

EU envoys signal support for Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The European Union's foreign policy chief on Monday led a delegation of top diplomats on an unannounced visit to Kyiv and dismissed concerns about political tension in the bloc over its long-term support for Ukraine's fight against Russia.

Though largely symbolic, the informal meeting between EU and Ukrainian diplomats demonstrated the EU's "clear commitment" to Ukraine in its 19-month-long war, Josep Borrell said.

"The EU remains united in its support to Ukraine ... I don't see any member state folding on their engagement," Borrell told a news conference in the Ukrainian capital.

The gathering was the first time EU foreign ministers have met outside the bloc — and in a war zone, according to Borrell.

The talks took place after the weekend election victory in EU member Slovakia of former Prime Minister Robert Fico, whose pro-Russian agenda has increased the question marks about the EU's continued support for Kyiv.

The small eastern European country could bring more tension to the EU's discussions on Ukraine, as has happened with Hungary's at-times cool attitude toward Kyiv. Budapest has maintained close relations with Moscow and argued against supplying arms to Ukraine or providing it with economic assistance. Slovakia operates a key rail line used to transport western military hardware to Ukraine.

The EU, the United States and the United Kingdom have provided massive military and financial support to Ukraine, enabling it to stand up to the Krem-

lin's attack. The assistance is crucial for Ukraine's weakened economy and has so far been open-ended.

But uncertainty has set in over how long Kyiv's allies will keep sending aid worth billions of dollars.

President Joe Biden on Sunday reassured allies of continued U.S. financial support for the war effort, after Congress averted a government shutdown by adopting a short-term funding package that dropped assistance for Ukraine in its battle against Russia.

Many U.S. lawmakers acknowledge that winning approval for Ukraine assistance in Congress is growing more difficult as the war grinds on.

Borrell, at his news conference, insisted the EU is devoted to "sustained engagement" with Ukraine. "Our resolve ... is firm and will continue," he said.

He ticked off a list of ongoing commitments the 27-nation EU has made and hopes to make, including proposed military aid of \$5.3 billion next year, a target to train some 40,000 Ukrainian troops and possible joint arms industry ventures between EU and Ukrainian defense companies.

Other signs of the EU's commitment include help with cyber defense, a demining program to enable Ukraine's postwar recovery and the reform of Ukrainian law enforcement to crack down on corruption, Borrell said.

But the EU's "strongest security commitment" for Ukraine is to grant it membership of the bloc, he said. Ukraine is bent on becoming a member of the EU, and EU officials have encouraged that course, even though it could take years amid a war of attrition with no end in sight.

New Marine rotational force deploys to the Philippines

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

A new Marine rotational force has deployed to the Philippines to begin a series of back-to-back exercises in the region, the service announced in a news release Friday.

Marine Rotational Force — Southeast Asia is participating in the multinational naval exercise Sama Sama — Tagalog for "together" — according to the release.

The 12-day exercise kicked off Monday near the island of Luzon with troops from the U.S., the Philippines and seven other nations.

The rotational force is slated

to conduct a series of back-to-back exercises and engagements through mid-December, including with counterparts from Malaysia and Indonesia, according to the Marines.

"We are enabling operations that span the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific region, demonstrating our adaptability in pursuit of our mission," the rotational force's commander, Col. Thomas Siverts, said in the release.

He also leads the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit out of Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The Marines didn't immediately respond Monday to an interview request or emailed

questions about the force's size.

The first Marine rotational force to Southeast Asia arrived in September 2022 and trained with counterparts in the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei, according to a Marine Corps news release on Jan. 15.

The older Marine Rotational Force — Darwin has been deploying to northern Australia for six-month training missions each year since 2012. This year's rotation of 2,500 Marines wraps up this month.

The size, composition and duration of the Southeast Asia rotations can be adjusted, according to the Marines.

"As a forward-positioned

force, it is optimized to conduct security cooperation engagements with Allies and partners in Southeast Asia while also standing ready to support crisis or contingency response in the region," the release states.

The rotational force's command-and-control element is based on the U.S. West Coast, the statement said.

The rotational force includes a command element, a reconnaissance platoon, joint terminal attack controllers, air and naval gunfire liaisons, explosive ordnance disposal Marines and unmanned aerial systems operators, according to the release.

Ex-Harris adviser named to US Senate seat

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Sunday selected Laphonza Butler, a Democratic strategist and adviser to Kamala Harris' 2020 presidential campaign, to fill the vacant U.S. Senate seat held by the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

In choosing Butler, Newsom fulfilled his pledge to appoint a Black woman if Feinstein's seat became open. He had been facing pressure, however, from some Black politicians and advocacy groups to select Rep. Barbara Lee, a prominent Black congresswoman who is already running for the seat.

Butler will be the only Black woman serving in the U.S. Senate, and the first openly LGBTQ+

person to represent California in the chamber.

Newsom said in a statement that the priorities Feinstein fought for in Congress — reproductive freedom, equal protection and safety from gun violence — were under assault in the nation. "Laphonza will carry the baton left by Sen. Feinstein (and) continue to break glass ceilings and fight for all Californians in Washington D.C.," he said.

Butler leads Emily's List, a political organization that supports Democratic women candidates who favor abortion rights. She is also a former labor leader with SEIU 2015, a powerful force in California politics.

Her appointment sets up a potentially tricky political calculus

in the crowded 2024 contest to succeed Feinstein, which has been underway since the beginning of the year.

Newsom spokesman Anthony York said the governor did not ask Butler to commit to staying out of the race. The deadline for candidates to submit paperwork to seek the office is Dec. 8. Should Butler enter the contest, she could set up a competition for the relatively small but influential group of Black voters in California and possibly undercut Lee's chances.

Emily's List is known as a fundraising powerhouse. Newsom's statement said she will step down from the organization.

Butler currently lives in Maryland, according to her Emily's

List biography. Izzy Gardon, a spokesman for Newsom, said Butler owns a home in California. She is expected to reregister to vote in California before being sworn in.

The decision carried the threat of political fallout for Newsom, who is seen as a potential future national candidate. The candidate favored by Black voters has won the Democratic Party's presidential nomination every cycle since 1992. The Congressional Black Caucus was among the groups and Black politicians that had urged Newsom to appoint Lee.

Feinstein died Thursday at age 90 after a series of illnesses. Democrats control the Senate 51-49, though Feinstein's seat is vacant.

Jimmy Carter turns 99 at home as tributes pour in

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Jimmy Carter has always been a man of discipline and habit. But the former president broke routine Sunday, putting off his practice of quietly watching church services online to instead celebrate his 99th birthday with his wife, Rosalynn, and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Plains, Ga.

The gathering took place in the same one-story structure where the Carters lived before he was first elected to the Georgia Senate in 1962. As tributes poured in from around the world, it was an opportunity for Carter's family to honor his personal legacy.

"The remarkable piece to me and I think to my family is that while my grandparents have accomplished so much, they have really remained the same sort of South Georgia couple that lives in a 600-person village where they were born," said grandson Jason Carter, who chairs the board at

The Carter Center, which his grandparents founded in 1982 after leaving the White House a year earlier.

At The Carter Center in Atlanta, meanwhile, 99 new American citizens, who came from 45 countries, took the oath of allegiance as part of a naturalization ceremony timed for the former president's birthday.

"This is so impressive, and I'm so happy for it to be here," said Tania Martinez after the ceremony. A 53-year-old nurse in Roswell, Martinez was born in Cuba and came to the United States from Ghana 12 years ago.

The Carters announced in February that their patriarch was forgoing further medical treatments and entering home hospice care after a series of hospitalizations. Yet Carter, who overcame cancer diagnosed at age 90 and relearned to walk after having his hip replaced at age 94, defied all odds again.

Vet forced to quit job due to illness awarded \$2.5M

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — An Army Reserve veteran who was the driving force behind last year's sweeping reform of health care for toxic exposure was awarded nearly \$2.5 million in a Texas courtroom Friday after a jury agreed he was forced out of his job as a Texas state trooper because of war-related illnesses.

Retired Capt. Le Roy Torres first filed his wrongful termination lawsuit against the Texas Department of Public Safety in 2017 and took his fight all the way to the Supreme Court.

Torres claimed in his lawsuit that he returned from a deployment to Iraq in 2007 and began to have breathing problems connected to his time overseas, and he was forced out of his job as a state trooper — a violation of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, which pro-

tections civilian employment of service members.

"It has been a tremendous grueling journey of legal battles," Torres said in a statement. "Today, justice was served upholding the principles of USERRA and ensuring that the rights of service members are protected."

Torres spent his deployment at Camp Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, where toxic fumes from a 10-acre burn pit wafted through the air. His unit's living area was within a mile of the pit, where everything no longer needed was burned including medical waste, aircraft engines, computers and tires.

Even before leaving Iraq, Torres said he began to have severe headaches. Once home, he began having chest pains and other symptoms. He has since been diagnosed with terminal lung disease, toxic brain injury and autoimmune issues.

Trump denounces fraud case as trial begins

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The fraud lawsuit that could cost former President Donald Trump control of some of his most prized properties went to trial Monday, with New York state lawyers vowing to hold him accountable while he denounced the case as a politically motivated “scam.”

The civil case, brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James, accuses the business-mogul-turned-politician and his company of deceiving banks, insurers and others by habitually misstating his wealth in financial statements.

“They were lying year after year after year,” Kevin Wallace, a lawyer in James’ office, said in an opening statement as Trump sat at the defense table. He looked straight ahead, arms crossed, facing away from the screen that showed details of Wallace’s presentation.

Defense lawyer Christopher Kise, in his opening, said the financial statements were true, and he suggested the proof was in the outcome of Trump’s business career.

“He has made a fortune, literally, being right about real estate investments,” Kise said.

Trump showed up voluntarily for the trial, with his control over Trump Tower and some other major real estate holdings in jeopardy.

“This is a continuation of the single greatest witch hunt of all time,” the Republican said as he approached the courtroom, reiterating claims that James, a Democrat, is trying to thwart his return to the White House.

“It’s a scam. It’s a sham,” Trump said. He called the case “an attempt to hurt me in an election” and added: “I don’t think the people of this country are going to stand for it.”

Judge Arthur Engoron already has ruled that Trump committed fraud in his business dealings. That ruling last week, if upheld on appeal, could force Trump to give up New York properties including Trump Tower, a Wall Street office building, golf courses and a suburban estate. Trump has called it “a corporate death penalty” and insisted the judge is unfair and out to get him.

It is a non-jury trial, so Engoron will decide on six other claims in the lawsuit. James is seeking \$250 million in penalties and a ban on Trump doing business in New York.

Before the trial Monday, James reiterated her position that Trump for years engaged in “persistent and repeated fraud.”

“No matter how powerful you are, and no matter how much money you think you have, no one is above the law,” she said on her way into the courthouse.

2 COVID vaccine pioneers win Nobel Prize in medicine

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Two scientists won the Nobel Prize in medicine on Monday for discoveries that enabled the development of mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 and could be used in the future to create other shots.

Katalin Karikó, a professor at Sagan’s University in Hungary and an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Drew Weissman, of the University of Pennsylvania, were awarded the prize for “their groundbreaking findings, which have fundamentally changed our understanding of how mRNA interacts with our immune system,” the panel that awarded the prize said.

“The laureates contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during one of the greatest threats to human health in modern times,” the panel added.

Karikó said her husband was the first to pick up the early morning call, then handed it to her to hear the news. “I couldn’t believe it,” she said. “I was very

much surprised. But I am very happy.”

Before COVID-19, mRNA vaccines were already being tested for other diseases like Zika, influenza and rabies — but the pandemic brought more attention to this approach, Karikó said.

“There was already clinical trials before COVID, but people were not aware,” she said.

Thomas Perlmann, the secretary of the Nobel Assembly who announced the prize, said both scientists were “overwhelmed” by the news.

Traditionally, making vaccines required growing viruses or pieces of viruses — often in giant vats of cells or, like most flu shots, in chicken eggs — and then purifying them before next steps in brewing shots.

The messenger RNA approach is radically different. It starts with a snippet of genetic code that carries instructions for making proteins. Pick the right virus protein to target, and the body turns into a mini vaccine factory.

Turkey strikes suspected Kurdish militant targets

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish warplanes carried out airstrikes on suspected Kurdish militant targets in northern Iraq on Sunday following a suicide attack on a government building in the Turkish capital, Turkey’s defense ministry announced.

Some 20 targets of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, were “destroyed” in the latest aerial operation, including caves, shelters and depots, the ministry said, adding that a large number of PKK operatives were “neutralized” in the strikes.

Earlier on Sunday, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device near an entrance of the Interior Ministry, wounding two police officers. A second assailant was killed in a shootout with police.

The PKK, which maintains bases in northern Iraq, claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing, according to a news agency close to the rebel group. Turkey’s Interior Ministry also identified one of the assailants

as a member of the outlawed group. It said efforts were still underway to identify the second attacker.

The attack happened hours before Turkey’s Parliament reopened after its three-month summer recess with an address by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The two assailants arrived at the scene inside a light commercial vehicle, which they seized from a veterinarian in the central province of Kayseri, according to the Interior Ministry. The pro-government daily Sabah reported that they shot the man in the head and threw his body into a ditch by the side of the road. They then drove the vehicle to Ankara, roughly 200 miles away.

“Our heroic police officers, through their intuition, resisted the terrorists as soon as they got out of the vehicle,” Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told reporters. “One of them blew himself up, while the other one was shot in the head before he had a chance to blow himself up.”

Fatalities persist as car safety advances

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Alyssa Milligan was someone who intuitively knew when another person needed help, encouragement or a kind word. Although she was new to Tennessee, the physical therapy student, whose mother called her “Sweet Alyssa,” had already made many close connections, especially within the tightknit cycling community around Nashville — before she was killed last month, struck by a pickup truck while cycling with a friend.

Roadway deaths in the United States are mounting despite government test data showing vehicles have been getting safer. While the number of all car-related fatalities has trended upward over the last decade, pedestrians and cyclists have seen the sharpest rise: over 60% between 2011 and 2022.

It coincides with a steep increase in sales of SUVs, pickup trucks and vans, which accounted for 78% of new U.S. vehicle sales in 2022, according to Motorintelligence.com.

Current U.S. ratings only consider the safety of the people inside the vehicle. The National Association of City Transportation

Officials is leading an effort asking U.S. transportation officials to begin factoring the safety of those outside of vehicles into their 5-star safety ratings.

“We don’t know exactly what’s going on with the increase in pedestrian fatalities. It certainly seems like the increase in bigger vehicles is contributing to it,” said Jessica Cicchino, vice president of research at the nonprofit Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

“Many studies have shown that larger vehicles like SUVs and pickups are more likely to kill or seriously injure pedestrians and cyclists when they’re involved in a crash,” she said, noting that large vehicles are more likely to strike people in the head and vital organs, rather than the legs.

The design of these vehicles can also pose visibility problems. An Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study of crashes with pedestrians at intersections found that the vehicles most likely to be involved in left-turn crashes were SUVs and pickups.

Subaru, which has performed well in IIHS pedestrian crash avoidance tests, considers visibility its first line of safety, according

to spokesperson Todd Hill. But that has become more challenging as safety standards for rollovers have required vehicles to improve the strength of the pillars that support the roof.

“The smaller the glass you make, the more design flexibility you have ... but it really comes at the sacrifice of outward visibility,” he said.

While there has been less research on blind spots directly in front of passenger vehicles, Consumer Reports found in 2021 that high hoods obstructed driver views of pedestrians. Meanwhile, a January report from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Volpe Center determined “the increasingly large blind zones in SUVs and pickups have been associated with fatal ‘frontover’ crashes,” where people are run over by slow-moving vehicles.

The Volpe Center, which works to address the nation’s most pressing transportation challenges, recently collaborated to produce a web application called VIEW, which uses crowd-sourcing to create a database of vehicle blind zones. For example, the app shows that as many as eight elementary school children could

stand shoulder-to-shoulder in front of a 2016 Chevrolet Silverado without being visible to the driver.

The U.S. first began crash testing cars in the 1970s, and it implemented the 5-star rating system in 1993. In 2006, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began requiring window labels on new vehicles to include those ratings.

Thanks to vehicle improvements, seat belt laws and other changes, fatal crashes in the U.S. trended downward for decades, hitting a low of 29,867 in 2011. But that trend has reversed. Government estimates of fatal crashes in 2022 show a 43% increase to 42,795 — partially due to increases in speeding and drunken driving and decreases in seat belt use. Pedestrian and cyclist deaths increased by 64% since 2011, to an estimated 8,413 in 2022.

NHTSA has proposed new voluntary pedestrian crash avoidance tests that would not be part of the agency’s 5-star rating system, said Billy Richling, a spokesperson at the National Association of City Transportation Officials, which is pushing to make pedestrian safety testing mandatory.

Tech firms aim to refine protections with AI image generators

Associated Press

Artificial intelligence tools that can conjure whimsical artwork or realistic-looking images from written commands started wowing the public last year. But most people don’t actually use them at work or home.

That could change as leading tech companies are competing to take text-to-image generators mainstream by integrating them into Adobe Photoshop, YouTube and other familiar tools.

But first, they’re trying to convince users and regulators that they’ve tamed some of the Wild West nature of early AI image-generators with stronger safeguards against copyright theft and troubling content.

A year ago, a relatively small group of early adopters and hobbyists began playing with cutting-edge image generators such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney and OpenAI’s DALL-E.

“The previous ones were an interesting curiosity,” but businesses were wary, said David Truog, an analyst at market research group Forrester.

A backlash followed, including copyright lawsuits from artists and photo stock company Getty, and calls for new laws to rein in generative AI technology’s misuse to create deceptive political ads or abusive sexual imagery.

Those problems aren’t yet solved. But a proliferation of

new image generators have said they’re business-ready this time.

Adobe, known for the Photoshop graphics editor it introduced decades ago, was the first this year to release an AI generator designed to avoid legal and ethical problems created by competitors who trained their AI models on troves of images pulled off the internet. Adobe’s product, Firefly, was built on its own Adobe Stock image collection, as well as content it has licensed. Stock contributors are also getting some compensation out of the arrangement, said Ely Greenfield, Adobe’s chief technology officer for its digital media business.

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI unveiled its third-generation image generator DALL-E 3 on Wednesday, emphasizing its capabilities and future integration with ChatGPT along with safeguards to decline requests that ask for an image in the style of a living artist. Creators can also opt to exclude their images from training future models, though Truog notes that OpenAI hasn’t said anything “about compensating authors whose work they use for training, even with permission.”

In separate showcase events Thursday, both Microsoft and Google-owned YouTube also unveiled new products infused with AI image generation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Taxes raised on guns to pay for school safety

CA SACRAMENTO — California will ban people from carrying firearms in most public places while doubling the taxes on guns and ammunition sold in the state under two new laws Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Tuesday that will test the limits of the U.S. Supreme Court's new standard for interpreting the Second Amendment.

The federal government already taxes the sale of guns and ammunition at either 10% or 11%, depending on the type of gun. The law Newsom signed adds another 11% tax on top of that — making California the only state with a separate tax on guns and ammunition, according to the gun control advocacy group Brady.

The money will pay for security improvements at public schools and a variety of gun violence prevention programs.

The laws were some of nearly two dozen gun control measures Newsom signed Tuesday. He acknowledged many of these laws might not survive legal challenges.

2 new gun control laws set to go into effect

CO DENVER — After two Colorado gun control laws took effect Sunday, purchasing a firearm requires a three-day waiting period — meant to curtail suicide attempts and shootings — and gun violence victims have an easier path toward filing lawsuits against the firearm industry.

The laws, pushed through Colorado's Democrat-controlled legislature this year, come as violent crime and mass shootings

surge nationwide — including last year's bloodshed at an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs, where a gunman killed five people and wounded 17 others.

Students flooded the Colorado Capitol's halls in March after a high school student was shot and killed just outside their campus. Later that month, teachers marched into the House and Senate chambers after a student shot and wounded two school administrators in Denver.

Judge blocks 2 portions of state abortion law

NC RALEIGH — A federal judge on Saturday blocked two portions of North Carolina's new abortion law from taking effect while a lawsuit continues. But nearly all of the restrictions approved by the legislature this year, including a near-ban after 12 weeks of pregnancy, aren't being specifically challenged and remain intact.

U.S. District Judge Catherine Eagles issued an order halting enforcement of a provision to require surgical abortions that occur after 12 weeks — those for cases of rape and incest, for example — be performed only in hospitals, not abortion clinics. That limitation would have otherwise taken effect on Sunday.

And in the same preliminary injunction, Eagles extended beyond her temporary decision in June an order preventing enforcement of a rule that doctors must document the existence of a pregnancy within the uterus before prescribing a medication abortion.

Short of successful appeals by Republican legislative leaders,

the order will remain in effect until a lawsuit filed by Planned Parenthood South Atlantic and a physician who performs abortions challenging the sections is resolved.

Congressman pulls alarm amid vote on funding bill

DC WASHINGTON — Democratic Rep. Jamaal Bowman acknowledged triggering a fire alarm Saturday in one of the U.S. Capitol office buildings as lawmakers scrambled to pass a bill to fund the government before the midnight shutdown deadline.

The fire alarm sounded out around noon in the Cannon House Office Building and prompted a building-wide evacuation at a time when the House was in session and staffers were working in the building. The building was reopened an hour later after Capitol Police determined it was not a threat.

The GOP-controlled House Administration Committee posted a picture of a person pulling the fire alarm who appeared to be Bowman.

The New York lawmaker told reporters hours later that it was a mistake and that he was rushing to get to votes and was trying to get through a door that is usually open, but was closed due to it being a weekend.

Project conserves 3.7K acres of forest territory

NH SHELBURNE — The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests has completed a long-term effort to protect two adjacent forests in the northern part of the state totaling 3,700 acres.

The forests will be managed for multiple objectives, including habitat protection, scenic value, and for public recreation and education. They will remain open to hiking, hunting, fishing and forest management.

The 2,670-acre Shelburne Valley Forest rises from the Androscoggin River to the ridgeline of the Mahoosuc Range, an extension of the White Mountains that straddles the border between New Hampshire and Maine. The 1,030-acre Bald Cap Peak Forest is home to hiking trails. The rocky pine ledges of Bald Cap Peak and Middle Mountain and the 300-foot cascades of Giant Falls are prominent features.

Remains found during search for Tulsa victims

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — The latest search for the remains of victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre has ended with 59 graves found and seven sets of remains exhumed, according to Oklahoma state archaeologist Kary Stackelbeck.

The seven that were exhumed were found in simple, wooden boxes that Stackelbeck has said investigators were searching for because they were described in newspaper articles at the time, death certificates and funeral home records as the type used for burials of massacre victims. None of the remains found thus far have been confirmed as victims of the massacre.

The seven exhumed remains will be reburied in their original grave sites after the forensic analysis is complete and any DNA is collected, according to a news release from the city of Tulsa.

—From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Bracket set for baseball's postseason

Associated Press

Ronald Acuña Jr., Matt Olson and the hard-hitting Atlanta Braves have earned a couple days of rest and relaxation after Major League Baseball's long 162-game regular season.

So have Jose Altuve, Justin Verlander and the defending World Series champion Houston Astros — who won the AL West on the season's final day — along with the Los Angeles Dodgers and feel-good story Baltimore Orioles.

As for the other eight teams that qualified for Major League Baseball's 12-team October showcase? The action comes in a hurry.

MLB's postseason bracket is set, with the American League and National League wild-card matchups beginning Tuesday. It's the second year for the new October format, which includes an opening-round, best-of-three series with all of the games at the higher seed's ballpark.

It's a postseason bracket missing some of the sport's marquee franchises. Slugger Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees will spend October at home. So will the big-spending New York Mets and San Diego Padres.

But for those who remain, the road to the World Series begins soon. Here's a look at the qualifiers:

Wild-card matchups

National League

No. 6 Diamondbacks at No. 3 Brewers

The season series: D-backs won 4-2.

The skinny: Arizona is back in the postseason for the first time since 2017 despite losing its final four games of the regular season. Rookie speedster Corbin Carroll leads a versatile lineup while right-hander Zac Gallen is among the top candidates for the NL Cy Young Award. The Brewers' lineup is led by 2018

MVP Christian Yelich, while the pitching staff has a solid top three in Corbin Burnes, Brandon Woodruff and Freddy Peralta.

No. 5 Marlins at No. 4 Phillies

The season series: Marlins won 7-6.

The skinny: The Marlins have been an under-the-radar success story and dealt with a weather mess in New York during some of the most important games of the wild-card race. Luis Arraez won the NL batting title with a .354 mark while Jesus Luzardo and Braxton Garrett are at the top of the rotation. The Phillies are trying to make it back to the World Series — they lost to the Astros last year — and have a deep lineup with Bryce Harper, Kyle Schwarber, Nick Castellanos and Trea Turner.

American League

No. 6 Blue Jays at No. 3 Twins

The season series: Tied 3-3.

The skinny: The Blue Jays are a tough No. 6 seed with one of the deepest lineups in baseball, including Bo Bichette, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Matt Chapman, George Springer and Whit Merrifield. They're also deep on the mound with Chris Bassitt, José Berríos, Kevin Gausman and Yusei Kikuchi. The Twins were easily the best team in a weak AL Central. They're hoping that some of their best players — like shortstop Carlos Correa and third baseman Royce Lewis — will be healthy after fighting injuries in the season's final weeks.

No. 5 Rangers at No. 4 Rays

The season series: Rangers won 4-2.

The skinny: The Rangers are led by the stellar middle infield combo of Marcus Semien and Corey Seager, who could both finish in the top five of AL MVP balloting. Outfielder Adolis Garcia also had a big year. The pitching staff doesn't have a lot of big names who are healthy but has been steady with Dane Dunning, Andrew Heaney and Nathan Eovaldi. The Rays were the hottest team in baseball in the early weeks but got caught by the Orioles around midseason. Tampa Bay continues to thrive despite one of the lowest payrolls in the league. The bal-

anced lineup includes Yandy Diaz, Isaac Paredes and Randy Arozarena. Zach Elfin and Tyler Glasnow lead the pitching staff.

The top seeds

National League

No. 1 Atlanta Braves: They've got the best lineup in baseball, led by Acuña's speed-power combo. But their biggest strength is depth. Olson just wrapped up a 54-homer season while Austin Riley, Ozzie Albies and Marcell Ozuna all have at least 30 homers. The pitching staff has struggled with injuries, but hard-throwing Spencer Strider led the majors with 281 strikeouts. They won the World Series in 2021. Acuña was hurt during that playoff run in 2021, and is eager to make his mark this fall.

No. 2 Los Angeles Dodgers: They looked like they might struggle to win the NL West for much of the season, but caught fire with a 24-5 record in August and haven't looked back. The lineup revolves around stars like Mookie Betts, Freddie Freeman and J.D. Martinez while three-time Cy Young winner Clayton Kershaw anchors the pitching staff. They won the World Series in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season and are looking to win their first World Series in a full season since 1988.

American League

No. 1 Baltimore Orioles: They're arguably the best story in baseball, winning more than 100 games just two seasons after losing 110. They've got a young, balanced lineup, led by catcher Adley Rutschman and shortstop Gunnar Henderson. The pitching staff leans on the trio of Kyle Gibson, Dean Kremer and Kyle Bradish, who have been solid most of the season.

No. 2 Houston Astros: They stumbled in September, but righted the ship just in time to have a shot at defending their World Series title and even rallied late to win the AL West. Franchise stalwarts Altuve, Alex Bregman and Kyle Tucker lead the lineup while the rotation includes Verlander — a three-time Cy Young winner — and Framber Valdez.

Showalter fired as Mets manager after two seasons

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the fifth time in six years, the New York Mets are in the market for a manager.

Buck Showalter was fired Sunday after a disappointing season in which baseball's highest-spending team tumbled from contention by midsummer.

The 67-year-old Showalter said before the 2023 finale

against Philadelphia that he will not return next year, and a few minutes later the Mets announced the club had decided on the change.

New York plans to introduce David Stearns as president of baseball operations Monday, placing him above general manager Billy Eppler. Showalter's departure with a season remaining on his three-year contract

clears the way for Stearns to pick the next manager.

"When hiring a president of baseball operations, they're entitled to bring in their own people," owner Steve Cohen said during a brief postgame news conference. "It became clear he wanted to go in a different direction and that's certainly his right and I gave him that right. It's no different than when a CEO comes

into a new company. They bring in some of their own people.

"This is not a reflection on Buck," Cohen added. "Buck did everything we wanted him to do. Obviously, the season was a disappointment, but it's not Buck's fault, OK? It's spread across the organization."

Showalter and Stearns did not speak before the decision was made.

Blaney advances by holding off Harvick

Associated Press

TALLADEGA, Ala. — In a battle of Ford drivers, Ryan Blaney held off Kevin Harvick at the Talladega Superspeedway finish line as Blaney advanced into the round of eight of NASCAR's playoffs.

Harvick, who is retiring at the end of the year, remained winless on the season and was disqualified after the race when his car failed inspection.

Blaney used a crossover move from the outside lane to the inside to nudge ahead of Harvick with two laps remaining. Blaney in his Ford for Team Penske and Harvick in a Ford for Stewart-Haas Racing finished essentially in a drag race with both refusing to lift as a crash broke out behind them.

"I've won it by more than I have the last couple years. That one might have been by 4 feet, the others were by 2 but you just don't know," said Blaney, a three-time winner at Talladega. "You just kind of drag race a line

and hope you get help."

Blaney joined William Byron as the two drivers locked into the round of eight. The field of 12 will be pared next Sunday to eight following the race on The Roval at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Blaney boss Roger Penske praised the strategy of the Ford camp to work together to ensure a Ford victory as the Chevrolets from Hendrick Motorsports were making a quick challenge.

"For Harvick, who it was his last race here, working like he did with Ryan, it was amazing to see that," said Penske. "The Hendrick freight train was coming and we all stayed together. That was the call that Ford had earlier in the day when we talked. It was just perfect execution."

Ford has won 10 playoff races at Talladega, most at any track, and Team Penske has won 10 of the last 18 races at the 2.66-mile Alabama oval.

Blaney, winner of the Coca-

Cola 600 at Charlotte in May, now has multiple wins in a season for the second time in his career. But he's got a lopsided stat this season in that he has only five top-five finishes, but two wins.

"It was a pretty wild restart, let alone the last couple of laps, losing momentum and getting it back, just getting clear to the bottom to get to the front row and drag race it out with Kevin," said Blaney. "To win here three times at Talladega is super cool."

Harvick finished second as his winless streak stretched to 43 races dating back to last season. NASCAR said nearly two hours after the race that his Ford had been disqualified because the fasteners on his windshield were not secure.

The Harvick disqualification dropped him to last in the field. Byron in a Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports moved up to second and Denny Hamlin, who rallied from a lap down, moved up to third in a Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing.

Hamlin led three laps during the second stage but was flagged for speeding on pit road — a troubling habit of the three-time Daytona 500 winner considered the best driver to never win a Cup championship — and the penalty contributed to him falling a lap off the pace. It was Hamlin's fourth speeding penalty of the season and it took him most of the race to earn his position back on the lead lap.

"Not how we drew it up, but a dub is a dub and that was a dub in our book — it's as close as it gets to it," Hamlin said. "A top-five is a long way from where we were with about 15 laps to go."

None of the drivers who finished fourth through 10th are in the playoffs.

The race had 70 lead changes among 24 drivers and was fairly clean. Ross Chastain was in an early crash that caused last year's championship runner-up to finish last. Brad Keselowski was in a crash with 28 laps to go that ended the race for him.

Beloved Red Sox knuckleballer Wakefield dies at 57

Associated Press

BOSTON — Tim Wakefield, the knuckleballing workhorse of the Red Sox pitching staff who bounced back after giving up a season-ending home run to the Yankees in the 2003 playoffs to help Boston win its curse-busting World Series title the following year, has died. He was 57.

The Red Sox announced his death in a statement Sunday that detailed not only his baseball statistics but a career full of charitable endeavors. Wakefield had brain cancer, according to ex-teammate Curt Schilling, who outed the illness on a podcast last week — drawing an outpouring of support for Wakefield. The Red Sox confirmed an illness at the time but did not elaborate, saying Wakefield had requested privacy.

"It's one thing to be an out-

standing athlete; it's another to be an extraordinary human being. Tim was both," Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner said in the team's statement. "I know the world was made better because he was in it."

The news brought condolences from baseball commissioner Rob Manfred and Players Association President Tony Clark — a former teammate — and from teams and players around the majors. Mariners pitcher George Kirby even broke out a knuckleball in Seattle's game against Texas.

The Red Sox released a tribute video on X, formerly known as Twitter. Ex-catcher Jason Varitek fought back tears as he told reporters: "I don't know if I have to tell you anything. I think I'm showing it."

"We lost a brother, a teammate, a family member," Bos-

ton manager Alex Cora said. "One of the best teammates I ever had. ... Of all the guys I played with, nobody wore his jersey with more pride than Tim Wakefield."

Drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates as a first baseman who set home run records in college, Wakefield converted to pitcher after mastering the knuckleball in the minor leagues. Relying on a pitch that had largely fallen into disuse, he went on to win 200 major league games, including 186 with the Red Sox.

Wakefield won the Roberto Clemente Award for sportsmanship and community involvement in 2010. He was the team's first Jimmy Fund captain, visiting with patients and raising funds for the childhood cancer charity.

But it was Wakefield's role in the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry

that turned him into a fan favorite.

After New York rallied to tie Game 7 of the '03 AL Championship Series, Wakefield came on in the 11th inning and Aaron Boone hit his first pitch for a walkoff home run.

In the ALCS the following October, Wakefield sacrificed his Game 4 start to pitch in relief in a Game 3 blowout, saving the bullpen for the rest of the series. Boston rallied with four straight wins, with Wakefield getting nine outs in extra innings of Game 5 to set up David Ortiz to win it in the 14th.

"I can't describe what you mean to me and my family," Ortiz posted on social media. "My heart is broken right now because I will never be able to replace a brother and a friend like you. ... Rest and peace my brother."

Hurts, Elliott lift Eagles over Commanders in OT

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — A.J. Brown saw more than a spark out of Jalen Hurts.

With the Eagles needing to channel the big-play, clutch-in-crunch-time machine that powered them to the Super Bowl, Brown saw Hurts bring the heat.

“That fire,” Brown said. “He woke up a little today.”

Hurts threw for 319 yards and hit Brown for two touchdowns, and Jake Elliott kicked a 54-yard field goal in overtime to lift Philadelphia to a 34-31 win over the Washington Commanders on Sunday for its second straight 4-0 start.

Elliott also kicked field goals of 41, 47 and 36 yards before boom-

ing the winner that sent the crowd into a frenzy and kept the Eagles unbeaten.

“My whole career has kind of been a rollercoaster in terms of being in different and unique and unprecedented moments, which you may call pressure and stormy and that fire,” Hurts said. “But that’s what I was born in. I feel like it’s a unique feeling being in those situations because you work so hard and you prepare so hard, and you go through so much to put yourself in a position where you’re comfortable in those moments.”

The Eagles survived a little late-game drama that put them on the brink of being upset at home by the Commanders (2-2) for the

second straight season.

Hurts hit Brown for a 28-yard touchdown with 1:28 left in regulation for a 31-24 lead. Instead of killing the clock and trying for a winning field goal, the Eagles left enough time for Sam Howell to lead Washington to the tying score.

Brown was flagged for taunting on his TD, giving the Commanders a boost. Washington started on the Eagles 36 and tied it when Howell hit Jahan Dotson for a 10-yard touchdown as time expired.

Coach Ron Rivera went for the extra point and the tie on the road, a call that sent them knotted 31-all into OT.

The Commanders did nothing with the ball in OT. Hurts then

converted a fourth-down sneak that pushed the Eagles to Washington’s 48-yard line and helped set up the winner.

Sparked by Brown’s nine catches for 175 yards and two touchdowns, the NFC champion Eagles are 4-0 in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1992-93. A year ago, the Eagles’ 8-0 start was spoiled by a home loss to Washington.

Howell was 29-for-41 for 290 yards.

“It was definitely a game I think we should have won and we were capable of winning it,” Howell said. “We feel like we can play a lot better and that is a good thing. We were really close against a good team.”

Bills rout Dolphins, hand division rivals 1st loss of season

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Stefon Diggs was so elusive Sunday, the Bills’ star receiver even came away with two full cups of beer while celebrating the second of his three touchdown catches.

“Yeah, I owe somebody \$18,” Diggs joked following a 48-20 win in which the Bills brought the Miami Dolphins’ unbeaten start to an emphatic end.

As bar tabs go, Diggs’ celebration — in which he sprayed a group of people in the corner of the end zone — was the price both fans and the Dolphins had to pay for running into a Bills juggernaut that scored on eight of its first nine possessions (not including a kneel-down before halftime).

Josh Allen threw four touchdown passes and added another rushing as the Bills served a reminder they know a thing or two about offense — and defense for that matter — after spending much of the week hearing about the Dolphins producing one of the most impressive offensive performances in NFL history in a 70-20 win over Denver.

“We’re just trying to wake everybody up and make people talk,” defensive tackle Ed Oliver said. “We want everybody to know that this defense is for real. And we got special guys.”

Chiefs 23, Jets 20: Patrick Mahomes and Kansas City shook off a subpar performance during which they blew a 17-point lead, but held on to defeat New York.

Mahomes, who became the fastest to 200 NFL touchdown passes, was 18 of 30 for 203 yards and a touchdown. He also ran for 51 yards. Isiah Pacheco rushed for 115 yards and a touchdown on 20 carries, and Travis Kelce had six catches for 60 yards.

Cowboys 38, Patriots 3: DaRon Bland returned one of his two interceptions for a touchdown, Leighton Vander Esch scooped up a fumble for a score and host Dallas routed New England.

Mac Jones was responsible for all three turnovers and was pulled in the second half of the Patriots’ worst loss in 24 seasons under Bill Belichick, surpassing a 31-0 defeat at Buffalo in 2003.

Texans 30, Steelers 6: Rookie C.J. Stroud had another big game, throwing for 306 yards and two touchdowns to lead host Houston past Pittsburgh.

The Texans (2-2) won their second straight and first at home since beating the Los Angeles Chargers on Dec. 26, 2021. Houston’s 24-point win was its largest margin of victory in exactly six years.

Rams 29, Colts 23 (OT): Playing with a hip injury that left him limping at times, Matthew Stafford threw a 22-yard touchdown pass to rookie sensation Puka Nacua in overtime to give visiting Los Angeles the win over Indianapolis.

The Rams (2-2) blew a 23-point lead in the final 21 minutes of regulation, but recovered to win their fourth straight in the series and

third in a row at Indy.

49ers 35, Cardinals 16: Christian McCaffrey scored a career-high four touchdowns and host San Francisco beat Arizona, its 14th straight regular-season win.

Broncos 31, Bears 28: Russell Wilson threw for three touchdowns, Wil Lutz kicked a tiebreaking 51-yard field goal with 1:46 remaining and visiting Denver rallied past Chicago.

Titans 27, Bengals 3: Ryan Tannehill threw for 240 yards and a touchdown and host Tennessee routed Cincinnati.

Ravens 28, Browns 3: Baltimore’s Lamar Jackson ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more against host Cleveland’s top-ranked defense as the Ravens took sole possession of first place in the AFC North.

Chargers 24, Raiders 17: Khalil Mack set a franchise single-game record with six sacks, Justin Herbert accounted for three touchdowns and host Los Angeles beat Las Vegas.

Buccaneers 26, Saints 9: Baker Mayfield threw three touchdown passes and visiting Tampa Bay beat New Orleans, which continued to struggle on offense even with Derek Carr returning from a shoulder injury.

Vikings 21, Panthers 13: Kirk Cousins threw two touchdown passes to Justin Jefferson, D.J. Wonnun returned Bryce Young’s fumble 51 yards for a momentum-changing touchdown and visiting Minnesota held on to beat Carolina.