

## US warns it will defend Philippines

*Associated Press*

MANILA, Philippines — The United States renewed a warning Monday that it would defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack under a 1951 treaty, after Chinese ships blocked and collided with two Filipino vessels off a contested shoal in the South China Sea.

Philippine diplomats summoned a Chinese Embassy official in Manila on Monday for a strongly worded protest following Sunday's collisions off Second Thomas Shoal. No injuries were reported but the encounters damaged a Philippine coast guard ship and a wooden-hulled supply boat operated by navy personnel, officials said.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. called an emergency meeting with the defense secretary and other top military and security officials to discuss the latest hostilities in the disputed waters. The Philippines and other neighbors of China have

resisted Beijing's sweeping territorial claims over virtually the entire South China Sea, and some, like Manila, have sought U.S. military support as incidents multiply.

After the meeting, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro blasted China in a news conference for resorting to "brute force" that he said endangered Filipino crew members and for twisting the facts to conceal its aggression.

"The Philippine government views the latest aggression by China as a blatant violation of international law," Teodoro said. "China has no legal right or authority to conduct law enforcement operations in our territorial waters and in our exclusive economic zone."

Marcos ordered an investigation of the high-sea collisions, Teodoro said, but he refused to disclose what steps the Philippine government would take.

"We are taking these inci-

dents seriously at the highest levels of government," he said, adding that the government called for a news conference to provide accurate facts. "The Chinese government is deliberately obfuscating the truth," the defense chief said.

The Philippines also plans to raise its alarm over the Chinese ships' dangerous maneuvers in talks between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on a proposed nonaggression pact — a "code of conduct" — to prevent a major armed conflict in the South China Sea. Beijing is hosting the three-day negotiations starting Monday, two Philippine officials told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to publicly discuss details of the talks.

Teodoro said it was "very ironic" that China was hosting the talks that aim to prevent major conflicts at sea when they

just committed "a blatant disregard of international law."

The territorial conflicts involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have long been regarded as a flashpoint in a delicate fault line in the U.S.-China rivalry.

About five Chinese coast guard ships, eight accompanying vessels and two navy ships formed a blockade on Sunday to prevent two Philippine coast guard ships and two boats from delivering food and other supplies to Filipino forces stationed at Second Thomas Shoal aboard a marooned navy ship, Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela said.

During the standoff, one of the Philippine coast guard ships and a supply boat were separately hit by a Chinese coast guard ship and a vessel. Only one of the two Filipino boats managed to deliver supplies to Philippine forces, Tarriela said.

## Blinken, Austin: US will respond if troops targeted

*Associated Press*

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. — Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Sunday that the United States expects the Israel-Hamas war to escalate through involvement by proxies of Iran, and they asserted that the Biden administration is prepared to respond if American personnel become the target of any such hostilities.

"This is not what we want, not what we're looking for. We don't want escalation," Blinken said. "We don't want to see our forces or our personnel come under

fire. But if that happens, we're ready for it."

Austin, echoing Blinken, said "what we're seeing is a prospect of a significant escalation of attacks on our troops and our people throughout the region."

He said the U.S. has the right to self-defense "and we won't hesitate to take the appropriate action."

The warning from the high-ranking officials came as Israel's military response to a deadly Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on civilians in communities in Israel entered its third week.

Israeli warplanes struck tar-

gets across Gaza overnight and into Sunday, as well as two airports in Syria and a mosque in the occupied West Bank allegedly used by militants as the war threatened to engulf more of the Middle East.

Israel has traded fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah on a near-daily basis since the war began, and tensions are soaring in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces have battled militants in refugee camps and carried out two airstrikes in recent days.

The U.S. announced Sunday that non-essential staff at its em-

bassy in Iraq should leave the country.

Blinken, who recently spent several days in the region, spoke of a "likelihood of escalation" while saying no one wants to see a second or third front to the hostilities between Israel and Hamas, which rules Gaza.

The secretary said he expects "escalation by Iranian proxies directed against our forces, directed against our personnel," and added: "We are taking steps to make sure that we can effectively defend our people and respond decisively if we need to." Iran is an enemy of Israel.

# Marines mark 40 years since Beirut attack

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Monday marked the 40th anniversary of a suicide bombing on a barracks at the Beirut airport that killed 241 U.S. troops in what was the deadliest day for the Marine Corps since the battle of Iwo Jima in 1945.

The bombing, which killed 220 Marines, 18 sailors and three soldiers, took place during a civil war in Lebanon that killed tens of thousands and left almost a million people displaced.

“In a matter of seconds, a cowardly act of terrorism robbed these American servicemen of their bright futures,” U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea said Monday at a memorial in Beirut.

Approximately 58 French troops and six civilians died in a separate suicide bombing a few

minutes afterward.

Monday’s memorial was held amid fears of a new war in Lebanon. Clashes between Israeli forces and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon have increased in recent weeks, in advance of a looming ground offensive by Israel into Gaza.

Unrest in the Middle East after Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, leading to an Israeli aerial bombardment campaign in Gaza, has raised concerns of a regional war between Israel and militant groups tied to Iran, including Hezbollah.

Shea addressed those fears in her speech Monday remembering the Beirut barracks bombing, which she said was conducted with Iran’s support.

“Today, we reject, and the Lebanese people reject, the threats of some to drag Lebanon into a

new war,” Shea said.

The service members killed during the Beirut barracks bombing attack 40 years ago were part of an international peacekeeping force. Troops from the U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Italy arrived at the invitation of the Lebanese government in 1982. The move came after Israel invaded southern Lebanon to attack the Palestine Liberation Organization, and during the Lebanese civil war.

American forces gained enemies in the region after the U.S. Navy shelled anti-government militias in support of the Lebanese government, an official Marine Corps history of the event published in 2013 said.

On Oct. 23, 1983, a suicide bomber drove a truck carrying 12,000 pounds of explosives into

the U.S. military barracks at the Beirut airport. The building collapsed into rubble almost instantly.

The devastation left survivors in shock, said U.S. Marines who were evacuated to medical hospitals after the attack, in interviews with Stars and Stripes in 1983.

“The first thing I remember was there was a giant concrete slab looming over me, six inches away. It was like a dream, like a coffin. I didn’t know what happened,” said Renard Manley, a lance corporal at the time who was asleep on the fourth floor of the headquarters building.

The U.S. withdrew troops from Lebanon in 1984. After 18 months in the country, 238 Marines had died and 151 had been wounded, the Marine Corps’ official history of the conflict said.

## Israel escalates in Gaza; US seeks ground war delay

*Associated Press*

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israel ramped up its airstrikes Monday in Gaza, where the death toll was rising rapidly, and the United States advised Israel to delay an expected ground invasion to allow more time to negotiate the release of hostages taken by Hamas militants.

A third small aid convoy from Egypt entered Gaza, where the population of 2.3 million has been running out of food, water and medicine under Israel’s two-week seal. Israel was still barring the entry of fuel, and Gaza hospitals have said they are struggling to keep generators running to power life-saving medical equipment and incubators for premature babies.

Heavy airstrikes demolished buildings across Gaza, including in areas where Palestinians have been told to seek refuge, killing hundreds and sending

new waves of wounded into already packed hospitals, according to Palestinian officials and witnesses. After a strike in Gaza City, a woman with blood on her face wept as she clasped the hand of a dead relative. At least three bodies were sprawled on the street, one lying in a gray stream of water.

Israel is widely expected to launch a ground offensive in Gaza following Hamas’ brutal Oct. 7 rampage into southern Israeli communities. That is raising fears of the war spreading beyond Gaza and Israel, as Iranian-backed fighters in the region are warning of possible escalation, including targeting U.S. forces deployed in the Mideast.

The U.S. has urged Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and other groups not to join the fight. Israel has frequently traded fire with Hezbollah, which is

armed with tens of thousands of rockets. Israeli warplanes have struck targets in the occupied West Bank, Syria and Lebanon in recent days.

The U.S. has advised Israeli officials that delaying the expected ground offensive would give Washington more time to work with regional mediators on securing the release of people captured by Hamas during its deadly incursion, according to a U.S. official.

The official, who requested anonymity to discuss the private discussions, said it was unclear how much the argument will “move the needle” on Israeli thinking. Hamas released an American woman and her teenage daughter last week in what it said was a humanitarian gesture mediated by Qatar.

Tanks and troops have been massed at the Gaza border, and Israel says it has stepped up air-

strikes in order to reduce the risk to troops in the next stages. A ground excursion is likely to dramatically increase casualties in what is already the deadliest by far of five wars fought between Israel and Hamas in less than 15 years.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed — mostly civilians slain during the initial Hamas attack. At least 222 people were captured and dragged back to Gaza, including foreigners, the military said Monday, updating a previous figure.

More than 5,000 Palestinians, including some 2,000 minors and around 1,100 women, have been killed, the Hamas-run Health Ministry said Monday. That includes the disputed toll from an explosion at a hospital last week. The toll has climbed rapidly in recent days, with the ministry reporting 436 additional deaths in just the last 24 hours.

# DOD increases cap on malpractice damages

By **ROSE L. THAYER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Defense Department increased its cap on medical malpractice claims to allow for non-economic damages up to \$750,000 to be paid out to service members who are mistreated in military medical facilities, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The change, which goes into effect immediately, raises that cap from \$600,000, and applies to any pending claims, according to the Defense Department.

A second proposed change updates how the Pentagon offsets payouts to service members based on military or Department of Veterans Affairs benefits that they receive because of the medical condition involved in the claim.

The changes follow calls from members of Congress and the

military community that the guidelines put into place roughly two years ago were not providing proper oversight and were failing troops with valid claims.

Master Sgt. Richard Stayskal, the soldier whose story moved Congress in 2019 to change the more than 70-year-old law that shielded the military from malpractice claims, had his own claim denied earlier this year.

Stayskal, who is assigned to Fort Liberty, N.C., was diagnosed in 2017 with terminal lung cancer that grew for months as military doctors mistook his symptoms for pneumonia. It's since spread to his neck, lymph nodes, spleen, liver, spine, a hip joint and other areas of his body.

The Pentagon began accepting claims in January 2020, but began adjudicating them on July 17, 2021, when the interim rules on

how to do so went into effect, according to the Federal Register.

In March, several members of Congress rallied with Stayskal at a news conference to call for improvements to the Pentagon's malpractice regulations.

Natalie Khawam, Stayskal's attorney, said she's "cautiously optimistic" that the proposed changes will get additional resources in the hands of medical malpractice victims "that's more commensurate with the harm done to them."

She called on Congress to do more to improve the medical malpractice system and pass a House bill that allows service members to take their medical malpractice claims to district court. The Healthcare Equality and Rights for Our Heroes Act has not had any further action since its introduction in July.

The proposed regulation changes published Friday in the Federal Register will undergo a 60-day comment period and final evaluation before becoming law, according to the Pentagon.

If published as a final rule, offsetting of other benefits would only apply to economic damages, and would require clarification on when lost wages might be awarded — allowing some troops to receive larger payouts.

It also clarifies how to consider the claimant's ability to return to work.

Of the four claims filed in 2021 and 2022 that would have been affected by these changes, only one would have been different, according to the Federal Register. In that claim, \$200,000 was subject to offset. It would not have been offset under the proposed changes.

## Former Navy mechanic gets prison time for fraud scheme

By **DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A former Navy chief petty officer has been sentenced to more than two years in prison for defrauding a military insurance program that's supposed to help seriously injured and disabled veterans, federal authorities said.

The former sailor, Christopher Toups, was accused in federal court on multiple charges in the case including wire fraud, conspiracy and making fraudulent insurance claims.

Toups admitted to carrying out his scheme between 2012 and 2015 and conspiring with several people to receive thousands of dollars to which he was not entitled. Prosecutors said the scheme involved filing bogus claims with the Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program.

"Participants in the scheme obtained approximately \$2 million in payments from fraudulent claims," the Justice Department

said in a statement. "Toups personally obtained about \$400,000."

"Toups participated in a fraud scheme that defrauded the American taxpayer and diverted vital money, care and resources from service members recovering from traumatic injuries," said Greg Gross, special agent in charge for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

Toups, who retired from the Navy six years ago, agreed to a plea deal last year with federal prosecutors that dismissed the charges of filing fraudulent claims and wire fraud. In exchange, he pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud and was sentenced last week to 30 months in federal prison.

During Toups' time in the Navy, he was a construction mechanic for the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expeditionary Support Unit One based in Coronado, Calif. As part of Toups' plea deal, he was ordered to pay restitution to the fund.

## AAFES pinpad program ups donations for relief group

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Army and Air Force Exchange Service is partnering with the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society to accept donations at its stores on Marine bases across the Pacific.

The groups signed a memorandum of agreement on Sept. 13 to accept \$1 and \$5 pinpad donations at checkout counters in Japan and South Korea, Army Staff Sgt. Mark Kauffman, an AAFES spokesman, wrote in an emailed statement Oct. 2.

The first batch of donations — about \$19,000 collected in the first month — was handed over Friday at the Camp Foster exchange during a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the partnership.

The Relief Society uses the donations to provide programs and services that assist active-duty and retired sailors, Marines and their families. These include interest-free emergency loans, fi-

nancial and education assistance.

"We're very happy that [the Marines] brought it to our attention," David Swenson, general manager of AAFES stores on Okinawa, said at Friday's ceremony. "It's a very worthwhile fund."

The partnership is the brainchild of Marine Col. David Banning, commander of Headquarters and Support Battalion at Camp Butler, Lt. Col. Spencer Szewczyk said Friday at the Foster exchange.

Banning saw an option to donate to Army and Air Force relief groups while checking out at an exchange at nearby Kadena Air Base. He approached AAFES in the spring about doing the same for sailors and Marines on Marine bases in the Pacific.

"Turned out, it was very easy," Szewczyk said. "Nobody asked the question before."

After a brief beta test, the donation option was rolled out to self-checkout and staffed counters on 20 Pacific installations.

# Smith advocating bipartisan path for Ukraine aid package

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee said Friday that the White House will need to collaborate with House Republicans to push a \$105 billion aid package for Ukraine and Israel through the divided and paralyzed lower chamber.

The Biden administration is requesting the funds as the House remains at a standstill without a speaker and Republicans show growing skepticism toward providing support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia's invasion and pairing that aid with funding for Israel as it embarks on a war with Hamas militants in Gaza.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., said top Republicans, including the chairmen of the House committees on Armed Services, Foreign Affairs and Intelligence, as well as others are "clearly" supportive of the White House's supplemental aid request.

"The key thing is the administration needs to be working very, very closely with Republicans," Smith said during an event at the Center for a New American Security, a Washington think tank. "Make the pitch, get Republicans broadly supportive, get the Senate to pass a package, put it on our doorstep and then say, 'All we're asking for is a vote. ... There are over 300 votes for what we want to do here. Just put it on the floor.' That has to be the strategy."

A major roadblock for the package, which the White House formally requested Friday, is the speakership vacancy in the House and Republicans' ongoing struggle to agree on a new leader after the ouster of Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., more than two weeks ago, Smith said. Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, failed for a third time Friday to win election as speaker.

Smith said McCarthy's removal has opened the door for aid to Ukraine and Israel to pass the House, even amid the Republican infighting. McCarthy stripped \$6 billion in Ukraine aid from a deal that avoided a government shutdown last month.

The White House had requested \$24 billion for Ukraine in August.

"Kevin McCarthy had no intention whatsoever of bringing that up," Smith said. "He had told more than one person that he felt putting up a supplemental package would be a speakership-ending decision, which he wasn't inclined to do. So we had to move past that, which we did."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the Senate is taking the lead on the White House's latest request.

"This legislation is too important to wait for the House to settle their chaos," he said. "Senate Democrats will move expeditiously on this request, and we hope that our Republican colleagues across the aisle will join us to pass this much-needed funding."

# Giant rare right whale population leveling off

*Associated Press*

PORTLAND, Maine — The decline of one of the rarest whales in the world appears to be slowing, but scientists warn the giant mammals still face existential threats from warming oceans, ship collisions and entanglement in fishing gear.

The population of North Atlantic right whales, which live off the U.S. East Coast, fell by about 25% from 2010 to 2020 and was down to only about 364 whales as of 2021. Now the whales are at around 356 in total, according to a group of scientists, industry members and government officials who study them.

This suggests the population is potentially leveling off, as equal numbers of whales could be entering the population as are being killed, the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium said Monday. Getting an accurate count of the aquatic creatures involves certain ranges of error, however, which put estimates for 2021 and 2022 at roughly around the same number.

The whales were buoyed by a strong birthing year in 2021. Consortium members cautioned, however, that the high mortality faced by the whales from collisions and entanglement remains an unsustainable burden.

"The news is less bad than it has been. My heart is a little less heavy, but certainly not light or hopeful," said Philip Hamilton, a consortium board member and a senior scientist at the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life at the New England Aquarium.

Tangled up in nets and heavy ropes, the gentle giants can drown when they're unable to reach the surface, or they can suffer grievous, life-threatening injuries.

# Biden names tech hubs for 32 states

*Associated Press*

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. — The Biden administration is designating 31 technology hubs touching 32 states and Puerto Rico to help spur innovation and create jobs in the industries that are concentrated in these areas.

President Joe Biden planned to announce the hubs Monday at the White House with Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

"I have to say, in my entire career in public service, I have never seen as much interest in any initiative than this one," Raimondo told reporters during a Sunday conference call to preview the announcement. Her

department received 400 applications, she said.

"No matter where I go or who I meet with — CEOs, governors, senators, congresspeople, university presidents — everyone wants to tell me about their application and how excited they are," said Raimondo.

The tech hubs are the result of a process Raimondo's department launched to distribute \$500 million in grants to cities.

The \$500 million came from a \$10 billion authorization in last year's CHIPS and Science Act to stimulate investments in new technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and biotech. It's an attempt

to expand tech investment that is largely concentrated around a few U.S. cities — Austin, Texas; Boston; New York; San Francisco; and Seattle — to the rest of the country.

The program, formally the Regional Technology and Innovation Hub Program, ties into the president's economic argument that people should be able to find good jobs where they live and that opportunity should be spread across the country, rather than be concentrated. The White House has sought to elevate that message and highlight Biden's policies as the president undertakes his 2024 reelection bid.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Wrong home demolished while owner was away

**GA** ATLANTA — A homeowner is mulling the next step after a company mistakenly demolished a home she owned in southwest Atlanta.

Susan Hodgson said in an interview Saturday that she found a pile of rubble in place of what used to be her longtime family property when she returned from vacation last month.

Hodgson said a neighbor called her while she was away and asked if someone had been hired to tear down the vacant house. She sent a family member over to see what was going on and who asked to see a permit. When a person in charge at the site checked his permit, Hodgson said he admitted he was at the wrong address.

Hodgson said she's filed a report with police and has talked with lawyers, but that they remain in limbo so far. She said the Atlanta-based company responsible, You Call It We Haul It, has yet to contact her.

### Woman who lied about cancer avoids prison

**IA** DAVENPORT — An Iowa woman who falsely claimed to have cancer and documented her "battle" on social media will stay out of prison after a judge gave her probation and a suspended sentence.

Madison Russo, 20, never had pancreatic cancer, leukemia nor the football-sized tumor wrapped around her spine she that claimed in postings on TikTok, GoFundMe, Facebook and LinkedIn. But over 400 people sent her donations. As part of

the 10-year suspended sentence handed down Friday, she was ordered to pay \$39,000 in restitution and a \$1,370 fine. If she stays out of trouble for three years of probation, she'll stay free.

Her sentence also includes 100 hours of community service. She paid the \$39,000 restitution earlier, and the money was being held by the court. GoFundMe has already sent refunds to donors.

### County has new record for heat-related deaths

**AZ** PHOENIX — Arizona's Maricopa County set a new record Thursday for annual heat-associated deaths, with 425 tallied so far this year, the same number confirmed for all of 2022.

Maricopa County, the hottest metropolitan area in the United States and home to Phoenix, said the 425 deaths were confirmed as of Oct. 14. Another 199 deaths remained under investigation.

As of the same time last year, 359 heat-associated deaths had been confirmed, with another 91 deaths still being studied.

No other major metropolitan area in the U.S. has reported such high heat-associated death figures or spends so much time tracking and studying them.

### Car found, no suspect in judge's fatal shooting

**MD** HAGERSTOWN — A manhunt for a suspect in the fatal shooting of a Maryland judge continued for a fourth day Sunday as authorities completed their search of an area where the suspect's

SUV was found.

Pedro Argote, 49, is suspected of gunning down the judge in his driveway hours after he ruled against him in a divorce case. The Washington County Sheriff's Office said in a statement posted on Facebook that the silver Mercedes SUV that Argote was believed to be driving had been located in a wooded area in Williamsport, about 8 miles southwest of Hagerstown, where the judge was shot outside his home.

Circuit Court Judge Andrew Wilkinson, 52, was shot Thursday night, just hours after he awarded custody of Argote's children to his wife. Washington County Sheriff Brian Albert said it was a "targeted attack."

During a news conference Saturday, Albert said local, state and federal law enforcement agencies are participating in the search for Argote.

### Judge upholds overturn of assault weapons ban

**CA** SAN DIEGO — A federal judge who previously overturned California's 3-decade-old ban on assault weapons did it again Thursday, ruling that the state's attempts to prohibit sales of semiautomatic guns violates the constitutional right to bear arms.

U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez of San Diego conceded that powerful weapons like AR-15 rifles are commonly used by criminals, but said the guns are also owned by people who obey the law and feel they need firearms to protect themselves.

The judge's ruling is nearly identical to a 2021 decision in which he called California's ban

on assault weapons a "failed experiment."

Benitez's latest decision would overturn multiple state statutes related to assault weapons. The judge gave the state 10 days to seek a stay on the ruling as part of an appeal to the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. California Attorney General Rob Bonta said his office had already filed a notice of appeal.

### Painting stolen by US soldier back in Germany

**IL** CHICAGO — After a stopover in the U.S. that lasted the better part of a century, a baroque landscape painting that went missing during World War II was returned to Germany on Thursday.

The FBI handed over the artwork by 18th century Austrian artist Johann Franz Nepomuk Lauterer to a German museum representative in a brief ceremony at the German Consulate in Chicago, where the pastoral piece showing an Italian countryside was on display.

Art Recovery International, a company focused on locating and recovering stolen and looted art, tracked down the elusive painting after a person in Chicago reached out last year claiming to possess a "stolen or looted painting" that their uncle brought back to the U.S. after serving in World War II.

The painting has been missing since 1945 and was first reported stolen from the Bavarian State Painting Collections in Munich, Germany. It was added to the database of the German Lost Art Foundation in 2012, according to a statement from the art recovery company.

— From wire reports

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# Rangers force Game 7 against Astros

Associated Press

HOUSTON — One more Texas-sized matchup to finally settle this Lone Star State showdown.

Nathan Eovaldi remained perfect this postseason, and Mitch Garver and Jonah Heim homered early before a ninth-inning grand slam by Adolis García helped the Texas Rangers avoid elimination with a 9-2 win over the Houston Astros in Game 6 of the AL Championship Series on Sunday night.

Road teams are unbeaten in this series going into the decisive Game 7 on Monday night in Houston. Cristian Javier was scheduled to pitch for the Astros against three-time Cy Young Award winner Max Scherzer. Javier beat Scherzer in Game 3 at Texas.

"I'm just proud of how these guys keep bouncing back," Rangers manager Bruce Bochy said.

"They're amazing. They really are. They just don't let adversity get to them."

Texas and Houston had identical regular-season records (90-72), with the AL West title going to the Astros on a head-to-head tiebreaker. Now the heated rivals are tied once again, and this time the stakes are much higher — with a World Series trip on the line.

Eovaldi, who also won Game 2, yielded five hits and two runs in 6½ innings to improve to 4-0 with a 2.42 ERA in the playoffs this year. The wild-card Rangers, one of six major league teams without a World Series title, are trying to return to the Fall Classic for the first time since back-to-back trips in 2010-11.

"Of course, Nate set the tone out there. How many times has he done that?" Bochy said. "And we just had great at-bats throughout the lineup."

The defending World Series champion Astros were again felled by a subpar start from Framber Valdez and lackluster play at home. Valdez was charged with five hits and three runs while striking out six in five innings to fall to 0-3 with a 9.00 ERA this postseason.

The Rangers led by two before breaking open the game with a five-run ninth, punctuated by the slam from García — who struck out his previous four times up. The slugger was booed throughout the game after being at the center of a bench-clearing scuffle in Game 5 after being hit by a pitch from Bryan Abreu.

When García knocked a pitch from Ryne Stanek into the Crawford Boxes in left field with one out, many of those fans

began streaming for the exits after yet another poor showing at home by Houston.

The Astros, who are 5-0 on the road this postseason, won three in a row in Arlington wearing their orange jerseys to move within a win of reaching their third consecutive World Series. Those orange tops didn't help them carry their road magic home as they fell to 1-4 in Houston this postseason after posting a 39-42 mark at Minute Maid Park in the regular season.

"That doesn't matter. It's in the past," left fielder Michael Brantley said. "We need to turn the page and be ready for tomorrow."

No team with a losing record at home has ever reached the World Series.

This series joins the 2019 World Series, which Houston lost to Washington in seven games, as the only best-of-seven series in postseason history in which the road team won the first six games.

Houston led by one after a first-inning RBI single by Jordan Alvarez. Garver tied it on his solo shot to start the second.

Heim connected off Valdez for the second time this series with a two-run shot with two outs in the fourth that put Texas on top 3-1.

"I think seven out of their nine

runs scored were on homers. So you've really got to keep them in the ballpark," Astros manager Dusty Baker said.

Houston got within 3-2 on a sacrifice fly by Mauricio Dubón in the sixth. But the Rangers got some insurance thanks to an RBI double by Garver in the eighth off Abreu.

It was the first time the Rangers won an elimination game in the postseason since Game 5 of the 2010 AL Division Series at Tampa Bay when Cliff Lee pitched a complete game in a 5-1 Texas victory. They'd lost five straight such games, and Sunday's win was just their second in eight tries.

Houston had a shot to cut into the lead in the eighth, but Texas reliever José Leclerc came through after giving up the decisive three-run homer to Jose Altuve in the ninth inning of Game 5.

Josh Sborz walked Alex Bregman to start the inning and struck out Alvarez before José Abreu singled with one out.

Leclerc took over and walked Kyle Tucker to load the bases before Dubón lined out softly to shortstop. Pinch-hitter Jon Singleton, who entered with one career postseason at-bat, batted for Jeremy Peña and struck out against Leclerc to end the threat.

# DeBrincat scores hat trick as Wings win 5th in row

Associated Press

DETROIT — Alex DeBrincat scored three goals for his fifth career hat trick and the Detroit Red Wings beat the road-weary Calgary Flames 6-2 Sunday for their fifth straight win.

Joe Veleno scored his third goal in two games, Dylan Larkin had a goal and an assist, and Jake Walman got his first of the season for Detroit.

Justin Holl and Lucas Raymond each had three assists,

and James Reimer made 29 saves.

DeBrincat, acquired in an off-season trade with Ottawa, increased his season goal total to a league-high eight.

"I've played with a lot of great players in my career, and I've tried to watch them and see where they go and learn some things from all of them," DeBrincat said.

"I think it is a little bit of that and a little bit of natural in-

stincts. I was always smaller than everyone else, so I had to find different ways to score other than powering to the net."

Andrew Mangiapane and Yegor Sharangovich scored for Calgary. Dan Vladar stopped 24 shots as the Flames finished 1-3-1 on a five-game trip.

**Bruins 3, Ducks 1:** Matthew Poitras scored his first two NHL goals in the third period and visiting Boston got its season-opening fifth straight win.

The 19-year-old Poitras, playing in his fifth career game, scored at 6:29 of the final period to erase the Ducks' lead and then got the go-ahead goal nearly 4 minutes later when he stuffed home the rebound of Jake DeBrusk's shot.

Brad Marchand added an empty-net goal and Linus Ullmark made 32 saves as the Bruins remained one of three undefeated teams along with Vegas and Colorado.

# Pats stun Bills on Jones' late TD pass

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Mac Jones threw a 1-yard touchdown pass to Mike Gesicki with 12 seconds remaining to lift the New England Patriots to a 29-25 win over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday, making Bill Belichick the third coach in NFL history with 300 regular-season victories.

Belichick joins Pro Football Hall of Famers Don Shula (328) and George Halas (318) as the only coaches to reach the milestone.

"I mean, it's great. I'm really more focused on our team and this year," Belichick said. "We'll worry about that later."

Jones completed 25 of 30 passes for 272 yards and two touchdowns as the Patriots (2-5) snapped a three-game skid.

"I always believe in myself," Jones said. "I'm not going to sit up here and say it every time. But I do believe in myself and I do that through work and all that stuff. ... You go as your quarterback goes. For me, it's continuing to be the same guy every day and just be Mac."

Ezekiel Elliott rushed for a score and rookie Chad Ryland added three field goals to help the Patriots beat back a second-half rally by Buffalo (4-3), which briefly took the lead late in the fourth quarter.

Josh Allen was 27-for-41 for 265 yards with two TDs and ran for a score. He also threw an interception that set up New England's first touchdown. The Bills struggled on third down and scored touchdowns on only two of their four red-zone opportunities.

Allen led two touchdown drives late in the fourth quarter to turn a 22-10 deficit into a 25-10 lead for Buffalo.

Jones began the decisive drive with a short pass to Rhamondre Stevenson that turned into a 34-yard gain. He hit Hunter Harvey for 14 yards on a third-and-8, and the Patriots had a first-and-goal after six plays. A

pass-interference penalty set them up at the Buffalo 1, and Jones connected with Gesicki on second down.

**Eagles 31, Dolphins 17:** Jalen Hurts rebounded from a pick-6 to hit A.J. Brown for the go-ahead touchdown on the next drive, and host Philadelphia beat Miami.

Hurts threw for 279 yards and two touchdowns and ran for another score for the Eagles (6-1). He was intercepted twice but found Brown 10 times for 137 yards to best his former Alabama teammate Tua Tagovailoa and the Dolphins (5-2).

**Ravens 38, Lions 6:** Lamar Jackson guided host Baltimore to touchdowns on its first four possessions of a dominant first half, and the Ravens trounced Detroit in a matchup of division leaders that was lopsided from the start.

Baltimore (5-2) was up 28-0 before the NFC North-leading Lions (5-2) even managed a first down. At that point, the Ravens had a 16-0 edge in first downs and a 325-13 advantage in total yards. It was the most complete performance of the season by the Ravens, and a resurgent Detroit squad fell flat while facing a major test on the road.

Jackson went 21-for-27 for 357 yards and three touchdowns, finishing with a near-perfect passer rating of 155.8. He also ran for a TD.

**Chiefs 31, Chargers 17:** Patrick Mahomes threw for 424 yards and four touchdowns, Travis Kelce caught 12 passes for 179 yards and a score, and host Kansas City beat Los Angeles to take command of the AFC West.

Marquez Valdes-Scantling had three catches for 84 yards and a touchdown, Rashee Rice and Isiah Pacheco also caught TD passes, and the Chiefs (6-1) won their sixth straight to take a three-game lead in a division they have won seven straight years.

Justin Herbert, who spent the

day under constant pressure from the league's No. 2 scoring defense, had 259 yards passing with a touchdown and two interceptions for the Chargers (2-4).

**Browns 39, Colts 38:** Kareem Hunt scored on a 1-yard touchdown plunge with 15 seconds left, capping an 80-yard touchdown drive that gave visiting Cleveland a win over Indianapolis.

Backup quarterback P.J. Walker rallied Cleveland (4-2) for the second straight week. This time it was in relief of Deshaun Watson, who started his first game since Sept. 24 but left in the first quarter after taking a big hit.

The Colts (3-4) lost their second straight as Gardner Minshew committed four more turnovers — three of which Cleveland turned into scores.

**Broncos 19, Packers 17:** P.J. Locke saved host Denver from another second-half meltdown, intercepting Jordan Love's deep pass in the closing minutes to preserve a win over Green Bay.

Locke — subbing for safety Kareem Jackson, who was ejected for the second time this season following an illegal high hit — picked off the throw intended for Samori Toure just after the two-minute warning.

The Broncos ran out the clock to give coach Sean Payton his first win at home in four tries and end a dubious streak in which Denver had lost 10 consecutive games when leading at halftime.

**Falcons 16, Buccaneers 13:** Youngbowe Koo's third field goal of the game, a 51-yarder as time expired, bailed out quarterback Desmond Ridder and gave mistake-prone Atlanta a win over host Tampa Bay.

The Falcons (4-3) snapped an eight-game road losing streak and moved atop the NFC South ahead of the Bucs (3-3) despite Ridder losing three fumbles inside Tampa Bay's red zone, including one that cost him a 12-yard touchdown run that would have put Atlanta up 10 points

with less than four minutes to go.

Baker Mayfield threw for 275 yards, one touchdown and one interception for Tampa Bay, which scored on Mike Evans' 40-yard TD reception in the first quarter and field goals of 24 and 36 yards by McLaughlin.

**Steelers 24, Rams 17:** Jaylen Warren and Najee Harris rushed for touchdowns in the fourth quarter, and visiting Pittsburgh awoke from a quiet offensive day just in time to beat Los Angeles.

Kenny Pickett passed for 230 yards and ran for a score for the Steelers (4-2), who had just 110 yards in the first three quarters. Pittsburgh's only early touchdown came after T.J. Watt intercepted Matthew Stafford's first pass of the second half and returned it inside the Los Angeles 10, setting up Pickett's TD sneak.

**Seahawks 20, Cardinals 10:** Kenneth Walker III rushed for a season-high 105 yards, rookies Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Jake Bobo both caught first-half touchdown passes, and host Seattle beat Arizona.

The Seahawks (4-2) relied on their defense to make key stops in the second half after a handful of mistakes.

**Bears 30, Raiders 12:** Undrafted rookie Tyson Bagent led three touchdown drives with Justin Fields sidelined, D'Onta Foreman ran for two scores and caught a TD pass, and host Chicago beat Las Vegas.

The Bears (2-5) won for the second time in three games after dropping 14 in a row.

Foreman ran for 89 yards on 16 attempts and his first two touchdowns since signing with Chicago in March.

**Giants 14, Commanders 7:** Tyrod Taylor threw two second-quarter touchdown passes and New York's defense had six sacks and made a last-minute stand to beat visiting Washington, snapping a four-game skid.

Dexter Lawrence had two sacks for New York.

# Bell clinches spot in NASCAR title race

*Associated Press*

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Christopher Bell wasn't thinking of winning the race.

Balance issues with his Toyota caused him to fall to 22nd after Stage 2 on Sunday at Homestead-Miami Speedway. But Bell took advantage of a late caution in Stage 3 and stormed from behind for his second win of the season.

"I can't even say I was thinking of a win at any point in the day except maybe the last 10 laps," Bell said.

Bell took the lead with 15 laps to go and held off Ryan Blaney for a win that locked him into next month's NASCAR Championship finale.

Bell, who entered the race below the playoff cutline, will compete in his second straight championship race. He beat Blaney by 1.651 seconds Sunday and only led 26 of 267 laps in a chaotic race in which three playoff drivers did not finish.

"Today was a whirlwind for sure," said Bell, who drives the No. 20 for Joe Gibbs Racing. "To be able to overcome and to be in that bad of a spot ... it was just incredible that difference a couple pit stop adjustments will do to your car."

There were 25 lead changes — one fewer

than the track's record of 26 set in 2011.

Blaney, who led for 53 laps, moved above the cutline — up from seventh. Tyler Reddick and William Byron finished third and fourth and are still vying for a spot in the Nov. 5 title-deciding finale.

Six drivers will compete for the remaining two spots next week in the final race of the round of eight at Martinsville Speedway.

Kyle Larson, last year's Homestead winner, was out of the race at Lap 214 after he slammed into the pit road barriers trying to overtake Blaney for the lead. Larson was going too fast after heading into pit lane and said he didn't expect Blaney to slow down as early as he did.

"I was just maximizing all I could," said a frustrated Larson afterward. "I hate it for Ryan more than anything. He was doing a super good job out front. That was not my intention. I was just trying to get as close to his back bumper as I could, hopefully have a good cycle and have a better pit stop, then come out in front of him and control the race from there."

Larson's No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet clipped the rear of Blaney's Ford, but Blaney was able to pit as the caution flag came out and continued.

Larson had been dominating the race, in

which he was a favorite to win. He led for 96 laps before Blaney nudged ahead of him late in Stage 2 for the lead. That ending is largely inconsequential for Larson as far as the playoff goes. He is already locked into the finale with his victory in the opening race of the round of eight in Las Vegas.

The crash briefly made it a race between Blaney and Joe Gibbs Racing's Denny Hamlin, who took the lead on the restart. But JJ Yeley, Brad Keselowski and Ross Chastain were all involved in a wreck seconds later, causing the caution flag to come out for the fifth time in the race, which ultimately gave Bell room to stage a comeback.

After the restart, Hamlin slammed into the wall on Turn 1 and radioed that something broke in the steering and sent him into the wall. He was out of the race with 32 laps to go in an unfortunate turn of events for Joe Gibbs Racing — Hamlin's teammate Martin Truex Jr., another playoff driver, left with an engine issue moments later.

Both playoff drivers will look for a better outcome next week.

"We've still got a chance," said owner Job Gibbs. "That's the way we look at it. We're going to Martinsville. It's going to be a classic, I'm sure, but we do have a chance."

# Michigan sign-stealing investigation rooted in financial rules

*Associated Press*

There was a time in college football when it was not uncommon to see a coach at a game involving a future opponent, taking notes and gathering intel.

"When I worked for Jimmy Johnson at Oklahoma State, when they had a game Saturday, I was at the next (opponent). I was scouting the next game," recalled Houston Nutt, the former Arkansas and Mississippi coach who worked under Johnson with the Cowboys in the early 1980s.

The NCAA banned in-person advanced scouting in 1994 in part because not every school could afford to do it. Now Michigan is being investigated by the NCAA for a sign-stealing scheme that allegedly involved people secretly being sent to record opponents' games.

No. 2 Michigan on Friday suspended a low-level football

staffer who is a focus of the NCAA's investigation. The Big Ten has informed all of Michigan's upcoming opponents. Unfazed, the Wolverines continued to romp through their schedule Saturday night, beating rival Michigan State 49-0.

NCAA rules do not directly ban the stealing of signs. There are rules against using electronic equipment to record an opponent's signals, but what's mostly at issue with Michigan is NCAA Bylaw 11.6.1: "Off-campus, in-person scouting of future opponents (in the same season) is prohibited."

Wolverines coach Jim Harbaugh, who served a three-game, school-imposed suspension earlier this season for a separate, still-active NCAA infractions case tied to recruiting, denied any knowledge of or involvement in impermissible advanced scouting.

As with many NCAA rules, the association is trying to govern away advantages that one school might have over another based on budget sizes. Programs such as Michigan, Ohio State, Texas and Alabama have annual athletic budgets that surpass \$200 million, almost double some of those even in their own Power Five conferences.

Go outside the Power Five and even the biggest-spending major college football schools have budgets closer to \$50 million than \$100 million.

Every game is recorded for self-scouting purposes by the home team, but a long time has passed since actual film was exchanged between opposing teams. Access to digital recordings of games is readily available through online exchange programs.

The way the game is played

now has also put more of an emphasis on signs, and in turn sign-stealing.

Frequently spotted on sidelines these days is a large sheet, tarp or poster board used to shield signs from ending up on scouting film.

Still, somebody in a stadium could conceivably be monitoring or recording signals that can then be matched up to scouting film for decoding.

Player-to-coach communication has been a persistent topic in college football. Much like with in-person scouting, concerns about creating a competitive advantage based upon resources have been a stumbling block.

Still, this year during bowl season, the NCAA will allow teams to use coach-to-player communication technology during postseason games if both sides agree.