

A8 MORNING BRIEFING

PENNSYLVANIA

AT SINKHOLE ABOVE
ABANDONED MINE, HOPE
OF RESCUE DWINDLES

Three days after a Pennsylvania woman searching for her cat disappeared at the chasm of a three-story deep sinkhole, the digging crews were back at it Thursday, hoping for a miracle but expecting to recover her remains.

The scope of the effort was scaled down after authorities concluded 44-year-old Elizabeth Pollard, still hoping the search will produce good news while bracing for the worst. "We're just trying to hold hopes out," Hayes said in a phone interview. "We're not really sure what to feed right now."

NATION
NASA PUSHES BACK
ASTRONAUT FLIGHTS
TO THE MOON AGAIN

NASA announced more delays Thursday in sending astronauts back to the moon more than 50 years after Apollo. Administrator Bill Nelson said the next mission in the Artemis program — flying four astronauts around the moon and back — is now targeted to April 2026. It had been on the books for September 2025, after slipping from this year.

The investigation into heat-shield damage from the capsule's initial test flight two years ago took time, officials said, and other spacecraft improvements are still needed.

This bumps the third Artemis mission — a moon landing by two other astronauts — to at least 2027. NASA had been aiming for 2026.

SYRIA
SYRIAN REBELS TAKE
HAMA, A SECOND MAJOR
CITY, IN BLOW TO ASSAD

An Islamist rebel group said Thursday that it had taken control of Hama, Syria's fourth-largest city, dealing another significant blow to President Bashar al-Assad less than a week after his forces ended Aleppo to rebel advances. The Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which is leading the offensive, released a series of short statements Thursday afternoon, saying it had entered neighborhoods in Hama after days of fighting on its outskirts and freed inmates from the city's central prison. Around the same time, the Syrian army announced it had withdrawn from the city.

"Military units stationed there have redeployed and repositioned outside the city," it said in order to "preserve the lives of civilians," an army statement said. By nightfall, HTS said Hama was completely under its control.

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MEMPHIS

said federal prosecutors will continue their work regardless of who's in the White House. The investigation determined that police in Tennessee's second-largest city have violated citizens' constitutional rights and civil rights, Assistant U.S. Attorney General Kristen Clarke said at a Thursday news conference, describing the lengthy review as "comprehensive and exhaustive."

The police department's practices violate the Constitution and federal law, and "harm and demean people and they promote distrust, undermining the fundamental safety mission of a police department," Clarke said.

The fatal beating of Nicholas by officers after he ran away from a January 2023 traffic stop exposed serious problems in police department, from its use of excessive force to its mistreatment of Black people in the majority-Black city according to the investigation report released Wednesday.

Nichols, who was kicked, punched and beaten with a baton, died three days after his encounter with police. Nichols was Black, as are the former officers involved in his beating. His death led to national protests, raised the volume on calls for police reforms in the U.S., and directed intense



Law enforcement members with rescue workers continue to search Thursday for Elizabeth Pollard, who is believed to have disappeared in a sinkhole while looking for her cat, in Marguerite, Pa.

FRANCE
MACRON WILL NAME
A NEW PRIME MINISTER
'IN COMING DAYS'

French President Emmanuel Macron came out fighting Thursday in his first command performance since the resignation of ousted Prime Minister Michel Barnier, a day after a historic no-confidence vote at the National Assembly left France without a functioning government.

Macron said he will serve as president "until the end" of his five-year term scheduled in 2027. He also said he would name a new prime minister within days, but gave no hints who that might be.

Macron laid blame at the door of his opponents on the far right for bringing down the government of Michel Barnier. He said they chose "Not to do but to undo." "They chose disorder," he said. The president said the far right and the far left had united in what he called "an anti-Republican front" and stressed "I won't shoulder other people's irresponsibility."

CALIFORNIA
U.S. IS CLOSING WOMEN'S
PRISON, OTHER FACILITIES
AFTER YEARS OF ABUSE

The federal Bureau of Prisons is permanently closing its "rape club" women's prison in California and will idle six facilities in a sweeping realignment after years of abuse, decay and mismanagement. The Associated Press has learned.

The agency informed employees and Congress on Thursday that it plans to shutter the Federal Correctional Institution in Dublin, California, and its de facto minimum-security prison camps in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Florida. Staff and inmates are being moved to other facilities, the agency said.

In a document, the Bureau of Prisons said it was taking "decisive and strategic action" to address "significant challenges, including a critical staffing shortage, crumbling infrastructure and limited budgetary resources." The agency said it is not downsizing and is committed to finding positions for every affected employee.

NATION
STUDY: ONE MUTATION
CAN MAKE BIRD FLU
A THREAT TO HUMANS

California researchers say the world may be just one genetic tweak away from human-to-human transmission of the H5N1 bird flu virus — a worrisome mutation that could open the door to widespread human infections and possibly even a pandemic, according to some experts.

In a study published Thursday in the journal Science, Scripps Research Institute biologists determined that a single mutation of the hemagglutinin protein — the "H" in H5N1 — could transform a virus that has so far sickened or killed mostly birds and some into a pathogen that targets cells in human beings.

The finding comes amid a growing number of H5N1 outbreaks among California dairy cows, as well as a state-ordered recall of raw milk products. Since the virus began infecting the nation's dairy stock in March, infectious disease experts have warned that unprotected contact between dairy workers and infected cows could enable the virus to evolve in a manner that threatens humans.

Now, Scripps researchers suggest the path for such a genetic change may be much shorter than state and national health officers anticipated.

CONGO
GOVERNMENT 'ON ALERT'
OVER MYSTERY DISEASE
THAT KILLED DOZENS

Public health officials in Africa urged caution Thursday as Congo's health minister said the government was on alert over a mystery flu-like disease that in recent weeks killed dozens of people.

Jean Kaseya, the head of Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told reporters that more details about the disease should be known in the next 48 hours as experts receive results from laboratory samples of infected people.

Authorities in Congo have so far confirmed 71 deaths, including 27 people who died in hospitals and 44 in the community in the southern Kwango province.

FLORIDA
A GEORGE FLOYD
PROTESTER INJURED BY
POLICE GETS \$2 MILLION

A protester who suffered eye damage when a rubber bullet fired by Fort Lauderdale police struck her in the face during a 2020 protest over George Floyd's murder has received \$2 million from the city to settle a federal lawsuit accusing the officer and the department of violating her civil rights, her attorneys announced.

LaToya Ratliff, 38, was injured on May 31, 2020, when Detective Elizer Ramos fired the rubber bullet into the face during a 2020 protest over George Floyd's murder.

A bystander's video shows Ratliff was struck as she choked on tear gas that had been fired by officers and stumbled into a street. She suffered a broken right eye socket, nerve damage to that eye and a 30-stitch gash to her forehead that left a scar. She also suffers from migraines and mental trauma.

NATION
BITCOIN HITS \$100,000
IN HIGHLY ANTICIPATED
CRYPTO MILESTONE

On Wednesday night in New York, the dreams of crypto's permabulls became reality: Bitcoin hit \$100,000.

Spurring the move: the digital asset industry's chest-thumping optimism that President-elect Donald Trump would halt the tough government scrutiny that prevailed during his predecessor's administration and instead pursue policies and regulations friendly to the digital-asset industry.

Events on Wednesday provided concrete support for that enthusiasm, with Trump's nomination of the pro-crypto crypto to replace Gary Gensler at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

A price just north of \$100,000 pushed the market value of Bitcoin to over \$2 trillion and makes it a larger investment asset than all but a handful of public companies such as Nvidia Corp., Apple Inc. and Google parent Alphabet Inc.

— Daily News wire reports

FYI

Canadian man leaps onto polar
bear about to maul his wife in
driveway, cops say. 'What a hero'

A man is recovering after he leapt onto a polar bear to prevent it from mauling his wife in their driveway in Canada, police said.

It worked — and the bear attacked the man instead, the Nainiwaduck-Ashi Police Service said on Facebook on Dec. 3.

The couple had left their home before 5 a.m. to find their missing dog when they encountered the polar bear, which lunged at the woman in their driveway, police said.

She slipped to the ground and her husband leapt onto the animal to protect her, officials said. The bear then attacked him, causing "serious but non-life-threatening injuries to his arms and legs."

A neighbor stepped in during the attack and shot the bear several times until it retreated into woods nearby and died from its injuries, police said.

It happened in Fort Severn First Nation, a small community near the Hudson Bay in far North Ontario. Officers patrolled the area to make sure there were no other bears roaming the community, officials said.

The man is expected to recover, officials said. People praised his heroic instincts in comments on the post.

"Don't know the man but glad he's OK and protected his wife, a hero in our books and also to his neighbor that came to the rescue with a rifle," someone said.

"What a hero," someone else said.

— The Charlotte Observer

Apes the \$45M Stegosaurus is on
display in New York. Here's what
scientists hope to learn about it

NEW YORK — The most expensive dinosaur fossil ever discovered will be on view in New York starting this weekend, American Museum of Natural History officials announced Wednesday.

The giant Stegosaurus fossil, dubbed "Ape," is 11 feet tall and 27 feet long to the tail. The display will sit in a giant atrium at the museum's entrance before being moved to the museum's existing fossil halls next year.

The museum also confirmed the identity of the philanthropist who purchased Ape. Billionaire hedge fund manager and longtime museum donor Ken Griffin bought it at an auction in July for \$45 million, the most ever paid for dinosaur remains. Sean Decatur, president of the American Museum of Natural History, said that Griffin agreed a long-term loan of Ape, as well as allowing scientists to take samples from the fossil for analysis.

This partnership allows Ape to have pride of place at a museum world-renowned for its dinosaur collection and for its longstanding leadership in paleontology and, even more exciting, enables us to pursue specialized Stegosaurus research centered around this extraordinary and scientifically important specimen," Decatur said in a statement Wednesday.

Of the more than 80 Stegosaurus made available to scientific institutions, very few are substantially complete, the statement said. Ape is the most complete specimen ever found, he said.

With about 80% of its 320 bones preserved, it is miraculous for creature that has been dead for 150 million years. The specimen is also prized by scientists because it is estimated to have died at a relatively old age, and it could reveal insights into Stegosaurus' metabolism and bone growth.

"As exciting as it is to have this dinosaur on display, it is even more exciting to have the opportunity to study it and make important scientific discoveries available for research," said Roger Benson, who curates the American Museum of Natural History's fossil amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

— Associated Press

A \$105 trillion inheritance windfall
is on the way for US heirs

The largest intergenerational wealth transfer in U.S. history is about to take place — through the vast majority of Americans are unlikely to inherit much money at all.

About \$105 trillion is projected to be passed down from older generations over the next quarter century, according to research firm Cerditi Associates, an amount roughly equal to global gross domestic product in 2023.

Rising stock markets and home prices, as well as inflation, have fattened the estates that members of the baby boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, are expected to leave their heirs. The latest inheritance projection by Cerditi is 45% higher than the 25-year forecast the firm made only three years ago. U.S. gifts and inheritances are expected to total \$2.5 trillion next year alone.

"About 80% of the wealth held today is going to be in motion," Chayce Horton, the lead author of the Cerditi report, said in an interview. "The ratio of wealth expected to be changing hands in the next 25 years is significant, and much greater than what we've seen in a decade or so."

Yet even as the assets of millions of aging Americans are passed on, the share of the U.S. population that will benefit from inherited money has remained static, a sign of how accumulating family wealth has become more concentrated among the most affluent households.

"We're becoming less of an economy that promotes entrepreneurship and production and more of an economy focused on inheritance and dynasty," said Chuck Collins, director of the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies.

Inherited wealth is expected to become increasingly concentrated among the most affluent, according to Cerditi. The firm estimates that more than half of the wealth transferred between generations through 2048 will come from households with at least \$5 million in net assets. Only about 2% of U.S. households meet that threshold.

— Bloomberg



Mayor Paul Young, center, speaks during a news conference with Tamara Gibson, left, and Police Chief Carolyn Davis, right, on Thursday in Memphis, Tenn.

scrutiny toward the Memphis Police Department, more than half of whose members are Black, including Chief Carolyn "CJ" Davis.

The federal probe looked at the department's "pattern or practice" of how it uses force and conducts stops, searches and arrests, and whether it engages in discriminatory policing.

It found that officers would punch, kick and use other force against people who were already handcuffed or restrained, which it described as unconstitutional but which were nearly always approved after the fact by supervisors. Officers resort to force likely to cause pain or injury "almost immediately in response to low-level, nonviolent offenses, even when people

are not aggressive," investigators determined.

"Memphis police officers regularly violate the rights of the people they are sworn to protect," according to the report.

Memphis officers cite or arrest Black people for loitering or curfew violations at 13 times the rate it does for white people, and cite or arrest Black people for disorderly conduct at 3.6 times the rate of white people, the report said.

Police video showed officers pepper-spraying Nichols and hitting him with a Taser before he ran from a traffic stop. Five officers chased down Nichols just steps from his home as he called out for his mother. The video showed the officers mistreat him, talking and laughing

as Nichols struggled with his injuries.

The officers were fired, charged in state court with murder, and indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights and witness tampering charges. Two pleaded guilty to federal charges under plea deals. The other three were convicted at trial on split verdicts.

Although the report mentions the Nichols case, it also describes others, including one in which officers pepper-sprayed, kicked and fired a Taser at an unarmed man with a mental illness who tried to take a \$2 soda from a gas station.

The investigation cited police training that "primed officers to believe that force was the most likely way to end an encounter," rather than talking to a suspect to de-escalate a situation. In one training example, officers were told that "If a fight is unavoidable, harm him first and hurt them last."

In a Wednesday letter to the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the city attorney said Memphis had received a DOJ's consent decree request but wouldn't agree to one until it had thoroughly reviewed the report.

A consent decree requires reforms overseen by an independent monitor and approved by a federal judge. The federal oversight can continue for years, and violations could result in fines paid by the city.