

Trump signs bill to release Epstein files

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he has signed a bill directing the Justice Department to release the Jeffrey Epstein files, documents related to the sprawling sex-trafficking investigation into the one-time powerful financier that are fervently sought by Trump's political opponents and members of his political base.

After Trump's announcement, made in a social media post, the Justice Department will have 30 days to release all unclassified documents about Epstein, who was arrested on federal sex-trafficking charges in 2019 and died while in federal custody.

But despite Trump's signature, there are many reasons to doubt that a bulk release of the files is imminent — the legislation includes major loopholes,

and the Justice Department has said little about its plans.

In his post Wednesday, Trump again sought to shift the negative attention associated with Epstein to Democrats. He also credited himself with the bill's near-unanimous passage through Congress, though he had resisted calls to make the documents public for months — including personally whipping votes against the effort in public and private.

Trump's signature on the bill comes after a week in which the Epstein files were a frequent topic of conversation among officials in Washington. On Tuesday, the House and Senate agreed to pass the bill directing Attorney General Pam Bondi to release the files.

Earlier Wednesday, Bondi broke the department's official silence but only slightly. At a

news conference on an unrelated issue, she parried repeated questions about the Epstein files, saying: "We will continue to follow the law with maximum transparency while protecting victims."

If Trump had always wanted Bondi to release all of the Epstein files, he could have ordered her to do so at any point in the past six months. He didn't.

On Sunday, when Trump did an about-face and said House Republicans should vote in favor of releasing the Epstein files, he notably did not say he favored releasing them. Instead, he said in a social media post that the House "can have whatever they are legally entitled to, I DON'T CARE!"

What Congress is "legally entitled to" is complicated.

The legislation gives the Justice Department a few excep-

tions under which it can refuse to release material. Among them: if release "would jeopardize an active federal investigation or ongoing prosecution."

On Friday, Trump ordered Bondi to launch a federal investigation related to Epstein — this one aimed at his ties to several prominent Democrats, including former President Bill Clinton, megadonor Reid Hoffman and former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers.

The Justice Department has also said many of the files cannot be released because they contain sensitive victim information and pornographic material. The legislation contains another exception allowing the Justice Department to withhold material that "would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" or "depicts or contains child sexual abuse."

Report: US-Russia peace plan cedes Ukraine land

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The U.S. and Russia have drawn up a plan aimed at ending the war in Ukraine that calls for major concessions from Kyiv, according to a person familiar with the matter, including granting some demands the Kremlin has made repeatedly since the full-scale invasion began nearly four years ago.

It was not clear what, if any, concessions the proposal asks of Russia. The same person confirmed that promises from Moscow of no further attacks are part of the framework. As reports of the plan emerged, blindsided European diplomats insisted they and Ukraine must be consulted.

U.S. special envoy Steve Wit-

koff has been quietly working on the plan for a month, receiving input from both Ukrainians and Russians on terms that are acceptable to each side, according to a senior U.S. official.

President Donald Trump, the official added, has been briefed on the plan and supports it.

The talk of a secret peace plan piled more pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is marshaling his country's defenses against Russia's bigger army, visiting European leaders to ensure they continue their support for Ukraine and navigating a major corruption scandal.

Several high-ranking Army officials, including Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, were in Kyiv on Thursday to give a new push

to peace efforts and assess the reality on the ground in Ukraine, U.S. officials said.

Zelenskyy's office said he formally received the peace plan Thursday. The statement said Zelenskyy expected to talk to Trump soon about what was needed for peace. Zelenskyy underlined Ukraine's main conditions for peace and promised to work on the conclusions reached in the meetings with U.S. officials.

European leaders have already been alarmed this year by indications that Trump's administration might be sidelining them and Zelenskyy in its push to stop the fighting. Trump's at-times conciliatory approach to Russian President Vladimir Putin has fueled those

concerns, but Trump adopted a tougher line last month when he announced heavy sanctions on Russia's vital oil sector that come into force Friday.

The proposal, which could still be changed, calls in part for Ukraine to cede territory to Russia and to abandon certain weaponry, according to the person who had been briefed on the contours of the plan. It would also include the rollback of some U.S. military assistance. Russia would be given effective control of the entire eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland made up of the Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk regions, even though Ukraine still holds part of it. Putin has listed the capture of the Donbas as the key goal of the invasion.

Driscoll eyes daily check-ins for soldiers

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll instructed unit leaders across the service to check in with all their soldiers every day of the holiday season, a time often associated with an increase in suicide attempts.

Driscoll demanded an officer or noncommissioned officer in every formation “call, text or visit” with their soldiers once every day through Jan. 15 “to see if they need help,” in a memorandum sent service wide this week.

“The holidays can be a high-risk period for self-harm. We know it’s a problem, it happens every year, so we’ll address it head-on,” Driscoll wrote. “... This isn’t performative — it’s real for

me.”

Driscoll, a former armor officer who saw combat in Iraq in 2009, said his initiative was based on efforts in the 11th Airborne Division, where unit leaders have “systemically prioritized soldier checks” in recent months to combat a once-high suicide rate among the division’s troops at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The efforts, Driscoll wrote, have resulted in a 14-month period with no suicides reported in the division.

For years, the Army — and its sister services — have struggled to bring down the number of suicides in their ranks. The Defense Department began collecting and reporting quarterly surveillance data on service member suicides

in 2018 to help guide prevention efforts.

Those efforts have seen mixed results. Suicides were up across the Army — and the military as a whole — in 2023, the last year for which the Pentagon has provided complete data. The Army saw 289 suicides across its entire force, including the National Guard and reserves. Preliminary data from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office for 2024 shows a drop to 260 suicides last year.

The top Army civilian said the prevention effort also needed to be reciprocated by soldiers across the service. He encouraging them to “just pick up” when their leaders call and relay to them any troubles they were facing.

“Seeking help is not weakness — it takes courage, faith and trust that your family, friends and community will accept you and help you,” Driscoll wrote. “We want to pick you up, share your load and get you moving forward again. There is light beyond the darkness that surrounds you. Just keep fighting through this moment, pick up your phone, and let us help you.”

He instructed anyone who needed immediate help or knew of someone in need to call the Military Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1 to speak with a trained responder.

“Every life is sacred,” he wrote. “We’re all in this together and just picking up can save soldiers’ lives.”

Senate Dems demand return to quicker PFAS cleanup plan

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats are demanding a reversal of the Pentagon’s decision earlier this year to delay the cleanup of “forever chemicals” at military installations around the U.S., arguing it will harm service members and communities.

Some 150 military sites have been given revised timelines for cleanups of chemicals known as PFAS, commonly found in firefighting foam and extensively used for decades by the military in training exercises that led to soil and groundwater contamination.

The Pentagon produced the new cleanup timetables at the end of March, pushing back the time frame for collecting information on the extent of contamination and studies to evaluate cleanup options for some installations by nearly a decade. The delays were a marked

change from a timetable the Pentagon released in December 2024 under then-President Joe Biden’s administration.

Nearly 30 Senate Democrats, led by Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, called the delays “unacceptable” in a letter sent Wednesday to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. The senators are requesting the Pentagon revert to the timetable released last year and accelerate efforts to remediate PFAS contamination on military sites.

The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

At least 700 military sites in all 50 states are known or suspected to have pollution from PFAS, which is short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The chemicals linger in the environment and in people and have been linked to cancer as well as decreased fertility and developmental delays in children.

US envoy envisions German in NATO commander role

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The top U.S. envoy to NATO said this week that he is eager for a German general to eventually take command of all allied forces, a job that has been held by an American officer since the bloc’s founding nearly 80 years ago.

Matthew Whitaker, the American ambassador to the alliance, told the audience at the Berlin Security Conference that such a significant shakeup at NATO would take time, according to several news outlets, including British newspaper *The Telegraph*.

“I look forward to the day when Germany comes to the United States and says that ‘We’re ready to take over the Supreme Allied Commander position,’” Whitaker said Tuesday. “I think we’re a long way away from that, but I look

forward to those discussions.”

In a social media post following the discussions in Berlin, Whitaker did not mention the SACEUR issue. He did, however, emphasize the need for allies to follow through on recent pledges to increase defense spending to 5% of gross domestic product.

Still, questions have swirled around the idea that a European could one day take the job of Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a post first held by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Earlier this year, there were discussions at the Pentagon about the idea of the U.S. relinquishing command of NATO forces, NBC News reported in March. However, in July, U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich took over the job, signaling there was no immediate change in the works.

US added solid 119K jobs in September

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers added a surprisingly solid 119,000 jobs in September, the government said, issuing a key economic report that had been delayed for seven weeks by the federal government shutdown.

The unemployment rate rose to 4.4% in September, the highest since October 2021 and up from 4.3% in August, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The unemployment rate rose partly because 470,000 people entered the labor market — either working or looking for work — in September and not all of them found jobs right away.

The increase in payrolls was more than double the 50,000

economists had forecast. But Labor Department revisions showed that the economy lost 4,000 jobs in August instead of gaining 22,000 as originally reported.

Altogether, revisions shaved 33,000 jobs off July and August payrolls.

Health care and social assistance firms added more than 57,000 jobs in September, construction companies 19,000 and retailers almost 14,000. But factories shed 6,000 jobs and the federal government lost 3,000.

Average hourly wages rose just 0.2% from August and 3.8% from a year earlier, edging closer to the 3.5% year-over-year increase that the Federal Reserve's inflation fighters like to

see.

During the 43-day U.S. government shutdown, investors, businesses, policymakers and the Federal Reserve were groping in the dark for clues about the health of the market because federal workers had been furloughed and couldn't collect the data.

The report comes at a time of considerable uncertainty about the economy. The job market has been strained by the lingering effects of high interest rates and uncertainty around Trump's erratic campaign to slap taxes on imports from almost every country on Earth.

But economic growth at midyear was resilient.

Labor Department revisions

in September showed that the economy created 911,000 fewer jobs than originally reported in the year that ended in March.

That meant that employers added an average of just 71,000 new jobs a month over that period, not the 147,000 first reported.

Since March, job creation has slowed even more — to an average 53,000 a month. During the 2021-23 boom that followed lockdowns, the economy was creating 400,000 jobs a month.

President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration is expected to reduce the number of people looking for work, which means that the economy can create fewer jobs without sending the unemployment rate higher.

Process questions create new hurdle in Comey case

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The prosecution of former FBI Director James Comey hit another hurdle Wednesday as the Justice Department encountered mounting questions about how the case was presented to a grand jury for indictment.

The development risked further imperiling a politically charged prosecution already subject to multiple challenges and demands for its dismissal. It came during a hearing in which Comey's lawyers asked U.S. District Judge Michael Nachmanoff to throw out the case on grounds that the government was being vindictive and as a separate challenge to Lindsey Halligan, the hastily appointed and inexperienced prosecutor who secured the indictment, is pending.

The Justice Department's acknowledgment under questioning from a judge that the full grand jury did not review a copy of the final indictment is the latest indication of its seemingly disjointed pursuit of a criminal

case against one of President Donald Trump's political enemies. Comey was fired by Trump in May 2017 while overseeing an FBI investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign. The two have been publicly at odds ever since.

Concerns about the legal process came into focus earlier in the week when a different judge in the case raised questions about what he said were "profound investigative missteps," including misstatements of law to the grand jury. The Justice Department denies that the process was tainted by irregularities.

Halligan initially asked the grand jury to return a three-count indictment against Comey. But after the grand jurors rejected one of the proposed counts, the Justice Department subsequently secured a second two-count indictment that accused Comey of making a false statement and obstructing Congress. Comey has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing.

New Orleans awaiting immigration crackdown

AP/Report for America

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans, the laid-back city known as the Big Easy and the birthplace of jazz, where lavish parades, bead-throwing debauchery and Creole cuisine attract tourists from around the globe, is about to become the next staging ground for the Trump administration's mass deportation agenda.

Operation "Swamp Sweep," an expansive, monthslong immigration crackdown, is expected to launch in southeast Louisiana Dec. 1, but Democrat-run New Orleans is anticipating the arrival of as many as 250 federal troops as soon as Friday, all with the backing of the state's Republican governor.

Gov. Jeff Landry has sought to align New Orleans with federal immigration enforcement efforts through legislation and legal challenges, and the Border Patrol deployment is just the latest drive to ramp up that pressure. And with the New Or-

leans Police Department being released from a federal reform pact Wednesday, its officers have lost a legal mechanism that has long shielded them from having to participate in immigration enforcement.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security operation will be led by Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino, who has already overseen aggressive campaigns in Los Angeles, Chicago and Charlotte, N.C.

Landry, who has close ties to the nation's top immigration officials, has made immigration enforcement a priority.

Louisiana does not share a border with another country, yet it has become one of the nation's largest detention hubs for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, with a capacity upward of 6,000 detainees. In September, the Bayou State opened the "Louisiana Lockup" inside a notorious state prison to hold immigrants whom federal officials consider dangerous.

Coast Guard to reclassify swastika, nooses

The Washington Post

The Coast Guard will no longer classify the Nazi's swastika as a hate symbol under a policy that takes effect next month.

Instead, the Coast Guard will classify the Nazi-era insignia as "potentially divisive" under its new guidelines. The new policy, set to take effect Dec. 15, similarly downgrades the definition of nooses and the Confederate flag, though display of the latter remains banned, according to documents reviewed by *The Washington Post*.

Certain historic displays or artwork where the Confederate flag is a minor element are still permissible, according to the policy.

Though the Coast Guard is not part of the Defense Department, the service has been reworking its policies to align with the Trump administration's changing tolerances for hazing and harassment within the U.S. military. In September

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directed a review and overhaul of those policies, calling the military's existing standards "overly broad" and saying they jeopardize U.S. troops' combat readiness.

The Coast Guard did not immediately provide comment.

A Coast Guard official who had seen the new wording called the policy changes chilling.

"We don't deserve the trust of the nation if we're unclear about the divisiveness of swastikas," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity due to a fear of reprisal.

The Coast Guard is a military service under the Department of Homeland Security and the purview of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi L. Noem. But the service, which has been central to President Donald Trump's increased focus on homeland defense, has been swept up like the others in the administration's rash of leader-

ship firings and broader targeting of military culture.

Former Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan, the first woman to lead a branch of the U.S. military, was fired on Trump's first day in office for what administration officials said then was her focus on diversity initiatives and her handling of sexual assault investigations.

Within days, Fagan's replacement, acting commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday, ordered the suspension of the Coast Guard's hazing and harassment policy that, among its other guidance, said explicitly that the swastika was among a "list of symbols whose display, presentation, creation, or depiction would constitute a potential hate incident." Nooses and the Confederate flag also matched that description under the previous policy.

Lunday was later nominated by Trump to become the service's commandant. His Senate

confirmation hearing was held Wednesday, and he was due to meet with lawmakers Thursday.

It is unclear when the Senate Commerce, Transportation and Science Committee, which has jurisdiction over DHS, may vote to advance Lunday's nomination.

The Pentagon, where Hegseth has argued that prior administrations' focus on racial diversity has harmed military recruiting, referred questions on the Coast Guard's policy to DHS, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The new Coast Guard policy also limits the amount of time that service members have to formally report the display of a noose or swastika — which could be enormously problematic for personnel at sea. The new policy gives them 45 days to report an incident whereas the previous policy did not have a deadline.

Bipartisan remembrance at Cheney funeral; Trump not invited

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington National Cathedral on Thursday hosted a bipartisan show of respect and remembrance for Dick Cheney, the consequential and polarizing vice president who in later years became an acidic scold of fellow Republican President Donald Trump.

Trump, who has been publicly silent about Cheney's death Nov. 3, was not invited to the service.

Two ex-presidents came: Republican George W. Bush, who eulogized the man who served him as vice president, and Democrat Joe Biden, who once called Cheney "the most dangerous vice president we've had probably in American history" but now honors his commitment to his family and to his values.

"Solid and rare and reliable," Bush said of his vice president, praising a man whose "talent and his restraint" exceeded his ego.

Moments before the service began, figures of recent but now receded power mingled: Bush and Biden and their wives sitting in a row together, former Vice Presidents Kamala Harris and Mike Pence chatting side by side in their pew with Al Gore and Dan Quayle together behind them.

Biden greeted Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell, the former longtime Senate leader, and his wife, former labor and transportation secretary Elaine Chao. Behind them sat Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker.

Daughter Liz Cheney, a former high-ranking House member whose Republican

political career was shredded by Trump's MAGA movement, also addressed the gathering at the grand church known as "a spiritual home for the nation."

Others delivering tributes at Thursday's funeral are Cheney's longtime cardiologist, Jonathan Reiner; former NBC News correspondent Pete Williams, who was Cheney's spokesman at the Pentagon; and the former vice president's grandchildren.

Cheney had lived with heart disease for decades and, after the Bush administration, with a heart transplant. He died at age 84 from complications of pneumonia and cardiac and vascular disease, his family said.

Trump's vice president, JD Vance, was also not invited to the funeral, according to a per-

son familiar with the details.

The White House lowered its flags to half-staff after Cheney's death, as it said the law calls for, but Trump did not issue the presidential proclamation that often accompanies the death of notable figures, nor has he commented publicly on his passing.

The deeply conservative Cheney's influence in the Bush administration was legendary and, to his critics, tragic.

He advocated for the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the basis of what proved to be faulty intelligence and consistently defended the extraordinary tools of surveillance, detention and inquisition employed in response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Bush credited him with helping to keep the country safe and stable in a perilous time.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Recreational marijuana question closer to ballot

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida elections officials have taken early steps under pressure from activists to advance a proposed initiative to legalize recreational marijuana to next year's ballot, legal filings showed.

The procedural move comes after the campaign behind the issue, Smart & Safe Florida, filed a complaint with the Florida Supreme Court, alleging that officials in Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration were trying to improperly block the measure from getting on the ballot in 2026.

In a Nov. 17 legal filing, Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd argued that the lawsuit is now moot and should be dismissed. That's after state officials issued a formal letter to Smart & Safe Florida and submitted the proposed ballot amendment to the state's attorney general.

Those steps represent official confirmation that the campaign has gathered the hundreds of thousands of voter petitions needed to qualify for the ballot, triggering the process for the state Supreme Court to ultimately review the proposed amendment language. Those steps are required by state law in order for the issue to advance to the ballot.

Suit: Police 'misconduct' shielded the real killers

MA BOSTON — Karen Read, who was found not guilty of charges in the death of her boyfriend, has filed a lawsuit accusing mem-

bers of the Massachusetts State Police and several others of targeting her and shielding the real killers.

Read walked out of court earlier this year after more than three years and two trials over the death of her boyfriend, Boston police officer John O'Keefe, who was found on the lawn of a fellow officer's home after a night of heavy drinking.

Read was accused of striking O'Keefe with her SUV in 2022 and leaving him to die alone in the snow outside of a house party in Canton. She was charged with second-degree murder, manslaughter while operating a vehicle under the influence and leaving the scene.

A mistrial was declared last year after jurors said they were at an impasse. In the second trial, a jury found her not guilty of second degree murder and manslaughter charges but did find her guilty of a lesser charge of drunken driving.

Instead of Read, the lawsuit alleges O'Keefe was killed at the house party during an "altercation during a late night house party with other defendants after a night of heavy drinking." It alleges there was a vast conspiracy by members of a well-connected and close social group in the house to cover up the crime.

City pays owner of deaf, blind dog killed by officer

MO STURGEON — A city in Missouri has agreed to pay a dog owner \$500,000 after a police officer fatally shot the man's 13-pound blind, deaf pet — an incident that led to a mayor's resignation and calls to disband the local law enforcement agency.

Officials in Sturgeon, Mo., and one of the city's police officers agreed to the payout to Nicholas Hunter, who had owned Teddy — a 5-year-old Shih Tzu — since the dog was 12 weeks old. Hunter sued the city in May 2024 after Police Officer Myron Woodson shot Teddy twice at close range while responding to a call from a neighbor reporting a lost dog.

The Sturgeon mayor's office did not respond to a request for comment. Woodson, who has left the department, could not be reached for comment Monday.

Teddy escaped his fenced-in kennel while Hunter was at dinner and wandered into a nearby yard. The neighbor called police, hoping to reunite Teddy with his owner. Woodson responded and fruitlessly tried to secure Teddy with a "catch pole" for about five minutes before drawing his gun and firing twice on Teddy as the small dog was facing away, according to Hunter's lawsuit and body-camera video.

The city posted on its Facebook page that the officer shot the dog out of concern that it had rabies.

Kevin Abrahamson, Sturgeon's mayor at the time, initially defended the shooting before abruptly resigning. The new mayor suspended Woodson, who eventually left the department, according to ABC17.

Kroger to close delivery centers, take \$2.6B hit

OH CINCINNATI — Kroger Co. said it would close some e-commerce fulfillment centers and expand partnerships with delivery companies, a shift in its digital

strategy.

The grocer said these efforts would result in impairment and related charges of about \$2.6 billion in its fiscal third quarter.

Kroger recently said it would deepen partnerships with Instacart and DoorDash in an effort to reach more consumers and offer faster delivery options. These efforts will help Kroger deliver profitable sales growth, interim Chief Executive Officer Ron Sargent said in a statement.

The grocer said it's closing standalone fulfillment facilities in three locations and would closely monitor the performance of its remaining centers. The facilities — in Frederick, Md.; Pleasant Prairie, Wis.; and Groveland, Fla., — are expected to close in January, according to a filing from Kroger partner, British company Ocado Group PLC. The two companies will continue to operate centers in other cities.

Corrections officer slain by inmate, officials say

VA INDEPENDENCE — An inmate killed a corrections officer at a prison in Virginia, the state corrections department said Monday.

Corrections officer Jeremy Lewis Hall, 40, was killed in what the Virginia Department of Corrections called a "vicious attack." Hall had worked for the corrections department for a year and a half.

The attack occurred at River North Correctional Center in Independence, a town in the southwestern part of the state.

The attacker was not immediately identified. It was not clear what preceded the attack.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

BYU-Cincinnati could spell chaos for Big 12

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Utah coach Kyle Whittingham turns 66 on Friday and certainly wouldn't mind a belated birthday present from Cincinnati. It would be a gift for several teams around the Big 12, actually.

Because if the Bearcats knock off No. 11 BYU at home on Saturday night, the door opens for chaos in the conference standings.

Assume, for the sake of argument, that No. 6 Texas Tech (10-1, 7-1) — off this weekend — grabs the top seed. And assume, again for the sake of argument, that the Cougars (9-1, 6-1) fall, there could theoretically be a five-way tie for the other spot in the title game.

So, yeah, those teams with two conference losses — that's BYU, No. 13 Utah (8-2, 5-2), No. 25 Houston (8-2, 5-2), Arizona State (7-3, 5-2) and Cincy (7-3, 5-2) — have a lot invested in Saturday. If five teams were to be tied, the tiebreaker scenarios could become quite complex.

Cougars coach Kalani Sitake has an ideal way to avoid all the clutter — just keeping winning.

"That really," Sitake said, "is the best style to me."

The spotlight will certainly be on this game, with Fox's Big Noon Kickoff pregame showing up in Cincinnati. BYU, which is a 2½-point favorite, has won 13 of its last 16 conference games since 2024.

"We need to make sure that we don't let this win make us hot-headed," Cougars running back LJ Martin said after a 44-13 win over TCU. "The preparation doesn't change for Cincinnati. If we do what we just did this past week, we will be all right."

The Bearcats, led by quarterback Brendan Sorsby, had won seven in a row before dropping their last two games.

"There's a lot riding on these games at the end of the year, especially when you're playing teams that are in the mix," Sitake said. "We know that. We understand that."

The Big 12 championship Dec. 6 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, would see two new teams in Texas Tech and BYU. The Red Raiders, who own the tiebreaker over the Cougars, are firmly in the driver's seat with a bye this week

before finishing at West Virginia on Nov. 29. They can wrap up a spot with a loss by Arizona State (at Colorado) and a BYU win. Another clinching scenario for Texas Tech is if Arizona State, the Cougars and Utah (the Utes host Kansas State) all lose.

"They know," Red Raiders coach Joey McGuire said of his players and what's potentially at stake this weekend. "There's not going to be anything that I need to tell these dudes other than, 'Guys, no matter what anyone else does, if we win in two weeks, we're in Dallas.' They will be really focused on that."

BYU is also in control of earning a spot. It can clinch with a win over Cincinnati and losses by the Sun Devils and Houston (the Cougars host TCU). Another way is a win coupled with an ASU loss and a Utah win.

The Cougars play UCF to close out the regular season. Winning with ease the next two weeks would go a long way in making an impression on the College Football Playoff selection committee. Only don't bring that up to Sitake, whose

team sits behind several two-loss teams.

"When I say I don't really pay attention to it, I know it exists. I'm not dumb. I know all the stuff that's out there," Sitake said. "I know what people are saying and the metrics and analytics and style points and all that stuff. My focus is not on that."

"I have to be focused on what we can control, which is playing football and the preparation today. That's what I have to be focused on. It's nice that we're in the mix and that people are recognizing what we're doing, but what does that matter if we don't go 1-0 this weekend?"

That's the thinking of Whittingham as well. Utah won three straight since a 24-21 loss at BYU on Oct. 18. All they're focused on is Kansas State and then the game at Kansas on Nov. 28.

"We think we're playing good football. Is it good enough? We'll find out," Whittingham said. "We have to take care of our business first. When the dust settles and the regular season is over, we'll see where we're at and what kind of opportunities are there."

Georgia Tech-Pitt prime-time game to have CFP implications

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A shot at the College Football Playoff is on the line for both No. 15 Georgia Tech and Pittsburgh ahead of a prime-time matchup Saturday night.

The Yellow Jackets (9-1, 6-1) will clinch a spot in the Atlantic Coast Conference title game Dec. 6 if they beat the Panthers (7-3, 5-1), while a Pitt victory would keep it alive for the same goal heading into its regular-season finale against No. 14 Miami.

"This is a championship game in its own right," Georgia Tech coach Brent Key said Tuesday. "That's the way we're viewing it, that's the way we're approaching it. It's on everybody to get the job done."

Regardless of the outcome, the ACC standings remain in flux. No. 19 Virginia, SMU, Miami and Duke are all in the mix

for the title game, but the Yellow Jackets are the only team completely in control of their destiny.

Key said simply put, games this time of year are "different," and he doesn't "shy away from that."

Georgia Tech trailed Boston College (1-10, 0-7) 28-17 late in its game last week, but rallied to escape with a 36-34 victory. Still, the scare against the conference cellar dweller coupled with a Nov. 1 loss at N.C. State has created an uneasy feeling around the Yellow Jackets, particularly with their struggling defense.

Georgia Tech leads the Football Bowl Subdivision in total offense, but resides near the bottom of 136 teams in total defense.

"I got after them pretty good," Key said of his defense. "But it's telling them,

'You're good. Let's fix it and go play that way.'"

Pittsburgh is coming off a disappointing game in its own right, albeit one with no bearing on ACC positioning. The Panthers stepped out of conference play and fell flat in a 37-15 defeat against No. 9 Notre Dame, but would still reach the conference title game with wins in their final two games plus one loss by either Virginia or SMU.

"We just take it one game at a time," Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi said. "We treat everything the same. The word pressure is bad. Our guys know what they've got to do. They've got to go out and win one football game."

The Panthers are seeking their third trip to the ACC title game under Narduzzi and first since 2021, while Georgia Tech is aiming for its first appearance since 2014.

Packers defensive backs trying to hold on

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — With a young quarterback up next on their schedule, the Packers are hoping to make the most of their opportunities for a potentially important turnover.

By an unofficial count, Green Bay had five chances for interceptions against Jameis Winston on Sunday, and it came away with one of them: Evan Williams' end-zone pick in the fourth quarter that helped seal a 27-20 victory over the New York Giants.

"I mean, coulda, woulda, shoulda. You had five opportunities to come away with interceptions, and we had one," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said. "You guys saw the game. Those were in our hands. The expectation is we're going to make those plays."

The good news for Green Bay (6-3-1) heading into Sunday's matchup with the Minnesota Vikings (4-6) at Lambeau Field is that J.J. McCarthy is throwing interceptions at an alarming rate.

Not only has McCarthy been picked off eight times — including at least once in each of his five starts this season — but his 5.7% interception rate is the worst in the NFL among current starters.

"I think in some ways, you definitely are like, 'OK, there's going to be a lot of (opportunities)," Packers safety Xavier McKinney said. "But I also think that they have really good playmakers, where they can kind of make the game a little bit easier for him."

"From a back-end perspective, we've got to make sure that we're on our job, doing what we're supposed to do."

The Giants scored two of their three touchdowns on Sunday after a Green Bay defender dropped a potential interception. The missed opportunities also allowed New York to run 69 plays, the second-most for a Packers opponent this season.

Both McKinney and cornerback Keisean Nixon pointed out that Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell is one of the NFL's

top offensive play-callers. They expect O'Connell to do what he can to reduce the number of situations that could lead to a mistake by McCarthy.

The 22-year-old McCarthy, the No. 10 overall pick in the 2024 draft, was sidelined for his rookie season because of a knee injury.

Green Bay lost both of its matchups with Minnesota last season as Sam Darnold completed 74.7% of his passes for 652 yards for the Vikings with six touchdowns and two interceptions. So the Packers know they can't take McCarthy lightly.

McKinney said he didn't impose any punishments on his fellow defensive backs for their drops — Nixon blamed McKinney for tipping the one he couldn't hold onto — but emphasized how those missed opportunities can be costly.

He also believes the opportunities the defense had against the Giants are a sign of things to come.

"The picks are going to come.

Just, believe me when I tell you. The. Picks. Will. Come," McKinney said.

"It's just not all the way there right now. But they will come, and when they do, I'm going to come back to the camera like, 'I told you.' It's going to happen. Sometimes, you've got to be patient. And once they do come, we've just got to make them."

Notes: Running back Josh Jacobs, who bruised a knee against New York, was one of five players who didn't practice Wednesday. If Jacobs can't go against Minnesota, third-year back Emanuel Wilson would start in his place. ... Starting middle linebacker Quay Walker, who suffered a neck stinger against the Giants, also didn't practice. ... Green Bay hasn't yet opened up the 21-day practice window for wide receiver Jayden Reed, who remains on injured reserve after breaking his collarbone Sept. 11 against Washington.

"He's excited to get back," LaFleur said of Reed. "As am I."

Bradley breaks 1K points as No. 4 Arizona beats No. 3 UConn

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — Jaden Bradley scored 21 points, Motiejus Krivas made the go-ahead basket with 1:12 left and fourth-ranked Arizona beat No. 3 UConn 71-67 on Wednesday night.

Koa Peat had 16 points and 12 rebounds and Krivas finished with nine points and 14 rebounds as the Wildcats (5-0) outrebounded the Huskies by 20.

Freshman Eric Reibe had 15 points for UConn (4-1). He had a chance to tie the game when he was fouled in the lane with eight seconds left. His layup rolled off the rim and he missed both free throws. Tobe Awaka hit two free throws to ice the game.

Solo Ball had 14 points and Silas Demary Jr. added 13 for the Huskies, who played without

starting center Tarris Reed Jr. because of an ankle injury.

Arizona, which led by two points at halftime, held UConn to one field goal in the first 5½ minutes of the second half. The Wildcats took their first double-digit lead on a driving layup by Brayden Burries with 14:57 left before the Huskies began chipping away.

A 3-pointer by Alex Karaban with 4:38 to play pulled UConn within a point. Reibe tied the game with a 3-pointer before Jaylin Stewart's basket with 3:02 left gave the Huskies a 62-60 lead, their first since 17:14 remained in the first half.

It was a one-possession game for nearly 18 minutes in the first half. Arizona missed seven of its last nine shots in the first half as it squandered the opportunity to

take a commanding lead. A driving layup by Demary cut the lead to 35-33 with five seconds left in the first half.

No. 7 Michigan 86, Middle Tennessee 61: Yaxel Lendeborg had season highs with 25 points and 12 rebounds to lead the host Wolverines over the Blue Raiders.

Michigan (4-0) tuned up for next week's three-game tournament in Las Vegas, where it might face No. 2 Houston in a field with many AP Top 25 teams.

Middle Tennessee (3-1) went on a 13-2 run in the first half to pull within one and trailed by just six points at halftime before getting routed.

No. 11 Alabama 90, No. 8 Illinois 86: Labaron Philon scored 24 points, and the visiting Crimson Tide beat the Fighting Illini

at the United Center.

Philon made three 3-pointers and had five assists. Taylor Bol Bowen scored 12 and Aden Holloway finished with 11 points, helping Alabama (3-1) squeeze out a tight win in its third straight game against a top-10 team.

Andrej Stojakovic led Illinois (4-1) with 26 points, and Kylan Boswell had 22.

No. 22 Auburn 112, Jackson State 66: KeShawn Murphy had 19 points and seven rebounds, Filip Jovic added a career-high 18 points off the bench and host Auburn dominated Jackson State.

Elyjah Freeman chipped in 14 points, six rebounds and five assists for Auburn (4-1), which bounced back from its first loss of the season and improved to 41-0 against teams from the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

Thunder extend streak with win over Kings

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder won their seventh straight game to improve to 15-1, beating the Sacramento Kings 113-99 on Wednesday night.

Chet Holmgren had 21 points and Lu Dort scored all 14 of his points in the second half, including 11 in the fourth quarter for the defending champion Thunder. They have won all three matchups with the Kings.

Dennis Schroder scored 21 points and DeMar DeRozan added 17 for the Kings, who lost their seventh straight.

The Thunder started the season with a pair of double-overtime wins and had some close calls before finally losing to Portland. Since the loss, they have won every game — with an average margin of 20.3 points. All have been by double digits.

Gilgeous-Alexander worked some magic late in the third quarter. He banked in a mid-range jumper from near the right side of the free throw line and was fouled and made the free throw to put the

Thunder up 83-67. Oklahoma City took an 83-69 advantage into the fourth.

Rockets 114, Cavaliers 104: Alperen Sengun had 28 points and 11 rebounds, Kevin Durant scored 20 points, and Houston extended its winning streak to five with a road victory over Cleveland.

Aaron Holiday scored 14 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter for Houston, which is 10-1 since starting the season with two losses.

Raptors 121, 76ers 112: Brandon Ingram and RJ Barrett each scored 22 points and visiting Toronto won its fifth straight game, surging in the third quarter to beat Philadelphia.

The 76ers led 56-53 at halftime behind 15 points from Maxey. Toronto took the lead with an 18-7 run to start the third quarter, powered by seven points from Ingram. The Raptors outscored the 76ers 44-28 in the period.

Pacers 127, Hornets 118: Bennedict Mathurin scored 24 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, and Indiana snapped an eight-game losing streak with a home victory over Charlotte.

The Pacers, off to their worst

start in franchise history with 12 losses in 13 previous games, pulled away in the second quarter as Mathurin scored nine of his team's last 11 points for a 70-54 halftime lead.

Heat 110, Warriors 96: Norman Powell scored 25 points, Bam Adebayo returned to score 20 and visiting Miami pulled away late to top extremely short-handed Golden State.

Former Warriors forward Andrew Wiggins scored 17 and Kel'el Ware grabbed 16 rebounds for Miami, which outscored Golden State 38-22 in the fourth quarter.

Nuggets 125, Pelicans 118: Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds, and visiting Denver defeated New Orleans.

Rookie Derik Queen, who started opposite Jokic at center, scored a season-high 30 points to go with nine rebounds, and Trey Murphy III added 23 points for the Pelicans, who lost their seventh straight and fell to 0-3 under interim coach James Borrego.

Timberwolves 120, Wizards 109: Julius Randle had 32 points and 10 rebounds and Minnesota held off a late rally by Washington

to secure a home victory.

The Timberwolves, who have won six of their last seven games, were without forward Jaden McDaniels, who has a sprained left wrist and missed his first game in nearly two years. Naz Reid had 28 points off the bench.

Bulls 122, Trail Blazers 121: Nikola Vucevic hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer and Chicago held off a furious comeback attempt by Portland Trail Blazers for a road victory.

Vucevic finished with 27 points and Coby White had 25 off the bench for the Bulls, who led by 21 points in the fourth quarter.

Knicks 113, Mavericks 111: Jalen Brunson had a game-high 28 points in his return from a two-game absence, Landry Shamet scored a pair of 3-pointers in the final 1:02 and drew a crucial charging foul in the final second, and visiting New York beat Dallas.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 18 points and 14 rebounds while Josh Hart had 16 points and 10 rebounds off the bench for the Knicks, who won for the first time in five road games.

Wallstedt's goaltending helps lift Wild over Hurricanes

Associated Press

ST, PAUL, Minn. — Jesper Wallstedt stopped a career-high 42 shots and three more in a shootout, Matt Boldy scored in regulation and had the lone goal in the tiebreaker in the Minnesota Wild's 4-3 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night.

The Hurricanes outshot Minnesota 45-18 and scored with 1:06 left with their net empty to force overtime. But Wallstedt's third great showing in a row and 24 blocked shots helped the Wild improve to 5-0-1 in their past six games.

Jackson Blake scored twice for the Hurricanes, including late from the crease on a stuff-in that barely crossed the goal line

and had to be reviewed. The Fargo, N.D., native had two more chances in overtime, including a breakaway.

Wallstedt then kept Seth Jarvis, Andrei Svechnikov and Taylor Hall from scoring in the shootout. Boldy's backhander off a deke got past Frederik Andersen to help give Minnesota its second shootout victory this season.

Mats Zuccarello scored his first goal of the season on a breakaway 15 seconds into the third to make it 3-1. Zuccarello missed Minnesota's first 15 games because of lower-body injury, returning to the lineup Nov. 7.

Wallstedt was particularly stingy early in the second period,

when he made nine saves in less than seven minutes. It took Blake's net-front deflection with 5:56 left to finally solve the 23-year-old rookie from Sweden.

Wallstedt entered Wednesday as the only NHL netminder with more than one shutout this season.

Capitals 7, Oilers 4: Ryan Leonard had two goals and Alex Ovechkin also scored, helping host Washington beat Edmonton.

John Carlson and Connor McMichael each had three assists for Washington in its second straight win.

The Oilers dropped to 2-3-0 on a seven-game trip.

Flames 6, Sabres 2: Morgan Frost slipped Jonathan Huber-

deau's cross-crease pass past Colten Ellis to break a tie at 2:02 of the third and visiting NHL-worst Calgary beat Buffalo.

Backup Devin Cooley made 28 saves for his first NHL victory since April 2024 with San Jose to help Calgary rebound from a 5-2 loss at Chicago on Tuesday night with starter Dustin Wolf in goal. The Flames improved to 6-13-3.

Ducks 4, Bruins 3: Ian Moore scored the tiebreaking goal with 3:35 to play, and Lukas Dostal made 36 saves in Anaheim's home victory over Boston.

Jansen Harkins. Radko Gudas and Ryan Strome also scored for the first-place Ducks, who have won nine of 12 after sweeping their season series with the Bruins.