

Ukraine blasts Russia's 'dirty bomb' talk

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's defense chief on Sunday alleged that Ukraine was preparing a "provocation" involving a radioactive device, a stark claim that was strongly rejected by Ukrainian and British officials amid soaring tensions as Moscow struggles to stem Ukrainian advances in the south.

Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made the allegations in phone calls with his counterparts from Britain, France and Turkey. He also spoke to U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in their second call in three days, but a terse Russian readout of that call didn't say whether the dirty bomb claim was also mentioned in their conversation.

Russia's defense ministry said Shoigu voiced concern about "possible Ukrainian provocations involving a 'dirty bomb,' " a device that uses explosives to

scatter radioactive waste. It doesn't have the devastating effect of a nuclear explosion, but it could expose broad areas to radioactive contamination.

Britain strongly rejected the claims. The British Ministry of Defense said in his call with Defense Secretary Ben Wallace that Shoigu "alleged that Ukraine was planning actions facilitated by Western countries, including the UK, to escalate the conflict in Ukraine."

"The Defense Secretary refuted these claims and cautioned that such allegations should not be used as a pretext for greater escalation," the ministry said. "The Defense Secretary also reiterated UK and wider international support for Ukraine and desire to de-escalate this conflict. It is for Ukraine and Russia to seek resolution to the war and the UK stands ready to assist."

Ukraine's presidential adviser

Mykhailo Podolyak also dismissed Shoigu's claims as an "absolute and quite predictable absurdity from those who believe that they blatantly lie and make people believe in that."

The French Ministry of the Armed Forces said that Shoigu told his counterpart, Sebastien Lecornu, that the situation in Ukraine was rapidly worsening and "trending towards uncontrollable escalation."

Russian authorities repeatedly have made allegations that Ukraine could detonate a dirty bomb in a false flag attack and blame it on Moscow. Ukrainian authorities, in turn, have accused the Kremlin of hatching such a plan.

The mention of the threat in Shoigu's calls with his counterparts appeared to indicate that the threat of such an attack has risen to an unprecedented level.

"It appears that there is a shared feeling that the tensions

have approached the level that could raise the real threat for all," Fyodor Lukyanov, the Kremlin-connected head of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, a Moscow-based group of top foreign affairs experts, said in a commentary on Shoigu's phone calls.

Elsewhere, Russian authorities reported that they are building defensive positions in occupied areas of Ukraine and border regions of Russia, reflecting fears that Ukrainian forces may attack along new sections of the 620-mile front line.

The governor of Russia's Kursk region, Roman Starovoit, said Sunday that two defensive lines have been built and a third would be finished by Nov. 5. Defensive lines were also established in the Belgorod region, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. He posted pictures Saturday of lines of concrete blocks to block the movement of armored vehicles.

China's Xi expands powers, promotes allies in party

Associated Press

BEIJING — President Xi Jinping, China's most powerful leader in decades, increased his dominance Sunday when he was named to another term as head of the ruling Communist Party in a break with tradition and promoted allies who support his vision of tighter control over society and the struggling economy.

Xi, who took power in 2012, was awarded a third five-year term as general secretary, discarding a custom under which his predecessor left after 10 years. The 69-year-old leader is expected by some to try to stay in power for life. The party also named a seven-member Standing Committee, its inner circle of power, dominated by Xi allies after Premier

Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader and an advocate of market-style reform and private enterprise, was dropped from the leadership Saturday. That was despite Li being a year younger than the party's informal retirement age of 68.

"Power will be even more concentrated in the hands of Xi Jinping," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a Chinese politics expert at Hong Kong Baptist University. The new appointees are "all loyal to Xi," he said. "There is no counterweight or checks and balances in the system at all."

On Saturday, Xi's predecessor, 79-year-old Hu Jintao, abruptly left a meeting of the party Central Committee with an aide holding his arm. That prompted questions about whether Xi was flexing his

powers by expelling other leaders. The official Xinhua News Agency later reported Hu was in poor health and needed to rest.

Xi and other Standing Committee members appeared for the first time as a group before reporters in the Great Hall of the People, the seat of China's ceremonial legislature in Beijing.

The No. 2 leader was Li Qiang, the Shanghai party secretary. That puts Li Qiang, who is no relation to Li Keqiang, in line to become premier, the top economic official. Zhao Leji, already a member, was promoted to No. 3, likely to head the legislature. Those posts are to be assigned when the legislature meets next year.

Leadership changes were announced as the party wrapped up

a twice-a-decade congress that was closely watched for initiatives to reverse an economic slump or changes in a severe "zero-COVID" strategy that has shut down cities and disrupted business. Officials disappointed investors and the Chinese public by announcing no changes.

The lineup appeared to reflect what some commentators called "Maximum Xi," valuing loyalty over ability. Some new leaders lack national-level experience as vice premier or Cabinet minister that typically is seen as a requirement for the post.

During the congress, Xi called for faster military development, "self-reliance and strength" in technology and defense of China's interests abroad.

Marines: New ACV is future of warfare

The Orange County Register

The Marine Corps' new armored Amphibious Combat Vehicles, intended to become the main transport in the future for getting troops and gear from ship to shore, won't be available for their first planned deployment this fall and are now being restricted in water training at Camp Pendleton, Calif., because of safety concerns.

Four of the new ACVs flipped in the surf in just the last year — in all cases, the Marines were able to get out and swim to shore. Three of the 36-ton vehicles were damaged beyond repair.

The ACVs, which use eight wheels and have a shape designed to better survive a bomb blast, are replacing the Marine's aging fleet of 800 tracked Amphibious Assault Vehicles, which have been in use for decades and now require many hours of maintenance to keep operational. The ACVs have been designed to have a swim capability similar to the AAVs and have equal or greater mobility when compared to the M1 Abrams tank, another vehicle on its way out.

But Marine officials are slowing the rollout of the new ACVs after the vehicle's difficulties in the surf zone. Since the first ACV flipped in September 2021, leaders have restricted the water conditions Marines can train in and even temporarily suspended water training to give time for further reviews.

Still, Marine officials say the ACV is the future of amphibious warfighting.

And the Marine Corps' response placing restrictions on training with the ACVs shows lessons were learned, officials said, after a deadly training accident in 2020 involving an AAV — nine men died when the vehicle sank to the bottom of the ocean as it swam from San Clemente Island to an awaiting ship. Investigators said the accident could have been prevented, and a lack of adherence to protocols and a rush to prepare for a deployment contributed. The Marine Corps rolled out new, stricter rules and procedures guiding training.

Marines called for the delays in ACV training to ensure that "the assault amphibian community can review best practices and procedures to remain capable, safe and ready."

After an open water pause was initiated in July when two ACVs flipped in high surf off Camp Pendleton, Marines could only train with the vehicles in protected waters near the

base. Then, late last month, those restrictions were lifted, and the vehicles returned to the ocean again, but only if the surf conditions were moderate, including waves at 4 feet or smaller. Then, on Oct. 13, another ACV flipped in surf condition reported at 2 feet to 3 feet.

On Oct. 14, Marine officials again limited the vehicles from surf zone training. Marines can still train in the ocean, but only by entering and exiting through a protected basin. It took Marines four days to get the broken-down ACV from the water.

"We're taking a deliberate and methodical approach to fielding this platform," Lt. Gen. David Furness, deputy commandant for plans, policies and operations, said. "This adjustment to current guidance ensures our Marines have the ability to safely train and maintain proficiency while we work to conduct additional testing."

Evaluated on West Coast

The ACVs were put through their paces on land at Twentynine Palms and then in 2019, moved to Camp Pendleton for evaluation on training ranges and in the water. Marines who tested them then reported finding the vehicles superior to the outgoing AAVs.

The vehicle can carry 13 infantry Marines plus three crew members. It travels at 6 knots in the water and up to a distance of 14 miles at sea.

The ACV is considered "the future" of the Marines' operations, especially now as Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger sees the service returning to its amphibious roots and working more closely with the Navy. He envisions the potential for island-hopping campaigns and other amphibious operations in the Indo-Pacific, an area military leaders expect will be particularly contested in the coming years.

Concern about reliability

But some Marine veterans familiar with the vehicle and its operations have worried about the reliability of the ACV, especially in the surf zone.

Among them is retired Lt. Col. Kent Ralston, a former AAV battalion commander who was also a testing director for the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle — a vehicle he said was actually "incredible" in the water.

When the ACV program was announced, Ralston and others in the AAV community weren't so sure its design was the best for re-

placing the AAVs.

The AAV runs on tracks, which help anchor the vehicle in water. The ACV switches out those treads for wheels.

"When it flips, they want to go to the surface like eight gigantic balloons," Ralston said. "We're fortunate those four vehicles only flipped on their side. If they flipped on the top, Marines would not have been able to get out. Maybe they could have found an air pocket until someone could get them, but one of the vehicles sat out there for days."

As the ACV program continued to ramp up over the last several years, Ralston went as far as to write letters to two commandants at the time, airing his concerns.

"I felt strongly it was a bad idea and that it's going to get guys killed," he said. "I could see the disaster it would be."

Marines remain confident

Marine Corps officials say they are convinced the ACV is the best vehicle for their future operations and that it is more lethal, is better designed for troops to survive attacks and is reliable.

Marine officials worked with manufacturer BAE on the vehicle's design to meet their needs and on production and testing. Included in the testing was making sure the ACV could surf through a 6-foot wave, Marine officials said.

Now, in light of the recent incidents with flipping, Marines will test the ACVs in the surf to see what other factors beyond surf height might impact the vehicle's performance, officials said.

And, officials said, contrary to what Ralston has heard, Marines who have operated both vehicles report the ACV is more responsive in the water.

"Our current guidance allows us to train our Marines, giving them the opportunity to gain that experience safely while also allowing us to test the ACV in certain conditions," said Capt. Ryan Bruce, a Marine Corps spokesman. "We'll take the data from these tests and ultimately incorporate it into our tactics and procedures that will allow us to take full advantage of the ACV's capabilities in the real world."

Marines will continue to test the ACVs in controlled water conditions to determine the challenges and how to best overcome them, he said. The vehicles have no restrictions on their use for land training.

Illegal US border crossings hit annual high

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A surge in migration from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua in September brought the number of illegal crossings to the highest level ever recorded in a fiscal year, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The year-end numbers reflect deteriorating economic and political conditions in some countries, the relative strength of the U.S. economy and uneven enforcement of Trump-era asylum restrictions.

Migrants were stopped 227,547 times in September at the U.S. border with Mexico, the third-highest month of Joe Biden's presidency. It was up 11.5% from 204,087 times in August and 18.5% from 192,001 times in September 2021.

In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, migrants were stopped

2.38 million times, up 37% from 1.73 million times the year before, according to figures released late Friday night. The annual total surpassed 2 million for the first time in August and is more than twice the highest level during Donald Trump's presidency in 2019.

Nearly 78,000 migrants from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua were stopped in September, compared to about 58,000 from Mexico and three countries of northern Central America that have historically accounted for most of the flow.

The remarkable geographic shift is at least partly a result of Title 42, a public health rule that suspends rights to seek asylum under U.S. and international law on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Due to strained diplomatic relations, the U.S. cannot expel mi-

grants to Venezuela, Cuba or Nicaragua. As a result, they are largely released in the United States to pursue their immigration cases.

Title 42 authority has been applied 2.4 million times since it began in March 2020 but has fallen disproportionately on migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

U.S. officials say Venezuelan migration to the United States has plunged more than 85% since Oct. 12, when the U.S. began expelling Venezuelans to Mexico under Title 42. At the same time, the Biden administration pledged to admit up to 24,000 Venezuelans to the United States on humanitarian parole if they apply online with a financial sponsor and enter through an airport, similar to how tens of thousands of Ukrainians have come since Russia invaded their country.

The first four Venezuelans paroled into the United States arrived Saturday — two from Mexico, one from Guatemala, one from Peru — and hundreds more have been approved to fly, the Homeland Security Department said.

“While this early data is not reflected in the (September) report, it confirms what we've said all along: When there is a lawful and orderly way to enter the country, individuals will be less likely to put their lives in the hands of smugglers and try to cross the border unlawfully,” said CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus.

The expansion of Title 42 for Venezuelans to be expelled to Mexico came despite the administration's attempt to end the public health authority in May, which was blocked by a federal judge.

2 Alaska asylum seekers are Indigenous Siberians

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Two Russian Indigenous Siberians were so scared of having to fight the war in Ukraine, they chanced everything to take a small boat across the treacherous Bering Sea to reach American soil, Alaska's senior U.S. senator said after talking with the two.

The two, identified as males by a resident, landed earlier this month near Gambell, on Alaska's St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Strait, where they asked for asylum.

“They feared for their lives because of Russia, who is targeting minority populations, for conscription into service in Ukraine,” Republican U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski said Saturday during a candidate forum at the Alaska Federation of Natives conference in Anchorage.

“It is very clear to me that these individuals were in fear, so much

in fear of their own government that they risked their lives and took a 15-foot skiff across those open waters,” Murkowski said when answering a question about Arctic policy.

“It is clear that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is focused on a military conquest at the expense of his own people,” Murkowski said. “He's got one hand on Ukraine and he's got the other on the Arctic, so we have to be eyes wide open on the Arctic.”

Murkowski said she met with the two Siberians recently but didn't provide more details about exactly when or where the meeting took place or where their asylum process stood.

Murkowski's office on Oct. 6 announced their request for asylum.

Gambell, an Alaska Native community of about 600 people, is about 36 miles from Russia's Chukotka Peninsula in Siberia.

Will SD OK pot again after its 1st measure reversed?

Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — When it comes to marijuana, South Dakota has been a leader among its Great Plains neighbors: one of the first to legalize recreational use, the first to approve both medical and recreational forms on the same ballot and the only one to have its recreational measure reversed.

Legalization is back on the ballot in November, but whether the politically red state will become the first to pass it twice remains in doubt.

It's facing strong opposition from conservative groups and figures determined to pull the state back from legalizing pot. And though 54% of voters approved a constitutional amendment to legalize cannabis in 2020, that campaign may have benefited from the medical marijuana measure that appeared on the same ballot.

This time, recreational mari-

juana stands alone on the ballot. And it likely faces a different demographic of voters — older and perhaps less inclined toward the drug — in a midterm election, said Matt Schweick, who organized that campaign and is doing so again this year.

Pot legalization advocates have found success primarily through ballot measures rather than legislatures, especially in GOP-held states. Voters in Arkansas, Missouri and North Dakota are deciding on recreational marijuana, as is politically divided Maryland.

Jim Kinyon said he was caught by surprise when voters decided to legalize pot in 2020.

Not this year. He's leading an organization called Protecting South Dakota Kids with the message that legalizing pot for adults would be detrimental to children.

“This is about my families, my communities and my kids,” Kinyon said.

Democrats fear midterm map is slipping away

Associated Press

The liberal Navigator public tracking poll flashed a major warning sign for Democrats in mid-October, reporting a 20 percentage point jump since September in the share of independent voters concerned about the economy and gas prices.

That was not the only data showing a turning of the tide in the battle for Congress. Regional challenges had shown up in internal Democratic polls from deep blue sanctums in the Pacific Northwest, New York and even Rhode Island, Democratic strategists say. Crime, a major focus of Republican advertising, has also risen as a major issue in several races.

Candidates say they have felt the ground shift.

“The economic concern is definitely worse, and I think that is probably part of what has corroded concern about abortion rights,” said Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, 34, a Democratic candidate for Congress in southern Washington State.

Perez is a symbol of the Democratic struggles, fighting in a margin-of-error race against exactly the kind of “ultra-MAGA” candidate Democrats have elevated this year — Republican Joe Kent, who denies the outcome of the 2020 election, argues U.S. Capitol rioters have been mistreated and wants a moratorium on all legal immigration. But Democrats in Washington have not yet been able to invest directly in her race, as they play defense elsewhere on far less favorable issues.

“Anybody in the real world is very concerned about crime, very concerned about the price of groceries,” said Perez, whose own auto-repair shop, in northeast Portland, has been broken into four times in the last year.

Rather than expanding their ambitions, Democratic strategists are now trying to keep voters, donors and volunteers from losing their nerve. Though there is wide agreement that the environment has deteriorated in recent weeks, it is far stronger for Democrats than it was in the spring, they argue.

“It is way better than it was. It is no harder than we thought it would be,” said Tim Persico, the executive director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, who has said he wish there was more money to fund Perez. “We are in a midterm in a tough economic climate against an extremely well-resourced opponent. It is supposed to be hard. It is not supposed to be a straight line.”

President Biden also tried to tamp down any sense of Democratic panic Friday, when he predicted fortunes would again improve before the Nov. 8 elections.

“It’s been back and forth with them ahead, us ahead, them ahead. Back and forth. And the polls have been all over the place. I think that we’re going to see one more shift back to our side in the closing days,” he said at the White House. “I think that we’re going to see one more shift back to our side in the closing days.”

Unlike the Senate, where a handful of high-profile races will decide control, the next House majority will be slotted together like a jigsaw puzzle on Election Day, with the pieces chosen by retirements, redistricting, recruiting failures, national mood and regional concerns.

The GOP is all but certain to pick up at least a few of the five seats they need to take control through new district lines and a few more from flagship races where Democrats have all but stopped spending. But Democrats also find themselves in a position to topple some Republican incumbents.

The real open questions are the dozens of races where polling offers no clear signal. Far more Democratic seats sit on a knife edge than Republican ones, subject to unknown factors like turnout and voter whims over the coming weeks.

Predicting the exact outcome has been made even more difficult because polling in 2020 largely failed to see the strong night Republican House candidates had. On the other hand, recent special elections this cycle have shown Democrats outperform expectations.

“The election is so close that we are just past the point of national polling having the ability to tell us where we are. It is going to go race by race at this point,” said Simon Rosenberg, a Democratic strategist who has worked with the DCCC. “The big remaining question is whether the Democratic overperformance of public polls in recent elections carries on to current voting.”

Companies lure hourly workers with college tuition perks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When Daniella Malave started working for Chipotle at 17, the main benefit she was seeking was free food. As it turned out, she also got a free college education.

While working full time for the chain, Malave completed two years of community college with annual stipends of \$5,250 from Chipotle. After that, she enrolled in the company’s free online college program, through which she earned a bachelor’s degree in business management from Wilmington University in 2020.

“I didn’t have to pay for my education,” said Malave, 24, who now works as a recruiting analyst for Chipotle in New Jersey. “Every time I say it out loud, I’m like, ‘Is

this real?’”

Chipotle is one of more than a dozen companies that have launched free or almost-free college programs for their front-line workers over the last decade. Since 2021 alone, Walmart, Amazon, Target, Macy’s, Citi and Lowe’s have made free college available to more than 3 million U.S. workers.

Companies see the programs as a way to recruit and retain workers in a tight labor market or train them for management positions. For hourly employees, the programs remove the financial barriers of obtaining a degree.

Thousands of people are now taking advantage of the benefits. Starbucks, which operates an online college program through

Arizona State University, says 22,000 workers are currently enrolled in its program. Guild Education, which administers programs for Walmart, Hilton, Disney and others and offers online programs at more than 140 schools, says it worked with 130,000 students over the last year.

But some critics question whether the programs are papering over deeper problems, like pay so low that workers can’t afford college without them or hours so erratic that it’s too hard to go to school in person.

“I do think they are providing these programs to skirt around the issue of just paying people more, giving people more certainty, improving their quality of life,” said Stephanie Hall, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, a nonpartisan think tank.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Girl breaks into safe, gives \$10K to students

FL SUMMERFIELD — A 14-year-old girl caused a stir at a north Florida middle school when she handed out more than \$10,000 that officials said she stole from her grandmother's safe.

Marion County deputies responded to Lake Weir Middle School in Summerfield after reports that a student was giving classmates hundreds of dollars each, according to an arrest report.

School officials searched the girl's backpack and found about \$2,500, deputies said. The teen said an unknown former student had given her the money and wanted it disseminated. Investigators said they later determined that the girl had broken into her grandmother's home safe and stolen about \$13,500 of the woman's life savings.

Officials had recovered about \$700 of the money that had been handed out. That money and the \$2,500 recovered from the girl's backpack were returned to the grandmother.

The girl is facing a grand theft charge.

Dogwalker discovers errant alligator roaming

IA BOISE — It's not uncommon for Idaho wildlife officials to be called for help when a moose, mountain lion, black bear or other wild animal wanders into one of the state's rural communities.

But Idaho Fish and Game officials are asking the public for help with a particularly un-

usual find — a 3.5-foot alligator that was discovered hiding in the brush of a rural neighborhood about 40 miles northwest of Boise.

Southwest Region spokesperson Brian Pearson told the Idaho Statesman that a New Plymouth resident was walking their dog when they noticed something moving in the brush.

The department has the animal in captivity for now, but Pearson said it will be euthanized or given to a licensed facility unless the owner is found.

Idaho Fish and Game officials are hoping members of the public will call the department if they have any information about the alligator's origins.

Woman in 911 hoax now faces wire fraud charges

PA PHILADELPHIA — A former Pennsylvania woman who made national headlines more than a decade ago by falsely claiming she had been kidnapped when she had actually gone to Walt Disney World is facing new charges in an alleged attempt to steal from an employer.

Federal authorities have charged Bonnie Sweeten, 51, of Delanco, N.J., with two counts of wire fraud, alleging that she forged checks and made fraudulent purchases with a company credit card.

U.S. Attorney Jacqueline Romero said the former Feasterville resident was hired in 2017 as a bookkeeper for an unnamed Doylestown excavation firm headed by someone who had known her for many years.

Prosecutors allege that she used her position and access to issue dozens of company

checks to herself, steal checks mailed to the firm and fraudulently endorse them over to herself, and make tens of thousands of dollars of personal purchases on the company credit card.

Officials: Mom charged in son's THC gummy death

VA SPOTSYLVANIA — A Virginia mother has been charged with felony murder and felony child neglect in the death of her 4-year-old son, who authorities believe ate a large amount of THC gummies.

Detectives arrested Dorothy Annette Clements and she is being held without bond, the Spotsylvania County Sheriff's Office said in a statement posted on Facebook.

Clements' son, Tanner, was found unresponsive and was taken to a hospital where he died two days later, news outlets reported.

Clements told police that only one gummy containing CBD, which does not cause a high, was left when her son accessed the jar. When she told poison control that the boy ate part of a gummy, she was assured that he'd be OK, according to court documents. But the documents showed that when police seized the empty jar, they learned that the gummies contained THC, the compound that gives pot its high, not CBD.

2 arrested in armored car robbery, guard shooting

CA LOS ANGELES — Two men were arrested after they allegedly robbed an armored car outside a Los Angeles County bank and

shot a guard several times in an ambush, authorities said.

Robbers stole about \$140,000 and the guard's gun outside a Bank of America branch in the Harbor City area, south of downtown Los Angeles near Carson, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles.

The men face charges of Hobbs Act robbery and discharging a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. The defendants face three decades in prison.

The Loomis armored car guard had been working on ATMs at the bank when the suspects, both armed and masked, ambushed him and opened fire, federal prosecutors said.

Jury convicts 2 in \$280K heist at horse track

NY NEW YORK — Two men were convicted for an armed robbery of more than a quarter-million dollars from New York's famed Aqueduct Racetrack.

A federal jury returned the verdicts against Lafayette Morrison and Lamel Miller, both of Queens. Morrison was convicted on robbery and conspiracy counts and both were convicted on a weapons count. Miller had previously pleaded guilty to the robbery.

Morrison was a security guard at the track and tipped off his confederates about when cash was being transported to the track's vault after the Gotham Stakes race, according to prosecutors.

They made off with \$284,000 and went to a hotel to divide up the cash.

— From wire reports



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Phillies rally from 4 down, beat Padres

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Bryce Harper stood on second base after a go-ahead double and ran his hands across the script “Phillies” on his jersey as Citizens Bank Park shook in ecstasy over a World Series that suddenly seems oh-so-close.

Harper punched his fists toward the ground and blurted a cuss-filled exclamation sure to be printed on T-shirts everywhere in Philly:

“This is my (expletive) house!”

With one more win, it will be a home for the World Series.

Rhys Hoskins homered twice, Kyle Schwarber hit a solo shot into shrubbery and Harper doubled to put Philadelphia ahead for good in a wild 10-6 win over the San Diego Padres on Saturday night for a 3-1 lead in the NL Championship Series.

“I believe our team is built for October, I really do,” Harper said.

Harper — who signed a 13-

year, \$330 million free-agent deal in 2019 — had made Philly both his home and a championship contender with a postseason already among the greatest in franchise history. He’s hit in nine straight games, reached base in 10 straight games, is hitting .410 in the postseason and already told his team they weren’t losing in the postseason.

“It’s just a lot of fun to be able to be part of this group,” Harper said. “It’s a lot of fun to be able to come to the park every day knowing our fans are going to show out each night.”

J.T. Realmuto also homered for the big-hitting Phillies, who are trying to become the first third-place team to reach the Fall Classic.

The Phillies sent ace Zack Wheeler to the mound in Game 5 Sunday at Citizens Bank Park to try to clinch their first National League pennant since 2009. They haven’t won the World Series since 2008.

“Yeah, you can’t write it bet-

ter,” Hoskins said. “I can’t imagine what (Sunday) is going to be like.”

Get the champagne ready, just in case.

No matter the outcome, Game 4 was one to remember for the Phillies and their fans.

The Phillies trailed 4-0 in the first and then chipped away, slugged away and finally put away the Padres. The clincher came in a four-run fifth inning against reliever Sean Manaea. Trailing 6-4, Schwarber walked to start the rally. Hoskins then ripped his second homer of the game — no bat spike, but just as dramatic — for the tying shot. Realmuto walked to set the stage for Harper.

The 2021 NL MVP lined the go-ahead double that rolled to the left-center wall for a 7-6 lead as the Philly crowd absolutely exploded. Harper then told the fans exactly where he lived — and his house is their home, too.

The Phillies fans refused to

sit — and they had no reason to the rest of the game. Nick Castellanos singled in Harper to complete the scoring in the fifth.

Schwarber smashed the ball into the shrubs in dead center in the sixth for his third homer of this series and Realmuto punctuated the scoring with a solo shot in the seventh.

The Phillies 1-5 hitters went 9-for-18 with four homers, three doubles, nine RBIs and 10 runs scored.

Whew!

“You get the one big hit, it gets louder, and that’s where you can really snowball things,” Hoskins said. “We’re not new to scoring runs in bunches, but in the playoffs when things are so much tighter and more intense, the crowd is one way to kind of let that snowball happen, and we saw it twice tonight.”

The Padres and Phillies had already nearly stuffed nine innings worth of commotion into 48 minutes of a frenzied first.

Astros romp, close in on sweep of Yanks in ALCS

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cristian Javier and the Houston Astros aren’t just beating the Yankees, they’re chomping them up. And now Dusty Baker’s team is on the verge of an astonishing four-game sweep.

Javier and Houston’s bullpen combined on a three-hitter, Chas McCormick followed a dropped fly ball with an early two-run homer and the Astros beat Gerrit Cole and the Yankees 5-0 on Saturday night to take a 3-0 AL Championship Series lead.

“We’re not going to come out any slower than we did today,” McCormick said after setting off another round of the Chas Chomp celebration in Houston’s dugout. “We’re going to be ready to play (Sunday) and go for the sweep.”

Trying for their second straight AL pennant, the 106-win Astros improved to 6-0 this postseason and need one win for their fourth World Series trip in six years. Houston aimed to close out the series on Sunday night when Lance McCullers Jr. started against Nestor Cortes.

Only one of 39 teams has recovered from a 3-0 postseason series deficit to win, Boston against the Yankees in the 2004 ALCS. Thirty teams completed sweeps.

McCormick, the No. 9 hitter, launched his second home run of the series for a 2-0 second-inning lead after Gold Glove center fielder Harrison Bader let Christian Vázquez’s fly ball bounce out of his green glove for an error.

“It’s a loud atmosphere. ... Calling it until the very end and we both got a little spooked,” Bader said. “He’s like 9 feet tall, so you don’t want to get anybody hurt.”

Aaron Judge had sprinted over from right and cut in front of him.

“At the last second I hear him. I’m trying to get out of the way,” Judge said. “I definitely messed him up on that play.”

McCormick drove a fastball 335 feet to the opposite field, and the ball hit the right-field short porch and bounced into the seats.

“It was a couple inches a little more over the plate than we wanted to and obviously the bounce went his way,” Cole said.

It would not have been a homer at any other major league ballpark, according to Statcast.

“That’s what the game’s about,” Baker said. “Even though it may not be, you have to kind of fool yourself that it is a break. And it’s amazing whatever you think can happen usually does happen. That was huge.”

Houston players responded to the homer with exaggerated clapping, arms spread wide. The gesture appeared to be initiated by Astros fan Scott Agruso, who attends games at Minute Maid Park wearing an alligator suit.

Houston loaded the bases in the sixth and chased Cole. Trey Mancini followed with a sacrifice fly off Lou Trivino and Vázquez added a two-run single.

New York is hitting .128 in the ALCS with 41 strikeouts and has lost eight of 10 to Houston this year, throwing just 13 pitches with a lead.

Bader was caught stealing second by Vázquez after a leadoff walk in the fifth.

“We shut down the momentum from them,” Vázquez said. “It was awesome.”

Clemson a favorite to reach CFP, not win national title

Associated Press

As the number of unbeaten teams in major college football was whittled to six, Clemson emerged as the best bet to reach the playoff — even though the Tigers don't appear to be a serious threat to win a national championship.

The Tigers (8-0) head into the last month of the season a virtual lock to return to the Atlantic Coast Conference title game after rallying for a sloppy 27-21 victory against No. 14 Syracuse on Saturday.

The Orange were one of three undefeated teams to fall Saturday along with No. 9 UCLA at No. 10 Oregon and No. 8 Mississippi at LSU.

The Ducks have put that opening-weekend humiliation against No. 1 Georgia in the rearview mirror and played like the Pac-12's best team since.

Brian Kelly's Tigers closed out Ole Miss with a 42-3 run and now head into an off week tied atop the SEC West, and preparing for a visit from No. 6 Alabama on Nov. 5.

Not many expected 'Bama-LSU to be a big one this season, but here they are.

As for those other Tigers, the ones who play in South Carolina's Death Valley, they survived four turnovers and quarterback DJ Uiagalelei being benched against Syracuse.

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney shut down talk of a quarterback controversy.

"As far as DJ, DJ's our starter. DJ's our leader. Ain't nothing changed there," Swinney told reporters.

Clemson has knocked off its four toughest division foes (No. 13 Wake Forest, No. 23 North Carolina State, Florida State and Syracuse) in the last five weeks.

The Tigers have won a high-scoring game and a defensive struggle. They have held off a late rally and erased a fourth-quarter deficit.

Clemson's freshman quarterback Cade Klubnik came off the bench to guide the Tigers to a 17-point fourth quarter, mostly by handing off to Will Shipley (career-high 172 yards rushing) and Phil Mafah (94).

Aside from one blowout against a tattered Boston College team, Clemson's victories against Wake, N.C. State, FSU and Syracuse have come by a combined 28 points.

In November, Clemson plays at Notre Dame (4-3) before a three-game homestand against Louisville (4-3), Miami (3-4) and South Carolina (5-2). No other playoff contender has a path to the playoff quite so accommodating the rest of the way.

Among the six remaining unbeaten teams, four of them (No. 1 Georgia and No. 3 Tennessee, No. 2 Ohio State and No. 4 Michigan) play each other.

No. 8 TCU, which overcame a double-digit, second-half deficit for the second straight week to stay perfect, still has Big 12 road games against No. 20 Texas and defending conference champ Baylor.

Clemson might look vulnerable, but it will be a healthy favorite in all its remaining games, and will likely be the same in the ACC title game.

An undefeated season will get Clemson back to the playoff for the seventh time, but compared to the top teams in the Southeastern Conference and Big Ten, the Tigers seem to be a notch or two behind.

Ducks Bo up

Oregon turned the first top-10 matchup in the Pac-12 in four

years into a Bo Nix Heisman campaign commercial.

He was 22-for-28 for 283 yards and five touchdowns passes. Nix also chipped in 51 yards on the ground as the Ducks displayed devastating balance with 261 yards rushing. The last time Oregon's offense was this explosive and efficient, UCLA coach Chip Kelly was leading the Ducks. Kelly is now 0-4 against his old school.

Nix was a blue-chip recruit who started as a freshman at Auburn. There were some good moments, but he never got substantially better over three seasons.

Now, Nix already has a career-high 17 touchdown passes and just one interception since the two he threw against Georgia.

"I think we've got an elite quarterback," Oregon coach Dan Lanning said.

Losing to the defending national champion by 46 points is going to be tough to overcome, but the Ducks have a chance to break the Pac-12's five-year CFP drought.

Around the country

The Texas message boards will have a field day with this: The Longhorns were flagged 14 times in a loss to No. 11 Oklahoma State. The Cowboys were not penalized once in beating Texas for the sixth time in eight meetings. Even Cowboys coach Mike Gundy called it "the difference in the game" as Oklahoma State — like Oregon — scored one for the teams left behind in conference realignment. C.J. Stroud and No. 2 Ohio State needed about two and a half quarters to figure out the Iowa defense, but finished with 54 points, the most ever scored against the Hawkeyes in Kirk Ferentz's 24 seasons as coach.

Jemel Jones has 3 TDs in Army win

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — Jemel Jones scored a career-high three touchdowns and Army rallied in the second half to beat Louisiana-Monroe 48-24 on Saturday.

Jones, who began the year as the third-string quarterback, started his second straight game and rushed for 96 of Army's 441 yards on the ground.

After Quinn Maretzki tied the game at 17-all with a field goal early in the third quarter, the Black Knights (3-4) scored twice more in the period to pull away.

Leo Lowin's interception led to Jones' third touchdown, a 6-yarder, to take the lead. Ay'Jaun Marshall's 36-yard catch — one of two completions for Army — set up the Black Knights at the ULM 9 and Tyson Riley scored from the 3 in the final minute of the third.

Bryson Daily capped Army's 34-point second half with a 64-yard run late in the game.

Boise State 19, Air Force 14: Ashton Jeanty scored on a 1-yard run and Jonah Dalmas kicked four field goals to help the Broncos top the Falcons.

Boise State (5-2, 4-0 Mountain West) led 16-0 lead with 9 minutes to go in the first half.

Haaziq Daniels capped a seven-play, 75-yard drive with a 15-yard touchdown run that got Air Force (5-3, 2-3) on the board with 6:18 left in the second quarter.

Brad Roberts ran for 90 yards — including a 3-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter — on 25 carries for the Falcons.

Houston 38, Navy 20: Clayton Tune threw five touchdown passes, two apiece to Nathaniel Dell and Sam Brown, to help the visiting Cougars down the Midshipmen.

Tune had touchdown passes of 6, 11, 3, 7 and 4 yards. He was 21-for-30 for 261 yards.

Mavericks rout Grizzlies in home opener

Associated Press

DALLAS — Luka Dončić dribbled behind his back before an alley-oop pass to new pick-and-roll partner Christian Wood for a one-handed dunk.

Moments later the Dallas superstar delivered his final assist to Tim Hardaway Jr. for a punctuating three-pointer in a home-opening party for the Mavericks.

Never mind what Dončić did early.

The young Slovenian scored 21 of his 32 points in the first quarter, and the Mavericks rode a hot start to a 137-96 rout of the Memphis Grizzlies on Saturday night.

Ja Morant scored the first six Memphis points, but the first bucket from someone else didn't come until the 4:30 mark of the first quarter as the Grizzlies trailed 39-17 going to the second.

Morant finished with 20 points a night after a 49-point showing in a victory at Houston gave him 83 points through two games.

Spurs 114, 76ers 105: Doug McDermott hit four three-pointers and scored all 14 of his points in the second half and visiting San Antonio sent Philadelphia to its third straight loss to open the season.

Devin Vassell scored 20 of his 22 points in the first half, and Keldon Johnson had 21.

Pacers 124, Pistons 115: Rookie Benedict Mathurin scored 27 points, hitting three three-pointers in a pivotal third quarter, and host Indiana beat Detroit to snap a 12-game losing streak dating to last season.

Mathurin, a 20-year-old Canadian forward selected sixth overall, made the three three-pointers in a 2:20 span as the Pacers surged to an 88-79 lead after three quarters. Pacers point guard Tyrese Haliburton added 24 points.

Celtics 126, Magic 120: Jayson Tatum and Derrick White combined for 12 straight points late in the fourth quarter to help visiting Boston beat Orlando.

Tatum had 40 points and eight rebounds. He launched a 10-2 run with two free throws with 4:08 remaining to put the Celtics up for good.

Heat 112, Raptors 109: Jimmy Butler scored 24 points, Max Strus added 20 off the bench and host Miami beat Toronto to stop a season-opening two-game slide.

Miami's Kyle Lowry had 17 points against his former club, Tyler Herro had 14 and Bam Adebayo added 10 for the Heat.

Bucks 125, Rockets 105: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 44 points and became the franchise's career free-throws leader as host Milwaukee rolled past Houston.

Antetokounmpo went 8-for-13 from the foul line to increase his total to 3,508 free throws out of 4,891 attempts (71.7%). Sidney Moncrief made 3,505 free throws with the Bucks from 1979-89.

Nuggets 122, Thunder 117: Nikola Jokic tied Wilt Chamberlain for sixth place with his 78th triple-double and Jamal Murray scored 16 points in his first game at Ball Arena in more than 18 months as host Denver outlasted Oklahoma City.

Jokic had 19 points, 16 rebounds and 13 assists. Michael Porter Jr. added 22 points. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 28 points.

Cavaliers 128, Bulls 96: Donovan Mitchell scored 32 points and Cleveland ruined Chicago's home opener.

Mitchell just missed a triple-double with nine rebounds and eight assists, after scoring 31 points in his Cleveland debut.

Clippers 111, Kings 109: Paul George scored 40 points to help visiting Los Angeles hold off Sacramento.

The Clippers (2-0) were missing Kawhi Leonard and new acquisition John Wall. Both players didn't play because of knee injury management. They traveled with the team to Sacramento and worked out pregame.

Hall's power-play goal in OT goal lifts Bruins over Wild

Associated Press

BOSTON — Taylor Hall scored a power-play goal 4:49 into overtime, and the Boston Bruins beat the Minnesota Wild 4-3 on Saturday.

Hall, who also had two assists, took a crossing pass from David Pastrnak and one-timed a shot past Marc-Andre Fleury, who had stopped eight shots in OT with the Wild playing most of the extra period short-handed.

"You get two opportunities in overtime you've got to make do," Hall said. "It was an amazing play by Pasta. He had the whole rink on the other side and I had the whole net."

Pastrnak scored his fourth goal of the season and Nick Foligno and Hampus Lindholm also scored for the Bruins, who improved to 5-1-0 under new

coach Jim Montgomery and remain unbeaten at home.

"I think we are on the right track. Obviously, there are some small details that we have to work on," Pastrnak said.

Fleury stopped 39 shots for the Wild, keeping Minnesota close through a lopsided second period and giving the Wild a chance in the third, when Jared Spurgeon tied it at 3 with 4:31 left on a shot from the slot through traffic.

Devils 2, Sharks 1: Yegor Sharangovich and Dawson Mercer scored in the second period, and host New Jersey earned its third straight win.

Capitals 4, Kings 3: Marcus Johansson scored on a wrap-around late in regulation to help host Washington beat Los Angeles.

Avalanche 3, Golden Knights

2: Valeri Nichushkin's third-period goal held up as the winner for visiting Colorado.

Flames 3, Hurricanes 2 (OT): Tyler Toffoli scored at 4:30 of overtime as host Calgary rallied to beat Carolina.

Blues 2, Oilers 0: Jordan Binnington made 23 saves for the shutout as visiting St. Louis remained perfect in three games this season.

Flyers 3, Predators 1: Joel Farabee had a goal and two assists, Carter Hart stopped 31 shots and visiting Philadelphia beat Nashville.

Lightning 5, Islanders 3: Nicholas Paul scored a buzzer-beating second-period goal, Brayden Point had a goal and an assist, and host Tampa Bay beat New York.

Stars 5, Canadiens 2: Joe Pavelski finished with three

goals and an assist, leading visiting Dallas past Montreal.

Maple Leafs 4, Jets 1: John Tavares scored two power-play goals and Auston Matthews finished with three assists, lifting visiting Toronto over Winnipeg.

Penguins 6, Blue Jackets 3: Sidney Crosby scored the 79th game winner of his career and rallied Pittsburgh from a two-goal deficit for its first road win of the season.

Sabres 5, Canucks 1: Rasmus Dahlin scored for the fifth straight game, extending his NHL record for defenseman to open a season, and added an assist as visiting Buffalo beat Vancouver.

Senators 6, Coyotes 2: Brady Tkachuk scored twice and Ottawa won its third straight at home after starting with two road losses.