

## US forces ready for Ukraine response

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. paratroopers landing in the Baltics, Army cavalry and artillerymen convoying in from Germany and an armored brigade massing its forces.

Those are some of the moves U.S. European Command could make to shore up NATO's eastern flank if Russia invades Ukraine, analysts say.

There also will be pressure on NATO to activate its little-used quick reaction spearhead force, a unit created in response to Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine, to showcase allied unity.

"This (NATO) force was built for just this kind of crisis," said John R. Deni, a European security expert at the U.S. Army War College. "It's a force representative of many of the allies. So to not use it now, frankly, risks undermining NATO solidarity."

While it's not certain whether Russian President Vladimir Putin will launch a new invasion of Ukraine, what has become clear is that there will be an allied military response of some form within NATO territory if an attack does occur.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan, speaking Tuesday after a meeting between Putin and his American counterpart, Joe Biden, said the United States is ready to fortify its NATO allies on the eastern flank.

"What additional capabilities can we provide to ensure that they feel strong and confident in their own sovereignty and territorial integrity?" Sullivan said.

He didn't specify what the additional capabilities are, but he said they are "on the table in those countries should Russia move in Ukraine in a more decisive way."

The question now is what types of military maneuvering could come into play if the U.S.-led NATO alliance must boost defenses in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland and Romania.

Retired Gen. Philip Breedlove, who commanded EUCOM and served as NATO's supreme allied commander from 2013-16, said the alliance is better-positioned now to respond to a crisis than it was in 2014, when Moscow suddenly annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

"The bottom line is we made some good changes to NATO, and we need to continue to finish what we started," said Breedlove.

He declined to offer a prescription on how exactly U.S. and allied forces should be mobilized if another invasion of Ukraine occurs. But he did say "a change in readiness is called for."

EUCOM's initial response to Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine offers an indication of what it might do a second time around, notably, enhancing air policing in the Baltics with Air Force F-16s and parachuting 173rd Airborne Brigade soldiers into Poland and the Baltics.

The rapid mobilization focused on assuring allies and deterring Russian aggression.

Subsequent high-profile road convoys by the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, based in Vilseck, Germany, also were part of the Army's response then.

Deni said similar moves should be expected if allies need to respond once again. But unlike the case seven years ago, the U.S. military is no longer in decline on the Continent, giving EUCOM more forces to choose from.

"Certainly, we didn't have everything we needed (in 2014)," Breedlove said. "Thankfully, since those days, our forces have only grown in Europe, so that is a good thing."

## House OKs \$768B defense bill with strong support

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The House passed a finalized version of the \$768 billion 2022 National Defense Authorization Act late Tuesday night with overwhelming bipartisan support, moving legislation hamstrung by delays, amendment fights and political discord one step closer to becoming law before the end of the year.

The legislation directs an independent review of the Afghanistan War's legacy and errors, and establishes a new means for the military to prosecute sexual assault and related crimes, according to a final draft released hours before the House passed it by a vote of 363 to 70.

But several key policy provisions that had won clear majority support in Congress — including to more broadly change the military justice system, require women to register with Selective Service and repeal the

Iraq War authorization — were discarded as lawmakers in the House and Senate raced to strike a compromise on the measure that dictates funding for the Pentagon and other defense operations in the year ahead. Their omission caused an uproar among some lawmakers, even as others cheered the legislation as comprehensive and historic.

The bill next heads to the Senate, where it is expected to pass and move on to the White House for President Joe Biden's approval.

In a break with common practice, this year's final bill was cobbled together behind closed doors by the leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services committees before the full Senate, stymied by scheduling delays and a dispute over amendments, was able to vote on its version of the legislation.

While the push to scrutinize the nation's 20-year campaign in Afghanistan, driven

largely by the haphazard evacuation from Kabul earlier this year, generated broad bipartisan support in both chambers, the rushed approach to fuse the House and Senate versions of the bill has drawn protests from several groups of lawmakers — particularly those hoping it would take bolder steps to change the military's culture and make it a more equitable environment for women and minorities.

Issues that disproportionately affect female service members were at the heart of several of the most high-profile issues debated as part of this year's defense bill. The bill creates a special victims prosecutor with the ability to determine when charges ought to be filed in cases of sexual assault and related crimes, murder, kidnapping and child pornography. The legislation also guarantees 12 weeks of parental leave for all service members.

# Hawaii orders Navy to shut fuel tanks

BY WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Hawaii Department of Health ordered the U.S. Navy on Tuesday to remove all fuel in 20 Red Hill underground storage tanks that are the suspected source of tap water contamination in hundreds of military households near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The Navy suspended transfer of fuel from the tanks on Nov. 27 after military housing residents began complaining of foul-smelling water and an oily sheen. Navy testing last week confirmed that water samples contained petroleum and traced the source to one of three wells used by the Navy water system.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro said during a news conference at the joint base Monday

that he was considering the fuel storage facility's future, up to and including possibly closing it down permanently.

"I appreciate the Navy's announcement that it has temporarily suspended its fuel operations at Red Hill," Hawaii Gov. David Ige said in a news release issued Tuesday by the Health Department along with its emergency order.

"Hawaii's well-being and the safety of our residents, including military families, must come first," Ige said. "We cannot have national security without ensuring public health and safety."

State health director Dr. Elizabeth Char said in the news release that the department was taking the action "to fulfill our mission of protecting human health and the environment."

"The order by the Hawaii De-

partment of Health has been received and is currently under legal review," Capt. Jereal Dorsey, a spokesman for Del Toro, said in emailed statement to Stars and Stripes.

The order lists a series of requirements:

- Immediate suspension of operations at the Red Hill bulk fuel storage tanks, including transfers.

- Continued monitoring by the Navy.

- Immediate steps to install a drinking water treatment system, or systems, at the contaminated Red Hill water well.

- Submission of a plan to be implemented within 30 days to assess the operations and system integrity to safely remove the fuel from the tanks. The plan must be prepared by a qualified, independent third party approved by

the Health Department.

- Remove all fuel from the underground storage tanks.

The Navy can request a hearing on the emergency order within 24 hours of its issuance.

The order underscores a series of fuel spills at Red Hill over the past eight years, including incidents from May and early November.

"Given the number of incidences that have occurred at the Facility within the last year, and in view of the current drinking water contamination, [Navy Region Hawaii] has not demonstrated that immediate and appropriate response actions are available, and therefore cannot ensure that immediate and appropriate response actions will be available should another release occur in the future," the emergency order states.

## Marine base touts its link to Route 66 with emblem

BY CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

There's a Marine Corps logistics base in California's high desert outside Barstow where the service's Eagle, Globe and Anchor looks unlike those in any other clime or place.

The symbol, made up of a highway shield superimposed over the service's emblem, is found on signs lining the shoulder of Joseph L. Boll Avenue, an original part of U.S. Highway 66 at Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow.

The modified emblem recognizes the road's ties to the logistics hub, which "has the privilege of being the only military base that has Route 66 running straight through it," said Jason Thompson, the installation's environmental director, who oversees its historical preservation program,

in an email this week.

The road section has been off-limits to the public since 1964, after Interstate 40 was built. But officials who get their kicks from preserving history came up with the emblem redesign in 2019.

It's painted in large stencils on the pavement of that 1.7-mile stretch of road, which passes the commissary and Leatherneck Lanes bowling alley, was used to decorate the base's Marine Corps birthday cake, and was memorialized in a towering sculpture of gleaming brass and steel.

The symbol was "approved enthusiastically" and trademarked by Headquarters Marine Corps after first being unanimously approved by the California Historic Route 66 Association, Thompson said. Base documents say the logo can only be used there.

## Navy police officer on Guam charged with drunken driving

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy police officer on Guam, found bloodied and unresponsive in a damaged automobile over the weekend, faces a drunken driving charge, a Navy spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Master-at-Arms Seaman Apprentice Deadrien Harris, 19, of Mississippi, was arrested on a charge of misdemeanor driving while impaired at 1:53 a.m. Saturday in a Tumon hotel parking lot, according to a magistrate's complaint filed that day.

Harris' shirt and hands were stained with blood and his breath smelled of alcohol, according to police statements in the complaint. He refused a field sobriety test and any form of test to determine his blood alcohol content, according to police.

Harris is assigned to the securi-

ty forces at Naval Base Guam, base spokeswoman Theresa Cepeda wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Harris was placed on an administrative detail after the incident, Cepeda said.

Guam Police arrived shortly after 1:30 a.m. at Tsubaki Towers on Guam's northwest coast, where a security guard saw a damaged, red Mazda 3 enter the parking lot, the complaint states.

Police reported finding the car, its windshield cracked and its hood damaged, with Harris inside and vomit outside the driver's door. The sailor, whom police roused with some difficulty, said he'd been in the parking lot the whole night. Harris became unresponsive to further questions, began scrolling through his cellphone and was eventually removed by force from the car.

# Coronavirus cases growing again in US

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Even as the United States closes in on a milestone of 200 million people fully vaccinated against COVID-19, cases and hospitalizations are spiking again, including in highly inoculated corners of the country like New England.

New cases in the U.S. climbed from an average of nearly 95,000 a day on Nov. 22 to almost 119,000 a day this week, and hospitalizations are up 25% from a month ago. The increases are due almost entirely to the delta variant, though the omicron mutation has been detected in about 20 states and is sure to spread even more.

Deaths are running close to 1,600 a day on average, back up to where they were in October. And the overall U.S. death toll less

than two years into the crisis could hit another heartbreaking milestone, 800,000, in a matter of days.

The situation is not as dire as last year's surge, before the public had any access to COVID-19 vaccines, but the roughly 60% of the U.S. population that is fully vaccinated is not enough to prevent hot spots.

The cold weather, Thanksgiving gatherings and a big rebound in holiday travel are all believed to be playing a role, along with public weariness with pandemic restrictions.

Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Public Health Law and Human Rights at Georgetown University, likened the virus to a wildfire.

"You can clear a forest of the shrubbery.

But if you leave some shrubs and trees standing, the fire will find them," Gostin said. "The virus will find you. It is searching for hosts that are not immune. The fact that you live in New England or New York doesn't insulate you."

Demand for the vaccine — with recent approval of boosters for all adults and shots for elementary school children — has been high amid the surge and the emergence of the omicron variant, whose dangers are still not fully understood.

Nearly 48 million people have received a booster, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

White House officials noted the U.S. administered 12.5 million shots last week, the highest weekly total since May.

## Pfizer says booster protects against omicron variant

Associated Press

Pfizer said Wednesday that a booster dose of its COVID-19 vaccine may protect against the new omicron variant even though the initial two doses appear significantly less effective.

Pfizer and its partner BioNTech said lab tests showed a booster dose increased the level of so-called neutralizing antibodies against omicron by 25-fold.

Pfizer announced the preliminary laboratory data in a press release and it hasn't yet undergone scientific review. The com-

panies are already working to create an omicron-specific vaccine in case it's needed.

Scientists have speculated that the high jump in antibodies that comes with a third dose of COVID-19 vaccines might ultimately be enough to counter any decrease in effectiveness.

Antibody levels predict how well a vaccine may prevent infection with the coronavirus, but they are just one layer of the immune system's defenses. Pfizer said two doses of the vaccine may still induce protection against severe disease.

"Although two doses of the vaccine may still offer protection against severe disease caused by the Omicron strain, it's clear from these preliminary data that protection is maximized with a third dose of our vaccine," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement.

Pfizer's announcement had an immediate impact on U.S. markets. Futures that had pointed to a lower open reversed course in seconds and swung solidly to the positive with the Dow jumping almost 200 points.

## Judge blocks vaccine mandate for federal contractors

Associated Press

A federal judge on Tuesday blocked President Joe Biden's administration from enforcing a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for employees of federal contractors, the latest in a string of victories for Republican-led states pushing back against Biden's pandemic policies.

U.S. District Court Judge R. Stan Baker, in Augusta, Ga., issued a stay to bar enforcement of the mandate nationwide.

The order came in response to a lawsuit from several contractors and seven states — Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia. It applies across the United States because one of those contractors challenging the order is the trade group Associated Builders and Contractors Inc., whose members do busi-

ness nationwide.

Baker found that the states are likely to succeed in their claim that Biden exceeded authorization from Congress when he issued the requirement in September.

"The Court acknowledges the tragic toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought throughout the nation and the globe," wrote the judge, an appointee of former President Donald Trump. "However, even in times of crisis this Court must preserve the rule of law and ensure that all branches of government act within the bounds of their constitutionally granted authorities."

A White House spokeswoman said the Justice Department would continue to defend the mandate.

"The reason that we proposed these requirements is that we know they work, and

we are confident in our ability, legally, to make these happen across the country," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at Tuesday's briefing.

A federal judge in Kentucky had also issued a preliminary injunction against the mandate last week, but it applied only to contractors in three states that had sued together — Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

Biden issued an executive order Sept. 9 requiring federal contractors and subcontractors to comply with workplace safety guidelines developed by a federal task force. That task force subsequently issued guidelines that new, renewed or extended contracts include a clause requiring employees to be fully vaccinated by Jan. 18. That meant those receiving a two-dose vaccine must get their second shot by Jan. 4.

# Amazon outage rattles businesses across US

Associated Press

A major outage in Amazon's cloud computing network Tuesday severely disrupted services at a wide range of U.S. companies for more than five hours, the latest sign of just how concentrated the business of keeping the internet running has become.

The incident at Amazon Web Services mostly affected the eastern United States, but still impacted everything from airline reservations and auto dealerships to payment apps and video streaming services to Amazon's own massive e-commerce operation. That included The Associated Press, whose publishing system was inoperable for much of the day,

greatly limiting its ability to publish its news report.

Amazon has still said nothing about what exactly went wrong. In fact, the company limited its communications Tuesday to terse technical explanations on an AWS dashboard and a brief statement delivered via spokesperson Richard Rocha that acknowledged the outage had affected Amazon's own warehouse and delivery operation but said the company was "working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible."

Roughly five hours after numerous companies and other organizations began reporting issues, the company said in a post on the AWS status page

that it had "mitigated" the underlying problem responsible for the outage, which it did not describe. It took some affected companies hours more to thoroughly check their systems and restart their own services.

Amazon Web Services was formerly run by Amazon CEO Andy Jassy, who succeeded founder Jeff Bezos in July. The cloud-service operation is a huge profit center for Amazon. It holds roughly a third of the \$152 billion market for cloud services, according to a report by Synergy Research — a larger share than its closest rivals, Microsoft and Google, combined.

Problems began midmorning on the U.S. East Coast, said

Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at Kentik Inc, a network intelligence firm. Netflix was one of the more prominent names affected; Kentik saw a 26% drop in traffic to the streaming service.

Madory said he saw no reason to suspect nefarious activity. He said the recent cluster of major outages reflects how complex the networking industry has become.

"More and more these outages end up being the product of automation and centralization of administration," he said. "This ends up leading to outages that are hard to completely avoid due to operational complexity but are very impactful when they happen."

## Closing arguments set in Smollett trial

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A prosecutor told jurors Wednesday that there is "overwhelming evidence" that former "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett staged a racist, anti-gay attack against himself in downtown Chicago for publicity, then lied to police about it.

Special prosecutor Dan Webb said during his closing argument that what Smollett did in January 2019 caused Chicago police to spend enormous amounts of time and resources investigating an alleged crime that turned out to be fake. Smollett, who is Black and gay, told police someone put a noose around his neck and yelled racist and homophobic slurs.

"Besides being against the law, it is just plain wrong to outright denigrate something as serious as a real hate crime and then make sure it involved words and symbols that have such historical significance in

our country," Webb said.

He also accused Smollett of lying to jurors, saying surveillance video from before the alleged attack and that night contradicts key moments of Smollett's testimony.

"At the end of the day, he lacks any credibility whatsoever," Webb said.

An attorney for Smollett, 39, was expected to give a closing argument later Wednesday before the jury begins deliberating whether Smollett is guilty on six counts of a low-level felony for making what prosecutors have said was a false police report about the alleged attack. He faces one count of felony disorderly conduct for each time he gave a report to three different officers.

Taking the witness stand this week, Smollett repeatedly denied the attack was a fake, telling a prosecutor "there was no hoax on my part" and that two brothers who testified against him are "liars."

## Oakland backtracks, votes to add police as crimes rise

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The Oakland City Council, a longtime leader in the Black Lives Matter movement to cut police funding, reversed course Tuesday and voted to hire more officers as it grapples with a surge in homicides and gun violence.

The proposal by Mayor Libby Schaaf to add two new police academies and unfreeze positions within the department to add 60 new officers passed with six members voting yes, one voting no and one abstention.

Council members ended up not voting on a separate proposal to offer one-time bonuses of at least \$50,000 to recruit experienced officers from other cities and at least \$20,000 to Oakland residents who become police cadets. They will later consider hiring incentives for experienced officers.

Schaaf applauded the vote in a statement, saying that residents "spoke up for a comprehensive approach to public safety — one that includes prevention, inter-

vention and addressing crime's root causes, as well as an adequately staffed police department."

Oakland is among several politically liberal cities reversing course on police funding amid a spike in violence, to the dismay of police critics who have said officers are ineffective at preventing crime and end up traumatizing residents, especially Black people. They have said there is no staffing shortage within the police department, and that officers should focus on the most serious crimes.

"What's terrifying about this is as Oakland goes, so goes the country," said Cat Brooks, co-founder of Oakland's Anti Police-Terror Project, urging the council to vote down increased police staffing. "If we allow it to be demolished here, we are giving fuel for faux progressives and right-wing folks to destroy the movement across the country."

Oakland has had 129 homicides this year, up from 109 last year and 78 in 2019.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Active shooter training injures city worker

**FL** FORT LAUDERDALE — A training session designed to teach city employees how best to survive an active shooter situation is on hold in Fort Lauderdale after a worker was injured.

Burning discharge from the blank of a gun landed on the worker's pant leg at the city's training center, the South Florida SunSentinel reported. The worker was treated by paramedics and then taken to a hospital for treatment.

The city's risk management department had been training employees for several weeks, city spokeswoman Ashley Doussard told the newspaper.

### Zoo wants gun activist to pay its legal bills

**MO** ST. LOUIS — After successfully defending its weapons ban in court, the St. Louis Zoo is now trying to force the gun rights activist who challenged the ban to pay part of its \$150,000 in legal bills.

The zoo filed its request for legal fees in August, but a judge has yet to rule on the motion, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. A lawyer for Jeffrey Smith, of Cincinnati, who challenged the ban on guns, called the motion "ludicrous."

A St. Louis judge ruled last year that the zoo could ban guns on its property because it qualifies as a school and a gated amusement park under state law. The ruling came after a series of appeals in a 2015 lawsuit the zoo filed against

Smith after he announced plans to challenge the gun ban by marching on zoo property while openly carrying guns.

The planned protest with guns never happened, although Smith came to the zoo wearing an empty holster.

### Man shot at teenagers throwing water balloons

**CA** RIDGECREST — A Southern California man was arrested after he fired a shotgun at two teens for throwing water balloons, authorities said.

Police in Ridgecrest said the 63-year-old man was asleep in his pickup when the teens, ages 18 and 17, drove by and threw water balloons at his truck.

While the man inspected his pickup for damage, the teens drove by again. He pulled a 12 gauge shotgun from the truck and fired at the driver's door, causing damage to their vehicle and minor injuries to the driver, according to police.

Deputies with the Kern County Sheriff's Office arrested the man later in the day without incident.

### Police say driver was hanging out of vehicle

**NH** MERRIMACK — A driver traveling the wrong way on the Everett Turnpike in Merrimack and later seen hanging outside of his vehicle was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of drugs, New Hampshire State Police said.

Police said the vehicle was seen heading north in the southbound lane. When police responded, callers said the ve-

hicle had made a U-turn and was heading south in the southbound lanes, but the driver's door was open and the driver was hanging outside of the vehicle.

Police said that with help from additional concerned citizens who followed the vehicle and reported its location, they were able to stop it.

The driver, a 41-year-old Salem, Mass., man, was also accused of driving with a suspended license.

### Power loss at hatchery means smaller fish

**OR** ASHLAND — Species like Chinook salmon, steelhead and rainbow trout at a hatchery in southern Oregon will not grow as large as usual this winter.

The Cole Rivers fish hatchery heats its water from October through April. But last April, a cable that connected the hatchery to the Lost Creek dam broke, Jefferson Public Radio reported.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said it was unable to fix the mile-long, 50-year-old cable.

The hatchery is looking into holding the fish longer to give them more time to grow.

### Ancient crab fossil found on island

**MD** SALISBURY — The National Parks Service confirmed the discovery of an ancient crab fossil found along the shores of Assateague Island National Seashore.

Sharon Conn, a visitor to the area, found the fossil in early

October on the Virginia portion of Assateague Island.

The parks service identified the rare blue crab fossil with the help of the Department of Paleobiology at the Smithsonian. Matthew Miller, museum specialist at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, tested the fossil to find out how old it is. He concluded it is likely from the Pleistocene age about 2 million to 12,000 years ago.

The fossil was found on public land and is therefore protected by the 2009 Paleontological Resources Preservation Act.

### Passenger grabs wheel, causes bus crash

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — A passenger faces charges after grabbing the steering wheel of a Greyhound bus during a dispute with his brother and causing the bus to crash into a light pole in Albuquerque, police said.

They said the bus driver and two passengers were hospitalized along with two other people after the crash.

Police said Leroy Maass, 52, was booked into jail on suspicion of three counts of aggravated battery resulting in great bodily harm and two misdemeanor counts of aggravated battery.

At some point, police said Maass and his brother got into an argument and Maass threw an object at his brother.

Police said Maass jumped over the plexiglass barrier where the bus driver was sitting and grabbed the steering wheel.

— From wire reports

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# Frenzy likely when MLB roster freeze lifts

Associated Press

The ink was hardly dry on Corey Seager's \$325 million, 10-year contract with the Texas Rangers last week when baseball's historically hurried free agency period crashed to a halt.

It's hard to imagine anything competing with last Wednesday's spending spree, when teams combined to commit a record \$1.4 billion in the hours before baseball tumbled into its first labor stoppage in 26 years. But when the lockout ends, the frenzy for the game's remaining free agents should be entertaining, too.

There are 141 major league free agents waiting for a freeze on roster transactions to lift once a new collective bargaining agreement is reached. Progress on a CBA isn't expected until at least the weeks before pitchers and catchers are set to report, meaning another mad dash is probably in store for teams trying to fill out their rosters ahead of spring training.

Here's what to look for when the hot stove reignites:

## In short supply

This year's free agent class

was headlined by a star quintet of shortstops, but three of them signed big-money deals last week — Seager, Marcus Semien (Rangers) and Javier Báez (Tigers).

Carlos Correa and Trevor Story remain, with Andrelton Simmons also available for suitors who might miss out.

Correa, the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year and a two-time All-Star, was considered the top player on the market entering the offseason and is certain to get the biggest deal after the lockout. The 27-year-old batted .279 with 26 homers, 92 RBIs and an .850 OPS for Houston in 2021, perhaps shaking some concerns about his durability by playing 148 games — his first time with at least 111 since 2016.

Two targets loom for Correa — Seager's \$325 million deal was the biggest signed this offseason, and Francisco Lindor's \$341 million, 10-year contract with the Mets is the record payday for a shortstop. Correa is looking for a deep-pocketed team ready to make a last-minute splash before spring training. Conveniently, the Yankees

top the list of clubs that need a shortstop. General manager Brian Cashman has heaped praise on Correa, saying last month that negative fan reaction tied to the sign-stealing scandal was “not going to enter my calculus” and that Correa was “clearly not afraid.”

The 29-year-old Story has played six stellar seasons with the Colorado Rockies and hit .251 with 24 homers and 75 RBIs in 2021, surprisingly remaining in Denver all season instead of being traded to a contender. He could get something similar to Báez's \$140 million, six-year deal with Detroit.

Simmons won the last of his four Gold Gloves in 2018 and batted just .223 with three homers for Minnesota last year.

## Braves or new world?

Freddie Freeman remains a free agent despite his apparently tight ties with the World Series champion Braves. The 2020 MVP is coming off another stellar season, hitting .300 with 31 homers, 83 RBIs and an .896 OPS.

Drafted by Atlanta in 2007,

the 32-year-old seems like a prime candidate to follow friend and mentor Chipper Jones in being a lifelong Brave.

If that doesn't happen, it's not hard to picture nearly every big-market team trying to take a run at the five-time All-Star.

## Universal demand?

It's expected — but not certain — that the National League will adopt the designated hitter as part of the new collective bargaining agreement. Several players stand to benefit by waiting to sign until that change is official.

Nick Castellanos should get the biggest payday of the group. The 29-year-old hit .309 with 34 homers and 100 RBIs for Cincinnati in 2021, but his outfield defense is just OK. Kyle Schwarber, who hit 32 homers for Washington and Boston last year, has a similar profile.

Nelson Cruz struggled after a midseason trade to Tampa Bay last year, but the 41-year-old still hit 32 homers and should get an everyday job. World Series MVP Jorge Soler also remains available.

# Serena skipping Australian Open due to injury

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Not long after Serena Williams' name was absent from the entry list for the Australian Open, she confirmed the obvious: the seven-time champion won't play the 2022 edition of the season-opening major in January.

The 40-year-old Williams hasn't played since retiring from her first-round match at Wimbledon with a right hamstring injury, and her ranking has slipped to No. 41 since then. She won the last of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles at the 2017 Australian Open, and was beaten in the semifinals this year by Naomi Osaka in

straight sets.

The Australian Open's website Wednesday said the seven-time women's singles champion would not compete in Melbourne “following advice from her medical team.”

## UConn's Bueckers may miss up to 2 months

STORRS, Conn. — UConn star Paige Bueckers suffered a fracture just below her left knee and will be sidelined for up to two months, the school said Tuesday.

Last season's women's college basketball player of the year was dribbling up the court with under 40 seconds left in

Sunday's 73-54 victory over Notre Dame when she stumbled and came down awkwardly. She had to be carried off the court.

The school said an MRI and CT scan showed she suffered a tibial plateau fracture, which is a break of the tibia bone that extends into the knee joint. It has a recovery time estimated at between six and eight weeks.

UConn coach Geno Aureimma said the school will not rush Bueckers back to the court.

## IOC unable to give certainties about Peng

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — After five weeks of concern

about the safety of tennis player Peng Shuai in China, the International Olympic Committee said Tuesday that it cannot give any certainties about her case.

The IOC's two video calls with the Grand Slam doubles champion are the only reported contacts Peng has had with people outside China since Nov. 2, when she sent a social media post alleging she was sexually assaulted by a former top Communist Party official.

Critics have claimed the IOC is enabling a cover-up by China ahead of the state-backed project to host the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February.

# Cup repeat: Lightning down Canadiens

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Ondrej Palat scored with 38 seconds left, giving the Tampa Bay Lightning a 3-2 comeback win over the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday night.

Tampa Bay's victory came exactly five months after it beat Montreal in the 2021 Stanley Cup Final.

Patrick Maroon and Corey Perry also scored for the Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 21 saves.

Nick Suzuki and Mike Hoffman scored for the Canadiens. Jake Allen stopped 24 shots.

Perry scored the tying goal with just more than two minutes left in the third period in his first game back in Montreal, setting the stage for Palat's winner.

**Blues 4, Panthers 3 (OT):** Pavel Buchnevich scored a wraparound goal 53 seconds into overtime and host St. Louis beat Florida.

The Blues split their back-to-

back with the Panthers. Both games went to overtime.

**Ducks 2, Sabres 0:** Trevor Zegras flipped a pass over the net to set up the go-ahead goal, Anthony Stolarz made 25 saves and visiting Anaheim blanked Buffalo.

Zegras scooped the puck onto the blade of his stick behind the net and lobbed it over goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen's head. Sonny Milano was waiting on the right edge of the crease and batted the feed past Luukkonen's glove for his eighth goal 5:14 into the second period.

**Rangers 6, Blackhawks 2:** Chicago forward Jujhar Khaira was stretchered off the ice after he was leveled by Jacob Trouba in the second period of visiting New York's victory.

Artemi Panarin had two goals and two assists against his first NHL team, passing 500 career points and helping the Rangers to their seventh straight win. Trouba, Chris Kreider, Kevin

Rooney and Barclay Goodrow also scored, and Alexandar Georgiev made 24 saves.

**Wild 4, Oilers 1:** Cam Talbot made 38 saves against his former team and visiting Minnesota shut down Edmonton for its seventh straight victory.

Joel Eriksson Ek had a goal and an assist. Marcus Foligno, Victor Rask and Dmitry Kulikov also scored for the Wild (18-6-1), off to their best start in franchise history with 37 points through 25 games.

**Maple Leafs 5, Blue Jackets 4:** Auston Matthews scored twice, defenseman Morgan Rielly set up four goals and host Toronto beat Columbus to stop a two-game skid.

Rielly set up power-play goals by William Nylander and captain John Tavares, and two more from Matthews. His second goal came seven seconds after Tavares put the Maple Leafs in front 4-1 late in the second period.

**Predators 5, Red Wings 2:**

Roman Josi beat four defenders for a first-period goal, Ryan Johansen scored on a power play and Nashville won at Detroit.

The loss snapped the Red Wings' five-game winning streak and their five-game home winning streak.

**Hurricanes 4, Jets 2:** Martin Necas and Vincent Trocheck scored power-play goals to lead Carolina to a win at Winnipeg.

Jacob Slavin and Sebastian Aho each had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes. Nino Niederreiter added two assists and Frederik Andersen made 16 saves in the opener of a five-game road trip.

**Sharks 5, Flames 3:** Tomas Hertl scored his fourth career hat trick and host San Jose used a three-goal barrage in the second period to beat Calgary.

The Pacific Division-leading Flames broke out to a 3-1 lead early in the second before the Sharks responded with goals from Erik Karlsson, Logan Couture and Hertl to take the lead.

## MLS expands staffs' diversity hiring requirements

Associated Press

Major League Soccer clubs must interview at least one Black candidate when hiring for sporting positions as part of updates to the diversity hiring policy announced by the league Tuesday.

The new requirement calls for at least two non-white candidates to be interviewed for any open sporting/technical positions with clubs and one of the candidates must be Black. Previously, the league's hiring requirements called for only one "diverse" candidate to be interviewed for open positions.

Teams not abiding by the new policy face fines, including \$50,000 for a first offense and up to \$100,000 for a second offense.

Commissioner Don Garber said during his state of the league address that the work on updating the league's diversity hiring process started about a year ago following the hiring of Sola Winley as the league's chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, and included collaboration with Black Play-

ers for Change and the Soccer Collective on Racial Equality.

"We had the equivalent of the Rooney Rule ... it's been some time and it needed evolution," Garber said. "I mean, the goal is to increase representation, particularly among the Black community. We need to fill the pipeline with candidates. We've got work that we need to do there. There are a lot of programs and initiatives."

While the new requirements are only related to technical staff within each franchise, the league plans to expand the hiring requirements to front offices in the future. Garber didn't have a timeframe on when that would happen other than to say it would be coming soon. He said the teams have been supportive.

For a change, Garber's year-end address didn't focus on labor agreements after the sides settled on a new collective bargaining agreement in February that runs through 2027.

But expansion remains a hot question.

MLS will welcome its 28th franchise with Charlotte beginning play next season and St. Louis starting in 2023 with its downtown soccer stadium expected to be completed in late 2022.

As for the 30th team, Las Vegas is the clear leader in the discussions. There are ongoing conversations with other potential markets like Phoenix and San Diego, but Garber said there's been progress made in Las Vegas with potential owner Wes Edens and the chance of an announcement in the next year.

"We're very bullish about the market and will continue to plow forward," Garber said.

Meanwhile, the league hopes to have its next media deals completed in the first quarter of 2022. The current media deals expire after next year. Garber said what's being presented to potential bidders is an entire package as teams were told several years ago to have their local media, streaming, data and sports betting deals expiring by the end of the 2022 season.

# Moore, No. 16 Villanova down Syracuse

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Justin Moore scored 18 points, Collin Gillespie had 14 and No. 6 Villanova beat Syracuse 67-53 in the Jimmy V Classic on Tuesday night.

Jermaine Samuels added 13 for the Wildcats (7-2) in their 22nd win at Madison Square Garden since 2014.

Gillespie made the play of the game when he picked off a late Orange pass and hit a bounce pass to a streaking Samuels for the one-handed jam down the lane and a 10-point lead that sent the crowd into a frenzy.

Jimmy Boenheim led Syracuse (5-4) with 21 points and Joe Girard III had 11.

**Texas Tech 57, No. 13 Tennessee 52 (OT):** Terrence Shannon Jr. had 18 points and 12 rebounds, and the Red Raiders continued their run of Jimmy V Classic upsets in an overtime win over the Volunteers.

Texas Tech (7-1) might want to petition to play in the Jimmy V Classic every season. The unranked Red Raiders knocked off No. 1 Louisville in 2019.

Tennessee (6-2) missed a whopping 34 of 40 three-pointers overall and shot only 27% overall in regulation from the floor.

John Fulkerson led the Vols with 10 points, followed by three players with nine points.

**No. 8 Kansas 78, UTEP 52:** Ochai Agbaji scored 23 points, Christian Braun added 20 and the Jayhawks tuned up for this weekend's return of the Border War by blowing out the Miners in Kansas City, Mo.

David McCormack and Mitch Lightfoot added eight points apiece for Kansas (7-1), which led by 21 at halftime and wasn't threatened the rest of the way.

Souley Boom had 18 points and Keonte Kennedy 11 for UTEP (4-4).

Now, the Jayhawks turn their attention to Saturday's showdown with Missouri. The bitter rivals haven't played a regular-season game since the Tigers bolted for the SEC nearly a decade ago.

**No. 10 Kentucky 76, Southern 64:** Oscar Tshiebwe scored 18 of his 23 points after halftime despite being in foul trouble, TyTy Washington Jr. added 14 points and both keyed small runs to help the host Wildcats earn their seventh consecutive victory.

Jayden Saddler had 18 points, Brion Whitley added 14 points and Tyrone Lyons 12 for the Jaguars (3-6), who dropped their second consecutive game.

Kentucky (7-1) was playing for the first time in eight days. Tshiebwe ended up with 11 rebounds for his seventh double-double — the most in the nation this season.

**No. 12 Arkansas 86, Charlotte 66:** J.D. Notae recorded his first career double-double and the host Razorbacks rolled over the 49ers.

Notae finished with 23 points and 10 rebounds as Arkansas (9-0) took control of the game in the first half and never let up.

Razorbacks sophomore Jaylin Williams scored a career-high 15 points and added eight rebounds. Four players scored in dou-

ble-figures for Arkansas.

Austin Butler led Charlotte (4-4) with 14 points and Jahmir Young finished with 10.

**No. 16 USC 80, Eastern Kentucky 68:** Isaiah Mobley had a career-high 23 points and 13 rebounds, and the host Trojans took care of the Colonels.

USC (9-0, 2-0 Pac-12) is off to its best start since 2016-17 when it opened 14-0.

Mobley hit a career-high five three-pointers and his rebounds tied his career high. Drew Peterson added 15 points, Chevez Goodwin added 14 points and Max Agbonkpolo added 12 points for Eastern Kentucky.

The Colonels (5-5) dropped their fourth in a row. They were led by Braxton Beverly with 16 points.

**George Mason 71, Navy 65:** Josh Oduro had a career-high 32 points as the host Patriots beat the Midshipmen.

Davonte Gaines had 13 points and nine rebounds for George Mason (5-5), which ended its five-game losing streak.

John Carter Jr. had 21 points for Navy (6-3), whose five-game winning streak ended. Greg Summers added 12 points.

**Army 97, Purchase 40:** The host Black Knights tied a program record with 16 made three-pointers en route to a rout of the Panthers.

Army (5-4) was led by Aaron Duhart with 12 points. The team had twice made 16 three-pointers in a game — against Colgate on Feb. 11, 2012, and versus Air Force on Dec. 17, 2017.

# Nets hand Mavs fifth consecutive defeat at home

Associated Press

DALLAS — Kevin Durant scored 24 points, James Harden had 23 points and 12 assists, and the Brooklyn Nets beat Dallas 102-99 on Tuesday night, handing the Mavericks their fifth consecutive home loss.

The Eastern Conference-leading Nets erased a 17-point third-quarter deficit to avoid back-to-back losses for the first time this season. Brooklyn squandered a double-digit lead after halftime in a loss to Chicago.

Luka Doncic scored 28 points but had another rough night from three-point range except for the 30-footer he banked in

just before the first-half buzzer. Kristaps Porzingis had 17 points and 12 rebounds.

Harden, who also had nine rebounds, easily beat Doncic one-on-one for a layup and the Nets' biggest lead at 100-97 with 1:23 remaining. They didn't take their first lead until the middle of the fourth quarter.

Dallas didn't make a basket after Doncic's short jumper with 3:51 to go.

**Lakers 117, Celtics 102:** LeBron James scored 30 points, Russell Westbrook added 24 points and 11 assists, and host Los Angeles beat Boston in the latest chapter of the NBA's most storied rivalry.

Anthony Davis had 17 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers, who produced one of their best recent performances in their fourth victory in six games overall. Los Angeles made 56.5% of its shots in the first three quarters and throttled Jayson Tatum's supporting cast defensively.

Tatum scored 14 of his 34 points in a first-quarter blitz for the Celtics, who dropped to 1-2 on their four-game West Coast trip. Jaylen Brown sat out his third straight game with a strained right hamstring, and nobody else managed more than Robert Williams III's 13 points for Boston.

**Knicks 121, Spurs 109:** R.J. Barrett made a career-high seven three-pointers and scored 32 points, and New York won at San Antonio to snap a three-game skid.

Alec Burks scored 18 points, Immanuel Quickley added 16 points and Julius Randle had 15 for the Knicks, who hadn't won at San Antonio since Jan. 2, 2014.

Derrick White had 26 points, six rebounds and seven assists for the Spurs, who have dropped two straight after a season-long three-game winning streak. Dejounte Murray added 15 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.