



# Commentary: Sooners coach Venables has Alabama coach DeBoer's number

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# Trump: Oil tanker seized 'for a very good reason'



A Venezuelan navy patrol boat escorts Panamanian-flagged crude oil tanker Yoeslin on Nov. 11 near the El Palito refinery in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. The U.S. military has launched 22 strikes on boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, killing at least 87 people, including some Venezuelans. JUAN CARLOS HERNANDEZ/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

## U.S. alleges vessel's cargo was bound for Cuba

Cybele Mayes-Osterman and Joey Garrison  
USA TODAY

The United States has seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela amid a monthslong buildup of military forces surrounding the country, President Donald Trump confirmed Dec. 10.

"As you probably know, we've just seized a tanker on the coast of Venezuela," Trump said at a meeting at the White House. "Largest one ever seized, actually. And other things are happening."

Trump declined to provide additional

details about the tanker to reporters and said the administration would be releasing more information at a later time.

"You see the result, and I guess they probably released the pictures by now - pretty soon," Trump said. "You'll discuss that with the appropriate people later on."

The president added, "It was seized for a very good reason."

The vessel was under U.S. sanctions, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. They said the cargo on board was owned by a businessman with ties to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and the boat was bound for Cuba, the people said.

The news was first reported by Bloomberg.

It comes after the United States has built up military forces around Venezuela for months in a pressure campaign by the Trump administration to remove

Maduro.

U.S. Southern Command and the Pentagon referred USA TODAY to the White House for comment.

Separately, the U.S. military has launched 22 strikes on boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, killing at least 87 people, including some Venezuelans.

Critics have called the strikes, which have not been approved by Congress, illegal and said they amount to extrajudicial assassinations.

Trump and his officials have said Maduro is the leader of a criminal enterprise called Cartel de los Soles.

Experts have told USA TODAY that Cartel de los Soles is a loose network of corruption and not a real drug trafficking organization.

Maduro and other top Venezuelan officials were indicted on drug trafficking and corruption charges in 2020.

# High court weighs low IQ in death row case

## Man's varying scores complicate decision

Maureen Groppe  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - After the Supreme Court in 2002 said inmates who are intellectually disabled can't be executed, prosecutors largely stopped seeking the death penalty for defendants with clear developmental disabilities.

The borderline cases remained. Judges often hear competing testimony from experts about whether a death row inmate has a severe enough intellectual disability to prevent execution, a threshold the high court left up to states to determine.

The justices on Dec. 10 dove back into the issue, debating how courts should assess the results of multiple intelligence tests when making close calls.

One hundred and forty-four people have had their death sentences vacated due to intellectual disabilities since 2002, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Whether the high court will now make raising a claim harder is a matter of life or death for Joseph Smith, an Alabama inmate on death row for a brutal murder in 1997. Smith's IQ scores have ranged from 72 to 78.

Because IQ tests have an error range, lower courts said Smith's IQ could be below 70, one of the factors for defining intellectual disability.

But the state argues that because all five test scores are above 70, Smith can't prove he's disabled by a preponderance of the evidence.

"Nothing in the Eighth Amendment bars the sentence Joseph Smith received for murdering Durk Van Dam nearly 30 years ago," Robert Overing, the attorney for Alabama, told the justices. "He didn't come close to proving an IQ of 70 or below."

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# EU seeks long-term freeze of Russian assets

Jan Strupczewski  
REUTERS

BRUSSELS - European Union governments want to agree on Dec. 12 to freeze Russian central bank assets immobilized in Europe for as long as necessary, replacing the need for a vote to renew the freeze every six months, EU diplomats said.

The move is the basis for the EU's plan to use the Russian sovereign assets in the EU for a loan to Ukraine that would keep it financed in 2026 and 2027, allowing the country to continue to defend itself against Russia's invasion.

The European Commission has proposed using a provision of the EU treaty, Article 122, to keep the assets frozen indefinitely.

The provision gives EU governments

a free hand to adopt whatever measures they see necessary, by qualified majority, to address a difficult economic situation in the EU.

One EU diplomat said the plan was for ambassadors from the bloc's member states to agree on launching a written procedure to approve the use of Article 122 of the EU treaty "by tomorrow."

The European Commission said last week that using this legal option was justified in the case of the Ukraine loan to preserve the stability of the economy affected by Russia's war in Ukraine and the hybrid warfare of Russia against EU countries.

"The [EU] economic situation could be further destabilized if the security context was to further deteriorate, as a result of Russia's intervention in Ukraine."

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Delegates from European countries attend an informal meeting of European Union ministers of European affairs on Dec. 11 in Lviv, Ukraine.

ROMAN BALUK/REUTERS

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