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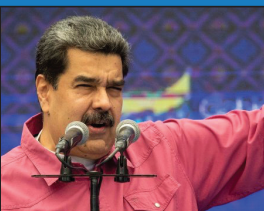
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Venezuela moves ahead with plan to annex Guyana's oil-rich Essequibo region
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Sen. Tommy Tuberville drops blockade on most military nominations

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN BLASTS ALABAMA LAWMAKER, REPUBLICANS WHO STOOD WITH HIM

By Patrick Hilsman
UPI

that don't allow abortion to travel to states that do.



Tuberville

U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., on Tuesday mostly dropped his boycott of military nominations, which left multiple nominees in a state of limbo for months.

Tuberville initiated the boycott in February as a protest against military rules that allow service-members to leave base in states

The boycott was in response to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin signing the memorandum Ensuring Access to Reproductive Health Care, which also granted soldiers leave if they required abortion services.

"I'm releasing everybody -- I've still got a hold on, I think, 11 four-star generals, everybody else is completely released from me. Now somebody else might think... a few other people got holds on one or two or three people. But other than that, it's over," Tuberville told reporters.

"It was pretty much a draw," Tuberville told reporters.

icism from former officials who accused him of "harming military readiness."

In May, seven former military officials sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer who said, "leaving these and many other senior positions in doubt at a time of enormous geopolitical uncertainty sends the wrong message to

See **BLOCKADE**, page 4

Special election to fill George Santos' seat

By Clyde Hughes
UPI

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul set the special election to fill expelled Rep. George Santos' House seat for Feb. 13.

Hochul announced the date on Tuesday after Santos, R-N.Y., was expelled from the House on Friday, potentially shrinking the already slim advantage the GOP has in the chamber.

"As governor, I have the solemn responsibility to call a special election to ensure the voters of Long Island and Queens once again have representation in Congress," Hochul said in a statement.

"Members of Congress provide critical constituent services, serve as a link to federal agencies, and advocate on behalf of the constituents who sent them to Washington. I look forward to working with the next representative for the 3rd Congressional District on the issues facing New Yorkers."

See **SEAT**, page 5

GOP senators walk out of briefing over lack of border support in Ukraine aid package

By Darryl Coote
UPI

A classified briefing on Ukraine fell apart as some Republicans walked out in protest over the lack of domestic immigration measures in a supplemental aid package the White House is pushing Congress to pass to bolster its besieged ally's defenses against Russia.

The White House has for months argued that with Ukraine funding almost spent, a new \$106 billion supplemental aid package unveiled in October was needed to advance



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OPINION

Russia's hard line at European security meeting raises tensions

By Stefan Wolff, University of Birmingham

After many months of diplomatic wrangling, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was granted another lease of life at the annual ministerial council meeting last week in a messy compromise between Russia and the West.

But rather than ushering in a period of renewed efforts to mend Europe's broken security order, existing fault lines have deepened and new ones have emerged.

The OSCE traces its roots back to a period of serious attempts at detente between the United States and the USSR during the 1970s. It's now the world's largest regional security organization with 57 participating states encompassing three continents -- North America, Europe and Asia. Yet its ability to fulfill its mandate of providing security has been severely compromised in recent years.

While the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the latest and most egregious violation of the OSCE's fundamental principles, it was not the first. Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent recognition of the independence of the Kremlin-supported breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August was followed, in 2014, by the annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donbas.

Russia has also deliberately undermined the OSCE's existing missions in Ukraine. The "Observer Mission," which was set up in July 2014 to monitor activity at key Russian-Ukrainian border checkpoints in eastern Ukraine was discontinued in September 2021.

Meanwhile, the "Special Monitoring Mission," set up in March 2014 to observe and report in an impartial and objective manner on the security situation in Ukraine was closed in March 2022, weeks after Russia launched its all-out invasion.

The office of the project coordinator in Ukraine, which was set up at Kyiv's request in 1999 to help it meet a range of security challenges and assist and advise on reforms, was closed in June 2022. All of these initiatives ended after Russia vetoed their continuation.

Yet, none of this stopped the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, from declaring at the latest meeting that the OSCE was becoming "an appendage of NATO and the EU" and finds itself "on the brink of the abyss."

At least on this latter point, there is little disagreement. The OSCE is experiencing the deepest crisis in its history. Because of Russia's veto, the organization has not had an approved budget since 2021. It has only survived on the basis of "creative diplomacy," with individual member states finding money to fund its missions.

Sense of instability

The compromises achieved at the ministerial council in Skopje last week do little to put the OSCE back onto a more sustainable footing. While appointing Malta as chair of the organization for 2024 averts complete dysfunctionality, the mandates of the organization's other top officials, including the secretary-general, were extended by only nine months, rather than the customary three-year period.

This merely prolongs the existing agony by putting off a decision on who is to lead the organization and its institutions. The pervasive sense of instability that surrounds the OSCE fits neatly with the Kremlin's narrative of the need for a fundamentally new and different European security order.

While Russia managed to block Estonia's candidacy for the chair and secured a non-NATO member for the role with Malta, this is hardly a triumph of Russian diplomacy, given that the Kremlin had to drop its opposition to the renewal of the other leadership positions.



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New York's Adult Survivors Act Combats Sexual Offenses by Offending the Principles of Justice

Beneath the surface of many legislative acts with good intentions, a sinister reality often lurks. This is frequently the consequence of lawmakers' failure to courageously confront and consider the potential adverse effects of their policies. This can manifest in many different ways: For instance, a legislator might overlook the few instances where their law could fail, or they may succumb to external political pressures, opting for silence over scrutiny.

The Adult Survivors Act, a landmark law passed in New York, is a prime example of a well-intentioned law that turned ugly due to its sponsor failing or refusing to consider its negative ramifications.

The Adult Survivors Act is simple: It establishes a one-year time period in which people who endured sexual offenses are permitted to sue their abusers. At first glance, this seems to be a step in the right direction. After all, it is well-documented that, for various reasons, victims of sexual assault generally remain silent when they are abused. This is why, on its face, the Adult Survivors Act is a persuasive law. However, a closer examination of the unintended -- or perhaps intended -- consequences of the law reveals that this

law makes a mockery of the principles of justice.

To start, let's consider the fact that this applies to every person who has ever stepped foot in New York State. It does not matter whether you live right next

door in New Jersey, across the country in California, or oceans away across the world in Australia. It does not matter if you have never stepped foot in New York. The act makes it so that if someone claims you committed sexual assault in New York years ago, you could be compelled to return to New York to mount a defense.

This is particularly concerning when you consider the lack of evidence that would exist in an older case. Sexual assault generally occurs behind closed doors, so even in a new case, evidence is scant. However, at least the recollections of the people and any evidence from after the fact to disprove the assault would still be preserved. Add the passage of time into the mix, and the challenges compound.

A person accused of a sexual offense may find themselves at a loss to re-

member where they were during the day or time of the alleged crime, and they may dispute the non-consensual nature of the encounter. And what if there was evidence in the past proving their alibi or that the encounter was consensual, like a letter, email, photograph, or witness? Odds are, they're gone now.

We must keep in mind that the dispositive question in a sexual offense case is whether the encounter was consensual. Consider a person who enters into a legal sexual encounter under the assumption that it was consensual, using affirmative verbal and nonverbal cues. Now imagine that two decades later, they face allegations of nonconsensual sex. What memory could they possibly draw upon to credibly attest to the consensual nature of that past encounter? What if they have had numerous encounters with other women and didn't remember it? Is it enough for them to say that they are a good person and that they would never commit a sexual offense against another person? Obviously not.

Now, we've witnessed several public figures, including renowned individuals like musician Sean Combs and New York City's Mayor Eric Adams, face allegations of sexual assault

under the Adult Survivors Act. Their guilt or innocence remains uncertain. Yet, an important question arises: Would they even know themselves if they did it? Eric Adams was accused of sexually assaulting someone 30 years ago. Sean Combs, 32 years ago. How could someone possibly remember an encounter from so long ago? Allowing someone to bring forward a lawsuit so old is dangerous for all reasons.

Sex abusers deserve to be sued for every dollar of theirs; they deserve to rot in prison, too. But this isn't about the ones who have committed these heinous acts and who are guilty of them. This is about the potential liability for those wrongfully accused individuals who may be caught in the crossfire, alleged to have committed one of the most egregious offenses a person can commit, and find themselves without the means to defend themselves.

Armstrong Williams is the manager/sole owner of Howard Stirk Holdings I & II Broadcast Television Stations and the 2016 Multicultural Media Broadcast Owner of the Year. To learn more about him and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

ChatGPT turns 1: AI chatbot's success says as much about humans as tech

By Tim Gorichanaz, Drexel University

ChatGPT was launched on Nov. 30, 2022, ushering in what many have called artificial intelligence's breakout year. Within days of its release, ChatGPT went viral.

Screenshots of conversations snowballed across social media, and the use of ChatGPT skyrocketed to an extent that seems to have surprised even its maker, OpenAI. By January, ChatGPT was seeing 13 million unique visitors each day, setting a record for the fastest-growing user base of a consumer application.

Throughout this breakout year, ChatGPT has revealed the power of a good interface and the perils of hype, and it has sown the seeds of a new set of human behaviors. As a researcher who studies technology and human information behavior, I find that ChatGPT's influence in society comes as much from how people view and use it as the technology itself.

Generative AI systems like ChatGPT are becoming pervasive. Since ChatGPT's release, some mention of AI has seemed obligatory in presentations, conversations and articles. Today, OpenAI claims 100 million people use ChatGPT every week.

Besides people interacting with ChatGPT at home, employees at all levels up to the C-suite in businesses are using the AI chatbot. In tech, generative AI is being called the biggest platform

since the iPhone, which debuted in 2007. All the major players are making AI bets, and venture funding in AI startups is booming.

Along the way, ChatGPT has raised numerous concerns, such as its implications for disinformation, fraud, intellectual property issues and discrimination. In my world of higher education, much of the discussion has surrounded cheating, which has become a focus of my own research this year.

Lessons from first year

The success of ChatGPT speaks foremost to the power of a good interface. AI has been part of countless everyday products for well over a decade, from Spotify and Netflix to Facebook and Google Maps. The first version of GPT, the AI model that powers ChatGPT, dates back to 2018. And even OpenAI's other products, such as DALL-E, did not make the waves that ChatGPT did immediately upon its release. It was the chat-based interface that set off AI's breakout year.

There is something uniquely beguiling about chat. Humans are endowed with language, and conversation is a primary way people interact with each other and infer intelligence. A chat-based interface is a natural mode for interaction and a way for people to experience the "intelligence" of an AI system. The phenomenal success of ChatGPT

shows again that user interfaces drive widespread adoption of technology, from the Macintosh to web browsers and the iPhone. Design makes the difference.

At the same time, one of the technology's principal strengths -- generating convincing language -- makes it well-suited for producing false or misleading information. ChatGPT and other generative AI systems make it easier for criminals and propagandists to prey on human vulnerabilities. The potential of the technology to boost fraud and misinformation is one of the key rationales for regulating AI.

Amid the real promises and perils of generative AI, the technology has also provided another case study in the power of hype. This year has brought no shortage of articles on how AI is going to transform every aspect of society and how the proliferation of the technology is inevitable.

ChatGPT is not the first technology to be hyped as "the next big thing," but it is perhaps unique in simultaneously being hyped as an existential risk. Numerous tech titans and even some AI researchers have warned about the risk of superintelligent AI systems emerging and wiping out humanity, though I believe that these fears are far-fetched.

The media environment favors hype, and the current venture funding climate further fuels AI hype in particular. Playing to people's hopes and fears is a recipe

for anxiety with none of the ingredients for wise decision making.

The future

The AI floodgates opened in 2023, but the next year may bring a slowdown. AI development is likely to meet technical limitations and encounter infrastructural hurdles such as chip manufacturing and server capacity. Simultaneously, AI regulation is likely to be on the way.

This slowdown should give space for norms in human behavior to form, both in terms of etiquette, as in when and where using ChatGPT is socially acceptable, and effectiveness, like when and where ChatGPT is most useful.

ChatGPT and other generative AI systems will settle into people's workflows, allowing workers to accomplish some tasks faster and with fewer errors. In the same way that people learned "to Google" for information, humans will need to learn new practices for working with generative AI tools.

But the outlook for 2024 isn't completely rosy. It is shaping up to be a historic year for elections around the world, and AI-generated content will almost certainly be used to influence public opinion and stoke division. Meta may have banned the use of generative AI in political advertising, but this isn't likely to stop ChatGPT and similar tools from being used to create and spread false or misleading content.

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Rep. Kevin McCarthy says he will leave Congress by year's end



By Clyde Hughes
UPI

Rep. Kevin McCarthy said on Wednesday that he will leave his seat in Congress by the end of the year, months after being ousted as House speaker.

McCarthy, R-Calif., announced his decision in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, in which he said that while he will leave Congress he intends to maintain an active role in the GOP.

"I have decided to depart the House at the end of this year to serve America in new ways," McCarthy said. "I know my work is only getting started."

While not being specific about his next steps, McCarthy said he

would "continue to recruit our country's best and brightest to run for elected office."

"The Republican Party is expanding every day, and I am committed to lending my experience to support the next generation of leaders," he said.

McCarthy endured 15 rounds of voting -- a record voting for House Speaker -- to win the position in the face of opposition from hardline Republicans where the GOP held a slim margin in January.

In October, McCarthy became the first speaker to be removed by a House vote and was later replaced by Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La.

Despite the turmoil around his

brief time as speaker, McCarthy said he was proud of what his team accomplished.

In a post on social media, McCarthy said that serving Congress as speaker "has been my greatest honor."

"As the son of a firefighter from Bakersfield, my story is the story of America," he said. "For me, every moment came with a great deal of devotion and responsibility."

With the loss of former Rep. George Santos on Friday, the Republican advantage in the House is now two seats, which will make it even more critical for Johnson as speaker to keep members on the same page when it comes to legislating.

Blockade

continued from page 1

our adversaries and could weaken our deterrence."

Tuberville's announcement meant that hundreds of military nominees that previously were held up could move forward at last.

After Tuberville's decision, Senate Majority Lead-

er Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., quickly moved some 400+ nominations in one bloc of unanimous consent Tuesday afternoon, according to a report by The Hill.

Also later Tuesday, the White House released a statement from the president, in which Joe Biden praised the end of the hold but criticized the lawmaker who initiated it and the Republicans who support-

ed him. "After 10 months of undermining military readiness and the morale of our troops, Sen. Tuberville of Alabama has finally lifted his politically motivated hold on hundreds of military nominations," Biden said in the release. "Four hundred twenty five highly-qualified, patriotic military leaders have now been confirmed by the Senate

to perform their duties as they fulfill their sacred oath to keep our country safe. These confirmations are long overdue, and should never have been held up in the first place.

"Our service members are the backbone of our country and deserve to receive the pay and promotions they have earned," the president said. "In the end, this was all pointless."

Package

continued from page 1

U.S. national security by supporting allies Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan at a time when democracy worldwide was under threat from autocrats and dictators.

President Joe Biden's supplemental funding bill includes resources for border security and enforcement, but does not appear to go as far as Republicans would like.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., told reporters prior to the briefing Tuesday that Republican leaders' bid to staple a GOP border bill to it was a "non-starter."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-K.Y., earlier Tuesday warned that he would urge his members to vote against moving the bill forward unless it included "meaningful changes to the border."

Republican senators later walked out of the briefing on the war in Ukraine by administration officials, voicing frustration to reporters that there was no discussion about the border. One complained that Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas should have been present.

"Republicans are walking out of the meeting because Democrats are not willing to actually discuss what it takes to get a deal done," Sen. Mitt Romney R-Utah, told reporters as he left the briefing, stating nothing new was said about Ukraine in the meeting and that "there has to be security for our border" in the supplemental package.

Schumer told reporters that the briefing on Ukraine was "immediately hijacked" by McConnell who called on Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., to give a talk on border negotiations.

"That wasn't the purpose. At all," he said.

Then a senator he would not name began screaming at one of the generals on the panel, challenging him on why he didn't go to the border, Schumer said.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., agreed that it was a "very tense meeting" but blamed Schumer for trying to "shut down anybody who raised the border issue."

"He called the meeting and didn't have anyone from DHS there," he said. "It was a complete waste of time."

Schumer has said funding to Ukraine cannot wait and that he will move to a procedural vote on the supplemental package.

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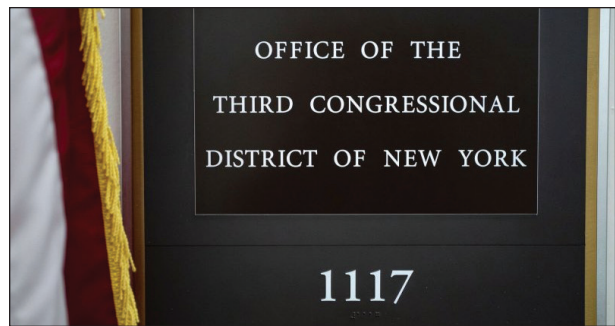
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Community Unites to Call for Healing and Action in Southeast Raleigh

SOUTHEAST RALEIGH FAITH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS ISSUE CALL TO ACTION, PRAYER, AND SOLUTIONS AFTER VIOLENCE AT HIGH SCHOOL

RALEIGH, NC - November 30 - In response to the recent violence at Southeast Raleigh High School on Monday, November 27, faith and community leaders from Southeast Raleigh are issuing a citywide "call to action, prayer, and solution" this Sunday, December 3.

Congregations throughout Raleigh are urged to gather after Sunday services at Word of God Fellowship, at 3000 Rock Quarry Road, Raleigh. At 1 p.m., a community-based conversation will take place, providing organizations and community groups with a platform to share actionable

solutions and steps to support the youth in Southeast Raleigh. Following this dialogue, participants will march from Word of God Fellowship to Southeast Raleigh High School, where they will convene in front of the school for a moment of reflection and prayer. Students, educators, political leaders, and community members from across the city and county are encouraged to join in this display of unity. Those interested in participating are invited to gather at Word of God Fellowship no later than 1 p.m. The community conversation and vigil are open to the public and

media. After the vigil, the Raleigh Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (RIMA) will host a time of healing, comfort, and support for Southeast Raleigh High School students and their families at 4 p.m. at Macedonia New Life Church, 2004 Rock Quarry Road, Raleigh. This event is not open to the media. Together, the community aims to foster healing, understanding, and a collaborative commitment to creating positive change in the wake of recent events.

Seat

continued from page 1

The House took the rare step of removing Santos from his seat in an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 311-114.

Santos had won the seat with 54% of the vote but shortly after his election, Santos faced revelations that he made false state-

ments about many aspects of his personal and professional lives as well as his educational background.

That led to an investigation where he is now charged with 23 felony counts for alleged misconduct, including wire fraud, identity theft and campaign finance violations as well as a scathing House Ethics Committee report that preceded his expulsion.

Congressman Don Davis Announces Nash Community College Distance Learning Grant

GREENVILLE, N.C. — Congressman Don Davis (NC-01) is pleased to announce that Nash Community College will be awarded \$348,130 for high-quality video-conferencing equipment

and 3D interactive education solutions. The investment as part of the USDA Rural Development Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant program will allow Nash Community College

instructors to deliver interactive, immersive college-level distance learning courses to rural high school students, allowing the students to receive college credit while still enrolled in high school.

"By bridging the gap between rural areas and higher education, these federal funds will not only help enrich the lives of our students but also foster a brighter future for eastern North Carolina,"

said Congressman Don Davis. Nash Community College received the following grant: USDA Rural Development Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants: \$348,130



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Democrats unveil legislation to fund schools fighting book bans

By Elleiana Green
Medill News Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 (UPI) -- Pushing back against book bans across the country, Rep. Maxwell Frost of Florida was joined by his Democratic colleagues as he introduced the Fight Book

Bans Act on Tuesday. "The far right, fascist, MAGA extreme has caught up to the fact that their agenda is unpopular with young people, because it turns out young people don't want fascism," Frost said at the Capitol. "Instead of changing

their policies to appeal to young people, they want to change the way young people learn in schools to try to change what they think." As books containing content about race, sexuality and gender continue to be pulled off shelves across the country, school boards and districts

have come under fire as parents remain split about their role in their children's education. While Republican lawmakers say parents should have a choice in the content their children have access to, Democrats say these controversies are further straining an education system that is

underserving young people. Citing the cost schools have to pay to investigate controversial books, Frost said schools need to be equipped with funding to fight censorship and authoritarian control. To do this, the bill would fund school districts up to \$100,000 to oppose challeng-

es against materials in their libraries. Frost was joined by Democratic colleagues, including Reps. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, Jasmine Crockett and Greg Casar of Texas, and Shontel Brown of Ohio in their attempt to move toward protecting free speech.

North Carolina Representatives Send Bipartisan Letter in Support of F15E Strike Eagle Aircraft at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (SJAFOB)

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Representatives Don Davis (NC-01), Gregory Murphy (NC-03), Wiley Nickel (NC-13) and Jeff Jackson (NC-14), members of Congress representing Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and the surrounding community, sent a letter to House Armed Services Committee leadership in support of Section 5133 of the Senate's National Defense Authorization Act, which prohibits divestiture of F-15E aircraft through Fiscal Year 2029. Senator Ted Budd offered

the provision earlier this year. "The F-15E Strike Eagle is a unique air-to-ground attack aircraft that brings much to the fight, plays an essential role in our national security, and remains vital to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base's mission," said Congressman Davis. "I stand in full support of efforts to keep the F-15E at Seymour Johnson AFB. We cannot afford to lose any of these aircraft or suffer lengthy delays without any replacement. Our com-

munity and nation depend on this highly specialized aircraft now and in the future." "Eastern North Carolina is the proud home of many of our nation's premier fighting forces, including the F-15E program at Seymour Johnson Air Force base," said Congressman Murphy. The impact of the F-15E on our military readiness and immediate war fighting capability is unparalleled. In the face of great global instability, it would be to

the detriment of our preparedness to eliminate this critical unit." "North Carolina's 13th Congressional District is home to the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, which is essential to North Carolina and to U.S. national security interests," said Congressman Wiley Nickel. "These brave airmen and women are on the front lines and rely on the F-15E aircraft. It would be irresponsible to divest from these dynamic and versatile fighter planes without a proper replacement. I'm

proud to join this bipartisan effort and will continue to work with the North Carolina delegation to preserve F-15Es at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and across the country." The letter states: "Since its inaugural flight in 1986, the Strike Eagle has been and continues to be one of the most versatile fighter jets in the Air Force. F-15E upgrades, completed or underway, are equivalent to four times the useful life of an F-35A. Further, the Combatant Command

(COCOM) requests the F-15E aircraft more than any other fighter and deploys it for long-range missions at a rate that is second to none. For North Carolina particularly Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (SJAFOB), the impact of the Strike Eagle on military readiness is immeasurably significant. F-15Es have been the backbone of all four fighter squadrons for decades. Most importantly, the Strike Eagles are deployed on the frontlines nearly 50 percent of the time."

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DEQUAN JAGODZ CARNEY

ATTEMPTED FIRST DEGREE MURDER — FELONY
DISCHARGE WEAPON OCCUPIED PROP — FELONY
AWDWIKISI — FELONY



DAVID WAYLON FINCHER

FELONY POSSESSION SC I CS — FELONY
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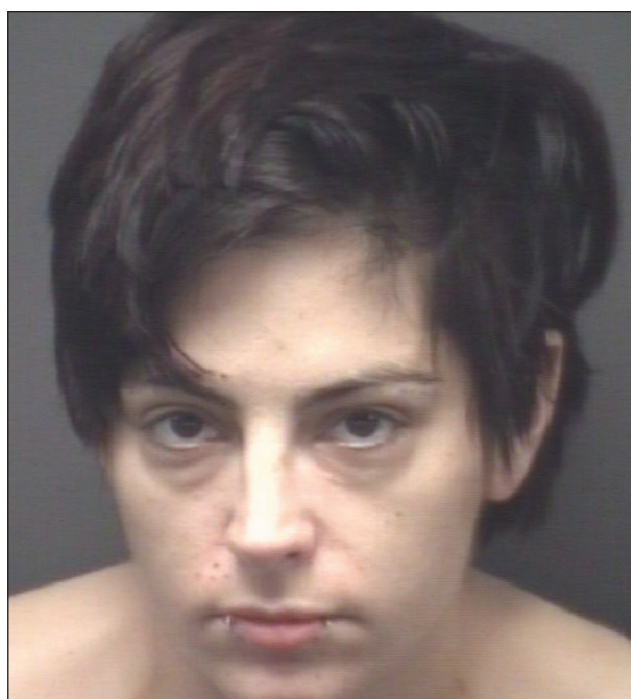
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Olave, Garrett, Wilson among injured in NFL's Week 12

By Alex Butler
UPI

Chris Olave, Myles Garrett and Logan Wilson were among the key players injured in Week 12 of the 2023 NFL season.

Players hurt in Sunday's games will be evaluated to determine the extent of their injuries and potential timelines to return.

Olave sustained a concussion in the third quarter of the New Orleans Saints' loss to the Atlanta Falcons. He did not return. The star wide receiver totaled 114 yards on nine catches before his exit.

Saints wide receiver Rashid Shaheed (thigh) and defensive end Cameron Jordan (shin) also sustained injuries. Falcons defensive back Mike Hughes injured his hand and did not return.

The Saints already were playing without starting wide receiver Michael Thomas, who is on injured reserve because of a knee injury. A.T. Perry, Keith Kirkwood and Lynn Bowden Jr. are the other wide receivers on the Saints' roster.

Carl Granderson, Tanoh Kpassagnon, Isaiah Foskey, Kyle Phil-

lips and Jason Pierre-Paul are the other defensive ends on the roster.

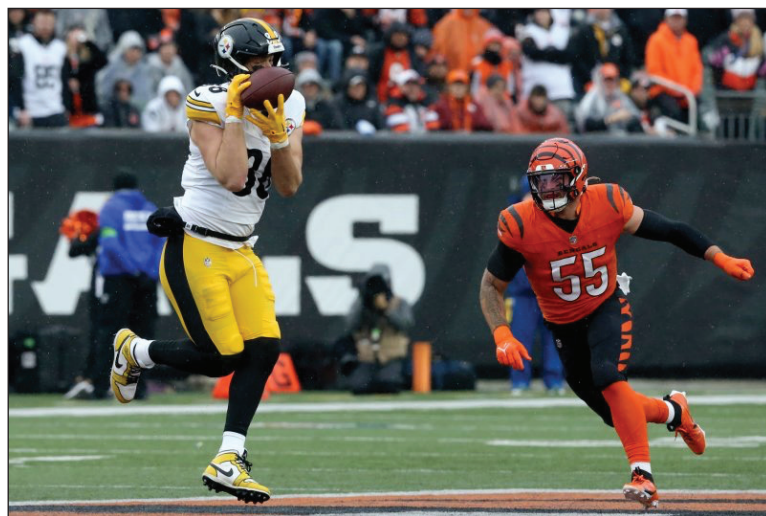
The Saints (5-6) will host the Detroit Lions (8-3) at 1 p.m. EST in New Orleans. The Falcons (5-6) will play the New York Jets (4-7) on Sunday in East Rutherford, N.J.

Myles Garrett sustained an arm injury during the Cleveland Browns' 29-12 loss to the Denver Broncos. The star defensive end told reporters that he felt something pop in his left shoulder. He had the arm in a sling in the locker room, and was to undergo an MRI Monday.

Browns quarterback Dorian Thompson-Robinson was evaluated for a head injury. Wide receiver Amari Cooper sustained a rib injury. Defensive lineman Jordan Elliott left the game early because of an ankle issue.

Garrett totaled two tackles. The two-time All-Pro leads the NFL with 13 sacks this season. Cooper made two catches for 16 yards. Thompson-Robinson completed 14 of 29 passes for 134 yards and a score.

Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said Thompson-Robinson was in the concussion protocol. He did not say who will start at quarter-



back in Week 13. P.J. Walker is the only other quarterback on the Browns' roster.

The Browns (7-4) will face the Los Angeles Rams (5-6) on Sunday in Inglewood, Calif. The Broncos (6-5) will play the Houston Texans (6-5) on Sunday in Houston.

Linebacker Logan Wilson sustained an ankle injury in the fourth quarter of the Cincinnati Bengals' loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers. Bengals coach Zac Taylor did not provide an update on Wilson, who was injured in the fourth quarter. He totaled a game-high 10

combined tackles.

Steelers wide receiver Calvin Austin III also sustained an ankle injury in the AFC North division matchup.

The Bengals (5-6) will face the Jacksonville Jaguars (8-3) in Week 13. The Steelers (7-4) will host the Arizona Cardinals (2-10).

Philadelphia Eagles defensive tackle Fletcher Cox (groin) and linebacker Zach Cunningham (hamstring) were injured in their win over the Buffalo Bills.

The Eagles (10-1) will host the San Francisco 49ers (8-3) on Sunday in Philadelphia. The Bills

(6-6) are on bye in Week 13.

New England Patriots wide receiver Demario Douglas sustained a head injury and was ruled out during a loss to the New York Giants. Douglas caught six passes for 49 yards before his fourth-quarter exit.

The Patriots (2-9) will host the Los Angeles Chargers (4-7) on Sunday in Foxborough, Mass. The Giants (4-8) are on bye in Week 13. They will host the Green Bay Packers (5-6) in Week 14.

Several Carolina Panthers players were injured in their loss to the Tennessee Titans. Wide receiver Laviska Shenault sustained an ankle injury. Offensive linemen Chandler Zavala and Cade Mays sustained knee injuries. Panthers linebacker D.J. Johnson left the game early because of a neck injury.

The Panthers (1-10) will face the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (4-7) on Sunday in Tampa, Fla. The Titans (4-7) will host the Indianapolis Colts (6-5) in Week 13.

The Minnesota Vikings (6-5) will host the Chicago Bears (3-8) in the final game of Week 12 at 8:15 p.m. EST Monday in Minneapolis.

LeBron James, Lakers beat Suns after controversial call, clinch tourney spot

By Alex Butler
UPI

LeBron James scored 15 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter, leading the Los Angeles Lakers past the Phoenix Suns in the quarterfinals of the NBA's in-season tournament in Los Angeles.

"I surprise myself still with what I'm able to do, for as long as I've been in this league and for as many miles I've put on these tires," James told reporters after the 106-103 victory Tuesday at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.

The Lakers outscored the Suns 54-42 in the paint, 31-20 off the bench and led by as many as 15 points. They won the game despite shooting just 37.3% from the floor, compared to the Suns' 49.3% clip.

The Suns also shot 48% (12 of 25) from 3-point range. The Lakers shot just 30% (9 of 30) from downtown.

A controversial call from referees in the final seconds also injected drama into the contest.

The Lakers led the Suns 83-82 through three quarters, but the Suns kept the game tight, tying the score several times and even taking a brief lead.

Suns star Kevin Durant made a reverse layup with 11 seconds remaining, cutting the Lakers' lead to 105-103. Referees then allowed a Lakers timeout during what appeared to be a loose ball to start the next possession, sparking controversy.

James threw in inbound pass to guard Austin Reaves. Reaves attempted to dribble up the right flank, but lost

control while defended by Durant and Suns guard Devin Booker. Referees then recognized a Lakers signal for a timeout, instead of giving the ball to the Suns, who appeared to recover it.

Lakers forward/center Anthony Davis made a free throw when play resumed for the final 3-point advantage. Durant followed by air-balling a deep 3-point attempt just before the final buzzer.

"It's a loose ball, and you can't call a timeout on a loose ball," Suns coach Frank Vogel said. "The whistle blows. I don't know why. Everything in the league is reviewable. I don't know why that can't be reviewable."

Davis scored 14 of his 27 points in the first quarter, helping the Lakers carry a

33-23 edge into the second. The Lakers held a 59-47 lead at halftime. Durant and Suns guard Grayson Allen scored 12 and 11 points, respectively, in the third quarter. The Suns outscored the Lakers 35-24 in the frame to cut the deficit to a single point to start the fourth. The Lakers outscored the Suns 23-21 over the final 12 minutes.

Durant scored 22 of his 31 points in the second half. Allen and Booker chipped in 21 points apiece.

Davis logged 15 rebounds, in addition to his 27 points. Reaves scored 20 off the Lakers bench. James nearly logged a triple-double, with 11 assists and eight rebounds, in addition to his 31 points. He also picked up five steals.

The Lakers (13-9) will host the New Orleans Pel-



cans (12-10) at 9 p.m. EST Thursday in Los Angeles. The Pelicans beat the Sacramento Kings 127-117 in another tournament quarterfinal Monday in Sacramento.

The Milwaukee Bucks (15-6), who have the top seed in the Eastern Conference, beat the No. 4 New York Knicks (12-8) in another tournament quarterfinal Tuesday in Milwaukee. They will host the No. 2 Indiana Pacers (11-8) in the other semifinal at 5 p.m. Thursday in Milwaukee.

The Pacers beat the No.

3 Boston Celtics (15-5) on Monday in the other Eastern Conference quarterfinal.

Players who make the quarterfinals of the in-season tournament will receive \$50,000 apiece. They will get \$100,000 for reaching the semifinals and \$200,000 for making the final. Players on the title-winning team will get \$500,000 apiece.

The Bucks-Pacers game will air on ESPN. The Lakers-Pelicans semifinal will air on TNT/truTV. The final will air at 8:30 p.m. Saturday on ABC/ESPN2.

Red Sox trade OF Alex Verdugo to rival Yankees

By Alex Butler
UPI

The Boston Red Sox agreed to trade outfielder Alex Verdugo to the rival New York Yankees in exchange for three players, the teams announced.

The Red Sox and Yankees announced the swap Tuesday night. They acquired right-handed pitcher Greg Weissert and minor league right-handed pitchers Richard Fitts and Nicholas Judice in the swap.

"For the passion, for the electricity, for all the memories," the Red Sox wrote on their social media accounts. "Thank you, Dugie."

Verdugo, 27, hit .264 with 13 home runs with 54 RBIs in 142 games last season for the Red Sox.



He hit .281 with 43 homers in 493 games over four seasons with the

American League East franchise. Verdugo, who joined the Red

Sox in a 2020 trade from the Los Angeles Dodgers, hit a career-high .308 in his first season with the franchise. The Dodgers acquired former Red Sox stars Mookie Betts and David Price as part of that five-player trade.

Verdugo made his debut in 2017 for the Dodgers. He hit .282 with 14 homers over his first three seasons. He owns a career batting average of .281. Verdugo hit 57 homers and totaled 20 stolen bases over his first 651 career games.

He is eligible for arbitration in 2024. He can become a free agent in 2025.

Weissert, 28, posted a 4.05 ERA in 17 games last season for the Yankees. He logged a 5.56 ERA with a 3-0 record in 12 games in 2022. He joined the Yankees as an 18th-round pick in the 2016

MLB Draft.

Fitts, 23, was a sixth-round pick by the Yankees in the 2021 MLB Draft. The 2023 Eastern League Pitcher of the Year went 18-13 with a 3.57 ERA in 49 appearances in two minor league seasons. He was the Yankees No. 12 prospect and is now the No. 10 player in the Red Sox system, according to MLB Pipeline.

Judice, 22, was an eighth-round pick in the 2023 MLB Draft. He went 8-5 with a 4.09 ERA in 59 games during his collegiate career at Louisiana-Monroe. He went 1-1 with a 4.55 ERA in three seasons of collegiate summer league play.

MLB pitchers and catchers are set to report in February to respective spring training sites in Florida and Arizona.

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Von Miller returns to Bills, could play amid felony domestic violence probe

By Alex Butler
UPI

Von Miller returned to the Buffalo Bills and is available to play amid investigations into an incident which led to his arrest for an alleged assault of a pregnant woman, general manager Brandon Beane said Wednesday.

Beane made the comments when he met with reporters for a news conference at the Bills facility in Orchard Park, N.Y. Miller was given a veteran's day off Wednesday, but will return to practice Thursday as a full participant.

The veteran linebacker turned himself in to police Thursday and was released later that day from a Dallas-area jail. He has not



publicly commented on the matter. Miller remains under investigation by the police and the NFL.

"We weren't there," Beane said Wednesday. "We're not the investigators. ... We had our conversations with Von and understood what he believes happened and so, from that standpoint, we can't get into it. It's an open

investigation, and so we'll just let the legal process play out, and he'll participate like normal in practice."

Officers responded to the 3100 block of North Harwood Street after they received calls about major disturbance about 11 a.m. local time Nov. 28 from just north of downtown Dallas. Miller left the scene before

officers arrived.

A preliminary investigation determined that Miller and the woman were involved in a verbal argument before he allegedly assaulted her. The Dallas County Sheriff's Office then issued an arrest warrant for Miller. He turned himself in and was later released on \$5,000 bond from DeSoto Regional Jail.

A charge of assault of a pregnant woman, a third degree felony, is punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

The NFL and Bills said Thursday that they were gathering information about the veteran linebacker. The NFL also said it will follow all legal developments. The league could opt to place Miller

on the commissioner's exempt list, which would bar him from participating in football activities amid investigations.

Placements on that list generally aren't made until formal charges have been filed by a prosecutor or an indictment comes from a grand jury.

Beane told reporters that he doesn't expect Miller to be placed on the list.

"As you probably read or heard, there were multiple versions of what happened," Beane said. "There is not a lot I can say. Von is here. He'll be a part of the team. We will let the investigation [continue] and we'll follow the lead of the NFL, from that standpoint."

Beane also said the allegations seem "out of charac-

ter" for Miller.

Bills coach Sean McDermott also spoke with reporters Wednesday in Orchard Park, but frequently deferred to Beane's comments instead of elaborating about Miller's status.

"It's a very serious situation," McDermott said. "There are no ifs, ands or buts about it. It's something we take very seriously."

Miller, 34, totaled two tackles through eight games this season for the Bills. His 123.5 career sacks are the most among active players. The Bills signed Miller to a six-year, \$120 million contract during the 2022 off-season.

The Bills, who were on bye in Week 13, will face the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday in Kansas City, Mo.

Charlotte FC fires coach Christian Lattanzio after second season

By Alex Butler
UPI

Charlotte FC fired coach Christian Lattanzio after his second season, the MLS franchise announced Wednesday.

Assistant coach Andy Quy also will leave the second-year club. Charlotte FC went 10-11-13 and finished ninth in the Eastern Conference this season, making the playoffs for the first time. They then lost to the New York Red Bulls in the wild-card round.

"A thorough and comprehensive search for the club's next head coach will begin immediately," Charlotte FC sporting director Zoran Krneta said in a news release. "Out of respect to all prospective candidates, we will not have further comment at this time."

Lattanzio took over as interim coach of Charlotte FC in May 2022, after Miguel Angel Ramirez was fired. Lattanzio led the team to a 12-13-4 record to end the 2022 campaign. It posted a 13-18-3 overall record last season, finishing ninth in the Eastern Conference, but missing the playoffs.

"We would like to thank Christian and Andy for their time at the club," Charlotte FC owner David Tepper said. "They helped guide us through the last 18 months and we are all appreciative of their contributions to Charlotte FC."

A dozen teams remain in the best-of-three format first round of the MLS Cup playoffs.

The New England Revolution (0-1), the No. 5 seed in the Eastern Conference,



will host the No. 4 Philadelphia Union (1-0) in the second game of that series at 7 p.m. EST Wednesday in Foxborough, Mass.

The Seattle Sounders, the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference, will host No. 7 FC Dallas in that series finale at 10 p.m. Friday in Seattle. The No. 4 Houston Dynamo will host No. 5 Real Salt Lake in another series finale Saturday in Houston.

Sunday's slate could feature another two games. The third game of the Revolution-Union series, if necessary, will be at 3 p.m. in Philadelphia. The No. 3 Columbus Crew will host No. 6 Atlanta United in the final series finale at 7 p.m. in Columbus.

No. 1 FC Cincinnati and No. 2 Orlando City were the first two Eastern Conference teams to clinch spots in the semifinals.

Sporting Kansas City, the No. 8 seed in the Western Conference, upset No. 1 St. Louis City in two games to reach the semifinals. No. 3 LAFC also advanced to the semifinals.

FC Cincinnati's Luciano Acosta named 2023 MLS MVP

By Alex Butler
UPI

FC Cincinnati midfielder Luciano Acosta, who was responsible for a league-leading 31 goal contributions this season, earned 2023 Landon Donovan MLS MVP honors, the league announced Monday.

The Argentine is the first player in FC Cincinnati history to receive the honor.

"When I had my first meeting with [FC Cincinnati co-CEO] Jeff Berding, I said I wanted to make his

tory for this club," Acosta said at a news conference.

"I wanted to create memories for this club. And here we are."

Acosta scored 17 goals and registered 14 assists during the 2023 season for the Orange and Blue (20-5-9), who claimed the Supporters' Shield by totaling a league-high 69 points.

LAFc forward Denis Bouanga and Atlanta United midfielder Thiago Almada finished second and third, respectively, in MVP voting.

Acosta, 29, totaled the

most goal contributions (136) among MLS players since 2016, when he made his debut. He also captained FC Cincinnati a record 97 times. Acosta is signed through 2026, and his contract includes an option for 2027.

FC Cincinnati will host the Columbus Crew in the Eastern Conference final of the MLS Cup playoffs at 6 p.m. EST Saturday at TQL Stadium in Cincinnati. The winner will meet the Houston Dynamo or LAFC on Dec. 9 in the MLS Cup final.



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La Voz Latina

Venezuela moves ahead with plan to annex Guyana's oil-rich Essequibo region

By Doug Cunningham
UPI

Venezuela will annex oil-rich Essequibo, a disputed territory in Guyana, in an effort to enforce results of a referendum Sunday.

President Nicolás Maduro displayed a new map with the annexed territory during a Tuesday TV appearance and instructed the state oil company to draft a map of exploration and exploitation of resources in the region and issue extraction licenses.

He also proposed a series of laws before the National Assembly to officially make the region part of Venezuela.

Earlier in the day he sent the military to Puerto Barima, near the area on Venezuela's Atlantic border.

"We want the peaceful rescue of the Guayana Essequibo," said Maduro. "Our Guayana Essequibo has been de facto occupied by the British Empire and its heirs and they have destroyed the area."

"We are giving three months to the companies that are exploiting resources there without Venezuelan permission to comply with the law."

Guyana responded by placing its defense forces on full alert. Brazil, which shares a border with both countries also reinforced military deployment to the border.

In a Facebook video, Guyana President Irfaan Ali called the annexation unlawful.

"This is a direct threat to Guyana's territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence and a violation of fundamental principles



of international law," Ali said. The Venezuelan National Election Council said more than 95% of voters approved the annexation

in a referendum held Sunday but turnout was low, with only 2 million people, or 10% of eligible voters, casting ballots.

Guyana has governed the area since an 1899 arbitration gave it the region while Guyana was still a British colony.

The International Court of Justice has warned Venezuela not to act on taking control of Essequibo, but Venezuela claims the court lacks authority to rule on the matter.

Ali asserts that Venezuela's action is in "blatant disregard" of an order from the International Court of Justice and said Guyana sees the annexation as an imminent threat.

He said Guyana will intensify preparations to safeguard the territory and will raise the issue at the U.N. Security Council.



'Barbie' coming to Max Dec. 15 with ASL version

By Fred Topel
UPI

HBO Max announced Monday that Barbie will debut on the streaming service Dec. 15. The streaming edition will also include an American Sign Language version.

Barbie is the highest grossing movie of the year since its release on July 21. It is also the highest grossing movie in Warner Bros. history.

Barbie stars Margot Robbie as the stereotypical Barbie doll but included many diverse Barbies and Kens, including a Barbie in a wheelchair, Black Barbies, a trans Barbies and more.

Warner Bros. is currently campaigning Barbie for awards consideration, including director Greta Gerwig and stars Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling and America Ferrera. The film's music is also up for song awards for Billie Eilish and Finneas, Dua Lipa and Mark Ronson and Andrew Wyatt's songs.

At one awards event, Ronson described his song "I'm Just Ken" as tragic rather than comedic.

MLB owners unanimously approve Athletics' move to Las Vegas

By Alex Butler
UPI

All 30 MLB team owners unanimously approved the Oakland Athletics plans to relocate to Las Vegas, a league source told UPI on Thursday morning.

The owners' vote occurred at a meeting Thursday in Arlington, Texas. Legal challenges, including one from a Nevada teachers union regarding use for public funds used for the new stadium project, remain potential obstacles for the move.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred is expected to discuss the plan Thursday at a news conference.

The Athletics are to become the second MLB franchise to relocate within the last 52 years. The Montreal Expos were the last team to relocate after owners approved their becoming the Washington Nationals in 2004. The vote was 28-1 vote, with only the Baltimore Orioles dissenting.

The Athletics franchise started play in 1901 in Philadelphia. They moved to Kansas City in 1955 and started in Oakland in 1968. They



would become the first MLB franchise move three times.

The Athletics' lease for Oakland Coliseum expires after the 2024 season.

Athletics president Dave Kaval announced in April

that the franchise agreed to buy 49 acres at Dean Martin Drive and Tropicana Avenue, near the Las Vegas Strip. Kaval said the Athletics plan to construct a \$1.5 billion stadium.

The Athletics have not announced plans for where they plan to play games from 2025 through 2027, before their Las Vegas stadium opens for play in 2028.

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