

GAO: Clear steps needed for response to absent personnel

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Giving U.S. military commanders clear, specific procedures to follow in the critical hours after service members unexpectedly go missing could improve the odds of saving their lives, a government watchdog agency says.

Air Force and Navy guidance on facilitating the search for absent personnel should designate a timeline for certain actions, such as notifying law enforcement or family members, the Government Accountability Office said in a report released last week.

Also, the Marine Corps still has not issued formal guidance for locating missing service members despite a 2022 recommendation by the GAO that it do so, according to the report.

“Clear formal guidance for the command-led response process during the first 24 hours following an absence can help to prevent harm and save lives,” the report’s authors said.

The agency noted that only the Army has specified when certain actions, such as notifying law enforcement or family members, should take place.

That and other gaps in guidance for commands in locating and tracking absent personnel could result in missed opportunities, the report stated.

“A timely and well-coordinated response to a service member’s absence between unit commanders and law enforcement is critical to establishing the facts and helping to ensure the service member’s safe return, if possible,” the GAO said.

The Marine Corps will issue an interim directive in March addressing the GAO recommendations, with full implementation by January 2028, the report stated, citing service officials.

The report follows updates to the Army’s missing-soldier process in the aftermath of the killing of Spc. Vanessa Guillen in 2020. Guillen was reported missing from Fort Hood, Texas, in late April of that year. Her remains were found over two months later more than 20 miles from the base.

Authorities believe she was bludgeoned to death with a hammer by fellow soldier Spc. Aaron Robinson and then taken to the place where her remains were found. Robinson fatally shot himself during a confrontation with law enforcement.

The case led to Pentagon policy reforms on sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The GAO recommendations also come amid questions about the Navy’s handling of the disappearance of now-Petty Officer 3rd Class Angelina Resendiz last year.

Her badly decomposed body was found in a wooded area near Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia in early June, 12 days after family members and fellow sailors raised concerns about her well-being on May 29.

But it wasn’t until June 3, five days after she was last seen or in contact with family and friends, that a statewide alert was issued, a lag that occurred because the Navy initially considered her absent without official leave.

That response has drawn criticism from her family and congressional inquiries into the handling of her disappearance.

Seaman Jeremiah Copeland, who was assigned to the same ship as Resendiz, is charged with premeditated murder in her death, along with several crimes involving three other women

Service members can be absent from their duty stations for varying reasons, which may be either voluntary or involuntary.

For example, 295 service members were listed as involuntarily absent in a nonhostile setting from 2015 through 2024, with 93% of those absences resulting in a declaration of death, according to the GAO report.

About 78% of those deaths were from accidents, including service-related ship collisions and aircraft crashes. A further 10% were from suicides. The causes behind the remaining involuntary absences were not identified in the report.

In its assessment, the GAO said the Navy and Air Force should include greater specificity in the timing for taking certain actions.

For example, Army guidance requires commanders to notify service law enforcement officials of a soldier’s absence within three hours of discovery and to inform family members within eight hours, the GAO said.

The GAO made 12 recommendations, including that the services also better address the role of mental health in unexpected absences and potential safety issues that could arise during the response process.

Latest talks on Ukraine end with no breakthrough

Associated Press

GENEVA — The latest U.S.-brokered talks between envoys from Moscow and Kyiv over Russia’s all-out invasion of Ukraine ended Wednesday with no sign of a breakthrough and with both sides saying the talks were “difficult,” as the war’s fourth anniversary approaches next week.

The negotiations in Switzerland were the third round of direct talks organized by the U.S., after meetings earlier this year in Abu Dhabi that officials described as constructive but which also made no major headway. Expectations for significant progress in Geneva were low.

“The negotiations were not easy,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after the talks broke up and he spoke briefly by phone from Kyiv with his negotiating team.

He accused Russia of “trying to drag out negotiations” while it presses on with its invasion — an accusation he and European leaders have repeatedly made.

Despite that, some progress was made on military issues although political differences remain deep, including over the future of land in eastern Ukraine that is occupied by the Russian army and that Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to keep, Zelenskyy said.

The head of the Russian delegation, Putin adviser Vladimir Medinsky, told reporters that the two days of talks in Geneva “were difficult but businesslike.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that it’s “too early” to speak about the outcome of the talks.

New ICBM program may soon lead to prototype this year

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The new LGM-35A Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile being developed for the U.S. Air Force is on track with initial capability tests to allow for a decision by the end of the year on whether to build a prototype, the Air Force said Tuesday.

The program plans to “achieve a Milestone B decision by the end of 2026, while delivering an initial capability targeted for the early 2030s,” the Air Force said in a statement.

Defense weapons programs begin with the initial concept. Milestone B is when a project moves toward a prototype, and the performance, schedule and funding plans are set.

“This progress paves the way for the program’s next major operational milestone: the first missile pad launch, planned for 2027,” the Air Force said.

The booster will be integrated with the missile’s forward section to create the first fully assembled ground-test Sentinel missile.

“This pathfinder test missile is essential for verifying the weapon system’s design and preparing for the first Sentinel flight test, ensuring the future of our nation’s strategic deterrence,” the Air Force said.

Milestone C is the production of the weapon.

The advancements announced Tuesday “also solidified the early 2030s as the firm target for delivering initial capability,” the statement said.

The missile, which the Pentagon plans to take the place of the current LGM-30G Minuteman

III ICBMs, would anchor the land-based portion of the triad for attacking enemy targets with nuclear weapons. The triad also includes sea-launched ICBMs from Ohio- and future Columbia-class submarines, and manned bombers.

Northrop Grumman has said the Sentinel is designed to carry W87-0 and W87-1 thermonuclear warheads with a yield of between 300 kilotons and 475 kilotons of TNT over 3,500 miles or more. The program will modernize the nuclear missile system that currently has over 450 silos. The Air Force said it was building 600 facilities across 40,000 square miles of U.S. territory, the contractor said.

The Air Force last year announced its plans to concentrate the manned bomber force on the new B-21 Raider bomber now under development, while maintaining the B-52 Stratofortress in a role as a standoff weapon delivery system.

The B-1 Lancer and B-2 Spirit bombers will be phased out as the new B-21s enter service.

The Sentinel will replace the Minuteman III with hundreds of new silos spread across the north-central tier of the U.S.

“Sentinel is a comprehensive, once-in-a-generation modernization of the entire land-based leg of the nuclear triad, a key component of the nation’s integrated deterrence posture,” the Air Force said. “It is a full-scale replacement of the missile, launch systems and command-and-control infrastructure with a new architecture designed with built-in adaptability for the digital era.”

Two Marines suspected of \$65K in thefts in Japan

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
AND JANIQUA ROBINSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japanese authorities are investigating two U.S. Marines for possible thefts totaling \$65,000 or more since last fall, according to recent Japanese police and media reports.

Tokyo Metropolitan Police on Friday forwarded to Japanese prosecutors their case against two Marines, ages 20 and 26, for stealing 27,000 yen, or \$175, in cash from two restaurants in Kabukicho, a nightlife district near Shinjuku, between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. Dec. 24, The Mainichi newspaper reported Friday.

The newspaper cited the police as a source, although a Tokyo police spokeswoman declined to confirm the report.

The Marines may be linked to

multiple thefts last fall with losses exceeding \$65,000, The Mainichi reported, citing an unnamed investigative source.

Two Marines from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni and under suspicion by Japanese authorities of “criminal misconduct” are in Marine Corps custody, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman Maj. Joseph Butterfield said Tuesday.

He said the wing is “actively cooperating with Japanese authorities,” but did not specify the allegations against the two.

The Hiroshima Prefectural Police also forwarded a case to prosecutors there accusing the older Marine of trespassing in two buildings, damage to a building, theft and attempted theft, a spokesman for the police third investigative division said.

Army troop surge in Hawaii leaves living space at premium

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

WHEELER ARMY AIRFIELD, Hawaii — Judging by its jam-packed parking lot, the post exchange on Fort Shafter in Hawaii appears to be doing bang-up trade.

On any given weekday morning, every parking spot is filled, with other vehicles wedged pell-mell onto curbs and in lanes. Inside the exchange, however, customers are typically few.

The phantom vehicles belong to soldiers assigned to units adjacent to the exchange that have surged in personnel in recent months and now have no parking space to accommodate them.

“Parking has become a nightmare at Fort Shafter,” Col. Rachel Sullivan, commander of Army Garrison Hawaii, said Feb. 11 at her headquarters at Wheeler Army Airfield.

But surge-related parking woes are a small annoyance compared to the strain on barracks on Oahu, where soldiers are now doubling up in rooms and on-post family housing that has reached almost 100% occupancy.

The incoming troops represent the military’s long-promised “pivot to the Pacific” and the result of the Army’s updated manning structure for 2027 to 2031, Sullivan said.

“I think it’s a shift that’s been a long time coming but that has just been really finally realized here recently,” she said.

Changes that typically take four or five years are now greatly accelerated, she said. So instead of another 2,000 personnel arriving over five years, almost 90% will arrive before the end of this year, according to Sullivan.

EPA sued over repeal of climate protections

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—A coalition of health and environmental groups sued the Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday, challenging its determination last week that revoked a scientific finding that has been the central basis for U.S. action to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change.

A rule finalized by the EPA last Thursday rescinds a 2009 government declaration known as the endangerment finding that determined that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases threaten public health and welfare. The Obama-era finding is the legal underpinning of nearly all climate regulations under the Clean Air Act for motor vehicles, power plants and other pollution sources that are

heating the planet.

The repeal eliminates all greenhouse gas emissions standards for cars and trucks and could unleash a broader undoing of climate regulations on stationary sources such as power plants and oil and gas facilities, experts say.

The legal challenge, filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, asserts that the EPA's rescission of the endangerment finding is unlawful. The 2009 finding supported common sense safeguards to cut climate pollution, including from cars and trucks, the lawsuit says. Clean vehicle standards imposed by the Biden administration were set to "deliver the single biggest cut to U.S. carbon pollution in history, save lives and save Americans

hard-earned money on gas," the coalition said in filing the case.

After nearly two decades of scientific evidence supporting the 2009 finding, "the agency cannot credibly claim that the body of work is now incorrect," said Brian Lynk, a senior attorney at the Environmental Law & Policy Center.

"This reckless and legally untenable decision creates immediate uncertainty for businesses, guarantees prolonged legal battles and undermines the stability of federal climate regulations," Lynk said.

The case was brought by groups including the American Public Health Association, American Lung Association, Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment and Physicians for Social Responsibility, along

with environmental groups such as the Center for Biological Diversity, Conservation Law Foundation, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council and Sierra Club.

The suit named EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin and EPA itself as defendants.

President Donald Trump said in announcing the repeal that it was "the single largest deregulatory action in American history, by far," while Zeldin called the endangerment finding "the Holy Grail of federal regulatory overreach."

The endangerment finding "led to trillions of dollars in regulations that strangled entire sectors of the United States economy, including the American auto industry," Zeldin said.

FDA reconsiders, now set to review flu shot from Moderna

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration will consider whether to approve Moderna's new flu vaccine after all, resolving a dispute that had blocked the company's application for the first-of-its-kind shot.

Moderna announced the change Wednesday, about a week after revealing that the FDA's vaccine chief was refusing to review the new vaccine, made with Nobel Prize-winning mRNA technology.

The dispute centered over a 40,000-person clinical trial that concluded Moderna's new vaccine was more effective in adults age 50 and older than one of the standard flu shots used today. In the FDA's rare "refusal to file" letter, vaccine director Dr. Vinay Prasad faulted the trial for not including another brand specifically recommended for people 65 and older.

Moderna publicly objected. It said that while the FDA had recommended that approach, the

agency ultimately agreed to the study's design — and that the company shared additional comparison data from a separate trial that used a high-dose shot for older people. Nor did the FDA identify any safety concerns.

Still, Moderna said Wednesday that in a compromise, it is seeking full approval for the vaccine's use in adults 50 to 64 and accelerated approval for those 65 and older, with an additional study once the shot is on the market.

The FDA is targeting a decision on the application by Aug. 5, and Moderna said it hoped to make the vaccine available later this year. It also has applied for the vaccine's approval in Europe, Canada and Australia.

The highly unusual public dispute was the latest sign of the FDA's heightened scrutiny of vaccines under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., particularly those using mRNA technology, which he has criticized before and after becoming the nation's top health official.

FBI, police probing ICE arrest that resulted in skull fractures

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS—Minnesota and federal authorities are investigating the alleged beating of a Mexican citizen by immigration officers last month, seeking to identify what caused the eight skull fractures that landed the man in the intensive care unit of a Minneapolis hospital.

Investigators from the St. Paul Police Department and FBI last week canvassed the shopping center parking lot where Alberto Castañeda Mondragón says Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents wrested him from a vehicle, threw him to the ground and repeatedly struck him in the head with a steel baton.

ICE has blamed Castañeda Mondragón for his own injuries, saying he attempted to flee while handcuffed and "fell and hit his head against a concrete wall."

But hospital staff who treated the man told The Associated Press such a fall could not plausibly account for the man's brain

hemorrhaging and fragmented memory. A CT scan showed fractures to the front, back and both sides of his skull — injuries a doctor told the AP were inconsistent with a fall.

Earlier this month, the AP published an interview with Castañeda Mondragón in which he said the arresting officers had been "racist" and "started beating me right away when they arrested me." His lawyers have contended ICE racially profiled him.

In separate visits to the shopping center last week, local and federal investigators requested surveillance footage from at least two businesses, whose employees told the AP their cameras either did not capture the Jan. 8 arrest or the images had been overwritten because more than a month passed before law enforcement asked for the video.

The St. Paul Police Department did not respond to requests for comment. The FBI declined to comment.

8 skiers found dead from Calif. avalanche

Associated Press

TRUCKEE, Calif. — Eight backcountry skiers have been found dead and 1 remains missing after an avalanche near Lake Tahoe in California, officials said, making it the deadliest avalanche in the U.S. in more than four decades.

Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon announced the deaths at a news conference Wednesday.

Search and rescue crews were dispatched to the Castle Peak area of the Sierra Nevada after a 911 call Tuesday afternoon reporting an avalanche had buried 15 skiers. Six of them have been found alive.

It is the deadliest avalanche in the U.S. since 1981, when 11 climbers were killed on Mount Rainier, Washington.

The group was on a three-day trek in Northern California's Sierra Nevada on Tuesday morning when the avalanche occurred as a monster winter storm pummeled the West Coast.

Two of those rescued after several hours of searching were taken to a hospital for treatment, said Ashley Quadros, a spokesperson for the Nevada County Sheriff's Office. Heavy snow and the threat of additional avalanches slowed the rescue effort in

the mountains near Castle Peak, northwest of Lake Tahoe.

The area near Donner Summit is one of the snowiest places in the Western Hemisphere and until just a few years ago was closed to the public. It sees an average of nearly 35 feet of snow a year, according to the Truckee Donner Land Trust, which owns a cluster of huts where the group was staying near Frog Lake.

The Sierra Avalanche Center warned Wednesday that the risk of avalanche remains high and advised against travel in the area. Multiple feet of snowfall and gale force winds

in recent days left the snowpack unstable and unpredictable, and more snow was predicted to fall, the center said.

"Our thoughts are with the missing individuals, their families, and first responders in the field," Blackbird said in a statement Wednesday. The company said it is helping authorities in the search.

Several Tahoe ski resorts had been fully or partially closed due to the weather. Resorts, which use controlled explosions and barriers to manage avalanche threats, were not expected to be at as high of a risk as the backcountry, the center said.

Rhode Island ice rink shooter targeted family

Associated Press

PAWTUCKET, R.I. — The person who opened fire Monday during a youth hockey game at a Rhode Island ice rink was specifically targeting family members, killing an ex-wife and son as many fans dived for cover while a handful rushed the shooter to stop the attack, authorities said.

Pawtucket Chief of Police Tina Goncalves said the shooter's ex-wife Rhonda Dorgan and

adult son Aidan Dorgan were killed and three others were injured: Rhonda Dorgan's parents, Linda and Gerald Dorgan, and a family friend Thomas Geroso, all of whom remained in critical condition Tuesday afternoon, Goncalves said.

Police identified the shooter as 56-year-old Robert Dorgan, who died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. Dorgan also went by the names Roberta Esposito and Roberta

Dorgano, authorities said.

Goncalves said there was "no indication" there would be violence at the ice rink in Pawtucket on Monday afternoon, adding that Dorgan had been to many hockey games to watch family members play before without incident.

Gender identity apparently was a contributing factor to Dorgan's wife filing for divorce in 2020 after nearly 30 years of marriage.

Court documents show that two shared the same last name even prior to getting married. Authorities have not provided additional details about the same name.

Dorgan briefly served in the Marine Corps, enlisting on April 26, 1988, according to military records provided by the service. Less than three months later, on July 13, Dorgan was separated from the service with the lowest military rank.

Republican faces calls to resign over anti-Muslim post

The Washington Post

Democrats are demanding that Rep. Randy Fine, R-Fla., resign or face disciplinary action after making an anti-Muslim social media post in which he suggested that he would choose dogs over Muslims.

"If they force us to choose, the choice between dogs and Muslims is not a difficult one," Fine said in a post Sunday on X, which he wrote in response to comments by a leader of a pro-Palestinian group about dog owners not cleaning up after their pets on

New York City streets. Fine defended his comments during a television interview Tuesday.

In response, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., said Tuesday that Fine is "an Islamophobic, disgusting and unrepentant bigot."

Jeffries said it is "unacceptable" that House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and other House Republicans have not forcefully criticized Fine, who has a history in his short tenure in Congress of making Islamophobic comments.

Fine needs to be held "accountable," Jeffries said.

Fine made his initial post in response to a comment made by activist Nerdeen Kiswani, who on Feb. 12 said on X that New York City was "coming to Islam" because many New Yorkers were complaining about how dog owners in the city were not cleaning after their pets and leaving behind dog poop all over the sidewalks.

"Dogs definitely have a place in society, just not as indoor pets," Kiswani said Feb. 12. "Like we've

said all along, they are unclean."

Kiswani, who co-founded the pro-Palestine group Within Our Lifetime, said on the same X thread that she was joking.

Fine, who arrived in Congress last year after winning a special election, has drawn criticism for other anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian comments.

In July, he said Gazans should "starve away" until Israeli hostages were released.

In December, Fine called for the mass expulsion of Muslims from the United States.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Logan Paul's Pokémon card sells for \$16.5M

NY NEW YORK — Logan Paul has set a new world's record — for the auction price of a trading card.

The wrestling and social media star's rare Pickachu II-illustrator Pokémon card, a "Holy Grail" for collectors, sold for \$16.5 million Monday at Goldin Auctions after 41 days of bidding. Paul had purchased the card in 2021 for \$5.275 million, a Guinness record at the time for a Pokémon card. He had added a diamond necklace and custom case and wore the card at WrestleMania 38 in 2022.

Guinness World Records adjudicator Sarah Casson was on hand Monday for the auction's closure, which was live-streamed on YouTube, and confirmed the price was a record not just for a Pokémon card, but for any trading card sold at auction.

"Oh my gosh, this is crazy," said Paul, who placed the card around the neck of winning bidder A.J. Scaramucci, a venture capitalist and son of former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci.

The card was designed by Atsuko Nishida for a 1998 contest. Only a few dozen are believed to exist, and Paul's card is believed the only with a quality rating of 10.

End to vehicle safety inspections advances

MO JEFFERSON CITY — A plan to eliminate safety inspections for most passenger cars and trucks advanced to the Missouri Senate on Monday.

On a 104-43 vote, the House

approved legislation to end a program in which vehicles more than 10 years old or those with more than 150,000 miles on the odometer are required to pass a state safety inspection every two years.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Ann Kelley, R-Lamar, said the inspections are a burden on Missourians at a time when vehicle safety has improved because of technological advances.

The inspections, which affect about 1.8 million of the state's more than 6 million passenger vehicles, are required every two years and cost \$12 each.

If a vehicle fails to pass inspection, repairs must be made before it can be registered and licensed.

Safety advocates say elimination of the inspections could boost highway fatalities if motorists attempt to operate vehicles that have worn or broken parts, such as tires, headlights and brakes.

Republicans, DNC settle voter purge lawsuit

NC RALEIGH — A Republican-led effort to purge roughly 225,000 North Carolina voters from the state's rolls would be largely abandoned under a settlement agreement that national Democrats and Republicans filed in federal court on Monday.

The deal between the Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee must still be approved by a judge for it to become final.

Under the settlement, the RNC agrees to drop its effort to purge the contested voters in exchange for the State Board of Elections continuing to carry out its "Registration Repair"

program.

Through the program, which the board approved last year, the state is contacting North Carolinians with incomplete voter registrations and asking them to provide the missing information.

Muslims harassed while praying at Plano park

TX PLANO — North Texas Muslim leaders are calling on public officials to speak out after a man spewing anti-Islamic slurs harassed a group praying at a park in Plano.

In a video circulating on social media, a man is seen shouting "disgusting fake religion" and calling the group "wicked devils" who will "go to hell" if they do not repent, among other insults.

Members of Islamic Relief at the University of Texas at Dallas were gathered at the park Sunday morning for a Barakah Breakfast, a community event focused on reflection, connection and service. The group can be heard praying while the man yells.

Trump protester accused of assault at golf course

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A man protesting President Donald Trump's visit to his golf club in West Palm Beach was arrested and accused of assaulting a Trump supporter on Sunday.

Paul Arthur Messer, 76, was holding a flag attached to a metal pole while participating in an anti-Trump protest across from Trump International Golf Course, according to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

A woman in a Trump hat seated behind the protesters complained that the protesters' signs were blocking her view, according to a report from the White House press pool.

The pool report, which did not name Messer, said that a man holding an anti-Trump flag approached her and they got into an altercation.

"The argument escalated, and deputies observed Messer strike the female multiple times in the upper chest and neck area with the metal flagpole," stated a report from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Messer was arrested on charges of simple battery.

City breaks century-old record for warmest day

IL CHICAGO — After a snow-steeped and sometimes bone-chilling January, Chicago is enjoying a downright balmy — even record-setting — start to the week.

But don't pack up your sweaters just yet.

The glimpse of spring will remain just a preview as temperatures dial back down this weekend to the brisk conditions more typical for this time of year, weather officials say.

O'Hare International Airport hit a high of 65 degrees Fahrenheit on Monday, marking the warmest Feb. 16 on record in Chicago, according to National Weather Service data. The previous bar was set in 1921 at 58 degrees.

On average, the normal temperature for Feb. 16 is 28.9 degrees, with the average temperature for the month also in the mid- to high 20s, weather service data shows.

— From wire reports

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Shiffrin wins slalom for 1st medal in 8 years

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Mikaela Shiffrin closed her eyes, gave a deep breath and took a big step back onto the top of an Olympic podium.

The American skiing standout was a gold medalist at the Winter Games once again — and she couldn't quite believe it.

Shiffrin put in two dominant runs in gorgeous conditions amid the jagged peaks of the Dolomites to win the women's slalom by a massive 1.50 seconds, ending her eight-year medal drought at the Winter Games and showing why she is widely regarded as the greatest Alpine skier of all time.

In emotional scenes after the race, the 30-year-old Shiffrin was embraced by Camille Rast of Switzerland, who took silver, and bronze-medalist Anna Swenn Larsson before fighting back tears as she approached her mom and coach, Eileen, for a long, deep hug next to the finish area.

She also said she was thinking about her father, Jeff, who died at the age of 65 in an accident at the family home in Colorado in February 2020.

"This was a moment I have

dreamed about — I've also been very scared of this moment," Shiffrin said. "Everything in life that you do after you lose someone you love is like a new experience. It's like being born again.

"And I still have so many moments where I resist this. I don't want to be in life without my dad," she added, her voice trembling. "And maybe today was the first time that I could actually accept this, like, reality."

The victory made Shiffrin the first American skier to win three Alpine golds and was the third-largest margin of victory in a women's Olympic slalom — the event she won as a fresh-faced teenager in Sochi in 2014 to underline her status as a skiing star.

Twelve years later, and having gone through so many highs and lows on and off the course, she delivered again in her favorite race as her skiing career came full circle.

"Maybe," she added, "just today, I realized what happened in Sochi. It's crazy."

At the medal ceremony, she shook both of her hands as she was about to receive her gold medal, clearly overcome by

emotion. When it was placed around her neck, she looked down at it almost in disbelief.

Maybe it was a release of all the pressure on Shiffrin after she failed to win an Olympic medal in eight races since adding gold and silver to her collection in Pyeongchang in 2018.

A nightmarish 0-for-6 performance in Beijing was followed in Cortina d'Ampezzo this year by a fourth-place finish with Breezy Johnson in the team combined, in which Shiffrin placed 15th in the slalom portion and 11th in the giant slalom.

It was fodder for the "keyboard warriors," Shiffrin acknowledged, but she ignored all of them.

That's all in the past.

Shiffrin has now won three golds and a silver at the Olympics to add to her record total on World Cup wins — it's 108 and counting, including 71 in slalom. There's also world titles in slalom (four), giant slalom and super-G to fill out arguably the greatest career in Alpine racing.

"In another league," was how Larsson put it.

Shiffrin led by 0.82 seconds after the first run on a mostly

flat course that Team USA officials described to her over the radio as a "high-tempo ripper."

There was one wobble when she struck a gate and for a fraction of a second, and it appeared she was headed for another Olympic disappointment.

Not this time.

She snapped back into form to post a time, in the No. 7 bib, no one could get near.

"When I saw one second (behind) after the first run," Rast said, "I was like, 'OK, the gold is gone.'"

Shiffrin's second run was also smooth, getting through the tough top section without a hitch and pushing through the slower middle section. When she leaned forward to cross the line, Shiffrin had the largest margin of victory in any Olympic Alpine skiing event since 1998.

"I just wanted to feel those two runs — I'm proud but I'm also very grateful," Shiffrin said. "A big thing I've been working on with my team and my psychologist is, like, you have what you need within yourself. And I can't say that for giant slalom yet. I can't always say that in the start gate. But in the start gate today, I could."

US captures silver in men's cross-country skiing

Associated Press

TESERO, Italy — Fresh off ending a 50-year medal drought in men's cross-country skiing, American Ben Ogden proved Wednesday that it was no fluke by winning a second silver.

Teaming up with Gus Schumacher, the U.S. men even gave runaway favorites Norway some real competition and held off host-country Italy in the home stretch for its winningest Olympics ever at the Milan Cortina Games.

"We just proved today and all week that we're here to stay and that U.S. guys are in good form," Ogden said. "So it was awesome."

Ogden became the first American man to win a cross-country skiing medal in the Olympics in 50 years when he won a silver in

the sprint event Feb. 10. Until then, Bill Koch, who won silver in 1976 in Innsbruck, was the sole American man to medal in the sport.

The win in the men's team sprint makes Ogden America's most decorated male cross-country skier.

The two-man relay involved two legs by each skier, with Ogden starting the race and Schumacher closing.

That meant Schumacher was competing head-to-head with Norway's Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo, who has dominated the sport and keeps setting new Olympic records. Klaebo's win Wednesday was his 10th gold medal, breaking his own record for the most overall golds in the Winter Olympics.

As Schumacher stayed on Klaebo's tail up the final climb, his focus was: "Look at Klaebo's butt and just lock in and follow that to the

finish line," he said. "I did it and I'm really proud of it."

Schumacher couldn't catch Klaebo, but he held off Italy's Federico Pellegrino.

With 10 meters to go, he saw Ogden across the finish line to greet him and knew a medal was in hand. He crossed the line 1.4 seconds behind Klaebo and collapsed in the snow. Ogden dropped to his knees and hugged his teammate and friend.

"I'm going to be the guy that got beat," Schumacher joked. "That's the problem with being second, but yeah, I am so happy with it."

Ogden said the result was "huge" for U.S. skiing and he hoped the bicoastal victory — he lives in Vermont and Schumacher lives in Alaska — will provide inspiration to all skiers.

Liu wins third place in short program

Associated Press

MILAN — Alysia Liu is left to carry the hopes of the “Blade Angels” into the women’s free skate at the Milan Cortina Olympics.

The reigning world champion was the only one of American’s vaunted figure skating trio to put herself in contention for gold after the short program on Tuesday night.

Liu landed a triple lutz-triple loop, the hardest combination that any woman attempted, and sat only two points back of leader Ami Nakai and right behind her Japanese teammate Kaori Sakamoto on the leaderboard.

“I am really happy about how I skated,” Liu said, “and my siblings, my best friends and a ton of my family is out there. And I saw them on the warmup. I also saw them during my program, so, I don’t know. It was a really cool moment, because they never come to watch like this. I’m really glad I did super well. I felt super grounded and I connected with my program on another lev-

el.”

Things didn’t go nearly as well for the rest of the American team Tuesday night.

Isabeau Levito was dinged for under-rotating her triple loop and got leveled down for her step sequence, which is where she tends to pick up points on the competition. It left her in eighth place and a long shot to climb her way onto the podium Thursday night.

Amber Glenn, the three-time reigning U.S. champion, was right in the medal mix until her final jump.

After landing a huge opening triple axel — Glenn and Nakai were the only ones in the women’s field to attempt the 3½-revolution jump — she kept the momentum going with a triple flip-triple toe loop.

But something seemed amiss as Glenn approached a triple loop, and she wound up bailing out of it. The resulting double loop became an invalid element and earned her no points.

The lost points on the jump, somewhere in the range of seven or eight, took away any chance of being a medal contender.

“I had it,” Glenn told her coach, Damon Allen, as she tried to hold back the tears stepping off the ice.

“It’s not over,” he replied, giving her a hug.

It certainly was not the way Glenn wanted to end a night that began with the euphoria of a message from Madonna, the “Queen of Pop.” Her song “Like a Prayer” serves as the soundtrack to Glenn’s free skate, and Madonna had seen a clip of the short program and sent a video to Glenn, telling her, “Go get that gold.”

Glenn already has one from the team event on the opening weekend of the Winter Games. Liu also has one from that event.

Now, it’s up to Liu if the Americans are going to bring home a medal from the individual competition.

She also can salvage what has

been a largely frustrating Olympics for U.S. Figure Skating.

While it won the team event, ice dancers Madison Chock and Evan Bates were left with a bittersweet silver medal thanks in part to some questionable scoring by the French judge.

Meanwhile, two-time world champion and Olympic favorite Ilia Malinin crashed out of the men’s free skate.

Liu has experience on this stage, having finished sixth at the 2022 Beijing Games.

She also has a carefree attitude after going through a brief retirement, which allowed her to learn a whole lot about herself and put figure skating into perspective.

Liu was asked whether she thinks she can beat the Japanese on Thursday night.

“I don’t think about stuff like that,” she replied.

“Whether I beat them or not is not my goal. My goal is just to do my programs and share my story and I don’t need to be over or under anyone to do that.”

Lochner leads German bobsled sweep as US takes 4th

Associated Press

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO, Italy — Germany left no doubt, again: It dominates the men’s bobsled world.

Johannes Lochner left no doubt, either: In his farewell season, he’s going out as the most unbeatable bobsledder on the planet.

Making it look as easy as one, two, three — or eins, zwei, drei, if you prefer — the Germans swept the medals in the two-man race at the Milan Cortina Olympics on Tuesday night, a show of absolute dominance. It was the second Olympic sweep in bobsled history; the other was by the Germans, also in two-man, at the Beijing Games four years ago.

And leading the way was Lochner, who got his first gold

medal while posting the biggest Olympic two-man winning margin in nearly a half-century.

The U.S. was the closest to thwarting the sweep; Army Sgt. Frank Del Duca and Josh Williamson were fourth, just one spot from bronze.

“There’s nothing better than when a plan works out,” Lochner said as he wrapped his arm around brakeman Georg Fleischhauer. “Speechless ... feeling so much happiness. I cannot describe this.”

In what he says was the next-to-last race of his international career, Lochner teamed with Fleischhauer to finish the four-run competition in 3 minutes, 39.70 seconds for his third Olympic medal. Lochner — the favorite in this weekend’s four-

man race, which he plans as his finale — won by 1.34 seconds, the most lopsided margin in the Olympic two-man race in 46 years.

“To have this big a lead, it’s unbelievable. We did it,” Lochner said.

Francesco Friedrich, the gold medalist in two- and four-man at each of the last two Olympics, partnered with Alexander Schuller and was second in 3:41.04. Adam Ammour finished off the sweep, teaming with Alexander Schaller to win bronze in 3:41.52.

For the U.S., Del Duca and Williamson were fourth in 3:41.96 — matching the second-best effort by an American two-man sled in 70 years. Steven Holcomb and Steven Langton won silver at the 2014 Sochi

Games, and Todd Hays and Garrett Hines were fourth at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics.

Del Duca had the third-fastest run in the fourth heat, but it wasn’t enough to close the medal gap.

“I wish we did that fourth run four times, to be closer or in that medal spot. It is very bittersweet, because this is a good result, and a few years ago we would be backflipping in joy,” said Del Duca, who was 13th in the two-man Olympic race at Beijing four years ago. “But I know that we’ve worked really hard, and we had the potential to medal. And I know how much support we have, and I really wanted to get that medal for our support system as much, if not more than, for us.”

No. 1 Michigan defeats No. 7 Purdue

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Elliot Cadeau scored 14 of his 17 points in the second half Tuesday night, and Aday Mara added 10 points and 11 rebounds to send No. 1 Michigan past No. 7 Purdue 91-80.

The Wolverines won their 11th straight and took a big step toward capturing their first outright Big Ten regular-season title in five years. The win came one day after Michigan (25-1, 15-1) moved into the nation's top spot for the first time since January 2013.

It was the 7-foot-3 Mara's early tone-setting presence that helped the Wolverines turn the tables on the Boilermakers' usually dominant front line as two-time national player of the year Zach Edey watched from the second row. Mara made each of his first four shots on the way to a 10-point, eight-rebound first half. He spent most of the second half in foul trouble, finishing 4 of 6 from the field as Michigan had a 39-31 rebounding advantage.

Trey Kaufman-Renn scored a

season high 27 points to lead Purdue on a night most of his teammates struggled. Braden Smith added 20 points as the Boilermakers (21-5, 11-4) had their four-game winning streak end. They now trail the Wolverines by 3½ games in the league race.

Michigan took control quickly by using an early 13-0 spurt to take a 23-10 lead. A 14-4 scoring flurry gave the Wolverines a comfortable 44-22 cushion with 4:23 left in the first half, forcing Purdue to futilely play catchup the rest of the night.

Iowa 57, No. 9 Nebraska 52: Bennett Stirtz scored 25 points and Cooper Koch added 10 as the host Hawkeyes overcame a cold-shooting second half to defeat the Cornhuskers.

Iowa (19-7, 9-6 Big Ten) won despite not making a field goal in the final 4:59.

No. 12 Florida 76, South Carolina 62: Alex Condon had 20 points and 10 rebounds, Rueben Chinyelu also notched a double-double and the host Gators handled the Gamecocks for the sec-

ond time in three weeks.

Florida won its sixth consecutive game and improved to 11-1 since losing at Missouri to open Southeastern Conference play.

Arizona State 72, No. 13 Texas Tech 67: Maurice Odum scored 23 points, Massamba Diop added 14 and the host Sun Devils held on for an upset over the Red Raiders, who lost star forward JT Toppin to an injury in the second half.

Texas Tech (19-7, 9-4) had a three-game winning streak snapped.

No. 15 Michigan State 82, UCLA 59: Jeremy Fears Jr. had 16 points and 10 assists, leading the host Spartans over the Bruins.

Michigan State (21-5, 11-4 Big Ten) bounced back with a strong performance after losing three of four games and falling five spots in the AP Top 25 this week.

N.C. State 82, No. 16 North Carolina 58: Quadir Copeland scored 20 points while the host Wolfpack held the Tar Heels to 31.7% shooting in a rivalry win.

Rhode Island 81, No. 18

Saint Louis 76: Jonah Hinton made nine 3-pointers and scored 29 points as the host Rams upset the Billikens, snapping Saint Louis' 18-game winning streak.

Robbie Avila led the Billikens (24-2, 12-1 Atlantic 10) with 21 points and Dion Brown added 19.

SMU 95, No. 21 Louisville 85: Jaron Pierre Jr. scored 25 points and Boopie Miller had 23 points with nine assists as the host Mustangs beat the Cardinals, ending Louisville's five-game winning streak.

SMU (18-8, 7-6 Atlantic Coast Conference) went ahead to stay on Miller's short floater in the lane with 6:19 left that broke a 76-all tie.

No. 22 Miami (Ohio) 86, UMass 77: The visiting Red-Hawks won their 26th straight game to remain the last unbeaten team in Division 1, defeating the Minutemen thanks to 23 points from Peter Suder.

Ohio State 86, No. 24 Wisconsin 69: Bruce Thornton scored 27 points and Devin Royal added 25 as the host Buckeyes knocked off the Badgers.

Clark steps down as MLB players' union head amid probe

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tony Clark resigned as head of the Major League Baseball Players Association, the union announced Tuesday, as a possible salary cap fight looms during a federal investigation of its finances.

"The full executive board of player representatives met this afternoon with MLBPA staff and outside counsel to discuss next steps," the union said in a statement. "As always, the players remain focused on their ongoing preparations for collective bargaining this year."

Clark was asked to resign by the eight-man executive subcommittee of the players' association after an investigation by the union's outside counsel discov-

ered evidence that Clark had an inappropriate relationship with his sister-in-law, a union employee since 2023, a person familiar with the union's deliberations told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because that was not announced.

Clark did not respond to a text message seeking comment.

His departure took place during a probe by the U.S. Attorney in Brooklyn into OneTeam Partners, a licensing company founded by the union, the NFL Players Association and RedBird Capital Partners in 2019.

"A lot of people have known that the investigation has been going on," said the New York Mets' Marcus Semien, a member of the

subcommittee. "I think that this happening during the investigation is not like, as a subcommittee, is not like overly surprising, but it still hurts and it's still something I'm processing."

The union's executive board, which includes the subcommittee and the player representatives of the 30 teams, did not make any decisions about a successor during Tuesday's meeting, the person told the AP.

Clark's decision to step down was made ahead of an expected start of collective bargaining in April for an agreement to replace the five-year labor contract that expires Dec. 1. Management appears on track to propose a salary cap, which could lead to a work stoppage that causes regular-sea-

son games to be canceled for the first time since 1995.

Deputy executive director Bruce Meyer is set to be the primary negotiator in the upcoming labor talks, as he was in 2021-22. After Clark and Rick Shapiro led the 2016 negotiations, Meyer was hired in August 2018 as senior director of collective bargaining and legal and was promoted to his current role in July 2022.

Adam L. Braverman, a former U.S. associate deputy attorney general and U.S. attorney in Los Angeles, was hired by the union's executive subcommittee as outside counsel, two people familiar with the group's action told the AP. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the union hadn't announced that.