

## Merck touts experimental COVID-19 pill

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON—Drugmaker Merck said Friday that its experimental COVID-19 pill reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half in people recently infected with the coronavirus and that it would soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize its use.

If cleared, the drug would be the first pill shown to treat COVID-19, a potentially major advance in efforts to fight the pandemic. All COVID-19 therapies now authorized in the U.S. require an IV or injection.

Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said early results showed patients who received the drug, called molnupiravir, within five days of COVID-19 symptoms had about half the rate of hospitalization and death as patients who received a dummy pill. The study tracked 775 adults with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who were considered higher risk for severe disease due to health problems such as obesity, diabetes or heart disease.

Among patients taking molnupiravir, 7.3% were either hospitalized or died at the end of 30 days, compared with 14.1% of those getting

the dummy pill. There were no deaths in the drug group after that time period compared with eight deaths in the placebo group, according to Merck. The results were released by the company and have not been peer reviewed by outside experts, the usual procedure for vetting new medical research. Merck said it plans to present them at a future medical meeting.

An independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early because the interim results were so strong. That is typical when early results so clearly show a treatment works that there is no need for further testing before applying for authorization. Company executives said they plan to submit the data for review by the Food and Drug Administration in coming days. Once the submission is complete, the FDA could make a decision within weeks — and, if approved, the drug could be on the market soon after.

“It exceeded what I thought the drug might be able to do in this clinical trial,” said Dr. Dean Li, vice president of Merck Research Laboratories. “When you see a 50% reduction

in hospitalization or death that’s a substantial clinical impact.”

Side effects were reported by both groups in the Merck trial, but they were slightly more common among the group that received a dummy pill. The company did not specify the problems.

Patients take the pill twice a day for five days to complete a course of treatment.

Earlier study results showed the drug did not benefit patients who were already hospitalized with severe disease.

The U.S. has approved one antiviral drug, remdesivir, specifically for COVID-19, and allowed emergency use of three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But all the drugs have to be given by IV or injection at hospitals or medical clinics, and supplies have been stretched by the latest surge of the delta variant.

Health experts including the top U.S. infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci have long called for a convenient pill that patients could take when COVID-19 symptoms first appear, much the way the standard flu medication Tamiflu helps fight influenza.

## Suicide rates in the military increase again in 2020

**BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON—The suicide rate for active-duty troops rose again in 2020, according to the Pentagon’s annual suicide report, and defense officials said Thursday they do not know why.

About 29 per 100,000 active-duty troops died by suicide in 2020, up from about 26 in 2019 and about 25 in 2018. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in a statement Thursday described the upward trend as “troubling” and called for a greater effort to tackle issues of mental health in the military.

“We cannot bring back those we have lost, but we hope that we can in some way honor their memory by doing more — right now — to prevent future tragedies from suicide among our wider DOD family,” he said.

In total, 580 active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops died by suicide in 2020 — up from 504 in 2019 and 543 in 2018, according to the report. Of those, about 103

were Army National Guard members, representing a jump of about 35% from 2019 numbers. Active-duty soldiers also saw a nearly 20% rise.

The report also concluded enlisted and young male service members are at a higher risk of suicide than their elder peers and commissioned officers, said Dr. Karin Orvis, director of the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. Though enlisted men made up about 42% of the military population in 2020, they accounted for about 63% of all military suicides that year, according to the report.

“In short, we see continued heightened risk for our young and enlisted service members,” Orvis said, noting young men are at a higher risk of suicide nationwide.

The report also tracked military family suicide rates, which found about 53% of all military spouses who end their lives are male despite there being significantly more female military spouses than male.

This is the third year that the military pro-

duced an annual report about suicide in the ranks, which Maj. Gen. Clement S. Coward, acting executive director for the Pentagon’s Office of Force Resiliency, said helps to leverage “best scientific practices — collecting evidence, analyzing trends, and so forth” to develop suicide prevention strategies.

To help tackle the issue, the Pentagon is “implementing a new policy to screen for depression and suicide risk during primary care visits” at military hospitals and clinics for all patients who are 11 years old and older, Orvis said.

“We’re also exploring measures on how to better understand help-seeking behaviors, perceived barriers to care and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among our military spouses,” she said.

While service members are exposed to trauma in their work, Orvis said there was little difference between the rate of suicides among troops who deployed overseas and those who did not.

# 53K Afghan evacuees remain at US bases

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — More than 2,600 Afghan evacuees have resettled in the United States while about 53,000 await processing at military bases in the United States, the top general for U.S. Northern Command said Thursday.

The military has been housing Afghan evacuees at eight installations in the U.S. since late July when evacuations began in Afghanistan. As of Thursday, the bases have a capacity of 64,000, said Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, the top commander for U.S. forces in North America.

An additional 14,000 evacuees at overseas staging bases are still awaiting flights to the U.S. after they were halted in early Septem-

ber due to a measles outbreak. But with space for just 11,000 more at stateside installations, VanHerck said more evacuees need to be processed through the system and resettled so more can be moved into the eight bases in the United States.

“When you do the math, you’ll see that we’re relying on the output to ensure that we have enough capacity for the additional remaining Afghans coming this way,” the general said.

VanHerck could not give an end date to the evacuee housing mission, dubbed Operation Allies Welcome, but he said the military would continue to provide shelter and food for evacuees as long as it’s necessary.

After the measles outbreak, the military vaccinated all evacuees against that disease. Medical workers are also working to

vaccinate the Afghans against influenza and the coronavirus.

It was the general’s first time briefing reporters on the mission since a grand jury indicted two Afghan evacuees at Fort McCoy, Wis., with drug charges and a female service member reported “a small group of male evacuees” assaulted her last week at Fort Bliss, Texas.

While VanHerck acknowledged the allegations, he said Afghan evacuees have committed significantly less crime than the U.S. population over the same time period.

“For example, in six weeks in Operation Allies Welcome in a population of 53,000, there have been eight reported cases of robbery and theft,” VanHerck said. “An average six-week period in a similar place is in excess of 150.”

## 27K ideas given for renaming bases

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Among more than 27,000 public submissions of new names for Army bases now honoring Confederate generals were a number of “quite intense” proposals that disparaged the Congress-mandated renaming process, the leader of the commission undertaking the effort said Thursday.

“There are some folks who are distinctly opposed [to renaming bases named for Confederates] and the verbiage they used is quite deliberate,” said Michelle Howard, the retired Navy admiral and chairwoman of the Naming Commission. “They make it clear that they do not support the commission.”

Howard said the majority of suggestions would be taken into consideration, including 5,000 names proposed multiple times by members of the public. The eight-member commission, which began work in the spring, is charged with providing recommendations to Congress by October 2022. Lawmakers will then instruct the defense secretary to change the names of bases, ships, buildings and other military assets that commemorate the Confederacy.

In addition to at least nine Army bases, Howard estimated there were thousands of items across the military that likely qualified to be changed.

Commissioners spent the summer months visiting several of the Army bases named for Confederate generals and other military institutions with Confederate-linked items, Howard said. They met with military and civilian leaders — including elected officials, business leaders and local nongovernmental organizations — in those communities in an effort to hear directly from those who would be most impacted by the name changes.

Howard said the public submissions include names that would honor women and people of color and others. She said Sherman and Benavidez were among the most common names submitted. Sherman would honor Union Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, who was perhaps most famous for his 1864 scorched-earth march through Georgia. Benavidez would honor Green Beret Staff Sgt. Roy Benavidez, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for valor in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. She did not tie either name to a specific base on Thursday, however Benavidez’ name has been suggested publicly for Fort Hood.

The commission will accept public suggestions for military installations through Dec. 1.

Suggestions can be submitted at [www.thenamingcommission.gov](http://www.thenamingcommission.gov).

## Marine injured in Afghanistan has 20th surgery

*The Sacramento Bee*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Tyler Andrews of Folsom, Calif., a Marine critically injured in Afghanistan, is still fighting for his life.

Andrews, 23, underwent his 20th surgery this week as part of ongoing treatment for “catastrophic” injuries he suffered as a result of a suicide bomber attack on Aug. 26 at Kabul’s Hamid Karzai International Airport.

“Tyler is the most severely wounded to have survived,” said Warfighter Overwatch, a veterans’ organization supporting Andrews and his family, in a social media post. “With two amputations, we are lucky Tyler is still with us. He is a miracle.”

Andrews was among 18 U.S. service members injured in the bombing as he and others helped evacuate Americans and Afghan refugees. The blast killed 13 service members.

Following the attack, Andrews was transported to Germany for medical treatment. His mother, Tiffany Andrews joined her son there and has been at his side every step of the way, Warfighter Overwatch said.

Andrews was transferred to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center earlier this month.

# Biden signs bill to avert partial shutdown

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — With only hours to spare, President Joe Biden on Thursday evening signed legislation that would avoid a partial federal shutdown and keep the government funded through Dec. 3. Congress had passed the bill earlier Thursday.

The back-to-back votes by the Senate and then the House averted one crisis, but delays on another continue as the political parties dig in on a dispute over how to raise the government's borrowing cap before the United States risks a potentially catastrophic default.

The House approved the short-term funding measure by a 254-175 vote not long after Senate passage in a 65-35 vote. A large majority of Republicans in both chambers voted against it. The legislation was needed to keep the government running once the current

budget year ended at midnight Thursday. Passage will buy lawmakers more time to craft the spending measures that will fund federal agencies and the programs they administer.

The work to keep the government open and running served as the backdrop during a chaotic day for Democrats as they struggled to get Biden's top domestic priorities over the finish line, including a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure bill at risk of stalling in the House.

"It is a glimmer of hope as we go through many, many other activities," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

With their energy focused on Biden's agenda, Democrats backed down from a showdown over the debt limit in the government funding bill, deciding to uncouple the bor-

rowing ceiling at the insistence of Republicans. If that cap is not raised by Oct. 18, the U.S. probably will face a financial crisis and economic recession, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Republicans say Democrats have the votes to raise the debt limit on their own, and Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky is insisting they do so.

The short-term spending legislation will also provide about \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for those recovering from Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters. Some \$10 billion of that money will help farmers cover crop losses from drought, wildfires and hurricanes. An additional \$6.3 billion will help support the resettlement of Afghanistan evacuees from the 20-year war between the U.S. and the Taliban.

## After setback, Dems trying to scale back \$3.5T plan

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Democrats were back at it Friday, doggedly determined to rescue a scaled-back version of President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion government overhaul and salvage a related public works bill after a long night of frantic negotiations resulted in no deal.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met privately with the party's lawmakers for a morning session to assess the path forward. She had earlier vowed there would be a "vote today" on the companion \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that is popular but has become snared in the broader debate. But the situation was highly uncertain, and no schedule was set.

Holdout Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia sank hopes for a compromise late Thursday, despite hours of shuttle diplomacy with White House aides on Capitol Hill, when he refused to budge on his demands for

a smaller overall package, around \$1.5 trillion. That's too meager for progressive lawmakers who are refusing to vote on the public works measure without a commitment to Biden's broader framework on the bigger bill.

Talks swirled over a compromise in the \$2 trillion range. Because of the ongoing negotiations, Biden opted to remain in Washington on Friday instead of traveling to his Delaware home as he often does on weekends. His public approval rating has dropped, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center.

"We understand that we're going to have to get everybody on board in order to be able to close this deal," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "We're waiting for that."

The president and his party are facing a potentially embarrassing setback — and per-

haps a politically devastating collapse of the whole enterprise — if they cannot resolve the standoff.

At immediate risk was the promised vote on the first piece of Biden's proposal, the slimmer \$1 trillion public works bill, a roads-and-bridges package.

Biden's bigger proposal is a years-in-the-making collection of Democratic priorities, a sweeping rewrite of the nation's tax and spending policies that would essentially raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy and plow that money back into government health care, education and other programs, touching the lives of countless Americans.

Biden says the ultimate price tag is zero, because the tax revenue would cover the spending costs — higher rates on businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and individuals earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

## Poll: Biden's approval slumps following slew of crises

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's popularity has slumped after a slew of challenges in recent weeks at home and abroad for the leader who pledged to bring the country together and restore competence in government, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Fifty percent now say they approve of

Biden, while 49% disapprove. Fifty-four percent approved in August, and 59% did in July. The results come as Americans process the harried and deadly evacuation from Afghanistan, mounted border patrol agents charging at Haitian refugees, the threat of the coronavirus with its delta variant and the legislative drama of Biden trying to negotiate his economic, infrastructure and tax policies through Con-

gress.

Since July, Biden's approval rating has dipped slightly among Democrats (from 92% to 85%) and among independents who don't lean toward either party (from 62% to 38%). Just 11% of Republicans approve of the president, which is similar to July.

Approval also dipped somewhat among both white Americans (49% to 42%) and Black Americans (86% to 64%).

# Texas abortion law returns to court

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal judge heard arguments Friday over whether Texas can leave in place the nation's most restrictive abortion law, which has banned most abortions and sent women racing to get care beyond the borders of the second-most populous state in the U.S.

A lawsuit filed by the Biden administration seeks to land the first legal blow against the state law that has thus far withstood an early wave of challenges, including one reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court, which allowed it to remain in force.

The law is now in the hands of U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman, an appointee of former President Barack Obama. The Justice De-

partment wants Pitman to immediately stop Texas from banning abortions once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks.

That is before some women know they are pregnant, and there are no exceptions in cases of rape or incest. Enforcement is solely left up to private citizens, who are entitled to at least \$10,000 in damages if they are successful in suing not just abortion providers who violate the law, but anyone found to have helped a woman get an abortion.

"A state may not ban abortions at six weeks. Texas knew this, but it wanted a six-week ban anyway, so the state resorted to an unprecedented scheme of vigilante justice that was designed to scare abortion providers and others who might help women exercise their consti-

tutional rights," Justice Department attorney Brian Netter told the court.

The law was signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May and took effect Sept. 1.

"This is not some kind of vigilante scheme," said Will Thompson, defending the law for the Texas Attorney General's Office. "This is a scheme that uses the normal, lawful process of justice in Texas."

It is unclear how soon Pitman will decide. It is also unclear how quickly any of Texas' nearly two dozen abortion clinics would move to resume normal operations if the law is set aside. Texas officials would likely seek a swift reversal from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which previously allowed the restrictions to take effect.

## Big drop in teen vaping reported during pandemic

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Teen vaping plummeted this year as many U.S. students were forced to learn from home during the pandemic, according to a government report released Thursday.

U.S. health officials urged caution in interpreting the numbers, which were collected using an online questionnaire for the first time. But outside experts said the big decrease in electronic cigarette use is likely real and makes sense given that young people often vape socially.

"They found a dramatic drop from last year and it's hard to imagine that doesn't represent a real decrease in use among high school and middle school students," said Dr. Nancy Rigotti of Harvard University, who

was not involved in the research.

In the national survey, 11% of high school students and less than 3% of middle school students said they were recent users of e-cigarettes and other vaping products, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

That's a roughly 40% drop from last year, when nearly 20% of high school students and 5% of middle schoolers said they'd recently vaped. If this year's numbers hold up, it would be the second big drop in a row, from a peak of 28% for high schoolers in 2019.

Even before the pandemic, a number of new restrictions were curtailing underage use of e-cigarettes. In late 2019, a new federal law raised the purchase age for all tobacco

and vaping products from 18 to 21. Shortly afterward, the FDA banned nearly all flavors from small, cartridge-based e-cigarettes, which first sparked the teen vaping craze. Also, some kids may have been scared off by an outbreak of vaping-related illnesses and deaths; most were tied to a filler in black market vaping liquids that contained THC, the chemical in marijuana that makes users feel high.

Previously, the survey was always conducted in classrooms. This year's was done online from January through May to accommodate students both at home and in school. Anti-tobacco advocates point out that students who completed the survey in school reported higher rates of vaping — 16% compared to 8% for students learning at home.

## Senators push Facebook on Instagram policies for youth

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senators fired a barrage of criticism Thursday at a Facebook executive over the social-networking giant's handling of internal research on how its Instagram photo-sharing platform can harm teens.

The lawmakers accused Facebook of concealing the negative findings about Instagram and demanded a commitment from the company to

make changes.

During testimony before a Senate Commerce subcommittee, Antigone Davis, Facebook's head of global safety, defended Instagram's efforts to protect young people using its platform. She disputed the way a recent newspaper story describes what the research shows.

"We care deeply about the safety and security of the people on our platform," Davis

said. "We take the issue very seriously ... We have put in place multiple protections to create safe and age-appropriate experiences for people between the ages of 13 and 17."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the subcommittee chairman, wasn't convinced.

"I don't understand how you can deny that Instagram is exploiting young users for its own profit," he told Davis.

The panel is examining

Facebook's use of information from its own researchers that could indicate potential harm for some of its young users, especially girls, while it publicly downplayed the negative impacts. For some of the Instagram-devoted teens, the peer pressure generated by the visually focused app led to mental-health and body-image problems, and in some cases, eating disorders and suicidal thoughts, the research showed.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Man opens door of plane, jumps onto wing

**FL** MIAMI — A passenger on an American Airlines flight that landed at Miami International Airport opened an emergency door and walked onto the wing as the plane reached the terminal, authorities said.

Flight 920 from Cali, Colombia, had just landed in Miami on Wednesday night when the incident happened.

“The customer was immediately detained by law enforcement. We thank our team members and law enforcement for their professionalism and quick action,” American Airlines said in a statement.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection took the man into custody without incident. WPLG reported that the incident did not cause any delays and all other passengers on the plane were able to leave without any issues.

### Repairs make bridge safer for vehicles, bats

**KY** FRANKFORT — A deteriorating Kentucky bridge that was home to thousands of endangered gray bats has been repaired in a way that makes the span safer for motorists and wildlife, officials said.

A project team from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make a habitat-focused design as crews replaced the bridge superstructure with new beams, deck and railing and made repairs to the existing abutment and piers, state officials said Wednesday

in a statement. Repairs on the rural, two-lane span were made in a way that provides more roosting space for the bats.

After construction, officials estimated more than 1,000 bats had returned to the bridge. Officials didn’t release the span’s exact location in an effort to prevent interference with the bat habitat.

### Orange lobster saved, donated to aquarium

**AZ** PHOENIX — A rare orange lobster has found a home at an Arizona aquarium instead of becoming someone’s dinner.

The unique lobster was discovered over the summer by staff at the Japanese restaurant Nobu in Scottsdale, ABC15 reported Monday.

The restaurant staff contacted the Odysea Aquarium and ultimately donated the crustacean.

Dave Peranteau, the Odysea’s director of animal care, said the chance of finding an orange lobster in the wild is one in 30 million and the aquarium is really fortunate to have it in its collection now.

Due to its bright coloring, experts say the lobster would be considered an easy target for predators in the wild.

They also say lobsters can live up to 100 years and grow to more than 3 feet long and weigh more than 40 pounds.

### Man dies of rabies after an apparent bat bite

**IL** SPRINGFIELD — A northern Illinois man has died of rabies after apparently being bitten by a bat — the

first human case of rabies in the state since 1954, health officials reported Tuesday.

The diagnosis has been confirmed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Illinois Department of Public Health said in a release.

The man’s name was not released. Officials said he was in his 80s.

He woke up in mid-August and found a bat on his neck. The bat was captured and later tested positive for rabies. The man declined to begin post-exposure rabies treatment, health officials said.

### 3 sentenced to prison for bank robberies

**TN** MEMPHIS — Three people have been sentenced to federal prison for using tracking devices and zip ties to abduct bank employees and steal more than \$600,000 from Tennessee banks.

Last month, U.S. District Judge Sheryl Lipman sentenced Travis Jackson, 37, to more than 45 years in prison, the U.S. attorney’s office in Memphis said in a news release Wednesday.

Also in September, Lipman sentenced Antonio Johnson, 44, to 36 years in prison, and Shalundra Johnson, 39, to more than 11 years in prison, the U.S. attorney’s office said.

The trio was convicted of kidnapping and bank robbery charges in June.

In three separate robberies of Memphis banks in 2018 and 2019, bank employees were restrained in zip ties and taken from their homes at gunpoint. The defendants forced the employees to take them to the

banks, where they stole money.

### Man throws Molotov cocktail into Dems’ HQ

**TX** AUSTIN — An arson investigation was underway after a man wearing an American flag bandanna threw a Molotov cocktail into the headquarters of the county Democratic Party in Austin.

The incendiary device did not ignite when it was thrown at the Travis County Democratic Party headquarters at about 2 a.m. Wednesday, Austin Fire Capt. Brandon Jennings said. A stack of papers was set on fire, but that was quickly put out by employees of a neighboring business using a fire extinguisher.

No one was in the office at the time, Travis County Democratic Party Chairwoman Katie Naranjo said, but the incident was caught on security cameras. A note was left with a politically motivated threat, Naranjo said.

### Invasive and toxic ‘devil weed’ found on island

**HI** HILO — An invasive plant species that is toxic to cattle and highly flammable has been found on Hawaii’s Big Island.

Chromolaena odorata, also known as “devil weed,” was found on the east side of the Big Island earlier this year, the Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported.

First detected in the state on Oahu in 2011, officials worry that the invasive plant could harm the cattle industry and fuel future wildfires on the Big Island. Devil weed has small, sticky seeds that can be transported easily.

— From Associated Press

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# Bengals' McPherson sinks Jaguars with game-winning FG

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Joe Burrow spoiled Urban Meyer's return to Ohio and kept his former college coach winless on an NFL sideline.

Burrow engineered four second-half scoring drives while passing for 348 yards and two touchdowns and the Bengals overcame a 14-0 halftime deficit to beat Meyer and the Jacksonville Jaguars 24-21 on Thursday night.

Evan McPherson won it with a 35-yard field goal as time ran out, culminating a 10-play, 73-yard drive that consumed the last 5½ minutes.

Burrow, the top overall draft pick in 2020 out of LSU after transferring from Ohio State, outdueled the 2021 top pick, Jacksonville quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who looked at halftime as if he might direct his first NFL win and create a happy homecoming for his coach. Meyer grew up in northeastern Ohio, played safety at the University of Cincinnati and won the 2014 national championship coaching at Ohio State.

The Bengals (3-1) were shut out in the first half and couldn't get running back Joe Mixon loose. McPherson missed a 43-yard field-goal attempt, and Cincinnati punted on the next three possessions.

"We did not play great football; they generally beat us in all three phases" in the first half, Cincinnati coach Zac Taylor said. "But we get a whole second half to play, so there was no reason to panic. Nobody did. Everyone was calm, cool and collected. They knew we were going to get the ball to start the half where we are

usually pretty efficient."

Cincinnati had two quick scoring drives to open the second. James Robinson's second rushing touchdown put Jacksonville up again early in the fourth quarter. Burrow answered with a 31-yard touchdown pass to tight end C.J. Uzomah to tie it again.

After the Jaguars punted, Burrow set up McPherson, who had the winning kick in two of Cincinnati's three victories.

"I'm really happy with my performance tonight," Burrow said. "I'm going to keep building on this and getting better and better."

The Jaguars scored in the first half on a 6-yard plunge by Robinson and a 7-yard keeper by Lawrence.

It could have been worse for Cincinnati at the break. Lawrence was stopped by linebacker Logan Wilson on fourth-and-goal at the 1 with under a minute left in the half.

"When you control the game like we did in the first — and it should've been 21-0," Lawrence said. "The second half, we didn't do a good job of holding on to the ball. They scored the quick touchdown and then we went three-and-out."

Lawrence was 17-for-24 for 204 yards.

"Trevor took care of the ball," Meyer said. "Trevor played his best game. He's coming alive."

Tyler Boyd had nine receptions for 118 yards for the Bengals. Uzomah had five catches for 95 yards and two touchdowns.

Robinson rushed for a season-high 78 yards.

# Arkansas roars into Georgia for Top 10 SEC showdown

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Arkansas coach Sam Pittman has been careful to keep his soaring Razorbacks grounded.

"It's hard to get the big head because somebody is going to knock you out if you're not prepared for them and our team understands that," Pittman said this week with the Razorbacks off to a 4-0 start for the first time in 18 years.

That knockout alert is well-timed as No. 8 Arkansas prepares for Saturday's visit to No. 2 Georgia in a matchup of undefeated Southeastern Conference teams.

Georgia (4-0, 2-0 SEC) has leaned on the nation's top defense to outscore opponents 174-23. Like Pittman, Georgia coach Kirby Smart is wary that overconfidence could lead to an unpleasant reality check.

"I don't know that we are playing to our full potential," Smart said Wednesday when asked about the strong start by his defense.

"We are going to face better offenses than we have already faced, so we are not really buying into all that hype. We have to play. We have to play better. We are going to play better people than we have played, so I think that verdict is still out. These guys will either answer the bell or they won't because we are going to play against a really good team and a really good offense Saturday."

Arkansas moved up the Top 25 poll after last week's 20-10 win over No. 7 Texas A&M. The Razorbacks have emerged as a surprise of the SEC in their second season under Pittman, the former Georgia offensive line coach.

The Razorbacks didn't win an SEC game in 2018 or 2019 before finishing 3-7 last season. Pittman's Razorbacks already have claimed two wins over top-15 teams this season, including a crushing 40-21 defeat

of No. 15 Texas that sent Arkansas fans rushing onto the field.

## Feel the love

Pittman worked four years on Smart's staff before moving to Arkansas. The Bulldogs took a 37-10 win at Arkansas to open last season in Pittman's debut, but this will be the first return to Athens for Pittman and his wife, Jamie.

"We're sure looking forward to going back to Georgia," Pittman said. "The people of Georgia were so kind to Jamie and I when we were there."

Pittman said he has "a lot of good memories" about Smart "and the way he treated me."

Smart said Pittman and his staff "have done a tremendous job creating a new culture and energy there at Arkansas. I would expect nothing less from him. I'm very thankful for what he did with our organization before he left."

## Big-play threat

Arkansas quarterback KJ Jefferson is expected to start after missing most of the second half of the win over Texas A&M with a bruised knee. He returned for the final drive.

Jefferson threw an 85-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Treyton Burks, his favorite target, last week. Smart said the deep passes are set up by the Razorbacks' running game.

"When you run the ball successfully, you create one-on-one opportunities and shots," Smart said. "They've done that well. I also think their quarterback does an unbelievable job of throwing the deep ball. That is probably the best throw that KJ makes. Getting the timing on the deep ball. They have some really big wideouts that create matchup issues."

Jefferson averages 18.4 yards per completion, the top mark of any Football Bowl Subdivision quarterback.

# Source: NBA vaccination rate at 95%

*Associated Press*

MIAMI — The NBA has seen a rise in vaccination rates in recent days when factoring in those players who have received at least one of the necessary shots, a person with direct knowledge of the situation said Thursday.

The leaguewide rate is now around 95% when counting those who are now at least in the vaccination process, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither the NBA nor the National Basketball Players Association released the figure publicly.

Based on a rough count of nearly 600 players in the league right now for training camps — that figure will be closer to 500 when the regular season begins Oct. 19 and rosters get trimmed

— the 95% figure would suggest that, on average, one player per team is unvaccinated.

ESPN first reported the 95% figure. Earlier in the week, AP reported that the leaguewide rate entering the week was 90% and climbing.

The NBA gave teams tentative health and safety protocols for the season Tuesday, detailing how players who haven't gotten the COVID-19 vaccination will be tested far more often than their vaccinated colleagues and face a slew of other restrictions.

Among the rules for unvaccinated players: They will not be able to eat in the same room with vaccinated teammates or staff, must have lockers as far away from vaccinated players as possible, and must stay masked and at least 6 feet away

from all other attendees in any team meeting.

Further, unvaccinated players will be “required to remain at their residence when in their home market,” teams were told in the draft of the rules, a copy of which was obtained by AP. They will also need to stay on team hotel properties when on the road. In both cases, there are limited permissible exceptions — such as going to buy groceries, taking children to school and the like.

Nearly half of the league's teams have said in recent days that they are already fully vaccinated or on the cusp of hitting that threshold. Other players, such as Golden State's Andrew Wiggins and Washington's Bradley Beal, have said they remain unvaccinated.

Phoenix's Devin Booker —

who has missed the start of camp after testing positive for COVID-19 — has not disclosed his vaccination status. Neither has Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving, though not appearing in person at Nets media day in New York on Monday would suggest that he is unvaccinated.

Local laws in San Francisco and New York mean that players for the Warriors, Nets and New York Knicks will have to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to play home games. And if players like Wiggins or Irving are unable to play at home because of their vaccination status, they will not be paid for those games, the NBA said earlier this week.

The first preseason game of the season is Sunday when the Nets visit the Los Angeles Lakers.

## NCAA considers holding both Final Fours in same city

*Associated Press*

The NCAA is exploring holding a joint Final Four with the men and women's basketball tournaments holding their semifinals and title games in the same city on the same weekend, though it would not happen until at least 2027 with sites already locked in through 2026.

Combining the tournaments was one of the recommendations stemming from an external review of gender equity issues of the tournaments. The report released in August was sparked by outrage at the disparities between amenities at the two tournaments, including weight rooms and other features.

The NCAA earlier this week said the women's tournament can start using “March Madness” in marketing and branding beginning this season, addressing another sharp criticism raised this year.

A combined Final Four is likely to be more controversial and

the idea does not have universal support. But the NCAA said Thursday it will look into the details.

“We are committed to continuing discussion about the concept of conducting both the Women's and Men's Final Fours in the same city in the next bid cycle for each of these premier NCAA Championships,” said Nina King, chair of the Division I Women's Basketball Committee. “Finding ways to address the gender equity issues that have come to exist through the years between the Division I Women's and Men's Basketball Championships is a priority, and we are dedicated to making impactful changes.”

Tom Burnett, chair of the Division I Men's Basketball Committee, said the committee meetings have been productive.

“If both committees agree that the recommendation of having both Final Fours in the same city is the best option, we are com-

mitted to seeing that it will be executed with comprehensive planning,” he said.

Coaches are split on the idea. The Women's Basketball Coaches Association did a survey of its coaches last month on the recommendations in the report and only 55% were in favor of a combined Final Four. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the survey results, which included participation from 345 of 356 WBCA members.

Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer said she supported exploring the idea if it is done correctly.

“If they have the hotels correctly with both number one seeds staying in the same place and the facilities right, I think it's doable,” she said. “I don't think you could say you're going to do it and not work at it. You have to iron out the details.”

VanDerveer also said she has no issue if the women's Final Four is played in a basketball arena in the city while the men's

game is played in a much larger dome.

“I think we should recognize that the sports are in two different places,” she said. “Do what's best for growing women's basketball. Women's basketball is not where men's basketball is because we started later and haven't been promoted as heavily. We have catching up to do. You're in an 18-20,000 seat arena we can fill it up. I don't know we're selling out the dome yet.”

Most of the other ideas suggested by the report had over 90% approval from the coaches in the WBCA survey.

Last season, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the entire women's tournament was played at a neutral site in the San Antonio arena. The men's tournament was played entirely in Indiana. The NCAA faced a backlash as players called out disparities on social media and later apologized before launching a review.

# Correa, Astros top Rays, clinch AL West

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Carlos Correa hit his career-high 25th homer with a three-run shot and the Houston Astros clinched the AL West with a 3-2 win over the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday night.

It's the fourth division title in five seasons and 10th overall for the Astros. They're in the playoffs for the fifth consecutive season, extending a franchise record.

Manager Dusty Baker's Astros will open the AL Division Series on Oct. 7 against the Chicago White Sox — home field for that best-of-five matchup is still to be determined.

**Braves 5, Phillies 3:** Ian Anderson turned in another dominant pitching performance, Jorge Soler and Austin Riley homered, and host Atlanta won its fourth straight NL East title by completing a sweep of Philadelphia.

They open the best-of-five Division Series at the NL Central champion Brewers on Oct. 8.

**Dodgers 8, Padres 3:** Moo-

kie Betts and Corey Seager homered back-to-back in the first inning, Justin Turner and AJ Pollock did the same in the fourth, and host Los Angeles completed a three-game sweep of San Diego.

The defending World Series champions remained two games behind NL West-leading San Francisco after the Giants beat Arizona 5-4.

**Giants 5, Diamondbacks 4:** LaMonte Wade Jr. singled home the winning run with one out in the ninth inning and host San Francisco held its two-game lead in the NL West, beating Arizona.

The Giants posted their 105th victory — one off the franchise record set in 1904 — and kept their edge over the second-place Los Angeles Dodgers going into the final weekend of the season.

**Orioles 6, Red Sox 2:** Boston was dealt another blow in its postseason push, with Ryan Mountcastle hitting a three-run homer in the third inning of host Baltimore's win.

The Red Sox fell into a tie

with Seattle for the American League's second wild card.

**Yankees 6, Blue Jays 2:** Aaron Judge hit two of his team's five home runs and visiting New York extended its AL wild-card lead by beating Toronto.

Gleyber Torres and Anthony Rizzo also connected off Blue Jays starter Robbie Ray (13-7), and Brett Gardner added a solo homer as New York (91-68) slimmed its magic number to clinch a postseason spot to two.

**Cardinals 4, Brewers 3:** Rookie Dylan Carlson homered from each side of the plate and host St. Louis beat Milwaukee.

J.A. Happ (10-8) gave up three runs on nine hits and struck out seven in 6 ½ innings, his longest outing since St. Louis acquired him from the Minnesota Twins on July 30.

**Mets 12, Marlins 3:** Michael Conforto hit a pair of run-scoring singles, doubled and made a shoestring catch in what might have been his final game at Citi Field for New York, which routed visiting Miami.

Pete Alonso homered twice

for the Mets, raising his season total to 37 — just 12 at Citi Field. Francisco Lindor hit a grand slam in the eighth inning.

**Rangers 7, Angels 6:** Adolis Garcia set a Texas rookie record for home runs and RBIs in a series-clinching win over visiting Los Angeles.

Angels star Shohei Ohtani went 2-for-5 with a double and his AL-leading eighth triple.

**Cubs 9, Pirates 0:** Justin Steele breezed through seven innings and visiting Chicago handed Pittsburgh its 100th loss of the season.

**Tigers 10, Twins 7:** Niko Goodrum homered twice and drove in four runs and visiting Detroit beat Minnesota in a slugfest with seven homers.

**Indians 6, Royals 1:** Shane Bieber pitched three effective innings, Bradley Zimmer drove in three runs and visiting Cleveland beat Kansas City to avoid a three-game sweep.

Royals star Salvador Perez hit a double. He leads the majors with 48 home runs and 121 RBIs.

## NWSL calls off weekend games due to sexual allegations

Associated Press

The National Women's Soccer League will not play the games scheduled for this weekend as it deals with the fallout from allegations of sexual misconduct against a former coach.

North Carolina Courage coach Paul Riley was fired by the team following a report in The Athletic that detailed the alleged misconduct, which included claims from two former players of sexual coercion.

The NWSL did not specify Friday whether the games were canceled or postponed. In a statement, Commissioner Lisa Baird said the decision was made with the NWSL players' association.

"This week, and much of this

season, has been incredibly traumatic for our players and staff, and I take full responsibility for the role I have played. I am so sorry for the pain so many are feeling," Baird said in the statement. "Recognizing that trauma, we have decided not to take the field this weekend to give everyone some space to reflect. Business as usual isn't our concern right now. Our entire league has a great deal of healing to do, and our players deserve so much better."

### Clemson men's hoops coach gets extension

Clemson men's basketball coach Brad Brownell has received a two-year contract ex-

tension that will tie him to the Tigers through the 2025-26 season.

Brownell is the program's all-time victories leader with a 201-149 record over 11 seasons.

The new deal also includes a raise of \$400,000 for this season with a total financial package of \$2.6 million. Brownell's compensation grows to \$3 million for each of the final two years of the agreement.

The new deal was approved by the compensation committee of the school's board of trustees on Friday.

"Brad continues to be a great leader and ambassador for our men's basketball program," Clemson athletic director Dan Radakovich said in a statement.

Should the school end Brownell's employment after this season, it would owe him \$25,000 per month for the remainder of the contract. That monthly amount increases each year and would be \$250,000 a month in Brownell's last season.

Should Brownell choose to leave, he'd owe Clemson \$500,000 in the first season, \$250,000 in the second through fourth years and 25 percent of what the university would owe him in its buyout for the final season.

Brownell has spent 11 seasons with the Tigers, leading them to three NCAA Tournament berths including two in the past four years.