

Budget gives troops biggest raise in years

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is asking Congress to fund a 5.2% pay raise for service members, the largest in decades, in a proposed \$886 billion budget for national defense released Thursday.

The White House's \$6.8 trillion funding request for fiscal 2024, which begins Oct. 1, includes \$842 billion specifically for the Defense Department, representing a \$26 billion increase to the amount appropriated by Congress last year. The pay hike applies to troops and the department's civilian employees, who received a 4.6% salary bump — the highest in 20 years — under last year's budget.

Biden's request also calls for \$6 billion to continue support for Ukraine's defense and its neighbors against Russian aggression as well as \$9.1 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, an effort by the Pentagon to shore up U.S. military presence in the Pacific to counter China's growing influence.

"The president's budget request provides the resources necessary to address the pac-

ing challenge from the People's Republic of China, address advanced and persistent threats, accelerate innovation and modernization, and ensure operational resiliency amidst our changing climate," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

Nearly \$40 billion of the spending plan would be dedicated to modernizing the nation's nuclear arsenal, and overall defense spending, including nuclear programs under the Energy Department, would rise from \$858 billion last fiscal year to \$886 billion.

Congressional Republicans on Thursday argued it was not enough.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said a budget that proposed to increase non-defense spending at twice the rate of defense spending was "absurd."

"The United States is facing the most complex and challenging set of threats to our national security in decades. Unfortunately, the president has once again submitted a budget request that fails to take these threats seriously," Rogers said in a state-

ment. "The president's incredibly misplaced priorities send all the wrong messages to our adversaries."

Sen. Roger Wicker, of Mississippi, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, called Biden's request "woefully inadequate and disappointing."

Republicans have traditionally sought 5% increases in defense spending above inflation. The White House's budget blueprint for the Pentagon marks a 3.2% increase from the spending plan Congress passed last year.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, defended the budget request as "strong" and said it was a useful starting point for beginning negotiations on the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual policy bill that outlines priorities for the Pentagon.

"Some will inevitably say the topline is too much, while others will claim it is not enough. I say America's defense budget should be guided by our values, needs, and national security strategy," Reed said in a statement.

Early retirement proposed for US 6th Fleet flagship

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy's proposal to dump an amphibious command ship that it needs for keeping Russia in check is risky and ignores lessons from the war in Ukraine, according to analysts and a retired admiral who once led the service in Europe.

USS Mount Whitney, flagship of the Naples, Italy-based U.S. 6th Fleet, is slated for decommissioning in 2026, a move the Navy says in 2023 budget documents could save \$179.7 million.

The plan doesn't detail how the service would replace the ship's maritime operations center, or MOC, and other capabilities, except to say the ship's functions would be handled by

ashore staff.

The MOC gives the Mount Whitney an incomparable range of applications in naval warfare, said retired Adm. James Foggo, who led U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples from 2017 to 2020.

"It's ludicrous to get rid of it," said Foggo, now dean of the Center for Maritime Strategy of the Navy League. "We need that capability."

Efforts to decommission the ship, which offers a strategic backup to ashore operations centers in Naples and Bahrain, run counter to the lessons learned from Russia's failures in logistics and command and control in Ukraine, he said.

Transferring the Mount Whitney's functions to a shore facility could impose significant limitations, said retired Capt. Bradley Martin, a former surface warfare officer.

Mount Whitney gives the U.S. the flexibility to move into international waters if another country, potentially Italy, objects to military decisions within its borders, Martin said.

"If we ever had to execute a full war, not having the command ships is something we would notice," said Martin, now director of the National Security Supply Chain Institute for the Rand Corp. think tank.

For example, joint task force personnel embarked on the Mount Whitney in 2011 during

Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, the international response following a brutal crackdown on Arab Spring protests by then-Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The ship traveled from its home port in Gaeta, Italy, about 12 miles offshore to conduct operations, Foggo said.

Foggo argues that no vessel in the current fleet could adequately replace Mount Whitney.

The fate of the Mount Whitney has not been decided, so discussion about how it would be replaced or what would happen to its homeport in Gaeta is premature, Lt. Cmdr. Karl Schonberg, a Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet spokesman, said in a statement Thursday.

7th Fleet chief picked for intelligence lead

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet has been nominated by President Joe Biden to serve as director of naval intelligence, one of several promotions or new assignments announced recently.

Vice Adm. Karl Thomas' nomination Wednesday, announced in a news release by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, is one of four moves by flag officers with recent experience in the Indo-Pacific region.

A native of Northern Virginia, Thomas in July 2021 took command of 7th Fleet, the largest overseas U.S. naval fleet, headquartered at Yokosuka south of Tokyo.

He previously served as commander of Task Force 70 and Carrier Strike Group 5, centered

on the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, also homeported at Yokosuka.

If confirmed by the Senate, Thomas' new assignment returns him to the Pentagon, where he served as assistant deputy chief for naval operations, plans and strategy prior to taking command of 7th Fleet. His new assignment includes the title deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare, according to a DOD news release.

Another Indo-Pacific veteran, Rear Adm. (lower half) Patrick Hannifin, will take Thomas' previous role commanding the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group and Task Force 70 sometime this year, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro announced last month.

Hannifin skippered the Ronald Reagan from September

2018 until October 2020, when he turned the ship over to Capt. Fred Goldhammer in a scaled-down bridge ceremony during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hannifin will replace Rear Adm. (lower half) Michael "Buzz" Donnelly, who is slated for promotion to rear admiral (upper half) and reassignment as air warfare division director for the chief of naval operations.

The change is expected to take place sometime this summer, Task Force 70 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Keiley told Stars and Stripes by email March 3.

Hannifin, a Hornet and Super Hornet fighter pilot, is currently deputy director for political-military affairs in Asia for the Joint Staff's director of strategy, plans and policy. He also served on or commanded units aboard the carriers USS George Washington, USS Nimitz and USS Harry

S. Truman.

Hannifin succeeded Donnelly as commander of the Ronald Reagan in 2018. From there, Donnelly took over U.S. Naval Forces Korea and Navy Region Korea.

Another Yokosuka officer, Rear Adm. (lower half) Richard Seif Jr., was selected for promotion to upper half and assignment as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Submarine Force at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Seif, currently the commander at Yokosuka of Submarine Group 7, Task Force 74 and Task Force 54, will take over from Rear Adm. (upper half) Jeffrey Jablon.

Replacing Seif is Rear Adm. (lower half) Christopher Cavanaugh, currently the director of Maritime Headquarters for U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, according to Del Toro.

US sanctions Chinese firms tied to drones used by Russia

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Five Chinese companies were added to a U.S. blacklist last week over accusations that they sold parts to an Iranian firm that manufactures drones used by Russia for attacks in Ukraine.

The Treasury Department says the firms used shell companies to hide sales of light aircraft engines and other components used in production of the Shahed-136 unmanned aerial vehicles that the U.S. believes Iran has exported to Russia.

"The United States will continue to target global Iranian procurement networks that supply Russia with deadly UAVs for use in its illegal war in Ukraine," Treasury Undersecretary Brian Nelson said in a statement Thursday.

The sanctions announcement

comes a month after U.S. diplomats warned of increasing Chinese support for Russia's military.

China has said it wants a peaceful end to the war in Ukraine, but U.S. officials counter that Chinese manufacturers have increased sales of nonlethal aid to Russia and are considering sending lethal aid in the future, CNN reported in February.

The four companies based in mainland China that joined the sanctions list Thursday are Hangzhou Fuyang Koto Machinery, Guilin Alpha Rubber and Plastics Technology, S&C Trade PTY and Shenzhen Caspro Technology. Also included in the sanctions are a fifth company based in Hong Kong, Raven International Trade, and an employee of one of the China-based firms, Yun Xia Yuan.

Experts: Nansei Islands bomb shelters make sense

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan plans to guard against a potential conflict with China by building bomb shelters across the Nansei Islands, a move that security experts say is practical and not necessarily a signal of coming war.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently has doubled down on security policies released in December that call for "securing various types of evacuation facilities" should a hot war with China spill over from Taiwan.

Some citizens may view the move as increasing the risk of war, but building shelters is a necessary measure that could save lives, experts said.

"Building evacuation facilities

to protect the lives and property of the people makes sense," Junjiro Shida, an associate professor of international politics at Okinawa's Meio University, said by email Monday. "When we think about natural disasters, it is normal to build evacuation facilities and conduct evacuation drills; the same can be said about a hypothetical enemy attack."

The Japanese government plans new construction and to identify existing concrete structures that could withstand missile attacks, a spokesman for Kishida's Cabinet said by phone Wednesday. No tangible plans have been made and no potential sites have been identified, he said.

The Nansei chain includes Okinawa and stretches from Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, to Taiwan.

Calif. storm breaks river levee, thousands flee

Associated Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — A Northern California agricultural community famous for its strawberry crop was forced to evacuate early Saturday after the Pajaro River's levee was breached by flooding from a new atmospheric river that pummeled the state.

Across the Central Coast's Monterey County, more than 8,500 people were under evacuation orders and warnings Saturday, including roughly 1,700 residents — many of them Latino farmworkers — from the unincorporated community of Pajaro.

Officials said the Pajaro River's levee breach is about 100 feet wide. Crews had gone door to door Friday afternoon to urge residents to leave before the rains came, but some stayed and had to be pulled from flood-

waters early Saturday.

First responders and the California National Guard rescued more than 50 people overnight. One video showed a member of the Guard helping a driver out of a car trapped by water up to their waists.

"We were hoping to avoid and prevent this situation, but the worst case scenario has arrived with the Pajaro River overtopping and levee breaching at about midnight," wrote Luis Alejo, chair of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, on Twitter.

Alejo called the flooding "massive," saying the damage will take months to repair.

The Pajaro River separates the counties of Santa Cruz and Monterey in the area that flooded Saturday. Floodwaters that got into the region's wells might be contaminated with chemi-

cals, officials said, and residents were told not to drink or cook with tap water for fear of illness.

Officials had been working along the levee in the hopes of shoring it up when it was breached around midnight Friday into Saturday. Crews began working to fix the levee around daybreak Saturday as residents slept in evacuation centers.

Oliver Gonzalez, 12, told The Associated Press that he, his mother and his aunt were rescued around 5 a.m. Saturday in Pajaro. He grabbed his laptop, cellphone and some important documents, but so much was left behind in their rush to leave.

"I'm kinda scared," he said several hours later from an evacuation center in nearby Watsonville. "My mom's car was left in the water."

Anais Rodriguez, 37, said first

responders knocked on her home's door shortly after midnight. Her family packed about four days' worth of clothing and drove out to safety. She and her two children, her husband and her parents — along with their dog, Mila — arrived at the shelter about an hour later with few answers about what this would mean for their community going forward.

Weather-related power outages affected more than 17,000 customers in Monterey County late Saturday, according to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office on Saturday said it was monitoring the situation in Pajaro.

"Our thoughts are with everyone impacted and the state has mobilized to support the community," the governor's office wrote on Twitter.

Hawaii's Kilauea not erupting, reversing warning

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Hawaii's second-largest volcano is not erupting, scientists said in an update to a previous warning.

The U.S. Geological Survey said in a statement late Saturday that seismic activity beneath the summit of Kilauea "has returned to background levels, ground deformation has stabilized and no lava has been observed at the surface."

The statement cautioned "another intrusion or resumption may occur in the near future with little or no warning."

The agency previously said a shallow earthquake storm signaled "resumption of eruptive activity at Kilauea summit is likely imminent."

Scientists said Tuesday that lava had stopped flowing after 61 days of volcanic activity.

Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, erupted from September 2021 to last December. A 2018 Kilauea eruption destroyed more than 700 residences.

For about two weeks last December, Hawaii's biggest volcano, Mauna Loa, was also erupting on Hawaii's Big Island.

The dual eruptions of Hawaii's biggest volcanoes provided a temporary boost to tourism during the slow season.

Yellen: No federal bailout for collapsed Silicon Valley Bank

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Sunday that the federal government would not bail out Silicon Valley Bank, but is working to help depositors who are concerned about their money.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. insures deposits up to \$250,000, but many of the companies and wealthy people who used the bank — known for

its relationships with technology startups and venture capital — had more than that amount in their account. There are fears that some workers across the country won't receive their paychecks.

Yellen, in an interview with CBS' "Face the Nation," provided few details on the government's next steps. But she emphasized that the situation was much different from the financial crisis almost 15 years ago,

which led to bank bailouts to protect the industry.

"We're not going to do that again," she said. "But we are concerned about depositors, and we're focused on trying to meet their needs."

With Wall Street rattled, Yellen tried to reassure Americans that there will be no domino effect after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank.

"The American banking system is really safe and well cap-

italized," she said. "It's resilient."

Yellen described rising interest rates, which have been increased by the Federal Reserve to combat inflation, as the core problem for Silicon Valley Bank. Many of its assets, such as bonds or mortgage-backed securities, lost market value as rates climbed.

"The problems with the tech sector aren't at the heart of the problems at this bank," she said.

Report says Russia stalls in Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's advance seems to have stalled in Moscow's campaign to capture the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, a leading think tank said in an assessment of the longest ground battle of the war.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said there were no confirmed advances by Russian forces in Bakhmut. Russian forces and units from the Kremlin-controlled paramilitary Wagner Group continued to launch ground attacks in the city, but there was no evidence that they were able to make any progress, ISW said late Saturday.

The report cited the spokesperson of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Eastern Group, Serhii Cherevaty, who said that fighting in the Bakhmut area had been growing in intensity. According to Cherevaty, there were 23 clashes in the city over the previous 24 hours.

The ISW's report comes following claims of Russian progress early last week. The U.K. Defense Ministry said Saturday that

paramilitary units from the Kremlin-controlled Wagner Group had seized most of eastern Bakhmut, with a river flowing through the city now marking the front line of the fighting. The assessment highlighted that Russia's assault will be difficult to sustain without more significant personnel losses.

The mining city of Bakhmut is located in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province, one of four regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed last year. Russia's military opened the campaign to take control of Bakhmut in August, and both sides have experienced staggering casualties. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed not to retreat.

In its latest report Sunday, the U.K. Defense Ministry said Sunday that the impact of the heavy casualties Russia is continuing to suffer in Ukraine varies dramatically across the country. The ministry's intelligence update said that the major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg remain "relatively unscathed," particularly among members of Russia's elite. In contrast, in

many of Russia's eastern regions, the death rate as a percentage of the population is "30-40 times higher than in Moscow."

The report highlighted that ethnic minorities often take the biggest hit. In the southern Astrakhan region, for example, about "75% of casualties come from the minority Kazakh and Tartar populations."

Russia's mounting casualties are reflected in a loss of government control over the country's information sphere, ISW said. The think tank said that Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova confirmed "infighting in the Kremlin inner circle" and that the Kremlin has effectively ceded control over the country's information space, with Putin unable to readily regain control.

The ISW sees Zakharova's comments, made at a forum on the "practical and technological aspects of information and cognitive warfare in modern realities" in Moscow, as "noteworthy" and in line with the think tank's long standing assessments about the "deteriorating Kremlin regime and information space control dynamics."

Iran claims prisoner swap; US calls it 'cruel lie'

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's top diplomat claimed Sunday that a prisoner swap was near with the U.S., though he offered no evidence to support his assertion. The U.S. immediately dismissed his comments as a "cruel lie."

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has made similar comments in the past about possible deals with the U.S. on frozen assets abroad and other issues

that never came to fruition. Some of those remarks have appeared aimed at shoring up domestic support amid the mass protests challenging Iran's theocracy and supporting the country's troubled rial currency.

However, in an interview Sunday, Amirabdollahian claimed that Iran had "reached an agreement in recent days regarding the exchange of prisoners between Iran and the United States."

"If everything goes well on the Ameri-

can's side, I think we will see the exchange of prisoners in the short term," he added. He alleged a document between Iran and the U.S. laying out the exchange had been "indirectly signed and approved" since March 2022.

Reached by The Associated Press, U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the comments "another especially cruel lie that only adds to the suffering of their families."

Japan marks 12 years since earthquake, tsunami

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan on Saturday marked the 12th anniversary of the massive earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster with a minute of silence, as concerns grew ahead of the planned release of the treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant and the government's return to nuclear energy.

The 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami that ravaged large parts of Japan's northeastern coast on March 11, 2011, left more than 22,000 people dead, including about 3,700 whose subsequent deaths were linked to the disaster. A moment of silence was observed nationwide at 2:46 p.m., the moment the earthquake struck.

Some residents in the tsuna-

mi-hit northern prefectures of Iwate and Miyagi walked down to the coast to pray for their loved ones and the 2,519 whose remains were never found.

At a ceremony, Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said decontamination and reconstruction had made progress, but "we still face many difficult problems." He said many people were still leaving and the pre-

fecture was burdened with the plant cleanup and rumors about the effects of the upcoming release of the treated water.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, and the government are making final preparations to release into the sea more than 1.3 million tons of treated radioactive water, beginning in coming months.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill banning marriages under age 16 passes

WV CHARLESTON — A child marriage bill is heading to the West Virginia governor's desk after lawmakers agreed to let 16- and 17-year-olds get married with restrictions.

The House of Delegates passed the bill 83-9 without debate Saturday, a day after the Senate easily endorsed it after making changes to an earlier House version. Republican Gov. Jim Justice hasn't publicly indicated whether he'll sign it.

Currently, children can marry as young as 16 in West Virginia with parental consent, and anyone younger than that regardless of age can get married with a judge's waiver.

The bill passed Saturday would remove the possibility that anyone younger than 16 could marry. Those ages 16 and 17 would have to obtain parental consent and they couldn't marry someone more than four years older than them. Existing legal marriages, including those done in other states, would be unaffected.

Some Democrats, including the bill's sponsor, Del. Kayla Young of Kanawha County, had hoped to eliminate child marriage altogether, while some Republicans spoke about how they or their parents had married before adulthood and that such marriages protect families.

Card dealers with cancer seek casino smoking ban

NJ TRENTON — Tammy Brady began her career as an Atlantic City casino

dealer at age 18. Now 55, she has stage 2 breast cancer.

"While I'm not sure we will ever know the exact cause of my illness, I can't help but wonder if it would have happened if the casinos hadn't forced me to work in secondhand smoke," said Brady, who works at the Borgata casino.

She was among casino employees who testified before two state Assembly committees in favor of a bill that would prohibit smoking in Atlantic City's nine casinos. No vote was taken on the bill. Gov. Phil Murphy has promised to sign the bill if it passes the Legislature.

The bill would close a loophole in the state's indoor smoking law. That measure was written specifically to exempt casinos from bans on smoking indoors. Currently, smoking is permitted on 25% of a casino floor in Atlantic City.

Judge uses slavery law to rule embryos are property

VA FAIRFAX — Frozen human embryos can legally be considered property, or "chattel," a Virginia judge has ruled, basing his decision in part on a 19th-century law governing the treatment of slaves. The preliminary opinion by Fairfax County Circuit Court Judge Richard Gardiner — delivered in a long-running dispute between a divorced husband and wife — is being criticized by some for wrongly and unnecessarily delving into a time in Virginia history when it was legally permissible to own human beings.

Gardiner's decision, issued last month, is not final: He has not yet ruled on other argu-

ments in the case involving Honeyhline and Jason Heidemann, a divorced couple fighting over two frozen embryos that remain in storage.

Honeyhline Heidemann, 45, wants to use the embryos. Jason Heidemann objects.

Man freed after wrong photo led to conviction

NY NEW YORK — A photo of another man with the same name led to the wrongful arrest of a New York City man who was exonerated and freed after spending more than 18 years behind bars for murder.

The prosecution of Sheldon Thomas, now 35, "was compromised from the very start by grave errors and lack of probable cause" to arrest him for the fatal shooting of 14-year-old Anderson Bercy in 2004, Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said as his office moved to vacate the conviction.

Thomas was one of three people charged with killing Bercy and wounding another teenager in a drive-by shooting.

A review of the case by the district attorney's Conviction Review Unit found that the lead detective in the Bercy shooting asked to unseal a prior arrest of Thomas for allegedly pointing an inoperable gun at police officers so that detectives could use his picture in a photo lineup.

Detectives also obtained a photo of a different Sheldon Thomas and showed it to a witness they were questioning in Bercy's shooting. The witness identified the second Sheldon Thomas as being in the car the shots were fired from, the investigation found.

National Guard helping prison with staff shortage

NH CONCORD — Eighteen New Hampshire National Guard soldiers and airmen are working at the state prison for men in Concord for the next three months to help corrections officials with a staff shortage.

Maj. Gen. David Mikolaities told WMUR-TV they will help with "internal correctional control tower procedures that will have no sort of direct impact with any prisoners."

The vacancy rate for entry-level corrections officers is 51%, according to the department.

Rep. Boebert, 36, about to be grandmother

CO DENVER — Rep. Lauren Boebert, 36, announced she's going to be a grandmother next month.

The Colorado Republican made the declaration last week at a Moms for America event.

"Not only am I mom of four boys, but come April, I will be a GG to a brand new grandson," she said.

Newsweek reported that the child's father is Boebert's 17-year-old son, Tyler.

Boebert's announcement came just days after she called for the elimination of "comprehensive sex ed" in public schools, according to Raw Story.

The far-right lawmaker told the Durango Herald in 2020 that she dropped out of high school to raise Tyler. She earned her GED before being elected to Congress in 2020.

— From wire reports

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Shiffrin sets record for World Cup wins

Associated Press

ARE, Sweden — Two minutes after earning her 87th career win, Mikaela Shiffrin finally understood the significance of setting the record for most World Cup victories.

In the middle of the awards ceremony, a man in a red jacket unexpectedly stepped forward from the crowd and that was the moment Shiffrin first realized what it all meant to her.

It was her brother, Taylor, who had secretly flown in to Sweden and now came over to hug her.

“I’ve said it the whole time, I don’t know how to define that,” Shiffrin said about the record. “But when you have these special moments ... seeing my brother and (sister-in-law) Kristi and my mom (and coach, Eileen) in the finish today, that’s what makes it memorable.”

Shiffrin set the outright World Cup record for most career victories by winning a slalom Saturday, breaking a tie with Ingemar Stenmark on the

all-time overall winners list between men and women. The Swede competed in the 1970s and 80s.

Shiffrin had matched Stenmark’s mark of 86 wins with a victory in the giant slalom Friday.

“Pretty hard to comprehend,” said Shiffrin, who crouched and rested her head on her knees after finishing the final run. Runner-up Wendy Holdener of Switzerland and third-place home favorite Anna Swenn Larsson came over to congratulate her.

“My brother and sister-in-law are here and I didn’t know they were coming. That makes this so special,” Shiffrin said. “They flew here for this. I don’t know how they did it. I don’t know how they got here.”

The victory gave Shiffrin the outright record 12 years to the day after her first race on the World Cup, as a 15-year-old at a GS in Spindleruv Mlyn, Czech Republic.

In a course-side interview, Shiffrin said she’s “so proud of

the team, this whole season” for being “strong and positive” and “having the right goals.”

Shiffrin set the record less than a month after her head coach, Mike Day, left the team in the second week of the world championships in France.

Day’s departure, however, has not affected Shiffrin’s achievements, as she next won GS gold and slalom silver at the worlds, wrapped up her overall World Cup title at speed races in Norway last weekend, and celebrated back-to-back wins in Sweden to become the winningest ski racer in the 56-year history of the World Cup.

Saturday’s result marked the American’s sixth slalom win of the season and the record-extending 53rd career win in the discipline.

Shiffrin also has a women’s record-equaling 20 wins in GS, as well as five in super-G, five in parallel, three in downhill, and one in combined.

“It’s pretty hard to describe — and it’s not over yet, which is even more ridiculous,” said

Shiffrin, who turns 28 Monday and is expected to continue until at the least the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy.

Apart from Stenmark’s record, which she never actively chased, Shiffrin had no pressure on her shoulders going into her 246th career World Cup race Saturday, having already locked up the discipline title in slalom. On Friday, she had also secured the GS season title.

“I still had the feeling at the start of this run that I have every race, it’s like, I shouldn’t feel pressure. But somehow I feel something in my heartbeat,” Shiffrin said about having to protect her lead after dominating the first run.

Shiffrin posted the fifth-fastest time in the second run to beat Holdener by 0.92 seconds. Swenn Larsson was 0.95 back and the last racer to finish within a second of Shiffrin’s time. Shiffrin’s teammate Paula Moltzan finished 1.54 behind in fourth in the American’s first race since fracturing her left hand last month.

NFL free agency brings questions about quarterbacks

Associated Press

NFL free agency kicks off this week and the biggest questions surround two star quarterbacks who aren’t on the list.

Will Aaron Rodgers retire, return to Green Bay or get traded to the Jets or another team?

Will Lamar Jackson get a contract offer from any team knowing Baltimore can match it?

The league’s legal tampering period opens Monday and plenty of free agents will be on the move when players can officially start signing new deals Wednesday.

Quarterbacks, of course, get the most money and attention.

Derek Carr, Geno Smith and Daniel Jones are already off the market after receiving huge contracts this week.

The Ravens gave Jackson a

nonexclusive franchise tag so he can negotiate with other teams. Jackson would make \$32.4 million if he plays this season on the nonexclusive tag.

If Baltimore lets him go, it’ll receive two first-round picks. Some teams may be reluctant to pursue Jackson knowing the Ravens could end up keeping the 2019 NFL MVP. But it only takes one team to come up with a contract structured in a way — perhaps more guaranteed money than Baltimore wants to pay — to snatch the dynamic QB.

As for Rodgers, he has two years left on his contract and is due to make about \$59.5 million this season. The Packers are waiting on the 39-year-old, four-time MVP to decide his future. He could end up in New York,

stay put or hang up his cleats. Until Rodgers tells the Packers what he wants to do, they’re in a holding pattern.

The most accomplished quarterback among the unrestricted free agents is Jimmy Garoppolo. He’s 44-19 as a starter, including 4-2 in the playoffs and has been to one Super Bowl and an NFC championship game.

Jacoby Brissett, Gardner Minshew, Taylor Heinicke, Andy Dalton, Jameis Winston, Baker Mayfield, Teddy Bridgewater, Sam Darnold and Carson Wentz are also free agents. A few could get opportunities to start for teams who are grooming a rookie.

Beyond the QBs, the top players available play in the trenches.

Chiefs four-time Pro Bowl left tackle Orlando Brown Jr. headlines the list. Kansas City’s decision not to use the franchise tag on Brown surprised many and now he hits the open market with a huge payday awaiting.

San Francisco right tackle Mike McGlinchey, Atlanta left tackle Kaleb McGary and Jacksonville left tackle Jawann Taylor are also going to get huge deals.

On the defensive line, Eagles tackle Javon Hargrave leads the list. Hargrave had a career-best 11 sacks in 2022. Denver’s Dre’Mont Jones and Arizona’s Zach Allen are also top talents.

At defensive end, New Orleans’ Marcus Davenport and Kansas City’s Frank Clark lead the way.

Curry, Warriors top Bucks in overtime

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry knocked down all the dazzling shots everybody has come to expect from him in crunch time night after night — and then a surprising block at the rim that mattered just as much or maybe even more.

Curry scored 36 points with 22 of those in the fourth quarter and overtime, shining in his first home game back from a long injury absence and leading the Golden State Warriors past the NBA-best Milwaukee Bucks 125-116 on Saturday night.

Curry hit a tying three-pointer with 19 seconds left in regulation, then blocked a layup attempt by Jrue Holiday in the closing moments.

“He came out of nowhere. Jrue had a straight-line drive to the rim,” Draymond Green said.

The Warriors got the ball back with 1.9 seconds remaining and Curry inbounded to Green, who missed from deep though he thought for sure it was “cash.”

Holiday had put Milwaukee up on a three with 32.7 seconds to play and wound

up with 18 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. But the Bucks (48-19), playing without star Giannis Antetokounmpo, had their three-game winning streak snapped with just their second defeat in 21 games since Jan. 21.

“I loved this game. I thought we competed the entire time,” coach Steve Kerr said. “I thought we were really solid for most of the night.”

Celtics 134, Hawks 125: Jayson Tatum led a balanced attack by scoring 11 of his 34 points in the fourth quarter, and visiting Boston overcame Atlanta’s fourth-quarter comeback bid.

Clippers 106, Knicks 95: Kawhi Leonard scored 38 points and host Los Angeles pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat New York.

Pacers 121, Pistons 115: Jalen Smith scored 11 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter and visiting Indiana extended Detroit’s losing streak to 11 games.

Magic 126, Heat 114 (OT): Wendell Carter had 27 points and 11 rebounds, and host Orlando bounced back from a fourth-

quarter collapse to beat Miami in overtime.

Bulls 119, Rockets 111: Zach LaVine scored 36 points and DeMar DeRozan added 27 as visiting Chicago used a huge run in the fourth quarter to top Houston.

Grizzlies 112, Mavericks 108: Rookie David Roddy scored a career-high 24 points, including 17 points in the fourth quarter, and host Memphis rallied past short-handed Dallas.

Thunder 110, Pelicans 96: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points and visiting Oklahoma City defeated undermanned New Orleans for its fourth victory in five games.

Kings 128, Suns 119: Harrison Barnes scored 19 points, De’Aaron Fox and Malik Monk each added 18 and visiting Sacramento used a balanced effort to snap Phoenix’s four-game winning streak.

Jazz 119, Hornets 111: Talen Horton-Tucker scored a season-high 37 points and had 10 assists and eight rebounds as visiting Utah defeated Charlotte for its second win in a row.

Ramey’s three-pointer lifts No. 8 Arizona to Pac-12 title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Courtney Ramey had missed all four of his previous three-point attempts Saturday night when the ball wound up back in his hands at the most critical moment.

Ramey shook a defender and then calmly drilled one from the top of the key with 16.7 seconds left to put Arizona in front. The eighth-ranked Wildcats hung on from there, beating No. 2 UCLA 61-59 in the Pac-12 championship game.

The Wildcats (28-6) boosted their case for a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. UCLA (29-5) still hopes to land the No. 1 seed in the West and return to Las Vegas in two weeks for the regional.

It was the second year in a row Arizona beat UCLA in the Pac-12 title game.

No. 7 Texas 76, No. 3 Kansas 56: Dylan Disu overcame early foul trouble to score 18 points,

Marcus Carr and Sir’Jabari Rice added 17 apiece, and the Longhorns silenced a heavily pro-Jayhawks crowd in the Big 12 Tournament title game.

No. 6 Marquette 65, No. 15 Xavier 51: Tyler Kolek and the Golden Eagles raced out to a hefty lead and never looked back, beating the Musketeers to win the Big East Tournament for the first time.

No. 21 Duke 59, No. 13 Virginia 49: Jeremy Roach scored 23 points and the Blue Devils locked down defensively to beat the Cavaliers in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament championship, securing a title in Jon Scheyer’s debut season as the successor to Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski.

No. 20 San Diego State 62, Utah State 57: Matt Bradley scored 16 points and Jaedon LeDee added 13 to lead the Azteks to a victory over the Aggies in the Mountain West Tournament

championship game.

Florida Atlantic 78, UAB 56: Alijah Martin scored 30 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, and the Owls took control early to beat the Blazers in the Conference USA Tournament championship game to clinch an automatic bid in the NCAA Tournament.

Kent State 93, Toledo 78: Sincere Carry scored 26 points, Malique Jacobs added 18 and the Golden Flashes won the Mid-American Conference championship over the top-seeded Rockets, who had their winning streak stopped at 17 and will likely miss the NCAA Tournament for the 43rd straight year.

UC Santa Barbara 72, Cal State Fullerton 62: Ajay Mitchell scored 12 of his team-high 20 points during a four-minute span to help the Gauchos pull away from from the Titans and claim a win in the Big West Conference championship game.

Iona 76, Marist 55: Daniss

Jenkins scored 22 of his 27 points in the second half and Walter Clayton Jr. scored 17 points and the Gaels beat the Red Foxes in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Tournament championship game and clinched an automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Grand Canyon 84, Southern Utah 66: Ray Harrison scored 20 of his 31 points in the first half to put his team comfortably in front and Gabe McGlothlin scored 16 of his 21 points in the second half as the Antelopes eased past the Thunderbirds to win the Western Athletic Conference tournament championship.

Howard 65, Norfolk State 64: Jelani Williams scored 20 points including two free throws with 6.1 seconds left to lead the Bison to a win in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Tournament championship game and their first trip to the NCAA Tournament in 31 years.

Bruins fastest team ever to 50 victories

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Boston Bruins' T-shirt factory is struggling to keep up with all the milestones the team is cruising past on its way to the Presidents' Trophy.

"Fifty wins, it's amazing," said forward A.J. Greer, who was wearing a shirt commemorating Patrice Bergeron's 1,000th NHL point while discussing Boston's 50th win of the season, a 3-2 victory over Detroit on Saturday.

The Bruins became the first team to clinch a playoff berth this season, earning their spot when the Capitals beat the Islanders 5-1 on Saturday night. Boston's win also made it the fastest team to 50 wins in NHL history.

"I love playing for this team," Greer said after assisting on Garnet Hathaway's game-winner with six minutes left. "I love wearing the Bruins logo and especially with the results, it's been an amazing journey so far. But we're not really focused on

anything right now besides playing the right way for 60 minutes every night."

Hathaway gathered in a rebound and poked it in to break a third-period tie as Boston rallied from a two-goal deficit to beat Detroit and improve to 50-9-5 on the season. The 50 wins in 64 games broke the record of 66 set by the 1995-96 Red Wings and matched by the 2018-19 Lightning.

Rangers 2, Sabres 1 (OT): Artemi Panarin converted a blocked shot to score a power-play goal 2:02 into overtime, and visiting New York won for the fourth time in six games.

Predators 2, Kings 1 (SO): Matt Duchene scored in the second round of the shootout and visiting Nashville snapped Los Angeles' five-game winning streak.

Avalanche 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Cale Makar scored at 1:38 of overtime, Nathan MacKinnon ran his franchise-record home goals streak to nine games and host Colorado beat Arizona.

Jets 5, Panthers 4 (OT): Mark Scheifele scored his second goal of the game at 4:31 of overtime as visiting Winnipeg snapped Florida's three-game winning streak.

Stars 4, Kraken 3 (OT): Miro Heiskanen scored 3:26 into overtime to lift visiting Dallas past Seattle.

Devils 3, Canadiens 1: Nico Hischier had a goal and an assist to lead visiting New Jersey.

Lightning 3, Blackhawks 1: Brayden Point scored his second goal of the game with a minute left, and host Tampa Bay won after losing captain Steven Stamkos to a leg injury.

Blues 5, Blue Jackets 2: Jordan Kyrou scored three goals, seldom-used goaltender Thomas Greiss stopped 38 shots and visiting St. Louis beat Columbus.

Canucks 5, Senators 2: Andrei Kuzmenko scored twice and host Vancouver got its season-high fourth straight victory. J.T. Miller, Nils Aman and Sheldon Dries also scored for

the Canucks, and Thatcher Demko made 18 saves.

Wild 5, Sharks 2: Marcus Johansson, Mats Zuccarello and Matt Boly scored in their team's three-goal third period, and visiting Minnesota beat San Jose.

Maple Leafs 7, Oilers 4: John Tavares scored two of host Toronto's four goals in the second period to rally past Edmonton.

Golden Knights 4, Hurricanes 0: Jonathan Quick had 33 saves for his first shutout since joining Vegas.

Penguins 5, Flyers 1: Sidney Crosby scored a power-play goal and host Pittsburgh beat Philadelphia. Jason Zucker, Rickard Rakell, Jake Guentzel and Mikael Granlund also scored for the Penguins, who have won six of their last eight games.

Capitals 5, Islanders 1: Dylan Strome and T.J. Oshie scored first-period goals, Darcy Kuemper made 17 saves and visiting Washington beat New York.

Ohtani homer powers Japan to rout of Italy in WBC

Associated Press

TOKYO — Shohei Ohtani hit a 448-foot, three-run home run in the first inning that landed just below his image on a video advertising board and had four RBIs to lead Japan over Australia 7-1 Sunday night at the World Baseball Classic.

Japan, already assured of advancement, won its group with a 4-0 record and will play a quarterfinal on Wednesday against Italy, which advanced along with Cuba from Group A on tiebreakers. Matt Harvey got the win as Italy defeated the Netherlands 7-1, causing all five teams to finish 2-2.

South Korea beat the Czech Republic 7-3 in the day's other Group B game and Cuba defeated Taiwan 7-1 in Group A.

Australia (2-1) is second in Group B, ahead of the Czechs and South Korea (both 1-2) and eliminated China (0-3).

United States 6, Britain 2: At Phoenix, Kyle Schwarber launched a three-run homer, Nolan Arenado had three hits and two RBIs, and the United States overcame a

slow start to beat Britain in the tournament opener for both teams.

Trayce Thompson put Britain up 1-0 in the first inning with a homer off Adam Wainwright that just cleared the left-center wall. Thompson — who plays for the Los Angeles Dodgers — is one of the few players on Britain's roster with big league experience.

Thompson's drive briefly put a damper on the mood for the crowd of 39,650 at Chase Field, but the Americans weren't down long.

The U.S. grabbed a 2-1 lead in the third and then broke the game open in the fourth on Schwarber's shot that landed in the stands near the swimming pool that sits behind the right-center fence at Chase Field.

Italy 7, Netherlands 1: At Taichung, Taiwan, Italian players had to wait a few minutes after the final out to find out they advanced with Cuba while the Netherlands, Taiwan and Panama were eliminated. The group was decided by runs allowed divided

by outs, and Cuba (15/108, .139) finished first, followed by Italy (17/108, .157), Netherlands (19/102, .186), Panama (21/105, .200) and Taiwan (31/105, .295).

South Korea 7, Czech Republic 3: At Tokyo, Ha-Seong Kim of the San Diego Padres hit two solo homers for South Korea.

Cuba 7, Taiwan 1: At Taichung, Taiwan, Cuba got home runs from Yoán Moncada of the Chicago White Sox and Erisbel Arruebarrena.

Venezuela 5, Dominican Republic 1: At Miami, Luis Garcia struck out seven in three hitless innings and Venezuela tagged NL Cy Young Award winner Sandy Alcantara to beat the Dominican Republic.

Colombia 5, Mexico 4 (10): At Phoenix, the back-and-forth game saw Mexico take a 1-0 lead in the fourth on an RBI single by Isaac Paredes.

Puerto Rico 9, Nicaragua 1: At Miami, Francisco Lindor scored twice and hit an RBI single as Puerto Rico won its 2023 WBC debut.