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Hegseth aims to curtail DOD watchdog and whistleblowers

By TARA COPP AND NOAH ROBERTSON
The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said he will overhaul the military channels that allow troops and defense personnel to file whistleblower complaints, report toxic leadership or point out discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality or religion.

The changes are being implemented at the same time that Hegseth is loosening rules on how senior officers can treat enlisted personnel without having it impact their careers — including a review of what constitutes bullying or hazing — in moves the secretary said would “empower leaders to enforce standards without fear of retribution or second-guessing.”

“The [inspector general] has been weaponized, putting complainers, ideologues and poor performers in the driver’s seat,” Hegseth told a group of generals and admirals Tuesday at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia, referring to the independent watchdog offices in the Pentagon.

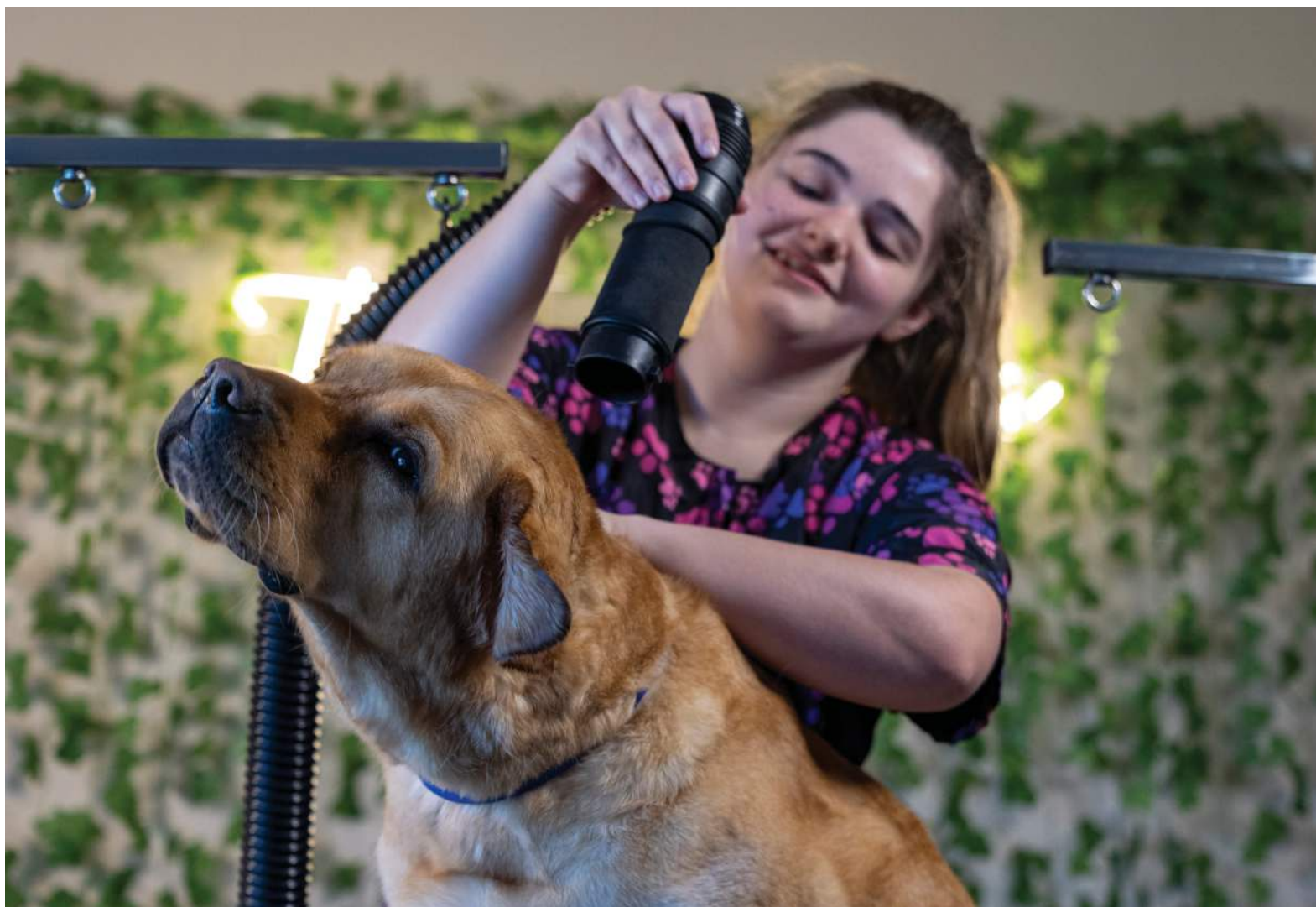
Hegseth is currently awaiting a final report from the Pentagon’s inspector general on his own misuse of the commercial app Signal to share classified information.

“We’re doing the same with the equal opportunity and military equal opportunity policies,” he said. “No more frivolous com-

SEE HEGSETH ON PAGE 7

RELATED

Branches given 60 days to end shaving waivers
Page 7



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

Casey Showalter, who runs an in-home pet-grooming business, works on Deen, a 4-year old Labrador, last month at Fort Meade, Md.

Taking care of businesses

Army’s program enriches communities while employing spouses based at home

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Lakesha Finley-Flowers had made 18 moves as an Army spouse, adapting and switching her job with each one, until move No. 19.

When she arrived at Fort Polk, La., from Detroit, Finley-Flowers brought along her business, Candles by Lakesha. After settling into on-base housing, she learned about the Army’s Home-Based Business program, which approves residents running a busi-

ness from their homes and provides support and connections within the community.

Within two weeks, she had the green light and converted her dining room into a workspace to craft scented wickless candles adorned with flower petals and unique designs.

“I love the shock and awe when someone turns the lid on my can-



Finley-Flowers

dle, and they’re like, ‘Oh my God. I wasn’t expecting that,’” she said.

Her business has helped her feel more connected to her new community, and it took away the stress of finding new employment with the move — something she’s been dealing with for much of the past 33 years since she met her husband, Lt. Col. Gary Flowers, while they were soldiers based at Fort Lewis, Wash.

He’s eyeing retirement in a few years, and she’s ready to take her business into the spotlight.

“I have so many plans for my business,” she said. “I already have a five-year goal-post planned and am waiting for it to happen.”

There are 28 businesses approved to operate at Fort Polk, and anywhere between 550 and 650 across the Army, according to the Army’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division, which oversees the program.

When military spouses — or service members — establish

SEE PROGRAM ON PAGE 8

BUSINESS/WEATHER

FTC suit accuses Zillow, Redfin of suppressing competition

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The U.S. Federal Trade Commission is suing Zillow and Redfin, accusing the real estate companies of entering what the regulator says is an illegal deal to suppress competition in online rental advertising.

In a lawsuit filed on Tuesday, the FTC alleges that this agreement started in February — when Zillow paid Redfin \$100 million. In exchange for that and other compensation, the commission said, Redfin agreed to end contracts with ad-

vertising partners, stop competing ads for multifamily properties for up to nine years and serve as a syndicator of Zillow listings on its own sites.

Redfin also fired hundreds of employees shortly after the announcement of this plan, Tuesday's complaint notes, alleging that the company also helped Zillow hire "its pick" of these workers.

"Zillow paid millions of dollars to eliminate Redfin as an independent competitor in an already concentrated advertising market —

one that's critical for renters, property managers, and the health of the overall U.S. housing market," said Daniel Guarnera, director of the FTC's Bureau of Competition, in a statement.

Guarnera added that Zillow and Redfin's actions were a violation of federal antitrust laws. The commission argues that the companies' "unlawful scheme" may reduce incentives for further competition, and could lead to higher prices and fewer choices for multifamily rental advertising customers.

EXCHANGE RATES

| Military rates | | Commercial rates | |
|---------------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
| Euro costs (Oct. 2) | 0.83 | Bahrain (Dinar) | 0.3745 |
| British pound (Oct. 2) | \$1.31 | Britain (Pound) | 1.3510 |
| Japanese yen (Oct. 2) | 145.00 | Canada (Dollar) | 1.3930 |
| South Korean won (Oct. 2) | 1366.00 | China (Yuan) | 7.119 |
| | | Denmark (Krone) | 6.3522 |
| | | Egypt (Pound) | 47.8269 |
| | | Euro | 0.8508 |
| | | Hong Kong (Dollar) | 7.7815 |
| | | Hungary (Forint) | 330.70 |
| | | Israel (Shekel) | 3.3115 |
| | | Japan (Yen) | 146.776 |
| | | Kuwait (Dinar) | 0.3049 |
| | | Norway (Krone) | 9.9132 |
| | | Philippines (Peso) | 58.059 |
| | | Poland (Zloty) | 3.6209 |
| | | Saudi Arabia (Riyal) | 3.7461 |
| | | Singapore (Dollar) | 1.2868 |
| | | South Korea (Won) | 1401.43 |
| | | Switzerland (Franc) | 0.7966 |
| | | Thailand (Baht) | 32.358 |
| | | Turkey (NewLira) | 41.5805 |

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

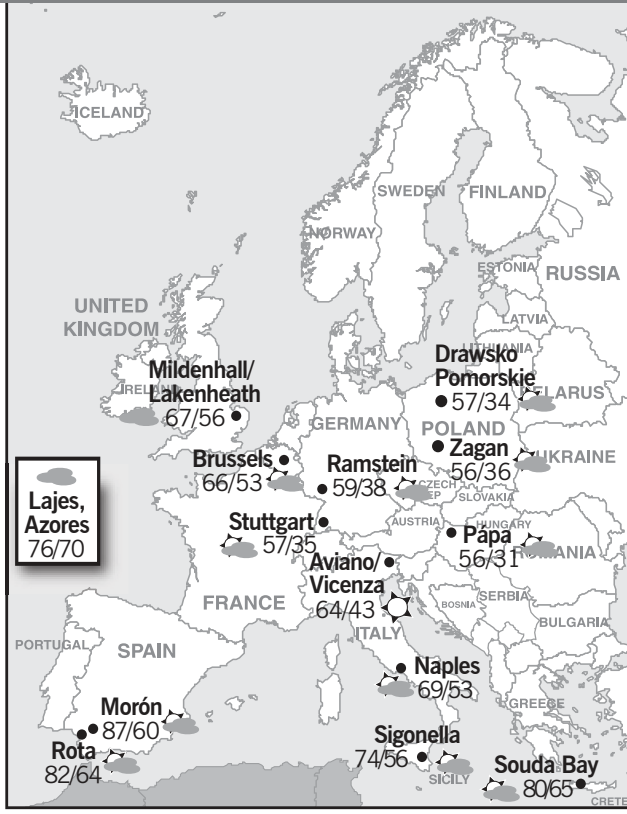
| INTEREST RATES | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Prime rate | 7.25 |
| Interest Rates Discount rate | 4.25 |
| Federal funds market rate | 4.12 |
| 3-month bill | 3.95 |
| 30-year bond | 4.74 |

WEATHER OUTLOOK

THURSDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THURSDAY IN EUROPE



FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

Navy, USMC motorcycle deaths spike in 2025

Despite safety efforts, fatalities nearly double from previous year

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

At least 45 sailors and Marines were killed in off-duty motorcycle crashes during the past year, nearly double the number from 2024, the Navy reported Tuesday.

The Navy's fatalities accounted for more than half of the 84 active-duty service members killed in motorcycle crashes through Sept. 30, the end of the 2025 fiscal year.

The Naval Safety Command reported that 30 sailors and 15 Marines died while riding motorcycles off duty. The Army reported 28 deaths, and the Air Force reported 11.

California, Virginia and Florida topped the Navy's list of fatal accident sites. However, crashes occurred in more than 20 states, as well as Japan, South Korea, Guam, Spain, Italy and Bahrain.

The 45 motorcycle deaths were the most reported by the Navy since 2008, according to the Pentagon. The Navy reported 28 deaths in 2024.

The Navy's increase reflects a trend among motorcyclists, civilian and military, in the U.S. Fatal crashes rose 38% to 6,335 in 2023 — the last full year for which statistics are available, according to the National Safety Council.

Safety advocates attribute the rise in motorcycle crashes nationally to increased travel following the COVID-19 pandemic, which was marked by the World Health Organization's lifting of its 1,221-day pandemic emergency decla-

ration in March 2023.

More than 75 active-duty service members have been killed in motorcycle crashes for the third consecutive year. Before 2023, those deaths had been in decline following the 118 reported in 2008.

Navy leaders say they aren't sure why fatalities have shot up, according to the monthly official "Rider Down" newsletter.

Among factors cited by the Navy are lack of personal protective gear, such as helmets and gloves, training in how to drive in groups and in heavy traffic and knowing how to maneuver to avoid collisions.

The U.S. military's demographics — a group including more young males than the civilian population — may explain higher fatality rates. While 8% of Americans ride motorcycles, the Pentagon estimates military ridership at 16%.

The largest number of fatal motorcycle accidents involve high-speed sport racing motorcycles, which many safety officials say are too challenging for novice riders who learned to ride on less powerful machines.

"It really is like trading in your Dodge Minivan for a Ferrari," Marine Corps Lt. Col. Mike Miller, director of the Ground Safety Branch of the Marine Corps Safety Division in Washington, D.C., said in a statement earlier this year.

When involved in a crash, a motorcyclist — civilian or military —



RYAN FREIBURGH/AUS. Navy

USS Ronald Reagan sailors participate in a motorcycle safety inspection at Naval Base Kitsap-Bremerton, Wash., in June. The Navy has increased safety education as motorcycle deaths rose in 2025.

is 27 times more likely to die than a driver of an automobile. The figure is noted by both the Pentagon and the National Safety Council.

Navy Secretary John Phelan announced in April that the service was moving toward a steep climb in total deaths, after 28 recorded fatalities in the first six months of fiscal 2025.

"We face a sobering reality," Phelan said. "This trend is unacceptable and demands immediate action to prevent further loss."

After a spike in deaths in 2008, the Pentagon instituted an aggressive program of driving rules and mandatory classes that was cred-

ited with lowering the death count.

The Navy launched a program this year to increase mandatory risk management training and require commanders to identify sailors and Marines who ride motorcycles. Group safety rides are organized to bring together experienced and inexperienced riders. Each Navy and Marine command must have a motorcycle safety representative to answer questions and to ensure that unsafe practices aren't occurring within units.

The Navy is taking additional steps to reverse the trend of fatal

crashes. Beginning Oct. 1, all motorcycle riders — both owners and users — will be required to register with their local command to ensure they meet safety standards and attend educational courses.

The Navy has tied motorcycle safety to military preparedness, telling riders to "Ride right. Stay in the fight." The service reminded sailors in April to intervene if they observed unsafe riding or riders without proper qualifications.

"You are responsible for the safety and well-being of your shipmates," The Navy said in an official Facebook post.

US begins reducing military mission in Iraq, Pentagon says

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military has begun drawing down its mission in Iraq under an agreement signed with the Iraqi government last year, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

Washington and Baghdad agreed last year to wind down the military mission in Iraq of an American-led coalition fighting Islamic State by September 2025, with U.S. forces departing some bases where they have stationed troops during a two-decade-long military presence in the country.

"The United States and coalition partners will reduce its military mission in Iraq. This reduction reflects our combined success in fighting ISIS and marks an effort to transition to a lasting U.S.-Iraq security partnership," Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement. "The U.S. government will continue close



ANDREW LIGHTSEY IV/U.S. Army

U.S. Army pilots conduct a crew briefing before starting up a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at al Asad Air Base, Iraq, in April.

coordination with the government of Iraq and coalition members to ensure a responsible transition."

A senior U.S. defense official,

who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the plan is that the majority of U.S.

troops will be in Irbil, and those that are stationed inside Baghdad will be conducting a bilateral security relationship like in other countries. There will be fewer than 2,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, the official added.

A senior Iraqi security official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly, said the U.S. withdrawal began weeks ago from Baghdad and from al Asad Air Base in western Iraq.

The agreement announced September 2024 included two phases. The first phase ran through September 2025 and stated the coalition mission against ISIS will end, and forces will leave some long-standing bases. As part of the second phase, the U.S. will continue to operate from Iraq through 2026 to support counter-ISIS operations in neighboring Syria.

The U.S. has had a presence in

Iraq since 2003. American forces invaded after what turned out to be faulty claims that its ruler Saddam Hussein had secretly stashed weapons of mass destruction. Such weapons never materialized.

In 2014, the rise of ISIS and its rapid capture of a wide swath across Iraq and Syria brought U.S. and partner nation forces back at the invitation of the Iraqi government to help rebuild and retrain police and military units that had fallen apart and fled.

After ISIS lost its hold on the territory it once claimed, coalition military operations ended in 2021. The U.S. has maintained about 2,500 troops in Iraq to maintain training and conduct partnered counter-ISIS operations with Iraq's military.

"U.S. troops simply are not necessary to be in federal Iraq to conduct a counter-ISIS mission. Iraq is eminently capable of doing it themselves," the U.S. official said.

MILITARY

DOD plans polygraphs, NDAs to stop leaks

BY ALEX HORTON,
TARA COPP

AND ELLEN NAKASHIMA
The Washington Post

The Pentagon plans to impose strict nondisclosure agreements and random polygraph testing for scores of people in its headquarters, including many top officials, according to two people familiar with the proposal and documents obtained by *The Washington Post*, escalating Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's war on leakers and internal dissent.

All military service members, civilian employees and contract workers within the office of the defense secretary and the Joint Staff, estimated to be more than 5,000 personnel, would be required to sign a nondisclosure agreement that "prohibits the release of non-public information without approval or through a defined process," according to a draft memo from Deputy Defense Secretary Steve Feinberg.

A separate document also from Feinberg would establish a pro-

gram to randomly polygraph those officials. The documents do not prescribe a limit on who would be subjected to these agreements and tests, suggesting it could include everyone from four-star generals to administrative assistants.

The efforts are part of a wider strategy by the Trump administration and the Pentagon to ferret out officials deemed insufficiently loyal or who provide information to reporters.

Pentagon spokespeople did not return a request for comment.

Former officials and national security lawyers pointed to already existing restrictions and penalties for unauthorized release of information, indicating these new measures were meant to further frighten and deter personnel.

"This seems to be far more directed at ensuring loyalty to DOD [the Department of Defense] and the Trump administration leadership rather than countering any foreign espionage," said Mark Zaid, a lawyer who has represented multiple whistleblowers and

government officials targeted by the Trump administration. "There are reasons why individuals were not required to take polygraphs before. And I would question why now the polygraph, and an over-broad NDA is being required other than to intimidate the workforce and ensure tighter control."

The unsigned and undated document is still in the deliberation stage and has not yet been approved, said one of the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

US destroyer joins NATO Baltic Sea mission as drone concerns increase

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A U.S. Navy destroyer is operating in the Baltic Sea as part of a NATO mission that is adding air defense to its underwater focus as the alliance confronts repeated unidentified drone incursions into northern European countries.

USS Bulkeley joined Baltic Sentry on Tuesday, the first deployment of a U.S. ship to the mission, an unidentified Defense Department official said Tuesday, speaking on background because they were not authorized to talk publicly about the matter.

A Navy P-8 Poseidon patrol and reconnaissance plane deployed to Baltic Sentry last week. The Navy has previously supported the mission with P-8 aircraft, the DOD official said.

NATO formed Baltic Sentry in January following a rash of telecommunication cable cuttings and pipeline disruptions thought to be sabotage. The mission largely comprises Baltic countries, including Germany and Finland.

The beefing up of Baltic Sentry with a U.S. destroyer capable of simultaneously tracking and neutralizing multiple aerial targets along with the P-8 and other assets is a visible sign of allied solidarity, James Holmes, chair of the mar-

itime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., said.

It also is the use of deterrence, "issuing a clear threat — in this case, putting Russia on notice to stay out of NATO airspace," he said. "If successful, this effort should deter further Russian mischief. That assumes Moscow believes in NATO capability and resolve, of course."

The uptick in U.S. participation in Baltic Sentry comes as NATO grapples with repeated incursions of its airspace by unidentified drones in Norway and Denmark, among other northern European countries. Those incursions have caused the temporary shutdown of airports and raised concerns about protecting NATO's eastern flank.

Russia has strongly denied any involvement in drone incidents in Norway and Denmark.

But on Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fingered Moscow, saying the drones were being launched from Russian oil tankers, *The Kyiv Independent* reported the same day.

"There is growing evidence that Russia may have used tankers in the Baltic Sea to launch drones — the drones that caused major disruption in northern Europe," Zelenskyy said at the Warsaw Secur-

ity Forum.

Those incidents follow incursions by Russian drones in Poland and Romania as well as a breach of Estonian airspace by Kremlin fighter jets in September that NATO officials have characterized as probes of the alliance's defenses.

The violation of Polish airspace prompted NATO to create Eastern Sentry, a new mission designed to shore up defenses there.

The arrival of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets along with air defense frigates demonstrates the "flexibility and agility" of Baltic Sentry to broaden the mission beyond solely the protection of critical undersea infrastructure, U.S. Navy Cmdr. Arlo Abrahamson, a spokesman for Allied Maritime Command, said Tuesday.

The force increase also is a tangible example of alliance members' resolve to act decisively to protect and defend each other, Abrahamson said. He added that the German frigate FGS Hamburg, assigned to NATO's Standing Maritime Group 1, made a port call in Copenhagen on Sunday and will support Baltic Sentry activities.

The NATO show of strength coincides with the anniversary of another demonstration of U.S. resolve — also in the Baltic — 40



JONATHAN NYE/U.S. Navy

The destroyer USS Bulkeley is helped out of the port at Gdynia, Poland, by two tug boats Sept. 17. Bulkeley joined Baltic Sentry on Tuesday, the first deployment of a U.S. ship to the NATO mission.

years ago this month. In October 1985, the U.S. sent a destroyer squadron, including the battleship USS Iowa, into the sea as part of the annual BALTOPS military exercise.

That demonstration included the Iowa firing its 16-inch guns during maneuvers.

The ship also drew crowds of visitors during stops in Scandinavian ports and the attention of

Russian and East German spy ships while operating in open water, *Stars and Stripes* reported in 2021.

At the time, U.S. officials wouldn't openly characterize the exercise as a message to the Russians but "Danish Defense Minister Hans Engell said it 'lets them know that the Baltic Sea is not a Soviet lake,'" according to the report.

Romania eyes \$7B Abrams deal with US amid push to modernize

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

NATO ally Romania is looking to buy hundreds of M1A2 Abrams tanks from the United States, as Russia's war in Ukraine continues to reshape defense priorities along the alliance's eastern flank.

Romania's Defense Ministry has asked the country's parliament to approve the next stages of its main battle tank program, a plan worth more than \$7 billion

aimed at replacing the country's Soviet-era armor and meeting NATO's defense commitments, the ministry said in a statement.

The first stage would provide support for the Abrams battalion Romania ordered from the U.S., in 2023, adding ammunition, spare parts, training and simulators in a package worth about \$485 million before taxes.

The bigger move is a proposal to buy 216 additional Abrams tanks and 76 support vehicles. This part

of the program is estimated at roughly \$7.6 billion before taxes, and includes maintenance, logistics and training facilities in Romania, the ministry said.

It wasn't immediately clear when parliament might respond to the request or when — assuming the U.S. approves the purchase — the equipment would be delivered to the country.

The request comes amid broad military modernization efforts by Romania, whose Army 2040 plan

aims to transform the force with modern equipment, digital command systems and stronger integration into NATO operations by the end of the next decade.

These efforts have resulted in Romania meeting NATO's previous benchmark of spending 2% of its gross domestic product on defense for nine years, as of this year. During his first term as president, Donald Trump, who often criticized NATO members for underspending on defense, praised

Romania for meeting the target.

Romania, which shares a 400-mile border with Ukraine and has been among the more vocal critics of Russia's war in the country, has seen repeated drone incursions into its air space.

Romania's initial Abrams contract, signed in 2023, covered the purchase of 54 tanks and 12 support vehicles from U.S. Army stocks. The deal was valued at more than \$1 billion and is scheduled to be completed by 2028.

MILITARY

Company with checkered past gets contract

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The Army awarded a contract to manage a dining facility at five bases to a company with a history of settling multimillion-dollar claims for overcharging customers in government contracts.

Without releasing the Aug. 28 contract document, Army Materiel Command said Compass Group USA will create dining facilities that mirrors those it operates at college campuses at Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Stewart, Ga.; Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Hood, Texas; and Fort Drum, N.Y. The command also declined to provide how many companies were considered before selecting Compass.

The company will only receive money from the Army when soldiers who live in the barracks and receive meal entitlements choose to dine there, according to Army Materiel Command. The meal reimbursement rates for 2025 are \$9.29 for breakfast, \$15.42 for lunch and \$13.20 for dinner, which mirrors the rates paid to traditional dining facilities.

In testing the privatization of feeding soldiers the Army hopes to alleviate some of the problems it has faced in drawing soldiers into its facilities where the junior enlisted can spend their entitlements on three meals a day. Changing preferences combined with fewer cooks enlisted into the service has forced some bases to resort to



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers select food from a dining facility at Fort Carson, Colo., in May.

weekend closures and shorter hours during the week while opening more grab-and-go stations to try and find what soldiers are looking for in a dining facility.

“The Army is focused on creating a positive seismic shift in food service operations,” Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan, Army Materiel Command acting commander, said in a statement. “It’s all about taking care of the warfighter by increasing healthier, more easily accessible food options that are convenient to

them.”

The U.K.-based company, Compass Group, which entered the U.S. market in 1994 and established its headquarters in Charlotte, N.C., owns several brands that run dining operations at colleges, hospitals, sports arenas, museums and airport lounges, according to its website.

Its brand Canteen settled a class action lawsuit in August regarding hidden credit card fees on its vending machines, charging cus-

tomers without warning between 2014 and July. Compass agreed to pay \$6.9 million to settle the claims.

It also reached an \$18 million settlement in 2012 with New York state after an investigation found its brand Chartwells overcharged 39 school and public lunch programs for seven years, according to news reports from the time.

Compass did not respond to requests for comment about its past settlements but said in a statement

it was an honor to be selected by the Army.

“We truly believe in the positive impact a great meal can have on health and well-being and look forward to serving those who serve our nation — and their families — with modern, flexible and convenient options that provide more ways to enjoy great-tasting, healthy meals every day,” Compass said in a statement.

Amy Materiel Command said the contract “features extensive oversight at multiple levels to ensure accountability.”

The contract includes a five-year base period with five one-year extension options and was awarded through the Army Non-appropriated Fund Contracting Office at Installation Management Command.

Representatives from Compass will conduct site visits and aim to have all locations open by the summer of 2026, according to Army Materiel Command.

The Army began seeking a partner for dining more than two years ago but hit roadblocks with laws that regulate how the military facilities operate.

Outside of privatization, the Army is also exploring options to allow soldiers to use their meal entitlements at on-base restaurants and encouraging culinary soldiers to get creative with pre-order meals, to-go counters and variety within traditional dining facilities.

Extended tours set for US troops ordered to S. Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — American troops bound for duty stations on the Korean Peninsula will serve longer tours there following a change in Defense Department policy that took effect Wednesday.

Most service members who receive orders to South Korea will be serving an additional year there compared to those already in the country, according to a July amendment to the Pentagon’s joint travel regulations.

Service members accompanied by their family members to the peninsula will be required to

serve 36 months; unaccompanied troops will serve 24 months. The change will not affect those already serving in the country.

Troops who are denied a 36-month accompanied tour due to logistical limitations at their new base in South Korea will be given an option to serve 12 months.

U.S. Forces Korea, the command responsible for roughly 28,500 American troops on the peninsula, previously described the extension as the “normalization” of tour lengths in the country.

The increased timeline is expected to bring more stability to service members in their homes

and workplaces.

“The shift is designed to improve force stability, enhance operational readiness and support quality of life for service members and their families,” USFK said in a July 29 news release.

U.S. military bases like Camp Mjuk and Kunsan Air Base, roughly 180 and 115 miles south of Seoul, respectively, will largely be restricted to unaccompanied service members for the foreseeable future, USFK’s personnel director, Air Force Col. William Parker, said in an interview at the command’s headquarters in July.

Major U.S. bases in South Korea like Camp Humphreys, the

largest American military installation overseas, will continue to invest in its infrastructure to accommodate more family members, Parker told Stars and Stripes.

“We are increasing our capacities to support accompanied tours rather significantly; we have already in the last year and we’re intending to do that in the next year or two,” he said.

Extending South Korea tours allows individual units to retain troops and their skills for another year.

“The complexities of this region have just increased in the number of years,” Parker said.

“Having those regional experts is critical. That is a key component of why we’re doing this.”

The Army and Air Force each reactivated one South Korea-based unit so far this year to bolster the military’s capabilities in the region.

The Army’s 528th Military Intelligence Company was reactivated at Humphreys in August to analyze enemy forces, terrain and potential threats, according to a service news release.

The following month, the Air Force revived the 431st Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron at Kunsan to conduct MQ-9 Reaper drone operations.

Trump nominates Wilsbach to lead Air Force after Allvin’s retirement

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has nominated Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, the former head of Air Combat Command, to serve as the Air Force’s next top officer and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Senate received the nomi-



Wilsbach

nation on Monday. If confirmed, Wilsbach will succeed Gen. David Allvin, who unexpectedly announced in August he would retire as the Air Force’s chief of staff

halfway through his four-year term.

Allvin said he plans to leave his post in November and did not give a reason for his early retirement.

His departure follows the firing of the Air Force’s vice chief of staff in February and makes him the third member of the Joint Chiefs to leave or be dismissed early in re-

cent months.

Wilsbach most recently served as the commander of Air Combat Command, which ensures airmen and aircraft are prepared for combat. He stepped down from his position as head of Air Combat Command in August and previously led U.S. Air Forces in the Pacific.

As a fighter pilot, Wilsbach has

logged 6,000 flying hours in aircraft such as the F-22, F-15 and F-16 and has flown 71 combat missions.

Wilsbach is expected to assume his new role around Nov. 1, if confirmed. He will need to appear before the Senate Armed Services Committee for a confirmation hearing and be approved by the full Senate.

MILITARY

‘No honor in murder’

Native Americans decry Hegseth decision to retain medals for Wounded Knee soldiers

Associated Press

Native American communities that had long wanted the removal of military honors for the soldiers involved in the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre had their hopes dashed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, in his effort to root out what he calls a “woke culture” in the armed forces.

“The era of politically correct, overly sensitive, ‘don’t-hurt-anyone’s-feelings’ leadership ends right now at every level,” Hegseth said Tuesday to hundreds of military officials at a ceremony. The defense secretary announced new directives for troops that include “gender-neutral” or “male-level” standards for physical fitness and painted a picture of a military that has been hamstrung by “woke” policies.

Hegseth had announced last week in a video on social media that Wounded Knee soldiers will keep their Medals of Honor, part of a wider Trump administration move that Indigenous leaders and historians on Tuesday called part of a culture war against racial and ethnic minorities and women’s rights.

In 1890, an estimated 250 men, women and children were killed by U.S. soldiers on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, many as they fled the violence and well after orders to cease fire. Some estimates put the number of dead over 300, more than half women and children.

“The actions at Wounded Knee were not acts of bravery and valor deserving of the Medal of Honor,” Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairwoman Janet Alkire said. “There is nothing Hegseth can do to rewrite the truth of that day.”

Sen. Elizabeth Warren vowed to keep pushing for the medals to be revoked through legislation.

“We cannot be a country that celebrates and rewards horrifying acts of violence,” Warren said.

“Secretary Hegseth is valorizing people who committed a massacre.”

Massacre left scars

Oglala Lakota Chief American Horse survived the killing and testified to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1891 that pregnant women and women holding infants were fatally shot as they fled.

“After most all of them had been killed, a cry was made that all those who were not killed or wounded should come forth and they would be safe,” he testified. “Little boys who were not wounded came out of their places of refuge, and as soon as they came in sight a number of soldiers surrounded them and butchered them there,” he said, according to a transcript of his testimony that has been published several times in recent decades.

Arriving a few days later, Army Gen. Nelson A. Miles was shocked by the carnage, noting the large number of women and children killed.

“I have never heard of a more brutal, cold-blooded massacre than that at Wounded Knee,” he wrote the following year to a fellow officer.

Several soldiers involved in the massacre later wrote or testified about that day, including some who admitted to firing on women and children after the order to cease fire. One soldier said he “expected a court-martial” for his actions but found himself instead being praised.

As news of the killing spread across the country, there was both horror and a sense that the troops had dealt a final blow to Indigenous resistance, said David Treuer, an Ojibwe professor of English at the University of Southern California and the author of “The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee,” a book that aims to tell American history from an Indige-



RAPID CITY JOURNAL/AP

The Wounded Knee Memorial for victims of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre stands in 2012, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in Wounded Knee, S.D.

nous perspective.

For Native Americans nationwide, even those not directly connected to the Lakota people caught up in the Wounded Knee killings, the massacre is a deeply traumatic historical event.

“It was the final punctuation mark on the conquest of the West,” Treuer said. “What also died on the plains at that moment were not just women and children but any vestige of American goodness and moral power.”

Advocating to rescind

In a social media post Thursday, Hegseth referred to the events at Wounded Knee as a “battle,” but most historians disagree.

“Hegseth’s proclamation on this reflects the way that this administration thinks of history — as something that one person can somehow determine through a

magical proclamation,” said Philip Deloria, a Harvard history professor and member of the Dakota Nation.

“We will always be around to unsettle this celebratory, sanitized version of a dishonorable, bloody massacre,” he said.

In 1990, Congress passed a resolution that called Wounded Knee a massacre and expressed “deep regret to the Sioux people and in particular to the descendants of the victims and survivors for this terrible tragedy.”

In 2024, then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered a review of the medals by a panel of two appointees from Interior and three from the Department of Defense. The report was completed last October and, according to Hegseth, it found that the medals should not be rescinded.

Hegseth accused Austin of not

making a final decision because he was “more interested in being politically correct than historically correct.”

Austin has not responded to a request for comment.

“This is one of America’s darkest days and the medals must be revoked,” Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Chairman Ryman LeBeau said.

“They tarnish America’s Medals of Honor. There is no honor in murder.”

OJ Semans, a Rosebud Sioux organizer, has been working for several years on a bill to preserve the site of the massacre to secure the legislation. He said he is disappointed but not surprised by Hegseth’s announcement.

“It’s heartbreaking knowing the actual truth out there is being buried again for political gain,” he said.

Federal worker in custody after ‘active shooter hoax’ at NJ base

Associated Press

An active shooter hoax that prompted a lockdown at New Jersey’s largest military base was caused by a civilian employee who wanted to “trauma bond” with her colleagues, according to court documents.

Malika Brittingham, who works for the Naval Air Warfare Center in Maryland and is assigned to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, faces counts of knowingly conveying false and misleading information related to the use of firearms at a federal

facility, according to a criminal complaint filed by federal prosecutors.

The lockdown order was issued shortly before 11 a.m. Tuesday at the sprawling base, which is among the nation’s largest military installations.

According to a criminal complaint filed in the case, Brittingham texted someone around 10:15 a.m., writing that a shooter was on the base, that she had heard five or six shots and that she was hiding in a closet with co-workers.

The person she texted then

called the base’s operation center and 911, relaying what Brittingham told her, the complaint stated.

That prompted the lockdown order, officials said.

The lockdown lasted about an hour before base officials determined there was no shooter.

Brittingham initially told authorities that she did not send the text until after she was told to shelter in place, according to the complaint, but further investigation regarding the timing proved that was false, prosecutors said.

Brittingham eventually admitted that she sent the text and knew there was no active shooter, prosecutors said.

She told investigators she carried out the hoax because she had been “ostracized by her co-workers and hoped that their shared experience in response to an active shooter would allow them to ‘trauma bond,’” the complaint said.

The Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst spans 42,000 acres and combines Air Force, Army and Navy functions with more than

42,000 service members, relatives and civilian employees.

The base is about 18 miles south of Trenton, the state capital, and about 30 miles east of Philadelphia.

The incident unfolded as military leaders gathered at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Va., where Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had summoned them from around the world to hear him declare an end to “woke” culture in the armed forces, among other Trump administration priorities.

MILITARY

'No more beardos': Shaving waivers ending

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon will cease granting permanent medical shaving exemptions and end most religious exemptions that have allowed some U.S. military troops to wear beards in uniform in recent years, according to a Tuesday memorandum from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Hegseth issued the memo after lambasting a military culture that has allowed thousands of troops to sport beards in the last 15 years during his 45-minute speech Tuesday before hundreds of generals, admirals and senior enlisted troops at Marine Corps Base Quantico, in Virginia. The memo gives the Pentagon's military branches 60 days to construct plans for implementing the new grooming policies and about 90 days to enforce them.

While Hegseth wrote in his memo that the new standards were "not about appearance," but instead "about survivability, interoperability and mission execution" — including the need to wear properly-sealed protective masks in some environments — he took aim at service members' appearance in his Tuesday speech, calling out "fat troops" and those with beards.

"No more beardos," Hegseth said during the presentation, which he ordered top officers and

their enlisted advisers from around the world to attend. "The era of rampant and ridiculous shaving profiles is done. Simply put, if you do not meet the male-level physical standards for combat positions, cannot pass a [physical training] test or don't want to shave and look professional, it's time for a new position or a new profession."

Hegseth has railed against bearded troops for months and ordered a military-wide review of grooming standards in March. The Army and Marine Corps tightened rules on medical shaving waivers shortly after that order.

The memo issued Tuesday ends virtually all religious exemptions that have allowed some service members to wear beards in recent years, including Sikh, Norse Pagan and some Muslim troops. It instructs the Defense Department to return to pre-2010 standards, referring to the first year the Army granted an exemption to a Sikh soldier to wear a beard in uniform. The service began granting permanent religious accommodations to Sikh soldiers in 2017, and other troops have been granted religious beard waivers on a case-by-case basis since 2019.

Under Hegseth's new policy, "facial hair waivers are generally not authorized," and those who have been granted an exemption



SCOTT JENKINS/U.S. Marines

U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Jeremy Rojas shaves before an exercise at Fort Barfoot, Va., now named Fort Pickett, on Oct. 20, 2024.

will face "individualized reviews" and must provide documentation proving their "sincerity of the religious or sincerely held belief" to be considered for an accommodation.

The policy also ends permanent shaving profiles for those who suffer from pseudofolliculitis barbae, or razor bumps. Current troops with razor-bump profiles can be granted shaving exemptions for up to 12 months, but they must also have a treatment plan. Those with permanent conditions will be con-

sidered for administrative separation, Hegseth wrote.

Pseudofolliculitis barbae, caused by curly hairs growing back into the skin, disproportionately affects Black men and is associated with frequent shaving, according to a study by the Society of Federal Health Professionals.

Army officials said in July they would help train soldiers suffering from the condition to shave properly.

Hegseth said the new policy will bar military hopefuls from enter-

ing the ranks if they cannot meet his new grooming standards — including those diagnosed with pseudofolliculitis barbae.

The memo also orders all service members to complete annual training to include a mask-fit test to ensure they can achieve a proper seal on a gas or firefighting mask, he wrote.

Those who refuse to comply with Hegseth's new shaving standards or fail mask-seal tests will not be allowed to deploy, and "repeated noncompliance may result in administrative separation," according to the memo.

Hegseth's policy allows male soldiers to wear sideburns "above ear openings" and "neatly trimmed" mustaches which cannot "extend past the mouth corners or into a respirator seal zone."

There is one place Hegseth said he would continue to allow beards: In some special operations formations when they request modified grooming standards for "mission-essential requirements." Some Green Berets, Navy SEALs and other special operators have famously sported beards during combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere during the Global War on Terror.

"If you want a beard, you can join Special Forces," Hegseth said Tuesday at Quantico. "If not, then shave."

Hegseth: New directives will prohibit anonymous complaints

FROM PAGE 1

complaints. No more anonymous complaints, no more repeat complaints, no more smearing reputations, no more endless waiting, no more legal limbo, no more side-tracking careers. No more walking on eggshells."

The offices that will be overhauled include the Defense Department's equal opportunity outfit and the inspectors general for the military services.

Hegseth's new directives, outlined in two new policy memos signed by Hegseth and viewed by The Washington Post, are part of a campaign that includes the purging of offices that he argues have distracted the military from its core warfighting mission. Since taking office, the secretary has slashed Pentagon initiatives related to diversity and climate change and fired a slate of top military officers, including a disproportionate number who are Black or female.

Hegseth spoke of those firings onstage Tuesday, saying that they were necessary to change the culture of the military. He also referenced his physical fitness reforms, which critics have said are



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks to senior military leaders at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Tuesday.

targeted at getting women out of combat roles — something Hegseth has pushed for years.

"If women can make it, excellent, if not, it is what it is," Hegseth told the assembly. "If that means no women qualify for some combat jobs, so be it."

Some former defense officials and congressional Democrats criticized the new effort, saying it would roll back decades of work to limit harassment and abuse within the armed forces.

Robert Storch, who served as the Pentagon's inspector general

until President Donald Trump fired him this January, said the new directives would have a chilling effect on people coming forward "with what would be valuable information in detecting and deterring waste fraud, abuse and corruption within the DOD."

Storch warned that the memo language discourages whistleblowers and threatens them with consequences if their claims are proven false. "People who come forward perform a valuable service to the department and the American public," Storch said.

The changes drew immediate concern from lawmakers.

"From firing Judge Advocates General to now purportedly weakening the Pentagon's Inspector General and Equal Opportunity programs, Secretary Hegseth and President Trump have shown a clear pattern of undermining the very mechanisms that safeguard accountability and protect our servicemembers," Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a statement.

"Watering down the definitions for hazing, harassment and discrimination does not make our

military stronger — it erodes trust, silences victims, emboldens bullies and strips leadership of credible tools to facilitate good order and discipline," Hirono added.

The Republican chairs of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees declined or did not respond to requests for comment.

Under one of the policies, Hegseth directed that the equal opportunity office will scrap anonymous reporting and replace it with a confidential complaint system. It also orders those who file "frivolous" complaints to be "held accountable," according to documents viewed by The Post.

All of that will likely discourage people from coming forward, another former defense official said.

"Reducing the number of oversight channels might cut down on the number of complaints and investigations, but it will likely also choke off honest feedback about everything from toxic leadership to readiness problems at the unit level," said the official, speaking like others on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation.

The equal opportunity revisions would expedite cases that involve

senior officers and senior defense civilian executives to prevent "the indefinite suspension of careers" and use artificial intelligence to evaluate the validity of complaints and get those leaders "back to doing what they do best, warfighting," the memo stated.

Hegseth's directive also instructs the service secretaries to overhaul their inspector general offices, arguing that their current process is "inefficient and inconsistent." The instructions would require the watchdogs to within seven days assess the credibility of those who file complaints and raise the threshold for an inquiry that might affect a service member's record.

It also directs that promotions, retirements or other career opportunities should not be held up during the investigation "except in limited circumstances," the memo states.

One former military lawyer agreed that many anonymous complaints lack merit, but that the new policy could mean a "valid and accurate complaint could result in no accountability for some truly egregious behavior or actions."

MILITARY

Program: Spouses overcome hurdles to start their businesses

FROM PAGE 1

themselves as independent business owners, it alleviates the challenges of finding a job with every move and expands community access to goods and services on base, said Matt Margotta, chief of Installation and Management Command's installation mission support office.

"They move from location to location to location, and some of our locations are in fairly remote and austere areas where you don't have robust communities. Employment opportunities may be limited," he said. "As they move ... they can keep that same business throughout their Army lives."

The program experienced an overhaul roughly five years ago that allowed it to expand. Previously, installations denied many businesses because of a policy barring direct competition with something already available through MWR and also Army and Air Force Exchange Service operations.

"The Army said no more. The volume of home-based businesses, that really wasn't in competition," Margotta said.

Garrison commands are now encouraged to try to say yes to a business idea. Margotta could only find four instances where a prospective business was told no, including a plan to sell firearms and another for a tattoo parlor. The private landlord for the base, if there is one, also is involved in the approval process.

Casey Showalter, an Army spouse at Fort Meade, Md., experienced some pushback in her goal of launching an in-home pet grooming business. After about a year of back and forth, her business That's So Fetch began taking clients in August. She had to take on a part-time job to get through the process, which also delayed her start.

The application felt like a test case for such an operation, and Showalter said both she and the housing office learned a lot in the process. At one point, Corvias, the company that manages housing at Fort Meade, told Showalter the nearby county's animal control would need to approve her home for animals. After waiting months for the appointment, she learned that the county did not have jurisdiction, so Corvias said it was no longer necessary.

Corvias manages homes at seven Army installations and said it works closely with each garrison commander to meet the requirements, regulations and laws for that location. More than 80 businesses are approved in Corvias homes, "creating a more dynamic and economically vibrant community," Kolby Stobbe, the company's senior vice president for property operations, said in a statement.



Army Staff Sgt. Mason Showalter, left, feeds a treat to Deen, a 4-year-old Labrador, as his spouse Casey finishes grooming him Sept. 12, in Fort Meade, Md.

ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes



Photos by Gilbert Romero

Engraved gifts from Master Sgt. Gilbert Romero's business Tactical Etchings, which he operates from his home at Fort Irwin, Calif.



Engraved gift from Romero's business Tactical Etchings.



A candle made by Army veteran and spouse, Finley-Flowers.

"I want it to be so much easier for whoever else wants to start up," Showalter said.

The idea of pet grooming came from Showalter's love of animals and her realization that the two Army bases where they previously had lived did not have the service available within the gates. She got licensed through another Army benefit, the My Career Advancement Account scholarship program.

"It's just something I have a passion for," Showalter said. "I'm ve-



Photos by Lakesha Finley-Flowers

A candle made by Army veteran and spouse, Lakesha Finley-Flowers as part of her business, Candles by Lakesha, that she operates from her home at Fort Polk, La.

ry creative, and I love animals, so I put my passions together."

Customers have said they love the convenience of staying on post

and that Showalter only takes care of one pet at a time.

"A lot of people have very stressed out, anxiety-based dogs, and it really helps them not being in a facility with a ton of other dogs or a ton of other people," she said.

Master Sgt. Gilbert Romero also found the approval process to be long — he waited more than three months for approval at Fort Irwin in California to continue operating his business, Tactical Etchings, which specializes in laser engraving, engraving and etching on to wood, acrylic and different metals. He had previously established the business living outside of base housing as a recruiter in Los Angeles.

"That's where I got introduced to creating plaques and stuff like that for top recruiters, top companies. It just created this idea," he said.

So, Romero bought his own laser machine and now fills orders to personalize all sorts of items outside of the standard awards, including whiteboard erasers for teachers, and travel cups and mugs.

A recent update to Army policy on the program put into place a 60-day window to approve requests, though the average is about 34 days, Margotta said. Before the process was streamlined, applications would bounce for months between offices, or the onus would be on the resident to go to each office individually.

Once Romero was approved, he joined the Army's largest concentration of over 100 registered businesses — likely due to Fort Irwin's isolation in the Mojave Desert.

Aside from on-post customers, the company does a fair amount of shipping for orders placed online. It's a family affair to fill these orders with his wife and children chipping in to finalize products and box and label items.

"We've shipped to 15 different military installations, and we've even shipped to other countries," he said. "We get most of our clients from referrals, which is a good thing."

It is not just approval to operate that comes from the program. Finley-Flowers said the benefits for the program "are countless."

Notably, whenever MWR at Fort Polk hosts events on post that have vendor space, she can book it and get her deposit reimbursed or set up a kiosk in the entryway of the Exchange. She also receives information from MWR about opportunities for vendor space in the civilian community.

These events have also created connections between the businesses on post, and Finley-Flowers has collaborated to sell gift sets, such as candles and flowers on Valentine's Day.

"We are like a small town," she said. "I love it here."

NATION

Government shutdown blame begins

BY LISA MASCARO,
MARY CLARE JALONICK
AND STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Blame was hurled Wednesday at all sides for start of a government shutdown after President Donald Trump and Congress failed to strike an agreement to fund federal operations and plunged the country into a new cycle of uncertainty.

Roughly 750,000 federal workers were expected to be furloughed, with some potentially fired by Trump's Republican administration. Many offices will be shuttered, perhaps permanently, as Trump vows to "do things that are irreversible" to punish Democrats. His deportation agenda is expected to run full speed ahead, while education, environmental and other services sputter. The economic fallout is expected to ripple nationwide.

The Republican-led Senate voted again around midday, but the same outcome occurred as Democrats demand more health care funding that Trump and Republicans say they will negotiate later.

The tally showed cracks in the Democrats' resolve but offered no breakthrough.

"I certainly pray they will come to their senses," House Speaker Mike Johnson said, flanked by GOP leaders at the Capitol.

This is the third time Trump has presided over a federal funding lapse and the first since his return to the White House this year. His record underscores the polarizing divide over budget priorities in a political climate that rewards hard-line positions rather than more traditional compromises.

The Democrats picked this fight, which was unusual for the party that prefers to keep government running, but their voters are eager to challenge the president's second-term agenda. Democrats are demanding funding for health care subsidies that are expiring for millions of people under the



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., gives a tour of the Capitol to a group of students from New York after their previously-scheduled tour was canceled due to the government shutdown on Wednesday.

Affordable Care Act, causing the insurance premiums to spike nationwide.

Republicans have refused to negotiate and have encouraged Trump to steer clear of any talks. After convening a White House meeting this week with the Democratic leaders, the president posted a cartoonish fake video mocking the Democratic leadership that was widely viewed as unserious and racist.

"President Trump's behavior has become more erratic and unhinged," Democratic leaders Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Haakeem Jeffries said in a joint statement, calling for an "intervention" to get the country out of the shutdown. "Instead of negotiating a bipartisan agreement in good faith, he is obsessively posting crazed deepfake videos."

Vice President JD Vance said Republicans want to resolve the health care issues that concern Democrats but will not negotiate

until the government reopens.

"It's craziness, and people are going to suffer because of this," Vance said Wednesday on the Fox News show "Fox & Friends."

What neither side has devised is an easy off-ramp to prevent what could become a protracted closure. The ramifications are certain to spread beyond the political arena, upending the lives of Americans who rely on the government for benefit payments, work contracts and the many services being thrown into turmoil.

An economic jolt could be felt in a matter of days. The government is expected Friday to produce its monthly jobs report, which may or may not be delivered.

Across the government, preparations have begun.

Trump's Office of Management and Budget, headed by Russ Vought, directed agencies to execute plans not just for furloughs, which are typical during a federal funding lapse, but mass firings of

federal workers.

It's part of the Trump administration's mission, including its Department of Government Efficiency, to shrink the government.

The Medicare and Medicaid health care programs are expected to continue, though staffing shortages could mean delays for some services. The Pentagon would still function. And most employees will stay on the job at the Department of Homeland Security.

But Trump has warned that the administration could focus on programs important to Democrats, "cutting vast numbers of people out, cutting things that they like, cutting programs that they like."

As agencies sort out which workers are essential, or not, Smithsonian museums are expected to stay open at least until Monday.

A group of former national park superintendents urged the administration to close the parks to vis-

itors, arguing that poorly staffed parks in a shutdown are a danger to the public and put park resources at risk.

Ahead of Wednesday's start of the fiscal year, House Republicans had approved a temporary funding bill, over opposition from Democrats, to keep government running into mid-November while broader negotiations continue.

But that bill has failed repeatedly in the Senate, including Wednesday. It requires 60 votes for approval, which requires cooperation between the two parties in the 53-47 GOP majority Senate. A Democratic bill also failed.

Divisions within the Democrats are apparent, signaling that Democratic leverage may be eroding.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, who has said Republicans are happy to discuss the health care issue — but not as part of talks to keep the government open — is working to peel off more Democrats to his side.

The standoff is a political test for Schumer, who has drawn scorn from a restive base of left-flank voters pushing the party to hold firm in its demands for health care funding.

Johnson sent lawmakers home nearly two weeks ago after having passed the GOP bill but said they would be back next week.

Trump, during his meeting with the congressional leaders, expressed surprise at the scope of the rising costs of health care, but Democrats left with no path toward talks.

During Trump's first term, the nation endured its longest-ever shutdown, 35 days, over his demands for funds Congress refused to provide to build his promised U.S.-Mexico border wall.

In 2013, the government shut down for 16 days during the Obama presidency over GOP demands to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

Supreme Court lets Lisa Cook remain as a Fed member for now

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed Lisa Cook to remain as a Federal Reserve governor for now, declining to act on the Trump administration's effort to immediately remove her from the central bank.

In a brief unsigned order, the high court said it would hear arguments in January over Republican President Donald Trump's effort to force Cook off the Fed board.

The court will consider whether to block a lower-court ruling in

Cook's favor while her challenge to her firing by Trump continues.



Cook

The high-court order was a rare instance of Trump not quickly getting everything he wants from the justices, many of whom he appointed to the

bench, in an emergency appeal. Separately, the justices are hearing arguments in December in a separate but related legal fight over Trump's actions to fire mem-

bers of the boards that oversee other independent federal agencies. The case concerns whether Trump can fire those officials at will.

But a second issue in the case could bear directly on Cook's fate: whether federal judges have the authority to prevent the firings or instead may only order back pay for officials who were wrongly dismissed.

Trump had sought to oust Cook before the September meeting of the Fed's interest rate-setting committee. But a judge ruled that the firing was illegal, and a divid-

ed appeals court rejected the Trump administration's emergency appeal.

A day after the meeting concluded with a one-quarter of a percentage point reduction in a key interest rate, the administration turned to the Supreme Court in a new emergency appeal.

The White House campaign to unseat Cook marks an unprecedented bid to reshape the Fed board, which was designed to be largely independent from day-to-day politics.

No president has fired a sitting Fed governor in the Fed's 112-year

history.

Cook, who was appointed to the Fed board by Democratic President Joe Biden, has said she will not leave her job and won't be "bullied" by Trump.

One of her lawyers, Abbe Lowell, has said she "will continue to carry out her sworn duties as a Senate-confirmed Board Governor."

Separately, Senate Republicans recently confirmed Stephen Miran, Trump's nominee to an open spot on the Fed's board. Both Cook and Miran took part in the Fed's recent meeting.

NATION

Tool used to probe discrimination in workplace dropped

BY CLAIRE SAVAGE
AND ALEXANDRA OLSON
Associated Press

The U.S. civil rights agency responsible for enforcing worker rights will stop investigating complaints about company policies that don't explicitly discriminate but may disproportionately harm certain groups, according to an internal memo obtained by The Associated Press.

The memo, emailed to all area, local and district office directors of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Sept. 15, says that the agency will discharge by Tuesday any complaints based on "disparate impact liability," a legal concept that argues that even if a policy looks fair on the surface, it can still be discriminatory if it creates unnecessary barriers that make it harder for certain groups of people to succeed.

The EEOC's decision to drop such cases aligns with President Donald Trump's April executive order directing federal agencies to deprioritize the use of disparate impact in civil rights enforcement because it encourages the assumption that any racial imbalance in the workforce is a result of discrimination, which creates undue burden on businesses.

The move marks a significant shift in EEOC enforcement, and critics say it weakens an effective legal tool used to root out workplace discrimination. That's especially true when it comes to addressing algorithmic bias as more employers rely on AI in the hiring process.

Since AI draws on large amounts of data to generate results, it can replicate the patterns of inequality even if it's not programmed to do so. In one infamous example, Amazon developed a resume-scanning tool to

recruit top talent, but abandoned it after finding it favored men for technical roles — in part because it was comparing job candidates against the company's own male-dominated tech workforce.

"As AI is becoming more and more popular, it's particularly important that we have the disparate impact tools available to be able to police it and make sure it's not being used to re-segregate the workforce," said civil rights and plaintiff-side employment attorney Christine Webber.

Historically, discrimination claims invoking disparate impact have been less common than those alleging intentional discrimination, known as disparate treatment. But in AI systems, discrimination is more likely to occur in the disparate impact context, said Littler attorney Bradford Kelley, who was chief counsel to former Republican EEOC Commissioner Keith Sonderling.

Kelley said companies should still be concerned that their algorithms could invite disparate impact complaints, noting that many states and local authorities have their own laws and regulations.

"The risk is still there," he said.

Despite its modern-day applications, the idea of disparate impact is not new: It has been an established part of U.S. civil rights law for decades, and has helped stop unfair practices that keep minorities, women, people with disabilities, older adults, and others from getting jobs, loans, or equal pay.

The EEOC memo cites Trump's executive order arguing that disparate impact has become a "key tool" of a "pernicious movement" that threatens meritocracy in favor of "racial balancing" in the workforce, and instructs districts to compile a list of pending disparate impact cases, then close them by Tuesday.



OLGA FEDOROVA/AP

Pro-Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil chants during a rally celebrating his return from immigration detention in June in New York.

Judge finds noncitizens targeted unconstitutionally over protests

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Trump administration violated the Constitution when it targeted non-U.S. citizens for deportation solely for supporting Palestinians and criticizing Israel, a federal judge said Tuesday in a scathing ruling directly and sharply criticizing President Donald Trump and his policies as serious threats to free speech.

U.S. District Judge William Young in Boston agreed with several university associations that the policy they described as ideological deportation violates the First Amendment as well as the Administrative Procedure Act, a law governing how federal agencies develop and issue regulations. Young found the policy was "arbitrary or capricious because it reverses prior policy without reasoned explanation."

"This case — perhaps the most important ever to fall within the jurisdiction of this district court — squarely presents the issue whether non-citizens lawfully present here in United States actually have the same free speech rights as the rest of us. The Court answers this Constitu-

tional question unequivocally 'yes, they do,'" Young, a nominee of Republican President Ronald Reagan, wrote.

Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, released a statement that didn't directly address the ruling but said Young was "smearing and demonizing federal law enforcement."

"Our ICE law enforcement should be thanked for risking their lives every day to arrest murderers, pedophiles, rapists, gang members, and terrorists instead of vilified by sanctuary politicians," she said. "It's disheartening that even after the terrorist attack and recent arrests of rioters with guns outside of ICE facilities, this judge decides to stoke the embers of hatred."

Plaintiffs in the case welcomed the ruling.

"The Trump administration's attempt to deport students for their political views is an assault on the Constitution and a betrayal of American values," said Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors union. "This

trial exposed their true aim: to intimidate and silence anyone who dares oppose them. If we fail to fight back, Trump's thought police won't stop at pro-Palestinian voices — they will come for anyone who speaks out."

The ruling came after a trial during which lawyers for the associations presented witnesses who testified that the Trump administration had launched a coordinated effort to target students and scholars who had criticized Israel or showed sympathy for Palestinians.

"Not since the McCarthy era have immigrants been the target of such intense repression for lawful political speech," Ramya Krishnan, senior staff attorney at the Knight First Amendment Institute, told the court. "The policy creates a cloud of fear over university communities, and it is at war with the First Amendment."

Young will hold a separate hearing on the relief requested by the plaintiffs, which is likely to be a request that the Trump administration stop engaging in ideological deportations.

Trump pulls nomination of Antoni to lead Bureau of Labor Statistics

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House is withdrawing the nomination of E.J. Antoni to lead the Bureau of Labor Statistics, according to a White House official and an AP source who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the action, which has yet to be publicly announced.

The White House official declined to say the reasons for withdrawing the nomination, only to say that Antoni was a talent-

ed economist and that President Donald Trump plans to announce a new nominee soon. The Senate received paperwork formally withdrawing Antoni's nomination on Tuesday.

Antoni's nomination, announced in August, was an attempt by Trump to gain greater control over the federal agency responsible for producing key economic data, including the monthly jobs report and consumer price index, which is used to

measure inflation. As the chief economist at The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, he was a major critic of the BLS. Yet most economists saw him as overtly partisan and warned that his basic misreads on recessions, import prices and other measures made him a risk to lead the federal agency.

Kyle Pomerleau, a tax expert for the conservative American Enterprise Institute, wrote on X after Antoni's nomination in Au-

gust: "There are a lot of competent conservative economists that could do this job. E.J. is not one of them."

Kevin Roberts, president of The Heritage Foundation and Heritage Action, said in a statement that Antoni "continues to be one of the sharpest economic minds in the country" and that he "was the right man for the job" at the BLS. But the statement said that Antoni would remain at the conservative think

tank instead of taking a job in the government.

Other details emerged about Antoni that caused worry about his credibility as an economic scorekeeper. NBC News reported that Antoni was in the crowd outside the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. And observers found that the wall art behind Antoni during interviews on TV was of the German battleship Bismarck used by the Nazis in World War II.

NATION



RYAN SUN/AP

Devon Lamb, of Durand, kisses his daughter Lux during a vigil held for the Sunday morning shooting at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Grand Blanc Township, Mich., Tuesday.

Friends of shooting suspect say he carried hatred toward Mormons

Associated Press

GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP, Mich. — The man who opened fire in a Michigan church and killed four people while setting it ablaze long harbored hatred toward the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, according to longtime friends, and told a stranger who showed up at his door days before that attack that Mormons were the “antichrist.”

The suspect, identified as 40-year-old Thomas Jacob Sanford, began making those sentiments known years ago following his return from Utah where he dated but later broke up with a girlfriend who was a member of the Mormon faith, two childhood friends said Tuesday.

Sanford had moved to Utah after leaving the Marines and told

his friends he had become addicted to methamphetamines.

No longer the happy-go-lucky kid who was voted class clown of their graduating class, Sanford routinely spouted off about his grievances against the church, his friends said.

The first time they heard it was at a wedding 13 years ago.

“We were like, ‘come on,’ we don’t want to hear this,” said Bobby Kalush, who grew up down the road from Sanford. “When he came back from Utah, he was a completely different person.”

Just six days before Sunday’s attack, those grudges were still boiling at the surface, said Kris Johns, a city council candidate who described a bizarre brush with Sanford while door knocking for his campaign.

The two were speaking at Sanford’s home in Burton about gun rights when Sanford physically leaned in, Johns said, and asked, “What do you know about Mormons?”

For close to 15 minutes, Sanford spoke in controlled and calm tones about the Mormon faith, saying he was concerned about their beliefs while expressing that he was a Christian.

Sanford then said he believed that Mormons are the “antichrist,” according to Johns.

Police have released very few details about Sanford, who died after being shot by officers, and have refused to discuss what might have motivated the attack at the church, which was reduced to rubble in Grand Blanc Township, about 60 miles north of Detroit.

La. governor formally requests National Guard

BY LEO SANDS
AND MOLLY
HENNESSY-FISKE
The Washington Post

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, a Republican, has requested federal assistance to deploy National Guard troops to combat crime in urban centers throughout the state, weeks after President Donald Trump floated the possibility of sending troops to New Orleans.

In a letter dated Monday, Landry asked Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for as many as 1,000 troops to be mobilized in Louisiana until September 2026, citing “elevated violent crime rates” in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport as well as “critical personnel shortages within local law enforcement.”



Landry

The Trump administration has deployed military force in unprecedented ways in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and other U.S. cities, despite falling crime rates and opposition from Democratic leaders in many of the jurisdictions.

In New Orleans, too, crime rates have decreased significantly this year. After a pandemic-era spike in killings, the city’s murder rate has fallen to lows not seen since the 1970s.

In Baton Rouge, the city’s crime data Tuesday showed slightly fewer homicides this year than the

previous year, while the number of felony arrests so far this year was 13.5% lower than this time last year.

“The proposed mission and scope for the Louisiana National Guard would be to deploy throughout the state to urban centers, supplement law enforcement presence in high-crime areas, provide logistical and communication support, and secure critical infrastructure,” wrote Landry, a Trump ally who has expressed support for the idea of sending in troops.

Landry, a former congressman and police officer, announced his request on Fox News’s Sean Hannity show late Monday and released his letter with a statement titled, “Continuing the momentum of our federal-state law enforcement partnership to keep Louisiana safe.”

In Louisiana, Landry’s request for assistance cited Title 32, a federal-state status where troops are federally funded but controlled by their state governor. It said the request would remain in place through the next fiscal year, Sept. 30, 2026.

His letter closely mirrored a Pentagon plan for sending troops to the state, which The Washington Post first reported two weeks ago. At the time, experts called the plan highly irregular, noting that the internal documents reported by The Post said the Pentagon had not received a formal request from Landry’s office stating a need for assistance.

Mexican man second to die after shooting at Dallas ICE facility

Associated Press

DALLAS — A Mexican man who was among three people shot at a Dallas immigration field office last week died Tuesday, becoming the second person killed in the attack, officials said.

The family of Miguel Ángel García-Hernández said he died after being removed from life support, according to a statement provided through the League of United Latin American Citizens, a civil rights organization. A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said García-Hernández died early Tuesday. The agency said he was 31, but LULAC said he was 32.

Authorities have said the gunman in the Sept. 24 attack, Joshua Jahn, 29, fired indiscriminately

from a nearby roof onto the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility and a van holding detainees in a gated area. Authorities have said Jahn hated the U.S. government and wanted to incite terror by killing federal agents. No ICE personnel were hurt in the shooting, and Jahn fatally shot himself.

Norlan Guzman-Fuentes, 37, a detainee from El Salvador, was also killed.

The attack happened as heightened immigration enforcement has generated backlash against ICE agents and stirred fear in communities across the country.

Stephany Gauffeny, García-Hernández’s wife, said in the statement that her husband “was a good man, a loving father and the

provider for our family.”

“We had just bought our first home together, and he worked hard every single day to make sure our children had what they needed,” she said. “His death is a senseless tragedy that has left our family shattered. I do not know how to explain to our children that their father is gone.”

In an earlier interview with WFAA television, she said her husband was a “goofball” who liked to make people laugh and was always willing to help people.

Gauffeny is expecting their fifth child, LULAC said.

Eric Cedillo, a Dallas attorney who has been helping Gauffeny since the shooting, said she had filed a petition seeking a green card for her husband. He said

García-Hernández came to the U.S. when he was about 13 and has lived in the Dallas area since then.

García-Hernández was being brought to the ICE facility the morning of the shooting after an immigration detainer was placed for him following an August arrest. Gauffeny told WFAA that he was arrested on charges of driving while intoxicated and evading arrest in Tarrant County. She said the latter charge was dropped, and Cedillo said García-Hernández served time on the former.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Tuesday that her administration helped García-Hernández’s mother with the necessary paperwork to allow her to travel to Dallas. Sheinbaum also said her government asked U.S.

authorities for an investigation and Mexico would get involved if there was any kind of violation of García-Hernández’s rights.

Following ICE procedures, the detainees were restrained inside the van, an ICE official said, adding that federal agents ran into gunfire to remove them.

Guzman-Fuentes’ sister, Alba Rubida Guzman, said he left El Salvador when he was 17 years old and worked in the U.S. for two decades.

After his detention he resigned himself to leaving the U.S. His wife planned to meet him in El Salvador, and then they both planned to move to Mexico, where her father had a construction job waiting for him, the sister told Channel 12 in Jiquilisco.

NATION

Pfizer to lower Medicaid costs of prescriptions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pfizer has agreed to lower the cost of prescription drugs for Medicaid under a deal struck with the Trump administration, President Donald Trump said Tuesday as he promised similar deals with other drugmakers under the threat of tariffs.

Trump made the announcement at the White House alongside Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla just hours ahead of the government shutdown, which came about as a result of a partisan standoff over health care and spending.

Pfizer Inc., one of the largest U.S. drugmakers, produces the COVID-19 vaccine Comirnaty and the treatment Paxlovid.

Its products also include several cancer drugs, the blood thinner Eliquis and Prevnar pneumonia vaccines.

Under the deal, New York-based Pfizer will charge most-favored-nation pricing to Medicaid and guarantee that pricing on newly launched drugs, Trump said. That involves matching the lowest price offered in other developed nations.

Pfizer also agreed to participate in a new website the administration plans to start called TrumpRx, which will allow people to buy drugs directly from manufacturers. Pfizer said many of its treatments will be offered at discounts that average 50%

through that platform.

The agreement builds on an executive order Trump signed in May, setting a deadline for drugmakers to electively lower prices or face new limits on what the government will pay. Trump said deals with other drug companies would be coming over the next week.

“I can’t tell you how big this is,” the president said Tuesday.

“We are turning the tide and we are reversing an unfair situation,” Bourla said.

But prescription drug pricing expert Stacie Dusetzina said it isn’t clear yet the extent of the pricing changes that will occur. The Vanderbilt University Medical Center professor noted that Pfizer is keeping specific terms of the deal confidential, and it wasn’t clear how different any new pricing levels will be from what Medicaid already pays Pfizer.

Consumers are not expected to start seeing lower prices under the Pfizer deal until 2026, according to senior administration officials who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Patients in Medicaid, the state and federally funded program for people with low incomes, already pay a nominal co-payment of a few dollars to fill their prescriptions, but lower prices could help state budgets that fund the programs.



HEATHER JENNETTE/AP

Waves from Hurricanes Humberto and Imelda destroy a home in Buxton, N.C., on Tuesday.

6 homes collapse into Outer Banks surf as hurricanes swirl offshore

Associated Press

Six unoccupied houses along North Carolina’s Outer Banks have collapsed into the ocean as Hurricanes Humberto and Imelda rumble in the Atlantic, the latest private beachfront structures to fall as sea levels rise due to global warming.

Five of the homes, once propped on high stilts, collapsed Tuesday afternoon in Buxton, a community on the string of islands that make up the Outer Banks, said Mike Barber, a spokesperson for the National Park Service. A sixth in Buxton collapsed overnight, the park service said on its website.

No injuries were reported, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore said in a post on social media.

In videos shown by the local sta-

tion 13News Now, the homes teetered on stilts, battered by the waves before plunging into the surf, clogging the seashore with debris, two-by-fours, cushions and an entire home as wave after wave rolled in.

The post said that more collapses are possible given the ocean conditions, and urged visitors to avoid an area stretching for miles south of the collapses, to stay clear of the debris.

Ocean overwash on Tuesday also prompted the state Transportation Department to close a portion of North Carolina Highway 12 on Ocracoke Island.

The ferry connecting Ocracoke and Hatteras islands was also suspended Tuesday, the department said.

North Carolina’s coast is made up almost entirely of narrow, low-lying barrier islands that have been eroding for years as rising seas swallow the land. Eighteen privately owned houses have now collapsed on Seashore beaches since 2020, the park service said.

The first 11 were north of Buxton in Rodanthe, but a Buxton home fell into the surf two weeks ago.

The threat often increases when storms affect the region, as is the case with the two latest hurricanes, even as they moved further out in the Atlantic. The National Weather Service issued coastal flood advisories and warnings for parts of eastern North Carolina, and dangerous surf conditions were expected through the rest of the week.

Chunk, 1,200-pound bear with broken jaw, declared fattest bear

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Chunk, a towering brown bear with a broken jaw, swept the competition Tuesday in the popular Fat Bear Week contest — his first win after narrowly finishing in second place three previous years.

The annual online competition allows viewers to follow 12 bears in Alaska’s Katmai National Park and Preserve on live webcams and cast ballots in a bracket-style, single-elimination tournament that lasts a week. Chunk — known officially as Bear 32 — beat out Bear 856, who doesn’t have a nickname, in the final bracket, according to totals posted on the organizers’ website.

Chunk’s weight was estimated at 1,200 pounds by contest organizers. While they do not weigh in-



T CARMACK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE/AP

Bear 32, winner of the popular Fat Bear Week contest, at the Katmai National Park and Preserve in Alaska on Sept. 15.

dividual bears during the contest because of safety concerns, Chunk and others have had their density scanned to bolster weight estimates in the past using laser technology called LIDAR.

“Despite his broken jaw, he remains one of the biggest, baddest bears at Brooks River,” said Mike Fitz, a naturalist for explore.org. Fitz said Chunk likely hurt his jaw in a fight with another bear.

The contest is wildly popular. This year it attracted over 1.5 million votes from fans who watched the ursines gorge on a record run of fall salmon as they fished in the Brooks River about 300 miles from Anchorage.

It is the largest glut of salmon in the living memories of the bears or the humans who have been running the Fat Bear Week contest since 2014, according to Katmai Conservancy spokesperson Naomi Boak.

That abundance “decreased conflict in the river since salmon were readily available,” Boak said in an email. In Tuesday’s announcement, Katmai National Park ranger Sarah Bruce estimated around 200,000 salmon made their way up Brooks River.

In leaner years, the toughest bears jockey for the best fishing

spots at Brooks Falls, where the salmon converge in a bottleneck and leap from the water as they fight their way upstream to spawn.

This year, Brooks Falls fishing spots were often empty as bears hunted up and down stream. There was even room for humans to fish. At one point Monday, one of the Explore.org live cameras showed two people calmly casting fishing rods along the river even as brown bears plodded upstream and downstream from them.

Voters in the online contest could review before and after photos of the bears, lean at the start of summer and fattened at the end. The bears are not actually weighed — that would be too dangerous and difficult — and some fans choose their favorite based on looks or backstory.

WORLD

Zelenskyy, UN atomic agency head warn of increased risk at nuke plant

BY ILLIA NOVIKOV
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine—Ukraine's president and the U.N. nuclear agency head are sounding the alarm about increased safety risks at the Russia-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in southeastern Ukraine, which lost its external power supply more than a week ago as the war raged around it.

Emergency diesel generators are providing power for crucial cooling systems for the facility's six shutdown reactors and spent fuel, and there is no immediate danger to Europe's biggest nuclear plant, according to International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi.

But "it is clearly not a sustainable situation in terms of nuclear safety," he said.

The backup generators have never needed to run for so long, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"The generators and the plant were not designed for this," Zelenskyy said late Tuesday, describing the situation as "critical."

Zaporizhzhia is one of the 10 big-



The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in southeast Ukraine — seen in 2022, the year Russia seized it — has lost its external power supply.

gest nuclear plants in the world, and its fate amid the fighting has caused fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe. Russian forces seized it days after the full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine began on Feb. 24, 2022.

The tension around the nuclear plant's safety has added to broader concerns about the course of the war, which shows no signs of ending after a U.S.-led effort this year to stop the fighting came to nothing.

European leaders, spooked by vi-

olations of their airspace by unidentified drones and Russian warplanes, gathered Wednesday in Denmark for two summits centered on security, defense and the war in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy blamed Russian artillery for cutting the power line to the Zaporizhzhia plant, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was Ukrainian shelling. Peskov told reporters Wednesday that it was "stupid to accuse the Russian side of shelling the plant it controls."

Denmark: Russia is waging a hybrid war

BY LORNE COOK
Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Europe is in the middle of a hybrid war waged by Russia and the Continent must arm itself, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned on Wednesday as she hosted a summit of European Union leaders in Copenhagen.

"I hope that everybody recognizes now that there is a hybrid war and one day it's Poland, the other day it's Denmark, and next week it will probably be somewhere else that we see sabotage or we see drones flying," Frederiksen told reporters.

Wednesday's summit comes after a spate of troubling drone incidents at Danish airports and military bases over the last week. Ahead of the meeting, a special radar system was set up at Copenhagen airport to help keep watch. Unidentified drones forced the closure of the airfield a week ago.

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the U.K. also sent aircraft, ships and air defense sys-

tems to Denmark ahead of the talks. Ukraine's armed forces have dispatched a mission to the Nordic country for joint exercises, sharing its expertise on combating drones.

While the Danish authorities have not identified those believed to be responsible, Frederiksen said, "There is only one country that are willing to threaten us and it is Russia and therefore we need a very strong answer back."

"I want us to rearm. I want us to buy more capabilities. I want us to innovate more, for example on drones," she said. "When I look at Europe today, I think we are in the most difficult and dangerous situation since the end of the Second World War."

Russia is the focus of Wednesday's summit, where discussions are expected to center on how to prepare Europe to fend off Russian aggression by 2030.

Ukraine is also high on the agenda, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is due to address the EU leaders by videolink.

Israeli strikes Gaza as Hamas mulls its response to Trump's plan

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel pressed its offensive in Gaza on Wednesday, with at least 16 Palestinians reported killed across the strip as Hamas mullied its response to President Donald Trump's peace plan for the embattled territory.

The dead included people who

had sought refuge in a school sheltering the displaced in Gaza City. Al-Falah school in the city's eastern Zeitoun neighborhood was hit twice, minutes apart, officials said.

Israel's defense minister later ordered all remaining Palestinians to leave Gaza City, saying it was their "last opportunity" and that anyone

who stayed would be considered a militant supporter and face the "full force" of Israel's latest offensive.

Also Wednesday, Egypt's Foreign Minister Bader Abdelatty said Trump's proposal for ending the nearly two-year war requires more negotiations on certain elements, echoing remarks made by Qatar a

day earlier. Hamas has said it would study the plan before responding.

The comments by Qatar and Egypt appeared to reflect Arab countries' discontent over the text of the plan that the White House put Monday.

The plan, which has received

wide international support, requires Hamas to release hostages, leave power and disarm in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners and an end to fighting. It guarantees the flow of humanitarian aid and promises reconstruction in Gaza. It sets no path to Palestinian statehood.

STARS AND STRIPES

SERVICE DIRECTORY

The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

Transportation 944

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For 2nd POV Shipments - Offices / Agencies near Military Installations

Trans Global

LOGISTICS EUROPE GMBH

Are you in the picture?

Reading Stars and Stripes gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.
No one covers the bases the way we do.

However you read us, wherever you need us.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman violently arrested secures \$17M settlement

CA LOS ANGELES — A woman who was knocked unconscious and arrested by two sheriff's deputies in Northern California after stopping to change drivers during a family trip in 2020 has reached a \$17 million settlement with the county, her lawyer said Monday.

Nakia Porter had filed a federal lawsuit accusing the Solano County Sheriff's Office deputies violating state and federal civil rights statutes by engaging in "unlawful seizure, assault and excessive force."

Porter, her father and her three young children were driving home at night on Aug. 6, 2020, when they pulled off the road. Porter, who is Black, was already out of the car when the deputies pulled up with lights flashing and she explained that they were just switching drivers and would be on their way, according to the lawsuit.

Body cameras worn by the deputies recorded them pulling guns on Porter before slamming her to the pavement while handcuffing her along a rural road in the town of Dixon. Her father, Joe Powell, was also placed in handcuffs and briefly detained.

Porter was jailed overnight on suspicion of resisting arrest, but never charged.

Man pleads guilty to attempting to join ISIS

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minnesota man accused of trying to join Islamic State pleaded guilty Monday to attempting to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Abdisatar Ahmed Hassan, 23, changed his plea to guilty during an appearance before U.S. District Judge Donovan Frank in St. Paul.

When Hassan was charged in February, prosecutors said he had expressed admiration on social media for the man who carried out a Jan. 1 truck attack on Bourbon Street in New Orleans that killed 14 people. That attacker was killed by police. His truck bore the flag of ISIS.

Prosecutors say Hassan tried twice in December to travel from Minnesota to Somalia to join ISIS and fight on its behalf but failed both times.

The FBI said it observed Hassan driving with the group's flag the day before his arrest.

Ex-lawmaker shared child sex abuse videos

SC COLUMBIA — Former Republican South Carolina Rep. RJ May admitted in court Monday that he sent hundreds of videos of children being sexually abused to people across the country on social media.

May pleaded guilty to what prosecutors in court papers called a "five-day child pornography spree" in the spring of 2024.



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Walking with his feet 10 feet onto Beale

A person walks across Beale Street, on Monday, in Memphis, Tenn.

May, who resigned earlier this year, is accused of using the screen name "joebiden69" to exchange 220 different files of toddlers and young children involved in sex acts on the Kik social media network, according to court documents that graphically detailed the videos.

"Bear with me. This is very hard to read," U.S. Attorney Bryan Stirling said as he haltingly read a brief description of each video for television reporters outside of court since cameras aren't allowed in federal courtrooms.

May, 38, pleaded guilty to five counts of distributing the videos and faces five to 20 years in prison on each charge. He will have to register as a sex offender and could be fined up to \$250,000, according to his plea agreement.

Endangered whooping crane dies of avian flu

WI MADISON — Ducky is dead.

The International Crane Foundation announced Monday that Ducky, an endangered female whooping crane the foundation planned to release into the wilds of Wisconsin this fall, died last Thursday after becoming infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, a strain of avian flu.

Foundation officials said in a news release that Ducky's death marks the first time the strain has killed a whooping crane.

Only about 700 wild whooping cranes are left in North America, according to the foundation. Duck-

y's death translates to a 1% decline in the eastern migratory population, which stands at fewer than 70 birds.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of Ducky," Kim Boardman, the foundation's birds curator, said in the release. "Each Whooping Crane is invaluable — not only to our organization, but to the survival of the entire species."

Ducky hatched in May and was part of the Baraboo-based foundation's breeding and reintroduction program. She was reared by foundation staff outfitted in crane costumes in an effort to prevent her from imprinting on humans, boosting her chances of survival in the wild. She was among a group of eight cranes set to be released into the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in October.

2 killed when man starts shooting outside casino

TX EAGLE PASS — Authorities are trying to determine why a man opened fire in the parking lot of a casino in a Texas border city over the weekend, killing two people and wounding at least five others.

Keryan Rashad Jones, 34, was arrested during a traffic stop several hours after the shooting late Saturday night at the Kickapoo Lucky Eagle Casino in Eagle Pass, authorities said. Jones was arrested Sunday morning following a pursuit by authorities near Stockdale, which is about 180 miles east of Eagle Pass, according to the Wilson County Sheriff's Office.

Jones faces two counts of capital murder and five counts of assault with a deadly weapon, Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber said.

The Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas Police Department is leading the investigation and said the casino will remain closed while the investigation continues.

Woman gets 7 years for fraudulent sale of startup

NY NEW YORK — Charlie Javice, the founder of a startup company that promised to revolutionize the way college students apply for financial aid, was sentenced Monday to more than seven years in prison for cheating JPMorgan Chase out of \$175 million by greatly exaggerating how many students it served.

Javice, 33, was convicted in March of duping the banking giant when it bought her company, called Frank, in the summer of 2021. She made false records that made it seem like Frank had over 4 million customers when it had fewer than 300,000.

Addressing the court before she was sentenced, Javice, who was in her mid-20s when she founded the company, said she was "haunted that my failure has transformed something meaningful into something infamous."

Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein largely dismissed arguments by Javice's lawyer, Ronald Sullivan, that he should be lenient because the negotiations that led to Frank's sale pitted "a 28-year-old versus 300 in-

vestment bankers from the largest bank in the world."

Still, the judge criticized the bank, saying "they have a lot to blame themselves" after failing to do adequate due diligence.

Prosecutors urge 11-year sentence for 'Diddy'

NY NEW YORK — Key witnesses against Sean "Diddy" Combs, including longtime ex-girlfriend Casandra "Cassie" Ventura, are urging a federal judge to reject leniency for the hip-hop mogul at his sentencing Friday, saying they fear for their safety if he is freed.

Prosecutors included letters from R&B singer Cassie, her parents and four others with a written submission Tuesday as they seek to have Combs sentenced to at least 11 years and 3 months in prison for his conviction on two prostitution-related charges.

Notably absent was the voice of an ex-girlfriend who testified under the pseudonym Jane. Like Cassie, she said Combs subjected her over several years to dayslong, drug-fueled sexual performances with male sex workers that Combs watched and often filmed.

Late Tuesday, Judge Arun Subramanian denied Combs' request to have his conviction overturned, rejecting his lawyers' argument that he was an amateur pornographer — not engaging in prostitution — and that the guilty verdict violates his First Amendment rights.

FACES

Q&A



ANDY KROPA, INVISION/AP

Zara Larsson, shown Sept. 4, says her fourth studio album, "Midnight Sun," is a love letter to her native Sweden.

Filling in the pop puzzle

Zara Larsson hopes to bring her career into focus with 'Midnight Sun'

BY GARY GERARD HAMILTON
Associated Press

Zara Larsson is no stranger to packing dance floors around the world, boasting a catalog with several songs that have earned more than a billion streams. But despite possessing all the individual pieces a superstar career requires, her jigsaw has yet to be fully completed in the way she's hoped.

"I feel like it's been a disconnect between what I've released and who I am," said the 27-year-old. "I feel finally people are starting to piece the puzzle together."

Larsson is betting that the image becomes more clear with her new album, "Midnight Sun," which came out Sept. 26. Serving as love letter to her native Sweden where summer sunlight can extend until midnight, her 10-track, fourth studio project follows up 2024's "Venus."

Larsson, who entered the entertainment world when she was just 10, has never been shy about her desire to become the biggest pop star in the world. But her journey has taught her that expectations may have to be tempered.

"Maybe my perspective of life has changed, too, just growing older. And now, I'm at a point where it's like maybe I want a family. ... That, in a way, feels more important than just being amazing in front of people I don't know," said the artist, whose 2017 "Symphony" collaboration with Clean Bandit — already a megahit — recently went viral on TikTok. "It's maturity, but also actively — like really actively — having to say ... I am good enough as I am."

The "Lush Life" singer, who recently opened on Tate McRae's tour, will headline her own dates later this month in Europe before launching a North American leg in February. Larsson spoke with The Associated Press about "Midnight Sun," the pressure to create more big hits and her willingness to expose her professional insecurities. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Associated Press: You wrote on every song and said you're most proud of this album. Why is it special?

Larsson: The older I get, I just wanna make what I

put out, and just make it feel like it's coming from me. Because I've had great songs and great projects and really real and heartfelt stuff, but it's different when it's my words.

Is there pressure to create another huge hit like "Lush Life"?

What was so fun about making this album is that, this time around, I felt no pressure. And it was kind of like coming back to when I first started making music, like my first EPs that I released only in Scandinavia. We were just having fun and trying things.

I felt a lot of pressure after my first album, "So Good," just to keep that huge mainstream success going, which led to me kind of like not be able to do anything for four years.

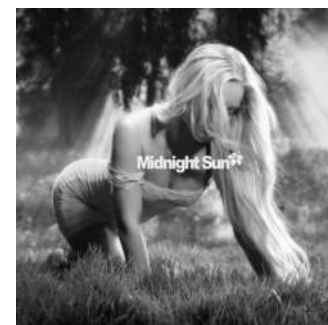
You've made no secret of your desire to become the biggest pop star in the world. How do you respond when your goals aren't reached?

I've just had to actively work on how I view myself and life because I do still want to be the best, but I think life's about the journey. ... Even though I've been doing it for a long time, I just really, really feel like I am just at the beginning.

It takes courage to put out a song like "The Ambition." Why were you willing to openly express your professional insecurities?

A lot of people that I play that song to, they're like, "I feel that." And especially in an industry where ... it's like how other people are seeing you and how much they like you. And you're chasing this thing that you will never really reach. ... A lot of my success that I had so early on, it's sad that I can't go back and really enjoy what I got to experience.

I romanticized just moving out to the countryside and not caring about any of this, and just maybe record some music on my laptop. But then, it's like I know I don't want that.



Stephen King the most banned author in US schools, report says

Associated Press

A new report on book bans in U.S. schools finds Stephen King as the author most likely to be censored and the country divided between states actively restricting works and those attempting to limit or eliminate bans.

PEN America's "Banned in the USA," released Wednesday, tracks more than 6,800 instances of books being temporarily or permanently pulled for the 2024-2025 school year. The new number is down from more than 10,000 in 2023-24, but still far above the levels of a few years ago, when PEN didn't even see the need to compile a report.

Some 80% of those bans originated in just three states that have enacted or attempted to enact laws calling for removal of books deemed objectionable — Florida, Texas and Tennessee. Meanwhile, PEN found little or no instances of removals in several other states, with Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey among those with laws that limit the authority of school and public libraries to pull books.

"It is increasingly a story of two countries," says Kasey Meehan, director of

PEN's Freedom to Read program and an author of Wednesday's report. "And it's not just a story of red states and blue states. In Florida, not all of the school districts responded to the calls for banning books. You can find differences from county to county."



King

King's books were censored 206 times, according to PEN, with "Carrie" and "The Stand" among the 87 of his works affected.

The most banned work of any author was Anthony Burgess' dystopian classic from the 1960s, "A Clockwork Orange," for which PEN found 23 removals. Other books and authors facing extensive restrictions included Patricia McCormick's "Sold," Judy Blume's "Forever" and Jennifer Niven's "Breathless," and numerous works by Sarah J. Maas and Jodi Picoult.

Reasons often cited for pulling a book include LGBTQ+ themes, depictions of race and passages with violence and sexual violence. An ongoing trend that PEN finds has

only intensified: Thousands of books were taken off shelves in anticipation of community, political or legal pressure rather than in response to a direct threat.

"This functions as a form of 'obeying advance,'" the report reads, "rooted in fear or simply a desire to avoid topics that might be deemed controversial."

The PEN report comes amid ongoing censorship efforts not just from states and conservative activists, but from the federal government. The Department of Education ended an initiative by the Biden administration to investigate the legality of bans and has called the whole issue a "hoax." PEN's numbers include the Department of Defense's removal of hundreds of books from K-12 school libraries for military families as part of an overall campaign against DEI initiatives and "un-American" thinking.

Beloved 'Reading Rainbow' series returns with new host

After nearly 20 years, the beloved, long-running children's series "Reading Rainbow" is back, this time on the KidZuko YouTube channel.

The first of four episodes hosted by Mychal Threats, a librarian and literacy advocate, will be released Saturday at 10 a.m. Eastern. The others will drop on subsequent Saturdays at the same time. Adam DeVine, John Legend, Chrissy Teigen, Gabrielle Union and Jamie Chung will appear, along with Rylee Arnold and Ezra Sosa from "Dancing with the Stars."

Threats, who goes by Mychal the Librarian on social media, steps into the shoes of original host LeVar Burton. Threats broke the reboot news Tuesday on his channels. KidZuko released a trailer.

"I was raised on Reading Rainbow, LeVar Burton is my hero," Threats wrote on Instagram. "I am a reader, I am a librarian because LeVar Burton and Reading Rainbow so powerfully made us believe we belong in books, we belong everywhere."

The original "Reading Rainbow" premiered in 1983 and became a wildly successful approach to using television to inspire children's love of reading and build connections between kids and books.

It ended production in 2006, winning a Peabody Award and 26 Emmys.

STARS AND STRIPES.

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Trump and Hegseth's backward-facing message

BY DAVID IGNATIUS

The Washington Post

Here's the scariest part about Tuesday's military pep rally: President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth — in their focus on grooming, fitness standards and "the enemy within" — seem oblivious to the reality that 21st-century combat will be dominated by drones and artificial intelligence, plus commanders who understand these high-tech weapons.

America's generals and admirals sat stone-faced as they listened to Trump and Hegseth. They had been summoned to Washington at a moment when they're struggling to adapt America's military to dizzying changes in combat systems and doctrine. What they got was a lecture from Hegseth about the threat of facial hair, "fat generals" and lax training — along with a meandering speech from Trump bashing his political enemies.

Trump's and Hegseth's speeches were an exercise in military nostalgia. Trump talked about bringing back battleships, a Navy fighting platform that was already outmoded during World War II. Hegseth urged military leaders to apply "the 1990 test" — meaning any standard that had changed since then was suspect. He celebrated generals of the last century — George Patton and Norman Schwarzkopf — who shared his flair for showmanship.

Watching this political theater, the audience of senior military leaders was properly silent. They applauded, politely, at the end. But what must they have thought about the directives they received from a defense secretary whose views were shaped as a National Guard officer in Iraq 20 years ago and a commander in chief who avoided service because of a medical exemption?

The implicit message of Tuesday's "key leaders all-call," as it was officially termed, was to get on board with Team Trump or get out. "If the words I'm speaking today are mak-

ing your heart sink, then you should do the honorable thing and resign," said Hegseth. Hopefully, those gathered at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., will ignore that guidance. It would be a national disaster to lose the battle-tested leaders who understand the military's true challenges in the decades ahead.

For Trump and Hegseth, the issues facing the military seem more symbol than substance. Thus their emphasis on rebranding the enterprise as the Department of War. And their endless rehashing of culture-war issues: "No more identity months, DEI offices, dudes in dresses. No more climate change worship. No more division, distraction or gender delusions," said Hegseth.

OK, got it. Clear away the modest elements of "woke" culture that developed in the Pentagon. But what are you building for the future?

Hegseth is so intent on creating a tough military that having a smart one appears secondary. He wants to restore the old-time, gung ho imagery. Basic training that's "scary, tough and disciplined." Drill sergeants who can "instill healthy fear" and "put their hands on recruits." Hegseth seems convinced that how soldiers fight depends on how they look. "The era of unprofessional appearance is over," he said. "No more beardos." Maybe he doesn't remember the unshaven "dogfaces" of Bill Mauldin's cartoons during World War II.

Hegseth wants to overturn more than grooming standards. Among the 10 directives he issued Tuesday is a review of standards for bullying and hazing, so that leaders can "enforce high standards without fear of reprisal." Yikes. That sounds like a blank check for behavior that could drive away, say, the math-and-science whiz who could design and operate future combat systems.

Another unpinned grenade is Hegseth's directive to revise an inspector general process that he claimed has been "weaponized, putting complainers, ideologues and poor performers in the driver's seat." If a commander makes "honest mistakes," those can be ex-

punged from their record. For the military, Tuesday was "liberation day," he said. "We are attacking and ending the walking on eggshells and zero-defect command culture."

Hegseth's vision of a hard-ass military might be compelling if you believed that future combat would be a reprise of landing on Omaha Beach or Iwo Jima. But the nature of military conflict is changing — on the drone-saturated battlefields of Ukraine and in the scenarios for deterring a tech-savvy China in the future. Beijing would be delighted if America focused on how many push-ups a soldier can do rather than how many computer tools he or she can use.

There was a broader conceptual failure in Tuesday's presentations. Trump focused repeatedly on using the military to fight the "enemy from within," by which he seemed to mean illegal immigrants, and perhaps also the "radical left lunatics" who might sympathize with their plight. Using the military for domestic law enforcement is illegal under the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act. But beyond that, it's just dumb at a time when Russia and China pose a growing military threat to the United States.

The military commanders in Trump's audience are obliged to obey a commander in chief's orders — so long as they are legal. What did those senior officers think as Trump explained to them his rules of engagement for domestic protest — "They spit, we hit" — and his repeated claims that "we're under invasion from within"? Hopefully, they'll seek good legal advice about what constitutes a proper order for deployments on U.S. soil.

The U.S. military is a jewel. Trump and Hegseth are right about that. Its excellence is rooted in values that transcend politics. As the U.S. Military Academy at West Point motto puts it: "Duty. Honor. Country." Each of the people who listened to Trump and Hegseth swore an oath to the Constitution — and they aren't promise breakers, no matter who's leaning on them.

N. Korea threat highlighted amid S. Korea success

BY ARTHUR I. CYR

North Korea is on the verge of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of striking the United States.

The surviving, struggling communist totalitarian state has been steadily, relentlessly developing missiles with expanding ranges, but this would represent a major — and extremely ominous — technological advance.

South Korea President Lee Jae Myung announced this publicly on Sept. 25 in New York City, while hosting a session for investors at the New York Stock Exchange. He and his nation's delegation were in the city for the annual General Assembly of the United Nations.

The theme of this year's 80th session was "Eighty Years and More for Peace, Development and Human Rights."

Lee no doubt got the attention of his audience by mentioning the specter of nuclear weapons that could directly threaten the continental United States in the hands of the bizarre rogue regime in Pyongyang. Fortunately, there remain reassuring factors. Knowledgeable experts remain skeptical of the North Koreans' ability to guide their missiles accurately or protect warheads as they reenter Earth's atmosphere from space.

He went on to emphasize, shrewdly, that

President Donald Trump is essential to any diplomatic progress with Pyongyang. Trump indicated in August that he wanted to have another meeting with North Korea leader Kim Jong Un, possibly as early as this year.

Lee, who assumed office in June, has been working to reopen dialogue with the North. So far, however, there has been nothing but hostility from that side.

North Korea is contributing combat troops to aid Russia in Ukraine. At the start of this year, Pyongyang fired artillery barrages near a maritime buffer zone.

On the west coast, Pyongyang wants to move the maritime border south. Roads and railroads linking North and South have been shut down. The North is jamming GPS signals in the South.

Meanwhile, South Korea continues on a positive course of exceptional economic growth and development, combined with representative democracy.

The United Nations with unequivocal United States support successfully defended South Korea during the Korean War. South Korea maintained approximately 50,000 troops in South Vietnam during the long U.S. war. Our alliance remains extremely close and effective.

As recently as the early 1960s, South Korea was one of the poorest economies in the world.

Still a peasant society, the entire Korean Peninsula was devastated by the Korean War of 1950-53. Yet today, the Republic of Korea ranks among the strongest economies in the world, holding leadership roles in the automobile, advanced electronics, shipbuilding and other industries.

Capping the democratic transition, after years of harsh dictatorship, was the election of Kim Dae-jung as president in 1998. He completed his five-year term without interruption, and in 2000 received the Nobel Peace Prize.

South Korea's remarkable domestic accomplishments have unfolded while the country becomes increasingly influential in global arenas. In 2012, the Obama administration shrewdly nominated President Jim Yong Kim of Dartmouth College, who was born in Seoul Korea, as president of the World Bank.

The vision of the United Nations combines favoring very powerful nations and inclusive global representation. Kim and former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon personify South Korea's significant role as a bridge between developed and developing nations.

Scare stories about actions of the North overshadow the good news regarding the South. That is unfortunate.

Arthur I. Cyr is author of "After the Cold War — American Foreign Policy, Europe and Asia."

SCOREBOARD/WNBA PLAYOFFS

DEALS

Tuesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball American League
CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Selected the contract of RF Chase DeLauter from Columbus (IL).
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Released manager Ron Washington.
National League
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Selected the contract of C Martin Maldonado from spring training complex. Transferred RHP Jason Adam from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
CHICAGO BULLS — Waived G Ruben Nemhard Jr.
WASHINGTON WIZARDS — Waived G Keshon Gilbert.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Released CB Ekow Boye-Doe from the practice squad.
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed G Kenyon Green to the practice squad. Released C Sam Mustipher from the practice squad.
BUFFALO BILLS — Signed P Mitch Wishnowsky to the active roster. Placed P Cameron Johnston on injured reserve.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Released OLB DJ Johnson. Waived/injured WR Dalevon Campbell.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed WRs Malachi Corley and Gage Larvadain to the active roster from the practice squad. Placed WR Cedric Tillman on injured reserve. Waived CB Cameron Mitchell. Signed CB Ameer Speed to the practice squad.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Signed WR Parris Campbell to the practice squad.
DETROIT LIONS — Released WR Ronnie Bell from the practice squad. Signed LB Ty Summers to the active roster.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Released T Brant Banks.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed OLB Jarrett Kingston from the Carolina practice squad to the active roster.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Waived LB Cameron McGrone. Signed LB Buddy Johnson off the Dallas practice squad.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed QB Carter Bradley to the practice squad. Released QB Seth Henigan from the practice squad.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed OL Michael Dunn and CB Isas Waxter to the practice squad. Released CB Myles Purchase and OLB Rashad Weaver from the practice squad.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Waived CB Cam Smith off the reserve/non-football illness list.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed OT Matt Waletzko to the practice squad. Released WR Tim Jones from the practice squad.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed T Sebastian Gutierrez and G Andrew Rupcich to the practice squad. Released G Jack Conley and DL Fabien Lovett from the practice squad.
NEW YORK JETS — Signed OL Liam Fornadel to the practice squad. Released LB Ben Niemann from the practice squad.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed LS Cal Adomitis to the active roster. Placed LS Charley Hughlett and LB Ogbornia Okoronkwo on injured reserve. Released LB Lance Dixon from the practice squad.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed OL Logan Brown to the practice squad.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Signed S Sebastian Castro off the Pittsburgh practice squad. Signed CB Damarion Williams to the practice squad. Placed S Rashad Wisdom on injured reserve and DT Jayson Jones on the practice squad injured reserve.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League
CALGARY FLAMES — Placed Cs Sam Morton and Clark Bishop, D Yan Kuznetsov and LW Dryden Hunt on waivers.
CAROLINA HURRICANES — Placed D Gavin Bayreuther, C Ryan Suzuki, LWs Josiah Slavin and Tyson Jost and RW Noel Gunler on waivers.
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Recalled C TJ Tynan, RW Jason Polin, LW Tye Felhaber and Ds Alex Gagne and Ronald Attard from Colorado (AHL).
MINNESOTA WILD — Re-signed LW Kirill Kaprizov to an eight-year contract extension through 2034.
NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Placed C Matthew Highmore and G Marcus Hogberg on waivers.
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Released Oliver Wahlstrom. Placed Cs Jimmy Huntington, Samuel Laberge, Oskar Olausson and Shane Bowers and G Jakob Skarek on waivers.
WINNIPEG JETS — Placed Ds Tyrel Bauer and Isaak Phillips on waivers.

TENNIS

China Open

Wednesday At Beijing

Purse: \$4,016,050

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor Seeding in parentheses

Men's Singles Championship

Jannik Sinner (1), Italy, def. Learner Tien, United States, 6-2, 6-2.

Women's Singles Round of 16

Linda Noskova (26), Czechia, def. Anastasia Potapova, Russia, 6-2, 6-4.
Sonay Kartal, Britain, def. Mirra Andreeva (4), Russia, 7-5, 2-6, 7-5.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|----------------|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Philadelphia | 19 | 7 | 6 | 63 | 56 | 33 |
| Cincinnati | 18 | 9 | 5 | 59 | 48 | 40 |
| NYC FC | 17 | 10 | 5 | 56 | 49 | 41 |
| Inter Miami CF | 16 | 7 | 8 | 56 | 68 | 52 |
| Charlotte FC | 17 | 13 | 2 | 53 | 52 | 46 |
| Nashville | 16 | 11 | 5 | 53 | 55 | 39 |
| Orlando City | 14 | 7 | 10 | 52 | 59 | 44 |
| Chicago | 15 | 11 | 6 | 51 | 64 | 56 |
| Columbus | 13 | 8 | 11 | 50 | 51 | 49 |
| New York | 12 | 13 | 7 | 43 | 47 | 43 |
| New England | 9 | 15 | 8 | 35 | 41 | 45 |
| Toronto FC | 5 | 13 | 13 | 28 | 31 | 38 |
| CF Montréal | 6 | 17 | 9 | 27 | 33 | 56 |
| Atlanta | 5 | 14 | 12 | 27 | 37 | 57 |
| D.C. United | 5 | 17 | 10 | 25 | 29 | 64 |

Western Conference

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|----------------|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| San Diego FC | 17 | 9 | 6 | 57 | 56 | 39 |
| Vancouver | 16 | 6 | 9 | 57 | 59 | 34 |
| Minn. United | 15 | 7 | 10 | 55 | 52 | 37 |
| LAFC | 15 | 7 | 8 | 53 | 60 | 37 |
| Seattle | 12 | 9 | 10 | 46 | 54 | 47 |
| Austin FC | 12 | 11 | 8 | 44 | 34 | 40 |
| Portland | 11 | 10 | 11 | 44 | 41 | 43 |
| Colorado | 11 | 14 | 7 | 40 | 42 | 53 |
| San Jose | 10 | 14 | 8 | 38 | 57 | 58 |
| FC Dallas | 9 | 11 | 11 | 38 | 47 | 51 |
| Real Salt Lake | 11 | 16 | 4 | 37 | 35 | 46 |
| Houston | 9 | 14 | 9 | 36 | 41 | 52 |
| St Louis City | 7 | 18 | 7 | 28 | 39 | 55 |
| Sporting KC | 7 | 19 | 6 | 27 | 46 | 67 |
| LA Galaxy | 5 | 17 | 9 | 24 | 41 | 62 |

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Tuesday's game

Chicago 5, Miami 3

Saturday's games

Charlotte FC at D.C. United
Nashville at CF Montréal
LA Galaxy at FC Dallas
New England at Miami
Cincinnati at New York
Columbus at Orlando City
New York City FC at Philadelphia
St Louis City at Austin FC
Toronto FC at Chicago
San Diego FC at Houston
Sporting Kansas City at Minnesota
Colorado at Real Salt Lake
Portland at Seattle

NWSL

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|----------------|----|----|---|-----|----|----|
| Kansas City | 18 | 2 | 2 | 56 | 44 | 11 |
| Washington | 11 | 4 | 7 | 40 | 37 | 27 |
| Gotham FC | 9 | 6 | 7 | 34 | 31 | 18 |
| Seattle | 9 | 7 | 6 | 33 | 28 | 26 |
| Orlando | 9 | 8 | 5 | 32 | 27 | 23 |
| Portland | 8 | 7 | 7 | 31 | 30 | 27 |
| San Diego | 8 | 7 | 7 | 31 | 30 | 27 |
| Louisville | 8 | 9 | 5 | 29 | 28 | 34 |
| North Carolina | 7 | 8 | 7 | 28 | 28 | 32 |
| Houston | 7 | 10 | 5 | 26 | 25 | 34 |
| Angel City | 6 | 10 | 6 | 24 | 28 | 36 |
| Utah Royals FC | 5 | 11 | 6 | 21 | 22 | 35 |
| Bay FC | 4 | 11 | 7 | 19 | 23 | 33 |
| Chicago | 2 | 11 | 9 | 15 | 26 | 44 |

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's game

Orlando at Houston

Saturday's games

Louisville at North Carolina
Bay FC at Portland

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA Playoffs

Semifinals

Best-of-five

Phoenix 3, Minnesota 1

Minnesota 85, Phoenix 69
Phoenix 89, Minnesota 83, OT
Phoenix 84, Minnesota 76
Phoenix 86, Minnesota 81

Las Vegas 3, Indiana 2

Indiana 89, Las Vegas 73
Las Vegas 90, Indiana 68
Las Vegas 84, Indiana 72
Indiana 90, Las Vegas 83
Tuesday: Las Vegas 107, Indiana 98, OT

Finals

Best-of-seven

x-if necessary

Phoenix vs. Las Vegas

Friday: at Las Vegas
Sunday: at Las Vegas
Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Phoenix
Friday, Oct. 10: at Phoenix
x-Sunday, Oct. 12: at Las Vegas
x-Wednesday, Oct. 15: at Phoenix
x-Friday, Oct. 17: at Las Vegas

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Schedule

Thursday FAR WEST

Sam Houston St. (0-4) at New Mexico St. (2-2)

Friday EAST

W. Kentucky (4-1) at Delaware (3-1)
Brown (1-1) vs. Rhode Island (4-1) at Pawtucket, R.I.
Columbia (1-1) at Princeton (1-1)

SOUTH

Charlotte (1-3) at South Florida (3-1)
FAR WEST
New Mexico (3-1) at San Jose St. (1-3)
Colorado St. (1-3) at San Diego St. (3-1)
West Virginia (2-3) at BYU (4-0)

Saturday EAST

San Diego (3-2) at Marist (2-2)
Richmond (3-2) at Bucknell (3-2)
Boston College (1-3) at Pittsburgh (2-2)
Sacred Heart (4-1) at CCSU (2-3)
Yale (2-0) at Lehigh (5-0)
Stonehill (2-3) at Duquesne (2-3)
Air Force (1-3) at Navy (4-0)
Fordham (1-4) at Lafayette (3-2)
Villanova (2-2) at New Hampshire (3-2)
LIU Brooklyn (1-4) at Mercyhurst (1-4)
Delaware St. (3-2) at Monmouth (NJ) (3-1)
Robert Morris (1-3) at Merrimack (2-3)
Dartmouth (2-0) at Penn (1-1)
Morgan St. (2-3) at Georgetown (2-3)
UTSA (2-2) at Temple (2-2)
Colgate (1-3) at Cornell (0-2)
Harvard (2-0) at Holy Cross (0-5)
Maine (1-4) at Bryant (2-3)
W. Michigan (2-3) at Umass (0-4)
E. Michigan (1-4) at Buffalo (2-3)
Stony Brook (2-3) at Albany (NY) (1-4)
Washington (3-1) at Maryland (4-0)
FIU (2-2) at Uconn (3-2)
Elon (3-2) at Towson (3-2)

SOUTH

Kentucky (2-2) at Georgia (3-1)
Clemson (1-3) at North Carolina (2-2)
Army (1-3) at UAB (2-2)
Wake Forest (2-2) at Virginia Tech (2-3)
W. Illinois (1-4) at Tennessee Tech (4-0)
Dayton (3-1) at Morehead St. (2-3)
Davidson (1-3) at Stetson (1-4)
W. Carolina (2-3) at Wofford (0-4)
Savannah St. (0-0) at SC State (2-3)
Chattanooga (1-4) at Miami (1-3)
Charleston Southern (1-4) at Gardner-Webb (2-2)
ETSU (2-3) at Furman (3-1)
Campbell (1-4) at NC State (3-2)
Bethune-Cookman (2-3) at Alabama St. (3-1)
James Madison (3-1) at Georgia St. (1-3)
Texas (3-1) at Florida (1-3)
NC A&T (1-4) at William & Mary (2-3)
Virginia (4-1) at Louisville (4-0)
Oregon St. (0-5) at Appalachian St. (2-2)
Vanderbilt (5-0) at Alabama (3-1)
Prairie View (3-2) at Alcorn St. (0-4)
West Georgia (5-0) at Austin Peay (3-2)
Norfolk St. (1-4) at Hampton (1-4)
Samford (0-5) at Mercer (3-1)
MVSU (0-4) vs. Florida A&M (1-3) at Atlanta

Alabama A&M (3-2) vs. Jackson St. (3-1) at Mobile, Ala.
Coastal Carolina (2-2) at Old Dominion (3-1)
South Alabama (1-4) at Troy (2-2)
East Texas A&M (0-4) at Northwestern St. (1-3)
SE Louisiana (3-2) at McNeese St. (1-4)
Miami (4-0) at Florida St. (3-1)
Kansas (3-2) at UCF (3-1)
Tulsa (2-3) at Memphis (5-0)

MIDWEST

Iowa St. (5-0) at Cincinnati (3-1)
Wisconsin (2-2) at Michigan (3-1)
Ohio (3-2) at Ball St. (1-3)
Illinois (4-1) at Purdue (2-2)
Valparaiso (1-3) at Drake (1-2)
UT Martin (1-4) at Lindenwood (Mo.) (2-3)
Butler (3-2) at St. Thomas (Minn.) (2-2)
Tennessee St. (1-3) at E. Illinois (2-2)
Murray St. (0-4) at South Dakota (2-3)
Cent. Michigan (3-2) at Akron (1-4)
Miami (Ohio) (1-3) at N. Illinois (1-3)
Boise St. (3-1) at Notre Dame (2-2)
La.-Monroe (3-1) at Northwestern (2-2)
Michigan St. (3-1) at Nebraska (3-1)
North Dakota (2-2) at N. Iowa (2-2), 5p.m.
S. Dakota St. (4-0) at Youngstown St. (3-1)
N. Dakota St. (4-0) at Illinois St. (3-1)
Indiana St. (2-2) at S. Illinois (3-1)
Minnesota (3-1) at Ohio St. (4-0)

SOUTHWEST

Kansas St. (2-3) at Baylor (3-2)
North Alabama (1-3) at Abilene Christian (2-3)
Syracuse (3-2) at SMU (2-2)
Texas State (3-1) at Arkansas St. (1-4)
Kent St. (1-3) at Oklahoma (4-0)
Nicholls (1-4) at Lamar (3-1)
Utah Tech (1-4) at Cent. Arkansas (1-4)
S. Utah (1-4) at Tarleton St. (5-0)
FAU (1-3) at Rice (3-2)
Stephen F. Austin (3-2) at Incarnate Word (2-3)
Texas Tech (4-0) at Houston (4-0)
Ark.-Pine Bluff (2-2) at Texas Southern (1-3)
Mississippi St. (4-1) at Texas A&M (4-0)
Colorado (2-3) at TCU (3-1)
Houston Christian (1-3) at UT Rio Grande Valley (4-1)

FAR WEST

Oklahoma St. (1-3) at Arizona (3-1)
Penn St. (3-1) at UCLA (0-4)
Montana St. (3-2) at N. Arizona (4-1)
Portland St. (0-5) at E. Washington (1-4)
UNLV (4-0) at Wyoming (2-2)
Montana (4-0) at Idaho St. (2-3)
UC Davis (3-1) at Cal Poly (3-2)
Duke (3-2) at California (4-1)
Nevada (1-3) at Fresno St. (4-1)



JOHN LOCHER/AP

The Aces celebrate their overtime win over the Indiana Fever in Game 5 of the WNBA semifinals Tuesday in Las Vegas.

Aces hold off Fever in OT, reach Finals

BY MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Fever, with about half their roster in street clothes, weren't supposed to be this kind of challenge for the Aces.

And then when Kelsey Mitchell left Game 5 on Tuesday night because of severe leg cramping, victory seemed assured for Las Vegas — only to have Indiana keep fighting back.

But the Aces, pushed to the brink for the second postseason series in a row, survived 107-98 in overtime to advance to the WNBA Finals for the third time in four years. A'ja Wilson, with 35 points, and Jackie Young, with 32, became the first teammates to score more than 30 points in a playoff game.

Second-seeded Las Vegas, which won the league title in 2022 and 2023, will host the fourth-seeded Phoenix Mercury on Friday in the opener of the best-of-seven championship series.

The Aces went on a 16-game winning streak to end the regular season, but were pushed to the edge by the Seattle Storm in the first round and then the Fever.

"I think that streak we went on prepared us for moments like this, how to fight through the highs and lows of the game," Wilson said. "It allows us to never take our foot off the gas."

Indiana made Las Vegas work for it even though the sixth-seeded Fever have been decimated by injuries, which includes Caitlin Clark and Sophie Cunningham.

Coach Stephanie White somehow not only kept the team together, Indiana reached the doorstep of its first Finals appearance since 2015.

Mitchell had scored a team-high 15 points at the time of her injury. Six Fever players reached double digits, including Odyssey Sims with 27 points and Natasha Howard with 16. Aliyah Boston finished with 11 points and 16 rebounds, but fouled out with 27 seconds left in regulation.

The Aces were closer to a three-woman show, with Wilson coming within three points of her playoff career high. Young, whose putback basket in the opening round against Seattle allowed Las Vegas to advance to this round, had a playoff career-high 10 assists.

The Aces needed every one of those points because Indiana challenged Las Vegas throughout, including after Mitchell got hurt. Rather than fade away and concede the playoff series to the home team, the Fever battled to tie the game at 84 on two Sims free throws with 52 seconds left.

After Young made two free throws with 27.1 seconds remaining, Sims answered with a drive down the lane for a layup with 22.5 seconds to go to again tie the game. Young missed a layup in the closing seconds and Jewell Loyd the follow to send the game to overtime.

The Aces then took the lead early in OT and didn't give it up. "They would just not go away," Las Vegas coach Becky Hammon said of the Fever. "The resiliency of (White's) group. They went through a lot of adversity this year and for Steph to keep everybody onboard ... I thought they did an unbelievable job all the way around. They just gas-pedaled the whole time, and it was tough for us."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Australian kickers make Big 12 mark with booming punts

BY PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The Big 12 has certainly gone Down Under to get a leg up in the punting game. Nine of the conference's top 15 punters this season hail from Australia.

"Punting is a natural thing for us," explained Colorado's Damon Greaves, who's from Busselton, a small city in the southwestern corner of Western Australia. "You guys grow up throwing it. ... We grow up punting it."

Statistically, the league's best Aussies include Finn Lappin (Kansas), Liam Dougherty (Houston), Max Fletcher (Cincinnati), Orion Phillips (Utah), Jack Burgess (Texas Tech), Sam Vander Haar (BYU), Greaves, Oliver Straw (West Virginia) and Ethan Crow (TCU).

Combined, the Australian contingent is averaging 44.1 yards per boot this season. They've also pinned opponents inside the 20-yard line on 55 occasions. Crow has the long punt of the bunch this season at 69 yards.

The influx of Aussies can be at-

tributed, in part, to Australian rules football, which is a blend of running with the ball (think tailback) and kicking (punter). Just like American football, the Aussie version uses an oddly shaped ball (in their case, an oval).

Most players can kick with either foot and roll out either way to rocket a punt — just in case it's needed.

The transition between Aussie rules and American football, though, takes some time.

That's where Prokick Australia enters the picture. The development academy teaches burgeoning punters the proper technique, skills and strategy. Not only that, but the program gets prospective players used to playing with a helmet and pads.

There are roughly 85 players from Prokick Australia in American college or pro football. Among those are Broncos rookie Jeremy Crawshaw (Florida), Bears punter Tory Taylor (Iowa) and Seahawks punter Michael Dickson (Texas).

The program has produced Ray Guy award winners and numerous All-Americans since it was started



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Colorado punter Damon Greaves follows the flight of his kick in the second half against BYU on Saturday in Boulder, Colo. Greaves is one of several standout Australian punters in the Big 12 this season.

in 2007 by former Australian Football League player Nathan Chapman.

"We're instinctively good at kicking. But there's not much that needs to happen for it to go wrong, so we still need to practice it," Chapman said in a phone interview from Australia. "It's part of what we've grown up doing and

this is where we start to just utilize some of those skills to bring it into the American game."

The Big Ten had an influx of Aussie punters in 2022.

Now, it's the Big 12's turn.

"If we put a dominant punter in the Big Ten or the Big 12 or the SEC and a coach plays against one of our players and says, 'I want that,'

we need to give them someone who's going to compete against that level," Chapman explained. "We're really selective on who we give the opportunity to kick at that level and they do a lot of training to get through our processes to make sure that we feel like they can handle the demands of SEC football or the Big 12."



WILFREDO LEE/AP

Though he has been getting heaps of praise this season, Miami defensive lineman Akheem Mesidor has been careful to not listen to any of it.

Standout: Mesidor-Bain combo devastating against offenses so far

FROM PAGE 24

through it as a player. If you're the only good pass rusher in your team, they're going to wear your (butt) out.

"My best years, I had Trace Armstrong when he and I led the league in sacks combined," he added. "Had Adewale Ogunleye beside me, had Kenny Mixon, had Joey Porter, had Cam Wake. How many great players? ... Bain understands what Mez brings to the table, and Mez understands what Bain brings to the table. They're separate entities, obviously, but they work so well together. They compete with each other. They try to outwork each other, and it makes them both great."

As Taylor was saying those words last week, Mesidor and Bain were the last two players working on the Miami practice field an hour after practice had ended. They were still going, with a couple of younger players — presumably guys who'll vie to take their spots in 2026 — watching and learning.

"Mesidor has done everything we've asked," Hurricanes coach

Mario Cristobal said. "He's become something special."

Cristobal then reeled off a list of about a half-dozen plays that Mesidor made at big times in Miami's season-opening win over Notre Dame and its Sept. 20 win over rival Florida. He then added that Mesidor probably wouldn't want to hear any praise.

Indeed, Mesidor said when he goes to sleep these days, he's not thinking about his highlights.

"I've been told by a lot of people about how well I've played, but all that's been in the back of my head since last Saturday at 11 o'clock is how much money I left on the field, not how much I gained," Mesidor said. "I'm trying to get that out of my mind. It kind of keeps me up at night. Going to sleep is difficult, because I just can't stop thinking about it. You can't be satisfied with where you are."

Sometimes, that also includes the position you play.

Mesidor played defensive tackle last year and, put simply, didn't care for it. He believes he's a defensive end, thinks he's best suited to play on the end and asked Tay-

lor and Cristobal what he had to do in order to move back to that position for 2025.

He got a list. He checked every box. The move was made and he's off to a flying start.

"The best thing for him, and the best thing for the University of Miami, was for him to play defensive end and go back to his natural position," Taylor said. "And there's nobody who has worked harder than Akheem Mesidor."

It made sense that the final chapter of Mesidor's college career comes in a melting pot area like South Florida. Besides being raised in Canada, Mesidor also has Haitian heritage — there is a large Haitian population in the Miami area — and speaks French. Add it all up, Cristobal said, and that gives Mesidor a perspective that not many college guys have.

"I have a lot of friends back home who I grew up playing football with who would do anything to be in this position, and they weren't able to have this chance," Mesidor said. "I know that I'm super blessed and I'm fortunate to be in this position."

NFL



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Tutu Atwell makes a dash to the end zone after a catch against the Indianapolis Colts during the second half Sunday in Inglewood, Calif.

Despite 3-1 start, Rams want to balance offense

By GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The ball hasn't been distributed evenly in the Los Angeles Rams' offense so far this season, and coach Sean McVay would like to change that.

Yet it's still not clear their star-reliant approach is a bad thing at all — particularly when the supporting cast can still step up as dramatically as Tutu Atwell did Sunday.

Although Atwell made the single biggest play by a receiver in the Rams' 27-20 comeback victory over Indianapolis, NFL receiving leader Puka Nacua was their backbone with another prolific afternoon in his latest wildly productive season.

Because the Colts couldn't stop Matthew Stafford from feeding Nacua for 13 catches and a career-high 170 yards in the most productive game for any NFL wideout this season, they weren't able to overcome Atwell's spectacular 88-yard TD reception that put Los Angeles (3-1) ahead to stay with 1:33 to play.

Heading into a short week of preparation for their first NFC West game against the San Francisco 49ers on Thursday night, McVay realizes the Rams' passing offense doesn't yet have balance.



**San Francisco 49ers (3-1)
at Los Angeles Rams (3-1)**
AFN-Sports2
2:15 a.m. Thursday CET
9:15 p.m. Thursday JKT

Matthew Stafford has thrown 97 passes targeted to his wide receivers this season, but 85 of them went to Nacua or Davante Adams, who each had a TD catch against Indianapolis.

"I do think it's important with the distribution of the ball that we're cognizant of that and still getting those guys involved," McVay said Monday. "You just continue to let those guys know, where are those examples? What a cool credit to Tutu. You talk about the enjoyment of others' success, and watching how happy his teammates were for him, and him being ready in the moment. ... I think you want to get (Nacua and Adams) involved, but also make sure that we're balanced. That's something that we're aware of, and we'll continue to try to monitor and figure

out ultimately what's best for our football team."

LA is off to an excellent start because its opponents have yet to stop its star receivers or Kyren Williams, who has 68 of their 97 rushing attempts by all players except Stafford. The divide was even more stark before Blake Corum got a career-high nine carries against the Colts — although they resulted in only 21 yards.

Williams is the NFL's sixth-leading rusher with 303 yards, while rookie fourth-round pick Jarquez Hunter has only played on special teams.

The Rams' stars might dominate the ball, but they're also ecstatic when a teammate such as Atwell gets a chance to shine.

"I almost cried, to be honest with you," Adams said. "Just being on the sideline, you could just feel the emotion. ... Obviously, the team, everybody in this building just loves Tu and what he brings."

McVay's group is up to fourth in total offense at 388.3 yards per game after hanging 462 on Indy. Aside from four straight punts in a brutal third quarter, Los Angeles was aggressive, versatile and inventive — and they're not even getting contributions from their highest draft pick last spring, inactive tight end Terrance Ferguson.

Weekly statistics

AFC individual leaders

Quarterbacks

| | Att | Com | Yds | TD | Int |
|---------------|-----|-----|------|----|-----|
| D.Jones, Ind | 121 | 87 | 1078 | 4 | 2 |
| Herbert, LAC | 149 | 95 | 1063 | 7 | 3 |
| Maye, NE | 123 | 91 | 988 | 7 | 2 |
| G.Smith, Las | 127 | 81 | 948 | 6 | 7 |
| Mahomes, KC | 142 | 87 | 939 | 7 | 1 |
| Jackson, Bal | 95 | 68 | 869 | 10 | 1 |
| Nix, Den | 137 | 90 | 861 | 7 | 4 |
| Lawrence, Jac | 144 | 84 | 845 | 5 | 4 |

Rushers

| | Att | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Taylor, Ind | 77 | 414 | 5.4 | 68 | 3 |
| Cook, Buf | 75 | 401 | 5.3 | 44t | 5 |
| Etienne, Jac | 65 | 394 | 6.1 | 71 | 2 |
| Dobbins, Den | 57 | 323 | 5.7 | 41 | 3 |
| Henry, Bal | 49 | 284 | 5.8 | 49 | 3 |
| Jeanty, Las | 68 | 282 | 4.1 | 64t | 2 |
| Hampton, LAC | 54 | 270 | 5.0 | 54t | 2 |
| Pollard, Ten | 68 | 261 | 3.8 | 21 | 1 |
| Achane, Mia | 50 | 246 | 4.9 | 26 | 1 |
| Hall, NYJ | 52 | 238 | 4.6 | 23 | 0 |

Receivers

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|---------------|----|-----|------|-----|----|
| Johnston, LAC | 22 | 337 | 15.3 | 60t | 4 |
| Wilson, NYJ | 27 | 311 | 11.5 | 33t | 3 |
| Flowers, Bal | 23 | 305 | 13.3 | 39 | 1 |
| Sutton, Den | 18 | 266 | 14.8 | 52t | 3 |
| T.Hill, Mia | 21 | 265 | 12.6 | 47 | 1 |
| Chase, Cin | 26 | 264 | 10.2 | 28 | 1 |
| Warren, Ind | 19 | 263 | 13.8 | 41 | 0 |
| Metcalfe, Pit | 15 | 261 | 17.4 | 80t | 3 |
| Collins, Hou | 18 | 260 | 14.4 | 50t | 2 |
| Meyers, Las | 21 | 258 | 12.3 | 45 | 0 |

Punters

| | No | Yds | Lg | Avg |
|--------------|----|------|----|------|
| Rehkwow, Cin | 23 | 1213 | 70 | 52.7 |
| Stout, Bal | 12 | 618 | 63 | 51.5 |

Scoring Touchdowns

| | TD | Rush | Rec | Ret | Pts |
|-----------|----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Cook, Buf | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| 4 tied | 4 | | | 0 | 24 |

Kicking

| | PAT | FG | LG | Pts |
|--------------|-------|-------|----|-----|
| Shrader, Ind | 12-12 | 13-14 | 52 | 51 |
| Butker, KC | 7-9 | 10-13 | 59 | 37 |
| Prater, Buf | 13-13 | 8-9 | 52 | 37 |

Kickoff Returners

| | NO | Yds | AVG | LG | TD |
|------------|----|-----|------|-----|----|
| Davis, NYJ | 11 | 323 | 29.4 | 41 | 0 |
| Gibson, NE | 10 | 293 | 29.3 | 90t | 1 |

AFC team statistics

Average per game

Offense

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Buffalo | 404.0 | 163.5 | 240.5 |
| Indianapolis | 397.2 | 136.2 | 261.0 |
| L.A. Chargers | 356.2 | 107.2 | 249.0 |
| Denver | 354.5 | 143.2 | 211.2 |
| Jacksonville | 348.5 | 144.0 | 204.5 |
| Baltimore | 338.0 | 133.5 | 204.5 |
| New England | 336.2 | 101.2 | 235.0 |
| Kansas City | 332.2 | 110.5 | 221.8 |
| Las Vegas | 329.5 | 114.2 | 215.2 |
| N.Y. Jets | 304.8 | 144.5 | 160.2 |
| Houston | 288.8 | 103.5 | 185.2 |
| Miami | 286.2 | 98.0 | 188.2 |
| Cleveland | 279.8 | 84.8 | 195.0 |
| Pittsburgh | 263.5 | 80.0 | 183.5 |
| Tennessee | 210.5 | 87.0 | 123.5 |
| Cincinnati | 205.2 | 50.0 | 155.2 |

Defense

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Cleveland | 222.5 | 70.2 | 152.2 |
| L.A. Chargers | 270.0 | 111.2 | 158.8 |
| Houston | 280.5 | 102.2 | 178.2 |
| Denver | 285.2 | 99.2 | 186.0 |
| Buffalo | 290.0 | 164.2 | 125.8 |
| Kansas City | 312.8 | 127.0 | 185.8 |
| Jacksonville | 316.2 | 82.8 | 233.5 |
| New England | 319.0 | 77.5 | 241.5 |
| Indianapolis | 319.8 | 96.0 | 223.8 |
| N.Y. Jets | 330.2 | 130.5 | 199.8 |
| Las Vegas | 331.0 | 102.8 | 228.2 |
| Tennessee | 368.5 | 141.5 | 227.0 |
| Miami | 378.8 | 158.0 | 220.8 |
| Pittsburgh | 382.5 | 122.0 | 260.5 |
| Cincinnati | 397.8 | 135.8 | 262.0 |
| Baltimore | 406.8 | 141.2 | 265.5 |

NFC individual leaders

Quarterbacks

| | Att | Com | Yds | TD | Int |
|------------------|-----|-----|------|----|-----|
| Prescott, Dal | 166 | 121 | 1119 | 6 | 3 |
| Stafford, LAR | 136 | 92 | 1114 | 8 | 2 |
| Love, GB | 121 | 84 | 1000 | 8 | 1 |
| Goff, Det | 122 | 90 | 929 | 9 | 2 |
| Ca.Williams, Chi | 130 | 81 | 927 | 8 | 2 |
| Penix, Atl | 125 | 78 | 918 | 3 | 3 |
| Darnold, Sea | 100 | 70 | 905 | 5 | 2 |
| Mayfield, TB | 139 | 83 | 904 | 8 | 1 |

Rushers

| | Att | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Robinson, Atl | 64 | 314 | 4.9 | 25 | 1 |
| J.Williams, Dal | 63 | 312 | 5.0 | 30t | 4 |
| K.Williams, LAR | 68 | 303 | 4.5 | 15 | 1 |
| Gibbs, Det | 58 | 271 | 4.7 | 42 | 4 |
| Mason, Min | 56 | 271 | 4.8 | 24 | 2 |
| Jacobs, GB | 80 | 266 | 3.3 | 19 | 4 |
| Kamara, NO | 65 | 256 | 3.9 | 18t | 1 |
| Montgomery, Det | 43 | 245 | 5.7 | 72 | 3 |
| Walker, Sea | 58 | 244 | 4.2 | 21 | 3 |
| Barkley, Phi | 77 | 237 | 3.1 | 16 | 3 |

Receivers

| | No | Yds | Avg | LG | TD |
|------------------|----|-----|------|-----|----|
| Nacua, LAR | 42 | 503 | 12.0 | 31 | 1 |
| Smith-Njig., Sea | 26 | 402 | 15.5 | 45 | 1 |
| Pearsall, SF | 20 | 327 | 16.4 | 45 | 0 |
| Jefferson, Min | 22 | 326 | 14.8 | 50 | 1 |
| St. Brown, Det | 27 | 307 | 11.4 | 34 | 6 |
| McCaffrey, SF | 31 | 305 | 9.8 | 29 | 2 |
| Pickens, Dal | 21 | 300 | 14.3 | 28t | 4 |
| Odunze, Chi | 20 | 296 | 14.8 | 37 | 5 |
| Egbuka, TB | 18 | 282 | 15.7 | 77t | 4 |
| McMillan, Car | 18 | 278 | 15.4 | 40 | 0 |

Punters

| | No | Yds | Lg | Avg |
|------------|----|------|----|------|
| Mann, Phi | 19 | 1005 | 70 | 52.9 |
| Whelan, GB | 14 | 725 | 65 | 51.8 |

Scoring Touchdowns

| | TD | Rush | Rec | Ret | Pts |
|----------------|----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| St. Brown, Det | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 36 |
| Odunze, Chi | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 30 |

Kicking

| | PAT | FG | LG | Pts |
|-------------|-------|------|----|-----|
| Myers, Sea | 12-12 | 9-11 | 56 | 39 |
| Aubrey, Dal | 11-11 | 9-9 | 64 | 38 |
| Bates, Det | 17-17 | 6-8 | 58 | 35 |

Kickoff Returners

| | NO | Yds | AVG | LG | TD |
|----------------|----|-----|------|----|----|
| Samuel, Was | 6 | 221 | 36.8 | 69 | 0 |
| McCaffrey, Was | 9 | 285 | 31.7 | 58 | 0 |

NFC team statistics

Average per game

Offense

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Dallas | 404.2 | 123.0 | 281.2 |
| L.A. Rams | 388.2 | 120.8 | 267.5 |
| San Francisco | 368.0 | 88.0 | 280.0 |
| Detroit | 365.0 | 139.0 | 226.0 |
| Atlanta | 362.8 | 136.5 | 226.2 |
| Green Bay | 347.2 | 114.5 | 232.8 |
| Washington | 339.0 | 154.8 | 184.2 |
| Tampa Bay | 335.8 | 124.0 | 211.8 |
| Seattle | 332.2 | 110.8 | 221.5 |
| Chicago | 328.0 | 102.2 | 225.8 |
| N.Y. Giants | 317.0 | 112.2 | 204.8 |
| New Orleans | 301.0 | 124.0 | 177.0 |
| Minnesota | 294.0 | 109.2 | 184.8 |
| Carolina | 289.2 | 100.2 | 189.0 |
| Arizona | 270.5 | 105.8 | 164.8 |
| Philadelphia | 251.5 | 113.5 | 138.0 |

Defense

| | Yards | Rush | Pass |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Atlanta | 244.0 | 109.0 | 135.0 |
| Tampa Bay | 272.8 | 85.0 | 187.8 |
| San Francisco | 280.5 | 115.5 | 165.0 |
| Minnesota | 281.8 | 130.2 | 151.5 |
| Green Bay | 283.2 | 77.5 | 205.8 |
| L.A. Rams | 284.5 | 98.5 | 186.0 |
| Detroit | 293.0 | 94.0 | 199.0 |
| Seattle | 297.0 | 89.8 | 207.2 |
| New Orleans | 324.0 | 118.8 | 205.2 |
| Carolina | 327.5 | 129.2 | 198.2 |
| Philadelphia | 333.2 | 126.0 | 207.2 |
| Arizona | 351.5 | 96.0 | 255.5 |
| Washington | 356.0 | 107.5 | 248.5 |
| Chicago | 379.5 | 164.5 | 215.0 |
| N.Y. Giants | 388.5 | 153.0 | 235.5 |
| Dallas | 420.5 | 123.2 | 297.2 |

NFL/MLB

Gabriel will start at QB for Browns

By JOE REEDY
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Rookie Dillon Gabriel will get his first NFL start Sunday when Cleveland faces the Minnesota Vikings in London.

The Browns announced Wednesday that they were benching Joe Flacco after he struggled to lead the offense in the first four games.



Gabriel

Cleveland is 1-3 and ranked next-to-last in scoring, averaging 14 points per game. The team has scored 17

points or fewer in nine straight games dating back to last season. Gabriel will be the fifth different starting QB in 10 games, joining Jameis Winston, Dorian Thompson-Robinson, Bailey Zappe and Flacco.

Gabriel was selected in the third round of April's draft. He has seen action in two games — Week 2 at Baltimore and Week 4 at Detroit — and has completed all three of his passes for 19 yards and a touchdown. He was named the backup quarterback at the end of training camp after the Browns traded Kenny Pickett to the Las Vegas Raiders.

During the preseason, Gabriel led Cleveland to either a touchdown or field goal on five of his seven drives. He also directed a pair of two-minute, first-half drives against the Philadelphia Eagles and Los Angeles Rams.

In his two preseason outings, Gabriel completed 25 of 37 passes for 272 yards with one touchdown and one interception.

The Browns practiced at their facility Wednesday before taking a flight to Britain.

Among the 33 quarterbacks who have made at least 56 pass attempts, Flacco is last in the league with a 60.3 passer rating, has the second-worst completion rate (58.1%) and his six interceptions are second-most.

Cleveland's offense is ranked 27th in total yards (279.8 yards per game), 20th in passing (195 ypg) and 30th in rushing (84.8 ypg).

The switch to Gabriel is also sure to reignite questions about where Shedeur Sanders might eventually factor down the line or if Sanders will be Gabriel's backup. He has been the third-string quarterback the first four weeks.

Sanders dropped to the 144th pick and fifth round after many thought he would go in the first two rounds. He completed 17 of 29 passes for 152 yards and two touchdowns in two preseason games.

NFL scoreboard

American Conference

| East | | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|-------|--------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Buffalo | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 133 90 |
| New England | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 102 81 |
| Miami | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 83 118 |
| N.Y. Jets | 0 | 4 | 0 | .000 | 90 120 |

| South | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|------|--------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Indianapolis | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 123 83 |
| Jacksonville | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 96 72 |
| Houston | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 64 51 |
| Tennessee | 0 | 4 | 0 | .000 | 51 120 |

| North | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|------|---------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Pittsburgh | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 96 98 |
| Cincinnati | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 61 119 |
| Baltimore | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 131 133 |
| Cleveland | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 56 102 |

| West | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|------|-------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| L.A. Chargers | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 88 71 |
| Denver | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 96 67 |
| Kansas City | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 97 76 |
| Las Vegas | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 77 99 |

National Conference

| East | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------|---------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Philadelphia | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 108 88 |
| Washington | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 107 91 |
| Dallas | 1 | 2 | 1 | .375 | 114 132 |
| N.Y. Giants | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 73 101 |

| South | | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|------|--------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Tampa Bay | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 97 97 |
| Atlanta | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 76 86 |
| Carolina | 1 | 3 | 0 | .250 | 75 95 |
| New Orleans | 0 | 4 | 0 | .000 | 66 121 |

| North | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|------|---------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| Detroit | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 137 88 |
| Green Bay | 2 | 1 | 1 | .625 | 104 84 |
| Chicago | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 101 117 |
| Minnesota | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 102 80 |

| West | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|------|--------|
| | W | L | T | Pct | PF PA |
| L.A. Rams | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 100 81 |
| San Francisco | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 80 75 |
| Seattle | 3 | 1 | 0 | .750 | 111 67 |
| Arizona | 2 | 2 | 0 | .500 | 82 74 |

Thursday's game

San Francisco at L.A. Rams

Sunday's games

Minnesota vs. Cleveland at London
Dallas at N.Y. Jets
Denver at Philadelphia
Houston at Baltimore
Las Vegas at Indianapolis
Miami at Carolina
N.Y. Giants at New Orleans
Tampa Bay at Seattle
Tennessee at Arizona
Detroit at Cincinnati
Washington at L.A. Chargers
New England at Buffalo
Open: Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Chicago, Green Bay

Monday's game

Kansas City at Jacksonville

Thursday, Oct. 9

Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants

Sunday, Oct. 12

Denver vs. N.Y. Jets at London
Arizona at Indianapolis
Cleveland at Pittsburgh
Dallas at Carolina
L.A. Chargers at Miami
L.A. Rams at Baltimore
New England at New Orleans
Seattle at Jacksonville
Tennessee at Las Vegas
Cincinnati at Green Bay
San Francisco at Tampa Bay
Detroit at Kansas City
Open: Houston, Minnesota

Monday, Oct. 13

Buffalo at Atlanta
Chicago at Washington

Thursday, Oct. 16

Pittsburgh at Cincinnati

Sunday, Oct. 19

L.A. Rams vs. Jacksonville at London
Philadelphia at Minnesota
New Orleans at Chicago
Miami at Cleveland
Las Vegas at Kansas City
Carolina at N.Y. Jets
New England at Tennessee
N.Y. Giants at Denver
Indianapolis at L.A. Chargers
Green Bay at Arizona
Washington at Dallas
Atlanta at San Francisco



COLIN HUBBARD/AP

In 10 seasons as the Braves' manger, Brian Snitker led Atlanta to seven consecutive playoff appearances, highlighted by a World Series championship in 2021, and won Manager of the Year in 2018.

Snitker retires as Braves manager after 10 years

Associated Press

ATLANTA — When in doubt, Brian Snitker turned to Bobby Cox for advice.

It was only natural for Snitker to once again seek counsel from Cox, through his wife Pam, when considering if this was the right time to step down as Atlanta Braves manager. Snitker received reassurance that following his career as a manager, Cox relished serving the same advisory role that Snitker now assumes.

Snitker, who managed the Braves to the 2021 World Series championship as the highlight of almost a half-century with the organization, will not return to the dugout next season.

Atlanta announced Wednesday that the 69-year-old Snitker will be inducted into the team's hall of fame next year.

"I talked with Pam yesterday," Snitker said at a news conference. "She did tell me once he got the hang of this position, he really loved it."

Cox was Snitker's mentor. Snitker continued to visit Cox regularly after Cox was hospitalized in 2019 following a stroke. Cox, 84, returned to Truist Park on Aug. 22 for a 30-year celebration of the Braves' 1995 World Series title.

The news conference to announce Snitker's decision was described as a celebration by Atlanta chairman Terry McGuirk and general manager Alex Anthopoulos. Snitker was emotional at times as

he described his late-season uncertainty about his desire to manage another year and how he finally concluded it was time to step down.

"I said I'm going to need a little time after that last out to decide what I'm going to do," said Snitker, who was joined by his wife, Ronnie, at the news conference. "After I got home and decompressed a little bit I did decide this was the best move."

Snitker has been with the organization for 49 years as a minor league player and manager and major league coach and manager.

Snitker led the Braves to 811 wins, six NL East division titles, one wild-card berth and the 2021 World Series championship in his 10 seasons as manager.

"Honestly I never thought I'd manage one day in the major leagues, much less 10 years," Snitker said. "I never thought I'd hoist a trophy."

Snitker paused to collect his emotions before referring to players at the news conference and his joy to "be around a group of guys that makes this so special."

Atlanta players who attended the news conference included Ozzie Albies, Spencer Strider, Joe Jiménez, Reynaldo López, Austin Riley, Michael Harris II and Drake Baldwin.

McGuirk presented Snitker with keys to a new Ford truck and announced the team was sending him and his wife on a vacation to Hawaii.

"Today we celebrate and honor not only one of the most accomplished managers in the history of our franchise but also one of the finest people to ever wear the uniform," McGuirk said. "You will always be a Brave, a Brave forever, and this organization will always be your home."

Snitker said he looked forward to his new role.

"I'm still going to be here," he said. "I'm going to be in spring training. I'm excited about this new role."

Cox was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2014. His No. 6 was retired by Atlanta.

Snitker, who signed with the team as an undrafted free agent catcher in 1977, spent 20 seasons with the organization as a minor league manager. He was named the Braves' interim manager May 17, 2016, and was given the title of permanent manager following the season.

He posted a record of 811-688 as manager and ranks third in franchise history in wins, trailing only Cox (2,149) and Frank Selee (1,004).

Anthopoulos and McGuirk did not address a plan to find Snitker's replacement. Atlanta bench coach Walt Weiss is Colorado's former manager. Third base coach Fredi González is a former manager with the Braves and Marlins.

Atlanta finished 76-87 this season, which was the final year of Snitker's current contract.

MLB PLAYOFFS

Dodgers start strong in Wild Card

By BETH HARRIS
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Shohei Ohtani and Teoscar Hernández hit two home runs apiece, Blake Snell struck out nine over seven strong innings and the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Cincinnati Reds 10-5 in their NL Wild Card Series opener Tuesday night.

Tommy Edman also went deep for the Dodgers, who tied a franchise postseason record with five homers and pounded out 15 hits as they opened their bid to become the first back-to-back World Series winners in 25 years.

Ohtani, who had a career-high 55 homers in the regular season, homered leading off the first. His 117.7 mph drive off a 100.4 mph fastball from Reds ace Hunter Greene was the fastest pitch Ohtani has homered on in his major league career.

“It was a really hard pitch to hit, but I felt like I reacted pretty well,” Ohtani said through a translator. “I was happy I was able to help the team score early.”

The two-way superstar from Japan added a 454-foot, two-run shot off Connor Phillips with two outs in the sixth. Ohtani also struck out three times.

The only hit Snell allowed through six innings was Matt McClain’s double down the third base line that eluded a diving Max Muncy with two outs in the third. Cincinnati scored two runs in the seventh on Elly De La Cruz’s



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

The Dodgers’ Teoscar Hernández celebrates his three-run home run during the third inning in Game 1 of an NL wild-card series against the Cincinnati Reds on Tuesday in Los Angeles. The Dodgers won 10-5.

groundout and Tyler Stephenson’s double.

Snell retired his initial eight batters in his first playoff start since 2022, when the two-time Cy Young Award winner was with the San Diego Padres. He matched his postseason high for strikeouts in the longest postseason start of his career.

“I felt really in control, could read swings and just kind of navi-

gate through the lineup the way I wanted to,” Snell said.

The cheers turned to boos for a shaky Los Angeles bullpen in the eighth when the Reds batted around. Dodgers relievers Alex Vesia, Edgardo Henriquez and Jack Dreyer combined to issue four walks as Cincinnati scored three runs and pulled to 10-5. The trio needed 59 pitches to get three outs.

“When you’re on the attack, those guys are on their heels with the lead we have,” LA manager Dave Roberts said. “When you start being too fine and getting behind, you start giving them free bases. That’s how you can build innings and get momentum, so that’s what I saw in that inning there, for sure.”

Game 2 in the best-of-three series was Wednesday night. The winner advances to a best-of-five Division Series against Philadelphia.

Greene was knocked out after just three innings, a disappointing postseason debut in his hometown. He gave up five runs, including three homers, and six hits on 65 pitches. The right-hander, whose favorite team growing up was the Dodgers, struck out four and walked three.

“He didn’t locate,” Reds manager Terry Francona said, “and when he didn’t locate he really paid a price for that.”

Greene walked Freddie Freeman and Muncy back-to-back in the third. They moved up on a wild pitch before Hernández’s three-run homer to the left-field pavilion. Edman followed with a solo shot, extending the lead to 5-0.

“From the outset we had a really good game plan against Hunter,” Roberts said, “and we just didn’t miss pitches when he made mistakes.”

Hernández greeted Phillips with a two-strike homer that made it 6-0 in the fifth.

Scoreboard

Playoffs

x-if necessary
WILD CARD SERIES
Best-of-three
American League
Detroit 1, Cleveland 0

Tuesday: Detroit 2, Cleveland 1
Wednesday: Detroit at Cleveland
x-Thursday: Detroit (Flaherty 8-15) at Cleveland (Ceconci 7-7)

Boston 1, New York 0

Tuesday: Boston 3, New York 1
Wednesday: Boston at New York
x-Thursday: Boston (TBD) at New York (Schlittler 4-3)

National League
Chicago 1, San Diego 0

Tuesday: Chicago 3, San Diego 1
Wednesday: San Diego at Chicago
x-Thursday: San Diego (Darvish 5-5) at Chicago (TBD)

Los Angeles 1, Cincinnati 0

Tuesday: Los Angeles 10, Cincinnati 5
Wednesday: Cincinnati at Los Angeles
x-Thursday: Cincinnati (Abbott 10-7) at Los Angeles (TBD)

DIVISION SERIES
Best-of-five
American League

Toronto vs. New York or Boston

Saturday, Oct. 4: at Toronto
Sunday, Oct. 5: at Toronto
Tuesday, Oct. 7: at New York-Boston winner
x-Wednesday, Oct. 8: at New York-Boston winner

x-Friday, Oct. 10: at Toronto
Seattle vs. Cleveland or Detroit
Saturday, Oct. 4: at Seattle
Sunday, Oct. 5: at Seattle
Tuesday, Oct. 7: at Cleveland-Detroit winner
x-Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Cleveland-Detroit winner
x-Friday, Oct. 10: at Seattle

National League

Milwaukee vs. Chicago or San Diego
Saturday, Oct. 4: at Milwaukee
Monday, Oct. 6: at Milwaukee
Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Chicago-San Diego winner
x-Thursday, Oct. 9: at Chicago-San Diego winner
x-Saturday, Oct. 11: at Milwaukee

Philadelphia vs. Los Angeles or Cincinnati
Saturday, Oct. 4: at Philadelphia
Monday, Oct. 6: at Philadelphia
Wed, Oct. 8: at Los Angeles-Cincinnati winner
x-Thursday, Oct. 9: at Los Angeles-Cincinnati winner
x-Saturday, Oct. 11: at Philadelphia

Cubs win Game 1 as Suzuki, Kelly hit back-to-back HRs

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Seiya Suzuki and Carson Kelly hit back-to-back homers, helping the Chicago Cubs beat the San Diego Padres 3-1 on Tuesday in Game 1 of their NL Wild Card Series.

Chicago also got a perfect performance from its bullpen in the franchise’s first playoff win since the 2017 National League Championship Series. The Cubs were swept by the Miami Marlins in the wild-card round in 2020 during their last postseason appearance.

Game 2 of the best-of-three series was back at Wrigley Field on Wednesday afternoon, with the winner advancing to face the MLB-best Milwaukee Brewers.

“All in all, a really good day for us,” Kelly said. “Having a chance to clinch tomorrow and move to the next round is all you can ask for.”

Suzuki opened the fifth inning with a 424-foot drive to left-center off Nick Pivetta, tying it at 1 and sending a charge through a towel-waving crowd of 39,114 on a picturesque day.

Pivetta had retired 11 in a row before Suzuki extended his homer

streak to five games going back to the regular season.

Kelly followed with a towering shot that drifted just over the wall in left-center. The catcher and Chicago native held his right arm in the air as he rounded first base.

It was the MLB postseason debut for both Suzuki and Kelly, who combined for the franchise’s first set of back-to-back homers in the playoffs since Miguel Montero and Dexter Fowler went deep on Oct. 15, 2016, against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

“Simply put, it was fantastic,” Suzuki said through a translator. “You just felt the passion of the fans, them cheering us on. Rounding the bases, I felt some nerves, obviously, but great feeling overall.”

Pivetta struck out nine in five solid innings, but San Diego’s lineup was shut down by Matthew Boyd and four relievers.

Jackson Merrill and Xander Bogaerts produced an early lead for the Padres with back-to-back doubles in the second. Bogaerts advanced to third on center fielder Pete Crow-Armstrong’s throwing error, but he was stranded there when Boyd retired



NAM Y. HUH/AP

The Cubs’ Seiya Suzuki rounds the bases after hitting a home run during the fifth inning of Game 1 of an NL wild-card series against the San Diego Padres on Tuesday in Chicago. The Cubs won 3-1.

Ryan O’Hearn (grounder to shortstop), Gavin Sheets (popup to third) and Jake Cronenworth (grounder to shortstop).

San Diego put runners on the corners with one out in the fourth, but Cubs shortstop Dansby Swanson made a nice running catch to

help Boyd escape again.

“Everybody knows how big those situations are,” Padres slugger Fernando Tatis Jr. said. “We’ve just got to do better in those situations.”

San Diego manager Mike Shildt said Swanson’s over-the-shoulder grab on O’Hearn’s soft liner was a big moment.

“Right off the bat, I thought it was going to fall in there, but Dansby got a nice drop step, went out and made what ended up being probably the play of the game,” Shildt said.

Boyd exited after Freddy Fermin’s one-out single in the fifth. As shadows started to creep across home plate, Daniel Palencia retired each of his five batters for the win, including strikeouts of Manny Machado and Jackson Merrill.

Drew Pomeranz and Andrew Kittredge each got three outs before Brad Keller handled the ninth for the save.

“Just a brilliant job,” Chicago manager Craig Counsell said of his bullpen. “Everybody just made — executed pitches, made pitches. Can’t say enough about what they did today.”

MLB PLAYOFFS

Red Sox top Yankees in opener thanks to Crochet's dominance

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Garrett Crochet was in Boston's dugout on the day before the playoffs began when manager Alex Cora picked up the phone to the bullpen to contact a member of the front office.

"Tomorrow you're going to make one call to the bullpen," Cora recalled the pitcher telling him.

"I said: 'Maybe two,'" the manager responded.

"He's like: 'No, no, no. One. It's going to be straight to Chappy,'" Cora said.

Crochet backed up his bravado with his pitches. He threw 117 of them, the most in a postseason game in six years, besting Max Fried and the New York Yankees with a throwback performance on the mound.

The left-hander struck out 11 and walked none over 7⅓ innings while allowing four hits as the Red Sox rallied for a 3-1 victory Tuesday night in an AL Wild Card Series opener. When he was pulled, Cora went directly to All-Star closer Aroldis Chapman. No setup men needed.

"Just being arrogant, to be honest. I didn't actually expect that to be the case," Crochet said.

Anthony Volpe put New York ahead in the second with an opposite-field homer to right on a sinker. Crochet then retired 17 consecutive batters until Volpe's one-out single in the eighth.

By then, Boston had taken a 2-1 lead. As soon as Fried left the game, Cedanne Rafaela overcome an 0-2 count against reliever Luke Weaver to walk on 11 pitches. Nick Sogard doubled and pinch-hitter Masataka Yoshida lined a two-run single.

Crochet saved his hardest pitch for last, a 100.2 mph full-count offering on the inside corner at the

knees that froze Austin Wells for a called third strike.

"That's why we call him the beast," Red Sox shortstop Trevor Story said.

Crochet went to full counts on four batters and struck out all four.

"We had some big 3-2 counts and some hitter's counts and just weren't able to come through," Yankees first baseman Paul Goldschmidt said.

When Crochet reached the dugout after striking out Wells, he was clutched in a bear hug by fellow pitcher Lucas Giolito, his old Chicago White Sox teammate.

"He was aggressive. You could see it in his eyes before the game that he wanted it bad," said Boston's Alex Bregman, who in his 100th postseason game added an RBI double in the ninth off David Bednar.

Victory wasn't assured until Chapman escaped a bases-loaded, none-out jam in the ninth.

The winner of Game 1 advanced in all 12 previous Wild Card Series, 10 in sweeps.

"Hopefully we can continue that," Cora said.

A 26-year-old left-hander, Crochet was traded to the Red Sox in December, escaping a White Sox team that lost 121 games in 2024, a major league record since 1900. He agreed in April to a \$170 million, six-year contract that starts next year.

Crochet went 18-5 with a 2.59 ERA this season, leading the major leagues with 255 strikeouts and topping the AL with 205⅓ innings.

"He's just a guy that wants it bad," Cora said. "He was in a situation last year that he was learning how to become a starter. He got traded to become the ace. He got paid like an ace, and since day one he's acted like that."



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Boston Red Sox pitcher Garrett Crochet talks to manager Alex Cora as he walks off the field during the eighth inning of Game 1 of an AL wild-card series against the Yankees on Tuesday in New York.



SUE OGRICKI/AP

Tigers starting pitcher Tarik Skubal throws home in front of second baseman Gleyber Torres during Game 1 of an AL wild-card series against the Guardians on Tuesday. Skubal struck out 14 in Detroit's 2-1 victory.

Skubal's gem gives Tigers momentum after late skid

By JOE REEDY
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Detroit catcher Dillon Dingler knew two hours before the first pitch in Game 1 of the AL Wild Card Series against Cleveland on Tuesday that Tarik Skubal was going to be more dominant than usual.

"As soon as he walked through the door, I saw the intensity," Dingler said. "It was fun to be a part of."

After being a part of two frustrating losses to the Guardians the past two weeks as the Tigers spiraled through a historic collapse that cost them the AL Central title, Skubal was determined that Detroit would seize the early momentum in the best-of-three playoff series.

The left-hander tied the Tigers' postseason record with 14 strikeouts in 7⅓ overpowering innings as they beat Cleveland 2-1.

"It means a lot to take the ball Game 1. And it doesn't really matter how we got here. We got in," Skubal said. "Everybody's in the same boat. And we're up 1-0 in a best-of-three. So it doesn't really matter how you get here, as long as you get in."

Skubal equaled Joe Coleman's team mark of 14 strikeouts in Game 3 of the 1972 American League Championship Series against the Oakland Athletics.

"I understand, but it doesn't

really matter. Winning is what matters to me. It's mattered to me all year," Skubal said. "I think winning is the most important thing in sports. It's why you play, is to win."

Skubal, favored to win his second straight AL Cy Young Award, went 13-6 during the regular season with an AL-low 2.21 ERA. He ranked second in strikeouts with 241. But Detroit lost each of Skubal's final three starts, including two vs. the Guardians, and ended up with a wild card after blowing a big division lead.

It was all part of the Tigers going an AL-worst 7-17 in September. Meanwhile, Cleveland won 19 of its final 23 games and rallied from 15½ games back in early July to win its second consecutive AL Central crown.

"He's a different kind of pitcher. Most guys that are pitching for that day are intense and more focused," Dingler said. "He has the ability to be the same person — like joke around like he would usually be — and lock it in. Today he was straight business."

Skubal also showed he wasn't shaken, pitching on the same mound where one week ago he threw a 99 mph fastball that struck Guardians designated hitter David Fry in the nose and face during the sixth inning.

"He's an emotional leader. There's a great presence with

him. Everything changes the day that he pitches, which is what should be around an ace," Detroit manager A.J. Hinch said. "It's vintage Tarik Skubal for those who don't know him. This is what you get."

Skubal threw 107 pitches, one off his career high, including 73 strikes. He allowed one run and three hits, with two being infield singles, and walked three. His fastball averaged 99.1 mph, 1.6 mph above his season average.

Skubal's slider was his second-least used pitch during the regular season, but he went to the slider often Tuesday. His 28 sliders were the most he's thrown in a game since his third season in the majors in 2022.

Cleveland batters whiffed on 26 pitches, tied for the second-most against Skubal this season.

"I was just kind of worried about executing each pitch and trying to do my best to live pitch-by-pitch and just do what makes me a good pitcher, and that's getting ahead and getting guys into leverage," Skubal said.

One of the infield singles allowed by Skubal was a slow grounder by Angel Martinez in the fourth. The other was Gabriel Arias' high chopper over Skubal that scored Martinez.

The Tigers regained the lead when Riley Greene scored on Zach McKinstry's safety squeeze.

SPORTS

Starting strong

Tigers, Red Sox, Dodgers, Cubs secure Wild Card openers » MLB Playoffs, Pages 22-23



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

From overlooked to standout

Unnoticed in Canada, Mesidor has become crucial part of defense for No. 3 Miami

By TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Akheem Mesidor was once on the brink of quitting football while growing up in Canada, largely because he wasn't getting any attention.

Funny how things change.

The Miami defensive end whose 25.5 career sacks are second-most among active FBS players is hearing plenty of accolades these days, and he isn't listening to any of them. He's a big reason why No. 3 Miami (4-0) is off to a perfect start, with a huge test looming when the Hurricanes open Atlantic Coast Conference play at No. 18 Florida State (3-1) on Saturday.

"Once you start taking too much credit for everything you do, you will get humbled really fast," Mesidor said. "So I try just to stay humble, appreciate everything I have, never be satisfied and just keep working."

It wasn't always that way.

Trying to get noticed by colleges was an exhausting process for Mesidor, who grew up in Ottawa and bounced around about a half-dozen high schools, the last of which was in Clearwater, Fla. He'd cross the border into the United States to go to camps and seek scholarship offers, only to often be told some form of "come back next year." Mesidor eventually got attention from recruiters, signed with West Virginia as a three-star player and stayed with the Mountaineers for two years before coming to Miami in 2022.

These days, he gets all the attention he wants. He and fellow Hurricanes defensive lineman Ruben Bain Jr. — mentioned by some as an early season Heisman Trophy candidate — have become a devastating 1-2 punch for Miami, setting the tone for a defense that's vastly improved over a year ago.

"They need each other in every way," said Hurricanes defensive line coach Jason Taylor, a Pro Football Hall of Famer. "I've been



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

Miami defensive linemen Akheem Mesidor (3) wraps up Bethune-Cookman running back Juan Rodriguez with an assist from Donta Simpson during the first half Sept. 6 in Miami Gardens, Fla. Mesidor's 25½ career sacks are second-most among active FBS players.

SEE STANDOUT ON PAGE 19

Aces reach Finals with OT win vs. Fever » WNBA Playoffs, Page 18

