

## Blinken, German minister discuss Taliban

*Associated Press*

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken conferred with his German counterpart and others Wednesday about how to handle Afghanistan as the Taliban's announcement of an interim government lineup received a skeptical Western response.

Blinken met with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at Ramstein Air Base, a major U.S. facility in Germany that has become a key gateway for people evacuated from Afghanistan. As of Wednesday, about 23,000 people had been flown from Ramstein to the United States or other locations. There were about 11,200 people at the base and the nearby Rhine Ordnance Barracks awaiting onward travel.

The German Foreign Ministry said the two officials would host a virtual meeting with other foreign ministers and that more than 20 countries were expected.

It didn't identify them, but Maas said in a statement that they want to discuss a common approach to the Taliban "which also serves our interests: adherence to fundamental human rights, maintaining possibilities to leave (Afghanistan) and humanitarian access, and the fight against terror groups" such as al-Qaida and Islamic State.

The get-together comes the day after the Taliban announced an all-male interim government stacked with veterans of their hard-line rule from the 1990s and the 20-year battle against the U.S.-led coalition. Germany was a major troop provider for that alliance.

Initial responses suggested the new administration may struggle to win the international support the new leaders desperately need to avoid an economic meltdown. It includes Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is wanted for questioning by the FBI, as interior minister.

The announcement came hours after the Taliban fired their guns into the air to disperse protesters in the capital of Kabul and arrested several journalists, the second time in less than a week that heavy-handed tactics were used to break up a demonstration.

The U.S. State Department expressed concern that the Cabinet included only Taliban, no women and personalities with a troubling track record, but said the new administration would be judged by its actions.

Maas said Germany is ready to provide humanitarian aid via the United Nations and will continue to speak to the Taliban to

secure the departure from Afghanistan of former employees and others. He added that any commitment beyond that will depend on the Taliban's behavior.

"The announcement of an interim government without the participation of other groups and yesterday's violence against female demonstrators and journalists in Kabul are not signals that make us optimistic about that," he said.

France's Foreign Ministry said the international community's demands are clear — among them breaking all links with terror groups and respect for human rights, particularly women's rights.

"We can only note that these demands are not fulfilled," ministry spokeswoman Agnes von der Muhll said in an online briefing. "The actions are not in line with the words."

Pakistan's foreign minister, meanwhile, urged the international community to help prevent a humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi was addressing a virtual meeting of foreign ministers from countries neighboring Afghanistan. It was attended by his counterparts from China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

## US carrier, destroyer steam through South China Sea

**BY ALEX WILSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy aircraft carrier strike group and a destroyer steamed separately through the South China Sea on Wednesday, just days after China imposed a law requiring foreign vessels to give notice before entering waters claimed by Beijing.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold "asserted navigation rights and freedoms" within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands, according to a 7th Fleet news release Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group were training elsewhere in the region, according to the Navy.

The entire Spratly chain is claimed by China, Vietnam and Taiwan; the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei also claim por-

tions of the island chain.

Neither warship provided notice to any country with claims in the South China Sea, 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Mark Langford told Stars and Stripes in an email Wednesday.

Also Wednesday, the Chinese military issued a statement saying the Benfold entered the area without permission and that it had tracked, monitored and warned off the destroyer.

The statement, attributed to Col. Tian Junli of the Southern Theater Command, said Beijing has "indisputable sovereignty" over the islands. It also called the U.S. a "security risk maker in the South China Sea" and the "biggest destroyer" of peace and regional stability.

The 7th Fleet responded with its own statement Wednesday afternoon, saying the

operation abided by international law. It called Beijing's statement "the latest in a long string" of actions intended to misrepresent the Navy's operations and "assert excessive and illegitimate maritime claims."

China has reclaimed land and built military infrastructure in the Spratlys since 2014, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. Mischief Reef is one island China has improved and occupies.

The Benfold made the Navy's seventh freedom-of-navigation operation in the area this year, according to a Defense Department statement Langford provided to Stars and Stripes. The U.S. last conducted a freedom-of-navigation operation in the Spratly Islands in February.

# Afghans seeking evacuation plead for action

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Americans trying to evacuate hundreds of Afghans and American citizens — including one Afghan who worked as a U.S. military translator and says he is anticipating his beheading by the Taliban — pleaded for action from the Biden administration to get the would-be evacuees aboard charter flights that are standing by to fly them from Afghanistan.

“Unfortunately we are left behind now,” the former translator said quietly in the pre-dawn darkness Wednesday in Afghanistan. “No one heard our voice.”

The man, whose identity The Associated Press withheld for his security, said he was running out of money to keep his family housed in a hotel in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, after waiting a week for Taliban permission for the chartered evacuation flights to leave the airport there.

U.S. Army veterans working to help the man, an interpreter for U.S. forces for 15 years, called the effort more grinding than their months of deployment in Afghanistan. They tried and failed to get their old interpreter on the earlier airlifts that ended with the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan Aug. 30.

“I hope we can help them out, and get

them out of this mess,” said a retired Army colonel, Thomas McGrath, one of the veterans trying to help his former interpreter.

Hundreds of vulnerable Afghans are waiting for permission from Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers to board prearranged charter flights standing by at the airport in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The group includes dozens of American citizens and green card holders and their families, the Afghans and their American advocates say.

“We think we are in some kind of jail,” said one Afghan woman among the would-be evacuees gathered at one large hotel in Mazar-e-Sharif.

She described the Americans and green-card holders in their group as elderly parents of Afghan American citizens in the United States.

Taliban leaders, who named a new Cabinet Tuesday in the wake of their lightning takeover of most of the country last month, say they will allow people with proper documents to leave the country.

Taliban officials insist they are currently going through the manifests, and passenger documents, for the charter flights at Mazar-e-Sharif.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said

Tuesday that the U.S. was working with the Taliban to resolve the standoff over the charter flights.

He rejected an assertion from a Republican lawmaker, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, over the weekend that the standoff at Mazar-e-Sharif was turning into a “hostage situation” for American citizens in the group.

“We’ve been assured all American citizens and Afghan citizens with valid travel documents will be allowed to leave,” Blinken said in Doha, Qatar, a major transit point for last month’s frantic U.S. military-led evacuations from Afghanistan.

Later Tuesday, 12 Democratic lawmakers added to the pressure for evacuees, in a letter urging the administration to disclose its plans for getting out all of the hundreds of at-risk people remaining in Afghanistan, and not just American citizens.

“Our staff have been working around the clock responding to urgent pleas from constituents whose families and colleagues are seeking to flee Afghanistan, and they urgently require timely, post-withdrawal guidance to best assist those in need,” Reps. Jerrold Nadler, Zoe Lofgren, Gerald Connolly and nine other lawmakers from President Joe Biden’s party wrote.

## Solar could supply 40% of US electricity by 2035

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Solar energy has the potential to supply up to 40% of the nation’s electricity within 15 years — a 10-fold increase over current solar output, but one that would require massive changes in U.S. policy and billions of federal dollars in investment to modernize the nation’s electric grid, a new federal report says.

The report by the Energy Department’s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy says the U.S. would need to quadruple its annual solar capacity — and continue to increase it year by year — as it shifts to a renewable-dominant grid in order to address the existential threat posed by climate change.

The report released Wednesday is not intended as a policy statement or administration goal, officials said. Instead, it is “de-

signed to guide and inspire the next decade of solar innovation by helping us answer questions like: How fast does solar need to increase capacity and to what level?” said Becca Jones-Albertus, director of the Energy Department’s solar energy technologies office.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a statement that the study “illuminates the fact that solar, our cheapest and fastest-growing source of clean energy, could produce enough electricity to power all of the homes in the U.S. by 2035 and employ as many as 1.5 million people in the process.”

The U.S. installed a record 15 gigawatts of solar generating capacity in 2020, and solar now represents about just over 3% of the current electricity supply, the Energy Department said.

The “Solar Futures Study,” prepared by DOE’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory, shows that, by 2035, the U.S. would need to quadruple its yearly solar capacity additions and provide 1,000 GW of power to a renewable-dominant grid. By 2050, solar energy could provide 1,600 GW on a zero-carbon grid — producing more electricity than consumed in all residential and commercial buildings in the country today, the report said. Decarbonizing the entire energy system could result in as much as 3,000 GW of solar by 2050 due to increased electrification in the transportation, buildings and industrial sectors, the report said.

To achieve such an increase, the U.S. must install an average of 30 GW of solar capacity per year between now and 2025 and 60 GW per year from 2025 to 2030, the report said.

# Post-Ida power disparity decried in La.

Associated Press

LaPLACE — Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses in Louisiana, most of them outside New Orleans, still didn't have power Tuesday, and more than half the gas stations in two major cities were without fuel nine days after Hurricane Ida slammed into the state, splintering homes and toppling electric lines.

There were continuing signs of recovery, however, as the total number of people without electricity has fallen from more than a million at its peak, while hundreds of thousands of people have had their water restored.

State health officials, meanwhile, announced that they are revoking the licenses of seven nursing homes that evacuated to a warehouse where seven residents died amid deteriorating conditions after the hurricane.

The disparity in power resto-

ration between New Orleans, where nearly 3/4 of the city had electricity again, and other communities where almost all residents were still in the dark prompted frustration and finger-pointing. State Rep. Tanner Magee, the House's second-ranking Republican who lives in the devastated city of Houma in Terrebonne Parish, said he's convinced his region is being short-changed in favor of New Orleans.

"It's very infuriating to me," Magee said.

Though water was running again in his area, most hospitals in the region remained shuttered and the parish was in desperate need of temporary shelter for first responders and others vital to the rebuilding effort, he said.

Warner Thomas, president and CEO of the state's largest hospital system, Ochsner Health, warned that it would be

"some time" before two Ochsner hospitals — one in Terrebonne Parish and the other in Lafourche Parish — fully reopen. Emergency rooms at the two hospitals, however, were operating.

In many neighborhoods, homes were uninhabitable. State and federal officials said about 3,200 people are in mass shelters around Louisiana, while another 25,000 people whose houses have been damaged are staying in hotel rooms through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's transitional sheltering program. FEMA has already approved more than 159,000 household applications for disaster assistance, according to Louisiana's emergency preparedness office.

The power situation has improved greatly since Ida first hit. In the first hours after the storm, nearly 1.1 million customers

were in the dark, but that number was down to about 430,000 on Tuesday. With the help of tens of thousands of workers from power companies in numerous states, the state's biggest energy provider, Entergy, has been able to slowly bring electricity back, leaving only 19% of its customers in the region without power as of Tuesday.

For residents in the state's five hardest-hit parishes in southeastern Louisiana, however, that number is of little comfort. About 98% of those residents are still fully without power more than a week after Ida slammed onshore with 150 mph winds on Aug. 29.

Power probably won't be widely restored to St. John the Baptist and St. James parishes until Sept. 17 and until Sept. 29 to Lafourche, St. Charles and Terrebonne parishes, Entergy said Tuesday.

## In NYC after Ida, Biden calls climate 'everybody's crisis'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Joe Biden declared that climate change has become "everybody's crisis" on Tuesday as he toured neighborhoods flooded by the remnants of Hurricane Ida, warning it's time for America to get serious about the "code red" danger or face ever worse loss of life and property.

Biden spoke after walking streets in New Jersey and then Queens in New York City, meeting people whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged by flooding when Ida barreled through. The storm dumped record amounts of rain onto already saturated ground and was blamed for more than a dozen deaths in the city.

The president said he thinks the damage everyone is seeing, from wildfires in the West to hurricane havoc in the South and

Northeast, is turning climate-change skeptics into believers, but years of unheeded warnings mean time for action is short.

"The threat is here. It is not getting any better," Biden said in New York. "The question is can it get worse. We can stop it from getting worse."

Biden sounded a similar theme before he toured Manville, N.J., also ravaged by severe flooding caused by Ida.

"Every part of the country is getting hit by extreme weather," Biden said.

The natural disasters have given Biden an opening to push Congress to approve his plan to spend \$1 trillion to fortify infrastructure, including electrical grids, water and sewer systems, to better defend against extreme weather. The legislation has cleared the Senate and awaits a House vote.

## Calif. fire threat high despite progress close to Lake Tahoe

Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — California could be on track for one of its worst fire seasons ever as hotter, drier conditions across the north raise the threat of new fires or existing ones flaring into dangerous life, officials said.

Crews on Tuesday cut miles of new containment line around the Caldor Fire, which was 50% contained after burning up and over the crest of the mountain range and threatening South Lake Tahoe.

Evacuation orders for 22,000 residents were lifted Sunday and more orders were reduced to warnings on Tuesday. But elsewhere, some existing large fires continued to grow.

New evacuations were ordered for some areas of Trinity and Siskiyou counties as the River Complex of three wildfires spread. One blaze driven

by strong winds jumped a creek, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

Since Monday, the fires had grown by more than 20 square miles. It was 19% contained.

More than 15,500 personnel were working on 14 active large wildfires in the state and new or existing fires could flare up this week as the weather turns more dangerous, said Tony Scardina, the U.S. Forest Service's deputy regional forester for California.

About 3,125 square miles of land have burned so far this year, similar to the record 2020 fire season, Porter said.

The good news was near the Nevada state line, where the Caldor Fire was practically stopped in its tracks a few miles outside of South Lake Tahoe.

Crews had largely been able to keep the flames away from populated areas.

# Idaho rationing health care amid virus surge

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho public health leaders announced Tuesday that they activated “crisis standards of care” allowing health care rationing for the state’s northern hospitals because there are more coronavirus patients than the institutions can handle.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare quietly enacted the move Monday and publicly announced it in a statement Tuesday morning — warning residents that they may not get the care they would normally expect if they need to be hospitalized.

The move came as the state’s confirmed coronavirus cases skyrocketed in recent weeks.

Idaho has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the United States.

The state health agency cited “a severe shortage of staffing and available beds in the northern area of the state caused by a massive increase in patients with COVID-19 who require hospitalization.”

The designation includes 10 hospitals and health care systems in the Idaho panhandle and in north-central Idaho. The agency said its goal is to extend care to as many patients as possible and to save as many lives as possible.

The move allows hospitals to allot scarce resources like intensive care unit rooms to patients most likely to survive and

make other dramatic changes to the way they treat patients. Other patients will still receive care, but they may be placed in hospital classrooms or conference rooms rather than traditional hospital rooms or go without some life-saving medical equipment.

At Kootenai Health — the largest hospital in northern Idaho — some patients are waiting for long periods for beds to open up in the full intensive care unit, said Dr. Robert Scoggins, the chief of staff. Inside the ICU, one critical care nurse might be supervising up to six patients with the help of two other non-critical care nurses. That’s a big departure from the usual one ICU nurse for one ICU patient

ratio, he said.

On Monday, the Coeur d’Alene hospital started moving some coronavirus patients into its nearby conference center. A large classroom in the center was converted into a COVID-19 ward, with temporary dividers separating the beds. Some emergency room patients are being treated in a converted portion of the emergency room lobby, and the hospital’s entire third floor has also been designated for coronavirus patients.

Urgent and elective surgeries are on hold, Scoggins said, and Kootenai Health is struggling to accept any of the high-level trauma patients that would normally be transferred from the smaller hospitals in the region.

## Gen. Robert E. Lee statue removed from Va. pedestal

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — A crowd erupted in cheers and song Wednesday as work crews hoisted an enormous statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee off the giant pedestal where it has towered over Virginia’s capital city for more than a century.

The piece, one of America’s largest monuments to the Confederacy, was lifted away just before 9 a.m. as one of the construction workers who helped strap harnesses to Lee and his horse lifted his arms in the air and counted down, “Three, two, one!” to jubilant shouts from a crowd of hundreds.

“This was a long time coming, part of the healing process so Virginia can move forward and be a welcoming state with inclusiveness and diversity,” Gov. Ralph Northam said once the statue was lowered to the ground. The Democrat said it represents “more than 400 years of history that we should not be proud of,” and he congratulated Virginians for supporting

its removal.

BlackLivesMatter signs were seen in the crowd. Some chanted “Whose streets? Our streets!” and sang, “Hey hey hey, goodbye.”

The statue was lowered to the ground where it was expected to be cut into pieces so that it can be brought to a secure location, where it will be stored until its final disposition is determined.

One of America’s largest monuments to the Confederacy, it was taken down from its prominent perch after years of resistance and a long court battle. Among the crowd watching the removal, there did not appear to be any visible counterprotesters.

Northam ordered the statue taken down last summer, citing the pain felt across the country over the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis after a white police officer pressed a knee into his neck. But until a recent court ruling cleared the way, Northam’s plans had been tied up in litigation.

## Abbott defends new abortion law with no rape exceptions

Associated Press

DALLAS — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Tuesday defended a new state law banning most abortions that also does not provide exceptions for cases of rape or incest, saying it does not force victims to give birth even though it prohibits abortions before some women know they’re pregnant.

Abbott, a Republican, added that Texas would strive to “eliminate all rapists from the streets” while taking questions during his first press conference since the law took effect last week.

The comments drew new criticism from opponents of the law that is the biggest curb on abortion in the U.S. since the procedure was legalized a half-century ago, prohibiting abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, which is usually around six weeks. Though abortion providers in Texas say the law is unconstitutional, they say they are abiding by it.

“His comments are confusing to me because they certainly do not seem to reflect the realities of this law,” said Amy Jones, the

chief executive officer of the Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center.

Recent surveys by the U.S. Department of Justice found most rapes go unreported to police, including a 2019 survey that found about 1 in 3 victims reporting they were raped or sexually assaulted.

Abbott was asked about the new abortion restrictions while signing into law an overhaul of Texas’ election rules.

“Texas will work tirelessly to make sure that we eliminate all rapists from the streets of Texas by aggressively going out and arresting them and prosecuting them,” Abbott said.

Jones said Abbott’s statements were both confusing and disheartening. She said she’d “like to hear more” from Abbott on his statement on eliminating rape.

“Certainly it is in our mission statement to work to end sexual violence, that is why we exist, but we are also very aware that that is an aspirational goal that yes, we do believe that this is a preventable crime, but it if it were that easy, rape would no longer exist,” Jones said.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Police: Man found dead in cemetery was hit by car**

**IN** SOUTH BEND — Police discovered a man's body in a cemetery, apparently the victim of a car-pedestrian crash in northern Indiana.

Investigators believe Joshua Rahm, 27, of South Bend, was walking along State Route 2 early Monday when he was struck and thrown over a guardrail. He landed in St. Joseph Cemetery in St. Joseph County.

A driver called 911 and said he had struck a guardrail on his way to work in New Carlisle, the prosecutor's office said Tuesday.

"The crash remains under investigation and toxicology results are pending," the prosecutor's office said.

**Meatpacker fined after worker loses arm on job**

**CO** GREELEY — Meatpacking giant JBS USA has been issued five citations and fines totaling nearly \$175,000 after a worker's arm was amputated when it got stuck in a conveyor belt at the company's beef plant in northern Colorado.

The 37-year-old worker was cleaning a conveyor belt at the Greeley plant Feb. 17 and reached for something that fell off the end of the machinery, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. His smock sleeve then became tangled in the conveyor belt's sprockets.

OSHA determined that JBS hadn't properly guarded the conveyor belt, and employees didn't know to wear a plastic device that ensures smock sleeves don't dangle, The Greeley Tribune reported.

JBS spokesman Cameron Bruett said the company conducted a full-plant safety audit and en-

listed a third-party expert to review health and safety training and protocols.

**Reduced pot penalty OK'd for beach community**

**GA** TYBEE ISLAND — Possessing a small amount of marijuana is no longer a crime in the coastal city that's home to Georgia's largest public beach.

The city council on Tybee Island recently approved an ordinance that imposes a civil fine of \$150 for possession of an ounce or less of marijuana. Before the change, it was a misdemeanor offense, punishable by a \$1,000 fine and up to a year in jail.

Tybee Island joins at least a dozen other Georgia cities and counties — including Atlanta and Savannah — that have similarly rolled back pot penalties when dealing with minor amounts, the Savannah Morning News reported.

The ordinance only decriminalizes minor marijuana possession if there are no related charges. Anyone found with the drug while being charged with driving under the influence, for example, would still face a misdemeanor marijuana charge.

**Wrong-way driver hits police cruisers at station**

**MA** LOWELL — A car traveling the wrong way down the street slammed into two police cruisers that were parked in front of a Lowell Police Department station, authorities said.

The SUV flipped onto its side and landed in the middle of the street after striking the two cruisers on Monday, police said. No one was in the cruisers at the time and the driver of the SUV suffered injuries that were believed to be minor. No other injuries

were reported.

Authorities say the crash remains under investigation and no other details were immediately available.

**Blues exhibit designed for the eyes, hands and ears**

**MS** HATTIESBURG — An exhibit about blues legends and juke joints is opening soon in Mississippi, and it's designed to appeal to the eyes, hands and ears.

A Cast of Blues will be on display Sept. 11-Oct. 9 at the Historic Eureka School in Hattiesburg. It features 15 resin-cast masks of blues legends and photographs of blues performers and juke joints made by Mississippi artists.

Sharon McConnell-Dickerson created the resin-cast masks, and the photographs were taken by Ken Murphy, the Hattiesburg American reported.

McConnell-Dickerson, who is visually impaired, said the casts are like 3-D photographs for people who are blind.

"It captures the flesh, muscle, bone, hair and subtle expressions of emotion," she said. "I wanted to discover the faces behind the music I love, so I went to Mississippi to map out the visages of the real Delta blues men and women."

Visitors are encouraged to touch the masks, McConnell-Dickerson said. Among the artists spotlighted are Bo Diddley and Bobby Rush.

**Judge refuses to block new sports betting law**

**AZ** PHOENIX — A judge on Monday evening refused to block a new Arizona law allowing sports gambling to be run by professional sports teams in a decision that will allow the major gambling expansion start as planned this week.

Maricopa County Superior Court Judge James Smith refused to issue an injunction barring sports betting from starting Thursday. The ruling came just hours after he held an unusual Labor Day hearing on the request filed by one Native American tribe.

The Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe wanted the law, which allows professional sports teams to get licenses to run sports gambling, declared unconstitutional. They argued it violates the state's Voter Protection Act by illegally amending the 2002 voter initiative that authorized tribal gambling in Arizona by allowing non-tribal groups to have gambling operations without asking voters to weigh in. Proposition 202 restricted gambling outside tribal reservations.

But Smith wrote that Proposition 202 regulated the types of gambling allowed at tribal casinos, not other kinds of betting.

**Police recover stolen car during traffic stop**

**DE** DOVER — Police in Delaware say that they recovered a car stolen from New Jersey during a traffic stop.

The Delaware State Police said in a news release that officers arrested a 22-year-old and 25-year-old woman from Delaware after they were stopped in a stolen 2018 Hyundai Sonata late Friday night.

The release said an officer stopped them for a seatbelt and equipment violation south of Dover. A computer search revealed that the car had been reported stolen out of Lakewood Township, N.J., in August.

The women face charges including receiving stolen property.

— From wire reports



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Henry poised to break more records

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Derrick Henry is a man of few words, preferring to work hard with a tunnel-vision focus and let his play do all the talking.

Henry has been almost shouting the way he keeps running into the NFL record books.

Now the NFL's back-to-back rushing leader has the opportunity in 2021 to add even more history to what's been an amazing couple of years. Fresh off becoming just the eighth man to run for at least 2,000 yards, Henry now has a 17th game giving him a chance at Eric Dickerson's league record of 2,105 yards set in 1984.

Henry could also become the first man — fifth all time — to lead the NFL in rushing in three consecutive seasons in nearly three decades. Emmitt Smith was the last with his three-peat coming between 1991 and 1993.

"I don't get caught up in that," Henry said. "I just focus on me getting better. I say it a lot. That's all I focus on. Just getting better every day. Working hard, putting in the work and competing. That's all you can do. Let everything else take care of itself."

The 2020 NFL Offensive Player of the Year and All-Pro has certainly done that better than anyone in the NFL the past two seasons. No one has more carries than Hen-

ry's 782 combined rushes in the regular season and playoffs. When he ran for 2,027 yards last season, it was the fifth-best single-season total.

Henry, who averaged 126 yards per game, could become only the second in NFL history to lead the league in rushing yards, attempts and rushing touchdowns for a third straight season. Steve Van Buren did it from 1947-49.

Only four other men have led the NFL in rushing at least three straight seasons. Before Smith, Earl Campbell did it between 1978-1989, Jim Brown between 1958 and 1961, and Van Buren.

The 2015 Heisman Trophy winner out of Alabama is also the NFL's first running back with at least two seasons of at least 300 rushing attempts, 15 TD runs and a 5-yard rushing average.

Ryan Tannehill has had an up-close view since becoming the Titans' starting quarterback in October 2019, and he says it's impressive to see the running back's sustained success and dependability at the 6-foot-3 and 247 pounds Henry is listed by the Titans.

How Henry physically withstands all the hits and carries yet keeps plugging away? Tannehill calls it "wild."

"You talk to him on Monday and Tuesday

and he is, 'Oh, I am not sore. I am good,'" Tannehill said. "Think some of that is God's gift to him, of just being a physical freak and being 6-3 and 250 or whatever he is. He has the attitude, the mindset and he loves playing football. You put that all together, and it is a good package."

Running backs coach Tony Dew has had similar conversations, only to hear Henry say he's good.

"Now whether he is or he isn't, just his mentality he's not going to tell you he isn't," Dew said. "He's going to come out and do whatever everyone else does. That's the one thing I do really admire about him and so many others is that he just comes to work and he does whatever coach asks him to do."

The Titans have tried, and keep trying, to find a backup to ease some of Henry's workload knowing that such a workload can shorten a running back's career. Yet Henry is the man that is available each Sunday — and coming through with big moments.

He became the first in NFL history to score two touchdowns in overtime in 2020. He outrushed 23 of the NFL's 31 other teams. He had three games with 200 yards and two touchdowns, setting a franchise record with 250 yards in the regular season finale.

## NFLPA president wants daily testing for all players

*From wire reports*

The NFL Players Association wants daily COVID-19 testing for fully vaccinated players.

The league and the union agreed last week to update protocols so vaccinated players would be tested weekly instead of every 14 days as they were during training camp.

That's not enough, according to NFLPA president and Cleveland Browns center JC Tretter.

"Since the beginning of training camp, we have been testing our vaccinated players once every 14 days. It has been ineffective as we've had significantly more incidents of transmission inside the building this year than last year," Tretter wrote in a column on the union's website. "The NFLPA saw this coming months ago and has been advocating for a return to daily testing because it is a more effective way to stop and prevent the spread of the coronavirus in our locker

rooms. However, the NFL decided to move to weekly testing; and while that is a step in the right direction, it leaves us open to many of the same problems we've been facing."

The league most recently announced 93% of players are vaccinated. Unvaccinated players are tested daily and face strict protocol requirements. The league didn't immediately respond to a request for a response to Tretter's comments.

### Ex-NFL players plead guilty

WASHINGTON — Former NFL players Clinton Portis, Tamarick Vanover and Robert McCune pleaded guilty for their roles in a nationwide health care fraud scheme and could face years in prison, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Tuesday.

Portis, Vanover and McCune admitted to defrauding an NFL program set up to reimburse medical expenses not covered by insurance for retired players and their families, the Justice Department said.

McCune could be facing life in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and health care fraud, 13 counts of health care fraud, 11 counts of wire fraud and three counts of aggravated identity theft. He is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 19.

The DOJ said McCune orchestrated the scheme that resulted in approximately \$2.9 million worth of false and fraudulent claims being filed and \$2.5 million paid out between June 2017 and April 2018.

Portis and Vanover each pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit health care fraud and could face up to 10 years in prison. According to court documents, Portis was responsible for just under \$100,000 and Vanover just under \$160,000 in benefits for expensive medical equipment that were not provided.

They agreed to pay back that money. Portis is scheduled for sentencing on Jan. 6 and Vanover on Jan. 22.

# Canadian teen reaches US Open semis

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — When Leylah Fernandez wins a pivotal point at the U.S. Open—and she’s won enough of them to become the tournament’s youngest semifinalist since Maria Sharapova in 2005—the teenager with the exciting game and enthusiasm to match raises her right fist or windmills her arms, firing up herself and the crowd.

What often happens next, after good points or bad, is just as important to the success of the unseeded Canadian left-hander with the quick reflexes: She’ll turn her back to the court and her opponent, face the wall behind the baseline for a few moments, gather herself and repeat whatever that day’s mantra of choice is.

During Tuesday’s 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (5) victory against No. 5 seed Elina Svitolina in Arthur Ashe Stadium, which followed wins over past U.S. Open champions and former No. 1s Naomi Osaka and

Angelique Kerber, Fernandez focused on self-belief.

“I was only thinking of trusting myself, trusting my game. After every point, win or lose, I would always tell myself, ‘Trust my game. Go for my shots. Just see where the ball goes,’” said Fernandez, who turned 19 on Monday and had never been past the third round in her previous half-dozen major appearances. “I see what I’m feeling. I see if there’s one phrase that really catches me or that makes me more motivated than the others. I just keep it throughout the match.”

Another young Canadian moved into the semifinals when 21-year-old Felix Auger-Aliassime’s opponent Tuesday night, 18-year-old Carlos Alcaraz of Spain, stopped playing in the second set while trailing 6-3, 3-1 because of an issue with a muscle in his right leg. Alcaraz was coming off two five-set wins in a row — including against No. 3

seed Stefanos Tsitsipas — that made him the youngest male quarterfinalist in New York since 1963.

“It’s really tough to end a great tournament like this,” Alcaraz said, “but I had no choice.”

The 12th-seeded Auger-Aliassime is the first man from Canada to reach the U.S. Open semifinals and plays No. 2 Daniil Medvedev next. Medvedev, a 25-year-old from Russia, earned a spot in the final four at Flushing Meadows for the third consecutive year by stopping the surprising run of Dutch qualifier Botić van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-0, 4-6, 7-5.

With no players from the United States left to pull for, U.S. Open fans are adopting their neighbors from the North — although the 73rd-ranked Fernandez is actually based in Florida after being born in Montreal to a Filipino Canadian mother and an Ecuadorian father.

Fernandez’s father is also her

coach, but isn’t in New York. He stayed home for what Fernandez called “personal reasons” and is offering tips in daily phone conversations.

“I called him right after the match, when I went to the locker room,” she said. “He honestly told me that I put him through hell and back with this match.”

And the spectators loved every minute of it.

“Thanks to you, I was able to push through today,” she told the crowd after edging Svitolina, the Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist who’s been to two Grand Slam semifinals, including at the 2019 U.S. Open.

The truth is, Fernandez likes the spotlight.

When asked whether she’s more nervous against a top player in a big arena or a lower-ranked player at a smaller site, her reply was simple: “There’s no difference.”

It’s hard to argue that right now.

# Banished McKennie could be welcomed back to USMNT

*Associated Press*

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras — Weston McKennie could be welcomed back to the U.S. national team in the future, coach Gregg Berhalter said after banishing him from a pair of World Cup qualifiers for violating team COVID-19 protocols.

“The team absolutely comes first, knowing we made a decision not only for the short term, but to the long-term health of the program, and it’s not an easy decision,” Berhalter said Tuesday, a day before the Americans play Honduras. “Trust me, countless coaches are faced with decisions where they have to take talented players out of the lineup for some reason or other. But we did it for what we think is the good of the group and good of the team.”

ESPN reported that McKen-

nie spent a night outside the team’s COVID-19 hotel bubble in Nashville, Tenn., and also brought an unauthorized person to the hotel on a different evening, the latter also reported by TUDN. Berhalter declined to detail the violations.

“It doesn’t rule him out for the future,” Berhalter said.

McKennie, among the top American players, started last week’s 0-0 draw at El Salvador. He did not dress for Sunday’s 1-1 tie against Canada in Nashville, then was told Monday to return home.

“People make mistakes. Weston apologized to the group. He apologized to me, and things happen,” Berhalter said. “I guess the most important message that we’re getting through, that we’re trying to get through, is that we’re here in camp for

seven days and know the intensity is incredible. It’s three finals in seven days, and we need everyone’s single-minded focus on what we’re trying to accomplish.”

Berhalter has what he referred to as an “open-door” policy, although in the past that has referred to players falling in and out of form and returning from injury.

“Me and Weston had long conversations, and he’s a guy that I care for deeply,” Berhalter said. “He’s a big part of the team. And I’m sure when he’s performing well, he’ll be back in the team.”

Goalkeeper Matt Turner said McKennie addressed the team as a group.

“He was able to say what he needed to say to us,” Turner said. “There needs to be a prec-

edent set at some point when it comes to this virus. It’s about the bigger picture. There’s rules in place and I think it’s definitely a wakeup call in general, just not only for us as a soccer team, but for the population, that this this virus is still out there, it’s rampant and you need to take it seriously.”

McKennie apologized in a statement Sunday. The U.S. Soccer Federation did not make him available to media.

A 23-year-old from Fort Lewis, Wash., McKennie missed Juventus’ derby against Torino in April after violating COVID-19 protocols in Italy. He has seven goals in 25 international appearances.

Midfielder Brenden Aaronson said the team’s attention was on the match against Honduras.

# Cruz reaches 30 HRs, Rays rip Red Sox

Associated Press

BOSTON — Nelson Cruz homered twice and, at 41 years old, became the oldest player in major league history to hit 30 home runs in a season, powering the Tampa Bay Rays past the Boston Red Sox 12-7 Wednesday night.

Mike Zunino also homered twice and Jordan Luplow connected for the team with the best record in the American League and the highest-scoring club in the majors.

Rays rookie Wander Franco went 0-for-4 with a walk, extending his on-base streak to 37 games and passing Mickey Mantle (1951-52) for the longest by an AL player under 21 years old. The 20-year-old Franco now trails only Frank Robinson, who reached in 43 straight in 1956.

Cruz hit a two-run homer in the third inning and a solo drive in the fifth, giving him 447 in his career and his eighth 30-homer season. He passed David Ortiz (38 in 2016) and Darrell Evans (34 in 1987), who were both 40 when they hit the mark.

**Blue Jays 5, Yankees 1:** Marcus Semien homered again, Alejandro Kirk went deep twice and visiting Toronto beat skidding New York after Gerrit Cole exited early with a hamstring injury.

Cole (14-7) was pulled in the fourth with left hamstring tightness. He allowed three runs, two earned, and five hits in 3⅓ innings.

**Reds 4, Cubs 3:** Wade Miley pitched seven effective innings, Nick Castellanos homered and visiting Cincinnati got a sorely needed victory, topping Chicago.

The Reds had dropped seven of nine to

lose ground in the NL playoff race. They began the day one game back of San Diego for the second wild card.

**Braves 8, Nationals 5:** Ozzie Albies hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer off Ryne Harper in the seventh inning. Adam Duvall took Paolo Espino deep with an early three-run shot, and host Atlanta beat Washington.

Albies, who had four RBIs and went deep for the fourth straight game, put the Braves up 5-1 in the fourth with a sacrifice fly.

**Dodgers 7, Cardinals 2:** Albert Pujols homered in his return to Busch Stadium, sending Los Angeles past St. Louis.

Justin Turner homered twice and Will Smith also homered for the playoff-contending Dodgers, who won for the sixth time in eight games. St. Louis has lost five of six.

The 41-year-old Pujols drilled the fourth pitch from J.A. Happ on a line over the wall in left. It was his 679th career home run and 17th of the season.

**Angels 4, Padres 0:** San Diego left-hander Blake Snell made another bid at a gem and this one didn't end so well when Los Angeles broke up his no-hit try with two outs in the seventh inning and went on to win on the road.

Snell, who struck out 11 in seven innings, took a perfect game into the seventh before walking two batters and then allowing Jo Adell's two-run single on his 96th pitch. Adell finished with three RBIs.

**Mets 9, Marlins 4:** Pete Alonso hit two home runs, including the 100th of his career, and New York won at Miami to give Carlos

Carrasco his first win with the team.

**Brewers 10, Phillies 0:** Eric Lauer allowed four hits in seven innings to lead host Milwaukee over Philadelphia.

**White Sox 6, Athletics 3:** Gavin Sheets hit a go-ahead RBI single in the fifth, Cesar Hernandez added a two-run single in the same inning, and AL Central-leading Chicago won at stumbling Oakland.

**Twins 3, Indians 0:** John Gant pitched five solid innings on the road to get his first win since joining Minnesota, spoiling Cleveland starter Aaron Civale's return from injury.

**Pirates 3, Tigers 2:** Ben Gamel had a go-ahead two-run single in the sixth inning among his three hits and host Pittsburgh dealt Detroit its ninth loss in 13 games.

**Orioles 7, Royals 3:** Cedric Mullins homered for the third consecutive game and host Baltimore topped Kansas City.

**Astros 5, Mariners 4:** Carlos Correa drove in the winning run in the 10th inning after Alex Bregman tied the game in the ninth, and Houston rallied past visiting Seattle.

**Giants 12, Rockies 3:** Logan Webb pitched effectively for seven innings, Mike Yastrzemski homered and Steve Duggar had two triples among his three hits as NL West-leading San Francisco rolled to a win at Colorado.

**Rangers 3, Diamondbacks 1:** Jordan Lyles pitched seven smooth innings in relief, Jason Martin hit a two-run single and Texas handed host Arizona its ninth loss in 10 games.

## Coaches deal with breakthrough COVID-19 cases

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky men's basketball coach John Calipari said he contracted COVID-19 after being vaccinated, but pointed out he is relieved the shot did its job in leaving him with mild symptoms.

Other notable breakthrough cases have occurred in college football, with vaccinated players and coaches testing positive. That includes second-ranked Georgia and Mississippi; the Bulldogs could be without several players in their next game and Rebels coach Lane Kiffin missed his team's opener after testing positive.

Calipari revealed Tuesday that he tested positive before July's NBA Draft, which kept the Hall of Famer from his annual ritual of attending the festivities to see his highly touted players realize dreams of becoming first-round selections. His announcement follows Monday's revelation by Georgia football Kirby Smart that "three or four" players on the second-ranked Bulldogs were sidelined with COVID-19.

Kiffin did not travel with the Rebels to Atlanta for Monday night's 43-24 victory over Louisville after announcing his own breakthrough case on Saturday.

"I am grateful to be vaccinated

and experiencing only mild symptoms," Kiffin said in a statement released on Twitter.

Calipari felt just as fortunate.

The coach joked during the virtual news conference that he "busted the line" to get vaccinated and added that he didn't reveal his positive test back then to avoid discouraging the public from being vaccinated.

In going public now with his mild symptoms, he hopes more people get vaccinated.

"I just encourage people to think about this," said Calipari, who isolated himself from family members. "It is kids going back to schools that are not vaccinated

that can bring it back to you or your family. It could happen. And if you are vaccinated, the chances of something serious happening are very, very, very slim.

"It's your best chance of protecting yourself, maybe your family, your parents, whatever. ... There were breakthroughs, but they're not that sick."

The positive tests for Georgia and Ole Miss come despite both programs having met the Southeastern Conference's 85% vaccination threshold to avoid further COVID testing and masking requirements. At Ole Miss in particular, Kiffin, his players and staff are fully vaccinated.