

## DOD civilians get vaccination deadline

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — All Defense Department civilian employees must be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus by Nov. 22, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said in a memorandum issued Monday.

While seven weeks remain until the deadline, Defense Department employees only have until Nov. 8 to receive their final shots. The Pentagon does not consider a person fully vaccinated until two weeks after the last shot in the series is administered.

Two available vaccines — by Moderna and Pfizer — require two shots. Those receiving the Moderna shot must receive their first dose by Oct. 11, and Pfizer recipients by Oct. 18 to be ready for the second dose by Nov. 8.

The Johnson & Johnson shot requires a single dose, which can be taken any time before Nov. 8.

Hicks' memo did not say what would happen if personnel refuse the shots, but she noted that more guidance is forthcoming, in-

cluding on possible exemptions for Defense Department employees for medical or religious reasons.

While the vaccinations are given at many public pharmacies and clinics, Defense Department civilian employees are also eligible to receive the shots at any military vaccination site, including military hospitals typically reserved only for troops and their families.

The Pentagon guidance comes after President Joe Biden on Sept. 9 ordered all federal agencies to require their employees get the vaccine "to ensure the health and safety of the public with whom they interact," according to the memo.

Since the start of the pandemic, 321 Defense Department civilians and 58 service members have died from the coronavirus, according to the DOD, which does not break down the numbers by service.

Once vaccinated, personnel "must be prepared to provide a copy of their vaccine record" to their employers, though Defense Department procedures to verify vaccina-

tion status have not yet been announced.

"Vaccinating DOD civilian employees against [the coronavirus] will save lives and allow for the defense of our nation," Hicks said in the memo.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin required the vaccine for all service members on Aug. 24, one day after the Food and Drug Administration gave full approval to the Pfizer shot. The service branches have set individual vaccination deadlines for their troops.

Active-duty soldiers have until Dec. 15 to become fully vaccinated, and Reserve and National Guard units have until June 30, 2022, the Army announced Sept. 14.

Active-duty airmen and Space Force guardians must be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus by Nov. 2, Air Force officials announced Sept. 3.

Air Force reservists and Guard troops have until Dec. 2 to meet the requirement.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro on Aug. 30 ordered active-duty sailors and Marines get the vaccine by Nov. 28 and reservists by Dec. 28.

## US resuming Afghan refugee flights after measles shots

*From staff and wire reports*

WASHINGTON — Afghan refugees will soon be arriving again in the United States after a massive campaign to vaccinate them against measles following a small outbreak that caused a three-week pause in evacuations, officials said.

Authorities have administered the vaccination to about 49,000 evacuees staying temporarily on American military bases as well as to those still at transit points in Europe and the Middle East, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Officials with the 86th Airlift Wing said outbound flights from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, were expected to resume over the Columbus Day weekend.

Nearly 9,000 evacuees are temporarily housed at Ramstein and Rhine Ordnance Barracks in the Kaiserslautern area, where they have been stuck for more than three weeks.

Evacuation flights from bases in Europe

and Qatar to the U.S. were halted Sept. 10 after a few cases of measles were discovered among new arrivals.

The measles outbreak, detected in 24 people, had put on hold one of the largest refugee resettlement efforts in U.S. history, dubbed Operation Allies Welcome. It also stranded about 15,000 at overseas transit points.

"The success of this vaccination campaign demonstrates our commitment to the health and well-being of arriving Afghan evacuees, the personnel assisting this mission, and the American people," Dr. Pritesh Gandhi, the DHS chief medical officer, said in announcing the completion of the effort.

Everyone coming from Afghanistan is also tested for COVID-19. About 84% of the refugees in the U.S. and at overseas transit points have now received vaccinations against the coronavirus, officials said.

The U.S. evacuated about 120,000 people in the chaotic days following the fall of Ka-

bul to the Taliban in August. They were a mix of U.S. citizens, Afghans with legal permanent residency or who were applying for visas and refugee status along with their families.

Testifying before Congress last week, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the U.S. has admitted about 60,000 people from the airlift out of Afghanistan, about 7% of whom are American citizens and about 6% of whom are permanent residents. About 3% have, along with their families, received the special immigrant visa for people who worked for the U.S. government or its allies during the war as interpreters or in some other capacity.

The rest are a combination of people in the process of finalizing their special immigrant visas or are considered likely candidates for refugee status because they are human rights activists, journalists or others who are considered particularly vulnerable under Taliban rule or for some other reasons.

# Taiwan prepares defenses after China flights

By MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA  
*Stars and Stripes*

Taiwan says it is preparing to defend itself from its neighbor to the west after four days of record-breaking Chinese incursions into its airspace.

The comments were made Monday by Foreign Minister Joseph Wu on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Television program “China Tonight.” Nearly 150 Chinese military aircraft buzzed through Taiwan’s air defense zone between Friday and Monday, the island’s Ministry of National Defense said in a series of press

statements.

“China has been threatening Taiwan, and the threat seems to be more serious than before,” Wu said. “We are very concerned that China is going to launch a war against Taiwan at some point.”

Beijing considers Taiwan, which has its own democratic government, a renegade province that must, at some point, be unified politically with the mainland.

The threat may not be imminent, Wu added, but the island is preparing to defend itself nonetheless. Taipei is carefully monitoring domestic discontent in

China and any signs of an economic slowdown that could be used as a precursor for invasion, he said.

“Taiwan might become a target of this authoritarianism to divert its domestic attention,” Wu said.

On Monday, 56 Chinese army aircraft, including dozens of fighters and nuclear-capable bombers, entered Taiwan’s southwest air defense zone, the Taiwanese defense ministry wrote in a statement. They traveled southeast off the island’s southwest coast before turning around and heading back toward China. Four of the flights

happened at night.

This followed 16 similar sorties on Sunday, 39 on Saturday and 38 on Friday, the ministry said in previous statements.

In response, Taiwan dispatched air patrols, issued radio warnings and readied air defense missile systems. Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council strongly protested the incursions and demanded that they stop, Bloomberg news reported Tuesday.

The Biden administration is watching the situation “very closely,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said during her press conference Monday.

## US planes 1st to fly from Japan carrier since WWII

By SETH ROBSON  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — A pair of Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II stealth aircraft became the first fighters to fly from a Japanese carrier since World War II after landing and taking off from the JS Izumo on Sunday.

News about the successful test of the newly upgraded warship’s ability to support the short-takeoff, vertical-landing jets was tweeted by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force on Tuesday.

The message, which included video footage of the operation, said the JMSDF will continue “to steadily carry out the necessary modifications to the Izumo class to acquire the capability to operate the F-35B.”

The announcement was retweeted Tuesday by 1st Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman Maj. Ken Kunze.

“Our F-35s are the first fighter aircraft to fly from a Japanese carrier since WWII,” he wrote in

a follow-up tweet.

Plans to land and launch F-35Bs from the Izumo were announced Thursday by Japan’s Defense Ministry, although they’d been signaled by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger during a security dialogue last month.

The aircraft tapped to land on the Izumo were from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, about 50 miles south of Hiroshima, Kunze said in a telephone interview Friday.

The Izumo, commissioned in 2015 as a helicopter carrier, had heat-resistant coating added to its deck this year, enabling it to support the F-35B’s vertical landings. Its sister ship, the JS Kaga, is scheduled for a similar makeover ahead of Japan’s acquisition of 42 F-35Bs, which are slated to arrive sometime in the next five years.

Japan already operates the F-35A, a conventional takeoff-and-landing version of aircraft, from Misawa Air Base in the country’s northeast.

## Biden renews pledge to defend Senkakus to new Japanese PM

By SETH ROBSON  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — President Joe Biden repeated his promise that the United States would step in to defend the disputed Senkaku Islands during his first call with new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Tuesday.

The leaders spoke a day after Kishida, 64, was sworn in to replace Yoshihide Suga, who resigned after a year in office due to plunging support over his administration’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden told Suga last year that he could count on the U.S. military to help in case of an attack on the Senkakus, a small group of East China Sea islets that are controlled by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan.

China regularly irks Japan by sending vessels near the uninhabited islands. Tokyo filed a protest with Beijing last month after seven Chinese coast guard ships — four outfitted with “cannons” — appeared there.

Kishida told reporters Tuesday that Biden conveyed a strong commitment to the defense of Japan, including the Senkakus.

The pair agreed to work together on the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea and on global problems such as the pandemic, climate change and nuclear weapons, he said.

“We also agreed to call each other by Joe and Fumio during the talk and to meet in person as early as possible,” Kishida said. “This was my first phone conversation with a foreign leader since assuming the leadership and the fact that I was able to speak with the U.S. president first was an important step forward toward taking Japan-U.S. alliance to an even higher level.”

The White House, in a statement about Tuesday’s talk, said the leaders affirmed their alliance’s strength, calling it the “cornerstone of peace, security and stability in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.”

# Biden lifts abortion referral ban on clinics

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Monday reversed a ban on abortion referrals by family planning clinics, lifting a Trump-era restriction, as political and legal battles over abortion grow sharper from Texas to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Department of Health and Human Services said its new regulation will restore the federal family planning program to the way it ran under the Obama administration, when clinics were able to refer women seeking abortions to a provider. The goal is to “strengthen and restore” services, said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra.

Groups representing the clinics said they hope the Biden administration action will lead some 1,300 local facilities that left in protest over Trump’s pol-

icies to return, helping to stabilize a longstanding program shaken by the coronavirus pandemic on top of ideological battles.

“I have heard that almost everywhere in the country, people have made the decision that conditions will be good for them to return to the program,” Clare Coleman, president of the umbrella group National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association, said in an interview. “My sense is that people have been waiting for the rule.”

Planned Parenthood, the biggest service provider, said on Twitter that its health centers look forward to returning. But the group criticized part of the Biden administration rule that allows individual clinicians who object to abortion not to provide referrals. The administration

said that’s “in accordance with applicable federal law.”

Known as Title X, the taxpayer-funded program makes available more than \$250 million a year to clinics to provide birth control and basic health care services mainly to low-income women, many of them from minority communities. Under former President Donald Trump, clinics were barred from referring patients for abortions, prompting a mass exit by service providers affiliated with Planned Parenthood, as well as several states and other independent organizations.

Women’s groups labeled the Trump policy a “gag rule,” and medical organizations called it a violation of the clinician-patient relationship.

But religious and social conservatives praised the policy for imposing a strict separation be-

tween family planning services and abortion. Under federal law, clinics cannot use federal family planning money to pay for abortions. Abortion opponents have argued, however, that birth control funding for organizations like Planned Parenthood, the leading provider of abortions, amounts to an indirect subsidy.

On Monday, the National Right to Life Committee criticized the Biden administration for “supplementing the abortion industry through taxpayer funds.”

Title X family planning clinics served about 3.9 million clients in 2018, but HHS estimates that number fell by nearly 40% after the Trump policy. The upheaval may have led to more than 180,000 unintended pregnancies, the agency said. In all, more than one-quarter of the clinics left the program.

## Biden tells GOP to ‘get out of the way’ on US debt limit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden urged Republican senators to “get out of the way” and let Democrats suspend the nation’s debt limit, hoping to keep the U.S. government from bumping dangerously close to a credit default as Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell refuses to lend his party’s help.

Biden’s criticism Monday came with Congress facing an Oct. 18 deadline to allow for more borrowing to keep the government operating after having accrued a total public debt of \$28.4 trillion. The House has passed a measure to suspend the debt limit, but McConnell is forcing Senate Democrats into a cumbersome process that could drag on and approach the deadline with little margin for error.

Both Biden and McConnell have promised that the country will avoid default, yet the public

fight and political posturing risks an economic meltdown. The global economy relies on the stability of U.S. Treasury notes, and unpaid debt could crush financial markets and hurl America into a recession. Biden said Republicans are hurting the country by blocking the limit’s suspension.

“They need to stop playing Russian roulette with the U.S. economy,” Biden said at the White House. “Republicans just have to let us do our job. Just get out of the way. If you don’t want to help save the country, get out of the way so you don’t destroy it.”

Biden said he planned to talk with McConnell, who dug in with a letter to the president.

“We have no list of demands. For two-and-a-half months, we have simply warned that since your party wishes to govern alone, it must handle the debt limit alone as well,” the Kentucky senator wrote Monday.

## Data show refugee admissions at a record low despite pledge

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Refugee admissions to the United States fell to a record low during the 2021 budget year, despite President Joe Biden’s pledge to reverse the sharp cuts made by the Trump administration, according to figures obtained by The Associated Press.

A total of 11,445 refugees were allowed into the U.S. during the budget year that ended Thursday, according to a person with access to the information who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the figure.

That number does not include the tens of thousands of Afghans brought to the U.S. as American troops withdrew from Afghanistan, ending the 20-year war there. Many of those Afghans were allowed into the country under a different legal status known as humanitarian parole, which is why they are not included in the

refugee tally.

Still, the number highlights Biden’s challenges in reversing the restrictive refugee policies set by former President Donald Trump’s administration, which targeted the program as part of a broader campaign to slash both legal and illegal immigration to the U.S.

The U.S. president determines the cap on refugee admissions each budget year, which runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. Biden didn’t take office until almost four months after the last fiscal year began. The 11,445 refugee admissions total falls far below the nation’s cap of 62,500 for the 2021 budget year that Biden set in May. It’s also below the record-low ceiling of 15,000 that Trump had initially set for the year.

It remains to be seen whether admissions will reach anywhere near the 125,000 cap that Biden has set for the current budget year, which started Friday.



# Rural Alaska at risk amid surge in virus

*Associated Press*

TANACROSS, Alaska — One Alaska Native village knew what to do to keep out COVID-19. They put up a gate on the only road into town and guarded it round the clock. It was the same idea used a century ago in some isolated Indigenous villages to protect people from outsiders during another deadly pandemic — the Spanish flu.

It largely worked. Only one person died of COVID-19 and 20 people got sick in Tanacross, an Athabascan village of 140 whose rustic wood cabins and other homes are nestled between the Alaska Highway and Tanana River.

But the battle against the coronavirus isn't over. The highly contagious delta variant is spreading across Alaska, driving one of the

nation's sharpest upticks in infections and posing risks for remote outposts like Tanacross where the closest hospital is hours away.

The COVID-19 surge is worsened by Alaska's limited health care system that largely relies on hospitals in Anchorage, the biggest city. It's where the state's largest hospital, Providence Alaska Medical Center, is overwhelmed with patients and was the first weeks ago to declare crisis-of-care protocols, meaning doctors are sometimes prioritizing care based on who has the best odds of survival.

Since then, 19 other health care facilities in Alaska, including Anchorage's two other hospitals and Fairbanks Memorial, have also entered crisis care mode, something overtaxed facilities in other states have had to do, includ-

ing Idaho and Wyoming.

"Even though we live here, we're concerned about Anchorage and Fairbanks," said Alfred Jonathan, a Tanacross elder. "If somebody gets sick around there, there's no place to take them."

While Alaska has contracted with nearly 500 medical professionals to help over the next few months, the ramifications are dire for those in rural Alaska if they need higher levels of care — for COVID-19 or otherwise — but no beds are available.

Sometimes those patients get lucky and get transferred to Fairbanks or Anchorage. Other times, health care staff are on the phones — in some cases, for hours — looking for a bed or facility that can provide specialty treatments like dialysis.

## Former worker says Facebook products fuel division

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A former Facebook data scientist told Congress on Tuesday that the social network giant's products harm children and fuel polarization in the U.S. while its executives refuse to make changes because they elevate profits over safety.

Frances Haugen testified to the Senate commerce subcommittee on consumer protection. She is accusing the company of being aware of apparent harm to some teens from Instagram and being dishonest in its public fight against hate and misinformation.

Haugen has come forward with a wide-ranging condemnation of Facebook, buttressed with tens of thousands of pages of internal research documents she secretly co-

pied before leaving her job in the company's civic integrity unit. She also has filed complaints with federal authorities alleging that Facebook's own research shows that it amplifies hate, misinformation and political unrest, but the company hides what it knows.

Haugen says she is speaking out because of her belief that "Facebook's products harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy."

"The company's leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer but won't make the necessary changes because they have put their astronomical profits before people," she says in her written testimony prepared for the hearing.

After recent reports in The Wall Street

Journal based on documents she leaked to the newspaper raised a public outcry, Haugen revealed her identity in a CBS "60 Minutes" interview aired Sunday night.

The ex-employee challenging the social network giant with 2.8 billion users worldwide and nearly \$1 trillion in market value is a 37-year-old data expert from Iowa with a degree in computer engineering and a master's degree in business from Harvard. Prior to being recruited by Facebook in 2019, she worked for 15 years at tech companies including Google, Pinterest and Yelp.

Facebook maintains that Haugen's allegations are misleading and insists there is no evidence to support the premise that it is the primary cause of social polarization.

## Garland: Feds set to target threats to school boards

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Merrick Garland on Monday directed federal authorities to hold strategy sessions in the next 30 days with law enforcement to address the increasing threats targeting school board members, teachers and other employees in the nation's public schools.

In a memorandum, Garland said there has been "a disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation and threats of violence against school administrators, board members, teachers and staff who participate in the vital work of running our nation's public schools."

To address the rising problem, Garland

said the FBI would work with U.S. attorneys and federal, state, local, territorial and tribal authorities in each district to develop strategies against the threats.

"While spirited debate about policy matters is protected under our Constitution, that protection does not extend to threats of violence or efforts to intimidate individuals based on their views," he said.

The action is in response to an urgent request last week from the National School Boards Association. The group, which represents school board members around the country, asked President Joe Biden for federal assistance to investigate and stop threats made over policies including face

mask mandates driven by the coronavirus pandemic, likening the vitriol to a form of domestic terrorism. The association asked for the federal government to investigate cases where threats or violence could be handled as violations of federal laws protecting civil rights. It also asked for the Justice Department, FBI, Homeland Security and Secret Service to help monitor threat levels and assess risks to students, educators, board members and school buildings.

The group's letter documented more than 20 instances of threats, harassment, disruption and acts of intimidation in California, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Ohio and other states.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Brief outage after 2 air balloons hit power lines**

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — Hundreds of hot air balloons filled the sky over Albuquerque on the second day of the Balloon Fiesta, but two balloons hit power lines and caused a brief outage for some Public Service Company of New Mexico customers.

The company said 1,230 of its customers were without electricity for a couple hours after the two hot air balloons hit power lines in the north valley.

No injuries were reported.

Viewer photos sent to Albuquerque TV station KOB showed one balloon's envelope draped over the power lines near Daniel Circle while another balloon hit power lines closer to 2nd Street and Ranchitos.

**Surfer bitten on leg by shark in water off coast**

**CA** SONOMA — A surfer was bitten on the leg by a shark off the Northern California coast and airlifted to a hospital, authorities said.

The man was with a group of surfers off Sonoma County's Salmon Creek Beach when the shark bit him on the thigh, according to the Bodega Bay Fire Protection District.

His fellow surfers helped get him to shore and bystanders applied first aid until emergency crews arrived, KTVU-TV reported.

**George Floyd memorial statue defaced again**

**NY** NEW YORK — A statue honoring George Floyd in New York City's Union Square Park was vandalized, police said.

According to police, a video showed an unidentified man on a skateboard throwing paint on the statue then fleeing. Nearby statues of late Congressman John Lewis and Breonna Taylor, a Louisville, Ky., woman shot and killed by police last year, apparently weren't touched.

The statue was unveiled on the Juneteenth holiday in a spot on Flatbush Avenue, in Brooklyn, and it was vandalized five days later with black paint and marked with an alleged logo of a white supremacist group.

**City: Police union leader harassed female cops**

**IA** IOWA CITY — The longtime president of the Des Moines police officers' union sent explicit photos to four female colleagues, but retired before he could face discipline and wasn't criminally charged, the city confirmed.

In a lawsuit, four Des Moines Police Department employees alleged that they were sent unsolicited photos by Des Moines Police Bargaining Unit Association President Stew Barnes in 2019 and 2020, including many of himself naked.

The department let Barnes, 61, retire in August 2020 with full benefits despite "overwhelming evidence" of his harassment of co-workers and employees of a tanning salon and a credit union, the lawsuit claims.

Iowa law allows the state pension system to deny retirement benefits to members who are not "in good standing," including those who face pending disciplinary proceedings for misconduct. The lawsuit argues that Barnes should have been disqualified from benefits and faced a criminal investigation,

alleging he was using police resources "to find and stalk women" and that his victims were ready to cooperate.

**Ex-judge's trial to move forward with 1st judge**

**WA** ASOTIN — The delayed trial of a former judge in southeastern Washington charged with rape and other crimes will now move forward with the initial judge assigned to the case.

According to an order signed and filed in Asotin County Superior Court, Spokane County Judge Michael Price has been reassigned to the Scott D. Gallina case, The Lewiston Tribune reported.

Price presided over Gallina's initial bond hearing, arraignment and status hearings in 2019, following the former judge's arrest at the courthouse that April.

Gallina, 57, is charged with second-degree rape, fourth-degree sexual assault and indecent liberties for his alleged misconduct involving employees in the Asotin County Courthouse while he was the Superior Court judge in Asotin, Garfield and Columbia counties.

**Woman fell into canal, attacked by alligator**

**FL** ST. PETERSBURG — An alligator attacked a homeless woman who fell into a Florida canal, authorities said.

The woman was resting on a sea wall when she fell into the canal, according to a St. Petersburg Fire Rescue news release. Someone heard her cries for help and called 911.

The woman, who is in her 50s, was taken to a hospital with severe injuries to her arms, the release said. She was reported to

be in stable condition.

**Convicted company exec to forfeit \$800K home**

**MA** BOSTON — A former executive at a Massachusetts shoe manufacturer convicted of embezzling \$30 million from the company must also now surrender his \$800,000 home, according to court records.

A federal forfeiture notice showed the government will seize a Duxbury home owned by Richard Hajjar, Masslive.com reported. The home is assessed at \$802,400.

Hajjar, 64, the former chief financial officer of Alden Shoe Co., was sentenced in September to nearly six years in prison after pleading guilty in May to wire fraud, unlawful monetary transactions and filing a false tax return. He was also ordered to pay more than \$60 million in restitution and penalties.

**State first to give hourly wages in garment work**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — California Gov. Gavin Newsom approved what he termed a "nation-leading" law requiring the garment industry to pay workers by the hour instead of for each piece of clothing they produce.

Piece-rate compensation can be used to pay workers below the minimum wage, supporters said.

The bill makes California the first state to eliminate piece work compensation, though there is an exception for work-sites covered by collective bargaining agreements, and the first to create liability for companies that subcontract with the garment makers.

— From wire reports

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# With MVPs out, new stars set to shine

*Associated Press*

A funny thing about this year's likely MVPs — none were valuable enough to push their teams into the postseason.

Shohei Ohtani, Bryce Harper, Fernando Tatis Jr., Juan Soto, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. — all contenders for the individual prize, and all set to watch from home while a champion is crowned.

Other big names remain — Freddie Freeman, Mookie Betts, Jose Altuve and Aaron Judge are plenty familiar to fall audiences. Of course, they were all there last year, too, when Tampa Bay rookie Randy Arozarena stole the show.

Arozarena set postseason records with 10 homers and 29 hits, winning the AL Championship Series MVP, and made a wild scramble home to help the Rays push the Dodgers to six games in the World Series. It was a remarkable rise for a then-25-year-old who had just 42 regular-season games under his belt, propelling him from no-name rookie to a standout on baseball's biggest stage.

Stars are cemented in October. Here are five budding ones that might stick in the spotlight this month:

## Wander Franco, SS, Rays

An AL Rookie of the Year candidate despite playing just 70 games, Franco successfully transformed from a minor league phenom to a

big league contributor. The 20-year-old switch-hitter batted .288 with seven homers and an .810 OPS, matching Hall of Famer Frank Robinson's 43-game on-base streak in 1956 for the longest by a player 20 or younger. Flashy yet polished, Franco looks destined for stardom regardless of this postseason, but it could speed his ascent into the conversation for best player in baseball.

## Tyler O'Neill, OF, Cardinals

The son of a champion bodybuilder, the stoutly built O'Neill muscled the Cardinals to a franchise-record 17-game winning streak in September. He clubbed 13 homers over the final 31 games with an NL-most 30 RBIs in that time. After hitting 21 homers combined in his first three big league seasons, the 26-year-old Canadian had 34 to form a dangerous mid-order trio with All-Stars Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado.

## Austin Riley, 3B, Braves

Riley stepped up bigger than any other Braves player after Ronald Acuña Jr.'s season-ending knee injury in July. The 24-year-old slugged his way into NL MVP consideration with 33 homers, 107 RBIs and an .898 OPS, production fueled by a .333 batting average in the second half. Riley slumped in the spotlight last October, hitting .143 while Atlanta lost the NLCS to Los Angeles in seven games. He

came back for 2021, showing his best form yet for the four-time defending NL East champs.

## Luis Garcia, RHP, Astros

The Astros are still led by many of the same stars as their tainted 2017 title team — Altuve, Carlos Correa, Alex Bregman and Yuli Gurriel — but their 2021 aspirations rely largely on the 24-year-old Garcia. A 6-foot-1 rookie with tree-trunk legs, Garcia was 11-8 with a 3.30 ERA over 30 games, including 28 starts. With Justin Verlander out for the year following Tommy John surgery and Zack Greinke likely pushed to the bullpen following a late-season injury, Garcia might slot behind Lance McCullers Jr. in a critical spot for a young rotation.

## LaMonte Wade Jr., 1B/OF, Giants

Late Night LaMonte — pronounced “lah-MONT” — has been the feel-good, breakout star for surprising San Francisco. A castoff by the Minnesota Twins, Wade worked his way into regular duty and contributed several big hits as the Giants ended the Dodgers' reign as eight-time defending NL West champs. Wade went 13-for-23 with 12 RBIs in ninth-inning at-bats, including a walk-off hit to sink Arizona on Friday night. A day later, he was given the team's Willie Mac Award, an honor voted on by players, coaches, staff and fans to recognize the club's most inspirational player.

# Rojas out as manager after Mets finish third in NL East

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — For a while this summer, Luis Rojas was a potential Manager of the Year contender.

Just a few months later, he's out of a job.

Rojas was let go as New York Mets manager on Monday after two losing seasons. The team declined its option on his contract for 2022, making the announcement a day after finishing third in the NL East at 77-85 in Steve Cohen's first year of ownership.

The move was no surprise, likely being the first of several significant changes coming again this offseason for a club in constant turmoil.

“I want to share such heartfelt gratitude to so many in the Mets

organization for not only the last two seasons as manager, but for the last 16 years in a variety of roles,” Rojas said in a statement released by the team.

“We live in a results-oriented business, and I am deeply disappointed for our staff and fans that we didn't reach our goals this season,” he said.

The Mets said Rojas has been offered the opportunity to remain in the organization in a role still to be determined. The club said decisions about the coaching staff will be made in the coming days.

“The entire Mets organization is grateful for the dedication and devotion that Luis has exhibited over the last two seasons as manager,” team President Sandy Al-

derson said in a statement. “He has shown a great commitment to the Mets over many years in multiple capacities. These decisions are never easy, but we feel a change is needed at this time.”

Expected to challenge for the playoffs or even a pennant with \$341 million newcomer Francisco Lindor at shortstop, New York led its division for 90 straight days despite a wave of injuries — and Rojas drew praise for his steady hand and communication skills.

But then everything fell apart over the final two months of the season.

With ace pitcher Jacob deGrom sidelined since the All-Star break by a sprained elbow, New York went into a nosedive once

August arrived. The lineup languished even when healthy, and an overtaxed pitching staff started to crack.

Lindor missed more than five weeks in the second half with an oblique injury and didn't emerge from his season-long slump until too late. Michael Conforto, Jeff McNeil, Dominic Smith and James McCann also flopped at the plate, leaving Pete Alonso to carry the load.

An untimely 2-11 stretch against the Dodgers and Giants, baseball's top two teams, dropped the Mets from five games over .500 and tied for first place to 62-66 and 6½ games out on Aug. 26. In a middling division, they lost the lead for good on Aug. 14 and never really recovered.



# Herbert, Ekeler lift Chargers past Raiders

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Justin Herbert and the Los Angeles Chargers came into their showdown against the Las Vegas Raiders after a signature win on the road at Kansas City.

In front of a prime-time audience on Monday night, the Chargers showed they are indeed for real.

Herbert threw for three touchdowns, Austin Ekeler rushed for a career-high 117 yards and scored twice as they knocked the Raiders from the unbeaten ranks with a 28-14 victory.

Los Angeles is 3-1 for the first time since 2014 and part of a three-way tie atop the AFC West with Las Vegas and Denver. The Raiders' loss means the Arizona Cardinals are the NFL's lone undefeated team after four weeks.

"We stayed patient, I thought we had a good mix of the run and pass. Justin was extremely patient and Austin came alive tonight," Chargers first-year coach Brandon Staley said.

Herbert accounted for all of his TDs in the first half as Los Angeles built a 21-0 halftime lead. Las Vegas scored on its first two possessions of the second half to draw within a touchdown, but Ekeler gave the Chargers

some breathing room with an 11-yard run scoring off left guard. Herbert had the key play of the drive with a 13-yard completion to Jared Cook on fourth-and-2 from midfield.

The reception by Cook was one of two fourth downs converted by the offense and four on the season.

"He picks and chooses the right time to be able to do it. Sometimes on critical downs, especially when we have the momentum and we're driving, and maybe when he feels like we need points," said Cook, who had six catches for 70 yards and a touchdown. "He's been choosing great. We might as well play some lottery numbers with coach."

Herbert achieved a pair of milestones in the win. He completed his 500th pass in his 19th start, becoming the first quarterback in the Super Bowl era to reach that mark before his 20th start.

"It's awesome that he believes in us because everyone in the huddle believes in each other, too, and whenever we get into one of those situations, we know that we've got the right play, we know that we've got the right guys," said Herbert, who completed 25 of 38 passes for 222 yards.

Derek Carr was 21-for-34 for 196 yards with two TDs and an interception. The Raiders could manage only 48 yards rushing

against a Los Angeles defense that was last in the league in run defense.

"We cannot come out and take that many punches in the first round," coach Jon Gruden said. "We found a way to make it a football game and give ourselves a chance, but it's just too hard in this league against good teams."

The Chargers took the opening kickoff and went 75 yards in 12 plays, including a 4-yard bullet to tight end Donald Parham in the back of the end zone to put them on top 7-0.

Los Angeles extended its lead to 21-0 at halftime by scoring on the final two drives of the first half—Herbert's 10-yard TD to Cook and a 14-yard screen to Ekeler.

Las Vegas was held to one first down and 51 net yards in the first half, but made adjustments at halftime. The Raiders took the third-quarter kickoff and scored when Carr found Hunter Renfrow for a 10-yard touchdown.

Darren Waller then drew them within 21-14 when he caught a 3-yard pass with 1:44 remaining in the third.

"If anything, hopefully this wakes us up a little bit. I think we need to start a lot faster, if I'm honest," Carr said. "We started the season great, but we don't start games nearly good enough yet."

## Meyer shows regret but Harbaugh doubles down

Associated Press

DENVER—Victory formation is for losers. The Baltimore Ravens wanted the rushing record.

So John Harbaugh isn't one bit sorry for not having Lamar Jackson take a knee to close out their rout at Denver.

Harbaugh explained enthusiastically and unapologetically after Baltimore's 23-7 victory Sunday that it was important to his players, coaches and even the team's fans to match the mark of 43 consecutive 100-yard rushing games set by the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1974-77.

Harbaugh reacted with dismay Monday when he learned that Broncos coach Vic Fangio saw his decision as classless and dangerous and compared it to bull excrement.

"Thirty-seven years in pro ball, I've never seen anything like

that," Fangio said, "but it was to be expected and we expected it."

"I thought we were on good terms," retorted Harbaugh, who had Fangio on his first staff 14 years ago. "We had a nice chat before the game. Known each other for a long time."

"But I promise you, I'm not going to give that insult one second's thought. What's meaningful to us might not be meaningful to them. Their concerns are definitely not our concerns."

Urban Meyer? Now he couldn't apologize enough for his latest misstep in what's become the bumpiest jump to the NFL ever attempted by a college coaching great.

The Jacksonville Jaguars coach apologized to his family, team owner Shad Khan and his players for actions over the weekend that he called "just stupid."

After Jacksonville blew a big lead in a 24-21 loss at Cincinnati on Thursday night, Meyer didn't fly back with his team on its charter plane, an unheard-of breach of coaching protocol, especially for a team that's 0-4 and has lost 19 consecutive games.

The three-time collegiate national championship-winning coach said he remained in his home state of Ohio to see his grandkids and that they all went to dinner Friday night at his restaurant/bar in Columbus.

A video that surfaced Saturday night wasn't one of family fun, however. It showed a young woman rubbing up against Meyer as he sat on a bar stool. He explained that she was trying to entice him on the dance floor. Another video appears to show Meyer touching the woman's buttocks.

Meyer called a team meeting Monday and vowed to "own it," the college-like motto he uses daily and has plastered all around the Jaguars facility.

"I just apologized to the team and staff for being a distraction," Meyer told reporters afterward. "Just stupid and so I explained everything that happened and owned it. Just stupid. Should not have put myself in that kind of position."

Since trading his microphone for a headset in January to rejuvenate a floundering franchise and its fanbase, Meyer has instead spearheaded a steady stream of embarrassments.

Those include the botched hiring of strength coach Chris Doyle despite accusations of racist behavior. The Jaguars had to let him go a day later because of a pending lawsuit.

# Wallace earns his first NASCAR win

*Associated Press*

TALLADEGA, Ala. — The hard part wasn't dodging his way around a crash and then driving to the front of the field at Talladega Superspeedway. That was just instinct for Bubba Wallace.

The challenge was the 45 minutes after Wallace took the lead, when the sky opened and he anxiously sat in the rain — hoping, wishing, praying — that NASCAR would call off Monday's rescheduled race and declare him the winner.

With a crowd gathered behind his pit stand chanting its support — one man told his 6-year-old son, clad in a Wallace shirt and jumping up and down along the fence, that he was “witnessing history” — NASCAR pulled the plug and Wallace became just the second Black driver to win a race at the Cup Series level.

“Got some credibility to my name now,” said Wallace, a first-time Cup winner in his 143 starts. “I'm just like, ‘Finally, I'm a winner and I'm a winner in the Cup level,’ and it's just like ‘Hell yeah!’ It was a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.”

This was so much more than just a first win.

Wallace is the first Black driver to win at the top level of the elite stock car series since Wendell Scott in 1963, a race where he wasn't declared the victor until long after Buck Baker had already been awarded the trophy. NASCAR at last presented Scott's family with his trophy from that race two months ago.

“You can't swim standing on the Bank!!,” tweeted Warrick Scott Sr., who is Scott's grandson. “RIP Wendell Scott. Congratulations @bubbawallace!!” A second post showed his grandfather leaning against a car and read: “PaPa was there the whole time chilling in the rain.”

The Wallace victory earned praise from rapper Big Sean, the University of Tennessee football team and Bill Lester, a Black driver who raced intermittently in NASCAR from 1999 through a Trucks Series start this season, among others.

“Finally, it's official, you've done it!” Lester posted. “So proud of you and what you've accomplished. Your win moves the @NASCAR needle forward on so many fronts. Glad I was a witness.”

The race was spotlighted on NBC's “Nightly News” at the top of Monday's broadcast, illustrating how culturally important Wallace's win was for NASCAR, a predominately white sport with deep South-

ern roots and a longtime embrace of Confederate symbols.

As much as Wallace wanted the moment to be solely about his first career win, he couldn't ignore the significance.

“It's definitely been tough going to some of the tracks this year, we get some of the most boos now,” Wallace said. “Everybody says as long as they're making noise that's fine, but you know, I get booed for different reasons and that's the tough thing to swallow. I appreciate all those who were there doing the rain dance with us, pulling for us, supporting me my whole career, but especially those who have supported me with everything that's gone on the last 15-16 months.”

In June 2020 at Talladega, NASCAR discovered a noose in the garage stall assigned to Wallace. The finding came just a week after NASCAR had banned the Confederate flag at its events at Wallace's urging.

The FBI investigated and found that the noose was tied at the end of the garage door pull and had been there for months, meaning Wallace was not a victim of a hate crime. Still, the series rallied around him and stood in solidarity with Wallace at the front of the grid before the race.

The flag ban continues to be an issue at Talladega, where a convoy of vehicles has paraded up and down Speedway Boulevard outside the main entrance of the speedway during all four race weekends since NASCAR announced the ban. The convoy was back this weekend and included one car pulling a trailer that contained a Civil War-era cannon.

Wallace has called the noose incident a low point and he's been subjected to online harassment that last year even included a tweet from then-President Donald Trump that falsely accused Wallace of making up the noose. Although Wallace never saw the noose and was only told about it by NASCAR President Steve Phelps after the FBI had been summoned to investigate, he's been accused by many in the public of orchestrating a hoax.

When Monday's race was halted with Wallace as the leader, social media was ablaze with comments attacking the 27-year-old Alabama native whose birthday is later this week.

“They just are haters. That's all you can really say about it,” said Denny Hamlin, Wallace's team co-owner and a fellow driver. “I try to say to him, ‘Don't get your motivation trying to prove haters wrong. Instead

get your motivation from trying to do the people that support you proud.’

“That's where the motivation is going to come from, is the people that are going to support you through the good times and the bad times,” Hamlin said.

Wallace had driven through a crash and to the front of the field five laps before the second rain stoppage of the race. When he surged to the front, and with the entire field realizing that rain could halt the race at any time, runner-up Brad Keselowski recognized Wallace had likely just won the race with his pass.

“I was thinking, ‘Oh, geez. I wish I would have made that move,’” Keselowski said. “(His) was the right move at the right time.”

NASCAR tried to dry the track for nearly 45 minutes, but called things off as sunset approached and the rain showed no sign of ceasing.

Wallace had been waiting atop his pit stand and celebrated wildly with his crew when the decision came. Wallace is in his first season driving for 23XI Racing, a team owned by both Hamlin and Michael Jordan.

“I'm so happy for Bubba and our entire 23XI Racing team. This is a huge milestone and a historic win for us,” Jordan said in a tweeted statement. “From the day we signed him, I knew Bubba had the talent to win and Denny and I could not be more proud of him. Let's go!”

Wallace broke down in tears after he returned to his parked No. 23 Toyota, the car number picked for Jordan, who wore 23 in the NBA.

“This is for all the kids out there that want to have an opportunity and whatever they want to achieve, and be the best at what they want to do,” Wallace said as he choked back tears. “You're going to go through a lot of (BS). But you always got to stick true to your path and not let the nonsense get to you.

“Stay strong. Stay humble. Stay hungry. Been plenty of times when I wanted to give up.”

Wallace went to a makeshift victory lane inside an empty garage stall to celebrate with his team, which made a personnel change three races ago and named Bootie Barker his crew chief. It was the first victory for Barker in more than 400 races as a Cup crew chief.

The organization was formed a year ago and Wallace was the centerpiece based on all the corporations that entered NASCAR in support of Wallace and his social justice efforts.