

Egypt fights plan to remove Palestinians

Associated Press

CAIRO — Israel said it has begun preparations for the departure of Palestinians from Gaza despite international rejection of President Donald Trump's plan to empty the territory of its population. Egypt has launched a diplomatic blitz behind the scenes against the proposal, warning it would put its peace deal with Israel at risk, officials said.

The Trump administration has already dialed back aspects of the proposal after it was widely rejected internationally, saying the relocation of Palestinians would be temporary. U.S. officials have provided few details about how or when the plan would be carried out.

In a social media post Thursday, Trump said Israel would turn Gaza over to the United States after the war and that no U.S. soldiers would be needed for his plan to redevelop it.

The Palestinians have vehemently rejected Trump's pro-

posal, fearing Israel would never allow refugees to return. Egypt has warned that an expulsion of Palestinians would destabilize the region and undermine its peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of stability and American influence for decades.

Saudi Arabia, another key U.S. ally, has also rejected any mass transfer of Palestinians and said it will not normalize relations with Israel — a key goal of the Trump administration — without the creation of a Palestinian state that includes Gaza.

Trump and Israeli officials have depicted the proposed relocation from war-ravaged Gaza as voluntary, but the Palestinians have universally expressed their determination to remain in their homeland.

Trump and Israeli officials have not said how they would respond if Palestinians refuse to leave. But Human Rights Watch and other groups said

the plan, if implemented, would amount to "ethnic cleansing," the forcible relocation of the civilian population of an ethnic group from a geographic area.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Thursday that he has ordered the military to make preparations to facilitate the emigration of large numbers of Palestinians from Gaza through land crossings as well as "special arrangements for exit by sea and air."

There were no immediate signs of such preparations on the ground.

Trump said he wanted to "permanently" resettle most of Gaza's population in other countries and for the U.S. to take charge of clearing debris and rebuilding Gaza as a "Riviera of the Middle East" for all people.

He did not rule out the deployment of U.S. troops there.

U.S. officials later appeared to walk it back, saying the relocation of Palestinians would be

temporary and that Trump had not committed to putting American boots on the ground or spending American tax dollars in Gaza.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has not publicly responded to Trump's stunning proposal that most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians be relocated and the U.S. take charge of rebuilding the territory.

Israel's 15-month campaign against the militant Hamas group had reduced large parts of Gaza to rubble before a fragile ceasefire took hold last month.

But Egyptian officials, speaking Wednesday on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks, said Cairo has made clear to the Trump administration and Israel that it will resist any such proposal, and that the peace deal with Israel — which has stood for nearly half a century — is at risk.

Panama disputes claim US Navy will transit canal for free

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Navy ships transiting the Panama Canal aren't entitled to a free ride just yet despite the State Department's announcement this week saying they would transit the waterway without paying fees, according to the canal's governing authority.

The Panama Canal Authority said Wednesday on an official social media account that it had not made any adjustments to the tolls or fees charged for canal use.

The authority also empha-

sized its sovereign governance of the passageway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The post on X did express a willingness "to establish a dialogue with the relevant officials of the United States regarding the transit of warships from said country."

The communication followed a State Department announcement the same day saying an agreement had been reached with Panama to allow U.S. government vessels free passage through the canal.

"This saves the U.S. government millions of dollars a year,"

the State Department said on X.

The dueling messages followed Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Panama on Sunday and Monday, during which he met with Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino and toured the canal, among other activities.

During Rubio's visit, both governments agreed to study the feasibility of giving U.S. warships free passage, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

Navy use of the canal is infrequent, with about 40 vessels transiting annually, excluding

the service's aircraft carriers, which are too large. Allowing free access would reportedly save the U.S. about \$13 million each year, according to the WSJ report.

Ships pay an average of about \$750,000 per crossing, but tolls can range from \$300,000 to \$1 million, the newspaper said.

Waiving the fees for Navy ships would require Panama to find a way around the Neutrality Treaty signed in September 1977, which bars preferential treatment among nations and calls for "equal conditions of charges or transit."

Suspected Venezuelan gang members at Gitmo

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

Ten suspected Venezuelan gang members were among the first to arrive Tuesday at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay as about 300 U.S. troops worked to expand the center's migrant capacity to hold thousands more deported migrants.

The 10 "high-threat" individuals are associated with the Tren de Aragua, a transnational criminal street gang, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday.

The flights departed from El Paso, Texas. "Americans are safer every single day one of these criminals is arrested and deported from our country," Leavitt said.

The migrants are temporarily being housed in vacant detention facilities at the base in Cuba, the Department of Defense

said. They eventually will be transported to their country of origin. According to Leavitt, Venezuela has agreed to accept the return of Tren de Aragua gang members.

The migrants arrived at Guantanamo Bay as more than 300 sailors, soldiers and Marines worked alongside Department of Homeland Security forces to expand the facility's capacity to hold 2,000 migrants.

Additional expansion phases are planned, according to U.S. Southern Command, the combatant command that oversees military operations in the region.

The Navy base has been used primarily for the last two decades to detain those associated with the 9/11 attacks. President Donald Trump has said the base has the capacity to hold as many as 30,000 migrants.

Wednesday, Leavitt said Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum agreed to supply

10,000 soldiers on the U.S.-Mexico border. Those soldiers, Leavitt said, will be tasked with preventing fentanyl and illegal migrants from "pouring into our country."

Additionally, El Salvador has agreed to book in Salvadoran prisons illegal migrants of any nationality who are slated for deportation from the U.S.

The agreement, Leavitt said, is "unprecedented."

"Efforts to seal the border, halt the invasion and carry out the largest mass deportation campaign continue at lightning speed," she said.

To date, Leavitt said, more than 8,000 migrants have been arrested since Jan. 20, when Trump took office. Of those, 461 have been released for various reasons, including medical conditions and lack of detention facilities.

Envoy soon to share Trump plan to end war in Ukraine

Bloomberg News

U.S. allies expect President Donald Trump's administration to present a long-awaited plan to end Russia's war on Ukraine at the Munich Security Conference in Germany next week, according to people familiar with the matter.

The blueprint would be presented to allies by Trump's special representative for Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, the people said on condition of anonymity. They declined to say how detailed they expected the discussions to be or what format they would take.

The proposal would be delivered at the Feb. 14-16 conference a week before Russia's war hits the three-year mark. Kellogg and others have dropped hints in recent weeks of what Trump allies have referred to as "peace through strength."

Elements include potentially freezing the conflict and leaving territory occupied by Russian forces in limbo while providing Ukraine with security guarantees

to ensure that Moscow can't attack again.

Later this month, Kellogg is expected to make his first trip to Kyiv and elsewhere in the European Union, according to people familiar with the matter. In Ukraine, he is expected to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian leader is planning to travel to several countries in the Gulf region after the Munich conference.

Spokespeople at the office of the Ukrainian president declined to comment. Kellogg will continue to engage allies to help fulfill Trump's promise to end the war, National Security Council spokesperson Brian Hughes said.

Kellogg has signaled that the U.S. would like to see elections held in Ukraine after a ceasefire, while Trump has indicated that access to critical minerals in return for U.S. support could be part of a settlement. The retired general on Wednesday confirmed plans to attend the Munich gathering.

US, France, Japan prep for Indo-Pacific 3-carrier drill

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A flotilla of about 10 warships, including the USS Carl Vinson and the French aircraft carrier FS Charles de Gaulle, are set to train together Saturday in the Philippine Sea, according to the U.S. 7th Fleet.

Joining the two carriers for the exercise, dubbed Pacific Steller 2025, are at least eight escort ships and Japan's JS Kaga, a small-deck flattop called a helicopter carrier, the command announced Thursday in a news release.

A 7th Fleet spokeswoman, Lt. j.g. Sarah Merrill, confirmed the exercise will take place in the East Philippine Sea and said it's an opportunity to advance the three navies' ability to work together and improve maritime security.

"Cooperating with our allies and partners enhances our ability to deter conflict and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific," she said.

The last multicarrier drill in the Indo-Pacific took place in August, with the USS Abraham Lincoln and the Italian aircraft carrier ITS Cavour training together, a first for the U.S. and Italian navies in the region.

The Carl Vinson strike group includes the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton and the guided-missile destroyers USS Sterett and USS William P. Lawrence.

The nuclear-powered Charles de Gaulle, currently engaged in its Clemenceau 25 deployment, is escorted by the destroyer FS Forbin, frigates FS Provence and FS Alsace, fleet oiler FS Jacques Chevallier and a nuclear-powered attack submarine, USNI News reported Jan. 31.

The Kaga supports a complement of helicopters. In November, the Kaga completed trials for the first of two rounds of modifications that will allow it to carry the fifth-generation F-35B Lightning II, a short-takeoff and vertical-landing stealth fighter.

Trump to pressure IOC to ban transgender athletes

Associated Press

President Donald Trump is ready to take his fight against transgender athletes to the International Olympic Committee.

Trump said Wednesday during a signing ceremony for an executive order aimed at banning transgender athletes from women's sports that his administration wants the IOC to "change everything having to do with the Olympics and having to do with this absolutely ri-

diculous subject" ahead of the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles.

The order empowers the Secretary of State's office to pressure the IOC to amend standards "to promote fairness, safety and the best interests of female athletes by ensuring that eligibility for participation in women's sporting events is determined according to sex and not gender identity or testosterone reduction."

The order also calls for the

Secretary of State and the Department of Homeland Security to "review and adjust, as needed, policies permitting admission to the United States of males seeking to participate in women's sports."

The IOC has allowed transgender athletes to participate at the Olympics since 2004. It wasn't until 2021 that the first openly transgender athletes competed.

Outgoing IOC President Thomas Bach said in December

that Olympic organizers were "very confident" they could work with the Trump administration.

Officials with the LA28 committee did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The question going forward is what kind of leverage the United States can use to influence the IOC. Given the volatile nature of the issue, Trump's order could begin a groundswell for the IOC to come up with a uniform standard.

Trump blames 'obsolete' system for air collision

Associated Press

President Donald Trump on Thursday blamed last week's deadly collision of a passenger jet and Army helicopter on what he called an "obsolete" computer system used by U.S. air traffic controllers, and he vowed to replace it.

Trump said during an event that "a lot of mistakes happened" on Jan. 29 when an American Airlines flight out of Wichita, Kan., collided with an Army helicopter as the plane was about to land at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, killing all 67 peo-

ple on board the two aircraft.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, Trump blamed diversity hiring programs for the crash. But on Thursday, he blamed the computer system used by the country's air traffic controllers.

Trump said the U.S. spent billions of dollars to "renovate an old, broken system" instead of investing in a new one. He said in his own private jet, he uses a system from another country because his pilot says the existing system is obsolete.

Federal officials have been raising concerns about an over-

taxed and understaffed air traffic control system for years, especially after a series of close calls between planes at U.S. airports. Among the reasons they've cited for staffing shortages are uncompetitive pay, long shifts, intensive training and mandatory retirements.

Trump said that if the nation had a newer system, alarms would have sounded when the Black Hawk helicopter, which was on a training exercise, reached the same altitude as the plane.

But an FAA report after the crash said that the controller

did get an alert that the plane and helicopter were converging when they were still more than a mile apart.

The controller responded by asking the helicopter if it had the plane in sight and directed the helicopter to pass behind the plane. The helicopter responded that it did have the plane in sight.

To get more precise information, investigators need to be able to examine the wreckage of the still-submerged Black Hawk to verify the data. The helicopter isn't expected to be recovered until later this week.

Trump says he wants to root out 'anti-Christian bias'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he wants to root out "anti-Christian bias" in the U.S., announcing that he was forming a task force led by Attorney General Pam Bondi to investigate the "targeting" of Christians.

Speaking at two separate events in Washington surrounding the National Prayer Breakfast, Trump said that he would direct the task force to "immediately halt all forms of anti-Christian targeting and discrimination within the federal

government, including at the DOJ, which was absolutely terrible, the IRS, the FBI — terrible — and other agencies."

Trump said Bondi would also work to "fully prosecute anti-Christian violence and vandalism in our society and to move heaven and earth to defend the rights of Christians and religious believers nationwide."

The president's comments came after he joined the National Prayer Breakfast at the Capitol, a more than 70-year-old Washington tradition that brings together a bipartisan

group of lawmakers for fellowship, and told lawmakers there that his relationship with religion had "changed" after two failed assassination attempts last year, and he urged Americans to "bring God back" into their lives.

An hour after calling for "unity" on Capitol Hill, though, Trump struck a more partisan tone at the second event across town, announcing that, in addition to the task force, he was forming a commission on religious liberty, criticizing the Biden administration for "perse-

cution" of believers for prosecuting anti-abortion advocates.

And Trump took a victory lap over his early administration efforts to roll back diversity, equity and inclusion programs and to limit transgender participation in women's sports.

"I don't know if you've been watching, but we got rid of woke," he said.

The president, who is a non-denominational Christian, called religious liberty "part of the bedrock of American life" and called for protecting it with "absolute devotion."

Google scrapping diversity hiring goals

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO—Google is scrapping some of its diversity hiring targets, joining a lengthening list of U.S. companies that have abandoned or scaled back their diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

The move, which was outlined in an email sent to Google employees on Wednesday, came in the wake of an executive order issued by President Donald Trump that was aimed in part at pressuring government contractors to scrap their DEI initiatives.

Like several other major tech companies, Google sells some of its technology and services to the federal government, including its rapidly growing cloud division that's a key piece of its push into artificial technology.

Google's parent company, Alphabet, also signaled the shift in

its annual 10-K report it filed this week with the Securities and Exchange Commission. In it, Google removed a line included in previous annual reports saying that it's "committed to making diversity, equity, and inclusion part of everything we do and to growing a workforce that is representative of the users we serve."

Google generates most of Alphabet's annual revenue of \$350 billion and accounts for almost all of its worldwide workforce of 183,000.

"We're committed to creating a workplace where all our employees can succeed and have equal opportunities, and over the last year we've been reviewing our programs designed to help us get there," Google said in a statement to The Associated Press. "We've updated our 10-K lan-

guage to reflect this, and as a federal contractor, our teams are also evaluating changes required following recent court decisions and executive orders on this topic."

The change in language also comes slightly more than two weeks after Google CEO Sundar Pichai and other prominent technology executives — including Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Apple CEO Tim Cook and Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg — stood behind Trump during his inauguration.

Meta jettisoned its DEI program last month, shortly before the inauguration, while Amazon halted some of its DEI programs in December following Trump's election.

Many companies outside of the technology industry also have

backed away from DEI. Those include Walt Disney Co., McDonald's, Ford, Walmart, Target, Lowe's and John Deere.

Trump's recent executive order threatens to impose financial sanctions on federal contractors deemed to have "illegal" DEI programs. If the companies are found to be in violation, they could be subject to massive damages under the 1863 False Claims Act. That law states that contractors that make false claims to the government could be liable for three times the government's damages.

The order also directed all federal agencies to choose the targets of up to nine investigations of publicly traded companies, large nonprofits and other institutions with DEI policies that constitute "Illegal discrimination or preference."

US service member, 3 contractors killed in crash

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — One U.S. service member and three defense contractors were killed Thursday when an aircraft contracted by the U.S. military crashed in a rice field in the southern Philippines, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said.

The aircraft was conducting a routine mission "providing intelligence, surveillance, and re-

connaissance support at the request of our Philippine allies," the command said in a statement. It said the cause of the crash was under investigation.

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines also confirmed the crash of a light plane in Maguindanao del Sur province.

The bodies of the four people were retrieved from the wreck-

age in Ampatuan town, said Ameer Jehad Tim Ambolodto, a safety officer of Maguindanao del Sur. Indo-Pacific Command said the names of the crew were being withheld pending family notifications.

Windy Beaty, a provincial disaster-mitigation officer, said she received reports that residents saw smoke coming from the aircraft and heard an explo-

sion before it plummeted to the ground less than half a mile from a cluster of farmhouses.

Nobody was reported injured on or near the crash site, Beaty said.

U.S. forces have been deployed in a Philippine military camp in the country's south for decades to help provide advice and training to Filipino forces battling Muslim militants.

Iran inaugurates its first drone-carrying warship

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has inaugurated its first drone-carrier warship, saying the vessel is capable of operating in oceans far from its mainland, the official IRNA news agency reported Thursday.

The report said the vessel, manned by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's navy, can carry several squadrons of drones as well as helicopters and cruise

missiles.

Named Shahid Bagheri, the warship is capable of launching cruise missiles, IRNA said.

With a 180-meter-long runway for drones, the vessel can travel up to 22,000 nautical miles without needing to refuel in ports.

The report said it was converted from a commercial ship and would increase Iran's power of deterrence.

Footage broadcast by state TV

on the inauguration showed at least four helicopters and three drones on the runway of the warship.

Chief of the Guard, Gen. Hosein Salami, said at the ceremony that the warship can travel "independently" in seas for up to one year.

Iran needs to increase its deterrence capacity to prevent war, he said, stressing that Iran doesn't wish to wage war with any coun-

try.

"Iran is not considered a threat to any country, but we do not bow before threat by any power," Salami said.

Chief of the Guard's navy Adm. Ali Reza Tangsiri said it took more than two years to convert the new warship out of the commercial vessel.

Iran has long vowed to increase its naval presence on seas worldwide.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Miraculous' recovery for boy who protected sister

PA PHILADELPHIA — A 10-year-old boy has been making a “miraculous” recovery after protecting his younger sister from the flying debris of a medical transport plane that crashed in Philadelphia last week, his family said.

“Daddy, did I save my sister?” was one of the first things Trey Howard asked his father after he woke up following emergency brain surgery, Andre Howard Jr. said. He had gone out for donuts with three of his kids when the plane crashed Friday night, he said.

“It sounded like a missile was firing bullets, metal at my car, everyone else’s car,” Andre Howard told WPVI-TV in Philadelphia. Howard said he immediately backed up his car while his son covered his sister and told her, “Get down!” Trey grabbed his sister and Howard heard the glass shatter, he said.

“I turn around — there’s a piece of metal sticking out of my son’s head from the plane,” Howard said.

Doctors warned the family he might not survive his injuries, but he has improved every day.

The crash last Friday evening killed all six people on the Learjet 55 air ambulance. A seventh person inside a vehicle was killed on the ground.

State employees ordered back to all-in-office work

OH COLUMBUS — Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has ordered state employees back to their offices full-time starting next month.

In an executive order issued

Tuesday, DeWine required all permanent employees of state agencies, boards and commissions to resume five-day, in-office work weeks no later than March 17.

The return date set by DeWine falls almost five years to the day after the state declared an emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 9, 2020, and allowed certain employees to work remotely.

Many of those workers either returned to their offices full time or on a hybrid basis starting in June 2021, when the emergency was lifted.

Aide says governor didn't invite immigrant to stay

NJ TRENTON — New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy sparked Republican outrage over recent comments suggesting he and the state’s first lady offered an immigrant with uncertain immigration status the opportunity to stay at their home, but he didn’t actually make the offer and the person never moved in, his spokesperson said Tuesday.

The second-term Democratic governor was relaying a conversation he had had with first lady Tammy Murphy about someone they knew who was legally in the country but worried about their status, his spokesperson Mahen Gunaratna said. The governor had said he suggested inviting the person to stay at their house, but the offer wasn’t made in the end, Gunaratna said.

Murphy’s initial comments came up over the weekend while he was speaking at a progressive forum about how his administration could push back against President Donald

Trump.

Republicans pounced. Mario Kranjac, a Republican running to succeed Murphy, said it’s time for immigration officials to pay the governor a visit.

Judge resigns after saying all defendants are guilty

NY ALBANY — An upstate New York judge has resigned after he got out of jury duty by claiming that he couldn’t be impartial — because he thought everyone brought before a court is guilty.

Richard T. Snyder, who had been a justice of the Peterborough Town Court for about a decade, left his post after being charged with misconduct by a state judicial commission, officials said Tuesday.

According to court transcripts, Snyder tried to avoid serving on a jury in 2023 by first identifying himself as a judge and then saying, “I know everybody come in front of me. I know they are guilty. They would not be in front of me.”

He was eventually dismissed from serving on the jury.

The judge who was overseeing the jury selection reported Snyder to state officials.

At a judicial commission hearing the following year, Snyder said he understood that defendants are supposed to be considered innocent until proven guilty but that he still felt that people wouldn’t be in court if they didn’t commit crimes.

Mayor gets new powers to battle fentanyl crisis

CA SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to give newly elected Mayor Daniel Lurie greater

powers and flexibility to expedite the city’s response to a fentanyl crisis that has turned sidewalks into open-air dens of drug consumption and homelessness.

The board voted 10-1 to eliminate competitive bidding requirements for some contracts and allow the administration to solicit private donations to quickly add 1,500 shelter beds and hire more public safety and behavioral health specialists.

The board relinquished oversight powers for an effort with no concrete plan or accountability metrics, underscoring how desperate supervisors are for a solution.

Officials push to expand child care tax credits

GA ATLANTA — Georgia’s Republican lieutenant governor is renewing a push to expand child care tax credits.

Lt. Gov. Burt Jones said Tuesday that a Senate ally has introduced a bill to create a state income tax credit of up to \$250 for every child under age 7, expand an existing tax credit for child care to give parents up to \$300 more per child, and let employers claim a larger credit for investing in an on-site child care center. Jones has made those items part of his agenda as he is considering a run for governor in 2026.

Jones’ announcement comes after Democrats proposed even more generous breaks, a \$200 child tax credit for all children under 17 and a child care tax credit worth up to the total amount a parent spends on day care, preschool, after-school care or summer programs.

— From wire reports

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Ex-Saint Baun an All-Pro with Eagles

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Jason Kelce stood on stage during a taping of his late-night talk show when he spotted his former boss and Eagles general manager Howie Roseman hanging out in the balcony.

Kelce turned the cameo into a Q&A and asked what every fan in Philadelphia — heck, everyone around the NFL — really wanted to know: “Did you know Zack Baun was going to be this good?”

Roseman, who built the franchise’s first Super Bowl championship team in 2017, took a flier on Baun and signed him to a modest \$3.5 million, one-year deal in the offseason after four mostly forgettable years with the New Orleans Saints.

The goal was that Baun would be serviceable on his prove-it deal and maybe play decent enough to find a fit on the defense, perhaps even play some special teams.

The Eagles’ payoff on Roseman’s gamble? Baun blossomed

into a first-team All-Pro under Vic Fangio, and now the linebacker is set to enjoy a professional homecoming in New Orleans, this time trying to help Philadelphia beat the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl.

So, c’mon Howie, did you really know?

“I went to him after he made first-team All-Pro, and I went to him and I congratulated him, and I said, ‘Man, you deserve this,’” Roseman said. “And he said, ‘Be honest, did you think there was any shot at this?’

“I said, ‘(Heck) no,’” Roseman said to roaring laughter.

Hey, who can blame him? The 28-year-old Baun’s signing was barely a blip on the offseason transactions wire compared to more ballyhooed deals with running back Saquon Barkley — a smashing success — and linebacker Bryce Huff — a \$51 million bust. The Saints took Baun in the third round of the 2020 draft and he did little to distinguish himself for a team well out of the NFL spotlight,

with a combined 12 starts and 88 tackles over four seasons.

In his first season with the Eagles, Baun is a finalist for the AP NFL Defensive Player of the Year award.

New Orleans let him walk, but the Super Bowl is far from any type of revenge game for Baun to show up in his old stadium and show his former team and fans what they missed.

He took the fall for his shortcomings with the Saints.

“Kind of getting in my own way,” Baun said. “I had great coaches, it was a great scheme. But I kind of blame myself for getting in my own way. I think just the new environment, the new coaching staff, the new people around me kind of gave me a new opportunity and a new perspective on my career.”

Baun got out of his head and into a fresh start in Philadelphia.

In New Orleans, Baun was primarily an edge defender who failed to crack the starting lineup and played only a handful

of snaps each game. The Eagles moved him to inside linebacker and he instantly found new life under Fangio’s scheme that forced him into being a run stopper and pass rusher on the blitz. He had 151 total tackles, including 93 solo.

Take this assessment of Baun’s career from Fangio in May:

“He really didn’t play a whole lot of defense there, but he was inside some, more outside,” he said. “We think he can play inside, and I have not seen anything so far that says otherwise.”

Consider him a fast learner. Baun was a smash hit straight out of the gate with 15 tackles in a season-opening win against Green Bay. He even sealed the 34-29 win with a sack on the last play of the game.

He was a bit overshadowed in that one by the other new free agent in town. That Barkley guy scored three touchdowns.

Like Barkley, Baun never slowed down.

Source: Alonso stays with Mets on \$54M, 2-year deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — First baseman Pete Alonso is staying with the New York Mets, agreeing to a \$54 million, two-year contract, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Wednesday night because the agreement, first reported by The New York Post, was subject to a successful physical.

Alonso gets a \$10 million signing bonus and gets salaries of \$20 million this year and \$24 million in 2026. He can opt out after the 2025 season to become a free agent again.

New York also offered a \$71 million, three-year deal with salaries of \$27 million in 2025 and \$22 million in each of the follow-

ing two seasons, with the ability to opt out after each of the first two years, the person said.

Alonso, who turned 30 on Dec. 7, lingered on the market longer than other top players. Among other free-agent first basemen, Christian Walker agreed to a \$60 million, three-year contract with Houston, and Paul Goldschmidt (New York Yankees) and Carlos Santana (Cleveland) accepted one-year agreements.

Mets owner Steve Cohen expressed frustration last month, saying the negotiating was more difficult than the talks that led to a record contract with Juan Soto, who like Alonso is represented by agent Scott Boras.

“I don’t like the structures that are being presented to us,”

Steve Cohen said. “It’s highly asymmetric against us and I feel strongly about it. I will never say no. You know, there’s always a possibility.”

“But the reality is that we’re moving forward and we continue to bring in players. And as we continue to bring in players, the reality is, it becomes harder to fit Pete into what is a very expensive group of players that we already have.”

Under his previous agency, Alonso turned down a \$158 million, seven-year offer in 2023 that would have covered 2024-30. He switched representation to Boras after the 2023 season and agreed to a \$20.5 million, one-year deal.

Alonso hit 226 homers over six seasons with New York and

became a four-time All-Star, but his strikeouts steadily increased to a career high 172 last year while his OPS has dropped to a career-low .788.

Alonso became a Citi Field fan favorite as a home-grown member of the Mets.

He was NL Rookie of the Year in 2019, when he hit .260 with a major league-high 53 homers — a rookie record — and 120 RBIs. He had a career-high 131 RBIs in 2022.

Alonso batted a career-low .217 in 2023 while hitting 46 homers and driving in 118 runs and hit .240 with 34 homers and 88 RBIs this year. His three-run, ninth-inning home run lifted New York over Milwaukee in the decisive third game of its NL Wild Card Series.

Heat reportedly trade Butler to Warriors

Associated Press

Jimmy Butler got what he wanted. He's being traded out of Miami and got a new contract in the process.

The Heat and Golden State Warriors have agreed on a deal that sends Butler to the Bay Area, a person with knowledge of the talks said Wednesday. Butler helped carry Miami to the NBA Finals twice, long before a hostile breakup that saw him suspended three times by the team in January.

Golden State is making it happen by moving Andrewiggins, Dennis Schroder, Kyle Anderson, Lindy Waters and first-round draft compensation out in the deal, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade had not gotten league approval.

Wiggins and Anderson are headed to Miami, though it's unclear if Anderson will be staying with the Heat. Schroder is getting moved to Utah — where the Warriors, coincidentally, were

Wednesday night — and Josh Richardson is heading from Miami to Detroit along with Waters. Also on the move: P.J. Tucker, who was just traded to Utah and now is set to return to the Heat, where he played in 2021-22.

"My brother, man. I'm going to miss him, for sure," said Miami forward Nikola Jovic, who looked up to Butler. "I think a lot of guys here will. He's someone who did a lot for this franchise."

The Heat will get a protected first-rounder from Golden State; for now, that is a pick in this year's draft though that could change based on final terms. And ESPN reported that Butler has already agreed on a two-year extension with the Warriors, one that would be worth around \$113 million.

"I'm really happy that he got what he wanted," Jovic said. "That bag's kinda really big."

Mark down March 25: Golden State at Miami, the first time Butler could play again in South Florida.

The Warriors become Butler's fifth team, after stints the Bulls, Timberwolves, 76ers and Heat. His arrivals were celebrated in all four cities, and his departures weren't exactly smooth in any of them.

With Golden State, he joins Stephen Curry and Draymond Green — two players who were part of all four recent Warriors championship teams and have hopes of getting back to title contention again.

Golden State had a closed-door meeting in the locker room Wednesday as news of the trade was getting out; coach Steve Kerr met with the team during the period that the room is typically open to reporters before games. The Warriors wound up falling to the Jazz 131-128.

"Our guys were in the locker room getting ready to play and all of a sudden we're saying goodbye," Kerr said.

Butler's breakup with Miami brewed for months. The primary issue was money; he was eligible for the two-year, \$113

million extension and the Heat never offered it, largely because he missed about 25% of the team's games in his Miami tenure.

The relationship was broken beyond repair at the end. When Butler said he didn't expect to find on-court joy with the Heat again in early January, he was suspended for seven games as the last straw on a list of what the team called detrimental conduct.

It kept getting worse: Butler was suspended three times in January alone, the second a two-game ban for missing a team flight, the last an indefinite one that followed him leaving shootaround early after learning he wasn't going to start a Jan. 27 game against Orlando. That was the end.

"There was a lot said by everybody, except for me, to tell you the truth," Butler said after his first game back following the first suspension. "We'll let people keep talking. ... The whole truth will come out."

Source: Lakers get Williams from Hornets for Knecht, Reddish

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Lakers are acquiring center Mark Williams from the Charlotte Hornets in a trade for rookie Dalton Knecht, Cam Reddish and draft considerations, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity Wednesday night because the latest trade by the busy Lakers hasn't been finalized.

The Hornets are also getting Los Angeles' first-round pick in 2031 and a first-round pick swap in 2030 in exchange for Williams, one of the NBA's most intriguing young centers.

Williams is another major addition in the Lakers' thorough roster overhaul, which has been highlighted by their acquisition of Luka Doncic from the Dallas Mavericks last Saturday in a blockbuster trade for Anthony Davis.

Los Angeles has dramatically revamped their nucleus since Christmas, assembling a roster that could be a championship con-

tender this season with Doncic and 40-year-old LeBron James.

Williams fills an obvious need for the Lakers, who were briefly left with Jaxson Hayes as their only veteran center following Davis' departure and Christian Wood's long-term injury absence.

The 7-foot-2 Williams has spent three mostly injury-plagued seasons with Charlotte, managing to play in just 84 games mostly due to back problems.

When healthy, he's shown potential.

The Duke product has averaged 16 points, 9.8 rebounds and 1.2 blocks per game this season in 22 games and has excelled in pick-and-roll situations when he's had a chance to play alongside LaMelo Ball.

Williams, who knows LA coach JJ Redick as a fellow Duke product, should fit well with Doncic as a target for his playmaking skills in lobs and pick-and-rolls. He'll also have to be a key defensive player for the Lakers, whose defense was built heavily around Davis' peerless rim protection.

Charlotte, meanwhile, is clearly building for the long term under new owners Gabe Plotkin and Rick Schnall while collecting assets.

The Hornets now own their first-round pick in the next seven years, as well as a top-14 protected first-round pick in 2027 from Miami (unprotected in 2028), a top-two protected pick from Dallas in 2027, the right to swap first rounders with Los Angeles in 2030 and the Lakers' unprotected first round pick in 2031.

Knecht was LA's first-round pick last summer, and the outside shooting specialist has averaged 9.4 points and 3.1 rebounds per game as a rookie. He started 12 games and even had a 37-point performance while hitting a record-tying nine 3-pointers in November, but he has received less playing time in the new year.

Reddish is averaging 3.3 points per game in his second season with the Lakers. He started 26 games for Los Angeles last season under coach Darvin Ham, but has played much less under Redick.

Spurs hold off Hawks in Fox's debut

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Victor Wembanyama broke a tie with a free throw with 2.4 seconds left and De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points in his first game for San Antonio, leading the Spurs to a 126-125 victory over the Atlanta Hawks on Wednesday night.

Fox arrived from Sacramento in a three-team trade Sunday and started in his San Antonio debut as Wembanyama's new point guard.

Wembanyama, who also had 24 points, intentionally missed the second free throw, denying Atlanta the opportunity for an inbound play. Trae Young missed a last-second 3-pointer.

Wembanyama added 12 rebounds. Fox matched his season high with 13 assists.

Young had 32 points and 12 assists for Atlanta. Onyeka Okongwu had a career-high 30 points.

Bucks 112, Hornets 102: Damian Lillard had 29 points and 12 assists, Bobby Portis had 23 points and 17 rebounds in his first game since Jan. 23 and Milwaukee won at Charlotte in its first game since trading longtime guard Khris Middleton.

Nick Smith Jr. had 23 points on four 3s for Charlotte, which has lost six straight.

Lillard was forced to carry

the load for the Bucks, who played without Giannis Antetokounmpo. He was scratched due to left calf soreness minutes before tipoff.

Cavaliers 118, Pistons 115: Darius Garland hit a 31-foot 3-pointer at the buzzer to give Cleveland a win at Detroit.

The Cavaliers, playing without All-Star Donovan Mitchell (shoulder contusion), overcame nine points from Detroit's Cade Cunningham in 11 seconds.

Evan Mobley had 30 points for Cleveland and Garland added 25.

Cunningham had 38 points, nine assists and seven rebounds.

Wizards 119, Nets 102: Jordan Poole scored 19 points to lead Washington past host Brooklyn.

Poole was one of six Wizards (9-41) to finish in double-figure scoring as Washington won its third straight game.

Keon Johnson scored 25 points and Cam Johnson added 17 for Brooklyn (17-34).

Heat 108, 76ers 101: Tyler Herro scored 30 points, and Bam Adebayo had 18 points and 13 rebounds as visiting Miami defeated Philadelphia on the night the Heat traded Jimmy Butler to Golden State.

Tyrese Maxey scored 31, his seventh straight scoring at least

30 points. Kelly Oubre Jr. added 15 points and 11 rebounds. The 76ers forced 22 turnovers but couldn't capitalize on them.

Grizzlies 138, Raptors 107: Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 32 points, Ja Morant had 16 of his 26 in the third quarter and Memphis won its fourth straight game, routing host Toronto.

Making his first professional appearance in his home city, Grizzlies rookie Zach Edey had 13 points and 14 rebounds for his eighth double-double and third in three games.

Jamal Sheard, Ochai Agbaji and Ja'Kobe Walter each scored 14 points for the Raptors. Grady Dick had 13 and Scottie Barnes added 11.

Timberwolves 127, Bulls 108: Anthony Edwards scored 49 points, including 20 in the third quarter, as host Minnesota beat short-handed Chicago.

Coby White had 20 points, and Nikola Vucevic had 10 points and 11 rebounds for Chicago, which was without center Zach Collins, swingman Kevin Huerter and guard Tre Jones after the weekend trade that sent Zach LaVine to Sacramento and Kings guard De'Aaron Fox to San Antonio.

Nuggets 144, Pelicans 119: Michael Porter Jr. tied a career high with 39 points on the eve of

the trade deadline, Nikola Jokic added 38 and host Denver beat struggling New Orleans for its fourth straight win.

Zion Williamson finished with 28 points for the Pelicans, who lost their seventh straight game.

Jazz 131, Warriors 128: Jordan Clarkson scored 31 points and Keyonte George added 26 to lead Utah to a victory over visiting Golden State.

Stephen Curry led Golden State with 32 points and seven assists. Brandin Podziemski added a career-high 29 points and Buddy Hield chipped in 18.

Thunder 140, Suns 109: NBA-leading Oklahoma City got 50 points from Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and routed visiting Phoenix to improve to 40-9.

Bradley Beal led Phoenix with 25 points, Devin Booker had 19 and Royce O'Neale 18. They have lost three in a row.

Magic 130, Kings 111: Franz Wagner had 31 points, Paolo Banchero added 23 and Orlando won at Sacramento to spoil Zach LaVine's Kings debut and end a four-game losing streak.

LaVine had 13 points. He went from Chicago to Sacramento on Sunday in a three-team trade that sent De'Aaron Fox from the Kings to San Antonio.

Hyman scores winner as Oilers top Blackhawks in OT

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Connor McDavid set up Zach Hyman in overtime, and the Edmonton Oilers beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-3 on Wednesday night.

Hyman redirected McDavid's pass for the power-play goal at 1:36. It was Hyman's 19th goal and McDavid's 49th assist of the season.

Leon Draisaitl and Jeff Skinner each had a goal and an assist as Edmonton won for the

fifth time in seven games. Viktor Arvidsson also scored and Calvin Pickard made 29 saves.

Skinner and Draisaitl scored in the third period to help Edmonton open a 3-1 lead.

But Chicago rallied behind Ryan Donato, who matched his career high with his 16th goal at 12:12. He also picked up an assist on Alec Martinez's tying goal with 3:44 left in regulation.

It was an impressive rally

for the Blackhawks after they lost Jason Dickinson to an apparent left knee injury 4:33 into the second period.

Lukas Reichel also scored for Chicago in its third consecutive loss. Arvid Soderblom stopped 34 shots.

Rangers 3, Bruins 2: Chris Kreider scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period and New York rallied to beat visiting Boston.

David Pastrnak and Elias

Lindholm scored 16 seconds apart late in the second period for Boston.

Kings 6, Canadiens 3: Kevin Fiala had two goals, Warren Foegele scored on a penalty shot, and Los Angeles beat visiting Montreal.

Vladislav Gavrikov, Brandt Clarke and Trevor Moore also scored for the Kings, who have won 11 of their past 12 home games. Darcy Kuemper made 18 saves.