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But what about the bus?

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Adversity gave Eagles QB
a path to Super Bowl MVP

“Wrapped in wisdom,” Hurts changed narrative of his NFL career, Jarrett Bell writes. **In Sports**

A heartfelt
Hollywood
journey to
‘Love Hurts’

Ke Huy Quan, child star of “Indiana Jones” and “The Goonies,” is now a leading man and action hero – just in time for Valentine’s Day. **In Life**

JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES

USA TODAY

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What’s next on Musk’s hit list?

How the tech billionaire is rebooting Washington

Joey Garrison and Erin Mansfield
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Elon Musk has mounted an onslaught on the federal government three weeks into President Donald Trump’s second term, taking over federal infrastructure and feverishly gutting departments in a battle to produce the small government Republicans have long demanded.

It’s an arrangement like no other in U.S. history: Trump has empowered Musk, the richest man in the world, to take down the federal bureaucracy from within the White House alongside a group of 20-something lieutenants who make up his Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.



President Donald Trump has given Elon Musk unprecedented and disruptive power in his new administration. BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

The billionaire tech entrepreneur has installed loyalists into agencies and reveled in the chaos he has created, using the social media company he owns, X, to update the nation on his latest targets as the DOGE team moves systematically from one department to another.

His efforts have created show-downs in court that could ultimately decide whether the president has the executive authority to dismantle the federal government in the way Musk envisions.

Meanwhile, Musk has turned into Democrats’ top villain. Lawmakers from the minority party have been attacking him as much as they are Trump as they frantically try to stop

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Tune in

Watch ABC’s “Good Morning America” on Thursday as USA TODAY reporter Erin Jensen dishes on her dream date after a nationwide search.



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New York Mayor Eric Adams, indicted on federal bribery and fraud charges in September, said Tuesday that he welcomed an end to a legal saga “that put me, my family and this city through an unnecessary ordeal.” YUKI IWAMURA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Trump brand of justice landing like a hammer

Relationships, alliances and vendettas have the capital circling its wagons



Susan Page
Washington Bureau Chief
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – There’s a new sheriff in town, and he lives in Mar-a-Lago.

The Justice Department’s directive to drop the criminal prosecution of New York Mayor Eric Adams is one more example that relationships, allegiances and vendettas are in some cases determining who gets targeted – and who gets reprieved – in the age of Donald Trump.

The new president has abruptly upended efforts since the Watergate scandal four decades ago, some more successful than others, to insulate the justice system from the political interference of one president or another. Instead, with Trump, justice is avowedly personal.

The first evidence of that came just hours after his inauguration last month when he issued sweeping pardons and commutations to almost

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At the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York City in October, then-candidate Donald Trump told Adams: “I know what it’s like to be persecuted by the DOJ. ... We were persecuted, Eric. I was persecuted, and so are you.” MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES

In just over three weeks in office, Donald Trump has moved quickly and decisively to expand the powers of his office.

NYC mayor says federal prosecutors dropping ‘baseless’ charges of bribery

Christopher Cann
USA TODAY

New York Mayor Eric Adams said on Tuesday the Department of Justice ordered federal prosecutors to dismiss the corruption charges against him, thanking the agency for a move he says will end “a monthslong saga that put me, my family and this city through an unnecessary ordeal.”

It remains unclear how quickly the criminal case might be dropped. The federal court docket had not been updated to reflect the change by the time Adams spoke. A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney’s office, Nicholas Biase, declined to comment.

In his speech, Adams said he was innocent, calling the bribery charges “baseless” and saying he never traded his power for personal benefit. “I thank the Justice Department for its honesty,” he said. “Now, we can put this cruel episode behind us and focus entirely on the future of this city. It’s time to

See ADAMS, Page 6A



Ronald Toney treats the ice Tuesday in Louisville, Ky. MATT STONE/USA TODAY NETWORK

Winter 2025 is bringing a one-two wallop

Not one but two powerful weather systems were taking aim at more than a dozen states from Missouri to Virginia, bringing a foot of snow in some areas, ice and freezing rain through Wednesday as a second storm threatened to pile on with frigid temperatures and wind chills into next week. Some of the coldest air of the winter was spreading across the northern Plains, with temperatures in the minus 20s and minus 30s, and in the East, forecasters said areas around the nation’s capital could see 6 to 11 inches of snow and up to a half-inch of ice.

Gulf of America name change takes effect

The switch doesn’t affect what other nations call it

Trevor Hughes
USA TODAY

It’s official: The Gulf of Mexico is no more (at least in the United States). Employees at the federal Board on Geographic Names have formally changed the name to the Gulf of America per one of President Donald Trump’s first executive orders. The change doesn’t affect what other countries call it, and Mexico’s president has promised to ignore the order and asked others to do the same.

Trump flew in Air Force 1 over the Gulf on Sunday while attending the Super Bowl and declared the day as the “first-ever Gulf of America Day.” Traveling with the president, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum shared on social media an official U.S. Geological Survey map image showing the new name.

While some U.S agencies immediately began using the new name upon



The federal Board on Geographic Names has formally changed the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY FILE

Trump’s order Jan. 20, it’s now effective across all the federal government because it has been changed in the centralized Geographic Names Information System.

Google also has updated its maps. Apple did not reply to a request for comment on whether it would honor the change and had not swapped in the new name by 5 p.m. Monday.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo joked that she’s going to start calling the United States “Mexican America” in retaliation. International practice is to use whatever place name is preferred by the country a specific geographic feature belongs to, but the gulf touches Mexico, the United States, Cuba and several other island nations.

There is precedent for different names for the same places: A contested chain off islands off South America is known by the British as the Falkland Islands, while Argentina, which also claims the islands, calls them the Islas Malvinas. Argentina invaded the islands in 1982, sparking a vicious two-

month battle won by the British.

Also changed is the name of the tallest mountain in North America, which is again Mount McKinley to the federal government. Alaska officials long called the mountain Denali, but that name wasn’t used by federal officials until President Barack Obama aligned it in 2015.

Trump called Obama’s action an “af-front to President McKinley’s life, his achievements, and his sacrifice.”

In renaming Denali, Trump specifically highlighted McKinley’s use of tariffs – a Trump favorite – and his “expansion of territorial gains.” McKinley, a Republican, added Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii to the United States in various forms.

Trump has said he wants to annex Greenland, suggested that Canada should become the 51st state and threatened to invade Panama to take back the Panama Canal.

Although the mountain has been renamed, the national park that encloses it remains the same: Denali National Park and Preserve.

NTSB probes private jets’ collision at Ariz. airport

Christopher Cann
USA TODAY

Federal investigators were working Tuesday to find out what led a pair of private jets to collide on a runway at a small airport in Scottsdale, Arizona, killing one person and injuring several others.

The crash occurred Monday afternoon when a Learjet owned by Mötley Crüe singer Vince Neil veered off the runway at Scottsdale Airport and hit a parked Gulfstream jet, officials said, adding that it appears the plane’s landing gear had failed. No official cause of the crash has been announced.

One person was found dead when first responders arrived, said Scottsdale Fire Capt. Dave Folio at a news conference on Monday. Two people were taken to nearby trauma centers in critical condition. Another person was taken to a hospital in stable condition and a fourth person refused medical treatment, he said.

The Learjet, which was returning from Austin, had two pilots and two passengers on board, according to a statement from Worrick Robinson, Neil’s legal representative. The singer was not on the plane at the time of the crash.

“Mr. Neil’s thoughts and prayers go out to everyone involved, and he is grateful for the critical aid of the first responders today,” said a statement from Robinson.

One person was aboard the other Gulfstream jet when the aircraft collided. Officials have not publicly identified the fatal victim or those who were injured.

The incident is being investigated by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

Scottsdale Airport is a small municipal airport that serves as one of the premier corporate jet facilities in Arizona, according to the city’s website. The airport, which reopened its runway Monday night, does not have any commercial commuter or airline service.

The collision came amid heightened scrutiny of U.S. air travel following a series of fatal incidents this year. Last week, 10 people were killed in a plane crash near Nome, Alaska. Late last month, a Medevac jet crashed in Philadelphia, killing seven people and injuring more than 20 others. In Washington, a passenger plane collided with a military helicopter, leaving 67 passengers and crew members dead.

Contributing: Minnah Arshad and Catherine Reagor



A whale shark approaches a feeder boat off the beach of Tan-awan, Oslob, in the southern Philippines island of Cebu. Four shark attacks on humans last year resulted in deaths, a significant reduction from recent years. DAVID LOH/REUTERS

2024 saw ‘quiet year’ for shark bites

Doyle Rice
USA TODAY

There was a bit of a lull in the annual conflict between sharks and humans.

2024 was an “exceptionally quiet year” for shark bites around the world, with far fewer than usual, according to a new report released Tuesday by the International Shark Attack File. Worldwide, there were only 47 unprovoked attacks, down 22 from the previous year and well below the 10-year average of 70.

Four of last year’s attacks resulted in deaths, also a significant reduction from recent years.

Researchers at the file, based at the Florida Museum of Natural History, track both fatal and nonfatal attacks in the shark’s natural habitat in which there was no human provocation, which is the definition of an “unprovoked” bite.

This is in contrast to a “provoked” bite, which occurs when a human initiates interaction with a shark in some way.

Sharks might be getting extra attention this summer, the 50th anniversary of the movie “Jaws” that started the nation’s obsession with sharks.

Where were the fatal shark attacks?

- An attack by an unknown shark species off the northwest coast of Oahu, Hawaii, in June resulted in the only unprovoked fatality in the U.S. in 2024. According to Field and Stream magazine, the victim, Tamayo Perry, was a well-known surfer and lifeguard who had also been featured as an actor in movies and television shows. “Tamayo was a legendary waterman and highly respected,” said Honolulu May-

Though shark attacks are a potential danger that must be acknowledged by anyone who frequents marine waters, they should be kept in perspective, the International Shark Attack File said. Bees, wasps and snakes are responsible for far more fatalities each year.

or Rick Blangiardi.

- One death each was also confirmed in Egypt, the Maldives and near Western Sahara.
- The death near Western Sahara marked the first reported shark attack for the region. A German tourist sailing on a British catamaran traveling from the Canary Islands was attacked while swimming alongside the boat. The incident occurred in remote international waters, and it took several hours for an emergency crew to reach the scene by helicopter. The woman died from her injuries on the return trip.

US leads the world in shark attacks

Consistent with long-term trends, the U.S. experienced the most unprovoked shark bites in 2024 – 28 confirmed cases.

With warm waters and ample shoreline, Florida had a total of 14 bites, more than any other state. Of these, eight occurred in Volusia County (home to Daytona Beach), which bears the unofficial title of shark bite capital of the world.

Most bites are associated with swimming or wading

Swimmers and waders accounted for

a majority of unprovoked bites, representing 50% of the incidents. Surfers accounted for 34% and snorkelers/free divers accounted for 8%.

Surfing dangers

Globally, surfers accounted for 34% of all attacks last year.

“People surf where there are good waves, and where there are good waves, there’s turbidity, and where there’s turbidity, there are often bait fish that attract sharks. The turbidity also reduces visibility in the water, making it harder for sharks to see. Some of them make mistakes,” said Gavin Naylor, director of the Florida Program for Shark Research.

Hardly a fair fight between humans and shark

Worldwide, humans kill about 80 million sharks and rays each year, a study last year said. Most are killed by commercial fishermen for their fins and flesh.

The chances of being killed by a shark remain incredibly low. According to the World Health Organization, drowning is far deadlier – and is the third leading cause of accidental death worldwide. In addition, coastal features like rip tides and strong currents pose a greater risk to beachgoers than sharks.

The odds of being killed by a shark in the U.S. are 4,332,817 to 1.

Though shark attacks are a potential danger that must be acknowledged by anyone who frequents marine waters, they should be kept in perspective, the International Shark Attack File said. Bees, wasps and snakes are responsible for far more fatalities each year.

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Hegseth faces backlash in move to revert to former names of bases

Tom Vanden Brook and Cybele Mayes-Osterman
USA TODAY

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s move to rename Fort Bragg appears to be his latest effort to roll back Biden-administration diversity policies for the military.

On Monday, a memo from Hegseth appeared in federal court that prohibits the armed services from accepting recruits who are transgender. He also ordered a pause in medical treatment for service members who have gender dysphoria.

Later, Hegseth said Fort Liberty’s name would be changed back to Fort Bragg – in honor of a World War II hero, not the Confederate general.

“Bragg is back,” Hegseth told reporters while on a trip to Germany on Tuesday. “It’s about that legacy. It’s about the connection to the community, to those who served.”

“We’re not done there,” he said of other bases and roads that have been similarly renamed.

A commission created by Congress during the Biden administration recommended changing the names of bases and other monuments honoring Confederate soldiers. Hegseth has the authority to change base names if he chooses to honor a person who did not serve in the Confederacy.

The action “violates the spirit of the law but not the law itself,” said Ty Seidule, a retired Army general and the former vice chair of the naming commission, said in an email. Seidule said he was “surprised” that Hegseth “did not stick with the name the local community united around,” including a Gold Star mother who led the effort.

A congressional source who was not authorized to speak publicly confirmed that Hegseth has the ability to change the name because the law prohibits the Defense secretary from naming a military asset after a Confederate soldier.

Why was Fort Liberty renamed to Fort Bragg?

Through the National Defense Au-

thorization Act of 2021, the annual defense policy bill, Congress appointed a commission to recommend new names for bases, streets and other monuments that bore the names of Confederate soldiers who committed treason and fought against U.S. soldiers in the Civil War.

Trump, in his first term, vetoed the must-pass Defense bill that sets defense policy because of the commission. Bi-partisan majorities in the House and Senate overrode his veto.

The base was officially renamed in 2023. Costs to update its name were estimated at \$8 million at the time. It’s unclear how much it might cost the military to change the name again.

Hegseth calls new names ‘garbage’

Hegseth already signaled his intention to revert the original, Confederate names of two bases.

In some of his first remarks as defense secretary, Hegseth referred to Fort Bragg and Fort Benning, a Georgia base renamed Fort Moore, pointedly using their original Confederate namesakes.

In a podcast interview last year, Hegseth said, “there’s also a generational link that breaks when you rename Benning and Bragg,” calling the new names “garbage.”

Trump also promised during the campaign that he would rename the bases, vowing at a rally in Fayetteville, North Carolina, home to Fort Liberty, that “we’re going to do everything we can, we’re going to get it back.”

His plans to revert the bases’ names have drawn criticism from lawmakers. Republican Rep. Don Bacon, of Nebraska, told POLITICO, “The law was passed, it’s not going to go backward.”

Base originally was named for ‘ardent secessionist’

Fort Moore was renamed in honor of Lt. Gen. Hal Moore and his wife, Julia Moore. Lt. Gen. Moore was highly decorated for his heroism during the battle of Ia Drang, the first major battle of the Vietnam War.

Julia Moore’s support of families of

troops killed in action prompted the Army to change the way it makes death notifications.

Like Bragg, Camp Benning was built in 1918. Its mission was to provide basic training for soldiers deploying in World War I. The Army named the base in honor of Henry Benning, a senior Confederate officer whom the commission, on the Army’s website, labeled an “ardent secessionist.”

“He is on record as saying that he would rather be stricken with illness and starvation than see slaves liberated and given equality as citizens,” the commission report said. “As the commander of the Benning Brigade, he fought in many of the battles throughout the war. Heartbroken over the Confederacy’s defeat, he was one of the last officers to lead his men to the surrender ceremony in 1865.”

Fort Liberty began as Camp Bragg in 1918 as an Army artillery training ground. It was named after Braxton Bragg, who, according to the commission charged with changing base names, was “a slave owning plantation owner and senior Confederate Army officer.”

Bragg is “considered one of the worst generals of the Civil War,” according to the commission. “Most of the battles he was involved in ended in defeat and resulted in tremendous losses for the Confederate Army” and were “highly consequential to the ultimate defeat of the Confederacy.”

“Bragg was temperamental, a harsh disciplinarian, and widely disliked in the pre-Civil War U.S. Army and within the Confederate Army by peers and subordinates alike throughout his career,” according to the commission.

Hegseth’s decision to name the base after Roland Bragg could be seen as an admission that Braxton Bragg was undeserving, said Peter Feaver, a Duke University professor.

Hegseth has made clear that “he understands the Department of Defense faces a daunting array of challenges and I doubt that he thinks those problems will be fixed merely by changing names and pronouns,” Feaver said.

Former Ill. governor Blagojevich is pardoned

Joey Garrison and Zac Anderson
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump on Monday pardoned former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a Democrat who served prison time for soliciting campaign funds and other favors in exchange for former President Barack Obama’s Senate seat.

Blagojevich has become a vocal Trump supporter. He attended the 2024 Republican National Convention and backed Trump during his New York trial on charges related to paying hush money to an adult film actress to conceal an affair.

Blagojevich entered prison in 2012 after being sentenced to 14 years. He served eight years.

Trump commuted Blagojevich’s prison sentence before leaving office in 2020. The former governor, who was impeached and removed from office, appeared on Trump’s television show “Celebrity Apprentice.”

Trump has been quick to use his pardon power after regaining the presidency. Shortly after taking office, he pardoned nearly every individual convicted on charges related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters.

Contributing: Reuters



Former Illinois governor and convicted felon Rod Blagojevich speaks to the press in 2021 in Chicago. SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

Musk

Continued from Page 1A

the president’s agenda.

Here are five ways Musk has started to dismantle the federal government:

Buyout plan for federal employees

Trump, guided by Musk and DOGE, has offered buyouts to all 2.3 million federal employees in a push to drastically cut the federal workforce.

The Trump administration offered all federal workers eight months of pay through September in exchange for their immediate terminations. Those who stay in their jobs have been told they must return to in-person work, embrace new “performance standards” and be “reliable, loyal and trustworthy” in their work, among other new “reforms” across the government.

The initial offer came in an email titled “Fork in the Road,” the same subject line Musk used in 2022 when he gave employees of Twitter a similar ultimatum after buying the social media company and later changing its name to X.

But federal employees’ unions have challenged the legality of the program in court. A federal judge in Massachusetts extended a pause on the buyouts Monday until a ruling is made on the legality of the program. It was unclear when the judge would rule.

Democrats have warned federal workers that Trump can’t be trusted to deliver on the eight months of pay, noting that the federal government isn’t funded beyond March 14.

The Trump administration has signaled layoffs or furloughs could be in store for federal workers who don’t accept the deal. The Office of Personnel Management, which Trump’s team has taken over, has asked department heads to provide lists of their lowest-performing employees. About 60,000 federal workers had accepted the offer as of late last week, according to NBC News. That represents about 2.6% of the workforce, below a goal of 5% to 10% the White House has targeted.

An accounting of the treasury

Under a Day One executive order, Trump turned an obscure federal agency, the United States Digital Service, into DOGE and instructed department

heads to give the new agency “full and prompt access to all unclassified agency records, software systems, and IT systems.”

The Treasury Department gave Musk’s team access to the federal system that pays the nation’s bills, a move that has prompted widespread concern about his access to personal information and the potential to deny payment to people and entities who expect them.

A lawsuit from three labor groups says DOGE was unable to get access to the system until Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was sworn in, placed a civil servant who had opposed the access on leave, and provided access to Musk and his team.

Bessent wrote in a public letter Feb. 4 that the review of payment systems is being overseen by Tom Krause, a tech executive and Musk ally who was affiliated with DOGE. Bessent wrote that Krause is now a Treasury Department employee.

Bessent wrote that Krause has “read-only” access to the payment system and compared the level of access to what outside auditors receive. Bessent said that only career treasury officials were involved in his review and that it was being done “in accordance with all standard security, safety, and privacy standards.”

A federal judge temporarily blocked Musk and his team from accessing the payment system as part of a separate lawsuit brought by 19 Democratic states that said one purpose of the access was “to block federal funds from reaching beneficiaries who do not align with the president’s political agenda.”

An earthquake at USAID

In the first department to be targeted, Musk shuttered the U.S. Agency for International Development, the federal agency that oversees foreign aid. But a federal judge halted elements of the shutdown last Friday, putting the effort in jeopardy.

Nearly all of the approximately 10,000 USAID employees worldwide were placed on administrative leave last week after the Trump administration announced the closure of USAID’s Washington headquarters. Trump has named Secretary of State Marco Rubio the agency’s acting director as USAID merges with the State Department.

Musk and Trump have called USAID “corrupt,” singling out foreign aid ex-

penditures they’ve characterized as wasteful and advancing a leftist agenda. Democrats have argued Trump lacks the authority to eliminate a department that Congress made an independent federal agency in 1998.

The takedown of USAID – which has ceased U.S. humanitarian aid in other nations – could become a template for the Trump administration to try to take down other agencies and departments.

But in a decision Friday, U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols in Washington issued a “very limited” temporary order pausing the imminent administrative leave of 2,200 agency employees and the relocation of certain humanitarian workers stationed outside the United States.

‘RIP’ to financial watchdog

Mirroring efforts to shut down USAID, Musk and the Trump administration are now taking aim at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau – a government agency long criticized by Republicans.

Over the weekend, Trump’s Office of Management and Budget director, Russ Vought, ordered staff at the agency to stop all work “effective immediately.”

Vought, the consumer watchdog bureau’s acting director, also ordered employees not to start investigations, to stop existing investigations, to not approve or issue proposed rules or guidance and not issue any public communications.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was created during the Obama administration after the Great Recession of the late 2000s to make sure consumers were treated fairly by banks, lenders and other financial institutions.

Rohit Chopra, former bureau director in the Biden administration, was fired by Trump this month after a tenure in which many in the financial industry accused him of regulatory overreach. Under his watch, the consumer protection bureau capped overdraft fees charged by banks, worked to stop businesses from hiding “junk fees” from consumers and led the removal of medical debt from credit reports.

“CFPB RIP,” Musk wrote in an X post last Friday around the same time the agency’s website went dark.

“CFPB has \$711M?” Musk wrote in another post Monday, referring to the agency’s balance. “That money should be returned to taxpayers.”

A death knell to DEI

Musk is leading changes at breakneck speed while showing no appetite for slowing down. He regularly defends his projects actions on X and fires back at opponents.

After a federal judge blocked Musk’s team from accessing the treasury’s payment systems, he called the judge “corrupt” and said he should be impeached. When five former leaders of the Treasury Department wrote an op-ed saying the Musk team’s access to the payment system was a threat to democracy, Musk tweeted: “Too bad. Deal with it.”

Musk and his team have taken the lead carrying out Trump’s executive order eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion efforts throughout the government. The social media account for DOGE wrote that by Jan. 29, about \$1 billion in contracts related to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility had been terminated, including at the Department of Education, the Pentagon, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA.

DOGE’s movements in some departments have raised concerns from Democrats about Musk’s intentions.

That includes DOGE aides recently visiting the headquarters of NOAA, an agency best known for weather forecasting that also has regulatory and scientific research functions, according to Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland.

This ruffled Democratic members of Congress from Maryland, home of the headquarters of the agency that runs the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center and does scientific research on climate change.

They sent a letter to leaders at the Department of Commerce, which houses NOAA, criticizing “unvetted and unknown DOGE bureaucrats” and calling on the leaders to reaffirm their “unwavering support” for the agency.

In his first term, Trump proposed reducing the agency’s budget, and last month he revoked 78 climate- and environment-related actions put in place under President Joe Biden.

Trump has previewed other departments DOGE plans to blitz through next. In an interview Sunday on Fox News, Trump said he would turn the spotlight “very soon” on the Education Department and the Pentagon.

“We’re going to find hundreds of billions of dollars of fraud and abuse.”

Egg thieves hit Seattle cafe with painful loss

Heist comes days after similar incident in Pa.

Amaris Encinas
USA TODAY

Egg thieves have struck again. Days after 100,000 organic eggs worth more than \$40,000 were stolen from a distribution trailer in south-central Pennsylvania, two men struck a west Seattle restaurant’s walk-in refrigerator around 3 a.m. last week as egg prices soar amid nationwide shortages.

The men took an estimated 540 eggs and other breakfast items from Luna Park Cafe, Seattle police said.

Cafe owner Heong Soon Park told USA TODAY on Monday that he arrived at the restaurant about 15 minutes after he was notified that the alarm went off and his landlord phoned to tell him that “something’s not right.”

“When I was there, I noticed a white van with two guys stealing stuff, including eggs from my walk-in that’s located outside of my restaurant,” Park said. “When I was trying to stop them, they kind of scrambled into the car and they fled the scene.”

Video of the theft last Wednesday shows the two men racing back and forth from a walk-in refrigerator outdoors to a white van as snow falls before they make their getaway.

When Park looked back at surveillance footage of the heist, he noticed that the men had made two visits that night. They stole a few things and left, then waited 10 minutes before they returned a second time, which is when they were caught in the act, according to Park.

The eggs the thieves stole were worth almost \$390. They also made off with liquid egg products, bacon, ground beef and blueberries.

The two men were long gone by the time police arrived at the restaurant just after 4:40 a.m.

“In Seattle that day, we had a heavy snow,” Park said. “They kind of knew the police would arrive late.”

The eggs the thieves stole were worth almost \$390. They also made off with liquid egg products, bacon, ground beef and blueberries. The items stolen in the breakfast heist, including the eggs, were worth \$780, according to a Seattle Police Department news release.

No arrests have been made but the theft is still under investigation, a Seattle Police spokesperson told USA TODAY Monday evening. Anyone with information that could help Seattle police crack the case is encouraged to contact the SPD Tip Line at 206-233-5000.

Park has replaced all the locks and updated the restaurant’s security system since the theft, saying that there was “nothing we could have done.”

“It’s something that’s kind of rough for us to prevent situations like this in the first place,” Park said

Park believes somebody knew where things were in the restaurant because they “knew what they wanted.”

“They just took the food product that’s more valuable these days, that’s one thing,” he said.

Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, local authorities were still working the case of the stolen 100,000 eggs worth \$40,000.

Franklin County District Attorney Ian Brink told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Monday that there have been no breaks in the case.

The theft was initially reported the night of Feb. 1. The facility where the eggs were poached was operated by Pete & Gerry’s Organics in the borough of Greencastle, according to Pennsylvania State Police.

Pete & Gerry’s said in a statement to USA TODAY that it was “increasing our security and surveillance to help prevent this from happening again.”

Contributing: Eric Lagatta and Anthony Robledo

Webb telescope discovery sheds light on planet formation

Eric Lagatta
USA TODAY

A stunning corner of the cosmos was recently revealed by the James Webb Space Telescope, and astronomers think the find will unveil more about the mysteries of both star and planet formation.

Hiding 450 light-years away in a dark molecular cloud in the Taurus constellation, the young protostar that Webb illuminated is one that has long been of interest to astronomers. The protostar, called HH 30, is what’s known in astronomy as a Herbig-Haro object – a bright patch of cosmic emission associated with newborn stars.

The Hubble Space Telescope was the first to discover HH 30. Now, Webb, the most powerful instrument of its kind ever put into orbit, has investigated the stellar formation in unprecedented detail.

Webb’s target was a protoplanetary disk of dense gas and dust that rotates around and surrounds a newborn star.

An international team of astronomers then combined Webb’s observations with not only those previously obtained by Hubble, but also the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA.) The astronomers, who published their findings Feb. 3 in The Astrophysical Journal, believe that by studying the luminous region, they can learn more about how dust grains combine with massive jets to form planets.

How stars are born: Webb helps reveal more of planetary disk

Star formation is a complex process that has long held a degree of mystery for astronomers.

Stars form when an accumulation of gas and dust collapses because of gravity. Scientists think that generally what follows is the formation of planets, which emerge from the giant, doughnut-shaped disk of gas and dust that circles young stars.

HH 30 is a luminous region surrounding a newborn star, or protostar, which is forming as stellar winds or jets of gas spewing forth form shockwaves while colliding with nearby gas and dust.

Observations from the Hubble Space Telescope had previously revealed a silhouette of the protoplanetary disk as seen edge-on, meaning only the disk’s side was visible in the angle at which it was seen from Earth. But unlike its predecessor, Webb can observe the universe in infrared light, which allowed the cosmic observatory to unveil more features of the region.

The team of astronomers combined images from Webb, Hubble and ALMA so that they could study the appearance of the disk in multiple wavelengths. The observations were then been detailed in a new image that the European Space Agency released in February as its “picture of the month.”

In the image, different wavelengths of light are combined and represented in various colors. A dark line across the center is the disk itself, where the hidden star is emanating in a slight glow. A band going straight up is a jet, with a tail trailing to the left side of the image.

Researchers observe crucial step in planet formation

Data from both ALMA and Webb allowed the researchers to trace how dust grains move and are distributed within the disk in a process scientists believe is the building block for planetary formation. As the grains clump together to form small rocks, it kick-starts a process for planets to take shape.

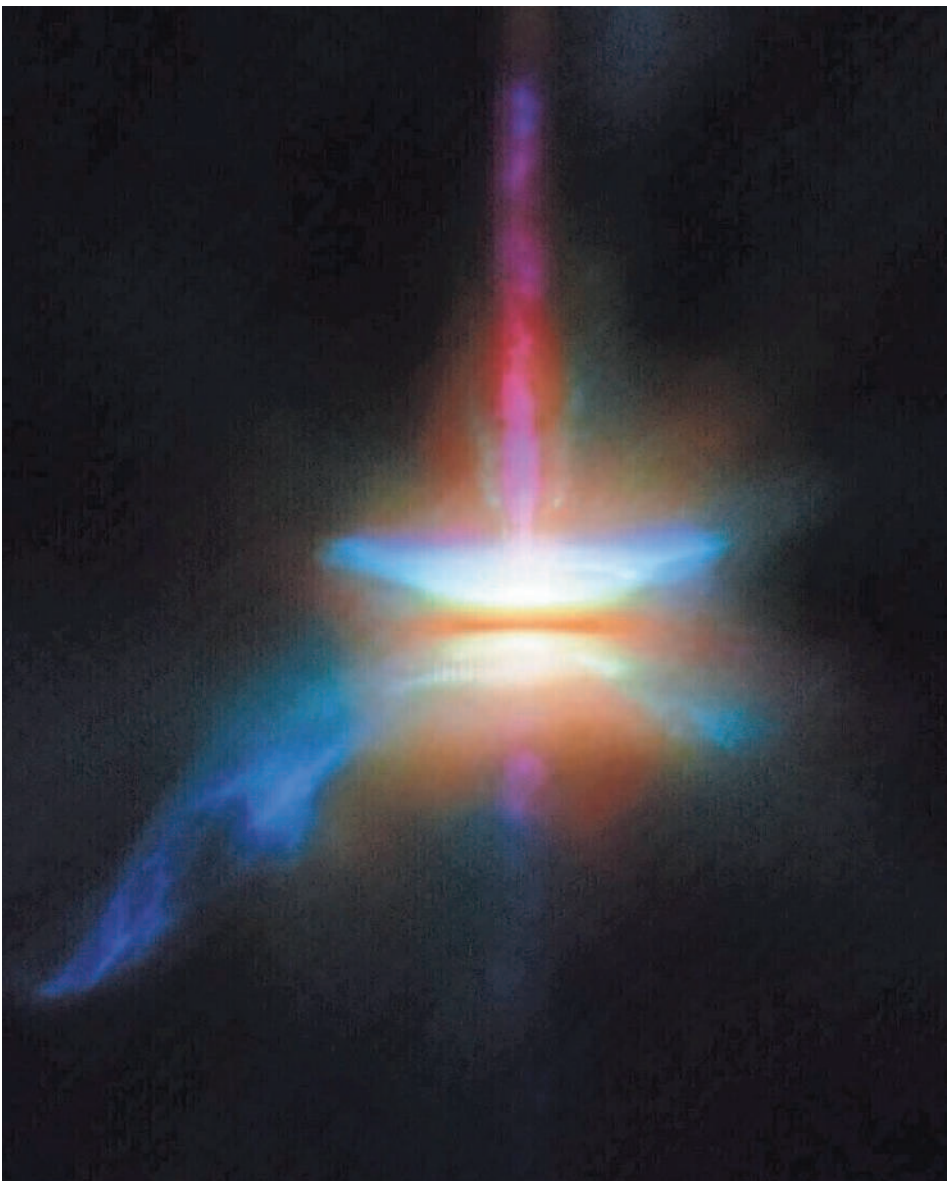
Nested alongside the rocky clumps are several outflows of gas. One is a narrow “high-velocity jet of gas,” according to the researchers, while another surrounding it is a cone-shaped outflow shrouded by a wide nebula reflecting the light of the new star embedded within the disk.

“Together, these data reveal HH 30 to be a dynamic place, where tiny dust grains and massive jets alike play a role in the formation of new planets,” the researchers wrote.

What is the James Webb Space Telescope?

Noted as the world’s premier space science observatory, the James Webb Space Telescope is part of an international partnership between NASA, the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency.

Ever since the instrument launched in 2021 into space, astronomers have



A region known as HH 30 surrounding newborn stars is seen in unprecedented resolution. This target is an edge-on protoplanetary disc that is surrounded by jets and a disc wind, and is located in the Taurus Molecular Cloud. PROVIDED BY ESA/WEBB/NASA & CSA.TAZAKI ET

increasingly turned to the powerful observatory to make new cosmic discoveries. Webb, which orbits the sun – unlike Hubble, which orbits Earth – is outfitted with a gold-coated mirror and powerful infrared instruments that allow it to observe the cosmos like no instrument before.

In that time, the telescope has offered stunning views of our solar system’s planets, galaxies, stars and other parts of the universe never glimpsed before. Many cosmic discoveries, such as the observations of HH 30, are possible only due to data Webb obtains and is made available to researchers.

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Americans may not be sad over getting rid of lowly penny

Some believe 233-year-old coin is a relic of the past

Karissa Waddick, Christopher Cann, N’dea Yancey-Bragg and Dinah Voyles Pulver

USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Americans have a message for the penny: Good riddance. Around the country, people of all ages are expressing giddiness, relief – as well as a bit of wistfulness – over President Donald Trump’s plan to direct the Treasury Department to stop minting 1-cent coins.

“It’s probably the only good idea I’ve heard in the last two weeks,” said Walt Rok, who was visiting the Smithsonian National Museum of American History with his wife, Pat, from their home in Rhode Island on Monday.

Despite childhood nostalgia associated with the coin, Rok, 70, said he agreed with Trump’s assessment that the penny simply costs too much. Many others agreed with him.

USA TODAY spoke with more than a dozen people on Monday, most of whom suggested the 233-year-old coin is a relic of the past better remembered in places like the Smithsonian, than at the bottom of junk drawers and purses.

A penny-presser machine near the museum gift shop that spits out elongated copper-colored souvenirs no longer lets patrons use their own pennies. Once requiring people to plop in four quarters and a penny, the machine now asks they pay with dollar bills, a credit card or their Apple digital wallet.

Chris Jacobsen, 59, who was visiting from Michigan, saw the change as a sign of the times.

“I think it should just be shelved, honored for what it was,” Jacobsen said of the penny. “Time to move on.”

A pretty penny’s nostalgia

For many, pennies stand as an endur-

ing reminder of youth – a time when 1 cent was enough to buy a piece of candy, each new year marked a fresh chance to add a new Lincoln-faced coin to their collection book and finding a penny on the street meant a year of good luck.

When David Hartgrove was growing up in Miami in the 1950s, he would pile the coins atop the counter at his neighborhood sundries store to load up on penny candy.

Hartgrove said he had fond memories of walking to school back then, picking up bottles alongside the busy four-lane highway. One glass bottle could be turned in for three pennies.

“When you’re 8 years old, you don’t have a lot of money-making capabilities,” Hartgrove remembered. “Going out and finding Coke bottles, Nehi bottles and Pepsi bottles on the side of the road and taking them to the store allowed you to buy enough candy to live like a king for a half-hour.”

As a young boy in the logging town of Aberdeen, Washington, Caleb Backholm, now 50, never walked past a penny without picking it up. In grade school, Backholm and a group of his friends would take any pennies they had found throughout the day and hastily slip them into a gumball machine near their bus stop.

“When you got a piece of gum that was a good day,” Backholm said.

But today, like many, he can’t remember the last time he used a penny to buy something. The father of three said his children – all between 18 and 23 years old – did not have the same relationship with the coin that he had as a child.

“When I was (growing up), if you saw a penny on the ground, you stopped and you got it, and it meant something,” he said. “That era is gone. I wish it wasn’t the case but it is.”

Others, like Marilyn Mason, see the death of the penny as “history in the



Pennies, including a wheat penny, also known as the Lincoln penny or the Lincoln cent, which was introduced in 1909 and minted until 1958.

ALBINA SPORTELLI/USA TODAY NETWORK



Pat and Walt Rok, both 70, say they won’t miss the penny when it’s gone. “It’s probably the only good idea I’ve heard in the last two weeks,” Walt said.

KARISSA WADDICKI/USA TODAY

making” that could bode well for coin collectors, including her son.

The 88-year-old associates the copper coin with her childhood penny loafers and the summer afternoons when she and her friends would place them on a railroad track and wait for a train to smash them down.

To this day, Mason, a retired accountant, checks the date on most pennies she comes across, looking to see whether it corresponds with an important moment or occasion in her life, such as her

mother’s birth year.

“There may be a time people will look back and say, ‘Remember when they had pennies?’”

A penny saved

Not everyone is excited about the history-making potential and decluttering that could arise from the loss of the penny.

Otha Anders, 82, has been collecting pennies for more than five decades. He vowed when he started to never spend one unless he absolutely had to and at one point amassed more than \$5,130 worth of pennies, which he stored in 15 five-gallon plastic water jugs around his Ruston, Louisiana, home. But he was forced to cash them in a decade ago to pay a large dental bill.

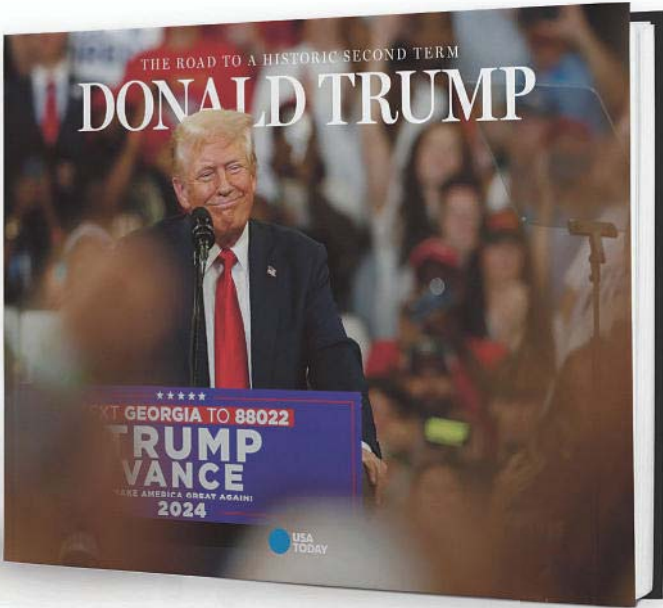
When asked if he’d be sad to see the Treasury Department stop minting the coins, Anders was emphatic: “Yes, I would. Yes, yes, yes, yes, because they mean just that much to me.”

Anders said he started saving pennies in 1970 because whenever he spotted one on the street or got one back as change, he saw it as a reminder to thank God.

“I’d give you a dollar before I would give you a penny,” Anders said.

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Bannon pleads guilty to fraud, avoids jail time in New York

Deal has conditions for former Trump adviser

Aysha Bagchi
USA TODAY

Steve Bannon pleaded guilty in a Manhattan criminal courtroom Tuesday to defrauding donors who gave money for the construction of a wall at the southern U.S. border.

The guilty plea was made under a deal in which Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg agreed to recommend Bannon avoid jail or prison time as long as he meets the agreement’s conditions, which include a three-year prohibition on fundraising for any charitable organization with assets in New York state.

If Bannon doesn’t satisfy the conditions, he could face a state prison sentence ranging from just over one year to four years in prison, according to the plea deal.

“This resolution achieves our primary goal: to protect New York’s charities and New Yorkers’ charitable giving from fraud,” Bragg said in a statement. “New York has an important interest in rooting out fraud in our markets, our corporations, and our charities, and we will continue to do just that.”

“We are pleased to put this matter behind Mr. Bannon so he can focus on his other work,” Arthur Aidala, Bannon’s defense lawyer, said in a statement. “Sadly, it was clear that he could not get a fair trial in New York county.”

Prosecutors accused Bannon, a right-wing political strategist and long-time ally of President Donald Trump, of participating in a conspiracy to send hun-



Steve Bannon, former adviser to President Donald Trump, attends a pre-trial hearing in his fraud case stemming from a fundraising effort to build a border wall, at the New York Criminal Court last month. CURTIS MEANS/POOL VIA REUTERS

dreds of thousands of dollars to the president of We Build the Wall, an organization that solicited donations for the wall’s construction. The organization said in fundraising appeals that its president, an unindicted co-conspirator, wasn’t taking a penny, yet he received more than \$250,000 in secret salary payments, according to the indictment.

Bannon, who was chairman of the organization’s advisory board, helped funnel the money through third-party entities, including a nonprofit he controlled, according to the indictment.

Trump pardoned Bannon on similar federal charges at the end of his first

presidency. The presidential pardon power doesn’t extend to state charges such as the ones Bannon faced.

Bannon was released from prison in October after serving a four-month sentence for defying a subpoena from the House panel that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

During Trump’s first term, his administration built 458 miles of what it called a “border wall system,” according to U.S. News, which cited figures from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Most of that length already had some barrier in place. The U.S.-Mexico border is nearly 2,000 miles long.

ed the indictment might unfairly interfere with the mayoral primary in June.

“The pending prosecution has unduly restricted Mayor Adams’ ability to devote full attention and resources to the illegal immigration and violent crime,” Bove wrote. Now acting deputy attorney general, he used to be a member of Trump’s legal team fighting charges of obstructing the 2020 election, mishandling sensitive government documents and falsifying business records.

Adams was charged with corruption going back more than a decade, to the days when he was Brooklyn borough president. The indictment accused him of accepting lavish travel perks from Turkish officials and illegal campaign contributions from foreigners in exchange for taking actions to benefit Turkey. They included pressuring the New York Fire Department to accelerate approval of a new Turkish consulate.

The uproar in legal circles over Adams’ case may be overshadowed by rising alarms about a potential constitutional crisis on another front.

In recent days, Trump and Vice President JD Vance have suggested that the new administration may upend a fundamental legal precept: that the White House is obliged to obey the rulings of federal courts. Legal scholars warn that a refusal to comply would test the nation’s core checks and balances, a system in which the powers of the president, Congress and the courts are designed to prevent any one branch of government from exercising unlimited authority.

In just over three weeks, Trump has moved more quickly and decisively than any modern-day president to expand the powers of his office, from freezing billions in spending to embracing territorial expansion in Canada, Greenland, Panama and Gaza.

And, now, in rewriting some assumptions about how the judicial system works.

Adams’ legal reprieve doesn’t necessarily rescue him from his political perils.

More than a half-dozen credible candidates already have entered the contest for the Democratic nomination for mayor in November’s election, and former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is considered another possible contender. The Justice Department’s action would save Adams from the potential damage of a public trial, but his alliance with Trump could cost him support among progressive and Black voters.

The Justice Department’s dismissal also doesn’t necessarily end his legal troubles once and for all. Adams would be required to sign an agreement that the charges could be filed again down the road.

When, perhaps, someone else will be president.

Education research contracts are slashed

DOGE terminates nearly \$1 billion in agreements

Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Education moved to terminate nearly \$1 billion in research contracts on Monday, a decision critics said depleted the government of vital data sources on schooling and all but decimated the agency’s research division.

The move was announced on social media by the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, a new quasi-government agency run by X owner Elon Musk. The task force run by Musk, a tech billionaire, said it terminated 89 contracts worth \$881 million. In another X post, DOGE said it had canceled 29 “DEI training grants” totaling \$101 million.

Eliminating the agreements effectively halted the work of the Institute of Education Sciences, the arm of the Education Department responsible for gathering information about students and schools nationwide.

The scope of DOGE’s changes may be larger than publicly stated, according to an internal memo from an Institute of Education Sciences employee obtained by USA TODAY.

Members of the DOGE team said Monday that 169 education research contracts would be canceled, ending nearly all of the institute office’s work, the memo said. Although institute employees hadn’t been placed on leave, they expected to receive notices soon. The DOGE team, according to the memo, communicated that the legality of its cost-cutting measures wasn’t a factor in its decision-making.

Eliminating the agreements effectively halts the work of the Institute of Education Sciences, the arm of the Education Department responsible for gathering information about students and schools nationwide.

The department said Tuesday that several contracts, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” were spared. Also intact was the College Scorecard, an Obama-era tool that uses information about universities to help students decide whether programs provide value that merits the investment. College Navigator, a similar government platform, was saved, too.

But scores of other major research undertakings were scrapped seemingly overnight. What Works Clearinghouse was nixed. The School Pulse Panel, which began surveying public K-12 schools on education-related topics during the 2021-2022 school year, also was wiped out.

Based on a list of federal contracts for fiscal year 2024, studies about international education, career and technical education and early childhood education also appeared to be contenders for DOGE’s cuts.

Michael Itzkowitz, who oversaw the creation of the College Scorecard, said cutting critical research about schools and colleges will have ripple effects that could endanger American global competitiveness.

“We don’t want consumers to have more information about buying the best blender than they do about attending an institution of higher education,” he said.

The termination of the contracts is the latest example of turmoil at the federal Education Department, which President Donald Trump has routinely criticized. An employee familiar with the matter confirmed that Musk’s DOGE team has gained access to vast databases containing the personal and financial information of millions of students, USA TODAY reported last week. Drove of staffers at the agency have also been placed on paid leave since the president signed an executive order banning diversity, equity and inclusion in the federal workforce.

Adams

Continued from Page 1A

move forward.”

His remarks come one day after acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove, in a two-page memo sent Monday, told prosecutors for the Southern District of New York to drop the bribery charges against Adams as soon as possible, multiple news outlets reported, including The New York Times, Reuters and The Associated Press.

Bove said in the memo that the case distracted Adams from focusing on immigration, crime and his reelection campaign. Bove also wrote that the move did not concern the merits of the case and criticized former President Joe Biden and former U.S. Attorney Damian Williams, a Biden appointee who brought the charges against Adams last year.

The directive came after mounting speculation that President Donald Trump would seek to end the case against Adams, to whom he has grown increasingly sympathetic. The president has previously suggested that Adams was a victim of a political prosecution and said he would consider pardoning the mayor. Last month, Adams met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago and attended his Jan. 20 inauguration.

The move also further showed the willingness of the Trump administration to intervene in criminal cases against his allies. On his first day in office, Trump pardoned nearly 1,600 people involved in the Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021.

In September, Adams was indicted on federal bribery, fraud and campaign finance charges, making him New York City’s first mayor to be criminally charged while in office. Prosecutors alleged that Adams received more than \$100,000 worth of illegal campaign contributions and free luxury travel in exchange for favors for the Turkish government. He pleaded not guilty and denies wrongdoing.

Adams, a Democrat, has suggested his indictment was political retribution for his criticisms of the Biden administration’s handling of illegal immigration.

Adams was once a close ally of Biden, but the relationship soured after an influx of migrants put a strain on city resources and Adams blasted the White House and Biden publicly.

Adams has recently said his administration will cooperate with the federal government’s deportation efforts and has suggested reining in sanctuary city laws protecting migrants from deportation. Adams is one of several mayors scheduled to testify next month before the House Oversight Committee as part of an investigation into sanctuary cities.

Contributing: Bart Jansen; Reuters

Justice

Continued from Page 1A

every defendant charged in connection with the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol, a melee that was intended to disrupt the electoral vote count of Joe Biden’s victory over him. Trump’s pardons included those convicted of attacking police officers, sometimes causing grievous injuries.

In its opening weeks, the administration also has removed dozens of officials at the Justice Department and the FBI, targeting those who worked on investigations of Trump and of the Jan. 6 defendants.

Adams may be the next example, but he seems unlikely to be the last defendant to recognize the new possibilities.

“I thank the Justice Department for its honesty,” Adams said in a statement at City Hall. “Now we can put this cruel episode behind us and focus entirely on the future of our city. It’s time to move forward.”

The Democratic mayor of the nation’s largest city – where Kamala Harris trounced Trump by more than 2-1 in November – had since his indictment in September become increasingly friendly with Trump. In what critics called a campaign for leniency, Adams traveled to Mar-a-Lago last month to meet with the president-elect, attended his inauguration in Washington and declared that he wouldn’t publicly criticize him, even on immigration policies that are fiercely opposed by many of his own constituents.

The mayor has complained he is the victim of politically motivated prosecutors because he had criticized President Joe Biden’s immigration policies. That’s an argument that has particular resonance for Trump, who has long blamed political foes for his own legal troubles in federal and state courts.

“I know what it’s like to be persecuted by the DOJ (Department of Justice) for speaking out against open borders,” Trump said at the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York in October, which Adams also attended. “We were persecuted, Eric. I was persecuted, and so are you, Eric.”

On Monday, the Justice Department told federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York that they were “directed to dismiss” corruption charges against Adams immediately.

The letter from Emil Bove, the department’s acting No. 2 official, cited political reasons, not legal ones, specifically noting that the department hadn’t assessed the strength of the evidence or the legal reasoning behind the prosecution. Instead, it said the case was interfering with the mayor’s ability to cooperate with Trump’s immigration crackdown. It also suggest-

OPINION

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Democratic ‘sanctuaries’ are anti-democratic



Ingrid Jacques
USA TODAY

Pam Bondi isn’t wasting any time getting started on her job. Kudos to her. The newly confirmed U.S. attorney general is playing hardball on illegal immigration, as her boss President Donald Trump wants. That includes going after the dozens of “sanctuary” jurisdictions (states, cities and counties) that have decided to defy federal immigration law and provide haven to immigrants here illegally. Many of these Democrat-led enclaves – think California, Oregon, Denver, Chicago, Washington, D.C., etc. – are blatantly flaunting the law, and saying that they’ll refuse to work with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on deportations.

So Trump and Bondi are punching back, threatening to cut off Justice Department funding to these sanctuary districts. Bondi’s memo states: “To protect the American people from the effects of unlawful immigration, President Trump has prioritized securing our Nation’s borders and enforcing federal immigration laws. In furtherance of that objective, the Department of Justice will ensure that consistent with law, ‘sanctuary jurisdictions’ do not receive access to Federal funds from the Department.”

Democratic mayors, governors aren’t making (dollars and) sense

How refreshing, after four years of former President Joe Biden’s de facto open border policies that allowed for unprecedented illegal immigration in defiance of federal law. The Trump administration must now clean up Biden’s mess. And it’s disheartening to see Democratic mayors and governors stand in the way. It also doesn’t make any sense. More on that shortly. Democratic officials all over the country have taken to grandstanding about how they’ll stand up to the Trump



President Donald Trump and newly sworn in Attorney General Pam Bondi in the Oval Office of the White House last Wednesday. ANDREW CABALLERO REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

administration and ICE. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said recently that he would not cooperate with federal law enforcement officers on deportations. “I want to speak directly to people who are undocumented: We love you. We care about you,” Frey said at a news conference. “In the city of Minneapolis, we will stand up for you and we will do anything in our power to help because you’re not an alien; in our city, you’re a neighbor.” “Our police officers will not be cooperating with federal law enforcement around federal immigration law,” he added. “We enforce state and local laws here in Minneapolis, and we will do so to the best of our ability. But as for cooperation with ICE, the answer is no.” After getting lectured by Democrats over the past few years about how they’re the defenders of democracy, forgive me for pointing out how hypocritical it is for liberals to pick and choose which laws they want to follow. Disregarding our most basic immigration laws and border policies isn’t heroic. It’s harmful to our country. Yet, Frey is far from alone.

After getting lectured by Democrats over the past few years about how they’re the defenders of democracy, forgive me for pointing out how hypocritical it is for liberals to pick and choose which laws they want to follow.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy recently told a progressive group that he and his wife had discussed housing a migrant. “I don’t want to get into too much detail, but there is someone in our broader universe whose immigration status is not yet at the point that they are trying to get it to,” Murphy said. “And we said, you know what? Let’s have her live at our house above our garage. And good luck to the feds coming in to try to get her.” Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey

said she would “absolutely not” assist with federal deportation efforts, and Denver Mayor Mike Johnston even alluded in November that he’d be willing to use police to keep ICE agents out of the city. This show of lawlessness by Democratic leaders is counterintuitive on several levels. First of all, it was mayors such as Johnston who in recent years raised the alarm that their cities were close to a breaking point. Johnston had to divert millions of dollars from the coffers of Denver to cover the costs of thousands of migrants. Other mayors of large blue cities – including Chicago and New York City – made similar pleas to Biden and Congress to help them deal with the crisis that the Biden administration caused on illegal migrants. To his credit, New York City Mayor Eric Adams has been one of the most outspoken Democrats about the unsustainability of the illegal immigration his city has faced over the past few years. Adams recently told state lawmakers that he needs an additional \$1.1 billion to fund migrant services. “We have still spent more than \$6.9 billion to care for the immigrants over just three fiscal years and anticipate spending billions more in the years to come,” Adams said.

Democratic leaders ignoring the message voters sent

Democrats who insist on flouting federal immigration laws are also completely ignoring the message voters sent in November. Illegal immigration was one of the top reasons the country ditched the Democrats and gave Trump a second term. So it’s really unclear who they’re trying to impress. Regardless, Trump is following through on his promises to secure our border and ensure we know who exactly is coming into this country. Americans will thank him for that. Ingrid Jacques is a columnist at USA TODAY. You can contact her at ijacques@usatoday.com or on X: [@Ingrid_Jacques](https://twitter.com/Ingrid_Jacques)

Judges are doing their jobs even if Congress won’t



Sara Pequeño
USA TODAY

The courts appear to be our last line of defense against President Donald Trump’s overhaul of the U.S. government. Thankfully, judges nationwide and across the political spectrum seem committed to doing their jobs; it’s clear that Congress won’t. Less than a month into his second presidency, more than 40 lawsuits have been filed against a slew of Trump’s executive orders. Multiple rulings have paused the president’s plans to end birthright citizenship, shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development, move trans women into men’s prisons, and more. Republicans aren’t too happy about the roadblocks keeping them from completely upending our democracy.

Does Vance really not understand America’s checks and balances?

“If a judge tried to tell a general how to conduct a military operation, that would be illegal,” Vice President JD Vance wrote on X. “If a judge tried to command the attorney general in how to use her discretion as a prosecutor, that’s also illegal. “Judges aren’t allowed to control the executive’s legitimate power.” Despite Vance’s whining, judicial intervention is part of America’s healthy checks and balances system, something Republicans appear happy to ignore. I would be much more concerned if judges let Trump do whatever he wants, which is apparently what the GOP thinks should happen. Trump has also said that he will ap-

peal the court rulings against him. He could argue these cases all the way up to the Supreme Court, to which he appointed three justices. I worry that these legal challenges are simply roadblocks, not actual deterrents to Trump’s MAGA agenda. On Monday, U.S. District Judge Joseph Laplante of New Hampshire became the third federal judge to rule against Trump’s executive order ending birthright citizenship. Laplante, nominated to the federal court by then-President George W. Bush, joins Judges John Coughenour of Seattle and Deborah Boardman of Maryland in ruling against the president on birthright citizenship. Coughenour, a Reagan appointee, called Trump’s executive order “blatantly unconstitutional.”

‘In this courtroom and under my watch’

“The rule of law is, according to (Trump), something to navigate around or something ignored, whether that be for political or personal gain,” Coughenour said. “In this courtroom and under my watch the rule of law is a bright beacon, which I intend to follow.” This is necessary. A president does not have the singular authority to change the citizenship criteria as defined in the Constitution’s 14th Amendment. The fact that Trump is even attempting this is an affront to American ideals. Trump got hit with a second judicial ruling Monday, this one about the administration’s federal employee buyout plans. U.S. District Judge George O’Toole, who had paused the buyout offer Thursday, issued a temporary restraining order. This time, the Boston federal judge said, the order would remain in place



Protesters rally at the Texas Capitol in Austin last Wednesday against the Trump administration’s policies. BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

“until I respond to the issues presented.” Also on Monday, U.S. District Court Chief Judge John McConnell of Rhode Island ordered the Trump administration to continue funding federal programs after he froze it last month. Previously, D.C. Court of Appeals Judge Loren AliKhan had blocked the efforts to freeze trillions of dollars in federal spending. Two federal judges, Colleen Kollar-Kotelly of Washington, D.C., and Paul Engelmayer of New York, have ruled against Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency accessing and sharing Treasury Department data. Even Trump’s own appointees are ruling against his hostile takeover of the U.S. government. Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee in the U.S. District Court for D.C., paused the administration’s attempt to shut down the USAID. Again, this is how government is supposed to work. No one is supposed to have absolute authority over the United States, not

even the president. This is what should be happening to stave off some of the radical Republican agenda that seems to be getting shoved down our throats without any sense of law or connotational adherence. Judges are also pausing some of the Trump administration’s attacks on transgender people. Last week, Reagan appointee U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth paused the moving of three incarcerated trans women to men’s prisons. Judge O’Toole did this for a transgender woman in Massachusetts last month. There are also lawsuits filed against Trump related to other aspects of his challenges to transgender rights – including his ban on trans people serving in the military and his mandate to withhold federal funding from hospitals that provide gender-affirming care for people under 19.


I want to believe Supreme Court is still independent of Trump

Overall, it’s good that the U.S. legal system is working as it should to halt some of the most extreme aspects of Trump’s executive orders. Still, these are only delays. Trump will appeal any decision made against him, all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. I want to believe that the highest court in the land still operates independent of the Republican agenda. I just don’t think it is. Republican lawmakers could also grow some backbone and oppose Trump’s executive actions in Congress. They have the power to keep the president in check, especially with a majority in both chambers. Instead, they seem content to cede power to the president. Follow USA TODAY columnist Sara Pequeño on X, formerly Twitter: [@sara_pequeno](https://twitter.com/sara_pequeno)

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MONEYLINE

TRAVEL INSURANCE CLAIMS AT HIGHEST MARK IN DECADE

Last year, medical emergency travel insurance claims reached the single highest-paid amount and most frequently claimed in more than a decade. Medical emergency claims accounted for 27% of all paid claims in 2024, surpassing trip cancellations. The average payout for these claims increased 14% to \$1,654, according to data by Squaremouth, a travel insurance marketplace. Most were on cruises. The highest medical emergency claim last year – that wasn’t an evacuation – hit \$61,976 for an illness in Aruba. In the past year, more travelers sought to protect trips, with an 18% increase in paid claims from 2023. Part of these dramatic spikes are due to the rise in travel costs and people being ready to embark on that big bucket list trip, said Jenna Hummer, Squaremouth’s public relations director. A recent Squaremouth poll found the number of travelers who want to go on a major adventure doubled this year.



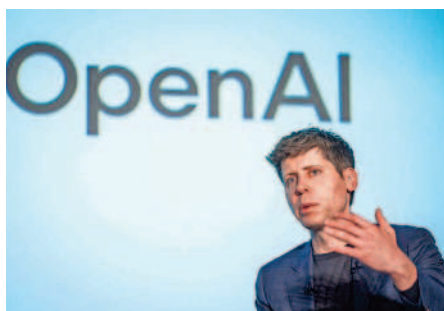
DANIEL SLIM/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

WHICH CRUISE LINE IS POPULAR IN YOUR STATE?

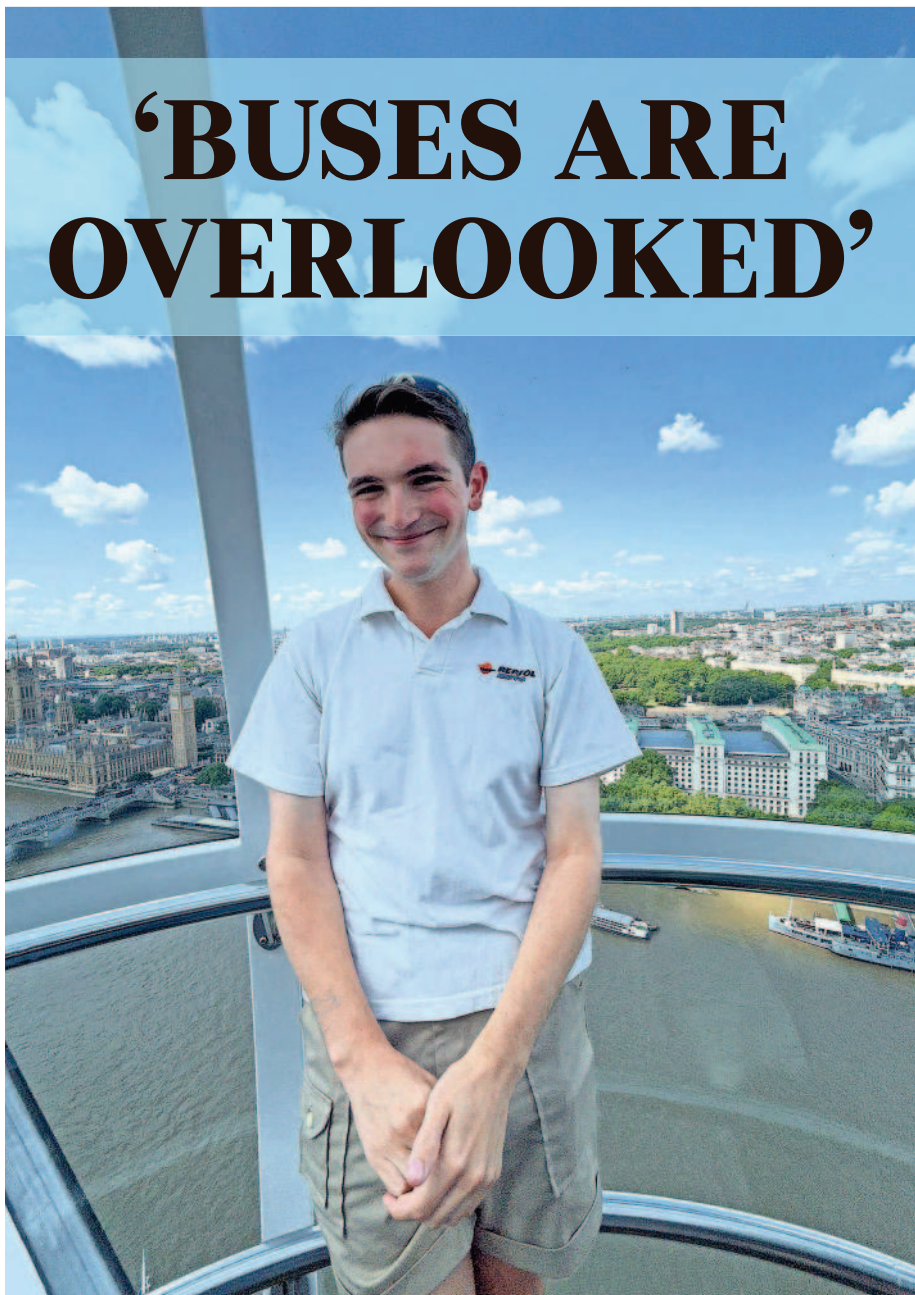
The major cruise ports in the U.S. are concentrated around the coast, but cruise lines have fans all over the country. A study from sports betting company BetMGM shows Disney was crowned the most popular line in 29 states, from Idaho to Maine. “Its combination of family-friendly entertainment, top-tier service, and the allure of beloved Disney characters makes it a go-to choice for many, especially in states like California, Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and Utah,” BetMGM said. The study found Carnival was popular in the Southeast. Princess dominated the Pacific Northwest, ranking most popular in Washington and Oregon, as well as Alaska, Nevada and Arizona. Virgin Voyages was the winner in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Georgia. Celebrity was most popular in Rhode Island and Florida, and MSC Cruises was No. 1 in New York. “The line’s mix of contemporary luxury and diverse itineraries resonates with travelers from the city that never sleeps,” the line said.

MUSK GROUP BIDS TO BUY PARENT OF OPENAI

A consortium led by Elon Musk said on Monday it has offered \$97.4 billion to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI, months after the billionaire sued the artificial intelligence startup to block it from transitioning to a for-profit firm. Musk’s bid could ratchet up longstanding tensions with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. Altman promptly posted on X: “no thank you but we will buy twitter for \$9.74 billion if you want.” The two already are embroiled in an ongoing lawsuit. Musk criticized a \$500 billion OpenAI-led project called Stargate announced with great fanfare at the White House just after President Donald Trump returned to office, suggesting the investors involved lacked the funding for the project. Even without any antitrust implications, a deal this size would need Musk and his consortium to raise enormous funds.



YUICHI YAMAZAKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Nick Portello often travels by bus throughout the Northeast.
PROVIDED BY NICK PORTELLO

Cheap, sustainable way to travel has some advantages over planes, trains

Kathleen Wong
USA TODAY

Travel days can be draining, packed with long waits and lines – maybe even a delay or disruption. Benjamin Fields said he avoids those headaches by traveling on a bus.

“Flying seems quicker, but you go to the airport, you go through security, if you go to another country, through customs – it’s a lot of time you don’t realize,” the 27-year-old Ph.D. student and teacher based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, told USA TODAY. Bus travel “is quicker and more efficient. It’s easy, too; you show up to your bus, and it leaves in 20 minutes.”

Fields goes on a bus trip twice a month, often visiting his uncle who also lives in Oklahoma, when he doesn’t feel like driving himself. When

he attended college in Ithaca, New York, he visited cities like Toronto by bus.

Most people think of hopping on a flight when going on a long-distance trip, but buses are an underrated way to travel that can be friendlier to both your wallet and the environment.

For trips of 200 to 500 miles – like between New York City and Washington, D.C. – intercity buses are not only significantly cheaper than a flight but have much lower greenhouse gas emissions per trip compared with personal vehicles or air travel, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation Climate Change Center. Taking the bus over a flight can reduce a traveler’s carbon footprint by up to 77.5%, a 2023 Wanderu study found.

See BUS TRAVEL, Page 2B



FlixBus has around 67,752 routes within the U.S. PROVIDED BY FLIXBUS

Experts don’t expect chicken meat to see shortages and soaring prices

Betty Lin-Fisher
USA TODAY

A shortage of chicken meat isn’t on the menu for the U.S., experts said, even as eggs remain relatively expensive and in short supply nationwide.

At least not due to bird flu-related shortages.

Still, a lack of eggs and steep prices may lead consumers to move to other cheap forms of protein, which could lead to consumer-induced shortages

and price increases, one expert told USA TODAY. Egg-laying hens and broiler chickens – poultry raised for meat – are different, said Will Strickland, an assistant extension agent for Louisiana State University’s AgCenter.

Egg layers “usually never end up in our meat supply when they’re done,” Strickland said.

While both are chickens, they are very different, explained Matt Sutton-Vermeulen, principal in the agriculture and food practice of Kearney, a global

Accuracy can help prevent tax audit

Avoid sloppiness racing to collect refund faster

Medora Lee
USA TODAY

Many Americans think rushing through their taxes will get them a refund sooner. In most cases that may be true, but what really works best is doing your taxes right, experts say.

If something doesn’t add up or match – whether intentionally or by accident – you run the risk of getting audited, they said.

When you’re audited, it means your return was selected from a batch of returns for a closer inspection. This happens because your tax filing was among those that showed the “highest potential noncompliance,” the IRS says. The agency uses data-driven algorithms, third-party information, whistleblowers and information you provide to determine whether income, expenses and credits are reported accurately.

The easiest way to avoid an audit is to slow down and be “accurate, honest and modest,” said Eric Scaringe, principal at certified public accounting firm UHY.

What triggers an IRS audit?

Mismatches. “One thing tax jurisdictions like more than money is information,” Scaringe said. “They look for mismatches, and use AI (artificial intelligence) tools to find it and send autogenerated notices. That’s low-hanging fruit.”

For instance, make sure you enter your information from your W-2 income tax form correctly so it’s consistent with the income that’s stated on official income tax documents like a 1099 or W-2, said Erin Collins, National Taxpayer Advocate at an independent organization within the IRS that works for taxpayers. Otherwise, you can expect an IRS inquiry.

“We find a lot of taxpayers take their last pay stub (of the year) and use that number,” she said. But they can run into problems because that last pay stub may not cover their typical pay period.

She also recommends parents discuss who will be claiming a child on their return if they file separate returns. They should also ensure additional caretakers like grandparents don’t try to claim a child on their return if they don’t meet the IRS’ requirements for doing so. Otherwise, an audit may be triggered if multiple people try to claim the same child as a dependent.

People often get tripped up on the earned income tax credit (EITC) because IRS records show a child claimed by the taxpayer does not meet the relationship or residency test to be considered a qualifying child, according to the Taxpayer Advocate.

Michael Steffany, a senior tax attorney at Withersworldwide, said that in his experience, “the IRS concentrates its efforts on those items most likely to result in a large amount of additional tax due.”

See TAX AUDITS, Page 2B

strategy and management consulting firm.

“You have sprinters and you have marathoners and they’re not the same,” he said.

The average price of a pound of boneless chicken breast in a U.S. city was \$4.10 in December, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The average price in November was \$4.01. In December of 2023, it was \$4.08.

See CHICKENS, Page 2B

Bus travel

Continued from Page 1B

“Intercity buses are often overlooked, but they’re one of the best ways to travel affordably, comfortably and sustainably,” said Kai Boysan, CEO of Flix North America, which also owns Greyhound. Together, Flix and Greyhound operate North America’s largest intercity bus network, connecting more than 1,600 destinations across the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

From 2022 to 2023, FlixBus ridership surged by 36%, and the bus service is seeing a trend among last-minute bookings for weekend getaways to national parks and ski towns.

What are the benefits of bus travel?

Many travelers find intercity buses a convenient, accessible way to move between cities. A bus ride from downtown New York to downtown Philadelphia is an estimated 27.9% faster than traveling to the airport and taking a flight, according to data by the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University.

New York City-based content creator and frequent bus traveler Nick Portello, 23, recommends bus travel for trips of five hours or less.

Whenever Portello visits his alma mater in Boston, he prefers to take the northeast bus service, OurBus.

“I love it as opposed to flying and even Amtrak,” he told USA TODAY. “The most obvious reason is the price – a round-trip bus ride between Boston and New York is often less than \$50.” A 2023 CNET analysis of median cost per mile for popular U.S. travel routes, like between New York and Chicago, found buses to be the cheapest option compared with planes, cars and trains.

He also likes how bus pickups and drop-offs are centrally located within cities, eliminating the need for additional transportation to the airport. On a recent trip to Philadelphia, his bus dropped him off near his friend’s apartment.

“It’s a very relaxed experience that allows you to look at the New York skyline through the window seat,” Portello said. Scheduled rest stops allow travelers to grab food, use the bathroom and stretch their legs for a few minutes. All Flix buses feature free Wi-Fi – you have to pay for it on most U.S. airlines – and power outlets at each seat.

Buses also help make travel more accessible by linking rural communities to major cities, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. They accommodate mobility-challenged passengers with wheelchair lifts and priority seating on every bus. Greyhound bus drivers are trained to help passengers with disabilities and offer boarding assistance and wheelchair storage, FlixBus said.

Though intercity bus travel is already a sustainable option, the industry is working to become greener; Flix has committed to being carbon-neutral by 2050. The company is piloting zero-emission technologies like electric and solar-powered buses along with AI-powered technology to come up with the most efficient driving routes.

Popular bus routes in the US

- New York City to Washington, D.C. – from \$62
- Los Angeles to Las Vegas – from \$90
- Boston to New York City – from \$50
- Seattle to Portland – from \$52
- Chicago to Minneapolis – from \$91
- Miami to Orlando – from \$53
- Dallas to Austin – from \$53



Broiler chickens eat in 2020 at Yuppie Hill Poultry in Burlington, Wis. Broiler chickens raised for their meat are different than egg-laying hens, which have been impacted more directly by the bird flu shortages. MARK HOFFMAN/USA TODAY NETWORK

Chickens

Continued from Page 1B

Current bird flu strains have been impacting egg-laying hens

While the bird flu could affect hens and broiler chickens, the current strains affect egg-laying hens at a much higher rate.

It also has to do with how the hens and broiler chickens are raised and housed.

“The amount of birds that are on a premises for our laying facilities is a much higher number than the amount of birds that are on a premises at our broiler facilities,” Strickland said.

For instance, some hen complexes can have 1 million-plus birds on-site, while a broiler facility may have 10,000 chickens, Sutton-Vermeulen said.

So when a bird flu case shows up in an egg-laying facility and the United States Department of Agriculture orders the birds killed, it is much more devastating to the supply, Strickland said.

“When you lose 10% of a total production system in an inelastic commodity where demand doesn’t go down because the prices go up, it’s really tough,” Sutton-Vermeulen said.

Then, it takes much longer for new egg-laying hens to mature and be ready to produce eggs that can show up in the grocery store.

In the “best-case scenario,” with no more bird losses with bird flu, it could take more than nine months for the replacements of those lost hens to have eggs that show up in grocery stores, Sutton-Vermeulen previously told USA TODAY. There have already been 14 million egg-laying hens lost in the past two weeks.

Chickens raised as broiler chickens are born and harvested usually within 30 to 60 days, Strickland said.

The short life cycle of the broiler chicken makes it a lower potential that exposure to bird flu will have a ripple effect on the supply in the industry, Sutton-Vermeulen said.

“I am not necessarily worried right now about a (broiler) poultry shortage,” Strickland said. “That’s not to say that

something devastating couldn’t happen.”

There have been some turkey farms and duck operations that have had some cases of bird flu, but not enough to cause any worries of eventual shortages due to bird flu, Sutton-Vermeulen said.

Turkeys do have a higher vulnerability because it takes longer for a turkey to grow and mature, but Sutton-Vermeulen said he is not fearing a turkey shortage when demand is highest, “but we’ll have to monitor that flock.”

Could other food like beef and milk supplies get affected by shortages?

Bird flu is not having the same impact on beef and dairy cattle supplies as it is on hen-laying birds, despite a variant of the bird flu being found in dairy cows, said Sutton-Vermeulen.

“That is not a concern that I’m hearing from ... the veterinarians and producers,” he said.

Sutton-Vermeulen’s firm, Kearney, has working relationships with people all across the food supply chains, he said.

“I don’t see any other strategic vulnerabilities in the food supply system that are related to this,” he said.

Shortages, price hikes could come from switching goods and demand

While there are no widespread worries of egg shortages affecting the markets for chicken and other foods, there still could be shortages and price increases for other foods driven by consumer behavior, said John Clear, senior director in the consumer and retail group of global professional services firm Alvarez & Marsal.

There could be ripple effects with other products, Clear said.

“It’s like protein ping-pong,” he said. Eggs have historically been a cheap source of protein for all income levels. But when people, especially those looking for a protein-rich diet, start looking for alternatives to eggs, they will move to the next cheapest form of protein in the retail chain, usually things like tuna, chicken meat and pork, Clear said.

Then grocers, who may temporarily

run out of stock since they weren’t anticipating the ripple effect, will over-order and then there will be a surplus at the store, Clear said.

It’s similar to what happened to toilet paper during the COVID-19 pandemic when consumers emptied store shelves when they feared shortages. It’s called the bullwhip effect, Clear said.

Also, something to a smaller effect happened in 2021 when a bird flu outbreak caused shortages of eggs, but it wasn’t to this scale, Clear said.

“We’ve got record high prices right now, so this is more of an extreme situation,” he said. “But this happened before ... and the best indicator of future (consumer) behavior is past behavior.”

Clear does not think consumers will transition to beef as a protein alternative as quickly as others since beef prices aren’t as cheap.

Egg price increases will be bigger, last in the food service market longer

Clear also foresees the rising prices of eggs having a bigger and longer effect on the food service industry – or any provider that is not the grocery store.

Grocers can quickly change the price of eggs based on the higher costs from producers. But food service providers, from restaurants to convenience stores with prepared foods, have previous contracts for eggs in place. Those contracts don’t reflect current prices. So, producers will likely prioritize getting their supplies to grocers, who can pay higher prices than food service providers, while trying to renegotiate the food service contracts, Clear said.

But restaurants can’t change their menu prices every day to reflect increasing egg prices, he said. Food service providers use eggs in myriad dishes, sauces and for baking. He believes more will add surcharges to their egg products, like Waffle House, which announced a 50-cent surcharge.

“You’re going to see a larger impact in food service for a longer time,” he said.

Betty Lin-Fisher is a consumer reporter for USA TODAY. Reach her at blinfisher@USATODAY.com or follow her on X, Facebook, or Instagram @blinfisher.

Tax audits

Continued from Page 1B

“We continue to see high-net-worth taxpayers, as well as taxpayers with non-U.S. income and foreign entities, be a particular point of concentration,” he added.

How does the IRS choose whom to audit?

The IRS says audits can also commonly be triggered through a random selection process in which a computerized system compares your return “against ‘norms’ for similar returns,” the IRS said in an online post.

For example, a freelancer earning \$100,000 might typically have \$5,000 in travel costs. “If you’re out there and wrote \$50,000 in travel costs, that’s way outside the mean someone would deduct,” said Mark Jaeger, vice president of tax operations at preparer Tax-Act. “The IRS would flag that because you’re an outlier.”

Another trigger for an audit is if the information on your return is connected to someone else’s, such as a business partner or investor, that is being audited.

Who gets audited by the IRS the most?

In terms of income levels, the IRS in recent years has audited taxpayers with incomes below \$25,000 and above \$500,000 at higher-than-average rates, according to government data.

In May, the IRS said it’s working on increasing audits by more than 50% on wealthy individual taxpayers with total income above \$10 million. It forecasts audit rates in this group to rise to 16.5% in tax year 2026 from 11% in 2019.

Over that same period, the agency said it won’t increase the “historically low levels” of audits for small businesses and taxpayers making under \$400,000.

Odds of being audited by the IRS

For all returns filed for tax years 2013 through 2021, the IRS said in its 2023 Data Book, it has audited 0.44% of individual returns filed.

In 2022, 3.8 out of every 1,000 returns, or 0.38%, were audited by the IRS, according to a report using IRS data from Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. That was down from 4.1 out of every 1,000 returns filed, or 0.41%, the year before.

Low-income wage earners taking the EITC were 5.5 times more likely to be audited than anyone else “because they are easy marks in an era when IRS increasingly relies upon correspondence audits yet doesn’t have the resources to assist taxpayers or answer their questions,” the report said.

How does the IRS notify you of an audit?

You’ll initially be contacted by snail mail. The IRS will provide all contact information and instructions in the letter you’ll receive.

If the IRS conducts the audit by mail, it’ll ask you for more information about certain items on your tax return, such as income, expenses and itemized deductions.

If you have too many books or records to mail, you can request a face-to-face audit and the agency will provide contact information and instructions in the letter you receive.

The in-person interview may be at an IRS office or at the taxpayer’s home, place of business or an accountant’s office. IRS agents don’t usually show up at your doorstep anymore.

How far back can the IRS audit you?

Typically, the IRS can include returns filed within the past three years in an audit. If it finds a “substantial error” it can add years, but it usually doesn’t go back more than the past six years.

What should you do if you get audited?

If you receive an audit notice, you generally have 30 days to respond. Take that time to read the letter carefully to understand what the IRS is requesting. Not all notices are audits, and not all are related to your latest tax return.

Whatever you do, don’t ignore the IRS. Failure to comply could result in additional interest and penalty charges for late response or providing incomplete information, or losing your right to challenge the finding, the Taxpayer Advocate says.

ASK HUMAN RESOURCES

AI doesn't have to be big worry for workers



Johnny C. Taylor
Columnist
USA TODAY

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. tackles your human resources questions as part of a series for USA TODAY. Taylor is president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management, the world's largest HR professional society and author of "Reset: A Leader's Guide to Work in an Age of Upheaval."

Question: One of the smaller groups in our organization has been using artificial intelligence for some of their work. Should we be concerned that AI will replace jobs as we expand the usage of it? – Kima

Answer: It's natural to feel concerned about the potential impact of AI on jobs, especially as its adoption grows in your organization. You're not alone in these worries: Recent research shows that about one-quarter of U.S. workers are apprehensive about automation potentially supplanting their jobs in the near future. However, while AI will undoubtedly transform certain roles, it's also poised to create new opportunities and enhance our work.

Think of AI not as a replacement for human intelligence but as a tool to amplify it. AI excels at processing vast amounts of data, automating repetitive tasks and improving efficiency, but it can't replicate the creativity, empathy or nuanced decision-making humans bring to the workplace. The "human element" will always be essential because our work ultimately serves people.

Here's how you can approach this evolving landscape with confidence and resilience:

- **Embrace AI as a partner.** Rather than viewing AI as a threat, consider how it can augment your abilities. AI can take over mundane tasks, freeing you to focus on your work's strategic, creative or interpersonal aspects.
- **Upskill and adapt.** Continuously learning and growing your skill set is key to staying relevant in a rapidly changing world. Take courses, attend training



While AI will undoubtedly transform certain roles, it's also poised to create new opportunities and enhance our work. ARIYA SONTRAPORNPOL/GETTY IMAGES

sessions or participate in professional development opportunities, especially those teaching how to work alongside AI or apply it to your field.

- **Demonstrate value.** Take on new challenges, be proactive in problem-solving and consistently exceed expectations. Look for ways to integrate AI into your role to drive efficiency and productivity.
 - **Collaborate and innovate.** Discuss with your manager how AI can enhance your team's performance and explore how to leverage it to serve customers or clients better. Sharing ideas and demonstrating initiative can position you as a forward-thinking leader.
 - **Prepare for the future.** Careers are no longer static, and neither should our skill sets be. As new technology creates demand for roles such as AI monitoring, management and ethical oversight, consider how you can align your expertise with these emerging opportunities.
- I'll add this: AI in and of itself is not the most significant threat to workers. Other workers who know how to use AI are the more likely threat to your jobs. Employers favor workers with AI ac-

men to facilitate their advancement. AI needs human input and oversight to be effective. So, developing your AI skill set is the best way to ensure your career. We can choose to run from it and limit our opportunities and growth or embrace it to expand our potential.

Make no mistake, AI is here to stay and now is the time to focus on harnessing its potential to enhance our productivity, performance and possibilities. By proactively engaging with this technology, you position yourself to not just survive but thrive in an AI-augmented workplace.

I was laid off while on FMLA leave. Isn't FMLA supposed to protect workers with personal medical challenges? Do I have any recourse to fight the layoff or receive compensation? – Pamela

I'm so sorry to hear about your situation. The Family and Medical Leave Act is, indeed, designed to protect employees facing personal or family medical challenges by granting up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave. However, it's important to understand that while FMLA offers job protection, it does not

guarantee immunity from layoffs or terminations if those actions are unrelated to the leave itself.

Under FMLA regulations, an employee on leave has no greater right to reinstatement or job security than they would have if they were continuously employed during that time. This means that if your employer can demonstrate the layoff was part of a broader, legitimate business decision and not influenced by your leave, they may be within their legal rights. For example, if your position was eliminated companywide or due to a restructuring unrelated to your medical leave, the employer might have grounds for the action.

Here are a few steps you can take:

- **Review the documentation.** Carefully examine any layoff notices, severance offers or exit paperwork provided. Look for details about the reasons for the layoff and whether it also impacted other employees.
- **Contact HR.** Reach out to your former employer's HR department for clarification on the criteria used for the layoff. Ask for transparency about how your position was selected for termination while you were on leave.
- **Seek legal guidance.** Consulting with an employment attorney may be worthwhile if you suspect your FMLA leave influenced the layoff decision. An attorney can assess whether the employer violated your rights and advise on potential recourse, such as filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Labor or pursuing legal action.
- **Explore additional compensation.** Some employers offer severance packages as part of layoffs. Review any severance agreement closely and consult a legal professional before signing, especially if you're uncertain about its terms.

While losing a job during a challenging time is undoubtedly difficult, understanding your rights and options can help you navigate the situation more effectively. I hope you can find clarity and support in addressing this matter and that your health continues to improve.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of USA TODAY.

How to keep a watchful eye on your credit score



Tech Talk
Kim Komando

Do you know the difference between 550 and 780? Yes, they're 230 digits apart, but they're also examples of bad and good credit scores, respectively.

If you don't check yours regularly, now's the time to start. Small mistakes are a lot more common than you think, and they can do some serious damage to your credit score. I'll let you in on some of the most common credit report mistakes and what you can do to fix them.

Step 1: Get your free credit report

The three credit reporting agencies (TransUnion, Experian and Equifax) are required by law to provide you with one free credit report a year. Sweet. There are a few ways you can request a copy from each agency.

Online is the fastest route. If you submit a request via phone or mail, expect to wait two weeks after the paperwork is received.

- **Online:** www.AnnualCreditReport.com
- **Phone:** 877-FACTACT (877-322-8228)
- **Mail:** Download and complete the Annual Credit Report Request Form. Send it to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Pro tip: Grab your report from the fourth credit bureau, Innovis, too.

Step 2: Look for the most common mistakes

Typos or wrong info: Anything from your name spelled incorrectly to your address or your birth date off by one number. Tiny mistakes can mix up your credit with someone else's.

Accounts you don't recognize: If you see something you don't recognize, don't ignore it! This includes credit cards you never applied for, loans in your name or purchases you didn't make.

Duplicates: It's not normal to see a debt twice on a credit report. This includes things like the same collection



Small mistakes are a lot more common than you think, and they can do some serious damage to your credit score. NICOELNINO/GETTY IMAGES

account, transferred debts showing as separate accounts or paid-off debts still sitting there.

Incorrect account info: Sometimes, payments mistakenly can show up as late, or closed accounts may still show as active. Other times, reports may show the wrong credit limit or mess up your payment history.

Outdated info: Bankruptcies older than 10 years, late payments older than seven years and outdated collections accounts should not be showing on your credit report.

Step 3: Report anything strange

Don't panic! Write down and make copies of anything that looks off, then file a dispute with the credit reporting company by mail, phone or online.

If you're filing online or by mail, explain in writing exactly what's wrong and why, and include copies of documents with proof. Make sure to include your contact info, credit report confirmation numbers and a copy of your version of your credit report.

- **Equifax:** Online or call 866-349-5191
- **Experian:** Online or call 888-397-3742
- **TransUnion:** Online or call 800-916-8800
- **Innovis:** Online or call 800-540-2505

And always follow up! Bureaus are required to look into your disputes within 30 days. Track its progress until you have a resolution in writing. If your dispute is valid, the bureau has to fix it and tell the other bureaus as well.

A lot of these issues boil down to good old-fashioned human error. It happens, but don't let that stop you from taking charge.

While you're at it, find your job number

Equifax also runs a database of 716 million income and employment records, including, potentially, yours. It's called The Work Number, and employers use it to make sure you are who you say you are.

Your Employment Data Report (EDR) includes things like where you've worked, when you worked there and your exact past salary numbers.

Trying to get a new job? An employer could use your EDR to find your past salary range and lowball you in negotiations. And, of course, Equifax will sell your EDR to anyone who's buying, including debt collectors.

How to stop it

You can freeze your EDR just like a credit report. You can also see who's tried to access it within the past two years. You'll need to make an account with The Work Number to do it.

- Search for your current or former employer(s) using their **name or employer code** (the nine-digit number on your W-2).
- Click their name, followed by **Register Now**. Heads-up: It'll ask for your Social Security number.

Once you register, look over your report and make sure it's accurate. Fill out this data dispute form if you find anything fishy.

Then, head back to the dashboard and click **Freeze Your Data**. Fill out the **Data Freeze Placement Form** and submit it. The Work Number will send you a freeze confirmation letter, along with a **PIN**. Save your PIN in your password manager. You'll need it if you ever want to unfreeze your report.

You can always log into The Work Number or call them to unfreeze your report.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of USA TODAY. Learn about all the latest technology on the Kim Komando Show, the nation's largest weekend radio talk show.

50★States

ALABAMA Camp Hill: A new animal-borne virus has been discovered in Alabama, but the creature that carries it can be found along parts of the Atlantic seaboard, as far north as southern Saskatchewan, Canada, as far south as the Gulf states and as far west as Kansas. A group of researchers from The University of Queensland in Australia have identified a new strain of henipavirus in North America, the first found on the continent. This strain is called Camp Hill, named for the Tallapoosa County town near Auburn where four infected northern short-tailed shrews were caught in 2021.

ALASKA Juneau: Taiwan is interested in natural gas from Alaska and will continue to assess the feasibility of purchases, the economy ministry said, as the government looks to narrow the trade surplus with the United States and head off tariffs.

ARIZONA Phoenix: Two of Arizona’s largest pieces of water infrastructure are linking up. A coalition of 14 central Arizona municipalities and water companies is working to complete the interconnection between the Central Arizona Project and the Salt River Project, two water systems that collectively serve more than 80% of Arizona’s population.

ARKANSAS Pine Bluff: Officials said one person has been arrested after a break-in at the Main Library in Pine Bluff, KARK reported. The library said it will be closed until further notice as it undergoes repairs, according to the news outlet.

CALIFORNIA Sacramento: College students in California sued the U.S. Department of Education on Friday, alleging Elon Musk’s government efficiency team illegally accessed the agency’s confidential student data.

COLORADO Johnstown: A behavioral health care facility is closing its doors after less than four years in operation. Johnstown Heights Behavioral Health, a 92-bed facility in Johnstown, will shutter March 31, citing “shifting referral and reimbursement trends, patient census and acuity, bed expansions and new facilities in closer proximity to major population centers,” Johnstown Heights CEO Sabrina Gibson said.

CONNECTICUT Hartford: Gov. Ned Lamont unveiled a \$55.2 billion biennial budget that would loosen Connecticut’s fiscal “guardrails,” launch a major early childhood development initiative, provide a \$50 income tax cut and restructure hospital taxes to secure more federal aid, The CT Mirror reported.

DELAWARE Wilmington: One in 5 Wilmington residents live in poverty, and many more struggle to afford housing. The city faces a deepening affordable housing crisis with 500 vacant properties, exacerbated by a lack of coordination among housing resources and development plans. To address these challenges, state Sen. Elizabeth “Tizzy” Lockman convened a housing summit on Monday. The closed-door meeting brought together local civic leaders, housing data experts and representatives from state agencies to discuss a unified strategy for tackling the city’s housing crisis.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: Police said a shooting that occurred nearly 20 years ago is now being investigated as a homicide after the woman who was shot died from her injuries last year, DC News Now reported.

FLORIDA Miami: Calling her “the mother of panthers,” after the school’s mascot, the Florida International University Board of Trustees Friday named Lt. Gov. Jeanette Nuñez its interim president.

GEORGIA Pooler: After a zoning map amendment approval by Pooler City Council, the city will welcome an electrical vehicle charging station and a HydroFleet manufacturing and fueling site.

HAWAII Honolulu: Hawaii Department of Education announced that two previously suspended school bus routes serving Pahoia High and Intermediate, Pahoia Elementary, and Keonepoko Elementary have been reinstated, Hawaii News Now reported.

IDAHO Boise: The Ada County Highway District announced that it has received funding through the Leading Idaho Local Bridge Program to replace the Eckert Road Bridge, which has been closed to motor vehicle traffic due to structural concerns, KTVB reported.

HIGHLIGHT: MICHIGAN



Matthew Larsen works on carving out an owl at the Harbor Springs Ice Fest on Friday. KARLY GRAHAM/USA TODAY NETWORK

Harbor Springs: Frigid temperatures made for the perfect environment at Ice Fest last weekend in Harbor Springs. Celebrated on Feb. 7-8, the Harbor Springs Ice Fest had live carving demos, an interactive ice park and dueling chainsaw shows for people to enjoy. While people dressed in their best and warmest winter gear, carvers worked on making new ice sculptures to add to the lineup downtown. Ice Creations, a company from Ohio, provided the ice sculptures. The carvings will remain downtown as long as the weather stays cold enough to maintain the ice.

ILLINOIS Springfield: A bill introduced to the Illinois General Assembly that would lower the state’s drinking age to 18 years old comes with a caveat. Under the bill introduced by Illinois Rep. John Cabello, the drinking age would be lowered to 18, but only if a parent or guardian is present.

INDIANA Bloomington: The Indiana University School of Medicine has said little about its decision to cancel its LGBTQ+ Health Care Conference less than three months before the event was to take place.

IOWA Des Moines: Nine Iowa school districts were awarded nearly \$600,000 in grant funding to support a program where students earn national credentials in child care. Gov. Kim Reynolds said the program will aid in Iowa’s child care needs.

KANSAS Topeka: Kansas’s Committee on the Social Services Budget recommended further reducing the state’s waitlist for Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities waiver after a big investment in the program last year.

KENTUCKY Louisville: There are more than a dozen new places where you can sip Kentucky’s favorite spirit along the famed Kentucky Bourbon Trail. The trail has added 15 new locations to its route, bringing the total to 60 destinations in 27 of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

LOUISIANA Baton Rouge: Republican Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy vowed to protect Americans’ access to vaccines after providing the swing vote to advance immunization skeptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s nomination to lead the nation’s health agency.

MAINE Portland: Police said an investigation is underway after two people were found dead in the woods behind a supermarket, WMTW reported.

MARYLAND Baltimore: A Maryland man is facing three federal felony charges for illegally operating a drone during a wild-card playoff game between the Baltimore Ravens and Pittsburgh Steelers on Jan. 11.

MASSACHUSETTS Hyannis: Actress and singer Judy Garland’s Cape Cod house has hit the market for the first time in 45 years, real estate listings show. Garland rented the home in Hyannis Port while her daughter, Liza Minnelli, performed and worked at the Cape Cod Melody Tent. Now, you can buy the Colonial house for \$7,495,000, according to the listing.

MINNESOTA St. Cloud: A new development is coming to St. Cloud to help address the area’s housing shortage. Local housing development company Dreamliner Estates has planned a 34-home project for south St. Cloud, with help from a recent \$3.4 million Minnesota Housing Finance Agency grant.

MISSISSIPPI Batesville: Generator enclosure and fuel tank manufacturer Yancey Engineered Solutions, a division of Yancey Bros. Co., is locating operations in Batesville, according to the Mississippi Development Authority. The project is a \$20.8 million investment and is expected to create 250 jobs.

MISSOURI Springfield: Top officials at the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame said they are making significant progress to stabilize the financial health of the nonprofit foundation, distribute funds owed to local charities, and plan for the future.

MONTANA Billings: MetraPark general manager Stoney Field issued a statement saying it will not be used as a detention facility for undocumented immigrants, KPAX reported.

NEBRASKA Stanton County: Authorities said a man has been arrested after a more than 150-mile pursuit through multiple counties in northeast Nebraska, KOLN reported.

NEVADA Churchill County: Nevada has confirmed its first human case of bird flu in a farm worker who was exposed to infected dairy cattle, the Central Nevada Health District said on Monday, after authorities last week reported a second strain of the virus in cows in the state.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Durham: An instrument created by a team at the University of New Hampshire was recently installed onto a spacecraft that is preparing for launch. Known as IMAP-Lo, the instrument could help us learn more about what’s beyond the boundaries of our solar system, New Hampshire Public Radio reported.

NEW JERSEY Branchburg: Three community colleges have launched a workforce development effort to create a talent pipeline to support New Jersey’s rapidly expanding cell and gene therapeutics industry. Raritan Valley Community College, Middlesex College and Mercer County Community College have joined with Johnson & Johnson to create the initiative.

NEW MEXICO Albuquerque: Work is underway to add bike lanes to parts of Central Avenue in downtown Albuquerque, KOB reported.

NEW YORK Albany: If you’re planning on starting a business in New York, it may be a bit more difficult to keep it afloat as WalletHub has ranked the Empire State one of the worst states to start a business in 2025, according to a newly released report. New York fell within the bottom 10 states on the list.

NORTH CAROLINA Raleigh: Amazon is facing its second workers’ union vote in as many months as laborers at a warehouse in suburban Raleigh decide this week whether they wish to collectively bargain with the retail giant. Workers at the 5-year-old warehouse in the city of Garner will vote through Friday to join or reject the upstart Carolina Amazonians United for Solidarity and Empowerment, or CAUSE.

NORTH DAKOTA Bismarck: The North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality said that wind energy is soaring to new heights across the state as it ranks ninth in the U.S. for wind power generation, KXNET reported.

OHIO Columbus: Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine picked former Ohio State University football coach Jim Tressel to serve as lieutenant governor for the remaining two years of his term.

OKLAHOMA Oklahoma City: A study shows Oklahoma has seen a surge in film and television activity since the Filmed in Oklahoma Act of 2021 was enacted and established state incentives. Since Gov. Kevin Stitt signed the bill into law in May 2021, it has generated a direct economic impact of more than \$531 million for the state, according to an economic study released by state film, commerce and tourism arms.

OREGON Mapleton: A broken trail bridge on a popular waterfall hike is scheduled to be replaced in June, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Sweet Creek Trail, located 10 miles south of Mapleton, features numerous waterfalls and boardwalk bridges on a popular family-friendly hike. However, for about a year, a broken bridge has disrupted the normal 2.2 mile round-trip hike.

PENNSYLVANIA Harrisburg: Two years after the courts found Pennsylvania’s school funding system was inequitable and fundamentally broken, Gov. Josh Shapiro called for putting more than \$525 million toward a fix. But some education advocates say help is still coming too slowly for kids in struggling schools.

RHODE ISLAND Warwick: Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport will add twice-weekly service to Bermuda as BermudAir begins service May 22, the airport announced.

SOUTH CAROLINA Columbia: Cason Development Group announced that an open-air food hall called GATHER COLA is coming to the Bull Street District, WIS reported.

SOUTH DAKOTA Pierre: The South Dakota Senate failed to pass a bill that would cap school administrators’ salaries at three times their district’s average teacher salary.

TENNESSEE Nashville: Vanderbilt University, one of Nashville’s oldest institutions, plans to expand beyond Tennessee in the coming years with two new multi-million-dollar locations in West Palm Beach, Florida, and New York City. While the New York campus is in earlier planning stages, the university released its first renderings of the \$520 million Florida campus, combining coastal-inspired design with traditional Vanderbilt architecture and incorporating solar-powered elements.

TEXAS Dallas: Ride-hailing firm Lyft plans to launch “as soon as 2026” fully autonomous robotaxis in Dallas, powered by Mobileye’s technology, CEO David Risher said.

UTAH Salt Lake City: State wildlife officials reported that an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 eared grebes have died across the Great Salt Lake in recent months from bird flu, KSL reported.

VERMONT Burlington: Breeze Airways will begin seasonal nonstop service from Burlington to Charleston, South Carolina, on May 30, according to a news release. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak said the new nonstop route marks the first time since 1990 that Vermonters can fly directly to 19 destinations.

VIRGINIA Charlottesville: The Virginia High School League says its decision to not adhere to President Donald Trump’s executive order banning transgender athletes from competing is strategic, not political. Instead, spokesperson Mike McCall said, the league wants its executive committee to take a deep look into Trump’s directive and decide how to handle the sensitive issue.

WASHINGTON Voltage: Authorities said four people were killed and seven were injured in a crash involving a bus near Wenatchee, KING reported.

WEST VIRGINIA Weston: Officials said a man was arrested after leaving four children at home with no electricity and spoiled food, WDTV reported.

WISCONSIN Menasha: Snow couldn’t dampen the excitement Saturday for the reopening of the Elisha D. Smith Public Library following a \$9 million renovation. About 25 people waited outside before the doors opened at 10 a.m., eager to experience how the library has been transformed into a community center focused on hands-on learning.

WYOMING Cheyenne: A bill that seeks to create a version of Mount Rushmore in Wyoming has passed a state House committee, Casper Star-Tribune reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports



Lakers guard Luka Dončić looks to make a pass down court during Monday’s game against the Jazz at Crypto.com Arena. PHOTOS BY JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

Luka Dončić feels Lakers fans’ love

‘I was a little nervous’ says star with new LA team

James H. Williams USA TODAY

LOS ANGELES

Luka Dončić did not disappoint the fans in attendance at Crypto.com Arena for his debut with the Los Angeles Lakers. • He was one of seven players to score in double figures as the Lakers beat up the Utah Jazz 132-113 Monday night in Los Angeles. • Dončić was given the stamp of approval from the fan base, who cheered for the Slovenian throughout the evening. Most of the fans in attendance wore the shirt with his last name and jersey number (No. 77), which were left at their seats before the game.

After the game, Dončić reflected on the evening and called the moments before the game as his favorite part of the night. Dončić received a text message from LeBron James in the morning about the decision to have the guard introduced last in the starting lineup.

“It was special the way they received me,” Dončić said. “It was amazing to see. I was a little nervous before. I can’t remember the last time I was nervous before the game, but once I stepped out on the court it was fun being out there again. It felt amazing.”

There was a sense of a new beginning for the Lakers, with fans cheering for Dončić every time he touched the ball and even chanting his name while he was sitting on the bench. The guard brought the crowd to its feet on several occasions with his playmaking ability.

Among those in attendance for the Lakers’ new star was Rams wide receiver Puka Nacua, Dallas Mavericks legend Dirk Nowitzki, singer Adele and actor Will Ferrell.

Dončić was in the starting lineup alongside LeBron James, Austin Reaves, Rui Hachimura and Jaxon Hayes but was on a minute restriction as he continues to work his way back from a calf injury. He recorded his first assist less than a

minute into the game on an alley-oop dunk shot by Jaxson Hayes and scored his first points on a three-ball three minutes later – the only 3-point shot he would hit all night.

His shots weren’t as crisp as they usually are – he shot only 35.7% from the field and a paltry 14.3% from 3-point range – but the five-time All-Star hadn’t seen any game action since his calf injury during a Christmas Day game with the Mavericks.

The Lakers (32-19) acquired Dončić as part of a blockbuster trade that sent Anthony Davis to the Dallas.

While the starting lineup featured Dončić and James, Mark Williams was notably absent. The Lakers acquired the center from the Charlotte Hornets before the trade deadline, but Los Angeles rescinded the deal over the weekend after Williams failed a physical.

With the trade rescinded, Dalton Knecht and Cam Reddish returned to the Lakers.

Knecht returned to Los Angeles on Sunday night but did not play in Monday’s game.

Reddish remains away from the team as he spends time with his family after the birth of his child.



Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

Journey to MVP of Super Bowl forged by adversity

Eagles QB Jalen Hurts has been through it all

NEW ORLEANS – Never forget where you came from.

Jalen Hurts won’t forget. He was benched in college in the middle of a national championship game. Lost a Super Bowl. Shoot, not too long ago, while his Philadelphia Eagles were only in the midst of winning 16 of their past 17 games, ridiculed for not connecting better with star receiver A.J. Brown. Always something.

Yet on the morning after Super Bowl 59, after the Eagles quarterback capped his phenomenal season with a clutch performance for the ages, there was nothing else to knock. As Hurts posed with the Lombardi Trophy and the Pete Rozelle Trophy, a sterling silver football awarded to the Super Bowl MVP for the definitive photo op, he looked to be so at peace.

“When you hoist those trophies, it’s more so about the journey and less about the results,” Hurts said during the last news conference of the Super Bowl 59 hype program. “Obviously, we’re going to be judged for results, but that’s for everyone else to talk about. But the journey is what builds us, it makes us who we are.”

As I sat there in the New Orleans Convention Center listening to Hurts drop philosophy while accompanied by Eagles coach Nick Sirianni and NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, I was struck by how much he resembled the man who met with the media during the middle of the week at the team’s hotel.

Or the man seen last year.

Or at his last Super Bowl, two years ago.

So consistent. Low-key. Mellow.

See BELL, Page 2C



Jalen Hurts, and coach Nick Sirianni (right), missed their first chance to win a Super Bowl together but delivered on try No. 2.

JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES

Johnson, Shiffrin win team combined at worlds

Nancy Armour
USA TODAY

Mikaela Shiffrin and Breezy Johnson make a great team.

Shiffrin and Johnson, whose friendship goes back 15 years to when they got paired together as roommates, won the inaugural team combined event at the Alpine skiing world championships on Tuesday. It’s the second gold of these worlds for Johnson, who won the downhill Saturday, and the third medal in three events for the U.S. women. Lauren Macuga won bronze in the super-G.

“I feel like we talked at that time about the hopes and dreams, and I think we connected specifically about feeling like we were a little bit lost in a world where young girls were not really supposed to

be as ambitious as we were,” Shiffrin said at a post-race victory party.

“So, so grateful to be your teammate today,” Shiffrin said. “Thank you for a memory that tops the list of any medal I’ve ever won.”

That’s quite the statement, given the team combined was Shiffrin’s eighth gold at the world championships, a record. It also was her 15th medal overall at worlds.

“She’s such a legend,” Johnson said of Shiffrin, whose 99 World Cup victories are more than any other skier, male or female. “It’s super cool to be hitting my stride and she’s obviously been on hers for a decade or more.”

While Johnson and Shiffrin’s pairing might seem like a no-brainer, it almost didn’t happen. Shiffrin missed roughly two months with a deep gash in her



Mikaela Shiffrin and Breezy Johnson won the inaugural team combined event at the worlds Tuesday in Austria.

FABRICE COFFRINI/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

obliques after she was impaled – she still doesn’t know by what – during a crash in a giant slalom race in Killington, Ver-

mont. She only returned to the World Cup circuit on Jan. 30 and said last week she would skip the team combined to focus on the individual GS and slalom races.

On Monday, however, Shiffrin withdrew from the GS, citing lingering PTSD from the crash. That opened up the possibility of doing the combined, and U.S. Ski Team officials paired her with Johnson, currently the top U.S. downhill.

“You could have won (downhill) gold and said, ‘I’m good. Peace out.’ And you were just like, ‘No, let’s do it!’ ” Shiffrin said.

The team combined, which is one downhill run and one slalom run, will make its Olympic debut next year in

See WORLDS, Page 2C

Bell

Continued from Page 1C

Thoughtful. Hurts is just 26. But he sounds like he could be going on 50, an old soul wrapped in wisdom.

Someone asked if he felt validated, which might have also been another way of suggesting that his critics are silenced with Hurts becoming the newest member of an elite club of Super Bowl MVPs.

“What’s the quote?” Hurts replied. “I had a purpose before anybody had an opinion. That thing is still true. My purpose is being who God called me to be. It’s never been about anybody else. It’s just been about the journey and embracing everything and trying to grow and be the best that I can be.

“I wouldn’t be here without that journey. And that’s something I embrace along the way and I think it’s just something to continue to build on. ... I’m just thankful for the highs and lows, because I know God is greater and has his hands on me, through the highs and the lows.”

Amen.

Sunday night, Hurts changed the narrative about his career arc. Maybe the blowout triumph – backed by the NFL’s top-ranked defense – that prevented the Kansas City Chiefs from becoming the first team to win three consecutive Super Bowls wasn’t so much about avenging the loss to Patrick Mahomes in Super Bowl 57, but that happened, too.

In the last Super Bowl, Hurts lost a fumble that Nick Bolton returned 36 yards for a touchdown. It was a pivotal moment in a 38-35 setback. This time, the multidimensional Hurts was nearly flawless as the first player in Super Bowl history to complete at least 75% of his passes (17 of 22, 221 yards) with two TDs while rushing for least 70 yards with a score.

Sure, we’ve seen quarterbacks dominate in Super Bowls or otherwise with bigger passing numbers. Yet with Hurts, who had just one 300-yard passing game all season (Week 3, at New Orleans), it’s a different type of flow.

“When it’s all said and done for me, I won’t measure my success off of any numbers, or statistics, or passing yards, or touchdowns, or anything like that,” he said. “I measure it off rings and championships.”

Mahomes knows. There’s a bottom-line appreciation for Hurts – who broke his own Super Bowl record for rushing yards by a quarterback with a game-high 72 yards on 11 carries, including the game’s longest scamper, 17 yards – that many don’t get.

“The one thing I’ve always respected about Jalen is that he’s a winner,” Mahomes said afterward. “I know it sounds ... some people take that as if it’s not a good thing, but you have to find ways to win with your football team around you. That’s what I’ve learned my entire career, and that’s what he’s come into the NFL and done his entire career. If he needs to make a big play, he’ll make a big play. That’s stuff that not everybody has.

“I have a lot of respect for Jalen. I said it after the first Super Bowl we played against them. I said he would be back and he was, and he got the better of me today. I’m sure we’ll face off against (each other again) at some point in our careers in a big game like this.”

You can believe that Hurts, who left the Super Bowl site for a trip to Walt Disney World in Orlando before returning to Philadelphia, will keep it in perspective.

“My entire career, I’ve been challenged by different things, and it’s put me in a place where I try to improve, improve, improve, so I could be the best that I can be,” he said.

“Then there’s the other side of it, where you experience a shortcoming and a failure, and you now see the importance of winning. I think both of those components are essential to being great and achieving success.”

Especially when the winding path leads to the place where Hurts is standing now at the top of the NFL mountaintop.

Follow Jarrett Bell on X @Jarrett-Bell.

High-paid Bonilla savors his own MLB ‘national holiday’

Bob Nightengale
USA TODAY

He was the Shohei Ohtani of deferred baseball payments, making his financial decision 26 years ago with an annual paycheck that’s celebrated every July 1.

He was the Juan Soto of free agent stars, signing the richest contract in baseball history with the New York Mets, nearly seven years before Soto was born.

He was a shrewd talent evaluator back when he was skinny outfielder out of Arizona State University, predicting nearly 40 years ago that Barry Bonds would be on his way to superstardom, and seething that Bonds isn’t in the Hall of Fame today.

He is Bobby Bonilla, the former six-time All-Star and World Series champion who is a special assistant for the Major League Baseball Players Association and a spokesman for their Players Trust Playmakers Classic with Fanatics.

Bonilla, executive director Tony Clark, and nearly 100 major league players will be on hand for the Feb. 18 event in downtown Phoenix to raise money for youth development programs across the country, along with other charitable initiatives. Milwaukee Brewers first baseman Rhys Hoskins will be honored as the 2024 Philanthropist of the Year.

“I think people going to have a blast, man,” Bonilla says. “Everything the Playmakers Classic is providing goes to just tremendous causes around the globe. The players are really behind it.”

Bonilla, 61, who had a 16-year MLB playing career, certainly will be an invaluable resource for the younger players in attendance, knowing that whatever they’re about to endure in their career, Bonilla has already experienced.

Where else you going to find a guy who can relate to the stress and internal pressure Soto is about to face in New York as the game’s highest-paid player?

Who else made the shrewd financial decision to defer money in his contract, with interest that will pay him \$1.19 million through 2035?

Who else not only help nurtured a young talented player like Bonds in Pittsburgh, but future Hall of Famer Albert Pujols in St. Louis?

“I’ve been through it all,” says Bonilla, who retired as a player after the 2001 season.

Bonilla won a World Series championship with the Florida Marlins in 1997 but still laments how close they were to bringing a World Series title to Pittsburgh. The Pirates lost three consecutive times in the National League championship series, twice when Bonds and Bonilla were teammates under Hall of Fame manager Jim Leyland. The Pirates’ World Series drought still extends to 1979, and Bonds never did win a World Series ring with the Pirates or San Francisco Giants.

“Those Pirate teams, where we all got our start, was a very special place to play,” Bonilla said. “Jim made it a fantastic place to play. The city was amazing. It would have been really, really nice if we were able to bring a championship to Pittsburgh because they really deserved it. ... That group of players was about as good a bunch of guys to play with as any place I’ve ever played.

“We just ran into a couple of buzz saws during the playoffs and couldn’t punch through. Trust me, it would have been really, really nice.”

Bonilla and Bonds live on opposite sides of the country but still reminisce about those days. If the time ever comes that Bonds is elected into the Hall of Fame, Bonilla vows he’ll be sitting right there in the front row.

“I’m expecting him to get in,” Bonilla said. “Look at the numbers. I’m not taking anything away from the Ohtanis, the (Mike) Trouts, the (Miguel) Cabreras, Pujols. But what BB did was just epic. Just take in account the walks (MLB-record 2,558). Everybody talks about the home runs (MLB-record



Pirates outfielders Barry Bonds and Bobby Bonilla stretch on the field prior to a game in 1991. TONY TOMSIC/IMAGN IMAGES

762). Can you imagine if they pitched to him? His stats speak for itself. ...

“Just think about how many times they didn’t let him play. The one thing about baseball is if they don’t want you beating them, they’ll put you on first base, and you don’t get to play. If they don’t want you hitting, you’re not hitting. I don’t know how they’re not taking that into account how many times they did not let him play. ...

“So when you really put it all into perspective, what part of it are people missing?”

Bonds, whose peers insist is the greatest player they’ve seen and arguably the greatest living baseball player, has been punished by the Baseball Writers’ Association of America and the Contemporary Baseball Era committee for his name prominently surfacing in the BALCO scandal. Bonds topped out at 66% of the 75% of the vote needed in his 10th and final year of the ballot.

While there are several players elected into the Hall of Fame who have been under strong suspicion of using performance-enhancing drugs, there has never been a player who has been caught or admitted to using PEDs elected into the Hall of Fame.

Bonds likely will once again be on the eras committee ballot in November, but there’s no indication that sentiments have shifted and that he’ll suddenly be elected along with Roger Clemens and any other peers who have been linked to PEDs.

Then again, Andy Pettitte, the former All-Star pitcher and five-time World Series champion with the New York Yankees, just saw his voting share spike to 27.5% in January.

The increase was prompted by arguments that if CC Sabathia is voted into the Hall of Fame on his first year on the ballot, Pettitte should soon follow with similar statistics. Sabathia, a Cy Young winner, had a 251-161 record and 3.74 ERA while Pettitte was 256-153 with a 3.84 ERA.

Yet, there’s a huge difference. Sabathia played the game clean.

Pettitte was in the infamous 2007 Mitchell Report report as a PED user and admitted later that he used HGH to overcome injuries.

So how could anyone possibly justify Pettitte to be the first admitted PED user to be elected into the Hall of Fame while Bonds and Clemens are kept out?

Bonds, a seven-time MVP, is one of the five greatest players in history and Clemens, a seven-time Cy Young winner, is one of the greatest right-handed pitchers in the last 50 years. They were accused of steroid use through BALCO and Clemens’ former trainer, but neither tested positive, were suspended or ever punished by MLB. Their cases are completely different than the likes of Alex Rodriguez, who was suspended an entire year for PED use, and Manny Ramirez, who was suspended three times.

“Regardless of how people feel,” Bonilla said, “I just don’t know how people keep him out. ... I just don’t know to keep that young man out. I’m super confident he’ll get in. He deserves to get in, there’s no question about it. Just look at the big picture.”

Bonilla, of course, had a decorated ca-

reer himself, finishing second and third in the NL MVP balloting his last two years in Pittsburgh before signing a record five-year, \$29 million contract with the Mets. It was the richest contract for an athlete in North America team sports.

Now, that honor goes to Soto, with his 15-year, \$765 million contract that he signed in December. While Bonilla’s \$6.1million salary in 1992 was the largest in history, Soto will earn that much by mid-April.

But while the money will set up generations of wealth for Soto’s family, along comes the pressure. Nothing short of a World Series championship, or perhaps several titles for the Mets, may justify the deal. The Mets, who had the highest payroll in baseball in 1992 with some of the game’s biggest stars, went 78-84 and became infamously known as “The Worst Team Money Could Buy,” with a book published about their season.

“For the most part, I believe players would love to stay where they’re at,” Bonilla said. “Sometimes, you’re forced into doing certain things, and then once you go that route, obviously the flood gates open up a little bit. You land somewhere and you do the very best you can to justify what you’re getting.

“The key to that is to just go out there and play. Don’t worry about the money. I mean, it’s what the market is bearing. So just go out and do your thing and try not to put any pressure on yourself. That’s easier said than done because everyone wants to do great. ...

“But I think Soto is well grounded. I mean, if you’re going to turn down \$400 million (\$440 million from the Washington Nationals in 2022), and do what he did, I think he’s going to be just fine. The Mets fans and (owner) Steve Cohen are going to be pleasantly surprised. He’s going to go out and do what he does well, and that’s hit a baseball.”

Soto is one of the few high-profile free agents who didn’t have any money deferred in their contract this winter. The Dodgers have \$1.039 billion in deferred contracts alone on their roster, led by Ohtani, who deferred \$680 million of his 10-year, \$700 million deal a year ago.

Yet, while Bonilla is thrilled that he deferred the final \$5.9 million of his contract with the Mets, he also reminds you that he gets 8% interest in his deferrals. The deferrals given out these days don’t include any interest.

Perhaps this is why when Bonilla receives his \$1.19 million paycheck each July 1, it’s called Bobby Bonilla Day, with checks coming in annually until he’s 72 years old.

“It’s bigger than my birthday,” Bonilla said, laughing. “When that day comes, I get texts all day long, and couple of days after and maybe a day or two before. Everybody just seems to love that day and have fun with it.

“It’s become a pretty big thing.” Bonilla laughs, knowing that many of the players today never had a chance to see him play, but, oh, they sure know all about Bobby Bonilla Day. It’s the contract that keeps on giving.

“What can I say?” Bonilla said. “I’ve been blessed. Very blessed.”

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Worlds

Continued from Page 1C

Milan Cortina. This was the first time it was contested at the world championships.

“The vibe around it, teaming up and feeling like we’re doing it together, was so cool,” Shiffrin said.

Johnson posted the fourth-fastest

time in the downhill, 0.51 seconds behind Macuga. With Shiffrin as her partner, however, it was a manageable gap to close.

Shiffrin came out blazing, sluicing her way through the gates on the upper part of the course. She got a little loose toward the bottom but pulled it together to finish strong. Johnson and Shiffrin’s combined time of 2:40.89 put them in first, but with Austria, Germany and fellow American Paula Moltzan still to go, they had to wait

to see if it would stand up.

It did. Austria couldn’t keep pace while Germany had a major error that dropped them all the way to 17th. That left only Moltzan, and she couldn’t come close to catching Shiffrin.

Johnson and Shiffrin finished 0.39 seconds ahead of Switzerland’s Lara Gut-Behrami and Wendy Holdener. Austria’s Stephanie Venier and Katharina Truppe took bronze. Macuga and Moltzan were fourth, missing third by 0.11 seconds.

Jackie Wiles and Katie Hensien were 10th and Lindsey Vonn and AJ Hurt were 16th.

“This was an amazing day,” Shiffrin said. “For me, up there it was nerve-racking because Breezy did her job spectacularly. ... Really, really unbelievable. Just happy.”

Shiffrin will have a chance to add to her medal haul with Saturday’s slalom race. She is a four-time world champion in that event.



Quarterback Jalen Hurts holds the Lombardi Trophy after the Eagles defeated the Chiefs in Super Bowl 59. GEOFF BURKE/IMAGN IMAGES

Hurts shows path for college QBs with Super victory



Matt Hayes
USA TODAY Sports Network

So the joke goes something like this: Nick Saban is the only person who successfully stopped Jalen Hurts.

But before we get into rehashing the past or who did what and why, maybe the fall and rise of Hurts can be a teaching moment for college football quarterbacks of the now generation.

Maybe, if we look real close, Hurts isn't the outlier. He's part of an undeniable quarterback trend that can no longer be ignored.

"There's untold value in failure," Georgia's Kirby Smart told me last summer.

Somewhere along the way, we've lost sight of that.

Somewhere, amid the hustle and bustle of free player movement and NIL deals, and if it doesn't work here, there's always the transfer portal, is a story of reality everyone needed.

The story of the young quarterback from suburban Houston who arrived at Alabama in 2016 as a midterm enrollee, and it took all of one quarter in the season opener for Saban to realize Hurts had to be on the field. If you think that's an improbable ride, consider these next steps:

- But for an improbable, two-minute TD drive from DeShaun Watson and Clemson, Hurts would've been a national championship QB as a freshman.

- A year later, after leading Alabama to 25 wins in 27 starts, Hurts was benched at halftime of the College Football Playoff national championship game against Georgia for freshman Tua Tagovailoa.

- A year after that, after the humility of losing the starting job again in fall camp, Hurts stayed at Alabama and eventually replaced an injured Tagovailoa in the SEC championship game. And led a comeback victory.

Only then did Hurts transfer to Oklahoma, where he led the Sooners to the College Football Playoff and was a Heisman Trophy finalist. Only then did he persevere five more years before finally completing the road to redemption with a Super Bowl championship.

From benched in the then-biggest moment of his athletic career, to coming all the way back to being named MVP of the Super Bowl. That's the value of failure.

That's Hurts, whose cell phone wallpaper was a photo of his dejected self after losing Super Bowl 57 in 2023. For two years that photo was the first and last

thing he saw every day.

But Hurts isn't alone in his unique battle with failure.

Nearly a year ago, Kansas State told Will Howard after four seasons in the program it was moving forward with uber-talented sophomore Avery Johnson. So Howard signed with Ohio State, absorbed two brutal losses to Oregon and Michigan, then played the best four-game stretch of his college career and won it all.

Stetson Bennett failed at Georgia, was told he wouldn't play quarterback for the Bulldogs and left to play in junior college. He returned a year later, and eventually won back-to-back national titles in 2021-22.

Joe Burrow failed for three seasons to win the starting job at Ohio State, transferred to LSU in 2018, and in 2019 had the greatest individual season in the modern era of college football – and won the national title and Heisman.

See a trend?

The issue in college football isn't the transfer portal. It's giving up.

The issue isn't players making money off their name, image and likeness, it's players gaming the system for more money while ignoring the beautiful slog of the grind.

It's quarterbacks, the most important position on the field and the one position with more turnover than any other, hopping from team to team, and dream to dream.

It's avoiding failure and all the potential to learn and develop from it, for the easy money and easy out of the next team.

Four of the top 10 quarterbacks in the 2024 recruiting class, according to the 247Sports composite ranking, are no longer with their original teams. Five of the top 10 from 2023 aren't, either.

Free player movement was a pipe dream when Hurts was benched in 2017, and then didn't win the job again in his junior season of 2018. Only after graduating early from Alabama prior to the start of the 2019 season could Hurts use a graduate transfer rule to play immediately at Oklahoma.

But think about this: He could've left Alabama during the fall camp of 2018, when it was clear Tagovailoa was the starter. He could've sat out a season, and still played in 2019 at Oklahoma.

The beautiful slog changed him. Just like it did Bennett and Burrow and Howard after him. Like it did for Bo Nix and Kurtis Rourke.

There is value in failure. It doesn't take a Super Bowl trophy to see it.



Hellmann's "When Sally Met Hellmann's" was the ninth-highest rated Super Bowl commercial at 3.38 in the USA TODAY Ad Meter. HELLMANN'S

Ad Meter rankings of 57 Super Bowl commercials

Jesse Yomtov
USA TODAY

Budweiser broke out the Clydesdales to win USA TODAY Ad Meter 2025, the ninth time the brand has claimed the prize as the Super Bowl's best commercial.

The beer brand brought back the beloved horses in its spot titled "First Delivery," featuring a foal's journey to deliver a keg to claim the contest for the first time since 2015.

Anheuser-Busch had four ads finish in the top eight, with Michelob Ultra's "Ultra Hustle" (No. 3) and Bud Light's "Big Men on Cul-De-Sac" (No. 8) among the most popular ads of the night. Lay's heartwarming spot "The Little Farmer" finished a close second behind Budweiser.

Tubi's 15-second ad "The Z-Suite" was the lowest-rate ad of the 57 national commercials, with Fetch (No. 55) and Coffee mate (No. 56) rounding out the bottom three.

Here's a look at the full rankings from this year's Ad Meter:

1. Budweiser – "First Delivery" (3.56)
2. Lay's – "The Little Farmer" (3.55)
3. Michelob Ultra – "The ULTRA Hustle" (3.52)
4. Stella Artois – "David and Dave" (3.51)
5. NFL – "Somebody" (3.49)
6. NFL – "Flag 50" (3.48)
7. Bud Light – "Big Men on Cul-De-Sac" (3.44)
8. Uber Eats – "Century of Cravings" (3.38)
9. Hellmann's – "When Sally Met Hellmann's" (3.38)
10. Pfizer – "Knock Out" 3.34
11. Doritos – "Abduction (For the Bold)" (3.31)
12. Jeep – "Owner's Manual" (3.31)

13. Instacart – "We're Here" (3.31)

14. Google – "Dream Job" (3.31)
15. Dove – "These Legs" 3.3
16. Novartis – "Your Attention, Please" (3.22)
17. Foundation to Combat Antisemitism – "No Reason to Hate" (3.21)
18. Coors Light – "Slow Monday" (3.16)
19. RAM Trucks – "Goldilocks and the Three Trucks" (3.16)
20. WeatherTech – "Whatever Comes Your Way" (3.13)
21. Pringles – "Call of the Mus-

- taches" (3.09)
22. Little Caesar's – "Whoa!" (3.02)
23. Rocket – "Own The Dream" (3.02)
24. Mountain Dew – "Kiss from a Lime" (2.95)
25. Booking.com – "Get Your Stay Ridiculously Right" (2.92)
26. He Gets Us "What is Greatness?" (2.91)
27. Reese's – "Don't Eat Lava" (2.88)
28. RITZ – "RITZ Salty Club" (2.86)
29. Haagen-Dazs "Not So Fast, Not So Furious" (2.83)
30. NerdWallet "Genius Beluga" (2.83)
31. NERDS – "Wonderful World of NERDS" (2.82)
32. Disney+ "What If" (2.81)
33. Duracell – "Brady Reboost" (2.81)
34. Dunkin' "DunKings 2" (2.79)
35. HexClad Cookware – "Unidentified Frying Object" (2.78)
36. Liquid Death – "Safe For Work" (2.77)
37. Homes.com – "Not Saying We're the Best" (2.74)
38. Universal Pictures – "How To Train Your Dragon | Big Game Spot" (2.68)
39. MSC Cruises – "Let's Holiday" (2.66)
40. Homes.com – "Still Not Saying We're the Best" (2.64)
41. Angel Soft – "The Big Game Potty-tunity" (2.61)
42. Totino's Pizza Rolls – "Chazmo Finally Goes Home" (2.61)
43. Bosch – "The More You Bosch" (2.61)
44. Ray-Ban | Meta "Hey Meta, Who Eats Art? Ft. Chris Hemsworth, Chris Pratt and Kris Jenner | Ray-Ban Meta Glasses" (2.61)
45. Taco Bell – "The Fans" (2.61)
46. Poppi – "Soda Thoughts" (2.6)
47. TurboTax – "Now Taxes is So Sweet" (2.57)
48. GoDaddy – "Act Like You Know" (2.57)
49. Hims & Hers – "Sick of the System" (2.51)
50. DoorDash – "DashPass Math" (2.5)
51. T-Mobile – "A New Era in Connectivity" (2.5)
52. Squarespace – "A Tale As Old As Websites" (2.46)
53. OpenAI – "ChatGPT | The Intelligence Age" (2.41)
54. Cirkul – "You Got Cirkul" (2.37)
55. Coffee mate – "Foam Diva" (2.04)
56. Fetch – "The Big Reward" (1.98)
57. Tubi – "The Z-Suite" (1.85)

Jason Kelce on 'odd for me to watch' game

Jacob Camenker
USA TODAY

Jason Kelce made it clear he was rooting for the Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl 59 despite his younger brother Travis Kelce playing for the Kansas City Chiefs.

The elder Kelce spent his entire 13-year NFL career with the Eagles, so his allegiance wasn't a major surprise.

Still, he admitted in a social media post Tuesday he felt "a lot of emotions" watching Philadelphia's 40-22 blowout win.

"That game was odd for me to watch if I'm being completely honest," Kelce wrote in a statement posted to X (formerly Twitter).

Kelce detailed that he expected to feel "mixed emotions" during Sunday's con-

test but still wasn't ready for the full impact of those.

"I now know what my parents had to deal with two years ago," Kelce wrote. "On one hand, I wanted what is best for my brother and to see his success. And on the other hand, there are so many people, teammates, and coaches, in the Philadelphia Eagles organization that I care deeply about, Many of whom I owe my own success to throughout my career."

Kelce went on to congratulate the Eagles, specifically mentioning quarterback Jalen Hurts and coach Nick Siriani while expressing his pride in the team as a whole.

"They have persevered greatly, answered their critics amazingly, and proved themselves to be undoubtedly



Jason Kelce

the best team this season," Kelce said of the Eagles. "It is extremely difficult for a team in the NFL to have enough talent, coaching, fortune, and character to win a Super Bowl. The character and swagger of this Eagles team was something truly special to behold. A true representation of the toughness and grit that makes Philadelphia what it is."

Despite feeling joy for the Eagles, Kelce also felt bad for his brother after the Chiefs' three-peat bid came up short.

"There isn't a person I love or care about more," Jason said of Travis. "It has been tough to process these feelings, of course I feel for him and am always rooting for him, but I know he does not need, nor want my pity. He has amassed greatness few on this planet could ever dream

of, as has his team, and they should feel pride in their accomplishments this season and in the past."

The elder Kelce knows about dealing with disappointment on the NFL's biggest stage. His Eagles lost to the Chiefs in his second and final Super Bowl appearance in 2023. Kelce was forced to grapple with that defeat after the season and while contemplating retirement after Philadelphia's early playoff exit in 2024.

As such, he had a simple message to his brother and the Chiefs.

"I know right now they are still thinking of last night and the shortcomings in the last game," Kelce said. "But in time that will fade, and the greatness they have exhibited as a group will remain as one of the most dominant eras of football ever."

NASCAR THIS WEEK

WHAT’S ON TAP

Wednesday: Daytona 500 pole qualifying, 8 p.m. (FS1)
Thursday: Daytona Duels, 7 p.m. (FS1)
Friday: Truck Series at Daytona, 7:30 p.m. (FS1)
Saturday: ARCA 200 at Daytona, noon (Fox); Xfinity at Daytona, 5 p.m. (CW).
Sunday: Daytona 500, 2:30 p.m. (Fox)



JASEN VINLOVE/IMAGN IMAGES

TRACK FACTS

Daytona International Speedway
Where: Daytona Beach, Fla.
Size: 2.5-mile tri-oval
Opened: 1959

THROUGH THE GEARS

Hope abounds for Daytona 500



Motor Mouth
Ken Willis
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

To have a shot at poker glory, they say, all you need is a chip and a chair.
“Just give me a chance (and a pair of aces for hole cards, if you don’t mind).”
At the Daytona 500, you just need four wheels and a starting spot (and some Sunoco, which might soon be hard to find and, yes, more on that later).

We have 45 cars in town for the 500, the most since 2015, when 50 came south and seven left early — that was the last year of the 43-car lineup.
Depending on whether Helio Castroneves makes the field conventionally or through a new NASCAR hall pass, either four or five of those 45 will hit that I-95 North ramp Thursday night after the Duels at Dusk (my new favored name, but I’m not smart enough to copyright it).

Down below, you’ll eventually learn why we can rule out Helio for a potential Victory Lane visit, but everyone else will have the proverbial chip and chair. Before William Byron’s unsurprising win last year, we saw a three-year Daytona run where the winners were tucked fairly deep on the odds board — Michael McDowell, Austin Cindric, Ricky Stenhouse Jr.
Horsepower-sapping, field-equalizing rules at Daytona (and Talladega and Atlanta) make this anyone’s ballgame, and it all begins with something we haven’t seen in a while around here: practice.

First Gear: A Wednesday morning shakedown as a Daytona wakeup

Years back, it wasn’t uncommon to see some teams come to Daytona in December to get a head-start on Daytona 500 prep. Then all would return in January for official test weekend.
They’d return in February, pull the gear off the haulers for more practice laps to see if the Boys in the Shop got ’er dialed in.
In recent years, all of that: gone. All relics of an earlier time, back before simulators and wind tunnels could replicate conditions and trim the travel budget.
But what’s this, a Daytona practice session right out of the gate? That’s right, Wednesday morning, starting at 10, a 50-minute track availability for the 45 cars and



Two years ago, Ricky Stenhouse Jr. (42) was the latest to prove you just never know who’ll win the Daytona 500.
DAVID TUCKER/USA TODAY NETWORK

drivers ahead of Wednesday night’s pole qualifying.
Since there’s not another practice before Thursday night’s qualifying races, it’ll be interesting to see who prefers drafting instead of single-car runs in hopes of finding potential pole speed.
There’ll also be practice sessions Friday and Saturday, some of which Helio may devote to entering and exiting the pit.

Second Gear: Off the throttle, Helio, this ain’t Indy!

In his IndyCar and sports-car rides, Helio Castroneves has an easy method for maintaining legal pit-road speed. He just pushes a button, and the onboard computer keeps him at, say, 55 or 60 or whatever the posted limit is for a particular track.
In NASCAR, the driver controls these things with his right foot feathering the throttle and an eyeball glued to the tachometer.
“You have to get that one right,” Helio told Fox Sports in a Daytona preview. “The biggest challenge I think, for me ... it’s about six or seven pit stops I have to be careful and control what to do.”
Along with practices and the Thursday

qualifier, he’ll also get track time via the 200-mile ARCA race scheduled for Saturday, which is preceded by a Thursday afternoon practice and Friday qualifying.
By the way, Helio isn’t the only Indy/Sports-car crossover entered in the ARCA field. Katherine Legge, the British racer whose long career includes four Indy 500s and 12 Rolex 24s at Daytona, is entered in a Chevy owned by Joe Farré.

Third Gear: Got gas? Through November, yes







Some of you never stopped saying Unocal, and here we are, 21 years later, on the cusp of another possible change in NASCAR’s fuel supplier. This season is the last for Sunoco in its current deal as the official fuel of NASCAR. They may stay beyond this year. They may not. It’s called negotiating.
According to the smarties over at Sports Business Journal, Sunoco began changing its business model eight years ago by selling more than 1,000 of its convenience stores to 7-Eleven. They say that move “started Sunoco’s shift from being more B2C-focused as a retail store operator to being more B2B-focused as a fuel supplier.”
Got that? I think it means they wanted to

quit selling Slurpees and focus on selling gas to those who sell both Slurpees and gas. And corn dogs, at the proper locations.

Fourth Gear: Speaking of a Hall pass

We shouldn’t cut the motor without proper congrats to the new members of NASCAR’s Hall of Fame: Ricky Rudd, Carl Edwards and Ralph Moody.
At just 45, by the way, “Cousin Carl” is the youngest Hall of Famer.
The voting will be tougher next year among the modern-era candidates who are eligible (Kurt Busch and Kevin Harvick aren’t eligible yet). We’re getting into that gray area of non-champs in that 16-to-24 career wins range — racers such as Jeff Burton, Harry Gant, Neil Bonnet, Greg Biffle ...
... And Geoff Bodine, who not only included a Daytona 500 among his 18 career wins, but put together a spectacular run of success on the Northeast modified circuits before “coming south.” Richie Evans and Jerry Cook are in the NASCAR Hall based almost solely on their modified work. Hell, Bodine can’t even get nominated, which gets you wondering.
Email Ken Willis at ken.willis@news-jrn.com

KEN WILLIS’ TOP 10 DRIVER RANKINGS

									
KYLE LARSON Only bad luck seems to slow him down	WILLIAM BYRON Billy the Kid always a factor	CHASE ELLIOTT Is Clash win a sign of life?	RYAN BLANEY Penske ball is back in his court	CHRISTOPHER BELL Lives in the lead pack	DENNY HAMLIN Will Fed Ex dollars be missed?	JOEY LOGANO Just get him to October	TYLER REDDICK Has entered the world of contenders	BRAD KESELOWSKI Another step forward this year?	KYLE BUSCH Speaking of improvement ...

2025 CUP SERIES SCHEDULE

Feb. 2: Cook Out Clash at Bowman Gray (Chase Elliott)
Feb. 13: Daytona Duels
Feb. 16: Daytona 500
Feb. 23: Atlanta
March 2: Austin
March 9: Phoenix
March 16: Las Vegas
March 23: Homestead-Miami
March 30: Martinsville

April 6: Darlington
April 13: Bristol
April 27: Talladega
May 4: Texas
May 11: Kansas
May 18: North Wilkesboro All Star Race
May 25: Charlotte
June 1: Nashville
June 8: Michigan
June 15: Mexico City
June 22: Pocono

June 28: Atlanta
July 6: Chicago
July 13: Sonoma
July 20: Dover
July 27: Indianapolis
Aug. 3: Iowa
Aug. 10: Watkins Glen
Aug. 16: Richmond
Aug. 23: Daytona
Playoffs Round of 16
Aug. 31: Darlington
Sept. 7: St. Louis

Sept. 13: Bristol
Playoffs Round of 12
Sept. 21: New Hampshire
Sept. 28: Kansas
Oct. 5: Charlotte Roval
Playoffs Round of 8
Oct. 12: Las Vegas
Oct. 19: Talladega
Oct. 26: Martinsville
Championship Round
Nov. 2: Phoenix

Naylor knows he has big shoes to fill



Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. – Josh Naylor didn’t ask to be in the Arizona Diamondbacks camp and, quite honestly, was perfectly content staying in Cleveland. He didn’t volunteer to be the one to replace three-time Gold Glove first baseman Christian Walker on the field, or his leadership in the clubhouse, but now he has no choice.

Naylor, one of eight first basemen to switch teams during the winter when he was traded by the Guardians in December for reliever Slade Cecconi and a Competitive Balance Round B draft pick, knows that if he can replicate the power he displayed a year ago when he hit a career-high 31 homers and 108 RBIs, everything will take care of itself. He’s not going to bring the same defense as Walker and might not be as popular with the fans, but he can certainly follow Walker’s lead.

Walker was the one who replaced All-Star Paul Goldschmidt, their perennial MVP candidate and fan favorite, in 2019. He took the opportunity and capitalized on it, receiving a three-year, \$60 million free agent contract with the Houston Astros.

“He’s a phenomenal player,” Naylor, 27, said Monday, “and I know he was a popular leader, too. I would love to fill that role and step in those shoes and become that leader that he was in the locker room. Maybe a little bit of a voice and players that someone could come to in confidence and talk to when things are going rough or whatever, just be a good friend.

“I’m not going to change the player I am. I’m just going to be myself and grow the most I can.”

Certainly, Naylor did that as a hitter last year. He hit a career-high .308 in 2023 with 17 homers and 97 RBIs with a



Former Cleveland Guardians first baseman Josh Naylor bats against the Los Angeles Dodgers during a 2024 spring training game. MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

.842 OPS, and then decided he wanted to hit more homers. His home run total leaped, but his batting average plummeted by 65 points to .243.

“I went into last season trying to hit more homers, knowing my average would fluctuate a little bit,” Naylor said. “My goal (now) is just to put both together. I want to be a complete hitter, have the .300 average, have the 30-plus homers, 100-plus RBI. I want to put all of those numbers together and have a great year.”

The Diamondbacks will gladly take that kind of production. They haven’t had a first baseman hit at least .300 with 30 or more homers since 2015. They have the potential to get 60 homers from their corner infield spots with third baseman Eugenio Suarez having hit at least 30 homers in five of the past six full seasons.

Who knows, maybe he’ll be able to stick around awhile, too? Naylor, who says he didn’t pay attention to the Pete Alonso saga with the Mets, or really the

entire free agent first base market at all, is eligible for free agency after the season. It’s too early to know where he’ll be playing in 2026, but he sure likes what he sees so far in the D-backs camp.

“This team is phenomenal,” he said, “extreme talent level here. Everyone is great in their own way. I’m looking forward to just learning everyone and learning how they play, fit into their game style. ... Great team, great players, young squad, too. Hopefully, I’ll fit right in.”

Of course, Naylor thought he was in an ideal situation in Cleveland, too. The Guardians stunned everyone last season by winning 92 games, winning the American League Central title, knocking off the Detroit Tigers in then AL division series round, before losing to the New York Yankees in the AL championship series.

Instead of building off that success, the Guardians scaled back and lowered their payroll, trading three-time Gold Glove second baseman Andres Gimenez

to the Toronto Blue Jays in a \$100 million salary dump and sending Naylor to Arizona.

Was Naylor, who will earn \$10.9 million this year, surprised he was traded? “I kind of had a feeling,” he said, who was never approached by the Guardians about a contract extension. “Maybe the last few offseasons I kind of had a feeling. It happens. Baseball is a business. Kind of get used to this. It’s the fourth organization I’ve been with since I started playing pro ball. The first few trades are hard, but you get used to it.

“God plans things for you, and you never know what it’s going to be or where you’re going to be. Just go to roll with the punches, continue to grow and make the best out of opportunities.”

OK, so not surprised Gimenez was dumped, either? “Now him?” Naylor said. “Yes. Very surprised.”

It’s now the Guardians’ problem to figure out a way to repeat as AL Central champions after cutting their payroll to \$89 million. For the Diamondbacks, they’re going all in with a payroll exceeding \$190 million, highest in franchise history, after signing ace Corbin Burnes to a club-record \$210 million contract.

“It’s great, what a phenomenal pitcher,” Naylor said. “This team, they clearly want to win. I’m very thankful to be part of it.”

While Naylor will definitely miss playing together with his 24-year-old brother Bo, the Guardians’ catcher, the brothers can at least stay together in the same house in spring training, along with 19-year-old brother Myles, a third baseman in the Athletics organization.

And together, they share a dream. “Our parents, they really made all this happen for us,” Naylor said, “and we owe them a lot. I think that’s why we work so hard, to give back to them. One day, hopefully, (we’ll) be able to retire them and have them come out to every single game that they can. They did a phenomenal job raising us, and we’re very thankful.”

US Open shakes up mixed doubles format

Dan Wolken
USA TODAY

The US Open is making a big bet on the potential of mixed doubles, fundamentally changing the format of the tournament in ways that will draw significant curiosity and controversy when the final Grand Slam of the tennis season kicks off in late August.

Here are the four major changes the USTA announced on Tuesday:

- Instead of 32 teams, the draw will be limited to 16 with eight of those teams getting in on the basis of combined singles rankings and eight wild cards to be given out by the tournament.
- The mixed doubles matches will be played on Arthur Ashe and Louis Armstrong stadiums the week before the main singles and doubles draws begin while the qualifying tournament is taking place on the outside courts, effectively extending the US Open to a full-fledged three week event.
- The matches will be played in a so-called “Fast Four” format, with short sets (first-to-four games with a tiebreaker at 4-4 instead of first-to-six), no-ad scoring and a 10-point tiebreaker instead of a full third set. Only the final

will be played with a first-to-six format.

- Prize money is being bumped up to \$1 million to the winning team as opposed to last year’s \$200,000 top prize.

Why are these changes being made? For one primary reason: To encourage more highly ranked singles players to participate in mixed doubles.

Star power could boost interest

Long an afterthought at the Grand Slams, mixed doubles is generally relegated to the outside courts and rarely have teams with enough star power to generate much buzz. But anecdotally, there’s clear interest in the concept when players whom fans recognize participate.

At last year’s US Open, for instance, there was standing room only seating on Court 11 when the boyfriend-girlfriend team of Stefanos Tsitsipas and Paula Badosa played (and lost) to Santiago Gonzalez and Giuliana Olmos of Mexico. Andy Murray and Serena Williams teamed up at Wimbledon in 2019 and won a couple of rounds.

“It truly is something unique in sport where you have the best athletes, male and female, competing on the same field



Paula Badosa and Stefanos Tsitsipas watch the mixed doubles during the BNP Paribas Open last year. JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

of play at the same time against one another,” USTA executive director Lew Sherr told The Athletic. “It doesn’t exist in other professional sports.”

But it only happens rarely in tennis because the WTA and ATP tours don’t intersect other than at the Grand Slams and a few other 1000-level events, which very rarely offer mixed doubles other than some exhibition play due to a variety of factors including scheduling and court availability.

At the Grand Slams, though, players generally focus on singles or doubles.

There have also been situations where top players may enter mixed doubles but then withdraw as they advance in singles.

Changes criticized by purists

The changes will have some detractors, though, particularly among the tour’s doubles specialists who will be largely shut out of an opportunity to play for a Grand Slam title.

Former doubles No. 1 Paul McNamee slammed the decision, writing on X that the US Open “will not produce a bona fide mixed doubles winner. Devalued from a Grand Slam title to an (exhibition). Let’s just say I’m in shock.”

While McNamee’s criticism will resonate with some purists, it’s not hard to understand why the USTA views mixed doubles as prime ground for experimentation and growing the game – not to mention selling some tickets.

It’s been proved over and over again that mixed doubles can be a big hit with fans when the right players are in the draw. By incentivizing their participation, the US Open believes it can turn an afterthought during Slam weeks into a big event on its own.

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The Springfield Public Schools Purchasing & Distribution Department is soliciting competitive bids for Employee Healthcare Navigation and Decision Support AI. Interested suppliers must submit a proposal in accordance to solicitation documents posted www.houstontx.gov/bizwithhou/ or www.coretrustpg.com/public-sector/solicitations. Responses must be received by 2:00 pm February 28, 2025.

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL

USA TODAY Sports

Women's Coaches Poll

Rank, team (1sts)	W-L	Pts	LW
1 UCLA (31)	23-0	775	1
2 Notre Dame	21-2	728	3
3 Texas	24-2	693	6
4 South Carolina	22-2	692	2
5 LSU	25-1	671	4
6 Southern Cal	21-2	624	7
7 UConn	22-3	580	5
8 Ohio State	20-3	491	8
9 TCU	22-3	478	9
10 Duke	19-5	475	12
11 North Carolina State	19-4	464	14
12 North Carolina	21-4	431	13
13 Kansas State	22-3	420	10
14 Kentucky	19-5	420	11
15 Maryland	19-5	329	15
16 Tennessee	17-6	324	17
17 Oklahoma	18-6	290	16
18 West Virginia	19-4	253	18
19 Georgia Tech	20-4	228	19
20 Alabama	20-5	174	23
21 Florida State	19-5	98	22
22 Michigan State	18-5	85	20
23 Oklahoma State	19-4	72	29
24 South Dakota State	21-3	71	25
25 Creighton	20-4	51	26

Dropped out: No. 21 California 19-6, No. 24 Vanderbilt 18-6.

Others receiving votes: Baylor 20-5 41; California 19-6 36; Vanderbilt 18-6 20; Ole Miss 16-7 17; Utah 18-15; Richmond 20-5 9; Louisville 17-7 8; George Mason 21-3 5; Michigan 17-7 5; FGCU 21-3 2.

The USA TODAY Sports board of coaches is made up of 31 head coaches at Division I institutions. All are members of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association.

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	38	16	.704	—
N.Y. Knicks	34	18	.654	3
Philadelphia	20	32	.385	17
Brooklyn	19	34	.358	18½
Toronto	16	37	.302	21½

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	25	26	.490	—
Atlanta	26	28	.481	½
Orlando	26	28	.473	1
Charlotte	13	38	.255	12
Washington	9	44	.170	17

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	43	10	.811	—
Indiana	29	22	.569	13
Milwaukee	28	24	.538	14½
Detroit	27	26	.509	16
Chicago	22	31	.415	21

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	35	17	.673	—
Houston	33	20	.623	2½
Dallas	28	26	.519	8
San Antonio	23	28	.451	11½
New Orleans	12	41	.226	23½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	43	9	.827	—
Denver	35	19	.648	9
Minnesota	30	24	.556	14
Portland	23	31	.426	21
Utah	12	39	.235	30½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	31	19	.620	—
L.A. Clippers	29	23	.558	3
Sacramento	27	26	.509	5½
Golden State	27	26	.509	5½
Phoenix	26	26	.500	6

Sunday's Games

Detroit 112, Charlotte 102
Houston 94, Toronto 87
Milwaukee 135, Philadelphia 127

Monday's Games

San Antonio 131, Washington 121
Cleveland 128, Minnesota 107
Atlanta 112, Orlando 106
Brooklyn 97, Charlotte 89
Boston 103, Miami 85
Golden State 125, Milwaukee 111
Oklahoma City 137, New Orleans 101
Sacramento 129, Dallas 128

Denver 146, Portland 117
L.A. Lakers 132, Utah 113
Tuesday's Games
Toronto at Philadelphia
N.Y. Knicks at Indiana
Detroit at Chicago
Memphis at Phoenix
Wednesday's Games
San Antonio at Boston, 7 p.m.
Indiana at Washington, 7 p.m.
Charlotte at Orlando, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.
Cleveland at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.
Atlanta at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Detroit at Chicago, 8 p.m.
Sacramento at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
Miami at Oklahoma City, 8 p.m.
Milwaukee at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Phoenix at Houston, 8:30 p.m.
L.A. Lakers at Utah, 9 p.m.
Portland at Denver, 9 p.m.
Golden State at Dallas, 9:30 p.m.
Memphis at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.
Thursday's Games
Golden State at Houston, 8 p.m.
Sacramento at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
Miami at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Minnesota, 8:30 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Utah, 9 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	34	20	3	71	192	165
Toronto	33	20	2	68	169	156
Tampa Bay	31	20	4	66	197	153
Ottawa	29	23	4	62	158	156
Detroit	28	22	5	61	160	171
Boston	27	24	6	60	157	182
Montreal	25	26	5	55	163	194
Buffalo	22	27	5	49	171	185

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	36	11	8	80	196	140
Carolina	33	19	4	70	184	154
New Jersey	31	20	6	68	175	142
Columbus	26	22	8	60	184	186
N.Y. Rangers	27	24	4	58	165	168
N.Y. Islanders	25	23	4	57	152	162
Pittsburgh	23	25	5	55	164	201
Philadelphia	24	26	7	55	162	192

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	39	14	3	81	202	134
Dallas	35	18	2	72	182	139
Minnesota	33	19	4	70	163	154
Colorado	33	22	6	68	186	174
Utah	24	23	9	57	158	170
St. Louis	25	26	5	55	154	171
Nashville	19	28	7	45	144	179
Chicago	17	31	7	41	149	191

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Edmonton	34	17	4	72	182	152
Vegas	33	17	6	72	185	155
L.A. Kings	29	17	7	65	151	136
Vancouver	26	18	11	63	155	166
Calgary	26	21	8	60	148	165
Anaheim	24	24	6	54	137	165
Seattle	24	29	4	52	169	183
San Jose	15	35	7	37	148	216

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Sunday's Games

Utah 5, Washington 4, SO
Tampa Bay 5, Montreal 3

SOCCER

English Premier League

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Liverpool	23	17	5	1	56	21	56
Arsenal	24	14	8	2	49	22	50
Not'tm Forest	24	14	5	5	40	27	47
Chelsea	24	12	7	5	47	31	43
Man City	24	12	5	7	48	35	41
Newcastle	24	12	5	7	42	29	41
Bournemouth	24	11	7	6	41	28	40
Aston Villa	24	10	7	7	34	37	37
Fulham	24	9	9	6	36	32	36
Brighton	24	10	6	35	34	34	34
Brentford	24	9	4	11	42	42	31
Crystal Palace	24	7	9	8	28	30	30
Man United	24	8	5	11	28	34	29
Tottenham	24	8	3	13	48	37	27
West Ham	24	7	6	11	29	47	27
Everton	23	8	9	23	28	26	26
Wolverhampton	24	5	4	15	34	52	19
Leicester City	24	4	5	15	25	53	17
Ipswich Town	24	3	7	14	22	49	16
Southampton	24	2	3	19	18	54	9

Note: Three points for win, one point for tie.

Wednesday's Game

Everton vs. Liverpool, 2:30 p.m.

Friday's Game

Chelsea vs. Brighton & Hove Albion, 3 p.m.

Champions League

Tuesday's Games

Paris Saint-Germain 3, Brest 0
Juventus 2, PSV Eindhoven 1
Real Madrid 3, Manchester City 2
Borussia Dortmund 3, Sporting CP 0
Wednesday's Games
Club Brugge vs. Atalanta, 12:45 p.m.
AS Monaco vs. Benfica, 3 p.m.
Celtic vs. Bayern Munich, 3 p.m.
Feyenoord vs. AC Milan, 3 p.m.

DEALS

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball
CINCINNATI REDS — Scott Barlow Signed as Free Agent one-year contract. Josh Staumont Signed to a Minor League Contract.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Luis Guillorme Signed to a Minor League Contract.
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Kenley Jansen Signed as Free Agent one-year contract.
FOOTBALL
National Football League
TENNESSEE TITANS — K Matthew Wright signed to Carolina Panthers.

GOLF

PGA Tour Schedule

Jan. 2-5 — The Sentry (Hideki Matsuyama)
Jan. 9-12 — Sony Open in Hawaii (Nick Taylor)
Jan. 16-19 — The American Express (Sepp Straka)
Jan. 22-25 — Farmers Insurance Open (Harris English)
Jan. 30-Feb. 2 — AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am (Rory McIlroy)
Feb. 6-9 — WM Phoenix Open (Thomas Detry)
Feb. 13-16 — The Genesis Invitational, La Jolla, Calif.
Feb. 20-23 — Mexico Open at VidantaWorld, Vallarta, Mexico
Feb. 27-March 2 — Cognizant Classic in The Palm Beaches, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
March 6-9 — Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard, Orlando, Fla.
March 9-9 — Puerto Rico Open, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico
March 13-16 — The Players Championship, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.
March 20-23 — Valspar Championship, Palm Harbor, Fla.
March 27-30 — Texas Children's Houston Open, Houston
April 3-6 — Valero Texas Open, San Antonio, Texas
April 10-13 — Masters Tournament, Augusta, Ga.
April 17-20 — Corales Puntacana Championship, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
April 17-20 — RBC Heritage, Hilton Head Island, SC
April 24-27 — Zurich Classic of New Orleans, Avondale, La.
May 1-4 — The CJ Cup Byron Nelson, McKinney, Texas
May 8-11 — Myrtle Beach Classic, Myrtle Beach, SC
May 8-11 — Trusti Championship, Montgomery, Pa.
May 15-18 — PGA Championship, Charlotte, NC
May 22-25 — Charles Schwab Challenge, Fort Worth, Texas
May 29-June 1 — The Memorial Tournament presented by Workday, Dublin, Ohio
June 5-8 — RBC Canadian Open, Caledon, Canada
June 12-15 — U.S. Open, Oakmont, Pa.
June 19-22 — Travelers Championship, Cromwell, Conn.
June 26-29 — Rocket Classic, Detroit
July 3-6 — John Deere Classic, Silvis, Ill.
July 10-13 — Genesis Scottish Open, North Berwick, Scotland
July 10-13 — ISCO Championship, Louisville, Ky.
July 17-20 — Barracuda Championship, Truckee, Calif.
July 17-20 — The Open Championship, Portrush, Northern Ireland
July 24-27 — 3M Open, Blaine, Minn.
July 31-Aug. 3 — Wyndham Championship, Greensboro, NC
Aug. 7-10 — FedEx St. Jude Championship, Memphis, Tenn.
Aug. 14-17 — BMW Championship, Owings Mills, Md.
Aug. 21-24 — TOUR Championship, Atlanta

Sports Weekly

On newsstands: Get a keepsake cover commemorating the Eagles' decisive win over the Chiefs in Super Bowl 59, plus coverage from all angles on Super Sunday. We also review how Tom

Brady fared in calling his first Super Bowl and, looking ahead to the offseason, look at the potential landing spots for Aaron Rodgers after the Jets. We also have features, columns and news stories on MLB, NBA and NHL, plus NBA and NHL box scores and leaders. You can order the edition at onlinestore.usatoday.com and subscribe to the magazine by going mysportsweekly.com or by calling 800-872-1415.



Sept. 11-14 — Procore Championship, Napa, Calif.
Sept. 26-28 — Ryder Cup, Farmingdale, NY
Oct. 2-5 — Sanderson Farms Championship, Jackson, Miss.
Oct. 9-12 — Baycurrent Classic
Oct. 23-26 — Black Desert Championship, Ivins, Utah
Nov. 6-9 — World Wide Technology Championship, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
Nov. 13-16 — Butterfield Bermuda Championship, Southampton, Bermuda
Nov. 20-23 — The RSM Classic, Sea Island, Ga.
Dec. 4-7 — Hero World Challenge, Albany, Bahamas
PGA Tour Statistics
Through Feb. 11
Season Points
1. Sepp Straka, 854.
2. Thomas Detry, 832.
3. Hideki Matsuyama, 814.
4. Rory McIlroy, 700.
5. Nick Taylor, 626.
6. Harris English, 515.
7. Sungjae Im, 502.
8. Collin Morikawa, 460.
9. Justin Thomas, 443.
10. Cam Davis, 340.
Scoring Average
1. Bud Cauley, 69.33.
2. Webb Simpson, 69.52.
3. Sepp Straka, 69.57.
4. Gary Woodland, 69.80.
5. Alex Smalley, 69.81.
6. Matt Kuchar, 69.84.
7. Hideki Matsuyama, 69.92.
8. (tie), Scottie Scheffler and Min Woo Lee, 69.92.
10. Adam Schenk, 69.92.
Driving Distance
1. Aldrich Potgieter, 328.70.
2. Gary Woodland, 326.00.
3. Min Woo Lee, 324.90.
4. Tim Widing, 321.70.
5. Alejandro Tosti, 320.90.
6. Rasmus Hojgaard, 320.80.
7. Jeremy Paul, 320.00.
8. Trey Mullinax, 319.40.
9. Adam Schenk, 318.60.
10. Keith Mitchell, 318.30.
Driving Accuracy Percentage
1. Takumi Kanaya, 80.61%.
2. Collin Morikawa, 77.59%.
3. Aaron Rai, 75.00%.
4. Ben Kohles, 74.29%.
5. Brian Hart, 74.12%.
6. Russell Henley, 72.67%.
7. Chez Reavie, 72.62%.
8. Sepp Straka, 71.48%.
9. (tie), Kevin Kisner and Lucas Glover, 71.43%.
Greens in Regulation Percentage
1. Collin Morikawa, 81.94%.
2. Taylor Pendrith, 78.47%.
3. Sepp Straka, 78.06%.
4. Patrick Cantlay, 77.78%.
5. Sam Burns, 77.43%.
6. Robert MacIntyre, 77.08%.
7. Nick Taylor, 76.67%.

8. (tie), Rasmus Hojgaard and Adam Scott, 76.39%.
8. (tie), Will Zalatoris and Rasmus Hojgaard, 76.39%.
Total Putts Per Round
1. Shane Lowry, 27.00%.
2. Brendon Todd, 27.30%.
3. Sungjae Im, 27.32%.
4. Sepp Straka, 5.85.
5. Patrick Cantlay, 5.83.
6. Cam Davis, 5.79.
7. Justin Thomas, 5.38.
8. Will Zalatoris, 5.25.
9. Harry Hall, 5.22.
10. Robert MacIntyre, 5.19.
Sand Save Percentage
1. Matthew Riedel, 100.00%.
2. Zac Blair, 87.50%.
3. (tie), Webb Simpson and Hideki Matsuyama, 83.33%.
5. (tie), Braden Thornberry and Webb Simpson, 83.33%.
6. Danny Willett, 80.00%.
7. Keith Mitchell, 78.12%.
8. (tie), Andrew Novak and Sepp Straka, 76.92%.
8. (tie), Takumi Kanaya and Andrew Novak, 76.92%.
All-Around Ranking
1. Collin Morikawa, 293.
2. Rasmus Hojgaard, 315.
3. Sepp Straka, 318.
4. Cam Davis, 355.
5. Scottie Scheffler, 356.
6. Patrick Cantlay, 357.
7. Alex Smalley, 359.
8. Justin Thomas, 362.
9. Taylor Pendrith, 383.
10. Shane Lowry, 407.
LPGA Tour Schedule
Jan. 30-Feb. 2 — Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions (A Lim Kim)
Feb. 6-9 — Founders Cup presented by U.S. Virgin Islands (Yeallimi Noh)
Feb. 20-23 — Honda LPGA Thailand, Pattaya, Thailand
Feb. 27-March 2 — HSBC Women's World Championship, Sentosa, Singapore
March 6-9 — Blue Bay LPGA, Hainan Island, China PR
March 20-23 — Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship, Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.
March 27-30 — Ford Championship presented by Wild Horse Pass, Chandler, Ariz.
April 2-6 — T-Mobile Match Play presented by MGM Rewards, North Las Vegas, Nev.
April 17-20 — JM Eagle LA Championship pre-



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mented by Plastpro, Los Angeles
April 24-27 — The Chevron Championship, The Woodlands, Texas
May 1-4 — Black Desert Championship (W), Ivins, Utah
May 8-11 — Mizuho Americas Open, Jersey City, NJ
May 22-25 — Riviera Maya Open at Mayakoba, Playa del Carmen, Mexico
May 29-June 1 — U.S. Women's Open presented by Ally, Erin, Wis.
June 6-8 — ShopRite LPGA Classic Presented by Acer, GALLOWAY, NJ
June 12-15 — Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give, Belmont, Mich.
June 19-22 — KPMG Women's PGA Championship, Frisco, Texas
June 26-29 — Dow Championship, Midland, Mich.
July 10-13 — The Amundi Evian Championship, Evian-les-Bains, France
July 24-27 — ISPS Handa Women's Scottish Open, Ayrshire, Scotland
July 31-Aug. 3 — AIG Women's Open, Porthcawl, Wales
Aug. 14-17 — The Standard Portland Classic, Portland, Ore.
Aug. 21-24 — CPKC Women's Open, Mississauga, Canada
Aug. 28-31 — FM Championship, Norton, Mass.
Sept. 11-14 — Kroger Queen City Championship presented by P&G, Maineville, Ohio
Sept. 19-21 — Walmart NW Arkansas Championship Presented by P&G, Arkansas, Ark.
Oct. 1-4 — LOTTE Championship presented by Hoakalei, Ewa Beach, Hawaii
Oct. 9-12 — Buick LPGA Shanghai, Shanghai, China PR
Oct. 23-26 — Hanwha LIFEPLUS International Crown
Oct. 30

Players to watch in 4 Nations Face-Off

Mike Brehm
USA TODAY

There’s no NHL All-Star Game this season. Instead, there’s an international star-filled tournament.

Players from the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden will suit up in their national team jerseys at the 4 Nations Face-Off. It’s a major gathering of star power in Montreal and Boston before the NHL returns to the Olympics in 2026.

Players on the teams have combined for seven Hart (MVP) trophies, seven Norris (defenseman) trophies and three Vezina (goaltender) trophies. There are 35 combined Stanley Cup titles and five playoff MVP wins.

There are six goal titles, three by the Toronto Maple Leafs’ Auston Matthews (USA), who scored 69 times last season. There are seven scoring titles, led by Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid’s five. The three-time MVP is playing on Team Canada with reigning MVP Nathan MacKinnon.

Here are 12 players to watch (three from each team):

Players to watch: USA

G Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets: He is a two-time Vezina Trophy winner and could become the first back-to-back winner since Martin Brodeur in 2007 and 2008. He’s the NHL leader in shutouts (6), goals-against average (2.06) and save percentage (.925), while facing nearly 1,200 shots.

D Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets: With Quinn Hughes out because of injury, Werenski takes on a greater role. He’s the USA’s top scorer from the blue line (59 points, tied with Hughes) and one of the front-runners for the Norris Trophy. His play has helped the Blue Jackets be in the playoff mix despite the offseason death of Johnny Gaudreau and lengthy injury absences for Boone Jenner and Sean Monahan.

F Matthew Tkachuk, Florida Panthers: Tkachuk has a six-game goal streak with 13 points in that span. He gets under opponents’ skin. He won a Stanley Cup last season. And he’s on the team with brother Brady.

Others to watch: Matthews, Jack Eichel, Kyle Connor, Jack Hughes, Adam Fox.



Avalanche center Nathan MacKinnon, seen during a game against the Flyers on Feb. 2, is the reigning NHL MVP. RON CHENOV/IMAGN IMAGES

Players to watch: Canada

F Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche: Last year’s MVP is making a case again. He leads the NHL with 87 points and is averaging 1.6 points a game since early December. He’s putting up big points even after the trade of his regular winger Mikko Rantanen in January. He and his Colorado teammates lit up Hellebuyck (5.23 goals-against average) in last season’s playoffs.

Sam Reinhart, Florida Panthers: A 57-goal scorer last season, he’s on a 44-goal pace this season. But he is a threat anytime he’s on the ice and likely will play on a line with McDavid, plus on the top power-play unit. He has nine power-play goals and, more important, a league-best five short-handed goals. His explosiveness means teams will have to be

cautious when they’re on the power play.

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins: The Penguins captain is Canada’s captain. He scored the gold medal game overtime goal in the 2010 Olympics, scored in the championship game in 2014 and was MVP as Canada picked up a third consecutive win in best-on-best tournaments at the World Cup of Hockey in 2016. It looked like an upper-body injury might keep him out of this tournament, but he got the go-ahead to play. It’s worth watching how he’s affected by the injury and the two-game absence.

Others to watch: McDavid, Cale Makar, Mitch Marner, Brad Marchand, Brayden Point

Players to watch: Finland

Aleksander Barkov, Florida Pan-

thers: How best to stop the powerful offenses in the tournament? Strong two-way play. Barkov is one of the best in the league. He has won the Selke Trophy twice as the league’s top defensive forward. He puts up points, too, and has 11 in his last six games.

Mikko Rantanen, Carolina Hurricanes: Which version does Finland get? He had 64 points with Colorado before the trade and two points in six games after being moved. He will have former Avalanche linemate Artturi Lehkonen with him on Team Finland, along with current teammate Sebastian Aho. He missed the last game before the break with an injury.

Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators: Finland is known for producing top goalies, and Saros is one of them. But his numbers have dropped as the Predators have unexpectedly struggled. His 23 losses are two off his career worst and he has a sub-.900 save percentage. He never has finished below .900.

Others to watch: Aho, Roope Hintz, Mikael Granlund, Lehkonen, Anton Lundell.

Players to watch: Sweden

D Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning: He replaced Steven Stamkos as Lightning captain and is captain of Team Sweden. He has won two Stanley Cups, one playoff MVP award and one Norris Trophy during a stretch of six seasons as a finalist.

F William Nylander, Toronto Maple Leafs: His 33 goals lead Swedish players. Seven of those have been game-winners and 25 were scored at even strength. He has 21 power-play points, third on Team Sweden.

G Linus Ullmark, Ottawa Senators, or Filip Gustavsson, Minnesota Wild: In theory, Sweden would go with former Vezina winner Ullmark as their No. 1 goalie. But he has just returned from an injury, getting in two games (facing a combined 84 shots) before the tournament. Gustavsson has 22 wins in 37 starts and has won four of his last five games. Ullmark has the better goals-against average. They’re even in save percentage and shutouts. It will be interesting to see how Sweden deploys its goaltenders.

Others to watch: Lucas Raymond, Jesper Bratt, Adrian Kempe, Filip Forsberg, Rasmus Dahlin

4 NATIONS FACE-OFF EVERYTHING TO KNOW

National bragging rights on the ice on the line

Mike Brehm
USA TODAY

NHL players haven’t represented their countries in the Olympics since 2014 or taken part in a best-on-best tournament since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

The league will return to the 2026 Olympics after not going in 2018 and 2022. But first, this month’s 4th Nations Face-Off will serve as a warm-up as NHL players from the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden compete in their national team jerseys.

“It’s been a while,” Toronto and Team USA captain Auston Matthews said. “It’s something that the players have been craving and looking forward to and the fans as well.

“I think it will be great for the game.” Here’s what to know about the 4 Nations Face-Off:

Where is it?

The first four round-robin games will be played at Montreal’s Bell Centre. The final two round-robin games and the championship game will be played at Boston’s TD Garden.

How to watch it

Games will be shown on TNT, ESPN and ABC.

How to stream it

Sling and MAX carry TNT games.

Sling, Fubo and ESPN+ carry ESPN and ABC games.

Schedule, TV

- (Times p.m. Eastern)
- **Wednesday, Feb. 12:** Canada vs. Sweden at Montreal, 8, TNT
 - **Thursday, Feb. 13:** USA vs. Finland at Montreal, 8, ESPN
 - **Saturday, Feb. 15:** Finland vs. Sweden at Montreal, 1, ABC
 - **Saturday, Feb. 15:** USA vs. Canada at Montreal, 8, ABC
 - **Monday, Feb. 17:** Canada vs. Finland at Boston, 1, TNT
 - **Monday, Feb. 17:** Sweden vs. USA at Boston, 8, TNT
 - **Thursday, Feb. 20:** Championship game at Boston, 8, ESPN

Format

Each country will play one game against the other three nations during the round robin. Teams get three points for a regulation win, two points for an overtime/shootout win and one point for an overtime/shootout loss. The two teams with the best records play each other in the championship game.

Games will be played under NHL rules, except that overtime involves 10 minutes of 3-on-3 sudden death during the round robin rather than the NHL’s five minutes. If it’s still tied after 10 minutes, the game goes to a shootout. During the championship game, overtime is like NHL playoff overtime: 5-on-5 hockey for 20-minute periods until a goal is scored.

Best of the goaltenders could be powerful

Mike Brehm
USA TODAY

The 4 Nations Face-Off will be short. Each country will play three round-robin games. Two teams will go home. Two will play for the championship.

Establishing chemistry quickly be key. So will goaltending. And defense wins championships, especially necessary with plenty of high-powered offense in the tournament.

So which country has the best chance of skating off as the winner of the NHL’s first best-on-best showdown since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

USA TODAY offers power rankings on the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden as they prepare to play in the seven-game tournament that runs Wednesday through Feb. 20 in Montreal and Boston.

1. Team USA

The Americans have the edge because of their goaltending. Connor Hellebuyck is the favorite to win a third Vezina Trophy and second in a row. He leads with 34

wins and six shutouts and Jake Oettinger ranks second with 26 wins. Jeremy Swayman’s numbers are down this season, but he had a league-best .933 save percentage in last season’s playoffs.

The USA also trots out high-skilled forwards. Jack Eichel and Kyle Connor are on pace for 100 points, and Jack Hughes has 10 points in his last eight games. Auston Matthews won’t match last year’s 69 goals because of time missed with injuries but he’s a threat to score and also is solid defensively. Matthew Tkachuk and brother Brady bring scoring and grit.

The defense took a hit with Quinn Hughes unavailable, but there’s plenty of talent with Zach Werenski, Adam Fox, Charlie McAvoy and more.

2. Canada

Canada’s strength is its offense. When you have Nathan MacKinnon on your second line, that says something. Connor McDavid, a five-time scoring champion and three-time MVP, is on the top line. The reported No. 1 power play unit of McDavid, MacKinnon, Sam Reinhart,

Sidney Crosby and Cale Makar will be hard to stop. There’s also feistiness with Brad Marchand and Sam Bennett, who’s a big-time hitter.

Canada also has built-in chemistry. Brayden Point, Brandon Hagel and Anthony Cirelli are from the Lightning. Makar and Devon Toews are defensive partners on the Avalanche. Reinhardt and Bennett are from the Panthers.

The only quibble is goaltending. Adin Hill, Jordan Binnington and Sam Montembeault have save percentages of .900 or below. But Hill and Binnington have won Stanley Cups, which might be the most important statistic.

3. Sweden

Sweden has a solid foundation on defense with Victor Hedman, Rasmus Dahlin, Mattias Ekholm and others. Forwards William Nylander, Lucas Raymond, Adrian Kempe, Jesper Bratt and Rickard Rakell can bring offense. But forwards Mika Zibanejad, Filip Forsberg, Elias Pettersson and Elias Lindholm are having down seasons.

Linus Ullmark is a former Vezina win-

ner but is coming off an injury. Filip Gustavsson has been solid this season.

4. Finland

Finland doesn’t have many defensemen in the NHL, and it lost a key one in injured Miro Heiskanen. Rasmus Ristolainen also had to withdraw and was replaced by Nikolas Matinpalo, who has played more than half the season in the American Hockey League.

Fortunately for Finland, it’s known for its team defense, and Aleksander Barkov is a two-time Selke Trophy winner as top defensive forward. Sebastian Aho also plays a strong two-way game. Mikko Rantanen is the team’s top scorer with 66 points, but he has only two points in six games since he was traded. Patrik Laine is in an eight-game point drought. Finland will have chemistry, though, because four players are from the Panthers and three from the Stars.

Juuse Saros is the biggest name among the Finnish goalies, but Kevin Lankinen has the best stats. He has a .905 save percentage while Saros and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen are below .900.

Unrivaled 1-on-1 raises excitement, spurs shocking upset

Safid Deen
USA TODAY

MEDLEY, Fla. – Unrivaled’s 1-on-1 women’s basketball tournament is fast-paced and unforgiving. Just ask Breanna Stewart – a league co-founder ousted in the first night of the competition after just three minutes.

Stewart fell to her Unrivaled teammate Alliyah Edwards 12-0 during their first-round matchup in the league’s midseason tournament on Monday night.

“Lee was hot. She was just being aggressive and I’m happy for her. It sucks that I only had one shot, but Lee deserved it,” Stewart told USA TODAY Sports after the defeat to her Mist teammate.

Napheesa Collier, Kahleah Copper, Rhyne Howard, Skylar Diggins-Smith, Allisha Gray, Rickea Jackson and Shakira Austin all moved into the second round on Tuesday.

Eight first-round games were played on Monday night, while the other games lasted roughly 6-7 minutes as players played to 11 points by twos and threes.

However, the Stewart-Edwards game was the biggest upset of the night and sets the stage for the rest of the tournament, where the winner gets \$200,000 of the \$350,000 in prize pool money.

The credentials are obvious: Stewart, 30, is a two-time WNBA Finals MVP, a three-time WNBA champion and three-time Olympic gold medalist. She was one of four No. 1 seeds in the tournament.

Edwards was one of the No. 8 seeds, but the No. 6 pick for the Washington Mystics in the 2024 WNBA draft surely did not play like it against a fellow



Napheesa Collier, right, shown Jan. 17, won her first-round Unrivaled 1-on-1 Tournament game Monday.

JIM RASSOL/IMAGN IMAGES

UConn standout she looked up to.

“That was crazy. My strategy was to trust my shot first, then get a couple buckets at the rim where I’m comfortable. But I was just ready for the moment,” Edwards told USA TODAY Sports after the game. “I’m sad it had to be against Stewie. I feel like it was a set up. But Misties and UConn for life.”

The Unrivaled players slowly picked up on their 1-on-1 strategies after watching Collier beat fellow UConn standout Katie Lou Samuelson 12-6 in the first game.

Monday’s complete results: Aaliyah Edwards beats Breanna Stewart 12-0; Rickea Jackson beats Jackie Young 11-3; Allisha Gray beats Jordin Canada 11-4; Skylar Diggins-Smith beats Dearica Hamby 11-3; Rhyne Howard beats Lexie Hull 12-7; Kahleah Copper beats Aliyah Boston 11-6; Shakira Austin beats Chelsea Gray 12-2; and Napheesa Collier beats Katie Lou Samuelson 12-6.

Group winners selected ahead of Best in Show

Scooby Axson
USA TODAY

Now that the Super Bowl is over, it’s time for the other elite athletes to take center stage.

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show is taking place this week in New York, leading up to one of the pups competing being named Best in Show.

Dogs compete in seven groups (Hound, Toy, Non-Sporting, Herding, Sporting, Working and Terrier), and the winners advance to the final round.

The Wire Fox Terrier breed has 15 Best in Show wins in the Westminster Dog Show history, with Scottish Terrier (eight) and English Springer Spaniel (six) next in line.

With 47 Best in Show triumphs, the Terrier group has by far the most wins in history, followed by the Sporting group with 18 wins.

The group winners from Monday:

- Hound: Bourbon the Whippet.
- Non-Sporting: Neal the Bichon Frisé.



Shelby, a poodle, competed Saturday in the masters agility championship ahead of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

JEENAH MOON/REUTERS

- Toy: Comet the Shih Tzu.
 - Herding: Mercedes the German Shepherd.
- The Sporting Group, Working Group, and Terrier Group winners will be named on Tuesday before the judges award the Best in Show prize in prime time.

Woods to skip Genesis, cites mom’s recent death

Mark Giannotto
USA TODAY

Tiger Woods will not make his return to PGA Tour golf at The Genesis Invitational tournament he hosts this week.

Woods announced Monday he is withdrawing from the event, which is taking place at Torrey Pines Golf Course in San Diego this year instead of Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles due to damage caused by the recent wildfires in the Pacific Palisades area.

Woods cited the death of his mother, Kultida Woods, last week as the reason.



Woods

“I planned to tee it up this week, but I’m just not ready,” Woods wrote in a statement released on social media. “I did my best to prepare, knowing it’s what my Mom would have wanted, but I’m still processing her loss. Thanks to everyone who has reached out. I hope to be at Torrey later in the week and appre-

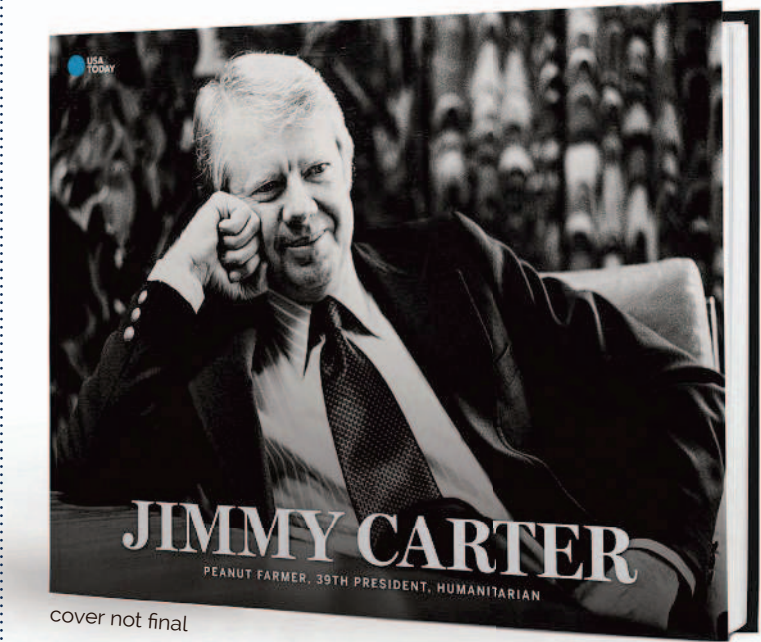
ciate the continued kindness since my Mom’s passing.”

Woods hasn’t played in a full-fledged, professional golf tournament since the British Open last July, when he missed the cut. He said in December at the Hero World Challenge – another tournament he hosts in the Bahamas – that he was not physically ready and “not sharp enough” yet to compete against the best golfers on the PGA Tour following another back surgery in September.

Woods has since played at the PNC Championship with his son, Charlie Woods, in December. Woods also played two matches with his Jupiter Links GC team in the TGL, the virtual golf league he co-founded along with a group of investors that includes Rory McIlroy.

It’s unclear when Woods might elect to make his 2025 PGA Tour debut. Next month’s Arnold Palmer Invitational and The Players Championship loom as possibilities on the schedule before the Masters in April.

Remembering President JIMMY CARTER in a commemorative hardcover book



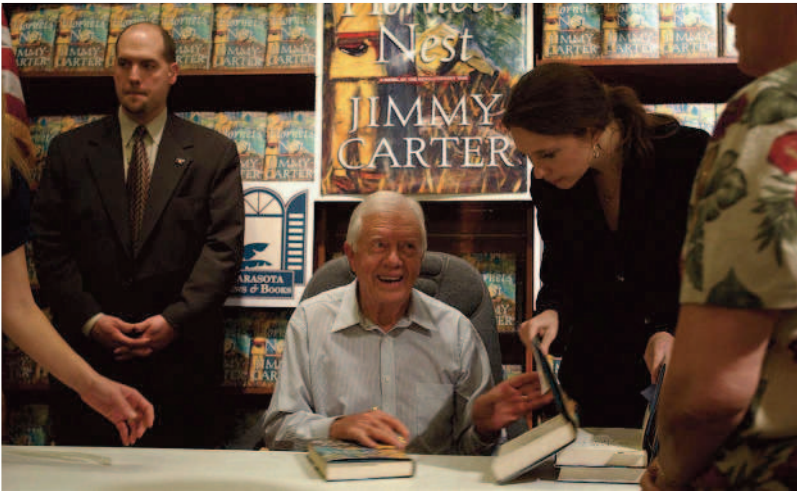
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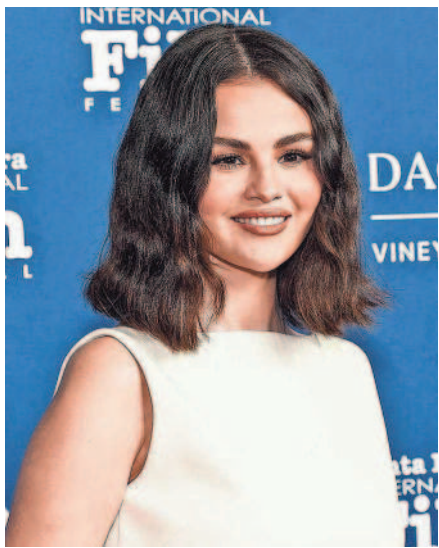
From humble peanut fields to the highest office in the land, Jimmy Carter’s extraordinary journey exemplifies the American dream. This stunning 160-page hardcover celebration captures the remarkable life of America’s longest-lived president through breathtaking photography and compelling storytelling from the USA TODAY Network. Experience Carter’s transformation from a small-town Georgia farmer to the 39th president of the United States, and witness his even more impactful post-presidency years as a Nobel Peace Prize winner and tireless humanitarian.

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LIFELINE



PRESLEY ANN/GETTY IMAGES

THEY SAID WHAT? THE STARS' BEST QUOTES

“Some of the magic has disappeared. But I choose to continue to be proud of what I’ve done, and I’m just grateful.” – Selena Gomez speaking about her film “Emilia Pérez,” which is embroiled in a PR crisis due to past offensive social media posts from co-star Karla Sofía Gascón. In a Q&A during the Santa Barbara International Film Festival, Gomez acknowledged that the recent controversy has affected the way she has been feeling but added, “I live with no regrets, and I would do this movie over and over again if I could.” Gascón has apologized for her comments.



IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY WHO'S CELEBRATING TODAY

Christina Ricci is 45. Josh Brolin is 57. Arsenio Hall is 69.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). In need of “me time”? Today’s Leo full moon asks you to balance your hectic calendar with some fun!

Taurus (April 20-May 20). This is personal. Drama at home forces you to put a pin in business under today’s Leo full moon!

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Correspondence requires your immediate attention under today’s Leo full moon. Tackle one issue before moving on to the next.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Spending with your heart, not your head? The Leo full moon gives your inner child control of your credit card!

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Claiming what is yours? Your heart is on your sleeve under today’s Leo full moon! Lead with passion, not pettiness.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Emotional overwhelm? Exhaustion hits hard under today’s Leo full moon! Prepare for a moody meltdown!

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You’ve been busy with personal projects for the past two weeks. Now it’s time to share your creations!

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Taking center stage? You’ve been in hibernation mode, but when duty calls, you answer!

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Want to break free? Be sure not to break anything else in the process during today’s Leo full moon!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Claiming your power? Your resilience gives another confidence under today’s Leo full moon. Join forces with creatives.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Offering a compromise? This feels risky under the Leo full moon, but the risky move is the right move.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Receiving a wake-up call? Today’s Leo full moon brings you back to life! It’s time for a new game plan!

STREAMING



Kaitlyn Dever as Australian wellness influencer Belle Gibson in Netflix’s limited series “Apple Cider Vinegar.”

Her role in ‘Vinegar’ was bittersweet for Kaitlyn Dever

Erin Jensen USA TODAY

“Apple Cider Vinegar” star Kaitlyn Dever knows all too well the desperate desire to heal what modern medicine can’t. Doctors diagnosed Dever’s mom, Kathy, with Stage 4 breast cancer at just 39. She died last year, after a 14-year fight. • “In the last few years of her life,” Dever tells USA TODAY, “I became really interested in holistic protocols and other therapeutic things that she could do for her body that weren’t conventional,” in addition to conventional treatments. “I became very obsessed with it just because I wanted to look at every option possible for her. So it was interesting timing when (“Apple Cider Vinegar”) came into my life.” • Dever described her mother as her “everything” in an Instagram tribute. “Nothing I’ll ever say will amount to the gifts you have given me in my life, the boundless joy you brought, the deep, endless, unconditional love you gave me and our family,” she writes. “Your love was everywhere.” • Netflix’s six-part limited series dramatizes the rise and fall of Australian wellness influencer Belle Gibson (Dever) who amassed an Instagram following while claiming to manage her terminal brain cancer with whole foods, natural medicine and Gerson Therapy. Gibson promoted her methods in a cookbook and app downloaded at least 300,000 times. After all, her cancer was now shockingly undetectable. But that’s because she never had it in the first place, as journalists Beau Donnelly and Nick Toscano uncovered.

See VINEGAR, Page 2D



Aisha Dee stars as Chanelle, left, and Alycia Debnam-Carey is Milla in “Apple Cider Vinegar.” PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NETFLIX

MOVIES

Quan is ready to be a part of the action

Brian Truitt USA TODAY

Valentine’s Day isn’t just an annual thing for Ke Huy Quan.

The Oscar-winning actor and his wife, Echo, have a lovers’ tradition of going out to a nice dinner and then a movie with popcorn and Coke. “We have many Valentine’s Days in a year,” Quan says with a laugh.

And just in time for the most romantic holiday is the latest in Quan’s Hollywood journey, the hard-hitting action comedy “Love Hurts” (in theaters). He stars as Marvin Gable, a good-natured Milwaukee real estate agent and ex-hitman whose past comes flying back in his face – as do a lot of punches – when Rose (Ariana DeBose), the lawyer he was supposed to kill years ago (but saved instead), returns to town. And Marvin still harbors seriously strong feelings for her, though she doesn’t know it.

It marks the first leading role for the 54-year-old comeback kid: A 1980s pop-culture staple as a child star in “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom” and “The Goonies,” Quan took a two-decade hiatus from acting and enjoyed a high-profile return three years ago in “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” which won best picture and earned him best supporting actor.

Quan, who also stars this year in Netflix’s “The Electric State” and Disney’s “Zootopia 2,” talks with USA TODAY about “Love Hurts,” his “Goonies” reunion and what pushes his nostalgia buttons.



Ke Huy Quan has his first major leading role in a movie with the Valentine’s Day-themed action comedy “Love Hurts.” PROVIDED BY ALLEN FRASER/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Question: It’s taken you 40 years to finally reach leading man status. Why is “Love Hurts” the perfect vehicle for that?

Answer: When I was younger, I loved the action genre, and that’s why I studied tae kwon do and got a black belt. I loved watching those movies: Schwarzenegger, Steven Seagal, Stallone – but especially Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. I always wanted to star in my own action movie. I didn’t get the opportunity back then, but better late than never, here I am.

You worked as an action choreographer in the early 2000s with “X-Men” and “The One.” Did you stick with martial arts this whole time?

When I was younger, I would practice all the time with my younger brother. We would study three days a week and then on the weekends, we would go back to the studio. When we weren’t at the studio, we would watch martial arts movies. I thought I didn’t have any use for those skills until I became an action choreographer. And then, I wasn’t practicing every day. Especially as you get a little older, you just don’t.

So for “Love Hurts,” I actually had to get back into shape. It was really fun for me to do, except there was just a lot of aches and pains.

After a tough day of fighting former NFL bruiser Marshawn Lynch, what’s your go-to routine to recover?

I would soak in an Epsom salt bath every night. I used so many bags I feel like I should get an endorsement from

See QUAN, Page 2D

NEW YORK FASHION WEEK

Hudson goes for ‘very moody’ for fall/winter 2025

Anika Reed
USA TODAY

NEW YORK – Black excellence is in the building.

For his New York Fashion Week runway show on Friday, Sergio Hudson brought out the best for his front row, including Keke Palmer, who has become somewhat of a Hudson muse and has been making the rounds all fashion week.

Muni Long and Tamron Hall also sat front row at the show, with all three looking like tall glasses of milk in various shades of white.

Palmer was stunning in a creamy floor-length coat with large lapels, pairing it with a caramel turtleneck, cream trousers and large tan belt; Hall was cinched at the waist with a white double-breasted coat with satin lapels; and Long leaned into suiting with a white hourglass tuxedo jacket with a dark blue pocket square and a white button-down shirt and pants, topped with a white bow tie and glasses.

Hall embraced former model and activist Bethann Hardison as she made her way into the show. Palmer and Hall also sat front row at Christopher John Rogers’ show the previous evening, making it a priority to support Black designers during Fashion Week.

Former “Real Housewives of Atlanta” star Kandi Burruss also shone in a gold dress and a dark blazer. Her 22-year-old daughter Riley Burruss, who came of age on the Bravo reality show and is believed to be starring in a new reality show with some of the kids of the Bravoverse, joined her for the evening in a long-sleeved red gown that skimmed the floor, cinched at the waist with a belt.

Backstage before the show, Hudson told USA TODAY his collection is “the antithesis” of his previous spring/summer 2025 offering, which was a 180 for the designer with pastel tones and soft femininity woven through. For fall/winter 2025, Hudson put together pieces that are “very dark, very moody, very much, ‘It’s cold outside, and I want to give you the best that I got anyway.’ So you know, I’m putting on the clothes, but they’re going to be snatched.”

The luxury of “putting on a bunch of clothes for really no reason” is at the heart of Hudson’s vision for the upcoming season, and the styling of the runway show highlighted the art of really getting dressed.



Sergio Hudson walks the runway for the Sergio Hudson fashion show during New York Fashion Week at NeueHouse Madison Square on Friday in New York City. DIA DIPASUPIL/GETTY IMAGES



Melania Trump and Usha Vance attend a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery ahead of the presidential inauguration in Arlington, Va., on Jan. 19. CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

The designer says he embraced “a lot of texture, a lot of leather, a lot of hand-embroidered pieces. (And) nothing is going to be by itself. So if we’re doing an embroidered top, we’re doing a turtle-neck under it.”

And though Hudson says the collec-

tion was “dark in the beginning,” leave it to the designer known for his bold color palette to have a “little color pop (start) sneaking in there.”

“It’s a little electric blue skirt or suede coat or a bright chartreuse coat, and a red section,” he says, naming some of

the collection’s true highlights. A red dress made for a 2025 Jessica Rabbit came down the runway on frequent Hudson collaborator and supermodel Veronica Webb, while supermodel Chanel Iman showed off a black fur, black leather gloves and an all-black ensemble paired with a black oversized belt. Oversized feathery furs made way for suiting moments and monochromatic ensembles in burgundy, magenta and red.

JD Vance’s wife Usha’s inaugural weekend outfit was by Hudson

Hudson has dressed many a powerful woman, from Michelle Obama to Beyoncé, but another woman in politics made headlines around the designer in January.

Usha Vance, wife of Vice President JD Vance, wore a Sergio Hudson coat and dress alongside first lady Melania Trump to attend a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Ceremony the day before President Donald Trump’s inauguration.

“I had nothing to do with that!” Hudson says, laughing.

Though designers will lend or make custom creations for high-profile clients, Vance bought the pieces she wore instead of working directly with the designer.

Hudson’s reaction to the fashion nod? “Thank you for purchasing a piece, I had no clue. You know, it’s a free country, and I appreciate the business.”

He dressed Obama for the 2021 inauguration in a striking plum look, complete with a floor-length coat, a turtleneck sweater with matching trousers and a large plum belt with a gold buckle.

Hudson at the Met Gala? It’s happening

Speaking of his top-notch tailoring and stellar suits, the upcoming Met Gala, with its focus on Black menswear and the Black dandy, will be Hudson’s playground (“I mean, it’s *me*,” he says). But he’s mum on the details.

“We’ll be there!” he says with a laugh.

The designer made waves on the 2023 Met Gala red carpet with Palmer, who donned a strapless cream and pastel tweed dress for the Karl Lagerfeld-inspired gala, and La La Anthony, who hosted the red carpet show for Vogue in a body-hugging, white one-shoulder custom gown.



Hitman-turned-realtor Marvin Gable (Ke Huy Quan, left) tussles with enforcer King (Marshawn Lynch) in “Love Hurts.” PROVIDED BY ALLEN FRASER/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Quan

Continued from Page 1D

them. (Laughs) Every single day, I would go home and my body would just be all bruised. In order to make these fight scenes look real, you really have to go at it. And getting a little hurt is a very common thing.

In “Love Hurts,” you share scenes with your old “Goonies” co-star Sean Astin. His character says in the movie, “Man, you’ve come a long way. I’m proud of you.” Is that also a little bit of Sean talking to his friend Ke?

I think so. That line really resonated with me. And having it delivered by Sean just made it even more special. We have a great relationship, and Sean has always been there for me. It wasn’t just emotional for Marvin Gable to get that kind of validation from his boss, but also to do this with Sean on a personal level was incredible.

What thing from your childhood still gets you nostalgic feelings?

Every time I see those movies that I love, “Goonies” or “Indiana Jones” or “Back to the Future,” it just brings me back to that wonderful time where movies really allowed you to escape reality. They’re really fun to watch, and

you come out of it feeling a little bit refreshed. “Love Hurts” is certainly an homage to those early ’80s action movies: “Project A,” “Police Story,” “Winners and Sinners.” Those are the kind of movies I’ve seen more than any other movie.

Has winning an Oscar changed how people see you in Hollywood?

I think so? What’s really incredible is that I’ve met so many actors that are going through a very similar journey that I went through and who are really putting in the work and just being patient and waiting for their own spotlight. To hear them say “Your story really inspires me,” they’re all so generous and willing to share their own story.

You recently signed on for “Bad Boy,” a thriller told from a dog’s perspective where you play a serial killer. Is that another first, as a villain?

Yes! I’m really excited. I was talking to my agent and he says, “What do you want to do?” And I said, “I would love to do a good horror movie where I play a serial killer.” What I love about Marvin Gable is that element of surprise: You don’t think he’s lethal but he’s really a badass when you mess with him. With “Bad Boy,” somebody that looks like me, you don’t really think he’s a serial killer. It’s definitely another check off the bucket list.

Vinegar

Continued from Page 1D

They detailed their findings in the book, “The Woman Who Fooled the World,” which inspired the series. In the show, Belle emulates blogger Milla Blake (Alycia Debnam-Carey), who found brief success treating her (real) cancer naturally.

The unchecked influencer is still a threat that Debnam-Carey, 31, recognizes today.

It’s “maybe as rampant and as insidious,” she says. “TikTok is a great example,” with its constant barrage of hacks and trends. “The space that it takes up in your brain and then having to do all this research and (gather) information to really make sure that what you’re getting is correct, it is constant, and it is just as prevalent now as I think it was then.”

She says what all of us tempted by magic pills on social media already know: “It’s so easy to be drawn in by those things, and to feel quite gullible at times.”

Creator Samantha Strauss says she received a letter from someone who had seen the show and battled breast cancer. “She’s like, ‘I wanted to run off and eat some blueberries,’” Strauss recalls. “That sounds like such a lovely alternative.” Especially compared with the reality of chemotherapy, surgery and radiation. The 3-year-old son of Strauss’ best friend has been diagnosed with leukemia. “The doctors have to put all this awful medicine into his body every day,” Strauss says. Her friend “has to trust that it’s going to work. He’s screaming on the bed, and he doesn’t understand why it’s happening. And she feels like a monster to put him through this.”

In preparing to play Belle, who relished the sympathy her faked illness won her, Dever thought “a lot about what amount of hope wellness can bring to people. In our story, we’re really trying to convey the idea that this is just a person that is desperate for community and desperate for love and will do anything she can to get that. And a



Kaitlyn Dever stars as Australian wellness influencer Belle Gibson in Netflix’s limited series “Apple Cider Vinegar.” PROVIDED BY NETFLIX

lot of these moments, a lot of these more emotional beats that we were playing out in the show were just a cry for help in a lot of ways.”

The idea of playing the fictionalized Belle, crafted by Strauss in a “twisted and gripping and kind of funny way,” excited Dever.

She also welcomed the challenge of an Australian accent, which Sydney native Debnam-Carey thinks she nailed.

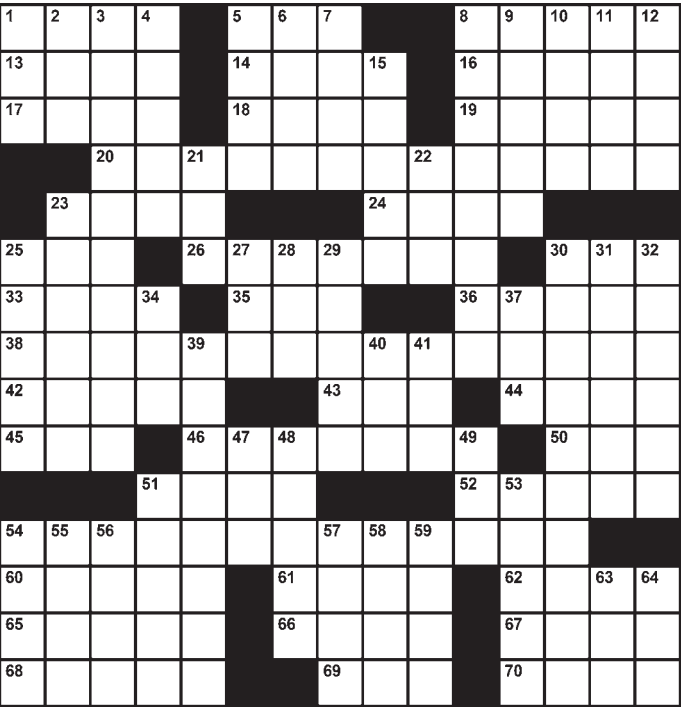
And perhaps most heartwarming, the project is one that delighted Dever’s late mom.

“I knew it would be difficult subject matter for me to be surrounded by,” says Dever. “But I know that my mom was very excited. She got to read all of the scripts, and she loved it. She thought it was such a great story, and there was so much excitement surrounding it. So I felt like I just had to do it, and I felt a certain calling to do it.”

USA TODAY CROSSWORD

EDITED Anna Gundlach
BY Taylor Johnson
BACK TRACK

- ACROSS**
- 1 Passing crazes
5 Droplets on a lawn
8 Digging tool
13 Drive-___ window
14 Some hoppy brews
16 Greased, like a baking sheet
17 Methods
18 Potluck contribution
19 Nonmasculine gender expression
20 Thomas the Tank Engine, to a toddler
23 “Search Party” star Shawkat
24 Spheres
25 Regret
26 Hot sauce brand with a namesake pepper and Mexican state
30 Oolong or kukicha
33 Like many Yemenis “hahaha”
36 “Gonna take off now, bye!”
38 “Pfft, what a foolish thing to say!”
42 “Am not!” retort
43 By way of
44 What a papaya grows on
45 “Sick!”
46 “Almost got me!”
50 Quaint lodging
51 Old Russian leader
52 Lessens in difficulty
54 Extremely quickly
60 Absolutely love
61 Panda or grizzly
62 Little rascals
65 Crowdfunding contributor
66 Drummer’s moment in the spotlight
67 Truth alternative at a slumber party
68 Oodles
69 Pester, pester, pester
70 Olympic fencing event
- ANSWERS:** Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.



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2/12

- DOWN**
- 1 “Victory!” in online shorthand
2 “That’s it!”
3 Laundered without water
4 Tobiko-topped roll
5 “Thank You” singer
6 On a huge scale
7 Do some laundry
8 Prepare runny, like an egg for ramen
9 Docking locales
10 ___ mater
11 Low-cut bra type
12 Garden in the Torah
15 Brushes away, like a fly
21 Steel-cut grain
22 Middle-earth monster
23 ___ borealis
25 Meteorologist’s tool
27 In the style of
28 ___ choy
29 Pain relief brand
30 Guide for seeing the sights
- 31 “Schitt’s Creek” actor Levy
32 Capital city that’s home to the Parthenon
34 “Dynamite” K-pop band
37 Pilates pad
39 What kids might look for under their beds
40 STEM school in Cambridge, MA
41 Corn unit
47 Bilbo Baggins portrayer
48 Beds that new parents might hang mobiles over
49 Thumbs-up vote
51 Toss
53 Actor’s comment that breaks the fourth wall
54 Fellas
- 55 Any member of 34-Down, e.g.
56 Vanished
57 Like some highlighter colors
58 Swanky party
59 “___ and Toad Are Friends” (children’s book)
63 Opposite of post-
64 Witness



2/11

CROSSWORDS ON YOUR PHONE
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Numbers

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Feedback: feedback@usatoday.com



SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).



2/12

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★☆☆☆

SUDOKU FUSION
ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).



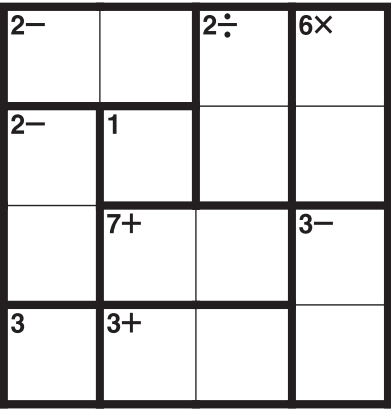
DIFFICULTY RATING ★★☆☆☆

Tuesday's Answers

2	3	1	6	8	5	7	4	9	4	1	5	3	6	2
5	7	6	3	4	9	8	2	1	3	6	2	5	4	1
9	4	8	1	7	2	3	5	6	1	3	6	2	5	4
7	8	9	5	2	3	6	1	4	5	2	4	1	3	6
1	5	4	8	6	7	2	9	3	2	4	3	6	1	5
3	6	2	4	9	1	5	7	8	6	5	1	4	2	3
4	9	5	2	3	8	1	6	7	3	6	5	1	4	2
8	2	7	9	1	6	4	3	5	2	4	3	6	1	5
6	1	3	7	5	4	9	8	2	1	3	7	5	4	9

2/11

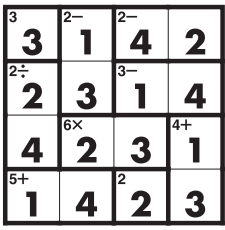
KENKEN



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1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 through 6 (challenging) without repeating.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



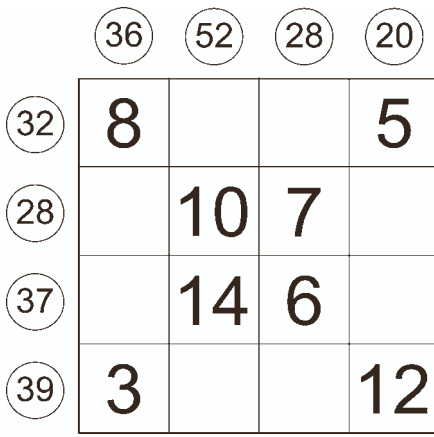
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2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.
3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo

Difficulty: MEDIUM



Solution to Tuesday's puzzle

6	7	11	14
16	9	13	4
2	3	5	15
12	1	8	10

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

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2/12/25

Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

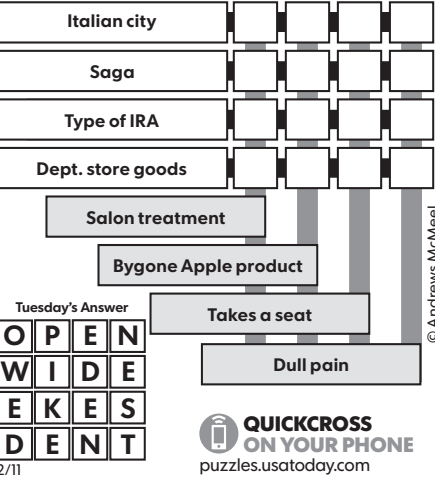
- Find and Circle:
Five major U.S. rivers
Four six-letter mammals
Three parts of speech
Two four-letter land formations
Movie: “___ Me If You Can”

Tuesday's answer: GOLD IRON LEAD ZINC / BELIZE FRANCE GREECE CANADA / STREAM RIVER CREEK BROOK / LIBRA VIRGO ARIES / LONG ISLAND

QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes

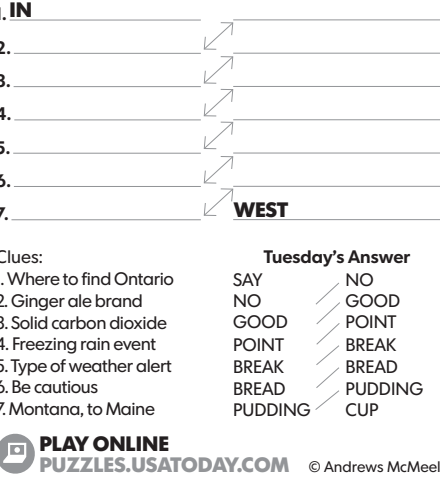
2/12



UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt

2/12



DON'T QUOTE ME

Author Helen Keller talks about the power of smell.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.

ACROSS LIVED MILES POTENT SMELL TRANSPORTS WIZARD

___ IS A ___ THAT ___
YOU ___ THOUSANDS OF ___ AND
THE YEARS YOU HAVE ___

Tuesday's Answer: "Loafing needs no explanation and is its own excuse." - Christopher Morley

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 fast-growing paddle sport (10)	_____
2 laundry or picnic container (6)	_____
3 what sleepers are under (6)	_____
4 long or high Olympic event (7)	_____
5 Chicago's North Side ballers (7)	_____
6 Sea west of Denmark (5)	_____
7 sundae accoutrements (8)	_____



Tuesday's Answers: 1. PURCHASED 2. YUCKY 3. GAZING 4. PUNCTUATION 5. HONEYSUCKLE 6. SPINES 7. AFTER

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.



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Yesterday's Jumbles: AGAIN TUNER WRENCH GLOOMY
Answer: She had doubted that she'd like his new beard, but it was — GROWING ON HER

BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS

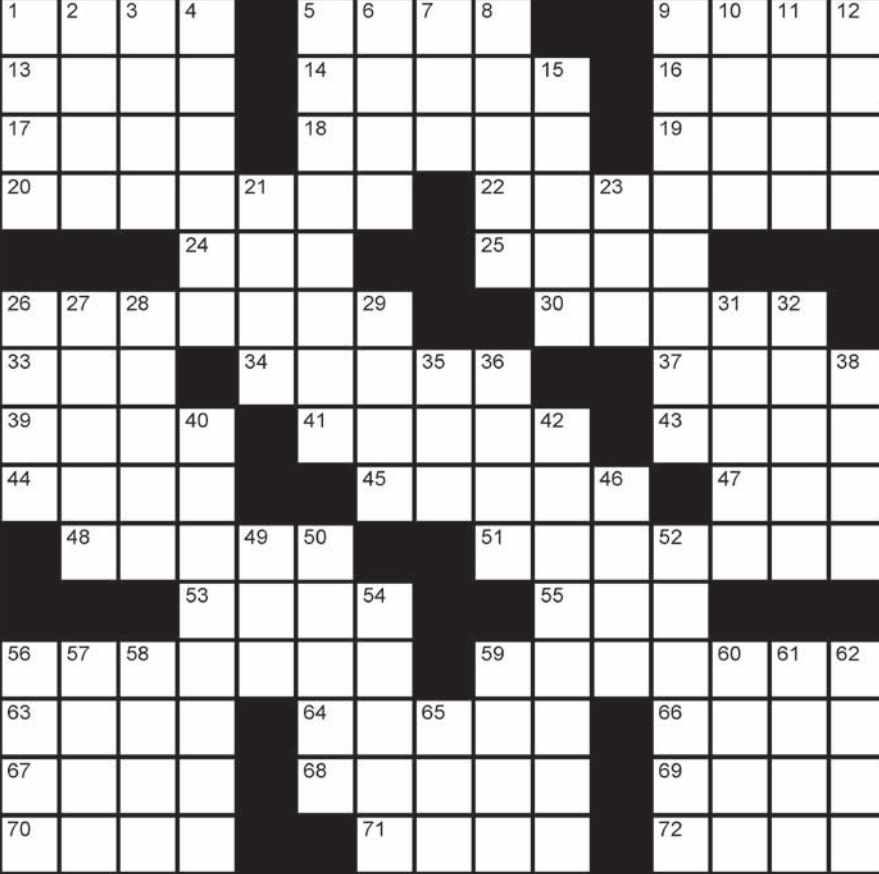
- 1 Put forth
5 Poet — Sandburg
9 Bungle
13 Reunion attendee
14 Arches
16 Type style (Abbr.)
17 Branch
18 Kathmandu's country
19 Benefit
20 Tile pictures
22 Retrieved
24 Caviar
25 Slangy affirmative
26 Passage for pedestrians
30 Previous
33 — Baba
34 “— came a spider ...”
37 Noteworthy times
39 Youngsters
41 Drink noisily
43 Broad bean
44 “The bigger — are ...”
45 Work dough
47 Snood
48 Carrying heat
51 Bicker
53 Prepare for
- 55 Broad street (Abbr.)
56 Card game
59 Long pins
63 “It’s beginning to look — like Christmas ...”
64 Overact
66 London native
67 Course
68 Musical show
69 “La — Bonita”
70 Three-pip card
71 “— make me laugh!”
72 Wriggling
- DOWN**
- 1 — Springs
2 Hodgepodge
3 Dollar amounts
4 Begin
5 Hides
6 Reaches maturity
7 Agent
8 Like woodlands
9 Shenanigans
10 Four Corners state
11 Ersatz
12 Escaped
15 Bed down
21 Sioux City's state
23 Road surface goop

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



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- 26 Electrical unit
27 Island greeting
28 Metric unit
29 Yellow
31 Chimp relative
32 “Bolero” composer
35 Mother superior
36 Developed
38 Fill
40 Tea and —
42 Caged bird
46 Comedian — Chappelle
49 Letters
- 50 Office gadget
52 Beginner
54 Christened
56 Police rank (Abbr.)
57 Winglike
58 Observe
59 Bowl over
60 Gaelic
61 Brook
62 Remain
65 Ab — (from the beginning)



NATION & WORLD

EXTRA

INSIDE
Netanyahu threatens to end truce in Gaza. **8NN**

GAZA

Trump pushes displacement

Jordan opposes plan to resettle Palestinians

Jeff Mason and Simon Lewis
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump on Tuesday pressed Jordan’s King Abdullah to take in Palestinians who would be permanently displaced under the president’s plan for the U.S. to take over the Gaza Strip, even as the

king said his country was firmly opposed to the move.
Speaking alongside the Arab country’s ruler in the White House, Trump signaled he would not budge on his idea that involves moving the Gaza Strip’s shell-shocked residents and transforming the war-ravaged territory into what he billed a “Riviera of the Middle East.”
Trump has infuriated the Arab world by saying that Palestinians would not be able to return to their homes under his proposal to redevelop the enclave,

which has been devastated by an Israeli offensive.
“We’re going to take it. We’re going to hold it, we’re going to cherish it. We’re going to get it going eventually, where a lot of jobs are going to be created for the people in the Middle East,” Trump said in the Oval Office, saying his plan would “bring peace” to the region.
King Abdullah said later that he reiterated to Trump Jordan’s “steadfast position” against the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, as well as in the occu-

pied West Bank that borders his country.
“This is the unified Arab position,” he said in a post on X. “Rebuilding Gaza without displacing the Palestinians and addressing the dire humanitarian situation should be the priority for all.”
Despite the views of his Jordanian counterpart, Trump said Jordan, as well as Egypt, would ultimately agree to house displaced residents of Gaza. Both

See GAZA, Page 8NN

FEDERAL WORKERS

REIGNING CUTS

Trump orders large-scale downsizing in latest move for Musk-led DOGE effort

Steve Holland, Trevor Hunnicutt and Jeff Mason
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump ordered U.S. agencies on Tuesday to work closely with top adviser Elon Musk’s effort to shrink the federal workforce by identifying government employees who can be laid off and functions that can be eliminated entirely.
With his 4-year-old son by his side or on his shoulders, Musk stood alongside Trump in the Oval Office at the White House before the order was signed. The billionaire answered questions from reporters, making it clear that he is leading Trump’s government downsizing efforts.
Wearing a “Make America Great Again” cap, the

world’s richest man defended his role as an unelected official who has been granted unprecedented authority by the president to dismantle parts of the U.S. government.
“You can’t have an autonomous federal bureaucracy. You have to have one that’s responsive to the people,” Musk said.
Musk, the Tesla CEO and owner of X, pushed back at criticism that he and his Department of Government Efficiency team have operated largely in secrecy.
“I fully expect to be scrutinized and get, you know, a daily proctology exam, basically,” Musk said. “It’s not like I think I can get away with some-

See CUTS, Page 6NN

Few mourn the penny amid move to kill it

Coins cost more to make than their face value

Jessica DiNapoli and Rich McKay
REUTERS


Nour Ismail, a cashier at the All-Star Deli & Grocery in Manhattan, says the handful of pennies tossed into the bodega’s tip jar by the end of the day is mostly a nuisance, rather than a welcome reward for good service.
As a tip, pennies are nearly worthless, the 24-year-old said, adding that the offering shows customers’ kindness and sometimes they add up. But “pennies don’t matter,” he said with a shrug.
It is a point of view shared by President Donald Trump, who said on Sunday that he had directed the U.S. Treasury, which oversees the U.S. Mint, to end production of pennies.
The announcement, which Trump made on his Truth Social platform, has stirred up a decadeslong debate about the utility and cost of the copper-colored one-cent coin.
Those pushing for their demise say pennies are wasteful, and point to countries such as Canada that have successfully pulled them out of circulation.
According to the Mint’s annual report, a penny last year cost 3.69 cents to produce, up about 20% from 2023 due to the cost of materials, including zinc.
Larry Jackson, 65, a lifelong numismatist – meaning someone who studies coins – and proprietor of Larry Jackson Rare Coins in Atlanta, supports Trump’s plan. “People don’t want them. They don’t use them. They sock them away in cans and drawers and jars and try to bring them in here by the sackful,” Jackson said. “We don’t want them. Even a thirty-pound bag won’t fetch you \$50.”
Jackson said there are collectors who hoard pennies minted in 1982 and before for their copper value. But that scheme would only work if it ever becomes legal to melt them down, he said.
Despite Trump’s directive, it is unclear whether the president has the power to end production of the penny, as the Mint derives its authority from Congress, according to its website. Neither the Treasury Department nor the U.S. Mint returned phone calls seeking comment.

See PENNY, Page 5NN

“People don’t want (pennies). They don’t use them. They sock them away in cans and drawers and jars and try to bring them in here by the sackful.”

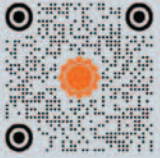
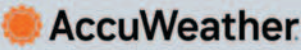
Larry Jackson
Proprietor of Larry Jackson Rare Coins in Atlanta

ILLUSTRATION BY RICK KONOPKA/USA TODAY NETWORK; AND GETTY IMAGES



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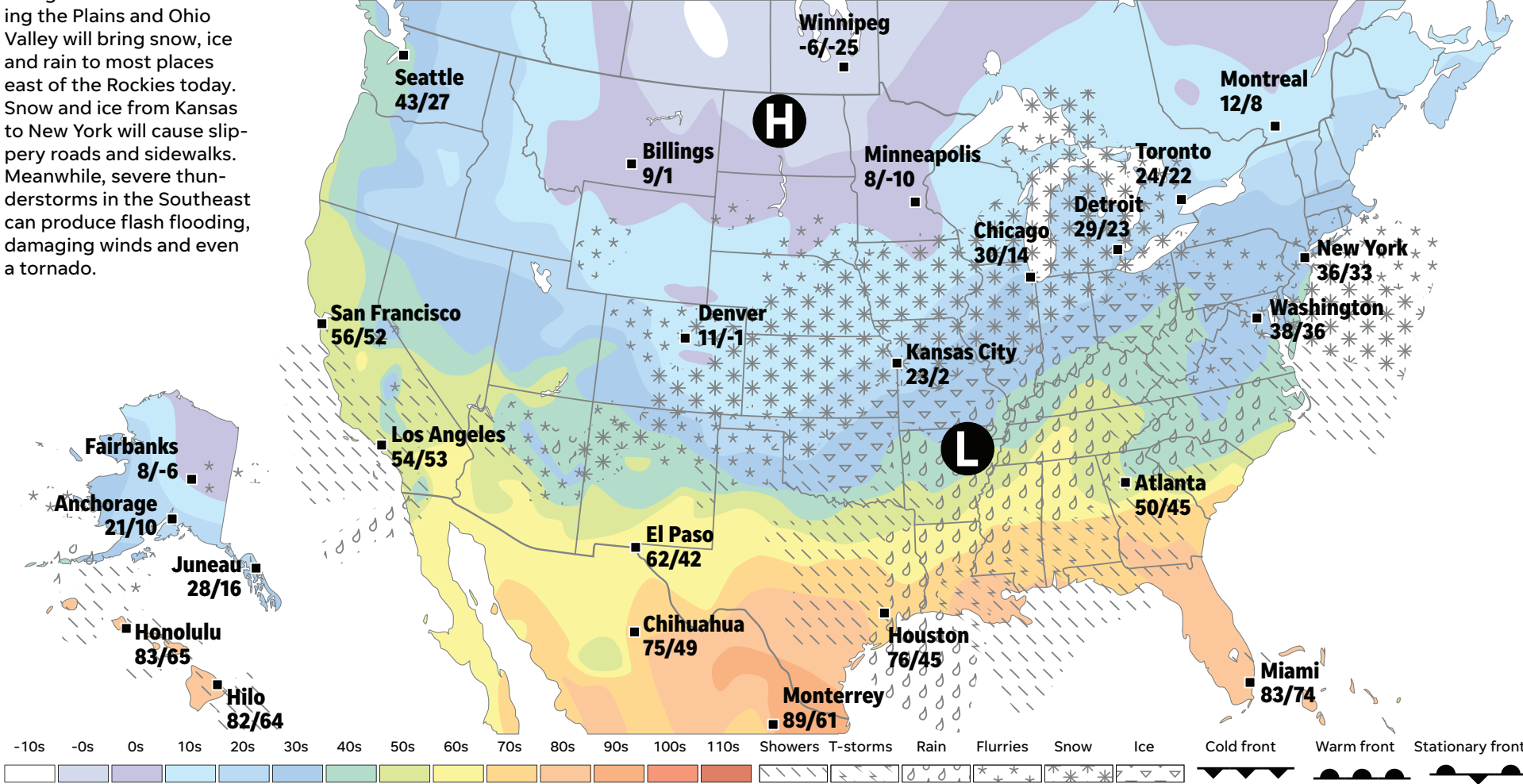


NATIONAL SUMMARY

A large winter storm crossing the Plains and Ohio Valley will bring snow, ice and rain to most places east of the Rockies today. Snow and ice from Kansas to New York will cause slippery roads and sidewalks. Meanwhile, severe thunderstorms in the Southeast can produce flash flooding, damaging winds and even a tornado.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Wednesday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



TUESDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)
High: 90 at McAllen, TX
Low: -43 at Ingomar, MT
Precip: 3.17" at Austin, TX

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)
High: 115 at Warburton, Australia
Low: -64 at Delyankir, Russia
Precip: 4.83" at Pandang Island, Indonesia

TODAY IN HISTORY

On Feb. 12, 1899, an Atlantic coast blizzard pulled extremely cold air southward, causing a low of 8 below zero in Dallas. Savannah, Ga., received 2 inches of snow.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: Is glaze a form of precipitation?
A: No; it is the result of rain falling on a sub-freezing surface

NATIONAL CITIES WEDNESDAY

	High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality
● Aberdeen, SD	3/-21/s	53	● Evansville, IN	41/27/r	25	● Levittown, PA	36/34/sf	51	● Rochester, NY	31/27/c	44
● Abilene, TX	62/22/s	21	● Fall River, MA	38/32/sf	38	● Lincoln, IL	31/13/sn	33	● Rockford, IL	28/9/sn	30
● Accomac, VA	42/39/r	24	● Farmington, NM	41/14/c	35	● Louisville, KY	46/31/r	34	● Ruidoso, NM	40/22/pc	46
● Adrian, MI	28/21/sn	36	● Fayetteville, NC	45/43/r	31	● Lubbock, TX	58/16/pc	30	● Salem, OR	47/28/s	40
● Akron, OH	38/31/i	48	● Fond du Lac, WI	21/8/sn	36	● Manitowoc, WI	23/10/sn	29	● Salina, KS	17/-5/sn	40
● Alamogordo, NM	57/29/pc	33	● Fort Myers, FL	86/69/s	26	● Mansfield, OH	37/28/sn	41	● Salinas, CA	58/52/c	35
● Alexandria, VA	38/34/sn	50	● Fort Smith, AR	45/22/r	23	● Marshall, NC	45/42/r	27	● Salisbury, MD	41/38/sn	26
● Alliance, OH	39/32/sn	45	● Framingham, MA	34/30/pc	34	● Marshfield, WI	13/-4/sn	27	● San Angelo, TX	73/27/pc	22
● Amarillo, TX	30/8/sn	42	● Freeport, IL	22/7/sn	38	● Massillon, OH	40/32/sn	50	● Sarasota, FL	83/69/s	31
● Ames, IA	16/-7/sn	32	● Fremont, OH	32/26/sn	39	● McLean, VA	36/33/sn	51	● Savannah, GA	80/63/r	33
● Anderson, SC	44/42/r	28	● Fort Collins, CO	13/-9/sn	48	● Melbourne, FL	84/68/s	29	● Sheboygan, WI	24/11/sn	28
● Appleton, WI	19/8/sn	32	● Gadsden, AL	60/47/r	31	● Memphis, TN	54/32/r	24	● Shelby, NC	39/37/r	50
● Asheville, NC	41/38/r	34	● Gainesville, FL	84/65/s	35	● Middletown, NY	30/28/sn	43	● Sherman, TX	47/20/r	26
● Ashland, OH	39/27/r	42	● Galesburg, IL	28/5/sn	31	● Milford, MA	34/30/pc	35	● Shreveport, LA	65/37/r	16
● Athens, GA	47/44/sh	25	● Gastonia, NC	41/38/r	50	● Milwaukee, WI	28/13/sn	74	● Silver City, NM	49/27/pc	36
● Augusta, GA	61/54/r	33	● Glen Rose, TX	62/22/r	23	● Monroe, MI	30/22/sn	38	● Sioux Falls, SD	13/-16/sn	24
● Austin, TX	79/37/pc	18	● Gonzales, LA	81/55/sh	18	● Monroe, LA	65/40/r	17	● Somerset, PA	32/29/i	38
● Bartlesville, OK	31/9/sn	33	● Great Falls, MT	12/4/c	52	● Montgomery, AL	76/57/t	20	● Somerville, NJ	36/33/sf	45
● Battle Creek, MI	28/21/sn	36	● Green Bay, WI	20/9/sn	27	● Muncie, IN	35/27/i	36	● South Bend, IN	28/24/sn	37
● Bedford, IN	39/26/sn	41	● Greenville, SC	42/39/r	27	● Murfreesboro, TN	61/37/r	46	● Spartanburg, SC	41/39/r	44
● Binghamton, NY	31/26/sn	39	● Hackensack, NJ	36/33/sf	59	● Naples, FL	84/70/s	26	● Springfield, IL	32/12/sn	33
● Bluffton, SC	71/61/c	34	● Hagerstown, MD	34/33/i	40	● Nashville, TN	60/36/r	42	● Springfield, MO	34/12/sn	28
● Bremerton, WA	41/25/s	46	● Hattiesburg, MS	80/51/t	28	● Neptune, NJ	39/37/sf	50	● St. Augustine, FL	80/66/s	38
● Brockton, MA	36/31/pc	36	● Henderson, KY	39/25/r	33	● New Bedford, MA	38/32/sf	32	● St. Cloud, MN	8/-17/pc	28
● Brownwood, TX	69/23/pc	22	● Hendersonville, NC	40/37/r	47	● New Bern, NC	52/48/r	25	● St. George, UT	49/29/pc	45
● Burlington, IA	26/4/sn	31	● Herkimer, NY	27/23/pc	38	● New Philadelphia, OH	42/35/i	43	● Staunton, VA	34/31/sn	31
● Burlington, NC	38/36/r	29	● Hillsdale, MI	27/19/sn	33	● Newark, OH	40/32/i	44	● Stevens Point, WI	16/1/sn	28
● Burlington, VT	20/12/pc	36	● Holland, MI	25/24/sn	29	● Newton, NJ	33/30/sn	47	● Stockton, CA	58/49/c	31
● Cambridge, OH	42/38/i	39	● Hornell, NY	34/30/sn	36	● New York, NY	36/33/sf	63	● Stroudsburg, PA	33/29/sn	48
● Camdenton, MO	32/10/sn	35	● Houma, LA	82/59/sh	19	● Norwich, CT	37/32/sf	34	● Stuart, FL	85/69/s	38
● Canandaigua, NY	31/27/pc	44	● Howell, MI	26/19/sn	33	● Ocala, FL	86/66/s	36	● Sturgis, MI	27/20/sn	38
● Canton, OH	39/32/sn	51	● Hutchinson, KS	18/-2/sn	40	● Oklahoma City, OK	32/11/sn	29	● Tallahassee, FL	79/68/pc	22
● Carlsbad, NM	61/33/pc	49	● Hyannis, MA	39/32/sf	31	● Opelousas, LA	77/48/t	18	● Thibodaux, LA	82/57/sh	18
● Chambersburg, PA	34/32/i	48	● Indianapolis, IN	37/24/r	37	● Oshkosh, WI	19/8/sn	34	● Topeka, KS	21/-1/sn	37
● Cherry Hill, NJ	37/35/sf	50	● Iowa City, IA	22/1/sn	27	● Palm Beach, FL	82/74/s	32	● Tuscaloosa, AL	69/47/r	40
● Cincinnati, OH	42/29/i	43	● Ithaca, NY	32/29/sn	38	● Palm Springs, CA	62/54/c	109	● Utica, NY	27/22/pc	37
● Clarksville, TN	54/31/r	25	● Jackson, MS	74/43/r	20	● Panama City, FL	78/69/pc	20	● Ventura, CA	57/53/r	51
● Coldwater, MI	27/19/sn	35	● Jackson, TN	55/32/r	20	● Pekin, IL	30/9/sn	45	● Victorville, CA	51/45/c	50
● Columbus, OH	41/32/i	39	● Jacksonville, FL	86/65/s	38	● Pensacola, FL	77/62/pc	20	● Vineland, NJ	39/36/sn	36
● Corning, NY	35/32/sn	42	● Jacksonville, NC	53/50/c	29	● Peoria, IL	30/9/sn	36	● Visalia, CA	58/49/c	40
● Corpus Christi, TX	88/50/pc	40	● Kent, OH	40/30/r	49	● Petersburg, VA	40/36/r	34	● Washington, DC	38/36/sn	39
● Daytona Beach, FL	84/67/s	35	● Kewanee, IL	28/7/sn	32	● Phoenix, AZ	64/51/c	91	● Watertown, SD	8/-16/pc	30
● Deming, NM	57/31/pc	33	● Keyser, WV	36/33/c	41	● Port Huron, MI	29/24/sn	33	● Wausau, WI	16/0/sn	26
● DeRidder, LA	74/45/r	17	● Kinston, NC	47/45/r	26	● Portsmouth, NH	29/26/pc	41	● Waynesboro, PA	34/31/i	43
● Des Moines, IA	17/-6/sn	31	● Knoxville, TN	52/49/r	31	● Poughkeepsie, NY	35/31/pc	40	● White Plains, NY	30/31/sf	51
● Detroit, MI	29/23/sn	38	● Lafayette, IN	30/19/sn	37	● Providence, RI	36/31/sf	37	● Wichita Falls, TX	38/17/r	36
● Devils Lake, ND	-6/-24/pc	37	● Lafayette, LA	79/51/t	18	● Pueblo, CO	18/-4/sn	39	● Wilmington, DE	37/35/sf	38
● Dover, NH	28/20/pc	38	● Lakeland, FL	88/67/s	30	● Quincy, CA	35/31/c	51	● Wilmington, NC	59/55/c	24
● El Paso, TX	62/42/pc	32	● Lansing, MI	27/20/sn	28	● Redding, CA	57/38/pc	39	● Wisconsin Rapids, WI	15/-1/sn	30
● Elmira, NY	34/31/sn	41	● Las Cruces, NM	56/33/pc	29	● Reno, NV	45/29/pc	41	● Wooster, OH	38/30/i	42
● Erie, PA	37/32/sn	36	● Lebanon, PA	34/31/sn	43	● Ravenna, OH	40/30/r	46	● Worcester, MA	30/26/pc	38
● Eugene, OR	43/27/s	40	● Leesburg, FL	86/67/s	35	● Richmond, IN	37/27/r	47	● York, PA	35/32/sn	38

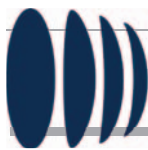
Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Wednesday High/low/W	Thursday High/low/W		Wednesday High/low/W	Thursday High/low/W		Wednesday High/low/W	Thursday High/low/W		Wednesday High/low/W	Thursday High/low/W
Acapulco	88/71/s	88/71/s	Cape Town	82/63/s	75/60/pc	La Paz	55/42/r	56/40/r	San Jose	84/66/sh	84/68/pc
Addis Ababa	78/53/pc	79/52/c	Caracas	89/73/pc	88/74/s	Lagos	91/78/t	92/78/s	San Salvador	87/64/pc	87/64/pc
Algiers	70/45/pc	60/46/sh	Casablanca	69/45/pc	69/39/s	● Lima	81/72/r	83/71/pc	Santiago	88/55/s	89/54/s
Amman	53/41/sh	50/38/pc	Colombo	92/76/pc	90/76/pc	Lisbon	61/49/c	61/48/pc	Sao Paulo	92/74/pc	90/72/t
Amsterdam	41/32/c	39/31/c	Copenhagen	35/31/s	35/28/pc	● London	44/36/c	43/33/c	Sarajevo	49/39/r	54/40/c
Ankara	39/26/sn	43/20/pc	Damascus	56/39/sh	54/29/pc	Madrid	58/32/pc	59/35/pc	Shanghai	52/34/c	50/37/s
Asuncion	101/76/s	98/76/t	● Dublin	43/40/r	42/39/r	Manila	91/76/pc	90/76/t	Singapore	90/77/pc	90/77/c
Athens	51/39/pc	53/49/c	Geneva	51/42/sh	50/35/r	Mexico City	77/47/s	77/51/s	● Stockholm	30/25/c	32/21/pc
Auckland	79/62/pc	78/63/pc	Guatemala City	79/59/sh	81/60/pc	Milan	50/45/r	54/40/c	● Sydney	80/73/sh	84/72/s
Baghdad	68/43/s	67/45/pc	Hanoi	71/64/c	70/62/c	Mombasa	90/77/sh	91/76/pc	● Taipei	74/57/sh	62/59/r
Bangkok	96/73/pc	98/74/s	● Harare	75/64/t	78/64/t	● Montevideo	75/61/pc	81/61/s	Tegucigalpa	84/59/pc	82/63/c
Beijing	45/17/pc	54/19/s	Havana	87/67/s	89/68/s	Montreal	12/8/s	32/8/sn	Tehran	50/38/pc	42/34/pc
● Beirut	59/51/sh	59/49/sh	Helsinki	33/27/c	30/18/s	● Moscow	28/19/c	26/19/c	● Tokyo	56/47/pc	56/39/s
Belgrade	42/33/c	50/34/pc	Hong Kong	69/61/r	69/60/pc	● Nairobi	80/64/c	77/60/t	● Toronto	24/22/sn	31/15/sn
● Berlin	39/32/s	34/28/sn	Jakarta	93/75/c	91/76/r	● New Delhi	78/53/pc	77/51/s	Tunis	68/48/pc	65/50/c
● Bogota	66/51/r	65/50/r	Jerusalem	49/40/sh	50/40/pc	Panama City	90/73/pc	91/73/r	Vancouver	37/22/s	36/26/s
Brussels	43/33/c	38/28/c	Johannesburg	75/57/t	77/58/t	● Paris	44/37/c	43/29/c	Vienna	33/30/sn	38/32/c
Bucharest	36/20/s	40/28/pc	Kabul	43/25/s	45/32/pc	Port-au-Prince	94/69/s	94/68/s	Warsaw	38/22/s	38/28/pc
Budapest	37/31/c	36/32/r	Khartoum	90/67/s	90/69/s	Rio de Janeiro	89/77/pc	90/77/s	Yerevan	39/21/s	40/28/pc
● Buenos Aires	78/70/pc	83/70/s	Kyiv	27/17/pc	33/22/pc	Riyadh	81/61/pc	75/57/sh	● Zagreb	39/32/r	50/36/c
Cairo	63/49/pc	65/48/s	Kingston	88/76/pc	89/74/s	● Rome	58/49/sh	60/51/r	● Zurich	52/42/c	45/31/r

● Denotes possible travel delays Wednesday

Weather(W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.



ROMANIA

Keeping the peace

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis resigned Monday, a move aimed at preventing a political crisis amid an ongoing fight over the annulment of last year's presidential elections, Radio Free Europe reported.

Iohannis announced he would leave office Wednesday, saying he wanted "to spare Romania and its citizens from this crisis."

His decision came a day before lawmakers were set to discuss and vote on a third request to impeach Iohannis following the constitutional court's annulment of the presidential vote in November.

The November elections saw little-known, far-right candidate Călin Georgescu unexpectedly emerge as the top contender in the first round of voting – a result that shocked the country because he was initially polling in single digits before the elections, according to the Guardian.

His victory was marred by allegations of Russian interference and electoral violations after it appeared that Georgescu benefited from an on-line sleeper network that artificially boosted his social media reach before the November vote. Russia has denied any involvement.

In December, the court annulled the results and requested Iohannis stay in office even after his term was set to end in mid-December, Euro-news noted.

The annulment sparked large protests in Romania, with demonstrators expressing support for Georgescu.

In his resignation, the outgoing leader called the attempt to impeach him "useless," warning that such a move would spark political chaos and hinder negotiations on rescheduling presidential elections.

Although the new election date has not been set, Romania's ruling coalition has proposed holding the presidential vote on May 4, with a possible run-off on May 18.



COLOMBIA

Off the rails

Colombian President Gustavo Petro called for the resignation of his ministers and senior officials following a week of political turmoil that further deepened divisions within his leftist government, the Financial Times reported.

On Sunday, Petro announced on social media that "there will be some changes in the cabinet to achieve greater compliance with the program mandated by the people."

He did not specify the extent of the reshuffle.

His call for resignations came after a tense televised cabinet meeting last Tuesday, where Petro publicly criticized members of his administration for failing to deliver on key projects.

The six-hour meeting led last week to the resignations of Culture Minister Juan David Correa and Jorge Rojas, head of the presidential administrative department. Environment Minister Susana Muhamad – a longtime ally – also resigned Sunday before Petro's posts.

Muhamad cited disagreements over the presence of controversial figures in the government.

The leftist president has come under scrutiny in recent days over his decision to appoint Armando Benedetti and Laura Sarabia into senior positions, even though both are linked to corruption and wire-tapping scandals.

Petro has defended his decision to appoint Benedetti as his chief of staff, despite the latter being under investigation for illegal campaign financing and facing accusations of domestic abuse, Agence France-Presse wrote.

He also justified the promotion of Sarabia to foreign minister. Sarabia, a former aide, was involved in a case of alleged illegal wiretapping.

Petro dismissed critics, arguing that the internal conflicts stemmed from ministers positioning themselves ahead of next year's elections.

The political crisis threatens to derail Petro's sweeping leftist agenda, which includes overhauling Colombia's pension, health care and education systems while transitioning the economy away from fossil fuels.

Petro has also attempted to pursue a policy of "total peace" to end the country's decadeslong conflict with armed groups. However, his peace efforts derailed in recent weeks amid escalating violence in the northeast.

DISCOVERIES

Alive and kicking

Beneath its cold, dormant exterior, the moon is much more active than previously thought.

Studies have shown that the moon's lunar maria – those dark and flat areas filled with solidified lava – underwent significant compression in processes that ended billions of years ago.

These contractions created large, arching ridges on the near side of the moon between 2.5 billion and 3 billion years ago, and scientists had believed the surface was dormant ever since.

However, a new study published in the Planetary Science Journal found that the ridges of the moon's far side are much younger than those on the near side, suggesting that the moon's surface has been active within the last 200 million years and might still be active today. Through advanced mapping and modeling techniques, the researchers found 266 ridges on the moon's far side that had previously gone unnoticed.

The moon's ridges generally appeared in groups of 10 to 40 in certain volcanic regions estimated to be as old as 3.6 billion years. These areas are where the moon's surface tends to be weak, the researchers explained in a statement.

To estimate how old the ridges are, the team used a technique called crater counting.

"Essentially, the more craters a surface has, the older it is," said assistant researcher Jaclyn Clark.

By counting the craters around the ridges and observing that some of the ridges cut through existing craters, the researchers concluded that the moon was tectonically active in the past 160 million years – that's relatively recent considering the moon is about 4.5 billion years old.

This discovery could impact the logistics of future moon missions.

Rebels threaten to advance on Congo's capital Bukavu

Fighting flares between M23 and government

REUTERS

The Rwandan-backed M23 armed group in Democratic Republic of Congo threatened on Tuesday to advance on the provincial capital of Bukavu, citing a "dangerously deteriorating" situation, as Congo rejected a call for direct talks with the rebels.

The capture of Bukavu would represent an unprecedented expansion of territory under the M23's control and deal a further blow to Kinshasa's authority in eastern Congo in the wake of the fall of Goma, the region's largest city, at the end of January.

Further fighting in the South Kivu province would also add to fears of a broader war due to the presence of Burundian troops, backing up Congo, and reports of more Rwandan troops gathering at the border to support the M23.

The M23 had paused their march toward Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, after declaring a unilateral ceasefire that was followed by calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire from regional leaders.

The regional leaders also called for direct talks between President Felix Tshisekedi's government and the M23 rebels.

Tshisekedi's ruling UDPS party on Tuesday said Congo would not engage directly with the M23, reiterating any negotiation with the rebels must be done alongside other armed groups within a peace process led by the East African regional bloc.

The M23 have not made any significant progress since seizing the mining town of Nyabibwe last week, but heavy shelling was reported along the front line on Tuesday morning, rebel, military and local sources told Reuters.

"The situation in Bukavu is deteriorating dangerously. Our compatriots are continually being killed and pilaged," Lawrence Kanyuka, a spokes-



Students head home from classes in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Tuesday after M23 rebels announced the reopening of schools and universities. ARLETTE BASHIZI/REUTERS

person for a rebel alliance that includes M23, said in a post on X.

Bukavu and the strategic town of Kavumu, about 22 miles to the north, where the airport is located, are still under the control of the Congolese army.

"If these crimes persist, we will take our responsibilities to eradicate the threat at its source and protect our people," Kanyuka said.

The security situation in South Kivu has been further complicated by cases of runaway Congolese soldiers looting villages and attacking civilians.

On Tuesday, a military court in Bukavu heard that 272 detained soldiers and government-allied militia members would be brought before the court for identification and to respond to various charges including looting and murder.

A Congo army spokesperson said a military commander in the region had led an operation that saw the arrest of undisputed soldiers.

The rebels' stop-start advance and the possibility of a battle for Bukavu have been stoking fears of a broader conflict with armies from regional countries pitted against each other, as seen in previous wars between 1996 and

2003.

The Congolese army, supported by allied militia groups and the Burundian army, faces likely opposition from the rebels and Rwandan troops, many more of whom have been gathering at Rwanda's border with South Kivu, witnesses, military and diplomatic sources have said.

Rwanda has been accused by Congo, the United Nations and several Western countries of supporting the rebels with thousands of its own troops and weapons. Rwanda insists it has taken mostly defensive positions to protect its borders and citizens.

The resurgence of the conflict in eastern Congo has killed thousands since early 2022 and displaced over one million.

The U.N. office for humanitarian affairs said on Tuesday that an uneasy calm had returned to Goma with a gradual return to activities.

It said thousands of civilians were leaving displacement sites around Goma to head elsewhere, after the rebels said on Sunday the sites should be vacated within 72 hours. The rebels later clarified that such moves should be voluntary.

South Korea election official rejects Yoon's fraud claims

Supporters have adopted 'Stop the Steal' slogan

Ju-min Park

REUTERS

SEOUL, South Korea – The secretary general of South Korea's National Election Commission defended the integrity of the country's elections on Tuesday amid claims by impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol that votes may have been compromised.

Kim Yong-bin made his remarks while testifying at a hearing in Yoon's impeachment trial over the president's decision to impose a short-lived martial law on Dec. 3.

Yoon deployed troops to the National Election Commission, or NEC, during the martial law and later said the decree was necessary in part because the NEC had been unwilling to address concerns over election hacking.

"It is regrettable that the controversy over election fraud continues," Kim said, adding that the independent commission had taken steps to improve cybersecurity after vulnerabilities were found, including implementing multi-factor authentication.

Baek Jong-wook, a former official from the National Intelligence Service, testified that the spy agency had discovered vulnerabilities on NEC servers during an investigation in 2023, but said their probe was limited to computer security and had no findings on election fraud.

The Constitutional Court will decide whether to reinstate Yoon, or remove him permanently from office after the opposition-controlled parliament impeached him on Dec. 14.

Yoon separately faces criminal charges for insurrection, and is in jail.

Backers of Yoon have adopted "Stop the Steal" slogans popularized by U.S. President Donald Trump's supporters and said they hoped Trump would help their embattled leader.

Source: OpenAI hasn't received bid

CEO Altman dismisses Musk's offer as tactic

Krystal Hu and Manuel Ausloos
REUTERS

NEW YORK – OpenAI's board of directors has not yet received a formal bid from a consortium led by Elon Musk, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Tuesday, adding to the confusion over an unsolicited attempt to take control of the world's most prominent AI company.

A day after Musk publicized a bid to offer \$97.4 billion to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI, the two sides were still at odds over what exactly happened to the formal bid.

Musk's lawyer, Marc Toberoff, told Reuters that he sent the offer by email on Monday to OpenAI's outside counsel at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz.

A source close to OpenAI's board said the board and its outside law firms had not received any formal bid from the Musk consortium as of Tuesday afternoon.

The nonprofit that controls the ChatGPT maker is not for sale, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman told Reuters on Tuesday when asked about Musk's offer to buy it. The offer by the Musk-led con-



Altman

sortium came amid the billionaire's fight to block the artificial intelligence startup from transitioning to a for-profit firm.

"I have nothing to say. I mean, it's ridiculous," Altman said on the sidelines of an AI summit in Paris when asked about the offer.

"The company is not for sale. It's another one of his tactics to try to mess with us," Altman said, referring to Musk.

In an internal message to OpenAI employees on Monday, Altman said the board, though it had not officially reviewed the offer, planned to reject it based on the interest of OpenAI's mission.

Musk co-founded OpenAI with Altman in 2015 as a nonprofit, but left before the company took off due to a disagreement over the company's direction and funding sources with Altman and other co-founders. In 2023, he launched the competing AI startup, xAI.

Musk, the CEO of Tesla and owner of technology company X, is a close ally of President Donald Trump. He leads the Department of Government Efficiency, a new arm of the White House tasked

with radically shrinking the federal bureaucracy.

OpenAI, in the process of raising \$40 billion, is also seeking to transition into a for-profit from a nonprofit entity, which it says is required to secure the capital needed for developing the best AI models. The complicated transition involves putting a price tag on OpenAI's nonprofit control of the for-profit arm.

Delaware Attorney General Kathy Jennings has said she is reviewing OpenAI's proposed changes to ensure the company is "adhering to its specific charitable purposes for the benefit of the public beneficiaries, as opposed to the commercial or private interests of OpenAI's directors or partners."

Legal experts said Musk's bid complicates the fair value held by OpenAI, particularly regarding charitable assets in its complicated corporate conversion, meaning the price it needs to pay in exchange for the nonprofit to give up control.

"It does help set a price point for the thinking about the valuation of the nonprofit assets," Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen, a consumer rights watchdog, told Reuters. "If it were to occur as proposed, the regulators have a duty to ensure that if there's a selloff of assets to a for-profit entity, that fair market value is obtained."

FINANCIAL MARKETS

Stocks end mixed as Coca-Cola, Apple gain

Investors parse latest comments by Powell

Noel Randewich and Sukriti Gupta
REUTERS

Wall Street's main indexes ended mixed on Tuesday as gains in Coca-Cola and Apple offset losses in Tesla, while investors parsed Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's latest comments.

The U.S. central bank is no rush to cut its short-term interest rate again given the economy is "strong overall," with low unemployment and inflation still above the Fed's 2% target, Powell said in opening remarks at a Senate Banking Committee hearing.

Investors were also on the lookout for any new tariff comments from President Donald Trump, a day after he substantially raised levies on imports of steel and aluminum and said there would be announcements over the next two days about reciprocal tariffs on all countries that impose duties on U.S. goods.

"Valuations are elevated, company guidance is measured, inflation is persistent, government policy is uncertain, tariff talk is ongoing, and global tensions are elevated. So in aggregate, the level of uncertainty is high, which implies increased volatility," said Terry Sandven, chief equity strategist at U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

Coca-Cola advanced 4.7% after the beverage maker beat fourth-quarter revenue estimates, helped by higher prices and resilient demand for its sodas and juices.

Tesla tumbled 6.3% a day after Reuters and others reported a consortium led by CEO Elon Musk offered \$97 billion to buy the nonprofit that controls artificial intelligence startup OpenAI.

Powell's Senate testimony marked the first of two days of hearings on Capitol Hill. He is set to speak to the House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday.

Traders expect at least one 25-basis-point rate cut from the Fed this year, and a 44% chance of another reduction of the same magnitude, according to LSEG data.

January consumer price index data is scheduled to be released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern on Wednesday, before Powell's appearance.

Apple climbed 2.2% after The Information reported the iPhone maker was partnering with Alibaba to develop and roll out artificial intelligence features for iPhone users in China.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.03% to end the session at 6,068.50 points.

The Nasdaq declined 0.36% to 19,643.86 points, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.28% to 44,593.65 points.

Volume on U.S. exchanges was relatively heavy, with 15.4 billion shares traded, compared with an average of 14.9 billion shares over the previous 20 sessions.

Of the 11 S&P 500 sector indexes, eight rose, led by consumer staples, up 0.91%, followed by a 0.76% gain in energy. Consumer discretionary fell 1.2%.

Phillips 66 rose 4.7% after activist Elliott Investment Management said it had built a stake of more than \$2.5 billion in the oil refiner.

DuPont de Nemours jumped almost 7% after the industrial materials maker raised its 2025 profit forecast on strong demand for electronics.

Water technology firm Ecolab rallied 6.2% after the company forecast higher-than-expected adjusted profit for 2025.

Fidelity National Information Services sank over 11% after the banking and payments processing conglomerate forecast first-quarter profit below estimates.

Advancing issues outnumbered falling ones within the S&P 500 by a 1.1-to-1 ratio. Across the U.S. stock market, declining stocks outnumbered rising ones by a 1.3-to-1 ratio.

"Valuations are elevated, company guidance is measured, inflation is persistent, government policy is uncertain, tariff talk is ongoing, and global tensions are elevated."

Terry Sandven
Chief equity strategist at
U.S. Bank Wealth Management

Starbucks sued by Missouri over DEI

Coffee chain says state's accusations inaccurate

Jonathan Stempel
REUTERS

NEW YORK – Starbucks was sued on Tuesday by the state of Missouri, which accused the coffee chain of using a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as a pretext to systematically discriminate based on race, gender and sexual orientation.

In a complaint filed in St. Louis federal court, Missouri accused Starbucks of tying executive pay to the company's achieving racial and gender-based hiring quotas.

It also accused Starbucks of singling out preferred groups for additional training and job advancement prospects, and employing a quota system to ensure its own board of directors had a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

"All of this is unlawful," and violates federal and state civil rights laws, according to the complaint from Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey.

Bailey, a Republican, also contended that Missouri consumers pay higher prices and wait longer for services at Starbucks than if the Seattle-based chain employed the most qualified workers.

"We disagree with the attorney general and these allegations are inaccurate," Starbucks said. "We are deeply committed to creating opportunity for every single one of our partners (employees). Our programs and benefits are open to everyone and lawful."

President Donald Trump, also a Republican, has tried to shut down poli-



Starbucks employs about 211,000 people in the U.S. and 361,000 people worldwide. RAQUEL CUNHA/REUTERS FILE

cies promoting diversity, equity and inclusion inside and outside the federal government, and some companies have taken action.

For example, the Wall Street bank Goldman Sachs on Tuesday canceled a policy to take companies public only if they had two diverse board members, generally defined as people from underrepresented demographics.

Last week, meanwhile, Google scrapped diversity-based hiring targets, while Amazon.com removed a reference to inclusion and diversity from its annual report.

Tuesday's lawsuit challenged Starbucks policies adopted since 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a Minneapolis police officer triggered unrest nationwide and led many companies to rethink employment practices.

Missouri said Starbucks' alleged endorsement of quotas "should come as no surprise," citing new Chief Executive Brian Niccol's support of environmental, social and governance goals while leading the Chipotle burrito chain.

Starbucks employs about 211,000 people in the U.S. and 361,000 people worldwide.

In August 2023, a federal judge in Spokane, Washington, dismissed a shareholder lawsuit challenging Starbucks' diversity policies, saying the case addressed public policy questions best decided by lawmakers and companies, not courts.

Missouri's lawsuit seeks to force Starbucks to end alleged discrimination based on race, gender and national origin; rehire and rescind discipline against employees affected by discrimination; and pay unspecified damages.

Massachusetts vehicle data access measure survives federal court challenge

Nate Raymond and David Shepardson
REUTERS

BOSTON – A federal judge on Tuesday rejected a challenge by a group representing automakers to a Massachusetts voter-approved measure that expanded access to vehicle data and allowed independent shops to repair increasingly sophisticated automotive technology.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Denise Casper in Boston marked a defeat for the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a trade association representing General Motors, Volkswagen, Stellantis and other automakers that challenged the law.

The group sued after voters in November 2020 approved a ballot measure revising the state's 2013 "Right to Repair" law to require automakers to provide expanded access to mechanical and electronic repair data.

The Washington-based alliance in a statement said it was evaluating its options to appeal the ruling, saying it continued to believe the Massachusetts Data Access Law was at odds with the



Unprecedented advancements in modern vehicles have prompted many automakers to limit information over safety and privacy concerns. NICK CAREY/REUTERS FILE

U.S. Constitution.

"Today's decision will introduce potential security risks to our customers and their vehicles," the group said.

Unprecedented advancements in modern vehicles and crash-avoidance systems have prompted many automakers to limit information and warranties to only parts and repairs from authorized dealers to ensure safety and privacy.

The Alliance for Automotive Innova-

tion argued the measure impermissibly forces automakers to degrade cybersecurity controls related to safety- and emissions-critical vehicle functions.

The group claimed the measure unconstitutionally conflicted with federal laws governing those functions, the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Clean Air Act.

The office of Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell, a Democrat, countered that the measure allowed manufacturers to establish a standardized system run by a third-party to authorize access to diagnostic systems by independent repair shops.

The lawsuit had gone to trial before a different judge in 2021. Following a four-year wait for a decision from U.S. District Judge Douglas Woolock, the case was reassigned in January to Casper, who moved to quickly resolve it.

Casper, an appointee of Democratic former President Barack Obama, on Tuesday dismissed the trade group's claims. She temporarily sealed her decision so the parties could discuss whether any aspects of it should be redacted.

Tariffs lift US metals prices

Industry will struggle to meet new demand

Eric Onstad
REUTERS

LONDON – Prices of industrial metals in the U.S. extended gains on Tuesday, reflecting the impact of President Donald Trump’s 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum as industry will struggle to source enough domestic material.

While the stated goal of the new tariffs is to aid struggling U.S. metal producers, it will take time to reopen closed plants and build new ones to compensate for large amounts of imports.

In the meantime, traders are marking up U.S. metals prices to reflect the price automakers and other industries will have to pay for foreign metal when the measures take effect on March 12.

The biggest impact will be on aluminum, used in transport, construction and packaging, with net imports accounting for around 82% of U.S. requirements, according to Morgan Stanley.

The U.S. aluminum premium over the global benchmark on the London Metal Exchange has shot up by a quarter since Friday to 35 cents per pound and has surged by 60% since Trump was elected.

“Aluminum capacities would have to be massively expanded in a short period of time to replace even a portion of the imports with domestic production,” said analyst Volkmar Baur at Commerzbank.

The United Steelworkers, a union representing U.S. and Canadian workers, said it welcomes efforts “to contain the global overcapacity that has for too long enabled bad actors like China to flood the global market,” but encouraged Trump to work with Canada.

“We must distinguish between trusted trade partners, like Canada, and those who are seeking to undercut our



An employee works Tuesday at a factory in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, that manufactures parts with aluminum and steel and exports its products to the United States. Traders are marking up U.S. metals prices. JOSE LUIS GONZALEZ/REUTERS

industries as they work to dominate the global market,” said David McCall, the USW’s CEO.

The American Primary Aluminum Association praised Trump for the tariffs.

“Today is a great day for the U.S. aluminum industry,” said Mark Duffy, president of the association.

But U.S. aluminum smelters produced only 670,000 metric tons of the metal last year, down from 3.7 million in 2000, while U.S. demand was 4.3 million tons, U.S. Geological Survey data showed.

About 470,000 tons of U.S. production has been curtailed, and could in theory restart, said Amy Gower at Morgan Stanley.

“But this would take at least 6-12 months in our view, depending on how much preparatory work has been done.”

Building new smelters would likely take even longer, she added.

That was underscored by the Washington-based Aluminum Association industry trade group, which said it appreciated Trump’s trade actions but would like to see more U.S. production.

“There is not enough smelting capacity in the United States to supply the growing aluminum industry with the input materials it needs,” said Charles Johnson, the association’s CEO.

New York-based PerennialAL, a privately held distributor of aluminum slab, wire rod, billet and other products used to make wheels, window frames and other products, said it planned to pass along any price increases to its customers.

“I don’t think anyone in the U.S. is more in favor of increasing domestic aluminum production than me, but it has to be done thoughtfully over several years,” said Brian Hesse, PerennialAL’s CEO. “You can’t cut your nose off to spite your face.”

The U.S. imports about a quarter of its steel, and domestic prices for U.S. hot rolled coil steel, a semi-processed product, have jumped by nearly 40% since last Thursday.

“Supply growth would not offset these volumes in most products, resulting in materially higher U.S. prices, if implemented,” said analyst Andrew Jones at UBS.

“The larger impact could be the negative impact on growth from an escalating trade war.”

In Canada, aluminum producers said they were ready to compete but warned the pricing ramifications could harm U.S. consumers, as a similar tariff did in Trump’s first term.

“Remembering how disruptive a 10% tariff was for the U.S. (aluminum) industry, I can only begin to imagine how destructive a 25% tariff will be for the U.S. economy,” said Jean Simard, CEO of the Aluminum Association of Canada.

Ultimatums win concessions – some real, but others less so

REUTERS

President Donald Trump has thrust himself onto the world stage, issuing ultimatums to friend and foe alike and insisting they jump to the tune of American interests or else.

His threats – from big trade tariffs right through to outright resource grabs – are part of a transactional approach to diplomacy often accompanied by explicit demands.

Many of his targets have been quick to offer concessions. Some have been real, notably pledges to buy more American goods or invest in U.S. activities. In other cases they have been a repackaging of policy that was already going ahead, or moves with more symbol than substance.

The following picks through some of the detail of those responses since Trump’s Jan. 20 inauguration.

American borders

The 10,000 National Guard troops which Mexico has sent to the border with the United States to work on migration controls and stopping the flow of drugs are clearly new additions to its security presence on the border. That move was enough to prompt Trump to suspend his threat of steep trade tariffs last week. Most experts doubt whether the reinforcements will have a real impact, however, and they are reserving judgment for now.

In the case of Canada – which also won a reprieve on tariffs – it had already announced in December a \$909 million investment on border security, targeting fentanyl, irregular migration and organized crime. Announcing the pause in U.S. tariffs on Feb. 3, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau referred to “a new intelligence directive” on crime and fentanyl-trafficking backed by \$140 million. He also committed to appointing a “fentanyl czar” – a new post whose occupant has yet to be named.

Japan

Japan’s hefty trade surplus with the United States has long irked Trump, who was quick to raise it with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on his first White House visit last week.

While it is unclear whether Japan is in the firing line for tariffs, Ishiba signaled a readiness to favor U.S. interests by pledging to raise Japanese invest-



U.S. President Donald Trump was quick to raise the issue of Japan’s trade surplus with the U.S. with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during their White House meeting last week. KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS FILE

ment in America to \$1 trillion and purchase U.S. gas, ethanol and ammonia.

The investments are likely to include a \$100 million pledge that SoftBank Group CEO Masayoshi Son made in a meeting with Trump in December. Ishiba also mentioned new factory plans in the United States by Toyota Motor Corp. and Isuzu Motors.

Trump also announced what he called progress on Nippon Steel’s blocked \$14.9 billion attempt to take over U.S. Steel. He said any bid must take the form of an investment rather than an outright purchase. It is still unclear how Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel plan to revise their proposed deal.

India

Previously labeled by Trump a “very big abuser” on trade, India has long been keen to emphasize its readiness to open its economy – a message Prime Minister Narendra Modi will underline during his two-day visit to the United States this week.

“We don’t want to give anybody any signal that we would like to be protectionist,” Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey told Reuters. “Our stance is that we don’t want to increase protection.”

India is considering tariff cuts in at least a dozen sectors, from electronics to medical and surgical equipment, and

chemicals, to boost U.S. exports in line with New Delhi’s domestic production plans, government officials said.

Europe security

Trump started haranguing European NATO allies on the need to step up their defense spending in his first term – with some effect.

NATO’s Secretary-General Mark Rutte said last week a new military spending pledge to be decided this year would be “considerably” higher than the target of 2% of national output which many NATO allies were failing to meet a decade ago. The Ukraine war has clearly also focused minds in Europe on security needs. But it remains to be decided how governments with their stretched budgets will pay for the surge in defense spending.

Even more uncertain is what will come of Trump’s assertion that the United States must get a share of revenues from the future extraction of Ukraine’s deposits of rare earths and other critical minerals in return for supporting the war effort. Ukraine floated the idea of opening its critical minerals to investment by allies last year and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Reuters interview last week he was ready to do a deal with Trump.

Penny

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Bad for consumers?

Advocates for the penny argue that the coin plays an important role in U.S. society. People toss them as loose change into a jar for charity or use them to pay for single items at convenience and grocery stores.

“The key issue is that it is bad for consumers and the economy,” said Mark Weller, director of Americans for Common Cents, a lobbying group backed by businesses involved in the coin’s manufacture.

Weller said polling shows Americans do not like rounding, and grocers and corner stores, facing razor-thin margins, are likely to round up if the coin is discontinued.

In addition to fueling inflation, discontinuing the penny would “disproportionately hurt lower-income groups, people who are unbanked and underbanked and are relying on a cash economy,” Weller added. “Cash is cheapest for consumers.”

But a 2007 Wake Forest University study of a multi-state convenience store chain offered evidence that eliminating the penny would not create a rounding tax, and would not contribute to rising prices.

“Losing the penny was just a wash for the consumer,” said Robert Whaples, professor at Wake Forest who authored the study. “It’s as much rounding up as it is down.”

Sean Snaith, an economist and director of the Institute of Economic Competitiveness at the University of Central Florida, agrees that the penny is an historical relic.

“Gone are the days of penny candy or even buying a gum ball for a penny,” Snaith said.

“I think at some point in history canceling the penny would have been a bigger deal, but now people don’t even carry them in their pockets,” he said. “They’re largely not in circulation.”

Snaith said that the nickel, which costs more than 13 cents to make but is only worth five cents, is an even bigger loss leader.

“We’re losing more money on the nickel; people should worry about that,” he said.

Richie Figueroa, 55, of Staten Island, agrees pennies are more a nuisance and would welcome the move to get rid of them. “A lot of times I go into the store, I don’t even wait for change for pennies,” Figueroa said. “What purpose do they serve?”

Gabbard heads toward confirmation

Republicans line up behind intel nominee

Patricia Zengerle
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Tulsi Gabbard, a former U.S. representative with little intelligence experience, should be confirmed as the top U.S. spy by Wednesday morning, as Republicans line up behind a nominee once seen as among President Donald Trump’s most controversial picks.

The Senate voted 52-46, along party lines, on Monday on a procedural measure to limit debate on the nomination, clearing the way for the 100-member chamber to vote on Gabbard’s confirmation to a position overseeing the 18-agency intelligence community.

A vote to confirm Gabbard would be another victory for Trump’s push to secure quick Senate approval for his nominees. The Senate’s Republican majority leader, John Thune, planned to start voting on Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who also faced fierce opposition, immediately after the Gabbard confirmation vote.

With a snowstorm hitting the capital, the greatest uncertainty surrounding

what was once considered Gabbard’s at-risk nomination was whether bad weather might delay the vote.

Senate leaders announced Tuesday evening that it had been shifted to Wednesday morning from shortly after midnight.

Republicans, who have a 53-47 Senate majority, were confident. Vice President JD Vance, whose vote would be needed if they worried about a 50-50 tie, is out of the country.

Gabbard, a 43-year-old former Democrat, once faced bipartisan questions about her past statements seen as supporting U.S. adversaries. If confirmed, she would oversee an agency created by Congress in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaida attacks on the U.S. to coordinate the country’s sprawling intelligence apparatus.

“The selection of a DNI is a very big deal,” said Emily Harding, director of the Intelligence, National Security and Technology Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, noting the DNI’s broad access to classified material and role as the president’s main intelligence adviser.

Opponents had questioned the choice of Gabbard, an Army National Guard veteran who has never served on

an intelligence committee, after Trump announced the pick last year.

They expressed doubts about past statements seen as sympathetic toward Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and defense of the government of former Syria leader Bashar al-Assad, whom she visited in Syria in 2017 while he was under U.S. sanction.

At her hearing, Gabbard also faced pointed questioning from senators from both parties about her past defense of former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, who leaked thousands of highly classified documents and then sought asylum in Russia.

Republicans who expressed such concerns faced an intense political pressure campaign, from Trump and his billionaire ally Elon Musk, who threatened to support primary opponents of any Republican who obstructed nominees.

Sen. Todd Young, an Intelligence Committee member who did not immediately back Gabbard, issued a statement supporting her before the panel’s party-line 9-8 vote to recommend the nominee to the full Senate.

A former Marine Corps intelligence officer criticized by Musk before he en-

dorsed Gabbard, Young said Gabbard had reassured him that she would support intelligence professionals and provide unbiased information.

Gabbard’s supporters also praised her pledges to pare back the DNI’s office, at a time when Trump’s administration is slashing and seeking to close government agencies.

Past DNI nominees have been intelligence veterans confirmed with broad bipartisan support. Daniel Coats, a former ambassador and Republican senator who served on the Intelligence Committee, was confirmed by 85-12 in 2017, as Trump began his first term.

The last DNI, Avril Haines, who left the position when Trump was inaugurated on Jan. 20, had held a series of major national security positions, including deputy director of the CIA. She was confirmed by 84-10.

Harding said Gabbard will need to reassure allies that they can trust Washington as Trump pursues an aggressive foreign policy, and be cautious about making cuts amid myriad global challenges.

“The person that is going to be doing it needs to be someone that he (Trump) trusts and somebody that he’ll listen to,” Harding said.

USAID contractors join others suing Trump administration

Brendan Pierson
REUTERS

Organizations and companies that contract with USAID, including the American Bar Association and international development firm Chemonics, on Tuesday sued President Donald Trump’s administration over what they called its unlawful moves to dismantle the U.S. foreign aid agency.

In the lawsuit filed in federal court in Washington, the plaintiffs said Trump lacks the legal authority to shut down a federal agency established by Congress or to refuse to spend money that U.S. lawmakers allocated to it.

The lawsuit is the latest in a series of legal challenges to the administration’s actions toward the U.S. Agency for International Development. It names Trump, the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget, which has issued a series of memos halting federal spending, as defendants and seeks a court order reversing the cuts to the agency’s funding and operations.

“Neither the president nor his subordinates have authority to thwart duly

enacted statutes and substitute their own funding preferences for those Congress has expressed through legislation,” the lawsuit said.

“Defendants have dismantled the federal foreign-assistance system, reducing USAID to a husk of its former self: stripped of funding, devoid of employees, unable to perform basic tasks, and ultimately swallowed by the State Department,” it added.

The lawsuit said that funding has been cut off for existing contracts, including hundreds of millions of dollars for work that is already done.

Without funding, contractors – which perform much of USAID’s work around the world – “must lay off staff, cut ties with local actors, and essentially terminate their operations,” the lawsuit said. “There is a serious risk that they simply will not exist if defendants ever decide to un-pause their work.”

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The administration has argued in court that the president has “vast and generally unreviewable” power over foreign affairs and that the administration can put agency staff on leave for any reason.

It is the third lawsuit filed in Washington against the administration over its moves against USAID, following similar ones by a government employee union and association and by non-profit groups advocating AIDS research and global journalism development.

Hours after he was inaugurated on Jan. 20, the Republican president ordered all U.S. foreign aid to be paused to ensure it is aligned with his “America First” policy. The U.S. State Department issued worldwide stop-work directives after the executive order was issued, halting lifesaving aid programs around the world with limited exceptions for emergency food delivery. Most of USAID’s staff was put on leave last week, and employees stationed abroad have been recalled.

Numerous aid efforts have been halted as a result of the administration’s actions, according to the contractors’ lawsuit, including the contracted delivery of \$240 million worth of medicines and health supplies by Chemonics. Failing to deliver them could lead to up to 566,000 deaths, including 215,000 children, the suit said.

Democrat alleges Patel overseeing FBI firings

Sarah N. Lynch
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday alleged that President Donald Trump’s FBI director nominee, Kash Patel, has been secretly overseeing the ouster of the bureau’s leadership before being confirmed for the role.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said he learned about Patel’s alleged role in the firings from several whistleblowers, and he has asked Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz to investigate.

Durbin said that Patel was working with senior White House and Justice Department staffers to oversee the removals.

“This alleged misconduct is beyond the pale and must be investigated immediately,” Durbin wrote in a letter to the inspector general calling for an investigation urgently.

“It is unacceptable for a nominee with no current role in government, much less at the FBI, to personally direct unjustified and potentially illegal adverse employment actions against senior career FBI leadership and other dedicated, nonpartisan law enforcement officers.”

Patel spokesperson Erica Knight on social media called Durbin’s claims “second-hand gossip.”

“Kash Patel is a highly qualified national security expert who has been fully transparent with the American people throughout this process,” Knight said.

An FBI spokesperson declined to comment. Spokespeople for the White House and Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The panel is set to vote on Thursday on Patel, who told lawmakers under oath during his confirmation hearing that he was unaware of any efforts to fire or punish FBI employees who worked on cases associated with Trump. Patel may have perjured himself before the committee if the allegations are true, Durbin said.

Cuts

Continued from Page 1NN

thing.”

DOGE has operated in near-complete secrecy, providing no information on whom it employs, where it is operating or what actions it is taking inside government agencies. It posts few actual results from its work, providing only dollar figures for purported cuts in specific agencies and little specific detail.

Tuesday’s executive order was the latest effort by Trump and Musk to shrink and align the U.S. government with Trump’s policy priorities. There have already been large-scale buyout offers, attempts to strip civil-service protections from federal workers and the effective shuttering of some federal agencies.

The order sets forth rules requiring government agencies to hire no more than one employee for every four workers who leave, and it compels agencies to work with Musk’s team to identify large-scale reductions in force and determine which agency components may be eliminated outright.

The order exempts from cuts those employees whose work is critical to national security, public safety, law enforcement and immigration enforcement.

Many government workers belong to labor unions, which means any big layoffs or reductions in force must comply with their collective bargaining agreements. Nonunion employees of the civil service also enjoy job protections under federal law.

The push toward mass layoffs comes after the Trump administration attempted to cajole federal workers into accepting buyout offers. That effort has been blocked by a federal judge.

Musk, who said he speaks to Trump



Billionaire Elon Musk listens as President Donald Trump speaks in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday. JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

nearly every day, pledged on Tuesday to find \$1 trillion in savings through his efforts to identify fraud and waste in the government, a figure that would represent almost 15% of total federal spending.

Trump resisted the suggestion by Democrats and other critics that Musk’s role presents a conflict of interest.

As CEO of rocket maker SpaceX, Musk oversees the company’s contracts with the Pentagon and intelligence community that are worth billions of dollars.

“You know, (if) we thought that, we would not let him do that segment or look in that area, if we thought there was a lack of transparency or a conflict of interest,” Trump said.

Beyond blocking Trump’s buyout plan, the courts have also paused his efforts to put U.S. Agency for International Development workers on leave and Musk’s access to sensitive payment systems at the U.S. Treasury.

There are about 2.3 million U.S. civilian employees, excluding the Postal Service.

Security-related agencies account for the bulk of the federal workforce, but hundreds of thousands of people work across the country in jobs overseeing veterans’ health care, inspecting agriculture and paying the government’s bills, among other jobs.

Earlier, Musk made a post on his social media platform X that harshly criticized firms that have filed lawsuits on behalf of federal employees.

“Which law firms are pushing these anti-democratic cases to impede the will of the people?” Musk wrote in the post.

Musk has also aimed his ire at judges who have issued rulings that paused Trump’s executive actions. “Democracy in America is being destroyed by judicial coup,” Musk wrote in a separate post on Tuesday.

Rushdie faces his accused stabber

Novelist shows jury in NY his injured eye

Jonathan Allen
REUTERS

MAYVILLE, N.Y. – Salman Rushdie spoke calmly and with occasional dry humor as he testified on Tuesday against the man accused of trying to murder him, the first time the two have been in the same place since the 2022 knife attack on the novelist onstage at a New York arts institute.

Hadi Matar, 26, has pleaded not guilty to charges of second-degree attempted murder and second-degree assault.

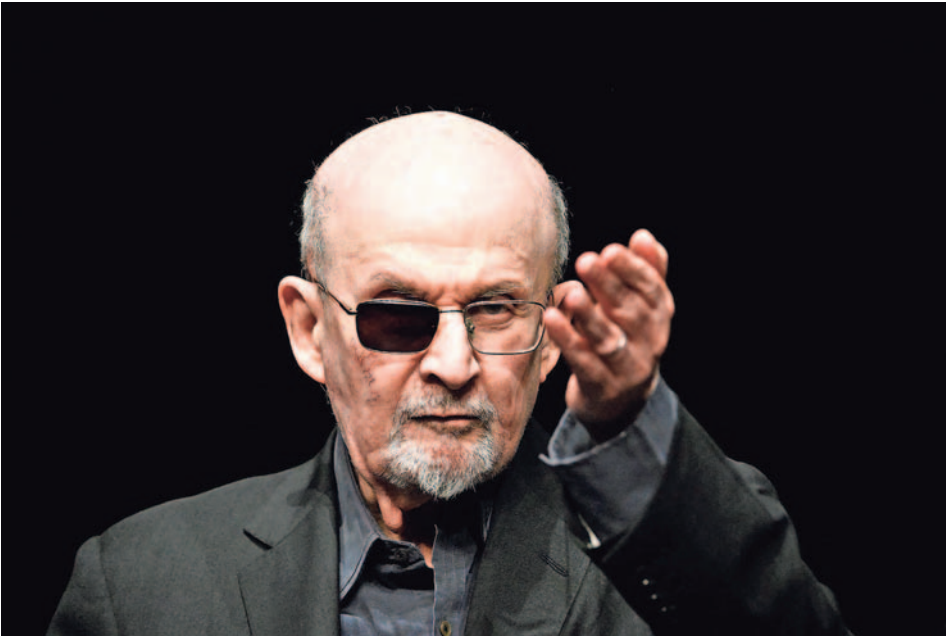
Rushdie, 77, walked into the courtroom dressed in a dark suit, white shirt and gray tie. Two sheriff’s deputies stood at alert by Matar, seated at a table with his team of public defenders. The right lens of Rushdie’s spectacles was blacked out, masking the eye, which his attacker’s knife had pierced through to the optic nerve.

“I was aware of this person rushing at me from my right-hand side,” Rushdie testified in a courtroom in Mayville, a few miles north of the Chautauqua Institution, the lakeside rural arts haven where he was attacked on August 12, 2022.

The controversial writer, for decades the target of death threats, had been seated onstage at the institution’s outdoor amphitheater that morning, about to give a talk on keeping writers safe from harm.

“He hit me very hard,” Rushdie said. “Initially, I thought he had punched me. I thought he was hitting me with his fist. But very soon afterwards I saw really quite a very large quantity of blood pouring out onto my clothes, and by that time he was hitting me repeatedly. Stabbing, slashing.”

Rushdie’s wife, the poet Rachel Eliza Griffiths, sat in the public gallery, becoming tearful as Rushdie described



Novelist Salman Rushdie has been for decades the target of death threats.
TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

falling bloodied to the floor. She was next to the writer Bill Buford, a friend of Rushdie’s, who took Griffiths’ hand to comfort her.

Matar, dressed in a baggy blue shirt, sometimes looked at Rushdie, and filled the page of a yellow legal pad with dark ink. In his memoir about the attack, Rushdie wrote that he was looking forward to facing him in a courtroom.

Soon after the attack, Matar, a U.S.-Lebanese dual citizen from New Jersey, told the New York Post in a jailhouse interview that he disliked Rushdie because he believed the writer had insulted Islam, and said he was surprised that Rushdie survived.

His defense lawyers have not disputed that Matar was in the amphitheater that day but have told the jury that the prosecutor’s evidence will not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Matar had the necessary criminal intent to be convicted of attempted murder.

Born in India into a Muslim Kashmiri family, Rushdie spent most of the 1990s

in hiding in the U.K. after receiving death threats over his 1988 novel “The Satanic Verses.”

The novel prompted Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then Iran’s supreme leader, to issue a fatwa calling on Muslims to kill Rushdie for what he said was blasphemy against Islam.

The jury has not heard about the fatwa or the threats against Rushdie’s life, with the Chautauqua prosecutor’s office saying they are not relevant to proving the charges against Matar.

Rushdie abandoned his reclusive existence more than two decades ago, moving to New York City.

Onstage at the institution, Rushdie was stabbed about 15 times: in the head, neck, torso and left hand, blinding his right eye and damaging his liver and intestines, nearly killing him, according to his surgeons.

Rushdie said the stabbing in his right eye, which almost penetrated his brain, was the most dangerous.

“You can see that’s what’s left of it,”

Rushdie said, removing his spectacles and turning to the jury. “There’s no vision in the eye at all.” He also pointed out scars on his neck and left hand.

The assault charge is for the wounding of Henry Reese, the co-founder of Pittsburgh’s City of Asylum, a nonprofit group that helps exiled writers, who was conducting the talk with Rushdie that morning.

Rushdie described his attacker as dressed in dark clothes with a dark face mask.

“I was very struck by his eyes which were dark and seemed very ferocious to me,” Rushdie testified.

A defense lawyer for Matar objected to the characterization, and Judge David Foley struck the answer from the record.

“OK, not ferocious,” Rushdie said.

Chautauqua District Attorney Jason Schmidt rephrased his question, asking the writer how he came to make conclusions about his attacker’s ferocity.

“He struck me a number of times, another half a dozen times,” Rushdie replied. “At some point I thought I was dying. That was my immediate thought.”

If convicted of attempted murder, Matar faces a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison. He also faces separate federal terrorism charges at a trial in Buffalo.

Lynn Schaffer, one of Matar’s defense lawyers, asked Rushdie in her cross-examination about how he was able to testify that he was stabbed 15 times.

“I wasn’t counting at the time,” Rushdie said. “As I said, I was otherwise occupied. But afterwards I could see them on my body. I didn’t need to be told by anybody.”

Schaffer asked him about his work as a writer and his occasional cameos in movies, noting that “Bridget Jones’s Diary” was one of her favorites.

“My most important work,” Rushdie replied, a few minutes before he stepped down from the stand and walked near Matar’s table to leave the courtroom.

Trump loses bid to halt order barring freezes

Nate Raymond and Jack Queen
REUTERS

BOSTON – President Donald Trump on Tuesday lost the latest round in a court battle over his administration’s bid to freeze federal spending after an appeals court declined to pause a court order requiring the government to continue delivering funds.

The U.S. Department of Justice had asked the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to put on hold an order a Rhode Island federal judge issued on Monday, after finding the administration had defied his Jan. 31 ruling by continuing to withhold billions of dollars in federal funding.

The Justice Department argued U.S. District Judge John McConnell engaged in “intolerable judicial overreach” as Trump’s authority to direct agencies to carry out actions consistent with his policy preferences was “well-settled.”

But the three-judge appellate panel in a short order said it was confident McConnell would quickly clarify the concerns the administration had raised, including that his order bars Trump from exercising his lawful authority.

The ruling marked the first appellate court setback that Trump’s agenda has faced since he returned to office on Jan. 20. The 1st Circuit did not bar the administration from seeking again to have McConnell’s order put on hold and said it could file additional papers seeking to do so by the end of Thursday.

The three-judge panel included U.S. Circuit Judges David Barron, Lara Moncalvo and Julie Rikelman, all appointees of Democratic presidents. The White House said it would continue to fight in court.

“These unlawful injunctions are a continuation of the weaponization of justice against President Trump,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

The 1st Circuit ruled as Trump, key members of his administration and billionaire ally Elon Musk have been criticizing judges who have blocked major pieces of the president’s agenda, in some cases arguing judges have no power to intrude on the president’s authority.

Trump said on social media on Tuesday that “certain activists and highly political judges want us to slow down, or stop,” the administration’s efforts to eliminate federal government waste.



President Donald Trump has been criticizing judges who have blocked major pieces of his agenda.
ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

“Democracy in America is being destroyed by judicial coup,” Musk, the world’s richest man, wrote on social media on Tuesday, after calling for the impeachment of a judge in New York who barred his Department of Government Efficiency from accessing Treasury Department systems.

Such comments have fueled concerns about whether the Trump administration would abide by court rulings. The American Bar Association, in a statement on Monday, raised concerns about “wide-scale affronts to the rule of law itself” under Trump.

The lawsuit before McConnell was filed by Democratic attorneys general from 22 states and the District of Columbia, who sued after the White House’s Office of Management and Budget issued a memo announcing a freeze that implicated trillions of dollars in spending.

OMB later withdrew that memo. But McConnell had concluded a temporary restraining order was still necessary because of evidence a funding freeze remained in effect and OMB’s rescission of the memo was in “name-only.”

The case is one of dozens of lawsuits in which Democratic-led states, civil rights groups and progressive advocacy organizations have obtained court orders blocking for now Trump’s efforts to reduce the size of the federal government, cut spending and crack down on immigration.

The Democratic state attorneys general on Friday urged McConnell to enforce his funding freeze order, saying the administration had taken the position it could still withhold billions of dollars in infrastructure and environmental funding under the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Improvement and Jobs Act.

Russia frees American Fogel after four years

Steve Holland and Jeff Mason
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Russia released American schoolteacher Marc Fogel on Tuesday following an unannounced visit to Moscow by U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and he was headed for a White House welcome, President Donald Trump said.

The release of 63-year-old Fogel, who had been detained in Russia since August 2021 and was serving a 14-year sentence, came as Trump seeks to improve relations with Moscow as part of an effort to secure an end to the war in Ukraine.

Trump told reporters that Fogel would visit the White House on his return to the U.S. late on Tuesday, and White House national security adviser Mike Waltz said he would also be reunited Tuesday night with his family, who celebrated the news.

On a plane home, Fogel, who is from Pennsylvania, was shown with a raised glass, a cheese plate and his U.S. passport in a photo posted on social media by Trump’s chief hostage envoy Adam Boehler.

Asked what the United States gave up in exchange for Fogel, Trump said: “Not much” and called the release a show of good faith from the Russians.

“We were treated very nicely by Russia. Actually, I hope that’s the beginning of a relationship where we can end that (Ukraine) war and millions of people can stop being killed,” Trump said.

Fogel was sentenced to 14 years in prison for drug smuggling after he was detained in Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport in August 2021 with 17 grams of marijuana – which he said was for medical use – in his luggage.

“We are beyond grateful, relieved, and overwhelmed that after more than three years of detention, our father, husband, and son, Marc Fogel, is finally coming home,” the Fogel family said in a statement.

“This has been the darkest and most painful period of our lives, but today, we begin to heal.”

Fogel’s Russian lawyer Dmitry Ovsyannikov confirmed the release to state news agency RIA.

“For the moment, we don’t know on what grounds he was released from where he was serving time – a pardon or something else,” Ovsyannikov told TASS.



Marc Fogel, an American schoolteacher detained in Russia since August 2021, holds a raised glass on an airplane flying him back to the United States on Tuesday.
ADAM BOEHLER VIA REUTERS

“For the moment, we don’t know on what grounds he was released from where he was serving time – a pardon or something else.”

Dmitry Ovsyannikov
Marc Fogel’s Russian lawyer

He told Russia’s Interfax news agency that Fogel was last week transferred from a prison in Rybinsk, north of Moscow, to a pretrial detention center in Moscow ahead of his release.

Fogel was left out of a historic swap of prisoners in August that involved 24 prisoners – 16 sent from Russia to the West, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, and eight sent back to Russia from the West.

Trump has indicated he has spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin but has been vague on the details other than to say he is insistent on ending the three-year-old Ukraine war.

“We’re making good progress there. I think, I really think we’re making some very good progress,” Trump told reporters about Ukraine on Tuesday.

IN BRIEF

Switch poised to bring Starliner astronauts home days sooner

WASHINGTON – NASA on Tuesday swapped out the astronaut capsule it plans to use for an upcoming routine flight to the International Space Station, a scheduling move that will allow a slightly earlier return for two Starliner astronauts who have been on the station far longer than expected.

The U.S. space agency said mission management teams opted to use a previously flown SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule for its Crew-10 mission to the space station, instead of a new SpaceX capsule whose production it said has been delayed.

The decision moves up the Crew-10 launch to March 12, from the previous target of March 25. NASA said it would still need to do a flight readiness assessment of the previously flown Crew Dragon capsule, which is named Endeavor and has been used on three previous missions.

The return of two astronauts, Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, who flew to the International Space Station on Boeing’s faulty Starliner capsule last summer, has hinged on the arrival of the Crew-10’s four-person crew in order to keep the station’s American contingent staffed at normal levels.

The decision follows President Donald Trump’s abrupt demand to SpaceX CEO Elon Musk last month to bring Wilmore and Williams back to Earth “as soon as possible,” pleading for an end to their mission that in large part had already been decided on last year.

After Trump’s demand, NASA affirmed its plan to bring home the astronauts, saying it would do so “as soon as practical.” In its statement on Tuesday, the agency did not say its decision to change the Crew-10 capsule was made to bring the Starliner crew home early.

Watchdog fired after critical report on bid to dismantle USAID

WASHINGTON – The inspector general for the U.S. Agency for International Development was fired on Tuesday, a USAID official said, a day after his office published a report critical of the Trump administration’s effort to eliminate the agency.

Paul Martin had served as the agency’s inspector general, a position requiring U.S. Senate confirmation, since December 2023.

The USAID official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said Martin was “removed from his position.”

Martin was informed by an email from Trent Morse, deputy director of the Office of Presidential Personnel. Morse told Martin that his position as USAID inspector general was terminated “effective immediately,” a copy of the email showed.

No reason was provided. The White House did not have any comment.

The inspector general’s office on Monday released a report that said the Trump administration’s move to dismantle USAID has crippled its ability to conduct oversight of unspent aid worth \$8.2 billion.

The report said staff cuts and stop-work orders have made it difficult to ensure taxpayer-funded aid would end up in the hands of those intended.

Calif. seeks \$1B from insurers to shore up state-backed plan

California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara has requested \$1 billion in additional funds from the commission’s member insurers to shore up the state-backed FAIR Plan after wildfires ravaged swaths of land in and around Los Angeles last month.

Lara also directed those responsible for implementing the FAIR Plan – an insurance program designed to help property owners who cannot find private market coverage – to hire more staff and utilize all available funds, including reserves and reinsurance funds.

Two fires on either side of Los Angeles burned an area nearly the size of Washington, D.C., from Jan. 7 until they were fully contained, killing 29 people and damaging or destroying more than 16,000 structures, officials have said. As of Sunday, the FAIR Plan has received around 3,469 claims for damage caused by the Palisades Fire and around 1,325 claims for damage in the Eaton Fire, its website showed. The program has paid out more than \$914 million to policyholders.

“The FAIR Plan must pay claims just like any other insurance company,” Lara said in a statement on Tuesday.

The funds request could exacerbate financial strain on insurers who have been hit hard by rising catastrophe claims following several wildfires and other natural disasters.

Reuters



Vehicles drive near a sign with stickers of Israeli and U.S. flags near Kibbutz Mefalsim, Israel, on Tuesday. AMIR COHEN/REUTERS

Netanyahu threatens to end truce in Gaza

Nidal al-Mughrabi and Alexander Cornwell
REUTERS

CAIRO – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared on Tuesday the ceasefire in Gaza would end and the military would resume fighting Hamas until it was defeated if the Palestinian militant group did not release hostages by midday Saturday.

Following Netanyahu’s ultimatum, Hamas issued a statement renewing its commitment to the ceasefire and accusing Israel of jeopardizing the ceasefire.

The Israeli announcement came after Netanyahu met with several key ministers, including defense, foreign affairs and national security, who he said gave the ultimatum their full support.

After nearly 16 months of war, Hamas has gradually been releasing hostages since the first phase of a ceasefire began on Jan. 19, but on Monday said it would not free any more until further notice over accusations Israel was violating the deal.

“If Hamas does not return our hostages by Saturday noon – the ceasefire will end and the IDF (military) will return to intense fighting until Hamas is finally defeated,” Netanyahu said.

It was not immediately clear if Netanyahu meant Hamas should release all hostages held in Gaza or just the three who had been expected to be released on Saturday under the ceasefire.

His office did not immediately respond to a Reuters request seeking comment on the prime minister’s remarks.

U.S. President Donald Trump, a

close ally of Israel, has said that Hamas should release all of the hostages by Saturday.

The prime minister also said he had ordered the military to gather forces inside and around Gaza, with the military announcing shortly after it was deploying additional forces to Israel’s south including the mobilization of reservists.

A Hamas official earlier said that Israeli hostages could only be brought home if the ceasefire was respected, dismissing the “language of threats” after Trump said he would “let hell break out” if they were not freed.

“Trump must remember there is an agreement that must be respected by both parties, and this is the only way to bring back the (Israeli) prisoners,” senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

Hamas has said Israel has violated the ceasefire with several deadly shootings as well as by holding up some aid deliveries and impeding the return of Gazans to the strip’s north.

Israel denies holding back aid and says it has fired on people who disregarded warnings not to approach Israeli troops.

So far, 16 of 33 hostages have been freed as part of the ceasefire deal’s first phase due to last 42 days. Five Thai hostages were also let go in an unscheduled release.

In exchange, Israel has released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, including prisoners serving life sentences for deadly attacks and others detained during the war and held without charge.

An Israeli group representing families of hostages urged Netanyahu to stick to the ceasefire agreement.

“We must not go backwards. We can-

not allow the hostages to waste away in captivity,” the hostages forum said.

There are 76 hostages still held in Gaza, more than 35 of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli media.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who was among key ministers who met with Netanyahu on Tuesday, said that if all hostages were not released by Saturday, the war should resume. If that happens, Gaza’s water, electricity and aid should be cut off and Palestinians there should be removed, he said.

“There will only be fire and brimstone from our planes, our artillery, our tanks, and our heroic fighters. There will be full occupation of the Gaza Strip,” he said.

Gaza, one of the world’s most densely populated areas, has been devastated by Israel’s military offensive.

More than 48,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, the Gaza health ministry says, and nearly all of Gaza’s pre-war population of 2.3 million has been internally displaced by the conflict. Some 1,200 people were killed in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on southern Israel and about 250 were taken as hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Trump said last week the U.S. should take over Gaza and move out more than 2 million Palestinian residents so the enclave can be developed into the “Riviera of the Middle East.”

Trump’s plan has enraged Palestinians and Arab leaders and upended decades of U.S. policy that endorsed a two-state solution in which Israel and a Palestinian state would coexist.

The forcible displacement of a population under military occupation is a war crime banned by the 1949 Geneva conventions.

Gaza

Continued from Page 1NN

countries rely on Washington for economic and military aid.

“I believe we’ll have a parcel of land in Jordan. I believe we’ll have a parcel of land in Egypt,” Trump said. “We may have someplace else, but I think when we finish our talks, we’ll have a place where they’re going to live very happily and very safely.”

US assistance in question

Trump, who has suggested he could consider withholding aid to Jordan, said he was not using support as a threat.

“We contribute a lot of money to Jordan, and to Egypt by the way – a lot to both. But I don’t have to threaten that. I think we’re above that,” Trump said.

Abdullah has previously said he rejects any moves to annex land and displace Palestinians. He is the first Arab leader to meet Trump since the Gaza plan was floated.

While the two leaders were cordial with each other, Trump’s comments about Gaza put Abdullah in an awkward position, given the sensitivity in Jordan of the Palestinians’ claim of a right to return to the lands that many

fled during the war that surrounded the creation of Israel in 1948.

Trump at one point appeared to prompt Abdullah to say he would take in Palestinians from Gaza. The king said he would do what is best for his country, but said Jordan would take in 2,000 sick children from Gaza for treatment, an offer that Trump praised.

Arab nations would come to Washington with a counterproposal, he said.

“The point is how to make this work in a way that is good for everybody,” he said, appearing uncomfortable, without explicitly supporting or opposing Trump’s plan.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi later told state-owned al-Mamlaka TV that there is an Egyptian-led Arab plan to rebuild Gaza without displacing its people.

Jordanian officials ahead of the talks said they wanted to avoid a public engagement where Trump would put the king on the spot, and the remarks inside the Oval Office were not planned.

The two spoke in front of reporters with the king’s son, Crown Prince Hussein, Safadi, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other officials also present. The king later met a bipartisan group of U.S. senators including John Thune, the Republican majority leader.

Sandwiched between Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel and the occupied West Bank, Jordan is already home to more than 2 million Palestinian refugees in its

population of 11 million, their status and number long providing a source of anxiety for the country’s leadership.

Amman is also reeling from Trump’s 90-day aid pause. Israel and Egypt have been granted waivers, but the \$1.45 billion Jordan gets each year remains frozen pending a Trump administration review of all foreign aid.

Fragile ceasefire

Trump’s proposal has introduced new complexity into a sensitive regional dynamic, including a fragile ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Hamas on Monday said it would stop releasing Israeli hostages from Gaza until further notice, saying Israel was violating the agreement to end strikes that have pummeled Gaza. Trump later proposed canceling the ceasefire if Hamas doesn’t release all remaining hostages it took on Oct. 7, 2023, by Saturday.

Trump said on Tuesday that “all bets are off” if Hamas does not meet the deadline, adding that he does not think the Palestinian militant group will do so.

Three out of four Americans – 74% – in a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted Feb. 7-9 said they opposed the idea of the U.S. taking control of Gaza and displacing the Palestinians who live there. The poll showed that Republicans were divided on the issue, with 55% opposed and 43% supportive.

SPORTS **EXTRA**

NBA



Suns forward Kevin Durant points to the video board acknowledging his 30,000th career point, which he recorded Tuesday night against the Memphis Grizzlies at Footprint Center in Phoenix. JOE CAMPOREALE/IMAGN IMAGES

SUNS’ DURANT JOINS 30,000-POINT CLUB

Phoenix forward Kevin Durant made two free throws with 1:11 left in the third quarter of the Suns’ Tuesday home game against the Memphis Grizzlies to become the eighth player in NBA history to reach 30,000 career points. Durant needed 26 points prior to the contest to join the exclusive group. He got to 30,000 in 1,101 games, tying Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for third fastest. Wilt Chamberlain (941) and Michael Jordan (960) got there faster. **ROUNDUP, 5NS**

NASCAR DAYTONA 500

Storylines to watch at Cup Series’ ’25 opener

Samuel Stubbs
Field Level Media

The stars of the NASCAR Cup Series will once more descend on the birthplace of NASCAR for the 67th annual Daytona 500 on Sunday. Since 1959, the “Great American Race” has provided fans with thrill after thrill. Here are five storylines to follow during Speed-weeks.

● **1. Twenty years of trying, Part 2?**
On Feb. 15, 1998, Mike Joy called Dale Earnhardt to victory in the Daytona 500 by uttering one of the most iconic lines in NASCAR history: “Twenty years of trying, 20 years of frustration! Dale Earnhardt will come to the caution flag to win the Daytona 500!”

Almost 27 years to the day of Earnhardt’s long-awaited Daytona triumph, Kyle Busch – who like Earnhardt, will drive for Richard Childress Racing – will look for his first Daytona 500 win in his 20th start. Busch has been close several times before. In 2023, Busch led at the 500-mile mark, but lost in overtime to Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

Busch hasn’t won in 57 races and is coming off of the worst season of his career in 2024, so should be more than motivated. He has just about every trophy a NASCAR driver could want displayed in his trophy case, but a Harley J. Earl trophy would complete the collection and be one of the crowning achievements in his Hall of Fame career.

See NASCAR, Page 3NS



Joey Logano, shown on Nov. 10 at Phoenix Raceway in Avondale, Ariz., is the defending NASCAR Cup Series champion. MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

MLB WINNERS AND LOSERS

Dodgers look ready for a Series repeat



Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

PHOENIX – The weather is gorgeous without a cloud in the sky for the opening of the spring training, but everywhere you turn there are orange traffic cones, potholes and detours. It has nothing to do with the partying and traffic from the wild Waste Management Open in Phoenix, rather the other 29 Major League Baseball teams trying to navigate any possible way to knock off the mighty Los Angeles Dodgers. The Dodgers, the defending World Series champions, are threatening to strangle the hope out of all their com-

petitors with their sexy array of stars, massive \$380 million payroll and enough talent where they could their divide their team in two, and still wind up playing against one another in the World Series. If the Dodgers can win the World Series with only three healthy starters, Shohei Ohtani and Freddie Freeman playing injured, and forced to rely on a bullpen from the first inning to the ninth, can you imagine how powerful they’ll be after spending close to a half-billion dollars in the winter? They’ve now got eight starters – nine when three-time Cy Young winner and future Hall of Famer Clayton Kershaw re-signs – after signing two-time Cy Young winner Blake Snell and grabbing Roki Sasaki, perhaps the greatest young

See NIGHTENGALE, Page 3NS



Dodgers designated hitter Shohei Ohtani bats against the Mariners during a 2024 spring training game in Phoenix. MARK J. REBILAS/USA TODAY SPORTS

FOOTBALL

Hurts shows path for college QBs



Matt Hayes
College football columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

So the joke goes something like this: Nick Saban is the only person who successfully stopped Jalen Hurts.

But before we get into rehashing the past or who did what and why, maybe the fall and rise of Hurts can be a teaching moment for college football quarterbacks of the now generation.

Maybe, if we look real close, Hurts isn't the outlier. He's part of an undeniable quarterback trend that can no longer be ignored.

"There's untold value in failure," Georgia coach Kirby Smart told me last summer.

Somewhere along the way, we've lost sight of that.

Somewhere, amid the hustle and bustle of free player movement and NIL deals, and if it doesn't work here, there's always the transfer portal, is a story of reality everyone needed.

The story of the young quarterback from suburban Houston who arrived at Alabama in 2016 as a midterm enrollee, and it took all of one quarter in the season opener for Saban to realize Hurts had to be on the field. If you think that's an improbable ride, consider these next steps:

- But for an improbable, two-minute touchdown drive from DeShaun Watson and Clemson, Hurts would've been a national championship quarterback as a freshman.
- A year later, after leading Alabama to 25 wins in 27 starts, Hurts was benched at halftime of the College Football Playoff national championship game against Georgia for freshman Tua Tagovailoa.
- A year after that, after the humility of losing the starting job again in fall camp, Hurts stayed at Alabama and eventually replaced an injured Tagovailoa in the SEC championship game. And led a comeback victory.

Only then did Hurts transfer to Okla-



Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts looks to pass against the Kansas City Chiefs during Super Bowl 59 on Sunday in New Orleans. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

homa, where he led the Sooners to the College Football Playoff and was a Heisman Trophy finalist. Only then did he persevere five more years before finally completing the road to redemption with a Super Bowl championship.

From benched in the then-biggest moment of his athletic career, to coming all the way back to being named MVP of the Super Bowl. That's the value of failure.

That's Hurts, whose cell phone wallpaper was a photo of his dejected self after losing Super Bowl LVII in 2023. For

two years that photo was the first and last thing he saw every day.

But Hurts isn't alone in his unique battle with failure.

Nearly a year ago, Kansas State told Will Howard after four seasons in the program it was moving forward with uber-talented sophomore Avery Johnson. So Howard signed with Ohio State, absorbed two brutal losses to Oregon and Michigan, then played the best four-game stretch of his college career and won it all.

Stetson Bennett failed at Georgia,

was told he wouldn't play quarterback for the Bulldogs and left to play in junior college. He returned a year later, and eventually won back-to-back national titles in 2021-22.

Joe Burrow failed for three seasons to win the starting job at Ohio State, transferred to LSU in 2018, and in 2019 had the greatest individual season in the modern era of college football — and won the national title and Heisman Trophy.

See a trend?

The issue in college football isn't the transfer portal. It's giving up.

The issue isn't players making money off their name, image and likeness, it's players gaming the system for more money while ignoring the beautiful slog of the grind.

It's quarterbacks, the most important position on the field and the one position with more turnover than any other, hopping from team to team, and dream to dream.

It's avoiding failure and all the potential to learn and develop from it, for the easy money and easy out of the next team.

Four of the top 10 quarterbacks in the 2024 recruiting class, according to the 247Sports composite ranking, are no longer with their original teams. Five of the top 10 from 2023 aren't, either.

Free player movement was a pipe dream when Hurts was benched in 2017, and then didn't win the job again in his junior season of 2018. Only after graduating early from Alabama prior to the start of the 2019 season, could Hurts use a graduate transfer rule to play immediately at Oklahoma.

But think about this: he could've left Alabama during the fall camp of 2018, when it was clear Tagovailoa was the team's starter. He could've sat out a season, and still played in 2019 at Oklahoma.

The beautiful slog changed him. Just like it did Bennett and Burrow and Howard after him.

Like it did for Bo Nix and Kurtis Rourke and maybe even Arch Manning.

There is value in failure. It doesn't take a Super Bowl trophy to see it.

NFL NOTEBOOK

Super Bowl 59 draws record 127.7M viewers

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

A record 127.7 million viewers watched the Philadelphia Eagles defeat the Kansas City Chiefs 40-22 in Super Bowl 59 Sunday, according to the official Nielsen numbers released Tuesday.

The game in New Orleans aired on Fox, Fox Deportes and Telemundo and streamed on Tubi and drew a combined average household rating of 41.7 and combined household share of 83. The audience peaked at 137.7 million during the second quarter, from 8 to 8:15 p.m. ET.

Viewership was up 3.2 percent over the previous year, when a then-record 123.7 million watched the Chiefs defeat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in overtime in Las Vegas.

The Super Bowl is annually the most watched U.S. telecast of the year. In fact, 19 of the top 20 most-viewed telecasts in national history are Super Bowls.

Over 1 million fans expected at Philadelphia Super Bowl parade

The city of Philadelphia is preparing for more than 1 million fans to celebrate the Eagles' Super Bowl 59 championship at a downtown parade on Friday.

City officials, at a news conference, announced details of the parade, which will follow the same route as the Eagles' 2018 celebration after they defeated the New England Patriots in Super Bowl LII.

Tony Watlington, the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, also announced Tuesday that all city schools will be closed Friday to allow families to attend the parade. Several school districts in Philadelphia suburbs in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey already had announced school closures.

The parade will begin at 11 a.m. at the intersection of Broad Street and Pattison Avenue, heading toward City Hall. From that point, buses will transport

the players to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where players and coaches are expected to address the crowd from the famous steps leading to the building.

The site is where Sylvester Stallone, portraying fictional boxer Rocky Balboa, triumphantly ran the stairs in the 1976 movie "Rocky."

Panthers sign K Wright

The Carolina Panthers signed Matthew Wright to a reserve/future contract, allowing the team to enter the off-season with at least one kicker on the roster.

Wright, 28, spent training camp in 2023 with the Panthers and returned to the team at the end of that season. He kicked in the season finale versus the Tampa Bay Buccaneers with Eddy Piñeiro nursing an injury.

Report: Dolphins hiring former Texans OC Slowik as assistant

Former Houston Texans offensive coordinator Bobby Slowik has landed in Miami as senior passing game coordinator, according to an NFL Network report on Tuesday, reuniting him with Dolphins head coach Mike McDaniel.

The Texans fired Slowik, 37, last month after two seasons as offensive coordinator. Houston's offense took a downturn following quarterback C.J. Stroud's impressive rookie season, finishing 19th in the NFL in average points per game (21.9) and 22nd in total yards (319.7) in 2024. The Texans ranked 13th and 12th in those categories, respectively, in 2023.

Reports: Dorsey joining Cowboys as pass-game specialist

Ken Dorsey is expected to join the Dallas Cowboys' coaching staff as a passing game specialist, multiple media outlets reported Monday night.

Dorsey most recently served as the Browns' offensive coordinator.

Saints make it official, hire Moore as coach

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz
USA TODAY

The New Orleans Saints are the last of seven NFL teams to fill a head-coaching vacancy this offseason. The team's lengthy wait is finally over, with a key figure from its Super Bowl victory set to head back to the city.

The Saints on Tuesday hired Philadelphia Eagles offensive coordinator Kellen Moore as their next coach. The team had already zeroed in on Moore as its front-runner but could not complete an agreement until after Eagles completed their season Sunday with its 40-22 win over the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl 59.

Eagles coach Nick Sirianni teased Moore after the game with a public plea to come back. "Let's run this (expletive) back, Kellen," Sirianni said with a laugh.

Moore, 36, will become the NFL's youngest head coach, a title previous held by the Seattle Seahawks' Mike Macdonald, 37.

A backup quarterback for the Detroit Lions (2012-14) and Dallas Cowboys (2015-17), Moore immediately pivoted from his playing days into a coaching career by taking on the job of quarterbacks coach for the Cowboys in 2018, serving as a trusted and familiar voice for starter Dak Prescott.

He was elevated to offensive coordinator a year later and remained in the role after Mike McCarthy's 2020 hiring.

His units twice led the league in total yards and ranked in the top six for scoring in three of his four seasons as coordinator.

After the Cowboys' divisional-round playoff exit, however, Moore and the team parted ways, with McCarthy taking over play-calling duties. Moore served as the Los Angeles Chargers' offensive coordinator for one year before joining the Eagles.

He orchestrated an attack that ranked second in rushing, with All-Pro running back Saquon Barkley leading the charge by racking up 2,005 rushing yards in the regular season.

The Saints, who fired coach Dennis



Kellen Moore, seen during Super Bowl 59, has been named head coach of the Saints. MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

Allen in November after a 2-7 start, had several candidates drop out of the running for their opening. Former Detroit Lions defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn, who was an assistant in New Orleans under Sean Payton from 2016-20, opted to take the New York Jets' top job after having been scheduled for a second interview with the Saints.

Buffalo Bills offensive coordinator Joe Brady withdrew from consideration after a virtual interview with the team, and Washington Commanders offensive coordinator Kliff Kingsbury opted not to pursue the position. McCarthy, who parted ways with the Cowboys after five years, also backed out, choosing instead to focus on next year's hiring cycle.

Set to be \$54 million over the salary cap in 2025, according to Over The Cap, the Saints will once again face an off-season of reshuffling and restructuring.

Quarterback Derek Carr is set to have a cap hit in excess of \$51 million, with a \$10 million roster bonus due in mid-March. Releasing him would incur a \$50 million dead cap hit.

Several longtime franchise stalwarts — including defensive end Cameron Jordan, right tackle Ryan Ramczyk and tight end Taysom Hill — also face uncertain futures.

FROM THE COVER

Nightengale

Continued from Page 1

pitching talent in Japanese history. Oh, and don't forget they also signed the two best closers on the market, too, with Tanner Scott and Kirby Yates.

Little wonder when Dodgers shortstop Miguel Rojas was recently asked if the team could break the Seattle Mariners' all-time record with 116 victories in 2001, he flatly predicted they'd win 120 games: "It's not a goal. It's an expectation."

The Dodgers are simply that loaded. Sportsbooks have the over/under on the Dodgers' win total at more than 103 and the team is the overwhelming favorite to win it all.

How would you like to reside in the NL West, where the San Diego Padres had the Dodgers on the ropes in last year's division series and then watched the Dodgers spend \$461 million this winter while the Padres did nothing more than bring back their backup catcher and sign a platoon for left field?

Or the Arizona Diamondbacks, who spent a franchise-record \$210 million on ace Corbin Burnes, only for the Dodgers rotation to improve even more with Snell, Sasaki and the return of Ohtani?

Or the San Francisco Giants, who spent a franchise-record \$182 million on shortstop Willy Adames, only for the Dodgers to snag their ace in Snell and outfielder in Michael Conforto?

Oh, to be in the NL Central or AL Central, where all 12 teams in the two divisions were outspent by the Athletics of Sacramento.

Well, after teams spent all winter trying to work their magic, they now will be reporting in the next two days to spring training camps in Arizona and Florida, fashioning a report card for the top six winners and losers of the offseason:

Offseason winners

Juan Soto: Come on, \$765 million? Really? It's mind-boggling that Soto is being paid more than Shohei Ohtani, who's a cash cow for the Dodgers.

Soto is a mighty fine hitter, but he's also a one-dimensional player who could end up being the Mets' starting first baseman or DH in a couple of years. This is the most stunning contract in baseball since Alex Rodriguez's record 10-year, \$252 million deal with the Texas Rangers nearly a quarter-century ago.

Los Angeles Dodgers: This team is so deep with pitching that there's no need for a single starter to pitch 150 innings this season, making sure that everyone is well-rested and fresh for the playoffs and World Series.

The Dodgers' toughest task of the spring will be setting aside time to get their fingers sized for their 2025 World Series rings.

New York Yankees: The Yankees will tell you in hindsight that their loss in the Soto sweepstakes might have been the best \$760 million they never spent.

Sure, they wanted Soto, but they also



Mets right fielder Juan Soto poses for photos during his introductory news conference Dec. 12.

BRAD PENNER/IMAGN IMAGES

concede that if they landed him, they never would have been able to build their team into the best in the American League.

They signed ace Max Fried to a \$218 million contract, traded for Cody Bellinger, traded for Devin Williams, and signed former MVP Paul Goldschmidt. And, for an added bonus, it sure helped that most of the marquee free agents headed to the National League over the winter, clearing the path for a Yankees' return trip to the World Series.

Willy Adames: Raise your hand if you thought Adames would get a guaranteed contract worth \$128 million more than free-agent slugger Pete Alonso.

Adames made the shrewd decision to sign early, and got a fat seven-year, \$182 million payday from the San Francisco Giants. If he had waited, who knows, he could still be sitting out there waiting for his contract like Alex Bregman.

The team formerly known as the Oakland Athletics: Finally, no more payroll slashing. No more distractions. No more protests.

The Athletics, who lost 307 games the past three seasons, suddenly are legitimate. They improved by 19 games from their 2023 season, going 39-37 after July 1, tied for the third-best record in the American League.

They even started acting like a major-league team this past winter, increasing their payroll, signing starter Luis Severino to a franchise-record \$67 million contract over three years, locked up outfielder Brent Rooker to a five-year, \$60 million contract, and resisted all trade overtures for All-Star closer Mason Miller.

Sure, they'll be playing the next three years in a minor-league ballpark, but the stands will be filled at their 14,000-seat stadium, and they'll be cheered by the good folks of Sacramento. The biggest bummer may be dodging those bad hops in the infield with 156 games scheduled between the A's and the Sacramento River Cats.

Left-handed starters: What a winter it was for the lefties in the game. Max Fried, who was 11-10 with a 3.25 ERA with Atlanta, signed the richest contract for a left-handed pitcher in baseball his-

tory (eight-years, \$218 million) with the Yankees.

Blake Snell, who was 0-3 with a 6.31 ERA at the All-Star break, signed a five-year, \$182 million contract with the Dodgers. Sean Manaea, who has never won more than 12 games in a season with a career 4.00 ERA, signed a three-year, \$75 million deal with the Mets. Yes, left-handed starters have never been more in demand.

Offseason losers

St. Louis Cardinals: This is a franchise we no longer recognize. They've been the class of the NL Central since the turn of this century with 11 division titles, four World Series appearances and two championships in front of baseball's greatest fans.

Now, for the first time in three decades, they're settling for mediocrity while they undergo a rebuild.

They haven't signed a single free agent, made one trade for utilityman Michael Helman, who was about to be designated for assignment by the Minnesota Twins, and still are desperately trying to unload third baseman Nolan Arenado and the remaining \$74 million in his contract. It's going to be a long, hot summer in St. Louis.

San Diego Padres: They may be spending the next 20 years lamenting just how close they were to toppling the Dodgers in the 2024 NLDS.

And just when they thought they were closing the gap on the Dodgers, the Dodgers went out and spent nearly another half-billion dollars while the Padres ran out of cash.

They lost their closer (Tanner Scott), All-Star left fielder (Jurickson Profar), infielders (Ha-Seong Kim and Donovan Solano) and catcher (Kyle Higashioka). Most painful, they lost Roki Sasaki to the Dodgers just when they were confident he was coming their way.

All they've done all winter is bring back reserve catcher Elias Diaz and sign an outfield platoon of Jason Heyward and Connor Joe. If that's not tough enough to swallow, they've been shopping starter Dylan Cease all winter trying to clear room to dip below the luxury tax threshold.

Meanwhile, the ownership is muddled in a game of Family Feud with nasty lawsuits swapped between family members, leaving fellow owners to wonder if the team will eventually be sold.

Pete Alonso: No one's free-agent value came crashing down mightier than Alonso's.

It was two years ago that he turned down a seven-year, \$158 million extension. It was four months ago that he was seeking close to a \$200 million payday. He was left with a two-year, \$54 million contract with the Mets that no one could possibly have envisioned.

Certainly, he could have gotten a bigger payday if he wanted to play for the Toronto Blue Jays. He even rejected a three-year, \$85 million contract in January from the Mets, which was heavily deferred, and ultimately even passed on a three-year, \$71 million proposal. Alon-

so was left with no choice but to bet on himself, and can only hope that a year from now when he likely opts out, he can change a lot of folks' minds, particularly with no qualifying offer attached to him.

Nick Pivetta: Remember when the baseball industry was surprised back in November when the Boston Red Sox gave a \$21.05 million qualifying offer to Pivetta after going just 6-12 with a 4.14 ERA?

Despite Pivetta never making more than \$7.5 million in a season, he turned it down. Well, here we are, with pitchers and catchers reporting to camp, and Pivetta still is unemployed. No team is willing to give him \$21 million a year while also forfeiting a draft pick.

Pivetta can either swallow his pride and accept a cheaper deal or if he is really thinking about skipping spring training, he may want to pick up the phone and talk to Jordan Montgomery and Blake Snell. They'll gladly let him know what a mistake it would be.

Stu Sternberg: Just when it looked like Rays owner Stu Sternberg and St. Petersburg officials finally resolved the Tampa Bay Rays' stadium mess after two decades of negotiations, along came Hurricanes Helene and Milton, blowing the top off Tropicana Field and perhaps blowing up their tentative deal for a new ballpark.

All the Rays know is that they'll be spending the 2025 season playing at the Yankees' spring-training complex, George M. Steinbrenner Field, with no idea of their future after the season. Will the city fix the roof permitting the Rays to return for the 2026-2028 seasons, delaying their new stadium by a year?

Do the Rays want to back out of their deal by March 31 and pursue a new ballpark instead in Tampa or Orlando? The trust between Sternberg and the local politicians is now at a breaking point and could eventually lead to the team being sold.

Seattle Mariners: Come on, didn't they learn their lesson from a year ago? Wasn't it painful enough knowing they had the best pitching staff in baseball, one that could have carried them right into the World Series but instead sat home all winter?

Now, instead of spending money to bring in offensive help, trying to sign free agents Alonso or Bregman, or trading for Alec Bohm of the Philadelphia Phillies, they're going to run it back again with basically the same offense.

This is an offense that entered the final five weeks of the season ranked last in hitting (.216), last in strikeout rate (27.7%), 28th in OPS (.666) and 27th in runs per game (3.93). And they did nothing to supplement it other than resign Jorge Polanco to a one-year, \$7.75 million contract and sign free-agent infielder Donovan Solano to a one-year, \$3.5 million deal. That's it.

Shame on the Mariners and their ownership if they waste another year. For a team that has never played in the World Series, you'd think there'd be a semblance of urgency to take advantage of having perhaps the most talented rotation in baseball.

NASCAR

Continued from Page 1

2. Qualifying, Duel races to be high stakes.

Forty-five drivers will attempt to make the 40-car field (or 41, depending on Helio Castroneves' qualifying/Duel results). That's the most amount of cars that will have attempted to race their way into the Daytona 500 since 2015, the final year of the 43-car field.

The list of drivers trying to race their way in is star-studded, as 2017 Cup Series champion Martin Truex Jr. will attempt to win his first Daytona 500 with TRICON Garage, while seven-time champion and two-time Daytona 500 winner Jimmie Johnson will attempt his first of two Cup Series races in 2025. Four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Castroneves is guaranteed a spot in the race via the open-exemption provisional.

The most high-profile open car will be driven by defending Xfinity Series champion Justin Allgaier. Chris Stapleton's Traveller Whiskey will adorn the hood of the No. 40 Chevrolet owned by Dale Earnhardt Jr. If Allgaier makes the race, it will be the first ever Cup Series start for Jr. Motorsports.

Other drivers trying to race their way into the field include Corey LaJoie (No. 01, Rick Ware Racing), J.J. Yeley (No. 44, N.Y. Racing), Anthony Alfredo (No. 62, Beard Motorsports), Chandler Smith (No. 66, MBM Motorsports/Garage 66) and B.J. McLeod (No. 78, Live Fast Mo-



Defending NASCAR Xfinity Series champion Justin Allgaier will try to qualify for the Cup Series Daytona 500.

MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

torsports).

3. Underdogs look to make a splash.

Since the restrictor plates bunched up the field at Daytona and Talladega, the great equalizer of the draft has given

underdogs the opportunity to seize Daytona glory.

Trevor Bayne (2011), Michael McDowell (2021) and Stenhouse (2023) all took advantage of pack racing to snag a Daytona 500 victory. This year, look for

drivers such as Erik Jones and Todd Gilliland to lead the way for the little guys.

4. Can Blaney finally break through?

Ryan Blaney has only made 10 Daytona 500 starts, but he's been close to victory several times already. In 2017, Blaney watched as many contenders ran out of gas late in the race.

The only driver ahead of him that had enough fuel? Race winner Kurt Busch, who held Blaney to a runner-up finish in his third 500 start. In 2020, Blaney narrowly lost to Denny Hamlin in a photo finish as Ryan Newman flew through the air. In 2022, Blaney was run up the track on the race's final lap by teammate and race winner Austin Cindric. The 2023 champion has become one of NASCAR's elite, and he could add to his resume by finally capturing a Harley J. Earl trophy.

5. Veterans look to set the tone.

While many fans decry modern speedway racing as too random, the best of the best usually find their way to the front.

Plenty of veterans are looking to start 2025 off on the right foot by winning the "Great American Race."

Three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin is looking to win his first race with crew chief Chris Gayle, while defending Cup Series champion and 2015 Daytona 500 champion Joey Logano looks to roll his momentum over to a new season.

Other vets looking to make their mark in Daytona include the aforementioned Busch, 2012 Cup Series champion Brad Keselowski and 2021 Cup Series champion Kyle Larson.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MEN’S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 15 Kentucky holds off No. 5 Tennessee

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Ansley Almonor and Otega Oweh scored 13 points each for short-handed No. 15 Kentucky, as the Wildcats withstood a second-half charge from No. 5 Tennessee to beat the Volunteers 75-64 in a SEC showdown Tuesday night in Lexington, Ky.

Almonor and Oweh were among four players to score in double-figures for the Wildcats (17-7, 6-5), who made 12-of-24 3-point shots to match their performance against the Volunteers (20-5, 7-5) two weeks ago. Notably, Tennessee entered Tuesday leading the country in 3-point defense (26.6 percent).

Oweh scored five of his points in the final 1:21, helping the Wildcats pull away. Zakai Zeigler led Tennessee with 17 points. Igor Milicic Jr. added 16 points.

No. 1 Auburn 80, Vanderbilt 68

Denver Jones scored a game-high 21 points as Auburn (22-2, 10-1 SEC) pulled away for a win over Vanderbilt (17-7, 5-6) in Nashville, Tenn.

Chaney Johnson racked up 20 points off the bench on 9-of-10 shooting, and Johni Broome scored 17 points, 15 in the second half, for Auburn. Broome added seven rebounds and three blocks.

Jason Edwards led the Commodores with 13 points. A.J. Hoggard and Devin McGlockton chipped in 10 each for Vanderbilt. McGlockton also had 13 rebounds and two blocks.

Shortly after Vanderbilt took its first lead of the game early in the second half, the Commodores led 49-48 on a jumper by Chris Manon. Johnson responded with nine straight points. He started with a 3-pointer, and three consecutive buckets in the paint put Auburn up by eight with 11:38 left in the game.

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No. 2 Alabama 103, Texas 80

Jarin Stevenson scored a career-high 22 points to help Alabama (21-3, 10-1 SEC) cruise to a victory over Texas (15-10, 4-8) in Austin, Texas.

Aden Holloway and Mark Sears added 18 points apiece for the Crimson Tide, who have won seven straight games and 15 of their last 16. Alabama has a home showdown with No. 1 Auburn on Saturday.

Labaron Philon had 15 points and Mouhamed Dioubate added 13 for Alabama, which shot 61.8 percent, including a stellar 58.8 percent (17-of-29) from 3-point range, while topping 100 points for the seventh time this season.

Tre Johnson scored 24 points and Jayson Kent added a season-best 19 for the Longhorns, who have lost four of their past five games. Julian Larry added 10 points and three steals.

No. 3 Florida 81, No. 22 Mississippi State 68

Denzel Aberdeen scored 20 points to lead five players in double figures as Florida (21-3, 8-3 SEC) overcame a half-time deficit in a win over Mississippi State (17-7, 5-6) in Starkville, Miss.

Walter Clayton stuffed the stat sheet with 19 points, six rebounds and six assists for the Gators, while Thomas Haugh came off the bench for 16 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. Will



Kentucky forward Ansley Almonor (15) shoots during Tuesday's game against Tennessee in Lexington, Ky. JORDAN PRATHER/IMAGN IMAGES

Richard and Rueben Chinyelu each added 10 points.

Josh Hubbard scored 19 points and dished out six assists for the Bulldogs, while reserve KeShawn Murphy added 18 points and 13 boards. Mississippi State struggled from the floor, making only 24 of 58 field goal attempts (41.4 percent).

Meanwhile, Florida recovered from its first-half struggles to shoot 45.9 percent from the field (28-for-61), including 14 of 36 3-pointers. The Gators were careful with the ball, committing just eight turnovers.

No. 20 Michigan 75, No. 7 Purdue 73

Danny Wolf had 15 points and nine rebounds to lead Michigan (19-5, 11-2) to a win over Purdue (19-6, 11-3) in a battle for first place in the Big Ten in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Roddy Gayle came off the bench to score 14 points and grab seven rebounds, and Vladislav Goldin and Tre Donaldson each scored 12 points for Michigan, which has won five straight.

Braden Smith scored 24 points and Trey Kaufman-Renn added 22 points with seven rebounds for Purdue, which had a four-game winning streak snapped.

Purdue held a 65-61 with 4:00 left in the game, but Michigan took a 66-65 lead with 3:08 remaining after a 3-pointer by Donaldson and a basket by Rubin Jones.

No. 8 Texas A&M 69, Georgia 53

Solomon Washington scored a season-high 17 points off the bench to help Texas A&M (19-5, 8-3 SEC) rally for a win over visiting Georgia (16-9, 4-8) in College Station, Texas.

Henry Coleman III added 13 points and Wade Taylor IV chipped in 12 for the Aggies, who won their fourth straight game. Zhuric Phelps tallied all 10 of his

points in the second half as Texas A&M outscored the Bulldogs 46-21 after the break.

Georgia was led by Silas Demary Jr.'s 19 points and Blue Cain's 17. The Bulldogs were held without a field goal for the first 12:40 of the second half en route to their seventh loss in nine games.

Leading by nine at halftime, Georgia extended its advantage to 11 on Cain's free throws to begin the second half. After Demary's free throws gave the Bulldogs ahead 36-28 with 15:50 left, the Aggies took control of the game with a 22-0 run – including Phelps' eight points and Washington's seven – to open up a 50-36 lead with 9:01 remaining.

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No. 10 Iowa State 77, UCF 65

Keshon Gilbert scored 15 points, Joshua Jefferson added 13 points and eight rebounds and Iowa State (19-5, 9-4 Big 12) beat Central Florida (13-11, 4-9) in Orlando.

Iowa State outscored the Knights 45-35 after halftime to run away with the contest. The Cyclones opened the second half on an 18-9 run, with Gilbert converting a breakaway layup that gave the visitors a 50-39 lead with 11:55 remaining.

Seven Cyclones scored at least eight points as part of a well-balanced effort. Keyshawn Hall paced UCF with a game-high 22 points to go along with eight rebounds.

Indiana 71, No. 11 Michigan St. 67

Malik Reneau had 19 points and 12 rebounds and Indiana (15-10, 6-8 Big Ten) snapped a five-game losing streak with an upset of Michigan State (19-5, 10-3) in East Lansing, Mich.

Oumar Ballo supplied 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Hoosiers, while Myles Rice and Luke Goode had 10 points apiece.

Jaden Akins led Michigan State with 14 points, and Jase Richardson added 13.

Spartans coach Tom Izzo remained tied with longtime Indiana coach Bob Knight for the most wins in conference history (353).

Kansas State 73, No. 13 Arizona 70

Dug McDaniel had 24 points and five steals, including a pivotal one in the waning seconds, to lead Kansas State (13-11, 7-6 Big 12) to a victory over Arizona (17-7, 11-2) in Manhattan, Kan.

Kansas State has won six straight games, four of them against ranked opponents.

Arizona had its six-game winning streak snapped.

KJ Lewis led Arizona with 15 points and eight rebounds, and Bradley finished with 13 points. Bradley also was responsible for five of Arizona's 17 turnovers, which Kansas State turned into 23 points.

No. 17 Kansas 71, Colorado 59

Hunter Dickinson finished with 19 points and nine rebounds and Kansas beat Colorado in Lawrence, Kan.

Zeke Mayo had 13 points and eight rebounds, and Dajuan Harris and KJ Adams scored 10 points apiece for the Jayhawks (17-7, 8-5 Big 12).

Sebastian Rancik had 19 points and nine rebounds, Bangot Dak contributed 11 points and Elijah Malone scored 10 for plummeting Colorado (9-15, 0-13), which has lost 13 in a row. It is the Buffaloes' worst start to a conference season since they went 0-14 in the Big 8 in the 1985-86 season.

Colorado trailed by 14 at halftime but came out strong after the break. Andrej Jakimovski hit two 3-pointers, Dak made a layup and Rancik drained a jumper during an opening 10-2 run.

No. 18 Marquette 68, DePaul 58

Kam Jones had 19 points and Stevie Mitchell added 17 as Marquette (19-6, 10-4 Big East) snapped a three-game skid with a victory over DePaul (11-14, 2-12) in Milwaukee.

David Joplin pulled down 10 rebounds and Mitchell added seven to pace the Golden Eagles to a 44-36 edge on the boards and a 15-2 advantage in second-chance points.

Jones moved into third on Marquette's all-time scoring list with 1,870 points.

CJ Gunn had 14 points and Isaiah Rivera scored 13 for DePaul, which has lost 10 of its last 12.

UConn 70, No. 24 Creighton 66

Liam McNeeley scored a career-high 38 points to go along with 10 rebounds, fueling visiting UConn (17-7, 9-4 Big East) to a victory over Creighton (18-7, 11-3) in Omaha, Neb.

McNeeley, a freshman, made 12 of 22 shots from the floor and 5 of 10 from 3-point range while playing in his second game since missing the previous eight due to an ankle injury.

Solo Ball scored 11 points and Alex Karaban added 10 for the Huskies, who overcame an early 14-point deficit.

Creighton's Ryan Kalkbrenner collected 13 points, nine rebounds and three blocks.

WOMEN’S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Vonleh lifts No. 25 Baylor over No. 18 West Virginia

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Aaronette Vonleh scored 21 points on 10-of-12 shooting as the No. 25 Baylor Bears knocked off the visiting No. 18 West Virginia Mountaineers 75-65 in a Big 12 contest on Tuesday night in Waco, Texas.

Vonleh, who was held to 4-of-16 from the field against BYU on Saturday, had 13 points in the third quarter as Baylor (21-5, 11-2 Big 12) won its fifth straight game and remained tied atop the conference with TCU. Bella Fontleroy added 15 points, Jada Walker 13 and Sarah Andrews 12.

Baylor's Darianna Littlepage-Buggs, the conference's player of the week, racked up nine points, 13 rebounds, seven assists and two steals.

Jordan Harrison collected 20 points and four steals for West Virginia (19-5, 9-4), which had a three-game winning

streak snapped. JJ Quinerly added 17 points but was only 5 of 19 from the floor.

No. 11 TCU 79, BYU 47

The Horned Frogs put four scorers in double figures and coasted past the visiting Cougars in the Big 12 matchup in Fort Worth, Texas.

Connor Madison led TCU (23-3, 11-2 Big 12) with 14 points. Sedona Prince added 13 points and seven rebounds, Hailey Van Lith scored 11 points and Agnes Emma-Nnopus 10. Deasia Merrill added nine points and seven boards.

Emma Calvert paced BYU (12-12, 3-10) with 16 points and six rebounds, and Delaney Gibb supplied 14 points and three steals. The Cougars were within three points with just over four minutes left in the second quarter, but TCU went on a 9-0 run and led by double digits for most of the duration.



Aaronette Vonleh (21, shooting against New Orleans on Nov. 29) scored 21 points Tuesday to lead Baylor to a 75-65 win over West Virginia. CHRIS JONES/IMAGN IMAGES

NBA

TUESDAY’S ROUNDUP

Grizzlies spoil Durant’s night

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Ja Morant recorded 26 points, seven rebounds and six assists to help the Memphis Grizzlies post a 119-112 victory over the host Phoenix Suns on Tuesday night.

Phoenix’s Kevin Durant scored 34 points on 12-of-18 shooting and became the eighth player in NBA history to reach 30,000 career points. His total sits at 30,008.

The loss was the fifth in six games for the Suns, while Memphis won for the 11th time in 13 games.

Desmond Bane registered 20 points and eight rebounds and Jaren Jackson Jr. added 17 points and six rebounds for Memphis. Brandon Clarke had 14 points and seven rebounds, and Santi Aldama also produced 14 points for the Grizzlies.

Bol Bol scored 18 points, collected a season-best 14 rebounds and matched his career high of four blocked shots for Phoenix. Devin Booker added 17 points and nine assists.

Knicks 128, Pacers 115

Karl-Anthony Towns recorded 40 points and 12 rebounds, Josh Hart added a season-high 30 points, and New York beat Indiana in Indianapolis.

Hart also had 10 rebounds and five assists while shooting 12 of 16 from the field. Miles McBride added 15 points for New York, which drew clear in the fourth quarter to win the season series against Indiana 2-1.

New York led by eight early in the fourth quarter before using a 13-5 run to go up 116-100 with 5:41 remaining on a layup by Hart. The Knicks remained in control to win for the eighth time in their past 10 games.

Pascal Siakam led Indiana with 24 points. Bennedict Mathurin scored 18 off the bench, and Thomas Bryant had 18 points and nine rebounds, Tyrese Haliburton added 16 points and eight assists, and Ben Sheppard had 12 points.

Bryant started in place of center Myles Turner, who missed his second straight game with a cervical strain.



New York Knicks center Karl-Anthony Towns (32) shoots against Pacers center Thomas Bryant and forward Aaron Nesmith during Tuesday's game at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. TREVOR RUSZKOWSKI/IMAGN IMAGES

Raptors 106, 76ers 103

Scottie Barnes collected 33 points and 10 rebounds and Immanuel Quickley added 23 points, lifting visiting Toronto over Philadelphia.

Barnes made 10 of 16 shots from the floor and Quickley sank 7 of 11 attempts for the Raptors, who snapped a four-game losing skid. The win was just Toronto’s fifth in 26 road games this season.

Gradey Dick had 17 points and three steals, including one on Joel Embiid in the late stages, for the Raptors. He added a free throw with 5.3 seconds to play to cap the scoring.

Embiid recorded 27 points and 12 rebounds for the struggling 76ers, who have lost four in a row and 13 of their last 18 games.

Jared Butler scored 15 points, Paul George had 14, Quentin Grimes chipped in 13 and Kelly Oubre Jr. added 12 for Philadelphia.

Tyrese Maxey, however, was limited to just five points on 1-of-9 shooting from the floor.

Pistons 132, Bulls 92

Reserve Malik Beasley scored 24 points and Cade Cunningham added 20 points and seven assists to guide visiting Detroit to a rout of Chicago.

The Pistons never trailed while shooting 53.1 percent from the field. Their biggest advantage was 49 points.

Detroit has won three games in a row and five of its past seven. The Pistons matched their season low for points allowed while limiting the Bulls to 35 percent shooting overall, and Chicago went just 10-for-47 from long range.

Tobias Harris (18 points), Ausar Thompson (16), Isaiah Stewart (14) and Marcus Sasser (14) also scored in double figures for Detroit. Jalen Duren snaged a game-high 11 rebounds.

Rookie Matas Buzelis led Chicago with 12 points, scoring in double figures for the seventh straight game. Josh Giddey followed with 11 points.

Chicago trailed 71-29 at the break, with its halftime deficit matching the largest in franchise history.

TUESDAY’S BOX SCORES

Toronto 106, Philadelphia 103
TORONTO (106)
Agbaji 5-10 0-0 11, Barnes 10-16 12-15 33, Mogbo 2-4 0-0 4, Dick 6-13 2-3 17, Quickley 7-11 5-5 23, Walter 2-8 0-0 5, Shead 3-5 0-0 6, Boucher 0-6 0-0 0, Robinson 2-4 0-0 4, Chomche 0-2 0-0 0, Battle 1-3 0-0 3. Totals 38-82 19-23 106.

PHILADELPHIA (103)
Edwards 4-7 0-0 9, George 5-12 2-2 14, Embiid 8-19 10-13 27, Maxey 1-9 2-2 5, Oubre Jr. 6-12 0-0 12, Grimes 5-12 2-3 13, Yabusele 2-9 2-2 8, Butler 6-10 2-2 15, Council IV 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 37-91 20-24 103.

TOR 26 24 34 22 - 106
PHI 18 34 29 22 - 103

3-Point Goals: Toronto 11-33 (Quickley 4-8, Dick 3-8, Barnes 1-2, Agbaji 1-3, Battle 1-3, Walter 1-4, Shead 0-1, Mogbo 0-1, Boucher 0-3), Philadelphia 9-38 (George 2-6, Yabusele 2-6, Edwards 1-2, Butler 1-3, Embiid 1-5, Grimes 1-6, Maxey 1-7, Council IV 0-1, Oubre Jr. 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Toronto 49 (Barnes 10), Philadelphia 46 (Embiid 12). Assists: Toronto 23 (Mogbo, Quickley, Shead 5), Philadelphia 22 (Butler, Embiid, Grimes 4). Total Fouls: Toronto 20, Philadelphia 18. A: 19,767 (20,318)

New York 128, Indiana 115

NEW YORK (128)
Achiuwa 3-8 3-4 9, Hart 12-16 5-7 30, Towns 14-23 9-9 40, Bridges 3-7 0-0 6, Brunson 4-11 0-0 8, McBride 4-7 3-3 15, Payne 4-8 0-0 9, Shamet 5-9 0-0 11, Hukporti 0-1 0-0 0, Ryan 0-1 0-0 0, Kolek 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 49-91 20-23 128.

INDIANA (115)
Nesmith 0-3 0-0 0, Siakam 9-18 3-3 24, Bryant 8-12 1-1 18, Haliburton 7-15 0-0 16, Nembhard 3-8 2-2 8, Mathurin 4-10 9-11 18, Toppin 4-8 1-2 9, McConnell 3-5 1-4 7, Sheppard 4-5 2-2 12, Walker 1-3 1-3 3, Okafor 0-0 0-0 0, Furphy 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 43-89 20-26 115.

NYK 27 41 30 30 - 128
IND 26 34 28 27 - 115

3-Point Goals: New York 10-27 (McBride 4-4, Towns 3-8, Hart 1-3, Payne 1-4, Shamet 1-4, Bridges 0-1, Ryan 0-1, Brunson 0-1, Achiuwa 0-1), Indiana 9-31 (Siakam 3-6, Sheppard 2-3, Haliburton 2-6, Bryant 1-3, Mathurin 1-5, McConnell 0-1, Nembhard 0-2, Nesmith 0-2, Toppin 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: New York 48 (Achiuwa, Towns 12), Indiana 36 (Bryant 9). Assists: New York 37 (Payne 8), Indiana 32 (Haliburton 8). Total Fouls: New York 22, Indiana 17. A: 16,685 (18,165)

Detroit 132, Chicago 92

DETROIT (132)
Harris 8-13 0-0 18, Thompson 7-8 2-2 16, Duren 2-5 0-0 4, Cunningham 9-14 1-1 20, Hardaway Jr. 1-6 0-0 3, Fontecchio 2-8 3-3 8, Holland II 0-4 2-2 2, Beasley 8-12 1-1 24, Schroder 1-6 2-2 4, Stewart 6-8 0-0 14, Sasser 5-5 0-0 14, Reed 2-4 1-2 5, Waters III 0-3 0-0 0. Totals 51-96 12-13 132.

CHICAGO (92)

Buzelis 5-7 0-0 12, Dosunmu 3-6 1-2 8, Vucevic 4-15 0-1 8, Giddey 5-10 0-0 11, White 2-13 1-2 5, Huertter 2-7 1-2 5, Williams 2-8 0-0 5, Jones 3-6 2-2 8, Terry 2-6 1-2 6, Phillips 2-4 2-3 7, Collins 1-2 2-2 5, Carter 1-5 0-0 3, Smith 2-6 0-0 5, Horton-Tucker 1-5 2-3 4. Totals 35-100 12-19 92.

DET 34 37 34 27 - 132
CHI 18 11 30 33 - 92

3-Point Goals: Detroit 18-41 (Beasley 7-10, Sasser 4-4, Stewart 2-2, Harris 2-6, Cunningham 1-2, Fontecchio 1-3, Hardaway Jr. 1-6, Schroder 0-1, Reed 0-2, Holland II 0-2, Waters III 0-3), Chicago 10-47 (Buzelis 2-2, Collins 1-2, Carter 1-3, Dosunmu 1-3, Williams 1-3, Terry 1-3, Phillips 1-3, Giddey 1-4, Smith 1-5, Jones 0-1, Horton-Tucker 0-2, Huertter 0-3, Vucevic 0-5, White 0-8). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Detroit 55 (Duren 11), Chicago 44 (Vucevic 7). Assists: Detroit 30 (Cunningham 7), Chicago 22 (Carter, Giddey, Huertter 4). Total Fouls: Detroit 19, Chicago 10. A: 18,321 (20,917)

Memphis 119, Phoenix 112

MEMPHIS (119)
Jackson Jr. 6-17 5-8 17, Wells 3-8 0-0 8, Edey 2-6 0-0 4, Bane 6-13 6-7 20, Morant 8-19 10-12 26, Aldama 5-10 0-0 14, Clarke 7-11 0-0 14, Williams Jr. 3-9 0-0 7, Kennard 0-1 0-0 0, Jackson 1-3 0-0 3, Phippen Jr. 2-3 0-0 6. Totals 43-100 21-27 119.

PHOENIX (112)

Bol 7-16 1-2 18, Durant 12-18 7-10 34, Richards 2-4 2-2 6, Booker 6-13 5-5 17, Jones 4-11 1-1 11, O’Neale 4-12 0-0 11, Allen 3-7 2-2 9, Washington Jr. 1-8 0-0 2, Plumlee 2-3 0-0 4, Dunn 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 41-92 18-22 112.

MEM 36 32 27 24 - 119
PHX 26 30 31 25 - 112

3-Point Goals: Memphis 12-39 (Aldama 4-6, Phippen Jr. 2-3, Bane 2-5, Wells 2-5, Jackson 1-2, Williams Jr. 1-6, Kennard 0-1, Edey 0-1, Morant 0-5, Jackson Jr. 0-5), Phoenix 12-44 (Durant 3-4, O’Neale 3-10, Bol 3-10, Jones 2-7, Allen 1-4, Booker 0-3, Washington Jr. 0-6). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Memphis 60 (Edey, Williams Jr. 9), Phoenix 42 (Bol 14). Assists: Memphis 22 (Morant 6), Phoenix 35 (Booker, Jones 9). Total Fouls: Memphis 22, Phoenix 17. A: 17,071 (18,055)

HOCKEY

Players to watch in 4 Nations Face-Off

Mike Brehm

USA TODAY

There's no NHL All-Star Game this season. Instead, there's an international star-filled tournament.

Players from the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden will suit up in their national team jerseys at the 4 Nations Face-Off. It's a major gathering of star power in Montreal and Boston before the NHL returns to the Olympics in 2026.

Players on the teams have combined for seven Hart (MVP) trophies, seven Norris (defenseman) trophies and three Vezina (goaltender) trophies. There are 35 combined Stanley Cup titles and five playoff MVP wins.

There are six goal titles, three by the Toronto Maple Leafs' Auston Matthews (USA), who scored 69 times last season. There are seven scoring titles, led by Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid's five. The three-time MVP is playing on Team Canada with reigning MVP Nathan MacKinnon.

Here are 12 players to watch (three from each team):

Players to watch: USA

G Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets: He's a two-time Vezina Trophy winner and could become the first back-to-back winner since Martin Brodeur in 2007 and 2008. He's the NHL leader in shutouts (6), goals-against average (2.06) and save percentage (.925), while facing nearly 1,200 shots.

D Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets: With Quinn Hughes out because of injury, Werenski takes on a greater role. He's the USA's top scorer from the blue line (59 points, tied with Hughes) and one of the front-runners for the Norris Trophy. His play has helped the Blue Jackets be in the playoff mix despite the offseason death of



Avalanche center Nathan MacKinnon, seen during a game against the Flyers on Feb. 2, is the reigning NHL MVP. RON CHENOY/IMAGN IMAGES

Johnny Gaudreau and lengthy injury absences for Boone Jenner and Sean Monahan.

F Matthew Tkachuk, Florida Panthers: Tkachuk has a six-game goal streak with 13 points in that span. He gets under opponents' skin. He won a Stanley Cup last season. And he's on the team with brother Brady.

Others to watch: Matthews, Jack Eichel, Kyle Connor, Jack Hughes, Adam Fox.

Players to watch: Canada

F Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche: Last year's MVP is making a case again. He leads the NHL with 87 points and is averaging 1.6 points a game since early December. He's put-

ting up big points even after the trade of his regular winger Mikko Rantanen in January. He and his Colorado teammates lit up Hellebuyck (5.23 goals-against average) in last season's play-offs.

Sam Reinhart, Florida Panthers: A 57-goal scorer last season, he's on a 44-goal pace this season. But he's a threat anytime he's on the ice and likely will play on a line with McDavid, plus on the top power-play unit. He has nine power-play goals and more important, a league-best five short-handed goals. His explosiveness means teams will have to be cautious when they're on the power play.

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins: The Penguins captain is Canada's captain. He scored the gold-medal game overtime goal in the 2010 Olympics, scored in the championship game in 2014 and was MVP as Canada picked up a third consecutive win in best-on-best tournaments at the World Cup of Hockey in 2016. It looked like an upper-body injury might keep him out of this tournament, but he got the go-ahead to play. It's worth watching how he's affected by the injury and the two-game absence.

Others to watch: McDavid, Cale Makar, Mitch Marner, Brad Marchand, Brayden Point

Players to watch: Finland

Aleksander Barkov, Florida Panthers: How best to stop the powerful offenses in the tournament? Strong two-way play. Barkov is one of the best in the league. He has won the Selke Trophy twice as the league's top defensive forward. He puts up points, too, and has 11 in his last six games.

Mikko Rantanen, Carolina Hurricanes: Which version does Finland get? He had 64 points with Colorado before the trade and two points in six games after being moved. He'll have former Ava-

lanche linemate Artturi Lehkonen with him on Team Finland, along with current teammate Sebastian Aho. He missed the last game before the break with an injury.

Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators: Finland is known for producing top goalies, and Saros is one of them. But his numbers have dropped as the Predators have unexpectedly struggled. His 23 losses are two off his career worst and he has a sub-.900 save percentage. He never has finished below .900.

Others to watch: Aho, Roope Hintz, Mikael Granlund, Lehkonen, Anton Lundell.

Players to watch: Sweden

D Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning: He replaced Steven Stamkos as Lightning captain and is captain of Team Sweden. He has won two Stanley Cups, one playoff MVP award and one Norris Trophy during a stretch of six seasons as a finalist.

F William Nylander, Toronto Maple Leafs: His 33 goals lead Swedish players. Seven of those have been game-winners and 25 were scored at even strength. He has 21 power-play points, third on Team Sweden.

G Linus Ullmark, Ottawa Senators, or Filip Gustavsson, Minnesota Wild: In theory, Sweden would go with former Vezina winner Ullmark as their No. 1 goalie. But he has just returned from an injury, getting in two games (facing a combined 84 shots) before the tournament. Gustavsson has 22 wins in 37 starts and has won four of his last five games. Ullmark has the better goals-against average. They're even in save percentage and shutouts. It will be interesting to see how Sweden deploys its goaltenders.

Others to watch: Lucas Raymond, Jesper Bratt, Adrian Kempe, Filip Forsberg, Rasmus Dahlin

SCOREBOARD

All times Eastern				
NBA				
EASTERN CONFERENCE				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	38	16	.704	—
N.Y. Knicks	35	18	.660	2½
Philadelphia	20	33	.377	17½
Brooklyn	19	34	.358	18½
Toronto	17	37	.315	21
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	25	26	.490	—
Atlanta	26	28	.481	½
Orlando	25	29	.473	1
Charlotte	13	38	.255	12
Washington	9	44	.170	17
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	43	10	.811	—
Indiana	29	23	.558	13½
Milwaukee	28	24	.538	14½
Detroit	28	26	.519	15½
Chicago	22	32	.407	21½
WESTERN CONFERENCE				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	36	17	.679	—
Houston	33	20	.623	3
Dallas	28	26	.519	8½
San Antonio	23	28	.451	12
New Orleans	12	41	.226	24
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	43	9	.827	—
Denver	35	19	.648	9
Minnesota	30	24	.556	14
Portland	23	31	.426	21
Utah	12	40	.231	31
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	32	19	.627	—
L.A. Clippers	29	23	.558	3½
Sacramento	27	26	.509	6
Golden State	27	26	.509	6
Phoenix	26	27	.491	7
Monday's Scores				
San Antonio 131, Washington 121				
Cleveland 128, Minnesota 107				
Atlanta 112, Orlando 106				
Brooklyn 97, Charlotte 89				
Boston 103, Miami 85				
Golden State 125, Milwaukee 111				
Oklahoma City 137, New Orleans 101				
Sacramento 129, Dallas 128				
Denver 146, Portland 117				
L.A. Lakers 132, Utah 113				
Tuesday's Scores				
Toronto 106, Philadelphia 103				
N.Y. Knicks 128, Indiana 115				
Detroit 132, Chicago 92				
Memphis 119, Phoenix 112				
Wednesday's Games				
San Antonio at Boston, 7 p.m.				
Indiana at Washington, 7 p.m.				
Charlotte at Orlando, 7 p.m.				
Philadelphia at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.				
Cleveland at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.				
Atlanta at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.				
Detroit at Chicago, 8 p.m.				
Sacramento at New Orleans, 8 p.m.				
Miami at Oklahoma City, 8 p.m.				
Milwaukee at Minnesota, 8 p.m.				
Phoenix at Houston, 8:30 p.m.				
L.A. Lakers at Utah, 9 p.m.				
Portland at Denver, 9 p.m.				
Golden State at Dallas, 9:30 p.m.				
Memphis at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.				
Thursday's Games				
Golden State at Houston, 8 p.m.				
Sacramento at New Orleans, 8 p.m.				
Miami at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.				
Oklahoma City at Minnesota, 8:30 p.m.				
L.A. Clippers at Utah, 9 p.m.				
League Leaders				
Scoring Averages				
	GP	PTS	AVG	
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	51	1664	32.6	
Antetokounmpo, MIL	41	1302	31.8	
Jokic, DEN	48	1432	29.8	

Maxey, PHI	45	1264	28.1
Edwards, MIN	52	1432	27.5
Tatum, BOS	51	1374	26.9
Durant, PHX	39	1050	26.9
Booker, PHX	47	1239	26.4
Brunson, NYK	51	1340	26.3
Lillard, MIL	44	1133	25.8
Davis, DAL	43	1107	25.7
Cunningham, DET	48	1222	25.5
Fox, SAS	49	1209	24.7
James, LAL	47	1149	24.5
Wembanyama, SAS	45	1099	24.4
Irving, DAL	43	1042	24.2
Towns, NYK	47	1128	24.0
Mitchell, CLE	50	1200	24.0
Powell, LAC	43	1031	24.0
Herro, MIA	49	1163	23.7
Rebounds Per Game			
	GP	OFF DEF TOT	AVG
Sabonis, SAC	50	199 517	716.14
Towns, NYK	47	147 488	635.13
Zubac, LAC	50	190 445	635.12
Jokic, DEN	48	144 458	602.12
Antetokounmpo, MIL	41	94 405	499.12
Davis, DAL	43	123 392	515.12
Kessler, UTA	41	187 301	488.11
Wembanyama, SAS	45	81 412	493.12
Sengun, HOU	50	169 350	519.12
Gobert, MIN	54	188 371	559.12
Allen, CLE	53	142 406	548.12
Vucevic, CHI	52	121 411	532.12
Ayton, POR	40	124 282	406.10
Poeltl, TOR	45	156 299	455.10
Duren, DET	50	180 324	504.10
Adebayo, MIA	50	130 370	500.10
Hart, NYK	51	113 378	491.10
Mobley, CLE	47	101 323	424.10
Capela, ATL	45	147 258	405.10
Tatum, BOS	51	30 408	438.10
Assists Per Game			
	GP	AST	AVG
Young, ATL	50	568	11.4
Jokic, DEN	48	492	10.3
Cunningham, DET	48	456	9.5
James, LAL	47	424	9.0
Harden, LAC	49	427	8.6
Haliburton, IND	50	427	8.5
Paul, SAS	51	414	8.1
Lillard, MIL	44	330	7.5
Brunson, NYK	51	381	7.5
Garland, CLE	51	339	6.7
Booker, PHX	47	312	6.6
Giddey, CHI	49	319	6.5
Barnes, TOR	40	256	6.4
Westbrook, DEN	48	307	6.4
Fox, SAS	49	310	6.3
Sabonis, SAC	50	314	6.3
Maxey, PHI	45	277	6.2
Murray, DEN	47	288	6.1
Curry, GSW	44	268	6.1
Reaves, LAL	46	279	6.1
Steals Per Game			
	GP	STL	AVG
Daniels, ATL	49	145	2.96
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	51	98	1.92
Maxey, PHI	45	85	1.89
Jokic, DEN	48	87	1.81
Wallace, OKC	46	81	1.76
Williams, OKC	49	86	1.76
VanVleet, HOU	45	72	1.60
Hart, NYK	51	79	1.55
Dunn, LAC	45	69	1.53
Fox, SAS	49	75	1.53
Oubre Jr., PHI	49	74	1.51
Caldwell-Pope, ORL	52	78	1.50
Barnes, TOR	40	60	1.50
Westbrook, DEN	48	72	1.50
Harden, LAC	49	72	1.47
McDaniels, MIN	54	79	1.46
Murray, DEN	47	68	1.45
Thompson, HOU	50	72	1.44
Mitchell, CLE	50	72	1.44
Poole, WAS	46	66	1.43
Blocks Per Game			
	GP	BLK	AVG
Wembanyama, SAS	45	174	3.87
Kessler, UTA	41	96	2.34
Davis, DAL	43	93	2.16
Lopez, MIL	51	99	1.94
Gafford, DAL	51	96	1.88
Turner, IND	46	82	1.78
Jackson Jr., MEM	50	82	1.64
Bitadze, ORL	44	84	1.61
Gobert, MIN	54	74	1.56
Sarr, WAS	41	63	1.54
Mobley, CLE	47	72	1.53
Clingan, POR	40	61	1.53
Missi, NOP	50	73	1.46

Durant, PHX

39

52

1.33

Claxton, BKN

46

61

1.33

Antetokounmpo, MIL

41

54

1.32

Poeltl, TOR

45

58

1.29

Isaac, ORL

49

61

1.24

Thompson, HOU

50

62

1.24

Stewart, DET

48

59

1.23

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

W

L

OT

Pts

GF

GA

Florida

34

20

3

71

192

166

Toronto

33

20

2

68

169

155

Tampa Bay

31

20

4

66

197

155

Ottawa

29

23

4

62

158

155

Detroit

28

22

5

61

160

170

Boston

27

24

6

60

157

178

Montreal

25

26

5

55

163

193

Buffalo

22

27

5

49

171

188

Metropolitan Division

W

L

OT

Pts

GF

GA

Washington

36

11

8

80

196

144

Carolina

33

19

4

70

184

155

New Jersey

31

20

6

68

175

144

Columbus

26

22

8

60

184

188

N.Y. Rangers

27

24

4

58

165

166

N.Y. Islanders

25

23

7

57

152

166

Pittsburgh

23

25

9

55

164

200

Philadelphia

24

26

7

55

162

199

Western Conference

Central Division

W

L

OT

Pts

GF

GA

Winnipeg

39

14

3

81

202

133

Dallas

35

18

2

72

182

133

Minnesota

33

19

4

70

163

155

Colorado

33

22

2

68

186

177

Utah

24

23

9

57

158

177

St. Louis

25

26

5

55

154

177

Nashville

19

28

7

45

144

197

Chicago

17

31

7

41

149

197

Pacific Division

W

L

OT

Pts

GF

GA

Edmonton

34

17

4

72

182

155

Vegas

33

17

6

72

185

155

L.A. Kings

29

17

7

65

151

133

Vancouver

26

18

11

63

155

166

Calgary

26

21

8

60

148

166

Anaheim

24

24

6

54

137

166

Seattle

24

29

4

52

169

188

San Jose

15

35

7

37

148

211

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Monday's Games

No Games Scheduled

Tuesday's Games

No Games Scheduled

Wednesday's Games

No Games Scheduled

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Tuesday's Men's Scores

East

Loyola Chicago 87, Richmond 80

BYU 73, West Virginia 69

East Carolina 82, UAB 75

Southeast

Miami (FL) 91, Syracuse 84

Iowa State 77, UCF 65

Kentucky 75, Tennessee 64

Florida 81, Mississippi State 68

Auburn 80, Vanderbilt 68

Murray State 63, UIC 53

Southeast Missouri State 57, Little Rock 45

Midwest

Kent State 91, Central Michigan 83

Miami (OH) 92, Toledo 80

Buffalo 73, Northern Illinois 67

Akron 105, Western Michigan 92

Ball State 86, Eastern Michigan 84

Ohio 86, Bowling Green 81

Michigan 75, Purdue 73

Cincinnati 85, Utah 75

Illinois 83, UCLA 78

George Mason 76, Saint Louis 74

Kansas State 73, Arizona 70

UNI 88, Indiana State 78

Marquette 68, DePaul 58

Indiana 71, Michigan State 67

Kansas 71, Colorado 59