.

The game’s big draw is that the copying ability allows for unprecedented freedom to fight enemies and navigate treacherous dungeons. One of the first things she copies is a bed, and that turned out to be my second-most-used object after the water block. Creating ladders and bridges of dirty beds remained a viable way

to move through the world, all the way up until the very final dungeon. Sleeping on these beds is also the most efficient way to heal her: Taking naps during epic struggles will be a common sight for many players.

You can also save Hyrule your way with your own version of Princess Zelda. Maybe she’ll only summon spiders, using their webs to climb great heights. I took to casting electric moths that shoot toward enemies like missiles. *Echoes* is a shockingly combat-heavy game — don’t be fooled just because she doesn’t always use a sword (except in a meter-limited “sword fighter” form that mimics combat from past games). There’s even a series of combat challenges that strip her of all learned echoes, testing the player’s ability to improvise.

I just wish the central mechanic was easier to use. Copying objects is a simple concept, but choosing which object to cast is cumbersome, using the directional arrows to bring up menus that scroll for way too long, with 127 different echoes by the game’s end. Other directions on the pad are also used for other functions that seem superfluous to the game. Zelda’s absurd power is a huge part of what makes *Echoes* unique and fun, but it comes at the cost of some bal-



GENE PARK/The Washington Post

Boss keys reappear in Echoes of Wisdom as dungeons return to the classic formula missing in the larger Nintendo Switch titles.

ance to the game. She’s over-stuffed with ability, and some buttons could have been freed up to give us a “favorites” menu for optimizing a more personalized summoner.

Fortunately, the story sings. This game is a miraculous fusion of the Switch games’ freedom and the more directed, procedural pacing of classic titles like *Link to the Past*. Dungeons are filled with keys, gates and the occasional miniboss, and solved by finding some power or echo within them. The dungeons use the classic template as guidelines, but developer Grezzo and Nintendo aren’t afraid to weave out of it here and there.

I also hesitate to call this game a 2D title. It’s only the top-down camera that gives us the illusion of two dimensions, but this is a fully 3D environment with physics that follows natural law (fire melts ice, burns grass, etc.),

allowing for the kind of free-form play in *Breath of the Wild*. But with a restricted camera angle, the franchise is finally able to revisit and refine its immaculate dungeon formula it once abandoned. That decision also helps the game return to more linear storytelling, with charming narrative arcs unfolding in each region, complete with new unique characters. Through each quest, Zelda helps people become the best versions of themselves, such as a young village chief hoping to live up to the legacy of his late father, or two friends mending a long-standing conflict.

To get a game this innovative, charming and polished over a year after the remarkable *Tears* is miraculous. I can’t wait to see what the next Zelda game learns from this one. Its echoes will ring long after the credits roll.

Platform: Nintendo Switch
Online: tinyurl.com/phdsy62c

CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

BY AIMEE LUCIDO / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Aimee Lucido, of Irvington, N.Y., is a children’s author. Her third book, “Pasta Pasta Lotsa Pasta,” came out in July. Puzzles and children’s books are “both ways to stretch out language,” she says. “They’re about using every sentence, every word, every letter to its absolute fullest.” Having two related hobbies comes in handy: “I definitely use puzzles to procrastinate writing, and writing to procrastinate puzzles!”

ACROSS

1 “Here’s looking at you, kid” or “You can’t handle the truth!” famously

6 Jane Goodall subject

11 Platform for Mega Man, for short

14 Butter (up)

17 Jim who sang “Time in a Bottle”

18 Scintillae

19 Turn in some board games

20 Humble dwelling

21 Record book?

23 Home to Cedar Point

24 Sugar ending

25 ____ Air (carrier to Taiwan)

26 Marked with a tag, maybe

27 Composted material

29 Altima alternative

31 Spell book?

34 Apt name for a gardener

36 Goofs up

37 FAQ consultants

38 Group of conferences, for short

41 Creature whose mating habitats are a scientific mystery

43 Pack ‘n Play and stroller, for a traveling parent

44 Walk with confidence

46 Green book?

50 Talent finder

51 Placed on a peg

52 Bops (in two senses)

53 Nail-salon extensions

57 Musical finales

59 Kunis of “Black Swan”

62 Conductor’s announcement

64 Lost-at-sea plea

65 Logbook?

69 Most of van Gogh’s “The Starry Night”

70 Perfunctory

72 Source of a natural gel

73 Mother of Perseus

75 “The Clan of the Cave Bear” heroine

76 Sebastian the ____, University of Miami mascot

78 Picked a card

81 John who married Pocahontas

83 Yearbook?

88 Member of the original “S.N.L.” cast

90 Lambs’ moms

91 Sticky substance

92 Occasional disrupter of activity at Sicily’s Vincenzo Bellini Airport

93 Bad buy

94 Spot for a wineglass charm

95 Where the chair of St. Peter sits in St. Peter’s Basilica

97 Rule book?

103 Curtain adornment

107 Potluck dish

108 Makes blank

110 Diagnostic tool, briefly

111 Org. that administers the G.R.E.

112 Chugging a bottle of hot sauce, perhaps

113 Scrapbook?

116 Four Corners native

117 Kristin ____, first woman to win six gold medals at a single Olympic Games

118 Late-night host who once wrote for “The Simpsons”

119 Pass

120 Always product

121 Dismissive cry

122 Climbs

123 Cheat, so to speak

DOWN

1 Back issues

2 Determination

3 2017 film about Wolverine

4 I, to Einstein

5 Caption under the first half of a makeup ad

6 Mix, as butter and sugar

7 Bailey of 2023’s “The Little Mermaid”

8 Less friendly

9 Bumped into

10 Liberal-arts major: Abbr.

11 “Ain’t happening!”

12 Skip over, as a sound

13 Gradual buildup

14 Suddenly stopped texting

15 Like monastery life

16 Takes the helm

18 Rare punt return outcomes, for short

19 Stays (with)

22 Covered by one’s network

27 Fawcett who played one of Charlie’s Angels

28 Column in a hockey box score

30 Sat on the kitchen counter, perhaps

32 Natural barrier

33 It’s opposite Oman on the Gulf of Oman

35 Waist product?

38 High degree

39 Plant also known as coffeeweed

40 Nebulizer’s output

42 Cell-service inits.

43 Big name in chocolate

44 Instrument with as many as 21 strings

45 Thrown out

47 Lyre-plucking Muse

48 Lead-in to sphere

49 Pinball game ender

54 “I’m overwhelmed by all this”

55 Tease

56 Bad person to confide in

58 Pilgrim’s destination, maybe

60 Rapper ____ Baby

61 Some poles

63 In a flow state?

64 Business that offers microdermabrasion

66 Glowing remnant

67 Manner of walking

68 Halliwell of the Spice Girls

71 The Beyhive and the Swifties, for two

74 Credit-card lure

77 See red

79 A Tyrannosaurus rex’s was nearly 17 inches long

80 “Hold your horses!”

82 Chapter of history

84 Requiring

85 Decorative pitcher

86 Film character who becomes trapped in a dentist’s office

87 Many a critic’s year-end list

88 Crew meet

89 Stockpiled

93 Get ready to skate

94 “The Great” pope

96 Addresses impudently

98 Give an address

99 Onward

100 Approaches

101 Hudson of the “Ghostbusters” movies

102 Listings on a Japanese menu, maybe

104 Bad-mouth

105 Writer Jong

106 Like a dryer trap

109 Title for Sanders: Abbr.

113 Word in many greeting-card categories

114 Slugger’s stat

115 What takes this puzzle out with a bang?

68 Halliwell of the Spice Girls

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GUNSTON STREET

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

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FACES

Q&A

Suki Waterhouse finds her sparkle

‘Daisy Jones & The Six’ actress embraces music career on wide-ranging 2nd album

BY ELISE RYAN
Associated Press

Suki Waterhouse discovered the Sparklemuffin spider during a late-night scroll.

“He’s wildly colored. He’s cute,” she said. Best of all: He dances. “I felt somewhat akin to him.”

The spider became a foil and a mascot for Waterhouse’s second album, “Memoir of a Sparklemuffin,” which came out Sept. 13.

The release follows the British singer-songwriter’s 2022 debut “I Can’t Let Go” and her time playing keyboardist Karen Sirko in “Daisy Jones & The Six,” the Amazon Prime series based on Taylor Jenkins Reid’s bestselling novel about a 1970s rock band. The record’s 18 songs cover heartache and the search for a “Big Love,” but also the 32-year-old’s time in the industry, which she entered as a teen, modeling first. The project wrapped just days before the birth of her daughter, now six months old, with partner Robert Pattinson.

After celebrating the release with stops at the Michael Kors fashion show and the MTV Video Music Awards, Waterhouse talked with The Associated Press about making the album while pregnant and how playing Sirko motivated her to fully embrace her music career.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Associated Press: Much of “Memoir of a Sparklemuffin” was made while you were pregnant with your daughter. How did that shape the music you were making during that time?

Waterhouse: I think the physical limitations were something that shaped the album, in a really good way. It was sort of amazing to not be able to leave the house for a couple of months. I mean, I really got to focus in a way that I don’t know if sometimes you are able to when the world keeps moving.

I’m someone that loves working at home. All of my music that I’ve made pretty much has been made in home studios — big studios can freak me out a little bit. There’s something especially about being in Los Angeles, there’s just so many talented people around you, so you’re literally able to call up the best guitarist and he lives 15 minutes away. So it was very much that feeling of having awesome people just flow in and out of my house, with also a good deadline. It wasn’t just the deadline of — finish the record. It was, we must finish the record. There will be a baby here if we don’t.

The song “Model, Actress, Whatever,” feels like a reclamation of those labels.

It’s funny; when I wrote that song, I kind of had that loop going around — (singing) “call me a model, an actress, whatever” — and it was something that I thought was kind of self-deprecating and funny. But I also felt like I would want to be in my car singing that. It’s dramatic, it’s glamorous.

I love consuming stories about people’s lives written by them. I love reading a memoir; I love reading from someone’s perspective what really went down, what really happened. That song, I guess, I was a little afraid after I wrote it — like, I’ve been trying to



MATT LICARI, INVISION/AP

Suki Waterhouse, shown Sept. 12, says the limitations of making her new album, “Memoir of a Sparklemuffin,” while pregnant meant that she was able to stay home and give the project needed focus.

get away from being called this, from having these kind of labels — and then I think that was why I ended up writing it. There were a couple of months where I was like, “I’m not going to have this as a single. Let’s sweep that one under the carpet.” And then it’s always those ones actually, that eventually, you’re like, “No, yeah, this is reclaiming those words.”

You told AP last year that playing Karen Sirko in “Daisy Jones & The Six” helped you embrace your own music career. Why do you think that was?

Looking at the book, she was cool and calm and collected and she knew exactly what she wanted to do and she knew exactly who she was. She wanted to be on tour for the rest of her life. And you know, there was a reason why I was drawn to the part. I think

whenever you step into a role, you do just absorb — that’s the job. There’s just so much to be gained from that experience.

Something about playing her gave me that nudge, that voice in my head that was like: “Right, now is that time that you need to go and make that album that you’ve been wanting to make for years and years and years, that you’ve been working towards. You’ve got the songs, they’re all there; go and make the album.” Also, playing a role where we were all in a band, hanging out in Sound City Studios every day, I was kind embracing that life of a musician. I had this hole in my heart like, that’s what I want to be doing too.

Do you ever find yourself tapping into Karen, now?

(Laughs) Yeah, I guess. She’s always there; she’s always there.

Kotb reveals she’s leaving ‘Today’ show

Associated Press

Hoda Kotb, a fixture at NBC for more than two decades, says she will leave her morning perch on the “Today” show early next year, telling staffers “it’s time.”

In a memo to her team and later on air, Kotb said her 60th birthday this summer helped trigger the departure. “I saw it all so clearly: my broadcast career has been beyond meaningful, a new decade of my life lies ahead, and now my daughters and my mom need and deserve a bigger slice of my time pie.”



Kotb

Kotb has co-anchored “Today” with Savannah Guthrie since 2018, filling in after Matt Lauer was fired amid sexual harassment allegations. She first joined NBC News as a correspondent for “Dateline” in 1998, and later joined “Today” in 2007.

“Happily and gratefully, I plan to remain a part of the NBC family, the longest work relationship I’ve been lucky enough to hold close to my heart. I’ll be around. How could I not? Family is family and you all will always be a part of mine,” she wrote.

The Cure announces album, releases new song

Goths, rejoice: At long last, The Cure has released new music.

“Alone,” their first new song in 16 years, premiered on the BBC 6 Music channel on Thursday. The English band also announced a new album, “Songs of A Lost World,” to be released on Nov. 1.

The Cure teased new music on social media leading up to its release, sharing a snippet of the song that featured their trademark layered guitars, metallic percussion and sparkling synths. Near the end, singer Robert Smith jumped in with the gloomy lyrics, “This is the end of every song that we sing.”

“It’s the track that unlocked the record; as soon as we had that piece of music recorded I knew it was the opening song, and I felt the whole album come into focus,” Smith said in a press release.

The Cure has toured in the years since their last album, 2008’s “4:13 Dream,” but had yet to release a new album.

The Cure joins a long list of 2024 band reunions, which so far includes Britpop icons Oasis, who ended a 15-year hiatus, and Linkin Park — now with a new singer, Dead Sara’s Emily Armstrong — who had not performed since the 2017 death of lead singer Chester Bennington.

DeGeneres embraces being ‘mean’ post-controversy

New York Daily News

Ellen DeGeneres is leaning into her “toxic” persona after the once-beloved talk show host found herself out of mainstream media’s good graces.

The Emmy winner, 66, says in her new Netflix special, “For Your Approval,” that she “just can’t” care anymore about what people think of her, per TMZ.

“Proud” of who she is today, the “Finding Nemo” star said she “spent an entire lifetime trying to make people happy and ... cared far too much what other people think of me

“So, the thought of anyone thinking that I’m



DeGeneres

said it had fostered a toxic workplace culture rife with “racism, fear and intimidation.” “The Ellen DeGeneres Show” came to an end last year, after two decades and 19 seasons.

In July of this year, DeGeneres said her “El-

len’s Last Stand...Up Comedy Tour” would be “the last time you’re going to see me.”

She added: “After my Netflix special, I’m done,” confirming for a curious crowd member that retirement extended to movies and theater.

During the show, DeGeneres addressed the “mean girl” allegations against her.

She contended that while she’s “many things” — including, sometimes, “demanding and impatient and tough” — she is “not mean.”

Billed as “the final comedy special of her historic career,” DeGeneres’ “For Your Approval” dropped Tuesday on Netflix.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Snowmobiler who collided with helo is awarded \$3M

MA BOSTON — The federal government was mostly responsible for a nighttime collision involving a snowmobiler who nearly died after hitting a Black Hawk helicopter that was parked on a Massachusetts trail, a judge ruled in awarding him \$3.3 million in damages.

U.S. District Judge Mark Mas-troianni blamed both parties for the March 2019 crash in his ruling Monday, but said the government was 60% responsible for parking the helicopter on a snowmobile trail. He criticized Jeff Smith for not operating the snowmobile safely, for speeding and for wearing tinted goggles.

Smith, a Massachusetts lawyer, had asked for \$9.5 million in damages to cover his medical expenses and lost wages and to hold the military responsible for the crash.

Smith’s lawyers argued that the crew of the Black Hawk helicopter that flew from New York’s Fort Drum to Worthington, Mass., for night training was negligent for parking a camouflaged 64-foot aircraft on a rarely used airfield also used by snowmobilers.

Smith, who was airlifted to a trauma center with a dozen broken ribs, a punctured lung and severe internal bleeding, has been surviving on disability assistance. The 48-year-old struggles with simple tasks.

Passenger, horse killed in quick series of crashes

CA NORCO — The passenger in a car was killed when a horse smashed through the windshield during a series of crashes on a Southern California interstate over the weekend, authorities said.

The first collision occurred about 2 a.m. Sunday when a Toyota Tacoma towing a horse trailer veered to the right and struck a guardrail on northbound Interstate 15 near Norco, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The trailer split open, sending the horse onto the freeway. Then a semitractor-trailer smashed into the horse trailer.

The horse made it to the median but then tried to cross the interstate, when it was clipped by a black Honda Accord, highway patrol Officer Javier Navarro told the Southern California News Group.

Next, a gray Honda Accord struck the horse, which smashed through the car’s windshield, Navarro said. The passenger, a 25-year-old man in the front seat, was killed. The horse also died.

State senator’s arrest is his second in 2 months

WV CHARLESTON — A West Virginia state lawmaker who was arrested last month is facing new charges after police say they suspect he was driving under the influence, news outlets reported.



CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

Seeing what’s in store

Pedestrians in Chicago’s famed Loop walk past a window display at Macy’s department store during a light rain on Tuesday.

Police pulled over Republican Sen. Mike Maroney, 56, on Monday for several alleged traffic offenses, the Wheeling News-Register reported. Following a roadside investigation, Maroney was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, McMechen Police Chief Robert Shilling told the newspaper.

Maroney is charged with three misdemeanors: control of a vehicle under the influence, no registration and expired registration. He has served in the state senate since 2016.

Maroney has only a few months left to serve in his second four-year term. He was defeated in the May primary.

In August, Maroney was stripped of his position as chair of the state Senate Health and Human Resources Committee after being charged with indecent exposure and disorderly conduct. Maroney was arrested on the two misdemeanor charges after an Aug. 4 episode at Gumby’s Cigarette & Beer World in Glen Dale.

‘Authentic self’ video gets ex-COVID adviser fired

NY NEW YORK — A former New York City official who helped coordinate the city’s response to the pandemic was fired from his private-sector job after a recording showed him talking about attending a sex party and other private gatherings when the city was urging people to practice social distancing.

Dr. Jay Varma was terminated from his position as executive vice president and chief medical officer at SIGA Technologies, the New

York-based pharmaceutical company disclosed in a filing Monday with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Varma served as a senior public health adviser to then-Mayor Bill de Blasio from April 2020 to May 2021. He regularly appeared with the Democratic mayor at press briefings discussing the city’s COVID-19 response.

A hidden-camera video posted last week by podcaster Steven Crowder shows Varma speaking casually to a woman about attending gatherings even as he served as a face of the city’s pandemic response.

“I did all this deviant, sexual stuff while I was on TV and people were like, ‘Aren’t you afraid? Aren’t you embarrassed?’ ” he said at one point in the edited recording. “And I was like, no, I really like being my authentic self.”

Varma declined Tuesday to comment on his firing, but acknowledged the authenticity of the video in a statement provided by a spokesperson.

Judge sides with Catholic employers on protections

ND BISMARCK — A federal judge is allowing more than 8,000 Catholic employers nationwide to reject government regulations that protect workers seeking abortions and fertility care.

U.S. District Judge Daniel Traynor, of Bismarck, N.D., granted a preliminary injunction Monday, ruling that the Catholic Benefits Association and the Diocese of Bismarck were likely to succeed in

proving that a final rule adopted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in April violated their freedom of religion. The regulations are meant to enforce the federal Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act passed with widespread bipartisan support in December 2022. It was widely considered a victory for women who are low-wage workers and have routinely been denied accommodations for everything from time off for medical appointments to the ability to sit or stand on the job. But controversy ensued when the EEOC adopted an expansive view of conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth that required accommodations, including for abortion, fertility treatment and birth control.

Court: Man can sue state over solitary confinement

PA PHILADELPHIA — A man who spent 26 years in solitary confinement despite a history of mental illness can sue Pennsylvania prison officials for alleged cruel and unusual punishment, a U.S. appeals court said in reviving the man’s lawsuit.

Roy Lee Williams spent nearly all of his time alone from 1993 until 2019, when a legal settlement led the state to end the practice of routinely housing death-row inmates in solitary confinement.

Williams had been sentenced to death for killing a construction worker in Philadelphia in 1988. An Associated Press story on the 1992 trial reported that Williams, who is Black, had said he wanted to kill a

white person because a white person had put him in jail in a robbery case.

He was sentenced to death row at 26. His mental health problems date back to at least age 14, when he was involuntarily committed to a psychiatric facility amid suicidal ideation, according to his lawsuit. Prison officials knew of his history of severe mental health and cognition problems at least by 1996, Senior U.S. Circuit Judge Theodore McKee wrote in the 2-1 ruling issued Friday, which reversed a lower court ruling.

Williams remains in custody, and under a death sentence, in a state prison near Philadelphia. He is represented by the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, which has filed a number of similar suits alleging undue harm from years of isolation. Some lawsuits seek policy changes, while Williams is seeking money damages since he is no longer in solitary confinement.

Democratic campaign office damaged by gunfire

AZ TEMPE — Someone fired shots at a Democratic Party campaign office in a Phoenix suburb, causing damage but no injuries, authorities said.

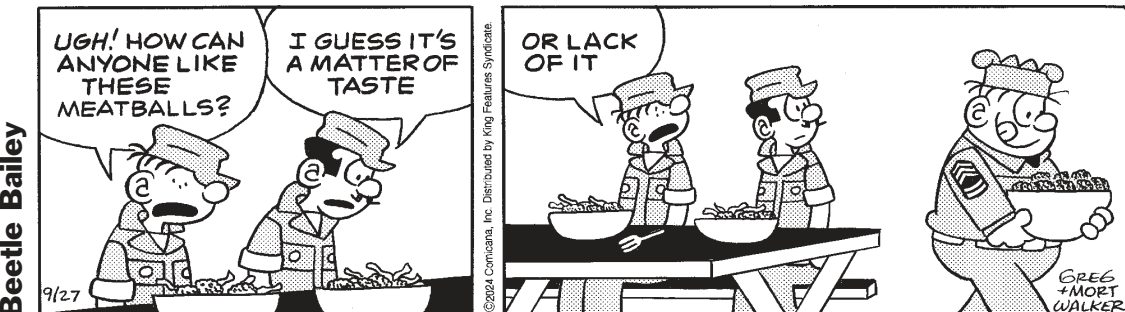
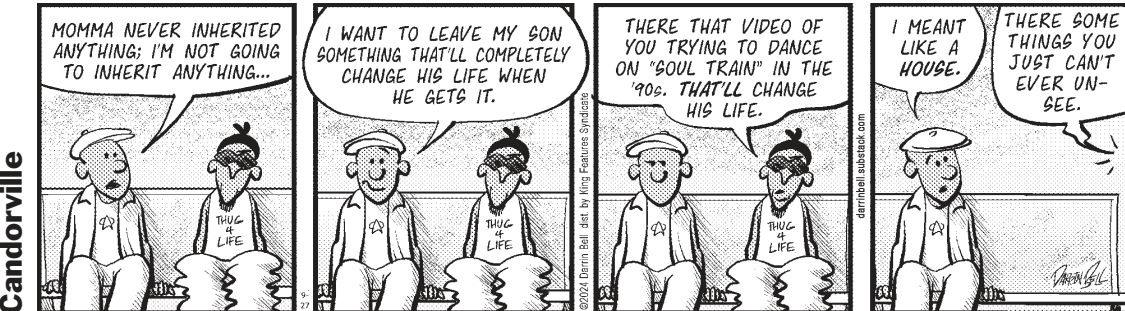
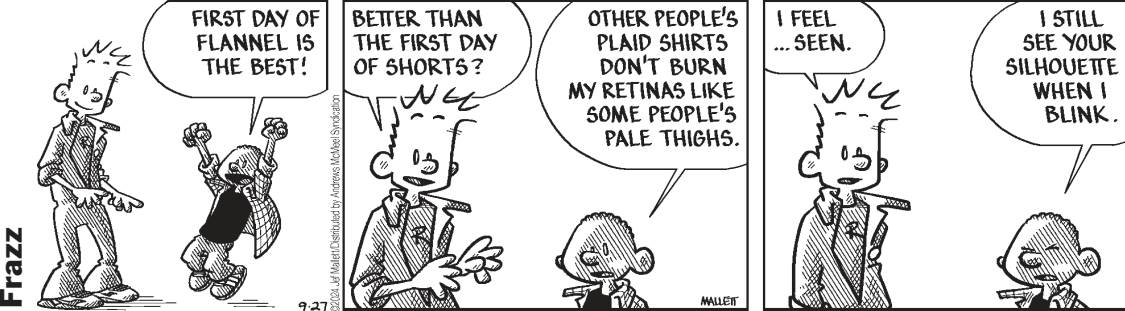
Tempe police said the damage was discovered early Monday and it is being investigated as a property crime since nobody was in the office at the time the gunshots were fired.

Police also said rounds from a pellet or BB gun were shot at the same office a week before, the Arizona Republic reported.

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 27 Fallon predecessor
- 28 Brewer's kiln
- 29 Pampering, for short
- 32 Biting
- 33 Piglike mammal
- 35 "Houdini" singer Lipa
- 36 French caps
- 38 Boxing ring border
- 39 — Peak
- 42 Easy targets
- 43 Outside (Pref.)
- 44 Penn or Astin
- 45 Fist bump
- 46 "Yecch!"
- 47 Wet dirt
- 49 Hosp. section

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

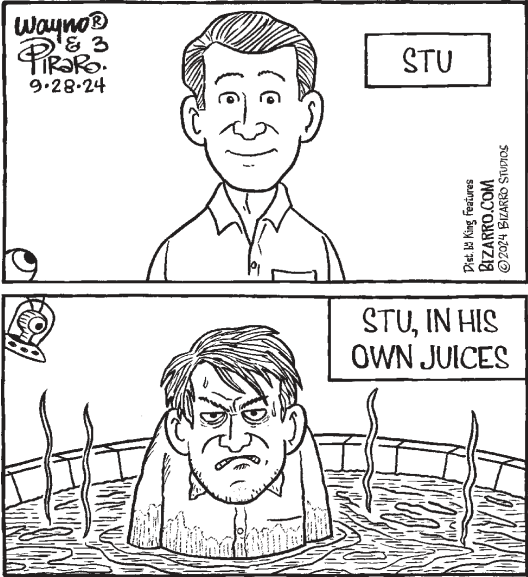
9-27

CRYPTOQUIP

UV C BESZZ-ZOQBUQZ TSA
BSJQZ VESJ ZFOQEUSE ZHSBN,
U HIUMN UH'Z FMTSFXHQTRG
C IUAIXEQT IGXEUT.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: YES, THAT GUY DOES INDEED HAIL FROM A LARGE CITY SOUTH OF MILAN. HE'S THE GENOAN ARTICLE.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals S

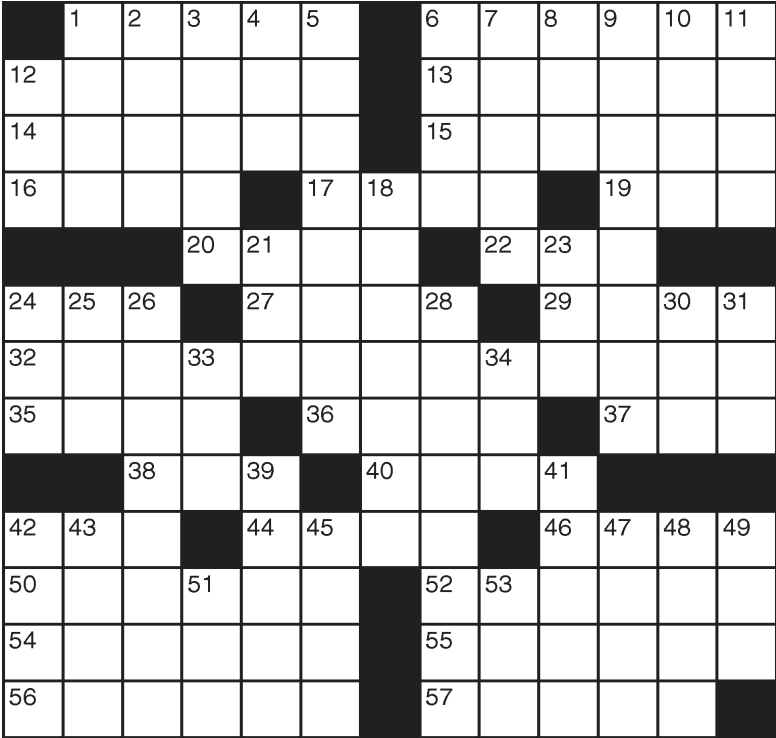
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

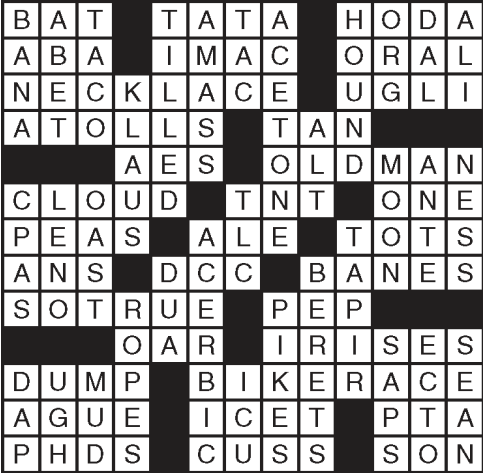
- 1 Fund
- 6 "Don't delay!"
- 12 Melodious
- 13 Long recliner
- 14 Evening repast
- 15 "Heck!"
- 16 Campus bigwig
- 17 Letter extras (Abbr.)
- 19 Curved letter
- 20 Sparkling Italian wine
- 22 Debussy's "La —"
- 24 Lawyers' org.
- 27 Bangkok language
- 29 Staffer
- 32 Politician's pre-election route
- 35 Eventful periods
- 36 Cathedral area
- 37 Private aid gp.
- 38 Poetic contraction
- 40 Tear
- 42 Singer Carly — Jepsen
- 44 Israel's Abba
- 46 Nest egg choices
- 50 Big lizard
- 52 City near Seattle
- 54 From Bonn
- 55 Beef soup ingredient

- 56 Strong points
- 57 Paper packs

DOWN

- 1 Toledo's lake
- 2 Pinta's companion
- 3 Disco queen Summer
- 4 Sugar suffix
- 5 Became less appealing
- 6 Outlet letters
- 7 Deep gorge
- 8 Sandy shade
- 9 Resident of Lagos
- 10 Medical suffix
- 11 Saturates
- 12 Toss in
- 18 — Falls
- 21 Depot (Abbr.)
- 23 Corn spike
- 24 Super serve
- 25 Rail
- 26 Non-professionals
- 28 Patent seeker
- 30 Use a shovel
- 31 "Strange Magic" gp.
- 33 Chi follower
- 34 Sawbuck
- 39 French legislature
- 41 Formal decrees
- 42 Latvia's capital
- 43 Ice and Bronze
- 45 Proscribes
- 47 Meander
- 48 Writer Kingsley
- 49 Bando of baseball
- 51 Soul, to Sartre
- 53 Chopper

Answer to Previous Puzzle



Frazz



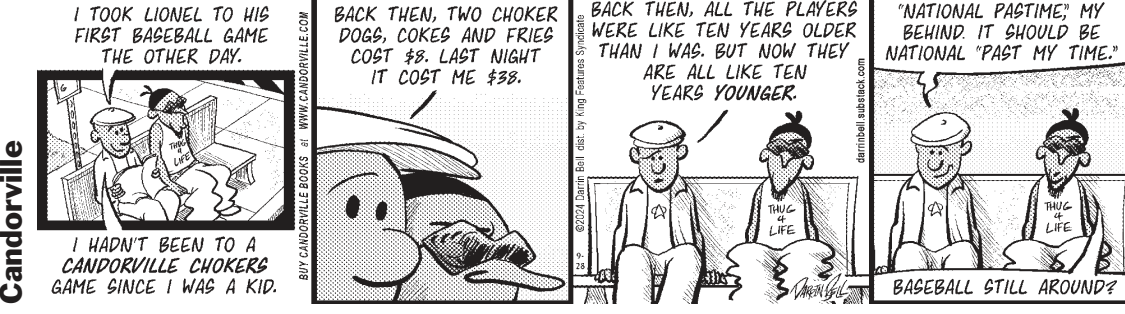
Pearls Before Swine



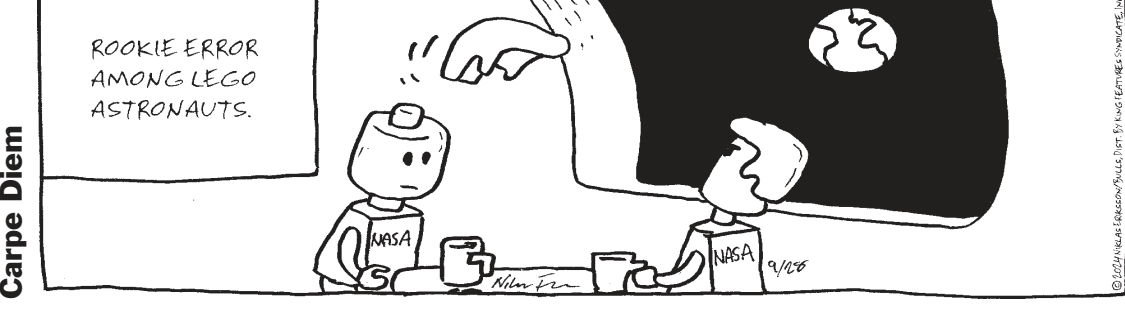
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey





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 Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

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OPINION

Putin’s military barbarism tests US credibility

BY GEORGE F. WILL

The Washington Post

“We have now at last got far enough ahead of barbarism to control it, and to avert it, if only we realize what is afoot and make up our minds in good time.”

— Winston Churchill, 1938 radio broadcast to the United States

Barbarism is on the ballot this year. About Ukraine’s future, as about everything important, Vice President Kamala Harris is largely uninformative, and perhaps uninformed. Even worse, the Trump-Vance ticket is why Russian President Vladimir Putin’s supporters — such as Hungary’s authoritarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (Donald Trump swoons about his being “strong,” a weak person’s adjective of admiration) — eagerly await Nov. 5, U.S. Election Day. And then winter.

Winter rescued Russia from Napoleon’s aggression, and, 129 years later, from Hitler’s. Eighty-three years after that, Putin expects winter to help his aggression succeed. Hence, when his barbarian military is not targeting a children’s hospital, a nursing home or civilians’ apartments, it is degrading energy sources, the life-sustaining infrastructure of modern nations. Ukrainians are scavenging batteries from scrapped Teslas for winter power.

Zoltan Barany, a University of Texas political scientist, writes in the Journal of Democracy that Russia’s military “is a quintessential reflection of the state that created it”: corrupt (a Russian prosecutor “admitted that about a fifth of the Defense Ministry’s budget was stolen; other officials said that it could be as high as two-fifths”), brutal, hyper-centralized and institutionally stupid because it is

hostile to debate. And until Feb. 24, 2022, inexperienced: Its engagements in Georgia (where Russian officers had to borrow war correspondents’ cellphones to reach troops), Crimea and Syria were “against feeble adversaries and said zero about how Russian forces would perform in a conventional land war against a resolute, well-armed enemy.” Furthermore, “The 2018 decision to revive the post of zampolit (political officer) in units as small as infantry companies harks back to the Soviet era and signals that the state doubts its soldiers’ loyalty.”

Sen. JD Vance, the Metternich from Middletown, Ohio, says Ukraine does not have an “achievable objective.” Ukraine’s objective is to thwart Putin’s, which is to erase Ukraine. The logic of Vance’s diagnosis is to stop resisting Putin.

This presidential campaign features the least discussion of national security since the nation’s 1990s, post-Cold War holiday from history. Perhaps even since 1936. This, even though the variety and totality of threats is the worst since 1945.

One candidate seems unaware that it is momentous for a powerful nation to lose a war. Even, perhaps especially, a proxy war, in which the most serious sacrifices — of lives — are done by others. The former commander in chief will not say it is vital for Ukraine to prevail.

Imagine what our watching enemies will conclude if U.S. policy, particularly regarding permission for Ukraine to strike military targets deep in Russia, continues to be timid, tentative and subject to minute presidential calibrations akin to those Lyndon B. Johnson made when personally approving bombing targets in Vietnam.

This timidity exists, even though support

Vance’s health care idea: Bad politics, reasonable policy

BY RAMESH PONNURU

Special to The Washington Post

JD Vance says he wants “more choice in our health-care system.” Progressives warn that what he really has in mind would make health insurance more expensive and less accessible for people who are poor and sick.

His idea has some positive potential, though, at least if it were implemented the right way.

Vance suggests that if the government were to allow young and healthy people to buy policies designed for their risk profiles, they would have lower premiums and more of them would have coverage. The counterargument is that people with low risks will drop more extensive plans for the cheaper ones, leaving those policies covering a sicker population and charging higher premiums. Premium hikes could start a vicious cycle, making the more comprehensive policies even less attractive to low-risk customers. In the worst-case scenario, the market for individually purchased insurance would fall apart.

Yet catastrophic predictions about the effects of relaxing rules on health insurance have a poor track record. The Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, included a fine on people who did not buy insurance, mainly to prevent any unraveling of the market. Experts on the left and the right thought that without this mandate, the ranks of the insured would drop by 13 million. Markets survived when Republicans in 2017 voted to set the fine at zero dollars beginning in 2019, though. The number of

people with insurance has risen since then.

There were similar warnings when the Trump administration allowed people to buy renewable short-term insurance that avoids some of the ACA’s regulations. The doom-sayers seem to have been wrong about that, too: These plans reduced premiums and increased coverage.

Deregulating also wouldn’t have to mean going all the way back to the way things were before the ACA, when people with preexisting conditions and no insurance often languished in underfunded high-risk pools run by the states. Much of the point of letting healthy people buy affordable insurance is to persuade them to buy insurance before they get sick. People who had kept their coverage and then got sick could still be protected from being cut off or charged higher premiums. That’s the policy Republicans embraced the last time they tried to replace Obamacare.

Maintaining continuous coverage would also be easier than it was pre-ACA, since that law both expanded Medicaid and created tax credits for people who weren’t covered by Medicare, Medicaid or an employer plan. Because of these changes in health insurance, the demand for government-funded high-risk pools should be more manageable.

In fact, we already have risk pools with substantial federal funding. As Obamacare has evolved, that’s the function its exchanges have performed. The vast majority of participants are receiving federal subsidies that increase when their premiums do. There are not a lot of low-risk, unsubsidized participants who

for Ukraine is not politically risky. The number of Republican senators and representatives who, deviating from Trump, robustly support U.S. aid to Ukraine, and who this year lost in primaries, is zero.

In France in 1917, U.S. Gen. John Pershing reportedly told Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau: “We are here to fight and be killed. Do with us as you will, without counting.” Many wars later, no U.S. leader would talk like that — or need to, regarding Ukraine.

Today, U.S. credibility, the coin that purchases deterrence, depends on the success of Ukraine, which does the dying. U.S. “sacrifices” are merely material and negligible as a portion of gross domestic product. They do not noticeably subtract from government’s domestic spending because the government’s incontinent borrowing has long-since severed the connection between revenue and outlays.

So, if U.S. “sacrifices” are deemed too excruciating to be justified by the goal of preventing the destruction of the geographically largest nation entirely in Europe, we will have earned from Russia and its friends (China, Iran, North Korea) what makes enemies doubly dangerous: contempt.

If Putin succeeds, historians generations hence might designate Russia’s war against Ukraine — as they did, after World War II, the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) — the “great rehearsal”: a bloody prologue to a blood-soaked aftermath. The politician and novelist John Buchan, Churchill’s contemporary, said: “You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilization from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass.” We have been warned, redundantly, by wise leaders and past events, and the sound of cracking glass.

would be tempted by cheap, unsubsidized insurance. If any left and premiums rose, higher subsidies would protect those who remained.

To a large extent, you’d just be changing the way we pay to insure people with chronic conditions. More of the cost would be paid by taxpayers in general and less by young and healthy people who choose to buy insurance on the individual market. And the money would be routed through the beneficiaries to the insurance companies, rather than the other way around.

That’s the theory, anyway. We’d have to see specific legislation to get a better sense of the pros and cons of Vance’s ideas. But we may not get the chance. Congressional Republicans have little appetite for reopening Obamacare, which is why they have mostly stayed silent since Vance spoke. (As has Donald Trump.)

If Trump wins in November, his administration would probably again enforce regulations with a light hand. Trump would almost certainly fail, though, if he tried to adjust the ACA’s protections for people with preexisting conditions, which is why he is unlikely to try.

Which leaves open why Vance mentioned the possibility. My guess is that having spent more time thinking about health policy than most Republican officials, he couldn’t let the question go unanswered and then kept defending his position — even though it’s only going to bring him political trouble.

Ramesh Ponnuru, a contributing columnist for The Washington Post, is the editor of National Review and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

SCOREBOARD/NBA

PRO FOOTBALL							
NFL							
AMERICAN CONFERENCE							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Buffalo	3	0	0	1.000	112	48	
N.Y. Jets	2	1	0	.667	67	52	
Miami	1	2	0	.333	33	72	
New England	1	2	0	.333	39	57	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Houston	2	1	0	.667	55	74	
Indianapolis	1	2	0	.333	58	61	
Cleveland	0	3	0	.000	40	85	
Tennessee	0	3	0	.000	48	78	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Pittsburgh	3	0	0	1.000	51	26	
Baltimore	1	2	0	.333	71	78	
Cleveland	1	2	0	.333	50	67	
Cincinnati	0	3	0	.000	68	80	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Kansas City	3	0	0	1.000	75	62	
L.A. Chargers	2	1	0	.667	58	33	
Denver	1	2	0	.333	52	46	
Las Vegas	1	2	0	.333	58	81	
NATIONAL CONFERENCE							
East							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Philadelphia	2	1	0	.667	70	63	
Washington	2	1	0	.667	79	88	
Dallas	1	2	0	.333	77	89	
N.Y. Giants	1	2	0	.333	45	64	
South							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
New Orleans	2	1	0	.667	103	44	
Tampa Bay	2	1	0	.667	64	62	
Atlanta	1	2	0	.333	49	61	
Carolina	1	2	0	.333	49	95	
North							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Minnesota	3	0	0	1.000	85	30	
Detroit	2	1	0	.667	62	53	
Green Bay	2	1	0	.667	75	58	
Chicago	1	2	0	.333	53	57	
West							
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	
Seattle	3	0	0	1.000	73	43	
Arizona	1	2	0	.333	82	64	
L.A. Rams	1	2	0	.333	57	91	
San Francisco	1	2	0	.333	73	69	
Thursday, Sept. 19							
N.Y. Jets 24, New England 3							
Sunday, Sept. 22							
Denver 26, Tampa Bay 7							
Green Bay 30, Tennessee 14							
Indianapolis 21, Chicago 16							
Minnesota 34, Houston 7							
N.Y. Giants 21, Cleveland 15							
Philadelphia 15, New Orleans 12							
Pittsburgh 20, L.A. Chargers 10							
Carolina 36, Las Vegas 22							
Seattle 24, Miami 3							
Baltimore 28, Dallas 25							
Detroit 20, Arizona 13							
L.A. Rams 27, San Francisco 24							
Kansas City 22, Atlanta 17							
Monday, Sept. 23							
Buffalo 47, Jacksonville 10							
Washington 38, Cincinnati 33							
Thursday's game							
Dallas at N.Y. Giants							
Sunday's games							
Cincinnati at Carolina							
Denver at N.Y. Jets							
Jacksonville at Houston							
L.A. Rams at Chicago							
Minnesota at Green Bay							
New Orleans at Atlanta							
Philadelphia at Tampa Bay							
Pittsburgh at Indianapolis							
New England at San Francisco							
Washington at Arizona							
Cleveland at Las Vegas							
Kansas City at L.A. Chargers							
Buffalo at Baltimore							
Monday's games							
Tennessee at Miami							
Seattle at Detroit							
Thursday, Oct. 3							
Tampa Bay at Atlanta							
Sunday, Oct. 6							
N.Y. Jets at Minnesota							
Baltimore at Cincinnati							
Buffalo at Houston							
Carolina at Chicago							
Cleveland at Washington							
Indianapolis at Jacksonville							
Miami at New England							
Arizona at San Francisco							
Las Vegas at Denver							
Green Bay at L.A. Rams							
N.Y. Giants at Seattle							
Dallas at Pittsburgh							

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Schedule

Thursday's game

EAST

Army (3-0) at Temple (1-3)

Friday's games

EAST

Washington (3-1) at Rutgers (3-0)

SOUTH

Virginia Tech (2-2) at Miami (4-0)

Saturday's games

EAST

W. Kentucky (3-1) at Boston College (3-1)

Harvard (1-0) at Brown (1-0)

Bucknell (2-2) at Lehigh (3-1)

Dayton (2-1) at Marist (0-3)

Buffalo (3-1) at Uconn (2-2)

Holy Cross (1-3) at Syracuse (2-1)

Columbia (1-0) at Georgetown (2-2)

Frostburg St. (0-0) at Mercyhurst (1-3)

Colgate (1-3) at Penn (0-1)

Dartmouth (1-0) at Merrimack (1-3)

Fordham (0-4) at Monmouth (NJ) (2-2)

Yale (1-0) at Cornell (0-1)

Howard (2-2) at Princeton (0-1)

Sacred Heart (2-2) at Delaware (3-0)

W. Michigan (1-2) at Marshall (1-2)

Maine (2-2) at Albany (NY) (1-2)

Morgan St. (2-2) at Stony Brook (3-1)

LIU Brooklyn (0-4) at Villanova (3-1)

Illinois (4-0) at Penn St. (3-0)

SOUTH

Navy (3-0) at UAB (1-2)

N. Illinois (2-1) at NC State (2-2)

South Florida (2-2) at Tulane (2-2)

Kentucky (2-2) at Mississippi (4-0)

Valparaiso (2-2) at Morehead St. (2-2)

Ball St. (1-2) at James Madison (3-0)

Mercer (4-0) at Wofford (2-1)

ETSU (2-2) at The Citadel (2-2)

S. Utah (1-3) at Austin Peay (1-3)

Richmond (2-2) at Elon (1-3)

Delaware St. (1-3) at Campbell (1-3)

Robert Morris (2-2) at E. Kentucky (2-2)

North Alabama (0-5) at West Georgia (1-2)

Samford (1-2) at Furman (1-3)

Alabama St. (1-2) at Beth.-Cook. (0-4)

Norfolk St. (2-3) vs. NC Central (2-2) at Indianapolis

Georgia Southern (2-2) at Georgia St. (2-1)

Liberty (4-0) at Appalachian St. (2-2)

Louisiana-Lafayette (2-1) at Wake Forest (1-2)

Oklahoma (3-1) at Auburn (2-2)

Colorado (3-1) at UCF (3-0)

Tenn. Tech (1-2) at Gardner-Webb (1-3)

UTSA (2-2) at East Carolina (2-2)

North Carolina (3-1) at Duke (4-0)

Wagner (2-2) at FAU (1-3)

Hampton (3-1) at William & Mary (3-1)

NC A&T (1-3) at SC State (1-2)

Louisiana Tech (1-2) at FIU (1-3)

Alabama A&M (2-2) at Florida A&M (2-2)

Charleston Southern (1-2) at Tennessee St. (2-2)

UT Martin (1-3) at Kennesaw St. (0-3)

Davidson (2-1) at Presbyterian (2-2)

Alcorn St. (1-3) at MVSU (0-4)

Louisiana-Monroe (2-1) at Troy (1-3)

Grambling St. (3-1) vs. Prairie View (1-3) at Dallas

Portland St. (0-3) at Chattanooga (0-3)

Stanford (2-1) at Clemson (2-1)

Middle Tennessee (1-3) at Memphis (3-1)

Georgia (3-0) at Alabama (3-0)

South Alabama (2-2) at LSU (3-1)

MIDWEST

Maryland (3-1) at Indiana (4-0)

Oklahoma St. (3-1) at Kansas St. (3-1)

Nebraska (3-1) at Purdue (1-2)

Minnesota (2-2) at Michigan (3-1)

Va. Lynchburg (0-3) at Butler (3-0)

San Diego (2-1) at Drake (1-1)

Houston Christian (1-3) at Indiana St. (1-2)

Murray St. (1-2) at North Dakota (3-1)

S. Illinois (2-2) at South Dakota (2-1)

Youngstown St. (1-3) at Missouri St. (2-2)

Lindenwood (Mo.) (1-3) at E. Illinois (1-3)

N. Dakota St. (3-1) at Illinois St. (3-1)

Akron (1-3) at Ohio (2-2)

San Diego St. (1-2) at Cent. Michigan (2-2)

Louisville (3-0) at Notre Dame (3-1)

Umass (1-3) at Miami (Ohio) (0-3)

E. Michigan (3-1) at Kent St. (0-4)

TCU (2-2) at Kansas (1-3)

Northwestern St. (0-4) at SE Missouri (3-1)

Old Dominion (0-3) at Bowling Green (1-2)

Ohio St. (3-0) at Michigan St. (3-1)

McKendree (0-0) at W. Illinois (0-3)

SOUTHWEST

BYU (4-0) at Baylor (2-2)

Sam Houston St. (3-1) vs. Texas State (2-1) at Houston

Texas A&M (3-1) vs. Arkansas (3-1) at Arlington, Texas

Mississippi St. (1-3) at Texas (4-0)

Charlotte (1-3) at Rice (1-3)

Jackson St. (2-2) at Texas Southern (1-2)

SE Louisiana (1-3) at Tarleton St. (3-1)

Lamar (3-1) at Cent. Arkansas (3-1)

Iowa St. (3-0) at Houston (1-3)

Tulsa (2-2) at North Texas (3-1)

Cincinnati (3-1) at Texas Tech (3-1)

Florida St. (1-3) at SMU (3-1)

FAR WEST

Cal Poly (1-2) at N. Colorado (0-4)

Fresno St. (3-1) at UNLV (3-0)

Wisconsin (2-1) at Southern Cal (2-1)

Sacramento St. (2-2) at N. Arizona (2-2)

Montana St. (4-0) at Idaho St. (2-2)

Air Force (1-2) at Wyoming (0-4)

Montana (3-1) at E. Washington (1-3)

New Mexico (0-4) at New Mexico St. (1-3)

McNeese St. (3-2) at Weber St. (2-2)

Abilene Christian (2-2) at Utah Tech (0-4)

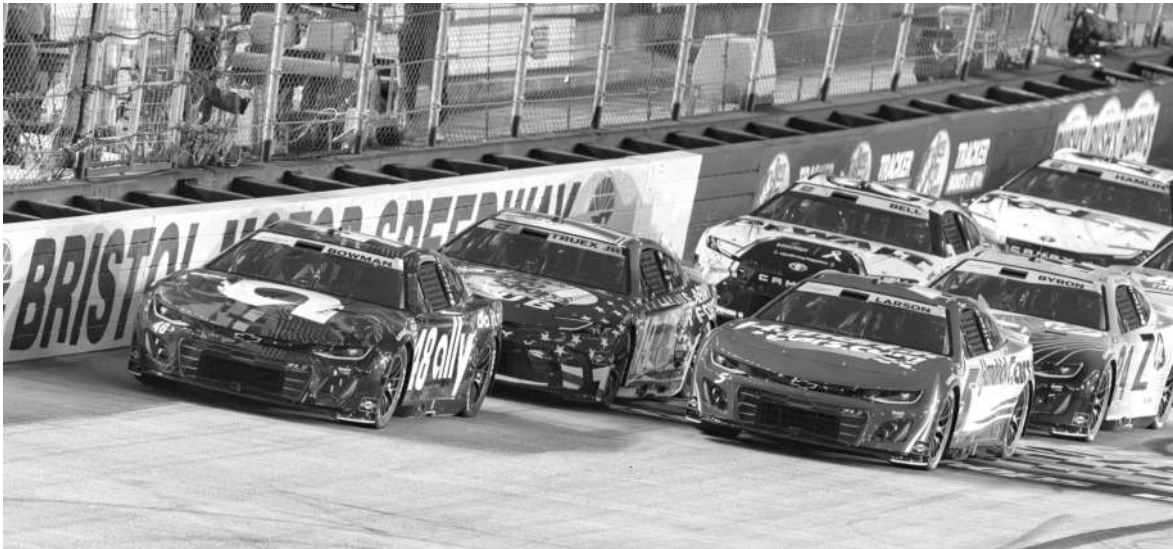
Idaho (3-1) at UC Davis (3-1)

Washington St. (4-0) at Boise St. (2-1)

Arizona (2-1) at Utah (4-0)

Oregon (3-0) at UCLA (1-2)

AUTO RACING/NFL



Alex Bowman, top left, leads the field at the start of the NASCAR Cup Series race last Saturday in Bristol, Tenn. Bowman advanced in the playoffs even as there were doubts about his future.

Some drivers iffy to make playoffs still in contention

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press
CHARLOTTE, N.C.— Alex Bowman opened NASCAR’s playoffs on defense — not of his style of driving, but of his status in the seat of the No. 48 Chevrolet at Hendrick Motorsports.

The first playoff race was just days away and Bowman spent an entire afternoon insisting rumors he’d be out of the car next season were untrue.

“That rumor has certainly been annoying,” Bowman said. “All I can tell you is like what my bosses have told me, and that is that there are no plans to change anything. As far as I know, I’m driving the No. 48 next year. Just focused on trying to be strong the next 10 weeks.”

Despite the assurances from Hendrick Motorsports and a contract that runs through next season, Bowman still had doubters. Then he finished fifth in the playoff opener at Atlanta Motor Speedway, moved into the top 10 in points, and received a public endorsement from Rick Hendrick.

“The team is really happy, the sponsor is really happy, so we’re good to go,” said Hendrick, who answered “yes” when asked if Bowman would “unequivocally” be in the HMS lineup next year.

That sentiment was backed by Andrea Brimmer, chief marketing officer of Bowman sponsor Ally, who reposted Hendrick’s quote on social media “To all the doubters.” She added an emoji that intimates “be quiet.”

Bowman was then 18th at Watkins Glen and ninth Saturday night at Bristol Motor Speedway, where he started on the pole and advanced into the second round of the playoffs. His 120 points scored in the three races was the most among the 16 drivers, and unlike former Cup champions Brad Kesse-

lowski and Martin Truex Jr., Bowman avoided playoff elimination.

The reseeding process has him ranked 11th out of 12 drivers and below the cutline as NASCAR heads to Kansas Speedway for Sunday’s second-round opening race.

“We did what we needed the whole first round of the playoffs, but also we want to be better and continue that through the next round,” said Bowman, who doesn’t think the speculation about his future will stop.

“They’ll keep talking. I’m not worried about it,” he said.

The talk seems pointless as Bowman has turned his season around and is one of a handful of surprise drivers to advance into the second round. Although Ty Gibbs and Harrison Burton were not considered title contenders and their elimination was not shocking, the departure of Keselowski and Truex opened up slots to otherwise overlooked drivers.

The field is led into Kansas by Kyle Larson, who obliterated the competition at Bristol by leading all but 38 of the 500 laps and winning by more than 7 seconds. Then there’s Christopher Bell, a final four participant the last two seasons, regular season champion Tyler Reddick, William Byron and defending Cup champion Ryan Blaney.

The surprises are Bowman, Chase Briscoe, Austin Cindric and Daniel Suarez — any of whom could have been picked as first round dropouts based on their season-long performance.

Stewart-Haas Racing has hardly been competitive this season and is closing three of its four teams in November, yet Briscoe has surged in his final months in the No. 14 Ford. He snatched the final spot in the playoff field by winning the

regular season finale at Darlington, then rallied from crashing at Atlanta with finishes of sixth and eighth in the next two races.

He dropped to last in the field with the points reset before Kansas, but he’s still a contender.

“I don’t think anybody believes this, but I really think we can battle for the championship,” Briscoe said. “And I think these last two weeks show that. We’re hitting our stride at the right time, and with this format, if you can just be good for 10 weeks, then you can be a champion.

“I feel like we’re as strong as any team right now.”

Cindric made it through with consistency, scoring back-to-back 10th-place finishes at Atlanta and Watkins Glen, and then was 13th at Bristol — enough to advance the Team Penske driver.

“I don’t know what the average finish is for the round, but two top-10s and a 13th, that’s what we need to do as a team,” Cindric said.

Suarez, despite nearly winning the opener at Atlanta, found himself in trouble at Bristol with a Trackhouse Racing entry that lacked the speed needed to be competitive. He struggled the entire race and, with a 31st-place finish, barely made it into the second round.

But as soon as the race was over, Suarez was already looking toward the second round, which starts at Kansas, then goes to Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama, and the hybrid road course at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

“I think we’re going to be pretty good. I’m really excited for Kansas. I think we can be competitive there,” Suarez said. “A superspeedway, as we all know, anything can happen. And a road course in there, always puts a smile on my face.”

McKinney justifies Packers’ investment

Associated Press
GREENBAY, Wis. — This is just what Xavier McKinney anticipated when he joined the Green Bay Packers.

Green Bay signed McKinney away from the New York Giants in hopes he could upgrade a safety position that ranked among the Packers’ biggest weaknesses last season. McKinney has responded by intercepting passes in each of the Packers’ first three games.

“I expected to do this,” McKinney said Sunday after the Packers’ 30-14 victory at Tennessee. “I know where I want to get and what I want to do and what I want to accomplish.”

McKinney’s fast start has exemplified the Packers’ opportunistic defense under new coordinator Jeff Hafley. The Packers (2-1) lead the NFL with nine takeaways and have already intercepted seven passes, matching their 2023 season total.

They’ll try to keep it going Sunday when they host the NFC North-leading Minnesota Vikings (3-0).

“We’re bonding, man, and we’re building something special,” McKinney said. “We’re trying to make this year’s defense a special group and right now, I think we’re doing a great job of doing that. We’re just going to keep trying to improve and figure out where we can take a step forward each week.”

His presence has enabled Green Bay’s safety production to take a giant leap. The Packers allowed their top three safeties from last season to depart, as Darnell Savage signed with Jacksonville and Jonathan Owens headed to Chicago while Rudy Ford remains a free agent.

Green Bay believed it could upgrade at safety by signing McKinney to a four-year, \$67 million deal. The Packers also addressed the position in the draft by selecting Georgia’s Javon Bullard in the second round and Oregon’s Evan Williams in the fourth.

McKinney has never reached a Pro Bowl, but the 2020 second-round pick from Alabama had been productive with the New



Minnesota Vikings (3-0)
at Green Bay Packers (2-1)
AFN-Sports2
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

York Giants. He joined Tampa Bay’s Jordan Whitehead as the only players to total at least 250 tackles, eight interceptions and 25 passes defended from 2021-23.

He’s taken his game up a level since arriving in Green Bay.

In his first defensive series as a Packer, McKinney picked off a pass from Philadelphia’s Jalen Hurts and returned it to the Eagles’ 19-yard line to set up a field goal. One week later, McKinney intercepted a pass from Indianapolis’ Anthony Richardson after the Colts had reached Green Bay’s 30.

“He obviously is a ball magnet,” cornerback Jaire Alexander said after the Packers’ 16-10 victory over the Colts.

McKinney picked off a third pass Sunday against the Titans as part of the Green Bay defense’s eight-sack, three-takeaway performance. He’s the only NFL player with as many as three interceptions this season.

Hafley said McKinney’s contributions have gone beyond those interceptions. He praised the way McKinney has guided the younger safeties on this roster.

“He’s kind of being the captain back there, the quarterback there and he’s done a really nice job with that,” Hafley said last week. “But that’s exactly what I expected. He’s a great football player.”

McKinney couldn’t have scripted a better start for himself.

“My coaches believe in me, my teammates believe in me, and it’s been special,” McKinney said. “I’m going to keep doing what I do, going out there and playing hard for them and doing everything that I can to prove them right.”



Green Bay Packers safety Xavier McKinney celebrates intercepting a pass against the Indianapolis Colts on Sunday. It was his third of the year.

NFL

Hunt still looking to prove himself back with Chiefs

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kareem Hunt never expected to walk through the doors of the Kansas City Chiefs practice facility again. So when their erstwhile star running back did last week, what struck Hunt first was even more unexpected.

“Honestly, my first thought was the building smelled the same,” he said Wednesday. “Brought back so many memories.”

Mostly good. Some bad, including the way things ended six years ago.

Hunt had become one of the NFL’s premier players by his second season in the league, and was helping a team led for the first time by Patrick Mahomes in pursuit of the playoffs. But in late November, video surfaced that showed Hunt kicking a woman in the hall of a Cleveland hotel. While no charges were filed when she stopped cooperating with authorities, the Chiefs swiftly and decisively released him, putting Hunt’s future as a professional football player in peril.

“I was very young at the time — 23 — and had a lot of success going for me, and felt like I needed time to figure myself out,” said Hunt, who was signed by Kansas City last week when Isiah Pacheco was placed on injured reserve with a knee injury.

“I felt like it was good for me to do that,” he added. “I guess it worked out.”

Hunt ultimately signed with the Browns, served an eight-game suspension for violating the NFL’s personal-conduct policy and became an important part of their backfield. He ran for 2,285 yards and five touchdowns over five years.

After he was hampered for



**Kansas City Chiefs (3-0)
at Los Angeles Chargers (2-1)**
AFN-Sports2
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
5:25 p.m. Sunday JKT

much of last season by a sports hernia, Hunt opted for offseason surgery. He didn’t sign with a team during the summer or training camp, so when the Chiefs lost their second running back — Clyde Edwards-Helaire was already on the non-football illness list — they flew Hunt into town and gave him a chance to prove he still had it.

“You can see how hungry he is,” said Mahomes, who remained close to Hunt even after his release by Kansas City. “You come in and you haven’t had training camp and stuff like that, but he pushed through. He took last week like a mini training camp.”

Hunt spent last week working with the scout team ahead of their game Sunday night in Atlanta.

While the Chiefs have been happy with the production of Carson Steele, an undrafted rookie, and journeyman Samaje Perine, they also wanted some experienced depth. Hunt checked that box. And the fact that he already was familiar with some of the playbook, and its complex terminology, allowed him to get up to speed more quickly than most.

“Looks like he’s in pretty good shape, so now the next step is getting him into the game. He’ll rotate in and we’ll see how he does,” Chiefs coach Andy Reid said.



RYAN SUN/AP

San Francisco 49ers defensive tackle Javon Hargrave sacks Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford on Sept. 22 in Inglewood, Calif. Hargrave suffered a likely season-ending injury in a 27-24 loss.

49ers’ defense must fix its problems without Hargrave

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The past two weeks have exposed flaws on the San Francisco 49ers’ defense that typically aren’t an issue for what has been one of the league’s top units.

Fixing those problems will be an even bigger challenge now that star defensive tackle Javon Hargrave is likely out for the rest of the season after partially tearing his triceps during Sunday’s loss to the Los Angeles Rams.



**New England Patriots (1-2)
at San Francisco 49ers (1-2)**
AFN-Atlantic
10 p.m. Sunday CET
5 a.m. Monday JKT

During losses to Minnesota and the Rams the past two weeks, San Francisco has struggled to generate consistent pressure on the quarterback, failed to slow down the run game and been beaten for two big plays over the top.

It adds up to a team that is allowing a staggering 6.11 yards per play, which is the third-worst mark in the NFL this season and the fourth-worst in franchise history through three games.

“People are going to look at all the bad stuff that we’re doing when we are losing,” All-Pro linebacker Fred Warner said. “It’s not the standard that we have had since I’ve been here. But I see the things that are positive on tape and we just need to clean up things that are negative.”

They will have to do it without Hargrave, who signed a four-year, \$81 million deal in 2023. He had an up-and-down first season with the Niners but was coming off one of his better games, with his five pressures against the Rams

matching his high from any regular-season game last season.

After cutting defensive tackle Arik Armstead in a salary-cap move in the offseason, the Niners will likely go with two newcomers at defensive tackle in Maliek Collins and Jordan Elliott. Kevin Givens provides depth and San Francisco will likely promote another defensive tackle from the practice squad with T.Y. McGill the most experienced option.

“It’s just a group effort,” defensive end Nick Bosa said. “We have a lot of depth at that position.”

The Niners build their defense from the front to the back, investing heavy resources into the defensive line in hopes of controlling the game in the trenches.

That hasn’t happened so far this season. San Francisco is tied for 14th with eight sacks and ranks 19th in pressure rate at 21.3% of dropbacks, according to Sportradar. Over the previous five seasons, the Niners ranked tied for seventh in sacks and 11th in pressure rate.

Hargrave’s absence could force San Francisco to use more blitzes to create pressure.

“You would love to always get there with the front four,” coach Kyle Shanahan said. “That’s the goal. Getting there with four and having seven guys in coverage makes it a lot harder for the offense. But if you can’t do that, you’ve got to mix it up. ... It’s a huge loss, losing Javon. Guys are going to have to step it up and when you don’t have the rush, then you’ve got to turn to other things schematically.”

Hargrave has nearly half of the team’s pressures from the interior — eight out of 18 — leaving a gap in the defense that needs more options outside of Bosa to generate pressure.

Defensive end Leonard Floyd was supposed to provide a boost this season after signing as a free agent. He recorded 39½ sacks the previous four years. But he has one sack through three games this season and has generated only one pressure the past two weeks, according to Pro Football Focus.

The run defense has also been spotty, with the 4.52 yards per carry on pace to be the worst mark since Shanahan arrived in 2017 and more than a yard more per carry than the team allowed in 2022.

“We’ve had moments where we’ve been strong, but we’re not playing up to how we usually do,” Shanahan said. “We’ve got to make sure to get back to playing that way.”



MATT PATTERSON/AP

After five seasons with the Cleveland Browns, running back Kareem Hunt is back with the Kansas City Chiefs, the team who drafted him.

MLB

Finishing up their time in Oakland

After 57 years in the East Bay, A's about to leave city behind for good

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE
Associated Press

The Athletics had long ago carved out a Jekyll-and-Hyde legacy as one of Major League Baseball's most successful — and sad-sack — franchises. Under their belts: nine World Series titles and 19 seasons of futility punctuated by 100 or more losses.

This, though, is different. Now, legions of A's fans view the team as the sport's most treacherous under the ownership of billionaire John Fisher, an heir of the family that founded The Gap in 1969 — one year after the A's moved to Oakland, Calif., from Kansas City, Mo.

Just a few years after embracing "Rooted In Oakland" as their motto, the A's this week are coming to the end of their 57 see-sawing seasons in a city regularly overshadowed by the mystique of its storied neighbor, San Francisco.

"I know these times coming to the games are always going to be among the best years of my life," longtime A's fan Will MacNeil, 40, rued as he contemplated the end of an era that's crushing a community's soul. "And for a billionaire owner to rip it away from me, it's frustrating."

Another move

The A's exodus from Oakland will give the team the dubious distinction of being the first Major League Baseball franchise to have moved on four different occasions. After starting in Philadelphia in 1901, the A's moved to Kansas City in 1955, then to Oakland in 1968, with California's capital city of Sacramento and Las Vegas next

in the peripatetic pipeline.

No place has been the A's home for as long as Oakland, where they're the last professional sports team in a two-county region known as the East Bay — home to 2.8 million people living across the water from San Francisco.

Through the years, the baseball team became an emblem of East Bay's grit and flair. The A's glory years have included the colorfully attired, mustachioed "Swingin' A's" during the first half of the 1970s, the muscular and swaggering "Bash Brothers" of the late 1980s, and the scrappy underdogs of the 2000s that yielded a real-life fairy tale in the film, "Moneyball," based on the Michael Lewis book that ushered in the era of data-driven analysis.

Through those decades, the A's stadium — the now-crumbling Oakland Coliseum — became an East Bay hub where people of all races, ages, incomes and backgrounds rallied around a common cause.

"It was really like the public square," lifelong A's fan Jim Zelinski said earlier this year. His father brought him to the team's first game at the Oakland Coliseum on April 17, 1968 — a 4-1 loss to the Baltimore Orioles before a crowd of 50,164.

Rooting for the A's connected everyone from longshore workers at Oakland's bustling port to the tech geeks of Silicon Valley to hippies from nearby Berkeley to technology to subversives forged in the cauldron of a city where Huey Newton started the Black Panthers and Sonny Barger led a notorious chapter of the Hells Angels.

"The A's are such an indelible part of this community," Zelinski



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL LIEDTKE/AP

With the pending move to Sacramento looming, games at the Oakland Coliseum are sparsely attended.



Longtime A's fan Mike Silva holds up his framed ticket stubs from the team's World Series games at the Oakland Coliseum resulting in three of the nine World Series titles dating back to the franchise's origins.

said. "Everybody was so proud of not only the teams, but there was also this sense of, 'Hey, this is us! This is the East Bay!'"

The bond is strong

Other beloved sports teams have spurned their devoted fans by moving elsewhere through the decades, but none of them have been jilted in quite the same way as the East Bay.

The NFL's Raiders already turned their back on Oakland twice. They did it first in 1982 when they moved to Los Angeles before coming back in 1995, only to leave for Las Vegas in 2020 — the year after the NBA's Warriors hopped over the bay to San Francisco.

"It's taken so long for this move to evolve that it's been like a slow death eating me up very single day," said A's fan Mike Silva, 72,

wiping away tears as he showed some of his old ticket stubs.

After the A's decided to follow the Raiders to Las Vegas, Fisher poured more salt into Oakland fans' wounds.

Rather than stay in the Coliseum, Fisher chose to move the A's 85 miles northeast to a minor-league ballpark in Sacramento for at least the next three years while waiting for the new stadium in Nevada to be built.

"I know there is great disappointment, even bitterness," Fisher acknowledged in an open letter to fans released Monday. "I can tell you this from my heart: we tried. Staying in Oakland was our goal. It was our mission, and we failed to achieve it. And for that I am genuinely sorry."

To the bitter end

Many devout A's fans have been

boycotting games in disgust this season. Those who still come, like Will MacNeil, regularly lead chants of "Sell the team!" before lobbing a profanity at Fisher.

MacNeil, known as "Right-Field Will" after being a fixture in the Coliseum's bleachers for nearly 20 years, has accumulated about 200 A's jerseys during his fandom. He estimates only 20 fit him now because of the weight he put on while drowning his sorrow about the team's move in beers.

"This move really destroyed me," MacNeil said as he cheered the A's on to a victory in May.

Zelinski, the fan who attended the A's first game in 1968, spent nearly 30 years fighting to keep sports teams in Oakland. When the season started, he still didn't want to believe it would all be to no avail.

"I had some of the greatest memories of my life at the Oakland Coliseum," Zelinski, 65, said in April. "The A's are such an irreplaceable part of the East Bay culture that I don't think people can quite grasp what incredible sadness there is going to be like at that final game in September."

He will never find out. After a long battle with bladder cancer, Jim Zelinski died June 7 — the same day that A's outfielder JJ Bleday slugged a home run in the bottom of the ninth to catapult the team to a 2-1 victory.

Here in Oakland, as a quiet end approaches, that sets us up to leave you with an observation that former Baseball Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti once made about the sport. It hangs over Oakland this week like a misplaced curveball: "It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart."



"Right-Field" Will MacNeil waves an A's flag as they prepare to take to the field for a game on May 1 in Oakland, Calif.

MLB

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-New York	92	66	.582	—
z-Baltimore	88	70	.557	4
Boston	80	79	.503	12½
Tampa Bay	78	80	.494	14
Toronto	74	85	.465	18½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Cleveland	92	67	.579	—
Detroit	84	74	.532	7½
Kansas City	84	74	.532	7½
Minnesota	82	76	.519	9½
Chicago	38	120	.241	53½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Houston	86	73	.541	—
Seattle	82	77	.516	4
Texas	75	83	.475	10½
Oakland	68	90	.430	17½
Los Angeles	63	95	.399	22½
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Philadelphia	94	65	.591	—
New York	87	70	.554	6
Atlanta	86	71	.548	7
Washington	69	89	.437	24½
Miami	58	100	.367	35½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Milwaukee	90	68	.570	—
St. Louis	81	77	.513	9
Chicago	81	78	.509	9½
Cincinnati	76	83	.478	14½
Pittsburgh	74	84	.468	16
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Los Angeles	94	64	.595	—
z-San Diego	91	67	.576	3
Arizona	88	71	.553	6½
San Francisco	79	80	.497	15½
Colorado	60	98	.380	34
x-clinched division				
z-clinched playoff berth				

Wednesday's games	
Seattle 8, Houston 1	
Cleveland 5, Cincinnati 2	
Kansas City 3, Washington 0	
Detroit 7, Tampa Bay 1	
Toronto 6, Boston 1	
Baltimore 9, N.Y. Yankees 7	
Minnesota 8, Miami 3	
Chicago White Sox 4, L.A. Angels 3, 10 in- nings	
Texas 5, Oakland 1	
Philadelphia 9, Chicago Cubs 6	
Pittsburgh 2, Milwaukee 1	
St. Louis 5, Colorado 2	
Arizona 8, San Francisco 2	
L.A. Dodgers 4, San Diego 3	
N.Y. Mets at Atlanta, ppd.	
Thursday's games	
Milwaukee at Pittsburgh	
Kansas City at Washington	
Tampa Bay at Detroit	
L.A. Angels at Chicago White Sox	
St. Louis at Colorado	
Texas at Oakland	
Baltimore at N.Y. Yankees	
Miami at Minnesota	
San Diego at L.A. Dodgers	
N.Y. Mets at Atlanta, ppd.	
Friday's games	
Cincinnati (TBD) at Chicago Cubs (Tail- lon 11-8)	
Chicago White Sox (Crochet 6-12) at De- troit (TBD)	
Philadelphia (Suárez 12-7) at Washing- ton (Williams 5-1)	
Pittsburgh (Jones 6-8) at N.Y. Yankees (Rodón 16-9)	
Miami (Oller 1-4) at Toronto (Berríos 16- 10)	
Houston (Blanco 12-6) at Cleveland (Cantillo 2-3)	
Tampa Bay (Bradley 7-11) at Boston (Pi- vetta 6-11)	
Kansas City (Singer 9-12) at Atlanta (TBD)	
L.A. Dodgers (TBD) at Colorado (Quan- trill 8-10)	
N.Y. Mets (Manaea 12-5) at Milwaukee (Montas 7-11)	
Baltimore (Povich 2-9) at Minnesota (Ló- pez 15-9)	
Texas (deGrom 0-0) at L.A. Angels (Detmers 4-8)	
San Diego (Pérez 5-5) at Arizona (Kelly 5-0)	
Oakland (Sears 11-12) at Seattle (TBD)	
St. Louis (Mikolas 9-11) at San Francisco (Roupp 1-1)	

Mets-Braves set to finish up Monday

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — The final two games of a crucial series between the New York Mets and Atlanta Braves were postponed Wednesday by heavy rains ahead of Hurricane Helene.

Now, a wild-card race that seemed headed to the final day of the regular season may require an extra day.

And a doubleheader, at that.

The regular season was set to end Sunday, but the Mets are now scheduled to return to Atlanta on Monday for a pair of games 40 minutes apart that could determine who heads to the playoffs.

New York plays three games in Milwaukee against the NL Central champion Brewers beginning Friday, while the Braves have a weekend series against the Kansas City Royals, a playoff contender in the AL.

“We’ve got to move on to the next series now,” Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said. “We’re facing another really good team in Milwaukee and we’ve got to go out there and not only win a series but we’ve got to go out there and take care of business. That’s the only thing we can do: control the things we control.”

The Mets (87-70) went into the day with a half-game lead over Arizona in the wild-card race, with the Braves (86-71) a full game back.

Wild card				
AMERICAN LEAGUE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Baltimore	88	70	.557	+4
Detroit	84	74	.532	—
Kansas City	84	74	.532	—
Minnesota	82	76	.519	2
Seattle	82	77	.516	2½
z-clinched playoff berth				
NATIONAL LEAGUE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
z-San Diego	91	67	.576	+3½
New York	87	70	.554	—
Arizona	88	71	.553	—
Atlanta	86	71	.548	1

Two of those teams will make the playoffs, which are set to begin Tuesday with the best-of-three wild-card round.

“I hope the Royals can get here,” said Braves manager Brian Snitker, looking ahead to an ominous forecast for the next two days as the hurricane’s remnants move through Georgia. “I would hope we don’t get things screwed up for their series.”

The Diamondbacks had a game Wednesday night against the San Francisco Giants. Arizona is off Thursday before a three-game series at home against the San Diego Padres to close out the regular season.

The Braves beat the Mets 5-1 on Tuesday night in the opening game of the series against their NL East rivals.



JASON ALLEN / AP

A tarp covers the infield at Truist Park after the game between the Mets and Braves was postponed on Wednesday.

Both teams were off Monday, but there was no indication that the teams or MLB considered moving up the start of the series. Also, there was a missed opportunity to get in Wednesday’s game before heavy rain swept through the area during the afternoon.

Mendoza said he didn’t have discussions with MLB until just before the decision was made to postpone both games.

“Look, my job is to manage a team,” he said. “We knew there was weather, but you can’t predict it. We came here (Tuesday), lost a game, and we were ready to play today and we just got a call.”

With the final two games in Atlanta pushed back, the Mets could be facing an especially grueling

travel schedule.

It’s not out of the question that they will fly to back to Atlanta for the doubleheader Monday, then hustle to grab another flight — either back to Milwaukee or to the West Coast — for the start of the wild-card series on Tuesday.

Then again, they did get a couple of unplanned off days before that final stretch.

“I mean, it could be beneficial,” Mendoza said. “A couple of guys needing an extra day or two and your bullpen is going to be a little bit fresher.”

There is a chance the doubleheader would not be needed if the playoff race is settled by Sunday, but Mendoza wasn’t sure if there was a contingency plan.

Working: Not everyone in favor of expanded format

FROM PAGE 32

made it more interesting for our fans,” Picollo said.

“There’s more fans coming to the games — watching games — than there typically is. There’s several teams on the fringes that could make a move. So the fan base is engaged, and I think that’s awesome for the game.”

There are myriad reasons that baseball has become relevant again this season, from the pitch clock and rules changes that have shortened games to historic performances by the likes of Shohei Ohtani and Aaron Judge.

Yet the fact remains that many fans shut down once their team is out of contention — for the Royals, that’s been about mid-May lately. The expanded playoffs means more fan bases are engaged deeper into the season; with just over a week to go, seven were alive for the three AL wild cards and five were fighting for the three NL wild cards.

“I think it’s done exactly what they wanted it to do, which is keep a lot of people interested, and a lot of teams in it,” said Atlanta manager Brian Snitker, whose team watched the Phillies run away with the NL East but were still alive for a wild card.

The Braves were battling another



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Mets outfielder J.D. Martinez thinks it’s wrong that MLB makes a division winner face a wild card in a three-game series, as in the current playoff configuration.

er division rival — the Mets — for one of the available spots.

“You know who hates it? My mom,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora, whose brother, Joey, happens to be the third-base coach for Detroit, meaning one of Iris Amaro’s favorite teams could be making the playoffs at the expense of the other.

“Let’s see who Iris is actually pulling for,” Cora said with a grin. “I think it’s good for the

sport, regardless.”

Major League Baseball has changed its playoff format several times. From 1969 until 1993, division winners went straight to the league championship series, and the winners met in the World Series. The wild card was instituted in 1994 along with a division realignment to give more teams a chance, and a second wild card in 2012 expanded the playoffs to 10 teams.

At that point, each league’s wild cards played a one-game, winner-take-all showdown for a spot in the divisional round.

“I was involved in two wild cards where it was, ‘Win or go home,’” said Orioles manager Brandon Hyde, whose team began this week in the first AL wild-card spot. “That was like the Super Bowl, it felt like, that one night.”

Two years ago, a third wild card in each league expanded the playoffs to 12, and the play-in game was replaced by best-of-three series featuring those three teams and lowest-seeded division winner. While it brought two more teams into the mix, it also forced a team that won its division after a 162-game slog to play a series just to reach the divisional round.

That particular element of the expanded playoffs doesn’t sit well

with everyone.

“If you win your division, you shouldn’t have to play in a wild-card series,” Mets outfielder J.D. Martinez said. “I like the idea of a single-game wild card, not a three-game. I played in two of them and they were electric. They were unbelievable. They were some of my favorite experiences, those two wild-card games. There’s just so much. It’s like a Game 7.”

Even fans of the same team, still alive because of the expanded playoff format, have mixed feelings about it.

“I’m not a fan,” said Charlies Devries, a Braves fan from Atlanta. “There is no real reason for it. I like the old way of doing it. I like the one-game wild-card tiebreaker. It doesn’t make it any more exciting in the last part of the season.”

“I kind of like the new format,” countered Jack Mixon, a Braves fan from Hall County, Georgia. “It’s nice to see (the Braves) try to win another World Series. The end of the season is now really exciting because any mistake could cost us the playoffs.”

With just over a week left in the season, that was the case for a dozen teams still fighting for wild cards.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

UNLV QB Sluka to sit out rest of season

Agent says \$100K NIL payment promised for transfer from Holy Cross has not been made

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

The convoluted way college athletes are paid for the use of their name, image and likeness and a dispute between player and coaches over money appears to have cost an undefeated team its quarterback three games into the season.

UNLV quarterback Matthew Sluka has decided to sit out the rest of the season over a \$100,000 NIL payment that was promised but never paid after he agreed to transfer to the Rebels from Holy Cross last winter, Sluka's agent told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

"I think there was some kind of breakdown in communication," Bob Sluka, Matthew's father, told AP.

Sluka's decision sent shockwaves throughout major college football, where the old rules of amateurism have fallen, leaving schools and the NCAA grappling with how to regulate the way players can be paid. Just how much regulation is part of a \$2.8 billion antitrust settlement agreement involving the NCAA and the nation's top conferences that is before a federal judge in California.

Sluka's agent, Marcus Cromartie of Equity Sports, said Sluka was promised \$100,000 by a UNLV assistant coach who recruited the quarterback last winter when he agreed to transfer in January.

Both Cromartie and the company that runs UNLV's NIL collective, which would be responsible for paying school athletes, acknowledge there was no signed agreement between the player and the organization for \$100,000.

UNLV issued a statement accusing Sluka's representative of making "financial demands upon the university and its NIL collective in order to continue playing."



Ed ZURGA/AP

UNLV quarterback Matthew Sluka leaps past Kansas cornerback Cobee Bryant as he runs with the ball in the first half of a game Friday at Children's Mercy Park in Kansas City, Kan.

"UNLV athletics interpreted these demands as a violation of the NCAA pay-for-play rules, as well as Nevada state law," the school said. "UNLV does not engage in such activity, nor does it respond to implied threats. UNLV has honored all previously agreed-upon scholarships for Matthew Sluka."

Sluka's transfer

Equity Sports represents numerous NFL and college players, including Kansas City Chiefs star Patrick Mahomes. Bob Sluka told AP his son signed with Equity Sports when Matthew Sluka declared his intent to switch schools and entered the NCAA transfer portal in December.

During a recruiting trip to UNLV with his son, Bob Sluka said a discussion about NIL payments

came up with offensive coordinator Brennan Marion and the Slukas informed him those could be had with Equity.

Cromartie said he spoke with the assistant coach by phone and a promise of \$100,000 was made, but because Sluka was still completing his degree at Holy Cross, the quarterback could not sign a contract with a collective until after he enrolled at UNLV. Sluka did not join the team until preseason practice in August.

Friends of Unlv, the collective that works with UNLV athletes, does not sign deals with athletes until they are enrolled, said Bob Sine, whose company Blueprint Sports oversees and operates that collective and dozens others around the country.

Sine said a payment of \$3,000

was made to Sluka over the summer, but nothing else.

Things fall apart

"In July, there was no NIL payments. There was no \$100,000, I guess you could say zero dollars. He was given a \$3,000 relocation fee and that was it," said Cromartie, who added head coach Barry Odom was not involved in the initial discussions.

Sine said the first time they heard from Cromartie was Aug. 29 via email, and Sept. 19 there was another email communication during which the collective offered a potential deal that would pay Sluka \$3,000 per month.

Sine said Cromartie was not registered as an agent in Nevada or with the school. They informed him he needed to do that to move

forward. Sluka's father said Cromartie was directed to speak with Odom and director of player development Hunkie Cooper.

Cromartie said he suggested payments of \$10,000 a month over the next five months and even \$5,000 per month and was declined.

"At that point I think Matt felt lied to. At that point he just wanted to stand up for himself," Cromartie said.

Bob Sluka said his son went to see Odom on Monday before practice and the coach refused to talk to Matthew about the NIL arrangement. Bob Sluka said Matthew returned to the coach's office after practice, but Odom was gone.

"I committed to UNLV based on certain representations that were made to me, which were not upheld after I enrolled," Matthew Sluka posted on X late Tuesday. "Despite discussions, it became clear that these commitments would not be fulfilled in the future. I wish my teammates the best of luck this season and hope for the continued success of the program."

What now?

UNLV went 9-5 last season and played for the Mountain West championship, but the quarterback who led that team, Jayden Maiava, transferred to Southern California.

Neither Sluka's father nor his agent completely ruled out the possibility of a resolution that could have Matthew Sluka back with UNLV, but neither voiced any optimism.

"At the end of the day, \$100,000 for a quarterback that's in a Top 25 program is actually probably on the lower tier," Cromartie said. "The fact that he hasn't gotten that or anything in between just speaks to the point he's getting done unjustly and unfairly."

Illinois, Indiana both 4-0 and sitting atop Big Ten standings

By MITCH STACY
Associated Press

No, this is not a typo or somebody's idea of a joke: Illinois and Indiana, two perennial also-rans in the mighty Big Ten, are both 4-0 and sitting atop the conference standings.

The last time both of those schools were unbeaten after the first four games was in 1910. The last time Indiana and Illinois finished the same season with winning records was in 2007 — Indiana was 7-6, Illinois was 9-4.

A lot of football ranging from mediocre to bad has been played in Bloomington, Ind., and Champaign, Ill.

It's been more than two decades



No. 19 Illinois (4-0)
at No. 9 Penn State (3-0)
AFN-Sports2
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

since either school won a Big Ten title. Illinois coach Ron Turner did it in 2001 when he guided the Illini to a 10-2 finish. John Pont was the coach when Hoosiers last won a Big Ten crown in 1967.

So there hasn't been much to crow about — until 2024.

Indiana beat FIU 31-7 in the opener, routed FCS squad Western Illinois in Week 2 and then grabbed everyone's attention by going on the road and walloping new Big Ten member UCLA 42-13. The Hoosiers came back the next week and beat Charlotte 52-14.

Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke, a transfer from Ohio who threw for 307 yards and four touchdowns against UCLA, is currently the top-rated quarterback in the conference. Wake Forest transfer Justice Ellison is among the top 10 in the conference with 290 rushing yards and four touchdowns going into Saturday's game at Maryland (3-1).

"I think this team has learned a lot, and I think they've developed some pretty strong intangibles," first-year Hoosiers coach Curt Cignetti said. "We certainly have strong character on this football team and a lot of really good guys as well as good players. We're looking forward to what's ahead. I think the whole key right now is maintaining our focus."

Illinois under fourth-year coach Bret Bielema dispatched Eastern Illinois 45-0, got by then-No. 19 Kansas 23-17 and beat Central Michigan 30-9. The Illini showed they were no fluke last week with a 31-24 overtime win at then-No. 22 Nebraska.

Illinois debuted in the AP Top 25

two weeks ago and have moved up five spots to No. 19. They will look for their third win over a ranked team when they travel to No. 9 Penn State (3-0) on Saturday.

"I wanted those guys to understand, it's great, right?" Bielema said. "Now every week you kind of set the standard over again."

The Illini's Luke Altmeyer, who transferred from Ole Miss last year, leads conference quarterbacks with 10 touchdown passes. He was named Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week for his performance against Nebraska.

Besides Penn State, the other conference unbeaten are Ohio State, Oregon and Rutgers — all 3-0.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



MIKE STEWART/AP

The last time Alabama and Georgia met was in the SEC championship game in Atlanta on Dec. 2, which the Crimson Tide won 27-24. Their upcoming match will be highly anticipated again with both teams in the top five.

Alabama, Georgia meet early for another Top 5 showdown

By JOHN ZENOR
Associated Press

It's still Alabama and Georgia, with all the made-for-TV trappings. Star quarterbacks. Stout defenses. Top 5 rankings and NFL prospects galore.

All Saturday night's clash between the fourth-ranked Crimson Tide and second-ranked Bulldogs lacks is the make-or-break, elimination game-style magnitude. It's also minus the familiar story line of Kirby Smart vs. Nick Saban, protege vs. mentor.

Whatever happens, the national and Southeastern Conference championship hopes of the loser will be damaged but hardly dashed. National showcase games are nothing new for either team.

"We've been on the national stage a lot, especially the last three to four years," Smart said. "So it's the reason kids want to come to Georgia. They say, 'I want to play in games like that.'"

It's September, not December or January when Georgia and Alabama customarily meet. And with the newly expanded College Football Playoff field, there's still little reason to doubt that both will be among the top 12 teams at the end of the season.

Lo and behold, Alabama is a home underdog for the first time since Nick Saban's debut season, 17 years ago.

"Yeah, that's interesting," said Kalen DeBoer, Saban's first-year successor and a coach with a 12-2 record against ranked teams in his own right. "I actually didn't know that. Yeah, welcome to the SEC, right?"



No. 2 Georgia (3-0)
at No. 4 Alabama (3-0)
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

Welcome to the SEC, indeed. Georgia still has to play No. 1 Texas, No. 5 Tennessee and No. 6 Mississippi. Alabama has the Volunteers, 11th-ranked Missouri and No. 14 LSU still on the docket.

Nothing will necessarily be decided in this one, but it's still Alabama-Georgia.

Rare home underdog

Georgia is favored by 1½ points, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. It's the first time Alabama has been the underdog at Bryant-Denny Stadium since LSU was a touchdown favorite in the 2007 game as Saban was just beginning to build what turned into a dynasty.

"Winning is hard," Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe said. "You know, that's something that we embrace as a football team, is that winning is hard. One motto that we try to preach much as possible is prepare like you never won before. You know, that's so key. You've got to hate losing more than you love winning."

Tangling for titles

Titles have been on the line the

last three times these two SEC powerhouses met. Alabama won the SEC Championship Game 27-24 last season to make the playoffs and bounce previously unbeaten Georgia from contention for a third straight national title, ending a 29-game win streak in the process. The Bulldogs won in the 2022 national championship game (33-18), which was a rematch from the 2021 SEC title game also won by Georgia 41-24.

Milroe vs. Beck

Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe and Georgia's Carson Beck are no strangers to big games. This is Beck's eighth start against a Top 20 team, and his only loss as a starter came against the Tide. Milroe led Alabama to the win in last year's SEC Championship game and has accounted for 14 touchdowns already this season (eight passing, six rushing).

Neither he nor Beck has thrown an interception.

Pedigreed coaches

Smart has led Georgia to a school-record streak of 42 consecutive regular-season wins, including 28 against SEC teams. The Bulldogs have won 16 straight in an opponent's home stadium, the longest active streak in the FBS. The last such loss: At then-No. 2 Alabama in 2020.

DeBoer hasn't been in a game like this with Alabama but is 4-1 against Top-10 foes at other stops. His streak of 12 consecutive wins over ranked teams was snapped in Washington's 34-13 loss to Michigan in last season's national championship game.

Miami opens ACC play against Virginia Tech, looks to keep hot start

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — This is basically where Miami was at this time last year. Unbeaten through four games, climbing in the national rankings, feeling good going into the start of Atlantic Coast Conference play.

And then, thud.

ACC play last season for Miami started with a debacle against Georgia Tech, a contest where the Hurricanes didn't take a knee to run out the clock and wound up giving the game away. This season's ACC slate for No. 7 Miami starts on Friday night, at home against Virginia Tech, a game where these Hurricanes can try to continue to show that things really are different now.

"They decided a while back," Miami coach Mario Cristobal said. "They've had enough."

Expectations were high entering the year for the Hurricanes and have climbed every week since. Quarterback Cam Ward — now the Heisman Trophy favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook — is leading one of the highest-octane offenses in the country and the Hurricanes are one of only four unbeaten teams left in the ACC.

"These games really don't matter," Ward said after Miami finished its four-game non-conference slate with a 50-15 rout at South Florida last weekend. "Only games that matter are ACC play."

It's also the ACC opener for Virginia Tech (2-2), which has two wins over Sun Belt teams and two one-score losses against Power Four opponents. The Hokies didn't face the Hurricanes last year.

"I think it's one of the better rivalries in college football," Virginia Tech coach Brent Pry said. "I'm glad that they're back on our schedule. I think it's good for us and good for our league and we've got to go down and play competitive."



Virginia Tech (2-2)
at No. 7 Miami (4-0)
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Saturday CET
8:30 a.m. Saturday JKT

They're doing their part, we got to do ours. They've got a load of talent."

Lots of balance

Miami enters the week as one of six power-conference teams with at least nine rushing touchdowns and nine passing touchdowns so far this season. The Hurricanes have scored 15 through the air, 12 more on the ground.

The other Power Four schools in the 9-and-9 club so far are Indiana, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Washington State and Texas. All six of those schools are 4-0 entering this week.

Virginia Tech will test Miami's plan for balance. The Hokies have allowed eight rushing TDs but only three passing scores through four games.

Ranked vs. unranked

It's been nearly 20 years since Virginia Tech beat a team ranked No. 7 or higher. The Hokies topped No. 6 West Virginia 19-13 on Oct. 2, 2004; they're 0-12 against top-7 opponents since.

Miami is 152-27 all-time when ranked No. 7 or higher. But the Hurricanes are 0-3 in their last three games with such a ranking, falling to then-No. 1 Clemson in 2020, then-No. 1 Clemson in the 2017 ACC title game and unranked Pitt to close the 2017 regular season.



CHRIS O'MEARA/AP

Miami quarterback Cam Ward is one of the early favorites to win the Heisman Trophy this season, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

SPORTS



Second chance in KC

Hunt wants to prove to Chiefs that he has matured » **NFL, Page 27**



A fan cheers during a game between the Kansas City Royals and the San Francisco Giants on Sept. 21 in Kansas City, Mo. The Royals, who are coming off a 106-loss season, are in contention for one of the three American League wild cards.

CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Working to perfection

Expanded playoffs are keeping more fans engaged in final stretch of season

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas City Royals general manager J.J. Picollo sat in his team's dugout on an unseasonably warm autumn afternoon, waiting for the Royals to play the Detroit Tigers in a matchup of AL Central rivals that few thought would be fighting for the postseason this year.

Both teams had losing records last season, and the Royals had fallen so far from the hal-

INSIDE

After 57 see-saw seasons, an era ending in Oakland
Page 28

cyon days of their 2014 and '15 pennants that they were coming off a 106-loss campaign that was arguably the worst season in the history of the franchise.

Neither the Royals nor the Tigers were fighting for the division title, though. The Cleveland Guardians were busy putting that race to rest. But they were firmly in the mix for one of the three wild cards awarded to teams in each league, and giving Major League Baseball exactly what it wanted when it expanded its playoffs a couple of years ago.

"I like that more teams get in. I think it's

SEE WORKING ON PAGE 29



"I think it's done exactly what they wanted it to do, which is keep a lot of people interested, and a lot of teams in it."

Brian Snitker
Atlanta Braves manager

Agent says UNLV QB leaving over unpaid \$100K NIL deal » **Page 30**