

GOP scrutinizes Afghan withdrawal

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Marine injured in a suicide attack during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 choked up as he told House lawmakers on Wednesday that he had spotted the suspected bomber hours before the blast.

Sgt. Tyler Vargas-Andrews, 25, said his unit had warned commanders that they saw two suspects in the chaotic crowd outside Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport on Aug. 26, 2021, that fit a description flagged by U.S. intelligence, but the Marines were denied permission to shoot.

"Plain and simple, we were ignored," Vargas-Andrews said.

The ensuing explosion at the airport's Abey Gate killed 13 U.S. troops and about 170 civilians and wounded 45 service members. Vargas-Andrews lost an arm, leg and kidney as a result of the attack and has since undergone 44 surgeries.

His emotional testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday was part of a revived effort by Republicans since taking control of the House in January to examine the tumultuous end of the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

"What happened in Afghanistan was a systemic breakdown of the federal government at every level and a stunning failure of leadership by the Biden administration," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, the committee chairman. "I will not rest and this committee will not rest until we determine how this happened and hold those responsible for it accountable."

McCaul said "our game plan" was to ultimately bring Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Capitol Hill for further scrutiny.

Vargas-Andrews cried several times as he recounted the days and hours before the deadly suicide attack. He described the desperate attempts of exhausted and dehydrated Afghans to reach evacuation planes as the Taliban killed and brutalized them in full view of U.S. service members. Troops were not allowed to engage, he said.

"We were just helpless," Vargas-Andrews said. "We passed over intel, let people know what was going on but [we were] unable to do anything."

Vargas-Andrews, a gunman and radio operator, belonged to a scout sniper team and

was tasked with scanning and controlling the crowd and helping the State Department process evacuees.

He said an intelligence bulletin went out at 2 a.m. on the day of the suicide attack describing a potential bomber and his male companion. Vargas-Andrews said he and others saw the individuals, "nervously looking up at our position," between noon and 1 p.m. When Marines relayed their findings to a commander and asked for permission to shoot, the commander said he did not have the authority to approve such an action, he said.

"We asked who did and [the commander] said he didn't know and would find out," Vargas-Andrews said. "In that time, the two individuals disappeared into the crowd."

The Marine and veterans who testified Wednesday expressed frustration with a lack of accountability for the haphazard withdrawal and deep regret for the thousands of Afghan allies who were left behind.

Vargas-Andrews said no one from the military or any other government agency had interviewed him about his experiences at the Kabul airport. He said he feels his service "is not valued to this country by the government."

Russian missile barrage hits Ukrainian cities

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia launched a massive barrage of missiles and drones that hit residential buildings and critical infrastructure across Ukraine on Thursday, killing six people and leaving hundreds of thousands without heat or electricity.

The largest such attack in three weeks also put Europe's largest nuclear plant at risk by knocking it off the power grid for hours before it was reconnected. Nuclear plants need constant power to run cooling systems and avoid a meltdown, and the latest threat to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant once again raised the specter of a nuclear catastrophe.

Air raid sirens wailed through the night, as the attacks targeted a wide swath of the country, including some far from the front

lines. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the assault that came while many people slept was an attempt by Moscow "to intimidate Ukrainians again."

The Russian Defense Ministry said the strikes were in retaliation for a recent incursion into the Bryansk region of Russia by what Moscow claimed were Ukrainian saboteurs. Ukraine denied the claim and warned that Moscow could use the allegations to justify stepping up its own assaults.

The war has largely ground to a stalemate on the battlefield over the winter. The Kremlin's forces started targeting Ukraine's power supply last October in an apparent attempt to demoralize the civilian population and compel Kyiv to negotiate peace on Moscow's terms. The attacks later became less frequent, with analysts specu-

lating Russia may have been running low on ammunition.

The last major bombardment took place on Feb. 16. Overall, Russia launched 81 missiles and eight exploding Iranian-made Shahed drones Thursday, according to Ukraine's chief commander of the armed forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi. Thirty-four missiles were intercepted, as were four drones, he said. The mixture of munitions makes it harder for air defenses to cope with the onslaught, military analysts say.

Among the weapons were six hypersonic Kinzhal cruise missiles, which are among the most sophisticated weapons in the Russian arsenal, Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said. Ukraine says it doesn't have air defenses that can intercept them.

N. Korea fires missile ahead of US drills

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea fired its fifth ballistic missile of the year Thursday, one day after U.S. intelligence officials assessed that the communist regime had “no intention of abandoning” its weapons program.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff in a message to reporters said the military had detected a short-range ballistic missile launched from the coastal city of Nampo toward the Yellow Sea around 6:20 p.m.

The South Korean military

“maintains a full readiness posture” and is working with the United States in surveilling the launch, the Joint Chiefs said.

The regime last launched two short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast on Feb. 20 and fired an intercontinental ballistic missile eastward on Feb. 18.

Thursday’s launch came a day after the Office of the Director of National Intelligence made public an unclassified version of its annual threat assessment report. In it, the directorate said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un “almost certainly views nuclear weapons and

ICBMs as the ultimate guarantor of his autocratic rule and has no intention of abandoning those programs ...”

“Kim is continuing to prioritize efforts to build an increasingly capable missile force designed to evade U.S. and regional missile defenses,” the report said. “Kim probably will continue to order missile tests ... to validate technical objectives, reinforce deterrence, and normalize Pyongyang’s missile testing.”

North Korea fired roughly 75 missiles in 2022, an annual record, in 36 separate days of test-

ing. The latest launch comes as the U.S. and South Korean forces prepare to kick off their largest joint military exercises in recent years. The allies are scheduled to conduct their Freedom Shield exercise Monday through March 23 and will concurrently hold a series of large-scale field exercises dubbed Warrior Shield.

North Korea’s state-run Korean Central News Agency has warned the U.S. and the South over the upcoming exercises and continues to describe them as provocative acts that destabilizes the region.

USMC moving Hawaii firing range threatened by shoreline erosion

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Marine Corps has begun the process of moving inland the first of four short-distance firing ranges on Oahu threatened by encroaching beach erosion.

The initial steps to move Foxtrot Range roughly 44 yards inland at Pu’uloa Range Training Facility in Ewa Beach began in late February, 1st Lt. Mark McDonough, a spokesman for Marine Corps Base Hawaii, said by phone Wednesday.

The training facility lies across Pearl Harbor due west of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. It also includes two long-distance firing ranges. Relocating the small-arms ranges at the site is part of a multiyear effort to protect the facility from erosion and to prevent possible beach contamination from bullet lead.

“Pu’uloa Range Training Facility is an essential part of the Marine Corps’ training resources on the island of Oahu,” Maj. Jeffrey Hart, director of Marine Corps Base Hawaii’s Environmental Compliance and Protec-

tion Division, said in a March 2 news release.

“We have a responsibility to protect the natural resources we are entrusted to manage,” he said.

Ranges Charlie, Delta and Echo are slated to be relocated next to Foxtrot as part of an overall military construction project being pursued by Marine Corps Base Hawaii, McDonough said.

Alpha and Bravo ranges are for long-distance firing, the longest at 1,000 yards and used for sniper training, he said. Soldiers also train on the long ranges.

The firing-range relocation is the second part of a three-phase plan that Marine Corps Base Hawaii unveiled in 2019 to stabilize the shoreline from erosion.

The firing ranges came under greater scrutiny after the Surfrider Foundation Oahu Chapter in early 2022 reported it had found elevated levels of lead in beach sand collected near the facility.

The Foxtrot Range was selected for the first move because it is most vulnerable to erosion and, thus, possible migration of lead to beach sand, McDonough said.

Marine in Japan who refused vaccine faces multiple charges

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — A Marine lance corporal who refused the COVID-19 vaccine last year and was jailed in January on separate charges is headed for a court-martial for insubordination and other alleged offenses.

Lance Cpl. Catherine Arnett, 24, of Fort Worth, Texas, is scheduled to be arraigned Tuesday for alleged violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice articles 86, failure to go to an appointed place of duty; 87, missing an official flight or ship movement; 87b, offenses against correctional custody and restriction; 90, willfully disobeying a superior commissioned officer; and 91, insubordinate conduct, according to the Navy and Marine Corps court-martial docket website.

Arnett’s charges were referred to a special court-martial on Feb. 8, but her arraignment Monday was delayed until next week, a spokesman for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Maj. Rob

Martins said. Since January, Arnett has been in the brig at the Marines’ Camp Hansen on Okinawa, according to Martins.

Wing commander Maj. Gen. Eric Austin ordered Arnett discharged on Jan. 9 based on allegations that she committed forgery and made false official statements, violations of UCMJ articles 105 and 107, respectively, Martins said Jan. 24.

Martins did not detail those allegations against Arnett or why the two articles were dropped.

Military police arrested Arnett after she refused to board a U.S.-bound flight on Jan. 21.

In September, the Marine Corps dismissed two counts against Arnett of missing troop movements and one of disobeying a direct order after a federal judge in August temporarily barred the Corps from punishing or discharging Marines who refused the COVID-19 vaccine on religious grounds. Arnett has said she regards the August 2021 vaccine mandate, now repealed, as an unlawful order. The Marines never charged Arnett with refusing the COVID-19 vaccine.

Pentagon is wary of using troops against drug cartels

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A top Pentagon official told lawmakers Wednesday that she was wary of growing calls to deploy American troops into Mexico to battle cartels responsible for at least some of the deadly drugs pouring into the United States across the southern border.

Melissa Dalton, the assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and hemispheric affairs, told House Armed Services Committee members that the Pentagon has found increasing violence in Mexico and the flow of the synthetic opioid fentanyl into the United States “deeply concerning.”

But Dalton also warned unilateral U.S. military action into Mexico could harm the relationship between the U.S. and its southern neighbor, after lawmakers in both chambers this year have raised the idea of designating some cartels as terrorist groups and sending U.S. troops into Mexico to confront them.

“In terms of weighing the advantages and disadvantages of some of the steps that are under consideration in terms of use of force or certain designations, I think we need to be clear-eyed about what some of the impli-

cations might be for the lines of cooperation we do have with Mexico,” Dalton said in response to an inquiry from Rep. Jimmy Panetta, D-Calif. “I do worry, based on signals — very strong signals we’ve gotten from the Mexicans in the past, concerns about their sovereignty, concerns about potential reciprocal steps that they might take to cut off our access, if we were to take some of these steps that are in consideration.”

Recent calls to deploy U.S. forces alongside U.S. law enforcement into Mexico to deal with the drug cartels have largely come from Republicans. In an op-ed published last week by The Wall Street Journal, former Attorney General Bill Barr, who served in that role under former presidents Donald Trump and George H.W. Bush, called for “a far more aggressive American effort inside Mexico than ever before.” He called on President Joe Biden to deploy “select military capabilities” into Mexican regions dominated by the cartels and endorsed a resolution proposed in January by Reps. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, and Michael Waltz, R-Fla., to provide presidential authority to battle Mexican cartels with the U.S. military.

Chinese President Xi calls for ‘more quickly elevating’ military

Associated Press

BEIJING—China’s leader Xi Jinping has called for “more quickly elevating the armed forces to world-class standards,” in a speech just days after a top diplomat warned of the growing possibility of conflict with the U.S. unless Washington changes course.

China must maximize its “national strategic capabilities” in a bid to “systematically upgrade the country’s overall strength to cope with strategic risks, safeguard strategic interests and realize strategic objectives,” Xi said Wednesday.

His remarks to delegates in the ceremonial parliament representing the People’s Liberation Army, the military wing of the ruling Communist Party, and the paramilitary People’s Armed Police, were carried by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Xi issued a series of calls to accelerate the buildup of self-reliance in science and tech-

nology, bolster strategic capabilities in emergency fields, make industrial and supply chains more resilient and make national reserves “more capable of safeguarding national security.”

The program laid out by Xi dovetails with a number of national strategies already underway, including the “Made in China 2025” campaign to make China dominant in 10 key fields.

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Qin Gang had warned in unusually stark terms about the possibility of U.S.-China frictions leading to something more dire.

“If the United States does not hit the brake, but continues to speed down the wrong path, no amount of guardrails can prevent derailing and there surely will be conflict and confrontation,” Qin said in his first news conference since taking up his post last year.

Military adviser: Beard issue is a ‘waste of time’

By ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

Airmen and other service members clamoring for the right to grow a beard had their hopes crushed by the military’s top enlisted adviser, who called the issue a waste of time during a recent video.

Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Ramon “CZ” Colon-Lopez, the senior enlisted adviser to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, voiced his disapproval of nonuniformity while addressing an airman’s question alongside Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne Bass and Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force Roger Towberman on Wednesday at the Air and Space Forces Association Warfare Symposium.

“The question is do we really need to be discussing fashion when we’re preparing, after 20 years of war, to best an opponent that can potentially have the best of us,” Colon-Lopez said during the Facebook broadcast. “Is the beard relevant? Is there a need for a beard other than personal comfort to not shave?”

He continued to double down on the notion of beards as nothing more than an expression of personal style.

“If you want to look cute with your skinny jeans and your beard, by all means do it someplace else,” Colon-Lopez said. “But quit wasting our time on something that doesn’t have anything to do with kicking the enemy’s ass.”

Colon-Lopez’s full-throated beard rejection comes as the services have relaxed some rules amid a recruiting slump. For example, the Air Force last week began allowing hand and some neck tattoos up to an inch long.

Colon-Lopez added that he was against religious waivers exempting service members from shaving mandates because of the potential impact on unit discipline. That stance drew criticism from online commenters Wednesday and Thursday.

A self-described Air Force chaplain who took to Reddit on Wednesday called Colon-Lopez’s comments “despicable.”

Colon-Lopez, a pararescueman, acknowledged that he wore a beard in Afghanistan because of a “combat need to blend in” during special operations missions. But he said that the need went away when service members stopped blending in by wearing body armor and U.S. flag patches.

Biden's budget seeks big deficit cuts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With the government at risk of defaulting, President Joe Biden on Thursday will make his opening offer in a high-stakes debate over federal finances as he proposes a federal budget that would cut deficits by nearly \$3 trillion over the next decade.

It's part of a broader attempt by the president to call out House Republicans, who are demanding severe cuts to federal spending in return for lifting the government's legal borrowing limit. But the GOP has no counter offer so far, other than a flat "no" to a budget plan that could form the policy spine of Biden's yet-to-be-declared campaign for reelection in 2024.

"We see this as a value statement," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters Wednesday. "This is something that shows the American people that

we take this very seriously when we think about the fiscal responsibility, when we think about how do we move forward."

Biden's package of tax and spending priorities is unlikely to pass the House or Senate as proposed. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., predicted in advance that the plan "will not see the light of day," a sign that it might primarily serve as a messaging document going into the 2024 elections.

Biden will unveil his spending plan in the battleground state of Pennsylvania, staking out what he believes is popular terrain that will make it hard for Republicans to criticize without risking blowback. Biden wants to impose tax hikes on the wealthy to limit federal borrowing, including a reversal of the 2017 tax cuts made by then-President Donald Trump on people earning above \$400,000. The added revenues would help to

improve Medicare, the government health insurance program for adults over 65.

In the run-up to the plan's release, Biden has floated a new tax on incomes above \$100 million that would target billionaires. He's called for lower prescription drug prices. The tax that companies pay on stock buybacks would be quadrupled, and those earning above \$400,000 would pay an additional Medicare tax that would help to keep the program solvent beyond the year 2050.

Biden's budget would seek to close the "carried interest" loophole that allows wealthy hedge fund managers and others to pay their taxes at a lower rate, and prevent billionaires from being able to set aside large amounts of their holdings in tax-favored retirement accounts, according to an administration official. The plan also projects saving \$24 billion over 10 years by removing a tax subsidy for cryptocurrency transactions.

3 hurt in fiery train derailment caused by rockslide

Associated Press

SANDSTONE, W.Va. — An empty coal train hit a rockslide along tracks in West Virginia on Wednesday morning, causing a fiery derailment that injured three crewmembers, CSX Transportation said in a statement.

Four locomotives and 22 empty cars derailed in Summers County near the New River, CSX said. The lead locomotive, which carried a conductor, an engineer

and an engineer trainee, caught fire and the crewmembers were being evaluated and treated for non-life threatening injuries, the company said.

CSX said an unoccupied locomotive was partially in the waterway where an unknown amount of diesel fuel and oil spilled, officials said. Environmental teams were deploying containment measures.

The derailment occurred in a remote area just south of Sandstone inside the New

River National Park and Preserve, according to a statement from the West Virginia Emergency Management Division. Several state agencies are monitoring the situation and said public water systems downstream have been notified and are monitoring for any potential public health impacts.

No hazardous materials were being transported and there was no danger to the public, CSX said.

Norfolk Southern CEO apologizes, pledges assistance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Norfolk Southern's CEO apologized before Congress on Thursday and pledged millions of dollars to help East Palestine, Ohio, recover from last weekend's fiery, hazardous materials train derailment. But he stopped short of fully endorsing a Senate bill to toughen safety regulations.

CEO Alan Shaw said his railroad supports the goal of improving rail safety, but he also defended the railroad's record.

He did back proposals to tighten standards for tank cars that the railroads don't own, expand hazardous materials training for first responders and establish standards for the trackside detectors railroads use to spot problems.

"I'm terribly sorry for the impact this derailment has had on the folks of that community," Shaw said. "We're going to be there for as long as it takes to help East Palestine thrive and recover."

He pointed to a \$20 million commitment so far to help the community recover. Norfolk Southern's final financial responsibility is expected to run far beyond that.

The company has announced several voluntary safety upgrades. Senators, however, have promised an inquiry into the derailment, the Biden administration's response and the company's safety practices after the toppling of 38 railcars, including 11 carrying hazardous materials. Federal regulators have also said Norfolk Southern itself must do more to improve safety.

No one was injured in the crash, but state and local officials decided to release and burn toxic vinyl chloride from five tanker cars, prompting the evacuation of half of the roughly 5,000 residents of East Palestine. Scenes of billowing smoke above the village, alongside an outcry from residents that they are still suffering from illnesses, have turned high-level attention to railroad safety and how dangerous materials are transported.

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., the chair of the committee opened the hearing by calling it an "an opportunity to put ourselves in the shoes of those impacted by this disaster, examine the immediate response and ensure long-term accountability for the cleanup efforts."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Live free or dry: Can't buy booze on part of train trip

ME PORTLAND—Riders on an Amtrak train that runs from Maine to Boston will soon have to hold off on buying alcoholic beverages during the 35-mile stretch of the trip that goes through New Hampshire.

The Amtrak Downeaster takes passengers 145 miles from Brunswick, Maine, to Boston. The train includes a cafe car that serves alcohol. However, the New Hampshire Liquor Commission has told the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority that the train can't serve alcohol during the New Hampshire portion of the journey.

The change is set to go on the books on March 20, the Portland Press Herald reported. It stems from a New Hampshire law that forbids the serving of alcohol that hasn't been purchased in the state.

Border state may curb paramilitary patrols

NM SANTA FE — Legislators in New Mexico are advancing legislation to rein in paramilitary patrols that have popped up in recent years to halt migrants near the international border with Mexico and at a protest over a statue of a Spanish conquistador.

The bill places New Mexico among several states weighing changes this year to restrictions on paramilitary organizations. Lawmakers in Oregon and Vermont also are considering initiatives aimed at limiting activities by private militarized groups. Legislators in Idaho are

moving in the other direction by advancing a bill to repeal a state law banning private militias, despite criticism that the move could dangerously embolden existing paramilitary groups in the region. A narrow ban on municipal-run paramilitary groups would remain in place.

Democratic state Rep. Raymundo Lara, of Sunland Park, is cosponsoring the New Mexico initiative and says it gives district attorneys new tools and discretion by making it a crime for armed paramilitary organizations to engage in public patrols capable of causing injury or death with provisions regarding intimidation. The bill includes felony penalties including prison.

Nonbinary lawmaker censured after arrest

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — A Black, nonbinary Democratic state legislator in the Oklahoma House was formally censured by the Republican majority on Tuesday, accused of blocking state troopers from questioning a transgender rights activist who was accused of assaulting a police officer.

The party-line vote means Rep. Mauree Turner, who uses they/them pronouns, will be removed from all committee assignments unless Turner issues a formal apology, including to the Highway Patrol. Turner, the first openly nonbinary and Muslim person elected to the Legislature in Oklahoma, said Tuesday that won't happen.

Recent efforts by the GOP-controlled Legislature to prohibit gender-affirming medical care for trans children and pass other anti-trans legislation has led to several protests at the

Capitol. One protest last week became heated when a protester allegedly poured water on a state representative and scuffled with a trooper before being arrested. Officers wanted to question the activist, who was inside Turner's legislative office.

State Senate advances House riot penalties bill

NC RALEIGH — Legislation that would toughen punishments for violent protests — a response to 2020 demonstrations over racial injustice that at times turned into tumult — advanced in the North Carolina Senate on Tuesday.

The Senate Judiciary Committee's vote to recommend the House bill brings the General Assembly closer to a potential veto showdown with Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, who two years ago successfully blocked a similar measure with a veto. But Republican seat gains in the fall elections, combined with some bipartisan support for the bill in the House, raises the possibility of an override.

Last month in the House, six Democrats joined all Republicans present in voting for the measure. The House margin, if left intact, would be veto-proof. Senate Republicans already hold a veto-proof seat advantage in their chamber.

Judge strikes down state gun law on enforcement

MO JEFFERSON CITY — A Missouri law banning local police from enforcing federal gun laws is unconstitutional and void, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Judge Brian

Wimes ruled the 2021 law is preempted by the federal government under the U.S. Constitution's supremacy clause.

Missouri's Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey in a statement said he will appeal the ruling.

The Missouri law had subjected law enforcement agencies with officers who knowingly enforced federal gun laws without equivalent state laws to a fine of \$50,000 per violating officer. Federal laws without similar Missouri laws include statutes covering weapons registration and tracking, and possession of firearms by some domestic violence offenders.

Latest volcano eruption stops after 61 days

HI HONOLULU — The latest eruption at Kilauea's summit on Hawaii's Big Island has paused after 61 days of volcanic activity.

U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory scientists said Tuesday lava was no longer flowing on the crater floor of Halemaumau, where all recent volcanic activity had been confined, Hawaii News Now reported.

No significant changes have been observed along the volcano's rift zones. Scientists on Monday observed small "ooze-outs" of lava flowing sluggishly in the lava lake. Officials said activity diminished in the afternoon, and by Tuesday, there was no active lava in the crater.

Kilauea began erupting again Jan. 5 after scientists detected a glow within Halemaumau Crater. The latest eruption started after a nearly monthlong pause in activity.

— From wire reports

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Boeheim out as Syracuse coach, Autry in

Associated Press

Jim Boeheim enrolled at Syracuse in 1962. Played there until 1966. Started coaching there in 1969. Took over the program as head coach in 1976.

Put simply, he was Syracuse basketball. Until now.

The Basketball Hall of Famer's 47-year tenure as coach at Syracuse came to an awkward end on Wednesday, with the university saying Orange associate head coach and former Syracuse player Adrian Autry has been promoted to the job. The Orange moved quickly, making the announcement less than three hours after Syracuse lost to Wake Forest in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. And if Boeheim knew the announcement was coming, he didn't let on at what was his final postgame news conference.

"It's up to the university," Boeheim said. "They have to make their decision, and it's up to them."

The university didn't wait long before making the decision public, saying in part: "Today, as his 47th season coaching his alma mater comes to an end, so too does his storied career at Syracuse University. Associate Head Coach Adrian Autry '94, one of Boeheim's former players and longtime assistant, has been named the program's next head coach."

Autry has been on Boeheim's staff since 2011, and held the title of associate head coach since March 2017.

"There have been very few stronger influential forces in my life than Syracuse University and Jim Boeheim," Autry said. "They have both played such important roles and without either of them, I am certain I would not have this incredible opportunity before me."

The 78-year-old Boeheim's record in his 47 seasons, officially, was 1,015-441. That reflects 101 wins taken away by the NCAA for violations between the 2004-07 and 2010-12 seasons.

Whether the count was 1,015 or 1,116, only now-retired Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski had more wins than Boeheim at the Division I level. Boeheim led the Orange to the 2003 national title — Carmelo Anthony's lone season in Syracuse — and saw 46 of his players get taken in NBA drafts. Among them: Anthony, Derrick Coleman, Rony Seikaly, Dion Waiters, Billy Owens, Sherman Douglas and Pearl Washington. Boeheim also was a USA Basketball assistant under Krzyzewski on the teams that won Olympic gold medals in 2008, 2012 and 2016.

"I've been very lucky to be able to coach my college team, to play and then be an assistant coach and then a head coach, never having to leave Syracuse," Boeheim said in that postgame news conference, one in which he hinted at retirement, then hinted at returning. "It's a great university."

He has, in many ways, been the face of that university. Boeheim and his wife Juli, through their family foundation, have raised millions for children's causes across Central New York. He helped champion what became known as the "Coaches vs. Cancer" phenomenon with the American Cancer Society.

The 2-3 zone defense he used almost exclusively caused opponents fits for decades. His dedication was unwavering; the best examples were how he returned to work earlier than doctors wanted after he was treated for prostate cancer in December 2001 — the team was struggling and needed him, Boeheim said at the time — and how he went to

work at 12:01 a.m. on the day his nine-game suspension for NCAA violations was lifted during the 2015-16 season.

"He's given his heart and soul to that school," said Washington coach Mike Hopkins, a former Boeheim assistant. "Still surprised they don't have a statue made of him in the middle of campus. When you think of Syracuse University, you think of Jim Boeheim and you think of the Carrier Dome, and now both of those will be gone, which is very sad."

The Orange were 17-15 this season and will miss the NCAA Tournament for a second consecutive season. That led to criticism, which led to questions about Boeheim's future, and what the school would ultimately decide.

"It's an honor to play for Coach Boeheim," Syracuse's Benny Williams said after the loss to Wake Forest.

Syracuse reached the NCAA Tournament 35 times under Boeheim, went to the Final Four in five of those appearances, won 10 Big East regular-season titles and five more titles in that conference's tournament.

"I've been just so lucky to be able to coach at Syracuse, a place I love, I place I love to live," Boeheim said. "People keep wondering about that, but maybe that's a flaw I have. But I've lived in Syracuse my whole life, and I'll live there hopefully a long time into the future. I think it's a great place."

Syracuse clearly has faith in Autry as well.

He played in 121 games in his four seasons for Boeheim, then spent more than a decade on the bench with his former coach.

"I have spent much of my time in the game of basketball learning from Jim and am so grateful to him for preparing me to carry on the winning tradition that is Orange Basketball," Autry said.

Hoyas blown out of Big East as Ewing's future in question

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Patrick Ewing walked off the court alone Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden, the site of his greatest moments as both an NBA player and Georgetown's coach, after another blowout loss that might have been his final game leading the Hoyas.

Last-place Georgetown (7-25) was eliminated by sixth-seeded Villanova 80-48 in the first round of the Big East Tournament.

School officials have given no indication of whether Ewing will be back for a seventh season, but he fell to 75-109 as coach of the program he led to three Final Fours and a national title as player.

"No thoughts about my future," Ewing said. "The (last) two seasons (have) been rough. Disappointed in the outcomes of these last two years. My future's in the hands of our president and our AD and the board of the directors."

Athletic director Lee Reed declined to comment on Ewing's status.

"My thoughts are with those kids right now," Reed said outside of the Georgetown locker room. "It's been a long year."

The Garden will always be a second home to Ewing, with a familiar faces and warm welcomes.

He played 15 seasons for the Knicks after being drafted first overall in 1985, and became one of their all-time greats. His No. 33

hangs from the rafters at MSG.

In the first half against Villanova, Ewing paced the sideline, shouting directions to his players and looking incredulous at times when his team failed to smoothly execute its offense or allowed yet another easy basket.

"It was a rough year. It was not the year we thought we would have had," Ewing said. "We kept fighting. We didn't give up, and we're disappointed the season ended the way that it did."

Ohtani's impact reaches beyond baseball

Associated Press

TOKYO — He'd paid about \$80 for his ticket. He wore a Japan cap above a blue Los Angeles Angels jersey. And as he enthused about the sensation that is Shohei Ohtani, baseball fan Hotaru Shiromizu was talking about far more than sports.

Shiromizu, 23, was part of the quilt of thousands of colorfully dressed fans outside the Tokyo Dome on Thursday afternoon. They paced, they camped out, and they discussed their hopes of seeing Ohtani pitch — and hit — against China in Japan's opening game in the World Baseball Classic.

"He's a legendary player, but he's more than just a good player," Shiromizu said, using his translator app to help clarify a few thoughts in English. "His aspirations — his achievements — have had a positive influence on all Japanese people."

He added: "All the kids want to be like Ohtani."

These days, Japanese culture and politics feel more tenuous than a few decades ago. The economy is stagnant. The birth-

rate is among the world's lowest. A former prime minister was assassinated a few months ago on the street. And despite the "Cool Japan" image abroad, the nation faces uncertainty on many fronts, a corruption scandal surrounding the pandemic-delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics and a giant Asian rival in neighboring China.

For many, Ohtani is the antidote.

Part of an evolution

He does things modern players don't do. He's a throwback who pitches, bats and can play in the field. Many call him the finest player in the major leagues. If that's the case, then he's better than Americans — Latin Americans, too — at what they consider their own game.

He's the culmination — so far, at least — of an evolution in Japanese baseball that began when the game was introduced to the country in 1872 by an American professor. And his fame has now arguably surpassed that of players like Ichiro Suzuki and Hideo Nomo, who

came before him.

One of them could hit really well. One could pitch the same way. But Ohtani? He does both, and with more power — on the pitcher's mound and at bat — than either Ichiro or Nomo.

"I suppose the idolization of Ohtani in Japan reflects its own inferiority complex vis a vis the fatherland of baseball that is the U.S.," said Koichi Nakano, who teaches politics and culture in Tokyo at Sophia University.

"Baseball is so major here, but it has long been said that Japanese baseball, called *yakyu*, is different from 'real' baseball in America. Books have been written and published on the topic," Nakano said. "So each time where there is a Japanese 'export' that was hugely successful in MLB, the Japanese are enthralled."

The wait to see Ohtani play again in Japan is also driving the buzz around him — and the sellouts at the Tokyo Dome.

It had been almost 2,000 days since Ohtani played his last inning in Japan on Oct. 9, 2017, for the Nippon Ham-Fighters be-

fore leaving for California. That appearance drought ended in a practice game on Monday when Ohtani hit a pair of three-run homers off the Hanshin Tigers.

Talent and character

Atop all the talent, Ohtani has a sterling reputation. No scandals. No tabloid stories about his social life. He's overflowing with \$20 million in endorsements, more than any other major leaguer. And he could sign the largest contract in baseball history — the number \$500 million has been kicked around — when he becomes a free agent after this season.

"He is very authentic," said Masako Yamamoto, standing in a ticket line outside the Tokyo Dome with her 12-year-old son Shutaro and other family members. Facing her was a pulsating billboard with Ohtani's image flashing.

"As a human, he's polite and very charming and good to people," she said. "He's special. His personality is so even. He seems to make the atmosphere."

Canadian Olympians push for opposition to Russians

Associated Press

A group of 42 retired Canadian Olympians urged the Canadian Olympic Committee to reject the idea of allowing Russians to participate in next year's Paris Games unless Russia withdraws from Ukraine.

"We condemn recent public statements issued by the COC supporting the 'exploration of a pathway' for Russians and Belarusians to compete as 'neutrals' in the 2024 Paris Olympics," the Canadians wrote in a statement released Wednesday.

Opening that door, the athletes said, "sends a message that the COC is no longer concerned with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine."

Signing the statement was a who's-who of Canadian Olympic greats and gold medalists, including Hayley Wickenheiser (hockey), Jenn Heil and Alex Bilodeau (freestyle skiing), Tessa Virtue (skating)

and Beckie Scott (cross-country skiing).

Russian and Belarusian athletes have been largely excluded from international competition since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The International Olympic Committee has sought a pathway back for those athletes to compete without officially representing their countries, citing human-rights experts who have argued the athletes should not be discriminated against solely because of their passports.

"Refusing their participation in international sport is not simply a matter of denying athletes a choice to compete because of their passport, it is a rejection of an unlawful and inhumane war and a recognition of the role international sports plays in geopolitics," the Canadians wrote.

The COC has walked a fine line in staking out a position. Last month, secretary general David Shoemaker suggested ath-

letes from the banned countries should be made to publicly speak out against the war to gain the neutral status they would need to participate.

Canada's was also among a group of 35 governments that released a statement last month saying that, without clarity on a workable neutrality model, "we do not agree that Russian and Belarusian athletes should be allowed back into competition."

The COC and the governments have stopped short of stating that Russians should not be allowed.

In their statement, the Canadian Olympians said a requirement for Russians to declare opposition to the war is "unfounded and out of touch."

"For example, it is illegal in Russia to publicly denounce military actions abroad, and virtually impossible for high-profile athletes to oppose the war," the statement said.

Morant to miss 4 more games, no charges

Associated Press

Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant will be away from the team for at least four more games, the team said on Wednesday, shortly after police announced that he will not face charges in Colorado related to the livestreamed video in which he appeared to be displaying a gun in a strip club.

“Ja Morant will continue to remain away from the team for at least the next four games,” the team said with no further comment.

That means Morant will miss games against Golden State on Thursday, home against Dallas on Saturday, at Dallas on Monday and at Mia-

mi on March 15. The earliest he could play is March 17 at San Antonio, and there’s no guarantee of that.

Meanwhile, the Glendale Police Department said it looked into the video, which was a stream that Morant showed on his Instagram channel while he seemed to be holding a firearm, and found no proof that a crime was committed. Glendale is an enclave surrounded by the city of Denver.

“In this case, it should be noted that on the night in question the GPD did not receive any calls for service at the nightclub regarding a weapon of any type,” police said. “Subsequently, no disturbances

were reported, and no citizens or patrons of the club came forward to make a complaint.

“The investigation also concluded that no one was threatened or menaced with the firearm and in fact no firearm was ever located.”

The NBA has said it is also looking into the matter, and has not announced any sanctions — such as a suspension — against Morant.

Police said the investigation confirmed that “the incident” — Morant was not named in the release, which only made reference to “a prominent NBA player” — occurred at an establishment called Shotgun Willie’s in Glendale.

The two-time All-Star streamed the video in the early hours of Saturday, after the Grizzlies played in Denver on Friday night.

The Grizzlies said Morant would be away from the team for at least two games — those were Sunday and Tuesday — and Morant later said that he decided “to take some time away to get help and work on learning better methods of dealing with stress and my overall well-being.”

It is not clear what that means. Morant has not commented further and the Grizzlies have not shared what steps he is taking or why he is seeking help.

Caps have new look after bevy of deadline trades

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — When the Washington Capitals departed for a four-game road trip in late February, players knew change was afoot.

Dmitry Orlov and Garnet Hathaway had been traded away to NHL-leading Boston, and there were many more pending free agents still on the roster with a few days remaining until the deadline. One by one, they were gone: Marcus Johansson to Minnesota, Lars Eller to Colorado and Erik Gustafsson to Toronto.

The team at the first home practice Wednesday since all of those moves looked very different. Alex Ovechkin and the Capitals’ core remains in place to chase fading playoff hopes, but it’s also a rare period of transition in Washington after the organization’s first deadline sell-off in more than a decade.

“You hate to see guys leave,” said defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk, one of just two players unsigned beyond this season not traded. “It happens quick. Obviously, this time of year when you’re not in the position you want to be, it seems to be more changes than you’d like.”

Because of a combination of trades and injuries, more than half of the skaters expected to play Thursday night against the New Jersey Devils were not in the opening-night lineup — four of them weren’t even with the organization.

Chief among the new faces is Rasmus Sandin, a Swedish defenseman who turned 23 on Tuesday. Acquired from the Maple Leafs for a first-round pick and Gustafsson, Sandin is part of the Capitals’ plan to try to quickly reset from a difficult year and win again next season.

“I think we want to be competitive next year,” general manager Brian MacLellan said. “I still think we want to be competitive this year. I still think we got a pretty good team.”

This banged-up team will attempt the uphill climb of extending the Capitals’ streak of playoff appearances to nine.

Five points back of the second and final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference is not a small gap with 17 games left. But Washington is close enough, even after the trades, to still feel a part of the post-season race.

“You keep looking up the standings and we’re only a few points out, and we play a lot of those teams that are in front of us a bunch, so if you can win those games it can change a lot,” van Riemsdyk said.

An important player could be returning to the ice before the end of the month: Top defenseman John Carlson practiced with teammates Wednesday for the first time since taking a slap shot to the head Dec. 23.

Carlson skated in a no-contact jersey and is still at least a couple of weeks from

returning, but his presence on the ice alone is a sign of progress.

“This is an off-in-the-distance thing,” coach Peter Laviolette said. “But there’s a process that goes with where he’s at and what he’s gone through, and this is the beginning of the process as far as him joining our team.”

Washington’s slide down the standings coincided with Carlson’s absence and the toll it took on the players asked to make up for it. The team has since lost 17 of 30 games.

More injuries on the blue line over the past week, plus the trades of Orlov and Gustafsson, have put the onus on Sandin, the newcomer who’s so new he wasn’t initially recognized walking into the practice facility for the first time. But with veteran Swede Nicklas Backstrom around — and plenty of other new faces — Sandin is trying to fit in quickly with the Capitals.

“Just getting in here, you see how tight this group is,” Sandin said. “Since I just came in to the first breakfast, all the guys on this team have just welcomed me in with open arms. They’ve been making it very easy for me, and it’s just a lot of fun being here.”

Washington has a 31-28-6 record overall and a 10-6-1 record in Metropolitan Division games. The Capitals have a 28-4-3 record when scoring three or more goals.