

Military families facing food insecurity

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The rate of military families suffering from food insecurity has surged in the last two years, according to the latest annual survey of spouses, active-duty service members and veterans.

More than 41% of respondents in a new Military Family Advisory Network study said they experienced low or very low food security in 2025, up from about 16% in 2023.

That is nearly three times the national rate of food insecurity in 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The findings point to growing financial pressures across military households that researchers said threaten morale and military readiness.

"Military families are operating with really tight financial budgets, and food insecurity is just one indicator of a larger financial strain," said Gabby

L'Esperance, vice president of research and evaluation at MFAN.

The survey found that 85% of respondents were paying more than what they could comfortably afford to cover housing, rent or utility payments. Much like food insecurity, housing burdens were also greater on enlisted families compared with officer families.

"We see enlisted family respondents consistently reporting different outcomes than their officer counterparts," L'Esperance said.

Junior enlisted families reported the highest rate of food insecurity among those surveyed, about 74%. Currently serving families also reported food insecurity at higher rates than veteran and retiree populations, according to the report.

Researchers cautioned that the increase from 2023 was partly driven by changes in the sur-

vvey population, which included a larger share of currently serving families and enlisted respondents compared to previous years. But they said the findings also reflect growing economic strain facing military families.

The polling was conducted between October 2025 and January 2026 as rising costs, a strained housing market and the government shutdown worsened financial conditions for many military families.

For the first time since the survey launched more than a decade ago, military families identified grocery prices as a significant factor preventing them from making ends meet. Nearly 58% of respondents said rising food costs were the biggest barrier to saving money.

Spouse unemployment is also increasing, especially among active-duty families. The survey found that nearly a third of spouses in currently-serving

families are unemployed, compared with 19% across the entire population.

One of the biggest factors driving spouses out of the workforce is access to affordable child care, L'Esperance said. Without it, she said many spouses can't maintain a full-time job, which in turn worsens other financial burdens related to food and housing.

Housing costs have also become a major burden. Nearly 60% of active-duty families are paying more than their basic allowance for housing, the report said.

The financial strain has left many families with little cushion for emergencies. Nearly 1 in 3 respondents said they have less than \$500 in emergency savings. That rate was highest among veteran and retiree families, at 36%.

The report urged leaders and policymakers to treat military families' financial health as a national security imperative.

Rutte trumpets examples of NATO help in Iran war

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Thousands of U.S. military planes took off from bases and airports in Europe during the Iran war, NATO's top official said this week while pushing back on White House claims that allies did not offer support during the conflict.

Secretary-General Mark Rutte said during a meeting Wednesday with President Donald Trump that up to 5,000 U.S. military flights launched from inside NATO territory during the six-week campaign against Iran.

"I know there have been isolated cases about which you are really disappointed, but gener-

ally speaking, your European allies have been there with you," Rutte said.

However, Trump seemed unconvinced by Rutte's argument.

"We were disappointed with most of them," he said.

During the campaign, numerous U.S. military bases in Europe aided combat operations against Iran. The list includes locations in Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Romania.

Rutte highlighted an instance in which an airport in Bucharest, the Romanian capital, was closed to commercial traffic for a time so that U.S. aerial refueling tankers could get airborne.

His comments come as allies

in Europe face intense U.S. criticism over disagreements about the Iran conflict. Last week, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth blasted NATO members for what he called a lack of support.

Decisions about the United States' future force posture in Europe will be influenced by how allies responded to the operation in Iran, Hegseth said.

Trump on Wednesday reiterated his unhappiness with allies and singled out several countries, including Germany.

His irritation with Germany could stem more from Chancellor Friedrich Merz's comments about the war rather than from issues with base access and

overflight rights, given the large role American facilities in Germany played in the war.

Merz said in April that the United States was "being humiliated by the Iranian leadership" and that the war should come to a quick end. Soon after those comments, the Pentagon announced a plan to pull 5,000 troops from Germany.

Rutte was largely effusive in his praise of Trump during their discussion Wednesday and said the war in Iran was a boost for European security. At one point, Rutte stood beside a chart highlighting how NATO allies have increased defense spending during Trump's first and second terms.

US pays \$17M to Red Hill spill plaintiffs

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Department of Justice this week paid approximately \$17 million to hundreds of people affected by the U.S. Navy's 2021 jet fuel spill in Hawaii, but plaintiffs' attorneys say thousands of claims remain unresolved.

The DOJ made payments Monday to 629 plaintiffs, following approval of a settlement May 19 by the U.S. District Court in Hawaii, according to a DOJ news release Wednesday.

The settlements stem from two lawsuits following the 2021 JP-5 jet fuel spill at the Navy's Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Honolulu that contaminated groundwater used by thousands of military personnel and civilians on and near Joint

Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

More than 93,000 people were affected by the spill, with thousands forced to temporarily relocate. Residents at the time complained about headaches, nausea and fatigue, and some say health problems continue to this day.

Approximately 7,000 individuals claimed injury due to the tainted water, according to the most recent amended complaint filed in August.

The federal government has thus far settled with about 3,600 civilians who filed claims connected with the spill, the DOJ said Wednesday.

The first 17 "bellwether" plaintiffs went to trial in 2024; U.S. District Court Judge Leslie Kobayashi in May 2025 awarded them amounts between

\$37,500 and \$80,000 in those cases.

"This Justice Department is proud to announce the fair and efficient resolution of claims relating to the Red Hill jet fuel spills," Associate Attorney General Stanley Woodward said in the release. "These latest settlements show that we strive to handle all potential settlements justly, and according to the public interest, without exception."

Approximately 3,000 civilians' and 1,000 service members' cases remain unresolved or unpaid, plaintiffs' attorney Kristina Baehr, of the Texas-based Just Well Law PLLC, said by email Wednesday.

The settlements so far are a "step in the right direction," but the average \$27,000-per-person payment is well below court-or-

dered damages in the bellwether cases, she said by phone Thursday.

"They're legally allowed to do that, but they can't start paying out those payments that are so much less than the judge's order and then claim that they're taking care of America's heroes," she said.

Separately, the federal government has refused to compensate service members after arguing that exposure to contaminated water was "incident to military service," Baehr said in a separate email Thursday.

Just Law appealed that issue to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, where Baehr plans to ask whether "bathing yourself and your babies at home is an act that is 'incident to military service,'" she said.

Officer who gave soldier abortion drug gets 12 years

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. — An Army captain was sentenced Wednesday to 12 years in prison after pleading guilty to intentionally killing the unborn child of a junior enlisted soldier he impregnated.

Capt. Brandon Jones-Adams, 34, admitted to secretly administering the drug mifepristone to the soldier, causing an abortion.

Mifepristone is a medication that works primarily by blocking the hormone progesterone. By blocking progesterone, the drug causes the uterine lining to break down, ending the pregnancy.

Jones-Adams also pleaded guilty to domestic violence, fraternization and conduct unbecoming an officer under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The prosecution was led by the Army Office of Special Trial

Counsel, based at Fort Belvoir, Va. The office handles murder, kidnapping and major sex crimes involving soldiers.

"Capt. Jones-Adams' actions were deliberate, calculated and malicious," said Circuit Chief Lt. Col. Tyler Heimann, 6th Circuit, Army Office of Special Trial Counsel. "By committing these crimes, he inflicted profound harm on his victim and betrayed the trust placed in him as an Army officer."

Jones-Adams is assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 23rd Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division, Multi-Domain Command Pacific, at Lewis-McChord.

In addition to prison, the military judge sentenced Jones-Adams to forfeiture of all pay and allowances and to be dismissed from the Army.

Flu vaccine mandate back for some service members

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The military has resumed requiring flu vaccines for some service members after an outbreak of influenza among trainees at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth lifted the annual flu vaccine requirement in April.

Sean Parnell, the Pentagon's chief spokesman and a senior adviser to Hegseth, said in a statement that Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Anthony Tata has granted exceptions to the Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as the National Security Agency and the Defense Health Agency.

"The decisions were based upon thorough risk assessments and are designed to maximize operational readiness, lethality and force generation, while

safeguarding at-risk populations," Parnell said. "The department remains committed to the health and readiness of our warfighters and civilian personnel."

The statement said that the services and departments are responsible for implementation. It is unclear how the exceptions will be implemented.

The Army, Navy and Air Force are requiring flu vaccines for basic trainees, ABC News reported.

The decision comes as 275 trainees at Lackland AFB have contracted influenza.

The Air Force confirmed an influenza outbreak has affected the 37th Training Wing at Lackland over the past three weeks. Each year, more than 36,000 recruits come through the unit.

The U.S. military dates its flu vaccine requirement to 1945.

Venezuela hit with 2 quakes

Miami Herald

The death toll from the powerful double earthquake that struck Venezuela's Caribbean coast on Wednesday has climbed to at least 164, with more than 970 people injured, as rescue crews continue searching through collapsed buildings amid growing fears that the final number of victims could rise significantly.

"As of now, we have recorded 164 deaths and 971 injuries, with 30 aftershocks since the two consecutive main quakes that struck at 6 p.m. on Wednesday," Interim President Delcy Rodríguez said Thursday morning.

Late Wednesday, Rodríguez said the earlier casualty figures had not yet included victims from La Guaira, the coastal state neighboring Caracas that she described as the area hardest hit by the disaster.

"We can say that the situation

in La Guaira state is a true tragedy; it has become a disaster zone," Rodríguez said.

Emergency officials and rescue workers warned that the current death toll may represent only a fraction of the final number, as dozens of collapsed buildings in La Guaira, Caracas and surrounding urban centers continue to be searched.

The Venezuelan Caribbean was shaken Wednesday afternoon by two powerful earthquakes — measuring 7.2 and 7.5 in magnitude — that struck just 39 seconds apart, according to the U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center.

The agency described the event as a "seismic doublet," a rare one-two punch in which a pair of major earthquakes occur within seconds of each other in the same region. The stronger second quake, a shallow 7.5-

magnitude tremor, caused widespread destruction across Venezuela's central and coastal states.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the main earthquake struck at 6:04 p.m. local time, with its epicenter about 186 miles east of Caracas, near Montalbán, in the country's central region.

Because of its shallow depth, the quake was felt intensely across much of Venezuela, including Caracas, where residents described some of the strongest shaking in decades.

In the capital, residents reported evacuations, structural damage and partial building collapses across multiple neighborhoods.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday that Washington would immediately deploy rescue and humanitarian assistance teams to Venezuela.

Warships arrive for RIMPAC

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The Rim of the Pacific maritime exercise that began Wednesday will include experiments with unmanned systems and the sinking of two derelict ships, the deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet said Wednesday.

"This summer we are joined by forces from 30 nations, 31 surface ships, five submarines, 1,100 landing forces, 197 aircraft and approximately 30,000 personnel," Vice Adm. Jeffery Jablon, who is serving as the commander of RIMPAC's combined task force, said at a news conference.

He was joined by Commodore Andres Howard of the Chilean navy serving as deputy commander of the combined task force; Rear Adm. Takuo Kobayashi of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force serving as vice commander of the combined task force; Rear Adm.

In-Ho Kim of the South Korean navy commanding the exercise's maritime component; and Brig. Gen. J.S. Davis of the Royal Canadian Air Force commanding RIMPAC's air component.

Jablon noted that this year's RIMPAC carries additional significance as it occurs on the anniversary of America's founding in 1776.

Participants will conduct a full range of drills, including anti-submarine, anti-air and land warfare; humanitarian assistance and disaster recovery; and search and rescue, Jablon said.

Alongside those typical RIMPAC operations will be 30 to 35 experiments utilizing unmanned systems throughout the exercise, Jablon said.

House panel OKs \$1T funding bill with Department of War renaming

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

The House Appropriations Committee approved a defense funding bill Wednesday that endorses the Pentagon's rebrand to the Department of War while allocating \$1.1 trillion in defense spending and providing a range of pay raises to troops.

The legislation was approved in a 34-27 vote, reflecting concerns from Democrats about funding a record-high Pentagon budget amid cuts to domestic spending programs. The bill next heads to the full House for a vote.

Republicans touted the legislation as an effort aimed at reversing chronic under-investment that has left the Air Force with aircraft more than 30 years old and the Navy with ships pushing 20 years of service.

"The choice before us is not between spending and saving; it's between preparing for the threats of tomorrow or paying a far greater price later," said Rep. Tom Cole, of Oklahoma, the Republican chairman of the committee. "This legislation chooses preparedness, it chooses strength."

Democrats derided the legislation, pointing to its price tag as well as its lack of funding for Ukraine, continued funding for the deployment of National Guard troops in Washington, D.C., and spending on the proposed Trump-class battleship.

"I will oppose this legislation until we can find a bipartisan consensus on our funding priorities," said Rep. Betty McCollum, of Minnesota, the top Democrat on the defense appropriations subpanel.

Democrats opposed several Republican amendments added to the bill on Wednesday, including a proposal to formally rename the Department of Defense to the Department of War after President Donald Trump authorized the use of the name last year.

Other adopted amendments block funds for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, gender-affirming care for transgender people and a rescinded policy that reimbursed troops who had to cross state lines for abortions.

The panel rejected several amendments offered by Democrats, including attempts to limit troop withdrawals from Europe, rein in the Iran war, cut funding for the Trump-class battleship and force Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to justify the blocking of senior officer promotions.

No peace deal for Trump, GOP at Senate lunch

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Republicans on Capitol Hill had been hoping to spend the summer touting a rare bipartisan legislative feat, but Donald Trump and his growing anger toward Senate Republicans torched that effort Wednesday. And more trouble could lie ahead, if a tense in-person meeting was any indication.

Trump descended on the Capitol for a Senate GOP lunch, where he vented frustration over both an Iran war powers resolution that passed the chamber this week — with the help of a few Republicans — and a stalled election security and voter ID measure known as the SAVE America Act.

It came as communication between the two sides of Pennsylvania Avenue continues to deteriorate. The latest surprise for Republican lawmakers had arrived just that morning:

Hours before he was scheduled to sign a sweeping housing package into law from the Capitol, Trump abruptly canceled the event, saying he won't sign it until Congress passes SAVE, "which I consider to be a National Emergency."

It's not the first time Trump has pulled attention away from senators' agenda while demanding unwavering loyalty.

During the meeting, Trump got into a shouting match with Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., who he successfully primaried out of his seat, over whether the president has been forthcoming about the war in Iran and a pending peace deal.

After Trump asked the room how anyone could vote for the war powers resolution — which aims to halt any further military action against Iran not authorized by Congress — Cassidy asked the president whether the question was "rhetorical."

"Well, we've not been briefed on how it's going," the Louisiana Republican told reporters after the lunch. "At which point I think the president said something negative about me."

Republican senators have been pressing the administration for hearings and more information about peace negotiations and an \$80 billion defense-related supplemental request from the White House.

"I'm not going to be bullied when I feel like I'm asking a question the American people need to know," Cassidy said. "It began to escalate."

Cassidy also said Trump threw his primary loss in his face.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., described it on Fox News as Trump "calling people out."

"But people need to be called out if you're not going to vote for this country," Tuberville said, describing Trump as annoyed

by the timing of the war powers' vote amid negotiations. "The Iranians see what's going on, so what's going on? Your Senate just passed 'no war against Iran' ... right in the middle of negotiations."

Senate Steering Committee Chairman Rick Scott, R-Fla., who'd invited Trump to the Hill, described him as "disappointed" in those Republicans.

Sen. Jim Justice, R-W.Va., summed up the exchange between Cassidy and Trump: "I wouldn't say super combative, but very passionate. Very passionate," while Cassidy said the moment was "gratifying."

"Several senators came up afterwards, very encouraging," Cassidy said.

Whether the visit cleared the air or clouded it remains to be seen. Trump called it a "great meeting" and described unity in the party, but noted he "doesn't like a few people. That's OK."

Trump refuses to sign landmark housing bill

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump canceled his planned signing Wednesday of the landmark housing bill Congress passed this week, in a striking decision to jeopardize a rare bipartisan success in order to demand that lawmakers pass voter ID legislation.

The president's reversal, as a stage and chairs for the signing ceremony were set up in the Capitol and stakeholders were arriving on the Hill, underscored his fixation on asserting some federal control over election processes.

And it displayed a remarkable willingness to threaten a bill that he and his party could have framed as a win on affordability ahead of the midterm elections, as Republicans fight to keep U.S. House control amid economic dissatisfaction among Americans.

Hours before the president torpedoed the bill signing, the White House had said the measure was an example of a "promise kept."

"Today's Housing News Conference and Signing is hereby cancelled (sic) until such time as we pass the desperately needed SAVE AMERICA ACT, which I consider to be a National Emergency," Trump wrote Wednesday.

It opened a new front in ongoing tension between Trump and Senate Republicans, which had already neared a breaking point this week over the proof-of-citizenship bill. Senate leaders have told the president that the bill, dubbed the SAVE America Act, does not have the votes to pass.

And it shocked lawmakers who had been celebrating the bipartisan accomplishment. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., who had helped lead negotiations,

said that Trump was "slapping millions of families in the face" after having supported the bill.

"Trump is making his promise crystal clear: If you're dealing with high housing costs, you're on your own," Waters told reporters at a Democratic news conference Wednesday afternoon.

The housing bill, which passed with overwhelming support in the House on Tuesday evening and the Senate on Monday, aims to boost housing supply.

It is the most significant legislation Congress has passed on housing in more than 30 years, and it contains a host of provisions aimed at removing regulatory barriers, improving federal programs and incentivizing new home building.

As president, Trump has 10 days to sign or veto bills after they are presented. If he takes

no action and Congress remains in session, a bill becomes law, though it could be subject to a pocket veto if Congress is out of session.

Rep. Katherine Clark, D-Mass., the House minority whip, said Republican leadership had not yet presented the bill to Trump.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., indicated to reporters Wednesday that a signing could still be on the table, saying he had spoken to Trump about "delaying" the housing bill before the president announced the cancellation.

"He decided — I didn't announce it, I wanted him to announce it — but we're delaying this," Johnson said. "He has a window of time before he has to sign a bill and he's going to use a little bit more of that window of time and we're gonna go through this together."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mayor files suit against Airbnb, host company

IL CHICAGO — Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration is suing Airbnb and one of its most-active Chicago hosts, alleging they broke and evaded city laws regulating short-term rentals.

The city's lawsuit, filed Monday, alleges host Slumber Stay LLC failed to register its units with the city and used a non-transferable hotel license across numerous properties — then continued to illegally rent units even after it paid fines and admitted to misconduct.

Airbnb backed up the law-breaking host by processing bookings for unregistered, unlicensed units, the lawsuit alleges.

Johnson painted the allegedly illegal short-term rentals as a threat to affordable housing in a Tuesday statement.

"At a time when affordability remains front of mind, our administration will continue to prioritize the needs of our residents, stability within our neighborhoods, and responsible business practices," he wrote.

A spokesperson for Airbnb did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Milan Rubenstein, a real estate broker and investor named in the lawsuit as Slumber Stay's manager, also did not immediately respond.

State's strict rent control proposal is struck down

MA BOSTON — The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court struck down a ballot proposal that would have imposed the strict

test statewide rent control in the U.S.

The measure sought to limit apartment rent increases to 5% or the annual gain in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is lower. The proposal can't go before voters in November because it includes an exception for religious housing and therefore violates a Massachusetts constitutional ban on religion-related ballot questions, the state's highest appeals court ruled on Tuesday.

Tenant advocates had sought to follow states like California and Washington in adopting rent limits, arguing they were particularly necessary at a time when many Americans are struggling with inflation in everyday goods. The typical Boston rent is about \$3,200 a month, roughly 65% higher than the national average, putting it among the top five least affordable metro areas in the U.S., according to Zillow Group Inc.

While rent increases in Boston have cooled recently with the local economy under threat, the typical cost in May was about 2.5% higher than last year, according to a Zillow report. Massachusetts voters approved a ban on rent control in 1994 that this ballot measure would have overturned.

Real estate developers were prepared to mount an expensive advertising campaign against the initiative, warning it would choke off housing construction.

Woman pleads guilty to voting twice in election

PA PHILADELPHIA — A Philadelphia woman pleaded guilty Monday to voting twice in the 2024 election — first in northern New Jersey,

then in Philadelphia.

Miya Pack, 40, said little beyond responding to routine legal questions as she pleaded guilty to a charge of voter fraud before U.S. District Judge Joshua D. Wolson.

Pack has been registered to vote since 2004 in Bergen County, N.J., prosecutors said in court documents, and she's also been registered to vote in Philadelphia since 2016. She is not affiliated with any political party, voter records show.

On Oct. 26, 2024, prosecutors said, Pack cast a ballot in that year's presidential election in Bergen County. Then, 10 days later, prosecutors said, she cast a ballot in the same contest in Philadelphia on Election Day.

They did not say whom she voted for, and she declined to comment as she left the courtroom Monday.

Man reportedly falls from Yosemite waterfall

CA YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK — Reports of a 23-year-old man falling from a nearly 600-foot waterfall at Yosemite National Park are under investigation by the National Park Service, according to authorities.

A Yosemite spokesperson offered minimal details about the Saturday incident at Nevada Fall except to confirm that a 23-year-old male was involved and that "emergency personnel responded to the incident, which remains under investigation."

According to a Reddit user, a group of friends was dragged down by the current at the top of Nevada Fall, which is located below the granite dome known as Liberty Cap.

"A person nearby handed the

girl a branch and she was rescued," the user wrote. "But the other person couldn't attach to anything and went with the current to the fall."

Carlson claims there's 'no chance' he votes GOP

NY NEW YORK — Right-wing influencer Tucker Carlson claims he can't vote for the Republican Party under current circumstances.

The former Fox News prime-time star expressed regret over his support for President Donald Trump during an April interview with his brother Buckley. Both conservatives confessed they would be indefinitely "tormented" for their advocacy.

Carlson took that a step further on a recent Canadian podcast by claiming he doesn't see himself supporting any Republican in leadership.

"There's no chance I would support the Republican Party," he told "Can't Be Censored" listeners. "I have nothing in common with these people at all."

The 57-year-old TV host-turned-podcaster said he doesn't see supporting the Democratic Party in November's midterm elections either.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," he confessed.

Carlson supported Trump on the 2020 campaign trail. There was speculation he would be picked as Trump's running mate or mount a presidential campaign of his own at some point. The pair have since split ways with Carlson criticizing the Trump administration's handling of various issues, particularly the war in Iran.

— From wire reports

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Mexico tops Czechia for first group sweep

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Javier Aguirre has been saying for a while now that the key to the Mexican team's success at the World Cup is that they are a family. This family, it seems, is on a historic journey.

Mateo Chávez and Julián Quiñones scored in a six-minute span early in the second half, and Mexico beat Czechia 3-0 on Wednesday to complete wins in all three of its World Cup group-stage matches for the first time.

The 22-year-old Chávez, in his first World Cup, opened the scoring in the 55th minute and Quiñones scored his second goal of the tournament in the 61st minute. Alvaro Fidalgo added a goal in stoppage time.

"It was something very beautiful, and I'll take it with me to the grave," Chávez said of his goal. "I imagined it many times; I dreamed of this."

Mexico's previous best group-stage performance was two wins and one draw, done in 1986 and

2002 and both featuring Javier Aguirre, the first as a midfielder and the second as El Tri's coach. Aguirre is back as coach this year, his third stint leading the national team.

After topping Group A, Mexico will play again at Estadio Azteca on Tuesday in a round-of-32 match against an opponent to be determined.

"Now comes the knockout stage; statistics and data don't matter. We're achieving things, but what lies ahead is what counts," Aguirre said. "Neither the players nor I dwell on what we've just done; we're thinking about what's next."

Mexico is undefeated at nine World Cup matches at the massive stadium, which was packed with 80,824 fans Wednesday. El Tri has only two losses at Azteca, most recently in World Cup qualifying against Honduras on Sept. 6, 2013.

The match Wednesday included nods to Mexico's past and future. Gilberto Mora became the

youngest Mexico player to start in a World Cup at 17. And 40-year-old goalkeeper Guillermo "Memo" Ochoa entered in the 77th minute, joining Argentina's Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo as the only players to appear in six World Cups.

Mora said "it's like a dream come true after everything I've worked for."

"Now we have tough opponents ahead," he added. "We're going to keep working to stay on this path. We want to keep advancing because the Mexican national team can become champion."

Mexico's triumph was marred, however, by the return of a homophobic chant by fans that has previously led to fines and other sanctions against its soccer federation. The chant, a one-word slur, was heard near the end of the first half when Czech goalkeeper Matej Kovar took a goal kick.

Czechia was eliminated, finishing with one point in three games.

Mexico is unbeaten in 11 games dating to a friendly loss against Panama last November. And Aguirre has made the most of his roster, using 25 of 26 players in the tournament. Chávez was one of five starters Wednesday who didn't start in the previous win over South Korea.

"Twenty-five of the 26 have played — that is no small detail — nor is it a small detail that everyone celebrates the goals," Aguirre said.

Ochoa, who wears No. 13, played the last 13 minutes in regulation, plus stoppage time, in what's likely to be his last appearance for Mexico. He turns 41 on July 13 and plans to retire from international competition after the World Cup.

"Life — football — had this farewell in store for me, to cap it all off perfectly. For my part, I've left it all out there; I gave everything," Ochoa said. "I leave with nothing left because I poured it all into my teams and the national squad."

Bosnia tops Qatar, boosting chances of facing US next

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Ermin Mahmic stripped his jersey off, darted toward the corner of the pitch in front of Bosnia-Herzegovina's fans and pumped his right fist.

The 21-year-old Mahmic prompted thousands of the team's supporters at Lumen Field to celebrate Wednesday following his goal in the 80th minute against Qatar in a 3-1 victory that boosted Bosnia-Herzegovina's chances of advancing at the World Cup.

Mahmic, who had come on just past the hour mark, received a yellow card for removing his top.

It was worth it.

"We knew that the bookings are erased after the group stage," coach Sergej Barbarez said in Bosnian. "I also heard that he shed a tear. I think it was quite emotional for him."

With the victory, Bosnia finished third in the group and is likely to advance to the Round of 32 in the expanded field. The eight best third-place finishers across the 12 groups advance.

Depending on how the bracket shakes out, Bosnia is in line to face the United States on July 1 in the round of 32.

Bosnia has played in only one other World Cup — 2014 in Brazil — and didn't get out of the group stage.

"We all wanted to write history, and make history," Barbarez said. "But this was never initially, honestly, our plan. We still have to see whether we are going to progress to the next stage."

Bosnia-Herzegovina's fate will be determined by how the rest of the group-stage matches play out. But the party was on Wednesday after just 29 minutes when Kerim Alajbegovic became the eighth-youngest scorer in World Cup history.

The 18-year-old powered a shot past Qatar goalkeeper Mahmud Abunada from 20 yards away to give Bosnia the lead.

"I'm really happy for him," Bosnia goalkeeper Nikola Vasilj said. "At that age, to be able to play such a big game and to score a goal, and he's showing that he's able to score goals."

Bosnia tacked on a second goal in the 34th minute when Sead Kolasinac launched a cross to the back post. A volley to the middle by Edin Dzeko deflected off Qatar's Sultan Al-Brake for an own goal.

Mahmic's tally sealed Qatar's elimination — and a celebration for Bosnia.

The party was on the rest of the way for the country of roughly three million people. Just making it to the World Cup, let alone being on the verge of advancing, was a long-shot.

Bosnia-Herzegovina secured a spot in the tournament by winning in penalty shootouts against Wales and four-time World Cup winner Italy in the European playoffs in March.

Barbarez avoided speculating about a matchup with the U.S., but is confident his team will be up for the task on the host country's soil.

"All of this is a bonus for us," Barbarez said. "We will be extremely relieved, and we will try to take on any team that comes our way. We are confident enough to face anyone."

Hornets to trade Ball to T-wolves for Reid

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — LaMelo Ball is the latest NBA star with a new home.

The Charlotte Hornets agreed to trade Ball, their starting point guard, and Josh Green to the Minnesota Timberwolves for power forward Naz Reid, a 2033 unprotected first-round draft pick, three first-round pick swaps and three future second-round picks, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The person spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the deal, first reported by ESPN, has yet to be approved by the league.

The three first-round pick swaps will be in 2028, 2029 and

2030. The Hornets also get three second-round picks in 2029, 2032 and 2033.

The 24-year-old Ball, the No. 3 overall pick in the 2020 NBA draft, had three years left on a franchise-record five-year, \$203.9 million designated rookie contract. An All-Star in 2022, Ball has struggled with ankle and foot injuries during his career, but he played in 72 games last season and averaged 20.1 points, 7.1 assists and 4.8 rebounds per game, helping the Hornets win 44 games before being blown out in the play-in tournament by the Orlando Magic.

Ball finished second in the league in 3s made last year with 272, one behind rookie teammate Kon Knueppel.

Ball is considered an exceptional offensive player, but his shortcomings on the defensive end were at times a source of irritation for coach Charles Lee.

Still, Ball's ability to create opportunities for his teammates off the dribble, his exceptional passing and unique knack for getting off 3-pointers — with shots often coming off one foot — via a step-back move, make him one of the league's most dynamic scoring point guards.

But Ball was never able to get the Hornets to the playoffs in his six seasons with the club, with injuries playing a role. Before this season, Ball missed 141 games over the previous three seasons.

This trade is expected to be included as part of the transaction

in which Minnesota agreed to send Julius Randle to Brooklyn in a deal that involved the Chicago Bulls, a second person with knowledge of the agreement told the AP. It will create an NBA-record trade exception of nearly \$41 million for the Hornets.

The deals cannot be finalized until July 6, when the league moratorium on such moves is lifted.

It's another blockbuster for the league, which has seen Giannis Antetokounmpo getting traded by Milwaukee to Miami for a package that includes Tyler Herro, a move that followed the Randle deal before the draft.

The Hornets are expected to re-sign unrestricted free agent Coby White to serve as their starting point guard.

McKenna pushed himself to be possible No. 1 draft pick

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — For all the offense, leadership and star-power Gavin McKenna brought to Penn State hockey this season, coach Guy Gadowsky discovered yet another attribute in the celebrated forward's talented arsenal.

And it involved ping-pong, of all things.

Having dominated most of his players in table tennis over the years, Gadowsky is still stung after meeting his match.

"It wasn't fun because I was able to beat him on his recruiting trip. And then I beat him early in the season and quite regularly," Gadowsky recalled. "He just kept on improving and improving and improving. And by the end of it, I think he probably has beaten me more than any other player."

As the projected No. 1 pick in the NHL draft in Buffalo on Friday night, McKenna has larger visions than ping-pong. Yet what the 18-year-old from Whitehorse, Yukon, did in improving his paddle skills was eye-opening to Gadowsky in reflecting McKenna's innate competitiveness.

"He has great confidence in his ability to figure things out and improve," he said, noting how it compared to McKenna's ability to adapt against older and more physical players at the NCAA level.

"He very quickly became the best ping-pong player, and he very quickly became the best (hockey) player in the Big Ten at such a

young age."

He found his groove in 2nd half

It took the entire first half of the season for the 5-foot-11, 170-pound McKenna to adjust in making the jump from Canada's Western Hockey League to college.

Driven by his own expectations and outside critics, McKenna found his groove upon returning to Penn State in January after representing Canada at the world junior championship. He had 32 points in his final 17 games to finish tied for fourth in the nation with 51 (15 goals, 36 assists) in 35 outings.

"When you see yourself at the top since a young age, and then you start to see things in the media that I'm falling down, I think you get pretty fired up from it," McKenna said of his second-half surge.

"I got sick and tired of seeing it, just used it as fuel. I started working harder off the ice, on the ice," he added. "I don't think (the criticisms) will ever go away, but it's something I'll carry with me forever. I learned that hard work is key to confidence."

On the draft radar since 2023

McKenna's been pegged as his age group's top talent since 2023-24, when he piled up 97 points in 61 games in his first full season with Medicine Hat. He followed with 41 goals and 129 points in 56 games the next year, before opting for Penn State — and announcing his

decision on ESPN — in the wake of the NCAA lifting its ban of CHL players.

McKenna did so by banking on himself and taking the more difficult path to show he can compete at a higher level.

Chance to go first to Toronto

The Toronto Maple Leafs are scheduled to pick first, and aren't tipping their hand, though team executives have met several times with McKenna, including a visit to Whitehorse.

McKenna has the opportunity to be the second Yukoner selected in the first round, after family friend Dylan Cozens went No. 7 to Buffalo in 2019.

To develop his skills, McKenna left his hometown behind six years ago in a journey that's featured various challenges and numerous stops.

And now he is a day away from potentially landing in one of the NHL's premier markets.

McKenna welcomed the possibility of playing in Toronto, and living in a metropolis nearly 100 times the size of Whitehorse's population of about 39,000.

"If I was a young kid telling myself this is where I'd be, that'd be a dream come true," McKenna said of speaking in front of a crowd of reporters at the NHL prospect combine earlier this month. "It's something I'm very grateful for, and something I'll never take for granted."

Swanson, Cubs sweep Mets in doubleheader

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Dansby Swanson had a go-ahead RBI triple and four RBIs to cap a monster doubleheader performance and help the Chicago Cubs sweep the reeling New York Mets with a 10-5 victory Wednesday night.

Swanson hit a three-run homer and a grand slam in Chicago's 10-3 victory in the opener. The 11 RBIs in a doubleheader are a franchise record, breaking the mark of 10 set by Hall of Famer Ron Santo on July 6, 1970.

Swanson also homered Tuesday night and has three homers and 15 RBIs in the first three games of the series. That set a franchise record for most RBIs in a four-game series with one game left. The shortstop had just 14 RBIs in his previous 48 games entering Tuesday.

Pedro Ramirez had two RBIs in the second game, when Carson Kelly, Pete Crow-Armstrong and Matt Shaw had an RBI apiece.

In the first game, the Cubs trailed 3-0 before tying the game in the fifth inning, when Crow-Armstrong singled with two outs against Nolan Schanuel (4-5) and scored on Michael Conforto's double before Michael Busch hit a two-run homer off the advertising signage in right field.

Rockies 8, Red Sox 6: Tyler Freeman's sacrifice bunt in the eighth inning drove in the go-ahead run, Cole Carrigg had three RBIs and host Colorado rallied past Boston.

After pinch-hitter Mickey Moniak and Willi Castro singled off Justin Slaten (0-4) and put runners on first and third with the game tied at 6, Freeman put down a bunt along the first-base line that scored Moniak to put the Rockies up. Carrigg capped the scoring with an RBI double.

Carrigg, Jake McCarthy and Troy Johnston each hit RBI singles during the Rockies' three-run seventh inning to tie it at 6.

Angels 7, Orioles 6 (10): Nolan Schanuel reached third on an error and Logan O'Hoppe drove

him in on a soft ground ball in the 10th inning as host Los Angeles rallied back to defeat Baltimore.

Pinch-hitter Vaughn Grissom started the rally with an RBI single in the eighth, and Wade Meckler tied the game with a two-run single.

Pete Alonso gave the Orioles the lead again with a 10th-inning RBI single, but Oswald Peraza scored on Schanuel's soft grounder to tie after Keegan Akin mishandled the toss while covering first.

Guardians 4, White Sox 3 (10): Khalil Watson singled in the go-ahead run in the 10th inning for his third RBI of the day, and visiting Cleveland survived a ninth-inning collapse to beat Chicago.

In a game delayed by rain at the start for 2 hours, 40 minutes, Watson singled to left off Grant Taylor (2-1) to score automatic runner Petey Halpin from third and help the Guardians tie the White Sox for the AL Central lead.

Braden Montgomery and Randal Grichuk homered off majors saves leader Cade Smith with two outs in the ninth to tie it for Chicago. Smith had two of his three blown saves this season in this series.

Marlins 4, Rangers 2: Otto López homered, Xavier Edwards had an RBI single in the fifth and host Miami beat Texas.

López's two-run shot in the eighth off reliever Cole Winn gave him a 33rd multi-hit game and raised his major league-leading batting average to .340. López also had a single.

Yankees 4, Tigers 2: Paul Goldschmidt had two home runs and Jasson Domínguez hit a go-ahead, two-run shot in the sixth inning off Tarik Skubal, lifting visiting New York to a series-winning victory over Detroit.

Skubal (3-4) tied a career high by giving up three home runs, allowing that many in a game for the first time since 2021. The two-time reigning Cy Young Award winner gave up only one other

hit, didn't walk a batter and had nine strikeouts over six innings.

Pirates 11, Mariners 1: Braxton Ashcraft pitched six strong innings, batterymate Endy Rodríguez drove in three runs and Ryan O'Hearn had three hits to help host Pittsburgh rout Seattle.

Ashcraft (7-3) had 10 strikeouts without a walk while allowing one run and five hits. He became the first Pirates pitcher to have at least two starts in the same season with at least 10 strikeouts and zero walks since at least 1901.

Rays 5, Royals 3: Griffin Jax (3-5) pitched five innings with seven strikeouts, Yandy Díaz tied Tampa Bay's franchise record for career RBIs and the host Rays defeated Kansas City.

Díaz hammered a line drive to left field in the fourth inning to tie B.J. Upton's franchise mark of 447 RBIs and give Tampa Bay a 4-0 lead. Jonny DeLuca followed with an RBI double.

Astros 3, Blue Jays 1: Joey Loperfido scored the tiebreaking run on Jeff Hoffman's errant pickoff throw in the eighth inning and visiting Houston beat Toronto for its sixth victory in eight games.

Isaac Paredes had an RBI double in the first and Jeremy Peña's infield single scored an insurance run in the ninth as the Astros won with only four hits.

Phillies 5, Nationals 4: Derek Hill hit a two-run pinch home run to lift visiting Philadelphia to its second straight two-out, ninth-inning victory over Washington.

Major league homers leader Kyle Schwarber, out of the starting lineup with lower back tightness, pinch hit with two outs and walked against Orlando Ribalta. Left-hander Richard Lovelady (2-4) came on and Hill pinch hit for Justin Crawford and homered to right center on a 1-2 pitch.

Dodgers 4, Twins 3: Mookie Betts backed Shohei Ohtani with three hits, including his 300th career home run, as visiting Los Angeles finished a three-game

sweep of Minnesota.

Ohtani helped himself with an RBI single to spark a three-run third inning against Twins starter Joe Ryan after the two-way superstar fell behind with a three-run second. Ohtani (8-2) finished with eight strikeouts in six innings.

Brewers 6, Reds 5: William Contreras and Jake Bauers hit back-to-back homers in the third inning and visiting Milwaukee beat Cincinnati to complete a three-game sweep.

The Reds loaded the bases with one out in the ninth against Joel Kuhnel, who got Dane Myers to ground into an ending 6-4-3 double play.

Diamondbacks 9, Cardinals 4: LuJames Groover and Ketel Marte hit back-to-back home runs to cap a six-run fourth inning that powered visiting Arizona over St. Louis.

Mitch Bratt allowed one run and two hits and two walks in three innings as he became the first Canadian pitcher to make his major league debut with the Diamondbacks. Ryan Thompson (3-1) allowed one run on two hits in two innings in relief of Bratt.

Padres 5, Braves 2: Ty France homered and JP Sears won his season debut for host San Diego, which beat NL East-leading Atlanta for a three-game sweep.

Sears (1-0) was cruising with a four-hitter before allowing Joey Bart's two-run home run with two outs in the sixth. It was his third and came with Austin Riley aboard on a walk.

Giants 2, Athletics 1: Rafael Devers hit a tying home run leading off the ninth and Victor Bericoto connected one out later with a drive over the center-field fence, sending host San Francisco to a victory against the Athletics.

Devers and Bericoto connected off Elvis Alvarado (3-3), who blew the save. Erik Miller (1-0) pitched the top of the ninth for the win.