

## In Fla., Biden puts focus on assistance

*Associated Press*

FORT MYERS, Fla. — President Joe Biden toured hurricane-ravaged areas of Florida on Wednesday, surveying storm damage by helicopter as he pledged that federal, state and local governments will work together to help rebuild homes, businesses and lives — putting politics on mute for now.

Hurricane Ian has resulted in at least 84 people confirmed dead, including 75 in Florida, and hundreds of thousands of people waiting for power to be restored. Ian's 150 mph winds and punishing storm surge last week took out power for 2.6 million in Florida. Many people are still unable to get food and water.

Biden planned to meet Wednesday with residents and small business owners in Fort Myers, and to thank government officials providing emergency aid and removing debris.

With the midterm elections just a month away, the crisis was bringing together political rivals in common cause at least for a time.

Joining Biden in Florida will be two of his most prominent Republican critics: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Sen. Rick Scott, according to the White House and Scott's

spokesman. Other state and local officials, including Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, are accompanying Biden.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre suggested it would be inappropriate for them to focus on political differences.

"There will be plenty of time, plenty of time, to discuss differences between the president and the governor — but now is not the time," Jean-Pierre told reporters at a White House briefing.

"When it comes to delivering and making sure that the people of Florida have what they need, especially after Hurricane Ian, we are one. We are working as one."

Before the storm hit, the president had intended to visit the Florida cities of Orlando and Fort Lauderdale last week, where he planned to stress his efforts to strengthen Social Security and Medicaid.

Biden has accused Scott of wanting to end both programs by proposing that federal laws should expire every five years, although the Florida senator has said he wants to preserve the programs.

Biden and DeSantis have had a multitude of

differences in recent years over how to fight COVID-19, immigration policy and more. In recent weeks, they tussled over the governor's decision to put migrants on planes or buses to Democratic strongholds, a practice that Biden has called "reckless."

The hurricane changed the purpose and tone of Biden's first trip to Florida this year.

The president is visiting an area especially devastated by winds and surging tides.

Boats, including huge yachts, were capsized and hurled inland. As water receded, the destruction at Fort Myers' Fisherman's Wharf become evident. Homes and businesses lay in ruins amid debris and muck.

The wharf lies on one side of the bridge that leads into Fort Myers Beach, which was brutalized by the Category 4 storm.

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell told reporters on Air Force One on Wednesday that the cost of rebuilding will be in the billions.

DeSantis made a point Wednesday of praising FEMA along with local and state agencies, saying coordination among them has been exceptional during Ian's aftermath.

## Navy to roll out 'common sense alternative' to coveralls

**BY KELLY AGEE**

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy is preparing to introduce yet another clothing item to the fleet — a two-piece flame retardant uniform that aims to be "a common sense alternative to coveralls," according to a U.S. Fleet Forces spokeswoman.

More commonly known as the 2POC, the two-piece organizational clothing uniform will debut later this year, Lt. Cmdr. Madie Hansen told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday. It was designed for various working conditions and environments, she said, including surface ships, submarines, flight decks, during sea-and-anchor detail and firefighting.

Advertised by the Navy as its "primary at-sea" uniform, the 2POC features the same flame resistance as the improved coveralls rolled out in 2018, according to Hansen. They are made of flame-resistant rayon, aramid, meta-aramid, para-aramid and nylon.

"The Navy is committed to continuously

improving safety, and our sailors are much safer today than before the introduction of flame-resistant variants," she said.

It mirrors the cut of the Type III working uniform and is lighter and more comfortable than the current coveralls, Hansen said. No ironing is necessary; the 2POC was designed to be worn right out of the dryer, she added.

The 2POC is not a uniform, but "organizational clothing," Hansen said, meaning it is issued to sailors for free by their command and is not an additional requirement to the sea bag.

Forty "ambassadors" have been wearing the uniform over the past year to educate sailors about the 2POC, Hansen said. This follows modifications made after enlisted sailors and officers tried out the clothing and provided their feedback.

Not everyone is happy about the change. Michael Frech, a chief petty officer who retired in February, said there are "far too many uniforms and too many unnecessary

uniforms as well as requirements."

"Why do we need fire retardant coveralls?" he asked Stars and Stripes via Facebook Messenger on Monday. "To fight fires, right? Well, what does the repair locker have? Fire retardant bulwark coveralls and fire-fighting garments. So, what's the point?"

Hansen said 84% of sailors surveyed between May and September 2019 at Norfolk, Oceana and Bahrain said they wanted something other than standard coveralls.

Unlike the coveralls it is replacing, the 2POC can be worn in port and underway and is approved for on and off base while making routine stops, she said.

The 2POC is dark blue for E-6 and below and khaki for E-7 and above, including officers.

For outerwear, sailors will be authorized to wear the black navy working uniform fleece liner with the color match tab as well as their command ball caps.

# Reagan redeploys after N. Korean ballistic missile goes over Japan

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan is redeploying to South Korea's eastern coast less than a week after it concluded trilateral naval drills with South Korean and Japanese warships.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff in a press release Wednesday said the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group would be entering international waters in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, on the same day due to "highly unusual" timing of North Korea's activities.

On Tuesday, the communist regime fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile that flew over Japan before splashing down in the Pacific Ocean.

The strike group's redeployment "demonstrates the determined will of the [South Korea]-U.S. alliance and will enhance the readiness posture of the alliance against consecutive North Korean provocations," the Joint Chief's statement said.

The strike group made port in and around the coastal city of Busan on Sept. 23, shortly before a four-day drill with South Korean warships to address "North Korean provocations with an aim to improve capabilities" of the U.S. and South Korean navies, according to South Korea's Ministry of National Defense.

The ships were joined by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force for an anti-submarine warfare exercise on Sept. 30, the first such drill in five years.

North Korea has launched several missiles since those drills. It has carried out five rounds of tests in a span of 10 days and 22 tests so far this year, which is a record.

Tuesday's IRBM test prompted the Japanese government and U.S. military to issue alerts warning people to seek shelter. The incident marked the first time in five years that North Korea has fired a missile over Japan.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, during a news conference immediately following the launch, described it as an "extremely problematic act."

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol presided over a meeting with the country's National Security Council and said the "reckless nuclear provocation" would only bolster Seoul's defense capabilities and its alliance with Washington.

Hours after the test, four South Korean F-15K Slam Eagles and four U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons dropped two Joint Direct Attack Munition bombs on an island target in the Yellow Sea. The exercise resembled a similar drill by South Korea after the North launched an intercontinental ballistic missile March 24. Seoul fired several ground-to-sea missiles and dropped two bombs into the East Sea then as a show of force.

A U.S. Indo-Pacific Command news release on Tuesday's joint exercise referred to North Korea's latest test and said the JDAMs showcased the "combined deterrent and dynamic strike capabilities" of the U.S. and South Korea.

U.S. and South Korean forces followed that up with another exercise early Wednesday. The two sides launched four Army Tactical Missile System surface-to-surface missiles toward the East Sea. One of its missiles was successfully launched but the other failed, a South Korean military official told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

# Putin OKs annexation of 4 regions in Ukraine

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the final papers Wednesday to annex four regions of Ukraine while his military struggled to control the new territory that was added in violation of international laws.

The documents finalizing the annexation were published on a Russian government website. Putin last week signed treaties that purported to absorb Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions into Russia. The annexation followed Kremlin-orchestrated "referendums" in Ukraine that the Ukrainian government and the West have dismissed as illegitimate.

Ukrainian law enforcement officials, meanwhile, reported discovering more evidence of torture and killings in areas retaken from Russian forces in the eastern Kharkiv region.

Serhiy Bolvinov, who heads the investigative department of the national police in the region, said authorities are investigating an alleged Russian torture chamber in the village of Pisky-Radkivski. He posted an image of a box of what appeared to be precious metal teeth and dentures presumably extracted from those held at the site.

Ukraine's prosecutor general also spoke of new evidence of torture and killings found Wednesday in the Kharkiv region. Andriy Kostin said on the sidelines of a security conference in Warsaw that he had just been notified of four bodies found with signs of possible torture. He said they were believed to be civilians but an investigation was still needed.

In the Mykolaiv region, the governor said Russian troops have started to withdraw from Snihurivka, a city that Moscow seized early in the war and annexed along with the Kherson region. A Russian-installed official, Yury Barbashov, denied that Russian troops had lost control of the strategic railway hub, but said the Ukrainian forces were advancing.

# After 1 day delay, USS Ford underway

*The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot*

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — The USS Gerald R. Ford pushed off the pier at Naval Station Norfolk on Tuesday, embarking on its first deployment a day later than expected due to stormy weather.

The 1,000-foot-long warship heads out to sea for the first time, culminating years of construction and costly technology delays.

The Navy opted to forgo a traditional sendoff for the Ford and the 4,000 sailors aboard due to changing weather condi-

tions, and instead livestreamed the preparations and push off on the U.S. 2nd Fleet Facebook page.

The Ford was scheduled to depart Monday, but the Navy scrapped that plan due to gusty winds and dangerous seas, postponing the push off from the pier by one day.

The Ford will sail the Atlantic alongside navies from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

# US starts fiscal year with \$31 trillion in debt

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The nation’s gross national debt has surpassed \$31 trillion, according to a U.S. Treasury report released Tuesday that logs America’s daily finances.

Edging closer to the statutory ceiling of roughly \$31.4 trillion — an artificial cap Congress placed on the U.S. government’s ability to borrow — the debt numbers hit an already tenuous economy facing high inflation, rising interest rates and a strong U.S. dollar.

And while President Joe Biden has touted his administration’s deficit reduction efforts this year and recently signed the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which attempts to tame 40-year high price increases caused by a variety of economic factors, economists say the latest debt numbers are a cause for concern.

Owen Zidar, a Princeton economist, said rising interest rates will exacerbate the nation’s growing debt issues and make the debt itself more costly. The Federal Reserve has raised rates several times this year in an effort to combat inflation.

Zidar said the debt “should encourage us

to consider some tax policies that almost passed through the legislative process but didn’t get enough support,” like imposing higher taxes on the wealthy and closing the carried interest loophole, which allows money managers to treat their income as capital gains.

“I think the point here is if you weren’t worried before about the debt before, you should be — and if you were worried before, you should be even more worried,” Zidar said.

The Congressional Budget Office earlier this year released a report on America’s debt load, warning in its 30-year outlook that, if unaddressed, the debt will soon spiral upward to new highs that could ultimately imperil the U.S. economy.

In its August Mid-Session Review, the administration forecasted that this year’s budget deficit will be nearly \$400 billion lower than it estimated back in March, due in part to stronger than expected revenues, reduced spending, and an economy that has recovered all the jobs lost during the multi-year pandemic.

In full, this year’s deficit will decline by

\$1.7 trillion, representing the single largest decline in the federal deficit in American history, the Office of Management and Budget said in August.

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget said in an emailed statement Tuesday, “This is a new record no one should be proud of.”

“In the past 18 months, we’ve witnessed inflation rise to a 40-year high, interest rates climbing in part to combat this inflation, and several budget-busting pieces of legislation and executive actions,” MacGuineas said. “We are addicted to debt.”

A representative from the Treasury Department was not immediately available for comment. Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at Loyola Marymount University, said “it took this nation 200 years to pile up its first trillion dollars in national debt, and since the pandemic we have been adding at the rate of 1 trillion nearly every quarter.”

Predicting high inflation for the “foreseeable future,” he said, “when you increase government spending and money supply, you will pay the price later.”

## Trump asks Supreme Court to intervene in Mar-a-Lago dispute

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Lawyers for former President Donald Trump asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday to step into the legal fight over the classified documents seized during an FBI search of his Florida estate, escalating a dispute over the powers of an arbiter appointed to inspect the records.

The Trump team asked the justices to overturn a lower court ruling and allow the arbiter, called a special master, to review the roughly 100 documents with classification markings that were taken in the Aug. 8 search of Mar-a-Lago.

A three-judge panel from the Atlanta-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit last month limited the special master’s review to the much larger tranche of non-classified documents. The judges sided with the Justice Department, which

had argued there was no legal basis for the special master to conduct his own review of the classified records.

But Trump’s lawyers said in their application to the Supreme Court that it was essential for the special master to have access to the classified records to “determine whether documents bearing classification markings are in fact classified, and regardless of classification, whether those records are personal records or presidential records.”

The FBI says it seized roughly 11,000 documents, including about 100 with classification markings, during its search. The Trump team asked a judge in Florida, Aileen Cannon, to appoint a special master to do an independent review of the records and Cannon subsequently assigned Raymond Dearie to review the records.

## Flint water crisis charges dropped for 7 involved in case

*Associated Press*

A Michigan judge threw out felony charges Tuesday against seven people in the Flint water scandal, including two former state health officials blamed for deaths from Legionnaires’ disease.

The dismissal was significant but not a complete surprise after the Michigan Supreme Court in June said a different judge acting as a one-person grand jury had no authority to issue indictments.

Judge Elizabeth Kelly rejected efforts by the attorney general’s office to just send the cases to Flint District Court and turn them into criminal complaints, a typical path to filing felony charges in Michigan. It was a last-gasp effort to keep things afloat.

“Anything arising out of the invalid indictments are irreconcilably tainted from incep-

tion. ... Simply put, there are no valid charges,” Kelly said.

Kelly’s decision doesn’t affect former Republican Gov. Rick Snyder.

That’s only because he was charged with two misdemeanors — willful neglect of duty — and his case is being handled by another judge. But he, too, was indicted in a process declared invalid by the Supreme Court. His next hearing is Oct. 26.

In 2014, Flint managers appointed by Snyder took the city out of a regional water system and began using the Flint River to save money while a new pipeline to Lake Huron was being built. But the river water wasn’t treated to reduce its corrosive qualities.

Lead broke off from old pipes and contaminated the system for more than a year.



# GOP likes Senate odds even after Walker issues

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Leading Republicans are entering the final month of the midterm campaign increasingly optimistic that a Senate majority is within reach even as a dramatic family fight in Georgia clouds one of the party's biggest pickup chances.

And as some Democrats crowd on social media about apparent Republican setbacks, party strategists have privately conceded that their own shortcomings may not be outweighed by the GOP's mounting challenges.

The evolving outlook is tied to a blunt reality: Democrats have virtually no margin for error as

they confront the weight of history, widespread economic concerns and President Joe Biden's weak standing. There is broad agreement among both parties that the Democrats' summertime momentum across states like Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin has eroded just five weeks before Election Day.

"There's reason to be apprehensive, not reason to be gloomy," veteran Democratic strategist James Carville said. "It looked like at the end of August we had a little momentum. I don't know if we've regressed any, but we're not progressing in many places."

That tepid outlook comes

even as Republicans confront a series of self-imposed setbacks in the states that matter most in the 2022 midterms, which will decide the balance of power in Congress and statehouses across the nation.

None has been more glaring than Herschel Walker's struggles in Georgia, where the Republican Senate candidate's own son accused him of lying about his personal challenges — including a report from *The Daily Beast* alleging that the anti-abortion Walker paid for a girlfriend's abortion in 2009. Walker called the accusation a "flat-out lie" and said he would sue. Walker had not taken legal action as of late Tuesday, but he

repeated his denials Wednesday morning during a Fox News interview.

The Republican establishment, including the Sen. Mitch McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund, and former President Donald Trump himself remained staunchly behind Walker on Tuesday in his bid to oust first-term Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock. The Walker campaign also reported a massive fundraising haul that coincided with the latest allegations.

"If you're in a fight, people will come to your aid," said Steven Law, head of the Senate Leadership Fund and a close ally of McConnell, R-Ky.

## Lake retracts 'rare and legal' abortion comment

Associated Press

PHOENIX — A spokesman for Kari Lake said Tuesday that the Republican candidate for Arizona governor didn't mean to suggest abortion should be legal, saying she's not calling for changes to abortion laws weeks after a judge ruled that prosecutors can enforce a near-total ban on terminating pregnancies.

In her most expansive comments on abortion since the ruling last month, Lake told a Phoenix talk radio host that it should be "rare and legal" before saying twice that it should be "rare but safe." Ross Trumble, a spokesman for Lake, said she meant to say only "rare but safe."

"You know, it would be really wonderful if abortion was rare and legal — the way they said it before, remember? Rare but safe, rare but safe, I think is what they said," Lake told conservative host Mike Broomhead on KTAR radio. "It'd be really wonderful if that's how it turned out. But that's not what they want, Mike. They don't want

rare but safe."

Lake appeared to be referring to former President Bill Clinton's famous line that abortion should be "safe, legal and rare."

Arizona doctors stopped performing abortions late last month after a judge in Tucson ruled that prosecutors can enforce a law dating to 1864 that bans abortion unless it's necessary to save a woman's life. Arizona also has a law passed this year that bans abortion after 15 weeks, creating speculation about what's allowed.

Trumble said either the total ban or the 15-week law would fit Lake's standard of abortion being "rare but safe."

"'Rare but safe' would apply to whatever the current law is interpreted to mean," Trumble said.

He said Lake has no plans to ask the Legislature to change abortion laws and declined to say whether she would sign legislation expanding access, saying he wouldn't address "hypotheticals."

## Schools reject claims that students identify as cats

The Denver Post

DENVER — No, several large Colorado school districts said Tuesday, they are not having issues with students identifying as cats or other animals, as Republican gubernatorial candidate Heidi Ganahl has repeatedly claimed is happening in schools across the state.

Ganahl, a University of Colorado regent running to unseat Gov. Jared Polis next month, said in a radio interview last week that "schools are tolerating" students "identifying as cats." She then doubled down on that position in subsequent interviews over the past several days: She told KDVR-TV that she'd received more than 100 messages from parents "across Colorado" talking about the issue in their school.

Ganahl reiterated her concern in a statement to the *Denver Post* on Tuesday, casting students dressing up like cats as a distraction when they should be learning.

"As a candidate for governor, but more than anything as a par-

ent, my concern is that distractions like children dressing up in costumes at school detract from the reality that 60% of our kids are not performing at grade level," she said. "It's tragic that we are failing our children. We need to make them our priority."

Officials for Denver Public Schools, Cherry Creek Schools, Aurora Public Schools and Colorado Springs School District 11 all denied having any issues with students dressing up as cats or other animals. Two statewide organizations, representing teachers and administrators, criticized Ganahl's claims and said they had never been made aware of such issues, either.

Randy Barber, spokesman for Boulder Valley School District, which is included on a list Ganahl's campaign provided of schools where students dress like animals, said he was unaware of any such issues.

"The concerns being generated by the Republican gubernatorial candidate are baseless," he said.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Cheating scandal probe mars fishing tournament**

**OH** CLEVELAND — The county prosecutor's office in Cleveland has opened an investigation into an apparent cheating scandal during a lucrative walleye fishing tournament on Lake Erie.

A video posted to Twitter shows Jason Fischer, tournament director for the Lake Erie Walleye Trail, cutting open the winning catch of five walleye and finding lead weights and prepared fish fillets inside them.

The winning anglers, Jacob Runyan, of Broadview Heights, Ohio, and Chase Cominsky, of Hermitage, Pa., were immediately disqualified. The video shows Fischer urging Runyan to leave for his own safety as people hurled expletive-laced insults at him.

Fischer told WOIO-TV that he cut the fish open because they appeared heavier than typical walleye of that length.

**Racist events sideline 2 high school teams**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — Two recent racist incidents involving a mock slave auction and violence against Black people have sidelined two Sacramento-area high schools for the remainder of the varsity football season.

The Sacramento Bee reported that Amador High School canceled the rest of its season because of a Snapchat group named "Kill the Blacks" and that River Valley High School in Yuba City forfeited its game after a TikTok video created by players involving a mock slave auction surfaced.

River Valley also forfeited the remainder of its season. With varsity players out after the video surfaced, the team doesn't have enough players, KCRA-TV reported.

**2,554-pound pumpkin sets new record in US**

**NY** CLARENCE — A 2,554-pound pumpkin grown in upstate New York set a new U.S. weight record.

State and national records fell at the Great Pumpkin Farm in the Buffalo suburb of Clarence, when Scott Andrusz's entry broke the previous national record of 2,528 pounds, The Buffalo News reported.

The previous New York state record was 2,517 pounds, a news release said.

A grower in Italy holds the world record for heaviest pumpkin. He grew a 2,702-pound squash in 2021, according to Guinness World Records.

**3 die when plane hits home, 2 in house safe**

**MN** HERMANTOWN — Three people aboard a small airplane died when it crashed into a house near a northern Minnesota airport, but the two people sleeping inside the home — and their cat — were unharmed.

Hermantown Police said the Cessna 172 plane crashed into the second floor of the home just south of the Duluth airport, before coming to rest in the backyard.

Jason Hoffman told Minnesota Public Radio that he and his wife had been asleep for a little more than an hour before the plane tore through the roof

above their bed.

The three people aboard the plane who died included two men from Burnsville and a woman from St. Paul. They were all in their 30s but weren't immediately identified.

**8 more convictions get linked to ex-cop vacated**

**IL** CHICAGO — Cook County Judge Erica Reddick threw out convictions for eight more people whose cases were linked to a notorious former Chicago police sergeant who regularly framed people for drug crimes they didn't commit.

The action, in response to motions filed jointly by their attorneys and the Cook County State's Attorney Office, followed the dismissal of 44 convictions in April and brought to 237 the number of vacated convictions in recent years linked to former Sgt. Ronald Watts and his tactical unit, State's Attorney Kim Foxx said.

Watts, a Black sergeant, led a team that until 2012 planted drugs or falsely accused residents of a public housing complex, and others who were visiting or simply happened to be in the area.

Watts and another officer pleaded guilty in 2013 to stealing money from an FBI informant. Watts received a 22-month prison sentence.

**4 triple-decker homes ablaze in neighborhood**

**MA** BOSTON — A wind-whipped fire damaged four triple-decker homes in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, the city fire de-

partment said.

Boston Fire Commissioner Paul Burke said heavy winds pushed the first fire to three other buildings.

Boston Fire spokesperson Brian Alkins said 15 people were displaced by the fire. He estimated damage to the buildings at \$2 million.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the fire.

One of the homes involved was 25 Peverell St., where actors Mark and Donnie Wahlberg and their large family used to live. Mark Wahlberg visited the address "where it all started" during the production of his Netflix movie "Wonderland" in 2018 and 2019.

**41 endangered turtle species hatch at zoo**

**CA** SAN DIEGO — It only took two decades, but a rare and endangered turtle species has finally bred at the San Diego Zoo.

Zoo officials announced the arrival of 41 tiny Indian narrow-headed softshell turtle hatchlings.

Conservationists from the San Diego Wildlife Alliance had for 20 years closely monitored three adult turtles for any indications of breeding.

"This is an extremely prolonged process as the turtles can take close to 10 years to even reach sexual maturity," according to a news release.

The reptiles are known to lay their eggs overnight and cover them with dirt — adding to the difficulty of locating a nest. Two nests were found over the summer containing 41 eggs, which all survived.

— From wire reports



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Judge hits No. 62 to break AL record

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Aaron Judge took a smooth, mighty swing, then broke into a big smile as he trotted around the bases. Heading home, his teammates backed away, letting him touch the plate alone.

At last, the New York Yankees slugger had the American League home run record all to himself.

Judge hit his 62nd home run of the season Tuesday night, breaking Roger Maris' AL record and setting what some fans consider baseball's "clean" standard.

"It's a big relief," Judge said. "Everybody can finally sit down in their seats and watch the ballgame. It's been a fun ride so far, getting a chance to do this. ... Getting a chance to have your name next to someone as great as Roger Maris and Babe Ruth and those guys is incredible."

Judge said he felt "quite a few emotions" after connecting, thinking about his family and fans and supporters. He said it would probably be after the season until he'd truly soak in and appreciate the significance of his achievement.

"In my book, it's just another day," the stoic Judge said.

After slamming his helmet in a rare show of frustration when he went without a homer in the first game of the doubleheader against the Rangers in Texas, Judge hit the third pitch of the nightcap into the first row of seats in left field.

That trip around the bases after a long chase was certainly a mixture of pure joy

and relief for No. 99, whose only homer in the previous 13 games had been when he tied Maris' 61 last Wednesday in Toronto.

Judge did it just in time, too, homering on the next-to-last day of the regular season.

Barry Bonds holds the major league record of 73 home runs, set with the San Francisco Giants in 2001.

Judge's milestone ball was caught by Cory Youmans of Dallas, who was sitting in Section 31. When asked what he was going to do with the ball while being taken away with security to have the ball authenticated, Youmans responded, "Good question. I haven't thought about it."

Asked after the 3-2 loss if he'd gotten the ball, Judge said, "not yet."

"I don't know where it's at. It'd be great to get it back," he said.

Judge also praised the fan for making a "great catch" and said the man had every right to keep the prized souvenir.

Another fan was escorted away after leaping over the rail into a gap between the seats and the left-field wall. The crowd of 38,832 was Texas' third sellout this season.

Almost as soon as Judge connected on a 1-1 slider from right-hander Jesús Tinoco, his Yankees teammates streamed out of the dugout to celebrate with him. But they stayed away from home plate — leaving him to step on it before sharing hugs and high-fives.

"You never know how you're going to react in the moment. And it was just so, so very cool," manager Aaron Boone said.

Gerrit Cole, who set a Yankees single-season strikeout record in the same game, said he didn't know if Judge was pressing as of late, but chuckled when saying everybody else on the team was.

"Just wanted it to happen so bad," Cole said. "So I don't know if that's pressing, or it's just hoping hard. We were all just hoping really hard, I think ... He's not trying to get the record for himself. He's trying to get the record for his teammates, and for the Yankee fans."

New York wound up losing the second game after winning the opener 5-4. With one game left in the regular season, the split left the Yankees with a fitting 99-62 record — Judge's number and his home run total.

Judge's mother and father were in the stands to see the 30-year-old outfielder end a five-game homerless streak, including the earlier game Tuesday when he was 1-for-5 with a single.

The Maris family wasn't in Texas after following Judge around for a while, but Roger Maris Jr. tweeted, "Congratulations to Aaron Judge and his family on Aaron's historic home run number 62! It has definitely been a baseball season to remember. You are all class and someone who should be revered. For the MAJORITY of the fans, we can now celebrate a new CLEANHOME RUN KING!!"

When the top of the first ended, and Judge went to take his place in right field, he carried the glove and cap of first baseman DJ LeMahieu, who patted him on the back.

## Verlander, bullpen keep Phillies hitless until ninth

Associated Press

HOUSTON — After capping his magnificent comeback season with another stellar start Tuesday night, Justin Verlander was too busy looking ahead to reflect too much on what he's accomplished already.

"I wouldn't be who I am or in this position now if I just was happy with where I finish the regular season. ... I'm already trying to prepare myself for the postseason and get ready for that," he said. "But at the same time, I see the numbers, I know how good they are, and I do appreciate it."

Verlander struck out 10 without allowing a hit in five innings, and Houston's bullpen kept the Philadelphia Phillies hitless until the ninth inning in a 10-0 win.

Verlander, who has pitched three no-hit-

ters in his career, walked one before being pulled after 77 pitches. The AL West champion Astros led the NL wild-card Phillies 8-0 at that point.

"It's great to have him on the mound," manager Dusty Baker said. "The team's excited, the fans are excited, I think baseball is excited when he's on the mound on a national stage like that. He's some pitcher."

Rookie Hunter Brown pitched 2½ hitless innings and Hector Neris got the last two outs of the eighth inning. Will Smith came on for the ninth and Garrett Stubbs singled to center field to break up the no-hit bid.

"About the fifth inning you start thinking about it," Baker said of the possibility of a no-hitter. "You start counting the amount of outs ... everybody in our bullpen, the guys

that came in, they wanted to be a part of it."

Added Verlander: "It didn't work out. It wasn't our night."

Jeremy Peña, Kyle Tucker and Martín Maldonado homered as the Astros jumped on Ranger Suárez (10-7) for six runs in two innings.

Verlander (18-4) collected his American League-leading 18th win, and his MLB-leading 1.75 ERA is the lowest for a qualified pitcher in the AL, excluding the pandemic-shortened season, since Pedro Martínez posted a 1.74 ERA in 2000.

The two-time Cy Young Award winner's ERA is also the lowest of his career, besting his 2.40 ERA in 2011, when he won his first Cy Young and was also named AL MVP while with Detroit.



# Braves win fifth straight NL East title

Associated Press

MIAMI — Their sluggish start now far behind them, Ronald Acuña Jr. and the World Series champion Atlanta Braves needed just one more win to complete a most stunning turnaround.

They earned it Tuesday night, beating the Miami Marlins 2-1 to take their fifth straight NL East title and finish the first leg of a trek they hope leads them to another crown.

Afterward, they popped Champagne and puffed cigars, basking in their accomplishment.

“It’s hard to win one,” manager Brian Snitker said. “To win five is pretty special. It’s a credit to our organization.”

William Contreras drove in the go-ahead run with an infield single in the fifth, and the Atlanta pitching staff turned in a solid performance.

With the win, Atlanta earned a first-round bye as the No. 2 seed in the NL, behind the Los Angeles Dodgers.

**Mets 4-8, Nationals 2-0:** Host New York was eliminated from the NL East race even as Brandon Nimmo, Francisco Lindor and Jeff McNeill opened with three straight homers to spark the team to a doubleheader sweep.

The Braves were batting in the sixth with a 2-1 lead in Miami when the Mets started the second game with three straight homers for the first time in team history.

Stephen Nogosek (1-1) got six strikeouts in 2 2/3 innings for his first career win in the second game.

Carlos Carrasco allowed two runs on five hits in four-plus innings in the first game.

Adam Ottavino (6-3) pitched 1 2/3 innings and Edwin Díaz got four outs for his 32nd save.

**White Sox 8, Twins 3:** Luis Arraez had one hit to move closer to his first AL batting championship, one of only two hits visiting Minnesota managed off Chicago’s Lucas Giolito in seven innings.

The 25-year-old Arraez extended his hitting streak to eight games and held his average at .315 as he tries to become the fifth Twins player to win the league batting title.

He is ahead of Yankees slugger Aaron Judge, who is hitting .311 in his bid for the AL Triple Crown.

**Padres 6, Giants 2:** Sean Manaea allowed only one hit in six shutout innings and host San Diego wrapped up the fifth seed in the NL playoffs, beating San Francisco.

Wil Myers homered and drove in two runs for the Padres. They got the second wild-card spot with the victory and Philadelphia’s 10-0 loss at Houston.

**Red Sox 6, Rays 0 (5):** Xander Bogaerts hit a grand slam and Nathan Eovaldi pitched five scoreless innings in what could be his final appearance in a Boston uniform to help the home team beat playoff-bound Tampa in a rain-shortened game.

**Mariners 7-9, Tigers 6-6:** Abraham Toro homered and drove in four runs, Cal Raleigh hit his 27th home run of the season and host Seattle beat Detroit to complete a sweep of their doubleheader.

Seattle won the first game 7-6 in 10 innings as catcher Luis Torrens became the first position player in club history earn a win when the Mariners rallied for two runs in the bot-

tom of the 10th.

**Brewers 3, Diamondbacks 0:** Eric Lauer pitched six innings of no-hit ball before getting removed from the game in host Milwaukee’s victory over Arizona.

Jake Cousins and Peter Strzelecki worked the final three innings of the one-hit shutout.

**Cardinals 8, Pirates 7 (10):** Albert Pujols drove in two more runs and visiting St. Louis went on to beat Pittsburgh.

**Guardians 5, Royals 3:** Cal Quantrill finished the regular season unbeaten at home, improving to 14-0 in his career at Progressive Field after Owen Miller hit a two-run homer in Cleveland’s win over Kansas City.

José Ramírez hit a two-run double and Andrés Giménez had an RBI single in the fifth.

Guardians closer Emmanuel Clase gave up a run in the ninth before getting his MLB-leading 42nd save.

**Rockies 5, Dodgers 2:** Julio Urias made his final tune-up for the postseason and case for the Cy Young Award a solid one, though visiting Colorado went ahead after he left and beat Los Angeles.

Urias pitched five innings and allowed two runs — both on solo homers. He will finish season as the National League’s ERA leader at 2.16 with a 17-7 record.

**Reds 3, Cubs 2:** Spencer Steer doubled off Brandon Hughes in the ninth inning to score Stuart Fairchild and host Cincinnati avoided its 100th loss, beating Chicago.

**Athletics 2, Angels 1 (10):** Shea Langeliers drew a bases-loaded walk in the 10th inning, sending host Oakland past Los Angeles.

## MLB playoff matchups set with 1 game left in season

Associated Press

Albert Pujols taking his final swings in October, Julio Rodríguez stepping in for the first time. Max Scherzer and Jacob deGrom facing Manny Machado and Juan Soto.

Bryce Harper, back at last. José Ramírez and his Cleveland teammates trying to break a long drought — with a new name.

And Aaron Judge, Mookie Betts and other top stars looming next week.

All of a sudden, the entire Major League Baseball playoff pic-

ture came into focus Tuesday night. The matchups were finally set, right before the last day of the regular season.

The postseason, expanded from 10 teams last year to 12 this season, begins Friday with a newly created wild-card round. All four series are best-of-three — three days in a row, no breaks, with the higher seed hosting every game.

In the National League, it’s Padres-Mets and Phillies-Cardinals. In the American League, it’s Mariners-Blue Jays and

Rays-Guardians.

At Citi Field, the New York Mets figure to throw aces Scherzer and deGrom at San Diego, featuring big-hitting Machado and Soto. The Mets’ bid to win the NL East ended when they were eliminated by the defending World Series champion Atlanta Braves, so New York wound up as the top NL wild-card team.

“We have to go on the road and play against a tough team and beat some of the best pitchers in the game,” Machado said. “It is about going out there and enjoy-

ing the moment.”

At Busch Stadium, soon-to-be retired St. Louis stars Yadier Molina and Pujols host Harper and Philadelphia. The Cardinals won the NL Central, but as the No. 3 seed don’t get the benefit of an early bye.

A two-time MVP, Harper makes his first playoff appearance since 2017 with Washington.

All four matchups are scheduled to end Sunday. The best-of-five Division Series in both leagues begin Oct. 11.

# Steelers switch to Pickett at quarterback

*Associated Press*

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin never had a definitive timeline on when to hand the keys to the Pittsburgh Steelers' offense to Kenny Pickett.

If anything, Tomlin wanted to delay a move that seemed inevitable from the moment the Steelers drafted Pickett with the 20th overall pick six months ago. Asked as recently as a week ago how he would know it's time, Tomlin shrugged and said simply "you just kind of know when you're there."

The Steelers, 1-3 and heading into the most daunting stretch of their season, are there.

The Pickett era is officially underway in Pittsburgh. No turning back now. The rookie quarterback will make his first start on Sunday when the Steelers visit Buffalo (3-1), a decision Tomlin made because he feels it gives his team its best chance to win, not only this weekend but down the road.

"He's a young guy, he's going to grow throughout this process," Tomlin said Tuesday. "But make no mistake about it, we're not grading him on a curve. He's not grading himself on a curve. There's an expectation of quality play and playing to win."

Tangible qualities Pickett showed in abundance while playing next door at the University of Pittsburgh, where he morphed from a three-star prospect when

he arrived in January 2017 to a Heisman Trophy finalist last fall.

Tomlin watched Pickett's development casually over the years, his interest piquing after Pickett spent 2021 re-writing most of the Pitt record book while leading the Panthers to the ACC title.

Pickett carries himself with a swagger that's greater than the sum of his parts, the NFL prospect who spent months listening to draftniks openly wonder about the size of his hands now finds himself tasked with carrying the considerable baggage that comes when you're the heir apparent to a likely Hall of Famer in Ben Roethlisberger. Like Roethlisberger, Pickett was taken in the first round. Like Roethlisberger, Pickett spent the beginning of his rookie season sitting behind a veteran on the depth chart.

And like Roethlisberger, Pickett now finds himself thrust into the spotlight perhaps a little earlier than anticipated.

It's a glare Tomlin believes Pickett is ready to handle.

"Kenny has shown us maturity at every point throughout this process," Tomlin said, pointing out that at age 24 Pickett is older than most NFL rookies.

"The things that we valued in him from a draft perspective: fluid and quick decision-making, pro-like anticipation and things of that nature have proven to be true."

Pickett showed flashes during the second

half on Sunday against the Jets, becoming the first rookie quarterback in NFL history to run for two touchdowns in his debut. There were also mistakes, namely an ill-advised heave toward the sideline late in the fourth quarter that smacked off the hands of tight end Pat Freiermuth and into the awaiting arms of Jets safety Michael Carter II that set up New York's game-winning touchdown drive.

The player who Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi called "Kenny Perfect" took full responsibility for the miscues as the Steelers dropped their third straight game, though what's ailing Pittsburgh goes far beyond the quarterback position.

Tomlin was quick to not place full blame for the switch at the feet of Mitch Trubisky, who found only sporadic success in three-plus games after being tabbed as the starter at the end of training camp.

"Oftentimes a quarterback position gets too much credit and too much blame," Tomlin said. "We haven't moved the ball fluidly enough to our liking. We hadn't put enough points on the board. The quarterback is a component of that, but not the only component. We've all got to absorb the responsibility that comes with what we are."

Trubisky, signed to a two-year deal in March and selected as a co-captain on the eve of the season, will serve as Pickett's backup.

## Thorns owner Paulson steps away after abuse report

*Associated Press*

PORTLAND, Ore. — Portland Thorns owner Merritt Paulson has removed himself from a decision-making role with the National Women's Soccer League club until the findings are released from an ongoing investigation into scandals around the league.

Paulson, who is also the owner of Major League Soccer's Portland Timbers, announced his decision in a statement Tuesday, one day after the release of the findings of a disturbing independent investigation into the NWSL's abuse scandals commissioned by U.S. Soccer. A concurrent investigation is still being conducted jointly by the league and the players' union, and Paulson plans to step away until its completion.

Gavin Wilkinson and Mike Golub, who have both served in executive roles with Paulson's teams, are also stepping away from the Thorns, who are headed into the

NWSL playoffs. Paulson's statement didn't indicate whether the trio will also step away from the Timbers, and Paulson gave no indication he plans to sell his teams.

"Yesterday's Yates report unveiling was the darkest day I have experienced, and I know the same is true for everyone else who loves our team and our league," Paulson said. "I know it was even harder and darker for those whose stories were shared publicly. I cannot apologize enough for our role in a gross systemic failure to protect player safety and the missteps we made in 2015. I am truly sorry."

In the investigation report commissioned by U.S. Soccer, Paulson is accused of enabling and supporting former Thorns coach Paul Riley after Riley was accused of harassment and sexual coercion by players Sinead Farrelly and Mana Shim.

Golub is accused of making inappropriate sexual remarks in 2013 to former Thorns

coach Cindy Parlow Cone, now the president of U.S. Soccer. Golub has previously faced criticism for his workplace behavior and his tolerance for others' misbehavior.

In her investigative report, former acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Q. Yates also accused Thorns' management of not being forthcoming with information around Riley's departure from the team in 2015, writing that the club "interfered with our access to relevant witnesses and raised specious legal arguments in an attempt to impede our use of relevant documents."

The Thorns didn't announce why they weren't renewing Riley's contract that year, and Paulson subsequently vouched for Riley as he landed a job with the Western New York Flash, which subsequently became the North Carolina Courage. Riley was with the Courage until being fired in September 2021 after allegations of his misconduct were made public.