

EDWARDS CAFE - PINETOPS
200 W. Hamlet St., Pinetops, N.C. 27864
Ph. No. 252-258-3871

MON-FRI 6:00 UNTIL 9:00 P.M.
 SATURDAY 7:00 UNTIL 9:00 P.M.
 Breakfast-Lunch-Dinner
 Hot Coffee, Cold Soft Drinks

Proud Sponsor of the Black Excellence Banquet 2024 **Feb. 24th, 2024, at the Greenville County Club**

PGV **American Airlines**

PITT-GREENVILLE AIRPORT

400 AIRPORT RD., GREENVILLE, NC 27834 • 252-902-2025

www.flypgv.com

December 21, 2023 - January 4, 2024

The Daily Drum

READ ONLINE www.dailydrummedia.com

Quality is Our Standard, Integrity is Our Tradition. A Biweekly Newspaper Serving Down East North Carolina

@thedailydrum
www.dailydrummedia.com
 252-933-5406 mobile

BREAKING NEWS: FTC BANS RITE AID FACIAL RECOGNITION OVER 'RECKLESS' USE

INSIDE THIS EDITION:

CDC calls COVID-19 variant JN.1 'fastest-growing' strain Page 4

Georgia election workers sue Rudy Giuliani again, days after \$148M award Page 6

Grizzlies' Ja Morant nets buzzer beater in return vs. Pelicans Page 8

Champions League soccer: Napoli-Barcelona, Madrid-Leipzig drawn for Round of 16 Page 10

Colorado Supreme Court disqualifies Donald Trump from 2024 ballot



By Sheri Walsh UPI

The Colorado Supreme Court has disqualified Donald Trump from appearing on the state's ballot in 2024, in a ruling Tuesday that states the former president is not eligible to run for the White House because of the 14th Amendment's insurrectionist ban.

Colorado's ruling, which was 4 to 3, is now on hold until Jan. 4, pending Trump's appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We do not reach these conclusions lightly," the court's majority wrote Tuesday. "We are mindful of the magnitude and weight of the questions now before us. We are likewise mindful of our solemn duty to apply the law, without fear or favor, and without being swayed by public reaction to the decisions that the law mandates we reach."

"We conclude that the foregoing evidence, the great bulk of which was undisputed at trial, established that President Trump engaged in insurrection," the court added. "President Trump's direct and express efforts, over several months, to ban abortions in the wake of the conservative-leaning Supreme Court repealing federal protections for the medical practice by overturning the landmark 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling.

See **BALLOT**, page 3

Senate approves remaining military promotions blocked by Sen. Tuberville

By Darryl Coote UPI

The U.S. Senate Tuesday evening unanimously confirmed the promotions of nearly a dozen military service members who remained blocked for months by Sen. Tommy Tuberville's protest against the military's abortion policies.

Tuberville, a Republican from Alabama, had held up the promotions of more than 400 service members since early last year over the Pentagon's policy to reimburse service members for traveling out of state to receive the controversial medical practice.

The move attracted staunch criticism from democrats, and earlier this month, he relented, permitting all but 11 four-star generals to be confirmed.

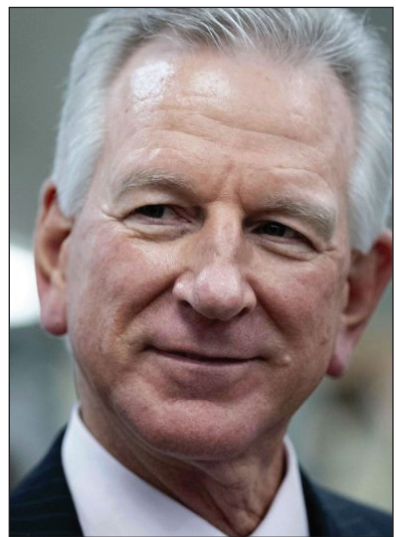
And on Tuesday, despite receiving no concessions, he dropped his final objection to the near dozen high-ranking military officials.

"These 11 flag officers have now been approved, joining the rest of their colleagues who we approved a few weeks ago," Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer said from the Senate floor following the confirmation.

"That's good news."

Tuberville began his protest in February, blocking more than 400 military promotions in opposition to the Pentagon granting service members administrative leave and travel expenses to receive an abortion.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had issued the new policies in an October 2022 memo as many Republican-led states had sought



Tuberville's protest had attracted strong and growing criticism from Democrats the longer it went on over accusations that it posed a threat to national security with crucial positions left vacant.

Prior to the confirmation, Sen. Jack Reed, a Democrat from Rhode Island, told reporters during a press conference Tuesday that they were prepared to stay in the Senate until they confirmed the remaining 11 service members affected by Tuberville's blanket blockade.

"Collectively, these 11 officers have won over 250 major awards, from the Purple Heart to the Legion of Merit," he said. "To me, they have received their promotions because of the quality of their service and their selfish sacrifice to the nation, and they have to be promoted."

VANESSA'S
 Sewing & Alterations
 (252) 756-1707
 (252) 258-3376cell

Hours- Mon.- Fri. • 9:30 AM until 6:00 PM
 Saturday by Appointment Only
 Located 216 Main Street, Winterville, NC 28590
 252-756-1707 • 252-258-3376
vanessatheseamtress@gmail.com

Proud Sponsor of the Black Excellence Banquet 2024

OPINION

The Biden Administration's Struggles: Declining Support Among Minority Voters

In America, it's the winter of discontent

By Harlan Ullman
UPI

The political landscape is changing in an unprecedented way: An increasing number of men of color, particularly Black and Hispanic voters, are becoming more receptive to Republican ideologies. This shift, underscored by concerns centered on economic opportunity and financial sustainability, suggests these men are seeking an environment that empowers them to fulfill their roles as providers and active community members. The growing consensus is that under Republican leadership, the economic outlook is generally more favorable, aligning with a philosophy that values economic freedom, liberation and growth -- principles rooted in the conservative thought traced back to Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations."

Recent polling data, including an ABC News-Washington Post poll, further highlights this trend. Conducted from April 28 to May 3, 2023, the poll indicates a significant decline in President Joe Biden's support among Black voters, dropping from 82% approval at the start of his presidency in 2021 to just 52%. This 30-point decrease marks the lowest approval rating of Biden's presidency and signifies a broader sentiment of dissatisfaction within the Black community. Additionally, 27% of Black voters

have expressed a probability or definite intention to support former President Donald Trump, more than doubling his 12% support in the 2020 presidential election.



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

This shift in political allegiance among Black men is not merely a reaction to current events but reflects a deeper alignment with conservative values, particularly in economic policy. Core principles of conservatism, such as promoting a pro-business environment, advocating for lower taxes and reducing regulatory burdens, are in sync with aspirations for economic growth and stability. The conservative emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility is also resonating within the Black community, which seeks to move beyond a narrative of dependency on government assistance.

For the GOP, this evolving landscape presents a unique opportunity to engage with Black voters in a meaningful way. This requires more than a critique of the Biden administration; it demands a consistent presence in Black communities, engaging in dialogue and building re-

lationships beyond election cycles. Advocating for policies that promote economic growth within the Black community, such as supporting small businesses and job creation initiatives, is crucial.

Addressing criminal justice reform is vital for the GOP to build trust within the Black community. Historically viewed as tough on crime, a commitment to addressing systemic inequalities in the justice system can help bridge gaps and build rapport. Amplifying diverse voices within the GOP, particularly those of Black conservatives, is crucial in providing perspectives that resonate with the Black community and demonstrate the party's commitment to inclusivity.

Advocating for school choice and educational reforms is also important, aligning with the desires of many Black families seeking better opportunities for their children. The decline in Biden's support among Black voters, especially men, signals a more profound shift in the community's political landscape. This moment calls for a genuine, sustained effort by the GOP to understand and address the concerns of Black voters.

Through a nuanced approach that emphasizes economic growth, educational opportunities and criminal justice reform, the GOP can effective-

ly engage with the Black community, presenting a compelling alternative to the current political status quo. This opportunity allows the GOP to showcase its commitment to inclusivity and diversity in its policies and ranks, reflecting a deep understanding of the diverse needs and aspirations of the Black community.

In addition to the shift among Black voters, the ABC News-Washington Post poll also reveals a similar trend among Hispanic voters. Only 40% of Hispanics approve of Biden, with 43% expressing a likelihood to support Trump or lean toward him in a potential rematch. This marks an 11-point increase from the 32% of the Hispanic vote Trump received in 2020. This data further underscores the broader realignment occurring within these key demographics, emphasizing the need for the GOP to present a robust, inclusive and responsive political alternative.

This evolving voter sentiment among Black and Hispanic communities presents a crucial moment for the GOP to articulate and demonstrate how its principles and policies can effectively address the economic, educational and social needs of these communities, thereby reshaping the political landscape in a more inclusive and representative manner.

End of E3 video game expo highlights industry's move to streaming

By Theo Tzanidis
University of the West of Scotland

The Electronic Entertainment Expo, an annual trade event for the video game industry, has been permanently canceled by its organizers, who cited the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in company marketing techniques as the reason for the closure.

Stanley Pierre-Louis, CEO of the Entertainment Software Association who organized the expo, told the Washington Post: "We know the entire industry, players and creators alike have a lot of passion for E3. We share that passion ... We know it's difficult to say goodbye to such a beloved event, but it's the right thing to do given the new opportunities our industry has to reach fans and partners."

The expo has historically been regarded as the largest and most prominent event in the video game business. Since its inception in 1995, E3 has been a yearly ritual, where developers and publishers gathered to reveal new games and technology. The expo fostered a sense of community in the gaming world as industry people, fans and the media all came together under one roof.

The event's competitive nature pushed game makers to be more innovative and speed up their research and development to impress the audience, accelerating progress in the

industry.

While disappointing for fans who looked forward to E3 celebrations each year, its death seems to symbolize the game industry's increasing transformation in reaction to digitalization. Many see the closure as a signal that the industry needs to adapt to meet the demands of a new era.

This is being demonstrated by the move of game producers to deliver streaming sessions en masse, such as Nintendo Directs, Sony State of Plays, Xbox Showcases and The Game Awards among others.

Hybrid gaming era
The cancellation of E3 highlights how in-person presentations are losing significance to such a beloved event and live streams. These online formats offer instant global reach, generating more revenue and attracting a broader audience.

As virtual worlds like the metaverse grow, it's likely that fewer people will attend physical gaming events. Instead, fans may prefer to meet up and play games in immersive spaces, using headsets.

And gaming brands are interested. Microsoft's major partnership deal with Meta which was announced in 2022, for example, signals their interest in this new way for people to connect and interact.

Several big game producers, including PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo, have concentrated efforts

in recent years on building their own showcases for game launches, such as State of Play, outside E3.

Streaming platforms like YouTube, Twitch and TikTok have become the main places for sharing and promoting video game content, meaning the importance of a big gaming convention like E3 has decreased.

This shift away from physical gatherings, however, risks losing the unique thrill that E3's yearly event inspired. E3 played a crucial role as an anchor and focus point for large developers to catch attention and generate engagement, from unexpected revelations of legendary franchises like Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy and Halo, or to announce big-budget product launches like the Nintendo DS.

E3's extinction event begs the question of how smaller independent studios can maintain widespread recognition without depending only on streaming networks. While Internet events like BlizzCon eliminate geographical limits and decrease physical obstacles to entry, they run the danger of diluting promotional efforts for non-AAA titles (AAA titles are video games made by big or medium-sized companies with large marketing budgets).

The road ahead
In essence, the conclusion of E3 cements the gaming industry's inevitable

transition towards direct, online, creator-to-consumer connection, a pattern mirrored in most, if not all entertainment industries.

A good example of that is the Fortnite Creative experience, where five top gaming influencers are collaborating to create Project V, a custom Fortnite game. They are aiming to make it the leading experience in the platform.

This project leverages their combined 120 million followers and draws inspiration from successful Roblox games, a platform where people mix work and fun by making and selling digital experiences, learning about trade and investment in a social, creative community and hosting their own events to promote their own games. The project is supported by Epic Games' new creator revenue-sharing model.

While the gap that was created by E3 puts an end to an iconic gaming conference, it does pave the way for future growth in community interaction and game marketing that is suitable for an increasingly virtual age. Businesses should leverage Internet platforms to innovate event and announcement experiences, ensuring they are engaging and accessible to all.

There are several ways businesses could adapt to these changing trends. One approach could be to hold digital conventions over several weeks instead of short, packed events.



Daily Drum Media Group
PO Box 965
Greenville, NC 27835
www.dailydrummedia.com
tdd@dailydrummediagroup.com

Roger Johnson.....Publisher
Ben Johnson.....CFO
Alishia Albrooks.....Sales Consultant
George Ayino.....Sales Consultant
Ben Ayino.....Sales Consultant
Data Group.....Web Host
Jasmine Smith.....Accounting Consultant
Restoration NewsMedia.....Graphic Design & Layout

THE DAILY DRUM IS PUBLISHED BI-WEEKLY FOR \$25.00 (PLUS TAX) PER YEAR BY THE DAILY DRUM MEDIA GROUP, P.O. BOX 965, GREENVILLE, NC 27835. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT GREENVILLE, NC.

POSTMASTER: ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE DAILY DRUM, P.O. BOX 965, GREENVILLE, NC 27835.

Holiday Season of Savings at Piggly Wiggly

BEST WISHES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON FROM THE STAFF & FAMILY OF PIGGLY WIGGLY



144 THIRD ST., AYDEN, NC | 2407 N. HERITAGE ST., KINSTON, NC 28501

Rep. Kevin McCarthy formally submits House resignation

By Darryl Coote
UPI

Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has formally submitted his resignation from Congress, ending the Republican lawmaker's near 20-year political career. His resignation letter was read to lawmakers Tuesday by House Reading Clerk Tylease Alli, who said McCarthy will step down as the representative of California's District 20 on Dec. 31. "It has been the honor

of a lifetime to represent the great people and communities of Kern, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, Tulare, Fresno and Kings counties over the past 17 years and especially my hometown of Baker Field and the Central Valley of the Great State of California," McCarthy said in the resignation letter read by Alli. The announcement comes after McCarthy said earlier this month that he will resign from his House seat by year's end in the

wake of becoming the first speaker in history to be removed by a House vote. McCarthy became House speaker in January after the Republicans retook the chamber of Congress. But he was only handed the gavel following 15 rounds of voting, which highlighted the tensions present within the party. He gained the position only after courting enough votes by making concessions to far-right Republicans -- a move that would

ultimately see him unseated. Among the compromises was the reinstatement of a procedure that permits for a sole House member to call a vote to vacate, which Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., used when McCarthy made a deal with the Democratic Party to prevent a government shut down by passing bipartisan legislation in the fall. McCarthy held the title of House speaker for only 269 days, which is the third



shortest tenure in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives. He has since been succeeded by Rep Mike Johnson, R-La.

Ballot

continued from page 1

exhorting his supporters to march to the Capitol to prevent what he falsely characterized as an alleged fraud on the people of this country were indisputably overt and voluntary." The 14th Amendment states that officials who take an oath to support the U.S. Constitution are banned from future office if they "engaged in insurrection." The court also rejected Trump's free speech claims, stating that

"President Trump's speech on Jan. 6 was not protected by the First Amendment." In a statement Tuesday night on his campaign website, Donald Trump blasted Colorado's decision and vowed to appeal "immediately" to the U.S. Supreme Court. "A ruling party is attempting to amass total control over America by rigging the election against its leading opponent who happens to be a political outsider committed to defending the needs and interests of hardworking Americans," Trump said. "This is how dictatorships are born."

"Crooked Joe and the Democrats know they can't beat us at the ballot box, so their new plan is to nullify every single 'Trump ballot' in the nation to keep Biden in the White House," Trump added. Colorado is the first state to disqualify Trump from the 2024 election. On Tuesday, North Carolina elections officials dismissed a complaint seeking to remove Trump from its state primary ballot. Last week, a Michigan appeals court ruled that the former president may remain on the Republican presidential primary ballot, stating that there was no sufficient

basis "at this time" for the removal of Trump's name. And last month, a Colorado district judge rejected claims that Trump should be barred under the constitutional amendment. "As a result, the court holds that Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment does not apply to Trump," Judge Sarah B. Wallace wrote in response to the lawsuit filed by six Republican and unaffiliated voters in Colorado, represented by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. On Tuesday night, Trump Campaign Spokesman Steven

Cheung issued a statement, saying an appeal to Colorado's latest ruling would be filed within hours. "The Colorado Supreme Court issued a completely flawed decision tonight and we will swiftly file an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court and a concurrent request for a stay of this deeply undemocratic decision," Cheung said, adding that the ruling amounts to "election interference." "We have full confidence that the U.S. Supreme Court will quickly rule in our favor and finally put an end to these un-American lawsuits."



Moving North Carolina Students Forward. One Story At A Time.

The North Carolina Education Lottery has generated more than \$10 Billion for education, benefiting students and communities all across the state. This money has impacted countless lives and we want to hear those stories. You could earn \$2,000 when you share your story. Let us know how you, your student, or your school have benefited from lottery funds at MovingNCStudentsForward.com.



MUST BE 18 TO PLAY. Problem Gambling Helpline: 877-718-5543.

CDC calls COVID-19 variant JN.1 'fastest-growing' strain

By Sheri Walsh
UPI

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the COVID-19 variant JN.1, which is a descendant of this summer's BA.2.86, is currently the fastest-growing variant in the United States.

JN.1 accounts for about 21% of all new COVID-19 infections and is already dominant in the Northeast, where it accounts for an estimated 32% of new cases.

"Amid the peak of respiratory virus season in the U.S., a highly

mutated form of SARS-CoV-2 is spreading and contributing to rising cases nationwide: JN.1," the American Medical Association said in a statement Tuesday.

JN.1, which first emerged in September, has gained steam during the holiday season.

"JN.1 accounts for more than 20% of all cases in the U.S. and could be more transmissible and better at slipping past people's immune systems," the AMA added.

The symptoms of JN.1 are similar to other COVID-19 variants and subvariants, which include cough, sore throat, congestion,

runny nose, sneezing, fatigue, headache, muscle aches and altered sense of smell.

The CDC and the AMA both recommend the best protection is to remain up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccinations, wear a medical-grade face mask in crowded spaces and practice good handwashing.

"At this time, the expected public health risk of JN.1 and BA.2.86 variants, according to the CDC, remains low for severe illness compared with other variants," the AMA said. "But during the winter and holiday season, there

are more opportunities for the virus to spread as it has during the last couple of years."

The CDC estimates JN.1 more than doubled in the United States between Thanksgiving and mid-December, due to added holiday travel and waning immunity.

"When I just look at the growth curve, it is rising quite sharply, and it seems to coincide with the Thanksgiving break in terms of timing," said Dr. Shishi Luo, head of infectious diseases for the genomic sequencing company Helix.

The World Health Organization is also tracking the variant,

stating Tuesday that JN.1 could become the leading coronavirus variant in the world by January.

"Due to its rapidly increasing spread, WHO is classifying the variant JN.1 as a separate variant of interest from the parent lineage BA.2.86," the World Health Organization wrote Tuesday in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"The additional global public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low. Despite this, with the onset of winter in the Northern Hemisphere, JN.1 could increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries."

Congress ends 2023 as most inactive year since Great Depression

By Joe Fisher
UPI

The 118th Congress is nearing the end of its first year by hitting a historical mark for inactivity: The U.S. House and Senate have passed 22 pieces of legislation, the lowest tally since the Great Depression.

The 72nd Congress passed 21 bills that were signed into law by President Herbert Hoover in the year beginning in March 1931, but lawmakers did not meet until the final three months of their first year. Congressional sessions started convening in January in 1933 with the adoption of the 20th Amendment.

In 1931, 14 members died between Election Day and the first day of Congress, about a 13-month span. When their seats were filled, the majority had flipped from Republicans to Democrats.

This year, according to the congressional public law website, the U.S. House has



voted on 724 pieces of legislation. The U.S. Senate held 352 votes. Of the 12,103 bills introduced, the 22 enacted represent a 0.001% success rate.

Though some hope remains: The Senate is expected to take up additional support to Ukraine in its defense against Russia before leaving Washington for the

holidays. Some Republicans have pushed for Ukraine support to be tied to immigration reform, creating the threat of a standstill.

YEAR OF TUMULT

The first week in session was tumultuous in the House as members of the Republican majority nearly came to blows in an attempt to name a speaker. After 15 votes, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., emerged the leader.

Among the first tests for McCarthy was to negotiate a debt ceiling bill that would pass the Senate and be signed by President Joe Biden. Talks with Biden kicked off in February, but the bill was not signed until June 3. It was the first of three bills that would avoid what officials said would be a national economic crisis.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that the United States would default on its debts if it did not raise or suspend the debt limit by June 5.

The bill required support from Democrats in the House to pass, setting the stage for conflict between McCarthy and a group of House Republicans. In October, that conflict came to a head.

In late September, McCarthy passed a continuing resolution to temporarily avert a government shutdown. Again, it passed with support from Democrats. On Oct. 1, Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., filed a motion to remove McCarthy as speaker.

Eight Republicans voted with House Democrats to remove McCarthy, leaving the speakership vacant for a record 21 days. McCarthy has since announced he will leave the House at the end of the year.

Before McCarthy's announcement, Gaetz filed an ethics complaint against him, accusing him of elbowing Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., in the back on Nov. 14. Burchett was one of the Republicans who voted to remove McCarthy.

Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., was named the new speaker after failed campaigns by Reps. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, Steve Scalise, R-La.,

and Tom Emmer, R-Minn.

About two weeks into Johnson's speakership, the House passed his two-step resolution to again avoid a government shutdown. The bill was signed, keeping the government fully funded until Jan. 19.

Earlier this month, the House expelled embattled Rep. George Santos, R-N.Y., amid allegations of fraud. Santos faces more than a dozen charges for wire fraud, identity theft and falsifying records. In May, he pleaded not guilty to more than a dozen charges in his first indictment. He has maintained his innocence.

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., was also indicted - facing federal bribery charges in September. He has refused calls to resign. His term ends in January 2025.

LAWS PASSED

The first bills of the year were not signed into law until March 20. (In comparison, the 117th Congress had its first bill of the year passed into law on Jan. 22, 2021, three weeks after convening.)

This year's first was a joint resolution to disapprove of and nullify the District of Columbia council's revised criminal code. Biden also signed the COVID-19 Origin Act to require the director of national intelligence to declassify information relating to potential links between the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China and COVID-19.

The third bill ended the COVID-19 national emergency declaration in April.

Of the 22 pieces of legislation passed into law, eight related to veterans affairs. Two bills designated health-care facilities. Six bills were introduced by Democrats, including three by Montana Sen. Jon Tester.

"Montanans sent me to Washington to deliver common-sense legislation that helps lower costs for Montana's working families, ensures our military has the tools it needs to keep our country safe and honors the commitment we made to our nation's veterans," Tester told UPI in a statement. "I'll continue to work with anyone, Republican or Democrat, to get the job done."

The first of these bills, introduced by Tester, was the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act. It requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to increase wartime disability compensation and payments to dependents, surviving spouses and children of veterans at the same rate of Social Security benefits.

Tester also introduced a bill that authorizes seven medical facility projects in

Sponsored by
**Vanessa's Sewing & Alterations
 & Pitt Greenville Airport**
*The Black Excellence
 Achievement Award Banquet*







Honoring
Dr. Ben Chavis
 of the Wilmington Ten

Greenville Country Club
 Saturday, Feb. 24, 2024
 3:00 until 8:00 p.m.

For all VIP Ticket information contact
Ben Johnson at 252-258-6827

Extra added guest to be announced.

Pilot, photographer killed in television news helicopter crash

By Clyde Hughes
UPI

A pilot and news photographer working for a Philadelphia news station died after their helicopter crashed in New Jersey, the station said.

Philadelphia's WPVI said the

crew members died after the chopper crashed in Washington Township, N.J., at 8 p.m. EST Tuesday.

"We know that a pilot and a photographer from our news team went down with Chopper 6 while returning from an assignment at the Jersey Shore," the station said.

The television station has not released the names of the victims of their Action News team because their families have not been fully contacted.

Tracking data from Flight-Aware said the helicopter, an American Eurocopter AS-350-A-STAR, left the Northeast Philadel-

phia Airport at 7:23 p.m., Eastern time, to New Jersey, and made several loops around the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge in Atlantic County near Galloway and the Atlantic City International Airport, before returning at 8:03 p.m.

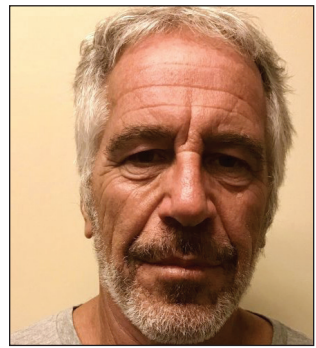
The cause of the crash remained

under investigation Wednesday morning. The Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board are both expected to start probes.

Officials said the helicopter was last known to be flying over Wharton State Forest when it crashed in a remote section of the woods.

Names of Jeffrey Epstein associates to be made public next year, judge rules

By Clyde Hughes
UPI



A New York-based federal judge ordered the unsealing of court documents in early 2024 that will make public the names of scores of Jeffrey Epstein's associates.

The documents are

connected to a civil lawsuit that alleged that Epstein's one-time girlfriend and longtime associate Ghislaine Maxwell orchestrated the sexual abuse of Virginia Giuffre. The lawsuit has since been settled.

Epstein committed suicide in a Manhattan federal

jail in 2019 while awaiting trial on trafficking charges. Maxwell is serving a 20-year prison sentence after she was convicted in 2021 for sex trafficking and procuring underage girls for Epstein.

More than 170 names, from employees, victims and associates, had been

cloaked, but U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska ordered Monday that the documents can be unsealed. Previously, blocked names had appeared as Jane Doe or John Doe.

Preska gave individuals 14 days to appeal her ruling. The unsealed documents could reveal more about

Epstein's alleged sex trafficking of women and girls in New York, New Mexico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and elsewhere.

From 1994 to 2004, authorities said Maxwell and Epstein identified girls, groomed them and then enticed them to travel to Epstein's many properties.

Rep. Scott Perry ordered to disclose nearly 1,700 documents in Jan. 6 investigation

By Darryl Coote
UPI

A federal judge has ruled that Rep. Scott Perry must disclose nearly 1,700 communication documents to government agents investigating former President Donald Trump's alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

More than 2,000 communication documents were seized from the Pennsylvania Republican's phone in August 2022 by the FBI, and Chief Judge James Boasberg of the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia ruled Tuesday that 1,659 of them must be disclosed to investigators as they do not fall under the Constitu-

tion's speech or debate clause that shields members of Congress from law enforcement.

Boasberg's ruling states that of the more than 2,000 documents analyzed, all but 396 must be disclosed.

The phone was seized in the summer of 2022 under a search warrant. The FBI then sought a second search warrant from the court in order to review the contents copied from the device to further its investigation into efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

Perry at the time had said he was traveling with his family when FBI agents took his phone.

"I'm outraged -- though not surprised -- that the FBI, under the



direction of Merrick Garland's [Department of Justice], would seize the phone of a sitting member of Congress," he had said in a statement.

After the second warrant was issued, Perry argued before the court that the records were protected by the Speech or Debate

Clause, with a judge ordering that all but 164 of the disputed communications must be handed over.

An appeals court largely agreed with the lower court's ruling but ordered another review of the documents, finding that some may be protected by the Constitution.

"Having now analyzed each of the 2,055 documents still at issue, the court will order Perry to disclose 1,659 of them, but not the 396 others," Boasberg said Tuesday.

Perry is a staunch ally of the former president and has been accused of being instrumental to efforts to overturn Joe Biden's election as the 46th president of the United States, which culminated with the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection attempt on Congress.

Specifically, Perry has been tied to alleged plans to replace then-Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen in a last-ditch effort to prevent Trump from relinquishing the White House in the last weeks of his administration.

Biden to visit Wisconsin to highlight federal investments in Black business ownership

By A.L. Lee
UPI

President Joe Biden will travel to Wisconsin Wednesday to highlight the growth of Black business ownership under his administration, and to call attention to federal investments in Black-owned plumbing firms to remove lead pipes in Milwaukee.

Biden will speak at the Wisconsin Black Chamber of Commerce on the broader government effort to cultivate and strengthen small businesses across the country, with Black business ownership growing at the fastest pace in 30 years, the White House said.

The president will be joined by the founder and owner of Hero Plumbing, a Black-owned business that is working to dismantle and replace lead pipes across Milwaukee amid Biden's goal of removing all lead service lines in the United States by 2030 -- a massive project funded through \$15 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.



Biden will announce the Grow Milwaukee Coalition as one of 22 finalists for new investments in job creation, small business growth and economic opportunity in majority-Black communities that were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the 2024 election cycle drew near, Biden planned to use the visit to try to sway voters who were still on the fence with the incumbent

due to his age and lingering concerns about the economy.

Despite many positive economic signs in recent months, including lower inflation, a rising stock market, and 3.7% unemployment, Americans remain pessimistic about their economic future as wages were not keeping pace with the high cost of living, according to a poll released last month by Marquette

University Law School.

Biden's stop in the battleground state presented an opportunity for the president to slam Republicans, including Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, for voting against his legislative agenda that is now serving to promote small business opportunities across the country, with \$79 million to help Wisconsin expand access to Black business owners.

Democrats in the state hailed the president's visit while acknowledging the importance of Biden's trip leading up to 2024, with primaries for Democrats and Republicans each scheduled for Feb. 20.

"As goes Wisconsin, so goes the nation," said former County Democratic chairman Chris Walton. "We are the deciders in this country of the presidential election."

State Republicans said they were glad to see Biden putting focus on the state, but expressed dissonance with the president's economic policies.

"I think it's good the president is coming to Milwaukee, but I hope that he talks to people who are actually suffering under Bidenomics," said Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Wis. "Everything is 17% more expensive than when the president took office. In large part that's due to his policies that have driven inflation higher, particularly reckless spending."

The third visit by the president to Wisconsin this year comes as Milwaukee

has experienced an economic resurgence since Biden took office three years ago, according to the White House.

The employment rate among the Black population has reached its highest point in over a decade, and new business applications have surged by almost 70%.

Since Biden took office, 15 million Americans have applied to start new businesses, while the share of Black households owning a business doubled from 2019 to 2022 after declining between 2007 and 2019.

This has led to a record 60% increase in Black wealth since before the pandemic, while Black unemployment has reached historic lows, the White House said.

The administration awarded \$70 billion in federal contracts to small, disadvantaged businesses in 2022, as well as \$12 billion to community lenders to improve access to capital resources for Black firms. About 14.6 million applica-

See INVESTMENT, page 6

Inactive

continued from page 4

fiscal year 2023, including the construction of a \$395 million outpatient clinic and national cemetery in Alameda, Calif.

Three veterans bills passed that expanded the eligibility of benefits.

Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., in-

troduced a bill to extend care to children with spina bifida and other birth defects. It was signed on Oct. 6.

Tester brought a bill to the floor in September that allows more healthcare professionals to perform medical examinations as part of a VA pilot program.

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., led the Korean American VALOR Act to expand benefits for veterans of the armed forces of

South Korea who served in the Vietnam War.

While Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville blocked promotions within the Department of Defense over his opposition to the department's reproductive healthcare policy, one bill loosely related to defense has been signed. The CADETS Act modifies the age requirement for the Maritime Administration's Student Incentive Payment program.

The program gives financial support to cadets enrolled in the Strategic Sealift Midshipmen Program. The previous law was limited to students 17 to 25 years old at the time of enrollment. It was changed to students age 17 to 41 at the time of graduation. The change will cost the Maritime Administration an estimated \$1 million to implement.

Of the remaining bills passed,

one related to education and another to public health. The education bill authorizes schools to purchase weapons or use "dangerous weapons" to teach students archery, hunting, shooting sports and culinary arts.

The public health bill modifies how the organ procurement and transplant network is managed. This includes authorizing the award of grants, contracts and cooperative agreements.

Georgia election workers sue Rudy Giuliani again, days after \$148M award

By Sheri Walsh
UPI

Two Georgia election workers, who won a \$148 million defamation award against Rudy Giuliani last week, are suing him again for continuing to spread “the very same lies.”

Ruby Freeman and her daughter Shaye Moss filed a 10-page complaint in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on Monday, over comments the former New York City mayor allegedly made to reporters after his defamation trial.

While Freeman and Moss are not seeking additional damages, they are asking a federal judge to permanently ban Giuliani from making false statements about



them and spreading allegations of voter fraud during the 2020 election.

According to the complaint, Giuliani told reporters he did

not regret his remarks that led to the defamation suit, saying, “Of course I don’t regret it. I told the truth.”

“Defendant Giuliani contin-

ues to spread the very same lies for which he has already been held liable,” Monday’s complaint states.

“Defendant Giuliani’s statements, coupled with his refusal to agree to refrain from continuing to make such statements, make clear that he intends to persist in his campaign of targeted defamation and harassment. It must stop.”

Despite Giuliani’s statements being debunked by state and federal investigators, Freeman said Giuliani continued to falsely accuse them of ballot stuffing and other illegal acts at Atlanta’s State Farm Arena on election night in 2020.

During the trial, the women said Giuliani’s accusations led to

them receiving threats and being harassed by others. Freeman testified that one of the threats said, “They are coming for you. I’m not far behind. I’m coming for you also. Trash will be taken to the street in bags.”

While Giuliani’s attorney Joseph Sibley admitted there was harm done, he argued that the monetary compensation the plaintiffs sought and received in damages was excessive.

In addition to Monday’s lawsuit, Giuliani is also facing criminal charges in Georgia where he has pleaded not guilty to conspiring to reverse Georgia’s 2020 presidential election results, violating Georgia’s racketeering act and soliciting a public officer to break their oath.

Donald Trump to appear on North Carolina’s primary ballot after complaint tossed

By Sheri Walsh
UPI

Former President Donald Trump will appear on North Carolina’s ballot for the 2024 primary, after state elections officials dismissed a complaint Tuesday that sought to disqualify him from running for the White House.

North Carolina’s State Board of Elections voted 4 to 1 to dismiss the complaint, which was filed Monday by a federal government attorney and businessman in Stokes County.

Brian Martin’s 27-page complaint argued that Trump was not qualified to run for president because he violated the 14th Amend-

ment by engaging in the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021.

“Trump directed the crowd to march on the Capitol and said he would join them,” the complaint said, adding “Trump did so even though he knew he had lost the election.”

North Carolina House Speaker Tim Moore said Tuesday the “complaint filed with the NCSBE against President Trump has entirely no merit and has one aim -- to deny North Carolina voters their constitutional right to decide for themselves who our next president will be.”

“Rather than let the voters decide, some activists would prefer to effectively silence the former presi-

dent,” Moore added in a statement. “I wholeheartedly condemn this malicious attempt to interfere with our elections here in North Carolina.”

Earlier Tuesday, the Colorado Supreme Court disqualified Trump from Colorado’s 2024 ballot, stating in its ruling that “President Trump engaged in insurrection” and violated the 14th Amendment, which states that officials who take an oath to support the U.S. Constitution are banned from future office if they “engage in insurrection.”

Trump blasted Colorado’s ruling and vowed to appeal it to the U.S. Supreme Court.



While elections officials in North Carolina voted Tuesday to keep Trump on the primary ballot, they said another challenge could get the former president removed from the state’s general election ballot, if he wins the Republican nomination.

In total, seven Republican presidential candidates were approved for North Carolina’s primary ballot. They include Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, Vivek Ramaswamy, former

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Ryan Binkley.

Elections officials also voted to secure only one spot on the ballot for Democratic presidential candidates, which went to President Joe Biden and angered his rivals.

U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips, D-Minn., who is challenging Biden for the Democratic nomination, blasted North Carolina’s ballot decision to keep him off the ballot.

“If Joe Biden is the best candidate to defeat Donald Trump and lead us to a safer, more affordable future, let him compete for that privilege without his supporters suppressing and disenfranchising millions of voters.”

Judge again dismisses Donald Trump’s attempt to throw out civil fraud trial

By Darryl Coote
UPI

A New York judge overseeing Donald Trump’s civil fraud trial has denied the former president’s latest motion to have the state’s case thrown out in a scathing rebuke of his defense.

Trump is on trial in a \$250 million civil lawsuit filed by New York Attorney General Letitia James who accuses him and his Trump Organization of committing financial fraud by inflating their net worth by more than \$2 billion by overvaluing their property in order to secure loans with favorable conditions.

Trump has four times asked the judge to throw out the case, with each time being denied, and his defense filed a fifth motion for a directed verdict late last week as

James rested her case. Closing arguments are to begin Jan. 11.

On Monday, Judge Arthur Engoron not only ruled against Trump’s request but detailed his defenses’ “fatal flaws,” the “most glaring” of which would be to assume testimony from his expert accounting witnesses, Eli Bartov and Jason Flemmons, “is true and accurate.”

“Bartov is a tenured professor, but all that his testimony proves is that for a million or so dollars, some experts will say whatever you want them to say,” Engoron wrote in his ruling.

Engoron stated that there were numerous errors in Trump’s financial statements and by attempting to justify each one, “Prof. Bartov lost all credibility.”

Engoron also dismissed Trump’s counsel’s argument that if a loan is closed prior the statute

of limitations than any future relevant filings that contain related misstatements are outside the court’s purview. He said this is proven false not only by law but common sense.

“Closing is not a get-out-of-jail-free card for future misstatements,” he said. “All that \$63(12) requires is a false statement used in business; the subject financial statements fit that definition ‘to a T.’”

He continued that Trump’s defense that his lenders did not incur damages and that they were “happy” with the agreements fall shorts in that ill-gotten gains are accrued when a client pays a lower interest rate on a loan by overstating the value of assets.

“The lender has lost money, although the loss is not out-of-pocket, and so the loss is not

what the law traditionally things of as damages,” he said. “That the instant lenders made millions of dollars and were happy with the transactions does not mean that they were not damaged by lending at lower interest rates than they otherwise would have.”

And he rejected the Trump defense that valuations are subjective by stating that is essentially correct, “but a lie is still a lie.”

“Valuing occupied residences as if vacant, valuing restricted land as if unrestricted, valuing an apartment as if it were triple its actual size, valuing property many times the amount of concealed appraisals, valuing planned buildings as if completed and read to rent, valuing gold courses with brand premium while claiming not to, and valuing restricted funds as cash, are not subjective

differences of opinion, they are misstatements at best and fraud at worst,” he said.

Chris Kise, Trump’s attorney in the case, rejected Engoron’s ruling in a statement to CNN as a failure to address their argument’s legal elements while rejecting “the real facts from the real participants in the real world.”

“Based on the decision, it appears the Attorney General’s burden of proof does not matter, the testimony from the involved bankers does not matter, application of governing accounting standards does not matter, the express language of the financial statements does not matter, and the ruling from the First Department does not matter,” Kise said.

“All that seems to matter is arriving at a predetermined destination.”



Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signs bill making illegal immigration a state crime

By Uriel J. Garcia
The Texas Tribune

Gov. Greg Abbott traveled to the Rio Grande Valley on Monday to sign into law three bills that pour more money into his three-year effort to deter illegal immigration at the

Texas-Mexico border and give Texas law enforcement authority to arrest undocumented immigrants anywhere in the state.

Senate Bill 3 earmarks \$1.54 billion in state money to continue construction of barriers along the 1,200-mile border, and allows the state to spend

up to \$40 million for state troopers to patrol Colony Ridge, a housing development near Houston that far-right publications claim is a magnet for undocumented immigrants.

The money would be added to at

See **CRIME**, page 9

Investment

continued from page 5

tions have been received to participate in the programs, the White House said.

Biden’s visit was intended to call attention to policies that have

benefited the nation’s Black citizens as he faced criticism from some progressives that he had not fully addressed the issue of reparations during his term.

So far, the Treasury Department has given the green light for more than \$8 billion in funding to all 50 states. Additionally,

they’ve granted an extra \$108 million in technical assistance to 32 states.

Additionally, the Small Business Administration provided \$50 billion in affordable loans to small businesses in fiscal 2023, with a large percentage of support going to Black-owned businesses.

Meanwhile, the Small Business Community Navigators Pilot Program has provided \$100 million in funding to 51 organizations, including the U.S. Black Chambers of Commerce and the National Urban League, to help finance minority entrepreneurs.

On Tuesday, the White House also announced that Vice President Kamala Harris will visit Wisconsin on Jan. 22 as part of a national tour to promote abortion rights as Democrats seek to knuckle down on another key issue leading up to the November election.

Call Morgan Printers Inc. for all of your printing needs!

**Business Cards • Letterhead Envelopes • Signs
Banners • Vehicles Wraps • Books • Magazines
Apparel • Name Badges • Promotional Items
and More!**

"If you can put ink on it, Call Us First!"



**MORGAN
PRINTERS, Inc.**

252-355-5588 www.morganprinters.com

FANTASY FOOTBALL

Samuel, Rice among 5 must-start WRs in Week 16

By Alex Butler
UPI

Curtis Samuel and Rashee Rice are among my five must-start wide receivers for Week 16 of the fantasy football season.

If you need more options for your roster, check out my top add/drops article. My Week 16 rankings for quarterbacks and running backs will also be available and updated throughout the week.

Stefon Diggs, A.J. Brown, DK Metcalf, Amon-Ra St. Brown and Jaylen Waddle lead my Top 50 Week 16 wide receiver rankings, which are listed below. D.J. Moore, Cooper Kupp, Justin Jefferson, Rice and Deebo Samuel round out my Top 10.

All of my must-start options rank inside the Top 28 in my rankings, meaning all should be started in leagues that include at least 14 teams.

Those with stock in Ja'Marr Chase, Tyreek Hill, Michael Pittman Jr., Chris Olave and other injured wide receivers should monitor their status before plugging them into starting lineups.

Rashee Rice

Rice sneaks into my Top 10 this week. The Kansas City Chiefs pass catcher quietly provided Top 10 fantasy football production for his stock owners over the last four weeks, averaging the seventh-most points among wide receivers in that span.

Rice drew 38 targets over his last four games. He scored in three of those appearances and caught at least even passes in each of those games.

Rice, who also scored in six of his last 10 games, will battle the Las Vegas Raiders in Week 16. The Raiders just demolished the Los Angeles Chargers, but surrendered three touchdowns to wide receivers in that game.

They also allowed two scores in Week 12 to Kansas City Chiefs wide receivers and 146 yards and a score to Tyreek Hill in Week 11. I expect the Chiefs and Raiders to air it out in this matchup, with Patrick



Mahomes finding Rice on one of his multiple touchdown passes.

He is my No. 9 option, but will serve best as a high-end WR2.

Diontae Johnson

Johnson is my No. 15 play for Week 16. The Pittsburgh Steelers playmaker is among the hottest wide receivers in the NFL as of late, with scores in each of his last three games.

Johnson ranked as a Top 25 option over the past four weeks, in terms of fantasy points per game among wide receivers. This week, he'll face a Cincinnati Bengals secondary that allowed the sixth-most receiving yards per game to opposing wide receivers through 15 weeks.

The Bengals also just surrendered 111 yards and two scores to Jordan Addison and 84 yards to Justin Jefferson in Week 15. Look for Johnson to snag at least six catches for 75 yards and a score.

Chris Godwin

Godwin exploded for a season-high 155 receiving yards on 10 catches in Week 15.

He also received a total of 23 targets over his last two games.

This week, Godwin and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers will host the Jacksonville Jaguars. The Jaguars allowed the ninth-most fantasy points and 10th-most receiving yards per game to wide receivers so far this season.

Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield continues to produce great passing statistics, which keeps all of his pass-catching targets relevant for fantasy football purposes. Mayfield, who threw at least two touchdown passes in six of his last eight games, should do the same Sunday against the Jaguars, who own one of the worst pass defenses in the NFL.

Godwin, my No. 19 play, can provide WR2 production against this generous defense.

Jordan Addison

As previously mentioned, Addison scored twice last week and was fantasy football's top wide receiver play. The Minnesota Vikings rookie totaled nine touchdowns through his first 14 appearances in

the league.

He should reach double-digits in the scoring category in Week 16, when the Vikings host the Detroit Lions. The Lions allowed the eighth-most fantasy points and tied for allowing the fourth-most receiving scores to wide receivers so far this season.

I expect this to be another high-scoring matchup, with the NFC North division foes both providing high-volume passing production.

Addison, my No. 21 option, should eclipse 50 yards and find the end zone.

Curtis Samuel

Samuel is a bit more of a fringe play, but can be used as a streaming WR3 in Week 16. The Washington Commanders wide receiver was a Top 20 producer, in terms of fantasy points per game among wide receivers, over the last four weeks.

Samuel was the No. 14 wide receiver in Week 15 and should again provide starter-worthy value when the Commanders battle the New York Jets on Sunday in East Rutherford, N.J.

The Jets still own one of the best pass defenses in the NFL, but just surrendered 142 yards and a score to Jaylen Waddle in Week 15. They also surrendered at least 100 yards and a score to at least one wide receiver in three of their last five games.

This game could be low scoring, but I still expect Samuel to provide value, especially in points-per-reception formats. Samuel was targeted 26 times over his last three games. He totaled more than 200 receiving yards during that span.

Look for the veteran pass catcher to catch at least six passes for 70 yards in this meeting, with Jets defenders focusing most of their attention on Commanders wide receiver Terry McLaurin. He could end the week as a Top 14 play if he reaches the end zone. Samuel is the No. 28 player in my Week 16 wide receiver rankings.

Grizzlies' Ja Morant nets buzzer beater in return vs. Pelicans

By Alex Butler
UPI

Ja Morant drove toward the rim, dribbled into a 360-degree turn and hit a shot in off the back of the rim as the final buzzer sounded, leading the Memphis Grizzlies to a dramatic win in his return from a suspension.

Morant scored a game-high 34 points in the 115-113 win Tuesday at Smoothie King Center in New Orleans. The star guard was booed early on, as he took the court for the first time since his 25-game suspension for a firearm-related incident, his second such ban in the span of three months.

"I've been prepping for this for eight months," Morant told reporters, when asked about his time away from the court. "It's been eight months since I've played a game."

"I'm confident in the work I was putting in. I was trying to be in the best shape possible to go out there and be able to be out there for the guys."

Morant also totaled eight assists and six rebounds in Tuesday's victory. He scored 27 points in the second half,

helping the Grizzlies overcome a large deficit.

"My one expectation for him was to have fun, honestly," Grizzlies coach Taylor Jenkins said of Morant. "I know the work he's been putting in. His teammates know the work he's been putting in and how was excited for this opportunity."

The Grizzlies outscored the Pelicans 62-50. They also outshot their foes 50% to 47.1%. The Pelicans, who led by as many as 24 points, were outscored 74-53 over the final 24 minutes.

The Grizzlies outscored the Pelicans 25-21 in the first quarter. Veteran guard C.J. McCollum scored 12 points in the second, as the Pelicans outscored the Grizzlies 39-16 for a 60-41 lead at halftime. The Pelicans used a 28-2 run early on in the second quarter to spark their surge.

The Grizzlies cut the deficit to 10 with a 15-4 run to start the third. Morant scored 13 in the quarter, but the Grizzlies still trailed 87-77 to start the fourth.

Morant and the Grizzlies outscored the Pelicans 38-26 over the final 12 minutes. Grizzlies guard Jaren Jackson Jr. tied the score with



two free throws with 1:56 remaining. Morant followed consecutive go-ahead shots, but the Pelicans answered each time.

Morant went on to catch in inbound pass with about 10 seconds remaining for the final possession. He dribbled over half-court, broke into the lane and planted his feet, propelling a spin to his right. He then

elevated over several defenders and tossed a shot up with his right hand. The attempt hit the back of the rim before falling through the net as the final buzzer sounded.

Grizzlies players then swarmed Morant in celebration of the victory.

Morant, who hadn't played for the Grizzlies since April, set an NBA

record on Thursday for the most points in a return after missing at least 25-consecutive games.

"I've been putting work in," Morant said on the TNT broadcast. "I had a lot of time to learn myself and a lot of hard days where I went through it. Basketball is my life and what I love. It's therapeutic for me. I'm excited to be back."

Morant first suspension -- for eight games -- was issued in March after he live streamed himself while holding a firearm while intoxicated inside a Denver nightclub. His second ban, issued in June, occurred after he was seen waving a gun while inside a car and recorded in a social media video.

Morant, the 2019-20 NBA Rookie of the Year and a two-time All-Star, said he worked on his mental health and decision-making, while also meeting with NBA commissioner Adam Silver, during his suspensions.

He logged 34:46 of action in his return. Jackson scored 24 points in 29:38 for the Grizzlies. Grizzlies guard Desmond Bane totaled 21 points.

Pelicans forward Brandon Ingram matched Morant's game-high, with 34 points in the loss. Pelicans center Jonas Valanciunas totaled 22 points and 14 rebounds.

The Grizzlies (7-19) will host the Indiana Pacers (13-12) at 8 p.m. EST Thursday in Memphis. The Pelicans (16-12) will face the Cleveland Cavaliers (15-12) at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Cleveland.



"CHOOSE PUGH'S"

www.choosepughs.com




**First Price...Right Price
GUARANTEED**

BRIDGESTONE Firestone MICHELIN GOODYEAR

**FULL SYNTHETIC
OIL CHANGE
\$59.95**

GREENVILLE MALL
252-355-6162

DICKINSON
252-758-7044

WILLIAMSTON
252-508-4691

MEMORIAL DRIVE
252-756-7844

WASHINGTON
252-940-1446

NFL suspends Pittsburgh Steelers' Damontae Kazee for rest of season

By Alex Butler
UPI

The NFL suspended Pittsburgh Steelers safety Damontae Kazee for the rest of the 2023 season for repeated violations of its health and safety rules, the league announced Monday.

"When players violate the rules intended to protect player safety on a repeated basis, and particularly when the violations carry with them a significant risk of injury to an opposing player, it is appropriate to impose substantially greater penalties," NFL vice president of football operations Jon Runyan said in a news release.

Kazee's latest incident occurred in the second quarter of the Steelers' loss to the Indianapolis Colts on Saturday in Indianapolis. The seven-year veteran lowered his head and hit Colts wide receiver Michael Pittman Jr., delivering a strong blow to his head/neck area as he dove to catch a pass.



Kazee was then given a penalty for unnecessary roughness and ejected from the game.

Pittman entered the concus-

sion protocol as a result. He did not return.

Steelers coach Mike Tomlin defended Kazee when he met

with reporters Monday for a news conference.

"Usually, I talk about lowering the target," Tomlin said. "The tar-

get was low and both guys were going. It was just unfortunate. I know he is not a dirty player. He doesn't aspire to do some of the things that came to light under those circumstances."

Kazee, who can appeal the suspension, is expected to miss upcoming games against the Cincinnati Bengals, Seattle Seahawks and Baltimore Ravens. He also was disqualified from the postseason.

The veteran safety totaled 61 combined tackles, three passes defended, two interceptions and two fumble recoveries in 14 appearances this season. He totaled 332 combined tackles, 22 passes defended, 16 interceptions, seven forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries in 92 career appearances.

Kazee entered the league as a fifth-round pick by the Atlanta Falcons in the 2017 NFL Draft. He spent his first four seasons with the Falcons and 2021 with the Dallas Cowboys.

Former North Carolina basketball star Eric Montross dies at 52

By Alex Butler
UPI



Former North Carolina center Eric Montross, who helped the Tar Heels win the 1993 men's basketball title, died after battling cancer, his family announced Monday. He was 52.

The Montross family, who released a statement through North Carolina athletics, said he died Sunday at home in Chapel Hill, N.C.

"Eric was diagnosed with cancer in March 2023, and his family is grateful for the tremendous support and the truly overwhelming love expressed by so many people as he battled with

his signature determination and grace," the Montross family said.

Montross, who played for several NBA teams was born Sept. 23, 1971, in Indianapolis. He attended Lawrence North High School in Indianapolis and then played for the Tar Heels.

The former 7-foot center averaged 11.7 points, 6.8 rebounds and 1.2 blocks per game in four seasons with the Tar Heels. He averaged a career-high 15.8 points per game during their 1992-93 championship season.

Montross was a two-time All-American in college. He then joined the Boston Celtics as the No. 9 overall

pick in the 1994 NBA Draft. He averaged a career-high 10 points in his first season with the Celtics, earning All-Rookie team honors.

Montross averaged 4.5 points and 4.6 rebounds per game over 465 career appearances in the NBA. In addition to the Celtics, he played for the Dallas Mavericks, New Jersey Nets, Philadelphia 76ers, Detroit Pistons and Toronto Raptors.

He announced his retirement from the NBA in 2003. He then worked as a color commentator for the Tar Heel Sports Network.

"Carolina Athletics, the Tar Heel basketball family and the entire University

community are profoundly saddened and stunned by the loss of Eric Montross, one of our most beloved former student-athletes, at far too young an age," the Tar Heels said.

"Eric was a great player and accomplished student, but the impacts he made on our community went way beyond the basketball court.

"He was a man of faith, a tremendous father, husband and son, and one of the most recognizable ambassadors of the university and Chapel Hill."

Montross is survived by his wife, Laura, daughters Sarah and Megan, and son Andrew.

Crime

continued from page 6

least \$1.5 billion in contracts the state has issued since September 2021 to build about 40 miles of border barrier. As of August, Texas had erected 16 miles of steel bollard barriers in Starr, Cameron, Val Verde and Webb counties.

Senate Bill 4 creates a state crime for illegally crossing the border from Mexico -- a new law that is likely to force a legal showdown with the federal government.

Another Senate Bill 4 -- this one passed by lawmakers during the third special session earlier this year -- would increase the minimum sentence from two years to 10 years for smuggling immigrants or operating a stash house.

The laws funding the border barrier and making crossing illegally a state crime go into effect in early March. The human smuggling law goes into effect in early February.

Abbott, who was in Brownsville on Monday to sign the bills, said Texas needs to defend itself from drug cartels, blaming the Democratic President Joe Biden admin-

istration's immigration policies.

"Biden's deliberate inaction has left Texas to fend for itself," Abbott said.

Immigrant rights organizations, Democrats and former immigration judges said S.B. 4 that makes illegally crossing the border a state crime is unconstitutional because immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility.

Federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have ruled that immigration laws can only be enforced by the federal government. But some Texas Republicans have said they hope the new law will push the issue back before a U.S. Supreme Court that is more conservative since three appointees of former President Donald Trump joined it.

The law would make it a state crime to cross the Texas-Mexico border between ports of entry. The new crime is a Class B misdemeanor carrying a punishment of up to six months in jail. Repeat offenders could face a second-degree felony with a punishment of two to 20 years in prison.

The law allows a judge to drop the charges if a migrant agrees to return to Mexico.

"These measures not only

threaten the safety and dignity of asylum seekers, but also risk undermining the foundational principles of our legal system," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, a national organization that helps refugees settle in the U.S.

"Immigration is clearly a federal authority, and this legislation knowingly dances on the edge of constitutional cliffs at the expense of vulnerable children and families."

U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-San Antonio, sent a letter, signed by other Democratic members of Congress, asking the U.S. Department of Justice to sue Texas to stop the law from taking effect.

"We urge you to assert your authority over federal immigration and foreign policy and pursue legal action, as appropriate, to stop this unconstitutional and dangerous legislation from going into effect," the letter says.

In another statement, 30 former immigration judges appointed by both Republican and Democratic administrations said the bill is unconstitutional.

"The proposed Texas legislation, which would allow a state court magistrate judge to issue

a removal order, is not lawful. Immigration is plainly a federal function," the statement says.

"State legislators cannot enact immigration laws for the same reasons that the United States Congress cannot enact Texas state legislation. State magistrate judges cannot conduct immigration proceedings for the same reason that federal Immigration Judges cannot adjudicate Texas state criminal cases."

Under the new law, migrants who decline to return immediately to Mexico would serve their sentence, then be transported by police to a port of entry -- and they could face a felony charge for refusing to return to Mexico at that point.

The new law faces a potential roadblock if the Mexican government refuses to accept certain migrants when they're deported. Professors and a former Mexican immigration official have said Mexico is under no obligation to accept non-Mexican immigrants deported by Texas.

When asked what Texas would do if Mexico does not accept migrants deported by the state, Abbott said at the news conference: "We're going to send them right back to Mexico."

The new law prohibits police from arresting migrants in public or private schools; churches and other places of worship; healthcare facilities; and facilities that provide forensic medical examinations to sexual assault survivors. The bill doesn't prohibit arrests on college or university campuses.

Texas isn't the first state to empower its police to pursue undocumented immigrants. In 2010, Arizona lawmakers passed Senate Bill 1070, which made it a state crime for legal immigrants not to carry their immigration papers and required police to investigate the immigration status of any person they come into contact with. In a landmark 2012 case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that local police didn't have the authority to arrest someone solely based on their immigration status and said that responsibility falls to the federal government.

This article originally appeared in The Texas Tribune. Read the original here. The Texas Tribune is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans -- and engages with them -- about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.

La Voz Latina

Champions League soccer: Napoli-Barcelona, Madrid-Leipzig drawn for Round of 16

By Alex Butler
UPI

Barcelona-Napoli, Real Madrid-Leipzig and Manchester City-Copenhagen were among the matchups drawn for the Round of 16 for the 2023-24 Champions League soccer tournament, UEFA announced Monday.

The European tournament organizers drew the teams during a ceremony at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland. First-leg Round of 16 matchups will be held Feb. 13, 14, 20 and 21. Second-leg matches will be held March 5, 6, 12 and 13.

The winners from the matchups will advance to the quarterfinals, which will be held in mid-April.

Manchester City, the defending champions, will battle Copenha-



gen in the first leg in Copenhagen. The Sky Blues will then host their Danish Superliga foes in Manchester, England.

"We have to take it seriously and respect what they have done," Sky Blues director of football Tx-

iki Begiristain said on the team website. "They have something very good."

Barcelona will face Napoli in the first leg in Naples, Italy. The Spanish La Liga power will host their Italian Serie A foes in the second leg.

Fellow La Liga squad Real Madrid, who owns a record 14 Champions League titles, will battle Leipzig of Germany's Bundesliga in the first leg in Leipzig, Germany. Madrid will then host Leipzig in the second leg.

Paris Saint-Germain, of France's Ligue 1, will host La Liga's Real Sociedad in a first-leg match in Paris. The second leg will be in San Sebastian, Spain.

La Liga's Atletico Madrid will first face Serie A's Inter Milan in Milan and host the finale in Madrid.

The Bundesliga's Borussia Dortmund will meet Dutch Eredivisie squad PSV Eindhoven for the first leg in Eindhoven in the Netherlands and host the finale in Dortmund, Germany.

Fellow Bundesliga team Bayern Munich will face Serie A's Lazio in

the first leg in Rome and host the second leg in Munich.

Arsenal, of England's Premier League, will face Porto of Portugal's Primeira Liga in the first leg in Porto. The Gunners will host Porto in the second leg in London.

Official match dates and times will be announced later.

The Manchester City Sky Blues, who won the treble with Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup titles last season, are favored to repeat as champions.

Champions League games will air on Paramount+ and CBS.

The Champions League quarterfinal and semifinal draw will be held March 15 in Nyon. The quarterfinals will be held April 9, 10, 16 and 17. The semifinals will be April 30, May 1, 7 and 8.

The final will be held June 1 at Wembley Stadium in London.

Brazil-Argentina soccer game marred by brawl between police, fans

By Alex Butler
UPI

Dozens of soccer fans fought with police in the stands as national anthems played before Brazil faced Argentina, causing a 30-minute delay of the World Cup qualifier in Rio de Janeiro.

The scary sequence occurred Tuesday at Maracana Stadium. Argentina beat Brazil 1-0, with a goal from defender Nicolas Otamendi.

Brazil and Argentina fans -- who were seated near one another -- started fighting in the stands behind a goal just before kickoff. Brazilian police then entered the area, armed with batons. Some fans threw their seats at the officers, while others ran onto the field to flee the area.

"This team continues to make history," Argentina striker Lionel Messi wrote on Instagram. "Great victory at the Maracana, although it will be marked by the repression of Argentina fans once again in Brazil."

"This madness can't be tolerated, and it has to end now!"

Argentina players, including goalie Emiliano Martinez, attempted to hold



back police during the confrontation.

The Argentine players eventually left the field as the brawl fizzled. They returned after a nearly 30-minute delay to start the game, which remained tense. Some police remained in the stands, while more surrounded the field for the match, which featured more than 40 fouls and a scoreless first half.

Otamendi scored the game's lone goal in the 63rd minute.

Brazilian midfielder Joelson also received a red card in the 81st minute.

Nearly 70,000 fans attended the game contested between South America rivals. The Brazilian Football Confederation released a statement saying that officers followed protocol

during the melee.

"It is important to clarify that the organization and planning of the match were carried out carefully and strategically by the CBF, together and in constant dialogue with all competent public bodies, especially the Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro," the confederation said.

FIFA protocol requires

match reports to be submitted and reviewed before the world soccer governing body can take any potential action in regard to the incident.

"There is absolutely no place for violence in football, on or off the field," FIFA president Gianni Infantino wrote Wednesday on his Instagram story. "Such events, as seen during the

FIFA World Cup qualifier between Brazil and Argentina at the Maracana Stadium, have no place in our sport or society.

"Without exception, all players, fans, staff and officials have to be safe and secure to play and enjoy football. and I call on the relevant authorities to ensure that this is respected at all levels."

The Argentines top South American World Cup qualifying standings. Brazil is in sixth, behind Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador. The Top 6 teams will qualify for the World Cup. The No. 7 team will compete in a playoff for another World Cup spot.

The 10 teams in the South American qualifiers will compete in a dozen more games to decide who claims those seven spots.

No. 3 Brazil, led by Vinicius Junior, Neymar, Rodrygo, Marquinhos, Gabriel Jesus, Raphinha and Ederison, among others, will face Ecuador on Sept. 5 in another qualifier.

The reigning World Cup champion Argentinians, ranked No. 1, will face Chile the same day in their next qualifier.

Chargers running back Austin Ekeler says he wouldn't have fired coach

By Alex Butler
UPI

Los Angeles Chargers running back Austin Ekeler says he wouldn't have fired head coach Brandon Staley if he were running the team.

Ekeler made the comment during an appearance Monday on the God Bless Football podcast, three days after the Chargers fired Staley and general manager Tom Telesco.

The firings occurred fewer than 24 hours after the Las Vegas Raiders beat the Chargers 63-21 on Thursday Night Football.

"We are all so locked in. Now we gotta figure out who is what and now the whole culture has changed," Ekeler said. "It's tough. That's why [firing a coach during the

season] doesn't happen often. Even on teams that are bad, it doesn't happen often."

"There are teams that have [lost] more games than us that still have their head coach. It's not my decision. Obviously, that's [owner] Dean Spanos' decision."

"There are three games left. It's not looking great for us for the playoffs. ... They made a change. We'll live with it and play as hard as we can."

Ekeler also talked about the firings Monday during the Ekeler's Edge on Yahoo Fantasy Football Show. He said he found out about it via social media.

"No one ever thought it would come down to what we are going through right now," he said. "You have so much respect for these men.

These are your co-workers. We spend so much time together. ... It really does suck on a personal level."

"It is what it is. It's the ugly side of football. We are going through the business of the NFL. It's not safe for anybody. It is straight production or you get out of there."

The Chargers (5-9) hold the No. 13 spot in the AFC playoff picture and are eliminated from division title contention. They also are on track to hold the No. 8 pick in the 2024 NFL Draft.

The Chargers have the fourth-worst defense in terms of yards allowed. They have the No. 15 offense.

Ekeler, who struggled with injuries earlier this season, totaled 879 yards from scrimmage and six scores



through 11 games. He led the NFL in touchdowns, with 20 and 18, during 2021 and 2022, respectively.

The seven-year veteran also spoke Monday about the firings impacting his future. Ekeler played under several head coaches, but joined the team under Telesco, who signed him in 2017 as an undrafted free agent.

Ekeler, who requested a trade last off-season, is playing on the final year of his contract. He will again become a free agent this off-season.

"I have no idea what's going to happen with me, because I still got three games left," Ekeler said.

"But guess what? I've continued to stay strong

and I'm continuing to look forward to staying strong and looking forward to continuing to pushing through these last three games and then through this offseason and coming back and giving it another shot."

The Chargers will host the Buffalo Bills (8-6) at 8 p.m. EST Sunday in Inglewood, Calif.