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Aruban Cotton Tail, Aruba's Native Rabbit Species



Page 8

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Supervisor in D.C. federal prosecutors' office told to resign after dispute over investigation

By **ALANNA DURKIN RICHER** and **ERIC TUCKER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top supervisor in the federal prosecutors' office in Washington said she was forced to resign following a dispute with her boss over a directive that she scrutinize the awarding of a government contract during the Biden administration, according to a letter reviewed by The Associated Press.

Denise Cheung, a longtime Justice Department official who led the office's criminal division, wrote in a resignation letter that interim U.S. Attorney Ed Martin ordered her to seek a freeze on assets related to the contract and to issue grand jury subpoenas despite her believing there was an insufficient basis for doing so. Cheung said Martin asked



The logo for the Justice Department is seen before a news conference at the Department of Justice, Aug. 23, 2024, in Washington.

for her resignation after she resisted his demand to tell a bank not to release any funds from certain ac-

counts because of a criminal investigation. Cheung said she "lacked the legal authority to is-

sue such a letter" to the bank, telling Martin that the "quantum of evidence did not support that action."

Associated Press

Cheung's letter recapping her dispute with Martin did not describe the nature of the contract or which agency was involved. A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office declined to comment, and a spokesperson for the Justice Department said failing to follow orders "is not an act of heroism."

The conflict was the latest to roil the Justice Department and to result in the resignation of a career official who was unwilling to follow a Trump administration mandate.

Cheung did not explain the reason for her departure in an email to her colleagues Tuesday morning, but encouraged them to continue to fulfill their commitment to "pursuing justice without fear or prejudice." □

U.S. Postal Service head DeJoy to step down after 5 years marked by pandemic, losses and cost cuts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Louis DeJoy, the head of the U.S. Postal Service, intends to step down, the federal agency said Tuesday, after a nearly five-year tenure marked by the coronavirus pandemic, surges in mail-in election ballots and efforts to stem losses through cost and service cuts.

In a Monday letter, Postmaster General DeJoy asked the Postal Service Board of Governors to begin looking for his successor.

"As you know, I have worked tirelessly to lead the 640,000 men and women of the Postal Service in accomplishing an extraordinary transformation," he wrote. "We have served

the American people through an unprecedented pandemic and through a period of high inflation and sensationalized politics."

DeJoy took the helm of the postal service in the summer of 2020 during President Donald Trump's first term. He was a Republican donor who owned a legis-

tics business before taking office and was the first postmaster general in nearly two decades who was not a career postal employee. DeJoy developed a 10-year plan to modernize operations and stem losses. He previously said that postal customers should get used to "uncomfortable" rate hikes as the postal service seeks to stabilize its finances and become more self-sufficient.

The plan calls for making the mail delivery system more efficient and less costly by consolidating mail processing centers. Critics, including members of Congress from several states, have said the first consolidations slowed service and that further consolidations

could particularly hurt rural mail delivery.

DeJoy has disputed that and told a U.S. House subcommittee during a contentious September hearing that the Postal Service had embarked on long-overdue investments in "ratty" facilities and making other changes to create "a Postal Service for the future" that delivered mail more quickly.

DeJoy also oversaw the postal service during two presidential elections that saw spikes in mail-in ballots. Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, a federal judge limited one of the postal service's cost-cutting practices after finding it contributed to delays in mail delivery. □



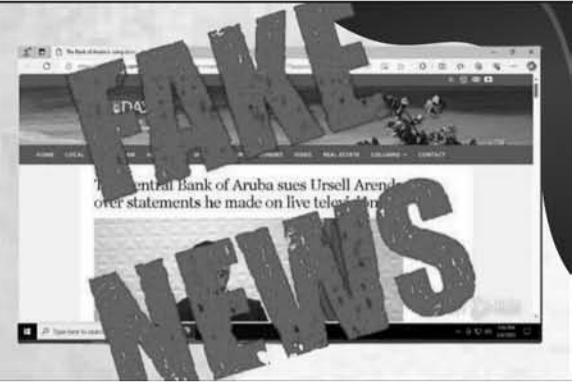
Postmaster General of the United States Louis DeJoy speaks during a news conference, Dec. 20, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

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Trump administration gives schools a deadline to end DEI programs or risk losing federal money

By COLLIN BINKLEY
AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is giving America's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money, raising the stakes in the president's fight against "wokeness" and sowing confusion as schools scramble to comply. In a memo Friday, the Education Department gave an ultimatum to stop using "racial preferences" as a factor in admissions, financial aid, hiring or other areas. Schools are being given 14 days to end any practice that treats students or workers differently because of their race.

Educators at colleges nationwide were rushing to evaluate their risk and decide whether to stand up for practices they believe are legal. The sweeping demand threatens to upend all aspects of campus operations, from essays on college applications to classroom lessons and campus clubs.

It's meant to correct what the memo described as rampant discrimination in education, often against white and Asian students.

"Schools have been operating on the pretext that selecting students for 'diversity' or similar euphemisms is not selecting them based on race," said Craig Trainor, acting assistant secretary for civil rights. "No longer. Students should be assessed according to merit, accomplishment and character."

The guidance drew sharp backlash from civil rights groups and university groups. Some believe its vague language is meant



President Donald Trump waves from his vehicle as he arrives at the Trump International Golf Club, Monday, Feb. 17, 2025, in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

to have a chilling effect, pressuring schools to eliminate anything touching on the topic of race even if it may be defensible in court. "Creating a sense of risk around doing work that might promote diverse and welcoming campuses is much more of the goal than a clear statement of existing law," said Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education, an association of college presidents.

The memo is an extension of President Donald Trump's executive order banning diversity, equity and inclusion programs. It reflects a change in the federal government's interpretation of antidiscrimination laws. As legal justification, it cites the 2023 Supreme Court decision barring race as a factor in college admissions.

"Put simply, educational in-

stitutions may neither separate or segregate students based on race, nor distribute benefits or burdens based on race," it said.

On Monday the Education Department announced it also cut \$600 million in grants for organizations that train teachers. The programs promoted "divisive" concepts like DEI, critical race theory and social justice activism, the department said.

The new guidance seeks to remove race from areas including financial aid, housing, graduation ceremonies, hiring and promotion. It takes aim directly at college admissions, suggesting colleges have sought to work around the Supreme Court's decision.

College essays, for instance, cannot be used to predict a student's race, the guidance says. In the Supreme Court decision, Chief Justice John Roberts said nothing prevents col-

leges "from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life," though he warned that colleges couldn't use essays as an indirect work-around to consider students' race.

The memo also said it's unlawful for colleges to eliminate standardized testing requirements "to achieve a desired racial balance or to increase racial diversity." Dozens of colleges across the U.S. have dropped SAT and ACT requirements in recent years, citing concerns the exams favor students from high-income families. Practices that have long been commonplace could become legal liabilities, including recruiting in underrepresented areas or buying lists of potential students with certain academic and demographic information, said Angel B. Pérez, CEO of the National Association for College Admission Counseling. "Colleges and

universities are going to find themselves between a rock and a hard place," Pérez said. "They know that what they're doing is not illegal, but they are worried that if they do not comply, not having federal funding will decimate them."

Some universities they expect little change. At Oregon State University, a legal review concluded that its programs "are fully compliant with all state and federal laws," according to a campus message from Rob Odom, vice president of university relations and marketing.

The department memo appears to take aim at scholarships for students from certain racial backgrounds. There's been legal debate about whether the Supreme Court decision extends to financial aid, with some schools and institutions deciding to scrap racial requirements for some scholarships.

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators said there's no consensus on the question, and the group is trying to understand how the memo could affect student aid.

"The last thing students need when making plans about how to pay for college is uncertainty over when or whether they will receive financial aid they've been relying on," the group said in a statement. The confusion around Trump's order was apparent at last week's confirmation hearing for education secretary nominee Linda McMahon. Asked whether classes on African American history would run afoul of the president's order, McMahon said she wasn't certain. □

NYC voters would likely support Gov. Kathy Hochul removing Adams as mayor, AP VoteCast shows

By **LINLEY SANDERS**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As New York Gov. Kathy Hochul weighs whether to remove New York City Mayor Eric Adams from office, AP VoteCast shows that many New York City voters in last year's election were already on board with the move.

About two-thirds of New York City voters in November's election said at the time that they would approve of Hochul removing Adams, and most had an unfavorable view of the Democratic mayor. That's according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 4,000 New York voters and 120,000 voters nationwide. About 1,700 of those New York voters resided in New York City.

Hochul said on Monday she was considering removing Adams amid what she called "serious questions about the long-term future" of his administration. They arose after a series of



New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and Rev. Al Sharpton meet at the governor's office in New York, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

extraordinary events in the last week.

The federal Justice Department pushed to dismiss corruption charges against Adams, saying that the case was interfering with his ability to help President

Donald Trump with immigration enforcement. Several federal prosecutors resigned in protest, including the interim U.S. attorney for Manhattan. Then four of Adams' top deputies quit. Adams has pleaded not

guilty to charges including conspiracy, wire fraud and bribery after prosecutors accused him of accepting illegal campaign contributions and overseas trips. He denies wrongdoing. NYC voters had negative

Associated Press

views of Adams. Even before the order from top Justice Department officials to drop charges against Adams, he wasn't broadly popular among New York City voters. Just over half of NYC voters had a "very" or "somewhat" unfavorable view of Adams in November, and about one-third viewed him favorably. About 1 in 10 NYC voters said they did not know enough about Adams to have an opinion.

In the state as a whole, Adams was not as well-known: about one-third of New York voters living outside NYC said they didn't know enough about Adams to give an opinion. But those with one were about three times as likely to have a negative view as a positive one.

New York voters are concerned about corruption. Most New York voters saw corruption as a pervasive problem in their state's government in the November survey. □

Wisconsin Republicans propose \$10K income tax break for hurricane and wildfire relocations

By **TODD RICHMOND**
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — People who lost their homes to Hurricane Helene or California wildfires could get a sizeable tax break to move to Wisconsin.

Republican legislators in the Dairy State have proposed a bill that would give anyone who moves to Wisconsin from North Carolina or Los Angeles County because they were displaced by one of the disasters a \$10,000 income tax credit for the 2025 tax year. People who have been convicted of felonies wouldn't be eligible.

The bill's authors, state Rep. Cindi Duchow and state Sen. Dan Feyen, said in memo to their colleagues seeking co-sponsors that the tax credit could draw people to the state and

help alleviate chronic workforce shortages, particularly in the health care sector. A task force that Democratic Gov. Tony Evers formed to study Wisconsin's worker shortage released a report in August showing a potential deficit

of up to 19,000 registered nurses in the state by 2040 and nearly 32,000 annual openings in the health care field over the next five years.

"Hurricane Helene created massive flooding issues in Appalachia, and

the devastating wildfires affecting Los Angeles County have displaced thousands of people from their homes," the lawmakers wrote in their memo. "Many have lost nearly all possessions and will need to rebuild in the wake of this tragedy. Some highly skilled workers may consider or be forced to leave North Carolina or California, so why not incentivize them to settle in Wisconsin?"

Duchow told The Associated Press that she got the idea for the bill after looking at photos of the wildfire destruction and thinking, "Where do these people go?"

The bill makes sense because Wisconsin would offer people displaced by the disasters a safe haven and so many businesses in the state need workers,

she said. The bill's prospects look murky at best.

Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said in an email to The Associated Press that the bill is an interesting concept and that he'd like lawmakers to learn more about how it could boost the state's workforce. A spokesperson for Senate Republican Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu didn't immediately respond to emails.

Evers' spokesperson, Britt Cudaback, also didn't immediately respond to an email asking what the governor might do with the proposal if it reaches his desk. It's unlikely he would sign it into law given the gaping rift that has developed between him and Republican legislative leaders since he first took office in in 2019. □



Addisun Cole, 8, plays with Little Bit, her grandmother's cat, outside the trailer of her grandmother, Vickie Revis, where Revis is living after her home was destroyed by Hurricane Helene, Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2025, in Swannanoa, N.C.

Associated Press

Hamas says it will free 6 living hostages and hand over 4 bodies, accelerating Gaza releases

By SAMY MAGDY and NATALIE MELZER

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — A top Hamas official says the militant group will free six living Israeli hostages on Saturday and return the bodies of four others on Thursday, a surprise acceleration in releases that apparently comes in return for Israel's allowing mobile homes and construction equipment into the devastated Gaza Strip.

The six are the last living hostages set to be freed under the ceasefire's first phase. The warring sides have yet to negotiate the second and more difficult phase, in which Hamas would release dozens more hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal.

Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya, in prerecorded remarks released Tuesday, said the "Bibas family" would be included in the handover of four bodies, apparently referring to Shiri Bibas and her two young sons, Ariel and Kfir, who for many Israelis embody the captives' plight.

Israel has not confirmed their deaths, and the prime minister's office urged the public not to distribute "photos, names and rumors" after the announcement by Hamas.

"In the past few hours, we have been in turmoil," surviving members of the Bibas family said in a statement released Tuesday by a group representing the relatives of hostages. "Until we receive definitive confirmation, our journey is not over."

Israel has said it was gravely concerned about the Bibas family, while Hamas said they were killed in an Israeli airstrike early in the war. Yarden Bibas, the husband and father, was kidnapped separately and released this month.

Kfir, who was 9 months old at the time, was the youngest hostage taken in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. A video of the abduc-



Displaced Palestinians, traveling in vehicles, wait to cross through a security checkpoint at the Netzarim corridor as they make their way from central Gaza to the northern Gaza Strip, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

Associated Press

The AP journalist saw two bulldozers clearing rubble in an area near the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing. An Egyptian driver told AP that dozens of bulldozers and tractors were at another crossing, awaiting Israeli permission to enter.

Israel is expected to continue releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including many serving life sentences for deadly attacks, in exchange for the hostages. Others were detained without charge. During the first phase, Israel is also due to release all women and children seized from Gaza since the war began. □

tion showed Shiri swaddling her redheaded boys in a blanket and being whisked away by armed men.

The six living hostages slated for release are Eliya Cohen, Tal Shoham, Omer Shem Tov, Omer Wenkert, Hisham Al-Sayed, and Avera Mengistu, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said Tuesday. Cohen, 27, Shem Tov, 22, and Wenkert, 23, were abducted from a music festival. Shoham was taken from the hard-hit community of Kibbutz Beeri. Al-Sayed, 36, and Mengistu, 39, have both been held since crossing into Gaza years before the Oct. 7 attack.

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed to allow long-requested mobile homes and construction equipment into Gaza as part of efforts to accelerate the hostages' release. Hamas last week threatened to hold up releases, citing the refusal to allow in mobile homes and heavy equipment among other alleged violations of the truce.

Israel began allowing entry of rubble-removing equipment Tuesday, according to an Associated Press journalist in southern Gaza and Egypt's state-run media.

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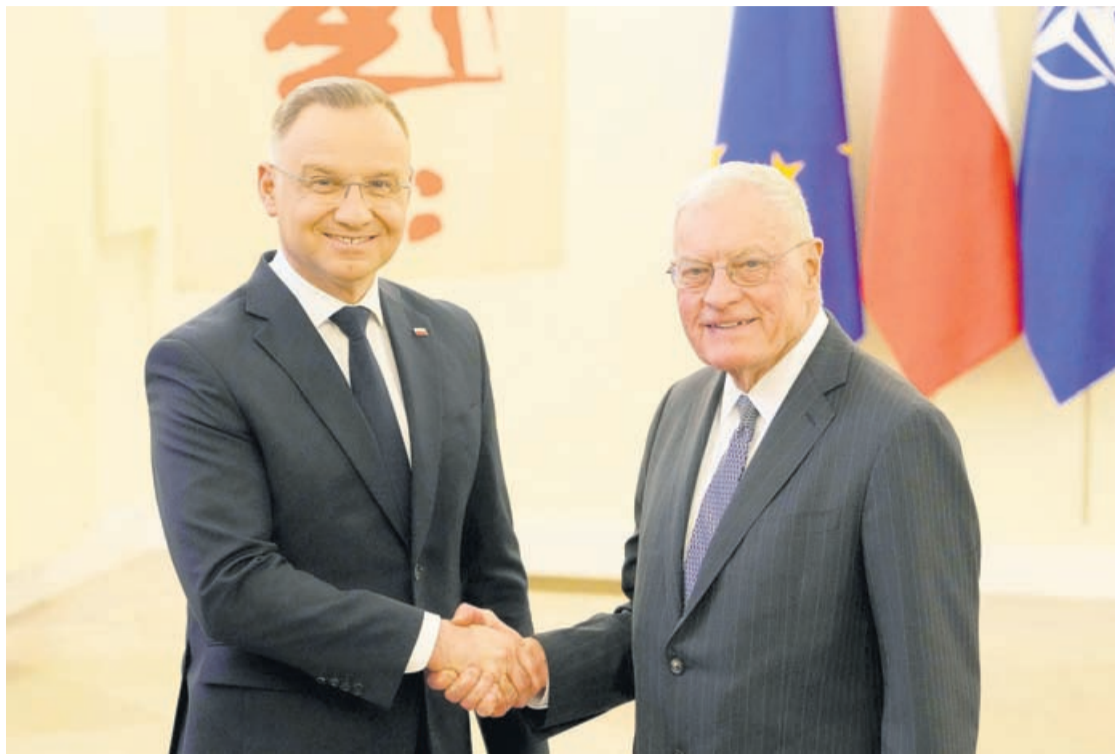
Polish president says U.S. assures him it won't reduce troop levels as he revives 'Fort Trump' idea

By VANESSA GERA
Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland's President Andrzej Duda said Tuesday that he has received U.S. assurances that Washington will not reduce its troop presence in Poland and elsewhere along NATO's eastern flank. A conservative who has long had good ties with U.S. President Donald Trump, Duda also returned to an idea he proposed years ago to create a U.S. military base called "Fort Trump" in his country.

The Trump administration has not announced any plans to pull forces out of the region, but has said Europe must do more to provide for its own security. His administration's stance has raised questions in the region about whether Washington will maintain its long-standing commitments to NATO partners.

"There are no concerns that the U.S. would reduce the level of its presence in our country, that the U.S. would in any way withdraw from its responsibility or co-responsibility for the security of this part of Europe," Duda told reporters in Warsaw after a meeting with



Poland's President Andrzej Duda, left, greets U.S. envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, right, ahead of talks on steps being taken to end the war in Ukraine, across Poland's eastern border, at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, Poland, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

Gen. Keith Kellogg, the U.S. special envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

"On the contrary, I hope that thanks to the efforts that President Trump is currently making, the war in Ukraine will end."

"I will say that in my personal opinion, America has entered the game very strongly when it comes to

ending the war in Ukraine. I know President Donald Trump, I know that he is an extremely decisive man and when he acts, he acts in a very determined and usually effective way," Duda said.

The U.S. deployed troops to Poland after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, but increased the deploy-

ment and created a long-term presence there after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

There are now about 10,000 U.S. troops based in Poland. Duda said his assessment was based on conversations he had in recent days, both with Kellogg on Tuesday and with U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth,

whom he hosted in Warsaw last week.

Duda said Hegseth told him "that we can rather expect a strengthening of the American presence here. We even talked about the fact that I hope that Fort Trump, which we talked about during the first term of President Donald Trump, will really be established."

Fort Trump was a Polish proposal for a permanent U.S. base in Poland, which Duda spoke of publicly during a visit to the White House in 2018. The base was never created.

Polish officials hope to preserve the U.S. commitment to NATO and its long-standing commitment to security in the region, with fears of Russia growing.

They are convinced that Warsaw's strong alliance with the U.S. and its high level of spending on defense will help its cause. They also hope that their position will allow it to advocate for Ukraine.

"We have told both the Secretary of Defense and General Kellogg clearly and distinctly that it is obvious to us that this war cannot end in a victory for Russia," Duda said. □

Associated Press

Brazil to join OPEC+, group of major oil-exporting nations

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE
Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's government on Tuesday approved joining OPEC+, a group of major oil-exporting nations, sig-

naling the country's evolution into a major oil state just nine months ahead of hosting the United Nations' annual climate summit.

The National Council for Energy Policy's approval

came in response to an official invitation in 2023. The group includes the 12 members of OPEC, the longstanding group set up to coordinate oil production to stabilize markets, plus 10 more significant oil-producing nations with Russia by far the largest.

Though non-OPEC members agree to cooperate with OPEC nations, Brazil won't have any binding obligation such as production cuts, Mines and Energy Minister Alexandre Silveira said at a news conference. The participation will be limited to the Charter of Cooperation, a permanent forum for OPEC and OPEC+ countries to discuss industry-related issues.

The South American coun-

try will not participate in decisions.

Silveira called the charter merely "a forum for discussing strategies among oil-producing countries. We should not be ashamed of being oil producers. Brazil needs to grow, develop and create income and jobs."

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva began his third term in 2023 touting himself as an environmental defender, and has worked to reduce deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and to protect Indigenous rights. But he has also argued that new oil revenues could finance a transition to green energy.

In recent weeks, he has pressed the country's en-

vironmental regulator to approve exploratory drilling near the mouth of the Amazon River, one of the most biodiverse regions of the world.

Brazil is the world's seventh-largest oil producer, with about 4.3 million barrels daily, or 4% of the world's output, according to Energy Information Administration, a U.S. government agency.

In 2024, crude oil became the country's top export product, accounting for 13.3% of Brazil's foreign sales, surpassing soy.

The U.S. is the world's largest producer at nearly 22 million barrels daily, with Saudi Arabia, the largest producer in OPEC, at about 11 million barrels. □



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks during the inauguration ceremony for the new president of the state-run oil company Petrobras, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 19, 2024.

Associated Press

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Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitors at Divi Aruba Phoenix Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. The honorees were respectively honored with a certificate for their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honorary certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say

Dining in? Try making a local favorite How to make “pan bati”



(Oranjestad)—If you’re ever up for an Aruban snack, try making another Aruban classic appetizer called Pan Bati. Similar to a pancake both in appearance and cooking, this is a super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here’s how to make it!

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of all purpose flour
- 1 cup grams of fine cornmeal (we recommend the Harina PAN brand)
- 2 tbsp baking powder
- 1 1/3 cup of milk
- 1 pinch of salt
- 2 tbsp of granulated sugar
- Oil for cooking

Instructions:

Add all the dry ingredients in a bowl first, and stir until well mixed. Then add the milk and beat until reached a pancake-like consistency. If more moisture is needed, add some water until reached desired consistency.

In a hot pan with oil, pour in enough batter to cover the bottom of the pan. Just like pancakes, flip the pan bati when one side turns golden brown. When your pan bati is ready, place on a plate and cover with a clean kitchen towel.

Traditionally, pan bati is cut in triangle pieces, and is often eaten as a side dish with soup, fried fish or stews. However, it is also casually enjoyed with some butter and cheese on top! □

“Masha Danki” to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

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The honorees were:

Goodwill Ambassadors
Mr. Robert & Mrs. Carolyn Campbell from Exton Pennsylvania, United States.

Mr. Jorgino Willems representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of Divi Aruba Phoenix Beach Resort bestowed the certificate upon the honorees, presented them with gifts, and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.



The top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honorees were:

- The people of Aruba.
- The weather in Aruba.
- Aruba's infrastructure.
- "Divi is actually my home."

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the “One Happy Island”. □

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Do you know about...?

Aruban Cotton Tail, Aruba's Native Rabbit Species

Aruba's native rabbit, the subspecies **Aruban Cotton Tail**, is possibly at risk of extinction. In an effort to save this endemic species, the **Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF)** has launched a project to protect and collect more information about it. **Natasha Silva**, Chief Conservation Officer at ACF, explained in an interview with **Aruba Today** how they arrived at this project, what the objectives are, and what they hope to achieve with it.

Silva explained that Aruba has its own rabbit, a subspecies of the Eastern Cottontail. The Eastern Cottontail species ranges from southern Canada to Venezuela and Colombia.

This subspecies inhabits only two islands, Aruba and Curaçao, and in Aruba, it is known as the Aruban Cotton Tail. Its scientific name also means "desert rabbit." The subspecies in Aruba and Curaçao have a black patch on their neck, distinguishing them from rabbits in other countries, making them truly native to Aruba.

Silva continued explaining that in the past, they were abundant and could frequently be spotted along the roads, but now there are fewer, and sometimes only one may be seen in a year within Arikok National Park, a protected area. She noted that there are other locations on the island where they are found, but their numbers appear to be significantly lower than before. This decline concerns the foundation, as it is important to monitor native biodiversity to determine whether they are at risk of extinction.



"For the rabbit, we don't know how many remain, and that was actually the first question that led us to realize we need to learn more about the species, whether they are doing okay or not. We believe they are at risk of extinction because we are seeing fewer of them, and we are noticing that all threats have increased, making survival in Aruba much more difficult," she said.

She explained that a year ago, ACF worked on its Conservation Framework, identifying priorities for the next ten years. The framework emphasized that priority should be given to native species, flora, and fauna. The foundation identified key species, and the rabbit was included on the list.

This project is a collaboration with the Riu International hotel chain, which approached ACF over a year ago to establish a multi-year project with the foundation.

Silva noted that ACF had

never collaborated with a hotel chain or a local hotel before, so before agreeing to this partnership, they had multiple discussions and conducted research to evaluate the hotel's commitment to sustainability, their progress in becoming more sustainable, and their future aspirations regarding sustainability and environmental conservation.

Based on criteria set by ACF, they agreed to formalize this collaboration. One of the criteria was that the partner must be serious about sustainability, and another was that the foundation did not want to be involved in any form of



"greenwashing."

After discussions and negotiations, both parties agreed to proceed with the collaboration, and ACF received funding for three years. However, this is a project that ACF intends to continue for decades.

Regarding the project and how the funding will be utilized, Silva explained that it will allow ACF to hire a dedicated ranger for the project, which is a significant development.

With this funding, ACF will also assess the rabbit population, as current observations indicate a drastic decline. The project will include an educational aspect, recognizing that many people in Aruba are unaware of the existence of the native rabbit—something ACF acknowledges as a failure on their part due to a lack of sufficient public education.

Another important aspect is data collection, as there is currently a lack of information. The foundation does not have accurate knowledge of the rabbit population size, where they live, what habitat they require, and what specific

threats they face.

Silva explained that they have some ideas about the threats based on observations in other countries, but she emphasized that human activity—especially the use of UTVs and ATVs—is a major issue, as many rabbits are found run over on roads.

"With this in mind, we believe we must conduct a project where we collect all essential data on the population, their habitat, and from there, develop a plan to restore the habitat they depend on," she said.

Part of the project will also include research on invasive species, such as the impact of boas on rabbits and the effect of stray dogs and cats, which Silva highlighted as a growing threat—possibly even greater than boas—because the number of stray dogs and cats in nature is increasing.

"A plan will be developed on how to manage these threats. We are setting up a long-term monitoring plan to observe the rabbit population for a decade, to determine if it fluctuates, what causes the fluctuations, or if habitat restoration efforts lead to an increase in rabbit populations in restored areas," she stated.

Finally, she emphasized that as part of this project, educational programs will also be implemented to inform the general public about Aruba's native rabbit.

Picture credit: Aruba Birdlife Conservation.

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Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today News-

paper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we received a lovely message from Neale & Judy Weeks From Berrien Springs Michigan, US.

They wrote to us saying: "Aruba to me is the



beautiful sunsets, blue waters & the soft sandy beach."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □

Surf's Up: Favorite places to catch waves in Aruba

ORANJESTAD – Whether you are a salt-seasoned surfer looking for a thrill, or just looking to wet your toes in a little ocean adventure, Aruba has amazing places to learn and practice surfing! Although more known for the calmer waters of Palm Beach, Eagle Beach and Mangel Halto, Aruba also has some special places to thrill your senses.

Because of strong winds and breezes, Aruba is perfect for wind and kite surfing. You will surely notice kites in the air as you drive around the wilder, rougher areas on Aruba's east side.

There are plenty of surf shop rentals to help you with your gear, and there are also a lot of tutors if you're looking



to try for the first time and need a little help. These can be found around the island, and will surely come in hand if you're wanting to try a new experience!

With that said, here are Aruba's favorite surf spots!

Andicuri

Andicuri is recognized as the best place for body boarding. Because of the rough waves, this beach is better

suited for those with more experience in surfing. However, the beach with two bluffs – one on each side – is worth a visit, if only to watch the exciting show presented by the surfers.

To go to Andicuri, you will need a 4x4 vehicle and drive from the ex-Natural Bridge Center. Alternatively, you can make it an adventure by going on a hike! The scenery is unique and beautiful on its own.

Reaching Andicuri Beach can be an adventure in itself, as it can be difficult to find and is only accessible by 4x4 vehicle or walking from the ex-Natural Bridge center, but the impressive scenery makes it all worthwhile!



Arashi

Arashi, a beach located close to the California Lighthouse, is a good spot for learning and having fun – if you're lucky! The waves at Arashi are usually calm, but with just the right weather, a swell forms attracting all the local surfers to the area.

Boca Grandi

Boca Grandi is at the most southern spot in Aruba, and is a popular spot with experienced surfers. Close to the famous Red Anchor and our beloved Sunrise City – San Nicolas, a trip to Boca Grandi can easily turn into an all-day trip to this area of the island. With a beautiful beach (although it is not allowed to swim here, because of strong currents), you can enjoy a relaxing time combing the beach for driftwood, coral,

and little crabs and snails.

Hadicurari

Known locally as Fisherman's Hut, here is where you will find most of the action for surfers in Aruba. With a variety of surf shops and schools in this area, you will find it easy to get in on the action. Hadicurari is also the site of the Aruba Hi Winds World Challenge, which takes place usually in June/July, and it is the largest windsurfing competition in the Caribbean!

Malmok

If you're a beginner, this is your spot. There are also various shops to rent gear and receive lessons, facilitating learning and just trying out a new experience. The beach is also popular for paddleboarding and other watersport activities. □





Article by Etnia Nativa
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Awakening Discoveries

Episode CCXXIX - 291

Our weekly episodes brought to you by Etnia Nativa serve as a platform for promoting recognition and appreciation of Aruba's cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of reconnecting with the island's unique roots and its ancestral spirit. During this episode we will share a bit of our perspective regarding cultural institutions and museums, shedding a fresh light on how to envision impactful experiences; reflecting on external contemporary realities and the need for museums to better position themselves as cultural impacting entities.

Museums are traditionally seen as custodians of history and heritage. However, there's an increasing need for them to adapt and evolve in response to contemporary issues. Etnia Nativa, as a unique entity in itself, offers exactly this new conceptual perspective, covering a vacuum with the idea of focusing on connecting museums with current realities and social issues.

The idea of positioning museums to characterize a genuine cultural impact is vital when a travel destination is the issue. In a world where information and culture are constantly expanding and diversifying, museums can no longer just be static spaces for showcasing the past. They must engage with the present, be more inclusive, and be proactive in addressing pressing global concerns, such as social justice, identity, and sustainability.

Through its experience, Etnia Nativa enhances and creates spaces for dialogue that reflect the diverse and multicultural society in which we live. A relevant characteristic is that it transforms passive exhibition halls into active and participatory spaces where visitors are not just spectators, but contributors to the cultural conversation.

In terms of positioning themselves for greater cultural impact, museums need to ensure they are relevant and accessible to all. This involves reconsidering how they display collections, which they collaborate with, and how they address and interact with modern challenges. In the context of Etnia Nativa, the idea reflects the significance of Indigenous voices, the impact and perspectives created and provoked by the colonial element, something that is often underrepresented in mainstream institutions.

Etnia Nativa plays a crucial role in preserving and showcasing the island's rich indigenous history. It celebrates the island's original ethnic Caquetian people, who were the first permanent settlers of Aruba



long before European colonization. The facility offers a fascinating look at Aruba's ancient history through its exhibitions, which are permanently displayed. It houses artifacts such as pottery, tools, and objects used by the indigenous groups, all of which help tell the story of their daily life, culture, spirituality and survival challenges of insular existence. The exhibits not only explore pre-Columbian history but also offer insights into the island's colonial past, the interaction between the indigenous peoples and the settlers, and the evolution of the island over time. The architecture of the place is often considered a gem as well—combining recycled materials with the island's historical character. The building itself is carefully crafted to harmonize with Aruba's natural landscape and cultural heritage.

Its mission is "preserve our past in order to protect our future," fulfilling the assignment to educate visitors regarding the island's origins, in hopes of foster-

ing a deeper appreciation for the cultural heritage that continues to shape Aruba today. By preserving the past, Etnia Nativa ensures that visitors understand the significance of Aruba's history and carry it forward with respect and pride. □

If our mission has touched you and our stories woke up interest in learning more regarding Aruba's true identity, we recommend you to book a visit to Etnia Nativa—the only "living museum of its kind in the Caribbean"—a fascinating choice, a trend setter since 1994 and co-founders of the islands National Park, Archaeological Museum Aruba and Artisan Foundations among others. Etnia Nativa shares valuable knowledge and connects you to the ancient island's spirit and soul.

Whats App+297 592 2702
 etnianativa03@gmail.com



Place names in San Nicolas and their origins

(Oranjestad)--If you're ever taking a tour of Aruba, San Nicolas would definitely be on your itinerary. From relaxing on the white, sandy beaches of Baby and Roger's Beach, to exploring the prehistoric caves of Quadirikiri and Fontein, you are taking in a full view of what San Nicolas has to offer. But did you know that you are also passing through areas whose names have historical origins? Here are a few place names in San Nicolas and their origin story.

Sero Colorado

On your way to Baby or Roger's Beach, you'll pass by the famous Red Anchor at what was once the entrance to the Colony residential community and be greeted with red soiled hills by the coast. This is Sero Colorado. Named after the 30-meter, deep red, limestone hill, "Sero Colorado" translates to "Colored Hill". Sero Colorado has deep historical ties with the once-thriving phosphate industry in the area. Matter of fact, there are still underground shafts and passages deep in Sero Colorado from the time of



phosphate mining. In 1958, the refinery at the time, Lago, adopted this name for the residential section of its employees.

Vader Piet

Another well visited area, Vader Piet is located in the Arikok National Park. Recognizable sites within this area includes the Wind Mills and the Quadirikiri Cave. The origin of this name is part historical and speculation, as there are slight deviations from what actually hap-

pened.

In 1829, Pieter Lampe was a planter and the person responsible for governing this remote area. As the story goes, Pieter was well known and beloved for his kindness and good treatment of his employees, and was therefore also called Vader Piet (Father Piet). However, he was tragically murdered—some speculate at the hands of a slave. For his work and good heart, the area was named after him.

San Nicolas

Of course we can't forget San Nicolas itself. Much like Vader Piet, the origin of the name San Nicolas has so far two different accounts. In the literal sense, "San Nicolas" translates to "Saint Nicolas", leading many to believe that this district was named after a Spanish saint. Though one account does support this with the theory that the district was named after the saint by Spanish colonizers, the other account is much less divine, but does refer to an influential figure in the area.

Nicolaas van der Biest was a successful landowner during the time of the phosphate boom in late 19th century Aruba. Back then, landowners (most, if not all of them men) were referred to as "Shon" by their subordinates. So, the district was originally named after Shon Nicolaas. Over time, the name evolved into what is now San Nicolas. □

Source: "Aruba: Short History" by Dr. J. Hartog.

Visit the natural bridges of Aruba!

(Oranjestad)—After you've visited the Alto Vista Church, the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and the mini natural pool that is located right next to it, you're next up around the northern coast line must be the Natural Bridge. Once the largest natural bridge in the Caribbean, this bridge has been a tourist attraction for many years.

The bridge was formed during thousands of years, cut and crafted by the wild waves that crash into the coral stone walls of the coast. Before its collapse, this bridge measured 30 meters in length and 7 meters in height, making it the biggest natural bridge in the Caribbean.

an at the time. For many years, this site was also a frequently visited beach, as the bridge had a small opening through which the water would flow into the tiny beach.

Unfortunately in 2005, the bridge collapsed, and the little beach dried up. Despite this, this site remained a tourist attraction, with many visitors walking along the coral cliffs of the bridge to see the spectacular view of the northern coastline and the Caribbean Sea. Visitors can also still visit the souvenir shop on the left of the bridge entrance.

While the natural bridge no longer



is functional, there is now a smaller natural bridge very close. This

bridge is often called the "Baby Bridge" or "Daughter Bridge". □



CROSSWORD

By **THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS**
- 40 Make
 - 1 Serious amends
 - 6 Theater failure unit
 - 10 Rolling landscape
 - 11 "My Fair Lady" lady
 - 12 To any extent
 - 13 Labyrinth-building king
 - 14 Blocks up
 - 15 Gadget protector
 - 16 Music's Yoko
 - 17 Caterer's pot
 - 18 Notice
 - 19 Sign on a truck
 - 22 Euro division
 - 23 Final, e.g.
 - 26 Byway
 - 29 Towel word
 - 32 Fuming
 - 33 Use deceit
 - 34 Nevertheless
 - 36 Course activity
 - 37 Stone unit
 - 38 Marisa of movies
 - 39 Kitchen need
- DOWN**
- 1 Sundial reading
 - 2 Ship in 1912 headlines
 - 3 Stylish
 - 4 Miseries
 - 5 Cable modem alternative
 - 6 Move like a moth
 - 7 Script makeup
 - 8 UV stopper
 - 9 Cut's counter-part
 - 11 Came forth
 - 15 Old hand
 - 17 Last
 - 20 USN rank
 - 21 German article
 - 24 Wise king
 - 25 Concluding part
 - 27 Week part
 - 28 Stands up to
 - 29 Bad writers
 - 30 Laughable
 - 31 Iraq neighbor
 - 35 Float on the breeze
 - 36 Attend
 - 38 Bar bill

F	A	M	E	D	B	E	G	A	T	
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C	A	T	A	L	O	N	I	A	N	S
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T	E	R	R	O	R	S	A	X	E	
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34			35				36	
37						38		
39						40		
41						42		

A XYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-21 **CRYPTOQUOTE**

Q V P L D N N G I A P I E P P O Q U

F D U Q N N D C Q U L S W C D F S R

D W P X U O L E S J Q L K E S U R L P F S .

— M D K J J S W P X D K
Cryptoquote: I WISH YOU TO KNOW
THAT YOU HAVE BEEN THE LAST DREAM OF MY
SOUL. — CHARLES DICKENS

Cruise ship Schedule: February 17 - 23 2025

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	17	RESILIENT LADY	09.00	23.59	C	1
TUE	18	CARNIVAL HORIZON	09.00	23.00	C	1
		NORWEGIAN VIVA	13.00	21.00	I	1
WED	19	ROTTERDAM	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EMERALD PRINCESS	09.00	****	C	1
		CELEBRITY REFLECTION	08.00	21.00	I	1
THU	20	EMERALD PRINCESS - Dept.	****	22.00	C	
SAT	22	OCEANIA SIRENA	11.00	21.00	C	1
SUN	23	EXPLORA II	08.00	21.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

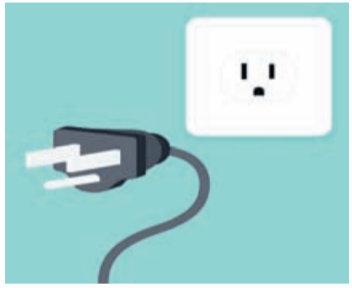
lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Supermarket hours



Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Electrical power



Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

From farms to bakeries, egg shortages and price hikes are challenging small businesses

By MAE ANDERSON
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Small business owners that rely on eggs for their products are facing sticker shock because the usually reliable staple is in short supply. Avian flu is forcing farmers to slaughter millions of chickens a month, causing U.S. egg prices to sky-



The price is displayed on the edge of an empty shelf used to display eggs at a grocery store, Feb. 12, 2025, in Nashville, Tenn.

rocket. The average price of a dozen Grade A eggs in U.S. cities reached \$4.95 in January, eclipsing the previous record of \$4.82 set two years earlier and more than double the low of \$2.04 that was recorded in August 2023. The Agriculture Department predicts prices will soar another 20% this year.

Most owners are taking the increase in stride, looking at it as just one of many hurdles they constantly face. But if the problem persists, they could be forced to raise prices or adjust their

products. Liz Berman is the owner and sole proprietor of The Sleepy Baker in Natick, Massachusetts. She specializes in custom, from-scratch cakes but also sells cupcakes, cookies, pies and other baked goods. Eggs are just one of the baking ingredients experiencing price shocks. Items such as cocoa powder and butter have gone up as well. And price isn't the only issue.

"It's not just the cost of eggs, right? It's also just the availability," she said. She prefers to buy medium-

sized white shelled eggs, buying a box with 18 dozen eggs, but two weeks ago those were unavailable, so she had to buy brown eggs in individual cartons of 12. "It sounds kind of silly, but when I'm the sole proprietor and I have a huge volume of work, to have to take a dozen of eggs out of my walk-in at a time as opposed to a flat of eggs, it's just it's a pain," she said. She doesn't think prices will ease anytime soon. Cocoa powder prices have been elevated for years. "I think ultimately I'm go-

ing to have to increase my prices, which is hard because that's going to mean that there's a category of customer that won't order from me anymore," she said. In Princeton, New Jersey, John Nachlinger, owner of the Bad Cookie Company, is imposing a temporary 25 cent per cookie surcharge to help mitigate added costs. "As cookies are already a tight-margin food, these increases have really hurt our bottom line," Nachlinger said. He said he doesn't want to permanently raise prices or adjust the size of his cookies since he hopes the egg situation is temporary. "We want to bring value to our customers," he said.

Associated Press

At Daisies, a pasta restaurant in Chicago, chef/partner Joe Frillman and chef/partner Leigh Omilinsky haven't raised prices but are thinking of adjusting menu items.

Omilinsky said she is thinking of adding more vegan and egg-free deserts to the menu and has been working more with flax seeds. She said the shortage has made her more conscious of the ingredients she is using and wasting less.

"You know, if we need egg yolks we are absolutely saving those whites," she said. □



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Trump Media says it lost more than \$400 million last year

By The Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — The parent company of President Donald Trump's social networking site Truth Social says it lost \$400.9 million last year and its annual revenue declined 12% to \$3.6 million.

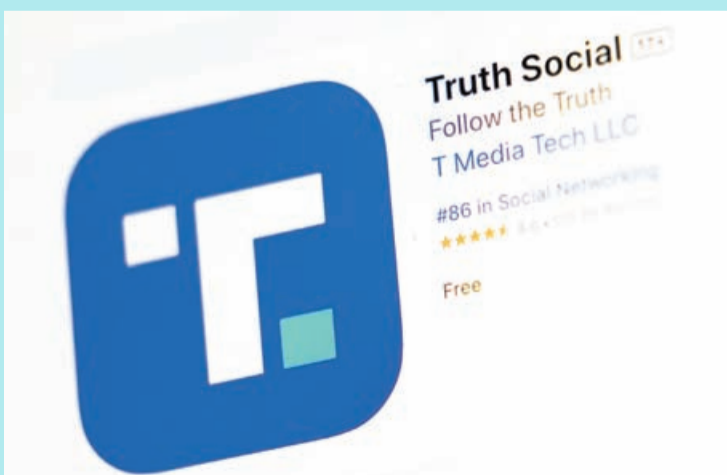
Trump Media & Technology Group reported its earnings late Friday, blaming the losses in part on a revenue-sharing agreement with an undisclosed advertising partner. After winning the U.S. presidential election in November, Trump in December transferred all of his shares worth around \$4 billion

on paper as a "bona fide gift" to the Donald J. Trump Revocable Trust. Trump's shares amounted

to more than half of the company's stock. Donald Trump Jr., the oldest of the president's five

children, is the sole trustee and has sole voting and investment power over all securities owned by the trust.

Trump created Truth Social after he was banned from Twitter and Facebook following the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot. Citing its "early development stage," the parent company based in Sarasota, Florida, said it doesn't report "traditional key performance indicators" used by other social media companies, such as how many people have signed up for the service, use it on a daily or monthly basis or see its ads. □



The download screen for Truth Social app is seen on a laptop computer, March 20, 2024, in New York.

Associated Press

Guerrero plans to become free agent after season, fails to reach long-term deal with Blue Jays

By **CHRIS NELSEN**

Associated Press

DUNEDIN, Fla. (AP) — Vladimir Guerrero Jr. plans to become a free agent after the season following the passing of his deadline Tuesday to reach a long-term agreement with the Toronto Blue Jays.

"Listen, I want to be here. I want to be a Blue Jay for the rest of my career," the four-time All-Star first baseman said through translator Hector Lebron at Blue Jays camp. "But it's free agency. It's business. I'm going to have to listen to 29 more teams and they're going to have to compete for that." Guerrero has a \$28.5 million, one-year contract and will be perhaps the top free agent on the market one year after Juan Soto signed a record \$765 million, 15-year contract with the New York Mets. Guerrero, who turns 26 next month, said his last communication with the team came around 10:30 p.m. Monday and the two sides never came close to a deal. "I have my number all along," Guerrero said. "I changed it a little bit. I tried, but it still didn't happen." "I know my value," he added. "I didn't see the front office moving to my number. It wasn't the number I was looking for. Unfortunately, it didn't happen."



Toronto Blue Jays first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. takes batting practice during spring training baseball workouts in Dunedin Fla., Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

Guerrero had said during the offseason he would cut off negotiations when he reported for spring training. "I don't want, especially my teammates, to go through any distractions about that," Guerrero said. "I'm here today and I'm ready. I want to win a lot of games and I want to make it to the playoffs. That's all that's in my head right now." Guerrero hit .323 last season with a .940 OPS, 30 homers and 103 RBIs. "We're disappointed we

couldn't get a deal done," Blue Jays president Mark Shapiro said. "When you go into a negotiation, each side has rational for a number. In this case, we couldn't align on a common number. There's no such thing as close or not close. There's done or not done." Shapiro maintained the team will not entertain trade offers for Guerrero. "Our only focus now is winning with Vladdy," he said. Guerrero came up through the Toronto system, made

his big league debut in 2019 and has a .288 average, .863 OPS, 160 homers and 507 RBs. "I'll do anything, everything I have, to stay here with the Blue Jays," Guerrero said. "I love it here. I want to be here. I'm not thinking about free agency. I won't be thinking about free agency at all during the season." Shapiro, team chairman Edward Rogers and Rogers Communications Inc. CEO Tony Staffieri were involved in the negotiations. General manager Ross At-

Associated Press

kins thinks the team made fair proposals.

"The offers we made for Vlad would have been record-setting and made him one of the highest-paid players in the game," Atkins said. "We were, in our view, very aggressive."

Guerrero's father, Vladimir Guerrero, is a Hall of Famer and nine-time All-Star who was voted the 2004 AL MVP. Toronto players hope their teammate's contract situation doesn't become a constant focus during the season.

"We know, without a doubt, he's a Blue Jay this year," pitcher Kevin Gausman said. "I'm sure it could be a distraction, but I'm not too worried about that. I think Vladdy is focused on going out and playing baseball."

Guerrero appeared to be in good spirits when practice began Tuesday, laughing and smiling with his teammates. As Guerrero was preparing for running drills, a fan from Toronto yelled: "I'd write you a blank check if I had the money."

Toronto expects to make offers to Guerrero as a free agent after the World Series. "We are certainly positioned well," Shapiro said. "We have the financial wherewithal to pursue the contracts we want to pursue." □

Bruins D Charlie McAvoy is out and Canucks' Quinn Hughes is in for U.S. in 4 Nations final vs. Canada

By **JIMMY GOLEN**

AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The United States didn't have to sacrifice much when looking for a replacement for injured defenseman Charlie McAvoy in the 4 Nations Face-Off final: Reigning Norris Trophy winner Quinn Hughes was ready to step in.

U.S. coach Mike Sullivan said Tuesday that Hughes was on his way to Boston to be available when the Americans play Canada in the championship game. Hughes has missed the Canucks' last four games and was a last minute scratch from the international tournament, which marks the return of the world's best

hockey players to the international stage after they missed the last two Winter Olympics. Hughes, 25, was a first-round draft choice who joined the Canucks after two years at Michigan, where he was a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award as a sophomore. He had career highs of 17 goals and 75 assists for Vancouver last season, when he was the runaway winner of the award that for the NHL's top defenseman and finished seventh in voting for the Hart Trophy that goes to the league MVP. According to the 4 Nations rules, the Americans can only add him to the roster if they drop below six "able-bodied" defenseman; that

would mean one more U.S. defenseman would have to be ruled out. The rules allow them to apply for emergency relief on an "as needed" basis, an application that would be considered by tournament chairs Bill Daly and Rob Zepp. "Right now, we're just taking each day as it comes," Sullivan said. "We'll see what potential options might be available for us for the championship game and then we'll make decisions accordingly from there." A 27-year-old Boston University product and top Bruins defenseman who has twice finished in the top five of the Norris Trophy voting, McAvoy had been a key contributor



Canada's Connor McDavid (97) scores on United States goaltender Connor Hellebuyck (37) as United States' Charlie McAvoy (25) looks on during first period 4 Nations Face-Off hockey action in Montreal on Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025.

Associated Press

to the American team whose big hits on Canadian stars Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby were credited with setting a tone in the round robin matchup between the North Americans. Thursday's championship will be at the

TD Garden, the Bruins' home ice.

The Bruins announced on Tuesday that he was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital on Monday night with an unspecified upper body injury. □



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Spurs star Victor Wembanyama brings books to games; that's not all that makes him different

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

Let's start with this: He brought a book to the All-Star Game.

As if the NBA needed more proof that San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama is different, the latest example came Sunday in a locker-room video posted by the league. Wembanyama was getting settled in before the games and Denver's Nikola Jokic was puzzled by what the Spurs star had with him.

"You really brought a book?" Jokic asked.

"I read before every game," Wembanyama said.

Even at All-Star weekend, Wembanyama didn't change who he is. He got himself and Spurs teammate Chris Paul disqualified from the skills competition at All-Star Saturday night after finding what he thought was a loophole in the rules and could increase the chance of winning. He brought the book on Sunday. He was visibly frustrated

when his team lost the All-Star tournament final.

San Antonio knows, and has known, that Wembanyama is the face of the Spurs. The rest of the league has probably figured out that he's one of the faces of the league — the game globally, too — and is well on his way to super-duper-superstardom, if he's not there already.

LeBron James had nothing but rave reviews for Wembanyama when the 7-foot-3 French center — who just turned 21 last month — was coming into the league. James heaps the Wemby praise even higher now.

"I've seen one quote that he says that nobody better call him past 9 o'clock at night because he's either reading or he's asleep. I think that's super cool. I think that's super dope," the Los Angeles Lakers' star said. "That lets you know where his mind frame is at, where he is at intellectually, and I think he's been

great, obviously, for the franchise with the Spurs. But he's going to be great for our league for so many years to come."

Wembanyama was the unanimous rookie of the year last season; he's the favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, to be defensive player of the year this season. He is almost certainly going to make the All-NBA team. He will likely get MVP votes.

All for good reason.

His scoring average is up. Rebounds per game, up. Shooting percentages, up. He's already taken 403 3-pointers and blocked 176 shots this season — no player in NBA history has ever finished a season with those numbers, and Wemby did it this year by the All-Star break. He's averaging 24.3 points, 11 rebounds, 3.8 blocks and 3.7 assists; the only other player to finish a season averaging all that was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in 1975-76.

Golden State's Stephen Curry was



San Antonio Spurs center Victor Wembanyama dunks past teammates Trae Young and Nikola Jokic during the NBA All-Star basketball game Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, in San Francisco.

Associated Press

asked what he marvels at when he watches Wembanyama.

"Everything he does," Curry said. "Everything."

The Spurs have been through some things this season. □

Lack of snow north of the Alaska Range prompts Iditarod to move official start to Fairbanks

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)

— A lack of snow along a dangerous stretch of trail has led organizers of the world's most famous sled dog race to move the start of the Iditarod farther north.

The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race will still have its ceremonial start in Anchorage on March 1, but the official start for the 33 teams will be two days later in Fairbanks, about 360 miles (579 kilometers) north.

It's the fourth time the race has been moved because of a lack of snow. The race previously started in Fairbanks in 2003, 2015 and 2017.

Race officials last month said the race would start as normal from the Anchorage area. However,



Mats Pettersson, from Sweden, makes the corner onto Cordova Street during the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race ceremonial start in Anchorage, Alaska, on Saturday, March 2, 2024.

Associated Press

in a statement Monday, trail breakers said no snow since that Jan. 31 announcement led them to deem one portion of the trail — from the Rohn to Nikolai checkpoints — north of the Alaska Range

as unpassable. "After a heavy discussion with our lead Trail Breaker and other friends of the race including local knowledge, and with no new snow on the horizon, there is simply no way we

can allow the teams to progress through that 20-mile (32-kilometer) stretch," Race Marshal Warren Palfrey said in the statement. "It is a shame because the remainder of the trail is in great shape all the way to

Nome." The safety of the dogs, mushers and volunteers remains the Iditarod's top priority, the statement said. Even with snow, this stretch of the Iditarod consistently has some of the worst trail in the entire 1,000-mile (1,609-kilometer) race across the Alaska wilderness.

The race's description of the trail for mushers encourages them to do this stretch in a convoy with one or more teams because they might require help. Conditions include windblown gravel sandbars, high winds, rivers, a glacier, slippery conditions and ice at the bottom of a canyon.

The winner is expected in Nome about 10 days after the start. □