

Ukraine claims control of Russian town

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday that the country's troops have full control of the Russian town of Sudzha in the Kursk region in their incursion into Russian territory.

The town, the largest that Ukraine has reportedly seized so far, had a prewar population of around 5,000 people. It holds a measuring station for Russian natural gas that flows through Ukrainian pipelines to Europe.

Natural gas flows from West Siberian gas fields through pipes that pass through Sudzha and cross the Ukrainian border into Ukraine's system.

Zelenskyy said a Ukrainian military commander's office is being set up in Sudzha. He didn't elaborate on the details or the functions of the office.

The claim couldn't be inde-

pendently verified. Russia did not immediately respond to Zelenskyy's statement, but its defense ministry said earlier Thursday that Russian forces had blocked attempts to take several other communities.

There was no indication of any disruption of the gas flow through Sudzha, which accounts for about 3% of Europe's imports.

Satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press on Thursday show that a Ukrainian drone attack on Russian air bases damaged at least two hangars and other areas.

Images taken Wednesday by Planet Labs PBC show that two hangars at Borisoglebsk Air Base had been struck, with a field of debris around both. It was not immediately clear what purpose the hangars served. There also appeared to be po-

tential damage to two fighter aircraft at the base.

Separately, at Savasleika Air Base, one burn mark could be seen on the apron in images Wednesday, though there was no apparent damage to the fighter jets and other aircraft there.

Kursk acting Gov. Alexei Smirnov on Thursday ordered the evacuation of the Glushkovo region, about 28 miles northwest of Sudzha, as Ukraine's daring incursion into the bordering Kursk region entered its second week.

The evacuation order suggests Ukrainian forces are gradually advancing toward the area. Authorities say more than 120,000 residents in the Kursk region already have been evacuated.

At a facility receiving evacuees, Tatyana Anikeyeva told

of her flight from the fighting. "We were rushing from Sudzha. ... We hid in the bushes. Volunteers were handing out water, food, bread to people on the go. The sound of the cannonade continued without any break. The house was shaking," she told Russian state television.

Evacuees milled around and waited in long lines for food and other supplies. One man stroked his pet dog and tried to comfort her, while saying that he felt nauseous and couldn't eat himself.

Russia also declared a federal-level state of emergency in the Belgorod region. A regional-level state of emergency had been declared a day earlier in Belgorod, and the change in status suggests officials believe the situation is worsening and hampering the region's ability to deliver aid.

Report: Sexual assaults surpass Pentagon estimates

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

The official Pentagon tally of sexual assaults in the military during the past 20-plus years likely undercounts the actual number by at least two to four times, researchers say in a new study.

The Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute compared Defense Department data with figures compiled by independent sources between 2001 and 2023 to calculate its findings.

Last year alone, there were nearly 74,000 such assaults in the armed forces, compared with the Defense Department's official tally of around 29,000, according to the study, released Wednesday.

The range of two to four times higher was described as "conservative" and "likely accurate" by the report's authors, who added that high-end estimates suggested a prevalence 10 times higher than DOD figures.

The findings come after more than a decade

of efforts to address the prevalence of sexual assault in the military, including several dozen initiatives by defense secretaries and hundreds of recommendations by government panels and task forces.

Despite these efforts, military officials put an overarching emphasis on training and deploying troops to Iraq and Afghanistan at the expense of confronting "a clear institutional problem of sexual assault," according to the report.

"During the post-9/11 wars, the prioritization of force readiness above all else allowed the problem of sexual assault to fester, papering over internal violence and gender inequalities within military institutions, and thus we must consider this problem to be a cost of war," the report said.

The authors argued that a slight decrease in the number of cases in 2023 as compared with that of 2021, the final year of the war in Afghanistan, "is further evidence that the previous 20 years of institutional focus on training

and deploying troops to Afghanistan ... contributed to a permissive environment for sexual assault."

The report estimates there were over 75,500 cases in 2021, with DOD putting the figure for that year at about 36,000, roughly the same level as when the war began in 2001.

Over the course of the war, on average, nearly one-quarter of all active-duty women and almost 2% of all active-duty men experienced sexual assault, according to the report's calculations.

Black women and LGBTQ+ service members were more likely to experience sexual harassment and assault than others, the report said.

The Costs of War study follows a 2021 Congressional Research Service report that said there was some evidence that most sexual offenses in the military were not being reported.

DOD officials in past years have conceded that the true number was likely higher because of those who didn't file a report.

Harris' policies are still taking shape

The Washington Post

Kamala Harris, amid a furious battle for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2019, embraced a ban on fracking and offshore drilling. She supported Medicare-for-all. At one point, she advocated abolishing private health insurance. And she signaled an openness to a sweeping overhaul of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

Now, the vice president's campaign says she would not pursue the fracking and offshore drilling ban — it's a highly unpopular position in states like Pennsylvania where natural gas drives the economy — if she becomes president. She does not support a single-payer health care system, instead focusing on what she and President Joe Biden call "corporate price-gouging" by pharmaceutical companies. And she is taking a much harder line on illegal immigration, arguing that Republicans are to blame for blocking a tough border-control measure this year.

Since Harris catapulted to the top of the Democratic ticket less

than a month ago, she has been forced to reiterate that she rejects a wide array of positions she embraced five years ago, a dynamic likely to become even more evident as she rolls out pillars of her agenda in coming days. On Friday in North Carolina, she is set to outline her economic plan, which is expected to largely mirror Biden's efforts to lower costs for middle-class families, including by curtailing late fees, hidden costs and junk fees. But Harris' aides stress that she will roll out myriad policies that are unique to her.

In 2019, Harris articulated a series of liberal positions as she sought to distinguish herself among a crowded group of Democratic contenders, many of them tacking to the left to court voters in the primaries. Now her singular focus is taking on Republican nominee Donald Trump, with a big emphasis on winning over swing voters.

But Harris' critics say her dramatic shifts on so many issues point to a deeper issue — that Harris has few core political beliefs and only a vague governing

philosophy. That lack of a clear political identity, Republicans contend, gives them an opening to frame her image for voters.

"It's clear the Kamala Harris who wanted to ban fracking, who supported Medicare-for-all ... couldn't win Pennsylvania or a single swing state," said Corry Bliss, a Republican campaign consultant. "The average voter does not have a well-defined vision of her, so we have a great opportunity to define her simply on her record."

Harris ascended to the top of the Democratic ticket after Biden's abrupt decision to drop out of the presidential race on July 21, which followed weeks of nervous Democrats calling for a new candidate after the president's rocky debate performance against Trump. The party quickly coalesced around Harris, who is running on a tightly compressed schedule and has skipped many of the rituals of a presidential race — including a drawn-out primary contest and months of campaigning across the country — that usually force candidates to specify their views

on a range of issues.

The Democratic Party platform was locked in before Harris became the nominee, limiting her ability to put her stamp on the document. Since Harris' emergence, many Democrats have felt relief and even euphoria after weeks of worrying that Biden would lose decisively, and they have shown little appetite to press her even on such contentious issues as immigration and the war in Gaza.

Harris, meanwhile, has inherited Biden's campaign apparatus and kept on many of his senior campaign advisers, while adding some of her own. So far she has largely adopted the policies Biden pushed or implemented as president, in some cases adding her own touch, such as an emphasis on lower-income Americans.

When she has deviated from Biden, it is often a matter of tone rather than substance. Most notably, Harris often speaks forcefully about reproductive rights, while Biden, a lifelong Catholic, can appear uncomfortable talking about abortion.

At NC rally, Trump blames Biden, Harris for high inflation

The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer

Former President Donald Trump's speech Wednesday in Asheville, N.C., was billed as being about the economy, but this year's Republican nominee spent much of his address on other topics.

Trump repeated familiar attacks on his opponents, immigration talking points and, when sticking to the script, pledged to generate an "economic boom" if reelected. He spoke during a campaign appearance at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium inside the Harrah's Cherokee Center, where there was a line to get in

hours ahead of Trump's speech.

"They say it's the most important subject," Trump said of the economy. "I'm not sure it is, but they say it's the most important. ... Inflation is the most important, but that's part of economy."

Trump laid the blame for high inflation on the Biden-Harris administration.

Inflation reached its highest level in four decades in 2022, but year-over-year inflation reached its lowest level in more than three years in July, according to a Wednesday report from the Labor Department. Consumer prices rose 0.2% from June to July af-

ter dropping slightly the previous month for the first time in four years, The Associated Press reported.

Even with numbers improving, Trump told the crowd that Americans have already paid the price for more expensive gas, groceries and other expenses.

"[Vice President] Kamala [Harris] has declared that tackling inflation will be a day one priority for her, but day one for Kamala was 3½ years ago. Why hasn't she done it?" he said.

Trump also accused Harris of throwing President Joe Biden "overboard" when she took over

the Democratic ticket and called her "crazy" and a socialist.

If reelected, Trump said his economic agenda would center on improving affordability and addressing supply chain issues. He pledged to cut energy costs by 50% or more within 18 months in office by rolling back clean energy initiatives instituted by the current administration and increasing domestic oil production.

"We're all environmentalists. We all want clean air, clean water, but we don't want to destroy our country. ... Drill, baby, drill," he told the crowd, prompting attendees to chant the same phrase.

White House: New deals will cut prices of Medicare drugs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration said Thursday that drug price negotiations will knock hundreds of dollars — in some cases thousands — off the list prices of 10 of Medicare's most popular and costliest drugs.

The discounts, agreed to after months of negotiations with drug manufacturers, range between 38% and 79% on the medication's list price, which is the cost of medication before discounts or rebates are applied — not the price people actually pay for prescriptions.

Medicare spent \$50 billion covering the drugs last year and taxpayers are expected to save \$6 billion on the new prices, which do not go into effect until 2026. Older adults could save as much as \$1.5 billion in total on their medications in out-of-pocket costs. Administration officials released few

details about how they arrived at those calculations.

The newly negotiated prices will impact the price of drugs used by millions of older Americans to help manage diabetes, blood cancers and prevent heart failure or blood clots. The drugs include the blood thinners Xarelto and Eliquis and diabetes drugs Jardiance and Januvia.

It's a landmark deal for the Medicare program, which provides health care coverage for more than 67 million older and disabled Americans. For decades, the federal government had been barred from bartering with pharmaceutical companies over the price of their drugs, even though it's a routine process for private insurers.

"For years, millions of Americans were forced to choose between paying for medications or putting food on the table,

while Big Pharma blocked Medicare from being able to negotiate prices on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities," President Joe Biden said in a statement. "But we fought back — and won."

The drug deals will become a focal point for Vice President Kamala Harris' presidential campaign, especially since she cast the tiebreaking vote to pass the law. She planned to join Biden on Thursday to announce the drug prices, in their first joint speaking appearance since she replaced him at the top of the Democratic ticket, as they both struggle to persuade voters that costs will trend down after years of above-normal inflation.

Harris is set to release part of her economic agenda on Friday in North Carolina, where she plans to detail other ways to help cut costs and boost incomes for the middle class.

Puerto Rico lacks power, water after hurricane

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Hurricane Ernesto barreled toward Bermuda on Thursday after leaving hundreds of thousands of people in Puerto Rico without power or water as sweltering heat enveloped the U.S. territory, raising concerns about people's health.

A hurricane warning was in effect for Bermuda, with Ernesto expected to pass near or over the island on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the spinning storm on Thursday was generating southern winds in Puerto Rico, which have a heating effect as opposed to the typical cooling trade winds that blow from the east.

"We know a lot of people don't have power," said Ernesto Morales with the National Weather Service as he warned of extreme heat and urged people to stay hydrated.

Nearly half a million of 1.4 million customers remained in the dark more than a day after Ernesto swiped past Puerto Rico late Tuesday as a tropical storm before strengthening into a hurricane.

Hundreds of thousands of people also are without water given the power outages.

The situation worried many who lived through Hurricane Maria, a powerful Category 4 storm that hit Puerto Rico in September 2017 and was blamed for at least 2,975 deaths in its sweltering aftermath.

The National Weather Service issued a heat advisory on Thursday warning of "dangerously hot and humid conditions."

Officials said they don't know when power would be fully restored as concerns grow about the health of many in Puerto Rico who cannot afford generators or solar panels on the island.

US unemployment claims fall in latest sign of resiliency in current job market

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week, another sign that the job market remains resilient in the face of high interest rates.

Jobless claims dropped by 7,000 to 227,000 last week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week ups and downs, fell by 4,500 to 236,500.

In the week that ended Aug. 3, 1.86 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits, down by 7,000 from the week before.

Weekly filings for unemployment benefits, which are a

proxy for layoffs, remain low by historic standards. But they started rising in May, adding to evidence that high interest rates are taking a toll on the U.S. job market.

The Federal Reserve, fighting inflation that hit a four-decade high just over two years ago, raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023, taking it to a 23-year high. Inflation has come down steadily — from 9.1% in June 2022 to a three-year low of 2.9% last month. Despite higher borrowing costs, the economy and hiring kept cruising along, defying widespread fears that the United States would sink into recession.

But the higher rates finally seem to be taking a toll. Employers added just 114,000 jobs in July, well below the January-June monthly average of nearly 218,000.

The unemployment rate rose for the fourth straight month in July, though it remains low at 4.3%. Monthly job openings have fallen steadily since peaking at a record 12.2 million in March 2022. They were down to 8.2 million in June.

As signs of an economic slowdown accumulate and inflation continues to drift down toward its 2% target, the Fed is expected to start cutting rates at its next meeting in September.

State Fair of Texas adds firearms ban

Associated Press

DALLAS — The State Fair of Texas is laying down a new rule before millions of visitors flock through the gates for corn dogs, deep-fried delights and a friendly wave from a five-story cowboy named Big Tex: No guns allowed.

But that decision by fair organizers — which comes after a shooting last year on the 277-acre fairgrounds in the heart of Dallas — has drawn outrage from Republican lawmakers, who in recent years have proudly expanded gun rights in Texas. On Wednesday, the state's attorney general threatened a lawsuit unless the fair reversed course.

"Dallas has fifteen days to fix the issue," Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said in a statement, "otherwise I will see them in court."

Tensions over where and how gun owners can carry firearms in public are frequent in Texas, but the standoff with one of the state's most beloved institutions has moved the fight onto unusual turf. The fair has not backed down since cowboy hat-wearing organizers announced the new policy at a news conference last week.

The fair, which reopens in September and lasts for nearly a month, dates back to 1886. In addition to a maze of midway games, car shows and the Texas Star Ferris wheel — one of the tallest in the U.S. — the fairgrounds are also home to the annual college football rivalry between the University of Texas and University of Oklahoma. And after Big Tex, the towering cowboy that greets fairgoers, went up in flames in 2012 due to an electrical short, the fair mascot was met with great fanfare upon its return.

But a shooting near the rows of food booths last year dam-

pened the revelry.

Investigators said one man opened fire on another, injuring three people and resulting in police clearing the fairgrounds. Videos posted on social media showed groups of people running along sidewalks and climbing barriers as they fled.

Defending the new policy Wednesday, fair spokesperson Karissa Condoianis acknowledged it has attracted "both criticism and praise." She noted that the fair previously allowed gun owners to carry concealed weapons "even after virtually all other public events ceased to allow the same."

"This is the right decision moving forward to ensure a safe environment and family-friendly atmosphere," Condoianis said.

Republican lawmakers urged the fair to reconsider in a letter signed by more than 70 legislators, arguing that the ban made the fairgrounds less safe and was "anything but a celebration of Texas."

In a separate letter to the City of Dallas, Paxton argued that the ban infringes on the rights of Texas gun owners. The city owns Fair Park, where the annual fair takes place; Paxton argued that gun owners can carry on property owned or leased by the government unless otherwise prohibited by state law.

A city spokesperson said in a statement Wednesday that they were reviewing Paxton's letter "and will respond accordingly."

Condoianis said the fair, which is a private, not-for-profit organization, "is not a government entity nor is it controlled by a government entity." She said they are aware of Paxton's letter to the city, and it appears he's "seeking clarification" on the city's relationship with the fair and its use of Fair Park under the long-term lease agreement between the two parties.

Hunter Biden reportedly eyed US help for Ukraine gas firm

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hunter Biden asked the U.S. ambassador to Italy for help regarding an energy project a Ukrainian gas company was pursuing while his father was vice president, according to The New York Times.

Hunter Biden, son of President Joe Biden, wrote a letter to the ambassador in 2016 seeking assistance for Burisma, which had been working on a geothermal project in Italy, the newspaper reported, citing newly released records and interviews.

At the time, Hunter Biden sat on the board of Burisma, which was having trouble getting regulatory approval for the project, a businessman involved in the project said.

The revelation is likely to fuel Republican criticism of Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings, which have been the center of GOP investigations. The report comes weeks before Hunter Biden is set to stand trial on federal charges alleging he

failed to pay taxes on money he received from Burisma and other foreign businesses.

Prosecutors indicated they want to introduce evidence at trial about Hunter Biden's other business dealings, including an arrangement with a Romanian businessman who was trying to "influence U.S. government policy" during Joe Biden's term as vice president.

Hunter Biden's lawyer said his client's outreach to the ambassador on behalf of Burisma was a "proper request" and that he had asked "various people" to help arrange an introduction between Burisma and the president of Italy's Tuscany region.

"No meeting occurred, no project materialized, no request for anything in the U.S. was ever sought and only an introduction in Italy was requested," attorney Abbe Lowell said.

A White House spokesperson said the president was not aware when he was vice president that his son had reached out on Burisma's behalf.

Columbia University director resigns after months of unrest

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Columbia University President Minouche Shafik resigned Wednesday after a brief, tumultuous tenure that saw the head of the prestigious New York university face heavy scrutiny for her handling of protests and campus divisions over the Israel-Hamas war.

The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan was roiled this year by student demonstrations, culminating in scenes of police officers carrying zip ties and riot shields storming a building that had been occupied by pro-Palestinian protesters. Similar protests swept college campuses nationwide, with many leading to violent clashes with police and thousands of ar-

rests.

The announcement comes days after the school confirmed that three deans had resigned after officials said they exchanged disparaging texts during a campus discussion about Jewish life and antisemitism.

Shafik was also among the university leaders called for questioning before Congress earlier this year. She was heavily criticized by Republicans who accused her of not doing enough to combat concerns about antisemitism on Columbia's campus.

Columbia's Board of Trustees meanwhile announced that Katrina Armstrong, the CEO of Columbia University Irving Medical Center, will serve as interim president.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Meth found hidden in farmers market celery

GA FOREST PARK — Celery was used to conceal more than 2,300 pounds of methamphetamines that federal agents discovered in a truck at a farmers market outside Atlanta, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration said.

In what the DEA called one of the largest seizures of its kind, agents confiscated the drugs being delivered to the Atlanta State Farmers Market in Forest Park, authorities said at a Monday news conference, WAGA-TV reported.

The agency had learned about a semitrailer coming across the Mexican border and agents tracked the drugs to the farmers market, said DEA Special Agent in Charge Robert Murphy. The drugs were found inside the truck, he said.

"It was hiding in the celery. Obviously, we threw away the celery. That didn't make it to the store," Murphy said.

A Mexican citizen was arrested, the Atlanta TV station reported.

Police officer guilty in college course scam

CA LOS ANGELES — The troubled Antioch Police Department faces another blow, as a second police officer was convicted last week in a scheme to fraudulently obtain college degrees for higher pay.

Morteza Amiri, 33, and five others from the Antioch and Pittsburg police departments falsely claimed they had obtained bachelor's degrees in criminal justice in a ploy to qualify for higher pay, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California

said in a statement Friday.

But the officers actually hired someone else to complete the courses online, unlocking raises and financial incentives they had not earned, prosecutors said. The other five pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud earlier this year; Amiri's case was the only one to go to trial.

Black bear mauls girl, 3, in tent at campground

MT RED LODGE — A black bear mauled and injured a 3-year-old girl in a tent at a private campground in Montana just north of Yellowstone National Park over the weekend, state wildlife officials said.

The girl was attacked at about 10 p.m. Sunday at a campground south of Red Lodge and taken to the hospital in Billings. Fish, Wildlife and Parks didn't have any information on her condition on Tuesday, game warden Randy Hutzenbiller said.

The campground was evacuated and traps were placed. A bear believed to have been involved was captured and euthanized Monday afternoon, Hutzenbiller said. The wildlife agency still has traps in the area.

No charges for officers who shot, killed student

WI MADISON — Three Wisconsin police officers who killed a student as he tried to break into his middle school with an air rifle this past spring won't face criminal charges, prosecutors announced Monday.

Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne said in a statement exonerating Mount Horeb

police officers Tyler Stephens, Carson Stoddard and Steve Rosemeyer that 14-year-old Damian Haglund's air rifle looked like a real firearm and he refused repeated commands to drop the weapon.

Moments after the announcement, the state Justice Department released hundreds of pages of investigative notes connected with the May 1 shooting at Mount Horeb Middle School that show Haglund had planned to "get the popular kids" for months.

Investigators found writings in Haglund's journal titled "Battle Plan," dated Jan. 26, three months before the attack. He planned to tell his mother that he was sick, steal a car, sneak into the school at lunch time, burn down the library and go after the popular kids, according to the documents. He then planned to escape and die, the documents said.

Haglund never got inside and no other students were hurt.

Ford, Mazda warn owners of unsafe air bag inflators

MI DETROIT — Ford and Mazda are warning the owners of more than 475,000 older vehicles in the United States not to drive them because they have dangerous Takata air bag inflators that have not been replaced.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says the inflators can explode with too much force in a crash, blowing apart a metal canister and shooting fragments that can severely injure or kill people. All were recalled previously but repairs have not been completed.

Ford models covered by the warning include 2004 to 2011 Ranger pickups, 2005 through 2014 Mustangs, 2005 and 2006

Ford GTs, 2006 through 2012 Fusions and 2007 through 2010 Edge SUVs.

Affected Mercury and Lincoln models include the Milan, MKZ and Zephyr from 2006 through 2012, and the MKX from 2007 through 2010.

Mazdas covered by the warning are the 2004 to 2009 B-Series pickup, 2003 through 2013 Mazda 6, the 2006 and 2007 Speed6 and the 2004 through 2011 RX-8. Also included are the 2004 through 2006 MPV, the 2007 through 2012 CX-7 and the 2007 through 2015 CX-9.

Site of church shooting torn down over protests

TX SUTHERLAND SPRINGS — Crews on Monday tore down a Texas church where a gunman killed more than two dozen worshippers in 2017, using heavy machinery to raze the small building even after some families sought to preserve the scene.

A judge cleared the way last month for the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs to tear down the sanctuary where the attack took place, which until now had been kept as a memorial. Church members voted in 2021 to tear it down, but some families in the community of less than 1,000 people filed a lawsuit hoping for a new vote on the building's fate.

Authorities put the number of dead in the Nov. 5, 2017, shooting at 26 people, including a pregnant woman and her unborn baby. After the shooting, the interior of the sanctuary was painted white and chairs with the names of those who were killed were placed there. A new church was completed for the congregation about a year and a half after the shooting.

— From wire reports

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Yankees' Judge fastest to 300 homers

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Aaron Judge noticed his teammates dancing in the bullpen as he rounded first. He got quite the reception when he crossed the plate, too.

Not only did he hit his 300th homer, the New York Yankees' slugger reached that milestone faster than any other player when he connected against the Chicago White Sox during a 10-2 victory on Wednesday night.

"It's a great achievement," he said. "Like I said a couple days ago, I was hoping it would come in a win. It came in a big win for us. We were down for a little bit, couldn't get much going, so I was just excited it was there in a big moment."

Judge hit the mark in his 955th game and 3,431st at-bat with a three-run drive in the eighth inning. The six-time All-Star and 2022 American League MVP drove a 3-0 up-and-in sinker from Chad Kuhl into the White Sox bullpen in left for his major league-leading 43rd homer.

The Yankees let loose as the ball cleared the wall, jumping up and raising their arms and banging the dugout railing. After the game, DJ LeMahieu and Austin Wells doused Judge with a tub of water.

"That means a lot," Judge said. "These guys grind with me every single day. I know the hard work they put in. They see what I do. That was pretty special."

Ralph Kiner reached 300 homers in his 1,087th game, and Babe Ruth did in his 3,831st at-bat.

"Those are some guys that have done a lot of great things in this game," Judge said. "You throw around a lot of those names to people who don't know baseball and they know who they are. It's a special group to be in."

Judge continues to amaze his teammates. Juan Soto thinks Judge has a chance to surpass Barry Bonds' 762 homers.

"Why not?" Soto said. "I think he's the guy who can literally

break the record. ... I hope he got the health to do it and I'm going to enjoy it as much as I can, too."

Chicago was trailing 6-2 when interim manager Grady Sizemore intentionally walked Soto to bring up Judge, who had not homered on a 3-0 pitch since 2021.

"You guys all saw how he's swinging the bat this week," Judge said. "It makes sense. The guy had three homers yesterday, a homer to start the game today. Why wouldn't you?"

Judge leads the major leagues with 14 intentional walks. Soto was intentionally walked for the first time this season after hitting three homers Tuesday and another in the first inning Wednesday.

Judge wouldn't say if he thought the White Sox made the right call. But either way, he made them pay.

"If they're going to do that, you've got to come up and drive those runs in," he said. "I was lucky I was able to do that

there."

Sizemore made the decision in his fifth game after replacing Pedro Grifol as manager. He said the four homers by Soto caused him to make the decision.

"It's pick your poison. I'm not trying to get to Judge. I got a base open," Sizemore said. "There's no solution or an easy way out of that jam, but Soto's definitely been the hotter of those two bats, even though Judge has been hot, too."

Judge, who hit an American League-record 62 homers in his MVP season, is batting .333 and leads the major leagues with 110 RBIs. No. 300 came eight years and one day after he homered in his first big league at-bat.

"Definitely caught us off guard," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said of the intentional walk, "but Aaron was ready to throw up a great at-bat."

"I thought he expanded the zone a little bit too much there on 3-0," the manager added playfully.

Aiyuk watches 49ers practice as 'hold in' enters 4th week

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Star receiver Brandon Aiyuk was back out at San Francisco 49ers practice as a spectator as his contract hold in enters a fourth week still in search of a resolution.

Aiyuk had mostly stayed off the field the past two weeks after making waves with his boisterous handshakes with general manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan two weeks ago.

Aiyuk skipped the entire off-season program and hasn't practiced yet in training camp as he seeks either a long-term contract with San Francisco or a trade to a team that can agree with the receiver on a new deal and give the 49ers enough com-

pensation to part with him.

Neither of those options has come to a resolution yet, though an end may be getting closer with NFL Network reporting earlier this week that the Niners have a framework for a potential deal with Pittsburgh in place but are waiting to see if they can reach a deal with Aiyuk before making any trade.

Aiyuk came out to practice late in the session Wednesday. He shook hands with Lynch and watched part of practice, chatting at times with teammates Deebo Samuel and George Kittle.

"I don't see him all the time, because I'm in camp mode. So being able to have a conversation with him is fantastic, to see how he's doing and if everything

is going the way that he wants it to go," Kittle said. "Just the chance to see him is always fantastic. I love the smile on his face."

Even Aiyuk's choice of wardrobe caught his teammates' attention as he wore a red 49ers shirt.

"Wearing red for the first time, too," Kittle said. "It's crazy."

Aiyuk had been set to play on the fifth-year option worth about \$14.1 million this season and wanted San Francisco to make him the latest receiver to cash in with a long-term deal. Ten receivers before Aiyuk had signed contracts worth at least \$70 million already this off-season, with Justin Jefferson's four-year, \$140 million exten-

sion with Minnesota setting the top of the market.

Aiyuk was a key part of San Francisco's offense last season as he formed a great connection with quarterback Brock Purdy. Aiyuk had 75 catches and a career-high 1,375 yards last season with seven touchdowns as he earned second-team All-Pro honors.

His absence would be hard to overcome if San Francisco has designs on getting back to the Super Bowl and winning it this upcoming season.

"The season hasn't started yet so we don't know how much we miss him yet," cornerback Charvarius Ward said. "I don't want to say nothing crazy but they'll figure it out eventually, for sure."

NASCAR revokes Dillon's playoff eligibility

Associated Press

Austin Dillon's automatic spot in NASCAR's playoff was revoked — though he retained his victory at Richmond Raceway — after it was determined the driver “crossed a line” in his intentional last-lap wreck of drivers Joey Logano and Denny Hamlin.

Dillon won for the first time in nearly two years in the Cup Series on Sunday night, but the checkered flag seemed out of reach before he spun Logano out of the way and then sent Hamlin into the wall as well — all in the final few seconds.

Logano and Hamlin railed against Dillon's aggressiveness and the highlight-reel finish set off days of controversy in NASCAR.

NASCAR said Wednesday that Dillon committed “actions detrimental to stock car auto racing” in its decision to kick him out of a spot in the 16-driver field. There are three Cup Series races left before the field is set, starting Sunday at Michigan Interna-

tional Speedway.

Elton Sawyer, the senior vice president of competition, said NASCAR considered suspending Dillon for his actions. Dillon and the Richard Childress Racing No. 3 team were also docked 25 points in both the drivers' and owners' standings. Dillon dropped from 26th to 31st in the driver standings.

Dillon's spotter, Brandon Benesch, was suspended for three races for yelling “wreck him!” over the radio as the driver battled with Hamlin down the stretch.

“The No. 1 thing is we want to make sure is we're protecting the integrity of the playoffs as well as our championship when we get to Phoenix,” Sawyer said.

RCR said it would appeal, stating on social media it was “very disappointed” in NASCAR's decision.

In NASCAR's view, Dillon's moves went beyond the hard-racing ethos that's been part of the Cup Series' DNA since its

1948 inception.

Logano also was fined \$50,000 for smoking his tires on pit road as he drove by Dillon and his team.

“It's ridiculous that that's the way we race. Unbelievable,” Logano said Sunday. “I get bump and runs. I do that. I would expect it. But from four car lengths back, he was never going to make the corner. And then he wrecks the other car. He wrecks the 11 to go with it. What a piece of crap.”

Dillon said he was trying to move Logano's car, but hitting Hamlin as well was more of an instant reaction.

“I've seen Denny and Joey make moves that have been running people up the track to win,” Dillon said. “This was the first opportunity in two years for me to be able to get a win. ... I've seen a lot of stuff over the years in NASCAR where people move people, and it's just part of our sport.”

It was his first win since Aug. 28, 2022, at Daytona. He had just two top-10 finishes

this year. Dillon emerged from all the chaos with a victory in his No. 3 Chevrolet. That number was famously driven — often aggressively — by Dale Earnhardt.

“That's not the way we want our races to end,” Sawyer said. “That's not the way we want to decide a champion. That's not the way we want to decide an event.”

The win-and-you're-in nature of postseason qualification means the difference between first place and second can be massive. In this case — in the moment, at least — it meant the difference for Dillon between another lost season and a championship chase.

“The record book won't care, right, about what happened,” Hamlin said on pit road Sunday. “He's going to be credited with the win.”

He will — the fifth of Dillon's career over 395 Cup starts. The victory won't mean much if Dillon is just racing out the string once the final 10-race postseason starts.

Source: US trying to land Pochettino as men's coach

Associated Press

Mauricio Pochettino and the U.S. Soccer Federation are working toward a deal for him to become the men's national team coach, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

Pochettino, the former Tottenham, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain coach, has agreed to take over as the U.S. coach but the deal is not complete, the person said Thursday, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the agreement was not finalized.

Pochettino would succeed Gregg Berhalter less than 22 months before the Americans host the 2026 World Cup.

The USSF declined to comment.

A 52-year-old Argentine, Pochettino would become the first foreign-born coach to head the United States since Jurgen Klinsmann from 2011-16. He has coached Espanyol in Spain (2009-12), Southampton (2013-14), Tottenham (2014-19) and Chelsea (2023-24) in England and Paris Saint-Germain in France (2021-22), leaving after winning a Ligue 1 title.

Matt Crocker, the USSF's sporting director in charge of the search, was Southampton's academy director when Pochettino started at that club.

The U.S. has four upcoming friendlies against Canada on Sept. 7, New Zealand three days later, Panama on Oct. 12 and an opponent to be determined on Oct. 15. The next competitive

matches are a two-leg CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal in November.

Mikey Varas, a Berhalter assistant, could be in charge of the team for the September games and Pochettino could take over for the October matches.

Berhalter was fired July 10, a week after the Americans were eliminated in the first round of the Copa America. He was hired in December 2018, was allowed to leave when his contract expired following a 3-1 loss to the Netherlands in the second round of the 2022 World Cup, then was rehired in June 2023 to return in September.

Pochettino would inherit a player pool led by Christian Pulisic, Weston McKennie and

Tyler Adams, who have thrived with European clubs. But goalkeepers Matt Turner and Ethan Horvath and midfielder Gio Reyna have failed to gain playing time with first-tier teams, and Chris Richards — at Crystal Palace in England — is the only central defender in his 20s playing regularly with a top-league European club.

Berhalter minimized Major League Soccer players, not using any during the Copa America. Before heading the national team, Berhalter coached Columbus in MLS.

On-field discipline has been a problem, with defender Sergiño Dest getting two red cards in the past 13 months, and McKennie and winger Tim Weah receiving one each.

Witt, Royals beat Twins to avoid sweep

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Bobby Witt Jr. homered on a pitch outside the strike zone for the fourth time this season and Paul DeJong finished a triple short of the cycle, helping the Kansas City Royals beat the Minnesota Twins 4-1 Wednesday to avoid a series sweep.

Witt homered into the left-center bullpen on a shoulder-high, full-count fastball from Louie Varland (0-5) in the third inning, putting the Royals ahead 2-0 with his 24th home run this season. The pitch was 4.07 feet above the ground, the highest hit by a Kansas City player for a home run since pitch tracking started in 2008, according to MLB Statcast.

"When you're on time, you can do a lot of good things," Witt said when asked how he hit Varland's 96.8 mph offering. "So just trying to be on time with the pitch and just let things happen."

Witt leads the major leagues with a .349 average.

"I did not think he would get a piece of that well enough to get it over the fence, but it is what it is," Varland said.

Cole Ragans (10-7) struck out eight and walked none in seven innings, allowing one run and five hits. He has won three straight starts for the first time as a major leaguer.

Padres 8, Pirates 2: Martín Pérez beat his old team in his first victory since host San Diego acquired him at the trade deadline, and the Padres defeated Pittsburgh for their 19th win in 22 games.

Jake Cronenworth and David Peralta homered for the Padres, who swept six games from the Pirates this season. San Diego (69-53) improved to a season-high 16 games over .500, sweeping the three-game series and winning eight series in a row for the first time since 2007.

Diamondbacks 11, Rockies 4: Eugenio Suárez hit a grand slam and finished with five RBIs, Joc Pederson drove in two early runs and host Arizona beat Colorado

for its sixth straight win.

Arizona swept the three-game series and has won 18 of 21, rocketing into postseason contention with its longest winning streak since last August.

Orioles 4, Nationals 1: Gunnar Henderson hit a two-run homer in the first, Dean Kremer stopped a four-start losing streak and host Baltimore salvaged a split of its two-game series against Washington.

Kremer (5-9) outdueled DJ Herz (2-5) in a sharply pitched game, allowing a run and five hits over six innings. Yennier Cano and Cionel Pérez each worked a perfect inning of relief, and Seranthony Domínguez followed with a hitless ninth for his second save since joining the Orioles before the trade deadline.

Guardians 6, Cubs 1: Alex Cobb (1-1) got his first win in nearly a year, allowing one run and three hits in 5½ innings, and Andrés Giménez drove in three runs, sending American League-leading Cleveland to a victory over visiting Chicago.

José Ramírez, Josh Naylor and Will Brennan also had RBIs for the Guardians, who swept the three-game series and extended their winning streak to five. Cleveland is 72-49 and has the best home record in the majors at 38-20.

Reds 9, Cardinals 2: Jonathan India homered twice and drove in four runs, TJ Friedl had two solo shots on his 29th birthday and host Cincinnati completed a three-game sweep of St. Louis.

Tyler Stephenson also homered to help the Reds win their fourth straight — the first time that's happened since they strung together seven in a row in early June — and move into a tie with St. Louis for second place in the NL Central.

Phillies 9, Marlins 5: Kyle Schwarber hit his seventh career grand slam, putting host Philadelphia ahead and leading it to a victory over Miami to end its four-game losing streak.

Phillies catcher J.T. Realmuto

added two hits, including a two-run double in the seventh, as first-place Philadelphia won for just the ninth time in its last 27 games.

Astros 2, Rays 1 (10): Mauricio Dubón drove in the go-ahead run with a 10th-inning single, closer Josh Hader worked two scoreless innings and visiting Houston won its season-high eighth straight game by beating Tampa Bay.

Pedro León advanced from second to third on Jeremy Peña's fly to deep center off Garrett Cleavinger (7-3) starting the 10th. Zach Dezenzo struck out, Jake Meyers and Dubón got Houston's second hit of the game. The Rays also had two hits.

Rangers 9, Red Sox 7 (10): Wyatt Langford hit a tying three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning and Jonah Heim had a two-run homer in the 10th to lead visiting Texas to a win over Boston.

Heim's homer came on the first pitch from Boston reliever Zach Kelly (4-2), scoring automatic runner Ezequiel Duran.

Tigers 3, Mariners 2 (10): Akil Baddoo's pinch-hit double in the 10th inning gave host Detroit a come-from-behind win over Seattle.

Tyler Holton (5-1) held Seattle scoreless in the top of the 10th and Collin Snider (2-2) walked Justyn-Henry Malloy to start the bottom of the inning. Zach McKinstry struck out trying to bunt, but Baddoo hit for Jake Rogers and hit a deep fly ball over the head of Victor Robles to win the game.

Mets 9, Athletics 1: Pete Alonso had four hits that included a fourth-inning homer and three RBIs to lead host New York over Oakland, stopping a four-game losing streak.

Francisco Lindor had two hits and two RBIs while Mark Vientos had a go-ahead, run-scoring double for the Mets, who were outscored 31-5 in their previous four games. Lindor's third-inning homer made him the 17th player to hit 100 for the Mets, who had dropped two games behind At-

lanta for the last NL wild card.

Yankees 10, White Sox 2: Aaron Judge reached 300 home runs faster than any other player, going deep in visiting New York's win over Chicago.

Judge hit that mark in his 955th game and 3,431st at-bat with a three-run drive in the eighth inning. The six-time All-Star and 2022 American League MVP drove a 3-0 up-and-in sinker Chad Kuhl into the White Sox bullpen in left for his major league-leading 43rd homer.

Brewers 5, Dodgers 4: Devin Williams retired Shohei Ohtani, Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman in order in the ninth inning to preserve a Milwaukee victory over visiting Los Angeles that snapped the Dodgers' five-game winning streak.

The Brewers got only four hits but capitalized on three Dodgers errors to end a three-game skid, with Williams earning his second save in as many opportunities. Milwaukee is the only major league team that hasn't lost at least four in a row at some point this season.

Blue Jays 9, Angels 2: Daulton Varsho hit a three-run home run, Jose Berrios dominated over seven innings and visiting Toronto finished off a three-game sweep of Los Angeles.

Ernie Clement and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. each hit a two-run home run and Berrios (11-9) gave up one run on two hits with a walk and five strikeouts as the Blue Jays pulled off their third series sweep of the season and second on the road.

Braves 13, Giants 2: Michael Harris hit his first career grand slam in his first at-bat after missing nearly two months because of a hamstring injury, helping visiting Atlanta rout San Francisco.

Grant Holmes (1-0) had six strikeouts in seven innings in his first career victory. The 28-year-old rookie allowed eight hits and two runs. Former Giants pitcher Luke Jackson and Jimmy Herget retired three batters each to finish the game.