

## Military police enforce Buffalo driving ban

*Associated Press*

BUFFALO, N.Y. — State and military police were sent Tuesday to keep people off Buffalo's snow-choked roads, and officials kept counting fatalities three days after western New York's deadliest storm in at least two generations.

Amid some signs of progress — suburban roads reopened and emergency response service was restored — County Executive Mark Poloncarz warned that police would be stationed at entrances to Buffalo and at major intersections to enforce a ban on driving within New York's second-most populous city.

"Too many people are ignoring the ban," Poloncarz, a Democrat, said at a news conference.

The National Weather Service predicted that as much as 2 inches more snow could fall Tuesday in Erie County, which includes Buffalo and its 275,000 residents. County Emergency Services Commissioner Dan Neaverth Jr. said officials also were somewhat concerned about the potential for flooding later in the week, when the weather is projected to warm and start melting the snow.

The rest of the United States also was reeling from the ferocious winter storm, with at least an additional two dozen deaths reported

in other parts of the country, and power outages in communities from Maine to Washington state.

On the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's reservation in South Dakota, there were plans to use snowmobiles Tuesday to reach residents after food boxes were delivered by helicopter and trucks over the weekend, the tribe said.

In Buffalo, the dead were found in cars, homes and snowbanks. Some died while shoveling snow, others when emergency crews could not respond in time to medical crises.

Poloncarz called the blizzard "the worst storm probably in our lifetime," even for an area known for heavy snow.

The winter blast stranded some people in cars for days, shuttered the city's airport and left some residents shivering without heat. More than 4,000 homes and businesses were still without power late Tuesday morning.

Trisha LoGrasso and her family were still huddled around a space heater in a makeshift hut in her Buffalo living room Monday.

She was without heat because of a gas leak, the temperature inside the home was 42 degrees, and burst pipes left her with no running water.

"I've lived here my whole life, and this is the worst storm I've ever seen," said LoGrasso, 48.

President Joe Biden offered federal assistance Monday to New York, while Gov. Kathy Hochul toured the aftermath in Buffalo, her hometown, and called the blizzard "one for the ages."

Almost every fire truck in the city became stranded Saturday, she said.

Hochul, a Democrat, noted the storm came a little over a month after the region was inundated with another historic snowfall.

Between the two storms, snowfall totals are not far off from the 95.4 inches the area normally sees in an entire winter season.

The National Weather Service said the snow total at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport stood at 49.2 inches at 10 a.m. Monday.

Officials said the airport will be shut through Wednesday morning.

More than 2,900 domestic and international U.S. flights were canceled Tuesday as of about noon Eastern time, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

The U.S. Department of Transportation said it will look into flight cancellations by Southwest Airlines that left travelers stranded at airports across the country amid the winter storm.

Many airlines were forced to cancel flights, but Southwest was by far the leader.

## Lavrov says Ukraine must disarm or Russia will do it

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's foreign minister on Tuesday warned anew Ukraine that it must demilitarize, threatening further military action and falsely accusing Kyiv and the West of fueling the war that started with Moscow's invasion.

Sergey Lavrov said Ukraine must remove any military threat to Russia — otherwise "the Russian army (will) solve the issue." His comments also reflected persistent unfounded claims by the Kremlin that Ukraine and its Western allies were responsible for the 10-month war, which has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions.

Russia launched the war on Feb. 24, alleging a threat to its security and a plot to bring NATO to its doorstep. Lavrov reiterated on Tuesday that the West was feeding the war

in Ukraine to weaken Russia, and said that it depends on Kyiv and Washington how long the conflict will last.

"As for the duration of the conflict, the ball is on the side of the (Kyiv) regime and Washington that stands behind its back," Lavrov told the state Tass news agency. "They may stop senseless resistance at any moment."

In an apparent reaction, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted that "Russia needs to face the reality."

"Neither total mobilization, nor panicky search for ammo, nor secret contracts with Iran, nor Lavrov's threats will help," he said. "Ukraine will demilitarize the RF (Russian Federation) to the end, oust the invaders from all occupied territories. Wait for the finale silently..."

A day earlier, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told the Associated Press in an interview that his government wants a summit to end the war but that he doesn't anticipate Russia taking part.

Kuleba said Ukraine wants a "peace" summit within two months with U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres acting as mediator. But he also said that Russia must face a war crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow.

Both statements illustrate how complex and difficult any attempts to end the war could be. Ukraine has said in the past that it wouldn't negotiate with Russia before the full withdrawal of its troops, while Moscow insists its military gains and the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula cannot be ignored.

# To find, keep caregivers, DOD raises fees

By DOUG G. WARE  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has increased fees for military-certified child care services, mainly to find qualified caregivers and keep them from going elsewhere, defense officials said Friday.

The Defense Department specified the fee policy changes for its Child Development Program, which offers full-time, accredited and installation-based child care for the children of service members.

“To find and retain skilled staff and continue providing quality child care for military families, changes to the policy that guide child care fees are necessary to enhance recruitment and retention efforts,” the department said in a statement.

The department said there are three main fee-related changes.

The rate for on-base child care is increasing from \$7 to \$8 per hour, the department said. There also will be an extra income category, which is used to determine what families will pay each month for military-provided child care.

The third main change is a raise in the subsidy gap to help pay for private-run care, from \$1,500 to \$1,700 per child. For example, if a family qualifies to pay \$500 per month for on-base care, the military will see to it that they also pay \$500 per month for private care—as long as the off-base provider charges no more than \$2,200 per month. Parents would be responsible for an amount that is more than \$1,700.

“Most families will see a change in child care fees,” said Stacey Young, director of the Office of Military Family Readiness Policy. “But we also know our

families understand the importance of ensuring the [Defense Department] is able to attract the best employees from local labor markets.”

“These child care fee changes will ensure military parents can continue to be mission-ready knowing their children are safe, nurtured and receiving quality child development services,” said Heidi Welch, child and family director at the Office of Military Family Readiness Programs.

Each year, government defense funding pays for at least 50% of the care provided by the Child Development Program. The fees paid by parents account for the other half of operating revenue. For many years, defense officials have said the availability of child care is important to the overall health of the all-volunteer U.S. military force, particularly since combat roles were opened

to women six years ago.

“The Department of Defense views child care as a workforce enabler that directly impacts the readiness, efficiency, and retention of the total force,” the Pentagon wrote in the report, noting it’s always looking for ideas and programs to solve child care issues.

In September, the National Guard Bureau launched a pilot program to offer free child care to soldiers in six states during drill weekends in a move to better retain single parents in the service.

The Pentagon has the largest U.S. employer-sponsored child care program, which cared for more than 210,000 military children younger than 12 in 2019, according to a DOD report to Congress that year. But the report noted there were almost 9,000 children on waiting lists for on-base child care — nearly two-thirds of whom were younger than 2.

## IG finds bases in US had \$260M in damage from Afghan exodus

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Military bases that housed tens of thousands of Afghan refugees in the U.S. incurred almost \$260 million in damages that in some cases rendered buildings unusable for troops until significant repairs to walls and plumbing are made, the Pentagon’s inspector general found.

Over the last two weeks of August 2021, the U.S. Air Force managed the largest humanitarian evacuation in its history, airlifting 120,000 people from Afghanistan in just 17 days. The bulk of those passengers were Afghans fleeing Taliban rule, and U.S. aircraft delivered tens of thousands of those Afghans initially to bases in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Italy, Bahrain and Germany.

After processing, many of the

refugees were flown to eight military bases in the U.S., where many were housed for months as they awaited visa processing and resettlement; the last Afghan refugee left military housing in February.

The refugees were housed at Fort Bliss, Texas; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.; Fort McCoy, Wis.; Camp Atterbury, Ind.; Fort Pickett, Fort Lee, and Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.; and Holloman Air Force Base, N.M.

The sheer volume of people in the temporary housing left those barracks and buildings with significant wear and tear, the inspector general found.

But the inspector general questioned whether all the repair work requested by the eight bases was connected to the refugees’ stay.

## Space Force takes over all DOD satellite communications

*The Gazette*  
*(Colorado Springs, Colo.)*

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — The Space Force has taken over all of the Department of Defense’s military satellite communication functions, a major step in building the new service.

The Navy and the Army have transferred major satellite communication operations to the Space Force in an effort to consolidate training, operations, acquisition and other activities, according to a news release. The transfer marks the first time all military satellite communication functions have been consolidated under a single military service.

The Army’s transfers were expected to include \$78 million in operations, maintenance and 500 positions, the release said. As part of the consolidation, the Ar-

my transferred the Wideband Global SATCOM and Defense Satellite Communications System to the Space Force in August. The Wideband Global SATCOM system is considered the “backbone of the U.S. military’s global satellite communications,” according to the Space Force.

Col. David Pheasant, commander of Space Delta 8 at Schriever Space Force Base, Colo., said the transfer of all new Space Force members as part of the consolidation is still underway and is expected to last through December. However, those people are already working for the Space Force, even though they may still officially be members of other military branches.

As part of growing Space Force capabilities, Pheasant said he expects the service to grow its partnerships with other countries.

# 4 Wash. power stations damaged, motives unclear

*The Washington Post*

Investigators in Washington state continued to search for suspects in a string of Christmas Day burglaries at four electrical substations near Tacoma, causing a fire at one location and leaving thousands without power.

Burglars broke through the fences at two substations run by Tacoma Public Utilities — and two by Puget Sound Energy over a roughly 17-hour stretch beginning early Sunday. The burglaries left an estimated 14,000 customers in the dark on Christmas, with power mostly restored Monday.

The break-ins and resulting power outages were as frustrating for local residents as they were puzzling for local law enforcement, who said they are aware of “similar incidents occurring across the country.” The vandals did not take anything from the facilities and the motive is unclear, the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department said in a bulletin.

“The weirdest part about the whole thing is that this is all rural area; it’s not like it was Tacoma or downtown Seattle,” Sgt. Darren Moss Jr., a spokesperson for the sheriff’s department, told *The Washington Post* on Monday. “If it was a message, who is it for? Or is it just some people pulling a prank?”

The affected substations were in or near unincorporated and largely rural Pierce County, Moss said. He noted that the facilities were all unmanned but do have some security measures, though he couldn’t

elaborate on the details. Fences outside the affected substations all showed signs of forced entry, he said.

Moss said the sheriff’s department would contact the FBI if it hadn’t already. A spokesperson with the FBI field office in Seattle on Monday would not confirm or deny it was investigating the Christmas Day incidents, only noting it regularly shares information with local law enforcement partners and “[takes] threats against our infrastructure seriously.”

Tacoma Power, a division of TPU, said in a statement that federal law enforcement earlier in the month sent it a security alert for the electrical grid. TPU did not respond to additional requests for comment Monday. A spokesperson for Puget Sound Energy would only confirm the company was coordinating with authorities and that the vandalism incidents were under investigation. Earlier this month, two electrical substations in Moore County, N.C., were struck with gunfire in what the FBI described as “willful damage.” Thousands of residents in the affected area were left without heat or power, prompting a state of emergency declaration in the county and a briefly implemented curfew.

Moss, of the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department, acknowledged Sunday’s acts of vandalism share similarities with the incidents in other parts of the country, but he stopped short of calling the incidents “attacks” until investigators can connect them with a motive, like extremist beliefs.

# Holiday sales up 7.6% despite inflation spike

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Holiday sales rose this year as American spending remained resilient during the critical shopping season despite surging prices on everything from food to rent, according to one measure.

Holiday sales rose 7.6, a slower pace than the 8.5% increase from a year earlier when shoppers began spending the money they had saved during the early part of the pandemic, according to Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all kinds of payments including cash and debit cards.

Mastercard SpendingPulse had expected a 7.1% increase. The data released Monday excludes the automotive industry and is not adjusted for inflation, which has eased somewhat but remains painfully high.

U.S. sales between Nov. 1 and Dec. 24, a period that is critical for retailers, were fueled by spending at restaurants and on clothing.

By category, clothing rose 4.4%, while jewelry and electronics dipped roughly 5%. Online sales jumped 10.6% from a year ago and in-person spending rose 6.8%. Department stores registered a modest 1% increase over 2021.

Consumer spending accounts for nearly 70% of U.S. economic activity, and Americans have remained resilient ever since inflation first spiked almost 18 months ago.

Cracks have begun to show, however, as higher prices for basic necessities take up an increasingly large share of everyone’s take-home pay.

# Co-leader of plot to kidnap Mich. governor sentenced

*AP/Report for America*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The co-leader of a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer was sentenced Tuesday to 16 years in prison for conspiring to abduct the Democrat and blow up a bridge to ease an escape.

Adam Fox returned to federal court four months after he and Barry Croft Jr. were convicted of conspiracy charges at a second trial in Grand Rapids, Mich.

They were accused of being at the helm of a wild plot to whip up anti-government extremists just before the 2020 presidential election. Their arrest, as well as the

capture of 12 others, was a stunning coda to a tumultuous year of racial strife and political turmoil in the U.S.

The government had pushed for a life sentence, saying Croft offered bomb-making skills and ideology while Fox was the “driving force urging their recruits to take up arms, kidnap the governor and kill those who stood in their way.”

But Judge Robert J. Jonker said that while Fox’s sentence was needed as a punishment and deterrent to future similar acts, the government’s request for life in prison is “not necessary to achieve those purposes.”

“It’s too much. Something less than life gets the job done in this case,” Jonker said, later adding that 16 years in prison “is still in my mind a very long time.”

Jonker said he also considered the emotional baggage Whitmer will have to carry due to the plot.

“It undoubtedly affects other people who are in public office or are considering public office. They have to count the cost.”

In addition to the 16-year prison sentence, Fox will have to serve five years of supervised release. He’ll also get credit for more than two years in custody since his arrest.



# Japan approves its largest defense budget

By HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — Citing concern over its challengers' growing military might, Japan's Cabinet on Friday approved the nation's largest-ever defense budget for next fiscal year, a drastic increase over this year's budget.

The fiscal 2023 defense spending plan amounts to 6.82 trillion yen, or about \$51.4 billion. That's a 26.3% increase over the current budget of 5.4 trillion yen, or about \$40.7 billion. Japan's fiscal year begins in April.

This is the 11th consecutive increase in defense spending for Japan, according to the budget document released by the Ministry of Defense. It is also the first defense budget composed after three significant policy statements were adopted Dec. 16: National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and Defense Buildup Program.

The revised policies state that Japan's defense spending should be increased to "fundamentally enhance defense capability in the next five years" as Japan faces increasing security threats in the region and adopts new ways of fighting.

Starting next year, Japan plans to increase its defense spending to a total of 43 trillion yen, or about \$324.2 billion, over the next five years. That sum is about 1.6 times current five-year total spending, according

to the Defense Buildup Plan.

The increase is necessary, the budget states, to cope with new threats surrounding Japan, such as China's attempt to unilaterally change the regional balance of power by force, North Korea's record-breaking run of missile tests this year and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, along with its increasingly frequent military activities in the Far East.

Next year's budget follows the Defense Buildup Program, which aims to fundamentally strengthen Japan's multi-domain defense force, which includes space, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum, according to the budget.

The budget "accumulates necessary expenses as the first year of building fundamentally strengthened defense capability," the budget states.

The approved budget includes funds for stand-off defense, such as 211.3 billion yen, or \$1.59 billion, to acquire Tomahawk missiles; and 127.7 billion yen, or about \$963 million, for development and mass production of improved surface-to-ship guided missiles.

The missiles are part of a counterstrike capability embraced by the new National Defense Strategy. The defense strategy defines counterstrike as hitting an opponent's missile bases to prevent further attacks after an opponent's first strike.

The budget allocates 828.3 billion yen, or

about \$6.24 billion, more than three times the previous year's budget, to acquire ammunition for continuous unit operations, it stated.

It also allocated 896.8 billion yen or about \$6.76 billion, again more than three times the previous year's budget, for research and development, such as development of next generation fighter jets and research for stand-off defense capabilities.

Japan's drastic defense policy review and increased spending comes as neighboring countries in the region have strengthened their military powers.

North Korea in October launched an intercontinental ballistic missile over Japan for the first time in five years. China and Russia are sending military aircraft and vessels into the airspace and waters surrounding Japan.

The two started a weeklong joint naval exercise Thursday in the South China Sea, for example.

During a meeting with President Joe Biden in May, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida committed to fundamentally strengthening the nation's defense and increasing its defense budget.

Although Japan has gradually increased its defense spending in recent years, it had the lowest ratio of defense expenditures to GDP among its G-7 partners the United States, Canada, France, Germany and Italy, as well as Australia and South Korea.

## Oregon trains 'facilitators' for safe mushroom use

*Associated Press*

DAMASCUS, Ore. — At a retreat center in Oregon, some 30 men and women are seated or lying down, masks covering their eyes, listening to serene music.

They are among the first crop of students being trained how to accompany patients tripping on psilocybin, as Oregon prepares to become the first U.S. state to offer controlled use of the psychedelic mushroom to the public. Expected to be available to the public in mid- or late-2023, the program is charting a potential course for other states. Oregon voters approved Ballot Measure 109 on psilocybin by an 11% margin in 2020.

In November, Colorado voters also passed a ballot measure allowing regulated use of "magic mushrooms" starting in 2024. On Dec. 16, California state Sen. Scott Wiener, of San Francisco, introduced a bill to legalize psilocybin and other psychedelics.

"Psychedelics help people heal from trauma, depression & addiction," Wiener tweeted. "Why are they still illegal in California?"

InnerTrek, a Portland company, is now training around 100 students, in three groups, to be licensed "facilitators" who will create a safe space for dosing sessions and be a reassuring, but nonintrusive, presence. Some classes in the six-month, \$7,900 course are online but others are in-person, held near Portland in a building resembling a mountain lodge with Tibetan prayer flags flapping in the breeze nearby.

Because psilocybin use is still illegal, the only mushrooms at the training center were the shitake ones served in the miso soup.

Trainer Gina Gratza told the students that the space, or "container," for a dosing session at a licensed center should include a couch or mats for clients to sit or lie on, an

eye mask, comfort items like a blanket and stuffed animals, a sketch pad, pencils and a bucket for vomiting. A session typically lasts at least six hours.

Tom Eckert, the architect of Ballot Measure 109, is now moving it along as InnerTrek's program director. He said it's not about people getting "high" for the sake of it, but to use psilocybin to improve lives.

Researchers believe psilocybin changes the way the brain organizes itself, permitting a user to adopt new attitudes more easily and help overcome depression, PTSD and other issues.

"What we're bringing forward here in Oregon is a platform for psilocybin services," Eckert said. "And service means a sequence of sessions in which a psilocybin experience is contextualized. So, there's preparation beforehand and integration afterwards. It's a therapeutic sequence."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Police: Woman tracked stolen car, killed 2 men**

**MO** ST. LOUIS — A St. Louis County woman was charged with two counts of first-degree murder after she tracked down her stolen car and allegedly killed two men outside a gas station, police said.

Demesha Coleman, 35, of Spanish Lake, was charged in the deaths of Darius Jackson, 19, and Joseph Farrar, 49. Another man was shot in the head during the shootout but survived.

Surveillance video showed Coleman walking up to a Hyundai Tucson at the gas station with a man who was also carrying a weapon, according to a police detective. Police have not released the man's name.

The video shows Coleman opening the car door with her gun raised, while the man opens another door, also with his gun raised. Coleman opened fire and sparked the shootout, police said.

She told detectives that she went to the gas station to take her stolen car back, police said.

**Netflix plans \$900M facility at former base**

**NJ** EATONTOWN — Netflix said it plans to build a state-of-the-art production facility at a former Army base at the Jersey Shore that will cost more than \$900 million, and create thousands of jobs.

The subscription video streaming company will pay \$55 million for a 292-acre site on the former Fort Monmouth

military base in Eatontown and Oceanport.

The California-based company plans an additional \$848 million worth of investments in 12 sound stages and for other uses related to the film industry.

**Police investigating rideshare carjackings**

**MD** BALTIMORE — Police in Baltimore are investigating dozens of rideshare carjackings and robberies over the past month but have seen more cases despite several arrests, Police Commissioner Michael Harrison said.

In many cases, an active rideshare driver's car and phone are stolen and the carjacker then poses as a driver, using the rideshare app to pick up unsuspecting riders, who are robbed through mobile payment apps or taken to ATMs to withdraw cash, Harrison said at a news conference.

There have been 39 such cases since Nov. 22, he said. Six teens with ties to 12 of the cases have been arrested, Harrison said. Four of the six, who range in age from 15 to 18, have prior arrests and there are two open warrants for one more suspect, he said. Another nine people have been arrested in relation to other crimes linked to the rideshare carjackings, Harrison said.

**'Cousin Eddie' display in leads to police response**

**KY** SHEPHERDSVILLE — A "Cousin Eddie" display in Kentucky apparently looked a little too real and police were called to check

it out.

After receiving the call, a dispatcher described the scene to responding officers as "a male standing outside. He is naked. He has a robe covering part of his body. He is exposing himself, and he has a hose between his legs."

Officers arrived at the Shepherdsville home to find a mannequin in the yard that looked like Cousin Eddie from "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." It was decorated with a robe, a hat, a cigar and a beer and was holding what appeared to be an orange hose, WDRB-TV reported.

Homeowner Joni Keeney said she decided to put up the display from her favorite Christmas movie to have some fun.

**State to open first legal pot dispensary soon**

**NY** NEW YORK — The first legal dispensary for recreational marijuana in New York is set to open Dec. 29, marking a long-awaited launch of a cannabis industry that could become one of the country's most lucrative.

Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that Housing Works, a minority-controlled nonprofit in Manhattan that serves people with HIV and AIDS, will be the first of 36 recently licensed dispensaries to begin selling cannabis to the general public — even though dozens of illegal shops have been in operation for many months.

The announcement was made one month after the state's Cannabis Control Board took a monumental step in establishing a legal marketplace

for marijuana by issuing the first round of licenses. In the coming months, the state is expected to issue an additional 139 licenses, with about 900 applicants waiting to learn their fate.

New York legalized recreational use of marijuana in March 2021.

**City says Air Force jet damaged runway**

**OK** STILLWATER — A military cargo jet carrying the U.S. Air Force Academy women's basketball team damaged a regional airport runway when it allegedly landed without prior authorization in Stillwater, city officials said.

The C-17 Globemaster aircraft is 45 tons heavier than the runway's maximum weight capacity, city officials said in a news release. The plane touched down at the airport, the city said, ahead of a game against Oklahoma State University.

"Airport staff have temporarily patched surface damage to the runway and taxiways but must have the sub-surface assessed for potential long-term damage," the statement said. The city didn't give an estimate of the repair costs.

City officials say all charter flights are required to receive permission prior to using the airport — but in this case, prior approval was neither requested nor granted.

However, U.S. Air Force officials disputed the city's characterization, saying the flight was coordinated with airport officials five days before the landing.

— From wire reports

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# Oluwatimi has heavy heart in banner year

*Associated Press*

Standout Michigan center Olu Oluwatimi had a season that was even better than his dreams.

The graduate transfer from Virginia wasn't surprised the Wolverines had a successful season, which earned them a matchup with TCU in the Fiesta Bowl in a New Year's Eve semifinal for a berth in the national title game. It also didn't stun the AP All-American to win the Rimington Award as college football's best center.

Oluwatimi was thrilled — and surprised — to become the first player in school history to win the Outland Trophy that recognizes the top interior lineman on either side of the ball.

He would, though, like to forget a five-day stretch in November.

Oluwatimi lost three friends and former teammates at Virginia in a shooting attack that shocked the Cavaliers and prompted the cancellation of the last two games of their season.

"They will always be my brothers even though they're no longer with us," Oluwatimi said quietly in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "I know they're definitely looking down on me, and hopefully they're proud."

Four days after the tragedy, his father had surgery to remove a brain tumor a year after

having major heart surgery. "It was a tough week," Oluwatimi said.

Oluwatimi endured the emotional trauma without missing a beat, drawing praise for his mental toughness from Wolverines coach Jim Harbaugh.

"I think back to being that age and there's no way I could have handled that," Harbaugh said. "But he has the strength of 10 men and thank God that that was a successful surgery."

Michigan, until this month, had not dipped into the transfer portal much and Harbaugh is thankful he did a year ago.

The 23-year-old Oluwatimi, who is from Maryland, was on Air Force's team as a freshman before transferring to Virginia, where he started in 35 games over three seasons and was a finalist for the Rimington Award in 2021.

He wanted to transfer again to take advantage of an extra season of eligibility the NCAA gave athletes enrolled during the 2019-20 school year because of the pandemic. The 6-foot-3, 307-pound Oluwatimi wanted to join a program that would put him in a better position to pursue his goal of playing in the NFL.

"I knew I wanted to be here before I hit the portal," Oluwatimi said in an office on the second floor of Schembechler Hall. "It was here or Clemson, but it wasn't close. Michi-

gan is so prestigious, the program is ascending and needed a center.

"When I watched them play and saw the physicality of the offensive line, as a lineman, it was the perfect culture to try to be a part of for my last year."

Over the last two seasons, Harbaugh has had award-winning offensive lines that allowed him to implement his preferred run-heavy offense. The Joe Moore Award recognizes college football's best offensive line and Oluwatimi helped the Wolverines win it for a second straight year — a first for any program.

"He's very powerful," said Michigan tight end Joel Honigford, who played on the offensive line before switching positions two years ago. "If he gets his hands on you, it's pretty much over for you that play. He's a really good communicator and he allows the guys around him to play thought-free and just play football."

As rough as November was for Oluwatimi, there was a lot to like this month with a Big Ten championship along with the awards.

"When I committed to Michigan, the only thing I didn't expect was to win the Outland," he said. "I don't say that in a cocky way, but I was a finalist for the Rimington last year and I expected us to be 13-0 with a chance to compete for the national championship."

## Buckeyes 'D' motivated to limit UGA's big plays

*Associated Press*

COLUMBUS, Ohio — J.T. Tuimoloau stood in front of the Buckeyes before practice the week after Ohio State's second straight loss to Michigan.

As the sting of defeat began to set in and the prospect of missing the playoff remained a possibility, the second-year defensive end offered a reminder to his teammates.

Ohio State still has a chance.

"I felt like we just needed to get back on track, and these boys push me to go my hardest and bring out the best in me every day," Tuimoloau recalled. "I know what we can bring so I just wanted to come and just reiterate that. The job's not finished."

That's the focus for Ohio State's defense ahead of the College Football Playoff semifinal matchup against No. 1 Georgia (13-0) in the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31: Correct mistakes and limit big plays.

Ohio State (11-1) allowed 530 yards of of-

fense during its loss to the Wolverines on Nov. 26, including five plays of 45 yards or more that went for touchdowns. Those explosive plays have been on the mind of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

Knowles said he takes ultimate responsibility for Ohio State's miscues in its only loss of the season.

"Any call that goes for an explosive, you have to look at, take responsibility for," Knowles said. "You got to evaluate the call from top to bottom and the game plan."

Coach Ryan Day said Michigan's 85- and 75-yard touchdown runs were enough to "ruin the whole day," but he's taking the good with the bad when evaluating his defense.

"There was still a lot of good things that happened," Day said. "It wasn't like you watch the film and you're like, 'Jeez, we just got completely outmatched.' It was just a lack of execution and too many big plays."

Occasional questions on defense have lin-

gered for much of Day's tenure.

In 2019, Day and the Buckeyes won the Big Ten and advanced to the CFP behind a stout defense that held teams under 260 yards and 14 points per game.

But in 2020 and 2021, those numbers ballooned. Ohio State gave up 401.6 yards and 25.8 points per game in his second season and were 372.9 yards and 22.8 points on average during his third, which prompted him to seek out Knowles and make changes on the defensive coaching staff.

Knowles' defense allowed just under 304 yards per game and ranked No. 12 in total defense this season, and he's been doing his part to quickly turn the focus toward the CFP.

"We've been having some of the best practices we've had all season," safety Ronnie Hickman said. "Being able to have this second chance is huge, so we're just doing everything we can to not let it slip through our fingers."



# Chargers beat Colts, reach playoffs

*Associated Press*

INDIANAPOLIS — The Los Angeles Chargers tried to keep their postgame playoff celebration private.

No such luck. After shaking hands and walking off the field in Indianapolis, players jogged through a tunnel to blaring music, high-fives and hugs and headed into a first-time locker room scene for many of these Chargers — a playoff party.

Austin Ekeler scored on two 1-yard runs and Los Angeles clinched its first postseason berth since 2018, intercepting Nick Foles three times to beat the overmatched Colts 20-3 on Monday night.

“We’re in it, now let’s go win it!” one player screamed before reporters were allowed into the locker room.

The bash included second-year coach Brandon Staley handing a game ball to owner Dean Spanos, whose organization earned its second playoff spot since 2014, a little less than a year after a brutal overtime loss at Las Vegas in last season’s final game kept LA out of the postseason.

Justin Herbert threw for 235 yards and Cameron Dicker made two short field goals for the Chargers (9-6), who won their third

straight after getting the help they needed this weekend from Las Vegas, Miami, New England and the New York Jets. When all four lost, the Chargers simply needed a win to clinch a playoff spot, and they did their part.

“It’s been a while,” receiver Keenan Allen said after catching 11 passes for 104 yards, his sixth straight 100-yard game on the road. “The playoffs are never guaranteed, so when you get in, it feels good. Now the season starts.”

Indy (4-10-1) lost its fifth straight under interim coach Jeff Saturday, though this was a more ho-hum defeat than the previous two, when it gave up 33 fourth-quarter points to Dallas and blew a 33-0 halftime lead at Minnesota.

Foles, making his first Colts start, squandered two first-quarter scoring chances by throwing picks, was sacked seven times and went 0-for-10 on third down.

As usual, though, Indy’s third starting quarterback of the season was only part of the problem.

“We started out, thought we had some shots early but obviously the turnovers hurt you and dissuade you to keep doing it,” Sat-

urday said. “We ran the ball well, but when it’s second-and-14, it’s hard to catch back up. I thought we ran the ball effectively but couldn’t stick with it.”

Herbert also struggled early until Ekeler scored the first points of the game with his short TD run midway through the second quarter.

The Colts took advantage of two personal foul calls that led to the ejection of Pro Bowl safety Derwin James to drive for their only score of the game, a 46-yard field goal by Chase McLaughlin.

But that was it for the Colts. Dicker’s two kicks made it 13-3, and Ekeler’s second scoring run sealed the victory.

Ekeler had 18 carries for 67 yards, became the fourth player in 15 years to score at least 15 TDs in back-to-back seasons and needs one more catch to post the sixth 100-catch season by a running back.

While Herbert went 24-for-31 and his three-game streak of 300-yard games ended, the numbers didn’t matter. The win did.

“It was tough to lose to the Raiders at the end [last year],” Herbert said. “The guys in that locker room deserve this. So it’ll be exciting to have that opportunity.”

## Cardinals’ Watt indicates he’ll retire at end of season

*Associated Press*

TEMPE, Ariz. — J.J. Watt could be a terrifying presence on a football field, hunting opposing quarterbacks with unparalleled ferocity, particularly during the early 2010s with the Houston Texans.

But the 6-foot-5, 288-pounder also could be a joyful fan favorite, playing catch with young fans in the stands before games.

Now one of the best defensive players in NFL history looks like he’s ready to call it a career.

Watt — a three-time AP Defensive Player of the Year — indicated Tuesday that he will retire at the end of the season, posting pictures of his wife and baby on social media while writing: “Koa’s first ever NFL game. My last ever NFL home game. My heart is filled with nothing but love and gratitude. It’s been an absolute honor and a pleasure.”

The Arizona Cardinals defensive lineman and his wife, Kealia, became parents in October. Koa is their son.

Watt, 33, was among the premier defensive players in the NFL during the early 2010s with the Houston Texans. The former

Wisconsin standout was a first-round pick in 2011 and was dominant from 2012 to 2015, finishing that four-year stretch with 69 sacks, to earn all three of his AP Defensive Player of the Year awards.

### Broncos fire head coach Hackett

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos fired first-year head coach Nathaniel Hackett on Monday with two games left in the season.

Team owner and CEO Greg Penner said he’ll lead the search for a new coach with assistance from GM George Paton, in whom he expressed confidence while announcing Hackett’s dismissal.

Firing Hackett with two games left in a lost season allows Penner to begin his search for a replacement immediately.

### Jets QB White to start on Sunday

Mike White is back at quarterback for the New York Jets.

And just in time, with their playoff hopes hanging by a thread.

White was cleared by team doctors and

will start Sunday in Seattle after he missed the Jets’ past two games while dealing with broken ribs suffered in New York’s 20-12 loss at Buffalo on Dec. 11.

“I thought Mike had been doing a great job moving the offense, sustaining drives and getting first downs,” coach Robert Saleh said while confirming the decision.

White has practiced on a limited basis since, but hadn’t been cleared for contact so he couldn’t play.

Saleh said Joe Flacco would serve as White’s backup and Zach Wilson will go from starting to being the No. 3 quarterback and inactive on Sunday.

### Tagovailoa in protocol again

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has returned to the NFL’s concussion protocol, Miami coach Mike McDaniel said Monday.

Tagovailoa was experiencing symptoms when he met with team doctors Monday, though McDaniel said it is unclear if Tagovailoa was concussed in Sunday’s 26-20 loss to Green Bay.

# Nets push winning streak to nine games

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The only drama surrounding the Brooklyn Nets right now is when they're going to lose again.

Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant scored 32 points apiece and the Nets extended their longest winning streak since moving to Brooklyn to nine games with a 125-117 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Monday night.

The Nets withstood a sensational 46-point performance by Darius Garland, who single-handedly brought the Cavs back in the fourth.

Brooklyn has won 13 of 14 and is beginning to look like an NBA title contender after months of distractions — mainly revolving around Irving and his off-court antics.

Durant moved past Tim Duncan (26,496) into 15th place on the career scoring list when he dropped a 20-foot jumper in the second quarter. Next up for Durant is Dominique Wilkins (26,668).

**Clippers 142, Pistons 131 (OT):** Paul George scored 32 points and visiting Los Angeles overcame a 14-point deficit in the final 3:34 of regulation to beat Detroit in overtime.

Bojan Bogdanovic led Detroit with 23 points, including the Pistons' only field goal of the last eight minutes. Isaiah Stewart added 21 points for NBA-worst Detroit.

**Heat 113, Timberwolves 110:** Max Strus scored 19 points, Kyle Lowry added 18 points and nine assists, and host Miami got back to .500 by holding off Minnesota.

Anthony Edwards led all scorers with 29 points for the Timberwolves (16-18).

**Rockets 133, Bulls 118:** Kevin Porter Jr. scored a season-high 36 points and visiting Houston used a 17-1 run in the third quarter to beat Chicago, snapping a five-game losing streak.

DeMar DeRozan scored 31 for the Bulls, who won their previous three games.

**Pelicans 113, Pacers 93:** Naji Marshall scored a career-high 22 points, Jonas Valanciunas had 20 points and 12 rebounds, and short-handed New Orleans extended its winning streak to three games by beating visiting Indiana.

Rookie guard Bennedict Mathurin led the Pacers with 15 points in 22 minutes off the bench. Myles Turner scored 14.

**Spurs 126, Jazz 122:** Devin Vassell had 24 points, Keldon Johnson added 21 and host San Antonio fended off Utah in the final minutes.

Lauri Markkanen had 32 points and Jordan Clarkson added 25 for Utah.

**Trail Blazers 124, Hornets 113:** Jusuf Nurkic scored 27 points, including a career-high five three-pointers, to go with 14 rebounds and six assists as host Portland defeated Charlotte.

LaMelo Ball paced the Hornets with 25 points.

## Pitino's No. 22 Lobos push their way onto AP Top 25 slate

Associated Press

Richard Pitino took less than a day after his firing from Minnesota to jump at the chance to coach New Mexico. And like their second-year coach, the 22nd-ranked Lobos are moving fast.

New Mexico is one of three unbeaten teams left in Division I — the others being No. 1 Purdue and No. 2 Connecticut. And the Lobos (12-0) will play their first games in more than eight years with a national ranking as part of this week's AP Top 25 schedule, starting Wednesday against Colorado State to open Mountain West Conference play followed by Saturday's trip to Wyoming.

The program was last ranked during the 2013-14 season.

"You want to get to the stage, to the big stage where people know who you are individually as well as your program," Pitino said Monday in an interview with The Associated Press. "It's no different than an upstart band, a young rapper, that's trying to go on tour to sell tickets by the show that he puts on, so he gets more recognition and opens more doors for them individually as well as the program."

"But if you go and lay an egg when it's time for the concert, then the attention, the fan support, the all-eyes-on-you goes away."

Pitino inherited a six-win team and his first squad went 13-19. But a win Wednes-

day would give the Lobos their second 13-0 start in program history (the other came in a school-record 17-0 start in 1967-68).

Success has come with the return of high-scoring guards Jamal Mashburn Jr. (16.8 points per game) and Jaelen House (16.4), and the addition of transfer big men Morris Udeze (17.5 points, 7.3 rebounds) from Wichita State and Josiah Allick (9.3, 8.2) from Missouri-Kansas City.

### Boilermakers' week

Purdue remained No. 1 in Monday's poll, marking the Boilermakers' third straight week at the top. Purdue (12-0, 2-0 Big Ten) hosts Florida A&M on Thursday, its final game before returning to league play next week.

### Instate rivalries

Fifth-ranked Arizona faces an interesting test with in-state rival Arizona State on Saturday, though No. 19 Kentucky's matchup that day with Louisville doesn't look nearly as intriguing.

Arizona (12-1, 1-1 Pac-12) has won six straight and owns KenPom's No. 1-ranked offense (120.2 points per 100 possessions) as of Monday. The Sun Devils were ranked No. 25 last week before a blowout loss at San Francisco, though they still rank in the top 10% of Division I teams in KenPom's adjusted defensive efficiency

(92.4 points allowed per 100 possessions).

As for Louisville-Kentucky, the Wildcats (8-3) first face Missouri on Wednesday in their Southeastern Conference opener before hosting the Cardinals (2-11), who are off to a miserable start under first-year coach Kenny Payne.

### ACC movers

North Carolina had a rapid fall from preseason No. 1 to unranked by early December after a four-game losing streak. But the 25th-ranked Tar Heels (9-4, 1-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) have regrouped to win four straight entering Friday's trip to Pittsburgh.

Meanwhile, No. 14 Miami (12-1, 3-0) is rolling with eight straight wins, including at home against highly ranked Virginia last week. The Hurricanes, up eight spots from last week's poll, host Vermont on Wednesday and then visit Notre Dame on Friday in league play.

### Watch list

College of Charleston is the headliner just outside the Top 25.

The Cougars (12-1) host Hampton on Thursday before visiting Towson in Colonial Athletic Association play, and their only loss came at UNC. They're within one spot of moving into the AP Top 25 for the first time since spending a week at No. 25 in December 2003.