

## House speaker chaos roils Washington

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers who had been sitting in stunned silence gasped at the declaration: The office of speaker “is hereby declared vacant.”

For the first time ever, a House speaker had been voted out of the position, plunging Congress into a new degree of turmoil. “Now what?” someone in the chamber yelled out.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy, the California Republican who has survived decades of upheaval in Congress, had projected a sense of cool as he strolled out of his office just hours earlier, still speaker. But when he exited the House chamber, no longer with the gavel, he walked in silence.

He left a House roiling. Lawmakers fled the chamber after the vote, some speechless at what they had witnessed. An essential body of American democracy no longer has an elected leader, the latest moment of testing for an institution grappling with aftermath of the Capitol siege on Jan.

6, 2021, a Republican Party in upheaval and the United States’ contested role in global leadership.

Where the House goes from here, no one can say.

Tempers are red hot in Washington and across-the-political-aisle relationships — endangered but crucial in times of crisis — have all but collapsed.

The House faces pressing questions of how to avert a government shutdown, whether to continue to fund Ukraine’s defense against the Russian invasion and whether to proceed with an impeachment inquiry — unprecedented in many respects — into President Joe Biden.

Meanwhile, procedural weapons Congress once reserved for the most dire offenses — censure, expulsion, impeachment and now the motion to vacate the speaker’s chair — have become common.

Many Republicans were left in a state of total exasperation, having begged their colleagues not to

follow through.

“If we vacate the chair, the government will shut down. Our credit rating will go down; interest rates will go up,” Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican known for working with Democrats, warned hours before the vote to oust McCarthy. “Ukraine will be victimized and lose that war to Russia. That is what is at stake here. Not to mention the institutional erosion that will occur.”

McCarthy, who had managed to hold his conference together for nine months by taking a defiant stance toward the rest of Washington, insisted on fighting to hold on to his speakership. He told Republicans at a morning meeting that he wanted to get on with the motion to vacate vote and insisted he would not give Democrats any concessions to save his job.

Bring it on, was McCarthy’s message.

He seemed to have a chance of surviving: Most Republicans ral-

lied around McCarthy as they met in the Capitol’s basement, giving him several rounds of applause.

But Democrats, at their own meeting in the Capitol’s sub-levels, played through what they see as the black marks of McCarthy’s record: how he had continued to support former President Donald Trump even after a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol and how he had catered to his party’s right wing during his nine months as speaker.

In the end, they united around Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries and decided to wash their hands of what they cast as a Republican problem.

“Kevin McCarthy brought this madness upon himself,” said Rep. Jamie Raskin, a Democrat from Maryland, citing how McCarthy had agreed to allow any one member to bring the motion to vacate as part of a deal with right-wing lawmakers to win the speaker’s gavel in January.

## Marines seek to offset a widespread camo shortage

By JONATHAN SNYDER

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Marines shopping for new camouflage uniforms at this air base south of Hiroshima will find mostly empty shelves at the Marine Corps Exchange.

A sign posted nearby cites “supply chain and manufacturing related disruptions” for a shortage of the Marines’ distinctive woodland-pattern utility uniform.

The widespread shortage is prompting commanders from the top down to loosen some restrictions and permit Marines to

wear nonstandard uniform items until the problem is solved.

Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Eric Smith and Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Carlos Ruiz delivered a sobering update on Sept. 29 via an Instagram video. The uniform shortage will bedevil the devil dogs another year, the commandant said.

“That problem is going to stay with us until the fall of 2024 when the manufacturer can fill that backlog that has been created after COVID,” Smith said. “Until that time, local commanders, battalions and squadrons are authorized to use FROG gear

[Flame Resistant Organizational Gear] or desert cammies to mitigate,” Smith said in the video, using the shorthand term for camouflage uniforms.

Flame-resistant gear is a breathable, lightweight and moisture-wicking jersey normally worn under body armor, tactical vests and chest rigs. It’s made from a trademarked material, Nomex, that’s also used to make firefighter clothing and reduce the likelihood of burn injuries, according to [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

Smith in the video said he heard from Marines about the uniform shortage during his re-

cent tour of the Indo-Pacific.

American Apparel Inc., the primary manufacturer of the uniforms, has difficulty meeting the uniform quantities stipulated at a fixed price in a contract with the Defense Logistics Agency, the Marine Corps Times reported Saturday, citing company CEO Chuck Lambert. He cannot offset inflation and labor shortages without increasing the uniform cost, he told the newspaper.

The III Marine Expeditionary Force is aware of the issue but was unable provide additional information at this time, spokesman 1st Lt. Alejandro Arteaga said.

# US warns of Chinese disinformation campaign

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — For much of the world, China's Xinjiang region is notorious, a place where ethnic Uyghurs face forced labor and arbitrary detention. But a group of visiting foreign journalists was left with a decidedly different impression.

On a tour in late September sponsored by Beijing, the 22 journalists from 17 countries visited bazaars and chatted with residents over dates and watermelon slices. They later told

state media they were impressed with the bustling economy, described the region as “full of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity,” and denounced what they said were lies by Western media.

The trip is an example of what Washington sees as Beijing's growing efforts to reshape the global narrative on China. It's spending billions of dollars annually to do so.

In a first-of-its-kind report, the State Department last week laid out Beijing's tactics and

techniques for molding public opinion, such as buying content, creating fake personas to spread its message and using repression to quash unfavorable accounts.

The Global Engagement Center, a State Department agency that's tasked with combating foreign propaganda and disinformation and that released the 58-page report, warned that Beijing's information campaign could eventually sway how decisions are made around the world and undermine U.S. interests.

“Unchecked, the (Chinese government's) information manipulation could in many parts of the world diminish freedom to express views critical of Beijing,” said Jamie Rubin, who heads the center. He said Beijing's efforts could “transform the global information landscape and damage the security and stability of the United States, its friends, and partners.”

China over the weekend slammed the report, calling it “in itself disinformation as it misrepresents facts and truth.”

## Russians say they foiled Ukrainian drone attack

*Associated Press*

Russian air defenses shot down 31 Ukrainian drones during a concerted nighttime attack by Kyiv's forces on border regions, the Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday.

The drone attack appeared to be Kyiv's largest single cross-border drone assault reported by Moscow since it launched its invasion 20 months ago. There were no immediate reports of any damage or casualties.

Ukraine is pressing on with a slow-moving counteroffensive it launched three months ago to expel Russian invaders.

The Russian Defense Ministry didn't provide any evidence for its claims about intercepting Ukrainian drones nor any details about any damage or casualties.

It also said Russian aircraft thwarted a Ukrainian attempt to deploy a group of soldiers by sea to the western side of Russian-annexed Crimea. The force attempted to land on Cape Tarkhankut, on Crimea's western end, using a high-speed boat and three jet skis, the ministry said.

Moscow's claims could not be

independently verified, and Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment.

The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has been a frequent target of Ukrainian attacks. The region has been the key hub supporting the invasion.

Meanwhile Wednesday, sirens blared across Russia and television stations briefly interrupted regular broadcasts to air emergency warnings as part of nationwide drills that started on the previous day to test the readiness of the country's emergency agencies.

Russian media said the scenario of the drills envisioned the increasing danger of a conflict between nuclear powers and simulated action in response to a situation where 70% of housing and all vital infrastructure are destroyed and wide areas are contaminated by a radioactive fallout.

The drills follow a series of warnings from Russian officials that Western support for Ukraine has increased the threat of a direct military conflict between Russia and NATO.

## Dems, vets call for urgent approval of Ukraine aid

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Democrats in the Senate and House joined veterans and former military leaders Tuesday to urge Congress to approve immediate aid for Ukraine as funds available for the country's defense against Russia's invasion dwindle.

The calls for action followed a decision by Congress on Saturday to pass a stopgap funding bill that omitted Ukraine aid in order to win enough Republican support to avoid a government shutdown. Some Democrats said it is vital to correct that omission.

“Ukraine is not just fighting for their territorial integrity. It's not just fighting for their democracy. Ukraine is fighting for our democracy as well,” said Rep. Jake Auchincloss, D-Mass., a Marine veteran. “They're not asking for American troops to fight there. They are asking for Americans to stand shoulder to shoulder with them.”

The White House asked Congress in August to approve \$24 billion in aid to Ukraine, including \$13 billion in military assistance.

The money was expected to be included in the short-term spending agreement to keep the government open but was stripped away as Republicans in the House rebelled against continued funds for the Eastern European country.

House Republicans took the unusual step last week of separating funding for a 9-year-old program that trains and equips Ukrainian forces from its customary place in an annual defense appropriations bill. A growing number of Republicans contend money earmarked for the war would be better spent strengthening the U.S. border with Mexico and countering China.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., dismissed that view, pointing out that aid to Ukraine makes up less than 5% of the defense budget.

“All this talk about how, ‘Oh we ought to be spending it on the border, we ought to be spending it on our needs’ — we can do both. That's what a great country does. We keep our word,” he said. “We do what's necessary at home, and we stop appeasement, we do not appease.”

## Butler sworn in as 3rd Black female senator in US history

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Former union leader and Democratic insider Laphonza Butler was sworn in as the newest member of the Senate on Tuesday, replacing California Sen. Dianne Feinstein after her death and becoming only the third Black female senator in history.

Butler was appointed by California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Sunday, just two days after Feinstein died at her home in Washington. Butler is a longtime fundraiser and strategist in the state's Democratic circles and was the head of Emily's List, a national organization that raises money for women candidates who support abortion rights.

The new senator was sworn in by Vice President Kamala Harris, who served as the second Black female senator until she resigned in 2021 to join President Joe Biden in the White House. The first was Democratic Sen. Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois, who served one term in the 1990s.

With dozens of supporters and family members looking down from the gallery, Butler smiled broadly as she walked down the center aisle of the Senate alongside Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla of California and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. After Harris administered the oath of office, members of the Senate from both parties crowded around her to shake her hand.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said that "today, the Senate takes another step towards fully reflecting our vibrant democracy."

He said Butler has "dedicated her entire career to fighting for others — fighting for women, fighting for working families and fighting for the cause of justice."

After she was sworn in, Biden called her to congratulate her, the White House said.

The Congressional Black Caucus also held a ceremonial swearing-in for Butler. "Her background and years of experience will bring a much-needed

perspective to the Senate, which currently does not have any Black women," CBC Chairman Steven Horsford, D-Nev., said in a statement after she was appointed.

Butler is also the first openly LGBTQ+ senator from California.

Though she has never held elective office, Newsom praised her "deep knowledge" of the legislative process.

Butler is well known inside California's Democratic Party apparatus. Her credentials include working for nearly two years with a consulting firm tied closely to Newsom and founded by his top political lieutenants. She also served as a senior adviser to Harris' 2020 presidential campaign.

It is unclear if Butler will run to hold the seat when Feinstein's term ends next year. A competitive race for Feinstein's seat is already underway among three prominent House Democrats, Reps. Katie Porter, Adam Schiff and Barbara Lee, who is Black. The governor has said he didn't want to tip the scales in the 2024 race by choosing among those candidates.

Newsom said he told Butler to "do what you think is best for you and the state of California, and you make that judgment completely independent of any expectations from me."

Butler, 44, comes from a working-class family. Her father, a small-business owner, died from a terminal illness when she was 16. Her mother worked as a classroom aide, a home care provider, a security guard and a bookkeeper while caring for Butler and her two siblings, the governor's office said.

She was elected president of the state's largest labor union in the early 2010s, back when the nation was reeling from the Great Recession.

Butler has also worked for corporate clients, including Airbnb and Uber.

## Biden move erases \$9B in student debt

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden announced another wave of federal student loan forgiveness on Wednesday as borrowers brace for payments to restart after a three-year pause that began during the COVID-19 pandemic.

His latest step will help 125,000 borrowers by erasing \$9 billion in debt through existing relief programs.

In total, 3.6 million borrowers will have had \$127 billion in debt wiped out since Biden took office.

"President Biden has long believed that college should be a ticket to the middle class, not a burden that weighs on families," the White House said in a statement.

Biden promised to help alleviate the burden of student debt while running for president, and he's been under pressure to follow through even though his original plan was overturned by

the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court.

He's been relying on a patchwork of different programs to chip away at debt, such as public service loan forgiveness and the SAVE Plan, which lowers payments by tying them to borrowers' income.

"For years, millions of eligible borrowers were unable to access the student debt relief they qualified for, but that's all changed thanks to President Biden and this administration's relentless efforts to fix the broken student loan system," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a statement.

Republicans have fought Biden's plans on student debt, but Wednesday's announcement comes as they're consumed by infighting. Hard-right Republicans forced a vote that ousted Rep. Kevin McCarthy as House speaker, leaving the chamber in chaos.

## Health care workers strike over wages, low staffing

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Picketing began Wednesday morning at Kaiser Permanente hospitals as some 75,000 health care workers went on strike in Virginia, California and three other states over wages and staffing shortages, marking the latest major labor unrest in the United States.

Kaiser Permanente is one of the country's larger insurers and health care system operators, with 39 hospitals nationwide.

The nonprofit company, based in Oakland, Calif., provides health coverage for nearly 13 million people, sending customers to clinics and hospitals it runs or contracts with to provide care.

The Coalition of Kaiser Perma-

nente Unions, representing about 85,000 of the health system's employees nationally, approved a strike for three days in California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, and for one day in Virginia and Washington, D.C.

The strikers include licensed vocational nurses, home health aides and ultrasound sonographers, as well as technicians in radiology, X-ray, surgical, pharmacy and emergency departments.

Doctors are not participating, and Kaiser says its hospitals, including emergency rooms, will remain open.

Unions representing Kaiser workers in August sought a \$25 hourly minimum wage and increases in the next four years.

# 'Miracle' year for water in California

*Associated Press*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California ended its “miracle” water year on Saturday with enough rain and snow to fill the state’s reservoirs to 128% of their historical average, making it among the wettest years in recorded state history.

That’s a welcome boon to a state that has spent much of the past dozen years in a deep drought, forcing state leaders to grapple with how the state should share and manage its water in the future. A series of winter storms in early 2023 busted the state’s most recent dry spell.

State officials measured 33.56 inches of precipitation through the end of September.

California’s “water year” begins annually on Oct. 1 so it can include all of the fall and winter months when California gets the bulk of its rain and snow.

The state depends on those wet months to

fill its reservoirs that supply water for drinking, farming and environmental uses throughout the state. Those reservoirs dipped to dangerously low levels in recent years because of an extreme drought.

That prompted water restrictions on homes and businesses and curtailed deliveries to farmers. It also threatened already endangered species of fish, including salmon, that need cold water in the rivers to survive. But the State Water Project — which includes 30 reservoirs and storage facilities and provides water to 27 million people — reported 27.4 million acre feet in its reservoirs as of Sept. 30. One acre foot of water is enough to supply two families of four for a year.

“This was as close to a miracle year as you can get,” said Karla Nemeth, director of the California Department of Water Resources.

The reservoirs were helped by a series of

nine strong storms that hit California over the winter. Those storms carried so much rain and snow they were known as “atmospheric rivers.” They caused widespread flooding throughout the state and were blamed for multiple deaths.

The storms also dumped tons of snow on the mountains. The state snowpack on April 1 was 237% above its historical average.

It’s just the fourth time since 1950 the state’s snowpack exceeded 200% of average, according to Michael Anderson, the state’s climatologist.

All of that snow melted in the spring and summer, filling rivers and reservoirs. Water levels at Lake Oroville rose 240 feet between Dec. 1, 2022, and the end of the snowmelt period. That’s the largest increase in storage in one season since the reservoir opened in 1968, according to Ted Craddock, deputy director for the State Water Project.

## Have a package to return? Call Uber.

*Associated Press*

Uber is adding a new task to its list of services: mailing consumers’ return packages.

The ride-hailing and delivery company said Wednesday that its drivers will collect up to five prepaid and sealed packages and drop them off at a local post office or at UPS or FedEx stores. Uber will charge a flat fee of \$5 for the service or \$3 for its Uber One members. The San Francisco-based company said the service will be available in nearly 5,000 U.S. cities to start.

Uber said customers will be able to choose package drop off locations within its app. Only locations open for at least the next hour will be listed. Drivers will provide visual confirmation once a package has been dropped off.

## US takes sweeping action against Chinese fentanyl trafficking chain

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration took aim Tuesday at the fentanyl trafficking threat, announcing a series of indictments and sanctions against Chinese companies and executives blamed for importing the chemicals used to make the deadly drug.

Officials described the actions, which include charges against eight Chinese companies accused of advertising, manufacturing and distributing precursor chemicals for synthetic opioids like fentanyl, as the latest effort in their fight against the deadliest overdose crisis in U.S. history. The moves come one day before senior administration officials were set to visit Mexico, whose cartels are part of the global trafficking network, for meetings expected to involve discussion of the drug threat.

“We know that this network includes the cartels’ leaders, their drug traffickers, their

money launderers, their clandestine lab operators, their security forces, their weapons suppliers, and their chemical suppliers,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said at a news conference. “And we know that this global fentanyl supply chain, which ends with the deaths of Americans, often starts with chemical companies in China.”

Besides charging eight companies, the Justice Department also indicted 12 executives for their alleged roles in drug trafficking. In a coordinated action, the Treasury Department announced sanctions against 28 people and companies — mostly in China but also in Canada — that will cut them off from the U.S. financial system and prohibit anyone in the U.S. from doing business with them. None of those charged has been arrested, but Garland said prosecutors intended to “bring every one of these defendants to justice.”

“It’s the latest step in the rapid scaling up of our work targeting the financial flows that power the global illicit drug trade,” said Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo. He said Treasury is also seeking out the friends, family members and affiliates of the people who benefit from drug sales.

“If you benefit from the proceeds of this illicit activity, we are going to come after your assets,” he said.

Mexico and China are the primary sources for fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances trafficked directly into the U.S., according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, which is tasked with combating illicit drug trafficking. Nearly all the precursor chemicals that are needed to make fentanyl come from China. And the companies that make the precursors routinely use fake return addresses and mislabel the products in order to avoid being caught by law enforcement.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Judge says birth centers can remain open**

**AL** MONTGOMERY — A judge ruled that Alabama cannot shut down freestanding birth centers that meet certain standards, siding with midwives and doctors who challenged what they described as Alabama’s de facto ban on the facilities.

Montgomery Circuit Court Judge Greg Griffin on Saturday issued a preliminary injunction that for now prevents the Alabama Department of Public Health from refusing to license the centers as long as they demonstrate compliance with standards established by the American Association of Birth Centers. The centers are where babies are delivered via the midwifery care model.

The ruling provides a pathway for the birth centers to get licensed to operate while a lawsuit goes forward challenging a requirement for the facilities to be licensed as hospitals.

**Senator, wife and 2 kids killed in plane crash**

**ND** BISMARCK — A state lawmaker who had recently received his commercial pilot’s license was flying his own small plane home from a family celebration in Arizona when it crashed in Utah, killing him, his wife and their two young sons, family members said Tuesday.

It was the first time state Sen. Doug Larsen, of Mandan, and his family had flown his single-engine Piper Cherokee to visit his sister in Scottsdale, Ariz. Peggy Steimel said he made the trip so he could be part of her sendoff before she deployed for

about a year overseas with the Arizona National Guard.

The plane crashed Sunday evening shortly after taking off from Canyonlands Airfield about 15 miles north of Moab, according to a Grand County Sheriff’s Department statement posted on Facebook. Larsen served 29 years in the North Dakota Army National Guard, reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel.

**Man gets jail time in COVID money plot**

**GA** BRUNSWICK — A Georgia man was sentenced Monday to more than five years in federal prison for organizing a scheme that stole nearly \$2 million in government aid intended to help businesses endure the coronavirus pandemic.

A U.S. District Court judge in Brunswick sentenced 41-year-old Bernard Okojie after a jury in March convicted him of fraud and conspiracy charges.

Prosecutors say Okojie filed dozens of applications for himself and others to receive COVID-19 relief funds in 2020 and 2021, but none of the businesses named in the applications existed.

**Democrats sue to block voting requirements**

**WI** MADISON — A national Democratic law firm on Monday challenged Wisconsin’s witness requirements for absentee voting, arguing that the state is violating the federal Voting Rights Act by demanding a witness signature on ballot envelopes.

Elias Law Group, representing four Wisconsin voters,

called the requirement a “burden” to voters in the lawsuit, which they filed in federal court against the Wisconsin Elections Commission and other elections officials.

State law requires clerks to reject absentee ballots that are missing a witness’ address or signature. A Wisconsin judge ruled last year that elections officials cannot correct or fill in missing information on witness certifications, a practice known as ballot curing.

The Voting Rights Act prohibits states from requiring a voter to “prove his qualifications by the voucher of registered voters or members of any other class.”

**Painter threatened with eviction wins reprieve**

**MA** PROVINCETOWN — A 95-year-old painter and his family threatened with eviction from the Provincetown dune shack they have helped care for and occupy for nearly eight decades have won a reprieve.

A legal team representing the painter worked out an agreement with federal officials that allows Salvatore Del Deo and his family to continue to live in and maintain the shack for five years, according to his son Romolo Del Deo.

The shack is one of a number dotting the more remote reaches of the Cape Cod National Seashore, located within the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District in Provincetown and Truro.

The isolated shacks have no electricity or indoor plumbing and are prized for their uninterrupted solitude.

The family was abruptly evic-

ted by the National Park Service this summer when the agency opted to start a bidding process to let the public apply for up to 10-year leases to occupy eight of the shacks.

The shack occupied by the Del Deos was not among the eight, but could be included in future bidding rounds.

Romolo Del Deo said the family opted to fight the eviction, in part because of their decades-long connection to the shack.

“He’s painted at that location for 77 years,” Del Deo said. “His connection to the place is very, very deep.”

**Juvenile shoots 2 children after football practice**

**FL** APOPKA — An 11-year-old boy retrieved a gun from an unlocked box in his mother’s vehicle and shot two 13-year-olds following an altercation that began during a Pop Warner football practice in central Florida, police said Tuesday.

The child fired one shot on Monday night, hitting one teen in the arm and the other in the torso, Apopka police Chief Mike McKinley said. He said surveillance video showed that both teens were running away from the boy when the shot was fired.

The two teens are in stable condition, McKinley said.

Responding officers took the gun from the child, and he was detained, McKinley said. The boy was later charged with one count of attempted second-degree murder and booked into the juvenile assessment center. The chief said the boy’s mother may face a second-degree misdemeanor charge of leaving a gun unsecured.

— From wire reports



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# Twins get 1st playoff win in nearly 20 years

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Royce Lewis felt a jolt of confidence from his inclusion on Minnesota's roster for the AL Wild Card Series, ending the uncertainty around his hamstring strain.

Pablo López found inspiration in his closet, wearing a throwback jersey of his boyhood hero Johan Santana, who just happened to be the last Twins pitcher to win a game in the playoffs.

The Twins and their fans fed off the energy, finally stopping that record 18-game postseason skid.

Lewis smashed the streak into the seats, homering in each of his first two at-bats to carry the Twins to a 3-1 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays in the opener of their AL Wild Card Series on Tuesday.

"It was a blessing to play today. That atmosphere was electric," said Lewis, whose two-run shot off Kevin Gausman in the first inning and leadoff drive in the third sent the sellout crowd into a frenzy.

The bigger celebration oc-

curred a few hours later when Jhoan Duran pitched a hitless ninth to close the first victory for the Twins in the playoffs since Oct. 5, 2004, and vanquish the longest postseason skid in major North American professional sports.

"This was my team growing up. It's still my team," said Caleb Thielbar, a Minnesota native who pitched a perfect seventh. "I know how people feel, and I know what weight was lifted off everyone's backs today."

It was the first home win for the Twins in the playoffs since Game 1 of the ALCS in 2002 at the Metrodome. Lewis was a 3-year-old then. He's the type of big-time player — with five grand slams in 70 career games — that could lead the Twins on an actual postseason run instead of just hanging a division title banner and leaving the party after three or four days.

"I thought the place was going to split open and melt, honestly," Twins manager Rocco Baldelli

said. "It was out of this universe out there on the field. The fans took over the game. They helped us win today."

López also had a strong playoff debut for Minnesota, permitting one run and five hits in 5<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings. After wearing his Santana jersey to the ballpark, he delivered a performance that was reminiscent of his fellow Venezuelan.

"Sometimes things line up too perfectly to pass up on those opportunities," López said.

Game 2 was Wednesday afternoon. The entire series is at Target Field.

"You don't want to say like an over sense of urgency, but these guys know it's going to take everybody to get to Game 3," Blue Jays manager John Schneider said.

The Blue Jays finally got on the board when Kevin Kiermaier's two-out single drove in Bo Bichette in the sixth, but they left nine runners on base.

The Blue Jays carried their own October angst into this se-

ries, having not won a postseason game since the 2016 ALCS. They took two-game sweeps as wild cards in 2020 and 2022, and Bichette and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. — two franchise cornerstones and the celebrated sons of former major leaguers — have not yet won a postseason game.

López and his four relievers got plenty of defensive help. Michael A. Taylor made a diving catch of a sharp line drive to center by Alejandro Kirk in the second and a leaping grab at the wall to take an extra-base hit away from a fuming Matt Chapman in the sixth. Max Kepler crashed against the same padding to catch Guerrero's long fly ball in the fourth.

The most vital play of all was later in that inning, when Kiermaier's two-out roller eluded third baseman Jorge Polanco as Bichette rounded for home with two outs. Carlos Correa backed him up from shortstop and threw a strike to the plate to end the inning.

# Montgomery sparkles, Rangers beat sloppy Rays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Jordan Montgomery was exceptional against the Tampa Bay Rays, even better when he lumbered off the mound to make a diving catch that helped the Texas Rangers to a 4-0 victory in their AL Wild Card Series opener.

"It's good to do your job and help the team win," Montgomery said after scattering six hits over seven innings Tuesday to move the Rangers within a victory of an AL Division Series matchup against the Baltimore Orioles.

Texas rebounded from a weekend collapse that cost it the AL West title and a first-round playoff bye. The Rays dropped a club-record sixth consecutive postseason game dating to Game 2 of the 2021 AL Division Series against Boston.

Montgomery's pitching set the tone as the best-of-three series began. The Rangers also drew inspiration from the 6-foot-6 left-hander's defensive gem on a bunt that Jose Siri popped into the air along the first-base line with runners at the corners.

Montgomery dove to make the catch and landed awkwardly.

"I saw it high enough in the air, kind of made two quick steps at it, and then just blacked out and went for it," Montgomery said.

"That was electric. I was fired up," said rookie left fielder Evan Carter, who doubled twice and drew two walks in his postseason debut.

"It wasn't a soft landing was it? He's a big fellow," Rangers manager Bruce Bochy said. "Great catch by him. We were in a tight situation there. ... Just shows you how competitive he is to go out there and dive for that ball."

Bochy and Rangers athletic trainers went to the mound to check on Montgomery, who was not injured.

"I think I was just as shocked as everybody in the stands. I had to backhand it. ... It just was something I've never done before," the pitcher said. "I don't know if I've done that since I was 12. Just kind of a heat-of-the-moment competitive thing."

Corey Seager and Josh Jung drove in runs and the Rangers benefited from four errors by the Rays, who also fizzled offensively before a crowd of just 19,704 — roughly 5,300 below listed capacity — at Tropicana Field.

"We didn't hit, pitch or defend," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "When you're up against a good team, they're going to capitalize, and they eventually really did."

Tampa Bay, wearing throwback Devil Rays jerseys in the style of 1998-2000, has reached the postseason for the fifth straight season but has one run in its past three playoff defeats, hitting .133.

Montgomery, a 30-year-old left-hander acquired from St. Louis at the trade deadline, retired 14 of his last 16 batters. He fanned pinch-hitter Junior Caminero, Tampa Bay's top minor league prospect, to end his outing with five strikeouts and no walks.

Aroldis Chapman pitched a perfect eighth and José Leclerc worked around a walk in the ninth to finish a six-hitter, the Rangers' first postseason shutout since the 2011 World Series.

"We're not going to alter our approach. This team has scored a lot of runs this year. It's a good-hitting lineup," Cash said. "We got shut down today. I'm very confident that we're going to bounce back and have some good at-bats."

# D-backs hit Burnes hard to rally past Brewers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Corbin Carroll and the Arizona Diamondbacks are one resilient bunch. Staring at an early deficit against Corbin Burnes, they slugged their way to the front of their NL Wild Card Series.

Carroll and Ketel Marte homered on back-to-back pitches and Gabriel Moreno also went deep, sending the Diamondbacks to a 6-3 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday night in the opener of their best-of-three series.

Arizona is making the franchise's first playoff appearance since 2017, and it had been 0-14 in postseason games when trailing by at least three runs. But this is a tested group

of Diamondbacks who had to push all the way to the final days of the season to secure an NL wild card.

So that 3-0 hole with Burnes on the mound for the Brewers was just another challenge that had to be overcome.

"He is a really good pitcher," said Carroll, who added another memorable performance to his breakout rookie season.

"We wanted to get him out of there. I thought we took really patient at-bats and got rewarded with that patience by getting some balls in the middle of the plate that we were able to put some good swings on."

The rally put Arizona in a prime position to advance. Game 2 is Wednesday, and the

Diamondbacks had All-Star Zac Gallen and Merrill Kelly lined up after rookie Brandon Pfaadt lasted just 2⅔ innings in the opener.

Arizona's comeback began when Carroll followed Geraldo Perdomo's one-out single in the third with a 444-foot drive into the second deck of the stands in right-center. On Burnes' next pitch, Marte sent a cutter over the right-field wall to tie the game.

Moreno put the Diamondbacks in front by homering for the first time since Sept. 2. Moreno's 425-foot shot in the fourth came on a 2-2 slider.

Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo felt Carroll's homer was a turning point.

"I think at that point, we all

exhaled," Lovullo said, "and I think we collectively got our feet underneath us and felt very good about the direction in which we were going."

Third baseman Evan Longoria protected Arizona's 4-3 lead in the fifth by robbing Tyrone Taylor of a bases-loaded hit and turning it into an inning-ending double play. Christian Walker provided some insurance with a two-run double off Devin Williams in the ninth.

Arizona's Joe Mantipty, Miguel Castro, Ryne Nelson, Ryan Thompson, Kevin Ginkel and Paul Sewald combined for 6⅓ innings of shutout relief.

"Our bullpen is the reason why we won this game," Lovullo said.

# Wheeler shuts down Marlins in Phillies' win

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Flip that finger, Nick.

The ring one, of course. Nick Castellanos had no desire to turn his moment on second base into a NSFW moment in the post-season.

The All-Star slugger did — with millions briefly confusing the gesture for the obscene finger — direct his ring finger toward a joyous Phillies dugout, sending a message that the defending NL champions are chasing the World Series ring they were denied by Houston last year.

"That's why we're playing this month," Castellanos said.

Zack Wheeler struck out eight in a sensational effort, José Alvarado preserved the lead with a pivotal strikeout and Philadelphia opened a resolute postseason push with a 4-1 victory over the Miami Marlins in the opener of their NL Wild Card Series on Tuesday night.

"As soon as I stepped foot out of the dugout to go stretch out there in the bullpen, the crowd went nuts and I got chills," Wheeler said.

Wheeler quickly started dealing and got the run support needed to put the Marlins on the ropes.

Led by Kyle Schwarber's 47 homers, the Phillies had six players in the Game 1 li-

neup with at least 20. They didn't need the Schwarbombs and Alec Booms to get the job done; every starter had at least one hit without a home run.

Castellanos added an RBI double in the eighth inning to score Bryce Harper — who knocked off his helmet as he steamrolled past a stop sign — and the Phillies moved within a victory of an NL Division Series matchup against Atlanta.

Wheeler allowed one run in 6⅓ innings. Craig Kimbrel worked a scoreless ninth for the save.

Phillies fans held signs that read "Unfinished Business" and they were downright delirious when injured slugger Rhys Hoskins fought back tears and threw the ceremonial first pitch.

Castellanos did, too. He wore Hoskins' No. 17 on the side of his cap this season in tribute to the first baseman who spiked his bat on a home run last season in an NLDS victory.

"He symbolizes Philadelphia, honestly more than any of the signees that have come here after the fact," Castellanos said.

The Phillies won 11 postseason games last season, two shy of their first World Series title since 2008. The theme of unfinished business was a key element that permeated throughout the clubhouse this season.

"We've got to get back after it this year, and it's a different team," manager Rob Thomson said. "I believe it's a better team, to be honest with you."

Here they are again, this time with star shortstop Trea Turner, playing big games in October — and with Wheeler in top form.

Wheeler, on the short list of great free-agent signings in team history, brought the heat from the start. He threw nine fastballs in the 97-99 mph range in the first inning, the hardest a pitcher who struck out 212 batters has thrown all season.

The veteran right-hander never backed down as 45,662 fans at Citizens Bank Park roared on every K.

Wheeler took a two-hit shutout into the seventh and was pulled after allowing consecutive infield singles with two outs, the second one by Bryan De La Cruz driving in Miami's only run.

Alvarado struck out pinch-hitter Yuli Gurriel with two runners aboard to protect a 3-1 lead. The left-hander retired two batters in the eighth, and Jeff Hoffman got the third out of the inning.

The Marlins had seven hits.

"I think they know what's at stake," manager Skip Schumaker said. "They know what tomorrow means. We're going to do the same thing we've always done."

# 3 continents to host 2030 World Cup

Associated Press

GENEVA — A unique 2030 World Cup is set to be played in Europe and Africa with the surprising addition of South America in a deal to allow the men's soccer tournament to start with a 100th birthday party in Uruguay.

FIFA reached an agreement Wednesday between soccer's continental leaders to accept only one candidate for hosting the 2030 tournament in six countries, the sport's governing body said.

The Spain-Portugal bid grew to add Morocco this year and now also includes long-time bid rivals Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. All six national teams will get automatic entry to the 48-team tournament, FIFA said.

A key lure of the unprecedented three-continent project is being able to open in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo, where the Centenario Stadium hosted the inaugural 1930 World Cup final.

"The centennial World Cup could not be far from South America, where everything began," said Alejandro Dominguez, the president of South American soccer body CON-

MEBOL. "The 2030 World Cup will be played in three continents."

The consensus reached by once-rival soccer continents also let FIFA fast-track the opening of the 2034 World Cup bidding contest, limited to member federations from Asia and Oceania.

Saudi Arabia has targeted the 2034 edition and Australia also is interested after successfully co-hosting the Women's World Cup this year with New Zealand. Either way, the 2034 tournament will almost certainly be played in November and December — like last year's World Cup in Qatar.

Accelerating the choice of a 2034 host to the end of next year will be widely seen as a victory for Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has built close ties to FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

"We want to celebrate our football culture and share our country with the world," Yasser Al Mishal, the president of the Saudi soccer federation and a member of the FIFA Council, said in a government statement announcing its intention to bid.

The FIFA Council's acceptance of a unified 2030 candida-

cy still needs formal approval next year at a meeting of the 211 member federations. That should be just a formality. The 2034 pick will be at a separate congress, FIFA said.

"In 2030, we will have a unique global footprint, three continents — Africa, Europe and South America — six countries — Argentina, Morocco, Paraguay, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay — welcoming and uniting the world while celebrating together the beautiful game, the centenary and the FIFA World Cup," Infantino said in a statement.

The 48-team, 104-game tournament scheduled for June-July 2030 is planned to start with games in Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay before the action moves to the core host nations Spain, Portugal and Morocco.

The plan involves an unprecedented amount of travel across distances and time zones and was not popular with Football Supporters Europe, the fan group officially recognized by European soccer body UEFA.

"FIFA continues its cycle of destruction against the greatest tournament on earth," FSE said in a statement. "Horrendous for supporters, disregards the envi-

ronment and rolls the red carpet out to a host for 2034 with an appalling human rights record."

The South American co-host bid has been promoted since the 2018 World Cup in Russia and had included Chile, which was not mentioned Wednesday.

Ukraine was also dropped after it was added to the European bid a year ago at a news conference at UEFA headquarters in Switzerland. However, Ukraine has not been mentioned in official comments about the UEFA-backed bid this year.

The first 48-team men's World Cup will be hosted in 2026 by the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The 2030 decision marks a victory for Morocco, which has invested heavily in infrastructure in its largest cities and was last week chosen to host the 2025 African Cup of Nations. The men's national team helped push its case by reaching the World Cup semifinals in Qatar, eliminating Spain and Portugal in the previous rounds.

In a statement on Wednesday, Moroccan King Mohammed VI's Royal Cabinet said the selection "recognized Morocco's choice place in the ranks of great nations."

## NCAA close to implementing NIL rules for athletes

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — In a step toward putting rules in place to regulate the way college athletes can be compensated for their fame, the NCAA Division I Council introduced on Tuesday several proposals to bring transparency to the transactions and oversight of those who want to work with students.

The proposals come from NIL working group recommendations and don't become final until the council meeting concludes Wednesday.

The proposals could be adopt-

ed as soon as January at the NCAA convention.

They include creation of a voluntary registry for NIL service providers, such as agents and financial advisers; requirements for disclosure of NIL deals worth more than \$600 by athletes to their schools; development of a standardized NIL contract; and education programs for both high school prospects and college athletes.

"Today's action by the DI Council is a great step toward achieving our shared priority at the NCAA, which is better out-

comes for all college athletes who participate in NIL activities," NCAA President Charlie Baker said in a statement. "As the Association makes these changes to improve the environment for young people with NCAA rules, I look forward to partnering with members of Congress to build on these protections and create greater consistency and opportunities for all college athletes."

Since the NCAA lifted its ban on college athletes earning money for use of their names, images and likenesses in the summer of

2021, it has been operating without detailed rules regarding NIL.

A patchwork of state laws has dictated how athletes can cash in on NIL. Inconsistencies and a lack of transparency has made it almost impossible for the NCAA to enforce rules prohibiting NIL being used as an improper recruiting inducement or pay for play.

College sports leaders have been lobbying lawmakers in Washington for federal NIL legislation, but with help uncertain to come, the NCAA is working on creating its own rules.