



# NFL’s top 25 QBs of the 21st century

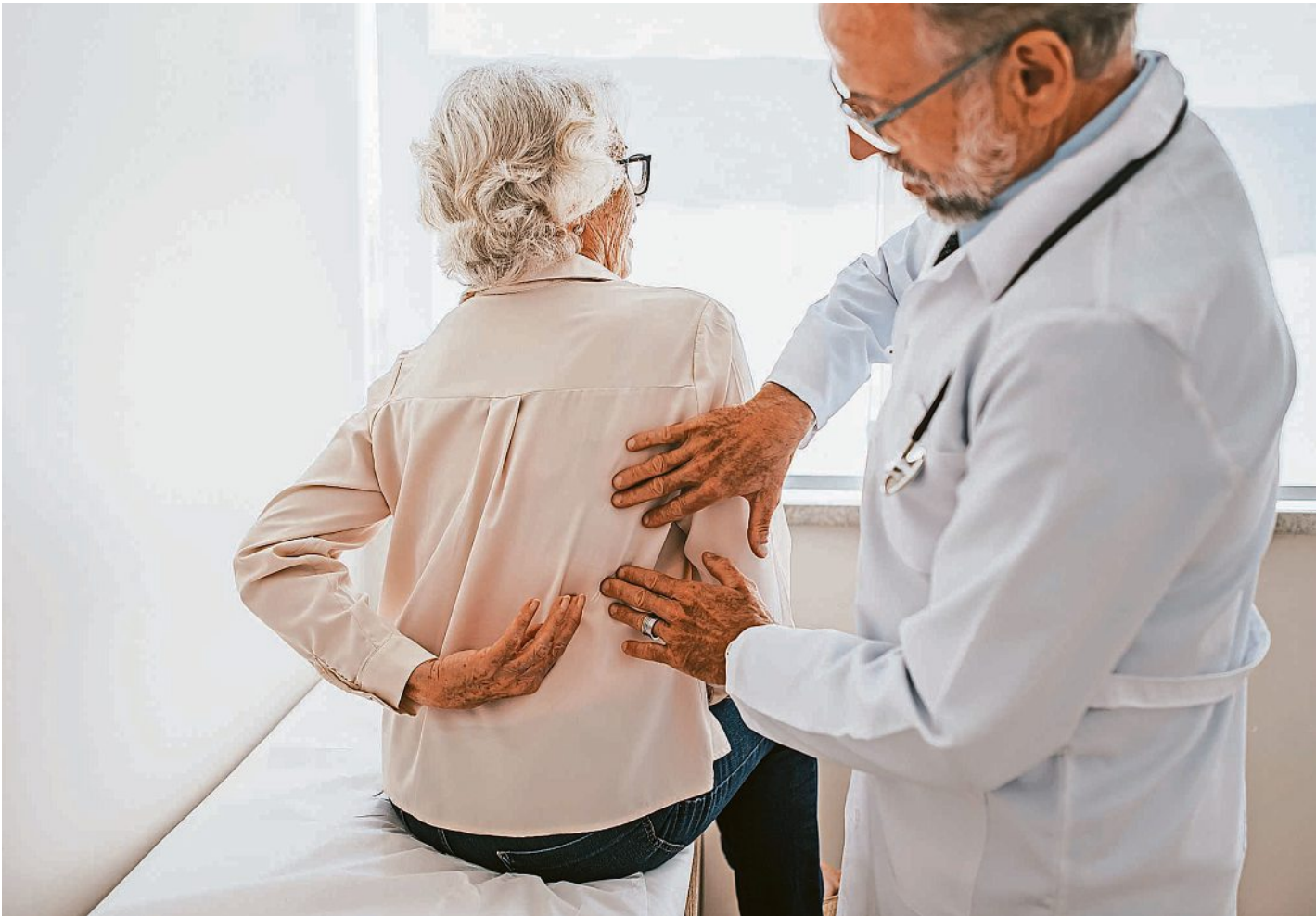
SPORTS, 1B

NORTHWEST FLORIDA

# Daily News

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Physicians who authored a New England Journal of Medicine article found that the WISeR program could cause “considerable suffering for patients,” citing as an example a person with excruciating pain caused by spinal stenosis who is denied access to lumbar decompression. PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

# AI to review Medicare claims in pilot program

Profit incentive raises concerns over restrictions of care

Stephanie Innes  
Arizona Republic  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new Medicare program that uses artificial intelligence to review medical claims is set to launch in six states. Critics worry it will lead to patients being denied necessary care and more red tape for providers.

The controversial new six-year pilot program, set to begin Jan. 1, is a model that makes use of “leveraging enhanced technologies” operated by private, for-profit companies to authorize – and possibly deny – certain medical care for people enrolled in traditional Medicare, often also known as original Medicare. The enhanced technologies include AI.

Some providers and a group of Democrats in Congress have tried to put a stop to the federal pilot program, which is called WISeR (Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction), but their efforts have not been successful.

Sen. Mark Kelly, a Democrat from Arizona, criticized WISeR on the social media platform X, characterizing it as a way for AI companies to profit off of denying care to seniors.

Officials with the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services say the program is designed to protect taxpayers.



The Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction, or WISeR, will use “enhanced technologies” operated by private, for-profit companies to authorize – and possibly deny – certain medical care for people enrolled in traditional Medicare.

ers. They say it will cut down on wasteful spending in Medicare, which is primarily for ages 65 and over, as well as some who are younger with certain disabilities and those with end-stage renal failure. The six states in the pilot program are Arizona, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington.

CMS administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, who has made “crushing” Medicare fraud a priority, has said that the model will help bring Medicare into the 21st

century by testing a “streamlined prior authorization process, while protecting Medicare beneficiaries from being given unnecessary and often costly procedures.”

The pilot is a significant shift for traditional Medicare. Prior authorization, which means a determination process where an insurer decides whether a health service is medically

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# Lawyers: Pipe bomb suspect disliked GOP, Dems

Thao Nguyen  
USA TODAY

The man suspected of planting pipe bombs in Washington, DC, in 2021 confessed after his arrest that “something just snapped” and he wanted to target the Democratic and Republican parties because “they were in charge,” federal prosecutors said in court documents released Dec. 28.

Brian Cole Jr., 30, was arrested Dec. 4 at his home in Woodbridge, Virginia, about 25 miles from Washington, DC, and charged with transporting and planting two pipe bombs. Prosecutors accused Cole of placing the pipe bombs near the offices of the Democratic and Republican national committees on the night before the Jan. 6, 2021, riots at the U.S. Capitol.

The devices, which were discovered on the day of the attack, did not detonate, and no one was hurt, federal authorities previously said. Following a nearly five-year investigation, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced Dec. 4 that Cole had been taken into custody.

He made his first court appearance in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on Dec. 5 and was ordered to

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# Experts see major First Amendment rulings for next year

Stephany Matat  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Age verification, artificial intelligence, and academic freedom dominated First Amendment debates in 2025. As the calendar turns to 2026, constitutional scholars say those disputes are poised to intensify – and to produce consequential legal outcomes.

Battles over speech, expression, and religious liberty are already unfolding in state legislatures and federal courtrooms across the country. In the year ahead, experts anticipate federal judges and the U.S. Supreme Court to confront cases that could redefine the boundaries of protected expression in the digital age.

The stakes rise even higher in 2026, when voters will also have their say at the ballot box. With midterm elections approaching, the direction of these debates may be shaped not only by court rulings, but by the political choices Americans make.

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## Note to readers

We will not be printing a paper on Thursday, Jan. 1, but will be providing it to you via the eNewspaper. You can always find the latest news on our website, mobile app, newsletters and social media. Subscribers can access the eNewspaper by going to our website and clicking on eNewspaper in the black navigation bar.

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