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Trump picks RFK Jr. as health secretary

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump announced Thursday he will nominate antivaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, putting a man whose views public health officials have decried as dangerous in charge of a massive agency that oversees everything from drug, vaccine and food safety to medical research, Medicare and Medicaid.

"For too long, Americans have been crushed by the industrial food complex and drug companies who have engaged in deception, misinformation, and disinformation when it comes to Public Health," Trump said Thursday in a post on his Truth Social site announcing the appointment. Kennedy, he said, would "end the Chronic Disease epidemic" and "Make America Great and Healthy Again!"

Trump said Kennedy would target drugs, food additives and chemicals.

As one of the most prominent antivaccine activists in the world, Kennedy's nomination immediately alarmed some public health officials.

Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told The Associated Press, "I don't want to go backwards and see children or adults suffer or lose their lives to remind us that vaccines work, and so I am concerned."

Trump also announced Thursday that he has chosen Doug Collins, a former congressman from Georgia, to run the Department of Veterans Affairs. Collins is a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force Reserve Command. The Republican served in Congress from 2013 to 2021, and he helped defend Trump during his first impeachment process.

Later Thursday, Trump said he was nominating North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to lead the Department of the Interior. After ending his own presidential campaign in December 2023, Burgum endorsed Trump and became an outspoken supporter, appearing on TV news shows and at rallies and other events.

President-elect daring Congress to oppose him

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After a resounding election victory, delivering what President-elect Donald Trump and Republicans said is a mandate to govern, an uneasy political question is emerging: Will there be any room for dissent in Congress?

Trump is laying down a gauntlet even before taking office challenging the Senate, in particular, to dare defy him over the nominations of Matt Gaetz, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other controversial choices for administration positions.

The promise of unified government, with the Republican sweep of the White House and GOP majorities in the House and Senate, is making way for a more complicated political reality as congressional leaders confront anew what it means to line up with Trump's agenda.

"This is going to be a red alert moment for American democracy," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said on CNN after Trump tapped Gaetz for attorney general.

Trump is returning to the White House at the height of his political power, having won both the Electoral College and the popular vote for his party for the first time in decades. The trifecta in Washington offers a tantalizing political opportunity for Republicans, opening up a universe of political and policy priorities — from tax cuts to mass deportations to the gutting of the regulatory and federal bureaucracy, along with Trump's vows to seek vengeance and prosecution of his perceived enemies and pardon those who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

But for Congress, it's also a potentially existential moment, one that is testing whether its status as a co-equal branch of government can withstand a second Trump administration.

"One of the possible futures for Congress is that it becomes a rubber stamp," said Phillip Wallach, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, who writes extensively about Congress.

Wallach said the threat to Congress has been on his mind, but he also believes it would be more pronounced if Republicans had won larger majorities. The House, in fact, may end up with slimmer numbers, and the Senate's 53-seat advantage, while more than the simple majority needed to confirm nominees, can hardly be seen as mandates.

Besides, "they're not wimps," he said of elected lawmakers. "There's no reason for them to just turn themselves into a doormat."

Trump's Cabinet picks are posing the biggest early test for Congress.

While Trump's choice of Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., for secretary of state is expected to have somewhat broad support, including from Democrats, others like Kennedy, Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence and Pete Hegseth as defense secretary are raising more scrutiny.

The choice of Gaetz, a fierce Trump loyalist who talks about the wholesale upheaval of the Justice Department, is all the more troubling for senators because of a House ethics probe over alleged sexual misconduct and illicit drug use. He denies the allegations but submitted his resignation from Congress as soon as he was nominated, effectively shutting down the probe.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, a Republican member of the Judiciary committee, said he expects "any and all" information on the nominees will be made available.

Other Republicans in the House and Senate stood with Gaetz, supporting his effort to take on the Justice Department over what they see as perceived bias, particularly over its prosecutions of Trump for trying to overturn the 2020 election ahead of the Capitol attack and for hoarding classified documents.

Biden to meet S. Korean, Japanese leaders amid worries about North

Associated Press

LIMA, Peru — President Joe Biden is gathering South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba for talks Friday amid heightened concerns about North Korea's growing military partnership with Russia and Pyongyang's stepped-up cadence of ballistic missile tests.

The meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru comes as North Korea has deployed thousands of troops to Russia to help Moscow try to claw back land in the Kursk border region that Ukraine seized earlier this year.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also ordered a series of ballistic missile tests in the lead-up to this month's U.S. election and is claiming progress on efforts to build capability to strike the U.S. mainland.

White House officials are concerned that Pyongyang could be dialed up for more provocative action ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration and the early days of his administration.

"I do not think we can count on a period of quiet with the DPRK," said White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan, using the initials for North Korea's formal name. "The possibility of a seventh nuclear test remains ever present and something we're vigilant for. The transitions have historically been time periods when the DPRK has taken provocative actions both before and after the transition from one president to a new president."

Biden is on a six-day visit to Latin America for the final major international summits of his presidency, following up APEC with a gathering in Brazil of leaders from the Group of 20 top economies. He's likely to face questions from world leaders about the incoming administration as they turn their attention to what Donald Trump's return to the White House will mean for them.

With the growing North Korea-Russia relationship top of mind, the U.S., Japanese and South Korean leaders planned to discuss the North's soldiers deploying to Russia and ensure their three countries are acting in a "coordinated way," Sullivan said.

The introduction of North Korean troops to the Russia-Ukraine conflict comes as Moscow has seen a favorable shift in momentum in the grinding war on its neighbor.

Trump has signaled that he could push Ukraine to agree to give up some land seized by Russia to find an end to the conflict.

Up to 12,000 North Korean troops have been sent to Russia, according to U.S., South Korean and Ukrainian assessments.

Typhoon Usagi wreaks more damage in Philippines as another storm looms

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Typhoon Usagi swamped rural villages in floods, knocked down power and displaced thousands more people before blowing away on Friday from the northern Philippines, which has now been pounded by five major storms in less than a month.

A new storm could strengthen into a powerful typhoon before hitting the Philippine archipelago on Sunday, according to state forecasters.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the onslaught caused by Usagi, which was blowing toward southern Taiwan on Friday.

In Cagayan province in the northernmost tip of the main Luzon region, a key concrete bridge connecting two towns partly collapsed Thursday after logs swept by rampaging river currents smashed into it. Several other bridges were engulfed in floodwaters and were unusable, provincial officials said.

Usagi made landfall in the northeastern Philippines on Thursday, just two days after the last typhoon, Toraji, exited after setting off floods and forcing more than 82,500 people to flee from their homes in northern provinces.

Many of the displaced were still in shelters when Usagi hit, according to welfare officials, who have scrambled to transport large numbers of food packs and other aid to more than 300 evacuation centers as the back-to-back storms and typhoons lashed the region.

The government has struggled to deal with the impact of the multiple storms, which left at least 160 people dead, displaced more than 9 million others and devastated farmland and infrastructure.

Philippines, China again avoid clash at shoal

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine navy transported food and other supplies to a territorial ship outpost in a shoal in the South China Sea without any confrontation with Chinese forces guarding the disputed area, officials said Friday.

The Philippine delivery of supplies and military personnel on Thursday to the Second Thomas Shoal was the third such trip that did not lead to any confrontation since July, when both sides signed a rare deal to stop an alarming spike in violent confrontations.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines continues to uphold its mandate of safeguarding Philippine sovereignty and ensuring the welfare of its stationed personnel in the West Philippine Sea," military spokesperson Col. Xerxes Trinidad said, using the Philippine name for the South China Sea.

"There were no untoward incidents during the mission," Trinidad said.

The Philippines occupied the shoal by permanently beaching a navy ship in its shallows in 1999, prompting China, which also claims it, to surround the atoll with its coast guard and naval forces in what has been a continuing territorial standoff.

Called Ayungin by the Philippines and Ren'ai Jiao by China, the shoal had been the most dangerous flash point in the South China Sea and became the scene of increasingly violent confrontations starting last year that alarmed other governments, led by the United States.

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Powell: Fed will likely cut rates cautiously

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Chair Jerome Powell said Thursday that the Federal Reserve will likely cut its key interest rate slowly and deliberately in the coming months, in part because inflation has shown signs of persistence and the Fed's officials want to see where it heads next.

Powell, speaking in Dallas, said that inflation is edging closer to the central bank's 2% target, "but it is not there yet."

At the same time, he said, the economy is strong, and the policymakers can take time to monitor the path of inflation.

"The economy is not sending any signals that we need to be in a hurry to lower rates," the Fed chair said. "The strength we are currently seeing in the economy gives us the ability to approach our decisions carefully."

Economists expect the Fed to announce another quarter-point rate cut in December, after a quarter-point reduction last week and half-point cut in September.

But the Fed's steps after that are much less clear. In September, the central bank's officials collectively signaled that they envisioned cutting their key rate four times in 2025. Wall Street traders, though, now expect just two rate reductions, according to futures pricing tracked by CME FedWatch. And after Powell's cautious remarks Thursday, traders estimated the likelihood of a Fed rate cut in December at just below 59%, down from 83% a day earlier.

The Fed's benchmark interest rate tends to influence borrowing rates across the economy, including for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards. Other factors, though, can also push up longer-term rates, notably expectations for inflation and economic growth.

For example, Donald Trump's presidential election victory has sent yields on Treasury securities higher.

It is a sign that investors expect faster growth next year as well as potentially larger budget deficits and even higher inflation should Trump impose widespread tariffs and mass deportations of migrants as he has promised.

In his remarks Thursday, Powell suggested that inflation may remain stuck somewhat above the Fed's target in the coming months. But he reiterated that inflation should eventually decline further, "albeit on a sometimes bumpy path."

DOD pick was accused of sexual assault in 2017

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pete Hegseth, a popular Fox News host who is Donald Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Defense, was accused of sexual assault in 2017 after a speaking appearance at a Republican women's event in Monterey, Calif., according to a statement released by the city. No charges were filed in the case.

Hegseth's attorney, Timothy Parlatore, said the allegations were "completely false."

"This was investigated by the police at the time and they found no evidence," Parlatore said.

Monterey City officials declined to release a police report that documented the accusations and instead issued a statement Thursday in response to press inquiries. It said Monterey Police were contacted in October 2017 to investigate a sexual assault that allegedly took place several days earlier at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Monterey and involved Hegseth.

The person who reported the assault — whose name, age and sex were not released — had bruises on the right thigh. No weapons were involved in the encounter, the person told police. The incident occurred sometime between 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 7 and 7 a.m. the following morning, according to the city's statement.

Hegseth was in town at the time to address the California Federation of Republican Women during a banquet dinner held at the group's biennial convention, according to social media posts and promotional materials from the time.

Monterey City officials said they were withholding further details included in the police report because it included analysis and conclusions by law enforcement officials that are exempt from release under state public records law.

At the time of the alleged assault, Hegseth, now 44, was going through a divorce with his second wife, with whom he has three children. She filed for divorce after he had a child with a Fox News producer who is now his wife, according to court records and social media posts by Hegseth.

Vet misused chokehold in NYC death, trainer says

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When Daniel Penny wrapped his arm around the neck of a homeless man on a Manhattan subway last year, the 25-year-old veteran appeared to be deploying a nonlethal chokehold long drilled into U.S. Marines.

Done right, the maneuver should knock a person out without killing them, according to Joseph Caballer, a combat instructor in the Marine Corps who trained Penny in several types of holds. But held too long, the technique can restrict the flow of blood to a person's brain, ending their life in a matter of minutes.

"Once the person is rendered unconscious, that's when you're supposed to let go," Caballer told a jury on Thursday.

His testimony came weeks into the trial of Penny, who faces charges of manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide after placing Jordan Neely, a homeless man and Michael Jackson impersonator, in the fatal chokehold last May.

Prosecutors allege that Penny "went way too far" in his attempt to restrain Neely, showing an "indifference" toward his life even after he had lost consciousness and stopped fighting back.

Penny, an architecture student who served four years in the U.S. Marines, told police he was seeking to protect himself and other riders from a man who was acting erratically on the train and frightening riders with distressing comments. His attorneys have emphasized Neely's previous arrests, along with his struggles with mental illness and drug use.

Bystander video of the encounter shows Penny with his bicep pressed across Neely's neck and his other arm on top of his head, a position he held for close to six minutes, even after the man went limp.

The technique — an apparent "blood choke" — can make a person feel like "trying to breathe through a crushed straw," Caballer said. In his own training sessions, Caballer recalled telling his fellow Marines: "You don't want to keep holding on. This can result in actual injury or death."

Iran asked to help secure Lebanon cease-fire

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Lebanon's caretaker prime minister on Friday asked Iran to help secure a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hezbollah and appeared to urge it to convince the militant group to agree to a deal that could require it to pull back from the Israel-Lebanon border.

The prime minister made the comments in talks with Ali Larijani, a top adviser to Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. Larijani's visit to Lebanon comes as the United States continued pushing both sides to agree to a deal to end 13 months of exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah.

Iran is a main backer of Hezbollah and for decades has been funding and arming the Lebanese militant group. Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel the day after Hamas' surprise attack into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 ignited the war in Gaza — prompting exchanges between the two sides ever since.

Since late September, Israel dramatically escalated its bombardment of Lebanon, vowing to cripple Hezbollah and end its barrages in Israel. More than 3,300 people have been killed in Lebanon by Israeli fire — 80% of them in the past month — Lebanon's Health Ministry says.

According to Lebanese media, U.S. Ambassador Lisa Johnson handed over a draft of a proposed cease-fire deal to Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who has been leading the talks representing Hezbollah.

A Lebanese official confirmed that Beirut has received a copy of a draft proposal based on U.N. Security Council resolution 1701, which ended the last Israel-Hezbollah war, in the summer of 2006.

That resolution, among other things, said that only the Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers should operate in southern Lebanon, meaning Hezbollah would have to end its presence there.

That provision was never implemented. Lebanon accuses Israel of also violating the resolution by maintaining hold of a small, disputed border area and conducting frequent military overflights over Lebanon.

The Lebanese official did not give details other than to say Israel was insisting that some guarantees be included. The official spoke on condition of anonymity, because they weren't authorized to speak to the media about the ongoing talks.

The U.S. Embassy refused to either confirm or deny the reports.

In talks with Larijani, caretaker Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati urged Iran to help implement resolution 1701. He said the Lebanese government wants the war to end and the resolution to be implemented "in all its details," according to a statement on the talks issued by his office.

Mikati, who in recent weeks has become more critical of Iran's role in Lebanon, also said the government wants Iran to help Lebanon's national unity and not take any stance backing one party against another.

Iran's backing for Hezbollah has helped the group, which is the most powerful faction among Lebanon's Shiite Muslims, dominate the country's politics the last decade.

After meeting Mikati and Berri, Larijani said his visit's main aim was "to loudly say that we will stand by Lebanon's government and people."

Asked if he was trying to thwart U.S. cease-fire mediation, Larijani said, "We are not trying to blow up any effort, but we want to solve the problem and we will stand by Lebanon, whatever the circumstances."

Larijani held similar talks a day earlier in Syria with President Bashar Assad. Syria's state news agency said that Assad and Larijani discussed the "ongoing aggression on Palestine and Lebanon and the necessity of stopping it."

While Larijani was in Beirut, Israeli forces carried out a new strike on the southeastern edge of the city.

Hotel workers strike at casino near Vegas Strip

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Hundreds of hotel workers at a casino near the Las Vegas Strip went on strike just before dawn Friday after a long and highly publicized fight for a new contract.

The strike at Virgin Hotels Las Vegas marks the first open-ended strike in 22 years for the Culinary Workers Union, the largest labor union in Nevada, with about 60,000 members.

The union posted on the social platform X on Friday morning: "@VirginHotelsLV casino is ON STRIKE! Virgin hotel workers are walking out RIGHT NOW at Virgin Las Vegas for a fair contract! Stand with the workers, DO NOT CROSS THE STRIKE LINE!"

"24/7 picket lines around the property" would be in place during the strike, the union said, urging customers to cancel reservations or check out and to choose a union accommodation.

The company's proposal worked out to an estimated $0.30 per year to wages over five years after deducting money for benefits, Culinary Union Secretary-Treasurer Ted Pappageorge said.

Workers at the casino also walked off the job for 48 hours earlier this year as negotiations escalated, hoping to pressure Virgin Hotels to agree to a new five-year deal with increased wages and better benefits.

Germany's Scholz discusses Ukraine with Russia's Putin

Associated Press

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday urged Russia to be willing to negotiate with Ukraine in his first call with Russian President Vladimir Putin in nearly two years. The Kremlin responded that Moscow was open to new talks and pointed to Putin's earlier proposal that Kyiv should cede territory and back off its plans to join NATO.

Government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said Scholz condemned "Russia's war of aggression" against Ukraine during the call, and called on Putin to end it by withdrawing troops that launched a full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022. That conflict reaches its 1,000-day mark next week.

"The chancellor urged Russia to be willing to negotiate with Ukraine with the aim of achieving a just and lasting peace and stressed Germany's unwavering determination to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression for as long as necessary," Hebestreit said in a statement.

The new communication between the leader of Germany — one of Ukraine's strongest backers since late 2022 — and Putin comes at a time of widespread speculation about what the upcoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump will mean for Ukraine.

Eagles stomp on DC dreams in NFC East

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jalen Hurts rolled over, face down, and grabbed his helmet.

The Philadelphia Eagles quarterback's head was spiked into the turf by Washington linebacker Frankie Luvu in the second quarter and bounced off the ground. Hurts was evaluated for a concussion — "I guess I beat the protocol," he quipped — and stayed in the game.

Hurts ran for the go-ahead score, Saquon Barkley rushed for 146 yards and two fourth-quarter touchdowns, and the Eagles stretched their lead in the NFC East with a 26-18 win Thursday night over Jayden Daniels and the Commanders.

"Really," coach Nick Sirianni said, "what we talked about at halftime was this was going to be a grimy, gritty game."

After three quarters of uninspired offense by the Eagles, Barkley and Hurts led them to 20 points in the fourth.

The Eagles (8-2) won their sixth straight since their bye. Fans cheered when Hurts ran out of the tunnel for the second half, and he finished with 221 yards passing.

"When you see grass coming out of his helmet, yeah man, he got rocked a few times," offensive lineman Lane Johnson said. "I thought he did a good job coming in the second half, and really putting it behind him."

After the game, Hurts laughed when he failed to recall details of a specific play.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Probably not the right thing to say right now," he said.

The Eagles' defense pitched in with a decisive stop.

With the Eagles leading 12-10 in the fourth quarter, Washington was in range for a go-ahead field goal and coach Dan Quinn elected to go for it on fourth down. Daniels scrambled and was stopped for no gain, and less than three minutes later, Barkley scored on a 23-yard run.

"I trust my teammates. I trust the unit," Daniels said of the fourth-down gamble. "I always trust the coaches. I never question them."

Jake Elliott made the extra point to give the Eagles a two-score lead after missing his previous try — along with two of his four field goal attempts.

Daniels, who finished 22 of 32 for 191 yards and a late touchdown pass, was intercepted by safety Reed Blankenship on Washington's next play. A dozen seconds later, Barkley finished off the Commanders (7-4) with a 39-yard touchdown run.

With 1,137 rushing yards through 10 games, Barkley moved ahead of Baltimore's Derrick Henry for the NFL lead. Both veteran running backs were signed as free agents in the offseason.

"You can't be great without the greatness of others," Sirianni said. "Saquon was great tonight but the offensive line was really good."

Washington entered with a chance to take over first place in the division but left with its second straight loss.

Elliott, who missed field goals of 44 and 51 yards, was wide left on the extra point after Hurts' 1-yard tush-push touchdown in the fourth quarter. He made field goals of 21 and 31 yards.

Elliott holds the franchise record with seven field goals of 50 yards or more in a season but has missed all four attempts from 50-plus in 2024.

The matchup was hyped as the biggest game in this NFC East rivalry in nearly 30 years, but the first 30 minutes had all the excitement of a preseason game.

Hurts had an ineffective first half. He underthrew receivers — notably a pair of times to DeVonta Smith — and hung his head when a pass attempt with no nearby open receiver sailed out of bounds.

Washington's Brian Robinson Jr. ripped off an 18-yard run to the 1-yard line and punched in a touchdown on the next play for a 7-0 lead in the first quarter. Zane Gonzalez kicked a 45-yard field goal in the third quarter for a 10-3 lead.

But Gonzalez, promoted off the practice squad with Austin Seibert dealing with a hip injury, didn't get another opportunity late in the fourth. The Commanders were stopped on second- and third-and-1, and Daniels, the No. 2 overall draft pick, was stuffed on Philadelphia's 26.

The Eagles took over and Hurts instantly connected with Dallas Goedert for a 31-yard gain. Barkley scored three plays later.

Zach Ertz, who played for the Eagles from 2013-2021, had a touchdown catch in the final minute for the Commanders and then got both feet down in the back of the end zone for a 2-point conversion that cut the lead to eight. Washington tried an onside kick, but Philadelphia recovered.

"We'll get there," Quinn said. "But over the last two weeks, we weren't able to demonstrate that and express that to the fullest level."

Snooker player King banned 5 years for fixing match

Associated Press

SHEFFIELD, England — English snooker player Mark King was handed a five-year ban on Friday after being found guilty of match-fixing and providing inside information in the latest corruption scandal to blight the sport.

The punishment for the 50-year-old King, who reached a career-high ranking of No. 11 in 2003, related to a match against Joe Perry at the Welsh Open played on Feb. 13 last year that was flagged following suspicious betting patterns.

King was suspended by snooker's world governing body a month later and an independent disciplinary commission has ruled that he fixed the result of the match, while giving information to others about that match for betting purposes. He had denied the charges.

King's suspension comes after Chinese players Liang Wenbo and Li Hang were handed lifetime bans from snooker last year for their role in a match-fixing scandal.

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Storm-stricken Rays to play at Yanks' field

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Rays will play their 2025 home games at the New York Yankees' nearby spring training ballpark amid uncertainty about the future of hurricane-damaged Tropicana Field, Rays executives said.

Stuart Sternberg, the Rays' principal owner, said in an interview that Steinbrenner Field in Tampa is the best fit for the team and its fanbase. At about 11,000 seats, it's also the largest of the spring training sites in Florida.

"It is singularly the best opportunity for our fans to experience 81 games of major league Rays baseball," Sternberg said. "As difficult as it is to get any of these stadiums up to major league standards, it was the least difficult. You're going to see Major League Baseball in a small environment."

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said the Rays-Yankees deal is good for the sport and the Tampa Bay region.

"This outcome meets Major League Baseball's goals that Rays fans will see their team play next season in their home market and that their players can remain home without disruption to their families," Manfred said in a news release.

The Rays' home since 1998, the domed Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg was hit hard by Hurricane Milton on Oct. 9, with most of its fabric roof shredded and water damage inside. The city of St. Petersburg, which owns the Trop, released an assessment of the damage and repair needs that estimated the cost at $55.7 million if it is to be ready for the start of the 2026 season.

The work would have to be approved by the city council, which earlier this year voted for a new $1.3 billion, 30,000-seat stadium to replace Tropicana Field beginning in 2028. The new stadium is part of a much larger urban revitalization project known as the Historic Gas Plant District — named for the Black community that once occupied the 86 acres that includes retail, office and hotel space; a Black history museum; and restaurants and bars.

Amid all the uncertainty, the Rays know one thing: they will play 2025 in a smallish, outdoor ballpark operated by one of their main American League East division rivals.

A ballpark with a facade mimicking that of Yankee Stadium in the Bronx and festooned with plaques of Yankee players whose numbers have been retired.

Brian Auld, the Rays co-president, said in an interview that Tampa Bay has to be ready for a regular-season MLB game March 27 against the Colorado Rockies, just three days after the Yankees break training camp.

"There will be a ton of work toward putting in our brand — the term we like to use for that is 'Rayful' — into Steinbrenner Field," Auld said.

Baseball's top comebacks, relievers, DHs named

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Left-handers Chris Sale of the Atlanta Braves and Garrett Crochet of the Chicago White Sox were selected Major League Baseball's Comeback Players of the Year on Thursday.

Cleveland right-hander Emmanuel Clase won his second AL Reliever of the Year Award and St. Louis righty Ryan Helsley won the NL honor.

Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani joined David Ortiz as the only players to win four straight Outstanding Designated Hitter Awards. Ohtani and the New York Yankees' Aaron Judge won Hank Aaron Awards as the outstanding offensive performers in their leagues.

Major League Baseball made the announcements at its All-MLB Awards Show.

Sale, 35, was 18-3 with a 2.38 ERA and 225 strikeouts in 177 2/3 innings for the NL's first pitching triple crown since the Los Angeles Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw in 2011. He earned his eighth All-Star selection and first since 2018.

Sale helped Boston to the 2018 World Series title but made just 56 starts from 2020-23, going 17-18 with a 4.86 ERA, 400 strikeouts and 79 walks over 298 1/3 innings. He was acquired by Boston from the Chicago White Sox in December 2016 and made nine trips to the disabled and injured lists with the Red Sox, mostly due to shoulder and elbow ailments. He had Tommy John surgery on March 30, 2020, and returned to a big-league mound on Aug. 14, 2021.

Sale fractured a rib while pitching in batting practice in February 2022 during the management lockout. In his second start back, he broke his left pinkie finger on July 17 when he was hit by a line drive off the bat of the New York Yankees' Aaron Hicks. Sale broke his right wrist while riding a bicycle en route to lunch on Aug. 6, ending his season.

Crochet, 25, was 6-12 with a 3.58 ERA over 32 starts for a White Sox team that set a post-1900 record of 121 losses, becoming a first-time All-Star. He struck out 209 and walked 33 in 146 innings.

He had Tommy John surgery on April 5, 2022, and returned to the major leagues on May 18, 2023. Crochet had a 3.55 ERA in 13 relief appearances in 2023, and then joined the rotation this year.

Sale and Crochet were chosen in voting by MLB.com beat writers. Clase and Helsley were unanimous picks by a panel that included Hall of Famers Trevor Hoffman, Mariano Rivera, Dennis Eckersley and Rollie Fingers, along with John Franco and Billy Wagner. The AL award is named after Rivera and the NL honor after Hoffman.

A three-time All-Star, Clase was 4-2 with a 0.61 ERA, 66 strikeouts and 10 walks in 74 1/3 innings, holding batters to a .154 average. The 26-year-old converted 47 of 50 save chances, including his last 47.

Voting was based on the regular season. Clase was 0-2 with a 9.00 ERA in the playoffs, allowing three home runs, one more than his regular-season total.

Helsley, a two-time All-Star, was 7-4 with a 2.04 ERA and 49 saves in 53 chances. He struck out 79 and walked 23 in 66 1/3 innings.

Ohtani became the first player with 50 or more homers and 50 or more stolen bases in a season. A two-way star limited to hitting following elbow surgery, Ohtani batted .310 and led the NL with 54 homers and 130 RBIs while stealing 59 bases.

Ortiz won the DH award five years in a row from 2003-07.

The DH award, named after Edgar Martinez, is picked in voting by team beat writers, broadcasters and public relations departments. MLB.com writers determined the finalists for the Aaron awards, and a fan vote was combined with picks from a panel of Hall of Famers and former winners to determine the selections.

Judge led the major leagues with 58 homers and 144 RBIs while hitting .322.

Tyson concedes villain's role to Jake Paul

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Friendship is at the heart of how a fight came together between 58-year-old former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson and much younger YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul.

Friction helped build the hype for a bout that is testing the formula for how boxing is delivered to the masses, a first-ever combat sports offering from the streaming platform Netflix rather than pay-per-view or traditional cable.

"I think they're beloved fans of Mike Tyson," Paul said, trying to explain the boisterous boos that have greeted him when the two have appeared together in recent months to hype the event.

"And I'm the new kid on the block, the disrupter, loudmouth, polarizing figure," Paul said. "And I've built my career as the heel. Naturally people want to root against me, and that's great for the sport of boxing."

Tyson's first sanctioned professional fight in almost 20 years is set for Friday night at the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. A crowd of at least 60,000 is expected while Netflix offers the bout at no additional cost to more than 280 million subscribers globally.

The 27-year-old Paul is relatively new to the sport, the one-time social media influencer bringing a 10-1 record with seven knockouts mostly against mixed martial artists and journeymen boxers.

Asked about the friendship earlier in the week, Tyson said, "There's no feeling attached." He proved it by slapping Paul as they faced off following the weigh-in Thursday night.

Tyson appeared to take offense to the way Paul approached him for the faceoff, but didn't bother explaining. "The talk is over," Tyson, who checked in at 228 pounds, said when one of the hosts tried to ask a question.

"Now it's personal," Paul screamed into a microphone before storming off the stage. Paul weighed 227 pounds.

Tyson was 50-6 with 44 knockouts when he retired after losing to Kevin McBride in 2005, saying he didn't have anything left to give the sport. He last fought in an exhibition against Roy Jones Jr. with no fans during the pandemic in 2020.

A fight originally scheduled for July 20 was postponed when Tyson had to be treated for a stomach ulcer after falling ill on a flight.

Tyson said in a documentary chronicling the preparations for the fight that he lost 26 pounds in the process of recovering.

Promoter Nakisa Bidarian, who co-founded Most Valuable Promotions with Paul, said Tyson was cleared medically weeks ago.

Bidarian sidestepped a question of how concerned he was for Tyson's health once he steps in the ring.

"I'm nervous for both men," Bidarian said. "The reality is, Jake's never been hit by someone like Mike Tyson flush on the chin. And Mike hasn't fought someone like Jake for a very long time. That's what makes this interesting."

Paul said he had a vision for the fight about two years ago and shared it with Tyson because he thought the Hall of Famer would understand — and be interested. It took about that long for the bout to come together.

Tyson appeared agitated at both hype events with fans in the Dallas area, first in the weeks before the originally scheduled fight and again at a news conference two nights before the bout.

He was more reflective in a smaller setting with reporters, suggesting he wasn't the same foul-mouthed, scowling fighter from his prime.

"I've been through so many ups and downs since my last fight with Kevin McBride," Tyson said. "I've been in rehab. I've been in prison, been locked up. Never in a million years did I believe I'd be doing this."

According to reports, Paul will get $40 million for the fight, a number he mentioned at another news conference in New York in August.

Tyson, who had two stints in prison over convictions in the 1990s for rape and assault and declared bankruptcy 21 years ago, will get $20 million.

Tyson has said he isn't doing the fight for money.

"That old Mike Tyson ... he doesn't have no more purpose in my life. He just doesn't exist," Tyson said. "I'm having a good time in my life. I don't have much time left, so I'm having the best time of my life."

Paul has faced persistent questions about why he would fight someone so much older, regardless of Tyson's pedigree. His answers have been consistent.

"I say talk to Mike and tell Mike that," Paul said. "He's the one that wanted it to be a pro fight and me, as a young person in this sport, is not going to (pass) up the opportunity to fight the GOAT of boxing. It's like Ja Morant turning down a 1-v-1 against LeBron. It's not going to happen."

Lindsey Vonn, 40, will return to professional skiing

The Washington Post

Four-time World Cup overall champion and 2010 Olympic gold medalist Lindsey Vonn will rejoin the U.S. ski team more than five years after saying, in her retirement announcement, that her "body is broken beyond repair and it isn't letting me have the final season I dreamed of."

Vonn, 40, decided to give professional skiing another try after having knee-replacement surgery this year.

"Getting back to skiing without pain has been an incredible journey," Vonn said in a statement released by U.S. Ski & Snowboard.

In October, the International Ski and Snowboard Federation revised its wild-card regulations that allow for former champions who have not raced in at least two years to receive entries into events if they come out of retirement, even if they have not accumulated enough ranking points in lower-level races. This gives Vonn a pathway back into World Cup races.

Vonn won 82 World Cup races, which at the time of her retirement was a women's record that has since been surpassed by Mikaela Shiffrin, who has 97. At the 2010 Vancouver Games, she became the first American woman to win Olympic gold in the downhill. She also won bronze in the super-G in Vancouver and another bronze in the downhill at the 2018 Pyeong-Chang Games.

But the wear and tear of professional skiing proved too much for her body to overcome. In the spring of 2018, she had surgery to remove cartilage from her knee and then suffered a crash in November of that year while training in Copper Mountain, Colo., tearing ligaments in her knee and suffering three fractures.

Lightning 4-1 victory ends Jets' win streak

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy made 24 saves in his 300th NHL win, and the Tampa Bay Lightning stopped Winnipeg's seven-game win streak with a 4-1 victory over the Jets on Thursday night.

Vasilevskiy is the 40th goaltender in league history to win 300 games. He reached the milestone in 490 games, the fewest in NHL history, 31 faster than Jacques Plante.

Winnipeg lost for just the second time in 17 games. It dropped to 7-1 on the road.

Jake Guentzel scored twice for the Lightning, who had lost their previous five games against the Jets, including 7-4 in Winnipeg on Nov. 3.

Devils 6, Panthers 2: Jesper Bratt got his second career hat trick, Stefan Noesen scored twice and New Jersey beat Florida to sweep a two-game series with the Stanley Cup champions.

Jack Hughes had a goal and two assists for the Devils, who also won 4-1 in Florida on Tuesday. Jake Allen stopped 25 shots for New Jersey, which got three power-play scores — along with a short-handed empty-netter with 5:12 left, Bratt's third of the night — and is now 7-2-0 in its past nine games.

Sam Reinhart and Jesper Boqvist scored for Florida, which hadn't dropped two straight since Oct. 10 and 12. Sergei Bobrovsky made 23 saves.

Rangers 3, Sharks 2: Mika Zibanejad, Jimmy Vesey and Vincent Trocheck each scored in the second period and New York beat San Jose.

Igor Shesterkin made 25 saves as the Rangers rebounded from Tuesday's 6-3 loss to league-best Winnipeg and got their fourth win in six games.

Timothy Liljegren and Fabian Zetterlund scored for the Sharks, who have lost four of six. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 32 shots.

Liljegren was credited with the game's first goal at 2:51 of the opening period when the puck caromed off several players in front of Shesterkin and into the net.

Zibanejad tied it with 9:19 left in the middle period. Vesey put the Rangers ahead with 6:45 left in the period, and Trocheck made it 3-1 with 3:39 to go.

Zetterlund closed the gap with a power play in the final minute.

Flyers 5, Senators 4, OT: Matvei Michkov scored from a sharp angle at the side of the goal at 4:05 of overtime to give Philadelphia a comeback victory over Ottawa.

Anthony Richard and Bobby Brink tied it for Philadelphia midway through the third period with goals in a 2:03 span. Travis Sanheim and Travis Konecny also scored. Ivan Fedotov made 33 saves.

Brady Tkachuk, Drake Batherson, Josh Norris and Adam Gaudette scored for Ottawa, coming off road victories over Boston and Toronto. Linus Ullmark made 14 saves.

Sabres 4, Blues 3, OT: Rasmus Dahlin scored 1:33 into overtime to lift Buffalo to a win against St. Louis.

Alex Tuch and Ryan McLeod each had a goal and an assist in Buffalo's fourth win in five games. Zach Benson also scored, and Devon Levi made 24 stops.

Brandon Saad scored twice for St. Louis, which dropped to 0-3-1 in its last four games. Pavel Buchnevich also scored.

Blues goaltender Jordan Binnington had 29 saves.

St. Louis had a 3-2 lead before Tuch scored with 7:03 remaining in regulation. Dahlin's power-play goal in OT was his fourth of the season.

Stars 7, Bruins 2: Evgenii Dadonov scored two goals, including the first successful penalty shot in the NHL this season, and Dallas beat Boston.

Matt Duchene, Roope Hintz, Mason Marchment and rookies Logan Stankoven and Oskar Back also scored for the Stars, who continued an offensive roll following a 7-1 win at Pittsburgh on Monday.

Dadonov gave Dallas a 2-0 lead at 6:36 of the first period after being obstructed on a breakaway by Mason Lohrei. Five previous NHL penalty shots didn't produce a goal.

Charlie Coyle and David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins, who split two games on a Central Division road trip.

Dallas' Jake Oettinger made 23 saves, and Boston's Jeremy Swayman stopped 31 shots.

Marchment had a goal and an assist following a five-point game at Pittsburgh.

It was Back's first NHL goal.

Wild 3, Canadiens 0: Kirill Kaprizov had an empty-net goal and an assist, Filip Gustavsson made 19 saves for his first shutout of the season and Minnesota beat Montreal.

Matt Boldy and Marco Rossi also scored.

Boldy opened the scoring in the second period when he tapped in a goal-mouth feed from Marcus Johansson. Rossi added a power-play goal in the third for the Wild.

The Canadiens pulled their goalie with a minute and a half to play, and Kaprizov scored into the empty net with 20 seconds left to clinch it for the Wild, who are 6-1-1 since Oct. 29.

Sam Montembeault stopped 25 shots for the Canadiens.

Oilers 3, Predators 2, OT: Connor McDavid scored early in the second period to become the fourth-fastest NHL player to reach 1,000 points, then assisted on Darnell Nurse's overtime goal in Edmonton's victory over Nashville.

On the milestone goal, McDavid took a pass from Leon Draisaitl on a 2-on-1 break and beat goalie Scott Wedgewood with a shot to the near post to tie it at 1.

The 27-year-old McDavid reached 1,000 in his 659th game. Wayne Gretzky was the fastest at 424 games, followed by Mario Lemieux at 513.

McDavid has 341 goals and 659 assists. He's the 99th NHL player to reach 1,000 points.

Nurse put the Oilers ahead at 5:30 of the second with his first goal of the season. Calvin Pickard stopped 21 shots.

Cole Smith tied it for Nashville on a breakaway with 1:48 left in regulation.

Islanders 5, Canucks 2: Semyon Varlamov made 24 saves, Anders Lee had a goal and an assist and New York beat Vancouver.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Scott Mayfield, Pierre Engvall and Noah Dobson — into an empty net — also scored for New York. The Islanders were coming off consecutive 4-3 overtime losses, at home against New Jersey on Saturday and at Edmonton on Tuesday night.

Jonathan Lekkerimaki scored early in the first period for Vancouver, and Tyler Myers finished the scoring late in the third.

Kraken 3, Blackhawks 1: Jaden Schwartz scored on a power play 1:34 into the third period, and Seattle pushed their winning streak to three games with a win over Chicago.

Matty Beniers and Brandon Tanev also scored.

Beniers made it 1-0 4:18 in the second period before Schwartz's goal gave Seattle a two-goal cushion.

Soon after Schwartz scored, former Kraken player Ryan Donato pulled Chicago back within one with his eighth goal of the season, but Tanev sealed the game with an empty-net goal at with 19 seconds left.

Seattle goaltender Joey Daccord made 18 saves for Seattle, while Chicago's Petr Mrazek stopped 23 shots.

Kraken captain Jordan Eberle left the game and did not return after crashing into the boards 17 seconds into the second period.