

## Ospreys cleared to return to flight

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Osprey, a work-horse aircraft vital to U.S. military missions, has been approved to return to flight after an “unprecedented” part failure led to the deaths of eight service members in a crash in Japan in November, Naval Air Systems Command announced Friday.

The crash was the second fatal accident in months and the fourth in two years. It quickly led to a rare fleet-wide grounding of hundreds of Ospreys across the Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy.

Before clearing the Osprey, which can fly like an airplane and then convert to a helicopter, officials said they put increased attention on its proprotor gearbox, instituted new limitations on how it can be flown and added maintenance inspections and requirements that gave them confidence it could safely return to flight.

The entire fleet was grounded Dec. 6, just a week after eight Air Force Special Operations Command service members

were killed when their CV-22B Osprey crashed off Yakushima island.

Before lifting the flight restrictions the military also briefed officials in Japan, where public opinion on the Osprey is mixed, on the crash findings and new safety measures. In a statement Friday, Japan defense minister Minoru Kihara said his nation would likewise return its 14 Ospreys to flight status following an “adequate” analysis of the cause of the crash, extremely detailed information on the accident and the steps to mitigate the issue in the future.

Kihara said Japan and the United States will closely coordinate the timeline for resuming flights in Japan, to give the government time to “thoroughly” explain the issue to its citizens.

However, Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki did not support the return to flight. Okinawa is home to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and its 24 MV-22B Ospreys and is where the public has been most vocal in its opposition to the aircraft.

“It would be best if they stay on the ground, as we have all along requested scrapping of the Osprey deployment,” Tamaki said.

Officials who briefed reporters Wednesday ahead of the flight restrictions lifting said that they quickly grounded the entire fleet in December because it became clear that the way the Osprey part failed in that crash was something they had not seen before on the tiltrotor aircraft.

While the officials did not identify the specific component, because the Air Force’s crash investigation is still not completed, they said they now have a better — but not complete — understanding of why it failed.

“This is the first time that we’ve seen this particular component fail in this way. And so this is unprecedented,” said Marine Corps Col. Brian Taylor, V-22 joint program manager at Naval Air Systems Command, or NAVAIR, which is responsible for the V-22 program servicewide.

## Biden orders temporary aid port be set up for Gaza

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden ordered the U.S. military Thursday to set up a temporary port off the coast of Gaza, joining international partners in trying to carve out a sea route to deliver food and other aid to desperate Palestinian civilians cut off by the Hamas-Israel war and by Israeli restrictions on humanitarian access by land.

While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used the announcement and the bright spotlight of his State of the Union speech to renew months of U.S. calls to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to change how he conducts the war, including by allowing in more aid to Gaza and doing more to protect humanitarian

workers there.

“To the leadership of Israel I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip,” Biden declared before Congress. He repeated calls as well for Israel to do more to protect civilians in the fighting, and to work toward Palestinian statehood as the only long-term solution to Israeli-Palestinian violence.

The U.S. announcement, signaling deepening U.S. involvement in the war and the escalating fighting in the region, comes as Biden faces pressure to act more forcefully to ease what the U.N. says are near-famine conditions for many of Gaza’s 2.3 million people.

It also shows the administration resorting to an unusual

workaround after months of appealing to Israel, the U.S.’s close ally and top recipient of military aid, to step up access and protection for trucks bearing humanitarian goods for Gaza.

Meanwhile Thursday, efforts to reach a cease-fire before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which starts within days, appeared stalled. Hamas said its delegation had left Cairo, where talks were being held. The outline for the cease-fire included a wide infusion of aid into Gaza.

A widening humanitarian crisis across Gaza and tight Israeli control of aid trucks has left virtually the entire population desperately short of food, the U.N. says. Medical workers in northern Gaza this past week reported 15 children dead of starva-

tion there. In a meeting pressing Israel Ambassador Michael Herzog to provide access and security for more aid trucks, the U.S. international development director, Samantha Power, warned that blockaded Gaza “faced a real risk of famine,” her office said Thursday.

Israel accuses Hamas of commandeering some aid deliveries.

The U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview Biden’s announcement before his State of the Union speech, said the planned operation will not require American troops on the ground to build the pier that is intended to allow more shipments of food, medicine and other essential items from a port in the Mediterranean island country of Cyprus.

# US soldier accused of selling information

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — An Army soldier has been arrested on accusations of selling sensitive information related to U.S. military capabilities, Justice Department officials said Thursday.

Sgt. Korbein Schultz, who is also an intelligence analyst, was accused in a six-count indictment of charges including conspiring to obtain and disclose military defense information and bribery of a public official. The 24-year-old was arrested at Fort Campbell, which straddles the Tennessee-Kentucky border, shortly after the indictment was released Thursday.

“The men and women of the United States Armed Forces dedicate their lives to maintain our national security,” Henry C. Leventis, U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, told reporters. “Our laws protecting national defense information are critical to that mission, and they must be enforced. Illegal dissemination of national defense information puts our country, our fellow citizens, members of our military and our allies at risk.”

The indictment alleges Schultz — who had a top-secret security clearance — conspired with an individual identified only as

“Conspirator A” to disclose various documents, photographs and other national defense materials since June 2022. The indictment claims that Schultz was recruited by the individual not only due to his security clearance but also because he was tasked with gathering sensitive U.S. military information.

Some of the information that Schultz supposedly gave to the individual included information related to: the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, hypersonic equipment and studies on future developments of U.S. military forces and on military drills and operations in countries like China.

The indictment outlines that Schultz was initially asked to provide documents detailing lessons that could be learned from Russia’s war with Ukraine and how those lessons could be applied to the U.S. helping Taiwan in the event of an attack. Schultz was paid \$200 for that information, which then prompted Conspirator A, to ask for a “long-term partnership.”

Conspirator A, who was described in the indictment as a foreign national purporting to reside in Hong Kong, later suggested that Schultz could earn more money if he handed over “internal only” material rather than

unclassified documents. In total, Schultz received at least 14 payments totaling \$42,000.

“The defendant and his co-conspirator also discussed recruiting another member of the U.S. military to join their conspiracy and to provide additional national defense information in order to conceal their illegal conduct,” Leventis said.

Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Ruth Castro said in a statement that Schultz has been in the Army since November 2018 and his hometown is Wills Point, Texas.

Schultz was previously assigned to Fort Cavazos, Texas, and was deployed once to Eastern Europe, according to Lt. Col. Tony Hoefler, a spokesperson for Fort Campbell.

The case is the latest in a series of federal prosecutions of current or former military members accused of illegally disclosing sensitive government secrets.

In April 2023, Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira was charged with leaking highly classified military documents about Russia’s war in Ukraine on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games. He pleaded guilty on Monday in a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to serve at least 11 years in prison.

## Experts: TBI can’t explain Maine shooter’s violence

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — Brain injury experts are cautioning against drawing conclusions from newly released and limited information about evidence of a brain injury in an Army reservist who killed 18 people last year in Maine’s deadliest mass shooting.

Boston University researchers who analyzed a sample of Robert Card’s brain tissue said Wednesday they found evidence of traumatic brain injury. The analysis, requested by the Maine medical examiner, found degeneration in the nerve fibers allowing communication between different areas of the brain, inflammation and small blood vessel injury, according to Dr. Ann McKee of the university’s Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) Center.

Card had been an instructor at an Army hand grenade training range, where it is believed he was exposed to repeated low-level blasts. It is unknown if that caused Card’s brain injury and what role the injury may

have played in his declining mental health before he opened fire at a bowling alley and bar in Lewiston on Oct. 25.

McKee made no connection between the injury and Card’s violent actions.

“While I cannot say with certainty that these pathological findings underlie Mr. Card’s behavioral changes in the last 10 months of life, based on our previous work, brain injury likely played a role in his symptoms,” McKee said in a statement released by the Card family.

Dr. Alexandra Filippakis, a neurologist who has treated members of the military and others for traumatic brain injuries, said Thursday she would not conclude brain injury played a role in Card’s behavior based on McKee’s description of her findings.

“TBI is a very broad diagnosis, and it looks different in different people. Not everybody has the same symptoms. Not everybody has the same severity of symptoms,” Filippakis said. “There’s no way that

you could, with certainty, link that to a particular action.”

Filippakis, who works at Wentworth-Douglass Hospital in Dover, N.H., said the connectivity damage McKee described is common and can have many causes, including aging, high blood pressure and smoking.

“That could mean so many different things,” she said. “You certainly can’t draw any conclusions from that piece of information.”

But James Stone, a University of Virginia radiologist who has studied repeated low-level blast exposure in the military, said changes to Card’s brain “seemed pretty profound.”

Such injuries can affect impulse control and emotional regulation, he said, and though he doesn’t know if those parts of Card’s brain were affected, “it’s certainly hard to imagine that the level of brain changes that we’re seeing in some way did not contribute to his behavior.”

# Biden delivers feisty State of the Union

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden delivered a defiant argument for a second term in his State of the Union speech Thursday night, lacing into Republican front-runner Donald Trump for espousing “resentment, revenge and retribution” and for jeopardizing freedom at home and abroad.

Reveling in the political moment, Biden fired multiple broadsides at “my predecessor” without ever mentioning Trump by name — 13 times in all — raising his voice repeatedly as he worked to quell voter concerns about his age and job performance while sharpening the contrast with his all-but-certain November rival.

The scrappy tone from Biden was a sharp break from his often humdrum daily appearances and was intended to banish doubts about whether the 81-year-old president, the country’s oldest ever, is still up to the job.

For 68 minutes in the House chamber, Biden goaded Republicans over their policies on immigration, taxes and more, invited call-and-response banter with fellow Democrats and seemed to relish the fight.

“I know I may not look like it, but I’ve been around a while,” Biden deadpanned. “And when you get to my age certain things become clearer than ever before.”

Noting he was born during World War II and came of political age during the up-

heaval of the 1960s, Biden declared: “My lifetime has taught me to embrace freedom and democracy. A future based on the core values that have defined America: honesty, decency, dignity, equality. To respect everyone. To give everyone a fair shot. To give hate no safe harbor. Now some other people my age see a different story: an American story of resentment, revenge, and retribution. That’s not me.”

The president linked Trump’s praise for those who overran the Capitol in an attempt to subvert the 2020 election with antidemocratic threats abroad.

“Freedom and democracy are under attack both at home and overseas at the very same time,” Biden said as he appealed for Congress to support Ukraine’s efforts to defend itself against Russia’s 2-year-old invasion. “History is watching.”

Biden directly referenced the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol, calling out those who have played it down.

“My predecessor — and some of you here — seek to bury the truth about Jan. 6 — I will not do that,” Biden said. “This is a moment to speak the truth and to bury the lies. Here’s a simple truth. You can’t love your country only when you win.”

The State of the Union address is the marquee night on the White House calendar, offering presidents a direct line to a captive audience of lawmakers and dignitaries in

the House chamber and tens of millions of viewers at home — almost certain to be Biden’s largest audience of the year. Biden knew he would be watched not just for his message, but for whether he could deliver it with vigor and command.

Aides said Biden was aiming to prove his doubters wrong by flashing his combative side and trying to needle Republicans over positions he believes are out of step with the country, particularly on access to abortion, but also tax policy and health care.

Taking a victory lap in selling his legislative accomplishments, including funding to bolster manufacturing of computer chips nationwide, Biden veered from his prepared script to take a dig at Republicans who voted against such policies but nonetheless take credit for them back home.

“If any of you don’t want that money in your districts,” Biden said, “just let me know.”

The president was speaking before a historically ineffective Congress. In the GOP-led House, Speaker Mike Johnson took power five months ago after the chaotic ouster of former Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Legislators are still struggling to approve funding bills for the current year and have been deadlocked for months on foreign assistance bills to help Ukraine stave off Russia’s invasion and to support Israel’s fight against Hamas.

## Katie Britt hits Biden in GOP response to speech

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sitting at her kitchen table in Alabama, Sen. Katie Britt called President Joe Biden a “dithering and diminished leader” and warned of a bleak American future under his presidency in the Republican rebuttal to his State of the Union address Thursday evening.

The first-term Alabama Republican, the youngest woman in the Senate, delivered a stinging election-year critique of the president. She argued that “the country we know and love seems to be slipping away” and appealed directly to her fellow mothers, who she said are prob-

ably “disgusted” with Washington.

Britt, a 42 year-old former congressional staffer and mother of two, was elected to the Senate in 2022 with former President Donald Trump’s endorsement. She promised to come to Washington as a “momma on a mission” and has carved out a unique role in the GOP conference as an adviser to Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and an experienced former aide on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

It’s the third year in a row that Republicans have picked a woman to speak to the nation after Biden leaves the podium.

## GOP pushes bill to detain migrants accused of theft

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday passed a bill that would require federal authorities to detain unauthorized immigrants who have been accused of theft, as Republicans seized on the recent death of a nursing student in Georgia to rebuke President Joe Biden’s border policies just hours ahead of his State of the Union address.

After 22-year-old Laken Riley, an Augusta University nursing student, was killed late last month while on a morning run, Republicans rushed the “Laken Riley Act” to the House floor to coincide

with Biden’s annual address.

The legislation easily passed 251-170 with all Republicans and 37 Democrats voting for it. But the nine-page bill was designed more to deliver a political point than to enact law and had little chance of being taken up in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

As immigration becomes a top issue in the presidential election, Republicans are using nearly every tool at their disposal — including impeaching Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas — to condemn how the president has handled immigration.



# GOP warned Haiti force can't deploy until funds are released

*Miami Herald*

The Biden administration is warning senior Republicans in Congress that a multinational force to Haiti cannot deploy unless they lift their long-standing hold on the release of key U.S. funds, a potentially significant hurdle for the White House as it addresses a dire crisis in the Caribbean nation, McClatchy has learned.

The quiet, monthslong dispute between the White House and senior GOP leadership over the funding request became heated this week, as the prospect of Haiti's government falling to gangs became a palpable fear across Washington.

Any delay in the deployment of the force, to be led by Kenyan police, could be fatal to Haiti's government, which is now under broad assault by a united front of powerful gangs throughout the nation's capital, Port-au-Prince.

Biden administration officials are accusing the staffs of

the top Republican lawmakers on the foreign affairs committees in the House and Senate of ignoring their urgent requests for meetings in recent days. A senior administration official told McClatchy they have provided 63 briefings and 35 written responses answering questions from the GOP offices.

But on Capitol Hill, aides to the two lawmakers, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas and Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, are accusing the administration of stonewalling critical questions on the size of the force.

A senior State Department official told McClatchy that the release of roughly \$40 million in pledged funds "would in fact be needed for deployment," to pay for training equipment, personnel kits and uniforms.

Two other senior administration officials said that a failure by Congress to provide the funds could imperil the commitments of allies, who have also pledged to contribute.

The dispute jeopardizes more than a year-and-a-half of efforts to establish a Multinational Security Support mission, referred to as an MSS, with international partners.

After a worldwide search for a country to lead it, Kenya stepped up, offering to deploy 1,000 police officers. The force will also include security personnel from other nations, five of which have officially notified the United Nations Security Council of their intentions.

Only 400 of them have been trained and properly vetted for past human rights violations, a requirement under U.S. law for the force to receive funding. While the nation of Benin has recently offered to contribute 2,000 additional forces, the vetting process for them will also take time.

U.S. officials said the initial deployment of 400 Kenyan forces was always part of the international plan to scale up their force posture.

# Employers in US added 275,000 jobs

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — America's employers delivered another healthy month of hiring in February, adding a surprising 275,000 jobs and again showcasing the U.S. economy's resilience in the face of high interest rates.

Last month's job growth marked an increase from a revised gain of 229,000 jobs in January. At the same time, the unemployment rate ticked up two-tenths of a point in February to 3.9%. Though that was the highest rate in two years, it is still low by historic standards. And it marked the 25th straight month in which joblessness has remained below 4% — the longest such streak since the 1960s.

Yet despite sharply lower inflation, a healthy job market and a record-high stock market, many Americans say they are unhappy with the state of the economy — a sentiment that is sure to weigh on President Joe Biden's bid for reelection. Many voters blame Biden for the surge in consumer prices that began in 2021. Though inflationary pressures have significantly eased, average prices remain about 17% above where they stood three years ago.

Friday's report drastically revised down the government's estimate of hiring in December and January from what had been blockbuster increases to still-solid gains. The report also gave the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve what could be a dose of encouraging news: Average hourly wages rose just 0.1% from January, the smallest monthly gain in more than two years, and 4.3% from a year earlier, less than expected. Average pay growth has been exceeding inflation for more than a year, but when it rises too fast it can feed inflation.

# Ship with aid prepares to inaugurate a sea route from Cyprus to Gaza Strip

*Associated Press*

LARNACA, Cyprus — A ship bearing humanitarian aid was making preparations to leave Cyprus and head for Gaza, the European Commission president said Friday as international donors launched a sea corridor to supply the besieged territory that is facing widespread hunger after five months of war.

The opening of the corridor, along with the recent inauguration of airdrops of aid, showed increasing frustration with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a new international willingness to work around Israeli restrictions.

The vessel belonging to Spain's Open Arms aid group will make a pilot voyage to test the corridor in the coming days, Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Cyprus, where she's inspecting preparations for it. The ship has been waiting at Cyprus's port of Larnaca for permission to deliver food aid from World Central Kitchen, a U.S. charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés.

Israel said Friday it welcomed the maritime corridor. But cautioned it would also need security checks.

"The Cypriot initiative will allow the increase of humanitar-

ian aid to the Gaza Strip, after a security check according to Israeli standards," Lior Haiat, spokesperson for Israel's foreign ministry, said on X, formerly Twitter.

The European Union, together with the United States, the United Arab Emirates and other involved countries were launching the sea route in response to the "humanitarian catastrophe" unfolding in Gaza, Von der Leyen said at a news conference with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides.

The ship will depart for Gaza on Saturday, Christodoulides told The Associated Press.

# A's set for Las Vegas exhibition games

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Oakland Athletics return to Las Vegas this weekend for exhibition games against the Milwaukee Brewers, their first appearance since announcing the relocation to what the team envisions as its future home city.

The games at Las Vegas Ballpark, home of the franchise's Triple-A Aviators, feature an A's team planning a new regular-season ballpark on the Strip it hopes will open in 2028. The Nevada Legislature last June enacted \$380 million in funding for a \$1.5 billion stadium, and baseball owners unanimously approved the relocation in November.

Close to a sellout crowd is expected in the 10,000-seat capacity ballpark for the Saturday afternoon game, but breezy temperatures that will drop into the

50s could depress attendance Friday night.

Las Vegas has hosted spring training games since at least 1983, and the A's played their first six regular-season games in 1996 at Cashman Field because of renovations at the Oakland Coliseum. Because of the planned permanent move, this weekend's games create an unusual dynamic for players, who will return to Oakland and a fan base irate at owner John Fisher.

"Being from the Bay Area, it kind of sucks, just the fan base and the community that's in Oakland," right-hander Paul Blackburn said. "I grew up going to A's games, watching their teams in the early 2000s, the 'Moneyball' year (2002). They lose a big part of (the community). But on the other side, you got a community that's been looking for a big-league team.

For the people in Vegas, I would assume it is exciting for them to have a team to look forward to."

The A's released renderings for the 33,000-seat stadium on Tuesday, the latest step in the relocation process. That ballpark will be on a nine-acre segment of a 35-acre property owned by Bally's at the corner of Tropicana Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard.

The nearly 67-year-old Tropicana resort that sits on that property will close April 2 in preparation for demolition to make room for ballpark and hotel construction.

Where the A's play from 2025-27 hasn't been announced. Club officials met with the city of Oakland about a potential lease extension. Other possible options include the San Francisco Giants' Oracle Park or Triple-A ballparks in Salt Lake City

or Sacramento, Calif.

A Nevada teachers political action committee has sued to block the state from distributing the money approved by the Legislature for the stadium. Construction delays also are possible.

The A's went 50-112 last season, the team's most losses since the 1916 Philadelphia A's, and finished 40 games back in the AL West. Fans protested the Las Vegas move throughout the season, aiming their ire at Fisher.

"I think we did a pretty good job of handling it," said designated hitter Brent Rooker, who hit 30 home runs last season and was the A's lone All-Star. "I think that we have guys who have the experience where they kind of know what's coming and we know how to keep things internally."

## Venus Williams loses at Indian Wells; Osaka advances

Associated Press

INDIAN WELLS, Calif. — Venus Williams played a match on tour for the first time in about six months on Thursday, and the 43-year-old owner of seven Grand Slam titles gave away the lead and the last 10 games in a 2-6, 6-3, 6-0 loss to qualifier Nao Hibino at the BNP Paribas Open.

Williams hadn't competed anywhere since a first-round exit at the U.S. Open on Aug. 29. That 6-1, 6-1 defeat against Greet Minnen was the American's most lopsided loss in 100 career matches at the major tournament she won in 2000 and 2001.

When Thursday's defeat ended with Williams getting broken for the seventh time in 12 service games, she walked to the net to congratulate Hibino, then left the court with a smile and a wave as much of the sparse crowd stood to applaud.

Williams, once ranked No. 1 and now outside the top 450, won her most recent Grand Slam title at Wimbledon in 2008 and has played sparingly in recent years, in part because of injuries. Her most recent appearance at Indian Wells came in 2019.

She still can offer stinging serves and big backhands, but her performance this time was

filled with mistakes, including 10 double-faults.

The match was interrupted by heavy rain after they completed just two games in windy and chilly conditions Wednesday night.

The 80th-ranked Hibino, who came into this match with an 0-3 career record at Indian Wells, will meet No. 17 seed Veronika Kudermetova in the second round.

On Day 2 in the desert, with a packed schedule because of the previous night's weather, winners included four-time Grand Slam title winner Naomi Osaka, 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, 2018

Australian Open winner Caroline Wozniacki and 2022 Australian Open runner-up Danielle Collins. Next for Collins is a matchup with No. 1 Iga Swiatek, who edged her in three sets at the Australian Open in January, while Osaka's 6-3, 6-1 victory over qualifier Sara Errani allowed her to move on to face No. 14 Liudmila Samsonova.

Among the men, three-time major champ Stan Wawrinka was edged 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-2 by 63rd-ranked Tomas Machac, and Gael Monfils, qualifier Lucas Pouille, Borna Coric and 19-year-old American Alex Michelsen won.

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# NFL teams prep for free agency deals

*Associated Press*

Chris Jones won't have to wait so long to cash in this year.

The Kansas City Chiefs' star defensive tackle will be among the headliners when free agency opens next week and he could eclipse Aaron Donald's three-year, \$96 million deal that made Donald the league's highest-paid defensive tackle.

Teams can begin negotiating Monday and can sign players starting Wednesday.

Jones held out last year, missing the offseason plus the opener and a \$1.1 million weekly paycheck, in a contract dispute that resulted in a restructuring of the final year of his deal.

Although the Chiefs retained the right to franchise tag Jones in 2024, they decided to place that tag instead on cornerback L'Jarius Sneed at \$19.8 million.

Call them priorities 1A and 1B for Chiefs GM Brett Veach, the architect of the NFL's latest dynasty with a trio of Lombardi Trophies since 2020.

"You'd like to ... pay all the guys and it's tough because the more you win, the more you've got to pay players, and obviously when you have this amount of success you're paying a lot of players a lot of money," Veach said. "Hopefully, we'll be able to figure something out but every free agent is different, unique and crazy. But we do have one tag and ... our goal is to get both those players done and then work down the rest of our roster."

The 31 other teams looking to knock the Chiefs from their pedestal will begin plugging holes with veterans next week.

The team that made the most racket in free agency a year ago won't be noisy this year.

The Denver Broncos signed 14 veterans to contracts totaling \$242,647,500, only slightly more than the \$242,588,236 extension Russell Wilson signed less than a year earlier.

Now, the Broncos are moving

on from Wilson, a separation that saddles them with a record \$85 million in dead cap charges, crimping any designs on another spending spree even with the salary cap's historic spike.

"We can't do that every year," said Broncos general manager George Paton, who began the roster purge Thursday by releasing star safety Justin Simmons to save \$14.5 million.

One truism about free agency is it's usually a whole lot less risky to re-sign one's own free agents than to acquire other teams' castoffs, misfits, pluggers or stars.

With that in mind, here's a free agent from every team that front offices want to keep from calling the moving trucks:

■ **Arizona Cardinals:** WR Marquise Brown has had a star-crossed stint in Arizona but he has flashed when he and Kyler Murray are healthy.

■ **Atlanta Falcons:** EDGE Calais Campbell. He's valued more for his leadership at age 37, although he did post 6½ sacks last season.

■ **Baltimore Ravens:** DL Justin Madubuike's 13 sacks and 33 QB hits led all defensive tackles. Baltimore put its \$22.1 million franchise tag on him.

■ **Buffalo Bills:** EDGE A.J. Epenesa is a consistent, improving player on a team whose purge of players this week cut deep into its core.

■ **Carolina Panthers:** EDGE Brian Burns, a two-time Pro Bowl selection, received the franchise tag, which is worth \$24 million.

■ **Chicago Bears:** CB Jaylon Johnson, a second-team All-Pro, received the franchise tag, which will pay him \$19.8 million in 2024.

■ **Cincinnati Bengals:** WR Tee Higgins received the franchise tag that will pay him just under \$22 million next season.

■ **Cleveland Browns:** Joe Flacco is the most valuable backup QB in the NFL and Deshaun Watson is recovering

from shoulder surgery.

■ **Dallas Cowboys:** LT Tyron Smith is 33 and often hurt, but he gave up one sack in '23 and remains the NFL's top pass-blocking tackle.

■ **Denver Broncos:** C Lloyd Cushenberry III is one of the NFL's best, but Luke Wattenberg or Alex Forsyth could step in if he bolts Denver.

■ **Detroit Lions:** G Graham Glasgow had a resurgence in 2023 in his return to Detroit after a three-year stint in Denver.

■ **Green Bay Packers:** KR-CB Keisean Nixon was an All-Pro kick returner in each of the last two seasons. No more one-year "prove it" deals.

■ **Houston Texans:** EDGE Jonathan Greenard collected 12½ sacks last season as the Texans returned to relevance.

■ **Indianapolis Colts:** WR Michael Pittman is coming off his first 100-catch season and received the franchise tag worth \$21.8 million in '24.

■ **Jacksonville Jaguars:** EDGE Josh Allen received the \$24 million franchise tag after setting franchise record with 17½ sacks last season.

■ **Kansas City Chiefs:** DT Chris Jones and CB L'Jarius Sneed. Of course KC gets two mentions here. They're the team of the 2020s, after all.

■ **Los Angeles Rams:** OG Kevin Dotson went from an afterthought in Pittsburgh to the NFL's best run-blocking guard in 2023.

■ **Los Angeles Chargers:** K Cameron Dicker has nailed 52 of 55 career FG attempts and absolutely crushed his Pro Bowl campaign video.

■ **Las Vegas Raiders:** C Andre James will get another big salary bump after seeing his pay jump from \$505,000 in '19 to \$6.5 million in '23.

■ **Miami Dolphins:** DT Christian Wilkins, a five-year pro, enjoyed a breakout 2023 season with a career-best nine sacks.

■ **Minnesota Vikings:** QB Kirk Cousins. Even at 36 in '24 and with a repaired Achilles, his exit would shake up the Vikings and the NFL QB market.

■ **New England Patriots:** Safety Kyle Dugger received the Patriots' transition tag, which will pay him \$13.8 million in 2024.

■ **New Orleans Saints:** Jameis Winston provides a spark whenever he subs for starter Derek Carr, much like Flacco does with Watson out.

■ **New York Giants:** FS Xavier McKinney picked off three passes and didn't allow a single TD catch in 2023, solidifying his topflight status.

■ **New York Jets:** EDGE Bryce Huff was one of the few Jets who had a stellar 2023 with a career-high 10 sacks and a budding reputation.

■ **Philadelphia Eagles:** RB D'Andre Swift posted his first 1,000-yard season and made the Pro Bowl in '23 after three years in Detroit.

■ **Pittsburgh Steelers:** QB Mason Rudolph was terrific subbing for Kenny Pickett in '23 and could provide similar support for a new QB in '24.

■ **Seattle Seahawks:** DT Leonard Williams is a 10th-year pro who has 43½ career sacks and averages 19.2 QB hits a year.

■ **San Francisco 49ers:** EDGE Chase Young, 2020's second overall pick, showed glimpses of greatness after his '23 trade from Washington.

■ **Tampa Bay Buccaneers:** QB Baker Mayfield has finally arrived. He set career highs last year in accuracy (64.3%), yards (4,044) and TDs (28).

■ **Tennessee Titans:** RB Derrick Henry, 30, was the NFL's second-leading rusher in '23 with 1,167 yards and 12 TDs, but seems set to leave.

■ **Washington Commanders:** CB Kendall Fuller was the only bright spot on Washington's dreadful defense in '23 and should thrive under Dan Quinn.



# Jokic notches triple-double as Nuggets slip past Celtics

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic recorded his 20th triple-double of the season and the Denver Nuggets withstood a furious fourth-quarter surge by Boston to beat the Celtics 115-109 on Thursday night and sweep their season series with the Eastern Conference leaders.

Jokic had 32 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists, several of them on alley-oops to Aaron Gordon, and Jamal Murray added 19 points and eight assists.

Jaylen Brown scored a season-high 41 points and had 14 rebounds for the Celtics, who hadn't lost consecutive games since early November. But Brown came up short on a dunk attempt that had him stretching his back during the subsequent timeout, and he was just 7 of 14 from the foul line.

Boston missed nine free throws overall, while the Nuggets missed just one of 22 foul shots.

**Timberwolves 113, Pacers 111:** Anthony Edwards matched his season high with 44 points, made a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 1:11 remaining and came up with a spectacular block at the buzzer to give short-handed Minnesota the victory over host Indiana.

Edwards soared to reject a last-second layup by the Pacers' Aaron Nesmith, hitting his head on the rim as time expired.

Rudy Gobert added 18 points and 14 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who played without All-Star Karl-Anthony Towns.

Minnesota moved into the top spot in the Western Conference, one-half game ahead of Oklahoma City.

Neither team led by more than five points over the final 20 minutes, and Edwards scored the final eight points for the

Timberwolves.

Pascal Siakam scored 24 points and Tyrese Haliburton added 23 points and 13 assists for the Pacers.

**Bulls 125, Warriors 122:** DeMar DeRozan scored 33 points and converted a three-point play with 26 seconds left, and visiting Chicago beat Golden State after Stephen Curry limped off and went to the locker room in the closing minutes.

Klay Thompson put the Warriors ahead on a 3-pointer with 40 seconds left before DeRozan delivered again in Chicago's third straight victory.

Curry exited with 3:51 to play having scored 15 points, while Thompson finished with 25 points.

Nikola Vucevic had 33 points, 11 rebounds and five assists for Chicago, hitting a tying 3-pointer with 2:49 remaining. The Bulls won for the fourth time in five games and snapped an eight-game losing streak on Golden State's home floor with their first win in the Bay Area since Jan. 27, 2015.

**Mavericks 114, Heat 108:** Luka Doncic had 35 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to become the second NBA player to record five consecutive 30-point triple-doubles, and host Dallas rallied past Miami.

Doncic matched Russell Westbrook, who had five consecutive 30-point triple-doubles in 2017 for Oklahoma City. The All-Star, who leads the league in scoring, also became the first player in history with four straight 35-point triple-doubles.

Kyrie Irving added 23 points for Dallas, which snapped a three-game skid.

Terry Rozier had 27 points and 11 assists for Miami, his highest-scoring game since being acquired from Charlotte in late January.

**Kings 131, Spurs 129:** Domantas Sabonis scored 31 points, including the go-ahead dunk with 7.7 seconds remaining, and host Sacramento beat San Antonio.

Sacramento closed the game with a 7-0 run in the final minute. Malik Monk hit a tying 3-pointer with 23.1 seconds left, followed by Sabonis' steal and transition dunk.

Sabonis added 17 rebounds and nine assists, posting his 45th straight double-double. De'Aaron Fox scored 17 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter for the Kings.

The Spurs fell to 0-7 without leading scorer Victor Wembanyama, who sat with a sprained right ankle. Devin Vassell led the Spurs with 30 points and nine assists.

**Suns 120, Raptors 113:** Kevin Durant scored 35 points, Grayson Allen added 26 and host Phoenix beat Toronto.

Bradley Beal had 20 points and eight assists for the Suns, who never trailed. Durant shot 11 of 19 from the field while Allen did all of his scoring in the first half, setting a franchise record with seven 3-pointers in the first quarter.

Gary Trent Jr. led Toronto with 30 points. Immanuel Quickley added 21 points and 17 assists, while RJ Barrett scored 23.

**Pistons 118, Nets 112:** Jaden Ivey scored 34 points and Cade Cunningham had 32 points and 11 assists as host Detroit beat Brooklyn.

The Pistons (10-52) had lost nine of 10 and hadn't won at home since beating Oklahoma City on Jan. 28.

Dennis Schroder had a season-high 31 points for the Nets, who had won three of four. Lonnie Walker IV scored 21.

## Arizona clinches Pac-12 title

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — KJ Lewis scored 18 points, Caleb Love added 17 and No. 5 Arizona routed UCLA 88-65 to clinch the Pac-12 regular-season title Thursday night in the Wildcats' final season in the league.

The Wildcats (24-6, 15-4) got some help in the Pacific Northwest, where Washington defeated second-place Washington State 74-68. Arizona is headed to the Big 12 next season, while the Bruins are bound for the Big Ten.

Jaden Bradley added 13 points for Arizona, which had five players in double figures while winning its fourth in a row. The Wildcats earned their first win at Pauley Pavilion under third-year coach Tommy Lloyd, who was 0-2 in the building.

Lazar Stefanovic scored 20 to lead UCLA (14-16, 9-10), which lost its season-worst fifth in a row.

**Washington 74, No. 18 Washington State 68:** Koren Johnson scored 23 points, Keion Brooks Jr. added 22 and Washington knocked off Washington State in the final Pac-12 matchup between the cross-state rivals.

Washington State (23-8, 14-6) failed to get stops at critical moments and shot 4 of 24 from 3-point range.

The second-place Cougars came in hoping for their first conference title since 1941, but their loss coupled with Arizona's victory at UCLA clinched the Pac-12 regular-season crown outright for the Wildcats.

As for the Huskies (17-14, 9-11), they spoiled what had been a charmed season at home for the Cougars in the final meeting between the schools as members of the Pac-12.

Isaac Jones led Washington State with 20 points but was 2 of 8 from the foul line.

# Bruins beat the weary Maple Leafs 4-1

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jeremy Swayman made 28 saves and the Boston Bruins beat the weary Toronto Maple Leafs 4-1 on Thursday night.

David Pastrnak, Trent Frederic, Morgan Geekie and Brandon Carlo scored to help Boston win for the 20th time at home this season. At 37-13-15, the Bruins trail Atlantic Division rival Florida by a point for the NHL lead.

Mitch Marner scored for Toronto, and Joseph Wall made 22 saves. The Maple Leafs were coming off a 2-1 overtime victory over Buffalo at home on Wednesday night. They are 10-3-0 in their past 13 — and 36-19-8 overall.

Boston extended its winning streak to seven games against Toronto, which last beat the Bruins on Nov. 22, 2022. The teams met Monday night in Toronto, with Boston also winning 4-1.

**Capitals 6, Penguins 0:** Alex Ovechkin scored his 840th goal and added an assist to help visiting Washington rout Pittsburgh.

Ovechkin passed Hall of Fame defenseman Paul Coffey for 15th place on the NHL's career scoring list. The Russian superstar has 1,532 points, one shy of Hall of Fame forward Mark Recchi in 14th.

The 38-year-old's 10th goal in his past 15 games — a rebound early in the second period that put Washington firmly in control — moved him within 54 goals of Wayne Gretzky's NHL record career total of 894.

Charlie Lindgren, who got the start with Darcy Kuemper out with an illness, made 39 saves for his sixth career shutout.

Tom Wilson scored a short-handed goal less than two minutes into the game and added an assist for Washington. Nick Jensen, Sonny Milano and rookies Hendrix Lapierre and Ivan Miroshnichenko also scored for the Capitals, who won for the

sixth time in nine games as they try to stay in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

**Canucks 3, Golden Knights 1:** Thatcher Demko made 27 saves, Quinn Hughes, Phillip Di Giuseppe and Conor Garland scored and Western Conference-leading Vancouver beat host Vegas.

Canucks center Elias Pettersson got his 400th career point with a first-period assist. He's the second-fastest player in franchise history to reach the mark, doing it in 390 games — 30 more than Pavel Bure. Pettersson also has 16 points in 14 career games against the Knights, most among active Canucks.

The Canucks have won three in a row. With 89 points, they are a point behind Florida for the NHL lead.

Michael Amadio scored Vegas. The defending champion Knights are 2-8-1 over their past 11 games, putting their playoff hopes in jeopardy.

**Flyers 2, Panthers 1:** Garnet Hathaway scored off a rebound with 22 seconds left to lift visiting Philadelphia over Florida.

Ryan Poehling also scored for Philadelphia. Samuel Ersson made 29 saves.

Gustav Forsling scored for Florida, and Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 24 shots. The Panthers had won six in a row.

**Blue Jackets 4, Oilers 2:** Matthew Olivier, Alex Nylander and Dmitri Voronkov scored in the first period and host Columbus ended Edmonton's winning streak at five.

Daniil Tarasov stopped 29 shots for Columbus, which has won three of its last four but remains last in the Metropolitan Division. Jack Roslovic also scored.

Connor McDavid got his 100th point of the season with an assist for Edmonton. Zach Hyman and Corey Perry scored.

**Islanders 7, Sharks 2:** Bo Horvat opened New York's four-goal, second-period burst

with his 25th goal and the visiting Islanders routed San Jose.

Kyle McLean, Matthew Barzal and Sebastian Aho also scored in the second period, with the goals coming in a 5:01 span. Noah Dobson, Alexander Romanov and Anders Lee also scored for the Islanders, and Ilya Sorokin made 23 saves.

Horvat also had two assists, and Brock Nelson finished with three. The Islanders, beginning a four-game trip, are two points out of the final wild card in the Eastern Conference.

Thomas Bordeleau and Mike Hoffman scored for San Jose in its ninth straight loss. Magnus Chrona had 26 saves in his third career start. The Sharks traded Anthony Duclair to Tampa Bay before the game.

**Flames 6, Lightning 3:** Yegor Sharangovich had two goals and two assists, Jacob Markstrom made 19 saves and visiting Calgary beat Tampa Bay for its sixth victory in seven games.

Dryden Hunt, Jakob Pelletier, Blake Coleman and Andrew Mangiapane also scored for the Flames.

Conor Sheary, Anthony Cirelli and Michael Eyssimont scored for Tampa Bay.

**Wild 5, Coyotes 2:** Joel Eriksson Ek broke a third-period tie with his 29th goal, Marc-Andre Fleury made 23 saves and visiting Minnesota beat Arizona.

After Zach Bogosian pulled the Wild even at 2 two minutes into the third period, Ek beat goalie Karel Vejmelka with a wrist shot from the left circle at 7:16.

Kirill Kaprizov had his 30th goal, Brock Faber and Connor Seward added empty-netters and Mats Zuccarello had three assists. Minnesota has won two straight after a three-game skid dropped it nine points out of the final Western Conference wild card.

Clayton Keller and Michael Carcone scored seven seconds apart in the first 1:28 of the third

to give Arizona a 2-1 lead. The Coyotes have lost two in a row and 16 of 18.

**Devils 4, Blues 1:** Timo Meier scored three goals and added an assist on an empty-net goal by Erik Haula and host New Jersey beat St. Louis, giving New Jersey interim coach Travis Green his first win since replacing Lindy Ruff this week.

Linemates Nico Hischier and Ondrej Palat each had two assists as the Devils snapped a three-game losing streak and won for only the fourth time in 11 games. Nico Daws made 23 saves for New Jersey.

Brandon Saad scored for St. Louis.

**Predators 4, Sabres 2:** Filip Forsberg scored three goals for his ninth career hat trick, leading host Nashville past Buffalo.

Luke Evangelista also scored and Juuse Saros made 26 saves for Nashville, which is 9-0-1 in its last 10. Gustav Nyquist had three assists.

Bowen Byram scored and had an assist, Owen Power also had a goal and Eric Comrie made 21 saves for Buffalo, which has lost three straight.

**Kings 4, Senators 3 (OT):** Kevin Fiala scored on a spinning backhand two minutes into overtime to lift host Los Angeles past Ottawa for its third victory in four games.

Jacob Moverare had his first career goal, Quinton Byfield and Pierre-Luc Dubois also scored and Cam Talbot made 28 saves.

Drake Batherson had a goal late in the third period to tie it at 3, Dominik Kubalik scored on the power play, and Brady Tkachuk had a goal for the Senators.

**Hurricanes 4, Canadiens 1:** Brady Skjei scored two goals, Frederik Andersen made 24 saves after a four-month absence and host Carolina beat Montreal.

Stefan Noesen and Andrei Svechnikov also scored.

Joshua Roy scored for Montreal.