

## Pending NDAA grants prosecutors more power

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

New military prosecution offices will take more power from commanders in certain criminal cases, creating a more transparent justice system under reforms included in the defense budget bill.

The reforms will allow prosecutors to approve expert witnesses, grant immunity and approve trial delays. They will also create randomized jury selection and add three new crimes to the prosecutors' jurisdiction.

"While changes in last year's NDAA did give some powers to [new military prosecutors], commanders still had a significant prosecutorial and judicial power making the system susceptible to bias and undermining trust," Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said. The New York Democrat drafted the legislation included in this year's National Defense Authorization Act, the annual bill that outlines defense

priorities and spending.

The changes build on reforms enacted as part of 2022's NDAA. Last year's legislation formed new offices in each service branch to make decisions on when to prosecute a service member charged with one of 11 felonies, a task previously left to the commander of the accused.

The House is set to take up the bill this week, followed by a vote in the Senate.

"This year's NDAA is the culmination of nearly a decade of work with advocates, survivors and veterans groups. It finally strips commanders of their remaining judicial and prosecutorial powers for covered offenses and gives them to trained professional military prosecutors," Gillibrand said Wednesday during a news conference.

Gillibrand has long been a vocal proponent of overhauling the military justice system, citing its failure to get sexual assault and harassment in the

armed forces under control. Despite increasing scrutiny and millions of dollars spent on prevention efforts, the numbers of assaults rose from about 2,500 in fiscal 2010 to about 6,200 in fiscal 2019, according to a March 2021 Government Accountability Office report on military sexual assault.

Only one-third of sexual assault victims are willing to come forward and report their crimes, which shows a lack of trust in the system, Gillibrand said. About 44% of victims indicated they would be more likely to come forward with a prosecutor in charge of decision-making instead of a commander.

"Taking commanders out of the role of overseeing and influencing these cases will build more credibility for survivors and more credibility in the special trial counsel. It just creates the perception that justice is possible and so hopefully more cases come forward and more

cases end in conviction," Gillibrand said.

Congress mandated in 2022 that the decision on whether to prosecute service members accused of 11 felony crimes move to an Office of Special Trial Counsel housed within each military service branch. The military attorney leading each office reports to the civilian secretary of the service.

The 11 crimes included were murder, manslaughter, rape and sexual assault, rape and sexual assault of a child, other sexual misconduct, kidnapping, domestic violence, stalking, retaliation, child pornography and nonconsensual pornography.

The fiscal 2023 NDAA would add three new crimes to the jurisdiction of the new prosecutors: death or injury of an unborn child and mailing obscene matter, as well as sexual harassment, which was added under an amendment from Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif.

## WNBA star Griner freed in prisoner swap with Russia

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Russia freed WNBA star Brittney Griner on Thursday in a dramatic prisoner exchange, as the U.S. released notorious Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout but failed to win freedom for another American, Paul Whelan, who has been jailed for nearly four years.

The swap, at a time of heightened tensions over Ukraine, achieved a top goal for President Joe Biden but carried a heavy price.

"She's safe, she's on a plane, she's on her way home," Biden said from the White House, where he was accompanied by Griner's wife, Cherelle, and administration officials.

The deal, the second such exchange in eight months with Russia, procured the re-

lease of the most prominent American detained abroad. Griner is a two-time Olympic gold medalist whose monthslong imprisonment on drug charges brought unprecedented attention to the population of wrongful detainees.

Biden's authorization to release a Russian felon once nicknamed "the Merchant of Death" underscored the escalating pressure that his administration faced to get Griner home, particularly after the recent resolution of her criminal case and her subsequent transfer to a penal colony.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also confirmed the swap, saying in a statement carried by Russian news agencies that the exchange took place in Abu Dhabi and that Bout has been flown home.

Russian and U.S. officials had conveyed

cautious optimism in recent weeks after months of strained negotiations, with Biden saying in November that he was hopeful that Russia would engage in a deal now that the midterm elections were completed. A top Russian official said last week that a deal was possible before year's end.

Even so, the fact that the deal was a one-for-one swap was a surprise given that U.S. officials had for months expressed their determination to bring home both Griner and Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive jailed in Russia since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the U.S. government has said are baseless.

"We've not forgotten about Paul Whelan," Biden said. "We will keep negotiating in good faith for Paul's release."

# DOD to split \$9B cloud contract among 4 firms

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Google, Oracle, Microsoft and Amazon will share in the Pentagon's \$9 billion contract to build its cloud computing network, a year after accusations of politicization over the previously announced contract and a protracted legal battle resulted in the military starting over in its award process.

The Joint Warfighter Cloud Capability is envisioned to provide access to unclassified, secret and top-secret data to military personnel all over the globe. It is anticipated to serve as a backbone for the Pentagon's modern war operations, which will rely heavily on unmanned aircraft and space communications satellites, but will still need a way to quickly get the intelligence from those platforms to troops on the ground.

The contract will be awarded in parts, with a total estimated completion date of June 2028, the Pentagon said in a statement.

Competition is intense to snap up big corporate and government cloud contracts — awards to build global computing networks where information is stored, shared and secured over the internet instead of on local computer systems. The Pentagon's award is

seen as one of the most coveted because it's a stamp of approval in a market where ensuring a client's data security is important.

"It's the most important cloud deal to come out of the Beltway," said analyst Daniel Ives, who monitors the cloud industry for Wedbush Securities. "It's about the Pentagon as a reference customer. It says significant accolades about what they think about that vendor, and that's the best reference customer you could have in that world."

Last July, the Pentagon announced it was canceling its previous cloud computing award, then named JEDI. At the time, the Pentagon said that due to delays in proceeding with the contract, technology had changed to the extent that the old contract, which was awarded to Microsoft, no longer met DOD's needs.

It did not mention the legal challenges behind those delays, which had come from Amazon, the losing bidder. Amazon had questioned whether former President Donald Trump's administration had steered the contract toward Microsoft due to Trump's adversarial relationship with Amazon's chief executive officer at the time, Jeff Bezos.

## US to deploy additional troops to Estonia to boost NATO defenses

*Associated Press*

TALLINN, Estonia — The United States will deploy additional infantry troops to the Baltic country of Estonia "in the coming weeks" to strengthen defenses on NATO's eastern flank, Estonian defense officials said Thursday.

The deployment consists of a U.S. infantry company — a unit typically consisting of 80 to 250 soldiers, Estonia's Defense Ministry said in a statement. That will be accompanied by the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System as well as associated command and control equipment and systems.

"This decision marks a significant enhancement of the U.S. rotational military pres-

ence in Estonia and the Baltic States, demonstrating the U.S.' long-standing commitment to the security of our region and greatly enhancing NATO's posture," Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said.

Last week, Russia's neighbor Estonia said it would acquire the advanced HIMARS to boost its defense capabilities in the Baltic country's largest arms procurement project ever, worth more than \$200 million.

In a separate statement, the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn said the American troops are part of NATO's enhanced rotational troop deployments agreed at the military alliance's Madrid summit earlier this year.

## After 70 years, Christmas drops keep delivering

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam — Three crates brimming with essential supplies for island life fell swiftly over the Pacific Ocean from the back of a cargo plane Wednesday until small parachutes blossomed to slow their descent.

Its four powerful engines roared as the C-130J Super Hercules from the 374th Airlift Wing at Yokota Air Base, Japan, circled 300 feet above Eauripik, a lonely speck in a vast sea about 500 miles south of Guam.

The drop was one of two the crew made that day, delivering seven crates to two atolls as part of the 71st annual Operation Christmas Drop, which delivers humanitarian aid to the small, nearly inaccessible islands of Oceania.

The U.S. Air Force leads the way on Operation Christmas Drop and was joined this year by air force crews and aircraft from Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India. Ten other nations, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Indonesia and Malaysia, sent observers to see the missions in action.

The yearly operation kicked off Dec. 2 and is set to end Friday, during which time air crews will fly approximately 35 sorties and make 200 drops to 57 islands, a spokesman for the 374th Airlift Wing, 1st Lt. Danny Rangel, told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday. Those drops deliver more than 60,000 pounds — 30 tons — in total.

Inside each 2-by-2.4-by-3-foot crate are myriad provisions for the remote islands' inhabitants: food, water, medical supplies, fishing gear and amenities such as clothing and toys.

The chance to participate in Operation Christmas Drop, and the knowledge that it delivers such essentials, is second to none, according to Capt. Andrew Zaldivar, 31, a C-130 instructor pilot from Yokota.

"It is one of the most incredible experiences in my life," the native of Hockessin, Del., said during media interviews Wednesday. "I tell everybody that this is the best thing I've ever done in the Air Force, hands down."

# House OKs same-sex, interracial unions bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House gave final approval Thursday to legislation protecting same-sex marriages, a monumental step in a decadeslong battle for nationwide recognition of such unions that reflects a stunning turnaround in societal attitudes.

President Joe Biden is expected to promptly sign the measure, which requires all states to recognize same-sex marriages, a relief for hundreds of thousands of couples who have married since the Supreme Court's 2015 decision that legalized those marriages nationwide.

The bipartisan legislation, which passed 258-169, would also protect interracial unions by requiring states to recognize legal marriages regardless of "sex, race, ethnicity, or national origin."

In a debate ahead of the vote, several gay members of Congress talked about what it would mean for them and their families. Rep. Chris Pappas, D-N.H., said he was set to marry

"the love of my life" next year and that it is "unthinkable" that his marriage might not be recognized in some states.

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., said he and his husband should be able to visit each other in the hospital just like any other married couple and receive spousal benefits "regardless of if your spouse's named Samuel or Samantha."

Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I., said that the idea of marriage equality used to be a "far fetched idea, Now it's the law of the land and supported by the vast majority of Americans."

While the bill received GOP votes, most Republicans opposed the legislation and some conservative advocacy groups lobbied aggressively against it, arguing that it doesn't do enough to protect those who want to refuse services for same-sex couples.

"God's perfect design is indeed marriage between one man and one woman for life," said Rep. Bob Good, R-Va. "And it doesn't

matter what you think or what I think, that's what the Bible says."

Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., choked up as she begged colleagues to vote against the bill, which she said undermines "natural marriage" between a man and a woman.

"I'll tell you my priorities," Hartzler said. "Protect religious liberty, protect people of faith and protect Americans who believe in the true meaning of marriage."

Democrats moved the bill quickly through the House and Senate after the Supreme Court's June decision that overturned the federal right to an abortion. That ruling included a concurring opinion from Justice Clarence Thomas that suggested same-sex marriage should also be reconsidered.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., presided over the vote as one of her last acts in leadership before stepping aside in January. She said the legislation "will ensure that 'the federal government will never again stand in the way of marrying the person you love.'"

## US jobless claims see modest increase in last week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Slightly more Americans filed for jobless claims last week but the labor market remains one of the strongest parts of the U.S. economy.

Applications for unemployment benefits rose to 230,000 for the week ending Dec. 3, up by 4,000 from the previous week's 226,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week moving average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week volatility, rose by 1,000 to 230,000.

About 1.67 million people were receiving

jobless aid the week that ended Nov. 26, up 62,000 from the week before. That's the most in 10 months, but still historically low.

Jobless claims are seen as a proxy for layoffs, and combined with other employment data, show that American workers are enjoying extraordinary job security at the moment. That's despite an economy some see in danger of tipping into a recession due to the aggressive actions of the Federal Reserve, which is trying to cool the economy by raising interest rates.

The Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark interest rate six times since March, sending the housing market into a downturn under the strain of mortgage rates that have more than doubled from a year ago. Many economists expect the United States to slip into a recession next year with more Fed rate hikes expected to increase borrowing costs and slow economic activity.

Most observers forecast that the Fed will raise rates by another half-point at its final meeting of 2022 next week.

## Schumer reelected Senate leader with Dem majority

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Chuck Schumer was unanimously elected Thursday for another term as Senate Democratic leader, helming a bolstered 51-seat majority for a new era of divided government in Congress.

Senate Democrats met behind closed doors at the Capitol to choose their leadership team for the new Congress that begins in January.

As Senate majority leader, Schumer has proven to be a surprisingly steady, if frenzied, force amid one of the more consequential sessions of Congress.

He took the helm in the weeks after the Jan.

6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, and led his party through the COVID-19 crisis and unexpected legislative achievements, many of them bipartisan. A former campaign chief, he steered the party to the majority and expanded it to 51 seats with Sen. Raphael Warnock's special election win Tuesday in Georgia.

Schumer's reelection puts two New Yorkers at the top of the Democratic leadership in Congress, alongside Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, the incoming House minority leader. Jeffries was elected to lead Democrats after Speaker Nancy Pelosi's decision to step aside next year.

Senate Democrats are expected to fill out their leadership team with new and returning figures.

Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois is on track for another term in the No. 2 spot. The No. 3 position is to be filled by Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan.

With Republicans taking control of the House, it will be a new challenge for Schumer in divided Washington.

Senate Republicans already chose their team, putting Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell on track to become the longest serving party leader in the chamber.



# Pot now legal in Mo., but you can't buy it

Associated Press

O'FALLON, Mo. — As of Thursday, it's lawful for adults to possess and use marijuana in Missouri. That doesn't mean you can legally buy it just yet, or use it everywhere.

Medical marijuana has been legal in the state since a ballot measure passed in 2018, but voters went a step further this November by approving a constitutional amendment legalizing the drug for anyone 21 or older. The new law makes Missouri the 21st state to allow recreational use.

The change comes with some confusion. For one thing, dispensaries can't yet sell for recreational use. People will eventually be able to grow their own, but applications to do so won't be taken until next month. And places such as schools and businesses can still prohibit the drug.

John Mueller, co-founder of Greenlight Dispensaries, said the company's 15 Missouri shops are getting calls from people confused about the new law and why they can't yet buy it from the dispensaries.

"I think everybody's anxious and excited about adult use," said Mueller, whose com-

pany plans to add 300 jobs at cultivation, manufacturing and dispensary locations for the expected uptick in business. "Every dollar we sell is a dollar that doesn't go to the black market."

Recreational users are also calling and emailing the Missouri Wild Alchemy dispensary in O'Fallon, owner Jason Crady said — "24/7."

"There's a lot of buzz about it," said Crady, who is busy hiring and training staff in preparation for recreational sales.

Existing medical dispensaries will eventually be allowed to sell to recreational users, but the agency hasn't determined when that will be.

John Payne, a leader of the campaign to legalize marijuana, said recreational sales will likely begin in February.

The state is expected to issue an additional 144 dispensary licenses by early 2025.

Spokeswoman Lisa Cox of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, which regulates marijuana, said personal cultivation application forms will be available Jan. 7 for people who want to grow a

limited amount of their own.

Some places will continue to prohibit lighting up. Among them: the four campuses of the University of Missouri System. The system cited two federal laws — the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act and the Drug-Free Workplace Act — on Wednesday in announcing a continued prohibition of marijuana on campuses and at university-sponsored events. Student violators could face discipline up to expulsion.

Legalization is concerning for some in law enforcement who worry it will mean more impaired drivers.

Kevin Merritt, executive director of the Missouri Sheriffs' Association, said marijuana impairment is more difficult for police to assess because there is nothing comparable to blood-alcohol tests that determine intoxication levels in people who have been drinking.

The amendment also requires expungement of criminal records for most people incarcerated or on probation for a misdemeanor marijuana offense, a process expected to be completed by mid-2023.

## Former Border Patrol agent convicted of killing 4 women

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — A former Border Patrol agent who confessed to killing four sex workers in 2018 was convicted Wednesday of capital murder, after jurors heard recordings of him telling investigators he was trying to "clean up the streets" of his South Texas hometown.

Juan David Ortiz, 39, receives an automatic sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole because prosecutors decided not to seek the death penalty.

Ortiz, a Border Patrol intel supervisor at the time of his arrest, was accused of killing Melissa Ramirez, 29, Claudine Anne Luera, 42, Guiselda Alicia Cantu, 35, and Janelle Ortiz, 28. Their bodies were found along roads on the outskirts of Laredo in September 2018.

During the trial that began last week, jurors heard Ortiz's

confession during a lengthy taped interview with investigators.

Ortiz told investigators he had been a customer of most of the women, but he also expressed disdain for sex workers, referring to them as "trash" and "so dirty" and insisting he wanted to "clean up the streets."

He said "the monster would come out" as he drove along a stretch of street in Laredo frequented by the women.

Following the verdict, family members of the victims faced Ortiz to give their statements. Ramirez's sister-in-law, Gracie Perez, said she was "a loving, kind and funny person." She told Ortiz that the hearts of Ramirez's children are now broken.

"Do you know how much pain you have caused this family?" Perez said. "My heart is torn apart knowing that I won't be able to see her but to visit her in the cemetery."

## Iran executes first known prisoner arrested in protests

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran said Thursday it executed a prisoner convicted for a crime allegedly committed during the country's ongoing nationwide protests, the first such death penalty carried out by Tehran.

The execution comes as other detainees also face the possibility of the death penalty for their involvement in the protests, which began in mid-September, first as an outcry against Iran's morality police.

Activists warn that others could also be put to death in the near future, saying that at least a dozen people so far have received death sentences over their involvement in the demonstrations.

The execution "must be met with strong reactions otherwise we will be facing daily executions of protesters," wrote Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the

director of the Oslo-based activist group Iran Human Rights. "This execution must have rapid practical consequences internationally."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock condemned the execution in a Twitter post, saying "the Iranian regime's contempt for humanity is limitless."

The Mizan news agency identified the executed protester as Mohsen Shekari. It said he had been convicted in Tehran's Revolutionary Court, which typically holds closed-door cases. The tribunals have been internationally criticized for not allowing those on trial to pick their own lawyers or even see the evidence against them.

Shekari was accused of blocking a street in Tehran and attacking with a machete a member of the security forces, who required stitches for his wounds, the agency said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Ex-prison worker faces 100-year jail sentence

**IN** INDIANAPOLIS — A former Indiana Department of Correction worker faces a potential sentence of 100 years in prison under a deal in which she agreed to plead guilty to two counts of murder for a knife attack two years ago in which two people were killed and a third was wounded, a prosecutor said.

Kristen L. Wolf, of Madison, also will plead guilty to attempted murder and attempted battery by means of a deadly weapon for the attack at an Indianapolis apartment that killed Victoria Cook, 24, and Dylan Dickover, 28, and seriously injured Elizabeth McHugh, Marion County Prosecutor Ryan Mears said.

During the attack, a DOC hat that Wolf was wearing fell off and was left at the scene, investigators said. The hat had a tag with the name "Wolf" written on it. At the time, Wolf worked at a prison in the Ohio River city of Madison.

## State officials: No giant hornets found in 2022

**WA** BELLINGHAM — Citizen trapping of northern giant hornets in northwest Washington ended Nov. 30 without any confirmed sightings of the hornets this year, state officials said.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture also said no confirmed sightings of the hornets were reported nearby in British Columbia, Canada. The northern giant hornet is native to Asia and has been the target of eradication efforts af-

ter hornets were discovered in both locations in 2019.

The hornets will not be considered eradicated until Washington has gone three years with no detections. Confirmed sightings were last recorded in 2021.

## Jury awards \$2.6M to 3 workers fired by clerk

**IL** WAUKEGAN — A jury awarded more than \$2.6 million to three former Lake County employees who claimed the county circuit court clerk fired them because they supported her opponent in the 2016 election.

One of Lake County Circuit Court Clerk Erin Cartwright Weinstein's first acts after taking office in December 2016 was to fire three former top deputies of former clerk Keith Brin, whom she defeated in the election.

Michelle Higgins, Tiffany Deram and Joshua Smothers campaigned for Brin and were seen alongside him in parades and other events by Weinstein, her husband or her top deputy, court records state.

Including punitive damages, the jury awarded Higgins \$1.1 million in compensation for pain and suffering, lost wages and pension, Deram received \$1 million and Smothers \$542,000.

## Governor wants free lunch for all students

**NM** SANTA FE — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham wants New Mexico to help provide school lunches without charge to all K-12 students across the state.

Lujan Grisham spokeswoman Nora Meyers Sackett confirmed the governor will pursue legislation when lawmakers meet in January 2023 to ensure every student has access to free and nutritious school meals by covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for students that don't already qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

The new initiative backed by the governor would build on efforts to combat hunger by offsetting co-payment charges for school meals.

## Beach erosion uncovers wood ship from 1800s

**FL** DAYTONA BEACH SHORES — Severe beach erosion from two late-season hurricanes has helped uncover what appears to be a wooden ship dating from the 1800s which had been buried under the sand on Florida's East Coast for up to two centuries.

Beachgoers and lifeguards discovered the wooden structure, between 80 feet to 100 feet, poking out of the sand over Thanksgiving weekend in front of homes which collapsed into rubble on Daytona Beach Shores last month from Hurricane Nicole.

An archaeological team removed sand and made a shallow trench around the structure's wooden timbers, took measurements and made sketches in an effort to solve the 200-year mystery.

There are no plans to remove the ship from Daytona Beach Shores, not only because the cost would likely run in the millions of dollars, but because it's protected where it is, packed in-

to the wet sand, maritime archaeologist Chuck Meide said.

## State library to display historic photographs

**TN** NASHVILLE — The Tennessee State Library & Archives is putting its collection of over a million historic photographs on display for a new exhibit on portraits.

The library in Nashville said its exhibit, named Tennesseans Through the Lens: Portrait Photography in Tennessee, is free and open to the public.

The photos show how Tennesseans used portraits throughout history to share pictures of themselves, friends, family and celebrities.

The exhibit displays the way technology has changed the way Tennesseans document significant moments.

## Man sentenced for gun stashed away in bunker

**WA** EVERETT — A man was sentenced to 42 months in federal prison after he was found with an illegal arsenal of guns and explosives in a bunker in the Arlington area northeast of Everett.

Court documents said James Bowden, 42, confronted a man in a car and the two argued before Bowden fired a gun into the car's windshield, hitting the man's hand, The Herald reported.

A removable panel in the floor revealed a ladder to a bunker with guns, ammunition, grenades and other equipment, prosecutors said. Prior felony convictions prohibited Bowden from having the weapons.

— From wire reports

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Reporting  
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# Army, Navy seniors put it all on line

**BILL WAGNER**

*The Capital (Annapolis, Md.)*

Legendary Navy football player Eddie Meyers went 2-0-1 against archrival Army during his varsity career.

Meyers has fond memories of the 1979 Army-Navy game, the last played at historic John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia. As a sophomore tailback, Meyers set an Army-Navy game record with 278 rushing yards as the Annapolis service academy rolled, 31-7.

Meyers, who still holds the single-game school record for carries, had another big game as a junior in helping the Midshipmen rout the Black Knights, 33-6.

However, what happened in Meyers' senior year was so painful that he absolutely refuses to even discuss it to this day. The 1981 Army-Navy game ended in a 3-3 tie, leaving Meyers with a lingering bitter memory.

Success or failure in the biggest game of the year defines Army and Navy football players long after they graduate. Ninth-year Army head coach Jeff Monken has learned that lesson, having heard many former players express regret about losing to the archrival as a senior.

"This game is always about the seniors.

So much of their career as a Cadet and an Army football player is based on their record in the Army-Navy game and it is particularly important what happens in their senior year," said Monken, who previously spent six seasons as an assistant at Navy. "They feel a strong responsibility as seniors to win this game."

Army starting center Connor Bishop has been looking forward to the 2022 edition of "America's Game" since he was a high school senior. Bishop grew up in Holland, Pa., about an hour outside of Philadelphia.

Bishop did not play in the 2019 Army-Navy game that was held at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. The last two meetings between the Black Knights and Midshipmen were played at Michie Stadium on the West Point campus and MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J..

For Bishop, it would mean the world to beat Navy in Philadelphia in front of family and friends in a homecoming of sorts. A victory on Saturday would also enable him to hold his head high as an infantry officer as part of the "Long Gray Line."

"That's something everyone is going to ask you for the rest of your life: What happened in the Army-Navy game your senior year? It's kind of our legacy game

and that kind of ups the ante a little bit," Bishop said. "I'm excited to go out there with the rest of this senior class and put on display what we're all about. We've been doing this together for four years now and we want to go out in style."

Navy offensive tackle and tri-captain Kip Frankland feels the same way. He recently received Naval pilot as a service selection and is headed to flight school at Air Station Pensacola. The Tennessee native can already anticipate the questions when other flight officers find out he played football at the academy.

"Army-Navy is the game of all games here, so to go out losing would be absolutely atrocious. You always want to go out on top," Frankland said. "To have that feeling that you took care of business against Army as a senior would be wonderful. That is something you can take out to the fleet and be proud of. You definitely don't want to be someone who lost to Army as a senior."

Outside linebacker John Marshall has experienced both sides of the Army-Navy postgame. As a sophomore in 2020, Marshall walked into the visiting locker room at Michie Stadium and saw seniors sitting with their heads hung and shedding tears.

## USC quarterback Williams voted AP Player of Year

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Southern California quarterback Caleb Williams is The Associated Press college football player of the year, becoming the school's first winner of the award since 2005 with his stellar debut season for the Trojans.

Williams received 32 of the 46 first-place votes and 117 total points from AP Top 25 poll voters to win the award. The Heisman Trophy favorite finished well ahead of TCU quarterback Max Duggan, who came in second with six first-place votes and 64 points.

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was third, with Tennessee's Hendon Hooker in fourth and Georgia's Stetson Bennett fifth.

Alabama linebacker Will Anderson Jr., the first repeat SEC Defensive Player of the Year, was the only non-quarterback in this year's top eight vote-getters, finishing sixth after coming in fourth last season.

Stroud and Hooker got two first-place votes apiece, while one first-place vote each

went to Bennett, Anderson and star running backs Bijan Robinson of Texas and Blake Corum of Michigan.

The clear favorite was Williams, the elusive passer and runner with an electrifying arm and strong leadership skills. The sophomore followed Lincoln Riley from Oklahoma to the West Coast last winter, and the duo immediately returned USC (11-2) to national prominence with a seven-win improvement on last season's record.

Williams has passed for 4,075 yards with an FBS-leading 37 touchdowns and just four interceptions this season, completing 66.1% of his passes while winning the Pac-12's Offensive Player of the Year award.

His ability to avoid defensive pressure has bordered on the supernatural at times, and he has racked up 372 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns while setting the USC school records for total touchdowns and total offensive yards (4,447) in a season.

"I think he's just elegant in the way he plays the game," USC receiver Kyle Ford

said. "That's the only word to describe it. He's out there and he's in the backfield, zig-zagging around and doing spin moves, and he doesn't get touched and has a first down, and he's out of bounds. Stuff like that is amazing to me, stuff that he pulls off during a game. He's a gamer, and he's a winner."

Perhaps most impressively, Williams has played a critical role in bringing cohesion, teamwork and 11 victories to a program returning from a four-win season with a new coaching staff and more than two dozen veteran player additions through the transfer portal.

Although he usually deflects questions about his own play by praising his teammates, Williams admits leadership "means everything" to him.

"I've been trying to lead more," he added. "Being in a position where you can go and do something bigger, or do something that you've always dreamed of as a child, it brings that understanding that the time is right now."



# Padres take SS Bogaerts off market

*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — Farhan Zaidi got a text message from Aaron Judge's representatives early Wednesday morning. And just like that, it was over.

It was time to move on.

With Judge returning to the New York Yankees on a \$360 million, nine-year contract, the San Francisco Giants are mulling over their next move after they missed the playoffs this year.

"We always knew this was a possible outcome, and so we've done a lot of work on our other options," said Zaidi, the Giants' president of baseball operations.

"We'll kind of re-evaluate our board and still looking for ways to improve the next team."

San Diego also met with Judge before he went back to New York, and the Padres quickly jumped on another bat — reeling in All-Star shortstop Xander Bogaerts with a blockbuster \$280 million, 11-year contract.

The Padres already had Fernando Tatis Jr. at shortstop, but he missed the entire season because of injuries and an 80-game suspension for testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

San Diego also met with Aaron Judge and Trea Turner before the big stars opted for different teams. The Padres reached the NL Championship Series this year before losing to the Phillies.

"From our standpoint, you want to ex-

plore and make sure we're looking at every possible opportunity to get better," general manager A.J. Preller said before the Bogaerts deal surfaced. "We've got a real desire to win and do it for a long time."

Zaidi is keeping his cards close to his vest, but there remained plenty of intriguing possibilities on the market as the winter meetings concluded on Wednesday.

All-Star shortstops Carlos Correa and Dansby Swanson are free agents, along with left-hander Carlos Rodón after his terrific year for the Giants. Speedy center fielder Brandon Nimmo could be a nice fit for San Francisco's expansive outfield at Oracle Park.

"We have the support of ownership, but we're not being mandated to get to a certain level payroll-wise," Zaidi said. "We have the flexibility to do that if the opportunities are right."

Judge's contract — baseball's biggest free-agent deal ever — dominated the conversation at the winter meetings Wednesday, but catcher Willson Contreras and pitchers Jameson Taillon, José Quintana and Kenley Jansen all joined new teams, and the Philadelphia Phillies took U.S. Navy aviator Noah Song in the Rule 5 draft.

Taillon joined the Chicago Cubs, agreeing to a four-year contract that is worth roughly \$68 million. A person familiar with the negotiations confirmed the deal to The AP on condition of anonymity because it was

pending a physical.

The Cubs haven't formally announced the move, but President of Baseball Operations Jed Hoyer said the team has been looking at Taillon for a long time.

"I think he's a really good starting pitcher," Hoyer said. "He's been really consistent."

Contreras left the Cubs for NL Central rival St. Louis, which had a need at catcher after Yadier Molina retired. A person familiar with Contreras' \$87.5 million, five-year contract confirmed the move to The AP on condition of anonymity because the deal was pending a physical.

The fiery, strong-armed catcher hit .243 with 22 homers and 55 RBIs in 113 games in his last season with his first major league team. He was on the market this summer — leading to an emotional day at Wrigley Field for what looked like his final home game with Chicago — but he remained with the team after the trade deadline.

Contreras was the best option in a thin market for free-agent catchers that also included Christian Vázquez and Gary Sánchez.

Quintana agreed to a \$26 million, two-year contract with the New York Mets, adding another veteran arm to the team's rotation.

Quintana played for Pittsburgh and St. Louis last season, going 6-7 with a 2.93 ERA in 32 starts.

## England defender Walker aiming to contain Mbappe

*Associated Press*

DOHA, Qatar — With five goals at the World Cup so far, Kylian Mbappe is living up to his reputation as the man best-placed to succeed Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo as soccer's biggest star.

Spare a thought then for Kyle Walker, who is set to mark the France striker when England takes on the defending champions in the quarterfinals on Saturday.

"I do understand what I need to do and that's obviously to stop him," the Manchester City right back said Wednesday.

Walker described Mbappe as "probably" the best player in the world and accepted there is particular focus on how he handles the situation at Al Bayt Stadium. But he believes there has been too much talk about just one player when France has a squad full of world-class talent.

"The game is not England vs. Mbappe. The game is England vs. France," Walker said. "OK, he's a tool they have in their armory that's very good, but there are other very good players and we can't underestimate those players that have won big titles, won big cups. He's a great player, we all know that. That's why all the questions are about him, but let's not forget (Olivier) Giroud, who scored countless goals for France and in the Premier League."

"(Ousmane) Dembele who, for me, is just as good on the other wing, is a very tricky player. Then you've got (Antoine) Griezmann and stuff like this. These players can cause you the problems. OK, we take our hat off to him, he is a great player. For me, all the questions shouldn't be about him."

Mbappe is aiming to win his second World Cup after his starring role when

France won the title in Russia four years ago. He scored four goals in that tournament and has already surpassed that number in Qatar with five.

Walker has come up against the Frenchman three times in the Champions League with City against Paris Saint-Germain, winning twice and losing once. Mbappe only managed to score one goal in those three games — and that was in a 2-1 loss in November 2021.

While France won the title in Russia, England was knocked out by Croatia in the semifinals.

Walker believes the team is better placed to go further this time after reaching the final of last year's European Championship, which it lost on penalties to Italy.

France, he said, holds no fear for this England team.

# In NBA, 100 points no longer assures anything

Associated Press

If the NBA has a magic number, it's 100.

Wilt Chamberlain's single-game scoring record. A perfect shooting percentage. And the rule pretty much seemed to be that if a team scored 100 points in a game, it was probably going to walk off the floor as a winner.

Not anymore.

Put simply, 100 doesn't guarantee anything. Teams with at least 100 points are losing 45% of their games so far this season as of Tuesday, the highest such rate in more than 50 years and nearly 10% higher than the league's all-time average.

Orlando is 4-16 when scoring 100 points. Detroit is 7-14 in those games. Houston is 7-15. It's just not enough to win in this NBA era, where defense might seem optional — teams have insisted that isn't the case — and 20-point scorers appear to be everywhere.

Really. They're everywhere. Right now, there are nearly 50 NBA players on pace to average 20 points this season. A decade ago, only 11 players finished the season with such an average. There will, without question, be more 20-point-per-game guys not getting picked for the All-Star Game this year than ever before, simply because there aren't anywhere near enough roster spots in that game to accommodate them all.

"We've got a lot of threats out there to shoot the ball," said Brooklyn's Kevin Durant, whose current average of 29.9 points per game ranks seventh in the league this season — yet is more than he averaged in two of the four seasons in which he won the league's scoring title. "So that keeps defenses on their heels."

He was speaking of the Nets when he said that, though he could have just as easily been talking about the whole league.

Not since 1969-70 has the NBA seen a season where teams are averaging this many points per game. The league average this season is 113 points per contest; that's up 13 points from eight seasons ago and up almost 17 points from 11 seasons ago. Much of that has to do with the league's ongoing reliance on the three-pointer — a record number of those (30,598) were made last season and this season is on pace for a similar total in that department.

Magic coach Jamahl Mosley has said his definition of a good defensive game in this NBA is simple: holding an opponent to 107 or 108 points tends to make him happy.

"That's the crazy part about it," Mosley said. "You say you're scoring enough to get where you need to be, but then defensively, if you're giving up the 120's and the 115's, that's where it becomes tough. That's two or three less turnovers, that's one more re-

bound, that's knocking down one more shot, that's taking away one more three. You talk about the small gains and the small things you can do to help your defense get better, those are the pieces."

This may be the best and simplest example of how the game has changed. In the 2014-15 season, the Los Angeles Clippers averaged 106.9 points per game, which was second-best in the NBA.

This season, the Clippers are averaging 107.2 per game. That's last in the league.

"I think one of our team's greatest challenges right now is just being consistent on both ends of the floor, especially the defense," Denver coach Michael Malone said.

Every coach in the league could, and probably has, offered a similar assessment. The game just keeps changing and what used to be normal just isn't anymore.

## Christmas may be new Thanksgiving as NHL playoff gauge

Associated Press

For the better part of two decades since the NHL instituted a salary cap, enjoying turkey, stuffing and mashed potatoes were synonymous with feeling pretty good about making the playoffs.

Dating to 2005-06, with lockout- and pandemic-related seasons excepted, 76% of teams in a playoff spot by the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday wound up qualifying. It became such a popular narrative that it began to seep into coaches' offices and locker rooms based on the odds alone.

Maybe not this year. Thanks to the season starting later than normal, many contenders still trying to find a groove amid various injuries and expansion to 32 teams also makes it inherently harder to make the playoffs.

The Christmas break may be a better barometer for who's playing for the Stanley Cup beginning in April.

"This is the year where I don't know if it's going to correlate — I think there might be a little bit of a wrench in that," longtime player and coach Rick Tocchet said. "This is a little goofy season. I don't think you can have that barometer. I think you have to

wait a little bit longer."

Already in the week since Thanksgiving, the best eight teams in the Western Conference have changed out, with Calgary and St. Louis for Edmonton and Minnesota. While New Jersey is looking like the real deal, Detroit remains a bit surprisingly in a playoff spot in the East — with Washington, Florida and others on the outside looking in.

Capitals coach Peter Laviolette acknowledged the history of teams riding a good Thanksgiving spot into the playoffs. But, he points out, "I know teams have made it to the playoffs and played for Cups from behind the line."

He did it with Philadelphia in 2009-10, inheriting the 22nd-place team in the league in December and taking it to the Final. But the reality of the situation is that's more the exception than the rule.

"There's something to it," Washington center Lars Eller said. "You don't want to be chasing. You want to be in a good position early. You have a bad stretch like we had (recently), you can't have two or three of those a season (or) you're not going to make the playoffs."

Make the playoffs first is the focus of de-

fending champion Colorado, which like Washington and Philadelphia has been ravaged by injuries early in the season.

Coach Jared Bednar's theory is to stay in the mix and keep pushing until reinforcements arrive, and he knows other teams are going through similar struggles and transitions; there were 10 new coaches on the bench as the season began. That's why he thinks the first 15 or so games of the season are not enough to start making judgments.

"Some teams have a lot of new players, new coaches all around the league," Bednar said. "It takes some time to get dialed in exactly the way you want to go, so I think this year with all the movement through the league now last couple years — lots of coaches moving — I think it can take time for teams to find their footing."

Tocchet, now a Turner Sports analyst, has also pointed to the number of comebacks as a reason for uncertainty. There were 22 multi-goal, third-period comeback wins in the first quarter of the season, according to NHL Stats, the most at that point in league history.

"Nobody's ever out of it anymore," Tocchet said.